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World of Darkness



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Shriek it.

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— Killjoy, Forsworn of Philadelphia

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ROUGH TRADE

by C.A. Suleiman

The place was called Paradise Found, and whatever else might be said of it, the inside was a damn sight better than the outside. Like so many other places on the circuit, the location itself was nothing to write home about; an otherwise empty gravel-covered lot located about ten miles off the beaten path, which in this case meant Route 93 just north of Arnette. (A “beaten path” if ever there was one, to those who wore their wheels down traversing its length.) On such a site, it would be difficult to erect anything that didn’t disappoint, at least on first blush.

During the day, the exterior of the building suggested a structure so ill-kept — so muted and withdrawn — that it must have been abandoned by its owners, left to the whim of time and of restless teenagers and tramps. The wreckage of countless beer bottles lay strewn amongst the gravel, jagged bits of colored glass glinting like buried treasure in the light, and the base of every wall reeked of watery piss and sun-baked vomit. The place truly came alive at night, though, when the music struck up and the lights buzzed on, illuminating the sign above the grime-smeared door and warming away the look of cold



neglect it bore in the daylight. The smells remained, but at night they held a familiarity that was almost inviting. Whatever time of day, this was the sort of establishment that catered only to two types of clientele — the local regulars, and those whom the local regulars saw fit to deliver here.

The figure who just walked in was clearly and unmistakably of the latter sort.

No one local to the area would have dressed as he did, nor carried himself in quite the same manner as this man did. His hair was dark brown, short but wavy, and not covered by any hat. He wore slacks rather than jeans (or, more often, jeans with chaps), and although his jacket was leather, it was fashionably made. And as far as he could see, he was also the only man in the establishment not wearing boots. But then, he’d just walked in; it’s possible other bootless men were in tonight — sequestered away perhaps in a private room somewhere, out of view.

Standing out though he did, the man drew little attention for it, all the same. For a moment, he had en-

visioned a reaction like something out of a grind house double-feature, where the fish-out-of-water steps through the wrong door and is greeted by both a panorama of staring faces and the harsh scrape of a turntable grinding to a sudden stop. But clearly this wasn’t that kind of establishment. No, there was too much going on for any patron to be distracted by the likes of him.

The club (if one could call it that) was a one-story affair, roughly rectangular in shape but substantially larger than it appeared from the outside. The entry gave way to an open area filled with small round tables and chairs. Set against one wall was a long wooden bar, and against the opposite wall, a stage, with the two connecting walls covered in floor-to-ceiling mirrors that were speckled with flecks of what might have been black paint. On stage, a tall man of muscular build, clad in black chaps and wearing a leather mask with zippers for its mouth- and eye-holes, was going to work on a pasty-skinned redhead who was suspended from the ceiling by means of a series of loops,





buckles and straps, and presently bound in a way that many of the men watching her might refer to as a "hog-tie."

"Now, there's somethin' you don't see every day."

A woman's voice, from behind him. He turned and saw the comment had come, oddly enough, from the bartender. She was an attractive brunette in her early 20's, with sparkling eyes and a sly smile that was truly more suggestive than sly. One slender hand was wrapped around a frosted mug, the other around a white contoured tap handle. The man greeted her smile with one of his own, and walked as casually as he could over to the bar.

"Oh, I imagine you see things like that all the time," he replied. "Unless this is your first day here." (By the look of her, he seriously doubted this was the case.)

"I was talking about you, amigo," she said. And then, after a not unpleasant chuckle, added, "You're the proverbial sore thumb. Case you hadn't noticed."

The man's smile widened, the enamel of his front teeth glinting softly in the half-light. "I had picked up on that, yes."

"Well," she said, as the top of the mug settled into a circle of foam, "You think about what you want, and I'll be right back." He watched her push up a wooden panel at the end of the bar, then slip it back

down into place before strolling across the room with the frothy mug in hand. His gaze traced a slow outline of her sultry curves as she went. On her way back to the bar he tried to maintain eye contact, but failed when he caught sight of her belt buckle, which briefly held him transfixed. It was large, seemingly made of pewter (or a reasonable facsimile thereof), and it bore three lines of text, one atop the next, with a small horizontal slit in the buckle between the first and second lines. The text read:

INSERT COIN SHAKE WELL GUARANTEED ACTION

"The name's Porter," he offered as she stepped back behind the bar. "And I love the belt buckle."

"Do you, now?" she said, the suggestive smile returning once more. "Yeah, it's always a big hit around here. I'm Shay."

"That's your name? Like the stadium?" he asked, genuinely bemused.

"Yeah, but with an A-Y." She spoke this last as if on auto-pilot. He could see why. "So, did you figure out what it is you want?" she asked, prompting a laugh.

"Hell, if that isn't a loaded question," he said. She looked at him quizzically, but the smile never quite dropped from her face. "Well, I mean... does any of us?"

Shay glanced past his shoulder, at the men staring fixedly at the passion play that was unfolding slowly before them. "Yeah, I think so. I think some people know

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exactly what it is they want, Mr. Porter.”

He turned and regarded the room again, taking note of each ogling patron, of how each man in turn regarded the stage. After a moment, and without turning around, he said, “I suppose they do. And it’s just ‘Porter.’ I’m no ‘Mister,’ miss.”

Shay the bartender waited patiently for ‘just Porter’ to turn back around, and when he finally did, she leaned in conspiratorially and said, “I take it you didn’t come all the way out here just to drink, then.”

“Honestly, Shay? I’m not really sure why I came out tonight. But no, I’m pretty sure it wasn’t the booze... no matter how expertly it may be poured.” The bartender smiled at the compliment, then pointed at the stage across the room.

“Then it was that? Is that why you came? That’s why most fellas come, no doubt.”

“Not really, no. The man at the video store — the guy who directs most of the new blood out this way, I suspect — wouldn’t tell me exactly what to expect here, only that it might ‘somehow satisfy’.” Porter turned his attention again to the stage, and saw that the leathered he-man was now kneading the tender flesh of his captive’s breasts with two wide and calloused hands. He’d bound the woman’s chest in such a way that the exposed skin of her bosom had turned a deep rose madder color from the constriction, and even across the room Porter could hear her moaning throatily through the bright red ball gag in her mouth. He turned back around with a sigh. “But

now it’s clear that he was wrong. All I see here, all of what’s going on behind me as we speak, is... what’s the word?... disingenuous, maybe? Yes. That’s exactly what it is. It’s disingenuous. And disappointing.”

“‘Disingenuous.’ Well, what would you say if I told you there could be something more for you here? Something that might stand a better chance of ‘somehow satisfying?’” the woman said, and he realized then that the smile had finally, suddenly, gone from her face.

“If that’s a come-on,” he replied, “You really haven’t been paying attention, Shay.”

“It’s not a come-on, Porter. But it is an offer. Assuming you’re serious, of course.” The bartender’s silken eyes flashed then, briefly, and Porter had to ponder what it was that he’d seen behind them in that moment. All his accumulated experience with women told him that it was pure nerve (any man knows a dare when he hears one, especially from a woman), but deep down, in the most ill-lit part of his heart, he somehow knew it to be something else. Something more like hunger.

Porter regarded her carefully for a moment, but her flat expression betrayed no secret calculation, revealed to him no further insight into the motive beneath the manner. Behind him, the spectacle of sweat was kicking into high gear, its players readying themselves for an even more lewd, more disingenuous cabaret of acts.

“Alright,” he said at last. “Let’s say I am. Let’s say I’m dead serious. Just what are we talking about here?”

The woman’s smile returned,

and in a manner to suggest not only that had it never left to begin with, but that the very concept of it leaving was preposterous. “I can’t tell you,” she said, her smiling widening, her features sharpening as it did.

“Oh, I see,” said Porter. “If it’s like that, then here’s a follow-up question for you: Just what do you take me for, lady? Does the absence of a cowboy hat and shit-kickers automatically suggest stupidity in this place? If anything, the opposite—”

“Hush up a sec, amigo, that’s not what I meant. I can’t tell you, but not because I’m not allowed. I can’t tell you because, first, it’s not something that can be explained exactly, and second, because I don’t actually know what’ll be involved. Like the sign says... I just work here.”

“Then how do you know it’s for me, whatever it is?” Porter was trying to cover his bases now, but in his mind the point was secretly moot. He was already intrigued.

“Because you’re here,” she replied, then pointed again at the stage behind him. “And because that isn’t the reason why.” Porter knew himself unable to disagree.

“All right,” he said again. “Show me.”

* * *

Shay took him around the side of the bar to a hallway he hadn’t noticed before, even while standing some ten feet removed from it. The way the place was laid out, Porter imagined, part of the point was to direct attention towards the stage — and away from everything else — and in this, the placement of the little hallway had been a sterling success. With the added effect of

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the mirror paneling on the walls, he could easily see how the typical patron might bypass it entirely.

The hall had led to a shadowy back room full of boxes stacked head high. The only illumination came from a thin pen-light attached to the bartender's key-ring, and its narrow beam cut a wavering path through the darkness as she guided him around the looming columns of brown and black crates. In the back corner of the room, hidden from view behind a wall of boxes, was a door. When the light fell upon it, Porter saw that the door had been painted a bright, almost stark red, a color that stood out at once from the surrounding gloom. Set against this scarlet screen was a black placard with gold lettering that bore the legend:

PRIVATE.

The light fell away as his guide fumbled for a particular key, and on finding it, pushed it home with a soft click. She paused then, and though the only light source now lay in a pool between them on the floor, Porter could tell that she had turned toward him.

"Do you enter here of your own will?" Her voice was muted, almost a whisper.

Porter replied without hesitation. "I do."

"Allrighty," she said, and pushed the door open. Beyond lay a darkened stairwell into which she descended without delay.

"What about the redneck throng stinking up the other room?" he asked, stepping into the doorway behind her. "Won't you be missed at the bar, or something?"

"Don't worry about them," said Shay. Her voice bounced curiously off the stairwell walls as she moved deeper in. "They didn't come for the booze, either."

Stepping down onto the first stair, the first thing Porter noticed was the heat. If the bartender was

guiding him into a cellar or basement, and it was increasingly clear that she was, then the air should have been getting cooler. But it wasn't.

The air that pushed up to greet him was warm, and the way it tickled across his skin reminded him of butterfly kisses experienced in dreams. The air itself was different, too. Gone was the intermingled smell of cheap cologne and cigar smoke that had dominated the main room. In its place came the scent of something softer but richer, more pungent. Something somehow much more unrefined.

Ahead of him, the bartender had reached the bottom of the stairs, stopped, turned. She was facing him now, her back to a wall of dark gray stone, and she shone the pen-light at his feet as he took the last few steps. A soft light poured in from an archway to his left, and he could see now that her right arm was lifted in its direction. Into that light is where she meant for him to go.

"This is as far as I come," she said as he joined her. "But it's just through here. Hope you find what you're looking for, Porter."

As she moved past him up the stairs, he thought he caught sight of that sly smile of hers, now returned and perhaps even sharper than before.

* * *

Alone, the outsider stepped through the archway of light.

He found himself in a hall fashioned of that same dark gray stone, with a semi-rounded roof overhead, and wondered briefly if the Paradise Found basement had at one time served as a bomb shelter. (He thought it a distinct possibility.)

The soft light, he now saw, emanated from a chamber that lay at the end of the hall, about some 30 feet farther down. As he approached its open doorway, he realized that while the chamber

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clearly had no door, it did have a curtain of what appeared to be multi-colored beads. This curious veil not only filtered the light coming into the hall, but also twisted it into strange, hypnotic patterns, which danced along the stone and filled his head with thoughts of rivers under ground.

Porter stepped to the curtain, put his palms together as if in prayer, and slowly parted the veil before him. What greeted him was a vision like something pulled from a lunatic's fevered dream – or from one of Porter's own. The chamber was roughly square-shaped, its floor covered in a series of wide white tiles, with a long steel gurney as the scene's centerpiece. Whatever sterile feel these features might otherwise have lent the room was instantly overwhelmed by their condition. The tiles were grimy, chipped, and in one central section of the floor, missing entirely; the gurney was draped in a grisly scrim of clotted blood and human hair.

Some ten feet removed from the gurney, pushed against one dirt-caked wall, was an old-fashioned cast iron bathtub filled near to full with an opaque brown liquid. Above the tub dangled a pasty-skinned blonde girl. She was strapped into a black body harness, which was attached to a large ceiling hook by four lengths of chain. Her sparkling blue eyes bulged, forcing tears down her sweat-covered face, over and around the bright red ball gag that was pulled taut enough to choke her.

The floor between the tub and the gurney was a roughly circular patch of exposed ground, where the intervening tiles had been pulled up and cast aside. Within this space, drawn meticulously upon the barren earth, was a triangle, its three sides composed of what Porter felt positive was sprinkled rosemary (his favorite herb). Kneeling at the perimeter



of this shape, one cheek pressed flat to the ground, was a bald man. He wore faded blue jeans, but was otherwise nude.

The chamber's only light sources were a haphazard array of candles – which guttered violently, as though in the grip of a strong breeze, but never blew out – and an ambient shaft of bright moonlight, which shone into the room through a small window near the top of the far wall. As he stared, two things dawned on Porter in quick succession: He realized first that the shaft of moonlight was presently illuminating the triangle on the floor (and only the triangle, it seemed), and second, that if this was a cellar, that there shouldn't be any windows to begin with. He thought back to how the place had looked from the outside. Could a window to the outside even be possible? What the hell was going on here?

As if in reply, the bald man's eyes snapped open and he rose suddenly to his bare feet. The suspended girl gave a start, and Porter watched with mild detachment as a rivulet of urine ran down one chalky thigh, pooling briefly at the knot of her kneecap before dripping into the tub below. He couldn't be absolutely sure (his head was swimming and his ears were growing warm just now), but he thought he heard a quiet hiss accompany the plop when it hit the brown liquid's surface.

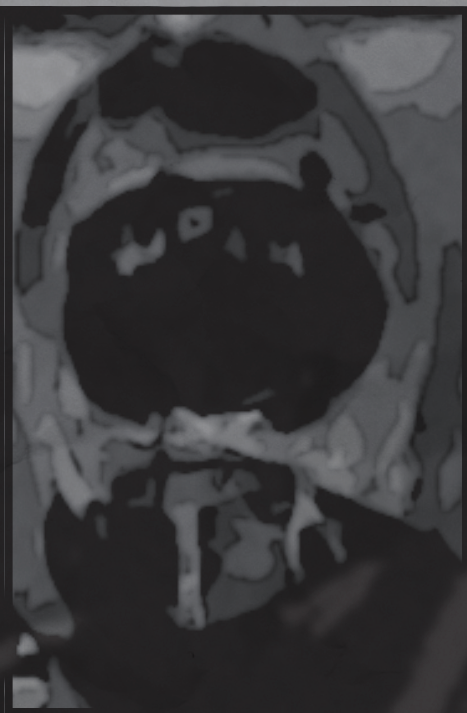
When Porter finally spoke, he almost didn't recognize the sound of his own voice. "What... is going on here?" was what came out.

A toothy grin spread across the bald man's face, his canines glinting in the flickering candlelight. In a low, husky voice he replied, "I can't tell you."

And then he winked.

As if on cue, Porter's mind erupt-

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ed in a storm of questions. There was so much he wanted to ask, so much he needed to know. But where to start? And how? The very idea that he could somehow organize it all seemed a flat impossibility at this moment, yet even as he remarked so, the swirl of activity in his head was fast distilling itself, concentrating itself down to a workable essence — giving him something to vocalize before the pressure rose so high it cracked his skull:

“Are you the devil?” Porter blurted out, his far-off voice somewhere between a croak and a whisper.

“Course not. But you might say that we’re on a first-name basis, He and I.” The bald man watched calmly as Porter’s gaze drifted to the girl, and then back again.

“You... knew I was coming here tonight, didn’t you?” Porter asked almost absently. He felt reasonably sure that he already knew the answer.

“Yes, sir, I did. I won’t lie to you,” came the reply.

“What do you want from me?”

Porter murmured. It seemed like the right thing to say, but in truth he hadn’t really intended to ask the question.

“It’s not about what I want from you, Porter. It’s about what you want — and whether or not I can help you get it. And that can’t be known until you’ve answered a simple question. Do you know what question that is, Porter?”

“I... don’t,” Porter rasped.

“Are you willing to trade?” That’s the question, Porter.”

Porter’s mind was still swimming, still dilating like a valve between the settled and the turbulent, but a new feeling was coming over him now, something that made even the turbulence feel somehow at ease. Something more like serenity. “Trade... what?” he finally whispered.

“I’ll put it to you this way,” the bald man said, stepping over to the cast iron tub. One tattooed hand curled itself around the soiled skin of the blonde girl’s calf. “You can leave now, and no harm will come to you. You may return to

your shell of a mortal life — to that vaunted flimsy caul of innocence — none the worse for wear. But know that doing so will close the door on all the answers you seek, Porter. There will be no second chance to receive the gift I offer you tonight. Rebuke me now, and ignorance will be your only bliss from now on.”

“Or...?” Porter asked. He knew now what was coming, but had to hear it, anyway.

“Or you can trade it. Give it up, all of it... and step into the light. But make your decision now, Porter.” He gave the dangling girl’s leg a playful jiggle, and her body twitched in fear beneath the stress of its restraints. “The lady and I have work to do, and well... the moon waits for no one. So... come you now unto me of your own free will? Trade you now the living lie of Man for the immortal truth?”

Porter replied without hesitation. “I do.”

With that, the monster grinned again, his canines elongating into wicked points.

“Welcome to Paradise, brother.”



Belial's Brew



by George Holochwest, Khaldoun Khelil,
Ari Marnell and E.A. Suleiman



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Authors' Dedication

This book is dedicated to Lucien Soulban, Lord Purveyor of Nastiness for earlier iterations of **Vampire**. Lucien's an RPG giant, and we were lucky to have such imaginative shoulders to stand on when it came to re-conceptualizing the notion of the infernal vampire for the World of Darkness.

Author's Special Thanks

I'd like to thank my wife, Joana, a perennial source of inspiration for all things Eeeeeevil™. (That may sound bad, but it's not.) *"It's all for you, Damien!"*

Thanks also to our intrepid foreman, Will Hindmarch, for being bold enough to let us take the concept where it wanted to go.

Credit Where it's Due

A couple of mistakes crept into the credits of **Mythologies**. Regrettably, Khaldoun Khelil's name was misspelled and Dean Shomshak's name was left out of the book altogether. They deserve credit, I deserve blame. Their hard work and creativity deserve to be recognized (with, you know, their names both printed and properly spelled). Sorry about that, you two. —Will

"It's been swell, but the swelling has gone down"

It's been a great 8+ years at White Wolf. I had a great time and am sorry to leave. I'll miss working there very much. I'm thankful for all the people at the Wolf, what I've learned and the artists that I've met. You all rock!

Pauline Benney



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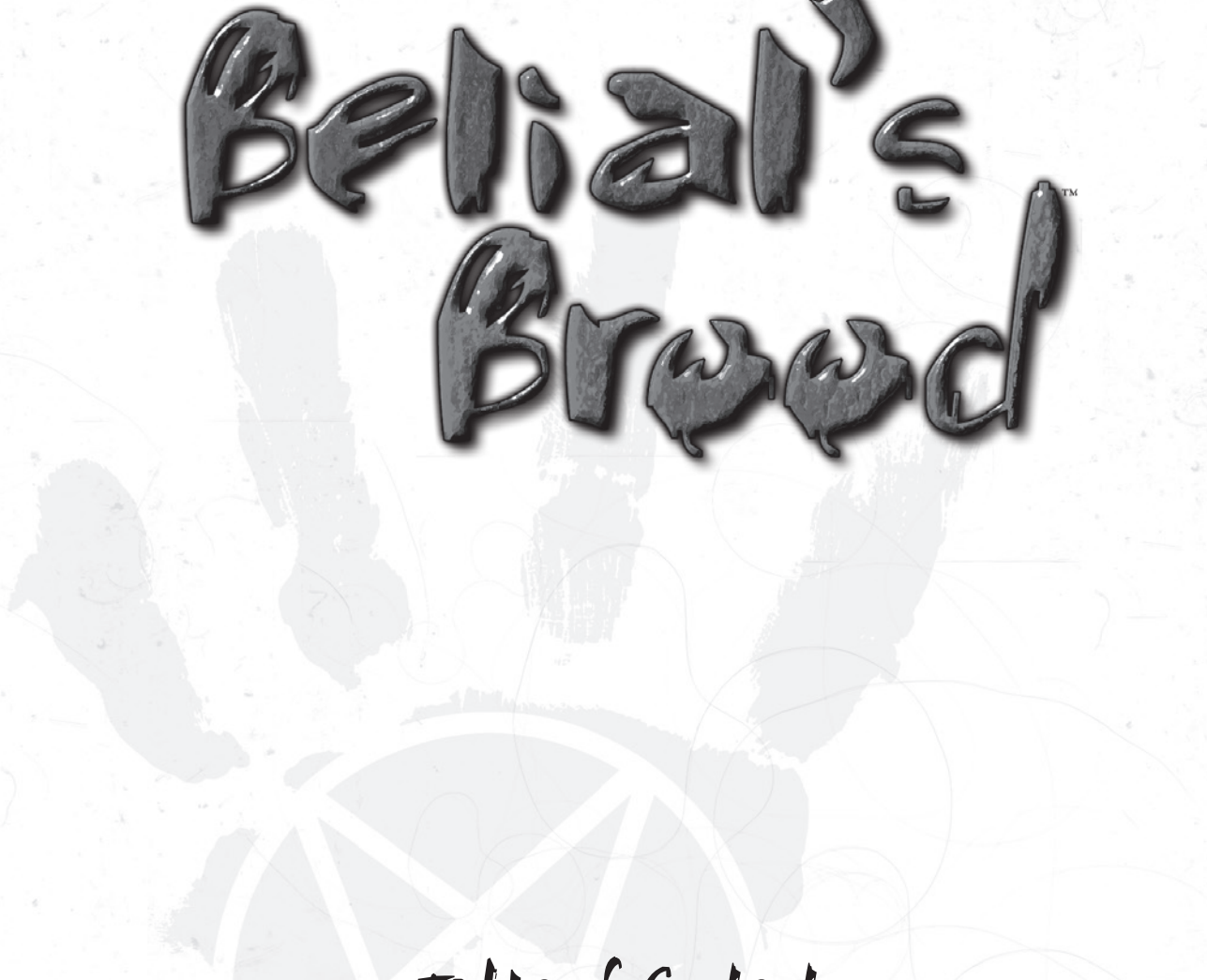
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Belial's Brew™

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Introduction

The Face of Evil

*The wailing of the women, mingled with the sting of the dust, disgusted him utterly and he moved forward, leaning over the open grave, but a hand pulled him back and a voice said, "Remember your God."
He was repulsed by the touch, and he cursed the man ...*

— The Search, Naguib Mahfouz

The Forsworn

No vampire covenant is truly a monolithic entity, but Belial's Brood is especially fractionary. Due to the nature of its beliefs and structure (or lack thereof), it can be said to be the only covenant that exists in microcosms of itself. While the Brood does have several major factions, even those groupings are intuitive rather than learned, drawing members whose souls feel the strongest inherent connection to their essential tenets. Brood organization spirals down even further, with the factions themselves only existing as discrete entities insofar as they are composed of numerous coterie of like-minded individuals. This, then, is the purest form and structure of Belial's Brood — the coterie — and every major rite the Brood conducts worldwide revolves around its dynamic.

Each major faction of Belial's Brood knows its own share of nicknames and titles, but all Brood members, regardless of faction, refer to themselves as the Forsworn. The vast majority of Brood members spend time among one or more of the standard covenants (or among the Unbound) before finding their way onto the path. They know intimately what it's like to 'live' a lie, to suffer the dogmatic edicts of the weak and unlearned, and then at last to hear the call of truth, and to make the choice to forswear all that they once knew. To forswear the lies of both mortal man and the others of their kind — this is what it means to be Forsworn. To these vampires, this is what it means to be free.

Welcome to the Brood.

Theme

While the material in **Belial's Brood** tackles a number of different concepts, the overall theme of both book and

covenant is the search for meaning. Are the Forsworn 'demon-worshippers'? Some of them, yes, but only because they *believe*. Are the Forsworn monsters? All of them, yes; but then, how many vampires can claim to not be monsters? The Forsworn are shameless to be sure, but neither careless nor thoughtless. They are vampires, in form like any other, making their way through their own Requiems, suffering many of the same doubts and pitfalls as other souls. For them, however, both journey and destination make all the blood, pain and suffering worthwhile. If this existence is what's meant for them, and they are damned to it for all eternity, then their hellish success lies in winning the race to shameless, immoral abandon — to turn their gazes towards the abyss, rather than away from it, and in so doing, to know truth.

Mood

Yellow teeth smiled out from a face sticky with blood. A child proudly holding a headless dog. A harem of undead whores suckling at the sores on their pimp's thighs. The mood of an encounter with Belial's Brood is vile and confident, revelry in grotesquerie. A night with the Forsworn is full of cocksure swagger and crippling violence, of bullshit stories sung as gospel and mock humility worn to hide a time-bomb of arrogance. One Forsworn kneels down and unzips your fly while another chews through your throat.

But that's not quite how the Forsworn see it. Maybe this book reveals what the Forsworn are really thinking, but so often all that seems to come out of their mouths is a maniacal cackle and the stink of spoiled blood. The delicate artifice of their beliefs explains their madness in their own minds, but does belief really matter when thought is drowned out by screams?

At the same time, this account reveals how even those monsters who claim to have cast off human ways cannot truly escape the weights around their ankles — even some of Belial's vampires are distracted by dogma. Even they raise themselves up on the prestige of knowledge over might alone. The slow tugging weight of damnation pulls the Forsworn between Hell and Earth like it does for all vampires, even those who think they can cheat damnation by charging into Hell.

What Lies Within

This sourcebook opened with **Rough Trade**, an inside view of what the trip might be like for one of the rare few who are Embraced directly into Belial's Brood, followed by the **Introduction** you're reading now, of course, which closes with a list of valuable references and a lexicon of essential Brood terminology.

Chapter One: A History of Vice showcases the origins, beliefs and myths of the Forsworn, as told through the stories of three individuals who've had direct experience with the inhuman Kindred of the Brood. Herein lies a frank exposé of a covenant that is at once unearthly alien and strangely familiar to all vampires.

In **Chapter Two: The Devil You Know**, all the disquieting ways and means of the Forsworn are laid bare. Revealed herein are secrets about a host of topics ranging from the spiritual, including discussion of the path the Forsworn call the Pursuit, to the political, from the importance of the coterie structure to the Brood's dealings with other vampires. Whether you're a Storyteller looking for inspiration or a player seeking illumination on this dark covenant, you'll find the basics here.

Chapter Three: Blood of Belial discusses both the permutations of Forsworn blood and the ways in which this highly factionalized covenant organizes itself. Meet both the Brood's inscrutable priest caste, the Therion, and its ghoulish cult, the Doulosi, as well as all the major (and a few minor) Brood factions active tonight.

Chapter Four: The Wages of Sin contains a collection of mystical gifts found only among the Forsworn, including an entirely new system called Investments — dark powers manifested by Brood members in the furtherance of their Pursuit. Also revealed are the Discipline of Choronzon and a sampling of new Devotions.

In the **Appendix: The Adversary** you'll meet a host of Storyteller characters, from the lowliest rank initiates to the highest ritualists of the mightiest factions. If the Storyteller is allowing Forsworn player characters, this section provides inspiration for both player character concepts and for Storyteller characters who are tied to them.

A NOTE FROM THE DEVELOPER

I didn't want to do this book. Not at first. I didn't want to add depth to Belial's Brood, because I was afraid it would humanize them. To me, what makes Belial's Brood scary is their fearlessness. They're not afraid of ruining the world they used to inhabit as living people. They're not afraid of exposing their loved ones to the truths of the World of Darkness. They're not afraid of losing their grip on immortality or humanity. They'd rather charge through the gates of Hell than dwell in fear of the inevitable.

Put another way, they're fodder for vampire-hunting tales in which the hunters are themselves vampires. Belial's Brood are the utter dark against which any Storyteller can cast her troupe's characters as protagonists. They're a rare breath of guiltless action in an otherwise morally complicated game.

Not everybody wants what I want, though. Colin and Ari changed my mind. They convinced me that some **Vampire** players want to see the vampires of Belial's Brood explain themselves. Some players want to see them get the philosophical depth that a chronicle can be built on. Some players want to see these monsters as people. Fair enough.

Unlike the approach we took in the book **VII**, which offered three distinct possible truths to the mystery of that fringe group, this book takes a closer look at a multifaceted possible truth for the would-be covenant. But that truth is tangled up with lies, errors, folklore, assumptions and disinformation that have been collecting over centuries like layers of blood drying on a slaughterhouse floor. You have lots of optional truths in here, but the edges of each are not so defined.

This book can be used whether you choose to humanize Belial's Brood in your World of Darkness or not, because everything in here is potentially hellish propaganda. Throughout this book, you'll see Belial's Brood meditate on its own existence, read thoughts of the Forsworn put down with a kind of clarity that seems impossible for these barbarians to muster, and maybe come to see them as something other than beasts and murderers. If you do, you're buying into the lie. (Look behind you.)

Some parts of this book will change the emotional tone or power level of your chronicle (Investments aren't quite like any other kind of vampiric mysticism) if you choose to let them in. Know what you're getting into. Once you've pulled back the curtain on Belial's Brood and let your players dabble with their powers, the shine starts to come off their crisp black finish.

Remember, though, that Belial's Brood has left so much of its past in darkness. Its self-destructive nature has left it without elders to anchor its culture or pass down stories from its past. Even what you see here may just be an attempt by some of the Forsworn to back away from the Hell just as they get close enough to blister and peel. Behind the Belial's Brood of this book, the truer, older and more alien insanity of the utter dark may yet be sleeping.

—Will Hindmarch, Developer, **Vampire: The Requiem**

References

The following books and films either proved educational or provided strong inspiration (or both) to the authors during the conception and execution of the material in this tome. Thus, these works may do likewise for those now making use of it.

Literature

Stephen E. Flowers, *Lords of the Left Hand Path: A History of Spiritual Dissent* — This amazing volume contains a huge variety of excellent information on Left-hand path magical, religious and philosophical movements throughout history. *Lords of the Left Hand Path* proved an invaluable resource for this book.

Will L. Garver, *Brother of the Third Degree* — First published in the United States in 1894, *Brother of the Third Degree* is perhaps the quintessential occult novel. The story itself is a rambling Victorian affair, loosely following the almost surreal misadventures of a man named Alphonso Colono, but the novel's true power lies in its ability to slowly lift the veil and open the reader's mind to what lies beyond.

James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library* — This invaluable collection of Gnostic writings was discovered in a large stone jar in the sands outside the Egyptian city of Nag Hammadi in 1945. A collection of 45 different religious and philosophical treatises, the entire text was gathered and translated by fourth-century Gnostics and first published in English in 1977.

Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* — A thoughtful and well-researched tome, Kurt Rudolph's reexamination of Gnosticism as both counter-culture and counter-religious movement stands as one of the most comprehensive studies of the subject matter published to date.

Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* — In what is widely regarded as the first comprehensive history of religious dualism, Warburg Institute researcher Yuri Stoyanov cuts no corners, plotting his course from ancient Egypt to the Dead Sea Scrolls, through the Mithraic Mysteries to the suppression of the Bogomils and Cathars and beyond. The final product weighs in at nearly 500 pages, without a wasted drop of ink.

Film

Altered States (1980) — A remarkably atmospheric mindbender that succeeds so well in coloring outside the lines that the lines begin to blur altogether. William Hurt's performance as a scientist researching the primal

mind of man is a wonder to behold, and the direction is so simultaneously gripping and confident that one can't help but be swept along. Rarely will you see the Beast and Man dynamic so definitively realized as it is in this film (which has no vampires).

Angel Heart (1987) — Set in New Orleans, *Angel Heart* is the now-classic neo-noir thriller about a private investigator who is literally hunting his own dark side. As one might expect, deals with the devil and ritual murder can provide great inspiration for a chronicle involving Belial's Brood.

Faust (1926) — The archetypal "Man vs. Himself" tale, *Faust* is the story of a man who sells his soul to the Devil. Nearly two dozen adaptations of Goethe's classic play have been put to film (including one utterly surreal rendering that relied heavily on marionettes, courtesy of Czech animator Jan Svankmajer), but nothing holds up to F.W. Murnau's legendary black-and-white rendition.

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer (1986) — Based on the vile exploits of real-life serial killing duo Henry Lee Lucas and Otis Tool, director John McNaughton's award-winning film tells a tale of social alienation and the descent into an animal state. Controversial in its time due to its gruesome depictions of sadistic violence.

The Hills Have Eyes (2005) — One of the few films whose remake far outshines the original, this film is an incredibly effective look at the pack mentality writ large, and what such behavior makes of human souls when coupled with stark barbarity. Inspirational particularly for views of isolated, *sarx*-dominant coveys.

Martin (1977) — One of George A. Romero's lesser known films, *Martin* tells the increasingly unsettling tale of a man who believes he is a vampire. A terrific "behind-the-scenes" look at what self-transfiguration does to the human mind. In many ways, Romero's film is the perfect reference on the concept of the Pursuit.

The Ninth Gate (1999) — Roman Polanski's film adaptation of Arturo Perez-Reverte's novel *The Club Dumas*, it follows the story of an unwitting scumbag who beats out an acclaimed occult scholar in the race to become the anti-Christ.

Rampage (1988) — While films such as *Henry* are important for the way in which they assess the impact of social alienation on the savage mind, films such as *Rampage* showcase the impact of the savage mind on the outside world. Based on the true story of Robert Trenton Chase, the so-called Vampire Killer, who butchered six people over a span of 72 hours in January of 1978.

Red Dragon (2002) — Director Brett Ratner's crack at reinventing the prequel to the Oscar-winning *Silence of the Lambs*. The film's horrific antagonist, Francis Dol-

arhyde (played by Ralph Fiennes), is the very model of a lone Brood member.

Lexicon

Terminology used by outsiders in reference to the Forsworn (as opposed to terminology they use themselves) is not included here. Otherwise, this lexicon is an addendum to the one presented on pp. 84–87 of **Vampire: The Requiem**.

Adversary, the: The common name among Forsworn for the source of the vampiric soul, the one true “deity” of all vampires. Some ascribe to it the traits of the Judeo-Christian Lucifer, while others feel the scope of the Adversary is beyond such familiarity. (Also *Demiurge*.)

Antinomian: A member of the Brood faction known as the *Pandaemonium*.

Archon: A member of the Brood faction known as the *Roaring Serpent*.

Archontes: Official covenant rites and ceremonies. Given the covenant’s disparate nature, Archontes are few and mostly revolve around the *Vaulderie*.

Belial: The messianic figurehead who stands at the core of Forsworn belief. Some Brood members hold that he was the first vampire, some that he was the anti-Christ, others that he was just an ordinary man blessed by the Adversary. If a single truth exists as to Belial’s identity, it has been lost to the Fog of Eternity.

brother: A male member of the Brood, to another Brood member.

covey: A tight-knit coterie of local Brood members.

Choronzon: The Discipline practiced by the ritualist priest caste of the Forsworn.

Credentes: Brood vampires who have not ritually adopted the Therion bloodline; though old form, the term still sees regular use among more scholarly Forsworn.

Crux, the: The unique group bond shared by members of a Brood covey, instigated and articulated through repeated practice of the *Vaulderie*.

Demiurge: The term used by the Brood in antiquity, and still used by Brood scholars tonight, to describe the source of the vampiric soul. (Also *Adversary*.)

Djinn: A member of the Brood faction known as the *Throne of Smokeless Fire*.

dynamei: Smaller and/or more localized covenant rites. Where an *Archonte* is performed by coveys the world over with little variation, the look and function of a dynameis may vary wildly from covey to covey, and from faction to faction.

Faustian: A member of the Brood faction known as the *Mercy Seat*.

Forsworn, the: The inhuman vampires of Belial’s Brood (singular and plural).

Hyletic: A member of the Brood faction known as the *Scarlet Rite*.

Investments: Gifts of transformation and power, manifested by the Forsworn through their bond with the Demiurge and their commitment to the Pursuit.

Mercy Seat, the: A faction of Brood members who believe it is their mandate to guide the soul of humanity into self-wrought ruin.

Nameless, the: Perhaps the oldest and most powerful of Brood factions, the Nameless hold that Belial was begotten of the Demiurge, and that he will return.

Pandaemonium, the: A strong and populous faction, the Pandaemonium draws vampires who are attracted to the classical occult trappings of their ethos. Only a portion views the Demiurge as the Biblical Lucifer, but the Forsworn all revel in sacrifice.

pneuma: In the Forsworn trinity of existence, the spirit.

Perfecti: A name for the Therion, this term sees the most use among the Scarlet Rite.

Pursuit, the: A common term for the ongoing process by which a Brood member unlearns what he was taught as a human and inherits his legacy as a vampire.

Roaring Serpent, the: A major Brood faction whose age and power rivals that of the Nameless, the Roaring Serpent holds that Belial was the first vampire.

sarx: In the Forsworn trinity of being, the flesh.

Scarlet Rite, the: Perhaps the smallest of the major factions of the Brood, the hedonistic Hyletics pride themselves on their appetite for degeneracy and vice.

sister: A female member of the Brood, to another Brood member.

soma: In the Forsworn trinity of being, the body.

Therion: The “Bloodline of the Beast,” the ritualist priests of the Forsworn.

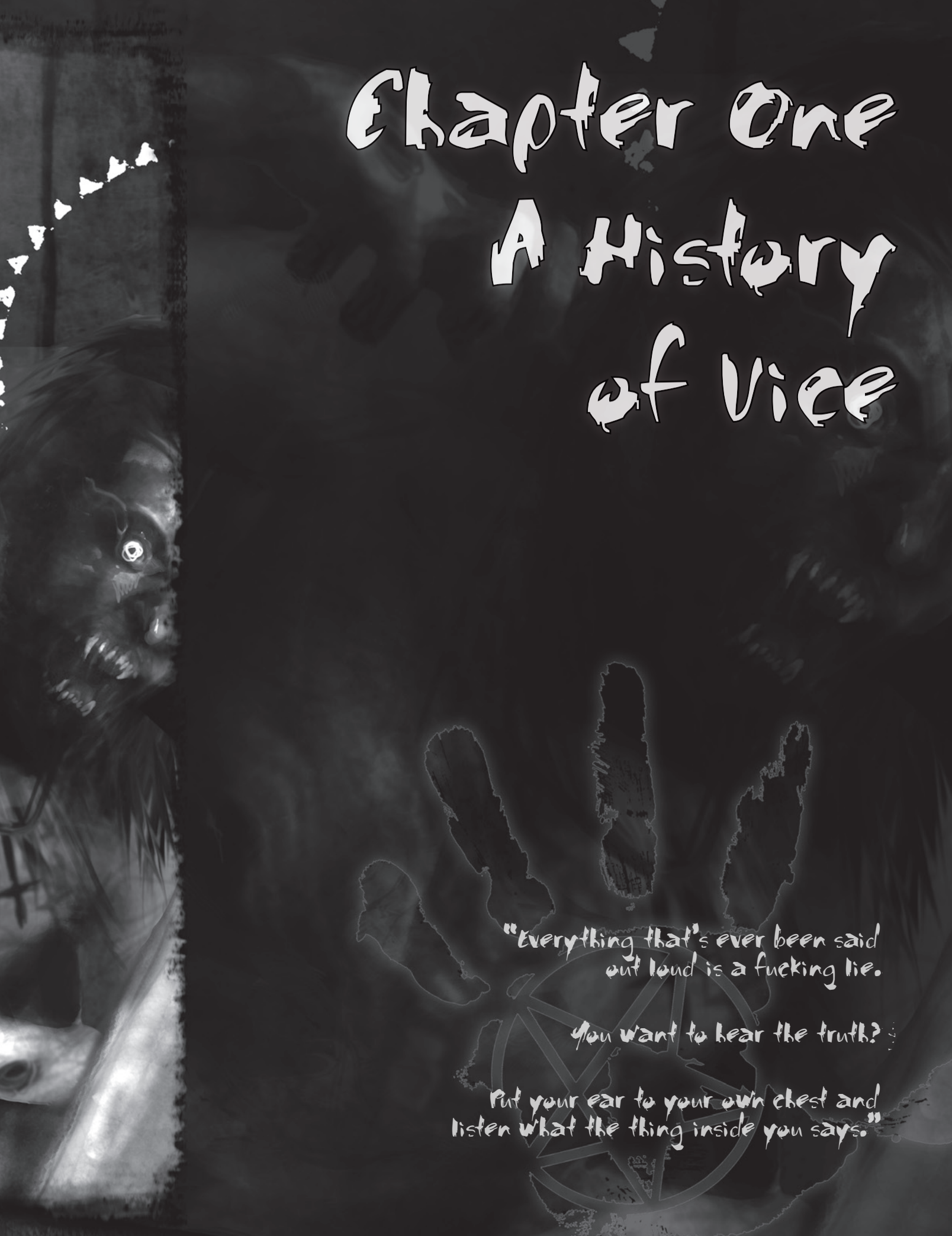
Throne of Smokeless Fire, the: A Brood faction whose members vie constantly with other Forsworn in their bid to gain ever more personal power and influence.

Trinity, the: The tri-partite essence of existence, composed of the *pneuma* (spirit), the *sarx* (flesh) and the *soma* (body).

Unlearned, the: A term used by the Forsworn to indicate non-Brood vampires.

Vaulderie, the: The central rite of the covenant, the Vaulderie involves the ritual pooling and sharing of Vitae among covey members. The Vaulderie forges powerful social and mystical bonds that are essential to the Brood’s philosophies and practices.





Chapter One

A History of Vice

"Everything that's ever been said
out loud is a fucking lie.

You want to hear the truth?

Put your ear to your own chest and
listen what the thing inside you says."

History, n. An account mostly false, of events mostly unimportant, which are brought about by rulers mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools.
— Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

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Constance: Introductory notes,
October 7. 10:43 pm.

I want it on record that I despise being reduced to begging, but begging is essentially what it amounted to. Had anyone else but you asked this of me, I would have refused. More, I'd have taken offense.

As it stands, after substantial negotiations — and, I should point out, a promise of funding that even you might find a bitter draught to swallow — the subject finally agreed to meet with me.

Name Kovitch — comma — Yvgeny. I'm all but certain he is "the Russian" we heard tell about during our otherwise wasted efforts in San Salvador. I know better than to expect anyone to live up to his reputation in the circles we run in, but if he's even half what he's said to be, I might *finally* be able to tell you something genuine about Belial's Brood. The meet's scheduled for tomorrow night.

Might want to cross your fingers, even pray, if you remember how. If this leads nowhere, I'm out of ideas.

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* * *

click

Constance: October 8. 1:30 AM.
Good evening, Mr. Kovitch.

Kovitch: Ah, hello, Ms. —

Constance, was it? You may call me Yvgeny. And I should call you . . . ?

Constance: Ms. Constance will do just fine.

Kovitch: Ah. So.

Constance: Word is, Mr. Kovitch, that you're among the Kindred's foremost experts on Belial's Brood. I'm in need of that expertise, that—

Kovitch: Not so loud, please. Unless, of course, you want to get us killed.

Constance: Mr. Kovitch, you put me off for weeks before agreeing to take this meeting. You chose the location — a nice view, I'll admit, but hardly convenient. And you've scarcely made the object of your studies a secret. If you cannot speak freely to me now, when can you?

Kovitch: Never, I suppose. But yes, I have agreed to speak with you, in exchange for much additional funding from your patron. I think refusing to do so now might hurt more than a mere loss of money, yes? So. What is it you wish to know?

Constance: Start with the basics. What is the Brood? Where does it come from?

Kovitch: [A soft chuckle] I think, Ms. Constance, you will find that those are the same question.

Constance: I'm all ears, Mr. Kovitch.

Kovitch: This mortal world is but a veil, Ms. Constance. A thin layer,

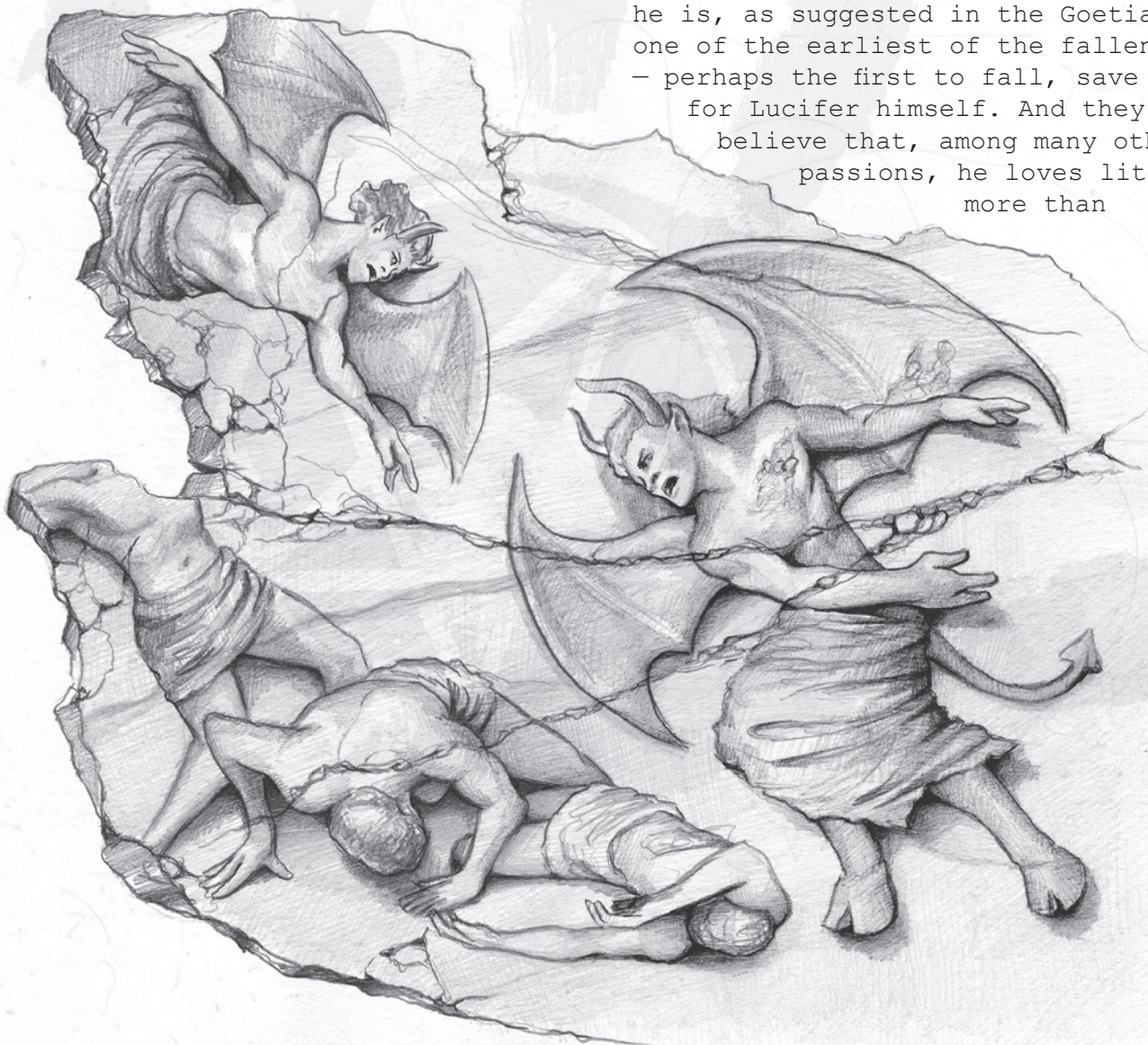
hazy and indistinct, yet sufficient to blind those who refuse to see beyond it. This is something ancient man knew far better than the fools of the modern world. Powers dwell beyond the understanding of mortals. Tonight, we see but glimpses of them in the trappings of faith, or the symbology and lore of the Goetia, but then? Then man interacted frequently with these powers, but now only a rare few can see the truth. A rare few, such as the Brood – or so they believe, anyway.

Look to the modern interpretation of the Goetia, and you shall find none other than Belial, 68th among the powers listed. He is a demanding

spirit, requiring great sacrifice merely to appear, and even greater to grant his favors. It can be no wonder, then, that we as vampires require the sacrifice of others to survive.

Constance: Are the Brood adherents of the Goetia, then?

Kovitch: No, not as modern occultists understand it. The Brood believes that Belial is a true demon, and perhaps King Solomon or other ancient infernalists may have communed with him, so many of Belial's aspects presented in the Goetia are presumably accurate. The ones who ascribe to him the Judeo-Christian-Islamic origin hold that he is, as suggested in the Goetia, one of the earliest of the fallen – perhaps the first to fall, save for Lucifer himself. And they believe that, among many other passions, he loves little more than



tempting priests and men of God into sin and disbelief.

Constance: But?

Kovitch: But they disbelieve that any mere mortal could possibly summon and command him. Beg his indulgence, perhaps, or offer sacrifice to buy his favor, but not command. They don't necessarily believe that the other Goetic demons are equally real — and those that are real are clearly inferior to Belial himself.

He is the right hand of the Adversary, also called the "Demiurge," the entity whom Belial's Brood names as the creator of the Kindred. If man is the creation of the supernal deity, then vampires are the mockery His infernal opposite makes of man. To some of these Antinomians, as the vampires of the Brood seem to call themselves, this "source" is none other than Lucifer himself, the Judeo-Christian-Islamic Satan, thereby making Belial one of the very Dukes of Hell.

Constance: To 'some?' And who is this Adversary to the rest?

Kovitch: The truth of the Brood, as best I've been able to gather, is that their belief system is substantially more Gnostic than traditionally Biblical. Demon, fallen angel, ancient god or simply great spirit, Belial is considered the Father of the Beast. The Adversary may have birthed the Kindred, and Belial may be just a servant who acts as intermediary with its dark children, but Belial was the one who placed us on the proper path. He was, in a very real way, our own Prometheus.

All this, of course, predates mortal or Kindred understanding of God, of Hell, of the Adversary. If legend holds true, Belial was but one demon among many, not even

particularly associated with vampires at all. But Belial saw in our kind a great potential unmet, great power wasted. What his initial connection with the Kindred might have been, I cannot say. He might simply have seen in us a spark of the darkness he called home. He might have seen us as his best tool to corrupt not only men of the supernal deity, but the very fabric of man, the God figure's greatest creation. Maybe Belial even thought of creating an army capable of rivaling the angels of Heaven, or the legions of Hell who served demons other than he. Whatever his interest, he watched from worlds below, seeking one of the Kindred who might prove worthy of his dark blessing.

And find such a one he did, in pre-Hamurabi Babylon, in the city of Dis —

Constance: Dis? As in the city in Hell? As in Dante? Mr. Kovitch, if the only reason you're here is to waste my time —

Kovitch: Ms. Constance, I tell you only what I myself have learned. Yes, I have come across many names for this city in my studies, but Dis is the one I find most often. If you intend only to question everything I tell you, then perhaps it is my time being wasted. If not, and you would care for me to continue . . .

* * *

Kovitch speaks

In this time, and this place, it would be almost impossible for anyone, mortal or Kindred, to make himself stand out to Belial. For this was a time of dark and jealous gods, of ritual sacrifice, of lawlessness and violence. No Hamurabic code of edicts, no covenants as we know them tonight, no protection for those not strong enough to defend themselves. Even before Belial's gift, Dis was a vile, rapacious hive.

It was, as you might imagine, a haven for the Kindred, even then. Scions of all five clans, and of many bloodlines long forgotten, flocked to Dis and other cities like it — where no law ruled, nobody watched the night for signs of violence. Where men sacrificed regularly to bloodthirsty gods, nobody questioned strange disappearances in the dark, or the finding of brutalized, bloodless bodies in the muddy streets at dawn. It is no exaggeration to say that, in all ways that mattered, the vampires ruled over Dis, at least at night.

Had they possessed a hierarchical system, a Prince or similar power as most cities have tonight, that rule might have been formalized. Instead, however, each vampire was concerned only with his own good and protecting his own territory. Just as the humans had not yet developed a code of law, so had the Kindred not formed anything in the way of a society. Indeed, other Kindred religious cults, dedicated to the worship of powerful spirits and demons, appeared throughout the years in the city of Dis. One was dedicated to Anshar, who we know today as one of the darkest of Babylon's greater deities, but the cult swiftly tore itself apart in a paroxysm of ambition, as each member sought to raise his own stature in the eyes of the gods and his fellows. The demon-god Baal — also one of the Goetia, incidentally — had his own cadre of vampire worshippers as well, and indeed the cult seemed primed on several occasions to truly take root in Dis, to establish a base of influence that might have made it a true power, perhaps the first such power, in Kindred society. Again, however, Kindred nature won out over faith. The cultists of Baal attempted to raise themselves over

their brethren, and they were hunted down to the last and slain for their troubles. Unlike Belial's children to come, Baal's followers lacked any special power or insight to grant them an advantage. If Baal truly existed at all, he certainly took no interest in the fates of those who killed in his name.

Had things continued as they were then, the city would likely have been lost to mythology and history, just another horrifically violent community in an era literally pockmarked with such.

But then! Then came one, purportedly of the Gangrel clan, whose name is recorded variously as Enkara, Enhidir and Enkhatur.

I can tell you who Enkhatur was, at least according to the Brood myths I've heard. He was, as I said, a Gangrel, and one of great age and power. He held power over many of the Kindred of Dis, through a combination of physical might and religious authority. Enkhatur was a priest among Kindred, at least of a sort. He preached the glory of many of early Babylon's darkest gods, and claimed that the "curse" of vampirism was the first step between mortality and divinity. One of the many gods whom he addressed in his rites and ceremonies was, of course, Belial, though Enkhatur might have called Belial by a different name at the time.

The legends of the Brood are spotty and ambiguous, and I fear that I cannot tell you precisely what Enkhatur did to attract Belial's oppressive attention. It is, in fact, not merely a common scholastic question among the Antinomians, but some of the neonates purportedly have made it into a game, to see who can come up with the most vile and outlandish tale of Enkhatur's depravities.

One common supposition claims that where most of the city's Kindred sacrificed animals or mortals to their gods, Enkhatur sacrificed other Kindred, maintaining that only they were worthy gifts to Belial and the other powers. Another would have it that Enkhatur went a step further yet, deliberately Embracing Kindred so that he might always have a pool of ready blood sacrifices. Still a third — one that I believe to be the most commonly held, though I must confess my skills as a researcher have led to no confirmation of this belief — maintains that Enkhatur made a dark pact with Belial while still a mortal, and then deliberately sought out the Embrace so that he might never die, and thus never pay the price of his soul. Belial, rather than being angered, was impressed (or at least amused) by the mortal's audacity, as well as his willingness to accept one damnation over another, provided it was of his own making.

Belial appeared to Enkhatur in visitations, coming upon him in the ecstasy of feeding, or as an horrific noonday dream. Gradually, Belial revealed to the Gangrel the truth of the Kindred state, made him understand that the gift the Adversary offered was being squandered. To Enkhatur, Belial granted the first of the great Investments, diabolic powers the likes of which only Kindred who know the "truth" of Belial can master. And Enkhatur worshipped him.

Like most of our kind, however, he worshipped ambition even more. When demonstrations of Enkhatur's new potency drew other Kindred to seek the truth of Belial, the demon rejoiced. When Enkhatur Embraced a small cadre of childer, that he might have allies he could trust

amidst the growing cult, Belial approved. When Enkhatur and his progeny revealed themselves as more enlightened than the other vampires of Dis, the demon delighted.

But when Enkhatur set the Kindred to rule over the mortals in the streets, reigning with iron fist at night and through the eyes and the hands of fanatical ghouls during the day, Belial grew wroth. Demon that he was, he delighted in the pain and suffering of the mortal herds, tortured and pleased, saved or slain, at the whim of their undying masters. Yet this was not the purpose to which he had set Enkhatur! Any fool could use power to hurt and enslave. Belial sought to lift the Kindred up, to make them true disciples of the Adversary, to become all that their deathless forms and powerful magics could become. The temporal power to which Enkhatur aspired could be a useful tool, but only to a vampire who had already mastered himself; to one who had only begun to walk the path, it was a distraction.

Still, had this been Enkhatur's only sin, Belial might have watched and waited, seen how the Gangrel's efforts played out, perhaps been content to seek a new disciple in decades or centuries. If there is any single trait that all demons share in common with Lucifer Morningstar, however, it must be an unbending pride. A delay in his objectives, Belial could tolerate, but when Enkhatur, drunk with power and acclaim, began teaching his newest followers that the Investments were the results of his own growing might, the demon's fury knew no bounds.

Belial reached into the dreams of the vampires of Dis, speaking directly to their dark soul, their Beast, in a tongue their minds could not hear, but that they

and their offspring could never truly forget. He awakened in them instincts so primal that, even in the deepest depths of frenzy, none had ever felt them before. The demon turned vampire against vampire throughout the city, drowning them in a tide of blood, burying them in an avalanche of tearing claws and gnashing fangs. The Kindred weren't the only combatants. Mortal turned on mortal, using the chaos as an excuse to exorcise old grudges, or to eliminate competitors. Cults of rival deities massacred one another in veritable orgies of bloodshed. Some among the Brood believe that even the spirits were wild that night, as magics flared uncontrolled and maddened shapeshifters tore random passersby apart.

This was the end of Dis itself, now remembered only in legends of Hell, instead of a very real Hell on Earth. All those who survived, mortal and Kindred, fled the city for distant lands.

Enkhatur, it must be noted, died shamefully, attempting to sneak out of Dis amidst a family of fleeing mortals. Legend says that even to the last, as he disappeared beneath a maddened pack of his own childer, he begged and shrieked at them to let him go, to keep him prisoner and torture him eternally—anything but to finally send his soul back to the demon he had so fully wronged.

* * *

Constance: It hardly sounds like a viable basis for a multi-millennial sect, Mr. Kovitch. Even assuming any of it were true, that sort of treatment hardly sounds like an inducement to worship.

Kovitch: Ms. Constance, do you want to know why you are seeking the aid of a scholar, as opposed to doing the necessary research and becoming one yourself?

Constance: I lack the time. Or the interest.

Kovitch: Hardly. Time is the one thing we Kindred are never short of, and if you had no interest, we would hardly be speaking now. You lack the patience. If my tale were concluded, I would say so.

Constance: Oh, I'm so terribly sorry. [A snort from Kovitch] By all means, pray continue.

* * *

Kovitch continues

Many of Enkhatur's childer were among the survivors . . . not least because, perhaps guided by Belial's own influence, they spent much of their time hunting down their sire and were thus on the periphery of the chaos and bloodshed. Legend tells that as their senses and their sanity slowly came back to them, they stood atop a small rise and watched Dis burn. Only when the plumes of smoke were subtly tinted by the coming dawn did the pack—arguably the Brood's first covey—go to ground in a nearby hole.

When they rose the next evening, they found one of their number still awake, having somehow waited out the day without so much as blinking her eyes. Called variably Shatri and Shadira, she was one of Enkhatur's eldest, and during her sleepless day she purportedly received the second revelation of Belial.

"We have proved unworthy of the gifts Belial has bestowed upon us," she told her brethren when they awakened. "We have squandered them in base pursuits, wasteful bids for power over those to whom we are already clearly superior. Yet he means not to strip them from us, for he hopes one night we shall indeed have earned them fully. Mistake this not for mercy on his part, for he has none, but like all good generals he seeks only the finest temper for his weapons."

"From this night, and ever forth, the Duke of the Pit shall whisper constantly to our true selves, our dark souls, the Beast we once mistook for a millstone about our necks. No more shall we, once mortal and still flawed as we are, be responsible for deciding who may know the truths Belial has brought us. All those whom he deems fit to benefit from his teachings shall hear him, though they know it not, and to him, and to us, be drawn. And only in the shedding of blood can we ever prove our worth, for only there can we display our strength, and only there can we show to Belial that we remember the fall of Dis, and the lessons it has taught.

"And never more shall we allow any of our number to put himself above the rest, as our misguided father had done, for Belial is the path to the Adversary, and only through him may we descend to our greatest depths."

* * *

Kovitch: [An exasperated sigh] And what is it that draws the skeptical expression this time, Ms. Constance?

Constance: I'm not sure which one I find harder to believe: that there was ever a city ruled openly by the Kindred or that those who ruled could so blithely agree not to seek to recreate that power in a new domain.

Kovitch: It is not so hard to believe. To the Fog of Eternity, we have lost much of the history of even the most meticulous covenants and bloodlines. How much more, then, this sect that cares so little for recording its secrets?

Constance: I can accept that knowledge of this city — Dis, if you must — might have been lost. But the closest thing to "Kindred rule" recorded by history is the Camarilla in Rome, and even then it wasn't

open. I just don't accept that none of the survivors of Dis tried to recreate it.

Kovitch: What would make you think they did not?

Constance: You just said —

Kovitch: I believe I said that none of Enkhatur's childer ever attempted such a thing again. But Enkhatur's childer were hardly the only Kindred of Dis, for all that they were the most influential.

Constance: What are you . . . ?

Kovitch: Where exactly do you think the Ventrue got the idea for the Camarilla?

[20 seconds of silence]

Constance: You cannot possibly expect me to believe that.

Kovitch: What do I care what you believe? It is what the Antinomians believe, and I have found nothing in my studies to prove otherwise.

Nor was Rome wasn't the first time and place this was tried. Many of the non-Antinomian Kindred who fled Dis had seen what a city looked like under open vampire rule. Even some of those who had followed Enkhatur's teachings, though none who were his immediate childer, found the pull of temporal power stronger than their commitment to Belial. They attempted to found the same sort of society elsewhere, scattering throughout what are now the African and Eurasian continents. And everywhere they failed.

Constance: I suppose the Brood takes credit for that, too.

Kovitch: Not all of it, no. The prevailing attitude amongst the Antinomians seems to be one of scorn, and a belief that no vampire-dominated society is possible without Belial's favor — and that as not even the Brood has yet proved itself fully worthy of that favor, certainly no unbeliever could hope to be.

But make no mistake, Belial's Brood has been watching. Each attempt at recreating Dis has provided the Antinomians with great opportunity to test and to prove themselves, to pit themselves against the interests of powerful Kindred, as well as to thumb their noses at established secular and religious authorities.

They were present at the founding of the Camarilla, the first serious effort to unite the Kindred under a single umbrella without the trappings of mortal power. When the Camarilla fell, they spread out along with other Kindred, finding their way to the edges of the Old World, and then to the New.

Constance: To what end? To destroy everything the other covenants built?

Kovitch: No, you are not listening. The Antinomians held masses to the Adversary during the Inquisition, practiced witchcraft in the Colonies, studied Goetic mysticism in the nights of Crowley, played heavy metal and mutilated children in the '80s. Some of it has been ludicrous, some terrifying and none intended to destroy the other Kindred. The Antimonians do not care about the other Kindred. To prove worthy of Belial's teachings, the Antimonians must embrace everything that makes them vampire, and reject everything that made them human. And what makes a human human, if not the works of God?

That, Ms. Constance, is what the Brood is, and where it's from. They are the children of a heretic, the disciples of Lucifer's right hand, the Beasts who would shed their flesh and be Beasts. Every act of inhumanity, every act that mocks God, every act performed for no better reason than it is against the dictates of Heaven — these are the

things that bring them closer to Belial, closer to learning whatever lesson the demon truly sought to teach the vampires of Dis.

Constance: And...what lesson is that?

[A pause of silence]

Kovitch: If I knew that, Ms. Constance, I would hardly require your patron's funding, would I?

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Constance: Supplementary notes.
February 27. 11:47 PM.

I thought I was done with this. The ridiculous fairytale told me by that insufferable Russian, while hardly believable, seemed more than sufficient to provide you what you wished to know. In the past months, I have moved on to other projects.

Several nights back, however, I received a telephone call from one of the contacts I had spoken to a year ago, and long since forgotten about. He wished to give me a name: Pratt-Alvigsonne — comma — Paul. My contact wouldn't say anything more than that, supposedly out of fear. It was, in fact, very over-the-top cloak-and-dagger, and really quite irritating. We simply must cultivate a better class of informants when we have the time.

In any event, knowing how much the topic interests you, I decided it would be prudent to put out a few feelers. The only Paul Pratt-Alvigsonne I could find (and I somehow doubt there are many with that particular name) is an old man dwelling in an "assisted living home for the incapable."

Mortals never say what they mean anymore. "Assisted living home," indeed. I'm standing outside it



right now, and it is an asylum if ever there was one, replete with unnecessarily gothic architecture, overhanging doorways and even the requisite crash of lightning in the storm clouds above. Lovecraft himself would be delighted.

As for me, I expect I am about to have another evening of my time wasted. I cannot imagine what a mortal might be able to tell us about the Brood that we do not already know. As always, though, I shall make certain. We wouldn't want you to be disappointed.

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Constance: Addendum:

There may be more to this than I thought. You know the acuity of my senses; it's one of the reasons you have me running all over looking for things for you. It has been a long time — my mortal days, in fact — since I have been uncertain of my surroundings.

Simply walking from the car to the door, however, I have developed the strong impression that someone is watching me. Shadows in the corner of my eyes that fade as I turn, sounds at the very farthest reaches of even my hearing.

If someone is keeping an eye on this asylum, it may just be that Mr. Pratt-Alvigsonne knows something important after all.

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Constance: ...if I record this, do you?

Pratt-Alvigsonne: Not at all.
[coughs twice] Nor, I suspect, would you let it stop you if I did.

Constance: Perhaps not, but it's only polite to ask. Mr. Pratt-Alvigsonne, I realize that you've gone over this dozens of times with dozens of doctors, but I'm here to ask the nature of the experiences you've had, or believe you've had. By better understanding them, we can —

Pratt-Alvigsonne: Ms. Constance, I apologize for [cough] interrupting you, but let's not prevaricate. You're here to ask me about Belial's Brood.

Constance: I . . . what?

Pratt-Alvigsonne: It's the only thing you Kindred ever come to ask me about.

[15 seconds of silence]

Constance: I see. And do you intend to answer my questions?

Pratt-Alvigsonne: I believe we can [coughs twice] come to an arrangement. Turn that [cough] off for a moment.

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Pratt-Alvigsonne: . . . me going for a good several weeks, at least. Thank you much, young lady.

Constance: The pleasure was all yours, I'm sure. And I'm likely several times your age.

Pratt-Alvigsonne: When you have seen what I have seen, Ms. Constance, you learn swiftly that one's age has very little to do with growing old.

So, you wish to know about Belial's Brood. I'm going to guess that I wasn't your first stop on this little hunt of yours, which means

you've probably already learned a great deal.

It's all wrong, of course.

Tell me, Ms. Constance, have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

[Five seconds of silence]

Constance: If you're about to start proselytizing to me . . .

Pratt-Alvigsonne: Not at all. Merely establishing a frame of reference. So many people believe the Messiah has come and gone once already, and that he will return at the end of days, a time heralded by the coming of the Anti-Christ.

Constance: Yes. And?

Pratt-Alvigsonne: Yet nobody seems to consider the possibility that the Anti-Christ, too, has walked the world once before.

[More silence]

Constance: Are you trying to tell me that you believe Belial . . . ?

Pratt-Alvigsonne: Is the offspring of the Adversary, born to a mortal, as a mortal, and sent to walk the world of man clothed in flesh and blood. That, Ms. Constance, is exactly what I'm trying to tell you.

* * *

Pratt-Alvigsonne speaks

His mother's name was Imarku. She is called a saint by some among the Brood, but she was certainly no virgin. A harlot who could be had by anyone, for any purpose, for the price of a crust of bread, her body was far too riddled with syphilis and other diseases for her to have borne a child. Yet she awoke one day to discover that she was, indeed, with child.

A hazard of her profession, she had learned long ago — before illness had stripped her of her reproductive capability — to recognize the signs. She knew that

she was pregnant long before her body showed any outward clues, and she knew as well that it could be no natural child growing within her pocked and shriveled womb.

More importantly, others would know, for Imarku's health was hardly a secret among those with whom she associated. In fear of being branded a consort of gods or demons, she fled her home, eventually settling in a city of ancient Babylon, one whose name has since been forgotten.

* * *

Constance: Mr. Pratt-Alvigsonne, my prior informant told me that the Brood descended from a pre-Babylonian city called Dis.

Pratt-Alvigsonne: Your prior contact was a jackass. Dis? Really. There are a few among the Brood who might believe such things – the same ones who believe they are honoring Belial by listening to bad music turned up much too loud or slitting the throats of animals and waving them about like party sparklers.

Constance: I see. I suppose every institution must have its unfortunate elements.

Pratt-Alvigsonne: I suppose so. May I continue?

* * *

Pratt-Alvigsonne continues

Belial's childhood and early adulthood, the legends tell us, were fraught with horrors and difficulties. He grew up in poverty, and in poverty he remained for a protracted period, oft-times surviving on little more than a few bites of food a day. His mother, his half-siblings, the master smith who taught him his trade of bronze-crafting, his first wife – all of them died violently, stripped away by the fist, or the sword or the teeth of creatures, vampire and otherwise, that haunted the nights

even then. Some few among the Brood maintain that Belial himself slew all these people over this slight or that insult. Most, however, believe instead that this was the Adversary's way of testing his son, of teaching Belial the first of many lessons he must eventually learn.

Indeed, Belial swiftly learned self-reliance. He needed none, and sought help from none. What he needed he earned, or took, on his own. He took a second wife, and when she died, a third, and he spawned children but refused to rely on the aid or assistance of any of them. He thrived, as much as anyone thrived in that primitive time. It became clear, after several years, that this bronze-smith whom others had believed to be cursed was, in fact, succeeding beyond anyone's expectations. His tools and weapons proved superior, even when rushed or made with inferior materials. There was always sufficient bronze or sufficient food when he went to market, regardless of prevailing conditions. No random robbers accosted him on the streets, nor did he ever fall afoul of the city's various religious fanatics.

Others began to watch him, to follow him, to learn his secrets of success. And Belial, though initially intending to send them away, found himself flattered by their attentions – it can be said that he had, if nothing else, his father's pride – and he began to preach. His doctrines of individuality, of self-reliance, of doing for oneself rather than turning to any of the myriad gods of the age, were revolutionary, but they found a home in the hearts of many who listened. Almost overnight, Belial found himself the equivalent of a religious leader.

This, of course, did not sit well with the priests of the local gods,

and they set soldiers against Belial and his new following. And it was here that Belial showed himself stronger than his spiritual nemesis, who was at this time many centuries away from being born – for Belial was willing to fight to protect what was his.

Dozens of Belial's followers stood against many hundreds of the priests' soldiers, and his followers did not yield. Perhaps Belial's success to this point was miraculous in and of itself, but it was here that he worked the first of his dark miracles before witnesses, the first of many to come. The soldiers struck at his flesh, and their swords grew brittle as glass and then shattered; yet the weapons of his own followers cleaved through the shields of the enemy with ease. Where Belial's followers were grossly outnumbered, the beasts of the night rose up and attacked his foes, squirming beneath armor and chewing through muscle and bone.

Amidst it all, Belial stood weaponless, laying about him with his hands alone. And where he struck flesh, that flesh burned, leaving behind dozens of corpses with nothing but the blackened imprint of an open hand to show how they had died.

When word of Belial's miracles spread, his following increased tenfold. Belial continued to use his abilities to defend what was his, to obtain further riches still, and he prospered. Eventually, there came a time when he had a sufficiency of disciples that he could have asked anything of them; he need never lift another finger on his own behalf. Yet he did not, for never had he forgotten the first of lessons life taught him: to rely on himself, and himself alone.

Yes, word of Belial spread – and not just among mortals. The Kindred of the era had no covenants as we

would recognize them, perhaps not even the clans we know tonight, but they were Kindred, and the Kindred nature does not change.

The first of the Kindred to seek power over Belial was one named Enhidir. We know little of him, save that he sought to overwhelm Belial's mind, to control one capable of such dark miracles for his own ends.

But Enhidir's power, the Kindred's power, was of the Adversary, and held no fear for one who was himself birthed of the Adversary. Belial allowed Enhidir to enter his mind, to see what it was he truly sought to master, and the vampire was left maddened and near mindless by the experience.

This was Belial's first direct experience with the Kindred, though he had encountered them in passing before, and it came as a revelation to him. He knew, now, who his true flock must be, what doctrine he must teach. Yet he knew, too, that they must come to him, if they were ever to accept his teachings.

We know not the name of the second vampire Belial encountered. It was some years after –

* * *

Constance: Wait one minute. What's with the name thing?

Pratt-Alvigsonne: I beg your pardon?

Constance: You haven't told me the name of Belial's siblings, or the smith to whom he was apprenticed or his wife. Now you've got this "nameless vampire." I realize the histories are spotty, but –

Pratt-Alvigsonne: I suggest you try to get used to it, Ms. Constance. There will be much more. The Brood believes it improper to try to identify such individuals. They have transcended any feeble names we might put to them; to seek to pin them down in such a

way is to seek power over them, and that is nothing but an insult. They recognize the name of Belial, because it is only through him that the Kindred can ascend, but the others must remain unknown. Some of the more zealous among the Brood prefer not to even utter Belial's name if they can avoid it. They refer to themselves as the Nameless, rather than as Belial's Brood.

Constance: Indeed. My prior source claimed the Kindred of the Brood called themselves "Antinomians."

Pratt-Alvigsonne: Phaw! I suppose someone poorly versed in Latin – and a cretin, besides – might come to believe that that term meant "Nameless."

Constance: I'm not certain that's what he –

Pratt-Alvigsonne: We've only just touched on Belial, Ms. Constance. We haven't even gotten to the Brood yet. And if you keep interrupting me...

* * *

Pratt-Alvigsonne continues

This vampire sought a more direct means of gaining Belial's power for himself. He sought not to dominate the worker of dark miracles, but instead to Embrace him. The tales tell that he appeared outside Belial's hut mere moments after dusk and slipped inside.

What happened within, however, the tales do not tell, except to say that the vampire and the son of the Adversary spoke long into the night, and nearly until dawn. Scholars among the Brood strive to this night to learn what Belial said, and to this night they strive in vain. What we do know is that when the pair emerged, mere moments before the sun arose, Belial was still a mortal and the vampire had become his First Apostle, never again to leave his side.

* * *

Constance: Wait.

Pratt-Alvigsonne: [An exasperated sigh] What did I just say about interrupting me?

Constance: So, if not at this point, when was Belial Embraced?

[10 seconds of silence]

Pratt-Alvigsonne: Ms. Constance, what could I possibly have said to give you the impression that he was Embraced?

[20 seconds of silence]

Constance: You mean to tell me that Belial's Brood worship – even named themselves, in fact – after a mortal?

Pratt-Alvigsonne: Ah . . . I never get tired of that look. Yes indeed, Ms. Constance. Like the son of God, the son of the Adversary was mortal. And remained so until the day he died – or at least he may have.

* * *

Pratt-Alvigsonne continues

To this First Apostle, Belial taught secrets the likes of which his mortal followers could never comprehend. "I perform miracles," Belial is said to have told his Kindred disciples, "but you are miracles. Dead yet living, waking yet ageless; there is nothing of the mundane, nothing of the natural, in your flesh. Learn the lessons I can teach you, guide yourself through my words onto my father's path and there will be nothing in this world you cannot do, no act of will you cannot make manifest." Indeed, most of the Brood believes that the various powers they can access tonight, abilities known to no other Kindred, are the simplest and weakest of the dark miracles of which Belial spoke.

Belial and his Apostle spread his words and his teachings, and many Kindred flocked to his call. From

one, Belial eventually acknowledged no fewer than five true Apostles, and several dozen other Kindred followers who never attained that level of favor – or of power. Belial brought the truth of their condition to the Kindred, and not only the Brood's abilities, but many of the Disciplines so common to vampires today, spring from his teachings. He taught the vampires to speak in the language of the Beast, so that no matter what their words sounded like to casual ears, each knew precisely what the other meant to convey.

Belial did not forget his mortal followers, but he clearly favored the Kindred, for they far more fully embodied his teachings of might and power. With his blessing, the Kindred assumed as much influence over the mortals as they could enforce. For several bloody years, the city was ruled entirely by night, with its mortal populace either living in fear of, or becoming devoted servants to, the demigods who slept by day.

Just as his preaching to his mortal flock had threatened the religious elite years earlier, and just as Jesus' own teachings would irritate the powers of Rome centuries later, so did many among the Kindred grow concerned at the news and the word they heard coming from this obscure city. The Kindred had no set societal structure to be endangered, of course, but certainly many individuals, Princes the likes of which we have even now, felt their grasp on power threatened. Some few might even have already had the beginnings of a larger plan, what would eventually result in the Camarilla or the covenants we know tonight.

Whatever their true motivations, many of the most influential vampires of the age moved against Belial's growing cult. Favored mortal

pawns and contacts died swiftly, supplies ceased moving – all the same song and dance with which you are no doubt already familiar. Many of Belial's followers, the more cowardly and weak-willed among them, abandoned their savior for fear of being associated with his inevitable fall. But the Five Apostles, and a few dozen other Kindred besides, stood by his side.

Persecution of the cult at the hands of frightened Kindred increased, until merely being associated with Belial was enough to condemn a vampire to Final Death. Slowly, through attrition as members were slain or fled, the cult was reduced to no more than Belial and his Five Apostles.

Belial was himself an old man by this time, and though his Apostles begged him to let one of them Embrace him, that he might continue to lead them, he refused. All his power, all his influence, he had gained himself, through his own ambition and the gifts he could call upon as the son of the Adversary. He would not, Belial swore, continue in any state wherein he would owe his power or his existence to another.

The First Apostle, who had known Belial and his teachings longest, accepted his declaration, albeit with a heavy heart. But the others, for all Belial's teachings of self-reliance, were too afraid to accept. In the dark hours before the dawn, three of them overcame the First Apostle and held him fast, while the Third Apostle crept into the room where the aged Belial slept. There, crying tears of crimson, she feasted upon her savior's blood, and bit her own lip asunder that she might return unlife in place of the life she had drained.

When the others freed him, the First Apostle raged. He set upon



the one who had attempted to Embrace Belial, and beat her nigh unto torpor. Yet he did not slay the Third Apostle, or any of her accomplices. He would wait to learn what his newly Embraced master would have him do, for it was only right that he be the one to assign punishment.

For three nights and three days, Belial lay in his hut, dead to all outward observers. For three nights and three days, the Apostles waited with diminishing hope, praying that their savior, the son of the Adversary, might yet awaken to unlife and guide them as he had always done.

On the evening of the fourth day, the Five Apostles entered the hut to check on their master, only to

find his room empty, the cot on which he had lain apparently undisturbed. Though they searched throughout the night, not even their greatest powers of Auspex could detect the slightest trace of Belial, or determine how he had slipped away – or even whether he was yet living or undead.

Now the others turned to the First Apostle with fear, for they knew that he was greatest among them, that without the element of surprise they would be hard-pressed to defeat him, and that he was greatly angered with them.

"You have proved us unworthy of Belial's teachings," he told them, his voice sad, his jaw clenched in anger. "You have been weak, where Belial taught strength. You have



been afraid, where Belial taught fearlessness.

"And I...I have been merciful, where Belial taught us to show none."

The First Apostle fell upon the Third, breaking her bones and drinking of her blood until there was nothing left to sustain her. As her dust fell through his fingers and poured from his lips, he turned again to the others. "Go. Flee from me now, before the legacy of Belial dies here with us. Others will come to you, and they will know what you should have learned even though you teach them not. Only at the end of nights will the Son of the Adversary walk the world again, and only those who have proved worthy will share in his power in the age to come."

* * *

Constance: And then?

Pratt-Alvigsonne: And then what?

Constance: Once the Apostles scattered. Where did they go? How did the Brood spread from there?

Pratt-Alvigsonne: All excellent questions, Ms. Constance. Come back in a few weeks, and I'll be happy to address them.

Oh, and Ms. Constance? You should probably eat before you visit me again.

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Constance: Sup-supplementary notes, March 22. 1-ah, 1:16 AM.

[slightly muffled] Do, um... Do you prefer "Mr. Jackal" or "the Jackal," or...?

Jackal: No. Just "Jackal" will suffice. I left other names and titles buried in an unmarked grave long ago.

Constance: I see. [volume returns to normal] I have returned to my room after a fruitless night to find a stranger waiting for me. He insists I call him "Jackal," and has provided no additional identification. He appears -

Jackal: I would prefer no record of my appearance, Ms. Constance. It is safer for us both. Consider it my price for allowing you to record this conversation at all.

Constance: I - yes, as you wish. All right, Jackal. You mentioned Belial's Brood.

Jackal: I did.

Constance: And what makes you think I have any involvement with them?

Jackal: You have no involvement with them, but not for lack of trying. You've spoken to the Slav, Kovitch. You've been to see Pratt-Alvigsonne - not, I would point out, the wisest move you might have made.

Constance: How did you -

Jackal: After your conversation with Kovitch, you stopped speaking to your contacts on this matter. After you saw the old lunatic, you redoubled your prior efforts. Also not the most shrewd move.

Constance: How do you know this?

Jackal: I keep a very close eye on all things connected to the Brood, Ms. Constance, or at the least I attempt to. You have been less than subtle in your inquiries.

Constance: Since when does the Brood care what people think or say about them?

Jackal: They likely don't. "Likely" is a very thin line on which to hang your continued well-being.

Constance: And why do you care?

Jackal: Because I think we may be able to help each other. I, too,

have a substantial interest in Belial's Brood.

Constance: And you are willing to share information?

Jackal: I am. Only, however, if you go first.

Constance: How do I know you'll uphold your end of the bargain?

Jackal: You do not, I suppose. But this is hardly the time to start worrying about risks, is it?

[10 seconds of silence]

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Jackal: —ry interesting.

Constance: You believe either of those stories?

Jackal: You would be surprised, Ms. Constance, how little I believe of anything.

Constance: But you said you had some information of your own about the Brood. Which of those tales corresponds most closely to your own knowledge of their beliefs?

Jackal: Neither.

Constance: What?

Jackal: This is the first time I recall having heard either of those legends. Let me tell you what I have heard regarding the birth of Belial's Brood.

* * *

The Jackal speaks

Belial was born so long ago that history and mythology are utterly indistinguishable. His father was a warrior of one of the ancient tribes, though the legends differ on precisely which — Midianite, perhaps, or Hittite. His life growing up was as so many others: hard and violent, made up of periods

of hunger and want, punctuated by short bursts of hideously bloody conquest and the temporary comfort of a life lived on the spoils of war.

He grew to become a great warrior himself, as so many of those people were, and eventually became the warlord of one of the smaller tribes of his nation. It is said that he was the greatest warrior of his age; I'm certain we must chalk at least some of that up to typical mythic exaggeration, but doubtless he was a soldier of no small ability. That he committed many of what the modern world would consider atrocities is also not in doubt. That was, after all, simply the way of the world. The tribes killed for land, for food, for vengeance, for religious reasons, sometimes because that is simply what they did. Men, women, children . . . It hardly mattered.

Distasteful, yes. But as I said, common to the time. It was certainly nothing to distinguish Belial from any of the other warlords and tribal leaders. His tribe was incredibly ferocious and highly skilled, much like their leader, and they proved victorious against every foe they encountered. Nomadic tribes, remnant Sumerians, communes of Israelites all fell to Belial's warriors. Had he led a larger tribe, or an entire nation, he might well have changed the course of pre-Christian history, but as it was, he had little cultural impact despite his fearsome nature.

Belial did, however, have two personality traits that caused him to stand out, even among the other skilled warriors and merciless leaders of the age. The first was his household god. Not only most nations, but most communities, and even many families had their own pantheon of gods and spirits, of

course. Belial always attributed his success to one, one that had, or so he claimed, watched over his family line since the very first dawn. It was a god to which he gave no name, when asked, save one. I do not know the actual term — nor could I likely pronounce it, coming as it does from a dead language — but I am given to understand that it translates most closely to “Most Terrible Enemy of My Enemy.”

The other was his rather unfortunate tendency toward cannibalism.

* * *

Constance: But how unusual is that, really?

Jackal: How many cannibals did you know in your mortal life, Ms. Constance?

Constance: That’s hardly what I meant, Jackal. Lots of primitive cultures practiced ritual cannibalism. Some Native American tribes believed they consume an enemy’s strength by eating his heart. On the Asian continent —

Jackal: If I’d known this was to be an anthropology lesson, I would have brought a pen.

Constance: My point is, while I don’t profess to be an expert on pre-Biblical era mytho-history, was cannibalism truly that unusual?

Jackal: I couldn’t say. But Belial was hardly a traditional cannibal.

* * *

The Jackal continues

You are at least partly correct in your surmise. Belial seemed to believe that consuming the flesh of his foes granted him a measure of their potency. It was, at least initially, an act he performed only on occasion. He might consume a great enemy he had just defeated, or he might consume some of an enemy’s

soldiers to give him strength to face his true foe. But in either case, it started as a quirk, not a true habit.

Eventually, however, word of his practice spread — and not only spread, but grew, as rumors and tales are wont to do. Many who dwelt in the lands near Belial’s tribe came to believe that he was a flesh-eating horror, birthed from the foulest imagination of the darkest gods. It was said that he used his teeth in combat, that he would eat the flesh off a man’s face on the battlefield, that he sent his warriors on raids with the sole purpose of bringing back captives to be devoured.

None of it was true, of course, but it was enough to cause fear of Belial and his tribe of savages to spread far faster and more strongly than it otherwise might. When Belial himself first heard of these tales, ironically enough from an enemy captive who begged the conqueror not to eat his family, the warlord was pleased. He knew full well the power of fear as a weapon.

Gradually, it seems that Belial began, to use the modern colloquialism, to believe his own hype. His behavior became ever more gruesome, ever more savage. He began to seek out opportunities to consume human flesh. He did indeed send raiding parties to take slaves, and some of those slaves had a very short span of service. He was witnessed more than once to move in on a foe and, rather than strike with his sword, to take a bite from the other man’s neck or shoulders.

Many among the Brood — or at least so I’m given to understand — theorize that Belial was simply playing to his reputation. If his previous behavior had spawned such horrific tales, and thus caused his

enemies to tremble in fear at his mere name, then what more could he accomplish by actually taking those tales to heart? Even if this were the case to start with, however, Belial swiftly lost sight of any goal so mundane. He developed a taste for the bloodshed, an apparent addiction to human flesh. On the rare occasion that his warriors could not acquire an appropriate meal, Belial turned one of his own people into his next repast. His most brutal warriors aped his behavior, adopting cannibalism themselves, though never to the same grotesque extremes as their warlord.

For all his apparent madness, however, at least one element of Belial's practice never changed. While he believed he was taking the strength of his foes into himself as he consumed them, he always dedicated their deaths to his unnamed god.

Unlikely as it sounds, Belial lived through many decades of war and conquest. Although injured many times, and struck down by illness many others, he always recovered. It must have seemed to his followers that his cannibalistic acts truly had given him the strength of all those whom he had slain, for he seemed to have the resilience of an army.

Eventually, Belial began to grow old, and it is said that for the first time, those who knew him best could see the glimmer of fear in his eyes. Belial was no coward. He was not afraid of death per se; but the notion of succumbing to a foe against whom he could not fight unsettled him. He sought the advice of wise men, prophets and witches, but while many provided means of staving the years off for a time, age continued to creep up on him.

It was one night, while deep in

prayer to his dark god, that Belial had what can only be described as a twisted epiphany. If consuming the flesh of the strong made him stronger...

Could consuming the flesh of the young make him younger?

Belial's standing orders to his soldiers changed, becoming so horrible that even many of his most savage men fled from his tribe rather than follow them, or face his wrath for disobeying. The focus of their raids against enemy lands shifted to the gathering of children almost exclusively. Within a span of several short years, scores if not hundreds of infants and adolescents met their deaths in the cooking fires of Belial's camps. When even this proved insufficient to sate Belial's lust for young flesh, he ordered the capture of women and girls of childbearing age, to be held as breeding stock – and, secondarily, to slake the more natural but still violent lusts of the soldiers.

Even then, Belial did not forget the strategic elements of his actions. Where possible, he directed these raids against the families of those who would soon face him on the field of battle, demoralizing them, rendering them afraid to leave their homes for fear their loved ones would be dragged away in their absence. Even though their numbers had shrunk, as those who refused to be part of such horrors fled, Belial's tribe remained the most feared warriors in the region.

It is, of course, unlikely that Belial's practice of eating the young would have truly slowed the aging process, but he was given no opportunity to find out for certain. For with these latest horrors, Belial learned the lesson so many other monsters and tyrants have learned throughout history: if you

push too far, fear can drive even the most cowardly or demure people to action.

No tribes existed anywhere nearby with sufficient strength, or sufficient numbers, to challenge Belial's warriors. But against all the local tribes together, united despite their own ancient feuds and current enmities, even the mightiest of soldiers could not hope to stand.

The battle raged long, with only a few moments of respite. Finally, as the sun began to sink into the west on the evening of the third day, the warriors of the united tribes pierced Belial's last line of defense. Atop a rise now slick with blood, they surrounded the great tent defended by Belial himself, along with his five most loyal and most fearsome soldiers. Although each took with him more than a dozen of the enemy, the warriors dropped one by one, until only Belial

himself still stood. Sword, spear and arrow opened wound after wound in Belial's flesh, and finally even he could no longer stand, yet he lived still. Triumphant, the tribesmen hefted Belial onto their shoulders and carried him into his own tent.

There they were confronted with horrors the likes of which they could scarcely have dreamt. Here lay evidence of the warlord's most recent repasts. Clothes of children lay folded in a neat pile, ready to be dispersed to the young of Belial's own tribe. Cuts of meat, some of which were still recognizably human, hung upon hooks, waiting to be prepared. Bloodstained bowls of wood and bone littered a long table. And before a gilded altar to an unknown god, there lay a pile of tiny skulls, stacked to the height of a short man.

Maddened with horror and grief – and not a little fear – Belial's



conquerors slit the warlord's throat and left him to die lying atop his own altar. Then they stepped outside and lit the tent aflame.

Had they stayed to watch it burn, they might have seen that although burning scraps rained down around Belial and the altar, the flames themselves did not reach him, for the dirt floor of the tent failed, of course, to burn. They might also have seen, after the sun set, the mighty warlord drag himself to his feet, one hand pressed firmly to the wound across his throat, staunching the flow of blood, even if only for a short time.

Belial knew he was dying, and he raged against his fate, against the weaklings who had managed to overcome him. He tried to shout, but his voice was a mere gurgling croak, muffled not merely by the wound that must soon slay him despite his best efforts, but also by the smoke that filled his lungs. Wracked by an agonizing thirst, Belial partook of the only drink available to him — his own previously spilled blood, collected in the cupped hands of the idol atop the altar.

Despite the flames nearby, the blood should have cooled at least somewhat in the night air, yet it burned like fire as it trickled down his throat. Belial felt a new strength flush his limbs, like nothing he had ever felt before. The wound on his neck slowed its flow, and then ceased to bleed altogether. And before Belial's suddenly sharpened eyes, the idol of his dark god melted away, starting at the hands where the warlord's blood had pooled.

* * *

Constance: I'm not entirely certain I understand. Are you suggesting Belial Embraced himself?

Jackal: Hardly, though it was his own blood that carried the dark

blessing. Haven't you been listening at all? Who do you think Belial's "familial god" was?

Constance: The Adversary, in Judeo-Christian-Islamic terms. I got that. I'm not an idiot.

Jackal: The Demiurge, or the "source," as he is known to the Brood. Belial received his gift directly. An Immaculate Embrace, if you prefer. Belial was the first vampire — patient zero, if you're of a scientific mind — an honor he had earned through his devout worship and his...interesting proclivities.

* * *

The Jackal continues

Belial received no immediate knowledge of his new condition, but he learned swiftly enough to follow his instincts. He knew, before the rising sun touched the horizon, that he was forevermore denied the light of day. He discovered how to draw upon the power within him to perform feats far beyond those he could have imagined as a mortal. And he learned that what he had believed in life was now the factual basis of his new existence: only by feeding on the lives of others could he survive, and remain strong.

More than that, however, he learned that his prayers to his god were now answered far more directly, so long as they were augmented with the power of his own blood. He could work uncountable dark miracles and mastered secret rites, only a few of which have survived to the modern nights as the Brood's own form of mysticism.

For several years, Belial dwelt alone in the wild. He hunted the fringes of nearby tribes and villages when he hungered, but otherwise avoided human contact. He acted thus not out of fear, for truly Belial feared nothing now save the burning touch of the sun, but

in order to obtain as complete a mastery of his new abilities as his soldier's training had granted him over his old. And finally, when he felt he was ready, Belial sought his revenge.

The first to die were the members of his own tribe who had deserted him. With the patience of immortality, Belial tracked them down to their new nations, and he slaughtered them to the last, along with their families. Tales spread of these terrible deaths; some attributed them to some horrible plague, while others evoked demons or angry spirits. Fear of Belial spread once more, though none now knew him by name.

Next were the leaders of the warriors who had defeated him, starting with the most mighty and working his way down, and again their families and loved ones perished with them. Now the tales that spread spoke of a curse, the vengeance of the god Belial had once worshipped — and in a way, I suppose, those tales were not wholly wrong.

But as before, the fear Belial engendered eventually turned on him. Perhaps guided by their own gods, or even by the voice of the one God whom they had not yet acknowledged, the priests of the tribes learned to guide their soldiers and their people in ways to fight the bearer of this curse. The cleansing power of open flame, the barrier of the holy sign faithfully presented and Belial's great vulnerability during the hours of day, all these were turned against him by the surviving family and friends of those he had slain. Although he lingered for years, continuing his murderous vendetta, Belial was eventually forced to flee the lands he had hunted as both man and Kindred, never to return.

For many years, Belial wandered, feasting off the various communities through which he moved. Eventually, however, with the passing years, the immortal warlord grew lonely, for he had rarely been without the company of the warriors of his tribe. For the first time, he sought out not a small village or a nomadic tribe in which to hunt but one of the great cities of the time. Eventually, he found himself in what would become Babylon, in the now-forgotten city of Sayhad.

* * *

Constance: Sayhad? Not "Dis?" Not "some unknown city?"

Jackal: That is what I said, yes.

Constance: Do you have any reason to suspect that your identification is any more accurate than the other two tales?

Jackal: It's what I've learned. As to which is the truth, if any of them, I can't imagine I'm any better a judge than you.

* * *

The Jackal continues

For a time, the relative crush of humanity around him slaked Belial's loneliness, and it certainly made hunting far easier. Soon, however, he craved true companionship. For the first time, Belial contemplated the possibility of creating more like him. He prayed to his god for guidance, but on this matter, no answer was forthcoming, no dark miracle or unholy power offered itself as a solution.

Belial was no fool, however, and it took him little time to determine that the power must be in the blood. Not only was it the source of his strength, but the blood had been the catalyst for his own transmutation.

He watched the city for months, until he had identified several individuals he considered worthy of

his own undying nature. His first attempt at the Embrace was less than a complete success. The man to whom he fed his blood gained strength, and grew unswervingly loyal to Belial, but he was still clearly mortal. Although disappointed, Belial saw the possibilities inherent in a faithful servant, stronger than any mortal soldier, who could operate by day, and he bound several more of these earliest ghouls to aid him in his endeavors. It is for this reason, I believe, that the Brood offers its ghouls an unusual amount of respect tonight: with the exception of Belial himself, they actually predate the Kindred.

It was only when several of Belial's ghouls died violently in battle with the zealots of a rival cult that the true nature of the Embrace became apparent. One of the ghouls, a man named Enkahas, who had fed most recently, arose as a vampire, the first other than Belial himself. Then Belial realized that, just as his life had been all but spent when he drank from the cupped hands of the altar, so, too, must a potential vampire be drained to the point of death before the blood of the sire would offer a true transformation.

I'm certain that more than a few would-be Kindred died as Belial and Enkahas mastered the procedure, but eventually the first vampire indeed had a loyal brood of childer. To them he taught all that he had learned, about the nature of their new existence, the extent of their powers and the fealty they owed his dark god.

Then, with a population of vampires and ghouls supporting him, Belial returned to what he did best — conquest through fear. The mortal leaders and priests of Sayhad could do nothing to protect themselves, let alone the other citizens of the city. In a mere handful of

nights, Belial's name was whispered and screamed throughout Sayhad, and the people knew that they now answered not to any mortal king but to a night-dwelling demigod against whom they had no defense. For the vampires it was a paradise; they fed when they chose, on whom they chose and none could gainsay them save Belial himself, who saw little need to reign his followers in. For the mortals, the city of Sayhad was a tiny piece of Hell.

It was ultimately Enkahas, the Second Eldest, who caused the downfall of Belial's dominion. Seduced by the power he held, Enkahas began to believe himself a true divinity on Earth. He ceased worshipping Belial's god, and instead pressed his followers, his minions and his childer to worship him.

He lost much of what he was in this apostasy. The tongue of Belial's god, whom all vampires could instinctively speak from the moment of Embrace, was lost to him. His Investments and rituals ceased to function.

Yet he remained ageless and undead, a creature of the night who fed on blood. He kept the vast majority of his unholy powers and his inhuman strength. Most horrifically, where Belial and the faithful were concerned, he retained the ability to bind humans through the power of his blood, and to create his own progeny through the Embrace.

Belial and his childer fell upon Enkahas and his own offspring with the maddened fury of Hell's own demons, tearing them apart in an orgy of blood and leaving the quivering chunks of flesh to burn in the rising sun. The damage, however, had already been done. The vampires of Sayhad now knew that, while Belial's god might be the original source of their kind, obedience,

fealty and worship were not integral aspects of their condition. For the sacrifice of only a few of their many abilities, the vampires could be their own masters, owing adulation to none, answerable to none. The vampires could create childer and ghouls without the necessity of dedicating them to this god, indoctrinating them to be loyal to their sires alone.

The Kindred of Sayhad fell into a religious and civil war, with Belial and the faithful on one side and this new breed of "independent" vampire on the other. In the first nights of the struggle, Belial held the upper hand, but his enemy grew in number far more swiftly than his own forces. Investments and the tongue of the Beast gave the faithful an edge, but it was one that would eventually be overwhelmed by sheer numbers.

As it happened, however, the vampires never had the opportunity to decide the matter for themselves. The mortals of the city swiftly became aware of the struggle occurring beneath the veil of night, and the most resourceful of them eventually learned the theological underpinnings behind it. This information they took to their priests, who realized that if the vampiric nature could be so drastically changed simply by failing to worship their creator, then perhaps the power of other gods could be turned against them as well. This was the source of faith as the enemy of the Kindred, and it was a weapon the mortals wielded with great skill and desperation. In months, between their own strife and the efforts of the priests, the vampires were almost wiped out, their numbers reduced to a fraction of what they had been.

Both factions of vampires knew that Sayhad was lost to them, but

they knew as well that they could hunt – and perhaps rule once more – in other cities, in other lands. The apostates scattered wildly in all directions, with no plan other than escape, and no unity. Belial's offspring, however, knew that they could not afford to disperse so completely. The teachings of Belial's god, and the true nature and true loyalty of vampires, must survive. They departed in small groups, determined to survive. In every land through which they passed, they searched for those who would join them in their worship and service of the Adversary. And indeed they seemed aided by their god directly, as a few of the vampires they met over the years – even those descended from the apostates, who had never even heard of Belial or his god – seemed blessed with an understanding of the language of the Beast. Thus, the teachings of the first vampire survived even the fall of his domain, and spread through the world even to the modern nights.

* * *

Constance: You seem to have left something out.

Jackal: Belial. His fate.

Constance: That would be it. You speak of his brood fleeing Sayhad, but nothing of Belial himself. Was he slain in the war?

Jackal: That's a very good question. I have no answer for you. The legends of the Brood simply cease mentioning Belial after the fall of his domain in Sayhad. They speak of him only in the past tense. But they don't suggest his final fate, either. There are certainly enough hypotheses, some so old they qualify as myths themselves: The mortal priests slew him. The apostates slew him. He sank into torpor and still rests deep beneath what was Sayhad, whatever it may be

now. He disappeared into the world with his followers, and spread his teachings even as they did, until he was slain in some other nation and some other time. He survives even now, passing as a normal vampire. He has ascended into some greater form, something above vampire, closer to the Adversary himself. Or any one of two dozen other possibilities, none of which have the tiniest shred of evidence supporting them.

Constance: That's vaguely unsatisfying.

Jackal: If you're looking for neat and tidy answers, Ms. Constance, perhaps the Requiem isn't the existence for you.

Constance: Indeed. So, what else?

Jackal: Else?

Constance: You've spoken at length about the birth of the Brood. It seems that's all anyone talks to me about. But there's so much more I need to know, about the Brood tonight. How they behave, what their practices are, how they're organized.

Jackal: I started with the beginning because it is the beginning. As for the rest . . . that's very dangerous information you're delving into, Ms. Constance.

Constance: No less so than you are, as you've made clear.

Jackal: True. I . . . no.

Constance: No?

Jackal: Not tonight. I've spent too much time here already, and I frankly do not yet know how fully you can be trusted. What I've told you so far is myth, legend. To speak of specifics, modern facts... no. Not yet.

Constance: But —

Jackal: When I've looked a bit more into who you are, when I've decided I'm prepared to continue our discussions, I'll contact you.

Constance: I see. And if you decide you're not prepared to continue?

Jackal: Then you'll not hear from me. Simple enough, no?

click

* * *

click

Constance: Addendum.

That was not pleasant. I'm not accustomed to being caught by surprise; it hasn't happened since my mortal days. I don't know who this Jackal is, but I intensely dislike the fact that I didn't know he was waiting in here for me. I'm going to have to look into him further, when all this is done.

I'm also finding it more than a little irritating that nobody wants to finish the conversations they start. I was hoping to be able to provide you a bit more in the way of concrete details.

Still, I think we can call what we have so far a successful start. I'm certain, as you listen, you'll note the same similarities in these tales that I have. For all their differences, there's a kernel of agreement in these origin myths, and certainly more than a little bit of shared thematics.

It may be enough, if we can eke even a few details out of the Jackal, or perhaps Pratt-Alvigsonne. It's not as though Prince Rittichier is an expert on the Brood, either. We should be able to use what we've got to make your next efforts look like just another Brood rampage, with nobody the wis —

click

* * *

click

[10 seconds of silence, punctuated by sporadic tearing noises and a choked gurgle]

Unknown: Hello, Jackal. *Ave Satani*, and all that.

As I record this message, you're thinking about Ms. Constance. You're wondering if she's an enemy, and thinking about the danger you've put her in, talking to her directly, if she's not. You're giving serious thought to coming back here, if you haven't turned back already. In a matter of moments, you're going to come through that door – or maybe the window – to warn her that staying here is a bad idea.

Trust me. She knows.

[gurgle]

I've been following your trail for a long time now, Jackal – engaged in your "pursuit," if you'll excuse the humor. I'm looking forward to catching up.

And right about now, the hair on your neck is starting to stand up. Because now, you're suddenly wondering why I bothered to leave you a recorded message, as opposed to waiting for you myself.

Turn around, brother.

click





Chapter Two

The Devil

You Know

"Your fire can't hurt me!

I'm going to Hell!

See you soon!

See you soon!

See you soon!"

'twere better that nothing were begun. Thus everything that you call "sin,"
destruction — in a word, as evil represent — that is my own real element.
— Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*

One of the Brood

Being a member of Belial's Brood is a substantially more transformative experience than many outside the Brood's ranks could possibly imagine, and while outsiders would undoubtedly be disturbed by what the Brood does, they'd likely be even more disturbed to discover what the Brood *is* and what the Brood *believe*.

Contrary to the oft-rehashed stereotype, the vampires of the Brood are not maddened arsonist nomads, charging into town and causing random destruction at every turn. They are vampires who have turned from the "damnable lie" taught to them by Kindred society, and by the Man within. They are vampires who have chosen to deal with the eternal struggle of Beast versus Man by accepting the Beast's dominance and power, rather than by fighting with it for what could amount to eternity. The Beast, they feel, is not some curse leveled upon their race, a fate to which they are doomed for all time. Rather, the Beast is their own dark soul, given them by the deity who claims dominion over the physical world — an entity some call the Demiurge and others call the Adversary (and others still even call by its Biblical name: Lucifer). If the supernal deity figure (which some call God) was responsible for their lives as mortals, and for the part of them that is Man, then His infernal opposite, the primordial Other, is responsible for the Beast, and thus for who and what vampires are once bereft of life.

Some factions among the Brood actively venerate the Adversary, most often through sacrifice and ritual, but by and large, the Forsworn view the Demiurge as unknowable and removed, distanced from the material realm over which the deity reigns. Indeed, many even believe that if they were to gaze upon the Demiurge's countenance before their souls were ready — before they return to his grace upon their Final Death — that doing so would drive them mad before annihilating them utterly. In a very real way, the Brood fears the Adversary, the Lord of Beasts and the ultimate predator, and the Brood knows all other vampires are wise to do

likewise. But if the Brood's deity figure is so fearsome and unknowable, how can the race of vampires come to know the deity's grace and purpose? Why, through an intermediary, of course.

Belial

Most every faction of the Brood, regardless of how vast the differences in mode or methodology, pays at least a modicum of respect and veneration to a being called Belial. For the three oldest and most powerful Brood factions, the Belial figure features prominently, indeed. As discussed in Chapter One, these three factions have some vastly differing perspectives on the being's origin.

The Forsworn of the Nameless, perhaps the oldest and most organized faction among the Brood, hold that Belial was a mortal man, sent by the Adversary to bring its word and will to its errant children, the race of vampires, who wallowed in ignorance, struggling to accept their own natures until his arrival. For the Nameless, Belial was a messiah, comparable to the Biblical anti-Christ, and they venerate him for revealing the truth. Belial was, in a very real way, their savior. Many believe that he bore his own mortal children before leaving his fleshly vessel, and they search vigilantly for signs of his mortal descendants to this day.

The proud members of the Roaring Serpent faction believe they are the inheritors of a mighty legacy. These self-styled "Archons" cast Belial in the role of progenitor, believing that the Adversary blessed him with the Embrace in the early hours of man. If they're right, and Belial was the first vampire, then that would make *all* vampires technically of Belial's "brood," and that is a notion that appeals to a great many Forsworn. The Roaring Serpent is popular among young Brood members, not just for this belief but for the faction's adherence to the eminence of their race. The Roaring Serpent believes that vampires should be proud to be vampires, and this faction refuses to court the affections of those outside the Brood. If one wants to join, one must prove oneself. Belial would have it no other way.



The vampires of the Pandaemonium are perhaps the most iconic members of Belial's Brood, at least where outsiders are concerned. These so-called Antinomians cast Belial in the role of demonic spirit, second only to the Adversary itself. Many of their number hew closely to the occult trappings of their ethos, believing Belial to be one of many demons in the service of "the devil." In their view, Belial is the patron of all vampires, the Duke of Beasts, and they credit him with bringing the truth of their soul's connection to the Adversary, as well as the secrets of the rare and disturbing powers they call Investments, to the world.

Other factions, and individual Forsworn of course, can and likely always will believe differing things about Belial. But even those who feel it is in their nature to be beholden to no other still pay at least lip service, for if Belial were real (whatever or whomever he was), and he really was sent by the Adversary, then it pays to keep him in their hearts . . . lest the Adversary think them ungrateful.

The Pursuit

The single most central idea to the vampires of Belial's Brood — more key even than Belial — is the long and spiritually demanding process they call the Pursuit.

For the Forsworn, the act of awakening to the truth of their existence is only the beginning, the alarum that rouses their bestial souls to action. And that action is the steady and dedicated dissolution of all that once made them human, and with it, the equally steady and dedicated acceptance of all that makes them what they are now: vampires.

The Pursuit is a unique and deeply personal affair for each vampire of the Brood. Forsworn mentors are quick to ingrain in their young converts the idea that there is no formula, no blueprint or guide to the twists and turns of the Pursuit. Each must find his own path, and learn from it what he can as progresses along it. Whatever form the Pursuit takes, it always involves the gradual stripping away of a vampire's Humanity. Being Forsworn means leading one's unlife as a true vampire, not a dead human who is play-acting at still being human. Being Forsworn means learning to distinguish which aspects of one's spirit are truly essential to survival and prosperity in this new form, and which are merely echoes of a long-gone past, remnants of the effect of umpteen years of "brainwashing" as a mortal. The Forsworn seek to curb the Man's influence on the Beast, which is and should be the truly dominant aspect of the psyche for any vampire, and the first and most important way of doing that is to shed one's self of the burdens of Humanity.

Each time a Brood member drops in Humanity, he analyzes the experience on a deeply spiritual, primal level, and gleans from it what he can before moving on with his Pursuit. The entire experience of being Forsworn is quintessentially instinctual rather than intellectual, and trying to articulate or explain even the most basic revelations of one's Pursuit becomes a frustrating and bothersome prospect. If one wants to pen tomes of wordy verbiage, many reason, one joins the Ordo Dracul (or better yet, avoids vampirism altogether). If one wants to truly be a vampire, to experience that which defies explanation, one joins the Brood.

The Trinity

One of the most fundamental aspects of Brood ideology, and one that shapes the course of any Forsworn vampire's Pursuit, is something the Brood calls the Trinity. In the Forsworn Trinity of being, all that is essential in Creation is composed of three primordial forces, the interplay of which binds everything to everything else and dictates how the patterns of time and matter unfold. These three primal forces are the *pneuma*, the *sarx* and the *soma*, and they are often depicted as the three sides of a perfect triangle, each in harmony with the others.

The *pneuma* is the essential spirit, the supernal spark that separates the self from the twin prisons of the flesh and the material world. For the Forsworn, the *pneuma* is the driving force that pushes them onward through their Pursuit, as well as the seat of their passions and the inchoate desires of the psyche. For many, the *pneuma* is the essence of that which makes them the chosen of the Adversary, proof that they are meant for this existence. The *soma* is the body, the essential nature of the sentient form, also referred to as the "god body." Through *soma*, a being exerts its will over its environment and spurs change in that which is otherwise static. Without the *soma*, the *pneuma* is inert and therefore powerless on Earth. The final aspect of the Trinity is the *sarx*, or the flesh. Symbolically, it represents the animal nature of a fleshly being, corresponding to the basic needs of the flesh. To the Forsworn, this often correlates to those elements that are most basic to their essential nature as vampires, the needs of the Beast: to hunt, to feed, to rest, to claim and to keep safe the flesh from the banes of fire and sunlight.

The Call

The first step one must take to joining the Brood, before one can even take up the barest consideration for the path demanded by the Pursuit, is to hear what the Forsworn refer to as the Call. Most vampires come to the

Brood after spending some period of time among others of their kind, typically as members of other covenants. More often than not, these souls feel constantly disconnected from their fellow Kindred, as though they never quite belong, but for some it happens relatively suddenly. Some make a legitimate effort at fitting in, and at taking the lessons of their sires and other authority figures to heart, but eventually there comes a time in such a vampire's unlife when he begins to have doubts.

When such doubts are allowed to fester, and ever darker thoughts find themselves creeping in on the sides of a vampire's soul, the end result is often the Call. This occurs when a vampire has decided that he is, in essence, "living" a lie, and that all the education and brainwashing in the world won't convince him otherwise. Neither the threat of the Traditions nor the empty promises of Golconda can keep him from feeling this way, and the only question becomes whether or not the vampire will find another path or simply end his tortured existence. And to be fair, more than a few would-be Brood members end their Pursuit at this time, for in the minds of many, Final Death is preferable to an unlife of either continued doubt or sin. But at this moment, often at the very nadir of a troubled vampire's alienation and despair, he hears the Call.

Similar to the Pursuit, the Call is subtly different for every vampire who hears it. Some describe it as a series of "daymares," during which the truth of vampiric existence — the hope of a viable alternative to the hell it had been until then — is revealed. For others, the Call is nothing more complicated or spectacular than a quiet whisper in the back of the mind, a soft nudge in the direction of another way, another unlife. However the Call manifests, there is a particular time in every would-be Brood member's unlife when he hears the Call. The determining factor is whether or not such a vampire *heeds* the Call after hearing it. Note the operative term of "prospective Brood member," as not every vampire who finds himself an outsider among his kind feels the urge or necessity to abandon his Humanity. Many such vampires exist just fine without ever doing so; they're called the Unbound.

If a vampire who hears the Call chooses to heed the Call, he has made the choice to abandon the lies of the society of his race — to forsake the tragedy of existence as he knows it, and to embrace the possibility that his Beast is not, in fact, his enemy. At this juncture, he is not yet of the Brood. He is, however, primed to discover the truth of Belial's Brood, and to possibly join their ranks. Before this can happen, though, his Beast must be awakened to the same possibility, and to do that the vampire must open his heart to the Adversary.

Resonants

Once a vampire has heeded the Call, he must find a way to connect with the Adversary in a more intimate way if he's to truly step onto the path of the Forsworn. No matter how long a vampire has been undead, or what inhuman acts he may have committed in that time, his Beast is still unprepared for the nature of and the effort that will be required of him by the Pursuit. Ultimately, there are only two ways of making the intimate connection required. The first is for a vampire who has heeded the Call to make contact with one of the Brood. Once a Brood member, any Forsworn can bring another vampire into the Brood by exchanging Vitae, usually by means of a sacred rite they call the *Vaulderie*. The second way of fully joining the covenant is through something called a Resonant.

In the World of Darkness, certain things — objects, sites and texts in particular — can grow fat with the energy and essence of the Adversary. Much as the wall between the land of the living and the dead can thin at certain places and times, making it easier for the dead to cross over, so, too, can certain things more deeply thrum with the power of the supernal Other — that which the Forsworn call the Adversary, and what we might call “evil.” These unholy objects, places and writings can act as a combination catalyst/semi-conductor for the Beast, preparing a vampire’s soul for the most important decision of its existence.

Some Brood members believe that anything trapped in the physical world can potentially be a Resonant, and they’re almost right, but for one very important exception: no living creature can actually *be* a Resonant in and of itself. Only inanimate objects, places and texts can properly serve as Resonants, and then only those with the necessary qualities the Adversary requires for its favor. The difficulty, however, comes in the fact that nobody seems to know just what those qualities are, specifically, despite substantial research into the subject on the part of the Forsworn (particularly those of the Nameless faction, who have been digging into the history of Resonants for centuries).

Presented below are three sample Resonants, one of each variety, to show the sort of things that tend to become Resonants in the first place. All Resonants are about connecting with the vampire who comes to them, but they might have different “qualifications” for the job from one to another. Any vampire who has heard and responded to the Call can sense a Resonant when he is in its presence, and will also get a vague impression of just how strong a given Resonant is. Some Forsworn believe

that the specific energies attached to a Resonant have some impact on what aspect of the Trinity a vampire will be most drawn to once of the Brood, but there’s no evidence to substantiate the theory.

Resonant Object Mr. Jingles

There once was a little girl who lived in a little white house by the water with her mother and father. Every night, her father would sing to her as he tucked her into bed — a beloved old standard one night, a bawdy sea shanty the next — and she imagined she must have been the luckiest daughter in the world.

Then one night, as her father came to tuck her in, she noticed he wasn’t singing. When she asked him why, he revealed to her the object he’d been hiding behind his back; a bright white teddy bear, a “polar teddy bear,” he told her. In addition to a black bow tie, the bear bore three tiny black bells in a line down its abdomen, buttons on an otherwise invisible tuxedo, which jingled when it shifted in her father’s hand. “This is Mr. Jingles,” he told her, settling the bear under her arm. “He’ll be looking out for you while I’m away.”

When she asked him where he was going, her father explained (as best he could to a girl so young) that his country needed him, and that he was going off to fight for it. When she realized what he was saying, she burst into tears and begged him not to go, forbid him to ever leave her and her mother. He hugged her and insisted that he loved her, but in the end, left her all the same. And when he did not return soon after, the little girl grew resentful of the bear and took it out to the water’s edge one afternoon. Spitting curses at her father’s name, she angrily tore off the teddy bear’s arms and legs and cast them into the depths, leaving the stump there on the bank.

Several weeks later, her father returned home from a place her mother called “Gallipoli.” When the army car arrived, two soldiers pulled from the back seat the man that once had been her father. Both his arms and both his legs had been blown off in the Battle of Suvla Bay, and all that remained was a head and torso. When the girl saw her father, her mind snapped and she raced back to the water’s edge, desperate to find the bear. It was still there, its white fur now matted and discolored, its perfect bow tie bent askew. Convinced that her only hope was to retrieve the pieces she’d cast aside, she dove fearlessly into the water and promptly drowned, her helpless father crying her name from above.

While the cotton limbs of Mr. Jingles never were recovered, the rest of the bear lived on. After losing his

daughter, the grief-stricken father couldn't bring himself to part with it, and it stayed by his bedside until the day of his death, passing soon after to his young goddaughter, a little girl of about his daughter's age . . .

Resonant Site 1408 Dearborn Place

At the far end of a quiet residential neighborhood, nestled between a canopy of overhanging greens, sits a quiet residential road called Dearborn Place. At the end of this road, just where the pavement breaks into a rough gravel, sits an unassuming one-story rambler, its face all but obscured by an overgrown yard. If it was ever the home of a truly happy family, those days are clearly long gone.

A family *did* live there, once — a widow and her three daughters. According to the mother, the father of her children had died mere months after the birth of the youngest, leaving her to raise the three girls all on her own. Various relatives on the mother's side came to visit from time to time during the aftermath, but such activity dried up quickly, according to the neighbors, and soon enough it was just the four of them, alone in the quiet residential house.

In the year to follow, the neighbors began to notice a change in the widow and her children. While they had never been what one would call the social type, they grew even more taciturn and withdrawn. Eventually, the mother stopped leaving the house altogether — “living off the insurance money,” neighbors assumed. Then she pulled her daughters out of school — “she wants to try home schooling.” Even when the newspaper boy stopped delivering to the house, nobody interfered. But after the windows facing the street were boarded up, and the once picturesque lawn became a tangle of crabgrass, the rumors started to fly. “She's truly lost her mind,” some said. “Her daughters killed her!” said others.

Soon after, on the night of a massive thunderstorm, one of the neighbors thought she heard a sound from the widow's house, and she crept to her window for a look. There, amid the intermittent flashes of white lightning, she thought she could just make out four figures piling hurriedly into the widow's station wagon. The next morning, she gathered the courage to go knock on the widow's door, but there was no response. The family was gone. No “For Sale” sign ever appeared out front, and no new family has moved into the house in the years since. The house just sits — waits, some say — falling into ever deeper disrepair, slowly merging into the forested backdrop of quiet residential Dearborn Place.

Resonant Text The Devereaux Codex

Allegedly writing during the 1950s, the author was said to be a Forsworn of Haitian extraction who in his mortal life was both a supporter of “Papa Doc” Duvalier and an inheritor of the mysterious and violent lineage of Vodoun known as the “Sect Rouge.” This text is truly more of a tattered, archival dossier than a proper book, consisting of news clippings, drawings and small objects such as talismans linked to evil spirits (*baka*) and medals of service awarded to loyal supporters and operatives of Duvalier's Tonton Macoutes. Because of this sort of piecemeal construction, the book itself is excruciatingly difficult to replicate, and is thus a highly treasured Resonant.

Nonetheless, there exist four catalogue documents that outline the contents of the text, making it one of the better known treatises on Forsworn devotion. To the uninitiated, the book presents a morbid but enthralling account of tortures that will seem very personal to the reader. As more time is spent with the codex, the line between Devereaux's experiences and those of the reader will blur and fold into one another, eventually overlapping into a discomforting confusion that forces most to search for some kind of help. Unfortunately for the dabbler, the only help that will give any respite is that provided by another devotee of the Adversary.

Cathexis

Once a vampire has both heeded the Call and sought out either a Resonant or an actual Brood member, the vampire must go through a process the Forsworn refer to as *Cathexis*. (*Cathexis* will not occur in a vampire who did not actually heed the Call.) This experience, which can differ widely from one vampire to the next, is the process by which a vampire's soul crystallizes the connection between itself and the Resonant or the Vitae with which it has been communing. Often times the communion process with a Resonant is brief, with the vampire merely handling the object or standing in the proper place for a few minutes, but it can also take a while, depending on the character and Resonant. A particular Resonant text, for example, might connect with vampires very slowly, not reaching full communion with the soul until it's taken in almost every word.

However long it takes, there comes a point in every communion when the vampire's soul is challenged to choose. To oversimplify, he's read every word on the brochure and must now decide whether his soul is buying or not. If he likes what he's heard from the Resonant or

Brood member, if it sits nicely with the things he's had in his mind and he's willing to commit to the Pursuit, then he chooses to join the Brood, to forswear all that made him what he once was. If he chooses this way, his Cathexis ends with a moment of epiphany as his soul unburdens itself. This is the moment at which the character loses all Covenant Status dots and gains Covenant Status (Belial's Brood) •. If he chooses to back out at the last minute, his Cathexis ends with him not joining the Brood. He likely drops the object or flees the site, and by then the Call is already receding from his mind and soul, fading first to a disturbing daydream and then to dim memory, at best. Eventually, the vampire who turns from evil at the last moment forgets just how close he truly came, though memories of a time when his soul was in "disarray" can remain (at least until the Fog of Eternity gets its claws on them).

A vampire who turns from the path during Cathexis almost never even considers repeating the experience. He's been there and done that, even if he doesn't remember much about it, and has made his peace with the whole thing. Turning from the Pursuit during Cathexis doesn't necessitate a sudden desire to return to God's grace, or to do good works (though it can and has in some cases). Such a vampire may still drop to a low Humanity rating later on in his unlife, might still go on to perform acts so monstrous even the Brood would take notice. The point is that he almost certainly won't be doing it as one of the Brood.

The Inmost Tug

A vampire who has just gone through Cathexis and emerged as one of the Brood is a changed being. His perspective is different, clearer, and his senses feel commensurately sharper, more honed (though they're not actually any more keen than those of any other vampire). In addition, the force that he previously experienced as the Call has evolved in him, just as it did while communing with the Resonant. Now, the force calls out to him from within, urging him to go seek out, to pursue. And although he might not yet realize it, what his Beast is urging him to seek out is others of his new kind, his new family — the Forsworn themselves.

The Brood knows this impulse as the Inmost Tug, for it feels akin to some force or tether pulling one's Beast along from afar, almost as if the impulse were trailing a scent. This impulse is not a finely-tuned sense, and the character cannot actually track any other vampires with it, let alone specific vampires. Rather, it's a general sense, a surety on the part of his soul, that a Brood member lies "that way." If the vampire chooses to follow the Tug, it

is indeed almost guaranteed to put him in the path of a true Brood member, though the Storyteller determines the how, who and when.

The first time a vampire following the Tug touches Predator's Taints with a Brood member, he knows he's in the presence of someone important, very likely the quarry of his recent pursuit. The pursuing vampire's Beast stirs and almost seems to reach out to the new vampire from within. Unfortunately, the vampires of the Brood are not exempt from the Predator's Taint system, and as such, the first thing that will likely happen is a test for frenzy between the two new "brothers." On the plus side, both Forsworn receive one bonus die to help smooth out this initial contact. If the touching of Taints is resolved without the death of either vampire, they then proceed to feel each other out, as the quarry begins to determine whether or not the new arrival will be a welcome or problematic addition to his particular covey.

If the existing covey member decides to introduce the new arrival to his covey-mates (assuming they weren't present at first contact), then both the arrival and the other covey-mates will gain a +2 bonus to resist when they, too, touch Taints.

Hermits

A newly minted Forsworn is not technically compelled to follow the Inmost Tug. And it's true that the Tug fades in time if it's not followed and encouraged, so it's possible for a vampire of the Brood to remain on his own, covey-less, after his Cathexis. These hermits lose out on a number of the key advantages to being in Belial's Brood (see "Being Forsworn," below), but are still free to conduct their own Pursuit and to manifest Investments once they're capable of doing so. Just as covey members, hermits lose all Covenant Status, Investments and Devotions for which Investments are a prerequisite if hermits either join another covenant or actively choose to raise their Humanity ratings.

Being Forsworn

While hermitage is a viable road for one of the Forsworn, it's a lonely and difficult road nonetheless, particularly for one who is new to the Pursuit. Once a vampire has spent enough time among his brothers and sisters to truly make the Pursuit his own, he might come to shed what he feels is the necessity of their company (see "The Eldest Beast," later in this chapter), but for the most part, the essential structure of the unlife of a Forsworn is a social one, revolving around the concept of the coterie — or, as Belial's Brood calls it, the covey.

The Vaulderie

The covey is a Brood member's pack, family and support structure, all rolled into one. Perhaps the most essential practice of unlife among the covey (aside from feeding, of course) is a ritual called the Vaulderie. By means of this rite, which involves the ritual pooling and sharing of Vitae among Forsworn, the members of a covey forge a powerful group bond among themselves, stronger even than a typical Vinculum but more tenuous. Through this bond, the covey does its work, and without the Vaulderie, the entire covenant would risk collapsing under its own weight, covey by covey. (For more on the Vaulderie, see "Rites of the Forsworn").

The Crux

A Brood member who has participated in the Vaulderie forms in his blood and soul the beginnings of a special bond called the Crux. This bond is unique among those forged between vampires, but is similar to others in that it requires three separate instances to take full effect.

The first time a vampire participates in the Vaulderie forges a connection to those Forsworn whose Vitae he imbibed during the rite. At this stage, a vampire's tie to the Crux is functionally similar to a two-step Vinculum between two Kindred. A sense of familiarity — and, more centrally, *understanding* — arises among all participants, and even though all that "happened" was the ritual shedding and drinking of blood, each one feels as though a deep and meaningful communion between his soul and the others' souls has taken place. Even at this stage, the potency of the bond makes the prospect of doing physical harm to another so bonded a difficult prospect (requiring in most cases a Resolve + Composure roll), and grants a participant a +1 die bonus to all Social rolls directed at another.

The second performance of the Vaulderie strengthens the vampire's connection to the Crux, and thus to his covey-mates, even further. The sense of empathy and understanding increases, as the vampire begins to truly feel a part of the covey. At this stage, which is similar in potency but different in the feel of a three-step bond under a standard Vinculum, each participant gains a +2 dice bonus on all Social rolls made against other covey-mates (and all those similarly two-steps bonded to that participant's Crux). In addition, participants must engage in Resolve + Composure rolls at a -1 penalty any time they wish to take physical action against another vampire so bonded, even while in the grip of frenzy.

The third and final Vaulderie draught fully cements a Forsworn's place in the Crux. The bonds among covey-

mates truly crystallize as their eyes and souls open to the truth of their group dynamic, and its importance in each individual vampire's fulfillment of his role as the Adversary intended. At this stage, the members of a given covey become true vampiric family to one another. In addition to the +2 dice bonus on all Social rolls, each participant develops an actual blood tie with each Forsworn who is also fully bonded to the Crux with him (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 162). Thus, each covey-mate receives a +2 bonus when trying to affect another covey-mate with certain vampiric powers, just as each one benefits from the mystical connection known as blood sympathy. At this level of bondedness, participants must engage in Resolve + Composure rolls at a -2 penalty any time they wish to take physical action against another vampire so bonded, even while in the grip of frenzy. (Note that a fully bonded Crux member suffers only the -1 penalty to take action against one who himself is only two-steps bonded to the Crux where the one taking action is concerned).

If the Crux is not refreshed with some regularity (most coveys tend to perform the Crux at least once a month), its power will wane at a much accelerated rate as compared to a standard Vinculum. After 366 days, a vampire's soul detaches completely from the Crux, in effect severing his blood bond with his covey-mates. No Stamina + Composure rolls are permitted to resist steps toward the Crux.

Once bonded to the Crux, a vampire's soul benefits from a sort of mystical bulwark so long as it is maintained. First and foremost, the Crux destroys all pre-existing Vinculums once one is fully connected to it (after three Vaulderie rites). Even if a given vampire has been thrall to his sire for centuries, the Crux takes over. Second, and almost as critical, the prospect of developing a new Vinculum with one not of the Brood becomes an impossibility thereafter, as the Crux inhibits the connections required to form such bonds. If a Brood member presently connected to the Crux drinks of a non-Forsworn's blood, no special effect occurs and no bond is established. Once a part of the Crux, a Brood member's blood bonds to other Forsworn are his *only* blood bonds.

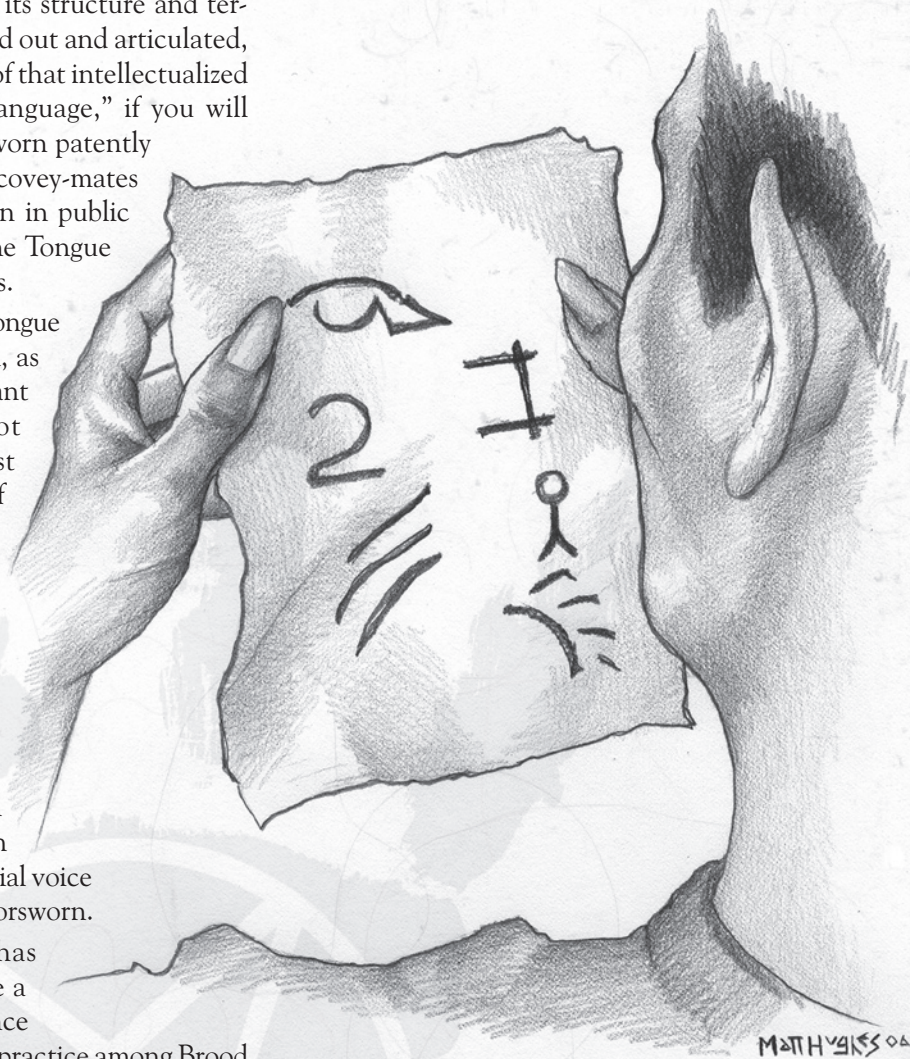
Tongue of the Beast

One of the first things a newly inducted Forsworn learns about his new family members is that they share in a mode of communication unknown among other vampires. The Brood calls this type of communion the "Tongue of the Beast," for they believe it is the essential vocabulary of the vampiric soul. If language as we know

it is a construct of the Man, and its structure and terminology things that can be parsed out and articulated, then the Tongue is the antithesis of that intellectualized process — the primeval “anti-language,” if you will — and once learned, many Forsworn patently refuse to communicate with their covey-mates by any other means, except when in public or in situations in which using the Tongue would cause undue complications.

It is important to note that the Tongue is not inherent to being Forsworn, as so many other aspects of covenant membership are. One does not simply grasp the Tongue’s almost subconscious patterns by means of the Crux alone. Rather, one has to open one’s mind to its primal, almost counterintuitive essence by means of the Pursuit. When one has begun one’s Pursuit in earnest, and is making strides at the stripping away of all that was once familiar to the Man, that is when the Tongue begins to manifest in the back of a vampire’s mind, when awareness of the Tongue’s primordial voice starts to become distinct to the Forsworn.

For this reason, the Brood has developed through ritual practice a means of encouraging the eminence of the Tongue. This is an essential practice among Brood coveys not merely because one’s grasping of the Tongue indicates progress in the Pursuit, or even because the Tongue is a failsafe way of determining when one is standing in the presence of a fellow Forsworn, but because the very presence of the Tongue — alien and maddening though it may be to those ignorant of the Crux — actually soothes a vampire’s mind, as acceptance helps ease the otherwise debilitating effect that descending through one’s Pursuit can have. After performance of this rite, which is considered an Archonte, a vampire can *choose* to select the Tongue of the Beast derangement the next time he fails a degeneration roll following the loss of a Humanity dot. Once he has the derangement, he cannot select it again after subsequent degeneration rolls (obviously), but the very presence of the derangement provides a +1 bonus to all subsequent degeneration rolls. In essence, by submitting to this particular type of “madness,” the Forsworn paradoxically girds his mind against future degeneration. In this regard, the Tongue is an essential part of every Brood member’s



Pursuit, for the Tongue helps the Forsworn dissolve their Humanity without going too crazy in the process. (For more on the Tongue, see the attached sidebar.)

NEW DERANGEMENT: TONGUE OF THE BEAST

The Tongue of the Beast is a type of primal Beast-to-Beast communion that manifests in a vampire’s mind as a derangement. As a mode of communication, the Tongue does not, of course, have a specific vocabulary or grammar all its own. In fact, the Tongue is the very essence of that which opposes rational thought in a linguistic sense, and as such, always comes out as gibberish when vocalized. A vampire with this derangement cannot, therefore, use the Tongue as a means of two-tiered communication, whereby he speaks to another Forsworn in an existing language but is actually transmitting an entirely different message. If a vampire uses a language with structure and syntax, with elements familiar to not only the Man but to other minds not of the Brood, then the vampire cannot use the Tongue simultaneously; his

mind simply can't process doing both at once. If he speaks nonsensically, however — even if his speech uses *pieces* of existing languages or vocabularies — then the Tongue will convey his true meaning when he is speaking to another Forsworn, so long as could make sense of it.

The upside to the Tongue's lack of structure is that its meaning and intent can be derived through writing as well as speech, so long as the text conforms to the same restrictions as vocalization. If a Forsworn vampire writes a note to a covey-mate in clear, articulated English, then the message implicit in the text is all that will be conveyed. If, however, he pens the same note using a series of meaningless pictograms, then another Forsworn (who also knows the Tongue) can derive the vampire's general intent simply by scanning said pictograms. It's important to note that the Tongue is a primal mode of communication, and thus is ill-suited to long-winded or detail-heavy expressions. If one wishes to convey truly involved or complex ideas, one should probably just speak or write normally.

The Tongue of the Beast is unique among derangements in that this derangement "cures" itself if the vampire ever leaves the Brood entirely (by joining another covenant or actively raising his Humanity rating). After one has abandoned the Pursuit in this fashion, the Tongue slowly recedes from one's mind and soul, removing all trace of the Tongue's passing as it goes. Before long, the vampire has little conscious conception that he could even communicate in such a fashion, let alone grasp the how of it.



The Hexad

A vampire who has been fully inducted into Belial's Brood is faced with an important choice, that of which faction of the Forsworn he'll become a member. The choice of which aspect of the Trinity (*pneuma*, *sarx*, or *soma*) he'll favor is an easy (and some say, inherent) one. But once that aspect is determined, the Forsworn still has a choice of which faction associated with that aspect to join. For most Brood members, only two choices exist for each aspect. Collectively, these six factions are often known as the Hexad (at least among the scholarly), and they represent the six largest, most intuitive, most "default" philosophies of Brood ideology.

The two fundamental *pneuma* factions are the Nameless and the Mercy Seat. The two sides of the eternal *soma* are the Roaring Serpent and the Throne of Smokeless Fire. And the twin faces of the *sarx* are the Pandaeonium and the Scarlet Rite. Each Brood vampire is free to switch from faction to faction over the course of her Requiem, but few vampires ever find the need or the will to change the fundamental Trinity aspect to which they are most attuned. Most Brood members tend to stick with a given faction until and unless their covey disbands or is destroyed, as the majority of coveys contain Brood members of like aspect, if not outright faction.

The factions of the Hexad (and others) are covered in detail in Chapter Three.

Apostasy

What happens when a vampire decides to forego the Pursuit and return to unlife among the rest of the Kindred? Demagogues among the Forsworn tend to call this behavior "apostasy," but the truth is that few among the Brood truly care. Most Brood members feel it's an honor to find one's way to the Brood, and the vampire who would be so foolish as to return to ignorance after being shown the path should be left to his own pathetic devices. Exceptions occur, of course, especially when the apostate leaves behind substantial messes and/or dead covey-mates, but by and large, the Brood is content to let such members go.

Part of the reason for this contentment is that the Brood knows it has little to fear from such cowards. When a vampire leaves the Brood, all her memories and experiences of her time among the Forsworn begin to fade, much like the effect the Fog of Eternity has on the minds of all Kindred. The process of becoming Forsworn involves intense acts of will and manipulations of the blood, not to mention the opening up of one's mind and soul to the energies and the will of a being as unknowable and puissant as the Adversary. As such, abandoning this stark path after it's been embarked upon results — and could *only* result — in the vampire's mind smoothing itself back into shape, as the Man struggles to regain his former dominance over the vampire's psyche. It is said that if the memory of being Forsworn did *not* fade thus, all Brood apostates would go irrevocably mad.

In game terms, this fading process begins once a vampire leaves the covenant. This happens in one of two discrete ways: First, the vampire can simply join another covenant, which is in itself a mystical act as well as a socio-political one. When a Forsworn fully commits to adopting the precepts of a philosophy so antithetical to the Brood's, the vampire's soul responds by discarding the former, as the alien draw of the Adversary's power ebbs from the soul like a slow-moving fog. When a vampire gains Covenant Status in any other covenant, he is thus ejected from the Brood, losing all Brood Status in the process. The second way in which a vampire leaves the Brood and begins to forget all he knew while among its number is by actively choosing to raise his Humanity rating. The gradual and systematic dissolution of Humanity lies at the core of Forsworn belief, and any vampire who would choose to direct his force of will at building back his Humanity has clearly forsaken all for which the Brood stands.

When a vampire leaves the Brood in either of these two ways — joining another covenant or actively raising



his Humanity — he immediately loses all Investments he learned while among the Brood and all Devotions for which Investments are a prerequisite (though this carries with it a potentially beneficial effect on his subsequent efforts to buy back his Humanity; see Chapter Four for more on this). In addition, he loses “access” to the Tongue of the Beast (if he possessed it), as the derangement, too, recedes from his mind and soul. Lastly, all his bonds with other Forsworn by means of the Crux snap, and he loses any benefits that might have come from those bonds. Thus, would-be apostates need to be careful about how and when they abandon the Brood, for their covey-mates will undoubtedly know about it when it happens.

Rites of the Forsworn

From the notebooks of Yugen Kovitch, Sworn of the Mysteries:

It is a simple truth that I have spent much time immersed in those tomes and studies of ritual lore of all kinds imaginable, privy to the secrets of Dragon, Crone and Sanctified, I have yet to find a demographic of our kind that is so bound by the performance of rites. Although we Dragons might ascend through the paths and the Coils of our blood, and the Crone’s children may tend to the sacred cycles of their belief, and the Sanctified mind their guilt and separation from fleeting divinity, the brood of Belial requires a variety of ceremonies for nearly every aspect of their function. The known covenants may require their rituals for political cohesion and some necessary functions, but only the Brood would nigh implode upon itself in an orgy of self-cannibalism if such rites were not tended to with vigilance and utter conviction.

One curious fact that I have arrived at during my research is the total absence of significant solitary rites among the Brood. Although there are certainly ritualized acts of self-mortification performed by the estranged Brood member, the mysticism and purpose of the covey rites is wholly absent from such twisted seizures of the Beast That Knows No Company. In most cases, these solitary practices result in increasingly flamboyant displays of bloodshed and mutilation on the part of the isolated vampire, eventually resulting in detection by either other members of the collected Brood or by the less sympathetic of our kind who would surely put such a wanton predator to the stake. So, it is a characteristic of the proper rites of the Brood that they are performed by a covey of one form or another.

After the deconstruction and rearranging of the data procured from the mad texts I refer to as the Devereaux Codex (named for individual by whom it was allegedly scripted) and the Matamoros Papers (salvaged from the ruins of a Brood compound on the Mexican border), I have discerned two types of rites. The first are those ceremonies that are most essential to the Brood’s way of existence. Every relevant body of the Brood performs these rites, called *Archontes*, in one form or another. Among these is the *Vaulderie*, the very lynchpin of Brood culture and cohesion. In addition, lesser rites called *dynamei* create individualized extensions of the *Archontes* principles, giving expression to the philosophies of more discrete factions and cults, but no less essential. The induction ceremony into a given covey would be an example of this kind of work.

I will cover, in greater detail, the bulk of these variegated obscenities in the exposition below, but there is a matter of curious note that I must mention before I expand. With the assistance of some close to me (those capable of the gravest discretion), I have determined that these rituals bear dissimilar or sterile fruit for the idle dabbler or daring dilettante. Whether it be my lack of knowledge of the elusive “Tongue of the Beast” or another unwritten component to the instructions, it can be somewhat reliably assumed that one must be a true and tested member of the Brood itself for these rites to have their full and desired effect.

SYSTEMS AND SIDEBARS

Below you will find descriptions of the major and minor rituals of Belial’s Brood. Although they are completely optional, the powerful *Archontes* also affect the participants in terms of game mechanics. These effects are meant to enhance the atmosphere of encounters with the wild and deranged vampires of Belial’s Brood, and will only be used at the Storyteller’s prerogative.

Although omitting these special effects may help maintain a grittier, more serial killer ambience to the ritual barbarism of the Forsworn in your chronicle, making use of the enhanced effects may prove to be irresistible bait for those seeking the quick route to power. In addition, you can restrict the effects to only those rites performed by specially ordained members of the Brood such as the alien inheritors of the Therion bloodline.

With the exception of initiations and other rites that specifically address outsiders, these in-game effects have absolutely no effect whatsoever on those who are not committed members of Belial’s Brood. This means the character must have experienced Cathexis, either through Resonants or by participating in at least one *Vaulderie* rite.

The Vaulderie

While it is well-known that our kind can form a tie to another soul through the ingestion of our precious blood, it is a curious thing when several of our kind blend their blood together in order to be consumed for the sake of solidarity. In these instances, a bond will form among the participants, moving them to look after each others' interests, and in cases of a full Vinculum, to lay down their unlives for the sake of another so bonded. While these ties may last for half a century without need for refreshment, the need for such things among our kind pale in importance to what this rite means to those of the Brood. Whereas those of the conventional covenants would form such ties on a whim to advance an emotional or political agenda, it is not an understatement to say that the Brood *requires* this ritual of shared blood to maintain its existence.

How did such a rite arise? Why would such a primal and destructive collective as the Brood of Belial weave a ritual, so formal, so precise, into the core workings of the Brood's mad, bloody designs? Did the ritual manifest out of need for cohesion that would honor the ties among the brothers and sisters of Belial or did the bond arise from the performance of the ritual so crafted to safeguard the unity of the Forsworn? Do the souls of those initiated into those dark mysteries cry for a spiritual offering that can be nothing less than the Vitae that sustains them?

Before I expound the details of what the Vaulderie is, I will first give an overview of what the Vaulderie is not. The Vaulderie is, in both its effect and method, distinctly different from the ritual of several of our kind merely sharing each other's blood. Whether this is caused by the ritual details and trappings, the fashion and regularity in which the blood is shared or if it is merely caused by mixing the blood of insane, blood-hungry monsters into a single elixir is a point of contention (even when dealing with the salvaged source materials penned by members of Belial's Brood itself). As I mentioned previously, even when I attempted to reconstruct the rites with the help of my coterie-mates, the results were merely that of sharing our blood in the conventional fashion, which resulted in my blood taking precedence to due its advanced age and power. On the other hand, recreating the rite did result in their continued compliance with my desires to experiment further with the rituals I was investigating.

However, these emotional and submissive ties that my coterie members had formed revealed to me that what I was reconstructing was a far cry from the sacred Vaulderie of the Forsworn. Melisande, a pillar of our circle

and my first childe, developed a grasping, worshipful nature that spoke of an underlying passiveness that had been integrated into her normally cutting and aggressive manner. Carmine Ocone, a less than intellectual thug who had taken a fancy to Melisande, relinquished his protectiveness of her and developed a dog-like subservience to my every whim, not unlike the most wanton and abused of ghouls. Archibald Bailey, the closest of my group to me in age and oft times insubordinate to my plans and agendas, became fully agreeable to my every suggestion and rebuked the others when he felt their plans or even feelings were in contest with my own.

Although some of the fragments I had deciphered suggested increasingly vile methods to enhance the Vaulderie ritual, I did not feel that such lines were to be crossed at this early stage in my experimentation. Although Archibald assured me that he would loyally assist me if I chose to make a lamb of my childe or of Carmine, I felt that some fundamental aspect was missing, something far less final than cutting out a heart or ritual decapitation. Among the codices that I had assembled, I had recovered a series of photographs on the backs of which were written notes in a rushed hand. Though they were not numbered or found in a specific order, they did denote a ritual process in a sequence that could be determined by the increasing number of bloodied hands among the participants depicted. On the back of the final photograph I found the phrase, "And the many heads become the One Beast."

One Beast.

Certainly not the language I would use to describe the hierarchical lattice of dependence that my coterie had forged through our pedestrian understanding of this distinct and terrifying rite.

So, it was with reluctance and excitement that I ended my explorations in the company of my coterie and began to seek elsewhere for uncorrupted company through which my search could continue. My pursuit began among the unaligned, for whom tenets of covenant were no hindrance and of whom there are few in this city in which I live. Thus, it was without surprise that I made the acquaintance of one of my kind, formerly a physician, by the name of Ambrose Hodge. Hodge, previously a proponent of the Carthian Movement, had fallen into disfavor after an alleged incident of poaching in which the respected doctor took the life of another's ghoul after succumbing to a unrepentant frenzy. Since that time, the doctor had kept company with those likewise estranged and had begun similar research to that in which I was so engrossed and offered to meet me on the Lower East Side to discuss my dilemmas. When I arrived he was in

the company of two others, a dark young man and an older but attractive woman, who, though well dressed, proved distant and difficult to address. Only Hodge offered for me to come to a place of privacy where the matter at hand could be readily discussed.

Upon arriving at the apartment building, I entered and found that the doors had been removed from all the units and that identical red curtains hung in their stead. The walls were a flat gray, and the entire complex was poorly illuminated. When we eventually reached the fourth floor, we came to a single door that opened into a well-appointed study, utterly out of place in this odd labyrinth. We took our seats, and I immediately began to expound my findings. As soon as I finished the details of the third performance of the rite, I was stopped, and, after giving a knowing nod to his two companions, he corrected me.

It seemed that it was my model of the rite that was flawed, and that I had taken a devotion to the philosophy for granted. The Vaulderie of Belial's Brood is not an oath made to another of your kind. It is a commitment made to a center point — an axis that exists equidistantly between all participants. The ritual of Vaulderie does not become corrupted by particularly potent blood or by previous bonds. This is because the Crux is that which the oath is made to and not to another vampire. This Crux, as Doctor Hodge explained, was interpreted differently depending on which faction of the Brood you ask. To some, the Crux was an abstract concept, to some a spiritual contract and to others an invisible and ancient monstrosity in which the Brood itself found their unholy beginnings. It was apparent, after brief discourse, that the doctor understood this "Crux" as the latter, as did his two companions who listened and watched him in an alien, unblinking fashion for the entirety of his discourse.

It was at that point that we rose from our seats. As I began to thank the trio for their hospitality and such invaluable information, the woman, whose name I learned was Evelyn, intimately placed her forefinger over my lips and escorted me with a light touch back into the hall. From there, in the company of Hodge and the Haitian boy Gabriel, Evelyn escorted me down the same flights of stairs we had climbed upon arriving and down two flights more into a dry, clean sub-basement with not a hint of light. Adjusting my senses to penetrate the darkness, my efforts were eased by the lighting of candles. Next, I was met with a pungent, stinging smoke that could only be *asafetida*.

The doctor then began to explain to me where I had gone wrong. He did so in a way that rapidly confirmed my mounting suspicions that I, in fact, was standing

in the company of fully awakened disciples of Belial's Brood. The connections were made quickly, and all of my confusion quickly unraveled until I was confronted with the fact that so much of my unlife had lead up to this very moment. Whether it was they who tracked me down, or my own Beast that had lead me to them, I was going to participate in a true Vaulderie and learn much, much more about the rites of the Brood from my newfound company.

The Heart of Vaulderie

The Rite of Vaulderie is the foremost of those ceremonies called Archontes, the central rites of the Forsworn. With the exception of those of Belial's Brood who are utterly isolated, every cult, club, cell and order associated with the Brood performs this rite in one form or another. While the trappings and props of the ritual can range from minimal to excessive, the core aspects of Vaulderie are universal from covey to covey. These core aspects sustain the balance and operation of the Brood as a whole.

First and foremost, the effects of the Vaulderie only manifest when performed by an experientially initiated member of the Forsworn. By that, I mean the participants must be true Brood members, those who have undergone at least the beginnings of what is called the Pursuit. At this point, the aspirant is capable of understanding that to which the oath of Blood is made, being what is called the Crux, or center point of Vaulderie (Hodge clarified to me that the Crux is, in fact, a daemonic spirit in itself, but also stated that this was not a view necessarily held by those outside of his faction). This is evidently why my experiments resulted in nothing more than a group Vinculum when I attempted the rite with my coterie. Although I had taken the essential philosophical steps toward this understanding, my coterie-mates had not, and thus the oath was made to the age of my blood, and not something between us.

Once we had performed the rite, the second aspect became evident to me. Namely, my feelings and emotional ties toward those with whom I had previously shared Vitae became deeply weakened. My desire to safeguard Carmine and Archibald became next to nothing, and my desire to safeguard my childe Melisande became a passing concern. Through this aspect, the Brood can liberate those who are tied to elders within their previous factions and assure their loyalty to the newfound covey. This is particularly important when dealing with mortal devotees of Belial's way, as those bonds can be particularly difficult to shatter after they have been reinforced and fed for many decades.

Lastly, the ritual creates a mystical bond among all participants to the covey's Crux. The effect, though similar to that of a Vinculum, is non-hierarchical as the Crux is that which holds the bond together. This creates a bond that is wholly unlike that of a group Vinculum, transforming the collected participants into a working unit that does not turn on itself except when in the throes of the most drastic and destructive of frenzies. The drawback of this abstract anchor, as opposed to using a vampire for this purpose, is that the duration of the bond is significantly shorter. While a Vinculum between two of our kind can persevere easily for a half-century without maintenance, the Vaulderie endures a mere year and a day. Due to the short span of the Vaulderie's potency, it is not uncommon for the ritual to be performed at nearly every gathering of a covey — even nightly, among the most fanatical of the Forsworn.

SYSTEM: VAULDERIE

Just as the rituals of Vaulderie and group Vinculum differ, so do the in-game effects. Firstly, the Vaulderie will only have special effects on those who have changed their covenant affiliation to Belial's Brood. This happens when one experiences Cathexis, most often by one's discovery of a Resonant or by one's participation in the Vaulderie with at least one established Brood member. Second, the duration of the Crux, the group bond the Vaulderie creates, is not as long-lasting as that of a full Vinculum. While a conventional blood bond can hold for as long as half a century, the Vaulderie must be replenished every year and a day (366 days). Lastly, the Vaulderie rites bestow all the advantages and disadvantages listed under the rules for blood ties and blood sympathy.

For a more comprehensive outline of the Vaulderie's effects and mechanics, refer to the section titled "The Crux."

The Ascension of the Therion

Although the above hold true for all performances of the Vaulderie, and seeing as the creation of the Vaulderie could have quite easily interdependently arisen along with the Brood itself, the ritual has other essential applications — the most curious being the ceremony during which a member of the Therion caste is anointed. Though I inquired repeatedly as to what, exactly, this caste actually is, I was informed that its closest approximation within my understanding is that of "bloodline" — the major difference being that this caste could only be entered through ceremonial induction and could not be inherited by way of birthright or ascended into through power of the blood. This, I have found, is



because the priest caste of Belial's Brood cannot create progeny of their own — they are born of the Crux and the blood of one of the five clans.

It is important to state, however, that the Therion do not embody the Crux itself. Though many find philosophical correlations between the role of the caste and the idea of the Crux, and though the Therion do share a somewhat deeper sympathy with a covey's spiritual center, the Therion does not take on a leadership role. Rather, the Therion becomes a kind of bestial yogi and guru who guides the spiritual plan of the working group. Although such a position would be undoubtedly exploited among the covenants proper, it is not so among the Forsworn. In fact, the Therion are more like scouts into the uncharted spiritual future of the Brood, and, in a sense, are almost like shaman — occupying a position on the delicate edge of Man and Beast, charged with the sacred duty of bringing back true knowledge to be taught to the worthy and devout among their coveys. Though the Therion of certain cults within the Brood would take exception to such religious descriptions, it is the function they serve in one form or another.

I assumed during our discussion that it was in fact Hodge who was in preparation to inherit this strange and seductive role as speaker for his covey's Crux as his grasp of Brood lore, to my estimation, is dramatically greater than that of either Evelyn or Gabriel. Nonetheless, I quickly learned that it was not academic acumen that won the right to such an honor but rather a deep and abiding closeness to the Beast itself. And so, it was the boy Gabriel that had begun his walk toward the darkness of the Therion caste, and it was on these grounds that I now understood the almost fearful manner that his own covey brother and sister assumed whenever they addressed him.

The ritual of induction varies greatly among factions. Among Hodge's faction, the ritual takes on a somewhat Judeo-Christian-Islamic affect, where the aspirant is hung by the feet in the center of the ritual space (the symbolic representation of the Crux), bound and blindfolded while the initiates of the covey invoke their Beasts through rites of provocation (which I will expound on later) with the intention of full frenzy. Through some method of control, whether on the part of the vampire or an effect of the rite, the frenzy is expelled, casting the predatory fury of the supporting ritualists into the suspended candidate. At this point, the Therion-to-be convulses wildly as his entire physiology is incubated in an all-penetrant cocoon of wracking hunger and violence. Once the seizure subsides, the blindfold is removed from the aspirant's face, revealing — in successful cases — the serene and terrible face of the new Therion.

SYSTEM: THERION CREATION

The creation of the Therion is no easy feat. Moreso than normal Vaulderie, the participants in the rite must give of themselves to properly transubstantiate the subject's blood. This occurs at the point in the rite when the rites of provocation are completed and the supporting participants expel the frenzy into the vampire being transformed. At that point, an expenditure of one Willpower point is expected of all the participants. For the would-be Therion himself, this expenditure is of course permanent. For his covey-mates, this expenditure will suppress the frenzy and assist their brother's transformation. If a participant chooses not to expend the willpower, the ritual will still be successful if at least two other participants do so (in addition to the Therion himself). Upon regaining full awareness, the Therion will know which of his brethren made the sacrifice to his rebirth and which did not.

It is important to note that the creation of one of the Therion is a deeply sacred and considered act of the covey. It is unlikely that a covey would ever go through with such a rite if the support of one or more of its members were in question. In a case in which such a ritual is performed, and one of the covey members does not sacrifice the requisite Willpower, the reaction can be extreme as not doing so is considered an insult bordering on blasphemy.

Unlike traditional bloodlines, the Therion may only awaken in a vampire of Blood Potency 3 or greater. The normal conditions for inheriting or choosing a bloodline are ignored for the purposes of creating one of the Therion.

For more information on the Therion, see Chapter Three.

Eulogy for the Beast

After the performance of the Vaulderie, I felt refreshed, almost sentimental. Not so much from the blood I shared with these curious strangers but from the nourishment something deep inside my core had experienced, almost a purr. As I stood in meditation by a window looking out into a darkened ally, I felt Evelyn's hand on the small of my back as she came forward to share my view of the shadows. Without looking at me, and without any real expression upon her face, she spoke to me about the last time they had performed the Vaulderie. She mentioned that at that time, only a month ago, there were four of them, and not three. As I knew the power of the rite took many months to fade, I turned to her and asked what had happened to their fourth. Evelyn continued to look ahead, and plainly stated that their fourth, whose name was Alice, had reached the end of her Pursuit and no longer existed. When I asked if she had died, Evelyn smiled slightly and said nothing more,

turned and walked away. As I stood there perplexed as Gabriel and Evelyn left the room, Hodge approached and explained.

The philosophy of the Brood is such that one's Pursuit is often rife with peril as one pursues the most damned of states. Sometimes, these cultivated horrors consume the devoted as the pilgrim who, in the pitch of ecstasy, burns himself in the flame of God. In other instances, those of our kind who do not understand the nature of knowledge and sacrifice relentlessly hunt the faithful of Belial. And in rare cases, the devotee has reached the terminus of his long Pursuit, casting off entirely the shackles of his humanity, and making his way into the endless night as a purely realized being. Though the devotee may do so literally or symbolically, the Vaulderie can also be implemented to mark this time of passing and release.

After a moment of consideration, I asked Hodge what happened if one of these brothers or sisters returned. At that point, he looked at me, square in the face and with great thrust of manner, and stated, "They do not return." It was then explained that the rites for the fallen were only performed once, and at that point the released were forever cut off from the Crux and no longer existed. Hodge then carefully stated that if the shell of one who was so released were to return, such an abomination would be hunted and destroyed for its defiance of the covey's will.

The Prongs of Fear and Wrath

After a strangely clinical inquiry as to how I was feeling, Hodge beckoned me toward a dark corner of the sub-basement and pulled down hard on a black metal lever that opened a utility door into a hot, dry boiler room. In the room there was a boiler that could have easily dated back to the 19th century and a roaring furnace that looked even older. The doctor then produced a mersham pipe from his coat pocket along with a brushed steel lighter. I stepped back a little and narrowed my eyes as he lit the pipe, cautious of the blaze that I instinctively feared. Hodge then opened the grate on the boiler, exposing its fiery innards, and walked to the back of the room and jerked free the metal latches that held the furnace door closed. With a grinding slam, the door fell open, and I suddenly felt as if I were in extreme danger despite what risks I had taken up until that moment. As my terror kicked inside of me, held in place by nothing more than my own will, I pressed myself against the farthest wall and turned my eyes from Hodge's silhouette, outlined by flames and a

terrible orange glow. As I stood there, I wondered why Hodge, blood of my clan, was not equally terrified by the presence of such gratuitous and open flames.

Hodge asked me, "Can you feel that? The voice of your spirit?" while all I could feel was a compulsion to tear through the walls and make my escape from the burning cell. As I turned and pressed against the wall, my back to the furnace, doing everything in my power to silence the voice of which Hodge spoke, I heard the same grating sounds as before, and the orange of the room dimmed to a less intense pulse. When I heard the door to the room unlatch, I pushed past the doctor and headed to the stairs of the place to make my exit. That is when Hodge asked me if I made a habit of fleeing the teachings of all my greatest teachers. Perplexed by this statement, I turned around, and asked him what exactly did he mean by such a seemingly inappropriate question. What Hodge then explained to me further transformed my understanding of Belial's Brood. Up until that point, I had assumed that nearly all of the rituals performed by the Forsworn were Vaulderie in one form or another or some empty ceremony used as an excuse for base violence. I had not begun to fathom the other levels of Brood religion and to what extent the dreadful nature of it went.

The clawing instinctual panic that I had felt in the boiler room was, in the view of the Forsworn, the very voice of a kind of God. To this ripping sense of peril, the vampires of Belial's Brood pay spiritual homage. They feel that this terrified and awakened Beast is the expression of the endpoint of their evolution as beings of flesh, body and spirit. So, it is with odd and terrible methods that they seek to achieve full knowledge and conversation of this thrashing and furious instinct. These rites, called by many names (but generally called Trials of Provocation), are the foundation of another of the Forsworn Archonte. With these rites, one carefully formulates the death of the Man and the rebirth, ascension and enlightenment of the great Beast.

The Trials of Provocation are divided into three primary categories and numerous sub-categories. The trappings of each of the rite's variations largely depend on the covey performing it. The three major types of trial are those of fear, fury and hunger. By agitating the Beast on a full spectrum, the Forsworn can achieve a full understanding of the Beast's nature, learning its language by fully embracing its most extreme instincts. In turn, this gives a greater knowledge of the Beast's power, state and language. Through these rites, a mystic of the Brood can learn the syllables and gestures of the strange Tongue of the Beast — the glossolalia and growls that are the speech of the Demiurge itself.

The Trials

Trials of fear are the most often employed as they include the fewest risks under normal circumstances. Ultimately, a failed trial of fear results in nothing more than embarrassment and inconvenience unless the covey performing the rite decides to implement a more severe penalty for failure (which is not uncommon). In addition, the ability to control the unfolding of one's fear nourishes the *pneuma* — the pillar of spirit in the Forsworn trinity of being. Through the guided unleashing of one's fear, the soul develops in reaction to the fear and is defined, providing exquisite nectar that empowers the mystical capacities of the devotee. These rites are performed to create the seed understanding required to learn the Tongue of the Beast.

The methods used to evoke the most violent outward thrashings of the Beast are the basis for the trails of fury. These rituals seek to stoke the Beast in way that will call forth its lust for domination. These rituals are often deadly for at least one of the participants. Under the most ideal circumstances, the Forsworn releases her rage upon a ritual victim, in some cases an effigy of meat and blood, in more grim performances a human, and in particularly auspicious times, another vampire. The primary operant of the rite is generally humiliated and insulted while being physically beaten in a way that is meant to incite more than harm. At the ritual's climax, the frenzied vampire loses all control and allows her Beast full rein, destroying everything within reach. At the end of the frenzy, the seeker collapses, and swims in the visions brought on by her sated aggression. It is believed that these rites of aggressive frenzy give the Forsworn insight into the *soma* — the pillar of the body according to Forsworn lore. By means of a total immersion in the most primal and destructive wrath, the disciple of Belial strengthens the force of her will and her capacity to dominate others. In addition, those who pursue knowledge of the Tongue of the Beast learn the syllables and words of the holiest madness by antagonizing their souls in such a way.

The practices that the Forsworn use to call for the hunger of the Beast are the most risky and potentially disastrous of the Trials of Provocation. Although the wild destruction wrought by a vampire in a wrathful frenzy is great, it is the unbridled hunger of the Beast that can result in a loss of control that ends in the devouring of another vampire's soul. Though the risk is great, the spiritual harvest reaped from such a ceremony not only feeds the Forsworn on the most rudimentary level; the harvest also evokes the purest understanding of the instincts of Demiurge itself. Through repeated perfor-

mances of these ordeals, the initiate gains a devotional understanding of the *sarx* — the raw flesh of the Trinity of Being. By cultivating and learning the pangs and thrust of their desires, the initiate fills his physical form with an actualized yearning that lifts him up. In these fluctuating states of satiation and thirst Belial's Brood acquires the gestures and subtleties required to fluently communicate in the Tongue of the Beast.

Though these basic frameworks are used throughout Forsworn society, each covey expresses the Archontes called the Trials of Provocation through cultic dynamei that illustrate the way in which that group understands what is happening to the subject of the rite. Among the Antinomians, a lengthy evocation of barbarous names will be chanted as the aspirant barks and slurs the names of demons as his grasp on his human mind slips into frenzy. However, among the Nameless, the ritual is performed in perfect darkness with nothing but muffled whimpers and the bestial sounds of flesh being ripped from the sacrament. It is important to remember that these variations are essential to these factions and are not merely extraneous details. That is to say, the ritual must be framed in a fashion that the participants understand it in accordance with their own mythos and experience. The truth of these rites is not one of formality, but of a deep and total immersion for those involved.

SYSTEM: TRIALS OF PROVOCATION

Those Forsworn who undergo the Trials of Provocation experience a lasting reward for their perseverance and conviction. After the completion of the rite, the primary operant receives a bonus that represents the achievement.

In the case of fear trials, the vampire is granted a two-dice bonus for resisting fear-related frenzy until the next evening. After unleashing one's Beast in a Fury rite, the vampire does one additional die of damage when fighting unarmed (including tooth and claw) until the next night. If a vampire undertakes the Hunger trials successfully, she receives the nourishment of three blood points for every two blood points consumed (rounded down) until the next sunset.

Forging the Forsworn

It was my assumption, that even though I had performed the Vaulderie with Hodge, Gabriel and Evelyn that I was still quite a ways off from becoming one of the covey. As I had no experience with the Trials of Provocation and had only for a day been acquainted with this covey, there were still steps to be taken toward becoming a right and full initiated member. The standards of initia-

tion vary dramatically throughout the Brood. For this reason, most initiation rituals are considered *dynameis*. However, the sacrament of initiation is universally accepted as one of the Archontes. Initiation into a covey is considered essential for full comprehension of the Forsworn path as it is only in the company of her brothers and sisters that the seeker can be assured of a properly guided journey into the depths of the Demiurge. This is because acceptance into a covey and establishing a relationship with that covey's Crux is a spiritual lesson and ordeal in and of itself.

Although the rituals of initiation do differ in their details and arrangement, there are some core elements that are essential. These core elements compose the Archontes aspect of all Forsworn initiations. These four elements are submission, ordeal, conundrum and the joining of the fold.

At first glance, submission appears to be the strangest of the initiatory elements as such a gesture would most commonly be viewed as a basic demonstration of weakness — an undesired quality when viewed on an exoteric level. However, during the submission stage of the initiation, the covey symbolizes the Adversary itself, and thus, the candidate's ability to submit to the group is considered her ability to submit to her own Beast, and in turn, her capacity to persevere through the obstacles of her Pursuit. So, in this way, submission becomes a demonstration of one's will to power as it is the false shell of humanity that submits and is the first signs of the candidate's true self that are drawn to the surface.

The ordeals of initiation are well documented in reports concerning the Brood's activities. Accounts of this stage of initiation are dwelled upon by the covenants as frightful images with which to terrify their childer who should stray toward a greater freedom. This is because the purpose of the ordeal is to induce the altered state of consciousness that is acted upon by later stages of the initiation. Where some coveys rely on nothing other than a moment of extreme terror (or otherwise visceral experience) to achieve this stage, among those adorants who devote themselves to the supernal light of the *pneuma*, the ordeal articulates the intricacies of the dismantled human soul, providing a path-working that unlocks secrets of the Adversary that serve to condition the candidate as a worthy vessel of the Demiurge. It should be noted that candidates who fail at this stage of the ritual are often destroyed on the spot (assuming that the ordeal is not a lethal trial itself). Among the *sarx* cults and *soma* cults, these ordeals are often excruciating physical trials, whereas the *pneuma* cults may employ powerful amounts of *etheogens* or other disorienting

factors such as time-deprivation and the application of vampiric powers that affect the mind.

After the candidate has been opened up by both the submission and the ensuing ordeal, the conundrum is posed. The essential nature of the conundrum is that it creates a subtle dilemma that must be resolved, competently, by a savage hand. Although the poetics of a rampaging Beast that unthinkingly destroys everything in its path may serve the needs of the romantic, such a creature does not benefit the overall mission of the Forsworn. So, the conundrum gives the candidate an opportunity to prove his effectiveness while under severe strain. Although some factions, such as the Scarlet Rite, may diminish the dramatic emphasis of this element of their initiations, it is nonetheless fully present in the structure of their obscene baptisms and blood orgies. Among the members of that faction called the Throne of Smoking Fire, the conundrum can be elaborate and have numerous tiers of problem solving, even taking the form of a ritual drama in which the members of the covey bombard the candidate with difficult challenges that force him to create a working marriage between his holy instincts and gross intellect.

At the final stage of the ritual, the candidate, having survived the rigors of the previous stages, is welcomed into the covey. At this point, all antagonism ceases, and the newly initiated member of the covey is marked in some fashion to signify his dedication to his brothers and sisters. In almost every instance, a *Vaulderie* follows this stage of the ritual. At this point, the new initiate will receive instruction in the lore of his covey and will be instructed in the full range of their often-secret *dynameis* as well as given access to the covey's resources. In some cases, the new member will take on a new name, or even a new identity entirely, in recognition of the official beginning of his descent into the realm of the Adversary.

SYSTEM: INITIATION

Those who have undergone a Forsworn initiation containing the four Archonte elements receive a permanent bonus of one die to Social rolls involving members of their own faction. In addition, certain factions may also inflict marks upon the initiated, sometimes making it difficult to disguise their inhumanity and/or philosophical affiliation. In even more extreme cases, the seizures of the Beast within can permanently alter the appearance of the initiated, transforming them into monsters without to give expression to the monster within.

Characters who have undergone such initiations can be given the Notoriety and/or Deformity Flaw to represent such gross alterations of the physical form.

The Devil's Footprints

After the initiation conversation with Hodge, I found myself with much to consider. Although consciously I knew I had, perhaps, gone beyond the point I had originally intended not to pass, the rich detail and intriguing violence of these ancient ways consumed my imagination. Whereas the Coils of my covenant certainly had methods for addressing the Beast, they were systems of control put in place to stifle the essential nature of what we'd all become. The rites of the Forsworn, however, spoke to my very core, addressing the dilemma of the vampiric state with a dark honesty that surpassed anything I would experience within the halls of the Dragons. And was it not my oath to the Mysteries that should make clear the course of my actions? As I paced the curtained halls of the covey's haven, I considered this very matter and how I had come to this place I now found myself.

As I absent-mindedly fingered the curtains of the rooms, I grew curious about the building itself. It was apparently a tenement of some sort, with each room now bare of any furnishings and painted in the stark, institutional gray that covered the walls of the snaking hallways as well. As I wandered and looked into one empty room after another, I was surprised to find Evelyn standing alone in one of the cells, mindfully pulling on her long cigarette as I stood there staring at her. Apparently not startled by my sudden appearance in the doorway, she moved to the back of the room and leaned into the corner, as if it were holding her safe. As I walked into the center of the room, I could feel a shaking at my center, an awareness of power and darkness that I, too, found oddly affirming. As the two of us stood in the dark chamber, Evelyn stared at me as if she were waiting for something to happen. Uncomfortable with the silence, I asked her why this room was different from the others.

Evelyn informed me that Aaron Kleig, a Swiss Dadaist of little vision, used the room in which we stood during the early 1900s. Though his skill with his chosen medium of sculpture was not appreciated by the critics of his time, his prodigal grasp of torture, murder and postmortem mutilation captured the imagination of the covey. According to Evelyn, it was to this room that Kleig lured twin nine-year-old boys on a sunny afternoon in July of that year, under the auspices of a gift of boiled sweets. Over a span of four days, Kleig produced his most infamous works by painstakingly removing the children's bones and stretching their shredded remains over copper pipe armatures originally intended for his

sculptures. The authorities discovered the bodies in a state of advanced decay, three of them, as Kleig had slit his own throat and collapsed facedown in the stinking offal of his two victims.

At that point, I took note of Evelyn's voice, which had collapsed into the solemn, droning tone that a fundamentalist would use when reciting the verses of a sacred text. I asked if she had known Kleig, and she smiled as she stated that she knew him but had never met him. She stated that the spiritual accomplishments of Aaron Kleig had drawn her to this place many years ago, like some sort of beacon of the Beast that called out to her own instincts. When she had arrived in this place those many nights ago, it was an abandoned tenement and the room was as nondescript as I found it now. Despite this, Evelyn returned to the room night after night as she said she could feel something neglected being nourished and awakened inside her. Though at that time the room's history was a secret to Evelyn's intellect, from her Beast the room could hide nothing. Through these nightly meditations at this place so close to the Beast, Evelyn had come to be one of the Forsworn. Through her explanation, I then came to understand my own route to Belial's Brood, and shared the tale of how I had come by the two codices that had given me my first clues of what I had now found.

Rites of Communion

The rites of communion, as they are called, are the methods used by Belial's Brood to unlock and understand those objects and places that are closest to the Beast. Forsworn grimoires, bloodstained surgical instruments and the sites of torture and murder all serve as a point of religious transmission for those set upon the Pursuit. Through this communion, one's own Beast is further enlightened and one's experience is connected to the greater movements of the Adversary as it cuts its path through hapless world of the blind. By interpreting the movements of so-called evil through the plane upon which we exist, our subjective instincts are harmonized with the frequency of the Demiurge's seductive call, giving meaning absolute to what others may see as aimless and pointless malevolence.

These sorts of rites come in two forms, the distinction being along the lines of the Archontes and dynameis. Evelyn's initial experience is an example of the preliminary communion rite that precedes the dynameis of communion as it is a ceremony of subjective structure that connects the individual Forsworn, although only intuitively, to the energy of the site. By meditating upon the egregore left by an intensely savage or predatory act, she found her

center and began her Pursuit. Years later, after the covey was established, Hodge, Gabriel and Evelyn returned to the site and performed their covey's dymnei of communion in honor of Kleig's holy atrocities and the role the murders played in the awakening of their covey sister.

The greater form of the communion rite is performed when a site is located of such magnitude that the entirety of Belial's Brood holds the site sacred. Though the history of such sites is usually recorded in great and gratuitous detail in the cryptic manuscripts of the Brood, this is not always the case. In some instances, the dreadful secrets of a site of atrocity are known only by the most abyssal pangs of the Beast and the Demiurge itself. Nonetheless, these sorts of ceremonies are usually quite elaborate and involve more than one covey and, in some cases, members of more than one faction. These events are generally held on a specific date, usually the day on which the site was consecrated, if such information is known.

The philosophical focus of communion rites varies depending on the focus of the covey's faction. Factions that focus on the *sarx* often choose sites of the most extreme nature, often having dubious historical significance even outside of occult circles. The Pandaemonium will often choose locations of ritual murder, massacre or mass cult suicide (or the instruments used to bring about

such things) to perform their larger rites. The *soma* cults generally choose places or objects that represent savage conquest or destruction, where culture has been crushed and violence rules. The Faustians focus on sites where the bestial nature of man served to undermine order and civilization either on a large scale or in secret. The seekers of the *pneuma* use such rites to guide them on their spiritual quest, seeking out omens and portents that transform their understanding as the Demiurge takes shape within them. Among the Nameless, sites and objects of unknown origin are examined with meditative precision as the faction feels that to not consciously know the significance of such places and things will lend the Brood members more power. Sites and objects sacred to the entire Brood are most often those of history-changing significance. The mass graves of St. Petersburg, the concentration camp sites of Germany and Poland, the Antietam battleground, as well as the killing fields Nanjing and Cambodia all possess signs of civilization's inevitable failure.

Though these rituals are most powerful when performed with one's covey, the subjective inspiration gained from personal experimentation with such places and objects cannot be denied. For this reason, solitary communion rites can be deeply significant even when performed without a group.



of sacrifice

It wasn't until nearly a week after the performance of the Vaulderie that I returned to speak with Hodge. Hiding my revelations from my Archibald, Carmine and my childe Melisande was more difficult than I suspected. My ability to engage in superficial conversation or express concern for their weakness had deteriorated, and I found myself wholly unable to relate to them in any fulfilling or meaningful way. Melisande's incessant cloying made me feel ill, and it wasn't until they had all departed for the Prince's banquet that I felt like myself again. It was that evening that I gathered my research materials and other essentials and made my way back to the old tenement building.

When I arrived, Hodge greeted me, and Evelyn was standing silently further down the hallway. Hodge was wearing a threadbare black sweater and was puffing on his pipe. Evelyn didn't even look at me when I came through the door and seemed intent on going upstairs before conversation began. Hodge and I strolled down the hall and into one of curtained rooms. The brightness of the bare bulb as the light switch was turned caused me to cover my face with my hands. When I had removed them, Hodge had dimmed the light to a faint yellow and asked me how I was feeling. I explained to him the alienation I had felt over the last week and how only now did I feel at all settled. I told him how foolish I felt for having thought the likes of Archibald, Carmine and Melisande could have had any role in my greater understanding of the lore of the Forsworn. Hodge smiled and put his hand on my shoulder and escorted me back into the hall.

Hodge then began speaking in a completely different tone. In the tone of one of my university professors from long ago, Hodge began giving me a personal lecture on the nature of the sacral cult. He began first by discussing prehistoric man and then the rites of blood from the days of Sumer and Babylon. He spoke of Carthage and Egypt and Greece. Although I found the academics of the discussion charming and interesting at points, I knew that Hodge was avoiding the point. After carrying on for almost 10 minutes, he stopped in front of a curtain at the end of the seventh story hall and said nothing more. I could see a faint candlelight radiating from beneath the split curtain. As I parted the curtains and ducked through them, I found Gabriel sitting on the bare floor at the center of which sat a lit can of Sterno and rusted carpenter's knife.

As I sat on the floor in front of Gabriel, it felt wholly different from when we had first met. Whereas before I had felt as if I were in the presence of a volatile preda-

tor, I now sat with the anxiety of one who treads upon a sheet of ice or glass. It was as if something monstrous gestated behind those still, brown eyes. In a thick Haitian accent and with an even meter, Gabriel drove right to the point that Hodge could not get to. Gabriel spoke of a currency of blood and a price that must be paid to the Powers That Be. He talked of sacrifice. And as he spoke he drew a thick "x" into the dust on the floor.

"Among the covey there is a bond. That bond, called the Crux, is raised to new life each time the Vaulderie is performed. Though the Vaulderie nourishes the Crux, the Vaulderie does not cause the Crux to grow or expand the reach and potency of the Crux's power. As the birth of each thing created feeds the rampant heart of civilization, so does each life taken feed the Adversary. Just as the Beast within us, the Crux requires sustenance and that sustenance must be one of blood and death. Only this will satisfy that is called The Spirit That Denies."

While he spoke far fewer words than Hodge, the truth of what Gabriel uttered burned into me like hot teeth, and it was laid plain as to why this small boy was considered closest to the Beast. I then asked Gabriel to tell me of those things that were viewed as adequate offering to the Adversary. Animals, he said, were offered when circumstance prevents more elaborate gifts or in instances where the blood of a particular animal is called for. Black roosters, snakes, cats and goats are often used in the rites of the Pandemonium as much of the faction's ceremonies are drawn from anachronistic grimoires and the fantasies of Victorian perverts.

However, with the exception of those factions that are as sentimental as the Antinomians, no less than human blood will do. Needless to say, in modern nights, one must be careful not to pull too heavily from the herds. In the case of vampires who have drifted far from their Humanity, the methods of seduction used by other vampires do not come as easily, as the predator's stink and menace cling thick to many of Belial's Brood. Nonetheless, the cults of all three aspects of the Trinity of Being implement human sacrifice. Humans are often sacrificed during Trials of Fury and Hunger, or Vaulderie. Even during large communion rites, human blood may be used to consecrate the ground or object that is being honored. Nonetheless, there are occasions when even human life is an insufficient offering. Though the mass murder of humans is by no means a constant occurrence for small coveys trying to remain hidden in lightly populated areas, in the swelling ghettos and impoverished ruins of the Third World, a covey of the Forsworn may perform sacrifices with weekly and even nightly regularity.



CREATING ARCHONTES

Belial's Brood's core rites have been described in the previous text, though the full breadth of the Forsworn ritual canon has yet to be fully revealed. Though there are certainly scholars and Therion with extensive knowledge about the ritual practices of their faction and the Brood in general, there is always more forbidden fruit to be picked and savored. What is the extent of these ceremonies? To answer that, one must ask other questions. What is the extent of pain, cruelty, corruption, weakness and predation? What is the limit of depravity, degeneracy, perversion and violence? What are the things that drive a sane and focused mind to total savagery? Much like a vile, sociopathic art form, the ritual archive of the Forsworn is only limited by one's ability to represent these dark forces.

First and foremost, the Archontes are believed to be those rites that were first performed by Belial himself. In the cases of factions that do not subscribe to the existence of a personified Belial, Archontes are believed to be the rituals that have existed since the inception of the Brood itself, making them some of the oldest rites of vampirekind. Although the trappings of such rites may develop and become more complicated over time, the principles of the Archonte are at their foundation quite simple as they are designed to address the basest and most primal aspects of the psyche. If the sidebar rules for these rituals are being used in your game, the Archontes are distinguished from the *dynamei* insofar as the Archontes generate a tangible and distinct effect that is reflected in the mechanical benefits they provide. These benefits should, however, be limited to minor effects as the primary function of all of the rituals is to enrich your storyline and deepen the atmosphere of Belial's Brood. Because the world of the Forsworn is filled with impermanence and decay, these benefits should rarely (if ever) be permanent. Finally, the most obvious difference between the Archontes and the *dynameis* is the Archontes' drama and ritual scope. The Archontes are highly significant events and are rarely performed spontaneously or without forethought, and usually make use of elaborate props or meticulously prepared ritual sites.

CREATING DYNAMEI

It is quite likely that there are more *dynamei* than there are members of the Brood itself as the *dynamei* form the rites that spontaneously arise from the birth cries of the awakened Adversary. From personal rites of dedication and initiation to the baroque methods of torture implemented by forgotten coveys to the rituals used to dovetail the core concepts of the ancient Archontes into the traditions and workings of a specific covey or faction, the *dynamei* are just as much artistic expression as they are religious ceremonies.

The minor rituals of the Forsworn are relegated to the domain of *dynamei* for a number of reasons. If a ritual is particular to a specific covey or based on a narrow interpretation of the Brood's traditions, the ritual may be considered a *dynameis*. If the ritual requires little preparation or takes the form of supplemental extension of the Archonte, the ritual would likely be a minor rite. Unlike the Archontes, these rituals do not generally convey any mechanical game effect. Exceptions to these guidelines are always possible but remain the sole purview of the Storyteller.

The ritual sacrifice of vampires is perhaps the most well-known practice of the Forsworn as this practice carries with it the greatest horror for Kindred society. Whether to revel in crimes of diablerie, ritually execute an enemy of the covey or satisfy an unseen patron, the rare but inevitable need for sacrificial Kindred is one of the few aspects of Brood culture that force the Brood to make prolonged contact with vampire society at large. At times, this dependence can put extreme strain on the security of the covey. Nonetheless, if a ritual calls for an offering of Kindred blood, the need will be met.

Though ritual sacrifice is punishable by torture and death in most of the factions, it is not completely unheard of for Forsworn of advanced age and power to exploit the rites of sacrifice. As the horrors of torpor can be unthinkable for the Forsworn who has grown great in power and investments, even the most devoted can be driven to endanger the covey out of fear of losing

such boons. Such deceptions carried on in secret can carry heavy consequences for the potent elder who has betrayed the well-being of his covey.

I could feel Evelyn and Hodge skulk in behind me. Though any sane of our kind would have trembled at what could have possibly been the end of one's Requiem, my instincts were affirmed by Evelyn's presentation of the Vaulderie chalice to Gabriel. As Gabriel recited a complex liturgy of guttural prayers to the Adversary, we each punctured our wrists and spilled our Vitae into the goblet. As the last of the blood was consumed, Gabriel spoke my new name that I shall not repeat here. He then spoke once more of a sacrifice to make holy that day that the Crux took another brother. Like a wave building beneath dark waters, I could feel the stirrings of my Beast as it stretched in the presence of its own kind. Then I spoke, in loyal and devoted words, the names and addresses of my childer and former brethren.



Blood of the Forsworn

No one clan dominates Belial's Brood, but the covenant's arduous rites and inhuman philosophy does attract vampires from the hardier, some would say coarser, bloodlines. Clan loyalty is of little value amongst the vampires of the Brood, even though it is acknowledged that a special bond exists between sire and childe. A Brood member's clan is often regarded as little more than an accident of fate, although certain factions do attribute clan to a design brought about by the Adversary's guiding hand. Whether a vampire is Nosferatu or Mekhet, the same Beast yearns for indulgence in all those touched by the hunger. Certain strengths or weaknesses may be inherited from a sire's blood, but a Forsworn's covey is expected to take the place of any familial bonds he may have had before joining the Brood. Vampires who continue to cling to old loyalties are likely to be ridiculed by their brethren and more easily targeted by their rivals. Nonetheless, certain clans have used the advantages inherent in their blood to carve out a niche within the covenant and within their coveys.



Daeva

Daeva vampires are surprisingly common amongst the younger ranks of the Brood, but the notorious appetites of the clan make their long-term survival in the covenant an unlikely prospect. The elders of the Brood count few Daeva amongst their number. Unlike many others who join Belial's Brood, Daeva have a reputation for being able to cast off their morality with few qualms or tribulations. The resultant destructive spiral is often spectacular enough to make even the most jaded Forsworn smirk with *schadenfreude*.

The handful of elder Daeva who do exist within the covenant are spoken of in reverential tones by younger Forsworn who bother to keep track of such things. These Daeva, known for their cold determination and mind-shattering frenzies, stand as inspirational terrors for those dedicated to the Adversary's path. Unsurprisingly, considering the clan's proclivities, *soma*-aspected factions claim the largest number of Daeva within their ranks. In fact, elder Daeva within Belial's Brood are rumored to be the founding force behind factions such as the Throne of Smokeless fire.



It is often thought that Succubi become Forsworn in hopes of indulging their most solipsistic fantasies. While most Daeva quickly learn the limits of their individual importance within the Brood, some continue to seek extravagant ways to differentiate themselves from the pack. For example, the Daeva of Belial's Brood are perhaps the most likely of the Forsworn to adopt a bloodline outside of the mystical Therion caste. Adopting a rarefied bloodline serves to further accentuate the unique passions and monstrous appetites Forsworn Daeva especially prize. This can cause tension amongst a covey suspicious of a headstrong Daeva's quest for an Avus outside of the covenant, though this concern is usually waved away by more naïve Succubi who believe their powers of persuasion, gentle or otherwise, make such an endeavor harmless. Especially stubborn Daeva can subvert an entire covey's agenda with their self-indulgent whims and, in extreme cases, jeopardize the Pursuit. Coveys bring Daeva into their ranks with initial trepidation, but quickly find loyalty and courage to be amongst their strongest passions. This loyalty is usually attributed to the clan's special reverence for the Vaulderie, though their egos chafe at the widely accepted claim that a Gangrel first developed the rite.

Daeva Forsworn are often reluctant travelers, and the nomad culture that has long been a part of the Brood does not play to Daeva's unnatural strengths. Territorial and overly concerned with matters of prestige, Succubi are usually in the vanguard of factions and coveys that seek to carve out a permanent base of operations within a city or region. Because of their predilection for mortal company and pawns, Daeva are perhaps the most likely of Forsworn to come into open conflict with vampires of other covenants. Succubi are some of the few Forsworn who openly compete with non-Brood vampires for influence and power in mortal society. Sometimes these personal vendettas drag entire coveys into a turf war only thinly disguised as a clash of philosophies.

Succubi fulfill numerous functions within a covey, but most often settle into a niche as the covey's pleasing face, interpreting the mortal world for their brethren while masking their inhumanity. Although fiercely committed to their covey-mates, Daeva vampires often struggle to attain leadership positions amongst their brethren. Daeva covey leaders sometimes emerge in times of conflict, striking a balance of power within the covey by taking command of the violence at hand while deferring to likely rivals on any spiritual matters that may present themselves. Succubi covey leaders are known to become especially concerned with securing their covey's feeding grounds and enforcing a modicum of discipline within

the covey itself. This light authoritarianism often rubs Brood vampires the wrong way and helps to explain the rarity of Daeva covey leaders. Quick to cast off their mortal identity and seemingly not as deeply committed to the Pursuit as other Forsworn, Daeva quickly make their coveys the center of their worlds.



Gangrel

If one clan could be said to hold a position of power throughout the entirety of Belial's Brood, that clan is the Gangrel. Much as the Ventrue ethos is often associated with the higher echelons and philosophical underpinnings

of the staid Invictus, Gangrel intuition and savagery are greatly respected by those in the Brood. Since the Brood of Belial puts such great stock in the ability to commune with the Beast, it should come as no great surprise that the passionate Gangrel hold many of the higher places of respect within the covenant. In both numbers and influence, the Gangrel are the premiere clan of the covenant, but the very nature of the clan's Requiem prevents the clan from consolidating power over the covenant as a whole. The aloof Savages often find themselves in places of prestige within the covenant despite their attempts to avoid such entanglements. Even Gangrel who attempt the Pursuit in solitude, away from covey and covenant, are sought out by intrepid Forsworn desperate for a hermit's insight. Even a vampire who manages to hold the attention of a Gangrel mentor is accorded a grudging respect, although these apprenticeships are often dangerous, as the Gangrel of Belial's Brood are not known for giving second chances.

All of the major factions within the Brood of Belial have a healthy contingent of Gangrel in their midst, and the Gangrel themselves seem to favor no particular aspect as a clan. Only in the smaller factions do Gangrel form the minority and even in those they rise above the rank and file as leaders, through violence or guile, and always by wisdom. The Gangrel are a well-known and respected clan within the Brood, serving as the model of vampirism for many in the covenant. The brooding contemplation and animalistic lack of empathy evident within the nature of the Gangrel clan are qualities much emulated within the Brood.

Bestial and introspective, the Savages lead by example and are openly contemptuous of cynics who try to gain power through political maneuvering. Gangrel often take on the mantle of a priest or a ritemaster within their

coveys, and this in turn usually provides the foundation for their leadership. Add to this the nomadic unlife adopted by some members of the covenant, and the Gangrel's status with the Brood becomes self-evident. Individually the most disciplined of vampire spiritualists, the Brood's Gangrel are often skilled at honing a covey's dedication to the Pursuit. Whether this is because of the clan's supposed connection with the Adversary or simply a result of the Gangrel's insights into the Beast, young Forsworn going through the travail of the Pursuit are fortunate if they have a Gangrel amongst their brethren.

Gangrel often take positions of leadership within a covey, but because of the large number of Gangrel within the covenant, this usually requires one Savage to top another. Normally, both vampires survive this process, but on rare occasions, a rival is killed trying to assert his will over the covey. More often, the rival assumes a secondary position amongst the brethren, his ambition tempered by the power of the Vaulderie. Gangrel unable to find a role of importance in their coveys can become dangerous liabilities as their Beasts dwell on the Gangrel's inadequacy, even confounding the clan's legendary composure. Small slights and pointless jabs take on the proportions of conspiracy, until even the bonds of the Crux can no longer keep the Beast in check. Experienced covey leaders with subordinate Gangrel often make a point of relying on their subordinates' strength and cunning for difficult tasks, banking on the Gangrel's task-oriented here-and-now mindset to delay any sudden grabs for power.

Brood Savages are often credited with promoting the covenant's quasi-nomadic side. While Gangrel are no more prone to wandering the wilderness than any other vampire, their hardy nature and innate Disciplines make them especially well-equipped to deal with the travails of nomadic unlife. Gangrel, especially those who have taken on a leadership position in a covey, are rarely hesitant to strike out into uncharted territory. Outside of cities, the Pursuit takes on an even more introspective tone than usual, even less reliant on action against mortals and more concerned with understanding the Beast within. While it may seem strange for Gangrel to seek a path less reliant on physical means, this only re-enforces the commonly held belief in their spiritual power and ability to guide others along the Adversary's path. The journey becomes a time of reflection for the covey, a respite from the Pursuit that may ultimately destroy the covey members despite their deeply held convictions.



Mekhet

The Mekhet are numerous within Belial's Brood, second only to the Gangrel in numbers. Unlike the Gangrel, Shadows must earn every iota of respect from their brethren, for none is given to them due to the blood fed to them by their sires. While Mekhet are not thought to have an innate understanding of the Beast, they are regarded as scholars of the covenant's history and traditions. In this capacity, Mekhet often find themselves adjudicating disputes between coveys that have tired of violence or fear the backlash of open conflict. Shadows who shirk this imposed responsibility are not uncommon, but most within Belial's Brood expect members of the clan to be well versed in covenant culture. According to an often-heard rumor, older Mekhet, using a combination of Auspex and subterfuge to find the best candidates, take younger protégés under their wing to instruct them in the ways of the Brood. If this modern myth were true, it would be a striking degree of clan solidarity that is absent from all the Brood's other bloodlines, save perhaps the Ventrue.

In a covey, a Mekhet who has not distinguished herself beyond the prejudices of her peers is expected to take on a secondary role, such as an advisor or a scout. Mekhet who seek to lead a covey usually come up against stiff opposition from more physically imposing brethren. A few Mekhet within the covenant have made a name for themselves as confessors of sorts, guiding covey-mates past the less obvious pitfalls of the Pursuit. Although these confessors are rare, coveys also depend on these Mekhet to sort out new members who are more dedicated to accumulating power than to the Adversary's path. When Mekhet covey leaders do emerge, they tend to steer their brethren toward a more philosophical understanding of the Brood's precepts, although with limited success considering the covenant's emphasis on intuition and spirituality. When a Shadow is at the helm of a covey, matters of regional or covenant importance are more likely to take precedence over more immediate local considerations. While this makes Mekhet less inclined to lead their coveys into open warfare against other members of the Brood on the grounds of territory or respect, Mekhet leaders do occasionally find themselves embroiled in local faction disputes that ultimately turn violent despite their higher-minded verbiage.

The Pursuit is central to the Requiem of every For-

sworn, but the Mekhet tend to reserve a special place for the Requiem in their nightly existence. Shadows tend to approach the Pursuit as a project to be developed with patience, not a headlong rush into the abyss. The Pursuit is an endeavor they excel at, often surviving far longer and more “intact” than their more enthusiastic brethren. Although Forsworn cannot approach the Pursuit in a clinical manner, the Mekhet seem to benefit from a healthy respect for the chaos and darkness within their souls and understand that humanity is sometimes best stripped away in contextual pieces. This has led to a number of conflicts in the past with less introspective branches of Belial’s Brood attempting to root out ‘heretics’ who supposedly downplayed the Beast’s role in the Pursuit. This may explain why *pneuma*-aspected factions attract most of the covenant’s Mekhet to their cause.

Mekhet vampires are well represented amongst the elder ranks of Belial’s Brood, nearly rivaling Gangrel in numbers and power at this echelon of the covenant. This has led to some speculation by perceptive covey leaders that the Mekhet must have as great a sway over the Brood’s traditions and methodology as the Gangrel have over the covenant’s philosophy and rituals. Younger Forsworn usually find elder Mekhet less approachable than others of age within the Brood. The Mekhet’s exacting focus on the Pursuit as a transformative experience often leaves them with little time for social diversions or the trivial distractions of local politics. While ancillae of the clan are famous mentors, elder Shadows take on few pupils and make a habit of sequestering themselves away in places of Resonance when they can. While Mekhet hermits are thought to be disproportionately common amongst the Brood, this is not necessarily a side effect of their age. In fact, more than one tale is told amongst the Forsworn of solitary Mekhets guarding ancient caches or ruined cities filled with lost secrets. Whether this is because of their propensity for finding sites of Resonance or some clan preference for solitude is part of the myth that has yet to be agreed upon.



Nosferatu

Within Belial’s Brood, Nosferatu find their greatest weakness turned into a strength. Physically repulsive or socially disquieting demeanors are celebrated qualities amongst many Forsworn, especially those who have pledged themselves to one of the *sarx*-aspected factions. The ability to engender fear is often sighted as a sign of respect in the covenant, the

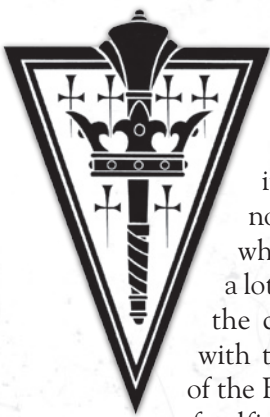
visceral and instinctive respect of one Beast given to another, and Nosferatu are nothing if not feared. Beyond their mastery over the power of Nightmare, Forsworn Nosferatu have cultivated a well-deserved reputation as cruel monsters within a covenant of cruel monsters. Haunts seem to relish making their brethren uncomfortable with their callous humor and their ironic flair for torture, both psychological and physical.

Horrible and unrepentant, Nosferatu are treasured members of any covey, applying their dramatic powers to bring an added touch of menace to their brethren’s arsenal. Younger Nosferatu are often found playing the part of a thug within a covey, toying with mortal and undead alike while paying lip service to the more actualized aspects of the Pursuit. The bonds of the Vaulderie and a devoted covey leader are usually enough to temper a neonate Haunt’s “enthusiasm,” but more than one has been made example of for taking the Adversary too lightly. Too stubborn to divulge their secrets, Nosferatu are also favored as assassins by Forsworn too weak to settle their differences in the open. As Nosferatu age, they quickly tire of the games of their youth and seek out positions of respect within their coveys. While this can lead to clashes with brethren uncomfortable with a “brute” in a seat of power, Haunts often find a temporary niche as a covey’s emissary. While Daeva are gifted in interpreting the mortal world for a covey, the Nosferatu often find themselves with the dangerous task of interacting with the supernatural world outside of the covenant. In a sick twist of the Pursuit’s effect on a Forsworn’s Humanity, the innate malfeasance of the Nosferatu helps mask the Brood’s depraved nature from the curious. Messages delivered by these foreboding creatures are usually succinct and sometimes shockingly violent, especially if a non-Forsworn vampire has attracted the covey’s attention.

Of all the clans, only the Gangrel can boast more covey leaders amongst their number. While some brethren may be initially hesitant to allow a Nosferatu to take power, a Haunt who has survived the Pursuit long enough to command a covey is an exceptional monster, indeed. Nosferatu covey leaders are known for their dedication to their brethren, if not to the Pursuit. Political and spiritual rewards are of a lesser value to these Nosferatu than the well-being of their covey-mates. Violence is often seen as the hallmark of the Brood, and Nosferatu excel at it. Coveys led by Nosferatu are fiercely territorial and react to signs of disrespect with extreme acts of barbarity. Even other coveys are not immune to these reprisals, although these intra-covenant clashes are not usually lethal, thanks in part to the restraining bonds of the Vaulderie.

While Nosferatu may seem to have a distinct advantage in the Pursuit because of the inhuman nature of their clan weakness, Nosferatu often have more trouble casting off their mortal concerns than most would expect. Unlike their Gangrel brothers, Nosferatu take their inhumanity for granted upon their Embrace, mistaking the curse on their flesh for the awakening of their bestial soul. Many Nosferatu thus postpone the Pursuit, only indulging in repetitive acts to which they had long ago grown accustomed or inured. Thus, their human nature survives far longer than is usually acceptable within the Brood, hidden by the Nosferatu's disturbing mien and sick preoccupations. While this is not common knowledge amongst the Forsworn, Nosferatu struggle to discard the few mortal affectations that survived their initiation into Belial's Brood. These nagging shreds of humanity can drive some Nosferatu into seclusion, afraid of their own brethren discovering their secret. Despite this hesitance to commit body and soul to the Pursuit, Nosferatu hermits are rare in the covenant overall, and Haunts seem to flourish most truly when ensconced in the company of a dedicated covey.

Often drawn to *sarx*-aspected factions, Nosferatu are known for their lust for Investments that sharpen their ability to horrify. In fact, many elder Antinomians are of Nosferatu blood and seem to believe the clan has a natural talent for warping flesh as well as minds. These hidden masters cackle with a dark joy as their faction's unspeakable acts torture the psyche of mortal society to the point of breakdown. A few more reserved Haunts are rumored to be well placed in the Nameless as well, carrying out secret rituals that are rumored to date back to the time of Belial himself.



Ventrue

The rarest clan within Belial's Brood is the Ventrue, their numbers being such a minority, in fact, that some Forsworn have no firsthand knowledge of the Lords whatsoever. Ventrue Forsworn have a lot to prove to their brethren. Since the clan is so intimately associated with the tyrannical Invictus, Ventrue of the Brood often champion the causes of selfishness and freedom to further distance themselves from the First Estate. Paragons of wild abandon, Forsworn Ventrue are notoriously insubordinate and difficult to control. This has made the clan strangely popular amongst younger Brood members who find the idea of being without limitations incredibly attractive. Some of these neonates have even taken to

passing around audiotapes and CDs of the hottest Ventrue philosophers, pontificating on the Beast and free will, sometimes in a spoken word performance format. But amongst the rank and file of Belial's Brood, the vindictive pogroms against their brethren from Invictus territories have left little love for the Lords within the covenant. This has led the clan members to look out for their own, and on more than one occasion attempt to organize, although these projects have inevitably ended in bickering and formation of rivalries amongst the Ventrue themselves.

Subtle and overt prejudices make it difficult for individual Ventrue to secure a place of leadership within their coveys, let alone in the covenant's upper echelons. The most dangerous obstacles a Ventrue faces when joining a covey are the preconceived notions of his brethren. Ventrue often adopt reactionary personas and extreme positions to counteract any hostility that may be directed toward them by untrusting Forsworn. Coupled to this is the Lords' supposed predilection for diablerie, a contentious taboo within Belial's Brood, but a taboo nonetheless. Whether Ventrue do have a taste for the heart's blood of other vampires is debatable, but many in the covenant wonder what else would drive members of such a privileged bloodline to join the Forsworn. Ventrue find that their brethren's trust, once won, is hard to keep, even with the ritual of *Vaulderie* on their side. The Pursuit damages Ventrue in ways that disturb even the Forsworn, warping the Ventrue's minds in unpredictable ways and with a speed unseen amongst other clans, despite the presence of both the Tongue and the Therion caste. Brethren keep a close eye on their Ventrue covey-mates for signs of degeneration. While rarely leaders, Lords often find a place within the covey as a procurer or problem fixer. When brute force fails to intimidate curious mortals or materials goods beyond the covey's financial means are needed, Ventrue become indispensable.

Ventrue covey leaders are a rare breed in Belial's Brood, having to overcome not only deadly rivals but also the treachery of those who fear the nature of the Ventrue's blood. A Ventrue's power over memory and free will is also viewed with great suspicion amongst Forsworn. Any Lord who achieves even a modicum of respect or power within the covenant is often dogged by accusations of coercive use of the Dominate Discipline. A Ventrue who does manage to wrest control of a covey away from another Forsworn leads his brethren in a more democratic manner than is typical in the covenant. Often brought to power by toppling an excessively domineering covey leader, Ventrue find their brethren even less receptive to orders and commandments than most Forsworn.

Pneuma-aspected factions, particularly the Mercy Seat, have the largest concentrations of Ventrue among the ranks, though even these are comparatively small. And while the Roaring Serpent is known to have some well-regarded Ventrue as members, they are far from the faction's levers of power. Unfortunately, the same prejudices that retard a Ventrue's ability to gain prestige in her covey usually work against her inside a faction. Even age does little to rectify this disparity in respect, as even elder Ventrue are almost unheard of within the Brood, outside of conspiracy theory and rumor. Certain familial lineages of Ventrue have supposedly been active within Belial's Brood since its inception, working to keep their kinship secret for reasons of their own.

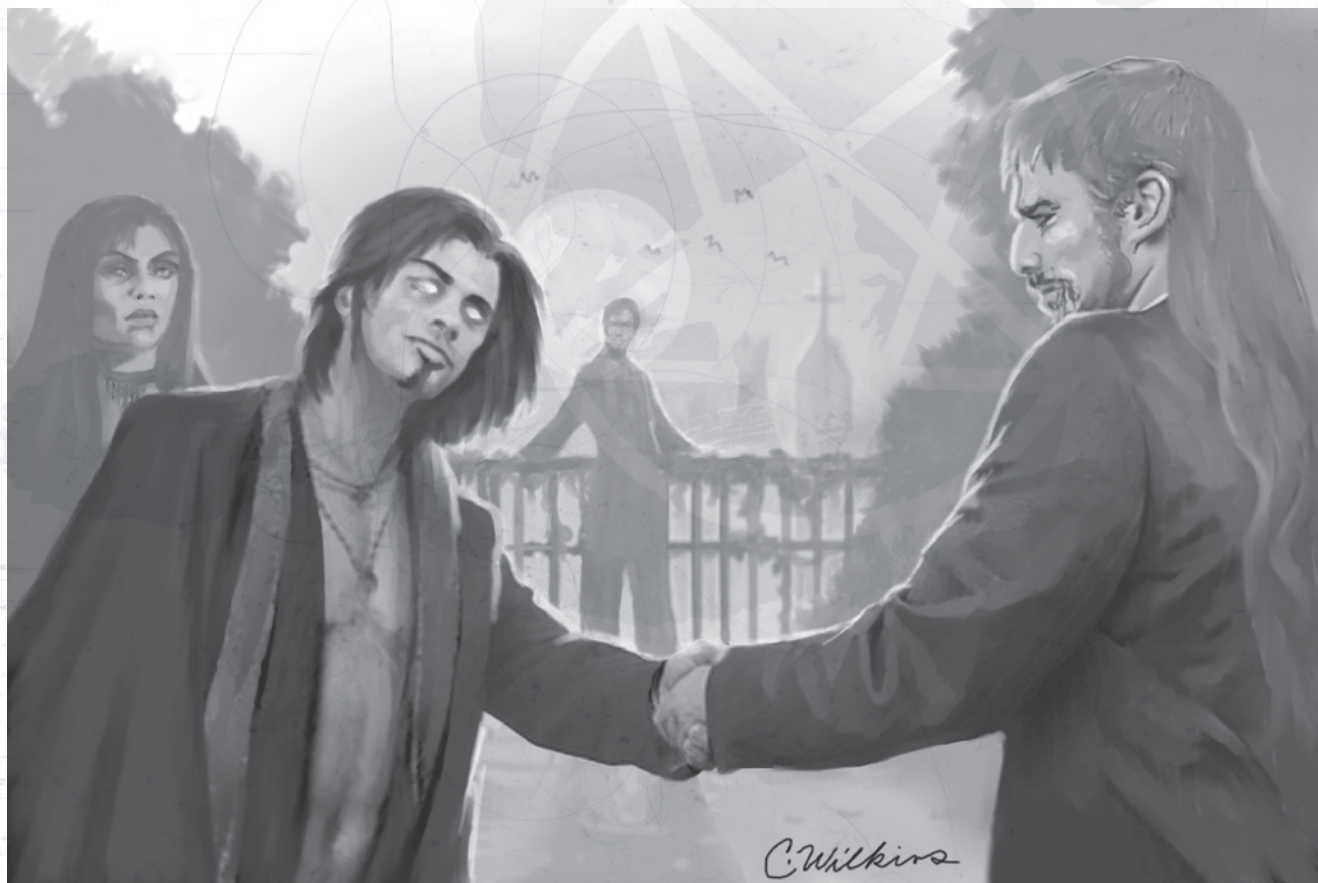
The Others

While relations between the Brood and vampires of other covenants are rare in the extreme, one might be surprised to know that they are not always hostile. Vampires of the Brood can be impulsive, and in some cases extremely violent, but they are also masters of the base cunning that comes naturally to all vampires. Given the right circumstances or convergence of the vagaries of fate, Belial's Brood has even on some occasions allied itself with vampires who subscribe to an ideology

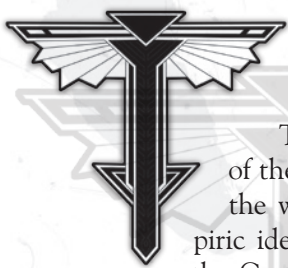
antithetical to the covenant's own. Such cross-covenant cooperation is a very rare event, with only local ramifications; alliances almost never expand beyond a city's borders. As with many things within Belial's Brood, a Forsworn's faction often has more sway in shaping the Forsworn's view of other vampires than any covenant-wide orthodoxy. Since active recruitment is frowned upon by all of the present-day factions within Belial's Brood, Forsworn who go out of their way to interact with vampires of other covenants are often viewed with suspicion. Although, considering the average Forsworn's ignorance of other covenants, few factions or coveys monitor their brethren for such improper behavior.

Violence as Dialog

As many outside the covenant have surely noted, violence has a special place within Belial's Brood. While members of factions such as the Pandaemonium have ritualized methods of brutality, other factions, such as the Mercy Seat, view violence as simply one of many tactics to further the Pursuit or, in extreme cases, to remove an obstacle. The Throne of Smokeless Fire has developed an appreciation of violence as the most honest means of communication, looking to the state of nature as the template for interpersonal interactions.



To wit, as master predators, vampires are naturally inclined to violence. Despite these different interpretations concerning the use and validity of violence, most of the Brood's aggressive energy is directed toward the Pursuit. The covenant as a whole has no structure to direct attacks against other groups, and the various factions are barely better organized. While it is true that some factions are very enthusiastic and hands-on when engaging in the Pursuit, violence may not be their first recourse when encountering Kindred. *Pneuma*-aspected factions especially go out of their way to avoid violence when dealing with non-Forsworn, preferring to instigate internal strife with insidious plots without getting directly involved in the ensuing conflagration. The ferocity and unflinching nature of Brood violence sends a powerful message to those on the receiving end of the missive, but the Forsworn are rarely unified in the intent and substance of their "communications" with the outside world.



The Carthian Movement

To the Forsworn, the vampires of the Carthian Movement personify the worst degeneration of the vampiric ideal. Parroting mortal ideologies, the Carthians are shackled to concepts such as democracy and equality, concepts that should have died along with their flesh. These Kindred are the epitome of the 'living vampire' that many in the Brood see as the antithesis of their core philosophy, and a secular mockery of the Pursuit. Politics, as the Carthians understand it, should remain the lazy obsession of mortal philosophers too afraid to get their hands dirty. True vampires have no use for such high-minded ideals, and the Beast is ill-used when put to such paltry work. Brood factions that have tried to incorporate political considerations into their ethos often find themselves unflatteringly compared to the leaders of the Carthian Movement. Considering that *soma*-aspected factions are usually at the forefront of such endeavors to construct a meaningful political framework within the Brood, these factions often go out of their way to demonstrate their scorn for any Carthian the factions can get their hands on.

Despite the special attention of the *soma*-aspected, such as the Roaring Serpent or the Throne of Smokeless Fire, this disdain is not only limited to Forsworn aligned with these factions. In fact, maligning the precepts of the Carthian Movement has become a bit of a rhetorical pastime amongst Forsworn ancillae, regardless of their

faction affiliation. These quasi-philosophical debates have dug a deep well of antipathy toward the Carthians. Younger Forsworn grasping for acceptance in the Brood can find themselves falling into the trap of reflexively adopting anti-Carthian rhetoric as their own. For a covenant that cherishes independence, creativity and activism, the Carthians stand as a painfully embarrassing reminder of how low a vampire can sink when he makes a fetish of his former life.

While many within Belial's Brood find the Carthian Movement's appeal to members of the Unbound disturbing, their differences do not stem from a simple tussle over the same pool of recruits. While Belial's Brood despises constraints on individual freedom and revels in unburdening the fetters of mortal conscience, the Carthians sell a twisted mockery of the Brood's own dogma. The Forsworn see the Carthian interpretation of freedom and equality as a lie, opium for the dull and dimwitted to insure the Beast's slavery to the Man. Real freedom is personified by the Pursuit and leaving behind the baggage of breathing days.

Still, domains with a Carthian and a Brood presence are not always destined to devolve into bitter warfare. Despite knee-jerk animosity from most members of Belial's Brood, the Carthian Movement is not seen as an existential threat by the more far-seeing brethren of the Forsworn. While nomadic coveys or violent individuals might single out a Carthian vampire for particularly rough treatment, most faction heads realize that the Carthian Movement as a whole has little interest in interfering with the Brood's nightly endeavors. Although the Brood and the Carthian Movement may squabble and clash, true mortals hold more interest for dedicated members of the Brood than vampires who play at living.

Forsworn-Carthian Partnerships

Forsworn coveys in a city controlled by the Carthian Movement often find that the needs of the Pursuit far outweigh any cultural distaste they might feel for their "hosts," shying away from confronting Carthian vampires and concentrating on mortal victims. On the other hand, Carthian cells in Brood territories are rarely given the opportunity to strike up any meaningful relationships with the Forsworn before being attacked by the overzealous. Brethren of the Brood are often relieved to discover that the Powers That Be in a Carthian domain are less likely to interfere with the Brood's predations on mortals. However, mistaking Carthian *laissez-faire* attitudes for apathy can lead to mounting atrocities, as the Forsworn indulge the opportunity to flaunt the purity of their convictions. The Throne of Smokeless

Fire is even known to have gone so far as to antagonize one Carthian-led city in North America by setting up brutal courts to try Carthian hostages using mortal standards, with the Djinn reportedly handing down no acquittals, of course.

On the rare occasions when vampires of Belial's Brood conspire with members of the Carthian Movement, the union often ends in bickering and bloodshed. Only the most self-serving Forsworn vampire can long endure the inane ramblings and perverse theories of a Carthian "ally." When such partnerships do take place, it is usually in the form of a pact of mutual protection against a hostile third element. Carthians, who would think of the Brood as nihilists indulging in violent power fantasies, would be confused by the overtly spiritual nature of the covenant. While a few Forsworn have been known to find unexpected friends among those Carthians who hold freedom as an ideal beyond empty rhetoric, these liaisons are usually dissolved out of fear that their respective covenants will catch wind of them.



The Circle of the Crone

At first glance, interactions between the Brood and the Circle of the Crone can seem confusing to those outside either covenant.

Within a domain, periods of calm and outright cooperation between the two covenants are punctuated with terrible nights of liver-devouring revenge. Belial's Brood sees the Circle of the Crone as a covenant obsessed with the trappings of spirituality, but unable to make the sacrifices necessary to leave behind mortal misconceptions. According to the Forsworn, the Circle of the Crone is satisfied with the few tricks the covenant has unearthed over the centuries, and has grown complacent. The well-known degenerative effects of Crúac enforce the opinion amongst many Forsworn that Acolytes were once on the edge of understanding, but shied away from taking the final leap necessary to free themselves from their mortal mindset.

In the present nights, the Circle of the Crone has devolved into a hodge-podge of pagans and New Age cultists, resting on the laurels of the Circle's past accomplishments. While some within the Circle of the Crone may still have insight into the supernatural underpinnings of their covenant's rituals, most seem all too happy to mimic the tired trappings of the mortal traditions they failed to grasp in life. While a small minority within the Brood believe this makes Acolytes the perfect allies, most harbor the same disdain for the

Circle of the Crone as they do for other covenants. Supposedly, members of the Roaring Serpent take particular issue with the Acolytes' adherence to a female progenitor, considering their belief that vampires sprung from a very masculine Belial. Other factions seem willing to accept the Circle of the Crone as simply the product of a gang of vampires unwilling to forsake the trappings of their mortal lives.

Despite the Acolytes' supposed harmlessness, Belial's Brood recognizes the appeal the Circle of the Crone holds for younger brethren of the Forsworn. The lure of power promised by the Acolytes is wrapped in trappings deceptively similar to that offered by the Brood, but devoid of the visceral price demanded by the Pursuit. Conflict often arises between the two covenants when a young Forsworn seeks shelter amongst the Circle of the Crone or attempts to breach the sacred trust of the Crux. Antinomians are known to indulge in especially berserk and depraved scenarios when they discover they have been betrayed by one of their own brethren and the Crone. Acolytes, for their part, seem to understand that the Brood is somehow related to the primal origins of the Circle of the Crone, and are comfortable accepting defectors from the Brood since such defectors have no worthwhile information to relate once they've left.

Forsworn-Acolyte Partnerships

While vampires of the Circle of the Crone would rarely admit to having any kind of working relationship with Belial's Brood, the covenants do seem to have a tacit understanding concerning the Brood's many nomadic coveys. Forsworn nomads often seek out domains controlled by Acolytes when fleeing persecution or when the Forsworn are in need of replenishing a covey's membership. These wandering coveys know better than to recruit from amongst the Acolytes, but understand that the Circle of the Crone is more likely to assume that their practices are simply an enthusiastic outgrowth of their own. By the time the Powers That Be suspect the wanderers are members of Belial's Brood, they have pulled up their stakes. Nomadic coveys that have made more formal arrangements can act as messengers for Crone Princes with more regional ambitions. In exchange for safe haven and anonymity, these Forsworn coveys deliver both tidings and omens to those who have displeased their benefactors.

When Forsworn put down roots in a domain controlled by the Circle of the Crone, long-term understandings become more difficult between the two covenants. Of the factions that have tried to co-exist with the Acolytes, the Throne of Smokeless Fire has had the most relative success in recent years. Djinn seem to pride themselves

on their ability to manipulate and cajole mortals into convoluted social hierarchies. Pacts between the two covenants invariably break down when the Forsworn become too numerous to resist striking at their allies' holdings, or when the notoriously potent Djinn become the targets of Acolyte diablerie attempts.



The Invictus

Of all the covenants, the Invictus seems to bear the most animus toward the Brood of Belial. The origin of this antipathy is unknown to the Forsworn, but many within the Brood claim the hoary elders that hold the reins of power within the First Estate direct it. Whatever the catalyst of the grudge, its ramifications are hard to argue against. Invictus-dominated domains are uniformly hostile to members of Belial's Brood, and actively slander the covenant even when no covey is present within the territory. Nomadic coveys often bear the brunt of this hostility, becoming the targets of literal witch-hunts when their true allegiances are sniffed out. Even political rivals within the Invictus itself were carelessly tarred with covert Brood membership when the rivals dare to question the status quo (ludicrous as such an allegation may be). Some Invictus domains have gone so long without a true Brood presence that younger vampires have even begun to doubt that the covenant exists. In fact, accusations of demon worship or "infernalism" became so common during the early 1980s that such tactics are often greeted with hysterics in the modern nights.

Of course, the vampires of the brood happily reciprocate this hostile stance. While *soma*-aspected factions find the power wielded by individual Invictus enviable, most Forsworn recognize the Invictus as an agent of spiritual ossification within vampire society. While the ideology of the Invictus does not boil the blood of Forsworn in the same way as the regurgitated moans of the Carthian Movement, the actions of the First Estate concern the Brood immensely. The Invictus is, at its core, a secular conspiracy, and although the First Estate may have wed itself to more religious covenants in the past, tonight the covenant rules on its own. While the First Estate inspires loyalty, the covenant has often found itself unable to inspire passionate conviction, a quality Belial's Brood possesses in abundance. According to the few politicians in the Brood, this "passion gap" threatens the established order the Invictus has labored so hard to get the other covenants to sign on to. The Invictus is not a testament to some breathing ideal, but the rusted cage that vampires believe will simultaneously protect them from the Beast and the mortal world.

In spite of the murder of their brethren, more experienced coveys make pilgrimages to Invictus territories in hopes of carrying out terrifying raids. These attacks are brutal affairs lasting only a few nights, but usually spark a string of recriminations within the city's hierarchy and a futile search for crypto-Satanists. Even though the Invictus is often thought of as the only covenant with even a faint understanding of the Brood's ethos, in times of crisis the First Estate finds comfort in the old stereotypes.

Forsworn-Invictus Partnerships

Even as the Invictus professes its hatred for the demon-spawned disciples of Belial, ignorant of them though the Invictus may be, few members of the First Estate would turn their backs on an effective tool of statecraft. While neither covenant is openly proud of occasions of past relationship, they have served both covenants well. To be sure, the Invictus' apparent hatred for the Forsworn is not stage acting, even though members of the Nameless seem strangely immune to such prosecution. As the Invictus as a whole persecutes and bedevils the Brood, less scrupulous individuals strike bargains with the devil. Considering the taboo nature of such contacts, many Invictus actually believe these arrangements are novel, but the unchecked ambition of the First Estate provides the lie to this conceit.

Forsworn coveys have surprising luck ferreting out havens and Retainers within cities they have only recently stepped foot in. Anonymous phone calls and ghouls bearing lists are often the first response a nomadic covey that has put down stakes in an Invictus stronghold. Such coveys have to be careful not to outstay their welcome, but can often safely operate over brief periods of time. In domains with a more fractured center of gravity, visiting coveys have terrorized the holdings of city Kindred for years on end. Some members of the Nameless faction are rumored to have a more nuanced understanding with the First Estate, serving as spiritual viziers and emissaries to Princes too old to be bothered with the New Age glitz of the Lancea Sanctum. Considering the Nameless' association with the antediluvian origins of the Brood, such ties to the Invictus might hint at a deeper connection between the two covenants.



The Lancea Sanctum

More than one preacher within the Lancea Sanctum has made her mark with fiery speeches condemning the debased and vile practices of Belial's Brood. But despite the inflammatory comments and pulpit thumping, the Forsworn rarely have dealings or conflicts with the Sanctified. The Lancea Sanctum is most comfortable when conceptual-



izing the Brood as an obnoxious tumor, a strange growth of satanism on the otherwise healthy body of vampire-kind. While the Forsworn are far from flattered by such ignorance, it is a state of affairs they generally prefer. No amount of dialogue will endear the vampires of the Sanctified to the precepts of Belial's Brood, so better that the Sanctified know nothing about the covenant at all beyond their laughable bedtime stories. Moreover, the Lancea Sanctum rarely takes an active role in confronting Belial's Brood unless the Forsworn overtly (and traceably) trespass one of the Traditions.

The Brood believes it is the strange powers of the Forsworn that most terrify the Lancea Sanctum. The fact that Belial's Brood displays abilities that turn divinely imposed limitations on their head seems alien to the Sanctified, even more so than the queer tricks of the Ordo Dracul. When rumors of the Forsworn's powers begin to crop up amongst the flock, Sanctified leaders are often quick to quash them, or so goes the rumors amongst the Brood. Whether the Sanctified truly fear the lure of Investments, or whether there is some conspiracy with the Lancea Sanctum to misrepresent Belial's Brood, is unknowable. More likely, the Lancea Sanctum has severely limited knowledge of the Brood and slanders the covenant out of ignorance, not insight. In fact, the Brood itself has limited knowledge of the Lancea Sanctum as well, as converts between the covenants are exceedingly rare and are rarely indoctrinated into the greatest mysteries without harrowing tests of loyalty.

Although the Lancea Sanctum enjoys the rhetorical victories it scores against the Brood by denouncing its barbarity, the Brood serves a useful function in the mindset of many Sanctified. The Forsworn are bogeymen and monsters that serve as a useful reminder to those who question Longinus' call for more "temperate" treatment of mortals. For their part, the Forsworn see the Lancea Sanctum as either a worthy spiritual adversary or a paper tiger. While few factions fear the Lancea Sanctum's capability to recruit from their ranks, they viscerally understand the fanaticism of the Lancea Sanctum's true believers. Thankfully, the leadership of the Sanctified is often too conservative to strike out against the Brood in force. Longinus' adherents would rather point to the shadows than risk their flock to illuminate them. When Sanctified domains do produce a firebrand intent on launching a crusade against the Brood, only the staunchest coveys remain in a city to witness it. Many Forsworn simply return to their nomadic routes at the first signs of a Lancea Sanctum purge, hoping to return when the fires of the Sanctified have been satiated.

Forsworn-Sanctified Partnerships

Unless one counts the constant use of the Forsworn as scapegoats for the travails of misguided Sanctified, few alliances are formed between Belial's Brood and the Lancea Sanctum. Coveys that overlay the myths of Belial's Brood with Abrahamic stories have an easier time dealing with the Lancea Sanctum, but also expose themselves to a greater risk of conversion. These coveys are rare in the modern nights, but typically match up more closely with the Belial's Brood espoused by the Sanctified. Some among the Lancea Sanctum even have the misguided perception that the Brood is somehow about the same business as the Sanctified, but suffer from an over-abundance of zeal. In this strange formulation, the Forsworn are fear-mongers, just as the Sanctified, but have become so committed to God's work they have sacrificed their own souls. As laughable as this premise may seem, more than one member of the Brood has found a sympathetic ear amongst some of the more militant Sanctified.

Strangely, vampires of the Pandaemonium have had a number of successful liaisons with Sanctified-controlled domains. The faction's unadulterated passion for depravity has been allowed to fester by more than one Bishop hoping to coerce her rivals into seeking Sanctified protection. While these partnerships are often informal affairs, a Lancea Sanctum leader overlooks the Brood's activities or restrains her minions from taking action for a few nights of mayhem. When formal agreements do exist between members of these covenants, the agreements are often secret affairs between individuals unsure of their ability to destroy one another.



The Ordo Dracon

Although both the Ordo Dracon and Belial's Brood believe in the continually transformative experience of undeath, the paths dictated by their respective covenants is quite different. While the Dragons seem to think that the Beast is an obstacle to this ongoing transformation, the Brood sees the Beast as the key to it. Forsworn see the Ordo Dracon as shy explorers similar to the Circle of the Crone, always making excuses for only sticking their toes into the pool. The Dragons hide behind scientific jargon and cerebral excuses to hide their failures. While they chip away at the edges of what they consider a curse, in essence defacing themselves, the Forsworn embrace the entirety of their vampiric nature. But in most cases, these covenants have little real knowledge of one another's core philosophies.

Strangely enough, the Ordo Dracon has taken an increasing fascination with the Brood over the years. The number of Dragons who have approached the Brood seeking insight into the covenant's beliefs is truly startling. Many Forsworn believe that the Dragons, ever power hungry, think they can simply learn the Brood's powers and return to their passionless unives untouched by the Pursuit. Considering the Brood's strict edicts concerning the recruitment of new members, this is, on its face, a losing proposition. Belial's Brood rejects any attempt to justify dual allegiances and treats those who attempt to play a double game quite harshly. If the Dragons truly wish to learn the secrets of Belial's Brood, there is but one route that can be traveled — the Adversary's path.

Of course, the Brood also realizes that there is no stopping the most dedicated amongst the Ordo Dracon from observing their rituals and abilities. But the Forsworn feel secure that the experiential nature of the Pursuit will keep their secrets safe from prying eyes. While other covenants often seek to directly challenge the Brood, the Ordo Dracon is a more insidious danger. Of the Brood's factions, the Mercy Seat has a special fancy for the Ordo Dracon's seemingly irrational fear of the Beast. Faustians delight in antagonizing the Dragon who dares snoop around their territory by laying puzzling traps of conscience. These Dragons and Wyrm's hunger not for the Brood's blood, but for its power. The Forsworn know that a Dragon's tongue is forked and that any aid taken from the Ordo Dracon will come with an expectation of payment.

Forsworn-Dragon Partnerships

When the Forsworn must ally themselves with members of the Ordo Dracon, it is usually over the use of the one thing they truly have in common — the places of Resonance. The Ordo Dracon seems to believe that true dragons dwell within the earth, forming places of supernatural power. Whether these sites of power are the same as those known as Resonants by the Forsworn is not completely known. Sites that resonate with the spiritual energy of the Adversary are sacred to the Brood, and most factions are loathe to share or reveal such places to those outside the covenant. But in domains in which a place of Resonance has been discovered by Dragons, sometimes the Forsworn have no choice but to share the site if attempts to wrest it away have failed. Since the Dragons pride themselves on being able to unravel the secrets of their so-called Wyrm's Nests, the Dragons often attempt to dangle their expertise in front of the Forsworn as an inducement to cooperation. While lone Forsworn hermits may attempt to juggle such arrange-

ments in hopes of enlightening their “allies” with the Adversary’s power, complete coveys are less likely to risk the Adversary’s wrath or jeopardize their Pursuit.



The Unbound

Unsurprisingly, Belial’s Brood is very sympathetic to the Unbound’s lot in vampiric society. Next to the Brood, the Unbound seem to make up the majority of the nomadic vampires traveling between the domains of the sedentary covenants. The Unbound’s strong spirit and refusal to be co-opted into a system in which they have no stake strikes a resonant chord amongst the independent-minded vampires of Belial’s Brood. Unfortunately, unaligned vampires are sometimes persecuted for the actions of the Brood. Although this is an unintended consequence of Forsworn masquerading as Unbound, the Brood makes no apologies. While the Forsworn respect the Unbound, the Brood feels no compunction to make the Unbound’s unlives any easier. If the Unbound meet increased animosity from the other covenants because of the Brood’s actions, this will only serve to increase the Unbound’s support for the Brood or sharpen their perseverance.

Often the Unbound are seen as a natural reservoir of recruits for Belial’s Brood. Unfettered by any single ideology, strong willed and fiercely committed to their liberty, the independents must find the Brood’s respect refreshing. While this is an idealized view of the Unbound, it is a common one. In truth, the Unbound’s view on Belial’s Brood is as varied as the vampires themselves. Few amongst the factions seek to antagonize the Unbound needlessly, for the factions understand that their nomadic coveys often depend on such unattached vampires when first arriving in a domain. Although the Forsworn are given no official sanction or protection, they know it is in their best interests to endear themselves to the Unbound, or at least to avoid making enemies of them. The Roaring Serpent seems especially interested in the Unbound. To this faction, the Unbound are the wayward children of the Adversary and, unlike others, have yet to be corrupted by the fanciful lies of the other covenants. While this view certainly paints the Unbound as naïve babes-in-the-wilderness, the Archons’ dramatic powers often quiet those who would take offense.

Forsworn-Unbound Partnerships

Other factions within the Brood take a dimmer view of the Unbound as a whole, but find their lack of orthodoxy a point in their favor. Since many coveys claim to be Unbound when they are pestered by vampires who claim

to rule a domain, the coveys often make alliances within the greater independent community. Unbound vampires seem to have a deeper respect for each others’ privacy, and the Forsworn take advantage of that to shield themselves from unwanted attention. In some domains, a Brood covey becomes the cornerstone of an Unbound community, enforcing the territorial “rights” of other Unbound in exchange for acceptance within the city. Although these arrangements are often short-lived once the covey’s Pursuit draws too much attention, a domain with a large Unbound population could allow a covey to operate for quite some time before the Powers That Be could muster the courage to move against the Brood openly.

Brood coveys are rarely hesitant to ally themselves with unaffiliated vampires, for no implicit recognition of a heretical concept or offending office is necessary. The Unbound are vampires, plain and simple, and few amongst their number claim knowledge of the true mysteries of undeath. In addition, that some Forsworn were Unbound themselves before dedicating themselves to the Pursuit and taking part in a Crux, and the ease with which these two groups find common ground, should come as no surprise. Of course, this close association also means that other vampires are notoriously suspicious of the Unbound. While this would lead some to believe that Belial’s Brood would come to the aid of the independents when called, this is rarely the case. Coveys certainly help those Unbound whom the coveys have come to rely upon, but many Forsworn think it is distasteful to coddle those loners who remain outside the fold.

Many Unbound in the modern nights find religion distasteful and keep Forsworn vampires at arm’s length because their passion for the Pursuit smacks of fanaticism. Some coveys with the Brood have been known to take the exceptional step of taking Unbound vampires under their wing. This prolonged process of initiation smacks of recruitment, and many factions are displeased with the leniency shown to these newcomers. The Throne of Smokeless Fire, known for its particularity brutal rites of initiation, has had open revolts about young coveys being too soft on Unbound initiates. While the Djinn tend to handle this matter by violently interfering in “flawed” initiation rites, most other factions are still confident that the Pursuit will eventually weed out the weak.



VII

As vampires, Brood members have been targeted by VII’s assassins in the past. Because of the preponderance of nomads

within Belial's Brood, VII's attacks have had limited success, and many Forsworn do not even realize that VII has an agenda against all vampires. Considering the antagonism that is almost universally directed against Belial's Brood by the other covenants, VII is often seen as simply more committed to carrying out its threats. Although nomadic coveys have yet to find a domain controlled by VII to retaliate against, Forsworn who have clashed with VII take special pride in recounting the battles against these shadowy murderers. As far as their actions against other covenants are concerned, the Forsworn tend to steer clear. The nomadic lifestyle of many Forsworn is the covenant's greatest defense against VII. While obviously dedicated and efficient killers, VII's numbers seem small and their covenant scattered. A covey that keeps moving has nothing to fear from them.

As for VII's goals and mindset, those are as much an enigma to the Forsworn as any other vampire. More than one communal haven has been destroyed by this group's operatives, and although VII seems to be even more nomadic than the Brood itself, few coveys have reported encountering VII on the road. Further re-enforcing their mystique, members of the Roaring Serpent claim to have destroyed an entire VII hit squad in Baltimore in the 1960s. According to the Archons, VII arrived from out of town specifically to carry out a strike, and intended to depart the same evening. For the Brood, VII is a cult of assassins without ideology and seemingly without a return address. VII is an enemy of the Forsworn, but only the most paranoid would consider VII an existential threat.

Forsworn-VII Partnerships

As should come as no surprise, the Forsworn have never entered into any formal agreements with VII, although it is rumored that especially desperate coveys have taken advantage of VII raids to dispatch rivals who were usually untouchable, in some cases even turning on brethren within their own faction. These alliances of opportunity could hardly be called true partnerships, but VII nonetheless advances the goals of the Brood by sheer coincidence. In an often recounted road tale from the late 1800s, a pack of VII decimated the entire vampire population of a Mexican border town just after a covey of nomads had been chased out by the local tyrant. The story goes that the Forsworn led VII to all the havens the Brood knew, and that afterwards they even gave up the road and set up their own little fief. Sure enough, these apocryphal Forsworn knew their nights were numbered, but instead of heading back to the road, they waited in their little kingdom for VII to return and try to finish them off.



Mages

True mages are almost unknown to the Brood of Belial. Most Forsworn would be hard-pressed to distinguish a mage from a carnival huckster. While certain factions within the Brood have attributed strange abilities to Belial as a mortal, none have claimed he was one of the Awakened. Relations between mages and the Forsworn are most likely dictated by the ideological leanings of the mage who is encountered and the circumstances of their introduction. Since few Brood members have foreknowledge of these beings, they would most likely be treated as mortals. This would explain why the few anecdotes concerning mages in the covenant are usually tales of cold vengeance acted out by an unseen wizard, exacting his due from an incautious covey. A mage's ego is notoriously inflated and fragile, and when a covey tarnishes willworker's pride, there is often hell to pay.

While few coveys take these precautionary tales seriously, mages are a true danger to sedentary coveys. The Pursuit can be difficult on a domain's mortal population, and mages are nothing if not meddlesome when it comes to their mortal pawns. Factions that find mages within their domains usually go out of their way to avoid them. Dispatching a mage is not impossible or even difficult, but as mages tend to hold grudges almost as long as the undead, if the target survives . . . More importantly, these magicians have nothing to offer the Forsworn. Mages' blood is not known to hide any special secrets, and despite mages' great powers, their hearts are all too human. While factions such as the Mercy Seat are thought to be adept at the prickly diplomacy required to manage a mage's pride, no one within the Brood claims to have made any ongoing allies amongst them.

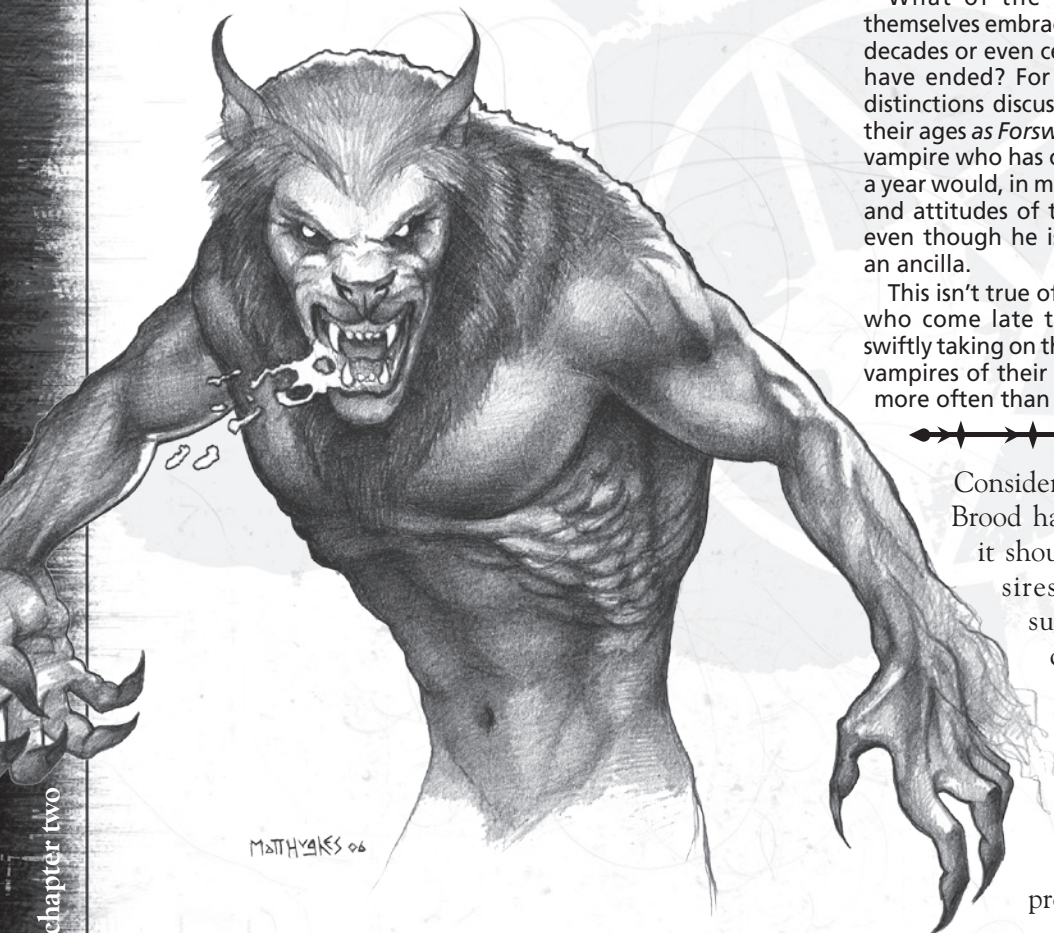


Werewolves

As Belial's Brood is a covenant known for its nomadic vampires, the monsters that inhabit the woods and the highways are of particular concern. While the Brood has no more knowledge of the internal politics or culture of werewolves than other vampires, Brood members have come to understand the territorial nature of the wolf-men. Certainly, familial differences exist among the werewolves, but coveys sneaking through the territory of flesh-eating shape-shifters rarely stop to chat. Some of the more powerful coveys claim to have informal truces or rights of way, but no one is aware of any true negotiations with these

creatures. Despite the view common to most Forsworn that werewolves are more animal than man, only the most foolhardy seek them out for sport. Respect for the natural rulers of the wild places is a common feeling amongst the Forsworn, and vampires of the Brood are deferential when crossing werewolves' territory.

The passion and brutality Forsworn covets have seen exhibited by the werewolves resonates. These strange creatures surely have no understanding of the Pursuit, and little within the Brood's mythology mentions them. Truly, many Forsworn envy the ease with which werewolves seem to discard their human nature, intuitively slipping on the beast's skin. Paradoxically, factions with more sedentary membership, such as the Throne of Smokeless Fire, hold the werewolves in what is ultimately the highest regard. This may have something to do with the fact that such factions have less reason to clash with the creatures. But despite their great prowess, the werewolves are but living things, and to hear the elders tell it, many remain hamstrung by a system of honor completely alien to the Brood. If even creatures such as these find need to delude themselves, is there truly any hope of ever stripping away the memory of being a man?



The Youthful Beast

When first brought into the Requiem, a vampire is usually introduced to the multitude of covenants by his sire or on rarer occasions, by his coterie. While many sires may expect their progeny to follow in their footsteps, few covenants will long tolerate a member who is not fully committed to their ideologies, pedigree notwithstanding. Those neonates who are given a choice often agonize over which of the covenants to pledge themselves. Having vampirism forced upon them, they find it difficult to believe that a covenant is truly a voluntary allegiance, to be joined or left at one's discretion. Although most covenants do punish traitors to some extent or other, only a few hold a grudge against those who leave their ranks without acrimony.

UNLIFE VS. FORSWORN UNLIFE

This portion of the chapter speaks, largely in generalities but with some specific details, of "neonates," "ancillae" and "elders." This is all well and good for the majority of Forsworn, who are either Embraced more or less directly into the Brood or find themselves drawn to its teachings fairly early in their Requiems.

What of the vampires who do not find themselves embracing the Brood's teachings until decades or even centuries after their mortal lives have ended? For these vampires, consider the distinctions discussed here to apply primarily to their ages *as Forsworn*. For instance, a 90-year-old vampire who has only been part of the Brood for a year would, in most respects, match the persona and attitudes of the neonates discussed herein, even though he is technically, by virtue of age, an ancilla.

This isn't true of *all* Forsworn — some of those who come late to the Brood find themselves swiftly taking on the beliefs and attitudes of other vampires of their age — but as a rule, it applies more often than it does not.

Considering the poor reputation Belial's Brood has amongst the other covenants, it should come as no surprise that few sires outside the covenant would suggest that their progeny should consider joining such a cult. Since becoming one of the Forsworn is not a choice made lightly, few neonates come to the Brood before having wasted their time in another covenant. Belial's Brood holds out the ultimate promise of freedom for those young

vampires who have long been tormented by their conflicting desires and useless conscience. Added to this is the promise of some day understanding the very core of vampire identity and being blessed with powers other vampires deny themselves by grasping the shreds of humanity they have left. While other covenants depend on a neonate's ignorance to lure them into the fold, the Brood prefers those who have been disillusioned by what vampire society has to offer. Neonates who hunger for more than rehashed Bible tales or thinly disguised nursery rhymes have the zeal that the Forsworn can channel into the Pursuit and the full awakening of their bestial soul.

Seeking Freedom

The Forsworn are cautioned by their elders not to hastily judge those who approach them for counsel or succor. For amongst these neonates are the seekers, those vampires who have been touched by the Adversary and long to rid themselves of the Man within. While every faction and covey has its own principles of determining what differentiates a seeker from a spy, the rites of initiation are regarded as the ultimate test by most within the Brood. Seekers usually come to Belial's Brood after having contact with a site or object that has been touched by the Adversary, but can also be drawn by their Beasts, calling out to them to cast off the memories of their former lives and accept the death of their flesh as the death of their mortal souls. These vampires are the preferred and most common neonates within the Brood, and the growing ranks of the covenant only increases the faith of the more traditional factions. Those who are called to seek out Belial's Brood are usually neonates, but older vampires are sometimes touched by the Adversary in this way.

All Forsworn see actively recruiting other vampires into the covenant as an act of weakness. According to these vampires, the Adversary has set his seal on those who will be accepted into the covenant; in time they will seek out the Brood and survive the initiation of their own accord, or they won't. Recruitment is therefore a form of hubris in their eyes, as the incautious second-guess the will of the Adversary and risk defiling the ranks of the Forsworn. Despite the popularity of this viewpoint amongst traditionalists such as the Roaring Serpent, recruitment does occur. Recruiters often mask their efforts from their covey and usually only approach vampires without a covenant, and from those only vampires who have proven their ability to keep a secret. These recruits are then presented to the covey as seekers who sought out the Brood on their own. While it can be difficult to deceive covey-mates in this way, most Forsworn will give their brethren the benefit of

the doubt when presented with a new adherent. The danger lies in the rites of initiation, as a recruiter will be tempted to aid his protégé. Such meddling in the Brood's rituals is dealt with harshly in most cases, and more than one neonate has met his end after watching his erstwhile benefactor cruelly tortured.

Rarer still are those vampires who are Embraced into the covenant. Considering the enormous spirit it takes to advance a Forsworn's Pursuit, few wish to risk their progress by weakening themselves to Embrace another vampire. On top of this concern rests the ideal prevalent in many factions that vampires are called to the Brood, and therefore there is never a guarantee that the Adversary will favor a progeny. Despite these obvious risks, mortals are still Embraced into the Brood on rare occasions. These Embraces are slightly more common amongst sedentary coveys that have established themselves in a domain or have regular contact with mortals outside of the Pursuit. While this practice is frowned upon, it can hardly be forbidden, although the leaders of all the factions are usually adamant that these Embraced neonates be initiated just as rigorously as those who seek the Brood out. Such progeny are not the responsibility of their sires and should technically be treated as unaligned vampires the moment they open their eyes. Coming to the Brood is always a matter of choice.

In practice, sires often go out of their way to prepare their childer for the initiation rites in hopes of increasing their prospects. Coveys are usually wary of brethren who continually Embrace new vampires: it signifies a hunger for companionship outside the Crux that is suspicious in those dedicated to the Adversary. Of the major factions, only the Nameless makes anything even approach a regular practice of Embracing new vampires into the covenant, and the Nameless' particular penchant for innovative interpretations of portents seems to give them enough of a spiritual mandate to avoid the ire of other Forsworn.

Revelation

Neonates need not grasp all the complex spiritual doctrines espoused by the Brood. In fact, such understanding is commonly thought to be beyond the keen of a young vampire, nonetheless they must participate in the rituals and obligations of the covenant even if they do not comprehend the significance of these actions. Still restrained by the remnants of their human nature, neonates must work to strengthen their connection with the Beast by embarking on the Pursuit. Every faction, and to a lesser extent every covey, has its own orthopraxy concerning the Pursuit. By adhering to these proscribed actions, a neonate can begin the process. Thus through action comes understanding of a vampire's Beast, and through this dialog



the Adversary's path is slowly unveiled. Belief in and acceptance of a vampire's role in the world are an outgrowth of deeds performed in the Adversary's name.

As humanity recedes, the Beast swells and reveals the intuitive nature of the Investments. While this progression is similar no matter the age of the vampire, neonates usually have a longer struggle shaking off their mortal self-image. A neonate struggling to define herself outside of her human nature will find her covey's guidance indispensable. Not only is a covey proof positive that such a state is possible, the bond shared by a covey's brethren draws them to aid the neonate in his travails. More importantly, the covey is the repository of the Brood's rituals and practices that have been honed over the centuries to ease the passing of the Man and herald the rise of the Beast. Neonates who are fortunate enough to belong to coveys with experienced leaders are taught the covenant's oral history and the parables of Belial that best illuminate the questions raised by their Pursuit. While nomadic coveys are more likely to have such a spiritualist amongst their number, sedentary coveys also put great emphasis on the covenant's founding mythology.

Organizing the Young

The Call brings vampires of all ages to Belial's Brood, but most seekers are neonates. These vampires have heeded the Call and rejected the false security offered by those lost Kindred who continue to act out a mortal passion play. Of this brave number, some will perish during initiation. Those who survive the process of becoming Forsworn are now bound to those who guided them; they are now the neonate's covey. While a vampire often changes coveys over the course of their Requiem, most neonates will stay with the coveys that indoctrinated them into Belial's Brood. In this first covey, they will discover what aspect they favor and choose a faction to call their own. More importantly, the covey is also their badge of membership. Only a covey will know how ardently a neonate has gone about the Pursuit, and until she distinguishes herself, her reputation amongst other Forsworn will prosper on the words of her brethren. While there are ways to garner prestige outside of the Pursuit and the covey, many Forsworn reserve their respect for those whose actions serve the Beast.

Coveys

The often brutal rites of initiation are a taste of what neonates can expect from an unlife running with a covey. Although a neonate within Belial's Brood should have a fair grasp of the Pursuit after surviving his initiation, many do not fully comprehend the centrality of stripping away their humanity to the covenant's ethos. Neonates who

have come to the Brood after leaving another covenant are shocked by the seeming absence of power politics and the intense dedication to empowering the Beast over the Man. Once a young vampire is accepted into Belial's Brood, she is expected to observe all of the rites performed by her covey. Some of these rituals, such as the Vaulderie, may have been revealed to her during her initiation, but the majority are only explained once she has become a true member of the Forsworn. Although not foolproof, the Crux formed among the brethren of a covey is a neonate's greatest protection as she learns what awaits her inside the Brood. Older Forsworn may sometimes chafe under the constraints of the powerful group bond, but neonates often find the rush of feelings instilled by the ritual a relief. While many young vampires are distressed when they discover their Requiems are destined to become re-enactments of their former lives, the Brood gives them new purpose, and the bonds they form within their covey re-invigorate them with newfound passion. With their coveys dedicated to their protection, these neonates are able to survive their initial encounters with other Forsworn.

Many coveys refrain from traveling while testing a new initiate. In fact, some neonates are surprised to discover that their coveys are essentially nomadic, only being told to pack their things after they complete their trials. Unfortunately, there is truly no other recourse for these reluctant wanderers but to follow their coveys beyond the city limits, for, as one of the Forsworn, they will have little chance on their own without the wisdom of their brethren. Also, becoming a wanderer further separates a neonate from the familiarity of his mortal home and makes it more difficult for him to revert to his breathing habits. Neonates who have been accepted into established sedentary coveys have less hazardous periods of transition, but are expected to begin their Pursuit immediately. The dangers of the road and the lack of readily available mortals to toy with makes the Pursuit a difficult proposition when traveling, but coveys based inside a city do not provide their neonates with such excuses. In fact, sedentary coveys are known for particularly cruel rites involving a neonate's living relations and friends; beyond fulfilling the Pursuit, such rites also deprive a neonate of the familiar touchstones that bind him to his breathing days.

For a neonate, respect is most readily acquired by successfully navigating the narrow path between aggrandizing their Beast and falling into madness. This can make gathering status within the covenant a tricky proposition as few domains have recognized authorities trusted to make such judgments. A neonate's covey often becomes the final arbitration of the neonate's standing within the covenant, and in some cases, especially amongst nomadic coveys that spend a great deal of time traveling, a Forsworn's reputation



only extends as far as her covey-mates. The most widely recognized way to identify when a neonate is on the right track in her Pursuit is the development of the Tongue of the Beast. Investments are also recognized as signs of progress, but the Tongue is held in higher regard in most factions. While additional status is not necessarily imparted on a Forsworn when she finally manifests these abilities, higher degrees of recognition are impossible to achieve for a neonate without a working knowledge of them. In fact, neonates who are lax in their resolve and do not dedicate themselves to the Pursuit may find themselves threatened by their own covey-mates. Such wayward neonates are pressed to recommit themselves to carrying out depraved acts, and reluctance can provoke a violent rebuke. Young Forsworn who persist in such laziness are occasionally even destroyed by their own merciless brethren.

Rules of the Neonates

Partially due to the Forsworn's violent unives, many are relatively young and occupy positions within Belial's Brood that, in other covenants, are usually reserved for older vampires. Although the places of greatest authority and prestige are still considered the preserve of the ancillae and elders, Brood neonates regularly become covey leaders and some even exhibit a peculiar insight into the nature of the Adversary that can propel them into positions of philosophical importance. Competition among neonates to prove their devotion to the Pursuit can be fierce, and often becomes deadly. Young Forsworn rarely come to blows over such things, but the zeal generated from such a game can push neonates to ignore even the pretense of caution. Final Death and falling to the grip of frenzy are common amongst the Brood's neonates, but the Forsworn take pride in those who heed the Call even if they meet a bitter end.

Because Belial's Brood considers actions to be of far greater merit than pronouncements, faction leaders are constantly searching for enthusiastic neonates who can be entrusted with greater responsibility. The power of neonates within the Brood is further exaggerated by the fierce independence expressed by many Forsworn, especially as they grow older and less willing to subsume their own desires for the benefit of the covenant. Those neonates eager to learn the covenant's ways and willing to give up some of their personal freedom can find a host of opportunities presented to them by powerful Forsworn desperate for reliable supporters.

Neonate as Warrior

The most common niche filled by neonates within their covey or faction is that of a soldier. Since neonates of all factions are expected to be about the business of

degrading their human nature, many develop a taste for violence. While these young Forsworn may consider themselves combatants for their respective faction, or even the covenant a whole, they are rarely organized and often only further the goals of their covey. When charismatic covey leaders or respected members of an influential faction call the Forsworn to arms, the appeal is strictly voluntary. However, factions that insist upon a somewhat stricter hierarchy, such as the Nameless, expect a greater degree of obedience from the neonates who rally under their banner. Even in factions with a more moderate attitude, coveys often punish cowards and the overly cautious. While few expect their brethren to rush off every time a firebrand rounds up a gaggle of followers for a night of raiding, refusing to take part because of fear is a strict taboo in Belial's Brood.

Despite the loose structure of the covenant and its almost complete lack of cohesive political goals, Belial's Brood offers many opportunities for neonates who have a martial calling. Most coveys depend upon a core set of militants amongst their brethren for protection and muscle. As these members die off or move on to other functions, other brethren must take their place. Just as many things within the Brood, this is most usually an organic process and not a matter of being assigned a task within the covey. Unsurprisingly, neonates who have advanced their Pursuit through brutality are the likeliest candidates to fulfill this necessary function. Nomadic coveys often encourage neonates to see themselves as warriors and to use their time spent outside of cities to hone their killer instinct. Wanderers have grown accustomed to seeing the younger members of their covey go mad or meet a violent end, and push their neonates to further absolve themselves of fear.

The Antinomians especially prize those neonates who take on the mantle of a warrior even before they have completed their initiation. These young foot soldiers are guided through grueling ceremonies that shatter their mortal façade, leaving them on the verge of Wassail. Coveys loose these martyrs on mortals and rivals alike, basking in the gore created by the neonates' unadulterated rage. While most neonates do not survive such initiations, those who do are known as the *sarx* cult's unflinching devotees. The Nameless, by comparison, have a perverse tradition of forcing some of their more aggressive neonates to take on stints as guardians. Many times these Forsworn do not know exactly what or whom they must protect, only that they must watch for other vampires who intrude on the neonates' assigned territory and inform their superiors without being detected. Such passive work can be torture for neonates with dreams of glory, a fact that is not lost on the faction's leaders.

Neonate as Protégé

Belial's Brood is often embroiled in violent conflict, and those who possess special knowledge or skills within the covenant can never be certain of their continued existence. Neonates who demonstrate a penchant for rituals or a keen grasp of the underpinnings of the Brood are encouraged to be understudies to older Forsworn. Since a covey's brethren often meet untimely ends or members of advanced age suddenly ostracize themselves, such young apprentices are quite appreciated by devout Forsworn. The Roaring Serpent usually promotes deserving neonates into such positions when one of their brethren has trespassed against them. The criminal is destroyed by the neonate who is to take his place, symbolically passing spiritual understanding to his murderer. Despite the added responsibility of being another Forsworn's protégé, these neonates are still expected to make progress in their Pursuit. In rare cases, an elder may call upon multiple neonates to learn his craft and teachings, encouraging them in their studies by openly fostering intense rivalries. These student conflicts inevitably intensify when their elder master final goes into seclusion, often without appointing a clear heir. The Scarlet Rite is notorious for fostering such deep passions in its younger members by playing one gifted neonate against another.

All Forsworn endeavor to pick up bits of the covenant's history and master its traditions, but for the majority such rational understanding is hollow without the insight of the Beast. Thus, it is understandably left to the ancillae and the elders to puzzle out the deeper meaning of ancient parables and more modern portents. Understanding the covenant's practices is an intuitive process inexorably linked to the Pursuit. While teaching a neonate such things is not necessary, the Brood's belief in the power of action over thought compels Brood members to instruct the young in rituals that will eventually reveal themselves intuitively. Neonates' understanding of will evolves and deepens as they advance in the Pursuit, but first they must go through the motions.

Neonate as Fat's-paw

The high attrition rate of Forsworn neonates is partly due to the unforgiving rules that govern a covey. Young Forsworn who backslide once they have been accepted into the covenant are given little more leeway than when they were just initiates. Some factions, such as the Throne of Smokeless Fire, doubt many neonates will last long enough to have the deeper mysteries of Belial's Brood revealed to them. These pragmatists know the odds of a neonate's long-term survival and prefer that their underlings be competent if not discerning.

Although these neonates are not thought of as disposable, their longevity is not foremost on the minds of their benefactors. Such neonates are tasked with distasteful duties such as maintaining a covey's herd or securing mortal Allies for a sedentary covey's protection. Better suited to interacting with mortals, these neonates often excel at these responsibilities before realizing the disdain that most Forsworn have for such interactions. Ironically, neonates who are particularly talented at dealing with the mortal world are not as intensely pressed to advance their Pursuit as others within their covey, but can find themselves suddenly condemned for the same activities that had previously won them praise.

The Mercy Seat also finds uses for such young pawns. Since understanding of the Beast and the Demiurge is intuitive as a Forsworn progresses in his Pursuit, what a neonate is taught when he first enters the Brood is immaterial. All these instructions will be swept away as true understanding fills the Forsworn from the Demiurge. Thus, neonates who seem to be failing in their Pursuit are recruited for special instruction by the Faustians. Instead of simply being executed, they are given hints as to the true mysteries of the covenant and sent on cryptic missions. Although these tasks are rarely suicidal, the Mercy Seat reserves such dupes as messengers and distractions. Even if caught, they further the cause by misdirecting their enemies. Those who manage to survive such a fate, and continue on their Pursuit, have simply proven that they are true Forsworn. The lies they were told were but trials on their journey.

Neonates and Ancillae

Along with other neonates, young Forsworn usually deal with ancillae when interacting with the authority of Belial's Brood. The covenant is loosely organized, but the structure that does exist is propped up by the ancillae, who are often taking the place of an elder who has moved on to more solitary games. An ancilla can play a multitude of parts in a neonate's Requiem in the Brood. These middlemen can come to represent the worst aspects of the covenant to an idealistic neonate who truly believed that Belial's Brood had truly suppressed political double-dealing in favor of purely spiritual work. Ancillae can also represent the promise of success. As neonates wrestle with the demons that plagued them as mortals, the ancillae walk amongst them unfettered by doubt or hesitation. These vampires are not as terrifying or aloof as the elders, but wield startling powers without conscience or compunction. Ironically, the ancilla's last vestiges of mortal character make him more palatable to neonates and drive him to take a hands-on role in the running of the covenant's affairs.

Antagonism between these two age groups is common because of the unprecedented power that can be achieved by a bold neonate. Many of the most influential ancillae rose to prominence as neonates themselves, and beat the odds to age into maturity only to be challenged by the next generation of Forsworn who are as unspeakably short-sighted as their probable Requiems. Ancillae become easily frustrated by neonates who believe they have earned the right to complete freedom by simply answering the Inmost Tug and thus shirking their responsibility to defend the covenant from forces that would cast it down. While neonates accuse the ancillae of hypocrisy and a lack of zeal, this mostly stems from the neonate tendency to ascribe mortal motivations to their superiors. Divisions notwithstanding, ancillae do occasionally mentor younger Forsworn. Usually these vampires belong to the same covey, but there have been notable exceptions in the past.

Coveys are usually composed of a mix of ancillae and neonates. While these are the ancillae a neonate most often deals with, they are his covey brethren and are usually exempt from the stereotypes the Forsworn form about the others. The most common point of conflict that arises between neonates and ancillae is the contradictions that these older vampires inevitably bring into being when they order other Forsworn around in the name of the covenant. A covey leader is expected to take charge of his brethren, and the Crux ensures his authority and responsibility, but a vampire outside of a covey has a tenuous claim on leadership. If the primary task set before a neonate is the Pursuit, and if the Pursuit is the central purpose of the Brood, no obligation or mission could possibly take precedence. While such arguments are freely expressed, ancillae are not forgiving of neonates who undermine the authority the ancillae have built up beyond their own covey.

Neonates and Elders

As neonates, Forsworn rarely interact with their elders. Some factions pass along stories of notorious ancients within their ranks, while others chastise those who openly admit that any elders exist within their number at all. According to some tales, a few neonates have the dubious pleasure of meeting an elder of the Brood almost immediately after being initiated into the covenant. Supposedly, many elders lead solitary Requiems as legendary ascetics and are sought out by nomadic coveys with promising neonates in tow. What happens to these students after they are left behind is part of the story's mystery. Upon first answering the Call, many neonates suspect that some shadowy cabal of elder vampires controls Belial's Brood. These neonates are quickly deprived of that illusion when the true chaos of the Brood's numerous factions and coveys becomes



apparent. Beyond being the bogeymen and heroes of Forsworn fantasy, elders are the purest manifestation of the Adversary on Earth.

Just as neonates usually see the ancillae as bureaucrats, elders are seen as terrible gods drawn from the pages of the Old Testament. The independence, solitude and deference afforded to elders by other Forsworn confuse younger vampires who had always been told that the Brood was nothing more than a diablerie cult. Much of what the younger Forsworn know about the elders is transmitted through the ancillae. Since the ancillae have more direct contact with these creatures and hope to reach such a state themselves one night, these stories are often embellished and romanticized. Neonates who do have the honor of meeting an elder face-to-face are usually surprised by the alien nature of the thing, and such meetings usually signify that the poor unfortunate has become caught up in one of the monster's many schemes.

The Seasoned Beast

The ancillae form the invisible spine of Belial's Brood. Neither as overtly violent and brash as the neonates nor as contemplative and spiritually attained as the elders, these vampires all but disappear into the more dramatic shadows of their younger and older counterparts. Nevertheless, the ancillae form a vital part of the Brood, one without which the covenant could not hope to continue.

It is unsurprising to those who study the Brood as best they can that the ancillae are far smaller in number than the covenant's neonates. After all, given the tendency of the younger vampires to engage in seemingly random orgies of overt violence, it's a wonder any of them survive to reach maturity at all. What is far more surprising, however, is that the ancillae do not number many more than the Brood's elders. While the neonates have the highest fatality rate, the ancillae suffer the highest percentage of attrition from other sources. It can be no wonder, then, that the ancillae have such a minuscule impact on the Brood's appearance and nature, at least where the outside world of the Kindred are concerned.

Roles of the Ancillae

It would be a mistake to suggest that the Brood's ancillae are deliberately excluded from positions of prominence or authority. Belial's Brood, after all, is not truly a covenant in any recognizable sense of the word. The Brood has no real formal structure for the ancillae to be excluded *from*. The fact that both the neonates and the elders drive the sect to a greater degree than the ancillae is a product of the race itself, and the nature of all who speak the secret tongue of the Beast. Despite this

fact, the ancillae seem to recognize — on an instinctual level, if not a conscious one — that they are the least prominent, and often considered the least important and least pure portion of the Brood, and this understanding colors their attitude toward their brethren.

Relations With Neonates

The ancillae of Belial's Brood have developed beyond the near-instinctive, primal rage and violence that drives the sect's youngest members, and for which the Brood is primarily known. Thus, the ancillae often look down with disdain upon Brood neonates, not unlike a child who has only just outgrown some infantile behavior looks down on younger siblings who still practice it. It's not that the ancillae of the Brood are any less possessive of mortals, or any less eager to display their own strength by shedding the blood of those weaker than they. Rather, the ancillae see their ability to *control* those desires to be a mark of maturity. Any animal can rip and tear at its prey without thought or restraint. A vampire truly in touch with his Beast, however, knows that indiscriminate violence is not what it wants. The Beast is the soul of a hunter, not a mass murderer, and Wassail without first obtaining a true understanding of the vampiric nature is nothing more than spiritual surrender.

Other reasons for this general attitude toward the Brood's neonates exist, of course, reasons that few ancillae indeed would admit to, or even acknowledge. Many ancillae, having only recently overcome the propensity to mindless violence, see it as a threat to the sect. Already, they forget how vital a step it is on the path to understanding the Beast that is their soul. Where their elders are wise enough to acknowledge the neonatal stage as a necessity, despite its inherent risks, the ancillae believe it only draws attention the Brood would do well to avoid.

Pride, too, drives the ancilla disdain for the neonates. The mortality rate among Brood neonates is fairly high, so each vampire who survives views doing so as a personal accomplishment. Neonates who have not yet done so are a reminder of what the ancillae used to be, and each neonate is a potential rival, should he, too, survive his first years in the Brood.

But perhaps the greatest motivator of all is jealousy. For all the ancillae's pride at overcoming their youthful nature, at finding a balance between the Beast's myriad instincts, they still feel the call of the Blood, still glorify the taking of life and the heat of battle. A part of every ancilla of the Brood, no matter how much he might wish to deny it, longs to return to the nights of youthful freedom he experienced as a neonate.

Relations with Elders

The ancillae of the Brood aren't as easily summarized in their attitudes toward their elders as they are toward the neonates. All ancillae respect their elders to at least some extent. The elders have achieved levels of understanding — of the Word of the Adversary, the teachings or examples of Belial, and the nature of vampires themselves — at which their younger brethren can only grasp. The elders have utterly mastered their own nature, or so the ancillae believe, finding a perfect balance between the needs of the spiritual Beast and the undead but still corporeal flesh in which it is housed.

Yet a significant portion of the Brood's ancillae scoff at their elders as well, seeing them as too old and set in their ways, too unwilling to provide the guidance and leadership that could turn Belial's Brood from a semi-united religious sect into a true covenant. These ancillae do not yet understand that doing so would be counter to the nature and teachings of Belial, that the group *must* remain driven by instinct and religious faith, not by any political hierarchy. They have not yet fully grasped that in order to truly become one with the Beast, the Forsworn must devote their attentions inward, leaving both mortals and outside Kindred alone save where interaction is absolutely necessary. No, these ancillae see only the worldwide spread of the covenants — the Invictus, the Ordo Dracul and especially their spiritual “rivals,” the Lancea Sanctum — and they wish for an equal degree of power and authority.

They are a minority amongst the ancillae of the Forsworn, but those who think this way are numerous enough to cause problems for their brothers and sisters in the Brood. These ancillae push for their elders to do more, to take a true and active leadership of the Brood. These ancillae deride the elders for failing to do so, and some among them have even attempted to take such positions of power for themselves. To date, the scattered and informal nature of the Brood has prevented any ancillae from doing so, but should any of them succeed, it would represent the first true formal organization of the Forsworn (even in minute quantities). How other Forsworn, and indeed outside Kindred, might react to such an occurrence is something these ancillae might do well to consider.

Faith, Observance and Forsworn Nature

The Forsworn ancillae are the most overtly and expressively devout members of Belial's Brood. This isn't to say that they're any more religious than their elders; if anything, the reverse is more frequently the case. The elder Forsworn understand, however, that their veneration of the Adver-

sary, and Belial his messenger, is a very personal thing, an understanding between the Beast and the shell that houses it. The ancillae, however, are still new to their faith, and they believe they have a far greater understanding of their religion — such as it is — than they actually do.

Many ancillae make a mistake common to so many practitioners of religion, be they Kindred or mortal: specifically, they confuse practice for faith. By this reckoning, anyone who practices the rites and the rituals frequently must, perforce, be more devout than one who does so less often. They scowl at elders who do not participate as frequently, questioning their devotion to the Brood and the depths of their belief. Even most ancillae who do not fall into this logical fallacy are frequent and devout practitioners of the rites, seeking within them a greater connection to, and understanding of, the Adversary and their own dark souls.

Thus, ancillae gather regularly when circumstances permit, sometimes even on a nightly basis, to perform the various Archontes and dynamei. While the Brood's neonates are more likely to perform random, homemade or simply half-understood sacrifices to a being they believe is the Biblical Satan, anyone who has witnessed a true Forsworn Black Mass has almost certainly witnessed a covey formed largely, if not solely, of ancillae.

Relations with the Unlearned

A great many of the ancillae grow haughty and arrogant about their religious practices. If they look down upon neonates for their wild, uncontrolled ways, and at some of their elders for failing to practice as often, the ancillae view vampires outside the Brood with little more than scorn. How blind these fools are to the truth of their own nature! How weak they are, how unworthy of Belial's teachings or the blessings of the Adversary!

This attitude makes it difficult for some Forsworn ancillae to interact with non-Brood vampires, at least in the long term. While their elders have learned how to balance their religious practices and beliefs with the needs of nightly living when among the nonbelievers, many ancillae are unable to hide their contempt. Many of those Forsworn ancillae who die at the hands of other Kindred do so not specifically because they are members of the Brood, but simply because their condescending attitudes anger one vampire too many.

A significant minority of ancillae who do not feel this way move, instead, too far in the other direction. The teachings of Belial discourage any form of proselytizing; all those who are appropriate for the Brood will be drawn to the Brood of their own volition, led by their own Call and Cathexis. By their ability to speak the Tongue of the

Beast, and by their instinctive knowledge of at least the basics of the Adversary's desires, are they known. To seek out converts, to spread the word of Belial by any means other than action, is a subversion of those teachings.

Nevertheless, some ancillae fail to grasp the importance of this prohibition. They do, indeed, observe the other Kindred of their cities, seeking those they feel have the makings of the Forsworn, and approaching them. They are not stupid in this. They don't simply walk up and began talking about Belial's Word. They attempt to get to know the other vampire, to make her acquaintance, to feel her out on various dictates and strictures of the Brood without making it clear that this is what they are doing.

In the vast majority of cases, one of three things happens: either the other vampire proves inappropriate for some reason (after many long nights of discussion and observation), the other vampire freaks out and flees when the topic of the Brood itself finally comes up or other Forsworn learn of what is occurring and *admonish* their misguided brother to cease what he's doing.

On rare occasions, however, a vampire attempts to join Belial's Brood in this fashion. To date, none of these "false Forsworn" has ever manifested the Brood's language, suggesting that no vampire can truly understand the Adversary's criteria for choosing his servants. True members of the Brood slaughter these false Forsworn wherever they are found.

Other ancillae, those who better understand the nature of Belial's Brood, also seek out new converts — not by proselytizing, but by finding those who have come to their own instinctive understanding of the Adversary and the Kindred nature, and bringing them into the fold. While a substantial number of Forsworn, particularly neonates, never truly realize they are part of a larger fraternity of vampires, the more organized sects and coveys of the Brood prefer to find as many of these newcomers as they can, the better to educate them (and, not incidentally, to swell that covey's own ranks). Obviously, other neonates cannot be trusted to undertake such a task, and the elders tend to have better things to do, leaving the ancillae to pick up the slack.

Understanding Through Faith

One of the needs that drives all Forsworn ancillae is the search for understanding. They have outgrown their phase of acting on pure instinct. Even though the instincts of the Beast are to be embraced, they represent merely the first step to true comprehension of the teachings of the Adversary. For a vampire to become what he was meant to be, he must find a *complete* balance of the Beast within the confines and dictates of the physical world — or at least to make every effort to do so until

he is somehow slain, and gone to join the Adversary directly. Neonates do not yet understand or share this need for understanding, and elders have had time to grasp at least the fundamentals, to discover their own methods of spiritual learning, to turn their attentions fully inward rather than outward. For the ancillae, however, the quest is new, and it is all-encompassing.

Not all ancillae approach this learning in the same fashion, of course. Many simply continue their nightly Requiem, abiding by what they understand of Belial's teachings, in the hopes that greater understanding will come to them instinctively, even as did their first taste of the Beast set loose. Others seek out elders or older ancillae of the Brood, hoping to serve them, and through service, to learn. (Most ancillae understand enough to know that if they seek simply to study at an elder's feet, they're in for disappointment. Belial's teachings have no room for passive learning; to *learn*, a vampire must *do*.) Some ancillae feel that even the more learned Forsworn can provide only a limited amount of knowledge, and seek out other, more ancient sources of information on Belial or the teachings of the Brood. In fact, while the hunt for such ancient texts and historical curiosities is common throughout the Brood, the ancillae make up the overwhelming majority of such seekers. Finally, a small but growing number of ancillae attempt to learn about their own natures by submerging themselves, if only briefly, in the society, politics and culture of other vampires. By observing how the weak behave, by watching them in their foolish and ultimately futile struggle against the Beast, the Forsworn hope to learn through negative example how best to commune with their own dark souls. (It probably goes without saying, but the few ancillae who choose this route are, perforce, not numbered among those who cannot hide their disdain for non-Forsworn vampires, as discussed previously.)

Investments

Of all the Forsworn, the ancillae are the most likely to deliberately seek out opportunities to learn and master the Investments that are the hallmark of the Brood's mysticism. Some neonates develop such abilities instinctively, spontaneously manifesting powers that others have to work at, but this is an unpredictable, if not particularly uncommon, phenomenon. Elders, on the other hand, have often mastered at least the rudiments of a wide array of Investments, and prefer to devote their efforts toward increasing their understanding of the powers they already have. The ancillae, however, have just begun their deliberate delve into the occult secrets of the Brood. Some devote themselves to it body and soul, spending countless nights in study, prayer or service to their elders in exchange for a promise of illumination. Even those who

consider Investments a secondary priority, however, are unlikely to pass up the opportunity to learn.

This is a potentially dangerous stage in the growth of the Forsworn. More than one ancilla has become drunk on the power of the Investments, forgetting that they bear a cost beyond those of most Kindred Disciplines. On occasion, such ancillae lose all sight of their faith, seeing the power of the Investments as an end unto itself. Ultimately, these Forsworn either fall into Wassail, or drift so completely away from the dictates of the Brood that they lose all access to the Investments with which they were so obsessed.

Factions and Allegiance

It is perhaps to be expected, but ancillae are the Forsworn most likely to shift factions within Belial's Brood. Neonates are often drawn to a faction through pure instinct, or even fail to recognize the difference in factions at all, while the elders have had time to find their niche, but ancillae are still finding their own path. While the majority of Forsworn tend to remain in a single faction, finding that they fit well within the group to which they were instinctively attracted, a significant minority find their attitudes and beliefs changing over the years. A Forsworn might find her belief regarding the origin and nature of Belial swayed by her mytho-historical studies. More frequently, a Forsworn vampire might find himself driven to pursue a different aspect of the Trinity altogether, following a period of intense delving into the first, or to simply develop his mastery of his existing aspect. A Hyletic of the Scarlet Rite might find his attitudes hardening, for example, driving him toward the more brutal expressions of the Pandaemonium.

This has little to do with the age of the ancillae; rather, this is simply the first opportunity most Forsworn have to really study and analyze their own beliefs, as well as the other options available to them. Nevertheless, more than a few elders within the Brood view their younger brethren as fickle, due to this precise effect.

With a very few exceptions, this "faction-jumping" has few true repercussions. The ancilla's old comrades may harbor resentment, and his new ones might be somewhat distrusting, but only the most violently fanatic Forsworn would take action against a brother or a sister for changing factions. In a few cases, however — such as the now infamous "Purifying Djinn" of Salem, Massachusetts, in the late 70s — a member of a faction is indeed sufficiently fanatic, or a convert is sufficiently prominent, that such a defection does indeed result in beatings, long-term enmities and even the occasional assassination or sacrifice.

Far more rare, but of far greater importance and repercussion, is the occasional Forsworn apostate. The instinc-

tive draw toward the Brood means that nearly all who join have the appropriate personality and temperament to remain Foresworn for the entirety of their potentially limitless existence. Every now and again, however, a member of the Brood seeks to leave the fold. Her experiences, as she ages, might cause her personal beliefs to drift out of line with the teachings of Belial and veneration of the Adversary. She may find her political ambitions outweigh her commitment to the Brood, causing her to seek temporal power among the other Kindred rather than remain with her brothers and sisters. She might simply prove unable to shake the last lingering traces of guilt that come with even the slightest remnant of Humanity.

Again, the ancillae produce the overwhelming majority of these apostates, and for much the same reasons that the ancillae shift factions more often than anyone else. Again, the neonates haven't reached the point when they can begin to make these sorts of decisions or to question their beliefs, and the elders have had time to grow comfortable with their positions and to cement their faith and attitudes. The ancillae, however, especially the relatively young ones, are only just now reaching the stage when they can truly examine their actions and the teachings of the Brood with any degree of detachment and logic. Only a tiny fraction of ancillae ever attempt to leave the Brood — but this is still a far larger percentage than any other age group.

Struggling with Humanity

While neonates have the highest mortality rate within the Brood, ancillae are the Forsworn most likely to fall to Wassail. The younger members either get themselves killed before they have the chance to lose the last vestiges of their Humanity; or else they reach a stage of vicious equilibrium, wherein the bloody rampages for which they are known are no longer capable of causing further degeneration. The elders of the Brood have almost universally low Humanity, but they have learned to walk the finest of lines and to take full advantage of Belial's teachings, allowing them to maintain a thin line between them and Wassail. The ancillae, however, have reached the stage when they must deliberately shed all but the barest traces of their humanity, yet they lack the elders' knowledge and occult skills. Some succumb to the Beast during occult rites, others when performing acts of brutal and methodical barbarity extreme even for Belial's Brood. The informality of the Brood and the inability of outsiders to study Brood members in depth makes precise percentages impossible to determine, but it's possible that as many as one-quarter to one-third of all Forsworn who survive to become ancillae fall to Wassail before reaching their elder years.

Ancillae and the Hexad

While the previous material applies more or less equally across the various factions and sects of Belial's Brood, the ancillae of various aspects do indeed differ from their brethren in some key respects. Presented here, in brief, is an overview of the three aspects of the Trinity, highlighting the differences as they apply specifically to the factions' ancillae.

The Nameless

The ancillae of the Nameless devote much of their attention to searching for signs of Belial's return and supervising the faction's efforts at discovering the modern remnants of his mortal line. Their elders may interpret prophecy and maintain a greater understanding of the Adversary's scriptures, but their younger brethren go out into the world and seek hard evidence, or even the most subtle omens, of the end times.

Paradoxically, Nameless ancillae lead a nightly existence that, at least on the surface, seems more similar to that of non-Forsworn vampires than do most other members of the Brood. Nameless ancillae practice a great many rites and rituals, of course, but beyond those, the Nameless need to observe the world largely unaltered by their own activities, if they are to have the greatest opportunities to discover and interpret the signs of things to come.

The Roaring Serpent

The ancillae Archons take their existence as hunters of humanity completely to heart. The Archons are direct descendents of the first vampire, and they will behave as such in his name and his memory. They focus on the hunt, and on their efforts to become the embodiment of the vampiric state. These ancillae eschew the mindless violence of their younger brethren and the static contemplation of their elders, preferring instead to ride the wave of their instincts and their Beasts without forgetting who and what they seek to become.

As hunters incarnate — or at least those who wish to become such — the vampires of the Roaring Serpent endeavor to eschew political and social machinations even more than other Forsworn. They consider it a distraction from the true nature of the vampiric state, and scoff at those who allow themselves to be caught up in such matters. The ancillae are frequently the most disdainful of other vampires, making even other Archons look tolerant.

The Pandaemonium

The direct opposite of the Nameless, at least on the surface, the Foresworn of the Pandaemonium spend an enormous number of their waking hours engaged in Sa-

tanic and occult rites, and the faction's ancillae are easily the most wrapped up in those rituals. Neonates might seek to practice these rituals, but they often have little clue what they're doing, thus performing "Black Masses" that are hardly more legitimate than those of rebellious teens. The ancillae, however, have learned a substantial amount of the true lore and practices behind the rites, while not yet reaching the level of mastery that allows them to practice primarily on their own. When outsiders picture the nightly requiem of the Forsworn — assuming outsiders picture anything beyond the mindless violence of the Brood's youngest members — odds are the outsiders see the ancillae of the Pandaemonium.

The Mercy Seat

To those unfamiliar with the faction, the ancillae of the Mercy Seat would seem, far and away, to be its least effective members. The rate of failure in their efforts to lead mortals into temptation and sin is staggering, as compared to the success of both the neonate and elder Faustians.

In truth, this has nothing to do with the ancillae's abilities, but rather their focus. By the time they reach this age, the ancillae have outgrown the neonate tendency to focus on easy targets, to celebrate in the corruption of those who have already lived lives of sin. The ancillae realize that corrupting a criminal or a sinner is no accomplishment at all, but they have yet to achieve their elders' skill in leading even the righteous to damnation. Thus, though they attempt to lay low the pure and the faithful, they have not yet fully mastered the methods for doing so. They spend much time discussing their efforts with their brothers and sisters, developing the skills that should eventually transform them into tempters worthy of the Demiurge itself.

The Throne of Smokeless Fire

Djinn ancillae have just begun to obtain positions of true power, both within the faction (or at least their own covey) and in the mortal world. They have taken to heart the lessons they learned as neonates, and have dedicated themselves to the individual advancement so prized by the sect. Capable of a level of long-term scheming unreachable by their younger brothers, but not yet as set in their ways as the elders, the ancillae of the Throne of Smokeless Fire rise — and fall — far faster and more frequently than any other Djinn.

The nightly life of the Djinn ancillae resembles that of non-Forsworn vampires more than those of most other members of the Brood. Whether Djinn ancillae are competing with their fellow Djinn for mastery over the covey, or manipulating mortals in a bid for temporal power, the ancillae's ambitions certainly seem to match those of outside Kindred, even if the Djinn's motivations are very different.

The Scarlet Rite

The ancillae of the Scarlet Rite make even the heights of “vampire erotica” pale in comparison. The entire faction is devoted to lust, gluttony and excess, but nobody practices them to such a degree as the ancillae. They have had the time to advance beyond the fairly unoriginal orgies and excesses of the neonates, but have not yet found their “preferred debasements” as have the elders. Thus, the Hyletic ancillae are the Forsworn most likely to feel out and experiment with the extremes of sexual taboo, to push well beyond the boundaries of even the most broadminded mortal fetishist into horrific levels of sadism and perversion.

The Eldest Beast

When one speaks of the elders of the Forsworn, one is speaking of what are perhaps the most malevolent and alien beings in all of vampirekind. Luckily, due to the extreme course that their spiritual path takes, these monstrosities are a true rarity. The reasons for the low count on elders among Belial's Brood can be attributed to several factors. First, similar to most of their brethren, the elders steer clear of Kindred society as a whole. Due to grossly deteriorated humanity, the acquisition of Investments and the pillar-like role they play in their coveys, Forsworn elders are much like living treasures to the Brood, with some factions revering these self-sculpted demons as a Roman Catholic would point to the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel — a testimony to the achievements of their faction and to Belial's Brood itself. Among some coveys, where the ancient Forsworn have maintained a coherent focus, the elder takes on a role that is similar to that of a hermit, left to his own devices until times of spiritual quandary, when his cryptic, inhuman ranting is deciphered through complex and non-intuitive rites that unfold the covey's future direction. In cases in which the elders have become less approachable, they function in the capacity of a twisted role model, a paragon of bestial wisdom and spectacular inhumanity.

Due to the nature of Investments, deteriorated Humanity and the hatred many vampires feel for the Forsworn, elders of Belial's Brood often seem rare because they usually desire solitude. Occasionally tempted to commit explosive violence and ritual cruelty even at the expense of the covey, many elders do not keep regular company with their coveys, only surfacing to participate in rituals or aid in protecting their covey-mates. At other times, the elder is entirely invisible, moving about the havens and territories of his covey like a legendary beast, transforming the whole of the territory into his personal ritual chamber onto which he inscribes the massacres

of his devotion. Between 1979 and 1981, a Forsworn elder known only as El Abominar transformed 20 square blocks of the city of Santa Ana into a bloody offering in honor of its Beast. The incident would have been disastrous to the area's Forsworn population were it not for the activities of mortal right wing death squads that were also active in the area at that time. Luckily for the Forsworn, the World of Darkness is rarely without such horrific occurrences that serve to hide their doings.

Thirst

Just as any other vampire of advanced age and Blood Potency, the Forsworn elder eventually develops a taste and need for the blood of other vampires. Unlike Kindred who are immersed in a continuous culture of their own kind, the Brood's eldest must make more complex efforts to acquire the precious Vitae. The most common method of feeding makes use of the blood of the covey members themselves. This simply involves the elder's covey-mates pooling offerings of their blood and then giving the blood to the elder. While this practice is both natural and familiar to a Brood covey, the fact that the other covey-mates do not also partake of the pooled Vitae can sometimes cause complications, as the sole member's ingestion of every drop can do strange things to an elder's relationship with his covey. Although heavily distorted by the Vaulderie's effects, odd spasms of dependence and attachment can cause the elder to act even more unpredictably than normal, often resulting in a disruption to the covey's operations.

The alternative, however, is the sacrifice of another vampire to the covey's elder. Ideally, the covey will hunt for a member of one of the other covenants, often preferring those who embody a virtue that is opposed to their covey's philosophy. For some, the members of the Lancea Sanctum represent spiritual stagnation; for others, the Carthians represent the obstacle of humanity itself, whereas the Invictus might embody cowardice and the Circle of the Crone represents the teetering reluctance to embrace one's true birthright. Regardless of covenant, the Kindred are generally fed to the elder by his covey to show contempt for the associated ideology as well as to appease the elder's terrible hunger.

In cases of extreme isolation, however, other measures may become necessary. The first method, sometimes referred to as “veal” by the younger Forsworn, involves the capture of a human being. Once this human is selected, she is Embraced, outside of any ritual context. The vampire who performs the Embrace sees his contribution as sacred and is often looked upon fondly by the elder for whom the vampire did the service. After the Embrace, the newly created vampire is locked in a lightless cell and sustained on



only enough blood to keep from falling into torpor. Over the period of one year, the incarcerated vampire quickly goes mad from pangs of shaking hunger, terror and fury—a sacrifice to the Demiurge made up of her sanity. At the close of the year, another human is introduced, bound and gagged, to the cell. After gorging herself on the blood of his cellmate, the vampire is pulled from her prison, fattened and sated, and staked through the heart. The vampire is then stretched out by the covey and ceremonially fed to the elder. As vile as this may seem, even for the Forsworn, many of the scholars of Belial's Brood believe this practice dates back to the Brood's origins, when the one known as Enkhatur would create and prepare vampires specifically intended as sacrifices to great Belial himself.

The very last resort, of course, is the sacrifice of a member of the elder's own covey. In each such case, this sacrifice has either betrayed the covey or has become too chaotic for the covey to function as it needs to. Forsworn elders bereft of covey-mates must find sustenance the same as any other elder.

Roles of the Elder Beast

While some generalizations can be made about the powerful elders of Belial's Brood, their function and nature is primarily dictated by the philosophies they've used to steer themselves toward such a state. Therefore,

to explore the elders of the Brood, one must consider the aged vampire in relation to the faction to which he has given he allegiance.

Elders and the sarx

Elders who have dedicated themselves to factions focused upon the actualization of the *sarx* are dreadful monsters in the most traditional sense of the word. Consumed by enormous lusts and compulsions of violence, they often gorge themselves on blood during elaborate rituals, which they celebrate with their coveys, acting as the demented ringleaders of complex sacrificial litanies derived from there unfolding insanity. Nonetheless, because of the physical nature of the *sarx* cult's sacraments and austerities, the elders are often far more coherent at their core than those Forsworn who seek the refinement of the more cerebral pillars of *soma* and *pneuma*. Because of this, *sarx*-aspected elders are often capable of coherent leadership and strategy, often possessed of their faculties to a degree that allows them to masterfully negotiate the snares laid for his covey by Kindred of the covenants and others who would seek to destroy the Forsworn. In contrast, when elders who exalt the *sarx* do finally snap, the physical nature of their Investments ensures that the true monster born of permanent frenzy will be a force to be reckoned with.

The elders who affiliate themselves with the hyper-violent branches of the Pandaemonium are, oddly, some of the most human of Forsworn, or so they seem. Due to their strange combination of intellect and savagery, Antinomians create an ideological labyrinth in which they trap both the Man and the Beast. Although the non-linear occult formulae the faction makes use of help to deteriorate the Humanity of the younger Antinomians, these are the same ideas to which the human remnant clings when it finds itself dangling over the yawning maw of the Beast. The language they use might be nonsensical, but it is still motivated by a desire to express devotion and abide by the covey's rites. Their appearance might be monstrous, but it is still mutilated and modified in a way that was born from a reactionary and individuating process styled along a very human understanding of what those things are as well as mean.

In a faction that clings so heavily to formality and traditional occult forms of hierarchy, Antinomian elders are treated as revered clergy, often adored by their covey (as either dark saint or enlightened demagogue), which often results in the covey having a very Manson Family atmosphere. Regardless, the elder does not remain on a pedestal as he is constantly called upon to transmit extended teachings, expound upon alien koans, and craft and refine the ritual process that the covey believes will lead it to total bestial "consciousness." The elder often serves as the voice of the covey's history, which is often important to Antinomian scholars, who, for some reason, insist on maintaining an true and faithful account of how their number brought the world to its end. Only in the minds of the deeply mad would such a pointless exercise be worth such a devoted effort — or make any sense.

Perhaps the most perverse of Forsworn elders are those who have pledged their hearts and minds to the Scarlet Rite. Whereas the Antinomians painstakingly fashion themselves into hideous monsters or living symbols of some obscure occult concept, the Hyletic elders, similarly, represent the Scarlet Rite's physical and spiritual ideals. Instead of mutilating and twisting the physical form, the Hyletic elders cultivate androgyny, youthfulness and a strange, gossamer otherworldliness that results in a presence unlike any other. Due to their mastery of secret devotions known only to devotees of the Scarlet Rite who have demonstrated an advanced understanding of the sensual and sexual arts, the perceptions of those around them are distorted and their inhibitions stripped from them.

Beneath their alien beauty, the masters of the Scarlet Rite are beyond attachment. Abiding by the tenets of the Hyletic philosophy, all meaning and purpose is stripped from anything they come into contact with, leaving

on the flesh. For this reason, the elders of the faction serve as focus points when the Scarlet Rite performs their more elaborate rites. Like stones set within the concentric circles of a Zen garden's sands, the elders are a point of meditation amidst the undulating flesh of the Scarlet Rite's orgies. Because the Hyletic philosophy prefers beauty to brawn when selecting its candidates for Embrace, the power that comes with age is vital to the defense of the faction's havens. In instances such as these, the fluid grace of the elder becomes savage and destructive, fully capable of fending off any but the most extreme threats. Regardless, violence is not their preferred method of dealing with conflict; they prefer to win their enemies' trust so that they can be lead through the labyrinths of Hyletic belief transformed into the source of their own undoing.

Elders and the soma

In the minds of many Forsworn scholars, the pillar of *soma* represents those things that many believe to be the very essence of being a vampire. Domination, predation and violent competition are all characteristics emphasized by these cults. Therefore, the elders of these cults usually find themselves in positions of significant power, leading their coveys and providing the vision that guides them spiritually. Unlike the elders of *sarx* and *pneuma* cults, the elders of the *soma* cults are more like generals or Princes, leaving the fine points of ritual and other such preparation to zealous neophytes and the ancillae who oversee them. Although such rigid power structures might seem uncharacteristic for such vicious and violent factions as the Roaring Serpent and the Throne of Smokeless Fire, the effect of these coveys is more like the eerie unification that one would see in a pack of jackals, a swarm of starving rats or the alien hum that sounds from a swarm of locusts.

Take your typical Invictus elder and strip away every last vestige of decency, mercy, grace and justice. Then, where there was once humanity, insert the most destructive and dominant of beasts, a perfect vampiric killing machine. This is the nature of the elders of the Roaring Serpent — perfect vampires, nothing more, nothing less. Through the actualization of the most pure and natural desires and instincts of the Beast, the Archon elders are often imbued with any variety of Investments, not merely those associated with the *soma*. Within their coveys, Archon elders are very similar to the Princes of those cities controlled by the five covenants. Archon elders delegate to their covey-mates and harshly judge and punish those who would fail to fulfill the desires of the group's Crux. In very, very rare instances, when multiple coveys devoted to the Roaring Serpent are

cooperating, a kind of shadow Prince may be instated, mimicking the methods of a proper Kindred city but unhindered by the slow politics of those wishing to maintain a semblance of civility.

Djinn elders are quite different from those who dwell among the Archons. Given to elaborate ceremony, the martial and competitive nature of the Throne of Smokeless Fire is personified in its elders, who create the rituals and trials that temper their covey's neonates into hardened Djinn soldiers. Though not as abjectly hierarchical as the Roaring Serpent, the Throne of Smokeless Fire's elders are the keepers of what little Djinn lore exists and provide the structure in which the fittest and most ruthless grow to inherit their birthright. In matters of physical competition, merciless Djinn elders judge the fights and take a deep pleasure in condemning those who fail in their trials to slow, painful deaths, making an example of the weakness that failure and defeat bring to light. When the ancillae of the Djinn compete against each other in matters of territory seizure, campaigns of terrorism directed against mortal institutions and other more drawn-out affairs, the wise and watchful eye of the Throne's elders monitor the contest. Most importantly, Djinn elders hold themselves responsible for ensuring the observance of the Archontes and dynamai that forge the tie between the Djinn and their future, actualized and perfect selves. However, although the Vaulderie protects elders from threats of diablerie from within their covey, the ancient vampires of the Throne of Smokeless fire are terribly paranoid and reactionary beings, always watchful for those Djinn outside their coveys who would claim the power of the elders' heart's blood for their own.

Elders and the *Pneuma*

The philosophies embraced by the cult of the *pneuma* have a particular appeal for reclusive, paranoid elders. Methods used by the Forsworn spiritualists simultaneously evolve the elder's capacity for interacting with his Beast that gradually grows more and more powerful. Elders invested in the rites and philosophies of the *pneuma* are the most likely of the Forsworn to act as gurus, communicating through teachings derived from their own descent, poetry derived from the surging blood and fury of frenzy's throes and the unspoken language of ritual ordeals constructed to liberate the bestial soul from the oppression of morality and fear. Although their self-mastery often exceed that of elders devoted to the *sarx* and *soma*, their unpredictability is also far greater. Given to meditations upon the irrational and vicious genius of the Beast within, their motives are seemingly random to anyone outside of their coveys and viewed

with a religious zeal by those closest to them. The words of these elders are often recorded and form the substance of grimoires (many of which become Resonants) which not only find use outside of their coveys, but also among Forsworn of other factions due to their profound insights into realm of the Adversary. These books are often found by Kindred elders of the other covenants, slowly coaxing them by appealing to the most intellectualized aspects of their repressed Beasts.

Faustian elders are rarely seen by any outside of their coveys. Devoted to semi-religious precepts implied by their understanding of the *pneuma* as well as their belief in a pure, untainted realm of spirit, the elders of the Mercy Seat isolate themselves in ongoing meditation in an effort to keep their minds and spirits equally pure of intention. While they certainly perceive themselves as beings of pure malevolence, the course of corruption that a Faustian covey follows is not a simple or obvious thing, or the selection of prey. Locked away in well-guarded temple-mansions, the Faustian elder plots the undoing of those he sees in his visions, and then delegates the steps and instructions to his covey-mates, in some cases not letting the various operatives have any sense of the overarching scheme. In this way, the elder of a Mercy Seat covey can maintain the integrity of his vision without the insubordination or individual interpretations of his younger brethren. In this way, the neonates can learn their roles, and the ancillae can master the emptiness necessary to perfectly assume another's identity.

During self-imposed isolations, elders of the Mercy Seat become lost in research and meditation. Their research mostly consists of two things: identities and infrastructure. The construction of new identities for their covey-mates to assume is tricky, as each must be specially tailored to the Forsworn that is to assume them. When dealing with larger organizations, Faustian elders spend enormous periods of time analyzing channels of communication, resource allocation, as well as all of the dirty laundry of every significant individual who participates in it. Such research can take years, but with the help of the covey, the Mercy Seat elder crafts plans that would dizzy the head of the most acute Kindred elder.

The doctrines and methods of the Nameless are perhaps the most well-guarded secrets in all of Forsworn society. It is even believed by some scholars that the elder mystics and philosophers of the faction have access to Resonants and rites crafted by the hand of Belial himself. These objects of power are said to be tied to the egregore of the Demiurge itself and to hold clues that supposedly reveal the true nature of the progenitor of Belial's Brood. Because of this knowledge, elders of the faction

sometimes (and in rarer cases, ancillae) take oaths of silence, believing that the creation of a concept through the use of language is a blasphemy against the unholy void to which they bend unliving knee. The counter-conceptual philosophies of the Nameless elders become increasingly demented as their humanity deteriorates, often making their revelations difficult to transmit to their younger covey-mates. Although the underpinnings of their belief are the same at their core, the concocted models of oblivion that these monsters realize are as many as there are coveys, possibly more.

Heeding the Call

Whereas younger vampires of the five covenants are often seduced into serving the Brood while their humanity is still fresh and intact, elders are rarely approached with such intentions. Ancient and potent, old vampires are not to be trifled with as they are often capable of rallying death squads composed of subordinates with but a phone call. One misstep or unpredicted frenzy, and the entire house of cards can come crashing down on the heads of the city's Forsworn population. This is just one reason why elders are left to their own devices when finding the Brood. Although such interest might be difficult for the Forsworn to monitor, sometimes the convenient placement of a book in a Sanctified library, the inclusion of a questionable idol in an Acolyte's rite or an allusion to a private party into the ear of the Invictus elite is all that it takes. An elder enlightened in this fashion is often the center point around which a new covey forms. This is only natural as one who has lived for centuries is unlikely to throw in his lot with younger vampires when treading on such precarious ground.

Release

For those elders who have grown old among the Forsworn, there comes a time when the last thread of Man is finally cut, when the Trinity of Being burns, and the supernal Beast is liberated and sent off into the night to find its way to the Adversary. Although the rites may vary from covey to covey in language and method, the manner in which the *draugr* of Belial's Brood are released is universal. When an elder's Humanity is finally extinguished, the *Vaulderie* for the fallen is performed, and the elder enlightened to permanent *Wassail* is separated permanently from the covey's *Crux*. Forsworn insist that these creatures neither return nor even exist after the rite is performed. Perhaps through some strange effect of the *Vaulderie* itself the coveys are kept safe from the reprisal of these castoff monsters. Nonetheless, there have been accounts of these frenzied beasts terrorizing

isolated locales for upwards of two centuries. In undeveloped parts of the world, such monsters can feed and live in blood-gorged bliss until a powerful and knowledgeable party puts them down for good.

Relations with Neonates

Within Belial's Brood, elders and neonates are a world apart. Even among the five covenants, age creates a disparity of experience that is nearly impossible to close as the perspective of a 300-year-old elder results in an entirely different outlook from that possessed by the newly Embraced. Among the Forsworn, this gap is exaggerated by the elders' lowered Humanity, which creates a second factor to drive a wedge between the two worlds. Whereas the neonate is often a zealous new recruit who has just begun her Pursuit, the Forsworn elder is a carefully cultivated bomb of inhumanity that tenuously holds to his coherence by way of his faith and a single-pointed desire to serve the Adversary. What is interesting, however, is that despite their radically different outlooks, Forsworn elders do not view neonates as lesser, merely less experienced, embryonic version of themselves, as they know it is not one's age but one's closeness to the Demiurge and a thorough mastery of the *sarx*, *soma* and *pneuma* that brings true power and station. Because of this, neonates take deep pride in the power of their covey's elders (assuming they have any) and consider them powerful saints of the Brood who can protect them and guide them to a more actualized and powerful state.

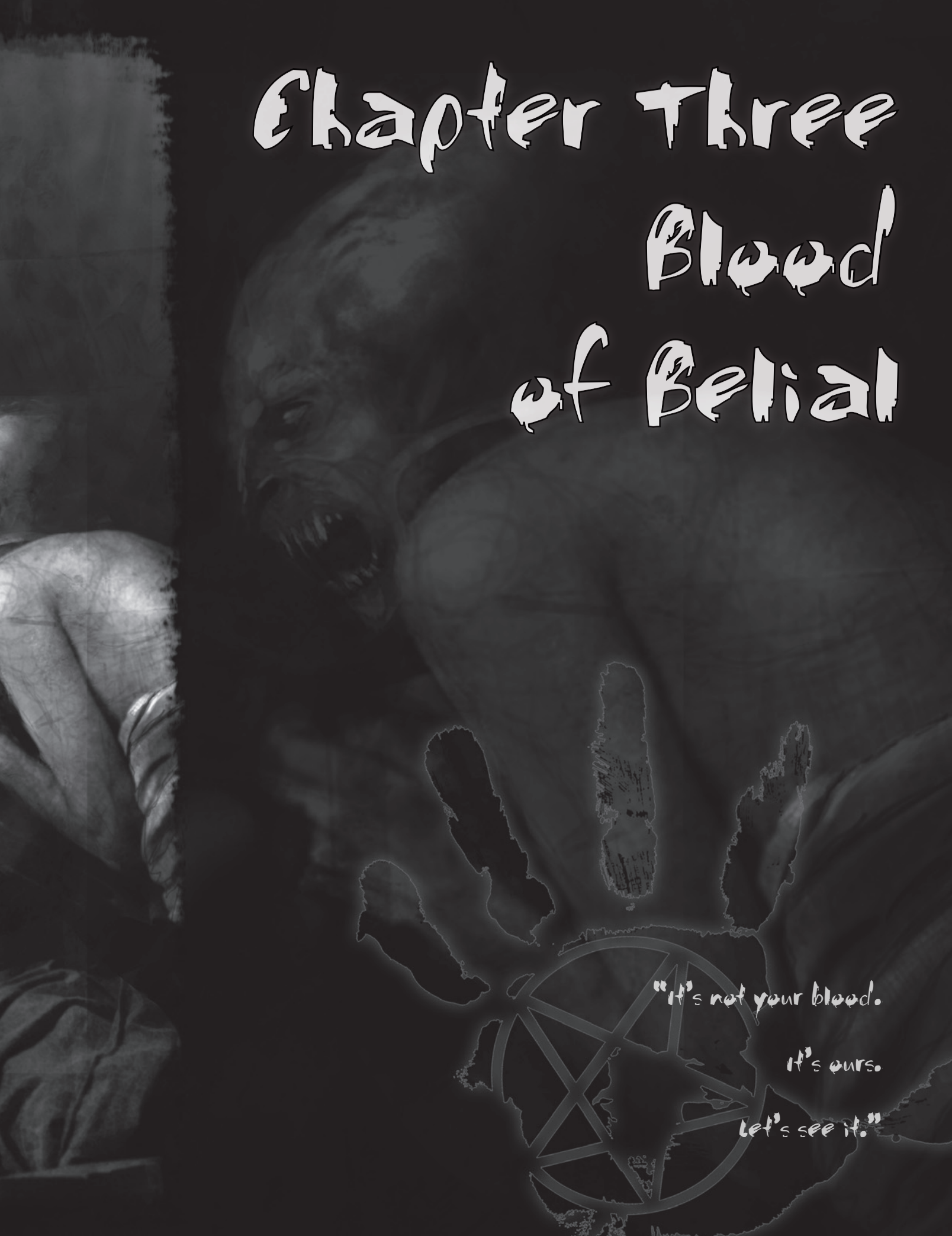
Relations with Ancillae

The ancillae are the tried-and-tested movers-and-shakers among the Forsworn. Not as far gone as the elders and not as wet behind the ears as the neonates, the ancillae have the experience, focus and vision that enable them to maintain the most important operations of their coveys. For this reason, the relationship between Forsworn elders and ancillae is extremely tight. As most of the Brood's ancillae have moved beyond the stark-raving zealotry of the newly initiated, they require the elusive insights of their elders in order to progress their Pursuit. In turn, elders who can no longer interact with the world outside of the Brood require these more experienced ancillae in order to actualize the final steps of their own descent. In cases in which the elders have taken on the role of Forsworn guru, they often take apprentices from the ranks of the ancillae. These carefully selected disciples are instructed in the secrets of the covey's most hidden rites, and will likely be the ones to lead the *Vaulderie* of release when the elder reaches the end of his Pursuit.



Chapter Three

Blood of Belial



"It's not your blood.

It's ours.

Let's see it."

Every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force – its will to power – and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies, and ends by coming to an arrangement with those of them that are sufficiently related to it. Thus, they then conspire together for power.

– The Will to Power, Friedrich Nietzsche

After a vampire's Cathexis into the Brood, he finds himself faced with an important choice. He must decide which Brood faction appeals most to his own essential nature as a vampire, and it's a choice that revolves around two core issues. The first, most determinant issue in this choice pertains to the Trinity – with which of the three aspects (*pneuma*, *sarx*, *soma*) he connects most strongly. Each of the major factions of the Brood contains Forsworn of all different stripes, but what binds the vampires of a given faction together most is their mutual focus on a particular aspect of the Trinity. The second issue, then, is with which of the cults of his favored aspect he feels most at home, most empowered as a Beast.

The process is similar to a Sanctified's choice of creed, or a Dragon's choice of rite, but is more inherent than that, more akin to one's choice of overall covenant. Of course, many new Forsworn rarely even realize that they *have* a choice, for their experience of the Brood is limited to the beliefs of those who brought the new ones to it. All the same, a vampire whose essential nature calls out to the *sarx* is going to know something is missing when inducted into the Brood by a *pneuma* cult. It then falls upon him to alter his perspective, to make the appropriate choice regardless of what he'd been taught by others up to that point.

It's important to note that one's choice of aspect is a completely personal one, and requires neither tutor nor acceptance from others. Similar to a vampire's adoption of a covenant, a Forsworn who feels what he feels and knows what he knows is already a member of the appropriately aspected cult, by definition and by default. A given Brood member may know little of the specific ways and means of a specific cult of his aspect until he gets to know the members, but once the issue of aspect is resolved, the rest is just details. While most coveys do tend to fall along faction lines, coveys composed of members of multiple factions are far from uncommon.

The Hexad

The Hexad is composed of the six most prominent factions in Belial's Brood, and they represent the six "default" beliefs and perspectives on Belial and the Pursuit. While minor factions do exist (see p. 115), most are merely extensions of one of these six broader groups, sub-factions of the umbrella nature of their aspects. Of the six, two correspond to each aspect, as befits the Forsworn duality of being.



The Nameless

Of all the factions of Belial's Brood, the vampires of the Nameless hold what is perhaps the most controversial perspective on the nature and origin of Belial. The Nameless believe he was a mortal man, born to the syphilitic womb of a dying whore in a dirt-caked village of the pre-Biblical era Middle East. According to their own legends, Belial was the child of the Demiurge itself, sent to Earth to redeem the souls of all vampires, who were dwelling in the darkness and squalor of the age, eking out miserable existences off the misery of miserable mortals. Belial, a bronze-smith by trade, drew to him a flock of these earliest vampires — five in number, at first — and showed them the truth of their condition, the truth of their bestial souls. He relieved them of the burden of their given names, the anchor on their souls and the source of one's ability to exercise power over them, and put them on the path of the Pursuit. If the legends hold true, he also revealed to them the mysteries of the first Investments, the eldritch gifts of his father.

Although Belial himself shuffled off his mortal coil after a lifetime of guiding the souls of the undead into truth, his legacy lived on; and even more, for the Nameless believe that Belial the man, acting true to his own mortal nature, took for himself a mate and propagated his number before his time ran out. The Nameless believe that this mortal bloodline continues to this day, and in this bloodline are contained the secrets of his father's plan for the Forsworn . . . and everyone else.

As such, the Forsworn are, among other things, an apocalyptic cult. While few of them believe in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic Bible, or in its Book of Revelations per se, many are of the opinion that an "end of days" of some kind or other will come, and that when it does, Belial will return. Some think he will be born of his own bloodline, rebirthed to draw the age of man to a thunderous close, while others feel he will not be reborn until the Nameless discover his mortal descendants and take pains to shepherd his second vessel into the world themselves. Whatever the truth, the Nameless of tonight are hoarders

of secrets and omens, purveyors of hidden knowledge and blasphemous insight. They search for clues in the ebbs and flows of humanity, and seek to incite fiery revolts of thought in their own kind, much as their living messiah once did for them.

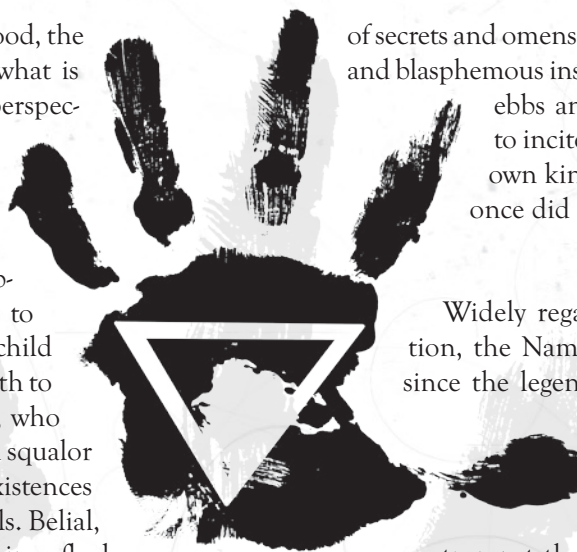
Nameless Domains

Widely regarded as the oldest Brood faction, the Nameless have spread far and wide since the legendary and controversial passing of their mortal messiah. The faction's inception was in the Old World, and the holdings of its adherents remain the strongest there, but coveys of the Nameless can be found anywhere.

In North America, the Nameless are most present and influential in the oldest areas. In the United States, coveys of the Nameless hold sway in parts of New England and all along the Eastern seaboard, with perhaps the most widely known and established Nameless covey operating out of Massachusetts. Interestingly, the faction is even stronger in Canada than in the United States, and powerful Nameless coveys can be found from Ottawa to Vancouver.

Europe is where the faction truly shines. London is home to one of the oldest extant coveys of the Nameless in the world, with the covey's members often acting as the hub of communication networks among Nameless (and even other Forsworn) all over the globe. After London, the faction is strongest in cities of historical value, wealth and learning, particularly the cities of Calais, Edinburgh and Vienna. Small coveys of Nameless nomads are known to make something of a circuit among the cities in Europe where the faction has established roots, working to further the overall power and usefulness of their information network.

Outside of Europe, the faction is strongest in eastern Asia, where the Nameless has been working steadily to increase its knowledge and holdings since the nights of the Silk Road. The Nameless more or less avoids Africa, with the notable exception of Egypt, where an intrepid covey has maintained operations for more than a century





now. And even more recently, several nomadic coveys of the Nameless have made the long trek to the Australian continent, where they work to establish themselves among the disparate flocks of natives (both mortal and otherwise).

Rites of the Nameless

The ritual practices of the Nameless are perhaps the diametric opposite of the stereotypes most commonly envisioned when mention of the Brood arises. When one imagines living sacrifices overtop blood-drawn diagrams of pentagrams, or orgiastic sex feasts in the name of the Morningstar, one is thinking of the cults of the *sarx*, such as the Pandaemonium or the Scarlet Rite. As a *pneuma* cult, the rites of the Nameless take on a substantially different tone.

The Nameless do not disregard the more visceral aspects of their ethos, and are known for performing the Vaulderie in particular with just as much devotion and regularity as any other faction. (Indeed, the Nameless claim to have been the first to practice the Vaulderie, along with every other Archonte, so their pride is clear.) Rather, the Nameless focus on the deeper mysteries invoked by the ritual formulae, the secret and unseen movements of energies central to the rites themselves. Where some factions perform rituals as displays of devotion or worthiness, the Nameless perform rites largely as a meditation, a way of communing with both their higher selves and the Demiurge that is their patron.

Within this paradigm, two rituals stand out as exemplary of the faction's mode. The first of these is a sacred *dynameis* format that the Nameless use to "stir" the *pneuma* among participants in the ritual space. During the rite, none but the ritemaster speaks (and even he speaks only in the Tongue of the Beast) and all movement of the physical form is inhibited to as great a degree as possible – which is substantial, given that the undead have no need of drawing breath except to speak. When the ritemaster is finished reciting the names of power, the covey members take turns burning or otherwise removing their own eyes. This done, the remainder of the rite is spent in an attempt to *see* while bereft of flesh.

The other rite that is perhaps best exemplifies the Nameless is the Archonte that all Forsworn use to induct a mortal into the Doulosi cult. The Nameless take great pride in having essentially created and supported the Doulosi as an institution, and all bravado notwithstanding, the Nameless' performance of the rite truly is a wonder to behold. And with the reverent way they treat their ghouls, it remains little wonder that few ghouls would actively desire to be with any other faction.

Nickname: None (though some refer to them as “the Hidden”)

Appearance: Few vampires go so far out of their way to appear nondescript as do the vampires of the Nameless. These Forsworn detest drawing unwanted attention, and one’s appearance is the first and most obvious factor in determining how much attention one garners. For this reason, there are fewer Daeva present in the Nameless than in any other faction (though not because the Daeva are not “accepted” into its ranks; all are accepted if they believe), just as the Mekhet and Nosferatu are prized for the very same reason. Sometimes, in the case of a covey that is bereft of either of these two clans, the covey will make a priority of exalting one of its number into the Therion bloodline if for no other reason than to make use of him as a tutor in the Obfuscate Discipline. However it happens, the Nameless take every pain to pass unnoticed through the night.

Haven: As befits their hidden (and some would say, paranoid) nature, the Nameless tend to make their havens in the most remote and/or secure locations they can find. When remoteness isn’t a viable option, such as with those Nameless who dwell in urban centers, the second best option is camouflage, as the ability to blend into one’s surroundings is often the best defense in a city setting. Coveys composed entirely of the Nameless tend to pool their resources in the interests of securing one truly exceptional haven, where all its members can congregate in safety but where none of its members are truly beholden. In these cases, each member also maintains a private haven separate and distinct from the communal one. In such instances, the Therion of the covey often is the only one who knows the location of every member’s private haven, assuming the covey has conducted the rite to exalt one of its members into that august bloodline.

Background: Almost without exception, the Nameless draws vampires with extremely active minds and spirits to its banner. For these Forsworn, the extended contemplation of the world and of the vampire’s place in it most often sends them to the Brood in the first place, so carrying that contemplative nature into their activities among the Brood is a natural extension. While the Nameless do not seek out new inductees any more than any other faction, the Nameless’ power and influence are legendary among the Forsworn, and as such, this faction does seem to court with some regularity the attentions of those who do their homework on the Brood.

Organization: While the tendency for all Forsworn is to shy away from overt or excessive organization, the Nameless have been around so long, and are so entrenched in various schemes and operations worldwide, that they’ve developed something of an “accidental” organization despite their best efforts. Such organization, however, is not true hierarchy or even real structure, so much as a network. Information is the typical Nameless member’s stock and trade, and as such, the more sources one can securely rely on, the better. Over time, this has resulted in a web of Forsworn (and their trusted ghouls) who know enough to communicate with one another, even across great distances. This is not to imply that all Nameless know one another, and individual members are just as responsible for forging their own contacts as any other Forsworn, but to aver that the contacts are in place should the individual take the time to develop them.

Favored Aspect: *Pneuma*. The Nameless is perhaps the quintessential embodiment of the *pneuma* cult, focusing as the faction does on the hegemony of the spirit over the flesh, the triumph of the will over the body. For the Nameless, everything is possible, and thus prioritized, under will.

Concepts: Archeologist, cryptographer, doomsayer, dream speaker, genealogist, occultist, private investigator, prophet, research assistant.

“Come the End of Days, we shall see
who was wrong and who was right.
In the meantime, do yourself a favor, child,
and forget you ever saw me here.”

The Roaring Serpent

Arguably the most powerful of Brood factions, the vampires of the Roaring Serpent are the consummate predators, reveling in all that makes them vampires. Some of these self-styled “Archons” perceive their mandate as a dark interpretation of John 3:15 – “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the son of Man be lifted up.” Disciples of the Serpent hold that Belial was the first of their kind, spontaneously cursed with the Embrace in the darkest pre-dawn of living man and charged by the Demiurge with becoming, in essence, the “anti-Man.” Regardless of the truth of their origins, the race of vampires is in a very real way the serpent that came into the garden, the “essence of all that opposes,” in the words of one Serpent scholar. The physical world is the realm of the Demiurge, and so long as a vampire is bound to it, he must be true to his Beast, his opposing soul – he must be the very best vampire he can be.

Much as the vampires of the Nameless await the night when their concept of Belial will return as a mortal, the vampires of the Roaring Serpent await the return of their progenitor, too. But unlike the Nameless, who are active only in the search for what they believe to be Belial’s mortal heirs, the Serpent actively seeks out the figure the faction believes to be Belial. A great many (the vast majority, truth be told) Archons hold to the notion that Belial still walks the Earth tonight, still alone, still undead. Some feel that if Belial can be located, he will reward the faction that finds him and return to lead the entire covenant into a new dark age. And even if he doesn’t, simply finding him – and confirming his identity as the father of all vampirekind – will prove the rightness of the Serpent’s claims, and thus put them above the other factions for good, as they believe they were meant to be.

Roaring Serpent Domains

As befits the faction’s age, status and belief system, the Roaring Serpent claims numerous powerful coveys, reach-

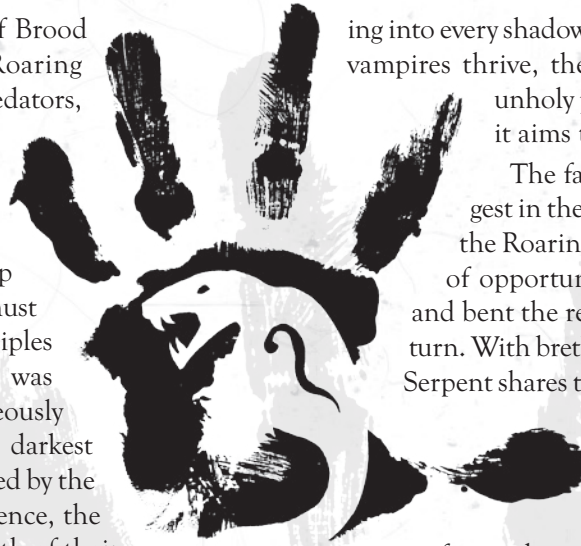
ing into every shadowy corner of the globe. Wherever vampires thrive, the Serpent is there, making an unholy paradise of every darkened place it aims to call its own.

The faction is undeniably at its strongest in the New World, where members of the Roaring Serpent have grasped the reins of opportunity with both inhuman hands and bent the reins to the faction’s will at every turn. With brethren in the Pandaemonium, the Serpent shares the distinction of being the most prevalent Brood faction in all the United States. Coveys of ambitious Archons grow fat on the blood and resources

of mortals in almost every urban center, from Albuquerque to Zanesville. America’s literal and economic bloat provides a rich backdrop before which Serpent coveys can prosper, and a number of the most powerful Archons in the world hold sway here, guiding their subordinates to ever greater nadirs of inhumanity and vice. Within the faction, perhaps the most infamous of these is the Serpent covey that makes its home in south central Los Angeles. Thirteen members strong, its individual members are some of the most powerful vampires in all of California.

Mexico, too, is a veritable playground for the Brood, and for the Roaring Serpent in particular. It is said that Mexico City is a veritable arena for Brood competition, where multiple Brood coveys compete for dominance against the city’s backdrop of intense heat, poverty and crime. While the faction has a much smaller presence in Central America than many might believe, the Roaring Serpent remains strong in select parts of South America. Colombia has a substantial presence, and among the Brood, the Brazilian coastline is infamous for its sheer numbers of Forsworn. The teeming city of São Paulo plays host to a handful of Brood coveys, the most powerful of which is composed entirely of Archons.

Outside the western hemisphere, the Roaring Serpent is the most prevalent in areas fraught with mortal strife. Coveys of Archons move through the broken and destitute villages of sub-Saharan Africa, trailing the wake of the tribal warlords like hyenas following the scent of



the kill, and doing likewise in some areas of southeast Asia. The Serpent tends to leave the Middle East largely to its confederates in the Throne of Smokeless Fire, but the brutal oppression of the Palestinian occupation in particular has proven too attractive to resist, and so the Serpent has slowly been increasing its activities there in recent years, feeding off the ceaseless misery of both the Palestinian people and their Israeli occupiers.

Rites of the Roaring Serpent

Of the factions in the Hexad, the Roaring Serpent has at once the most mainstream and the most peculiar approach to rites and rituals. Archons are known for performing all the Archontes, and the Vaulderie in particular, with not a shred of either disrespect or inefficiency, and visiting Forsworn are often transfixed by the harmonious words and motions of a Roaring Serpent Vaulderie. Not ones for the wasteful bloodletting of the Pandaemonium, or the psycho-sexual pomp of the Scarlet Rite, the Archons' rites are primarily designed around utility first and reverence of the Belial figure second.

In this latter regard, the most involved and unique of Roaring Serpent rituals appear. All Archons venerate Belial, the Father of Vampires, and each covey has its own rites to honor him. But the one rite that every Serpent

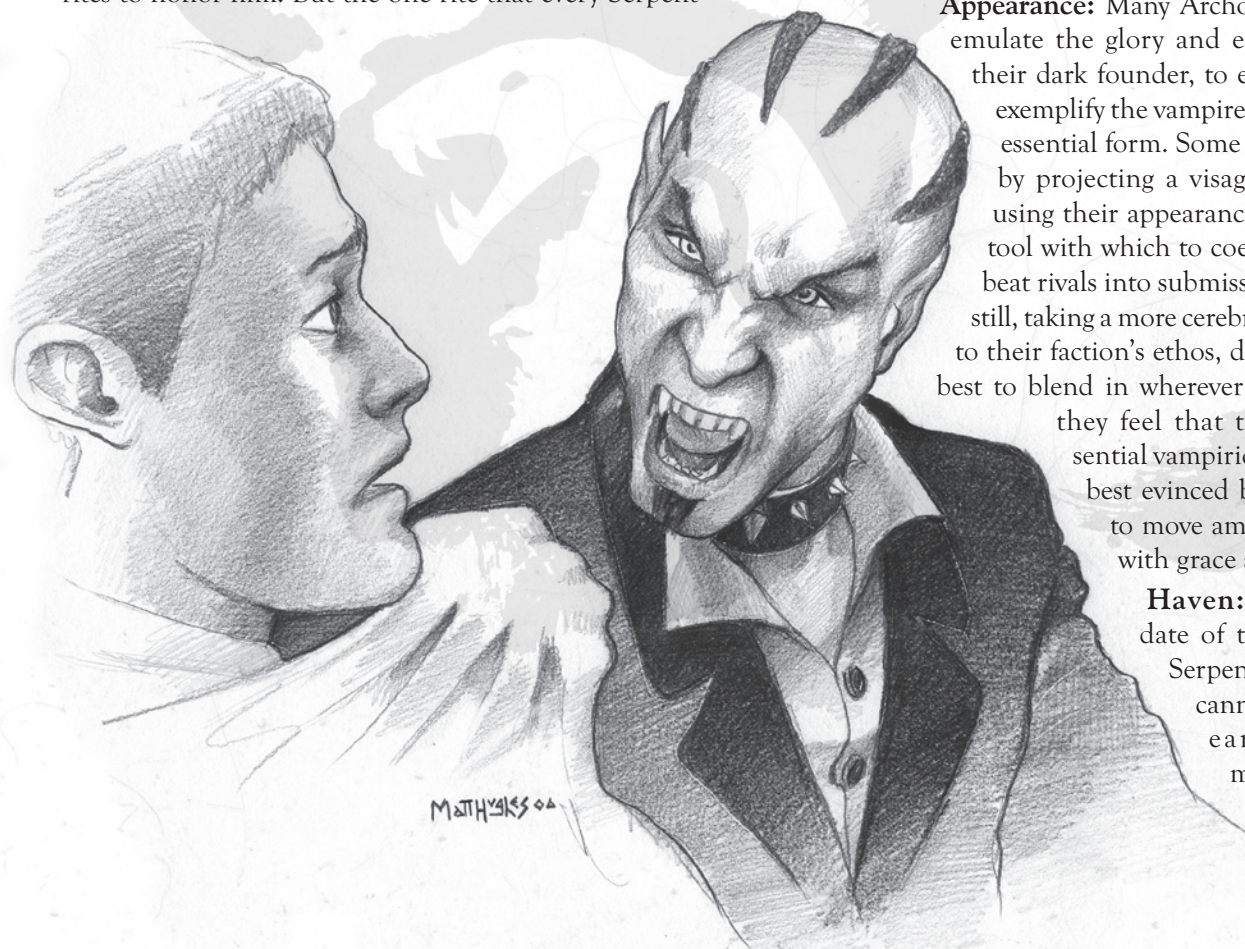
covey practices with somber reverence, and that coveys of no other faction perform, is a complex dynameis ritual — the highest of all Roaring Serpent dynameis — that its practitioners often call the “sacrament of blood.” The true purpose behind this rite is for an Archon to effectively commemorate the crystalline moment when consumed mortal blood transubstantiates into vampiric Vitae. By the taking of blood, an Archon is effectively filling himself with the essence of Belial himself, and such an honor is not to be taken lightly, no matter how often it occurs.

Second only to this unholy sacrament is the “reverse” of the very same ritual. In another sacred dynameis rite, the Archons likewise commemorate the moment of crystallization when their own dead blood enters the body of a mortal, and with its immortal Potency, halts the aging process of the living vessel, and in so doing, claims it for the Archon's Beast. For this reason, Serpent members take all formation of ghouls very seriously, and the induction of ghouls into their coveys even more seriously. When a covey of Archons elects to exalt a ghoul into the ranks of the Doulosi, the night is special indeed, full of glory and dark memoriam.

Nickname: Archons

Appearance: Many Archons strive to emulate the glory and eminence of their dark founder, to embody and exemplify the vampire in its quintessential form. Some achieve this by projecting a visage of power, using their appearance as a social tool with which to coerce allies or beat rivals into submission. Others still, taking a more cerebral approach to their faction's ethos, do their level best to blend in wherever they go, as they feel that the quintessential vampiric predator is best evinced by its ability to move among its prey with grace and ease.

Haven: The mandate of the Roaring Serpent is one that cannot help but earn for its members bitter rivals



at the very least, and hated enemies at worst (and perhaps more commonly). In seeking out a haven, the Archon seeks not extravagance but razor-keen precision and efficiency in suiting his needs. A prospective haven is selected for the sum of its advantages and detractions, and Archons are wise to study everything from the haven's size and location to its defensibility. For these and other reasons, Archons are notorious for moving around and for selecting new personal havens without so much as consulting their covey-mates.

Background: Contrary to the average Antinomian, members of the Roaring Serpent are, almost without exception, born to lead, or at least born to carve out their own niches within existing systems. Beyond this, the issue of one's mortal history is almost moot, as the Roaring Serpent very embodies the Brood's overall reluctance to Embrace directly into its ranks. Indeed, the preponderance of Archons deem the act of bringing a mortal into the faction without first allowing her to experience undeath among the Unlearned a sin against the Brood, most often punishable by the ritual sacrifice of the new inductee, at a bare minimum. On the exceedingly rare occasions when an exception is made to this rule, the exception is made on behalf of a hermit or pair of Archons seeking to make for themselves a true covey. In this case (and in almost no other) the sin is forgiven, and the faction is obliged to accept the new recruit as it would any other brother or sister, but even then, the sin

often remains a stain on the new covey's reputation, a lingering sign of its inability to draw "legitimate" converts to its cause.

Organization: Vampires of the Roaring Serpent form something of an intriguing exception to the usual rule pertaining to structure among the Forsworn. Due to the faction's focus on the empowerment of the vampiric creature, Archons tend to establish hierarchies of traditional dominance based upon achievement. In this regard, they are perhaps the truest "meritocracy" found in vampirekind, putting the mask of meritocracy worn by covenants such as the Invictus to shame with the unapologetic frankness of the Archons' conviction. This makes Roaring Serpent coveys veritable crucibles of competitiveness, but unlike their fellow *soma* adherents among the Throne of Smokeless Fire, the Archons draw the line at acting directly against one another unless absolutely necessary. They take the lessons of their founder with utmost seriousness, and will go to great lengths to show that they are indeed the superior examples of their race to be found anywhere in the world, especially when compared to the "Kindred" of the Unlearned.

Favored Aspect: *Soma*. The fleshly vessel is the instrument by which the vampire exerts dominance over both the body politic and the material spirit. Without *soma*, both *pneuma* and *sarx* are rendered inert, and therefore powerless.

Concepts: Benighted lord, born killer, dark prodigy, kennel master, law enforcement officer, natural leader, survivalist, urban predator, vampire historian.

"We are his body, and I am his blood.
Drink of me and know his glory."

The Pandaemonium

Although many of Belial's Brood seek to hide the outward signs of their dark path, the Pandaemonium makes its way with pride and malevolent glory through the endless night. Claiming origins as early as the first sacrificial cults of ancient Mesopotamia, Mesoamerica and the Far East, the modern face of the faction rides the coattails of satanic hysteria. With pentagrams and other sigils carved brazenly across their bodies, these so-called Antinomians assume the role of fanatical, demon-worshipping terrorists who willfully throw themselves into the front lines of what many of them view as the war against God.

The ancient faction known as the Pandaemonium has worn many masks throughout time. Where some claim that the faction was birthed in prehistory, marked by the first occasion when early man offered flesh and blood out of fear of unforgiving spirits, a sizeable number of Antinomians in the modern nights believe that Lucifer himself birthed their bloodthirsty number. They cast Belial in the role of literal devil's advocate – of all the hoary host of Hell, the one demon responsible for managing the interaction between the souls of the Damned and their unknowable deity figure. In their view, Belial brought forth the truth of the vampiric soul to the first ignorant Kindred in ancient times, bearing the gifts that the Brood would come to know as Investments.

Pandaemonium Domains

As one of the oldest factions of the Brood, the Pandaemonium is widespread and has many coveys squirming within the cracks of every population on Earth. Whether out of First World deviance or Third World despair, the Antinomians are there to cast down the holy and revere the abominable with savage sacrifices and dark invocations.

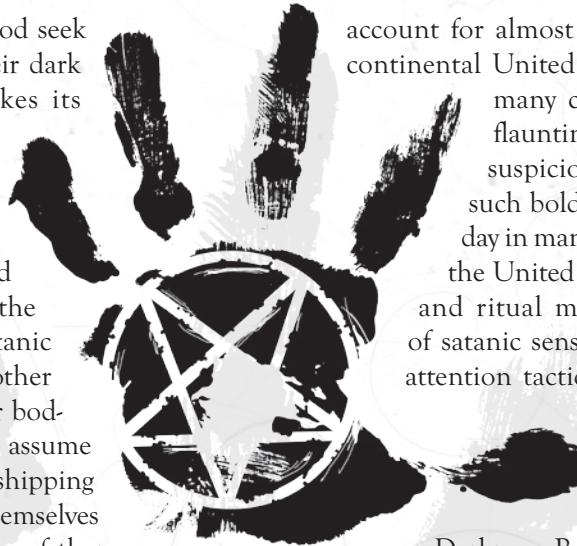
In North America, the cult of the Pandaemonium accounts for a sizeable portion of the Brood's presence. Although reports of Forsworn demographics are always sketchy at best, it is believed that Antinomian coveys

account for almost one-third of all Brood in the continental United States and Canada. While in many countries, such excess and the flaunting of sacrilege can still result in suspicion and even legal persecution, such bold displays are the fashion of the day in many fringe subcultures throughout the United States and Canada. Cult abuse and ritual murder, though often stripped of satanic sensationalism and reduced to the attention tactics of psychopathic pedophiles, happen every day throughout the cities, suburbs and rural regions of the United States, particularly in the World of Darkness. Behind such media smokescreens and basic denial the true and actual machinations of the Antinomians flourish with each missing runaway or abducted child.

In Central America, the Caribbean and the more impoverished areas of South America, drug cartels and other forms of organized crime create a rich loam in which Pandaemonium coveys can take root. During a prolonged drug war or the upheaval caused by a corrupt political regime, the Antinomians can take what they like without fear of reprisal. In addition, the deeply Catholic climate of the region produces a magnificent backdrop against which the Adversary's henchmen can cast the glamour of their blood-curdling blasphemies.

In Europe, the faction thrives in Germany, Denmark, Poland and the Scandinavian peninsula. Thanks in part to the rise of the Black Metal underground, national socialism, satanism and a bastardized mockery of traditional Germanic heathenry are married into a subculture of violence and blasphemy. Gang fights, hate crimes, satanic art and church burnings all serve the greater interests of the Pandaemonium in the Old Country. In war-torn areas of Eastern Europe, the Antinomians can purchase children from black market pornographers and pimps to be offered in hidden temples among the blasted buildings and barbed wire.

In the Middle East, the Antinomians are at their most conservative and discreet. While coveys do exist in the lands they claim saw the faction's birth, they are very





careful not to stir the waters of violent fundamentalism. Military conflicts provide adequate cover for the Pandaemonium's activities, but Kindred in service to the Adversary make no great display of their devotion in public, as even a hint of such activity could result in a fully funded hunt that could end with an entire covey being dragged from its hiding place to bake in the hot desert sun. Nonetheless, the Antinomians of this region are some of the most devout, as they feel the most deeply connected to the history of their cult.

In Asia and Africa, the impoverished masses are like fields of ripe fruit for the Adversary's own. Whether the throngs of prostitutes and the destitute in the streets of Bangkok, the terrified and isolated peoples subjected to the terror of military warlords or black market slavery rings, such places are like a dark paradise for the Pandaemonium.

Rites of the Pandaemonium

No other sizeable faction of Forsworn is so meticulous in the crafting of its rites as the Pandaemonium. Because such a substantial number of Antinomians recognize the Adversary as the Judeo-Christian-Islamic Prince of Darkness, their ceremonies are elaborate and full of devotional pomp, as fear of a dissatisfied liege is a very real thing for members of this faction. Through any number of stylized horrors, the Pandaemonium's rites

paint a picture of centuries upon centuries of service to the Morningstar himself.

Although all Forsworn commit acts of blasphemy and horror, the deliberateness of heretical and sacrilegious elements in Antinomian rites is perhaps their defining aspect. And though the coveys of the Nameless seek their secrets, and the Scarlet Rite celebrates its meaningless ruin in a gala of sin, the *point* of most Pandaemonium rites is largely to offend the God figure as the Antinomians hold up evidence of their master's victory on Earth. While the tattoos and ritual marks of this faction often seem childish, risky and superficial to others among the Brood, these outer signs help demonstrate an Antinomian's contempt for the vessel that many claim was made in the very image of the holy.

More so than any of the other factions, sacrifice lies at the very center of these Brood members' faith. Whether a black goat, an abducted human or even a fellow Brood member who has been judged an adequate gift, the offering of flesh has many levels of significance for the Pandaemonium. On the most basic level, the methods employed seek to mutilate the flesh, making a mockery of the God figure's design. In the case of human offerings, members of the human clergy are often chosen, and in the case of Kindred sacrifices (rare in the extreme), exceedingly devout advocates of Sanctified philosophy



are abducted after a long and careful process of scrutiny. Beneath the surface, blood sacrifices are viewed as the supreme method for revealing the mysteries of *sarx* itself. Although closely guarded, there exist grimoires of Antinomian lore that read like arcane medical texts with instructions of a mad saint guiding his flock down the labyrinthine corridors of pain, suffering and the frailty of the fleshy vessel, and how to explore these hidden levels in a way that satisfies the spiritual needs of the aspiring devotee of the Pandaemonium, as well as the endless hunger of whatever idea of the Adversary to which the covey seeks to pay homage.

Nickname: Antinomians

Appearance: For the most part, the Kindred of Belial's Brood take great pains to be ignored by both vampire and human society. This is the farthest thing from the truth when speaking of those Antinomians who take great effort to embody every feared rumor concerning "satanic cults" and "devil worshippers." While elders of the faction may exercise restraint, restricting themselves to ostentatious occult jewelry and black suits and the like, most of the younger Antinomians aspire to maximum devotion by covering their flesh in imagery drawn from classical occult sources, including Goetic sigils, Qliphotic glyphs and those symbols and images of modern satanic hysteria, such as the head of the Horned Goat of Mendes encased in an inverted pentagram, or the exceedingly common upside-down cross. Even in the case of those among the faction who do wish to remain undetected, hidden scarring, brands and tattoos are not uncommon.

Haven: While the Pandaemonium is given to flamboyance when it comes to appearances, its individual members do take great pains to hide their havens, as these places serve as the temples in which some of the most elaborate and baroque of Brood rituals are conducted. Isolated warehouses nestled in the depths of derelict industrial parks, decaying barns in the middle of rural desolation and abandoned tenements amidst desperate urban sprawl are common. Although a history of violence or evil is preferred when selecting these sites,

the Forsworn of the Pandaemonium are not sticklers on this point, as writing such history themselves taking little time.

Background: Individuals who are drawn to the Pandaemonium are generally followers of one sort or another. Whether they are sycophantic teenagers binding their weak wills and lack of self-esteem to something greater than themselves, or socially alienated occultists who tire of being big fish in small, largely ignored ponds, Antinomians prefer the types who will latch on to power with utter zeal.

Organization: Unlike many of their brethren, the Forsworn of the Pandaemonium are given to organizing their coveys along the lines of an occult order. While the Therion are recognized, the senior member possessing the greatest academic understanding of demonolatry and occult history is typically appointed as leader, and has a significant impact on the lore and the fashion in which his covey brothers and sisters approach the Pursuit. Also, Antinomians often work to restrict covey membership to a specific number of members — 3, 6, 9 and 13 are the most common. Insofar as mortal aspirants go, the Pandaemonium often organizes outer groups to buffer the core cult, which consists of the covey and its most trusted ghouls. Because of this, many who would attempt infiltration are dissuaded, confronted with a seemingly endless gauntlet of initiations and ceremonial formality, the majority of which has no true meaning aside from protecting the kernel covey.

Favored Aspect: *Sarx*. While emphasis is often placed on higher aspects of being in the ceremonial prayers and liturgies of the Pandaemonium, Antinomians focus primarily on flesh and blood. Whether mortifying their own flesh through ritual branding, scarification or elaborate tattoos or meticulously ritually mutilating sacrificial victims, most Antinomians understand the flesh as the throne and cathedral of the Dark Lord himself.

Concepts: Christian cultist, demonologist, heavy metal musician, modern monster, new babysitter, Satanist, serial killer, skinhead, tattoo artist.

*"I am the hand set against the tide of Creation.
I am the serpent that stirs to bite the hand of the saint.
Through my flesh and blood, I offer God's children
on the altar of the Adversary. Ave Satani,
and by my hand it is done."*

The Mercy Seat

The Forsworn of the Mercy Seat make up some of the most dedicated and focused coveys of Belial's Brood. This is because these appropriately styled "Faustians" believe strongly in the Forsworn notion that the material world is the realm of a deity of matter, in which the souls of men and beasts must play through the drama of life, with all of its impure and sloppy imperfection, until death releases them into the realm of spirit, be they worthy or not. The condition of the vampire, however, is to remain in this world, no matter what comes, bound to the pillar of *sarx* for eternity. Nonetheless, in this hopelessness the Faustians find purpose. As an act of devotion to the Demiurge and the purity of the supernal realm, the Faustians protect the balance of the pure and impure. The path of the Mercy Seat to mire the unworthy in the nets and snares of their own sin, providing irresistible obstacles of corruption and distraction to prevent all but the most worthy from moving beyond the world of the Demiurge.

These purest of souls, however, are the greatest prize of a true Faustian. Although a drunk can be lead to drink, or a whore to fornicate, in leading saints and the selfless astray the Faustian's greatest reward may be found. As each good soul is turned to sin, the higher realms are deprived of their bounty. This is important to the Faustians, as they believe their return to the Adversary is conditional upon the emptiness of Heaven.

The Mercy Seat traces the beginning of its hellish mandate to the first time man fell victim to his desires and caused ruin in his world. Although some even claim the "Eve and the Apple Story" as one of Faustian origin, the reality of the Faustians' past is far more complicated and subtle. Despite the poetics of such belief, the historical rise of the Mercy Seat as a dominant faction coincided with the rise of the city-states of northern Italy in the 11th century. As the new merchant class struggled to secure its footing amidst the theater of political fragmentation, coveys of Forsworn entrenched themselves in preparation for what was to come. Although the people

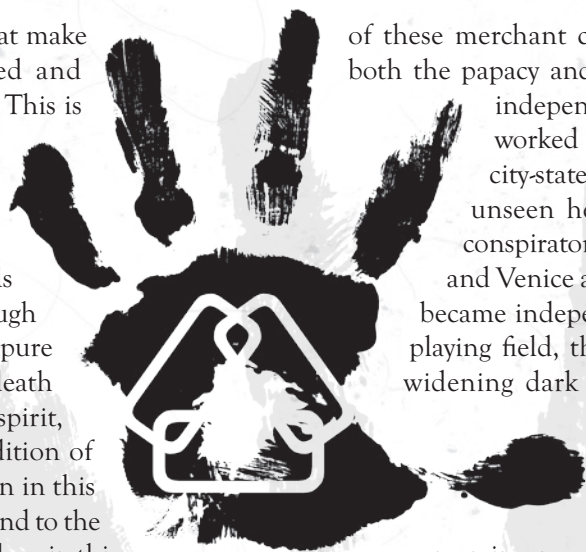
of these merchant communities struggled against both the papacy and the courts to maintain their independence, vampires of the Brood worked against these forces. Once the city-states secured their footing with the unseen help of numerous Kindred co-conspirators, Genoa, Milan, Pisa, Florence and Venice arose as powerful presences and became independent city-states. On this new playing field, the Faustians would work their widening dark agenda. Although these new states thrived economically and culturally, they became nests of decadence and corruption, redefining the viciousness of man in a new and powerful way. The nascent

faction's crowning achievement occurred when the Mercy Seat managed to drive a wedge between the region and the Pope by helping to foster a struggle between the Guelphs (the lapdogs of the pope) and the Gibellines (the supporters of the emperors). The Faustians work toward the legacy of such epic corruptions to this very day.

Mercy Seat Domains

Whereas most factions choose their domains based on some sort of resource or economic condition, the Faustians do not. The Mercy Seat chooses its areas of activity based on the individuals the Faustians are seeking to corrupt. While there are certainly places in the world where lovers of vice congregate, a Faustian covey is as likely to be found in Des Moines as in Paris. Wherever the Forsworn of the Mercy Seat are, they seek out little lattices of relationships, regret and unfilled desire so that they can begin engineering the spiritual undoing of whomever they are preying upon at the time. This being said, there is a handful of domains in which the Faustians are always lurking, watching and scheming.

In North America, one of the largest Mercy Seat coveys in the world has set up shop in and around the downtown district of old Las Vegas. Since the early 1900s, the Faustians have been there, sharing their history with the first Red Light district on Block 16. Preying on gamblers, prostitutes and other desperate souls, this covey has enjoyed many victories of suicide and despair.



The largest and oldest of Faustian strongholds, however, remains located at the site of the faction's Renaissance, in the beautiful city of Genoa, Italy. Although the Mercy Seat has branched out into every possible facet of corruption, the proudest of the faction still have their eyes fixed on what they feel is the greatest trophy that any fiend could desire — the Vatican, itself. Although direct confrontation with the papacy is something wise Faustians know better than to pursue, chipping away at the edges of the Catholic Church has been a meditation of the Mercy Seat since its inception.

Rites of the Mercy Seat

Although the Faustians are highly practical in their plans and schemes, the Mercy Seat's ceremonies are often deeply symbolic and solemn. Rich with the depth of their twisted philosophy, rites among the Faustians often include ritual dramas that play out the themes present in the cosmology of their beliefs.

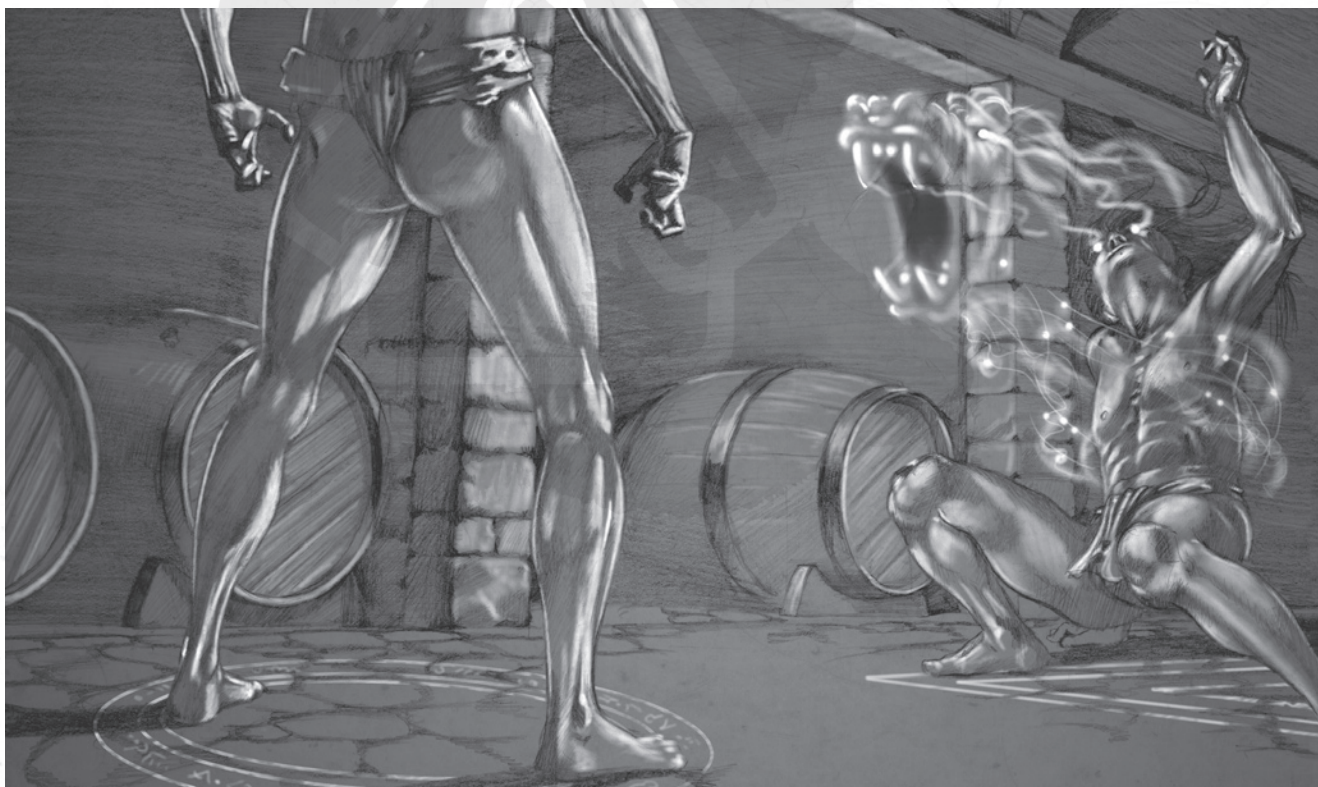
One curious rite of the Mercy Seat is also the primary source of the faction's nickname. Sometimes used as an initiation, the ritual is unusual because a non-vampire — specifically, a ghoul — takes the role of a major operant during the working. The ritual makes use of the Goetic circle and summoning triangle, which are both etched upon the floor in the blood of a sacrificial beast. Wearing a belt of lion fur (inside which is etched the names of the Adversary in glyphs drawn from the Tongue of the Beast), the ghoul stands within the circle while the

vampire stands in the triangle. Then, amidst thick clouds of dense incense smoke, the ghoul evokes the vampire's Beast. At that point, the vampire's Beast is believed to be briefly liberated of its fleshy shell, and is then able to give dark insights to the gathered celebrants at the ghoul-magician's command.

Although deeply spiritual, the most sacred ritual of the Faustian covey is the ceremonial acknowledgment of a soul turned away from the supernal realm. In most cases, this means that a mortal under the sway of the Faustians has committed some abominable sin from which he cannot morally or spiritually recover. Although such victories depend more on the sinner than the sin, the rite that ensues is one of grim affirmation. Once the completion of a corruption has been achieved, the covey gathers and in the blood of the presiding priest (whether it be one of the Therion or another covey member prone to revelation and insight), the name of the fallen is scripted upon a piece of vellum and cast into an open flame. While the rite is simple, it is the subject of quiet celebration for the agents of the Mercy Seat, and is generally followed by a celebratory Vaulderie.

Nickname: Faustians

Appearance: To make a fixed statement about the appearance of Faustian Forsworn would be an exercise in futility, as their attire and any witnessed face can change like a shift in the wind. The Prince's ghoul, the Seneschal's lover, the Priscus's confidant — any or all of





which could be a Mercy Seat operative, if the faction ever cared to meddle in the affairs of the Unlearned. As a covey moves from soul to soul, individual members could assume dozens of identities: whatever is required to bring their quarry to ground.

Haven: Much as their dress, the residences and resting places of the Faustian cult are acquired and shed like the skin of a serpent. However, as the ambitions of the Mercy Seat can run rather high, some coveys require more than a safe house or a tastefully decorated condo. In some cases, a Faustian will have need of technological surveillance and other monitoring equipment. For this reason, agents of the Mercy Seat may have state-of-the-art alarm systems, security camera networks, well-trained ghouls armed to the teeth and similar expensively precautionary measures.

Background: The Faustians select their new members with intense discrimination. Although the rites of other factions can often be tended to by the deranged and incompetent, the Faustian gambit is an advanced game and cannot be trifled with by amateurs and idiots. For this reason, members of the Mercy Seat are generally highly educated or have demonstrated skill at intrigue and social engineering. Therefore, those of political and psychiatric backgrounds are often selected. Among the Kindred, Ventrue and Mekhet have gifts and predilections that are well suited to the Faustian agenda. Because of their ability to move unseen and pull up the darkest fears of their prey, the Nosferatu make excellent agents of the Mercy Seat. And though rare within the faction, that occasional Gangrel who throws in with the Faustians is invariably a multi-leveled predator of utterly terrifying capacities.

Organization: For the most part, the methods by which the Faustians manage themselves vary dramatically from covey to covey. Effectively, local organization is set “as needed,” as the agents of the Mercy Seat must play many roles to bring their plans to fruition. Nonetheless, each member of a covey has a defined role and is completely responsible for everything that falls under its purview. Although mystics at their core, the Faustians can seem almost military in the practicality of these roles. Despite their internal cohesion, coveys of the Mercy Seat almost never work with each other, as each covey has its own projects, many of which are mutually exclusive to those of other groups. All the same, a style of “honor among thieves” holds true among members of the Mercy Seat, as members realize that all Faustian coveys seek to keep foul the corrupt material world.

As they are a cult of the *pneuma*, Faustians afford members of the Therion caste even more respect than they receive in other factions. Because of the deeply philosophical path of the Faustians, the inspired words and cryptic suggestions of the Advocates are the subject of much contemplation, and often chart the courses of the coveys to which they are attached.

Favored Aspect: *Pneuma*. The world of flesh is corrupt and beyond the wants of the spirit. Only by holding the tides of matter and frailty at bay does the spirit become pure. If the spirit is brought low to this flawed plane, the spirit may never return to the Demiurge.

Concepts: Assassin, con artist, counselor, informant, priest, psychiatrist, senator’s aid, tactician, terrorist.

“Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint!”

“I am the spirit that denies!”



The Throne of Smokeless Fire

The Throne of Smokeless Fire seeks to personify the most aggressive and competitive facets of the Beast. Jockeying endlessly for the top position of every environment, the self-styled “Djinn” believe that only by winning the race will their hunger be appeased. Agents of the Throne of Smokeless Fire lay their nets from the shadows and quickly devour the weak and unworthy who would walk into their snares. At every level of society, Djinn move through the night in violent competition for what they believe is the Adversary’s dark favor.

The history of the Throne of Smokeless Fire is etched in a seemingly endless litany of the individual histories of powerful Forsworn. Whether in the accounts of great warriors, generals, monarchs, murderers, assassins or statesmen, the history of the Throne of Smokeless Fire is one of individual achievement. Nonetheless, the beginnings of the Djinn are not such, as they are said to have taken root in the ancient Middle East. A sheikh who was well-known among the Sufis came to the Valley of Lalish, where he created an order of mystics who paid homage to God. Late one night in the desert, however, the Adversary appeared to the sheikh in the form of the angel Asa’el, a terrifying apparition wreathed in smokeless fire, and gave him commandments of the so-called Path of Flame—a brutal doctrine of predation and power. After receiving the transmission, the sheikh was transformed, dreading the light and desiring the blood of his disciples. Upon returning to his flock, the sheikh devoured those loyal to him and set out to find those worthy to hear the teachings of his new master. Since that time, the Throne of Smokeless Fire has forgotten much of the details of its past but has not faltered in upholding the path that was taught to the Djinn’s ancient founder on that fateful night in the cold, dark desert.

Djinn Remains

Whereas some factions of Belial’s Brood enjoy the sprawl of the impoverished masses, this simply will not do for the Throne of Smokeless Fire. Whereas others seek to move as

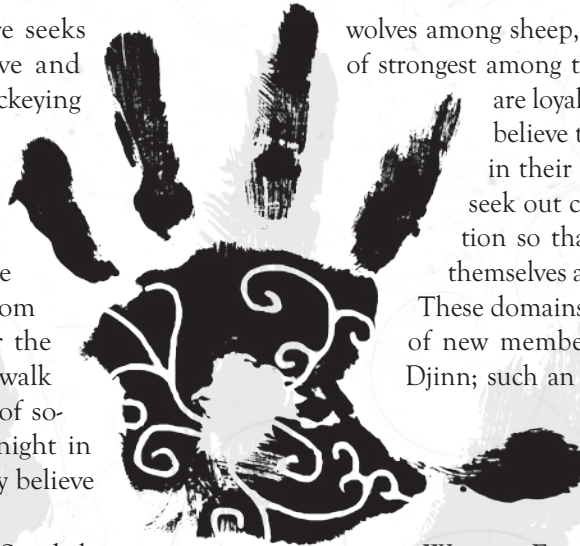
wolves among sheep, for the Djinn only the position of strongest among the strong will do. As most who are loyal to the Throne of Smokeless Fire believe that vampires are clearly superior in their capacities to humans, the Djinn seek out centers of dense Kindred population so that the faction members can test themselves against those who may be worthy. These domains also serve the faction as sources of new membership, as one is rarely made a Djinn; such an honor must be earned by one’s own efforts.

The Djinn are at their most numerous in the continental United States and Western Europe. Among the powerful and influential, the agents of the Throne of Smokeless Fire establish temples where those who rule among the more tame breeds of Kindred can come and test their so-called sovereignty. While these sorts of gambits can result in all involved being blood-hunted to the greatest extent time and money will allow, the Djinn are hardly wanting for resources and can easily recover from such attempts, quickly establishing new bases of operation from which they can issue their challenges to the next worthy comer.

Along the North African coast, between Morocco and Iraq, the Djinn are abundant. This is likely because the oldest of the Throne of Smokeless Fire’s temples were built in this region during the Crusades. Although the Djinn were as strange and frightening to Muslims as the Djinn are to the Christians of the age, these sites were likely selected to avoid the pilgrimage routes of fanatical Templars and the Knights of Malta as they made their way to the Holy Land, and the Djinn thus built their temples distantly south of the southern coast of Europe. The location of the Valley of Lalish in Iraq is but a couple of miles from the largest and oldest Djinn temple still extant in the modern world, and Morocco houses several of the largest and most powerful coveys of the Throne anywhere in the world.

Rites of Smokeless Fire

The ceremonies and traditions of the Throne of the Smokeless Fire are an intense mix of formality and brutality. Though



malevolent and predatory in intention, the Djinn rites are often thick with powerful iconography and expensive preparations. Black marble baptismal fonts, antique ritual weapons and huge statues are not uncommon when the Throne of Smokeless Fire gathers to honor power. However, despite the Djinn's love of draconian and fascist imagery, the rituals of the Throne of Smokeless Fire are not as ancient as one might think as the faction's emphasis on action and conquest take complete precedence, leaving scholarship and the translation of ancient texts as a passing afterthought.

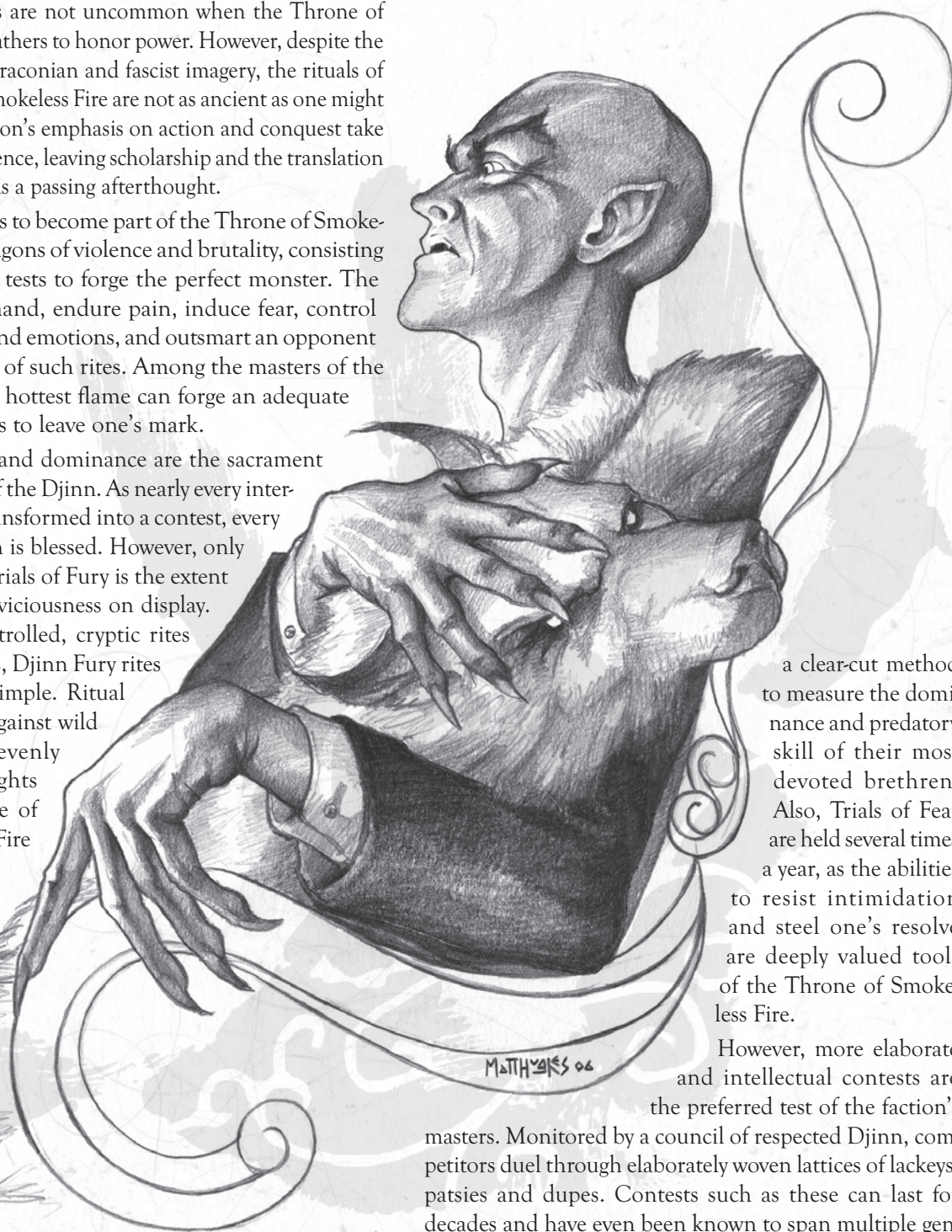
The initiations to become part of the Throne of Smokeless Fire are paragons of violence and brutality, consisting of a gauntlet of tests to forge the perfect monster. The ability to command, endure pain, induce fear, control one's own fear and emotions, and outsmart an opponent are all elements of such rites. Among the masters of the Djinn, only the hottest flame can forge an adequate weapon if one is to leave one's mark.

Competition and dominance are the sacrament and birthright of the Djinn. As nearly every interaction can be transformed into a contest, every act of aggression is blessed. However, only in the Djinn's Trials of Fury is the extent of the faction's viciousness on display. Unlike the controlled, cryptic rites of other factions, Djinn Fury rites are dreadfully simple. Ritual combat, duels against wild beasts and unevenly matched pit fights give the Throne of the Smokeless Fire

a clear-cut method to measure the dominance and predatory skill of their most devoted brethren. Also, Trials of Fear are held several times a year, as the abilities to resist intimidation and steel one's resolve are deeply valued tools of the Throne of Smokeless Fire.

However, more elaborate and intellectual contests are the preferred test of the faction's masters. Monitored by a council of respected Djinn, competitors duel through elaborately woven lattices of lackeys, patsies and dupes. Contests such as these can last for decades and have even been known to span multiple generations. The victor in such contests will generally receive a reward of great value to the covey or of gross value, such as a large sum of money or control of one of the loser's ghouls. However, the stakes may be all or nothing, with the winner seizing the loser's assets, servants and unlife.

Nickname: Djinn



Appearance: The Djinn wear the skins of wolves in whatever setting they prowl — whether in a power suit, a biker jacket or a one-of-a-kind evening gown, the Throne of the Smokeless Fire aims to intimidate and control. At the street level, the Djinn will be dressed in gear that clearly represents his rank and power. In business, members of the Throne of Smokeless Fire exude menace and wealth through carefully selected garments. However, only among their own, in the privacy of their havens and ritual halls, are the Djinn free to adorn themselves in trophies of those they have crushed and destroyed, hoping to attract the favor of the Adversary that guides them. It is important to note that even though the Djinn are fanatical and brutal, their emphasis on action over theory means they almost never wear visible occult trappings.

Haven: Needless to say, in the modern world one needs more than brawn to win most battles worth winning. Because of this, the Throne of Smokeless Fire is rarely without ample resources with which to enable its members' ascent to power. Massive estates, luxury penthouse apartments and technologically enabled militia compounds all serve as suitable havens for the Djinn.

Background: As mentioned earlier, the Throne of Smokeless Fire accepts the most aggressive, ruthless and superior of Kindred into the faction's august ranks, rarely if ever going out of the way to select untested humans unless they are of an incredibly actualized nature. Where these types are found varies depending on what level these gifts have manifested. Gangrel are often prized for their savage wisdom and raw survivability, whereas Daeva are valued for their force of personality and explosive strength and speed. The Ventrue, however, provide excellent stock because they possess both a capacity to rule and the un-

stable psychology that gives them an edge when interpreting the dictums and traditions of the Djinn. Needless to say, the Nosferatu are also strong among the Djinn, for no other clan commands fear in mortals with the same virtuosity of the Haunts. Of the Unlearned covenants, members of the Invictus are the most likely to convert to the cause of the Djinn.

Organization: Somewhat unique among the Brood, the Djinn are organized along the lines of rigid hierarchies of dominance. However, these are offices of pure control and do not obligate the Djinn to any role of demagogue or guru, only master. Regardless of titles, the soldiers of the Throne of Smokeless fire are self-absorbed and unconcerned with enormous networks of operatives and slaves. If a Djinn of high rank needs something done, he may command a less achieved brother to resolve the matter for him but is just as likely to do it himself, adding another notch of achievement to his belt. Coveys of the Throne of Smokeless Fire also tend to be a bit larger than those of other factions, but still within a manageable pack structure, and thus tend to average six members. An area with more than six Djinn produces a second covey, which vies bitterly with the first.

Favored Aspect: *Soma*. Power, rage, dominance and competition: the body is the instrument of power in the world. Whether physical combat, emotional resilience or intellectual rigor, the Throne of Smokeless Fire seeks to actualize its members into perfect predators, feared and respected by all as the chosen agents of the Adversary on Earth.

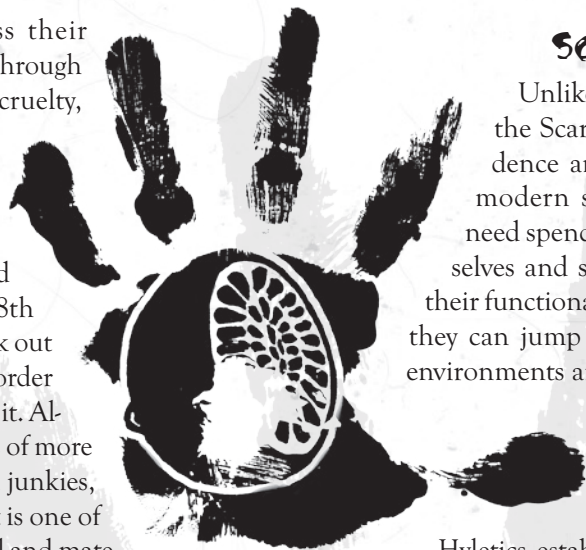
Concepts: Crime boss, deranged mercenary, ex-marine, foreman, gang leader, hit man, pit fighter, Third World warlord, union rep/union buster.

"Turn your eyes from me, child of sheep,
lest I pull your entrails out your mouth."

The Scarlet Rite

Where some factions express their understanding of the Adversary through acts of systematic brutality and cruelty, the Scarlet Rite chooses a softer shade of indulgence. While many such *sarx*-affiliated cults existed before, the faction truly came into its own amidst the perfumed parlors and salons of the early 18th century. The so-called Hyletics seek out ever-increasing carnal pleasures in order to satisfy the flesh that calls out for it. Although often dismissed by fanatics of more visceral cults as mere perverts and junkies, the path to Hyletic enlightenment is one of unrestrained lust, of both personal and material excess. While not as fixated on murder and mutilation, the limits of sexual deviance mark the point at which the ceremonies of the Scarlet Rite begin.

Undeniably the newest of the major factions of the Forsworn, the Scarlet Rite found its rise to prominence among the occult societies of the Age of (so-called) Enlightenment at the beginning of the 18th century. Where society still maintained its veneer of piety and higher thinking, in England, two organizations calling themselves "The Hellfire Club" surfaced with an agenda that frightened the prudish minds of the day. Although neither of these societies performed the Black Masses and satanic rites for which they are so infamous, one *did* consciously work toward undermining conventional morality to the best of its ability. Nonetheless, many of the members who were interested in more visceral satisfaction departed at this time. These degenerates then created their own society, called the "Scarlet Rite," which focused on acts of immorality instead of words. However, on the evening of January 18, 1723, a Kindred calling herself the Chalice of Babalon arrived. After that evening's events, half of the society's membership was dead and the other half had become the most powerful covey the ideology had ever seen. This covey, more than anything, was responsible for the rise of the Scarlet Rite as a major Brood faction. The Rite has grown rapidly ever since, taking powerful root in every debauchery human civilization has had to offer.



Scarlet Rite Domains

Unlike a good number of Forsworn, the Scarlet Rite prefers to take up residence among the swarming masses of modern society. Where other factions need spend many years entrenching themselves and setting up operations to insure their functionality, the Hyletics often find that they can jump right into most mortal social environments and turn them on their ear.

In North America, the Scarlet Rite works on two fronts. On the coasts and in the major cities of the Midwest, the

Hyletics establish their havens and cultivate surges in vice that they can steer toward greater menace. In places such as New York, Montreal, Los Angeles, Miami and Chicago, drugs, prostitution and black market pornography are spread out before Hyletics like a garden of earthly delights. However, the rare jewels are found in America's Bible Belt. In the repressed, quiet towns of the Midwest, a covey of the Scarlet Rite can demolish the social norm, using their ghouls and cultists to coax a quiet hardware store owner into an incestuous relationship with his own daughter or push a church activities director into secret atrocities of abuse and molestation.

In Central and South America, the Hyletics have entrenched strongholds in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. In these cities, the rich can come and enjoy unimaginable debauchery in luxuriously furnished compounds without any worry of legal scandal or legal consequence. In such places, the Hyletics and their cults have access to influential politicians, powerful corporate executives and famous entertainers, and the Hyletics infuse them with sugar-coated versions of their own dark philosophies that can later be disseminated to their social circles when they return home.

In Asia, Bangkok serves as Mecca for the Scarlet Rite. As anonymous connoisseurs of flesh and sin crawl like ants over the sex trade districts of the Sodom of the East, the Forsworn of the Scarlet Rite sit at the top of the hill. It is said that the "sacredness" of Bangkok is so significant to the Hyletics that more than a dozen

permanent temples have been established throughout the city, and have been maintained since the end of the 19th century. The Scarlet Rite has also made itself strong in Hong Kong and Tokyo, although these strongholds do not play host to nowhere near the magnitude of the faction's activities in Bangkok.

The fall of the Iron Curtain also resulted in heightened Hyletic activity in that region. In addition to legal and illegal prostitution, drug-related crimes have also seen an increase. In the city of Prague, young people are turned out for prostitution and hardcore pornography regardless of age, and every form of perversion can be met with but a few American dollars. It is not by chance that an increase in such things directly correlates to the arrival of Hyletic cults.

While zealous in their explorations of the limits of pleasure, the Hyletics are not stupid. In the areas of the world where sexual misconduct can be met with torture and death at the hands of religious fundamentalists, the Scarlet Rite stays clear. To wit, few Hyletic cults maintain power bases in any major city of the Middle East. During the early 1800s, the Scarlet Rite had a significant presence in China, but there has been precious little Hyletic activity there since the beginning of the 20th century.

Rites of the Hyletics

The aim of most Hyletic rites is to consume and devour without care or consequence, focusing almost exclusively on the satisfaction of appetite. The zealous among the Hyletics are marked by a total and constant

gluttony, denying the present moment and the past in favor of a future of more and more flesh. While Hyletic rituals may not be as horrifying as those of the Roaring Serpent or the Pandaemonium, what makes them truly powerful is how easily others, human and Kindred, are lured to participate.

The Scarlet Rite practices the *Vaulderie* in a number of ways. Because the drinking of blood and blood play are considered a high-risk activity for humans insofar as the spreading of disease is concerned, indulging in such a ritual would be a rare opportunity for the human libertine. In some extra decadent performances of the Hyletic *Vaulderie*, an exceptionally attractive ghoul may serve as the vessel, with participants taking their fill from the ghoul's mouth or from incisions made in his body. In addition, performances of the *Vaulderie* will often take place in the midst of mass orgies, where the desire for flesh and the thirst for blood can be satisfied simultaneously.

Although undeniably a *sarx* cult, the Scarlet Rite also encourages the heavy use of hallucinogens and uninhibitory drugs during the faction's rituals. Not only do such substances relax the moorings around the moral foundations of the participants nearly to collapse, but they also create a dreamlike atmosphere where what is actually happening is difficult to discern. Under these conditions and the provocations of persistent Hyletics, what would normally be a little drug experimentation and exotic sex among consenting adults can be taken to a much more ominous level.



Despite the parties and kink of the Hyletics, however, the Trials of Hunger among the Scarlet Rite are no less terrifying than the most debased rite of any other faction. In the private ritual chambers of these Forsworn, ritual rape, pedophilia, bestiality and even necrophilia are commonplace. In some cases, a victim will be restrained for several nights of ceremony, repeatedly subjected to ritual abuse for the fulfillment of the Scarlet Rite's insatiable carnal appetite.

Nickname: Hyletics

Appearance: Despite the bestial nature of their pastimes, the Hyletics still maintain fairly human standards of dress and attractiveness. Depending on the stock from which they feed, devotees of the Scarlet Rite will wear anything from designer suits to stylish club wear to couture fetish accessories. Unlike the more brutal Pandaemonium, members of the Scarlet Rite are often too vain for excessive piercing or tattoos, generally only indulging in such body play in the interest of making themselves more attractive or as a sexual enhancement. There are always exceptions, however, as sometimes remaining completely innocuous serves the faction to better effect.

Haven: The Hyletics, though wanton and reckless in their ways, prey on two levels of society – the estranged and desperate of the sex trade and the curious and deviant of high society. The havens the Hyletics select reflect this focus. The most common sorts are private residences of the rich. Enormous mansions with all the amenities prove more than adequate playgrounds for Hyletic gatherings. On one occasion, a Hyletic Therion seized control and influence over a preparatory academy in rural Massachusetts. The resulting scandals still precipitate to this day. While such opulent atmospheres are highly desirable, the Hyletics most often hole up in weekly rent apartment complexes in close proximity to red light districts, hourly fee motels located near truck stops and biker bars, as well as “massage parlors,” “escort services” and actual brothels. In addition, it is not uncommon for members of the Scarlet Rite to establish temporary

settings of excess in the form of private, underground sex and fetish clubs. Entry is for members or by invitation only, and the experiences that lie within are beyond the imagining of even the most jaded. Nonetheless, the Hyletics generally select their havens because of the ease of their maintenance, as most cannot be bothered with exhaustive record-keeping or business management, and will rarely devote more than a mortal servant or two to such things.

Background: Although promiscuous in almost all other matters, members of the Scarlet Rite are rather narrow when it comes to the stock from which the faction's adherents are drawn. Sex trade professionals (both legal and illegal) and the wealthy constitute a strong majority of the faction's membership. Among the Kindred, Daeva are preferred for any number of reasons, though Gangrel and Ventruue likewise find the Rite appealing. Among the covenants, members of the Lancea Sanctum and Carthian Movement are most susceptible to the Scarlet Rite's allure.

Organization: Overall, the Rite is non-hierarchical, though Sentinels and eunuch ghouls are often used for security at important events. Temporary officers called “patrons” often host such galas and are responsible for procuring havens and holdings. The Therion (called “Perfecti” among the Hyletics, and often by non-Hyletic Brood scholars, as well) are often used as unliving centerpieces at orgy rites, as the infertility of the priest caste serves as symbol and crux to the meaninglessness of all the frenzied lust and sex.

Favored Aspect: *Sarx*. The Forsworn of the Scarlet Rite are concerned almost exclusively with the satisfaction and appeasement of the flesh. Whether through sex, drugs or more obscure pleasures, the satisfaction of desire is all that matters, and all laws, spiritual tenets and lofty aims of apocalypse fall silent at the feet of supernal lust.

Concepts: Blood junkie, club owner, dominatrix, fetishist, pornographer, prostitute, serial rapist, starlet, trust fund dilettante.

*“if you think that felt good,
just take one of these and follow me.”*

Minor Factions

While the factions of the Hexad constitute the most numerous and powerful of Forsworn philosophies, they are far from the only ones. In a covenant as diverse as Belial's Brood, the number of potential sub-factions is limited only by the number of coveys worldwide. Since the factions of Hexad comprise the six most archetypal mindsets of the inhuman vampire, most of the factions outside their ranks are truly just offshoots of one of the six parent factions, but some are different enough to bear discussion as truly separate entities. The important thing to remember about sub-factions is that regardless of their specific behaviors or beliefs, they all share in the same basic tenets that bind all Forsworn together, core elements that include the Pursuit, the Tongue of the Beast, the Vaulderie, the manifestation of Investments and of course, the Trinity.

In this latter regard, the identity of these smaller factions can be most singularly and efficiently personified. When incorporating or even designing a sub-faction of the Brood, the most important question a Storyteller needs to ask is, "With which aspect of the Trinity is the covey most heavily associated?" Is it a *pneuma* cult, a *sarx* cult or a *soma* cult? Some concepts don't fall so neatly into one of these three categories, but it's important that the Storyteller ultimately settle on one as being most iconic because the covey's favored aspect benefit will be derived from this decision. Of course, a Storyteller can always choose to deny his sub-faction a favored aspect benefit at all, but in the interests of fairness, every Brood member — regardless of his faction's size or power — should have the opportunity to receive a favored aspect benefit from his faction.

The minor factions presented here are intended to showcase the manner in which factional offshoots can arise, and what form such diversion typically takes.

The Corpus Delecti (The Body Criminal)

More than an extended covey, less than a faction, the Corpus Delecti refers to itself most frequently as a cabal. The history of this bizarre religious sect (bizarre even by Belial's Brood standards) can be concretely traced to the occult fascination of England's Victorian Era, though members of the Corpus Delecti themselves claim that

their beliefs descend from far more ancient sources. Members of the cabal believe strongly in the duality of mortal (and vampire) nature, the juxtaposition of the flesh and the spirit, but they carry that belief to an extent that, in the eyes of other vampires, can only rationally be defined as mad.

The Corpus Delecti's philosophy is complex, spread across dozens of occult mantras and philosophical treatises, but when boiled down to its simplest, most fundamental concept, states simply this: he who consumes the blood of a man, so, too, does he consume the essence, the soul, of that man. Every mortal a vampire drains unto death, according to Corpus Delecti belief, is a soul added to the vampire's own spirit, making him that much more a being of spirit, of *pneuma*, that much less a being of flesh. Should a vampire consume a sufficiency of souls, he can become a being truly beyond the flesh entirely, a being of pure soul, just as the Adversary himself. This is the final fate of those vampires who prove most worthy, and the ultimate goal of every member of the cabal.

This renders the Corpus Delecti a threat to the Masquerade beyond even the rest of the Forsworn. Because a mortal must be consumed *completely* for her soul to be taken in with her blood, members of the group very rarely leave their vessels alive. In fact, paradoxically, only if a member of the cabal frenzies while feeding is the vessel likely to survive. Even though feeding is the most intimate act of which the Kindred are capable, the vampires of the Corpus Delecti *always* hunt in groups of at least three. This is so that, should a feeding vampire frenzy, the others can pull him off his prey. These vampires believe that only pure souls bring the one who consumes them closer to ascension. Frenzy during feeding is a sign that the Beast has recognized a darkness in the mortal soul akin to its own, and the presence of that darkness makes the soul far too impure for absorption. To be allowed to feed from a vessel while in frenzy is, for the Corpus Delecti, a horror akin to the way most mortals view cannibalism.

Similarly, any soul already taken in by a vampire has bonded with the Beast, and become too impure for anyone else to benefit from. As such, the Corpus Delecti abhors the notion of diablerie, and its members prefer any fate — up to and including Final Death — to committing the detestable and sacrilegious act.

The Horned Hand (Alpdrücke)

The extended covey known as the Horned Hand was born in the forested hills of Bavaria shortly after the turn of the 16th century. At that time, the cult was a Circle of the Crone coterie dedicated to a goat-headed folk god who had allegedly guarded the people of the region since the pre-conversion times of the eighth century. Some hints concerning the original cult can be found in *Indiculus Superstitionum Et Paganarium*, a document fragment dated from around AD 740 in Bavaria. It is also believed that the historical accounts of the Hartz Mountain Witches are related to this circle. During their days as Acolytes, members of the cult was discreet, though often the subject of superstition and tall tales in the nearby village of Teufelziege — a town that has barely changed to this very night. When a town elder by name of Leopold Von Metzger was Embraced by the coven's Hierophant, however, everything changed. This Hierophant of the Horned Hand (a Nosferatu known only as "Frau Uli") had taken to the earth for the long sleep, and her subordinates lacked direction in her absence. Suspicious of Von Metzger's intent, the coterie prohibited him from attending Winnowings and kept him distanced from other major rituals. Von Metzger, who actually *was* plotting to take control of the cult, was still profoundly insulted by the presumption. So he rallied the town's populace with the help of his three mortal sons, and had the old Horned Hand (as well as its elder) destroyed while the Acolytes slept, helpless.

Since that time, the cult has assumed almost total control of the isolated village of Teufelziege, making ghouls of some and holding the rest captive with terror, violence and nightmares (for which the cult members were given their nickname). The covey now consists entirely of Forsworn claiming to be Von Metzger's sons and grandchildren, all of whom maintain the patriarchal tenets of their father in his absence. Leopold Von Metzger himself is believed to be resting somewhere in the forest, sleeping the sleep of ages as his covey waits for his return.

Most rites of the Horned Hand take place on the same holy days recognized by the Circle of the Crone, with the primary exception being the elimination of the Crone's Liturgy and the addition of a feast celebrating the birth of their beast-god — celebrated on the day of Von Metzger's Embrace. The similarities end there, however, as the Forsworn of the Horned Hand believe that empowerment and enlightenment have but one price and one price alone . . . and that price is paid with a steady flow of living blood. Offered upon shrines hidden deep in the thicket of the Bavarian Forest, the Alpdrücke use the blood and pain of their sacrifices to summon up their own Beasts.

Once the frenzied rite is in full motion, the members of the cult descend like jackals on the living sacrifices, ripping them to shreds and endeavoring to lap up every drop of blood. Woe be unto the unwary traveler who should happen upon the blighted town of Teufelziege.

The Teeth of Yamatu (The Eaten)

Although this minor faction of the Forsworn likely claims no more than a couple dozen members worldwide, the Teeth of Yamatu is a source of terror even among Belial's Brood itself. Where the other factions may conduct their rites of power, destruction, blasphemy and lust, the Eaten are inspired only by the singular desire to consume creation itself. Nightmarish in both practices and appearance, the Teeth of Yamatu claims to be the most ancient of all *sarx* cults, its population diminishing over time to allow for the undiminished purity of its rites to continue.

It is the belief of the Eaten that there is no Adversary/Demiurge in any traditional sense. The yawning and devouring void, which they call Yamatu, is that to which all flesh must return, and the hunger of that void must be appeased. Life feeds this emptiness, they believe, and it is on this simple idea that their views of Kindred existence are based. However, the extreme to which the Eaten take this idea is terrifying even to the most jaded of minds. Although respected among *sarx* adherents as masters of that aspect of the Trinity, the Teeth technically fail as a body of the Brood, as they only practice two of the Archontes — the Vaulderie and acts of blood sacrifice. This is because the Vaulderie serves as the sole method of initiation among the Eaten, and sacrifice is its inevitable result.

Because they exclusively focus on the hunger and appetite of the Beast, the Eaten are cursed to devour live flesh and blood if they are to find nourishment. Stores of blood will not serve the pangs of the Eaten for long, so access to a large herd is a must. For this reason the Eaten are generally only found in Third World or war-torn countries where people can go permanently missing for any number of reasons. Even in such a setting, the Teeth of Yamatu avoids human contact almost entirely and doesn't use ghouls or a human cult.

To join the covey of the Teeth of Yamatu, one must undergo a very simple but profoundly unsettling initiation. After fasting for three nights while surrounded by one's covey brothers and sisters, the candidate must devour the flesh and blood of an entire human (or in special cases, another vampire), leaving nothing but the bones and teeth. This trial can require an enormous

span of time, as the candidate may only use his own teeth and fingers to feed himself. During this grizzly test of endurance, the aspirant undergoes a physical change as well as a spiritual one; the eyes of the candidate fill over white as a red crackle of vessels covers the eyeballs, while the initiate's teeth turn as black as obsidian. After this transformation and the feast are over, the teeth are jerked clean of the sacrifice's skull and given over to the newly initiated Eaten as a symbol of his acceptance. After the completion of this rite, the new member feels a compunction to derive nourishment from blood only if it is taken with equal parts of flesh. (In game terms, every member of this faction possesses the Belial's Feast Investment.)

PARENT CLAN: ANY?

Both the Therion bloodline and the Doulosi ghoule family are oddities of vampire physiology. How does a bloodline emerge without a parent clan? How does a ghoule family solidify its mystic properties enough to pass on the supernatural power of the Blood without also inheriting the unique aspects of the clan from which they derive their power? If bloodlines can be formed without the fetters of blood shackling them to one clan or another, if ghoule blood can achieve the difficult goal of graduating to a full-fledged ghoule lineage without an intimate debt to any one clan, why don't more vampires strive to win this kind of flexibility for their own bloodlines and their own ghoule families?

In the fictional game world of **Vampire**, the answer is simple: The Therion are not really a bloodline and the Doulosi are not really a ghoule family. At least, not in the same way that other

bloodlines and ghoule families are. Rather, they are unique anomalies of the Blood, perhaps caused by ancient contact with hellfire but reproducible through the same Vitae-altering methods that Kindred use to transmute their essential blood from that of a clan to that of a bloodline. The sanguine mutations that make a vampire into a Therion, for example, are not strictly the same as those that result in more traditional bloodlines, but the changes these transformations cause in the Blood render vampires unable to adopt any other bloodline. The effect is similar for the Doulosi — their weakness even demonstrates how volatile it can be to mix these blood anomalies with more common vampire blood factors.

In the language of the game itself, the issue is even less fantastic: What happens in the game world and how it's described in the game mechanics are not always the same. Vampires in and out of the Brood mistake the Therion and the Doulosi for things more commonly encountered (bloodlines and ghoule families), but that doesn't make them the same. The effects of the Therion and the Doulosi on gameplay are similar enough to those of regular bloodlines and ghoule families that it's not worth your trouble to learn new systems to use them. The role that these elements play in Belial's Brood require these mechanisms to be available to characters of any clan, and opening each element to any clan is the most direct way to represent that in the game. Five different Therion bloodlines could have been described — one for each clan, for example — but that would just use more pages to say the same thing.

The basic mechanics of the Doulosi, as described in this book, are enough to use them in most Vampire chronicles, but if you want more information on proper ghoule families and how they work, get yourself a copy of **Ghouls**.

Therion

*You have been lied to, brother. But rejoice now,
for you have found truth at last, and it shall set you free.*

In a covenant of inhuman beings ruled by their passions and led only by instinct, one can't help but wonder how the Brood manages to maintain even a semblance of social order, composure or spiritual contiguity. In a primitive pack structure, where each member is more monstrous than the next, one wonders what sort of being could effectively shoulder the responsibility of guiding the others toward that very order, composure and spiritual contiguity. In such a harsh and alien context, what sort of creature could even know how to provide such guidance? And even if it did, what sort of creature could hope to inspire both confidence and fear in sufficient measure to make it all work?

The Therion is just such a creature.

While the Brood happily accepts aspirants of all clans and bloodlines, the Therion is the only vampiric bloodline that is actually unique to the Forsworn. Known as the "bloodline of the Beast," the Therion are the gurus and shamans of the Forsworn, guiding their covey-mates' Beasts toward greater wisdom and power. If the Crux can be likened to a wheel, with each covey member represented by a single spoke, then the Therion is the central hub, the anchor point for the bonds of his covey. A Therion's primal understanding of the Demiurge, and of the Beast's interplay with its ethos, surpasses that of most any other Brood member.

Due to the nature of their role in the covey, and of how they are created in the first place, the Therion are the subjects of equal parts reverence and fear from other Forsworn. The Therion are the product of a strange and powerful rite, performed by a covey with the specific intent of exalting one of their number into the bloodline. Similar to other Archontes, this rite is one that all Forsworn have an instinctive awareness of how to perform upon bonding with others of their kind via the Crux, but their actual understanding of the rite (and thus the Therion) is largely limited to what they *feel* — what their Beasts know as opposed to what their thinking minds know. This subconscious assurance has a tendency to make the

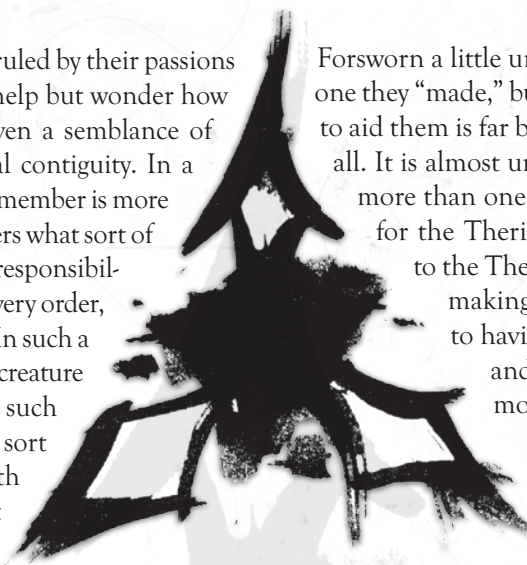
Forsworn a little unsettled by the Therion, even by the one they "made," but they know that having one around to aid them is far better than not having one around at all. It is almost unheard of for a Brood covey to have more than one Therion among its ranks, however, for the Therion's gifts cannot benefit those tied to the Therion by blood more than once (thus making redundancy the only real purpose to having a second Therion in one's covey, and its presence would undoubtedly do more harm than good).

In keeping with patterns central to other aspects of the Brood, the Therion focus on the Forsworn view of existence as being partitioned into three stages: mortality, vampirism and vampirism among the Forsworn.

While some Therion hail from the rare ranks of those Embraced directly into the Brood, the vast majority led unlives of blithe ignorance among the Unlearned before hearing the Call, and most consider it a weakness for one to have joined the bloodline bereft of this crucial experience (with exceptions, of course, made for those Therion prodigies spoken of in Brood prophecy).

While most of their dark wisdom is, like so much else in the Brood, largely a function of the primal, of the instinctual rather than the intellectual, a number of Therion have attempted to express in written format the ideas most central to their bloodline over the centuries. The practice began in Italy, after a Milanese printer named Panfilo Castaldi developed an early printing press using blocks of moveable type (some 10 years prior to the work of a certain German goldsmith). Seeing the potential inherent in the machine, an Antinomian Therion of the time by name of Arturo Ceniza secured the plans and constructed for himself a duplicate. With this device, he printed the first copies of the tome that would come to be known by many names, the first and still the most prevalent of which is the *Book of Threefold Darkness*.

The closest thing the Brood has to a Bible, the *Book* lays out, in head-swimmingly cryptic and circuitous fashion, a series of interwoven treatises on the nature of the Beast



and its relation to man. And, similar to the Bible, the *Book* was born of numerous authors, each of whom held different revelations and approaches, but nearly every version sees disturbingly consistent agreement on the basics, each version divided into precisely nine chapters. Ceniza's true intent was for the book to serve as a powerful resonant, to help draw other vampires to the Brood, and as the *Book's* legacy has spread, his wish has come true many, many times over.

Parent Clan: Any (though Gangrel is far and away the most common). Brood members of at least Blood Potency 3 can adopt this bloodline without need for an Avus if they have at least two other Brood members to aid them in the rite. In essence, covey and Vaulderie combine to replace the need for an Avus. (See Chapter Two.) This is the only way for a character to join the Therion.

Nickname: Advocates. (This name is only known and used in so far as it is the word that best describes the complicated concept that comes to mind when the Forsworn speak to one another about their bloodline in the Tongue of the Beast.) In practice, what a Therion is called has more to do with the faction affiliation of the speaker than anything else. The vast majority of Scarlet Rite-dominant coveys, for example, refer to the Therion as Perfecti, while Antinomian coveys tend to call them "magisters" and Archons often refer to one as a "Fortunatus." The Nameless deliberately avoid speaking of the Therion outside of the Tongue.

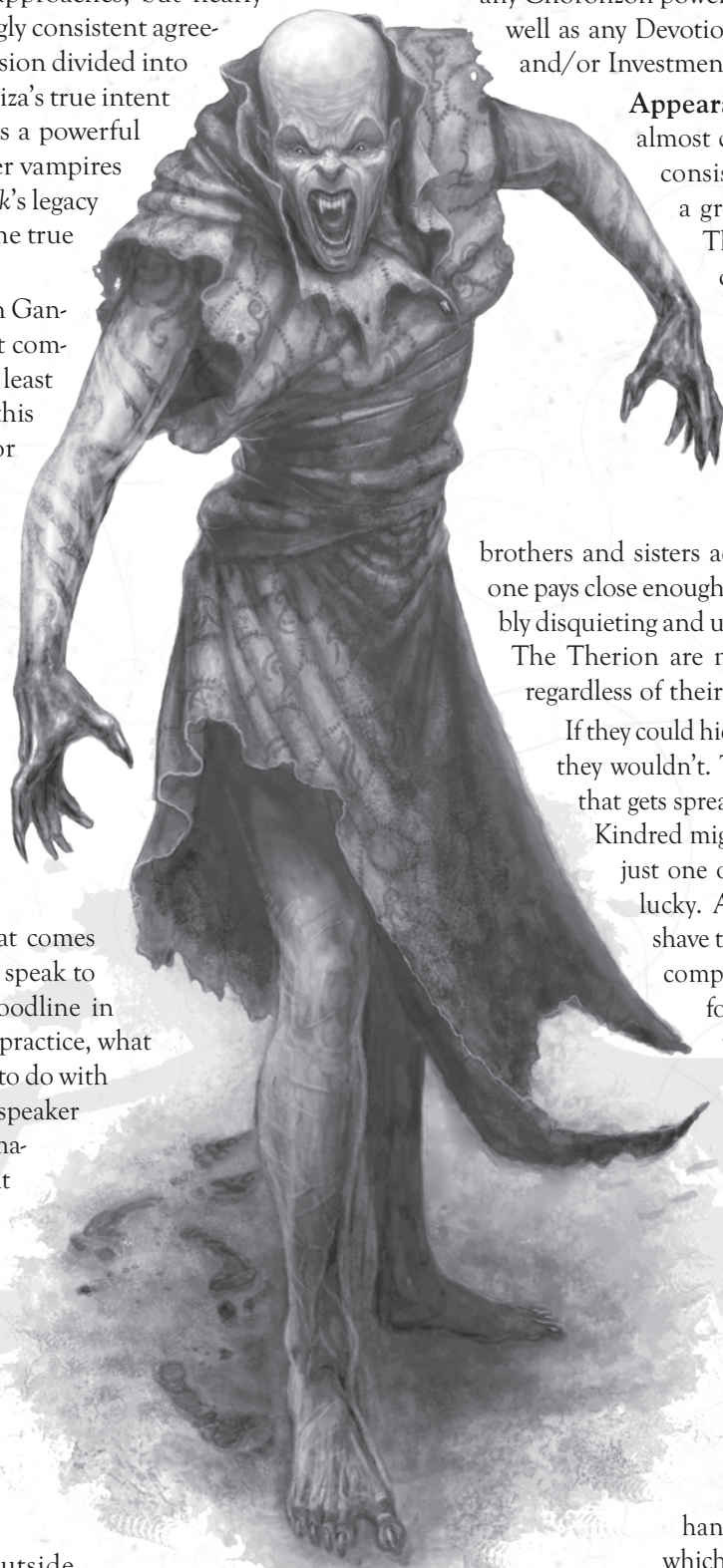
Covenant: Vampires outside the Brood are incapable of manifesting this bloodline. A Therion who chooses to raise his Humanity or join another covenant (and thus leave the Brood) does not stop being a member of his bloodline,

but similar to other Forsworn, he *does* lose all Investments. In addition, a Therion apostate also loses knowledge of any Choronzon powers he may have learned, as well as any Devotions for which Choronzon and/or Investments are a prerequisite.

Appearance: The Therion are almost deliberate in their lack of consistency in appearance, as a group. What connects one Therion to another is not clan, or faction or even blood, but something far more ephemeral. One tells the Therion of a Brood covey not by the color of his skin or the clothes draped over his frame, but by the way his brothers and sisters act in his presence, and if one pays close enough attention, by the inscrutably disquieting and utterly alien look in his eye. The Therion are monstrous and detached, regardless of their outward seeming.

If they could hide their homicidal insanity, they wouldn't. The image of the Therion that gets spread in the whispers of other Kindred might make you think there's just one of them, but you're not so lucky. According to rumor, they shave their bodies, so that no hair competes with their dark eyes for attention. They go barefoot, because they're not afraid of a little pain. They wear loose ponchos sewn together from the best parts of human skins, stained and branded with angelic glyphs stolen and defaced by a thousand years of Satanists. The Therion chew on these ponchos to keep their hunger at bay. Dizzying black tattoos run down their arms to utterly black hands, dripping with blood, which they walk through, leaving behind bare red footprints.

How much of that fearmonger's image is true? Any of it? Meeting a Therion is the only way to know the truth — if you survive long enough to know you've met one.



Haven: As important as the Therion are to their covey-mates, the Therion take no special pains to make their havens in any one particular place or fashion, as a rule. They will, however, often assume the role of covey Seneschal, opening their own havens for use as communal resting, ritual or meeting spaces, or in some cases, securing a separate place exclusively for the covey's use. Once a haven is established, the day-to-day details are typically left to subordinates (often a trusted ghoul of the covey), but the trust a covey places in its Therion is the often the first step to getting such measures underway, if not resolved outright. After that, it's just a matter of making sure the haven is secure, wherever it may be.

Background: A prospective Therion can come from any vampiric clan or mortal walk of life. The determining factors revolve much more heavily around the character's philosophical outlook and moral composition. Since no vampire comes to the Brood already a Therion, the importance of one's background is, as so many other things among the Forsworn, primarily about the *process*. Facets of one's first stage are pertinent only as they pertain to the attainment of the second stage, much as second-stage experiences are important primarily insofar as they pertain to one's heeding the Call, and so on. If an aspect of a Therion's background, mortal or otherwise, stands in the way of his Pursuit, it falls upon him to address it, but solely in the interests of deconstructing it and ultimately stripping the forgotten thing of its present or future hold over him. Otherwise, the things of the past are religiously, relentlessly, left to the past.

That said, certain fundamental personality traits do seem to appear more often than not among the Therion, despite their disparate nature as a bloodline. Foremost among these is a strong tendency toward introspection, an inborn gift, if you will, for what people call "soul searching." A vampire who does not yet know who (and what) he is or what he believes is not yet ready to be a Therion. Second only to this trait is the Therion's ability to bear witness to anything and everything in the interests of attained enlightenment – what some Brood scholars have dubbed "an avid willingness to gaze unflinchingly into the abyss." The ascension of a Therion's blood opens his eyes to images and truths that would easily shatter more delicate minds, and history has shown this propensity to develop early on in the mortal lives of all but the rarest few of the Therion.

Character Creation: A Therion is likely to continue focusing on whatever Traits he favored before adopting the bloodline, with an added interest in developing his Wits score. The Therion are repositories of primal wisdom, and as such, tend to focus on such Skills as Animal Ken, Empathy and Occult. Physical Traits tend to merit the least attention for those who walk the path of the Advocate, but as they

are still vampires (and Forsworn vampires at that), Skills such as Stealth and Survival will always retain their appeal. Depending on the character's role in the story, he may find it worthwhile to pursue acquisition of Contacts who can be of benefit to his covey, but on the whole, Merits tend to take a back seat to other pursuits once a character becomes a Therion. Remember that a character must have at least three dots of Blood Potency to even be eligible for the bloodline.

Bloodline Disciplines: When a character adopts this bloodline, his player selects two of his clan's favored Disciplines. The third is dropped and replaced by Obfuscate. The bloodline Discipline is Choronzon, the hallmark of the Therion.

Example: *The Daeva head of a Brood covey reaches Blood Potency 3 and decides to inherit his blood legacy as his covey-mates' resident Therion. After the character spends the requisite permanent Willpower dot and engages in the proper Vaulderie ritual, his player selects Celerity and Majesty from among his clan Disciplines, thus dropping Vigor and acquiring Choronzon and Obfuscate.*

Weakness: All Therion suffer from their parent clan's weakness. A Nosferatu Therion remains as frightful as a Ventrue Therion remains mentally deranged. Those who adopt this bloodline suffer from an additional blood-borne debilitation, however, and some find it a grave one indeed. Once a vampire has gone through the mystic transformation that makes him a Therion, he may never again sire childer. Forsworn Advocates are incapable of passing on the Curse, and should they try to Embrace anyway, their subjects always die screaming, their eyes turning a glossy black before smoldering painfully away into thick, black ash. This infertility is a sacrifice on the part of the Therion that cannot be undone, and the Forsworn look upon it as further proof of the bloodline's devotion to the Brood.

Organization: As one might expect, the Therion have little organization to speak of when it comes to other Therion. While the caste itself is large and influential in the covenant worldwide, each Therion, similar to each Brood covey, is very much an individual, and beyond that, an important member of the covey he serves. All other considerations pale in comparison to an Advocate's duties to his bonded brothers and sisters, though Brood members outside the covey can expect to be treated with some respect, particularly if they, too, are of the Therion's own faction. Depending on the region, and the number of coveys present therein, the Therion of a given faction will stay in communication with each other (this is especially true of those in the Nameless and the Perfecti of the Scarlet Rite), but like just about all Forsworn, are leery of getting too involved in one another's business.

Concepts: Anthropologist, clinical euthanasist, confessor, idiot savant, modern primitive, philosophy professor, psychonaut, street chemist, swami.

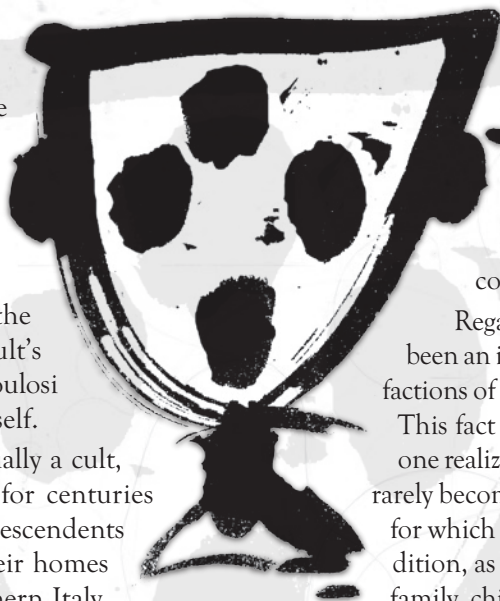
The Doulosi

*"That's good advice, but I'm no stranger, dear.
I'm an old friend of your mother's, and she's terribly hurt.
Hop on in and we'll go to her together. There's a good girl ..."*

The Doulosi cult of ghouls is perhaps one of the strangest entities to arise in the shadow world of the undead. The Doulosi's ability to blend into the changes of the ages often leads those who investigate such things to grossly underestimate the true antiquity of the Doulosi's line. Although several factions of the Forsworn claim to be the ghoule cult's source, just as many claim that the Doulosi were, in fact, founded by Belial himself.

Nonetheless, the Doulosi are actually a cult, and not a true ghoul family, that for centuries filled its ranks primarily with the descendents of six mortal families who made their homes along the Mediterranean — in northern Italy, around the Greek Islands and in Cyprus. The families were generally wealthy, but of lower social standing and often on the outs with their respective courts or ruling bodies. After making their pact with the Doulosi patricians, their woes were mysteriously eased and the Doulosi would collect their payment. Payment usually consisted of a firstborn child, or the head of the house taking of the blood of Belial, which was provided by one of the Forsworn of the nearest covey.

The original six families of the Doulosi (a variant on the Greek word for "bondservant") were the Androphonis, Anleemoni, Avigsonne, Carcassonne, Diakonos and the Schiavari. The Avigsonne are perhaps the most well-known among Forsworn worldwide, although the Androphonis are believed to be the oldest. It is said that Concetta Avigsonne was the widow of Lothario Avigsonne, an unsuccessful drunk of a merchant whose familial estates were seized in his home of Sardinia. After numerous failed attempts at restoring his fortune, Lothario fell into an irreversible depression. Disgusted by her husband's failure and weakness, Concetta calmly poisoned him. Committed to restoring both her station and her wealth, even while under suspicion for her husband's demise, Concetta Avigsonne attended parties and dinners in search of a new husband. Although she did not find a husband, she



did encounter a Forsworn ghoul who made her an offer she was unable to resist. Although her station in mortal society was never restored, Concetta's unseen influence and wealth was profound, and the power of her line has grown considerably over the centuries.

Regardless of family, the Doulosi cult has been an invaluable support network for several factions of Belial's Brood for at least 2,000 years. This fact is made even more significant when one realizes that the members of this ghoul cult rarely become Forsworn themselves (the reasons for which remain debated to this night). In addition, as the Doulosi are a cult and not a true family, children are born human and require a special ceremony and ritual to become Doulosi.

Similar to the core Vaulderie, the rite of making used to create the Doulosi cultists is an Archonte. Several coveys of the Forsworn have refused to perform the rite, but all Forsworn know how, and most coveys have at least one Doulosi to attend to their needs. The ritual itself is similar to a Vaulderie in the way that the blood of the ghoul candidate (or ghoul) fills a ceremonial vessel, pooling with that of the members of the hosting covey. After the goblet is filled, however, the covey turns its back to the candidate as the aspiring Doulosi empties the vessel in its entirety, often vomiting up the excess in the case of larger coveys. This done, the covey takes up metal styluses and inscribes prayers of blessing, claims of ownership and curses against betrayal on the ghoul's body. At that point, the mortal or ghoul becomes a full member of the Doulosi cult. Among the Nameless, there is a belief that the ghouls who undergo this transformation symbolically inherit the bloodline of Belial himself, whom they believe was a human who sired a hidden litany of mortal offspring. Whether there is any truth to the latter, it does account for the respectful way in which the Nameless handle their Doulosi, and why elders of the Nameless (as well as some of the other factions) take heed of their chosen ghouls, minding them not only for advice, but also for signs and portents.

Nickname: None. Individual members of the Doulosi are often referred to by their family names (e.g., Avigsonne, Diakonos, Androphonis, Anleemoni). In the case of new blood, the ghoul will either take the name of one of the older families (depending on the region and covey) or simply be called by the term “Doulosi.”

Clans: Any. As the Doulosi are not traditional ghoul families, the regnant can be of any clan. Ghouls of the Daeva are sometimes chosen because they are often physically powerful and can socially influence other mortals. Gangrel ghouls make excellent soldiers as well, but more importantly, have experience in dealing with vampires who are dangerously close to the Beast. Mekhet ghouls who have achieved any mastery of their regnant clans’ Disciplines are invaluable, making excellent watchdogs for the Forsworn. In addition, because of the abundance of Mekhet scholars and lore-hoarders, ghouls from their number often possess acute intellect and research skills. Nosferatu ghouls are beloved of many of the more visceral *sarx* cultists for their ability to unleash terror and physical punishment, but are also valued by the Brood in general because they tend to come with strong stomachs and an innate tolerance to things disturbing and nightmarish. Ghouls sustained by Ventrue regnants are versatile and useful, often used to taking orders from domineering Kindred who weave complex schemes that revolve around others’ undoing.

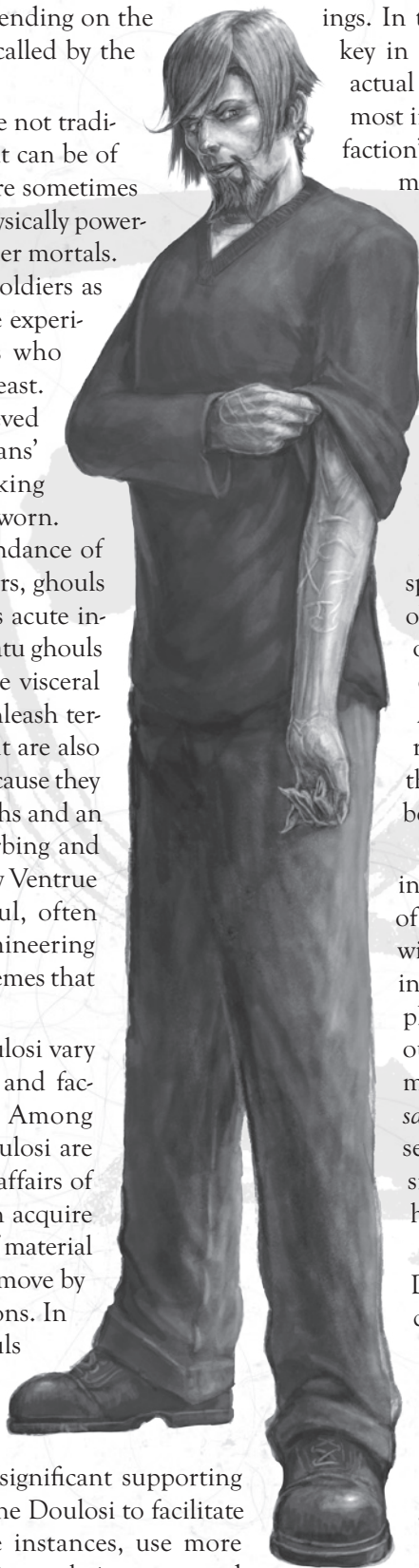
Factions: The uses of the Doulosi vary widely depending on the covey and faction to which they are sworn. Among the Archons and the Djinn, Doulosi are used chiefly to maintain mortal affairs of the Brood. As *soma* cultists often acquire significant resources and stores of material power, the aid of those who can move by day are essential to their operations. In the case of the Faustians, ghouls are absolutely required for the success of most of their plans, as the intricate methods of corruption can often require a significant supporting cast. Antinomians make use of the Doulosi to facilitate large-scale rituals and, in some instances, use more experienced Doulosi to indoctrinate their young and

ignorant recruits. The Scarlet Rite shares a history with the debauched Androphonis family and includes the esteemed members of the old family in their licentious agendas, and also employs them to maintain its holdings. In the case of both *sarx* cults, the Doulosi are key in maintaining a connection to the real and actual living flesh. However, the Doulosi hold the most importance for the Nameless. Because of the faction’s particular outlook, the Nameless requires a mortal interface to maintain balance and influence. Nonetheless, the Nameless belief that the Doulosi are the inheritors of the blood of Belial himself that gives them a sacred value to the members of that faction.

Appearance: In both the modern nights and those of the past, Doulosi are often prized for their ability to blend in. Although they may serve the vicious and violent warriors of the Throne of Smokeless Fire, or the flamboyant and gory Antinomians, the Doulosi all cultivate a passing inconspicuousness that allows them to seek out and obtain those things that the Forsworn cannot obtain on their own. However, the Doulosi are often no less devoted to the concept of the Adversary than any of Belial’s Brood. For this reason, the ghouls will often carve or tattoo the marks of their allegiance on areas of their bodies that are normally concealed.

Ghouls of the Brood are “marked” by their inconspicuous nature. As they are the hands of those who cannot walk freely among men without notice, the ghouls are indoctrinated into a silent practice of faith in the Brood’s philosophies without bearing any conspicuous marks. However, due to their zealotry, many of these ghouls (especially among the *sarx*-focused factions) engage in secret rites of self-mortification, such as carving or branding sigils onto parts of the body that are generally hidden by clothing.

Havens: The havens and holdings of the Doulosi cult take on many forms, largely depending on the covey (or coveys) that the ghouls serve. In the case of the Mercy Seat, Doulosi will generally take up residence with the covey itself, whereas those who serve the Scarlet Rite often open their homes to the members of the covey. The Throne of Smokeless Fire generally keeps its ghouls at a distance, the Doulosi being no exception.



Nonetheless, Doulosi who serve the Djinn are generally very influential and powerful, sometimes owning palatial estates, as the Forsworn of the Throne will accept nothing less. The ghouls who mind the affairs of the Roaring Serpent generally mind the affairs of the covey and have residences that reflect these mundane roles. The Forsworn of the Pandemonium almost always incorporate the Doulosi ghouls into their inner cults and share their havens with them, as the loyalty of the ghoul cult has stood the test of time. However, the Doulosi who serve the Nameless are the best off, being provided with the sort of luxury the legendary get of Belial would deserve.

Strengths: Even as ghouls, the Doulosi may purchase up to one dot of status in Belial's Brood (Covenant Status), and, just as for vampires of the Brood, status confers the privilege of learning Investments and Devotions for which Investments are a prerequisite. Ghouls must still meet all prerequisites to learn such gifts (i.e., Morality 4 or lower), and they never benefit from having a favored aspect, regardless of faction affiliation. Any ghoul who chooses to raise his Morality score loses all Investments and all Devotions requiring Investments.

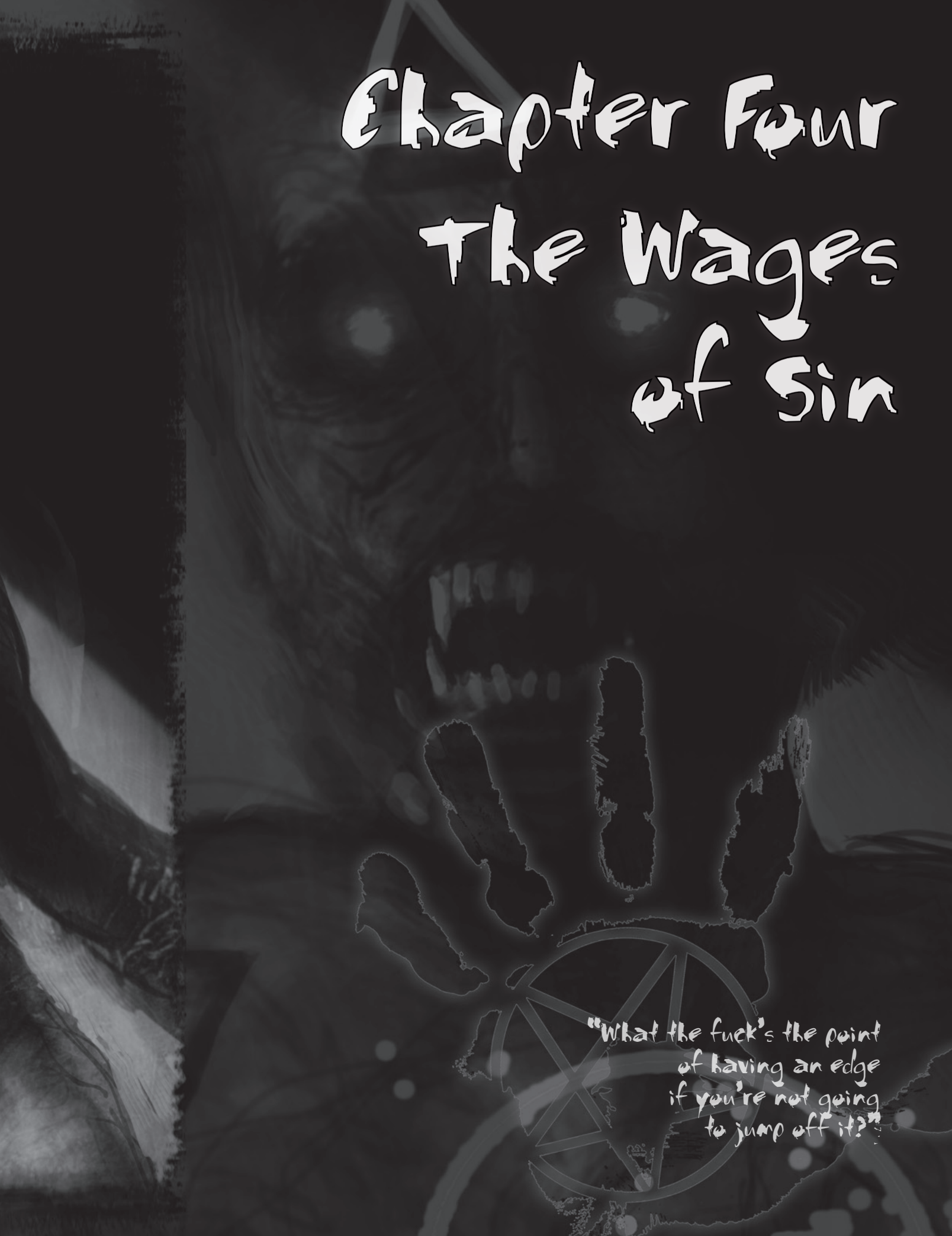
Weaknesses: The fact that the Doulosi have withstood the test of time to the degree they have is truly a testimony to their conviction and commitment. While they may serve for decades as slaves of the most inhuman of vampires, the ghouls of the Doulosi cult do not

themselves acclimate well or readily to the Embrace. Once ritually inducted into the Doulosi, a ghoul almost never survives the transformation into undeath. When a Doulosi is Embraced, roll the character's Morality with a -2 penalty. Only if the roll is a success does the Doulosi survive to become one of the Kindred. With any other roll result, the ghoul dies screaming.

Organization: The Doulosi ghouls are placed in positions of rank and function in accordance with what their covey requires. Within the Pandemonium, Doulosi can play almost as much of a role as the Forsworn themselves, often undergoing the same initiations as those of the core covey. Doulosi in service to the Roaring Serpent are perhaps the most traditionally handled, acting as bonded servants to their undead masters. When the Doulosi cult is employed by the Mercy Seat, they are occasionally placed in the care of subordinate, non-Doulosi ghouls. The Nameless treat the Doulosi as truly sacred, and often put them in direct service to their ranking priest figure, most often a member of the Therion bloodline (assuming the covey has initiated one). The Scarlet Rite, though not to the degree of the Nameless, will often incorporate the ghouls into their priesthood as well, as they feel the living ghouls can provide valuable insights into the *sarx*.

Concept: Bodyguard, coroner, cultist, groundskeeper, legal clerk, next-door neighbor, occult bookstore owner, personal assistant, youth center coordinator.





Chapter Four

The Wages of Sin

"What the fuck's the point
of having an edge
if you're not going
to jump off it?"

*Piety, n. Reverence for the Supreme Being,
based upon His supposed resemblance to man.
— Ambrose Bierce, The Devil's Dictionary*

The strange vampires of Belial's Brood practice the same blood-borne powers found in others of their kind, and indeed, generally tend to focus even more on the advancement thereof than do many of the Unlearned. And while the vampires of Belial's Brood eschew covenant-based mysticism that sits contrary to their own ideals — the practice of Theban Sorcery and the Coils of the Dragon in particular — they do have dark arts of their own, powerful secrets manifested by and found only among Belial's Brood.

These arts of the Forsworn can be divided roughly into three categories, the discussion of which is the subject of this chapter. The most prominent of these powers are known as Investments, gifts bestowed upon the Forsworn as they progress along the path of their Pursuit. The second type of power, the Discipline of Choronzon, is the bloodright of the enigmatic Therion bloodline. And the chapter closes with a sampling of vampiric Devotions developed originally by the Brood.

Choronzon

Few creatures in the World of Darkness are as unsettling as a Forsworn vampire whose covey-mates have exalted him into the ranks of the Therion. Once so inducted, the new blood priest can expect fear and reverence in equal measure from any other creature with a Beast, including his own covey-mates, and the sacred practice of Choronzon is one of the primary reasons why. With little measure of exaggeration, it can be truly said that the Brood itself would risk collapsing under its own weight without both the guidance of the Therion and the unique power of their Discipline. Without these, the Forsworn would be crippled by their own beliefs — rendered impotent (or worse) by the very Pursuit that drives them in all things. Through Choronzon, the Therion can draw on the power of the Crux (and the Adversary itself, some say) to manipulate the very essence of the vampiric curse, aiding the covey's ability to function despite its inhumanity.

Choronzon powers are often invoked with great ceremony, usually in conjunction with the Vaulderie, but such solemnity is not technically a requirement. What is a requirement, however, is that the Therion stays true to his covenant and to his beliefs. A Therion who actively chooses to abandon his covenant and/or increase his Humanity

rating loses all dots in Choronzon; if he later returns to the Brood, he must relearn any lost Choronzon dots.

Only the Therion and those covey-mates connected to him by means of the Crux can benefit from the effects of his Choronzon powers (keeping in mind that a covey can have no fewer than three and no more than 13 members). And since the Crux itself must be maintained through the Vaulderie, any covey member who stays away from his covey long enough to be detached from the Crux (366 days) loses the benefits of its ongoing Choronzon effects. (Returning to the fold thereafter requires the rites be performed again.) If a covey member other than the Therion leaves the covey with two or fewer members, the Therion and the remaining member continue to gain the benefits of existing effects but cannot conduct new Choronzon rites until the third member has been replaced. If the Therion leaves the covenant or meets Final Death, the benefits of his rites end at once for all involved. Otherwise, the effects of each rite last for so long as the Crux binds its participants together. If a new covey member arrives (or an errant one returns) and wishes to partake of the Therion's Discipline, each rite must be performed again to integrate the new member into the mystical group bond.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Choronzon, unlike most Disciplines, is composed of several concomitant effects, none of which is actively rolled. Rather, the boon of each effect grows alongside the Therion's escalating mastery of Choronzon itself. Once the initial ritual for each effect is performed, the effects are considered "always on" for each participant thereafter. All Therion have access to all four of these effects as soon as they gain their first dot in Choronzon.

Action: N/A

Consolamentum ("The Consolation")

Perhaps the most iconic mystery of Choronzon is a rite known as the Consolamentum ("the consolation") for the way it consoles the spirits of the Forsworn. Over the course of the rite, the Therion anoints the brow of each participant in turn — including himself — with a drop of blood, often from the communal Vaulderie chalice. Those who partake of this rite feel their spirits strengthened, as

of a mystical grip settling around both Man and Beast.

This power confers two related benefits. Ordinarily, vampires risk degenerating into madness with each successive drop in their Humanity. As the systematic dissolution of Humanity is integral to the Forsworn, however, this power works to aid in that intentional descent. All participants in the rite gain some measure of protection from the usual risks that accompany Humanity loss. First, any time a participant commits a sin for which he must make a degeneration roll, that covey member may opt to use the Therion's rating in the Choronzon Discipline (the current rating, not the rating at the time the rite was conducted) instead of the usual dice pool. Second, any time one who participated in the rite must roll for a derangement after losing Humanity, he or she adds the Therion's rating in Choronzon as bonus dice to the Humanity roll (to a maximum of 10 dice).

Example: A Brood member who took part in the Consolation rite finds himself faced with a degeneration check after cold-bloodedly murdering a child. Normally, he would roll only two dice to see if he drops in Humanity, but the rite's power permits him to use his Therion's Choronzon rating instead. His Therion's rating is •••, so he'd get an extra die in this case, but he decides he doesn't want the help this time. He rolls just the two dice . . . and fails, falling from Humanity 4 to Humanity 3. Usually, he would now roll his new Humanity rating (three dice) to see if he gains a derangement, but since he was under

the effects of this power at the time, he gets to add his Therion covey-mate's Choronzon rating (•••) as bonus dice to the derangement roll, in this case doubling his chances of success.

Convenenza ("The Promise")

Central to the operation of the Brood is the pivotal covey dynamic that lies at the core of Forsworn belief. A Therion's mastery of Choronzon aids not only in the individual member's spiritual control, but in the covey's effectiveness as a unit, as well. An important part of this effectiveness stems from the Brood's practice of riding the wave of frenzy — confidently, and with as little risk to other covey members as possible. Choronzon effectively oils the gears of this process by means of the Convenenza, a rite during which each covey member makes a sacred promise to his brothers that his soul will draw strength from their bond, and in so doing, help him direct the Beast's power where it will be most effective.

Each dot of Choronzon reduces the number of successes required on Resolve + Composure rolls for each participating covey member to ride the wave of frenzy (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 181). As the standard number of successes is five, this means that a covey whose Therion has Choronzon ••••• can ride the wave of frenzy almost at will, though each member must still roll Resolve + Composure to see if a dramatic failure results.



Also, certain conditions may increase the number of successes required to ride the wave above five, and in these cases, each member who wishes to ride the wave must still roll to acquire the difference.

Endura ("The Fasting")

Almost as essential to the Brood as the Consolamentum is the Endura, the rite of ritual fasting. By keeping himself and his covey-mates marginally deprived of Vitae, they can all more easily rouse themselves to action during the period when the Beast is normally at its weakest – from dawn until dusk.

just as other Choronzon powers, this rite needs only be performed once with the Therion's covey, after which the rite self-sustains through the power of the Crux. Once the rite's performed, the Therion and his covey-mates gain some measure of added awareness and control during daylight hours, so long as they observe at least a minimal fast. Any covey-mate who participates in this rite is allowed to add the Choronzon rating of the Therion to the covey-mate's Humanity rating to determine his maximum dice pool when trying to wake or take other actions during the day (maximum 10 dice), provided his blood pool is at anything less than full capacity. A Forsworn can spend Vitae upon rousing to receive the benefits of this power.

Example: A Brood member who took part in the Endura finds himself roused by a sound during the day. Instead of rolling just his Humanity (two dice) to rise, he can add his Therion's Choronzon rating (•••) as well, for a total of five dice – but only because he was not full up on blood when he went to sleep that morning. Once fully awake, his pools for daytime actions will be limited to five dice, rather than two.

Reconsolatio ("The Cleansing")

The deep sleep of torpor is rarely a balm for the mind of any vampire, but torpor is undeniably rejuvenating for the undead body. The question, then, becomes one of time: How long must the vampire's mind endure the Fog of Eternity while his mind waits for his body to reconstitute itself? Traditionally, a vampire's activity cycle increases the closer to human his brand of morality. This has the unfortunate side effect of putting the Forsworn out of commission for extremely long periods of time, while those outside his covenant rise much sooner after repairing even more grievous wounds to their undead flesh. The power of the Reconsolatio rite, however, works to even the scales some in this regard. The rite is known as "the cleansing" for the way it prepares the Forsworn soul for the rigors of torpor.

Each dot of Choronzon adds 1 to each participating covey member's Humanity rating for the purposes of determining time spent in torpor (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 175), to a maximum equivalent rating of 10.

A Brood member with Humanity 3, for example, would normally spend a base time of one decade in torpor (which is then multiplied by his Blood Potency to determine the total time spent in torpor). If he participated in the Reconsolatio as led by a Therion with Choronzon •••, however, he would be considered Humanity 6 with regards to torpor, and would thus reduce his base time spent in torpor to just two weeks, rather than 10 years.

Investments

Once a member of the Brood has progressed far enough in his Pursuit, his soul comes to know the secret of manifesting abilities unlike anything he'd ever known before. The Forsworn call these dark gifts Investments, and the source of their power is the subject of much discussion. Some maintain that Investments are at once the purest and most attained form of vampiric power, and that all others are merely either precursors or outright distractions to one's true potential. Others hold that Investments are gifts from the Adversary himself, funneled by his grace through the power and presence of the Forsworn's emergent Beast.

In terms of game mechanics, the Investment system is similar to a Dragon's progress through the Coils of the Dragon. Each Investment is a separate "level," the purchase of which is accompanied by an incremental rise in experience cost. Unlike Coils, however, the specific multiplier of that cost can vary from level to level, depending on the character's Humanity rating (see Investments and Humanity, below). Similar to other covenant-based gifts, the ability to manifest Investments is linked to membership in Belial's Brood. If one has not experienced Cathexis or otherwise been ritually inducted into a covey (i.e., does not simultaneously have at least one dot of Covenant Status (Belial's Brood) and no dots of Covenant Status in other covenants), one cannot learn Investments at all.

Some Investments also have specific prerequisites listed in their description, all of which must be met before a character can purchase that Investment. The nature of these prerequisites varies from Investment to Investment, and involves everything from knowledge of other Investments to minimum Blood Potency ratings and in some cases, even the character's possession a specific Vice. Prerequisites still apply after the vampire has manifested an Investment, so if an event or condition would permanently alter the character's ability to qualify for a given power, he loses that Investment and must repurchase it with experience. (Temporary alterations, such as through suffering a power's effect, do not count.)

The Investments below are divided into three sub-categories, one for each aspect of the Trinity – *pneuma*, *sarx* and *soma*. Accompanying each category is a benefit

reserved for those whose favored aspect corresponds to it. If a vampire shifts from one faction to another during the course of play, he loses the old favored aspect benefit and acquires the new one. All Forsworn are free to select any Investment for which they meet the prerequisites, but some choose to focus their efforts toward unearthing those secrets most pertinent to their spiritual view.

Faction	Favored Aspect
The Nameless	<i>pneuma</i>
The Roaring Serpent	<i>soma</i>
The Pandaemonium	<i>sarx</i>
The Mercy Seat	<i>pneuma</i>
The Throne of Smokeless Fire	<i>soma</i>
The Scarlet Rite	<i>sarx</i>

Investments and Humanity

Investments, whatever their origins, interact with a vampire's Humanity in several substantive ways. First and foremost, Investments become easier to learn as the Forsworn's Humanity fades (see table). Vampires cannot manifest Investments at all until their Humanity scores drop to 4, when the Beast within has finally grown prominent and receptive enough to call upon their power. After that, manifesting Investments grows easier with each successive drop until the character's Humanity reaches 1, at which time learning Investments becomes as second nature to him as learning even the most familiar of vampiric powers. While Investments are tied undeniably to the Beast, a vampire who retains no shred of Humanity cannot learn new ones, for the truly unfettered Beast lacks both the patience and focus required to learn much of anything.

While it may seem economical for a Forsworn to wait until he's fallen to Humanity 1 before manifesting his first Investment, it's generally not a good idea; the Pursuit is about understanding the path, not just arriving at the destination. Smart vampires know better than to rush through the descent, and elders often advise younger members to learn at least one new Investment at each step of the way.

The unusual bond Investments share with Humanity also lends the two traits some measure of mutual exclusivity. If a vampire ever chooses to raise his Humanity once he's dropped it low enough to manifest Investments in the first place, he immediately loses all Investments known. (Re-losing the regained Humanity does not bring them back; they must be relearned from scratch.)

Similar to many other vampiric powers, Investments receive a +2 bonus to their appropriate dice pools when turned on those with whom the user has a blood tie. The dice pools for Investments involving Empathy, Persuasion or Socialize don't suffer when turned on mortals, regardless of the Humanity rating of the user.



STORYTELLER'S OPTION: LIQUIDATION

Abandoning the Brood does have its benefits, however, at least where one's Humanity is concerned. When a Forsworn loses all his Investments due to joining another covenant or opting to raise his Humanity, all the collected knowledge that went into acquiring those Investments is "liquidated" into a pool of experience that the vampire's beleaguered soul can use to slowly climb back into the light. For every Investment lost, the vampire gains three experience points that he may apply to attempts to regain lost Humanity. Thus, if a vampire had four different Investments when he left the Brood, he would leave with a pool of 12 experience points set aside for him to spend on raising his Humanity rating. These 12 experience points could not be spent on anything but raising his Humanity.

Character Humanity	Investment Cost
10–5	N/A
4	New Level x 8
3	New Level x 7
2	New Level x 6
1	New Level x 5
0	N/A



Pneuma Investments

The aspect of *pneuma* is the aspect of the spirit, the soul and the will. *Pneuma* Investments often rely on the user's own understanding of vice and of his spirit's place in both its covey and in the corrupt material world. For a Brood member affiliated with a faction whose favored aspect is *pneuma* – either the Nameless or the Mercy Seat, most commonly – increasing knowledge of *pneuma* bestows a commensurate rise in the Forsworn's ability to fool the living world into believing he isn't the monster he appears. Every *pneuma* Investment such a character knows raises his equivalent Humanity by 1 for the purposes of interacting with non-vampires, to a maximum equivalent Humanity of 10. For example, a Nameless Forsworn with a Humanity of 2 and three *pneuma* Investments interacts with the living world as though he had a Humanity of 5 in every regard. This benefit does not affect how long a character spends in involuntary torpor, how active he is when roused during the day or any other element pertaining to or derived from Humanity. This benefit only affects how he appears to those non-vampires with whom he comes into contact (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 185).

Aeon's Crux

One of the pinnacles of achievement for a student of the *pneuma* is the ability to weave one's very soul into the Crux, the bond one shares with one's covey-mates. Through this linkage with the Crux, the vampire can act as conduit whereby the other interconnected Beasts can draw upon the primal strengths of one another.



Prerequisites: Beast Sense, Scent of Socius

Action: Instant

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: One turn per success

Dice Pool: Resolve + Blood Potency

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The spent Willpower is wasted, and the Forsworn cannot spend Willpower for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The spent Willpower is wasted with no effect.

Success: Each member of the user's covey is mystically linked for one turn per success on the roll. For the duration, each covey member may use any Investment known to any other covey member as though he possessed it himself, regardless of prerequisites (though each must pay any required costs and make any required rolls to use a given power). During this time, the one who manifests Aeon's Crux must concentrate on maintaining the link, and may invoke no other supernatural power (not even other Investments). If and when he does, the effects of this power end immediately. This power does not allow Devotions, Disciplines, Merits or any other Traits to be likewise shared.

Exceptional Success: The user can call upon Investments as well, even while the power's effects persist (though he still can't activate Disciplines or other powers without it instantly terminating this effect).

Appetite for Weakness

This Investment allows a vampire to literally feed on the weakness of others. The Brood member draws on the potency of his own vice to draw physical enrichment from the denial of moral satisfaction in the troubled soul of another.

Prerequisites: Must have Gluttony or Sloth as a Vice

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Larceny – victim's Resolve. If another soul fulfills a Virtue in the Forsworn's presence, the Forsworn may spend a point of Vitae to activate this power. The Forsworn need not know the victim's specific Virtue to use this Investment.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Vitae is wasted, and the Forsworn cannot regain Willpower for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The Vitae is wasted with no effect.

Success: The target regains no Willpower for fulfilling his Virtue, and the Forsworn gains a number of Vitae equal to the number of Willpower the target *would have regained* if not for the success of this power (up to the

vampire's normal blood pool maximum). As this power essentially robs souls of their moral victories, it tends to leave victims feeling confused and unsure about what they truly believe. Daeva vampires cheated by Appetite for Weakness do not lose additional Willpower points due to their clan weakness.

Exceptional Success: The vampire regains one Vitae per Willpower point the victim would have regained, and the victim of the power *loses* a Willpower point, as well. If this would drop the victim's current Willpower to 0, the victim lapses into a dribbling fugue state until at least one Willpower point has returned.

This Investment may only successfully affect a given subject once per chapter. If two vampires activate this power on the same target simultaneously, the one with the higher Initiative wins. In the case of an Initiative tie, the vampire with the stronger connection to the target (through Virtue and/or Vice) wins out. The Storyteller is the final arbiter of when and how this power comes into play.

Beast Sense

Most vampires stifle the voice of the Beast, afraid of what heeding its feral call might make of them. But for those who reach out to the Beast, and open their senses to what it senses, there is great wisdom to be found. The Beast sees and knows much that the Man does not, and those with this power learn how to listen.

Prerequisites: None

Action: Instant

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One scene

Dice Pool: None, or Wits + Investigation

With the "offering" up of Vitae, the Forsworn coaxes his Beast to the surface, where his Beast lends him its primitive powers of perception for the duration of a scene. During this time, the vampire can sense the presence of all vampires in his immediate area (as defined by line of sight equivalent, whether the Forsworn can actually see them or not). Normally, this power requires no roll, but should a vampire take pains to conceal his Beast by means of the Obfuscate power of Mask of Tranquility, then the two vampires must engage in a contested roll, pitting the Forsworn's Wits + Investigation against the other's Wits + Stealth. If the user of this power accumulates more successes, he detects the presence of the interloper's Beast, though the user cannot pinpoint the exact location of *any* vampire in his area by means of this power alone. This power senses the Beast itself, so powers such as Cloak of Night and Twilight Projection provide no immunity.

When the Forsworn senses another Beast, the Forsworn does so as if he had just encountered that Beast directly, which means he also gets a sense of the other's Blood Potency relative to his own (i.e., whether it's weaker

or not). Even though this latter effect mirrors the direct touching of Taints, the Forsworn need not check for frenzy upon sensing an unfamiliar Beast until and unless the other shows itself and demonstrates without doubt that it actually stands in his presence.

Feet of Clay

For those Forsworn who are strong in the *pneuma*, reaching out to the spirit of another becomes no more complicated or obscure than the act of blowing a kiss. By means of this power, a vampire can draw on the eminent power of his own Beast to humble and suppress the Man in another soul, sapping the other of its will to defy, even as it flees for its very existence.

Prerequisites: None

Action: Contested, resistance is reflexive

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: One turn per success

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Intimidation + Blood Potency contested by the target's Composure + Blood Potency

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The spent Willpower is wasted, and the Forsworn is rooted to his present spot until the end of the following turn.

Failure: The Forsworn fails to accumulate more successes than his target in the contested roll. The spent Willpower is wasted with no effect.

Success: The vampire accumulates the most successes in the contested roll, and the target is gripped by a debilitating terror for one turn per success gained. During this time, the target suffers a penalty to Initiative equal to the number of successes (potentially altering the target's place in the Initiative roster). In addition, the faster the target tries to move, the more it slows down. Taking normal moves (moving up to one's Speed) reduces the target's Speed by an amount equal to the number of successes rolled. Trying to run, however (i.e., taking a full action to move), fails and reduces the target's base Speed by *twice* the number of successes on the Forsworn's roll. In the event of a foot chase (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 65), the target's Stamina + Athletics dice pools are likewise reduced by one for each success on the roll. The effects of this Speed reduction can easily shift from turn to turn, based on the actions of the target.

Example: A Forsworn bests his target with three successes on the contested roll, meaning the target will suffer the power's effects for three turns. First, the target's Initiative immediately drops by 3. In the first turn, the target tries to move calmly away at a jog, but finds his Speed reduced by 3 for his efforts. In a panic, he makes a run for it and tries to double his Speed, but finds his base Speed reduced by 6, instead. In the third and final

turn, he manages to calm down and drop back to a walk, and his Speed once again suffers only a penalty of 3. But by then, of course, the Forsworn has already caught up to him . . .

Exceptional Success: The effects of the power persist for two turns per success on the contested roll, rather than one.

One may only successfully affect a given target with this power once per scene, but the target is not immune from subsequent uses of the power by other sources. Overlapping applications of this power do not stack with one another.

Fire in the Head

Forsworn disciples of the *pneuma* are known for the intricate and often horrific games they play with the souls of others. This insidious power is one of the reasons for this reputation, as Fire in the Head allows a Brood member to call on the power of his own Vice to draw spiritual enrichment from the indulgence of others.

Prerequisites: Must have Envy or Greed as a Vice

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy – target's Composure. If someone fulfills a Vice in the Forsworn's presence, he may spend a Willpower point to activate this power. The Forsworn need not know the victim's specific Vice to use this Investment, but does need to be at least peripherally involved in the victim's attempt to fulfill his or her Vice, even if only as an observer or subtle provocateur.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The spent Willpower is wasted, and the Forsworn cannot regain Willpower for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The spent Willpower is wasted with no effect.

Success: The vampire regains two Willpower points, while the victim gains no Willpower for fulfilling his Vice. In essence, the Forsworn robs the target of any satisfaction he might have otherwise felt through indulging his Vice. This leaves most victims feeling temporarily unsatisfied with their usual pleasures, though they may not immediately realize the vampire's role in their dissatisfaction. Daeva vampires cheated by Fire in the Head do not lose additional Willpower points due to their clan weakness.

Exceptional Success: The vampire regains the two spent Willpower points and the victim of the power gains a Willpower point, as normal for fulfilling a Vice.

A given target may only be successfully affected by this Investment once per scene. If two vampires activate this power on the same target simultaneously, the one with the higher Initiative wins out. In the case of an Initiative tie, the

vampire with the stronger connection to the target (through Virtue and/or Vice) wins out. The Storyteller is the final arbiter of when and how this power comes into play.

Hiriliu

A vampire's Beast is a creature of passion, and for no one is this any truer than for the Forsworn. A vampire with this Investment knows how to draw on the *pneuma* as a sympathetic conduit for the Beast, making of herself a sort of mouthpiece for all the fettered passion of her undead soul. When summoned up and released as a single roar — a cry known as the *hiriliu* among the Brood — the resulting torrent of fervor calls out to the dark side in another sentient being. The Forsworn often use this power to quickly learn the nature of a mortal's vice.

Prerequisites: Feet of Clay

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene (special)

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Animal Ken + Blood Potency versus Composure + Blood Potency

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The spent Willpower is wasted, and the user cannot activate this Investment again for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The vampire fails to acquire more successes than his subject, and the spent Willpower is wasted with no effect.

Success: The vampire acquires more successes than the subject, resulting in one of two possible effects depending on the type of target. If the target is a non-vampire, the subject immediately attempts to fulfill his or her Vice, regardless of the circumstances or surroundings. Affected subjects can spend Willpower to delay giving in, but must spend a number of Willpower points over successive rounds equal to the Forsworn's successes on the activation roll. If the subjects don't, they must immediately give in to their dark side (typically revealing their Vice for all to see in the process). If the subject is a vampire, her Beast hears the call of the Forsworn's Beast and immediately begins to enter frenzy, though the subject has no conscious idea of from where the provocation originated.

Exceptional Success: The vampire can demand that a non-vampiric subject try to act out both his Virtue and Vice in the same scene. A -2 penalty is applied to a vampiric subject's attempts to resist entering frenzy.

The primal scream issued forth by means of this power is silent, a mystical cry from the Beast into the dark heart of another's soul. No sound need be made. Multiple applications of this power upon a subject do not stack with one another.

Incite Katharos

A favorite of the manipulators of the faction known as the Mercy Seat, this Investment allows Forsworn of a certain moral turpitude to project desire and weakness into the spirit of another. And when the subject at last gives in to his artificial failings, he grows that much more powerless against the Forsworn.

Prerequisites: Must have Lust, Pride or Wrath as a Vice

Action: Contested, resistance is reflexive

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: One hour per success

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Blood Potency contested by subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The spent Willpower is wasted, and the Forsworn cannot regain Willpower for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The vampire fails to acquire more successes than the subject, and the spent Willpower is wasted with no effect.

Success: The subject adopts a Vice of the vampire's choosing for the duration of the effect. The affected subject immediately feels an urge to act on his new impulses; each time a situation arises that calls out for the subject's new Vice to fulfill itself, the subject must roll Resolve + Composure to resist giving in. If the subject fails so much as a single one of these rolls during the duration of the power's effect, he immediately indulges in the incited Vice to the best of his ability. For the subject, the upside is that if his indulgence fulfills the terms for regaining Willpower under the description of the incited Vice, the subject does regain Willpower as though the Vice were his own. The downside is that giving in puts the subject even further under the vampire's sway, granting the vampire a +2 to all actions and dice pools involving the subject until daybreak.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the above, the vampire also regains one of his own spent Willpower points whenever the victim of the power regains Willpower for fulfilling the incited Vice.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-2	The vampire has successfully incited the same Vice in the target before.
+1	The incited Vice corresponds with the Investment user's Vice.

Pneuma Transfer

With enough mystical comprehension of *pneuma*, a Forsworn can learn to permanently move her soul into

another living vessel. The process is taxing, but allows the vampire to experience unlife from within the flesh of another, and in so doing, to be reborn. Thus, Pneuma Transfer is a sacred rite of passage in the eyes of the Brood, and particularly among the Therion, who are denied the ability to sire childer.

Prerequisites: Feet of Clay, Hiriliu

Action: Contested and extended; resistance is reflexive

Cost: 1 Willpower dot

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: Resolve + Empathy contested by the victim's Morality. The first one to accumulate successes equal to the other's Willpower rating is the winner. A tie indicates that the vampire fails to usurp the body, and the victim dies peacefully.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The spent Willpower is wasted, and the Forsworn's progress is halted. He has failed to usurp this mortal vessel.

Failure: The Forsworn achieves no successes on this roll, but may continue, provided his opponent hasn't already gained the required number of successes.

Success: Success indicates that the vampire's soul passes to the body of the mortal, in effect granting the body a sort of "back door Embrace." The new body is now a vampire in every way, and the soul of its previous inhabitant is lost forever. The Forsworn gains the mortal's physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity, Stamina) and Skills, but keeps his own social and mental Attributes and Skills. He brings with him all powers he knew in his former body, except for the three physical Disciplines – Celerity, Resilience and Vigor – which he leaves behind for good. If he wishes to have these powers in his new body, he must relearn them anew.

Exceptional Success: No additional effect.

The vampire can only target ordinary mortal men and women (not mages, werewolves or any other type of being) with this power. Once the vampire has selected a victim, the vampire must prepare that victim in every way as though for the Embrace. The vampire drains the victim of his life-giving blood as normal, but at the moment of death, activates this power in lieu of reviving the body with Vitae. If the vampire wins the contested roll, her spirit leaves her flesh and enters the dying body, reanimating it instantly as one of the undead. If she fails or ties the contested roll, the mortal's soul fights off the intruding Beast just long enough to pass away peacefully, rendering his former body impenetrable to the Forsworn spirit.

When used successfully, this power leaves the user's former body utterly unscathed, much like a perfectly functioning home with no occupant. Bereft of the presence of its soul, the body will begin to break down and rot, but no

faster or slower than any other soulless husk. If measures are taken to ensure the body's protection from decay, there's no reason the body can't stick around more or less whole for some time thereafter. The Forsworn's soul cannot return to this vessel again (as it isn't alive), but nothing says the body can't be used for other purposes.

Scout of Socius

All Forsworn share some measure of connectivity with their covey-mates due to the nature of the Crux, but those with this Investment are even more sensitive to the bonds of blood. The Forsworn call creatures with whom they share a blood connection *socius*, a term translating roughly as "companion," and they use it in reference to covey-mates and ghouls bound to the covey (anyone who has tasted the vampire's blood on three separate occasions). This Investment grants the Forsworn the ability to track down those with whom he shares such bonds.

Prerequisites: Beast Sense

Action: Instant

Cost: None

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire gleans no information and cannot try to use this Investment again for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The vampire gleans no useful information.

Success: The vampire gets a strong feeling of the general direction and distance to his blood companion. While sharing a blood sympathy (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 163) with a vampire already allows such augury, the vampire can't usually choose when the sensations will come. With this Investment, he can, and can even "feel out" ghouls, too, which ordinary blood sympathy doesn't allow.

Exceptional Success: For a moment, the character perceives himself to be the subject. He knows exactly what's transpiring and the exact location of his socius.

Undying Beast

It is said that the Beast is but an extension of the Demiurge, a finger of his black hand. The Forsworn are the fire that can never be consumed, who burn all who would seek to contain them. Vampires who would drink of their heart's blood will find themselves consumed in turn. The same lips that tasted the last of the undying Beast's soul will rejoice at its inevitable return. While this Investment has a particularly narrow focus, many Forsworn develop the Investment all the same, out of either suspicion at their fellow predators or a desire to avenge their own future murders.

Prerequisite: None

Action: Contested and Extended; resistance is reflexive

Cost: Special (see text)

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: Resolve + Blood Potency versus diablerist's Composure + Blood Potency. The first to gather a number of successes equal to the opponent's Willpower rating wins the extended roll.

Roll Results

After being diablerized, the vampire with this Investment is dead for all intents and purposes, but a portion of his soul still lingers in the psyche of his diablerist. If the Forsworn can erode his murderer's Willpower dots to zero before fading away, he can usurp the body. This power may only be activated once per game session (but no more than once per night), and usually happens at a moment when the diablerist's Vice comes to the fore in the story. When the power is activated, the extended roll begins, though the diablerist has no idea what is truly taking place.

Dramatic Failure: The Forsworn loses a Willpower dot in his attempt to accumulate a number of successes equal to his diablerist's Willpower, and must wait until the next game session to try again. If this loss reduces the Forsworn to zero Willpower, his soul suffers Final Death.

Failure: The soul of the Forsworn fails to accumulate the required number of successes before his opponent can. The Forsworn loses a Willpower dot, and must wait until the next game session to try again. If the Forsworn is reduced to zero Willpower after this failure, his soul suffers Final Death.

Success: When the Forsworn accumulates the required number of successes before his opponent does, the diablerist loses a Willpower dot as the Forsworn's soul erodes his self-control. In the case of a tie (both attain their required successes simultaneously), neither one loses any Willpower and the struggle resumes the next game session. If the diablerist is ever reduced to zero Willpower dots (over an extended series of extended rolls), the Forsworn's soul takes control of the diablerist's body. The diablerist's Humanity, Virtue, Vice and Willpower dots are replaced by those of the Forsworn. The Forsworn's soul gains complete control, but in inheriting the diablerist's Attributes, derangements, Merits, powers (Devotions, Disciplines, Investments) and Skills, the Forsworn loses all derangements, Merits and powers known before. In most cases, this results in the character's expulsion from the Brood (since he loses his Covenant Status), as he becomes, in effect, a new and interesting hybrid of the two personas. This new soul will remember little of his experiences among the Brood, but may find himself called to rejoin it. Such decisions determine the course of his new unlife.

Exceptional Success: The Forsworn is well on his way to defeating his opponent.

Note: This is a narrative-intensive power, and its use requires both commitment and a time investiture on the part of the Storyteller. The Storyteller determines when each new roll must be made, and under what circumstances. Regardless of who played the Forsworn character before his diablerie, his soul fragment is, for all intents and purposes, a character under control of the Storyteller, who is assumed to be making any and all required rolls in private. The Storyteller can choose to turn over control of the character to a player if and when the soul fragment takes over the diablerist's body, or to keep the character as a Storyteller character.

Sarx Investments

Sarx is easily the most primal and visceral aspect of the Trinity. The *sarx* is the flesh, purely and simply, and it will be neither denied nor cast aside. The vampire cults of the *sarx* believe in the importance of the material in a material world, and the powers they manifest tend to focus heavily on the strengthening and manipulation thereof. At their most powerful, these Investments can effect drastic and often monstrous changes to flesh both alive and undead.

Brood members who excel in the way of the flesh, such as the degenerate Hyletics and the Antinomians of the Pandaemonium, can draw upon their intimate understanding of *sarx* to widen their own capacity for indulgence. Each night, any Forsworn whose favored aspect is *sarx* may by silent act of will expand his blood pool maximum by one for each *sarx* Investment he knows. This expansion does not mystically grant the Vitae that comes with the extra space, but merely allows the vampire to store more blood in his system. Every such expansion lasts for one scene or one hour (whichever is shorter), but the vampire needn't "spend" all his bonus slots at once.

Consider an Antinomian with a Blood Potency of 1 and three *sarx* Investments. Normally, he can only store a maximum of 10 Vitae in his system at one time. Because he has three *sarx* Investments, however (and because he's an Antinomian), he can raise his blood pool maximum by a total of 3 over the course of each night; he can do it all at once, granting him a blood pool of 13 for one scene, or he can spread it out across two or even three different scenes over the course of the evening (assuming he finds enough benefit in raising his blood pool by just 1 each time). This benefit does not create Vitae, or affect how much Vitae one may spend per turn. Any blood in excess of the vampire's normal maximum is vomited forth in a crimson gout unless spent before the end of the scene.

Belial's Feast

While all vampires of Belial's Brood understand the hunger intimately, some of the Forsworn even take pains to deepen their hunger for life. Blood is but the simplest substance the Beast craves, but flesh can also satisfy the Beast's desire. Forsworn well versed in the *sarx* may make a meal of meat, both living and dead. It's a dinner of souls as much as meat, and only the flesh of the sentient satisfies.

Prerequisites: None

Action: Instant

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. For the duration of the scene, the Forsworn may derive a meager sustenance from the flesh of the living or the dead. Eating flesh garners but a single Vitae per three turns of consumption, and only the flesh of humankind (of either gender) can be transmuted via this power. Every Vitae gained inflicts an automatic lethal wound on the body from which it's taken (even if the vampire feasts on his own flesh). Feasting on others, such as vampires or living mortals capable of resisting, requires that they be restrained or be willing victims. In either case, Vitae gained in this manner cannot exceed an active victim's Stamina. When consuming the flesh of the truly dead (including expired vampires), the target body's effective Stamina is reduced by 1 for every six hours that it's been deceased, to a minimum of 1. Even the beefiest mortal body has only a single Vitae worth of "edible" flesh after being dead for 24 hours. Bones and the ashen remains of Kindred can be consumed by means of this power, but such meals provide no true sustenance to the Forsworn.

Flesh Spider

The Forsworn often acknowledge that the spirit is stronger than the flesh, but the flesh is a powerful tool when put firmly under the yoke of the Beast. Just as the Adversary's unholy power allows a vampire's corpse to move and imitate life, so can this power animate flesh and bone that has become separated from the whole. Hands and limbs can be made to writhe and move at the vampire's whim, so long as they stay within his line of sight. While separated, these portions can move on their own, following the directions of the Forsworn that detached them.

Prerequisites: Warp Corpse

Action: Instant

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One scene

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Vitae is wasted, and the vampire takes a lethal wound in the attempt.

Failure: The limb or appendage is not detached, and the Vitae is wasted.

Success: The vampire's limb or appendage is detached and animated. Detached limbs have Health levels equivalent to their Size, a Defense of 1, a Strength of 1 and a Speed of 8. This removal has no effect on the Forsworn's overall Health levels. A detached head can move on its own, but leaves the vampire's body helpless. Detached heads have a Size of 2, Health levels equal to its Size (2) + the vampire's Stamina, a Speed of 8 and a +1 bonus to Defense. Detached heads get about with the flailing and serpentine movements of a mass of dangling viscera that separates from the body along with the head. A detached head has full access to the vampire's blood pool and can make use of any Discipline that doesn't require a body or gestures. A detached head that fails to reconnect with its body at the end of the scene must spend one additional Vitae per scene, or the vampire will enter involuntary torpor. Appendages other than the head can be animated if the vampire purposefully removed them in a previous turn.

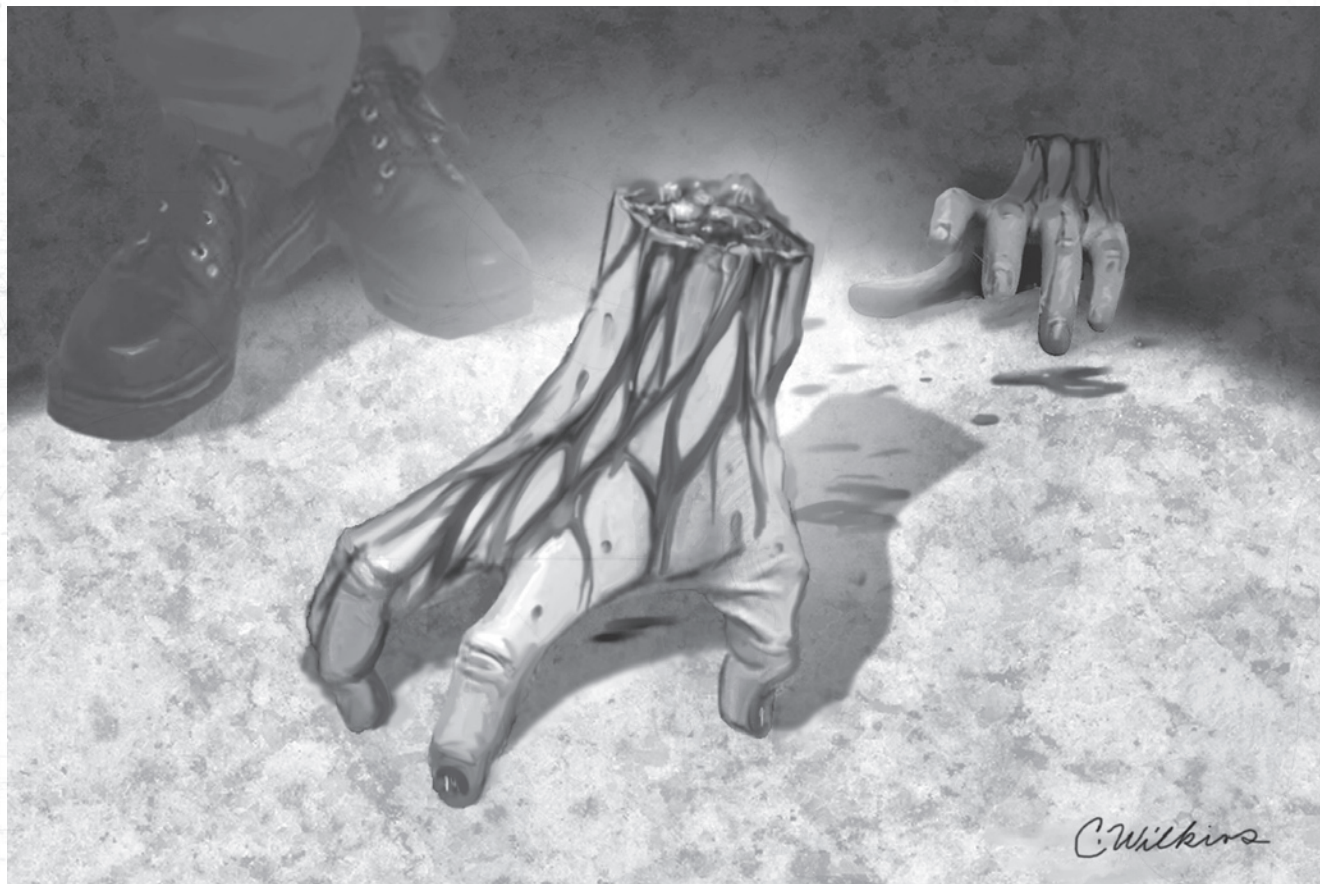
Exceptional Success: The vampire's detached limb or appendage can be controlled even if it leaves the sight of the controlling vampire. Limbs and appendages cannot travel more than [Blood Potency x 10] yards from the body once they leave the head's line of sight. Appendages that travel beyond this limit become lifeless and begin to rot away until such time as the vampire can bring his body close enough to animate them.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The vampire wounds himself to physically remove the limb or appendage before animating it. This bonus does not apply to attempts to detach a head.
-1	The vampire attempts to remove his hand or foot.
-2	The vampire attempts to remove his leg or arm.
-3	The vampire attempts to remove his own head.

Hands of the Beast

Forsworn who give their flesh over to the Beast understand that the Adversary hungers for the blood of the living. Empowered with dark Vitae, a vampire's fists take on a bruised and blackened appearance. By channeling *sarx*-stained blood into his hands, a vampire whets his Beast's appetite for violence, allowing his brawling attacks to tear through flesh and bone with frightening ease.



Prerequisite: Warp Corpse

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One turn (special)

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. Until the beginning of the vampire's next turn after activating this Investment, all his brawl attacks inflict lethal damage. In addition, they also benefit from a +2 bonus to damage against living opponents during this time, while vampires wounded by the Hands of the Beast take a -2 penalty on frenzy and Rötschreck rolls as long as the wounds inflicted by this power remain. If the Forsworn activates this power while he is himself in frenzy (and he may), the benefits last for the duration of the frenzy.

Mantle of the Adversary

Infusing her body with the power of the Beast, the Forsworn causes her flesh to bloat and harden with dead blood. In this monstrous form she is unnaturally large and inured to all but the most extreme pain. Despite the vampire's increased girth and stature, the telltale signs of her undead nature are exacerbated while this Investment is active, often producing striking supernatural clues, such as a foul grave stench or an especially unnatural pallor to the skin.

Prerequisites: Unfeeling Skin, Warp Corpse

Action: Instant

Cost: 2 Vitae

Duration: One scene

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. The vampire receives a +1 bonus to Size, a +2 bonus to Armor rating and ignores all wound penalties until her last Health box is filled with a lethal or aggravated wound, at which point the usual affects apply. In addition, all of the vampire's social dice pools not relating to Intimidation are at a -2 penalty for so long as she maintains the Mantle of the Adversary. The mantle can be dismissed by silent act of will of the vampire.

Mark of Hunger's Prey

By tasting the flesh of another, the Forsworn can opt to place the mark of the Adversary upon that creature. No refuge or secret shelter can hide one so marked from the gaze of the vampire's Beast.

Prerequisites: None

Action: Instant

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One night per success

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult - target's Resolve. A victim must be bitten, though not necessarily fed upon, for this power to be activated. This usually requires a separate grapple (Strength + Brawl) roll.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Vitae is wasted, and the Forsworn is unable to establish a connection with this victim for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The Vitae is wasted, and the power fails to take effect.

Success: A blood tie (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, pg. 162) is established with the subject. This false blood tie is mutual between the victim and the vampire, and is in addition to any other blood ties either creature may have. While mortals often lack the wherewithal to understand the strange visions that enter their dreams after being bitten, vampires may slowly come to realize the significance of their predicament.

Exceptional Success: The false blood tie lasts an entire week.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-2	The victim is under the effects of the Vinculum to another vampire.
-3	The victim is fully blood bound to another vampire.
+2	The victim has never been fed on by another vampire during his lifetime.
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie.

Rotting Touch

The Adversary is often viewed as the embodiment of chaos; whatever the Beast Lord touches is stripped to its base elements and laid bare. The unchanging state of a vampire form is only an extension of the Beast's will to survive, and a Forsworn with an intimate understanding of *sarx* may strip the material form of other creatures. With the lightest touch of the hand, the vampire's Beast flays the flesh of the living and rots the corpus of the dead.

Prerequisites: Flesh Spider, Hands of the Beast, Warp Corpse

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 2 Vitae

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult – victim's Stamina. A victim must be touched or grabbed for this power to be activated. This usually requires a separate grapple (Strength + Brawl) roll.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Vitae is wasted, and the Forsworn takes an aggravated wound as rot spreads along his skin.

Failure: The Vitae is wasted, and the power fails to damage the victim.

Success: Each success garnered on this roll translates to a point of lethal damage to living victims, or a point of aggravated damage to dead or undead victims. Living victims affected by this power leave behind strips of muscle and skin, while dead or undead flesh melts away into putrescence.

Exceptional Success: The victim has been impaired or crippled by the Rotting Touch, and, of course, limbs stripped of tissue are a gruesome sight. Victims take a –1 penalty to all Physical and Social dice pools until the end of the scene, or until the damage from Rotting Touch is healed, whichever comes first.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-1 to -2	The victim is heavily clothed or covered, with little exposed flesh.
+1 to +2	The victim is very lightly clothed or nude.

Unfeeling Skin

One of the first *sarx* powers learned by many Forsworn imparts the uncaring nature of the Beast onto the vampire's flesh. With barely a moment's thought, the Forsworn's flesh becomes bruised and livid, as the Beast inures his skin to the dangers of the outside world.

Prerequisite: Warp Corpse

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One turn

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. The vampire receives a +3 bonus to his Armor rating, and this bonus stacks with any other armor the vampire may have. This bonus lasts until the beginning of the vampire's next turn. Although ineffective against the anathema of sunlight or fire, this fleshly armor does protect against the attacks of other supernatural creatures and against magical effects that do not make use of sunlight or fire.

Veil of Flame

With enough understanding of *sarx*, a vampire's flesh can sidestep even the most timeless of banes. Warmed by the inner fire of the Adversary, the Forsworn's skin becomes inured to the mundane flames of the material world.

Prerequisites: Unfeeling Skin, Warp Corpse

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One scene

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. With the reflexive expenditure of but one Vitae, the vampire can render his flesh more resistant to the harmful effects of fire. For the duration of the scene, any and all

fire damage inflicted upon the vampire is automatically downgraded from aggravated to bashing damage. As this power is entirely reflexive, a Forsworn may declare its use in response to suffering a fire-based attack (and thereby assuage the attack's severity), so long as he has not reached his Blood Potency-based per-turn limit in Vitae expenditure at the moment of the attack. This Investment offers no protection from the harmful effects of sunlight or other damage types, and does not downgrade fire-based damage suffered prior to its activation.

Walk the Walls

Much as an insect, the vampire may crawl along sheer horizontal or vertical surfaces with ease upon activating this Investment. While walking along a wall or ceiling, the vampire's Speed is reduced by half.

Prerequisites: None

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One scene

Dice Pool: This power itself requires no roll, but Strength + Athletics rolls are required to cling to crumbling or hazardous surfaces or to move at faster than half Speed. Movement is easiest when both hands and feet are in contact with a surface, but one may attempt to cling to a surface with just one's hands or feet.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-1 to -3	The surface is crumbling, structurally weak or hazardous.
-2	The vampire attempts to move at full speed while clinging.
-3	The vampire attempts to cling while upright or with only his hands in contact with the surface.

Warp Corpse

A vampire's seemingly human body is but a puppet composed of flesh, a sham the Beast uses to lure the living into its clutches. For most vampires, this ruse also becomes their trap, as they accept the physical limits of their mortal lives despite the dead flesh they now wear. With the simplest understanding of *sarx*, however, a Forsworn can take advantage of his body's morbidity without giving in to false pain and discomfort. A vampire making use of Warp Corpse can contort his body to squeeze under doors, through building ducts or even between bars.

Prerequisites: None

Action: Instant

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One turn

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Athletics

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Vitae is wasted, and the vampire takes a lethal wound in the process.

Failure: The Vitae is wasted, and the vampire makes no progress moving through the opening.

Success: The vampire moves through an opening that is too small for his body to pass through. The vampire moves at half normal Speed while passing through the opening. If the contorted position has to be maintained for more than a single turn, an additional Vitae must be spent. (This is a reflexive action that does not require a new roll.) A vampire unable or unwilling to spend Vitae to maintain an unnatural contortion is shunted out of the space he's squeezing into at a rate equal to half his Speed. If a vampire ejected in this fashion is still contorted at the end of the turn, he suffers a lethal wound.

Exceptional Success: The vampire moves through the small opening at full speed.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The vampire uses Protean or another Discipline to assume a form of a slightly smaller size, such as a wolf.
+3	The vampire uses Protean or another Discipline to assume a form of a significantly smaller size, such as a bat.
-1	The vampire can only fit his head through the opening being squeezed through.
-2	The vampire can only fit his hand through the opening being squeezed through.

Soma Investments

The aspect of *soma* is the aspect of the body. Investments of this kind revolve around the eminence of the vampire's Beast, and around his empowerment over the physical form. For any Forsworn affiliated with a *soma*-heavy ideology, such as that held by the Archons and the Djinn, the understanding of *soma* itself is like unto a nurturing womb for the Beast within. For those whose favored aspect is *soma*, every *soma* Investment adds 1 to the vampire's effective Blood Potency score, but *only* as it pertains to the Predator's Taint system. Whenever such a Forsworn touches Taints with another vampire, his Beast appears for all the world as though it were commensurately stronger, more quintessentially predatory. For example, an Archon with a Blood Potency of 2

and four *soma* Investments gives off the “vibe” of being a Blood Potency 6 vampire. This benefit does not grant extra dice to rolls made to resist Disciplines, and does not grant any other benefit associated with higher Blood Potency. The benefit merely affects the seeming of the Beast as it relates to other creatures’ Beasts.

Blood Calls to Blood

The vampire may control the blood of others, calling it to him with the deadly allure of the Beast. Spilled blood can be drawn to the vampire almost effortlessly, while blood still in a vessel may resist the mystical summons. Blood controlled in this manner flows to the ground and undulates unnaturally towards the vampire, bubbling from an active victim’s eyes, mouth and even pores. While vampires find the sensation of having their blood mystically stolen incredibly unnerving, the experience can be downright excruciating for living victims.

Prerequisites: Blood of the Beast

Action: Instant

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene (special)

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy contested by victim’s Stamina + Blood Potency. Die rolls to control spilled or unattended blood are not contested.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Willpower is wasted, and the vampire is unable to use this Investment for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The Willpower is wasted, and the power fails to manipulate the targeted blood.

Success: Each success gathered on the roll causes a lethal wound to living victims, while vampires lose a number of Vitae equal to the number of successes gained. In both cases, a number of blood points equal to the successes gathered travels at a speed of 10 along the ground toward the controlling vampire as long as he continues to concentrate on this power, or until the end of the scene, whichever comes first. Once the blood reaches the power’s user, the blood immediately begins to enter his body at a rate of up to two blood points per turn, for so long as he continues to concentrate. If the vampire activates a Discipline, attacks, performs a dodge maneuver or moves more than his Speed in a turn, the effects of this power cease. Vitae stolen from another vampire has its normal effects when imbibed. Vampires and other supernatural creatures with no Vitae or blood in their system are immune to this power.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success indicates that the controlled blood moves at a speed of 20, and the power’s user may imbibe up to five blood points in a turn as long as he continues to concentrate.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
–1 to –2	The spilled blood is old or partially mixed with another substance.
–2	The target is more than 10 yards away.
–2	The target is a vampire with five or fewer Vitae in his blood pool.
+1	The target is presently bleeding from a wound.
+2	The vampire is touching the blood to be controlled.
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie.

Blood Curse

By awakening the blood of an enemy with the whispers of the Adversary, a Forsworn can open arteries and explode hearts. The Blood Curse is thought to be one of the oldest Investments still practiced by Belial’s Brood, an invocation of the Demiurge that is often out of place amongst the less spiritual members of the covenant. When placing the Blood Curse on another, a Forsworn vampire spills his own blood in front of the would-be victim, a warning of what is to come. Soon after, the victim’s body begins to reject its own blood as his skin cracks open and coagulated blood begins to join the token spatter at his feet.

Prerequisites: Blood Potency 3+, Blood Calls to Blood, Blood of the Beast

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Cost: 2 Vitae

Duration: One turn per success

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Subterfuge contested by victim’s Stamina + Blood Potency

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Vitae is wasted, and the Forsworn vampire is unable to spend Vitae for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The Vitae is wasted, and the Blood Curse fails to take hold of its victim.

Success: Each success gathered on the roll causes a single blood point per turn to boil out of the target’s skin and veins. Blood that is hemorrhaged out in this manner is foul and useless. Living victims suffer an aggravated wound every turn, while vampires lose one Vitae and suffer a lethal wound every turn so long as the effect persists. Vampires (and anyone else) with no Vitae or blood in their systems are immune to this power, so the effects of this power can wear off prematurely if a target is reduced to 0 Vitae in his blood pool by this process.

Exceptional Success: The vampire’s target takes a –2 penalty on all frenzy checks as long as the Blood Curse continues to do harm. Mortals suffer immediate heart failure and pass away in extreme agony.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-2	The victim is a vampire with five or fewer Vitae in his blood pool.
+2	The victim is in frenzy.
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie.

Blood of the Beast

The Beast is not a vampire's slave; it is his very soul howling for release. A Forsworn's flesh is the flesh of the Beast, his blood, the blood of the Beast. When he is torn, the Beast shall mend; when he bleeds, the Beast shall lick the wound. A vampire with this Investment allows his better half to heal his wounds while he concentrates on more immediate matters. The Beast is both shrewd and cunning when healing wounds, too greedy even to risk its own hunger.

Prerequisites: None

Action: Reflexive

Cost: None

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. The vampire may spend one additional Vitae per turn, regardless of Blood Potency, but this extra blood must be spent to heal lethal or bashing wounds. This Investment is considered always active and continues to function even when the vampire is in frenzy or torpor.

Blood Rage

The Adversary knows no boundaries, and teaches its monstrous children to pursue its trail. The limit of a vampire's reach is not dictated by the length of his arm, so why should the threshold of his power be held back by the body he wore in life? This Investment is the Adversary's gift in reply – the rage-filled strength of a vampire truly unhinged from mortal limitation.

Prerequisite: Blood Potency 3+

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One physical action

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. By paying the cost of this Investment, a Forsworn calling on Blood Rage may augment any one Physical dice pool with bonus dice equal to his Blood Potency score. The bonus dice granted by this Investment do *not* stack with the bonus dice granted by a vampire's physical augmentation ability (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 157).

Hide Within the Heart

Vampires who master the *soma* delve into the true nature of the Beast's power to give new life to dead flesh. The will to live does not reside in the brief flash of a neuron; the live to will rests within the heart of the Beast. No matter how mangled, torn or desecrated the flesh, those who keep the Adversary's counsel always come back to repay their debts.

Prerequisites: Blood Potency 6+



Action: None

Cost: None

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. When decapitated, the vampire does not die, but immediately enters involuntary torpor. The blood of other vampires cannot awaken a vampire sent into torpor in this fashion, although the blood can be used to heal wounds. The vampire awakens whole when the torpor duration runs its course. If the vampire loses this Investment due to a loss of Blood Potency while in torpor, he still awakens whole at the end of the torpor.

Led by Thirst

By allowing the Adversary to guide his actions, a Forsworn with this Investment can move with frightening alacrity. The Beast within senses danger and opportunity faster than any vampire, and even Forsworn who have made allies of their Beasts are hard-pressed to keep up.

Prerequisite: Blood Potency 2+

Action: N/A

Cost: None

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. The Forsworn's Blood Potency is added to his Initiative whenever he takes a physical action.

Master's Will

Many Forsworn hold that the Beast itself knows no fear, and that it is just the remnant of mortal thought that fills vampires with the *memory* of fear. To become the master of himself, a vampire must become the predator, and forget the prey. Master's Will allows the Forsworn to use the eminence of his Beast to steel himself against the frantic pleas of his own mortal mind.

Prerequisites: None

Action: Reflexive

Cost: None

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: Blood Potency. After entering Röttschreck, a vampire with this Investment may roll Blood Potency as a second chance to resist the frenzy.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire enters an uncontrolled Röttschreck and must make a degeneration roll to avoid gaining a derangement. If this roll is failed, the Storyteller determines the derangement, based upon the character and the circumstances.

Failure: The vampire experiences the Röttschreck as normal.

Success: The vampire resists the Röttschreck for the scene.

Exceptional Success: The vampire does not frenzy, and receives a +2 bonus on any roll to resist Röttschreck for the remainder of the night.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-1	Röttschreck was instigated by the anathema of fire or sunlight.
+2	At least one of the vampire's covey-mates is present.

Predator's Allure

It is in the nature of the living to be drawn to death, and this, too, is the allure of the Beast, the very instinct that brings a moth to flame. Mortal and vampire alike seek their downfall in the Forsworn who has mastered the Predator's Allure, for he is the destruction for which they have so secretly wished. By using blood to augment the appearance of life and vitality, a vampire can sidestep the better judgment of his prey.

Prerequisites: Blood Potency 2+

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 to 3 Vitae (special)

Duration: One social action

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. The vampire may add a +2 bonus to a single social dice pool by spending one Vitae. This Investment may not be invoked more than once per turn, but vampires with high Blood Potency may empower Predator's Allure with multiple Vitae in that time, thereby doubling or even tripling the bonus dice. (No more than three Vitae may be spent on this Investment per turn.)

Strike of the Adversary

Masters of the *soma* often teach that instinct is faster than thought. To think is to hesitate; to plan is to react. Action requires instinct and nothing more. To strike as the Adversary is to strip away thought and infuse the body with the inchoate passion of the Beast.

Prerequisites: Blood Potency 4+, Led by Thirst

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One turn

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. The vampire may spend one Vitae to immediately move himself to the top of the Initiative order before the first action in the Initiative order has been resolved. If more than one vampire activates this power in the same turn, they all act simultaneously and take their actions for the turn before the start of the regular Initiative order. The Forsworn must take a physical action immediately after activating this Investment.

Way of the Marauder

Guided by the Adversary's will, the Forsworn rains blows on his enemies with unimaginable speed and inexhaustible brutality. Consumed by the fury of his own Beast, a vampire who treads the way of the marauder seems to truly channel the Demiurge, becoming in essence the hand of destruction, itself.

Prerequisites: Blood Potency 4+, Led by Thirst, Strike of the Adversary

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: One turn

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. After spending a Willpower point, the Forsworn may make a total number of physical attacks at their full dice pools equal to one-half his Blood Potency (rounded down) on his Initiative that turn. A vampire cannot take a move action in the same turn that he activates this Investment, and his Defense is reduced by one-half (rounded down) until the start of his next turn. A vampire with Blood Potency 5 and Defense 3, for example, could shoot one target and then stab a second target in the same turn, but would have a Defense of 1 until the beginning of his next turn.

Forsworn Devotions

The nature of the Pursuit, and of the average Brood member's strict attention to it, makes Devotions something of a rarity among the Forsworn. Once they are capable of manifesting Investments, most prefer to focus their efforts on increasing their knowledge thereof, rather than seeking out new blood secrets. All the same, vampires are an inquisitive sort and the Forsworn are certainly no exception, and so a number of unique Devotions have arisen and been spread from covey to covey over the course of the Brood's history. Most are derived from Investments of one sort or other, as few Forsworn care to waste their time unearthing Devotions that any of the Unlearned could design with similar ease. Below is a sampling of the most common of such Devotions among the Brood.

Child of the Night (Beast Sense, Animalism ••)

The primeval vampires of Belial's Brood are known for their intuitive understanding of the more primal aspects of existence, and this power is a natural extension of that understanding. With Child of the Night, a Forsworn can draw upon the acuity of his own Beast to sense the presence of all "low animals" in his vicinity.

Action: Instant

Cost: —

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: Wits + Animal Ken + Animalism

Each success on the activation roll allows the user to increase the range of his perception. With one success, he can sense the presence of certain animal life in his immediate vicinity — defined as roughly 100 yards. Each success thereafter increases the range by a further 100 yards. A dramatic failure indicates that the vampire cannot get an accurate sense of nearby animal life for the remainder of the scene. Only "low animals" can be detected by means of this power, a category that includes arachnids, bats, rats, reptiles, wolves and insects of all varieties. (Apart from this list, the Storyteller is the final arbiter of what constitutes a "low animal" for the purposes of this Devotion.) The Forsworn detects the presence and approximate number of animals of each type, but he cannot pinpoint their exact location. This power does detect supernatural creatures who have assumed the shape of one of the aforementioned creatures, but it doesn't distinguish them from any normal animal of the same type (unless it's a vampire in animal form, in which case the Forsworn detects the vampire's presence).

This power costs six experience points to learn.

Discerning Palate (Belial's Feast, Animalism ••)

For those who manifest both a taste for flesh and a mystical understanding of the primal side of existence, this power is often the next logical step. Discerning Palate allows a Forsworn to draw information from the meat of other sentient beings simply by consuming it. This devotion is popular among the various *sarx*-dominant coveys, particularly the grisly Forsworn of the Teeth of Yamatu.

Action: Reflexive

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: N/A

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Animalism contested by Resolve + Blood Potency

No matter how much of the subject's flesh the character consumes, he only rolls for this power once. Obviously, an expired subject gets no roll to contest, but invoking this power on dead flesh carries its own disadvantages (see modifiers). Success allows the vampire to learn a piece of information about the subject, the type and specificity of which is dictated by the number of successes he scored in excess of his subject's. With one extra success, the vampire can only learn something about the creature's body — common examples include age, state of health, the rating of a Physical Attribute, Skill or Discipline or Blood Potency rating. With two excess successes, the vampire can learn a piece of personal data about the subject (e.g., likes, dislikes, fears and ratings of Mental or Social Attributes, Skills or Disciplines). And with three or more extra successes, the Forsworn can unearth specific memories, even those buried in the subconscious, assuming he knows what to "look" for. Regardless of suc-

cesses, the only piece of information a corpse reveals is the cause of its death, a byproduct of which also confers a sense of the subject's identity if not the actual name (though not the killer's identity). A vampire may only turn this power on a given subject once per night, regardless of how much of the creature's flesh he consumes at a sitting.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The subject is in frenzy at the time the flesh is consumed.
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie.
—	Subject of the power is an animal, vampire or other supernatural creature.
-1	Subject of the power is a living mortal.
-2	User has turned this power on the same subject before.
-3	Subject of the power is a corpse (includes expired vampires).

This power costs nine experience points to learn.

Disquieting Mien (Master's Will, Majesty •)

This Devotion is a favorite among young Forsworn who revel in lording over chaos. By allowing one's Beast to subtly purr and tease at those around him, the vampire agitates the minds of everyone in his immediate presence. Mortals and vampires alike are susceptible to the primal taunting of Disquieting Mien, but all would be hard-pressed to identify the source of their subtle unease without resorting to mystical means (e.g., Auspex).

Action: Instant

Cost: 1 Vitae

Duration: One scene

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Majesty contested by opponents' Resolve + Blood Potency. (The vampire rolls once and compares his results individually.)

This power affects everyone within 10 yards of the vampire for so long as the ability is active. Those who fail to accumulate as many successes as the Forsworn take a -2 penalty to all rolls involving the Composure Attribute for the remainder of the scene, for as long as they remain in his presence.

This power costs six experience points to learn.

Mesmeric Taint (Predator's Allure, Majesty •••)

A vampire's Beast is a creature of passion and territoriality. Weaker vampires can be cowed into submission by the mere presence of a Beast worthy of respect. Mesmeric Taint allows Forsworn to subjugate those who would challenge their authority by crushing any defiance presented

to their own Beasts. Forsworn of the Throne of Smokeless Fire consider this aura a mark of some distinction within their ranks, and some take a perverse pleasure in the fawning attention of weaker vampires.

Action: As Entrancement

Cost: —

Duration: As Entrancement

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + Majesty contested by Composure + Blood Potency

The potency of this Devotion is equally as substantial as it is narrow in scope; its effects only come into play in situations when touching Taints actually calls for opposed Composure + Resolve rolls (e.g., when meeting other vampires for the first time). When an unfamiliar or startled vampire fails his Composure + Resolve roll upon touching Taints with the character, instead of succumbing to frenzy, the other vampire must immediately enter a contested roll with the Forsworn to resist being Entranced (per Majesty •••). If the near-frenzy vampire fails this contested roll, his impending frenzy is averted, and he is instead affected per the Entrancement Discipline. If he wins the contested roll, his frenzy or Rötschreck proceeds as normal.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

Song of Bonded Blood (Scent of Socius, Auspex ••••)

The bonds of blood are strong among the Forsworn, and many of the covenant's rituals revolve around the pack dynamics of the covey. A vampire who develops this power learns how to use his mastery of Auspex to project his thoughts into the minds of those with whom he shares such a powerful bond, even when they are removed from his immediate presence.

Action: Instant

Cost: —

Duration: One scene

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Auspex

This Devotion allows the user to transmit mental messages to any creature with whom he shares a blood connection — his own ghouls, the covey's ghouls, his covey-mates themselves and any other creature with whom he shares a blood tie. Success on the activation roll allows the user to transmit messages (at a rate of one per turn) to any one, some or all of those connected to him in this fashion, for one scene. Subjects cannot reply with thoughts or messages of their own unless they are within line of sight of the user of this power (or they, too, possess this Devotion). A dramatic failure results in the user not being able to focus his mind enough to single out specific subjects; every thought he transmits goes out to every creature with whom he shares a blood connection. The power of this effect is limited to a range of about 50 miles.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.



Appendix The Adversary



"We got the same enemy.

So die brave.

We'll eat what's left."

After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave — a gruesome, terrible shadow. God is dead, but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. And we, we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.

— Friedrich Nietzsche

Similar to the other covenant sourcebooks for the **Vampire** game, **Belial's Brood** is meant to be both a player resource and a thorough guide for Storytellers who wish to introduce new material into their games. This appendix is filled with Storyteller characters who are meant to embody and fulfill that mandate. For ease of reference, the characters provided below are divided roughly into non-combatants and combatants (with the usual breakdown of game statistics), but all characters herein were compiled and designed to serve dual purposes — as both ready-made contacts and mentors for the players' characters, and as sources of inspiration for the players themselves, should the Storyteller confront the demanding challenge of running an all-Brood chronicle. This appendix offers glimpses of what is typical or illustrative of those belonging to the major factions of the Brood, while it simultaneously presents examples of what sorts of curious individuals tend to orbit around the periphery of stories featuring or focusing on the Forsworn.

That said, it bears repeating here that the entire concept of Belial's Brood is a complex one, and a tricky one to introduce into a game, even under the most model circumstances. The Forsworn tackle and represent some *extremely* mature themes, and any Storyteller who intends to feature them in any depth or realism should think long and hard about the role he expects the Brood to play in his game. Whatever else the Forsworn are, they are *not* black-and-white stereotypes, and Storytellers simply looking to throw new and "evil" vampires at bored players are better served using VII for those ends. Members of the Brood keep mostly to themselves, which makes the idea of other vampires running afoul of them largely circumstantial, and more often than not, a matter of competing resources.

This tone would seem to suggest that the best method of using the Brood is to run an all-Brood game, and that's certainly one viable option. But Storytellers should feel free to get creative with how they see the local covey (or coveys, depending on the setting) fitting into the big picture. Running the players' characters-as-covey may be the tidiest solution, but the point is that games featuring the Brood don't *have* to revolve solely around Brood charac-

ters — and indeed, the Brood as a whole works best when it retains some element of both its mystery and aloofness. The major differences in mindset between the Forsworn and other vampires, coupled with their intense pack mentality and focus, makes subtle interweaving of the Brood into an existing game a complicated prospect, but it can be done. All it takes is a bit of planning. Just keep in mind that setting the Forsworn as *directly antagonistic* to a coterie of non-Forsworn characters is the weakest, most ineffectual use of the material in this book. Storytellers should try to think more narratively, more outside the box, when it comes to Belial's Brood.

A Hoary Host

Storytellers should make use of the following sample characters primarily as non-combatants, in situations that call for diplomacy, finesse or simple dialogue. Although the Forsworn are instinct-driven and inhumane, the average **Vampire** character (which is to say, a vampire) needn't fear their wrath on that basis alone, and indeed, should find direct conflict with the Brood rare in the extreme. For better or worse, the Forsworn are almost exclusively preoccupied with their relationships with humanity and their own souls.

Agent of the Djinn

Quote: "I understand it's an heirloom. Nevertheless, my associates require it. So, be a good little sheep and give it to me before there are . . . consequences."

Background: Although some members of the Throne of Smokeless Fire have little interaction with the mortal world, the agent of the Djinn specializes in securing resources and acquiring those things needed to carry on the rites of her covey. Empowered and ruthless, such agents move through the throng of human inadequacy with grace and competence, intimidating the weak and charming the strong. Although loath to travel far from their covey, when journeys abroad become necessary, an agent usually makes the trip. Capable of infiltrating the Prince's court, covenant sanctums and well-guarded havens, what the covey needs, the agent of the Djinn will get.

Description: The agent of the Djinn is a fair-faced, socially savvy predator. The agent dresses powerfully for



whatever her habitat – whether it be an perfectly tailored Armani suit, expensive street gear or top-of-the-line club wear. In impoverished areas of the world, the agent will generally dress to scare rather than impress. Regardless of her ensemble, the look in her eyes reveals her bestial nature. Even though the agent of the Djinn is slender and appealing to the eye, she is no fragile weakling, but physical combat is not her arena of choice. In instances of physical conflict, the agent of the Djinn prefers a quick escape.

Storytelling Hints: The agent is the hands and eyes of the covey in the mortal world. Similar to other members of the Throne of Smokeless Fire, she carries herself with a posture of superiority but knows when to rein it in for her own good and that of her covey. As the agent is often required to resort to theft and murder, those of whom she is not aware may pursue her. Consorting with or harboring an agent of the Djinn can make one a lot of new enemies, whether mortal law enforcement, representatives of the church or the vengeful loved one of someone she's wronged.

Abilities:

Computer (dice pool 6) – The agent of the Djinn requires enormous amounts of information in order to achieve her goals. To procure this data in a timely fashion, the agent is usually adept at accessing electronic files and records as well as penetrating their associated passwords and security protocols.

Larceny (dice pool 7) – Many of the things the Throne of Smokeless Fire requires are not for sale. Whether in a private residence, a medical facility or a briefcase by the bedside, the agent of the Djinn must be prepared to take aggressive measures to get the things her covey needs. In these instances, the agent of the Djinn is

skilled at eliminating evidence of her passing and obscuring the methods used.

Intimidation (dice pool 7) – Although she is a trained operative capable of the most subtle means, the agent of the Djinn is still a warrior of the Throne of Smokeless Fire. When confronted with social obstacles, the agent will generally resort to brute intimidation rather than honeyed coercion.

Antinomian Scholar

Quote: “The correspondences are indeed consistent with the astrological phases. If the sacrifices are revered this evening, He should be appeased.”

Background: The Pandemonium crawls with some of the most blatant and crazed madmen that Belial's Brood has to offer. However, even with these self-made horrors holding the line against the forces of righteousness, even bloodthirsty mobs need direction if they are to be of any use. The Antinomian scholar, through the construction of bizarre rituals based on the exhaustive research of the most obscure occult and anthropological sources, is one of these leaders. Hunched over dusty grimoires and anachronistic ritual tools, the scholar of the Pandemonium often draws the blueprint for his covey's blasphemous doings. Despite his social limits, the Antinomian scholar is intellectually brilliant and can provide a wide range of useful information if managed by a covey sister possessed of more practical sensibilities.

Description: Insane and obsessed, a scholar of the Pandemonium is an occult cliché – bespectacled with ratty hair and questionable fashion sense, given to trench coats and ostentatious occult jewelry that the tackiest teenager wouldn't be caught dead wearing. Although not





as bold as the rank-and-file psychopaths of his faction, the Antinomian scholar holds his own when it comes to anti-social creep factor and odious habits.

Storytelling Hints: Despite a lack of any appealing social traits, the Antinomian scholar is valued as a treasure house of occult lore and detail. Obscure rites, names, histories and rumors are his bread and butter, and he is capable of correlating any of the above into confusing yet consistent conspiracies. In some cases, an Antinomian scholar will uncover information that reveals dark secrets about a domain or those who rule it. In other instances, a scholar can reveal the whereabouts of sacred objects that have been lost to his covey by spending hundreds of hours researching in the isolated darkness of his private occult library. If left to his own means, the Antinomian's unstable mind can weave elaborate conspiracy theories that unnerve members of his covey and terrify the members of the covey's mortal cult.

Abilities:

Academics (dice pool 7) – Lacking the physical intensity of many of his covey-mates, the Antinomian scholar compensates with seemingly limitless access to strange and uncommon facts. Versed in critical inquiry, history and the classics, the scholar will often understand details and nuances that his brutish companions cannot.

Investigation (dice pool 5) – The Antinomian scholar doesn't always have what he needs at his fingertips. In some cases, down and dirty investigation is what is called for and the scholar of the Pandaemonium is not at a loss when these times are at hand.

Occult (dice pool 8) – Above all other things, the Antinomian scholar is a master of occult lore, formula and ritual. Although other Forsworn demonstrate their faith through zeal and devotion, the scholar expresses his faith through tireless research into every aspect of the world beyond. Although more teacher than guru, because of his advanced knowledge, Antinomian scholars will often take up important supporting roles during the performance of rites.

Faustian Manipulator

Quote: "One can't go through life thinking in terms of need. If one is to be truly immortal, one must give equal weight to want and desire."

Background: The Faustian manipulator is a dangerous and feared master of the game. Regardless of the sin, the Mercy Seat's corruptors know how to bend any vice toward the benefit of their faction. Coercive and false, the manipulator can coax his victim to descend to lower and lower realms of debasement and then bring him lower by appealing to its shame. In many cases, the Faustian manipulator must assume an entirely new identity to perform his role. Once the

soul of the manipulator's prey is secured, the manipulator will dive into his next role without looking back.

Description: To provide a picture of what Faustian manipulators look like, one must address the roles that they are currently immersed in. Whatever the roles may be, these saboteurs will play the part to the very edge, perfectly imitating every habit and idiosyncrasy. Even without the aid of vampiric Disciplines, the Faustian manipulator can convey the subtlest nuance and earn the trust of the most skeptical mark.

Storytelling Hints: The Faustian manipulator is not a person in any conventional sense. When the manipulator is looked at closely, one realizes that he is merely a husk of cunning wrapped around philosophy of corruption and nihilism. Beyond that, the manipulator is whomever he needs to be in order to satisfy the plans of his covey. When infiltrating the institutions of the mortal realm, the manipulator will know the subtleties and modes of etiquette, never faltering in his perceived perspective. Sometimes, however, the agenda is more personal, and these cases give the manipulator the chance to exercise the vilest aspects of Faustian methodology. Twisting honesty into lies, and trust into suspicion, a Mercy Seat corruptor in one's midst is perhaps the ultimate nightmare for the moral mind. By warming up to individuals, he will learn their secrets, insecurities and deepest fears. After he has acquired such knowledge, the Faustian manipulator will reweave the truth out of pure falsehood and exploit any sign of distrust between the individual and his closest companions.

Abilities:

Empathy (dice pool 6) – In many cases, the Faustian manipulator has incomplete data from which to work.



When dealing with these circumstances, he is often forced to glean the rest of his profile from the emotional queues and body language of a close relation of the mark. Although often far from academic, the Faustian manipulator is capable of detecting and interpreting these signs with the acumen of a skilled psychotherapist.

Expression (dice pool 9) – The Faustian manipulator, if anything, is a master of disguise. Although he'll often use makeup and costumes to alter the gross aspects of his appearance, his perfect grasp of mannerism and theatrical technique make him the supreme wolf in sheep's clothing.

Persuasion (dice pool 7) – Over the roll of time, Mercy Seat's manipulators have ended entire dynasties through their powers of coercion. With a well-placed suggestion in the midst of crazed desperation, the experienced Faustian can break the resolve of the most vigilant and pious of mortal souls.

Subterfuge (dice pool 7) – There are perhaps no greater liars than those who serve the Mercy Seat. Whether twisting of the truth, omitting an essential fact, feigning sincerity of commiseration, or telling a bald-faced lie, the Faustian manipulator is so convincing that even his own covey brothers and sisters treat his "true nature" as if it were an act.

Nameless Genealogist

Quote: "It's ironic to see so many obsessed with the question of whether or not the Nazarene carpenter ever propagated, when the real question is whether or not the living line of Belial still walks the Earth. This is the truth that I seek."

Background: Almost every researcher of the Nameless is a dangerous combination of meticulous thoroughness and almost single-minded dedication, but none so singularly personifies these traits as does the Nameless genealogist. Although the faction is interested in all the secrets it believes are hidden away in the blood of countless families, the Nameless' genealogists are primarily concerned with discovering the mortal descendants of their living messiah, whom they believe increased his number before returning once more to the Adversary.

Description: Bookish and reserved though he may be, the genealogist of the Nameless is nonetheless devoted entirely to his work, and his aspect betrays his willingness to do whatever it takes to uncover the next piece of vital data. Some are hardy and worldly, having already done more traveling and exploring than most vampires will do in their entire unives, but such figures certainly qualify as the irregular exceptions that prove the rule.

Storytelling Hints: For his largely unassuming demeanor, the Nameless genealogists is still one of the Forsworn, which is to say, an inhuman predator. He is



brutally intrepid, and precious little will deter a Nameless genealogist once he's caught a scent he feels may lead to discovery. Of all the Forsworn, a researcher of the Nameless is perhaps the most likely to encounter Kindred outside the Brood, for he is sworn to following his research wherever it may go. For these reasons, he and his ilk are prone to forging passable relations with specific non-Brood individuals in the occult and academic communities. In these cases, he is sure to play his cards very close to his chest – as much to spare his useful contact the retribution that comes with meddling as to advance his own agenda with confidence.

Abilities:

Computer (dice pool 6) – The Forsworn may be predatory and instinctual but they're not moronic, by and large. The Nameless genealogist knows enough about computers and the Internet to not only navigate their pathways, but even to hack certain security measures and, with any luck, conceal the evidence of both his intrusion and his passing. Researchers like him are one of the main reasons the Brood has any virtual awareness or presence to speak of.

Persuasion (dice pool 7) – Similar to other vampires, the Nameless genealogist often finds himself with a need to persuade others to do something he wants them to do, frequently something they're not particularly inclined to do otherwise. (For example, few archivists or file clerks are initially predisposed to disclosing confidential records just because some stranger asked them to.) In these and other situations, the Forsworn finds it useful to know how to coerce and cajole.

Research (dice pool 8) – Research is a researcher's bread and butter, and there are few things for which the

Nameless genealogist is better suited. Whether obtaining access to a singular but extensive library, making a plethora of knowledgeable contacts, having an incisively brilliant mind or a combination of all these things and more, he just knows how to *find information*, pure and simple. It may not come fast, and it may not come complete, but the immortal have all the time in the world to seek it out.

scarlet libertine

Quote: “What is the nature of this flesh we wear? Are these not our masks for this great and terrible ball? Tell me, child, will you wear the frowning visage of guilt, or don the magnificent cowl of your desires made manifest?”

Background: The Scarlet Rite is a faction bent on consumption, lust and waste — your average Hyletic being nothing more than a philosophically deluded derelict and pervert with a penchant for occasional violence and gluttonous thirst for blood. In the midst of writhing orgies, you will find the conductor of the whole nihilistic symphony. These masters of the Hyletic rite are known as the Perfecti. Initiated into the sacred caste of the Therion, these attained deviants wield enormous influence within the extended cult of a covey and are respected throughout the Scarlet Rite at large. Although incapable of siring progeny of his own, the libertine serves as dark father to his Hyletic covey.

Description: Although the pursuit of lust is taken to the extreme, the Perfecti exalt the physical body and are often meticulous about its appearance. Despite finery and impeccable grooming, it is evident to any Kindred that behind the powdered exterior lurks a profoundly threatening predator. In the midst of his cult, the scarlet libertine



is a figure of striking presence that belies an alien wisdom detached utterly from moral and ethical consideration.

Storytelling Hints: The scarlet libertine is a monstrous creature of impeccable grace who has immersed himself utterly in the mysteries of the *sarx*. There is no test or sensation to which one can subject the flesh that the Hyletic Perfecti does not understand. Even if his intentions are without motive beyond a wish for amusement, he delights in pure cruelty beyond all else. Thus, the Hyletic Perfecti construct elaborate games that involve many players, Forsworn and otherwise. The scarlet libertine makes a relentless enemy if he is crossed.

Abilities:

Empathy (dice pool 8) — In order to play the role his covey expects of him, the scarlet libertine must be able to sense the emotions and tides of desire that flow through and around him. While his callousness is evident, he has razor-keen insight into the feelings of others.

Intimidation (Torture) (dice pool 7) — The practices of pleasure are not the only area of expertise of the scarlet libertine. In ritual or the interrogation room, the art of torture is a primary tool of the Hyletic Perfecti.

Occult (dice pool 7) — As a member of the Therion caste, the scarlet libertine is adept at conducting the Archontes and dynamei of his sect.

Persuasion (Seduction) (dice pool 9) — The presence of the Hyletic Perfecti is a drug to those around him. To call him charming is an understatement, as his powers of persuasion and seduction border on mind control in their potency.

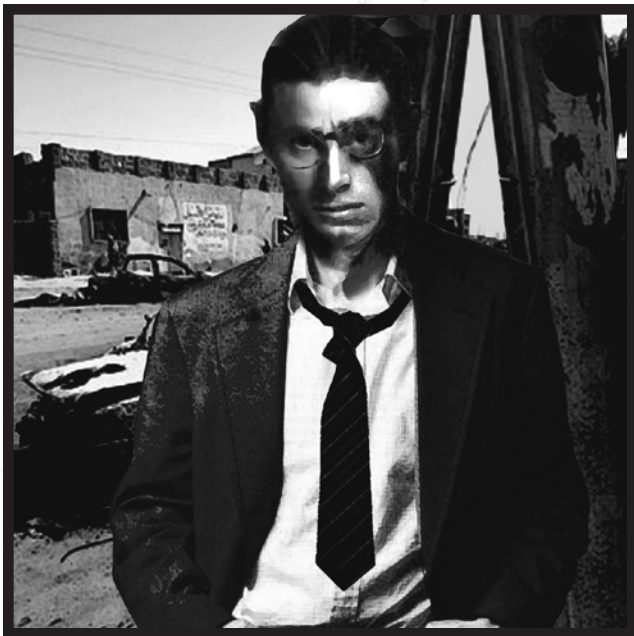
Socialize (dice pool 7) — Because of the social demands of the Hyletic agenda, the scarlet libertine must be a model of grace and savvy. With these talents, he moves through world of flesh and man.

Zealous Archon

Quote: “Whatever you call yourself — be it Acolyte, Dragon, Sanctified or some other delusional title — you, too, are of the Brood. You just won’t accept it.”

Background: The zealous Archon is a capable and driven agent of the Roaring Serpent. Where other Forsworn secret themselves away with their dark rites, or skulk unseen along the back roads of mortal degradation, the zealous Archon takes every opportunity to put himself at the front lines of his covenant’s efforts. He shows initiative, and actively pursues any lead that will further his covey’s cause (or his own personal agenda, of course). He is quick to respond when challenged, and has mastered the art of using body language to gain results.

Description: When set to a task, the zealous Archon is an intractable, unrelenting force. So convinced is he of the



rightness of his faction that it comes across in his bearing. He is tall and broad of shoulder, but comes off even bigger, cutting a figure that seems carefully constructed to shout, “larger than life!” Even in polite company, the telltale of bulge of a concealed weapon or two is evident.

Storytelling Hints: The zealous Archon is actualized and accomplished beast, a worthy descendant of his infamous blood ancestor and a true disciple of the vampiric *soma*. His pride in his understanding of the “truth” of the vampiric nature comes across in his every act and gesture, and his disdain for those who fail to grasp the Pursuit by the throat and make of it their own is intense, and concealed only when it is absolutely necessary to do so. The zealous Archon exemplifies the haughty and superior mindset often associated with cults of the *soma*.

Abilities:

Intimidation (dice pool 8) – Whatever his particular dealings may be, the art of intimidation is the zealous Archon’s stock and trade. Whether justified by actual game mechanics or not, it can be said that the zealous Archon possesses multiple specialties of the Intimidation skill, for he spends much of his time cultivating and perfecting the nuances of social manipulation through fear. It is a grave miscalculation to presume that an Archon cannot accomplish his goals through more delicate means; he simply prefers to first establish dominance.

Investigation (dice pool 6) – The specific duties carried out by the zealous Archon often require a substantial amount of fact-finding and fact-checking; after all, all the power in the world is meaningless until and unless one knows where and when to exert that force. Knowledge is power, and wherever one seeks power, one must also seek knowledge.

Politics (dice pool 6) – The inner workings of most *soma* cults, and the Roaring Serpent in particular, are a steaming cauldron of primate politics, always under the constant threat of boiling over. In the behind-the-scenes maneuverings of such groups, the struggle for dominance between vampiric Beasts is writ large. In order to weather such a froth of turmoil, the zealous Archon must be armed with a strong grasp of the nature and character of the interactions between both the politically strong and the politically weak.

Streetwise (dice pool 7) – Going hand in hand with a solid investigative procedure is the zealous Archon’s ability to maneuver in and around the gilded cage he calls his domain. Whether tracking down another vampire or securing important street items for his covey, the zealous Archon’s overall usefulness depends heavily on his effectiveness “in the field,” and that depends to no small extent on his familiarity with the ways and means of the urban jungle.

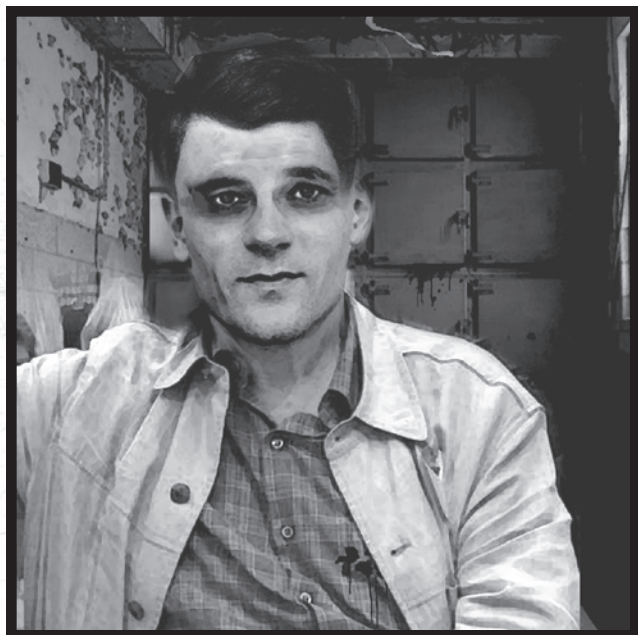
The Beast Unmasked

As so often happens during dealings between the Damned, occasionally the communication breaks down, resulting in direct conflict with one or more of the For-sworn. Few Kindred seek out such violence, however, for those of the Brood make truly terrifying opponents, swayed by neither mercy nor fear of final death. Storytellers can use the following characters as combatants in such situations.

Bogeyman

Quote: “Yeah, just moved in next door. Say, you need some help with those? They look real heavy, and well, I’m not busy just now. So, um, you live alone?”

Background: The next-door neighbor – he’s that pleasant guy you wave to when you are getting home in the evenings as he’s dragging in his garbage cans from the curb. He’s single and works from home. His lawn is always mowed, and he never causes any trouble. You’d never guess he had a pair of gutted nine-year-olds stretched out on his basement floor. Make no mistake: the bogeyman is a serial killer of the highest order who forged his allegiance to Belial’s Brood through contact with one of the sacred Resonants. Since he’s sold his soul, he’s maintained the appearance of being an unaligned loner, who goes about business as usual; that is, when he’s not performing the self-crafted rites he uses to commune with the Adversary. Without a covey to back his efforts, the bogeyman must be incredibly careful to leave no trace of his passing, an effort that can prove a might bit tricky considering what he leaves in his wake.



Description: Despite his morbid pastimes, the bogeyman has a flushed look of health and well-being about him. Conscious of how he is perceived, the bogeyman controls his every gesture and word, conveying a false sense of safety to those around him. Insofar as his clothing, the bogeyman is conservative and inconspicuous, maintaining the illusion that “he just doesn’t seem like the type who would do something like that.”

Storytelling Hints: In dealings with fellow Forsworn, the bogeyman is quiet and passive, obeying all covey customs and taking a kindly tone when discussing current events. However, when the bogeyman goes back out into the world of humans, he becomes what he is. The bogeyman is a sociopath and predator. On the surface, he does what he does out of devotion to the Adversary to which he has sworn himself. Although this outward devotion satisfies the bogeyman’s intellect, it is not really the case. The bogeyman is interested in one thing, and that is power over other beings. By torturing his victims for prolonged periods, he gloats and threatens in order to satisfy his deranged ego. If a mortal (even a ghoul) speaks to him in a pejorative manner, the bogeyman’s psychology cannot readily handle the offense and will later take out his fury on the offender or someone who acts or looks similarly. Other vampires are, for the most part, safe from this degenerate predator. Their ghouls, however, might not be so lucky . . .

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Skills: Academics 1, Brawl 1, Firearms 2, Investigation 3, Larceny (Breaking and Entering) 3, Persuasion (Earning Trust) 4, Socialize 1, Stealth 3, Subterfuge (Changing the Subject) 4, Weaponry 2

Merits: Covenant Status (Belial’s Brood) 1, Danger Sense, Haven (Location) 3, Resources 3, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 7

Humanity: 4

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Blood Potency: 1

Vitae/per Turn: 10/1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Spec	Dice Pool
Baseball Bat	2 (B)	2	4	
Butcher’s Knife	1 (L)	1	4	
Large Axe	3 (L)	3	9 again	4

Health: 7

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Dominate 2, Obfuscate 3, Vigor 2

Derangements: Anxiety (In instances in which the bogeyman would normally become flustered, he must check for frenzy. If he fails, he may spend a Willpower point to immediately suppress the frenzy), Tongue of the Beast.

Forsworn Ghoul

Quote: “Please don’t fight, sacred one. It will all be over in moments. And do not exhaust yourself with pleading. It is only the will of my masters that I obey.”

Background: The Forsworn ghoul understands what a far cry he is from those who serve the covenants, and for this he serves the covey with unswerving loyalty. Poached from his Invictus masters, he has spent the last several years absorbing the lore of the Archons and sealing his ties with the Roaring Serpent. Unfortunately, this has taken an enormous toll on his sanity as the tasks he tends to are often of the most cruel and barbaric sort. Because of this, his deteriorated morality is immediately evident to other humans as well as vampires who have maintained their humanity. He stays close to his covey, protecting and assisting the Forsworn, but maintains a consistency of faith that most mortals aren’t capable of. The Forsworn ghoul is devout, zealous and obedient to the whim of the covey, and for this he is richly rewarded and deeply appreciated.

Description: The Forsworn ghoul is a distant and placid creature with the doll-like eyes of a shark when feeding. He is extremely well fed and impeccably groomed, only showing signs of his feral nature after assisting in the restraint of a vigorous sacrificial victim. Often pressed to intense physical trials of both utility and ceremony, the Forsworn ghoul is physically powerful but prefers

less direct methods than violence, especially when dealing with vampires. For this reason, the Forsworn ghoul maintains perfect etiquette, avoiding those missteps that could result in bloody mess.

Storytelling Hints: The Forsworn ghoul can play any number of roles in a chronicle in which the Brood is featured. Because he is less subservient than a normal ghoul, he is often more confident and competent when left to his own devices. If the ghoul serves one of the *sarx* cults, he serves as a living connection to the mysteries of flesh they explore. If the Forsworn ghoul is an agent of one of the *soma*-oriented factions, he likely maintains management of their physical assets as well as providing security while his covey sleeps through the day. A Forsworn ghoul in the service of a Faustian covey will likely play a part in one of the faction's elaborate schemes of corruption. In almost every instance, Forsworn ghouls who are affiliated with the coveys of the Nameless will almost certainly undergo the initiatory ceremony that transforms them into one of the Doulosi ghoul cult (see p. 120).

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Skills: Academics 2, Computer 2, Drive 2, Firearms 2, Investigation 2, Larceny 2, Medicine (Anesthesia) 2, Occult 3, Socialize 2, Stealth (Crowds) 2, Streetwise (Black Market) 3, Subterfuge 3, Weaponry 2

Merits: Allies 1, Covenant Status (Belial's Brood) 1, Regnant 4, Resources 2

Willpower: 6

Morality: 3

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Vitae/per Turn: 4/1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Spec	Dice Pool
Ritual Dagger	1 (L)	1	4	
.357 Magnum	3	1	4	

Health: 9

Disciplines: Nightmare 2, Obfuscate 1, Vigor 1

Derangements: Fixation (severe)

Hand of Belial

Quote: "But for the glory of the Adversary go I."

Background: The Pandaemonium is perhaps the least discreet of all the factions of the Forsworn. Central to many Antinomians' beliefs is the notion that they are on an unholy crusade to destroy God's work, and ensure

the victory of the Adversary and of Belial, the infernal Duke of vampirekind. The hand of Belial is a tried and tested fanatic, an Antinomian warrior who has all but extinguished the very last of his self-preservation instinct, willing to throw himself into the flames of conflict at a moment's notice. Despite his aggression, the hand of Belial is a devastating combatant, capable of eviscerating all but the most skilled opponents. Through his martial prowess, the hand of Belial is tireless in proving himself to the unseen demon to whom his covey pays homage.

Description: Scarred, pierced and tattooed beyond description, the ascetic rank and file of the Pandaemonium is inscribed with his faith — covering his entire body in strange sigils envisioned during ecstatic rites of self-torment. Despite the obscene marks and scars, the hand of Belial is a vicious and relentless warrior, a combination of fanaticism, brutality and sheer fearlessness.

Storytelling Hints: The hand of Belial cannot be reasoned with. The mandates and obscure laws of his covey are inviolable, and anyone who stands in violation of its creed will be stretched upon the sacrificial slab by this fanatic's hand. If his covey is discovered, he will sacrifice his own unlfe to make sure the trespassers do not live to speak of it. When with his covey, he is unswerving in his devotion, never forgetting the prayers and evocations. Although not an operative for subtle objectives, the hand of Belial is invaluable when the situation calls for the application of intense violence. Due to his zeal, the hand of Belial also takes betrayals as an attack on his own honor and safety, and will often pursue such transgressors on behalf of the covey. In circumstances in which he finds himself separated from his covey, the hand of Belial is capable of tremendous cunning and survivability, despite being unable to blend easily into the human flock.



Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4, Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl (Claws) 4, Firearms 2, Intimidation (Blatant Threats) 4, Investigation 1, Occult 2, Stealth (Tails) 2, Streetwise 2, Survival 3, Weaponry 3

Merits: Covenant Status (Belial's Brood) 3, Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Iron Stamina 3, Resources 1

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 2

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 12

Blood Potency: 2

Vitae/per Turn: 11/1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Spec	Dice Pool
Claws	1 (A)	N/A	Uses Brawl	9
Shotgun	4 (L)	2	9 again	5
Stake	1 (L)	1	Must target heart	7

Health: 9

Disciplines: Protean 3, Resilience 3, Vigor 2

Investments: Unfeeling Skin, Walk the Walls, Warp Corpse

Derangements: Tongue of the Beast

High Ritualist

Quote: "And lo, did the weak lay down before the mighty and offer their heads to they who had conquered



them. From goblets of iron did we take of their blood, the rivers run red with the proof of our victory. All this shall come to pass!"

Background: Many devotees of the Throne of Smokeless Fire choose a specific path to excellence, whether it be material wealth, physical superiority or spiritual attainment. On rare occasion, a certain type of Djinn will rise from the swell of his brethren and manifest the traits of the true dark sovereign. These special Forsworn, often called high ritualists, are the favored generals of the Djinn and hold total power over their coveys and any members of the Throne of Smokeless Fire with which they should come in contact. Having attained excellence and wisdom, the high ritualist is a powerful vampire who understands the core mysteries of the Trinity. Through meditation, the performance of rites and countless victories in ceremonial combat, he now bears the investments of the *sarx*, *soma* and *pneuma*. Eager for confrontation in the mental, physical and social arenas, the high ritualist has total conviction in both his own superiority, and in the fact that he is favored above others in the eyes of the Adversary.

Description: The high ritualist is an attained and inhuman beast of a vampire. Often marked by the self-inflicted deformities and scars earned in ritual combat, the high ritualist carries himself with the demeanor of both a dark saint and a predatory beast. During his covey's ceremonies, the high ritualist wears flowing, red silk robes and abundant gold jewelry, and carries the sharpened machete with which he makes offerings to the Demiurge.

Storytelling Hints: The high ritualists of the Throne of Smokeless Fire are the unforgiving, fascist commanders of the faction. If one of these masters is attached to a covey, that covey likely has both a long list of successes and access to enormous resources. Regardless, the high ritualist is deadly on all fronts. A wide variety of high-level skills, vampiric Disciplines and Investments of all three aspects make him a versatile enemy. Nonetheless, the high ritualist does not waste his time with the little things, and only the most important matters merit his direct involvement.

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 5, Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Skills: Academics (Forsworn History) 4, Brawl 3, Empathy 3, Expression (Religious Ceremonies) 5, Intimidation 4, Investigation 3, Medicine (Anatomy) 3, Occult (Covey Rites) 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3, Weaponry 4

Merits: Allies (Occult) 4, Contacts 2, Covenant Status (Belial's Brood) 4, Disarm, Fast Reflexes 1, Fighting Finesse (Machete), Haven (Location) 3, Herd (Mortal Cult) 3, Language (Latin), Language (Greek), Meditative Mind, Resources 3, Retainer (Doulosi Ghoul) 2, Weaponry Dodge

Willpower: 8
Humanity: 2
Virtue: Faith
Vice: Pride
Initiative: 8
Defense: 3
Speed: 12
Blood Potency: 5
Vitae/per Turn: 14/2
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Spec	Dice Pool
Ritual Machete	3 (L)	2	8	
Stake	1 (L)	1	Must target heart	7

Health: 9

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Celerity 2, Majesty 4, Nightmare 4, Obfuscate 3, Resilience 3, Vigor 3

Investments: Blood of the Beast, Blood Rage, Scent of Socius, Walk the Walls

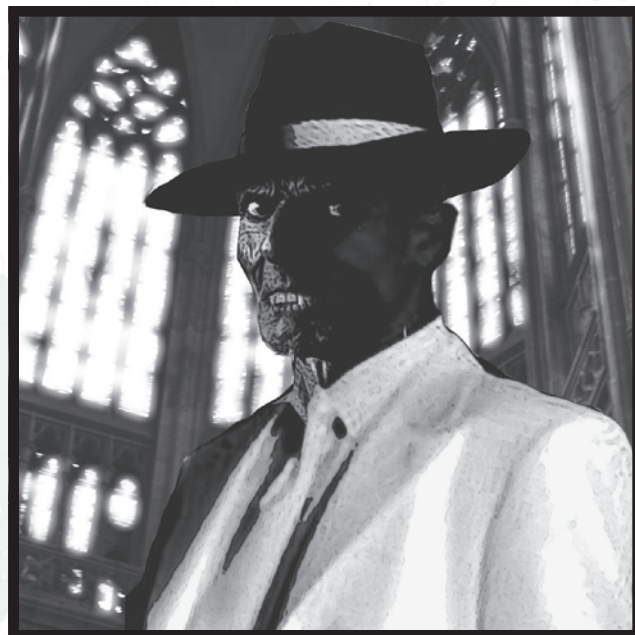
Derangements: Megalomania (mild), Tongue of the Beast

Paranoid Apostate

Quote: “You’ve made a grave error by following me. The Brood will take you, strip your flesh raw and bury you up to your neck in salt. And all just to spite me.”

Background: Once, not so long ago, there was a paragon among the Brood; a vampire who commanded respect from his covey-mates and great influence among his faction, the Roaring Serpent. He engaged the Pursuit with a vigor and acuity not seen in decades, and his efforts bore him delectable fruits. He amassed a host of potent Investments, the combination of which made him a fearsome predator, indeed, and was growing into a luminary among the Archons. Then, one fateful night, his covey engaged in battle with a band of strange interlopers, vampires who descended on his brothers with a ferocity and fearlessness that rivaled their own. In the fray, his Beast overtook him, and he drank of his assailant’s heart’s blood, disintegrating the last shred of the Man within him in the process and transforming him into a raving revenant.

Knowing what had become of their brother, his covey-mates solemnly conducted for him a Rite of the Released, and put all memory of him behind them forever. What they didn’t know is that their fallen brother did not burn himself out and return to the Demiurge, as they expected. Rather, he eventually fell into a torpor and slept, during which he was plagued with nightmares about his lost humanity, and when he awoke some 30 years later,



he had somehow regained some of what he’d cast aside over the years. Now no longer of the Brood, his mind is racked with confusion, and he has come to believe that his former brothers and sisters are hot on his tail since his awakening. Not content to simply send him to Final Death once and for all, he believes they toy with him at some remove, nettling his addled brain and savoring the torture and death that inevitably await.

Description: The paranoid apostate is a shadowy figure with swarthy skin and Middle Eastern features. He has a feral look to him, suggesting he is on the brink and could easily explode into violence at any moment, and his vampire claws never quite seem to withdraw fully into the flesh of his hands. Even at his best, it is evident to even the most obtuse onlooker that a barely concealed madness rages just beneath the surface of the paranoid apostate’s troubled brow, and only the bravest or most foolhardy would deliberately provoke its angry release.

Storytelling Hints: The paranoid apostate is a truly tragic figure. Once, he was in control; he knew what to do and what he was. Once, but no longer. Ever since waking up to find that he was no longer of the Brood, his mind began to spiral dangerously out of control. The loss of both his powers and his memories of being Forsworn have weighed heavily on his newly invigorated conscience, and he nightly struggles with the reemergence of the Man’s influence on his soul. He has convinced himself that the only hope for succor lies in discovering who and what he once was, and in reclaiming the time he “lost” to Belial’s Brood. Tragically, his only real hope lies in putting it all behind him and moving on with his new unlife, but such is the nature of every broken creature. Still, his resolve is firm, and those who stand in his way

find out just how unstable his mind truly is.

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

Skills: Academics 2, Animal Ken (Dogs) 2, Athletics 1, Brawl (Claws) 4, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Firearms 1, Intimidation 4, Investigation 3, Larceny 2, Occult 2, Politics 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3, Survival (Hiding) 4, Weaponry 2

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Contacts (Occult) 2, Disarm, Fast Reflexes 1, Haven (Location/Security) 4, Language (Arabic) 3, Language (French) 2, Resources 2

Willpower: 7 (reduced from 8 through unlife activities)

Humanity: 2

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 12

Blood Potency: 3

Vitae/per Turn: 13/1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Spec	Dice Pool
Claws	1 (A)	N/A	Uses Brawl	9
Stake	1 (L)	1	Must target heart	7

Health: 10

Disciplines: Animalism 2, Auspex 1, Obfuscate 3, Protean 5, Resilience 4

Investments: None

Derangements: Amnesia (severe), Paranoia (severe)

Wild-eyed Cultist

Quote: “So many pieces, so many pieces, so many pieces. The wet, red pieces are arranged like this, see? Only He can solve the puzzle of the wet, red pieces. Stop breathing . . . He shall be with us soon.”

Background: The cast-off progeny of reckless Kindred are often unaligned and despised by other vampires. Such treatment can result in an alienated monster that will seek out extreme means and take risky measures to seize some measure of power. Certain places, objects and written records of the Forsworn resonate with a palpable malevolence. When these estranged vampires stumble upon such items, the result can be terrifying. The wild-eyed cultist has only recently made contact with his new covey; he is completely dedicated to its cause, even if he doesn't consciously understand it. His covey primarily uses him for menial tasks, such as keeping an eye on captives and disposing of the remains. Despite his inability to blend in or serve higher functions, the wild-eyed cultist

is a paragon of deteriorated humanity.

Description: The de-socialized nature of the wild-eyed cultist is immediately noticeable to all but the most oblivious observer. Dressed in ugly pants, a wrinkled shirt and muddy shoes, the wild-eyed cultist is often found at the scene of the crime of many of the less discreet covey's rites — with blood up to the elbows and between his teeth. His deteriorated humanity gives him an animal affect, as he takes neither affirmation nor reprimand with any marked expression.

Storytelling Hints: Let there be no mistake: the wild-eyed cultist is the product of gratuitous cruelty, violence and sadism. Although he was briefly a sane and functional member of Kindred society, years of alienation and lack of contact with his own kind has resulted in a less-than-human result. To the darkness of his basement hovel, he would drag his unconscious prey and mutilate them in accordance with the chorus of demons in his head. Despite his methods, the wild-eyed cultist is no longer a sadist, merely an animal of habit. While more than capable of subduing human prey, the beaten-down Beast of this madman is easily intimidated by stronger Forsworn, cowed like a scared dog in the presence of superior wrath. While coveys do their best to control these types and keep them from the eyes of both human and Kindred society, the blood-thirst of the unpredictable wild-eyed cultist causes him to stray, often forcing the covey into difficult, and sometimes deadly, situations. For this reason, many *soma* cults will not accept these lunatics into their number, though cults of the *sarx* often use them as expendable monsters. Only the *pneuma* cults are so advanced in their madness that they would use these wild-eyed cultists as subjects of study and/or



meditation.

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2, Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 1

Skills: Brawl 3, Crafts (Carpentry) 2, Firearms 1, Intimidation (Threatening Presence) 2, Investigation 1, Larceny 1, Occult 1, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 1, Survival (Urban) 4, Weaponry 1

Merits: Covenant Status (Belial's Brood) 1, Haven (Location) 3, Resources 2, Strong Back

Willpower: 3

Humanity: 2

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 2

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Blood Potency: 1

Vitae/per Turn: 10/1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Spec	Dice Pool
Fist	0 (B)	—	Uses Brawl	6
Knife	1 (L)	1	4	
Small Axe	2 (L)	1	4	

Health: 8

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Obfuscate 2, Resilience 1

Investments: None (yet)

Derangements: Irrationality (severe), Schizophrenia (mild)



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