



VENTRUE

LORDS OVER THE DAMNED

Who are we to you? Kings? Bishops? Corporate executives and powerful politicians? Let me assure you, we are so much more than that. Where there is mastery of one over another, we lurk there, ready to snatch up the lion's portion of the power and glory. In our veins runs the thick blood of gods, my friend. That urge you feel to kneel is entirely natural, I assure you.

— Varimathras,
Ephor to the Mekhet of Portland

This book includes:

- The true, secret history of the Ventrue — the clan that always wins.
- The return of the Malkavians: Vampires driven insane by a supernatural plague.
- A glimpse at what the Ventrue look like first-hand, from accounts “written by” Kindred from across the globe. This is a rich, vivid, and frightening tour through the World of Darkness for players and readers alike.
- New Merits, bloodlines, Discipline powers, and clan secrets that every **Vampire: The Requiem** player will want to have.



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Author's Note

The best things about *Vampire: The Requiem* have come to you from the talented, brilliant, and frightening writers and artists that I have been privileged to work with. Our cunning precursors, who designed the various generations of the *World of Darkness* from scratch, and the initial vision of the *Requiem* by Justin Achilli, set the tone. Craig Grant labored over this book like an Irish monk.

The reason you picked this up and opened it is that it's lovely. That's the work of Craig, and matt milberger, and Rich Thomas. Buy them drinks.

This is my last book as the developer (to any degree) of *Vampire: The Requiem*.

I hope you enjoy it.

—Will Hindmarch

Coming Next



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To W.H. —

— From your most devoted servant:

Many years have passed, since you first charged me with this task, and I fervently hope that time has dulled somewhat the distressing mystery you have endured. The work has been long and uncertain, and for many months it seemed we'd find no Lord willing to speak to us, no stories willing to be told. I owe you some kind of explanation of what has gone into the work you now hold — and why I have kept it from you for so long.

Men and women have died. At least one of our Kindred has met a final end as the result of this work, but surely others have, as well. How many more have been (or will be) hidden away, punished, broken, or ruined for telling their tales? It depends on what you intend to do with these pages, I suppose. I've wondered.

I must confess that, many nights, I question whether I should abandon the work. I must confess that I thought of not sending it. I know this means that I considered dying, finally and truly, to be done with it. In the end, Nicodemus convinced me that this was not really my work to control, and that too much of us has been lost because too many of us refused to share our tales. For all that our secrets protect us, night after night, so too are they slowly smothering us.

At least one helot was released from a prison of blood during our search for these words, however, and at least one childe was reunited with a sire who she long loved and long sought, so I can't say the work has solely caused misery.

The protection that we can uphold, without sacrificing our history and our legendry, is allusion. Only if we share our stories with our kin, do we have some hope of keeping our pasts with us and knowing real immortality. With enough of our history kept in mind, we can continue to leave letters to our childer and to our future selves, and speak through allusions that the living and unmasked cannot see for what they are. Otherwise, we continue withholding our own history from each other, and from ourselves, out of fear of being overheard; that path brings only ignorance and diminishment of who we are.

Thus, in the name of knowledge and the spirit of the Masquerade, I have made much of this work an allegory, like our own history. I have changed some names to protect people and places from being revenged for their help, should this work reach hands other than your own. Those modifications aside, I have done what you asked, and found the face of the modern Ventrue.

Much of what follows is factual. All of it is true.

Semper Servus,

— V.T.

I kept this all this time but I don't want to think so much about the past anymore. You should keep this, though. It feels like part of the work to me.

W.H. –

– From your most devoted servant:

Sir, I am honored to be a part of this work.

I'm pleased to report to you that I already have people seeking out interviews and accounts for the project. It's been my experience that the age and secrecy of our kind has lead to quite a few writers among us. Several of my agents come from a time when letters and penmanship were not hobbies, as you can imagine.

Expect at least a dozen bodies to be at work for us before the year is out. Obviously, the M. will slow us a bit, but I trust my people to be discreet.

I anticipate several years' worth of interviews will be necessary to get the volume of material we'll need for anything resembling an accurate survey of the modern culture. We'll be working against habits of secrecy, years of ill-informed assumptions, and the slander of rumormongers, I'm sure. Locating manuscripts may be possible for getting an image of ages past, but I expect only first-hand accounts and observations of our modern Kindred will get us an authentic sense of the modern night.

It seems to me that the work will benefit if I can establish a base to operate from somewhere I can store notes, recordings, correspondence, and artifacts collected in pursuit of the work. I imagine we'll accumulate enough paper that retaining an archivist of some sort is probably a good idea. Can you recommend someone for the task, or should I conduct my own search? I'll admit that I'm not sure where to begin, and my connections don't yet extend very far into the right corners of academia or antiquity.

This is exciting. It's such a shame to think this hasn't been attempted earlier, or more often. May I ask what's inspired you to pursue this so generously? What are your goals for the work once it is complete?

If at any time I may be of service to you or your family, you know I will help as I can.

Semper Servus,

– V.T.

W.H.–

In an effort to ensure that this material is understandable and of the maximum usefulness to you, I have put together a quick summary of its contents, as well as a lexicon of terms commonly used by the Ventrue of tonight's Danse Macabre.

Semper Servus,

—V.T.

A GUIDE TO THIS COMPILATION

CHAPTER ONE:

A HISTORY OF THE VENTRUE: 8

This section is intended to shed some light on the origins of the vampires called the Ventrue in these nights. I present to you the **Testimony of Carlyle** (p.8), a Ven of quite aged Requiem, as gathered by one Thomas Clovis. We look at the **Precursors to the Ventrue** (p.12) and then delve into the lineage, with lore on **Aeneas, Son of Venus, First King of the Ventrue** (p.12).

Then, we dwell on the **Saga of the Ventrue** (p.16), which traces our history from the time of Aeneas to the modern nights. Finally, we end this section with **In The Name: Ventrue** (p.30), examining the evolution of the name claimed by the Ventrue today. I also thought it might be appropriate to give you an idea of some of the **Sources** (p. 32) used in this section, so I have appended them here.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE CULTURE OF LORDS: 38

The largest part of this compilation looks at a variety of aspects worth considering in these nights. First, we discuss the **Names of Lords** (p. 38), a study of not merely the sorts of names — both surnames and given — in use among the clan, but also the nuances of names and the changing thereof among the Ventrue. Then, we have an interview with **Crescentia Macellarius** (p. 40), of the Macellarius bloodline, who grants insight and grotesqueries in equal measure. An essay on **The Noble Crime of Tyranny: Custom and Family Among the Lords** (p. 44) examines the concepts of familial pride and the naming traditions of the Ventrue, followed by an absurd sort of pamphlet that made the rounds a few years back suggesting that **The Gods Were Vampires** (p. 49). Very amusing, I assure you.

The details of a meeting with **The Mogul** (p. 50), as he is called, follows. Next, I thought to include a selection of the very best of **The “Secret History” Mails** (p. 53), the very height of paranoid conspiracy theory among our kind. Of far more utility is the **Houston Letters** (p. 55) from two of the most important Kindred in Houston to the Carthian Commander of that city, addressing some interesting developments in the wake of Katrina in that part of the world. I also thought it appropriate to add an essay on the Ventrue tradition of **The Crypteia** (p. 59), along with various looks

at **Chastisement** (p. 60) from an assortment of perspectives. Enlightening, to say the least.

Then, we look at two sources of training in the so-called Ventrue voice: **The Dominatrix and The Academy** (p. 64). Following that, I present **Jordan’s Letter** (p. 66), written to me by an acquaintance of mine and possessed of some interesting insight. Additionally, we look at three somewhat unorthodox Ventrue of some reputation (or perhaps infamy): **King Rat** (p. 68), **The Lord of Paradise Lake** (p. 74) and **The Witch of the Weeds** (p. 80).

We close this section with **Insane Archontology** (p. 85), supposedly intended to inject some humility into this compilation by its shadowy author, but really serving as a reminder to the Ventrue that the Blood isn’t enough to make one noble. A laughable piece, I assure you. Afterward, we look at the Eulogy of the **Unbroken Chain** (p. 90), one neonate’s exploration of his Ven lineage, and something of an excellent warning as to why one should not go bothering one’s elders needlessly.

Finally, in closing, I present to you a far more somber look at the Affliction, better known perhaps as **Malkavia** (p. 95). Those who say that madness springs from a source deep in the Ven Blood will likely find all the ammunition for that perspective here.

*At the eleventh hour, something interesting has come to light — something that I can’t see leaving out. So, I’m somewhat haphazardly placing this addendum into the compilation. These **Notes From the Dead Girl** detail an investigation into a series of strange, grisly murders, and what the poor Kindred doing the investigating discovered. Something to take heed of, I think.*

<http://www.independenttalia.com>

A LEXICON FOR LORDS

The following guide presents terms essential to understanding the history and the culture of the Ventrue. Some of these words are familiar, but their meanings may not be. Some of the terms may be utterly foreign, though they describe well-known ideas. Some of these words and their definitions may make little sense without a deeper understanding of the Ventrue.

The following terms fall into a few simple, overlapping categories, which will help you understand the function of – and appropriate audience for – particular word choices. The categories are:

- **formal** – These are common terms suitable for use in polite society or in the presence of one's betters. These are acceptable in correspondence or in person, and likely go over fine with Ventrue of any age.
- **informal** – Avoid using these terms with Lords you don't yet know. It's presumptuous to think that an older or better lord would welcome such familiarity. Wait for a signal, like the use of an informal term

to you first, before stepping outside the bounds of polite language.

- **archaic** – Old parlance doesn't go out of style with the Ventrue. Instead, it tends to be regarded as eclectic or hiply ironic for a time, before gradually transforming back into standard language. Even ancient terms stand a good chance of being in regular use among modern Ventrue.

- **modern** – It's a sign of low manners among the Ventrue to assume that an elder or better Kindred will be up on modern slang and vernacular. Many Lords keep up with modern jargon just fine, but a careless Ventrue may find himself making a faux pas if he doesn't check himself before using one of these words in mixed company.

- **vulgar** – These are not simply "dirty words," like those insignificant phrases thrown about in casual language. These are deeply meaningful insults imbued with such remarkable venom that they have kept their potent sting for long decades. These are not mere obscenities; they have the power to be affronts. Use them accordingly.

GLOSSARY

afflicted: (adj./n., formal, archaic) Of or involving the Affliction (q.v.); any Kindred suffering from Malkavia (q.v.). *No one's seen her since she visited the afflicted last year.*

Affliction, the: (n., formal, archaic) An ancient, supernatural curse-cum-disease which supposedly appeared first within the Ventrue clan around the beginning of the Common Era, and later spread to all other Kindred clans. Kindred affected by *the Affliction* suffer from delusions, degenerative mental illnesses, emotional imbalances, and eventually dementia. It is incurable. (See also, *Malkavia*.) *He's got the look of the Affliction.*

Aenead: (adj., formal) Of, or pertaining to, the ancient Ventrue, the childer of Aeneas (q.v.); noble; venerable. (n., formal, archaic) Any Kindred of the Ventrue or Dead Julii familial lines; the childer of Aeneas. *Watch yourself, my boy — his is an Aenead lineage, and his allies are powerful and many.*

at the table: (adj., informal/formal) Involved in business; a part of the team; preoccupied. Typically, this phrase is used when referring to business, meetings, or operations which are best left undisclosed to present company. *Very sorry, but Master cannot see you now as he is at the table with the Priscus. Or, You're going to have to do better than that, Jonas, if you want a seat at the table.*

childer of Aeneas: (n., informal, archaic) A poetic (or pretentious) term for very ancient or old-fashioned Ventrue vampires. Among the kinds of Kindred this phrase describes, the *childer of Aeneas* are the Ventrue and the Dead Julii (q.v.), all of whom are legendarily descended from the Trojan hero, Aeneas. *The Priscus thinks all us childer of Aeneas would be better off with him as Prince.*

colonial: (n., informal, archaic) Any Kindred city, bloodline, childer, covenant, coterie or other group that is a direct offshoot of another, especially over long distance, but only when the parent individual or group is also mentioned. For example, "Edgar is a colonial," is ungrammatical, but, "Edgar is a colonial of Solomon," is grammatically correct. Traditionally, only subjects outside of the same city are considered colonial. *The Prince of Philadelphia is a colonial of our Priscus, you know.* (adj., informal) Being of any Kindred individual or group that is a direct offshoot of another. *You'd hope we'd still have connections in someplace so colonial, but we're not that lucky.*

Crypteia: (n., formal, archaic) Historically, a clandestine coterie of Ventrue employed by a city's Prince or Priscus for the purpose of covertly enacting secret punishments against Kindred or mortal enemies of the city or clan, especially for the sake of maintaining the balance of power or preventing potentially upsetting changes to the social hierarchy. As a formal body, the Crypteia were (or are) a kind of secret police; in practice, they may be little more than thugs. Customarily, "the Crypteia" is a formal (though secret) unit of two or more hand-picked Ventrue vampires. Tonight, any small group of Kindred sent out on any secret or illicit mission of malicious intent might be called "a crypteia," especially if the group or its commissioner are Ventrue. *Last night he's talking about how the Duke's a sham and tonight nobody knows where he's gone, and you're not thinking the Crypteia carried him off?*

Dead Julii: (n., formal; Dead JOO-lee-eye) The modern way to refer to the Julii clan of Kindred,

once common in the nights of Rome and the Camarilla, and traditionally regarded as cousins of the Ventrue. In modern nights, they are often thought of as being the very same clan, aside from differences of custom and culture. The true relationship between the Julii and the Ventrue is a matter of speculation and debate. *This building has been here since the time of the Dead Julii.*

Demented: (n., informal) A Kindred who uses or studies the mystic powers associated with Malkavia (q.v.); a practitioner of Dementation (q.v.); less properly, any Malkavian (q.v.). (adj., informal) Of or involving the mystic powers derived from the Affliction. *His sire's been sick for decades, but this is the first I've heard of him being Demented.*

dominion: (n., informal) The reach and limits of one's will as projected by the supernatural power of Ventrue blood (q.v.). This refers not only to a measure of physical range, but also a roster of subjects, contacts, and other targets being manipulated with Dominate, as well as the effects of the Discipline in general. *If you get in that car with him, he'll have you in his dominion inside of ten minutes.*

Ephor: (n., formal, archaic) The title given to a city's most respected, and usually aged, Lord or Lords, who advise Kindred on matters of politics, history, and custom. The maximum number of Ephors in any city is five; each Ephor is traditionally made ambassador to one clan (including the Ventrue). The Ventrue Priscus is typically an Ephor, and often regarded as the "ambassador" to his or her own clan. *I think that's how it works, but I'd feel a lot better if the Ephor of the Savages agreed with us.*

eulogy: (n., formal) Among Lords, a speech given in praise of an individual or that person's accomplishments, best delivered with reverence and humility. Unlike what is traditional for the living, a Ventrue eulogy is customarily performed in the presence of the subject, whether as a form of respectful celebration or a demonstration of one's loyalty, admiration or ambition. Multiple eulogies are sometimes delivered by competing orators as a contest of courtliness or wit. *You watch – this eulogy is going to make the difference between us being allowed to claim Edgewood and us being asked to claim it.*

genii: (n., archaic) 1. The plural of *genius* (q.v.). 2. In nights past, any Ventrue bloodline that was seemingly blessed by a powerful *genius* spirit, or any such bloodline that was prospering due to supernatural (or unexplained) involvement by forces outside of Kindred society or blood. 3. Tonight, a family or bloodline of respected or prosperous Lords; this sometimes carries a connotation of good fortune spiritually or personally, despite any noteworthy material wealth. *She is the youngest of the Cathedral Hill genii who built most of this neighborhood.*

genius: (n., archaic) 1. A representative spirit of a familial line; an ancestor guardian spirit or protective ghost. In old Roman custom, *genius* is a representative spirit – consider the *genius loci*, which is the spirit who represents a place's true character. While a *genius* is conventionally a male

spirit, in the traditions of the Ventrue, it has become an unsexed symbol of ancestral wisdom and protection, as the name of the old female counterpart spirit (the *juno*) has negative associations for many childer of Aeneas (q.v.). Most (but not all) Lords consider these spirits to be legendary or metaphorical, not actual supernatural beings. 2. In modern parlance, a *genius* is any Ventrue (regardless of gender) whose blood or ideas have greatly benefited the clan, or especially that individual's own line of childer; this is a term of endearment. 3. The secular ideal of the Ventrue sire (or grandsire, etc.) as a provider, advisor, and great leader. *We should all strive to be the genius of our childer.*

Great, the: (adj., informal) Excessively inflated or pretentious; arrogant; self-involved; hindered by delusions of grandeur. Since at least the 13th century, this has been a sarcastic title applied only for mockery of an absent person, especially a mortal. Modern Lords sometimes use the expression on its own in reference to persons and objects alike; e.g., "That is the great suit, Oscar." *You go and give your wrist to Marie the Great, then, but I'm staying here.*

hegemon: (n., informal) A Lord with formal or demonstrable authority or control over any group not Kindred, kine, or ghoul (e.g., werewolves or changelings), or of territory commonly associated with such beings. Strictly speaking, this term may be used as synonymous with "ruler" in an informal sense, but among the Ventrue it has connotations specifically of rule over "outsiders." (Elder Ventrue, or those educated by elders, often pronounce this such that it rhymes with *moan*.) *She seems to be all alone out there, but she's hegemon of the territory all the way out to Birnam Wood.*

helot: (n., archaic) A slave; a pathetic servant; a lowly creature without ambition or rights; a minion without hope of advancement; anyone that can be abused without consequence. From the name of Sparta's servitor class, the Helots, who may have been formally better than slaves but were in practice little more fortunate. As a result of Ventrue legends of ritualized abuse between Spartans and Helots, this more modern term bears the vague implication that the subject deserves abuse or "has it coming." *Keep talking like that, helot, and you're going to get dumped, bloodless, out back.*

Jacks: (n., informal) Two or more young and lively Kindred, especially up-and-coming Ventrue, with more ambition than discipline. In modern nights, Jacks might be seen as any small clique of Kindred rascals, whether they be frat boys or gangbangers. The popular notion of Jacks portrays them as mobile and active, seen briefly on their way to the next party or the next meeting. This term may be a derivation of the Jacks from a deck of cards; jabs and metaphors using card suits are common (e.g., Jacks of Clubs). (Lords have no female equivalent to this term, and though in practice a group of Jacks may be of mixed gender, the term still has a masculine connotation; female Jacks are likely to be thought of as tomboys.) A Ventrue idiom from the 19th century: "Is there

anything sorrier than a lonely Jack?" *Those two Jacks from Edgeville were up at Circus last night, trying to earn themselves roses and gold stars from the Duke.*

king: (n., informal) Any apparently powerful mortal or vampire who is susceptible to manipulation or outside control. A puppet ruler. The power on the throne, rather than the (true) power behind it. This is an ironic label among the Ventrue, used in reference to an appearance of power with little actual autonomy. (v., informal) To promote, aid, or empower someone for the purpose of using them and their power later for one's own gain. *Don't think you can go and king Spencer without paying a price – you know he's already Edgar's king, right?*

Lare: (n., formal, archaic) Originally a Latin term for a household god and/or ancestral spirit, this term is used by the Ventrue as a reminder of their origins playing such significant roles in clan mythology. It has connotations of "revered ancestor" and is considered an appropriate formal address for one's vampiric predecessors upline of the sire.

Lord's words: (n., formal, archaic) The mystical power of the Blood to project one's will onto another; the supernatural power traditionally associated with Ventrue Vitae. The Discipline of Dominate and any of its powers. (Also, *lordly words*.) *If common sense won't get him to do it, I'll give him Lord's words.*

malkavia: (n., formal) The Affliction (q.v.). The true origin of this name is lost to antiquity, but among the Damned it is still the *de facto* nomenclature for the mystical disease. *When that accursed failure came here he brought two childer and malkavia with him.*

Malkavian: (n., formal) Any Kindred suffering from the mystical disease, *malkavia* (q.v.). In many cities, Malkavians are mistaken for a bloodline descended from the Ventrue and responsible for the spread of the Affliction (q.v.), but no such bloodline actually exists; this may be the result of erroneous folk etymology tracing the origin of the word *malkavia* back to the name Malkavian. In fact, the word Malkavian is derived from *malkavia*. *The Prince has decreed that all Malkavians, and only Malkavians, shall make their nest in the old children's hospital.*

move: (v., informal) To change one's mind, or have it changed, especially through entreatment, oratory, discourse, or a passionate argument. *Well said, boy, but you cannot move me.* **-ed:** (adj., informal) Having been changed or persuaded through speech or argument; often with a connotation of minor weakness or vulnerability. *I wouldn't have thought it possible, either, but I'm a moved Carthian, now.*

mum: (v., informal) To use familial connections and obligations for political ends; to abuse personal relationships for political gain; to crassly invoke personal, especially familial, relationships in a formal situation. The image meant to be evoked by this word is that of the petulant

young prince demanding attention or affection in the midst of a meeting of statesmen. A modern mockery of a jacking vampire typically begins by whining something like, "But Mummy, I want to..." or, "Please, sire, can't I have..." like a spoiled rich girl. Did you see him mumming for feeding rights when the Regent was standing right there?

poem: (n., informal; also poetry) A well-crafted or intelligent argument, especially one which is personally or aesthetically appreciated, but that fails to truly achieve its goal. For example, a eulogy (q.v.) that earns great praise and genuine appreciation, but does not win political favor; a speech at court that succeeds in making other Kindred take the speaker's issues seriously but fails to change the Prince's decision on a recent proclamation. To these Kindred it was a fucking revolution, but to the Prince it was just poetry.

sibyl: (n., archaic) A Kindred or ghoul who uses the power of Ventrue blood to force or coerce a subject into behavior fulfilling a prophecy, especially if the Kindred or ghoul is also the source of the prophecy. Truly prophetic beings are not regarded as sibyls by the Ventrue; among them this term quietly but surely indicates a scam, exploiting the appearance of prophecy to cover up the use of the Dominate Discipline. (There is no masculine equivalent for this usage – the distrust inherent in this definition has never escaped its ancient sexism – but the term is applied to men as well as women.) (v., modern) To act as a sibyl against someone. *She's been sibyling the neonates on the West Side for probably ten years.*

solve: (v., modern, informal) To kill. Among the Ventrue, the disguised meaning has curved back on itself over the years to the degree that the expression "to solve the problem" may parse as "to kill the problem," which is practically the same as the literal meaning ("to deal with"), but quite different in its character. (Consider the difference between *solving* and *killing* a problem of lost keys.) *Go and solve the Lord of Uptown.*

Trojan: (n., informal) A very old or formal Ventrue. In nights past, this was a vaguely respectful term, but in the modern night it is more often used pejoratively to describe a Lord who is *too* old or *too* formal. *This Lord has been around longer than Christianity, so don't talk to him like you would other Trojans – he sees through that shit.*

venir: (adj., archaic, informal) 1. Of or being recently arrived, completed, or improved; new; imminent or forthcoming. This is an old semantic reformation of the French *venir* ("to come"). Under this definition, it means, essentially, someone or something that is "up-and-coming." *This venir Shadow is my new protégé, Sanaa.* 2. Of or pertaining to the Ventrue. *You see order, but all I see is another venir domain favoring its venir slaves.*

Ventrue blood: (n., informal) 1. Good breeding; respectable origins; a knack for command or control; a reputable family. 2. The Discipline of Dominate, or some command of its powers. *That Haunt has Ventrue blood, God only knows how, so keep your eyes away from hers.*

SUBJECT: WHERE DO WE FIND OUR HISTORY?

WH –

Where to begin? Lord Acton, in the same letter in which he gave us the famous warning “power corrupts,” wrote, roughly:

“My advice to persons about to write history – don’t.”

When he penned that admonition, with only a decade still left of the 19th century, there was a lot of history behind him, both written and unwritten.

So much ink has been spilled down the centuries, and so many fingerprints have stained the pages and smudged the words we meant to cherish. So much has been forgotten, and perhaps more has been confused or disguised, tangled and twisted, wrapped up by vines, crumbled into the sand, washed smooth by the sea, worn down by rain, sucked down by mud and overgrown by weeds.

Our history is a long line of headstones and dug-up graves, tombs with doors broken off their hinges, and the writing on them all is difficult to make out. Who of our number has died, and of more significance, when did they come back? We’ve all heard tell, we’ve each retold the stories we were given, and we’ve all told lies. So many, many lies.

What we make up for in first-hand accounts we seem to lose in trustworthiness: Few of the Kindred we were able to speak with seemed to trust the tales of the others. The question inevitably becomes, “Why would this scheming bastard tell the truth?” Yet many elders were eager to tell us their tales, despite being so wary of anyone else’s.

In the end, despite the Requiem, our history is not much more reliable than that of the kine, it seems. We should be able to look back into the nights behind us and find them lit by one lantern after another, each aglow with the memories of our immortal kind. Instead, it feels like we’re creeping through the years with a candle in our hands, able to see just a few years behind us as the past falls away into shadow. My work is simply the task of stumbling back through those shadows to rekindle a few dark and dusty lanterns.

Though we’ve been able to tap into a variety of historical sources for this work – some of them written by mortal hands and reinterpreted with Kindred eyes – the majority of our history is still passed on orally, presumably to avoid leaving a paper trail for the public. This is as disadvantageous as it is advantageous, however, and it explains why our history seems to be rich in details in some places, with wide, vague deserts in-between.

To get an account of any particular event, we must navigate the globe by night, penetrate layers of secrecy and disguise to locate genuine witnesses who have survived the ages, are able to speak, are willing to speak, and will tell the truth, all at the same time. This is a rare confluence of circumstances to capture. More often, we must settle for hearsay.

As a result, we have an overview of our history that is compiled from first-hand and second-hand accounts, some few surviving and accessible texts, and a great deal of informed extrapolation and speculation. In all these areas, your excellent contact, Nicodemus, was a tremendous asset. His technological and mystical knack for the work is uncanny. Together, we have researched and written what I think is the best-informed history of the Ventrue possible, given the limitations.

If more ancient Kindred awaken and share their memories or notes of the past, our history will become clearer.

Semper Servus,

– VT

Origins of the Ventrue

THE TESTIMONY OF CARLYLE

by Thomas Clovis, A Duke of Baltimore

"I want you to trust me. I want you to know that I have no motive here, tonight, other than to keep our history alive. To resuscitate it, through the telling. And I don't know any way to make my motive more clear to you – any way to promise that this story is not just a tool to get your ear – than to tell you this: When I've finished, you must go.

Go quickly. Ask me no more questions, and do not let me ask you any favors. Don't trust me not to take advantage of you. Don't trust me not to devise some use for you while I'm telling the tale. Don't trust me if I promise you, even now, that I won't ask something of you at the end of this meeting. Just don't trust me.

Do you understand?"

I told him I did.

CARLYLE THE ANCIENT



His name was Carlyle, and he was no elder. He was ancient. He was older than I could really appreciate at the time, and older than I could pretend to appreciate now. Sometime between the end of the American Civil War and the start of the Iraq War, which was just beginning when I met him, he had spent at least a hundred years asleep, somewhere under North America. Before that, he'd spent at least another hundred years asleep sometime around the time of the French Revolution, and its like.

I'd first heard of Carlyle when I was a neonate. My sire and one of Carlyle's childer are somehow connected, though the exact lineage was confusing to us both and, I expect, will remain so until my grandsire awakens and clarifies things for us.

For all that Ventrue boast about their ancestry and their childer, holes in our history leave us speculating. In the case of Carlyle and myself, at least one important Ventrue between us went missing, and was possibly destroyed, in London during the Great War. Adding to the confusion, of course, are the name changes over the years.

Carlyle looked like the bearded sage I always pictured, but thinner. If Donald Sutherland were to be discovered as the lone survivor of a hopeless shipwreck, and then carefully groomed, he would look like Carlyle. Something about this made it easy for me to imagine him as ancient. White-bearded old men with great voices have always been the ones to pass down the old ways, haven't they? *More on this on p. 30*

Where I met Carlyle, and exactly when, isn't something I will share. He has enemies, sleeping and awake, and it is not my place to undo any chance he has at a fresh start in the world, this time out. What I can tell you is that I heard his tale in a small upstairs room, where we sat next to an empty fireplace, just his chair and mine. The window rattled with rain and the gutters overflowed, making a sound like a river current. We were farther out from city lights and window-

The author who took down Carlyle's tale for me sent along this account of their meeting as well. I've included it here, because I thought you'd prefer to draw your own conclusions about Carlyle. But I think this fairly describes the kind of bullshit and hearsay we had to endure while digging up histories for Nic. to work from.

(I hope the connection between Carlyle and this old name of his will help you or yours find some degree of closure.)

less rooms than I ever like to be, and it was so cold that I had to push blood into my fingertips to keep my pen and pages moving. (I didn't tell him about the digital audio recorder in my pocket, but I suspect he knew.)

All of that fell away. I forgot the sounds and the cold. I lost track of time – which my sire always taught me was a fatal mistake for our kind.

But this man was more than a thousand-years old. When he spoke, I listened.

THE VOICE OF HISTORY

I don't know how old he is, or how many generations removed from the history and legendry of our clan he might be, but I do know that many of the tales he tells were told to him by eyewitnesses. In a past Requiem, Carlyle had done what I was there to do: Record the tales that slip away when our elders are lost to sleep. He had met countless elder Lords and heard their tales. He had met thousands of years of history, looked it in the eye, and heard it speak.

My sire told me that Carlyle was among the first vampires in the American Colonies, and that he had known Kindred who had actually spoken with the old Frankish kings. The Dragon who helped me find Carlyle, for this trip, said that she'd heard he was *in* Byzantium at the end of the Camarilla. The Prince of the city I set out from, who knew it was Carlyle I was traveling to meet, whispered in my ear just before I left, "Ask him about Numitor. Ask him about the Julii."

This rumor I'd heard before: That Carlyle's sire was one of the Dead Julii – the Kindred cousins to the Roman *gens* who included Julius Caesar and Emperor Augustus. The Julii were once a clan of Kindred, according to common wisdom. Most Kindred historians I've spoken to presume them to be precursors to our Ventrue. This was my icebreaker.

"Yes, that's an old one. I've had reputable, intelligent people tell me that the Ventrue did not exist until after the fall of the Camarilla. I'll concede that we did not achieve power – not the kind of power our ancestors demand of us – until after the Julii lost theirs. But don't believe that talk of us being some remains of the Julii. We are simply cousins, born from half-brothers with a common father," he said.

I prodded him for the rest of the story.

"It won't make much sense unless you hear it from the beginning. You want it all, don't you?"

I told him I did.

"Have you ever heard of Carloman?" he asked.

I hadn't.

"Of course not," said Carlyle. "You've not heard of him because we were on the side of his brother, now called Charlemagne." He smiled. His fangs poked past his mustache. In the light coming through the window, everything in that little room seemed tinged with blue.

"That's how it is, isn't it? A version of the truth pours down through the cracks, picking up grit and sand and nonsense along the way. And important things get left out, stuck in gullies, while the sullied truth keeps flowing farther away."

I asked him if his sire was a Julii. What about Numitor?

He looked up, like he was formulating. "My sire was a Ventrue," he said, "I've never known a Julii, first hand." Then he looked back down to me. "And Numitor was my name. Once. Long ago."

I waited for him to go on.

"Do you still change your names? Over time?" he asked. I nodded. "I took the name Numitor when I thought I was so much more than... what I turned out to be," he said. "That someone would tell you about it. I guess I've still not managed to outgrow that reputation. It's strange to think what all we can't escape about our past."

He looked me in the eyes, and held my gaze for a long while. I wanted to look away.

"I did something, long ago. I did something terrible, and I did it using that name. I can never be free of it."

The best we can guess, based on when my man lost the writer, is that their meeting took place somewhere west of Philadelphia. I wish I had more to tell.

OUR DEBT TO THE DEAD

"We owe a debt to the dead," he said to me later. "We are welshing on a debt we owe to nature. To God. The way we repay that debt is to drag the memories of the dead on with us, through time. The Curse makes that hard. It should be hard."

I nodded, but I knew even then that I didn't really appreciate what he was talking about.

"Sometimes," he said, "those dead will be us. I am dragging Numitor around behind me, on a chain, wherever I go. Word of us gets around faster than we can, and we have little hope of outliving the deathless gossips who stick to Princes and Bishops like flies."

He sighed, then, frustrated. "It's damn unfair, isn't it? That so much still gets lost? It is sad to think of all that has been forgotten in the face of

so many momentary passions. So much of what we used to know, is gone now because something else seemed important in this or that bloody moment."

His lip quivered, and he bit it back. I'd never seen an elder like this before. Seldom have I seen it since. He went on.

"I think of everything my sire could tell us about the world, and our people, and the kine. He tried to tell me. More than once. And I heard some of it... but not enough. There's so much that he tried to tell me that's gone now." He looked at me. "I have trouble, these nights, as he did, keeping straight all the details that he told me, compared to what I saw for myself, and what I read later. And what I can recall from... his blood. Our blood."

I sent Carlyle's account of our history (which was incomplete, to say the least) on to Nicodemus, who vetted it for his own account.

I thought I'd remember more. I thought I'd come away from," his mouth trembled again, "our time... knowing more than I do. I thought I'd see what he'd seen. But I find I remember him *telling* those stories better than I remember... his memories of them."

He wiped his thumb across his eye, just once, and it came away bloody.

I wanted to go. I'd never been afraid of that old Lord before – not really – but at that moment I was seized with the terror that he would say something soon that he would regret. Say something that I wouldn't be able to un-hear. Even with his potent blood, even with his power over Lords' words, I didn't want to hear anything he would wish I hadn't, now or later. I didn't want him to think that I needed to be quieted.

I tried to give him an out. I said, "Maybe one night he'll wake up and find you. You can ask him everything you wish you had."

His stare stretched out, far away. "No," he said.

As he sat there, for whatever reason, I thought of my mortal father and my grandfather. I thought of the things I would never be able to ask them, and imagined them wishing for one more conversation with their fathers. I'd never thought of them that way before. They seemed younger, to me, then. They seemed less like fathers and more like... just men.

My grandfather died almost one-hundred years ago. When he was buried, my father knew he would never see him again on this earth. I can't remember what it's like, anymore, to think of someone as being gone forever.

I looked up and found Carlyle looking at me.

"Any one of us remembering the way things used to be, doesn't make the past any more real. Not for us, and not for those who lived it. No undying old man's memory is a sufficient memorial for those who we outlive. If I hoard my memories, they'll wither and starve and die in this dried up old trunk," he said, tapping himself on the temple. "The past doesn't die just because we don't die, just as we don't really *live* just because we don't die.

It breathes when we breathe out the words. When we summon up the memories of our dead lovers and sleeping ancestors, we give them the sweetness of our curse. We make them live again, such as it is, despite the years, as a reward for them suffering through their days and nights with us monsters on their heels or at their sides.

We have to tell it. No! We have to tell it *and* we have to *listen*. You understand?"

I told him I did.

When he was done, we sat for a moment in the quiet.

"Thank you, *lare*," I said. I folded my notebook shut and slipped my pen into my jacket. I stood up and walked for the door, buttoning my coat on the way.

"Child, wait," he said. "Can I ask *you* something?"

I turned. He had a hand out toward me. Bent fingers, loose skin, dry bones, like dead branches draped in fabric. He'd never looked so old to me before. "I'm sorry, old man," I said, "but no." I buttoned my last button and left.

"Good boy," he said as I shut the door.

After your instruction, I sent a copy of Clovis's notes to that Shadow in Edinburgh, Nicodemus, to have it checked against the archive there. It was couriered by one of the Shadow's ghouls, called Samson. Nicodemus already had the notes you'd compiled, and we also sent him the notes from our other interviews, over the past few years.

The most recent piece of new information we've been able to find comes from Istanbul, from a Priest of the Spear called Christof, who had apparently been researching our history, and the Dead Julii. Why? We don't know. We've been unable to figure his blood or who he works for. Two nights after my man recovered this draft of his letter, the Priest and all of his notes disappeared. We've not seen anything of the good brother since then.

I've sent the letter along for you, and a copy to Nicodemus. It matches everything we've put together since '54, but I don't know what history he's working from. Either the Church is hiding texts in Istanbul or this Priest has found some Kin old enough to remember those nights.

PATER -

EVERYTHING HERE SEEMS TO SUPPORT NICHOLAS'S STORY. OUT OF MORE THAN FORTY COLLECTED LETTERS, I CAN FIND NO MODERN REFERENCE TO ANY OF THE JULII LINE, AND NO SIGN OF ANAXIMANDER. IF HE WAS HERE, THE LORDS SEEM TO HAVE LOST (OR NEVER HAD) RECORDS OF IT.

THE LEGENDRY I HAVE FOUND BEGINS WITH TROY AND AENEAS, WITH ONLY MINOR VARIATIONS ON THE TALE FROM THE CARTHAGINIAN MANUSCRIPT. IT SEEMS CLEAR, TO ME, THAT THE VEN. DID GO WEST AND NORTH FROM TROY, POSSIBLY SETTLING NEAR THE RHINE PRIOR EVEN TO THE ARRIVAL OF BRUT? WHEN BRUT ARRIVED, THEN, HE WOULD'VE FOUND THE KIN THERE TO BE FAMILY (DISTANT OR NOT, DEPENDING ON THEIR CONTROL) AND THEY MAY HAVE TAKEN TO HIM AS THEIR LEADER, DUE TO HIS CLOSE LINEAGE TO THE LARE. (OR TO VENUS?)

QUITE A FEW DETAILS ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE PAGES AT OSLO, BUT NOTHING THAT STRIKES ME AS SINISTER OR SUSPICIOUS AS OF YET. AT THIS POINT, I HAVE TO SAY THAT NICHOLAS MAY BE RIGHT. I COULD BELIEVE THAT THESE LETTERS AND HOURS FROM PRAGUE WERE WRITTEN BY THE SAME KINDRED. IF AN EFFORT WAS MADE IN BYZANTIUM TO COLLECT THE HISTORY OF THE VEN., IT MAY HAVE BEEN THE UNDERTAKING OF THE SAME KIN WHO PENNED THE PRAGUE LETTERS AND THE MONK'S MANUSCRIPT. IT MAY BE THE SAME PET PROJECT, IN FACT, GOING ON OVER CENTURIES, BY THE SAME HAND OR FOR THE SAME MASTER.

IF SO, THIS COULD MEAN THE OSLO TEXT IS A DELIBERATE FRAUD, EITHER INTENDED TO CONFUSE THE HISTORY OF THE VEN. (FOR OR AGAINST THEM?) OR TO CONTEST WHAT HAD BEEN SPREAD AS TRUE TO THAT POINT. PERHAPS THE TEXT IS MEANT TO MAKE SOME LOCAL LORD SEEM MORE ESTEEMED, OR COULD IT BE A MEANS TO CONTAMINATE THE MEMORY OF SOME WOKEN ANCIENT? IT IS EVEN QUITE PLAUSIBLE THAT ITS PURPOSE IS TO ACTIVELY DISGUISE THE TRUTH AND HIDE SOME VEN. FROM HISTORY, LIKE NENNIUS. (IS IT POSSIBLE ANAX KNOWS HE'S BEING PURSUED AND IS REWRITING HISTORY TO HIDE HIS TRACKS?)

NEW INFORMATION I HAVE FOUND, THAT I AM SENDING TO ROME FOR SAFE-KEEPING:

- NO MENTION OF ANAX PRIOR TO TROY
- THE ACCOUNT OF THE VEN. FROM DENMARK IS NOT HERE AND DOES NOT SEEM TO BE MISSING... WAS PROBABLY NEVER HERE
- ANOTHER REFERENCE HERE TO A PHILIP (ANAX?) BEING BOUND FOR IBERIA, BUT NOTHING AFTER THAT REGARDING IF HE EVER ARRIVED OR CONTINUED HIS CORRESPONDENCE

FROM THIS, IT SEEMS CLEAR TO ME THAT NICHOLAS IS RIGHT AND THE LORD FROM OSLO IS LYING. IF THE VEN. CAME DOWN FROM THE NORTH, THE BISHOP OF BYZANTIUM DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE KNOWN IT. IF I HAD TO GUESS, THE OSLO VEN. DOESN'T KNOW ANAX, AND HIS MANUSCRIPT IS A FRAUD. BUT MAYBE HE DOESN'T KNOW THAT? IF HE TASTES OF ANAX TO YOU, I MUST SUBMIT THAT HE IS LIKELY AT LEAST TWO GENERATIONS REMOVED AND HAS SIMPLY HEARD TALES.

YOUR SERVANT,
CHRISTOP

I don't know what "Carthag." text he's talking about, but could he mean Elissa? Those Prague Letters are prob. the same that Nicodemus is working from - do you think they're the same author as the letters from Budapest? So many of the stories we're finding seem so close to what's in those letters!

THE PRECURSORS OF THE VENTRUE

The first Ventrue were the secret masters of the great city of Troy. They emerge from the shadows of prehistory as minor gods, just visible over the shoulders of legendary kings.

They dwelled among the living as *lares* (household gods) and *mares* (the lingering shades of beloved ancestors). Often thought of as gods or ghosts, they were in fact undying flesh and blood, as we are now.

The Ventrue of Troy concerned themselves with the fates and fortunes of their own household kine, not the whole of the city. The greatest families of Ilium had their *lares* as well, to be sure, counseling them as they faced difficult decisions as the living lords of Troy; but the *lares* were devoted to their households, whether the kings of the kine dwelled within or not, and could just as easily be found influencing local merchants or tradesmen.

For untold generations – from the earliest nights of the city before Ilium, called Wilusa by the Hittites – the Trojan *lares* stood behind the living, shaping their great city by guiding their descen-

dants to victory and prosperity. In those earliest ancient nights, they were masters of homes and mortal families, advising living fathers and mothers from their considerable experience of years, but they weren't yet lords over the living or the Damned, as we think of them tonight.

At this point, though we have nothing else to call them, these *lares* were not yet Ventrue. They thought of themselves as Trojans – brushed by the noble hand of Hades and as much dead as alive, but still Trojans. Legends of the age, still retold by Kindred tonight, claim that these undead ancestors were not even vampires as we think of them.

They were clearly undead, fed by blood sacrifices made by their living descendants, and could not face the light of the sun, but they had no fear of fire and did not prey on the living. No Beast lurked in their souls. These damnations would come later, from the wrath of gods, in reflection of the travails of the Trojans, as embodied by the so-called First King of the Ventrue: Aeneas.

AENEAS, SON OF VENUS, FIRST KING OF THE VENTRUE

Everything changed with Aeneas.

To tonight's Ventrue, he is our father figure, but to the Trojan *lares* he was a mortal prince, a descendant to be aided by them in their ancestral roles. Though respected by the Trojans, the *lares* of Aeneas's household couldn't have predicted that he would be responsible for their eventual damnation – or empowerment over the living.

Aeneas was no vampire. His father was the Dardanian prince, Anchises, cousin to King Priam of Troy. His mother was the goddess Venus.

Roman poets like Ovid, Livy, and Virgil counted him among the legendary Greek heroes of the glorious age before the fall of Troy, and it's through them that we get most of the mortal legends (and allusions to Kindred history) that reveal Aeneas to us.

To understand the path of the Ventrue through history, we must first recognize how Aeneas's fate is bound to ours. He is the earliest defining figure in our history, and we suffer nightly as his childer. But we should not curse him, because he is also the source of our royal station and godly blood. He is a son of Venus, and though we are his

descendants through damnation, we also bear the blood and power of his royal ancestry.

What we know about Aeneas, tonight, is no accident. His saga from Troy unto death was a prophecy, describing the eternal fate of the people who would follow him. Our fates.

The legends of Aeneas that we have tonight are both history and allegory. They tell us not only *what* happened in our pasts, but also *why* we are as we are, and what our futures may hold.

The literal and the figurative in his tale have merged, and we will never be able to separate them. This is for the best. Let us never forget that every action has meaning. Let us never forget that everything which has happened before holds a lesson invaluable to mastering that which is about to occur.

Aeneas was then a great but flawed man. But tonight he has become *every* great but flawed man who has benefited from the advice, guidance, and rule of our clan, as well as every great but flawed man who has slipped out of our grasp and hurt himself – and us – while outside our care.

LEGENDS OF AENEAS

The Roman Emperor, Augustus Caesar, commissioned the poet Virgil to write the epic poem, *Aeneid*, to exalt his distant ancestor, Aeneas. Virgil

begins the poem with a hint of the godly spite that surrounded Aeneas in life, and eventually led to the existence of our clan:

WHAT GODDESS WAS PROVOK'D, AND WHENCE HER HATE;
FOR WHAT OFFENSE THE QUEEN OF HEAV'N BEGAN
TO PERSECUTE SO BRAVE, SO JUST A MAN;
INVOLV'D HIS ANXIOUS LIFE IN ENDLESS CARES,
EXPOS'D TO WANTS, AND HURRIED INTO WARS!
CAN HEAV'NLY MINDS SUCH HIGH RESENTMENT SHOW,
OR EXERCISE THEIR SPITE IN HUMAN WOE?

Virgil's work in the *Aeneid* is full of allusions to the damnation of the Trojan *lares* and the eventual creation of the Ventruie and the Dead Julii. (The *Aeneid* is a major source for "The Saga of the Ventruie," later in this work.) His information follows the tales told among Kindred so closely that it seems clear he had access either to our legends or to one of the childer of Aeneas.

The earliest work that Virgil could have referenced, aside from stories told by early Kindred, is doubtless the *Iliad*. Homer records little of Aeneas's story, and virtually nothing of the actions

leading to our damnation, but he does present a glimpse of just what it is about Aeneas that provoked the ire of a god.

That "Queen of Heaven" bent on bringing woe to Aeneas was the Greek goddess Hera, more often called by her Roman name – Juno – in the legends of our clan. Her wrath against brave Aeneas stems from earlier days in the War of Troy, but would haunt him and his descendants, both living and undead, ever after. Aeneas was selected by Apollo to face Achilles in battle, to determine the fate of Troy.

Homer tells it in the *Iliad*:

one of the gods is always with him as his guardian angel, and even were it not so, his weapon flies ever straight, and fails not to pierce the flesh of him who is against him; if heaven would let me fight him on even terms he should not soon overcome me, though he boasts that he is made of bronze."

Then [to Aeneas] said King Apollo, son to Jove, "Nay, hero, pray to the ever-living gods, for men say that you were born of Jove's daughter Venus, whereas Achilles is son to a goddess of inferior rank. Venus is child to Jove, while Thetis is but daughter to the old man of the sea. Bring, therefore, your spear to bear upon him, and let him not scare you with his taunts and menaces."

As he spoke he put courage into the heart of the shepherd of his people, and he strode in full armour among the ranks of the foremost fighters. Nor did [Aeneas], son of Anchises, escape the notice of white-armed Juno, as he went forth into the throng to meet Achilles. She called the gods about her, and said, "Look to it and consider how this shall be; Phoebus Apollo has been sending Aeneas clad in full armour to fight Achilles. Shall we turn him back at once, or shall one of us stand by Achilles and endow him with strength? Let us all come down from Olympus and join in the fight, that this day he may take no hurt at the hands of the Trojans."

The earth rang again under the tramp of their feet as they rushed towards each other, and two champions, by far the foremost of them all, met between the hosts to fight – to wit, Aeneas son of Anchises, and noble Achilles.

Aeneas was first to stride forward in attack, his doughty helmet tossing defiance as he came on. He held his strong shield before his breast, and brandished his bronze spear. The

Again and again while we were interviewing elders and experts we heard the rumor that Virgil did not die, but was taken away and Embraced in the Necropolis. This would mean he went out with the rest of the Julii, though I'd like to think that he's still out there somewhere, even if we haven't heard from him in two thousand years.

Three or four Kindred told us they thought he'd been killed (and the *Aeneid* censored) in the name of the Masq., but I'm not sure the timeline's right for that.

Aeneas's role in the War of Troy, and likewise the *Iliad*, is small but vital. His epic begins when Troy finally falls, but his importance in the ongoing fate of the Trojans is first revealed when the gods intervene on his behalf during his battle with Achilles.

The very idea that a champion against Achilles would be backed by another god is offensive to Juno. Aeneas, at the urging of an immortal, is defending his realm against the Achaeans, which makes him an enemy of Achilles, and thus an

enemy of Juno. And she does not forget.

Juno tortures Aeneas throughout his life, chasing him from Troy to Italy. She plagues him with lies and death and pain. Eventually, she presses all his sins and shortcomings into a wine, and with the draught she curses the childer of Aeneas to suffer in his place. Her wrath is insatiable.

Virgil portrayed Aeneas then as a figure of reason and piety. Homer cast Achilles in his traditional role of the warrior filled with all-consuming rage and furor. Together they are the confronta-



champions, by far the foremost of them all, met between the hosts to fight—to wit, Aeneas son of Anchises, and noble Achilles.

Aeneas was first to stride forward in attack, his helmet tossing defiance as he came on. He held his strong shield before his breast, and brandished his bronze spear. The son of Peleus from the other side sprang forth to meet him, like some fierce lion that the whole country-side has met to hunt and kill – at first he bodes no ill, but when some daring youth has struck him with a spear, he crouches open-mouthed, his jaws foam, he roars with fury, he lashes his tail from side to side about his ribs and loins, and glares as he springs straight before him, to find out whether he is to slay, or be slain among the foremost of his foes – even with such fury did Achilles burn to spring upon Aeneas.

When they were now close up with one another Achilles was first to speak. “Aeneas,” said he, “why do you stand thus out before the host to fight me? Is it that you hope to reign over the Trojans in the seat of Priam? Nay, though you kill me Priam will not hand his kingdom over to you. He is a man of sound judgment, and he has sons of his own. Or have the Trojans been allotting you a demesne of passing richness, fair with orchard lawns and corn lands, if you should slay me? This you shall hardly do. I have discomfited you once already. Have you forgotten how when you were alone I chased you from your kine helter-skelter down the slopes of Ida? You did not turn round to look behind you; you took refuge in Lyrnessus, but I attacked the city, and with the help of Minerva and father Jove I sacked it and carried its women into captivity, though Jove and the other gods rescued you. You think they will protect you now, but they will not do so; therefore I say go back into the host, and do not face me, or you will rue it. Even a fool may be wise after the event.”

Then Aeneas answered, “Son of Peleus, think not that your words can scare me as though I were a child. I too, if I will, can brag and talk unseemly. We know one another’s race and parentage as matters of common fame, though neither have you ever seen my parents nor I yours. Men say that you are son to noble Peleus, and that your mother is Thetis, fair-haired daughter of the sea. I have noble Anchises for my father, and Venus for my mother; the parents of one or other of us shall this day mourn a son, for it will be more than silly talk that shall part us when the fight is over. Learn, then, my lineage if you will – and it is known to many.

“In the beginning Dardanus was the son of Jove, and founded Dardania, for Ilius was not yet established on the plain for men to dwell in, and her people still abode on the spurs of many-fountained Ida. Dardanus had a son, king Erichthonius, who was wealthiest of all men living; he had three thousand mares that fed by the water-meadows, they and their foals with them. Boreas was enamoured of them as they were feeding, and covered them in the semblance of a dark-maned stallion. Twelve filly foals did they conceive and bear him, and these, as they sped over the rich plain, would go bounding on over the ripe ears of corn and not break them; or again when they would disport themselves on the broad back of Ocean they could gallop on the crest of a breaker. Erichthonius begat Tros, king of the Trojans, and Tros had three noble sons, Ilius, Assaracus, and Ganymede who was comeliest of mortal men; wherefore the gods carried him off to be Jove’s cupbearer, for his beauty’s sake, that he might dwell among the immortals. Ilius begat Laomedon, and Laomedon begat Tithonus, Priam, Lampus, Clytius, and Hiketaon of the stock of Mars. But Assaracus was father to Capys, and Capys to Anchises, who was my father, while Hector is son to Priam.

“Such do I declare my blood and lineage, but as for valour, Jove gives it or takes it as he will, for he is lord of all. And now let there be no more of this prating in mid-battle as though we were children. We could fling taunts without end at one another; a hundred-oared galley would not hold them. The tongue can run all whithers and talk all wise; it can go here and there, and as a man says, so shall he be gainsaid. What is the use of our bandying hard like women who when they fall foul of one another go out and wrangle in the streets, one half true and the other lies, as rage inspires them? No words of yours shall turn me now that I am fain to fight – therefore let us make trial of one another with our spears.”



Clearly, the use of mortal gifts to win power by the ven goes very far back indeed.

Note connections between wealth & ownership of animals. Too few of the young ven understand their inheritance as masters of animals in this fashion.

Bravery & worth does not derive from lineage? There is a lesson for our kind.



As he spoke he drove his spear at the great and terrible shield of Achilles, which rang out as the point struck it. The son of Peleus held the shield before him with his strong hand, and he was afraid, for he deemed that Aeneas's spear would go through it quite easily, not reflecting that the god's glorious gifts were little likely to yield before the blows of mortal men; and indeed Aeneas's spear did not pierce the shield, for the layer of gold, gift of the god, stayed the point. It went through two layers, but the god had made the shield in five, two of bronze, the two innermost ones of tin, and one of gold; it was in this that the spear was stayed.

Achilles in his turn threw, and struck the round shield of Aeneas at the very edge, where the bronze was thinnest; the spear of Pelian ash went clean through, and the shield rang under the blow; Aeneas was afraid, and crouched backwards, holding the shield away from him; the spear, however, flew over his back, and stuck quivering in the ground, after having gone through both circles of the sheltering shield. Aeneas, though he had avoided the spear, stood still, blinded with fear and grief because the weapon had gone so near him; then Achilles sprang furiously upon him, with a cry as of death and with his keen blade drawn, and Aeneas seized a great stone, so huge that two men, as men now are, would be unable to lift it, but Aeneas wielded it quite easily.

Aeneas would then have struck Achilles as he was springing towards him, either on the helmet, or on the shield that covered him, and Achilles would have closed with him and dispatched him with his sword, had not Neptune lord of the earthquake been quick to mark, and said forthwith to the immortals, "Alas, I am sorry for great Aeneas, who will now go down to the house of Hades, vanquished by the son of Peleus. Fool that he was to give ear to the counsel of Apollo. Apollo will never save him from destruction. Why should this man suffer when he is guiltless, to no purpose, and in another's quarrel? Has he not at all times offered acceptable sacrifice to the gods that dwell in heaven? Let us then snatch him from death's jaws, lest the son of Saturn be angry should Achilles slay him. It is fated, moreover, that he should escape, and that the race of Dardanus, whom Jove loved above all the sons born to him of mortal women, shall not perish utterly without seed or sign. For now indeed has Jove hated the blood of Priam, while Aeneas shall reign over the Trojans, he and his children's children that shall be born hereafter."

Then answered Juno, "Earth-shaker, look to this matter yourself, and consider concerning Aeneas, whether you will save him, or suffer him, brave though he be, to fall by the hand of Achilles son of Peleus. For of a truth we two, I and Pallas Minerva, have sworn full many a time before all the immortals, that never would we shield Trojans from destruction, not even when all Troy is burning in the flames that the Achaeans shall kindle."

When earth-encircling Neptune heard this he went into the battle amid the clash of spears, and came to the place where Achilles and Aeneas were. Forthwith he shed a darkness before the eyes of the son of Peleus, drew the bronze-headed ashen spear from the shield of Aeneas, and laid it at the feet of Achilles. Then he lifted Aeneas on high from off the earth and hurried him away. Over the heads of many a band of warriors both horse and foot did he soar as the god's hand sped him, till he came to the very fringe of the battle where the Cauconians were arming themselves for fight. Neptune, shaker of the earth, then came near to him and said, "Aeneas, what god has egged you on to this folly in fighting the son of Peleus, who is both a mightier man of valour and more beloved of heaven than you are? Give way before him whensoever you meet him, lest you go down to the house of Hades even though fate would have it otherwise. When Achilles is dead you may then fight among the foremost undaunted, for none other of the Achaeans shall slay you."

The god left him when he had given him these instructions, and at once removed the darkness from before the eyes of Achilles, who opened them wide indeed and said in great anger, "Alas! what marvel am I now beholding? Here is my spear upon the ground, but I see not him whom I meant to kill when I hurled it. Of a truth Aeneas also must



I wonder - is this the origin of describing our bodily resilience as "the fivefold aegis," as found in some post-classical references?

Earliest reference to enmity w/ sun?

And so we have...

tion of the Man and the Beast. Theirs is the battle of reason against the onslaught of frenzy – the civility of the *lares* and the *furor* of Juno.

For the Ventrue, the confrontation between Aeneas and Achilles as written by Homer is a cherished family memory, an ancient tale passed down like an heirloom. It is the portrait of the progenitor as a virile young man, as it were. In this meeting, we see the Ventrue tradition of reciting lineage and

ancestry, and their capacity to face invincible foes and yet, as though by divine mandate, emerge to fight and be victorious in future battles.

The following passage, drawn from Book XX of the *Iliad*, is invaluable for understanding the Ventrue. Fluency with this text provides a subtle advantage in dealings with modern Lords, and an enhanced understanding of their interactions with each other.

AENEAS AND OUR DAMNATION

The poetry of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* relate the tale of *Aeneas* for the eyes of the living. The allegory within his tale – the tale for our eyes – has either never been conclusively written, or has been lost. As such, we must divide our understanding between what is *known* to be true and what we can appreciate we are being told *about* the truth in these tales, whose tellings were doubtlessly influenced by our ancient and distant sires, as all ancestors influence the stories told after them. What is it that the ancient precursors to our modern clan wanted us to understand within these tales?

First, what we know: Prior to the fall of Troy, the undead beings who would become us were honorable and soulful, minor gods and beloved

ghosts – as much spirits as men. Tonight, we are damned and punished, diminished in our power perhaps, but greater than ever before in reason and learning and cunning – as much monsters as men. Between these two states, we were cursed and transformed.

That space in-between is the fall of Troy, and our true origin is lost in its fire and ashes. What we can glean from the cinders is that our damnation is the work of spiteful Juno, Queen of Heaven, and that the story of Aeneas reflects the shortcomings and inflections that were laid upon his guiding ancestors – that is, upon *us* – in the fires of Troy.

What follows, then, is the history and nature of the Ventrue, as revealed to us by the tale of Aeneas.

THE SAGA OF THE VENTRUE

SING, MUSE, OF FAMILY FELLED AND FAILED,
VEXED BY SPITE AND CHASED BY HATEFUL GODS,
THAT RISES ABOVE DEFEAT AS IT DOES ABOVE DEATH,
VICTORIOUS AND VOWED NEVER TO SUFFER SUCH AGAIN.
SING US THE TALE OF FIRES AND TEARS AND SMOKE AND BLOOD
AND SIN AND SUFFERING AND VICTORY THAT NEVER ENDS.

It starts with the end of Troy.

We were beaten, and let it be the last time. The princes and princesses who ruled Troy under our care were dying at the hands of the Achaeans, under the swords of the Myrmidons, and in the fires burning through the streets. Blood poured through the gates and over our feet. Our city was coming apart, and we expected to go out of the world with it. Statues of fathers and mothers were burning on the hearths of Trojan homes.

Aeneas, son of Anchises and Venus, who was fleeing from the city like so many, took up his

injured father and slung him over his back. His wife, Creusa, and his son, then called Ascanius (and sometimes Iulus), followed after him.

We, too, went with him. Where so many *lares* were left behind that morning to burn in their homes, Aeneas led a handful of us out through secret passages in the king's palace, through covered avenues in the city, through channels beneath the streets heading to the port of Troy. As we went, we gathered others who, moved by the piety of Aeneas, gathered their dead ancestors and fled with us.

MY HOUSEHOLD GODS, COMPANIONS OF MY WOES,
WITH PIOUS CARE I RESCUED FROM OUR FOES.

— VIRGIL, THE AENEID

As we ran we could see up through gates to the daylight blotted out by billowing darkness, to the shadows of the dying being cast by fire. Blood was running down in streams through the grates above us, painting us each with the dead.

At the harbor, we were hidden away in urns and boxes and slipped safely into the bellies of waiting

ships. We were many dozens, then, at least. But we were one short.

Somewhere in the chaos of the passageways, amid the choking smoke that was replacing Troy, Aeneas's wife, Creusa, had been separated from us. Aeneas, his face black, his eyes red, flew back into the city. And we let him go.

Ven. ancients and
the oral history
put this all
around 1175-85
BCE (close to the
archaeo. est.)

His cries came back through the dead avenues
to us, huddled within the boats. "Creusa, please!"

he cried. The sun sank. Troy grew dark.
Virgil tells it:

THEN, WITH UNGOVERN'D MADNESS, I PROCLAIM,
THRO' ALL THE SILENT STREET, CREUSA'S NAME:
CREUSA STILL I CALL; AT LENGTH SHE HEARS,
AND SUDDEN THRO' THE SHADES OF NIGHT APPEARS—
APPEARS, NO MORE CREUSA, NOR MY WIFE,
BUT A PALE SPECTER, LARGER THAN THE LIFE.
AGHAST, ASTONISH'D, AND STRUCK DUMB WITH FEAR,
I STOOD; LIKE BRISTLES ROSE MY STIFFEN'D HAIR.
THEN THUS THE GHOST BEGAN TO SOOTHE MY GRIEF
'NOR TEARS, NOR CRIES, CAN GIVE THE DEAD RELIEF.
DESIST, MY MUCH-LOV'D LORD, 'T INDULGE YOUR PAIN;
YOU BEAR NO MORE THAN WHAT THE GODS ORDAIN.
MY FATES PERMIT ME NOT FROM HENCE TO FLY;
NOR HE, THE HOLY MASTER OF THE SKY.
LONG WAND'RING WAYS FOR YOU THE POW'RS DECREE;
ON LAND HARD LABORS, AND A LENGTH OF SEA.
THEN, AFTER MANY PAINFUL YEARS ARE PAST,
ON LATIUM'S HAPPY SHORE YOU SHALL BE CAST,
WHERE GENTLE TIBER FROM HIS BED BEHOLDS
THE FLOW'RY MEADOWS, AND THE FEEDING FOLDS.
THERE END YOUR TOILS; AND THERE YOUR FATES PROVIDE
A QUIET KINGDOM, AND A ROYAL BRIDE:
THERE FORTUNE SHALL THE TROJAN LINE RESTORE,
AND YOU FOR LOST CREUSA WEEP NO MORE.
AND NOW, FAREWELL! THE PARENT OF THE GODS
RESTRAINS MY FLEETING SOUL IN HER ABODES:
I TRUST OUR COMMON ISSUE TO YOUR CARE.'

— VIRGIL, THE AENEID

Creusa forgave Aeneas, but Juno could not. Neither could she forgive us. She hated us, the men and gods of Troy, who would dare to flee the city from which we took our power, rather than burn as we should, in the fires of its defeat. We, the wise ancestors, had left a wife and mother behind, such that not even our whole house was under our control. It was not salvation we sought, she accused us, but escape.

We had sided not with tradition or our duties as *lares* of the Trojans to thrive or suffer with the

city, but with the mortals themselves even as they fled our purview of Troy, and with Aeneas, son of Venus, with whom she so often fought.

We should have been ruined with Troy. We should have accepted our defeat with them. We should have sided with her from the beginning. So Juno said.

Thus on the boat, ready to flee from Troy, with Aeneas, king, weeping in the ravaged city, did Juno curse us:

(Or had Juno taken Creusa to break the household and punish Aeneas?)

AS WE WERE NOW THE LARES OF A DEAD CITY, SHE SAID, LET US TAKE OUR TRIBUTE
[BLOOD] BY TOOTH, LIKE CARRION SCAVENGERS.

AS WE WERE LOVERS OF MORTALS, SHE SAID, LET US TAKE OUR TRIBUTE
[BLOOD] FROM THEM.

WE MAY MAKE ESCAPE FROM THE FIRES OF TROY, SHE SAID, BUT NO OTHERS.

WE MAY MAKE ESCAPE THROUGH THE NIGHT, SHE SAID,
BUT WILL KNOW DEFEAT COME DAY.

NEVER SHALL WE KNOW PEACE.

ALWAYS SHALL OUR CHILDREN BE MONSTERS.



THE VOYAGES

We fled Troy.

Cursed and defeated, we hid from the sun in the shadows within Aeneas's ships. The fleet was headed west, bound for what would become Italy.

We traveled with the living, loved as gods still by some of them, and regarded with suspicion by others. The stench of vexation must have been on us, for fear and distrust grew quickly in the wombs of those boats. We couldn't deny the presence of the Beast that she, the wrathful mother, had made us pregnant with. We were forced to turn on the mortals for our tribute, and they were near to turning on us out of fear.

It is during this fearsome time that Anchises died.

Thus, at each of our stops on the voyage west, a few of us stayed behind to find new havens in the habitats of men, as is our way. *Lares* of Troy thus spread out from each of our stops – Crete, Actium, Thrace, and others still – some went as gifts to those lands' kings, some crept as sneaks into cities in the night.

Aeneas had been given his prophecy about his future city, but Juno had been given a prophecy foretelling the end of her beloved Carthage at the hands of Aeneas's future people. Thinking that she could save Carthage by destroying Aeneas before he could found his great city, she bribed the winds with a bride, and they brought a storm down on us. Our fleet was smashed, ships scattered and broken, men and *lares* alike sank away.

But Neptune spared us. The gods were meant to rule within their own territories, however great or minor, and the god of winds had trespassed in Neptune's domain on Juno's behalf. Not because he loved us, but because Juno had acted out of accord, Neptune aided her enemy – Aeneas.

Bodies from our fleet washed to shore. The living made landing in Africa, near ancient Carthage, and many of us washed up with them on those rocky, midnight shores.

But many of us could survive the depths and the dark, those places that are the end of the living. Did others of our line wash up on other shores? Are some of us still laying, starved and asleep, where they sank, still fleeing Troy to this night?

Aeneas, of course, survived. So did his son, who we yet called Ascanius. Many more mortals were spared, and several of us *lares*.

At the urging of a wild huntress, we made for the young city of Carthage, where Aeneas found Queen Dido (sometimes called Elissa) and, through more scheming by the gods, love. Aeneas's mother, by dispatching Cupid disguised as Ascanius, planted thoughts of love in Dido's heart, and she grew those thoughts into passions. For months we stayed in Carthage, at the verge of the territory claimed by that city's own immortals – who were much like we'd become, but come from some other race – while Aeneas and Queen Dido rejoiced in their newfound happiness.



AT LENGTH, IN DEAD OF NIGHT, THE GHOST APPEARS
 OF HER UNHAPPY LORD: THE SPECTER STARES,
 AND, WITH ERECTED EYES, HIS BLOODY BOSOM BARES.
 THE CRUEL ALTARS AND HIS FATE HE TELLS,
 AND THE DIRE SECRET OF HIS HOUSE REVEALS,
 THEN WARNS THE WIDOW, WITH HER HOUSEHOLD GODS,
 TO SEEK A REFUGE IN REMOTE ABODES.
 LAST, TO SUPPORT HER IN SO LONG A WAY,
 HE SHOWS HER WHERE HIS HIDDEN TREASURE LAY.
 ADMONISH'D THUS, AND SEIZ'D WITH MORTAL FRIGHT,
 THE QUEEN PROVIDES COMPANIONS OF HER FLIGHT:
 THEY MEET, AND ALL COMBINE TO LEAVE THE STATE,
 WHO HATE THE TYRANT, OR WHO FEAR HIS HATE.

— VIRGIL, THE AENEID

Ah, Dido, who fled
 murder and lies
 in Tyre to found
 Carthage, and
 may have had
 kindred advisors
 of her own —

When we learned that Dido was pregnant with Aeneas's child, we went and begged him not to forget the pleadings and prophecy of his wife, who in death knew our fates. We asked that he not strand us in Carthage when our new land was still out there across the sea. Waiting and destined for us.

But he would not listen.

One of us, the *dominus lare* from Hector's own house, took Aeneas back to the sea, and on the

coast there held his face. "We must go, Aeneas," he said. "Leave. Sail again for our new lands and our own city. Take us there." He was the first of us to rise out of the sorrow of our vexation and take hold, again, of our duty as *lares* and *genii*.

Aeneas nodded, and looked out over the sea. He would break Dido's heart to lead us to our fates. Truly, he was our king.

Ovid, in his *Heroides*, gave these words to Queen Dido:

[ASCANIUS'] BROTHER WILL DIE WITH HIS MOTHER,
 AND ONE PUNISHMENT WILL DESTROY THE TWO OF US.
 'BUT THE GOD ORDERS ME TO DO.' I WISH HE HAD PREVENTED YOUR
 COMING TO CARTHAGE, ITS EARTH FROM BEING TOUCHED BY A TROJAN.
 LED BY THIS GOD, ARE YOU NOT DRIVEN BY ADVERSE WINDS,
 AND ENDLESSLY SCoured BY RAVENING SEAS?

Aeneas had changed her heart with his lordly ways, and nearly changed his own. Queen Dido truly loved him (Ovid wrote for her, "though I complain of his treachery, still I love him more"), but love could not stand in the way of his fate as a

ruler, and should not have overwhelmed her duty to Carthage. When we took to sea, the smoke of her funeral pyre cut across the sky.

Forever after that, Carthage was an enemy to us.

[...] WHEN I AM CONSUMED BY FIRE,
 LET ONLY THIS VERSE APPEAR ON MY MARBLE TOMB:
 "AENEAS OFFERED A REASON TO DIE, AND THE SWORD.
 DIDO KILLED HERSELF."

— OVID, HEROIDES, BOOK VII

THE UNDERWORLD

At Aeneas's insistence, we returned to Sicily to pay honor to Anchises at his grave. Then we were off to Cuma, and the sunken lake of Avernus, and beyond that, the Underworld.

He left us then, and went among the shades of the dead to take counsel with his father, and we felt sure he would be gone forever. Except for the *lares dominus*, who in his new role among us had taken the name Troius. Again, he took Aeneas aside. They sat by the lake for long hours before Aeneas braved the portal on its shore.

When Troius came back to us, and we slipped into the caves of the Cumaean sibyl to spend

our days, we asked him what they had talked about. "I simply told him to come back to us," Troius said.

Aeneas returned. We woke with the night and found him there with us. We feared that, in the Underworld, he might have been changed. That he might have been made like us, cursed by Juno or another. Troius looked him over for signs. "I'm alive," said Aeneas. "My father showed me the sons I'll bear, with names from Italy and Troy: Silvius, Procas, Capys, Numitor, Romulus. My wife will be Lavinia, and so we must go to Latium."

SEE ROMULUS THE GREAT, BORN TO RESTORE
THE CROWN THAT ONCE HIS INJUR'D GRANDSIRE WORE.
THIS PRINCE A PRIESTESS OF YOUR BLOOD SHALL BEAR,
AND LIKE HIS SIRE IN ARMS HE SHALL APPEAR.

— VIRGIL, THE AENEID

LATIUM

In Italia's Latium, we presented ourselves to Latinus, king there and father of Lavinia, who Aeneas came to love with a speed and certainty born of fate. Aeneas and his new queen, Lavinia, wished only to take up rule of Latium and create the cities where we would be gods again.

But Juno, who had seen all in Carthage and was always reminded of the ruin it was promised in prophecy, continued to pursue us. Her wrath now seemed to fall equally on us, the cursed *lares*, as on Aeneas. She saw Aeneas in love again, and moved to destroy that which would give him joy.

The Queen of Heaven went to the Queen of

Latium and through conspiracy made her agree that Lavinia should be married not to the stranger from across the sea – an enemy of the Queen of Heaven! – but to Turnus, ruler of the Rutuli people of Italia, who it is said had no household gods, and to whom Lavinia had long ago been promised. Amata, the Queen of Latium, came to agree with Juno, but the goddess's tastes weren't satisfied yet. She wanted more than strife and broken hearts. She wanted death and war on Aeneas – “a second Paris” to provoke through lust “a second flame.”

So Juno called on the Fury, Alecto, and dispatched her to Latium with these words:

“O VIRGIN DAUGHTER OF ETERNAL NIGHT,
GIVE ME THIS ONCE THY LABOR, TO SUSTAIN
MY RIGHT, AND EXECUTE MY JUST DISDAIN.
LET NOT THE TROJANS, WITH A FEIGN'D PRETENSE
OF PROFFER'D PEACE, DELUDE THE LATIAN PRINCE.
EXPUL FROM ITALY THAT ODISIOUS NAME,
AND LET NOT JUNO SUFFER IN HER FAME.
'T IS THINE TO RUIN REALMS, O'ERTURN A STATE,
BETWIXT THE DEAREST FRIENDS TO RAISE DEBATE,
AND KINDLE KINDRED BLOOD TO MUTUAL HATE.
THY HAND O'ER TOWNS THE FUN'RAL TORCH DISPLAYS,
AND FORMS A THOUSAND ILLS TEN THOUSAND WAYS.
NOW SHAKE, OUT THY FRUITFUL BREAST, THE SEEDS
OF ENVY, DISCORD, AND OF CRUEL DEEDS:
CONFOUND THE PEACE ESTABLISH'D, AND PREPARE
THEIR SOULS TO HATRED, AND THEIR HANDS TO WAR.”

— VIRGIL, THE AENEID

War came. Turnus brought the Rutuli and a vast and deadly army of Italians unto Latium. First they struck against our Trojan camp under the cover of darkness, slaying mortals and beheading *lares*. That night we fought to defend our right to fight again, for survival was the best we could hope for with so many Italians against us.

Aeneas was off entreating with the Arcadians, whose king, Evander, had been an ally of Anchises. Thus it was that an army was sent to us, led by their prince, Pallas. With the arrival of these reinforcements, we slipped out from under the assault of the Rutuli and into prolonged war. Battle after

battle was fought by the living, and by night we counted the dead and consulted Aeneas and Pallas, with whom Aeneas was forging a fast bond in battle, and the king, Latinus, as we were able.

Latinus, caught between his queen, Amata, and Aeneas, could only sit in Latium and let the lands outside the city be soaked with blood by the kings who sent men to die for the prize of his daughter's marriage bed. He could not choose sides between the warring suitors lest he stand against his queen, as well.

Pallas, the ambassador between his father, Evander, and we Trojans, was fast becoming a

trusted lieutenant to Aeneas. With them together, it was easy to see how Aeneas could found and rule a city of disparate tribes and peoples. Pallas, it seemed, would be a noble hero in our new land.

We formed ourselves a *Crypteia* and sent its five *lares* to find and kill Turnus, but failed three times. Juno's agent, Alecto, haunted the Rutuli and kept us from Turnus. She took three of us over three nights, stealing away the bodies, presumably for delivery to Juno. We tried, night and again, until Troius finally called us back to the court of Latinus to hear troubling news of Aeneas.

Pallas was dead. Slain in battle against the Rutuli. Aeneas, wounded with grief but always pious and reasonable, fell to tears at the opening of his tent. Then he planned.

Aeneas had become sick of death in the shadows of lords – tired of earthly mortals dying at the proclamations of kings and gods, when champions stood so close. He sent forth messengers to bear the word that war with the Rutuli would end, if Turnus would face Aeneas in single combat.

Twice they met to finish the strife face to face, and twice the Rutuli, terrified at the certain death to their mortal king at the hands of Venus's son, intervened. Their soldiers swarmed Aeneas, who fought them off, though wounded by their spears. We fled into the hills and our camps.

Aeneas, clever now with wisdom won for himself through wars and *lares* and the consul of

sybils and kings, refused to surrender his idea of victory through single combat. He said his plans calmly, looked on with the steady eyes of a practiced mind, and now spoke with the confidence of a ruler. He and Troilus met in the king's tent and the sounds of their debate echoed out over the nighttime camp.

We listened. "It must be capture," Troilus said. "These people of Turnus are not going away. We will take this land, and they will be our neighbors, and we cannot fight them forever. Let us capture him. Bring him here to speak with me, and I will make him your subject. None can deny the *lares dominus*."

Said Aeneas, "It must be me who takes him. These people must know what I am, in truth." Troilus looked at him with fear. Aeneas said, "I am not a foreign prince. I am not fighting a war. I am *their* king. I make and unmake war."

It was agreed, finally. Aeneas would enact his plan to draw Turnus to single combat, and capture him in sight of both armies. Then he and Troilus would remake Turnus as a loyal subject to Aeneas.

Aeneas took his army to Latium. There, where he told us he would merely make threat against Latinus to provoke a mandate for single combat for the hand of Lavinia, Aeneas stepped out from our guiding hands and away from the word he'd given to Troilus. Within sight of Latium he proclaimed to his army:

"YOUR FORCE AGAINST THE PERJUR'D CITY BEND.
THERE IT BEGAN, AND THERE THE WAR SHALL END.
THE PEACE PROFAN'D OUR RIGHTFUL ARMS REQUIRES;
CLEANSE THE POLLUTED PLACE WITH PURGING FIRES."

— VIRGIL, THE AENEID

Latium burned. Aeneas and his army sacked the city, driving citizens out into the countryside, and leaving a long scar of blood and ash through the streets. This gash stretched from the gates to the palace.

Queen Amata, seeing the soldiers with firebrands in her streets, hearing her people cry out through the smoke and the clashing arms, tore at her hair and wept curses to Juno's name. Turnus and his armies had not come. So many had died on her words. She had been ridden by the Fury like a horse, guided to this gruesome war by a hateful god. Now Latium was burning, and somewhere in the palace she could hear Lavinia's despairing sobs. So she made a ring of silk and hung herself from her palace window, so the army would know of her surrender.

Word spread. Turnus, hearing of Queen Amata's death and knowing Lavinia is soon to be handed

to Aeneas, attempted to leave Latium lands with his armies. Aeneas, however, had not been satisfied. The land he was promised by his ghostly wife, by his dead father, and by we *lares*, was not meant to be broken by strife and spiteful kings. He'd been promised in Hades that his sons would have names both Trojan and Italian. He did not yet have the victory he sought, despite having the rule of Latium in reach.

Come dark, Troilus went to Aeneas, and found him standing near the red fires of his camp. Latium lay behind him, smoke from its walls slicing across the stars. They stood there, again on the verge of a bloodied and burnt city, and Aeneas reaffirmed his plan. He had but to catch up to Turnus, and complete their original design.

When the two armies were once again met on the field, Aeneas stormed through the Rutulian ranks and tents, in search of Turnus. He found

the Rutuli king tying on his armor in preparation for their battle. The champions would have their single combat.

Juno looked down on Aeneas and Turnus, standing between their armies, and remembered Achilles, who had faced Aeneas before, and slain Hector – and yet still here was Aeneas. Still able to taste her spite, but growing sick inside, Juno sent forth Alecto to give Turnus might so that he might finally slay the son of Venus.

The Fury descended toward the battle field. Juno looked down on our king. And all we *lares* could do was hide from the sun above it all. Our king would have to face his day's fate, and we would have to rule over whatever was left come dark.

Aeneas hefted his spear. Turnus drew his sword.

Jupiter came to Juno. Those things foretold could not be untold, he reminded her. Aeneas was to rule his great city, and his children were to rule well beyond. His lordly place couldn't be

denied – so why was she continuing to torment him and stymie his fate? He had survived the toil and reached his fabled land. He had won.

Turnus cut away Aeneas's shield. Aeneas pushed him away with his spear. The armies were utterly quiet. Alecto drew near.

Juno couldn't surrender her hate for Troy, and told Jupiter as much. But she had been given her time to hurt them, to punish and torture them with her wrath. Now that time was over, said Jupiter.

Juno would concede, she said, and bless the marriage bed, if Jupiter would but end the Trojan people – blowing away their name and customs like dust from a shelf.

Aeneas pulled off his helmet, deformed by Turnus's strike. In Turnus's shield the reflection of a black shape descended and settled behind our king.

Jupiter spoke:

"FROM ANCIENT BLOOD TH' AUSONIAN PEOPLE SPRUNG,
SHALL KEEP THEIR NAME, THEIR HABIT, AND THEIR TONGUE.
THE TROJANS TO THEIR CUSTOMS SHALL BE TIED:
I WILL, MYSELF, THEIR COMMON RITES PROVIDE;
THE NATIVES SHALL COMMAND, THE FOREIGNERS SUBSIDE.
ALL SHALL BE LATIUM; TROY WITHOUT A NAME;
AND HER LOST SONS FORGET FROM WHENCE THEY CAME.
FROM BLOOD SO MIX'D, A PIOUS RACE SHALL FLOW,
EQUAL TO GODS, EXCELLING ALL BELOW.
NO NATION MORE RESPECT TO YOU SHALL PAY,
OR GREATER OFF'RINGS ON YOUR ALTARS LAY."

– VIRGIL, THE AENEID

Juno, relieved, let go of her fruitless toil. Jupiter departed. Alecto glided away, feathering past Turnus like an owl. He and Aeneas alike saw her go and knew what it bode. Turnus's sword quivered in his hand.

Aeneas drove his spear, and Turnus, down into the dirt. He held the Rutuli king there, stuck through the leg. Turnus dropped his sword and grabbed for the wound. In his anguish, he smeared himself with his blood.

Juno was smiling. The last drop of her bile hung like wine at the brim, and it was too late for any promise or decree to stop it.

Turnus begged for his life. "I know that in defeat I deserve death, but look for mercy in yourself. You know what it is, for fathers and sons. Please. Please, Trojan, spare my father the grief of outliving his son. If you can do nothing else, then send my body along to him, for my funeral."

Aeneas drew out the spear from dirt and flesh, and hoisted it up over Turnus's breast.

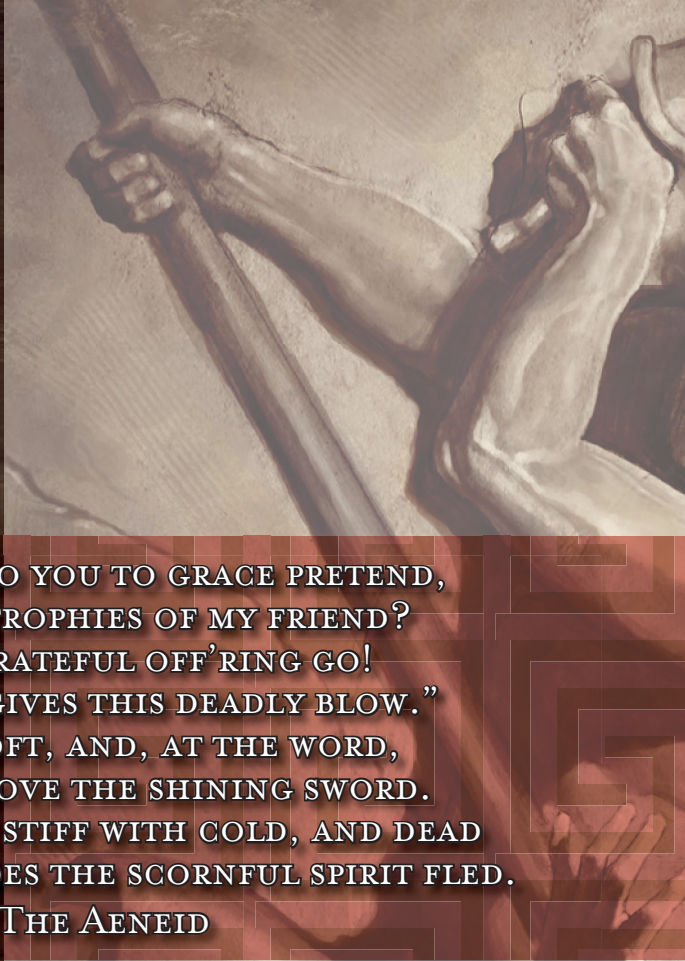
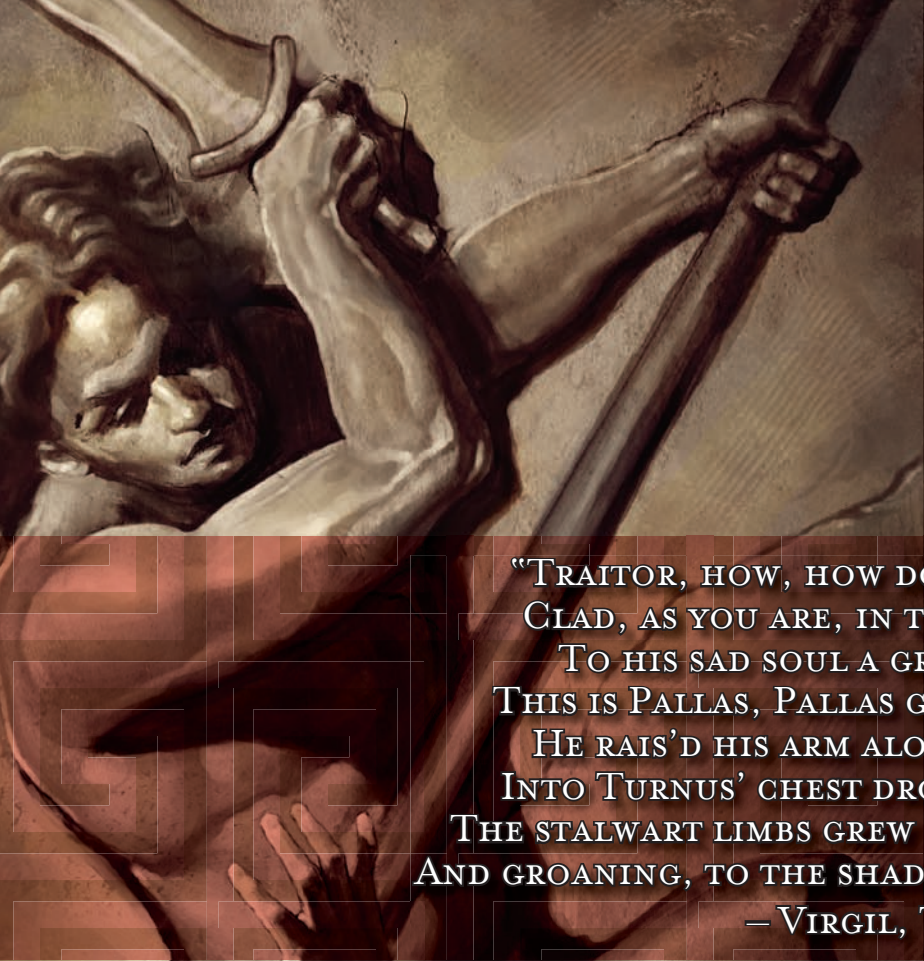
Turnus said, "You have shown these men the sight of me begging for my life. You have their fear and you have your bride. I declare my defeat. Another strike would be spite. Please. Please."

Aeneas straightened himself and looked away, toward the gray horizon. Toward Cuma and Carthage. Toward the *lares dominus*. Toward Troy. Finally he turned his head to Heaven and, with a long breath out, lowered his spear. A bit of sunlight fell through the clouds.

Turnus gave his thanks.

Aeneas looked down at Turnus and lifted up the king's fallen sword as his icon of victory. And there, in the single ray of descending sunlight, Aeneas caught a glint of gold. A belt. A golden band with familiar studs glittered, slung over Turnus's shoulder, under a smear of his blood.

It was the swordbelt Pallas had worn in battle. Aeneas's heart glowed like a coal. Wrath filled his throat like fire. In a frenzy, his eyes red and tearing, he cried:



"TRAITOR, HOW, HOW DO YOU TO GRACE PRETEND,
CLAD, AS YOU ARE, IN TROPHIES OF MY FRIEND?
TO HIS SAD SOUL A GRATEFUL OFF'RING GO!
THIS IS PALLAS, PALLAS GIVES THIS DEADLY BLOW."
HE RAIS'D HIS ARM ALOFT, AND, AT THE WORD,
INTO TURNUS' CHEST DROVE THE SHINING SWORD.
THE STALWART LIMBS GREW STIFF WITH COLD, AND DEAD
AND GROANING, TO THE SHADES THE SCORNFUL SPIRIT FLED.
— VIRGIL, THE AENEID



So ends the *Aeneid*.

US THROUGH AENEAS

The story of Aeneas is part historical and part myth. Aenead Kindred still exist on this earth, though most (if not all) of them lay torpid tonight. In the millennia since the *Aeneid* was written, however, enough Kindred have independently corroborated parts of the story to let us believe that veins of truth run through it.

Aeneas lived. He was, in some form, a mortal man (or, some speculate, a ghoul of the *lares dominus*). The migration from Troy was thus, on some level, a real event, though possibly much less sudden and dramatic than it appears in these tales. A Ventrue calling himself Mezelius in AD 1598, insists in a letter he sent to the Prince of Rome that he knew Queen Dido when he was alive, and that his sire was a Trojan, but his recollections do not match the timeline of the *Aeneid*.

Thus, we must remember how much of the *character* of Aeneas is allegorical. Aeneas the man is not the same person Augustus Caesar commissioned Virgil to write about, and neither was he wholly the symbol we use tonight.

It is the allegorical Aeneas who matters. The mortal myth long ago became trivial, and the mortal man is long dead. The *Aeneid* is a cautionary tale, showing Aeneas as the best and worst of our kings. It begins with Aeneas saving lives and ends with him no longer able or willing to spare one. It begins with him as a man of piety and reason,

and ends with him as a man of wrath and rage. It begins with him bold, but loyal, saving his revered gods, follows him through a period of heart-breaking subservience to his cursed masters, and ends with him acting out of control, defying the influence of Troius. The Aenead cycle is a course all Lords should watch for in their kings – if not carefully controlled, every king has the potential to break away from our guiding influence.

But Aeneas is also a symbol of our nature, reflected in him as he was our living charge. Whereas once he was a man bravely defending his Trojan herds, in the shadow of the cursed *lares* he became a conqueror, concerned with his own might but also unable to control himself when faced with personal pain. He left lovers dead in his wake as he journeyed in pursuit of his power. He hurt those who had helped him when it became the only means of achieving his goals. He defied the gods.

And though it is clear through history and legend that Aeneas did marry Lavinia and begin the royal lines that gave us the Roman kings, his story doesn't actually carry him that far. True victory never comes. That great era when we can rest and bask in our success is always – *always* – in our future. We must strive through endless nights of singular victories. We cannot mistake any one success for the end of our tale.

This is the work of the Lord called Sychacus from Naples.

Some imaginative Christian mythologists in the Dark Ages revised the Aenead tree to include Noah. Though most of that seems to be based on nothing more than pagan-placating propaganda, we met two (seemingly unrelated) Kindred who made claims that there's some truth in this, so we've included him in the tree. A main source for this decision is the emphatic writings of a 10th century Shadow Bishop (then called Edred, possibly the same as the one preaching in Brighton tonight) who proposed that the divine blood in the family line wasn't actually from Zeus or Venus, but from Noah. Make of that what you will.

AFTER AENEAS

Except for the oral histories that eventually become the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, we have few facts with which to reconstruct the age after Aeneas takes Lavinia as his wife and founds the city of Lavinium in her honor.

We do, however, have legendry and the shadowy recollections of our ancestors. Such was the existence of the Lords of the age that our knowledge is made up of bright points of light glittering across a wide map of darkness. We can gain tantalizing details about the history of *this lare* and *that one*,

but already they were spreading out and claiming their own domains throughout Latium and Italy. With no central source, we can only work out a conjecture formed from biased and scattered accounts. It's like mapping a countryside by the light of a few scattered candles.

After this, then, we have few individual Lords who we can follow to gain a knowledge of the clan as a whole. You must seek out the tales of these Lords yourself, if they are what you're after. Henceforth, we present the tale of a clan, not of one Lord.

THE EXILED SON AND THE SIRE OF BRITAIN

Ascanius, also called Iulus, son of Aeneas, founded the city of Alba Longa, where great kings would later be born: Aeneas Silvius, Numitor, and the twins, Romulus and Remus. His noble line would go on under the name he favored in Latium and Alba Longa: Iulus. Later we will know it as *Julus*, for Ascanius is the source of the Roman *gens* Julii, and thus also of the Roman clan of Kindred that took their name.

The sons of Ascanius, and the identities of his step-brothers by Aeneas and Lavinia, become unclear in this era. For the next few generations,

many mortal descendants of Aeneas are given the name Silvius – perhaps in an effort to make Aeneas's vision from the Underworld manifest itself in the living plane. Mortals called Silvius or Aeneas Silvius or Latinus Silvius are born to Ascanius and his unknown bride, as well as to Aeneas and Lavinia. One Silvius (the son of Aeneas and Lavinia is the favorite choice of modern Lords) fathers the line of the kings leading to Romulus and, eventually, the Dead Julii. Another Silvius, the son of Ascanius/Iulus, leads to a son called Brutus, who would be exiled for murder, and himself leads to the Ventrue.

Vegetius, a historian alive in the 5th century AD, and modern military historian Arthur Ferill, concur that a fatal condition existed in the Roman legions: "barbarization" resulting from an influx of mercenaries from Germania into the ranks. German soldiers eventually outnumbered Roman in the ranks of the Empire's armies. The chieftains who ruled over the Germans' homelands were likely kinged by the Ven. Were the Roman consuls stationed in Germania under their influence, too?

Legends told by kine and Kindred alike have it that Ascanius's son, Silvius, fathered a male child called Brutus. Mortal legends tell us that Brutus accidentally slew his father, Silvius, with an arrow, and was thereafter exiled by Ascanius. Brutus then travels, having many adventures, before finally reaching and settling on the isle of Albion, now called Britain in his honor. This is legend, not history. It is generally accepted that the man called Brutus of Troy (or Brutus of Britain) never truly existed.

Kindred keep a different legend.

The grandson of Ascanius did in fact slay his father, Silvius, but with no arrow. The son of Silvius, whose name has been lost to history (quite by design) was Embraced by a Kindred now called Brutus, against all traditions and decrees of Ascanius and Troilus. Some tales claim that Brutus and the heir of Silvius were lovers. Others say Brutus damned the mortal with the perverted parentage of the *lares* out of spite. Some theories even propose that the son of Silvius ordered Brutus to bring him into the line of the *lares*.

Whatever the truth, the consequence is the same in all versions of the tale: Ascanius had Brutus burned to ash for the crime, and exiled all his childer, including the son of Silvius, Ascanius's own grandson.

The childer of Brutus, now a kind of crude nomadic coterie traveling with a herd of outcast kine, went north toward Gaul, to find a place for themselves at the ears of the tribal kings there. Again we see the clan pushed on a journey, impassioned through family, toward prosperity.

Much of what is attributed to Brutus of Britain

is, in truth, the work of several scattered Kindred of the age, who may have traveled under his name, as they were in mourning for their sire. Over many decades, the coterie gradually broke apart, reformed, and broke apart again. Childer of Brutus's line – and thus descendants of the Trojan *lares* – found themselves royal mortal households throughout Europe and insinuated themselves within them. From Turones (now called Tours, France) through the Rhineland, the Aenead vampires were stepping from the night into the fire-lit halls of kings and introducing themselves as advisors, sorcerers, ambassadors, ghosts or gods.

It is in these years, it seems, that this line of Kindred, spreading across the land like a bloodstain, took up a new name for their undead family – a name which they may have brought from the Kindred of Alba Longa or may have chosen for themselves – that they used in contact with mortal and immortal alike. They were the Ven. This name spreads, adapts itself, and refuses to die for millennia thereafter.

The traditional legends of our clan maintain that it was the exiled and reviled grandson of Ascanius (who may have been using the name of his vampiric sire, Brutus, at the time) who first brought the blood of the Ven to Albion. Though we have little evidence to support this, it's a proud fiction.

Were the Ven the first Kindred of Britain? Other clans would debate with us, but let us continue to make the claim. Tonight, the island is yet known as Britain, and the myth of Brutus takes its life from our blood. Britain is ours.

CENTURIES OF MYSTERY

Europe soaks of the blood of the Ven, and for many long centuries, while the Julii and the Camarilla dominate the view of history, our distant sires guided a thousand minor kings. It seemed we were invisible to the eyes of the Julii, however, who saw us only as barbarian monsters. Was this because they still hated us for our sire's crime? Did they not recognize us? Or had they truly forgotten?

From outside the walls of Rome, it seemed they had succumbed to the madness of power. Juno continued to plague them with corruption and fury. They became as destructive and wrathful as Aeneas, and indeed Juno herself. The Dead Julii found and slew the *pater* of their hated enemies, who were said to be servants of Juno or the Striges, and with him the whole of his Kindred clan. They were not so unlike Aeneas, burning Lavinia's city and driving her mother to suicide in pursuit of her hand in marriage. And yet, like Aeneas, their mad strategy won them the empire they sought. For a time.

Some of this, no doubt, was the result of the wicked Strix that haunted Rome and its Kindred vampires. They – perhaps servants of Juno, perhaps the offspring of Alecto – found entrance into the fates of the Julii through the black heart of Remus, and he passed that vulnerability on to Julius and the Dead Julii. We, by fortune and luck, had been long since sent away by the era of those evil nights, and were thus spared the insanity and death that came in the wake of Remus.

Spared, of course, except for the violence done on our sires by the soldiers and Kindred of the Camarilla. We will never know how many of the Ven were burned and hacked apart by Roman armies and Camarilla vampires. And yet the Roman Kindred never seemed to know us.

The Julii had their empire, and from inside the Camarilla they could not see us for what we were – Lords and kin, whispering in the ears of mortal men they eventually chose as enemies. For all the Dead Julii thought they knew the ways of the world, they are gone and we are not.

THE MEROVINGIAN KINGS

Rome falls, but not as quickly or terribly as the Camarilla. With the waning of the Western Roman Empire, the age of the Goths gradually rises. At the same time, the Ventrue climb to new levels of lordship throughout the world.

When the house of Rome burned, many vital papers were lost in the fire. Our knowledge of the nights of the fourth and fifth centuries, AD, is not much better than that of mortal historians. As the cultures of the Franks and the Gothic tribes flourish, so do our sources for the history of the age.

The Ven at that time were scattering again, laying claim to mortal kings in every land. And it is because of the Frankish victories that the Ven associated with those kings will become the great icons of early European rule among our kind. Kindred of the Ven are in the court of Merovech, the first Salian Frankish dynasty known as the Merovingians, when he selects his wife and conceives Childeric I. Kindred of the Ven are there, in the halls of the Merovingian kings, for the next two centuries as they conquer Saxons and Goths and tribes throughout Gaul and West Germania. These are, in truth, the kings of one Ven bloodline battling the kings of another – for the Ven are spreading out anew through the kingdoms of Europe in this era.

By day, mortal armies march and fight and die. By night, the Ven steer mortal kings to marriage, murder, and war. Each of the Ven hopes that he has attached himself to a king who can bring him to prosperity and greater power. Each of the Ven prays that his kingdom will not fall to ruin and suffering, like ancestral Troy. Not all the Ven can win in these nights, but behind every victorious side there is a Ven.

This is the way of things for the next thousand years. But it is a pale shadow of what's to come. The Merovingians are merely the kings who carry Lords of the Ven clan toward the great era of Charlemagne.

THE CAROLINGIAN DYNASTY

The Ven lords followed the Merovingians until 751 AD, when a papal and aristocratic coup replaced the current Merovingian king, Childeric III, with an ambitious visionary backed by the church (and the Ven): Pippin the Short.

The coronation of this new king, and the transfer of power from the Merovingian line to the Carolingian, is thought to be the culmination of a long and carefully wrought shift in power designed by a handful of Ven lords. Modern reconstruction of those distant nights makes it clear, however, that the Carolingian dynasty of mortal kings had been selected by a conspiracy of Invictus Princes and Sanctified Bishops seeking a King of the Franks who could bridge the gap between secular interests and the demands of the Church.

The Kindred behind the design had enacted a plan that would grow far beyond their own reach, empowering secular and Sanctified Kindred throughout Europe (and perhaps farther) as new rich kingdoms rose in power... and their secret Kindred populations rose with them. The mortal Carolingian turned what may have been a cunning Kindred design into a breathtaking Empire.

But first, the Carolingian would face a crossroads. With the death of Pippin the Short, Frankish rule was divided between his two sons, Carloman and Carolus. This division of authority terrified the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum powers of the age. A battle for supremacy between these two brothers would force Kindred lords to endure the fires, sieges, and chaos of



We found that the credit for the backing of Charlemagne is still something old Ventrue fight about, not to mention Invictus and Sanctified of other blood. Most information we can find, and all the Kindred we talked to, go out of their way to give the First Estate and the Church equal billing in the credits on this (at the expense of any individual Kin.). Even still, the role of the Ventrue as scouts in the Frankish court is consistent across most accounts.

I looked for evidence that a Lord author actually wrote the first essays on the "European Miracle" prior to Jones's book, and found nothing conclusive. The phrase does appear in a letter from a Lord of London to a Lord of Swansea in 1811, but uses it to describe the unlikely survival of so many European Ventrue in the transition from Holy Roman to Napoleonic power. Sounds like coincidence.

war, which is precisely what they hoped to avoid by conspiring toward a stable mortal power base not even twenty years earlier. Yet, afraid of accidentally hastening either brother toward war, both covenants waited. Slowly, they positioned themselves, ready to snatch up whatever power and territory they could in the inevitable havoc.

A coterie of the Ven, however, was studying the courts of each brother, and went to local Princes and Bishops with the lessons they'd learned while watching the societies led by each king. The Ven, recognizing that victory was as much a matter of choosing the right side in battle as it was about effective fighting, presented their predictions for the future of the Carolingian dynasty. The Ven felt sure that Carolus, who was much more clever

and ambitious than his brother, was the mortal to stand behind. It was his leadership that would carry the Frankish kingdoms to prosperity. The next year, Carolus proved the Ven right by signing treaties with neighboring kingdoms, thereby surrounding Carloman's territories with his own. Then, in 771, just as Carloman was on the verge of formalizing new alliances against his brother, he died.

Carolus was now the sole King of the Franks. In time, he would be called *Carolus Magnus*, Charles the Great, and Charlemagne.

On Christmas Day, in the year 800, he was crowned Imperator of a new Holy Roman Empire. The *lares* had Troy. The Julii had Rome. And the Ven now had their own empire.

THE NEXT THOUSAND YEARS

The Holy Roman Empire endured, in one form or another, for 1,006 years, until Franz II (nephew to Marie Antoinette) surrendered his throne in 1806, following a brutal defeat by the armies of Napoleon at the Battle of Austerlitz. (He would console himself, however, by becoming Franz I of the Austrian Empire.) By this time, Ventrue were well established in cities large and small all across the globe, from the Americas through Russia and into Asia.

In the intervening centuries, the history of the Lords follows the history of mortals as night follows day. The individual fortunes of individual Lords are the result of thousands of smaller stories and histories, which are dwarfed by the larger sweep of the Ventrue story: Lords sweeten the victories of mortal kings, and diminish their defeats. Lords make themselves rich off the innovations and triumphs of the living, then hoard their wealth when their kingly ponies start to lose their races. The Ventrue icons of these middle centuries are local tales – the Lords who are legendary in Paris may be unheard of in Moscow – as the Masquerade muffles the secret praise and celebrations of the Damned in each city. All the neighbors here are the tales of mortal news, spreading through the public.

Though emperors give way to other emperors, and Carolingians give way to Habsburgs, the strategies of the Ventrue (claim a city and hold it against all rivals) do not much evolve, until the tastes of the kine undergo a major shift in the 18th century. By the reckoning of the era's Ventrue, the living were trading in royal loyalty

for nationalism, rebelling against centuries of rule by an informed few in favor of "liberty" – which many Lords regarded as a gentlemanly anarchy. How could thousands of shouting voices lead nations better than a few wise and well-spoken learned individuals?

Ventrue of the age who could not swiftly adapt to "the fad of liberty" paid in pain. By some accounts, the literal fires of the French Revolution nearly depopulated Paris of its Lords (many of whom were trapped, sleeping, in royal estates when they were sacked and burned). Throughout Europe, stubborn or ill-prepared Lords found themselves suddenly destitute or powerless as their kings were guillotined out from under them.

Savvy Ventrue made their own fortunes and secured their own futures in those nights. While some Ventrue were suffering the kinds of rare defeats that are truly undeniable, even by Lords, the neonates and ancillae of the age were winning the victories for which the Ventrue are known.

Instead of emperors and actual kings, these new Ventrue were insinuating themselves into parliaments and the lives of presidents. They whispered in the ears of the political architects writing the laws of the land. Ventrue were on the cobblestones, arguing democratic principles and matters of individual liberties with the force and grace of Lordly words. They drank wine with revolutionaries and played chess with the men writing constitutions. They saw who the new leaders of the mortal world were going to be, and simply made them into kings with other official titles.

THE NEW WORLD

In the early years of the mortals' exploration of the New World, the Lords of Europe expected to profit from their enterprise but had little expectation of ever seeing this New World for themselves. (In fact, modern anecdotal evidence suggests that few Ventrue ancillae or elders would visit the Americas until steamships were making the crossings.) Kindred of the era were calling it the Impossible Voyage.

Neonate Lords in Spain and Britain, however, seem to have independently, and nearly simultaneously, invoked the tale of Aeneas and the nature of Venus as grounds for braving the Impossible Voyage. Venus was a goddess of fertility, prosperity, and the sea, and neonate Lords argued in the courts of vampire Princes that it was the duty of Ventrue to make the journey, Embrace new childer in the Americas, and prosper. These neo-

nates would be new Aenead voyagers bound for a nascent empire founded not through desperate escape but bold ambition. These neonates merely needed their betters – established Lords and sires – to fund their mission.

American Lords who made the journey, and the first generation of American childer, all have tales of Kindred who failed in their journey to the New World. Ships sank. Torpid Kindred hidden in barrels of salt or soil were lost at sea. Terrifying boxes carrying strange, desiccated corpses were thrown overboard or burned in fear of witchcraft. Mortal handlers, trained by Ventrue masters with careful instructions for the long voyage, were sabotaged by the conditioning of rival masters.



Even Kindred who succeeded in reaching the New World could not be guaranteed a chance to continue their Requiems once they fell into the hands of the vampires already in residence. Faithful allies pledging to awaken torpid colonists from the old country often turned out to be less loyal when the time came. How many Kindred were awakened in pits or cells and extorted with threats of fire, burial or destruction unless they swore new oaths?

All this, to say nothing of those Kindred whose helpless corpses reached their allies, who were then unable to successfully revive the travelers until, decades later, their blood was potent enough to overcome the spell of torpor. Rumors abound (multiple Invictus domains in Virginia and Massachusetts tell the tales) of vaults containing colonial Kindred from the early nights of the Colonies, their bodies forgotten or unwanted or held hostage for four hundred years. It's no wonder that Kindred of the age now estimate as few as one in ten vampires successfully made the journey and awakened in the Americas.

Instead, new dynasties of Lords were founded in the Americas. Ventrue sires positioned themselves amid the roots of new societies and claimed for themselves the status and respect that they had given unto their betters in the old country. Kindred as young as 25 and 50 years into their Requiems were considering themselves elders.

Word back to Europe was scarce. Well into the 20th century, any Kindred making the journey to the Americas was venturing into unknown country, from the perspective of the Danse Macabre. Getting off the boat in Boston or New York was like stepping into a wilderness – how would a newcomer know where to find local Lords or Regents? How was one to go about presenting himself to the Prince, if indeed the city even had one. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, Boston harbor was a battleground for local Damned racing to find new Kindred before rival covenants could acquire them. They who got to the newcomers first could pass off anything they liked as the truth, or reshape the traveler's mind with Kindred witchcraft.

The history of Raleigh, North Carolina, as put forth by that city's current Prince, claims the metropolis was utterly empty of Kindred from 1820 until 1902. Area Kindred must have simply presumed an established court and hierarchy of domains was already in place, and so no vampire attempted to move into the city and carve out a territory. When the current Prince arrived in Raleigh in 1902, she found the city devoid of waking Kindred and, therefore, easily claimed the city as her own. Similar stories come out of western cities, as the chance for a vampire to safely reach the likes of Sacramento or Salt Lake City required a good deal of mortal infrastructure to be in place before most Kindred would risk the journey. Few vampires, it seems, assumed they would be the first to reach established mortal cities, but as the early American Lord, Virginia Creusa, says tonight, "Everything requires someone to do it first."

As suspected, few accounts survive of the plots against the indigenous Kindred that were carried out by colonial Lords. Likewise, few Kindred of any blood who were active at the time seem willing to share their stories of those chaotic years. Talking about this was different, though. These Kindred remember what happened. They either don't want to confess to what they did, or they don't see the advantage in talking about it. Can't blame them – what do they have to gain by giving details? It's enough (better?) to maintain the mystique of having conquered a continent than it is to teach your enemies how to do it.

Colonial “expeditions” (often consisting of lone or paired vampires) to established mortal cities often disregarded the claims of Kindred already in residence, especially in the first century of any city’s history. Being the first vampire to *claim* control of a city doesn’t grant that Kindred any special right to withstand those usurpers who would *take*

control of it. Until a Prince’s agents, influence and – perhaps most vitally – reputation were well established, her city remained vulnerable. Many American cities were home to two (or more!) distinct “cities” of Kindred within them, each with its own Prince and supposed authority. Some still exist in this fashion, even to these modern nights.

NOW: NETWORK WORLD

The feudal lordships created by the Kindred of the Dark Ages continue to be the most common model of Damned society. Eventually, the cities of the New World fell into the traditional rhythms and customs that Ventrue have known for a thousand years. The movements of the Danse Macabre are shaped by local lords and Princes. Most cities are countries unto themselves.

For many Ventrue – among whom the last century might very well be considered “modern” – it is only in the last twenty years that old-world contacts, sires and clan siblings are being heard from again. Some American Kindred have not heard word of their European sires since the American Revolution. Messengers get dispatched, but find no sign of the previous decade’s vampires at the once-familiar haunts. Kindred can seldom be looked up in public directories, so letters and phone calls have nowhere to go. It is due to modern cell-phone technology – when messengers can put the voice of their masters directly into the hands of the Kindred they’ve been sent to find – that so many old connections are being restored between American and old-world Lords.

Still, constructing these connections takes time. Scouts are sent from city to city, looking for contacts, Heralds, and Kindred with whom the Princes of their home cities can communicate. But the caution (and paranoia) so quickly learned in the Danse Macabre has taught many Kindred that there is

little advantage to establishing connections with the vampires of other cities. Communication channels can be used to plan coups or lure valuable vassals away. And what do most Kindred have to trade? The only essential commodity is Vitae, and that cannot be shared by cable.

Savvy Lords understand that while communication may be valuable, accessibility seldom is. It is best to be hard to find. It is best to be reachable only for those conversations you want to have. It is best to keep other Kindred out of one’s affairs.

That said, it is their network of contacts, old acquaintances, clan kin, mortal agents, ghouls, and kings that many Ventrue use to make themselves valuable to other vampires, whether Shadow, Savage, Haunt or Succubus. It’s these connections, through which Ventrue conspire, that let them outwit and outmaneuver all others in the Danse Macabre. It is the rare and precious point of access into another masked city that a Lord can use to make himself invaluable.

But letting other Kindred into your domain gives them the chance to turn, capture, or kill your assets. Telling them where to find your agents also informs them where to send their spies. Giving them a number to call gives them a line to tap.

Every avenue of communication that can be used to gain you power, can be used by others to take it away.

TRANSFORM THIS CITY INTO TROY,
AND RULE THIS PLACE, AND HOLD THE SACRED SCEPTER!
– OVID, *HEROIDES*: BOOK VII: DIDO TO AENEAS

IN THE NAME: VENTRUE

I’ve had numerous common Kindred, over the last 200 years, insist to me that our name is a French insult (*ventru* meaning “pot bellied”), but this theory comes from the kind of folk wisdom that doesn’t stop to separate the joke from any reasonable sense of the word. This joke about Ventrue descending from the phrase “pot bellied” has been around since at least the late 1700s. I, however, have been called, and have been calling myself, a Ventrue since the winter of AD 1574. Our name is the origin of the humor, it seems. (I’d be willing to speculate that it is the origin of the word as well, but that’s something else.)

We have been regarded, at least among our kind, as lords and aristocrats since the early nights of European history, when legends of Brutus and the Vanir gradually give way to recorded history, like

an ocean becoming land across a wide, soft and sandy shore. Nobles and aristocrats are, historically, mocked as being fat. This is true seemingly everywhere, throughout time. In more than a few passages of earthly history, pot bellies have been signs of prosperity and wealth, but even then they’ve been mocked by the poor and the starving, who haven’t been successful enough to indulge themselves. It seems clear to me that the word, *ventru*, is either an unlikely coincidence, or an example of Kindred culture seeping into the kine’s as immortals and mortals commiserated about their sorry luck in dingy taverns. Call it Europe’s most widespread and harmless Masquerade breach.

More informed origins for our name appear if we wave away the fog of eternity and do a bit of seri-

ous research. I've spoken with ancient Lords and poured through hundreds of correspondences – from those written in Roman times to those typed under the false anonymity of the Internet. From these footprints, we can approximate a course back to those who first stepped within the light of the fire and announced themselves as Ventrue.

First, let us be clear that no one origin seems absolute. Words don't descend like animals, they wonder around, aging and changing their appearance and personality, forever. Words describe an idea, which like some shadowy cryptid, can be known only through its descriptions. You'll never actually lay eyes on the moment in history when Troius or Brutus or Merovech declares, "From this moment on, we're called the Ventrue! Everybody get that? Ventrue. Spread it around." A shame, but there it is.

THE TRUE ORIGIN

When the first of the clan that would become Ventrue fled Troy in the 12th century, BC, they had no name for themselves other than Trojans or "the *Lares* of Troy." When they reached Italy, they were still thinking of themselves in this way.

But when Brutus of Troy left Italy in disgrace, the Kindred who followed him were calling themselves Ven (or "the Ven"). This was how they were introducing themselves throughout Gaul and the north. Somewhere between the founding of Lavinia and the exile of Brutus (a period of about two mortal generations), the *lares* of Troy took up this name, which for them must've had some special meaning.

We know of a few obvious inspirations they may have followed:

- The sound *ven* is quite similar to the Proto-Indo-European morpheme **wen*, meaning "to strive" or "to desire" or "to win." Thus the Ven were calling themselves, or alluding to themselves, as an ambitious and motivated people. Think of this as "the Victors."
- This same root, **wen*, is the origin of the Proto-Greek word *wanax*, which eventually became the Greek word *anax*, meaning "king." (In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon and Priam are both called *anax*, as kings who rule kings. Hector's son was called Astyanax.)
- This is also, obviously, a root morpheme in the name of Venus, the lady of desire and grandmother of sorts to the first vampires who would call themselves the Ven. The root *ven* is also very likely the root of Vanadis, also called Freyja, who is a defining figure (and Venus analog) of the Norse cult of the Vanir.
- The Vanir are gods of fertility, prosperity, and the sea. So is Venus. The Vanir are also gods of war. The Proto-Ventrue were ancestral creatures whose fertility was twisted by their curse, who had traveled across the sea, and who had brought prosperity and an Empire to Italy.

At this point, we have a strong notion of how the Ven arrived at their name, and how that moniker may have spread and adapted easily

Eventually, as word gets out that the Kindred ruler of your city is a colonial of the Kindred ruler of my city, and it turns out they're both childer of the Lord of Paris, the name of the family from which all these Lords descend becomes talked about. At first, we're both calling them the same thing, but then we each go back to our own cities and tell others about these "Ventrue." You spell it "venatroie" and I spell it "vantru" and we keep on doing this until we, or our childer, meet again and, realizing that they've been talking about the same thing all these years, agree on a single spelling. Rarely is that agreement based on, say, an academic understanding of the name's progress throughout history. More often we, like mortals, choose the form that looks most like it sounds, or has been used the most, or is prettiest. So it goes.

throughout Gaul and the Rhineland. This name seems to have stuck with the clan for a long while – thousands of years – before undergoing yet another change (very much in keeping with our traditional manners) in what may have been the time of the Carolingians.

By this era, the Ven have quite a reputation among the Damned. The Julii are long since gone from the world, it seems, and their absence makes room for the Ven to move toward the front of the stage, singing the legends of Troy. This, along with the evolution and spread of Frankish culture (alongside Latin) under Charlemagne, is probably when the name made its evolution:

- The first of the new age of the Proto-Ventrue and, barring his destruction or torpor (which has never been recorded), likely the Ven themselves, was the *lares dominus* and king-advisor called Troius, after his former city and charge. Troius and Troy are each regarded by some modern Lords as the origins of the Ventrue.
- The French root *venir* means "to come" or "to come over from." (Consider the French idiom, *Dans les années à venir*, meaning "In the years to come.")

In the time of the Holy Roman Empire, our grandsires were probably called some more formal (and likely longer) variation of our name, such that they would have been literally labeled as "Those Who Have Come From Troy." (This is subtly but meaningfully different from simply calling someone a Trojan – we are not simply "of Troy," but those who have come here from there. The sense of the journey and arrival was important, it seems.)

Over centuries of use and simplification, the name was compressed into the portmanteau, *Ventrue*. Tonight, you are one of those who has come here, across the sea and through warfare, from Troy. You bring with you your lust for power, your ambition, the glory of your lineage, and the promise of prosperity. And also, the curse of Troy.

You are a child of Venus. Advisor to ancient kings. You, Lord, are Ventrue.

SOURCES

To explain some of the travel in and out of the domain to my Prince, I submitted a formal statement of the research I was doing, written by Holcomb (why this reads so formal). I thought you might like to see some background on the sources we found (mostly through Nicodemus), so I've expanded some of this for you.

The best history of our clan, that I have been able to muster, comes from a small collection of sources, chosen for their relative reliability and trustworthiness. When we consider how Kindred culture is spread, and how secretive we tend to be both as a society and as individuals, the true magnitude of the challenge of assembling a history of our clan comes into view, like a mountain suddenly revealed through breaking fog. Beyond that crag is our past, hidden by lies, mistakes, omissions, and speculation, some malicious and some fielded for our own good. To navigate the precipitous terrain, we need maps to show us where the trails and mountain passes can be found – but not all the directions offered to us are accurate, and not all of them even intend to be.

Here, then, is a brief catalog of the texts used to assemble the history of the Ventrue that follows later in this manuscript. Some of these manuscripts have been referenced directly by scholars, historians, occultists and mystics contacted for the sake of this very work; others have not been seen first-hand in many long years by the Kindred trusted with the compilation of this text. These sources have been consulted through memory, through digests, through hand-copied notes, and in one case even through a recitation via telephone. Again, we see how the vagaries of time and the restrictions of secrecy limit our own ability to peer into the dark behind us.

The Byzantium Letters

The renowned collection of manuscripts, decrees, and personal correspondence kept by the (so-called) Sanctified Bishop of Byzantium is venerated by occultists living and undead. Following the fall of the Camarilla, certain texts from Rome and Necropolis were secreted away in vaults and archives beneath Constantinople for the purposes of preserving aspects of Kindred culture and knowledge. Over the tumultuous decades that immediately followed, this archive was culled by Sanctified clerics, it is said, bent on rewriting Kindred history and exorcising enemies, mistakes, shame and sin from the “truth” they would put forth to future scholars. In the centuries that followed *that*, the archive was gradually broken up further, sometimes to protect the contents of a vault about to be plundered or accidentally discovered by the kine, sometimes in trade or tribute to some colonial Bishop and his new parish. Eventually, the archives at Constantinople (now the Library of Istanbul) became a pocked, disorganized, piecemeal thing – but still a treasure trove compared to the relative ignorance in which so many other Kindred cities suffer.

For this work, ghouls were dispatched to entreat with the Shadows in residence at the Library of Istanbul and gain access to letters and documents of the Dead Julii and any of our ancestors whose writings may have found their way there. Searching the Library for specific wisdom is folly; every visit is a gamble. It has been our experience,

however, while compiling this text, that every gamble produces something invaluable if you match purpose to paper.

Where possible, we have also chased down Byzantium Letters that have been sent off to other Kindred over the millennia. Our scrivener and contact in Edinburgh, Nicodemus, has collected dozens of pages of the Byzantium Letters during the past three hundred years, many of which have proven invaluable for their additional perspectives on the legends of Aeneas.

The Prague Letters

The Prague Letters were misleadingly named so by modern Kindred. Unlike the Byzantium Letters, which were at one time a formal and intentional collection, the Prague Letters are in fact a vast number of unrelated and uncollected documents (some letters, many not) that have survived the centuries by happenstance. They're regarded together only for simplicity. (One seller of Prague Letters, however, tried to convince my man that they were hidden all throughout the city by design, in the 17th century, on the orders of some local Lord, for the sake of their protection. I imagine this was an attempt at inflating their importance for the sake of a sale.)

As Prague was spared much of the fighting during the Second World War, a great many buildings, cellars, attics, and Kindred havens survive to the modern nights. However, as with the relicts of Rome, poor Kindred – Methuselabs and the plain alike – slept below while their memories and property were looted above. So many papers were lost in bombings and barrages in those European cities, and so much of our history with it.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Prague was scoured by treasure-hunters, occultists, and academics, living and dead, in an attempt to loot or salvage the many documents that could be found in the city. In the 1990s, when captured papers could be easily reproduced, the pages themselves became less precious than the networks of contacts that allowed a potential buyer to locate willing sellers. The documents were in the hands of kine, wizards, and Kindred of every clan, but practically every network went through the Ventrue somewhere along the way. Thus, by combining considerable wealth with exceptional connections, many Ventrue came into possession of Prague Letters.

Bless them. Although few of the contacts we spoke with would consider parting with their original documents, quite a few were willing to allow us access to their collections in exchange for favors owed or to pay outstanding debts. The Prague Letters turned out to be an invaluable source of information on the genealogies of European Ventrue, going back as far as the Merovingians in some cases.

The Library of New Orleans

The Library of New Orleans houses the most complete and formal collection of Ventrue correspondence and documentation that we saw during our

research. In my opinion, it is the least contaminated collection of Ventruë correspondence in the world. The letters and documents kept by the Archivist of New Orleans have verifiable provenance dating back to the 16th century. No other Kindred or kine has ever been curator of these documents. Even the collection's gaps are well-documented; the Prince of New Orleans has removed a genealogy, but otherwise the letters have gone unmolested.

I dread the night when he fails to rise. Someone else will have to take responsibility for the papers then, and confusion and hearsay will leak in like rainwater.

The unfortunate shortcoming of this collection, of course, is its relative age and scope. The documents here go back only a few hundred years, and concern only Kindred history within the French colonies and, later, the American South. That history already echoes in our nightly ritual, in the very name by which we know the Danse Macabre. What we learned from these letters taught us more about the colonization of mortal cities by the Damned, and their peculiar relationship with the peculiar institution of slavery than anything else. Otherwise, what we found here merely illustrates the kinds of schemes and victories we Lords have championed for millennia.

The London Papers

Another archive put together as a result of World War II, the so-called London Papers are the work, allegedly, of a wizard who used magic to locate and protect rare and irreplaceable documents from the ravages of the war. No one could tell me what came of the wizard, but his collection has been passed down to new handlers.

The documents contained in this collection – kept in a quite handsome and modern display beneath a Notting Hill home – represent an astonishing range of religious and secular, occult and mundane, ancient and contemporary (for the War) sources. The gentlemen and lady who maintain the collection are a curious lot, not Kindred as near as I could tell, and seemed very suspicious of us when we were there.

In truth, while the archive is quite eclectic, it was also not especially helpful to us. Much of the information we could glean, from the pages they would show us, was drawn from previous texts and rather seriously confused by uninformed authors. Though we found a few items of obvious relevance (more than one pushing the boundaries of what I think the Invictus would find acceptable for the public), none of it was new information.

The Book of Cornwall/*Brut* of the Ven *

Two parts of a single, larger work, these manuscripts have undergone numerous revisions and renovations over the years at the hands of Kindred who want either to correct perceived mistakes or further disguise problematic accuracies.

The Book of Cornwall is a partial transcription of a manuscript by a Christian monk dwelling near Devon. The copy is thought to date from around 1100 AD, with the original having been written around four-hundred-years earlier, accord-

ing to the memory of the Kindred who ordered the initial manuscript written. The transcription inserts a variety of mythical British history into its accounts of Cornwall's past physical and spiritual inhabitants. Much of this mythology-masquerading-as-history resembles that which Geoffrey of Monmouth would later include in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (A History of the Kings of Britain), suggesting either that Geoffrey had seen this text or that he and this author worked from some shared source (possibly a vampire?). While the Book of Cornwall is lovely, it holds little meaningful detail beyond that also contained in The Childer of Aeneas.

The *Brut* of the Ven, on the other hand, may have been affixed to the Book of Cornwall as a kind of compare-and-contrast effort by some 12th-century Lord, for its details seem much more reliable (certainly they are more believable). The *Brut* of the Ven (roughly, Chronicle of the Ven in Britain) blends a variety of mythical, legendary, and historical information into an account that surely would not have been in keeping within the bounds of the Masquerade of its age. The author seems to be a Ventruë (archaically, a Ven) writing in the middle of the 12th century, and in regular contact with William of Newburgh (author of the medieval History of English Affairs). This contact may be the source of William's tales of "revenants" (Kindred, more likely).

The *Brut* chronicles the arrival of Brutus of Troy in Britain, and describes the spread of his childer across the isle. It also reports tales of his journeys in mainland Europe and relates stories of his childer, the Ven, throughout Gaul and up the Rhine. Modern interpretations suggest that these are highly fictionalized accounts based on real happenings, shared through stories told by one Kindred to another. Thus, their authenticity seems much more valuable than their accuracy.

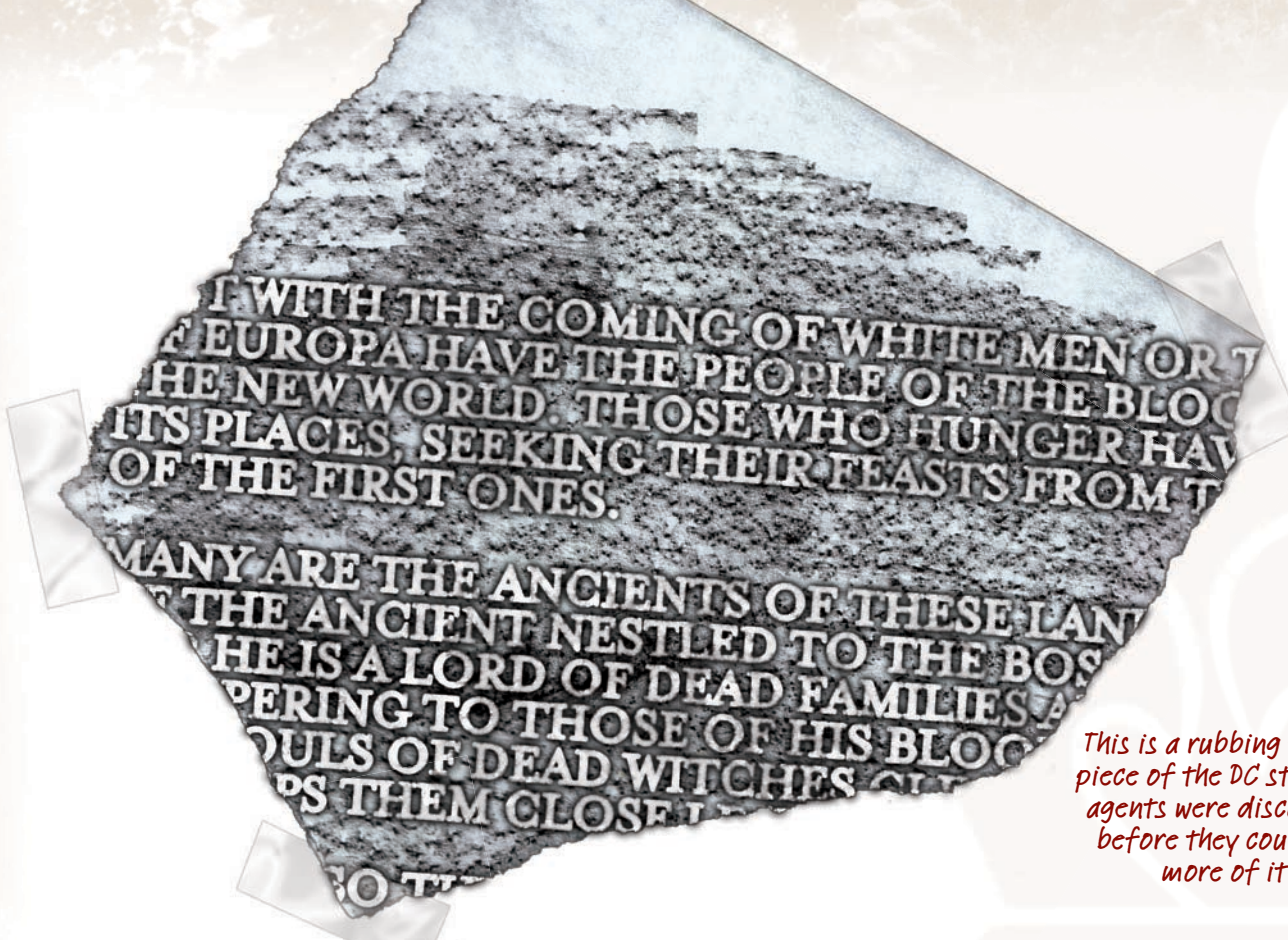
Perhaps as many as three copies of the *Brut* of the Ven survive to the modern night. Although the text is now so old as to be safely regarded as myth by any modern public, there is no particular value in sharing the text with any but the most devoted of Ventruë historians. I count myself lucky to have laid eyes on it.

The Childer of Aeneas

Only fragments of this ancient text remain. Written sometime during the reign of Augustus Caesar, when that mortal emperor was proclaiming his own family – the living Julii – to be descended from Aeneas, this epic narrative is thought to have been a mélange of pagan legends. That is, this poem was written more than a thousand years after the events it claims to describe. The anonymous author of the poem claims to have visited with (and consumed the blood of) heathen Goths, who also claim to bear the blood of Aeneas. Was the author using Augustus's mythic revisions as cover for a poem exposing the existence and history of the Ventruë?

The *Childer of Aeneas* follows Brutus of Britain on his journeys through Gaul, after being exiled for the death of his father. Kindred who have read the text prior to its eventual disintegration and fall out of

* "*brut*" =
a history of
Britain



I WITH THE COMING OF WHITE MEN OR THE
EUROPEA HAVE THE PEOPLE OF THE BLOOD
OF THE NEW WORLD. THOSE WHO HUNGER HAVE
ITS PLACES, SEEKING THEIR FEASTS FROM THE
OF THE FIRST ONES.

MANY ARE THE ANCIENTS OF THESE LANDS.
THE ANCIENT NESTLED TO THE BOSOM OF
HE IS A LORD OF DEAD FAMILIES, A
WHISPERING TO THOSE OF HIS BLOOD.
SOULS OF DEAD WITCHES CRY OUT TO
THEM CLOSE BY.

This is a rubbing from a piece of the DC stone. My agents were discovered before they could get more of it.

** Holcomb left out the Ephesus fragments. Not sure why. Nic. had access to 2-3 of them, which we were able to use to verify a few details from interviews, at least. According to Fragment IXa, the city had a V. Prince by 537 AD.*

history (I have met two), recall that very little of the text was truly about Brutus himself. Instead, it used Brutus as a vehicle for a kind of mythic travelogue, visiting various vampire-chieftains throughout the barbaric realms beyond the verges of the Roman Empire and the Camarilla. It combined tales collected over a thousand years into a single epic journey set prior to the founding of Rome.

For many Ventrue, further fragments of *The Childer of Aeneas* would be precious finds. Though the historicity of the poem is questionable, it is regarded as being deeply *truthful* despite factual problems imposed by the necessities of discretion. It is a work of great poetic value, as well, and perhaps the rarity and prestige of the work could compel a rich Lord with little interest in mythic history to fund further research. Most likely though, until some other fragment is dug up or some sleeping ancient awakens and recites the poem, we will be left wanting. *

The DC Stone

Sometime prior to 1858, a carved stone was delivered to an old vampire residing in Washington, DC. It resembled, they say, nothing so much as a small memorial marker – formally cut and shaped by trained hands. Etched on it was an account of early Kindred in the New World, including mention of such creatures prior to European arrival.

The source of the stone is still a mystery. The recipient claimed not to know who sent it, and subsequent investigations yielded nothing. Rubbings of the stone circulated throughout a few East Coast American cities, but little could be done to verify the engraved information. (It is from one of these rubbings that we had access to the stone's

etchings.) The current location of the DC Stone is unclear, but to this night it seems to still be in private hands within Washington, DC.

All that we've been able to take away from the DC Stone is a sense of tantalizing possibility. It implies that a "lord of dead families" lays sleeping beneath America's capital, "listening and whispering" to those who sleep above. Is some venir Methuselah hidden deep below the city, and if so, how long has he been there?

Monmouth Translations

This is a more recent oddity: A scholarly work on the history of the Ventrue, written for a Kindred audience and seemingly unconcerned with the Masquerade. Whatever Lord approved this work either had little fear of the First Estate or was quite sure he could keep a tight grip on the work. To date, no copy of this manuscript (there are thought to be nine in the hands of various Lords) seems to have leaked to the public.

Unfortunately, this book is not a history in its own right, but is rather a critical analysis and assessment of previous Kindred legendry, as contained or alluded to within mortal texts, like the aforementioned dubious histories by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Written between 1595 and 1602, *Monmouth Translations* examines and critiques the histories of William of Newburgh, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Walter Map, and other mortal authors whose works glance on Ventrue history and legendry. The unknown author of *Translations* also had access to histories that have since been lost, including a manuscript written by a fugitive ghoul on the run from a Lord who lurked at the edges of Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire.

Monmouth Translations has provided us with numerous references to use when verifying details in other texts, provided we trust the intelligence and motives of its secret author. So many of the details mentioned in this book support the history of the Ventrue as we know it, but do so while citing texts that no longer exist. Frustrating.

The Graeme Manuscript

Discovered in the possession of Wilfrid Voynich in 1912, the Graeme Manuscript is one of Kindred history's great close-calls. For almost two centuries it sat in the library of the Collegio Romano, unnoticed by living scholars, with frank and damning details of Requiems and covenants held between its covers. In 1912, the library quietly sold off several extraneous or misunderstood books to raise desperately needed funds. London bookseller Wilfrid Voynich was the buyer.

One of Voynich's regular customers was a London Lord, known to us now only as Graeme. Recognizing immediately that Voynich had come upon a book of volatile Kindred secrets, Graeme purchased it and, it is said, gave Voynich a new memory of the book and its contents. Graeme later claimed to have "retold" the memories of at least two mortals at the Collegio Romano, as well.

The Graeme Manuscript is the diary of a Ventrue, written in the 17th century as preparation for a long torpor. The author, called Leopold Kirchner at the time of his torpor, wrote the book around 1640 for his own reference upon waking. According to his diary, Kirchner was Embraced as a Ventrue in Britain in 118 AD, by a Lord substantially older.

Most of the details of the diary have been kept private by Graeme, partly to control the value of having access to the text and partly to preserve the worth of its secrets as secrets. Though some details in the diary are intentionally disguised (many names seem to be substitutions, for example), Graeme spent close to a decade between 1920 and 1930 researching the diary's accuracy and historical context. In 1974, Graeme produced a single, hand-written volume divulging just the historical details of the diary, which he titled *Kirchner's History*, but is more often (and somewhat confusingly) referred to as the Graeme Manuscript, as well.

Tonight, it's *Kirchner's History* that we use for reference, when we are able. A good deal of the information included herein, especially regarding

the Merovingian and Carolingian dynasties, is drawn from details written by Kirchner. The Kindred, Graeme, has kept the original diary hidden since the 1970s.

The location of Leopold Kirchner is unknown.

The Malkavian Testament (Codex Malkavia)

The Malkavian Testament (sometimes called *Codex Malkavia* in its most modern incarnation) is a work of demented glossolalia on paper. Since it was begun in the 1870s, it has been growing. Multiple Malkavian authors have contributed to this collection (compiled by numerous non-Malkavian editors) of stream-of-consciousness writings and outsider art over the years. These works are thought to be a peek at the insane mass consciousness of the Demented, which individually make little sense but when combined together can reveal a kind of dream-like pattern that inspires and evokes in provocative ways.

Some of the rambling text and impulsive illustrations in this unique volume synch up with mythic or historical tales from Kindred history. Is this a case of some "race memory" being passed down through the Blood, or is this coincidence? Does the mass psychosis of the Afflicted tap into some ancestral knowledge, or are these insane artists simply regurgitating stories they forgot they once heard from their sires?

Skeptics insist this book's only value is as entertainment, but I find that hard to believe since I met a recently risen Ventrue who recognized a moment from his last living day when he stumbled on it in the *Codex Malkavia*. That day, over a thousand years ago, "isn't something I talk about," he told me. "But there it is, right down to the name of the woman who died with me that night. How can I believe it's coincidence?"

The question remains: How best to make use of this ever-expanding book? It is useless for fact-checking, but may be a valuable resource for determining where, in the many shadowed places of our world, we should begin looking for relics that shed light on our past.

The Malkavian Testament travels every year or so with a band of Afflicted and un-afflicted nomads, who seek out Demented who have not yet contributed to the work. As of this writing, the book is in Sacramento, California.

About Nicodemus: A lot of letters, couriers, emails, and phone calls are coming through here. I've never seen anything like this with Kindred before. A lot of information is arriving at this building night after night. Old books, letters, photographs, paintings, digital files, etc.

At this point, I don't think I trust him anymore. Do you know who all he's working with? He seems so used to this kind of work that I think he must have done it before. Or maybe he's setting up something similar to our arrangement with some other master? Whatever. He's talking. If you say he's not selling us out I have to believe you, but I'm sure he's talking to someone else. Did you know this was going on?

— V

WH –

– From your most devoted servant:

Hearsay. This is the medium of Kindred culture. The laws of the Prince restricting our behavior are spread by the word of Heralds. When the Herald tells us the Prince has proclaimed something to be so, we have to trust the Herald that it *is* so. Still, it is hearsay.

Whatever information we're able to collect about the culture of our clan is and will be anecdotal. For this work, we've striven to make our sources more reliable by dispatching agents of our own to lay eyes on the anecdotes prior to reporting back. We hope this means the evidence, while anecdotal, will be less biased. Yet the writings of our agents are still hearsay, and so this work amounts to merely an anecdotal of Ventrue culture.

Trust is an essential component in the process of understanding our own kind, then, even while skepticism is an essential guard against our own abuse. We can't know for sure that what we're told is the same as what is true... but what else do we have to go on?

To gather the accounts for this work, I dispatched or commissioned thirty-three investigators, Harpies, Hounds, Heralds, nomads, ghouls, and writers. They were reached through my own contacts, as well as those of my sire, of my own city's Lord Priscus, and of a trusted two or three other local Lords. Once selected, these agents were sent out to investigate and interview the Kindred of their cities. When the interview process was complete, surveillance usually followed, as a means of adding candid data to whatever information could be gained through the interviews.

Many of the Kindred we spoke to offered us little new information beyond the rumors, stereotypes, and popular notions of Lords that it seems settle into preconception in every city. More than a few never showed up for the interviews we arranged. Several would only correspond with us through dead drops or anonymous letters (and these, to be fair, are probably the wisest and possibly the most trustworthy sources we have).

After all this, we spent a great deal of time weeding out information that was either obvious to any neonate or obviously false. Some stories we were able to combine into single accounts (and this is how a great deal of our history was compiled), but it seemed that the most informative examples of the breadth of Ventrue culture were the most specific – the character studies and journalistic profiles of subcultures heavily influenced by Lords. To me, it's the details of these accounts that make them trustworthy. We read a half-dozen reports of "rat kings" from two different cities, and they all seemed trivially interesting but not especially informative – until one of our men, contacted through his city's Priscus (and coerced by your name), was suitably motivated to dig past the bullshit and muck of rumors. Only now, having received the account of his city's King Rat, do I believe the rumors.

Some of these tales were collected by agents motivated by the promise of money. Some investigators did it for the sake of the truth. Some worked for political gain. Some would have done it anyway for their own personal advantage, but were only able to get the necessary access by tapping into our juice. Some of these accounts were easy to get, as it seems a fair number of aged Kindred want to pass on their stories as much as the old of the living. Some of these histories were collected only after a great deal of lying, bribery, fucking, or sanguine influence. What you have here carries a remarkable value in cash, drugs, territory, promises, broken hearts, and blood spilled or stolen.

This has been the price for a look at our culture that would not otherwise be possible from any one city, at any one time, or in any one Requiem.

–VT

NOTES FROM THE DEAD GIRL, I

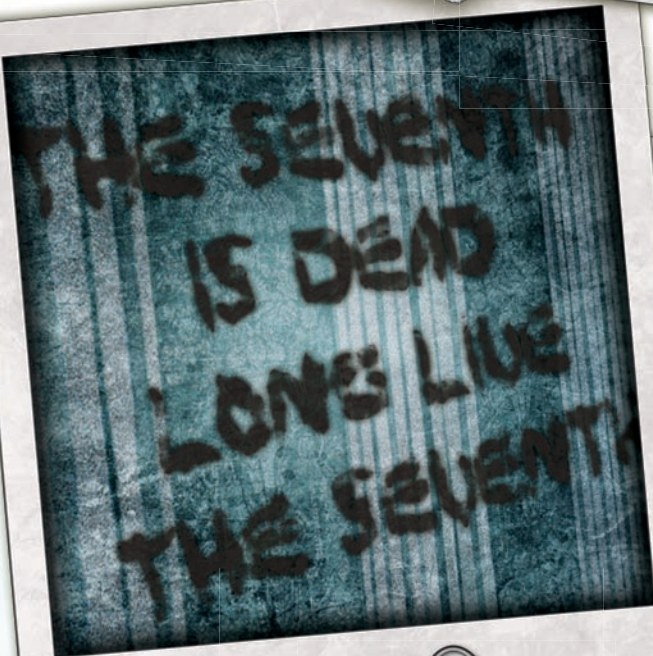
You want the setup? Here's the setup. That apartment was a prison of sensation, of goddamn desire. The blood all over the walls was dry, but that didn't stop me from wanting to tear the place apart looking for a beating heart to suckle. Like a fucking orange or an apple. My body aches just thinking about it. But I kept my shit together, don't worry. My thirst doesn't rule me, I rule it. I'm no embarrassment. Hardaiken was there, was the one pointed me to the place because he knows I'm... collecting things here and there. I don't know how he knows. But he's us, he's better than me, so I didn't say no.

Right, right, the setup: rat-trap apartment, not quite tenement, but damn sure not a penthouse. Brownstone, third-floor walkup. I don't know who lived there. I don't know whose blood and bits are all over the walls. I do know that whoever did this left a note, written in (what else?) blood on a piece of crummy yellow notebook paper.

Hardaiken swears this is relevant. Swears you'll want to see it.

So, go ahead. See it.

Cassius knows. He knows
what lurks in the blood of
his people. We, the Banu
Qasi! We, the little girls of
Valencia! We face it again:
conversion or exile! Submit,
or wake to the sun! I love
you, Daddy. I miss you.



This was written on the wall above the note. Not in blood, but in what Hardaiken assures me is shit. That's why he's the big, bad Sheriff of Nottingham, right?

Yeah, I don't know what this shit means. Literally. But Hardaiken handed me the camera, told me to include it with the note. Enjoy.

The Culture of Lords

ALL POLITICIANS WILL FROM TIME TO TIME DO WHAT THEY KNOW TO BE WRONG, OR NOT DO WHAT THEY KNOW TO BE RIGHT, IN THE INTERESTS OF PARTY OR COUNTRY OR PERSONAL ADVANTAGE; BUT SOME WORRY ABOUT IT LESS THAN OTHERS, SOME HAVE BETTER REASONS OR MOTIVES THAN OTHERS. IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO DENY THIS.

— DAVID STOCKTON, *CICERO: A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY*

NAMES OF LORDS

The son of Aeneas was called Ascanius, but also Iulus and Julius. The first Holy Roman Emperor is known as Carolus Magnus, but also as Charles the Great and Charlemagne. The great *lare* of the house of Priam took on the name of Troius only after he was cursed and fled from Troy. The name of Brutus was adopted by several of his childer, to ensure his legacy despite exile.

Glory endures, but names do not. We Ventrue have a long-standing tradition of adopting new names over the centuries. This protects us from investigation and our own great (or sorry) reputations, shielding ourselves and strengthening the Masquerade. This also enables us to escape the sinkholes of defeat, wash ourselves clean, and move on to new opportunities for victory.

Milestones of all sorts have inspired name changes in our past. A Lord with a pedestrian name may adopt a grand, prestigious moniker upon becoming Primogen or Prince. Colonial Lords often adopt new names when they reach fresh territories, to protect their political and familiar connections from casual inspection. Lords might choose a new title when they achieve recognition as ancilla or elder, when they awaken from torpor, or when they transform their Vitae into that of a new bloodline. The reasons are many, but the process is uncomplicated.

A renamed Lord either declares his new moniker through a local Herald, if he is already well known, or he simply begins introducing himself with his new name. Some rare Ventrue even keep and use more than one name at a time within the same domain. Unless you meet them face to face, you might not know that Gregor the Marquis of Chinatown is also Carter the Harpy of the Double Door bar. That same vampire might be known to his sire and childer, or his whole clan, by yet another name. Are these multiple nomenclatures used for skullduggery and deceit, or are they symbolic statements of the Lord's many roles, and his dedication to keep them from interfering with one another? We'd have to meet the individual and judge for ourselves.

Though many Lords adopt names with historical weight or allusions (Nicholas, Augustus, Creusa, Virginia), particularly when they reach some coveted level of office or prestigious and visible position in Kindred society, just as many adopt monikers to identify themselves *without* their name.

"The Sharp" of Las Vegas is one example – his name is known to few, but his reputation as a card-player and casino-dweller is quite renowned.

To help track clan kin, sires and childer throughout the years, many Lordly lines adopt familial names. These surnames don't change over time, but are often passionately protected or even kept hidden from those outside the "familial line." Those that are known outside the family are used only formally – citing them is a matter of pomp, pride, or castigation. ("Richard of the Argyles, I vow here to destroy any childer you might sire!") These familial lines are essentially bloodlines without any refinement or mutations of the Blood.

Familial names are often profoundly famous among local Kindred, but little known outside the immediate city. Those names with renown in multiple locations are often linked to (or flatly imitate) the names of influential mortal families, like the Rockefellers, the Roosevelts, or the Coppolas. The names that echo throughout the Danse Macabre ring with a legendary sound, familiar not only over miles but for long years. These are the Jeffersons, the Einsteins, and the Cromwells of the Kindred world, though to mortal ears their names might not be familiar.

A few Ventrue familial names to listen for:

- *Hawthorne* – A line of English-American Lords who have pulled strings behind North American newspapers since 1777.
- *Carmichael* – Canadian investors and bankers, whose colonial Lords have expanded the family's clutches into Europe and the United States. This bloodline is remarkably light-handed and reserved, despite its almost unfathomable wealth.
- *Anastasio* – A small family of Jewish killers and cover-up artists who took their name from Albert Anastasia (aka Umberto Anastasio), the Italian immigrant and Mafia Don sometimes called the Lord High Executioner. He ran Murder, Inc.
- *Zehtner* – Descended from a master craftsman Embraced in Eastern Europe around 1580, the Zehtners are a small but international line of smiths and carpenters renowned among the Lords who know them for building exquisite (and highly secure) homes and havens for the Damned.
- *Nassar* – This widespread Middle-Eastern family, with old colonial childer sent far and wide, is known for its excellence in the sciences. They

also maintain a customary distance from each other, seldom allowing more than two Nassars in a single city, to protect the longevity of the bloodline. Nassars have been refining mathematics and chemistry since the 11th century.

- *Del Amarr* – Descended from devout Catholic missionaries Embraced while bringing the word of the Pope to Scandinavia in the 10th century, the Del Amarr spent long decades making it back to Rome under the cover of night. Now they are found almost exclusively in Norway, Iceland, and the Vatican.
- *Gough* – Often mistaken for a Daeva bloodline, the Goughs are Lords of the Stage. The earliest Goughs were damned by London Lords around 1593 for works of heresy and sinful excess – specifically plays glorifying sex and murder. At least four mortal actors and playwrights were Embraced into the Gough family that year, supposedly to be punished, but in truth to present monstrous Sanctified values to Invictus

audiences at court. Ever since, they have been lurking over the shoulders of actors, film stars, directors, and recording artists.

- *Veck* – The Vecks are not the German family they sometimes pretend to be, but are in fact a Czech line of royally born Ventrue outcast from that land by their living kin. Vecks infiltrate mortal families, drive them to financial and moral self-destruction over years (or decades) and then move on. Their existence is one of grandiose spending and indulgence, interspersed with migratory poverty.
- *Adrestos* – A very recent lineage, the Adrestoi consider themselves consummate predators of the urban wilderness. Founded by a diablerist, they do not affect a regal bearing as so many of the Ventrue do. Instead, they consider themselves the nobility of the modern city, with fingers in all manner of corporate and investment ventures. They are notorious pack hunters, considering their Hunt to be a sacred act.

Though we changed a lot of names within the work, we also collected a great many of them. Each of these names was adopted as a moniker by at least one Lord we corresponded with or observed. Several of these names were used by a single Kindred (e.g., the New York Lord known as Bonaventure through 1974 and later as Cicero). Many of these names are used by more than one of the Lords we had contact with (a couple of Hectors and Creusas, lots of Alexanders and Elizabeths).

Abraham	Charles	Grant	Livy	Priam
Adam	Cicero	Grigori	Mbire	Richard
Alexander	Cortés	Han	Mehmed	Saladin
Alfred	Creusa	Harold	Meiji	San Bartolo
Anaxim	Cyrus	Hawthorne	Mercutio	Showa
Anaximander	Dante	Hector	Miranda	Solomon
Antigone	De Gaulle	Hecuba	Mutapa	Taisho
Ashadruj	Edo	Henry	Nebedza	Tlaloc
Augustus	Edward	Herod	Nicholas	Veno/a
Belálcazar	Elissa	Hirohito	Nils	Villa
Bonaventure	Elizabeth	Ismail	Numitor	Virgil
Budica	Fatima	Jefferson	Otto	Virginia
Carolina	Franco	Joseph	Pars	Walsingham
Castillo	Franz	Julius	Philip	Yamamoto
Castor	Gates	Laertes	Pizarro	Zhou
Catherine	Giancarlo	Leopold	Pollux	

CRESCENTIA MACELLARIUS

The interview went like this: I asked no questions. I simply let her talk, something she was glad to do. I won't lie; it's because I was terrified of her. It would be easy to dismiss her as some... corpulent thing. Some grotesque beast stuffed into a rumpled gown. Were she human, that might be the case.

But let me be clear about this: her presence was demanding, commanding, overwhelming. The way she ate – yes, “ate,” in case you don't know about this family in our clan, that's what they do, they *eat* flesh – was more a lustful dissection, a playful pick-apart of meat from bone, of blood squeezed from tissue. She took to the conversation, one-sided as it was, in the same fashion. Every word, she sounded it out, swishing it around in her mouth and upon her tongue like she was... enjoy-

ing the taste. Her voice, deep like air rushing out of leather bellows, overpowered the room and allowed no other sound entrance.

My time with her was one of the greatest pleasures of my Requiem. It was also one of the most menacing. Like a mantis, I wondered at when she might be done with our verbal coupling and take my head as a final meal.

Her conversation is below, transcribed. It's edited, broken up and switched around, but it's not manipulated in anyway; I only seek to cut the wheat from the chaff. Eight hours of her going on was, while fascinating, not entirely worth the transcription – unless you'd prefer that? Let me know. I'll have my people finish the task if you see fit.

Also below, you'll find my notes.

ON FAMILY

Family is the proper way, you see? It is the proper direction of the Blood. It's an expression, yes? An expression of taste and distaste, an exultation of shared ideals. It's how we do it in the broader clan, or at least how it *should* be done. Some give into the Blood and are not the masters of it, and they do not create families so much as cadres, cults, *herds* of monsters. Have you heard? Of the so-called “massage parlor” down in the Tenderloin? The women of our ilk who work there, they worship the basest, simplest of creatures: insects. Wasps or something in specific. One claims to be the Queen, I hear. What a grand position! To be the queen of the bugs! To lord over a swarm of empty-headed trollops! Oh, what Rapture. Disgusting.

Where was I? Family. Yes! We are only one lineage that purports to become a family of Kindred, to form the lineal bonds that act as the mortar holding all these disparate bricks together. (Or perhaps I should say the connective tissue, or the tendons that anchor muscle to bone? Since I dine: are you sure you don't want some? No? Pity.) We are family. Not those of like-minds. Not those who agree with one another or who have little more in common than some monstrous feature or another. No. We are relatives. Certainly few of us were actually born related to one another, but that is one of the great blessings of the Blood, isn't it? The ability to make and remake such bonds. The chance to find a brother or a sister where before you could not.

And I know what you're saying, “Oh, but those Macellarius, they're monsters, fat boars tied together only by their prodigious flesh.” And that is true to a

point, and I'll get to our size in but a moment. That is not what truly keeps us together. We are kin, don't you see? The way a set of human twins might sense one another from afar or share the same predilections in clothes or décor or food, we share our tastes, too. Our family used to breed horses, you know? Breeding is key. Choice traits, cultivated. That is what we hope to achieve with our families. We sense one another, we *become* one another.

Other households among the Lords are notable for the same: the hilltop Vargas, those keepers of such massive estates and *haciendas*; those Oldershaw boys, all young boys, all “brothers,” cast far and wide with their youthful vigilance and deep pockets; the Mordaunt household, well... I don't find them pleasant, given their backwater, bog-fouled sensibilities, but you still have to honor them for keeping to the fealty of family, don't you? What of you? Have you found a family yet? They're looking for little brothers within the Cremini household. I think you'd fit nicely. You look clean. Your mother dresses you nicely. Of course, they all sleep on stone slabs and favor ugly, austere décor, but the bloodline is not without its wealth.

At this point, Crescentia sized me up like a prize lamb. She literally reached over and grabbed my jaw in her prodigious palm and turned it this way and that, stopping short of prying back my lips and examining my gum-line. A part of me felt honored by the examination; she certainly seemed pleased with what she saw. Another part of me wondered if, in reality, she was just pondering what kind of soup she might make from my bones.

ON SIZE

I've heard tell that our clan name comes from the French word for “fat belly.” Is it true? I can't say. Can't care, either! What I do know is that size represents strength. It reveals one's *wealth* of character, as well as that of her bank account. The

flesh is mighty. The muscles, rich. I like to think of us as Rubenesque. Do you know Rubens' work? It's so often that one refers to his art in light of the plump woman, though his work goes far beyond that. How can you not love the *Feast of Venus*? The

droll but perfect simplicity of *Farmers Returning from the Fields*? Though it's the latest discovery, *Massacre of the Innocents*, that piques my interest. Miscataloged for over three centuries, it depicts the biblical massacre as put forth in the Gospel of Matthew. Delightful! I've heard other gems of his lie in wait, attributed perhaps to his assistants or contemporaries. I've even heard that the *Massacre* has... unique properties. Put your ear to the canvas, and you can hear the cries and lamentations. No matter. Rubens died of gout, you know? Unpleasant way to go, I have to believe.

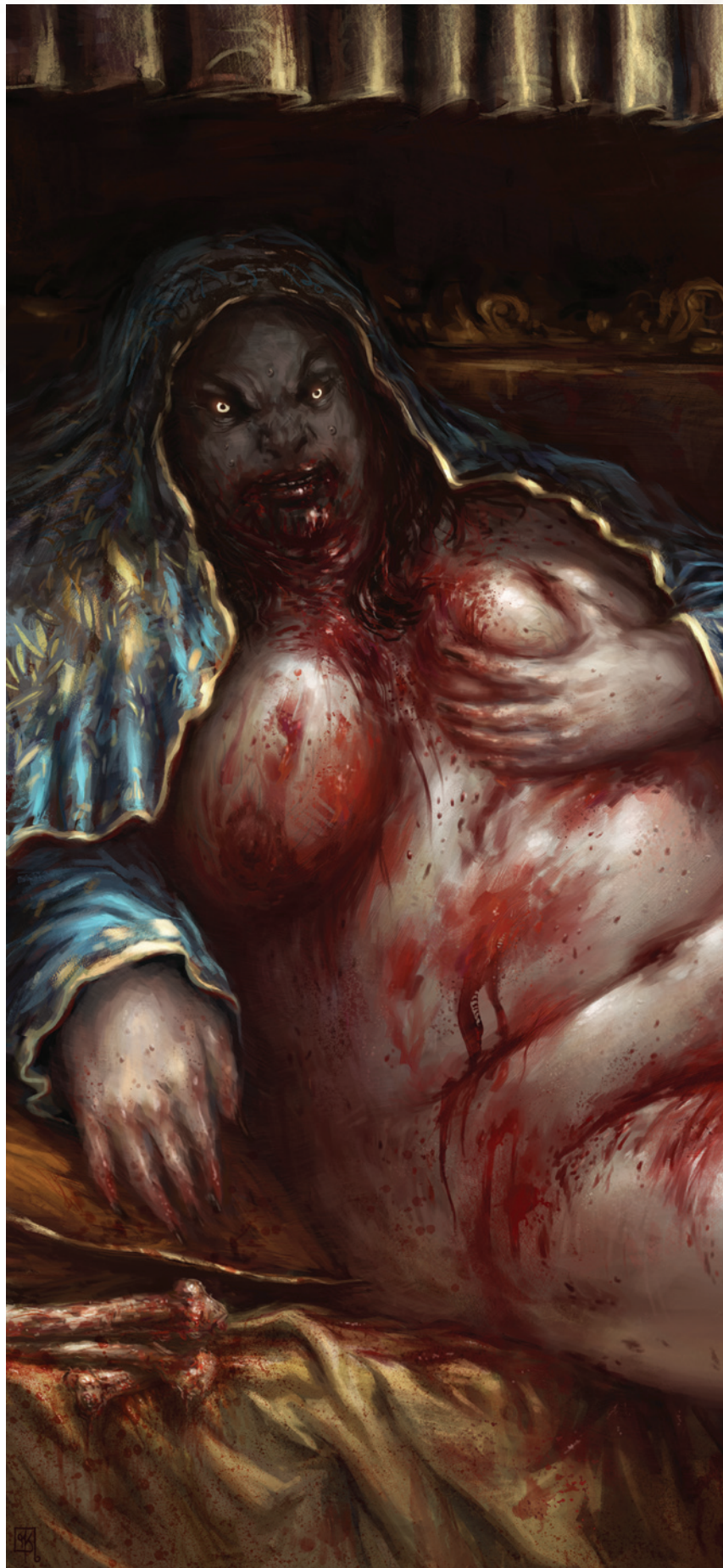
Speaking of unpleasant, I will note that my... *swelling* upon joining the estimable ranks of the family Macellarius was not the most pleasurable experience. Bones broke to accommodate new weight, healing poorly for a time before straightening out with agonizing slowness. The skin roiled with fatty deposits – tumors called *lipomas*, Jubal tells me – that shifted like shapes beneath a tarp. It was my power emerging, of course. But it was painful. Never let anyone tell you that personal power is gained without a measure of misery.

Never let anyone tell you that watching Crescentia Macellarius eat is not a grisly, hypnotizing affair. She rubs sweetbreads between her fingers, feeling their texture; then she does similarly between her tongue and the roof of her mouth, once more testing and *feeling*. Her palms are broad and fat but her fingers long and thin, like the legs of a cellar spider. With them she peels skin, pries meat from bone, separates fat from muscle. All of it goes in her mouth. After the meal I was both famished and disgusted. Even after consuming the many draughts of blood. Speaking of which...

ON TASTE

It's important to have taste. You know who doesn't have taste? *Dogs*. They'll eat whatever's put in front of them. So too with the homeless. Or drug addicts. Anything to get a fill. Just because we *gorge* doesn't make us *gluttons*. Is there something wrong with a refined palate? Should I be condemned because I don't stumble into just any prole nightclub and drain dry some dancing queen in the shadows? Why is it odd that I like my draughts with some taste? Consider: kings are as much the men they present outward as they are the men who live inward. Taste is a combination of both: a demonstration of sophistication and a refinement of the very soul. Did you know I knew a Primogen once – I shan't name who, so don't think you'll convince me, at least not until we've had a little more to drink – who was in almost all ways the pinnacle of elegance. Except in his choice of meal. His lips were *diseased* with the foulness sucked from the necks of... all sorts. Vagrants, transsexuals, *common beasts*. You could practically see the plague fleas leaping from his jowls. And it was his downfall. Oh, his detractors and destroyers didn't say such a thing. But I know it to be true.

I've heard rumors that Escoffier was an agent of ours. You know Escoffier? French chef, writer, *gourmand*? Popularized true gourmet cooking, *nouvelle*



cuisine. Eating became a measured thing under him, *service à la russe*, or one meal at a time, in the order of the menu. Well. It's said that he served a number of our European household, if not as one bound to the Blood then as one paid well with chests of gold. I don't know if one of us got to him during his time as a soldier during the war – Franco-Prussian, not the Great War – or if we simply dangled before him the opportunity to have his own restaurant. The Golden Pheasant, if you've not heard of it. I know we helped him take control of the kitchen at the Grand Hotel in Monte Carlo. The chatterbirds in the family say that he made the most delicious *Coq au vin*, thickened with great gouts of blood at the end. Softened the taste of the old rooster in the pot, and fed our needs, too. (Further rumor suggests that we had him cook the blood of his rivals, but perhaps that's just a silly tale.)

Did you know the palate can sense the appellation of blood? Familiar with appellations? It started with wine. The geographical region in which a grape grows gives that wine a particular twist to its taste – even if a grape in this valley is of the same type as one growing in a valley a hundred miles away, the wine made from them will taste different. (I hear they're doing it with cheeses and chicken now, is that true? You don't know, do you? Never mind, then, never mind.) The blood in the veins – and the meat on the bones, really – vary in the same way. And it makes sense if you put your mind to it. Cows fed with grass instead of grain have meat that taste different. Animal's milk picks up the flavors of its environment. So does blood. A region has its own fruits,

vegetables, meats, and so the people have a diet based on their location and station in life. Lamb and figs and couscous here, pig and purslane and potatoes there. Those flavors, they're in the blood. If only you stop long enough to taste it. You must command the palate. Our kind is all too fond of having the palate command us, but that is not the way of Lords.

Maybe it's psychosomatic. But have you ever listened so intently for something that you think you hear it, even though it's just the wind or the rustle of grass? Ever looked at a painting seeking hidden meaning, and soon the meaning emerges more out of your own mind than out of the brush strokes on the canvas?

It was like that with the blood that the Lady Macellarius offered. Vintage after vintage. The staff would pour the glasses. She'd make us admire the color of the blood, the clarity, we'd have to swirl it in the glass, let a bit of it drip off a finger to see its thickness. Tasting would come later, and in the tasting she'd exhort me to find the flavors hidden within. A child's blood tasting of chicory, a maid's draught sweet with all-spice, gooseberry, bitter apple. I couldn't taste any of it, not until the stockbroker's blood. Then, there it was: a bit of cherry, a mouth-feel of chestnut and pipe smoke.

That's just what Crescentia said *she* tasted, too. Was she just messing with me? Did I taste it because she told me to taste it? Around Kindred such as this, it's hard to find your footing. I felt like I was her plaything, even though I did nothing but sit and listen. And as we sat there, tasting blood, it seemed like somehow she was tasting *me*.

ON CLAN VENTRUE

These last bits... they're just fragments, really, things she said throughout the evening. I've compiled them here in no particular order. Again, if you want the entire transcription, I'll ensure that my people get it done.

The rivalries we have within the Blood are always friendly. Yes, sometimes, it ends up with someone taking the head of a fellow Lord and boiling it down so all that's left is the skull and the fattened broth, but even that is always done out of respect. We'd never do such a thing to any of our kind within the First Estate, of course. Our covenant and clan come together in a perfect marriage (or some would say a perfect storm!) and we could never betray such matrimony. Both are regal. Both are natural leaders. Both represent the pinnacle of what was once human about us all. Why not continue to be a part of such a holy union?

A bit about the "up and comers" in our clan. Sadly, it's hard not to feel like she was talking about me. She said she wasn't: pinching my cheek like an assuring mother. Or testing my face to see how much meat could be boiled off the bone.

Youth. Idiots, mostly. Oh, weren't we all idiots? No. No, we weren't. This latest crop seems to be all about entitlement, unwilling to clamber up the muddy, blood-soaked hill to get to the top. They think they should be carried up on the shoulders

of their superiors, the dirt and muck wiped from their tender cheeks by a silken kerchief. They rely overmuch on their little toys, too – special tiny phones and keypads and wristwatches. They think themselves connected, but it only serves to distance them from themselves. And then there is the question: who might be watching? Spying on them (and us) through those wretched devices? Bah!

This next bit offers a glimpse into the household's history – or at least, her take on it. Was she lying? I've heard rumors. Or has she herself been lied to? Has the lie taken on so much life that it has become truth?

Rome. Yes, of course, Rome! We were not a jewel in its crown so early on, but later, perhaps, we were. As fat and white as one of its seven hills. The Ventrue held the strings of the Camarilla, and the loss of such a noble group was similarly our doing. It had simply become too unwieldy, too wide, and so we cut the strings. Let the doll flop forward, its head cracking on the marble floor. Shame. But all good things come to an end. From time to time I hear a Lord whisper about how we should stir the Camarilla to rise again, to find a kind of unity among the thirsting dead. I'd agree to that. As long as everyone understood that the Ventrue belonged once more at its head.

That about covers it. She's given me a standing invite to come back and hear her talk some more. Said she has a bottle of something "special" in the cellar. And a reserve of incense, something she calls "black

smoke." I want to go. God help me, I don't know why, but I *want* to go. I'm not given into much superstition, but I feel like I need Communion. I think I'll go see Father Ementhaler. Just to get clean.

NOTES FROM THE DEAD GIRL, II

This is starting to be a problem. You can tell when it's a problem, because Hardaiken looks nervous. It's the tiniest detail, but his anxiety always shows itself one way: the ring finger on his left hand, it curls inward. Like a talon. And his long nail scratches at his palm again and again until it wears a furrow in the skin, opening it up. He doesn't bleed, of course, though you can see and smell it in there. Everything else about him is rock solid, like a face carved in stone. But that finger? Scritch, scritch.

So, he's nervous. Which makes me nervous. And our kind doesn't like to be nervous, does it?

Sorry, I know, cutting to the chase: another murder, another note. This time in the park, which makes it more public, which makes it more nerve-wracking. We got there before the cops, because Hardaiken knows a guy (who am I kidding, he knows **all** the guys). But we still had to work fast.

This time, the bodies were still intact. Intact **enough**, anyway. A young couple out walking a dog and a baby girl in a carriage. All dead. Dog strung up by his own guts. The couple, torn to... well, torn to practically nothing recognizable. The baby girl, though? Seems to have been killed delicately, a tiny prick in the back of her skull. Then she was opened up, filled with onions and rose-petals.

Thing is, the last killing? The one in the apartment? Hardaiken says it was similar. Couldn't tell at the time, because the victims were rendered down to their base components: skin, blood, bone, everywhere. But it was a young couple and a little girl. No dog, and the girl wasn't a baby but... I don't know how old, 10 or 12 or something.

Frankly, I still don't know how it's all connected. I don't even know how it's fucking relevant, but hey, Hardaiken says to come on by, so I come on by. He says to send this stuff off to you, so I send this stuff off to you. I asked him why doesn't he send it, and he says it's just not his place. And we all have our place in the great chain.

Whatever. Fuck him. Cocky nervous prick.

Here's the note. Pinned to a tree with a splinter of bone, positioned above the infant girl and the overturned carriage.

I asked Hardaiken, do I need to research this? Does he think I should find out what all this lunacy means? But the bastard dismissed me. Told me I wasn't to examine it, wasn't supposed to look into it. That I was just to put the notes in little baggies and send them along to you.

But I'm not playing heir, here. I'm no common helot.

I guess it's time to do some research.

Massacre! The time of massacre comes again. Emilianus predicted it once. But now I am the Saint, I am the foreseer. We are the stolen dynasty, the family that was not to live! We, the sixth who was meant to die, to fall at the hands of the seventh. The seventh comes again! The father begets the son who keeps the power, from son to father to son to father. But I am daughter! And I will escape this slaughter.

THE NOBLE CRIME OF TYRANNY: CUSTOM AND FAMILY AMONG THE LORDS

My "brother,"
a whip and
tutor to Lords,
wrote this at my
urging, against
the advice of an
Ephor. Though
we have seldom
met in the flesh,
we've found
it easy to fall
into a rapport;
something similar
in us must've
drawn our sire's
attention, even
decades apart.
Though, of
course, you know
the customs of
the clan as well as
any, I've included
this because I
think his insight
is valuable, if
pedestrian. I
apologize if this
all seems obvious
to you.

Cicero tells us that Julius Caesar often quoted these lines from Euripedes' *Phoenician Women*:

*Is crime consonant with nobility?
Then noblest is the crime of tyranny –
In all things else obey the laws of Heaven.*

The Ventrue Prince who ruled over the American city where I was Embraced had those last two lines etched into the walls of the old theater where he held court. I knew a Lord in my second city, forty years ago now, who tattooed the passage on three of his ghouls, one line each. The younger child of my sire, whom I had never before seen in the flesh or communicated with in any way prior to the turn of this last century, recited those lines to me, with no prompting, the first night we met.

Despite the vast, dark distances in miles and years, in defiance of the long and perilous spaces unexplored between us, and the endless and heartbreaking years of ignorance we share, word gets around.

I don't know how we could trace the actual path that Caesar's words have taken from his mouth to the walls of my old court and the backs of those sorry ghouls, but it is proof that our *culture* connects us even when our allies and family and history fail to do so. Our customs get carried with us across the rare miles and through the inevitable years, even when we wish we could escape them. After more than a century, I no longer believe in the figurative expression that it's "in our blood". I believe in the blood.

When I was still a new colonial in this city, my whelp of a protégé gave me static about all the pomp and ceremony that came with being a Lord. I thought I knew where he was coming from – I thought I remembered the nights when all the manners and conduct seemed like cobwebs – but the customs turned out to be stronger than my need for independence. The need for me to protect my eternity and quiet my serf long enough to just *get things done* came into focus. These things were

urgent. Protecting my identity as a free-thinking modern asshole was not.

So when my protégé gave me static, I told him, "That's not how you speak to your betters, whelp!" and I felt like a rich, privileged aristocrat doing it. And I understood why rich, privileged aristocrats go on acting that way. It feels good. It makes things simple. It's what I was taught.

You know the formal customs – recitation and hospitality, my sire called them – and you've practiced them. My experience these past decades has been that the old customs can seem perfunctory, like nothing better than formalized habit, if all you've seen is one domain over a short span of years. Get around, though, and they look different.

Given enough time, experience within a single domain (whether it's a city, or a neighborhood, or your old block) is functionally the same as experience in several domains. As the kine come and go, the same space becomes a different place. But, if you're one of the rare bastards who gets out into another city and sees how other Lords handle themselves, you'll see the same thing in less time.

What you'll experience is a rehearsed performance of manners and social graces, designed and refined for the purpose of protecting our Requiems and our investments in time, blood and dollars. It keeps the monsters in line while they're learning the ropes. It establishes a bit, a little bit, of common ground for those ugly hours when we're facing alien Kindred and trying to soothe the Beast while we discern if they're dignitaries or trespassers. The customs give us an edge over every bloodsucker who's in the same position as one of us, but *isn't* one of us.

Here, then, with a minimum of bullshit, is the barest-boned primer I know about the thinking behind those old customs. This is not what I teach my students. This is what I hope they figure out for themselves while I'm treating them like helots.

LINEAGE AND PRESTIGE

Aeneas is no great symbol of the Ventrue blood. He's a cautionary figure – and a king, not a ruler, besides. Brutus and Iulus are icons, but they are no *paters*. Even Troius, the one great *lare* to bear a name, passes largely out of the historical record and into legend after the founding of Alba Longa.

Ventrue ancestry doesn't revere a single grand father, but great lines of lords. One illustrious Ventrue is nothing – a fleeting success. But a familial line – that is something grand.

Tonight, we show familial pride (and promote ourselves personally) through a formal recitation

of lineage and prestige. This is nothing new. Seek and you will find it in the *Iliad*, where everyone is constantly being called "son of" their father. You see it in hereditary titles and letters of nobility. You see it in a person's resumé.

In casual meetings, begin with your name and the domain you're from, then name your sire, and then name whatever Kindred ancestors you have that your audience might be likely to have heard of (with the understanding that this will be a very short list). Name places and dates, to help your audience put you into *context*, which

is why you're going through the trouble to share this information. Avoid announcing your own triumphs to a casual listener – it's not much better than bragging.

An example:

"I'M RICHARD, IN FROM NEWCASTLE, AND CHILDE TO BONAVENTURE, THE DUKE OF EDGEVILLE AND ALL THE NORTHSIDE HOSPITALS. ONE OF MY GRANDSIRE WAS PHILIP, PRINCE OF PHILADELPHIA, BEFORE WORLD WAR I."

In formal meetings, you must observe the customs of whatever court you're attending. Certain clan standards give us a skeleton to build from, but different cities have distinctive traditions for formal recitation. (The local Whip or Herald should know what's proper and, if any good at the job, find you before you cause trouble.)

This all gets a little more problematic, if the amount of information you're expected to give in the name of courtesy is more than your sire and grandsire are likely to want you to share. Finding the polite balance between form and function is what makes recitation an appreciable art. It isn't just about memorization, but about walking that fine line. It's the discretion involved in your recitation – the judgment call regarding how to portray yourself – that makes it possible for other Lords to appreciate whether your presentation was artful or pedestrian.

What's the needle you're trying to thread here? The specific criteria, again, vary depending on the particular Lord you're trying to impress. I've known Lords who only really care about what you, the speaker, have accomplished, and I've known Lords who only care about the oldest Kindred to whom you can claim a blood connection. Know your audience. A good general goal, though, is this: You want to appear to present more information than you actually give. That is, you want to convey a sense of who you are and why we should give a damn what you have to say, but without surrendering so many details about yourself and your lineage that you come across as bragging, needy, or indiscreet.

This is all complicated by the fact that you and your audience may know the same Kindred, but by two different names. Focus on places, years, and duties. Recitation is about accomplishments, yours and your precursors, despite all the talk of lineage. Remember: Simply being here is prestigious. It isn't like being born. Being chosen for the clan by a noteworthy Lord is an accomplishment.

Don't assume any Ventrue wants any other Kindred to know her by her new name. Reveal the connections that your sire proudly has in common with your audience, and you're making "a good show of it." Reveal the associations your sire wants to keep discreet for now, and you're a rat.

This is the core form of recitation I teach my students, which is a good mix of the self-promoting and the informative:

- Give your current name, your sire's current name, plus your familial moniker (if it's something your sire would be proud of), and the domain where you were Embraced. The proper phrasing is: *[Name], childe of [Sire's Name], of the [Familial Name, maybe], raised in [domain of your Embrace].*

- Name the domain you're traveling from (or that which you are representing yourself to be from). Say, *I am in from [domain]* or *...by way of [domain].*

- Cite some triumph or victory from your past, or name-drop a king of yours. E.g., *I am landlord of the Diplomat Hotel* or *Police Captain John Cushing is my king.*

- Name your grandsire, if you're able. Otherwise, name the closest grandsire, and from where and when your audience might know her. It's more important, to many Ventrue, to get a sense of your colonial history. E.g., *My sire's grandsire was Memnon, Lord of Newcastle University until 1990, who was a colonial from New York in 1910.*

- Alternate additional personal accomplishments and forebears, if you have them. Three of each is probably pushing it for any modern Ventrue (though elders may be more patient). Consider the order in which you reveal your accomplishments, though...

- Save the best for last. Your most profound triumph, even if it's old, is the last thing you want the listener to hear during your recitation. The oldest Lords I know cite victories from the 1600s. Just make it a good one.

For example:

"I AM LUCIUS, CHILDE OF SIMEON, OF THE CARMICHAELS, RAISED ON THE SOUTH SIDE, AND HERE VIA EDGEVILLE, WITH PERMISSION OF REGENT HESS. I SERVE THE PRINCE AS A VASSAL TO LORD SIMEON, WHOSE SIRE WAS SISTER ALEXA, THE SANGUINE VOICE OF OUR SANCTIFIED PARISH. I AM A HOUND IN OUR DOMAIN, AND ALDERMAN CRYZSISKY IS MY KING."

Why bother with all this? The awkwardness that otherwise hangs over the initial meetings of we ferocious bloodsuckers can be impenetrable without structured niceties to fall back on. All of this breaks the ice (or, rather, bores the Beast) and establishes the formal power dynamic for the meeting. Everything recited might be a lie, but the structure and verifiable (even if so often unverified) details give savvy Lords a chance to smell out deception. To state it for the plebs, this is a form you fill out and submit to the courtly bullshit detector.

This works in the favor of the little neonate Lord, too, though. If you're too obscure in the city, your audience might not know what you've accomplished to date, and this stuffy routine gives you a chance to boast without coming across as pompous or desperate. You can name-

drop without being gauche. Take advantage of the opportunity.

For the clan, this custom has helped us maintain a sense of continuity from sire to childe, from city to city, from century to century, since the nights of the Holy Roman Empire. Think about that – it's phenomenal. Simply by structuring and ritualizing what could otherwise be petty behaviors – bragging and rumor-mongering – our forebears have made it possible for us to find delicate handholds across countries and centuries. We grope out into the darkness and can just make contact with another Lord's outstretched fingers because we have that common point of reference, however slight, that tells us where to reach.

I've known bold Lords who have used the custom of recitation to intimidate their hosts. I've known insidious Lords who have used the custom to *blackmail* their hosts. The rhetoricians who can pull that off are rare, however. Their knowledge

of connections across the Danse Macabre is so thorough, so meticulously detailed, that they can get those kind of hostile messages through the formality without being impolite. They reveal their allegiance with Kindred the listener should fear; they mention contacts or crimes which the listener would like to keep quiet about; they declare triumphs that have stung the listener in nights past. Taking these kinds of shots at the wrong sort of host, or doing it with the wrong ammunition, can put a Kindred into the dirt for a hundred years. It can end a Requiem.

Now take that idea back to what you read before. No one Ventrue is as great as the line. Recitation is meant to make you think of all those who have come before, and to remind each of us that no matter what happens tonight, the legacy of the Lords is bigger than any *one* of us. The victories of *the* Ventrue matter more than the victories of *a* Ventrue, whether you're an ancient or a fledgling.

THE LAW OF HOSPITALITY

Simple, useful, and obviously flawed. The so-called law of hospitality is so plainly defective that I can only conclude it is by design.

The only alternative is to reach the sad conclusion that we have become so paranoid, untrusting, and untrustworthy that we can no longer fulfill our own customs. That we are failing ourselves.

On its face, the law of hospitality is simple: No Ventrue may refuse another Lord who requests sanctuary from the daylight. In exchange, the host Lord collects a favor owed from his suppliant kin. Clearly the custom is intended to maintain the security and longevity of the clan by mandating a degree of obligatory solidarity. The protection of the individual Lord is framed as the responsibility of his neighbors, in hopes of countering the divisiveness and backstabbing that plagues all Kindred.

If that's the true purpose of the custom, it's a failure. I know of very few (I think the number is two) Kindred who have called on the law of hospitality. I know none who have not regretted it.

The trouble is that, in practice, the custom imposes shame on one or both participants. Even in a dreamland where host Lords trust each other enough to reveal their havens to all their kin, and the supplicants trust their hosts enough to risk excessive debts, one party or the other will lose face in the deal. If a host refuses a refugee, he has reneged on a millennia-old custom that honors and protects our very blood. If the host imposes too steep a price on his guest, he is not much better.

The supplicant, meanwhile, must admit defeat to even request sanctuary. How far from one's plans

and capabilities must one fall to not even be able to manage the basic necessity of shelter from the sun? It's not embarrassing, it's shameful. The Beast, in its most savage, animal brain, understands that it must reach shelter before the sun hits the sky. Are you less than an animal? Then why are you knocking on my door?

Think, though, about how many Ventrue there are, versus how many seats at the table? How many of the neonates who are Embraced are actually bred to be lieutenants? How many are meant to die in battle? How valuable, really, is that panicked, blood-soaked whelp who's just brought his troubles to your doorstep?

The fact is that while *some* Ventrue will honor and respect the successes of a lesser cousin, the custom doesn't trump ambition. Up-and-coming Ventrue can be an asset or a threat, and the local membership of the clan may not agree on an assessment. The Lord whose haven you visit for hospitality, when you're cut up and the sunrise is coming, might report to the Priscus that he never saw you. That night, you just disappear.

The point is: Know your enemies.

Ultimately, our failure to trust one another despite our noble blood renders even the optimistically flawed language of the law rather moot. I know what my fellow Lords are capable of doing to get information out of Kindred, kine, and ghoul. I know that a Haunt with no soul can spare many nights to cut information from a loyal ghoul. I do not share the locations of my havens.

I hope that, one night, I will know a Lord I trust enough that I dare to invoke the law of hospitality. I hope, but I do not expect.

THE NOBLE CRIME

This isn't a ritualized tradition of the clan, *per se*, but it's a precious bit of Lordly reasoning that I think is essential to understanding the mindset of

the most successful among us. I mention this here because I think it is an integral component in the philosophical architecture of our clan, right down

to the ways we traditionally draw attention to this concept, but cleverly do not give it a name. But I am gauche. My allusion is so crass that you can give the idea the same name Caesar did.

No Lord I've known describes this core Ventrue value more ably than my city's Ephor to the Savages, Antigone.

"The Ventrue *always* win, because we acknowledge no true endings," she explains. "We accept no finality. We continue ahead. And we are as good at spotting and attending to imminent victories as we are at crafting them from scratch. It's not simply that we win, but that we attach ourselves to winnable prospects, and protect them on their way to the finish line."

She once told me a story about a thieving ghoulish on the run from his Savage masters. Two Gangrel-blooded Kindred pursued him for four or five hours, hoping to find him before the sun came up. Antigone heard what was happening and mentioned it to our neonate Whip, who immediately gathered up a makeshift crypteia out of his coterie and some ghouls and set out to find this renegade first. They had greater numbers and better connections on the street. The ghoulish, thinking the Lords and the Savages wouldn't be coordinating to find him, didn't even bother to run when the crypteia found him. The Lords caught him – I think they killed him – and took possession of whatever this thing was that he'd stolen. They talked about selling the item back to the Savages. Who knows if they did.

But why did they go after the ghoulish at all? The Whip saw an opportunity for a win. He identified a winnable prospect, with basically zero repercussions for failure beyond wasted time, and chased the free victory. Because what you win sometimes matters less than winning.

Consider, also, the counter-situation. I teach my students this phrase, which I learned from Antigone: *Qui tam pro domino quam pro seipso* – "He who is as much for the King as for himself."

That is, you must protect the irreplaceable assets. They are: you and the clan. You cannot protect the clan if you are ashes. You can recover control, kings, and money if you and the clan survive. You can rebuild.

The lesson, then, is to abandon failing prospects. Failures are inevitable over the course of the Requiem, but many failures that we label inevitable are not. Regardless, minimize the damage. Protect yourself in the presence of defeat. Retreat and try again.

"I've heard it called cowardice, sure," Antigone says, "but let's be clear about something: We can't be martyrs. We're already damned. And beyond that, we're hidden behind the Masquerade, so who would really know about our sacrifice? What good is an invisible martyr?"

My personal feeling is that noble demises are valid ends to a Requiem. It is honorable to go out in service or defense of something larger than yourself. Yet, in more than a century on this earth, I've never once been tempted to do it. I've not yet found a cause that wouldn't be better served by pulling back, regrouping, and reeducating myself in preparation for another shot. I've yet to find a problem that's convinced me it can't be solved by whittling away at it year after year.

"What a waste," Antigone says. "We can't die for an idea. We can only throw away our Requiems for it, and that's a waste. Ideas aren't bigger than us. We can outlast them. We *have* outlasted ideas. Why surrender *that* victory by going down with the ship? As the yaht-racers, say, 'you can always build another boat.'"

How do we reconcile this attitude with the notion that the Ventrue always win? Big picture. Any one night's setback is not truly a defeat if you can return to conquer. Other people lose when they're forced to retreat in any one night. We count our victories and defeats by the decades and centuries, cities and countries.

It's hypocrisy, but the winning kind.



NOTES FROM THE DEAD GIRL: THINGS I'VE LEARNED

Not making much sense, yet. But this is what I've found:


- **Banu Qasi**, actually **Banú Qasí**. Sons, heirs, or childer of Cassius. (Heirs, there's that word again.) Patrilineal. Islamic Basque dynasty, 9th century or so.
- **Cassius, or Count Cassius**: founder of that dynasty. Was he one of us? Clan records are not stingy with mentions of various Cassius figures throughout our time. As it is with us, some are probably different, some are probably the same even when appearing different, some probably call themselves that to appear the same as or similar to another Cassius who has come before. The name, of course, means "vanity." Bloody appropriate. What's maybe interesting about the Basque Cassius is that he converted to Islam not out of faith but so he wouldn't be slaughtered, so his lands and power wasn't stolen out from under him. The story goes that he went to the Caliph by himself and personally knelt to kiss the hand of the ruling Muslim. That's a kiss-ass move if ever there was one.

- **Emilianus, or Saint Emilianus**. Eremite monk. One of the patron saints of Spain. Sometimes portrayed as a black-cowled monk on a black horse. Charitable, excessively so (which means he definitely wasn't one of us). Foretold the destruction of a Basque duchy, claimed that a massacre was coming because of that duchy's egregious sins. The sin, perhaps, of kneeling to another faith? The treachery against one god whose balls are bigger than another?

No idea what any of this means. Just the ranting of the mad, way I see it. Maybe you'll think differently. I'm not going to mention any of this to Hardaiken. Let him do his own legwork.

This was intercepted by my man in Amsterdam, who wrote the note in the margin. These were distributed at some fringe Acolyte/Carthian/? meeting in 2001. The session was broken up by Society K. who declared this a threat to the Masq. Only a few of these print-outs survived.

Not all these groups are so radical and nonsensical. (The Kindred quoted in here is a respected Lord in his city.) This is just one of those ideas that's been tainted by its association with ignorant fanatics and Malkavians.



The Gods Were Vampires

There is no God, but there are such things as vampires.

- The "IMMORTALS" that Homer wrote about were not gods! They are our blood ancestors! They're Kindred!
- If the LARES were real, where are they now?! Were all Lares, everywhere, cursed by Hera (Juno) like the Lords say? No! There are no such things as Lares!!!
- Lords are a Bronze-Age people embraced by the VAMPIRE Hera/Juno! We are her childer, and she is just like us!
- VENUS was a Lord. She made the Early Romans into Kindred and made Aeneas a ghoul!
- Ventrue is the Clan Of The Gods!
- These Kindred-Gods are still out there! They are sleeping and will wake when call to them!
- Lord Scholar Lycurgus of the Hilmarssons found truth of this! Is Venus buried in Greece?! DO NOT LET LYCURGUS BE SILENCED!

"Once our existence is revealed as truth, as well as the presence of Lupines and stranger things, still, how should we regard the reality of Homer's immortals and the gods of old? Imagine the possibilities if every legend were true. We could find the remains of Pegasus and hunt dragons in the distant north. But instead, we must rationally accept that the spirit of the ancient storyteller, and the mind of mortals-cum-Kindred, is still what we have long known it to be. Some legends are still legends. We would do better to investigate our history with one hand on the tangible, reliable, and reassuring truths that we know to be real, even if they are supernatural.

What other evidence do we have of the ancient gods beyond the legendry? By modern reckoning, if we accept some truth in the Aenead tales, we have but one piece of evidence: our clan. Isn't it more likely, then, that the gods and heroes we celebrate were as material as we? That they were flesh and blood? That Venus was a vampire, and may yet be buried 'neath some Grecian ruin, waiting to awaken? How thrilling is the idea that we may yet, if we endure, meet the gods?

— Lycurgus of the Hilmarssons' letter to his Prince

The Kindred of VENUS GENETRIX (Venus the Mother) is searching for the truth! The "I" don't want you to question what They say is The Truth. Look deeper! No evidence of The Gods at Troy! No evidence of The Gods at OLYMPUS! But we know Vampires are Real!

We are pursueing Faith and Truth by calling on Venus and Hera/Juno! Worship with us! One night they will come to us, and their loyal childer and followers will be rewarded. Join Us! Our Mother Venus will hear us! Hera/Juno will hear us! They'll Wake and find us and Hera (Juno) will see that we know the truth and forgive us our sins. Be on the side of Hera/Juno and Venus!

VENUS GENETRIX!

V- HAD THIS A FEW YEARS, SINCE THE VEN-GEN GOT BROKEN UP. I'D HEARD OF GROUPS LIKE THIS IN CZECH. AND GREECE, TOO, BUT MORE ACADEMIC/SCHOLARLY, LIKE OLD-TIME CULTS, NOT THIS NEW-AGE STUFF. SIRE USED TO MENTION THE GODS AS K. & I THINK HE BELIEVED IT. NOT A NEW IDEA. GOOD FOR ATHEISTS WHO CAN'T SHOOT DOWN THE MEMORIES OF 1,000-YEAR K. RIGHT? SINCE THIS, COLNL. SAYS DRAGONS IN PA AND DC HAVE SOME BOOK MAKING SAME CLAIMS. HAVEN'T SEEN IT, COULDN'T GET A COPY. I'LL KEEP TRYING. — E.B.



THE MOGUL

This is the boardroom where the Ephors meet. This is where the Whip gathers up all us Lords when it's time for an audience with the Priscus. I've never been in here alone before.

It's the second floor from the top of a huge building. From the outside, it looks like it was sculpted from a big block of glass, lit up from the inside. The room in here, though, is dark. Black like shoe polish. Shiny like a sports car. It smells like nothing. All over the building is this repeating motif of severe corporate art, cut from stone. One of these "sculptures" is in here. It's a huge slab of gray granite, rough and smooth in parts, like the Monolith from 2001 got dragged through a quarry.

Outside the windows, the city lights fan out like an electric net. Between me and the lights, a helicopter floats by. From in here, it's noiseless.

We use this building because it's secure, because it's imposing, because it's beautiful... and because it's ours. Somewhere in the building is the haven of the Ephor to our own clan. All of this, it's his.

We call him the Mogul. Every other name I have for him is fake – they're the names he uses with mortals. I've known him only as the Mogul.

And now he's got me sitting here, in one of these swooping metal chairs around the angular boardroom table (it looks like I could cut myself on it), waiting for him. His man, Pallas, a frighteningly white guy with dyed black hair and tiny black eyes, told me, "The Sir will be with you soon." Pallas has one arm. His left sleeve is folded up and pinned to the shoulder of his black coat.

Bored, I look around.

A hand is sticking out of the big granite slab. Another set of fingers is poking through now. A bare, black man's foot slips out of the stone near the bottom, like someone getting out of the shower with water in their eyes. First his chin appears, then the rest of his face, like he's got his head turned up to the water coming out of the showerhead. It's the Mogul, emerging from the scraped surface of the corporate art with an open mouth and a look like a man happily sighing. No breath comes out, of course.

He's nude, fit, tall. His close-cropped hair is just as it always is. Something in my head says he should be dusty from coming out of the rock like a Savage, but he's not.

"Good evening," he says, walking casually past me to the credenza at the end of the room. He opens a drawer, pulls out a stack of clothes – slacks, a textured white shirt – and puts them on. "Sorry you had to wait."

"No problem at all, sir," I say.

He strolls back and sits down in the seat at the closest head of the table to me. He's wearing just those slacks and that shirt. Cuffs and collar are open. He looks at me like a principal. "So, what's this?"

"Sir, I'm collecting the insight of my betters for the sake of my peers."

"I'm a neonate, son. You don't have to talk like that."

"Thank you, sir."

"Pallas said I'm supposed to tell you a bit about what I was taught when I was brought in." He means Embraced.

"If you would, sir."

"I'm not going to give away my secrets," he says with a big, fanged smile, "but I'll tell you some things I think young Lords need to know."

I pull out my pad and pen. "You're young for such success aren't you?"

"Only by our standards. When I was alive, I was successful for a 36-year-old. Now I'm about right for a 60-year-old, by living standards." He doesn't sound like the kind of stiff, corporate Lord I was expecting. At clan meetings he's much more formal.

"You inherited?"

He nods. "Titles and wealth. My sire, who we're still calling the Magnate, naturally, brought me in for the unique purpose of taking control of his holdings. He thought I had what it would take. I think he was right."

"The Magnate? Is that where–"

"He's the Magnate and, so, I'm the Mogul, I hear. These names are the work of the Priscus, who doesn't want to have to keep our business names straight. You can call me Cyrus, though."

I write it down.

"There's a good lesson for you: Fame and power can be a means of cover as much as anonymity is. Lots of people know a few of my names, but they don't really know *me*, and the preconceptions they bring to the table help shield me. I can walk around even this building and, if I wear a bad enough jacket, no one even knows who I am."

"The executives are your kings?"

"The important ones."

"So you have a lot of power," I say.

He waits a moment, then says it back to me. "Power." It's as if he's setting the word on the table between us, so I can see what I just said. As if he were playing the tape back for me. As if just hearing it again will make me realize how stupid I must sound. He leans back in his chair and makes a pyramid out of his hands.

I feel stupid, but I wait.

"Power is a weight around your neck. Power burns through anonymity. What you want is control," he says. "When you control, you can manipulate power, but you don't run the same risk of falling off the pedestal when it's lost. The executives have power. I have control over them."

I write it down.

"What else?" he asks. He looks away, like he's consulting a page

We were able to salvage this from an email sent to us by the author. Someone in his domain didn't want everything he recorded sent out, so this message was chopped off by his betters. We haven't heard from the writer since.

I hear the Magnate woke about a month after this interview.

filed in his memory. "Make sure that all is well. But, of course, you are the judge of what is well and what is not." He looks back at me. "The Magnate said that to me the night we said goodbye. That's a good lesson. And think about the difference between power and control, here. When he comes back, *he'll* be the judge of what's good, again. Control will shift, but no power is lost."

"When he comes back, do you have to give all this up?"

"It's not all mine. I'll keep some of it, though. I've grown the company quite a bit in the last few years."

"Isn't that frustrating?"

"It's a terrific arrangement. In a world of the living, where your fathers and leaders die, inheritance is a necessity that we've taken to thinking of as a windfall. But that power has to go somewhere, doesn't it? Being able to keep power indefinitely, and redistribute it based on ability and opportunity – strategically, rather than by necessity – that's a great advantage.

"Remember, no one is born a Lord. Some Kindred claim otherwise, but that's rhetoric. That's flattery. All Lords are chosen by other Lords, so all it takes for the *nouveau politique* to get representatives among the Ventrue is for one of them to catch the eye of a Lord who wants her ideas or her skills to be working on this side of the Masquerade, for that little edge in the Danse Macabre.

"The rulers of the world will always be an aristocracy – young or old, liberal or conservative, Right or Left.

Always be asking yourself: Are those two aristocrats debating for their ideas or are they battling for the power and position of their families? Does the fact that they're the same clan mean that blood can be reduced out of the equation, so it must all actually be about the issue? Or does it mean that, really, the issue is just pretext for a family squabble, a civil war of words? In some battles, the truth is one thing, and in some battles, it's the other. You have to learn to tell the two apart, and separate what the fight *looks like* from what the contest *really is*."



Notes From The Dead Girl, III

This is becoming a problem, these murders. It's in the news, now. Nobody likes it when our business makes the news. Hardaiken is out there, right now, looking for... I don't know what. An answer to the mystery? The killer? Some patsy to take the fall for it, at least until the idiot carves her next bloody swath?

Once more, a couple and their daughter - well, this time two daughters - slaughtered. Outside the city in a beautiful estate. Killed in the hedge garden, blood and bits gathered in the manicured shrubs: boxwood made to look like animals, barberry ringing the scene with rose leaves and dry thorns.

And, of course, a note. Longer than the others. Perhaps our killer, this "daughter" felt she had more time, this time. Out in the country, so to speak. Beneath the span of stars. I can almost feel her sitting here, composing this note with... a quill, maybe? Dipped in the guts of her victims? Yeah, I know, I'm waxing poetic. Sue me.

The note, your honor:

The ghosts of seven, the seven ghosts. We thought them dead and they are dead, deader than dead, so far past the mortal coil that they have come back on the other side! We Three Kings supplanted their brothers, did we not? We False Kings were meant to perish for our weakness and assumptions. Time and time again we are lead to the slaughter, the dynasty that should not be. But time and time again we survive! The Savages think

that they are the cockroaches, but it is us. We are the bugs, the beasts, the common but diligent dogs. Seven has come back to vindicate Six. Skin stealers, flesh takers, dead faces inside shriveled masks. Strega, Nona Strega! Cazador de la Bruja! What of the Witches' Hammer? What of the Malleus Maleficarum, the Tableau de l'Inconstance des Mauvais Anges et Demons? Who will be our Pierre de Lancre? Who can we turn like an

arrow toward the seventh devils, who will again punish the Basque witches at Logrono as they gather to sup at the Infernuko erreka? Will we survive once more, the kings of liars and the liars to kings? Or have our borrowed nights come to debt due?

No idea. Hardaiken wasn't there, just his agent, Pitor. Couldn't see the look on his face. I bet he's growing really nervous, now. I like Hardaiken, I really do. But it's nice to see him squirm, as I'm sure you can understand.

THE “SECRET HISTORY” MAILS

I don't even know why I'm including these emails, except that you asked that I be “thorough” about this matter. This is certainly me being complete, letting slip every lunatic script that comes bubbling up through the cracks. Well, to be fair, I guess it's not *that* thorough. I could've sent you the breadth and depth of these emails: right now, I'm looking at well-over 400 of the damn things. This is just a meager sampling. All the Lords in the city get these letters (we're all connected *somehow* to email, even if by the agent of an agent) on an irregular schedule. You can typically expect one a week, but sometimes they'll come one or two a day, or none for three months.

We don't have a clue who's sending these mad missives, though the theories of the mailer's identity are a popular discussion at the salons. Some speculate that he must be old and given over to the Fog. Why else would he be so interested (or

potentially knowledgeable about) the history of our clan? This is someone who knows what they are doing, however. Note that all the emails have the same date and time stamps, despite coming weeks or months apart, in some instances.

The emails I've included here are at least comprehensible, as I didn't bother to send some of the wilder, madder theories. His ramblings on the importance of the numbers 7, 14 and 21 do not fail to entertain, but I can't promise they are in any way telling. He also opines quite often about UFOs and angels, two subjects that have no place in our history. Clearly the individual responsible has taken some steps to avoid being traced in any way; note the date of the emails as just one of several “blinds” he's incorporated. You'll find a handful of the emails below, printed out. Again, I almost apologize for including this: it's barely cogent, hardly meaningful, and mostly just insipid.

Merovingian Hagiography

From: Anonymous (071421@DO-NOT-REPLY.com)
Date: Sunday, January 1st, 2001, 12:00 AM
To: Secret History List (124170@DO-NOT-REPLY.com)
Subject: Secret History

The female saints of the Merovingian cults have been reborn as Kindred within our Blood! They have returned upon the Embrace of nameless females dragged into our Requiem over the last seven years – each of these were not saints at the time of the Embrace but only after it, moments after it, seconds after it. Regunulfa of Incourt! Oda of Amay! Saint Choradora! Bathild! Rade Gund! Mone Gund! And last but not least, Genovefa, the Virgin of Paris. Seven saints, all women, all reborn into the Blood. Why is this? How have these ghosts claimed the souls of once-mortal, now-Kindred? This is *vitae et miracula*, miracles of the blood, and this miracle is performed in service to the Lords.

To find the answers to this we must examine the nature of the Merovingian line. The Merovingian kings are not the descendents of Jesus Christ as expected, but are rather the offspring of the mortal line of Longinus. That binds the seven female saints who once served the kings and who created hidden abbeys to the service of the Lancea Sanctum, or so we'd hope. Why has the Sanctum sought to repress knowledge of these seven saints? What do they hope to gain, or what is it the cardinals seek to hide? Have they become corrupted? Do they no longer serve the lord but instead have turned to the Lucifuge? Do mortal agents of the Lucifuge walk among the Sanctified of Lance and Spear? What of the Shield and Spear, and their claims of having the true Spear of Longinus? It all ties together, but we have no answers until we have the seven saints back in our possession. I only know the Human Name of one of them: Lucinda Horatio (*more things in heaven and earth*) of Sacramento. But she has left the city, fled on a plane.

To where? To the abbeys, of course, the hidden abbeys. Find the hidden abbeys and you find the seven saints. Find the seven saints and you know what the Sanctum is hiding from the rest of us. Find out what they're hiding and perhaps we can all become the pinnacle of what we need to be.

Remember that Diana had the blood of the Merovingians in her, too, descended from the Stuarts, and the current monarchy is a sham, a false face of undeserving leaders! Diana, belonging to Longinus, was killed...

By the Sanctified!

Courage.

Anon.

On Sunday, January 1st, 2001, 12:00 AM, Anonymous (071421@DO-NOT-REPLY.com) wrote:

Thascius Hostilinus

He has fallen 21 times, but Hostilinus (called Numida, called The Pestilence) has not yet been destroyed despite the many stories that confirm his demise. His heart contains the true blood of Longinus and he seeks to usurp those who have stolen the Throne of Christ from the Dark Father but who still use the Dark Father's name to commit their sins in these awful nights. He has refined his blood not once, but twice, a unique principle that none other has yet achieved – but then again, no other has the true blood of the Dark Father in the chambers of his dead heart, either! Hostilinus can be found in the shadows, gathering Lords to his side – the stories say that he *is* himself a Shadow but

this is false, patently false, his command of the holy writ designates him as a Lord. Perhaps he was born as Shadow but came into the Light as Lord? Stranger things have happened, true, true, like the 21 black horses seen in the sky over Toronto.

Those who gather by The Pestilence's side know that they must bring down the False Lance and the False Spear (hidden pagans, all of them, secret heathen) to once more replace it with the Kingdom of God. And the Kingdom of God shall be writ on the winds in the language of the plague. The plague – a worse plague than has ever been seen – grows in the belly of the American Heartland, in secret CDC laboratories. But these labs will be claimed by the Lords of Numida, terrorists working with the names of True God and Dark Father whispered on their lips. They will bring about the end on the Hills of Megiddo and march forth to tear asunder the pretenders.

Long live Hostilinus the Once-Shadow, Now-Lord!

Courage.

Anon.

On Sunday, January 1st, 2001, 12:00 AM, Anonymous (071421@DO-NOT-REPLY.com) wrote:

Charles Chiniquy

The bad priest Charles Chiniquy was right to claim that President Lincoln was assassinated by the Catholic Church (orchestrated in turn by the Lance and Spear), but he was wrong that John Wilkes Booth was a tool of the Jesuits. John Wilkes Booth did not even kill the president: he was an unwitting dupe!

The story goes that the Pretenders of Longinus hired a wretched Kindred unlike other Kindred, a vile thing of devilish origin, a secret keeper of the Head of Baphomet and the Sword of the Sworn. It attacked Lincoln and savaged his body, stealing his organs for later use (and from time to time these organs show up on the Black Market or on craigslist). A group of government men could not stop the attack, but saw the instability that such an event would cause in the world of men. They sought the help of the local Lords to find the man known as John Wilkes Booth. A cabal of powerful Lords wiped his memory and changed it to suit the story that he would fulfill. They also hired a Lincoln look-alike and staged the assassination (which was a true assassination given that the imitator died), but it was not Lincoln, for Lincoln had already been destroyed by the horrible demon Kindred working for the Lance and Spear.

It was a Catholic conspiracy. The church has long been in the hands of the Devil. The Papal state is an unholy one. Down with the pretenders. May the Lords once more fix what is broken.

On Sunday, January 1st, 2001, 12:00 AM, Anonymous (071421@DO-NOT-REPLY.com) wrote:

Vlad Tepes

Dracula belongs to Clan Ventrue, though he has four other masked pretenders who fake belonging to the other bloods.

Dracula has written secret epistles to us, hoping to supply the Lords with directives that operate in line with the Order of the Dragon.

How can you decipher these directives?

- Take Stoker's Masterpiece and write it backward. At this point it becomes a Vigenere Cipher with the code Julii. Compare with the Vigenere Square. Translate to learn the truth! I dare not reprint it all here, for fear that search engines will pick up on the terms within. In addition, Dracula wished that we of his blood would find the work soothing and empowering.
- Find the true version of the Rites of the Dragon. It explains everything. Used bookstores are the best place to look. It often masquerades as a French cookbook, or sometimes as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*.
- The Coils were designed only to dwell in the hands of the Ventrue, for we are masters of all and that is what the Coils represent: *mastery*. We must reclaim the Coils and conjure new ones to defeat those who have stolen from us. So sayeth the Tepes.
- We can learn from the Masons. Masonic doctrine is coded with Ventrue symbology: the scepter, the diadems, the lion, the dragon. Every Masonic lodge older than 200 years is home to a torpid Ventrue, a Ventrue programmed with the words of Dracula himself. Awaken the Sleepers, learn the truth.

Courage.

Anon.

THE HOUSTON LETTERS

The following is a set of letters sent to the Commander of Houston, by two of his nominal subordinates — his sheriff, Lake, and the head of the Houston Harpies, who supported his overthrow of the Invictus Prince of the city a number of years previous. I bring these to your attention because

the collection from which we took some of this compilation's material is mentioned herein. There are the seeds of other threats mentioned herein; I have no idea if they are real or imagined, but they were deemed important enough to put down in writing. You be the judge.

Commander,

I've given Rico and his storm chasers permission to leave the city. Stated destination of New Orleans. I'll be glad to see them gone, even just for the month. I sent Jacob to watch them halfway, and to see if the Catholic has changed anything along his borders.

Since I know the harpies will screech, I've sent the "Prince" our customary notification. Following his custom, he hasn't replied. I recommend more serious intelligence efforts come winter. The Catholic's buttoning up tighter every year, and that suggests he's got weakness to hide. We know that we've been cutting heavily into his drug supply, thanks to our excellent relationship with Houston's finest.

We might be in a position to expand into New Orleans within the decade.

-- Colonel Lake

Sheriff of Houston

Commander,

I hear Lake let the dogs off their leash... and towards New Orleans again. Do I need to remind you how stupid that is? The last thing I want is a bunch of half-assed Sanctified spreading the fear of God down here. I have enough work cleaning up after our local congregation. I know you don't like them any more than you like me, and you'll like the Crescent City bunch even less.

*Respectfully,
Genevieve*



*Speaker for the College of Harpies
Backed the Houston coup.*

Commander,

We're seeing increased mortal traffic from New Orleans. From what I'm hearing, I can see why the storm chasers were off early this year.

Genevieve came around headquarters last night. Sir, I don't like the harpies interfering. If she's a political necessity, can we at least keep her out of night-to-night business? If she's not, can we put her down? We could get a solid block of the undecided and even the anarchists if we redistributed her interests.

-- Colonel Lake

Commander,

Lake won't listen to me. I've been down among the herd, and I noticed a few things he hasn't bothered to tell you. The refugees from New Orleans aren't all mortal, and some of those who are, still smell of Kindred blood. The Catholic's grip is loosening.

In the next few years, you might easily add New Orleans to your domain, but for now, I'd be worried about dealing with the Catholic's castoffs.

Your predecessor's tomb remains in excellent condition. There's a reason you entrusted him to me, and not Lake. The harpies understand discretion.

Respectfully,

Genevieve



Commander,

We're seeing a lot of skirmishes and poaching along the highways. This human flood is bringing more than our usual share of Kindred, and very few are asylum-seekers.

I received a message from the Prince of New Orleans, in his old cypher. He seems poorly informed:

"My dear Prince and confederate,

"It is too long since we have renewed our acquaintance. A decade? Two? I received with interest your gift of the Gangrel. You must tell me, has my thickening blood become so open a secret? Do you seek to help me stave off slumber another few years, or are you simply liquidating your undesirables? Perhaps you are probing for weakness? You'd do better to look among the heathens, who are scattering in superstitious fear, their Baron no longer proud. Or to the so-called Lord of the French Quarter. See if the tourists come to him this year.

"If you send another gift, I might respond in kind. Nonetheless, they were delicious.

"Yours in the fear of God,

"New Orleans"

We lost a soldier last night; mortal, but he was a promising candidate. We now have a horde of the tired and wretched, Kindred and kine alike. Never mind that they're probably running from nothing at all. Previous scenarios to claim New Orleans required years of dismantling the Catholic's operations and removing his personnel. Mortal panic may be doing that faster than we could have accomplished.

I'm sending a group to join Jacob and penetrate the city.

-- Colonel Lake

Commander,

I believe we may be watching a disaster unprecedented even within my lifetime. They're not stampeding cattle, they're rats fleeing a sinking ship. Those who feed on the rats will follow, and soon we'll be knee-deep in Sanctified and vodouisant filth. It's already begun. I know you've lost soldiers, and I can't imagine Lake's not planning some kind of counter-attack. His idiocy has to be stopped. New Orleans is unfamiliar ground for any of his men, and if they get made, the kine will easily turn on us.

I am also given to understand that you have word from the Prince of New Orleans. It would behoove us to pool our resources.

Respectfully,

Genevieve



Commander,

According to human reports, eighty percent of their city is flooded. The Kindred crossing our borders have grown too numerous to census, and we're lucky to track them at all. I'm going to begin pulling most of the home guard back to Houston proper and send a detachment to see what we can do about slowing the highways. I fear, however, that we may have a much larger Kindred wave proceeding on foot or by other means. They'll follow their food, and all their food seems to be coming to us.

-- Colonel Lake

Commander,

Word reaches me that Lake has men active in New Orleans. I'd ordinarily call him an idiot and suggest you withdraw. However, I think we all respect the cultural significance of New Orleans and its library. If we must plunge our Kindred into this debacle, I recommend that we ask them to secure the library at all costs.

Respectfully,

Genevieve



Commander,

We're not getting Jacob's unit out anytime soon. The mortal communications infrastructure we're relying on is shoddy at best. I've relayed your instructions to locate and secure the library, but it may already be a lost cause. I've attached some pictures Jacob was able to take with his phone. Note the burning on the corpses - I'd say those are certainly Kindred, battered into torpor and exposed to the dawn.

Unexpectedly, I've also received a message from Rico... begging for our assistance. He claims his gang is afflicted by draugr and "hags"... I fear the M may be spreading amongst them, and if any survive, I recommend we do our best not to readmit them.

I'm taking a detachment myself to attempt to shore up the border, and to set up a private radio relay. With any luck, we'll be able to get a clearer line to Jacob.

-- Colonel Lake

Commander,

Lake's run off. I visited his headquarters every night this week, and he's not there. Please don't tell me that you've sent him on some fool's errand.

Respectfully,

Genevieve



Commander,

I'll give Lake some credit. Apparently, he did manage to cross into New Orleans, or get somewhere near. I have him, Jacob, and a handful of Gangrel in my custody.

Unfortunately, they've gone entirely mad. I've had to handle them more like animals than men. Oh, they retain some of their language, and a rude intelligence, but something's poisoning their blood. I've entombed them alongside your predecessor. One of the girls tells me they've been shifting and screaming, even during the day.

I asked Lake about the library. He spit blood in my face, and just leered with yellowing eyes. You're welcome to pick him up any time.

Regretfully,

Genevieve



NOTES FROM THE DEAD GIRL: MORE RESEARCH

More information, pulled from all that blood-scrrawl and crazy-talk:

- Witches' Hammer and **Malleus Maleficarum**: The 15th century treatise on witches, as I'm sure we all know. Heavily misogynistic. Maybe that's upset the "daughter" leaving these notes?

- The writing talks of witches in other ways, too: **strega**, **bruja**, the **Tableaus de [...] Demons** - another witch-hunting text, written by the Pierre de Lancre, who was a French judge who helped instigate witch hunts in the 1600s. Though some say his father wrote or at least helped him write the Tableau? Who knows? Interestingly enough, de Lancre was said to have a Basque heritage, but he was... I guess you could call him a self-hating Basque? Thought them all idolaters, drunkards, womanizers. Sinners, ultimately. Is the "daughter" writing our notes a self-hating Lord? I get that feeling. I catch a whiff of treachery. She thinks us cockroaches, does she not?

- **Infernuko erreka**: "Hell's ditch." Witches were said to gather at such places, supping at the infernal irrigation.

- **Logrono**: Basque witch trials held here; the elicited confessions were said to mass over 10,000 pages of signed admissions of witchcraft, taken from thousands of women. Some were said to be able to turn to flies or goats, others gathered in "black" meadows to sacrifice children or animals to dark powers. Others claimed they could steal bodies, wearing them like suits of clothing or armor. Our note-writer seems to reference this last part, a bit. Don't know why. And I really don't care to know why.

Do with this as you will.

NOTES FROM THE DEAD GIRL, IV

Two more dead, and one more note. This time, a father and his daughter. Beheaded and made to embrace one another in lifeless limbs in an old attic bedroom filled with junk: a paint-stripped carousel horse, old gilded mirrors, boxes of porcelain dolls and clowns, a decrepit cedar chest filled with nothing but wire hangers and a family of spiders. It's a place of death, and here it seems our killer and writer has chosen to be... well, I don't know if "respectful" is the word, but certainly "retrained."

Hardaiken's nowhere to be found. Pitor, the agent, claims he's off in "meditation" trying to puzzle it all out. I wonder if he's gone coward, if he can't handle the pressure from above and so he's ducking authority. Doesn't seem like him, I'll admit, but the Requiem is a grindstone. It wears the best of us down.

Anyway. I'm sure he'd want me to send you the note, par usual. Bagged and tagged:

Body snatchers and grave robbers. I was right! The ghosts have returned to punish us. The witches have found us again, and so the massacre comes. Will we be led to slaughter like lambs pretending to be lions? Will we find the Perfecti once more? Can we turn them toward our enemies and away from us? (Or will they again turn on their masters?) Those who read this, know that you must do as I do: protect yourself. Kill to remain living. Kill to keep your skin.

More lunatic talk from the... well, whoever she is. Is this why she's murdering these people? To somehow protect herself? Who are these mortals that she's killing?

THE CRYPTeia

The Crypteia comes from Sparta, but it is not now what it was then. In *The Life of Lycurgus*, Plutarch describes the ancient Crypteia:

[...] THE MAGISTRATES DISPATCHED PRIVATELY SOME OF THE ABLEST OF THE YOUNG MEN INTO THE COUNTRY, FROM TIME TO TIME, ARMED ONLY WITH THEIR DAGGERS, AND TAKING A LITTLE NECESSARY PROVISION WITH THEM; IN THE DAYTIME, THEY HID THEMSELVES IN OUT-OF-THE-WAY PLACES, AND THERE LAY CLOSE, BUT, IN THE NIGHT, ISSUED OUT INTO THE HIGHWAYS, AND KILLED ALL THE HELOTS THEY COULD LIGHT UPON....

The Crypteia were ruthless but subtle killers. It was their task to keep the local populace in its place, to keep each citizen and slave and would-be lord within his proper limits, so that the machinery of society could go on operating. When a part of the machine slid out of alignment, it was removed:

AS, ALSO, THUCYDIDES, IN HIS HISTORY OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR, TELLS US, THAT A GOOD NUMBER OF THEM, AFTER BEING SINGLED OUT FOR THEIR BRAVERY BY THE SPARTANS, GARLANDED, AS ENFRANCHISED PERSONS, AND LED ABOUT TO ALL THE TEMPLES IN TOKEN OF HONORS, SHORTLY AFTER DISAPPEARED ALL OF A SUDDEN, BEING ABOUT THE NUMBER OF TWO THOUSAND; AND NO MAN EITHER THEN OR SINCE COULD GIVE AN ACCOUNT HOW THEY CAME BY THEIR DEATHS.

Tonight, the Crypteia of the Lords are more sinister, more secretive, and shorter lived. A Crypteia is formed for a particular task – destroy that haven, find that runaway ghoul, behead another clan's Priscus – and then disbanded. Therefore, it is only as good, as subtle, as deceptive, as ruthless, and as effective as the Lords drawn into the mission. Some Crypteia are made of blunt thugs, others are composed of sharp assassins.

A Crypteia is always secret. Given their work, this is obvious. But in some domains, where the work of a Crypteia has been excused by ranking Lords as the equivalent of a “covert Blood Hunt,” the question often arises: How can justice carried in secret be trusted to be justice? Even the Lords who make up a Crypteia are not always allowed to keep their memories of the mission.

The short life of a particular Crypteia is intended to protect the Lord who assembles it and the Jacks who participate. With no single, stable body of Kindred in a standing Crypteia, each act of a Crypteia becomes more difficult to track. Who was a part of *this* hit squad? Who was present at *this* break-in? Even when evidence points to a Crypteia, it may not point to any particular Lord.

Each Crypteia has but a single assignment. When the task is completed, the Crypteia is disbanded. Due to the small number of Lords available in any city, and the even smaller number of Lords with skill sets appropriate for the work, oftentimes Crypteia end up being made of many of the same Lords, one assignment after another. When these groups become too close, too loyal to one another, too well-honed, they become dangerous to the Kindred who call the Crypteia – they develop an egalitarian sensibility that leads them to doubt, question, and even rebel. Wise Lords fear the brotherhood that forms between frequent cohorts. Wise Lords keep the agents in a Crypteia from trusting each other too much.

Though the nights are past when Crypteia were merely training exercises for Lordly knights and hunters tasked with bringing in enemies or prey, most Crypteia are made up of neonates pressured to prove themselves. Kindred with a base of power gather Crypteia. Kindred in search of the favor of their betters do the work of the Crypteia. But of course, youth and power are relative. When the Prince calls a Crypteia to do his work, he may summon up his vassal Regents to pay their black rent to him.

CHASTISEMENT

Been compiling these over the last couple years for you. Thought you might like to see how we in the blood mete out justice to those within our own ranks. This justice wears different faces in different cities, but in the end, you'll

find it boils down to a common theme: finality. It's not that we're without mercy. It's not that we cannot summon second chances. But those second chances are never, ever as good as the first, are they?

STREET SOLUTION

You've heard of the Devil Street Players? Gang down on the south side of the city, all Lords or thugs working for the Lords. I don't say that – "thugs" – in a disrespectful way. These are good guys. They get things done. And if they don't get it done the first time, they're like a dog with a bone: they worry at it, chewing at the problem until it's not a problem anymore. Doesn't hurt that they have connections with all the locals: the Latin Kings, the Eight Balls, the Black Disciples. Race doesn't matter as much to them as loyalty to the blood; a respectable position.

Anyway, this is their "boy," their lead banger, Cotton. He and the crew found out one of their own was plotting a coup, orchestrating a takedown of the Players with help from another rival gang (humans, too, what a fool), the S-Street Mafia. The Mafia isn't around anymore; Cotton made sure of that. Wasn't public either, bless his heart. He kept it on the deep, deep down-low. And like stamping out a brushfire or a bad disease, he made sure all the Mafia's family were put in the ground, too. Or should I say, "dumped in the bay."

You fucked us, Lucky. You fucked us good. I ain't so sad you tried to betray us Players. I ain't so sad you thought you had better friends in other places. I ain't sad about none of that because I always knew you was weak, Lucky. Like a motherfuckin' sniveling sewer rat, skinny like a drinkin' straw, looking at us all with those cheatin' eyes. I ain't sad about none of that, son.

I'm sad that you thought you could take on the kin. Bein' made a part of the family, well, shit, that's just about the highest honor of all the damn honors. Going against that is a fool insult, son. That's some crass shit. The gang, we just one part of the big picture. You didn't just piss on us, you pissed on all those came before you. Every proud Lord from the time of Jesus Christ and after, you just whipped out your shit and pissed on all our heads, man. And that's not somethin' we can abide.

What's that, Lucky? You tryin' to say something? Maybe a little somethin' – somethin' in your defense? Aw, shit, is that big chain too tight around your mouth? I see it's already broken off some of your teeth. Ain't that a shame? Looks like it's wearing into the skin of your cheek, too. Man, I guess we should treat a traitorin' brother better, huh?

Fuck that noise, Lucky. I hope those chains hurt. The ones around your wrists and legs, too, they already chafin' off the skin and I couldn't be happier about it, shit. You think you gonna get a jury of your peers? You think you get to make a case in front of them, tellin' us all why you did what you did? Nuh – uh, son, no way. Yeah, you get your jury. That's us. That's the Devil Street Players. But you don't say shit.

We the only ones who say shit. And here's how we say it: each of us? Each of us got a Glock with one bullet in the chamber. We think you're guilty, then we put a bullet in your chest. Each bullet is, ahh, how you wanna say this? Each bullet is a vote, I guess you could say. We count the bullets in your cheatin' chest and if it's a majority vote, then I guess you gotta take your medicine.

Guns up, sons. You know the process. Shoot if you think he's guilty. Eject that shit if you think he's not.

Oh, shit, Lucky, lemme see. One, two, uh – huh, four... aw, hell, brother, that's seven out of seven bullets jammed up in your lungs. That's seven votes. Seven votes says you're a guilty man, Lucky.

Seven votes says it's time to street your ass. You know how this goes 'cause you seen it done. We gonna cut that fuckin' head off, Lucky. We gonna cut it off nice and slow so you feel it. You still had family on this earth that gave two shits about you, and we'd send them some pictures, but that ain't the fact because you pissed on your human family long ago, and damn, maybe we shoulda seen the signs.

You shouldn'ta gone against the blood, son. Time to pay the piper.

Guess you ain't so lucky after all. Bitch.

SUBSERVIENCE

Sylvain Vioget (not French at all, by the way, and certainly not his real name) is the Prince of a small city up north. He's First Estate all the way, and he's a real barricuda. And I mean that in the best way possible.

Sylvain is... how to describe him? He's like silk. Everything about him is smooth and soft and you'd not think that he possesses any kind of toughness to him. Even his body language gives the impression that he sways with the wind, going in whatever direction he's pushed. The truth is quite a different thing. Sylvain has a granite interior, positively bulletproof. You think he's a wispy frond of grass, but in reality he's a piece of wrought rebar stuck deep into the ground.

In public, he tolerates everything. Every sling and arrow tossed in his direction he laughs off

with a titter, waves it away, and for this, some think him weak. Only those who don't know what happens after think such a thing, though. See, Sylvain takes justice into his own hands, in private. And most smart licks around here have heard the stories and have learned to shut their mouths, but some... well, some aren't as connected to the social bloodstream as they'd like. But isn't that in and of itself a kind of "survival of the fittest" situation? If you're not well-liked enough to play in the water with the other children, then you're not going to hear all that great playground talk. Which means you might very well stumble into a trap.

Remy Vincent stumbled into a trap.

I'll let Sylvain tell it. Note that he tells it to me with Remy sitting there. On a leash. At his feet.



Have you met Piglet? This darling creature at my feet is Piglet. Piglet, snort for the good man, will you? There you go. Just like hunting for truffles.

You want to know how Piglet here ended up at my feet? An easy story. This little piglet thought he could say some very mean things about Sylvain Vioget during the string quarter concert at Elysium. He meant for me to hear them, of course, because he surely knows how keen my ears are. Tuned to any frequency that mentions me, they are. I can hear my name spoken from a mile away, so the stories go.

What was it that Piglet said? Ohhh, I forget. Let me think. Mmm. Ahh, yes. That's right. "Faggot," was that what he called me? It was. But wasn't there more to it? "Weak-kneed faggot?" Am I getting it right, Piglet? Don't make me tug on that leash again and make you perform in front of the nice gentleman. Snort if I'm right.

(It's a test, of course, he knows I'm always right.)

Yes, he spoke those words like a big tough man, whispered to one of our cackling princesses, no less. Even if I had not heard him, did he think such disparagement wouldn't trickle its way up to me? Silly, silly piggy.

So, how does this work? I invited Remy to the suite here. He showed up and I had my muscle present to hold him down. And then I worked on him. Not physically. Not yet. We... talked. I looked in his eyes and I told him things. Told him what he really wanted. The things he would do to me, for me. He's so afraid of faggots, then so it goes that it should be a part of his punishment, don't you think? Piglet likes it, now. Don't you, Piglet? Good little swine.

Sexual punishment is ostensibly not that valuable among most of our kind. But human prejudices and fears still linger in some. And humiliation on that level can bring some of that to the surface, like drawing venom from some old, scabbed over wound. Piglet here was ripe for that kind of... castigation. He used his mouth to heap scorn upon me, and now he shall use that offending mouth in other ways to make up for it. Piglet has a good mouth. Round and stretchy. Make an 'o' for Daddy! There it is. Lovely, Piglet, just lovely. His lips are dry, though, dry like the dead, and so I chastise him: moisturize, moisturize, moisturize. A little blood mixed with oil - something scented, something flowery - makes for a lovely moisturizer, by the way. A tip from me to you. If we were made dead with dry skin, we'll always have dry skin. A tiny curse, but a curse nevertheless.

I don't flaunt my ownership of Piglet. I don't tell anybody that he's a great adorer of my blood and of other things. He's free to do as he chooses when he's not in my company. (Though he's developed something of a compulsion with washing himself, as if he cannot get clean. Strange, don't you think? Perhaps not.) Truly, I don't find that humiliation on the public scale is all that valuable. I prefer my punishment to be intimate. They'll talk, of course. Even Piglet here, he'll squeal to someone. And then they'll know what happens when you cross me.

COMPENSATION

This is a conversation had with a seneschal from the Left Coast. In the city, he and the Prince are the only Lords in a population of dozens. Neither have childer. Curiously, while neither of them are adherents of the Crone, they apparently hold fast

to some ancient “contract” with what he calls the “city spirit” that demands that no Kindred perform the Embrace within the domain. Those who do Embrace there are said to meet grisly ends. So, too, with the nascent childer.

Listen, it's like this: we're not kind to those who mess with the order of things, right? You damage the Movement, you damage the city, and we don't like that. I hate to quote from that too-common playbook, but Machiavelli had some good ideas. He distinguished between “good” cruelties and “bad” ones. See, the bad ones are brutal and awful and ceaseless, and the people? They don't forget the bad cruelties. It gets under their skin and lives there. Like a chigger. Bad cruelties are inconsistently applied. They don't make sense. They're violent for the sake of violence. I've seen some Princes, right, who are so addled and lost in the fog that their forms of justice all fall under the “bad cruelties” type.

What are “good cruelties?” Well, I'll tell you. They're savage but swift. Over fast, they leave the victims relieved that it's done. Good cruelties are fair cruelties. Consistent. Plain. And you can't take joy in the good cruelties or it stops looking like justice and starts looking like wrath. Or just sick pleasure.

Anyway, a little background, here. I'm the Amanuensis for Prince Cillian. I don't favor the title, I'd rather be Seneschal or Right Hand Man or even My Girl Friday (even though I'm a gent) because Amanuensis means... well, slave labor. Comes from Rome, though, and Cillian is a Rome-o-phile. You should talk to him one of these days. He's had conversations with some real thick-bloods, some legacy Lords from way, way back. He'll debate you on whether we were around before the fall of Rome or whether we really started earlier than that (Catal Hayuk, anybody?) and all that. So, even though Cillian's from Ireland and isn't more than a century old, he loves all those old Latinate terms. Amanuensis implies a slave “within reach” of his master. I'm no slave. I take care of all the things Cillian can't or won't handle. I'm no factotum, but such it is. Some have said it's odd that a prominent Carthian like Cillian would favor such old ways, but... well, people are strange.

So, back to the subject at hand. The theory behind the kinds of punishments we dole out is, as mentioned, they must be “good cruelties,” and in addition, they must reinforce the protected and elected authority of the Prince. The Prince's will is tantamount and must not be questioned outside the sanctioned sit-downs. Efforts of justice need to reinforce that.

Essentially, we go by a system of tiers when it comes down to it. Quite plainly, some offenses don't carry the weight or consequence of others, so they in turn carry lesser punishments. Failing to present yourself to the Prince? Speaking ill against him? Practicing oracular prophesy? All fairly small offenses, though offenses nevertheless. The Prince's initial punishment is one of labor: Arbeit mach frei and all that. They work for him, and they work near him. Sometimes, the Prince has particular needs: the installation of a new room drain, a re-writing or re-plumbing effort, or someone to work on his car. If the offender has particular talents, and seems repentant, the Prince might discover them and bring those talents to the fore. Alternately, sometimes the Prince just demands back-breaking labor. Dig a ditch. Move blocks. Move I-beams.

The next level of punishment, reserved for repeat offenders, is jail-time. Cillian has cells built into his home: those who have caused some affront are thrown into one of these empty little rooms. The cubicles are unique in that they are in full sight of a host of luxuries. Cillian, curiously, is not a man of luxury. He dresses simply. His manor is rather Spartan. But when it comes time to punish, he puts on a good show: he enjoys himself in front of the prisoner, licking blood from his fingers, moaning with pleasure, gorging himself on it. Dolls groom him: manicures, pedicures, massaging the dead skin around his eyes. He reads books, laughing raucously. It's a small torture, but a torture he revisits nightly for those in the cells. And they're behind soundproofed Plexiglass: their rants and bellows are heard only as muted complaints.

Break the first or second Tradition, and the punishments grow more severe. So too with flouting one of the city's feeding restrictions (no labor unions, no Irish immigrants). Cillian first hits them where it hurts: he halves their territories and feeding grounds, halves their herds, and usually destroys at least one of their mortal retainers. If they still hew to mortal families, they usually suffer a loss, as well – perhaps not the most beloved member, but a member nevertheless. If the offender doesn't have enough of these resources to cut into, then physical punishment always remains an option: bones broken with clubs and pipes, made to re-heal and then broken again. It's over in one night; protracted torture over such a transgression becomes a “bad” cruelty.

Repeated offenses at this level earn a whole new manner of punishment: the blood of the Prince, thrice-consumed. Some Princes enforce the “one drink per offense” rule, so the addiction builds. Cillian believes that is a bad cruelty, and thus prefers to bring the traitor under thrall as swiftly as possible. Three nights hence and the bond is forged.

Now, worst offenses: The Amaranth, or Love-Lies-Bleeding? Attacking the Prince or his cabal? Frenzy during Elysium and thus breaking the peace that the Prince has long sought to sow?

Cillian does not favor execution. Final death is, to him, too final: once more, Arbeit mach frei and even a broken tool can be rebuilt or reforged. It's happened, of course, but only the bloodiest of criminals have earned that mercy from him. Usually at the hands of a coordinated blood hunt.

Those who commit egregious crimes suffer at Elysium, quite publicly. All their resources are gutted and tithed to the Kindred of the city (except the Invictus), with a slightly larger percentage of lands and wealth going to Cillian. They are tortured in front of others. They are brought under thrall. They are then forged into something else. Cillian or I work on their minds, night in, night out. We break down walls. We build up new ones. Old memories are gone, new memories are made. It's time-consuming. It's painstaking. Some are turned into little more than mules. Others into good soldiers or diplomats. If old personas resurface,

the conditioning begins anew. The new memories and the thralldom serve to enforce the ultimate authority of Cillian. When it is time for votes to come rolling in, they inevitably go toward him. Largely because he's a good ruler, of course. Obviously. But to those who have brought offense to the city, well, they are made to serve, as they must be.

You'll notice that's how justice is served in our city, with an eye toward keeping the peace and enforcing the ideas of authority and discipline. Unpleasant, but fair. It's hard, but it subtly reinforces, too, that we remain Lords despite our minority. As noted, we're the only two Ventrue in the city. For some reason, at least here in North America, it seems that we are the least populous clan. Some have said it's because we are the "newest" to the Blood, but I don't find that a suitable answer. Cillian supports the notion that we number so few simply because royal blood is refined. It isn't common. Our Blood grants us the talents to naturally rule, and a population cannot be served by too many rulers. Too many cooks in the kitchen, so the saying goes. We are few because we are the best. It is our rare scepter that delivers justice with a swing of its jeweled tip.

THE AUCTOR, JENNY RAINES

Jenny Raines is an Auctor, a role that is fairly rare in these modern nights. She hunts down bloody-handed criminals and brings them to justice. When she smells a blood hunt in the city, she champions it with capable Kindred or if she can find none, takes it on herself. She specializes in hunting down those within the Lords who commit sins against their own, but the nights are long and she gladly farms out her talents to those who need her most.

That said, this has taken a toll on Miss Raines. Her mind is... frayed. I don't think she's a danger to herself or others, but she jumps at shadows. She hunts down ghosts and other anomalies, things that many within our estimable families do not agree exist. Still, even if she's wrong about what she believes and sees, perhaps there remains a drop of truth somewhere? Seems worth giving her a voice, even if it sounds unbelievable.

I am Auctor, or Auctoritas. I am the authority. I am the hunter. My calling is to track down those who should not be and bring them to serve their time before those they have insulted. I'm authorized by most to work outside the system, to do what must be done in the name of the safety, sanity and sanctity of the Blood. It's not always easy. Not every city is friendly to my needs. Some hunt me while I hunt others. It's just the way it is. If they come on too strong, they will end up bloody and limbless in the dirt so that I may continue my hunt unhindered.

I also hunt down monsters. True monsters. Some within our ranks shed themselves of the Lord moniker and become something else, something vile. They desecrate our tombs, our offices, our sacred spots. They kidnap our most estimable and our weakest, and they visit upon them the most profane tortures, violating them in countless unthinkable ways. They are creatures of garbage and rot. Some of them you can smell: bloody bits under the nails and between the teeth, the malodor of decay trailing them, their clothes sodden with moldering fruits and meats. One had a gutter-fed haven, the floor thick with shitty, sluiced sewer run off. Mannequin parts everywhere. I don't know why.

What I have learned is that they take on new names. Names sometimes unpronounceable. Sometimes the words sound Latin, other times they're incomprehensible gibberish.

The most concerning part? Sometimes, they have the same names. This... woman in Mexico City, she had taken one of the Prisci captive and was... doing things to him in a church tower. She called herself something: Briareus. Monster of a hundred hands.

Seven years later, Vancouver. A thing who looked like a teen boy, his mouth a nest of crooked fangs. Had stolen the ashes of some prominent Lords, had mixed them with pig's blood and consumed them. He looked small, frail, but he fought like a frenzied cat. He, too, called himself Briareus. And he claimed to have known me. And he remembered Mexico City.

Something's wrong. Something's going on out there in the night. It unsettles me, chills the blood in my bones.

I'll keep hunting. Whatever I find, I'll report to you.



THE DOMINATRIX AND THE ACADEMY

Everyone wanted to tell me about the Dominatrix called Bella Cohen. The Prince gave her the title of Dommé (rhymes with Monet), which makes her, I guess, the official Mistress of all the city's Kindred. If you're undead and you want to be whipped, you have to go through Dommé Bella Cohen.

Of course I had it wrong. The Dommé Cohen – the proper way to say her formal name – was given the title as a kind of play on words. She isn't an S&M dynamo (just an aficionado), and her position at court doesn't come through sexual service or covenant power. She's a Lord with more than a century of prestige among her brothers and sisters in the clan. She's got the rank of Baroness at court, just as a measure of the weight and respect we should all give to her opinions, and this is in

addition to her title as Dommé, which is how she pays the proverbial bills.

Bella Cohen is the master of "the sanguine voice," also called the Lordly words, the voice of the Ventrue, or as I'm hearing it called more and more, "dominate." (Use it like a verb or put it on something else like it was an adjective: "He called that fucker out with his dominant voice.") She teaches young Kindred how to use the Blood to project their will onto pliant minds. Her methods are scandalous, but it's her motives that scare so many Lords and carry her reputation on the lips of nomads.

I learned the ways of the Blood from a New England institution founded in secret by the kind of blue-blooded Lords who made kings of some of America's Founding Fathers – the Academy. Dommé Cohen's methods couldn't be more different.

THE ACADEMY

When it was based in Manchester, New Hampshire, the Academy was a rural estate owned and inhabited by three generations of Lords and five generations of their living kin, transformed into ghouls by the Vitae of the resident elder, called Forsyth. My sire attended the Academy in 1794, when it was highly regarded but rarely visited. The Forsyths welcomed only Ventrue between 20 and 60 years into their Requiems to come and study under masters of Lordly words: Forsyth and his childer, Abigail.

Students, sent on the precarious overland journey by their sires (who were not welcome to attend), were kept in the estate's cellar all winter long, their breath hanging in the air as a symbol of the radiant power of their words. Forsyth taught that the blush of life was essential to the invocation of dominant words – as an Academy graduate, I myself continue to believe it's the "proper" way to project one's will.

Several years of study were often necessary. Students traveled back and forth each winter, with seldom more than four or five gathered at a time. Forsyth believed that a year spent honing one's Lordly voice was essential to the process of refining its dominance. Students who excelled were sent away, told to come back next winter, because they'd already "learned this year's lessons" and would not be allowed to progress faster than Forsyth's trusted practice prescribed. He was, by all accounts, an exceptional bastard. Abigail maintained that his arrogant and smug attitude was a comforting assurance that he had not been tampering with the recollections or perceptions of his students; "Otherwise we'd remember admiring him, rather than calling him an ass, wouldn't we?"

The Academy burned in the winter of 1859. Forsyth and three students burned with it. Abigail and her childer, Jon Webster, escaped the blaze with the help of Forsyth's ghoulish kin. To this night, Abigail is quite certain the Academy was destroyed by hostile vampires, but here, 150 years later, the act is still unavenged.

Abigail and Webster relocated to Manchester, and then to New York City. In 1882, they opened a new Academy beneath a grand Victorian townhouse, but their attempts to keep the location secret failed, and within five years they closed the institution down. I've heard rumors that another underground Academy, under Jon Webster, taught the sanguine voice for the next decade or so, but Abigail (who was my tutor) insists this isn't true.

In 1921, the current Academy was revealed to the Lords of New England. This time it was located in an attractive high-rise building (about which I will reveal nothing more), moving from suite to suite, penthouse to penthouse, flat to flat, over the next 80 years. Abigail's hope was that the building was too immense to bring down behind the Masquerade, and that by shifting the tutoring space the lessons could be protected from spies and saboteurs. She seems to have been right.

I attended the Academy from 1930 to 1933, and during that time I left the building not once. Students are expected to remain on the premises for the duration of their education to protect the place's secrets. But my education was intensive. No – more accurately, it was intense. The lessons of the Academy are rigorous, strict, carefully formulated, deeply traditional, and formal in an Ivy League boarding-school kind of way. I am proud to have attended, and proud that I have survived the experience without becoming the kind of smug and presumptuous monster that so many graduates turn into. The experience was often humiliating, often painful, and seldom empowering, up to the moment of graduation. After that, I suspect weaker Kindred become insufferable assholes because they want to feel as though all the suffering was worth it. Or perhaps they are paying Lord Forsyth the honor of homage. Regardless, so often graduates emerge as entitled, domineering bastards.

Then they spend the rest of their Requiems forcing people to do what they want them to do.

This took a while to bring together, but we dispatched that occultist from Toronto, "Mr. Book," to check in with two different tutors of the so-called Ventrue voice. He and his retinue of ghouls dared to travel a lot of miles (by private jet) to check out these sources.

THE DOMINATRIX

For her, it's about making people *want* to do things they didn't want to do before. Dommé Cohen told me, "The dictator pushes people to do things they're not sure they want to do for the sake of their fearsome or terrible or just imposing overlord. A dominatrix, mistress, or master makes you find the appeal in doing things that maybe you *shouldn't* do, and impresses *her* enjoyment and passion onto you. Even if she acts disgusted or spiteful or mad along the way."

Her method of education shocked me, not so much because of the leather restraints or the iron contraptions, but because of the trust necessary between her and her pupils. (She calls them "slaves.") Trust, she insists, is a lubricant for sliding ideas and compulsions into a person's mind. She dominates her whelps with physical torture, sanguine words, and humiliation until they are finally able to turn the tables on her. "The first lesson my slaves learn is to stop me," she says. "Once they can say the word, and convince me to stop, we can begin the real lessons."

What makes her popular in her city (and some neighboring domains) is what makes her despicable to so many Lords: Dommé Cohen will teach you aspects of the sanguine voice, regardless of your blood. She's taught Shadows, Savages, Succubi and Haunts. "And I'll go on doing it," she says. "They only get so far, usually," she adds, "and I'm not going to waste my precious nights pushing them uphill. If they can't crawl, I leave them where they fall. Lords just take to it all better. A natural fit." She bites her lip a bit, and looks like a pinup girl. "An unnatural fit," she corrects herself.

One Kindred I was able to speak with, who was a student of hers in the 1950s, tells me she has driven students to perform "elaborate, sickly elaborate, plays" for her. She has driven students to fuck each other, and her. She has commanded students to bite, fight, and surrender their Vitae.

"How is this not rape?" I asked him. He says, "She would tell you that it's all rape – putting yourself into their minds, into their memories, into their bodies. If you can't get comfortable with that idea, or at least deaden yourself to it, you won't ever be good with the voice. And you don't deserve to be."

Graduation, he says, requires students to compete against Dommé Cohen for dominance over a mortal subject. Whoever wins – whoever's will the subject carries out – gets to keep the individual. I hear she's not above kidnapping kine with close ties to her pupils.

Her greatest students, she says, turn on her. "When one of them can make *me* do what they want – whatever it is, however humiliating for me or satisfying for them – I know they're done. They're ready."

This doling out of power, especially the power to control others (including herself!) appears out of character with the ways of her people. It would seem Dommé Cohen is, in the words of one Ventrue, "a terrible specimen of the breed."



"Fuck that," she says. "These slaves learn what I let them learn. When they finally dominate me, it's because I have created power in them. That is, in a very real sense, my power. There are a lot of facets to the sanguine blood, and I don't teach everything I know, and I don't tell everyone the same things. People leave here shaped by my will, knowing what I want them to

know, and ready to do things that they never wanted to do before – things *I* want Kindred doing."

Are Kindred leaving her tutelage somehow conditioned by her own Lordly voice? Are they still her slaves when they nominally graduate?

"Some of them," she says, point blank. "And they pay me handsomely for it."

VT,

If we hadn't left the city that night, I don't think we ever would have.

I left because I was starting to succumb. I was showing up at court and I was listening to the little speeches and I was starting to believe. The dirty little warehouse we staked out was starting to feel like home, the sailors and the hookers were starting to seem like a good square meal.

He left because I asked him to. Hell, left? He was driving. You'd think whatever debt he had to me is long over, but boys are funny. He's the only one of them I trust, because he's too messed up to hide anything right. I'll figure what some day, but I know it's about a girl and I know that's something a girl shouldn't ask about.

I don't trust you. You sound just like every other dry-mouthed liar I've met since I died. But you're the only one who's offered me anything I want. Everybody else just wants to exploit my needs. So you'll get your story and your stamp of blood. You'll get *my* story, and I'll get my answer. If I don't, I know some people back in the city who might be real interested in your project.

Why I got made, I can't tell you. I don't know. What I can say is that I come from a little backwater you'd laugh to hear about. Back a ways, after the War, there was a factory here and roads built to serve it. Attractions a few miles down, taking advantage of the submerged caves and the beautiful countryside.

You want me to say the storm took all that? Nah. It didn't. The factory took back what it gave. It closed down, and none too clean, either. We had a town full of injuries and leukemia cases, all in the shadow of that hunched, metal thing. The bus to high school took an hour, or so I'm told. I've always been more a reader than a student.

But enough about that. Let me give you what you asked for so we can be done with each other.

He looked at the woman in the backseat, when we were just a mile or so out of town. He hadn't been gentle with her, licked the wounds only just a little, closed them but they'd scar.

"We've taken her too far," he said."

"So, finish her up. Nobody'll miss a hooker."

"What if she has kids?"

"My mom had kids. We don't miss her."

He gives me a stare. I don't know whether it's anger or pity, but he stops the car. We drag the woman out, give her a walk into the woods. There can't be much in her veins, anyway. His eyes are still on me, asking which one of us is gonna do it. I step up.

"I can't let you," he tells me. And so he snaps her neck. He puts his hands together and hums a second. Praying. I can't make out whether it's Amazing Grace or Hey, Jude but what do I care. My hero coming through again, right? Does the dirty deeds and the driving so I don't have to. Goodness of his heart.

So why do I feel like I'm forcing him?

We're quiet after that. I turn up the radio, and we see town.

Well, no, we don't. We see the diner. My diner, the one that used to radiate a sickly but welcoming yellow down onto the highway. It's dark, though. I have him pull around back, and we have a looksee.

Strangest things trigger memories. I kick a piece of loose asphalt in the parking lot and I remember doing the same thing. A year ago, following the cowboy out.

I'm not an idiot. I did the research, but it's funny how little ghost towns don't get mentioned in the news. Even when the ghosts are still living.

We go in the back door, where the kitchen used to be. I remember the chaos back there. After two years of loyal and only occasionally stoned waitressing, I was once again called upon to serve. Serve the people running from the rain and the mud. They knew how close behind the storm was, but some of them stopped to eat, anyway.

Like the cowboy. All he asked for was coffee. And he didn't drink it, he just smiled at me and he said some words and I couldn't help but follow. You watch the world go by long enough, you'll believe anything. Or you'll convince yourself you believe something because you don't want to admit that it's just been a long time since the last loser. Or a vampire breaks your will. Can't say I know which of those happened.

The diner is on high ground, but it looks like the flood went through. The kitchen is covered in mud and worse, and I can't even smell the grease I could never get out of my clothes. Nature's a bitch, but I guess she can scrub. I'm looking at a knife, idly, when I realize we're not alone. Well, he realizes, and I feel him tense behind me.

"Don't look," he says. Stupid boy. Of course I look. I move. And the thing pounces on me. I recognize the face, even bloated by floodwater and left to dry out and rot. Bridget. Well, I have help from her nametag, right before it gouges into my eye.

"Stop," I grunt, and that's the magic word that's supposed to do everything. No means no when you're backing it with a tidal wave of the Blood. But Bridget's blood doesn't move in turn, and I'm distracted long enough for her to tangle teeth in my shoulder. I scream, and then I shove an elbow into her chest. Bye-bye, ribs. And then he's there, ripping her off of me, her teeth and clots of my blood scattering across the kitchen.

I spare him a glance.

"Kindred?"

"No kin of mine."

He's right. The yellow-eyed bitch isn't one of us. I'd thought a Haunt, maybe, disfigured by poison blood, but a vampire would have grown back its ribs. So who the fuck is this bitch?

Which I make the mistake of asking out loud.

"I'm your future, Jordan." The hissing, shredded voice catches me off-guard. And then I realize the rotting thing is reading my mind. So I think of the worst thing I can. For the first time, I'm glad I took Mom to the emergency room instead of watching her go out on the couch. Oh, no, that's better. I fantasize about that. Just letting the old hag die and burning the trailer down around us...

...and wouldn't you know, it's the burning image that upsets the Bridget-thing. She freaks, pulls out of my head, but my hero's across the room in a flash. He twists her neck off, splatters the head against the wall. The yellow eyes squish and I don't want to think how much the thick, black blood looks like mine.

I reach down to taste it, anyway. Just to catch a glimpse of what attacked me, what bit me, what decided it needed to wear poor old Bridget's face. The stuff burns my tongue. Tastes like wet cigarette ashes. And I get a glimmer. I see the rain. I see myself, through Bridget's eyes, through Bridget's fear and envy as I slip out after the cowboy. I see her spying, watching his mouth work down my neck in the parking lot and the beating rain. I hear Bridget humming to herself. Like with him, I can't make out the tune. Irish or country something, I think. Something predictable. Something she might have sung to comfort me, when I actually did miss Mom.

I actually *do*. God.

"Fuck," says my hero. "Any more, you think?"

I tell him no. And I lead him out to the car. I kiss his cheek.

"We're safe," I say, and he nods.

I don't know if he believes me. But I don't think he hears their singing like I can.

We bunk at a farmhouse, and I hear it all through the daylight. In my daydreams, there's something sitting on my chest. It pushes and it squishes and it drives the blood from me and it looks like Mom.

All that's two nights back, and I haven't told the hero a thing. He's asleep, and the sun's rising. I'll send this come nightfall. You know where to find me, and you know what I want.

Who was the cowboy, V?

Jordan

Nowhere, Louisiana

August 2006



KING RAT

He wasn't supposed to be real. Even the Lord Priscus told me he wasn't real. But here he is, knee-deep in run-off, with a sheet of sluicing rainwater coming down on him through a crack in the ceiling of a concrete drainage tunnel.

I'm crouched down here, leaning back on my palms in the dark, where I landed after tumbling off a low concrete wall. Brown, shit-smelling water is up to my armpits. A skin of half-rotten leaves clings to the top of the water, to my clothes, and to the skin of the vampire standing over me.

His nose is gone. Split down the middle and shriveled away to nothing. The open nostrils behind it are dried, cracked, black.

His eyes are sunken, jaundiced yellow, and ringed by swollen pink skin. He looks like he's been crying. The crusted mud on his face is streaked with thinner patches of watery filth. It looks like somebody emptied a coffee filter onto his face.

His lips are corpse-white, peeling, dotted with open sores the color of pus. A flap of loose skin sticks his bottom lip to one of his long, brown fangs. His jaw is swiveled off to one side, like my brother used to do when he was pissed off and thinking of some way to punish me.

I can't see his ears or his hair, if they're even there, because he's wearing a blue, hooded sweat-shirt under a soaked and stitched-up Army jacket. His long neck stretches out behind a ruined ring-tee. His hands, each one on an opposite wall of the narrow tunnel, are red-tipped, wrapped in fingerless wool gloves. Two of the fingers on his left hand are taped together. His nails are painted black. He's wearing lots of rings.

His posture says, "I'm sick of waiting." He's staring at me.

"No threat," I say. Some 'banger told me to say that, once, if somebody pulls up their shirt to show me their gat. I'm hoping this bloodsucker – who I figure must be King Rat – knows the custom.

He takes one hand off the tunnel wall and holds his wrist up in front of his face. Shaking his sleeve down, he reveals a big, outdoorsman's style watch, checks the time, and then leans back on his heels. He folds his arms across his chest.

"I'm trespassing," I say. It's true, but I'm not sure why I say it. The rainwater coming down through the cracked ceiling is splashing overflow into my nose and mouth, and I'm becoming aware of just how much it smells and tastes like wet shoes with shit on the bottom. "Sorry about that."

"Yeah," he finally says. It doesn't come out like a monster's voice, he just sounds like an ordinary person. But the more he talks, the more I realize his accent is like someone with a bandaged nose. "Why is that?"

"I, uh," I don't want to come across as helpless as I feel, but I've fucked that up already. "I didn't know how else to get in contact with you."

"But why?" he asks again, a little louder, like I'm foreign.

"I'm from uptown. I don't really know anybody down here who knew you for real."

"No. Why are you down here? What do you want?"

Oh. Right. I feel like an idiot. "Can I stand up?"

"Answer me first."

"I wanted to talk to you. You know. To see if you were real."

"You want something."

"I just want to talk."

"Okay," he says. What he means is, *you're lying*.

"Really. What I want is to talk to you. Just talk. To cut through—" I want to say, "to cut through the bullshit," but is that going to sound like I think he's bullshit, or his reputation is bullshit, or that people have been talking shit about him?

He raises his eyebrows at me. No hair there. Just a movement of naked skin. He's asking me.

"To get to the truth," I say.

"Oh yeah?"

I muster up some balls so this part will sound like I mean it, because I do mean it. I say, "Yeah."

He looks at me for a while yet, then looks back down the tunnel behind him, and up the length of tunnel I just came through. "Okay, get up. You're sitting in rainy shit."

I search around under the water with my hands, trying to find something less slick to brace myself on. There's no way, it turns out, to get my feet under me and stand up without splashing around in more filth. When I get on my feet, there are two more people standing here with us.

Both of them are bald, with black spiny stubble on their skulls. Both of them have big, yellow-green eyes and long fingers. Both of them have mouths that are too wide and straight, needle-like fangs. I don't know where they came from, but it's possible they've been here the whole time. It seems pretty clear that what I heard about the so-called Rat King was wrong – it's all Haunts down here.

Back on my feet, I try to pretend like it's no big deal that these two... creatures... appeared from nowhere. They're body language doesn't say, "Surprise, got you!" as much as it says, "What the hell is this guy up to?" I paw through my stuff, to see if anything's missing or broken.

"I broke my recorder, I think."

The first guy, who I thought was King Rat, looks me up and down. "Recorder?" he asks.

"Audio recorder," I say.

"Just as well."

"So," I say. I have nothing at all to follow that with.

"Reporter?" he asks.

"No," I say, probably sounding too much like I've put an unspoken, "what're you, crazy?" on the end of that. I continue with, "No, I'm not a reporter. I'm just trying to, I mean, I'm doing research. For the city."

"The city?"

"The court. Well, really, just my landlord. Paying the red rent," I say. The look he gives me back makes me realize that he probably doesn't spend enough time at court – or with other Kindred – to know about red rents and landlords. "I'm Kindred."

"We know," he says. "Swwhy you don't want to go trespassing like that. Smelled you coming, and almost ran you down. Don't want to surprise us like that. You're gonna get hurt."

I nod. "Sorry. Really. I wasn't sure what else to do."

"You spend a lot of time trespassing for re-search? To pay the rent?"

I smile, too much. "No. Just this one time. I came looking for, uh, to check out rumors. You know. See what's real."

"Yeah, you mentioned that. The truth. What's that mean?"

"People talk. Rumors about you guys."

"We hear some of that."

"Like the Rat King?"

"You mean the fifty rats with their tails all tangled up so they grow into one big thing, or you mean me?"

"I mean you, I guess" I say.

"I'm real."

"Yeah."

"So you're done?"

"My landlord, he sent me down here 'cause he wants to know about Lords in the city. Rumor was you were one—" I'm lucky he cuts me off before I say something stupid, like "but obviously you're not."

"I am," says the Rat King. "But I don't know who the fuck you are, or why you're really here, or why you think I should tell you anything about me."

"Yes. That's all true, you don't know me. What can I do to show you that I'm not here to fuck with you?" I ask.

One of the Haunts (I think they're Haunts) looks away and says, "No threat." He laughs into his fist.

"Nothing tonight. You go away and maybe I'll feel like talking to you later, when I have some sense of who you are, and maybe you have some idea why it is that I don't go to fucking 'court,'" he waves me away.

At least one of the Haunts – the one behind me – is gone already by this point. When I look back where the Rat King was, he's gone too. There's just that one, the joker, standing there behind the patch of light coming down with the rainwater, laughing at me.

I get back to the mouth of the drainage tunnel smelling like shit and pond water, and it's half a year before I hear from the Rat King or his posse again.

AGENTS OF THE KING

The next six months, I see rats everywhere. I catch them on garbage cans at the mouths of alleys, and they don't run off. I see them under dumpsters, watching me go by. I spot one at the window of a coffee shop I go to, looking at me through the glass.



I don't know how much of it is coincidence. I don't know how many of them – if any – work for the Rat King. All I know is that his name? It works.

SET STRAIGHT

"It's King Rat," comes a voice from... I don't know. Where the fuck did that come from?

"What?" I say, like a fool, in the direction of an abandoned car, a streetlight, and a smashed newspaper box.

I swear, he was not there a second ago, but the laughing Haunt is in the passenger seat of the abandoned car when he says, "We don't say 'Rat King.' We say 'King Rat.'"

"You scared the fuck out of me," I say, walking over to him. I started carrying a knife the size of my hand about four months ago. "Are you just here to mess with me?"

"No," he says. He sounds like an old man whose throat has been ruined by smoke. "I'm here to have you tell me what you want."

"Who's asking?"

"The King," says the Haunt.

I nod. "All right. I just want a little background, if he's willing to share it. My lord wants to know about Ventrue in the city. Who is whose sire, that sort of thing. He was at least a little surprised to find out that, uh, King Rat is real."

"Good," says the Haunt.

"He was also surprised to find out that he's a Lord." When I say it, I realize that too much of my landlord's attitude has come through with it. The implication is that we think King Rat's full of shit when he says he's Ventrue. I didn't want to ask it this way, but my landlord made me do it. Made me.

"That's nice," says the Haunt. He thinks I'm an idiot in the employ of an asshole.

"Is he really a Lord?" I ask.

"Yeah."

I've never tried this on another one of us, but it's what my landlord wants. I look him in the eye. "Be honest," I say to him, pushing the idea out there like I'm trying to push an apology past my pride.

"He's a Lord," says the Haunt. His eyes are a kind of green that people's eyes don't get. He looks like something that should live in a cave. Then he snaps out of it and we both realize: It worked. He said it because I told him to. "Now get the fuck out of here. And don't ever do that shit again."

"I'll hear from you?" I ask as I back away.

The Haunt doesn't say anything. The car is empty.

THE NEWS

Something like a month later, I notice an article in the local paper. "Area Child Goes Missing Near Derelict Industrial Park." There's a photo. In the background, past the waist-high weeds, is King Rat's tunnel.



THE LORD OF RATS

"I'll talk to you, a little bit," King Rat says to me through a chain-link fence, "but you don't ever come back to my ground. You understand?"

"I do," I say.

"Not in the tunnel. Not to the tunnel. Not near the tunnel. If I ever want to see you in there again, I'll come and get you," he says. I picture him coming and getting me. "You understand?"

"Yes," I say.

"All right, then. Come over here." He waves me past the fence and into the smashed-asphalt parking lot behind a row of burnt-out storefronts. Nearby, it occurs to me, are enough low-rent storefronts with cheap restaurants in them to house a whole lot of rats. The few of them that are open this late are bright white. Everything else is the color of asphalt, the color of concrete, or tinted the orange of sodium streetlamps.

It's only now that I realize one of King Rat's posse is walking behind me.

We stop between a couple of dumpsters, where a brick wall has been given a clown-like look with layer after layer of big, bright bubble letters. I can't tell what they spell. King Rat and I are standing in one circle of glowing sickly orange that bends up the wall. The one Haunt that I can see is standing in the shaft of fluttering light that cuts between the dumpsters. He is behind me.

This Haunt isn't the joker I talked to in the car. He can't be far away, though.

"You armed?" asks King Rat.

I look from King Rat to the Haunt behind me, back to King Rat. "Yeah."

"That's all right," King Rat says. "We got you outnumbered." The light that falls on his face makes weird shadows where his nose should be. I can't see his eyes beneath the shadows cast off his naked brow. He's cleaner this time, but not exactly clean.

"Is it all right if I record this?" I ask.

"No," he says. "Just talk." He pushes his hood down, and I see that on his head is the same stiff, black stubble that his Nosferatu posse wears. "First thing: Why are we having this conversation?"

"My landlords wants –"

"You said that. Why does your landlord want to know what he wants to know?"

"Honestly, I think it's either curiosity or paranoia. Somebody above him has him and me and I don't know who else, but others, collecting this kind of stuff."

"Listen, I want you to answer me honestly, all right? Whatever I ask you, you tell me the truth."

I know what he's doing. I don't plan on lying to him, and I don't want him to think I *want* to lie, either. I'd rather just make him comfortable, then make him talk, and then get out of here. I'm not

sure how to tell my brain to just go along with his lordly words, but I try. "Okay," I say.

Once he realizes that I don't know of any sinister plans for this information, King Rat relaxes enough that we manage to get a bit of a rapport going. It occurs to me later that we should be more worried that we don't know who's going to read all this, but in the moment we both just feel relieved that we're not a part of some assassination plot or something. On some level, we all want to get a chance to talk anyway.

His story, in his opinion anyway, isn't so strange. He seems bored by it. The best I can get out of him is the likes of, "Pretty much the typical sorry street youth for the age," and, "I've never had money, and I don't think I'd like what I'd have to do to get it."

"I'm my own master," he says, "which is maybe more than the Prince can say. More than you can say, and you consider yourself a Lord." We don't talk about it, but it seems clear to me that he's the master of these Haunts, too. This makes him like a chieftain or the leader of some tiny gang.

"Do you feel more at home with the Haunts?" I ask him.

"What, because of this?" he says, pointing at his face. "Medicine hasn't always been as good as it is now. Most of those Kindred at court wouldn't be able to get past this kind of shit. Wouldn't *want* to. They'd want to use it against me. Fuck them. I'm not wasting my time with that. The politicians and the courtiers and the posers invent all these little things they can triumph over – parties and etiquette and fashion. I don't care about pageants. I have books and time and food. I get by."

"I'll tell you what, though," he says, just when I think he's done. "I've learned a lot from these guys. I don't think you can do the stuff that these guys have showed me how to do. I've been in most of the houses in this neighborhood."

"Is that because you told –" I stop myself. "Let me ask this another way. Is it an exchange? Have you taught them stuff, too?"

He smiles, which pulls on the peeling skin on his lips. "Next question."

It starts to show through, now. On whatever level, he's still a Ventrue. He's not surrendering an advantage he doesn't have to, and the Haunts haven't made him have to.

"What about the name?" I ask.

"Rat King? King Rat? I didn't make it up, but I'm not too modest to use that shit if people are going to give it away for free. People surrender power all the time. I make my haven out of the stuff people give up, or leave out, or forget about, and it's not the hole you think it is. Enough people are petty and pathetic that I live like a king off them. It's basically like collecting a tax from the assholes above. That's pretty lordly, isn't it?"

"I have to ask, then," I say. "The rats? Is that just part of the title?"

"No, they're all right," he says. "They're a tool, like anything else. I'll bet I hear about things your landlord doesn't. They don't lie or betray, though. They don't want the same things I want, so we never fight. That's a big attraction."

"You feed on them, too?" I ask. When I hear myself, I feel like I'm asking the sales guy about features on my new appliance.

"I did," he says. "... don't anymore. I'll tell you that a stray dog in the right neighborhood can lure prey away from the herd, though. Most people will

go places they wouldn't if they weren't chasing their dog in there."

I let that subject rot on the vine for a minute. When I open my mouth to ask another question, he stops me.

"That's enough. Now you answer *my* questions," King Rat says. "Like you promised."

"Oh, shit," I say. By the time I realize that he and the Haunt have disappeared during a flicker in the lights, it's starting to sink in: I don't know what I've told him, or about whom.

NOTES FROM THE DEAD GIRL: INVESTIGATIONS

I don't know who the **Perfecti** are or were - I looked on-line and found some reference to Catharism, Manichaeism, Gnostic bullshit. Kind of a pseudo-Christian perfected state, the ability to forestall reincarnation by achieving... I don't know, enlightenment? Perfection? Sounds Buddhist to me, but what do I know? I have a Masters in Business Administration.

Looking up the identities of the dead families wasn't difficult, but it wasn't very illuminating. No common themes that I can discern. Girls are all of varying ages. Families are all white except for the last one, who (as it turns out) were light-skinned blacks. Varying economic brackets. No real commonality to the killings...

Jesus, I hesitate to mention this, but I feel like I have to. It's ridiculous, I get that. You'll think it's crazy, but even though we've never met in person and I don't really know anything about you (except what Hardaiken tells me), this seems important.

I don't dream. I don't know if others of our kind do. But when morning comes, I die again. That's just how it feels. The blood that seems alive in my body goes inert; it's like, I don't know, slipping underneath the surface of a cold lake and giving in to the chill and the water and the endless black.

But lately, after the darkness takes me...

I dream. I see a light, and I dream. And I feel pale hands reaching for me. I can see them, sometimes, and I can see through them, too. Sometimes they're barely arms at all, other times just wisps of living mist or like the ghostly arms of a fucking squid or something.

They reach for me again and again and I can't move - I feel a tremendous weight sitting on my chest, like the pressures of Death Himself - but just as they're almost upon me, there's this laugh. A girl's laugh, a little girl's laugh. That kind of twinkling titter, half-human, half the sound of wind chimes.

And then I see her: a little girl in a plain brown dress with a black ribbon in her hair. Her hands are red with blood. Bits of... something dangle from beneath her fingernails.

When she shows, the hands flee. They recoil into the shadows once more.



NOTES FROM THE DEAD GIRL, V

Six daughters, from between the ages of six and sixteen. One mother, pregnant with another child – probably a girl. One father, older than the mother by damn near ten years.

All of them, stuffed into a minivan turned cock-eyed on the goddamn Interstate. Their grave, a gray family car. Each killed with a blade or fingernail dragged across the neck, their heads tilted so that the back of the skull reaches the middle of the spine. And it has drawn national attention.

Hardaiken is flipping shit, or so the story goes. Again, not like I'm meeting with him anymore. Guess he doesn't think me important enough, just some young jack with nothing to contribute. Pitor says he's in the "War Room," with all the First Estate bigwigs. Fine. I didn't even know we had a "War Room."

This time, no writing on yellow paper. You could see the note yourself just by checking out the front page of any rag, from USA Today to the Bumblefuck Times.

She painted it on the hood of the car. All that blood. All those flies.

Just in case you don't have a newspaper subscription or know how to get to Flickr (or what Flickr even is), here's a Polaroid from Pitor's (well, Hardaiken's) camera.

This was written by a Shadow Herald for the Prince of Omaha, earlier this year. The Prince sent it to me when I mentioned your name.

The Lord of Paradise Lake

In a double-wide mobile home, about twenty minutes outside Omaha, the Lord of Paradise Lake swishes Miller High Life around in his mouth and then spits it out into a coffee can next to a plastic wastebasket full of dead birds. Piled up in there, they look like rags wadded up around forked twigs and little yellow technical pen nibs – but of course it's all feet and beaks. The smell, and the stirring, scouting black horseflies, don't seem to distract the king of this castle, though. He adjusts the cap on his head, its brim gone bent and floppy from abuse, and settles back in his plush recliner, waiting for our interview to begin.

His name is Luke. I heard he was out here from a fringe ghoul who moved into the city after losing popularity with Luke's clique. It had something to do with money, as near as I can tell, though this ghoul told me, "Luke felt disrespected, and there's no talking to him after that."

Luke's a young Lord. Looking at him, I'd figure he was Embraced in his early twenties. In however many years since, he hasn't gone too far. When I interview him, it's in a double-wide mobile home on a rise in the center of a trailer community called Paradise Lake. Word is, Luke lived less than ten miles from here, in a similar park, until he joined the Danse.

Since then, Luke has expanded his domain less through turf, and more through population. The ghoul I talked to – and who pointed me at the right blood doll to pinch to get access to Luke – claimed the Lord has three childer and close to a dozen ghouls between them. Sloppy. Beyond that, Luke's got his fingers in the pots of many of the kine living around him. Maybe too many.

The gray whales of Paradise Lake have an uncounted number of tapped vessels in their bellies. Rumor has it that Luke's been in every trailer, bitten every girl. It might not be out of line to call the whole park Luke's herd, corralled inside a cinderblock fence like cows.

Let us hope. Let us hope they are like cows, seeing the wrangler every day but never really understanding who he is or where he goes when he's not tending the herd. The living people of Paradise Lake are right on the line. They almost know too much. The truth is right there, and the Masquerade between Luke and his flock is almost paper-thin. If a motivated Invictus knight were to see this place, Luke could be in big trouble.

But there's no Invictus out here at Paradise Lake. Aside from the Lancea Sanctum, Luke doesn't seem to have heard much about Omaha's covenants, and those covenants certainly don't have any power over his little walled village.

And woe to whatever covenant Kindred who tries

to come out here and set Luke straight. As you'll see, Luke's brood are not so impressive by any standards the First Estate would be likely to set. Indeed, Luke is a joke to those Kindred in Omaha who even know his name – but those Kindred are dangerously short-sighted. Luke is ignorant, but he is not a fool. Luke is lazy, possibly drained from siring so many childer so quickly, but he is not without ambition. Luke wants things to be easy, but he is not afraid to kill to keep things the way he likes them.

Above all else, what scared me about Luke was his devotion to his people, from his absentee sire to his chummy childer to his suckling ghouls. I genuinely believe Luke would die to protect these creatures. He would throw away the centuries ahead of him to ensure his people had a chance for themselves.

All that's missing is the starter switch. Get Luke riled, and he could be a dangerous and useful instrument. The most obvious potential igniter must be Luke's sire, but I suspect any threat to Paradise Lake would suffice. If such a threat is to be mounted, I want no part of it.

I should note that I looked Luke over during the whole night I was out there, watched his lights, and at no point was he lying to me.

Begin Dictation

Questioner: You know why I wanted to meet you?

Luke: Because the boss of Omaha–

Q: The Prince.

Luke: Yeah, okay. The Prince wants to know what we're up to out here.

Q: You know how he heard about you?

Luke: No. I mean, no. You know. Word spreads.

Q: You know how I found you?

Luke: Yeah. You talked to [ghoul's name].

Q: That's right.

Luke: I have people. We're not fucking hillbillies out here. You know? I mean, we're not the Mob or big-time gang-bangers, but I know how things work in town.

Q: How does that look from out here? How do things work in the city?

Luke: The Prince is at the top – good title, by the way, Prince – and he gives people little yards, you know, turf that they take care of. You watch over your own. Lieutenants.

Q: Do you think of yourself as being a part of that? Is this your turf?

Luke: Sure it is. I didn't get it from the Prince, but this is mine. And he fucking knows it, too, or he wouldn't have to send you out here. He'd already know what was up. But this is mine and that's his.

Q: So you're outside the Prince's jurisdiction?

Luke: Hell yes, I am. I mean, come on, I know that he could come down here and probably beat my ass and take this shit if he wanted to, but he ain't done it yet and he didn't never do it

before I got here, so I doubt he gives much of a fuck about what happens out here. Besides, he's not going to find somebody better than me to watch over this place. So if he comes in here and takes me out, he's not doing himself any favors.

Q: But the Prince isn't your superior?

Luke: You're not going to get an answer you're going to like. You can't put it that neat. I mean, obviously, this guy's got a ton of people – uh, Kindreds and ghouls and everything – who report to him and could come out here and fuck my shit up. And I swear, it'd cost him more than he thinks to do that, but I'm not stupid. Me and my boys might get out of here, but we're not going to be able to stay here if twenty guys unload out of a truck and burn this place down, are we? We know that.

So it's like, he's bigger and tougher than us, sure. But he's got, like, these people that report to him? We don't do that. I haven't met him. I *don't* report to him. You – *you're* the first guy of his, actually *of his*, that's been out here. I haven't met anyone face to face.

Q: All right. Can we talk a bit about... your Embrace? Your sire? It's strange for us to not know about a fellow Ventrue's lineage.

Luke: Oh, right. *[Laughs.]* Okay.

Q: What?

Luke: That name you all use. It's hilarious, but I didn't hear about that name, Ventrue, for like ten years or something, until some city ghoul mentioned it.

Q: Your sire didn't tell you?

Luke: No, man. He said he was a Lord, that he'd make me a Lord. That we were, like, a Lordly family. Like nobility. You know. Royal.

Q: But he didn't tell you the family name?

Luke: He did. I mean, he told me *our* family name, and that he was like a duke or something from this other city. He's out, like, on missions for his Prince and when he comes back this way we'll be able to say who we are and he'll get his titles back.

Q: So he's coming back?

Luke: Yeah, he's coming back! And when he does it's going to be awesome.

Q: What was the family name he gave you?

Luke: *[Shakes his head.]* No, I can't tell you that.

Q: Maybe I know it.

Luke: No. I'm not going to tell you. That's ours.

[He looks me right in the eye, suddenly very serious.]

Luke: That's just for us.

Q: Okay. Can we talk about when you met him? About your Embrace?

Luke: Okay.

Q: When did you first meet him?

Luke: Uh, that was... the summer of '92. '93? Yeah, summer of '93.

Q: 1993?

Luke: Yeah.

Q: And you... took the Blood...



Luke: That summer.

Q: That same summer?

Luke: Yeah. I remember Kurt was going back to school the next day. Tech college. He's a mechanic.

Q: Kurt's one of your childer, now?

Luke: I guess, yeah. He's a Lord now, yeah. He's one of my boys.

Q: How did you meet your sire?

Luke: At a diner, some greasy spoon place, out by the highway. I don't think I should really say too much.

Q: This was by chance?

Luke: No. Well, I mean, I think it was sort of meant to happen, you know, but no. I went out there to close a deal.

Q: Drugs?

[Luke looks at me suspiciously now. I think he's going to ask me if I'm wearing a wire.]

Luke: Is the Prince a dealer?

Q: No.

Luke: You mean, not personally.

Q: Right.

Luke: He's got people, though... right? I mean... this isn't about cutting into his market, right? Because I sure didn't know about any Prince or any fucking vampires back then.

Q: No. It's all right.

Luke: Yeah. Yeah, we were cooking meth back then. And I was out at a truck stop to make some sales.

Q: Do you still do that?

Luke: I don't, but we have people who do, yeah. Not all of my ghoul's come for B. You know.

Q: Your sire was buying?

Luke: No. I mean, yeah, but I didn't know that. It wasn't like a pre-arranged thing. He came up to me, asked if I was selling, and we just kind of talked for a while. Shot the shit. You know.

Q: How long after that did he tell you about us?

Luke: The Prince?

Q: Kindred.

Luke: That night.

Q: That same night?

Luke: Yeah. He showed me. He had this girl in his truck, and we... *[He takes another mouthful of High Life, and spits it into the coffee can.]* He took a hit off her, and I took a hit off him.

Q: You were his ghoul?

Luke: For a little while, yeah.

Q: How long until your Embrace?

Luke: What? A couple of weeks? June to August, I think.

Q: And what was that like?

Luke: You know. A little scary. At first.

Q: What I mean is, how did he do it? How did he Embrace you?

[Luke looks at me with that same suspicion.]

Luke: You ever go down on girls?

[I'm trying to figure out how to respond to this, when he continues.]

Luke: That's a fucking thing to ask, isn't it? A little personal?

Q: Okay.

Luke: Tell me what it's like when you piss.

Q: We can move on if you—

Luke: It's just that it's fucking rude, man. It's a little personal. It's a little fucking personal, right?

Q: Yes it is.

Luke: It's crass.

Q: Yes, I guess it is.

Luke: I mean, I don't know you. I don't know who you are. You go into somebody's house and you ask that sort of question? Some stuff just isn't for company, you know? Manners, man.

Q: I'm sorry.

Luke: Okay, then.

[I turn to a new page at this point, and wait for him to settle down. It's quiet enough now that I can hear the birdcage in the laundry room, just past the kitchen. Somewhere outside, a car crunches over gravel. Most of Paradise Lake is asleep.]

Q: Can I ask you about the other, uh, the other Lords here?

Luke: Sure.

Q: How many of you are there?

Luke: Four of us. Me and my three guys.

Q: You sired them all?

Luke: I was the first of us, yeah. I, what, turned them.

Q: When was this?

Luke: Look, I know there's like a secret code, right? Like, ah, a deal that we don't talk about us and who we are, right?

Q: The Masquerade.

Luke: Right. I don't want to be too specific, 'cause folks in the neighborhood don't all know all, and not all of my guys know everything, and I'm not going to go telling you and your boss what's what with me and my guys, you know? So, like, some of these kinds of details are going to stay between me and my guys.

Q: This is secret information?

Luke: Not this, really. But I don't want to start talking about exactly how many people we've got and where they are and how old they are, and that shit, 'cause I know that age stuff is really important to you guys.

Q: That's all right. The Prince, as a Ventrué, is particularly curious, though, to know how many Ventrué — how many Lords — are in the area. Really, he's curious to know how many relatives are around, and whose childer they are.

Luke: Sure.

Q: So you can tell me, at least, that you're their sire?

Luke: Yeah.

Q: All three of them?

Luke: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell me, roughly, how old they all are? As Kindred?

Luke: Well... I made Keith a Lord in, like, '96. Kurt and Eric were the summer after that.

Q: So about ten years ago, now.

Luke: Shit. Yeah, I guess. Shit, it doesn't feel like it was that long ago.

Q: That's how it is.

Luke: Really?

Q: Yes. For a lot of us.

Luke: Huh.

[Luke gets distant here for a few minutes, and I let him stew for a while.]

Q: When's your sire coming back?

Luke: What?

Q: I'm sorry. I asked, if it's been ten years already, do you know when your sire is coming back?

Luke: No.

Q: All right. Can I-

Luke: He warned me that things go slower for Kindreds. That it would be something that felt like a long time for living people.

Q: All right.

Luke: So this is, like, nothing, I guess.

Q: Okay.

Luke: It's weird to think, though.

Q: Do you still have any living relatives?

Luke: Cousins, uncles, I guess.

Q: But your immediate family-

Luke: Yeah, none of them. I heard you'd probably ask. But they don't know. Mom died years ago, when I was like ten. My old man died a little bit after.

Q: After your mother?

Luke: After I changed.

[I let that sit for a moment, but he doesn't elaborate.]

Q: Do you see yourself as a father to your childer? To Keith and Eric and-

Luke: No way. I knew these guys when we were in high school, you know? This doesn't change any of that. We're basically the same guys, you know. Maybe it's a little like that with some of the ghouls, but they're more like little brothers or neighborhood kids. Customers. That sort of thing.

You know what it is, with me and my guys, is it's like I'm a Senior and they're Sophomores.

Q: Okay.

Luke: So, like, I'm just a couple of years ahead of them, is all.

Q: But are you their superior? Do you have a title that they don't? Are you their boss?

Luke: No, it's not like that. It's like... you ever read that book in school, *Lord of the Flies*?

Q: Yeah.

Luke: Okay, think of that. You know the conch?

Q: Sure.

Luke: I figure that's where they got it all fucked up. I mean, they're not just kids, but they're people. You can't stop them from fighting over who's going to get to call the shots. Of course they're going to fight with each other and piss each other off, right? I

mean, that's people. That's a given. But the big mistake they made was picking up that fucking conch. It's like, "Nice shell, kids, but keep your damned mouth shut about it, alright?"

Q: I don't understand.

Luke: The shell, it's like a symbol for order and leadership, right? I mean, in symbolism or whatever, but also actually *on* the island, to the kids and everybody. To them, it symbolizes power. Authority. Whoever has the conch is the boss. Right?

Q: Okay.

Luke: What a fucking mistake that is. I mean, clearly, it doesn't turn out too well for them, does it? Gets Piggy killed. Gets Ralph fucking attacked. The big kids come down looking for the conch so they can take over and be rulers and have power. They think they can prove it, prove that they have power, by waving the conch around. All they have to do to take over is get their hands on a stupid shell? That's fucking crazy.

None of that would have been possible if they hadn't made up all that bullshit about the shell. Why give your power away like that? Why put it into some worthless thing, some, like, trophy or symbol? It's like, if you put your money in a safe, and that safe's not bolted down, people can just steal the fucking safe, you know?

The thing to do is to keep your money *on* you, on your person, in your fucking pockets. All the time. All the time. If anybody wants what you got, they have to go through you. They *have* to face you and be willing to put you down. Put you down and keep you down.

What Ralph should've done, I say, is make himself the conch. It sounds crazy, right? I know it does. It's like, "Be the conch!" But this makes sense. Instead of saying, "I got the conch, so listen up," he should've said, "I am the leader, and whatever I say goes. Wherever I stand is the motherfucking capitol. So if you want your way, your idea, to be the way things go, you've got to convince me to say it. You have to convince me."

[He nods for a while here, looking at me. When I don't say anything, he finally goes on.]

Luke: I tell this to my guys all the time. So there isn't anything they can take from me that's going to make me less than I am. There isn't anything they can steal, that they can *[he knocks empty bottles and a can of spray deodorant around on the TV tray]* just fucking grab off the nightstand, you know, and then have power. I don't make myself vulnerable like that.

This way, see, the idea never even gets in their heads. I mean, what're they going to do without me? I'm the one that other people listen to. I'm the one that people know, the one they call. The one, you know, sure, that they fear. Don't even give them a chance to worry about whether somebody else should be calling the shots. Don't even worry about, you know, whether they could do better.

Q: You tell them this?

Luke: I tell them... Yeah. I mean, you know. I've told them about, like, that lesson about Ralph and the shell. About what's in that book, and how they should read it. I don't know if they did or not, but you know, I tell them.

And, you know, I also tell a little bit about what a hassle it is when Skit and whoever comes looking for money or a quick hit [of blood], or whatever. I let them know that it's sometimes kind of a drag to be the guy who has to hear people out, and know what's up, and hear everyone bitch and complain. That's the other thing, I think, that keeps them from wanting too much.

Power, I guess, sounds great to a lot of people, but they don't think about what it really is. Like, the President has all this power, supposedly, but he's got fucking meetings, and he's got to dress this way and talk that way, and he doesn't really have that much control over his life. You know? He's got to fucking do whatever will get him voted in. So, yeah, he can order air strikes and shit, but it's not that they're free! It's not like he doesn't have to pay for those. It's not like he doesn't get chewed out for that shit.

Q: It's hard.

Luke: Yeah, it's hard! That's what I think my boys get, which is why we're so tight and they're going to do just fine when my sire comes back: They're lucky not to have all these expectations, all this shit sort of hanging over them. By being good to me, by being my buds, you know, they get a sweet deal. I get to have them around, and sort of watching my back, and they get to enjoy some of the, uh, I guess perks, without all the fucking hassles.

Q: Responsibility.

Luke: Right. Yeah, man, exactly. Responsibility. It's like, I can tell one of these guys to, I don't know, mow the lawn or whatever, and

they got to do it! And sometimes I don't want to give them the shit jobs, 'cause I want them to like me, but that shit's got to get done. And I ain't going to do it! Not if they want to be hanging out in here with me, you know? Then I'm not going to get stuck doing it.

[He's smiling to himself now, nodding his head, until his gaze slides toward the kitchen end of the trailer. Birds squeak. His smile fades, but he keeps gently nodding to himself a bit.]

Luke: I'll tell you what, though. I have a lot more respect for my old man, now. I mean, my father. You know. Not my sire. My biological father. He was a prick. But he couldn't have been too happy about being a prick, either, you know?

He didn't know how to deal with power. He had all this power over his little kid, felt all big and like he had to be somebody's old man, but it's not like that's the only way to do it. He probably just learned from his old man, and that's how it goes. Down the line. Fathers and sons. Down the line.

Q: Your sire wasn't like that?

Luke: No, man. I mean, you spend eighteen, twenty years with somebody, you're going to see how big an asshole they can be, and I only hung out with my sire for, like, not even a year. So I'm sure he can be a dick. We all can. But he's much cooler, more easygoing.

I don't know if it comes more naturally to him than it did to my old man, or if he just worked harder at it, or what. Part of it, though, is that my sire and me could be, like, friends. It wasn't all, "I'm your father and I have to act this certain way," or any of that bullshit. We could just hang out.

Q: So you take after your sire more than your father?

Luke: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Definitely.



NOTES FROM THE DEAD GIRL, VI

Fuck you, Hardaiken! He's going to pay for this shit. He seems to know you - do you know him? I beg of you, tell me where he is. Tell me how to find him, how to lay waste to his gutter-fuck haven. I want to cut out his tongue and feed it back to him and ...

Goddamnit. I'm usually much better than this. Everybody says I have a nice demeanor, mild. But sometimes, sometimes I get angry. And I feel that Thing inside me just clawing at my innards to climb out and get free.

Hardaiken, he knew what he was doing when he sent me to that water tower, didn't he? "The next murder scene," he said. Over the phone, too; I haven't heard from him in months, and now I get a call direct? Of course I'm going to listen. He's the fucking Man with the Plan, the goddamn Shire Reeve. But he had to know what I'd find, had to know that the scene was already in-play, that I'd hurry over there and see it as it was unfolding.

It was her. The little girl from my dreams. Brown dress - made brown by so much blood, all dry and discolored - and the black velvet bow in her matted hair. She was... doing something with the corpse of another little girl, a girl of the same height and age, but this one was blonde, fat-cheeked. She was propping her up in the lap of her faceless mother when I showed up.

It... it happened so fast. She hissed. Leapt atop me. Whispered things in words that were words but meant so much more. It was in her eyes. She is old. Maybe not ancient, but I can believe she was there for those witch trials, for the rise of the heirs of Cassius, for all of it. Her tongue got into my head, wormed around in my brain... I can still feel her there, like a bug crawling about or a vine wrapped tight around my spine.

No note, this time.

Now: I'm the note.

She told me to give it to you. To give it to the "compiler." That you'd want to know the skin-thieves were back and that she was almost complete, that she had nearly finished protecting herself and that you ought to do the same.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

This is what she told me to tell you:

"They are the ghosts of vengeance. They are the dead clans come to haunt us! Once more they want us to perish, and once more we must rally to end them before they end us. The Perfecti were to destroy us, not them, but we are masters of lies, the kings of the false. Spiders and spinners, emperors of beasts and bugs made to believe we are so much more, and maybe we are. The seventh wants us dead for what we did to the sixth, and so they hope to wriggle into our dead veins and sup on our souls. Once more, we must gird our ways and summon our cruelty and sell the lie we told: we are Lords.

All part of the cycle. All part of the way. It will come again in a hundred years, maybe a thousand, but for now, let us let our funeral dirges play on. You've seen what I've done. It shall soon be done with one last ritual."

Then she threw me off the tower. I landed on a rooftop below. Shattered my back. My leg bones came up through the muscle and skin. I was able to heal myself enough to crawl into a doorway to hide from the sun. I slept and I dreamed and I don't really think I'm the same, anymore. Who the hell are we? What the hell are you? Do you know this little girl?

Is something terrible coming this way? Is it coming for us?



THE WITCH OF THE WEEDS

One of the Witch's sons taught me to understand the dogs. This was the only way I could get an audience with the matriarchal medicine woman the Acolytes were calling the Witch of the Weeds.

Her "sons," six vampires born by her blood over the past 140 years, wouldn't take me to see her. They were her liaisons to the Kindred court of Atlanta, her hunters, her messengers, her attendants, and her protectors. They wouldn't bring her my request for an audience, though. "If you want to see her, you'll have to check with the dogs." To do that, I'd have to be able to speak with them.

The Witch of the Weeds is an old figure in Atlanta. She's been in the city since before the Civil War, and by many accounts is the only Kindred to have survived General Sherman's destruction of the city. When Atlanta burned, the Damned burned, too. Her survival is part of her mystique among the Acolytes of the area, who regard her as something more than a vampire. They've raised her up within reach of godhead. They're the ones who gave her the title, the Witch of the Weeds, and they celebrate her as a symbol of creative power, of endurance through strife, and of witchcraft. She's their African Baba Yaga, a hoodoo grandmother goddess tough enough to come out the other side of an apocalyptic conflagration and smart enough to stay away from the wisdom-disrupting deceit and corruption of monster politics.

But the Witch of the Weeds doesn't consider herself part of the Circle cult that honors her. According to the Seneschal and the Herald, she is formally unaligned. And according to them, she is called Sycorax.

The Acolytes revere her as an idol. She's the sweet old lady, the tough old bird, and the sinister bitch they all want to have on their side. Women want to age to be her, men want her as their special grandma.

To the young cultists who invoke her name in bloody, sacrificial rituals (chickens with no heads, goats with nothing but, old-school quasi-voodoo), she may as well be a goddess. This coven of crone-worshippers totals four passionate neonates, three women, one man. They stand around a bonfire (much closer than I could push myself to get) in a cluttered, empty lot surrounded by smashed and derelict buildings, up to their ankles in gravel and rusted car parts. Prickly green weeds grow waist high in patches throughout the yard. Embers from the fire flit around like trailing cinders from a giant cigarette. Behind them, the tall towers of downtown Atlanta glow with stacks of orange lights.

They sing old slave songs and cut their feet on broken glass. They slice open their palms, their wrists, their bellies. They flail their arms and arch their backs, arcing curls of blood across the ground, into the fire, onto crushed, smoke-gray windshields. In the fire, something is moving. All of a sudden it smells like wet dirt, mildew, and rotting leaves.

One by one, the Acolytes get on their knees and stretch out, prostrate, with their arms reaching towards the edge of the bonfire. They're face down on jagged wreckage and rusted metal, with glass in their necks and chests. They're close enough to the fire that it hurts; it shows on their faces. After two of them are down on the ground like this, the third one kneels and joins them. Then the fourth.

They're still singing, or, really, they're humming. The song is all vowels now, a minor-chord melody falling away, like a boat of singers drifting downstream.

Something's unfurling in the bonfire, uncoiling like a hundred snakes. As if it were throwing the fire into the air, like flower petals at a wedding, the flames flutter up into the night and drift back down as harmless, vanishing cinders. Where the bonfire had been, there's now a large, thorny plant, taller than I am, alive and flowering like it was spring. The Acolytes raise their heads. Their mouths hang open, fangs out. One of them pushes back her hair, sucks in air, and breathes it out. The bush trembles, then releases dozens of tiny black starlings, like it was blowing out a long drag.

When it's over, the priestess of this coterie tells me those birds will go as a gift to Sycorax. "It's as much her blood as ours that makes the spells work," she says. She's a wide-hipped, slender-waisted black girl with a broad, stiff wedge of hair fanning out behind her head. "Her blood is all over this ground. We're tapping into her power, through the same ground, the same roots, the same air."

Then she smiles at me. She's got the sweaty adrenaline-amped demeanor of an athlete after the event. "There's really no way to *talk* about it without it coming across as this hippy New Age stuff," she says. Her fangs are still out. "But it's really much more primal, more instinctual than anything else. You feel it, not think it."

To these junkyard druids, the Witch of the Weeds is a goddess, but a goddess they *know* is flesh and blood, nesting not far away. Is this really faith, if they know she's out there? "It is," says the priestess. "It's faith because we don't know her mind or her plans. We don't really know when she's helping us and when we're just tapping into whatever lingering power of hers is still soaked up in this dirt and gravel and weeds."

I ask her if the coterie has ever met the Witch. "We've seen her a few times, walking through Cabbagetown or down Memorial Avenue, near the cemetery," she says. It sounds like she is telling me a ghost story. "She's always got her dogs with her."

The dogs. Strays and runaways from all over the city, drawn to the domain of the Witch. I've seen the "wild dogs" that roam the city at night, but never more than three or four at a time. One stood at the end of a block, just a big black shape under the orange streetlight, watching me. I was coming out of a bungalow, gently shutting the

front door behind me, and there it was – a black shape punctuated by a pair of glassy green disks for eyes, like lights blurred out in the back of a photograph. I must've stood on that porch for half an hour, staring back at it, waiting for something to happen. Finally it turned, first its body, then its head, and then its eyes, and ran off.

That's the dog that keeps coming to mind when I think of the Witch. It's the dog I think about when her youngest boy, Washington, is trying to teach me to tap into the animal instincts of the Blood. "Don't just listen with your ears," he says. "You gotta listen with your *skin*," it's two syllables, with his drawl, "with your hair, down in your balls and all the places where you'd sweat if you sweat. Feel like you sweatin', and you'll start to tune in." I'm trying to listen, but I'm also trying to imagine what I'd say to that black hound if I spoke the language.

I had to pull in more than a few favors to get Washington to coach me. In the end, I think the only reason he agreed was because he knew that teaching me this trick wouldn't help me get any closer to Sycorax unless she wanted me to get closer. The best this would do is get me an audience with the dogs.

Washington tells me where to go.

He tells me to go past the burnt-out houses near the derelict railyard. I get there and the place looks flooded with waist-high grass. Houses with broken windows, like gouged-out eyes, stand in a circle around the yard, their faces painted with swollen letters and symbols. I think I recognize Acolyte tags here and there.

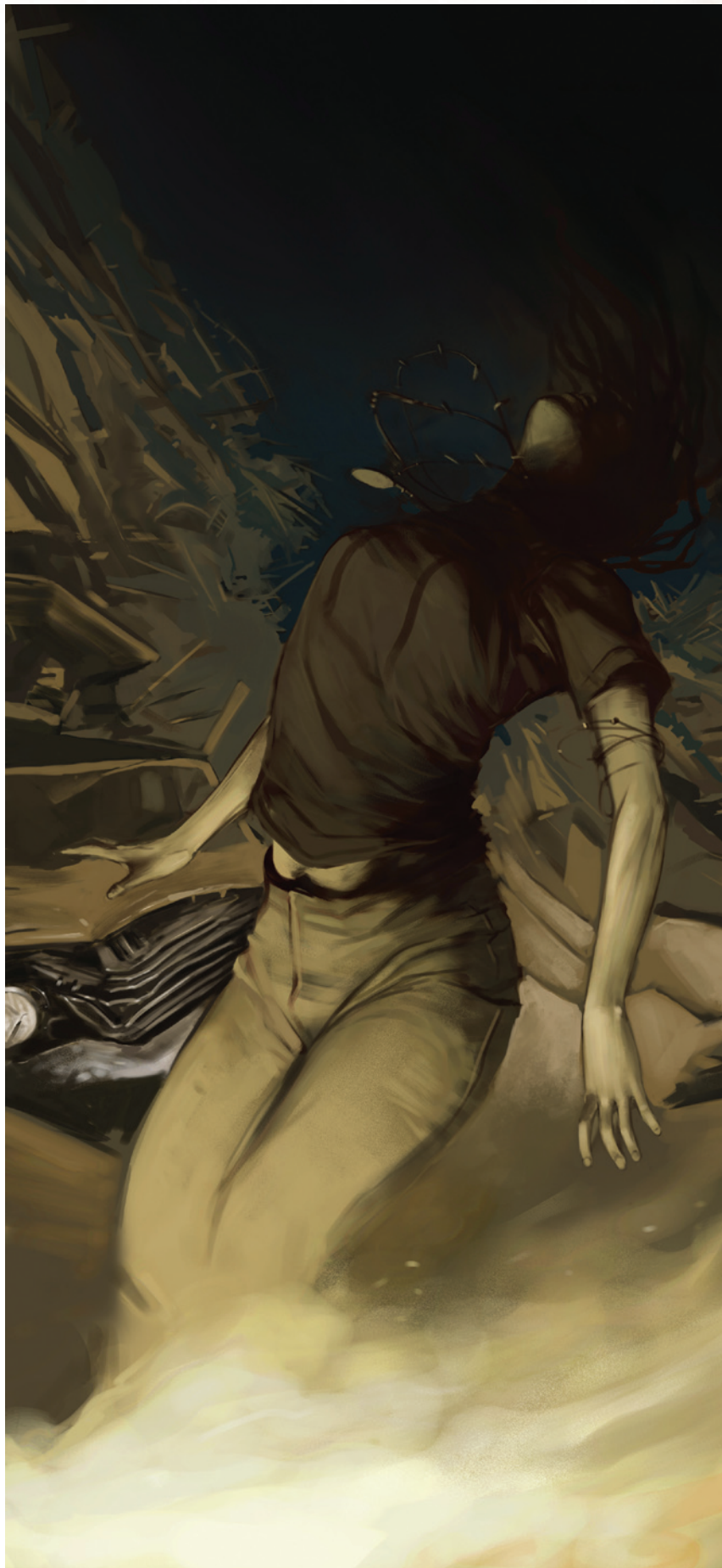
He tells me to stand in the big archway at the "train barn." So I go to the train barn, which is like a massive brick hangar, shaped like a slave ship turned upside-down, paint peeling underneath swirls of new gangland declarations. *Screw the space-time bullshit*, one of them reads. Something smells like motor oil or tar.

He tells me the dog will come find me, then decide whether or not to take me to see the Witch. So I wait until the dog appears. I listen to cicadas. I watch mosquitoes land on my arms, probe around, give up, and fly away. I see headlights come and go on the other side of the chainlink fence and the still-active train tracks. I wait.

The dog comes. I see it first as a bending in the grasses, then a pair of bent black ears and a jutting tail, like a barb. It steps out of the long weeds into the smashed-flat semi-circle in front of the train hangar, where I've been waiting, and sits calmly down in front of me. It has great posture. Its coat is slick and black, like a Doberman's, but it has a shape sort of like a Weimaraner body-builder with a pit-bull head. Its eyes are green. They shine like reflectors.

The sound isn't like talking. It's really not that far off from understanding the difference between a dog's barks. This one means "I'm hungry," that one means "someone's here!"

The dog vocalizes. It's a low, short vowel sound followed by a breathy, quiet, questioning sub-



bark. He's asking me who I am. Or why I'm here. Or what I want. It isn't clear. It's just, "What?"

First I speak back, in human words, "I'm here to see Sycorax. My lord is curious about her history, whatever of it she's willing to share. We want to know about Ventrue who aren't the board-room types." The dog stares at me. "I just want to talk. She doesn't have to tell me anything she doesn't want to. Obviously." The dog stares.

I try again, crouching down and feeling like an idiot as I mouth dog-like moans. While the dog is staring at me, though, his ears twitch. They react. Then there's this moment where it's like some tumblers slide into place inside my head and I find that I'm *thinking* in English but sounding out in these weird, easy whines. The blood in my veins stirs a bit. It feels warm.

The dog's demeanor softens, and when it turns and bounds the first few feet away from me, I understand that I am to follow.

It leads me out of the trainyard, onto the pocked asphalt of the street in front of the abandoned houses. Clusters of them, two or three in a bunch, are ribbed and black from fire. It's only now I notice that the black shapes sticking off the tops of these houses aren't peeling tiles or ashen scabs, but birds. Crows, magpies, and grackles.

I catch something out of the corner of my eye and see more dogs sitting on the porches of these houses, or standing alert in the spaces between them. As my guide-dog and I pass by them, they descend concrete steps and splintered porches and follow behind us in a loose mob. There are hounds, shepherds, brindled mutts, boxers, and mastiffs. Some of them are shaggy and wet, some of them are sticky with blood and pus where mange has worn off their hair. They don't pant. They make no noise. There must be twenty of them now.

When I look ahead again, I see a wide, round woman standing at the small, cracked intersection ahead of us. In the sickly pale light of the streetlamp she looks like a black-and-white photograph, all highlights and shadows. She has big, cracked lips, long flabby arms, and a tight, twisted shape of rough hair jutting off the back of her oval head.

"This is Adella," she says to me, waving her coffee-colored hands past her fat body and tacky housecoat as if she was disappointed with her tired old wardrobe. The dogs and I draw near, and they fan out to form a semi-circle behind me. If I wanted out of here, I'd have to go through them or this woman. "Don't bother her after tonight," she says, gesturing at her own sagging chest. "I won't be using her again."

This, I trusted, was the witch Lord they called Sycorax. She was old – centuries older than the grandmother looked standing there on the sidewalk at ten to two in the morning. I learned later that when she dealt with other Kindred, it was like this. She went out into the night wearing people from the neighborhood, scouting the area from behind unlikely faces.

When her dog first turned around to lead me here, when the Witch agreed to meet me on her own ground, within the bounds of her own domain in the city, I couldn't decide if this was some lingering specter of Southern hospitality, or a protective measure on her part. If I somehow threatened her, or made her think I had motives that could endanger her or her childer, (or if she knew I was here at your request) I would probably not make it out of her territory with my skin on my bones.

"Ma'am," I say in my best Southern-gentleman way. For a second, I'm afraid it's going to come out as a dog sound.

"What do you want, dear?" She says it like a sweet local shopkeep.

"Lady Sycorax," I feel like I'm in a play when I get this formal, "I'm here to satisfy my curiosity, and understand our clan better. You're not like the Midtown Lords. You're not like the gang leader I know in East Point. I want to know what our clan is like from your perspective. I guess I just want to know your story."

She eyeballs me. I glance at the dogs on either side, and they're all staring, too. I'm sure she can smell the bullshit on me – the pursuit of knowledge is never altruistic among us, is it? – but I'm hoping she'll also pick up on my harmlessness.

"I don't know what you've heard about me, son. I know what the Acolytes say... but what have you heard?"

I'm not sure how to answer that.

"What do people say about me? You can tell me. I won't be upset."

"Yes, ma'am," I say without thinking. "I know only that the Lords of Midtown call you a witch, and tell us that you're old – that you were here when Atlanta burned. They call you the Witch of the Weeds, and tell us not to go south of I-20 and east of the Connector without being prepared to pay tribute to you or your followers. They don't tell us that you're a Lord, though. I only figured that out by meeting your childer."

"My boys," she corrects me. She doesn't say it like the Midtown Lords, though. When she says it she means "my sons," not "my goons." She goes on, "A lot of that is correct. It's the same shallow nothing they've been saying for years, though." She smiles at me and I'm actually surprised not see fangs. But of course Adella isn't one of us. "I'll talk to you a bit. But just a bit." She looks up, like she's daydreaming, then turns back to me. "Call it 'spin control,' I guess. Isn't that what they say?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"All right, then. My dogs will take you somewhere that we can talk. I'll send Adella home and meet you there."

"Yes, ma'am," I say, and am about to thank her, but it's clear that Adella is suddenly as vacant as the houses around us. She turns and trudges up the street, her slippers scraping along the asphalt.

"Follow me," the black hound says. It takes me back up towards Cabbagetown, behind one-story

industrial buildings and chain-link-fenced lots of construction equipment. The skeleton of an unfinished condo development looks down on us as we slip under the train tracks, through a tunnel transformed by street art. We end up in a sunken lot, hedged in by brambles and a rusted wire fence, with shotgun-style factory houses looking down on us and vine-covered industrial buildings standing between us and the street like bodyguards.

The dog winds through the brambles and weeds, no problem. I stumble around like a city-dweller in my loafers. At the bottom, something fleshy and wet gives way under my foot. I smell a bright, lush fragrance. Tomato. Vines stretch all over down here. Tomatoes hang off them in little bunches. They're out of season, though. And some of them beat like hearts.

"You should take a few with you," comes a voice out of the weeds. I turn, and there's Sycorax – the real Sycorax, I think. She's tall, slender, with wide round hips and long muscular arms. The longest neck I've ever seen, I think. Something about her cheekbones and the angle of her eyes makes me think she looks African, not African-American... but how would I know. Her hair is a pair of wide shapes off the back of her head, stiff and black, tied and held with red cords. She has green eyes that shine like reflectors.

She plucks a tomato and gives it to the black hound. The dog runs off with it, lying down with the tomato between its paws. It presses down on the fruit with its back teeth until it bursts. It's not the watery pulp of a tomato that comes out, but thick blood, studded with seeds.

"Do you know what I miss?" she asks me. When I don't answer, she says, "Cooking. Eating. These took me quite a while to grow proper."

"Yes, ma'am," I say. "I'll bet they did."

"Sit down," she says, and I do, right there in the weeds and dirt. She asks me my name and I tell her. She says my sire's name, then, by itself. Nothing else. Then, "What do you want to know, son?"

"You're a Lord?"

"I am. Nothing but."

"How long have you been here?"

She looks up again, as if she were daydreaming. "Since before the War, but just. I was rural folk, back in my first nights in the Colonies." She looks back at me. "I was his lover, back in the old country. England. Got sick, and he couldn't let me go, he said. So he 'cured' me. That was... a long time ago, now."

"You came here as –"

"Oh, yes. We came here, with all his money, before Elizabeth died." She kneels down and pulls weeds up from around the tomatoes and slips them into pockets on the half-apron around her waist. "I came to this place after he died."

My sire would scold me if I used that word for one of us. We don't die. We already have. She must smell it on me, because without looking she says, "Call me old-fashioned, I guess." She doesn't sound like she's five centuries old, to me. The eldest of

the Midtown Lords, when he talks, does. "He got burned up in a fire. Witch-hunters or some such. I fled the plantation for Terminus, which is what we called Atlanta back then."

I'm not sure when they got here, but there must be half a dozen dogs laying in the weeds around us now. Black birds are crowded onto the rusted fence.

"Not many of us here, then. More started showing up after the War started. Coming down in crates of dirt and in train-cars full of coal from Virginia, Carolinas. Lots of Shadows, a few Lords. The ones who were already here were Haunts. They showed me where to nest. But when the other Lords started showing up, they set up a court and their Prince and everything they do. But I've always been used to a more private, hm, Requiem, I suppose. I stayed out of their way, except..." She drifts off. I wait.

"Except?"

"Not long before Sherman came, the Prince and I made a bargain that I'd keep a part of the city for myself, so long as I didn't go doling it out. He also offered to make me Hierophant, but I sure didn't know what that meant back then. As I was the only, I guess you'd say witch, in the city, it didn't mean much anyway."

"Is this Prince –"

"No, dear, this is a creature long since burnt up in the War. Nice man," she says in a way that makes me think of sex and manipulation. "Nice man."

"So when the city burned –"

"I was sleeping out in what was the countryside, back then. Oh, hell, I'll even say, I was in Oakland with the Haunts." She means Oakland Cemetery, the Victorian garden cemetery well within the city limits tonight, where a bunch of Confederate soldiers are buried now. "I woke up and crawled out, but I ain't never seen them since." Just then, for the first time to me, she sounds rural. It passes. "Don't know what happened."

"Why didn't you... You have a strong claim for praxis now, don't you?"

"What's that?"

"Praxis. Rule. Princedom."

She makes a face, frowning and rolling her eyes. She plucks a bundle of tomatoes off the vine and hands them to me. "Why'd I want to do that? I told the new ones who arrived after the war – the carpetbagging Damned and the Confederate dead – about me and the Prince, and word seems to have kept creeping on down the years. I don't feel like I have to defend myself here. And all that hassle of fighting and politics and..." she makes an exasperated sound. The black hound slurps up the last of his tomato. "There's things I'd rather be master of than men."

"What about your boys?"

"They're good boys. They held look out for mama," she says that with playful sass, "and I help them stay smart and out of trouble. But they're grown boys, as much their own masters as any woman's sons, I feel. Closest I'll ever come to being a mother."



"The Acolytes think of you as... Are you their leader?"

"I wouldn't make it so cut and dry. They're children. We'll see if this is a fad for them or not." She stands up and dusts herself off. "You can tell them all of this, I suppose. You'll tell who you will. But I don't think it's right for you to come down here without helping me in return."

I blink a few times. "Yes, ma'am."

She steps over to me, hiking her skirt up from the weeds. She's barefoot. She kneels down in front of me, leans over my lap, and takes my hand. While she strokes the veins on my wrist, she opens her mouth and pushes out her fangs with a slight sigh. She smells like tilled soil and lemons. As she puts her mouth over my wrist, she looks up at me. She shuts her eyes when her fangs pierce in. Without meaning to, I moan.

She reaches her palm up to my face, slips her fingers into my mouth, and they taste like sweat. Her thumb's pulling up on my jaw, and I understand what she wants. Holding her palm in place with my tongue, my eyes shut to the world, I bite into her tough skin. Instead of the bloody splash of the tomatoes, she bleeds out a slow, thick ooze of blood. It coats my throat.

When I open my eyes for a second, I see her dogs, the birds, watching us.

She pulls her fingers out of my mouth, but doesn't stop with my wrist. She's squeezing and releasing my arm at the elbow. Finally I feel her tongue brushing back and forth on the wound. She sits up, wipes blood from her lip with her thumb.

"All right," she says, and the black hound gets to his feet. He trots over to me, licking his snout. He starts up the hill, then stops and looks back at me. I pick up my tomatoes and start to go.

"Thank you, ma'am," I say.

"Be good now, son. You watch out for them downtown Lords," she says, smiling to herself and walking, skirt hiked, into the midst of the tomatoes. When the hound and I are up to the fence, I look back and see her squatting over the tomato vines. She's flicking blood over them from the gash I left in her palm. Their leaves shudder in the gentle rain of blood.

The tomatoes taste like real tomatoes, sweet and wet, but thick like tomato juice. The blood inside is slick, though, and smooth. The seeds get in my teeth.

When I come back to the garden, not quite a week later, the vines are curled and dead. The tomatoes are gone. A white, angular dog watches me leave.

INSANE ARCHONTOLOGY

This one dares speak of pride and then seems to be bold enough to put his name down? Though, I confess, we've yet to track the writer down. Nobody's heard of Archer Aims in any of the cities

up and down the coast. Further inland we don't have the connections that we once did, and that path has dried up. But we'll find him. And when we do, we'll cut out that slandering tongue.

You're not all kings, you know. You can't be. Aside from the obvious, that putting ten of you in a room means that only one can emerge the master, it misses some of the more subtle concerns about your brood.

First, you're too public. You Lords love to sit on the throne, don't you? Whether it's at the head of the boardroom table or leaning back on a pedestal made of the bones of your long-gone adversaries, you have a serious addiction to pride. The Shadows don't need such public pronouncement, such obvious pandering. We're good, thanks. We'll quietly rule all your asses from this corner of darkness right here.

Second, too many of you are off. Off, like a weird color of wallpaper. Off, like a sick animal who hasn't yet staggered in front of an onrushing car. Off like curdled milk, a waistband rash, someone who smiles too often. You know as well as I do that some of you are really off, so crooked and mad that it's amazing those with such dramatic peccadilloes don't jump off the roof trying to fly on phantom wings toward the rising sun, know what I mean? But that's not what I'm talking about. All of you are just off center, just off kilter. It's a wonder that anybody trusts you. Whatever it is that all of you are repressing... well, it's going to come out one day. And I don't aim to be here when it pops.

Third, Jesus Christ how you people are bound to your lineages. Listen, I understand, be proud of those who deserve pride. But you're proud of everybody who's ever carried the contagion of your blood regardless of how misplaced that pride happens to be. Uncle Wencelas talked to mole rats? Shit, give him a plaque, put his picture in the foyer, sing paeans of satisfied praise to him every third Tuesday of the month. Your tree has more than its share of bad apples, but you'd never know that from talking to any one of you. Once in a blue moon I find a realistic Lord, someone who recognizes that he must emerge from underneath the umbrella of a lunatic sire or a treacherous Priscus. But all too often you're a rah-rah club for every twisted branch and rotten stump in your so-called "family trees."

Fourth and finally, you hate the rest of us. How do you rule those you despise? Why do you do it is perhaps the better question. You think us lesser. What's the impetus of lording over those who you find plainly inferior? Is there a secret thrill in herding us rats? Do you feel some illicit rush of blood to the head every time you command your kingdom of worms, your country of imbeciles?

This is what I've done. I've caught wind, you see, of this compilation. This disgusting package of pride probably plays like some kind of go-team-go mix tape for every last one of you cock-eyed kings. I can't abide that.

So, let me interject. Let me cross the field of battle and under the cover of darkness slip this into your satchel: five of your kind who are still out there, still up and animated, and who are each a black mark on what you probably consider to be a flawless record. These are the big red X's, these are your black eyes, this is your spoiled broth.

I'm sure you'll get this tape, and you'll play it, and you'll burn it. And you'll take the attached pages and burn them, too. That's okay. Maybe I have copies, maybe I don't. Maybe I just enjoy the way putting this all together made me feel. As long as one of you knows, that might just be good enough.

Sincerely,
Archer Aims

BISHOP FOURNIER

This one is amazing for a couple reasons. First, who knew that even we monsters have limits? We draw the line much farther back than most, but for as distant as the line is, we still find nobility as long as we don't step over to the other side. Second, who knew that the transgressions of the Church were so bloody endemic that it transcends mortal man and worms its way into the immortal? Must come from God Himself, don't you think? Perhaps the presence of the divine is too heavy a burden. Or maybe you're all so sickened that even something as good as God is turned to poison in your crucible?

Fournier, as it turns out, is a rampant kid-toucher. Not just a feeder, oh no. Feeding on children carries its own stigma, to be sure, but it's doable. Had it just been a feeding restriction, as the goodly Bishop claimed, well, who wouldn't understand that? The Blood is finicky. So too are our minds, yours especially. Sip from the younglings, a taste here, a peck there. Fine. I'll frown, but let you go on your way. But the things Fournier would do with them? I won't regale you with specifics; whoever you are, I'm sure you're well-prepared for the realities of your people (or are you?), but me, I've no interest in having my midnight snack rise back up. I'll say only this: Fournier left many of his "altar boys" alive. Scarred emotionally, some physically. Some, though, were just too precious to him to be kept alive, and so - whether in the throes of his monster or out of some cold and calculating need - he killed a fair number and sealed them up in his walls, Cask of Amontillado style. What was most staggering, though, is how he secretly Embraced a handful of them and kept them in his wine cellar. His "brides," he called them. Even though they were all boys.

Fournier himself is walled away, much as some of his children are. He's kept from torpidity by blood drizzled down through holes in the ceiling of his thick-walled cell. I had a chance to speak to him. Like a lot of you, he seems reserved. His words, well-chosen. Sentences brief but powerful. I couldn't see him very well - just a single brick taken out of the wall for my visit, replaced and re-mortared upon my leaving. For the most part, he played the penitent, repentant role very well indeed.

But I pushed him. And kept pushing him.

He was no house of cards, no easy collapse. But it came. I said something specific about one of his victims, a still-living boy from one of the downtrodden suburbs. I mentioned all the promises the goodly Bishop had made to the boy for his family, exploiting the child's love for his parents. Just as, I said, Fournier had exploited God's own love. (Or was it, I asked, that God was exploiting Fournier's love?)

I don't know whether it was pointing out Fournier's own corrupted nature or suggesting that God Himself was the corrupt one.

But Fournier's calm veneer, his marble façade, cracked for just a moment.

I saw his face in the darkness emerge into the shaft of moonlight coming into the cell from above. I saw how pale and wretched it was. Twisted up like an angry fist. Fangs bared. Eyes wide and black and empty.

A pinnacle of the community, the goodly Bishop.

DUMUZID, FISHERMAN OF URUK

Seems that if I'm going to do this, I might as well start big. Let's talk about Dumuzid, Fisherman of Uruk. Known by those in his city as "The Little Old Man."

To describe him, he's little, and he carries himself like an old man: hunched over, walks with a cane, left hand shakes with a kind of twitching palsy. He's not old, though. He was dragged into the Requiem sometime in his early life, obviously - late teens, early 20s - and so it looks strange to see an otherwise young-appearing fellow operate in the world like he's a broken-down octogenarian.

Dumuzid isn't king of anything except the koi in the foul-smelling pond he keeps out back of his burned-out apartment. Oh, he thinks he's king. Or, more specifically, thinks he was a king, once. His story is that he fancies himself, quite literally, a figure from the Epic of Gilgamesh. He believes himself far older than any vampire (Lord or not) that any of us has ever met. Dumuzid claims to have ruled the city of Isin in Sumer for 100 years. Let me repeat that: Sumer. Not Sumer, New Jersey. Sumer, the



long-gone civilization from some four thousand years previous. Predecessor to Gilgamesh, Dumuzid claims to have ruled Sumer after deposing his tyrannical sire, Dal-suba. As King of Kua, Dumuzid supposedly captured and destroyed the King of Kish, En-Men-Barage-Si. He also claims to be married to a very real goddess, Inanna, for all the kings of Sumer were mystically bound to her in some kind of holy matrimony. Some aspects of this "bride" match what we think of to be the Crone, but you ask me, she's far too nice to be the Mama Monster.

Of course, when pressed about what he's done between then and now, Dumuzid gets a little fuzzy. He seems to indicate that he did a lot of "wandering," but can't precisely identify where. He, of course, claims to have met and influenced a number of historical and religious figures, from Ezekiel to Napoleon.

When I ask for proof of his supposed Sumerian kingship, he has little to offer. The one thing he does show me (and he cradles like a child when I convince him to pull it down out of his busted closet) is an alabaster vase, cracked but still together. He claims to have stolen this from En-Men-Barage-Si, taken from that ruler's temple and used for the ashes of all of Dumuzid's childer. All of whom met the final end over the years, it seems. Sure enough, the vase was filled with ashes. Sure enough, the outside was inscribed with a language I can't read. That doesn't mean it's Sumerian, of course; I can't read Russian, Bantu, or Aramaic, so it could be any one of those. Or it could be gibberish.

Here's the thing that you'll really love about Dumuzid: he's publicly the city's jester. Oh, he doesn't know that he is. He's like an addled child or a retarded brother: they bring him out from time to time, parade him before the cackling masses. They mock him in such a way that, to Dumuzid, he thinks he's being praised for his kingship, lauded for being the oldest Lord known. But to one another, they know that the praise is twisted, skewed. They sabotage him. Leave "gifts" for him at his derelict apartment, anything from bags of shit to dead cats for him to eat. They sometimes dress him up in these ridiculous purple robes and walk with him through the streets, even letting the human herd have a laugh.

Fit for a king? If you say so.

Though, in an effort to be fair, Dumuzid tells me his side of the story, and how much he loves how the city's Kindred exult him. But there's a darkness in his eye, a steely glint I can't quite ignore. Somewhere in the deep dark of this lunatic's head he knows that he's not the jewel in the crown but a peanut in the turd. And I think it angers him. Let's all hope he's not as old as he says he is, because who wants to see a Sumerian King angry?

SHERIFF DANIEL DICKLER

Let me preface this with: I love Sheriff Dan. Big fan. I told him so, too. He's a lanky length of rope, that guy, face weathered and worn like it was sand-blasted. You know what he reminds me of? A pair of distressed jeans, the denim faded, the fabric slashed.

Of course, he's just a haunt now. He wanders the ghost towns in and out of the desert, preying on the few folks who live there or those unfortunate vagrants or vacationers who wander into his path. A lonely old snake, isn't he?

Do you know why Dickler's a pale shade of what he once was? You people tore him down from his post and then tore him asunder. For what? Once more, nobility enters the equation, here. See, Sheriff Dan could not abide the corruption that had risen up in the city, like filthy water from a broken sewer main. For too long he acted as Sheriff under a despotic Prince, too long had he turned a blind eye toward the looting of coffers, the lies, the disappearances, the bizarre rituals that were no part of the First Estate (and hell, weren't even a part of the Crone cults). He was well-paid to keep his eyes blind, but as I noted with Fournier, it's amazing to me that we monsters have a line, an internal watermark that shan't be passed. Sheriff Dan, as he puts it, just wasn't feeling very human anymore.

So what unforgivable act did Dickler do? He marched up to the Council of Primogen, stood in front of the whole boardroom of fiends, and spilled his guts. Vomited up every awful fact that he'd been keeping in that head of his. Like knocking over a bee hive. I'll admit, I don't know what Dickler was thinking. Did he believe that his nobility would be rewarded? Did he suspect that he was the pivot point on which the Prince's corrupt actions hinged? The Prince, like a tumor, had a strong blood supply all his own. He was well-supported by a number of figures both mysterious and obvious. Oh, sure, the city was mired in a conspiracy, but they turned it around and made Dickler the fall guy. It's not like he wasn't tied to damn near every dirty deed in the city's borders, right? Easy to point the finger at him. He was the scapegoat. Heap the sins upon the dumb beast, then slaughter it by knife or by fire.

He escaped by the skin of his teeth, but knows he can't go back among us. He has some supporters, of course, those of us who go out and, when we can find him,



toss him some money or some food. He also has many more who would turn him into a streak of blasted black ash.

So why do I bring him up? If I admire the fellow in some strange way, how is he an example of the awfulness of you so-called kings? Because it was a cabal of Lords, led by the Prince, who destroyed a good man. That's what you do. You claim that nobility has no place in royalty, that authority is about making the hard choices. No. Dickler made the hard choice. You make the easy ones.

Whenever you catch a whiff of the smoke smoldering from decency or dignity, you stomp it out. If you can't be noble, then nobody can.

Like selfish children with ugly toys, you are.

THE NINE OF FLORENCE

I lied my way into the tombs beneath the city. The chambers of your accolades, the dead walls etched with poems to Ventrue greatness. I played the role of pilgrim. I pretended I was one of you (an ill-fitting coat, far too broad in the shoulders - and oh, the stink in the fabric...), come to pay tribute to those who had come before me. Like all your tombs and congratulatory attractions, I had to tithe blood (though, to whom that blood goes, I'll never know). I wandered my way through the miles of catacombs, seeing no others in the darkness reflected by the glow of concealed torches (surely you can get electricity down there by now, but I suppose you find something comforting in antiquity). So many statues, friezes, plaques, poems carved into the floors, songs sung on Victorolas bolted to the stone wall. With so much greatness, I'd hope that at least some of it was true. But who can say? Your legacies might all be lies, whispered from serpent tongue to serpent ear century after century.

It was an hour before I found what I was looking for: the tombs of the Black Signoria of Florence, the nine Ventrue who controlled much of that great city during a large part of the Renaissance. Their business acumen is not to be denied, I can agree with that. Eight of the nine Lords were tied up with one specific guild, mirroring the way the mortal Signoria was established. These Kindred, of course, handled the "dark side" of business - the predatory nature of that nascent spark of secret capitalism, the dominance of riches and the rise of the merchant class. All underworld stuff, really: leg-breaking, mind-changing, gross usury. Fine. I've no great problem with that. One must make his way in whatever manner he can, and our kind is conveniently suited for such underhandedness.

Oh, but the Signoria, how corrupted you were. In the cradle of Machiavelli, in the nest of the Medicis, you would've made both balk. You sided with Savonarola and all his book-burnings and persecutions (how much knowledge did you waste?) until it was time to be rid of him, at which point you had him executed in the Piazza - and oh, how the Medici family rejoiced! You punished decadence until it was again time to reward it. You elevated pederasts to positions of holy import. You executed entire families. You claimed to call back to the Camarilla, the nobility of the overarching order, and yet you did pretty much the opposite. And these are the facts, available to any who cares to do the proper research.

This doesn't even take into account all the rumors. Is it true that the Gonfaloniere, the head of the nine Signoria, cavorted with demons? Summoned vile familiars in his home (and was said to be always accompanied by a white cat with black eyes)? Sold his own soul and others to a host of entities from beyond this world and into Hell itself? One story - I'll admit, unsubstantiated - suggests that he aimed to bring back the Black Death to maximize the killings that his Faustian contracts demanded.

What noble leaders. What powerful men. What kings, these Kindred.

Trust me, I know what's happening here. You're rewarding them for their viciousness, which is fine. But be honest about it. Instead of lauding their dignity and decorum, tell it as it is. They are heroes for their awfulness. Notable for their atrocities.

This is what you've done: you've taken a rat, and given it a crown and called it a lion. You praise it for its hunting skills. You applaud its tremendous chest, its powerful teeth, its inarguable presence.

But we can all see that it's just a rat.

A gross colony, that's what you are. Seething and breeding and congratulating one another...

I've not listened to much of this, but I have read some of the transcriptions. The boy does well... up until the end, of course. These transcripts are only a fraction of the interviews: he filled up quite a few recorders. -C. Hardaiken

Eulogy of the Unbroken Chain

Sheriff Hardaiken gave me this little digital tape player, though he didn't tell me why, not at first. Actually, he gave me a whole box of them. When one fills, I'm supposed to... drop it off at a drop-box. I'm not to meet him. I'm not important enough to meet him. Not yet, I guess. Really, I'm nobody. One year dead. I've seen a lot in this year, but I know there's weirder and worse out there.

Jesus, I hope this thing is actually recording. The last thing I need is to get on the Sheriff's bad side, here. God. Not that he's going to be listening to it. He said he doesn't care what I say, but that doesn't mean somebody isn't listening. Somebody more important than him. (One of his e-mails to me said something about "not disappointing our masters," whatever that means.)

Okay, all right, introductions. My name is Noah Vincent Verhagen, though the leering faces and cackling ladies of Elysium have taken to calling me "Reed," because, I guess, I'm tall like a reed. It's better than "Stretch," right? The name stuck. So, Reed it is.

I am a novitiate in Clan Ventruue, a relative nobody. The only reason they gave me the Embrace was because my family owed them a child, and I was that child. I turned 21, and there they were, waiting for me as I left my dorm room, three weeks away from graduation. Just shapes under a streetlight in nice suits. They hissed, reached for me, took me away, and here I am. I see my family sometimes, because they know what I am. But they don't treat me the same. I'm told they're not my real family anymore, anyhow.

To the disappointment of Clan Verhagen and Clan Ventruue, I've never been much for aspirations. And it's not just because I was happy to rest on my laurels and enjoy the wealth into which I was born, it's just... I haven't found my niche. Right now, I still don't have any significant goals, which earns me a great deal of enmity. I find the priests of the Sanctified noble, though. Something about what they do and what they preach appeals to me. Then again, I just don't feel that religious.

I guess I'd better get on with this.

My genealogy – immortal, not mortal – is uninterrupted. What some Lords call an "unbroken chain." All of my forebears, every sire before me and mine, still exist out there in the world. Somewhere. They're not all up and awake, I guess, but excepting the earliest progenitors, my whole family – my "bloodline" – is continuous. All the way back to, though not including, something called the "Dead Julii," though I sometimes think they're saying the "Dread Julii."

Hardaiken tells me that I'm going to go and find them all.

And that I'm going to talk to them, and record everything here. If I can't interview them, I at least need to research whichever ones I can't get a hold of.

Jesus Christ, I'm scared.

I'm nobody. I don't matter. Why me?

He said they won't destroy me. They won't end me for the questions I ask.

I asked him why.

He said it was because they have faith in the unbroken chain, and destroying me ruins that for them.

Fine. So they won't destroy me.

But I've heard whispers about what else goes on. I know they

can do more than destroy me. I think they can do worse.

I thought I could get out of it. I thought I could ask my sire for a reprieve. But Hardaiken and Esme, they're tight. She agrees with him. Says I could use a little "direction," and she said that with a light little laugh, the one she does whenever she's toying with me.

Okay, okay, deep breath.

Okay, okay, I don't breathe. Amazing how 21 years of breathing will condition you.

Hardaiken told me to be honest. Accurate. Not necessarily swift, for patience is a virtue, but I shouldn't dawdle, because "eyes are watching."

Here we go.

Esmerelda Crassus

Reed: Mistress.

Esme: Childe.

Reed: Why are you laughing?

Esme: Why are you trembling?

Reed: I just... I don't know where to begin.

Esme: My name would be a good place.

Reed: Right. Of course. Mistress, may I ask your name?

Esme: You may.

Reed: What? Ah. Oh. Mistress, what is your name?

Esme: Esmerelda Crassus, sire to Noah Vincent Verhagen, childe of Elliot Oldershaw.

Reed: Thank you.

Esme: You're staring. Ask me another question.

Reed: How long... ahh, when was your Embrace?

Esme: It will be 20 years this year. I was 17 years old when the boys of the Oldershaw family were given the provenance to choose a thrall from the stables of the Crassus family. They chose me. Five years after that, your grandsire chose me for the Embrace, finding me unusually suitable. Usually, members of the Crassus line are not considered for the Embrace, unlike those of your own Verhagen lineage. The Crassus descendants all serve as thralls, and usually not more.

Reed: Really? I didn't know.

Esme: The Verhagens are an estimable line, considered to have "better" breeding than others. The Crassus, of course, possess far greater wealth, but therein lies the joy of making such powerful men into heeling bitches. The humiliation is sweeter. The more swollen the pride, the greater the release when that bladder is punctured. I've come to recognize that. I've seen my father and my brother both do things for our fellow Lords that gives me great pleasure. Neither were pleasant men.

Reed: Tell me more about Elliot Oldershaw.

Esme: I will not. You'll meet him as part of this fascinating experiment. This is about me, childe, so ask questions about *me*.

Reed: Of course, a thousand apologies. What does it mean to be a Lord?

Esme: It's about power. About rising above. About starting small and becoming large. But most of all, it's about *joy*. There are those within our admirable lot who will tell you that the Requiem is as the name suggests: a dirge for the dead, a sad song

Elliot Oldershaw

sung for eternity. Mirthless and hollow. Those are lies spoken by those who have not been able to maximize their experiences in this unlife. Were they immortal before? Could they make a man kneel and put his nose to the concrete with but a word? The Requiem is a song of celebration! Sovereignty is a delight.

Reed: Tell me about them, the other Lords who aren't... maximizing? Their experiences.

Esme: Tsk, tsk, tsk. You've gone and done it again. This is my profile, boy. Seems necessary to teach you a lesson about that. I'll show you the delight of which *I* speak.¹

Esmerelda... she's beautiful and she taught me a lesson. Keep it focused on her. She forced me to fix my eyes upon her face. For three nights I knelt, unable to blink or move my gaze. When the sun would rise, we would slumber together, my head slumped against her thigh. And when the sun set, I'd awaken anew and put my eyes back upon her. Her smooth skin. Her limbs, like delicate glass. Those dark eyes. It's a mistake I won't make again. I hope.



I can already tell you that Elliot is nothing like Mistress Esme. I've only seen him in passing as I wait here on the couch for our interview, but he seems... younger than she does. Not younger in looks, exactly, but he's... cooler? Jesus, that sounds stupid. But for as young as Esme looks, she has this aged *thing* about her, this depth. Elliot, who is actually much older than she is, has a lot more... life? This *bon vivant* thing hangs about him. An aura of vitality. I watch him as he sweeps through his penthouse, trying on ties, a jacket, gelling his hair, fiddling with his iPod, laughing into his cell phone. He's always moving.

Oh, shit, here he comes.

[...]

Elliot: Let me tell you about the Oldershaws. You don't mind if I talk, do you?

Reed: No.

Elliot: You can talk while you walk, right? I gotta get down to Limoges to meet some people. Been there? I don't think it's open to your kind, yet. Just those with some money in it. It's pretty slick, kind of a modern-meets-medieval aesthetic, with the two smashing together in an artistic car crash. No idea what kind of fucking music they're going to play there. Something with a beat, or something with strings? Maybe both? What do I know?

Reed: I...

Elliot: Let's walk. So. You want to know about the Oldershaw boys, that it?

Reed: ...Yes.

Elliot: Oldershaw family's been working for and with the Lords for... well, a long time. I'm not keen on my history. I know we come from England. Merseyside. Right near the river, like, *right* near it. Every house in this family has a picture of that fucking river, I swear to God, it's retarded. Anyway, here's the gist, right? The Oldershaw family has its breeders: a Mom, a Dad. They fuck. They have kids. The girls are reserved for breeding purposes or, if they're not into that, they're killed. Probably drowned in the River Mersey for all I know. Sad, but, hey, I can't stop to shed a tear over here. The boys, if they're worth their salt, they grow up to the ripe age of 18 and they're given the Embrace. Sometimes by another Oldershaw boy. Sometimes by some of our cousin families, like the Scarsbricks, the Hollisters, and those jerkoffs with the black stallion on the crest, the, uh... you know the ones, they have that bloodline progenitor who's all Afflicted and thinks the ocean is a giant mouth that's trying to eat him or some fucking thing... the Ebelthites! The goddamn Ebilthites, right.

Reed: And your sire came from –

Elliot: My sire? Arthur Scarsbrick, spelled like Scars-Brick but pronounced, obviously, Scays-brick. Hails from... Orkney? No. Ormskirk? Fuck. Brain like a sieve, sorry. Here, let me get the door for you. Nice fuckin' ride, right? Lexus. King of cars.

Reed: ... Thank you.

Elliot: Comfy? Good. Driver, Limoges. Chop-chop. Piss on the red lights. Anyway, Arthur, Arthur... you're going to meet him, that true?

Reed: Yes. I have the ticket booked for October. I fly to London at the end of the month.

Elliot: Arthur's certainly interesting. Have him tell you about *his* sire. Big gap between the two, years-wise, a couple centuries.

¹The foolish helot doesn't get much of an interview after the three nights of punishment. Though, knowing how low the neonate's esteem is, perhaps it wasn't as much a punishment as it would be for some of us. I'll let him talk about it.

Not many of us that old, but we're an unbroken chain, so I hear. So I guess it goes back even deeper than that. Arthur's a pompous bloater, just gassy with circumstance and manners. But he'll teach you a lot if you listen to his stories, his many... ceaseless... stories. Ugh. Still. The guy knows how to make and keep money. Me, I'm good at the making it, not so good at the keeping it. But these days, things are different than those days. The market is a living thing. I mean that. I see patterns in the numbers, in the stock prices, all that. I'm no Cassandra over here, I don't give into oracular bullshit, but I do think it takes more instinct than raw intelligence to make money in these nights, you know?

Reed: ... Sure

Elliot: And to me, it's all about making money. Money begets money, wealth feeds on wealth, and we have the good fortune of being alive – er, so to speak – forever and bloody ever. It just compounds. I have this theory, well, I didn't come up with it. There is this theory that says it's our kind – the Kindred as a whole, but the Lords more than others – actually float the economy. We're like immortal human bank accounts. We're anchor points in the economy, stable and fixed. Money flows to us and away from us. We're *persistent*, which is what keeps things balanced in an economy. Patience and persistence. Sorry, am I boring you? I'm a bit of a money nerd. A real venir.

Reed: No, it's all good, I was just –

Elliot: You can buy anything, seriously. Maybe not directly. A lot of us are rich. Stupid rich. Richer than most *countries* rich. But it's not about that, it's not about paying directly for things, it's about buying the services of others or the goods of others. Say you have one of us crazy wealthy assholes, and we don't want money, but we are collectors as so many of us are. Maybe we collect the works of Mondrian or books with strange marginalia or, I dunno, Hobbit skulls or something. I'm simplifying this, of course, the chain is often far deeper than this, but you buy the skulls and offer it to the crazy wealthy asshole because *that's* what he wants. Money was still part of the equation, it just wasn't a one-for-one translation, catch me?

Reed: I do. Maybe you could tell me about –

Elliot: Oh, hey, here we are. See from the alley here, just looks like... you know, dark brick and shitty dumpsters, but I swear there's a club in there. Limoges is the next big thing. I'll get you in next time. This time, though, I think I ought to say good night, good luck, and say hello to Arthur for me.

Reed: I...

Elliot: Later, man. Good talking to you. You ever need a favor, you know who to come to. And it's not me.

Arthur Scarsbrick

Arthur Scarsbrick is dead. Well. Okay, obviously he's dead, but he's... not destroyed, but... torpid. It just happened. His household is in fits. He has other childer I didn't know about – one Scarsbrick and two more Oldershaw boys – and they're flying in.

(By the way, flying is terrifying now. It's a state of constant agitation. All the ground delays, the security checks, the aging equipment creaking at 30,000 feet. I paid well for the flight, but

still we were delayed. I wasn't sure we were going to make it in before the sun came up. I have to plan better next time. They call it "sailing," but it feels all the more antiquated and dangerous. I cannot tell you how much it felt like I was traveling in some giant flying casket. It nearly drove me to panic. I... I can't do that again. Next time, private flight. Regardless of cost.)

The story goes that he was attacked in his own manor, and that's quite the surprise given how labyrinthine this place is. One of the staff found him, levitating above his bed just after sunrise. The woman said, as she entered the room she saw... something holding him by the throat. A ghost. With a face that wasn't human but something else. And it twisted his head around and the bones shattered one by one, but as she approached it, it relinquished its grip. Fled through the window. Shrieking.

I've heard the stories about the boogeymen, the ones called Seven, or VII.

I've seen Arthur's body. The fingers from the spirit that touched him left... impressions upon the neck. Discolored like bruises, only darker, redder. A 'v' shaped bruise on his right side, and two more slash-shaped 'stains' on his left. A 'V' and a 'II'. Jesus.

The staff, they lament over him all night. They stay by his bed, not eating, not sleeping, just bowing down and praying. Weeping. Pulling their hair. One even bit into her own arm so hard that blood welled up and dripped onto the floor. It's crazy. I've never seen anything like it.

Sleeping like he is, Scarsbrick is a fireplug. Salt-and-pepper hair. Dead eyes staring up. Jowls like a dog. But I can believe he's a powerful man. Even laying there, weak, you can sense his stature. On one hand, he's like a corpse. On the other, it feels like there's something in there. Something watching me. Or listening to me talk into this damn recorder.

At least he's only torpid. The chain isn't broken. Not yet, anyhow.²

Drüzzelstoz³

I can't stop shaking. That was the most frightening experience of my... life and beyond. The sounds you heard on the tape, those were... those were the pigs. Eating. They're the most nightmarish things I've ever seen, boars and razorbacks, bloodied tusks and broad hooves. They're not even animals anymore. They're monsters. When I was done, when I was leaving, I could see him at a distance – he got into the pen with them, and they encircled him. A chorus of squeals and grunts. He... answered them in the same sounds. They were like a human congregation surrounding their bishop or even their god. He's like the... their Saint or something. Jesus. I'm going to be sick.

⁴**Drüzzelstoz:** I will tell you a story. You look over there, in the woods, and you see a shack next to my house. You will soon see my men come across the yard and they will be holding a black bag. Depending on how well a job they have done, that bag will be moving or it may be still. They will come over here and they will open the top of that black bag and upend it into this pig pen. My hogs here are mostly *Angler Sattelschwein*, bred rarely. These have been here for a long time. I feed them part of myself to keep them here. When the body hits the mud, they will feast upon

²Arthur Scarsbrick, attacked and left to slumber. Unexpected. And the way the staff is behaving, coupled with that wild story. He couldn't be Afflicted, could he?

³This is where it starts to jump the tracks a little. Poor Noah. I've only heard peripheral stories about Drüzzelstoz. He's certainly... unusual. I've rearranged the order of the transcript for the sake of clarity. The novitiate speaks first to Drüzzelstoz and then gives his impressions, but it seems that the impressions should come first.

⁴And now, the interview. Or an excerpt from it, at least. We had to translate this from German. Rough German, too. Not modern by any stretch. Took some time.

it. If the body is awake, he will scream because they will not eat the face first. They eat the extremities first. Hands and feet, then arms and legs. Once they've gotten to the trunk they will move to the head, they will fight over its tender meat. They can clean a skull in minutes. Our kind, though, and you may see this here tonight, will still be animated even after all the meat is stripped from the skull. It is a thing to see. Boned jaw working. Tongue like a worm out of an apple. Until they eat it too.

You come here following the unbroken chain and wondering what it is to be of the Lords and I will tell you now. Being of the Lords is understanding that all things work within all things, that there is outside our family's chain a far greater chain of being and that we are one part of it. Our part, however, is a royal part, a part of rulers. It is not in our control, and it may not be desirable to us on a personal level. But it is in the Blood. It is ineluctable. As much a part of us as the sun is the day and the moon is the night.

It is easier to give yourself to that, then to resist it. To make yourself a ruler of things, men, beasts. To connect with the world around you. Grow a garden. Raise pigs or dogs. Maintain a stable

of mules, both the animal and the man. Find a paramour and enjoy the endeavor. Rule all that you see. Connect with it and control it.

Look. There. You see? The men with the bag coming through the trees? The hogs, they grow agitated. Hungry. The victim in the bag is a Noctuku, a Haunt who thought he could prey on my childer who dot this countryside. He can do no such thing. But I appreciate that he connected with me. That he showed himself a part of the greater chain. But now I must do my part.

The bag is not moving. My men did a thorough job.

But he will move when the swine begin to eat.

Svetovid⁵

Svetovid slumbers and has for well over a hundred years. At least I knew that going in, unlike with Arthur Scarsbrick.

I'm... on an island in the Baltic Sea. Rügen, though Drüzzelstoz called it "Rugia" or the isle of the "Trichterbecher," whatever that is. I guess it was a popular tourist island until very recently: they've found a whole host of dead animals here. Swans. Cats. Dogs. Lots of other birds. Fear of some kind of avian flu epidemic, I guess. Right now, the island is mostly deserted, at least at this far end of it.

Svetovid slumbers in a deep barrow, a chambered cairn on the far end of the island. It was blocked by a heavy stone, and some of Drüzzelstoz's agents came with me and helped me move it. They're not... friendly. And they don't speak English and my German is for crap. It's probably for the best.

Svetovid is a dry corpse. I've... never seen anything like it. Just a shriveled thing. I think the body would curl up like a cockroach on its back, but they've bound the corpse to the stone table with leather cords, presumably to stop it from tightening up. Atop him is a ratty leather skin, with a white horse painted across it. All around the body are artifacts. Stone phalluses. Broken ceramics. Several goat or bull horns filled with tiny bones and sticks, bits of heay moss.

From what I could glean from Drüzzelstoz, Svetovid is considered to be a very literal god. I don't know that I buy it, but I do know that Drüzzelstoz is something of a prominent Circle cultist around here, with his sire at the center of that worship. (And yet Drüzzelstoz isn't exactly a faithful adherent – paying something more like lip service to the whole affair. Jesus, I hope he never hears me say that. I can't imagine being thrown in with those awful hogs.) Still, though, Drüzzelstoz apparently numbers as 1 of 300 men – some Kindred, some the agents of those Kindred – who protect this barrow. None of them had any problem with me coming here, though, which almost scares me. I assume it's that I'm part of the "family," and that –

Well, okay. Drüzzelstoz's men just left. They just turned and walked out. I'd suggest they're going out for a smoke, but... well.

Anyway. I guess there was some row centuries back with the Sanctified trying to claim that sleeping Svetovid here was actually someone named Vitus from just after the collapse of the Camarilla from Rome. I guess there was a human, "Saint Vitus" in the Christian way, some patron saint of actors or something, but I don't think they mean this to be the same. I guess the Sanctified wanted to claim this barrow as their own and venerate this Vitus character as one of their own – some have even said he's a survivor out of the Dead Julii, but that can't really be possible, can it? – but of course, the pagans here didn't really think it was a good idea. Most times, I know our kind doesn't really do battle on any grand scale, but I guess the fight over this little plot of land was brutal.

⁵And this is where it all goes awry.



Lots of blood, both human and Lord, spilled in this –

What was that sound? Holy shit, hold on –

[...]

Jesus. Jesus! They moved the stone back! Drüzzelstoz's stupid brutes moved the goddamn stone back in front of the door! What am I supposed to do? *What am I supposed to do?*

Oh. What the –? Where did that –? Svetovid's mouth is open. It wasn't before. I swear, the mouth was shut, the jaw bound closed with leather cord, and...

Oh my God. The lips are wet. I can smell it. Blood. It's strong. It's old. It's... it's making me dizzy. I can't even...

He's moving. Oh my God he's –

We don't really know what happened. My assumption is that Svetovid is awake, though I've no idea how that would happen.

The chain remains unbroken, though, if you'll believe that.

We're still getting tapes from "Reed."

We got this one, obviously.

But all the others since are mostly static and white noise. Sometimes you'll hear something. A whispered voice, barely audible. We have people working on it.

One of the messages is quite clear, though.

"They have returned." -C. Hardaiken

PS. i.e. Notes From The Dead Girl

It's done, all that you requested. The author, Bryce, is in my keeping, now. He's hidden away under tight lock and key. His encounter with the daughter of Cassius left him... addled. As expected. It was wise to keep me out of it; as much as I wanted to pursue her and find out the information you needed, it seems that she is as potent a figure as you suggested. Invading his dreams. Recording her own voice within his.

She performed the last ritual on the empty moon, last night. As suspected, this time it was three generations of daughters: a grandmother, a mother, and the granddaughter. Stripped of clothing, then stripped of skin.

This is, I presume, the ritual you were hoping to see? Is it a ritual of the Crone? You mentioned it might be a way to refine the blood, that there exist ways to appease the eldest powers so that they might allow one of us the will and authority over her own vitae? Fascinating. I hope it's useful for your records. I assume it's not something you wish to replicate? I'm having enough trouble cleaning up after what Cassius's brood did to this city. But you are, of course, free to do as you choose.

The daughter did leave one last note. This one, tucked away in an envelope, sealed not with wax but with a gobbet of ear pressed to the paper with blood.

I include it here for your archives.

Best in service,

C. Hardaiken

Bruja, striga, screech owl,
lilitu, lamia, strigoaica...

The Strix have returned
but I am safe.

MALKAVIA

I always think of the Ship of Fools. It kept turning up in medieval manuscripts and illustrations — that image of a boatload of lunatics floating downstream. Eventually, I figure, they must get out to sea and then, what? Be lost forever? Turn up on some weird shore and found a Dali-esque city of bizarre glory and radical insight, with melted clocks all over the place? Is that what insanity is?

The idea I've heard is that the Ship of Fools idea is based on something they used to do in the Dark Ages: Load the crazies onto a boat and push them down-river. Let the next town deal with them. Let them drown. Whatever.

Can't you see it? The quiet retards and the trembling autistic zombies going two-by-two up the ramp and into the belly of this awful ark? They get sealed in by boards, nailed down over the hatches, so they won't wander out of the hold. The really mad ones, though — the schizos and the homicidal psychopaths, foaming at the mouth — they get chained up on the deck with iron cages around their heads. You'd think they'd want to put these maniacs in the hold, right? So they wouldn't get out? But, no. The reason you want them up top, is so everyone knows right away that this is a Ship of Fools. You hear the gibbering and the evil screams as they come floating down towards town, and you get your able-bodied men to the riverbank, with big poles in hand, to make sure the boat doesn't run aground. Get those fuckers out of here. Push them downstream. They're somebody else's problem.

I think it's more likely that the people loading the unwanted, insane nobodies onto boats got the idea from the allegory. (Tonight, hospitals are putting mental patients on buses and sending them to nearby cities, without cash, to be stranded in someone else's public medical system. They call it "Greyhound therapy." Good times.) Back in 1494, a German theologian wrote a satirical story called "Ship of Fools." (This is just two years after Columbus and his boat, which maybe we can chalk up to coincidence.)

The satire wasn't about crazy people, of course. We're all on the Ship of Fools. We're all fools, and the ship is every city, every country, every planet we ride downstream on. We're just a bunch of maniacs drifting nowhere.

Some of us are more maniacal than others. But we're all crazy.

Isn't this how art influences life, though? Some writer thinks of this crazy idea, of lunatics bundled onto a boat and shipped off, and a couple of decades later real people put the plan into real action. Seriously, I think I'd rather be one of the lunatics on the boat than one of the bastards who put them there. At least, while adrift, we have a chance of turning up on some strange coast and living the happy, sinful life Hieronymus Bosch showed us in his painting (*Ship of Fools*, naturally). The evil fucks who pulled back the gangplank and pushed that boat downriver will be evil fucks forever.

ORIGINS OF THE DISEASE

The idea of the Affliction — the mysterious curse-cum-illness that dements us Demented — as a disease is pretty new. An invention of modern medicine. (Generously. We're talking 19th century vampire psychology here.) Before big thinkers and armchair brainiacs like Freud and Jung cooked up the idea of "mental illness," we Kindred thought of the Affliction as a curse within the Curse. We thought it was some sub-vexation plaguing Lords (and, later, any clan of us) with madness, delusions, wicked thoughts and impulses, and an inability to separate our desires from our actions. But that's the Middle Ages.

Before all of that, it was just another aspect of the Blood, regarded more for the prophetic nonsense it put into Afflicted mouths, and the mystic visions it bled into Afflicted eyes. In the earliest nights, we were soothsayers, diviners, and prophets (both false and real). The madness that came with our insight was just the damage caused to the physical body when it processed these divine signals. When lightning strikes, it burns.

A lot of Kindred don't know that. A lot of Kindred have told me this idea of ancient proto-Malkavians as seers and doomsayers is self-aggrandizing bullshit. A lot of those Kindred are Lords — and they call us self-aggrandizing bullshitters. The absurdity is

doubled when you think of the face the Lords might save if they were to accept the idea that us dirty little secrets have actual value. Wouldn't they rather us embarrassing step-brothers were driven mad by a brush with some higher force, instead of their official party line that we're rabid, syphilitic sickos?

But whatever. These same assholes have relied on our visions to achieve precious victories. These same assholes have kept Demented visionaries in their attics and basements to get *themselves* an edge off *our* sickness. It's those same Demented visions that have cut through thousands of years of doubt and deception and fog to give us an image of ancient, Demented prophets.

That image we have is scratched and faded and overexposed and water-damaged like an old Polaroid found in a winter coat, but I trust it more than the defensive platitudes of shamed Lords.

This is the history that we're putting together in our *Codex Malkavia*, based on a mix of "historical accounts" (as [REDACTED] here calls them) and details pried out of Malkavian visions. Yeah, there's some speculation and extrapolation in here, but how's that different from anything else? What this does is give us an idea where Malkavians have been, and where the disease (we'll play along and call it that) comes from.

We contacted the ghoul in Berkeley you told us about, and sent him to find the bearers of the *Codex Malkavia*. He caught up to them in an abandoned motel outside of Sacramento and found the Demented nomads surprisingly cooperative. They want to be heard, it seems. One of the curators of the book, calling himself Michael St. Grobian, prepared this short article for you, based on his experiences as a Malkavian and the insights recorded into the *Book of Malkavia*.

Their Version: Naughty Lords overwhelmed by the stress of power and the sins they've committed in the pursuit of it find the Man gets weak and vulnerable to the Beast, and a big chunk of the human part gets eaten by the animal part of the Kindred "soul." (Let's say.) This is sort of the equivalent of a nervous breakdown, except it's also a breakdown in the mighty power of Vitae — the pieces of the broken mind get carried into the rest of the body by the Blood, and can then be spread on to other Kindred and kine. The metaphor's imperfect, but the general idea sticks with what we know about the Blood: It absorbs qualities of the cask it's kept in, like a wine absorbs flavor from a wood barrel, and that taint gets passed on to whoever drinks it. The difference here is that the "flavor" lasts a lot longer — like forever — once a piece of some Demented mind gets lodged in yours.

The point is that the Affliction is a contagious weakness caused by the personal failings of a few pathetic Lords who broke under the great pressures of their noble burden. (It's like a parable:

You weak pussies are going to bring us all down if we don't lock you away.)

Our Version: It's just like the visions, put down in the *Codex*, tell us. Ancient Lords, who we know had close contact with the gods (whatever you decide they were), were brushed by the touch of powers more potent than earthly flesh, the body or the Blood can handle. This wears away at the Man (and the mind), but through the threadbare parts of the mortal mind, divine light comes through, like holding a blanket up to the sun. The illumination that enters gets reflected or refracted by the Blood, like sunlight through the surface of the sea, and all that softens the light enough that we can look at it (some of us, for a while at least) without going blind. Vitae that's not Afflicted doesn't refract the light right, so only we can see this stuff — and even then, there's a trick to it.

The point is that we're suffering from exposure to something too bright for us to really understand. Staring at the sun leaves spots in your eyes. Staring at the divine sears the soul.

What ashamed Lords call a curse, we can call a breakthrough. Of sorts.

THE HISTORY OF MALKAVIANS

First, the name. Regardless of what year we're talking about, you'll see us use the name "Malkavian" throughout the *Codex Malkavia* (and here), even though the para-scientific name *malkavia* wasn't given to the Affliction until the 18th or 19th century. Without that word, *malkavia*, there were no Malkavians. We were the Afflicted, if we didn't have anything valuable to offer, or we were Demented, if we had visions that someone wanted to take advantage of.

In the old nights, by which I mean pretty much everything between our time as minor prophets in the courts of the Dark Ages until our general dismissal from any form of polite society in the 14th century, we were a scattered few. Rather than driving us together in shadowy holes, where even the bloodsucking monsters of Kindred society wouldn't have to look at us, we were isolated cases, a little like court jesters and magicians rolled into one. We had the kind of outcast freedoms enjoyed by other groups of already-fucked sods of the era — Jews could be moneylenders, we could be pagans and dissenters, as long as we did it in service of respectable powers. (The Malkavian who infected me, for example, says that every Afflicted elder he knows was versed in at least one or two rites of witchcraft from the Circle of the Crone, even though most Ventrue Princes were Sanctified or Church-friendly in those nights.)

That lasted, more or less, until the later years of the 14th century, when plagues (like the Black Death, maybe you've heard of it) swept through

Europe, making mortals sick and, subsequently, making vampires into carriers of nasty diseases. The odd behavior of the infected, plus the idea of spreading illness dominating so much of our nightly existence, seems to have spawned the idea that, like lepers, we were sick. Maybe it had to do with the spreading Sanctified propaganda, carried by rare traveling Kindred missionaries of the era, who were claiming that the rambling, panicky proclamations of the Afflicted were devil-speak, getting in the way of the Church-sanctioned epiphanies that Theban sorcerers were trying to spread as gospel. More likely it was a mixture of religious pressure and fear of the plague that drove us out.

Frenchman sociologist Michel Foucault supposed in his book, *Madness & Civilization*, that society needs a class of sick outcasts. This pretty well jibes with our account of history. As leprosy gradually faded from the front of the line of popular medical fears, the focus fell on the insane. This was among mortals, but of course the Damned quickly followed suit, as we are wont to do.

Any history of lunacy wouldn't be complete without some appearance by Bethlem Royal Hospital — which you probably know as Bedlam — and ours is a history of lunacy. Maybe there's some mystical or spiritual force that draws the insane toward Bethlem (or just toward England), because I know several Kindred who claim to have contracted *malkavia* by feeding on kine in the vicinity of the place. Maybe it really does give off some cloud of contagious crazy.

TANGENT: CRAZY PEOPLE GIVE YOU MALKAVIA

A bit of background, here: In the Middle Ages, before and after Bethlem, a new theory about the origins of the Affliction was spreading among the Damned. The idea, then, was that feeding from the insane ran the risk of tainting the Blood — especially if you killed the lunatic you fed from. Some vampire got the idea that a new wave of Malkavians spread through Europe after a coterie of Kindred preyed on a helpless ship of fools and that this, boys and girls, is how the disease got into the Vitae of other clans.

By our modern reckoning... there may actually be some truth to this idea. Mortals used to suppose that the insane were affected by some exposure to Godly Reason too great for their mere mortal minds to comprehend. (Lovecraft, I think, would've loved this idea. If you regard this kind of thinking as archaic, the romantic pap flick, *A Beautiful Mind*, essentially presents this same idea turned inside-out for the modern-day audience. How much more enlightened we are tonight.)

If mortals *were* driven mad by the same kind of exposure to arcane forces (whether you regard it as divine insight, alien truth, or some kind of higher perception of a super-reality) that supposedly drove early Malkavians loony, couldn't that same insanity be passed from kine to Kindred via the magic of Vitae, just as it can spread from vampire to vampire?

The point is, we think it's possible that multiple "outbreaks" (I hate writing that) of *malkavia* have occurred throughout history as Kindred have fed on a special kind of insane kine. I've known Malkavian Dragons who theorize that feeding on wizards (or unrealized wizards) who've been deranged by their magic is like striking a spark that *might* ignite *malkavia* in the Blood. Flocks of Kindred in cities like Miami and San Francisco seem convinced that feeding on some kind of runaway fairy-people can Afflict you. I know a Malkavian Shadow who insists he used to be one of these fairy-tale fugitives, and that this is why he was already Afflicted immediately upon his Embrace.

These guesses are as good as anyone else's, I suppose.

WHY MALKAVIANS HAUNT BEDLAMs

What all this has done, though, is turned "insane" mortals into a kind of reserve stock for Malkavians. In cities where Afflicted Kindred are well known, a fear of drinking from the mentally ill tends to spread alongside the general distaste for Malkavians. This keeps most vampires from lapping at the necks of easy prey, restrained in mental wards. This also leaves that prey available and tempting to already-Afflicted outcasts.



No small number of Malkavians have turned this to their advantage, by convincing Princes and Regents to give them official lordship over asylums, mental hospitals, and special-needs schools. This gives the Malkavian real power over the fields he'd be harvesting anyway, and it creates a kind of de facto leper colony for the Afflicted.

Plus, if something bad does happen at one of these institutions (and it seems like *something* bad always happens), the Prince has the Malkavian landlord as a scapegoat. This saves the leadership from having to vilify every Malkavian in the city for the fuck-up, and prevents everyone else from having to deal with angry, defensive, crazy vampires looking to prove something.

Anyway, Malkavians tend to be drawn to crazy prey. Some of the Afflicted vampires I know think the Vitae of schizophrenics, psychopaths, and sociopaths can help a vampire master the mystic powers of the Demented. (Others say only autistic blood, or bipolar blood, or whatever, is of real help.)

Bethlem continues to be a fine example of how mortal regard for the mentally ill has influenced the fate of Malkavians. Throughout the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, the Afflicted of England (where most of the Afflicted seemed to reside) were known as Bedlamites, or given the mocking

surname "o' Bedlam." (My sire's eldest child was Edgar o' Bedlam until the night he vanished, in 1970.) Lots of Malkavians walked the streets with other Bedlam Beggars (like the guy in *King Lear*), using people's fear or disgust to shake some coin out of them. ("Give me a pound or I'll get my crazy on you," I imagine.)

Patients used to disappear from Bedlam. More than the nuns and nurses there would want to admit. Some of these were killed and carried off by Malkavians. Some of these were sold to the Afflicted by ghoul-doctors. Some of these were Embraced.

This still happens. I know of at least two patients from Bethlem who've been Embraced by Malkavians who, to put it politely, became totally fucking obsessed with them to the point of thinking they were in love — and thinking of the Embrace as sex. (Contrary to what a London Harpy told me, Shane "The Pogues" MacGowan is not a vampire. I don't know about that Pete Doherty, though.)

One rumor that's true is the one about the Malkavian Nosferatu haunting Broadmoor, in the English countryside. I've met him. Don't.

The ghoul who told me that Haunt Embraced Richard Dadd — I believe him. Actually, the Haunt of Broadmoor might *be* Richard Dadd, for all I can tell.

THE DEMENTED VERSUS THE DOCTORS

As with so many Kindred infestations of mortal institutions, the Malkavians around Bethlem eventually went too far. They caught the attention of a doctor who was starting to suspect that some of his patients' tales of stalkers in the hospital... were real.

The story, as I've heard it, is that the doctor cornered (some say tortured) the patient-selling ghoul doctor inside Bethlem and got the truth out of him. *The* truth. The ghoul gave us up, and this crusading doctor got a look behind the Masquerade. This was around 1814. The hospital was moved the following year to get it and the patients out from under the fangs of the undead.

Since then, this Dr. Monrowe and his kids have been hunting us. They've put together a few small crews of vampire-hunters over the years, and did

a fine job of pruning (more like "practically exterminating," really) the Malkavian population of England. Our saving grace, though, is that the Monrowe hunters (operating as the Holy Society of Bedlam) are keeping the truth of our existence secret to protect themselves from being labeled insane, too. They're still an active threat in the UK, though.

That ghoul who tipped them off disappeared shortly thereafter. The natural assumption is that he's dead, but in 1929 a Malkavian in north London had a vision of that ghoul locked in a padded cell and being fed blood by the current Dr. Monrowe. Are they keeping him alive on captured Vitae as a font of information (even though he's years out of date)? The following year, in 1930, Bethlem Hospital was moved *again* — maybe to find a new hiding spot for that captured ghoul.

THE NAME

In the 18th century, when syphilis was all the rage and scientific rigor was pushing explorers and "ologists" of every stripe to name everything in sight, some Kindred scientist (or, more fairly, "scientist") sought to categorize and name the Affliction. I've heard two competing accounts of just when the moniker first appeared, but I've only seen one with documentation to support it, and that one is backed up by Demented visions, so that's the story I buy.

In this version, which starts around 1770, a Kindred academic working in relative isolation with his chapter of Dragons in Warsaw, took on the Affliction as his own "Great Work." He was

Lord Nicholas of the Polaskis, an ancilla Ventruue of little account at the time. He had lost a few of his Lordly clan-brothers to the Affliction over the years, and finally mustered the will to get close enough to the curse to study it. No doubt he had hopes that he could help the Demented rise above their curse, and thereby find some way to overcome the larger curse of Damnation. (Obviously, he failed on both counts.) But he made excellent progress not only in studying patients first-hand, but in digging up Kindred records of the Affliction going back to the 1600s.

In those histories, he found multiple references to an afflicted Russian vampire called, simply, Mal-

kav. (I've since seen it written as "Grigori Malkav," but I'm not sure where the first name comes from or if it's genuine.) Malkav was braving travel from one European city to the next, looking for Kindred (or anyone else) who might be able to cure him of his ailment. But Polaski found a diary entry by the former Seneschal of Bucharest, who said the Prince of the city (as of about 1750) had staked and buried Malkav to put an end to his travels and the perils of infection. The diary even said where Malkav had been planted in the earth, so Polaski sent two of his ghouls to go and dig him up.

The timeline here gets a little fuzzy, but by 1773 Polaski had Malkav with him in Warsaw. Based on his journals, Polaski seems to have done three things:

First, he concluded that torpor had been of little help to Malkav, who awakened far less lucid and stable than accounts of him would've suggested. Polaski wrote that Malkav was "homicidal, angrily deranged, and difficult to restrain," and also, "He seems bent on constant movement; restricted from bolting across the wilds like a stag, he paces around his cell like a caged lion."

Second, Polaski kept Malkav locked up and under observation for somewhere in the neighborhood of forty years. During this time, Polaski seems to have gone through all the traditional mortal methods of tormenting and testing mental patients, beginning with the earliest treatment (restrain them and let people poke them with sticks) and continuing to the cutting-edge method of doping the shit out of the patient and submerging them in freezing water. Polaski's journal says he fed Malkav "opiate blood" (presumably the Vitae of opium-smoking kine) and "the essence of kine dead of the oil of sweet vitriol" (probably meaning the Vitae of mortals he overdosed with ether). He also indicated that from 1798 to 1799, Malkav was kept in a basin of rainwater.

Third, Polaski became convinced that the Affliction was spread through a contagious "evil agent" which he characterized as a kind of malignant vampire bacterium, invisible and hostile. Naturally, he found the Affliction to be analogous to syphilis and rabies, and thus characterized the Kindred who suffered from it as sexual deviants, "infidelites" and "behaving like wild animals."

He named this germ-like agent *malkavia*, after his patient, and theorized that it could be spread not just by Afflicted Vitae but also by the *thoughts* of Afflicted Kindred. He believed the Demented – which Malkav surely was – could spread *malkavia* by "casting their visions" onto nearby minds, or possibly even by speaking the gibberish that comes with Demented epiphanies. (In a sense, I guess he was right, but only in the short term.)

After this, we don't know much else about Polaski. One of his two ghouls (Embraced by Malkav in 1818, during his escape), who now resides in London, told me that Polaski gradually grew so fearful of the affect Malkav's presence was having on his own mind that, one night, he just fled Warsaw. Hasn't been seen since.

Malkav escaped not long after by convincing the *other* ghoul to let him out, probably with the sanguine voice he'd inherited from his Lord sire. That ghoul died without Vitae the following year.

Most of this information didn't surface, though, until Malkav (much more sane-seeming than Polaski recorded) turns up again in Moscow around 1900, with Polaski's journals, looking for a cure again. It's after this that the name *malkavia* starts to spread slowly across Europe. When a biological approach to studying Kindred physiology boomed in Switzerland around 1925 (with a bunch of Dragons, imagining themselves to be vampiric Adolf Meyers), the name "Malkavian" caught on. Since then, things have been what they are.

Malkav, meanwhile, is supposedly locked up in (or lord over, depending on who you ask) a Siberian *psikhushka*, where doctors (Kindred? kine? something else?) continue to work on him, testing his limits and shooting him full of medicated blood. Only now they do it on his orders.

(An aside: Everywhere I go, young Kindred who fancy themselves to be historically informed snidely associate syphilis and *malkavia*. These are all very funny whelps, I'm sure, but kids, that joke was old in 1675, when John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester, was the butt of it. (I don't know if that guy was a Malkavian, but he should've been.) Can you imagine how obnoxious it is to weather four hundred years of asshole punks who think nobody made jokes before *The Honeymooners*?)

TONIGHT'S DEMENTED

This new medical spin on the Affliction, just in the last hundred years, has changed the Malkavian Requiem in a big way. With Big Pharma making brain drugs all the vogue, Malkavians throughout the States are claiming lots more kine as their own. If everyone who takes Valium, dilaudid, Xanax, or Quaaludes is considered to be mentally ill, the Malkavians have a huge new crop. If, like most Princes I've heard of, these people are just considered drug-users, then the Duke of Drug-Users (or whoever) gets to claim them.

I know lots of Malkavians who have tried to ease their symptoms, or shut out their Demented

visions for a few nights, by swallowing drugged blood. A few claim it helps, but who's to say the same power of the blood to distill fractured minds into contagious blood can't also react to desperate placebos? Regardless, it seems to take a lot of drugged blood to help any Malkavian. Usually enough to kill the donor, and putting that on the conscience of a strained brain seems to do more damage than good in the long run.

After all the tests and torture, the drugs and deranged treatments, the confusion and the castigation, the mystery and the misery, the last few thousand years have been the same for us



– terrifying and sad. We used to be wise women and prophets, visionaries and soothsayers. We might not have been understood, but at least we weren't reviled.

The madness of modern hospitals – most modern hospitals – isn't sick enough to hide us anymore. (Though they still abuse the ill, and they still use Greyhound therapy.) We can haunt the places, but we cannot hide among the living there – not anymore. Modern medicine is for the mentally ill. But we're cursed, not ill. It's mystical, not mental.

So we spend our Requiems on the edges of Kindred and mortal society. We lurk like the homeless, in underpasses and ruined buildings. We dwell like neighborhood spooks in the creepy house in the overgrown lot, or the abandoned trailer by the canals that smell like wet scum. Even those of us who come from the old family lines, those who are descended from the old Lord visionaries, are now lords of nothing. Even our own minds and impulses defy us. We strive and we desire, like the Ven name says, but we do it without any of the control you prize.

Tonight, we're still dangerous outcasts, contagious and gross. We're Afflicted and Demented. We're set apart as if we're a crazy sub-species. My sire doesn't consider me to be of his clan. He says I'm Malkavian. When I cut away his face, some part of me felt like it wasn't my fault. It's not me who did it, I thought. It was the *malkavia*. Me and my blood, me and my mind, we're different things. The *malkavia* does things I don't want it to. It follows me around, like an imp in my guts. It pulls out intestines and wraps my sire up in them. It buries him under the fireplace. It can't remember where it put his face. Or his eyes. Or his teeth. I would never do those things. I was in the garden of Eden when it happened, getting lectured to by the snake. Hearing stories about the prophet with the serpent fangs who walked out of the Deluge and foretold the fall of Troy, fathered the Dardanians, and fucked Venus until the prophecies came.

That's all I know.

THE LAST LETTER

How much, I wonder, has my service to you been the work of your own will pressed down over mine, like a stamp into soft wax? Was my hesitation to help you, in those last nights, my own will gradually overcoming your domination? Or have I just become the same sort of paranoid and hateful monster that has kept the truth a secret for so long? Am I you, now?

If you want more than I have been willing, in my newfound conscience, to share with you this far, you will have to drink me dead and pray. If your plans for the work are ill, know that I will not lie for you anymore. I won't hide you from your enemies.

You will not hear from me again.





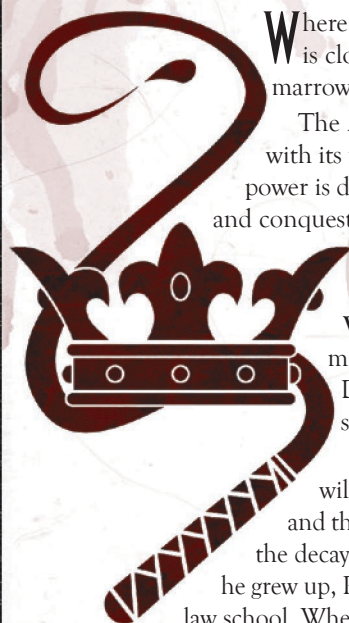


APPENDIX LORDS AND THE GAME

POWER TENDS
TO CORRUPT
AND ABSOLUTE POWER
CORRUPTS ABSOLUTELY.
GREAT MEN ARE ALMOST
ALWAYS BAD MEN,
EVEN WHEN THEY EXERCISE
INFLUENCE AND NOT AUTHORITY:
STILL MORE WHEN YOU SUPERADD
THE TENDENCY OR THE CERTAINTY
OF CORRUPTION BY AUTHORITY.
JOHN DALBERG-ACTON, 1ST BARON ACTON

ADRESTOI (BLOODLINE)

"MAY MY BELLY BE FULL, THAT MY WILL BE STRONG."



Where is a man's ambition? In his heart? What if his heart be still? In his blood? What if that blood is clotted and stolen? The Children of Midas are dead men who suck ambition from the blood and marrow of the living. Like the gods of the Aztecs, they can turn blood to gold and gold to blood.

The Adrestoi are creatures of the city, but more than that, creatures of its elite. They become one with its monoliths, command kine and beast alike. In death, they retain the vigor of life, but their will to power is dependent on the power of their blood. Fed well, an Adrestos is an irresistible force of command and conquest. Should he fail at the hunt, though, he becomes weak and easily swayed.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Dominate, Protean, Resilience

Nickname: Stalwarts, sometimes Children of Midas

Weakness: The children of Midas wax and wane according to their feeding. They push their minds and flesh too hard, try to accomplish too much, and so they drain away the Blood. Any Discipline which requires Willpower instead requires the same amount of Vitae. Adrestoi may spend Willpower normally to affect rolls.

History and Culture: The Adrestoi are a young bloodline, the product of their progenitor's fierce will and the mutations that ancestor wrought in his own Blood. He spawned his brood and line young, and they have evolved together. In the Detroit of the 1980s, Paul Gordon was a man with a mission. Amid the decay of the great automotive firms and the fires that swept regularly through the neighborhoods where he grew up, Paul learned to impose will over fear. He traded his father's blue collar for white, and he went off to law school. When he returned, a lawyer with a Georgetown degree, he started to make friends. The kind of friends who appreciated a white collar speckled with a little blood. The vampire wasn't far behind. He was looking for a servant, a cover, but Paul wore the monster down, manipulated and fought against him until the vampire Embraced him less by choice than force.

Paul's sire was young to begin with, an Ancilla too used to having mortal crutches. Once the attorney became the vampire, he made short and bloody work of his sire. Their merged blood changed fast, and altered in Paul's image. Invigorated, alive with cannibalized and mutated Vitae, he experienced an urge unusual among young Damned. He wanted to share. So he changed his name to Adrestos, the son of the legendary King Midas, and he Embraced the first of his line, the Adrestoi.

The most important ritual of the Adrestoi is the Hunt. All Kindred must hunt to survive, but the children of Midas find that their very character weakens when runs dry the Vitae. They become slothful and slow. Yet, that strength of character is required to pursue the hunt... one failure, one moment of sentimentality, one missed opportunity could doom the Adrestoi to a long mental rot. The Children of Midas celebrate the Hunt once per week, on the night before the Lancea Sanctum's Sabbath.

Paul Adrestos keeps a granite tomb on his estate, filled with his failures, fledglings whose minds collapsed early under his harsh tutelage. Each childe he takes is thrust into that tomb, to fend off and feed upon the horrors until he has mastered his blood sufficiently to escape. The battle typically takes multiple nights, usually culminating in the nascent vampire acquiring sufficient mastery of Protean to escape or diablerizing enough of his Kindred to force the doors through sheer will. Sometimes, it is not the new childe, but one of the formerly mindless who claws his way free. Adrestos welcomes him by the name of the vampire he destroyed, and celebrates him as a prodigal returned.

Reputation: The children of Midas are known for results, but also for obsession. Many Ventrue look at the hunt as a disgraceful necessity, something untidy and to be kept private. The Adrestoi



hunt in packs, instead, and those who have joined the Lancea Sanctum are often perceived as zealots as a consequence. Those with no such allegiance are often suspected of affliction with Malkavia or simply to have become too monstrous too fast. Where they are recognized as a bloodline, they are sometimes pitied. When encountered alone, they are often feared.

Pitied or feared, Adrestoi are also well-liked. After all, they have a lot to offer. If they hunt frequently and almost openly... well, that habit is no less distasteful than the predilections of some of the other lines. Their tenacity, seemingly wired in the blood, makes them effective allies even when very young; for just as their weakness drains Vitae, it conserves their inner strength. They can turn anything to gold, given their fill of blood...

VENTRUE MERITS

Ventruer culture is such that the clan's goals and areas of expertise are well represented by standard Merits like City Status, Covenant Status, Allies, Contacts, Retainer and Mentor, among others. Success in matters of territory, rank, prestige, renown and authority are what the Lords consider to be the measure of merit. Excellence in one's field and triumph in one's pursuits reflect one's true quality. Thus, any Merit is potentially suitable for a Ventruer – so long as your character has the ambition to reach the highest levels of that Merit.

The following new Merits reflect aspects of Ventruer culture, as well as their mystic familial traits. These are Merits that likely matter more to Ventruer than they do to other vampires, but these are not defining aspects of the Lords' society. For that, look back to Status. Here you'll find a few matters of Lordly blood, and a bit of Lordly posturing.

BAD BREEDING (• TO •••)

Prerequisite: Cannot have dots in Good Breeding. Only certain bloodlines and clans in the city qualify as “ill bred” for the purposes of this Merit, but the precise identity of the scorned varies from city to city. The Storyteller has final say on what clans or bloodlines make a character eligible for this Merit in the local city.

Effect: Your character is part of a bloodline or family line regarded as brutish, crass, pedestrian, dirty, or otherwise ignoble to Ventruer tastes (and the customs they promote throughout Kindred society). This peculiar counterpart to the Good Breeding Merit carries with it a distinct negative connotation to those Lords who concern themselves with ancestry and parentage, but that negativity is subjective – this trait is still a Merit, after all.

This Merit represents your character's ability to use traditional preconceptions of his social worth to his own advantage. As scum, your character can get away with rudeness that would not be tolerated from a more civil monster. It isn't considered crass or shameful for your character to be seen in the presence of prostitutes or common hoods. Your character may be able to admit (or fake) a degree of ignorance without losing face, because, after all, how would a Kindred of such poor breeding know anything about the Bishop's plans for the city?

In game terms, this Merit grants a bonus to Social dice pools when, at the Storyteller's discretion, the reputation of your character, his sire, his clan, or his bloodline influences the Kindred or ghoul he is trying to affect. You may choose to invoke a bonus up to the number of dots your character has in this Merit, depend-

ing on how aggressively your character takes advantage of other's preconceptions. Remember, though, that this is a Social Merit – a white-trash reputation doesn't actually grant your character any special knowledge or training with cars or guns.

The bonus from this Merit is useful only against characters who care about lineage, reputation, and breeding among the Damned. Even then, it is limited by the overriding importance of Status. While your character (through your clever play) may be able to balance a reputation from Bad Breeding with the respect he's due through Covenant Status, Kindred of great rank are likely to care about their authority, not your character's breeding. A character with more dots of Status than you have

A NOTE ON THE BREEDING MERITS

This is important: The Good Breeding and Bad Breeding Merits do not describe any actual quality of your character's blood. They do not represent any predisposition to a particular behavior in the way that the Inherited Skill Merit does. They do not measure how well bred or how trashy your character is thought to be, to any degree. These Merits reflect a binary state – good or bad – but do not measure how far from center your character's reputation is, either way. What these Merits describe is your character's capacity for taking advantage of that good or bad reputation.

It is *not* somehow *more* scandalous for a character of Good Breeding to be caught with a hooker, for example. It may be scandalous for a character of good or bad breeding, but a character with the Good Breeding or Bad Breeding Merit knows how to spin his reputation to protect himself from scandal. With these Merits, your character is better able to escape some of the consequences of his actions by hiding behind his breeding.

“What do you expect,” they say about the Gangrel with Bad Breeding, “they eat dogs.” Meanwhile, when the Ventruer with Good Breeding is caught doing the same thing, they say, “Those fops slum it down here just to see what it's like, I think.”

in this Merit is not subject to your Bad Breeding bonus. (For example, the Prince doesn't find your character's lowly behavior intimidating – everyone is lowly compared to him.)

Drawback: When you choose to make use of the Bad Breeding bonus in a given scene, your character is taking advantage of stereotypes and preconceptions. Those same preconceptions can work against him. Later, the Storyteller may penalize a dice pool by imposing a modifier equal to the bonus you invoked earlier, depending on how other characters in the scene regard yours. The bonus to Intimidation you drew from your reputation as an ill-tempered Savage might penalize a Persuasion roll later.

GOOD BREEDING (• TO •••)

Prerequisite: Cannot have dots in Bad Breeding. Only certain bloodlines and clans in the city qualify as “well bred” for the purposes of this Merit, but who is esteemed varies from city to city. The Storyteller has final say on what clans or bloodlines make a character eligible for this Merit in the local city.

Effect: Your character is part of a bloodline or family line regarded as admirable, classy, refined, dutiful or otherwise noble according to Ventrue tastes (and the customs they promote throughout Kindred society). This counterpart to the Bad Breeding Merit carries with it a distinct connotation of poise and excellence to those Lords who concern themselves with ancestry and parentage, but that connotation is subjective – Kindred expect a certain decorum from a well-bred vampire.

This Merit represents your character's ability to use traditional preconceptions of his social standing to his own advantage. As a creature of fashion and taste, your character might be able to pass off an exposed lie as a polite gesture, present his opinion as something more valuable than it is, or explain away his secrecy as discretion. It isn't considered rude for your character to miss appointments or excuse himself from difficult situations.

In game terms, this Merit grants a bonus to Social dice pools when, at the Storyteller's discretion, the reputation of your character, his sire, his clan, or his bloodline influences the Kindred or ghoul he is trying to affect. You may choose to invoke a bonus up to the number of dots your character has in this Merit, depending on how aggressively your character takes advantage of other's preconceptions. Remember, though, that this is a Social Merit – a white-collar reputation doesn't actually grant your character any special knowledge of politics or finance.

The bonus from this Merit is useful only when dealing with characters who care about lineage, reputation, and breeding among the Damned. Even then, it is limited by the overriding importance of Status. While your character (through your clever play) may be able to use Good Breeding to distract from his lack of useful Covenant Status, Kindred of great rank are likely to care more about their authority than your character's breeding. A character with more dots of Status than you have in this Merit is not subject to your Good Breeding bonus. (For example, the Priscus doesn't find your character's parentage impressive if you can't back it up with actual authority.)

Drawback: When you choose to make use of the Good Breeding bonus in a given scene, your character is taking advantage of preconceptions. Those same preconceptions can work against

him. Later, the Storyteller may penalize a dice pool by imposing a modifier equal to the bonus you invoked earlier, depending on how other characters in the scene regard yours. The bonus to Socialize you gained from your reputation as a prestigious social accessory might penalize a Subterfuge roll later on, when you try to claim you weren't at that party.

INHERITED RESISTANCE (•• OR ••••)

Prerequisite: Dominate • or Animalism •, Ventrue only

Effect: Your character is the child of a Ventrue sire with unusually potent blood or a phenomenally strong will. Some degree of her power has been passed on to you through the Blood – not genetically or through training, but through a kind of mystical reverberation. You are simply predisposed to have a greater resistance to certain powers of the Blood.

In game terms, your character enjoys an increased resistance to the powers of Dominate and/or Animalism when those powers are used against him by other vampires.

With two dots in this Merit, you gain a +2 bonus to resist or contest any power of Dominate or Animalism used against your character by another Ventrue vampire, if your character has dots in the same Discipline as that power.

With four dots in this Merit, you gain the +2 bonus regardless of the clan of the opposing vampire.

Thus, with two dots in this Merit and one dot in Dominate, you gain a +2 bonus to resist or contest all powers of Dominate used against your character by other Ventrue, but your character gains no special benefit against powers of Animalism or any Discipline used by non-Ventrue. With four dots in this Merit and one dot each in Dominate and Animalism, you gain a +2 bonus to resist or contest all powers of Dominate and Animalism, no matter what clan your opponent calls family.

LORDLY PALETTE (• TO •••)

Prerequisite: Kindred only

Effect: Your character possesses a keen palette for blood, either through training or raw talent. She is able to discern details about kine and Kindred through nuances in the taste of their Vitae. When your character attempts to discern parentage, power, or other details about a subject by tasting its blood, add your dots in this Merit to the dice pool.

You also gain this bonus on perception rolls that would otherwise involve scent or taste if your character is able to taste blood from the area. At the Storyteller's discretion, characters with two or more dots in this Merit may make a Wits + Medicine + Lordly Palette roll, with a –2 penalty (or greater), to detect known toxins or diseases in sampled blood. The character swishes the sample about like wine and then, hopefully, spits it out. Other unusual perception rolls may also be possible through this Merit on a case-by-case basis, as the Storyteller sees fit. A vampire machinist may be able to use a Wits + Crafts dice pool to detect the presence of industrial toxins in a subject's blood. Not just anything can be sampled and analyzed through the lordly palette, however – this Merit reflects only a knack for discerning things present in blood.

Despite its name, and the Ventrue reputation for well-honed palettes, this Merit is available to Kindred of any clan.

DAMNATION

The great weakness of the Lords is, of course, corruption. No matter how high a Ventrue rises, he is never safe from the dragging weight of his own damnation, threatening to pull him back down the terrible distance to the dirt.

Ventrue are plagued by social and familial pressure powerful enough to crush even able Lords beneath doubt and the expectations of one's betters. But the Ventrue don't celebrate the able, they celebrate the excellent.

NEW FLAWS

The society of the Lords is ancient and skewed, corrupted by power and preconception, dressed up in pretentious finery to hide its naked shame, and riddled with anxieties and animosities caused by the friction between what it wants and what it gets. It is not so different from our own society. Thus, all the Flaws experienced by the living may be suffered by the Lords of the Damned, as well. The reputation and station of the Lords, however, magnifies some sources of pressure into forces so profound that they can plague a character as Flaws:

Expectations (Social Flaw): Your character sees the world in a very orderly fashion and does not deal well with things – or people – that do not conform to his expectations of how things “should be.” Rather than adapting his expectations to his experience, your character sometimes lectures others that they’re “doing it wrong” or “don’t get it” when their choices or behavior don’t match his. This may derive from a rigid (or chokingly structured) youth, an over-reliance on book-learning, or any of a variety of childhood traumas which your character is trying to overcome. Your character suffers a –2 penalty on Social rolls when dealing with characters who do not conform to his preconceptions based on their job, age, race, clan or some other criterion. This penalty shouldn’t persist for more than a few scenes, as your character comes to accept this new person as “Douglas” instead of just “a banker.” You gain experience when your character’s expectations are challenged and, as a result, change.

Impossible Standard (Mental Flaw): Your character holds herself to an impossible standard, which she may never be able to meet, no matter how hard she tries. Perhaps her sire is a Lord of such repute and excellence that your character is facing the possibility of an eternity in his shadow. Perhaps her clan is so venerated (or so reviled) in the city that any deviation from their untouchable image would be considered an embarrassment, and your character faces a never-ending performance of protocol with no margin for error. Whatever the circumstances, your character learns something about her endurance when she fails to meet those impossible standards, suffers the consequences... and yet survives to try again. To gain experience from this Flaw, the consequences of failure must be substantial – being chastised by an elder probably isn’t enough, but being chastised by an elder in front of an audience of respected Kindred would suffice.

NEW DERANGEMENTS

Ventrue are betrayed by their own blood, which can seem to burn their hearts like acid, drown their minds with delusions, or poison their reason with bitter madness. Even the greatest Ventrue minds find themselves threatened by the cost of their own dwindling *menschwert* and morality. It can feel like your brain has been soaking too long, sinking to far, in a deep well. The inside of your own head becomes crowded with responsibility, dread, suspicion, doubt, fear, and centuries’ worth of names, faces, screams, pleas, and heartbreak, tangling around you like seaweed. You become trapped by yourself, and all that you have accumulated through age and expertise, until the spoils of victory become so heavy that your mind creaks and breaks under the weight.

And then the terrible question comes: Can *they* tell what’s happening to you? Can they see you suffering? Do they smell it? Do they know you’re vulnerable?

ANIMALISTIC DEPENDENCY

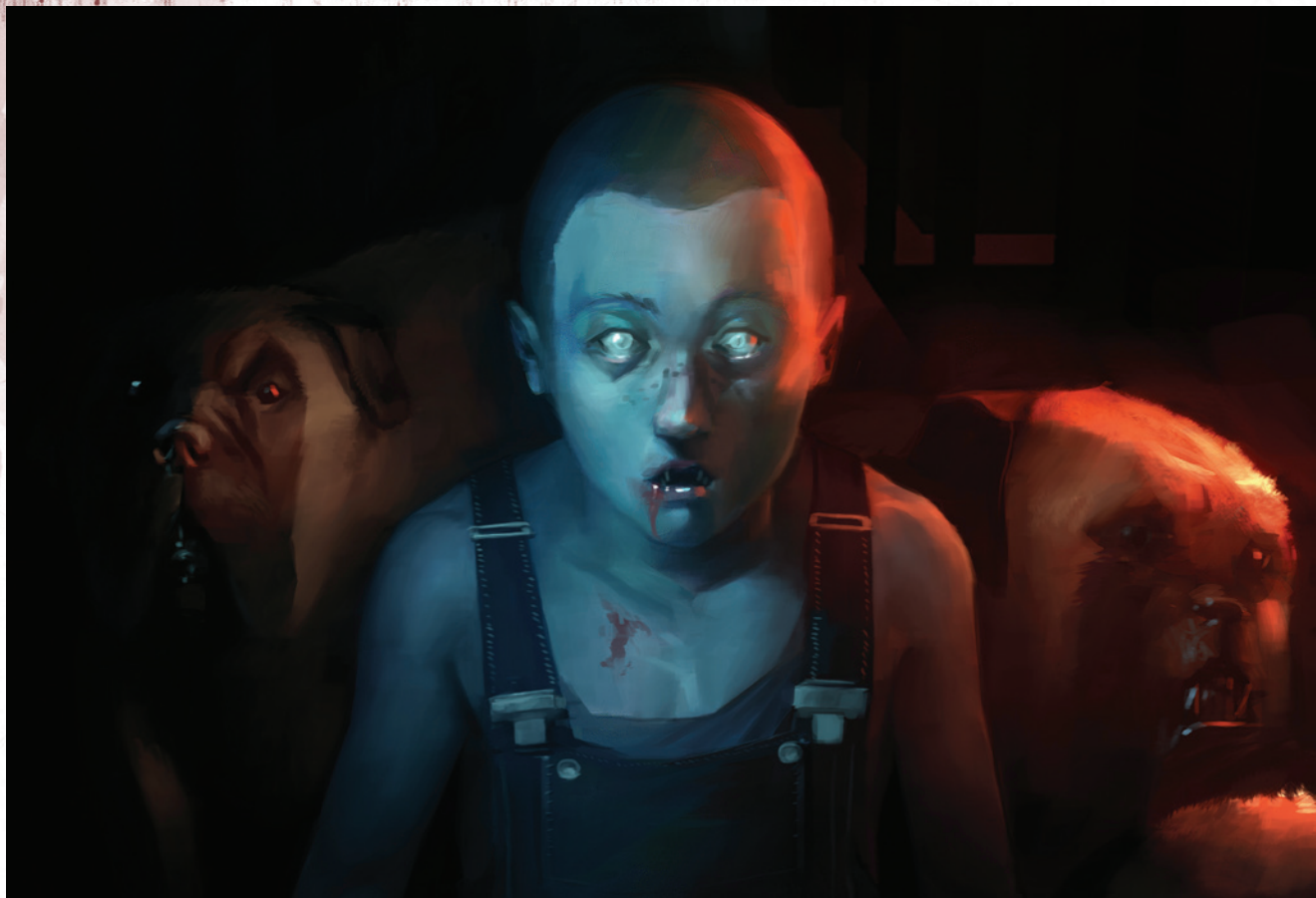
(mild or severe)

Your character feels isolated, vulnerable and alone when not in the presence of animals. Kindred and kine are untrustworthy, two-faced and wicked. Animals are honest and dependable. While, in most cases, your character is able to make do with her discomfort provided she is not too far removed from wild creatures, when frightened, pressured, or imperiled, she seeks out or summons the reassuring presence of mundane animals just for her own peace of mind.

This derangement most often manifests in the minds of Kindred who practice the Discipline of Animalism, though no particular level of ability in that Discipline is necessary to open the door to this disorder. A Kindred with the power to summon animals may be more likely to recover from her discomfort, but the anxiety does not wait for the Kindred to gain that power before it deranges her.

Mild Effect: In any scene set in an environment where your character cannot expect to see or hear wild animals (even squirrels or birds), roll Resolve + Composure to avoid a bout of anxiety. If the roll fails, the character suffers a –1 penalty to all dice pools for the remainder of the scene. Not *actually* seeing a wild animal isn’t enough to trigger the mild effect of this derangement; if the character can see a patch of ground or sky where animals would be able to reach her, should she call for them, that’s usually enough to ward off anxiety. GM discretion should dictate what environments are problematic for the character.

Severe Effect: The mild effects apply, as above, but in addition your character feels trapped whenever she is uncertain if her calls to nearby animals will be heard. It’s not enough to simply see sky or ground, at this level of derangement – the character cannot function unless she *knows* that some form of



animal life can hear her. If the player fails the Resolve + Composure roll to overcome the character's anxiety, the character must spend one Vitae and activate the Call of the Wild power (Animalism •••), just to get a sense of how well she can be heard by nearby animals. If the dice pool to activate the power is penalized by the Storyteller due to the nature of the physical environment (sealed windows, secure foundations, etc.), that same penalty affects *all* the character's dice pools for the scene if she fails to summon any animals (or if the summoned animals fail to reach her).

DELUSIONAL MANIA (mild or severe)

This derangement sometimes strikes Kindred who have experienced (and survived) traumatizing events while using the Discipline of Resilience, even if that Discipline isn't *why* the character survived. If your character suffers from this disorder, he imagines himself to be much tougher than he actually is. When your character first suffers lethal or aggravated damage in a scene, reflexively roll Stamina + Composure. This dice pool is penalized by the nature of the damage dealt: -3 for bashing, -2 for lethal, -1 to aggravated. (The amount of damage suffered does not affect the dice pool.) If the roll succeeds, the character keeps his head about him.

Mild Effect: If the roll fails, the character is unable to appreciate just how serious his injury is. Instead, he convinces himself that he's better off pushing through any pain and presenting a strong front. For the rest of the scene, the character cannot

Dodge unless you spend a Willpower point.

Severe Effect: If the roll fails, the character is unable to appreciate the seriousness of his injury and feels practically invulnerable to harm. The character cannot Dodge or voluntarily stop the action causing harm (e.g., he continues fighting or holds on to a speeding car) unless you spend a Willpower point.

IRRATIONAL DEFIANCE

(severe; follows Irrationality)

Your character feels trapped by his superiors and may lash out when he feels persecuted, accused or smothered. This disorder causes your character to feel personally threatened (see Irrationality in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) by seemingly harmless instructions and orders given by people with authority over him, especially when the deeper reasons behind such instructions aren't revealed. Roll Resolve + Composure to keep his cool.

Severe Effect: If the roll fails, your character undermines his own attempts to carry out the action instructed or ordered, no matter how innocuous or even beneficial it really is. For the rest of the scene, your character suffers a -5 penalty on dice pools for actions that contribute to the fulfillment of the order or instruction. How this manifests through your character's behavior depends on the nature of his derangement. In the style of Irrationality, your character may fume and overreact, complaining loudly the whole time. On the other hand, your character may passive-aggressively acquiesce, and then seethe and procrastinate, before finally delivering only half-hearted work.

MEMORY OBSESSION

(mild or severe)

This derangement sometimes affects practitioners of the mind-altering powers of the Ventrue clan. If she suffers from this disorder, your character no longer trusts that her memories are genuine. She suspects that hostile Kindred are rewriting her recollections with Dominate or that her every impulse is actually a missive coded into her psyche by some shadowy Lord. Whenever your character fails a Mental action to recall some detail or scan her own memory, she becomes suspicious and paranoid.

Mild Effect: For the rest of the scene, your character suffers a -2 penalty on all Mental rolls as she struggles to overcome her own self-doubt and wastes time double-checking her instincts and rational thought. “Wait,” the paranoid doctor might say, “I’m trying to think if that’s really how the pulmonary arteries work.”

Severe Effect: At this level of derangement, your character is quite certain that her memory has been altered, either maliciously or as a side-effect of her own usage of Ventrue blood. She suffers a -2 penalty on all actions for the rest of the scene, at least, as she is rattled by doubt and anxiety. This penalty persists into the next scene, as well, until she has gone over her memory sufficiently enough to convince herself that she is not the victim of someone’s Ventrue blood. The process of double-checking her memory requires an extended Intelligence + Composure action, with each roll taking one minute, versus a target number of 10 successes.

PREFERENTIAL OBSESSION

(mild or severe)

Your character erroneously believes that blood of a certain quality is essential to his wellbeing. He might think that only the blood of virgins (or of successful executives, or of Latinos, or of children, or whatever else) is sufficient for his delicate system. Or perhaps he believes unsuitable blood will soak up his mystic energy and rob him of his vampiric powers. Folkloric wisdom among ancient Ventrue has led some to think they must sup from a series of athletic, intelligent and sexy vessels in a precise sequence, lest the delicate cocktail of Vitae within their undead bodies be thrown out of balance and their Aenead powers be diluted. (“No! It is the second Monday! I must have someone strong of leg or back! Keep her until the Sabbath, when I can drink of the wise.”)

Your character’s feeding restrictions must be defined when this derangement is taken, and cannot be changed unless the derangement is “cured” and then reacquired.

Mild Effect: Your character simply won’t satiate himself with improper Vitae. He will not take more than two Vitae from a vessel who does not meet his particular feeding restriction, even if hungry or starving, unless driven to frenzy.

Severe Effect: Your character’s delusions overpower even his Beast. He *cannot* satisfy himself from an improper vessel, even if hungry or starving, even in the throes of frenzy. If faced with the dilemma of consuming improper Vitae or suffering frenzy and torpor, your character drinks only if driven to frenzy, and even then he expends one Vitae per minute just to flush the

unwelcome blood from his system. (Vitae spent in this way can be used to enhance Physical dice pools, simulate the blush of life, or simply be vomited up, but it cannot be used to activate Disciplines.)

DEVOTIONS

Though numerous powers of the Blood are hoarded by individual Ventrue, and families of Ventrue, throughout the world, these Devotions have the odd distinction of being well known throughout the clan, and yet well restricted from other Kindred. Certainly there are vampires of other clans who know these powers, but those trusted allies and thieving bastards are rare enough that these Devotions are still associated only with the Lords.

MESSENGER’S BLESSING

(Dominate •••, Resilience •)

For hundreds of years, messengers were the only means of communication between the Damned; even colonial Lords in nearby cities often found it impossible to get couriers through the wilds between domains and past the daggers of their enemies. In the time of the Frankish kings, the Ventrue refined a power from their blood that gave their messengers at least a more favorable chance of reaching their destinations.

With this Devotion, a Ventrue can imprint his profound will onto one messenger, and thus onto those who might impede the courier’s mission. He who would raise a hand against the messenger must first overcome the will of the master.

Cost: 1 or more Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Dominate vs. Presence + Brawl, Firearms, or Weaponry (see below)

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive

The activation roll is made when the power’s effect is placed upon the target messenger. Anyone who attempts to attack the messenger must first contest the activation roll with a reflexive roll of Presence + the Skill used to make the attack. If the attacker fails this contested action, he stops himself in the midst of his attack – his intention now clearly revealed to any who can see him. Hopefully, this gives the messenger a chance to escape.

This power can only contest a number of attempted attacks equal to the user’s Resilience dots, after which the power is exhausted and the subject is vulnerable as normal. The power’s effect, unless exhausted by attempted strikes, persists until the messenger speaks, until the messenger attacks anything human (or once human), or until the messenger dies, whichever comes first.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

THE MESSAGE

(Dominate ••, Auspex ••)

Trust is a rare commodity, among those Kindred who value it enough to even consider such a thing a commodity at all. This power was concocted between Shadows and Lords in the Dark Ages as a means of verifying that the message sent by one Kindred was, in fact, the same that reached the other. In those

cities and outposts that made use (or still make use) of this power, it has the added value to the local Mekhet of making them advantageous to the local Ventrue.

Cost: –

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Dominate

Action: Instant

This power simply imprints the user's intent onto the subject messenger, who then bears that intent bound within his words and heart (and aura) for a number of months equal to the successes scored on the activation roll. Thereafter, the messenger's aura and sense of "the truth" reflect the user's intentions. This doesn't prevent the messenger from lying, but it does help a scrutinizing vampire weed out the messenger's lies from the master's message. The messenger's soul gives off a kind of mystic signal that can be read and interpreted by other Kindred with mystical abilities.

Simply put, this power reveals whether or not the subject messenger has delivered his lord's genuine message in full. For the purposes of any other Kindred power that reveal, provoke, or discern truth – whether through mystical telemetry like *Aura Perception* or coercion like *Majesty* – the master's message "reads" as authentic. To be clear, this does not reveal whether or not the master has sent along an intentionally deceptive message – this reveals whether or not the messenger has delivered the whole message his master *did intend* to send.

This power costs ten experience points to learn.

HOUSES OF BLOOD

(Animalism • • •, Resilience •)

The old traditions of hunting hounds and guard dogs are hereby blended with the powers of the Damned to serve the needs of aging Kindred. With this rare, and much protected, power cultivated by English Lords, Ventrue of the moors have been able to feed on human blood without exposing themselves to their human prey. This power traps the mystic qualities of human Vitae within the veins of the Lord's hounds for a short, vital time, so that human Vitae can be delivered back to the master to drink.

(Rumors circulate throughout Europe that some Trojan in Amsterdam has found a way to advance this power, so that kine

can fetch Kindred Vitae for delivery to their ancient master, but the existence of such a power has never been proven.)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Animal Ken + Animalism

Action: Extended; each roll represents ten minutes; target number of successes equals the amount of Vitae to be retrieved (maximum 5).

Success on the extended action prepares the target – which must be a wolf or large dog (Size 4) – for the forthcoming hunt. Through a remarkable blend of the commanding power of Dominate and the preserving powers of Resilience, the target becomes a formidable, if short-lived, hunter. The so-called Hound of Blood attacks living men and women and drinks their blood, storing their human Vitae in its bones and flesh through a bizarre alteration of the mystical preservative properties of Resilience. The creature then hurries back to its master.

Vitae retrieved by the hound retains its human properties, which are sufficient to slake the thirst of a vampire no longer able to sustain himself on animal Vitae, until sunrise. A hound can only retrieve and bear an amount of human Vitae equal to or less than the user's dots of Resilience. (Thus, the target number of successes on the extended action to activate this power cannot exceed the user's Resilience dots.)

Only the Kindred who activated this power can make use of the human Vitae stored within the hound's body; it grows instantly stale in the mouth of any other vampire. The act of preparing the target hound for the hunt infuses its flesh with a preservative power that keeps the consumed human blood vital and potable for the Kindred user. The user must destroy the hound's body to get at the human Vitae stored in its bones and tissues. This kills the hound.

Unless the Storyteller has a dramatic reason to resolve a use of this power through actual play (perhaps the hound is unexpectedly captured by a rival Lord or vampire-hunter?), the Hound of Blood is presumed to deliver its bounty to the user's haven, where it may be consumed before the vampire sleeps for the day.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

THE MALKAVIAN CURSE

(See "Malkavia," on p. 95.)

Malkavia is wholly unnatural. It is neither a mental nor physical disease, exactly. It is a mystical affliction, like a magic curse, but it is also transmissible through the blood, like an illness.

It can't be easily categorized or analyzed. It can't be combated with science, cured with medicine, or dispelled with witchcraft. Describing its chemical structure (if it has one) won't make it understandable. Leeches, blessings, and animal sacrifices can't make it go away. It simply cannot be cured through science or magic.

This is the kind of unpredictable suffering that vampires bring into the world through their very existence. They are

monsters both mystically and materially, and the sicknesses that plague them are no more scientific than the sorceries invoked through the Blood.

It's the affliction's mysterious immunity to medicine and mysticism alike that makes it so terrifying to the Damned. If it cannot be cured, and it truly is a new curse, where did it come from and what does it mean? Is this a plague wrought by the evil chemistry of Vitae or is this a new slash to the soul by the hand of an angry god? It represents a potential new layer to their damnation, and a new magnitude of suffering to weigh down the pan opposite immortality.

To the Ventrue, Malkavia is not just frightening, but offensive. It's a mockery of everything the Lords imagine themselves to represent. It penetrates their supernatural toughness. It degrades their ability to control themselves and foments chaos in those nearby. Its origin within the family is an embarrassment, if not a direct threat to the untouchable image the Ventrue count on to carry them through the wounds and pains of all time. The Ventrue are supposed to triumph – yet they are threatened by defeat from within not only their own family, but by their own blood.

THE LORDLY VAMPIRE'S BURDEN

Or are they? In recent years, a new philosophy, using Malkavia as a touchstone, has begun to circulate through vampire society. It began with a Ventrue doctor and Dragon in Los Angeles – an ancilla *genius* called Diana of the Licinii – who proposed that the purpose of the Malkavia affliction was to give the Lords an obstacle to be conquered. She speculated that the Ventrue had been cursed with the role of its first victims because it is the burden of the Lords to achieve victory for the “plebeian Kindred.”

Diana's philosophy knowingly and actively invokes the imperial, Ventrue-centric notion that it is the duty of the Ventrue to save the other clans, due to their noble but trying position at the top (Diana's speech favored the term “forefront”) of Kindred society.

Writing as she is in a modern city in the modern night, Diana Licinius knows full well how offensive her position seems to so many Kindred. This is no accident. Her true purpose is to motivate the Damned to address the spread of Malkavia and perhaps even compete for the prize of overcoming it. Should any Kindred succeed in combating the Malkavian curse, the Ventrue win, alongside every clan, the prize of being free of it. At the same time, Diana will have earned, among her own people, the prize of having motivated the victory – and that is a victory itself.

In the meantime, she and her pundits are presenting an undeniable image, wherever they're able to spread the word, that the Ventrue are not victims of Malkavia. Rather, they are noble champions challenging a fearsome and relentless foe.

LORDS OF THE ASYLUM

The Kindred have one other way of triumphing over Malkavia. Rather than lament its awful effects and cry out over their misfortune, some of those afflicted with Malkavia choose to grab hold of their terrifying madness with both hands and put their fangs to it, drinking it in, and making it a part of themselves. These Malkavians don't surrender to the specter of defeat, and don't spend their Requiems hiding from the illness in the hopes of finding some escape hatch. They accept that their terrible state is real, and they plow through.

Many don't come out the other side. Looking deeper into a sickened mind is more often damning than cathartic. One anonymous Malkavian equated it with coming face to face with one's demented Beast “in the dark overgrowth of the soul, and you'd have to be deranged not to be afraid of that idea.”

The weird wisdom of the Malkavians, as manifested by the aspect of the Blood that the hopeful call Dementation, has its



value. For those Malkavians who haven't given up on their Requiems, the powers of Dementation are the gems at the bottom of the cesspool – those who search without pride or fear are more likely to find them. For those Ventrue with loved ones, confidants, advisors, and allies lost to Malkavia, Dementation is the consolation prize – it's a unique tool that, if ignored, renders the Requiem of every Malkavian a waste.

Put another way, it's what makes it worth while to keep Malkavians around.

The mystical effects of Dementation are not as clearly beneficial, though, as those of the lordly words or the enduring blood. Dementation in weak hands is dangerous. Dementation in merely unskilled hands is dangerous. Dementation in untrustworthy hands is dangerous. The vampire who can master it is an asset. The one who cannot, but won't put it down, is a liability.

PATIENT ZERO

As mentioned earlier in this book, Malkavia was named for the vampire blamed with spreading the condition among the Damned: a minor Ventrue failure called Malkav. In place of any real evidence of what Malkav might have done to contract or invoke the curse upon himself, Ventrue throughout the ages have settled for simply insulting the quality of his blood or his character.

He has been called a diablerist, a rapist, a turncoat, a mutant, and a degenerate drinker of foul blood, but in truth he has been called those things because he is blamed with originating the Affliction. No one has proven that the Affliction originated with him *because* he was a rapist, diablerist, traitor or degenerate. So many Ventrue have been all of those things and yet never suffered the Affliction. Why?

Despite speeches and assurances to the contrary, no one knows. The identity of Malkav as the curse's so-called Patient Zero is not even certain. While no Kindred prior to Malkav has been proven to suffer from the Affliction, so many Kindred have gone insane over the centuries of their Requiems, who can say if some of them were broken by the effects of this new curse? Worse, who can say for certain that the true Patient Zero is not sleeping through horrific, prophetic nightmares in some unopened tomb somewhere?

Perhaps one night an even more ancient Patient Zero will awaken, claw his way through the sand, and spread a mass hysteria among the Damned in his wake, as the Malkavian doomsayers have whispered. If the power of his torpid, bloodless corpse is enough to spread the Affliction, his frenzied, Vitae-fueled mind may be enough to turn all blood to poison. Is Patient Zero the beginning of something terrible, or the end?

SPREADING THE DISEASE

Whatever the Malkavian affliction truly is, it certainly seems to spread like a disease – but not *only* like a disease. Though it has been proven to be spread by the Kiss and by consuming tainted Vitae, it also seems to have leapt from Kindred to Kindred, on some rare occasions, through proximity alone. How

else to explain when a virtuous and self-disciplined Kindred falls prey to the Affliction when he had nothing but formal contact with a Malkavian?

Scientifically minded vampires posit that the Affliction can lay dormant in the Blood for centuries, being passed from sire to childe without either of them knowing. In some cases, the curse may never come to life, and an afflicted vampire's whole Requiem may go by without a trace of it. Yet his childe or grandchilde may not be so lucky and, after just a few months, or years, or centuries with the sire's infected blood, eventually succumb to Malkavia. The ugly implication in this theory, of course, is that the longer a Kindred's Requiem, the more likely that dormant Malkavia may one night flare to madness.

Branching off this idea is a supposition put forth by a coterie of Dragons from Paris. They suggest that the Affliction is present in the vast number of Kindred, but becomes active and dangerous only when the undead mind is weakened to such an extent that it becomes susceptible. In this way, it may be seen as vaguely akin to mortal diseases like Alzheimer's; a common and otherwise benign condition (age or exhaustion, for example) may increase the risk of a "Malkavian attack."

This theory becomes more troubling (and thus has been opposed by Kindred in several cities) when the Dragons' list of risk behaviors is revealed. They speculate that "psychic contact with mind-altering effects of the blood" can enable the Affliction to spread or, if dormant, flare up. If true, this would mean that turning certain mystic powers of the Blood on Malkavian subjects runs the risk of the user "catching" Malkavia. Is it true? That's still unproven.

In Game Terms

In game terms, the Malkavian affliction can be spread in several ways. Though the particular metaphysical relationships of cause-and-effect behind some of these methods are still uncertain to the vampires of the World of Darkness, the specific rules governing these relationships in the game are clear, and described below.

It is essential for players and Storytellers alike to remember that Malkavia is a dramatic tool as much as it is a peril in the game world. Its function in a story is like that of any other disease, as described in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 176). Malkavia represents a major dramatic issue, and a potentially game-altering change to the characters. It is not some random threat.

Any character may be inexplicably pardoned from the risk of Malkavia at the Storyteller's discretion. The Affliction takes flight as unpredictably as it descends.

These are the three ways in which Malkavia can be contracted:

- **Through the Kiss.** Malkavia is spread not through the blood, but through Vitae – the mystical charge that goes through mundane blood when it comes into contact with the Damned. Therefore, mortals can't pass it among other mortals. However, it can travel between a mortal and a vampire, or between two vampires. Whenever Vitae (not merely blood, but Vitae) is consumed, there's a chance that Malkavia can be transmitted.

Few Kindred know the truth about the chances and risks of transmitting Malkavia, so the following game system is hardly representative of what the Damned *think* is true.

The system for determining transmission is the same for Kindred and kine, but the effects are somewhat different. When a living creature (like a ghoul) or a vampire drinks afflicted Vitae, or when an afflicted vampire drinks from a living vessel, the un-afflicted subject must undertake an extended action to resist the effects of Malkavia. Roll Resolve + Stamina for the subject, with each roll representing a 24-hour period since exposure to Malkavia. To overcome the risk of Malkavia, the subject must accrue a number of successes equal to or greater than the afflicted vampire's Blood Potency.

A living subject who fails any roll of this extended action is plagued by a derangement for a number of *days* equal to however many successes he was shy of the target number. If the subject already has a derangement, it is increased in severity by the Malkavian curse. If the subject doesn't yet have a derangement, the Storyteller applies an appropriate minor derangement for the duration.

A living subject who has been exposed to Malkavia carries, and may transmit, the affliction for a number of *hours* equal to the Blood Potency of the vampire that exposed the victim. During this time, any Kindred who drinks from that vessel must roll to resist the affliction as described above. The target number for this extended action is two less than that of the mortal's extended action.

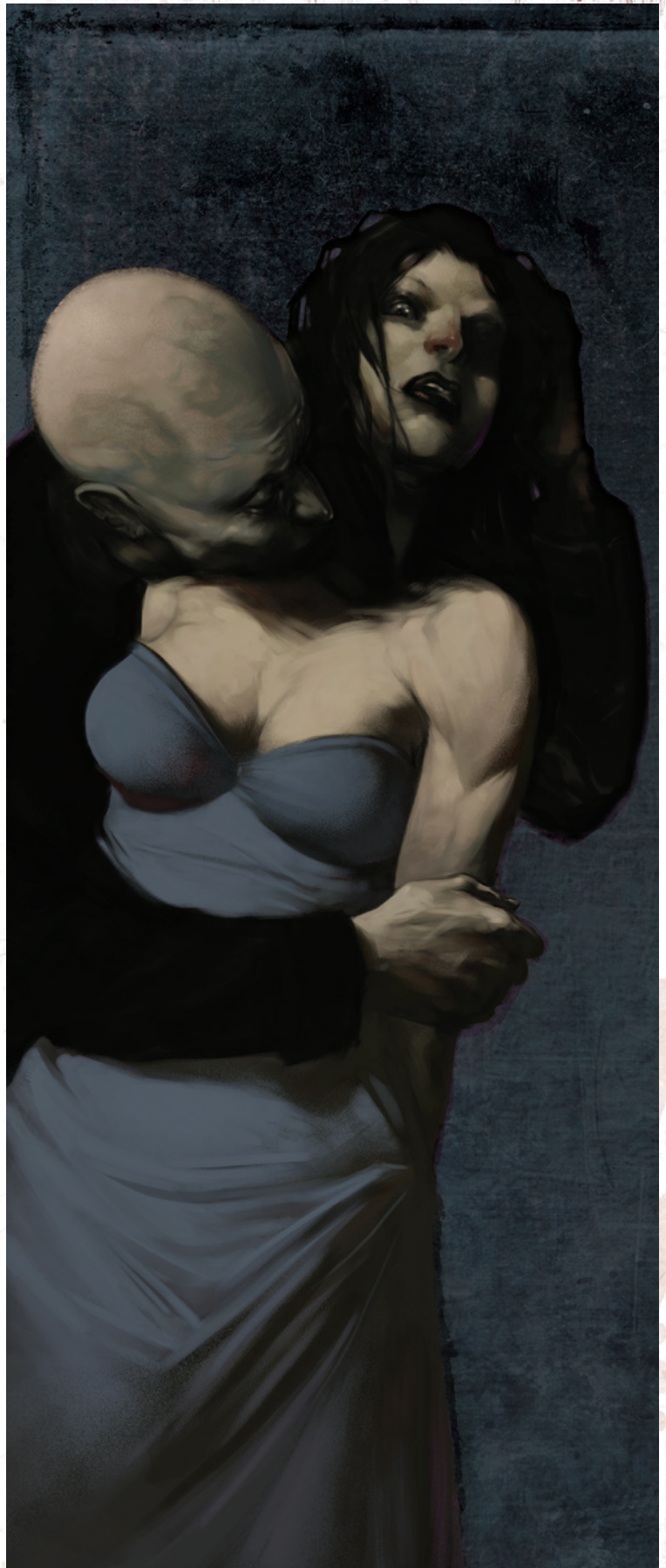
A vampire who fails an extended action to overcome Malkavia is afflicted by the curse. If the vampire was exposed by drinking the blood of a mortal, he suffers the effects of Malkavia for a number of *months* equal to the Blood Potency of the vampire that exposed the mortal. However, if the vampire was exposed by drinking Vitae from a Malkavian, he suffers from Malkavia forever.

Contrary to popular rumor among the Damned, the bite of a Malkavian is not enough to spread the disease. A vampire must either drink of the Blood of a Malkavian or have a Malkavian drink his Blood if he is to run the risk of becoming permanently afflicted.

A rule of thumb: If either party runs the risk of blood addiction or a Vinculum, both parties risk contracting Malkavia.

- **Through the Embrace.** Any Malkavian who Embraces a mortal passes the affliction on to that new vampire. Any Malkavian who acts as Avus to a new member of his bloodline passes the affliction on to that vampire.

- **Through Storyteller fiat.** Malkavia is a curse as much as anything else. It doesn't follow biological



vectors or consistently mimic viral behaviors. Where, in the context of the World of Darkness, these sudden breakouts of Malkavia come from – which, if any, higher power is striking the Damned with this curse – may forever be unclear.

The real truth, which exists beyond the fiction of the World of Darkness, is that the Storyteller has dramatic license to introduce Malkavia into the chronicle. It may come from exposure to some evil artifact, or be contracted from the ashes of a long-dead Malkavian, or it may strike some inhumane Kindred like a thunderbolt from Hell when he degenerates as the result of a truly horrid sin.

But listen: You'd be wise to think carefully before afflicting a player's character with Malkavia. See "Malkavian Characters," on p. 115.

What About Exposure Through Dementation?

It's a myth.

Strictly speaking, a Malkavian cannot spread the Affliction through the mad Discipline of Dementation. From the perspective of the Damned at large, however, the sudden insanity that comes with being the target of Dementation is regarded as tantamount to exposure, at least. Among the uninformed, a vampire temporarily affected by Dementation may be regarded as a vector for Malkavia for a long time afterward.

EFFECTS OF MALKAVIA

Malkavia is a degenerative disorder that erodes a vampire's mental stability, attention span and emotional control. Its manifestations are different from vampire to vampire, but most often it exacerbates existing conditions or amplifies brain disorders that might otherwise have occurred if the subject had aged normally, like a mortal. That is, Malkavia can instigate new symptoms of delirium, dementia, phobias, schizophrenia, or psychosis, but it can also dig up genetic disorders and mental illnesses that were a part of the Kindred's physiology in life.

As a mystical affliction, Malkavia makes no distinction between biological and psychological symptoms and disorders. Psychoses stemming from chemical imbalances and psychoses stemming from childhood abuse are equally likely to be found and fanned to a terrible new heat by this curse. In the event that Malkavia is introduced to a stable, healthy intellect (if such a vampire exists, she surely is a rarity), the affliction simply causes the mind to devise new ways of torturing itself.

Not all Kindred who suffer the curse of Malkavia become irredeemable madmen. Many are able, over time, to adapt to their chronic condition and manage their pain. Some do this through secrecy, retreating from unpredictable and dangerous stimuli into controlled environments where their illness can be kept from impeding on their reputation. Others gradually transition into roles within the covenant, coterie, or local court that can afford to pardon them their "eccentricities;" a hyperactive Hound is not such a liability, after all.

A few vampires are simply lucky, and get off the hook with a degree of insanity that does not define their Requiems.

How many Kindred can tell the difference between habitual paranoia and an undiagnosed case of Malkavia? How many

fatally narcissistic Princes have in fact been unrevealed Malkavians? How many insane vampires are truly Malkavians, and just don't know that Dementation is within their grasp?

The Weakness In Game Terms

Any Kindred who suffers the effects of Malkavia can be called a Malkavian. All Malkavians suffer a –2 penalty to Humanity rolls to avoid developing a derangement following a failed degeneration roll. This is identical to the Ventrue clan weakness, but does not compound that weakness for Ventrue characters. Thus, for Lords, this aspect of the Malkavian curse can be ignored as redundant.

In addition, all Malkavians suffer from at least one core derangement – a disorder that haunts them for eternity. This is a severe derangement that cannot be cured, reduced in severity, or "bought off" regardless of how high the character's Humanity soars. Malkavians of Blood Potency 6 or higher suffer an additional, minor derangement that cannot be escaped except through a thinning of the blood.

A Malkavian's severe derangement does not always plague the character to full effect. The Storyteller is free to declare a Malkavian's derangement to be affecting the character at its mild or severe magnitude on a scene-by-scene basis.

The impact of a character's derangement may be worsened by dramatic failures or exceptional successes, by running out of Willpower points, by losing a fight or failing to overcome frenzy, or by simple emotional swings.

The impact of a character's derangement may be relieved by exceptional successes, gaining Willpower points (from any source), achieving some minor or important goal, succeeding on a degeneration roll, gaining Vitae, or again, through simple emotional swings.

At the Storyteller's option, a character can outright diminish the severity of a derangement for one scene by spending a Willpower point in exchange for the privilege of making a Resolve + Composure as an instant action. The character is presumed to be focusing his thoughts, talking himself through his troubles, praying, or otherwise actively mustering his strength during this action. If the roll is a success, the derangement can be diminished to its mild effects for the scene. If the roll results in an exceptional success, the derangement can be overcome for the scene.

The Advantage In Game Terms

In addition to all that, Malkavians gain access to the Dementation Discipline – a unique manifestation of the Blood's mystic power filtered through the madness of Malkavia. Dementation is considered to be an in-clan Discipline for Malkavians *while they are suffering the effects of the curse*. A character temporarily experiencing the effects of Malkavia can buy and use dots in Dementation only while the curse is affecting him; when the months pass and the Affliction goes into remission, so too does Dementation.

A Malkavian who manages to overcome his core derangement for a scene is also barred from using Dementation in that scene. Any effect that neutralizes a Malkavian's core derangement also cancels his ability to use Dementation. With the cracks in his psyche closed, the power of Dementation cannot get out.

MALKAVIAN CHARACTERS

What impact does the Malkavian curse have on a character? Why would any player want to curse her character with this affliction? Why would any player ever select anything but the most delicate of derangements for her character?

Consider the difference between what your character wants, and what you might want as a player. Your character is almost certainly not going to ask another vampire to give him the Affliction. You, though, as a player, might go to your Storyteller and say, "I think I want to play a Malkavian."

Malkavians offer unique roleplaying possibilities. An Afflicted vampire thinks and acts differently than his kin, and the difference can be subtle or gross. The freedom granted to improvise, try out new character types, or take a character quickly from fury to sorrow, can be great escapism. And isn't escapism at least one of the reasons we pretend to be vampires? If nothing else, Malkavia gives you a little wiggle room to drift out of character now and again, to keep your interested.

Remember that "Malkavian" is not a character concept in and of itself – not anymore than "rabid" or "syphilitic" is a character concept. You have to add something else into the mix, bring some new element to the equation, to make your Malkavian truly yours. Every Malkavian was something else first.

Consider the mad genius, the truthful fool, the loving psycho, the suffering victim, the spooky visionary, the idiot savant, the disfigured gangster, the deluded artist, the heartbroken king, the terrified killer, the guilty lover, the delirious knight, the victimized mother, the lonely fanatic, the sleepless pariah.

What is it that your Malkavian *used to* want, and how has that want been demented by his illness?

Certainly, it can go too far. One player's comic relief is another's wasted time. The sudden inspiration for a joke can undermine a lot of mood-setting work on the part of the Storyteller and the other players. It's not okay for you to ruin somebody else's chance to play *their* character just because you chose to play a Malkavian.

Vampire remains a horror game. Insanity and the unpredictable can be frightening, but it can also be boring. Laughing in the face of real menace can make the vampire-hunter with the wooden stake lose his nerve, but it can also spoil the mood.

One key to playing a Malkavian as an effective character, is to remember that most Malkavians get their political and social power from being frightening. Not necessarily the kind of frightening that finds them screaming up and down the halls with axes, but the kind of underlying horror that makes other vampires recoil from their touch, shrink from their blood – afraid to catch what they have.

Another good bit of advice to remember is this: Most Malkavians are also afraid of themselves. Even the lunatic who laughs like a child while he's cutting off a grandmother's fingers has some fragment of the Man inside, somewhere, screaming, "Stop it!"

MEANINGFUL DERANGEMENTS

Derangements are more than just a manifestation of your character's inhumanity, and they are more than a mechanical counterbalance to Dementation and lost Humanity. They are a

dramatic representation of at least some part of your character, described in game terms. A derangement can be a foil for your character, a direct obstacle between him and his goals, but it can also be a symbolic extension of that character. Is his fear of enclosed spaces a part of the character because the Storyteller wants it to be harder for that vampire to face the traitorous Carthians lurking under the streets? Is that fear a dramatic manifestation of your character's reluctance to delve deep into the city's politics and intrigue, for fear that he'll become trapped? These two ideas come together when your character faces and pushes through his fears to descend into that Carthian underground and make a deal with them on behalf of the Prince.

As with the decision to play a Malkavian at all, consider the difference between what you, as the player, knows about your character's derangements, and what he knows about himself. Does your character regard his narcissism *as* narcissism, or is he blind to the magnitude of his own ego? Does he downplay the importance of his paranoia as just a side-effect of his sire's abuse, centuries earlier, or does he see it as a defining part of his self-identity and an insurmountable obstacle to his satisfaction? Do your character's coterie-mates know about the troubles he suffers through, night after night?

To what degree does your character internalize his derangements – or does he acknowledge them as a part of his own psyche at all? Among the most terrifying sensations of mental illness is the feeling that your thoughts are not your own. Wicked words and evil ideas intrude into your thoughts from... where? Is it the Man or the Beast that compels your character to lie, cheat and steal? Is it the monster you are, or the man you would've been had you lived, that abuses the people who he loves?

Your character doesn't have access to a list of derangements, neatly describing what's wrong with him. He may not know *what's* wrong, only that he is suffering.

Look at your character's derangements from the character's perspective, and then examine them a second time from your own perspective as the author of the character – and what plagues him. Will you use those derangements to add depth to the tale of his Requiem, or will you use them to give yourself an intimate sense of what it's like inside your character's head? Or will you do both?

MALKAVIA AND BLOODLINES

Malkavia imposes a weakness on a vampire while granting her access to a unique Discipline, but it is *not* a bloodline. Simply put, a character afflicted with Malkavia can choose to join a bloodline even though she has access to Dementation through the Affliction. Likewise, a character who is already a member of a bloodline is not immune to the effects of Malkavia.

The only meaningful interactions between Malkavia and a character's bloodline are thus:

- An afflicted character runs the risk of spreading Malkavia to other Kindred when she joins a bloodline or brings another character into her bloodline.
- The unique Discipline (if any) of an afflicted character's bloodline may be great inspiration for a new and distinctive derangement reflecting that Discipline's power.

MALKAVIANS AS A BLOODLINE

The basic game mechanics of the Malkavian affliction are almost identical to the basic rules for bloodlines, if you boil the issue down to a bare, passionless formula. The character takes on an additional weakness in exchange for access to a unique Discipline. Familiar.

This is by design. If you wanted to, you could recast or expand the Malkavians into a bloodline easily enough. To do this, just subtract the game rules for spreading the disease, use the game rules under "Effects of Malkavia" as the bloodline weakness, and add Dementation as the unique bloodline Discipline.

Alternately, you could simply make Malkav the progenitor of a bloodline that cannot escape the Affliction, in addition to the index case for the curse. Such a bloodline becomes a terrific dramatic tool for raising difficult questions. Would the characters be party to the annihilation of the Malkavian bloodline if it could help stop the curse? It's not the fault of Malkav's grandchilder, after all, that the curse exists.

The philosophy that "power corrupts" has infused the Ventrue with a deranged view of the world and makes them a fitting founding family for the Malkavians, but the Lords have no monopoly on crazy. The Malkavian curse is devised specifically so you can explore insanity through the lens of any clan – the blame for Malkavianism simply falls on the Ventrue and their inherent flaw. The ubiquity of madness can be hijacked to serve as a rationale for a Malkavian bloodline branching off in any direction.

With the right back-story, you could feasibly cast the Malkavians as descendants of just about any clan – or any number of clans. A Nosferatu driven mad by his own use of Nightmare might become the first of the line. A Mekhet might become gradually demented over the centuries as she comes into contact with evil spirits or wicked magic, and that dementia might eventually taint her blood. A Gangrel could develop the bloodline when his brain is irreparably twisted by exposure to animal psyches or a century spent infused with the dirt. A Daeva, her blood filthy with centuries' worth of diseases accumulated through shared needles and hedonistic sex, might pass on a soul-maddening illness to her progeny, thereby becoming the mother of all Malkavians.

The change in the Vitae that a bloodline represents doesn't have to take familial lines to wholly unique places. A Malkavian bloodline could stem from several clans at once, leading Kindred of different blood to end up in the same sick family. This is a great hook for a coterie.

DEMENTATION

Dementia grants Malkavians a vision of the world that even the sane can appreciate – when that vision can be pried from the trap of their insane minds.

Dementation is much the same. With it, the Demented can see the world in new ways, and share that vision with others. Alas, the Malkavian perception of the world is erratic, uncomfortable, maddening and frightening. Not all who get flashes of images through Malkavian eyes ask for the experience, and many who do go on to regret it.

Many more Malkavians learn powers of Dementation than realize it themselves. To many Kindred, the vision and provocative powers of Malkavia are simply further symptoms of the Affliction. Few Malkavians manage to master Dementation. Fewer still share their secrets with others of their sorry ilk. Unlike Kindred of the same clan, a Malkavian can't trust his fellow Afflicted – they come from different places, clans and philosophies, and are dangerously unpredictable. The seemingly trustworthy Kindred who is guided through the secrets of Dementation one night may be replaced by a murderous sex fetishist the next evening.

Greater mastery over Dementation does not equate to any greater mastery over the self. Quite the opposite. Dementation's

power provokes madness, fomenting chaos and affords glimpses of the overwhelming, overpowering secrets of the cosmos's dark machinery -- or makes the Demented think it does.

Dementation benefits the demented, not the sane. A Malkavian with a mastery of this Discipline can be a boon to other Kindred, but no one should trust an insane vampire when he offers to "show you what I see."

• THE FEAR

With this power, a Malkavian can pull fears to the surface of one's mind, or plunge them like an icy needle of adrenaline into a victim's heart. Mortal spirits can be frozen, minds clouded with despair, and egos set on fire. The parts of Kindred that used to live are just as vulnerable, and this power can also spook the Beast with a fright approximating the Red Fear.

Lots of Malkavians think their mystic blood can only be used to project their own fears and disorders onto others, but savvy Malkavians know that every Kindred heart remembers fear, even if it has not met it for years. Every Kindred heart knows madness, even if it lies to itself and calls it a stranger. With this power, fears and madness that once belonged to the vampire simply return to their old home.

This power, more than any other, seems to be invoked by Malkavians without their conscious intent. To be sure, Malkavians *can* use this power maliciously, by their own design. But it can also be activated by a Malkavian's own fears and madness. The Malkavian's own terror – rational or not – can radiate out into the minds of other poor souls nearby.

Urban legends and pop rumors among the Damned have more than a few young vampires thinking they are at risk of catching Malkavia when they are exposed to this power. It's not true.

Cost: – (or 1 Willpower)

Dice Pool: Presence + Empathy + Dementation – the target's Composure

Action: Instant. Note that, while it requires only an instant action to activate this power, additional instant actions are necessary to maintain it, as well. Roll the power's dice pool when The Fear is activated. If the roll is a success, the power is activated and, depending on the effect the Malkavian invokes, may be maintained in subsequent turns, to keep the pressure of fear on the target, without needing to roll.

A Malkavian can attempt to use this power a number of times in one scene equal to his dots in Presence.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Malkavian cannot ignore his own fears, and must roll Resolve + Composure to resist frenzy, using his own Blood Potency as the target number of successes for the action.

Failure: The Malkavian fails to project his own fears far enough to effect the target, or fails to reach down deep enough to touch the target's derangements. One use of this power for the scene is wasted.

Success: By scoring one or more successes, the character is able to activate one of two effects:

The first effect creates a sensation of irrational fear in the target's Beast, as if it were faced with fire or the ferocity of another hostile Beast. The target must roll Resolve + Composure to resist frenzy, versus a target number equal to the successes on the user's activation roll. As long as the user maintains this power with an instant action each turn, the pressure of The Fear persists. The target must continue to roll until the target number of successes is achieved or the Malkavian stops maintaining the power, whichever comes first. Otherwise, the target succumbs to the Röttschreck. This power, obviously, has no effect on mortals.

The second possible effect of The Fear is more insidious, and may be used only on a single target. The Malkavian can "activate" the target's derangements, if any, causing him to feel as if the typical stimulus for his shortcomings has been met. A character suffering from Suspicion feels as if he has just been the victim of someone else's intentional enmity, for example, while a character suffering from Anxiety is suddenly convinced that otherwise minor decisions have irrationally substantial consequences.

Nothing about this power makes it immediately obvious to the target where these feelings are coming from. Depending on the Malkavian's body language or actions, it may be obvious. At the Storyteller's discretion, a character may be entitled to a Wits + Empathy (or Composure) roll to identify the user's

intent. Otherwise, the target presumes something else to be the source of his stress, depending on the nature of his fear or derangement. The suspicious victim might assume the worst from an innocuous statement, while an anxious victim might simply be overwhelmed with pessimistic fears.

Exceptional Success: No special effect. Additional successes are their own reward.

Special: A character versed in this power, and who is suffering the immediate effects of his own derangements or is subject to a roll to resist Röttschreck, may spend a Willpower point to activate this power even if he would normally be incapacitated by fear, paralysis, or some other malignant effect. Even a torpid Malkavian can use this power, but only against targets in direct physical contact with his corpse.

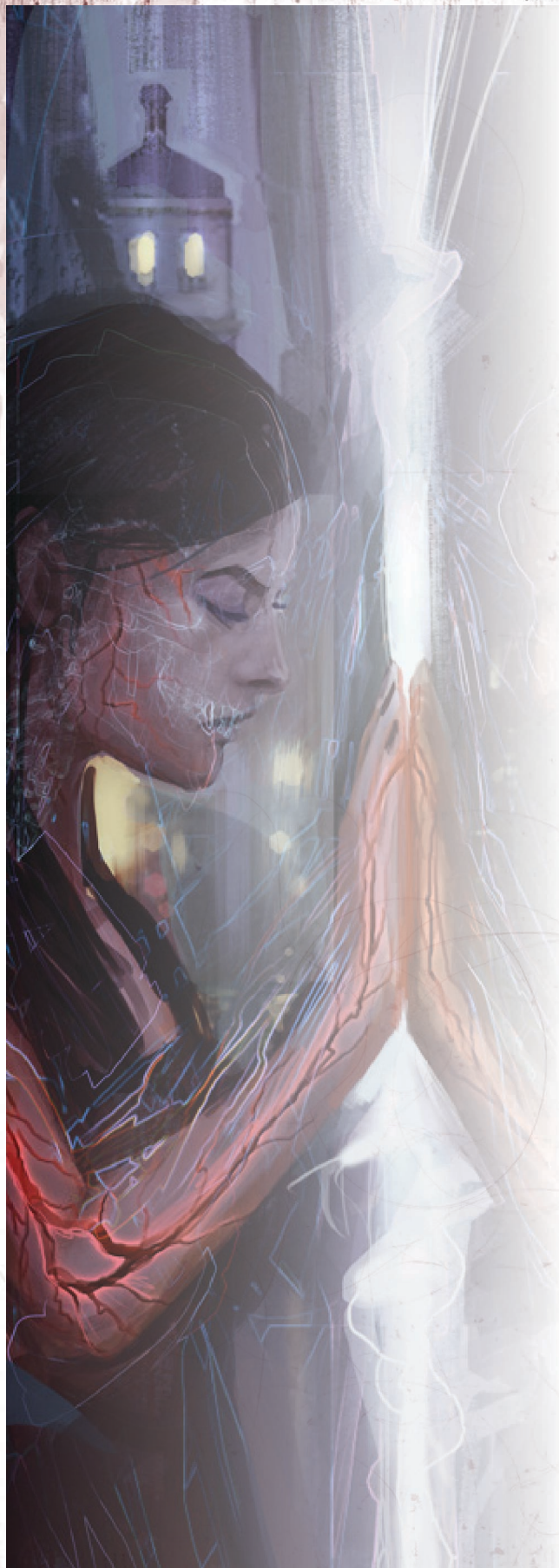
Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
–	The fear-frenzy effect is turned on a single target.
–2	The fear-frenzy effect is turned on two to three targets.
–4	The fear-frenzy effect is turned on four to five targets.
–	Either effect is turned on a target within a number of yards equal to the user's Presence.
–2 to –5	The distance to the target is greater than the user's Presence. Subtract one die to project the power out to another multiple of the user's Presence, in yards, to a maximum of five times his Presence.
–3	User is paralyzed or incapacitated by fear, poison, or some other effect.
–5	User is torpid.
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie.

•• MAD INSIGHT

As a Malkavian progresses in his abilities with Dementation, the power of his blood tears down his preconceptions, his assumptions, his expectations and his trust that the world is what it appears to be. The Malkavian's perceptions are heightened and freed, his mind becomes receptive to inputs both sensory and extrasensory, and he finds the Blood channeling barely comprehensible signals in the way that dental fillings pick up freak transmissions.

The benefit of this penetrating madness is the ability to sense and act without shame or doubt. The consequence of this wicked power is that no small part of the telemetry the Malkavian receives is hallucinatory bullshit – static and non-sense generated by his cursed Blood and psychic interference from the same place that torpid nightmares come from. To make sense of his visions, a Malkavian must pick carefully through the sensations he experiences – the sights, the smells, the sounds – for those repeating details that, over time, he can learn to depend on.



But to do that, he must also come to admit that his own mind and his own senses cannot truly be trusted.

Kindred legends claim that this power taps into some vast communal consciousness of the Malkavians – a consciousness as demented as the worst of them. Dementation savants claim that Malkavian blood is constantly giving off signals which interact with other Malkavian blood and are, together, modulated by the thrumming frequencies of the universe. This power makes the Malkavian a receiver for those frequencies. By making sense of the telemetry, a Malkavian can gain insight into the rhythms of the material world, and beyond.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Dementation

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Malkavian is besieged by a rush of overwhelming hallucinations made up of his nastiest, most debauched and immoral thoughts combined with warped perceptions of the world around him. He can do little more than scream or weep until he spends a Willpower point to push the vision away.

Failure: The Malkavian receives imagery with no genuine insight, only insane (and probably paranoid) delusions, whether he realizes it or not. At the Storyteller's discretion, the player may make an instant Intelligence + Composure roll when using the "visionary" effect, below, to parse the vision and conclude that there's nothing in it that can be trusted. It's quite possible the player will be unable to tell the difference between a failed roll and a successful roll, if the dice pool to invoke this power is rolled in secret by the Storyteller.

When invoking the "insight" effect, the power simply fails.

Success: The Malkavian experiences a vision punctuated by flashes of genuine insight. Again, two primary effects are possible as a result of this:

The first effect grants the Malkavian an intuitive and fleeting burst of understanding. It is not knowledge *per se*, but more of a momentary knack. With this use of the power, called the insight effect, the Malkavian may invoke one of the following bonuses:

- +3 bonus to any untrained Mental Skill
- +1 bonus to any untrained Physical or Social Skill
- +2 bonus to Initiative
- Use of the Danger Sense Merit for one scene
- +2 bonus to one perception roll

The second optional effect of this power grants the Malkavian a supernatural vision containing valuable information about his surroundings or even the future. This "visionary" effect is, essentially, a request on the player's behalf for information or inspiration necessary to further the story or help bail out the troupe's characters. The exact nature of this vision is up to the Storyteller, but virtually any kind of supernatural perception is fair game.

The more World of Darkness games you own, the more options you have to draw from for supernatural insight. Here are a few suggestions:

- Grant the character momentary use of one of these Auspex powers: Heightened Senses, Aura Perception, or Spirit's Touch.

- Grant the character momentary use of the Animalism power Feral Whispers.

- Grant the character the ability to see (and maybe even communicate with) ghosts or spirits in the material realm for one scene.

- Grant the character the ability to look into the Shadow Realm for a few moments.

- Grant the character the equivalent of one Mage Sight spell (from **Mage: The Awakening**) for one scene.

- Grant the character the equivalent to see past the illusions of Changelings for one scene.

Storytellers, keep in mind that the balancing factor behind this second effect is your own good judgment. You, not the player or her character, decide what kind of vision is experienced and what information it conveys. If there really is no special information for the character to glean in the current scene, you're entitled to declare that the Malkavian automatically fails to tap into any alternative consciousness this time, but manages to save the Vitae it would've cost him.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success when invoking the first effect grants the Malkavian *two* bonuses from the list above. An exceptional success when invoking the second effect grants no special bonus.

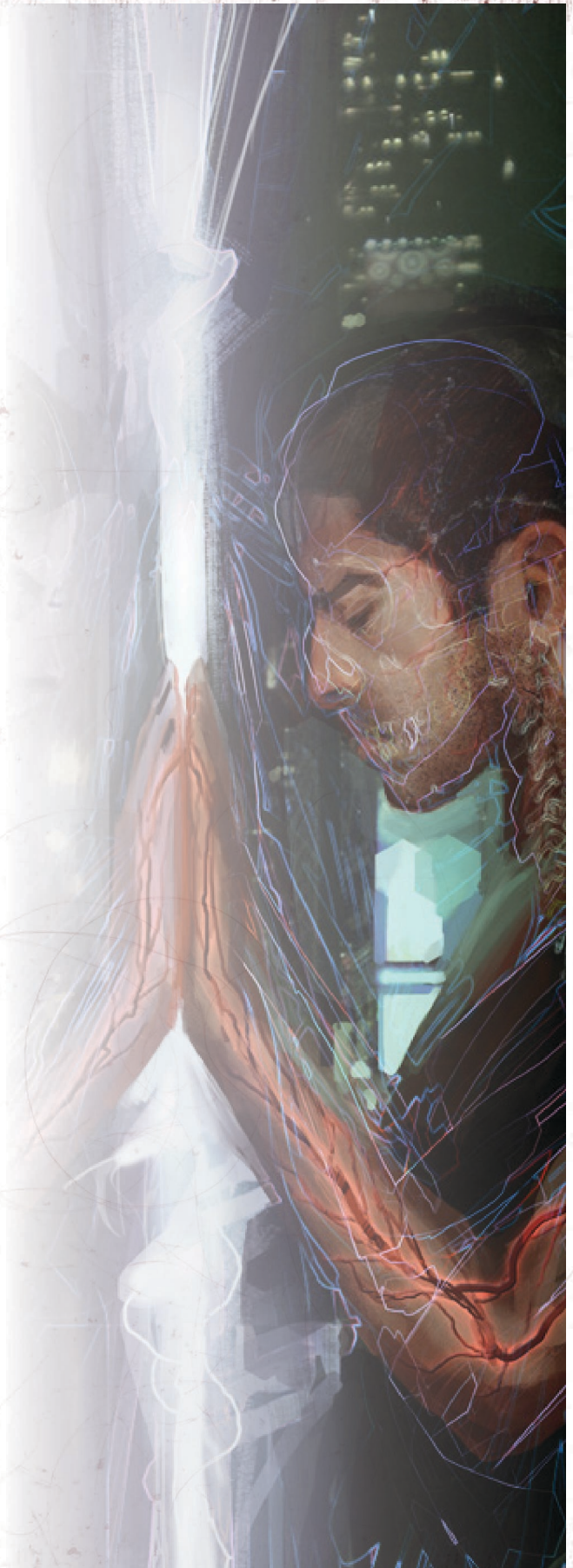
Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-1 to -5	The first time visionary effect is employed, the Malkavian suffers a -5 penalty. This penalty decreases by one point each time the power is invoked, until the penalty is finally negated.
-1 to -5	The visionary effect is invoked in a crowded, noisy, distracting space full of stimuli that will confuse and crowd the vision.
-1 to -5	The visionary effect is invoked while the user is under the effects of a mind-altering Discipline (like Majesty or Nightmare), werewolf Gift, mage spell or a similar power.

... GASLIGHTING

Furthering the illusion that Dementation actually spreads Malkavia, is this power. When a Malkavian has mastered this ability, she is able to plague a victim with a lingering madness that withers one's poise and self-control. A short while after being exposed to this power, victims start to wonder if they're going crazy. Later, they become certain that they are.

With Gaslighting, a Malkavian twists the victim's own mind into questioning itself, doubting its own perceptions and knowledge, and rotting its own stability through anxiety. It starts with something as subtle as being unable to find one's keys, and progresses through the kind of creeping doubt that makes one wonder things like, "Didn't this room used to be



red? I'm sure it was red," and, "I didn't leave that out – who's been in here?" Eventually, the victim may not be sure if he is being haunted, going crazy, or just being fucked with, but he will have no doubt that something is very wrong.

Cost: 1 or more Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Dementation

Action: Extended. The target number of successes is equal to the target's Willpower dots. Each roll represents ten minutes of watching the target, studying him, and projecting the user's malevolent will.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Malkavian cannot be sure if she is suffering the effects of her own power, or someone else's. She suffers a -2 penalty to Composure for the rest of the night, and cannot use this power again for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The target escapes the Malkavian's attention before she is able to overcome his Willpower. Her time is wasted, but she loses no Vitae.

Success: Once the Malkavian has accrued a number of successes equal to or greater than the target's Willpower, she spends one Vitae to begin his suffering. Within a few minutes, the target's derangement (if any) is triggered by his own imagination – he thinks someone on the subway is being intentionally rude to him, or he imagines his superior is angry at him, for example. If the target has no derangement, he does when he next wakes up.

Beginning when the victim next wakes, he begins a reflexive extended action to overcome the effects of Gaslighting. Roll Intelligence or Wits (as decided by the Malkavian when the power is invoked) + Resolve versus a target number of successes equal to the user's Manipulation + Intimidation. The user can raise this target number by +2 for each additional Vitae she spends on the turn when the power is activated, up to a maximum target number of 20.

The victim is not aware of this struggle going on in his own psyche – his efforts to regain his stability are happening in the back of his mind, outside his conscious control. (Yet the victim's *player* may be aware of it, and can spend Willpower on the character's behalf.)

The length of time represented by each roll depends on the penalty accepted by the Malkavian when this power was invoked (see below).

Every roll the character makes to attempt to overcome the effects of Gaslighting, whether it is a success or failure, reduces his Composure by one dot. If Composure is exhausted, subsequent rolls reduce Resolve by one dot per roll. If Resolve is exhausted, no further damage is accrued. This Attribute damage is healed as if it were lethal damage, with one point recovered every two days (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 167).

Until the victim completes the extended action to overcome this power, he continues to suffer the effects of his derangements. A victim can be subject to only one instance of this power at a time. Should a victim be targeted by several Malkavians, the most powerful instance of Gaslighting is effective. This power affects mortals, ghouls and Kindred alike.

Exceptional Success: If the user achieves five successes over and above the target's Willpower dots, the victim suffers the effects of an additional mild derangement of the Malkavian player's choosing, or the effects of a more severe case of an existing derangement.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
–	Each roll of the victim's extended action represents two days.
–2	Each roll of the victim's extended action represents one day.
–4	Each roll of the victim's extended action represents twelve hours.
–2	Power is turned on a target with no derangements.
–2	Power is turned on a target of Humanity 7 or higher.
+1	Power is turned on a target who has failed a degeneration roll in the past 72 hours.
+2	Power is turned on a target of Humanity 1 or 2.
+2	Power is turned on a target with whom the user has a blood tie.

•••• FRACTURED MIND

It's the fractured mind that opens up to the powers of Dementation. When a Malkavian achieves this level of control over the Discipline, he is able not only to open his own mind wider to the insights and freedoms that come with madness, but he is also able to find the cracks in others' minds, and exploit them.

This power makes minds "slippery," in the parlance of the Demented. For the Malkavian, this makes his mind nimble and quick, difficult to get a handle on and manipulate. For the Malkavian's enemy, this makes his own mind difficult to *keep* a handle on and hard to control. Where the Malkavian's mind expands along its seams to gain flexibility and let hostile thoughts and mystical attacks pass harmlessly through, the sane mind comes apart in pieces, leaving the victim scrambling to gather them up.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + Dementation – the target's Resolve or Composure (whichever is higher), when turned on a foe.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Whether the Malkavian was targeting himself or another, the effect is the same: Dementation turns in on itself and breaks down the part of the Malkavian's mind that controls this Discipline. The Malkavian suffers a -2 penalty to Composure for the remainder of the scene, this power cannot be used for the rest of the night, and the Willpower point spent to activate it is lost.

Failure: The Malkavian fails to muster the power necessary to pry the target's mind open. The Willpower point spent to activate this power is lost.

Success: Success enables the Malkavian to hurt an enemy or help himself. The user imposes a penalty on the target or grants a bonus to himself equal to the successes on the activation roll, to a maximum of +5, for the duration of the power (see below).

This power can be used to penalize a victim's Intelligence, Wits, Dexterity or Manipulation.

Alternately, this power can be used to augment the user's Wits, Resolve or Composure, or to grant a bonus to contest or reduce another vampire's attempt to use Auspex, Dominate, Majesty or Nightmare powers on the user. At the Storyteller's discretion, this power may expand to include enhanced resistance to other Disciplines as well.

A Malkavian can have only one instance of this power in effect at one time. That is, he can *either* penalize another character or grant a bonus to himself. Likewise, a victim can only be subject to one Fractured Mind effect at a time; the most powerful activation roll trumps all others. Thus, a Malkavian may be able to override a penalty imposed on him by the Dementation of another Afflicted vampire by gaining more successes on his activation roll to grant himself a bonus.

This power affects Kindred, kine and ghouls equally.

Exceptional Success: No special effect. More successes simply increase the effectiveness of the power, making it more likely to overcome other effects.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
—	Power is turned on a target within a number of yards equal to twice the user's Dementation dots.
-2	Power is turned on a target within a number of yards equal to four times the user's Dementation dots.
-4	Power is turned on a target further away in yards than four times the user's Dementation dots, but still visible with the naked eye. (Note that supernaturally augmented senses do extend the user's direct vision.)
—	Power is invoked for a duration of turns equal to the user's Presence dots.
-2	Power is invoked for a duration equal to the rest of the scene.
-5	Power is invoked for a duration equal to the rest of the night.

••••• DEMENTIA PRAECOX

At its pinnacle power, Dementation finally fulfills its name-sake. This power (literally, "premature dementia") imposes delusions on the Malkavian's victims, inserting a misconception, hallucination or outright lie into a target's mind and snapping it off. Victims of this power are left believing things – about themselves, about their loved ones, about the world at large – that simply are not true.

Though the length of the delusions imposed by this power is not long when compared to the years of dementia suffered by the aged living, a few nights of demented behavior can be

enough to ruin careers, break up marriages, and bring down powerful figures.

Victims of Dementia Praecox have broken into strangers' houses thinking they were simply locked out of their own homes. They have been found naked in the park, homeless on the street, and covered in blood behind the wheel. They've been found miles away from home, in bed with hookers and high on crack. They've killed spouses they thought were unfaithful. They've gotten themselves killed thinking themselves capable of impossible feats.

A few nights spent in the crucible of madness that makes of a Malkavian's eternity is more than some minds can handle.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Empathy + Dementation versus the target's Resolve + Presence

Action: Extended and contested. The rolls to activate this power and the rolls to resist it are instant actions. Each roll represents one turn of psychic conflict. The user's target number of successes is equal to the subject's Willpower. The subject's target number of successes is equal to the user's Composure + Dementation.

Note that the user cannot spend Willpower to enhance her dice pool on the initial roll of her extended action, as she must already spend a point that turn to activate this power. She may spend Willpower on subsequent turns as usual.

The subject can spend Willpower to increase his dice pool on each roll (and probably should). In addition, he may spend a single point of Willpower during the extended contest to raise the user's necessary target number by two successes. This does not entitle the subject to spend more than one Willpower point per turn.

This extended contest is resolved immediately, on the current Initiative count, when the user or the subject achieves the necessary number of successes to win the contest.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: In the unlikely event of a dramatic failure, the user is rendered catatonic and helpless for the remainder of the scene. The power fails and any Willpower points spent on the contest are wasted.

Failure: The Malkavian fails to break down her target's psyche with her maddening onslaught. The power fails and any Willpower points spent on the contest are wasted.

Success: If the user successfully overcomes the target's Willpower, she can impose a belief on the target's vulnerable psyche. The target absorbs this idea into his personality and worldview, believing it to be true and behaving thereafter as if it were. This imposed delusion might be as minor as the insidious suggestion, "You lost your wallet," delivered by a thieving Malkavian. On the other hand, the delusion can be life-changing, as major as telling a mortal, "You are a vampire."

This can be a difficult power to adjudicate in play. Just what are the limits of the delusion one character can impose on another? The necessary answer is: It depends. Is the victim of this power a player's character or a Storyteller character? How vital is that character to the chronicle? How strong-willed has

that character been shown to be in the past? How likely is the character, given his normal temperament, to go wild if he suddenly believes he is unmarried... or a serial killer? Perhaps most importantly, how willing is the player of the character (even if it's the Storyteller) to follow this dramatic turn wherever it leads?

The unpredictability of this power is one of its virtues, in the eyes of many Malkavians. Although it can be used to ruin someone's life, it is also an intriguing test of character. Would you turn yourself in if you believed you had killed someone? Or would you kill again?

To facilitate the use of this power in play, here are some mechanical effects for you to fall back on, whether you're a player or the Storyteller. Any one of these effects is possible with Dementia Praecox:

- The victim develops a new, permanent derangement at the lowest eligible "slot" on the Morality track. For example, the player of a vampire with Humanity 3 writes the new derangement on the line next to Humanity 4 – the lowest missing dot – while a mortal of Humanity 7 would be immune to this effect, as his lowest missing dot (Humanity 8) can't be saddled with a derangement. (The Kindred derangement, Delusional Obsession, is a good choice for this effect.)

- A Kindred victim may be compelled to waste Vitae, believing himself to be injured and in need of healing.

- A character may be compelled to waste Willpower points on unimportant actions, thinking that the fate of his family depends on repairing *this car right now*.

- A victim is made to believe he is repulsive, simple or hedonistic. Model the effect by denying the character any 8-again, 9-again, or 10-again re-rolls and penalizing him one success for every die that comes up "1" when using a particular Attribute or two.

- Neutralize a character's Virtue, potentially leading him to indulge his Vices on an uncharacteristic sin binge. (It's likely that a victim of this power is low on Willpower points, after all.) Not only is the character not able to regain Willpower through his Virtue, he behaves as if no Virtue particularly matters to him.

- A victim may be made to forget she has any experience with a particular Skill or Merit. A doctor can be made to repress all her medical knowledge. A Carthian can be made to forget his allegiance to the covenant. A driver can be made to not remember how to operate a car.

- A victim can be made to believe she has knowledge and experience in a field with which she is actually unfamiliar. In game terms, she believes she has ample dots in some Skill or Merit wherein she actually has few or none. A neonate is made to think he is actually the Prince. A banker is made to believe she is actually a doctor. An enemy's child is made to believe she can get away with murder.

This list is not exhaustive, and not all uses of this power need to focus on effects that reference game mechanics, but specific, identifiable traits and abilities help everyone conceptualize just what is at stake for the victim of Dementia Praecox.

The effects of this power last for 24 hours, unless extended by the user at the beginning of the contest (see "Suggested Modifiers," below). A particular target can be subject to only one instance of this power at a time. Additional attempts to use this power on a target already under the influence of it automatically fail – but any Malkavian able to wield this power is also able to intuitively sense when someone is under its influence. This intuition doesn't reveal the particulars of the subject's delusions, only that she is currently under the spell of *some* Malkavian's Dementia Praecox.

When the effects of the power pass, some subjects immediately snap out of their delusions. They often "come to" addled, sometimes terrified, and usually feeling drugged or hung-over. Other subjects may continue passively believing their delusion until it is called to the front of their minds ("Wait a minute, this isn't my car..."). Only the most modest delusions set victims down, back into their own psyches, so gently.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success grants no special effects.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-1 to -5	Each additional 24-hour period added to the effect's duration incurs an additional -1 penalty.
-2	Power is turned on a subject of Morality 7 or higher.
+2	The user limits the dementia's duration to a single night.
+1	Power is turned on a subject of lower Blood Potency.
+2	Power is turned on a subject of half, or less than half, the user's Blood Potency.

SAMPLE CHARACTERS

What follows are two sample Ventrue characters (both with full stats as potential combatants). Both are neonates, meant to serve as examples for players and Storytellers, though they can also be used as characters by either.

The first is a neonate who falls more "in line" with Ventrue ideals and stereotypes. The latter character breaks the mold in a number of ways, but still can be identified as a vampire of the Lords.

CORBIN DELACROIX



Quotes: *"Look at it this way: the world needs its janitors, and the world needs its CEOs. Nothing wrong with either. But to be clear, I'm no janitor."*

"Don't gawk. I'm talking on my iPhone, not worshipping false idols."

"Ah, dear sister, with your base desires and your delicate pretties. Go play. Leave brother alone. We Lords have real business to which we must attend."

Embrace: 2007

Apparent Age: 25

Background: Corbin Delacroix and his twin sister, Annalise, both come from money. Old money. Plantation money. Their family was and is home to politicians, CEOs, lobbyists, mobsters and eccentric artists. It's also home to a handful of Ventrue who have kept vigil over the Delacroix family for the better part of two centuries, now. The Lords like to keep a close eye on proper families: after all, good breeding stock in the mortal world easily equates to good stock in Clan Ventrue, too.

And so it came that the local Ventrue attention turned to young Corbin Delacroix: fresh out of law school, top of his class, loved by his family. Corbin, a smart conservative in a cleanly-pressed suit, deserved to belong to the Lords. It was in his nature, much as it was in the nature of his grandfather, Pious Delacroix. And so, after a Skull-and-Bones or Masonic style of initiation, he was gifted with the Embrace.

It hasn't been precisely easy for Corbin; he's a new face in a very, very old guard. They have their ways – but he likes to think he has his ways, and that his are quite plainly the best. He has a spirit that the Lords admire, but it is a spirit that they also must in some way break: the way one can admire the wild heart of a Mustang stallion but still seek to impress upon the beast a measure of control. Corbin is resistant, but knows that this is where his (now) dead heart belongs.

What's worse, though, is his sister, Annalise. A free-spirited socialite, Annalise is far more callous and vengeful than her brother. The twins have a love-hate relationship, a connection that some would say borders on the incestuous. Annalise, jealous at her brother's new "opportunity," leapt at the chance to join the Kindred when it was offered by a local Daeva dilettante. Seeing Annalise as a chance to stick a thumb in the eye of the local Lords, the Succubi are glad to have Annalise in their ranks, and fawn over her like so much royalty (this may change over time, given the temporary nature of many Daeva whims). But for now, they gladly encourage her to go for the throat when it comes to her "little brother" (who was born three and a half minutes after her).

Description: Corbin has dark eyes, dark hair, and alabaster features: a man of sharp contrasts, sharp as his cheekbones, sharp as the shoulders in his suit. His mouth seems frozen in a half-smile, the one side twisted up in a smarmy curl. He dresses in modern fashions, and wears his conservative clothing without a single wrinkle or loose thread; impeccable, some say. But he's also shackled to the technology of his generation: smartphone, Blackberry, earpiece, laptop. These are with him most hours of the night.

Storytelling Hints: *You're a cocky prick, Corbin Delacroix.* No matter what his betters say or do to him, Corbin hasn't yet relinquished his grip on a prickly attitude: he believes himself smarter than damn near everyone else around him, and in some cases, he's right.

When in doubt, exploit the weak. And since even the strong have a weak point, when Corbin finds it, he exploits that too. Essentially, he views everyone like a door with a lock: Corbin just has to find the key. Rival has a secret blood addiction? Mayor has a handful of dippy mistresses? The bouncer at the best club has a prodigious gambling debt? Exploit, exploit, exploit. Earn favor. Make threats. Win the day. Unlock the door.

He's scared, of course: joining the ranks of the well-groomed dead is a frightening endeavor, and even more intimidating is the very notion of "eternity." But it's not something he reveals. Corbin never shows his fear. Well... almost never.

It's his sister. His sister fucks with his balance. Calm, cool and smarmily collected goes way out the window when Annalise enters the picture. It's like the way some people get nervous around a pretty girl or around a foe who consistently bests them. And really, Annalise is both of those things to Corbin. He loves her, he hates her, and she almost always gets her way. She is his Achilles' heel.



CORBIN AS AUTHOR

Corbin Delacroix can serve as one of the authors working for the “compiler” of this book. He has been hired to collect interviews or information from Ventrue characters (be they player characters or Storyteller characters), whether overtly or covertly.

The thing to remember about Corbin is that he’s ultimately a greedy narcissist. He’ll want to get paid for the work he’s doing. And he’ll also be sure to turn and twist his assignments in just such a way so that it’s more about *him* than it is about his subject. One story hook to consider is that Corbin ends up as a target for the compiler, due to his irrepressible vanity, and ends up having to call on favors just to keep himself safe.

Playing Corbin: It is, first and foremost, all about Corbin. Never forget that. He grew up rich and spoiled, and learned from a young age to bring every topic of conversation back to himself. His Traits reflect that: Corbin is primarily Social-focused, with a strong Presence and Manipulation used to wow others and get his way - note that his two major Social skills are Persuasion and Socialize. Corbin makes people believe he is important, rich and beautiful through his bearing, then he makes others believe they are, too. And they stay that way, as long as they continue to help Corbin get his way - should someone fail to do as he wants, or otherwise piss him off, his name is mud to everyone that Corbin speaks to. Corbin has two dots of Dominate, allowing him to work simple, subtle commands into conversation, or condition someone to react to his presence in a certain way. He is not above instilling commands in his enemies to perform embarrassing acts in public when he gives a simple signal as a means of humiliating someone. His Resilience is there for those situations where his taunting and social assassinations take things over the line, and violence breaks out.

JORGE DEVIDAMENTE, THE BLOODHOUND



Quotes: “I can find her. I can find anybody.”

“I do not trust you. I trust my dog. My dog is strong. You are weak.”

“I like things simple. This has gotten too complex for me. Please find a way to make it simple again, or I must bid you goodbye.”

Embrace: 2005

Apparent Age: mid 40’s

Background: Jorge Devidamente was a bail bondsman, in this country illegally. Originally from Portugal, then Brazil, Jorge had a great disdain for lawbreakers (even though he himself was breaking the law by being in the country). His whole family? A nest of criminals. Thieves. Dealers. Even the mother, a con-artist and seducer. Yet, Jorge was always the good student, always the quiet thinker, and he finally decided to find his way in the world without the “support” of his kin.

It’s been a hard row to hoe. Jorge hasn’t had many friends, mostly because he’s standoffish. But he’s incredibly good at what he does. He’s worked as a bounty hunter, a repo man, and a bail bondsman and he’s had a success rate that’s unrivaled among his peers. Moreover, any time the mortal authorities came close to sniffing him out and sending him packing through deportation, he would duck and dodge them, disappearing for weeks and reappearing in another city. Off their radar and onto somebody else’s.

It came time when a local coterie of powerful Ventrue sought aid in pursuing those who committed crimes against the Blood or against the Traditions. Cowardly (or as they might suggest, *prudently*), they dared not track down the monsters themselves, and so they set a number of unwitting human bounty hunters to the task. Jorge was one of these bounty hunters, and was the only one who found success. He was also the only one to return alive.

Devidamente didn’t much care who his employers were, as long as they helped keep Immigration Services off his back. He knew something was shady, though, and could smell the illicit air about them – an aura of menace like that which surrounded his own family. Still, they were using him to hunt *breakers* of the law, right? Even if the laws weren’t precisely the laws of city and nation?

A few years in, Jorge almost died hunting down a vicious Savage known as “Jack Ruin.” The Ventrue had little interest in building up a relationship with another bounty hunter, and recognized that finding someone with Jorge’s talents would be no easy task.

The coterie – comprising all Carthians – voted to bring Jorge into clan and covenant with the Embrace. Since that time, he has served them like a loyal hound, and himself keeps a rather large “pack” of stray dogs, everything from bulldogs to rat terriers.

Description: Jorge doesn’t look like much. He’s short, stocky, hunched over with a bit of scoliosis. He wears long jackets that only serve to give him a more “mound-like” appearance. Some have compared him to Fidel Castro: bushy dark beard, tiny pinhole eyes, flesh the color and texture of abused leather. But those who have seen him in action know that he’s immovable, like a hill or a deeply-rooted weed. Those who have seen his hands, too, marvel at the size of them: like dinner plates, with broad flat fingers.

Storytelling Hints: The Ventruelike Jorge because he is the best at what he does, and because he takes *intense* pride in it. He will brook no disagreement on this point, acting utterly intolerant to those who dare question his work ethic. They can call him names, they can mock his look, they can whisper invectives about his boorish behavior at Elysium, and he'll take it all. But as soon as one word besmirches his "professional" reputation, he'll be at their throats like one of the pit bulls he keeps.

See, Jorge doesn't really like *people*. He has a unique physical presence, to be sure, but his tongue doesn't offer half the cunning of his peers among the Lords. He detests most social scenarios, finding them a great waste of time. For him, it's all about the pragmatic. About utilizing patience. He figures he's got a lot of time on this earth now, a fact he finds endlessly comforting.

Plus, he believes that he's basically going to outlast most other Ventruelike, at least the neonates. They're all "flavors of the week." They're in, they're out, they're cool, they're not. One minute they're on the shoulders of giants, practically hovering above the city like parade floats. The next, they're kicked to the curb, pissed on, made to eat filth like so many abused hounds. Jorge, though, is always somewhere in the middle of the pack. He's solid as a rock. The epitome of stability. Frankly, Jorge is confident that he's not going anywhere provided he keeps his head down and does his job well.

Important to note: Jorge responds to strong leaders. If someone in the local Ventruelike or Carthians steps up and emotes a potent authority, Jorge will follow. He'll protect the proper alpha figure tooth and nail.

Playing Jorge: Jorge is solid and unafraid of just about any sort of conflict: note the emphasis on Resilience Attributes in the character. He is unmoving and constant, generally speaking. Jorge comes across as somewhat subservient, attaching himself to the movers and shakers, but it's not because he's forced to do so, or cowed into it: it's all choice for Jorge. He makes his own decisions. Jorge has seen some tough times, and had to make some decisions that have reduced his Humanity by one (with those beginning XP partially spent on the Danger Sense Merit and his dot in Drive). His blood is also quite potent for his years already (having used three of his Merit dots to purchase an additional dot of Blood Potency).



JORGE AS AUTHOR

Jorge Devidamente makes a great author for the book: the guy's like wallpaper, he just quietly fades into the background. He's vigilant and diligent. He keeps himself out of the picture (unlike Corbin, above, who loses the subject in his own self-focus). He'll keep his mouth shut when it comes to maintaining any level of secrecy. In short, Jorge's a damn fine hound: he'll keep his nose out of trouble but stay on the task at hand with bulldog determination.

Of course, that can also lead to trouble for Jorge. Jorge's a man who appears average, as nothing special. But anybody who starts asking questions ends up popping up *on* the radar rather than *off* of it. Moreover, what happens when the compiler is done with him? Well, what happens when a hound's use has finished? Sure, you might put him on a leash and tie him out to the barn to live out his golden years laying around in the straw and dust. Or you might take a clue from Old Yeller, and put the animal down. Jorge's loyal. But a betrayal of that level could be the one thing that threatens Jorge's ultimate loyalty to the Blood.



VENTRUE

LORDS OVER THE DAMNED



NAME: *Corbin Delacroix*

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: *Spoiled Socialite*

VIRTUE: *Temperance*

VICE: *Greed*

CLAN: *Ventrue*

COVENANT: *Invictus*

COTERIE:

ATTRIBUTES

power

INTELLIGENCE ●●●●○

STRENGTH ●●○○○

PRESENCE ●●●●○

finesse

WITS ●●○○○

DEXTERITY ●●○○○

MANIPULATION ●●●●○

resistance

RESOLVE ●●○○○

STAMINA ●●○○○

COMPOSURE ●●○○○

SKILLS

MENTAL

(-3 unskilled)

Academics *Law* ●●●●○

Computer ●●○○○

Crafts ○○○○○

Investigation ○○○○○

Medicine ○○○○○

Occult ○○○○○

Politics ●●○○○

Science ○○○○○

PHYSICAL

(-1 unskilled)

Athletics ●●○○○

Brawl ○○○○○

Drive ●●○○○

Firearms ○○○○○

Larceny ○○○○○

Stealth ○○○○○

Survival ○○○○○

Weaponry ○○○○○

SOCIAL

(-1 unskilled)

Animal Ken ○○○○○

Empathy ○○○○○

Expression ○○○○○

Intimidation ●○○○○

Persuasion ●●●●○

Socialize *Hobnob* ●●●●○

Streetwise ○○○○○

Subterfuge *Business Deals* ●●○○○

OTHER TRAITS

MERITS

Allies (Lawyers) ●●○○○

Clan Status ●○○○○

Language (Latin) ●○○○○

Resources ●●●○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

FLAWS

DISCIPLINES

Dominate ●●○○○

Resilience ●○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

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○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

Size *5* [5 for adult human-sized kindred]

Defense *2* [lowest of dexterity or wits]

Initiative Mod *5* [dexterity+composure]

Speed *9* [strength+dexterity+5]

Experience

Armor

HEALTH

●●●●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□□

WILLPOWER

●●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□

VITAE

□□□□□□□□□
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Vitae/per turn *10/1*

BLOOD POTENCY

●○○○○○○○○○○○

HUMANITY

10 ○
9 ○
8 ○
7 ○
6 ●
5 ●
4 ●
3 ●
2 ●
1 ●

EQUIPMENT

- *Cutting-Edge Fashion* (+1 to Socialize in appropriate company)
- *messenger bag* (with latest lap-top)
- *iPhone*

Attributes 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Clan (+1 bonus Attribute; see p. 92) • Covenant • Blood Potency 1 (May be increased with Merit points) • Disciplines 3 (Two dots must be in-clan) • Merits 7 • (Buying the fifth dot in Attributes, Skills or Merits costs two points) • Health = Stamina + Size • Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = 5 for adult human-sized Kindred • Defense = Lowest of Dexterity or Wits • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity + 5 • Starting Humanity = 7 • Vitae = d10 roll



VENTRUE

LORDS OVER THE DAMNED



NAME: *Jorge Devidamente*

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: *The Bloodhound*

VIRTUE: *Prudence*

VICE: *Pride*

CLAN: *Ventrue*

COVENANT: *Carthians*

COTERIE:

ATTRIBUTES

power

INTELLIGENCE ●●○○○

STRENGTH ●●○○○

PRESENCE ●●○○○

finesse

WITS ●●●○○

DEXTERITY ●●○○○

MANIPULATION ●○○○○

resistance

RESOLVE ●●●○○

STAMINA ●●●○○

COMPOSURE ●●●○○

SKILLS

MENTAL

(-3 unskilled)

Academics ○○○○○
Computer ●○○○○
Crafts ○○○○○
Investigation ^{Paper Trail} ●●○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Politics ●○○○○
Science ○○○○○

PHYSICAL

(-1 unskilled)

Athletics ●●●○○
Brawl *Grapple* ●●●○○
Drive ●○○○○
Firearms ●○○○○
Larceny ○○○○○
Stealth ●●○○○
Survival ○○○○○
Weaponry ●●○○○

SOCIAL

(-1 unskilled)

Animal Ken *Dogs* ●●○○○○
Empathy ●○○○○
Expression ○○○○○
Intimidation ●●○○○
Persuasion ○○○○○
Socialize ○○○○○
Streetwise ●●○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

OTHER TRAITS

MERITS

Danger Sense ●○○○○
Fast Reflexes ●●○○○
Iron Stamina ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

FLAWS

DISCIPLINES

Animalism ●○○○○
Resilience ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Size *5* [5 for adult human-sized kindred]
Defense *2* [lowest of dexterity or wits]
Initiative Mod *5* [dexterity+composure]
Speed *9* [strength+dexterity+5]
Experience _____
Armor *1* (0 vs Firearms attacks)

Attributes 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Clan (+1 bonus Attribute; see p. 92) • Covenant • Blood Potency 1 (May be increased with Merit points) • Disciplines 3 (Two dots must be in-clan) • Merits 7 • (Buying the fifth dot in Attributes, Skills or Merits costs two points) • Health = Stamina + Size • Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = 5 for adult human-sized Kindred • Defense = Lowest of Dexterity or Wits • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity + 5 • Starting Humanity = 7 • Vitae = d10 roll

HEALTH

●●●●●●●●●●●●○○○
□□□□□□□□□□□□

WILLPOWER

●●●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

VITAE

□□□□□□□□□□
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Vitae/per turn _____

BLOOD POTENCY

●●○○○○○○○○○○○○

HUMANITY

10 _____ ○
9 _____ ○
8 _____ ○
7 _____ ○
6 _____ ○
5 _____ ●
4 _____ ●
3 _____ ●
2 _____ ●
1 _____ ●

EQUIPMENT

• *Heavy Pistol (+3L)*
• *small pack of various dogs*
• *long leather coat*
• *thick patchwork clothing*



VENTRUE

LORDS OVER THE DAMNED



NAME:

CONCEPT:

CLAN:

PLAYER:

VIRTUE:

COVENANT:

CHRONICLE:

VICE:

COTERIE:

ATTRIBUTES

power

INTELLIGENCE ●○○○○

STRENGTH ●○○○○

PRESENCE ●○○○○

finesse

WITS ●○○○○

DEXTERITY ●○○○○

MANIPULATION ●○○○○

resistance

RESOLVE ●○○○○

STAMINA ●○○○○

COMPOSURE ●○○○○

SKILLS

MENTAL

(-3 unskilled)

Academics _____ ○○○○○
Computer _____ ○○○○○
Crafts _____ ○○○○○
Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Medicine _____ ○○○○○
Occult _____ ○○○○○
Politics _____ ○○○○○
Science _____ ○○○○○

PHYSICAL

(-1 unskilled)

Athletics _____ ○○○○○
Brawl _____ ○○○○○
Drive _____ ○○○○○
Firearms _____ ○○○○○
Larceny _____ ○○○○○
Stealth _____ ○○○○○
Survival _____ ○○○○○
Weaponry _____ ○○○○○

SOCIAL

(-1 unskilled)

Animal Ken _____ ○○○○○
Empathy _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ○○○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○
Persuasion _____ ○○○○○
Socialize _____ ○○○○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○

OTHER TRAITS

MERITS

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

FLAWS

DISCIPLINES

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Size _____ [5 for adult human-sized kindred]

Defense _____ [lowest of dexterity or wits]

Initiative Mod _____ [dexterity+composure]

Speed _____ [strength+dexterity+5]

Experience _____

Armor _____

HEALTH

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□□□

WILLPOWER

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□□□

VITAE

□□□□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□□□□

Vitae/per turn _____

BLOOD POTENCY

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

HUMANITY

10 _____ ○
9 _____ ○
8 _____ ○
7 _____ ○
6 _____ ○
5 _____ ○
4 _____ ○
3 _____ ○
2 _____ ○
1 _____ ○

EQUIPMENT

Attributes 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Clan (+1 bonus Attribute; see p. 92) • Covenant • Blood Potency 1 (May be increased with Merit points) • Disciplines 3 (Two dots must be in-clan) • Merits 7 • (Buying the fifth dot in Attributes, Skills or Merits costs two points) • Health = Stamina + Size • Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = 5 for adult human-sized Kindred • Defense = Lowest of Dexterity or Wits • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity + 5 • Starting Humanity = 7 • Vitae = d10 roll

