



BLOODLINES: THE CHOSEN™

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Table of Contents

Prologue: Down in the Dark	4	Caligornia Kiao	85
Introduction	10	Tianpan Kiao	95
Agonistes	16	Yagnatia	105
Baddacelli	26	Appendix A: Bloodlines in the Danse Macabre	115
Duchagne	36	Appendix B: Bloodlines in the Story	125
Noctaku	46	Appendix C: Sample Bloodline Chronicles	129
Ratzgragen	56	Index of Bloodlines	139
Sangioranni	65		
Taija	75		

Prologue:

Down in the Dark

By Ray Fawkes

I don't know where I am. There is something dripping nearby, liquid into liquid, marking time. It's so dark in here I can't see nothing. I think the sound of the drops is coming from somewhere off to my left, but there is a crazy loud echo in here, and I can't be sure. My hands are pinned under some kind of heavy weight, feels like a block of metal. If I were alive, it'd hurt to stay in this position, crouched like this, arms back. Reminds me of some of the times I'd be under a pile-up when I was alive, you know, all bent out of shape with a 300-pound defensive tackle on me trying to grind my face into the field and wreck my throwing arm all at once.

But I'm not alive.

I think I been down here for maybe three or four days. They won't let me sleep, the ones who brought me here. Every time I pass out, they come at me with bells or sirens or screams, shaking me awake. Sometimes they touch a piece of wood to my bare chest and give it a tap, you know, really give me the signal. Sometimes they leave a television on, and it sounds like it's stuck between stations, real loud. I can't escape. I roar and thrash and turn on the Fear, I mean really amp it up, but my arms are locked down and I just can't move, not really. When they first put me here, I kicked like a bastard, and I felt somebody's bones crack under my heel. Nobody's touched me since, which I guess shows that they got some brains. The hunger churns my guts, but I don't feed, clamping my mouth shut whenever they drip their hot blood on my face. I know better.

They're trying to break me. My name is Abbott of Nosferatu. I'm a Hound in service to the Prince

of the city. I won't be broken. My Kindred will find me, and I'll visit some serious fury on these sons of bitches, these vampire freaks, and the Court of the Prince will name me a hero. I repeat it again and again, keeping myself sane. I can hold out. They can't get to me. I won't be broken.

A bell clangs, painfully loud and close to my ear. I jump, wrenching my shoulder. The sound stops abruptly, and a low voice speaks near me, real raspy. "Abbott. Drink the Vitae. Join with us. Claim the power of your blood and stand with us."

I turn my head away from the sound. A whisper responds from the other side, the side that I now face. "Don't turn away from us, Abbott. We are your family."

"Nah," I say, trying to play it cool. "Nah, I don't think you are." They got the Fear, too, and it's hitting me hard, but I keep it together.

The voice comes closer. "We are, we are. Don't deny us. We will make you strong. We will make you proud."

"WE ARE, WE ARE.
DON'T DENY US.
WE WILL MAKE
YOU STRONG.
WE WILL MAKE
YOU PROUD."

I lunge forward, feeling the snap and pop in my shoulders even as my forehead strikes slick, cold stone. The whispering voice chuckles, somewhere off in another direction. I thought he was right there, but - he must be fast. He must be real fast.

Shit. I shouldn'ta done that. Now the frustration is boiling up in me, racing straight for the thinking parts of my brain, shutting them down. I try to tamp it back, but it comes up in a flood, flashing through my mind. I want to kill these freaks, just rip them apart. They're still laughing, and I'm thinking about wrenching their limbs from the sockets and maybe getting a couple of fingers into their mouths and ripping off their jaws the way I did to that one guy once and everything goes red. Always did have a problem with anger, I guess.

• • •

The Prince had a problem. There were signs of feeding in one of the subway tunnels near the end of the East-West line. One of the Kindred smelled and saw the traces of blood on the tracks and told us. The transit lines are off limits, have been ever since the '70s. Someone new was in town - someone who didn't know the rules.

I got sent to check it out. This kind of thing happened every so often, some new lick bellying into town hoping to pick up a little bit of blood without being noticed, you know, figuring he could live

“ABBOTT, WE NEED YOU.
COME TO US.
STAY WITH US.
WE HAVE BLOOD FOR YOU.
TAKE AS MUCH AS
YOU WANT.
JUST ASK.”

free and get away without paying tribute. I always got sent around to check it out because I'm strong and willing to do the work. It was a good gig for me, better than nothing. Crack a few heads every so often, drag a poacher in front of the Court so the powers that be can make an example of him, and I get grounds of my own and a little respect. I usually didn't have to kill nobody, but Kindred talk anyway.

So I went down into the station after hours to make sure that I didn't have to worry about none of the living getting in the way or maybe seeing something they shouldn't. Couldn't see nothing from the platform, but then again I don't got the Sight, so it makes sense I was gonna have to wander in a bit. Brought a flashlight just in case, but I didn't exactly want to make a big bright target of myself to anyone who happened to be there. I just jumped right down and started walking. It's not like I'm scared of the dark. I'm usually what people are scared of.

Sure enough, I got maybe 30, 40 feet in, and I smelled it. Blood. Old blood, dry, but still enough to perk up the Beast. I crouched down and touched the rail. I lifted up my fingers, feeling the grit on them, trying to have a look in the dark. Suddenly I got the twitch, the way I always did when some lick I didn't know was nearby. My back was up right away, but I didn't really have time to move.

Next thing I knew, there was something slapped on my face, and somebody grabbed hold of one of my arms. I stood up fast, lifting him off his feet and cracking him like a whip. By the time I heard him hit the wall, there were at least two others on me. Maybe three, I don't know. They were pulling me down, one blowing some kind of air horn in my ear and it hurt like a bitch, and suddenly I was thinking of those fans I always saw in the stands, back in the day, blowing their horns and paint all over their faces. Their hands were all over me, strong, dragging me down, and they slapped some kinda hood over my face and were pushing my nose into the track, and of course I flipped out, so after that I don't remember nothing except waking up in this room in the dark.

• • •

So now I wake up again and that television is on, blasting at full volume. I can hear the static, and what sounds like a Spanish game show

mixed in with what's gotta be a porno movie. My forehead's all busted up, so I musta been smashing it against that wall again or something. My arms are useless, too, with my shoulders all popped out, but I don't think I can afford the blood to fix them up. I still can't see nothing, which means there must be something covering my eyes. Otherwise I'd see the light from the TV screen. At least I'm still hungry, so I wasn't drinking nothing while I was freaking out. Still don't know how long I been here, though, and losing it like I did don't make it any easier to track time. I gotta try to keep it together. How long would it be before they come looking for me? Three nights? A week? Shit man, I'm the one they send when there's real trouble. Who'd they follow up with?

Somebody's talking. I realize it, coming up on it like I'm coming outta water. It's always the same when I frenzy like that, it takes a little while for me to understand anything. Every time he talks, the television stops, and every time he stops it starts up again.

"Abbott, we need you. Come to us. Stay with us. We have blood for you. Take as much as you want. Just ask."

I shake my head, trying to see if maybe I can knock the hood or blindfold or whatever it is loose. I can't feel anything properly because of how I'm all messed up.

"We are your family. Stay with us. Your Blood is calling you. We need you."

"You must think I'm somebody else," I mumble, the sound coming out funny from my smashed face. "I'm Morotrophian blood. You're not Morotrophians."

"Not claimed," whispers the voice, "you're not claimed, and so you can be one of ours instead."

"It's not gonna happen."

The television comes back. The hunger is all over me - my skin's crawling inside and out with it, and everything's starting to hurt. I must be low, lower than I thought. I don't know if I can keep this up much longer. Somewhere in my head I'm back 20 years, back on the field, listening to my coach chew me out about fighting again. Even that keeps fading out, though, leaving me with nothing but hunger and pain, pain and hunger.

"YOU TOOK THE BLOOD,"
SHE SAYS, ALL SWEET
AND QUIET,
"AND NOW YOU'RE PART
OF THE FAMILY.
THE EYES GO WHEN YOU
TAKE THE BLOOD."

...

I'm starting to think maybe I've got these guys all wrong. I mean, they just want me with them, you know, like family. They just want me to...

Oh, shit. I spit on the ground, cursing, really shouting it out. "Fuck. Fucking bastards, fucking shitbag fucks, when I get my hands on you, I'm going to fucking tear you into little pieces, I'm going to pop your heads like fucking corks..." but I know it's not doing me any good. I must have taken the blood they were offering without even knowing what the hell I was doing. Their blood, obviously, and now the Love is coming up on me.

Somebody starts singing. Real soft, somewhere near my face. It's a nice song, real gentle, like an old lullaby. Sounds like a sweet girl, someone who shouldn't be down here with these animals.

Maybe they got her trapped here, too, like me.

"Hey," I say, calm. "Hey, you, singing. Hey, do I know you?"

"No," says the girl, her voice all glossy silk. "But I've heard you talking in Elysium. You're a man of sublime directness. I like you."

"I must've seen you around, though, if you're in the Court. You related to Gregory, maybe? One of his sisters?" I sorta strain to the side, leaning toward her a little. "Do they got you all pinned down? I got my arms under some kind of weight - I can't move right."

"No, I'm free to move," she says. Matter-of-fact, like she's shrugging it out.

"Maybe . . . maybe you can help me? Just take this blindfold off or something? It's driving me crazy that I can't see nothing. Maybe you can take this blindfold off for me?"

"You're not blindfolded," she says, and somehow I can tell she's smiling. "You haven't been blindfolded for three nights now. You just don't have eyes any more."

"What?" I say, my voice kinda cracking. "What? No, no, I have..."

But I try to blink and I can't feel nothing there.

"You took the blood," she says, all sweet and quiet, "and now you're part of the family. The eyes go when you take the blood. They go, but -"

I start screaming. I admit it. I start, and I'm not sure how long it is before I stop. At some point, somebody starts pouring blood into my mouth, and I'm screaming so hard that I don't even notice it until it slips down my throat, until it's way too late. That just makes me scream even harder,
h a r d
enough

to feel something start to rip inside my throat, and I'm wrenching myself forward, pulling my arms right out of the goddamn sockets, I don't care, and suddenly, suddenly, with a pop and a crash, I'm free. Sounds like I brought the whole goddamn wall down behind me, too. There's clouds of dust kicking up everywhere, I feel it settling on my skin and in my goddamn eye sockets.

I snarl, shaking my arms out in one quick motion, pushing a whack of blood into them. They're all fixed up faster than anyone can say "uh-oh," which is exactly what I hear maybe three feet away, maybe less. I snap out, grabbing a shoulder. Whoever it is twists in my grip, but it's too late - I done this 50 times, sight or no sight. By the time she gets the notion to say something smarter, I got my other hand around her neck and I'm crushing it with everything I got. The Love is licking at my brain, telling me to pull back and relax, telling me not to hurt her, but I push through that fuckin' mess and find a way to keep myself going. I mighta drunk the blood, but I didn't take that much.

I take her head right off her shoulders, just like I said I was gonna do.

I feel her body drop into ash, so I'm already forgetting her, lurching toward the wall and touching it, feeling my way along. It's cold stone, thick with greasy dust, so I think I might still be somewhere in the subway tunnels. I try to bring my eyes back with the blood, but they just don't come. They did something to me. Those son of a bitch vampires did something to my eyes so I can't bring them back. I pump out the Fear, which ain't hard when I'm in this kind of mood, and edge along looking for a door.



Doesn't take me too long to find one. Doesn't take me long to rip it right off its flimsy hinges either, tossing it behind me like a piece of wet cardboard.

There's another television on in the next room, blaring a sports show. I pound in through the doorway, ready to grab the next bastard, and I... I hear what it's saying:

"We couldn't move the ball those days, not until Marshall Abbott came along and really changed things for us. He was something else, really, just a cut above. A great guy, all-around hero. Huge. I remember that one season, his first one, he just kept firing them in, one after the other. Playing with injuries, playing with —"

"Turn it off!" I shout, flailing around, looking for something to smash. I stumble into a bookcase or something, and feel it crack. "Turn it off!"

"A great guy, all-around hero."

I grab a shelf and heave it right out of the wall, pulling down a pile of books and crap. Dust is flying everywhere, so much dust, and I'm shouting, "TURN IT OFF" but I can still hear it and there's other sounds, too, dripping liquid into liquid and that sweet girl's voice again, whispering something right in my ear, which is impossible because I just killed her and then all of a sudden, outta nowhere there's a really sharp pain in my head and I can feel something pop. Then it's quiet.

Nothing moving. Nothing making any kind of sound.

I blunder forward, trying to feel my way over to the television, so I can smash it for good. My ears start ringing, and I realize that something burst in them. I push the blood in and bring them back. I'm goddamn hungry. I grab at the air, swinging around, looking for the goddamn TV.

"Enough. There's nothing there," says a guy. Sounds pretty old. "There is no television. There is no water, there is no bell, there is no girl. Here there are only the books."

"Why are you doing this to me?"

"We toy with you because we must. You will have to learn to see without eyes, hear without trust. You will have to learn to understand what is real and what is not, now more than ever."

"Why? Why me?"

"WE TOY WITH YOU
BECAUSE WE MUST.
YOU WILL HAVE TO
LEARN TO SEE
WITHOUT EYES,
HEAR WITHOUT TRUST."

"Because we know that you were a good man, once, before the Kindred of this city touched you. Because we know that you can be that man again, and we can help you get there. But most of all, because we need you. The time has come for the Baddacelli to rise. Soon, the Court of Elysium will know what is real and what is not, and will understand why the Prince keeps vampires like you down in the depths, why he breaks the Nosferatu on his wheel of torturous obligation and the real reason he forbids you to follow the tracks under the city. Soon, they will know what truly dwells under the streets, and what bargains their Prince strikes on their behalf."

I turn around and around, but I can't figure out where this guy is. He keeps moving, or . . . no. No, he doesn't. He's tricking me. Stupid, I've been stupid. I stop and try to concentrate.

"Soon," he says, "we will rise to collect our due, and you, the warrior, the death-dealer, you will rise with us. No longer will we be denied. No longer will we be discarded. We will rise, and if necessary, we will make war."

I've got it. I hear something else while he talks - real quiet, but it's there. Cloth, moving, touching the ground, like a whisper. I know where he really is.

"You have been pained, and you have been confused. We will repay you for that. I am sorry, but your induction was a decision

that had to be made for you. Our need is strong.”

Yeah. There it is again. It only happens while he’s talking. Maybe he’s wearing something that I’m hearing. It’s not coming from the same place as his voice, but it seems to be staying still.

“We are Baddacelli. You are one of us, now.”

I don’t want to give myself away. I gotta keep him talking until I figure out what to do. “The girl. I killed a... I ripped her head off.”

“You were fooled. A Kindred corpse, yes, but not one of us. You heard the voice, but it did not come from her. These are our

ways. Anything can be simulated. You do not yet see without eyes or hear without trust.”

Guess I learn pretty quick. I spring, and this time there’s no mistake. I crash into this guy, nice, solid tackle, and hear his skull crack against the wall. He’s dazed, and I get on top of him, making sure to trap his arms under my knees. He pushes back, and he’s strong, but he’s not as strong as me. He lets out a little surprised grunt, and I got my fingers in his mouth, hooked over his bottom teeth. I can feel the fangs poking against my skin.

“Well now,” I say, feeling the Love good and strong this time. My grip is slipping a little, but I know that I could probably put myself over the edge and tear this guy to pieces before it really takes hold. He took my eyes. I don’t gotta love nobody who does something like that to me.

“Well now. I guess I could stick with you, now that I don’t got too much in the way of options. Or I could rip you open and take you back to the Prince.” He struggles a little again, and I can feel his dry tongue pushing against my fingers, like he’s trying to spit something out. My own gut is flipping as the Love worms its way up and down my spine. If I’m gonna do this, I better be quick.

“I’LL TELL YOU WHAT.
DON’T BOTHER SAYING NOTHING.
THIS TIME, I’LL DECIDE.”

Introduction

The Chosen

There are many bloodlines shot through the Kindred world, woven into the histories of its many domains like discolored threads in a great, red tapestry. The divergent families of the vampire clans each carry their own refinement of the undying curse, contributing a multiplicity of unusual strains to the Requiem and warping the tone of the greater Danse Macabre.

Each bloodline is born of one of the five parent clans, the Daeva, Gangrel, Mekhet, Nosferatu and Ventrue, but each becomes something unto itself. The members of a true bloodline mystically alter their

Blood, taking on unique features: powers that may be unknown to others, a weakness that defines the line and, in some cases, identifying physical marks. Once a vampire joins a bloodline, he forever distinguishes himself from the “ordinary” Kindred of the five clans, for better or worse.

Many of the Kindred know something of the bloodlines. Whether or not they have a complete understanding, a significant number of vampires take it upon themselves to seek out a line at one time or another, looking to employ their unique talents, or even to apply for membership. The search can be difficult, dangerous and for some, ultimately fruitless, but the appeal of unusual Vitae is enough to draw attention again and again.

The **Bloodlines** series explores some of the prominent, established and secretive lineages of the undead. Vampires of such varied heritage may be recognized and prominent members of their domains, or outcasts or exiles who are sooner persecuted than tolerated. **The Chosen** focuses on lines that identify themselves as extraordinary agents of Kindred destiny, whether elevated to that state by divine influence, scholarly acumen or mystic enlightenment. Players may create characters who join these lines shortly after Embrace, or they may play through the story of joining a line with already existing characters. Storytellers may introduce

the members of these bloodlines as unusual and dangerous allies or antagonists.

The Pact of Blood

There are three Appendices included at the back of this book.

Appendix A: Bloodlines in the Danse Macabre presents the ordinary vampire’s perspective on the bloodlines. The Appendix details the difficult process of tracking and contacting the members of a line, expands on the rules for induction into a line (including the diabolical options available to those Kindred who are willing to bring a vampire into the family without his co-operation) and explains some of the changes that any character joining a bloodline is likely to experience.

Appendix B: Bloodlines in the Story is a resource for Storytellers that discusses and highlights the implications of adding a bloodline to a game and provides a checklist of questions to aid in generating story seeds from bloodlines.

Appendix C: Sample Bloodline Chronicles provides five ready-to-run chronicles that revolve around bloodlines.

The main body of this book presents the following 10 broods for use in **Vampire: The Requiem**. Each bloodline has its own unique history and abilities, and each bears its own unique burden. The first Appendix of this book, together with Appendix I of **Vampire: The Requiem**, details complete information about joining a line and the rules, both mandatory and optional, for doing so.

Agonistes: A line of Kindred scholars obsessed with penetrating the fog of torpor. Possessors of forbidden knowledge, they are locked in a constant internal war of interpretation and purpose. The Polemicists are practitioners of intricate, demanding rituals designed to shield the memories of slumbering elders.

Baddacelli: Blinded by the Blood, these Nosferatu suffer a vicious curse in eternal shadow. Burrowing

beneath mortal settlements, they construct a lightless world of their own design. Few dare to cross into the Baddacelli's territory, and those who do are confounded by the unique, sound-based power of *Mimetismo*.

Duchagne: Jaded and fickle, these descendants of a wicked French *Daeva* visit their whims upon Kindred and kine alike with debilitating force. Feared and admired in equal measure, the Bacchantes are vicious in the application of the unique, sensual *Licentieux Discipline*.

Noctuku: Terrifying, legendary monsters of the vampire world, the Bogeymen feed gleefully on their own kind. Tradition and taboo are shattered in the face of their gruesome, rapacious hunger, and panicked rumor both precedes and follows their appearances. The unique Discipline of *Phagia* empowers the dire attacks they constantly stage against their fellow Kindred.

Rötgrafen: An oceangoing line of *Ventru* claiming direct heritage from a vampire who drank the blood of gods. The Sea Kings are a roving force of experienced warriors and sailors, tasked with a dark, divine purpose.

Sangiovanni: Perverse, incestuous and necrophiliac, this tight-knit line of *Mekhet* derives from a deranged former mage and his mortal family. Once restricted to a few domains in Italy, they have recently begun expansion, bringing their disturbing influence to new lands. The practice of their unique Discipline, *Cattiveria*, lends the *Necromancers* fantastic power, at a truly terrible price.

Taifa: A line of civil, genteel *Gangrel* founded in Moorish Spain, these Kindred constantly challenge the accepted view of their clan. Refined and elegant, they seek to keep the company of their fellow vampires, taking pleasure in great ceremonial gatherings.

California Xiao: A cult of *Daeva* who drain their devoted victims of emotion as well as blood. The California Xiao are a fiercely insular line of Kindred, self-obsessed and wallowing in a never-ending feast of sin. Their unique power, *Kingjan*, both binds and depletes their prey in an insidious emotional web.

Tianpàn Xiao: Born of a failed attempt at restraining the baser instincts of the *Daeva*, the *Tianpàn Xiao* are a tragic study in disappointment and excess. Rationalizing their misbegotten origins as resounding success, they make a proud banner of their founder's errors. The unique Discipline *Xinyao* fuels their willful deviance, aiding them in besmirching his memory in modern nights.

Yagnatia: An influential line of tainted aristocrats, these *Nosferatu* bring a monstrous determination to the courtly intrigues of the *Danse Macabre*. Hailing from the Russian territories of old, the Boyars face off against a line of Eastern *Ventru* in a centuries-old feud.

About the Contest

This book is unlike any of the other supplements for *Vampire: The Requiem*. The majority of this book was written by fan submissions, conceived as a contest to allow readers and players of the game to contribute to the construction of this, the third of the bloodline books. All of the bloodlines listed herein were originally named in *Vampire: The Requiem* under their respective clan entries as sample lines, and never officially detailed until this point. Players and Storytellers were encouraged to create their own histories and cultures for those lines, and our decision to print a number of their profiles was accompanied by the notion that the hard work of many of those players deserved notice. Hence, the **Bloodlines: The Chosen** Contest was created and conducted to select and support those interpretations we felt were most inspiring and merited public view.

The Structure of the Contest

The contest was originally announced online in a press release (duplicated below) in August of 2006, and an open call for submissions was initiated. Some of the named lines already had associated single-sentence summaries in the original book; others had none. For those that were only named, we created a new summary and included it in the announcement, encouraging submissions that would be thematically similar to one another (and thus, easier to compare), while keeping them short and relatively open to interpretation.

Shortly after the announcement was made, an online poll was launched on the White Wolf website (at www.white-wolf.com) asking readers which of the 18 lines described in the release they were most eager to see detailed in the final product. The result of the poll was not necessarily going to dictate which 10 lines made it into the book — we made it clear that the quality of entries was our first and most important guideline — but relative popularity could help make a decision if two entries were considered equally compelling.

The results of the poll, in descending order of popularity, were as follows:

Sangiovanni	16%
Anubi	12%
Xiao	10%
Rötgrafen	10%
Noctuku	8%
Cassius	5%
Mnemosyne	5%

Duchagne	5%
Agonistes	5%
Taifa	5%
Baddacelli	4%
Yagnatia	4%
Anavashra	3%
Norvegi	3%
Licinii	2%
Matasuntha	1%
Beni Murrahim	1%
Acteiuss	1%

And there, for us, the surprises began. We expected a number of lines to rise to prominence (most especially the Sangiovanni, because of their tenuous connection to a wildly popular clan in the previous incarnation of this game, **Vampire: The Masquerade**), but we weren't quite expecting the spread to be so close. Although five bloodlines did stand above the rest, the remaining 13 were relatively close in popularity — a comforting result in one sense, meaning that readers were roughly equally excited about seeing all of the lines in print, but a daunting one in another, because it meant that some were bound to be disappointed. Those of us at White Wolf are philosophical types, in that we like to shout arguments at one another across a long table, often smashing some kind of heavy breakable on its surface when we are reasonable, and on each other when we are not. The results of the poll touched off a series of gentle, friendly discussions about its implications with respect to our deliberations, and I had to wear an eye-patch for only about two weeks afterwards.

The Elimination Rounds

We began to receive entries almost immediately after announcing the contest. The first one came in just after noon on August 24, one day after the official launch! Over the course of the month, the submissions became steadily more frequent, eventually building to a torrent in the last hours before the deadline. Not surprisingly, they reflected the polled popularity of the bloodlines quite closely. The submissions for the Sangiovanni, Rötgrafen and Xiao were, shall we say, quite numerous, while the Beni Murrahim, Matasuntha and Acteiuss were few. There were a couple of surprises. We received many more entries for the Baddacelli than were predicted (my theory is that the summary presented a tantalizing challenge to a number of writers), while the Anubi received relatively few (perhaps because of the apparent geographical restriction in their description — some of the other lines with specified home regions were also less popular with writers).

I immediately began sifting through the entries, reading them for quality and style for initial eliminations. At this early stage, I was not concerned with mechanics or specific details — I was just reading to see if the entry was interesting, coherent and entertaining. A relatively large number made the first cut. The most common eliminating factor at this stage was grammatical composition: if the entry was poorly written in a linguistic sense, it didn't survive. The rest were those that didn't conform to the rules we set out in the announcement. One wasn't in English. Six or seven were less than five hundred words long. One was saved in a format I've never seen before, and sent my computer into a paroxysm of doubt and what I can only describe as technological self-loathing, causing it to ask me again and again if I wanted to try accessing the Internet to see if there was a program somewhere that could read it. I was forced to delete that file, and we have agreed never to speak of it again. All told, roughly 15% of the entries were disqualified at this stage — more than I was hoping for, but less than I was expecting.

I then read through the surviving entries, applying the three criteria we had mentioned in the Press Release — intensity, excitement and inspiration — as well as one more that I imposed: the unexpected. If an entry was powerfully written, displayed and generated an enthusiasm for the bloodline, and inspired great ideas for play, it was earmarked for the jury and put aside. If it managed to accomplish all of these and provided an unexpected (but logical) twist on the line, it got extra points. This was a difficult, agonizing stage. The majority of entries eliminated just didn't hold up to all three mandatory judging criteria, but many satisfied at least two. They might have been interesting or enthused, but they seemed devoid of story hooks. They might have been full of hooks, but they just read as uninspired reports — nothing that made me eager to play. Some were so enthused that they choked themselves off with declarations of the bloodline's attractive superiority while failing to actually make the bloodline interesting or worthy of play. Roughly 70% of the entries did not make it on to the next stage.

It may be interesting to note that a common thread began to appear in the vast majority of the entries I read. Many discussed (for reasons that may be related to the authors' attempts to distinguish their entries) the bloodlines' sense of superiority or destiny — that they were something better than other Kindred — not just the five parent clans, but *all* Kindred. Some merely hinted at the assumption, suggesting that their bloodlines were unnaturally successful. Others dealt with it in a more overt fashion, attributing the formation of the lines to hubristic failure or punishing curses. It occurred to me

that *The Chosen* was becoming an appropriate title for the book on more than one level: in reference to the writers winning the contest and as a reference (ironic or otherwise) to the self-image of many of their lines. I set this notion aside for later consideration.

The twice-promoted entries were then sorted into folders based on their respective bloodlines and presented to the jury of White Wolf employees, who will remain largely anonymous so that a) we can present a cold, faceless amalgam that will promote the entertaining rumors of conspiracy, falsehood and evil intent that help us make it through rainy afternoons and b) I can sell them out at the last minute if a really serious complaint arises, making a scene and buying me a couple of seconds to make my getaway.

The entries were compared to one another at a round table session for quality, readability and inspiration. For the first time, they were also judged based on mechanical merits — whether or not the weaknesses and special powers described were likely to foster or hinder good role-playing experience, and whether or not they contributed to the picture painted of the bloodline in the text. All of the jury members were invited to rank the lines and present their comments. After difficult deliberations and a semi-sequestered voting period, the 10 finalists you see in this book were chosen. Some of us were very kind to the entries. Some of us were brutal. One of us has earned a new nickname in the office: the Widowmaker. One of us may or may not have wept bitterly, but he swears that he just had “dust or booze or something” in his eye.

Redlines and Final Results

Each of the finalists was notified and sent a “redlined” version of his or her entry, edited for style and grammar, and commented on with suggestions. Each finalist was also asked to expand upon the 3,000-word entry he or she had contributed, adding another 2,000 words (or thereabouts) to the history and culture of the bloodline, and fleshing out the bloodline’s unique Discipline, if the bloodline had one. This process is almost exactly identical to that normally involved in writing for a **Vampire** book — the only significant difference is that freelance writers at White Wolf are normally instructed to include the fully detailed histories and Disciplines from the start, developing them further in the redline stage.

As the winners returned their reworked lines, we were pleased to see 10 very solid lines forming, each with a compelling feel all its own. Strictly mechanical concerns dictated that I focus special attention on the Disciplines

and powers listed with each entry, consulting with Will Hindmarch, the developer of the **Vampire: The Requiem** line, to make sure that none of the powers violated or contradicted rules already laid out in the rest of our source materials, and that none of them duplicated an already existing work or used terminology that was already earmarked for something else.

As far as I’m concerned, all 10 of our winners did a stellar job with the lines, and I am proud of the final product — as proud, I hope, as they are. I’d like to thank each and every one of them for the great work they contributed, as well as their most admirable patience in waiting for the public announcement of their victory.

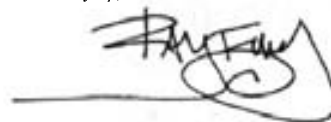
The Consolation Round

As of this writing, in January of 2007, the jury is holding a number of entries that qualified all the way to the round table session and final judging, but didn’t make the ultimate cut. They provoked considerable discussion, since some of them very narrowly missed top-10 status, and a few of them were still favorites among certain members of the jury. We decided to give them another chance — not to be chosen for this book (since that was the territory of the 10 winners, and we didn’t want to diminish their achievement), but to be presented for public consumption with the White Wolf stamp of approval.

Deadline requirements made it impossible for us to launch a third phase “open vote” about the entries above, and we chose the top 10 in Phase Two of the contest. I believe the consensus at White Wolf is to use that third phase to display these runner-up entries and subject them to a popular vote. The winners will be typeset and illustrated just as the ones in this book are, and made available as PDF files for download on the White Wolf website, www.white-wolf.com. By the time this book sees print, this ought to be done. Congratulations to those who won popular support with their pieces.

This book was made possible by your contributions. You are the players of **Vampire: The Requiem**, and you are the Storytellers of its many thousands of alternate worlds, running concurrently all around the globe. This is your artful, admirable work. Well done.

Enjoy,



Ray Fawkes

January 6, 2007

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Bloodlines: The Chosen Contest For Immediate Release

Bloodlines: The Chosen Contest Guidelines

It's true. We're finally going to publish full versions of the bloodlines hinted at on pages 104-113 of *Vampire: The Requiem* — but only some of those bloodlines will make the cut, getting complete, illustrated submissions. Only the ones you choose to write into existence. They are the Chosen.

We've been saying that the teased bloodlines in *Vampire: The Requiem* were intended to be fuel for your imagination. Now it's time for us to play together. You've had two years to devise your own takes on those bloodline sketches, and now it's time to share them with *Vampire* fans across the globe. The bloodlines in *Bloodlines: The Chosen* will be written by you, the fans and players of the game and here's how it works:

Overview: The bloodlines (or portions of bloodlines) chosen for inclusion in *Bloodlines: The Chosen* will be judged on technical merits but also by personal tastes. It's not enough for your entry to be bloody scary, it also has to make sense and be suitable for publication. The contest will progress through three phases, described below. The protocols of each phase may change as circumstances dictate. Remember, this is an actual book going through development and production on its way to publication.

Phase One: Open Submissions The contest opens on August 23, 2006. The deadline for Phase One will be no earlier than September 25, 2006. You may enter the contest by email only. Each entry shall consist of a written submission. Your initial submission should focus on the content of the bloodline write-up, not on a unique Discipline for the bloodline. Expect to write 2,500 - 2,750 words detailing the bloodline itself, and use the remaining words in your submission to outline the bloodline's unique Discipline (if any). See the Bloodline Format Guide for more information. Your submission must:

- be no more than 3,000 words, for the actual submission;
- include a two-sentence summary of the submission;
- follow the standard bloodline format for the *Vampire* line and demonstrate knowledge of the World of Darkness;
- include your name, date of birth, street address, phone number and email address
- include the following legal statement at the top of your submission: I submit my idea voluntarily and on a non-confidential basis, and I understand that this submission by me and its acceptance by White Wolf Publishing, Inc. does not, in whole or in part, establish or create by implication, or otherwise, any relationship between White Wolf and me beyond consideration in Round One of the present contest. I agree that this submission becomes the property of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. I further understand that the acceptance by White Wolf of this submission neither creates nor implies any confidential relationship, guarantee of secrecy, nor any recognition or acknowledgment of either novelty or originality.

Phase Two: Developer Jury & Finalists Each submission will be considered on the merits of writing quality, grammar, playability and originality. This begins Phase Two of the contest. The White Wolf in-house jury, with Ray Fawkes, the book's developer, as its foreman, will select a number of submissions to serve as finalists in the contest.

These will be red-lined, edited and revised like any freelance manuscript and sent back to the original authors for revisions, expansion and rewriting. Finalists who move on to Phase Two may be tasked with adding several thousand words of new, original writing to their bloodlines (possibly fleshing out the bloodline's history or detailing its unique Discipline, for example).

Those authors who are able to make revisions, meet the deadlines for their second drafts and meet our standards for writing and creative quality will move on to Phase Three.

Phase Three: Open Voting
Whatever happens, Phase Three will be a phantom from Phase Two. Stay tuned and vote on the chosen bloodline.

UPDATE: DUE TO THE VOLUME OF ENTRIES WE RECEIVED, THE AMOUNT OF SPACE AVAILABLE IN THE BOOK, AND THE LIMITED TIME LEFT BEFORE PUBLICATION, PHASE THREE MUST BE CANCELLED.

the first two phases. That emerge triumphant and your chance to

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In the End The winning bloodlines and Disciplines selected for inclusion in Bloodlines: The Chosen will be illustrated, given symbols and published in the finished book. Winning authors will receive an author credit and contributor's copies of the book. You might even be chosen to work with White Wolf Game Studio as a contracted freelance writer on other World of Darkness books!

Every bloodline and Discipline published in Bloodlines: The Chosen will include behind-the-scenes information (which the winning authors will be invited to contribute), author's notes and commentary by the White Wolf developers so you can see how the bloodline went from the kernel of an idea to a finished game element.

Eligible Bloodline Synopses The following bloodlines, mentioned in the corebook but not yet detailed in any Vampire product, are the only bloodlines eligible to be the subjects of submissions for this contest. Your challenge, as a writer, is to turn one of these into a fully-formed bloodline ready for play. Ready? Go!

Duchagne: European bloodline that seems to have the ability to directly manipulate the senses and sensations of others

Xiao: Predators who drain victims of their emotions as well as their blood

Anavashra: Mysterious ritualists who claim domains in India and Bangladesh

Anubi: Egyptian cultists who have feuded long with the Lancea Sanctum

Matasuntha: Warriors descended from an ancient warlord of the Huns

Taifa: Sophisticated, Middle-Eastern, known for political savvy and social aptitude

Agonistes: Mediterranean historians and philosophers who seek to record and retain the knowledge Kindred lose over time and in torpor

Mnemosyne: Able to share memories and experiences through blood ties

Norvegi: Inbred, degenerate cult of spies and thieves

Sangiovanni: Venetian necromancers who maintain a tight family structure that Embraces exclusively from its own mortal stock

Acteius: Cursed, brittle Kindred who suffer for the depraved brutality of their progenitor

Baddacelli: Blind horrors who burrow beneath mortal settlements and possess eerie powers of mimicry

Noctuku: Violent cannibals who prefer to feed on other Kindred

Yagnatia: A Russian family that claims unbroken lineage from both ancient nobility and witches

Cassius: An iconic line of insidious, posturing Lords known for decadence and power

Licinii: Proud, fiercely political Kindred embraced exclusively from lowborn mortal prodigies

Beni Murrahim: Persian Kindred from the ranks of kings dethroned in ancient wars

Rötgrafen: Seafaring warrior-kings who claim to have swallowed the blood of fallen gods

Contest Rules

The following rules apply:

1. Applicants must be at least 18 years of age on August 1, 2006.
2. The contest judges may at their sole discretion refuse to consider any entry for any reason. Submissions that do not follow the instructions may not be considered.
3. Vampire is a horror game, so horrific elements are expected, but the entry should not contain pornographic and tastelessly explicit material.
4. Applicants may submit no more than one entry for each bloodline synopsis. Applicants may submit one entry for each of the bloodline synopses, however.
5. Former and present employees of White Wolf, Inc. may not enter. Freelancers who have been published in White Wolf, Inc. products or are currently under contract with White Wolf, Inc. are eligible.
6. All entries must be accompanied by the full real name of the author as well as the author's physical address, email address and phone number.
7. All submissions must be sent in Rich Text Format (.RTF). Submissions in other file formats will not be considered. Only entries in English can be considered.
8. Only material written for the current incarnation of the game, Vampire: The Requiem, will be considered. All entries must be the original work of the author, who must be able to legally solicit the material. Copied, plagiarized or illegal submissions will be disqualified.
9. All submissions become the sole property of White Wolf Inc.
10. Submission of an entry for this contest constitutes acceptance of these rules and conditions.
11. We reserve the right to change the final prize terms.

AGONISTES

BY PAUL ALEXANDER SOKEL

"OF COURSE I HAD NO IDEA THAT EXERCISE WOULD CALL UP MEMORIES OF YOUR INDISCRETION WITH THE GOVERNOR'S DAUGHTER. I WILL TRY TO BE MORE CAREFUL, ALDER. NOW, SHALL WE CONTINUE?"

Hidden in the shadows of every great university town in the Western world, a group of Kindred wage war against ignorance, their own nature and the ever-hungry maw of time itself. As the Greeks once used the *agon*, contests of physical strength and endurance, to test the mettle of a person, so do the Agonistes, a bloodline wholly composed of historians, philosophers, psychologists and scientists, test themselves nightly in intellectual struggle against the forces of the world that would keep Kindred forever in the dark. Unfortunately, those forces are legion, and even the very Kindred the Agonistes claim to help often thank the Polemicists' efforts with violence, hatred and mistrust.

Most importantly, the Agonistes form a rare solid cornerstone within the often muddled Kindred historical tradition. They are the world's foremost experts on the Kindred condition known as torpor, an expertise highly valued by the oldest (and often, by extension, most influential) members of every clan and covenant. The Agonistes are also, however, fervent proponents of education, insistent that only by understanding the past can Kindred rise above the ignorance in which many domains seem content to wallow. The line's erstwhile beneficiaries find this philosophy, combined with the intellect and erudition these Kindred bring to their arguments, condescending at best and heretical at worst. Most Agonistes live furtive, hidden unives, anonymously publishing long philosophical tracts while working to avoid ruffling the wrong feathers, gathering in small enclaves with the only other Kindred who truly appreciate their work: other members of the bloodline.

While few Kindred can actually claim to have ever met one of these reclusive scholars, most knowledgeable Mekhet have heard of the Agonistes. Many elders make locating a member of this line a primary imperative, even after centuries of putting the lineage's libraries to the torch.

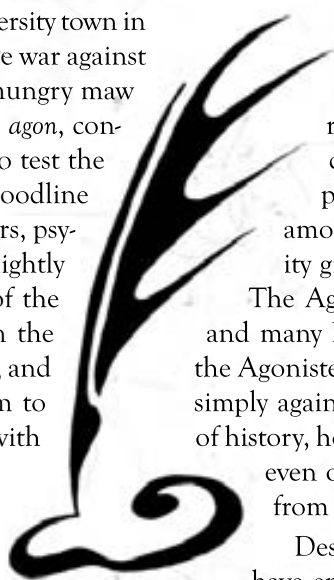
The Agonistes insist that no greater foolishness exists than to allow knowledge to slip from the world. To

combat the erosive effects of the Fog of Ages and simple attrition over time, the Agonistes tirelessly seek out and collect rare lore and hidden histories, copying their discoveries, debating the ramifications and publishing philosophies to be disseminated among the greater Kindred public without priority given to any geography, faith, gender or age.

The Agonistes line was founded on this precept, and many Mekhet over the centuries have flocked to the Agonistes' banner. Their great struggle is not waged simply against the Fog of Eternity and the slow trudge of history, however; Agonistes battle mortals, mages and even other Kindred who would hide great truths from the rest of the world.

Despite the number of attacks their libraries have endured, this millennia-old bloodline boasts a detailed and rich history leading back to its inception. Widely circulated legends indicate that the line was founded during the height of the Camarilla. A group of Mekhet elders from Egypt, Athens, Carthage and Rome banded together in an unknown location in Greece to share the knowledge they had garnered in their studies, seeking a method to avoid the Second Death or mitigate its attendant madness. Over the course of years of nightly discussions, the Shadows came to a consensus: to understand torpor they must embrace it. Together, they conceived a telepathic rite that would, theoretically, allow one of them to remain lucid during torpor and remember the experience afterwards. One of these elders, a philosopher from Anatolia, agreed to make the first attempt, and slipped into their ritually prepared torpor, exploring the Lethean Fog of Eternity for decades. He was forever changed by the experience.

Upon awakening, the philosopher found that his Vitae itself had been distorted, but he could not understand exactly how or why. He immediately took up what he termed his *agon*, teaching his fellow philosophers the lessons he had learned in dreams, altering their blood as well, and leading them through their own exegeses of torpor. The ancient Agonistes were soon delving into



Developer's Comments

This entry for the Agonistes first appealed to us largely because of the ritualism and the idea of the great struggle of the line – an ultimately impossible quest, especially for a bloodline that is bound to face persecution in some domains. Mr. Scokel provided them with an evocative purpose, and we believed that the night-to-night operation of the line, as described, would lead to a number of interesting story hooks in any game. Individual Agonistes were free to behave as they wished with their power, despite the semi-benevolent declared policy of the line, contributing to their compelling, realistic feel.

As the entry went through edits, the line took on a more oppressed tone – a history of denial and destruction worked its way through the story of the Agonistes, opening up great possibilities for dispute within the ranks of the line. The quest to preserve knowledge was complicated by the inevitable response of Kindred who have reason to obscure the past, and by the doubts that response would arouse in the Agonistes themselves. A very interesting take on the bloodline emerged, and we knew we had a winner on our hands.

the unconscious fog with regularity, learning how to manipulate it and successfully assisting influential elders cope with its worst side effects, soon gaining significant prestige. While their power has waned, waxed and waned again over the two millennia of their existence, each Polemicist enjoys some small part of that initial esteem to this night. Many members of the line have made their unlives by guiding a single desperate but powerful elder through the sleep of ages.

Yet the altruism of the Agonistes remains a pleasant fairy-tale elders tell themselves when they feel the first cravings for Kindred blood. The Agonistes of the modern nights are no more selfless than the desperate Mekhet scholars in Greece a millennia ago who sought to stave off their own torpor. The service of an Agoniste never comes cheap, as he demands his elder customers describe every facet of that elder's unlives and history if she is to benefit from his preservative powers. Savvy Polemicists often use this as a baseline, offering to perform rituals with even greater benefits in exchange for mentorship in esoteric sorceries or Disciplines, a price many desperate elders are quick to pay.

As the credulous patient rattles off centuries of secrets and conspiracies in the belief that it will protect her, the Agoniste records the knowledge to add to the bloodline's massive library. Perhaps more frightening, the Agonistes consider their torpor-fighting psychological exercises far from complete, and many elders unknowingly become experiments themselves as the Polemicists fine-tune their technique without worry that anyone will notice a problem for centuries, perhaps longer. Finally, the Agonistes recognize fully the power that their patients willingly if not eagerly provide them with. While extremely dangerous, the practice of sabotaging a malevolent elder's torpor is always tempting, and has brought more than one member of the line to ruin.

In modern nights, many of the Agonistes are bound by obligation, waiting for slumbering elders to rise so that they may fulfill their promise of revival. They continue to broker their deals, assembling histories from the testimony of Kindred frantic to stay whole even as the sleep of ages calls. Many delve again and again into the sleep themselves, honing their ritual skills and working to ensure that the whole of their assembled knowledge is well protected.

Parent Clan: Mekhet

Nickname: Polemicists

Covenant: Members of the Agoniste line tend toward the intellectual and occult-minded. They seek out ancient secrets and hidden lore with unparalleled zeal.

Therefore, it is no surprise that most tend to fall into the Ordo Dracul, the Sanctified or the Circle of the Crone.

The Order seems most fond of the Polemicists, as these knowledgeable Kindred possess some of the most extensive stores of Kindred history and philosophy, and few Dragons doubt the uncontested expertise of the Agonistes in the subject of Kindred psychology. The Agonistes often find the Ordo Dracul more receptive to their ideas than the other covenants, and the Coils exhibit an acute allure to Agonistes actively involved in the great struggle of the line. Elder Polemicists, however, often find that they must take great care to ensure their pupils do not forsake their mission for the Great Work, or worse, confuse the two.

Agonistes with less interest in Kindred physiology and Hermetic pseudo-science are often drawn to the Circle of the Crone. The Circle, they say, draws those Agonistes with an interest in *doing* rather than *thinking*. Acolyte Polemicists take to the mission of the bloodline with a visceral zeal, sifting through the covenant's endless oral

histories and divining the psychological underpinnings of the rituals of Cr'ac, taking comfort in the historicity of being a member of the world's most ancient covenant. Jungian Polemicists bring a peculiar form of faith to the Circle of the Crone, paying homage to the collective unconscious and offering sacrifices to favored archetypes.

The relationship of the Sanctified and the Agonistes has long been rife with distrust. While many hand-copied tomes resting in the line's libraries lend credence to the covenant's history and philosophy, many more undermine it. Texts dating from the time of Longinus and before often clearly contradict the Sanctified's teachings. Historically, the Lancea Sanctum has burned more of the Agonistes' libraries and treatises than the other major covenants combined. Yet Agonistes anxious to plumb the hidden depths of the Church (or sometimes even hungry for a sense of meaning to their unives beyond the endless Struggle) continue to enter the covenant, and the Lancea Sanctum continues to accept them, recognizing the line's incredible ability to help elders cope with torpor. In addition, more than a few Theban Rituals over the centuries have been unearthed thanks to the tireless investigations of the Agonistes, and many Sanctified Kindred believe that these findings are miraculous indications of divine favor.

The Invictus and the Carthian Movement, despite their best efforts, claim relatively few Polemicists; the Agonistes, generally speaking, simply don't get along with many of the Invictus or the Carthians very well. Kindred of the Invictus tend to dislike histories that contradict their own traditional tales, and are willing to destroy anyone who espouses them, even if the Invictus Kindred know that the offending tales are true. Furthermore, the Dynastic Houses of the Invictus make reliance upon the rituals of the Agonistes unnecessary — and

the inheritors of a house are more fully trusted than any Mekhet outsider could be.

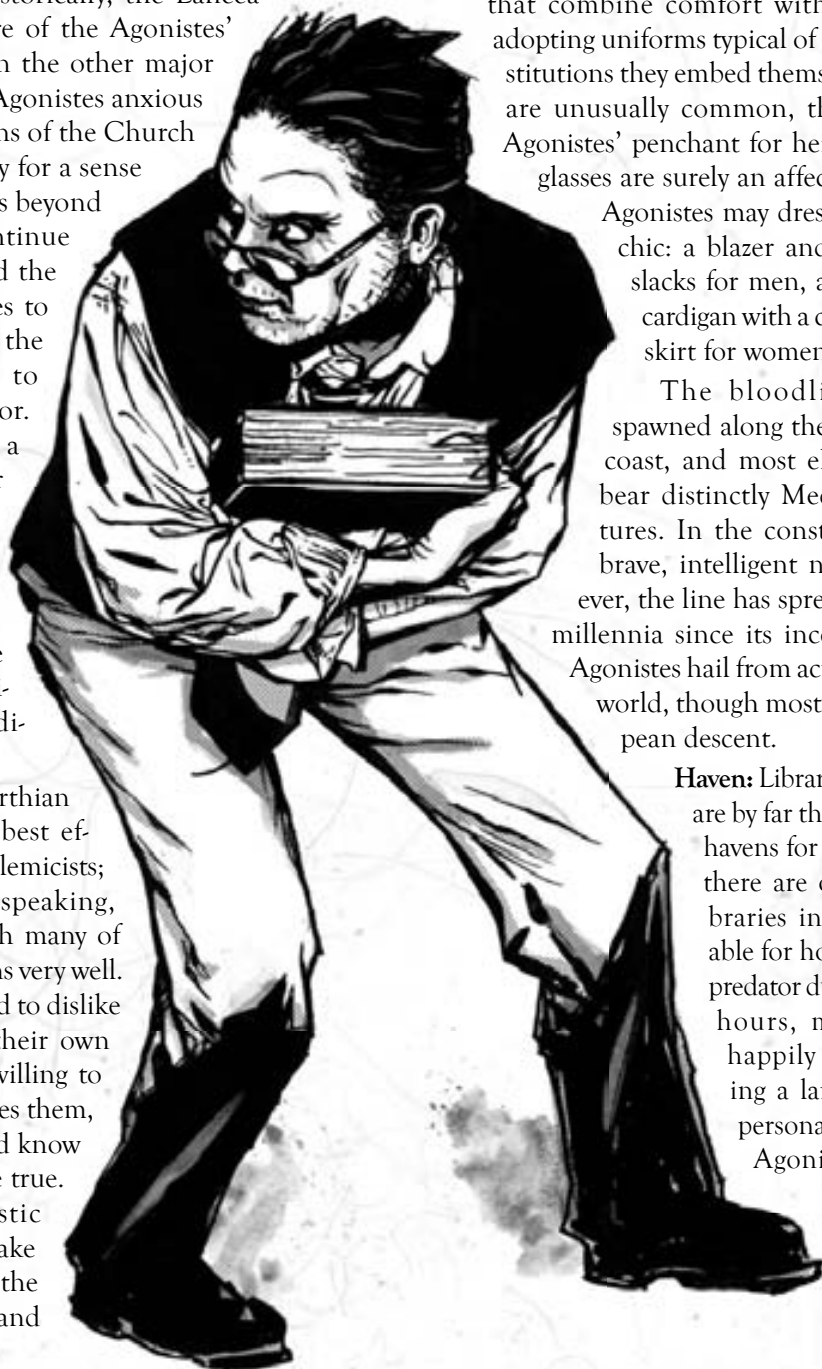
The Carthian Movement, on the other hand, demands activity from the Agonistes that many are unwilling to engage in, since it distracts from their studies. The political agitations of the covenant have nothing to do with the great struggle of the bloodline, and few will choose to deny it just to satisfy the Carthians. In addition, many Kindred of the Movement find the tendency of Agonistes to spend much of their time in study of distant history to be insufferably academic, in real-world political terms.

Appearance: Most Agonistes prefer utilitarian fashions that combine comfort with respectability, adopting uniforms typical of the academic institutions they embed themselves in. Glasses are unusually common, though with the Agonistes' penchant for heightened senses, glasses are surely an affectation. Younger Agonistes may dress in prep-school chic: a blazer and tie with khaki slacks for men, a sweater vest or cardigan with a collared shirt and skirt for women.

The bloodline originally spawned along the Mediterranean coast, and most elder Polemicists bear distinctly Mediterranean features. In the constant hunger for brave, intelligent new blood, however, the line has spread widely in the millennia since its inception; tonight, Agonistes hail from across the Western world, though most remain of European descent.

Haven: Libraries and museums are by far the most cherished havens for Agonistes. Since there are only so many libraries in the world suitable for hosting an undead predator during the daylight hours, most Agonistes happily resort to keeping a large, well-stocked personal store of tomes.

Agoniste havens vary greatly based on a number of factors, most especially location and age.



The Polemicists keep havens culturally appropriate to whatever area of the world they happen to be in, and elder Agonistes often have well-furnished, if understated, homes, paid for through the wealth and favors of the Kindred they have eased into torpor. Surprisingly few members of the line currently reside in Greece, the traditional homeland of the line, though the catacombs of Italy and France, as well as the underground cities of Anatolia have all historically served as havens for the Polemicists, and elders of the line remain entombed in them to this night.

Background: Agonistes overwhelmingly come from academic backgrounds. Whether psychologists, graduate students or tenured professors at the time of the Embrace, the Kindred of this line are universally familiar with the intricacies of research and scholarship. They are not all dusty librarians, however; field archeologists and explorers populate the ranks with hardy Kindred while former lecturers and priests add a socially competent force to the line. Most Agonistes hail from the middle or upper class, and many have at least some training, either academic or practical, in psychology before the Embrace.

The Agonistes line attracts many Mekhet elders, especially of the Ordo Dracul, who seek an Avus to train them in the ways of avoiding torpor. The bloodline may welcome these elders, though only after they have proven themselves through rigorous examination. A desire to diminish the effects of the sleep of ages isn't qualification enough to become a member, and many of these Kindred are simply offered ritual service instead.

Character Creation: Mental Attributes and Skills are universally prized among the Polemicists, and any vampire Embraced directly into the line likely has devoted her primary points to these groups. Social Attributes are common, as well, especially among vampires who experienced firsthand the competitive world of academe. Common skills for the Agonistes include Academics, Medicine, Occult, Science and Survival. Psychologist Polemicists often possess Empathy and Persuasion, while surprisingly savvy academicians possess Politics, Socialize and even Streetwise. The Mental Merits Encyclopedic Knowledge, Eidetic Memory and Meditative Mind are all appropriate for members of this bloodline. Because of the tight-knit structure of the line's enclaves, rare is the Agoniste without a Mentor or some Contacts among the lineage. Among the Kindred who can purchase it, the Library Merit is a must. Most Agonistes possess the Language Merit, with Greek and Latin being the most commonly understood languages among the line, followed by English, French and German.

Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Celerity, *Dominate*, Obfuscate

Weakness: All Agonistes suffer the weakness of the Mekhet clan.

In addition, though they are loathe to admit it, the first ritual torpor of the bloodline creates a subconscious yearning for the Second Death. Agonistes are addicted to the quiet oblivion and surreal dreamscapes of vampiric torpor, and most will remain in the sleep longer than they need. When determining the length of torpor for an Agoniste, treat the character's Humanity as one dot lower than it actually is. The rare and unfortunate Humanity 1 Agoniste remains in torpor for two centuries multiplied by her Blood Potency.

Agonistes tend to enter voluntary torpor more frequently than other Kindred, and are susceptible to its strange allure in their waking nights. Every time an Agoniste suffers tragic or extremely emotional circumstances that lead to a degeneration or derangement check (regardless of the result), a Resolve + Composure roll is required to avoid returning to a safe place and entering ritually prepared torpor.

Organization: The Polemicists maintain libraries around the world, nestled hidden in the shadows of Western intellectual institutions, training their childer in historical record-keeping, archival management and academic research. Many Agonistes spend years learning to become the bloodline's representatives, combining the line's propensity for Dominate with a thorough knowledge of the inner workings of the Kindred mind.

The Agonistes bloodline suffers from the unfortunate irony that they desire solitude and companionship in equal doses. Solitude and silence are necessary for serious academic work, yet most Polemicists demand nearby Kindred on par with their intellect to bounce theories and theses off as well as elder Kindred to act as clients. Thus, Agonistes tend to found small, secretive colonies called conservatories in cities with multiple major universities. These enclaves tend to be large communal havens filled with small personal living spaces for the Polemicists in residence or simple buildings where the Polemicists of the city gather to discuss their work.

The Agonistes are surprisingly structured for academicians, and, similar to university professors, are constantly expected to produce new works on Kindred history, psychology, theology, physiology or mythology. The bloodline is divided into colleges by area of study (the colleges of mythology and theology are the least respected of the colleges, while the colleges devoted to torpor and kindred psychology are exceptionally exclusive), each presided over by a Dean, whose chief duty lies in directing failing Agonistes into new areas of scholarship. The Polemicists deem the head of each enclave "Professor,"

and an Agoniste responsible for one of the lineage's vast repositories of information is known as an Archivist. Officially, loans between archives must pass through the Master Archivist, a unique title in the bloodline, but that requirement is ignored with increasing regularity in the modern nights, a development that the current Master Archivist is threatening to curb through her prodigious knowledge of sorcery.

From the outside, as a line, the Agonistes seem strikingly loyal. While as much backbiting and snobbery occurs among the Agonistes as in mortal academe, members of the bloodline know more than enough of their line's history to understand that as frequently as they are sought out for their torpor rituals, the Agonistes are as often persecuted for their knowledge and the openness with which they share it. When faced with an outside threat, individual quibbles vanish, and conservatories display a united face to their enemies. As a result of this loyalty and the line's willingness to share information other Kindred consider proprietary, the major p covenants have an uncomfortable and suspicious relationship with the uncannily useful Polemicists. Perhaps unfortunately, the suspicions of the covenants often prove to be true, and few Agonistes are truly devoted to their covenant over the Great Struggle. Indeed, the current Master Archivist of the line, a Londoner and noted Theban Sorcerer named Bianca Tilley, was recently expelled from her position in the Sanctified when she began displaying a knowledge of Crúac.

Concepts: Excitable archivist, single-minded museum librarian, stubborn art historian, immoral psychologist, jaded hipster, beleaguered corporate Polemicist, Jungian film junky, furtive grave robber, heroin-addict-turned-torpor-addict.

HISTORY

The libraries of the Agonistes boast the most complete record of Kindred history in the world, though, based as they are on the testimony of vampires, many of the historical texts are contradictory and unreliable. While difficulty in the transport of information between domains and the tendency of other Kindred to secrecy combine to make sure not even the eldest Agonistes have the whole story, rare is even the neonate Agoniste who does not know the accepted history of her lineage.

The Agonistes are a scholarly community, however, and numerous papers have been circulated among the line questioning the verity of the tale of the gathering of that first Mekhet enclave centuries ago. One recently published thesis, for example, claims that the fact that no two early histories of the line share the same name for

the founder indicates a possible conspiracy of falsehood in the line's early nights. The most famous alternate interpretation of the Agonistes' founding is alleged by the Mnemonic Institute, which insists that the line's quest for knowledge was inspired (or, among particularly radical Polemicists, founded) by the pseudo-mythical Agonista, an Athenian Kindred supposedly mentioned in Platonic-era documents. Most Polemicists dismiss this tale as fancy, despite the respect the Mnemonic Institute has garnered in its exploration of the depths of torpor. Another controversial dissertation indicates that the founders of the bloodline were themselves the victims of torpor-induced mental damage, and that the original purpose of the bloodline (and the inevitable outcome of its practices, still to fully manifest) is utterly unknowable. The destruction of many early documents of the bloodline over the centuries has almost ensured that no Polemicist will unearth a definitive answer to these questions, and members of the bloodline wage venomous wars of words over questions of Agoniste history.

In the first centuries after the bloodline's inception, the Agonistes Embraced almost exclusively from the scholars and scribes of humanity, and most Polemicists kept an additional scribe as a ghoul. The goal of the Great Struggle, to prevent the loss of history and the Kindred cultural memory, was accomplished primarily through the espousal of detailed journals and notes taken by Agonistes spread across the Kindred Courts of the Mediterranean coast and Near East. Most Princes kept an Agonistes as an advisor and witness to her greater glory. While personal journals and Court histories were kept with the elder who had them scribed, the Polemicists carefully penned and painstakingly illuminated copies to be sent to the Master Archivist, a Kindred who resided in a massive library in Rome. After the collapse of the Camarilla, the Agonistes carefully moved what texts they could retrieve from the archives to Constantinople, the Queen of Cities, filling a massive palace with the collected tomes of their history. The line spread eastwards, not only to Constantinople, but also to Eastern Europe and the Hungarian Kingdom, the Levant, and into Egypt and northern Africa. Building on the precepts of the founder's *Exegesis* ritual, the Agonistes line developed many of the earliest known defenses against torpor in the West during this time.

The Crusades strained and finally broke the power of the Agonistes, and the fire that preceded the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 saw the utter destruction of the archives, the Final Death of the Master Archivist and the end of more than half a millennium of Agoniste power among the Courts and scholars of the Queen of Cities.

A secondary result of the Crusades is known throughout the bloodline as the Silencing of the Middle East. Before the Crusades, the Agonistes existed in large numbers in the Levant, but the tenuous lines of communication between the Eastern Polemicists and their Western brethren were cut by centuries of war. Attempts to reclaim a foothold in the region failed time and again, and have yet to succeed. The Kindred of modern Istanbul are strangely distrustful of the Polemicists, and almost always refuse them entrance to the domain. This remains a constant thorn in the bloodline's side, as many would dearly love to explore the labyrinths, catacombs and libraries of the former Queen of Cities.

The loss of the archives forever altered the path of the bloodline. No longer content to hoard their hoary knowledge, the Polemicists began their vigorous campaign to educate the society of the night. The great struggle of the line, they reasoned, could never be won by amassing knowledge in a single, central location. As they spread into the universities of Central and Western Europe, the Agonistes devoted themselves and their resources to copying rare texts of Kindred origin and spreading them to as many disparate libraries as possible, hoping to combat the entropic nature of fire, war, superstition and neglect by ensuring that the loss of a copy of a work did not mean the loss of the work itself. Furthermore, the Agonistes used the printing press, invented in the 15th century, to spread their amassed knowledge among the domains of Europe. This sudden spread of previously forgotten history was met with intense distrust, leading to acrimonious conflict and, in some domains, outright violence. Inspired by Kindred of various factions, the Agonistes became a favored scapegoat in certain domains, accused of blasphemies great and small. Eventually, many members of the line went underground, distributing their hard-won knowledge from the shadows.

The Second World War, which forever changed the face of Europe for Kindred and kine, resulted in the destruction of a dozen Agonistes conservatories and archives and the loss of centuries of work. While the bloodline still struggles to make up for the lost efforts of ages, the damage may never be completely repaired. Detractors of the line claim that while the Agonistes have always presented a threat to the Masquerade, their efforts to find, copy and trade in Kindred history makes them ever more dangerous. The Agonistes, for their part, ignore the naysayers; the struggle must continue.

Even still, throughout the troubled history of the line, rumors of the Agonistes' talents attract the attention of worried elders, and they are approached time and again for the ritual protection they can provide. Every time

the line seems to find itself on the cusp of shame and destruction, an elder somewhere lends a member the power she needs to survive and rebuild, in exchange for the guarantee of a safe and whole return from torpor.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

When a prospective student of the Agonistes is ushered into their ranks, her Avus or sire carefully prepares her. She feels the thick touch of olive oil dabbed across her brow, the subtle contractions of the damp bandages she has been wrapped in and the cold, unyielding table against her back. As the presiding Agoniste places his hand on her forehead and begins to speak to her in a low, monotone voice, she slips away, only then realizing that she is about to enter torpor.

The secrets she learns from the experience that follows banish any residual resentment.

The Agonistes combine the trappings of ancient Greek culture with the structures and titles of university life. Members fuse the primal respect of the active mind and body (and thereby reject torpor, the very essence of the inactive mind and body) with the cut-throat backbiting of academic politics. Ideally, status in the bloodline is based on intellect and ability, as illustrated through the quality of work 'published'; in reality, most Agonistes realize that its not the quality of work published but the quantity and breadth of distribution that gains acknowledgement within the line. Thus often a hard-working ancilla who publishes a well-researched and well-reasoned polemic once every decade is ignored in favor of the neonate whose scribbled writings of barely factual historical notes gleaned from his mentor's teachings inspires excited conversation among the Kindred at Elysium. In short, it is more important to get other Kindred interested and involved in the struggle than it is to do quality work, if only barely. Of course, if that same neonate's writings are easily dismissed and contradicted by established fact, she is spreading disinformation, one of the line's cardinal sins. Young, hotshot Agonistes under pressure from their mentors to perform often carefully toe the line between the sensationally true and the fantastically false.

The mentor-pupil relationship forms the core of interactions between members of the line, though it is not unusual for a Polemicist to take on several pupils at once, or the eldest member of an Agoniste conservatory to be deferred to as mentor to the conservatory as a whole (sometimes an Agoniste even performs this function). Bloodline gatherings begin as reserved affairs, as members exchange information about their current projects or philosophical conundrums, but after business is out of the way, an Agoniste gathering builds an odd self-



celebratory manic energy. The Polemicists are known to prefer only the finest libations filtered through the blood of their hyper-literate guests.

During the Middle Ages, the Agonistes spent many of their nights in silent scribbling, delicately copying thousands of pages of ancient text by hand. Centuries later, the Polemicists bent over presses, carefully setting type and distributing treatises among the nascent Carthians and receptive Acolytes. Advances in technology have provided members of the lineage far more freedom and time in the modern nights, but most Agonistes spend each night furthering their own agendas in the Great Struggle. Though Agonistes remain stubbornly proud of their erudition and effort, most pamphlets distributed outside the bloodline are done so anonymously to prevent one member from taking too much heat.

There are few bloodline-wide rites or observances, but two of the most conventional are known as Matriculation and Encaenia. Matriculation celebrates the return of the fledgling Agoniste from her first dip into the tenebrous realm of lucid torpor. Often not entirely recovered from the experience, the fledgling, draped in scarlet gowns, ac-

companied by her sire or Avus, enters an assembly (called the Congregation for this ceremony) of her new conservatory gathered for the occasion and similarly dressed, representing entrance into the fraternity. In an elaborate ceremony, the mentor presents the fledgling with a sash of blue and white, setting it carefully across the kneeling Kindred's shoulders. Then the fledgling presents a paper on an academic subject to the Congregation, after which the gathered Polemicists take a simple vote of acceptance. In modern nights, this has become a formality, and rarely are the results anything but unanimous. On the unlikely occasion the Congregation refuses entrance to the fledgling, the mentor is expected to immediately rend the supplicant torpid and strip her of her gowns. After an appropriate length of time in torpor (called a Suspension), the fledgling is awakened and allowed to begin the process anew.

The bloodline expects each Polemicist to engage in Encaenia once per quarter century. This rite, created after the fall of the Archives in Constantinople, requires the Kindred to rediscover a piece of information once lost to the line. Initially, this referred to tracking down

a journal or tome captured by the rampaging Crusaders and reclaiming it for the bloodline. Since the mid-20th century, Polemicists traditionally seek to find information lost to the world wars. The Agoniste does not necessarily seek actual documents lost during the war; locating a lost torpid elder and reviving her, tracking an obscure reference in a charred text or interviewing a Kindred of Dresden who escaped Final Death are all possibilities.

Perhaps owing to their thorough understanding of the effects of the Fog of Ages and the potential of the Dominate discipline, the Polemicists are notoriously distrustful of a single Kindred's memory. Agonistes consider information that cannot be verified by more than a single source almost useless, and the information they have verified they disseminate to as many Kindred readers as possible, hoping to birth a mnemonic hydra (even if one Kindred with a particular piece of knowledge dies, or if one library burns, the knowledge remains elsewhere). In the past century, the Agonistes' suspicion has spread from the mind to the very linguistic structures that make up human (and Kindred) thought. Rumors currently circulate among the line of Polemicists so disconcerted by the questions raised by Deconstructionism that they have embraced torpor rather than face the implications it presents. Most Agonistes, however, are pragmatic enough to explore such dark philosophies from a distance.

While the Agonistes line draws intellectual Kindred from a wide variety of intellectual (and occasionally outdated) models, two philosophies have made great headway in the last century among those Agonistes more interested in the question of torpor than Kindred history. Ancillae of the line have found Jungian philosophy, particularly the focus on the universal archetypes, the collective unconscious and the shadow, an incredibly useful framework within which to discuss the torpid experience. They insist that torpor represents a necessary reconnection with the cultural mythologies that inform the man within the Kindred, and that a Kindred properly prepared by an Agoniste can experience through torpor a genuine and healthy interaction between the Man (the Animus) and the Beast (the Shadow). A contradictory philosophy currently gaining ground within older members of the lineage is the practice of *Entelechy*, a belief that purports a Kindred, provided a source of sufficiently potent blood, can stave off the ennui of ages through constant active and conscious thought and action. Neither philosophy has had ample time within the bloodline to be fully explored or tested, but numerous Polemicists are devoted to both factions.

BLOODLINE DEVOTIONS

The Agonistes have developed a range of devotions, widely called "rituals" or "exercises" among the Polemicists, based on their knowledge of torpor. Although Kindred find the Polemicists entirely candid about their process, going so far as to circulate "How To" pamphlets, the inability of other Kindred to replicate the Polemicists' results leads most outside the bloodline to believe the powers of the Agonistes to be a bloodline Discipline or type of ritual blood magic. In reality, the Devotions bear a closer resemblance to a pseudoscience, as the bloodline members use their deep understanding of Kindred psychology and torpor to fortify their subjects against the Fog of Eternity. Most Devotions involve the use of Auspex and Dominate to place subtle mental blocks or suggestions in the Kindred mind, which are used to maintain sanity and memory in a torpid Kindred.

Although the Polemicists have been historically forthcoming with the particulars of their rituals, the powers cannot be used outside of the line, as they hinge on the intertwining of the energies of torpor with the Vitae that the Agonistes experience. The secrets gleaned from their first Exegesis and emergence are so fundamental to the use of Agonistes' Devotions, that learning any of the exercises requires the Polemicist to be placed in controlled torpor through the use of Exegesis.

The Devotions of the Agonistes rely heavily on mental tricks, and none of them create any lasting physical alterations. After a Kindred has benefited from most of these powers (i.e., after she has awoken from torpor), the power becomes inactive and must be used again if the elder wants to gain the benefits for a second length of torpor. No Agoniste has ever developed a power that allows a vampire to maintain Attributes, Abilities or Disciplines in levels in excess of 5 after the elder's Blood Potency has dropped, though the search for such powers occupies the bloodline nightly.

Agoniste Devotions affect only vampires.

DEVOTIONS

EXEGESIS

(Auspex •••, Dominate ••)

The Exegesis is the Agoniste's ritual of exploration, through which the members of the line enter the mystic, transformative sleep. Those Kindred who wish to join the line must endure the Exegesis to change their Vitae and finalize their entry. Agonistes seeking to learn this and other ritual Devotions of the bloodline must undergo the Exegesis each time.

Through the lucid torpor induced by this Devotion, the vampire gains a better sense of the Kindred condition. Agonistes planning to undergo lengthy torpors to thin the blood universally seek another vampire of the line to perform the ritual on them, and an Agoniste so treated suffers no torpid nightmares and is only weakly affected by the Fog of Eternity. An Agoniste only gains this advantage in a torpor entered into through this power. This power has no effect on vampires outside of the bloodline, but the ritualism that surrounds the Exegesis may help peacefully lower a willing vampire into torpor.

There are Agonistes who make a point of declaring the number of times they have experienced the Exegesis to one another. Some wear a coded mark or series of marks on their body (or flesh) to make the declaration clear to all observers, while others are more subtle in their approach. The declaration becomes something of a badge of honor, indicating one's superior will to plumb the depths of torpor and retrieve the lost secrets of the Kindred. Lying about the number of attempts or otherwise exaggerating when discussing the Exegesis is considered extremely distasteful to all self-respecting members of the line.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Academics + Dominate

Action: Extended

Before a vampire enters torpor, the Exegesis is performed by the Agoniste with all attendant ritual observances: bathing, wrapping and positioning of the body, as well as reading of a series of implanted instructions. The Intelligence + Empathy + Dominate roll must accumulate a number of successes equal to the subject's Resolve + Blood Potency to activate the ritual; each roll represents an hour's work.

Once the necessary number of successes is accumulated, the subject is free to slip into a voluntary torpor empowered by the Exegesis, and will enjoy the benefits of the Devotion. Kindred not of the line (and not seeking membership) will not experience the enlightening sensation of the ritual, instead just enjoying a dreamless sleep.

This power costs 18 experience points to learn.

SYNCOPE

(Dominate **, Auspex ****)

Through the use of this Devotion, an Agoniste forces a vampire to experience a brief moment of torpor-like fog, stunning the target and sometimes leaving her thoughts muddled. The Agoniste must make eye contact with the target to use this power.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Intimidation + Dominate versus Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Success stuns the target for one turn. During this time, the target slips into a momentary fugue, utterly unaware of his surroundings. Any aggressive action taken toward the subject jerks him out of the effect immediately, and he is free to defend himself normally.

Observant Kindred who are affected by this power notice that they experience a brief flash of nightmarish imagery, exactly like the type that spools and repeats throughout torpor. Some Agonistes use this power as a means to demonstrate the sleep that awaits an elder who does not employ their assistance.

This power costs 18 experience points to learn.

PALINODE

(Auspex ***, Dominate ***)

The power allows an Agoniste to lock away a vampire's true memories before torpor, sealing them from the conscious mind and shielding them from the ravages of slumber. He or another Agoniste can easily find them in the awakened Kindred, banishing the false memories of the Fog of Eternity and drawing out the truth. The Palinode is often the last ritual enacted upon an elder preparing to enter torpor: the ready vampire target slips into a trance as the Agoniste ferrets out the target's memories and locks them deeply within the subconscious mind. Jungian Agonistes contend that sealing away the memories thus protects them from being subsumed into the archetypes the torpid vampire encounters during her exploration of the collective unconscious, while more mythological-minded Polemicists claim the barriers of the vampire's subconscious protects the memories from being swept away by the waters of the river Lethe. The end result is the same. By agreeing to be the subject of this power, a vampire puts himself at the mercy of the Agoniste and of fate. While each covenant possess methods of protecting its torpid elders, many vampires only agree to undergo this ritual when safely interred in an Agoniste catacomb, where a Polemicist will be on hand to perform the second half of the ritual when the torpid Kindred awakes.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Academics + Dominate versus Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Elders who have undergone the Palinode awaken from torpor in a daze (or, in some rare documented cases, become creatures crafted entirely from the torpor night-

mares and the Fog of Ages, more Beast than man) until an Agoniste uses this power to draw the memories back from the subconscious and reassert them, at which point the negative mental effects of torpor fade away.

An Agoniste knows if the attempt has failed, and can try again.

This power costs 21 experience points to learn.

DODONA

(Auspex ••••, Dominate ••••)

The Dodona is one of the most potent of the Agonistes' rituals; with this power, a Polemicist stores away a portion of an elder vampire's abilities, sealing them away in the vampire's subconscious to be rediscovered when her blood thickens again. This saves the elder time and effort when she awakens, allowing her to focus on rebuilding her lost empires with the confidence that her once super-human acumen will return with time.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Academics + Dominate

Action: Extended

Success allows the target vampire to protect Skills (not Attributes, Merits, Disciplines or any other traits) rated at higher than 5 before being lowered into torpor, so that the vampire may reclaim them when his Blood Potency reaches a high enough level without having to spend experience points. Each success allows for one Skill to be maintained.

Example: An elder with Crafts 7, Medicine 6 and Politics 7 decides to slip into torpor, asking an Agoniste to use Dodona on her. The Agoniste achieves two successes, and chooses to maintain the Agoniste's Crafts and Politics

ratings. When the elder wakes up, her Blood Potency has dropped to 3, and her Crafts, Medicine and Politics ratings are now 5, their maximum level for her Blood Potency. Over time the elder's Blood Potency rises to 6 again. When it rises from 5 to 6, her Crafts and Politics ratings rise to 6 as well. The same occurs when her Blood Potency rises to 7. This does not cost the elder experience points. Her Medicine trait remains at 5, however, and must be raised again through experience.

This power costs 24 experience points to learn.

SOMA

(Auspex •••, Dominate ••••, Celerity •)

Through a careful understanding of Kindred psychology and physiology, an Agoniste can exert some control over the speed of Blood Potency loss in torpor. While easing a vampire into torpor, the Agoniste works the Soma in a long, carefully constructed ritual, winding the subject in a prepared funeral shroud and intoning a complex chant. The entire ritual takes more than four hours to complete, and cannot be interrupted once it has begun.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Medicine + Dominate

Action: Instant

A successful use of this power alters the rate of change in the target vampire's Blood Potency, thinning it out more quickly or holding onto its power longer. Each success allows the base time for a drop in Blood Potency (normally 25 years) to be adjusted by five years, up to a maximum of 50 and a minimum of 5.

This power costs 24 experience points to learn.



BADDACELLI

BY BRIAN DAVID GIBSON

"MOMMY? MOMMY, IS THAT YOU? PLEASE! I'M IN HERE. IT'S SO DARK! I CAN'T SEE YOU, MOMMY...
COME CLOSER! MOMMY... ? CHKCHKCHKCHKCHKCHKCHKCHK!"

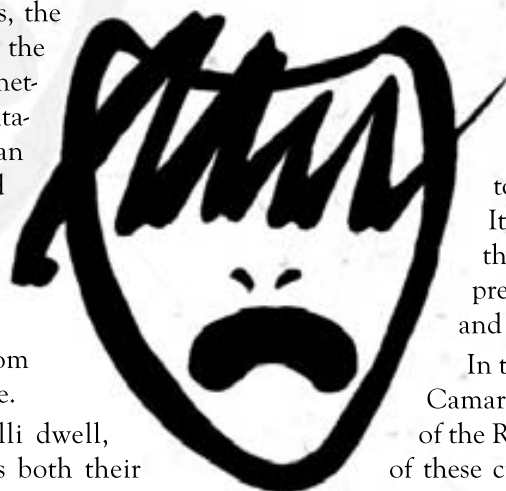
Condemned to eternal darkness, the sightless line of horrors known as the Baddacelli burrows through the network of catacombs that grow inevitably in the underground of all human cities. Whether lurking in collapsed sewer branches, abandoned subway stations, condemned basements or midnight labyrinths of their own construction, they hide — and hunt — in the dark places away from the sight of men and Kindred alike.

In these places, the Baddacelli dwell, shrouded in the darkness that is both their shield and their curse. Denied sight, they develop their remaining senses to preternatural levels and cultivate uncanny, horrifyingly effective abilities to aid in survival.

Everyone knows that sound can play tricks on you underground, but few suspect what a weapon sound becomes when touched by the unholy power of the Blood. When the Baddacelli infest the underground of a city, bereft mothers disappear into subway tunnels following the plaintive voices of lost children. Sewer workers separated from their crews hear their coworkers call from an unexpected direction and follow those voices — never to be seen again. Children hear the whimpering of lost pets coming from storm drains, and never realize until too late that a blind and hungry monster lurks in the darkness behind the wretched sounds. Enticing sounds that beg investigation, haunting echoes that confuse all sense of direction, chilling screeches that demand the listener flee ever deeper into the subterranean catacombs — all these and more drive unsuspecting victims to the waiting clutches of the Baddacelli.

The Kindred of this line are monsters and deceivers by nature. They have to be, in order to survive.

Therefore, they approach the world through the lens of that to which they are accustomed — cloaking themselves in secrecy and warding off trouble with misdirection.



This is not to say that they just hide in their tunnels and ignore the world above; in fact, they are curious about the surface world, and drawn to it as only beings accursed to be forever separated from it can be. It is simply that they choose to touch the world the same way they hunt their prey: by bringing it to them unawares, and in manageable amounts.

In the early centuries after the fall of the Camarilla, infighting among the Kindred of the Roman Empire was at its peak. In one of these cities (Baddacelli legends differ as to which, though almost all agree it was within the bounds of modern-day Italy), one Nosferatu grew to prominence and took advantage of the chaos to Embrace in great numbers. He had been an exceedingly large Kindred, a fact that had earned him the appellation by which he was known to the vampires of his city: Botticello, or "The Barrel." As his progeny grew to become a de facto faction of their own within city politics, they were in turn collectively referred to as the Botticelli, a diminutive form of their sire's own name meaning "The Little Barrels." The mutation of this name has accrued to the bloodline descendants of these Kindred, and predates the assumed provenance by several centuries.

Naturally, Botticello's ascendancy made him many enemies — he was particularly known for humiliating rivals with uncanny impersonations of their personal foibles. Himself an unabashed pagan who still clung to the old Roman gods, he was particularly fervent in undermining and attacking the vampires of the Lancea Sanctum. It was perhaps only a matter of time before the conflict being played out in the city's Elysium spilled over into outright violence. Over the next several years, the struggle took on the savage character of religious warfare fueled by strong personal hatreds on both sides.

In the end, Botticello was defeated, and the majority of his brood slain or scattered. He was captured by his

Developer's Comments

Originally, the Baddacelli was one of the bloodlines that we didn't think were going to make it into the final book. They were crippled and weird, and the initial description seemed fairly restrictive. However, they scored high on the popularity poll we ran online, and we received a surprising number of entries for them (only the Xiao, Rötgrafen, and Sangiovanni had more), some of which were outstanding. Of those that grabbed our attention, Mr. Gibson's was strongest, balancing the monstrous necessities of survival with a piteous reality: his Baddacelli were doubly accursed creatures in the world of Kindred, a group that could inspire both fear and sympathy.

Edits brought this dichotomy into sharp focus, detailing the frightening capabilities of the bloodline and fleshing out the society they built for themselves — without sight, but with access to any sound in the world. I think they make for a fantastic expression of one aspect of the Nosferatu clan: the outward appearance of freakish monstrosity despite all attempts to exist gracefully.

rivals, who set about torturing him until Final Death. His remaining childer managed to rescue him, but not before his body was broken and both eyes burned from his skull.

Botticello and his loyal childer fled deep into the sewers and catacombs beneath the city. Initially, it is said, they planned to allow the elder to recover from his injuries and flee the domain. In time, however, it became clear that the injuries to his eyes were not healing. It was unthinkable for a blind vampire to attempt to traverse the wilderness between cities in those nights, and so Botticello stayed hidden away in the underbelly of the city he had once sought to rule. A few of his most loyal progeny chose to remain with him. However, as the years passed, the Baddacelli began, one by one, to lose their own sight, and rumors spread within the brood that the sorcerers of the Lancea Sanctum had placed a curse upon their line. Some of the brood fled to distant cities in the hopes that by separation they could avoid a similar fate.

It was not to be. In the years that followed, most of the surviving vampires of the line lost the world of light and color forever. In lands distant from their city of origin, they, too, fled into the underground of their new homes. There in the endless darkness they hid, slowly learning mastery of the special talents and rarefied senses that could bring them the prey they needed. Sometimes, a recently Embraced vampire would attempt to flee the curse of the Blood by desperately seeking out a new city to call home. But the Baddacelli curse would inevitably have its due, and a new brood of blind horrors would begin beneath a new city.

Tonight, members of the Baddacelli bloodline can be found scattered throughout Europe, the Americas and the Middle East. Several major cities play unwitting host to a brood of these blind nightmares. Even where

other Kindred are aware of the Baddacelli's presence, these secretive Kindred keep their true numbers and the details of their existence to themselves. The Baddacelli survive, and they hunt in their lightless demesnes, and few indeed are the Kindred who would be willing to follow the Baddacelli into their catacombs to learn more of them than that.

Parent Clan: Nosferatu

Nickname: Morlocks

Covenant: Generally, an entire brood of Baddacelli within a city will claim membership in a single covenant. The nightly struggle for existence means that the broods rarely have the luxury of being able to bicker over politics. As a result, pressure to conform can be intense within a Baddacelli family.

Baddacelli crave stability, as unexpected shifts in footing tend to throw them off. Thus, they are very sympathetic to the philosophy of the Invictus, though the Baddacelli rarely rise to prominence within that organization. Baddacelli are most likely to be found doing the bidding of Invictus Princes and Sheriffs, acting as spies and enforcers among street-level (or lower-than-street-level) Kindred. This is not to say that the Baddacelli are necessarily unsophisticated in the machinations of the covenant, or that they are particularly subservient by nature. Indeed, more than one Baddacelli has amassed significant behind-the-scenes power in Invictus domains. It is simply that they prefer to stay out of the spotlight as much as possible while seeking to maintain the stability that Invictus rule tends to bring to a given city.

On very rare occasions, a Baddacelli will take a bolder position by operating openly in the Elysium Courts and salons of the First Estate. In these circumstances, a clever member of the line can make quite a name for

himself as a Player. The powers of the bloodline grant the Baddacelli particular skill in skewering opponents with scathing impersonations, dissecting them down to the last vocal nuance. Others use their developed hearing to serve as unparalleled Librettists and Interpreters, applying their discerning judgment to the many sounds of the Court.

The Circle of the Crone is also a strong draw for the vampires of the Baddacelli line. Subterranean imagery and tales of descent and imprisonment in the underworld abound in the stew of pagan religions that makes up the Acolytes' faith. And it can hardly be argued that the Baddacelli do not suffer trials, or that they fail to find knowledge and strength in the midst of those tribulations. As a result, members of the Circle make up probably the second highest proportion of the bloodline after those in the Invictus.

Among the Crones, Baddacelli are respected for their adaptability in the face of great hardship. But even more, their companions in the Circle prize the Baddacelli's vocal talents. A vampire of this bloodline who chooses to turn his talents to song can be a haunting performer, and a chorus of Baddacelli raising a hymn to the varied manifestations of the Crone is an experience that no witness can ever forget.

Those Baddacelli who fight the Curse, on the other hand, find succor in the Ordo Dracul, where they are prized for their ability to find and occupy Wyrms' Nests that form below ground. At the same time, they pursue transcendence with a fervor unmatched by vampires who do not bear the bloodline's burdens. The promise of overcoming the disadvantages of their state is motive enough for some Baddacelli to join the Ordo Dracul.

Those few Baddacelli who embrace their cursed state may join the Lancea Sanctum. Those Baddacelli who do are exceedingly zealous, more so than many of their compatriots. Morlock Spears see themselves as ideally designed to serve as God's Damned Hunters within the subterranean realms they claim. Perhaps ironically, Baddacelli Priests often

become popular confessors despite the unease they engender in others. Since Sanctified Priests traditionally take confession face-to-face, giving confession to a blind vampire who prefers lightless environments provides many Kindred with an illusion of anonymity that helps to set them at ease.

When Baddacelli join the Carthian Movement, it is often because they are intrigued by the Movement's claims of an egalitarianism that the Kindred of this bloodline have learned not to expect from other covenants. Still, the Baddacelli are latecomers to the Carthian fold.

Only as they have seen the relative stability of certain mortal governments that conforms to Carthian principles have the Baddacelli developed any faith that the Movement can achieve a lasting degree of change. Even so, only the most experimental of the lineage have gravitated to the Carthian Movement, and at present, they remain the smallest proportion of the Baddacelli population.

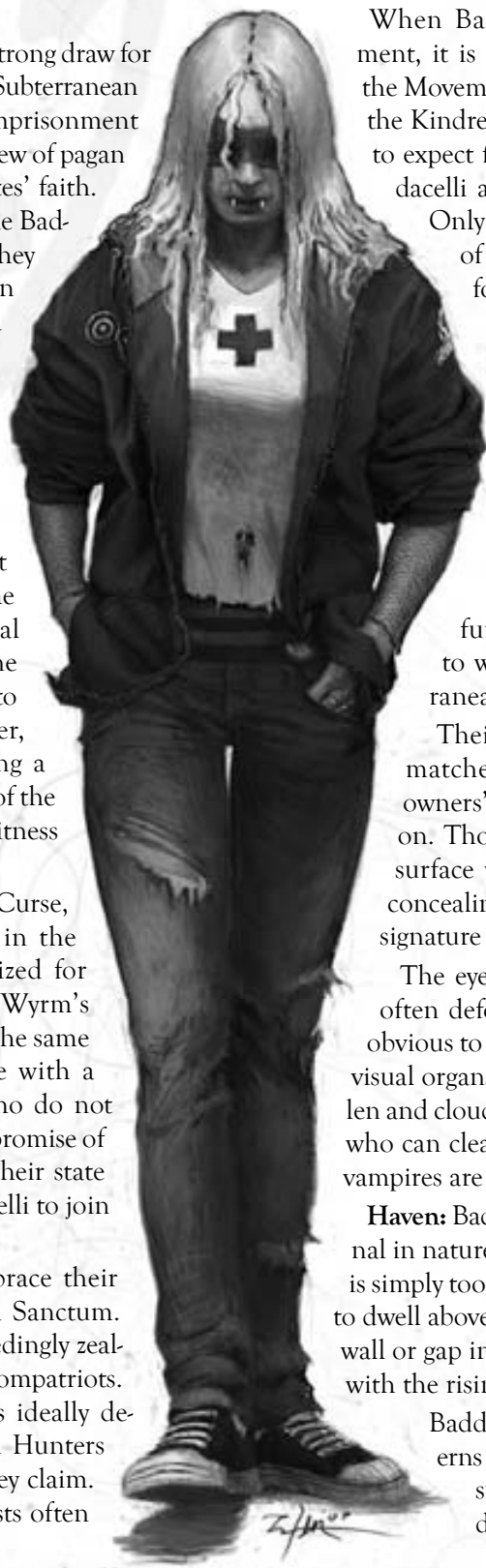
Appearance: Baddacelli prefer functional, utilitarian coverings able to withstand the rigors of their subterranean existence.

Their clothes are often worn and mismatched, owing at least in part to their owners' inability to see what they are putting on. Those Baddacelli who interact with the surface with any regularity prefer hoods or concealing headgear to hide the bloodline's signature deformities.

The eyes of the Baddacelli are useless, and often deformed in some way that makes this obvious to onlookers. Whether the Baddacelli's visual organs are shriveled to mere vestiges, swollen and clouded or even absent altogether, anyone who can clearly see their faces can tell that these vampires are denied sight.

Haven: Baddacelli havens are frequently communal in nature, and almost always underground. It is simply too dangerous for the sightless Morlocks to dwell above ground, where an unseen crack in a wall or gap in the curtains could spell their doom with the rising sun.

Baddacelli take advantage of natural caverns and abandoned human constructions such as forgotten sewer chambers or decommissioned subway stations



whenever possible, but will excavate their own tunnels when such convenient lairs are unavailable. Their havens are usually entirely lightless, or nearly so, and meticulously arranged with “landmarks” — objects placed so that the Morlocks who dwell there can easily memorize them and know their location within the unseen chamber, but guaranteed to impede the progress of strangers accustomed to relying on their eyes.

It is not unusual for Baddacelli broods to keep human herds caged in some portion of their communal haven. Since hunting can be a challenge, they are loath to waste a potential food source once it is caught.

Background: Almost all Baddacelli are themselves the childer of other Morlocks — few indeed are the vampires, even among the Haunts, who would willingly choose their blind, subterranean existence. Given the rigors of their state, the Baddacelli seek potential childer who are emotionally resilient and already dwelling on the fringes of society. Fortunately for the bloodline, the sort of person who would enter and/or work in their domain in the first place frequently fit this description already. Often, the mortals they select for the Embrace are already blind, since many Baddacelli hope that their childer will not resent them for stealing their sight.

In recent nights, some Baddacelli have been seeking potential childer proficient with modern communications and technology to bring into the fold. As voice recognition and other compensatory technologies improve, many Morlock broods see greater possibilities opening up to improve their access to the surface world (or at least its wealth of information) without placing themselves entirely at the mercy of sighted Kindred.

Character Creation: Baddacelli tend toward high Mental and Physical Attributes, with one of these usually being Primary and the other Secondary. Social Attributes are almost universally lowest in priority.

Skills are usually distributed similarly, with perhaps a stronger emphasis on Physical rather than Mental abilities. Survival is highly valued, as are Stealth, Brawl, Crafts and Investigation. The Baddacelli often acquire Specialties that will help compensate for their blindness in areas of focus (such as “grapples” or “blind fighting” for Brawl or “working by touch” for Crafts). Social Skills tend to focus on Intimidation, Subterfuge and Expression, the better to facilitate survival and misdirection on the societal fringe the Baddacelli call home.

Only a rare Baddacelli who acquires any significant amount of Resources. The often communal living arrangements of Baddacelli broods lend themselves well to the acquisition of Mentors within the bloodline, as well as shared Haven (Location) and Haven (Security) Mer-

BUT HE DOESN'T HAVE EYES!

Several vampiric Disciplines require eye contact in order to be effective. The Baddacelli are not prohibited from learning these powers, but what happens when a vampire who cannot see — who might not even possess eyes at all — attempts to actually use them?

Probably the simplest solution is to assume that someone looking into the Baddacelli's eyes (or, in some cases, where the eyes should be) may be affected by the power in question as normal. Storytellers may wish to impose a dice penalty on the activation roll, however, owing to the difficulty in timing the use properly when you can't actually see the eye contact. Other Storytellers may require the Baddacelli to develop particular Devotions in order to compensate (Auspex • + the Discipline in question would be appropriate).

its. Baddacelli who have taken to imprisoning captured mortals to ensure a steady supply of Vitae may represent this with Herd. Finally, a substantial number of these Kindred will also maintain a one- or two-dot Retainer, who serves the role of seeing-eye dog and errand-runner in the surface world.

Bloodline Disciplines: *Mimetismo*, Nightmare, Obfuscate, Vigor

Weakness: All Baddacelli are blind. Thus, they automatically fail any action that requires vision to accomplish, and are at a significant disadvantage (–3 penalty at least) in most actions in which vision plays a significant role. Although advancement in *Mimetismo* can eventually compensate to a certain degree, the Baddacelli can never fully enjoy the advantages of sighted individuals. In combat, Baddacelli use the “Fighting Blind” rules found on p. 166 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Organization: The Baddacelli tend to gather in familial broods, usually dominated by the eldest member present in the city (who is often, but not always, the Morlock from whom the others descend). Contact between broods of different cities is rare, as few Baddacelli are willing to risk the rigors of travel after the Blood's manifestation robs them of their sight.

Customarily, brood members are expected to contribute to the maintenance of the communal haven, and to assist each other in hunting — especially the younger members for whom even acquiring enough Vitae to get by can be quite a challenge. Broods that have taken to keeping a captive herd often find it efficient to delegate responsibility for care and maintenance to a single Baddacelli. This individual usually holds quite a bit of sway within the

brood, due to his ability to withhold access to the herd “to ensure the continuation of a healthy supply.”

Beyond these duties, individual Baddacelli are usually left to their own devices. The pecking order is otherwise pretty informal, with preference going to age (after all, few Baddacelli achieve a long unlife without some degree of wisdom) and ability to provide information on the surface world (provided security is maintained). A young Baddacelli with reliable surface contacts can make a comfortable place for himself within the brood.

The lowest status in a brood usually belongs to childer in whom the Blood has not yet manifested the Baddacelli's specific curse. These young and sighted Kindred spend much of their time running errands for their elder, sightless broodmates.

Concepts: The thing under the tracks, pied piper, curious spelunker, mother of the lost, reclusive geologist, cryptozoologist, Braille teacher, underground musician, resentful engineer, has-been impressionist comic.

HISTORY

Botticello's brood believed the theft of their sight was the product of some Theban Sorcery curse placed upon the line by the Lancea Sanctum. Botticello himself certainly espoused this belief. The truth is, however, that it is entirely the product of the line founder's terrible injuries and fear of abandonment.

In the years that followed the Baddacelli's defeat at the hands of the Sanctified, the vanquished brood hid in the catacombs beneath the city. As time passed and Botticello realized that the injuries to his eyes were not going to heal, he came to fear that his childer would abandon him rather than remain hidden with their blind patriarch. In secret, he began to place his closest childer under Vinculums, bonding them to him with the unnatural affection of the Blood. About this time, he was also beginning to realize the uncanny proficiency with sound that he was developing as the Blood, unable to heal his wounds, responded to his will by adapting to compensate for his new limitations.

Thus it was that the alterations taking place in his

Vitae were transmitted to the childer of his brood even as they took root in his own undead body. In seeking to bond his childer to him, Botticelli unconsciously acted as Avus to his fledgling bloodline.

Fear spread through the brood even faster than the affliction. As one after the other of Botticello's closest childer lost their vision, those who remained unaffected looked on with horror. It wasn't long before the exodus began; vampires who had not yet succumbed to the Vin-

culum stole away in hopes of escaping the terrible curse on their line. For many this was a vain hope, as even partial Vinculums to their potent elder were sufficient to transfer his influence over their blood.

This established the pattern that would account for the bulk of the bloodline's geographical expansion in the coming centuries. As a Baddacelli brood grows, sometimes a childe will flee — either to escape harsh treatment at the hands of elder broodmates or in hopes of evading the expression of the bloodline's unique traits. In many such cases, the bloodline's curse will defeat their hopes and manifest when their blood reaches the requisite potency.

It goes almost without saying that not every vampire of this line who attempted to transplant himself in this fashion was been successful. Particularly in the early nights of the bloodline when travel was far more difficult than it is today, many young Kindred met Final Death in the wilds between far-flung cities. In some cases, Kindred were rendered all but helpless when the bloodline's curse manifested on the road. In other cases, they reached their destination, only to fail to survive the transition to the sightless condition when it came upon them in their new homes. As a result, the Baddacelli's spread has been sporadic, and the cities that host these nightmares seem to bear no discernible geographical pattern. Great gaps exist between the homes of the Baddacelli in modern nights.

Invictus and Lancea Sanctum records indicate encounters with strange, pagan vampires in the Viking port of Horsens as early as AD 1000. As described, these blind Kindred dwelt in natural caves formed in the walls of the fjord, where a small cult brought them offerings of blood. These creatures claimed to be avatars of the Norse God of Night, Hödr. They maintained that Hödr, himself portrayed in myth as blind and able to summon visions of far-off lands, had bestowed blindness upon them to mark them out to his faithful, and granted them otherworldly senses that they might aid in protecting his mortal servants. As small and secretive as this cult was, the First and Second Estates declared it a violation of the First Tradition, and spent much blood in the effort to stamp it out. To this night, though the few remaining descendants of the Hørsen brood now give nominal allegiance to the Invictus, it is not entirely clear that they have abandoned their pagan ways.

At least one brood of these Kindred is known to have made a home in the vast subway, service tunnel and sewer systems that existed beneath New York City some time around the middle of the 20th century. The leader of the brood then was a Morlock by the name of Hendrik, who first arrived in the city as a Haunt when it was still

called New Amsterdam. He lost his sight only a few years before the English conquered the city, and as an influx of new Kindred asserted control, it was easy enough for him to go overlooked. So it was that he was able to accommodate himself to the rigors of his new existence with relatively little interference.

Hendrik had already established for himself a small brood before his presence was discovered. He reacted by immediately committing himself and his childer in service to the ruling Invictus, who elected to hold their noses and accept the advantages offered by fresh numbers in a segment of the city few other covenants would be in a position to contest. This move proved beneficial to the Baddacelli as well as their First Estate allies over the years, at the cost of making the bloodline more visible than they would normally prefer to be. Hendrik fell into torpor in the late 1980s, and the Baddacelli of his brood withdrew from the vampire Court en masse shortly thereafter. Rumor abounds that they remain politically active, but few Kindred can either confirm or refute this assumption directly; these Baddacelli are rarely seen.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Baddacelli are rarely found alone. Lone Morlocks are often relatively young vampires who fled their former broods and have only recently undergone the transition into the bloodline. These lonely vampires quickly learn the necessity of sighted retainers to aid them in their difficult nights. Haunts of Baddacelli lineage are well advised to keep ghouls, if for no other reason than as insurance against the night when the curse finally descends. These blood slaves are often the first childer in a fledgling brood as well, simply because it would be potentially unwise to create another vampire who has such a significant advantage as sight without some means of ensuring his loyalty. As a result, it is relatively common for the brood leader in a domain to hold Vinculums over his eldest childe or two.

It is unusual, however, for a Baddacelli brood to grow beyond half a dozen members. For while it is true that few Kindred are interested in descending into their midnight lairs to try and control their population, wise Baddacelli do not press their luck by overburdening their hunting grounds.

Unlife within the Baddacelli brood is rarely easy. Although there are few formal demands upon an individual Baddacelli's time, the informal burdens of favor and loyalty can be quite demanding. The desire for acceptance and approval within their small families can be a strong motivator, and many Baddacelli fill their nights with works designed to please their broodmates and sires.

Even while forcibly separated from surface life, many Baddacelli share an intense curiosity about the surface world. They have learned from painful experience that changes in mortal and Kindred society can affect the bloodline in unexpected and unpleasant ways. Morlock broods value news of surface world developments, and members of the line who can reliably satisfy their curiosity are accorded significant respect. Baddacelli, particularly younger ones, can often be found lurking in the shadows near subway stations, in the basements of government buildings or under sewer grates outside locations of cultural import to mortals and Kindred alike — anywhere that the Baddacelli's sensitive ears can bring them important snippets to bring home to their brothers and sisters.

These fishing expeditions are not limited solely to information gathering, however. Baddacelli are forever collecting new sounds to add to their repertoire, and not merely to aid in hunting. Inevitably, members of a line who can mimic practically any voice they hear pick up a good deal of facility at singing. Elder members of the line can even reproduce the tones of any of a vast array of musical instruments, and the endless variety of musical styles and variations among the kine are a source of immense fascination.

As an outgrowth of their fascination with sound and music, a common Baddacelli pastime is a kind sonic one-upmanship. When blood supplies are good, entire nights can be devoted to vocal competitions, and even in lean times most broods will find a few minutes to devote to them. Rarely formal events, they will often start with a single Baddacelli uttering some unique, complex or newly acquired sound so that it echoes through the pitch-black lair of the brood. As the echoes die away, he will be answered by another of the brood, who will be answered by yet another in turn. The vocal stylings typically progress in complexity as each participant tries to outdo the one who came before. Hauntingly beautiful melodies of original composition may give way to stylized reproductions of popular music, only to be followed in turn by an eerie reproduction of the sounds of a traffic accident or subway station at rush hour. These sounds and a near infinite variety of others float through the lightless catacombs inhabited by the Baddacelli.

As impressive as this spectacle may be, it is altogether different in character from what the Baddacelli can produce when they choose to sing in concert with each other. These occurrences are more rare than the competitive events, and usually more formally arranged. These are almost always staged for the brood alone, but the rare few occasions they have been displayed to any surface-

dwelling Kindred have endeared the bloodline to the Circle of the Crone.

In either case, whether competitive posturing or cooperative singing, the experience is especially moving and disturbing to those mortals held as a captive herd to these Kindred. Trapped in an a world of absolute darkness, subjected to the hungers of monstrous beings, the mortals cannot help but respond to the haunting sounds that assault them from the far corners of their lightless prisons. Many are moved to tears by the spectacle — though whether tears of longing or of despair even they may not know for sure.

MIMETISMO

Humans rely primarily on vision to observe their world. But in the universe inhabited by the Baddacelli, that sense is all but useless. So humans and Kindred in this environment fall back to the distant second of their preferred senses: hearing. When the Baddacelli are on the hunt, this is the worst mistake a victim can make.

Baddacelli, surviving as they have for centuries in a world without vision, have turned sound into their shield and their weapon. They are mimics of supernatural skill,

able to produce auditory tricks that put modern sound studios to shame.

• CERTAIN SOUNDS

Sounds echoing in the twisting and interconnected tunnels of the subterranean world are often confusing, making it all but impossible to determine their true direction of origin. But the Baddacelli are familiar with these tricks, and are rarely confused.

When this power is active, Baddacelli do not suffer situational penalties when trying to orient themselves by sound (such as, for example, confusing echoes in underground tunnels). Furthermore, they do not have to take an action to locate targets in combat by sound, and they don't run the risk of losing track of an opponent in succeeding turns. So long as their intended victims make any sound at all, the Baddacelli can find their targets. Note, however, that the Baddacelli still suffer the -3 dice penalty for fighting an unseen opponent. (See the "Fighting Blind" rules found on p. 166 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

Cost: —

Dice Pool: n/a

Action: Instant



•• IMPERSONATION

The Baddacelli is able to mimic any sound that can conceivably be produced by the human throat, including specific voices, with uncanny accuracy. So long as he has heard the sound at least once in his Requiem, he can reproduce it perfectly.

To fully impersonate a person, the Baddacelli first needs to hear him speak for at least 15 minutes so that she can pick out the varied inflections and accents of the speaker. The speech must be unfiltered (i.e., not conveyed over electronic media) and must involve a variety of statements.

Furthermore, at this stage, the voice the Baddacelli produces may seem to come from any direction she chooses, within a certain radius.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Subterfuge + Mimetismo

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does the Baddacelli fail to emulate the voice she's attempting, but she actually damages her vocal apparatus in the attempt. She suffers one point of lethal damage and cannot attempt Mimetismo again until she heals the wound.

Failure: Failure indicates that the power does not activate. The Baddacelli speaks or sings with her normal voice, and can be identified by anyone who knows her.

Success: The Baddacelli mimics the intended voice, and may fool her intended listeners.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success indicates that the subjects' Resolve is considered one less than normal for the purposes of determining who is fooled.

The number of successes the player acquires on the roll is compared to the Resolve of each listener. If the number of successes exceeds a given listener's Resolve, that target is affected by the power and fooled into identifying the voice as the Baddacelli intends. If a subject's Resolve is equal to or higher than the number of successes, he is unaffected. Every individual who hears the Baddacelli using this power must compare his Resolve against the number of successes accumulated to see if he is fooled or not — the Baddacelli cannot attempt to single out a listener in a crowd and deceive him alone.

Those individuals whose Resolve is exceeded by three successes or more will actually show a preference for the illusion when comparing it to the original voice. (For example, a child hearing his father calling from one tunnel and a Baddacelli impersonating his father's voice in

another will head toward the Baddacelli if his Resolve is exceeded by three successes or more.)

This mimicry may actually fool voice recognition systems, but competently constructed equipment is considered to have a Resolve of 5.

If the Baddacelli attempts to "throw" the sound of her voice so that the source seems to come from a different direction instead of her, the number of successes determining how far away the sound can seem to be coming from:

Successes	Max. Distance
1 success	1 yard
2 successes	2 yards
3 successes	5 yards
4 successes	10 yards
5+ successes	30 yards

The Baddacelli may choose the apparent direction of the sound's origin as long as at least one success is rolled.

••• CACOPHONY

The Baddacelli facility with mimicry now extends to sounds that no human could possibly produce. Whether the bustle of a swarming subway station, the soft trickle of water, the screech of a train or the sound of advancing footsteps, all are within the realm of the Baddacelli's uncanny talent for auditory trickery.

Before the Baddacelli can mimic a sound, he needs to hear it directly, unfiltered by electronic media. While he can easily copy the sound of a train as reproduced on a film, any subject who hears the result will instinctively feel "wrong" about it, knowing that it's fake. Only the true sound will produce a useful result.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Expression + Mimetismo

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does the Baddacelli fail to emulate the sound she's attempting, but she actually damages her vocal apparatus in the attempt. She suffers one point of lethal damage and cannot attempt Mimetismo again until she heals the wound.

Failure: Failure indicates that the power does not activate. The Baddacelli makes an attempt at the sound with her normal voice.

Success: The Baddacelli mimics the intended sound, and may fool her intended listeners.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success indicates that the subjects' Resolve is considered one less than normal for the purposes of determining who is fooled.

The number of successes the player acquires on the roll is compared to the Resolve of each listener. If the number of successes exceeds a given listener's Resolve, that target is affected by the power and fooled into identifying the sound as the Baddacelli intends. If a subject's Resolve is equal to or higher than the number of successes, he is unaffected. Every individual who hears the Baddacelli using this power must compare his Resolve against the number of successes accumulated to see if he is fooled or not — the Baddacelli cannot attempt to single out a listener in a crowd and deceive him alone.

Those individuals whose Resolve is exceeded by three successes or more will actually show a preference for the illusion when comparing it to the original sound. (For example, a wanderer hearing the sound of street traffic down one tunnel and a Baddacelli emulation in another will head toward the Baddacelli if his Resolve is exceeded by three successes or more.)

As with Mimicry, the Baddacelli may choose the apparent origin of the sound. If they choose to "throw" the sound, use the table listed above to determine the radius of effect.

•••• ECHOLOCAATION

The Baddacelli are able to sense their surroundings using a form of echolocation. By producing a series of rapid clicks and sensing the echoes, they can get a surprisingly detailed impression of their surroundings. At this stage, even absolute silence cannot hide their prey from them, and they can locate objects concealed from normal sight. The last sounds heard by many a hapless wanderer in the subterranean depths has been the dry, ratcheting call of a hunting Morlock.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Survival + Mimetismo

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Baddacelli receives only a confusing welter of echoes that fills his head with a distracting buzz. His next action will be at a -2 dice penalty in addition to whatever other modifiers may apply.

Failure: The Baddacelli fails to gain any additional information about his surroundings.

Success: For as long as the Baddacelli maintains this power, he may act without the normal penalties imposed by his blindness. Furthermore, because of the penetrating nature of sound vibrations he may be able to sense objects and events through physical barriers. If the number of successes generated by the activation roll exceeds the Durability rating of an intervening barrier,

the Baddacelli can sense what is on the other side subject to the following modifiers.

Condition	Roll Modifier
Per 1" thickness of barrier	-1
Barrier is baffled or soundproofed	-2
Barrier is crystalline	+1
Barrier is significantly softer than the object (i.e., cloth over a gun)	+1

Note that Echolocation is still not sight. Although capable of sensing shapes and textures in remarkable detail, the Baddacelli will remain entirely blind to changes in color and lighting conditions. This means that a Morlock is still unable to read printed words or interpret a picture using this power. Even perfectly clear glass will appear entirely opaque to this sense unless the Baddacelli has achieved enough successes to penetrate it.

The Baddacelli may maintain Echolocation while taking other actions for as long as he does not speak or invoke any other Mimetismo power, or until the end of the current scene, whichever comes first.

Exceptional Success: As above. In addition, Echolocation may be maintained even if the Baddacelli speaks or invokes another Mimetismo power, provided that the interruption lasts no longer than a single turn and is not repeated in the turn immediately following.

••••• AURAL ASSAULT

At the peak of Mimetismo, this power takes sound from the realm of deception and stalking and turns it into a weapon. By striking the right pitch and volume, the Baddacelli can stun and disorient potential prey with an overwhelming, painful auditory assault. Victims find themselves able to do little other than clutch their ears to block out the sounds, and may even be struck temporarily deaf by the intensity of the abuse to their hearing.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Expression + Mimetismo versus target's Stamina + Blood Potency

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does the Baddacelli fail to create the sound he's attempting, but he actually damages his vocal apparatus in the attempt. He suffers one point of lethal damage and cannot attempt Mimetismo again until he heals the wound.

Failure: Either the Baddacelli fails to generate a success, or the target's successes equal or exceed those of the Discipline user. The Aural Assault has no effect.

Success: The vampire achieves more successes than the target on the contested roll. He generates an earsplitting burst of focused sound that utterly stuns the intended target. Victims of this power lose their next action, and may not apply their Defense for that round. For the remainder of the scene, they suffer a -2 penalty to any perception related dice pools that depend on hearing.

If the sensitivity of the victim's hearing has been augmented, such as through the use of the Auspex power Heightened Senses, she is struck entirely deaf for the remainder of the scene.

Exceptional Success: As above. However, victims with ordinary hearing are also struck deaf for the remainder of the scene. Characters with heightened hearing also suffer a level of bashing damage for every bonus die normally granted by their augmented senses.

DEVOTIONS SONG OF SERENITY

(Majesty ••, Mimetismo ••)

It's all well and good to ambush prey lost in the catacombs the Baddacelli call home. But it's even better to take your prey without a struggle. This Devotion allows the Morlocks to do just that. The user sings a haunting, wordless song that soothes potential victims into a pleasant lethargy from which they find it all but impossible to rouse themselves even as their would-be devourers close in.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Expression + Majesty versus Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested and Extended; resistance is reflexive.

Use of this power requires that the intended victim not be aware of any immediate danger. Any overt threat (such as initiation of combat) automatically prevents this power from taking effect.

The Baddacelli initiates this power by singing to the victim in barely audible tones. He spends a point of Willpower to begin the extended and contested roll. In each turn during which he seeks to overcome the victim, his target may reflexively roll her Resolve + Composure to resist as a pleasant lethargy begins to steal over her. The first one to reach the opponent's Willpower dot total is the victor in the contest. If the target wins, she shakes off the seductive call of the Song and cannot be affected by it any further in the scene.

If the vampire using this Devotion wins the extended and contested roll, the victim is rendered nearly torpid by the soothing tones. She ceases any activity and, though remaining conscious, will not respond to any but the most alarming of stimuli. She will allow herself to be approached, handled, even picked up and carried so long as the Baddacelli continues his song.

Sudden movements, loud noises or the Baddacelli ceasing to sing will all immediately break the spell. Any damage suffered by the victim will immediately cancel the effect as well, and she applies her full Defense against any incoming attack.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.



Duchagne

By Roger William Barnes

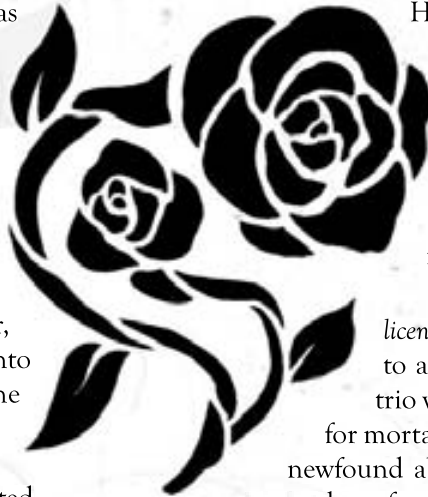
"Why do you cry, my lovely? If you would only surrender your flesh to me, lay bare your soul to my caress. If you would only do this, I can set you free."

In tales, vampires are often depicted as rapacious creatures of unmatched appetite. They appear from the shadows, turning the lives of hapless mortals into waking nightmares of blood and sorrow. Often, stories of decadent aristocracy parallel these portrayals of the undead. Bored nobility charm some naïve peasant, inviting him into the world of the languid halls of power, only to turn the poor worker's life into a game. In the languorous Duchagne bloodline, the two images have merged, spawning a creature driven as much by a never-ending hunger as by a deep-seated need for new sensations.

Among the bourgeoisie of 1765 France, few could hold the fickle attention of indolent aristocracy such as the Vicomte and Vicomtesse du Chagne. Though not land-owners, the du Chagne were competent merchants and excellent manipulators. Their lavish parties consistently pushed the boundaries between risqué and obscene, delighting the court of King Louis XV and his successor.

The Vicomte, Albaric, and his wife, Eglatina, had voracious appetites that would have put even Caligula to shame. The parties they held were always scandalous affairs: they often brought in prostitutes from nearby cities, each paid handsomely for her service and silence. There, they suffered the sadistic vices of the Vicomte, Vicomtesse and their guests. When not playing hosts to debauchery, the du Chagnes toyed with the affections of naïve youths in the Court, tempting them with deviant pleasures and empty promises of power and wealth. For husband and wife, the hunt was the only interest; the outcome unimportant.

A Daeva, attracted to their folly, found most of these games less than innovative in comparison to those of the Kindred. But the depraved couple themselves were fascinating to him, and he believed they had great potential.



He decided he would sculpt the two into social predators worthy of Kindred society. In the midst of an arranged party for his friends, the Daeva took the pair and introduced them to their Requiems. The two reveled in the Danse Macabre, diving into the courtly intrigues as though born to it.

Their sire instructed them in the *les arts licencieux*, showing them how to use the Vitae to alter the emotions of their victims. The trio was inseparable, holding grand masques for mortal and Kindred guests alike. As the pair's newfound abilities grew, the parties became lavish spectacles, often escalating into chaotic orgies of blood and pain. This unmitigated lust for sensation, however, led to their downfall. The three were so consumed in their own games of manipulation and self-gratification that they lost track of the troubles brewing around them.

The three remained blissfully ignorant for several decades as problems plagued the social structure of France. As insurgents assaulted the Tuileries, the Vicomte and his wife held a masque. When the Assembly suspended the monarchy with the support of the Jacobins, the three dallied with a family of the nouveaux riches. Then, as the sun was low in the Parisian sky, the revolution came with violence and voices raised in anger. Weakened from the sleep of the day, the vampires were no match for the mob. The Vicomte and his sire met Final Death, while only Eglatina survived, though barely. Wounded and in shock as her lavish world crumbled into ash, the Vicomtesse retreated into the numbing grasp of torpor.

Several decades later, she emerged from the death-like sleep and sought relief from the nightmares of torpor that plagued her. She took in several mortal retainers, hoping to use them to satisfy her debased appetites and to salve her grief. Strangely, the old methods failed to elicit any joy in her dead heart. Even more bizarrely, the loss of the Vicomte and her sire twisted her ministrations, forcing

Developer's Comments

This entry stood out for us right from the very start of the contest. It was one of a relative few – the Duchagne weren't an extremely popular choice for writers, it seems – but they were handled with a persuasive sense of tragedy that brought it to the fore of entries across the board. The notion of the Daeva's uncontrollable vice, exploded to a grand level by supernaturally imposed ennui, was too compelling to ignore.

In edits, the evolution of the line over time really took shape, laying in a believable foundation for its members and confirming the entry's place among our finalists. The Discipline of Licencieux went through a number of mechanical changes, presenting a challenge because we wanted to convey a sense of the Duchagne's manipulations without taking them entirely out of the realm of the real – we didn't want them to just be illusionists. I believe the result is a truly excellent expression of Daeva tragedy: a line with the power to move any heart, but expressing it only to keep their accelerated sense of boredom at bay.

the protégées (as she preferred to call her subjects) to share her sadness and regret, feeling it as their own. Most broke under the mixture of physical and psychological torment, but a small handful flourished. No matter what she levied against their flesh and minds, these servants begged for more. Impressed, she eventually Embraced them, training them in the ways of the Vitae as she had been trained. These protégées took on the title of Les Élèves du Chagne, or more simply, the Duchagne.

Or so goes the story as told by Eglatina. Many of her descendants, however, suspect that either purposeful deception or torpor-twisted memories have altered the truth. In the carefully manicured salons of the Duchagne, broodmates exchange whispered speculation. Some believe that the unnamed sire was the true origin of the bloodline's prized ability to manipulate the senses of others. They claim that Eglatina killed her own sire and husband out of a selfish desire to be in total control.

Others believe that Albaric was actually killed prior to the Vicomtesse's Embrace, and that her own desire twisted her mind in torpor, creating false memories of a fantasy life. The bloodline's ability to twist perception, they say, is a direct extension of Eglatina's wishful desire to change the truth. And what of the mysterious Daeva who sired her? Why has she never spoken his name? Has she forgotten, or does she merely choose not to remember?

Over the last couple of centuries, members of the bloodline have changed little from the sybaritic lifestyle of the du Chagne, even if they are a bit more adapted to modern lifestyles. It is also worth noting that the majority have taken a far more active role in Kindred society, adding their unique talents as marketable skills to their covenant of choice.

Because of the power wielded by members of this bloodline, outsiders are often leery of interaction. Rumors

abound about just what the Bacchantes are capable of doing, and few wish to find out from personal experience. Indeed, the grand balls held by the bloodline on special occasions are often more than most care to see. These gatherings are used by members to parade their latest protégées, or to display particularly clever uses of the bloodline's ability to manipulate the senses. These parties can be as formal as the standard high school prom or as surreal as the most twisted carnival.

However, in spite of their shared induction experiences, there is little that truly unifies members of the bloodline any more. Often it is only their rapid loss of empathy for others that connects two Duchagne. Sensations are quick to please, and discarded even more quickly. Within a few short years, a Duchagne vampire finds that it takes more and more depraved acts to stir any sense of pleasure in her existence, until only the most base and cruel indulgence manages to bring a weary smile to her pallid face. The reason for this desensitizing is as much grist for the rumor mill of the bloodline as their origin.

Parent Clan: Daeva

Nickname: Bacchantes

Covenant: Most Duchagne find a place in the hallowed halls of the First Estate. The Duchagne's manipulative gifts allow them to excel at negotiation and interrogation in equal measures, as well as general interaction with kine and Kindred. Duchagne vampires make excellent Advocates, Speakers and Interpreters. Some use their power to rocket up through the ranks of the Invictus, applying it viciously to their competition. Many Kindred fear the subversive talents of the Duchagne, but few give voice to those fears, knowing full well that they risk becoming targets of the Bacchantes' attention.

The Circle of the Crone holds the second largest number of this bloodline. The concept of growth through pain and tribulation appeals to the Bacchantes' nature, and

the bloody rites of Cr'ac hold a certain (some would say unhealthy) amount of fascination.

A Duchagne Acolyte is likely to build a cult of personality around herself, using her ability to alter the senses of her followers to convince them of her own divinity. Often these mortal cults enthusiastically deify the vampire, bringing willing, and not so willing, prey to sate her bloodlust. Many of the Bacchantes who take this route burn out quickly though, often buying into their own rhetoric and pushing themselves to wilder and wilder excess in the name of misbegotten self-worship.

Other, less self-serving Duchagne see the Crone's faith in growth through tribulation as a natural path to enlightenment, and consider their own initiation into undeath part of the process. To these ends, they begin to revere pain and torment. The members of these bloody factions are scar-covered, callous thugs who attempt to spread their own pain into the lives of all around them, believing that the anguish will ease their souls toward enlightenment.

Those few Duchagne who join the ranks of the Lancea Sanctum often disapprove of the decadence and self-indulgence their brothers and sisters wallow in. To these Sanctified, *les arts licencieux* are better put to the use of hounding the heretical and tormenting the wicked. Moreover, members of this covenant eschew many of the hedonistic indulgences of their brethren, choosing to indulge few pleasures of their own outside of the completion of their duty.

The Carthian Movement holds little appeal for the Duchagne. Eglatina has commented often to her childer and grandchilder of the Movement's similarities to the revolution that took her sire and husband from her, and these teachings have filtered down the ranks of the bloodline, tainting members' attitudes toward the covenant.

There are, to date, no members of the Duchagne within the ranks of the Ordo Dracul. Though certain ideals espoused by the Dragons pique the occasional interest of a lone Bacchante, the Duchagne's inability to stay interested in repetitious work tends to diminish her ability to take the covenant's philosophies seriously.

Appearance: Though Albaric and Eglatina were noble in title alone, the two still maintained the appearance of those born to the aristocracy. And while protégées are taken from generally all areas and cultures of life, there is a certain standard to which members are held when it comes to appearances. Two members of the same brood may be as differing in tastes as night and day, but whatever it is they choose to wear,



one can be assured it is the finest, and most fashionable and most expensive.

Yet, there is always a certain antiseptic look and scent about members of the Duchagne, like someone who has been working in a hospital or with chemical cleaners. Everything is too carefully arranged, too perfect. One would almost believe that their clothes are worn once, and never again.

Haven: The members of the bloodline are all about keeping up appearances, and few other places allow for such an intimate look at the soul as the hearth and home. The havens of the Duchagne are palettes and tools with which the vampires use to create their masterpieces upon the blank canvases of their protégées. As such, functionality is as important as style.

Where one might maintain a spartan dwelling filled with easily cleaned faux leather furniture, another exists in a lavish home in a cocoon of rich textures and color. Both, havens, however, would be set up for quick rearranging and cleaning. The two would also have ‘accommodations’ secreted away for future protégées. The maintaining of these hidden (and sometimes not-so-hidden) rooms often leaves behind a strong scent of antiseptic solutions, which clings to the bodies and clothing of residents. It is perhaps this scent that others commonly associate with the bloodline.

Background: The predominant number of Duchagne originated from the ranks of protégées with which the members surround themselves. Prospects are often watched for months before being taken. A few never even enter their possible sire’s haven, but are tested from a distance, their every action judged. There is no true measure to gauge a protégée’s worth as a member save that which the vampire decides. Those who survive their patron’s perverse affections and manage to show an enthusiasm for said treatment are desirable candidates for the Embrace. Those who fail remain the target of the Duchagne’s attentions. That is, until the vampire tires of them, and tire the Duchagne quickly do. Duchagne rarely use the Blood Oath, certainly not on a protégée. The student’s mind must be clear of foreign influences. Never does a protégée come from the blood addicted.

Induction of Daeva into the bloodline has rarely occurred. Indeed, the majority of this bloodline has never known anything other than the intimate relationship between sire and childe, and few even realize that they are anything but Duchagne. If a Bacchante found a Daeva with great promise, that Daeva might be taken into the bloodline, but the Daeva would have to be willing to undergo the same treatment that mortal protégées do.

Character Creation: Protégées are chosen from a wide variety of mortals, but those who excel in social or mental practice tend to be Embraced more often than those who are more physically inclined. Manipulation, Composure and Resolve are highly favored Attributes, although, after the physical trauma many protégées endure prior to the Embrace, a high Stamina is quite justified.

Social and Mental Skills are coveted by the members of this bloodline. Crafts, Intimidation and Subterfuge are all useful, as are Medicine and Socialize. Herd and Haven are highly prized Merits, as well as connections to mortal police and criminal organizations.

Bloodline Disciplines: Celerity, *Licencieux*, Majesty, Vigor

Weakness: Members of this bloodline tend to grow weary of simple pleasures quicker than most vampires. That which thrilled the vampire one day is discarded as *passé* the next. Within a few years, only the most deviant acts manage to stir any emotion in the Bacchantes. To many outsiders, the Duchagne seem to be fickle with their affections. In actuality, the Kindred of this bloodline simply lose their ability to empathize with their lost humanity, and are desperate to feel anything at all.

All Duchagne vampires suffer from a -1 die penalty to rolls for repeated actions. After they’ve done something once, they just get bored with it; they have trouble focusing their full attention and get sloppy. Any time a Duchagne does something the same way she’s done it before, this penalty applies.

On extended actions, the penalty accumulates on each roll following the first. For example, if a Duchagne character were to paint a portrait, the Storyteller may declare it an Extended Dexterity + Crafts action. The first roll is unmodified. A -1 die penalty would be applied to the second roll, a -2 dice penalty to the third, a -3 dice penalty to the fourth and so on.

Organization: The sire/childe connection continues to be the primary source of order within the Duchagne, with Eglatina sitting as the Matriarch above all. Typically, the sire, termed the esclavagiste, inducts a mortal possessing qualities the sire finds favorable. This mortal is referred to as the protégée, and remains such until released into Kindred society. Protégées possess little-to-no rights, save those their esclavagiste grant them, and are little more than slaves. Duchagne rarely trade protégées, but it might happen in instances of truly stubborn inductees.

Upon release into Kindred society, the protégée is referred to as being *sans entrave*, or unchained. Typically, a grand ball is held in the Duchagne’s honor. Such parties are not restricted by covenant politics, or even blood ties. Indeed, grand balls tend to be showcases of the bloodline’s collective talents.

Concepts: Lothario, Prince's interrogator, drug lord, bondage freak, con artist, power behind the throne, bored aristocrat, purveyor of the flesh, vengeful zealot.

History

When Eglatina first awoke from torpor, she found herself mired in the grief of her loss. Torpid dreams had left her confused and angry, while fate had stranded her without a purpose in existence. Knowing little else to do, she attempted to pick up where the trio had left off. The home of the Vicomte and Vicomtesse in Bordeaux was empty and lifeless, seemingly echoing her own inner state. Masquerading as one of the *nouveaux riches*, she hosted intimate parties where she attempted to recreate the past. Yet, she could not bring herself to enjoy the deviant entertainments.

About this time, France's Restoration began to falter. Unrest once again began to rear its head among the masses as the economy continued to tumble. Fearing the worst, Eglatina was quick to act this time. She made arrangements for travel to the British Isles, eventually making a place for herself in the antiquated Kindred Court of London.

Here the Vicomtesse encountered a minor lord named William Dorchester. In this stately landowner, she found the force of personality that she had longed for in a companion. Though he appeared cultured and well spoken in public, in private Lord Dorchester needed little prompting to engage in his vices.

Eglatina took the lusty noble under her wing; slowly, she introduced him to the world she had existed in for almost a half-century. She subtly pushed Dorchester to greater depths of depravity, using her abilities to alter his perceptions of their acts. Pleased with his progress, she pledged to make the man into her new Vicomte. With the instatement of Louis-Philippe as king of France and the apparent return of stability, Eglatina invited Lord Dorchester back to her Bordeaux home.

She introduced him to Kindred society during a lavish fete thrown for her return home. The party quickly descended into a bacchanal of prodigious violence and indulgence. Influenced by the Vicomtesse, Lord Dorchester eagerly joined the revelry. On that night, Eglatina Embraced William.

Though new to the Blood, William proved to be a shrewd member of Kindred society, manipulating the tensions between his fellow vampires to gain favors for himself and his 'wife.' His grasp of *Licencieux* also flowered quickly, as did his innovation in its use. Yet little seemed to hold his interest for long. Rapidly, more

and more vicious or exotic jaunts were needed to stir his interest.

Tensions mounted between the two, and they both sought solace in Embracing new childer. The vitriol displayed by the new Vicomte and Vicomtesse manifested mostly in biting criticisms and backhanded compliments. It was not long before the Vicomtesse and her new Vicomte realized what was soon to follow.

On a cold December evening in 1852, the two left their Parisian home for a night of hunting, though they went followed separate routes. By the time the cold winter sun began to lighten the horizon, only Eglatina had returned. The Vicomte never returned, and his childer likewise disappeared.

By the late 1860s, unrest grew across Europe. War between France and Prussia brought more anguish to a population already suffering from economic hardships and numerous government changes. The Duchagne had already intertwined themselves throughout many Kindred strongholds within the mid-continent, and Eglatina no longer cared much for the changes in the brief lives of the kine or their political problems. Resolutely, she maintained her residence even through the hellish siege of Paris.

Yet, her stagnation was engendering a dissatisfaction among her own descendants. The loudest voice within the salons of the Duchagne was that of Anastasia Halstead, a neonate recently made *sans entrave*. She argued to her broodmates that the bloodline needed to cease wasting their nights as petty entertainers for archaic feudal lords. With their powers, they could change the very society of the Kindred, and create a new order. Many considered her statements to be youthful folly, though a few seemed intrigued, if only as a means of diversion.

Eglatina, however, took notice of Anastasia's words. The Vicomtesse had heard these same cries from the disgruntled mortals every time unrest swept through the world. Indeed, there were already cells of Kindred threatening the same change across Europe. The Vicomtesse had little doubt that these so-called Carthians were in some way influencing her great-grandchilde. The bitterness of the loss of her sire and beloved Albaric spurred her into action. The matriarch declared Anastasia a disident threat to the Duchagne, and slew her.

Most of the family was cruelly entertained by the neonate's destruction, but, among many of the newly Embraced protégées and *sans entrave*, hushed criticism arose. Eglatina actually encouraged the rebellion she sought to stave off.

From 1867 to 1875, the Duchagne waged war upon themselves. None of the Duchagne on either side joined

the Carthian Movement, but many of the elder members of the line accused their childer and grandchilder of sympathizing with the “insurrectionists.” Battles raged between Duchagne kin, and many were petulantly destroyed. The members of the line who survived refer to these battles collectively as “The Nights of Sorrow,” remembering them with sad embarrassment.

The violent rages of the bloodline quelled almost as quickly as they had been stoked, and by the dawn of the 20th century, the Duchagne had returned to their seemingly jaded complacency. Even as two wars enveloped the world, the Bacchantes continued unaffected, although the brutal constructs of the mortal world certainly held their attention. By the early 1930s, the technology for international flight allowed the bloodline to spread itself across the world, most willing to brave the terrible risk just to find themselves in a new place. The exotic locales and sights enthralled the chilled hearts of the Duchagne and only seemed to push them faster than ever toward the depths of depravity. Like children in a candy store, members threw themselves into a world of foreign delights, seemingly wanting to drown themselves in sensation.

On the night of the new millennium, December 31, 1999, Eglatina threw a great fete for herself and all her kin in Paris. Those who attended said that she seemed uncharacteristically tired throughout, and impatient for the ringing of the New Year. Then, as the bells finally tolled, she simply rose from her seat, strode to the doors and left without a word.

That very night, several of her childer came calling at her lavish, palatial abode. Inside,

they discovered the home in a mess. Furniture had been smashed across the marble floors, and the bloody corpses of her protégées had already begun the putrefaction of death. The only living thing in the house was one of the Vicomtesse’s nearly starved ghouls, who was chained in her sleeping chambers, weeping piteously.

The bloodline was left floundering without their matriarch. Neither word nor sight of the Vicomtesse has risen since, though rumors come up now and again.

Bereft of their founder, most members of the bloodline continue on as they always have. Though the mystery of her disappearance spurs many nights of discourse in salons, younger Duchagne rarely seem concerned with the Vicomtesse’s absence. They busy themselves with affairs of local politics and furthering their own power. Elder Duchagne, on the other hand, do ponder this mystery, for some fear that Eglatina’s decline and disappearance can’t possibly be as simple as they seem.

Society and Culture

The most basic tie within the Duchagne is the one between esclavagiste and protégée, mentor and student. This relationship is not always known to the future protégée. Indeed, months or years may go by before the student encounters her mentor in person. Many Duchagne choose to become esclavagiste soon after being declared sans entrave — some out of a desire to prove their worth to their sire, others from a deep-seated desire to do unto others as was done to them.

The choice to become a mentor, and possible future sire, is as important to the Duchagne as it is to most Kindred, and not



taken lightly. This is no attempt at a cheap thrill, or search for a subject to unleash petty cruelty upon. The vampire's choice of protégée must be someone worthy of being an addition to the family. Thus, the esclavagiste may spend years searching for the protégée who exhibits the traits the esclavagiste desires. She may even go through several such candidates before settling upon one.

Elder Duchagne weary of crude and visceral ordeals fairly quickly, and seek a more complex and subtle approach. Working from a distance, they manipulate the lives of their protégées. Caresses by unseen hands, moments of sensory loss or even more tangible effects of job loss or diminished resources all become the tools of the esclavagiste's handiwork. A few cunning Bacchantes go after those around the protégée, driving them to the verge of madness. With judicious use of Disciplines, the vampire may even ensure that the protégée gradually grows to anticipate the challenges placed before him.

Once the protégée has shown a satisfactory degree of progress toward the goal of the esclavagiste, a fete is planned in the kine's honor. Close members of the bloodline are invited to this lavish affair where the protégée is introduced to his prospective family. For many potentials, this is the first time they ever come face-to-face with the orchestrator of their ordeals. This bloody party is the final test for the protégée. Should he give into the bacchanal around him, the esclavagiste draws him into the Requiem.

After the Embrace, the dynamics of the relationship change dramatically. The protégée is no longer subjected to trial after trial, but becomes a companion to his sire. For a brief while, the sire lives vicariously through her childe, seeing once again the pleasures in existence that she has forgotten. The protégée still remains under the watchful eye of his esclavagiste during this time, as she trains him not only in the ways of Kindred society but also in the powers within his Blood. As soon as the fledgling is able to master the basics of Licencieux, he is declared sans entrave, or unchained, and is considered a fully independent member of the bloodline.

The Duchagne are often known in Kindred society for the profligate parties they host. These bacchanals push the boundaries of even the most liberal vampire's bloodlust, and toe the line of decency many elders pretend to uphold. Yet, not all gatherings are equal in their extent or purpose.

A majority of social meetings held are salons in which one or two Duchagne invite a select group of Kindred for a private assemblage. These are often filled with political discussion or negotiations for favors advancing the

Duchagne's influence. Generally, a small demonstration is incorporated into the evening as amusement for the guests. This entertainment is also given as a subtle indication of the Bacchante's mentality, displaying openly what depths she is willing to go to get what she wants, and in what ways she is able to get them.

Embraced protégées are allowed to attend these salons, though the motto "be seen, but not heard" is often followed. Although answering questions posed by guests is acceptable, the protégée is there merely to learn, not participate.

Fetes are those gatherings meant mostly for the bloodline's own members. On rare occasions, close allies of the family are invited as well. These are lavish parties held for special occasions, such as the "Déclaration," when a protégée is released from his esclavagiste's care, or the "Adieu" for those Duchagne who have decided to fall into the grip of torpor, escaping the tedium of existence.

Most Kindred, however, only hold witness to the spectacles of the Duchagne Grand Masques. These are the resplendent parties that have given the bloodline their fame. These gatherings are open to all, not just the bloodline, and are often held to celebrate some event of the local Court. They are infamous affairs designed specifically to shock their guests and push them to more libidinous behaviors.

Fetes and Grand Masques present opportunities for the Duchagne to flaunt their abilities before their peers and gain recognition for them. The more brazen and enthralling the soirée is, the more respect given. Because of this, these grand events lead to an escalation of extremes as members attempt to outdo one another.

Due in part to the devotion of energies to these festivities, as well as their own fickle attentions, few Duchagne manage to gain significant positions within the city hierarchy. Those who do take on positions of high rank quickly find their excitement of newfound power dampened by the sheer tediousness of the job's duties.

Licencieux

To some, Licencieux is the greatest achievement of Eglatina du Chagne's focused grief; to others, Licencieux is the stolen secret of *les arts licencieux* shared by the Vicomtesse's unnamed sire. No matter where its true origins lay, Licencieux is the Duchagne's most prized possession. With it, the vampire warps the senses of her prey, manipulating others toward her own perverse goals. Those who have endured its touch are rarely left the same, for the power works upon the very senses of

the target, turning sound, touch and even sight against the subject.

• *Intime*

There are moments when one catches just the slightest hint of a scent, or hears a faint sound in which forgotten memories drift closer to the present. Though rarely clear, they offer a sense of the familiar: the safe warmth of a childhood moment or the creeping dread of a forgotten fear. With but a glance, the Duchagne may inspire this feeling.

These memories need not be known to the Kindred although he must decide which emotion he wishes to inspire. With a successful application of this power, the target automatically associates a sound, smell or other sense with a past memory tied to the determined emotion. While some Duchagne use this to manipulate the emotions of their protégées towards their own perverse enjoyment, many others find that the emotions inspired with Intime gives Vitae an added spice.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Wits + Expression + Licencieux - target's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire using this becomes reminded of some potent loss in his own past, suffering a -1 die penalty to actions for the rest of the scene. The Duchagne may also not use this power against the target for the rest of the night.

Failure: The target feels nothing.

Success: The target has a momentary flash of memory, either good or bad, inspiring the desired association. This adds a +1 die modifier in any roll to manipulate the target for the scene, but only in a manner befitting the type of memory stirred.

Exceptional Success: The target has a flash of memory so intense that it momentarily distracts him. The effect takes place as above, and any action the victim attempts on the next turn suffers a -2 dice penalty (except defending against incoming attack).

•• *La Touche Illusoïre*

Sometimes more than a mere hint of memory is needed to achieve one's desires, something a little less subtle. Whereas the memory of a torrid moment of passion might inspire a flicker of desire, a gentle caress in the right place and time can stoke the furnace of lust into a raging fire. Of course, the opposite is just as true. A panicked or frightened mortal is likely to remain so while being aggressively prodded.

Using this power, the Duchagne may create the illusion of a single touch in a target's mind. This can be the soft stroke of affection, or the sudden slap of anger. The target of La Touche Illusoïre remains physically unharmed, even though she may not believe herself to be. To inflict this sensation upon another, the vampire need only be able to see the target.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Expression + Licencieux versus target's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire attempting the power suffers feels the intended illusion himself. Distracted (and likely annoyed) by the sensation, he suffers a -1 die penalty to any action for the next turn. He may not use this power for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The effect fails to activate.

Success: The target feels either a gentle stroke, a pointed prod or a sharp slap, as directed by the vampire. These cause no damage to the target, but can serve as a distraction, or add to attempts to seduce or intimidate a target. This is a quick sensation, not lasting more than a few seconds at the most. The touch effectively reduces the target's Composure by 1 for the following turn.

Exceptional Success: The Duchagne is able to administer a complex pattern of "touches" that can last for several minutes. The target's Composure is effectively reduced by 2 for the remainder of the scene.

••• *Douleur Agréable*

Pain and pleasure are sensations that are closely associated, and on occasion, the two are intertwined. A cunning Duchagne may carefully sculpt the behavior of others by applying this power judiciously. Victims tend to associate the power's effects with the activity they happen to be engaged in at the time of its activation. A mortal struck with searing pain when he picks up a gun, for instance, is likely to associate the gun with the pain on a subconscious level, and may hesitate to pick the gun up again.

Douleur Agréable gives the Duchagne the ability to wrack a target's body with pain or flood it with a wave of soothing pleasure. The vampire must have a clear view of the subject to enact this ability, and choose exactly whether it is pain or pleasure she wishes to inflict.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Socialize + Licencieux versus target's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Duchagne using this immediately falls into a painful paroxysm, and spends the next turn writhing in agony. He may not use this power again for the remainder of the night.

Failure: The power fails to activate.

Success: The subject is affected by either a wave of intense pleasure or sharp wracking pain throughout his body. The subject is unable to take any action for the next turn, except to defend himself against incoming attack. If the power manifests painfully, the victim may be negatively disposed toward repeating the action taken while under its effects, and may eventually develop a Phobia of the given circumstance. If the power has been used in the same way, under the same circumstances, for a number of times equal to the subject's Composure, the subject must roll Resolve + Composure to avoid developing a Phobia. The derangement, if gained, lasts for a number of nights equal to the successes rolled on activation of the Discipline.

If the power invokes pleasure, the victim may be predisposed toward repeating the action he's currently engaged in, and may eventually develop an Obsessive Compulsion centered on it. If the power has been used in the same way, under the same circumstances, for a number of times equal to the subject's Composure, the subject must roll Resolve + Composure to avoid developing Obsessive Compulsion. The derangement, if gained, lasts for a number of nights equal to the successes rolled on activation of the Discipline.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the victim suffers a -1 die penalty to all actions (except defense) for the remainder of the scene.

•••• *Insensate*

Much can be accomplished through proper stimulation, yet not being able to sense the world around you can become far more tortuous. Sadistic Kindred use this power to cripple their victims, dimming one sense after another in a cycle of sensory deprivation. The Duchagne must speak to the target, mentioning the sense that he intends to affect.

In order to use *Insensate*, the Kindred draws upon his own detachment and "shares" it with the subject. Doing so causes a slight increase in the Duchagne vampire's own separation from his bodily senses.

An afflicted target does not always lose the use of the affected sense completely — some are merely numbed or dimmed significantly. Only the most powerful attack can fully blind or deafen a subject.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Subterfuge + Licencieux versus target's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure:

The vampire dims his own sense, suffering the full effects of the power. Any action he attempts to take that relies upon the sense affected incurs a -2 dice penalty.

Failure: The power fails to take hold.

Success: The victim suffers a penalty to all rolls involving the chosen sense equal to the number of successes made in excess of the victim's. The chosen sense dims significantly — sight fades and blurs, hearing becomes muted, flesh numbs, scent diffuses or taste diminishes. The effect begins to fade immediately, at the rate of one die per turn.

Example: *Gerard of Duchagne uses Insensate on a hapless Gangrel named Carmen, intending to dim her sight. He scores six successes on the activation roll, and Carmen scores three on her resistance roll, so the power activates with a total of 6-3=3 successes. Carmen's vision dims, and she suffers a -3 dice penalty to any sight-related action she takes the following turn. In the turn after that, she suffers a -2 dice penalty and in the turn after that she suffers a -1 die penalty. Once the penalty reaches 0, she no longer feels the effects of the power.*

Exceptional Success: As above. While the imposed penalty is -5 or higher, the subject has no access whatsoever to the target sense and is totally blind, deaf, numb and unable to smell or taste.

This power cannot be used more than once on a single victim per night, by any vampire.

•••• *Jardin d'Agrément*

The pinnacle of Licencieux, *Jardin d'Agrément* allows the Duchagne to create a fully realized fiction that overlaps and competes with the real world, confusing the victim and warping his environment completely. The vampire provides the story, but the target's mind fleshes out the scene, resulting in a surreal, powerfully manipulative vision.

To activate the power, the Duchagne must be able to see the victim, and must choose the emotion he wishes to inspire in her. It can be a simple concept such as love, regret or nostalgia, or it can be more complex, such as "queasy frustration" or "angry, jealous desire." The victim then falls into a growing wash of false input, intermingling with and tainting the real world.

Often, subjects of *Jardin d'Agrément* feel that they are experiencing a potent dream or nightmare, one that

they are unable to wake from. Ordinary encounters are fraught with illogical significance. Normal interactions seem to inspire unexpected emotional responses. The Duchagne does not control what the victim sees, but chooses exactly how it will make the victim feel. An ordinary traffic light can seem forlorn, inspiring feelings of sadness and remorse just by changing colors a little more slowly than normal. The same light might seem to bathe another victim in a warm glow, bestowing a false sense of happiness and security.

Hallucinations caused by this power can be resisted. Any mortal can resist this power for one turn if a Willpower point is spent and a successful Composure roll is made (though the Willpower point does not add three dice to the roll). This roll is reflexive. If the roll fails, the Willpower point is lost, and the target remains under the effects of the power. If the roll is successful, the mortal shakes off the dream-like state for one turn. The power resumes effect on the next turn if the mortal remains in the Kindred's vicinity.

Vampires resist the Jardin d'Agrément in much the same way (by spending a Willpower point), but Blood Potency is added to Composure rolls made for them.

This power can only be used upon one subject at a time.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Subterfuge + Licencieux versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire slips helplessly into a waking dream of his own making and is influenced by the emotion he intended to bring out in his victim. In addition, he cannot use any Licencieux power on the subject for the remainder of the night.

Failure: The power fails to activate.

Success: The subject is overwhelmed by the warping effect of the Jardin d'Agrément, and the whole of his surroundings are suffused with false meaning. Everything he

sees and hears will work toward imposing and multiplying the chosen emotion, completely changing his outlook and making it almost impossible to function normally. A penalty equivalent to the number of successes rolled in excess of the subject's resistance is imposed on all actions (except Defense) that the subject undertakes for the remainder of the scene, and the subject is likely to confuse real input with that of the Jardin.

In addition, any action that seems to run contrary to the prevailing tone of the vision will force a Resolve + Composure check to see if the subject can interpret it properly. A victim caught in a pleasurable vision may not understand an attack until it occurs — likewise, one caught in the throes of a wrathful one may not understand a conciliatory attempt.

Example: *Helene of Duchagne knows that Phillipe of Nosferatu is planning to murder her. When he appears in her haven, she quickly attempts to impose the Jardin d'Agrément, choosing to suffuse his environment with "gentle adoration." Helene's player rolls Intelligence + Subterfuge + Licencieux versus Phillipe's Composure + Blood Potency. She gains three successes more than he, and the Jardin springs to life.*

As Phillipe steps forward, everything he sees takes on a soft, warm glow that evokes feelings of gentle adoration. He looks upon Helene, but instead of seeing her as his hated enemy, he senses only love and peace. He hesitates, choosing not to draw the wooden stake hidden in his jacket.

Helene smiles, and her expression seems the epitome of mildness. Phillipe looks back at the door, unsure, and even it seems pliable and welcoming, seeming to thrum with a calming pulse. Helene draws a stake of her own, but to him the action seems like a sweet demonstration of devotion. When she moves to attack, a successful Resolve + Composure check is all that will allow him to understand what's really happening and defend himself appropriately.

If he succeeds and interprets the attack properly, he will have access to his full defense. He will suffer a -3 dice penalty if he attempts to fight back, though.

Exceptional Success: As above.



NOCTUKU

BY RANDY ULCH

“YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE COME HERE, LITTLE VAMPIRE. HERE, YOU ARE PREY.”

In every culture and region in the world there are stories of cannibalism. Horror stories of survival on the edge of starvation and monsters that hunt and eat the flesh of men. The Kindred have cannibal tales of their own: whispered rumors of the dread Noctuku, Nosferatu who take pleasure in hunting their Kindred cousins and eating the dead flesh that hangs from their bones.

These stories are passed along with the same excitement and fear as an urban legend or a ghost story — tales told of Noctuku dwelling on the edges of a city, waiting for Kindred to stray too far from the shelter of the Prince’s law. Kindred in larger domains scoff at mentions of the Noctuku, taking them to be rumors fueled by fearful neonates or worse, a competitor’s attempts to hide her crimes behind an old ghost story. Those who reside closer to the hidden haven of a Noctuku live in fear of the dark, for the Noctuku are very real.

Myth and rumor surround the Noctuku. It is believed that they may have existed long before the advent of the covenants, and that they may not be a bloodline at all; tales are told of Nosferatu who have spontaneously exhibited the hunger of the Noctuku following the diablerie of another. What is known is that many Nosferatu fear that they, too, will feel the pull of the Noctuku within their veins. Whether there is truth in these words, or merely more fairy tales told to scare young Nosferatu away from violating the Third Tradition is unknown. However, there have never been any reliable records of the founder of this bloodline, and the stories of the Noctuku are remembered by elders who have existed for centuries. Indeed, Kindred on many continents share tales of the cannibalistic Noctuku bogeymen who stalk the night; however, no single domain claims that they hold the origins of this strange and barbaric bloodline.

Any vampire who identifies herself as Noctuku is sure to face severe difficulties in Kindred society. The act



of consuming the flesh of vampires is seen as tantamount to that of diablerie — the temptation to consume the soul along with the body too great a risk. Cannibalism is just as much a taboo among vampires as in mortal society, and predators do not like the feeling of being hunted any more than mortals do. Most Kindred react violently when presented with the reality of the Noctuku.

The Noctuku themselves are perfectly comfortable with violent response. In their eyes, they are the apex predator — the elite among a killing race, capable of hunting and destroying hapless mortals and experienced vampires alike. In fact, the more powerful their Kindred opponent, the more likely that Noctuku will engage in the hunt with enthusiasm, savoring the challenge of the kill. Some encroach upon established vampire domains, knowing full well that doing so will draw conflict from their own kind. They chew a hole through reputable Kindred Courts, clashing with the agents of Princes with gleeful abandon.

Younger Noctuku — those who have yet to lose themselves to the cannibalistic hunger of the line — argue that all Kindred hunt their own when they consume the blood of mortals. The Noctuku believe that the Noctuku represent the pinnacle of all predators, feeding from Kindred just as ordinary Kindred hunt mortals — for survival, for power and for sport.

Parent Clan: Nosferatu

Nickname: Bogeymen

Covenant: The Noctuku find roles within the covenants that allow them to practice their taboo discipline and feed without the threat of a death sentence. The Circle of the Crone seems to appeal to the Noctuku the most; with its arcane practices, rituals and belief that it is above mortal taboos, the covenant is in many ways the only one that will accept the bloodline for everything that it is. In isolated domains, the Circle of the Crone has come to

Developer's Comments

Apex predators, hunting and tormenting Kindred for sport? Rumors that induction in the line happens spontaneously to diablerist Nosferatu? How could we resist? This entry was far and away the most monstrous and disturbing of all we received, for any of the bloodlines offered across the board. Great story hooks were scattered throughout, painting the Noctuku as an ideal line for non-player antagonists, and an interesting choice for advanced players hoping to up the stakes on exploration of Man versus Beast themes in a game.

If each bloodline is meant to distill some appealing part of a clan's thematic focus, then the Noctuku are clearly an exploration of the horrendous inhumanity of the hunter who has no appreciation for the suffering of his prey. They stand, not only as a fearsome threat to other Kindred, but also as a warning: stay virtuous, or you may well end up just like them.

The line went through a couple of revisions, fleshing out their history and culture (and offering up an example of the Noctuku society that can result under the right conditions) while streamlining their signature Discipline so that it conveyed the concept of the apex predator bloodline most faithfully. I think the result is incredibly compelling.

venerate the Noctuku for their unique ability to survive in even the harshest terrain, an example of their true communion with nature and their role as the top predators.

Those few Noctuku who join or remain in the Invictus following their bloody admission into this bloodline find their perverse hunger a liability that they must hide from their more delicate cousins. Concealing their cannibalistic tendencies behind a veneer of civility eventually grates on them, especially when surrounded by so many sources of Vitae-infused flesh on a nightly basis. Only the strict rigid structure of etiquette gives any of the Invictus Noctuku hope of maintaining humanity, giving them a crutch to lean on when the hunger calls.

While the promise of transcending the vampire condition appeals to a few Noctuku, the scholarly approach of the Ordo Dracul is foreign to the majority of Bogeymen. Most members of the covenant will not tolerate these violent and predatory Kindred, and few Noctuku manage to retain membership for long. Furthermore, the records of the Ordo Dracul in several cities warn against fraternizing with members of this line, alluding to incidences of uncontrollable violence and diablerie within the walls of academies foolish enough or hopeful enough to admit these monsters.

The Lancea Sanctum faces a unique dichotomy when the truth of a Noctuku is revealed — while the Sanctified praise the role of the ultimate predator, they decry the evils of diablerie and believe that the practices of the Noctuku will lead to greater sin. Thus, few members of the line openly join the Lancea Sanctum for fear of becoming a lightning rod for the pulpits of all manner of Kindred gospel.

Noctuku are also rare among the Carthians, as the Noctuku's perverse diet tends to alienate the very bonds that the Carthians seek to foster with other Kindred. The Carthians may simply express their pity for the Noctuku's plight and move on into the night or, worse, attempt to destroy any they encounter to satisfy their sense of justice.

Appearance: Noctuku dress in comfortable clothing, usually only a few months or years off the standard fashion for the mortals in their domains. Many Noctuku differ little physically from their Nosferatu cousins, which allows for an easier hunt. Only with time does the difference begin to display itself: Noctuku often appear slightly more gaunt and pale than other Nosferatu, and as the Noctuku age, they make little effort to appear lifelike, taking on the pallor of a walking corpse.

Haven: Residing in domains worldwide, from the edges of great cities to the rural wastes beset by competing horrors, the Noctuku are a hardy line, finding purchase in any nook that can protect them from the sun and allow them to stalk their prey. Lone Noctuku take up functional havens in out-of-the-way locations that will not raise suspicion, yet still allow them to be close enough to the mortal and Kindred populations to hunt with ease. Places such as animal slaughterhouses and butcher shops tend to mask the special diet that the Noctuku indulge in. Many of the havens of the Noctuku are eventually piled with the flesh and bones of their victims. Some are ghoulishly decorated with these remains, arranged with perverse tableaux of torn limbs and skeletal fragments.

Those Noctuku who remain part of Kindred society tend to live in small havens with only the basic ameni-

ties. Not the types to crave lavish surroundings, most Noctuku seek out the most basic aspects of what they need to survive their Requiems, focusing on safety and mobility over comfort.

When Noctuku form family coterries called “clutches,” they build functional havens similar to their more solitary brothers and sisters, with separate sleeping areas for their acolytes that commonly feature reinforced doors and locks on the outside so that the eldest

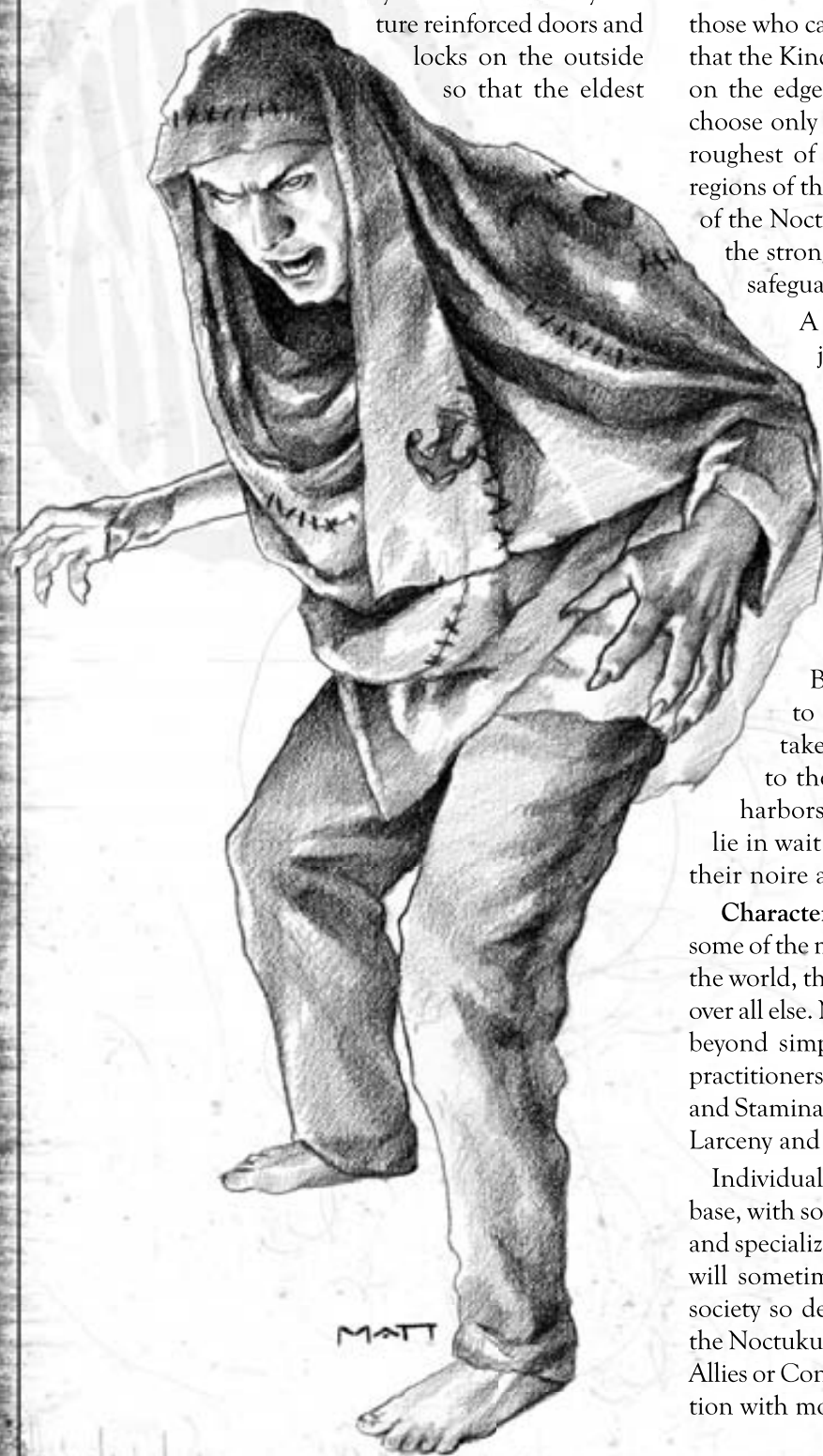
among them can then secure them to prevent any accidental attacks against other Noctuku.

Background: Most Noctuku are made of converts from their parent clan, those Nosferatu who are either drawn by the promise of secrets best left unrevealed or by necessity when they are driven from the luxury of the city. Due to the hunger that consumes them, many Noctuku who do Embrace from mortal stock choose those who can stomach the mental and spiritual stresses that the Kindred of the line must endure nightly. Living on the edge of Kindred and mortal society, Noctuku choose only those who are used to surviving under the roughest of conditions. In some of the more remote regions of the world, where there is also a mortal history of the Noctuku’s practices, they tend to Embrace from the strongest and fittest, creating warriors who then safeguard their mortal cousins from outsiders.

A Nosferatu rarely petitions a Noctuku to join the line; rather, a Noctuku Avus will select a Nosferatu whom the Noctuku feel has the mental and spiritual fortitude to survive the hunger and then go about slowly destroying any ties and connections that the Nosferatu enjoys. Newly adoptive Noctuku choose solitary Requiems out of a sense of necessity, usually because they have yet to truly accept their darker natures and embrace the true Beast within them. When Noctuku choose to live solitary lifestyles, they tend to either take to the road as nomads or push themselves to the very edge of civilization. Any place that harbors mortal souls could harbor Noctuku who lie in wait for the next unsuspecting victim to fall to their noire appetite.

Character Creation: With their need to survive in some of the most inhospitable terrain for Kindred around the world, the Noctuku tend to favor Physical Attributes over all else. Noctuku find little need for Social Attributes beyond simple Intimidation, and the most successful practitioners of Phagia have respectable levels of Strength and Stamina along with a strong background in Survival, Larceny and Medicine.

Individual Noctuku vary in their skill and knowledge base, with some even reveling in their roles as Bogeymen and specializing in Nightmare as well as Phagia. Noctuku will sometimes keep a Retainer, usually a member of society so debased or corrupted that he willingly feeds the Noctuku’s perverse hunger. The Noctuku rarely have Allies or Contacts, and almost never keep up communication with mortals at all.



A clutch of Noctuku tends to pool its resources to benefit all, which usually means that the eldest benefits from the younger members' hard work. Shared havens are common and even recommended with clutches, so that the bloodline elders can watch over their adoptive childer like wardens.

Bloodline Disciplines: Nightmare, Obfuscate, *Phagia*, Vigor

Weakness: In addition to the normal Nosferatu weakness, the Noctuku develop a dark hunger for the flesh of their prey. Nosferatu

who join the Noctuku bloodline soon find that the taste of blood alone does not sate their hunger, that until they consume the raw flesh of their prey, the Beast inside them does not subside. If they do not indulge the hunger for the raw, unspoiled flesh of their victims at least once a week, they are -1 on all Mental and Social dice rolls and require an additional success on hunger frenzies. For each week that passes thereafter without satisfying this hunger, these penalties increase by 1. If they fall to hunger frenzy while suffering this effect, they will attack and consume the flesh of the nearest victim, preferring Kindred to mortal flesh and human flesh to that of animals.

Note that Noctuku are no more capable of digesting meat than any other vampire. When they eat flesh, they will regurgitate it almost immediately. It is the simple act of consumption that satisfies their ghastly urge.

Organization: Most Noctuku eventually become solitary monsters, keeping to themselves out of necessity. When they do gather in any numbers larger than sire and childe or Avus and Acolyte, they tend to bow to the eldest and most powerful among them, generally adopting subservient mannerisms to prevent unwanted attacks. In the small clutches of Noctuku that share the hunt, the organization is similar: graduating respect paid to those with more power and experience. The clutches tend to keep a tightly knit community, and many Noctuku who feel the need for social ties without having to hide their depravity flock to them.

In most domains, the gatherings of Noctuku are subject to the simple philosophies of competitive survival and domination through strength. When a new Nosferatu is brought into a clutch, she endures weeks or months of physical trial, either proving herself worthy of the Blood or falling to the gnashing teeth of her compatriots.

Concepts: Hungry drifter, corrupt mortician, Embraced bushman, rural parish priest, freak show monster, serial killer, creepy cab driver, underground doctor, pathetic loner, blood-crusted trucker, and depraved cult leader.

HISTORY ANCIENT ORIGINS

The Noctuku's true origins are lost to the sands of time. Mortal archeologists have confirmed signs of cannibalistic attacks on the dead in Neolithic caves in Europe, and some Kindred believe these attacks bear the mark of the Noctuku.

Myths of the Noctuku — or something similar to them — abound, and seem to date back throughout both Kindred and mortal history. Many scholars debate the attribution of these legends, though, pointing out that every tale of Kindred cannibalism seems to be linked to the Noctuku, whether there is evidence of their involvement or not. Others, however, point to a more frightening legend: that Nosferatu who engage in the eating of Kindred flesh are said to spontaneously become Noctuku; habitual cannibalism may, in fact, be all that it takes for a Haunt to become one.

ROME AND THE DARK AGES

The stories that have survived from the Roman times, left ragged by the passage of time, have long been folded into the myths of the Noctuku. It is whispered that the line may have truly originated in Rome, but the stories are confused, and may be conflated with those of the flesh-eating Macellarius. It is believed that several clutches of Noctuku existed on the fringe of Roman society, vicious predators hunting at the edge of the Kindred territories and picking off vampires exiled by the Princes of Rome. The bloodline is said to have thrived in the nights following the collapse of the Camarilla, running rampant among the confused Kindred, sowing chaos and feeding with wild abandon.

Historical evidence seems to suggest that the Noctuku gleefully dogged a number of fleeing groups of Kindred, following them to the edges of Europe and devouring those who lagged behind or were otherwise vulnerable. The infamous clutches of Scandinavia were founded in those nights, ultimately destroying the Roman Kindred who hoped to find a new home there and claiming the territories for themselves in bloody triumph.

Legends of the Noctuku grew during the nights of the Dark Ages, even as their activity seems to have diminished. Many established domains began to force out members of the line as they were discovered, suffering terrible losses in the process. Their fierceness and malicious power inspired panicked edicts against the consumption of flesh — some of which remain in European domains to this night. In some places, though, their strength and murderous will earned the respect of warlike Kindred

who chose to employ them, engaging in subtle machinations that would place them along key roads into and out of a domain so that they could protect the cities and satisfy their hunger by feeding upon nomad invaders. The first records of Noctuku in service to the Invictus arise from this practice in several domains in and around modern-day Romania and the Ukraine.

THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The Age of Enlightenment began as a period of great success for the Noctuku. As the mortals and Kindred of Europe were driven to exploration and discovery, the predatory vampires of the line followed suit, freely feeding upon expeditionary forces and then settling into new domains, waiting for the investigations that would surely follow. They spread throughout the known world in this way, establishing clutches in the New World, Africa and East Asia.

Thriving in the wars of colonization and enriching themselves on the blood and souls of relatively weak Kindred fleeing old domains, many Noctuku became uncommonly powerful, establishing themselves as a horrible force in their outposts.

Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that Noctuku clutches may have been responsible for delaying or destroying Kindred settlement in some domains. Sanctified pilgrims traveling through the Dutch South African colony at the Cape of Good Hope in the early

17th century noted the general absence of Kindred at the port station, but did find a small hollow filled with bones and ash near the settlement. One Mekhet priest identified the detritus as Kindred remains, and later came to believe that he had unwittingly stumbled into the lair of a slumbering Noctuku.

Ordo Dracul records indicate that the first Kindred to establish a domain in Providence, Rhode Island, were dogged by a Noctuku hunter. Stalked throughout the first half of the 18th century, the creature was captured and ultimately destroyed by the civilized vampires of Providence in one well-documented confrontation that sent the first Prince of the domain to his Final Death.

However, with the expansive victories of the line came an unforeseen crisis. Cut loose from the restrictions of old Kindred society, many of the line drove themselves into a mad frenzy of diablerie, falling forever to the temptations of the Beast. Many Noctuku Draugr arose during the nights of the 18th and 19th centuries, and many were destroyed by their own kin in self-defense. The numbers of the bloodline dwindled as constant battles were fought between members. Many who were not felled by their own kin went on to face outsider Kindred who

redoubled their efforts to establish themselves in the new mortal domains, and few survived.

MODERN NIGHTS

Modern nights find the Noctuku relegated to urban legend in most domains, which is exactly what the surviving members of the line prefer. Now, as the majority of Kindred relate stories of the bloodline in abstract terms, believing they are simple myths meant to discourage diablerie, the vampires of the Noctuku hunt and feed, vicious and skillful as ever.

It is known that the Prince of one Russian city employs a clutch of Noctuku as a brutally effective border patrol, allowing them to feed upon the nomad coterie that stray too close to his domain (as well as the occasional exiled criminal). The disgust and indignation that the Noctuku's activities provoke are balanced by a wary fear, and they operate undisturbed.

A number of Ordo Dracul Academies have noticed increased Noctuku activity throughout eastern North America in recent years. Some researchers believe that the increased sprawl of cities and the tendency among some Princes to relegate suburban feeding grounds to younger and less established Kindred are combining to create ideal circumstances for the fringe-dwelling Noctuku.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Solitary Noctuku who still cling to the shreds of Humanity left to them hide their true blood lineage within clutches of Nosferatu or other Kindred who face dangerous hardships. Some exist as nomads, covering their dark hunger and pretending to a semblance of civility while enjoying the company of others; these Noctuku attempt to push back the ever-present hunger for the flesh of their compatriots, tamping down the temptations with the thrill and challenge of the open road. But sooner or later, every Noctuku is forced to come face-to-face with his perverse urges and risks turning upon his friends and allies. Thus, the nightly existence of the solitary Noctuku is one of lies and deceit or rabid hunting and fighting to fulfill the hunger that gnaws at him.

While lone Noctuku cannot be said to participate in any traditions or practices of the bloodline per se, they do often follow a pattern of behavior that has been well marked by those who observe them. Once they establish a haven that is well defended, they begin to hunt and feed in a growing outward spiral, festooning their home with trophies and the remains of their victims. When they encounter other members of the line, they often veer away, leaving one another to their own territory. Some will attack their brethren, but only if they are

starved for a challenge, or, as is occasionally the case with young Noctuku, overcome with a sense of revulsion. Conflict with other Kindred is inevitable, though — sooner or later, the Noctuku is bound to violate the feeding grounds of a vampire, and the response is likely to be immediate. Knowing full well that the hunt will be joined soon enough, most members of the line see no need to engage their own kind.

Sometimes the only salve to the madness of this existence is to gather with other Noctuku in clutches, working together to hunt and feed and prepare for the unavoidable clash with other Kindred. Small clutches often maintain status within one of the covenants as a defense against prosecution, working as enforcers or guardians within a domain.

A few rare clutches have grown into organized forces of their own, actually playing significant roles in domain politics. The Noctuku of certain Scandinavian domains have developed a whole set of evolving rules and strictures of their own, established through centuries of existence. These clutches are rigidly controlled by the eldest and most powerful Noctuku among them, called a Majikan. The Majikan is the supreme leader of his Kindred — acting as a parental figure, religious advisor or judge, jury and executioner in service to the Invictus, overseeing the whole of his clutch and inheriting the practice of delegating titles and tasks to his inferiors from the covenant as a whole. The Majikan defines the rules of etiquette for his clutch, such as forbidding the Noctuku from feeding on each other but actively promoting the consumption of mortals or Kindred. The Majikan is not always the most skilled in the understanding of Phagia, leaving that role to the Corazo, or heart of the clutch. The Domus, or home guard, is placed in charge of haven security and maintaining the secrecy of the clutch. In a sense, these members of the clutch are its own secret police, as well as a sort of butler or caretaker of the communal haven. The Servus is a role often given to several Noctuku, charging them with finding sources of food. They excel in tracking potential prey, mortal and Kindred, and gathering them without alerting the locals to the presence of the Noctuku. Whether or not this complicated set of duties and titles seems natural for the Noctuku, the long-term survival of the Scandinavian clutches is undeniably evident, and may one night set the standard for the bloodline. For now, it remains rare to see a clutch so organized.

When a Nosferatu is chosen to become a member of the Noctuku — for only the most debased petition a Noctuku elder to join the bloodline — her Avus slowly drives her toward darker and more perverse feeding practices by

corrupting her connections to the mortal and Kindred worlds. Sometimes, the Avus drives other Kindred to attack the Nosferatu, forcing a physical confrontation that all too often leads to frenzy, Vitae addiction or, worse, diablerie. The Avus is careful to not show herself too early and to not reveal any information connecting her to the Noctuku as too many proto-Noctuku turn upon their new brethren in a frustrated release of hunger. The Noctuku Avus waits until he believes the Nosferatu is ready to survive the rigors of the hunger and then confronts her with the reality of her potential, if only they allow her to truly feel the hunger of the Beast that claws within her. If the Nosferatu refuses, then the Noctuku merely cuts his losses and attempts to consume the failed inductee.

The nightly routine of the Noctuku is as varied as the organization of the bloodline itself. Those who throw in with the Circle of the Crone are very active within the covenant, participating in rituals with unparalleled enthusiasm. Noctuku Acolytes usually serve as a sort of secret weapon for the Crone, literally consuming any competition in service to the covenant. Entire clutches of Noctuku ritualize the hunt, turning the consumption of Kindred and mortal flesh into a twisted means of worship.

Young Noctuku never want to become what they really know they are — monsters that stalk their own kind. However, they are almost always lured by other Noctuku into experiencing the ecstatic pleasures derived from the consumption of human and Kindred flesh and are lost to chasing the high, just as so many other addicts, ignoring their own growing monstrosity and reveling in the thrill of power. Is the cost ever enough to compare to the gain? A Noctuku would be hard-pressed to tell.

With this denial heaped onto the raw hunger for mortal and Kindred flesh, elders of the line can be surprisingly strict when it comes to the Traditions and frown on a flagrant disregard of their wisdom, usually because it usually encourages other vampires to rise up and destroy the bloodline. Most discover that it is better to remain just shy of breaking the laws of Kindred, using the veneer of lawful obedience to protect them from wholesale persecution . . . so long as they can manage it. These Noctuku observe a kind of double Masquerade with their Kindred cousins for the very same reasons the Kindred do with mortals: it is better to hunt an unsuspecting prey than one who knows the truth.

PHAGIA

The greatest secret that the Noctuku harbor with their semi-solitary requiem is that of Phagia, a unique discipline that the Noctuku have developed, expressing their

true nature as apex predators in the world of Kindred. Noctuku scholars believe that Phagia was born of the dark hunger that all of the bloodline struggle with on a nightly basis, while others hypothesize that Phagia was simply born of necessity great power attending the hunger of the bloodline, strengthening the Bogeymen even as it encourages them to greater and greater depravity. Phagia is a dark art that is drawn from deep within the Noctuku's predatory souls, empowering and entrapping them for all time.

• GNASHING MAW

The vicious potential of the Noctuku shows itself in the very first expression of Phagia, allowing vampires to draw sustenance from flesh even as they rend it with their fangs. When most Kindred latch onto a victim with their teeth, they may choose whether to drink blood or do lethal damage by gnawing further. The Noctuku can do both at once, tearing through his victim and feeding at the same time.

The Gnashing Maw can be used to take blood from the corpse of a recently deceased mortal or animal, assuming there is any left in the system, drawing the blood from the torn vessels in the flesh itself. The blood will only be useful if the creature has died within the last hour or so — after that, the blood begins to break down.

This power does not involve any physical transformation on the part of the Noctuku. He is simply a more efficient predator than most, pulling the blood from his victims even as he tears them apart.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Strength + Survival + Phagia

Action: Reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure:

The Noctuku fails to use the power, accidentally disengaging from the victim without doing damage or draining blood, wasting his action for the turn.

Failure: The Noctuku fails to use the power, and must choose either to drink blood or to deal damage as normal.

Success: The Noctuku drains one point of Vitae and deals lethal bite damage to his victim, chewing through her flesh even as he drinks. If the wound is inflicted upon a mortal, it will be mangled and may disfigure the person permanently.

Exceptional Success: The bite of the Noctuku does an extra level of lethal damage while draining a point of Vitae.

•• RASPING FLESH

When this level of Phagia develops, the Noctuku's flesh changes to a rasping, rough surface covered in microscopic ridges that allow him to ingest blood through any point on his body. Anyone who feels the flesh of the Noctuku will notice the unusual texture, but those who have never seen this power in use may assume that

the flesh is a deformity of the Nosferatu, failing to understand its true purpose.

Because of the great increase in available intake area for feeding, the Noctuku can now drain two points of Vitae from a victim in a single round, as long as

the Noctuku maintains enough flesh-to-flesh contact (at least twice as much as the area of his open mouth).

Many Noctuku who develop this power choose to wear as little clothing as possible, maximizing the potential feeding surface of their bodies. Some eschew garments completely, while others prefer to wear cloaks or coats that are easy to tear away at appropriate moments. Those more concerned with maintaining a semblance of humanity (whether for psychological or tactical reasons) are likely to remain fully dressed though, leaving just their forearms or feet bare for potential use in battle.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll, and is considered “always on.” The character may turn it off if he wishes, but doing so requires a successful Resolve + Composure roll, which renders the power inaccessible for the duration of the scene. If the power is off, the character's flesh returns to its ordinary state and feels no different from any other vampire's.

Action: n/a

••• BLOODY CACHE

Empowered by the force of his hunger itself, the Noctuku can invoke this power to prepare and preserve the stolen flesh of his victims, imbuing it with unnatural longevity and storing it for later consumption.

Kindred with this power tend to litter their havens with the torn limbs of their prey, relying upon Bloody Cache to sate their hunger when hunting is too dangerous or inconvenient to engage in. So long as the power is in effect, the limbs appear fresh, and do not seem to decompose.

This power can be used once for each victim of Size 5 or less, although the body must be torn into pieces of Size 1 each. The power does not imbue flesh with additional blood — there will only be as much in the limbs as was left in the victim when it died.



.... MORTAL BALM

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Survival + Phagia

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attempt to imbue the flesh fails, and the Noctuku actually expends an additional point of Vitae in the process, doubling the cost of his failure. He may not attempt to use this power on these remains in the future.

Failure: The power fails to activate, and the retained limbs provide no sustenance in the future.

Success: The limbs and the blood within them are successfully preserved. For each success rolled, they remain edible for one night (so, for example, three successes on the roll would allow the Noctuku to gain sustenance from the limbs for up to three nights after the activation of the power). To access the blood within the limbs, the Noctuku must devour the flesh. Even if the Noctuku regurgitates it immediately, the blood within will be drawn out and ingested.

Only a Noctuku with this power can gain sustenance from the limbs so preserved; the Bloody Cache entails the ability to both extend the sustainability of the flesh and the ability to benefit from it.

Exceptional Success: The limbs are preserved for a number of nights equal to *twice* the number of successes rolled.

It is said in many cultures that the flesh and blood are the body of the soul, and when someone dies, her body becomes an empty shell, rotting slowly away until nothing remains. The Noctuku have discovered through their perverse rituals that the body that remains — when properly prepared — can act as protective armor. The Noctuku removes the skin of the victim, preparing it like the hide of an animal, and can then drape it over himself for protection. The flesh becomes a leathery, ablative casing, protecting the vampire from the rays of the sun, the heat of flames or other attacks. This cured hide is heavy and semi-flexible, trading freedom of motion for protection.

Mortals and Kindred who encounter a Noctuku wearing the hide may not understand exactly what it is that they're seeing. Most will mistake it for poorly prepared or hastily stitched leather unless they get a good chance to look it over. An observer attempting to identify it must garner a success on a Wits + Academics roll. Those who wish to identify the person (or specific creature) the hide came from will have to take the opportunity to examine it at length, acquiring a number of successes (as directed by the Storyteller) on an extended Intelligence + Investigation or Intelligence + Science roll. A Noctuku can choose to make identification more difficult by working or warping the hide (represented by a further Dexterity + Crafts roll, adding to the number of successes required on the extended forensic attempt).

Rather than sacrificing mobility for protection on a hunt, most Noctuku will keep a supply of prepared hides in their havens, sleeping under a pile of them for safety.

The process of preparation takes one night for each hide – the skin must be removed from the victim, scraped, dried and mystically imbued with the vampire's will. Putting on the hide takes one turn.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Crafts + Phagia

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hide produced is worthless, and the vampire exhausts herself in the process of attempting to activate the power, expending an additional point of Willpower.

Failure: The hide does not preserve properly, and will provide no protection.

Success: The hide is preserved, transforming it, for all intents and purposes, into armor with the following qualities: Rating 2/2, Strength 2, Defense -1, Speed -1. The hide can be layered, as with normal armor, with the attendant addition of bonuses and penalties.

If the hide absorbs two points of damage, the hide disintegrates immediately and cannot be used again. The hide will absorb aggravated damage caused by sunlight or flame as well as that of normal attacks, so long as the whole of the Noctuku's body (or whichever part is exposed to the damage-dealing factor) is wrapped in the hide.

Exceptional Success: The hide produced has the following qualities instead of those listed above: Rating 3/3, Strength 2, Defense -1, Speed 0.

••••• BLOOD COMPULSION

Perfecting her understanding of Phagia, the Noctuku becomes a truly favored predator, literally attracting blood to her flesh as if by some impossibly magnetic force. Blood running freely will turn toward the Noctuku, even if it runs counter to gravity, flowing around barriers and through cracks to get to the vampire. Even that contained within flesh will push toward the Noctuku, forming livid bruises under the skin of the living and rising uncontrollably to the surface of a vampire's body.

This ghastly attraction is a truly terrifying effect, and many who witness it are unlikely to forget the sight for as long as they live.

Unrestricted blood will flow toward the Noctuku with unnatural velocity, moving at the vampire's Speed rating.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Strength + Survival + Phagia (versus target's Stamina + Blood Potency if turned upon a victim)

Action: Instant/Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The magnetic lure of the vampire's body goes awry, tugging at her own Vitae. She spends one point uncontrollably, wasting it, and cannot make use of this power again for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The power fails to activate.

Success: The power is activated, affecting an area dictated by the number of successes achieved on the roll:

Successes	Radius of Effect
1 success	1 yard
2 successes	2 yards
3 successes	5 yards
4 successes	10 yards
5+ successes	30 yards

All of the free blood within the area of effect will flow toward the vampire at a rate equal to her Speed (without modifiers). Blood that is held within sealed containers and unable to flow freely will press up against the side nearest the vampire, as if searching for holes or cracks to pass through.

To turn the power upon a mortal victim, the Noctuku must touch him to activate it. The victim suffers levels of lethal damage equal to the number of successes achieved on the roll as dark bruises appear on the side of his body closest to the vampire. These bruises fade when the damage from the power is healed normally. If the victim bears an open wound, blood will flow profusely from it.

If the power is turned upon a vampire, touch is still necessary. The power forces the vampire to expend a point of Vitae for each success rolled on the activation roll, bringing the blood uselessly to the surface of the skin in an emulation of the "blush of health" effect.

Exceptional Success: As above.

This power can only be directed at one living or undead target at a time. Once used successfully on a victim, Blood Compulsion cannot be applied against him again in the scene by any vampire.

DEVOTIONS APPALLING LURE

(Majesty ••••, Phagia •••)

Many of the lairs of the Noctuku are festooned with the remnants of their victims; torn limbs and broken bones are scattered about in a terrible display. With this power, these discards are transformed, setting and baiting a trap for unsuspecting Kindred.

When the Noctuku activates this power, he distributes the remains in a pattern that, though it seems random, is actually meticulously constructed to attract attention. The

first vampire who notices one of the limbs — even if it's only partially visible — will feel a strange, dreamlike attraction to it, and may find himself wandering over to have a closer look, even if he knows it might be a bad idea.

At least five limbs of Size 1 or greater must be scattered for the lure to work, in a radius no more than 10 feet from a chosen center.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Majesty versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

The lure is sprung the moment any vampire looks at it (except for the one who set it) — it cannot be set to attract a specific target and ignore others. The activation roll is made when the lure is first set, and the resistance roll is made when the lure is noticed.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The lure activates properly, and is immediately discharged by the presence of the Noctuku. The Vitae for activation is wasted, and the Noctuku stands rooted to the spot, mesmerized by his own creation. He cannot act for the next 10 minutes, or until he is attacked (whichever comes first).

Failure: The lure fails to activate. The Noctuku intently senses this failure, and may attempt to set the snare again.

Success: The trap is set. The victim who is affected is compelled to approach the center of the pattern by the most direct path possible, not stopping until he reaches it. Even those who are fearful or sense danger will be helpless to resist the lure — although they may be perfectly aware that trouble is lurking, and will be able to defend themselves normally if attacked.

Exceptional Success: It is possible to have more than one Appalling Lure active at once. This power does not affect mortals. If the lure is not activated by the next sunrise, its power fades.

This power costs 21 experience points to learn.

THE WARDING FLESH

(Nightmare ••, Phagia ••••)

When a Noctuku makes use of the prepared skin of the Mortal Balm, he is shielding himself against physical assault in the monstrous way of his line. But there

are those who take the construction of the Balm further than most, working it and displaying it in a manner that is most offensive — and most frightening — to those who look upon it.

Those who see the hanging flesh of the Balm (whether worn by the Noctuku or not) can be made to suffer a nameless fear, subconsciously realizing what it is made of, and how it came to be.

Some of the Noctuku make use of this power to warn intruders away from their lairs. A well-placed hide may dissuade those who seek to enter, and those who manage to push past it are likely to suffer its effects, shaking their resolve for the battle that is sure to follow.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + Phagia versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency. (The Nosferatu Clan weakness does not apply to this activation roll.)

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

The activation roll is made for The Warding Flesh when it is placed (or first worn). The resistance roll is made the first time a sentient creature, mortal, Kindred or other, looks upon The Warding Flesh. It will not trigger when the Noctuku sees it.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Ward fails, and those who look upon it are actually steeled in their determination, knowing that they face a true monster. All of their rolls in opposition to the Noctuku gain a +1 die bonus for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The Ward fails to activate. The onlookers react as normal.

Success: The scene is suffused with an oppressive atmosphere of fear, per the Nightmare power "Dread" (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 133). All those present must make the reflexive roll against the power, and those who fail it suffer a -2 dice penalty on all actions for the remainder of the scene (or for as long as the skin remains visible), due to a rising panic.

Exceptional Success: As above, but each victim present also loses a Willpower point.

The penalty imposed by The Warding Flesh is not cumulative with that of Dread — if one is in use, victims will not feel more frightened by the other.

This power costs 21 experience points to learn.

Rötgrafen

By Ty Bjarnason

"Sorry, lad, but if you've actually seen the ships then it's already far too late."

From the frozen shores of Northern Europe to the warm beaches of the Caribbean, tales exist of terrifying invaders from the sea. Attacking without warning and without mercy, the Sea Kings claimed domain over the entire ocean. No coastal community was ever safe. The Sea Kings appeared at night. Ghost ships, emerging from the mists, without any apparent crew. If the townsfolk were lucky, the Sea Kings would be gone before sunrise, leaving a handful dead and a few missing. If the townsfolk were unlucky, the assault could last for weeks.

The Rötgrafen bloodline was founded nearly 1,000 years ago by Sigrún Ericsdottir, a woman who claimed to be the illegitimate daughter of Eric the Red. Through a series of lies, manipulations and outright killings, she was responsible for the deaths of more than two dozen people during an expedition to what is now L'Anse aux Meadows on the Canadian Atlantic coast. Two groups of explorers left Greenland together, determined to settle a rumored paradise discovered by wayward sailors. One group, led by Sigrún and her husband, returned a year later. The second group was never seen again.

Sigrún's manipulations started innocently enough; she lied just enough to ensure that her crew ended up with the prime location for a settlement. She was, after all, just looking out for those who sailed with her. Her desire for power slowly grew, and as it did, her thoughts darkened. She began to view the second group of settlers not as comrades united in purpose but as rivals, leeching away that which should be hers. Hatred boiled in her chest, much of it focused on the brothers, Sindri and Tryggvi, who were leading the other explorers. And so it was that she set forth one night, alone and unseen, to deliver an ultimatum to the brothers: leave now or die. Sindri and Tryggvi did not react the way Sigrún had envisioned: they scoffed at her and suggested that she cut down on



her drinking. Enraged, she stormed back to her own settlement, setting in motion the events that would lead to her eventual damnation. She told her husband that she had gone to visit Sindri and Tryggvi to arrange a feast, but she had overheard them plotting to kill her and all those who followed her. Sigrún demanded vengeance, and she led her sailors as they stormed the other settlement, killing all the men while they were still in bed. However, the sailors' code of honor prevented them from attacking unarmed Viking women.

Completely caught up in a blood fury, Sigrún grabbed an axe and killed the women herself while they huddled together, screaming for mercy.

Sigrún and her followers were eventually forced to flee North America, after her plot to poison indigenous people failed to kill as many of them as she anticipated. During the return voyage, she threatened to kill anyone who mentioned what had happened to Sindri and Tryggvi's crew. However, some of the men felt ashamed of what they had done, and upon returning to Greenland, confessed their deeds. Sigrún was banished from the island, but it would seem that her reign of carnage was only just beginning.

Sigrún wound up in Norway, where the tales of her crimes preceded her. Her ruthlessness caught the attention of a local Ventrue, and she was Embraced within days of arriving. Unfortunately, her sire did not wait to obtain the local Sanctified Prince's permission beforehand, and Sigrún found herself banished again, this time lashed to a ship with her sire and cast adrift to meet the morning sun.

A few years later, reports of midnight raids against Sanctified domains started surfacing all over the coast of the Baltic and North Seas. Eyewitness accounts all mentioned the arrival of a seemingly empty longship, shrouded in mist, floating off the shoreline shortly before the attacks commenced. The raids were well

Developer's Comments

The Rötgrafen presented another difficult decision for us. There were a number of interesting entries submitted about them, and a few made it quite far before final elimination. In the end, we chose this entry because it was a bit more restrained than most, which tended to go a bit overboard on the Norse imagery – making them interesting historical lines, but casting them as complete anachronisms in the modern setting. Mr. Bjarnason's entry evolved the line from ancient roots, putting them in a modern context that was both logical and playable, and securing its position as a finalist.

Their Discipline spread and culture were reworked in edits to help keep them more "Ventrue," and to highlight the subtlety of the line – even when engaging in open conflict on the seas, the whole of the bloodline is likely to escape the notice of most landlocked, city-bound vampires. They now make a perfect addition to any nomadic chronicle, and can add some real flavor to a coastal domain in any game.

organized, well planned and extremely violent. Kindred were left destroyed, their havens ransacked and their kine hauled away.

These 'ghost ship' sightings increased, soon becoming two ships. Then three. Merchant vessels in the area began going missing. And then Sigrún, Ghost Queen of the Baltic, revealed herself. She had amassed what amounted to a small army of followers according to vampire standards, an army that had managed to essentially carve a domain of their own on the open sea. And if the Sanctified didn't have reason enough to want to hunt her down before, after her tale was told they most certainly did.

Sigrún claimed that as the dawn of her execution approached, she was visited by the god Loki.

He told her that her actions in life amused him, and he was interested in seeing what she could do in unlife.

He said that he would help her survive to see another night if she would offer her service, and the service of all she created, to fight in his army of the unholy dead at Ragnarok, the great battle at the end of the world. He offered her the blood of his own children to seal the pact. Sigrún agreed. The blood of Fenrisulfr, he explained, would enhance her natural ferocity and gift her with the power to shift her form. The blood of J'rmungandr would help rejuvenate her corpse and grant her the power to withstand any assault. The blood of his daughter Hel would grant her rightful rule over a great army of the undead. Sigrún drank his offerings willingly and with great relish, and he fed her sire to his children to repay them for their contribution.

Of course, many scholars of modern nights debunk this tale as mere fantasy, suggesting that Sigrún most likely diablerized her sire. They don't bother trying to explain how she survived in an exposed boat on the open sea, claiming that the winds must have blown her back to shore or somehow managed to get her somewhere pro-

tected. Regardless, what is known is that her bloodline, under her direct command, ruled the northern seas for nearly 300 years.

As her fleet grew in size Sigrún realized that she needed direct control over ports to keep the ships seaworthy. Using the gifts of her Ventrue blood, she warped the minds of human leaders and worked to set up her childer as jarls in various Scandinavian coastal communities, posing as direct representatives of the king. The domains of Iceland were visited again and again by her line during the 13th century, and were used as a safe haven whenever the kine organized serious resistance. By the year 1300, the Rötgrafen were terrorizing seafarers all over the coastline of Northern Europe. Sigrún had sired nearly a dozen childer personally, and it appeared that she was on the verge of establishing an impenetrable, lasting power base, ruled exclusively by her bloodline. Then everything fell apart.

Sigrún fell into torpor shortly after the dawning of the 14th century. Her Ventrue blood warred with that of the dark gods of old, and her childer and grandchilder fought amongst themselves to fill the void in the bloodline's power structure created by her absence. Many ships were lost as the Sanctified took advantage of the infighting to claim revenge. Control of the seas slipped away as her childer pulled back to their individual coastal domains to protect what power they had. The dream of a great conquering army of Kindred vanished completely as individual Rötgrafen, no longer capable of surviving alone, looked to the Invictus and the Circle of the Crone for protection.

Sigrún emerged from torpor more than 200 years later, but the troubled sleep of centuries had changed her. Feeling her blood thinned considerably and confronting a political landscape completely alien to her, she decided it was in her best interests to abandon Europe

completely. She told no one where she was headed, but as rumors of ghost ships and vicious, impossibly strong pirates surfaced in the Caribbean, it was obvious where she had gone. The Ghost Queen of the Baltic was in the Americas.

Her activities in the Caribbean followed a pattern similar to her European conquests. She started with ocean-based raiding before expanding to the conquest of port domains. Her style of governance had changed, however, as her impatience for Ragnarok grew. Enamored by the passionate rhetoric of rebellious Kindred around her, she adopted a more democratic system of control, and while she maintained the final word, a significant amount of real power lay in the hands of those who followed her.

She fell back into torpor some time in the 19th century, and much of the framework she established still remains. Rötgrafen elements in the Caribbean were amongst the first open supporters of the Carthian Movement, and many remain in modern nights.

Rumor has it that the Ghost Queen of the Baltic is out of torpor once more, and that once more she has moved to a different part of the world. Some reports claim she is operating in Indonesia, but more reliable sources point to evidence of activity in the American Pacific Northwest. Of course, these reports could just be the result of an increase in activity of the bloodline itself and not necessarily actions directed by Sigrún herself.

Parent Clan: Ventrue

Nickname: Sea Kings

Covenant: Sea Kings generally fall into one of two camps, depending on their location. The vast majority of Rötgrafen in the “New World” are staunch supporters of the Carthian Movement, and have been since the covenant’s inception. Those who are not Carthians are often unaligned, with many operating as ocean-going nomads, sailing between islands and coastal communities.

In Europe, things are somewhat different. When the bloodline began to fragment short-

ly after Sigrún’s first descent into torpor, the Rötgrafen were left without their spiritual leader, who provided most of their internal organization. As the Sea Kings pulled back to individual cities, the unity of the bloodline was replaced by the protection of the covenants.

A few Sea Kings were absorbed into the Invictus, but most fully believed (and still believe) Sigrún’s account of her encounter with Loki and found the Circle of the Crone to be a more comfortable fit. With dreams of a united empire under Sigrún’s control still fresh in their minds, early Rötgrafen Acolytes adopted a more militant ideology than is usually seen within the Circle. Most European Sea Kings believe it is their duty to be prepared for the end of the world, when they will be called on to fight during Ragnarok, and much of their night-to-night existence is focused on ensuring that they are ready.

In modern nights, Rötgrafen nomads occasionally make the harrowing journey across the Atlantic, and the ideological beliefs of the two Sea King factions are slowly leaking into one another. Areas that have been visited by a nomad fleet will often have individual Sea Kings who are spiritually Acolyte and politically Carthian.

No Sea King has ever joined the Lancea Sanctum, thanks to centuries of mutual hatred and conflict stretching back to the early Middle Ages, when many of the Sanctified bishops decried the Rötgrafen as a heretic cult.

Appearance: With the exception of Rötgrafen Acolytes, who tend to look as if they have stepped out of a Viking documentary, most Sea Kings favor the elegant appearance of the Ventrue, tempered by their covenant affiliation. Their clothing almost always has a nautical flavor, however, so an Invictus may look as if he just came back from the yacht club while a Carthian could look like more like a longshoreman or a surfer.

A very significant number of Sea Kings also have tattoos, regardless of the



fit with the rest of their appearance. The tradition of tattooing has been passed down along the line, originating with its founders. The Vikings and Rus' who made up much of the early Sea King membership were often tattooed. Acolytes who are strict Votaries of Hel often have extensive black ink tattoos on the right side of their body. The left side is always kept clear. The Sea Kings may be one of the few bloodlines that boasts 200-year-old elders more likely to bear tattoos than the neonates Embraced in the last few years.

Due to the history of the bloodline, most Rötgrafen are of Northern European descent, primarily hailing from the Nordic countries but with ample representation from the Baltic states and Germany. Rötgrafen in the Caribbean tend to be of Dutch or British descent, but there was no particular ethnic preference for siring, and the 17th century saw a wide broadening in the cultural and racial base of the line.

Haven: Sea King havens tend to be large, lavishly decorated and very secure. They also tend to be located on the sea, such as an ocean-front mansion, a private yacht club or a refurbished warehouse down by the docks. The majority of Rötgrafen actually have their havens right on the water with large yachts the prime choice in modern nights. Houseboats, sailboats and even cargo ships have also seen use.

There are those among the line who maintain, either due to tradition or romantic nostalgia, that a wooden ship is still the most comfortable haven, and contrive means to inhabit one. Some still ply the seas in carefully maintained vessels that are centuries old in design — a strange sight, indeed, but no less dangerous under the command of a ruthless vampire than their modern steel counterparts.

Background: While the bloodline's beginnings were rooted in Viking raiding, the bloodline has diversified considerably over the last 1,000 years. There is a very heavy, nearly exclusive preference for individuals with some connection to the sea, be it physical location, vocational aptitude or an intangible emotional resonance.

Character Creation: Due to centuries of raiding and midnight combat, the Rötgrafen have long had a preference for Physical Attributes and Skills. Weaponry and Stealth are particularly common. This has traditionally been followed by the Social Attributes and the attendant Skills to maintain political control over the ports they needed. As the massive changes in society have made roving bands of warriors much less viable in the last century, younger Sea Kings often place a much lower emphasis on Physical Attributes, particularly amongst the Acolytes of the bloodline. Nearly all Rötgrafen who operate a ship

of any decent size put points into Herd and/or Retainer to represent additional crew members.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Dominate, Protean, Resilience

Weakness: All Rötgrafen suffer the weakness of their parent clan, the Ventrue.

In addition, every member of the line is more vulnerable to fire, the weapon of Loki, than any other member of the clan. Bound to the god's service, they are especially weak in the face of his greatest power. Whenever a Sea King suffers damage from fire, she takes one additional point of aggravated damage from the source per turn. In addition, the 10 again rule does not apply to rolls to resist Röttschreck caused by fire, and any 1s that come up on such a roll are subtracted from successes. These penalties apply only to fire, not to damage from, or fear of, the sun, as the sun was the domain of Freyr.

Organization: The bloodline hasn't had any dominant internal organization in Europe since Sigrún first went into torpor in the early 1300s. In the seven centuries that followed, most Rötgrafen have simply been absorbed into the overarching institutions of their respective covenants.

The Sea Kings operating in the Caribbean allied themselves with buccaneer democracies for the most part, although Sigrún and her Kindred usually worked to maintain a 'first amongst equals' position. These manipulations proved to be more robust than the feudal model she adhered to in the Baltic, and many Caribbean-based Rötgrafen who are not officially Carthian tend to espouse ideas of loose Kindred equality while maneuvering themselves into positions of control. Few are true believers in democratic right, preferring to judge one another (and outsider Kindred) on a system of merit earned largely in travel and battle.

Sigrún's piracy required ship crews and raiding parties, so she was never a close adherent of the Tradition outlawing Embrace. If you find one Sea King in a domain, you most likely will find a handful. European Rötgrafen are usually able to recite their lineage back to Sigrún herself, and try to keep abreast of developments in their extended 'family tree.' Ventrue who have joined the bloodline through an Avus trace their lineage as if their Avus were their sire. The application of this lineage recital varies between covenants, but is generally little more than a matter of pride, with no tangible power or status attached. Status within the bloodline itself is often moot; two Sea Kings who meet will almost always treat one another as brothers in arms. Those who engage in battle together tend to defer to the one with the most experience, but this deference is

considered a necessity of competent warfare, not one born of etiquette.

Concepts: Undead pirate, violent longshoreman, Hel-worshipping death cultist, manipulative cruise ship magnate, axe-wielding aristocrat, empowered Navy SEAL, shipbuilding tycoon, seafaring nomad, reclusive lighthouse keeper, midnight beachcomber.

History

The history of the Rötgrafen is chaotic and, because of the itinerant nature of the majority of its members, relatively incoherent. Sigrún's leadership kept the membership together in its early years, lending her own purpose to the whole of the line, but her defeat and decline led to a general dispersion that has never really been reversed.

Many Sea Kings believe that three distinct ages mark the progress and eventual fate of their line, and that they are on the cusp of the third now, the one that will lead them to the unending winter of legend — the final war of Ragnarok and the realization of their founder's pact.

The Rule of Sigrún

The early history of the bloodline revolved around its slow expansion. As the watery territories plied by Rötgrafen ships widened, so their numbers grew, and assaults on both seafaring and settled mortals became more frequent. Early incursions into coastal territories brought the line into conflict with the Kindred of the Lancea Sanctum, whom Sigrún specifically targeted and took pleasure in destroying.

For centuries, the Rötgrafen sailed the northern seas and engaged in their glorious battles, clashing with any force that crossed their path. They escaped the notice of most Kindred, though, sailing well away from the largest cities and managing to stay well fed without pushing too far inland. Shipping routes around Northern Europe provided them with all the bounty they needed, and the complete destruction of the occasional ship, with all hands, did not raise undue suspicion — especially if it happened to coincide with a storm.

Under Sigrún's leadership, the bloodline was a merciless force, a raging, blood-fueled fleet bent on honing and proving their strength in preparation for the imminent Ragnarok. One attack, launched under her direction late in the 13th century, demonstrated their vicious capacity and ended their anonymity forever.

Targeting a small coastal settlement named Honfleur because of its Sanctified presence, Sigrún initiated an unprovoked assault one winter night. Whipping her Kindred into a frenzied bloodlust, she declared that the whole of the town was an affront to her and the gods,

and that it should be razed to the ground, end to end. So it was — and hundreds of mortals, together with the four Sanctified monks who moved among them, went with it. One Mekhet priest, an evangelist vampire of German origin, survived the assault and managed to make his way to the domain of Caen, where he described the atrocity and the mad Kindred who committed it. Recognizing the line as Ventrue and commenting on their bloodstained coats, he named them the “red dukes” or “Rötgrafen.”

Responding to the massacre of Honfleur, nomadic Sanctified crusaders were tasked with the mission to find and punish those responsible. Three decades of pursuit and conflict followed, culminating in one terrible battle on turbulent summer seas. All of the crusaders were destroyed, taking many of the Rötgrafen with them and forcing Sigrún herself into torpor under the waves.

The Emergence of the Votaries of Hel

The bloodline splintered following Sigrún's descent into torpor, and many of the surviving members strayed from her vision, abandoning the battles of the north and finding refuge in the coastal territories that did not yet know them. Many threw their lot in with the Circle of the Crone, finding common ground with those who paid worship to the gods of Norse folk. A number of Rötgrafen Acolytes pledged themselves to veneration of Hel, the goddess destined to command the legions of undead at Ragnarok. Empowered by the blood of one god and sworn to another, these Rötgrafen prayed with fervency and devotion unmatched.

Those who did not seek the Circle turned to the Votaries for guidance. With Sigrún's fall, many Rötgrafen found themselves doubting their purpose. Her promises of Ragnarok and glory had failed to manifest, and she was now gone, possibly never to return. The Votaries of Hel declared that Sigrún's defeat represented the end of the First Age of the Rötgrafen — one of three. They were now moving into the Second Age, one of confusion and dispersion, and must fight to survive, to see the dusk of the Third Age some centuries hence, when they would finally arise to take their part in the great and final war.

Taking the words of the Votaries to heart, most of the line settled in for the long haul. Finding places for themselves in the domains of the Circle and the Invictus, the Rötgrafen sought to stay strong and faithful, waiting out the age.

The Return of the Queen

Sigrún emerged from torpor in the 16th century, rising to find her line scattered and maddeningly stationary.



Gathering those few who still fought and wandered on the open seas, she left Europe behind, making for the Caribbean islands in pursuit of a mortal shipping fleet.

Overtaking and demolishing the fleet, Sigrún established a new force and repopulated her loyal line. Operating much as they had before, they stalked the Caribbean seas, visiting their violence on the burgeoning domains there and warring upon Kindred, both European and native. Eventually, Sigrún realized that she was bound to invoke the rage of all and repeat the events of Honfleur — something she was not eager to do. Encouraging the members of her line to forge alliances with some of the local Kindred, she brokered tense treaties between the Rötgrafen nomads and a number of vampires, eventually leading to long-standing agreements with the early proponents of the Carthian Movement. Hundreds of victorious battles followed for the Sea Kings, and the provision of safe haven in the Carthian domains of the 17th and 18th centuries ensured their long-term security.

Vieux Fort, at the Southern edge of St. Lucia, is one domain that pays particular honor to the Rötgrafen for its members' efforts throughout the 18th century. In 1768, a small proto-Carthian government established the first modern Kindred Court in the domain, and was almost immediately assaulted by a contingent of Invictus Knights.

A marauding Rötgrafen crew destroyed the Knights, and created a schedule of patrol, defending the domain from incursion in exchange for permission to port and repair their vessel. Many of the modern Carthians of St. Lucia credit the bloodline with creating the atmosphere of security that allowed them to develop their government in relative peace, and elevate the Kindred of the line to an honored position in their Elysium parliament.

Sigrún's next slide into torpor was more peaceful than the first. The fatigue of age claimed her in the middle of the 19th century and she chose to sleep, entrusting herself to her two most loyal lieutenants.

The Coming of the Third Age

On December 2, 1974, those two Kindred disappeared somewhere in the vicinity of CuraÁao. Nobody knows what happened to them, but both left the bulk of their possessions behind, and their ghouls died soon after, taking the secret of their masters' last nights to the grave.

Rumor has it that Sigrún, the great and terrible Ghost Queen of the Baltic, has arisen again, and now leads a new fleet with her two lieutenants elsewhere in the world. Some believe that a spate of vicious pirate activity in the South Asian seas may well mark her passage, while others note that a number of uncredited assaults on Sanctified

Kindred up and down the West Coast of the Americas match her habit.

Stranger still, a number of Rötgrafen Acolytes throughout Europe seem to be rousing from their rest, returning to the seas and taking command of vessels once again. Perhaps they believe that the Third Age is truly arrived, and are taking up arms. Some may be responding to the call of their awakened founder, showing their faith and returning to the old ways. Whatever the reason, the Rötgrafen are returning to the waters all around the world, and reviving their warring habits.

Evidence gathered by some members of the line suggests that none of this activity is attributable — at least not directly — to the founder, and that there is nothing to suggest that the increased activity of the line isn't simply the result of speculation and over-eager response. Any experienced member of the Rötgrafen could lead the sort of fleet assaults that are attracting notice in modern nights, and would know that the Rötgrafen's sudden appearance in the news would electrify the remaining members of the line.

Society and Culture

While the Rötgrafen are a splintered, nomadic line without an official organized society per se, certain cultural developments have arisen over the course of the bloodline's existence. The evolution of the line, from nomadic raiders to settled Kindred and itinerant pirates to Carthian warriors has imbued the line with a number of common beliefs and practices that remain to this night.

The first and most significant conviction of the Rötgrafen involves the three mythic ages, as conceived by the Acolytes of the line. It is generally believed that the First Age of the line began with Sigrún's pact and ended with her defeat at the hands of Sanctified crusaders, drawing an arc of empowerment and legendary fierceness through to her prideful collapse.

The Second Age is said to mark the expansion of the line into Caribbean territories, dispersing the influence of the Sea Kings. Some argue that the Second Age is one of trial, and that those who moved west and continued to engage in battle are the only ones proving their loyalty to the founder and the pact, while others believe that the test of the age is one of survival, and that the activities of the line throughout the world just make it more likely that some Rötgrafen will endure, lasting until the nights of the final war.

The Third Age is said to embody the time that will see the Rötgrafen called to battle, fulfilling Sigrún's pledge and taking part in the great and final war of

the gods. Interpretation and translation of the signs of the Third Age are a constant occupation for some of the Sea Kings, and certain Acolyte Circles are constructed entirely around the symbolism of Ragnarok and Loki's pact.

Many of the Rötgrafen have taken to identifying themselves as "First Age" or "Second Age" Kindred, indicating their age, a reflection of their ideal or simply their geographic origin. A culture of terminology so complex and varied has sprung up about this expression alone that few Rötgrafen can actually agree on its meaning, even between themselves. Further complicating the matter, a number of neonate Rötgrafen are now identifying themselves as "Third Age" Sea Kings, making allusions to the final myth of the line as a means of declaring their hardiness and warmongering intent.

Most of the Sea Kings, even those sired recently, buy into the idea that the sole purpose of their Requiem is the preparation for Ragnarok. They emphasize martial prowess, and if their home domain is one of relative peace among the Kindred, many Sea Kings will take to the seas and hunt, keeping their skills sharp. Arguments on both sides of any debate are often peppered with references to Ragnarok and the continuing strength of the line; peaceful coexistence with outside Kindred is necessary for survival, but constant warfare is required to hone the necessary skills. Widespread Embrace will expand the bloodline and ensure that it serves as a strong standing force when the call to battle is issued, but overpopulation will draw the attention of outside Kindred and risk early war. The rationalization of myth into the reason of the line is constant and complete. There is no questioning the myth, and there is no appreciation for logic in the face of faith.

All of the Rötgrafen, young and old, engage in frequent ventures out on the sea. Many are nomads at least once during their Requiems, and a good number never really settle down in a domain, playing out the whole of their existence in constant voyage. Most have a wide territorial range marked out, and revisit the same locales over and over throughout the decades, memorizing their shores and navigating them with unparalleled expertise. Many keep connection to the rest of the line by crossing paths with their Kindred at roughly scheduled intervals, trading information and tales across the hulls of their ships on the open sea.

Almost every member of the Rötgrafen makes an effort to own and maintain some kind of seafaring vessel, even if that ship has become largely ornamental. Most of the Kindred of the line treat their ships as their single most important material possession: a weapon, a

haven and an expression of themselves. Many literally meld with some part of the ship itself, using Protean •• to sink into the wooden structure during the day. A great number spend almost all of their free time tending to the ship, crafting and repairing its many systems, endlessly improving and streamlining it even as it plies the seas. Every member of the line will treat an invitation to board another's ship as a great honor, and will regard the vessel itself with respect (often observing its characteristics as carefully as they would a vampire's own).

Despite rumors to the contrary, most Rötgrafen do not abide by a pirate's code or any democratic system of order on their ships. The Sea Kings rule without question, dictating orders to their crews in a militaristic fashion. Some may allow the mortals to believe they are running things via open vote, but careful application of Dominate and more mundane techniques of control always swing votes according to the vampire's whim. Mortal crews are always rewarded generously for their service, though, and all who are steadfastly loyal enjoy the supernatural protection of the vampire captain and his ghouls. Female Rötgrafen run their ships as fiercely as the males, and the line as a whole honors no ban on women in the fleets. There are no rules whatsoever governing conduct during war. Some Rötgrafen behave honorably, while others choose to engage in stealth and ambush tactics. Victory justifies any strategy, and the least humane of the bloodline are willing to carry this justification to its horrifying limits. These vampires consider themselves an unholy army in training for apocalypse, not a genteel force of noble captains, and they are quick to demonstrate this fact to anyone facing them on the open waters of the night.

As Kindred with a long nomadic tradition, the Rötgrafen understand the way of travel and the dangers of the road quite well — in fact, they often embody those dangers. None are willing to dismiss any journey as safe, and all engage in a ritual cleansing and purification before embarking on a voyage, essentially preparing to die on the way — and praying that they see their destination safely. Outsiders who witness these dirge-like preparations are often shaken by them, and the image of the Rötgrafen as suicidal marauders is enforced by the misinterpretation of the solemn proceedings. Knowing full well that their reputation inspires fear, most Sea Kings make no effort to correct the rumors.

Those Rötgrafen who settle in a domain are often regarded with suspicion by their nomadic counterparts. At best, settled Rötgrafen are considered lazy and warned not to forget their purpose, and not to become com-

placent as the nights of Ragnarok approach. At worst, they are named traitors to the line and must endure the frequent attacks of fanatic Sea Kings designed to provoke settled Sea Kings into a return to their old ways or destroy them outright. While some are able to fend off their brethren and others manage to escape their attentions completely, most are eventually driven back to wandering the seas. Few manage to participate in Kindred government for long, and their appearances at Elysium are relatively rare.

Still, there are exceptions to the rule. One domain on the west coast of Finland was settled by three Rötgrafen in the last years of the 19th century, and endured undisturbed for quite some time. The three imposed the rule of the Circle of the Crone in the domain, Embracing a number of childer (some of whom never completely joined the bloodline) and persisting in peace. That domain remains tonight, exclusively populated by Ventrue and Rötgrafen, and almost completely isolated from the rest of the world.

Devotions

Over the centuries, Rötgrafen nomads have developed a number of Devotions designed to enhance sea travel and improve their prowess in battle. Here are some of the more popular examples of their developed powers.

Rime of Salt

(Protean •••, Resilience •)

In battle, Rötgrafen are known to inflict extremely painful wounds on their foes as a means to quick resolution and intimidation of witnesses. This power allows the vampire to embed the salt of the ocean in the claws he grows, causing searing agony when he strikes his foes.

The vampire must be in or near (no more than 20 yards away) seawater in order to invoke this power.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll. When the Claws of the Wild are grown, salt is mystically drawn from the spray in the air and implanted in the resulting growth.

All of the bonuses of the Claws of the Wild are enjoyed as normal, with an added effect: mortals who suffer injury from the claws must make a Resolve + Composure roll to resist the burning pain that follows. Those who fail bear a -2 dice penalty on all actions for the remainder of the scene as they fight to act through the agony.

The power has no additional effect on Kindred.

Action: Reflexive

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

Undiminished Rage (Animalism ••••, Protean •)

Renowned for their bravery even in the face of vampiric banes, Rötgrafen warriors have developed the ability to reverse the rise of panic within themselves and redirect it, surprising the wielders of fire by turning upon them in apparent ignorance of the threat they face.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy + Animalism

Action: Instant

Any time a vampire with this power faces provocation that would normally lead to Röttschreck, he may attempt to invoke this power. The roll to activate Undiminished Rage occurs instead of the frenzy resistance roll.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does the power fail to take hold, resulting in an immediate fear frenzy, but the vampire is so completely shaken by the experience that he is unable to use this power again for the duration of the chapter.

Failure: The vampire exerts his will, but does not alter the nature of his oncoming frenzy. He may attempt to resist it as normal.

Success: The vampire is provoked by the source of the frenzy, but he is moved to rage instead of fear. He may Ride the Wave as normal, or may simply attack the source of his frenzy.

Exceptional Success: Not only does the vampire enter a rage frenzy instead of fleeing uncontrollably, but he is already considered to be Riding the Wave, and need not spend another Willpower point to impose limits on his frenzy.

This power costs 18 experience points to learn.

The Hidden Master (Dominate ••••, Protean ••)

There are Rötgrafen who are so domineering that they cannot rely on the members of their crew to complete crucial tasks under stressful circumstances. Developing this power in order to satisfy their urge to control all aspects of a ship's function, they learn to transmit their will through the very hull of the vessel, allowing them to seize command of any mortal who touches it.

Worse yet, this power allows Rötgrafen to defend most insidiously against an attempt to board, subjugating the attacker the moment he touches the hull of the vampire's ship.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Survival + Dominate versus Resolve

Action: Contested and Extended; resistance is reflexive.

To invoke this power, the Rötgrafen must first sink into the wooden hull of his ship using Haven of Soil, and then make the first roll. The mortal who is subjected to this power must be in flesh-to-wood contact with the hull of the ship at the time of activation. The vampire will instinctively attack the right person, even if there are many mortals in contact with the hull at the same time.

To completely seize control of the victim, the vampire must achieve a number of successes in excess of the victim's Willpower. The victim is locked in a rigid, immobile state as soon as activation begins, and remains that way as long as the vampire's player continues to win each contested roll.

Dramatic Failure: The attempt is ended, and the victim is immune to the vampire's Dominate until the next sunset.

Failure: The victim may attempt to break contact with the hull. If the vampire succeeds in restarting the process during the same scene, the contest picks up from where it left off.

Success: The character moves closer to gaining control over the victim.

Exceptional Success: The character makes significant progress toward the ultimate goal of seizing control over the victim.

Once the victim's Willpower is exceeded, the vampire may take control of her body, per Possession (Dominate •••••, see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 128). For the duration of the Possession, the vampire's body is melded to the hull of the ship and enjoys the protections of Haven of Soil (Protean ••, see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 138).

This power can only be used if the ship is constructed of a natural material (usually wood) that the vampire can meld with, per Haven of Soil.

This power costs 21 experience points to learn.

SANGIOVANNI

BY SEAN SMITH

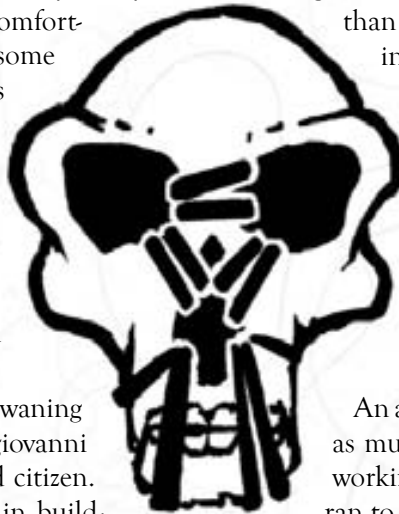
"OBSERVE HOW THE ADVANCED STATE OF DECOMPOSITION — SLOWED, IN THIS CASE, BUT NOT WHOLLY HALTED BY THE REANIMATING PLASM — CAUSES THE CORPSE SUBSTANTIAL DIFFICULTY IN ITS EFFORTS TO DRESS ITSELF. OF COURSE, I DON'T MIND TAKING A MOMENT TO ASSIST HER. I MAY MISS THE OPENING CEREMONIES AT TONIGHT'S ELYSIUM, BUT I LOVE HER SO... SHE'S SO BEAUTIFUL... AND THERE IS SUCH A THING AS BEING FASHIONABLY LATE."

The Sangiovanni bloodline is seen by many Mekhet as an embarrassment, an uncomfortable confirmation of certain unwholesome rumors surrounding the clan and its dealings. Based in Venice, the Sangiovanni family both acknowledges and disregards the contempt in which other Mekhet hold the bloodline. Members of the family, living, dead and undead, maintain degenerate traditions honed through centuries of incest and black magic.

Among the Venetian elite, during the waning years of the Renaissance, Lodovico Sangiovanni was a prominent, wealthy and talented citizen. An architect, Sangiovanni specialized in building churches, organizing the swift and masterful construction of many beautiful houses of God. The faithful who filed obediently into Lodovico's churches could never have guessed that the walls and foundation had been constructed almost entirely by the animated corpses of the dead.

How convenient it was for Lodovico that new churches were often built on the sites of old churches, and that the sites of old churches nearly always harbored old, forgotten graveyards. Dead workers never tire, require no payment and never complain. His patrons never guessed at the truth behind his methods, and it's doubtful the clergy would have appreciated the irony of their churches being constructed with the aid of the black arts.

Nearly all of the ancient lineages that converged into the prestigious and wealthy Sangiovanni family as it existed in Lodovico's time had produced a number of sorcerers, seers and witches. Lodovico learned at an early



age to worship things his mother claimed were older than the Christian God — shadowy things lurking behind the façade of the material world.

It was she who taught him to grasp at the curtain between worlds, to conjure spirits and raise the dead, binding them to his will. It was she who arranged his education as an architect as well, securing his place of esteem in the mundane world. He repaid her with a dagger in the heart, and an innocent slave was executed for her murder.

An alcoholic and a womanizer, Lodovico spent as much time drinking and whoring as he did working in construction. Occasionally, his tastes ran to darker pursuits, and much of his family's gold was spent acquiring artifacts of a distinctly unnatural nature. At the height of his career, Lodovico's name was gasped in Italy's filthiest brothels, even as it was whispered in the Vatican.

Whether the fact that Lodovico was never made to face the consequences of his less savory activities is a testament to his cleverness or to some dark pact, no one will ever know. It is known, however, that he endured the rigors of life at that time for a great many years, reaching quite an advanced age and siring a number of bastard children along the way, some of whom he even formally acknowledged. In any event, Lodovico's understanding of the world beyond lent itself to an almost insane fear of death in his later years, and the aging Sangiovanni threw himself into more and more desperate means of staving off his own inevitable demise.

It was the midnight sacrifice of his youngest daughter that attracted the notice of a being with the power to

Developer's Comments

The Sangiovanni presented an extremely difficult choice.

This bloodline was far and away the most popular among fans, both in terms of the number of submissions we received (which outdistanced every other bloodline offered by no small margin) and in our online poll asking which line readers were most eager to see. There were a lot of preconceived notions with regards to the Sangiovanni, and many writers submitting entries to the contest tried to incorporate them too comprehensively or disregarded too many. In the end, we felt that Mr. Smith's entry, while hewing to some of the expectations expressed by eager readers, managed to diverge in a couple of surprising and interesting ways, raising it above the competition.

We were first struck by this vision of the Sangiovanni as a line of deviant reanimators, subjecting the dead (and their living relatives) to a mystic slavery that seemed to reflect the Kindred habit of overpowering and perverting living things to their own ends. Subsequent edits brought some of the most compelling ideas of the line to the fore, and I encouraged Mr. Smith to deviate further from expectation. We arrived at the final version you see here: something I believe is a powerfully thematic line, perfect for adding that touch of diseased, degenerate atmosphere to any vampire game.

grant Lodovico the immortality he craved. A creature described in Lodovico's journals as having "fangs like a bat, a face like a skull" appeared to him, "arising... from the darkness... where no man had been but a moment before." The creature offered no conversation at first, but seized a shrieking Lodovico and swiftly drained his blood, transforming him into one of the undead. Its voice, Lodovico wrote, was like the crackling of a fresh fire in dry leaves, and it spoke to him, mostly nonsense, or so Lodovico thought at the time, about "men walking, men sleeping, men kneeling before God." Lodovico could feel the creature's thoughts pierce into his mind, and in an instant he was made to understand. The creature dissolved into blackness, leaving an acrid smell and dark visions of the dead rising to outnumber the living. Lodovico rose, but stood motionless for the rest of the night. Those of his acolytes who had looked on in mute horror as their guiding magus had been slain and resurrected later wrote that the freshly undead Lodovico roared with mad laughter until the sun forced him to sleep.

Lodovico Sangiovanni never saw his sire again, and his journals tell of the nightly discoveries he made in the first years of his Requiem. Those who would read his writings in the centuries to come would note the steady pace with which the Sangiovanni elder's grasp on sanity slackened. Lodovico wrote that he had been entrusted with a duty to raise up all the dead of the world, as had been foretold in the Book of Revelation. Initially, however, it seemed he had lost his former powers of sorcery upon becoming immortal, and his surviving writings from those early nights clearly reflect his rage. His sons aged and died before he mastered the arts of necromancy

once again. Lodovico Embraced a daughter and a son, each of whom was forced to Embrace a brother and a sister. Lodovico was clever, never allowing the number of vampires in the family to endanger its ability to produce a new generation of living offspring. Nevertheless, he ruled over the family as a twisted tyrant for many generations, slaying out of hand those who incurred his displeasure. Not all of his childer and descendants shared his strange vision for the family or his crazed devotion to his dead mother's wicked gods.

Eventually, Lodovico's insanity would prove immensely detrimental to him. In the early 1800s, his 'beloved' family at last decided that they'd had enough of the despot, and the old patriarch was staked and left out to greet the sun. After a tremendous restructuring, one of Lodovico's surviving grandchildren, Santino Sangiovanni, took over the mantle of leadership, and the family became less a den of degenerates bent solely on the preservation and empowerment of their founder and more a lodge for scholarly pursuits. The Kindred, however, are known for being set in their ways, and slow to change their minds, and even today the Sangiovanni family is seen as a blight on the history of the Mekhet clan.

More than once after Lodovico's death, the Sangiovanni family found itself the target of Invictus attempts to eradicate them, and advances by the Circle of the Crone seeking to force mass membership upon the bloodline. Each such expedition met with hideous failure, as the Sangiovanni Necromancers' occult prowess would seem strangely bolstered in the face of such concerted aggression. One such skirmish, eclipsed in the annals of Kindred history by the travails of those undead caught

up in the American Civil War, saw the presence of both the Invictus and the Circle undermined so thoroughly in parts of Venice that even to this day neither covenant dares intrude upon Sangiovanni lands. As to how a remote bloodline of scholars managed to so soundly defeat two covenants, many theories exist, but the Sangiovanni themselves have remained unsettlingly silent on the matter. What is known is that, afterward, startlingly large sums of money were transferred anonymously to the coffers of an occult lodge in Florence.

The Sangiovanni family and bloodline exist now as an embarrassing secret, hushed up by both Clan Mekhet and an order of mortal sorcerers. Breeding and inbreeding for centuries within polite Italian society, the Sangiovanni are considered little better than a nest of cockroaches by those who know them. Those who understand the Sangiovanni's secrets, however, often wish they could forget. Santino's efforts in recent decades to establish ties with the Lancea Sanctum, calling upon the family's old association with the Catholic Church, have yielded pleasing results. Diplomatically couching the family's occult activities in terms that evoke images of biblical resurrection, Santino has secured the covenant's protection, if not its respect.

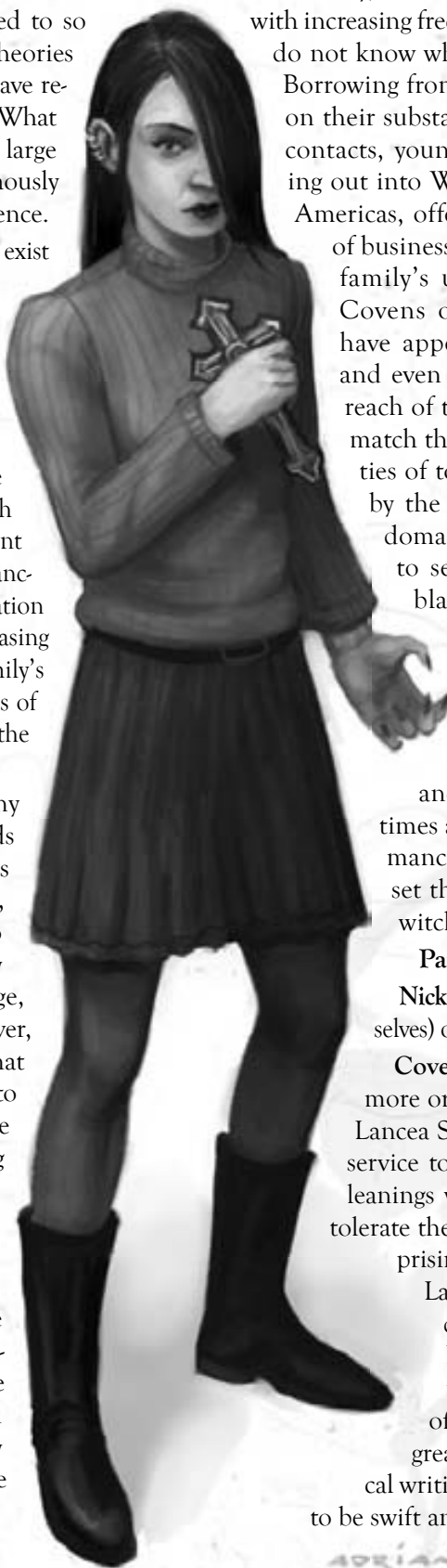
As for old Lodovico himself, many unanswered questions remain. Records are unclear as to the exact nature of his necromantic power before his Embrace, and less educated Kindred are quick to label him a mage. Mages, though poorly understood by Kindred society at large, are nonetheless known to seldom, if ever, survive the Embrace. The possibility that Lodovico was somehow the exception to this rule has kept many scholars, vampire and wizard alike, up through many long nights of wondering. What can be discovered, by those dedicated or suicidal enough to pry, is that the Sangiovanni bloodline's survival unto the modern day is ultimately attributable to the subtle intervention of a subset of mages — debauched, soul-stealing immortals, if the rumors are to be believed. Those few in the know seem to by turns inexplicably vanish, or choose to ignore their more disturbing findings on the matter.

Today, more Sangiovanni are leaving Venice than ever before. Modern Kindred have more on their minds than stories of nests of twisted vampires in the Old Country, and thus, the Sangiovanni are finding with increasing frequency that Kindred beyond Italy do not know who or what the Sangiovanni are. Borrowing from the family's coffers or drawing on their substantial web of European business contacts, young Sangiovanni have been striking out into Western Europe, and even to the Americas, offering their services in the fields of business and accounting, as well as their family's unique and eldritch specialty. Covens of Sangiovanni Necromancers have appeared in New York City, Paris and even smaller towns and cities as the reach of the bloodline races to expand to match the new communications capabilities of today. For every Prince disgusted by the prospect of necromancy in his domain, at least one instead chooses to see potential in a Sangiovanni's black magic, and many American Sangiovanni find that they can claim domains of their own in hospitals and funeral homes in return for providing their Princes with data both occult and scientific. Of course, whether times are truly changing for the Necromancers, or whether they have merely set themselves up for a new, modern witch hunt, remains to be seen.

Parent Clan: Mekhet

Nickname: Necromancers (among themselves) or Necrophiles (to everyone else)

Covenant: The Sangiovanni family more or less enjoys the protection of the Lancea Sanctum. Those willing to pay lip service to the Lancea Sanctum's religious leanings will find the covenant willing to tolerate the practice of necromancy to a surprising degree. However, this tie to the Lancea Sanctum is built more on old debts and favors than on any real loyalty, and Sanctified Sangiovanni seen to be flouting the ethics of the sect, or, worse, showing too great an interest in Lodovico's heretical writings, can expect their punishment to be swift and uncompromising.



Though hardly the majority, more than a few Sangiovanni have sided with the Circle of the Crone — particularly those who adhere to Lodovico's views concerning 'old gods.' Sangiovanni Acolytes almost universally found or join death cults centered around entities such as Charon or Cama Sotz.

Appearance: The elder Sangiovanni dress in fashions popular during the Renaissance, modern sensibilities be damned, whereas a startling number of younger family members seem to favor respectable business dress, typically in dark colors. A Sangiovanni of any ethnicity but Italian is a rare thing indeed, but not unheard of, as a number of foreigners have married into the family. Sadly, rather a lot of Sangiovanni are even more pallid than the average vampire, with weird, deep-set eyes, weak chins, eyebrows grown together, severe under- or over-bites and other defects that betray the family's penchant for inbreeding. Many make an effort to look gaunt or corpse-like in an attempt to make themselves attractive to the elders of the line — a bizarre practice that most onlookers never fully understand. Only a few can be said to look 'normal.'

Haven: For obvious reasons, the vast majority of Sangiovanni establish lairs in Italy, the bloodline's ancestral homeland, primarily in and around Venice. The family keeps a large estate not far outside of Venice, on the former site of a modest cathedral designed and built by Lodovico himself. Anyone who bears both the Sangiovanni blood and name is welcome there, but the family is infamous for turning away or simply destroying 'double bloods' — members of the bloodline who are not verifiable members of the family — who show up on their doorstep. Outside of Italy, Sangiovanni make their homes just as other vampires do, often grouping together when more than one of their kind meet in a given city. Independent Sangiovanni often go for theatrics, lairing in mausoleums or sleeping in the corpse drawers in morgues.

Background: Sangiovanni often have little experience with the modern world, having been raised in a sheltered and twisted environment from the start. These unfortunate, inbred and often slightly insane, have been aware of the existence of vampires since before they could talk. Luckily, not all Sangiovanni are so twisted. Those independent Sangiovanni, unfettered by the family at large, are often scholarly Kindred whose studies take a darker turn, causing them to seek out properties of the blood that are perhaps best left alone.

Character Creation: In spite of occasional handicaps levied by inbreeding, Sangiovanni are typically clever and knowledgeable. Mental Attributes and Skills are common, and members of the family are encouraged to

develop these aptitudes from an early age. After all, occult studies comprise the bulk of their lives and, for the lucky and clever ones, their Requiems as well. The family's vast stores of knowledge, in the form of both occult tomes and father-figure mentors who may have existed for centuries, make Encyclopedic Knowledge a common Merit, and it's a rare Sangiovanni indeed who lacks any Resources, thanks to the family's coffers, bloated with the sins of centuries. Of course, a second dot of Blood Potency is a good investment as well, if one wishes to begin play as a member of the bloodline. Finally, Allies and Contacts are extremely common, especially at high levels, due to the family's many business partners, occult acolytes and organized crime contacts.

Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Cattivieria, Celerity, Obfuscate

Weakness: All Sangiovanni share the weakness of the Mekhet clan.

In addition, the Sangiovanni carry a deep spiritual taint that comes of their close contact with the energies of death. While they may still appear pristine, even beautiful, there is an undeniable touch of the grave in everything they say and do. While they do not diverge physically from other Kindred, the Sangiovanni all appear somewhat unnatural in some intangible sense, repelling living onlookers. Dice pools for social interactions with mortals are capped at *two lower* than the vampire's Humanity rating, and observing Kindred likewise tend to misinterpret the Sangiovanni's closeness to the Beast.

Sangiovanni who degenerate are especially vulnerable to a peculiar type of Obsessive Compulsive behavior with regards to corpses. They begin to believe that the dead are somehow "more beautiful" than the living, and many develop necrophiliac urges, choosing to conduct amorous, one-sided affairs with preserved bodies. These Sangiovanni fawn over the objects of their affection, dressing them, speaking to them and otherwise lavishing attentions that would be better paid elsewhere. Though not necessarily sexual, these affairs are considered extremely distasteful (to say the least) to outsiders who discover them. To the Sangiovanni, this madness is understood to be a common feature of the family and, while embarrassing, is generally politely ignored.

Organization: The Sangiovanni, as noted above, are primarily organized into a close-knit family originating in Venice. Santino is the oldest surviving member of the family, being the founder's childe and grandson, and he continues to run things to this day. Family members willing to undertake the journey to Venice are encouraged to schedule an appointment to meet with Santino, should they require advice or formal aid, as Santino

has made it well-known throughout the family that the survival and well-being of the bloodline is his foremost concern. The family's resources are widespread, but are not casually available for the taking by anyone who hasn't spent generations cultivating pull with the higher-ups in the family. Nevertheless, being on good terms with the family has its advantages, as their various branches have fingers in numerous pies, including the obligatory ties to medical, religious and criminal establishments. Family members are expected to do their part to further the goals of the family, pulling their weight in financial and occult arenas alike, but also to ensure the bloodline's long-term survival, which means keeping other Kindred in the dark as to their broader nightly activities. The family's vaults are choked with corpses, and on nights of occult significance, the droning voices of chanting Sangiovanni witches can be heard on the wind for some distance around the mausoleum. Most of those Sangiovanni with ties to the Circle of the Crone make at least a token effort to attend the occasional gathering at the Venetian mausoleum. Most such Sangiovanni Acolytes hope that if some trace of Lodovico remains — even if only in the form of a lingering specter, or a tainted smear of ash — it will be one of them who finds it, and perhaps uncovers some hint to the bloodline founder's true intentions. Even those loyal to the Lancea Sanctum are expected to participate in family rites and ceremonies, mostly practices codified by Lodovico and later revised by Santino himself. What even other Venetian Kindred need not know is that the Sangiovanni as a whole are as corrupt as ever, exploiting the dead for their own selfish ends — often for mere temporal wealth. For his part, Santino is not so foolish as to have overlooked the obvious benefits of possessing magics unavailable to any other Kindred lineage. A perpetually renewable army of corpses has its uses, and even the great covenants could scarcely contend with shambling forces that effortlessly replenish themselves. Nevertheless, even Santino realizes that the time is not yet right, so he plots and waits. As long as Kindred society at large believes the Sangiovanni are simple, deluded degenerates lurking in the dark, tending to their own selfish, insignificant matters, the Kindred are playing into Santino's hands, and he remains free to plan for a secret war that may never come. Members of the bloodline who have rejected Santino's leadership, and thus his protection, are seldom welcome at the mausoleum, though even Santino is more likely to simply turn them away than to destroy them. In the case of wayward members of the Sangiovanni family, it is hoped that they will someday return to the fold. The mausoleum has room enough for anyone of the blood with a passion for exploring the mysteries of death.

Concepts: Unsavory mortician, half-crazed librarian, charismatic cult leader, dread dark magus, laconic gravedigger, degenerate jetsetter, established haven designer, wild-eyed Catholic priest, simpering pervert.

HISTORY

Violence and murder punctuate the history of the Sangiovanni, drawing a line of blood from their brutal origin on into the uncertain future. It seems only natural that a family of Necromancers has left a trail of corpses in its wake, but some Kindred wonder when karma will catch up to the Necromancers at last.

When Lodovico murdered his mother in cold blood, he must have felt he had learned from her all that he could. Scholars of the family's history return to this pivotal moment time and time again, always failing to answer this most basic question: why Lodovico felt the need to kill his mother. Santino was not yet born when the murder took place, but no being exists tonight who had as much contact with Lodovico as Santino did. He claims that the killing was nothing more than the act of a sick mind, an arrogant young wizard indulging in an act of symbolic cruelty — for once his mother had imparted to him the secrets of holding power over death, Lodovico executed her, probably smirking at the irony all the while. Those few degenerates in the family who value and preserve Lodovico's words and views make a different claim — that her sacrifice was necessary, even willing, and that her death ensured Lodovico's immortality.

As the bloodline grew, its practices (and, particularly, the rumored perversions of its eldest members) attracted the attention of less-than-tolerant Kindred among the Venetian Invictus. Throughout the middle of the 19th century, the Sangiovanni were forced to fight a quiet battle to defend themselves against an Invictus purge. Strangely, the family seemed to possess arcane might beyond that a single small bloodline of Kindred should have been able to muster. It is well-known that large sums of money changed hands, and vampires with contacts among the mages point to rumors of a mortal Sangiovanni who supposedly lives in Florence to this very night, tending to the affairs of a sheltered den of occult scholars there. Did the Sangiovanni trade an apprentice to a cabal of mages in exchange for protection from the Invictus? Though it seems far-fetched, at least one Acolyte of the Circle of the Crone has angrily wondered aloud how one small family of vampires on one estate in Venice can possibly have consistently defended their holdings from two covenants for so long. On this one matter, Santino has remained more suspiciously silent than on any other.

Regardless, the battle claimed several Kindred on both sides, and provoked a reimagining of Sangiovanni policy. First, Santino took it upon himself to broker a deal with the Lancea Sanctum, pledging his family's service, en masse, to the covenant and putting an end to the purge by earning its protection. Second, he began to encourage individual members to strike out and travel to distant domains with their living relatives, hoping that their dispersal would help to guarantee the viability of the family.

Kindred historians note the distressing ease of the Sangiovanni's transition into the Lancea Sanctum. Accounts gloss over it, merely stating that the Sangiovanni patriarch had been in talks with the Lancea Sanctum for some years, and that the covenant finally agreed to admit the bulk of the family. It is relatively common knowledge that the general flavor of the family's occultism shifted gradually until it was more in line with the Lancea Sanctum's religious leanings, while seeming to lose not even a fraction of its potency. It can scarcely be argued that the old-fashioned Sangiovanni family, steeped in the traditions of its founder's day, likely found the transition into a Christian covenant a relatively painless one. The marvel, it is said, is that the Lancea Sanctum was so willing to permit Necromancers within its ranks. The Lancea Sanctum could not have been swayed with money or even Santino's famous glibness, but rather must have been offered something far less tangible. Whatever debt, if any, the Sangiovanni owe to the Lancea Sanctum, a recent tension growing between the family and their covenant seems to suggest that it may soon be coming due.

The outward expansion of the Sangiovanni has been relatively rapid, in Kindred terms, because of the willing assistance of the large mortal family that supports it. Members of the line are protected by at least a few living relatives when they move to a new domain, and need not worry about finding trustworthy help to defend them on the road, locating or securing a new haven or establishing influence. The Prince of Paris famously welcomed the Sangiovanni to his Court at the close of the 19th century, even encouraging them to display their strange power in his Elysium, for the "entertainment" of his subjects. In modern nights, more and more cities are playing host to the bloodline, and while some refuse entry or work to eject the Sangiovanni once they arrive, many are all too willing to allow them to move in. Some Kindred are just ignorant of the Sangiovanni's ways, while others believe (mistakenly or not) that the depredations of the Sangiovanni are no worse than those of other Kindred.

Within the family, individual Sangiovanni are subject to a number of expectations. First and foremost is the assumption that the bloodline comes first. No outsider is to be favored over a family member, no bloodline is to be accorded more respect than the Sangiovanni, no clan is to be held in higher regard than Clan Mekhet, no covenant is to be more revered than the Lancea Sanctum. Santino knows best — he is old, he is powerful and he genuinely cares for every member of his extended family, so disrespect to him is disrespect to the family, and vice versa. Every family member knows that Santino has made countless sacrifices for them, defending the bloodline in its youth and securing the protection of the Lancea Sanctum, and most have the good sense to appreciate all that he's done. Disrespect is usually first met with harsh words from one's peers, then several hours of stern lecturing from the eldest local member of the line and finally censure and ostracism by family members, or revocation of one's access to the family's resources, based on the severity and frequency of one's offenses. The Sangiovanni take respect and family very seriously, and can expect to be treated like family as long as they act like family.

Betrayal is as serious a crime among the Sangiovanni as it is among any other group of Kindred. Though Santino typically allows the Lancea Sanctum to deal with those of his blood who betray the covenant, traitors within the family itself are handled by Santino and his agents alone. Sangiovanni who sell out, murder one another, share secrets — including living Sangiovanni necromancers — with outsiders or lead enemies back to family holdings are almost never slain, but rather staked and stored in a family vault. Only a handful of such traitors exist today, many very old indeed, but Santino refuses to ever have the blood of family on his hands. Whether some greater plan exists for dealing with these black sheep at a later date is known only to Santino. Only a few Sangiovanni would ever consider turning their backs on their family, but for those who might, thanks to their unique understanding of death and what comes after, the threat of an endless sleep in a cold tomb, forever denied the release of death, is more than enough to keep them in line.

For those who uphold the values of the family, eternity can be an almost pleasant prospect. Encouraged to study what interests them, to experiment and to prepare presentations on their findings for older family members to appraise, the practice of necromancy becomes almost a hobby — at least for the young. The family's elders take note of more promising individuals, subtly encouraging them to delve deeper into the black arts. The Black

Ring, a small college of the family's most accomplished necromancers, is always on the lookout for fresh blood for its ranks, and approaches those who take their studies seriously and possess an obvious natural talent for their craft. These elder Necromancers tattoo a slender black ring around the thumb on their right hand, but otherwise do nothing that might reveal their existence to the Lancea Sanctum. Preserving Lodovico's methods, if not his ideals, the Black Ring encourages necromancy as more of a scholarly pursuit than an arcane one, with Santino's blessing. Those who prove worthy can aspire to join, finding in the Ring a supportive structure not unlike a study group.

Of course, devoting oneself to necromancy is hardly required of every member of the family. Almost as valued are those who dedicate themselves to managing the family's finances, trading stocks and making wise investments to keep the coffers full. Santino himself has proven far more adept in the world of business than with spirits, and tutors clever Sangiovanni businessmen in the wisdom of Medici and Machiavelli. Sangiovanni who come to own businesses of their own are afforded great respect within the family, as are those who land jobs managing finances for large corporations or wealthy individuals. More than a few lawyers come from the family's ranks, and these are valued as well. Though the bloodline's disfiguring weakness often makes maintaining public ties with mortals a taxing exercise, most Sangiovanni who are serious about their work make liberal use of makeup, choose their hours very carefully and keep their complaints to themselves. The Sangiovanni family knows all too well the price that is often paid for living in the past, and is more than willing to live as fully in the modern age as unaging beings can.

CATTIVERIA

Cattiveria is an Italian word meaning, quite simply, "wickedness." Its development took generations of blood and sacrifice, such that it lives up to its name in both practice and spirit. *Cattiveria*, also called necromancy in some circles, is nothing less than the practice of manipulating the tainted essence of death toward such ends as raising seeping cadavers and enslaving specters and ghosts.

When Lodovico became a vampire, he found himself robbed of the sorcery that had allowed him to command corpses and spirits when he was alive. Infuriated by what seemed to be a calculated punishment, the fledgling Kindred threw himself once again into studying the texts and stories he had inherited from his mother, striving in a haze of madness to discover what manner of block had been imposed on his talents. He traveled to Flor-

ence, hearing of a gathering there of others of his kind, and there he encountered the Lancea Sanctum, at one of whose midnight masses Lodovico was at last stricken with the revelation he had sought.

Lodovico's epiphany related to the nature of the very force that traps a vampire in his undying state. Much as a vampire is able to impart power to a ghoul through his Blood, so, too, can that animating force be shared with a corpse, granting it a jerky, unwholesome animation. Its kinship with a substance spiritualists in a later age would call 'Ectoplasm' likewise makes it particularly useful for drawing ghostly manifestations into the world.

In practice, *Cattiveria* is almost more of a scholarly pursuit than an occult discipline, its practitioners more like engineers than occultists, even though its workings universally demand the trappings of black magic — if only to cement in the Necromancer's mind the grim reality of what he has set out to do. Almost no application of this discipline can be enacted on the fly, instead typically requiring candles to be lit and blood to be shed in addition to whatever bizarre trappings please the Necromancer's sense of drama.

• MORTICIAN'S APPRAISAL

Years of studying death and medicine have attuned the Sangiovanni's senses regarding corpses and the peculiar taint that distinguishes grave dirt from the soil around it. By laying his hands on a cadaver and closing his eyes in concentration, the vampire can discover hidden truths about the corpse, such as the person's name,

her undamaged appearance, how the person died, how long she has been dead and other minor facts.

Alternatively, the Necromancer may apply this power to the study of an area, standing in its midst and shutting his eyes in quiet meditation, thereby detecting any corpses that may be buried or hidden nearby. Necromancers describe this power as briefly reaching out and touching on the realm of death, either listening to the lingering echo of living souls.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Wits + Medicine + *Cattiveria*

Action: Extended

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire receives misleading information, such as incorrectly assessing a corpse, sensing several corpses where none are buried or sensing empty ground where bodies are interred.

Failure: Nothing happens. The vampire concentrates for a moment, but he receives no useful information.

Success: Visions relevant to the information appear in the vampire's mind's eye, revealing information that only he can see or hear. If the character is studying a corpse, the player may ask the Storyteller one question per success rolled. The information available includes the corpse's name, its undamaged description (for example, what its face looked like if its head is missing), the clinical cause of its death, the nature of any foreign materials in the body (including both material and chemical matter), the location and likely cause of any wounds and the exact time and date of its death. Note that the corpse is not "responding" to the vampire's inquiry — the information is revealing itself. There is no conversation between the user of Mortician's Appraisal and the spirit of the departed.

When Mortician's Appraisal is used on an area, each success extends the vampire's senses 10 yards out and 10 feet up and down, revealing to him the location of any and all corpses, human or otherwise, that are buried or hidden within that area. The vampire's sense of any bodies in the area persists for a scene, or until he takes any action other than moving at a slow walk.

If this power is used on a vampire, the roll is contested by the target's Resolve + Composure. If the user's suc-

cesses exceed those of the target's, the questions can be asked as normal, or the body can be located. Note that the clinical cause of a vampire's death is always exsanguination. No information about the Embrace will be provided.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success in examining a corpse allows the vampire to learn all of the information listed above in a flash of insight.

If the character is attempting to locate bodies, an exceptional success allows the vampire to maintain the sense even while taking other actions, for the duration of the scene.

••SHUFFLING PORTER

This power imparts weak animation to a corpse, whole or otherwise. The Shuffling Porter retains none of its body's former intelligence. It is a simple automaton, capable only of performing unchallenging tasks as directed by its master. This power can be used on a single limb, if desired, but must be used once for each separate piece being animated.

To activate this power, the vampire barks a short phrase in an obscene, guttural cant, commanding the



corpse to rise. The power of the vampire's Blood draws plasmic energies of spirit into the corpse, mobilizing it. Auspex-users may catch a flicker, similar to static, of a black, oily mist — what the Sangiovanni call ectoplasm — coalescing around a cold corpse before the body moans and shudders, clambering to its feet to do the Necromancer's bidding. The servants thus created are cold, with grayish skin and all the marks of death still upon them, shambling about stupidly and responding only to the simplest commands. These animated corpses rot at an accelerated rate, burning off ectoplasm and collapsing in a matter of hours.

Cost: 1 Vitae per corpse

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Cattiveria

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A horrible backlash occurs. Not only does the corpse fail to rise, but the

Necromancer takes a level of aggravated damage as the mysterious force that animates his own body flickers in brief failure.

Failure: Nothing happens. The corpse remains a corpse.

Success: The corpse rises as directed. The Shuffling Porter is a mindless creature, responding only to the simple commands of its master. It cannot be mentally or socially manipulated.

Shuffling Porters have an effective rating of 1 in all Physical Attributes and 0 in all Social and Mental Attributes, and they have no Abilities. Their Defense is 0, and their Speed is 2. Their initial Health rating is equal to the number of successes achieved on the activation roll, and they take one level of lethal damage every hour as they rot. When the lethal damage they take equals their Health rating, they collapse into a mass of rotten flesh and cannot be animated again. Until collapsing, the animated corpse suffers no wound penalties.

Exceptional Success: Shuffling Porters created with an exceptional success gain three extra Health levels upon activation.

••• ECTOPLASMIC MANIFESTATION

At this level of understanding, the Sangiovanni can summon and manipulate the black plasm of spiritual energy. She produces this gauzy, visible, weightless substance from any orifice in her body (usually the nose or mouth), and can apply it to heal wounds suffered by vampires or animated corpses.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Strength + Crafts + Cattiveria

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Ectoplasm appears, but it rips itself violently out of the vampire's body, doing one level of aggravated damage to the user, and dissipates before it can be used.

Failure: The vampire fails to produce the ectoplasm.

Success: The ectoplasm is produced harmlessly, and floats in the air before the vampire, who may then manipulate it. By applying the ectoplasm directly to a wound, the vampire may heal one level of lethal damage (or two levels of bashing damage) in a Kindred body or other animated corpse (such as a Shuffling Porter). The ectoplasm is absorbed into the body as it is used, sinking into the flesh and vanishing from normal sight.

This plasm is not composed directly of vampiric Vitae, and possesses none of the qualities of Vitae; the plasm cannot be ingested and does not impose a Vinculum on a subject who absorbs it.

Exceptional Success: Double the normal quantity of ectoplasm is produced, and two actions to heal can be performed with it before it is dissipated.

••• THE PREDATOR'S BEQUEST

Advanced understanding of the art of Cattiveria allows a vampire to learn how to imbue his animated servants with a measure of his own power and predatory instinct. With a symbolic kiss, he pushes a point of his Vitae into the corpse, awakening it and further empowering it.

Before this power can be used, the target corpse must be animated as a Shuffling Porter, above.

Cost: 1 Vitae per corpse

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Cattiveria

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Vitae is wasted and the corpse is paralyzed by the botched attempt, completely unable to move or act for the remainder of its existence.

Failure: The awakening of the corpse fails. It may continue operation as a normal Shuffling Porter.

Success: The animated corpse is empowered and becomes more capable and more dangerous than a normal Shuffling Porter. The corpse's Strength and Stamina rise to 4 each (adding 3 to its Maximum Health rating as well), and its Intelligence and Wits rise to 1 each. The corpse gains one dot of the Brawl Ability, with a specialty in Grappling. The corpse can comprehend more complicated commands, and will be imbued with the predatory nature of its master, who it will guard with fierce loyalty.

Shuffling Porters gifted with the Predator's Bequest stop taking damage from accelerated rot, and can only be destroyed by violent means. They do not heal damage naturally, requiring the application of ectoplasm for repair.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the attributes gained above, the Shuffling Porter inherits a second dot of Brawl and one dot of any other Ability the vampire possesses, as chosen by the vampire.

•••••ULTIMO RESPIRO

The Last Breath, as Santino originally named this power, is a truly horrifying spectacle. By invoking her power to the limit, a Sangiovanni can forcibly rip the animating plasm from a walking corpse, damaging it hideously in the process. Animated corpses are unmade in an instant, and vampires suffer terrible wounds.

When this power is used, the Sangiovanni literally tears visible ectoplasm from the victim's body, leaving a deep scar in its wake. He must touch the victim, flesh to flesh, and then whip back, pulling the ectoplasm away.

The plasm so removed dissipates in seconds and cannot be used for any other purpose. This power may only be used once on a given victim per night, no matter how many vampires attempt to use it.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts + Cattiveria - Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The power catastrophically backfires, rending the Necromancer's own plasm, which rips itself out through his heart and deals one level of aggravated damage as it goes, leaving a roughly circular scar on his chest.

Failure: The power fails to activate.

Success: The target, which must be some form of walking dead, takes one point of lethal damage per success rolled. The plasm that evacuates the body leaves agonizing burns in its path, searing whorls and loops of tissue before vanishing.

Characters with Auspex may see the plasm whip out of the victim's body, curling and dissolving in the air around him.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the target is wracked with paralyzing pain and cannot act (except to defend himself) for the duration of the next turn.



Taifa

By Zachary Thomas Tyler

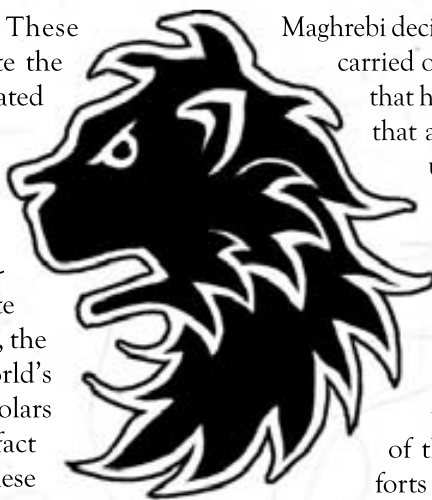
"Asalaam 'alaikoum, my Brother, come join us in our nightly hunt through the streets of Cairo, and we can exchange stories of our bloodline's past."

Culture, art, beauty, civilization. These are the things that attract and fascinate the Taifa, a lineage of refined and sophisticated Gangrel hailing from the Islamic lands of North Africa. Far from the stereotypical Savages, other Kindred of the region acknowledge the Moors as the protectors of civilization. From the shadows, they seek to guide and manipulate culture to better suit their tastes. Indeed, the bloodline claims to have some of the world's most talented politicians, artists and scholars amongst their ranks. Of course, the fact that they are static, dead things does these claims little good.

Their origins lie in the glorious nights of al-Andalus, centuries ago, when the Moors invaded Spain and established some of the most advanced and sophisticated societies in the world. While the rest of Europe struggled through the Dark Ages, the Moorish kingdoms led the Islamic world into a golden age of art, culture and science. In the cities of Córdoba, Granada and Seville, Muslims lived side by side with their Christian and Jewish neighbors, making great advances in the fields of architecture, medicine, astronomy and philosophy.

All Taifa can trace their ancestry back to Hassan al-Maghrebi, a former Berber warrior and scholar who followed the armies of the Islamic general Tariq ibn Ziyad as they arrived on the Iberian peninsula. Al-Maghrebi watched as what had once been the outposts of Muslim Arab and Berber armies grew into rich and powerful cities, and he became enamored with the achievements of Moorish civilization. When Abd al-Rahman II fled to CŪrdoba and established a new Umayyad court there, al-Maghrebi infiltrated it and Embraced or made ghouls of a number of the courtiers.

Proud, inspired by the majesty of the cities of Al-Andalus and empowered by the timely concentration of his Vitae, al-



Maghrebi decided to create a line of his own — one that carried on a tradition of nobility and patriotism that he would impart to them. He made a vow that all who inherited his Blood would take up the cause he so loved: to protect and bear witness to the great achievements of the conquerors of Iberia.

Very quickly, his line spread across the Iberian Peninsula, drawing in a proportion of the wisest and most talented scholars, artisans and politicians they could find. Flirting with violation of the Masquerade on occasion, their efforts aided the disparate Muslim states to flower and retain their hold in Spain despite continued war with the Christian enemy. Indeed, it is from these very states and petty kingdoms, or *Taifa* in Arabic, that the bloodline gained their name.

Legends of fierce, inhumanly tough Moorish warriors arose during one of many failed sieges laid by the Spanish Kingdom of Aragon, striking fear into many Spanish soldiers and attracting the attention (and ire) of observant European Kindred. Battles were fought in the Elysium courts of Spain in those nights, too, battles that brought both respect and destruction to the Taifa. Many who did not suffer Final Death in the mortal fields of war were forced to defend themselves against incensed Kindred foes, proving themselves in brutal political conflict as well as physical.

Unfortunately, the gilded splendor of Moorish Spain was not to last. Gradually, the Christian-led Reconquista was able to chip away at the Taifa states, while backstabbing, political intrigues and more conservative Muslim states in North Africa undermined the states from within. In the year 1492 on the Christian calendar, the Christian kingdoms of Castile and Aragon united and finally overtook Granada, the last of the great Muslim cities in Iberia. The Taifa were devastated by this loss.

Developer's Comments

For a bloodline that didn't seem especially popular, garnering only a few entries and falling right in the middle of the anticipatory poll, the Taifa inspired some of the most well-written submissions. Almost all of them were similar in theme and subject, but Mr. Tyler's stood out among the rest by virtue of the attractive playability of his version of the line and the clear indication of his historical research. The jury was unanimous in choosing it as a finalist.

Edits on the entry involved encouragement to expand on details mentioned in the original entry, giving the history and culture of the Taifa more room for illustration. The traditional wanderings and tale-telling of the line were extrapolated from original allusions, rounding out the night-to-night activities of these social Gangrel.

The Taifa present a wonderful distillation of the central theme of the Gangrel. Social and pack-oriented, they demonstrate that even the most animalistic Kindred can find a way to thrive in the world of mortal men — so long as they manage to find a strong-enough support system.

Worse still, the Spanish armies brought members of the European Invictus and Lancea Sanctum (and even a few Basque Acolytes) with them, intent on reclaiming the Moorish domains and driving out sympathetic vampires. The Taifa were forced into a corner, and many fled to North Africa and parts of the Middle East to find sanctuary. Only a small handful chose to remain in Spain, seeking to tend the glories of the bloodline's past.

Despite shared language, culture and religion, the Taifa initially faced difficulty assimilating into the Kindred society of the Middle East and North Africa. Other vampires already held many of the positions of power and authority in the region, and did not appreciate having naïve foreign upstarts trying to move into their territory. Only through adept social maneuvering and well-placed alliances was the bloodline able to survive through those dark and perilous nights.

Eventually, the bloodline managed to establish a presence in many of the major cities of the Islamic world, and slowly they began to spread out once again. In Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad and Istanbul, the Taifa once again became famous as socially astute political manipulators, patrons of the arts and insightful scholars and translators. To this night, many Arab elders maintain a soft spot in their cold, dead hearts for the Taifa and their cultural achievements.

Unfortunately, the Taifa's homelands have become a hotbed for political tensions and religious conservatism in the years following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. Because of this, many Taifa have once again found themselves forced to flee. Even though many Kindred still remember the glorious nights of Islamic art and scholarship, even the most powerful vampires are little match for a mob of angry mortals with torches. Hence, some Taifa have

been forced to go underground, while others seek their fortunes in the West.

Those Taifa who flee (or perhaps return) to Europe, ironically, follow the migrations of mortals from northern Africa and the Middle East. While members of the bloodline have yet to make their presence felt in North America, many Taifa can be found in Europe. They are particularly strong in France, where the Taifa lurk amongst "les Beurs," second- and third-generation immigrants of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian descent.

For their part, French Kindred have been less than welcoming, sharing many of their mortal countrymen's prejudices. Other Western Kindred (and mortals) harass Middle Eastern immigrants out of fears they harbor terrorists (which is, of course, little more than a racist stereotype). The future of the Taifa, especially in the West, remains to be seen. Nonetheless, the bloodline is quite politically astute and has many old and powerful allies. Perhaps they will make themselves an integral part of social life in their new homes, or perhaps they will wither and die. Only time shall tell.

Parent Clan: Gangrel

Nickname: Moors, though the Taifa themselves (and many other Muslim Kindred) prefer "The Civilized"

Covenant: The Taifa prefer the Invictus (or al-Harij, as it is sometimes known in Arabic), given the covenant's love of pomp and ceremony, and the value the covenant places on personal achievements. Naturally, in the Taifa's homelands of North Africa and the Middle East, the covenant takes on far more Arab culture. For instance, members of the bloodline prefer the term Sultan instead of a 'mere' Prince, and Arabic phrases are often used to show learning, culture and respect. Nonetheless, beyond such culture differences, the covenant is still the ruthless

meritocracy that it is in the West, and that suits the Taifa perfectly. Even under the many layers of tradition and formality, the Moors are predators, and they know it. That the Invictus allow them to claim their rightful place through their own efforts appeals to the bloodline, and for that reason, the majority of the Taifa can be found within the First Estate. Of course, far more Taifa are Harpies or Sheriffs than actual Princes, but that matters little.

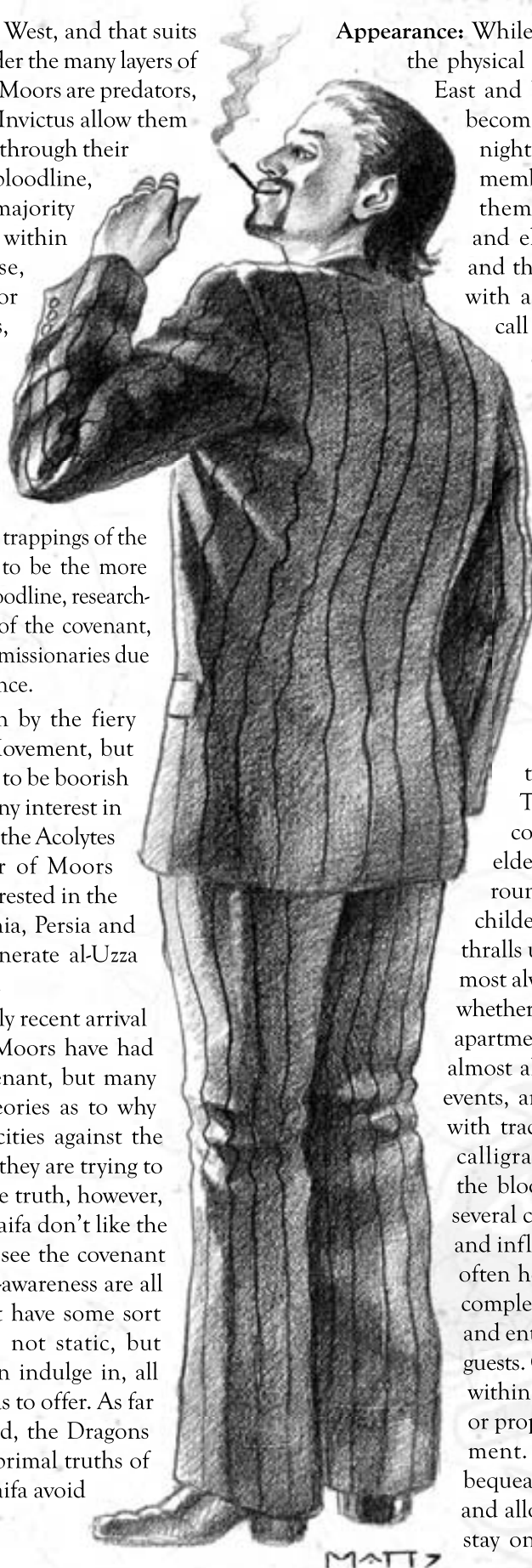
The Lancea Sanctum ranks a distant second, though in the Middle East the covenant adopts more Islamic imagery instead of the familiar Roman Catholic trappings of the West. Sanctified Taifa tend to be the more scholarly members of their bloodline, researching the history and sorcery of the covenant, though they are also popular missionaries due to their charisma and influence.

Some Taifa are drawn in by the fiery rhetoric of the Carthian Movement, but most consider the covenant to be boorish and crude. Few Taifa have any interest in the Circle of the Crone, but the Acolytes do count a small number of Moors amongst them who are interested in the pagan faiths of Mesopotamia, Persia and pre-Islamic Arabia who venerate al-Uzza and other pagan goddesses.

The Ordo Dracul is a fairly recent arrival in Islamic lands, and the Moors have had little contact with the covenant, but many instinctively dislike it. Theories as to why range from Dracula's atrocities against the Turks to some ancient lore they are trying to hide from the Dragons. The truth, however, is much more direct. The Taifa don't like the Ordo Dracul because they see the covenant as pointless. Study and self-awareness are all well and good, but it must have some sort of purpose. Vampires are not static, but rather meant to enjoy, even indulge in, all the things that the world has to offer. As far as most Taifa are concerned, the Dragons shut themselves off to the primal truths of being a vampire, and the Taifa avoid the covenant accordingly.

Appearance: While the majority of Moors still bear the physical features common to the Middle East and North Africa, the bloodline has become quite cosmopolitan in modern nights. Regardless of race or ethnicity, members of the bloodline tend to carry themselves with confidence, dignity and elegance. Most are quite swarthy, and their skin sometimes even darkens with age. Some particularly old Taifa call to mind legendary Arab heroes such as Abu Zayid al-Hilali and 'Antara ibn Shaddad. Many Taifa are quite attractive by local standards, and know how to use this to their advantage. They also know the value of appearances, and tailor themselves to suit the occasion. Most Taifa are just as comfortable in a Western-style three-piece suit as they are in the traditional *thobe*, *bisht* and *kaffiyeh* of a Bedouin tribesmen.

Haven: Given the nature of their weakness, members of the Taifa bloodline almost always prefer communal havens, though powerful elders are more likely to simply surround themselves with broods of their childer and grandchilder (or vampiric thralls unrelated to them). The Moors almost always keep large, expensive havens, whether these are private estates or upscale apartments in larger cities. Such havens are almost always large enough to host social events, and usually are lavishly decorated with traditional and modern art. Arabic calligraphy is especially popular with the bloodline, and indeed has been for several centuries now. The most powerful and influential members of the bloodline often hold court in their private havens, complete with talented musicians, poets and entertainers to amuse their vampiric guests. One particularly common practice within the bloodline is the abuse of *waqf*, or properties held in trust to the government. Traditionally, wealthy families bequeathed such property to the state, and allowed their mortal descendants to stay on as caretakers. Many Taifa took



advantage of this practice during the Almohad and Almoravid empires, making their havens in *waqfs* held by family members (or ghouls). However, the practice has mostly died out in modern, secularized states, so the Taifa can no longer use this method.

Background: Political acumen and social skills are perhaps the most important traits to the Taifa. Beyond that, the bloodline has no particular criteria, though individual tastes do play a role. Some Taifa prefer to Embrace only mortals from certain family lineages, meticulously tracking down descendants through the years before choosing a worthy candidate. Others give the gift of eternity to preserve particularly talented artists, musicians or scholars throughout the ages. And some Moors simply Embrace out of passion, choosing whichever reasonably attractive mortals catch their eye that night. Hence, there is a great deal of variety within the bloodline. Because of their origins in Moorish Spain, the vast majority of modern Taifa hail from North Africa or the Middle East. Arabs, Berbers and Sephardic Jews dominate the bloodline, though other ethnicities are represented as well. The bulk of the bloodline is Muslim, at least in name, though again this has more to do with their history and geographic background. Christian, Jewish and even atheist Taifa all exist as well.

Gangrel not of the bloodline are usually seen as backwards cousins, treated with respect perhaps, but not as equals. Only when they can prove themselves to be more than violent savages will they win respect within the bloodline. Nonetheless, those who do impress their Avus are adopted into the Taifa following traditional Arab custom and are considered full members of the lineage.

Character Creation: Social Attributes and Skills are almost always primary for the Taifa, though they also respect intellectual prowess as well so Mental Attributes and Skills are also appropriate. The Taifa prefer to be well-rounded, after all, and it's good to have a broad base of knowledge when striking up conversations. Skills such as Academics, Empathy, Expression, Persuasion, Politics, Socialize, Subterfuge and even Streetwise are all useful for the bloodline. Of course, it would be a mistake to assume all Taifa are fops, and those who make that mistake quickly learn to regret it if they survive. Many Moors appreciate the value of Merits, and Social Merits of all kinds are especially common within the bloodline. Striking Looks is not uncommon, and a fair number have Encyclopedic Knowledge as well, these are hardly required. Merits such as Allies, Contacts, Resources, Status and such are far more useful.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Majesty, Protean, Resilience

Weakness: There is a good reason that the Taifa choose to associate so frequently with other vampires. Much like wolves or lions, the Taifa are pack hunters and feel most comfortable amongst their own kind. When not in the presence of other vampires, a Taifa suffers a -2 dice penalty to all dice pools due to the unease of operating without a pack. The Moors do not necessarily need to be in the presence of other Taifa, or even other Gangrel. Any other vampires suffice. Ironically, this weakness helps to foster the personality and skills needed in the Taifa's role as consummate social predators.

In addition, all Taifa suffer the weakness of their parent clan, the Gangrel.

Organization: Despite being a very social group, the Taifa have little true organization of their own. They are numerous across North Africa and the Mediterranean, but the bloodline is plagued with numerous factions, broods and social intrigues. The most powerful, or well-connected, Taifa in a particular domain often bears the title of *Sheikh* (or *Sheikha* in the case of women), and holds private court somewhere in the city. Although the *Sheikh* is respected, he wields little actual authority in the bloodline. Often, he will form a small clique, competing with other Moors for status and influence. Once a month, the *Sheikh* will often hold an open court somewhere in the city, featuring art, music and decadence that harkens back to the courts of al-Andalus. Of course, other Taifa will often try to put on even more lavish displays to upstage the *Sheikh*. Beyond that, the Taifa are largely concerned with their covenant above all else.

In the West, the Taifa are often more tightly knit, if only for protection and because of the bloodline's unique weakness. The Taifa often form small, insular broods, especially in such cities as Paris, London or New York, where there are large immigrant communities they can blend in with. Sometimes, the Moors will play up their exotic appeal to win favor with the Prince or his court. At other times, the Moors look down upon their Western cousins. Some *Sheikhs* have been known to even claim the much more glorious title of *Emir* (or prince) for themselves, believing that Western Kindred won't speak Arabic. More often than not, these Taifa are right, but every once in a while they have been horribly wrong, much to their dismay.

Although they share little formal structure, the bloodline does share numerous traditions from their homeland. For instance, the Moors continue to preserve Arab naming conventions amongst themselves. If a vampire named Khalid was Embraced by a vampire named Ibrahim, he would be allowed to call himself Khalid ibn Ibrahim. If the vampire were Fatima, she would take

the name Fatima bint Ibrahim. And Ibrahim could call himself Abu Khalid. The Taifa take great pride in their lineage, and spend a great deal of time tracking down their ancestors.

Concepts: Bedouin prince, collector of fine art, diplomat between covenants, foreign news correspondent, Islamic legal scholar, manipulative advisor, modern warrior-poet, seductive predator, social scientist, translator, oil tycoon, wealthy merchant.

History

The Taifa record more than 1,000 years of history, but for many members of the bloodline, the magnificent gilded city-states of al-Andalus, were their greatest achievements. Of course, the precursors of the bloodline held far less influence over the mortals who founded and ruled these cities than the Taifa would like to believe, and what little influence they did hold was wasted on parties, petty squabbles and other diversions. Indeed, it is likely that their extravagances may have wound up causing more problems for the Muslim states than anything else toward the end. Nonetheless, the dream of their lost homelands has been a recurring theme throughout the bloodline's long and glorious history.

The bloodline's official founder, Hassan al-Maghrebi, was a former Berber soldier in the armies of the famed general Tariq ibn Ziyad, embraced into the Gangrel clan shortly after the force arrived in Iberia. The strongest member of his rural tribe, al-Maghrebi was a recent convert to Islam, and eager to travel the world. Although he never knew his sire, al-Maghrebi believes that his dedication and reputation as a brave fighter is what earned him the Embrace. However, he found little interest in bloodshed. What interested him were things such as learning, poetry, women and other comforts of civilization.

Hassan quickly adapted to the Requiem, flitting from one social group to the next, watching vampires and mortals. During these years, it is believed he journeyed far and wide across the Iberian peninsula, trading in skillfully told tales of his adventures and enjoying the company of both Kindred and mortal folk. For a time, he became a fixture at the Umayyad court in CŪrdoba, where the Taifa lineage is believed to have originated. However, the bloodline soon spread throughout Muslim Spain, growing as al-Maghrebi traveled.

It is known that al-Maghrebi spent some time in the city of Zaragoza somewhere around the middle of the 11th century, regaling the Elysium court with his tales and contributing to the ruling dynamic there. It is believed that he threw in with the Invictus during his stay there,

and sired a number of childer who went on to distinguish themselves in service to the domain.

The city of Tulaytulah (modern-day Toledo) also appears to have played host to him at some time — references in records of the Lancea Sanctum mention the traveling Gangrel and his personable retinue of Kindred, painting him in respectful tones while also suggesting that he was eventually ejected from the domain for “excessively fervent loyalty to transient mortal institution unbecoming of Kindred of Quality.”

Several modern-day Taifa trace their lineage to Kindred from DĒnia and Granada as well, suggesting that al-Maghrebi or his childer must have visited those domains at some time. If the legends are to be believed, and there is really little reason to doubt them, Hassan and his childer traversed the whole of the Iberian Peninsula at least once in their travels, becoming truly ubiquitous during the height of Moorish civilization.

The Reconquista

The last years of the 11th century saw the end of the relatively peaceful, proud existence of the Taifa. With the coming of the Spanish Reconquista and the retaliatory invasion of the Almoravid armies, war broke out in all of the Moorish territories of Iberia and the travels of the Taifa were severely curtailed. Many journeyed to sites of battle, hoping to defend the glory of al-Andalus from the enemy, while others retreated to their favorite cities, working to preserve and protect their splendor.

A fair number fell in battle, and the stories of the Taifa boldly proclaim their bravery even in modern nights. Those who remained were hardened by the experience and forced to confront the fact that their power and fervor alone were not enough to stem the waves of equally dedicated invaders from without.

In the cities of al-Andalus, the rest of the bloodline watched in horror as war brought economic crises, rampant panic and prejudice and eventual collapse. There was little they could do — the course of mortal history seemed set, with or without their opposition. Following the collapse of mortal Moorish civilization, many sympathetic Kindred of other lineages and clans vacated the domains or entered into long slumber, leaving them virtually undefended from encroaching European vampires.

Exile and Eclipse

Despite propaganda to the contrary, the Taifa have never been an entirely Muslim lineage. Since their early nights in al-Andalus, Christians and Jews have had a place in the bloodline. Muslims certainly make up the

majority, but even tonight there is a vocal minority made up of Sephardic Jews. Nonetheless, all Moors and their "sympathizers" found themselves targets of the Reconquista and, later, the Inquisition. Many of the Taifa met their doom at the hands of mortals, or rivals who took advantage of prevailing sentiment.

Although a few particularly old Taifa remained in the newly formed nation of Spain, the majority of those who survived the Inquisition's assault emigrated into the Almohad and Ottoman Empires, believing them to be safer. In part, this was true, since the Taifa were able to blend in fairly well due to shared culture and religion. However, their mass exodus also brought them into conflict with many other vampires and covenants who were already well established in the region. Whereas once they had been the dominant bloodlines, the Sultans and Sheikhs of the night, now they were virtual outcasts.

Slowly, the Taifa tried to establish themselves in the larger cities of the region. Large broods in Cairo, Beirut, Baghdad, Istanbul and Marrakech are legacies of those nights. In order to survive as a bloodline, the Taifa had to prove themselves useful, and many chose to attach themselves to courts of the Invictus, the dominant covenant in the area. Although seldom achieving the status of Sultan, the Moors were able to take prominent positions in the courts as viziers, diplomats, scholars and even enforcers. Others found themselves espousing the Iblic creed of the Lancea Sanctum, or even throwing in with the Circle of the Crone.

Unfortunately, despite their influence, the Moors were but a shadow of their former selves. The glories of al-Andalus were lost, and the bloodline was forced to adapt to a rapidly changing world. While the elders of the bloodline remained lost in nostalgic reminiscence, the younger Taifa were shocked to see other Kindred lineages pass them by. It quickly became clear that the Moors needed to adapt or die out. Gathering together in secret, a group of young Moors decided that the only way to save their bloodline was to establish themselves in one city, using it as a stronghold from which they could then expand. They chose Cairo. Led by a powerful elder named Zuhra Hussein, they fell upon the city's Sultan in 1463, killing him and proclaiming that Cairo would be thenceforth be a city of the Taifa.

Their error was critical. Instead of claiming the territory for the whole of the Invictus, they stated, time and again, that it was their own — as if to say that their line represented a superior force within the covenant, one that was more deserving than others. A schism formed in the Invictus of Cairo, and decades of intrigue, subversion and betrayal followed. By the middle of the 16th century, the

city's Kindred were in a virtual state of civil war, and the Taifa Emir was forced into a series of honorable battles that eventually led to his Final Death.

The Civilized Response

Shamed and humiliated, the surviving childer of Zuhra Hussein left Cairo, carrying a message of tragedy to the others of the line. Some called for vengeance, hoping to reawaken the dream of a Taifa stronghold by evoking images of the splendor of al-Andalus, but their calls fell on deaf ears. To many of the Taifa, who had carefully established themselves in their varied domains, the vision of conquest was a fool's reverie.

It is said by many Taifa that the fall of Zuhra was the pivotal event in the development of the line. The whole of the bloodline faced a decision in those nights: to pick up the sword and seek to revive long-forgotten glories or to settle into the Requiem with humble and honorable acceptance. Had they chosen the former, it is likely that the whole of the line would have been wiped out before the end of the 16th century.

Instead, many of the Taifa flourished in relative peace, growing more influential and more powerful with patient, small steps. Some achieved offices of great status within the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum, and many Embraced small broods of their own, contributing to the growth of the line and its establishment as a dignified, powerful lineage.

Diaspora

For centuries, the majority of the Taifa remained within the domains of North Africa and the Middle East. But increasing social pressures, political instability and growing religious conservatism in recent years has made this area less appealing for vampires, especially those as extravagant and wealthy as the Moors. Many younger members of the bloodline have begun to look toward the West in search of opportunities, and a growing number have followed their mortal counterparts into the cities of the Europe, seeking to make their fortunes.

Unfortunately, few Taifa find what they were hoping for when they arrive. Their very weakness drives them to seek out interaction with other Kindred. Yet racism and mortal prejudices can be just as strong amongst the Kindred as they are amongst mortals, and older vampires rarely appreciate having to deal with foreign upstarts intruding upon their territory. Furthermore, with the increased fear of terrorism, new arrivals from the Middle East who engage in strange behavior (in mortal terms, at least) run a very real risk of drawing attention from the wrong kind of government agencies.

Another problem facing Taifa in the West is that they are largely cut off from many of the bloodline's traditions. Although the bloodline has established a good reputation and built up a large network of allies in their homelands, this does little good for Moors living in the West. Their customs and practices seem strange, alienating them from local Kindred at times, and some Taifa are shocked to find that the Western versions of the covenants they are familiar with use different titles. For instance, many Moors are baffled by the Lancea Sanctum's use of Catholic rather than Islamic imagery in Western lands.

Still, there are plenty of opportunities in the West for Taifa who are clever and adaptable enough to manage. Most larger cities host immigrant communities from Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Algeria, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries, where a traditional Moor can rule over ethnic enclaves in near total isolation. Other, more adventurous members of the bloodline, however, have decided to make a name for themselves in the courts of the Western Invictus, boldly claiming their place in the domains of Europe, and sometimes playing up their exotic origins.

Society and Culture

As an ancient and distinguished bloodline, the Taifa take no small amount of pride in the many customs they have developed over the years. Social interaction is especially important amongst the Moors, who find themselves driven to seek out others of their kind. For this reason, they have developed a rich heritage that draws upon many elements of Moorish and Arab court culture. Ironically, Taifa in the West are especially driven to cling to such things when possible, because of the tangible connection to their bloodline's identity that it gives them.

Music, Art and Song

To the ancient Arabs, poetry was a form of magic or soothsaying inspired by the djinn. Indeed, even the Prophet Muhammad is recorded as saying, "Verily, eloquence is sorcery." This may be so, for it certainly holds a powerful fascination over the Taifa bloodline. Indeed, no small number of Moors are (or claim to be) brilliant artists. However, most members of the bloodline are more content to study, enjoy and patronize the arts from afar. Classical Arab music and poetry is held in high regard, though the romances and ballads of the Sephardic Jews are also very popular. During celebrations such as Eid al-Fitr, musicians are in high demand amongst the elders of the bloodline.

Some of the oldest and most decadent members of the bloodline go even further, making ghouls of their favorite

poets and musicians. Such ghouls, known as *qiyan* after the professional female musicians of Moorish courts, are often beautiful women who are trained in classical Arabic and Persian literature, poetry and musical theory. No small number are also talented instrumentalists, particularly on the 'oud. Since the nights of al-Andalus, it has been a popular way of showing friendship within the bloodline to trade *qiyan*, and some generous sires have been known to pass *qiyan* to their childer as well.

Much to the shock and horror of the elders in the bloodline, who lament the loss of their glorious past, younger Taifa have increasingly become interested in modern music as such Rai and Al-Jeel, which has become popular in North Africa today. While their elders prefer the styles of Abdel Halim Hafez, Fairouz and Farid al Atrache, younger Moors are drawn to, say, Khaled, Natasha Atlas and Amr Diab.

The Requiem of the Taifa

The Moors share the same wants, desires, beliefs and failings of their mortal days, but their weakness drives them to participate in social interactions. Similar to wolves or lions, the Taifa are goaded by the Beast into forming packs with other vampires. Although they do not necessarily need to be around members of their own brood, many Taifa prefer to associate with their own kind, in no small part because they share the same weakness.

For this reason, numerous broods of Moors have risen and fallen over the centuries. For many Taifa, particularly younger members of the bloodline, being part of a brood is little more than a symbol of status or ancestry. Yet many older Moors treat the bonds of Blood as a sacred chain, akin to the tribal structure of the Bedouin. This is ironic since the majority of Taifa come from urban, educated backgrounds, but nonetheless, the bonds of kinship are very important for such social beasts.

Many broods are characterized, by common interest or personality traits. For instance, the Banu Ibrahim of Tunis are mostly legal scholars who trace their ancestry to an 11th-century philosopher named Ibrahim ibn Mustafa. Rumors paint them as quiet, but manipulative. Another lineage, the Tariqa al-Nasir of Mosul, are more akin to a secretive Sufi mystical order, and are primarily of Kurdish descent. The Banaat al-Wadd, an all-female brood in southern Arabia, are rumored to be affiliated with the Circle of the Crone and study pagan witchcraft. And the venerable Bay't al-Hawa of Cairo is made up of some of the bloodline's most cunning and elitist politicians.

Not all broods are necessarily distinguished, or even well established. Indeed, younger Taifa in the West often form their own broods overnight, though these are not

necessarily recognized as such by the elders. Nonetheless, broods such as the Sanctified Ansara al-Sayf of Paris, made up of Moors of Algerian and Moroccan background, and the Maronite Banu Kinda of Detroit represent a new, dynamic face of the bloodline.

A fair number of the broods intermingle as well, owing to the tendency of Taifa to travel. Hardy and eager to share stories and see the world, many of the line take up the nomadic Requiem at least once, moving from place to place and gathering experiences, waiting to find a home they find sufficiently inspiring (or sufficiently civilized) to settle in. On their travels, those members of the line who encounter their brothers and sisters are happy to join up with one another, enjoying the company of like-minded Gangrel.

The Toreador Rivalry

Saddened by the decline of his beloved city-state of Ishbiliyya (modern Seville) in the 13th century, a Moor named Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad went into a voluntary torpor. When he awoke in the 17th century, he found a greatly changed world and a strange new lineage of Daeva vampires competing for power and attention. While at first amused by these so-called *Toreros*, his patience with them soon wore thin. The final straw came when ibn Ahmad and a Torero named Miguel de Santos fought over the right to Embrace a beautiful Andalusian woman who captivated both of them.

Although it's difficult to distill truth from the legends, it is known that the girl was poisoned and slain during the conflict, and that both Kindred blamed the other for her death. De Santos

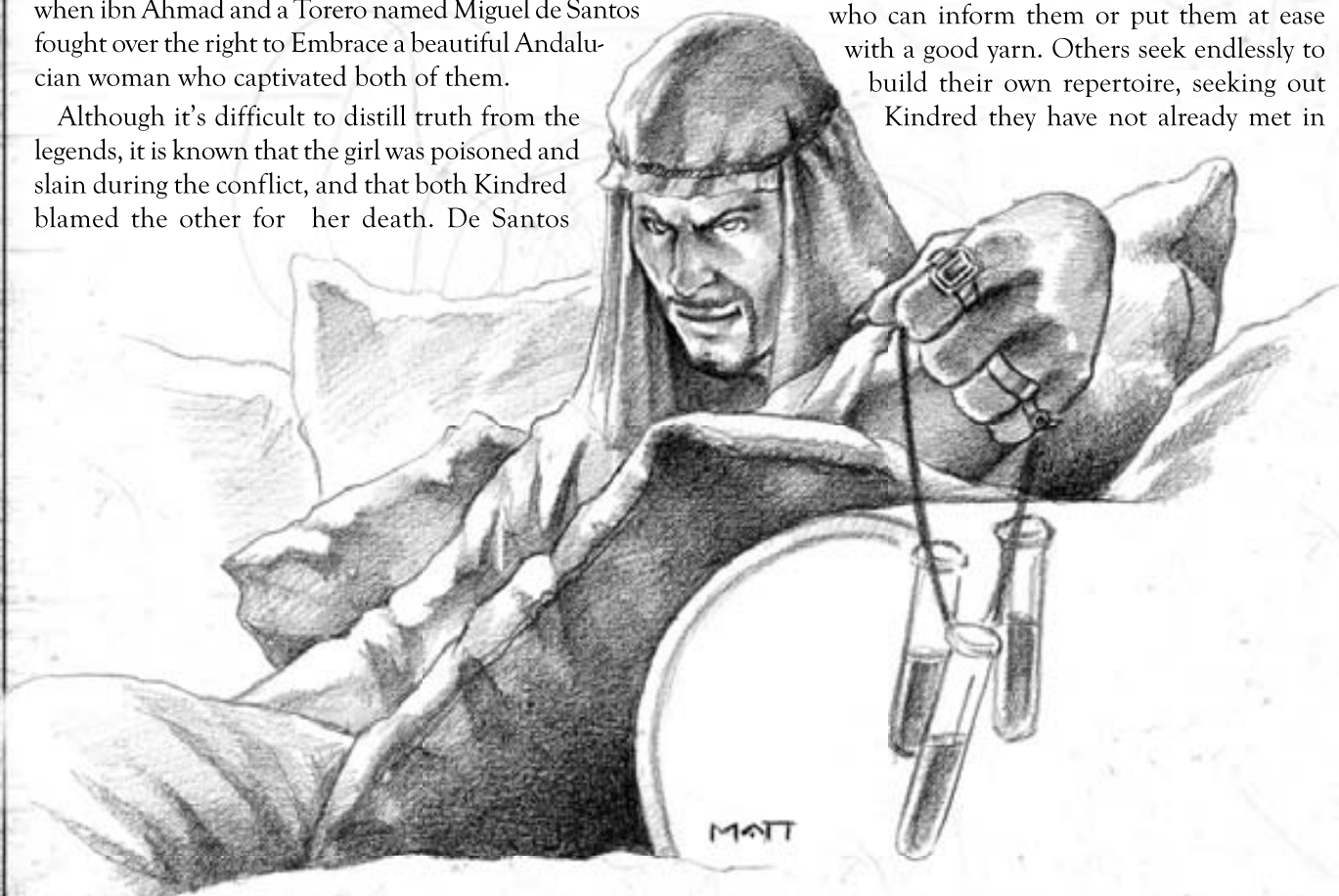
and ibn Ahmad swore bloody vengeance, clashing again and again over the following years until 1884, when the Taifa finally slew his enemy. By then, the lines of both Kindred were trapped in a complicated web of mutual hatred, violence and insult that none could unravel.

Several Taifa have traveled from Seville, telling their side of the story and spreading the rivalry outwards. On occasion, hapless Toreador who have never heard of de Santos or ibn Ahmad are drawn into conflict by a Taifa far away, sparking a new vendetta and spilling blood anew.

The Telling of Tales

As roving wanderers and inveterate seekers of Kindred company, many of the Taifa have developed the art of telling tales meant to inform and entertain their brethren. Assembling oral histories of the line and often inserting their own adventures into the mix, they happily spin hours-long stories of their travels to any vampire willing to listen. Many will trade tales back and forth, building their own mental store while sharing an entertaining accumulation of jokes, warnings and descriptive narratives in return.

Some Taifa are prone to judge their brethren according to the quality and range of stories they are willing and able to tell, and may accord greater respect to those who can inform them or put them at ease with a good yarn. Others seek endlessly to build their own repertoire, seeking out Kindred they have not already met in



hopes of hearing something new so that they may work to memorize it and add it to their store of knowledge.

As a result, many find themselves keenly prepared to socialize, drawing upon their accumulated tales as a means to add appropriate chatter to any gathering. Outsider Kindred consider many Taifa overly garrulous, but none can deny that the practice is charming.

Oaths of the Taifa

Taifa of the Invictus have invented a number of Blood Oaths over the centuries. While these oaths were originally sworn and traded only within the line, many have propagated outwards into the covenant proper, finding common use in domains visited by the Taifa.

The Oath of the Awliyah

Otherwise known as the Oath of Welcome Return, this is a mutual oath sworn between two members of the Invictus before one departs from the domain. The nomad preparing to undergo the journey swears that he will return by a certain night, and the vampire remaining in place likewise swears that when the nomad returns, he will be made welcome. Swearing the oath is more expensive for the Kindred who remains in place, and is thus considered an unsurpassed demonstration of good faith and friendship.

The terms of the oath are written out in the blood of both swearing Kindred. Both halves of the written contract remain red and fresh unless violated — if the nomad fails to return and has not met Final Death, his half turns black. If he is not made welcome upon his return, the other half does the same. If one of the two Kindred suffers Final Death, the blood writing on his half of the document turns to ash, flaking away and leaving only a faint impression.

Oath of Awilyah

Prerequisite: Covenant Status: Blood Potency •••+, Covenant Status: Invictus: •+

Cost: 1 Vitae (spent by the nomad) and 1 Vitae + 1 Willpower (spent by the remaining vampire)

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Majesty

Action: Instant

To invoke this oath, both Kindred must bleed into prepared vessels and dip pens in the Vitae, writing their halves of the contract within minutes — before the mystic substance reverts back to ordinary blood. The vampire who remains in the domain then spends one Willpower point to activate the contract.

For every success on the activation roll, the vampire who remains behind grants the nomad one bonus die

to be applied to any situation that may threaten the nomad's ability to return as promised. Each time one of the bonuses is used, it disappears and cannot be used again. The bonuses can be applied in any combination: all at once, one at a time, or otherwise divided.

If the nomad fails to return by the promised date and time, all of the remaining bonuses disappear.

Example: Before embarking on a journey between domains, Jalaal of Taifa swears an Oath of Awilyah with his sibling, Umar, promising to return within two months. Both Kindred sacrifice a point of Vitae, and Umar spends a point of Willpower to activate the contract. Umar's player scores six successes on the activation roll, creating a pool of six bonus dice for Jalaal to access over the course of his travels. His player uses a +1 bonus on a hunting roll when pickings get slim on the road, a +3 bonus to a Survival roll when looking for shelter in an unfamiliar domain and a +2 bonus to his Initiative roll when a strange vampire chases him out of the territory.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

The Oath of Infaq

Otherwise known as the Oath of Sanguine Compliment (or, in more cynical circles, as the Oath of Silence), this avoidance vow declares the vampire's intent to speak well of the subject wherever he goes. While swearing the oath, the vampire kneels and bleeds one point of Vitae into a hollow vessel of some sort — usually a bottle or jar — which he presents to the subject. The blood in the receptacle remains liquid until the oath is violated or annulled by the subject. In the former case, it darkens, eventually turning completely black, while in the latter it simply evaporates. If the swearer suffers Final Death, the blood turns to ash.

The great Taifa Knight, Badr-Aldin ibn Husam-al-Din, scourge of the North African domains and revered Meister of the Order of the Burning Sands, is said to have dozens of these vials in his possession, sworn by awestruck brethren and lords who witnessed his prowess in battle.

The Oath of Infaq

Prerequisite: Majesty •, Covenant Status: Invictus •+

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary to activate this power.

Action: Instant

The Oath of Infaq must be sworn willingly by a Kindred who donates the point of Vitae required to activate it. The oath cannot be sworn under mystical compulsion; the Kindred's will must be free.

While the oath is in effect, the swearing Kindred suffers a point of lethal damage every time he willingly speaks ill

of the subject. There is no resistance roll involved, as the vampire imposed the oath upon himself. The damage will not occur if the Kindred is mystically compelled to insult the subject, and the blood does not turn to ash.

While many of the Taifa who take this oath choose to do so, there is no actual compulsion to speak well

of the subject. It is possible to simply refrain from mentioning him.

The oath is ended when the vessel imbued with Vitae is broken — either by the subject or by anyone else. Otherwise, the oath lasts indefinitely.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.



California Xiao

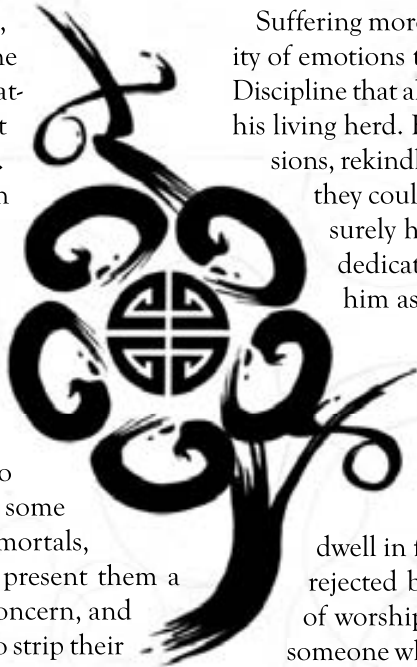
By Adriano Bompiani

My child, how could you trust your fickle feelings more than the teachings of our master?

Kindred emotions are but a pallid, hollow echo of living passions. Genuine feelings flowing through a warm, beating heart are lost to the undead. Most Kindred envy the living their emotions. The Xiao *crave* them. Unable to sustain their existence through Vitae alone, these Daeva offshoots drain their victims of emotions just as they feast on their blood. The secretive, cult-like bloodline has mastered the art of finding and exploiting those to whom emotions are a burden. The angry and bitter youths, the impressionable, those who have been recently rejected or suffered some other misfortune. The Xiao find such mortals, shower them with love and attention, present them a false façade of friendship and sincere concern, and then induct them into their blood cult to strip their victims of their very minds and souls.

Records of the bloodline founder's vampiric existence date back to the second half of the 19th century. Allegedly, Xiao Jun Jie was already a vampire when he moved to California from the Asian southeast. What is known for certain is that within a couple of decades the prolific Daeva had at least two childer and a sizable human herd.

At first, Xiao's followers were organized into an avant-garde polyamorous ring, but mystical elements crept into their philosophy. Xiao fancied himself a "holy man" — despite not being a "man" anymore — and went to reside with his followers and many lovers in a reclusive commune. He started a disturbing cult, mixing elements of primitive Buddhism with Catholic paraphernalia and the sharing of Vitae. His teachings revolved around escaping the cycle of reincarnation through ascetic practices, involving fasting, sleep deprivation, intercourse with the master himself and, ultimately, drinking the master's blood.



Suffering more than the average Daeva from the sterility of emotions that plagues all Kindred, Xiao devised a Discipline that allowed him to siphon passions away from his living herd. He gorged himself on his followers' passions, rekindling his own while destroying any interest they could have for anything but him. Slowly but surely his following grew in both numbers and dedication — most of his faithful now regarded him as a lover, a father, a god and more.

In the early years of the 20th century, some of his descendants managed to snap out of Xiao's spiritual iron grip. They were able to tear the veil of lies the cult had spun around them and flee. Known as Apostates, these rogue Xiao dwell in fear of reprisal. Xiao cannot stand being rejected by his own blood; deranged by decades of worship, he simply can't stand the thought of someone who knows him but doesn't love him. The elder vampire spends a great deal of resources trying to track down his stray childer, working to bring them back to the fold or destroy them.

This night, while most bloodline members still owe loyalty to the founder, a few rogue Xiao cults are scattered across Europe and Asia, far from their old master's interference. Other Apostates have turned their back on the Xiao lifestyle altogether and are striving to start their Requiems afresh, to find a place within vampiric society despite a troubled past and the enduring threat of the Sect.

Parent Clan: Daeva

Nickname: The Sect (members of the bloodline in good standing) or Apostates (rogue Xiao)

Covenant: By and large, most Xiao cultists are unaligned. The Sect's demand for absolute devotion and relentless dedication leaves little time for other pursuits. Besides, most covenants — indeed, most Kindred in their right state of mind — want nothing to do with the Xiao. To

Developer's Comments

In judging, there were a number of Xiao bloodlines that were good, but two very different entries stood clearly out above the rest. This one cast the Xiao as Kindred devoid of normal emotion, forced to provoke unnatural devotion among their mortal victims, draining them of sensation as well as blood in order to survive. There was another, equally promising one that cast the Xiao in nearly opposite terms: as overly emotional vampires who needed to diffuse their passions, using the surrounding mortals as a "sponge" to absorb the overflow. This one evoked a literal expression of the original one-line summary of the bloodline: its vampires feed directly on the emotions of their victims. The other involved a metaphorical expression of the same term. We debated the merits of both entries for quite some time, trying to figure out which would best suit the World of Darkness setting.

In the end, we decided that both were too good to eliminate, and that they should both be finalists. If Storytellers wish, they can choose one or the other as the "canon" Xiao in their games — but as work continued, I began to really enjoy the idea of both Xiao lines co-existing in the same world. Both have rather self-involved founders, so there's no reason they wouldn't both name their lines after themselves in ignorance of the other. The co-existence of two completely different bloodlines with the same name also went a long way toward highlighting the mystery of lines in the World of Darkness: it's always difficult to know that you're dealing with the line you think you are, and even careful investigation to separate fact from rumor could end up pointing you in the wrong direction. Something so mundane as a shared name can lead to all sorts of misdirection and misattribution — fertile ground for stories in the intrigue-laden Danse Macabre.

Mr. Bompani's Xiao present a challenge of their own to characters in-game, further complicating matters, because they are in the process of a serious schism drawn along ethical lines. Edits on the original entry mostly went toward highlighting that schism and working to create a bloodline that would serve well both as antagonists and as a source for player characters in a story. I believe that the California Xiao as they are presented here would make one of the best choices for a single-bloodline game.

those rare outsiders who know the Xiao, the bloodline's practices are universally considered a potential breach of the Traditions, and especially a severe threat to the Masquerade. For this reason, the covenants will usually turn down any application from a known Xiao.

Apostates, on the other hand, often join a covenant to give a new meaning to their unives or simply out of a need for protection. The accepting Carthian Movement is the prime choice for disaffected Xiao who have fully rejected the way of their bloodline. The modern, secular outlook of this covenant feels comfortably distant from the mystical Sect. It also helps that the Movement stresses individualism within a structured framework, helping rogue Xiao cope with their newfound freedom. In turn, Xiao tend to do well within the Movement — as uniformly charismatic leaders, Apostates can quickly rise to positions of great responsibility despite suffering some social stigmata because of their past.

The Lancea Sanctum is far less tolerant, but is still home to a small number of Xiao who have managed to turn their back on the Sect without losing their devotion. Sanctified Apostates bring their typical fiery Daeva pas-

sion into matters of religion, leaning toward the more mystical side of Longinus's teachings. They're more likely to meditate than to sermonize, and are generally more concerned with their own spiritual growth than with a covenant's agenda. The Lancea Sanctum is prone to consider attachment to an individual Priest a liability rather than an asset. Consequently, Sanctified Apostates rarely reach any position of authority, despite their ability to effortlessly draw sizable followings.

So far, no Xiao is known to have joined the Ordo Dracul, the Circle of the Crone or the Invictus.

Appearance: Older bloodline members from Xiao Jun Jie's community are uniformly attractive, chosen to suit his tastes. This is also true of most, but not all, younger Sect members. All Xiao Embraced in the 19th century, and many American Xiao Embraced later on, are of Asian descent.

No Xiao could be described as plain-looking. Bloodline members need to be able to attract attention to use their signature Discipline, so even those few who are not gifted with good looks soon learn how to dress for the part. As fashion-conscious as any Daeva, Xiao strive

first and foremost to win trust and confidence. They prefer to sport casual elegance and usually shy away from extravagant looks.

When conducting rites or meditation, Sectarian Xiao wear ornate ceremonial robes devised by the line founder. These are reminiscent of a Chinese Buddhist monk's robe, usually in lively warm colors, and are sewn with an eclectic assortment of mystical symbols, lifted from Christian, Buddhist and Taoist imagery. There is some variation in ceremonial robes among different communes, but every robe marks its wearer's status within the bloodline.

Haven: Sect Xiao are often to be found dwelling in commune-like compounds with their large human herds, usually sharing them with one or more other members of the bloodline. The vampires' quarters are always impeccably furnished – just as most Daeva, Xiao prefer to spend their Requiems in the lap of luxury. Chambers reserved for the cult masters are also well guarded and generally inaccessible to lowly cultists. The human followers' quarters, on the other hand, tend to be spartan at best and squalid at worst. If at all possible, the compound will be found in a remote, secluded location comfortably far from prying eyes.

Apostates tend to be more practical-minded in regard to their havens, favoring places that are both hard to find and easy to defend. Religious Apostates favor quiet, secluded, spacious havens. Their spiritual pursuits are readily apparent to any visitor: holy texts and images line the walls, and the smell of incense wafts through the air. Secular Apostates, on the other hand, fall back to the ways of other

Succubi, favoring cozy, well-kept quarters in lively urban areas, even at the loss of some safety.

Background: Faithful Xiao Embrace from within their cult herds exclusively. Indeed, it might be argued that the whole cult's purpose is to select the best prospective bloodline members. "Best," in Xiao Jun Jie's eyes, meaning of course "most beautiful and slavishly loyal." Over several years, cult members are accurately screened and tested for unswerving faith and unthinking devotion.

Eventually, a handful of the most promising cultists are required to undergo one last trial, breaching the veil between life and death and ascending to a deathless state beyond the circle of reincarnation. To the cultists, this looks like a suicide ritual, and it's the ultimate test of loyalty. Those who refuse are slain on the spot. The cult leader then Embraces the rest, or tries to. There are known instances of some manic Xiao trying to lead up to 12 cultists at a time into unlife, accidentally slaying all but one or two. Siring many childer seems to confer a measure of status within the Sect, but few Xiao have been able to perform mass Embraces more than once in their Requiem. This practice of mass Embrace does nothing to endear the bloodline to the rest of Kindred society. Most vampires see it as an offense to the Second Tradition and an unreasonable drain on the blood supply. Many simply see it as an abhorrent, downright despicable practice.

Most Xiao are of American nationality, and a plurality are of Asian descent. Members are chosen for their ability to successfully found and lead a cult cell of their own. Good looks, a strong personality, burning ambition and a way with words are all highly sought after. Usually, cultists are



drawn to the Xiao because the mortals find themselves at odds with society, or are unable to cope with some change they are going through.

Apostates are an even more diverse lot. Most are ex-cult members who escaped the bloodline's clutches. They share most of the traits normally associated with Sect Xiao, except blind devotion to the bloodline. A tiny minority of Xiao have never been cultists themselves, being instead the childer of fugitive Apostates.

Character Creation: As with all Daeva, Xiao favor Social Attributes and Skills. Furthermore, they all excel at Intimidation and Persuasion and receive at least some training in Academics and Occult. The Striking Looks Merit is a given for any Xiao, and Sect members should invest some dots in Herd and a communal Haven.

Bloodline Disciplines: Celerity, *Kingjan*, Majesty, Vigor

Weakness: All of the Xiao suffer the weakness of the Daeva, their parent clan.

In addition, Xiao Jun Jie's psychosis has twisted the blood of his line. All members of the Xiao are sociopaths, and do not experience the normal range of human emotion. They suffer a -2 dice penalty on all rolls involving Empathy, Expression and Socialize. Any time the Xiao is involved in circumstances that demand a display of compassion or remorse, he becomes irritable instead. If the circumstance persists, he may have to test for a frustration rage frenzy (requiring three successes on a Resolve + Composure roll to resist).

Organization: The Sectarian Xiao act much like a tight-knit charismatic cult, centered upon the bloodline founder, Xiao Jun Jie. As he created more childer, the founder sent them to other cities to spread the cult. Only a few were successful, though. Princes usually resent such intrusion on their domains and stomp out Sect cells with cold efficiency. No Xiao cell is known to exist in the American Midwest or on the East Coast.

Most Sectarian Xiao still reside on the West Coast, and all members in a given city share a haven and form a coterie. The single largest Xiao cell is located in California, where the bloodline founder resides. Some other West Coast states also boast a Xiao cell, usually consisting of one Kindred cell leader, two to four other coterie members, either vampires or ghouls, and at least 10 or 20 human followers. These independent cells often have something in common with the main Californian cult, but they also reflect their local leaders' personalities to some degree. A few work like secretive, paranoid militias; others have closer ties with organized crime and run extensive drug and prostitution rings under the religious fa ade. Regardless, all cult members are expected to show absolute loyalty to their cell leader.

Rogue Xiao don't usually keep any ties with members of their bloodline. A few crusading Apostates, though, have taken upon themselves the duty to help others escape the Sect. Over time, informal rings of Apostates have sprung up in a few cities. These loose affiliations provide each other with counsel and mutual protection, but have little in the way of formal organization, and most are rarely willing to trust any member of the line they don't already know.

Concepts: Doomsday preacher, spoiled socialite, angst-ridden runaway teen, frustrated writer, ex-cult member, paranoid militiaman, commune leader, conspiracy theorist, jaded polygamist, abusive office boss.

History

The tales that spread across Chinese ports and cities in 1848 told of Gum San, "Gold Mountain," a place far across the Pacific Ocean where precious metal could be dug in vast amounts. A backwater, dangerous place that the rest of the world called California. Lured by promises of easy riches or simply driven by desperation, at first only a handful of youths braved the sea, but that trickle would soon become a flood as thousands upon thousands of Cantonese immigrants moved to California in the following years. They fled civil unrest and crop failure and sailed toward disease, hard toil and discrimination. And yet a greater menace was traveling with them.

Hidden on a Chinese ship headed for the American West Coast, a Cantonese Daeva named Xiao Jun Jie moved with the hopeful mortals. The sailors who had met him at the dock didn't realize he was an undead. After all, he shared no trait with the vampires of folklore, except maybe for the ravenous sexual appetite that the Chinese attributed to the P'o, or lower soul. Jun Jie had been a monk and a slave trader, and he had walked down the path to both enlightenment and depravity, the latter with far more enthusiasm than the former.

Unfortunately, the reckless Succubus had made one too many enemies in his native country and had no choice left but to start anew in an unknown, savage land. The move turned out far better than expected for the fugitive Daeva. His destination proved to be a chaotic, nearly lawless place where competition was scarce and prey abundant. It was far easier for a vampire to have his fill of Vitae than for a man to have his fill of gold. California back then was sorely lacking in the subtler pleasures of unlife, but it provided Xiao with all the crude ones he could handle. The state was changing at an astonishing pace, though, even more so in the eyes of the stagnant Kindred. He could clearly see that it would be a matter of mere decades before California became a hub of civiliza-

tion. He needed but bide his time and wait for the squalid wooden shacks to be replaced by proper houses, palaces and cities. Xiao bade his time, and started a business.

He had taken half a dozen of his favorite lovers with him from Canton, and it didn't take him long to realize that lust was no less a powerful tool on this side of the sea than in the rest of the world. The immigrants were mostly young men, and women were rare and highly sought after. Xiao still had a few friends in Canton who could persuade a lady with words or actions, and he became adept at smuggling women, willing or not, into California. The most beautiful ones joined his personal menagerie. The ones he deemed unworthy or grew bored of were given to his most loyal followers as a reward, forced into prostitution or sold.

Soon Xiao had carved a niche for himself. He knew what people feared and what they craved, and he was able to give them both. He gained a reputation as a powerful and wise person, and gained many loyal followers among Chinese immigrants, who sought his advice, his protection and his favor.

Racial segregation worked in Xiao's favor, shielding his domain from the European and American competition that was slowly settling California. However, he knew he couldn't survive protracted conflict. Experimenting with his blood, he devised a new Discipline that would help control the kine, and gave birth to his own bloodline, believing that the newly arrived Kindred would be cowed by his unfamiliar capabilities. Finally, the Daeva "elevated" his two most beautiful and loyal lovers by Embracing them.

The Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882 to 1902 singled out ethnic Chinese and reversed the existing policy that actively encouraged immigration. Xiao realized that "his" community would never grow as fast as he wanted it to. He had successfully started cells of his cult across both the West Coast and East Coast, but he wanted more. He began to consider expanding his cult outside the Chinatowns. Taking an active interest in the occult revival that was gaining steam across the world, he was especially intrigued by the blending of Western and Eastern traditions in the theosophical movements of mortal men. Xiao had first been introduced to Catholicism by Jesuit missionaries when he was still in Canton, but his interest in Christianity was superficial at best. He cared more for the rituals and the pomp than for the underlying principles, but he realized that he could make his cult more palatable by applying a ritualism drawn from its symbols and language. With that goal in mind, he begun structuring his Sect. The rites and prayers became an eclectic hodge-podge of disparate elements designed

to appeal to the broadest possible demographic and launched an aggressive campaign of recruitment outside the Chinatown districts.

Within three decades, the Xiao Sect managed to gain a substantial number of converts, with cells led by one of Xiao's childer quickly expanding out into nearby domains. Jun Jie wanted more, he craved more and he was sure he could make his line grow faster. But his feeding habits had become onerous. In 1914, as his lengthy Requiem weighted heavily on him, Xiao went into torpor, content that his bloodline was well entrenched and would watch over his slumber with unwavering zeal.

But his very first childer grew restless without a strong hand to guide them. They suspected, quite correctly, that their sire's interest in exploring new spiritual avenues was insincere, and that he had strayed from the path. Some rejected his teachings, abandoning the Sect and seeking their fortunes elsewhere. Thus were the first Xiao Apostates created. Advocating for a return to the elder ways but still nominally Xiao faithful, the rest of the Sect argued and debated and waited for their sire to wake up.

The Sect founder slept away the decades leading up to and following World War II, tormented by vague nightmares of treachery and deceit. One unseasonably cold night in 1946, one of his adherents with potent enough blood managed to wake Xiao, although the adherent sacrificed himself in the process. Xiao woke up hungrier and more deranged than he had ever been, destroying his loyal servant in a frenzy of sudden violence. When Xiao came to his senses, the others present bowed low and told him what had come to pass. When he found out that some of the inheritors of his blood had questioned his wisdom, he swore cold vengeance. The purge that followed was brief and brutal. By the 1970s, most of his rebellious descendants had been sent to Final Death. In the fires of conflict, all Xiao cells had been wiped off the eastern United States. The surviving Apostates have successfully gone into hiding, and their numbers have grown as Xiao Jun Jie continues to reveal his insane tyranny.

Society and Culture

More than most Kindred, the Xiao depend on their herds. A multi-tiered religious group provides the bloodline a steady flow of new recruits. While roughly half of its mortal followers are laypeople living relatively normal lives, the Sect encourages a monastic lifestyle. Kindred or ghoul "Masters" provide nighttime empowerment classes to anybody who's willing to pay, but further advancement (and "true enlightenment") requires forsaking one's family and joining the local commune as a monk. Practitioners may be invited to special private meditation lessons

with their teachers. During these sessions, the Masters feed on their pupils and subject them to Vinculums and other forms of abuse. Promising monks who show good looks, extraordinary charisma, unswerving loyalty and the ability to please their Masters may be allowed to join the bloodline. When the leaders of a commune feel that overcrowding is reaching dangerous levels, they order their most gifted childer to found a new commune in some other town.

In addition to over-indulging in one's vices, this recruiting, screening and training process constitutes the bulk of a sectarian Xiao's night-to-night activities. Sustaining and expanding the bloodline is of paramount importance to these Kindred. The Sect rarely establishes itself in large cities or well-established domains, thus avoiding interference from other vampires. Friction between Xiao and Kindred covenants often reaches critical levels when they do presume to make their home near other vampires, as the Sect serves no Tradition but that imposed by Xiao Jun Jie.

Advancement within the bloodline works much like a pyramid scheme, with status being awarded according to the number of childer successfully Embraced, as long as these childer prove themselves worthy of the bloodline. By the same token, a failed Embrace or a child who goes Apostate is a source of powerful shame for any Xiao. The bloodline is tightly knit and extremely hierarchical — lower-ranking neonates are expected to blindly follow any order from a superior, no matter how debased. In turn, they expect their followers to degrade themselves just as readily.

Most Xiao have been Embraced directly into the bloodline, and are wary of outsider Daeva seeking an Avus. Such rare applicants must

prove their worth to the Sect beyond any doubt, usually with a lengthy probation period or by performing some outstanding deed.

Each individual Sect of the Xiao maintains a number of ritualized "cleansing" and "abasement" practices designed to strengthen ties to the leader of the cult and eliminate ones with outside influences. Self-imposed starvation, heavy regimens of prayer and meditation, directed asceticism and compulsory schedules help to enforce the isolation of cult members, while emotional "sharing sessions," ceremonial sexual congress and frequent reassurances are designed to draw individual members into a web of dependence and associated security. Kindred of the Sect are subject to these practices as well as ritual feedings upon the leader, and are no less vulnerable to their emotional effects. The Sects impose a complicated calendar of practice and ritual observance, ensuring that most members don't get much time to develop doubts or even think for themselves. Most (including the Sect of Xiao Jun Jie) actually discard the Gregorian calendar, replacing it with one of their own.

Kindred of the Sect do engage in one ritual that mortals never see. If the presence of an Apostate is suspected, the loyal



Xiao are expected to partake in a fanatic, prayer-fueled hunt designed to capture and destroy the traitor. Even the leader of a local Sect will take part, chasing his hated foe through the streets and harrying her until the very edge of dawn if necessary, stopping at nothing to destroy her. The destruction of an Apostate is one of the highest priorities of Sectarian Xiao, and one who personally achieves that goal is likely to be given control of his own cult (or further enforce the adoration of his existing membership).

Apostate Xiao, rejecting the culture of the Sect, tend to distance themselves from the practices of their founder as much as possible. Many actually retreat into monastic observance of one type or another, hiding from their families and seeking to repair the damage done to their souls all at once. Some actively combat the vengeance-seekers among their own kind, fighting to destroy them and hoping that they might one night put an end to Xiao Jun Jie's mad cult.

Kingjan

The Xiao signature Discipline, which derives its name from a distorted transcription of Xiao Jun Jie's teachings, allows the undead to drain or destroy others' emotions to the vampire's benefit. The target of this Discipline will usually feel listless and depressed after being subjected to it, and will tend to lose interest in anything but his vampire tormentor.

Except for Kiss of Oblivion, the Xiao usually needs do nothing more than talk to the victim to activate the Discipline. Kingjan is often used in conjunction with Majesty since it tends to sap defenses the victim's defenses. The Discipline doesn't exert any control on the victim the way Majesty and Dominate do, but does make the victim much more susceptible to manipulation.

• *Degradation*

Before the Xiao can learn to drain his victims, he must perfect the practice of breaking them. When activating this power, the Xiao speaks calmly to the target, flattering her or otherwise expressing approval in an apparent attempt to bolster her confidence. In fact, the power is a subtle attack, designed to weaken the victim's ability to function without the Xiao. The vampire's words seem harmless enough, but the mystic undertone delivers a deeper, more insidious message: "You are only at your best when you are with me."

This power does not multiply in effect if used more than once on a single target during a given scene. Two or more Xiao may hit the same target with it, though, causing her to suffer the effects with respect to all who succeed.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion + Kingjan versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The victim is unaffected by the power, reacting to the words of the Xiao only as he would normally. Furthermore, the victim is immune to the user's Kingjan attempts for the rest of the night.

Failure: The character loses or ties the contested roll. This attempt to Degrade the victim fails, and the target is unaffected.

Success: The character wins the contested roll by getting the most successes. The victim will feel confident in the Xiao's presence, but will be noticeably shaken if separated from the vampire. If the target is unable to see or hear the Xiao any time during the remainder of the scene, all of his actions will suffer a -1 die penalty caused by a sudden nervousness. The victim may not understand the cause of his anxiety, but he will understand that it fades as soon as the Xiao is nearby.

Exceptional Success: The character wins a contested roll with five or more successes, and the target is deeply affected by the Xiao's praise. The effect is doubled, imposing a -2 dice penalty instead of the normal one, and lasts for the remainder of the night.

•• *Mortify*

Xiao who have mastered this power create and enforce another unnatural bond with their subjects. By engaging the victim in conversation, the Xiao can warp the nature of the his passions, inspiring twisted feelings of remorse and guilt when they are indulged. The Xiao who invokes this sensation is then free to dispel it at whim, painting herself as a savior.

To activate the power, the Xiao must speak with the victim, encouraging him to talk about one of his favorite activities or sensations.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Subterfuge + Kingjan versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target experiences his passions with burning, renewed intensity. The target recovers a point of Willpower, if applicable, and is immune to the Xiao's Kingjan powers for the rest of the night.

Failure: The character loses or ties the contested roll. This attempt to Mortify fails, and the target is unaffected.

Success: The target of the power begins to feel ashamed of his desires while talking with the Xiao, and will suffer potentially crippling doubt when he attempts to engage in the act that he spoke of. To perform it (or enjoy it), he must first succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll, but he will still feel vaguely guilty afterwards.

This mortified guilt only fades when the Xiao chooses to release the target from it, by conversing with him again and reassuring him. At that moment, the guilt fades completely, and the target is free to engage in his passion. Victims will rationalize the power's effects, associating the guilt they felt with some internal failing (or outside influence unrelated to the Xiao) and viewing the Xiao as a soothing, encouraging influence.

Vampires are free to attempt to override this rationalization by spending a point of Willpower and succeeding on a Composure + Blood Potency roll. This roll is reflexive. If it fails, the Willpower is spent, and the vampire subject rationalizes the experience just as a mortal would. If the roll succeeds, the vampire can clearly see that the feelings inspired were not normal, and is not likely to be as appreciative as a mortal.

This power lasts one night for each success scored on the activation roll in excess of the defender.

Example: *Xiao Lian is speaking with one of the new members of her mortal herd, a young musician named Victor. She encourages him to discuss his love of music, which he does with enthusiasm. Lian's player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge + Kingjan versus Victor's Composure. She gains two more successes than he, so he starts feeling a little bit ashamed while he speaks, even though she seems to be perfectly receptive.*

The next night, Victor is at a jam session, getting ready to play a song. He feels strangely mortified, looking at the other members of the band and experiencing a vague sensation of disgust. He steels himself, trying to play, but his player must make a Resolve + Composure roll first. The roll is a success, so he plays as skillfully and enthusiastically as ever, but Victor can't shake the feeling of vague shame.

When he returns to Lian, he confesses his shame to her — and she reassures him, speaking a few words of encouragement and releasing him from the effect of the power. Victor is relieved, and thankful for her apparent kindness.

Exceptional Success: As above.

••• *Kiss of Oblivion*

This much sought-after power allows the user to drain emotions while feeding, stealing the pleasures and pains of life from the victim in addition to Vitae. The experience is almost unparalleled in pleasure, for the vampire.

Xiao who have learned this fearsome power can literally prey on their victims' souls, tainting them and driving the vampire's hooks deeper into them.

Kiss of Oblivion can only be used once per night on each victim.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Kingjan – subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The victim's soul proves too resilient for the user to feed on. The subject is immune to further uses of Kiss of Oblivion by the vampire for the rest of the chapter.

Failure: The user may feed normally but doesn't gain any other benefits.

Success: Success allows the vampire direct access to the emotional soul of the victim, tapping into the accumulated bank of his experience. She may select one emotion to drain. As long as the vampire continues to feed, she feels the full impact of all the victim's accumulated experience with respect to this emotion — an intensely enjoyable and stimulating sensation.

Thereafter, the vampire enjoys a special understanding of the victim. Her attempts to manipulate him enjoy a +2 dice bonus for the remainder of the night, until the feelings inspired by the feeding fade from her mind.

For the remainder of the night, the victim's soul is damaged by the Kiss of Oblivion. The emotional foundation of his spirit is thrown off balance by the drainage, and he cannot depend on his store of experience when confronted by certain stimuli. For the remainder of the night, he cannot gain Willpower by satisfying his Virtue. Those who observe him may note that he seems hollow, as if missing something crucial.

Kindred capable of Aura Perception will note that the victim's aura seems frayed after this power is used on him, slowly repairing itself until the duration of the power's effect is ended. The Xiao's aura will seem a little brighter than normal, and suffused with pleasure.

Exceptional Success: As above. In addition, the vampire retains some of the information gained indefinitely. Anytime afterwards, her attempts to manipulate the victim of this power enjoy a +1 die bonus. Further exceptional successes scored on subsequent attempts do not improve this bonus.

•••• *Wave of Apathy*

When the Xiao advances her understanding of Kingjan to this level, she gains access to one of the most potent

weapons of the line. With a simple wave of the hand or curl of the lip, she can demolish a victim's sense of self-confidence and determination, crippling him and viciously weakening his defenses.

A Xiao activates this power with a simple, dismissive gesture that the victim must see. By doing so, the vampire suddenly siphons away her target's passionate strength of mind, drowning it in a wave of apathy. A sense of indifferent sloth strikes the target, leaving him without access to his inner will for the remainder of the current scene.

A victim can only be affected by Wave of Apathy once per night, no matter how many vampires target him.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Kingjan versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The use of Wave of Apathy fails, and the subject is immune to the Xiao's Kingjan powers for the rest of the night.

Failure: The character loses or ties the contested roll. The subject is unaffected.

Success: The character wins the contested roll by getting the most successes. The subject finds himself unable to summon his innermost strength. While he may continue to act normally, his inability to tap into his inner reserves prevents the subject from using any Willpower for the remainder of the current scene.

Under the influence of this power, Kindred are unable to use any Discipline power that costs Willpower, and they may not attempt to Ride the Wave in frenzy. Daeva under the influence of Wave of Apathy are incapable of resisting their Vice for the remainder of the scene.

Exceptional Success: The character wins a contested roll with five or more successes. As success above, except that the effect extends until the end of the night.

••••• *Blessed Detachment*

Vampires who have fully mastered this Discipline wield a dire influence over those who trust them. No emotion, no matter how deeply rooted, is so strong that a Xiao cannot destroy it, eventually. The subject's psyche becomes as malleable as soft clay to the Xiao, allowing her to completely sever his emotional attachment to a subject of her choice. Unlike Dominate, this power doesn't allow a Kindred to exert full control over a subject. Since the subject retains part of his free will, he's able to pursue his goals creatively, and even to take initiative over and above what he's been ordered to do.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Intimidation + Kingjan versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested and Extended

To activate this power, the Kindred needs to engage the subject in conversation for at least a full scene, possibly many times over the course of several consecutive nights. Every roll represents a night's progress, and only one roll per night is allowed. The Willpower point is spent when first activating this power – no additional Willpower is required when further rolls are made toward accumulating successes unless an individual attempt fails outright.

The vampire needs to accumulate as many successes as the target has in Willpower dots to successfully activate the power. When this happens, the target stops feeling any emotion at all toward a given item (object, person, group or action) of the user's choice. This power doesn't force the subject to take any specific action against the chosen item, but the power completely changes his attitude toward it. With regard to the chosen item, the subject acts as if it no longer matters to him at all, but he remains otherwise free willed. Thus, a victim with a high Morality rating who suffers Blessed Detachment with regards to his wife suddenly finds that he no longer cares about her at all, but won't necessarily go out of his way to make her suffer.

Victims of this power retain all memory of their former emotions – they just no longer feel them. Attempts to encourage the victim to harm or forsake the chosen subject do not suffer the normal penalties. In addition, the chosen subject does not gain any bonus when attempting to influence the victim.

It is possible to target a victim's feelings about himself with this power, resulting in a temporary loss of ambition and sense of self-worth.

The effect lasts for as many nights as the user rolled successes, and the user can keep influencing the subject to prolong the effect. When the subject snaps out of the power's effect, he is suddenly overcome by a maddening feeling of guilt over any misdeed he might have done. As long as he's under the effect of Blessed Detachment, the subject needs not make derangement rolls for lost Morality, but when the effect ends he needs to make one derangement roll with a -2 dice penalty for every point of Morality lost while under the influence of the power.

Xiao who subject a target to Blessed Detachment are engaging in a deeply immoral act themselves and may be

subject to degeneration themselves. If a target is detached from anyone he normally loves or feels benevolence toward (or from himself), use of this power is tantamount to willful injury, and will require a degeneration roll if the Xiao activating it has a Humanity rating of 8 or higher. It may well be worse — especially if the victim of the disconnect returns the subject's love, and use of the power leads to a fundamental betrayal.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The subject's spirit rises in sudden, powerful rebellion, ruining the vampire's attempt. All accumulated successes are discarded, and the would-be

victim is immune to further uses of Blessed Detachment for the remainder of the chapter.

Failure: The vampire loses or ties the contested roll. All accumulated successes are lost, and the vampire must begin again. If he chooses to do so, the reactivation of the power will cost an additional Willpower point.

Success: The character wins the contested roll by getting the most successes and makes some progress in his attempt to violate the subject's mind.

Exceptional Success: The character wins a contested roll with five or more successes and makes substantial progress in his attempt to violate the subject's mind.



Tianpàn Xiao

By Misha James Maroon Handman

*You understand power, but you have no purpose, no passion.
Feel what I feel, see as I see, and you will finally be free.*

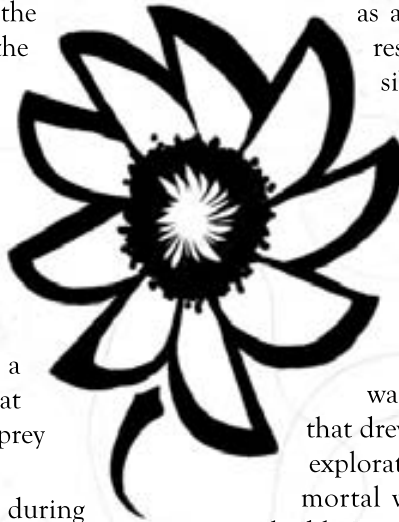
Among the Kindred, the passion of the Daeva is legendary. The lurid tales of the Harpies often include warnings about the dangers of allowing one's Vices to take control, using the Daeva as an object lesson. Young neonates content themselves with the thought that such loss of control could never happen to them.

They have never met the Xiao. This Daeva bloodline draws in those around them into excesses of emotion, setting a standard for self-indulgent behavior that few can match. Those who try soon fall prey to the Xiao's own manipulations.

Xiao Tianpàn was a Daeva Embraced during the height of the Qing dynasty, as corruption and greed began to spread through the nation. In life, he was a bureaucrat of the nation, employed as a ghoul by an elder Daeva of the Ordo Dracul for the purpose of increasing influence within the structured court of the Emperor. Serving as a long-term ghoul to a vice-ridden vampire, Tianpàn was well acquainted with the difficulty that the Daeva had holding on to their emotions, and when his sire chose to Embrace him, Tianpàn felt equally gifted and cursed.

While Tianpàn appreciated the immortality that the Embrace granted, he had no wish to become a slave to his passions, and spent the early years of his Requiem trying to restrain his urges and desires. Despite his best efforts, he found that his pride led him to rash actions that he would never have taken in life. As the 19th century dawned, and the dynasty waned, amidst the increasingly rampant corruption and violence of the land, Tianpàn took action. Taking the legendary passion of the Daeva and twisting it, he remade himself, hoping to escape his curse.

By Tianpàn's standards, the attempt was a terrible failure. He discovered that he had forged a newfound connection to the passions of others instead of his own;



as a result, his emotions ran rampant, and restraining them became thoroughly impossible. Bitter and vengeful, he began to use his newfound capabilities to manipulate the others, using their passions to bring them down to his level. In the process, he discovered that he took real pleasure in toying with his victims — almost as much as feeding from them, and the endgame, the complete self-destruction of a person as a result of his maneuvering, was a difficult and intriguing achievement that drew Tianpàn into further study. With each exploration of his newfound power, with each mortal who was ruined or destroyed, Tianpàn pushed his own failures further to the side. Eventually, he could almost pretend that he had always meant for this to happen.

Years passed, temptation grew and Tianpàn sired three childer, drawing them from the ranks of those whom he had preyed upon. Each of the three had been a person ruined by passion in life, whose ill-considered actions had brought failure upon his head. All chose to follow him down the path of the Blood that he had created, and his bloodline began in earnest. They took Tianpàn's family name as their own in tribute to him, enshrining his failure for all eternity. Each sired in turn, and within a century, there was a small but thriving population of Xiao throughout China. Xiao Shan, one of Tianpàn's childer, undertook the dangerous journey across the Pacific to the United States in the late 1800s, his curiosity at this young land overcoming his familial loyalty. There, he slowly began to spread the curse of the Xiao as well, working through the corrupt politicians of the day. Now, the Xiao range throughout China and the United States, encouraging their prey to destroy themselves through their own selfish desires.

Xiao Tianpàn himself fell into torpor early in the 20th century, and has not yet emerged. Without him,

Developer's Comments

This is the second version of the Xiao we chose as a finalist. We really liked this take on the bloodline — a great family of tumultuous Daeva, locked in a bitter, endless internal conflict. Most intriguing to us was the notion that these Kindred “fed on emotion” in a metaphorical sense, not a literal one. They suffer a surfeit of passion, and they maintain their confidence and rationale by lowering others to their level and claiming that they are “no worse” than anyone else. The seed of this idea was too fascinating to pass up, and in the end we decided that it deserved a final spot alongside the other.

In edits, I worked with Mr. Handman to highlight this attractive aspect of the Tianpàn Xiao and differentiate them further from the California Xiao (as we have taken to calling the two lines) by highlighting the Tianpàn Xiao's urge to perform before an audience of Kindred and share their feelings with strangers. We did retain one similarity, though. By coincidence, Mr. Handman had his Xiao moving through some of the same geographic locations as their California counterparts (most notably when Xiao Shan traveled through San Francisco), and we thought it would be interesting to allow that overlap, introducing the possibility of confusion between the lines in the Kindred world. Considering that it might be likely, if both bloodlines existed in the same world, that a vampire seeking to join the Tianpàn Xiao in America could mistakenly approach the California Xiao (or vice versa), we realized that there was a great potential for story involved.

While we feel that the co-existence of the two Xiao bloodlines is quite compelling, we have been careful to refrain from mentioning encounters in both entries so that Storytellers are free to choose only one as the “true” Xiao in their stories, and need not worry about references to the other in the body of the write-up.

the Xiao have fractured and scattered. Those who are most traditional follow in the footsteps of their clan founder, hoping to awaken him and aid him in his quest. Others simply enjoy manipulative play, working to unleash their hidden desires and watch the disastrous outcome. Most of the Xiao who bother to rationalize their behavior perversely consider themselves agents of justice. After all, they argue, a true innocent would face no danger from his or her own passion, and, therefore, any harm that comes to the Xiao's prey is entirely his or her own fault. A few of the Xiao, especially those in North America, combine this misplaced sense of judgment with a desire for justification; by seeing how passions bring others down, the Xiao hope that they can somehow prove that they are no worse than their victims.

While the power of the Xiao is rarely overtly supernatural, their presence seems to sow chaos and uncertainty in the domains that host them. As they rarely bother to concern themselves with the long-term impact of their actions, they can easily upend social orders and sunder alliances simply by encouraging the wrong emotions at the wrong times. Indeed, some Xiao have been known to cause the fall of Princes without taking any overt actions, and a cautious ruler does not suffer the Xiao's presence gladly.

Parent Clan: Daeva

Nickname: Sirens

Covenants: Xiao in Asia find themselves frequently drawn to the Ordo Dracul, whose emphasis on research and understanding appeals to those who think as their founder did. In the Ordo Dracul, the Xiao can continue to explore their condition, further mastering their natures in an effort to overcome their weaknesses — because of this, the Order remains the most popular of the covenants to join. Xiao within the Ordo Dracul often lend their passion to driving discovery forwards, and their mastery of passion lends itself to greater understanding of the connection between passion and the Beast. However, Xiao rarely rise high in the Ordo Dracul, as their uncontrolled emotions make it difficult to have the clinical restraint that many members of the covenant respect most. A number of Xiao (most famously Shan, childe of Tianpàn) have been ejected from the Ordo Dracul because of inappropriate behavior.

It is traditional for Xiao Dragons to undertake the quest to join the Sworn of the Dying Light and pledge themselves to the relentless study of the emotional weaknesses of Kindred — specifically, the tendency to vice and frenzy. Many pursue the Coil of the Beast in their studies, hoping that by mastering the understanding of its unconscious power, they can learn to direct their own passionate outbursts.

Other Xiao, however, gravitate to the Circle of the Crone, intrigued by its forbidden rites, ancient mysteries, blood magics and practice of unleashing the primal Beast. By joining the Circle, those Xiao who have chosen it seek to free themselves from restraint, often becoming more depraved and more violent than most of their kin. These vampires feel that they are holding more true to the spirit of their founder with their abandon, but they are, in fact, abiding instead by the warped rationale of his later waking years. Xiao Acolytes are extremely dangerous, blithely justifying their indulgences as they carry out the meticulous destruction of mortal hopes and aspirations. Many fall into a rapid decline of Humanity, becoming indefensibly cruel in their manipulative play. Acolytes of the Circle often believe that Xiao are talented channelers of discord and primal rage, affording them a measure of respect as a result.

The other covenants do not hold much in the way of attraction for the Xiao, and often do not make an effort to tolerate them. The passionate Carthian Movement and the fervent Kindred of the line have some commonalities on the surface, but the Sirens are uninterested in social change on a grand scale; they tend to work on the understanding that if someone powerful falls, that person will simply be replaced by an equivalent influence. This lack of belief in the fundamental tenets of the Movement means that while the Xiao may occasionally work with the covenant, they rarely belong to it.

A similar problem holds the Xiao away from the Invictus, who are not, as a whole, amused by the concept of wild cards running about and mucking things up for more proper, upstanding and respectable vampires — the Xiao, in turn, almost always refuse to consider the Invictus and their pawns as off-limits, further straining the likelihood of joining that covenant. As a result, the Xiao seem incapable of hewing to the oaths of the Invictus, and the bloodline's capricious nature is made most unwelcome.



Finally, while their roles as monsters might find some traction with the concept of the Damned of the Lancea Sanctum, few of the Xiao have the patience for the dogmatic ritualism of the covenant, much less its messages of holiness and restraint. One or two disrupted masses are all most Priests need to ban the Xiao from their gatherings, and more than one incident has led to a violent purge. Though most in the bloodline hold no particular disdain for the Lancea Sanctum, the Xiao generally make an effort (driven mostly by a sense of self-preservation) to avoid the covenant.

Appearance: Members of the bloodline tend to take meticulous care of themselves, making sure their hair is perfectly brushed and their clothing immaculately cleaned every night, presenting a tightly controlled façade as a counterpoint to their raging emotions. Extravagant hairstyles that take excessive effort to maintain are not uncommon, and elaborate, intricately detailed and layered costumes are almost a requirement. While the Xiao are not always beautiful, they work diligently to make sure that they are always striking.

In contrast to the perfection that most aspire to in dress, the auras of the Xiao are whirling maelstroms of color, and a skilled aura-reader who has encountered them before will instantly recognize the mark of the line, although some mistake the reading for full-blown psychosis.

While the elders of the Xiao are exclusively Chinese, younger vampires of other races are now joining the line with greater and greater frequency, especially in North America.

Haven: Most of the Xiao prefer well-placed havens to secure ones; proximity to potential targets and comfort for personal living are the main issues that the Xiao usually consider. Common choices are simple, but (if they can afford it) luxurious, lofts, or even large houses near major areas. Havens in areas frequented by current victims of the Xiao's manipulations are given precedence over the local nightlife, and those members of the line who have enough money frequently set up a number of well-appointed havens around a city to ensure that they can always be close to interesting subjects.

The havens of the modernist Xiao often give insight into their natures, if only obliquely. Just as everything else that the bloodline's members keep, their havens are carefully focused affairs, designed to draw the eye of those few who visit them. Each room often has its own motif, and some Xiao go so far as to have one for each mood, carefully designed to support and foster a specific ambience. Others simply allow their entire haven to become a paean to excess, with the most expensive furnishings and art decorating a lavish abode.

Traditionalist Xiao, especially elders of the line, almost always go the opposite route, and their havens are all but

empty of furnishings, conveying the feeling that their haven is not so much a place to live as it is a place to sleep away the days.

Background: Xiao have a strong tendency to recruit from those whose lives have been ruined by their passions, regardless of their social positions and histories — especially if the Xiao themselves were responsible for that ruination. They also prefer those who take pride in themselves, finding them more interesting comrades.

Some of the newer groups that the Xiao are beginning to target more frequently are those who begin life humbly but rise to greatness. Actors, musicians, businessmen who were born into the working classes and the like are becoming increasingly common prey. The Xiao may even create such icons, before tearing them down again, exposing their faults and then offering the Embrace as a second chance.

The Xiao remain a relatively small bloodline. Xiao Tianpàn had only three children, and they themselves have not Embraced frequently, or have most of their children in turn. The eldest of the bloodline have seen less than two centuries, and there are not more than a few dozen members of the line scattered around the world.

Character Creation: Much as the Daeva in general, Social Attributes and Skills are favored by the Xiao, especially those related to Presence. Composure tends to either be very low or very high, depending on whether the Xiao in question is trying to suppress or embrace her curse. Social Merits based on mortal connections are uncommon, as the Xiao frequently destroy those mortals with whom the bloodline members interact.

Bloodline Disciplines: Celerity, Majesty, Vigor, Xinyao

Weakness: The Xiao suffer the weakness common to all Daeva.

In addition, members of the line are subject to an ongoing whirlwind of emotion, weakening them in the face of provocation. They flicker uncontrollably from one passion to the next, barely able to contain themselves at any given moment. Tianpàn Xiao often burst out laughing or break down into a fit of weeping at the slightest provocation, to the bemusement and aggravation of onlookers. When making reflexive resistance rolls with their Composure, Xiao do not benefit from the 10 again rule, and any 1s that are rolled subtracted from their successes.

Xiao who degenerate are especially vulnerable to Manic Depression, Phobia and Hysteria because of the emotional nature of these derangements.

Organization: Once, Xiao Tianpàn kept a firm hold on his children through a mixture of iron resolve and excep-

tional manipulative technique. In his absence, however, the bloodline has quickly fragmented, losing its sense of singular purpose.

Overall, many of the Xiao tend toward similar goals, but they do not do so with a single, coherent plan. Instead, individual Xiao naturally gravitate toward areas that they find interesting, immersing themselves in the social world of the domain they happen to have settled in. Neonates, once they have been properly trained and introduced to the Danse Macabre, are often encouraged to go and find a domain a decent distance from their sire, taking the difficult step of cutting themselves off from their former lives to prevent them from becoming complacent as well as working to prevent the inevitable emotional clashes with their sires. There is no need for this severing to be complete, but maintaining closeness is often considered too risky to be allowed.

Part of the reason for this loose organization is that the Xiao are far from immune to each others' abilities. When two Xiao of sufficient power come together, their passions feed off one another, leading to a spiral of dark indulgence that can easily end with the death of one or both of the vampires involved. When more Xiao come together, the effect becomes increasingly pronounced. Because of this, most meetings between members of this bloodline, unless focused on a specific goal, are short and bittersweet.

There are a few Xiao currently attempting to impose some sort of order on the line, leading the charge to reunite the membership and reawaken the founder. Their efforts are relatively recent, though, and have not produced significant results. Those who do gather to them are suffering from one another's inevitable provocations, and most are beginning to believe (secretly or otherwise) that the effort is doomed to collapse.

Concepts: Serpent in the garden, backroom whisperer, untrustworthy drug dealer, deadly muse, corrupt politician, frenetic political activist, manipulative groupie, energetic road manager, sinful priest, fervent pop psychologist.

History

The Multitude of Errors

Tianpàn began the line with three childer. He chose each one for very different reasons, as part of his continued studies of the bloodline. First was Xiao Hong Li, who was most like Tianpàn himself in his eyes — a government aide who had gambled away his fortune and ruined his career, and who was now considering suicide rather than revealing his shame. After studying

him, Tianpàn Embraced the man, laid out his teachings and sought to gain an aide for his research. However, Tianpàn soon found that prolonged contact with his pupil led to violent fights and dangerous feuds, and the two decided that further research would best be done at a distance. Tianpàn was intrigued by the ways that he had related to his pupil, and began to seek to expand his bloodline further.

Searching for a proper apprentice, Tianpàn found Min, a poor street urchin who stood up for herself in the wrong place at the wrong time, and was beaten halfway to death. Then, he found a middle-class baker named Shan, who had converted to Christianity and lost the support of his family, and who turned to thievery rather than reconcile with them. Tianpàn spirited both away just before they would have died. He trained both as he had trained Hong Li, and noted that the raw emotions of his bloodline caused the same reactions when they gathered. Soon, he sent them away as well, darkly promising that he would be checking up on them, but allowing them to forge their own paths. In doing so, he set the stage for their own relationships with their childer to come.

Tianpàn's hands-off approach, however, ultimately led to problems for his line. Without rule or instruction, the three childer made the same mistake he did — Embracing Kindred who quickly became intolerable to them, and then cutting them loose. These neonates, though, did not take to rejection as easily as Tianpàn's own childer had. The grandchilder turned on their sires, attacking their bases of power and seeking to destroy them. Conflict flared, and blood was spilled.

When Tianpàn discovered what was happening, he was livid. His grandchilder, he felt, should not be directing their efforts at their elders or one another. He issued a proclamation, requiring all Xiao who remained within the domain of Shanghai to attend a central meeting at his home. At this meeting, he laid down simple rules: no Xiao would do battle with another, and none would enter another's territory without permission. His power was great enough that no childer felt confident enough to override him, although some of his line were too incensed to obey for long. The bloodline was still small, and emotional ties among all the members were too strong to be ignored.

Soon enough, the edicts were broken. Xiao turned upon one another again, simply unable to restrain their ire and unable to resist provoking their blood relations. Two Kindred died early in the battles, causing an outward growing spiral of anger and retribution that Tianpàn could not bring to a halt.

The Great Search

Dogged by recriminations and violence, Tianpàn's three childer left the domain of Shanghai, each hoping to find a new home elsewhere, away from the sickening behavior of their kin. Hong Li is assumed to have perished on the road somewhere to the west of Shanghai. Shan found his way to Hong Kong, then moved on to San Francisco, and finally settled in Chicago. Min, heading away from her brothers, moved north, to Beijing. All who remained in or near Tianpàn's domain became sullen neighbors, carefully avoiding contact in an attempt to ensure a lasting peace.

This state of affairs continued until the mid-1930s, when Tianpàn finally sank into disappointed torpor. Min established a home and swore to forsake the Embrace. She slipped quietly into torpor herself, sometime in the 1960s, and none have seen her since.

The Revival of the Xiao

Xiao Shan, alone in America, was not as restrained as his sister or as heartbroken as his sire. He Embraced two mortals and left them behind in Hong Kong, sired a childer in San Francisco who accompanied him to Chicago and then Embraced one more after settling down. Working to establish rules of engagement early on, Shan made sure to focus the capricious attentions of his childer on mortals instead of one another. He encouraged them to develop their power, schooling them and paying careful attention to its growth – something that Tianpàn never did.

In the early 1940s, the Ordo Dracul Academy in Chicago suffered a sudden and unexplained insurrection, resulting in the destruction of several valuable tomes and the Final Deaths of two prominent members (one of whom had gone irrefutably insane). Shan and his childer were unceremoniously ejected from the covenant soon after, although both claimed innocence and still maintain that they were scapegoats sacrificed so that none of the younger members of the Academy would lose faith in their superiors. Shan himself was slain by a nervous Prince after publicly decrying the practices of the Ordo Dracul in Elysium, and his two childer quietly threw their lot in with the Circle of the Crone.

Meanwhile, his childer in Hong Kong, left to their own devices because of a dispute with Shan, embarked on a quest to locate their grandsire and revive his dream of conquering the Daeva curse. They introduced themselves to the Kindred of Shanghai and were accepted into the Elysium Court, searching all the while for evidence of their lost kin. Eventually, they sired childer of their own as well, and, following a trail that led back out of the city, those neonates were sent outwards to try and locate their founder's final resting place.

In modern nights, the Tianpàn Xiao are an aimless, fractured line. Individual Kindred still hope to find the founder himself and reunite him with his surviving kin so that he can finish his work and release them all from their maddening curse. Others, believing that all hope is lost or distracted by personal passions, integrate themselves into Kindred society and pass the Blood on to selected childer, teaching their power without bothering to explain it or offer up direction. Some Tianpàn Xiao continue to move further and further from their kin, spreading the line slowly throughout North America and East Asia.

In recent nights, peculiar outbursts in the Kindred Courts of Mumbai, India, and Yangon, Myanmar, suggest that one or more of the Xiao have been active in each country for at least a few years. Whether Hong Li actually survived his trek and made it to one of these cities (and, presumably, Embraced) or Min awoke and migrated west with one of her childer is unknown. It's entirely possible that both theories are true – or neither. If these events are the cause of Xiao machinations, they would mark the furthest west the bloodline is known to have traveled on the continent.

Society and Culture

There are fewer than 50 of the Tianpàn Xiao active in modern nights, and most have never met more than one or two of their kin. Those who still consider themselves part of the original family are fiercely traditional in their teachings. They hold on to the limited guidance of Tianpàn, repeating his plea for co-operation and tolerance, seeking to overcome their passions. These Kindred look upon their childer with parental concern, believing that the sire is responsible for teaching the childer the dangers and joy of overwhelming passion, and this is a debt that can never be fully repaid. A new sire must teach her childer not just the ways of the Masquerade but the ways of the Requiem as a whole, showing the childer how to diminish his dangerous passions by sharing them. Any Xiao who grants the Embrace without carefully choosing and grooming her new ward is considered to be a disgrace to the line, and any childer who does not show his master the respect that she deserves is considered to be nothing; this tradition, alone, is sacrosanct.

These traditional Xiao engage in a number of ritualistic observances meant to tamp down their emotional energies and prevent outburst. Complex, structured dances and martial arts are taught and practiced, astrological charts are learned and frequently consulted, music is mastered and performed and each month is marked by an

elaborate ceremony of dress and display. Those domains that host the Xiao know well their powerful, emotional pageantry, and many Kindred are known to seek permission to witness the Xiao's practice at Elysium. The Xiao are often eager to engage in these displays, taking the opportunity to make use of their signature Discipline among masses of the vampire elite and interweave its power with their performance.

In fact, the gathering of a stimulated audience necessary for most of the Xiao's Discipline-fuelled attempts at self-control create the illusion that these Kindred are great lovers of performance. While many are happy to play to spectators (and benefit from their manipulation), at least the same number would prefer to take part in the viewing of entertainments instead of their execution.

A fair number of Xiao have discarded the structured teachings of the line and abandoned their Kindred families. Even as their traditional brethren struggle to reunite the line and awaken its founder, these self-declared exiles work to distance themselves from the bloodline's origins and its obsession with conquering passion. Instead, they revel in the power granted by the Blood, and make no effort to take responsibility for the actions of their childer. If they encounter their traditionalist brethren, these Xiao often work to undermine and humiliate them — a practice that inevitably leads to outright conflict.

This philosophical split creates problems for vampires who choose to join the bloodline. An unfortunate inductee may discover that his Avus is not the type he'd heard about, and may find himself subject to traditions and imperatives that he wasn't counting on (or, conversely, may find a defiance of the tradition he was hoping for).

Xinyao

Xinyao (literally, "to bite the heart") is the Discipline of emotional manipulation that Xiao Tianpàn created in his botched attempt to escape the curse of the Daeva. His hope was to create a power that would allow him to displace his emotions onto others, thereby nullifying them and leaving himself in complete control. The reality is tragically different.

Emotions are not like water; they cannot simply be poured from one person into another. Instead, they proved to be more like flame, and the vampire's emotions flared with proximity to the recipient. Certain powers allowed the Xiao to calm their hearts, but only by creating situations that were bound to stimulate them again. Defeated and despairing, Xiao Tianpàn nonetheless continued working to refine his Discipline, eventually giving into the temptation it offered. It remains the treasured weapon of his bloodline to this night.

• *Clear the Path*

As the Xiao learns to harness her natural abilities, she discovers that she can use the power of her Vitae to forge a connection directly to her target's emotional self. Using this supernatural connection, she can bypass the natural discomfort of a mortal in the presence of Kindred.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Presence + Empathy + Xinyao

Action: Instant

To activate the power, the Xiao must sing or speak to the subject while making eye contact. Only one subject may be affected per attempt, although several attempts may be made within a single scene.

Roll results

Dramatic Failure: The Xiao fails to activate the power and actually repels the subject, suffering a -2 dice penalty on all social interactions with him for the rest of the night. In addition, the subject is immune to all the powers of Xinyao until the next sunset.

Failure: The power fails to activate.

Success: For every success rolled on the activation roll, the Xiao may (with respect to this one subject) increase her Humanity dice cap on social interaction by one. This power lasts for the remainder of the night.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the power remains in effect for a week.

•• *Stoke the Flames*

The power of the Xiao lies in their ability to bring one's passions to the surface, goading their prey into emotional behavior without thought for the consequences of these acts. Stoke the Flames may be used on any target who is paying attention to the Xiao; she need not be actively dealing with that target. While active, Stoke the Flames brings the passion of the target to the fore, causing a momentary outburst. The Xiao cannot choose the nature of that outburst; she is prodding an urge that already exists.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Performance + Xinyao versus target's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character accidentally severs her connection to her target's emotions. The target cannot be affected by the character's use of Xinyao for the rest of the night.

Failure: The character loses or ties the contested roll. The target is unaffected, but the character may try again later.



Success: The target is electrified by the presence of the Xiao, and reacts with a brief outburst of emotion. The manifested emotion depends on how the target already feels with respect to the Xiao – if he is currently feeling unhappy, hurt or ashamed, tears will fall from his eyes. If he currently feels jealous, indignant or annoyed, he will be overcome by a flash of rage. If he desires the Xiao, he will beg for her affection.

The outburst caused by this power lasts for only one turn. Afterwards, the victim is free to recover his self-control, but in most cases the damage will be done. Strangely, some just seem to go with the flow, relaxing into the display and continuing to laugh or cry unbidden.

Note that Kindred who are affected by this power are likely to frenzy – especially if their feelings with regards to the Xiao are angry, fearful or lustful. The frenzy that is provoked (which can be resisted per normal) will certainly be directed at the Xiao, so the power must be used judiciously.

Exceptional Success: If the character wins the contested roll by five or more successes, she temporarily unhinges her target's heart. Mortals will lose all self-control, breaking down in a blubbing heap or flying into a screaming rage. Kindred will frenzy instantly, no matter what

their emotional state, and must roll seven successes on the Resolve + Composure resistance roll if they wish to calm themselves. The expressed emotion runs its course naturally, affecting the victim for the remainder of the scene. Even if he overcomes it mechanically, he will feel its echoes.

Stoke the Fire works most effectively if the Xiao herself is feeling the same emotion as her intended target. If that is the case, she gains a +2 dice bonus on the power's activation roll. If she feels an opposing emotion (a melancholy Xiao trying to stoke a joyful target, for example), she suffers a -2 dice penalty instead.

••• *Sympathetic Call*

Using this power, the Xiao can bring those who feel as she does close to her, sharing her pain (or joy) and drawing strength from the company. She expresses the depth of her emotion – sobbing in sorrow, howling with rage or laughing with pleasure – and all who feel the same way within a given area are compelled to seek her out, moving toward her at their fastest possible speed, via the most direct route they can find.

Only those mortals and vampires who can hear or see the emotional display will respond. Once they do, the intensity

of the Xiao's emotional state fades. It is as if those who respond to the call are taking her passion from her and accepting it into themselves. Many Xiao make use of this power when they are feeling dangerously emotional, hoping that they can numb themselves before they lose control.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Expression + Xinyao

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Xiao strains herself overmuch, failing to attract sympathizers and losing a point of Willpower.

Failure: The power fails to manifest. Nobody is compelled to respond. The Xiao's display may attract attention, but it is not likely to be the type she's looking for.

Success: The area of the call is 10 yards for every success rolled. The Storyteller determines how many mortals and vampires within the area share the Xiao's emotional state. Dozens or even hundreds might respond to the call, flocking to the Xiao and surrounding her with sympathy. Everyone who responds to the call is aware that his feelings are mirrored in the Xiao, and will be moved by the sense of commonality he feels with her.

Each will express his sympathy in any way that seems appropriate — taking her hand, speaking or standing silently by her side.

Mortals are unable to resist the compulsion of the Call, but vampires may sacrifice a point of willpower to be allowed a Composure + Blood Potency roll to resist. If they match or exceed the number of successes the Xiao scored on the activation roll, they are unmoved.

If the Xiao is currently experiencing an emotion that threatens frenzy, successful activation of this power may prevent the rising of the Beast. As the sympathizers gather, the Xiao is afforded a +1 die bonus on her rolls to resist frenzy, and enjoys that bonus for as long as the crowd remains.

Example: *Mei of Xiao is feeling intensely unhappy while attending an Elysium gathering, and she wishes to purge herself of the sensation. She weeps aloud, using Sympathetic Call. Her player rolls Mei's Manipulation + Expression + Xinyao for a total of four successes. Everyone within 40 yards, mortal and vampire both, who also feels unhappy is compelled to rise and join Mei in her suffering. The vampires present are given the chance to resist, if they so choose. If any gather around her, her sadness will wane to a certain degree. Her sadness is not gone entirely, but she feels less weighed down.*

Exceptional Success: As above, but the Xiao immediately gains a point of Willpower from the display of sympathy and enjoys a +2 dice bonus on rolls to resist frenzy.

•••• Guiding the Conflagration

Emotions feed each other like fire, spreading from one person to the next. The Xiao understands this process, and learns to manipulate it with this power, directing the flow of passions through a crowd and using it to sweep hapless subjects away. With the careful application of Guiding the Conflagration, a Xiao can start a riot or quell one, provoke a mob to panic or calm a seething horde.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + Xinyao

Action: Extended

To activate the power, the Xiao must have line of sight to at least 10 people (mortal or Kindred) who also share line of sight to one another. She sends an emotional impulse — one that she is currently experiencing — out of herself and into one of the victims, and then cycles that impulse from victim to victim, intensifying it with each pass. When the number of successes she accumulates exceeds a target's Composure (and Blood Potency, if applicable), that target is overwhelmed by the impulse and either spurred to action (if the impulse is provocative, such as anger, defiance or derision) or quieted (if the impulse is conciliatory, such as guilt, tranquility or melancholy).

Each roll represents the emotional impulse's passage from one target to another. The Xiao may continue to make rolls as long as she likes, provided that she takes no other action, does not lose line of sight to the targets and does not move faster than a slow walk (one-half her Speed rating). Once the number of successes rolled exceeds the Composure + Blood Potency of everyone in the crowd, she need only maintain this concentration to pass the impulse from one target to another until all are affected.

Victims of this power can resist its effects for one turn with the expenditure of a point of Willpower and a successful Composure roll (or Composure + Blood Potency, for Kindred). This roll is reflexive. If it fails, the Willpower point is lost and the target remains affected. If the roll is successful, the target temporarily shakes off the effect and is free to take any action he chooses, uninfluenced by the chosen emotion.

Kindred with Auspex may instinctively be able to locate the Xiao who is using this power just by paying attention to the crowd's reaction. If the observer succeeds on an Intelligence + Empathy + Auspex roll, he finds the Xiao immediately and understands that she is the source of the crowd's compulsion.

Note that Kindred who are affected by this power are likely to frenzy — especially if the projected emotion is

angry, fearful or lustful. The frenzy that is provoked (which can be resisted per normal) will be directed at the nearest logical target. Use of this power in a gathering of Kindred is extremely dangerous, and has led to the Final Death of more than one Xiao.

••••• *Shackle the Soul*

At the ultimate expression of Xinyao, the Xiao finally learns to shield herself completely from emotional impulse — but only by stealing the capacity for self-control from another. The result may protect the Xiao, but it strips her victim bare, leaving him ravaged by the vampire's emotional storm.

A given target can be subjected to this power only once per night, no matter how many Kindred attempt to use the power.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Xinyao versus target's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

To activate this power, the Xiao must have clear line of sight to the victim, and the victim must be paying full attention to the Xiao for one turn, taking no other action.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Xiao fails to activate the power and immediately enters a frustration-induced frenzy

directed at a random target. The frenzy requires three successes to be overcome. The intended victim of the power is rendered immune to all uses of Xinyao until the following sunrise.

Failure: The character loses or ties the contested roll. The target is unaffected.

Success: The character wins the contested roll. For the remainder of the scene, any emotional impulse the character would normally feel affects the target instead. All Social-based powers and Abilities are deflected to the victim (although the Xiao cannot circumvent passive powers such as Sovereignty). Any social provocation to frenzy likewise bypasses the vampire and affects the victim instead. Hunger frenzies and fear frenzies provoked by fire, sunlight or other physical sources are not affected.

Mortals who experience the fury of the Xiao's Beast are traumatized by the experience, and may gain a derangement if the Storyteller deems it appropriate.

The power immediately ceases its effect if the Xiao and the victim lose sight of one another.

Exceptional Success: The character wins the contested roll by five or more successes. The effects last for the remainder of the scene, whether or not line of sight is maintained. Furthermore, the victim will rationalize the effect, believing that his response to the Xiao's experiences is logical and reasonable.



YAGNATIA

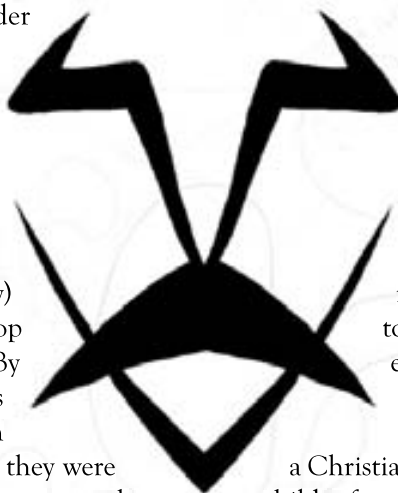
BY DAVID MICHAEL HUBBARD

"WE ARE THE SONS OF CZARS, THE DAUGHTERS OF NIGHT.
WE ARE THE IRON FIST BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN, AND WE WILL
ENSURE ALL WHO ENTER OUR DOMAINS LEARN THEIR PLACE."

All social creatures have a pecking order — from a pride of lions to a flock of chickens, from which the phrase is derived. Vampires are no different. Beginning with clan and ending with coterie, every vampire has his place, or so they are taught to accept by their elders. This being said, Clan Ventrue are arguably (and sometimes obviously) the equivalent of vampiric royalty — the top of the undead social ladder, as it were. By the same token, very few would dismiss the notion of the Nosferatu being on the bottom of that very same ladder, if they were even allowed on the rungs at all. Very few except the Nosferatu themselves, of course.

So when a bloodline such as the Yagnatia steps out of the darkness of Eastern Europe and throws Nosferatu stereotypes on its ear, many elders become curious and suspicious. Proud, terrifying and iron-fisted and possessed of a keen understanding of politics and social graces, the Yagnatia have emerged to take their place as kings of the night, not peasants.

In the late 10th century, Russia became officially Christianized with the conversion of Vladimir I, Prince of Kiev. With this mortal shift in religion, vampires of the Lancea Sanctum took it upon themselves to spread their doctrine to the Kindred of the Baltic region. The Lancea Sanctum met stiff, and usually violent, resistance from the pagan goddess-cults whose many followers were often Chorus members of the Circle of the Crone. The Acolytes had held power over the peoples of Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine for generations, but the Acolytes were unable to stop the inexorable advance of Christianity. Many of the Circle's adherents met Final Death in great pyres when entire cults were exterminated or else were forced to flee their ancestral territories for more tolerant locales.



Leading this crusade into the Baltic lands was a Sanctified Ventrue by the name of Pasko Grechkovik. He had had a religious epiphany after claiming to see visions of Christ on the cross floating over the city of Kiev around the time of that city's conversion. Grechkovik took this to mean that he was to be the instrument of God's will in bringing His Word to the heathen masses of Russia. To this end, Grechkovik was able to appropriate a large amount of the covenant's manpower and resources to accomplish his vision of a Christianized Russia. This included siring several childer from among the newly converted Princedoms to aid him.

The Circle of the Crone, naturally, resisted this intrusion and brought to bear their own resources, mortal and otherwise, in their efforts to retain control over their ancestral holdings. For almost 200 years, the Acolytes waged a war of attrition against the Sanctified. For every village the Circle managed to retain, two more were burned to the ground, their inhabitants slaughtered if they refused to kneel before Christ and His chosen messengers. With these tactics, it was no surprise that the mortal populace began converting by the thousands, and as paganism waned, so, too, did the Circle's power.

By the 12th century, the majority of Russia and Eastern Europe had been forcibly Christianized, and the Acolytes' power had diminished considerably. A large number of Nosferatu Acolytes in particular had been harshly persecuted, driven from their domains or dispatched to Final Death by Grechkovik's fanatical followers, although Pasko himself had entered torpor several decades before. The last stronghold of Acolyte power left in Russia was the state of Vladimir-Suzdal, a nation that succeeded Kievan Rus as the most powerful Eastern Slavic state, in the late 12th century.

Developer's Comments

This entry struck us because of its rich, detailed history and the well-placed story hooks throughout. The suggestion that the entire bloodline may have been created by Kindred within the Circle of the Crone as part of some plan or conspiracy was an interesting idea, and one we encouraged Mr. Hubbard to expand on in the edits. We also thought that the Yagnatia, as presented here, served as an intriguing counterpoint to the Baddacelli and the Noctuku – the two other Nosferatu lines in the book, both of which are exceedingly monstrous. Here, the fearsomeness of the Nosferatu is highlighted in a completely different way, describing it as a necessary force for maintaining order and standing against opponents in the social arena of Kindred.

In edits, the story of the Yagnatia was elaborated on, and a rival line of Ventrue was added to provide dramatic hooks for players and storytellers. We didn't want to add too much in the way of flash to the bloodline – it has a few rituals of its own, but we thought it was more important to focus on the Yagnatia's evolution into their current state: a line of noble Nosferatu who have every reason to be proud of their heritage.

The Lancea Sanctum, specifically the Ventrue members of Grechkovik's line, backed a Christian ruler by the name of Yuri II, who took the throne of Vladimir-Suzdal in 1212 from his ailing father. However, a short four years later, in 1216, at the Battle of Lipitsa, Konstantin I soundly defeated his younger brother, and seized the throne for himself to become the 5th Grand Prince of Vladimir. This upset Grechkovik's Sanctified Ventrue greatly, largely due to Konstantin's stubborn refusal to accept Christianity, and they blamed the Nosferatu and the Acolytes, though neither had anything to do with the usurpation. Pasko Grechkovik was awakened from torpor by his fellow Sanctified and brought up to date on all that his followers has accomplished while he lay in the grip of the Little Death. Grechkovik was furious at what he perceived to be the meddling of the Acolytes with his holy vision.

Konstantin's actions were entirely his own, the result of his bitterness at having been disowned on his father's deathbed in favor of his younger brother; no vampiric manipulation lay behind his grab for power. However, Konstantin's actions did not go unnoticed among certain vampires of the time, namely a Nosferatu elder and Acolyte named Zapruda, who saw an opportunity to strike back at the Lancea Sanctum (and Grechkovik in particular) for their prior pogrom against the Haunts. During those intervening two years of Konstantin's reign, Zapruda made her move to diminish the control Grechkovik's Sanctified Ventrue held over Vladimir-Suzdal.

Some time during the winter of 1216, Konstantin received reports of a coven of witches conducting blasphemous rites on the outskirts of a small village. The church took harsh reprisal against those who continued to follow the Old Ways, since Russia was supposed to be

thoroughly Christianized by this time. Despite his own pagan convictions, seeing Christianity as simply a retelling of much older myths and placing no real faith in its supposed savior, Konstantin did as he was required. He was forced to keep up the façade of a true, God-fearing lord in the eyes of the Church and his own subjects to cement his hold over his newly conquered lands. If he could use these followers of the Old Faith to further his goals, so be it, but if they all had to be burned at the stake, he wasn't above that Christian duty, either.

Finding the coven easily, he and his men rode into the clearing, interrupting their ritual. Declaring himself, Konstantin asked what manner of worship was taking place. The high priestess, calling herself Afanasiia (meaning "immortal"), the Daughter of Baba Yaga, told him of their intention to welcome the spring back to the land and honor the goddess to give them new life and fertility. (Popular belief is that the coven was composed of a mortal Chorus of the Circle of the Crone, but if so, none of the Acolytes has come forward with a definitive answer. This rumor is also cited as the reason why many women of the Yagnatia elect to become Acolytes, however.)

Konstantin snickered to his men, claiming he was more than fertile enough already, having sired several children in his original domains of Rostov and Yaroslav. Growling that though he was not himself a Christian, he much desired to see if the old gods still possessed any real power now that the Christ had come to the lands of the Rus, power that he, as the land's new ruler, was free to exploit. He then asked the witch to read his future, that he might discover what Yuri was plotting, since he had escaped during Konstantin's coup.

After gathering her cloak about her, Afanasiia stared into Konstantin's eyes and consulted the lines in his

palms, then pronounced her prophecy: Konstantin would only rule until the seasons turned twice more, then Yuri would reclaim his throne. Enraged at this news, Konstantin drew his sword and struck Afanasiia's head from her shoulders. So swift and clean was the cut that the priestess' body remained standing. He ordered his men to kill the entire coven, but suddenly the right hand of the corpse rose, pointed at its murderer, and the severed head began to speak, pronouncing a curse upon Konstantin: that he should never sire another heir for as long as he should walk the Earth unless blessed by a follower of her goddess. His men, crossing themselves, weeping and screaming of the devil, fled, leaving a shaken Grand Prince to straggle back to his palace.

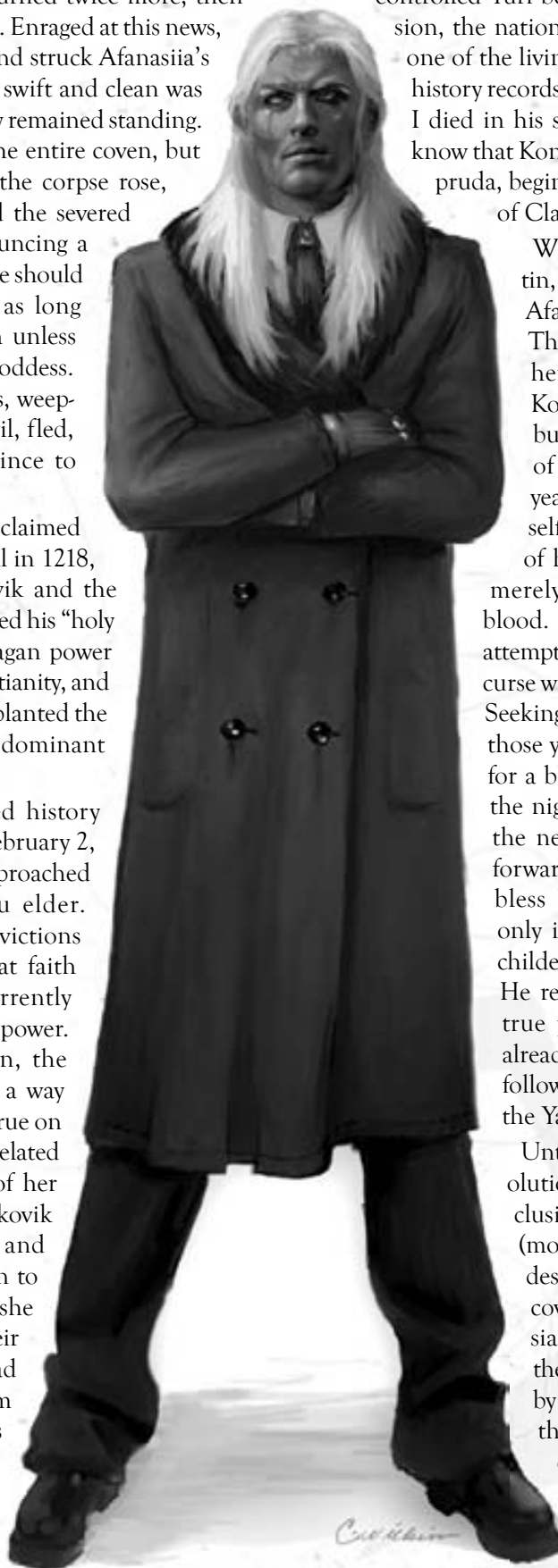
As was foretold, Yuri II reclaimed the throne of Vladimir-Suzdal in 1218, secretly backed by Grechkovik and the Lancea Sanctum. Pasko declared his "holy vision" had been realized; pagan power had been supplanted by Christianity, and the Lancea Sanctum had supplanted the Circle of the Crone as the dominant covenant in Russia.

Here, mortal and Kindred history diverge. It was the night of February 2, 1218, that Konstantin was approached by Zapruda, the Nosferatu elder. She admired his pagan convictions and vowed to show him that faith in the Old Ways, while currently diminished, still held great power. She explained that her clan, the Nosferatu, had long desired a way to directly challenge the Ventrue on their home ground. She also related the tale of the persecution of her clan at the hands of Grechkovik and his Sanctified cronies and that she intended Konstantin to be the instrument by which she and the Circle would exact their revenge. The elder Haunt had first taken an interest in him when he usurped his brother's throne, and offered Konstantin a proposition — in exchange for his assistance

in thwarting Grechkovik and the Lancea Sanctum who controlled Yuri behind the scenes and, by extension, the nation, he would become her childe, one of the living dead. He agreed, and human history records that Konstantin Vsevolodovich I died in his sleep at the age of 32. Kindred know that Konstantin became the childe of Zapruda, beginning his Requiem as a member of Clan Nosferatu that night.

When Zapruda Embraced Konstantin, she could not have foreseen how Afanasiia's curse would affect him. The mystical interaction between her Vitae and the curse caused Konstantin to become Nosferatu, but different. The insidious effects of the curse revealed themselves years later, when Konstantin himself attempted to Embrace a childe of his own. The poor unfortunate merely died after being drained of blood. Konstantin made several more attempts before realizing that the witch's curse was, in fact, real and fully in force. Seeking out the coven he had accosted those years before, he beseeched them for a blessing. After spending most of the night in ritual prayer and fasting, the new high priestess, Raina, came forward and declared that she would bless Konstantin with fertility, but only if he would then make her his childe, extracting an oath from him. He readily agreed; having tasted the true power of the Old Faith once already, he had no desire to cross its followers again, and the bloodline of the Yagnatia was born.

Until the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, the bloodline Embraced exclusively from several noble families (most notably Konstantin's mortal descendents), as well as the pagan covens of Eastern Europe and Russia. The Yagnatia made a name for themselves in those same territories by driving out, or at least holding their own against, Grechkovik's childer and his allies within the Lancea Sanctum. After the rise of communism, the



bloodline was forced to adapt to a changing environment. Many family lines of nobility still existed, but they did not hold the power and prestige they had once commanded. This loss of prestige did not prevent the Yagnatia (or the Ventrue, for that matter) from Embracing from those families, however.

Unfortunately, Konstantin himself met Final Death at the claws of a pack of vengeful Lupines in 1621.

The werewolves were given information by Grechkovik's ghouls on Konstantin's whereabouts and made to believe he was the vampire responsible for the destruction of one of their sacred sites. Grechkovik's followers had hoped that the loss of the founder would cripple the bloodline as a whole, but it only caused Raina, Konstantin's first childe, to bring to bear the Boyar's own resources and oust several of the Lords from their warm winter estates, cementing the Yagnatia's rule across several Russian cities.

The Industrial Revolution and the overthrow of the Russian czars by the Bolshevik party during the early 19th century brought major changes to more than just the mortal populace. The Yagnatia, mostly young ancillae but also a few elders, saw a time of change and were determined to capitalize on it. They determined to expand their bloodline's horizons and took to exploring the world outside their ancestral homelands. To this end, small groups of Yagnatia, composed of at least two men and one woman, embarked on journeys that would find them founding outposts in London, Madrid, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Bogotá, Buenos Aires and even Tokyo.

These groups petitioned the Princes of those cities for acceptance and territory to establish themselves. Where a cult of the Circle of the Crone already existed, the Yagnatia requested, and usually gained, admittance, adding their numbers to the Circle in exchange for secure havens and feeding rights. These goals were much easier to achieve in cities with Princes belonging to any covenant other than the Lancea Sanctum. Indeed, where the Yagnatia encountered a Prince of that covenant, the bloodline's members politely moved on. Sometimes, they were hounded out of the city by Sanctified zealots when the Yagnatia's own covenant affiliations were discovered, but most often they were allowed to pass through in relative peace. Where the Yagnatia encountered a strong Invictus presence, they were often able to negotiate certain concessions, offering their services as Acolytes in exchange. Despite their physical differences, this Nosferatu branch does not disdain their disfigured cousins; they honor their ancestry and take great pleasure in the reactions they receive when revealing their clan affiliation to others.

In the modern nights, the Yagnatia continue to slowly spread across the rest of the world, focusing their attentions on large, industrialized cities and emerging economies. This places several Yagnatia in the burgeoning cities of Asia that are just now starting to take their place among the movers-and-shakers of the world economy. These young Boyars are determined to make themselves and their bloodline a powerful force and with them, the Circle of the Crone stands to retake much of its lost glory, something the Sanctified shudder to imagine.

Parent Clan: Nosferatu

Nickname: Boyars

Covenant: Having played a major role in the creation of the bloodline, it's no surprise that the Circle of the Crone contains the most number of Yagnatia. Almost all female members join the Acolytes in honor of their ancestress, Afanasiia and her successor, Raina. Only the members of this covenant are taught the blessing ritual and elevated to the title of Holy Mothers. Many of the pagan cults of the Baltic region were mortal Choruses of the Circle, and it is rumored that the creation of the Yagnatia was by design rather than happenstance.

Second only to the Acolytes, the tradition-bound Invictus with their iron-fisted rule and political acumen draws some of the Yagnatia like flies to carrion. Those elders who pine for the days of the czars enthusiastically embrace the philosophy of the First Estate and all it represents. Solitary male Yagnatia tend to find themselves attached to this covenant, though when they decide to sire a childe of their own, they must abide by all the protocols and customs of the bloodline. For this reason, they maintain close ties with their pagan cousins, despite differences in ideology, something almost unheard of among other covenants.

For those few Yagnatia seeking a means of escaping or transcending their cursed existence, the Ordo Dracul is a viable option. Unconcerned with lineages, the Dragons present the Yagnatia with a means of exploring their own limitations without the burden of larger politics, should they choose. As with their First Estate brethren, the members of the Ordo Dracul who wish to sire childer must follow the proper customs and so keep cordial relations with the Holy Mothers among the Acolytes.

Neither the Carthian Movement nor the Lancea Sanctum attracts any members of this bloodline. The former because the Yagnatia's noble ancestry does not provoke respect among the Carthians and the latter because their pagan roots invite outright persecution from the Sanctified.

Appearance: Those Yagnatia Embraced from the members of Konstantin's mortal family are fair-haired

and pale skinned, with blue or green eyes. Unlike the majority of their parent clan, these Nosferatu tend to be attractive and very regal in their bearing. The Nosferatu curse manifests in the aura of predatory dread that surrounds them at all times, despite their genteel seeming. They embody the epitome of the Machiavellian ideal: a ruler who prefers to be feared rather than loved.

Regardless of mortal heritage, all Boyars have the carriage of true nobility. They are arrogant, imperious and regal. Even without the powers of Majesty at their command, Yagnatia demand attention by virtue of their forceful presence. Elders sometimes retain the style of dress favored during their breathing days, somewhat antiquated but every bit as impeccable and intimidating as younger vampires' Armani suits and Gucci shoes.

Haven: Almost without exception, the Boyars prefer to keep havens that display wealth and clout within their respective regions. Since the majority of the bloodline dwells in the ancestral home of Russia and surrounding Slavic nations, their havens' art and architecture reflect their mortal days. Many still hold court in ancient castles or walled estates surrounded by acres of woodland that have been passed down through the mortal generations of families from which they Embrace.

For those Yagnatia making their homes in the bustling metropolises of North and South America and the Pacific Rim nations, the desire to impress all visitors with their wealth and power remains just as strong as that of their Slavic cousins. Whether it be the prominent display of rare and priceless artwork, legions of servants at their beck and call, or vast compounds, estates or penthouses in traditional samurai, drug lord or stockbroker fashion, all are designed to flaunt the power of the Yagnatia in one way or another.

Whether the Yagnatia share a haven or not, there is always a communal structure in every city where they reside that allows the bloodline members to come together to discuss personal business. These shared havens always have enough secure quarters in case individuals wish to spend the day sleeping here as well as a central location reserved for gatherings, allowing individuals to mingle and share gossip and general social niceties. Politics are often discussed, but surprisingly, everyone tends to keep a cool head. Even when members of different covenants share a haven, there is an unspoken rule that covenant differences are set aside when meeting in the common areas. The level of cooperation between members of this bloodline is exceedingly high, considering the inherent nature of the vampiric condition and inter-covenant conflict. The fact that the majority of Yagnatia belong to either the Circle of the Crone or the Invictus and that

these vampires still maintain a close cooperative relationship has led to rumors of some unholy alliance between the Acolyte Boyars and those of the First Estate.

Background: All Yagnatia must bring prospective childer before a tribunal of elders who determine if the candidate is acceptable to be inducted into the "family." A lengthy interrogation follows the presentation of prospective candidates to determine their mortal lineage, specific talents or skills and any mystical affiliation (such as having been a local midwife who was also a member of a goddess cult). If the prospective neonate is deemed worthy, the soon-to-be sire then goes before his local high priestess to receive the blessing, allowing him to Embrace the childer. In nights prior, only those mortal members from among the noble houses or pagan cults of Eastern Europe and Russia were chosen for the Embrace—those sons who would have been targets of assassination by elder brothers or those daughters destined for the convent or the witch's pyre. The elders of the bloodline retain this practice and have yet to show a more progressive attitude to the changing social conditions of the world. In fact, the mortal descendants of Konstantin continued to rule the towns of Rostov and Yaroslav until the late 15th century. Numerous princely families of Russia issue from this Prince, and consequently, so do many elder members of the bloodline.

In the modern nights, where money has replaced a noble title as a path to respect and prestige, younger members of the bloodline have begun petitioning the elder tribunals to allow them to include rich and influential families in Western Europe, North and South America and even Japan. They argue that families with ties to industries as varied as steel, cocaine, computers, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology would all be of great benefit to the bloodline as a whole. Denied formal approval to do so, these younger Boyars have nonetheless Embraced several new members from these backgrounds, producing several lines. The Lackenbys of England's steel industry and the Shoups, investors in some of the United States' largest pharmaceutical manufacturers add connections to Europe and the U.S. The Cardenas Lizardi brings a noted Colombian drug cartel into the fold, and the Murakami are up-and-comers in the field of Japanese biotech. Other individuals have also been inducted into the Boyars, being Embraced from Wall Street, Hollywood and even Dallas. All of these neonates share the ambition and outright ruthlessness the Yagnatia prize. Competition with the Ventrue in their ancestral domains, who have no qualms about Embracing outside of nobility, will force the elder Yagnatia to do likewise or fall by the wayside.

Nosferatu from outside the bloodline can petition a tribunal for acceptance into the Yagnatia, though the requirements are stringent. To begin, they must not bear any outward physical deformity whatsoever. Passing that hurdle, the prospective Boyar must show a high degree of acumen in an area of interest to the bloodline, specifically business, politics, assassination and related talents. If the prospective Boyar proves successful, the Nosferatu is inducted into the bloodline, whereupon he assumes the strengths and weaknesses of the Yagnatia.

Character Creation: It's difficult to pin down a specific category of Attributes for any single Boyar. Most tend to favor power Attributes (Presence, Intelligence and Strength) over others, especially the first two. The average Boyar has higher scores in Mental Attributes rather than the Physical or Social, but only just so. Excellence in the social arena, quick wits and an intimidating demeanor, physical or otherwise, are all aspirations of the Yagnatia, despite the weakness of the Nosferatu. Favored Skills always include Intimidation and Politics as well as Academics, Persuasion and Socialize. Some familiarity with the Occult is relatively common, especially for those vampires wishing to become Holy Mothers. Social Merits with a high level of Contacts and Allies, although difficult for the Boyars to maintain, are almost universally prized, as well as certain Mental Merits such as Eidetic Memory.

Bloodline Disciplines: *Dominate*, *Nightmare*, *Obfuscate*, *Vigor*

Weakness: All Yagnatia suffer the weakness of Clan Nosferatu.

In addition, because of Afanasiia's curse on Konstantin centuries ago, no member of the Yagnatia may create childer on a whim. Their Vitae is completely infertile in regard to the ability to create progeny. Creating and maintaining ghouls remains unaffected, however. Should a Nosferatu from outside of the bloodline become a member, his Vitae immediately becomes sterile as well.

In order for a member of the Yagnatia to successfully Embrace a mortal, the Yagnatia must receive a blessing from the local high priestess of the bloodline. This takes the form of a mystic pagan ritual, refined by the blood magic of Crúac, wherein the prospective sire is anointed with special oils and the Blood of the priestess herself and prayers are offered to the mother goddess figure (venerated in one form or another depending on location). The vampire so "blessed" then has a full 24 hours to Embrace his prospective childer. Once the Yagnatia has performed the Embrace or the time has lapsed, the individual's Blood returns to the normal infertile state.

The inability to sire childer without this special blessing is the most closely guarded secret of the Yagnatia; if

their rivals learned of this, they could easily wipe out the bloodline by destroying all female members. It is also the reason that women of the bloodline are held in such high esteem; they are literally the "mothers" of the Yagnatia.

Organization: The Yagnatia appear, to those outside the bloodline, to be dominated by the male Boyars, while the women seem relatively unconcerned with vampiric politics and power plays. In reality, this branch of the Nosferatu is ruled by its female members, the aptly named "Holy Mothers." The reason for this deception is due to the bloodline's unique weakness. Women are a precious commodity to the Yagnatia, and they go to incredible lengths to protect them, and with them, the secret of their sterile Vitae.

Part of this protection is keeping up the façade of the men running the bloodline's night-to-night activities and policies. At the same time, women are seen as devoted Acolytes in service to the Crone, unconcerned with anything other than their worship and the recruitment of new cultists. Continuing this deception isn't as difficult as it sounds. The men truly believe their women to be holy, able to bestow a sacred blessing upon those of their choosing, and thus continuing the Yagnatia line. All Boyars, even those who belong to the Invictus or other covenants, maintain close ties to each other, and it is not unusual for these Boyars to attend Acolyte rituals. The Holy Mothers bind them to one another, regardless of covenant; without their blessing, there will be no more Yagnatia.

Should the loyalty of any member of the bloodline be called into serious question, he is forcibly blood bound to the high priestess herself in a special ritual that not only strips the unfortunate of his status within the bloodline but brands him as a potential traitor to other Yagnatia. Should the marked vampire commit an act that again calls his loyalty into question, he can expect the remainder of his Requiem to be short indeed: he becomes the immediate target of exsanguination by any of his fellow Boyars he encounters.

Candidates for the Embrace, as well as disputes between Boyars, are brought before a tribunal in a specific city or region. The tribunals are formed of the three oldest vampires in the area not in torpor, and they serve for a century before having the opportunity to appoint a successor or continue their post. Should a Yagnatia meet Final Death or enter torpor before choosing a successor, the remaining tribunal members will select a replacement. Regions are defined geographically based on mortal cities and their surrounding areas, population density and distance. In some places, the bloodline has actually secured positions of prominence among the

Courts of the Damned, and many large Eastern European cities have Yagnatia Prisci if not Primogen.

Concepts: Power behind the throne, follower of the Old Faith, separatist warlord, political advisor, Mafia boss, orphanage director, shrewd businessman, social worker, Old World aristocrat, patron of the arts, ex-KGB agent-for-hire.

HISTORY

Perhaps the single most influential moment in the history of the Yagnatia as a whole came in the mid-12th century, not long after their inception as a distinct bloodline. Prior to this, the Boyars maintained communal havens that were divided by gender. That is, several men might share a single residence while several women did the same, always in separate locations. At the time, it was customary for the women, many of whom could cast the blessing ritual that allowed the Embrace, to live apart from the men. Often times their havens were located away from city centers, hidden among the few pagan enclaves still in existence. It had only been 20 years since the bloodline's founding, and despite occasional conflict with the Lancea Sanctum, there had been no serious threat to the Yagnatia's existence. The coming of Batu Khan and the Golden Horde would change all that.

In the winter of 1238, Mongol warlord Batu Khan led 150,000 cavalry across the frozen Volga River to sack the Bulgar city of Ryazan, then moved on to Moscow. Once that city had fallen, Batu turned his attention to Vladimir-Suzdal and Grand Prince Yuri II. Yuri scrambled to present a secure defense, but only succeeded in slightly slowing the Mongol juggernaut. By February, the city had fallen to the invaders, though Yuri managed to escape the destruction until a month later, when his pitiful resistance was finally crushed by Batu's superior forces. The Kindred of the region were slightly more well informed than their mortal counterparts, and most already knew of the impending horde and what would result after their passing. Wise vampires fled the region before Batu Khan arrived, or else laid very low until the devastation had passed, secure in deep crypts and sealed vaults. Konstantin, however, chose to observe these powerful warriors, and selected four for the Embrace, his own childe, Raina, bestowing upon him the blessing ritual with which to do so.

Strengthening his bloodline with the addition of several powerful and ambitious Mongols proved to be Konstantin's biggest mistake, however. When the Asian vampires learned that they could not pass on the Embrace and thereby increase their numbers and personal power, they were furious. Not only had they been abducted from their own people and sentenced to a cursed existence, but

they were then thwarted from easily amassing personal power in a foreign land. When Raina refused to give them the secrets of the blessing ritual, the four returned to Batu's army and told him of demons lairing outside the city and the fabulous treasures they guarded. With the use of Dominate on several of the soldiers, it was an easy matter for the disgruntled Mongols to send a large force against the Acolyte women of the Yagnatia and massacre them to the last.

The bloodline could have ended there, only decades after its founding, but Raina had been wise enough not to be present at the witches' haven when the Mongols returned. After sending all four of his children to Final Death for their crime, Konstantin then set about calling all the surviving Boyars, a mere 10 members, to a secret emergency meeting in Kiev, where the system of the tribunal was established to safeguard against Embracing inadequate neonates into the bloodline. He also set down the edict that the bloodline was always to travel in threes, two men and one woman, whenever they went to establish a new domain in a foreign city. This was to help ensure adequate protection of each other and the Holy Mother who would be directly responsible for Embracing new members. These three would form the first tribunal of a given city once they arrived and became established.

This conclave also saw a meeting between powerful leaders of the Invictus and the Circle of the Crone, brokered by Konstantin. The exact details of that meeting were kept highly secret, and whatever concessions Konstantin offered or gained are known only to those in attendance. However, the amount of cooperation between Acolytes and the First Estate in regards to the Yagnatia cannot be overlooked as mere coincidence.

When Kiev was overrun by the Golden Horde two years later, every member of the Yagnatia had already fled further south and west, escaping the devastation. The Mongol Horde was forced to return to its homeland due to internal strife in 1240, making it a relatively easy matter for the Yagnatia to reclaim a portion of the power vacuum that resulted from the Horde's sudden departure. Offering up resources both monetary and otherwise, several Boyars assumed prominent roles among the Kindred Princes of Moscow, Kiev, Novgorod and other cities as the rebuilding took place. Of course, this did nothing to endear the Boyars to their rivals in the Lancea Sanctum, but by this time the Yagnatia had enough backing from both the Circle of the Crone and the Invictus that open hostility was not a feasible option for the Sanctified. The Yagnatia continued to build their power and spread slowly from their original holdings in Russia into the rest of Europe over the next several centuries.

Though the Italian Renaissance didn't extend as far into Eastern Europe as it did into the west and north of the continent, the Yagnatia saw their own golden opportunity to expand their holdings as well as their learning during the 15th century. Several members of the bloodline traveled extensively, under the guise of artists, merchants, scholars and even pilgrims, establishing treaties and trade agreements in foreign ports and learning much of the world beyond their traditional Russian borders. Their regal bearing and imperious personalities allowed them to make headway against the Sanctified where other Nosferatu had failed.

This period saw the slow spread of the Yagnatia, backed by both the Circle of the Crone and the Invictus, into southern Europe and the Mediterranean.

Where the Acolytes held power, the Yagnatia established a foothold through their common practice of goddess worship and their aggressive recruiting tactics; where the Invictus held sway, the Boyars established enclaves of merchant-princes and caravanserais along the bustling overland and seafaring trade routes to and from the Holy Land. These actions secured more territory and members for the bloodline, and its steady rise in numbers continued for the next several hundred years.

The next Great Leap Outward for the Yagnatia occurred during the Industrial Revolution that swept through Europe during the early 19th century. The introduction of mechanical engines to replace roles that were once occupied by humans saw an increase in trade between all nations, as both people and technology flowed freely. With the aid of steam-driven ships, younger members of the bloodline began to travel abroad, always in threes of course, journeying as far as the Americas in the West and Japan in the East. The Princes of these new domains had never heard of the Yagnatia bloodline, or, perhaps, didn't fully believe they were of Nosferatu stock. This made it easier for the Boyars to gain entry into these vampiric Courts and secure domain rights.

Many Boyars invested in early economic ventures in these new domains, especially in America, and became wealthy individuals in their own right.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

In the current nights, the Boyars have taken up the role given them by the Circle of the Crone with a fervor: that of fighting to reclaim the covenant's lost glory, and they do so through political and economic means. No



longer content to simply accept the discrimination and persecution heaped upon them by the Lancea Sanctum, the Yagnatia have taken the fight to their enemies. To this end, the bloodline has seized the reins and is making a name for itself as an undead leader in local and global economies. They have a special hatred reserved for the members of Grechkovik's line of Ventrue, though that tends to manifest itself mostly in their ancestral holdings in Russia. Some particularly rabid members of the bloodline let this hatred spill over onto *any* Ventrue who proves an obstacle to their goals, but these zealots are few and far between.

The Yagnatia's political savvy allows them to compete toe-to-toe with the likes of the Ventrue and Daeva, normally the unofficial masters of that arena. Even when Boyars aren't members of the Invictus, wherever that covenant holds sway they manage to pull many more strings than would normally seem possible, at least it seems so in the eyes of their rivals. While the Boyars certainly don't get along with the Lancea Sanctum, they can respect their convictions. Opponents who demonstrate good oratory skills, political acumen and dedication to their beliefs win admiration among the Yagnatia as worthy adversaries. The Boyars delight in rhetorical debates on policy, religion and other topics that help to pass the long nights of their Requiem.

The Yagnatia maintain their own internal hierarchy within the bloodline. While not a separate Merit, status within the bloodline can vary from that of Clan or Covenant Status. Women are automatically accorded a higher status than men, and Holy Mothers (those who have learned the blessing ritual) are held in the highest regard by all Boyars. Conversely, those Nosferatu who petition a tribunal for entry into the bloodline, called *neizvestni* or Unknown, rather than being Embraced directly, are accorded a slightly lower status. These variations are subtle and virtually undetectable to a vampire not of the bloodline, but they play an important role among the Boyars. It is possible to raise one's status among the bloodline, even for the Unknown. Playing to one's individual strengths during the course of accomplishing a goal for bloodline or covenant is a sure way to increase status among the Yagnatia.

Unlike some bloodlines, the traditions established early on by Konstantin and Raina have held fast and only strengthened in the intervening centuries. This accounts for the higher level of cooperation

among bloodline members, regardless of covenant affiliation. It is also the source of much rumor and speculation by those outside the bloodline, which helps to preserve the Yagnatia's secrets well. Not that there

aren't occasional squabbles between neonates or friction between the dictates of elders and their childer, but by and large, the members of this Nosferatu bloodline maintain a cooperative veneer that some vampires find enviable and others frightening.

NEW CROAC RITUALS

Through their long association (some would say origin) with the Circle of the Crone, the Yagnatia have developed several unique rituals. The first is that which allows the Boyars to Embrace neonates into the bloodline and is the most closely guarded secret of the Yagnatia. The remainder are available to other Acolytes and are often traded for information or other favors between cult members.

••• THE MOTHER'S BLESSING

Also called "Afanasiia's Blessing" by elder or nostalgic Boyars, this is the ritual that allows a member of the Yagnatia to Embrace another into the bloodline. Without it, the Vitae flowing through the Boyars' veins is sterile and unable to pass on the curse of vampirism to another. The existence of this ritual is completely unknown outside the bloodline, where it would be useless anyway, but is the most closely guarded secret of the Yagnatia.

The high priestess anoints the intended sire with a mixture of honey, sacred oil (usually olive) and a point of her own Vitae. The whole of the Chorus joins her in an ancient, dirge-like chant. If the ritual's casting succeeds, the recipient has 24 hours in which to Embrace an individual before his Vitae becomes sterile once more. This blessing is only good for a single Embrace; multiple vampires cannot be created. An individual can only receive The Mother's Blessing once a month, usually on the night of the new moon, and it cannot be cast on oneself. Perhaps as a holdover from Afanasiia's curse upon Konstantin, only women are able to cast this ritual successfully.

• THE BOYAR'S CAUL

To perform this prophetic ritual, an Acolyte smears a quantity of her own Vitae on her face before lying down to sleep for the day. As the hours of daylight pass, the Blood is transformed into a thin membrane that attaches itself to the flesh of her head. When she wakes, the Acolyte tears the membrane away, seeing the likeness of an individual who may be important to her situation from the shape, texture and pattern of dark and light spots on the skin in the moments before it collapses into ash. The number of successes on the activation roll determines the clarity and usefulness of the vision imparted. On an

exceptional success, the shape of the torn membrane and the pattern of spots on it may form recognizable features of a face that even appears to move and mouth a few relevant words as the dead skin disintegrates; whereas a single success might only show an abstract representation symbolizing the individual's name or affiliation.

This reading grants a +2 dice bonus on any dice pools to locate or identify the individual in question in the future. If the character using The Boyar's Caul has Auspex, it may be applied to rolls made in an attempt to spot an obfuscated subject.

Note that the Acolyte has no control over who the Caul selects. The subject revealed is someone who is currently important to the Acolyte's situation (whether friend or foe), and one who the Acolyte might wish to seek out. The subject of the ritual is chosen at the Storyteller's discretion.

•• HAWTHORN BARRIER

In times of war, many of the Yagnatia carry a braid of hawthorn branches, specially prepared by this ritual. It is used to halt the advance of a Kindred enemy, even if only for a moment — but that can be enough to turn the tide of battle.

To prepare for this ritual, an Acolyte must first grow a Hawthorn Mandragore infused with Kindred Vitae, entwining and braiding the branches as they grow. In winter, when the thorned branches are without leaves, the braided segments (each about six inches long and half an inch around) are cut away and dried.

To perform the ritual, the Acolyte must grasp the braid tightly, allowing the thorns to pierce his flesh and bleeding a few drops of his Vitae onto them. If he then throws the braid on the ground, it creates an invisible barrier to vampires that extends outwards about one foot from each end, creating a space effectively two and a half feet wide that no Kindred can easily pass.

Vampires with Blood Potency less than that used to activate the Hawthorn Barrier cannot voluntarily pass through it without making a Resolve + Composure roll and scoring more successes than were attained on the ritual's activate roll. Those with higher Blood Potency may freely cross. Regardless, any vampire stepping through the mystic barrier suffers bashing damage equal to the successes scored on the Crúac roll, minus his Defense.

The Hawthorn Barrier lasts for one minute per success scored on the activation roll.



Appendix A: Bloodlines in the Danse Macabre

The bloodlines of the Kindred are strange and terrible threads, shot through the tapestry of vampire society, bringing mystery, intrigue and deeper horror to the undead world. Some bloodlines embody the dogged force of a single, stubborn family, just slightly out of step with the rest of the Danse Macabre. Some are a cursed multitude, growing and spreading outwards, a blight that threatens domain after domain.

None are fully understood.

Vampires who dwell in the gilded cage of a city have little in the way of reliable information about these unusual Kindred. To most, the names and descriptions of the bloodlines are anecdotal, surrounded and suffused with unsubstantiated rumor and paranoid ramblings. Is there really a line of cannibal Nosferatu somewhere *out there*? Is it true that a cursed family of Mekhet seek to spread plague wherever they go? Are there actually Daeva who perform impossibly disgusting contortions for the pleasure of onlookers? Do they have access to power that other vampires only dream of? Every vampire must wonder when encountering rumors of these creatures: what is it that truly differentiates them from ordinary Kindred? How does one know if he is destined to be a part of one of these bloodlines. How does one know if she isn't *already* a member?

Bloodlines are extended families operating in the Kindred world, burdened with their own problems and, in some cases, empowered with abilities beyond the common Disciplines of the clans. Bloodlines have their own traditions and vendettas, their own inherited agendas and their own family relations. No two are the same, and to outsiders, members of bloodlines must be as frightening, as awe-inspiring, or as bizarre as ghosts, mages and other things completely foreign to ordinary Kindred.

Seeking the Blood

For most Kindred, finding a bloodline that hasn't made a point of revealing itself is extremely difficult — in some cases, nearly impossible. There are those who struggle for decades, searching for the strange and unusual among Kindred society with little more than rumor and conjecture to direct them. Painstaking investigation is often necessary, occasionally leading to confrontation with hostile or reclusive vampires who have a vested interest in

remaining hidden. In some domains, any investigation at all into Kindred heritage can prove dangerous — there are just too many vampires who don't want anyone digging into their histories, and too many ways to get hip-deep into knowledge that attracts more trouble than it's worth.

Before a search can truly begin, a vampire must **uncover** the bloodline. Somehow, somewhere, he comes across a reference to them, their name or their activities, and decides to investigate further. In most cases, the discovery of a line is an accident — a random footnote in a text or a rumor overheard.

If the hint of the line's existence is intriguing enough, the vampire may wish to **pursue evidence** of its operation. He must investigate further, by searching tomes, speaking to Kindred in the know, or working with archaeological data. Depending on his covenant and position, he may have access to reliable records — or to an actual member of the lineage. At this stage, the vampire is likely to encounter early resistance. Insular, paranoid bloodlines may work to erase evidence of their existence and dissuade seekers, while politically motivated Kindred in competition with the lines may wish to ensure that interested parties are steered away from a potential alliance. To the astute investigator, though, strong attempts to interfere with the search may be properly interpreted as verification of the bloodline's existence. Even if she can find a way to dodge the misdirection of those impeding her, though, she must still carefully sift through the rumor, conjecture and outright lies that accompany the mention of each line, searching for the grain of truth that will point her in the right direction. For some, this stage of the search takes years. A Mekhet investigator in one southern Italian city is said to have spent nearly seven decades attempting to verify and demonstrate the existence of the scandalous Malkovian line, most of which involved unraveling the complicated web of speculation and fabrication that surrounded them in his own domain.

Once the vampire has proven, to his own satisfaction, that the line truly exists, he may **track** its members, narrowing his search to the specific individuals in the extended family. Using what he already knows, the inquisitive vampire seeks evidence of activity in his domain (or, if both necessary and possible, elsewhere) and attempts to link it up with particular Kindred. At this point, those bloodline members hoping to avoid exposure

are likely to put up a serious fight. After all, unless they have a reason to trust the seeker, they might believe that his intentions are less than friendly.

If one or more members of a line are located and a seeker feels comfortable enough to do so, he may **approach** them, hoping to make contact. How the approach proceeds and what happens afterwards, of course, depends both on the work he's done so far and the attitude of the target in question. This, of all the steps in the search, tends to be the most dangerous because it's the most tempting. Many seekers, finally satisfied with the evidence they've painstakingly gathered, jump right into the approach without considering the implications of rash action. If not properly prepared, the target of a search is sure to respond badly to a sudden approach — he may attempt to flee or react violently — even if he wouldn't normally feel threatened. Any vampire with a secret has reason to be nervous in the world of cut-throat Kindred politics, so one cannot rush up and expose him (or otherwise intimating that one knows all about him) without making sure that he either trusts the one who finds him or has no choice but to cooperate quietly.

Organizations within some of the covenants do gather evidence of bloodline's activity and can be accessed by members or close allies. Archives of the Ordo Dracul

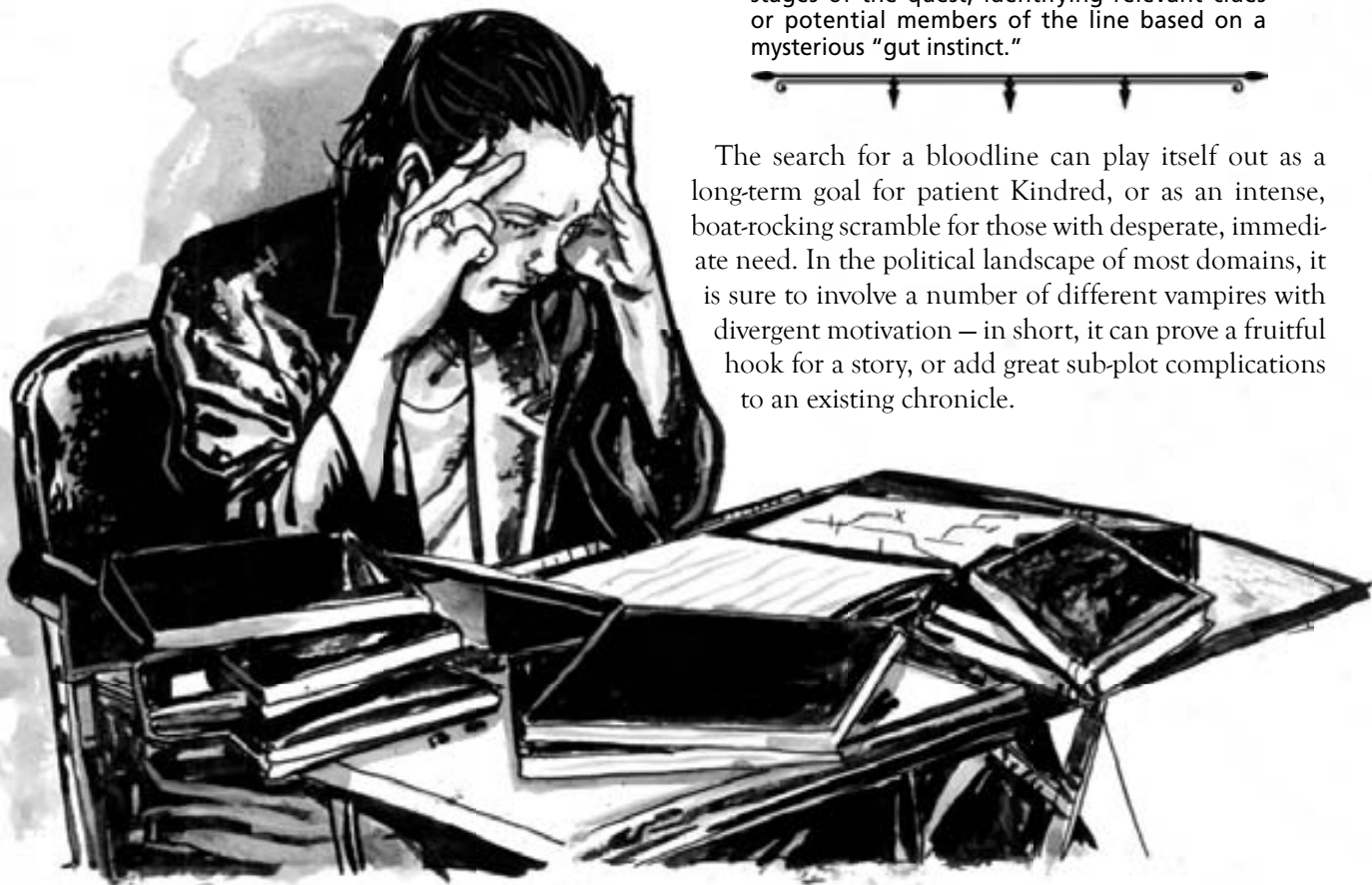
are bound to have some volumes of reference, whether directly related to the study of the lines themselves, or simply containing oblique notes as part of a larger work (on the structure of inherited qualities in *Vitae*, for instance). Most Invictus Kindred are able to recite their lineages to at least a few generations back, and may be able to provide information on their distant (or not-so-distant) relatives. Tracts detailing the existence and activities of heretical cults and families are available in some Sanctified libraries, and may provide insight for visitors.

SYMPATHY FOR THE UNKNOWN

There is one advantage some Kindred may enjoy when searching for specific bloodlines. Those who are already related to the line, whether they know it or not, may be able to *feel* its existence, even without hard evidence. These vampires may not know the name of the line, may not know any of the Kindred who are members of it and may not even understand what a bloodline is, but they experience an inexplicable tugging within — an urge to achieve a fuller understanding of themselves.

Storytellers may wish to give any character searching for her own bloodline, whether she knows it or not, a +2 dice bonus on rolls directly involved in the search. The character may even experience flashes of insight during the early stages of the quest, identifying relevant clues or potential members of the line based on a mysterious "gut instinct."

The search for a bloodline can play itself out as a long-term goal for patient Kindred, or as an intense, boat-rocking scramble for those with desperate, immediate need. In the political landscape of most domains, it is sure to involve a number of different vampires with divergent motivation — in short, it can prove a fruitful hook for a story, or add great sub-plot complications to an existing chronicle.



MAKING IT DIFFICULT

Joining a bloodline isn't like putting a coterie together or even throwing in with a covenant. It's a permanent, irreversible change, and the new member is forever a representative of the "family," carrying both its curses and its secret power. Those who don't inherit the blood of a line should have a very difficult time finding acceptance unless the line is actively seeking expansion.

If a Storyteller and player both want to expedite a character's transition into a line, there's nothing that says they can't gloss over the actual process, but they should be sure to work out the trials the character had to endure to prove her sincerity and loyalty to the line (even if they don't actually play them through).

Reluctant, secretive members of a bloodline aren't the only Kindred who are going to provide obstacles to the search. Politically speaking, there are those who may not wish to admit that a line exists, or that its members are still active in the vampire community. Perhaps a bloodline carries a political stigma, and a powerful vampire is purported to have wiped it out. Perhaps one or more of the prominent vampires in a city are related to the line, and would not want their association publicly acknowledged. Perhaps a line is so hated by some Kindred that evidence of its continued existence would threaten the outbreak of civil war in the domain. The operation of every domain is an organic system, growing out of the complex interrelation between each vampire present. The influence of blood ties is undeniable, and the added complication of bloodline heritage can run a shock through the entire system if it's suddenly added to the mix.

Stepping onto the Path

While some bloodlines only bring in new members by Embrace, many will accept Kindred who aren't related by close blood ties. Whether a vampire tracks them down and requests acceptance or they find him and offer it, the prospective member finds himself on the cusp of a change as thorough and permanent as his Embrace and original entry into a clan. The offering of membership is a momentous affair, whether presented in pompous ceremonial ritual or simply as a whispered exchange between Kindred.

Preparation for induction into a bloodline usually involves a comprehensive process of symbolic shedding and rebirth, whether the prospective member realizes it or not. Even if the material trappings of his Requiem remain the same, the vampire must understand that he is leaving one state of being for another — one that

is shared by many fewer Kindred. Some are required to perform a series of tasks as directed by the Avus, or to develop a particular skill in preparation for their new roles. Many are expected to demonstrate their loyalty to the line in some fashion, usually by discarding or destroying some possession or ally that is beneficial to them in their current state.

Even if the members of the bloodline welcome the prospective member's advances, he may face resistance from other Kindred. Those who are closely related to him may attempt to hold him back, knowing that they will forever be associated with him and his new line in matters of local reputation — they may be assumed to be members of the bloodline even if they deny it. He may already be the legitimate heir to another line, and its members may wish to make a competing offer in order to hold onto him. He may simply find that current loyalties are incompatible with the aims of the bloodline, and his attempts to discard friends and allies are sure to meet with confused opposition. Emotional and spiritual ties interfere with the rational (or irrational) desire to join the line, complicating the decision.

INDUCTION AS STORY

The initiation of Kindred into a bloodline carries great potential for melodrama, and can easily serve as the basis for an entire story (or chapter in a greater story). If at all possible, Storytellers should avoid glossing over the entry to the line. If the rhythm of the story doesn't allow for it, there are a few points that the Storyteller should make sure to cover, for future reference, and to give the player an idea of her character's experiences, so that she can draw upon them later:

- How compassionate and helpful was the Avus throughout the initiation? Did he care for the character, or was he just fulfilling a duty?
- Was the character carefully inducted into the philosophy and history of the line, or was she thrust directly into the physical change of Vitae without much background understanding?
- Did the character have any preconceived notions of the bloodline before joining? Were they close to the actual nature of the line, or was she operating on misinformed assumptions? How does she reconcile her original view of the line with the reality of membership?
- How did the weakness of the bloodline first manifest itself? Did the character have advance warning, or was it a surprise?
- How did the character learn to use the unique power (if there is one) of the bloodline?

Once these basic points are covered, the player will be able to formulate an emotional basis for her character's situation and flavor the story appropriately.

Joining the Family

The induction into a bloodline might be a simple affair in mechanical terms — a guided application of will resulting in the permanent alteration of one's Vitae — but in most cases, it plays out as a more convoluted process. To many, it is much like a second Embrace (and a second round of neonatal instruction) — a renewed Requiem in the deeper, more insular world of an inherited legacy. To some Kindred, it's an invigorating process, breathing new energy into their existence and providing the will to go on in the waking world. To others, it's a wrenching, disturbing journey, a permanent and irreversible change in their undead state.

Those with a close blood tie to the line usually enjoy an easier induction than unrelated applicants. A sire or sibling bringing his vampire kin into the line will share blood sympathy with the applicant and is thus unlikely to inflict unnecessary suffering on her in the process, for they will share the pain suffered as a result. The notion of inheritance often comes into play, serving as a legitimate claim to the right of membership.

Outsiders, on the other hand, can expect to be tested to the limit. A vampire must prove himself suitable to the line, and must prove that his dedication and intentions are legitimate. He is, after all, asking to be a permanent member and representative of the Avus's blood legacy — and will afterwards be empowered to sire future members of the bloodline.

To join a bloodline, a vampire must have the blood of the line in her system (either by inheritance or ingestion) and must exert the will to forever change her Vitae so that it awakens the unique qualities within. Certain scholars of the Ordo Dracul have compared it to crystal growth: once the seed of proper "shape" is in place, the rest of the Vitae can be encouraged to reconfigure, permanently locking itself into the seed's design. But these two steps are just the fundamental requirements — not necessarily the only ones that the Avus will demand. Certain Disciplines may be essential, in his opinion, for the transition to hold. Psychological preparation for the burdens of the bloodline is always a good idea, and some instructors will go so far as to attempt a simulation of the line's weakness to aid in the applicant's understanding.

And those are the best of circumstances. If an Avus is maliciously inclined, a vampire seeking membership in his bloodline may be made to suffer great pain before she is brought in (if he intends to bring her in at all). If the Avus is simply ill informed, he may guide the applicant through a series of superfluous preparations and tests, not knowing that the transition is actually a relatively

simple affair. One notorious member of the R^tgrafen, last seen in the South of France, was known to put inductees through an agonizing ritual, flaying them and forcing them to stand in the saltwater spray of the sea to "seek the approval of the gods." His sire, lost to madness, imposed the same torture on him immediately following the Embrace, and the Avus simply believed it was necessary to create a member of the line. There is nobody to tell him that he's wrong, and there is nobody to tell his inductees, either — not until they encounter another member of the line who knows better.



MECHANICS:

JOINING BY INDUCTION

The mechanics of willful change are as described in **Vampire: The Requiem**. The vampire wishing to join a bloodline must fulfill the following requirements:

- Have at least one point of the bloodline's Vitae in her system and
- Spend one Willpower dot to change her own Vitae.

Storytellers may impose further mechanical requirements as directed by the events of the story, but these two minimum guidelines must be met in all cases.



Of course, the Avus is not always the subject of the "seduction," and the applicant is not always the initiator. A vampire could be brought into a line she never intended to join — which is, in fact, more than common some believe.

Most cases of induction against will involve the imposition of legacy. A vampire Embraced into a monstrous or distasteful lineage may not want to be associated with his ancestry, and may wish to avoid becoming one of the

bloodline, defying the decree of his sire. In this case, a clash of wills ensues. The sire becomes a dogged antagonist, harassing, cajoling or threatening the vampire until his will breaks and he submits to the change of Vitae.

Some unlucky Kindred are tricked into joining a bloodline they never sought. Some are changed during the regular instruction of a neonate, not understanding the difference between the shift in Vitae and any other unnatural operation of the Blood until it's far too late. Others believe they are applying to join some other, more prestigious line, and fall victim to an elaborate hoax, only discovering their mistake after the change is made. These vampires are doubly cursed, for, though uninformed, they were clearly the ones who willed the change in themselves, and often feel that they have only



themselves to blame. A great number of suicides result from such manipulations as these, so a prospective Avus who actually wishes to create a viable member of the line must work to ensure a strong sense of self and a hardy will to survive in his chosen inductee.

Others are broken down, surrendering themselves in a desperate bid to end the torments of the prospective Avus who hounds them. Some submit to the change simply to save the lives of their mortal friends and relatives, sparing them the fury of the Avus by willingly sharing her curse. Some collapse under a prolonged barrage of torments, submitting to the change in a bid to satisfy the Avus and end the pain.

Some are literally seduced, falling in love with the Avus and yielding to more subtle manipulations, too far gone to understand what they are agreeing to. Only weeks, months or even years later do they surface from the haze of passion, realizing that they have undergone an irreversible change that they may not want. There is an entire line of the Anvari in South America who are traditionally brought into the bloodline this way, and some decades-old members remain ardent in their devotion even to this very night, unable or unwilling to acknowledge the weakness that led to their decision.

It is even possible to pull a vampire into a bloodline without her approval or her willful participation. It's not

MECHANICS:

JOINING BY COMPULSION

A character's reluctance to do something doesn't preclude her ability to spend Willpower on it. Even if she hates the notion of joining a particular bloodline, she can exert the will to change her Vitae when sufficiently motivated. The two requirements mentioned above still hold true, but the circumstances need not be entirely voluntary.

Of course, a character may be reluctant to do something that his player is perfectly happy with. The forced induction into a bloodline can be fodder for some extremely dramatic Storytelling, but it's not going to work out if the transition is actually something the player doesn't want. Be sure to discuss the implications and possibilities fully with a player and seek his approval before subjecting his character to a compulsion so severe and transformative.

advised — there are associated risks that can lead to the complete destruction of the potential member's sanity, and it's almost entirely guaranteed that the Avus will earn the new member's eternal hatred in the process.

The first method is available only to the Acolytes of the Circle of the Crone, and involves Embracing a

MECHANICS:

JOINING BY DISINTEGRATION

Here is how the destruction of a vampire's will and subsequent induction into a bloodline is represented:

- The vampire must be drained of all Willpower. This is a twofold process. First, he must either spend all of his Willpower in play (by fueling Disciplines or enhancing actions) or he must lose all of his Willpower points (by means out of his control, such as the Daevas' weakness or by falling victim to certain powers and Disciplines). Second, he must be prevented from regaining any Willpower during the process, so his Virtue and Vice must be inaccessible to him and he must not be allowed to gain a full day's rest.

- If the vampire is not already an heir to the blood of the line, the Avus must feed him a point of Vitae. The vampire must not spend this Vitae for the remainder of the night.

- The Avus must accumulate 10 successes on an extended Resolve + Composure roll, modified by subtracting the subject's Resolve. Each roll represents several hours of exertion, and only one roll can be performed per night. Each time the roll is made, a subject not already related to the line must ingest a point of the Avus' blood and keep it in his system for the remainder of the night. If a roll fails to produce any successes, previously accumulated successes must be erased and the Avus must begin again.

- The vampire must be conscious, and must not be allowed to descend into Frenzy during the change itself (the resolution of the extended Resolve + Composure roll). There are very few ways to accomplish this reliably, and the only means to do so that most Kindred are aware of is the advanced use of Animalism.

- Once the 10 successes are accumulated, the Avus must spend a Willpower dot of her own, finally forcing the change to take hold in the subject.

When all of these requirements are satisfied, the subject vampire becomes a member of the bloodline. Of course, the trauma is incredible, and many Kindred's minds snap during the process. Storytellers should consider assigning a derangement to those who endure it — especially when the process is prolonged or extraordinarily violent. Any Avus with a Humanity rating higher than 2 engaging in this practice will also have to make a degeneration roll, since it involves the mental (and, in some cases, physical) torture of the subject.

No player should be forced to play his character's victimization by this process. This, just as any especially traumatic or extreme scene, should be discussed with players in advance, and only run if both the Storyteller and the player involved agree that they are comfortable working it into the chronicle.

mortal directly into the line, bypassing the formation of normal Kindred Vitae and altering it concurrently with the first stirrings of the Beast. The ritual known as Crone's Renewal (see **Circle of the Crone**, p. 211) allows a prospective Avus to enhance the potency of a childe's blood immediately upon Embrace, and a carefully staged death can encourage the fledgling neonate to contribute the necessary expenditure of will and complete the compact of Blood. Some lines of the Circle make use of this ritual exclusively to bring in new members, barely aware themselves that there is a choice to be offered at all.

The second method, available to all, is worse by far. If a vampire can be broken down so completely, so comprehensively that he is totally incapable of making decisions or fighting those that are imposed upon him, he can be pulled into the change, guided helplessly through the everlasting reconfiguration of the Blood. To get him there, his will must be shattered, his Beast must be leashed and his body and mind must be subject to the whims of the Avus — not a simple accomplishment. For these extremely unlucky Kindred, the forced entry into a bloodline is the culmination of rigorous, persistent torture — a violation of unimaginable depth to cap a horrifying, systematic series of abuses.

This process of induction, above all, is a wildly dangerous and ugly means to bringing a vampire into one's bloodline. It virtually guarantees madness in the subject, and almost always utterly destroys her former personality. Only the most monstrously hateful Kindred could imagine subjecting anyone to this shattering process, and only the most deluded can justify it in anything but vengeful terms.

The vampire so inducted can never truly recover from the trauma. In most cases, those few who don't walk into the sun become monsters in their own right, turning around and unleashing their fury on the Avus or, if they are bound or otherwise unable to harm him, on innocents nearby. In many domains, this torturous method of inclusion is a truly horrifying crime, and is punished most severely.

A Requiem Apart

Regardless of the method of induction, once the transformation in the Blood is complete, a vampire's Requiem as a member of his chosen bloodline begins in earnest. He is incontrovertibly and irrevocably changed, no longer a simple member of his clan, but something more refined, more focused. A Gangrel becomes a Taifa Gangrel. A Daevas becomes a Spina Daevas. A Ventrue becomes a Dragolescu Ventrue. In some cases, the name of the bloodline completely replaces one's clan in the minds of outsiders, redefining the vampire completely.



PREDISPOSITION IN A DOMAIN

The reputation of a bloodline in a domain should have a real impact on interactions with other Kindred. If a character is known to be a member of a line, they are going to feel the effects of prejudice in all but the most tolerant domains. Storytellers should think about whether a line has a history in the story's setting, and how tolerant the local Kindred are, and apply a bonus or penalty to social interaction based on those factors. Following are some suggested roll modifications:

Factor	Modification
Bloodline has a good reputation.	+1
Bloodline has a bad reputation.	-1
Bloodline is considered anathema or criminal.	-2
Local Kindred are intolerant.	-1
Local Kindred are tolerant.	0
Bloodline is unknown in the domain.	-1
The Prince is a member of the bloodline.	+1

These modifiers should only be applied when the Kindred interacting with the character don't really know him personally. The more they get to know him, the more likely they are to overlook their prejudices (in either direction).

Once this new feature of a vampire's being takes hold, it informs the rest of her Requiem. Even if she hides her membership from the Kindred around her, she is undeniably aware of the boundary set between herself and her contemporaries. Very few vampires really understand the phenomenon of bloodline differentiation, and most treat members of the lines with fear and suspicion. Rumors of "infectious bloodlines" abound, and more than one vampire has seen the horrifying result (successful or not) of a forced initiation and spread the news. Only members of the most prestigious lines escape the fear and suspicion of ignorant vampires. At the other extreme, those of particularly famous lines can become something like celebrities themselves in vampire society, enjoying the benefits of familial association and basking in the hushed whispers that follow them in Elysium.

Of course, there are domains that operate under different rules. The bloodline of a Prince may enjoy special privileges in a city. Certain lines may be very prestigious or well-known, and may invoke positive reactions instead of negative ones. Much as clans, bloodlines can earn local reputations over time, and work to mitigate the instinctive fear of the unknown can be accomplished. The Kindred of one small domain in Germany actually revere the Morbus because of incidences of extraordinarily noble behavior on the part of two members of the line. The

vampires of a particular city in New England are predisposed toward the Galloi, if only because their Prince has made a public show of her love for one of them.

The prejudices of outsider Kindred aren't the only factor that sets a bloodline apart. Those within the line react differently to the outsiders as well, either anticipating prejudice or expressing the schooling of the line. Those among prestigious bloodlines are likely to see other Kindred as inferior and envious unfortunates. The members of reviled lines often react defensively to outsider attention — either aggressively seeking confrontation or debasing themselves to avoid it. The schooling of an Avus and the first reactions from local Kindred are both critical in setting the tone of a bloodline member's future interactions with outsider vampires.

Many of the bloodlines offer their members unique Disciplines or powers, setting them apart in another way. A vampire who practices powers that are unavailable to the ordinary Kindred population will be changed by her new ability, for better or worse. Some outsiders will see her as a valuable asset, cajoling or paying her to make use of the bloodline's signature in their service. Others (most often members of the Ordo Dracul) will want to study her, hoping to understand how the power works, and whether or not it can be learned without inheriting the Blood of the line. Some, of course, will treat her with fear or respect, realizing that they are dealing with something they don't entirely understand.

In many domains, a bloodline's signature Discipline may actually involve behavior outlawed by the Prince. Kindred in possession of these powers weigh the exploration of their newfound abilities against the rule of law in the domain, deciding whether the discovery of untried power is worth the risk. One Sanctified Prince in the American Midwest has defined "interfering and interacting with the mortal dead" as a criminal sin because of his personal beliefs, inadvertently outlawing the Disciplines of the Burakumin, Dragolescu, Macellarius, Noctuku and Sangiovanni, as well as a number of Devotions attributed to other lines. These declarations may or may not have anything to do with knowledge of the bloodlines in question — often, they are simply the result of logical laws or multilayered rules of etiquette in a populated domain.

The weaknesses of many bloodlines cause physical or behavioral changes that are impossible to conceal. The blindness of the Baddacelli or the sedentary existence of the Malocusians, for example, fundamentally and permanently alter the Requiems of most vampires who become members. It's hard for outsiders to understand the uncontrollable transformation involved in joining the line, and many of the Kindred who feel them are

compelled to draw tighter together, shutting out the ordinary vampires (in so much as it's possible to do so and still survive the Danse Macabre) and forming limited societies of their own. Not every line is so close, and not every member of the line is willing to draw inwards so spectacularly, but it can happen, and more often than not, it does because of the aforementioned weakness.

Most Kindred with obvious or debilitating weaknesses find themselves drawn into a struggle to maintain relations with outsiders they have come to trust. Those who don't join the line are offered the choice: to provide support for the vampire's new Requiem and help keep her involved in the society of the domain or to deride her for it and watch her withdraw into completely into the subculture of her bloodline. The strength of a coterie's relationships is truly tested by a vampire's induction into a line.



BLOODLINES VS. CLANS

These three factors (prejudice, Discipline and weakness) may set the member of every bloodline apart from the crowd, but they're actually exactly identical to the features that differentiate the five clans. The only real distinction, socially speaking, is that members of a bloodline are almost always outnumbered in large domains and must therefore endure exclusion. But that isn't the case everywhere. A bloodline that comprises a significant proportion of a city's Kindred population might be treated very much like a clan in its own right, complete with its own Priscus and attendant positions of respect. Storytellers should consider the Kindred demographic of a domain when figuring out how a bloodline is treated there, and adjust attitudes based on the relative size and influence of the line.

In some domains, a bloodline might even overtake its parent clan, becoming nearly synonymous with it. The Gangrel of one particular town in Morocco are so dominated by the Taifa that local Kindred use the two terms interchangeably. It has long been argued by certain Kindred historians that the Ventrue are just one such bloodline, distinguished only by their relative ubiquity and numbers. Others take the argument further, postulating that the five clans themselves are nothing more than extremely successful lineages, and that each and every downtrodden bloodline tonight has the potential to be a respected clan in the distant future.



All of this goes quite far toward explaining the secrecy and stealth of most bloodlines. Many members choose to operate in the shadows, hoping to bypass the prejudice of their Kindred and operate undisturbed in society. It's surprising how many functionally normal vampires are actually members of bloodlines commonly considered bizarre or criminally offensive.



BLOODLINE STATUS

While it is entirely conceivable that a large bloodline would eventually develop a system of recognition among its membership, most are too small or too fractured to bother. When there are only a handful of members in a single domain, who cares if one has more or less "Bloodline Status" than the rest? Nomad lines are even less likely to stand on ceremony than their city-bound counterparts, and all but the founder of a line can probably expect to be greeted the same way: first with mild suspicion, then, once verified as a true fellow member, with relatively warm welcome.

There are lines that are large enough, ubiquitous enough or just talkative enough to justify creating a "Bloodline Status" Merit. The Taifa, for example, tell tales about one another on their journeys, and could conceivably achieve a measure of fame among their own. For lines such as this, the Merit should behave exactly as Clan Status does, affecting social interaction with members of the line and reflecting one's popularity in the line alone. Characters with one dot of Bloodline Status are new members or those generally unknown to the rest of the line, but capable of proving their membership, while only the founder of a line and its most famous leaders might have five dots.

Unlike Clan or Covenant Status, though, Bloodline Status is generally be secret and unknown to outsiders. It may seem strange to see a powerful Priscus treating an itinerant nomad with respect, but outsiders shouldn't necessarily understand why it's happening unless they're particularly astute or afforded inside knowledge of the bloodline those two Kindred share.



While few of the bloodlines actually engage in an organized, active policy of misdirection, individual members often work to obscure the realities of the line in hopes that they will not be identified or that they can deflect undue attention. Even respected lines can be subject to suspicion, and any group that is identifiably different (as all bloodlines are) is vulnerable to prejudice in times of crisis. Careful Kindred work to remain as innocuous as possible, knowing that trusting outsiders with any information at all about one's family can be a potentially fatal mistake — especially considering the complicated maneuverings and subtle, sidelong attacks so common to the Danse Macabre.

The added burden of secrecy and caution is well balanced, though, by the integration of a vampire into a new "family." In most cases, joining a bloodline brings a new support structure into play in a vampire's Requiem, adding to her emotional and physical protection while providing her with an outlet of purpose and sympathy. Many who were once alone or downtrodden are

elevated by their new membership, enjoying attention and loyalty that was denied them before. Often, they join in a collective effort (the exact sort of activity that has paranoid outsiders worried about the bloodlines in the first place) that secures their place in the line, proving their enthusiasm and earning them respect. Those Kindred who are unable to advance in covenants and have failed to earn the recognition of a domain's governing body may still achieve status and garner appreciation if they get the chance to join a relatively unusual bloodline.

Intelligent Kindred work to bolster the cooperative spirit of their bloodline, contributing to it whenever they can, and ensuring that every member feels the obligation to do the same. Strength comes in numbers, but only when those numbers stand together. Fractured lines often fade into oblivion before long, losing members to the natural attrition of the Danse Macabre quicker than they can replenish.

Many bloodline members, thankful for the sense of security they receive and outraged when it's threatened, become somewhat fanatical in their support of the family. They fight viciously to ensure the empowerment of their own, and work tirelessly to keep potential opponents at bay — not always the wisest of approaches, since it can

generate unnecessary conflict and threaten to draw the whole of the line into vendetta. Even the best intentions can lead to over-enthusiased expressions of loyalty if one isn't careful, and terrible mistakes can result. More than one city has cleansed itself of a bloodline just because one member leapt up and declared his undying devotion to the family, exposing himself and his fellow Kindred to a most unfortunate scrutiny.

Some Kindred become fanatic in the protection and promotion of their bloodline simply because its numbers are diminishing, and they feel the urge to perpetuate the characteristics and practices of the line. If a vampire loyal to his line finds himself alone in a city, with no evidence to indicate that there are any others left outside the domain, he is likely to seek suitable new members and break any law to bring them onside (and protect them afterwards). Tradition, morality and the decrees of a Prince may be nothing to Kindred who believe that they are working to save a dying line.

Abandoning a Bloodline

There are Kindred who suffer unduly for their membership in a bloodline. Those who are subjected to extreme prejudices, or those who find the unexpected features of line membership to be too unpleasant often turn to a new quest: the search for a means to abandon the line.

In social terms, the attempt is only as difficult as the other members of the bloodline make it. A vampire who is unhappy with his familial attachments might be allowed to simply walk away from them, severing connections and denying obligations. He may go so far as to travel to another domain, hoping that there are no other members of the line at the destination, leaving him free to exist without ever encountering them again.

Many don't have it so easy. Leaving a domain is difficult at best, and simply not an option for some. A jealous or territorial Avus may simply refuse to let a vampire leave her bloodline behind for emotional reasons, if not to ensure that the "family vision" remains unspoiled. More often than not, a vampire trying to extricate himself from a bloodline can look forward to a long, emotionally draining battle to reassert his independence.

Even under ideal circumstances, a vampire cannot reverse the mystical change in his blood. As far as anyone knows, no Kindred has ever managed to truly remove himself from a bloodline and become a "normal" member of his clan again — just as none has ever moved from one bloodline to another.

Scholars of the Ordo Dracul have put a lot of time and work into attempting to unravel the ties of blood — both by clan and bloodline, and have consistently failed. Most



BUT CAN IT BE DONE?

No. There is no mechanic for altering a character's Blood so completely that she can remove herself from their clan or bloodline designation. The permanence of these features is part of the fundamental curse of a vampire's existence, and it shouldn't be mutable. Kindred who despair of what they've become make for dramatic characters — much more so than those who can jump from one bloodline to another with impunity. There are measures that the members of the Ordo Dracul can take to temporarily escape their curse, but the protection is never permanent. Theoretically, the benefits of Golconda might involve withdrawal from a bloodline, but the legendary enlightened state promises all sorts of benefits that may or may not be possible in actual, achievable terms.

A player's knowledge that the change is impossible shouldn't stop the character from throwing himself into the quest, though. The futile attempt to escape one's curse can make for an interesting story, so long as it serves as the backdrop to another element of plot — more a quirk of the character than anything else — and not the main focus of the tale. A Storyteller shouldn't allow the search to be all a character is engaged in, because it will lead to an ultimately unsatisfying conclusion.



Academy libraries contain a fair amount of research on the issue, since clan ties and the associated curses are considered integral features of Kindred existence. Vampires with access to those records, though, will find nothing but a frustrating litany of null results and theorems proved false. New Coils that release a vampire from the defining features of a bloodline are often considered, proposed and designed, but the attempts to put the theory into practice (and, to date, there have been hundreds around the world, if not thousands) have all proved fruitless.

The blood magic of the Circle of the Crone and the miracles of the Lancea Sanctum likewise prove powerless to alter such fundamental features of the Blood. Faith in myths of divine interference notwithstanding, there is no one who can point to a reliable, verifiable case of the mystic

disentangling of a vampire from his inherited Blood.

Some Kindred argue that these consistent failures don't necessarily mean that the attempts are futile. The answer has not been found yet — but there's nothing to say that it doesn't exist. Perhaps all of the earlier attempts were founded on incorrect assumptions. Perhaps they were constructed incorrectly, or presented to the wrong gods, or for the wrong reasons or by the wrong Kindred. To the lost and forlorn, to those utterly horrified by what they have become, more so than the monster they once were, hope cannot — must not — be abandoned. They toil still, researching or praying, pushing through years or decades of failure and vowing to keep working until they make their escape. All around the world, in small enclaves or alone, they struggle onwards.



Appendix B: Bloodlines in the Story

From a Storyteller's perspective, bloodlines are a bit of a dilemma. They are bound to attract the interest of players — it seems almost inevitable that at least one player in each game will want his character to belong to a bloodline — but bloodlines each carry their own thematic baggage, and can complicate or derail a plot if added haphazardly into the mix. On one hand, they are great story generators in their own right. On the other, taking advantage of their unique features may drive a wedge between characters in a coterie and shift the focus of play (at least in some scenes) away from the group as a whole to the one vampire who has been singled out as a member.

Careful consideration of a bloodline's implications can reduce this dilemma, though, and the addition of a line to a story can be controlled so that the bloodline contributes its best elements to support of the chronicle's themes, rather than detracting from them. This section discusses the best way to approach the integration of a bloodline in a chronicle and highlights a few ideas that may aid in providing plot seeds to benefit the story.

Integrating a Bloodline into a City

The addition of any bloodline to a setting will change its overall dynamic and may have a profound effect on the story. A Storyteller should take care to ensure that the line is compatible with the theme and plot of the story. A tragic, melancholy plot can be seriously disrupted by the addition of an extremely violent, action-oriented line, while a high-stakes battle for supremacy might be bogged down by the introduction of characters to a miserable, introspective line. The first question that really needs to be asked is: why should the line be included? What purpose will the Kindred of this line serve in the story? If the answer is satisfactory, then the Storyteller can move on to preparing the bloodline for play. If you do decide to add one to your city, there are a number of questions that, if asked and answered, can help work the bloodline in and open up story seeds that may be useful:

- How many Kindred of the bloodline are in the setting? The less populous the line, the less likely it is that it will powerfully affect the story. A single vampire might add a minor twist to the setting, putting a strange and unexpected power in play, while a large family could threaten to dominate the political landscape, becoming more of a focus.

- Why is the bloodline in the city? For every line that has its origins elsewhere, the only way to appear in a city is to come from outside. Did one of the members of the line first come to the domain hoping to expand the line's influence and Embrace new progeny? Did he come for another reason and decide to stay? Was he trapped in the domain? Was the first member of the line in the domain also its founder, or was she a member of little relative significance?

- How long has the bloodline been in the domain? Long-term Kindred of the domain are more likely to enjoy Status and have established, comfortable feeding grounds (so long as they are on good terms with the city's Prince and Court), while recent arrivals must find ways to survive, feeding away from prying eyes and working to curry favor with the reputable Kindred there (or, more dangerously, to defy them).

- What are the policies of the bloodline in the city? If members of the bloodline have an agenda, it should be laid out clearly in advance so that you can refer to it when planning their actions or detailing their response to stimuli. If the bloodline abides by certain traditions or practices, the members may be restricted in their activity or otherwise directed by unusual needs.

- Does the bloodline feature a feeding preference or other territorial behavior that will affect the balance of power in the domain? Are the members likely to encroach on other vampires' grounds, or will the bloodline members keep to themselves?

- How open is the bloodline? Those who work to avoid exposure will add to an overall feeling of paranoia and mystery in a setting. Those who are brash, proudly declaring their heritage, may add a competitive or combative tone to the politics of a city.

- Are any of the players' characters related to the bloodline? Close ties between a character (or several characters) and the line will drastically affect play — the characters may find themselves sharing blood sympathy with the members of the line, and the potential for induction into the bloodline will always be somewhere in their thoughts.

The Dramatic Impact of a Bloodline

The involvement of a bloodline can add significant drama to a story, bringing plots and themes into focus

by its presence alone. Some of the lines make for great “flavor,” adding rich detail to a city’s Kindred population, while others can provide a significant emotional prod for characters in play.

Some bloodlines present a major **threat to the status quo** by their simple existence. An orderly Sanctified city can see its Court powerfully jeopardized by the arrival of a Carnon family, say, or a R^tgrafen nomad fleet. Venture in powerful positions might feel profoundly threatened by the appearance of even a single Malkovian or Yagnatia vampire. Even if the bloodline involved is not the focus of a story, the Storyteller should keep in mind the significance of the line to those outsiders who encounter it. Kindred with relatively high Humanity may be moved to take up arms if they hear that a monstrous line (whether truly so or simply reputed to be so) may have breached the borders of the domain.

Others can intensify the mood of a given domain (or chronicle) by underscoring certain elements of the setting. Every line has a theme of its own, and each can be used to color existing domains, shifting the tone to the Storyteller’s liking. Agonistes have a way of bringing the selfish fears of elder Kindred to the fore, while



the Sectarian California Xiao embody an exercise in amoral indulgence for all Daeva to shudder at. A city with many Kindred close to the Beast may benefit from an appearance of the Noctuku, throwing new light on the struggle with Humanity and the terrors that can result from failure.

One of the most appealing and useful attributes of bloodlines, from a story perspective, arises from their unusual powers, weaknesses, and culture. Each line represents a **mystery**, and can be used to pepper the setting with surprising details. Even a character who is very familiar with the workings of the Lancea Sanctum will be taken aback when he first encounters the Sangiovanni, and is unlikely to be prepared for their unique abilities.

In fact, an entire plot can revolve around the mystery of a bloodline. A vampire with unusual powers might use them to influence a domain, destabilizing the city. Characters might be tasked with uncovering evidence of a bloodline’s existence just to satisfy the interest of a local vampire. Characters might be hunted by a member of an unusual bloodline, finding themselves subjected to his bizarre powers and deviant behavior. This unpredictable, indefinite factor may even cause characters to mistake the vampires of a line for creatures entirely foreign to Kindred.



PASSIVE IMPACT

The members of a bloodline need not even be very active to make this dramatic impact. Those who are merely attempting to eke out a living can become the target of other vampires’ attentions (for ill or good), drawing them into the core of the setting and highlighting their thematic qualities. Characters might be related to one or more members of a line, and sympathetic bursts can underscore those characters’ own night-to-night struggles in a unique and interesting way.

Even a vampire lost in torpor can affect the other Kindred nearby. The blood sympathy will provoke and guide her close relations, and other effects of Disciplines and Devotions might surround her, contributing the atmospheric feel of her bloodline to the goings-on of the domain.



Some bloodlines are constructed around a mystery. Their origins are obscure or unknown, their curses force them into the shadows or they make use of their unusual abilities in a bid to deliberately baffle outsiders. Their presence can constitute an unknown quantity that completely changes the flavor of a domain and serves as a great focus for chronicles concerned with puzzling secrets.

As threatening and mysterious as each of the bloodlines may be, though, their greatest potential for dramatic impact lies in the **emotional effect** they can have on characters. Almost every vampire in the Danse Macabre must be assumed to share lineage with at least one member of one bloodline (if not several), and may well encounter bizarre, horrifying or *altered* Kindred who also happen to be *relatives*. Characters in a chronicle may even find themselves sharing blood sympathy with a reviled bloodline — certainly a frightening notion, and one that leads to any number of fantastic dramatic opportunities.

Kindred within bloodlines may operate on agendas that run at cross-purposes with those of the characters, drawing them into conflict that is directed by inherited directive, not personal choice. This possibility paves the way for great tragedy: characters may find themselves facing off against Kindred whom they like or even admire, but must do battle with because of the legacy of blood.

Some bloodlines are bound to inspire deep revulsion in certain characters, creating an instant emotional effect that may be more difficult to achieve with ordinary Kindred. Others may have the opposite effect, provoking the whispered respect or fearful obedience of characters who are more affected by the reputation of the line than they are by the appearance of the vampires before them. In a way, certain bloodlines provide shortcuts to poignant or disturbing concepts, making it easy for the Storyteller to provoke a reaction from characters in the chronicle when necessary.

The Political Impact of a Bloodline

Very few vampires live in a political vacuum. Those who gravitate to populous mortal cities (as they must, if they intend to survive) find themselves in the company of other Kindred, and must play a part in the politicking that is sure to follow. A bloodline is more than a collection of vampires with similar attributes and powers — it is an extended family, sharing blood sympathy up and down the line. It is usually in the best interest of all members to keep one another safe and happy, because they can feel what the others feel (and they may not be able to depend on any outsiders in times of need). Each line, then, is a political bloc of its own, even if it has no

specific agenda. A bloodline's members might devote themselves to separate covenants, but their common ties will often play a part in the decisions they make. The consideration of Kindred in a line to one another can never be ignored in political stories.

A bloodline's **level of involvement** in local politics can add dimension to a story. A line that avoids the maneuverings of Elysium is an unknown quantity, and its members may be courted as potential allies — or browbeaten into throwing their support behind someone. Characters may be required to make diplomatic contact with representatives of a bloodline in order to feel out their loyalties (or establish some). One that involves itself deeply in local politics may get its fingers deep into several covenants, creating a conspiracy.

But no bloodline is a single-minded unit. Often, Kindred are too easily led to paint all of the members of a line with a single brush. Characters may find themselves associated with a line that is known to engage in illegal or distasteful practice, and may be subject to summary judgment even if they, themselves, are blameless. Outsider characters may notice that a bloodline member is being associated with crime unfairly, and may wish to protect her.

Larger and more stratified lines develop **internal politics**, providing any number of story seeds. The Danse Macabre may duplicate itself in miniature within the line, as blood relatives jockey with one another for recognition and position within the family. Disputes over the agenda of a bloodline can lead to intrigues and violence on par with that of the larger domain, and can draw outsider Kindred in just as easily. Schism is a frequent threat in larger bloodlines, as families become unwieldy and small groups fall away from the influence of the founder or local leader. Some Kindred simply tire of each other, chafing over decades of close contact and eventually turning on each other in defiance of logic and the sense of self-preservation.

Even small lines will have an effect on the **external politics** of a domain. As a body of (usually) like-minded vampires, their words may carry weight in some cities, especially if the governing system is likely to allow them the right to speak and interfere with policy. Even in less tolerant Kindred Courts, any group of cooperative vampires can present a serious challenge to the rule. They may fight for recognition, for feeding grounds, or even a fife-like sub-territory of their own.

It is true that some bloodlines act as a mitigating influence in times of conflict. If their members manage to devote themselves to several covenants and maintain good internal family relations at the same time, it is likely

that they will use their influence to avoid inter-covenant conflict, simply because they won't want to turn against their own. An otherwise unstable domain can actually be calmed by the presence of a ubiquitous line.

This is a rare case, though. In most cities, the prejudices of outside Kindred will prevent a line's participation in (some would say infiltration of) multiple-covenant politics, and the members of any one line, just as any family of Kindred, will not be able to maintain perfectly peaceful relations for long.

Maximizing the Story Benefits

All of the story benefits of a bloodline can be maximized if the setting (and the characters) are prepared for their integration into the chronicle. Any opportunity for drama should be intensified as much as possible with appropriate back story; a deviant line of freakish perverts works best if at least one of the characters in play is especially prudish, for instance, maximizing the potential for conflict and ensuring that the line has a strong emotional impact. Seeding the setting with elements that will either mesh well or completely chafe against the bloodline works toward ensuring that their entry is interesting and inspiring, not everyday or bland.

Direct connections to characters in play also go a long way toward enhancing the benefits of bloodlines as story elements. Kindred relations, mortal relations, involvement in organizations or belief systems that run at cross-purposes (or even ones with shared goals) and geographical location of the members of the line can all be planned out to play into character motives and inspire them to action. Consider any of the following as possibilities for increasing tension or adding emotional depth to the addition of a bloodline:

- Draw a direct connection between the friends, allies, influences and mortal family of a character in play and the members of the bloodline.
- Associate rumors or myths about the bloodline with a phobia or delusion that one of the characters suffers.
- Align the bloodline's agenda (if the line has one) so that it triggers the Virtue or Vice of at least one of the characters.
- Give the members of the bloodline a reason to encroach on the characters' territory.
- Have the members of the bloodline throw in with an established enemy of the characters' coterie.
- Make the bloodline a target of a powerful vampire's hatred or envy.



Appendix G: Bloodline Chronicles

Bloodlines aren't just optional add-ons for characters in a chronicle. They are story-rich elements of the *Danse Macabre* all their own, and can easily serve as the focus of a story. Following are several sample chronicles that

revolve around bloodline dynamics for Storytellers to use. They are presented as template summaries, without specific stats or plot points so that they can be adjusted to suit the characters in play.

The Quiet Invasion

A few years ago, one nomadic vampire belonging to a certain bloodline arrived in the city and presented himself to the Prince, as is proper. He was allowed to stay, provided that he remain on the outskirts of the domain and agree not to Embrace any childer. He has lived up to that agreement, but recently one of the vampires of the Elysium Court has changed considerably, becoming quite withdrawn and . . . strange. She has been seen visiting the old nomad more than once, and Kindred are beginning to get suspicious. Now, another vampire of the ruling covenant seems to be developing unusual characteristics and is making his friendship with the nomad known. A vampire approaches the players' characters with whispered suspicions: the nomad is a member of a horrific bloodline, and he is somehow convincing others to join him and take his instruction. The characters are tasked with observing the ex-nomad and helping to identify his true nature, as well as foil his plans. He hasn't done anything technically wrong, and none of the laws of the Prince have been broken, so they will have to be particularly careful — especially if he is winning the respect and allegiance of reputable Kindred so quickly.

Suggested Bloodlines: Noctuku, Sangiovanni, California Xiao

Theme: The creeping progress of a malignant influence. The best qualities of the Kindred of the domain have made them vulnerable to attack, but those who give over to their baser instincts in response are just going to make things worse. The threat presented by the invading bloodline is not limited to the vampires who join the line — it is a fundamental attack against the society of Kindred and the bulwark of their Humanity.

This chronicle is best served if the bloodline involved is unknown to the characters in play, to maximize their fear and suspicion. The less they know, the less likely it

is that they will shrug and come up with a pat solution to the problem. If possible, Storytellers should advise players not to read the entry on the bloodline so that they are just as surprised as their characters would be. The slow, poisonous expansion of the line will be more effectively presented if the characters aren't even sure what the features of the bloodline actually are — so that they can't tell the difference between someone who's "weird" and someone who's thrown in with the enemy.

Mood: Dark and organically menacing. The encroaching disturbance in the domain should make itself manifest in the environment of the setting, with a slowly developing effect that intensifies as time passes; a cold snap that deepens in winter, for example, or a tree blight that attacks the local fauna in summer. The surroundings seem to sicken and wither themselves as the ugly influence of the bloodline spreads into the Court of Kindred, surrounding and threatening to engulf the characters.

Atmosphere: Films such as *Jacob's Ladder* or *Apocalypse Now* are great examples of stories with a slowly intensifying atmosphere of malevolent energies. The characters are trapped by the ordinary forces of their environments, trying to hold on to some semblance of normalcy while the world around them seems to be disintegrating into madness. A sense of encirclement or inevitability goes a long way toward keeping the tension high in a story like this.

To aid in keeping the chronicle on course, it might be a good idea to spend some time establishing a friend or trusted ally to the characters early in the plot, and later reveal that he has thrown in with the enemy. His betrayal will contribute to the sense of diminishing options, and will hammer home the stakes the characters are playing for — especially if they are forced to confront their former friend, and find him willing to destroy them for his new cause.

Setting: This chronicle should begin in an established domain with relatively stable rule. The more the characters are subject to accepted laws and a system of etiquette, the more dangerous and twisted the ex-nomad's influence will appear. The Prince of the city should be one who is trusted and admired, making it difficult for characters to question his judgment in accepting the nomad, and even more so to go out and attack one of his recognized Kindred without permission from on high.

Character Creation: This is a chronicle made for a group of three to five neonate vampires. They should all ideally pledge allegiance to the ruling covenant or one that is in favor with the ruling covenant — the power of the story is undermined if any of them are persecuted or have reason to support the activity of the encroaching bloodline.

At least one of the characters in the coterie should be a member of the parent clan of the bloodline in question, raising the possibility that a close relation will join the line. This will raise the tension considerably, and keep the personal stakes high for all involved. It would also be interesting to assign one or more of the characters a feeding ground that is geographically close to the ex-nomad's territory, making sure the threat is right next door to some of the members of the coterie at all times.

The characters in the coterie should be reasonably familiar with one another and, ideally, relatively friendly. Internal political tensions should be kept at a minimum, if possible. There's enough trouble going on in the political landscape of the setting to keep them busy if they're in accord, and unnecessary strife will just confuse the story and make it difficult for the coterie to progress.

As an option, the coterie can be upped in power — ancillae, or even ruling elders could become the focus of this story — but you have to make sure that more powerful Kindred have more ties that prevent them from just getting up and slaying the ex-nomad and his new allies without political risk. A way to do this is to up the power level and influence of the apparent traitors to equal or surpass those of the characters so that they never have it too easy.

The players should know in advance that this is a tricky situation, politically speaking, and their characters should be able to handle themselves in Elysium. The potential for violence is just one part of the story — the real problem is the growing influence of the bloodline in the city's Court, and the machinations required to discredit and eliminate those Kindred who are going over to its service.

Antagonists: There are three antagonists in this story. The ex-nomad would-



be patriarch of the bloodline is the chronicle's main antagonist, and he embodies the real threat throughout. His recent converts are his weapons and shields, both in Elysium and on the street. They should be less powerful than he is, but not insignificant — and definitely respected in the political arena. Third, there are the vampires who will succumb to paranoia during the course of the story, and will begin reading signs of the nomad's influence in every unexpected event. These Kindred may well turn on the coterie of characters, expecting them to prove their loyalty again and again.

The patriarch of the bloodline should be powerful enough to be able to handle himself (or at least make a functional escape) in direct confrontation with the coterie of characters. A head-on assault shouldn't really be considered a good solution to this problem; if successful, it would undercut the tension of the story. There should be at least one or two surprises up his sleeve — unique Discipline powers or Devotions — that throw off characters who do attempt to prod him.

His recent converts should be constructed to provide a steadily increasing challenge to the characters. At least one of them should be less powerful than the coterie,

and the next should be more troublesome, and so on. Some should have significant connections within the Elysium Court, making it difficult to just take them off the board without careful maneuvering.

The paranoid outsiders are the Storytellers' "spoiler." They can fill any role that is needed, providing challenges to those characters in the coterie who may not feel qualified or able to confront the problems presented by the main antagonists. Physical characters restrained from attacking the patriarch and his followers might be attacked by a paranoid outsider. Intellectual ones may have to fend off the poorly thought-out arguments of members of the Court. Social ones may have to deal diplomatically with interlopers who threaten to interfere.

Story Concepts: Find a politically deniable way to sabotage one of the converts' appearance at Elysium. Investigate the territory of the ex-nomad and verify his misdeeds. Ambush one of his converts while she hunts, forcing her hand and proving that she has access to unusual powers she did not always possess. Convince the Sheriff to bring in the members of the bloodline on a trumped-up charge. Petition the Prince to rescind his acceptance of the ex-nomad and force the antagonist's hand.

Marriage into the Line

One of the characters falls in love with a member of an insular bloodline. They spend blissful nights together, completely unaware that they are provoking the ire of the elder Kindred of the city, both in and out of the line. When the character's lover is punished for his indiscretion, he approaches his beau with a proposal: that she agree to join the line and accept him as her Avus. The offer is not likely to make the elders of the line happy, but the ardent lover believes that her induction will improve the characters' standing in their eyes and win their approval for the romance. Other characters may have reason to believe that the lover is dreaming — that his elders will never accept an outsider in the line, and her induction will only lead them to denounce and destroy both lovers. Worse, her own kin may punish her if she is accepted into the line, demonstrating a greater loyalty to her lover and his family than her own. If the character chooses to join the bloodline, will they allow her to do so and risk the ire of the elders? Or will they attempt to dissuade her, interfering with her will and earning the animosity of her lover? If the character chooses not to join the bloodline, will she be able to endure the pleas of her lover? Will she

be able to do so without appearing to insult the line and the elders who rule it?

Suggested Bloodlines: Agonistes, Baddacelli, Tian-pàn Xiao

Theme: Forbidden love. The forces of Kindred society are arrayed against the affair, forcing a divide between emotional imperative and lawful obedience. Pressures from the outside only intensify the connection between the two lovers, but friction may develop over their attempts to defy the elder powers in the domain.

Mood: Tempestuous and operatic. Logic threatens to be overrun by emotion on all sides in this story, so uncontrollable forces should play a part in setting the mood. Local events can reflect this: violent weather and mortal civil unrest would make great environmental props to work off of. The very streets and buildings of the city should seem disrupted, pelted by natural energies that they are built to defend against.

Atmosphere: *Romeo and Juliet* is the classic example of a story like this. The lovers draw closer and closer, searching desperately for an escape from the traditional violence of their kin. There should be a sense of sacrifice running

through the plot — both lovers ought to be reasonably comfortable in their undisturbed state, knowing full well that their attraction to one another is provoking danger. The rational urge to peace and safety should be in direct opposition to their passionate need for each other, and the rest of the characters in the story should be drawn into the resulting chaos.

The influence of the elder characters is crucial in maintaining the right atmosphere for this story. They can seem irrational in their own right, but they are so entrenched that all of society seems to support their brand of madness. Their jaded experience and long-term animosities should go a long way toward explaining why they aren't likely to tolerate the lovers' affair for long, but elder characters don't all have to be completely hard-hearted. It's enough for them to believe, right or wrong, that the love of the characters is more than just inconvenient — it's unwise and unnecessary.

Setting: This chronicle should be in an established domain that is currently host to serious political tension. The bloodline in question should be at the heart of the disturbance, serving as a banner for one of the sides in the conflict to rally around. The story works best if the characters are not associated with the bloodline in any way before the lovers' affair begins.

The Prince of the city and his ruling Court of Kindred should be deeply entrenched and appear almost impossible to shake loose — further adding to the pressure on the lovers. If the characters align themselves with the bloodline, they risk not only the wrath of the line's elders, but also earning the distrust of the Prince.

The city itself should be lush and beautiful, underscoring the passions of the characters with elaborate, awe-inspiring set pieces. Cathedrals, museums, magnificent ocean-side villas and elaborate theatres make great backdrops for the conflict.

Character Creation: This is a chronicle made for a group of two to four neonate characters, and will work best if most or all of them begin play with a Humanity rating of 7 or higher. The simplest solution to the problem, to abandon the affair, should seem cruel and unfair to them all. Most crucial is the character of the lover, who must be in danger of real heartbreak if she is to be separated from her ill-chosen love.

The coterie of characters should include the lover and her closest friends, allies or blood relations, and all should be roughly equal in age. Every character should have a reason to want to protect the lover and see her safe. None of them should be especially influential in the Elysium Court, but all should have enough Status to make them legitimate, recognized Kindred, protected by the Prince's

law. It doesn't really matter which covenant they belong to or whether they all belong to the same one, as long as none of them is placed in political opposition to the rest. Harmony within the coterie should be crucial to the lovers' survival in this story.

This story doesn't really work if the characters are allowed to be older or more powerful than the average neonate, since the threat of disapproval comes from up above, and the characters must be made to feel that they, at the bottom of the pole, are likely to suffer the worst result of that disapproval.

Antagonists: The first and most prominent antagonist in this story is the bloodline-derived lover himself. He might not seem like trouble to the character who loves him, but whether he knows it or not, he represents the greatest danger to the coterie. The effect he has on the character is so intense that she shouldn't be willing to consider separating herself from him (and vice versa; he should feel the same way), and that leads to all the problems the coterie is facing. He can't be disposed of or driven away without earning the permanent hatred of the character who loves him and risking the ire of the bloodline, but his continued presence is contributing to a build-up of tension that is likely to result in violence. This character should be undeniably appealing, even if his actions are troublesome.

Second, the kin of both lovers represent a significantly dangerous force. On the one hand, both sets of Kindred are likely to attempt to separate the lovers in any way that seems expedient and least likely to harm their own. On the other hand, the kin will react to any perceived insult against themselves (or their young kin) with venom, and may well grow irrational. Appeals to the Prince for support will rapidly give way to threats of bloodshed, which will eventually, if left unchecked, be realized. These Kindred should have emotional connections of their own to their respective kin, making it difficult for the characters to defy them. Some of them should also present a significant physical threat, if the situation goes far enough.

Third, those vampires in the city who see the potential for personal gain will try to fan the flames of emotion in all parties, hoping for an explosion into civil war so that they can benefit. One particular vampire, ideally with significant influence in the city, should be designed to represent this third force. This Kindred need not be personally connected to the characters involved, and can be cast as the "pure villain," giving them someone to combat directly even while they face more complex dilemmas. His connections within the Kindred Court should be such that his destruction would cause serious repercussions, forcing the characters to handle him

another way (or exploding the story into open warfare if they choose to provoke it).

Story Concepts: Arrange a secret meeting between the lovers and protect them from spies. Help the lovers in a

bid to petition the elders of the bloodline in accepting their affair. Visit Elysium and trick the third antagonist into exposing his crude opportunism before the Kindred of Quality.

The Sudden Pogrom

The Prince of the city has recently discovered that one of his trusted, influential allies is actually member of a bloodline that is abhorrent to him. Pained by the perceived betrayal and consumed by the rage that follows, he suddenly issues an order: that the ally and all of his close relations be ejected from the city immediately, and with all necessary force. The whole of the domain is caught in a panic as the Sheriff and his Hounds ride forth. Kindred sharing the same clan with the disgraced ally wonder if the orders of the Prince will remain restricted to that one vampire and his family or if a pogrom is on the horizon. Some are considering defying his decree and sheltering the wanted Kindred until the Prince can be persuaded to rescind the order, but to do so is to risk certain destruction if attempts at diplomacy fail. The characters must decide whether to participate in the hunt and attempt to calm the ruler afterwards, to interfere and hope that the disgraced vampire can wrestle power away from the Prince (and reward them for their aid) or find a way to prove that the vampire is not a member of that line after all – before he suffers Final Death and launches the domain on a blood-fueled course that might end in great tragedy.

Suggested Bloodlines: Duchagne, Rötgrafen, Yagnatia

Theme: Blood-fueled momentum. The story begins with a blood hunt, and follows the evolution of an aggressive “snowball effect” as the initial act threatens to provoke further violence. The tendency of vampires to degenerate, learning to accept their misdeeds and slide comfortably into deeper and deeper violation is reflected in the progressing threat of the chronicle. Those characters who fight the hunt should feel that they are swimming against the current, while those who join in should begin to understand that its powerful inertia threatens to sweep them away.

Mood: Vice in ascendance. The worst part of every vampire in the city seems to be showing itself – wrath, pride, envy, greed, lust – all are bubbling to the surface as the blood hunt is called, threatening to carry less prudent Kindred away. All of the characters’ allies, Kindred or otherwise, should be feeling the effects, and most of them should be leaning toward their dark impulses. Violence

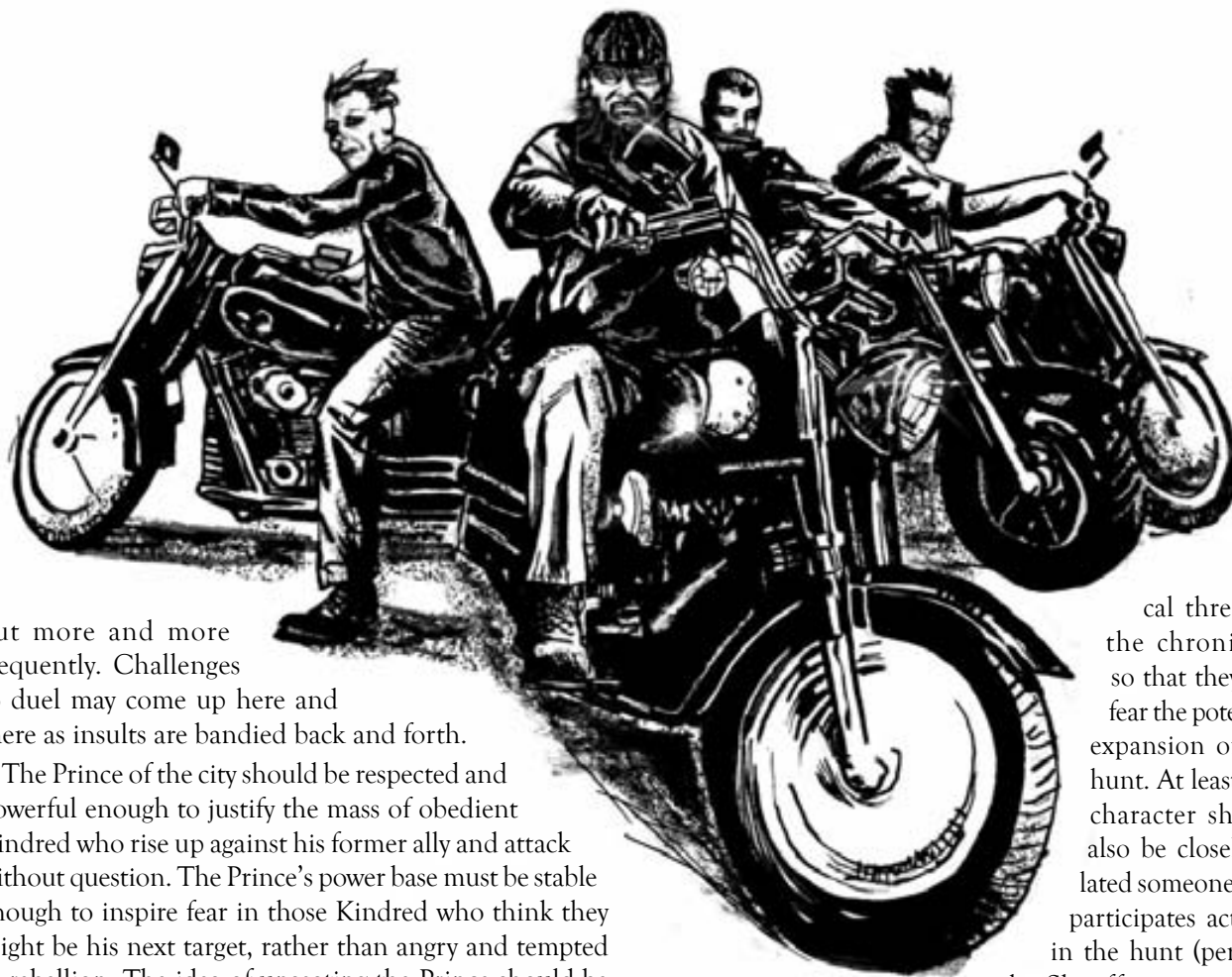
and general bad behavior should be prominent in the story, and growing more so as time passes. The characters may feel that they are the only ones maintaining their sanity, and if the situation progresses far enough, they may be right.

Atmosphere: Fear and bloodlust are motivating forces in this chronicle, and the tone of inevitability should contribute to both. *Strange Days*, the film directed by Kathryn Bigelow, with its well-executed sense of apocalyptic certainty, is a good atmospheric example. The characters are caught in the middle of a grinding conflict that they may or may not wish to participate in, but if they’re not careful, the violence of those involved may carry them away. Humane Kindred will be horrified at the ease with which some of their less moral compatriots are willing to slip into take up the murderous charge.

The atmosphere of the chronicle should be reflected in the environment: a prolonged heat wave shortens tempers among the mortal population and speeds the putrefaction of garbage in the streets. Repair initiatives cover some of the beautiful edifices with ugly scaffolding and canvas, reducing the appeal of landmarks and souring them in the eyes of vampires used to age and outmoded structure. The noise of demolition and construction chokes the night, driving residents crazy and making the hunt both easier and more aggravating. All of these forces are greater than the characters and seem unstoppable, lending to the feeling of inevitability.

Setting: A city in the midst of change. As mentioned above, reconstruction should be in evidence all over the domain, suggesting that the events of the chronicle take place at a historical crossroads. The summer heat underscores the tension of the story, creates a context for short-tempered mortal behavior and makes it more difficult to maintain the Masquerade during the blood hunt and thereafter, since more humans are likely to be out on the streets at all hours, and vampires don’t sweat or get bogged down.

The Kindred Court in Elysium should be experiencing pressures of its own. Etiquette strains while the vampires of the city degenerate, and shouting matches should break



out more and more frequently. Challenges to duel may come up here and there as insults are bandied back and forth.

The Prince of the city should be respected and powerful enough to justify the mass of obedient Kindred who rise up against his former ally and attack without question. The Prince's power base must be stable enough to inspire fear in those Kindred who think they might be his next target, rather than angry and tempted to rebellion. The idea of unseating the Prince should be almost completely unthinkable — unless the characters are willing to throw in with the target of the hunt, risking everything in a bid to convince him to reply with a coup.

Character Creation: This is a chronicle intended for three to five neonate Kindred who are quite familiar (and, ideally, friendly) with one another. They may or may not be an established coterie, but events of the chronicle should force them together with common interest. It's quite important that the players discuss the attitudes of their characters and make sure that they're basically on the same page, politically speaking, when the story begins so as to avoid fracturing the coterie at the very start of the chronicle.

The coterie need not be physically oriented. Political or intellectual Kindred are just as survivable in this chronicle, so long as they are willing to restrict their activities to the arena that best hosts their strengths. The story begins with the declaration of the blood hunt, but less physically capable Kindred are not expected to take up arms — just to avoid interfering with the hunt and avoid assisting the designated criminal.

One or more of the characters in the coterie should share the clan of the hunted vampire (if not his bloodline — an option for players willing to take on a more intense physi-

cal threat in the chronicle), so that they can fear the potential expansion of the hunt. At least one character should also be closely related someone who participates actively in the hunt (perhaps the Sheriff or one of his Hounds) so that they can feel

the thrill of the chase through blood sympathy, and can expect to be encouraged to 'show their loyalty' by joining in.

Antagonists: This chronicle is littered with potential antagonists. If the characters take the short-term safe route and side with the Prince, they must face the designated criminal and all of his kin, none of whom are likely to go down quietly or easily. Even if most of them are killed, at least one is bound to escape the domain and become a long-term threat. In the meantime, the successful conclusion of the hunt can lead quite quickly into the pogrom, forcing the characters to support the Prince again (in an even less moral endeavor) or turn on him. The targets of the hunt can be as powerful as the Storyteller chooses, offering characters greater challenges if necessary, or providing relatively easy victories to help bolster their confidence (and make it easier to make violent choices).

If they choose to defy the Prince's orders, the Prince and all of his loyal subjects become the antagonists of the story. The Sheriff and his Hounds will represent the most present threat, and the Prince himself (if he learns of the characters' treachery) will become their most active and dangerous enemy. Since this is the more moral

choice, it should be more difficult and the antagonists should present a greater challenge.

In either case, although not all of the antagonists will want the characters dead, many will be very spiteful and may engage in a concentrated effort to ruin them.

Story Concepts: Chase one of the members of the bloodline through the streets in an effort to win prestige

during the blood hunt. Meet with the Prince's representative in Elysium to appeal for clemency and try to stop the madness of the hunt. Grab one of the members of the bloodline and hide her in a van before the Sheriff and his people get to her. Visit the archives of the Ordo Dracul and search for evidence that can be used to clear the designated criminal of suspicion.

Vendetta

Two bloodlines are fixed in powerful positions in the same city, numbering some of the most influential members of the Court among their kin. Some or all of the characters are members of one of the lines, and when a perceived threat in Elysium leads to declaration of vendetta, they are expected to participate. Violence erupts quickly after a failed attempt at honorable apology leads to bloodshed, and those Kindred who fail to rally immediately to one side or the other risk drawing the animosity of both. As vampires fall on both sides, the bitter resentment and bloody-minded anger only grows. Will the characters choose to take a side and enter into the fray, or will they work to try and find a peace that both families can accept? Will the city's governing body fall into chaos as the two influential lines gradually draw every vampire in the domain into their conflict? Can the characters find a way to survive the battle and emerge with their reputations intact?

Suggested Bloodlines: Yagnatia and Malkovian, California Xiao and Bruja, Taifa and Toreador

Theme: An inescapable curse. The younger characters in this story are trapped into a life-threatening battle that they may not want to take part in, all because their elder relatives don't like one another. The whole of vampire existence is an inherited evil, passed from sire to childe, and this story underscores that quality of the Requiem. There is no retreat and there is no way to avoid the violence that results.

The specific conflict in this chronicle reflects the inevitable animosity between Kindred and their prey. No matter what measures a vampire takes to cushion his victims (and himself) from understanding the real nature of their relationship, the truth is always eventually unavoidable: that the vampire is the enemy of the living, and cannot be otherwise. His Embrace has made him what he is. Just as this is so with all Kindred, it is also true that the characters in this story are helpless to define themselves as anything but foes of the rival bloodline.

Mood: Thrilling recklessness. Many of the Kindred caught up in the vendetta are enthusiastically making things worse, endangering themselves and everyone around them. The characters are in danger of getting caught up in the thrill of escalating conflict, eventually risking their own destruction and their tenuous grip on Humanity.

Bloody, dangerous surroundings will enhance the tone of this story. Setting many of the scenes in poor, crime-ridden neighborhoods and barren outlands of the city will give the players a sense of the imperative to do predatory battle and emerge victorious. Characters should know that they are in constant danger, and they should take some small pleasure in it — as well as in representing the same danger to their enemies.

Atmosphere: Escalating conflict provides for a very emotional chronicle. Every time the characters strike a blow, they should understand that the enemy will seek to retaliate, and every time the enemy attacks, the characters should be tempted to respond in kind. Harder and harder strikes follow upon one another in an attempt to frighten or beat the enemy into submission — but both sides are more resilient than the other believes. An atmosphere of inexorable degeneration should be prominent — both literally, in the damage done to the environment, and spiritually, in the damage done to Kindred souls.

The atmosphere can be mirrored very well if you arrange a steadily building threat to the environment, such as warnings of an approaching tropical storm or early indications of an imminent earthquake. An imminent catastrophe can also provide the Storyteller with a clever “out” if the vendetta gets too intense and characters contribute to it instead of working to mitigate it: the catastrophe can strike, and characters can be forced to co-operate with their enemies in a bid to survive.

Setting: This chronicle can be set in just about any domain, as long as it's logical for two bloodlines to have risen to prominence there. It's best if the number of local Kindred is relatively low so that the two opposing factions

represent a significant proportion of the population. Some work should be put into explaining how the two lines have become so entrenched and respected before play begins.

Character Creation: This chronicle is designed for three to five neonate characters. As mentioned above, some or all of the characters should be members of one of the two offending lines. They will be obligated to join the vendetta on behalf of their line, and even those who hesitate will be targeted by the enemy. The coterie of characters should be tight-knit, with a strong emotional base to explain why those characters not directly involved in the bloodline would remain at their friends' side throughout the worsening battle. It would not do to have characters in both lines in the same coterie — the "otherness" of the antagonist line is necessary to keep the story rolling.

The vendetta is absolutely guaranteed to involve physical conflict, so the characters should be designed to be able to handle themselves in a fight. They don't have to be soldiers, but it's best to keep in mind that they are going to face vampires eager to kill them, so they'd best not be completely spineless or weak either.

The covenant of the coterie members has little bearing on the outcome of the chronicle; it works equally well for members of all five.

Antagonists: There are antagonists on either side of this conflict. First and foremost, the members and allies of the bloodline that opposes the characters will present a serious threat to survival. Some will attack the characters outright, some will seek to undermine their influences and resources and some will try to humiliate them in the political arena. Eventually, as more and more Kindred on both sides fall to the battle, finesse will give way to simple

bloodlust, and these antagonists will fly into a rage at the mere sight of the characters. These antagonists should be arranged on an increasing scale of power, at first presenting the characters with a relatively minor challenge, but eventually outclassing them so that they are forced to come up with creative solutions to their problem.

If the characters attempt to pull back and find peace between the lines, they will make antagonists of their own blood relations. These Kindred are less likely to attempt to dispose of the characters (who, after all, are their kin), but will seek to pressure them into battle and may find diabolical means to punish them if they continue to resist. These antagonists will be best suited to play their role in the story if they are, on average, significantly more powerful than the characters. The course of peace is both more difficult and potentially more rewarding, so the antagonists who obstruct it should be quite troublesome.

All of the vampires who are not directly involved in the conflict are likely to get sick of the ongoing war sooner or later, and they may well turn their backs on all of the characters (as well as their enemies) as a means of showing disapproval. This urge to ignore the vendetta will eventually give way to anger, and the Kindred who manage to remain neutral are likely to focus their ire on the remaining combatants. It's an ugly situation all around.

Story Concepts: Ambush a member of the opposing bloodline while he hunts on his own grounds. Outmaneuver a car full of bloodthirsty Kindred on the freeway as you attempt to escape an assault. Convince a powerful, neutral vampire to join your side of the battle and help crush the enemy. Petition your elder to attempt reconciliation with the enemy before too much blood is spilled.

The Bitter End

Two Kindred claiming to be the last members of a bloodline come to a domain, seeking retreat from murderous forces that are pursuing them. The Prince balks at allowing them to stay, knowing full well that trouble follows on their heels. After tense and prolonged negotiations, he agrees to take pity on them and accepts them as recognized citizens of the Kindred Court, pledging to defend them and preserve their line. The characters are assigned to meet the foreign threat that is giving chase — but while they fend off the enemy from outside, one of the vampires of the domain murders the two refugees, destroying the line forever. The apparent failure of the characters threatens their standing in the city, and their reputations will survive only if they can expose the criminal

and prove that she was already a citizen of the domain, acting in defiance of the Prince's declaration. Meanwhile, the emotional implications of a bloodline's extinction make themselves felt throughout the Elysium Court.

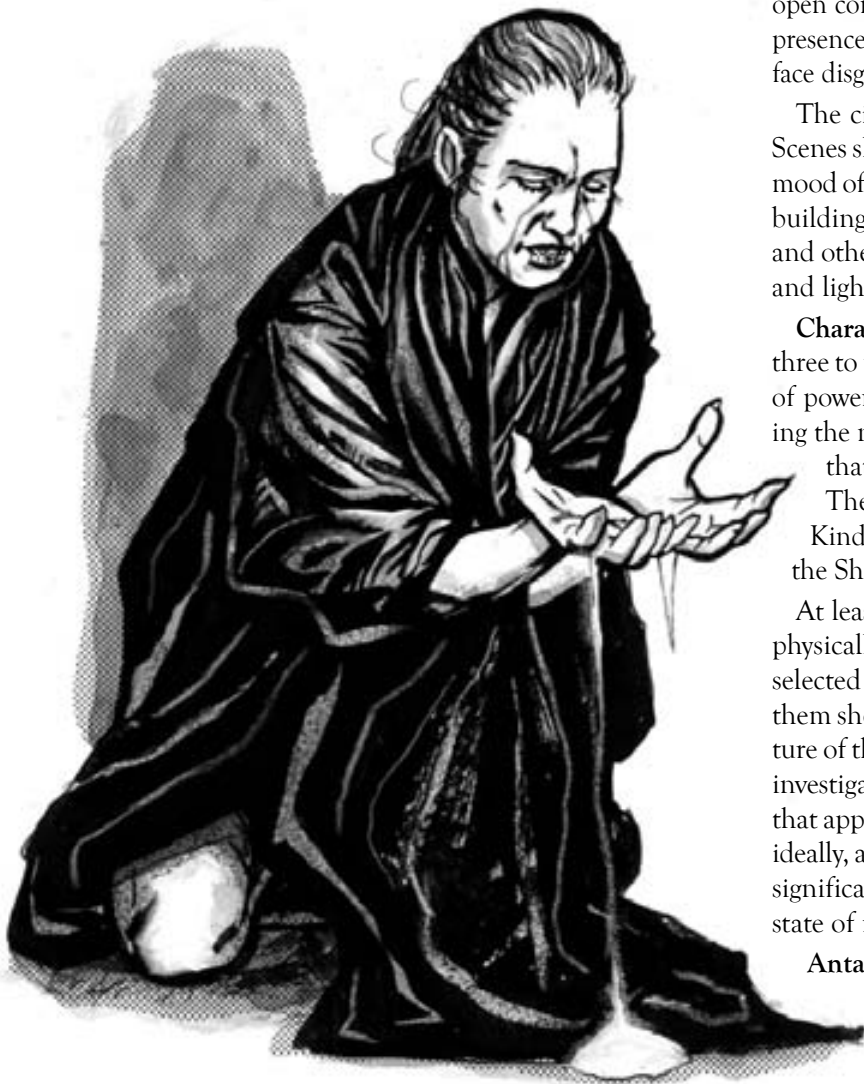
Suggested Bloodlines: Baddacelli, R^tgrafen, Taifa

Theme: The elimination of potential. When any creature is destroyed, all of its future hopes and dreams disappear with it. The loss is more keenly felt when an entire species is rendered extinct — and this loss is reflected in the Kindred world by the destruction of a bloodline. All vampires kill, and only a few realize the consequences of this act. In this story, every vampire in the domain is made to understand how final, and, ultimately, how sad these consequences can be.

This theme is mirrored in the threat of disgrace the characters are facing: all of their ambitions and long-term goals are endangered by the treachery of a fellow vampire, and they must fight tooth-and-nail to retrieve their hope. In so doing, they will gain an understanding of the last moments of the Kindred of the now-destroyed line.

Mood: Unexpected sadness. The Final Death of two strangers should matter little to the average vampire, but it should strike a chord with the characters in the story. Perhaps it's the pathetic desperation they display in coming to the city so fearfully, or perhaps it's the pitiable end they meet. Perhaps it's the striking notion of the end of a line, and the introspective musings that the event is sure to provoke.

Misty, chill environs, sick or failing plant life and depressed or hopeless-looking mortals go a long way toward supporting and promoting this mood in the chronicle. The doomed members of the line should contribute some noticeable improvement to the environment, however briefly, so that it can be missed when they are gone. Bad-dacelli might sing a haunting, moving song, for instance,



that the characters overhear, or Taifa might regale them with an amusing story that never reaches its punch line.

Atmosphere: Stories such as *The Fugitive* model this chronicle well. The imperative to investigate a crime combined with the feeling of melancholy and loss come together in a blend of plot and motive. The quiet, contemplative moments should be balanced by frenetic, dangerous scenes, keeping the characters on their toes and fighting to achieve their goal. As the story progresses, the characters may feel that they aren't just working to exonerate themselves but also to avenge the fallen Kindred (or, if they are so inclined, to seek justice), and as they get closer to making it happen, the enemy should get more and more vicious and direct.

Setting: An established domain with a relatively peaceable, lawful vampire society is necessary to provide this story with the proper level of impact. If deadly violence is common, nobody will blink at the destruction of the refugee Kindred. At the very least, the different factions of Kindred in the domain should be operating under a series of carefully organized truces and diplomatic agreements that prevent open conflict (and, ultimately, protect the murderer). The presence of law should also establish that the characters will face disgrace if they are perceived as failures.

The city itself should be a relatively calm one as well. Scenes should be set in locations that help underscore the mood of the overall story: cemeteries, formerly magnificent buildings now condemned and scheduled for destruction and other dilapidated, melancholy environs. A steady fog and light rain work well as environmental notes, too.

Character Creation: This is a chronicle designed for three to five neonate characters — low enough on the scale of power to be assigned such a thankless task as defending the newcomers to the domain but connected enough that suffering a loss of prestige will seem important. They should be lawfully recognized members of the Kindred Court and, ideally, connected to the office of the Sheriff.

At least half of the characters in the coterie should be physically capable, to help explain why they might be selected for the task they're assigned, and at least one of them should be intelligent enough to understand the nature of the crime that is committed and follow up with an investigation. None should be members of the bloodline that appears to be wiped out at the start of the story, and, ideally, at least one of them should have experienced some significant loss in her life (or unlfe) that can play into her state of mind when the newcomers are destroyed.

Antagonists: There are two antagonists in this story. First, the coterie of nomad attackers whom the characters must face as the story begins. The nomads should be challenging, but relatively

simple to defeat, because the real challenge lies in the murder that occurs while the characters are busy with this enemy. Overcoming them should provide the characters with something to feel good about just before they discover what's happened during their victory.

Second, the murderer of the newcomers must be carefully constructed to present a real challenge to the coterie. She must be clever enough to escape notice (and make their subsequent investigation difficult), connected enough to prevent a direct approach and enforce careful political thinking on the part of the characters and physically powerful enough to kill two Kindred and (potentially) present a serious threat to the characters. She must have a motive to destroy the newcomers — it might be something as simple as an established hatred of their line, or it might be something more complicated, such as a pre-emptive strike meant to deter the incoming attacks against the domain and preserve the present peace. She should be the type who isn't about to defy the orders of the Prince without setting up a number of double-blinds and defenses — hence the apparent failure on the part of

the characters and the ease with which a few members of the Kindred Court will simply blame the newcomers' destruction on the coterie's incompetence and be ready to move on.

When the characters insist that they did not fail to repel the attackers and initiate an internal investigation, they are sure to provoke the ire and suspicion of a number of local Kindred (and the eye-rolling dismissal of others). While these vampires are not likely to be actual antagonists, they may be difficult to get useful information out of or otherwise neglect to help. If the characters aren't careful, they might make enemies of some of these Kindred just by being overenthusiastic in their investigations.

Story Concepts: Tell tales of the murdered newcomers' exploits to the Kindred of the city as a memorial. Track the murderer through Elysium, using *Auspex* and *Socialize* to try and trip her up. Work behind the scenes to isolate the murderer politically to minimize the repercussions when the coterie exposes her. Petition the Prince for the right to investigate the murder and absolve the coterie's guilt.



Index of Bloodlines

Vampire: The Requiem

Bloodline	Parent Clan	Discipline	Devotions	Page
Bruja	Gangrel	Animalism, Protean, Resilience, Vigor	No	235
Burakumin	Nosferatu	Getsumeji, Nightmare, Obfuscate, Vigor	No	238
Malkovians	Ventruue	Auspex, Dominate, Obfuscate, Resilience	No	241
Morbus	Mekhet	Auspex, Cachexy, Celerity, Obfuscate	No	244
Toreador	Daeva	Celerity, Dominate, Majesty, Vigor	No	246

Belial & Brood

Therion	Any	2 Disciplines of the player's choice, Obfuscate, Choronzon	No	118
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Bloodlines: The Chosen

Agonistes	Mekhet	Auspex, Celerity, Dominate, Obfuscate	Yes	16
Baddacelli	Nosferatu	Mimetismo, Nightmare, Obfuscate, Vigor	Yes	26
Duchagne	Daeva	Celerity, Licencieux, Majesty, Vigor	No	36
Noctuku	Nosferatu	Nightmare, Obfuscate, Phagia, Vigor	Yes	46
Rötgrafen	Ventruue	Animalism, Dominate, Protean, Resilience	Yes	56
Sangiovanni	Mekhet	Auspex, Cattiveria, Celerity, Obfuscate	No	65
Taifa	Gangrel	Animalism, Majesty, Protean, Resilience	No	75
Xiao, California	Daeva	Celerity, Kingjan, Majesty, Vigor	No	85
Xiao, Tianpàn	Daeva	Celerity, Majesty, Vigor, Xinyao	No	95
Yagnatia	Nosferatu	Dominate, Nightmare, Obfuscate, Vigor	No	105

Bloodlines: The Hidden

Alucinor	Mekhet	Auspex, Celerity, Insomnium, Obfuscate	Yes	12
Anvari	Daeva	Celerity, Majesty, Nepenthe, Vigor	No	20
Architects of the Monolith	Ventruue	Auspex, Dominate, Gilded Cage, Resilience	No	30
Bohagande	Gangrel	Animalism, Protean, Resilience, Sunnikuse	No	38

Bloodlines: the Hidden cont.

Gethsemani	Nosferatu	Nightmare, Obfuscate, Stigmatica, Vigor	Yes	48
Khaibit	Mekhet	Auspex, Celerity, Obtenebration, Vigor	No	58
Morotrophians	Nosferatu	Institutionalize, Nightmare, Obfuscate, Vigor	No	68
Nahualli	Ventrue	Auspex, Dominate, Resilience, Tezcatl	No	78
Nelapsi	Daeva	Celerity, Majesty, Nightmare, Vigor	Yes	88
Oberlochs	Gangrel	Animalism, Dominate, Protean, Resilience	Yes	96
Qedeshah	Mekhet	Auspex, Celerity, Embrocation, Obfuscate	No	106
Rakshasa	Nosferatu	Nightmare, Obfuscate, Protean, Vigor	No	116

Bloodlines: the Legendary

Bron	Ventrue	Animalism, Crochan, Dominate, Resilience	No	10
The Carnival	Daeva	Celerity, Majesty, The Show, Vigor	Yes	23
Children of Judas	Daeva	Auspex, Despond, Majesty, Resilience	No	38
Gallot	Nosferatu	Majesty, Nightmare, Obfuscate, Taurobolium	Yes	51
Gulikan	Daeva	Celerity, Majesty, Ortam, Vigor	Yes	64
Kuufukuji	Mekhet	Auspex, Celerity, Obfuscate, Shihai	No	78
Macellarius	Ventrue	Animalism, Dominate, Gustus, Resilience	No	90
Melissidae	Ventrue	Animalism, Auspex, Dominate, Resilience	Yes	103
Players	Mekhet	Auspex, Celerity, Majesty, Obfuscate	Yes	116

Earthians

Barjot	Gangrel	Animalism, Celerity, Protean, Resilience	No	156
Deucalion	Ventrue	Animalism, Dominate, Impurity, Resilience	No	160
Zelani	Daeva	Celerity, Majesty, Serendipity, Vigor	No	166

Circle of the Prone

Asnam	Daeva	Celerity, Majesty, Ralab, Vigor	No	165
Carnon	Gangrel	Animalism, Nightmare, Protean, Resilience	No	168
Childer of the Morrigan	Gangrel	Animalism, Protean, Resilience, Vigor	No	172
Gorgons	Ventrue	Amphivena, Animalism, Dominate, Resilience	No	176
The Mara	Gangrel	Animalism, Obfuscate, Protean, Resilience	No	180

Invictus

Annunaku	Gangrel	Animalism, Protean, Resilience, Tenure	No	159
Kallisti	Daeva	Celerity, Dominate, Majesty, Perfidy	No	162
Lynx	Mekhet	Auspex, Celerity, Obfuscate, Web	No	165
Malocusians	Ventrue	Animalism, Domus, Presence, Resilience	No	168
Sotoha	Ventrue	Animalism, Dominate, Kamen, Resilience	No	170
Spina	Daeva	Celerity, Courtoisie, Majesty, Vigor	No	173

Rancea Sanctum

Nepheshim	Gangrel	Auspex, Nahded, Protean, Resilience	No	160
Icarians	Ventrue	Animalism, Constance, Dominate, Resilience	No	167
Mortifiers of the Flesh	Daeva (or other Parent Clan)	Scourge and Disciplines of their Parent Clan	No	170
Osites	Mekhet	Auspex, Celerity, Memento Mori, Obfuscate	No	173

Ordo Dracul

Azerkatil	Nosferatu	Nightmare, Obfuscate, Suikast, Vigor	No	145
Dragolescu	Ventrue	Animalism, Dominate, Essentiaphagia, Resilience	No	150
Libitinatus	Mekhet	Auspex, Dominate, Mortualia, Resilience	No	155
Moroi	Gangrel or Nosferatu	Animalism, Obfuscate, Resilience, Vigor	No	159
Tismanu	Mekhet	Auspex, Celerity, Eupraxia, Majesty	No	164
Vedma	Gangrel	Animalism, Protean, Resilience, Zagovny	No	169

Shadows of Mexico

Calacas	Nosferatu	Auspex, Nightmare, Obfuscate, Vigor	No	99
Malintzin	Daeva	Celerity, Dominate, Majesty, Vigor	No	101
Dead Wolves	Gangrel	Animalism, Protean, Resilience, Sublunario	Yes	102

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