

INVICTUS

World of Darkness

a sourcebook for:
Vampire
THE REQUIEM

Florida

by Ray Fawkes



"You have a spot of blood on your lip," she says with some distaste, sitting before the dresser. Her voice is flat, indicating a creeping boredom. "You're lucky I know how new you are. Anyone else might have easily misread your intentions."

Persephone eyes me for a moment and then turns back to her preparation. Makeup, jewelry, pins, electrical tape, a knife and some flowers are all laid out on the tabletop like surgical tools. She is wearing only a black bra, a crinoline and a pair of shiny black pumps. "All right," she declares, fingering the knife. "Do you know why you're here?"

"My . . . my sire sent me to you. She wants you to show me how to dress for an event."

"Yeah, that's right. But you think it's a waste of time. You already know how to dress yourself, don't you?"

I shrug, glancing off to the side. The apartment is small, but very tasteful. It's clean in here — so clean I'm starting to think it's not really her home at all.

"Pay attention," she snaps, and I whip my head around without thinking. "You don't know anything. You're covered in cloth, sure, and it looks okay, but there's nothing there. You are Invictus now, and everything you say, do and wear will be scrutinized for hidden meaning at an event like this. Especially you, because you're too young to speak freely.

If your appearance says nothing, everyone will assume you have nothing to say. You're here to learn from me because I'm the child of the Prince, and that's good for your reputation, but also because I know what I'm doing. Work with me, and I'll give you what you need to make it to the top."

I nod, slowly. "I think I understand. Show me what I need to do."

She gazes at me, searching for a hint of sarcasm. Seeming satisfied, she stands up, striding over to an open closet.

She pulls out a long, black satin ball gown bearing a white silk-patterned insert in a V-shape down the front. It looks like something out of the 1940s. "Prince Maxwell is my sire," she says, stepping into the dress. "He bought

me this a year ago, for an official event.

I didn't wear it then. Instead, I had it on at my own funeral." She turns around, indicating that I help with the zipper. I lean forward, pulling it closed over her flawless flesh.



Next, she lifts a black ribbon choker from the dresser, fastening it with a pearl-inlaid silver brooch at the front. "The brooch is another gift from MAX, but it used to sit on a red velvet ribbon. I took it off and put it on this instead."

"And the final detail," she says, lifting two silver rings.

"All right," she says, standing up. "What do you see? What do you think I'm saying?"

Her eyes seem to glitter as she appraises my response.

"Go on," she says.

I swallow. "You want people to know that you have a friend among the Unbound. You also want them to know that you're keenly aware of your death. You're wedded to your grave, which reminds anyone who looks at you that they are too. It almost looks like . . . it almost looks like you're saying you'd rather be dead."

She smiles a little — for the first time since I've arrived, actually, and it feels amazing. Like a warm wave, licking at the edges of me.

"Not bad," Persephone intones, letting her voice drop to a low, mesmerizing purr.

"And it's going to do exactly what I'm hoping, too."



When Maxwell sees this, he's going to flip. You won't warn anyone, will you? Wouldn't want to spoil my surprise."

"No . . . no," I manage to whisper. "But . . . why? Why provoke him?"

"Because he's been avoiding me lately," she responds. "Because he's been acting like I don't register. He needs to see that I register just fine when I want to. That I'm important, and that I can move him whenever I feel like it." I feel her hands touch the sides of my face. There's an electric moment, a thrill of an idea. Is she going to bite me?

"Look here," she says, and I do, locking eyes with her, helpless before her power. "You're not going to say a word until Max sits in his chair."

* * *

I don't know if I'm ever going to get used to Elysium. Persephone walks me through the doors, nodding to one of the guards, and suddenly we're in one of the biggest theaters I've ever seen. The place is covered in deep red fabric — all of the seats, the walls, even the stage.

Long red streamers hang down to the floor from the chandeliers above, and each is woven with some kind of shimmering silver thread that breaks up the light, diffusing it and casting it in all directions. The floor is scattered with red stones and gems, glass, each glittering underfoot. The overall effect is . . . organic. Like we're inside some huge, warm, expensive creature.

Basins full of blood are set in the aisles, with cups for those who feel the urge. Some of the younger Kindred are already into them, milling about on the upper balcony and trying to keep their chins clean. Persephone had warned me about the basins. "Feed from the offering," she said on the way here, "and you are telling people that you don't have enough on your own. That you need their charity, or worse, that you're foolish enough to take what you don't need just because it's there. The blood provided at Elysium is for the outsider covenants, to show them how much we have and how often they rely on our kindness."

Persephone dressed me for the night. A white strapless gown, taped in place to prevent mishap, with a sprig of bluebell pinned to the front. Bluebell, she says, indicates humility. It means that I know I'm young and relatively helpless. Even if I don't believe it, she says, it's a smart move, and it'll please the elders. No jewelry, no accessories of any kind. I'm keeping it simple so that nobody looks at me for long. Tonight I watch and learn.



I see the others, ones just as young as I am, and notice that they're wearing off-the-rack party clothes and leathers. Their trinkets are strictly holdovers from mortal days — rings and necklaces from abandoned loved ones. Keepsakes with little or no relevance. Reading them with my lessons in mind, I can tell why the elders are so dismissive. These young ones don't stand out. They're disorganized, and the ones who aren't Invictus just seem dull . . . lifeless.

Persephone grabs my hand. "Come on," she whispers. "Tonight you're with me." She pushes through a pair of guarded doors, taking us down to the main floor. "No upper balcony for you tonight."

We glide down the stairs, passing handfuls of Kindred here and there. I smile, caught in the heady rush of status. I am with Persephone the beauty, the favored childe, and she is holding my hand. I am moving closer to the territory of the elders with every step, and they notice me, they watch with dawning recognition and they realize that one of their own kind is growing in stature. I was a mortal, and then I was a Ventrue. I was claimed by the Invictus, raised above the rest, gifted with wealth and territory. I will never be one of the weird, shuffling whisperers and worshippers of the outsider covenants. Now, tonight, I count myself with the rulers and the players, the luxurious, beautiful nobility of Kindred.

Before I know it, we're down among the floor seats. The elders of the city are milling about here, waiting for the Prince to claim his chair so that they can arrange themselves around him. Up on stage, the players are sitting in darkness, forbidden to begin until he is comfortable and signaling ready. The atmosphere is dense and heavy. I fight the urge to squirm out of Persephone's grip and run back to the top, far above, where there's so little pressure. It's safe up there, hidden among the neonates and the castoffs. Safe and simple.

One of the elders turns as we approach. I know him — the Nosferatu, Scratch. The one who dresses like an old jazz man. He gazes at me for a second, fingering the lapel of his burgundy suit and flicking his eyes to the flowers at my breast, showing the barest hint of a smile. I just stare back, fascinated and repulsed. He drops his chin, bringing the wide brim of his hat down to obscure his face as he growls.

"My dear Madam Moore. You're late. You understand you had me waiting. Me and the others down here."

Persephone doesn't blink. "Most admirable Alder Scratch, I'm very sorry. I had to dress Lorelei here and we lost track of the time."

He spits a blackish-red wad on the floor. "Bullshit."



The words are forced out between his teeth. "You know very well what you're doing, as I can plainly see, no matter how sweet you talk at my face. You better watch yourself, girlie. You're asking for a world of trouble, what with pissin' on elders and wearing a . . . a tantrum of a getup like that."

"Alder Scratch," she says, indicating me with a gentle turn of the hand. "Allow me to introduce Miss Lorelei Stafford-Parker."

"Pleasure," he grumbles, and I curtsy automatically. "Guess you're schooling this pup now. Listen, Miss Stafford-whatever. Find yourself a better teacher. This one's still a baby herself. Maybe I should show you a thing or two. Yeah, I'll dress you up real nice."

"If you —"

Persephone begins a retort, but cuts it off immediately as the double doors open. All of the Kindred turn to look. Up above, I can hear the young ones scuffling toward the balcony's edge, fighting to get a glimpse. Some of them are glaring at me, taking note of my new position of favor. Shit, I'll probably be paying for this later. I'm going to have to watch myself in the usual haunts if I don't want to end up taking a beating in a back alley from some jealous Daeva. Unless, of course, I can convince them that I'm down here with the power-players for good. Then they'll be bowing and scraping, hoping I can walk them through those doors like Persephone just did with me.

A broad, powerful silhouette appears in the doorway. Even before he steps into the light, I know it's the Prince. He marches forward and everything falls silent. It's like a reverse thunderclap, muffling all speech, even muffling our thoughts. I can't make a sound or look away even if I want to. His every move is sure and steady, his attitude is perfectly predatory. He's magnificent. The effect spreads up to the balcony as he emerges into their view. He pauses to greet someone and I try to concentrate. Remember what Persephone told me: read the clothes. Read the way he moves. Everything says something.

He's wearing a tailored gray suit, perfectly modern in style.

His beard is shaped with alarming precision, almost as if sculpted.

His charcoal-gray necktie is pinned with some kind of black stone.

Onyx? Opal? I can't tell from this distance. He's wearing just one ring, on his right index finger. It looks exactly like the one he gave Persephone.

Did he replace it? Is that significant? It must be.



There's a white flower of some kind on his lapel. I think it's an oleander.

Okay, let me try to remember. Oleander. Persephone ran through a list of flowers for me while I was dressing, but there were so many of them. Buttercup for cheerfulness. Yellow hyacinth for jealousy. Oleander for — for — oleander for warning. "Beware."

Oh shit.

I'm trying to read the rest of him. My eyes flick from one detail to the next, but he seems almost completely devoid of statement. Is there some significance to his suit? Something I don't know about his shoes? What is he telling us to be wary of?

Every member of the Invictus seems to recognize it. There's a certain stiffness to their greeting as they fall into line, stepping towards him one after the other.

Those of the highest esteem go first, of course, and they are clearly analyzing him for signs of displeasure. They are immensely powerful, these vampires who step forward, and all of them are afraid. They bow deeply, or curtsy with careful, downcast looks. Their costumes are elaborately constructed innuendos and statements of loyalty, I can see that now, assembled for his approval.

He dismisses each of them with a short bow or a nod.

Persephone told me about this. If he bows, he favors you. If he nods, you're neutral in his eyes. If he touches your shoulder, you're in trouble, and if he just turns to look at Norris or one of the elders, you're in deep, deep shit.

One of them gets a hand on the shoulder, and a blood sweat springs to his brow almost immediately. I have no idea what he's done, but he's close to panic. He whispers something, and the Prince just waves him off, indicating that this isn't the time to talk. He's going to sweat the poor bastard for a while, I guess. Let him think about whatever it is he's done.

He steps to my sire next, and she curtsies low in her jet-black silk.

He bows to her, letting the corner of his lip rise just a fraction of an inch.

I manage to tear my eyes away for a split second, glancing at Persephone.

She's standing stock-still, maintaining a calm, patient look. Her eyes, though — her eyes are flying back and forth over him and I can tell she's trying to read him too.

I want to tell her to turn away for a moment, to drop her lily and take my bluebell, to show him that she doesn't want to anger him.



But, of course, I can't speak. She saw to that.

He turns towards us, coming closer. He lets his attention pass over the shoulder of some ridiculous peacock of a woman as he nods, locking eyes with his child.

My grip on her hand grows tighter. She doesn't move.

"Persephone," he says, stepping clear of the last of them, finally stopping. His voice rolls over the both of us like distant cannon fire. "My child. It's so nice to see you dressing for me like this." There is not the slightest hint of kindness in his tone, although there is something like satisfaction.

She trembles, just slightly. I feel in through the hand I'm still holding. My eyes are drawn to his tie. I know what that polished pin is now. It's the same rock as her ring, fashioned from her tombstone. He leans in close, taking her by the shoulder. I can see the pointed tip of a fang as he hisses in her ear. "Don't try to play with me, Persephone. You and your grave are both my making. Wed yourself to it at my pleasure."

He knew. He knew she was going to try something like this.

He's not surprised at all. He planned for it.

Persephone breaks away and runs for the exit.

She told me. "Never leave before the time comes. Above all, never look to have lost control." She told me that and now she's bolting. Scratch is smirking as she rushes past, half-blind with blood tears, one hand held to her face.

I don't want to be left alone with this deadly, intoxicating man and his flattering creatures. They turn to look at me, all of them, and I take an involuntary step back. My sire is among them, eyeing me with a mix of fear and hope.

She wanted me to walk with the kings and queens of the night. She wanted me to claim my place and now they're waiting for me to explain myself, to apologize or even just beg pardon and leave. They are giving me a chance to save face, the chance only afforded to Invictus Kindred. The Prince turns to me like a shark, like a force of nature bearing down on me, and if I make a mistake I know I might never recover, never find respect among these elders again.

But he's still standing.

And I can't say a word.





INVICTUS™

By Kraig Blackwelder, David Chart, Ray Fawkes and Dean Shomshak
Vampire® created by Mark Rein•Hagen

Credits

Written by: Kraig Blackwelder, David Chart, Ray Fawkes and Dean Shomshak with Will Hindmarch

Vampire and the World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen

Developer: Will Hindmarch

Editor: Scribendi.com

Art Director: Pauline Benney

Book Design: Pauline Benney

Interior Art: Carron Antoine, Samuel Araya, Jason Chan, Marko Djurdjevic, Andrew Hepworth, Tomasz Jedruszek, Mark Nelson, Torstein Nordstrand, RK Post and Cyril Van Der Haegen

Front Cover Art: Jean-Sebastien Rossbach



1554 LITTON DR.
STONE MOUNTAIN,
GA 30083
USA

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INTRODUCTION

*"Value is the most invincible and impalpable of ghosts, and comes and goes
unthought of while the visible and dense matter remains as it was."*

—W. Stanley Jevons

The Invictus.

Some Kindred speak that name as a curse. Others say it with envy. To the members of this society of vampires, however, their name is the proudest boast imaginable. Empires rise and fall but they remain the Unconquered — the eternal masters of the night, ruling vampires and mortals alike.

Vampires newly come into the secret world of the Damned often have trouble understanding the Invictus. In the modern world, how can anyone — even a vampire centuries old — keep the pretense of being a feudal lord? Surely, the Invictus must be a joke, nothing but a few ancient bloodsuckers lost in dreams of the past. Perhaps other Kindred humor the Invictus because of the personal power that age confers on the Damned, but — take them seriously? Bow before them, call them Prince or Regent or Lord, and mean it? Impossible!

Later, these Kindred learn the Invictus have as much power as the stories say. In many cities, the Invictus really are the lords of the night. Other Kindred really do bow before them, use their archaic titles and follow their formalized rituals. The Invictus are the secret influential power behind vampiric and mortal institutions alike, steering rulers and guiding authorities overtly and covertly. No tool of influence is off limits to them. The Invictus whisper in the ears of corporate executives and claim powerful mortal politicians as their vassals. They blackmail enemies with untraceable, insidious agents in the shadows and frighten allies into subservience with nebulous, terrible threats from on-high. The Invictus lies and promises, bullies and seduces, empowers and undermines, cajoles and oppresses, creates and destroys. The Invictus shapes the night and defines the lines of civilization. And the Invictus does all of it without disrespecting or compromising the Masquerade.

These relics of bygone ages somehow keep a grip on slender but vital threads of the modern world, the same threads that have pulled and tangled Princes and kings for millennia: the fibers of the human soul that want power and do anything to get it.

Some Kindred become bitter. "It isn't fair," they say, that an elite society of undying monsters should hold so much power and keep it from younger hands. They must

be cheating. Resentful younger Kindred think of the Invictus as the ultimate greedy, self-centered Establishment: the ruling class that did nothing to deserve such power, but does anything to keep it.

The elders of the Invictus disagree. When they deign to notice such complaints at all, they say they earned their power long ago and prove they deserve it every night. They spent centuries clawing their way up the ladder of power. Let the insolent younglings do the same. When they have built a fortune — when they have battled witch-hunters and horrors stranger than vampires, when they have survived the murderous plots of their rivals to seize power for themselves — then let them talk, and the Invictus listen.

The covenant's elders would also point out how many younger vampires take that advice. For now, the covenant's ancillae and neonates bow and serve their elders. The young ones are paying their dues and learning the trade of power. In them, the elders say, behold the Princes of cities yet unborn. The path is hard and progress slow — but those who prove themselves truly Unconquered shall win power and glory forever.

For, one night, every elder must relinquish his seat for a time. Every elder must eventually trust his estate to another while he lays in deathly torpor. Every elder must find others to trust, and where else should one look for integrity and success but within the Invictus? Eventually, all power must be shared with those who have survived the nights and aged to excellence.

They shall be lords of the night. They shall be masters of Kindred and kine. They shall never be defeated.

Invictus!

How To Use This Book

Invictus is a supplement to **Vampire: The Requiem**. This book is a guide to the covenant known as the Invictus, or the First Estate — the aristocracy, nobility and gentry of the Damned. In the following chapters, players and Storytellers will find tools, inspiration and advice to create Invictus characters and details to make them stand out from other Kindred. This book describes how vampires join the First Estate, how they advance in the

covenant, what they believe and how the Invictus conducts its affairs. Players and Storytellers alike will find a wealth of information about the Invictus to inspire chronicles and stories — whether those stories are unfolding in the chronicle now or lay tangled in the history of a player's character. Even when no one plays an Invictus character at the table, the First Estate is an important part of a chronicle's setting that cannot be ignored.

Invictus is divided into the following six chapters, plus the Introduction you're reading now:

Chapter One: A History of the Invictus recounts the legends of the covenant's origins and early history. The First Estate's history becomes somewhat more reliable in recent centuries, but the covenant's recent history is tied up in the unique, local histories of uncounted domains. Here you can learn something about how the Damned of the Invictus survived the fall of the Roman Empire and came to be the power of the modern night.

Chapter Two: Unlife in the Invictus looks at the covenant from the outside. Here you can learn about the First Estate's beliefs, its special titles and offices and its relations to the clans and the other covenants. This chapter also tells how the Invictus tries to govern a city's Kindred when the First Estate is the dominant power . . . and when it's not.

Chapter Three: The Invictus and the Danse Macabre inspects the covenant's inner workings. Here, you can learn how vampires join the First Estate and rise through its ranks. This chapter reveals how knightly orders and guilds help structure an Invictus member's Requiem and the elaborate codes of etiquette the Invictus demands from its members. From siring childer to giving gifts, this chapter tells you how to do things the Invictus way.

Chapter Four: Factions and Bloodlines provides a host of groups for characters to join, influence or oppose. Factions are groups of Invictus Kindred with common interests, almost like miniature sub-covenants of their own within the greater Invictus; they range from hidebound relics of the feudal era to young hustlers of the modern business world. Bloodlines provide more variation within the Blood of the First Estate, with distinctive powers and peculiar subcultures of their own. This chapter also includes a pair of rare "ghoul families" — thrall lineages bound by blood in service to the First Estate.

Chapter Five: Oaths, Merits and Disciplines collects a miscellanea of rules-related material. This chapter offers new Disciplines, Merits and Devotions unique to Invictus characters. You'll also learn how the First Estate enforces its oaths with supernatural power and discover mysterious properties of the Blood that the covenant inherited from its misty past.

The Appendix, **Allies and Antagonists**, offers a selection of quick-and-dirty Invictus characters you can either use in your chronicle right away or develop in detail. You'll

also find more complete characters, with their own goals, vendettas, enemies and aspirations. You can bring these characters and their stories into the chronicle as antagonists, Mentors, Allies or something less clearly defined. All of these characters provide the ideas, numbers and drama you need when you design your own characters, whether you are a player or Storyteller.

Theme

Any **Vampire** chronicle can involve the Invictus, but some themes work especially well with this covenant. Many Invictus-centered stories can focus on the First Estate's claim of aristocracy: rule by the wellborn or, literally, rule by the best. Are the covenant's greedy, power-hungry, manipulative elders really the *best* in Kindred society? Or are the elders really the creatures best suited to rule a race of monsters?

More generally, the Invictus is a grand venue to explore the nature of power. Where does power come from? Who gets it, and how? Who *should* receive power, and who *does* receive it? What is the difference between power that's achieved and power that's bestowed? At what point does the struggle for power overwhelm the purpose of power? Can power be taken or must power be given? How can one measure defeat? When can success truly be declared? Is the getting better than the wanting? Once you have power, how should you wield it? Where does firm leadership end and tyranny begin? Does rank deserve its privileges?

Through the Requiems of Invictus characters, Storytellers can show many different answers to these questions. The players' characters can choose answers for themselves as they struggle for power within the covenant, or against it. Once characters have made their choices, the Storyteller can create stories that ask the question in new ways or redefine the answers.

The persistence of the past is another good theme for the Invictus. More than any other covenant, the First Estate draws legitimacy and guidance from the past. The Carthian Movement and the Ordo Dracul, each in their way, seek a consummation in the future — a transformed self or society. The Lancea Sanctum and the Circle of the Crone believe their precepts are timeless and unaffected by changes in the world around them. The Invictus, however, revere age and history. Its elders claim the right to rule because they are old, with the experience of centuries. Do the achievements of the past justify power in the present?

The covenant likewise exalts tradition: doing something because it's what you, or those who came before, did in the past. Sometimes, tradition is a source of strength and security in uncertain times. Sometimes, tradition stultifies. Individuals and whole societies have doomed themselves because they refused to accept changing circumstances. Should the Invictus adapt to a

swiftly changing world? Hold fast to the old ways, confident they'll be vindicated? Or strike back and try to force the world into an archaic but proven pattern? What part of the past is strong and true, and what is truly outdated and a danger to the present? What is a tradition and what is a holdover? What persists and what is bygone?

Once again, such questions have no single answer: the First Estate gives players and Storytellers a chance to examine — and embody — many possible answers.

Theme For Players

As a protagonist in your stories, the character you create as a player is sure to be affected by the themes of the chronicle. At the same time, your character your agent in the narrative — the means through which you contribute to the story — so he also has the power to affect the themes of the chronicle as well.

Think about your Invictus character can be involved with the themes of the covenant. Think about how he can contribute a theme of his own to the chronicle and how he can contribute to themes of the chronicle, as well. If the Invictus, as a body, bring certain themes to mind when they appear in a story, then your character should have the same ability to invoke or imply a theme of his own. In general, your Invictus character's own theme should jive with those of the covenant, but that's not strictly necessary — perhaps you're using the covenant to contrast your character's personal themes with those of his peers. Your character may be Invictus, be he isn't *the* Invictus.

Some Storytellers don't want to speak plainly with their players about the themes they intend to explore — slowly revealing a story's theme is part of the fun — and as a player you should respect that. You may still find it entertaining to select a theme for your Invictus character, however, if only to have a landmark for yourself as you explore the philosophical territory of the covenant and the chronicle. A theme, then, becomes a ball you can keep your eye on, or a yardstick you can use to measure your character's presence in the drama as it plays out.

What's important to keep in mind when considering themes for your own character is how he'll interact with the tales the Storyteller has planned. Avoid creating difficulties for the Storyteller. Don't pick a theme for your character that clashes with those of the chronicle in general. A Storytelling game is a cooperative narrative, remember; you're all in it together. If you want your stories to be the best they can be, you have to collaborate with the Storyteller, who has taken it upon herself to be responsible for a lot of the work. Don't assume that building a theme into your character is going to make that theme the heart of every story (or even any story), and don't think that a theme that makes your character the star of the show.

Instead, find a theme for your Invictus character that works with the themes the Storyteller is associating with

the covenant in the chronicle. Involve your character in the larger themes of the chronicle, or interact with them by contrasting, rather than clashing, with them. Is the Storyteller using the First Estate to raise questions of power and responsibility? Then you might decide that your character seeks power the covenant but tries to dodge his responsibilities to it, becoming almost an embodiment of the covenant's theme. If the Storyteller decides to use the Invictus as an example of undead stagnation and the gradual erosion of morality by years of darkness, then you might create a modern young Invictus Kindred who believes he can bring morality back to the crusted folds of the covenant. Thus your character becomes a test of the covenant's thematic question in the chronicle: Can humanity flourish if it cannot die?

Including a theme into your character concept (or vice versa) is easy. Select a few trappings that evoke the theme you're after — dilemmas, characters, settings — and write them into your character's history. Then, decide on a goal for your character that will require him to face the thematic question you've chosen. In general, if you were to write out your character's history, you should be able to use that thematic question as the last sentence.

As an example, let's say the Storyteller has told you that one theme of the chronicle will involve the difference between "power achieved and power bestowed." To help manifest that theme in the game, you create (with the Storyteller's approval, of course) a character that exemplifies "power bestowed:" an Invictus neonate that has just inherited some authority and responsibility within the domain from his torpid (or dead?) sire. To represent this inherited authority, you give the character three dots in City Status. To show that this status was granted, rather than earned, you refrain from giving the character any dots in Politics yet. As the game progresses, you'll decide whether the character should purchase dots in certain Social Skills, or if he should rely on the influence that comes with his City Status, instead — you'll let the outcome of future stories guide your decision later on. Will the power he's inherited make him soft, or will it stir a thirst for more power?

This is important: Remember when you're creating your character that you're setting him up for a future you can't completely control. Don't fixate on your theme — let it adapt to the chronicle as it unfolds. Other questions should surface as more stories play out. Following the above example, your character might find that laziness has made him powerless despite his authority, or he might find himself battling the consequences of his own thirst for power.

Don't try to answer your character's own thematic questions. A thematic question often has no singular answer, and part of the satisfaction that comes with a well-played story arises from unexpected answers that lead to new, intriguing questions. Your character's the-

matic question might never even be answered, and that's fine, too: the question lends meaning to the stories you tell. It draws your character through the chronicle. It's more important than the answer.

Mood

You can suggest aristocracy and the power of the past through the trappings of archaic splendor. **Vampire: The Requiem** says that a Prince's court doesn't literally look like a medieval monarch's court, but with the Invictus in charge, it just might. Maybe the Prince *does* wear a crown, carry a scepter and dress in the satin, lace and ermine of centuries past, with armored knights at his side. If that seems too over-the-top, you can otherwise suggest an antiquated mood with Victorian frock-coats and gowns — clothing close enough to modern fashion that a person could wear it and not seem much more than eccentric.

When you see a whole room full of people dressed that way, though, either you're watching *Masterpiece Theater* or you're with people who don't want to admit the 20th century has happened. Don't focus on outdated fashions and accessories if such things will work against the impressive air that should come with the Invictus. Some groups of players may see Edwardian tuxedos or Prussian dress sabers as ridiculous rather than romantic. A crown may be dramatically regal or absurdly overwrought. Remember that the Invictus champions the Masquerade: sometimes a tie-pin in the shape of a scepter or a signet ring decorated with a crown is enough to provoke the right balance of mystique and awe.

The settings you choose can also create a mood of regal but outdated power. Victorian mansions, Gothic churches, palatial museums and opera houses are all suitable places to encounter the First Estate. Create contrast by pairing them with the trappings of modern power: the stretch limousine, a retinue of large men in tailored black suits with sunglasses at night and radio receivers in their ears, the CEO's three-story office with a Roman statue in one corner and a desk the size of a battleship. Your players will get the idea of the corporate elite as the modern world's lords and ladies — fit company for the Invictus.

The First Estate also engages in many archaic rites and customs. A gathering of Invictus features solemn processions, the swearing of oaths and elaborate courtesies rejected by the modern world. The Invictus fight duels over questions of honor. A message from an Invictus doesn't come as an impersonal email or memo: a courier shows up at your door to hand you a letter handwritten by the Prince's secretary, sealed with wax and stamped by the Prince's ring.

However, the opulence and archaism of the covenant often assumes darker shades of decadence and tyranny — the heavy hands of those who stayed in power far too



long can fall unchecked on the serfs below. The finery of centuries past becomes soiled and sodden in horrific, gluttonous blood feasts. Breaches of antiquated protocol are met with equally antiquated tortures: beatings, flayings, the stocks, the rack. Nobility goes hand in hand with savage cruelty among the Invictus.

Mood For Players

As a participant in the larger play of the chronicle, the character you design as a player is an important contributor to the overall mood of every story. As a protagonist in the story, your character has the power to help define — or ruin! — the mood of the story as well. Don't be irresponsible with that power.

When you play an Invictus character, other players and their characters are likely to make assumptions about the attitudes and style of your character. Likewise, the Storyteller may expect certain behaviors, goals and methods from a Kindred of the First Estate. Although you're not obligated to play an Invictus character that thinks and operates completely within the stereotyped boundaries of Invictus behavior and philosophy, you should know how those expectations affect your character's role in the larger chronicle.

A character that defies expectations and breaks the barriers of stereotypical roles can be great fun to play, can vitalize stories with unique viewpoints and spark exciting new takes on common **Vampire** stories. But such characters can also muddy the common ground other players in the group need to feel like they have a strong, shared mental image of the game world and wither the mood the Storyteller tries to set when involving the Invictus in the chronicle. The easy fix to this sometimes difficult to foresee problem is to communicate the style and attitude of your character to the Storyteller as soon as possible. Rather than trying to surprise her with a startlingly strange vampire aristocrat in a city of modern undead executives, work with the Storyteller to find out how your character — unusual or not — can enrich the mood of the chronicle. Storytelling games work best when they're a cooperative process, rather than adversarial. Working against the atmosphere crafted or expected by the Storyteller and the rest of the players breaks mood — collaboration expands the mood.

One key to understanding how your character affects the mood of the chronicle is recognizing the difference between the concept and the portrayal. Any concept can fit with any mood with the right portrayal (and the right audience), but conflicting portrayals can be disappointing or disastrous to the narrative. A treacherous, crooked Invictus Sheriff with no regard for the well-being of Kindred below a certain age could be portrayed as a dark and violent bastard prone to strong-arming, extortion and back-alley threats or he could be played as a foppish, self-serving weasel that'll do anything to anyone for even a

cosmetic advancement of his station in city politics. Either style could undermine a story's mood if the Storyteller is attempting to create a particular atmosphere around the vampires of the First Estate. If the Storyteller wants the Invictus to appear, in the current chronicle, as a dangerously outdated political ruin from which riches and power might be excavated, a lively and jovial aristocratic playboy can go against the feeling the Storyteller is after. By working with the Storyteller, you might find a way to use your contrary character concept to create contrast — and thereby better reveal the style of the rest of the Invictus — rather than creating conflicting moods.

Remember that, as a player, your character might be seen as a representative of the covenant to the “audience” of the game: that is, the other players and the Storyteller. Your character is a part of the covenant as much as it is a part of her. The covenant is a fabric of ideas the Storyteller can use to dress settings and conjure certain moods in the story, just as you can use it to costume your character in the trappings of power, tradition and history. Don't dress your character in clothes that clash with the stage.

The General and The Specific

This book is biased. What you'll find in these pages is what you might expect to learn from Invictus vampires themselves. Reading this book is a way to get into character. It's not necessarily the final word of truth on the First Estate — the Storyteller gets to decide what that is.

Without examining every domain in the World of Darkness, all this book can do is present some of the facets of Invictus culture, society and philosophy that are commonly found in cities where the Invictus holds ground. Remember: There is no central Invictus headquarters sending out talking points and strategies to Princes in satellite domains. Invictus culture is spread by practice, by word of mouth and by personal contact and conduct. Though the Invictus of one domain may be politically descended from an Invictus traveler from another city, it's very likely that the two cities have no formal connections or even regular communication at all.

When an Invictus vampire gets off the plane in Montreal, he can't just look up the local consulate or call City Hall — the Invictus are agents of the Masquerade. They're secret.

Even if one Invictus Prince has a phone number for an influential Invictus in a nearby city, no formal procedures exist for one dynasty of Invictus to respect or maintain the relationships of its predecessors. A new administration has little reason to maintain diplomatic ties with another — these aren't formal, public nations, after all. It's more likely that, when that Invictus contact in another city is displaced or ousted, one night the phone just keeps on ringing; no answer, no news, no word.

Thus most vampire domains develop alone, like oases of blood in a desert at night. Massive trends in Invictus culture develop by happenstance or coincidence rather than design. Though commonalities can be seen and described from one Invictus domain to another, do not mistake such vague uniformity for homogeneity; do not mistake patterns for design.

If anything, many Invictus domains that operate similarly do so through a quirk in the development of immortal societies: the effect of one trend can take many mortal lifetimes to run its course. One kernel of wisdom passed from one Prince to another can take a century or more to pass to a third ruler, and even then the information is only second-hand. Invictus domains are always changing, always moving apart from one another, but at a glacial rate.

A handful of foolhardy or hard-working nomads might see enough domains to draw broad conclusions about the nature of the covenant across the country or the continent, but most generalized information about the First Estate comes from small numbers of tales and gossip spread by messengers and rumormongers over the course of decades or centuries. Many of the stereotypes Kindred have for the First Estate are decades old but not yet out of date — the Damned change slowly, the Invictus almost not at all. And yet, if the last word from another Invictus domain were a century old that would not seem altogether peculiar.

WE, THE INVICTUS

Throughout this book, you'll find references to what "the Invictus thinks" or how "an Invictus behaves." Don't be mistaken by such phrases. Such statements are descriptive of the way the covenant is seen to operate, not indicative of some mandate prescribed and engraved in marble by some King of the Invictus. The language is decidedly deceptive, and by design.

Many Invictus elders say things like "the Invictus can't condone such behavior," or "the Invictus have never believed such lies." Who are "the Invictus" in those sentences? That depends on who's doing the talking. When a Kindred says "the Invictus," he might mean "most of the Invictus I've known," or "the one or two vampires who taught me," or "my sire." The eldest among the Invictus, who know (or can claim to know) vampires who walked the earth in ancient nights, might refer to ancient Invictus Kindred when they say "the Invictus" — or they might simply wrap their own wishes in the esteem that comes with the Invictus name.

This book provides **Vampire** players and Storytellers with information many Invictus vampires may not have. Certainly it grants a broader perspective on the Invictus than most Kindred have the resources or experiences to

develop. Remember that when conceptualizing your characters, stories and settings. The Invictus gets its image from the importance its members put on tradition and stability, from respecting and upholding what has come before — not from a constitution or national figurehead.

First: the Masquerade, Then: Everything Else

Although a great deal of the resources amassed and manipulated by the Invictus are put toward influencing Kindred and mortal society, the First Estate cherishes and protects the Masquerade. No failure, no incomplete plan, no misstep can bring ruin to the Invictus so long as they have the shield of the Masquerade. It is the wall around their city of secrecy. Within its protection, all other concerns can be managed and recovered with time, patience and ingenuity. As long as the Invictus have the cover of mortal ignorance, they can carry out all their other works with some measure of confidence.

The overwhelming importance of the Masquerade is sometimes under-appreciated by neonates, and even some ancillae, within the covenant, who make the mistake of pursuing their goals and expanding their power bases at the cost of secrecy. They reveal themselves or their monstrous natures to the mortals they seek to influence, expecting fear to render their investments invincible. It's a foolish mistake, and wise Invictus do everything they can to make sure their charges, vassals and childer avoid it.

Revealing the truth about the existence of the Damned to any but the most loyal and secure retainers only weakens the position of the Invictus, and indeed all Kindred. An asset with knowledge of Kindred society becomes more susceptible to the influences of other covenants. Worse, they come to think of themselves as powerful by extension. Eventually, such awareness leads to betrayal, breakdowns or perilous curiosity. One night, some mortal comes asking questions about the occult or the Blood, or he calls crying in the middle of the night, unable to deal with the lies and the blood anymore. One day, the mortals think they'll take what they want from their undead masters and come with shotguns and crowbars into the haven of an Invictus who thought immortality made him invincible. The Invictus know better.

Several familiar Invictus proverbs remind all Kindred: nothing can be gained by breaking the Masquerade that cannot be gained some other way. Whenever the Masquerade is broken, the transgressor has surrendered a field to the mortal world. Mortals can only ultimately gain by knowing the truth. Kindred can only ultimately lose by revealing themselves. Though every vampire is sure to make "a mistake of the Masquerade" on some night of her Requiem, every Invictus should be ashamed when she does. Every mortal who knows the truth is a living defeat.

It is not Damnation that makes a vampire immortal, that much has been proven countless times throughout history. It is not perfection that makes the covenant unconquerable; no vampire is perfect. It is the beating heart of immortality in the deceptive flesh of the Masquerade that together enable the Kindred of the Invictus to endure for eternity.

Feudalism and Storytelling

Feudalism is good for telling stories. The idea of feudalism might bring to mind images of specific historically feudal societies, like medieval Europe, but the social structures of a feudal society don't have to come with all the baggage of manorialism and serfdom. The neofeudal society of **Vampire** — which revises or updates some of the old-fashioned “givens” of traditional feudalism — is about private social contracts and loyalty, allegiance and mutual opposition, and servitude in exchange for rights, wealth or protection. The emphasis on personal territory, lineage and fealty makes feudalism ideal for social creatures like vampires, who sustain themselves by hunting and define themselves by their blood.

More importantly for social creatures like game-players, a society built on these ideas makes a great environment for tales of intrigue and personal horror. The neofeudal order of Kindred society in general, and Invictus culture in particular, puts the focus on individual relationships between characters rather than overarching rules of governance and elaborate systems of law. Fealty is about allegiance, and any diagram of a feudal society is also a diagram of personal loyalties and formalized — though sometimes improvised — power structures. Stories of politics and intrigue are about what characters that want something another character has — or can provide. A feudal hierarchy is built on these relationships.

By building Kindred society on a system of personal contracts, every relationship becomes subtly distinct but intuitively understandable, like a family's. Tales of intrigue arise out of the need to escape or change the terms of a feudal contract or the effort to uncover the private alliances between local Kindred. The presence of the Invictus in a chronicle adds weight to the neofeudal system by providing greater material benefits for participation (like dominion over a city park or skyscraper) and multiple ways to formalize, legitimize and dramatize the social contracts between characters. Blood Oaths are just one extreme example of this.

The things vampires do to survive are inherently horrific. The neofeudal society keeps it personal. The responsibilities of a liege or vassal aren't something she's born into — they're something she chooses, something she *swears* to do.

Fealty grows naturally out of these personal contracts (though with a Vinculum involved, it may be magnified supernaturally). Fealty is, broadly, just a kind of devoted

loyalty to a partner, leader or “team.” Without any clear-cut good guys running around in the World of Darkness, fealty helps organize characters into many different, manageable factions. To tell stories about politics and intrigue, Storytellers need different factions to play against each other — whether they're covenants, coterie or something in between. With fealty as the standard political relationship in vampire society, new factions can be created across covenant and coterie lines by allying characters with one another based on their *personal* goals and needs, rather than their religious or political affiliation alone. A whole other dimension is added to the Danse Macabre.

Fealty and Secrecy

Fealty doesn't only manifest as a formalized social contract. Fealty is about being faithful, not about formality. Remember that fealty doesn't have to be common knowledge. **Vampire** stories are rife with deceptions and betrayals — secret pacts and hidden loyalties are an integral part of the Danse Macabre. Every domain's political map should be rife with secret passages of hidden loyalty and private bargains.

Forbidden affairs, behind-the-scenes allegiances and secret pacts carry just as much political weight in the Danse Macabre because personal relationships are the fibers in the tapestry of vampire society, rather than the rule of law. A decision made out of some personal bias may be unfair, but it might not be possible to overrule such a decision simply because it was biased; the Prince's reasons are her own, and she is entitled to make decisions based on whatever factors she sees fit. Power branches out from her. Thus, secret pacts and invisible alliances may be substantially more valuable than public relationships, for they have as much power to affect those involved as any public relationship, but without the hindrance of attracting attention from an unwelcome audience of meddling monsters.

Fealty and Territory

In the world of **Vampire**, territory is a practical consideration meant to keep ferocious xenophobic monsters from slashing each other's throats. Beyond that, it clearly delineates authority and blame — a Regent is responsible for what happens in her territory. This territorial system also reduces the volume of bureaucratic flotsam that could otherwise entangle the mechanisms of Kindred society. Bureaucratic entanglements can be followed like roots back to the tree, and that's not what the rulers of a masquerading society of murderous liars want.

Kindred culture is spread through word of mouth and, especially when the Invictus is in power, personal messengers — binding rulers directly to their territories is leaner and simpler to understand for common folk. Leave bloody fingerprints in Wicker Park and get in trouble

with its Regent: that's easy to express, easy to remember. Instead of representatives and districts being a tangle of positions, people, terms of service and redrawn districts, there is only the territory. The domain and its Regent are the same thing. The Prince is the city.

In the stories you tell about the world of **Vampire**, neofeudal territorialism involves characters with the setting in an immediate, intimate way. It transforms the political landscape into a physical landscape: to see the Invictus leader, go to her part of the city.

By giving the figures in power a direct relationship with the game world, the Storyteller gains new tools to use to enrich the narrative, too. Neighborhoods and nightclubs linked directly to a character become easy tools for symbolism. An Invictus Regent who holds audience in a rotten tenement apartment seems very different than one who receives guests in a Turkish bathhouse. When a rival

Kindred goes from meeting with the protagonists in parking lots to hosting them on his roof deck with a skyline view, the *players*, as participants in the story, experience a change as well. Use the territoriality of Kindred society to control the mood of stories, then: a chronicle that begins by examining the Invictus who preside over the most filthy and miserable crack dens in the city can be energized when the characters later set foot on the wooded lot of the posh, overwrought mansion maintained by the Inner Circle. Thus characters themselves become characteristics of the game world, and vice versa.

The Invictus make it easy for Storytellers to use portions of the game world itself as a prize for success in a story: "Get the Mekhet Priscus to sign on with us and I'll give you this city's subways." There's no better way to give characters a chance to change the city than a piece at a time.

Lexicon

The language of the Invictus is drenched in tradition and shot through with subtle, coded terms meant to aid in expression while remaining within the bounds of strict etiquette. It serves as a doubly-enforced slang, excluding outsiders who cannot understand the Covenant's rules of communication, and then excluding those who learn the rules but cannot interpret the detailed, complicated vocabulary of its Kindred.

The following terms are but a sample of the multilayered idiom of the Invictus.

angel: A vampire who supports artistic endeavor as a means to achieve status.

aspiring: Scheming, overeager or difficult.

blooded: The condition of pure lineage, though the definition of "pure" varies from domain to domain. Generally, a line of Kindred in which all members are Invictus can be said to be blooded. Likewise, a Kindred is said to be "blooded with" or "blooded to" other members of her same bloodline. Usage: *Careful what you say: she's blooded to the Prince.* or *Prior to his Embrace, theirs was a blooded line.*

breathing: Panicking, acting irrationally, being emotional. Implies weakness. Usage: *You should've seen Matthew last night; I've never known him to be such a breather.*

castle: To fortify one's position. To withdraw from a debate without conceding the point. From the maneuver in chess. Usage: *Something must have gotten to Edgar for him to castle like that.*

drab: A lazy or unskilled vampire. May also be used to refer to the majority of Kindred, i.e. those who are not "Kindred of Quality" (see below).

dynastic compact: The binding contract or oath that forms the foundation of a cyclical dynasty and establishes the rights and responsibilities of each of its members.

eccentric: One who is insane and/or overpowered by the Beast. An unreliable vampire.

eclipse: An Invictus euphemism for torpor. May also refer to the time spent in torpor. Usage: *The eclipse has claimed her.* or: *The nineteenth century was eclipsed for me.*

exercise: A period of elementary training in Guild membership. Also used in reference to an unskilled or amateur attempt. Usage: *My debate with the Bishop was exercise, I should not have attempted it.*

fast honor: An title or reward that, once conferred, cannot be stripped.

familiar: Being friendly or on good terms with, but short of true allegiance. Usage: *Marcus is familiar with the Crone, but that's all.* or *Aren't you being very familiar?*

First Estate, the: The Invictus.

flower: As a verb, to encode or obscure meaning. Derived from a reference to Victorian floral code systems. Usage: *The message was flowered.*

foreigner: Any supernatural creature that is not a vampire.

Guild: An officially recognized school organized to provide professional training, eliminate

unacceptable practices, and preserve knowledge within the Invictus.

Guild War: A competition between Guilds to prove superiority of technique. May or may not involve physical violence.

House, or Dynastic House: A cyclical dynasty.

humility: A term that has variable meaning depending on who it is applied to. If used in reference to an elder vampire, it indicates a display of weakness. If used in reference to a neonate, it indicates intelligence. Usage: *His humble display was well noted.*

innovate, to: To create an inferior version; to destroy. Also expressed as an adjective: *innovative*. See: *refine, to*. Usage: *The Prince insists on innovating with respect to his defenses.*

I serve at the pleasure of the Prince: A functionally vague statement that acts as a catch-all response to questioning. May be used to abdicate responsibility (by shifting it upwards) or to claim it (by suggesting that one is empowered by order of the Prince without stating it explicitly).

Kindred: A vampire that participates in the social play of the city's covenants. A vampire with membership in any covenant or a vampire that is *familiar* with civilized covenants. (Typically, as opposed to an unbound vampire, which should never be considered *Kindred*.) See also: *familiar*

Kindred of Quality: Invictus vampires.

knight: Any Kindred of the Invictus with a responsibility to engage in violence. A Kindred with a sworn oath to hurt or be harmed on behalf of a superior, whether landed or not.

Knight: A knight whose sole or primary duty is to serve in combat. Any professionally militant Kindred who belongs to a Knightly Order. Any landed knight. (Historically, this term was reserved for knights with other Invictus titles, but modern nights have seen the term applied to sworn combatants of other covenants who fight on behalf of the Invictus as well.)

landed: Having a granted feeding ground or territory of authority and responsibility, customarily awarded by a superior in the city's Damned government. Usage: *The Viscount's a landed vampire. Everything south of the airport is his domain.*

largesse: The currency of the Invictus. Favors, territory, money, honors – anything of value bestowed upon a less powerful vampire by his superior. Usage: *I bought the car myself. The house and the property it sits on were largesse.*

loud: Modern.

Manumission: The formal separation of a vampire from her Sire, marking her qualification for the responsibilities and rewards of full citizenship.

Meister: An officially recognized professional expert; the leader of a Guild. (*archaic*; also: *master*)

misstep: A harmless or forgiven breach of etiquette or formality. Usage: *Think nothing of it — just a misstep.*

Monomacy: A formal duel with potentially fatal consequences. Such duels may be fought to Final Death or to simple injury. Traditionally such duels are a matter of honor of trial by combat.

new: An equivalent term for “inferior”. See: *old*.

noble partner: Euphemistic term for a Kindred enemy of the Covenant. See: *outsider*.

old: An equivalent term for “superior”. Anything that is old has survived, and is thus better suited than anything that is not. Usage: *You may find your gun quite exciting, but my sword is old.*

orchestra: One's sphere of influence. The Kindred and kine with which an Invictus vampire manipulates, influences or has pull. Usage: *I'll be out with the orchestra all night.* or: *He's a member of my orchestra.*

Order: A strict military-style Guild. E.g., a Knightly Order.

outsider: Any vampire who is not a member of the Invictus. Distinguished from *foreigner* and *noble partner*.

petition: Formal request to become a member of a Guild.

patron: The elder Kindred of a newly formed dynastic house partnership; also a general term referring to an influential member of the Invictus.

pretending: Acting beneath one's station. (i.e. *slumming*; *archaic*)

privilege: The inalienable right of an individual to assert power over others. In keeping with Invictus philosophy, privilege is pre-determined, limited, and static. Usage: *She may be Kindred of Quality, but the Inner Circle is beyond her privilege.*

protégé: The younger Kindred of a newly formed dynastic house partnership.

provenance: Literally, place of origin or proof of authenticity and past ownership. Among the Invictus, the word is used to politely refer to the source of a Kindred's authority or lineage even in decidedly rude or gossip conversations. In some domains, provenance is only valid if formally recorded. Usage: *He may act blooded, but his provenance isn't really so pure.*

red book: A notional list of the Kindred power elite in a city. May also be used to refer to the Inner Circle. Usage: *She is in the red book.*

refine, to: To invent or improve while paying proper respect to precedent; Also expressed as an adjective: *refined*. See: *innovate, to*. Usage: *The Meister's technique is not innovation. It is most refined.*

rejuvenated: Returned to a state of youth (i.e. lessened in power) by torpor. This is not a compliment. See: *old, new*.

right-thinking: Kindred ally to or supporter of the Invictus. See: outsider. Usage: *He is a right-thinking member of the Circle of the Crone.*

scratch: A minor betrayal or personal slight, often thinly disguised as an accident or a brief indiscretion. Also, to perform such an act. Usage: *Bronwyn scratched me last night in front of everyone.*

Society: A euphemism for the Invictus. Usage: *He is not of Society.*

stable: The maintenance of a herd. Also refers to work involved in locating and preparing a mortal vessel who matches the exacting tastes of an elder. Usage: *The Prince's stable is quite elaborate and very costly.*

summit: Any period of time in which all members of a House are awake and active.

teeth, drawn: refers to a submissive, harmless state imposed upon an individual. Does not necessarily refer

to actual mutilation. Usage: *After I dealt with her, she returned to the Prince with her teeth drawn.*

teeth, put: refers to an aggressive or defiant state imposed upon an individual. Usage: *Something put teeth into him before our meeting.*

Tribunal: A trio of Invictus elders or established ancillae who observe a House protégé after the patron has entered torpor for the first time.

Tribune: A member of a tribunal.


Tribute: A noble title, bestowed upon Kindred by the Inner Circle for deeds benefiting the Covenant.

vagrant: A vampire without a haven. Also, a Kindred with no responsibilities to any covenant. (Often therefore synonymous with *unbound*.)

valea: A concubine, spy or seductress that uses sex or other physical intimacy as a means of manipulation and information gathering. (*slang*; male: *valeo*)







Chapter One: A HISTORY OF THE INVICTUS

“Don’t you dare tell me how it was, childe!

I was there that day, beneath the sun . . .

when they opened

the cathedral doors for the first time.

So long as I remain,

that day

will never end.”

"Aim at perfection in everything, though in most things it is unattainable.

However, they who aim at it, and persevere, will come much nearer to it than those whose laziness and despondency make them give it up as unattainable."

— Lord Chesterfield

The Invictus is the oldest covenant, dating back to ancient Rome and the nights of the Camarilla. The covenant has persisted since those first nights, its longevity and power demonstrating the fundamental truth of its precepts. It has seen other covenants come and go, and will do so again. The Invictus is unconquered and invincible.

That is the official attitude of Invictus history, and many members of the covenant see no profit in investigating in more detail. Even some vampires outside the covenant accept the basic accounts of the Invictus' history, although many see stagnation where the Invictus sees strong tradition. Yet for all the shadows of torpor and the failings of Kindred memory, there are elders who remember traces of detail and believe that such things matter as much to the success of the covenant as its modern nights. Likewise, the formalities of the Invictus generate many written records — some trustworthy and some suspect — and many Kindred of the First Estate choose to busy themselves with historical research.

All this gives the Invictus of many domains access to centuries of information, but it does not always bring the truth. A detailed history does not overturn the fundamental points of public perception. The record that remembers a true history is often overlooked in favor of the record that describes a preferred history.

The Invictus is ancient and deeply conservative. Its customs and traditions have survived two thousand years of daylight and fire, dissention and insurgence. Its name is known and feared by some of the world's most terrible monsters, from the cold glass of the Atlantic domains to the hot lights of the Pacific Rim. Though the Invictus is often misunderstood and sometimes despised, it cannot be ignored or denied. Even external historians concede that the Invictus must be doing something right.

Classical Beginnings

"I, Marcus Didianus Scipio of Milan, hereby grant Marinus of the Invictus exclusive hunting rights among the tenements of the East bank of the river, to be held for as long as his House persists . . ."

The oldest demonstrably genuine Kindred document mentioning the Invictus is a grant of hunting rights to House Marinus — rights that the House still holds and defends whenever challenged. The grant is thought to have been made in AD 84, when the Camarilla still held

sway in Rome, and the document has been produced for inspection by Invictus vampires in the court of Milan at least once per century since. The Kindred of the Marinus line claim that the Invictus of the time were a ruling class of the Camarilla, the unconquered Kindred who had risen to the top of the organization. Commonly, covenant authorities officially endorse this view.

Unofficially, many historians in and out of the Invictus doubt that claim. The reference to the Invictus in the grant sounds more like a faction than a name for the rulers of the world's Kindred, and there is precious little supporting evidence outside of the fog of Kindred memory. Indeed, though there are other surviving documents from the period, there are no known earlier references to the name. The memories of other elders suggest the Invictus were simply a group of Kindred seeking power within the Camarilla, much like the factions of the Invictus tonight, albeit a group that was ultimately to see great success.

THE PRIVILEGES OF CAESAR

A set of marble tablets, supposedly held by the Invictus of Rome, carry an inscription granting the Invictus rulership of the night as Gaius Julius Caesar holds command over the day. The Latin of the inscription is appropriate to the late Republic, and the tablets have unquestionably existed in their present form since the early Middle Ages. The covenant, outside Rome, has never officially endorsed the tablets, which leads most Kindred to believe that the rulers of the Invictus suspect that they are forgeries.

Another theory, however, is that the tablets are genuine, and that the Invictus elders still include Kindred responsible for breaching the Masquerade to the extent of forming an explicit treaty with the kine. Some Carthians who would love to turn the Invictus' past into a tool for unseating some of its greatest elders have spent time searching for supporting evidence showing that the privileges are genuine trespasses against the Traditions.

Ancient Lies

Whatever the details, the evidence that the Invictus existed in some form before the fall of the Camarilla is overwhelming. If nothing else, the speed with which the covenant was able to take advantage of the power vacuum left

by the collapse of an over-arching structure indicates that the Invictus was already organized to a large extent. Some Kindred believe that the Invictus deliberately overthrew the Camarilla, expecting to take its place as the body ruling all vampires but that the covenant was not as strong as it thought.

The question that all Kindred historians, both in and out of the covenant of Society, must ask is, how reliable is the evidence? For many vampires, the idea that evidence may be fabricated, intentionally misrepresented or erroneously interpreted is quick to conjure and hard to dispel. Can the evidence be trusted any more than the memories of the elders?

In the minds of the most conspiratorial of the Damned, the question continues to tie itself into knots the more it is handled. When dealing with the patience and the guile of the Invictus, even unbelievable schemes become fearsome — become terribly believable. Could the Invictus have manufactured evidence in the form of texts, tablets, legend and folklore all those centuries ago for the very purpose of corroborating the stories they and their childer would tell in a thousand years? Is it possible that the eldest of Society had the clever minds to plan so far ahead and the willpower to pull it off? How much of the history that has been passed down by the First Estate is propaganda? How much has been slowly, painstakingly skewed over a thousand years for the purpose of creating the very world all the Kindred beneath the Invictus now dance and die in? How much of the intelligence passed down by — or dug up with — the ancient Invictus is an outright lie? How can anyone prove it?

As some scholastic-minded vampires have supposed over the centuries, the Invictus have the Fog of Eternity in their favor in such a scheme. Not only would the Fog of Eternity cloud the memories of Society's enemies and erode the facts that rivals and skeptics could use to disprove the Invictus accounts of history, but the Fog would aid the fablers among the First Estate in the maintenance of their thousand-year lie.

Imagine an Invictus Prince commissioning his own histories of the nights he rules — all life-like fictions, all very nearly the truth — from the hands of loyal scribes. A dozen such texts are scattered, hidden and inherited throughout the centuries. The texts age, become rare and are gradually forgotten. Then, a millennium later, vampires of every covenant awaken one by one across the globe. In time, by plan or by fortune, those ancient books are found. The books help the groggy elders fill in the blanks in their minds, and the elders support some — maybe most — of the history contained in those books, which are now priceless artifacts. Without knowing it, a handful of unwitting Kindred have become accomplices in an ancient lie, bearing false witness against history.

If even the scheming vampire who hatches this plan doesn't recall the truth — doesn't know what exactly he's done — how can anyone sniff out his lie? If he believes his own deception, how can anyone know him for the pretender he is? If the world believes his lie, is it truly a lie at all anymore?

The Heroic Age

The early Middle Ages were the Heroic Age of the Invictus, when individuals and cyclical dynasties performed great deeds that set the covenant firmly on the road to power. More than any other time, the stories of this period mix history and myth in a way that is hard to separate. Some of the greatest elders of modern nights have reputations founded on tales from this period, so objective historical investigation can be dangerous to one's social health. On the other hand, conclusively proving that an elder never performed the great deeds attributed to him would be a valuable part of a campaign against him.

The Invictus tell many stories of this period, and only a few representative ones can be recounted here. Modern Kindred, particularly among the Carthians and the Ordo Dracul, have noted that some tales of the Invictus do not fit with histories recognized by kine scholars. To the Carthians, this is clear evidence that the history of the Invictus is little more than a bunch of self-serving myths, a tradition of oral propaganda. To the Invictus, it shows the advantages of having eyewitnesses to events over a thousand years ago still available for consultation. Over time, however, the kine do change their opinions about history, often quite radically, and so debates of historical continuity are unlikely to be resolved soon.

Some vampires, Invictus and not, believe tales such as the following were always intended as parables of political and social power, rather than accounts of genuine history. The facts of these stories may be open to interpretation — they may even be disproved outright — but the boundaries of their truth extend beyond the realms of fact.

Quintus of Alexandria

When the Camarilla fell, the cities of North Africa were among the first to fall into chaos. The nights ran with blood and fire as Kindred brought old feuds out into the open grounds of Kindred society and created new feuds in the struggle for territory and influence. Not a dawn passed that was not seen by at least one of the city's Kindred, and every day the kine became a little more knowledgeable, a little more scared and a little more dangerous.

In the midst of this anarchy, Quintus of Alexandria, an Invictus ancilla, set out to bring peace. A great Advocate and Speaker, he warned powerful vampires of the risks to their own holdings if the struggle was allowed to continue, and pointed out to the weak that they were disproportionately the ones being sacrificed. He encouraged the formation of alliances and negotiated settlements between warring houses. Wearing the pure white cloth of a candidate for office, Quintus brought enemies together in front of the churches of the city and brokered settlements witnessed by "the stars above our heads, the sands beneath our feet, the sea in our ears and the God at our backs."



Moved by the terms of his oath, members of the Lancea Sanctum came to see his mission as divinely backed, and local Kindred of that covenant slowly fell into place behind him. The Invictus, of course, had always worked for order within the city. One night in December, the Kindred of the city gathered in the Church of the Blessed Virgin, and selected a Bishop of the Lancea Sanctum as their Prince. Quintus pronounced himself satisfied with the restoration of peace, and swore loyalty to the Prince like all the rest.

But, as might have been expected, a Prince with such strong loyalties to a single creed could not rule peacefully over a diverse city. Disputes began to flare, and the Kindred noticed that the Prince always resolved them in favor of the Lancea Sanctum. The Kindred of other covenants became discontented with this, and soon took their disputes to Quintus instead. They reminded the other parties of Quintus' long strivings for peace and his failure to seize power as a result, arguing that he was clearly a neutral broker.

Within a year, the Prince declared that Quintus was not permitted to resolve disputes and was banished from the city. Quintus responded by launching a bid for praxis, a bid supported by many non-Sanctified Kindred and some of the Prince's own covenant mates. Within two nights, the former Prince had fled, leaving Quintus in undisputed command of the city. The Inner Circle awarded him the title of Marquis of Alexandria in recognition of his great actions.

Note: Stories of similar form are told about several other cities within the former Roman Empire, but Quintus of Alexandria is the most famous. The Marquis of Alexandria survives to present nights, although he is no longer a Prince. Instead, he serves as an adviser to Princes, of whatever

covenant, and most knowledgeable Kindred believe that as long as he does so Alexandria shall remain an Invictus city.

Palladius of Ireland

Remaining an island of barbarians on the edge of the world, Ireland was never conquered by the Roman Empire. In the last nights of the Camarilla, a vampire named Palladius looked beyond its borders, reasoning that strength was likely to be found beyond the increasingly vicious political struggles of a dying organization. He took a ship to Ireland and brought it to land in the middle of a storm. He stepped onto the shore, planting his staff in the sand and declaring, "From shore to shore, surrounded by the sea, this land is the domain of the Invictus. Let none challenge our mastery of the night." The storm itself was cowed by his words, subsiding in mere moments, the clouds clearing to let the stars shine down on Palladius' head.

By such an omen, the success of the enterprise was assured, but it was not yet attained. Ireland had no cities and few resident Kindred of its own. Some of these vampires, unlike any in the rest of Europe, were said to take the form of serpents when they rested by day, and in that form basked in the sun. They held that this made them superior to the vampires of the rest of the world, and refused to negotiate in any way with the invader, Palladius. Instead, they swore they would destroy him and all his brood, wiping out the foreigners who dared to stain their island. Regretfully, Palladius prepared for war.

Palladius needed cities for his bases of action, and so his first act was to travel the length and breadth of the

island, encouraging the people to gather into larger settlements. These settlements, for the most part, formed around abbeys, and Palladius brought in allies from the Lancea Sanctum to help the Invictus administer the land. The relationship was clearly spelled out from the beginning, as the Invictus ruled and the Sanctified provided advice, and the two covenants worked harmoniously together.

Palladius himself sired many childer, the better to spread his influence, and his battles with the undead serpents became the stuff of legends. Finally, the last remnants of the serpents made a stand on the Atlantic coast, their backs to a cliff overlooking the ocean. Palladius stood alone, his childer and allies spread out as sentries to make sure that none of the serpents could flee. Calling on all the powers of his blood, Palladius rent the serpents limb from limb, and their magic was ineffective against him. He hurled the bodies into the ocean, and left the heads on the cliff to face the sunlight, for they would not be able to take refuge as serpents now.

With his final victory, Palladius was granted the title Duke of Ireland, and took his place as Prince of the whole country.

Note: Several stories of Invictus Kindred creating new realms to rule emerge from this period, but the conquest of the whole of Ireland is by far the most spectacular. There are two surviving Kindred who claim to be Palladius of Ireland. Both are allowed the title Duke of Ireland within their respective cities, and each one issues thunderous denunciations of the other and offers a reward for proof of his Final Death. Some Kindred believe that the two were originally part of a cyclical dynasty and that it was the dynasty that conquered Ireland. Others point out the plain parallels to the legend of St. Patrick, and believe that the legend of Palladius is wholly fabricated.

Valea of Byzantium

When the Eastern Roman Empire being transformed into the Byzantine Empire, there lurked a great but mysterious Invictus hero called Valea. Little is known of her before those nights during the reign of Heraclius when she seeped into power, but some say she had lived all of her days in Constantinople before her Embrace. Some take this even further, to say that she had been in the city since *its* first days, and that she slumbers there, still. The mystery of Valea's origin is a part of her heroism: history forgets the powerful women who operate behind the Princes and emperors of the past, but history never forget the women's work.

Valea was residing within Constantinople, in the rich, palatial havens of ambassadors, diplomats, merchants and advisors to Heraclius himself. In life, she was apparently a homeless waif, begging for bread and stealing wine. In death, she drifted among the wealthy and the powerful as an odalisque, drawing tales of intrigue out of her lovers as she had once drawn money from passersby and stealing blood like she once stole wine. Valea was already smarter and more insidious than most of her prey, but, after years of

lounging in expensive private libraries and attending lavish performances, she was more educated than her paramours as well. Decades of clandestine sex and spying with the renowned men of Byzantium yielded her a collection of information and insight into the city that no one mortal man could ever have been able to accumulate in a lifetime.

In the middle of the 7th century, the Byzantine Emperor Constans II divided Constantinople into a series of military-controlled sections, called *themes*. At the time, Constantinople was a swelling city — soon to be the largest is Christendom — and this growing population of urbanizing farmers and craftspeople was taking its toll on the Kindred of the city. The Invictus Prince of Constantinople was facing a rush of new vampires bred by passionate neonates who felt the city could finally support new Kindred made by their hand. With the formation of the Emperor's new themes, the Invictus were also finding that they had little familiarity and even less influence with the revised municipal order. While Constantinople was solidifying into a crowning city of the world — able to repel numerous Arab assaults and internal crises of iconoclasm and religion — the nighttime city of the Damned was in turmoil. The Prince feared that, without a new structure for the Kindred of Byzantium to dwell within, the Masquerade was at risk. Valea — who was nothing at court and had never met the Prince — heard tell of this and agreed with him.

She also had a plan. She knew several of the Emperor's advisors and attachés very well — much better than they knew her — so she had information about the philosophy behind the themes and the social mechanisms that made them work. She advised the Prince on ways to organize the domains within Constantinople to keep them from creating friction with the municipal order of the kine. "How do you know so much, girl?" the Prince asked her. "I listened," she said.

Through the end of the reign of Constans II, through the reign of Leo II in the 8th century, Valea and the Prince restructured the territories and politics of the Invictus in Constantinople. Using the Prince's experience and Valea's insight, they refined systems of action and responsibility that reduced the maneuvering room within the covenant for conspirators to plot against the Prince, as had been common since the Damned population swell a hundred years before. The Prince and Valea developed a series of operational social units within the domain — populations defined by their duties rather than their territory — that had to answer directly to the Prince himself. Therefore, conspiracies might swell within the individual competing units, called *tagmata* (regiments), but they could not reach the Prince without first going through one of his lieutenants who oversaw the *tagmata*. That lieutenant — who had to report directly, and alone, to the Prince — would be unlikely to face his lord during a formative coup without revealing himself to the Prince's formidable mind.

After the mortal Emperor Constantine V returned to Constantinople following his own betrayal and subsequent

military vengeance, he also called for municipal reform. He sought a system to replace the city's themes and protect himself from further intrigues and would-be usurpers. Much to the Prince's surprise, the system that Constantine's advisors eventually brought before their Emperor employed a collection of tagmata, each of which reported directly to Constantine — and several of whom were sharing beds with Valea or her childer. "How you did manage that, girl?" the Prince asked her. "I spoke," she said. "And they listened."

Note: Valea's name is known in domains from Turkey to the United States, but typically without much historical detail. Among modern Invictus, she is known by name only, like a mortal might know Joan of Arc without really knowing anything about her history or the period in which she gained her fame. The broad strokes of Valea's story — a concubine feeding from powerful mortals shapes the society of the Damned with the secrets she gleans — are common to a variety of rumors and urban legends among Society Kindred, as they are common among the kine. For a time, Valea's name was used (sometimes as the masculine Valeo) by numerous Invictus spies in European domains, inspired into action by tales of Mata Hari. Tonight, Valea's name has become a kind of crass Invictus slang for any undead seductress, from beguiling spies to treacherous whores.

The Emperor Myth: A Cautionary Tale

By the late 11th century, the Heroic Age had drawn to a close. The Invictus were powerful across Europe, and should have been poised to bring back the unity lost in the fall of the Camarilla. Instead, the covenant itself was at risk of splintering into fragments. The followers of each hero believed that they were the true Invictus, and that they should be leading the others. When their claims were denied, they rallied behind their hero, and they fought.

For a few decades around the turn of the 12th century, it seemed that the Invictus would destroy themselves in internecine conflict. An Invictus seer, Aelfgifu, had a series of visions of where this would lead, visions of European cities drenched in the blood of a hundred, tiny nocturnal wars, where monsters even darker than vampires came from the wilderness to wipe out the remaining Kindred and feast on the kine. Stirred by her vision, she began traveling in Europe, calling on the Invictus to cease their fighting and unify. Quickly, her call took the concrete form of a call for a great council of the elders of the Invictus, at which all disputes would be resolved and the Invictus formed into a single force to lead the Kindred and defend against the even greater threat of the monsters of the wilderness.

The First Council met within a few years of 1142, by modern reckonings. Most accounts hold that it was held in the catacombs under Rome, in the old center of the Empire, surrounded by the bones of the Imperial dead. Aelfgifu stood before the assembled elders, and told them once more of her vision and of the only chance she saw for avoiding such a fate. Then she stepped back, to allow the debate to begin.

The beginning was easy. The assembled elders quickly agreed that the Invictus should be unified, bringing all of the Kindred of Europe and, later, the world, under a single set of rulers. The inevitable following question was that of who should lead the Invictus, and here the expected deadlock set in. Each of the elders, ruler of a city, believed that he should lead the whole covenant, and no one was willing to give ground. Throughout the debate, Aelfgifu remained silent, seated on a simple chair in front of shelves filled with the delicate corpses of the ancient dead. For most of the debate, her eyes remained on the floor.

The Princes of Paris and Cologne strode into the center of the hall, intent on fighting to determine precedence, and Aelfgifu briefly raised her eyes. Abashed, the two elders returned to their seats, declaring that they would not sully this honorable location with violence. The Princes of Greece made to leave, declaring that the Council was a sham, and Aelfgifu looked briefly at each of them in turn. Each returned to his seat, muttering that despite the best efforts of others, he would ensure that the debate met with success. The Prince of Rome itself declared that, as the Council was held in his city, he would . . . At which point he realized that Aelfgifu was looking at him, and concluded his sentence by saying that he would guarantee the Council's safety for as long as it took to reach a decision.

After many nights of debate, a decision was reached. Each of the assembled elders was declared an Elector, and the Electors would choose an Emperor for the Invictus from among their number. The Emperor would be the first among the elders of the covenant, with the authority to settle disputes between them but without the authority to intervene in issues within the realm of a single elder. The Emperor would also be responsible for the strategy by which all the Kindred of the world were to be brought under the control of the Invictus.

The votes were made to Aelfgifu, who was herself neither Elector nor candidate, and the successful claimant announced. He was anointed with blood, robed in Imperial purple and presented to the Electors, who as one swore fealty on his behalf and on behalf of their followers.

After electing the Emperor, the Council continued under his guidance. The titles held within the Invictus, and the criteria on which they should be awarded, were standardized. Titles awarded during the Heroic Age were regularized, and the systems of the covenant in different domains brought into line with one another. The debates occasionally became slightly heated, but, in general, the assembled elders were content that the title of Elector out-ranked all but that of Emperor, and so were happy to see their underlings nominally demoted as the price of covenant unity.

The First Council dispersed a success and conflicts within the covenant halted, as elders enforced the law in their own domains and referred inter-domain disputes to the Emperor. The Invictus began their push to bring the rest of the Kindred under their sway, and for a time they seemed destined for success.

THE EMPEROR OF THE NIGHT

The Invictus Emperor is one of the most important figures in Invictus history. It is, then, surprising that no one remembers who was elected. There are surviving Kindred who were present at the First Council, and all are sure that they were not elected. That would be strange enough — but it is not that the recollections of these ancient vampires differ, but rather that they remember nothing.

They remember the ceremony, they remember swearing loyalty and they remember the continuing existence of the Emperor for decades afterward — but they do not remember who the Emperor was.

The Site of the First Council

While most accounts, and most Kindred memories, suggest that the First Council was held in Rome, there are differing accounts. A small but respected group of elders clearly remember that it was held in Aachen, others report that it was held in Constantinople. The elders who claim the First Council convened in London — or a half-dozen other personally favored cities — are typically discounted.

The Invictus of Rome sometimes show rare, celebrated visitors the chamber where the Council was purportedly held, but the room is rather different from the one depicted in either the Rome or Lake Codices, described below. Specifically, it is at the top of a well and largely undecorated.

The Book of the Council

The proceedings of the Council, and Aelfgifu's visions, were recorded in a sumptuous manuscript, illustrated with scenes from the Council itself. All those who were present remember the scribes creating this volume, and recall seeing it complete before they left.

The Book of the Council may survive. In fact, there are many surviving candidates, each claiming to be the real thing. Some are obvious late forgeries, written on paper manufactured in the 16th, 17th or even 18th centuries. A couple of printed editions have even circulated. These late forgeries include the name of the elected Emperor and were usually traced back to their authors by working out whose agenda was supported.

A handful of the surviving books are not obvious fakes. There are three well-known volumes (the Rome Codex, the Lake Codex and the Reilmeyer Codex), which have been securely dated to the 12th century, both in terms of writing style and the age of the materials. The Rome Codex and the Lake Codex are extremely similar, although both give slightly different accounts of the proceedings. The vampires who were present disagree on the same sorts of details as the two texts, so they cannot decide which is genuine. In both books, the name and portrait of the Emperor have been cut out wherever they occurred. Some of the text that was written on the back side of these cut portraits was written on slips stained into the books' last pages as haphazard replacements. The craftsmanship of these replacements is different from that of the bodies of the main texts but is the same in both volumes' replacement slips.



The calligraphy of these replacements is also 12th century in style, and the slips of parchment are of the same age. The evidence thus suggests that the Emperor was removed from the record while he was still in power.

The differences between the Lake and Rome Codices are mostly minor, with one exception. According to the Rome Codex, the Kindred of the Invictus unified to conquer all other Kindred. According to the Lake Codex, the Kindred of the Invictus unified to defend all Kindred from the monsters warned of in Aelfgifu's visions. Successful modern authorities in most Invictus domains tend to support the language of the Lake Codex.

The Reilmeyer Codex is even more different. Its account of the First Council simply fails to mention the election of the Emperor at all, although the Codex does cover the decision to give the members of the council that power and the title of Elector, and the Codex provides much more detail of Aelfgifu's visions. Indeed, it is largely an account of those visions. The book was almost certainly written some time in the 12th century, but its highly accurate account of the Third Crusade, as seen from a Kindred perspective, has led many Kindred to believe that the Codex is, in fact, a very early forgery, written to bolster a particular political agenda. It is less clear what that agenda was, and the prophecies in the book continue for centuries. The prophecies up to the early 21st century deal entirely with fairly minor events, and are not specific about places. There are some Kindred who devote their Requiems to tracking down the events mentioned in the Reilmeyer Codex. As the next set of larger prophecies, which do not bode well, approach their supposed time of fulfillment, the number of Kindred trying to work out the book's trustworthiness continues to increase.

The Imperial Years

The Emperor remained at the head of the Invictus for over a century. At first, his rule was highly effective, and the Invictus grew in power throughout Europe. After a few decades, the Invictus truly thought of themselves as part of an organization that spanned the world.

And that was where the problems started. Individual Kindred did not want titles that were recognized in one city; they wanted to be recognized, and deferred to, everywhere. The number of disputes appealed to the Emperor steadily rose, as the Notary of one city tried to prove his superiority to the Notary of another. Invictus Princes who weren't Electors petitioned for the title; Electors who weren't Princes petitioned to have the "upstart" removed.

Things were finally brought to a head, however, by a Guild War. The Guild of Speakers in Florence, led by Meister Ottobuono, declared that the Guild of Speakers in Pisa, led by Meister Beatrice, were a group of frauds, unworthy to teach, and that the Florentine Guild should have control over teaching in the other city as well. Meister Beatrice responded that Meister Ottobuono was

addled by age and megalomania, and should be stripped of the title of Meister as he was a disgrace to his rank.

The dispute was appealed to the Emperor, and the two Meisters began gathering allies. It is now, centuries after the assassination of both principals, agreed that Meister Ottobuono and Meister Beatrice were the two greatest Speakers in the history of the covenant. Each traveled to other cities, speaking persuasively of their struggle, and linking it to the political issues that exercised the Kindred of that place. In Cologne, Meister Ottobuono convinced a leadership under pressure from the Sanctified that a victory for the Pisans would result in the Invictus submitting to the Lancea Sanctum in all things. In Paris, Meister Beatrice convinced an Elector-Prince on the verge of torpor that the Florentines were seeking to bring his city under their personal control, so that he would awaken in centuries with no power, no allies and no hope.

Within a few years there was no one in the Invictus who was not either a Florentine or a Pisan. The dispute between the guilds had receded to minor importance, being nothing more than an occasion for differences that had, frequently, been manufactured by the two Meisters. When the case finally came before the Emperor, he was faced with an impossible decision, as ruling in any way would provoke civil war between Invictus domains.

The Imperial Court

The Invictus Emperor presided over the Imperial Court, an underground complex of unsurpassed magnificence. The audience chamber, decorated with statues and illuminated with hundreds of carefully shielded oil lamps, was as large as the nave of the largest cathedrals in Europe. The Oath Chamber, a much more intimate room where individual Kindred swore fealty and other oaths to the Emperor or their own lords, was said to be plated entirely in gold, studded with gems and decorated with panels painted on ivory. In the feasting hall, there were fountains that nightly ran with human blood.

The complex also included hundreds of rooms, providing accommodation for the Emperor's staff, his herd and the retinues of visiting elders. Neonates and ancillae were not granted access to the court itself, and even most elders needed an invitation before they could enter. Exceptions were made for the Electors, who had the right of access to the Emperor at any time.

The location of the Imperial Court was a well-kept secret, with the Emperor sending guides skilled in misdirection to bring most elders before him. The Electors all knew how to get there, but no two knew the same route. The portals to the complex were disguised, and some people suggest that the disguises were not wholly mundane.

The Imperial Court is now lost. The surviving Electors do not remember how to get there, and all attempts to piece together a route have failed. It is almost as if the place never existed.

The Final Council

At this point, Meister Ottobuono was found dead at the Imperial Court, dismembered at every joint, his torso sliced between each vertebra and his head cut in half. The pieces were carefully arranged around his haven. The ghouls, all under Vinculum to Ottobuono claimed to have seen nothing, but were executed anyway.

The same sunset, Meister Beatrice was found dead, her torso burned to ash, while her head and limbs, and the bed on which she was lying, remained entirely unharmed. Again, the guards, under Vinculum to Beatrice, claimed to have seen nothing, and were executed for betraying their mistress.

As shock and fear raced through the Imperial Court, the Emperor summoned all the Electors to a Council. They came, and that is a mystery. The Invictus were on the verge of war, an unstoppable assassin was at work at the Court — and yet the most powerful elders came from all over Europe, and some from beyond.

The Final Council's decisions were simple. The Council accepted the abdication of the Emperor and dissolved the title. All Electors renounced those titles and renounced any idea of a central government for the Invictus. Instead, the Electors would return to running city fiefs as individual realms, so that a Guild recognized in one city had no claim vis-à-vis a Guild recognized in another.

The First Council's decisions on regularizing titles and etiquette were retained, however, as all recognized that it was valuable for the Invictus to remain recognizably a single covenant and for those few Kindred who did move between cities to be able to integrate as quickly as possible into the Invictus of their new home. As the Final Council closed, the Imperial Court itself was closed, never to be used again.

Did It Happen?

The story of the Imperial Years of the Invictus is not completely coherent, as a number of young Kindred delight in pointing out. Why would all the elders gather for two great Councils, traveling impossibly across the dark between cities when civil war was imminent? The story of the First Council strongly suggests that Aelfgifu was using the mystic force of her blood to push all the elders into submission — why did they accept that? Why is there no record of the identity of the Emperor, even in the memories of those Kindred who claim to have been there? Where, exactly, was the Imperial Court, and why does no city claim it in current nights?

Some Kindred claim that the whole story is merely a parable, warning of the dangers of both excessive competition and excessive unity within the Invictus, and thus serving to prop up the regimes of contemporary Princes. This has a certain plausibility. Whatever the Emperor once was, tonight he is a symbol of the terrible risk that comes with an elected ruler.

And yet . . . A few very old Kindred remember the Invictus Emperor. No one remembers who the Emperor

was, but even members of other covenants also remember him existing, although they had little to do with him. Small references to the Florentine/Pisan division in the last years of the Emperor abound in contemporary documents. There are Invictus elders who believe they remember being Electors and being present at both Councils, and their memories agree as much as can be expected after so much time and so many torpors.

Some Invictus Kindred believe that the Imperial Years did happen, but that much more than the identity of the Emperor was erased from the historical record. Some Kindred worry about the power that is strong enough to rewrite not only history but the recollections of those who made that history.

Most modern Society vampires don't buy into the fairy tale, though, and they've found plenty of historical evidence to discount the tale. The most popular of the modern interpretations is that the Emperor Myth is, in truth, a tale of the end of the Camarilla, redressed in medieval costumes for a medieval audience, much as all biblical and many classical tales of the time were recast. The very presence of "Electors" in the legend even suggests that electoral systems are historically proven to be flawed — some Kindred in and out of Society believe such references may have been added to influence a population gradually hearing ancient tales of democratic Greece and getting ideas.

What is true and what is false in the Emperor Myth may be impossible for contemporary Kindred to know. Even the eldest among the Invictus have been rumored to say, "The facts of the story mean nothing anymore. It's too late for blame. The truth of it does not tarnish, and that is all we need know." In the modern night, what really matters to the covenant is that the story is a point of reference for many Kindred of Quality. All the Invictus should beware the fate of the Emperor, who was both conquered and ignored.

New Worlds

The Age of Exploration brought new worlds to the attention of Europeans and European Kindred. The rhetoric of the age was that these worlds were empty and ripe for the picking, but the Invictus were wise enough not to believe their own rhetoric.

Invictus expeditions to establish new domains in the new worlds — African, Asian and American — were backed up with significant resources, and helped greatly to consolidate Invictus power in the Old World. In those cities where there were disputes within the Invictus or elders with power that matched and even threatened the Prince, the members of one side would be sent by the other to follow the kine and establish a new colony.

This could be seen as exile and, of course, it was. However, many Invictus Princes took care to supply those who were being exiled with a great deal of assistance and large amounts of resources, to give them as high a chance of success as possible. Where rivalry was political rather than



personal, the exiles accepted this as a good deal. Rather than fight against entrenched leaders at home, they could go, with resources from their rivals, to establish new power bases in new places, where they would at least have the advantage of being an unknown quantity.

A few of these arrangements became famous. One popular Society account that may even be true is the tale of the Prince of Boston, in England, who faced a cyclical dynasty as a rival, a dynasty that had previously ruled the city. House Carder had lost power during the Black Death, when Margery Shepherd had claimed power in the chaotic aftermath. She proved to be an adept politician, and the House had yet to unseat her. When Boston was founded in the New World, Margery offered to resign the rulership of the English city, in return for support in establishing herself overseas. House Carder agreed, eager to have their old fief back. The agreement was celebrated at the foot of Boston Stump, and Margery sailed for the New World. As the English Boston declined and the American Boston rose, the Kindred of House Carder realized they had made a mistake. They petitioned Margery, still Prince of the American city, and traveled across the ocean themselves, serving as members of her Primogen for decades. Finally, Margery fell from power, and House Carder established itself as Princes of Boston once more, in a city far larger and more powerful than their old base.

Around the same time, the Prince of Florence was faced with a Speaker's Guild, led by Meister Michelangelo, which was growing in its ability to oppose the Prince's policies, without ever actually making a bid for praxis itself. The final straw reputedly came in a night meeting on the Ponte Vecchio, when Meister Michelangelo suggested to the Prince that the Guild would assert its authority over Pisa if certain demands were not met. The prospect of reawakening the Florentine/Pisan debate terrified the elders of the city, as Meister Michelangelo had intended, but the result was not exactly what he had planned.

The Prince summoned him to a private audience, and offered him the choice of the full backing of the Prince and Primogen to take his whole Guild and set up in an American city, at that time still a colony, or of being the subject of a blood hunt. The support offered was generous, and Meister Michelangelo realized that he could not count on unseating the Prince if he chose to stay and fight. He chose to leave, and took most of his Guild with him. The members of the group that survived the perilous, torpid journey west established themselves in America, but Meister Michelangelo chose to play a less prominent role in politics this time, rather serving as an adviser. The Guild leadership has passed to other Kindred now, but its members are still prominent in their American domain, even though the place is not ruled by an Invictus Prince. They also continue to maintain formal links to the Prince of Florence, though these are now little more than an annual letter and gift sent in each direction.

What many young vampires fail to understand about the emigration of Kindred from the Old World to the New is how little planning was involved in the Invictus' colonial efforts compared to those of England, France and Spain. The first Society vampires who came to America — and the story is much the same in other colonial nations — were typically unwanted, expendable or miserably restless in Europe, much like their mortal counterparts. What made the undead colonization of the New World so different was how little one colonist had to do with any other. There never was a central Invictus "crown" to declare the age of colonization begun. Rather, Princes of countless cities each chose, over time, to support individual plans to brave the sunlit seas into the west for the sake of preserving Invictus dominance wherever the night could be found.

Thus, those first nights in the colonies were haphazard and terrifying for the Damned of the Invictus. Knights errant, colonists and trailblazers looking to secure their own domains collided in the Americas and Africa when they followed the kine into new forts and cities, never knowing if they were stepping into another vampire's territory and never sure that they had the practical power necessary to take what they wanted. The Invictus name brought fear and respect with it, even across the Atlantic, but even two Society Kindred couldn't be sure they were truly on the same side. They couldn't send word back to their lords in Europe asking for guidance, reinforcements or mediation, because the Princes of the Old World had no praxis in the New. Even if they had, why would a Kindred of Quality vying for the blood of Jamestown defer to the word of your Prince when his Prince is the highest Kindred authority he recognizes?

The nature of colonization among the Invictus also further separated the Damned of the New World from the kine they hunted. Whereas in Europe a vampire was often dwelling in the nighttime sister to a city he already knew, populated by generations of the undead with claims and rights and entitlement throughout the city, the Damned of the colonies were often alone — unless they Embraced childer of their own. That was the keystone in the architecture of the future of almost every Invictus colonist, even though they each developed their plans on their own; the Invictus do not have so many different ways of arriving at a good thought, after all.

The Invictus in the New World kept their patience and bore their own colonial families very slowly, while the kine multiplied around them. All the early vampires had to do was support themselves and hold out until the mortal populations swelled enough to support more predators in their midst. For many Invictus vampires, this meant sending neonates into the west who could feed on animals and would not be missed at court. For others, this meant simply making it to the shores of Virginia and Massachusetts and finding a deep hole to hide in for a decade or so, while the herds populated the hillsides.

When the kine had finished building cities for the Invictus — like slaves building pyramids for Pharaoh —

the Invictus was reborn in the New World, free and cut off from the Old. Each new Prince was like an orphan who left to find his fortune and never looked back. And each had the freedom and the authority to redefine what it meant to be Invictus in his new domain.

Recent Nights

For the Invictus, the last two centuries are all part of current events. There are elders who have been in torpor since the United States was a group of English colonies — and even those who have been more active might only now be acknowledging that this country seems to have some staying power as a political entity. Elders are used to wars convulsing large portions of their known world and to plagues carrying off large numbers of kine. For some Invictus elders, the broad stroke of recent history is just a recast version of the oldest human stories of woe and blood and distraction.

The rest of the world may not agree. Most notable within Kindred society has been the rise of the Carthians. The Carthians are almost exactly the opposite of the Invictus, seeking to overthrow everything that the elder covenant stands for, and they attract a lot of support among neonates and even ancilla.

As a result, the Invictus is facing a crisis that many of its elders do not, on balance, even see as a problem: there are too few young vampires joining the covenant. Contemporary neonates see the Invictus as hidebound, and with too few opportunities for advancement. There are few remaining open cities to which they could lead colonization efforts with the support of the Inner Circle, and the grip of Invictus elders on the levers of power seems as secure as ever. Many elders, particularly the members of cyclical dynasties, do not see this as a problem. They see no need for weak, undisciplined, young Kindred in the covenant, and claim that they can always recruit from those older vampires who come to see the merits of Invictus philosophy as their Requiems progress.

A few of the more far-sighted elders, however, have accepted that the world really is changing, faster than ever before. Human nature and — even more so — Kindred nature might be the same as ever, but the ability to contact someone on the other side of the planet at a moment's notice really does make a difference to the way human nature plays out. These elders are worried that the covenant does not have the flexibility to adapt its structures to new conditions, and that the result will be anarchy as adaptable neonates take advantage of new technology to unseat their betters. The elders are convinced that this would be a bad thing; new toys do not change Kindred nature, so rule by elders is still required.

The more optimistic of these elders point out that the covenant has weathered major changes in society before, and have started making their own moves to be among those who flourish in the new world. The more pessimistic worry that the Invictus may have to be all but destroyed before the clear need for good rulership leads Kindred to recreate it.





Chapter Two: UNLIFE IN THE INVICTUS

"Nobility is in the blood we take
and the blood we keep,
the blood we spill
and the blood we seek."

— Proverb of the Invictus

*I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls, With vassals
and serfs at my side, And of all who assembled
within those walls, That I was the hope and the pride.*

— Alfred Bunn, *Bohemian Girl*

Etiquette and Protocol

Etiquette, protocol or simply good manners — in the First Estate, there's very definitely a right and wrong way to behave. The covenant steeps its activities in formality, from a grand ball in the Prince's honor to a private meeting between business partners. Invictus members often show the same formality when dealing with other Kindred. The Invictus uses the other vampire's title, and insists on the same courtesy in return.

Other Kindred sometimes make fun of the First Estate's obsession with elaborate manners. Invictus members can seem like pompous, stuffed shirts as they bow and make grandiloquent speeches. The covenant is deadly serious about its etiquette, though. Good manners alone won't raise Kindred to eminence in the Invictus, but a vampire who will not learn the covenant's codes of conduct will never receive any rank or respect, no matter what his achievements.

Honorifics, formal wear, the nuances of bows, curtsies and genuflections and other small social rituals are a way to show respect for another vampire. (See p. 44 for the details of Invictus etiquette.) Junior members of the Invictus must acknowledge the rank and, by extension, the achievements of their superiors. The covenant does not see this as a degrading show of submission. Bowing to an elder — or even a full genuflection, in the most tradition-bound Invictus groups — shows that you know and honor the elder's power. Likewise, you dress your best when presented to a superior: she honors you simply by allowing you to be in the same room with her. You should show you appreciate the honor. Anyone who doesn't show such respect would merely demonstrate his own ignorance and folly.

In the First Estate's culture of patronage, those who show respect receive it in return. Not much, maybe — a neonate with no great achievements to his name does not deserve any deference from an elder of high rank — but enough to show that the covenant's leaders accept their juniors as fellow members of their august company.

Customs of Address

Titles and honorifics are a close indicator of respect as well as formal rank. The greater the difference in Status between two Invictus, the more formality the lower-ranking member shows. An Invictus neonate

would not speak to a Prince, Primogen or Priscus unless commanded to do so; and then, he would address her as *Your Excellency*, *My lady* or some other honorific. Only a member of equal rank would dare even to say *Sir*. Any Invictus in good standing, however, can expect to be addressed as *Mister*, *Miss* or *Madam*, with the vampire's surname. (Some Invictus consider *Ms.* to be modern barbarism.) If a higher-ranking Invictus addressed a junior by his *first name*, she would demonstrate a complete lack of respect — even contempt, as if the Kindred were merely a servant or a childe. Even a servant or childe would never be addressed by some abbreviation or diminution of his first name or a nickname. Any vampire who has a high-ranking Invictus address him so familiarly knows his career in the covenant is over — or at least in grave danger.

Solidarity

Punctilious codes of conduct help to distinguish Invictus members from non-members, establishing the Invictus as a class apart from other vampires. An insider knows when he may speak and when he must remain silent. He knows the covenant's special turns of speech, and when to use them. He knows what gestures of honor or submission to make, and how to perform them gracefully. Most importantly, perhaps, he shows that he respects the covenant enough to learn its complicated rules. He reassures other members of his determination to stay in the Invictus. They know they can deal with him without fear he'll skip off to another covenant and abandon his commitments.

Defusing Conflict

By encasing every act in rituals of courtesy, the Invictus prevents open warfare between its members — no small task in a society built on ambition. Among such proud predators, any hint of weakness might provoke a challenge, any breath of insult might provoke a vendetta. Members hide behind the dance of etiquette, so that other members see only the privileges and obligations of their rank — not that the Gangrel Priscus loathes the Prince, the Seneschal is smitten with the Sheriff's childe and the Mekhet delegate to the Inner Circle suffers a paranoid fear of everyone.

Etiquette also gives Invictus members a way to compete and attack each other without risking anyone's

unlives. Trying to kill another member, or seizing property such as hunting turf or a business, could lead to all-out war as the disputants call in their allies. It's much safer for everyone to maneuver an enemy into a humiliating *faux pas* or into a situation in which he must grant a boon or lose face. Even the proudest elders accept their occasional losses in the social arena — because they have forever to turn the tables on their erstwhile victor.

Then again, sometimes one Invictus insults another by accident. For instance, one member's childe might unwittingly hunt in another member's domain. Graceful manners and scripted rites of contrition let both Kindred back away from the situation without looking weak. Once the insulting member acts out the proper formula of regret, the target must act out the proper formula of forgiveness. If he does not, he's the one who looks weak — too uncertain of his power and reputation to let the insult drop.

Humanity

The last reason for Invictus etiquette remains unspoken. The stiff formality of ritual helps Invictus members act human. Elders, in particular, may have lost more of themselves to the Beast than they'd like to show. Precise rules of conduct create a mask that hides their monstrosity — from themselves, as well as other Kindred. When Invictus members no longer feel empathy for other creatures, and even the prudence of the Masquerade becomes remote, at least they know one reason why they shouldn't rip out a convenient, tasty mortal's throat. It's *not the right time and place* for such activities, and one *doesn't make a mess* when feeding.

In the same way, social rituals help elder Kindred hide the madness that so often comes from long torpors and the horrors of their own existence. A deranged vampire can at least go through the motions of courtesy and protocol even if he's gibbering inside.

Order Against the Beast

Indeed, the Invictus as a whole functions to protect its members' Humanity against the Beast. Wealth and power insulate Kindred from the brutality and degradation of their existence. A successful Invictus doesn't have to stalk and overpower her prey; she can drink her blood from a snifter, and not think of the servant opening his own veins in the kitchen. She can sit in her private box and listen to the opera, instead of screams in an alley and a victim's death-rattle when she's lost control of her hunger. She can give money to fashionable charities, hobnob with politicians and celebrities and tell herself she's not a monster. And when she must do something terrible, she can tell herself it isn't her fault: it's the rules, an obligation placed on her by her superiors or by duty. The First Estate must

subject its members to the harsh winnowing of the competition for power, so that the Invictus may remain Unconquered and rule with an iron hand. Anything less would let the world slide into chaos, endangering Kindred and kine alike.

Titles and Offices

In a society of strict hierarchy and adherence to tradition such as the Invictus, it is always important that each member not only knows his place, but makes his rank clear to all who meet him so that they may address him with the proper deference or authority. Announcement of personal standing, relevant relations and profession are deeply important, as they define the limits of acceptable behavior. To that end, an array of titles and terms of address have been refined, over the centuries, into a relatively comprehensive set designed to describe one's place in the covenant as clearly and concisely as possible.

The terms of address used by the Invictus are carefully calculated to indicate the flavor of relations enjoyed between the speaker and the listener. Professional respect, formal courtesy or platonic intimacy are all codified, and can have much effect on the context of any declaration.

In addition, there are three types of titles accorded to each member: titles of esteem, titles of tribute and titles of function, which describe, respectively, who you are, how important you are to the covenant and what you do. Everyone bears a title of esteem, but the only acceptable way to append a title of tribute or function to your name is to earn it.

When two Invictus vampires meet for the first time, it is considered proper for them to be introduced by a third party who makes use of both members' full titles, helping each to understand their comparative rankings and determine how they will comport themselves. If a third party is unavailable and withdrawal is unavoidable, the vampire who has initiated the meeting (even if it is accidental) is expected to introduce herself with full title and allow the other to respond in kind.

Titles of the Invictus are related directly to a vampire's age, achievements, lineage and professional office, and none are to be treated lightly. The bearer of an impressive set of titles earns the admiration of the Invictus, and rightly so, for she must be a great citizen of the covenant to have received them. While it is theoretically possible to earn "hollow titles" through careerist manipulations, an honor poorly gained is almost always exposed and stripped away from the underhanded vampire in question, leaving him with less regard than before he partook of his foolish enterprise. If the practice of revering those who deserve accolade and deriding those who pretend to misapplied honors is maintained with absolute strictness, all members of the

Invictus have confidence in their covenant and incentive to strive for recognition through genuine achievements. If, on the other hand, the practice is poorly upheld, the covenant faces the threat of dissolution by a mass of frustrated, purposeless and disrespectful Kindred. Titles seem like such small, simple things to prop up the Invictus, but understand: in a world where money, beauty and physical power are all too easily attained, the only real measure of a worthwhile vampire is her reputation.

Titles of Esteem

Titles of esteem are the most common in the covenant — every neonate gains one the moment the Embrace takes hold. They are also the most malleable, changing with age and with the nature of a vampire's relationship to his local compatriots.

When a vampire is Embraced but still undergoing the instruction of his sire (and not yet officially a member of Invictus society), the neonate is referred to as *Master* if male and *Miss* if female. When the neonate enters Invictus society, and for some time thereafter, the vampire is referred to as *Mister* if male and *Madam* if female. If the vampire ages well beyond the average of the city's vampire populace, the title of esteem changes to *Alder* and remains thus from then on.

Of course, these simple titles do not usually paint a complete enough picture on their own, so they are subject to a number of variations based on clan relations and blood ties to the speaker.

A RULE OF THUMB

It's all well and good to say that vampires earn their titles, but how does a Storyteller decide what makes a fair application in game terms? A simple measure may be to compare the number of titles the character has with her level of Covenant Status. If the numbers match up, or differ by just one more or less, everything is as it should be. If the Status outweighs the number of titles, it's probably time to bestow a new one on the character. If the titles outweigh the Status, the character is either a less-respected, multi-disciplined professional or is bound to have a title or two stripped from him one night.

While this seems a simple measure, it does work out pretty well. Players never have to ask how much Covenant Status an NPC has if they keep this rule of thumb in mind. Thus, for example, when they meet "Madam Dolores" they know they're dealing with a relatively common member, while "The Right Honorable Alder Dolores, Marquise of Seattle, Advocate and Meister Interpreter" may be the most important vampire they'll ever meet.

If the vampire happens to be related by blood to the introducing speaker, a title to explain the relationship is appended to the name. For instance, in the example above, if the speaker introducing Vivian were her grandchilde, the proper introduction would be "*May I present the Alder Lady Vivian, Speaker — my*



grandsire.” Likewise, *sire*, *childe*, *sibling*, *aunt* and *uncle* are common terms.

When speaking of a sibling or cousin, it is sometimes convenient to indicate the relative order of Embrace. Generally, *sibling major* is the accepted term for an elder sibling, *sibling minor* for a younger one.

It is exceedingly offensive to append an incorrect age discriminator onto a title of esteem. In fact, *sire minor* is a deeply derogatory term, suggesting that one's sire is more a burden than an example to be followed, while *childe major* refers to an upstart with pretensions to superiority over his betters.

Members of the same clan who are not close blood relatives may customarily be referred to as *cousin*. Once again, the rules of relative age apply, so one may refer to a *cousin major* or *cousin minor* if the distinction seems necessary.

Those who share a bloodline with the speaker but are somehow not close blood relatives are sometimes referred to as a *close cousin* or *blooded brethren* whenever it seems appropriate to reveal the nature of their relationship.

Titles of Tribute

Officially deeded to Invictus vampires who distinguish themselves in service to the covenant, titles of tribute are the rarest and most sought after of all awards. It is a rare achievement to impress the Inner Circle of one's city, and rarer still for them to acknowledge their appreciation with tribute.

Some titles of tribute follow. Note that “Prince” is not a title of tribute — it is an office, held in vampire society at large. It is possible (and quite expected) for a Prince to hold one of the titles listed below.

Lord/Lady: Bestowed upon a vampire for honorable service to the Invictus, normally marking an achievement of some merit. The measure of merit differs from city to city, and has a lot to do with the power level enjoyed by the covenant in the domain, as well as the standing and relations of the Kindred in question. Some vampires earn the title merely by being the inoffensive childer of an extremely prestigious sire, while less fortunate vampires spend decades fighting tooth and claw to climb so high.

Baron/Baroness: Bestowed upon a Lord or Lady vampire who has distinguished himself or herself on several occasions, with honor and valor above and beyond the call of duty. Unlike Lord/Lady, this title is never given purely based on lineage, and is considered (by the haughtier members of the covenant) the lowest “true” title of tribute.

Viscount: Bestowed upon a vampire who is given permanent domain within the territories of the Invictus. The vampire so titled appends the name of his domain to the title (for example, *The Viscount of Soho*). If the

vampire loses control of the domain in question for any reason, he remains a Viscount, but the domain is no longer acknowledged in the name. *The Good* precedes the Viscount's name in introductions. No more than one vampire may hold this title for a domain at a time. Only Final Death or a declaration of the Inner Circle can free the title to be conferred upon another.

Earl: Bestowed upon a vampire who conquers a domain, adding it to the territories of the Invictus and earning the right to rule it (as determined by the Inner Circle). The vampire so titled appends the name of her domain to the title (for example, *The Earl of Montmartre*). As with a Viscount, an Earl who loses control of her domain must remove it from her title. *The Honorable* precedes the Earl's name in introductions. No more than one vampire may hold this title for a domain at a time. Only Final Death or a declaration of the Inner Circle can free the title to be conferred upon another.

LOSING A TITLE OF TRIBUTE

Just as gaining titles of tribute should be rare and momentous for a character, losing one should be almost unheard of. Just receiving the title in the first place tends to take accomplishments of great note, and its conferment indicates a position of permanent adulation. Nobody should be stripped of a tribute without having committed a truly devastating crime against the covenant.

When a vampire is stripped of tribute, a public (or at least embarrassingly witnessed) ceremony of humiliation and punishment is often held. The Inner Circle makes an open declaration of disappointment, officially removing the title forever after. It is not entirely unheard of for this ceremony to end with the disgraced vampire's exile, defection or self-destruction.

Marquis/Marquise: Bestowed upon a vampire who is given permanent place on the Inner Circle of a city. This is an extremely high honor, suggesting that no fault or mishap could ever diminish the influence this vampire has within the Invictus. This title is normally given to one who has clearly altered the course of history within the city to the covenant's advantage, and without whom (it is acknowledged), all would have been lost. The name of the city in question is appended to the title (for example, *The Marquis of Florence*). No more than one vampire may hold this title in a city at a time. Traditionally, only Final Death or permanent exile can free the title to be conferred upon another. *The Right Honorable* precedes the name of a Marquis or Marquise in introduction.

Duke/Duchess: Bestowed upon a vampire who is held responsible for conquering a city and establishing a strong base of power for lasting rule by the

Invictus. A Duke or Duchess is customarily given a permanent place in the Inner Circle of the city he or she has secured, as well as permanent personal rule over a domain within the city. The name of the city in question is appended to the title (for example, *The Duke of Sydney*). No more than one Invictus vampire may traditionally hold this title in a city's history. Even Final Death does not free the title for conferring upon another, though in modern nights this practice is relaxed somewhat if the Invictus are forced to re-conquer a city following a prolonged period of absence. Thus, a few cities hold Kindred with titles such as "the Second Duke of Glasgow." *His Grace* or *Her Grace* precedes the name of a Duke or Duchess in introduction.

Titles of Function

Many vampires in the Invictus prefer to declare a profession, underscoring the value of their contributions to the covenant in the city and ensuring that nobody ever needs to ask that tedious question, what do you do?

Following is a comprehensive list of acknowledged "professions of worth" in many Invictus domains. It is possible to create a new or unusual title of function, but a vampire who chooses to do so must be careful: anything too strange or modern (by local standards) may raise eyebrows and undermine confidence in one's ability to play a "worthwhile" role. In fact, there are cities where the Inner Circle even considers some of the positions in this list unacceptable — it's all a matter of the upper crust's tastes.

None of these titles are self-declared. Ordinarily, a vampire either completes Guild schooling in subjects relevant to the profession, earning the title upon graduation, or (in the absence of a skilled mentor) demonstrates his ability before the Inner Circle, earning the right to append the title if and only if the Council gives leave.

Normally, formal rules of address dictate that a vampire is referred to by her title of esteem, then title of function. For example: *Mister Secretary*, *Madam Interpreter*, *Alder Reeve*. Common exceptions to this rule are noted in the list below.

Note that the titles of function that refer to offices of the city are used only to describe Invictus vampires who hold those offices. One would not refer to a Hound who is not a member of the covenant as "Archon," for example, unless the Prince so dictated.

It is possible for a vampire to hold multiple titles of function. Some titles supersede all others (as noted below), but most do not. In matters of formal address, vampires with multiple titles of function are referred to by the title that most applies to the situation at hand, or the one for which they are most famous.

Advisor: An Invictus title for a member of the Primogen. There are Advisors' Guilds, involving courses of study in politics, academic debate, expression and emotional manipulation, among others. Many vampires who are thus schooled never actually take on the title, but the skills offered are so valuable, especially when taught by a Meister, that they may prove indispensable anyway. Of course, when offered the choice between a schooled Advisor and an amateur, most Princes pick the latter for their table.

Advocate: A specialist in public relations or activism to promote the interests of the covenant. Advocates may be called upon to make public speeches at city gatherings to help sway the general opinion of local vampires to favor the Invictus or to recruit outsiders to the covenant. Some Advocates are charming and well-spoken, representing the ideal of the Invictus to outsiders, while other Advocates are social chameleons, respected for their ability to address outsiders on their own terms, in their own language. Many Advocates, of course, double as spies for the covenant.

Almoner: A vampire who makes it a profession to care for the less fortunate, either in Kindred or mortal society or both. While dedication to this task attracts genuinely charitable vampires, it can be undertaken with some cynicism as well. At best, a good Almoner strengthens the domain and ensures that no one is driven to desperation by his circumstances, if possible. At worst, a skilled Almoner chooses the timing of his "kindness" with devilish precision, using his caring to manipulate the affections of the downtrodden and direct them according to his whim.

Archon: The Invictus title for a Hound. Archons may be trained in tactical strategy, investigative techniques and practical criminal skills. It is said that the Archons of the Invictus are unparalleled in dedication, experience and tenacious resolve.

Au Pair: A specialist in elementary training for neonates: basic vampire survival and etiquette, Discipline use and Masquerade preservation skills. Au Pairs are often called upon to verify that an Invictus child is ready to be considered a responsible member of the community and, if necessary, to "work out" any unacceptable opinions or habits the neonate has accumulated in her mortal life.

Commissioner: A vampire trained in the judicious distribution of resources. Generally, a Commissioner is called upon to administer plans that require the coordination of several vampires' material goods or contacts. Deals involving a sizable transfer of resources from the Invictus to outsider Kindred are almost always brokered by a professional Commissioner. It is also a Commissioner's duty to ensure the stability of the covenant's investments in a city.

Councilor: A member of the Inner Circle. This title supersedes any other title of function the vampire may possess except, of course, Prince.

Groom: A keeper of herds. This may refer to mortals or animals. Note that the function of a Groom is very different from an Almoner; a Groom is expected to keep the herd in superior condition and may be called upon to provide herds with specific qualities and training. This, as can well be imagined, is not always to the benefit of the members of the herd. If an elder vampire (or, really, anyone with sufficient influence) wishes to secure a “pedigree” mortal or creature for private purposes, a good Groom can be relied upon to produce a qualified candidate. Some Grooms even specialize in finding or preparing promising candidates for Embrace.

Interpreter: A translator and specialist in matters of subterfuge. An Interpreter must be able to interpret the motives of his subject as well as the language spoken. Many Interpreters work in conjunction with Speakers. It is worthwhile to note that Interpreter is the respectable cover a good number of dilettante vampires take on, especially since the education is easily misapplied to gambling, confidence schemes and other distasteful activities.

Judex: A professional judge and settler of disputes within the covenant. Advocates, Interpreters, Notaries and Senators are most likely to take on the position of Judex, but the Inner Circle is by no means restricted in its choice. Any fair-minded vampire with a reputation for honesty and a distinct lack of questionable associations could easily fill the role. If one takes this position, the title of Judex supersedes one’s previous title of function until the title of Judex is relinquished.

Knight: An oathsworn soldier. Distinguished from a Soldier by membership in an established Order of Knighthood with its own traditions and oaths of conduct. Orders of Knighthood replace titles of esteem with *Sir* or *Dame*, for male and female Knights, respectively. Formal address is *Sir Knight* or *Dame Knight*.

Librettist: A professional connoisseur of arts and entertainments. A Librettist may be called upon to arrange entertainment for Invictus events or to advise covenant members on the quality and authenticity of valuable works of art. A Librettist will often work in close company with a Steward, overseeing and verifying the undiluted quality of his collection. Of course, Librettists must be educated in processes of forgery to ensure that their discerning eyes cannot be fooled. This education may be put to more practical (but less honest) uses, if one is so inclined — but a librettist caught trying to pass a forgery off as a legitimate piece will lose her professional title and may suffer irreparable damage to her reputation.

Meister: An acknowledged expert and instructor in any field of study who oversees a Guild. The formal mode

of address is simply *Meister* for both male and female vampires. The title of esteem is not used if this is the only title of function the vampire possesses. One may become a Meister of a single, specific subject, a number of subjects or a collection of related courses of study (for example, *Meister of Medicine*, *Meister of Medicine and Education* or *Meister of Grooms*). Meister is the only title of function that appends to all other titles instead of being superseded. For instance, a vampire who is both an Advisor and a Meister would bear the two titles. In many English-speaking domains, this title is replaced with *Master*, though that term is often also used to refer to one’s sire, grandsires or mentors as well.

Minister: The Invictus title for a Herald. The ideal Invictus Minister is multilingual, capable of delivering a personal oral or written message to any member of the city’s Kindred community on demand. Ministers are often schooled as Interpreters or Speakers before taking on this position. If one takes this position, the title of Minister supersedes one’s previous title of function until the title of Minister is relinquished.

Notary: A professional witness to declarations and recitations of oaths. A Notary may be called upon to authenticate both the content and context of any vow or oath he has borne witness to. A Notary must have a reputation for strict honesty, and will also find himself relied upon for general reportage. Many Notaries thus become the oral “journalists” of the Invictus, reporting events of note to their compatriots in regular sessions. Some become Harpies, but many shy away from such a clearly political position, preferring to maintain the appearance of neutrality.

Player: A professional artist or performer. The term refers to creative arts as well, so a painter is still formally referred to as a Player. A good number of Invictus vampires who choose not to involve themselves in the workings of society take refuge in the solitary pursuit of the arts, allowing them to maintain respectability without requiring dedication to extroverted behavior. Players seeking the accolades of the Invictus would be well advised to befriend a recognized Librettist.

Prince: The city position of Prince.

Priscus: The city position of Priscus. This is a position conferred by right of age, and requires no training.

Reeve: An Invictus title for a Sheriff. A Reeves are customarily trained as an Archon, rising to this position by dint of impeccable service after the position is vacated (or, occasionally, by demonstrating superiority to the current holder of the title). As with Archons, Invictus Reeves bear a formidable reputation for steadiness and efficiency. If one takes this position, the title of Reeve supersedes one’s previous title of function until the title of Reeve is relinquished.

Secretary: The governor of Guilds in a city. Without acknowledgement from the Secretary, a Guild may

not officially exist. Secretaries are also academics by profession, but are distinguished from Senators and Au Pairs by their administration of the Invictus schools in a city. A Secretary may be called upon to advise a Meister in methods of discipline and instruction. Each Secretary also keeps a list of the recognized Invictus professionals in a city, and can be called upon to verify one's claim to a title of function. Because Secretaries hold the power to officially recognize or disband a Guild, they are often extremely influential. They may, after all, determine what is or is not "proper" for neonates to learn in a given domain.

Senator: A professional philosopher and advisor; may be called upon to give counsel on spiritual matters or interpret occult occurrences. Senators are nearly always dedicated specialists, obsessed (or very nearly so) with the minutiae of their chosen field of study. It is quite difficult to gain the title of Senator — while there are many Guilds of Philosophy, the Inner Circle of a given city is only likely to bestow this title on a vampire they truly believe to be wise and capable of valuable insights.

Seneschal: The city position of Seneschal. Most Invictus Seneschals are schooled as Speakers, Notaries or Stewards. If one takes this position, the title of Seneschal supersedes one's previous title of function until the title of Seneschal is relinquished.

Soldier: A professional warrior who is not sworn to an Order of Knights. Since Soldiers are not bound by the detailed Oaths of Knighthood, many become mercenary warriors and assassins. While they may not be viewed with the same admiration, Soldiers are no less skilled than Knights, and many prefer to trade a lower reputation for relative autonomy.

Speaker: A specialist in matters of etiquette and diplomacy. Speakers can expect to be called upon to handle delicate negotiations with members of other covenants. Speakers are also trained in expressive, formal styles of writing and may be hired to write official letters for any number of purposes (including a petition for Guild membership, a formal challenge to monomacy or almost any communication with an elder). Almost every Invictus Harpy is a Speaker.

Steward: A preserver of valuable artifacts. A Steward may also be an individual who has taken responsibility for an elder vampire in torpor, ensuring that all arrangements are made to welcome him back when he wakes, and caring for him, if necessary. There is training for both types of Stewards — the former is likely to focus on the practical application of academic knowledge (for instance, the construction and upkeep of a display case for a priceless ancient document), while the latter will learn the skills necessary to arrange an estate and ease a sleep-addled vampire into the modern nights. Stewards of this latter sort are often derided by their compatriots

for performing duties normally assigned to a servant — but the gratitude of a recently risen elder can be more than worth the sacrifice.

Technologist: An expert in the study and application of Disciplines, including the experimental development of new Devotions, categorization of bloodline-specific powers and observations of other "foreign" abilities (such as Theban Sorcery or Crúac). Technologists are expected to fully understand at least one Discipline in all its varied functions, and may be called upon to identify its use or attempt to track an effect back to its origin. Naturally, Technologists must double as skilled investigators and occultists. Many Old World cities will not acknowledge this as a legitimate profession, often because the studies required can involve a dangerously selfish pursuit of power. That lesson was learned after a catastrophic coup attempt by members of a Technologist's Guild in the south of Spain some centuries ago; news of that event has been spreading slowly ever since. However, Technologists' skills are appreciated by the more intelligent Invictus.

Whip: The city position of Whip. Ideal Whips are trained as Interpreters or Grooms. If one takes this position, the title of Whip supersedes one's previous title of function until the title of Whip is relinquished.

Terms of Address

The manner in which one chooses to address a fellow member of the covenant is no less important than the title of the vampire in question. To that end, there are several options available in discussion: the submissive, the formal, the familiar, the intimate and the disparaging.

One must be careful with terms of address. More than one Judex has authorized the expulsion or execution of a hapless vampire who felt safe using inappropriate terminology in reference to a powerful member of the covenant. A single slip of the tongue can lead to a demand for embarrassing apologies or the taking on of crippling boons just to repair the damage done.

For the sake of illustration, let us imagine a discussion about three individuals, whose full titles are *The Right Honorable Alder Dolores*, *Marquise of Seattle* and *Meister Interpreter*, *The Alder Lady Vivian*, *Speaker* and *Mister Jeffrey Wright*.

To refer to an individual in the **submissive** voice, one precedes the name with *Most*, an ingratiating (and complimentary) term, and the title of tribute (if there is one — the title of esteem if there is not), followed by the vampire's name, if and only if the title of tribute is not unique. For example, our three Kindred mentioned above might be spoken of as *The Most Magnificent Marquise of Seattle*, *The Most Eloquent Lady Vivian* and *The Most Admirable Mister Wright*. If addressing the vampire directly, the "*The*" and any specific details of title are

dropped from the phrase and only the last name is used (i.e., “*Most Magnificent Marquise, I beg you*” or “*Most Admirable Mister Wright, I must protest*”).

Speech in the submissive tone is recommended for any one who wishes to underscore his own inferiority to the vampire in question, most especially in attempts to ingratiate himself. The submissive tone speaks volumes when used in a public discussion: this tone may indicate, among other things, an oath of servitude to the individual named, a genuine admission of chaste admiration or a cowering fear. Note that making use of the submissive voice can be dangerous — if the slightest hint of sarcasm is suspected, the address becomes an insult. But, of course, some powerful members of the covenant will tolerate no other form of address from their lessers.

An address in the **formal** tone is a simple combination of the titles of esteem and function. If the vampire being addressed has no title of function, then his last name will suffice. For example: *Alder Meister*, *Alder Speaker* or *Mister Wright*. If a vampire bears more than one title of function, the one that most applies to the discussion at hand is chosen. This is generally the safest and most common mode of address in the Invictus. This mode of address is entirely neutral.

To speak in the **familiar** voice, one combines the title of esteem and the vampire’s first name. Our two vampires in the example would be referred to as *Alder Dolores*, *Alder Vivian* and *Mister Jeffrey* respectively.

It is respectful to use the familiar tone when speaking of close blood relatives, whereas using formal address

would indicate a certain coldness in one’s family relations. One also tends to refer to one’s coterie-mates in this mode unless special circumstances apply.

Using the familiar tone in reference to a distinct superior can invite a wrathful response. Of course, if it does not, then the rest of the members of the covenant will know you are being allowed to do so. This, in itself, can speak volumes about one’s social standing.

To refer to a vampire in the **intimate** voice, one simply states his name. In our example: *Dolores*, *Vivian* and *Jeffrey*, respectively.

Intimate references are only meant to be made to those who are (or have been) lovers. Misapplication of this mode of address can have disastrous results — or hilarious ones, depending on whether or not one is capable of weathering scandal. After all, in the halls of the Invictus, a quick throwaway reference to another vampire by her first name only will be taken as the public announcement of a romantic affair.

And, finally, if one wishes to make a **disparaging** reference to an Invictus vampire, one precedes the title of tribute (if there is one) with the word *My*, and appends the vampire’s name (if the title of tribute is not unique). So for our examples: *My Marquise*, *My Lady Vivian* and *My Mister Wright*, respectively. The effect is one of belittlement, and thus this mode of address is appropriate in only two situations: to assert one’s superiority over the Kindred in question or to issue a challenge intended to provoke an angry response. Woe to the vampire who opts for the latter choice and fails to back her words up with power and poise.



Invictus Etiquette

Titles and terms of address are not the only ways in which Invictus vampires make their opinions and aspirations known in public society. Although to outsiders the subtleties of etiquette within the covenant seem complex and layered, in truth, there are a few simple rules of communication that hold true. The basis of all public statements of the Invictus is context, and that is what renders the intentions of the Invictus opaque to all outside the covenant but crystal clear to all within.

WALKING THE LINE

Following the rules of Invictus etiquette is a sure way to avoid ruffling feathers and can impress vampires in high places. Then again, not everybody wants to avoid notoriety, and too much approval from above can lead to suspicion of toadying.

A clever vampire may make calculated forays into impolitic behavior just to make sure he's noticed. It's a dangerous game but can be charming if well played. It's all a matter of gauging the local scene and figuring out how far you can go without losing control of the situation. Many a roguish youngster can step into the spotlight through inadvisable conduct — but only those who carry themselves with aplomb when all eyes are turned their way will survive.

There is a saying among the Daeva of the Invictus: "A lovable rascal is just a reject with good timing."

Precedence: This is a simple rule. No superior must ever be made to wait for an inferior. If a party is thrown, the most prestigious attendee should be the last to arrive. Thus, it is expected that everyone responds to an invitation to verify their attendance — so that the host knows not to let the event officially begin until the most superior guest arrives.

If everyone adheres carefully to this rule, then superior Kindred will always speak before inferiors, will always be the first served in matters of gift-giving and other procedures and will always be called upon to perform, demonstrate or act before inferiors.

Breaking this order of precedence implies a direct challenge of authority, and is an acceptable lead-in to a duel of monomacy (even if it were unintentional — but not if it were directly caused by the superior).

Gifting: Among Invictus Kindred, the giving of gifts is a remarkable statement. Any gift given, whether in public or private, may imply affection, support or deference. What is most important is that the gift demonstrates *significance*, effectively saying that the gift-giver *believes the recipient is worthy of notice*. The giving of any gift allows the recipient some small power,

because she is free to refuse it. Refusal of a gift is, of course, an insult proportional to the sacrifice the gift represents. A refusal can lead to a duel, if the parties involved are hot-headed enough, or to a long-lasting animosity, if they are not.

Many Invictus vampires give small gifts of jewelry to one another as a bonding exercise, simply to acknowledge ties of blood or friendship (and to make sure that anybody who sees the exchange understands that the participants are on good terms with one another).

It is customary, upon settling a dispute in a manner that is to the satisfaction of both parties, to exchange a paltry gift as an indicator that all is well. Some Kindred insist that the signing of contracts is always followed by a trade of pens, while one South American Prince is known to require monomacy duelists to exchange gloves upon resolving their challenge.

Display: To accept a gift is one thing. To wear or display it is something entirely different and provides yet another subtle avenue of statement to the members of the covenant. Wearing an accepted gift in public implies a return of affection or support for the one who gave the gift: it essentially means that the recipient *wishes to be associated with the giver*. Not such a big deal in some cases, but when you're talking about a vampire who's making a bid for praxis (or one who is somehow scandalous), wearing a gift in public can provoke quite a reaction from those who notice.

Beyond gifts, the rule of display applies also to the self. Where one chooses to make appearances and how one positions oneself are equally important. Standing at the shoulder of another vampire indicates associative support again, while taking his arm is a declaration of affection. Facing another vampire without bowing the head indicates a formal indifference, while bowing the head is a display of subjugation.

Simply attending an event indicates support for the host. Thus, it is expected that all Invictus Kindred attend every official covenant event (unless they want to bring their loyalty into question). Even making an appearance within the bounds of another vampire's domain can be considered a declaration of association, assuming the visit is peaceful.

Displaying a weapon carries no special significance among the Invictus. However, touching the hilt of the weapon, even lightly, indicates a wish to do battle with the vampire one is facing. Invictus Kindred who are presented with such a demonstration must either rise to the challenge or respond with a submissive gesture.

Finally, displays of wealth are considered virtuous among Invictus Kindred. Ostentation can help solidify the covenant's power base in a city, indicating a lack of fear and dangling an alluring way of unlife to the

outsiders in the domain. This flaunting of material goods extends beyond human bounds, though — members of the Invictus are expected to be flush with Vitae at any public event (demonstrating the covenant's ample resources in more ways than one); blood is often provided in ample supply at Invictus hostings.

Respect: While it cannot be expected that members of the covenant will be able to avoid dispute with one another at all times, it is never acceptable to be openly rude or crass in reference to a compatriot in any venue. Invictus Kindred are beholden to one another in bonds of respect — choosing to be a member of the covenant means accepting a responsibility to uphold its tenets and serving as a part of a greater whole. Every vampire who makes that choice deserves the esteem of both her peers and her betters.

In truth, to outsiders, the respect Invictus vampires pay to one another is one of the covenant's most appealing features. A neonate thrust alone into the cruel world of the Requiem can find surprising solace in simple politeness.

Because of this rule, disparaging or insulting statements or demonstrations always need to be veiled from observers. Within the Invictus, it is best if one can completely humiliate one's enemies without ever failing to show common courtesy.

Invictus Philosophy

Most members of the Invictus would say their covenant doesn't have a philosophy. Not for them the theories and dogmas of other covenants. The First Estate does not serve some higher ideal. The covenant merely recognizes certain eternal truths about power and the world, truths that should be obvious to anyone who pays attention. The Invictus accepts the world as it is, always has been and ever shall be.

Admittedly, Invictus members often disagree on how to apply these eternal verities. In fact, some of the "eternal verities" contradict each other. Such differences seldom cause much conflict in the covenant. If two Kindred hold different beliefs and follow different practices, but both get what they want, they both must be right. A sire might encourage his childe to study both their careers. Philosophers may fret that when two people disagree, they can't both be right, but the Invictus don't care about ideal, abstract truth. The Invictus care about *results*. The First Estate claims its practices have worked for centuries. Millennia, even. And the practices shall continue to work forever — for Kindred, kine and everyone else. The powers of the First Estate's members, and the power of the covenant as a whole, are all the proof anyone should need that the Invictus has the true path. And if the covenant isn't powerful in a particular city — well, members say it will be, by and by.

The Essentials

The core convictions of the First Estate are easily summarized. By themselves, they require little explanation. The complications come in applying them.

The Purpose Of Power Is Power

Other covenants see power as a means to an end. The Invictus sees power as an end in itself. This, they believe, makes them Unconquered; for while other Kindred may squander their power chasing some idealistic goal, the First Estate remains focused on acquiring more influence for itself. Find another vampire's goals, and help her to achieve them — in exchange for whatever power she can give you. She becomes less able to achieve future goals — unless she asks your help and places herself even further in your power.

The Elite Lead, The Masses Follow

Power is not for everyone. Most people lack the temperament to wield power effectively. Indeed, most people don't have *time* to assume leadership. They are too busy with their own lives (or unlives) to study an issue, ponder the options and make a good decision. So why ask them to? They are better off letting professional leaders handle the Big Picture.

Sometimes, people say they want a share of power and responsibility in running society. More often than not, the Invictus says, they really mean they want assurance that their leaders will look after their interests. Pat them on the head, say you share their views and send them off to bed. Thus has it ever been, from Egyptian god-kings to corporate CEOs.

This goes for Kindred as well as kine. The Invictus accepts the responsibility to take charge and govern other Kindred. The covenant tells its members to become part of a ruling elite. A small part, perhaps: not every vampire can become Prince, own a vast corporation or become a power broker for mortal politicians. Simply by joining the First Estate, however, members place themselves above the ignorant mortal masses — and even above other vampires. The Invictus knows who's really in control. If Invictus members have enough cunning and determination, they can become the ones in charge themselves — masters of their fate and everyone else's, too.

Rank Has Its Privileges

This Invictus does not believe people are the same. Therefore, they should not be treated the same, and they should not act the same. Kindred are not kine. Masters are not servants. The rich are not the poor. People should not pretend these differences don't exist or don't matter, any more than the lion should pretend he is a lamb. The power elite follows different rules than the commoners, because the power elite are different creatures — and because they can.

But they do follow rules. The Invictus asserts privileges over other Kindred, and Invictus leaders claim privileges over other Invictus — but never a license to do whatever they want. Rank has its duties as well, and the First Estate takes its duties seriously.

Order Above All

Some believe God ordered the world. Others believe in impersonal forces of nature. Either way, the world has an order, a right and proper way of doing things. Acting in consonance with that order brings success; any deviation from that order increases the risk of failure, chaos and destruction.

The chief duty of the Invictus is to keep everything and everyone in their proper places, fulfilling their own natural or divinely ordained role. The laborer must toil, the soldier must fight, the priest must preach, the certified public accountant must tot up figures, the kine must supply their blood to the Kindred and the Kindred must take it without letting the mortals know. And the Kindred must continue their Danse Macabre forever, never changing the steps — with the Invictus calling the tune. As is its proper place.

Tradition

The facts of power never change, because people don't change. The hopes, fears, follies and ambitions of the kine stay the same for centuries and millennia. That's what Invictus elders say their experience teaches. If you don't believe them, literary members of the covenant can show you sniggering sex comedies from ancient Rome that sound just like Hollywood's latest offerings or laments from Egyptian scribes who complain the world's going to hell because children don't respect their parents anymore.

Since people don't change — and the Kindred even less so — why should anything else? The First Estate's elders have seen too many fads come and go; too many fate-of-the-world crises become historical footnotes, too many revelations and revolutions sputter and fail. Stick to the old and established customs, they say. Traditions became traditional because they must have worked for a long time. Odds are, they still work better than some newfangled reform.

Even in small things, therefore, the Invictus values tradition for its own sake. Any innovation will probably move the world further from its proper order, not closer. Rejecting tradition is vain at best — who are you, to think you know better than *everyone who came before you*? — and, at worst, could end the Danse Macabre in a holocaust of anarchy.

The Patronage System

The single most important concept in Invictus philosophy, however, is patronage. The practice of

patronage underlies many of the covenant's practices. Many mortal societies have elements of patronage; so do the other covenants. The First Estate, however, consciously structures itself around the relationship of master to supplicant.

A patronage system works simply. A patron — someone with wealth and power — distributes largesse to people poorer and weaker than himself. In return, the recipients — the clients — do something to help the patron maintain and increase his wealth and power. This lets the patron distribute more largesse, and receive still more favors from his clients.

As the Invictus claims, patronage is everywhere and it's old as the hills. In New Guinea, a "big man" invites the rest of his tribe to a feast; the respect and popularity he gains helps him acquire more livestock, so he can hold more feasts. In the Mafia, they say, "I do a favor for you, and someday you do a favor for me." Congressmen steer government spending to their districts, and receive votes in return. Middle Eastern despots from Sargon of Akkad to Saddam Hussein granted government posts and palaces to their cronies. The feudal system that guides the First Estate's elders was based on patronage: the king gave out grants of land and authority over the inhabitants, in return for his vassals' pledges of loyalty and military service. Given such ancient and widespread usage, it's no wonder the Invictus regards patronage as a law of nature.

Largesse

Rich and powerful Kindred have several forms of largesse they can offer to clients, which include the following:

- **Money** matters a lot more for the kine than the Kindred, but vampires are not completely disinterested in it. An Invictus who seeks influence among poorer Kindred can buy them stuff such as a car, a small building usable as a haven or braces for a mortal granddaughter. At higher social strata, Invictus deal in financial favors such as corporate stock (the gift that keep on giving), inside information or — for politically connected patrons — tax breaks and government contracts for a client's business.
- **Hunting Territory** is one of the most important commodities in Kindred society. Like medieval kings, Kindred Princes and Regents can distribute land to their followers, in the form of exclusive hunting rights to certain locations. Hunting territory might range from a particular neighborhood down to a specific nightclub. Best of all, a client can subdivide this privilege to offer largesse to other Kindred in turn: an Invictus might let another vampire prey on the mortals in a particular homeless shelter, say, or stalk her nightclub on Tuesday nights.

- **Herds** form a more specialized version of hunting privileges. Kindred who build a particularly large and easily exploited herd might offer other vampires access to their blood supply in exchange for favors. For instance, an Invictus who controls a blood bank might hand out pints of O-negative to his allies, while the Master of a blood cult can present visiting diners as subordinate gods or demons. A single easy feeding, however, isn't much of a favor. To gain real support from a client, a patron would need to offer steady access to his herd, such as one pint of off-the-books blood every week or a visit to the temple once a month.

- **Titles and Offices** are one of the strongest bases for patronage, and one of the most enduring. An Invictus who holds some high office in the city's power structure can arrange a lower office for a favored hanger-on. For instance, a Priscus might appoint a favorite as one of her designated Whips; or a Regent could appoint a client as the Master of his domain's Elysium. Princes, of course, have the greatest power to grant titles and offices. Just as importantly, they have the greatest power to *remove* titles, if an office-holder becomes ungrateful.

- **Boons** are an all-purpose form of largesse. If a vampire can't think of anything else to offer, he can fall back on the Mafia formula of a favor for a favor. For instance, a Primogen might want a wealthy clanmate to speak out in favor of a certain policy at the next meeting of the Prince's court. In return, he promises to do — something, later, using the power of his office. Boons are so undefined, however, that they don't make a very good basis for a long-term relationship of patron and client. More often, they are ad hoc arrangements between Kindred.

- **Subcontracting:** Some Invictus accumulate ties to other Kindred and kine with useful skills and resources. A member can offer access to these contacts and minions as a form of largesse. If she can't supply a particular favor herself, maybe she knows someone who can — and who owes her a favor, too. An Invictus might loan out a ghoul Retainer with special skills, ask her Contacts for information on another's behalf, request Allies to assist a client and so on. These minions may well be other clients of the Invictus, repaying past largesse by helping their patron ensnare another minion.

Favors in Return

Clients themselves can offer many different favors in exchange for their patron's largesse. Most simply, a vampire can let the Kindred community know he considers himself a client. Even if neither vampire holds any special office in Kindred society, the patron gains influence. Other Kindred know that if they persuade

the patron to back their schemes, they win the support of her clients as well.

- **Votes:** Especially in cities with a strong Carthian presence, some Kindred domains have at least the appearance of democracy. In these cities, the Invictus works to build political machines straight out of Tammany Hall. Every Kindred knows the Invictus will pay for her vote, with whatever favors it can arrange. In less democratic cities, votes in the Primogen Council can still be influenced by bribes, favors and the implicit or explicit threat of retaliation from a powerful vampire's supporters. Even the most autocratic Princes must still contend with power blocs: a Prince may rule an influential patron with a lighter hand, just because he knows the patron could cause a lot of trouble if she mobilized all her clients against him.

TOKENS OF FEALTY

Some Invictus like their clients to show some visible sign of their subservience. At one extreme, tokens of fealty may be formal, elaborate and blatant; for instance, all the squires of a particular Knight may sport identical face tattoos, an overcoat with the Knight's achievement of arms on the back, a pistol on one hip and a bowie knife on the other. Less obtrusive tokens of allegiance include rings with a particular design, a pin, a particular brand of wristwatch or a special handshake to use with other clients. Sometimes, as in the latter case, a fealty token is just to help fellow clients recognize each other, and may be hidden from other Kindred. More often, though, the point of a fealty token is to let other Kindred know about the relationship, to advertise the patron's influence. Most Invictus prefer unobtrusive tokens of fealty, for reasons of taste and to make sure the mortals don't notice. (Those face tattoos, heraldic overcoats and weapons do tend to make people ask questions.)

- **Assistance:** Clients may actively help with their patrons' projects. For instance, an Invictus who wants to gentrify a crime-riddled neighborhood might mobilize all her clients to stalk the muggers, drug dealers and gangbangers until the survivors figure out they should leave. A patron building a new haven might receive labor from clients skilled at construction and security — and, just as importantly, oaths of silence about what they have built. Invictus might also recruit clients to help members rig elections or arrange favorable business deals.

- **Informants:** Some Invictus seem to know everything another covenant seeks to hide. These members

of the First Estate have secret clients in that covenant, who repay Invictus largesse with inside information. Such a relationship is quite dangerous for the client, since none of the covenants suffer traitors gladly. It's not entirely safe for the patron, either: she invites retribution, which for some covenants may include dire curses straight from the Old Testament or the blackest corners of legend. The Invictus also spy on each other, of course, and try to recruit secret clients among the hangers-on of their rivals.

• **Oaths:** For a great boon, or a pledge of largesse indefinitely continued, a vampire might accept a long-term oath to an Invictus. (See p. 178 for more about oaths and their roles in the First Estate.)

A Covenant of Clients and Patrons

Everyone in the First Estate can become a patron to someone else. Nearly every member is a client to someone else.

When Kindred think of the Invictus patronage system, they usually think of its mighty elders — the vampires who own corporations and politicians, claim high office in the Kindred's governance and rule the night from their brooding mansions and gleaming skyscrapers. The First Estate lets all its members get in on the action, though. In fact, the First Estate demands this, if a neonate wants to gain any respect in the covenant.

In the Invictus, even a neonate can control impressive financial or political assets carried over from life; such assets are important reasons for selecting childer. Therefore, even a neonate may wield enough power to cultivate less fortunate vampires as clients. Neonates in other covenants (or unaligned) may feel reluctant to ask the great lords of the Invictus for help. A fellow neonate seems safer. These neonates or unaligned forget that the nice Kindred who seems so understanding, who shares their desire to stay free from the Masters of the Night, fully intends to become a Master of the Night herself.

The Invictus recognizes that its younger members are well placed to recruit clients in other covenants. So what if these unwary clients are mere neonates themselves? In another hundred years or so, they can gain great power in their own covenants — with Invictus help, binding them to the First Estate's interests.

A neonate may lack anything other Kindred want — but even without money or political influence, she has great power compared to mortals. For one thing, she has Disciplines, enabling her to perform amazing feats. Does a mortal client have trouble convincing a potential investor in his business? His "friend" can swing the deal using Dominate or Majesty. Animalism, Auspex and Obfuscate all have their uses in ferreting out secrets a mortal might wish to know. Nightmare can warn away a mortal's enemies; if warning fails,



the physical Disciplines can deliver a less subtle rebuke. A neonate's Disciplines may be feeble compared to an elder's, but to a mortal she can seem like a miracle worker. Though she'd better not seem *too* miraculous, for the sake of the Masquerade . . .

Any vampire also has the blood itself and its power to transform a mortal into a ghoul. This is the cruellest sort of patronage. The blood offers immortality to humans — but delivers slavery. Nevertheless, some mortals would trade their freedom for the bounty of a vampire's veins. A desperate mortal might also serve an undead patron in hopes the blood can save a loved one's life.

Over the decades, a diligent Invictus can cultivate such minor clients and exploit them to increase her own wealth and power. By the time she's an ancilla, she can offer greater largesse to a wider range of potential clients. She might recruit a number of neonates as permanent clients. Older clients, now ancillae themselves, may now be bound to her by oaths, blackmail or sheer dependence on her aid.

The Invictus member also has enough power for the First Estate's elders to cultivate her as a client. By serving their interests, she may win more power for herself. For instance, her patron might help her claim some minor office such as Harpy, Whip or Master of an Elysium. Her connection to mightier Kindred itself becomes a resource she can offer to her own clients. As the lower nobility of the Invictus, ancillae serve as all-purpose middlemen for the covenant.

The covenant's elders form the apex of the patronage system. Their financial, political and supernatural resources are so great they can give a client almost anything, either by themselves or using their minions. On top of that, an elder might possess some high office in Kindred society, which allows her to achieve many goals by her mere command. An Invictus elder's list of clients can include ancillae in the First Estate (and probably other covenants as well) and a variety of mortals in business, government, the civil service, crime, academia or any other field that catches her interest. Other elders owe her favors, too. Her clients in the First Estate have clients of their own, extending her web of influence even further. A powerful and respected elder in the covenant may be able to mobilize dozens of Kindred if she wants, and her reach in the mortal world defies calculation.

Honor, Respect and Reputation

The patronage system would fall apart without trust between its participants. Clients must trust that their patrons will grant the favors they promise. Patrons must trust their clients to show loyalty and perform services in return. Both sides must believe that betraying trust

will bring swift retribution. Modern mortals have all the machinery of law and government to enforce their contracts; the undead, alas, cannot take the Daeva Primogen to court for breaking his promise to award hunting rights at the latest rave.

So, reputation matters a great deal to the Invictus. The mortal world codifies reputation as credit reports, criminal records (or their lack), resumés and other documents. The Kindred use older terms such as *honor* and *face*. No vampire can ever completely trust another, but the First Estate consciously tries to discourage treachery among its members.

My Word Is My Bond

Willful and blatant betrayal of trust can wreck a Kindred's standing in the First Estate, or at least make any business more difficult. A vampire who welshes on one deal might default on others, too, so any agreement becomes riskier. Other Kindred demand greater rewards to compensate for that risk. Where once a Kindred's mere word was surety enough in a deal, other Invictus now demand payment in advance, oaths backed by supernatural sanctions or even ghouls and childer held hostage. A trusted Invictus might satisfy his clients with minor favors such as hunting rights at a porno theater, a few dozen shares in a decent mutual fund or 15 minutes with a Primogen Councilor. A distrusted member might need to offer hunting rights in his entire domain, a thousand shares of blue-chip stock and half an hour with the Prince. The betrayer must also fulfill many pledges before the Invictus trusts him again, for the undead have long memories indeed.

Lesser breaches of trust don't cause such catastrophic loss of prestige. Most Invictus are rational enough to accept that, sometimes, Kindred fail through circumstances beyond their control. If you promise to deliver a certain cargo and the supplier flakes out or some nutter from Belial's Brood burns down your warehouse, it isn't *your* fault.

Except it is. Why didn't you pick a more reliable supplier? Why didn't you invest in some guards? Why didn't you find a replacement cargo before the delivery date? Any failure, for any reason, shows the limitations of your power, your foresight and your determination to see things done. Potential clients and patrons wonder if they could do better by making a deal with someone else.

As a result, members of the First Estate treat every promise seriously. Even a promise to show up at a certain time becomes an implicit test of your abilities and honor: being late shows you didn't plan or you didn't care. Whereas modern mortals might brush off being half an hour late to a meeting, the lords of the night see an insult or incompetence.

For this reason, canny Invictus members don't give their word lightly. Invictus members sometimes seem pompous and lawyerly to other Kindred, insisting on spelling out every agreement in detail — with weaselly escape clauses like “as it please the Prince.” (The Carthians particularly enjoy pointing out the First Estate's evasions.) Invictus members do this because they don't want to be trapped in a commitment they cannot fulfill.

When Invictus do give their word, they can make amazing efforts to keep their promises. Childer and other new recruits hear stories of Invictus who overcame incredible obstacles to fulfill a pledge. Elders tell of the neonate who ran through sunlight and burned to ash to deliver his sire's reply to the Prince before a sunset deadline, and the Knight who fought a pack of werewolves because they came between him and a flower he'd promised his lady. On a less romantic level, Invictus businessmen may squander 10 times what a damaged cargo is worth to replace it, or a First Estate political operative might call in a dozen favors to protect a neonate client's haven from demolition. Invictus think the cost matters less than the reputation they gain. The mighty see a potential client they can trust to fulfill their commands; the lowly see a potential patron they can trust to take care of them.

Conflicting Duties

When members of the First Estate achieve some office in Kindred society, they approach their job with zeal. After all, they accepted a pledge to perform certain duties. The Invictus expects them to keep that pledge; they would lose face if they did not.

That's not a problem when the Invictus dominates Kindred society and governance. For instance, conflicts of interest seldom arise for an Invictus assistant to an Invictus Priscus in a city where most of the clan belongs to the Invictus. Office-holders may face awkward choices when the First Estate lacks such dominance. That Invictus assistant, for instance, has two responsibilities: as a helper to her Priscus, she has a duty to look after her clan's interests, but as a member of the First Estate, she should look out for the covenant's interests. If most of her clan belongs to other covenants, her duties may conflict — and the Invictus will not let her off the hook by saying, “Hang your clanmates; you work for us.” If she undercuts her Priscus and her clan, it wouldn't matter what benefits she brought to the First Estate. She'd still develop a reputation as a weasel no one should trust. The covenant's leaders might reward her with money, hunting privileges or other tangible rewards, but not with prestige and honor.

Fine Words, False Hearts

Of course, not all Invictus keep their honor pure or demand high standards from the rest of their covenant.

The First Estate speaks of honor so much because the Damned have so little. Frenzy, Wassail and Röttschreck can overpower the strongest wills, leading to breaches of honor and the respect due between client and patron. Vices tempt the Damned with selfish passions. All too many Invictus decide it's too hard actually to be honorable; it's easier just to *look* honorable, and conceal your failures and treacheries.

And rank does have its privileges. The First Estate's belief that all Kindred are *not* equal means that members with low Status may be judged more harshly than those who've accumulated great power and prestige. It isn't fair; it isn't supposed to be.

Shifting Blame

One common strategy is to find a scapegoat — some poor schlub you can blame for failure. “I trusted him to do his part for my plan,” goes the standard script, “and he failed my trust. I can't keep my word because of *his* incompetence.” You still suffer a little loss of face for relying on someone you should not have, but most of the onus goes on the scapegoat.

Neonates are, unfortunately, excellent candidates for scapegoats. They often haven't proven themselves through enough previous challenges. Their eagerness to make connections and gain patrons makes them take risks older Kindred know how to recognize and avoid — especially the risks of pledging their own honor to someone else's plan.

Suppose a coterie of neonates agree to serve as couriers, making a one-night journey to return a sacred relic to a neighboring city's Acolytes. It seems like an easy bit of errantry. They might not recognize that their cargo as a werewolf fetish, that their journey takes them across werewolf territory and that the ancilla who recruited them has an old grudge against the Acolytes and would like to see the powerful relic lost. After the neonates have publicly assured a local Circle of the Crone covenant that they will see the relic safely home to its owners, the ancilla won't take the blame if the neonates vanish without a trace. If the coterie succeeds, the ancilla looks good for recruiting them.

As the example suggests, cunning Invictus may even pre-select clients for failure. The Invictus not only have a scapegoat, they can make a conscious betrayal of trust look like someone else's failure. Even if the neonates survive, who will the other Invictus believe: some new-fledged childer or one of their own, who has proven himself in the past? A scapegoating or frame-up might not need to be very subtle or convincing, either, if the Invictus has great power or influence over other covenant members. Sometimes the largesse of patrons, and the service of clients, consists of accepting each other's lies and hiding each other's shames.

Weaseling Out

Another strategy is to claim you never made a pledge in the first place. Wrap any statement in enough gauzy generalities and florid rhetoric, and you can weasel out later. You could claim you never said *you* would silence that nosy private eye — only that someone ought to do it. Or you never said when you would do it. Or you didn't say you would do it personally, and your agents are on the case. A skilled Invictus rhetorician can seem to promise everything to everyone, while actually saying nothing at all. Other Invictus who see through the goo and dribble may at least admire the technique. After all, they've probably weaseled out of a few promises themselves.

Counterattack

As any politician knows, no one pays attention to your own failings if they're angry about someone else. In this strategy, you don't refute a charge of breaking a trust — you don't even acknowledge it, because you're too busy whipping up outrage against some other Kindred. You can accuse your accuser of having a vendetta against you, of some dark agenda (probably true among the Damned, even if it's irrelevant to the case at hand), of disloyalty to the covenant — or, of course, of trying to throw attention onto you to cover up his own crimes and failings.

Sometimes, however, you don't want to attack the person holding you to account. When the Prince asks you why you didn't return the Acolyte's relic, reviling the Prince as a traitor to the Invictus just isn't prudent. Instead, you say how awful someone else is. For instance, you might deliver a stirring speech asking the assembled Kindred why they're making such a fuss over Circle of the Crone property, when everyone knows those Damned Acolytes are crazed fanatics who worship foul forces from beyond and call them forth to pollute the world, and Longinus only knows what vile purpose they intended with their precious relic. The First Estate should thank you for getting rid of it!

Pre-emptive Contrition

Some Invictus think it's best to accept blame for failure or a breach of promise — spectacularly. Revile yourself and proclaim your grief at your own incapacity. Tear your clothes. Demand punishment with fire or the lash. Offer some extravagant payment as part of your penance. If you're lucky, your overblown contrition will embarrass your fellow Invictus into muttering that your fault wasn't that bad, and what if someone from another covenant saw you making a scene? On the other hand, turning into a drama queen may irritate other Invictus or whet their appetite to watch your pain, leaving you worse off than before. As usual, your own power and prestige influences the audience response (and so does your dramatic technique).

Directing your fellow Invictus' minds toward torture isn't necessarily a bad thing, though. If you show you can take pain, at least you win back some respect for your courage — a prime aristocratic virtue.

Deference

In a patronage system, clients need more than assurance of their patron's sincerity. They also need to know their patron has the power to back up her promises. One result is that insults demand retribution. If a client sees his patron swallow some shame or insult, he has to wonder how much power the patron really has. Maybe the patron is generous of spirit, self-controlled or too well-mannered to acknowledge an insult — or maybe she *can't* punish the person who gave offense. In that case, does she have the power to fulfill her commitments? Maybe the client had better hedge his bets by looking for other potential patrons, such as the person who delivered the insult. Since the First Estate lacks any outside authority to enforce its patronage system, the covenant's members take gestures of respect and disrespect seriously, and smack down anyone who fails to show proper respect.

Obedience

Most obviously, the covenant demands strict obedience to its chains of command. Invictus members have no patience for mavericks and loose cannons. Sass your sire, and he may have your mouth sewn shut until you learn when you may open it. Blow off a command from an Inner Circle member, and you have made a dangerous enemy for the rest of your unlife — which might not be that long. The Invictus punishes failure, but not nearly so severely as it punishes willful disobedience.

The burden of obedience falls most heavily on the lower ranks of the covenant, but Invictus elders remind neonates that they, too, are lords of the night. Younger members must insist upon respect and obedience from their own juniors and minions. For instance, a neonate is as a Prince to her ghoul Retainer. She has a right to demand obedience to every command. A young domitor who shows too much forgiveness or tolerance may find herself called on the carpet by her sire — or someone even higher in the First Estate — to receive a lecture about Maintaining Proper Discipline. Failure to perform small tasks promptly may not seem important, but if small acts of disobedience do not receive immediate punishment, servants grow bolder and attempt larger acts of defiance. Every Invictus elder can tell stories about indulgent masters who ended up destroyed by their ungrateful servants.

Of course, not every senior Invictus has the right to command any service from all younger members of the covenant. The First Estate carefully notes that only the



Prince has authority over all Kindred. Sometimes, a neonate has the right to refuse an order. For instance, Invictus tradition holds that even an Inner Circle member has no right to ask a childe to disobey her sire.

Then again, it may be *prudent* to obey such powerful Kindred, whether they have the right to give an order or not.

Retribution

Like other Kindred, Invictus have many options to punish insubordination and insults. Members of the highest ranks can use their official powers to chastise Kindred who offend them. A Prince, for instance, can send the Sheriff or his Hound to teach a lesson in manners. Other influential Kindred may “borrow” such officers, at the Prince’s pleasure. Most Invictus, however, know they must deliver their own punishments. Aside from the fact that few Invictus have the right to order a “hit” (or even just a roughing-up), honor demands they be seen dealing with the situation themselves. They must reassure clients of their power and determination — and their enemies, even more so.

Monomacy is the ultimate recourse for an aggrieved Invictus. Not every duel is to the Final Death or torpor, of course; it’s usually enough to show that you *could* slay your foe. At the other extreme, an acid remark that sets other Invictus smiling is often sufficient retribution for minor social snubs. Sometimes, though, you have to hurt a Kindred who insulted you, but in such a

way you don’t risk your own unlife. Popular methods include the following:

- **Destruction of Property.** Now and then, buildings catch fire, gas mains explode or drug-crazed gangbangers hold their turf battle right outside and shoot the place up. Then you send your condolences to the owner who insulted you. Express concern that the same thing could happen to his haven. The message is clear.

- **Threaten Mortals.** Mortals are so much more fragile than Kindred. Accidents could happen so easily to a pet city councilman or corporate VP — or a mortal granddaughter. Actual murder is seldom necessary. It’s usually enough to show you can get to mortals your enemy considers important. The young mortal relative picked up after school or in a bar, and then delivered home unharmed, is a classic approach. A Mekhet tycoon in London, on the other hand, prefers origami cranes that appear in the bedrooms of his enemies’ mortal servants. For more severe offenses, though, some Invictus still go straight to shooting, maiming or “disappearing” an enemy’s mortal allies.

- **Humiliation.** Make your enemy look foolish. This doesn’t mean Dominating your enemy into clucking like a chicken; you will only embarrass yourself with such crude pranks. If you can Dominate him into pinning his own hand to the table with a knife or use Nightmare to make him flee the room, you assert your greater power in a way no one can ignore. Kindred without suitable Disciplines can still attempt social sabotage, such as replacing healthy young vessels at



the enemy's blood feast with diseased or otherwise inferior stock.

Vendetta

Retribution for insults and injuries has an unfortunate consequence: the target seldom accepts the justice of the punishment. In fact, in a society in which respect is everything, he can't let the punishment pass. If he does, *he* looks weak and endangers his own network of patronage. So, the vampire who delivered the first insult responds to retribution by taking his own revenge. The original aggrieved party must punish that, too. The cycle tends to escalate, as each vampire responds with some fiercer attack to force his enemy to back down. Before long, no apology could ever suffice. They must continue until one destroys the other. Vendettas also easily spread, as the participants draw upon their allies, clients and patrons for assistance.

Princes rightly fear vendettas almost as much as they fear usurpers. Kindred communities have been torn apart because two well-connected Invictus got in a snit. Few Princes wield sufficient power that they can simply command feuding vampires to stop. Most of the time, the Princes settle for driving the vendetta into hiding, slowing it down and limiting its spread. Now and then, Princes respond by exiling whichever participant offers the least political advantage. Vampires seldom leave their cities willingly, so such exiles account for a surprisingly large proportion of Invictus emigrants.

SALUTARY CHASTISEMENT

Here are some of the punishments the Invictus metes out to the disrespectful, the shirkers and the mutineers. Truly severe offenses, of course, bring Final Death: these punishments are for lesser offenses, when one's elders and betters still believe one may learn improved conduct from the experience.

- Flay the offending Kindred and roll him in salt.
- Burn off the offending Kindred's hand.
- Beat the Kindred with a wire lash, so the welts form a chessboard on his back. The character may not heal the wounds until the Prince finishes a chess game. If the character moves, tipping over a chess piece, he receives the same punishment the next night.
- Spend a week doing scutwork for a ghoul or mortal. For a Master of the Night to serve a servant is utter humiliation.

Cyclical Dynasties

The extreme durability of the Kindred gives them much longer timeframes to work with when planning

for their Requiems. Being essentially immortal, they don't need to adopt the short-term strategies they relied on as mortals. The scheming, plotting Kindred of the Invictus see this durability as one more advantage for them to exploit in the Danse Macabre. Long-term planning, after all, leads to long-term rewards, and the Invictus is a great believer in moving slowly and cautiously.

Invictus Kindred consider it a luxury to be able to spin their webs over a span of centuries, and while they aren't obliged to plan for their deaths the way mortals must (at least not with the same degree of certainty), they do find it practical to plan for the next time they fall into eclipse (i.e., the fitful sleep of torpor). To that end, Invictus Kindred find themselves thinking in cyclical, not linear, terms. Yes, they will, eventually, fall into torpor, but they will also rise from torpor to feed and plot again.

In brief, that means that they do pay attention to matters of estate planning — they didn't establish their empire of influence and money just so they could lose it the moment they fall into torpor, after all. To that end, many Invictus Kindred choose an "heir" who gains control over their fortune when they enter torpor. But not only have the Invictus established a system of inheritance, they've also established a system for inheriting their empire *back* when they rise.

The vassals of such elder Kindred all strive to be their mentor's favorite so that they can be the executor and heir of their patron's estate when the elder next goes into torpor. This in itself is the basis for many games of one-upsmanship among Invictus ancillae. Some try to prove their worth to their would-be patron through flattery, others through strategy and others yet through simple overall competence. To become the chosen protégé of a powerful patron is among the greatest honors (not to mention strategic benefits) an ancilla can aspire to.

For his part, the patron wants to treat his heir with the greatest respect and kindness. After all, at some point he will be entirely vulnerable to his protégé, and he wants the full measure of his protégé's goodwill during that period of eclipse. (This is one of the many mechanisms the Invictus has adopted to ensure that elders don't simply grind down those beneath them in the hierarchy.)

There is more to the system, however. Once the patron has reawakened from his long sleep, he is weak. He will have lost Blood Potency and all that comes with it. Meanwhile, his protégé will have been advancing in age and growing in power. And, at this point, the patron and the protégé effectively change places. The once-powerful elder gets back his estate and all that goes with it, but he is likely weaker than the Kindred who was once his heir.

WHAT'S TO GAIN

Some Kindred might wonder why Invictus vampires expend so much effort on becoming an elder's heir or protégé, but to the First Estate, it's obvious. It's like winning the lottery. In the space of one night, a protégé's fortunes are multiplied a hundredfold by the addition of his patron's wealth to his own.

This means money, stock portfolios, real estate and financial power, of course, but it also includes the patron's journals, haven, ghouls and, ideally, most of his mortal influence.

If the protégé needed investment capital, he now has it *in spades*. If he needs Retainers to do his bidding, he has those as well.

The only stipulation, of course, is that at the end of his patron's torpor, he has to give back everything, plus what had better be a substantial return on investment. Any protégé who gives back *only* what his patron bequeathed him or — *scandalously!* — less than what he was bequeathed will have a lot of explaining to do if he hopes to avoid truly brutal punishment (and probably the dissolution of the arrangement.)

And when, in the fullness of time, the former protégé himself succumbs to torpor, it will be his former master who oversees *his* empire in turn. After one or two cycles of this, the two vampires' fortunes begin to meld together. The elder may have originally gathered much of the wealth, but it was nurtured, grown and added to by the younger while the elder was in torpor. Likewise, the younger should have generated his own fortune while his patron was in eclipse, and his mentor is responsible for building on *that* when the younger, in his turn, reaches a point where he must enter torpor.

As time goes on, the "estate" winds up belonging neither to the patron, nor to the protégé, but to that cyclical dynasty. It is theirs jointly, because each builds on it when he is the more powerful and guards it when the other is in torpor.

The Invictus calls this system of alternating fortune and eclipse "a cyclical dynasty" or "a dynastic house," and this system is one of the underpinnings of the Invictus' power. There are those within the covenant who see cyclical dynasties as "the Invictus among the Invictus." Those involved in such arrangements clearly think of themselves as major anchors of the covenant's power. Those who participate in this practice may even make statements implying that only those in a dynasty are *real* Invictus members, but since they're in the minority, they don't say it as loudly as they might prefer.

Most Kindred refer to a cyclical dynasty simply as a "House" in common parlance, as in "Michael, of House Glamorgan." The House name itself, traditionally, is not the name of any vampire in the cyclical dynasty, as that

would imply the superiority of one member over the other, which, most Invictus Kindred will tell you, is a fleeting illusion in this ongoing system of revolving ascendance. House names, then, are frequently the name of a place (generally the place where the House was first established) or a new name entirely arrived at by both parties to represent the nighttime empire they hope to establish together.

Establishing a cyclical dynasty, obviously, requires great trust, faith and responsibility on the parts of all Kindred involved. What may appear to be a simple property-holding arrangement inevitably becomes a very intimate partnership, like a marriage in many ways, often with a blurring of separate identities into a shared House identity. Active members of a cyclical dynasty frequently pass their days next to their torpid partner(s) as an expression of intimacy, loyalty or trust, and this comes with advantages, as you'll see shortly.

MORE THAN A CONTRACT

Joining a cyclical dynasty may at first seem like a straightforward contractual arrangement. It's not. Partners joining in a House often find their identities melding together over the decades. Members of Houses frequently adopt the "royal we" as a mannerism in their speech, but this isn't out of arrogance so much as a new sense of first-person-plural existence. By using "we," they convey that they speak for both themselves and, by extension, for their House, because there's no longer any effective way of differentiating the two. Their fortunes, motivations and, in time, personalities bleed together until they can no longer be untangled (or at least not without catastrophic consequences). Kindred who do *not* reach this degree of connection generally find themselves *intensely* uncomfortable with the arrangement and dissolve the compact as soon as possible. Mystically inclined Kindred (and the Invictus has more than one might expect) talk of the soul bond that arises when two Kindred are so intimately linked for so long, a Vinculum that has nothing to do with Vitae. And while most Kindred would rather not acknowledge the existence of such a link — as it is in blatant defiance of their highly rational approach to the Requiem — those members of Houses who have been asked about such a spiritual link almost always respond with enigmatic words, knowing smiles or haunted glances.

A handful of the cyclical dynasties that exist in the modern night were established as far back as the age of the Roman Republic. These are the great anchors of the First Estate. Members of these cyclical dynasties are among the wealthiest and most powerful Invictus Kindred. Their fame is such that young Kindred will grow

familiar with their names within a few months of their Embrace, even if they have no idea what or to whom that famous name refers or why. It is common in these oldest of Houses that members of the House are often known only by their shared House name, their personal names long ago having dissolved in the corrosive nightmares of torpor. In such cases, the personal identities of these Kindred became subordinate to the dynastic identity, just as their personal agendas are replaced by the dynastic agenda: the continuation of the dynasty and the maintenance and growth of the House's holdings.

MARINUS ET MARINUS

Abe and his sire Donatella were there at the station to meet the midnight train. It had been chartered by some Invictus from the Old World. Nothing like this had ever happened before, and the city's Invictus Prince had rented out the gorgeous Victorian train station and declared it Elysium for the evening in order to provide a proper welcome.

"So what are these gentlemen's names?"

"Marinus," Donatella replied.

"And the other one — ?"

"Marinus," she said again.

"They both have the same name?"

"Yes. Actually, all three of them share the same name. Their third is in eclipse in Rome."

"Isn't that just the teensiest bit affected?" Abe asked in a tired voice.

Faster than he could see and hard enough to knock him to the floor, Donatella slapped him. The sound echoed through the train station and scared the birds roosting in the eaves. The Kindred around them stepped away instantly to give them room. The Harpy gave them an acid look and wrote something in his notebook. Donatella glared at Abe even as she reached down to help him up.

"No, it is *not* affected," she hissed. "Those who go by their House name, and *Roman* ones at that, are among the eldest of us, and more dangerous than you can imagine. Keep a civil tongue in your head if you want to keep any tongue at all. And don't embarrass me like that again, with your stupid questions."

Stung into silence, Abe watched as the two men emerged from the train. They were shorter than he had expected, with dark hair and eyes and skin like alabaster, and they stared at the city's assembled Kindred with a cold, alien gaze.

Death of one party causes the entire House to collapse instantly. A third member grants a House greater resilience and more companionship to the members of the house as a member spends one half of his active span with each of the other members. A three-Kindred cyclical dynasty is not unlike a revolving *ménage à trois*, with two members active at any given time while the third is in eclipse. In situations like this, an arrangement is struck so that each member sleeps for one century out of every three.

A two-member House may easily transition into a three-member House, and this is not an uncommon occurrence as both parties keep an eye out for other promising young Kindred to include in their revolving dynasty.

Some Houses have been known to incorporate four (or even more) vampires into their dynastic cycle, but some Kindred find that they don't like that because they then have to share their "shift," and hence their empire, with too many others. It gets messy, power struggles ensue and it detracts from the elegant simplicity of the two- or three-Kindred dynastic model.

Whatever the specifics of the House system, Invictus Kindred agree on one thing: those admitted to a House unquestionably weather the ages better than other Kindred. The fortunes of Invictus Kindred who are part of a House do not stagnate while they sleep, and their minds are less battered by the rigors of torpor. Having a trusted companion during torpor and, in particular, at the moment of waking into a new age, appears to mitigate the cumulative weight of centuries to a remarkable extent.

Some younger members of the Invictus have tried to get around the "generation gap" that exists between elders and younger Kindred by forming Houses with others their own age. While it's *theoretically* possible for a group like this to coalesce into a House, it doesn't have the same advantages, specifically the great accrued experience, wealth and influence, that an elder can bring to the arrangement. Elders themselves are inclined to quietly scoff at younger Kindred trying to form a cyclical dynasty on their own; they call it "playing House," and, while they applaud the urge behind the attempt, they find it amusing that ancillae (or even neonates) would even contemplate entering such a relationship without an elder to guide them.

The Risks

Neither is this the whole of the system involved in a cyclical dynasty.

The waking member of the dynasty is entrusted to look for a suitable third member. A cyclical dynasty can exist with two members, but it is considered to be more stable with three; with more than three members, a House begins feeling crowded. In a two-member House, the Final

The advantages of cyclical dynasties are numerous and profound. They help younger Kindred advance, provide elders with security, ease the burden of torpor and help the Invictus as a whole remain strong.

And yet, for all that, a minority of Invictus Kindred takes part in the House system. The covenant's paranoid elders keep this number low. Horrifying stories that

tell of ungrateful protégés who gleefully take responsibility for their patron's estate and then commit foul diablerie upon their prone forms circulate through the population of elders.

When carefully investigated, only a handful of these tales have ever proven to have any basis in fact, but the popularity of the stories reflects the degree of paranoia felt by Kindred elders. It is not easy to give up an empire for the uneasy sleep of torpor and harder still to trust that another Kindred will be capable of competent, loyal guardianship over the span of the elder's decades of eclipse. Kindred know themselves, and they know how little they would trust themselves — so it's extraordinarily difficult to trust others, particularly to this extent. Trust issues may prevent Houses from forming, but such issues rarely enter the picture after the first decade or so.

When Houses *do* fall apart, it is rarely due to betrayal or the catastrophic mishandling of the estate, but rather over timing. Cyclical dynasties are often very particular about the timing of each member's torpor and rising. No Kindred wants to remain in torpor any longer than necessary, and the notion that another in their House is getting more "active time" doesn't appeal to members of such a House. When dynastic Houses break apart, petty issues of timing are the root cause more than any other factor. In the 17th century, House Marzandi came apart after the waking Kindred brought their third member out of torpor two nights later than agreed upon. While that's an extreme case, it illustrates the crucial role timing can play in House politics.

Truth be told, other covenants eschew the House system for precisely these reasons. The Invictus' emphasis on loyalty, order and hierarchy, however, make Houses a feasible system.

That and a system called the tribunal.

The Tribunal

When an elder opts to enter into a dynastic pact, he chooses three elders (or older ancillae) to witness the signing of the pact. These Invictus elders need not be allies of the elder, but they do need to be devoted to the orderly principles of the Invictus. Tribunes, as these elders are called, distantly monitor the protégé's behavior after his patron enters torpor. They watch the protégé's aura for signs of diablerie and see to it that he isn't doing anything bizarre or outrageous with his patron's assets. The scrutiny of the tribunes is most severe for the first five years of the patron's torpor, after which the scrutiny tapers off. The responsibilities of the tribunal last only for the first cycle of a new House, after which it is assumed that the members of the dynasty

have arrived at some sort of equilibrium and are, therefore, no longer in danger of betrayal or otherwise going awry.

Should it come to pass that the protégé actually *does* betray his patron, it is the role of the tribunal to send the traitor to Final Death via the most excruciatingly painful means possible.

One does not become a member of a tribunal because one is allied with the elder who requests it; one becomes a tribune in the name of the Invictus' devotion to order. More than one elder has asked a Kindred he doesn't particularly like to be part of his tribunal as he prepares to enter torpor, not because of any alliance between the two but because the elder knew that the tribune's dedication to Invictus ideals would force his hand if he found the protégé guilty of breaching the dynastic compact.

Dynastic Compacts

When an elder and a younger Kindred have arrived at their decision to establish a House, the two write out a formal document of agreement called a dynastic compact. The compact spells out the expectations each party has of the other. The patron, for example, may insist that his financial assets increase by a particular percentage, that he wants to be swaddled in black silk during his torpor and that he wants three young men lined up to feed from when he arises from his long sleep; the protégé might stipulate that he would rather not be held responsible for the outcome of a real estate deal recently made by the elder or that he be allowed to use an attorney other than the patron's unhinged old ghoul. These terms are negotiated far in advance of the actual ceremony when the compact is signed, so the terms of the compact will not be a surprise to either party.

Unlike the swearing of oaths, the signing of dynastic compacts is a relatively private affair. For strategic reasons, Kindred often don't want to advertise that they're entering into a cyclical dynasty until it's a done deal. Three elders witness for the patron (these witnesses will later become the tribunal), and three ancillae witness for the protégé.

While the compact is primarily a legal document, it hardly reflects the true depth and significance of entering a cyclical dynasty. The closest comparison to a dynastic compact would be a marriage license: by itself a marriage license is only a legal document, but it's a document that reflects a serious commitment on the parts of those who have entered the contract.

The dynastic compact is revised at every cycle (that is, when the elder has awakened and the protégé is preparing to enter torpor). Each Kindred involved in the compact enters into a separate dynastic compact with every other member.



A dynastic compact carries *at least* as much weight as an Oath of Fealty, and the punishments for violating the terms of the contract are extraordinarily severe, a point that reflects the elders' paranoia more than anything else.

Enforcing the Compact

Invictus members who enter into a dynastic compact are initially under *immense* pressure to succeed. The first several years of the patron's torpor are critical. If the protégé looks like he's betraying his patron or if he somehow seems not to be fulfilling his duties, other members of the First Estate will not hesitate to let him know. In the long run, a functional House is a major asset to the covenant, and the covenant has been known to take an active interest in cultivating young dynasties, particularly if the patron is a Kindred of any standing. The protégé may find that he has unexpected allies at critical junctures. While this can be a good thing, it can also be disturbing to have other members of one's covenant knowing more about one's business than one would like.

Establishing a Cyclical Dynasty

Cyclical dynasties are uncommon, and with good reason. Finding the perfect team of Kindred necessary to function at this level of intimacy and interdependence is difficult. Were it not so rewarding to those in the House, it would not be done at all.

The establishment of a cyclical dynasty is almost always initiated by an elder who feels himself on the verge of entering torpor *and* who feels he has found a shrewd, reliable protégé capable of managing the elder's assets. The elder vampire approaches the younger with a rough set of the terms that will eventually become the basis of the dynastic compact. On occasion, an enterprising younger Kindred might approach an elder, but doing so is nothing short of brazen.

The establishment of a cyclical dynasty is traditionally kept quiet right up through the moment when the elder enters eclipse and his protégé takes control of his holdings. Ideally, only the elders who witness the signing of the dynastic compact should know what's taking place. This is to prevent, among other things, young Kindred approaching the patron and trying to coax him into making *them* his protégé instead or hostile elders making a lunge for the patron's assets before the protégé has fully mastered his patron's various sources of wealth.

It also keeps other covenants from trying to interfere in a potential Invictus asset. Other covenants *hate* cyclical dynasties because established Houses represent a major asset for the First Estate. If a House is going to fail, it's likely to do so within five years of the patron first entering torpor or within five hours of his rising from it. A House that survives those critical moments could well wind up being one of the Invictus' bulwarks in the centuries to come, and is deserving of at least token interference on those grounds alone.

ANOTHER WAY IN

Most Invictus Kindred know at least the basics of how one winds up as part of a House, but there are other ways to get there. One trick is to find an elder who's not entirely satisfied with his choice of prot g and then work on him to sow dissent between patron and prot g while presenting yourself as a promising up-and-coming Kindred.

"I know Sebastian has been your prot g for many decades now, Violet, but he really hasn't been keeping up on the best investment techniques. Had you left *me* in charge last time you entered eclipse, you'd be worth three times as much by now, and here are the charts to prove it."

House Advantages

As practiced by the Invictus, cyclical dynasties have many advantages beyond the obvious stability benefits to wealth and influence. Some of these advantages are political. Moreover, the arrangement is often characterized by the Invictus as having a spiritual or subtle sorcerous element that benefits all members of the House, though this could be simple superstition or showmanship. Members of the First Estate don't know how these additional advantages are conveyed, but the Invictus make the most of the advantages.

On the other hand, there are the very visible and unquestionable advantages of continuance of a line. Being part of a House mitigates the fears many vampires have of torpor and makes them more willing to enter torpor for shorter periods of time; many of the advantages of the cyclical dynasty system originate with that fact.

Sweet Torpor

Cyclical dynasties do away with much, if not all, of the fear many elder Kindred have of torpor. The House system makes voluntary torpor a palatable idea and a feasible practice. Elders can comfortably turn over their empires to others while they regenerate themselves in relatively untroubled torpor. Given the system of timing adopted by many Houses, it's quite likely that some member of the House will always have sufficiently potent Vitae to rouse the sleeping members of the House, so torpor ceases to be a looming threat but becomes, instead, a minor disruptive annoyance. Freely entering torpor in such a fashion has many advantages, not the least of which is the higher quality of dreams that follow a serene transition to eclipse.

Kindred who are members of cyclical dynasties almost always share havens and pass the day in close proximity, often in physical contact. While they would never volunteer this information to vampires of other covenants, Invictus Kindred believe that this practice strongly mitigates the negative effects of torpor: the

torpid vampire is at peace; complete and blissful unconsciousness replaces the fevered hallucinations common to eclipse. This reduces the psychic strain and mental horror of torpor and allows the sleeping vampire to retain more and clearer memories from before his eclipse. It also prevents the Kindred from picking up derangements during long bouts of torpor. Truly old Kindred consider this one of the greatest advantages of the dynastic arrangement.

The exact benefits of sweet torpor are up to the Storyteller, but Invictus lore suggests that sweet torpor may grant elders perfect recall of their Requiems, help elders retain their Humanity or grant other subtle advantages at the Storyteller's discretion.

Houses and Bloodlines

Among the Kindred of the Invictus, cyclical dynasties are often associated with bloodlines. The continuity and unity of purpose provided by a dynastic House simplifies the otherwise complex task of establishing a bloodline, and minimizes the danger of the bloodline going awry after the founder succumbs to torpor. Obviously, this is easier if all members of the House are from the same clan, but even mixed-clan Houses have succeeded in creating bloodlines.

Once a House has established a bloodline, the House may move to create a brood of childer from that bloodline as the House's agents in the Danse Macabre. To many Invictus Kindred, this kind of arrangement is the pinnacle of accomplishment in the Requiem, a lasting legacy that many consider to be the one true indicator of success in the Requiem.

Continuance of Office

Any official title held by a Kindred is held by his House. Known members of a cyclical dynasty are expected to take one another's place in official Kindred positions (all those roles that the Invictus created in the first place). When Prince Miriam of House Hekovah needs to enter torpor, her protégé David (whom she, in all likelihood, has been grooming for decades for the position) steps into the position as though nothing had changed. Decades or centuries hence, when it's David's turn to enter torpor, he will either return the Princeship to Miriam (assuming she's out of torpor) or to the House's third member.

This custom is considered absolute and inviolable by the Invictus, although other covenants, *especially* the Carthians, see it as oppressive and occasionally try to override it in domains where the Invictus is relatively weak. The problem with this, of course, is that domains with a House at the helm are precisely those places where the Invictus is strongest and where it has held power for the longest. In the modern nights, then, the best that other covenants can hope for is to keep members of a House from becoming Prince in the first place.

Responsibilities to the House

Being part of a cyclical dynasty is not without its costs and its inconveniences. A vampire must prove himself *extensively* before he's even invited to join an established House, and once he's signed the dynastic compact, he must constantly live up to the standards of his House or be taken to task by the House's other members.

Among other things, he must be able to fulfill the obligations of all of his House's offices. If his House holds the title of Prince, he must be able to manage the domain effectively; if his House is Sheriff, then he must possess the abilities necessary for that position.

A member of a House must also be able to shepherd the House's holdings, building on what he has been given, in the form of financial assets and in mortal influence, boons and social capital.

Caring for the House's sleeping member(s) is a significant portion of the duties associated with cyclical dynasties. Active members are expected to pass their days slumbering alongside the House's torpid member(s) as a gesture of solidarity, loyalty or love.

Waking members of the House are also responsible for rousing members of their House from torpor at predetermined times or in cases of emergency. At these times, the active member is expected to have ample blood waiting to help smooth the transition from torpor to wakefulness as much as possible and avoid the drama of a hunger frenzy. Those Kindred with more regal sensibilities often stipulate that they expect to be immersed in fresh, warm blood at the moment of their rising; the House's waking member is responsible for seeing that this comes to pass.

The Summit

Any period when all members of a dynastic House are up and active is called a Summit. This is a rare occurrence, usually taking place no more than once every 25 to 50 years; a Summit usually lasts no more than a month before one or more members of the House fall into torpor. During this time, the members of the House discuss developments that have taken place in the world (the world of the Kindred, in particular), respond to challenges (of whatever type) to the House and plan their collective strategies for the next several decades. This is also when a House is most likely to take direct action against those it sees as its enemies. If a Kindred has landed herself on the wrong side of a dynastic House — say, by working against its interests or by consistently evincing contempt toward the House's members — she would do well to keep a low profile while the House is having its Summit because this is the ideal time for the House to strike against its enemies.

Even members of a cyclical dynasty can have misgivings about an approaching Summit, depending on the state of the House's holdings and how the torpid member of the House felt about how he was treated while he was in eclipse.

Dread, however, is only one response to a House during its Summit. Depending on the House and the city where it's located, a Summit might be celebrated with a huge party (as it would be in an Invictus city where members of the House were powerful and respected) or a Summit might be kept a closely guarded secret (as it would be in cities where the Invictus is weak or if the members of the House were feared or despised).

Complications

While participation in a cyclical dynasty is almost always an excellent long-term strategy for a Kindred, it also complicates certain aspects of the Requiem. Being part of a House means that one's greatest loyalty must always be to one's House. This makes some other social arrangements difficult, if not impossible, and impacts a number of other elements of the vampire's Requiem.

On a covenant-wide basis, the greatest problem of Houses is the effect they have on the morale of younger members of the Invictus. One city can only have so many dynastic Houses and still hope to gain new converts to the First Estate. Advancement in the Invictus is slow enough as it is. The presence of Houses brings advancement to a complete standstill, as one dynastic House can hold onto a coveted city office forever. Only the largest cities with the strongest Invictus presence can have even two cyclical dynasties before recruitment starts to suffer. More than that, and neonates are reduced to little more than disruptive rabble, pawns with no hope for advancement (at least not without packing up and leaving town). Still, even that can serve the Invictus' long-range plans. More than one city has been colonized by young Invictus Kindred who went out on their own after growing tired of the smothering effect of too many dynastic Houses.

If cyclical dynasties are problematic *within* the Invictus, they are loathed by the other covenants, particularly the Carthians. Cyclical dynasties embody everything the other covenants hate (or envy) about the Invictus: they're arrogant, spoiled, condescending and, worst of all, they seem to control *everything*. Other covenants recognize the Invictus' House system as a serious strategic advantage, but the covenants also know that, for a variety of reasons, the system would not translate well to their own covenant. Truth be told, other covenants have made attempts at cyclical dynasties, but never with results that could be called anything better than mediocre. The Carthians lack the elders, the Circle of the Crone lacks the discipline, the Drag-

ons lack the interest and the Sanctified have yet to decide if the House system might be sinful or unsavory.. Ultimately, cyclical dynasties, by their very nature, capture the essence of the Invictus mentality, and no other covenant can imitate their success without adopting certain philosophies or modes of thought that are quintessentially Invictus.

Vinculum

Given the numerous responsibilities associated with taking part in a cyclical dynasty, developing a Vinculum with a House member may be the *least* of a Kindred's worries. Still, no vampire is so trusting that he's willing to sign his unlife away without taking every opportunity to see that he's not betrayed while in eclipse. More experienced Kindred see their Vinculum with House members as an advantage, not a disadvantage. A Vinculum prevents them from being bound to anyone else and maintains the bond between members of the House better than any other method.

When the Vinculum *can* be a disadvantage is when an established House takes in a new member. If three members of a cyclical dynasty all have a Vinculum to one another and they decide to admit a fourth member into the House, the new member will be expected to undergo the Vinculum to his new brethren, but they will not be able to develop a Vinculum to him in return. Since it's the loyalty of the incoming member that's most suspect anyway, that may not be a problem, but the newer Kindred may find it a little harder to trust the other members of his House when he realizes how things stand.

Oaths

A Kindred taking part in a cyclical dynasty is presumed to have sworn an Oath of Fealty to the other members of his House. He may not swear any of the major oaths to any other Kindred for any other reason. His time and energy are expected to go toward furthering the goals of his House.

There is one infrequent exception to this rule. A vampire may swear an Oath of Service to another Kindred, provided the Oath is of short duration and relatively simple to execute.

At no point may a Kindred in a cyclical dynasty ever swear oaths that conflict with his allegiance to his House. Such arrangements are in clear violation of the spirit of the dynastic compact and will almost surely result in distrust and destruction.

Trust is a rare and precious commodity among the Kindred, and it's indispensable to the establishment and maintenance of a cyclical dynasty. There is no room for questionable loyalties or even the *appearance* of questionable loyalties in the House system, and any Kindred whose loyalties do appear questionable is unlikely to remain part of a House for long.

Coteries

A Kindred's true loyalty will always lie with his House, but this need not prevent him from joining a coterie. The coterie will certainly benefit from the Kindred's increased fortunes, but the other members of his coterie must also realize that a Kindred's loyalties to his coterie are always secondary to his loyalties to his House.

One way of dealing with this awkward situation is for all or most members of a coterie to be members of Houses (although Houses are hardly common enough for this to be an easy answer). In this situation, all members of the coterie will at least understand the basic rules of engagement and know what they can and cannot do in the context of their coterie.

Death in the House System

Killing a vampire who is a member of a cyclical dynasty is akin to removing the favored arm of the surviving Kindred in that House. It is emotionally — and often financially — crippling. To members of the House system, there is no worse transgression, and there is no limit to the lengths they will go for revenge. Any vampire who kills one member of a House had best be prepared to kill the others as well, as that's the only way he's going to escape retribution. In this sense, being a member of a House offers an additional modicum of security; any vampire aware of a Kindred's participation in a House may be inclined to seek another victim rather than earn the enmity of the House's remaining members.

Still, the loss of a member is devastating to a House, and the smaller the House, the more devastating the loss. If a House has only two members, the member in torpor may wake to find his resources long since disbursed or stolen. If the House has particularly loyal allies, another Kindred may take steps to awaken the torpid vampire and explain what has happened. Over the centuries, more than one Kindred has landed himself a place in a prestigious House by risking everything in order to wake an elder whose protégé had met Final Death.

In Houses with three or more members, the remaining active member of the House is free to rouse the torpid partner — the preferred course of action — or take a new protégé. The latter course of action is more acceptable the older the House is, although members of a cyclical dynasty with the Speaker for the Dead Merit (see below) may do so freely.

Dynastic Treasures

Over the centuries, Kindred who participate in the House system have occasionally devised wondrous items that help maintain their dynasties. The Invictus looks kindly on those who create tools or baubles that support the institution of dynasties.

Conservatias (Restorative Vessels)

A *conservatias* is a “restorative vessel,” a bottle, jar or other container for the storage of Vitae over long years. A rare handful of those owned by modern Invictus date from the dark of Rome. Several more *conservatii* were crafted by contracted or imprisoned warlocks in the medieval nights. For a brief time in the 19th century, new restorative vessels were being carried by nomads out of New England and South America, but their makers are not commonly known.

Many restorative vessels resemble nothing more than simple clay urns. Others appear as old alchemical beakers made from black iron and etched with alchemical symbols. Strictly speaking, a *conservatias* can be made from any suitably large vessel capable of holding blood — most are ornate or priceless only because Kindred of the Invictus have paid for them.

A *conservatias* does nothing but maintain the potency of blood stored within it, up to two Vitae’s worth. That, however, is enough for Kindred who fear torpor. An elder vampire preparing to enter a long torpor can put enough of his own Vitae into this vessel to bring him out of torpor only 50 years later. (Kindred lose Blood Potency at the rate of one point every 25 years, and it takes Vitae of a vampire of Blood Potency two notches higher to revive a torpid vampire, so, after 50 years, the vampire’s own Vitae, preserved in the phial, is sufficiently powerful to rouse him from torpor. See **Vampire: The Requiem** p. 99 for more on Blood Potency.) This may not seem like much, but when torpor can last for a thousand years for some aged vampires, it’s a great boon. Many elders want to make sure their protégés can rouse them at any time, if necessary, and such elders have been known to pay vast sums for one of these phials.

Heart Thorns

Crafted from a short length of rose stalk, heart thorns are perhaps the ultimate representation of fidelity and solidarity between members of a House. Heart thorns

are an all-or-nothing sort of item in that either all members of the House have them or no one does. When all members of a House decide to use these odd mystical devices, they gather lengths of thorny rose stem (on occasion with the roses still attached) and have a blood sorcerer or mage of some sort prepare them. The earliest blood thorns were created using the Crone’s art of Crúac, according to popular belief. Tonight, Acolytes sometimes trade training in the ritual to the Invictus in exchange for other favors.

When all members are ready, they undergo “heart surgery,” during which the participants must remain perfectly conscious and not enter frenzy. This last part can be difficult, as the operation inflicts the equivalent of four levels of lethal damage on those who endure it. The chosen elder carefully wraps the thorny lengths of rose stalks around their hearts in what is invariably an agonizing procedure. While the Kindred “surgeon” — usually one of the highest-ranking Invictus elders in the city, by tradition — does this, the participants swear allegiance to each other individually and to the House above all. These oaths are sanctified by the blood and pain of the participants.

Once the procedure is finished, a toast of blood is drunk to the House. (This toast isn’t part of the ritual; it’s to help replace the blood the Kindred expended to heal after their “operation.”) The House members are then free to go about their business. Heart thorns only have two effects: If a member of a House is ever about to harm another member of his House knowingly, either directly or indirectly, the thorns in the rose stalk immediately pierce his heart and send him mystically into torpor. Likewise, if a Kindred implanted with a heart thorn ever takes it out, the heart thorns in his brothers’ hearts writhe painfully in their chests, alerting them to his treachery or distress. The pain caused by this pronged mass moving in a vampire’s chest is excruciating, and is easily enough to awaken a vampire from sleep or even, in some mythic cases, torpor.

Houses

Following is a sampling of some notable Houses from the history of the Invictus. While the following short list can only hint at the true variety of cyclical dynasties, it does suggest some of the ways such arrangements can function (or be dysfunctional) and what roles they might play in your game.

House Takurizen

The fourth and last member of House Takurizen joined during the Heian period, nearly 800 years ago.

The intervening years have seen the House — and, by extension, the Invictus — slowly but steadily lay claim to more of Tokyo’s Kindred population. Not only does the First Estate have a near-monopoly on power in Tokyo, but most of the Kindred in the city are sworn vassals to the House.

The four Ventrué who compose House Takurizen are truly ancient and truly frightening — not that you could tell by looking at them. Judging solely by appearance, one could easily get the impression that all four members were young, well-behaved corporate men. They present a façade of cultured gentility, but they are ruthless to those who don’t support them. There are always at least two members of the House



active at any one time, and they have learned to coordinate their efforts to a degree most American Kindred would find nigh impossible.

These elders have seen Japan change drastically in the last 100 years, and while they've begun to dislike the country's culture, they appreciate the wealth the change has brought the House. House Takurizen's influence is everywhere in Tokyo's underworld. Tokyo's yakuza is largely the elders' to command. They have used their clan Disciplines extensively to keep tabs on everyone of interest to them. By making extensive use of animal spies and Manchurian candidates, House Takurizen has systematically undermined every faction that has dared challenge.

House Machten

Based in the sewers of Paris, House Machten comprises three ancient Nosferatu who refer to one another as "My Beloved," "My Delight" and "My Nightmare." Delight is the only member of the House currently active, although Nightmare is due out of torpor very shortly.

The Kindred of House Machten date back to the time of the Camarilla of Rome, and these Kindred still seem to think in terms of the Camarilla from time to time. House Machten still seems to view the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum as one entity, and the House members find themselves viewing the Ordo

Dracul as a strange offshoot of the Circle of the Crone. House Machten acknowledges the Carthians, on the other hand, only through acts of violence. Delight, in particular, derives great enjoyment from draining Carthians dry and hiding their desiccated bodies in the catacombs beneath the city, where they're indistinguishable from the mortal remains interred there.

Though House Machten could go for higher office, the House members fill the position of Hound in Paris. The Invictus Prince of Paris is relatively young, ironically, and all too happy to have a Kindred force of nature like House Machten at his command. They use Gestapo-like tactics to keep the other Kindred of Paris in line, and the House's reward is the orderly behavior of the city's terrified Kindred. House Machten has taken a particular dislike to the Carthians, whom the House sees as trying to disorder the city and soliciting disrespect for the Invictus; the Carthians have all but gone underground to escape persecution. Most recently, Paris' Carthian Movement has been discussing what tactics they need to adopt to send one or all members of House Machten to Final Death. The Carthians feel pressured to act before Nightmare wakes, but the Movement's numbers have been so reduced that they don't have the resources. Should the Kindred of House Machten hear word of the Carthians' conspiracy, it is entirely possible that Paris will be entirely without a Carthian presence.



House Lamia

The Kindred of House Lamia operate out of Thessoloniki, the second-largest city in Greece. It is an aggressively matriarchal House, and its three members have sworn to grant the Embrace only to women, preferably women who have been grievously wronged by men. All three members of House Lamia share a particular dislike of men. The House members have seen centuries of male arrogance and philandering and have dedicated their Requiem to making the cruelest, least loyal and most deceitful men in the city suffer for their assorted crimes. Every time House Lamia has a Summit, these three powerful old vampires determine who the city's most reprehensible men are and hunt them down. On average, the city sees a purge of its men once every 25 years or so, and the results are pronounced enough that House Lamia has established a place for itself in the local folklore.

Some Athenian women have taken to asking the members of the House for vengeance when they've been egregiously wronged by a man, and the House has shown a willingness to fulfill this function, especially if the women can contribute something to the long-term goals of the dynasty through gifts of money, influence, secrets or other resources.

Mortals are not the only ones who need to fear the Kindred of House Lamia, either. Male vampires,

particularly those who prove themselves untrustworthy or duplicitous, are also marked for punishment. Thessoloniki has a Kindred population comparable to that of any other city of similar size, but only a handful of those are male. The Kindred of House Lamia have made the city palpably hostile to male Kindred, and sent to Final Death many of those who chose to stay. Among the few mortals in Thessoloniki who know of the existence of Kindred, almost all of them would be amazed to discover that male vampires even exist.

Over the years, many of the city's male vampires have been captured by members of House Lamia (or their many agents) and "tapped," that is to say, they're totally immobilized, fed a diet of low-quality mortal blood and fed from when the members of the House reach a degree of Blood Potency that necessitates their feeding from other Kindred. Since all members of the House are already bound to one another through the Vinculum, feeding from a "tapped" Kindred doesn't pose any threat of changing loyalties. Worse, when the Lamia have grown tired of this vessel's "taste," they simply send him to Final Death, often through the act of diablerie.

The Lamia are hardly the ideal proponents of the Invictus' philosophies, but they are old, and powerful, and they rule the Kindred of Thessoloniki (most of whom are their childer), with a velvet-covered iron fist. Because of the Lamia, the Invictus is, for all intents and purposes, the only game in town for local Kindred.

The members of House Lamia seem to have discovered a secret to shortening torpor; even after reaching the lofty heights of Blood Potency, members of this House never seem to need to fall into eclipse for more than 25 years or so at a stretch before rising again. This ability to enter short torpor, if it needs to be said, is an incredible advantage as it allows the Kindred of this cyclical dynasty to determine their own Blood Potency with a degree of control rarely seen anywhere else. None of these three Kindred allows her Blood Potency to fall below five, and they frequently rise to the highest levels of Blood Potency, making them terrifying adversaries and favored allies.

House Sephenet

Among the oldest Houses in the Invictus is House Sephenet. Based in Cairo, all three of Sephenet's members hearken back to the days before the coming of Islam, making even the *youngest* of their number more than 1,300 years old.

Two of Sephenet's members are women, a Ventrue sire and childe. The third of their number is a socially astute Mekhet. The younger of the Ventrue is currently in torpor.





Together, House Sephenet acts as the Kindred Prince of Cairo, a slowly cycling oligarchy. The House uses its resources strategically to see to it that the Invictus is by far the strongest covenant in the city. Significantly, the House members also demonstrate a much-noted leniency toward Kindred affiliated with the Circle of the Crone. On the other hand, House Sephenet has never shown *any* mercy toward the Kindred of the Lancea Sanctum, and, even into the modern nights, the embattled Kindred of the Sanctified occupy an unusually lowly position in Cairo.

The great stone haven of House Sephenet is a palace furnished in lavish, almost sybaritic, style. Anything solid is crusted in gold and gemstones, anything soft is covered in silk and velvet.

The Kindred of House Sephenet are true libertines, and they have often been mistaken for Daeva. (Their Discipline spread makes this an easy mistake to make.) In the staunchly conservative environment of Cairo, this libertinism has made the House both enemies (among the strict Muslims) and friends (among those rebelling against the restrictive Islamic system). The House is responsible for much of Cairo's black market, and House members operate several carefully hidden opium dens and brothels. Over the centuries, House Sephenet has frequently used its *vast* influence in the area to undermine the more zealous mullahs and attenuate the more extremist elements of Islam.

Kindred visiting Cairo will find that the members of Sephenet have little trouble following the visiting Kindred's every move; little happens that the House does not at least implicitly condone.

Sephenet's influence web reaches into every aspect of Cairo's existence. There is no one and nothing that goes unseen by the House's beggars, whores, contacts and ghouls. It is a poorly kept secret in Cairo that House Sephenet is rich and loose with its purse strings when information of an *unusual* nature is concerned. The House is also quite adept at using the information it gathers. (One of its members is Mekhet, after all.)

Recent years have seen the conflict between House Sephenet and Cairo's Islamic regime grow hotter. An as-yet-unknown cleric has declared a *fatwah* on the House and its allies, and a series of Islamic witch-hunters have entered Cairo in an effort to rid the city of its decadent Kindred royalty. One of these witch hunts culminated in the destruction of a portion of the Sephenet palace when one witch-hunter turned suicide bomber. House Sephenet is now gearing up for a devastating counterattack; the House has offered an enormous bounty for information leading to the identity of the mullah who issued the *fatwah*.

House Penangallan

In the jungles of Malaysia exists a House that has set itself up as the nobility of the bloody jungle. Savage queens, they hold power not in a single city, but in a network of closely packed villages. These three Gangrel Kindred are easily identified by their long white hair and the long claws they sport as their sign of office (and clan). At times, the Kindred of House Penangallan seem more like forces of nature or terrible jungle demons than anything that can claim to be civilized — especially around mortals they deem to be ignorant or unworthy. Still, House members manifest a remarkable degree of civility in the presence of other Kindred.

This cyclical dynasty is among the most violent and primitive in the Invictus, though House members are among the covenant's more zealous members. Those Kindred familiar with the Invictus' more genteel reputation might have trouble accepting this House as part of the covenant at all, but House Penangallan observes all of the covenant's traditions with due respect and enthusiasm — they're just a bit more rustic in their execution.

Chief among its accomplishments, House Penangallan has survived the savagery of a largely rural area, establishing an orderly haven in the middle of the chaotic wilderness. They are considered trailblazers by some Kindred and ignorant bumpkins by others.



Two of these queens of the jungle are active at any one time. To their credit, the fierce queens of House Penangallan feed exclusively on the sick and the mad in their jungle with the express intention of strengthening the population the queens prey on. By their reckoning, the stronger their herd, the stronger they become.

The Penangallan haven is known to be a safehouse for Invictus on the run. So long as the fugitive is an Invictus member in good standing, he can expect to find refuge in the jungle haven of the Penangallan — for a price, of course. Safety is never a cheap commodity among the Kindred.

A Fallen House: Draumerai

Arising in the Swabian lands of the *Schwarzwalde*, House Draumerai consisted of two Kindred, a Daeva sire and his childe. While three-member Houses are considered more stable, the elder Draumerai was so particular about whom he would accept into his House that only his childe met his stringent criteria.

At its peak in the 16th and 17th centuries, House Draumerai, located in Munich, was considered one of the foremost cyclical dynasties in the Invictus. The House embodied the highest virtues of the covenant and vied with similarly powerful Houses throughout Bavaria for power and prestige. The

dark revels of House Draumerai were legendary throughout Europe, and the stuff of nightmares for kine. House members were, inarguably, among the best-known Kindred in the Invictus — and then subtle changes began to creep into both members of the House.

While House Draumerai had survived since the time of the Visigoths, each cycle of torpor and rising brought unexpected changes in both members of the House, and these changes affected the patron and protégé differently. Draumerai the elder awakened from every torpor more brilliant and focused than when he entered the long sleep. This, it was believed, was an unexpected benefit of his relationship with his childe. It was entirely unprecedented and hardly a common benefit of the House system, but inexplicable by any other means.

Draumerai the younger, alas, was less fortunate. He rose from every period of torpor with a new derangement. Whether this was the result of some curse, or simply some strange balance to his elder's growing insight is unknown. (The concern over a curse is not unwarranted superstition in this case, as House Draumerai had long been in conflict with a college of mortal mystics operating in the Black Forest.)

Toward the end of the 20th century, the younger Draumerai awakened from torpor entirely unfit to fulfill his dynastic responsibilities — or to interact with any sane person for that matter. The elder, who had been prepared to enter torpor, made last-minute arrangements to remain active. Rather than accept his rest, the elder took his mad childe to the heart of their Munich haven and diablerized him, weeping tears of blood all the while. It was, the elder felt, the only appropriate and suitably intimate way to end the House.

Now Draumerai the Prince of Munich, Draumerai the one and lonely, is seeking a new protégé (and possibly two) who might be worthy of entering into a cyclical dynasty with him. His fortune and influence are vast, extending throughout Germany, Vienna and the Czech Republic, and he shows no interest in making another dead-end mistake. His discriminating taste has only grown more particular with the passing of the centuries. Dozens of powerful European Kindred have met with him to discuss their fitness to join with him in the new House Draumerai, but thus far he has shown himself to be nigh-impossible to impress. He wants only the most beautiful, most brilliant, most driven Kindred in the world to be his protégés, and he refuses to settle for anything else. That said, so driven is Draumerai to re-enter a cyclical dynasty that he has hinted that an unprecedented voyage out of Bavaria might be on his agenda if he does not find a protégé soon.

Domain Politics

The charms of the Requiem may be myriad and plentiful, but the first among them — to the Invictus way of thinking, at least — is politics. Getting along, getting ahead, accruing and spending political capital and acquiring power are the nightly pastimes for First Estate Kindred.

The Invictus is concerned with control and order among the Kindred, and if true order cannot be attained, then at least the appearance of order must be maintained. If even that falls by the wayside, then the First Estate is likely to take extreme action to bring about a more orderly state of affairs.

The nightly goal among many Invictus members is to impact Kindred society in accordance with their wills without giving the impression of having done anything. The subtler course of action is the better course of action as far as the First Estate is concerned. Many Invictus Kindred have been known to feign ignorance even when a long-held goal of theirs is finally achieved, making it all but impossible to tell who is involved in what conspiracy.

Doing Business

Across the globe, the Kindred of the Invictus use the same general tools and techniques to conduct their business in domain after domain, usually with only minor regional variations. No discussion of the covenant would be complete without a look at the strategies that have kept it in power for all these centuries. Following is a catalogue of the basic building blocks upon which the First Estate's empire is built.

Hierarchy

From the perspective of the First Estate, there is no question regarding how interpersonal interactions should be carried out between members of the covenant. That's the purpose of the Invictus' tightly held social order: every Kindred should know exactly where she stands in the scheme of Kindred society. That takes the uncertainty out of interactions and provides all members of the First Estate with a framework for all interactions with other Kindred. When one swears an oath to the Invictus, one is agreeing to abide by the covenant's hierarchy (and all that is entailed thereby).

In some domains, this hierarchy is so highly formalized that every member of the Invictus is quietly assigned a number that refers to her position in the organization. The Prince is always number one, and any Kindred occupying the role of Judex is automatically number two so long she is carrying out the duties of that position; after that, the numbering goes down through the

Primogen, Prisci and other key positions until arriving at the highest numbered Kindred, usually a neonate or a member of the covenant who has brought disgrace upon himself in one way or another. The higher the number, the closer the Kindred is to the bottom of the heap. A Kindred's number will also reflect her standing in her coterie, whether she is Primus, Secundus or so on. (See "The Privileges of Rank" sidebar on p. 100 of *Coteries* for more on this ranking system).

This hierarchy of the First Estate is always in effect, but is hardly static. As Kindred meet Final Death, fall into eclipse, prove (or embarrass) themselves and so on, the hierarchy is always churning. Predictably, more churning takes place near the bottom than near the top, but there's a modicum of turnover even at the top. Members of dynastic Houses, incidentally, are all treated as a single unit and share a single rung on the Invictus ladder; the standing of the House is the standing of all its members.

Those Invictus occupying a higher station in the hierarchy are deferred to; those Invictus occupying lesser stations may be assigned tasks or commanded to perform deeds on behalf of the First Estate. A commonplace phrase often heard in domains controlled by the First Estate is "respectful deference is a sign of upward mobility." Some members of the covenant believe this, some don't, but all abide by it, lest it prove to be true so far as they're concerned.

Delegation

One of the advantages of the Invictus' strict attention to hierarchy is the ability to delegate responsibility to those Kindred lower in the organizational ranks. The Prince doesn't have enough time in her nights to provide personal attention to every last problem that needs solving. Since she's the Prince, however, she can assign a task to a Primogen or other lower-ranking member of the city and expect her will to be carried out; likewise, the Judex can request a "favor" of the Sheriff and expect it to be granted.

The types of tasks that a Kindred can delegate vary by domain and status, but, in general, the higher up the ladder the individual is, the more demanding favors he can ask. The Prince, of course, can ask anything of any other member of the First Estate. Others, technically, can ask anything of any vampire further down the Invictus hierarchy, but the further one is down the ladder, the more likely the request is to get lost or forgotten, especially if the Kindred of whom the favor was asked is relatively near the requesting Kindred on the hierarchy.

Rivalry

The closer two Kindred are in the hierarchy — especially if they're both relatively near the bottom

— the more competitive they're likely to be, and the more competitive the covenant *expects* them to be. Elders are notorious for subtly pitting two Kindred against one another as a means of seeing which one will advance in the First Estate and which one will fall by the wayside. The elders look not only at the degree of ambition this rivalry reveals but also at the degree of strategy and common sense. Ambition is a high virtue as far as the elders are concerned, but if ambition drives a Kindred to acts of blatant, tactless aggression, that individual is clearly not ready for promotion (and may, in fact, be demoted or otherwise penalized).

Money

For some members of the First Estate, especially elders, wealth is a given. One's standing in the covenant is affected by how much wealth one commands. Two Primogen may share the same rank and have as many years in the Requiem, but the one with the more money will have the higher ranking in the Invictus hierarchy. In some cases, extreme disparities of wealth can create an inversion of the covenant's usual ranking system. In the traditional Invictus hierarchy, for example, the Harpy outranks the Keeper of Elysium. If the Keeper of Elysium has *notably* more money than the Harpy, however, then it's possible that the Keeper of Elysium might enjoy a higher standing in the covenant (although that's likely to earn the unmitigated hatred of the Harpy, but that's par for the course).

The only exception to this rule is the Judex, who is *always* number two, whether she has an empire worth billions or is bankrupt. That said, a Judex who does not have her own fortune might likely be considered too easily bought, and therefore unfit for the position.

Money is key in the First Estate because of the influence that money represents and the needs it can satisfy. A member of the Invictus who aspires to municipal influence needs wealth to bribe politicians, pay corporate attorneys, buy witnesses, hire thugs and entertain powerful figures in the manner to which they've become accustomed. None of these come cheap. The Invictus isn't interested in money for its own sake (as common Kindred sometimes allege), but for the power and security that money can buy.

CYA

"Cover Your Ass" is among the foremost philosophies of the Invictus. Plausible deniability should be built into every plan, plot and machination carried out by Invictus members. If any plan has even the slightest chance of gaining the unfavorable notice of another Kindred, the standard Invictus protocol is to have a way out or a plausible means of denying responsibility. Many times, when

a member of the First Estate suffers punishment by a sire or mentor, it's not so much for committing the offending act in the first place as for getting caught and not having cultivated the appropriate plausible deniability.

Mortal Influence

The Invictus understands how to wield mortal influence in ways that other covenants, even the mortal-savvy Carthians do not. While that latter covenant may have numerous ties to the mortal world, the Invictus has the advantage of money — *old* money and lots of it — with which to back up the covenant's interactions with mortals. Every First Estate Kindred is likely to have connections to a variety of the domain's sectors, communities and subcultures through which she can subtly work her will in the mortal world. The power wielded collectively by a city's Invictus Kindred is astonishing and terrifying, not just for the breadth of communities it covers, but for the depth to which it penetrates the institutions of the mortal world.

Cultivating this degree of influence is not simply a matter of using a quick Discipline or flashing a roll of 100-dollar bills, however. Finding good pawns is a lengthy, time-intensive process that, when done right, pays amazing dividends in controlling a mortal realm.

Choosing an Influence Sector

The hardest decision many members of the First Estate make is where and how they want to establish themselves in the mortal world. Common wisdom states that the power and appeal of an influence sector are inversely related: the more inherently enjoyable forms of influence (nightlife or high society, for example) have only limited use, while the more powerful types of influence (banks, politics, churches) are harder to cultivate and often quite tedious to stay on top of. Patience, determination and ambition all typically play a part in where a Kindred establishes himself and how much utility he's able to gain from his contacts.

Within the First Estate, all mortal influence is good, although those Kindred who forego gratification for power are often seen as more likely candidates for advancement than those who do otherwise.

Finding the Perfect Pawn

Not all mortals are well suited to serving Kindred masters; choosing good pawns is considered something of an art form within the Invictus.

Every Kindred *wants* pawns sitting on the top of the power structure: mayors, deans and CEOs, but the fact is that that's simply not feasible. Not only are those figures the most aggressively vied for among the First Estate, but many of them (politicians in particular) are dangerously high profile and, therefore, exceedingly risky if a Masquerade breach should take place.

First Meetings

Once a Kindred has determined where in the great web of influence he wants his contacts, it's time to make the meetings come to pass. Obviously, more socially adept Kindred have the advantage in this regard: the Daeva, in particular, have a serious advantage with regard to gaining new pawns. Other clans may find this a little harder, particularly with more highly placed mortals. A Kindred doesn't just walk into the mayor's home and ask for a few moments of privacy.

One way of getting around this difficulty is to have lower-level pawns introduce the Kindred to better-placed individuals ("Sebastian, I'd like you to meet my boss, Jane Randolph. She works with the mayor . . .") or leverage one kind of mortal influence to gain a pawn in a new area. (A Daeva with a great deal of control over the local media would likely be able to arrange a meeting with key members of the law enforcement or political communities, for example.)

Advancing the Pawn

Every Kindred in the city *wants* all of the highest-ranking and most powerful pawns, but the reality of the situation is that that is simply not going to happen. There's far too much competition for well-placed mortals for one vampire to monopolize more than one or two such individuals. A more sensible, and much more widely practiced tactic, is to take an ambitious mid-level contact, develop his talents a bit (possibly by making him a ghoul) and arrange for his advancement through his organization.

Any Kindred who doesn't push his pawns to develop their talents beyond what they were when he took them on is missing out on an extraordinary opportunity. While it may be beneficial to have a well-connected reporter in one's "stable," it's even better to have a station manager or editor-in-chief. There's little reason not to nudge circumstances in that direction through strategic brokering of influence or by assisting fate here and there: compromising the pawn's competition through strategic uses of Dominate, for example, or arranging a heart attack through the use of Nightmare.

Real-estate speculators do this by buying inexpensive "fixer-uppers," refurbishing them and then selling them for several times what they paid for them. Kindred wanting highly placed contacts apply the same strategy: find an ambitious and talented mid-level agent in the area one wants to move into, offer some career assistance in exchange for future loyalty and, if she accepts, make some phone calls to some powerful friends and start the ball rolling on the individual's expedited career.

Not only is this approach much more subtle than simply assuming control of an influential mortal, but it creates a degree of loyalty to the Kindred "facilitator" that is hard to get without resorting to the Vinculum.

The city's Catholic archbishop may be out of reach, but a well-positioned priest may be more accessible, and should the archbishop's brakes fail at an inopportune moment, then the Kindred gets what he wanted anyway . . .

Some sectors have a higher turnover rate than others. A vampire may find that gang leaders and street-level contacts move up the chain faster than civil servants, for example.

This pawn cultivation technique is slow and only works well for patient Kindred, but that describes nearly all members of the First Estate. These kinds of tactics can take years, and even decades in some instances, but if there's anything Kindred have to spare, it's time, especially if the Kindred is rewarded with a high-level pawn in the end.

Given how long it takes to advance through the Invictus ranks anyway, most members of the First Estate are likely to find that their mortal contacts have made it to the top of the heap before the Kindred has.

Rewarding the Pawn

Nothing is more crucial when dealing with mortal pawns than understanding what motivates them. A thrall who has carried out an important task should always be rewarded: ghouls will want blood, of course. A well-fed ghoul is a loyal ghoul, but a hungry ghoul is a walking betrayal waiting to happen. Other pawns, however, may want money, attention or any of a wide range of other rewards.

Increasing the pawn's power or prestige is an old and popular form of showing a pawn the value of his services. If he has served well thus far, give him more power: more money, VIP status at the city's hottest nightclub, another thug to order around, better weapons and so on. Appealing to a mortal's ego or sense of self-importance is an effective and relatively simple technique for ensuring loyalty.

The Dangers of the Breach

Over the centuries, the Invictus has learned some painful lessons about dealing with high-profile mortals, and the common wisdom is that the risks to the Masquerade, *especially* in the modern world, are rarely worth the benefits.

The fact of the matter is that *every* mortal pawn is capable of bringing exposure to the Kindred through one means or another, and there exists an inverse relationship between the stature of the mortal and the willingness of a responsible Kindred to turn her into a pawn. Put another way, the more scrutiny a pawn is likely to get, the less likely a vampire is to choose her as a pawn.

History has shown that *any* pawn, however carefully hid, can be exposed. The more valuable and effective a

mortal pawn, the more likely another Kindred is going to want to either usurp or destroy that individual. Mortals wake up and take notice when, for example, three mayors in a row die under mysterious circumstances within a year of taking office or when media moguls issue blanket statements not to cover certain kinds of stories or when police corruption becomes so blatant that it's impossible to ignore.

In the modern age of instant trans-global communication, that kind of notice must be avoided at all cost; consequently, the First Estate limits itself to more strategic but less highly placed pawns: not the mayor but the mayor's closest advisor, not the media mogul but the media mogul's wife and son and not the police commissioner but a selection of other high-ranking police officers.

Cultivating less highly placed pawns weakens the First Estate's hold on the mortal world, a fact of which the Invictus is painfully aware, but as the covenant responsible for order and defense of the Traditions among the Kindred, there's really no other way to maintain the necessary degree of subtlety. Any other arrangement, while incredibly tempting, is an invitation to disaster.

The Invictus Ascendant

When a city's Kindred policy-makers are predominantly from the Invictus (and they often are), the Kindred of that city are likely to benefit through a number of the First Estate's policies — and suffer from others.

The Invictus takes nothing so seriously as order among the Kindred, and cities the Invictus controls (or even those in which the Invictus simply have a notable presence) even *feel* different from cities under the control of another covenant: safer, but somewhat oppressive and paranoid. Younger vampires are kept tightly reigned in by sires, mentors and the like. Competition for feeding rights and status keep Kindred in line.

There is sometimes a feeling in Invictus-heavy cities that elders, regardless of their covenant affiliation, are all connected by a bond of age and mutual understanding. Mortals may think they've got problems with cronyism, but they've got nothing on centuries-old Kindred who've had decades to refine their "old-boy network." For their part, neonates and younger ancillae in such cities may feel that they're getting shafted, as all the lowliest tasks and offices fall to them while the elders have the habit of meeting incessantly behind closed doors with a handful of toadies and beautiful blood dolls running on empty.

Invictus-only Cities

Not all domains play host to the full Darwinian petri dish ensemble of Kindred covenants. In some cities, the Invictus has leveraged its standing to undermine

all other covenants and either force them out or prevent them from establishing a presence in the first place. In those domains, if a vampire who is aligned with any other covenant enters the domain, he has three choices: leave, convert or watch the sun rise. The Invictus takes these bastions of its power *very* seriously.

The First Estate is quite proud of being self-contained. It created the roles and titles that are in use in nearly every Kindred domain in the Western world, and the First Estate certainly doesn't need input from other covenants. In fact, it would rather not have any.

Invictus-only cities tend to be tranquil, moderately repressive domains where disruptions of the Masquerade are particularly rare and the political intrigue is so thick as to be suffocating. In these domains, the constant power struggles among Kindred play themselves out through coldly calculated, lengthily plotted conspiracies that are byzantine enough to shock Machiavelli himself.

The one challenge that can nudge one of these cities out of its nightly games of intrigue is the arrival of Kindred of another covenant, who will be met with a frigid welcome and told their options. The Invictus does not care to share its games with others, and all activities of the First Estate come to a halt until the interloper is dealt with.

Just Like Old Times . . .

A handful of cities exist around the globe in which the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum control the domains by themselves. Both covenants are predisposed to revere the past and the glories of the Camarilla, although such cities are less likely to recall the grandeur of the Camarilla and more likely constantly feud over the role of "church" and "state" in Kindred politics.

Still, these two covenants exhibit more compatibilities than any two other covenants. The drawback is that these two most conservative covenants frequently establish a Kindred culture that is so repressive as to be intolerable. Invictus-only cities are bad enough, but with the addition of the Sanctified's religious strictures and dogma, the resulting culture is often hostile to all but the most doctrinaire Kindred.

Such strict cities are known to exist here and there throughout Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe, but American Kindred have not shown much interest in such repressive arrangements.

The Invictus Prince

Upping that ante just a little bit more is the situation in which the Prince herself is a member of the First Estate. As much as Kindred from other covenants may hate to admit it, unlife under an Invictus Prince is



generally quite orderly and relatively safe for the city's Kindred. Whatever else the Invictus Princes may be, they have a reputation (deserved or not) for being fair. There can be no society of the Damned if there are no laws or if those laws are not enforced with some degree of even-handedness. Elders certainly get a modicum of preferential treatment, but that's because they know the rules well enough that they're allowed to break them judiciously. That said, even an Invictus elder will feel the full wrath of the Prince if he does something truly, egregiously stupid (like break the Masquerade in front of a gaggle of reporters).

Those who break the rules, obviously, must be made examples of, but those who know their places and stick to them will find a degree of safety unattainable in cities not controlled by the First Estate.

That said, the city is safe because the sentences for dissent or rash behavior are almost uniformly ghastly. The punishments meted out by the Princes of the First Estate to those who would challenge the status quo are legendary for the cruelty every bit as much as for the relative fairness.

Invictus Princes are great proponents of civility. Civility, in their eyes, is the foundation of a long, orderly Requiem. But if civility should fail, as it often does among vampires, then tyranny is a terribly popular

"Plan B." Some cities — notably those where civility is in short supply — basically function under the Kindred equivalent of martial law, with the Prince carrying out his will through a motley assortment of Hounds, Sheriffs, deputies and whatever other "law enforcement" he feels he needs. First Estate Princes see to it that every Kindred in the city knows his or her place; those who adhere to their places and keep their heads down pass their Requiems blissfully unnoticed. On the other hand, those Kindred who act outside their standing, especially if they do so wantonly or repeatedly, suffer the consequences.

Elder status in such a city is respected. The Prince certainly treats other elders with a great deal of deference even as he makes the Requiem harsh for neonates and impudent ancillae.

Court Life

Unlife within the Invictus can be (and often has been) described as an ongoing waltz of courtiers, all with daggers that they just can't wait to plunge into each other's backs.

Or at least that's the impression other covenants have of the First Estate. While the court life the Invictus aspires to has a certain hint of these sorts of ongoing



rivalries, the covenant's emphasis on law and order often trumps all other concerns.

Following are some of the courtly elements widely seen in Invictus domains:

Flattery

The First Estate's pecking order is at the core of the entire covenant. In the eyes of the Invictus, there can be no order without hierarchy. Kindred, however, are inherently corrupt creatures; the Beast undermines systems by its very nature. Flattery is a common corruption of the hierarchy in the First Estate.

Secrets

Secrets are the preferred coin of the realm in Invictus cities. Quiet scandals and hushed rumors are second only to Vitae in the appetites of First Estate Kindred. In part, this is due to the fact that secrets represent power. The more an individual has to lose, the more powerful the threat of blackmail. An Invictus elder, then, for all her power, can find herself plummeting down the hierarchy if someone digs up some good dirt on her — an instance of diablerie, for example, or a conspiracy against the Prince.

Harpies are particularly adept at ferreting out this kind of damning information, but that blade cuts both ways: most elders with dangerous secrets make a point of securing blackmail evidence on the Harpy as well, just to be on the safe side.

For this reason, a Harpy with nothing to hide is both more effective in his position and, in many cases, considered a danger to elders.

Commerce

Commerce is a concern within the First Estate. It is the method Kindred use to build their fortunes and is also the force that nudges the hyper-conservative members of the Invictus to interact with those they would rather not.

Being among the most worldly of the covenants (a distinction they vie for with the Carthians), the First Estate is deeply interested in advancing its cause, particularly its fortunes in the mortal world. As money seems to have the power to motivate mortals to do just about anything, most Invictus members make a point of having a great deal of it. They don't like money for its own sake, they like it for what it gets them: servants, flatterers, cat's-paws, politicians, hitmen and the like don't come cheap.

In most banking and monetary systems, particularly in the modern West, money accrues over time, and if there's one thing the Kindred have, it's time. Members of the Invictus make sure they use that particular advantage to its fullest. Investments, particularly those paying compound interest, can turn even a modest sum into a fortune in the space of 50 years — less than the duration of most First Estate "apprenticeships." After 100

years of strategic investment, most members of the Invictus have a greater monthly cash flow than Kindred of other covenants see in the space of a year. And Invictus members know how to wield their money. They know how to buy mortals. Human greed is conveniently commonplace for these Kindred, and one they learn to exploit. The less money a mortal has, the more he can be counted on to do in order to get it. The Invictus loves desperation; it's one of their more insidious tools.

One method by which the Invictus furthers its agenda is through the buying, selling and trading of influence. Nearly every member of the First Estate (and every member in good standing) has her own influence "empire," however modest, and she can use this influence to do favors for — or make assaults on — others, mortal and Kindred alike.

This kind of influence trading is widely practiced throughout the Invictus. Influence trading is, in fact, one of the pillars supporting the First Estate's hegemony. Certain practices that mortal politicians (at least those in the West) would consider highly improper and blatantly corrupt are not only widespread but considered key strategies in the Invictus' nightly operations.

Example: *Sabine, the Ventruë Priscus of Washington, DC, has a solid grip on the gangs of that city that she has been cultivating since the early 70s. She all but controls the city's black market in guns and drugs. She's not so well connected in the city's law enforcement community, but she knows a Mekhet who is. By making deals, the two can control the city's overall sense of security. If Sabine wants a favor from Ricardo, the Mekhet, she can slow down illegal operations to make the police look good and give the mortal population a sense of security. Or she can make the cops look incompetent by turning up the gang activity. Or she can arrange a gang "incident" to distract the media from an internal affairs investigation in the police department to keep the heat off some of Ricardo's pawns. For his part, Ricardo can send the police off on missions that safeguard Sabine's gang interests, he can send them at her full force to make her unlife very difficult or he can gain promotions for certain key cops under his control by paying Sabine a small fortune to "sacrifice" a handful of her more incompetent gangbangers.*

Together, these two Kindred have far more power over the mortal world than either would have alone, and they might buy or trade favors that ensure their hold on the mortal sphere.

The Danse Macabre

The midnight games never stop in the Invictus. Petty conspiracies are as good a way to pass the time as anything, especially for elders who've had centuries to refine their game technique.

The Impact of Lineage

No other covenant emphasizes pedigree the way the Invictus does. Despite its ostensibly rational approach

to the Requiem, the First Estate is strangely, if quietly, superstitious about the heritable elements passed through Vitae. In the eyes of the Invictus, not only are the fundamental legacies of clan or bloodline transmitted through the Embrace but basic aspects of character as well: nobility, self-control, wisdom and the like (or the absence of all of the above). This attitude is never stated aloud — it doesn't need to be, any more than it need be said that sunlight is dangerous. It is the prevailing belief throughout the Invictus.

The Power of Pedigree

Within the Invictus, a vampire with a respected sire benefits from every possible advantage, as if nobility were a trait granted by the Embrace. Until he proves otherwise, he is considered to possess the same laudable character as his sire. Within the First Estate, this is a powerful key to the chambers of power. The childe of a Prince, Priscus or Primogen might be admitted to the closed meetings of those Kindred as his sire's "scribe" or assistant. While attending to his sire, the childe will certainly need to earn his keep, although he may feel himself to be something of a slave. What he may or may not realize is that being allowed into such surroundings at all is a form of apprenticeship to power. He learns the methodologies of dominion, the techniques of control and the strategies the Invictus uses to hold onto power. He may not even realize the boon he is receiving until he talks with other neonates and discovers that they have no such access to the powers that be.

Beyond even that, however, the childe of a respected member of the First Estate benefits in ways that other Kindred can only envy. A childe of a respected member, after proving herself in small ways, may be granted seed money to begin her own empire, for example, or a contingent of her sire's blood dolls (as represented by taking Resources or Herd ••• at character creation, for example).

The Burden of Expectation

However, nothing in the Requiem comes without a price, and so it is with these advantages. The childe of a respected Kindred is expected to prove himself the equal of his sire — if not his better — within a handful of decades. A student repays his teacher poorly if he remains always a student. So it is among the Kindred: a childe who never establishes his own fortune, his own base of influence, his own reputation, is seen as a failure. The prestige that comes with a respected sire acts as an initial updraft in the "career" of a young Invictus member; it does *not* allow her to pass her entire Requiem without having to actually apply what she has learned from her sire.

Guilty by Embrace

A vampire with a notorious sire, or even a sire who becomes notorious long after the childe's Embrace, is subtly tainted by his connection to his sire. Even one spectacular outburst on the part of a well-established elder (and the social implosion that follows) can taint dozens of childer for decades, if not the rest of their Requiems. Childer of a vampire who truly goes off the deep end can find doors closed to them that had been open since the first night of their Requiem.

Recourse for the Tainted

Even a Kindred with the most notorious sire needn't suffer guilt by association for the rest of his nights, however. There are ways out of the hole dug by even the most wayward sire. It is, however, a long and difficult climb.

The following are by far the most common means of escaping the taint of a shamed sire:

Eclipse

A long torpor does a lot to assuage the stigma of a shamed sire. Time may not heal *all* wounds, but it doesn't hurt. Over the course of a long eclipse, one's persecutors may meet Final Death, enter torpor, find new scandals to concern themselves with or simply forget. The Kindred may wake to find her sire redeemed or long destroyed, in which case the stigma is likely resolved. Torpor isn't always an option, however. The shamed childe may have too much going on, too many projects in play, to simply drop everything to retreat into torpor.

Hejira

In some cases, a shamed childe may feel the only way to escape the reputation of a wayward sire is by taking flight to a new domain and establishing herself in a new locale where no one is aware of her sire's guilt. This isn't considered a particularly noble way of dealing with the situation — it's seen as the cowardly way out — but it's common enough that there's a word for it: *hejira*. It's a word used contemptuously, to describe the act of a knave who lacks the character to resolve a problem through more honorable or constructive means.

Any Kindred making a *hejira* is also considered incompetent, because any properly established member of the First Estate would have far too much at stake to leave everything behind just to escape something as transient as a bad reputation.

Still, some Kindred may find it easier to establish themselves in a new domain, on their own credentials and behavior, than to suffer under the weight of a sire's infamy.

Expiation

By far the hardest means of dealing with a shamed sire is to fight the stigma by proving one's own merit and character. This is notoriously difficult, as it requires the Kindred to disprove one of the unstated assumptions of the First Estate: that blood doesn't fall far from the vein it poured from.

Expiation can take a myriad of forms. Restitution to the injured party might be feasible in some circumstances, but, more often than not, excelling in the covenant's nightly work, especially achieving some goal that is important to the First Estate, is a potent way of proving one's worth to the covenant.

Dead Offender

Final Death strips a sire of his power to shame his childe. While Final Death is an extreme course of action, ambitious childer have been known, singly and collectively, to destroy their sires in order to clear their own reputations.

Obviously, this is a challenge, since older Kindred typically hold the advantage over younger, but no one is beyond retribution. What the childe can't accomplish by brute force, he can usually achieve through cunning and the manipulation of others, if he's truly motivated.

Sires who develop a bad reputation and bring shame on their childe, particularly if they have a large or powerful brood, should be at least as concerned about the effects of their actions on their childe as on themselves. More often than not, Invictus sires and childe are relatively close (for Kindred, anyway), and a rogue childe is likely to have far more opportunity to harm her sire than other Kindred in a domain.

In the Danse Macabre, the shame of a rival's childe can be a powerful tool. By emphasizing just how far her sire's actions have dragged down *her* reputation, and pointing out the benefits of being rid of that dead weight, a clever Kindred can hone the childe into an ideal weapon for taking out an enemy.

For a sire's part, he who brings about the meltdown of his own reputation through scandal is unlikely to be ignorant of the effect on his childe. He's fully aware that he is the source of their shame, and he's likely (if he's smart) to cut himself off from his brood as quickly as possible to minimize the threat of murder by his own childe. Still, this has its own consequences. Over time, most Invictus Kindred grow to think of themselves as generals and their childe as lieutenants. A shamed vampire who cuts himself off from his childe has essentially maimed himself and undermined his own standing in Kindred society *even more* than his initial fall from grace.

A wise sire, then, might try to atone for his sins by bribing his childe with money, favors, promises or other

enticements in order to keep them loyal despite his (and consequently their) plummet down the Kindred social ladder. Feeling the peril of the situations, such sires are often *desperately* generous, because they know that if they lose the backing of their childe (on top of everything else), they are well and truly Damned.

Lastly, a childe attempting to use his sire's fall from grace as an excuse for destroying him may be surprised to find that the Invictus does not consider a sire's shame to be sufficient reason to violate the Traditions. The burden of a sire's bad reputation is not considered a legitimate defense for destroying him. When it comes right down to it, all Kindred know that the Beast could bring any one of them down at any moment. Shame and scandal may be slow to fade, but Final Death is permanent.

Monomacy

In conjunction with the First Estate's emphasis on law and order, the constant social games and cotillions for which the covenant is known may give Kindred of other covenants the impression that members of the First Estate have no real, bitter conflicts, that they're only interested in their petty intrigues and influence spats. Nothing could be further from the truth. Over the decades and centuries of engagement in the Danse Macabre, small hostilities build up between members of the First Estate just as hostilities do between any vampires; old alliances get strained and malice builds up like a static charge between rival Kindred — and the constant nudging of the Beast does nothing to ease tensions as the decades pass.

The hostilities are unquestionably there; it just so happens that, within the appearance-conscious Invictus, the nightly frictions of the Danse Macabre are almost entirely hidden out of sight. Slightings may be ignored, but they are neither forgotten nor forgiven. Members of the First Estate find violent hostility, even between known enemies, to be unseemly at best, and, more generally, scandalous. Subtle influence grabs, conflicts acted out through ghoulish proxies or street gangs and attacks on an enemy's financial base are all much more common than outright Kindred-on-Kindred violence.

But some conflicts need to be settled with absolute finality, and that's when members of the Invictus invoke the rite of monomacy.

If there is anything Invictus take with utter gravity, it is the one-on-one duel called monomacy. Monomacy is the most serious of the First Estate's rituals.

There was a time when it was believed that divine agencies ensured that the more virtuous party emerged from monomacy while the guilty party met Final Death. That superstition has long since fallen by the



wayside. Monomacy is now invoked only after all other options have been exhausted, when no lesser form of conflict resolution will suffice. The duel is the last resort when two Kindred simply cannot tolerate each other's existence.

Elders have died attempting to prove their honor. Fortunes have been won and lost. Dynasties have crumbled, and dreams have been shattered.

Some members of the First Estate see monomacy as an atavism, a throwback to a time when the Invictus was about war and empire-building, not diplomacy and rulership.

Traditionally, monomacy ends only when one party has met with Final Death. In recent years, some domains (usually those with a strong Sanctified presence) have allowed monomacy to stop when one party has been sent into torpor, although Invictus traditionalists are vehemently fighting this change, insisting that it weakens the power of monomachy. One Invictus went so far as to claim that this change threatened to turn a powerful Invictus tradition into "a pointless neonate slap fight."

The weight of monomacy can't be overestimated. Invictus Kindred are invested in the Requiem for the long term. Members of the First Estate, elders in particular, spend every night of their Requiem building their empires; consequently, Invictus members have the most to lose by meeting Final Death. Monomacy is never entered into lightly. Most Invictus Kindred are more likely to leave a domain than agree to monomacy.

Monomacy has only the following three rules:

- The Kindred involved cannot leave the arena until the duel is finished, one way or the other. Willingly leaving the field of battle during monomacy results in instant forfeiture of the duel. Using the Summon power to pull away someone involved in monomacy is punishable by blood hunt.
- No other Kindred are allowed to participate in the duel by any means, physical or otherwise. If this rule is broken, the monomacy is instantly rendered null and void.
- Combatants can only take along weapons that they can carry on their bodies. In some domains, this is interpreted to mean that even an Uzi is acceptable.

Beyond that, anything goes.

Monitors

Three monitors — usually the Judex and two elders or older ancillae — watch the monomacy duel for indications of cheating. These members of the covenant utilize high levels of Auspex to see to it that both duelists are abiding by the rules. If there is evidence that the duel is being tampered with, the monitors have the option of interrupting the monomacy and tracking down the offending interlopers. Monitors have full authority to call a blood hunt if they discover that someone outside the duel is trying to affect the outcome.

The Inner Circle

It is thought that the Invictus holds power in more cities than any other covenant. This figure includes many cities where other covenants even have numerical superiority and yet still defer to the First Estate's greater ability to maintain law and order among the Kindred. The Invictus is renowned for its ability to rule, and while other covenants may resent the covenant's ability to keep order, they can't argue with the facts.

Where the First Estate rules, the domain's hierarchy and the covenant's are one and the same, but in those cities where other covenants are in power, the core of the Invictus' power structure is the Inner Circle.

An Inner Circle consists of a handful of First Estate elders and whichever ancillae and even neonates they believe to be loyal and worthy members of the covenant. Most such groups tend to be heavily skewed toward elders, but this is no longer as absolute as it once was.

The Inner Circle's primary function is to guide (and maintain order among) the domain's Invictus Kindred. Secondary, the group's purpose is to further the covenant's standing and influence in the domain. In essence, the members of the Inner Circle strive to put themselves out of a job by turning around their domain and adding it to the column of Invictus-controlled cities.

While membership in the Inner Circle is unquestionably prestigious — its members have undeniable sway over the First Estate's operations in that domain — membership is not without disadvantages. Regardless of the domain they're in, members of the Inner Circle are, by necessity, secretive and more than a little paranoid. The Invictus only establishes Inner Circles in cities with substantial Kindred populations where the First Estate is *not* the dominant covenant. Any city with an Inner Circle is, almost by definition, a city worth controlling. The Inner Circle's unstated agenda (if not its driving, defining goal) is to *make* the Invictus the city's ruling faction by any means necessary. The weight of this agenda can be seen in every move the First Estate makes in that domain. The Invictus was founded to rule Kindred, and the covenant fulfills this responsibility effectively and with great aplomb, but in domains where other covenants rule the night, Invictus members must make their calling, and their worthiness, plain for all to see. This task falls to the Inner Circle as well.

Other covenants are well aware of the Invictus' hunger for dominance — most have suffered the sting of the covenant's will to power at least once — and they inevitably grow to resent the Inner Circle's constant manipulation and conspiracies. For that reason, members of the Inner Circle may find themselves spending their

nights avoiding assassination attempts (and, admittedly, launching a few of their own). No member of an Inner Circle is likely to brag about *being* in the Inner Circle to those not affiliated with the First Estate, because doing so is likely to get her destroyed.

In addition to setting the Invictus agenda for their respective domains, members of the Inner circle are also tasked with coordinating their efforts with other members of the First Estate.

Although a relatively recent (and not entirely popular) development, many Inner Circles are surprisingly well networked with the Invictus leadership of other cities, considering how isolated domains are from one another. There was a time when the First Estate had the luxury of ruling the Kindred of its domains in a vacuum. This was easily the case so long as each domain was a self-contained fiefdom with little or no contact with other cities, but in the modern nights, with the advent of telecommunications and a global monetary system, that is no longer an option. Invictus Kindred in Tokyo can now step on the financial toes of Kindred in New York City and Sydney without intending to. Accordingly, the Invictus has had to become the best-networked of the Kindred covenants. In First Estate domains, the Herald is traditionally the Kindred responsible for maintaining communication with the Invictus power structure in other cities. In non-Invictus domains, the Inner Circle grants one of its members the title of Herald (or Scribe, as it's known in some locales), and that individual keeps other domains apprised of such issues as inter-covenant clashes, impending threats, investments, strategic influence acquisitions and so on.

Activities of the Inner Circle

The very existence of an Inner Circle indicates, by definition, that the Invictus is not in power in a given domain, and yet you'd never know that based on the behavior of these ranking members of the First Estate. They comport themselves like nocturnal royalty to the full extent their circumstances allow. "Fake it 'til you make it," is a perfectly valid strategy in the eyes of the First Estate, and it works with a surprising frequency. The appearance of success and prestige is just as effective at gaining converts as the real thing, and so, even in domains where the Invictus has only a token representation, members of the Inner Circle will cast themselves as noble ladies and lords and wait for the followers to appear — and, in time, they always do.

On a night-to-night basis, the activities of the Inner Circle might include any of the following:

Neutralizing Key Targets

Members of the Inner Circle are keenly aware of the Invictus' compromised position in domains where

they guide their covenant. To work against what they see as their “unacknowledged and unacceptable” status in these domains, they target key members of the covenant(s) in power and “neutralize” them to undermine the power and standing of other covenants. (The Invictus has long maintained its power by pulling the rug out from beneath others, so this is hardly an unusual tactic.) This might take the form of anything from a profound humiliation to the actual destruction of the Kindred in question. Members of the Inner Circle are, of necessity, incredibly paranoid when carrying out such activities. They use contacts-of-contacts to arrange such activities, thereby keeping their own hands clean, and spare no effort to maintain secrecy. As the First Estate is the covenant that pushes “law and order,” it does not behoove the Invictus to get caught undermining a domain’s political establishment. All such underhanded activities carried out by the Invictus have a high degree of plausible deniability built into them, so even if Inner Circle members are caught red-handed, they can claim that it’s not what it looks like — and have a reasonable chance of being believed.

Growing and Wielding Influence

Mortal influence is one of the pillars of the First Estate’s power, and the Inner Circle frequently makes the acquisition and extensive use of mortal agents a high priority in its campaign to establish itself as the dominant covenant. Once the Invictus has established its mortal power base, the Inner Circle uses it extensively to distract and harass members of other covenants. As far as the Invictus is concerned, one of the greatest resources the Kindred can tap into is the world of mortals that teems and surges around them every night. The Inner Circle, composed as it often is of First Estate elders, typically has enough mortals in its pocket to make devastating attacks on other covenants. Only the Carthians benefit from a similar degree of control over mortal pawns, and most of them are still so young that they’ve not yet learned the most effective tactics involving mortals.

Throwing Lavish Parties

Even in domains where the Invictus is not the dominant power, the First Estate has an unquestionable cachet and a well-established reputation for power and prestige that lures curious or disaffected Kindred from other covenants. The First Estate is well-aware of this fact and is not above playing up its mystique to gain members. One of the most effective ways to play up this strength is to host large, formal parties as a means of showing off the covenant’s wealth, prestige and social graces. These parties are, without exception, impressive events, usually put together by talented and well-funded Daeva. Such productions may take the form of private concerts, lavish masquerade balls or intimate soirees featuring circus acts and other exotic

entertainments; inevitably, there is a small swarm of blood dolls wandering through the event, serene and glassy-eyed, waiting to be fed from by any attendee with an appetite.

The purpose of these events is to impress other Kindred so much that they join the First Estate. Members of the city’s Invictus mingle and play up the benefits of First Estate affiliation to all who will listen.

Knowing the dangers of letting members attend these sorts of Invictus parties, some covenants forbid their members to attend. This, too, serves the First Estate’s goals, because it causes those other covenants to come across as domineering killjoys, pushing away exactly those borderline members that the Invictus hopes to lure away.

Defending Themselves

Invictus members make no bones about believing themselves to be the best rulers of Kindred and pushing to gain control over any domain they’re in. In domains where other covenants are strong, this doesn’t go over well. The only time an Inner Circle is likely *not* to be pushing the First Estate’s agenda is if that Inner Circle is on the defensive. Other covenants have, over time, learned this the hard way, and so it is not uncommon for a domain’s Inner Circle to be under constant pressure from the other covenants. The Lancea Sanctum and Ordo Dracul tend to be less hostile toward the First Estate and, therefore, more likely to strike through mortal influences and other indirect, non-lethal means. The Carthian Movement and the Circle of the Crone, however, despise the hierarchical Invictus, and these covenants are at least as likely to try assassinating Inner Circle members as launch influence offensives against them.

In the most extreme cases, members of the Inner Circle may have to work entirely from secrecy or even masquerade as members of another covenant; although it is rare for domains to be this hostile toward the First Estate.

Invictus in the Wings

The First Estate always *wants* to be the dominant covenant in every domain, and they are infuriated when they’re not. Much of the business of the Invictus in those cities is directed toward *becoming* the dominant covenant, either by gaining more power themselves or by undermining the power base of the other covenants.

Such circumstances have been known to bring out the very worst in First Estate Kindred. While they continue to sing the praises of law and order, they frequently turn all their energies into cultivating unrest and fomenting rebellion, albeit through the subtlest means possible.

The strategies used by the Invictus under such circumstances are varied, subversive and remarkably effective.

Strategy and Tactics

The dark secret of the Invictus is that they have not consolidated their position in the Kindred world solely by guiding their own covenant with intelligent strategies and enlightened membership policies (though that is definitely the appearance they project to others). The Invictus is also skilled at undermining other covenants through influence attacks, spin control, smear campaigns and character assassination. While the covenant usually resorts to open warfare as a last resort, the Invictus is more than willing to use subtle, lengthy campaigns to turn their opponents into objects of ridicule. These kinds of very subtle efforts are among the First Estate's favored tactics. Defeating an enemy this way is far superior to outright destruction because there's no chance of the vanquished foe becoming a martyr.

This is hardly the full extent of the Invictus playbook. On the contrary, the elders of the First Estate pride themselves on their extensive collections of documents concerning Kindred warfare. Nine times out of 10, the Invictus has engaged the enemy and gained the advantage before the other covenant is even aware it's under attack. That's the power of First Estate's subtlety.

The Helping Hand of Destruction

Members of the Invictus insist that their covenant has no other agenda but the preservation of law and order in defense of Kindred society. This line serves the Invictus well, particularly when it comes time to undermine Princes of other covenants.

One tactic that the First Estate has employed effectively in the past is to subtly prop up the Princes of other covenants with money, influence or other resources, thereby giving them an artificial sense of their own power. The more the Invictus subsidizes such a Prince, the more other covenant feels it's in command and, more often than not, the sloppier its members become. When the Invictus decides to lower the boom, the covenant simply pulls out all its support and launches subtle attacks based on weaknesses that the First Estate has watched develop over the preceding years. If the target covenant even realizes what's happened before it's forced out of power, it will remember the burn for decades to come, but, by then, the Invictus will be back on top, where the covenant likes to be.

These are the strategies of the First Estate. Whatever Invictus Kindred are doing (or not doing) under cover of darkness, they *always* manage to uphold the appearance of propriety, even if they're plotting to take over the domain (which they usually are if they're not in power).

All-Out War

The Invictus hates open warfare, as it represents a persistent threat to the Masquerade and carries the threat of the death of elder Kindred. Nonetheless, the covenant will launch open assaults on an enemy if the Invictus is being directly attacked — and it will expect to win those battles. As a vaguely militaristic organization, and one that has played a role in some of the largest wars in history, the First Estate understands the need for coherent tactics and solid battle plans. When the First Estate does launch an actual offensive, the covenant's old militaristic bent comes surging to the fore and the First Estate demonstrates the power of time-tested strategies and military science through paralyzing influence strikes and devastating surgical attacks.

At times like this, the Invictus' wealth of elders makes it a force to be reckoned with. During such campaigns, Invictus Prisci become the lieutenants of the Inner Circle, and each clan has its assigned responsibilities: the Mekhet and Nosferatu gather information and the Ventrue command troops comprising the Daeva, Gangrel and Nosferatu. The threat of the Invictus' elders entering into combat together is generally ample to keep other covenants from launching direct attacks on the Invictus, but when such a thing happens, it's truly a devastating thing to behold.

The Importance of Being Important

One tactic common to members of the First Estate, whether they're in power or not, is to generate an overwhelming illusion of authority and importance. This is among the greatest strengths of the Invictus.

Kindred commonly treat others as they indicate they are willing to be treated. First Estate Kindred, therefore, indicate that they are willing to be treated as equals and nothing less. (At the Storyteller's discretion, this would likely involve a Presence + Socialize roll to pull off effectively, although a player may argue that the circumstances call for another Social Skill.)

The responses of other Kindred to this attitude varies by covenant. The Ordo Dracul appears to be fine with it. Members of the Lancea Sanctum tend to find this habit arrogant and off-putting. Acolytes make a habit of ignoring such First Estate members, and the Carthians hate it, although they're not likely to do much more than poke fun at the First Estate's bombastic attitude.

An untitled Invictus ancilla will comport himself with the pomp and arrogance of a Prince any time he is not in the presence of higher-ranking members of his own covenant. In the presence of older Kindred of other covenants, he will comport himself as their equal, entering into conversation with them, discussing business and



showing absolutely no deference to them whatsoever. By acting like the equal of these vampires, the ancilla effectively makes it so. Given the emphasis the First Estate places on social skills, most Kindred in the covenant can pull this off fairly convincingly even by the time they're young ancillae.

A Courtier's Unlife

Mere power is not enough to advance in the Invictus. Gaining status requires acceptance by those Kindred who already have great power and high Status in the covenant. An ambitious member of the First Estate needs to spend time at Elysium and the Prince's court. She must see other Invictus and be seen, currying favor and undercutting her rivals. Most of all, she must participate in the covenant's theater of power.

The Theater of Power

For the Invictus, gatherings of the Kindred are not just opportunities to socialize or engage in the mundane duties of resolving disputes and petitions. The gatherings are opportunities to display the covenant's power and glory. The First Estate shows its rival covenants and the unaligned who rules the night.

Most of the time, an Elysium run by the Invictus resembles an Elysium run by any other covenant. That's largely because the First Estate claims to have created the institution and set its traditions. The same is true for the Prince's court. Now and then, however, the

Invictus arranges a spectacle to stagger other Kindred's imagination. Such a "Grand Elysium" might take place only once a year, on a special occasion. A Grand Elysium is an opportunity for the Invictus to showcase every technique in its theatrical arsenal.

THE POWER OF SPECTACLE

People in power have always put on a show as a way to assert their power and dazzle the masses. Pomp and glitter make leaders seem grander than they really are. A big display warns rivals not to challenge you and entices the common folk with an implicit promise of the favor you could give them. A big show on civic or religious holidays also gives a chance for leaders to associate themselves with the myths and rituals that bind society together, from throwing out the first pitch on Opening Day to lighting the tree on Christmas Eve. Plus, people simply like a spectacle. Entertain them, and they might not think too hard about what you do for them. Or to them. It worked for the Roman emperors with their gladiatorial games and chariot races; it worked for Hitler with the Nuremberg Rallies. It works for the Invictus, too.

Suitable Occasions

A Grand Elysium usually takes place on a date with some significance to the city's Kindred — or at least it used to. After a few hundred years, even the Invictus may forget why they assemble on May 23 and not on

some other day. Once a tradition begins, the First Estate sticks by it, whether the tradition has an explanation or not.

Some dates are anniversaries, such as the night the city's first Prince first held court. The Prince's Embrace-Night is another common occasion or the anniversary of her accession to the office. Many Invictus-dominated cities also celebrate Founder's Night, the anniversary of the first vampire's arrival in the city (assuming this is known). These anniversaries are prime occasions to remind other Kindred of the rules and traditions they must obey.

In other cities, the Kindred may observe mortal holidays through a Grand Elysium. Many American elders come from a time when Independence Day was the chief civic holiday, and they continue to celebrate it with fireworks and speeches. Latin American elders often celebrate their own countries' independence days too: for instance, every Mexican city where the Invictus is strong sees lavish celebrations of Constitution Day, when Father Hidalgo issued the famous call for independence from Spain back in 1810. Mexican independence made no difference to the First Estate, but it's *tradition* — and a night when a grand party can blend in with mortal celebrations.

Religious holidays such as Easter or Christmas seldom become occasions for a Grand Elysium. Such nights have too strong an association with the Lancea Sanctum. If the Invictus recognize such holidays, it's usually as part of a power-sharing agreement with the Sanctified.

Young vampires sometimes celebrate Hallowe'en as "their night." The First Estate has none of it. As far as the covenant's elders are concerned, All Hallow's Eve is a minor Christian festival — which happens to come at the same time as a Celtic festival esteemed by the Circle of the Crone — which modern merchandisers have turned into an excuse to sell candy. Any weight of tradition is associated with other covenants. Besides, Hallowe'en is *tacky*, and any children who go missing will cause a firestorm of publicity and police investigation. When the Invictus pays attention to Hallowe'en at all, it's to send neonates on patrol to make sure no one else stirs up trouble by molesting the succulent morsels roaming the streets.

Suitable Locations

The Kindred have one great problem when arranging Grand Elysiums and other spectacles: everything must stay hidden from the mortals. When the Prince wants to throw a parade for a victorious war-coterie, he can't send them marching down Main Street with a brass band.

Sometimes, however, the First Estate can use semi-public facilities for its theaters of power. The lesson is

not lost on other Kindred. If the Invictus can commandeer an opera house, museum or sports stadium for a night, the elders show just how much control they have over mortals. Even if the First Estate comes up with a cover story to explain why dozens or hundreds of people might gather late at night, keeping out mortal gate-crashers is an impressive feat in itself.

More often, the Invictus uses private property, where the covenant doesn't need to explain anything to anyone. If the Prince or some other worthy owns a huge mansion, the First Estate can call the Kindred to court in something close to a palace. The Invictus can also buy a building and hang out a shingle for a private club. As long as the mortal authorities don't suspect any criminal activities at the "Centurion Club" or "Benevolent Association of Remus," the Kindred can gather without attracting attention. If the Invictus finds this inconvenient, enough money cannot only rent a convention center, it can clear the building of employees so the First Estate can bring in its own staff. (In the United States, at least, most convention centers are desperate for business and might not ask too many questions.)

As the club option suggests, sometimes the First Estate can build its own facilities, so that mortals never notice the Kindred. During the 1950s, the First Estate exploited nuclear jitters to build huge civil defense shelters in several cities — then erased the records of the shelters' existence, leaving them in Kindred hands. Invictus tycoons have built skyscrapers with entire floors sealed off and unknown to mortals (not always the 13th). In New York City, the Invictus took advantage of shifting subway routes to "lose" an entire station; in Moscow, Mexico City and other cities with expanding subway systems and high corruption, the First Estate built its own subterranean palaces to order. Such structures offer their own advertisement of the covenant's limitless wealth and power.

The Processional

The Invictus likes to begin an Elysium or Prince's court with a parade of dignitaries. This definitely takes place at a Grand Elysium. As the other Kindred watch, coterie and officers enter one by one. A stentor announces their names, titles and other awards. For example: "The Knights of Remus coterie, destroyers of Damned from Belial's Brood, guard of honor for this Elysium!" or "Lady Persephone Moore, Childe of Prince Maxwell!" or "Lord Geoffrey Maclure, Regent of Waterston, Master of Nightmare!" The Invictus march past the other Kindred, giving everyone a chance to see their fine clothes, and gather in ranks so the other Kindred can see how many of them there are. Plenty of liveried ghoul or mortal servants are on hand to stand at attention and add to the pomp of the scene, as well.

Naturally, there's music — something with lots of brass and percussion, like the overture to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* or the "Parade of the Charioteers" from *Ben-Hur*. Processional music written for the Olympic Games is another common choice. For a Grand Elysium, the covenant may hire composers to write new processional music. Kindred who discover a good new composer or bandleader earn at least a little prestige from the other Invictus.

The highest-ranking Kindred — usually the Prince — enters last, to the applause of the assembled Invictus. The Prince receives this honor even if he himself is not in the First Estate, as an unsubtle suggestion about which covenant respects him and his office most. When the Prince takes his seat, the ranked Invictus bow, then salute and shout an Invictus slogan such as "*Regnabimus intemporaliter!*" ("We will rule forever!") Only then may they sit as well.

Taking Care of Business: The Prince's Court

A Grand Elysium may include a court session. Either the Prince hears the business of the Kindred in general or a Judex or the Inner Circle hear pleas and petitions from other Invictus. Other elders and influential Kindred may report on their activities or request arbitration of disputes. (The actual arbitration takes place at some other time, at a more private meeting, though the Prince or Judex may announce his answer to a petition delivered earlier.) New titles and honors are awarded as well.

The Invictus prefers to treat this necessary business of governance more like a medieval royal court than a modern business or governmental meeting. The stentor announces each item of business: "Next item: Petition from the Right Reverend Bishop Solomon Birch, Prelate of the Lancea Sanctum, for recognition of his regency over the Crown Heights neighborhood!" The stentor may bang a staff on the floor for extra emphasis. Some cities even keep a squad of trumpeters on hand to blow a fanfare between each item on the agenda.

Not every Grand Elysium necessarily includes this stage. On holidays, for instance, the Invictus might throw a Grand Elysium simply to show off covenant's numbers and power before the festivities begin.

Entertainment

Once the agenda is complete, the First Estate rewards the assembled Kindred for their patience by offering some amusement. Naturally, the Invictus selects old-fashioned entertainments. Not for these Kindred a rock concert or even a classic movie: if an entertainment didn't exist in 1800, the First Estate will have none of it.

Many Invictus elders enjoy classical music. This was popular music when they still lived: the First Estate will

accept jazz, rock and rap in a few centuries, when tonight's neonates become the covenant's ruling elders. Many elders particularly like hearing piano or violin virtuosos, if only so they can say smugly that the new performers aren't as good as Liszt, Paganini or Mozart. Many elders also enjoy discussing the relative merits of modern opera singers, comparing them to Caruso, Jenny Lind (the "Swedish Nightingale") or even older performers — whether they actually heard these singers or not. Some elders like the ballet too.

For ordinary Elysium meetings or court sessions, the Invictus provides a few musicians, singers or dancers. For a Grand Elysium, a private performance from a whole symphony orchestra or opera company drives home the covenant's vast wealth. It's not too hard to explain the event away to the performers, either: one of the most frequent cover stories is that the performance is part of a charity fundraiser conducted by the city's millionaires. Sometimes the First Estate really does donate money to some worthy cause after a Grand Elysium, so the cover story is not far from the truth.

Plays are another favored entertainment. Every city has at least one mortal theater troupe, large or small, and the company is usually desperate for money. While the First Estate prefers classic dramas from Aeschylus to Ibsen for a Grand Elysium, covenant members sometimes pay for new works in an old style. A reading of poetry or prose is too small an event for a Grand Elysium, but is acceptable entertainment for a normal Elysium. Readings often include a mix of classic and modern work that sticks to older forms; the Invictus has no taste for free verse or "experimental" short stories.

Not all entertainments are so highbrow. Modern team sports such as baseball, basketball and soccer have sufficiently antique roots that even the hoariest elders can understand. Instead of pro teams, though, the First Estate sets up games between teams of ghoulish Retainers or other amateurs. Neonates may also hope to attract an elder's favor through a good performance on the sporting field. More often, though, the Invictus offers one-on-one sporting contests such as boxing, wrestling or fencing — with no newfangled safety equipment. Bare-knuckle boxing matches between ghouls can drive an audience to the edge of frenzy through the entertainment's bloody brutality.

For a Grand Elysium, the First Estate sometimes sponsors actual medieval-style contests and tourneys, in which the covenant's modern Knights and Squires show off their combat prowess. Since the advent of the Society for Creative Anachronism and the growth of Renaissance Faires, these entertainments have become much easier to explain to mortals, if this becomes necessary. No mortal medievalists can match the spectacle of two dueling Kindred with Celerity, however, or the power of Knights jousting on ghoulish horses.

When the covenant's elders were living kine, animal blood sports were also universally popular. People of every class enjoyed cockfights and similar amusements. In Latin American countries, the Invictus can commandeer a bullfighting ring for a night, and some Kindred achieve a shadow of fame as matadors. In other countries, the covenant sometimes offers bear-baiting, with both the bear and the attacking dogs ghouled. (The bear might be captured by a hunt club such as the Most Noble Fellowship of Artemis; see Chapter Five.)

Jugglers, acrobats and other old-fashioned entertainers also may find themselves performing for a Grand Elysium. They serve as warm-up acts or intermissions between the main events. Although the Kindred perform real magic themselves, the Invictus sometimes hires stage magicians, too, and enjoys their tricks just as much as any mortal would. They would never ask a genuine blood-sorcerer to perform. Even if an Acolyte or Sanctified prostituted his hard-won magic for mere entertainment, the First Estate does not want to give center stage to a vampire from another covenant.

Refreshments

After the night's entertainment, the Invictus elders offer a blood feast for the other Kindred dignitaries. The Invictus might spend months assembling enough vessels to feed all the honored guests at a Grand Elysium. Gathering mortals to feed upon would take less time, and require fewer people, if the covenant were ready to surrender completely to the Beast and simply slaughter the vessels. The First Estate members' concern for decorum (and keeping themselves from degenerating into mindless beasts) discourages the covenant from engaging in mass murder just for fun. The vessels may also come from Invictus members' herds, though the covenant frowns on destroying its own sources of power and sustenance. The mortals may be unconscious, or, if they come from a herd, they might be very well paid or bound by Vincula or Discipline use.

An Invictus blood feast tends to be a genteel affair. Servants drain fresh blood into pre-heated goblets, so it doesn't lose its warmth too quickly. Willing vessels from herds might dance with the Kindred about to feed upon them, and assure the Kindred that they consider it an honor as well as a pleasure to receive the Kiss from such distinguished Masters of the Night. Servants and junior Invictus stand by to help Kindred overwhelmed by feeding-frenzy to regain control. Woe to the junior Kindred who let the presence of so much blood overwhelm them. They shall not be invited to any of the covenant's festivities for a long time to come. If the Invictus who arrange the blood feast know what they're doing and their Retainers are properly trained, few vessels die from blood loss.

The blood feast traditionally concludes a Grand Elysium. Just to make sure everyone remembers who sponsored the festivities, however, the Invictus form a receiving line again and thank the other Kindred for attending. As morning approaches, everyone returns to their havens. The servants begin the task of cleaning up and making sure no trace of the undead revelry remains.

Executions

The Invictus combines business with entertainment on the rare occasions when Kindred are executed. Those in power have turned executions into public spectacles since forever; the Invictus upholds this tradition. The First Estate turns a Kindred's destruction into a darker, grimmer theater of power.

The fatal drama begins with a processional entrance by the city's leading Kindred officers, Invictus or not. During such a solemn affair, a Prince wants every clan and covenant represented to show their approval of the proceedings. By extension, the dignitaries endorse the Prince's power to order the Final Death of other Kindred.

Everyone dons some special article of dress for the occasion. Depending on the Prince's taste, execution garb can range from a red sash to black robes and periwigs. The condemned vampire may also wear special garb as he's brought in. Some Princes like to see prisoners naked except for the chains that bind them. Others prefer their prisoners to wear sackcloth of penitence or pointed hoods. Condemned Kindred of high Status, however, are often allowed to keep their normal clothing as a final gesture of respect.

The Sheriff or the Prince's Seneschal recites the crimes of the condemned vampire, all in the most high-flown rhetoric. The Prince himself reads the sentence of destruction and commands his Archon to carry out the sentence. The Archon, in turn, may oversee an entire squad of assistants. Neonates with strong stomachs can earn some respect by volunteering for execution duty. The Invictus prefers elaborate executions: the more fanciful and horrifying the execution, the more the Invictus feels it has expressed its hatred of lawbreakers.

A long and elaborate execution also arouses greater emotions among the watching Kindred — fear, satisfaction at society's revenge on the deviant and the raw bloodlust of the Beast. Beheading a condemned vampire is good — but fixing hooks in his body so teams of horses tear him apart is better, and slow impalement by a stake of red-hot iron is better still. An execution may also include preliminary tortures such as flaying the prisoner, breaking his bones one by one with a sledgehammer or running him through with rapiers while he hangs in an iron cage.

At the end of the execution, the theater of power concludes with the Prince, Primogen and other Kindred officers making statements that justice has been done. The Prince concludes by exhorting all Kindred to obey the Traditions and the Kindred leaders, for these are the strength of the Kindred and their safety from the mortals who would destroy the Kindred.

Fun and Games

The Invictus claims to rule by merit, so members often work very hard to be the best at anything that interests them. On the other hand, aristocrats often do not want to seem to take anything too seriously; it might imply they are not completely secure in their power. Mortal aristocrats resolve this conundrum by turning necessary activities into games. That way, they can hone their skills and compete with each other while pretending it's all in fun.

The First Estate does the same thing. The Kindred must feed from mortal prey, without letting their victims know it, the Kindred must manipulate mortal individuals and societies to cover up the Kindred's existence. Invictus courtiers turn these necessary activities into sport.

Venery

Venery is an archaic term for hunting. The term has become a metaphor for lechery and seduction. The Kindred find both senses appropriate when they hunt mortals for sport, since the Kindred prefer social skills to brute force.

A contest of *venery* can take up to a week. The sponsoring Kindred draw up a list of victim profiles, with different point values. "A blonde woman at a convenience store" might be worth only two points: it's not very restrictive. "A married, blonde woman in her 20s, in an Alfa Romeo" would be worth 20 points, since the profile has many elements and includes an unusual make of car.

Next, the participants in the hunt pair up. As each one hunts, the other serves as witness. (Participants now carry small instant cameras, too, as another way to prove they found their victims and fed upon them.) Each night, the participants receive a new partner, to prevent collusion between them. At the end of the week, the sponsors find which hunter achieved the highest score. The winner receives a prize, such as a cash purse or a boon from an elder who sponsored the contest.

For full points, contestants need to stalk and feed upon their prey without using Disciplines. That includes hiding their predations: if a contestant uses Dominate to erase a victim's memory, for instance, he loses half his points. Some Kindred use Disciplines anyway, because

they make hunting so much easier, and the Kindred hope they can accumulate enough victims to make up for each victim's lower point value.

Contestants also make choices about whether to seek rare, high-value targets or easy, low-value targets. High-value targets bring victory if you can find them, but you can also lose a lot of time looking for that Alfa Romeo. Winning at *venery* requires knowing your city — and the skill to *make* a high-value target. For instance, a hunter might look for a married, blonde woman in her 20s, then try to get her into an Alfa Romeo.

Hoax

The Kindred constantly need to cover up evidence of their activities, often creating false explanations for Masquerade breaches. The Invictus turns this into a sport. In a game of Hoax, contestants try to create a false news story. The more outrageous the story, the better. Typically, the contestants have a month to adjust memories, recruit false witnesses, manufacture physical evidence and feed the whole thing to the media. Then a panel of judges watches the media for another month, to see if the story stands up to scrutiny. A story that's too plausible or too close to reality might not receive close, skeptical inquiry; a story that's too ridiculous might not attract attention from any media but the tabloids. A winning hoax makes its way into respectable, mainstream media and survives inquiry from reporters; convincing police or scientists is even better.

The judges of a hoaxing contest assume that if a hoax can survive for a month, the hoax will last forever. Even if later investigation proves the story was false, a winning hoax will have saturated the media and convinced a large fraction of the mortal population. Later debunking won't affect popular belief that much, and any lives ruined will stay ruined.

As usual for Invictus sports, the winner receives a cash purse or a boon. The winner also becomes the go-to guy when the Invictus needs the media manipulated. A repeatedly successful hoaxer may gain Status from this skill alone.

Puppet Play

For a more elaborate game of social manipulation, Invictus members sometimes engage in Puppet Play. A single Invictus proposes to maneuver a group of mortals into acting out a drama of her design, without them knowing it. Typically, the undead dramatist has a month in which to move her mortal puppets. If she cannot create the situations she promised, she loses face but suffers no other penalty.

A typical drama might be to arrange a love affair between two selected mortals, then have the affair turn sour and end with one lover murdering the other in a



designated location. A group of other Kindred act as judges, rating the dramatist for the complexity of her storyline and her subtlety in manipulating her unwitting actors. For instance, using Dominate to force mortals' actions is too crude for true artistry; if the Discipline is used at all, it's to control people around the "actors," leading them in certain directions while leaving them free will. The "supporting cast" that helps manipulate the actors can also include bribed or blood-bound minions of the dramatist.

Puppet Play is more an art than a game, but has a competitive aspect. A successful dramatist proves that she is a master manipulator of the kine. The Invictus, in particular, tend to exist and work surrounded by mortals. Other Kindred have to wonder what other schemes the dramatist spins, and how much influence she has over the mortals around.

Blood Tasting

It's an understatement to say that blood matters a lot to Kindred. The aristocrats of the undead turn feeding into art. By concentrating on the nuances of the act, they make biting and sucking blood seem less sordid.

Some Invictus prefer to feed in the most elegant surroundings. They bring their drugged, dazed or duped vessel into a beautifully furnished chamber, where sweet music plays and perfume wafts through the air. Both vampire and victim are dressed to the nines, as part of the pretense that this isn't an assault.

Other Kindred obsess about the vessels themselves. They claim they can taste subtle differences in blood. Type O-negative, they say, tastes different from O-positive. The blood of youth has a stronger taste, but the blood of age is more complex. The mortal's diet, surroundings and activities leave traces in the blood, so the blood of the frightened or anxious fizzes with stress hormones, while blood taken during a mortal's orgasm seethes with hormones of a different sort. These Kindred gourmands devote great effort to selecting and preparing their vessels, combining desired physical types with particular diets and emotions to flavor the blood.

Gourmands also seek the blood of the famous or notorious. Although preserved blood tastes far inferior to blood sucked hot from the flesh, some Invictus pay enormous prices for samples of the blood of celebrities. "Ahh, a Kennedy! Full, rich and complex, as always. Now try this Windsor . . ."

Animal blood is normally low-subsistence fare for neonates, but some Kindred develop an interest in the blood of unusual animals. Even a vampire who can no longer take sustenance from animal blood might try a drink of Siberian tiger, oryx or Komodo dragon, just from curiosity — and because few other Kindred will get the chance to try. Young gourmands may try blending the bloods of various animals, in hopes the blood will taste better, or try to duplicate some more exotic taste. "I start with pig's blood, but if you mix it three to one with goose blood and add a drop of tarragon extract, it tastes just like hippopotamus. No, really!"

Tokens of Honor

The First Estate dearly loves to advertise rank and privilege. Sometimes this urge can even overpower the Kindred's paranoid tendency to hide information about themselves. For instance, a vampire might not want other Kindred to know exactly how powerful she is at Dominate or some other Discipline, so they will underestimate her. Mastering a Discipline is a big achievement, though, deserving respect — and asking an Invictus courtier to forgo respect is about like asking her to pull her own fangs.

On formal occasions, therefore, Invictus courtiers tend to flaunt their rank and achievements through their clothing and ornaments. No two cities' First Estates use exactly the same system, but some methods of showing honors are more frequent than others.

What Is Honored

First and foremost, the Invictus let everyone know about any offices the Invictus members hold in Kindred governance, no matter how small. For instance, the Primus for the coterie that decorates the Prince's Embrace-Night celebration proudly claims the title of Chief Decorator, and lets other Invictus know of this "honor." Even though the First Estate has very few formal offices of its own, its members invent their own titles with enthusiasm, along with their own uniforms, medals and other tokens of rank. Other Kindred often laugh at such attempts to pull Status from nowhere, but the Invictus know that you can give any title dignity if you back it up with power and connections. If the Prince happens to like his party decorations, his Chief Decorator might actually be worth knowing and flattering . . .

First Estate members who achieve more established offices such as Sheriff or Primogen invariably receive some special token of office. Very often, the uniform or regalia dates back centuries and looks ridiculously out of date — but the cumulative effect of a dozen or more Invictus in their archaic finery can still produce a strange grandeur.

More generally, all members of a guild or faction sport some token of their membership. Military orders are most assiduous in this: no Invictus gathering would be complete without a group of undead Knights in bemedalled uniforms. The Knights may even wear armor that's been militarily useless for centuries. Other guilds and factions usually settle for less obtrusive signs of membership, such as a pin or ring.

Clan membership is not really an "honor," but it is part of a Kindred's identity. The Invictus often asks its members to show some token of their clan. The First Estate simply likes to recognize the role of clan

in Kindred society, as part of the Invictus' general mission to establish and maintain order.

As mentioned, mastering a Discipline receives recognition, too. At Elysium or the Prince's court, the Invictus likes other Kindred to see the power of its members. Younger Kindred sarcastically call the medals, sashes or other tokens of Discipline mastery "merit badges," as if the First Estate were nothing more important than the Boy Scouts. These neonates miss the point: the First Estate *does* believe these tokens show merit. A token shows that a member had the persistence to become very good at something and, as a result, has become extremely dangerous. The Mekhet ancilla wearing her triangular All-Seeing-Eye brooch isn't just saying she's worked a long time getting good at Auspex; she announces to one and all that they have no secrets from her, because she can watch them as an intangible spirit any time she wants. The Ventruë Primogen makes a similar statement of power with the golden chain of Dominate mastery clipped to his lapel. There's nothing like a line of unsmiling elders, each sporting one or more "merit badges" of Discipline mastery, to remind other Kindred that the Invictus demands respect.

Specific deeds may also bring an Invictus some token of honor from the Inner Circle or an Invictus Prince. A coterie that destroys a group of Belial's Brood or a dangerous witch-hunter can certainly expect some sort of medal or badge. Covering up an especially dangerous Masquerade breach may also bring recognition. The First Estate doesn't hand out medals lightly, just for doing your job; but it appreciates service above and beyond the call of duty. A small ceremony and a token of honor encourages other Invictus to seek glory through service to the covenant and its elders.

Typical Tokens

The First Estate has several ways to show rank and achievement, besides the titles Kindred may hold. Not surprisingly, all are common among mortals, too — or were, once upon a time.

- **Clothing** is a frequent means of showing membership in a faction, guild or clan. Paramilitary orders often wear livery that resembles uniforms of the near or distant past. In Europe, the First Estate's Knights usually mark formal occasions by wearing medieval armor chased with insignia of their order. Invictus warriors may also wear the garb of *landsknechte*, musketeers, dragoons or other soldiers of the early modern era. In the New World, Invictus Knights usually wear uniforms from more recent times, from the Revolutionary to the Civil War. Sometimes, they can pass for modern soldiers in dress uniform, since mortal militaries are quite conservative, too. (Think of marine officers carrying dress swords.)

Invictus Knights are not the only members to wear uniforms. Everyone in a coterie or guild might adopt common garb on formal occasions, showing their unity of purpose. For instance, everyone in the Courier's Guild that operates through the Boston–Washington, DC corridor wears black livery with scarlet piping and a scarlet post-horn embroidered on the left breast. (Of course, they only wear it at Elysium or while making a delivery to an Invictus elder.)

• **Belts and sashes** provide another form of identification. They are popular because they are easy to see, and you can combine them with livery to show more than one form of membership at once. Sashes, belts, cummerbunds and similar accessories are often color-coded to show rank or membership in a particular group. For example, in Florence, the First Estate's formal dress code includes a colored sash for clan membership, with details of embroidery indicating a vampire's age or Status in the covenant.

Most recently, a few factions have begun using color-coded belts to show proficiency with a Discipline or other difficult skill they value highly. The practice comes from the famous color-coded belts of karate, by way of neonates joking that a vampire "has a black belt in Majesty" or the like. Most elders who hear of this new custom disapprove of it — not because they dislike borrowing from popular culture, but because they think it unseemly and imprudent for any member of the First Estate to tell anyone he is not yet a Master of a Discipline. Why advertise weakness?

CUSTOMARY CLAN SASHES

The Florentine Code is the most popular system for showing clan membership. This code assigns the following colored sashes to each clan:

Daevas	red and gold
Gangrel	red and brown
Mekhet	indigo and silver
Nosferatu	black and green
Ventrue	purple and gold

In some cities, influential bloodlines select their own colors or add a third color to show their distinction from the parent clan. This is far from universal, though.

• **Other clothing accessories** turn up now and then. In Hamburg, the Invictus Prince admired the Chinese Imperial civil service. He imitated the mandarins' custom of showing rank through a button on the cap, from plain ivory for a neonate accepted in the covenant with no other distinction to a golden button set with rubies for his Primogen Council members. The famously academic and arcane Invictus of Prague, on the other hand, wear a hooded cope of black velvet on formal occasions,

with the border and lining color-coded for various ranks, much like the copes worn by students receiving their doctoral degrees.

• **Jewelry** is one of the most frequently worn means to show rank and achievement. Rings and brooches are especially easy to wear, but the First Estate also uses cufflinks, watch chains or other ornamental chains, bracelets, buckles and other sorts of jewelry. A few Princes even wear genuine crowns. Most Invictus jewelry tends toward the unobtrusive, though — but not because the covenant values restrained good taste. Until recent centuries, the aristocratic standard was to show all the magpie flash and glitter you could afford. However, spectacular jewelry attracts attention from mortals, and the First Estate doesn't want that sort of attention.

Of all items of jewelry, rings are preferred the most by the First Estate. Rings have a long history as utilitarian tools of power, as well as ornament: for example, seal rings, by which illiterate aristocrats showed they really had sent messages written and signed by someone else. Any Invictus with an important position owns a personal seal ring, with which he stamps all correspondence. Rings also offer many choices for showing favor or disfavor — based on which rings a Kindred wears, on which particular fingers.

• **Medals** overlap with jewelry, of course, but the material doesn't matter so much. Plenty of Invictus Knights proudly wear an Iron Cross for some martial deed. While many Invictus medals copy mortal originals with crosses, sunbursts, palm leaves and the like, the covenant also draws upon vampiric images. The Golden Fang is a common award for valor. Bats and wolf-heads are common images too, and the red of blood is naturally a favored color. The Prince of Madrid recently awarded the Scarlet Wolf with Golden Fang cluster to the coterie that destroyed an elder who had become a rampaging revenant.

Modern militaries often use ribbons — small, colored rectangles — instead of the fancy medals of the past. Of course, the Invictus doesn't like this. As it Embraces decorated military veterans, however, they want to keep their ribbons. Philosophically, the Invictus finds it hard to deny any vampire the awards and honors he gained in life, so, even though military ribbons mean nothing to the First Estate's own hierarchy of Status, they are showing up more often, on the uniforms their owners wore in life — and the ribbons receive respect. An achievement is an achievement. Invictus militias also now copy the custom of using ribbons to show how long a Kindred has been a member in addition to particular skills such as sniper training or Masquerade cover-ups.

• **Patches and badges** embroidered or sewn onto clothing can show either a special deed or membership in a group. They are less obtrusive than livery,

copies or even sashes: if a mortal sees some guy with a patch of a leaping stag and crescent moon on one shoulder, she probably guesses the guy belongs to some sort of club. She won't have any clue that he died a century ago and belongs to the Most Noble Fellowship of Artemis. Because patches are unobtrusive, they are becoming more popular in the First Estate as a way to show off membership or awards in less formal settings.

- **Traditional tools** often form the regalia of Kindred office. When the Invictus has its way, these tend to be the tools people used centuries ago. Never mind that nobody's used a quill pen for more than a century: the Official Chronicler carries a pen case of horn and silver, containing a goose-quill pen, knife, blotter and a phial of authentically medieval iron-gall ink. The Sheriff is lucky if he receives a pistol (single-shot) and powder horn as his tokens of office, instead of a saber or Roman fasces. Invictus Princes sometimes carry archaic symbols of power such as the orb, scepter, sword, scales or — for a bluntly honest assertion of his role in forcing order on fractious Kindred — a knout.

- **Heraldry** remains common in Europe as the ultimate in splendidly feudal assertion of rank. Many New World Invictus like it too. In a few cities, Invictus officers carry actual shields painted with personal heraldic symbols. More often, Invictus members wear their "achievement of arms" on a surcoat, jacket or badge.

As with mortals, the basic design — the escutcheon — is a shield with a variety of geometric divisions, animals or other images. (The clan symbols are especially common, but only a Priscus or similarly exalted elder would use that device alone.) A full portrayal of the achievement of arms frames the escutcheon with a mantling of fabric, branches or something else that drapes. The achievement of arms also includes a ribbon bearing a motto, a helmet above the shield and animal or human figures as supporters to either side of the helmet.

Typically, Invictus members can design their own achievement of arms, once the Prince gives permission for such an honor. In some cities, however, the Invictus appoints a coterie as a "College of Arms" to design appropriate images for Kindred of merit (though the recipient can suggest elements and can approve or reject a design). An achievement of arms may change over time, as new rank or deeds call for some symbol of honor to be added to the panoply.

In some cities, the Invictus also allows members to inherit an achievement of arms from their sires or more remote ancestors. Local bloodlines might all use the shield of their powerful and respected inceptor. If a respected elder suffers Final Death, the childe who inherits her achievement of arms receives a high honor.

Gifts

Gifts form another part of Invictus etiquette. An Invictus courtier not only knows when to give, and what, but how to receive a gift and respond to it. As usual for the First Estate, the rules are informal and sometimes ambiguous. Propriety, discretion and good taste simply don't reduce to a formula. A Kindred who mechanically follows a rule or imitates what another vampire did will make a fool of himself.

Occasions for Gifts

The Invictus honors major religious and national holidays as expressions of tradition, if for no other reason. Any of these holidays can become an occasion to offer a gift. Birthdays and Embrace-Nights are trickier because they are *personal* anniversaries. Anyone who offers a birthday or Embrace-Night present shows she has a personal connection to the recipient or a close professional relationship — or she wants one.

As usual, this rule has its exceptions. In some cities, all Invictus are expected to offer greetings to the Prince on the anniversary of his Embrace, just to show respect. This also reminds the Prince of just how many Invictus are in his city, and that they all pay attention to him — a typically multi-layered First Estate message, combining flattery, promise and threat at once. Most Invictus, however, will just send a card to make their point.

Appropriate Gifts

Invictus gift-giving never involves anything too practical. Boons, hunting territories and corporate stock are transferred as part of business and political patronage. An ideal gift expresses esteem, without formally placing the recipient in debt.

Jewelry, for instance, makes an excellent gift. For the last 150 years or so, women have worn more jewelry than men, and the First Estate follows that fashion, but male vampires still wear rings, cufflinks, tie tacks, watchbands and a few other items. Jewelry is expensive, so it advertises the giver's wealth and status. Jewelry is also small and easy to store — no small matter when you accumulate presents for centuries. You can show you like the gift by wearing it where other Kindred see it and know from whom the gift came. Or, you never wear it — and show your contempt. If worst comes to worst, you can sell the jewelry for emergency funding.

Works of art are another safe choice. Sometimes, the message from a work of art is simply, "I can afford this." Invictus members who patronize the arts develop an enviable and reliable source of gifts.

A superior gift of art has some connection to the recipient. For instance, an icon of Longinus is a tasteful, if somewhat predictable, gift for a Lancea Sanctum leader. An icon that shows Longinus with the recipient's face would be blatant flattery — though an especially egotistical Sanctified might expect this. A poem written in a Kindred's honor is an excellent move in the Danse Macabre, if it's a good poem. Portrait paintings are somewhat personal. Only an intimate would give a portrait of himself. Giving a portrait of the recipient still suggests a close connection.

Vessels make a risky gift. Some Kindred like to drink from mortals with particular features, such as blonde girls, football players or service station attendants (there's no accounting for taste). Offering a mortal "treat" shows you took the effort to find the right person, and make her disappear (or at least ensure she won't remember becoming a victim). Feeding, however, is *extremely* personal. Procuring a vessel to order shows you know a vampire's most intimate desires and want to satisfy them. It's a lot like being a pimp. Some Invictus find such attention flattering. Others consider it presumptuous in the extreme.

Mortals often give presents of clothing, even though few like to receive it: so often, the implicit message is, "I couldn't think what to get you, so I got you socks." Kindred feel much the same way. In the First Estate, you do not give socks, a tie, a blouse or anything else so practical, unless you know it's what a vampire really wants. Once in a while, an elder may give every Invictus in the city a matching jacket or blouse, but that's not a gift; it's a command to wear a uniform at the next

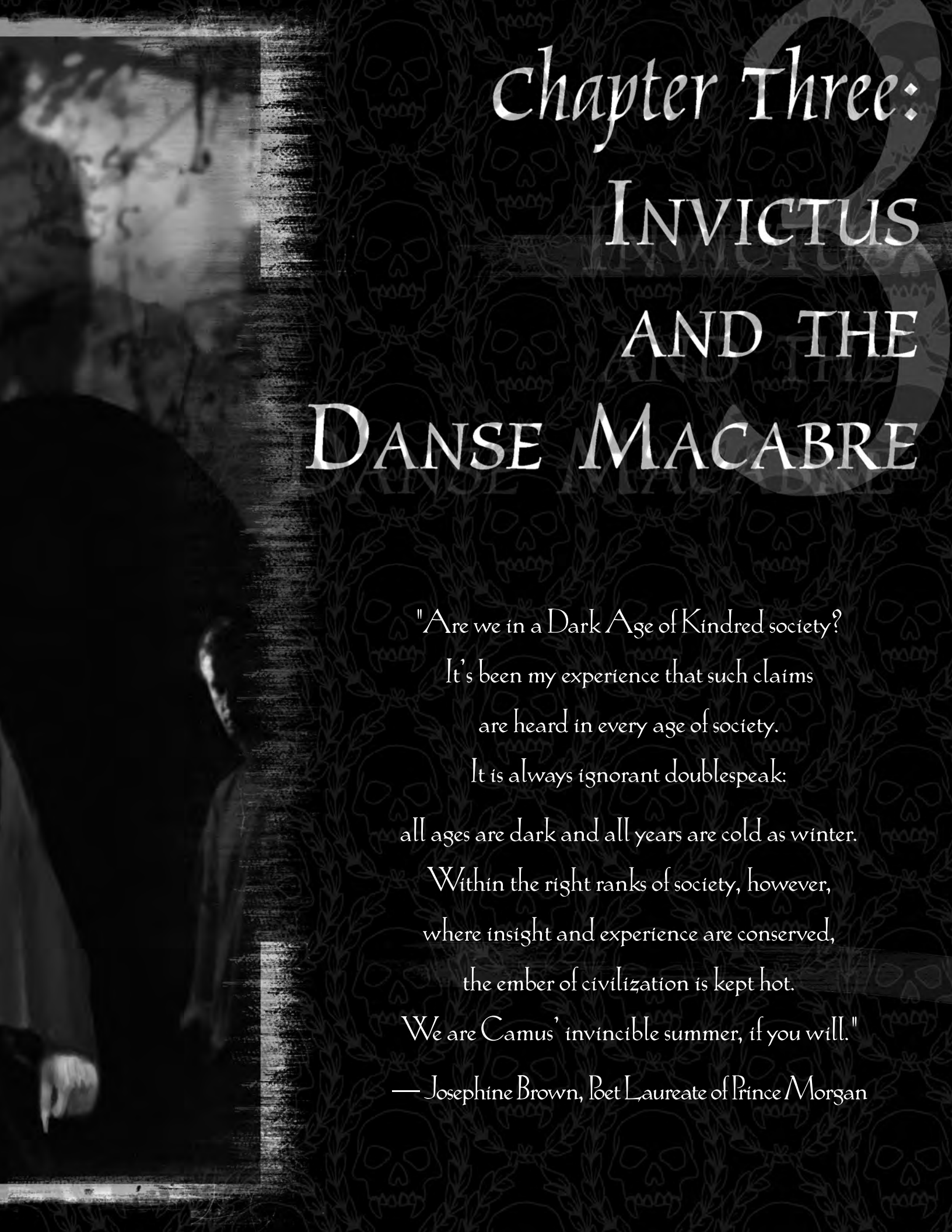
Elysium, to remind other Kindred of the First Estate's unity and power.

The best gifts have some connection to a Kindred's hobbies or interests. Just as with mortals, such a gift shows the giver cares enough to know something about the recipient. On the other hand, such gifts are less personal. For instance, giving a first edition of *Oliver Twist* to a Prince who likes Dickens shows effort, expense and awareness of the Prince's interests, but the gift isn't intimate. It's a gift of thought, rather than passion.

Rank and wealth matter when selecting a present. A cheap gift — cheap for your own income, at least — suggests you don't care very much about the vampire you give it to. If the recipient has higher Status than you, an insulting gift could be dangerous. Certainly, you won't improve your own reputation. A higher-ranking Invictus seldom spends much on gifts for a younger and lower-Status Kindred, because the higher-ranking Invictus honors the recipient by noticing her at all. A present from a high-Status Invictus cannot be too modest, however, or the Invictus looks like a cheapskate.

Once again, though, the rule has its subtleties. Especially among high-Status Invictus, sometimes a gift is meant as a veiled insult. No successful member of the First Estate would do something as crude as giving a velvet Elvis painting to an art-collecting Primogen. Giving a copy of a painting instead of the original, though, would show some contempt: it suggests you think the collector can't tell the difference or doesn't care. Costly but ugly jewelry hints that you think the recipient is a philistine who only cares about the price tag, and lacks real taste.





Chapter Three: INVICTUS AND THE DANSE MACABRE

"Are we in a Dark Age of Kindred society?

It's been my experience that such claims
are heard in every age of society.

It is always ignorant doublespeak:

all ages are dark and all years are cold as winter.

Within the right ranks of society, however,
where insight and experience are conserved,
the ember of civilization is kept hot.

"We are Camus' invincible summer, if you will."

— Josephine Brown, Poet Laureate of Prince Morgan

*Mountains interposed Make enemies of nations,
who had else Like kindred drops
been mingled into one.*

William Cowper, *Task*

Joining the Invictus

Every vampire's Requiem is different in detail, but the covenant the vampires join gives them certain themes in common. The Invictus emphasizes themes of mastery, aristocracy and patronage. Every member of the First Estate is a lord of the night in a fearsome, feudal hierarchy — and many of these Kindred began climbing the covenant's ladder of power before their Embraces. Before they even know the Kindred existed . . .

Before the Embrace

Most Kindred expect their childer to follow their sires into their chosen covenant. Invictus members are no exception. Whatever the motive for siring a childer, a First Estate vampire believes the childer can become a covenant member in good standing. Invictus do not sire childer as mere lackeys. The Invictus has ghouls for that work. A childer is a potential equal (though that potential may take centuries to realize).

An Invictus sire must also convince some higher-ranking member that a potential childer is a worthy addition to the covenant. The Invictus enforces the tradition that the Prince (or some similarly authoritative Kindred, such as a Regent or Inner Circle member) must sanction each Embrace. A sufficiently powerful member can ignore this rule and get away with it, but she would bring scandal on her name. Few Invictus would do so: anyone powerful enough to flout tradition is powerful enough that the Prince would grant her request anyway.

Professional Reasons

Invictus members often select childer who can further their own plans. The childer has some skill or asset the sire believes would be useful.

Sometimes, a sire seeks a childer with similar background and abilities. For instance, the military Guilds may recruit new members by Embracing soldiers, police, gangbangers or other people who already know how to fight. A sire who manages a large corporation might Embrace a newly mined MBA as a business assistant. Childer who have abilities and interests similar to the sire's can start working for their sire right away, as pre-trained associates. They may also help the sire keep up with new developments — a valuable consideration for

the static Kindred, especially after a long torpor. For example, if that business tycoon slept through the entire tech-sector bubble, he might want a childer who can explain what the fuss was about, and what is this "Internet" thing anyway?

Other times, a sire deliberately seeks a childer with very different aptitudes, as a way to broaden her own influence or compensate for some weakness. The tycoon puzzled by the Internet might sire a childer with technical skills rather than business skills, on the theory that business is business, he just needs someone to implement his plans. An Invictus whose Status comes from cultural activities might be the one to Embrace the young MBA, so she can expand into the business field, or she might Embrace a private eye to add investigative skills to her organization. A member of a military Guild that lost out in covenant scheming might Embrace a media whiz to burnish the group's image.

Personal Reasons

Not all Embraces are so calculated. Just like other Kindred, Invictus members sometimes Embrace out of passion or for other personal reasons. The lords and knights of the First Estate may want fair ladies to share their eternity, and the covenant's grand dames may seek handsome and noble lords for the same reason. Few among the First Estate are ever so bowled over by a pretty face as to ignore other considerations, though. Sires who seek childer as eternal consorts usually pick lovers with other abilities, too. Now and then, an Invictus Embraces a consort he thinks is too delicate for the covenant's infighting, so his consort will always need his protection and never leave. Older and cooler heads in the covenant warn that such tender flowers often destroy themselves from horror at the Danse Macabre, and if they do not, they eventually become tiresome. The covenant's great romances — the rare few that have not (yet) ended in betrayal, hatred or ennui — are all between Kindred who combine passion with respect for each other's competence.

Invictus members sometimes Embrace a mortal to fulfill a debt of honor. Now and then, an Invictus owes a great boon to a mortal, and the mortal demands the Embrace as payment. A Kindred may also pledge to protect a mortal ally's family, and for various reasons finds she cannot do it herself — so she Embraces someone in

the family, granting the power to take over the job. A valued ally might also ask an Invictus to Embrace a dying loved one, and not accept warnings that there are worse things than dying. Each particular circumstance is rare, but the covenant sees a steady trickle of such honor-inspired Embraces.

Covenant members also may Embrace mortals they hate, though this too is rare. For instance, an Invictus might Embrace the son of a witch-hunter he especially loathes, as an exquisite revenge. Princes do not encourage such perverse Embraces, for they usually lead to trouble for everyone, but sometimes Princes are trapped by their own promises to allow Embraces whose reasons are less than prudent.

Observation and Preparation

The decision to Embrace is seldom made quickly. The Invictus recommends that sires watch prospective childer for some time and investigate their backgrounds. The First Estate doesn't like surprises. Small but unpleasant surprises include drinking or drug problems or work histories that turn out to be padded or entirely fictional. Some problems are more exotic and much worse: Kindred legend includes stories of prospective childer who turn out to be mages, kin to werewolves or lures set by cunning witch-hunters. While the Invictus disdains most innovations, its elders regard the invention of private detectives and background checks as, on the whole, a good thing.

The covenant also suggests that a sire refrain from Embracing a childe until she has a clear, definite notion of what will ensure the childe's loyalty. Like other vampires, Invictus members cannot usually force their childer into Vincula. What else can make a childe *want* to work for her sire's goals?

Access to power is one of the strongest and most frequent incentives. Many of the First Estate's customs seem strange or archaic to modern mortals, but the covenant enjoys vast economic and political power. Members are advised to seek childer with strong ambitions, who can be seduced by that power. Such childer eagerly join the covenant's patronage system, serving for decades in hopes they may, in time, become a few of the world's secret masters. At least, that's the Invictus promise.

Revenge is another lure, though one that operates on a shorter timetable. A First Estate sire can offer to help a prospective childe destroy an enemy who seems beyond his reach as a mortal. If the childe accepts the Embrace willingly, however, she will gain more-than-mortal power as well as the guidance and protection of the world's greatest conspirators. The Invictus trusts that if a childe fails to feel gratitude for her revenge, she will at least feel a prudent fear of what the covenant could do to her if she betrayed it.

Money, however, is probably the easiest lure for a prospective childe. Many mortals feel the world does not give them rewards to match their talents. An Invictus sire can promise wealth beyond the dreams of avarice — maybe not right away, but eventually. The Invictus further recommends that sires look for prospective childer with loved ones in need: the childe must cut herself off from the people she loves, but the sire can see the loved ones are taken care of, until the childe is in a position to do it herself.

Whatever the lure, the goal is the same: a childe who views her sire as a benefactor, someone she serves willingly. Not uncommonly, however, a prospective childe works for her sire before the Embrace, too. A childe is a huge investment of the sire's time (and psychic force). Some Invictus members feel that a trial period is only prudent before making that investment. Not only can they test the mortal's abilities, they can make sure the mortal is someone they can stand having around them for years to come. The sire also gets a chance to decide whether she really needs a childe: maybe the prospective childe is more useful as a mortal minion.

So, the sire finds an excuse to bring the childe into her organization. For instance, an up-and-coming political activist might find herself invited to work with one of her party's local power-brokers — an Invictus or a front man for one. Or the young MBA gets a job offer from a famously reclusive tycoon. Or the private eye is hired to "recover" an artwork "stolen" from the Invictus esthete. Trial periods can last a few nights or a few years. Sometimes the mortal makes the sire's choice for her, by figuring out that he works for a vampire. The sire Embraces the mortal rather than kill him and lose his useful skills.

Of course, ghouling is another option for a mortal minion who penetrates the Masquerade. The First Estate has no clear policy about ghouling as part of a prospective childe's trial period. Some Invictus members believe a period as a ghoul helps ease a prospective childe into the Kindred world and that a Vinculum ensures loyalty while the sire trains the ghoul in Invictus ways. Other Invictus believe the Vitae-inspired servility of ghouldom spoils a candidate for the First Estate. Someone who has been that much a slave, they say, can never fully become a master.

The Embrace

Passing the Curse of undeath to a mortal is one of the most awesome and terrible acts in any vampire's Requiem. It's no surprise, then, that the First Estate surrounds this act with ritual. By concentrating on ceremony, the Kindred can acknowledge the forbidden power of the Embrace without feeling his transgression so keenly; by involving other Kindred, the vampire dilutes his own blasphemy. Such is

the unholy intimacy of the Embrace, however, that not every Invictus wants other Kindred present when he sires a childe.

Petitioning the Prince

Before Embracing the childe, a dutiful Invictus formally asks the Prince for permission. Most likely, the Kindred already asked the Prince in private, perhaps years before. The Invictus will not consider the Embrace legitimate, however, unless the sire makes a formal request at the Prince's court. This is usually just a formality — but occasionally, Princes change their minds and say no.

The petitioning process is steeped in ceremony. The ritual varies from city to city but typically begins with the would-be sire going down on one knee and declaiming the Prince's absolute authority, as deputy of Longinus, to approve or reject all sirings. Then the sire offers a beautifully illuminated scroll of her request to sire a childe. The sire recites her lineage as far back as she knows it, and lists every honor she and her "ancestors" have achieved, to show her fitness to bring a childe into the Invictus. She continues with a description of the childe and the assets (financial, political or personal) he brings to the First Estate, and concludes with a pledge to train him in the traditions of the Kindred and the Invictus, and in obedience to the Prince.

Along the way in this peroration, the Prince and supplicant may exchange formulaic questions and answers as the Prince asks why the supplicant wants to sire a childe and questions her fitness to do so. For instance, the Prince might ask the supplicant if she knows the Three Commandments of Longinus and order the would-be sire to teach them to the prospective childe. The supplicant responds with the appropriate ritual phrases (see the sidebar for examples).

The Prince and supplicant may also exchange various symbolic gifts. For example, during the catechism of the Traditions, the Prince might give the supplicant a beeswax candle after each response, symbolizing the light of Longinus' teachings to the Kindred, who must dwell in darkness. The supplicant responds by giving the Prince a phial of her Vitae, symbolizing that her unlife and that of her childe-to-be are in the Prince's hands. (Note: The Invictus never does this when the Prince is a member of the Circle of the Crone or the Lancea Sanctum, covenants that can do terrible things with a sample of a Kindred's blood.) The symbolism behind some exchanges may be so obscure and archaic nobody remembers the reason for them (assuming they were not the products of a long-ago Prince's derangements). For instance, in Marseille, the supplicant gives the Prince a small silver cup and the Prince responds by giving the supplicant an egg carved of onyx and five bulrushes, which the supplicant then distributes to the five Primogen. No one knows why.

Invictus Princes usually do not ask Kindred from other covenants to undergo this long, ceremonial petition to sire a childe. In some cities, other covenants design their own formulas to "legitimize" the siring of a childe in First Estate eyes. In others, the sire merely asks the Prince for permission, without ceremony. Depending on the relative strengths of the covenants, other Kindred might not ask the Prince's permission at all, and instead go to the elders of their own covenant. In most cases, though, Invictus Princes are strong enough that other covenants do not want to show disrespect over siring a childe. Few Invictus Princes are willing to provoke vendettas between covenants for the sake of childer, and, therefore, grant permission when the requests come from suitably influential members of other covenants.

CATECHISM OF THE SIRE

Prince: Sire-who-would-be, do you know the First Commandment of Longinus?

Supplicant: Great Longinus spake, Do not reveal your true nature to those not of the blood. Doing so forfeits you your claim to the blood.

Prince: Yet you would reveal your true nature to one of the kine through granting your blood. How do you plead?

Supplicant: Master, I crave your permission in Longinus' name. I swear the mortal shall keep the secrets of the Kindred, before the Embrace and after. On my own blood, I swear it.

Prince: Let it be so. Take this candle, in token of your oath. It is the light of the First Tradition, given us by Longinus to guide us in the darkness of our Damnation. Let it be a light to your childe as well; and if you are foresworn by his deeds, let its fire burn in your blood, to your destruction or his own.

Supplicant: Let it be so.

Embracing the Childe

Most of the time, an Invictus sire Embraces a childe in private. The sire picks a time that seems convenient for her and for the childe to drop out of sight for a few days (or longer).

Sometimes, however, a childe deserves extra ceremony. When a mortal has knowingly rendered service to the Invictus and has pledged to serve the covenant from then on, the First Estate member turns the childe's Embrace into a big production. Some high-ranking member of the covenant officiates — the Prince if possible, an Inner Circle member or Primogen if not. Other members of the covenant attend as well, for in showing honor for a favored childe-to-be, they gain honor themselves. (It's also a chance to hobnob with the covenant's elite.) Tradition recommends a dozen Kindred at the Embrace, plus the sire. (The number is variously explained as referring to



the disciples of Christ, the tribes of Israel, the paladins of Charlemagne or the astrological signs of the zodiac.) One of the 12 may include a priest from the Lancea Sanctum, exercising the Second Estate's traditional prerogative to officiate at the great transitions of life and undeath.

The details of the ritual vary from city to city, but always include the childe-to-be swearing to uphold the Traditions of Longinus, obey the Prince and honor the Invictus in all things. The childe may receive the sacrament of extreme unction (popularly miscalled the "Last Rites") from the Sanctified representative. Then the childe-to-be's clothes are stripped away, symbolizing the death of his mortal identity. The 12 Kindred drink some of the mortal's blood; the sire takes the last, before delivering the taste of Vitae that works the dark miracle of undeath. The newly Embraced childe is wrapped in a black shroud and laid on a bier. At his right side lies a scepter, representing the power of law and rulership; at his left side rests a sword, representing the First Estate's martial power when law and tradition fail. On his breast is the shield of the Invictus, for the covenant shall be his protection, even as he protects it. His head rests on the *Testament of Longinus*, to show that his accursed state comes from God. At his feet lies a human skull, for he shall walk the paths of death forever more.

When the childe is ready to rise again, he is unwrapped and the shroud reversed to reveal a purple lining. The reversed shroud is draped around the new vampire while he is proclaimed a lord among Kindred and master of the kine. The sire brings in a mortal — the childe's first meal — and bids him slake his thirst. The childe is supposed to stop feeding before he kills the vessel and to declare that he rules the Beast Within. The other Kindred are allowed to help him in this, as it is considered a bad omen for the childe to kill the vessel. (Besides, disposing of bodies is always a nuisance.) Each of the 12 Kindred offers the childe a brief homily on unlife in the Invictus, and the childe replies with expressions of gratitude and a promise to take the words to heart. The ceremony ends with the childe dressed in new clothing, to begin his Masquerade and Requiem. After that, courtesy demands the new sire offer a blood feast for his 11 guests.

A childe who receives this ceremonial Embrace begins his Requiem already a member of the Invictus in good standing. His still must serve his sire and receive training for years to come, but the childe has a head start on other neonates. Of course, he is also held to higher standards, and any failure or treachery reflects that much worse on himself and his sire.

Invictus Childehood: Unlife as a Paige

Some Invictus refer to their childer as "paiges." In medieval Europe, young men of noble birth spent time as attendants on other nobles, as a way to learn courtly

graces and prepare for future training in knighthood. The Invictus keeps a similar view of childer.

The First Estate believes that a childe is her sire's client in a patronage relationship. The sire has already provided largesse through the Embrace, which gave the childe eternity and the powers of the blood. The sire continues to act as the childe's patron by training her in Disciplines and the customs of the Kindred and Invictus.

In return, the paige serves her sire in whatever capacity her sire demands. Officially, the sire can demand anything at all. Kindred traditions say the sire has near-total power over the childe; in some cities, this extends to the childe's destruction, with no need to consult the Prince or anyone else. In practice, Invictus sires are usually quite reasonable in assigning tasks their childer can fulfill. Siring a childe is too difficult to waste the effort by making impossible demands; the sire usually had a very good idea in the first place of what service the childe could render as a paige.

SAMPLE SERVICES FOR A SIRE

- Help your sire take over the company you used to work for — or that you owned.
- Get an elderly couple to sell their home, so your sire can complete a bloc of property he wants to build on.
- Kill or drive away a gang that's interfered with one of your sire's projects.
- Deceive a community or activist group into protesting some project of your sire's rival.
- Help your sire cope with "newfangled" technology, occupations and institutions, such as cell phones, environmental groups or arbitrages.

The sire also gains unlimited use of the childe's property. Officially, the Invictus does not allow sires to confiscate a childe's home, land, company or bank account — but she can do whatever she wants with them. For instance, a sire could not simply take her childe's shares in the company he created. She could, however, order the paige to sell the stock and use the money to buy out some other company. Some Invictus childer are Embraced as millionaires and leave their sires as paupers. For whatever it's worth, the First Estate does not consider this honorable, and the Harpies will say nasty things about a sire who abuses her privileges this way.

During his childehood, an Invictus-in-training accompanies his sire to Elysiums and other Kindred affairs, at the sire's discretion. The childe is expected to speak only when spoken to, and then as little as possible within the bounds of courtesy. Many older Invictus say that "Yes, sir" and "No, ma'am" are all the vocabulary a paige needs.

Naturally, a paige cannot join a coterie. He must stay at his sire's command at all times.

Personal and Impersonal Relations

During the period as a paige, the Invictus expects the sire and childe to detach the childe from any close ties to mortals. The covenant does not approve of Kindred who stay in touch with their mortal families and friends. The risk to the Masquerade is severe, of course: Kindred communities have been thrown into crisis because a childe had to tell his best friend what happened to him or her parents figured out why they only saw their daughter at night — and the frightened mortal tried to tell the world.

And yet, the Invictus needs members who maintain mortal identities. You can't buy stock in a company or take out a loan if you're legally dead or never existed. Many sires select childer precisely because they can walk into a corporate boardroom and everyone says, "Hello, sir" or because politicians will take their calls.

The covenant has no good answer to this conundrum. Sires exercise their own judgments about the mortal connections of their childer. A sire might insist on faking a childe's death and creating a new, false identity; the childe wills his assets to his new identity, a trust fund or some other proxy by which he and his sire can reclaim them.

Other Invictus members, who select childer for their mortal connections, try to arrange their paiges' existences to hide that they are vampires. This is easiest if the childe has no close family. If not, inconvenient relatives can be eliminated: a job offer from far away, mental conditioning to accept a no-fault divorce or murder. (In this case, though, the sire had better make it look like an accident to the childe as well as the police. Childer who seemed utterly loyal have attacked sires when the childer learned how loved ones were slain.) Business owners can become reclusive. Political activists can invent imaginary jobs that only leave them free at night. Some people can simply retire from their jobs but stay in touch with old associates. Although the Invictus doesn't like most innovations, it welcomes the growth of work-from-home programs, consultancies and the 24-hour work schedule in general.

In any case, the sire helps her childe to distance himself from former mortal associates. Family and friends are cut off. Professional associates meet the paige less often, in surroundings that are more formal, and only to conduct professional affairs. Professional associates are less likely to figure out the paige has become a vampire because they don't really know him that well, and probably don't want to.

Childehood's End

The Invictus does not say how long a childe must remain her sire's paige. Different clans, bloodlines and factions are free to set their own standards. Some Invictus keep their childer bound to them as long as possible —

until the childe herself finds a way to escape. In other cases, a sire may need a childe's skills so much that, from the moment of Embrace, the paige is more a partner than a servant. Such a childehood will not last very long.

Whether the time comes in five years or 50, however, it comes when other Invictus start asking when the paige shall receive her independence. Once again, the patronage system demands it. A sire who won't release an increasingly competent paige shows disrespect for the childe's abilities. Such a sire also breaks the promise implicit in training a childe: that the apprenticeship shall someday end, and the childe can put her training to work for her own sake. Prudent elders also recognize that, while they may dole out rewards to their juniors slowly, the elders do have to dole rewards out eventually. An ever-increasing population of older, more powerful and deeply resentful paiges could lead to an explosive rebellion — or simply a mass abandonment of the covenant. Tradition says it's happened before.

The First Estate calls the end of a vampire's period of service as a paige her "manumission." After that, she's a free neonate. Naturally, the covenant soaks the event in ritual. One of the sire's duties is to coach his paige in the proper ceremonies.

Ceremony of Manumission

The procedure for liberating a childe takes at least an hour. The Invictus conducts the ceremony at a grand gathering of the covenant. Not only is this an important event for the sire and childe, it matters quite a lot for other members: they may want to inspect the new neonate and evaluate her as a potential client, pawn or enemy. Older members also bring their paiges or manumitted childer to meet the new neonate and perhaps lay the groundwork for a coterie.

The ceremony begins with the sire asking for the attention of the Prince and other dignitaries. The sire announces, in suitably elaborate phrasing, that his childe wishes to be released and become a free Kindred. The Prince asks that the childe be summoned to his presence; the sire demurs, saying that the childe is not ready. Three times, the Prince commands the childe be called forth, and only on the third time does the sire obey.

The childe enters from another room. She wears chains on her wrists, symbolic of bondage to her sire. She also carries an illuminated parchment manuscript bearing her request for manumission, written in her own Vitae. The Prince asks her name; she responds with her complete Kindred lineage, as far back as she knows it. As usual, this is to assert her worthiness as a successor to these Kindred of the past; if her forebears are not particularly glorious, at least stating her lineage shows respect for tradition. (If her Kindred "ancestors" disgraced themselves, the childe mentions her intent to do better and redeem their names.)



The Prince questions the childe about the Traditions of Longinus and other matters of Kindred custom. Upon receiving the proper responses, the Prince demands the sire give him the sword the sire wears. The childe kneels before the Prince and lays her hands on a pedestal provided for this purpose. The Prince cuts the chains with a blow of the sword, symbolically freeing the childe from her sire, and declares her a free neonate. The Prince then hands the sword to the neonate and bids her to wield it in defense of her Prince. The neonate responds by giving the Prince a glove, saying that her hand is ever at his service.

The sire, Prince and neonate then exchange other ceremonial items. The neonate gives her sire a piece of gold, to compensate for the loss of his servant. The sire gives the Prince a knout, representing the right to punish the childe. The Prince gives the sire a hunting dog, saying that since he has lost his childe, this beast can help him hunt his prey. The sire gives the childe a cloak, saying that she came into the work naked and ignorant, but leaves her service clothed and knowing the laws of the Kindred. Various additional gifts are possible, with transparent or obscure symbolism, as local tradition dictates. Normally, no one keeps these items; they are used repeatedly and may be centuries old. Finally, two Invictus members drape the neonate in a purple shroud to show her acceptance into the First Estate.

At the ceremony's end, the new neonate takes an ewer of fresh blood and a tray of small cups, and gives a drink to her sire, the Prince and the Primogen, as a symbolic blood feast. If the neonate can provide enough vessels for a real blood feast, she wins herself greater favor, but this is not obligatory. From then on, she is a free Kindred, for better or worse.

Joining the Invictus Later

Some Kindred try to join the First Estate without having a sire already in the covenant. Maybe they don't like their sire's covenant or have no past affiliation at all. The Invictus sees this as the youngsters developing good sense and does not turn them away.

Without a sire to vouch for the Kindred, however, any applicant to the First Estate does not find the process effortless. In the first place, an Invictus member in good standing must sponsor the applicant and testify to the applicant's desire to join. For a neonate with no Status in any covenant, any Invictus may stand as sponsor. A vampire who wants to defect after earning Status in another covenant needs a sponsor with *more* Status in the First Estate. In such cases, the sponsor risks considerable loss of face if the applicant proves false, so any Invictus demands payment in favors before bringing the petition before the Inner Circle.

Once the Inner Circle agrees to hear a petition, at least three elders or ancillae of the covenant interrogate

the applicant. All of them have Auspex and attend to the Kindred's aura as well as her words. They ask why the Kindred wants to join the First Estate and, if applicable, why she wants to leave her previous covenant. They also ask for information about the Kindred's former covenant. Even if the applicant cannot provide any new information about the covenant's activities and members, the interrogators pay close attention. Any discrepancy between what the applicant says, and what the interrogators believe to be true, is grounds for much closer questioning.

For an unaligned vampire, the committee of three requires no further surety than an oath of loyalty to the Invictus, signed in blood and witnessed by them. A defector must customarily sign a Blood Oath to guarantee his loyalty (see p. 178 for examples). The Inner Circle will also set some test of loyalty — some attack upon the Kindred's former covenant that ensures her former comrades will never, ever let her return. For instance, an Acolyte might be asked to steal some treasured item of blood-sorcery, or a Carthian might help Invictus elders subject other Carthians' mortal allies to Vincula.

Once the Invictus leaders feel sure of an applicant's sincerity, there is (of course) a ritual to mark the Kindred's acceptance into the covenant. After signing the pledge in blood, the applicant offers the Prince (or another elder) a manacle, a stake and a sword, representing his right to chastise or destroy her. Then other Invictus rip off the applicant's clothes, symbolizing the end of all former allegiances, and drape her in the black shroud of a potential First Estate member.

The presiding Invictus then assigns the applicant a teacher and minder to impart the covenant's traditions and protocol. This Kindred is usually an ancilla. Effectively, the applicant becomes the ancilla's childe and must serve and please him. At the end of the year, the teacher stands in as the applicant's sire during the ceremony of manumission, during which the new applicant wears her black shroud and, at the end of the night, exchanges it for the covenant's purple shroud.

The new member does not normally start with any Status in the covenant, though. Like a newly manumitted neonate, the new member is merely granted permission by the covenant to seek honor and power within its ranks. A Kindred who held some office before her defection, however, might keep that office; at least, the First Estate desires this, to tweak the defector's former covenant all the more.

Guilds

Much of the strength of the Invictus is based upon a series of mentor-student relationships that members find themselves a part of throughout unlife. A traditional structure of schooling based on this relationship has evolved over the centuries in the covenant: a standard

system of education and dissemination of knowledge known as “Guilds.”

A Guild in the Invictus has no size requirement — it may involve one, 10 or 100 Kindred (although in the case of very large numbers, a Guild tends to become a faction, more or less) — so long as the Guild comprises the recognized authority on a given subject in the city, imparts that knowledge to accepted pupils and works to protect the integrity of that knowledge. The individual who leads the Guild is a “Meister” (regardless of gender), while the “Guild” itself refers to the ongoing practice of communicating the Meister’s experience. All Guild instructors, whether Meister or not, are also referred to as Mentors.

Example: *Madam Chantal DeMaray, Speaker, is well respected for her flawless diplomatic skills at Elysium gatherings. No Invictus vampire in his right mind would deny her the “Meister Speaker” title. If she were willing to take on one or more students, they would collectively be referred to as a Speaker’s Guild.*

All Invictus neonates are encouraged to seek instruction in chosen fields as soon as possible upon release from their sires. Not only does petitioning a Guild demonstrate an eagerness to participate in the workings of the covenant, but it announces the neonate’s intended field of expertise to his elders, allowing them to understand how best to use his talents. The Guild also provides a safe, relatively private environment for younger Kindred to get to know one or more of their esteemed elder instructors (as well as fellow pupils) in person.

Likewise, elders looking to occupy their time are well-advised to participate in the Guild system, either by founding schools of their own or joining existing ones. Doing so allows an elder the opportunity to pass on her accumulated experience and wisdom to younger Kindred, strengthening the covenant as a whole while maintaining a connection to her more recently deceased, more human counterparts in the Invictus.

Guilds are very selective in their admissions criteria, and tend to cover subjects of expressive or professional artistry: diplomacy, etiquette, tactical debate and persuasive discourse are common courses, as are martial arts, application of Disciplines and personal style. Many Guilds make the skills necessary for a particular political position or profession their focus — so a Guild training potential Sheriffs would concentrate on investigative and interrogative techniques, as well as intimidation, leadership and non-linear thinking skills.

On rare occasions, Invictus Guilds have been known to take on students who are not members of the covenant. This is an unusual practice, and is only allowed in cases approved by the Inner Circle. The schooling so offered may be part of an inter-covenant bargain, or the schooling may be initiated by the Meister, having spotted a savant in the city he wishes to teach. However,

the vast majority of Guilds make membership in the Invictus their strictest requirement, stating that one cannot demonstrate a full willingness to learn without publicly adopting the Meister’s social principles.

The Benefits

There are many advantages to Guild membership, both for students and instructors. First and foremost, it allows those who are keen to perfect their skills an opportunity to learn from a vampire with decades, if not centuries, of accumulated knowledge and experience. The staggering efficiency and wisdom such a Meister can apply to her chosen art is almost beyond comprehension — almost, because a Meister is willing to explain her art to a select few. Enrolling in an Invictus Guild is truly an opportunity to learn from the very best.

That the Meister of a Guild is the best in his chosen subject, none will deny. That reputation brings prestige, and if his vaunted skill is put to use empowering the covenant and improving its neonates, that prestige brings Status. Likewise, a neonate who is accepted by a prominent Meister may find herself on a fast track to Status — provided that she performs to her Mentor’s satisfaction.

STATUS IMPACT

Membership in a very prestigious Guild can catapult a vampire into sudden fame among the Kindred. At the Storyteller’s discretion, simply being accepted as a student of a Guild may justify adding a dot of Covenant Status (or City Status), as the reputation of the Meister “rubs off” on the student.

Note, however, that this Status dot may be removed if the vampire is ever ejected from the Guild or if the Guild itself suffers a blow to its prestige. The reputation of the student is entirely contingent on the reputation of the school, after all.

The structure of Guild schooling requires so much contribution from the students that most Mentors find ways to make the subjects of study as exclusive as possible. That means removing some of the night-to-night concerns from the student’s thoughts, so Guild Meisters can often be relied upon to assist students in offloading menial tasks like scouting havens, running messages for elders or even (in some very extreme cases) hunting. It is not uncommon for a Guild Meister to employ Retainers specifically for this purpose. It is also accepted that neonates enrolled in prestigious Guilds tend to be protected from assignment to time-consuming tasks in the Invictus. This benefit is contingent on the student’s performance, though. If the Guild Meister believes that the neonate has enrolled just to avoid work, she will quickly dismiss the young vampire.

A neonate choose to join a prestigious Guild with an eye toward impressing a chosen elder. Schooling under a shared Mentor can be the first step toward building a relationship with the powerful and influential Kindred in a city, while the training received could qualify the neonate for coveted positions the elder may need to fill one night. With such respect paid to tradition and experience in the covenant, an “old-vampire network” often forms around certain Guilds, allowing accepted students to penetrate the glass ceiling of Status that applies to everyone else. It’s not too hard to understand why a rather young vampire would be able, on occasion, to bend the ear of an Inner Circle member who shares the same schooling, while other neonates would enjoy no such opportunity.

Guild training provides neonates with the opportunities to compete for the attention of elders in a controlled environment, allowing for subtle play between rivals from the moment of enrollment. Many a vampire has entered a Guild as a relative nobody and come out with a solid reputation based only on the tales of his spirited scholastic campaign.

There is, of course, one more advantage to having gone through the schooling of a Guild. While a student may enjoy the umbrella of prestige the Guild provides, the relationship tends to reverse itself after graduation: the prestige of the Guild is dependent, to a certain degree, on the performance of its alumni. Graduation from a Guild lends a vampire a certain amount of power with regard to her former Mentor by tying their reputations together. Any vampire willing to sacrifice her own Status can contribute to the ruin of her instructor simply by becoming a failure *after* graduation. It’s a risky (sometimes even suicidal) tactic, but nothing is beneath some Kindred.

ELDER STUDENTS

While neonates make up the majority of students in a given Guild, there are elders who are ready and willing to admit that someone else in the city has knowledge they wish to possess. In such cases, a Guild Meister might find herself instructing a vampire of greater power and experience. A simple agreement is entered into: within the boundaries of the school (as detailed in advance), the elder defers to the Meister.

Teaching an elder can bring great prestige to a Meister, catapulting his Guild into a coveted traditional spot. Fellow students in the Guild will also enjoy the spotlight brought by the elder, and may well use the opportunity to demonstrate diplomatic skills in relation to the new addition.

There is, however, an implicit threat in this relationship. If the elder is dissatisfied with the schooling, the Meister can suffer a serious blow to her prestige. The elder may even choose to challenge for rule of the Guild, or take action to have the Guild disbanded. Because of this threat, many elder students are referred to (in secret) as “Acid Pupils.”

But students are not the only ones who stand to gain from the Guild system. Meisters and instructors enjoy several benefits of position and prestige from presiding over the schooling of vampires. The opportunity to empower the covenant’s younger Kindred (and thus the covenant as a whole) with one’s personal store of experience is only the most obvious.

Guild rule carries with it the authority to dictate the expression of a certain philosophy or art within the Invictus. Since the Meister is recognized as the city-wide superior with respect to the chosen subject, hers is the prerogative to determine the boundaries of that subject as well as the mode of its delivery. None can dispute the Meister in the course of schooling, and doing so outside the Guild requires the initiation of a complex challenge (see “Guild Wars” below). Some Kindred take pleasure in the power this affords them — to set fashion, to eliminate “offensive” works or simply to dominate others.

Guild Meisters and instructors can expect to be consulted on matters related to their subjects of expertise, and are usually deferred to in public discourse. This may seem a small bonus, but in Elysium gatherings, Kindred tend to take notice when powerful elders bow to one of their number. It can mean the difference between anonymity and the appearance of real power.

Guild Meisters can expect gifts and boons from would-be students petitioning for enrollment, as well as from appreciative elders looking to secure fair (or special) treatment for their childer. The position is easy to abuse, and many a prestigious Guild Meister finds an avenue to rapid enrichment opened up simply by his willingness to teach.

To lead a Guild is to produce an ongoing Status attractor — one is respected for taking on students and educating them, and one is respected for having produced worthy graduates. Former students who go on to gain Status for themselves tend to reflect it back to their former Mentors. Many Mentors need not contribute anything *new* to the Invictus to maintain their Status — they just have to make sure that their alumni do.

In addition, many alumni never really abandon the Mentor-student relationship completely, and often return to meet with their instructors to ask for advice. A wily Meister can use the continuance of these relationships to exert a subtle influence on the covenant (and/or city) body politic, advising her former students in a manner that leads to personal enrichment.

With so much to gain from Guild membership and (and so little from maintaining a stance of independence), it’s hardly a surprise that nearly every vampire in the Invictus has involved himself in the operation of a Guild at least once in his long unlife.

Learning from the Meisters

The stages of traditional Guild membership are static and structured. One follows upon the other in orderly

succession, each existing as a recognized indicator of the student's current standing in the Guild and the qualifications required to move to the next level of schooling. These stages are petition, preparation, exercise, apprenticeship and graduation.

Petitioning a Guild is arguably the most nerve-wracking of all the steps. It is the first in which the would-be student makes plain her intent to join a Guild and demonstrates the seriousness of that intent. Many Kindred botch this initial approach, ruining their chances to enter the Guild of their choice before the education even has a chance to begin.

The petition is a complex undertaking, never to be treated lightly. It begins with the composition of an official letter of intent, written by hand in the chosen language of the Guild Meister. (Most prefer Latin, but not all — some desire their native language, while others pick something obscure or difficult just to make the petition that much more demanding. Tales of a Meister Senator requiring letters in demotic script or a Meister swordsman who will only acknowledge letters written in constrained *wenyan* Chinese are told here and there, but are not as unusual as one might think.) The letter must identify the petitioner, detail his lineage and make a humble request to meet with the Meister. The content of the message must not stray from the subject — any overt attempt to sway the Meister before the initial meeting will disqualify the petitioner. If the letter is poorly written, the petitioner may be refused the meeting (but may be allowed to try again, depending on the Meister's temperament). The letter must also be accompanied by a small gift, as dictated by the tastes of the Meister. Learning what the Meister expects is the other half of this, the first test presented to the petitioner. One Meister may expect a fresh, unmarred cherry blossom (restricting applications to the spring season), while another may demand an authentic 16th-century silver peso. The required gift must be something the Meister knows is attainable, even if it is difficult. Guild Meisters do, after all, want *some* successful candidates to approach them.

Assuming that the letter and the gift meet with the Meister's approval, the petitioner is called to a meeting. She must follow the instructions for the meeting to the letter, arriving exactly on time, approaching in the desired fashion and speaking a scripted request for audience. The Meister acknowledges the petitioner's request, and an interview begins.

During this interview, the petitioner is free to argue on her own behalf, displaying whatever talents she thinks are relevant to qualification. Bribes may be presented during the interview as well. The Meister may engage the petitioner in conversation, apply tests of skill or just choose to observe her carefully. At some point, when the Meister is satisfied, he signals that he is ready to end the interview. He issues a proclamation. The petitioner



is either considered qualified to prepare for instruction in the Guild, or she is rejected (with or without explanation) and expected to leave immediately.

There is no way to predict a Meister's behavior at interview: some Meisters will decide the moment they see petitioners enter the room while others engage the would-be students in a grueling series of questions and tests that can take hours (or in some extreme cases, several nights) to complete. Some Meisters look for unquestioning obedience, while others expect rebellion. It's best for a petitioner to research the Guild and its Meister carefully before the interview so she can figure out how best to conduct herself when the time comes.

Preparation for schooling marks the transition between the vampire's unlife before and after accepting the influence of the Guild. Meisters may dictate changes in the vampire's behavior, material possessions, manner of dress, manner of speech — anything that they think is pertinent to the schooling. If a Meister believes that a would-be student is not humble enough to learn, there is no limit to the demands the Meister may place on the successful petitioner. The process of change undertaken by the student not only prepares him for the schooling in a physical, mental or spiritual sense, but also marks him as a Guild member. All of the Invictus in a city will learn to recognize the identifying mannerisms of a particular Guild's student body, and will pay the new student the respect accorded to his new Status.

This is by no means a quick or simple stage in the student's career. Preparation can include the development and demonstration of certain skills or accomplishment of involved, extended tasks. These requirements are never arbitrary, though — students always come to realize, later in their careers, that the preparation was necessary to their schooling, even if the benefit didn't seem obvious or logical at the time.

A common preparation request involves the "unlearning" of certain skills or mannerisms, accomplished via a program of restrictive exercise. For example, a petitioner to a martial Guild may be expected to eliminate her long-practiced techniques before she may learn the Meister's way, simply because the Meister believes that her old habits will obstruct learning by the "correct path."

UNLEARNING SKILLS

At the Storyteller's discretion, a player whose character is in preparation at a Guild may opt to play out this "unlearning," removing a specified skill dot from her character sheet at the end of a session and cashing it in for the equivalent experience. The experience may be used to repurchase the skill later, in the training that follows, or the experience may be applied otherwise.

At any time, the Meister may call an end to the student's preparation. She may declare that the student is ready for schooling, calling on him to begin the next phase of his learning. She may, on the other hand, announce that the student will never be properly prepared for learning and dismiss him. It is a disgrace to be dismissed at this point: it implies stubbornness or deceit on the part of the student, and may do irreparable damage to his reputation. It is very rare for a prestigious Meister to take on a student who was dismissed in preparation by another Guild.

Exercise represents the actual course of lessons and practice of their application. A vampire at this stage of learning is generally identifiable by one or more adopted fashions: a specific accessory or style of dress, a mode of speech or physical location (as some students are required to dwell in a prepared haven). The student attends frequent scheduled meetings with her Mentor (or Mentors), which may take the form of lectures, exercises or less formal get-togethers and field lessons. This is the "meat" of the schooling, and it is the stage that most students can expect to spend the majority of time and effort on.

Tests are administered frequently to gauge a student's performance and to help illustrate real-world situations that may demand application of the lessons. In general, these tests begin at a rather low-pressure level and intensify as the training continues. Some tests can even threaten injury or Final Death (although a good Mentor would never present a student with a challenge that could not be survived).

The tests of skill can become so elaborate as to fool the student into thinking that she is experiencing a real, unscripted situation. Mentors are known, on occasion, to call in favors or exert significant influence in constructing a truly demanding exam scenario.

Many Mentors use this time to craft a "perfect" practitioner of the subject at hand, so students can expect to be pushed to continue to redefine themselves as the instructor dictates. It is said that a good Meister will teach the student to emulate her, while a great one will teach the student to surpass her. Here, at this stage of training, the student can finally see what it is the Meister hopes to achieve and how he is supposed to get there. In many cases, the student is expected (at the very least) to show a diminished interest in everything that does not relate to the subject of study. A martial Guild might demand that its students take a vow of silence during their exercise, so as to eliminate social complications during study. On the other hand, a Notary's Guild may set a strict rule of passivity on its students, forbidding all athletic or martial activity for the duration of exercise. These strictures may seem overbearing, even ridiculous, but they do tend to work. If obedient students can stick to the

program, they become more disciplined, more focused and prouder of their accomplishments than less-restricted counterparts.

In larger Guilds, competition comes to the fore in exercise. Each student displays the aptitude he has for the chosen subject, and may attempt to outshine one another in tests (or, in some cases, actually face off in direct conflict). Mentors often adopt a policy of promoting only one student to the next stage at a time, forcing rivalry as the students jockey to qualify.

It is possible for a Mentor to dismiss a student during the exercises, but very unusual. Generally, if a student fails a test (or even a series of tests), he is encouraged to continue his training and try again. Dismissal would imply admission that a student who had been accepted and properly prepared is not capable of learning — which many would suggest means rather that the Mentor is not capable of *teaching*. It is more likely, at this stage, for a student to withdraw for his own reasons.

When a Mentor believes the student is ready, she initiates a final elementary test of ability, one in which the student must draw upon all of his accumulated learning to pass. If the student passes to the satisfaction of the Meister (who presides even if the student is learning from a lesser instructor), this stage of education is declared complete. Failure generally leads to another set of exercises, followed by a repeat of the test (or administration of a similar test) some time later.

THE FINAL EXAM

Storytellers may wish to apply a mechanical benchmark to judge a character's general performance over the course of exercises and determine whether or not a Meister would consider the character ready for testing. An average Guild would demand ability in all relevant skills at a minimum of three dots, plus one pertinent specialty in each before the character qualifies to end his elementary exercises. If Disciplines are being judged, they too should be at a minimum of three dots each.

Remember that the end of exercises does not spell the end of training — students need not be at world-class level just yet. If a story involves Guild schooling, characters should be made to feel that the process is long and involved, but should never feel that moving to the next stage is completely impossible.

Apprenticeship marks the student's acceptance as a practitioner of the chosen subject. Once she achieves this level of schooling (and only from this point onwards), she is allowed to execute her abilities as an official representative of the Guild for her own benefit and for others. Any student who passes the final exercise

test is presented to the Invictus at a gathering and acknowledged as an official apprentice of the Guild.

Lessons are not finished for an apprentice, though. The student must practice her skills under the watchful eye of her Mentor, continuing her schedule of meetings and tests. In addition, she is expected to take on some of the duties of the Guild: teaching newly prepared students in their exercises, assisting in upkeep (if there is a need) and representing the Meister in dealings with other Kindred.

Another, more significant honor is accorded the student at this stage in her career: the freedom to innovate. Finally considered adequately conversant in the elementary aspects of the subject at hand, she is allowed (even, in the case of more progressive Mentors, encouraged) to experiment and break free of the methods of the Meister. This exploration may often lead to conflict with prideful instructors, but many Mentors aren't willing to let students complete their education until they can demonstrate some creative application of their skills. For truly brilliant students, lessons can become something more like discourse, as Mentor and student bandy theoretical details back and forth, hammering out a new and improved approach to the subject of study.

Not all experimentation leads to such happy circumstances, though. Some foolhardy students stray so far from the Meister's philosophy as to appear outrageous or, worse, self-indulgent. Many who go overboard suddenly find themselves the subjects of harsh treatment: punishment, demotion to exercise or even (if the Meister is offended enough) expulsion from the school. Demonstration of innovative talent is a razor's edge in the Invictus Guild, and arrogant students can find themselves pitched over the side with startling speed.

An apprentice is, surprisingly, the most likely to quit training in a Guild. While some might see this as the reckless act of an impatient vampire, those within the schools know that the truth can be more complicated. Some Meisters take to holding on to apprentices as long as possible, making sure that the apprentices remain to assist with the operation of the Guild and never end up challenging for supremacy. Other Meisters are simply too stubborn to admit that the students have nothing more to learn from them. It is one thing to instruct a promising, eager inferior and quite another to admit that he has equaled or even surpassed one's own skill. Some Meisters are simply too proud to let go.

Fair-minded Meisters, however, will honestly acknowledge an apprentice's advancement, recommending him for graduation as soon as it seems the Guild has no more to offer him by way of schooling.

Graduation marks the end of a student's professional relationship with her Mentor. In a formal ceremony, often held in Elysium, the Meister declares that the student has achieved all that could be hoped for her. She has successfully taken on all of the raw skill and

elementary experience that could be provided in a structured setting, and must take personal responsibility for all further development. The student is furthermore released from any real or perceived debts to the Guild Meister or any other instructor in this declaration.

Graduates of a Guild are often given a medal or similar symbol to indicate their Status, and many proud or vain Invictus Kindred take the opportunity to display these tokens at Elysium. The gift is always of equivalent rarity or worth to that which was demanded of the student at petitioning.

Most Guild alumni are friendly with their former Mentors, offering to assist in the management of the Guild as full instructors. The offer is rarely rejected, for to do so would be to suggest that the Meister does not consider the graduate worthy of passing *her* knowledge on. Other alumni choose to build reputations of their own, hoping to found their own Guilds some night, or simply to separate themselves from the oft-convoluted politics of Guild service and apply their learned skills exclusively in the “real world.”

Graduates are expected to uphold the integrity of the Guild at all times, ensuring that credit is paid to its members when appropriate. A common flipside to this responsibility often arises: the graduate must work to squeeze out any interlopers in the city, working to guarantee that the Guild is considered the best and only source of quality consultation on its subject of study.

When a Guild Meister is approached with a request related to her subject of expertise, she will often recommend a graduate of the Guild instead of taking it on herself. This means that Guild alumni do become “professionals” of a kind, and are expected to charge for their services. Some graduates are so sought after that Kindred are willing to meet extravagant prices in hiring them — but such is the blessing of reputable schooling.

Orders

There is one type of Guild that stands apart from the others. This Guild is stricter, more dangerous and designed for single purpose: indoctrination of oathsworn warriors in permanent service to the covenant. These are the military Orders: schools and career organizations of Invictus Knights.

All Orders require undying pledges from students before preparation can be declared complete. From the moment the pledge is taken, the student becomes a Knight, a permanent member of the Order accepted by her brethren as one of their own — and forever more tied to them, unable to renounce membership without dire consequences. A fanatical devotion to the declared virtues of the Order is required of all members, as is ready and demonstrated willingness to obey instructions without question.

Exercise (also known as “Drilling”) is especially grueling, and may last centuries for Knights of an Order. Their ongoing tests are just as likely to be real threat situations as staged events — an instructor will know which missions a less-experienced Knight should be able to handle, and will choose an assignment accordingly.

Those Knights who graduate to apprenticeships will not only take on the duties mentioned above, but will also be given command of a number of low-ranking Knights, taking responsibility for their deployment and training. Apprentices to Orders are known in some circles as “Officers.”

A graduate of any Order is essentially equivalent to a military general — either taking on increased command within the Order or moving on to found her own chapter. Only graduates are allowed to found chapters of an existing Order, and only in domains foreign to their training homes. No two chapters of the same Order may co-exist in a single domain.

The added prestige of Knighthood and the level of trust civilian citizens of the Invictus are willing to invest in them tend to mitigate the extreme conditions of schooling with Knights. Those who undergo the indoctrination of a prestigious Order are no ordinary warriors. The Knights tend to be superior to their less-structured counterparts in both skills and dedication, and operate in more efficient, perfectly tuned units.

There are some who say that Orders are a substitute for religion in the Invictus, a place for fanatics to go and preach their bloody-minded views. That may well be the case for some Orders, but it is certainly not true of all. Most are simply rational, well-disciplined units of operatives, prepared to do violent battle on behalf of their covenant but rarely eager to provoke it.

Success and Failure

The reputation of a Guild is earned by the quality of its students. It's as simple as that. No matter how popular or well-liked a Meister is, her school will never be respected unless the Kindred under its umbrella (or later, graduated from it) complete great works of their own. A Guild succeeds when its students impress the Invictus of the city, thereby attracting new students and establishing its Meister as the undisputed local authority on her subject of expertise.

When a Guild is a success, the Guild takes a firm hold in the consciousness of the local Invictus. It is commonly accepted — if the Guild becomes essentially (and exclusively) synonymous with the reliably superior execution of its subject of study, the Guild is doing well. Neonates battle fiercely to be accepted for training, and sires work to ensure that they make promising candidates. Elders consider the Guild a great contributor to the covenant's power in a city, and Kindred of

outside covenants find themselves incapable of competing with graduates in their chosen fields. A successful Guild combines its Meister's incalculable experience with the fresh, innovative spirit of its apprentices to stay ahead of the developmental curve, ensuring that the Guild is always fashionable, always admired and always dominating. The alumni of a successful Guild will proudly display their tokens of graduation. The apprentices will show inspiring confidence and discipline in their training, attracting the awe of onlookers.

Many Invictus factions find their beginnings in the foundation of a successful Guild. A number of martial Guilds eventually evolve into Knightly Orders, spreading their teachings from place to place and establishing firm footholds in the covenant. There are some Kindred who claim that certain professional Guilds have, through their influence over the ages, forever altered the basic traditional positions and powers in the Invictus.

But not every Guild succeeds. Some limp along under the surprisingly inadequate tutelage of an acknowledged Meister somehow incapable of communicating the spark of his talent. Some Guilds produce graduates who are poorly judged or, worse yet, determined to destroy their former Mentor's reputation. Some Guilds simply collapse under the stultifying influence of a stubborn, prideful Meister who refuses to acknowledge excellence in others.

Regardless of the reason, a failed Guild falls to inevitable ruin. Potential students become less numerous and less enthused in their petitions. Invictus Kindred begin to handle tasks related to the Guild's so-called area of expertise on their own, without bothering to consult the Meister. Students in both elementary exercise and apprenticeship abandon their Mentors, recognizing that the benefits of their schooling are rapidly diminishing. Eventually, the Meister is left alone, reduced to accepting inferior students or acknowledging the collapse of the Guild and denying further petitions. Eventually, he is supplanted by a competitor and left by the wayside.

Just as prestigious training can guarantee an illustrious career for an Invictus vampire, the collapse of her Guild can shatter her hopes. All graduates are thus tied to the ongoing function of the Guild and are best advised to work to ensure that its reputation stays strong. Even a tremor of scandal or mistrust can provoke intense politicking as the graduates work to stave off the damage or, if necessary, reshape the Guild to demonstrate its fitness. It may seem petty, but Status in the Invictus is so grounded in tradition and lineage that any black mark applied to one's former relations or instructors can work retroactively, doing serious damage. It is no small matter. Wars have been fought for less.

Intensely aware of the potential for a shift in popular opinion, good Guild Meisters plan for any eventuality, sometimes even secretly grooming potential (and apparently independent) replacements well in advance of

trouble. If a Meister is willing to put the reputation of the Guild ahead of his own, he may be able to ensure the Guild's protection and earn the gratitude of his graduates even in the direst of circumstances.

Guild Wars

Competition between Guilds is not unusual, and the occasional break between a Meister and his former pupils is to be expected. But neither is generally considered a serious affair — at best, it provides an opportunity for an entertaining display of one-upmanship, and, at worst, it's simply embarrassing for those involved.

A grave dispute, as initiated by formal notice to the Inner Circle, is another matter entirely. If the dispute is recognized, the ensuing battle between the challenger and the Meister can result in a loss of title, succession of command over a Guild or even its complete destruction.

By filing notice of challenge with the Inner Circle, the vampire initiating the dispute declares intent to subject himself to the scrutiny of his betters in comparison to the Meister named in the challenge. If the challenger proves to possess superior skill with respect to the subject at hand, the Meister will be stripped of title and required to step down, while the challenger is free to replace him (if so desired by the Invictus officials of the domain).

If the challenge is issued by the Meister of one Guild to another, both must risk their titles and the Status of their Guilds in trial. Thus unfolds a "Guild War," a high-stakes battle to seize control of a subject of expertise and the right to determine "proper" instructive technique.

Once the challenge is accepted by the Inner Circle, a proclamation is made in a gathering of the covenant. The challenged party is given the opportunity to withdraw, essentially forfeiting to the challenger and allowing the Inner Circle to determine the outcome on the spot. The challenger is then given one last chance to abandon his complaint. If both decline, the challenge begins in earnest.

Traditionally, a single month is allowed to pass between the announcement and final judgment. However, the Inner Circle is free to dictate longer or shorter terms (depending on the nature of the challenge), as well as any restrictions the Inner Circle feels would be appropriate or fair. A single judge is named (usually the Judex, but could be the Prince or any other elder with a significant stake in the function of the city), and, once the judge has had an opportunity to examine the work of both parties, the judge's word is considered final. Among the terms dictated are the outcomes of both a successful and an unsuccessful challenge — that is to say, the challenger does not get to choose what happens to the subject of the challenge if he wins and the challenged Meister does not decide what happens to the challenger in the case of an unsuccessful bid. That is up to the Inner Circle.

Note that nothing is considered off-limits during a Guild War, so long as it does not violate the law of the domain. Both involved parties are free to bribe, cajole, intimidate or otherwise attempt to influence the judges, and the parties are both free to interfere with one another's performance. It is wise to be aware that tactics unrelated to the nature of the dispute at hand may undermine one's apparent fitness in the challenge. For instance, a challenger for the position of Meister Martial Artist could better his position by ambushing his opponent in a back alley and beating him senseless, but the challenger would likely weaken his position if he attempted to seduce the judge. The reverse would be true in a challenge for the title of Meister Advocate. There is also the appearance of low self-confidence to consider: one who carries out a challenge without resorting to tactics of influence or interference will be more "pure" in her performance, essentially declaring that she needs nothing but her skill to overcome her opponent. As with anything else, appraisal of one's conduct tends to be flavored by the outcome. Any decision that leads to victory is a good one, once judgment is rendered — or at least the decision will be remembered as such.

Guild challenges can prove extremely dramatic (and, at times, worthwhile — if a Meister is truly failing in his role, he can forever damage the character of the covenant in the domain), but they can also create a serious destabilizing effect in a city. Any challenge may threaten to draw in more and more supporters on either side, drawing the local Invictus toward schism. Those who find themselves on the losing side will almost certainly hold

a grudge. The Inner Circle must be very careful when considering challenges, weighing the advantages of a result on either side against the potential upset it may cause. Often, unsurprisingly, the Circle simply refuses to accept challenges, preferring the status quo over the potential for unexpected consequences.

A Guild War

Madam DeMaray, Meister Speaker, has been formally challenged by Alder Vivian, Speaker, who accuses her of incompetence due to mental degeneration. The Inner Circle accepts the challenge, stating that a test will be conducted on both parties and judgment will be rendered by the Prince within 30 nights. It is further stated that, should the challenge be successful, Alder Vivian shall be named Meister Speaker and given control of the local Speaker's Guild. If, however, the challenge fails, Alder Vivian will be stripped of the title of Speaker and forced to publicly acknowledge Madam DeMaray's superiority — a great embarrassment, considering that she is Madam DeMaray's elder.

In the next few weeks, both Vivian and Madam DeMaray are questioned by the Prince, who creates a number of delicate situations for them to handle and carefully observes their techniques. Vivian's supporters begin spreading scandalous rumors about the Meister, most of which are deflected or defused by the current and former students of the Guild. Those rumors that remain are quite elegantly dismissed by Madam DeMaray herself in a stirring speech delivered at Elysium.



At the end of the month, the Prince declares that Madam DeMaray is clearly the superior Speaker. Alder Vivian must now submit to the humiliating punishment the Inner Circle has set out for her.

The Death of Experience

The collapse of a Guild can prove a significant, even crippling loss to the Invictus in a domain. It's relatively rare for an entire Guild to fall apart, but it can and does happen, for any number of reasons. When it does, a school of thought is lost, perhaps forever, and the covenant must find a way to do without the skills of its instructors. The Status of all who associated themselves with the Guild is put at risk, and prospective students find their options for the future reduced.

If a Guild Meister is rendered incapable of providing instruction through death, degeneration or torpor and there is no suitably skilled replacement to take control of the school, the Guild halts operation and all current students are suddenly cut loose. Obviously, this is a most unpleasant circumstance for all involved, so students will tend to do whatever is in their power to protect their Meister until graduation. It's not unusual for physically powerful students to take responsibility for guarding their Mentor outside of instruction, while others may hire Retainers, call in favors or otherwise work toward keeping their teacher safe for the duration of their schooling. A Meister will rarely demand protection from her students, but that has little to do with the choice to provide it.

The destruction or disablement of the Meister isn't the only way a Guild can fail. The terms of a Guild War challenge may dictate the disbanding of the school. Once again, this would mean the interruption (and probable invalidation) of any lessons in progress; something that the students are not likely to be happy with. It follows that students will go quite a long way to preserve the reputation of their Mentor during a challenge and may be willing to undertake dangerous, underhanded or even illegal action to ensure victory. So long as the students are subtle enough to avoid turning the judge against the Meister, their instructors are not likely to put a stop to their tactics.

Not every Guild has such loyal students, though. Some Guilds come to an end simply because all of the enrolled pupils withdraw from lessons, leaving the Meister alone. If the Meister cannot convince any new students to petition for acceptance, the Inner Circle (or the Secretary, if the city has one) may declare the Guild invalid, stripping the Meister of her title. Indeed, some weaker Guilds end up completely at the mercy of a confederation of students who threaten a collective withdrawal if the Meister displeases them. Such a reversal of power is absolutely scandalous and can forever mar the reputation of a school if it is discovered. A school that succumbs to blackmail by its own students becomes little more than a shell of its former self, and is unlikely to

impart any useful lessons on its pupils. Most often, a Meister who finds himself facing student revolt must acknowledge that his school has failed and avoid the further indignities of extortion.

Worse yet, the alumni of a Guild can turn on their former Meister, demonstrating the incompetence of their schooling through a program of self-inflicted failure in the public eye. This may seem a bizarre scheme, since it threatens to damage the reputations of the alumni, but it can prove quite effective. If a number of skilled professionals suddenly begin to make conscious and repeated "mistakes" in order to demonstrate the inferiority of their schooling, local Invictus Kindred are likely to take notice and do what it takes to put a stop to them. It's a suicide tactic, socially speaking, but it works.

Guilds face a further potential problem. Outsiders, whether members of a competing Guild or not, may simply begin a program of active discouragement, working to ensure that no new students petition the Meister for enrolment. This is sometimes called a "shadow challenge," because, if successful, it undercuts the Meister's capability to run a school while preventing him from meeting his challenger on an even keel before a qualified judge. The only real defense against a shadow challenge is to make sure the training provided by the Guild is clearly more attractive than any alternatives.

However it comes about, the elimination of a Guild represents the death of a tradition. If the Guild is fairly new, the effects may not be very pronounced (except on those who attempted to found it), but if the Guild was once an established, well-respected institution, the ramifications of its collapse can be far-reaching and serious.

Guild Succession

It is not unusual for conflict to be sparked by the Final Death or extended torpor of a Guild Meister, as graduates and apprentices struggle to seize control of the Guild and preserve its operation. Personal disputes arise from differing interpretations of the Meister's wishes, and ambitious Kindred seek the prestige of the title of Guild leadership. Documentation and evidence is often provided to support claims of favored treatment by the former Meister, and vampires involved in seeking succession can expect a full recounting of their performances in schooling, for better or worse.

Of course, all such conflict is eventually brought to a halt by the decision of the Inner Circle, but it's a bad idea to let the situation get bad enough for them to feel the need to step in. More succession quarrels are settled quietly by high-priced agreements than any other way.

New Thought

When a vampire with skills unique to the domain joins the Invictus, she is presented with an unusual opportunity:

the chance to found a new Guild. If she chooses to do so, a major social undertaking begins.

First, she must be officially recognized as a superior talent in her field of choice. Basically, she has to get the Inner Circle to acknowledge that her skill is sufficiently developed to earn her a title of function (see “Titles and Offices,” p. 37). A demonstration of ability may be in order, as may a variety of coercive techniques, depending on the character of the Inner Circle judges in the city. The title so earned serves as the vampire’s public affirmation of skill, a sort of social armor against derogatory statements in the steps to follow.

Next, the vampire must stand before the Inner Circle (or Secretary, if the city has one), and declare her intent to found a Guild. She can expect to be questioned on her subject of expertise, the manner in which she intends to teach and the benefit she believes her teachings will produce for the covenant. As can well be imagined, a number of factors influence the attitude of the Inner Circle during the questioning. If the vampire in question is highly regarded and possesses undeniably valuable knowledge, the interview is little more than a cursory formality. If, however, she is relatively young, unimportant or possessing knowledge that is considered distasteful or worthless by the members of the Inner Circle, she is likely to undergo a grueling, humiliating interrogation. If the Inner Circle (or the Secretary, as the case may be) is satisfied with her answers, they may decide to officially recognize her as the Meister of a fledgling Guild.

IMPRESSING THE INNER CIRCLE

The process of founding a Guild is more or less a quest, and should be played out for full effect. Remember that the members of the Inner Circle might want the character involved to form a Guild, but will still be likely to take advantage of the fact that he is completely at their mercy in attempting to get this venture off the ground. Greedy Councilors may want bribes, while more subtle ones may require favors or promises of service before they give the nod to the prospective Meister. Some Councilors may be vulnerable to intimidation (although that’s certainly a dangerous game), while others might be vulnerable to a sincere, heartfelt appeal.

It is safe to say that most Inner Circle members fail to be impressed by a character who does not realize that it takes more than a show of world-class skill to get their stamp of approval.

Once the vampire has become a Meister, she is allowed a “grace period,” usually no more than a couple of months, in which to find a suitable student and begin instruction. If she fails to do so before the end of the designated period, she will be stripped of her new title

and forced to return to the Inner Circle for questioning if she wishes to try again.

Assuming the above conditions are met and a suitable pupil is enrolled before the grace period elapses, the Guild becomes stable and may function as normal.

New Guilds are especially vulnerable to challenges and Guild warfare. They tend to have few students and fewer graduates to help defend the Meister’s reputation, and the majority of their resources are focused on establishing a respectable, legitimate presence in the domain. The truth is that protecting a Guild through the first years of its operation can be one of the costliest ventures in the Invictus.

So it is, and must be, for the introduction of new thought and philosophy to the Invictus. This is a covenant of tradition, and the establishment of new institutions must be difficult, ensuring that only the truly worthy ones are adopted into the operation of a domain.

Guild Stories

Guilds can provide the backdrop for a wide range of stories. Here are a few ideas to get you started, but you should feel free to create your own. All of these stories involve Invictus vampires, and work best if the player characters are relatively young Kindred.

• **Rival Applicants:** The characters are pushed by their sires into petitioning an extremely exclusive Guild, in hopes of securing a promising future for each of them in the covenant. The Meister has declared that he will take on a single, small group of students — preferably a coterie of friends — and the player characters are not the only group to apply. Another set of young vampires petitions the Guild as well, and the Meister has determined that the groups should be allowed one month to prepare themselves for his interview. In the intervening time, the rivals are sure to attack the characters with everything they’ve got in an attempt to force the characters to withdraw from the application process. Will the characters fight fire with fire, or will they weather the attacks, concentrating on developing a plan to impress the Meister? Will the conflict be reflected upwards, provoking battle between the sires and patrons of the two groups?

• **Inhuman Training:** The characters successfully petition a prestigious Guild, much to the delight of their sires. Once inside, the characters discover that the Meister believes that proper cultivation of their skills requires abandonment of their human past. At first, he imposes a difficult schedule, making sure that they don’t have time to keep up relationships with any of their living allies. Eventually, he demands that they cut off all connections with their former lives. The characters must face the fact that they may gain Status in the covenant by pleasing the Meister, but they will surely lose touch with their Humanity. Will they defy his restrictive instructions? Will they dare to question him? Is social advancement worth the price?

• **Guild War:** The characters are progressing comfortably through their studies in a recognized Guild when a competing Meister issues a formal challenge against their school. The Inner Circle declares that a competition between Meisters will take place in three months, and the loser will be required to disband her Guild. A program of social maneuvering, intimidation and outright violence is initiated by the challenging Guild against the characters and their Meister, but the Meister declares that her students must not respond in kind. The characters are instructed to continue their training and pay no heed to the underhanded devices of an inferior opponent. Can they weather the attacks and obey the Meister? If the tactics of the enemy appear to be working, are the characters willing to break with the Meister's wishes in order to guarantee victory?

• **The Last Resort:** The characters are members of a Guild that has just accepted a dangerous new recruit. The new student is half-mad, hanging on to the last vestiges of his Humanity with only the barest recognition of his predicament. The Meister has agreed to take on the student because she believes that the structured environment of Guild training will help this pitiful learn some restraint and give him the tools necessary to regain some Humanity. Her intentions may be kind, but the fact is that the characters are now keeping close company with a deranged beast. Will they try to help him redeem himself, or will they work to push him out of the Guild? Does this enrolment undermine the trust they've put in the Meister? If they fail to exert a good influence on him, will he begin to exert a bad one on them?

• **Obsolete Power:** The characters are learning from a Meister who is clearly experienced but incapable of translating his knowledge to the realities of the modern world. As training progresses, the characters become increasingly aware that their Meister, a powerful and well-respected elder in the city, is no longer capable of teaching relevant skills. To withdraw from the Guild at this stage in the lessons would risk irreparable damage to their reputations, so the characters are stuck. One of the Meister's apprentices has also recognized the problem but is too cowardly to issue a formal challenge. Do the characters risk the wrath of the Meister by making their views known to him? Will they attempt to push the apprentice into a challenge, knowing that if he fails he will be disgraced? Will they stick their own necks out, appealing to outsiders for help?

Sample Guild:

Madam DeMaray's Guild of Speakers

Grace, style, keen observational abilities and a honey wit are powerful weapons for a predator, and Madam Chantal DeMaray is an exemplary of these qualities. She will teach any student willing to learn, and has effec-

tively changed the face of the Invictus in her home city. The Meister is a former ballerina turned Ventrue, and she cuts a most astonishing figure. No matter whom she meets, Madam DeMaray leaves the Kindred with a favorable impression (and, often, a subtly implanted command or two). Her Guild is mid-sized — at any given time, there are at least four or five apprentices handling a significant portion of the instruction schedule and up to a dozen students in exercise. The influence of the Guild does not reach beyond the borders of its home city, though.

To request enrolment in DeMaray's Guild, a vampire must present a handwritten letter of petition in French, accompanied by a fresh, long-stemmed and thorned red rose. If the request is adequate, Madam DeMaray will arrange a private meeting with the vampire in Elysium and conduct a short interview. It is rare for her to turn an earnest applicant away, but she will do so if he seems too distracted or too bestial to receive her lessons.

Once accepted, pupils of the Meister are required to wear a red ribbon on their wrist at all times, marking them. They will participate in a series of interviews, lectures, interactive lessons and social gatherings arranged to sharpen their wits and otherwise practice their learnings. All of the students are required to attend Elysium events, and are usually assigned a task for each one. Common tasks include meeting a vampire previously unknown to the student, learning a specific piece of information or convincing a non-Invictus vampire to perform a simple chore for the student. Intense debriefing sessions follow each Elysium gathering, and the student is not only expected to prove completion of the assigned task but also report on everything he's seen and heard, interpreting each observation as he does so. Over the years, pupils' powers of perception are honed by these interviews, as are useful senses of detachment.

The Guild offers training in the application of Dominate and Majesty to its Ventrue and Daeva students, but will emphasize that these powers are extraordinary tools and must not be relied upon.

The notorious final test of DeMaray's Guild of Speakers is quite unique. The Guild throws a party for the student, inviting all the Kindred of the domain to pay their respects to her. If the relatively young vampire is capable of winning the crowd of vampires over and earning their applause, she earns the right to graduate to apprenticeship. If, on the other hand, the student cannot endear herself to her fellow Kindred, the test is failed. It should be noted that a number of Kindred at the party are not Invictus vampires, and may choose to undermine the student out of apathy, if not spite. The test is never as simple as it seems.

The Harpy in DeMaray's home city is an alumnus of her Guild, as are two members of the Inner Circle. This fact alone renders DeMaray and her school al-

most completely immune from challenge — few would dare to stand against her, and those who do are almost guaranteed to fail. This, in turn, makes the school all the more attractive to neonate applicants, especially when they see the Harpy treat enrolled students like war buddies, sharing tales of his schooling and commiserating on difficult assignments.

Several attempts have been made on Madam DeMaray's unlife in recent decades, though. It appears that some of the members of the city's Kindred population believe that she is manipulating her students, creating a small army of smiling, cruel puppeteers just to protect her interests and destroy her enemies. These attacks seem to be coming from outside the Invictus, but one can never be entirely sure.

Sample Guild: The Arai Groom's Guild

Proper selection, cultivation and control of a herd are skills most Kindred take for granted — until something goes wrong. More forward-thinking vampires will seek the counsel of a professional Groom on such matters, for she will be able to apply training and experience to ensure that the result is pleasant and trouble-free. The Guild of the Nosferatu Alder Morio Arai, Groom and Meister of Medicine, produces exemplary candidates for this position.

The subject is not a popular one (especially among self-righteous, “humane” types), so the Guild is relatively small. There are rarely more than one or two students enrolled at a time, but the Meister is not an ambitious vampire. He seems perfectly satisfied with the close Mentor-student relationship that such a small school provides, and his students have never complained.

To appeal to the Meister for enrollment, a prospective student must prepare a handwritten letter of petition in Latin and have it hand delivered by a mortal the student considers an attractive blood source. If the Meister is satisfied with the letter, he will feed on the mortal and dismiss her, arranging an interview with the applicant. At the interview, the Meister will ask for an explanation of the student's choice of messenger. He will also allow the student to make an argument on her own behalf, and then render a decision.

If he accepts the student, Alder Arai requires that the student learn conversational Latin, to make sure she understands and can keep up with the medical terms he tends to pepper his lectures with. He brings the students along on medical examinations of one or more of the herds he is tending to, and encourages each of his students to begin assembling a herd of her own.

As the herd is founded, Alder Arai will walk the student through the selection procedure, helping her weed out potential troublemakers or other undesirables, and ensuring that all who remain are healthy and attractive (in their own right) for their master.

As the exercise continues for the first few years, Alder Arai checks in on the student and her herd frequently, examining the mortals for deterioration. He instructs the pupil on techniques of encouragement and penalty to assist in shaping the character of the herd and maintaining its cohesiveness.

When the student thinks she is ready, she presents her herd to Alder Arai for a final examination. He observes her interaction with the mortals, and decides if the student has done a good job with them. If so, the student may become an apprentice with the Guild.

Apprentices must expand the scope of their operations and consider desires that are not their own. They will receive assignments to procure mortals who meet specific requirements, often with a time limit. More than once, the apprentices will have to cultivate the mortals in question, since it will be nearly impossible to find ones who meet the provided criteria.

When the apprentice appears to have learned everything Alder Arai has to teach, he presents her with a gift: a superior mortal specimen that he knows matches the tastes of the student perfectly.

Graduates of Alder Arai's Guild are actually referred to as “Arai Grooms,” and are proud to bear that title.

Oderint Dum Metuunt:

How The Invictus Scares Its Rivals

“Let them hate, so long as they shall fear.” So said Caligula. In his four years as Emperor of Rome, Caligula gave his enemies reason both to hate and fear him. His own guards murdered him.

The Invictus quotes Caligula's motto, but recommends a nuanced interpretation. As sires explain to their childer, Caligula's example shows the danger of making others hate and fear you too much. Rather, Invictus members say, one must accept that one can never be loved by all. Some people will always hate you. They may hate you for being stronger — a desirable state of affairs in the First Estate. They may hate you for being weaker; for holding different ideas, for your allies or for no sensible reason at all. All you can do is make sure your enemies fear to attack you, more than they lust to destroy you — and those who are not your enemies fear the consequences should they cease to be your friends.

In the harsh world of the Kindred, that sort of fear has another name. They call it *respect*.

Elders

When an elder feels she does not receive sufficient respect, she waits for someone to insult her. Then she shows her power by crushing the offending vampire. An

elder who wants to bankrupt, terrorize or destroy another Kindred can call upon multiple, advanced Disciplines, vast wealth, extensive social connections in the Kindred and mortal worlds and enormous experience. For instance, the average ancilla has little chance in Monomacy against an elder with Celerity and a few centuries of practice with a blade.

Invictus elders do *not* use their high offices to punish personal insults — at least, not often. A Prince has a Sheriff and Scourge to punish open defiance, but that's to defend the dignity of the office. An Invictus member of lesser rank cannot simply order another Kindred's punishment. Aside from infringing on the Prince's authority, pulling rank does not inspire respect for oneself or one's covenant. The First Estate likes to say its members make their offices powerful, not the other way around. When an Invictus member personally destroys an enemy, she proves her covenant's claim to rule by right of superior competence, and so brings honor to her covenant and herself.

Neonates and Ancillae

Younger Invictus members have a harder time inspiring fear in other Kindred, but the neonates do have some options. Most importantly, they try to limit their conflicts to foes they actually have a chance to beat — other neonates. A whole coterie can destroy an ancilla or even an elder, but only through careful strategy. Neonates who attack older and more prestigious Kindred also need an ironclad *casus belli* to justify their actions to the other elders, and influential friends to protect them from their target's allies.

The Invictus also has methods to inspire fear and respect that stop short of direct attacks on other Kindred. Although these sample methods do not show power so graphically as destroying another Kindred, these methods are considerably safer. Of course, older Kindred can use them, too.

- Sporting events, such as jousts and hunts, are opportunities to show off your strength and skill. Other Kindred may think twice before offending a vampire who can place a bullet in a target from 500 feet. The bullet could just as easily be incendiary.

The Invictus thinks it's all right to cheat at sporting events, as long as you don't get caught. After all, you probably aren't the only one. Successful cheating makes its own statement of skill.

- Learn something another Kindred wants to keep secret. This does not have to be something criminal or of strategic value in the Danse Macabre. Most Kindred remain human enough to feel embarrassment over certain private interests or activities, such as a Ventrue who feels that his enthusiasm for pro wrestling would compromise his aristocratic façade.



Let other Kindred know you know his secret. Hint that you might know other secrets about him, too. From then on, the other Kindred must fear you for what you might reveal, to the detriment of his reputation — or his unlife, if he has especially dangerous secrets.

- Kindred can also be blackmailed through their mortal connections; especially mortal relatives or other loved ones. Bring another vampire's mortal kid brother into your blood cult or give a job to her mortal daughter. Let the other vampire know that her loved one's continued well-being depends on her cooperation.

- If you (or your coterie) have skills at breaking and entering, infiltrate a rival's haven. Leave some harmless token of your visit, such as a note saying you wanted a meeting but the other Kindred was out. The real message is clear: you can get to the other vampire whenever you want. The message is especially compelling if your token is discovered immediately after the other vampire rises in the evening. The dangers and difficulties of daytime action are great, but the reward can be worth it — and a clever Kindred may figure out ways to *seem* like she made a daytime visit.

- Perhaps the easiest way to gain a reputation is to pay another vampire to say how powerful and dangerous you are. Of course, this only works if other Kindred don't know the speaker is your client. Such skills are one of the less obvious benefits of having a hidden client, especially one in another covenant.

Subcontracting Terror

When older Invictus members want to terrorize or make examples of other Kindred, the First Estate members may use younger covenant members to do their dirty work. Operating through clients doesn't bring the same prestige as defeating a foe single-handed, but sometimes it's more practical. The elder or ancilla may lack the time to do the job herself, or she may need proxies to give herself plausible deniability (in case the attack fails or if some other oath or commitment prevents her from taking action). In the former case, the older Invictus member openly admits that the neonates act at her behest. In the latter case, the elder officially denies any responsibility for whatever happens — but other Kindred know she launched the attack, and grant her greater honor for doing it in such a way no one can *prove* it was her. One common strategy is for the elder or ancilla to express a wish that something bad happen to another Kindred, to an audience that includes younger clients. (She might say, for instance, "Who will rid me of this troublesome Sanctified?") Officially, she merely vented a little frustration; if the attack fails, she can blame everything on "overzealous" clients. Whatever the reason for subcontracting an attack, the elder still warns other Kindred about the power she wields through her ties of patronage.

Sooner or later, Invictus neonates must expect their patrons to demand such service from them. Some neonates may even volunteer, to gain new patrons or greater rewards. Serving as other members' enforcers may place neonates in a conflict of interest, though. What if their patrons tell them to destroy or terrorize vampires or mortals the neonates consider friends? (As much as any of the Damned can have "friends.") The neonates can betray their friends' affections and probably erode a bit more of their Humanity — or the neonates can betray their patrons, lose Status and make powerful enemies who *must* destroy the neonates to maintain the patrons' own prestige. A similar dilemma happens if the neonates' patrons tell them to attack someone with whom the neonates share an oath or owe a debt. Whatever they choose, they dishonor themselves in the eyes of other Invictus.

Very often, the only way to escape such dilemmas with honor and Humanity intact is to make the target a client of the most powerful Invictus available. An elder or ancilla who's ready to make an example of a mouthy neonate or a mortal business rival might hesitate to attack another elder's client. If the most powerful Invictus available happens to be the neonate's patron, the neonate must also persuade the target to beg the patron's forgiveness and offer submission — in front of other Kindred, so everyone knows the elder didn't go soft. Young Invictus must decide for themselves if they want their friends bound to serve an ancient monster.

The Paradox of Fear

In all the First Estate's members' attempts to win respect through fear, they face one final problem. Everything they do to make Kindred of other covenants fear them is also seen by their fellow Invictus. The deeds that show a Kindred is a worthy ally also make her a potential threat. If she cannot be restrained and controlled by oaths, patronage and her own fear, she must be destroyed.

Up-and-coming Invictus, therefore, face their greatest dangers from their own elders. The faster the younger members' ascents to power and prestige, the more threatening they appear and the greater the odds that some elders will make examples of them. And so the Danse Macabre spins through its endless ironies, as the deeds to prove your usefulness make you a danger, the demonstrations of loyalty bring suspicion and the fear meant to counter hatred inspires greater hatred in turn.

Relations with Others

Much of the political maneuvering of the First Estate is nothing more than management of other Kindred (or, even more generally, other creatures). Order is the state of affairs with which the Invictus is most comfortable,

as order promotes rational behavior and adherence to the Traditions. Accordingly, the First Estate is willing to go to great lengths to maintain order, even if doing so brings Invictus members into conflict with others. The irony of conflicts for the sake of stability is not lost on the Invictus, generally speaking, but the wise aren't shaken by such short-sightedness. Kindred of Society have all eternity to achieve a lasting order — to maneuver, hammer and finesse the pieces into place — and all eternity to enjoy that order when it is finally achieved. Tonight's conflicts lead to tomorrow night's *Pax Invictus*.

The Other Covenants

Truth be told, many Invictus would leap at the chance to rid themselves of the other covenants. (As it turns out, Invictus members have done exactly that in some cities.) In the eyes of the First Estate's fanatics, none of the other covenants have the correct understanding of the Requiem and the uses to which it should be put. The covenants are all wayward organizations — misguided but too headstrong to accept the First Estate's wise guidance. From the perspective of these extremists, 99% of all Masquerade breaches are attributable to other clans, and only the presence, stern guidance and constant effort on the part of the Invictus prevents the world of mortals from learning of the existence of vampires.

More moderate Society vampires see the strategic advantage of a fractured civilization. Not every Kindred must be ruled explicitly. Not every citizen must be directly controlled to be a subject. The Invictus can govern the Sanctified congregation by influencing its Priests. The Invictus can control Acolytes by framing the religious debates at Elysium. The Invictus can define the philosophical territory of the Carthians by surrendering unwanted ground to them — let them strut and crow on their dung hill. When the Invictus defines the negative spaces it gives up in the composition of the city to the other covenants, it exerts its control over them.

When categorizing themselves into other covenants, Kindred climb aboard wagons which the Invictus can influence by dealing with their drivers, the roads and the signposts. When busying themselves with their own dogmas and strange goals, the Dragons and the Acolytes grow accustomed to the assumptions the Invictus insinuates into their Requiems: that Society vampires govern and politick. The Kindred of other covenants do all Society Kindred the favor of bowing out of the rat race within the Invictus.

To its credit, the Invictus accepts the other covenants (in most cities, anyway) with what it sees as a noble degree of forbearance (although this forbearance has been known to fall by the wayside at times when dealing with the Carthian Movement). Certainly, the First Estate puts pressure on those other covenants, but one

can only wonder what kind of disaster would unfold if the Invictus did not apply this pressure. By the exacting standards of the First Estate, all other covenants are chaotic, undisciplined aggregates of vampires who are constantly in danger of egregiously violating the Masquerade or otherwise triggering the collapse of Kindred society. Many Invictus vampires believe themselves to be members of the most rational, mature covenant in existence. As members of the First Estate perceive the situation, they *could* be much more aggressive about pushing the First Estate's rigidly rational agenda, but they choose to work through diplomatic channels for the moment so as not to create a rift between the First Estate and the rest of Kindred society.

The Lancea Sanctum

Nowhere is the division of church and state sharper and more awkward than between the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum. Some Damned say the Camarilla fractured because its spiritually inclined members, those who had been overwhelmed by an irrational devotion to Longinus, no longer felt that the organization's secular wings had anything to offer them. The most arrogant amid the Lancea Sanctum (or the proto-covenant it may have been in those nights) actually expected the Invictus to wither without spiritual guidance. But the Sanctified lost stature in the aftermath of the breakup, not the remnant of the Camarilla now calling itself the Invictus — the unconquered — both as a title of pride and as a means of announcing to the Lancea Sanctum that the departure of the Sanctified had not lessened the Invictus in any way.

In truth, the Invictus was reeling from the loss of its Roman spiritual advisors (both Sanctified and pagan), but the covenant, at least the elders and ancillae, refused to acknowledge that anything had changed. Invictus members made brief, concerted efforts to Embrace worthy mortals and continued to meddle in mortal politics, which the Invictus members found was easier to do now that the Sanctified were suddenly quite busy attending to more spiritual matters.

But even centuries after the split, the two covenants found themselves in sometimes uncomfortably close quarters. The fall of the Camarilla was not bitter enough to force the covenants into conflict, but neither was either covenant willing to give up its own autonomy or territory of power to merge again. The two estates may collaborate, conspire or conflict, but they are seldom able to commit. And so it has gone for the last several centuries.

Though the covenants set out on their own paths long ago, they are on a trajectory that sees them jostling one another a great deal, like the antagonistic siblings they are. At this point, both covenants are over their shared history, and yet they seldom seem to be able to leave cities where the other is found.

Truth be told, the relationship between the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum varies widely from domain to domain, and the tone is often set by the eldest Kindred in the domain. In one French domain, the two covenants are sworn enemies, doing everything in their power to undermine and strangle the other — the only winner there is the Circle of the Crone, which has grown considerably since the two covenants have been at each other's throats. In other domains, however, many Kindred are loosely affiliated with both sects, and claiming membership in one or the other of the covenants is largely arbitrary.

Circumstances have placed the Lancea Sanctum and the Invictus on a course that sees them drifting, pressing or clashing into each other time and again. Although each covenant has its own clear identity, both the Sanctified and the First Estate also have a long history with each other, and the disentangling of their destinies is not as easily done as it might seem from the dramatic fallings-out, conflicts and philosophical divorces experienced by some of their Damned.

THE ORDO DRACUL

So near to the order of the Invictus and yet so far, the Ordo Dracul represents (in the eyes of fanatical Society Kindred) a serious failure on the part of the Invictus. To an extremist's way of thinking, every single Dragon should have been an easy convert to the Invictus, but somewhere along the way, something went horribly awry. The First Estate was distracted when it should have been attentive.

The Invictus does not share the Dragons' fascination with change or "redemption." On the contrary, the Invictus is certain that Damnation is forever, and the best that can be done is to accrue as much power as possible to ease the weight of the ages. Kindred do not change and, ideally, neither should the cities they rule.

Many a member of the Invictus, however, those from European domains in particular, still entertains long-term intentions of annexing a local Ordo Dracul chapter. Invictus members may see the Coils of the Dragon as party tricks, heresies or secret weapons, but they're exceedingly useful whatever they are. The Invictus could put them to good use.

In many domains, the Ordo Dracul is treated as a society adjacent to the Invictus — a secret investigative force or private social club, perhaps. In general, it seems that Society Kindred and Dragons find ways to coexist when they recognize that they are in pursuit of different goals. When the Inner Circle seeks to hoard information for itself or when the Dragons seek to dabble in political power, troubles arise. When Kindred are present that can negotiate fair shares or divisions of authority between the two covenants (a joint Invictus/Dragon

coterie might bridge the gap), the Invictus and the Order can enjoy the kind of alliance normally associated with the First and Second Estates. (In some Invictus domains, the Order is known as the Secret Estate.)

THE CIRCLE OF THE CRONE

The archetypal Invictus vampire does not understand the appeal of the Circle of the Crone. The Circle has its share of elders, but many Invictus Kindred are simply at a loss to see what the Circle offers those vampires that the Invictus does not. Ultimately, this is how even fanatically rigid Society vampires make peace with Acolytes: at least the pagans have found a place for themselves.

The Invictus sees the Circle of the Crone as irrational where the Invictus is rational, chaotic where the Invictus is orderly. Because of the Circle's weird ways, many Invictus believe Circle cults to be perilous risks, potential breaches in the Masquerade, which the Invictus is passionately committed to preserving. In nearly every way that matters, such cults' nightly efforts run contrary to those of the First Estate. They are unpredictable, unstructured and volatile.

For vehemently factional Invictus vampires, this volatility is reason enough to forbid the presence of Acolytes in the domain. For more clever Society Kindred, the fringe lunacy of the Circle is a valuable tool for social order. Circle cults serve as asylums for potentially valuable or useful vampires. A wise Invictus leader defines a social and geographical area where the Acolytes can have their way, sends troublesome but useful neonates their way, and makes the pagan covenant responsible for its own members. The ugly alternative is a city riddled with lone, unknown religious radicals. The covenant of the Crone helps the Invictus categorize, identify and interact with a potentially unknown factor of Kindred society.

It's frustrating to the First Estate that so many otherwise-competent Kindred are lured away from order and defense of the Masquerade by such fringe philosophies. When Acolytes point to Crúac as vindication of their covenant affiliation, members of the Invictus just shake their heads. In the eyes of the First Estate, blood magic is hardly reason enough to abandon efforts to blend in and work with the mortal world. A large number of Invictus Kindred despise the practice of Crúac anyway — any vampire that gains much mastery in it becomes more monstrous and unpredictable, which, in the eyes of the First Estate, is just an invitation to Masquerade breaches and other unsavory behavior.

On those grounds alone, some Invictus-controlled domains have issued a strict ban on the practice of Crúac, with either torpor or Final Death as the penalty for breaking the ban. In the strictest of these domains, anyone

even associated with the Circle of the Crone is hunted down, overtly or covertly, as likely threats. Needless to say, these bans infuriate Acolytes, but these kinds of practices take place only where the Circle of the Crone is particularly weak.

On the other hand, many Invictus vampires believe Acolytes feel much more persecuted by the First Estate than they really are. The popularly perceived union of the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum causes Society vampires to get painted with the wrong brush by Acolytes — even when the Invictus and the Sanctified have no formal allegiances, many Crone cultists assume they do. Thus, while the Invictus has little interest in getting its hands too dirty with the Circle of the Crone, few Acolytes do much to learn more about the First Estate.

Individual Society Kindred have developed meaningful and powerful allegiances with Acolytes in numerous domains, of course. Both covenants have long memories and a fondness for the ancient ways. According to some tales, the Invictus and the Crone enjoyed many centuries of peace in the nights of pagan Rome. Certainly several modern domains, where Judeo-Christian religions do not dominate the mortal populations from which the Kindred are drawn, are still home to Society Acolytes and Invictus worshippers of the Crone. In some domains, these unions achieve remarkable power and solidity because they're formed under pressure from other covenants, like young lovers driven together by warring parents. In other domains, these unions are powerful precisely because they are secret or unexpected.

THE CARTHIAN MOVEMENT

In many domains, the Invictus sees the Carthian Movement not as a real threat, but as a wayward thorn in the First Estate's side, an unruly mob of neonates barely a step away from pistol-waving, bomb-throwing anarchy. The First Estate does not like the Carthian Movement and does not understand what has brought the Carthians to the bizarre philosophies they espouse. After all, no other creature on the planet insists on being led by its least experienced members or tries to mimic the social conventions of its food, so why should Kindred? The elders of the First Estate scoff at the naïve ideologies of the Carthians even as they chafe at the young covenant's rapid growth.

To the Invictus eye, the Carthian Movement is built upside down. It violates every principle of sound organizational structure. The Carthian Movement puts power in the hands of the average and the unremarkable. It empowers Kindred who have little or no concept of how to comport themselves in the Requiem. Carthian philosophies seem to restrict older, more powerful and more experienced members for the sake of equality, weakening the best to achieve a vulnerable mediocrity.

Not only is such organization disrespectful, it's dangerous and in violation of everything the Invictus stands for. Many Invictus find it unspeakably tedious to have to expend effort to keep its own neonates loyal. Once, Kindred at every stage of the Requiem flocked to the Invictus. Once, Kindred would do anything, suffer any indignity, just to play a small role in the nightly operations of the First Estate.

The rise of the Carthian Movement had a terrible impact on that state of affairs. Suddenly, neonates were looking askance at the notion of hierarchy itself, and — given the choice between pushing themselves to be something in the Invictus or wallowing around with the lowest common denominator of the Carthian Movement, they chose the latter — inexplicably, as far as the First Estate was concerned. Now, Society elders and ancillae in many domains must court new vassals and protégés from the broader ranks of the neonates.

The initial impression of First Estate Kindred, elders in particular, was that modern technology had made mortals weak, lazy and unwilling to work to achieve their true potential. Many First Estate Kindred feel that way about the neonates drawn from modern mortals as well.

In the modern nights, the Invictus pays more attention to recruiting and keeping members than the covenant ever did (or had to do) in the past, but doesn't especially go out of its way to attract members from the young ranks of the Carthian rabble. On the contrary, many Invictus elders think of the Carthians as a politically oriented prep school or an elaborate obstacle course. Carthian society carries the burden of socializing young Kindred while inadvertently preparing them for long, inevitable years of service to the Invictus.

As far as the First Estate is concerned, the will to power is immortal but the urge to play games and tinker around with political ideologies is not. Most members of the Invictus believe that, in the end, ancillae and elders will grow tired of Carthian games and take their talents and experience where they are appreciated and rewarded, where ancillae and elders are treated the way powerful elder Kindred ought to be treated: the Invictus.

Consequently, when the Invictus takes hostile action against the Carthian Movement, the First Estate moves most aggressively against the other covenant's brash younger members. At the same time, Invictus members continue to build bridges of temptation to Carthian elders and established ancillae. Nearly all Invictus elders are secretly (or not so secretly) of the belief that Carthian elders just need to see how much better the Requiem is for the established Kindred of the First Estate. Once these Carthian elders think through the long-term consequences of Carthian affiliation, how could they *not* opt to leave the rabble behind? Instead of making war on Carthian elders, then, the elders of the First Estate subtly *court* these Carthians, defer to them, flatter them,



treat them as the Invictus believes elders *ought* to be treated. In short, Invictus elders do everything but send the Carthian elders formal invitations to defect.

Often, the practice works. Not only do Carthian elders tire of the hoops their neonates make them jump through, but young Carthians witness the camaraderie extended to their elders by the Invictus and immediately jump to conclusions; the Carthian neonates assume that their own elders are somehow colluding with the enemy, and the situation degrades from there — until they effectively force their elders to jump ship for the First Estate.

If nothing else, Carthians that never come to understand the attraction of the Invictus are out of the way. Rather than causing internal troubles for the First Estate, rebels and revolutionaries can be driven together into the uncivil pseudo-state of the Carthians, where they bicker and undermine their own revolutions with their disorder. The most savvy modern Invictus see the Carthian Movement as a fortuitous opportunity — a beatable enemy that exemplifies exactly why the modern night needs the First Estate.

Why make the same mistakes as short-lived mortal societies? Why waste so much of the Requiem on political fads and experiments when the Invictus have already found the proof? Why gamble on the Carthians when the Invictus is a sure thing?

The Unaligned

Though other covenants may get the covenant's unadulterated hostility, the First Estate saves its deepest, most absolute contempt for the unaligned. This rabble is inevitably among the greatest threats to the Masquerade in any city in which unaligned vampires are found. In the eyes of the Invictus, the unaligned are like plague rats, scurrying around out of sight spreading disorder like a blight through Kindred society. To the First Estate's way of thinking, the unaligned are an impoverished lot, wholly lacking in loyalty and self-discipline. They possess no sense of history, no awareness of their place in the Requiem and no higher principles to guide their nightly disruptions than what they *want* to do. In the absence of any self-discipline, their only loyalty is to themselves, and as far as the Invictus is concerned, that may as well be loyalty to the Beast, given the trouble such isolation breeds.

In many domains, keeping tabs on unaligned Kindred is a major part of the Invictus mission, a key component in the covenant's campaign against disorder. This may mean anything from shadowing known agitators to bringing troublemakers to the Sheriff to posing as *agents provocateurs* among the rabble to lead them into actions that allow the First Estate to clamp down on every unaligned vampire in the city. This kind of monitoring of

unaligned activity is one of the key tasks elders assign to neonates and younger ancillae on a nightly basis.

For the childe of an Invictus Kindred to become unaligned is a deeply embarrassing event for a sire — and one that rarely goes unpunished. Elders have been known to launch attacks at their own childe's influences — minions and unaligned allies — in response. At the extreme, some in the First Estate have been known to put their own childe into torpor rather than allow the childe to shame them in such a way. Defecting from the Invictus is bad enough, but leaving society altogether — essentially throwing away every advantage that might help one throughout the course of the Requiem — is seen as an intolerable insult. On more than one occasion in the history of the Invictus, an elder has taken it upon herself to destroy *all* unaligned Kindred after her favorite childe was “seduced away by the lying rabble.” While that is not the standard response to a wayward childe, the unaligned do often suffer from a notable increase in unwanted scrutiny any time an Invictus childe opts to rebel by disappearing into the underbrush of the unaligned. Should the First Estate come to the conclusion that the unaligned are actually actively *recruiting* from Invictus ranks — actually undermining Kindred society — there will be hell to pay.

The eldest of Invictus elders sometimes have difficulty telling the difference between unaligned Kindred and members of the Carthian Movement. To such aged monsters, Carthian coterie are little more than political cults. Often, Carthian states resemble nothing so much as vagrants on the stoop of civilization. This underestimation sometimes works in the Carthians' favor.

Should an unaligned vampire manage to reach elder status, the Invictus *might* extend a formal invitation to him to join the First Estate, but such invitations are not usually extended with much enthusiasm, as Kindred who have been unaligned for so long are rarely felt to possess the discipline necessary to function as members of the First Estate's tight hierarchy. That kind of charity is more often intended as a demonstration or maneuver on the part of the inviting Kindred than it is a boon for the invited.

Belial's Brood

The Invictus sees every single member of the Brood as a walking, talking case of diablerie, the very antithesis of the order the First Estate has sworn to uphold. If the Invictus epitomizes order among the Kindred, Belial's Brood is pure, destructive chaos. To the Invictus philosophy, which thinks and acts long-term, the short-sighted nihilism of Belial's Brood is a cancer that *must* be destroyed before it can get a foothold.

Nothing causes a First Estate Prince to unleash his Hounds faster than rumors of a cell of Brood members. And when the Hounds catch those members, they don't

send the infernalists to Final Death until they have been through the most merciless and aggressive interrogation the covenant's elders can arrange. Any member of Belial's Brood captured by the Invictus has nothing to look forward to but being thoroughly and brutally unraveled by Invictus experts. Auspex, Majesty, Nightmare and Dominate all have their uses in such an interrogation session, and any captured member of Belial's Brood can expect to suffer through all of these Disciplines before being sent to a painful Final Death.

The animals of Belial's Brood may sometimes act civilized to get what they want, but they are enemies of the Masquerade and, thus, enemies of the Invictus.

VII

Generally speaking, the Invictus hates the genocidal faction known as "Seven," although not with the same deeply personal vendetta the First Estate reserves for Belial's Brood. That's not to say that members of the First Estate don't deal with members of VII using the same interrogate-and-destroy tactics that Invictus members bring to bear on Belial's Brood (they do), just that the Invictus hatred of VII is colder and more rational than the outright fanatical loathing reserved for Belial's Brood. VII is a threat to Kindred, while Belial's Brood is a threat to all of Kindred society.

The Others

Other Kindred are hardly the only *others* the Invictus deals with. The First Estate has long known of the existence of other supernatural entities, some more directly than others.

Because of its long history as a source of stability and order within Kindred society, when something *odd* or alarming pops up in a domain — a mystery, a menace, a monster — Invictus members, as the order-bringers, are often expected to take care of it. It is the burden of the crown, the cost of rulership, and one the Invictus pays willingly, if not enthusiastically. Then again, given how often the Invictus persuades or provokes others into doing the covenant's dirty work anyway, the burden the Invictus bears may not be all that heavy. On those occasions when the burden *has* fallen on Invictus elders, however, First Estate members have taken the challenges and met the enemies under whatever circumstances were required. And those moments have made the Invictus the subject of legends that extend even into the modern nights.

That said, the First Estate would still much rather avoid the supernatural when possible. The Invictus has cast its lot with the rational world of order, influence and wealth. The supernatural, especially in some of its manifestations, is a glaring affront to the order and control the Invictus cultivates.



Other covenants have faulted the First Estate for lingering in a state of denial and not being quicker to act against supernatural threats when they arise, but the fact remains that when the Invictus does wake from its complacency to take notice of such things, it acts decisively. Once brought to bear on an enemy, the First Estate's patience, guile and experience often allow the Invictus to annihilate enemies that would easily beat a similar-sized group of Kindred from another covenant.

Witch-Hunters

The stalking of predators by prey is a very disordered state of affairs and, hating disorder as they do, the Invictus dreads witch-hunters accordingly.

Given the length of time it takes to climb up to the peak of the First Estate's hierarchy, it's no wonder that witch-hunters elicit the nigh-incoherent rage they do from some Invictus elders. They damned sure didn't climb that pyramid just to be knocked off by some uppity morsel. And so it is that, when they discover the existence of a witch-hunter in their domain, Invictus elders declare all-out war.

Many Society leaders see vampire-hunters as the only "true" enemy — never to be trusted, not to be bargained with and pointless to hate. Vampire-hunters are a symptom of cracks in the Masquerade, and it is not the fault of humanity when the light shines through those cracks. It's the responsibility of the Damned to protect themselves while they reside in the mortal world; that means avoiding mortal revelations, combating witch-hunters and preventing the creation of new witch-hunters. "Do not underestimate them, do not hate them," goes one oft-quoted Princely speech on the subject, "but do fear them and do put a stop to them. We have no one to blame for their existence but ourselves."

Centuries of experience have taught the First Estate that the best way to deal with hunters is with alacrity and unassailable force — anything else gives them time to spread their message, make converts and worsen the breach of the Masquerade. Common Invictus thinking suggests that elders launch the following three-pronged attack against witch-hunters the moment their activities are uncovered:

Isolate

Compromise their ability to attack further with multiple stacked waves of influence attacks. Dispatch mortals to deal with a mortal threat. Hit the witch-hunters and hit them hard. Have them arrested, hospitalized, institutionalized. Destroy their reputations through concerted smear campaigns. Frame them for heinous crimes. (Reworking the memories of children is a particularly effective means of accomplishing this.) Strip the witch-hunters of any credibility or sheen of nobility that they may have established, and others will be less likely to

follow their mad cause. Remove the witch-hunters from their bases of operations and, by extension, from any stockpiles of weapons they may possess. This is often the easiest step, as witch-hunters often act outside the law in their vigilante crusades against the Kindred.

Cover-up

Once the witch-hunter has been taken away (or forced to flee), send in teams of competent neonates and ancillae to locate and remove anything that points to the existence of the Kindred, including any unusual or noteworthy weapons that the hunters were using. All books, computers, software, storage devices (from cassette tapes to DVDs to external hard drives), journals and the like must be destroyed, or at least removed. If you can find the hunter's passwords (or pry them out of him), you can pose as him on the Internet and further ruin his reputation there. More important than smearing is just being rid of any papers or records the witch-hunter may have kept. Fire does an excellent job of this, but the Masquerade must be observed: too many suspicious fires following a group of witch-hunters will begin to call down unwanted police attention.

Exterminate

Once the first two steps have been completed, dispatch whatever assassins are necessary to discretely kill the hunter. Again, use mortal retainers if at all possible. If the hunter has been placed in any sort of institution (jail, madhouse, hospital), suicide is always a believable resolution, and the workers at such places make so little money that you don't need much to bribe them into a course of action of your choosing. Drug overdoses are easy enough to arrange, either through use of Dominate or simply by providing the hunter with unusually high-grade, uncut drugs that lead the target to do away with himself. Given the frequency with which witch-hunters abuse chemicals, this mode of execution hardly raises eyebrows. Failing these, other methods of discreet extermination also work: traffic accidents, house fires, drownings and so on. And, of course, never forget the elegant simplicity of simply having someone disappear.

Werewolves

Centuries of oral histories, recorded dealings and popular wisdom have led the wise among the Invictus to see that no one way of dealing with werewolves is correct. They are too many, too varied and too difficult to summarize politically to be easily categorized. In theory, this unpredictability spells trouble for the Invictus. In practice, the covenant has managed some remarkable diplomatic feats with the Lupines.

The key to understanding the Invictus outlook on werewolves lies in a realistic perception of the threat Lupines pose to Kindred. A werewolf with a personal motive for murder can be a threat to *some* Kindred, but

Lupine society, with its own hidden wars and complex culture, is in a thankful stalemate with Kindred society. Many werewolves seem relieved to have one flank free of supernatural enemies, and the Invictus can provide that. The First Estate can be the peacemakers between Kindred and Lupines.

WOLVES AND MASKS

Does the Masquerade apply to the ranks of Lupines? By the reckoning of the Invictus: absolutely. The unfortunate truth is that the strict virginity of the Masquerade was lost long ago. Werewolves know vampires exist.

What isn't gone forever is the ability to control and limit the depth of the truth known by werewolves at large. Modern Invictus thinking sometimes sees Lupine society as a potentially hostile foreign nation threatened by the same ignorant superpower: mortal society. Thus, cooperation is often advantageous, but the foreigners don't need to know Kindred secrets. A certain amount of truth has made it through the Masquerade to the Lupines, but that doesn't excuse subsequent leaks of facts.

Certainly, such an arrangement is not always possible. In many cities, the Invictus has no guiding policy with werewolves except to deal with them on a case-by-case basis. Experience has shown this to be an extremely successful long-term strategy, as a single Invictus court may deal with several generations of Lupine leaders.

Invictus diplomacy works when the Kindred understand what both Kindred and Lupines want: to avoid the world of hurt that comes with a mortal city alerted to the monsters in its ranks. The knack of the Invictus to misguide mortal institutions and cover up crimes is perhaps the key to their peaceful relations with werewolves. And the trick to maintaining the calm of the kine is to avoid unnecessary contact between Kindred and Lupines.

Thus many Invictus encounters with werewolves come in the aftermath of some problem or clash between hot-headed individual monsters or between the "day world" and the night. So, despite the policy of defusing problems before they explode, the Invictus do sometimes have to deal with murderous and hostile werewolves.

When the issue of Lupine predation comes up in a domain, more often than not, the Kindred of the city look to the Invictus to take care of the problem — or to reveal how it has been successfully overcome in the past. The First Estate, after all, is the covenant that has made its name and earned its position by providing Kindred with stability and security. Ostensibly, that stability is the whole reason the Invictus occupies the noble position it does among the Damned.

And so, like Roman centurions forced to hunt down wild beasts to keep citizens safe, members of the First

Estate sometimes find themselves taking care of the matter directly.

Mortal Entanglements

For all that werewolves are ferocious and terrifying, they are also flesh and bone. As spiritual warriors and agents of two worlds, they are virtually unstoppable by the average Kindred. But as men and women with lives and goals in the same cities, with the same fears of exposure as vampires, they are touchable.

In their mortal guises, werewolves can be framed for crimes, evicted from their homes and harassed enough to make them leave a particular Invictus-held domain. Under such circumstances, the Invictus is likely to treat a rogue Lupine just as it would a witch-hunter: as a volatile threat to the Masquerade that must be contained and neutralized. The key difference is that a mortal vampire-hunter wants to reveal the truth of vampirism to the rest of his kind, but is afraid to do so, while a Lupine has little interest in being revealed to the world at large for what he is.

Thus, the Invictus can raise the stakes against hostile Lupines with more and more involved mortal entanglements and investigations, until they are forced to either fight or fold. A public fight brings other werewolves to pull on their leash, while the Invictus make use of their centuries of experience to disappear from the scene.

Traps

Somewhat more complicated is the possibility of setting a trap for a Lupine, making him easier to combat. Despite the terrifying combat prowess of Lupines, they have both limits and weaknesses that the Invictus can exploit. Since time and money are both available to the Invictus, they may wait to take action against enemy Lupines until the covenant is able to engineer a suitable trap. Lured into a steel-reinforced vault or a concrete cell, a werewolf is just as helpless as most mortals. Expert practitioners of Protean are ideal agents for this kind of duty, as they can lure the Lupine into place and dissolve into vapor when the trap is sprung. Fearsome masters of Nightmare may even be able to herd a werewolf into trap.

One of the benefits to trapping, rather than killing, a Lupine is that it gives the Kindred a rare opportunity to ransom (and possibly feed from) the creature. The blood of a werewolf is reputed to be incredibly potent, but the life of a werewolf may be even more valuable to its packmates. Handing over a wanted or beloved ally to area Lupines can net the Invictus two things more valuable than magic blood: a favor owed in return and the respectful caution of werewolves in the future.

Hunting Parties

Perhaps the least favored of all the techniques the Invictus uses to deal with combative Lupines is the hunting party. This approach constitutes a last-ditch effort when every other attempt has failed. The Invictus

resorts to this tactic only if the werewolf is actively preying on Kindred or somehow imperiling the Masquerade. Under these circumstances, the Invictus puts together a team of its most accomplished (or foolhardy) combatants, draws up a detailed battle plan and takes the fight to the enemy. Raw battles are perilous flirtations with boundary between secrecy and recognition by mortals, but sometimes a single, controllable engagement is preferable to the gradual accumulation of suspicion brought on by unchecked werewolves.

These hunts tend to become the stuff of Society legend. Members of the Invictus are fully aware that Kindred are at a disadvantage when facing off against Lupines, but the First Estate stacks the deck in their favor to gain the advantages of surprise, expert strategy, careful preparation and numerical superiority. Much of the work that leads to victory takes place well before the swords are drawn, so to speak.

This somewhat-desperate approach was once more common, back when cities were smaller, fewer and farther apart. Rumor has it that some old-world Invictus Princes possess entire books of strategies assembled to deal with hostile Lupines. These tomes are amended after every violent clash between Kindred and Lupines to keep tonight's vampires from having to relearn the lessons of those past. Although such books are rare, it's common knowledge among Invictus members that the First Estate has made use of such books in Europe, Africa and the Americas, and the Invictus has come out ahead in several conflicts that should have been easy victories for the Lupines.

Mages

The Invictus fears mages in a way it doesn't fear werewolves, because while werewolves are direct, mages are inscrutable. The chilling ability of witchcraft and magic to undermine the accepted truths of society and invisibly usurp control is terrifying to many Invictus leaders. A worst-case attack by werewolves might still drive Kindred society together, pressuring it into a more tightly knit culture; the Invictus could accept that. A worst-case war against mages could unravel the trust and appearances vampire society relies on, pulling the covenants apart.

As with werewolves, the best solution that smart Invictus strategists have come up with is to avoid defeat by avoiding the war. The terrible difference here is that the Invictus still has little confidence in its ability to do that.

What is known is that one mage — or even a single cabal — can be manageable. Mages have the same fears, shortcomings and blood as mundane mortals. A mage drained will die. Thus, the Invictus is most comfortable dealing with mages in the smallest possible units. As long as Kindred conflicts with mages are kept personal

and petty, the threat to Kindred society can be minimized. When hateful generalizations arise between mage societies and Kindred kind, trouble follows.

As with mortals, the best protection that any vampire has against a mage is secrecy. Though the Masquerade has long since been broken between mages and vampires, the Invictus insists on holding the pieces together. The Invictus believes that, while individual partnerships with mages can be profoundly beneficial, no vampire should ever surrender any secret or insight to a mage. Let them earn it. Slow the leak.

A mage that comes looking will see through even the best Kindred deception. The best strategy, then, is to avoid attracting a mage's suspicion altogether.

Stranger Things

Much as the vampires of the Invictus would like it to be otherwise, the world is not a particularly rational place. There are things roaming the night more disturbing than the blood-drinking dead. The Invictus' response to these things is to err on the side of caution. Conflict that can be avoided through simple good judgment should be.

The compartmentalization of Kindred society is an advantage, and the Invictus know how to make the best use of any advantage. While the Invictus might employ investigators to gauge the level of threat (to the Masquerade or to the common Damned), it is not in the covenant's best interest to reach beyond its grasp. Kindred of other covenants are better suited to the opposition and investigation of occult threats. In this way, they are the tools that Society leaders use to deal with such problems.

Savvy Invictus troubleshooters know how to introduce another covenant to a mutual threat in the right way. Some coteries want to be flattered: "We didn't know who else would be able to make sense of this. We need you." Some covenant leaders want to be deferred to: "That's all we know. What do you make of it?" Some Kindred can be exploited: "We propose an arrangement: you get to keep whatever evidence your agents collect, but you must report all of your findings to our man on the case." Done correctly, the Invictus can use another covenant and even net themselves a favor in the process: "We didn't have to bring this to you. Perhaps the Dragons would make better sense of it?"

Whenever the Invictus can be seen orchestrating a successful interaction between the covenants — or between Kindred society and the world at large — they gain. Tonight's loss of face ("We owe tonight's success to the Acolytes.") can lead to tomorrow night's advantage ("If you don't help us now, the Court will suspect you think you're above such things."). Short-

term losses are acceptable for long-term victories. When the Invictus gets out of the way and lets the right Kindred solve the domain's problems, everyone's place in society is reinforced. The Dragons may understand ghosts, but the Invictus lead Kindred society to survival and triumph.

The Acquisition of Power

The Invictus would not survive into modern nights if it could not back up its aristocratic poses with plenty of raw power. Hereditary aristocracy is dead. Even in Europe, a noble title won't get you very far. Ruling classes, however, still thrive. As early as the Renaissance (if not earlier), lowborn merchants used money to buy political power: the famous Medicis began as cloth dealers and ended up Dukes of Tuscany, with a pope or two along the way. Now, business and electoral politics form the most visible sources of power — and the Invictus has followed. Disciplines affect just a few people for a short time — but a mayor or a corporate CEO can mobilize hundreds or maybe thousands of mortals with a word.

Money and politics feed into each other, too. On the national level, many politicians are millionaires. Running for office costs a lot of money: self-financers have an advantage. Conversely, political connections are one of the surest routes to wealth, from outright graft to bureaucrats who retire into cushy jobs lobbying their former agencies.

These are the new aristocrats. Some of the old aristocrats even took the Medici journey in reverse. For example, the Habsburgs, the arch-dynastic family that ruled half of Europe, remain rich and powerful in their native Austria. They're bankers.

If the Habsburgs can adapt, so can the Invictus. The First Estate finds this new aristocracy of money and politics as friendly (and exploitable) as the lords and ladies of long ago. The covenant's patronage system acts as a sort of factory conveyor-belt, carrying ambitious neonates toward wealth and power. In the process, the Invictus transforms them from modern people into the neo-feudal gentry of the night.

Favored Merits

The First Estate's patronage system enables members to acquire certain Merits more easily than other Kindred can. The Invictus actively tries to help its members accumulate Resources and find Mentors and Retainers; the herds follow naturally. Contrary to what most Kindred think, Invictus elders do not want all younger Kindred poor and powerless. No, Invictus elders want their childer rich, politically connected — and seeing the elders' interests as their own.

Mentor

This Merit directly represents the patron-client relationship. Young Invictus easily acquire Mentors because older Invictus want to cultivate the younger ones as clients. Elders and ancillae do not do this out of altruism: they see neonates as investments for building their own power. Just like corporate headhunters scouting Ivy League business schools, Invictus members watch for young Kindred with talent and burning lust to succeed.

Very often these Kindred are the Invictus elders' own childer. In the First Estate, a childer's sire is her first patron: the sire gives her eternal life, and the covenant expects the childer to work for her sire from then on. Or, at least work with her sire, even after her period of training ends and she becomes a free Kindred. The Invictus does not demand that childer serve their sires forever, but its traditions certainly encourage sires to continue advising their childer and childer to continue respecting and assisting their sires.

Invictus members have two ways to gain more powerful Mentors. First, a Mentor can acquire greater wealth, influence and Status because she has a coterie of skilled and aggressive neonates helping her with her schemes. As she gains power, she can render greater assistance to her clients. This is exactly how the covenant's patronage system is supposed to work, to the benefit of both patron and client.

An Invictus member can also "trade up" to a more powerful Mentor. After all, a Kindred's patron probably has a patron of her own. For instance, a neonate might receive help from an ancilla, who herself is the client of a high-ranking elder. If the neonate shows great talent, the elder might take an interest and become the neonate's Mentor directly.

Again, the First Estate thinks this is good for everyone involved. The elder gains another talented client. The neonate gains a Mentor who can teach him more and better protect him. And, though the ancilla loses a client, she gains some prestige as the "talent scout" who developed the neonate's potential. (Admittedly, Invictus members who realize they trained and possibly sired their own replacements often feel some resentment.)

What's more, nothing forbids an Invictus member from having more than one Mentor. A young Invictus might keep her sire as one Mentor; then join a Guild and acquire her instructor as another Mentor (or, if she's very lucky or talented, the Guild Meister) and then enter a business partnership with an elder who becomes her third Mentor. Good luck pleasing all these Mentors — but one more reason Invictus characters acquire Mentors more easily than other Kindred is that the covenant permits — in some ways, encourages — multiple Mentorships.

In the modern world, money brings power and power brings money. The First Estate understands this, and encourages members to gain all the wealth they can. Resources can take the form of money in the bank, but also corporate stock, real estate, institutional funds you can direct or misdirect or mortal Retainers with money, such as successful drug dealers or lawyers placed under Vincula.

In the first place, the covenant tends to Embrace the rich. One way for an Invictus to gain working capital is to Embrace it, possibly after subjecting the mortal to a Vinculum and exploiting him as a ghoul for a time (though as mentioned, treating a potential equal in the covenant this way is not entirely respectable). Neonates in the First Estate often have a head start in building their fortunes, compared to Kindred Embraced into other covenants.

Even if an Invictus recruit doesn't start out rich, the covenant's patronage system can help any member gain wealth. You can approach an older covenant member who already made her fortune, and ask to become her client. In return for assisting with her schemes and her business empire, she helps you start a business of your own — or simply pays you a good salary.

Retainers are an example of the patronage system extending below a character, instead of above her. Just as the Invictus encourages Kindred to find Mentors in the covenant, it encourages members to seek clients that members can permanently bind to their service. After all, what's an aristocrat without a cadre of lackeys? The great wealth many Kindred enjoy in the First Estate also makes it easier for them to afford servants.

The covenant supplies more direct help in acquiring Retainers, too. Don't know where to find a trained butler or valet? Your elders know. One of them may even own an agency — though you may have cause to wonder where your hired servant's loyalties truly lie. The Invictus also supports a number of ghoul families trained and indoctrinated to serve covenant members.

The Invictus even provides an edge where animal Retainers are concerned, at least for some species of animals. Traditionally, aristocrats have a special fondness for horses and hunting dogs: the First Estate includes Kindred who specialize in training these animals to serve as ghouls so the Masters of the Night can joust and hunt. Members of the ruling class also sometimes develop a taste for stranger pets, such as cheetahs trained to hunt or a pit of crocodiles into which the wealthy may throw



their enemies. The First Estate can't really help you acquire such creatures, but can find someone with Animalism to help you train them. If there's enough demand, a city may even develop a Guild of animal trainers. Your fellow Invictus members also will not find such pets, or such uses, as odd as other Kindred might. Aristocrats are allowed such eccentricities.

Herd

As Invictus members gain wealth and political power, they sometimes gain mortals who seek their patronage. Mortals willing to place themselves at the mercy of a vampire can become a herd. The First Estate doesn't encourage members to gather blood cults of worshippers — that's more a Lancea Sanctum or Circle of the Crone approach — but the Masters of the Night can build many other sorts of herds.

For instance, servants who are not loyal or useful enough to count as Retainers may function as a small herd. (Of course, you had better make sure they are devoted enough that they won't flee in horror the first time they see you feed on one of them. Vinculums help.) Employees who work nights might form a potential herd for Invictus members who own businesses — but you need some way to keep your employees from knowing what you are and what you do. An employee who's so desperate to keep a job that he lets his boss bite his neck is rare, despite the pleasure of the Kiss. Using Dominate to erase memories is one option; another is to hold frequent company blood drives and take some of the donations for yourself. Kindred willing to support an extended mortal family can exploit the family members as a herd by playing on family loyalty and an aristocratic sense of separation from "commoners." (Vinculums on selected relatives, again, are a powerful tool.)

Invictus members often prefer not to hunt at the city's Rack like all the other vampires. Why troll for kinky or drunken clubbers when you can own the club yourself? Members of the First Estate who would not think it dignified to feed in a nightclub's bathroom stall may nevertheless watch from the high office and send a Retainer to fetch customers. The customer wakes up in a back room, a little dizzy from blood loss (and a lot hung over, most likely) but none the wiser.

Other businesses can also help an Invictus member feed copiously, if not well. Invictus members whose Blood Potency stays low enough that they can feed on animals can buy a slaughterhouse or a pet store. With greater Resources, you can own a hospital or nursing home. People die at these places anyway, so it's easier to hide the evidence of an ugly or uncontrolled feeding.

Whole communities of mortals may accept an Invictus member as their patron, and offer their blood in return for her largesse. In old Europe, undead lords really did

rule villages of peasants and take their blood at will. In the more backward parts of the world, perhaps some Invictus members still do. In the developed world, villages of frightened peasants are in short supply — but a few Invictus now rule tony gated communities in much the same way. The affluent mortals are so afraid of the poverty, crime and violence outside their walls that they submit to a monster that promises to keep them safe. For all practical purposes, the homeowners form a secret society dedicated to serving that Invictus member; or perhaps (and preferably) only a few residents know the truth and help the master prey on the rest. Only a powerful and confident vampire could dare to claim such a large herd, and risk the Masquerade so drastically. What one Kindred calls confident, the Inner Circle may call reckless.

Once you have a herd, you can turn around and use it to acquire other Merits. For instance, you can pick a few people from your herd to become Retainers. Some herds (like the gang of drug dealers or the gated community) can be tithed for Resources. Herd members may also possess abilities, property and connections of their own, which may justify gaining Allies, Contacts or still other Merits (though without an experience point discount).

The ready blood supply represented by a herd is itself an asset that First Estate members can use in the patronage system. If you own a large herd, you can gift blood directly to less fortunate Kindred or grant feeding rights in exchange for other favors. Thus does the Invictus patronage system run full circle: Mentors help you gain Resources used to build Herds; with these assets, becoming a Mentor to younger Kindred and starting the cycle over again.

Racism

Regrettable as it may be, many European and American Invictus elders are deeply racist. They feel utter contempt for non-white, non-European-descended people, and don't bother to hide it. These Invictus elders think Native Americans are all drunken savages, black people are fit only for farm labor and Chinese are opium-addicted gamblers. That's because many *mortals* held views like that, back when these elders were alive. Only in the 20th century did racism become popularly viewed as something backward and ignorant, and even then the message took a long time to reach some parts of the Western world. The stasis that is such a part of the Kindred condition affects the mind as well as the body: Kindred are even less able to change their views than mortals. As the Invictus persists, so do these specters of hate and influence.

Of all the covenants, the Invictus perhaps does the least to challenge its old bigotries. Contempt for other races has deep roots in the Western tradition. The

Invictus does not challenge traditions. The First Estate is also based on the premise that people are not alike, not equal and do not deserve equal rights. Some Invictus elders translate this premise into racial terms, and say that Kindred and kine of other races deserve less power and respect than those of what is, by modern reckoning, European descent.

To be fair, the peoples of most other cultures have acted in exactly the same ways at one time or another. Some Chinese call everyone else “foreign devils.” Some Indians are horrified and disgusted by foreigners who don’t know the proper duties and taboos of caste. The elders of these lands — whether from local incarnations of the Invictus or from analogous regional covenants — act just as racist as any undead European or American.

Of course, such racism runs directly counter to the covenant’s claim of meritocracy. However, racist mortals easily produce “evidence” that other peoples lack the abilities and achievements of the racists’ own cultures, and explain away any contrary examples. The Kindred are no different. In many Western cities, white Kindred dominate the Invictus power structure. They throw barriers up to the advancement of non-white Kindred — refusing to mentor them, keeping them out of financial opportunities, denying them offices in the Kindred power structure — and then use the Kindred’s low Status to “prove” their unsuitability to wield power.

The First Estate does have its exceptions. Some Kindred Embraced in past centuries were less racist than the norm, were (and perhaps still are) willing to mentor Kindred of other races. Some non-white Kindred have clawed their way to the heights of power despite every impediment. Childer sired after the civil rights movement are becoming ancillae and exercising greater power in the covenant. The fundamental pragmatism of the First Estate also works to reduce the covenant’s racism: a black person’s vote is just as valuable as a white person’s, and ignoring contemporary Asia is begging for failure in business. The most inflexible racists gradually weed themselves out of the power structure. Black, Asian, Native American, Arab Kindred as well as vampires of other ethnicities still face prejudice in the Invictus, but the barriers to power and patronage are lower than they once were.

Ultimately, many modern Invictus members come to identify themselves with the Damned and their own Society above their dead flesh and the ghosts of their transformed cultures. Though an equally large number of vampires never see the evidence and do not believe the Invictus propaganda, a Kindred’s ability to contribute to the stability and dignity of the covenant is more valuable than her race in many domains. The Invictus wants to continue its success; therefore, many elders are willing to share a helping of that success with those they personally deem inferior — for any of a thousand reasons — if it

means fortifying the elders’ own keeps. The language and behavior of so many elders is just a smokescreen that hides the mountain from those they discount so that it cannot be climbed.

The Invictus and Business

Many Invictus members engage in business of one sort or another — usually as owners or investors, of course, rather than employees. The Kindred’s system of boons and influence forms a second economy; here too, the First Estate seeks to profit and gain as much power as it can. As a result, many Invictus members see their covenant in terms of business instead of feudal aristocracy.

Ways of Doing Business

All businesses do not operate the same way. Students of corporate culture see four distinct patterns of business operations, with many variations and combinations. The Invictus finds some forms of business more suited to the covenant’s philosophies than others.

Service or Utility Mode

In some businesses, individuals take little or no risk, and success depends on technical competence. Accountancy is a good example: a CPA’s only risk is that he misses some arcane tax regulation, or gets tired and enters a figure wrong. The menial work of sales clerks, waitresses and other service occupations fits this model, too, at least for the employees. So do businesses that provide staple goods, such as a water company, oil refinery or paper mill. Such businesses are often quite safe as a whole once they reach a certain size: for a fast food chain or hospital, for instance, business success is almost a mathematical formula of predictable profits and costs.

Investment Potential

The Invictus likes quiet, steady money that ignores the vagaries of chance and the marketplace. Pulling big money from super-safe businesses, however, requires big money in the first place. Not many neonates can make their marks with an electric company, brokerage or bank of their own — unless they owned the businesses before their Embraces, which is possible in the First Estate. Other owners of such businesses tend to be ancillae or elders.

Invictus Analogues

The covenant itself has no close analogue to the service business model. No office or occupation in the Kindred world offers that much stability. An employee in a manufacturing or service job can hope to work steadily, changing employers but doing the same thing, until she retires. For the Kindred, however, the gold watch and the pension never come.

Just as importantly, Invictus members are not menials. Ever. In the First Estate, even a secretary or other assis-

tant to a Prince, Sheriff or other officer carries grave responsibilities — and must justify his usefulness every night. Invictus members have valets, butlers, handymen, accountants and other providers of routine services, but these providers are ghouls or blood-bound mortals. No Invictus member would stoop to take such labor, and no Invictus member would ask another member of the covenant to do so.

TECHNOLOGY CONSULTANTS

The First Estate's reluctance to adopt new technology is practically a joke among the Kindred. Few Invictus elders are actually stupid or crazy when it comes to new gadgets, though, or to new ways to do things. These elders say they just don't want to waste time on fads. From their point of view, a technology that disappears after 20 years was never worth learning to use.

For instance, many Invictus members like music. The covenant's elders took decades to accept phonographs as a possible alternative to live (or undead) performances. Only the younger Invictus ever bought CDs — and now that media such as MP3s grow in importance, some elders snicker that the childer got suckered. (Those elders who've even heard of MP3s, anyway.)

Sometimes, elders find they can't avoid new technologies in their endeavors. In that case, they hire neonates or ghouls with the needed technical expertise.

If something stays around for more than 20 years, Invictus elders might consider learning how to use it themselves. In that case, the elder hires a

technical consultant to teach him. The teacher is called a *glossator*. This contract is always kept secret, for admitting a need to learn something fundamentally new is a loss of face for a First Estate elder. Technical experts and glossators may achieve covenant Status •, but no more, since the covenant's leaders won't admit the experts' services are needed. Nevertheless, technical consultants have skills the covenant needs. Selling technical services can be a neonate's entry into the Invictus patronage system.

The Salesman Mode

In other businesses, success chiefly depends on hard work, with a touch of schmoozing. Sales on commission are the purest examples: the more cosmetics, insurance or homes you sell, the more money you make. Retail also fits this model. Personal risk is low, since if you miss one sale you can always look for another customer.

Investment Potential

The Invictus regards this sort of business as a safe, solid investment. If a neonate wants to enter the business world, most elders advise her to start by managing a small retail outlet such as a laundromat or convenience store — one that stays open all night, of course. In fact, this is a frequent exercise for Guilds that teach finance and business management.

Sweeping the floor, stocking the shelves and running the cash register may seem disappointingly far from the



posh boardrooms and billion-dollar deals the Kindred associate with the First Estate, and far below the vaunted dignity of the Invictus. But these tasks provide a chance to learn the basics: how to manage revenue and expenses, hire and fire employees and deal with suppliers and customers. And, although the First Estate looks after its dignity, the covenant believes an apprentice must accept scutwork cheerfully. If the business fails, it's no great loss, so long as the apprentice of commerce learns from the experience.

A small retail franchise also offers good practice at the Masquerade: can the vampire hide his true nature from his employees? Again, failure is not too severe a problem. These businesses tend to have high turnovers of socially invisible employees, so if your personal Masquerade fails you can easily make an unfortunate employee disappear — another valuable lesson.

Invictus Analogues

Within the covenant itself, coterie that provide services to other Kindred may work in this mode. For instance, a coterie that builds or reconditions havens for other Kindred won't amass great influence. If the coterie members do good work, though, the members can make decent incomes and acquire small boons they can save or trade to other vampires. Admittedly, a mortal realtor or gas station franchisee faces less danger from dissatisfied customers Similar to retail businesses, these low-value, contract-service businesses are recommended by Invictus elders to neonates, as a way to hone their skills and make contacts they can exploit later. Few ancillae in the First Estate, and no elders, would pursue such modest rewards.

The Gambler Mode

Some businesses offer great rewards but high personal risks. You also quickly know if you succeed or fail. Success or failure may also depend on factors you can't control. Day trading is one example: if you guess the stock fluctuations correctly, you end the day with more money than you began. (Vampires, of course, cannot *day* trade.) Most of the entertainment industry also follows this model, for an actor, singer, agent or producer is only as successful as her last job. One hit can put you on top of the world; one flop can plunge you down again. The most extreme example, though, is crime. For example, a big, successful drug deal might net millions. A failure could mean jail or death.

Investment Potential

Many Invictus members dislike this sort of uncertainty. They expend decades of effort making themselves financially and politically secure. Few elders would risk much of their assets or prestige on one short-term venture, and ancillae tend not to like it either. Older Invictus members might own businesses whose employees follow the

gambler model, such as currency trading firms (and some Invictus members are drawn to sponsor theaters or other entertainers for the prestige of being patrons of the arts), but the Invictus members try to foist the risks on to their employees, not themselves.

Of all the modern trends that disturb and disgust the Invictus, one of the worst is the tendency for American businesses to adopt the gambler model when that isn't their natural style. The savings and loan collapse of the 1980s shocked many Invictus members who thought they had the ultimate safe investment. The lure of spectacular profits turned many S&L managers into gamblers who made unsafe, speculative investments in real estate and other areas outside their competence. The fad for corporate takeovers financed by junk bonds decimated many Invictus-held companies, too, even though the covenant itself avoided such newfangled financial instruments. Speculators who trade in derivatives and other arcane financial instruments — and sometimes ruin billion-dollar companies with ever-larger gambles — remain a serious worry for the covenant's financiers. The recent collapse and exposure of tricky financial schemes (or outright frauds) by Enron, WorldCom, Parmalat and other megacorporations sets many Invictus tycoons harrumphing that it just goes to show: the old and safe ways are best.

Invictus Analogues

Nevertheless, quite a few younger Invictus members come from high-pressure financial occupations such as venture capital, arbitrage or organized crime. Elders appreciate the insane energy that successful gambler-businessmen bring to their jobs: in this sort of business, opportunities appear and vanish quickly, so success requires immediate, total effort. The First Estate tries to teach its neonates that adrenaline is for the living, however, and, in the long term, neonates should move into some steadier businesses.

In particular, the Invictus does not like its members making high-risk ventures with the covenant's own assets and prestige. Sure, stealing a lost Kindred artifact from a group of Lupines might bring great prestige to a coterie and its covenant. The theft also might provoke terrible retribution on all Kindred. The only Invictus faction that gains respect from taking great personal risks are the modern Knights of the covenant, who defend it from its foes and generally have the sense not to risk the existence of other Invictus members.

The Forecaster Mode

Of all types of business, the Invictus most prefers those where the risks can be managed through careful planning and comprehensive knowledge; where the rewards are slow, but enormous. The name of the game isn't to win now; it's to win *big*. Military contracting is a good

example: A new plane, rocket launcher or gun takes years to design and build, and millions or billions to produce. If governments like it, you can multiply your investment by many times. If they don't . . . One bad guess won't wreck the company, but two in a row might.

Many manufacturers of consumer goods, such as automobiles or refrigerators, also follow this model to some degree. So do insurance companies, pharmaceuticals and the fashion industry. These businesses can reduce their risks by watching their competitors, doing market research and even lobbying governments for fat contracts or favorable legislation, but fundamentally, each major venture is an attempt to forecast what their customers will want.

Investment Potential

As Invictus members age, many gravitate to this sort of big business. For the Kindred, 10 years is not that long to wait and see if a business venture pans out. Playing for larger sums than the budgets of some nations stirs their cold, dead hearts, but success also depends on skill at predicting and controlling the market, more than luck. Whether the product is a new drug, a new make of car or a new line of clothing, members of the First Estate approach each venture like a war in which they are the generals plotting strategy, with their competitors as the foe.

Invictus members like another aspect of the forecaster model business, as well. These companies tend to be hierarchical and formal, like the Invictus itself, and for much the same reasons. Traditionally, these companies don't entrust their futures to inexperienced hands. CEOs and vice presidents must work their ways up the corporate ladder, in the company itself or other large businesses, and prove their competence at every step. Such masters and commanders of the business world demand respect, and get it from subordinates who want to fill their shoes someday. The leaders also demand obedience and discipline, because one employee could doom the venture: A careless engineer could miss a design flaw in a new car or plane. A rash underwriter could pay out billions in ill-advised insurance policies. A contract accepted too hurriedly could bind the company to obligations, expenses or liabilities that drain away profits.

On a practical level, the hierarchical natures of these big businesses makes them easy for vampires to control. If the board members always meet after dark, no one lower wonders why (much) or makes a fuss. In fact, most employees have no idea what the corporate masters do, or when. The employees just receive their orders, do their work and submit reports about the results.

Rank, formality, a fierce demand for competence — this sounds almost military. And why not? War itself is the ultimate high-stakes game. Once upon a time, war was a business, too, with tribute or colonies

as the reward. The restrictions of undeath block Invictus members from literal conquest, but big business lets them build empires of capital: less tangible than the empires of Assyria, Rome or Britain, but reaching just as far around the world.

Invictus Analogues

The Invictus itself represents a forecast-based business for its members. The commodity is power itself, measured in boons, oathbound clients and offices in Kindred society. Ambitious members try to predict which alliances and stratagems will increase their power and which will leave them the ones indebted to Kindred who are more farsighted. After decades or centuries of plotting and correct predictions, a Kindred can win the ultimate reward as Prince of a city, with wealth and influence few mortals can imagine.

DEMOCRACY

The leaders of the Invictus say they don't believe in democracy. Many neonates think that means the elders don't approve of it — which is true, but insufficient. Elders of the First Estate don't believe in democracy the way they don't believe in the boogeyman. Fables such as "the consent of the governed" may please the young and simple, but grown-ups should know better.

At best, the First Estate's political thinkers say, an election reveals which party (or faction within a party) commands the greatest power, the greatest skill at promoting its message or, put another way, the greatest influence over the body politic. A political party's leaders and candidates — the people who really set policies and wield power — are not themselves elected by "the people," because the leaders built their factions around themselves or emerged from the party's internal contests of power.

At worst, an election takes the fitful whims of foolish, ignorant and short-sighted people, and engraves them into law. Invictus politicians can point to many examples when people elected leaders who were bad for them. Such unfortunate situations are not only a kind of democratic defeat, but an avoidable kind — the way of the Invictus does not lead to such failures. A meritorious leader defines what is good for the people.

Far better, the elders say, to reserve power for an elite that's wise enough to see things as they are and ruthless enough to wield power effectively. Such an elite should be divorced from the fickle passions of the mob, so the elite's leaders can act for the greater good. Such an elite should not have to justify itself; the ignorant masses do not even need to know their wise guardians exist. The elite should be immortal, preferably, with the perspective that comes with age and history and the patience to pursue goals for decades or centuries.

Only one group fills these requirements.

The Invictus and Politics

The Invictus likes political influence as much as the covenant likes money — maybe even more. The covenant isn't as good at acquiring political power, though. To a large degree, this is because the nature of politics has changed since Invictus leaders last breathed. Centuries ago, power rested with a small number of aristocrats — hereditary nobles, bishops or merchant princes. Embrace one, condition one using Dominate or secure one's loyalty with a Vinculum, and you had a voice with which to lobby the entire class and perhaps rule large numbers of people outright. The lower classes knew to obey.

Now it's not so easy. Modern societies diffuse power through legislatures, civil service bureaucracies, militaries, police forces, judges, private interest groups, businesses, professional groups, churches and a host of other public and private institutions, all of them jealously guarding their special zones of influence. Getting anything done requires cooperation between many groups, all asking what's in it for them. Oh for the good old nights, Invictus elders sigh, when a king could give an order and it was done! Lucky Kindred in countries ruled by dictators, where the old ways still stand!

Of course, it was never *really* that easy, and the First Estate still manages to bring much of mortal government to heel. The Invictus' greatest problems come not from the nature of modern politics, but from the fact that the Invictus now faces competition. The Carthian Movement is at least as good as the Invictus at manipulating mortals. The First Estate's elders also find themselves hampered by their own notions about who is worth influencing, how and for what ends.

Political Goals

The First Estate finds several reasons to meddle in politics. First and foremost, it wants to protect the Masquerade. Even the most hidebound elder realizes that modern governments could destroy the Kindred. Completely. The Kindred need to control governments as much as possible, so that knowledge of the Kindred never reaches the mortals with the power and desire to do anything about it. The Invictus see this as part of its special duty as the Kindred's ruling class, and believes the covenant is doing a good job. The other covenants are quite ungrateful in not showing proper appreciation for this great and continuing act of largesse from the First Estate.

The Invictus also believes it has a duty to preserve the right and proper order of mortal society, with a small elite ruling over obedient commoners. The covenant defends laws and practices that uphold class privileges. Invictus elders want the rich to get richer (including them) and the poor to stay poor. Invictus elders want dissident opinions silenced and leaders glorified. Invictus

elders want people to know their places. The covenant opposes civil rights laws and undercuts attempts to enforce such rules, because these laws give too much respect to ordinary people. To the First Estate's leaders, the state *should* be able to spy on citizens, tell them what to think and limit political power to certain favored groups. That's *order*. That's *the way it's always been*. What modern people call freedom, the First Estate's elders call chaos, immoral license and anarchy. Not coincidentally, freedom also makes society harder for the Invictus to control. The elders want power centralized as much as possible, so they have fewer people to influence.

Of course, individual members of the covenant seek political power to further their personal goals as well. Just like mortal corporate lobbyists, covenant members seek fat government contracts and laws that protect their industries from competition. Invictus members also try to mobilize government forces to interfere with the covenant's rivals' plans, from exposing rivals' criminal connections to demolishing their havens to make way for shopping centers.

Finally, the Invictus agrees with the Inner Party from 1984: the purpose of power is power. Even in matters that don't affect the Kindred in general, or themselves in particular, Invictus members want to feel in control. They allowed this law to pass or that judge's ruling to stand on appeal. Political connections are just another way for Invictus members to brag and high-hat each other. ("Two state senators take my calls, and I contributed to the resolution on the floor today." "How nice. I spoke with the governor tonight.")

Political Methods

Members of the First Estate can affect government in many ways. Some are the same methods that mortals use. Invictus members can bribe lawmakers, cops, judges and bureaucrats outright or tempt elected officials with dump trucks full of campaign cash, all suitably laundered through PACs and other front groups. Minions can lobby during the day, and Invictus members themselves can schmooze with officials at after-dark parties. (Attending the same party is easy for a rich Invictus: he throws it himself, and invites the officials he wants to influence.) Like wealthy mortals, members of the First Estate can fund *ersatz* grassroots letter-writing campaigns or gain influence in real activist groups by supplying them with money (and perhaps direct them for or against particular politicians).

Anyone who won't be bought (rare in the World of Darkness) or persuaded can be threatened. Enough money can buy attacks by muggers, kidnappings of children, drugs planted in homes or offices or artfully faked photographs of immoral acts with prostitutes. The Kindred attempt such dirty tricks more freely than mortals

usually dare, because the vampires' whole existence is a crime and deception. What's a few more?

Sometimes, however, government figures can be bought through deeds beyond the power of legitimate institutions or beyond mortal power altogether. Is a crusading district attorney or FBI agent frustrated by a mob boss who evades prosecution? Does a group of activists keep a city from building an incinerator the municipality truly needs because the dumps are all full? Did a social service agency bungle a case, and a judge ordered a \$10 million penalty? The government official receives a visit from someone who offers to make the problem go away. The judge will revisit his ruling. The outraged citizens' group will decide that the incinerator's okay after all. And the mobster will just disappear. The stranger wants just a *little* favor in return — and no questions asked.

The Invictus can offer favors like these because it isn't a legitimate institution and its members aren't mortal. When all legal and illegal resources fail, the Invictus can fall back on Disciplines and the Vinculum. These are brute-force methods — and not the first choice — because they risk the Masquerade. Still, the First Estate includes elders who can turn a mortal's mind inside-out through Dominate or Majesty or terrorize him into gibbering submission through Nightmare. Elders can read minds, see the past, enter locked rooms as a cloud of mist and generally uncover any blackmail-worthy secret they want to know, in time. They can ruin or kill any mortal they want and avoid suspicion by waiting for the right moment. There's no rush.

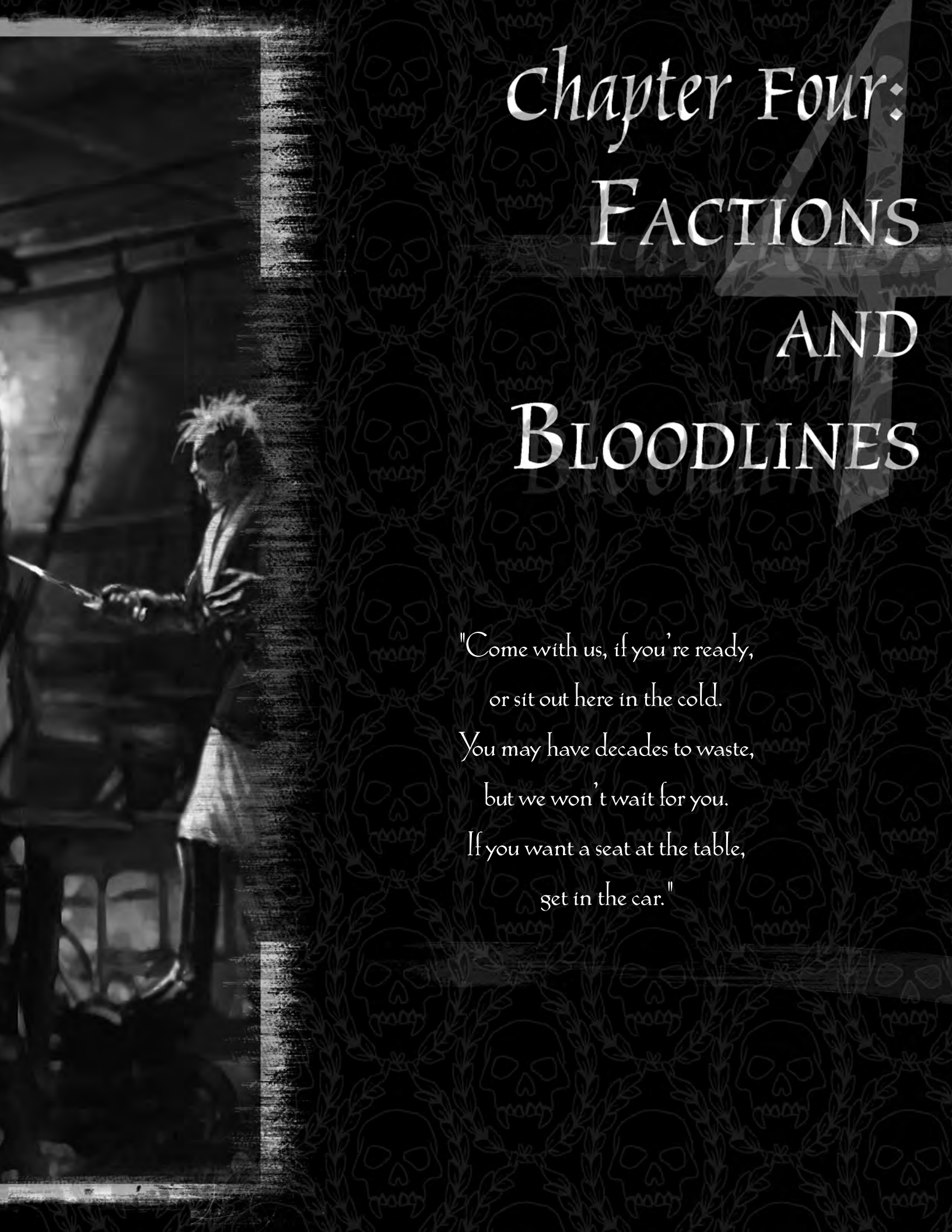
Thanks to the First Estate's patronage system, some elders also do these things for covenant members who can't do them for themselves. Of course, there's a price — a price the other Kindred shall pay back for decades, or forever. The elder will ask the other Kindred to help

with his political schemes, using her own money, connections and powers — not once but many times. Any political power sought by an Invictus member has a good chance of ending up in an elder's claws, not her own. Through such methods, however, the covenant as a whole accumulates formidable political power.

That power tends to nourish itself. The more political clout you have, the more other politicians, party leaders and government officials want to curry favor, so you will use that clout on their behalf. After decades of accumulating influence and contacts, a group of Invictus members might be able to rig elections and place their own pawns in high office — as mayor, state or national legislator, governor or head of a major bureaucracy. At this point, the Invictus members *can* achieve many things simply by having one mortal give an order.

If the covenant has a weakness in its political scheming, though, it's a tendency to focus on that one mortal. The elders easily fall into the old habit of seeking one very powerful pawn (a Retainer), instead of a lot of low-ranking pawns (Contacts and Allies), who have limited powers but operate below the public's attention. The Invictus has raised mortal agents shockingly high in the governments of many nations. Quite often, these pawns knew nothing about the Kindred; only that the mortals served at the pleasure of others. Invictus cabals have also suffered catastrophic losses of power when a pawn developed ideas of her own and stopped repaying for past favors, fell in a scandal or died. Sometimes other vampires stripped away the powerful pawn; sometimes it happened naturally. Either way, the Invictus forgot that while mortals are power, they are, alas, still mortal. As individuals, they do not endure.





Chapter Four: FACTIONS AND BLOODLINES

"Come with us, if you're ready,
or sit out here in the cold.

You may have decades to waste,
but we won't wait for you.

If you want a seat at the table,
get in the car."

*Some believe all that parents, tutors, and kindred believe.
They take their principles by inheritance, and defend them
as they would their estates, because they are born heirs to them.*

—Alan Watts

FACTIONS

THE CHERUBIM

From the dawn of history, leaders have hired artists to glorify them: Painters and sculptors record their likenesses. Poets compose panegyrics on their achievements. Architects build palaces, temples and halls of government as theaters of power. Kindred leaders are no different. For most of history, however, the artists themselves remained anonymous.

The Renaissance brought a new relationship between patron and artist. The artist became just as famous as his employer, if not more so. It wasn't enough for a Medici or Borgia to rule a city, or even be pope. He had to hire a Michaelangelo, a Leonardo or a Bernini to ornament the court with genius, or at least to have his portrait painted by a Rembrandt or Velasquez.

Most rich and powerful Kindred preferred to stay hidden — and hire artists to glorify their faith, their mystic doctrines or their politics but not themselves. The Invictus, however, recognized that art itself was now a road to power. Just like the mortal nobles, bishops and magnates of Renaissance Europe, the First Estate's leaders competed to attract brilliant painters, poets, architects and dramatists into their service. Some artists were Kindred themselves, but most artists were mortal. This custom continues to modern nights.

Of course, the Invictus were — and are — not the only Kindred to patronize the arts. More than other covenants, however, the First Estate esteems artistic patronage as a source of prestige. Some Invictus members devote considerable time and resources to recruiting and promoting artists as expressions of their wealth and power. While this "faction" has never existed as a formal organization, it forms a common and recognizable character within the covenant. To this night, individuals or whole coteries devote themselves to promoting their cities' artists and intellectuals.

The Kindred call these patrons of the arts by a variety of slang terms. In modern nights, they are often called "Angels," from a show-business term for a person who finances a play's production. During the 1920s and 30s, sponsoring the theater became a fad among the Invictus

of New York City. The local Invictus members still boast about the city's stage scene, both on and off Broadway, as if it were their creation. The Kindred soon extended the term to refer to any Invictus members who sponsors the arts, whether directly or through museums, galleries and other institutions.

Angels vary in how deeply they involve themselves in the arts. Some, like modern mortal tycoons, merely donate money to museums, symphonies and other cultural institutions, or underwrite movie or theater productions. Other Angels become personally involved in the lives of their client artists. They may even gather a colony of artists and intellectuals around themselves like the Medicis of old.

The loose coterie called the Cherubim is an example of the latter sort. The members named themselves for the angels sent to guard Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve. Like the Cherubim, those angels guarded an oasis of truth and beauty from a world turned crass and boorish. Most members of the Cherubim also belong to some other coterie, but they share an interest in every aspect of the arts. At their soirees, the Cherubim bring together poets, painters, dramatists and sculptors in addition to historians, scientists or any other savants who might have something interesting to say. For Kindred who value the life (or unlif) of the mind, an invitation to a Cherubim salon is an honor indeed.

The Cherubim began with Nestor Van Duesen, a financier Embraced in the 1890s. When he was alive, Van Duesen bought the occasional work of art — a painting here, a Chinese vase there — as objects struck his fancy. As Van Duesen's fortune grew and he rose in the First Estate, his interest in art grew as well. Works of beauty gave him solace from the horrors of the Danse Macabre. Gradually, he withdrew from business to concentrate on collecting and searching for talented new artists. As Van Duesen became a pivotal figure in the city's arts community, other Kindred with an interest in the arts naturally gravitated toward him, forming the Cherubim.

Van Duesen now leaves management of his extensive business portfolio to mortal agents, who have no idea

they work for a vampire. As far as the mortal world knows, Van Duesen is a middle-aged multimillionaire who inherited his wealth from a namesake grandfather. Van Duesen is well known throughout the city's arts community. Cultural institutions such as museums and theaters know they can count on him for large donations every year. Even the most self-consciously radical artists in the city, who normally say they loathe wealthy capitalists, have nothing but good things to say about Van Duesen: a single sale to him can support an artist for a year, and greatly increases an artist's chances of winning prestigious prizes and being written about in arts magazines.

Faction Membership

To become an Angel, a Kindred needs at least Academics •• (so he can at least talk as if he understands the arts), Resources ••• (to buy works of art and make donations to artistic institutions) and Contacts (generally •• or better) within the city's artistic community. Crafts or Expression (to engage in some plastic or verbal art himself) may help achieve the necessary Contacts and sense of authority, but are not essential.

Attaining recognition as an Angel typically gives an Invictus member one more dot of Covenant Status, to a maximum of •••. Above that, a Kindred has attained rank or honors that make patronage of the arts a mere ornament to his power, rather than a real source of influence.

Clans: The sensuous Daevas and high-toned Ventres make up a higher percentage of Angels, and the Gangrels perhaps contribute the fewest members to this faction — but Angels can come from any clan. Becoming an Angel depends far more on personal taste than on clan character. The Cherubim have members from all five clans.

(The Daevas bloodline called the Toreador form a notable exception. The Toreadors consider patronage of the arts part of their *raison d'être*. Few Toreadors would turn down opportunities to act as Angels.)

Nickname: "Angels" is itself a nickname. Older and more pretentious soubriquets for Invictus sponsors of the arts include "Muse" (from artists who flatter their patrons as inspiring their work, not merely paying for it) and "Helios" (the artist says that he and other hangers-on shine by the reflected glory of their patron). Some Invictus members reverse the latter title by calling an artistic patron a "Selene" — he is the one who merely reflects another's brilliance. The Cherubim, however, are usually referred to as Angels.

Covenant: These Kindred temper the First Estate's ruthless ambition by giving a secular purpose to wealth and power. The Invictus mocks most transcendent goals, but Angels can feel that, by cultivating the arts, they give the world more than they take from it. Whatever suffering a vampire has inflicted to gain power shall pass, but the paintings, verse, architecture and other works

he commissioned shall endure as permanent additions to civilization. The Cherubim certainly think so. Van Duesen and his cronies are ready to justify everything the Invictus does to gather wealth and power, because it makes their efforts possible.

Appearance: Like most Invictus members, Angels dress conservatively, expressing wealth and power without ostentation. Sloppy, vulgar or peculiar garb have become part of the "performance" for modern creative geniuses, but the Kindred who pay for their work do not pretend to be artists themselves. Van Duesen himself looks like a middle-aged man with receding, salt-and-pepper hair cut short. He last updated his wardrobe in 1940; his double-breasted suits and fedora hats look close enough to modern men's fashion to seem classic rather than eccentric.

Haven: Angels like to display works of art they've commissioned or collected, so they prefer large and luxurious havens (not that Angels differ much from other Invictus members in this respect). Some havens might even be called palatial. Even the Angels who specialize in drama, poetry or other performing arts usually dabble in the plastic arts to some degree; thus, visitors to these Angels' havens may see anything from Sumerian clay tablets to the latest paintings from the art shows of New York, Paris and London. Nestor Van Duesen has a large, Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired ranch house on a walled estate, in the very ritziest part of town. Numerous cases of armored glass hold Van Duesen's diverse collection of *objets d'art*, while dozens of valuable paintings hang on the walls. His collection is evenly divided between classic and cutting-edge modern works.

The most prized works, of course, are those wrested from other vampires. Beneath his mansion, Van Duesen has a secret vault for artworks and antiquities created by or for vampires themselves: icons of Longinus, sketches drawn in Vitae instead of ink, plays about particularly glorious vendettas and the like. Anything from "the Vault" could at least threaten the Masquerade, and the whole collection could blow it wide open. Naturally, the Vault is extremely well hidden. Van Duesen had it built in the 1950s, ostensibly as a fallout shelter. Then he spent 10 years calling in markers with other Invictus members to destroy the records of the Vault's construction.

Background: Patronage of the arts takes a fair bit of money, so Angels tend to be among the older, wealthier and higher-ranking members of the First Estate. Few Invictus members rely on their pet artists to maintain their prestige; many of these members hold titles in Kindred society, or at least have established themselves as powerful Kindred before they became Angels.

Achieving recognition as an Angel also takes time. One gift of money or one show from a sponsored artist does not a patron make. A would-be Angel must convince other Invictus members that her devotion to the



arts is not a passing whim, but an unlife-long commitment. She must also show knowledge of the arts and taste in judging good from bad (or at least fashionable from passé). Just as importantly, the artistic community must recognize her as a reliable source of funds, whatever the form of art she supports.

The Cherubim wouldn't consider a candidate unless they heard her name from several mortal artists. The faction is too loose to have any formal procedure for adopting new members. A Kindred involved in the arts simply receives an invitation to attend one of the group's soirees. Then she receives another invitation. At Elysium, members talk to her about their artistic endeavors and ask what she's doing. After a year or two of close contact, the Cherubim assume the candidate is part of the group, and other Kindred do, too.

Faction Disciplines: Many of the Cherubim develop Auspex — often at great personal cost — so they can appreciate artistic subtleties denied to merely mortal senses. Or at least these Cherubim say they see, hear and comprehend more than other people sense in a work of art.

Organization: Angels do not form an organized group within the Invictus as a whole. They are individuals or coteries that happen to share an interest. Angels seldom work together to further some greater goal. More often, they scheme to lure away each other's pet artists or to gain greater exposure for their own artists at the expense of their rivals.

Only one custom is distinctive and universal to Angels: the Opening Night, when an Angel invites other Kindred to experience some new work by a pet artist. The term comes from theater, but Opening Night can center on a new show of paintings or sculptures at a gallery, publication of a book of poems or stories or even the dedication of a building.

In many ways, Opening Night resembles many other Society soirees: the host provides fresh blood in elegant surroundings, and everyone tries to be graceful and witty while the Harpies evaluate the skill of presentation. The more cultured also pay attention to the art, but not all Invictus members actually know good art from bad. It's easier to judge how the Angel flatters and coddles influential guests than interpret a possibly subtle or radical work of art. Ironically, derivative, second-rate work often receives a better reception than a true work of genius.

The trickiest part of Opening Night consists of keeping the artist from knowing he works for vampires. Some Angels let their favorite artists in on the secret, perhaps with Vincula to assure loyalty and secrecy. These Angels generally want their pet artists to glorify their patrons as Masters of the Night; of course, the resulting paintings or panegyrics remain hidden from the masses. Most Angels, however, maintain poses as slightly eccentric millionaire patrons of the arts.

The Cherubim hold their Opening Nights at Van Duesen's mansion and let a few of their pet artists in on the secret. An Opening Night centered on these artists



always includes a spectacular blood feast. One Opening Night featured a fountain of glass that shot preserved and heated blood and plasma. The streams of dark red and pale yellow arching through the air and mingling in the basin drew much applause from the city's Kindred; no one has topped that display yet.

More often, the honored artists don't know they work for vampires. Neither do the other artists and savants invited as guests. For these occasions, Van Duesen likes to invite a diverse array of artists and intellectuals. The guest of honor might be a sculptor who just completed a new statue, but the guest list could include other local artists, a distinguished artist or two from out of town, local academics and visiting writers on book tours. At these Opening Nights, the Cherubim set a few ghoul or mortal minions to pose as fellow guests, to hide the fact that some people at this very private gathering do not actually eat their hors d'oeuvres or drink the wine. The actual refreshments come before or after the showing. The local Invictus turns this social ritual into a competition, to see who best counterfeits being alive, so the audience of selected mortal artists and intellectuals never know that they are surrounded by monsters surround.

Van Duesen enjoys close connections with several art museums and galleries in town, and has become a leading collector and promoter of modern art. Much of what Van Duesen buys is conservative, by modern standards. He likes paintings, sculptures and mixed-media works with recognizable human figures.

Van Duesen also has his "shockers." These are deliberately radical works, often stridently political, anti-religious or otherwise calculated to offend the bourgeoisie. Typical examples include crucified Ken and Barbie dolls or a rendition of the flag raising on Iwo Jima finger-painted in different colors of excrement. Van Duesen buys a few "shockers" every year, then loans them to museums or galleries he supports. The works get written about in arts magazines, win prizes from those museums or galleries, attract controversy — and quickly triple in value. Van Duesen sells some of his "shockers" while the price is high; others, he sends on museum tours around the world. He doesn't exhibit the "shockers" in his house: they're business investments, and Van Duesen freely admits to other Kindred that his "shockers" are a con game.

Van Duesen's third artistic interest, which he necessarily keeps secret from the kine, is collecting Kindred antiquities and *objets d'art* for the Vault. This interest consumes more of his resources. Van Duesen sends ghoul and mortal factors around the world in pursuit of collectibles, and knows about many rival collectors.

On rare occasions, Van Duesen even sends a coterie of ambitious neonates to acquire a new treasure for the Vault. He's worked out a cunning plan for shipping the undead in relative safety. One of his "shockers" is called

Run Over. The official description is of five embalmed cadavers, covered in macadam and painted to suggest human figures pressing up from beneath a section of road, with skid marks. The legalities of transporting cadavers as art are somewhat complex, but it's been done.

Actually, Van Duesen recreates *Run Over* when he needs to send Kindred long distances: they stay in torpor, covered in protective road tar and gravel, until they arrive at their destination. If fewer than five Kindred travel, Van Duesen uses real embalmed cadavers to make up the difference. To complete the illusion, Van Duesen rents some exhibition space in the target city and incorporates a gallery, which will never show anything except *Run Over*. Ghoul or mortal support staff guard the traveling "artwork" and handle the customs paperwork. They peel off the tar when the Kindred reach their destination, wake them up and craft a new *Run Over* using store mannequins. The Kindred make a return journey the same way. So far, no one has noticed that *Run Over* looks a little different every time it appears.

Other members of the Cherubim support the arts in their own ways. Of course, they all donate money to local arts institutions. The faction eagerly welcomes any Kindred who themselves practice some form of art. Van Duesen would especially like to meet skilled Kindred musicians with Celerity: his Vault holds several manuscripts for works of music too fast for mortals to play. The music-lovers among the city's Invictus would like to hear the works performed, so Van Duesen will collect several boons if he can arrange this. Neonates with great skill at any art, however, could find patronage and protection by the Cherubim.

Artistically talented ghouls could also find support from the Cherubim. These Kindred would be glad to supply Vitae and Willpower for a true genius. Unfortunately, Kindred experience is that great artists never stay great for long after they become tainted with vampirism. Once an artist receives a Vinculum, her talent narrows into an obsessive desire to glorify her regnant. Blood-bound artists have produced intensely passionate poems, portraits and statues of their regnants; but they also repeat themselves. The false passion of the Vinculum makes them gradually forget the disciplined techniques needed for the greatest art. Early stages of Vitae addiction, like drug addiction, also produce occasional works of startling (or disturbing) originality — but likewise end up burning out the artist's talent, leaving nothing but a maddened husk of a person who often ends up committing suicide.

Kindred who buy and sell art professionally can join the Cherubim. Two members of the faction own galleries themselves and run them with the help of mortal Retainers. Even if an art dealer doesn't handle contemporary works, Van Duesen and a number of fellow collectors welcome any chance to buy older works.

The Cherubim also appreciate academic expertise in the arts. Provenance — proof of where and when a work of art was created and by whom — is crucial for an artwork's value. It's also difficult to establish for an artwork that may be unknown to mortal scholars (because it's been in an Invictus elder's collection for the last 200 years). Of course, the sort of Kindred-created artwork that goes in the Vault can never have its provenance checked by mortal scholars. The Cherubim correspond with several undead scholars with sufficient knowledge of art history and Kindred culture to authenticate works that lack clear provenance.

The Cherubim don't limit themselves to the plastic arts, either. Not a few Invictus Princes appoint poet laureates to glorify them and commemorate important events in verse. Such a poet would be welcome among the Cherubim as well. Back in the 1970s, an Angel in another city published a literary magazine by and for the Kindred. It lasted four years, until a witch-hunter found a copy in the haven of a vampire she destroyed. This led to the publisher's destruction soon after. Copies of *Bleeding All Over The Page* are now highly valued by Kindred collectors, who would be glad if some brave Angel could start another magazine like it.

Concepts: Wealthy collector, gallery owner, opera sponsor, poetry slam organizer, architect, museum donor, small-press publisher

"Mortal existence is short, but art and the Kindred are long."

MOST NOBLE FELLOWSHIP OF ARTEMIS

Aristocrats enjoy hunting, and the Kindred are no exception. The First Estate, like mortal nobles throughout history, turns a necessary means of gaining sustenance into high sport. Since the covenant began, members have gathered in clubs for recreational hunting.

Many cities still have hunt clubs. These groups often become important venues for Kindred to meet, schmooze, make deals and plot betrayals while they hone and flaunt their skills as predators. Some clubs are small, informal affairs — just a few Kindred who hunt together. Other clubs grow into large and elaborate organizations, with titles, bylaws, rituals and properties of their own. Large clubs give themselves fancy names like the Pursuivant Order or Los Cazadores del Noche.

In the English-speaking world, the largest and most widespread hunt club calls itself the Most Noble Fellowship of Artemis. The Artemids have chapters in several American, Canadian and Australian cities, as well as their British homeland. The club began in the city of Birmingham during the 16th century. The Fellowship began with Lord Henry Tamworth, allegedly a Staffordshire viscount Embraced two centuries before. Lord Henry remained a keen huntsman after his Embrace into the Daeva. He attracted a circle of neonates who shared his passion for the chase . . . or who were willing to take up the sport to gain the patronage of the Prince's executioner, who was been rumored to have never failed in a blood hunt.

The Fellowship graduated from an informal coterie of enthusiasts to one of Birmingham's most important factions when Lord Henry and his protégés destroyed a Lupine pack that had threatened the city's Prince. Lord Henry became the new Prince's chief lieutenant, perhaps even the power behind the throne. A chance to hunt with Lord Henry became one of the surest routes

to the Prince's ear, so Birmingham's Kindred all became devotees of horse and hound.

A few members of the Fellowship, or their childer, eventually moved to other English cities and carried the Fellowship with them. Long before then, however, other hunt clubs took the Fellowship's name or slight variations upon it. Like many Kindred social clubs, the Artemids spread through imitation more rather than in the hearts of members traveling to establish new chapters. The Fellowship's bylaws are readily available to any Kindred who want to learn them. Even though some traditions are supposed to be hidden from non-members, the Artemids are no more secretive among other Invictus Kindred than the Rotarians or the Knights of Columbus are among mortals.

A Small Historical Oddity

The Most Noble Fellowship's name is somewhat unusual for its late-Renaissance origin. In the 16th century, most aristocrats knew classical mythology through Roman sources. The literature of the time refers to Diana, the Roman name for the goddess of the hunt and the moon, more often than Greek Artemis. One of Lord Henry's protégés had an Oxford education before his Embrace, however, and was very proud of his Greek. He also argued that the Greek-derived "Artemid" sounded better than the Latin-derived "Dianan" as a term for members. On such tiny questions of taste do the details of history sometimes depend.

Faction Requirements and Benefits

To become a member of the Most Noble Fellowship of Artemis, a Kindred customarily needs at least Animal Ken

•, Firearms • and some skill riding. The last qualification may be met with dots in Drive, interpreted to include some familiarity with horseback riding, or it might just be a Specialty of Animal Ken, depending on the character. Until a character shows she can keep her seat on a galloping horse, shoot a gun with reasonable accuracy and knows something about wildlife and the great outdoors, the Artemids are unlikely to ever consider her for membership, even though these are hardly the techniques they use when hunting mortals.

The Most Noble Fellowship charges membership dues — those lodges, dogs and horses don't come cheaply. A Kindred needs Resources ••• to afford the Fellowship's dues. (Most of the expenses are born by very wealthy senior members.)

OTHER HUNT CLUBS

The Fellowship is neither the oldest or the first hunt club of the First Estate. Most hunt clubs are small local groups that pass on their seats to childer and successors over time. Most hunt clubs are modest, even recreational, quasi-coteries assembled every year or so as an excuse to escape the pomp and politics of the court — to vacation farther than any common Elysium. Many, perhaps most, modern hunt clubs aren't hunt clubs at all, but handfuls of old coterie-mates and relatives-in-Damnation who gather to reminisce and seek counsel in private locales on the edge of the domain, where perhaps they sup on soft locals or someone's herd. The dirty secret of these clubs is that they often gather to peek out at the countryside, to imagine that they have the freedom and power of every day-loving mortal to visit "the cabin," to drive themselves on unfamiliar roads, to explore and be alive. These Kindred gather to lie to each other and themselves, to pretend they are satisfied.

Seemingly independent of the old-fashioned hunt clubs — those that seem populated by old, white vampires — are the new, strictly urban hunt clubs being formed by neonates in and out of the Invictus. Coteries of vicious city vampires calling themselves hunt clubs are taking to pack-hunting homeless and transient mortals in major cities all over the world. Some of these dangerously reckless young murderers organize forays into tenements and high-rise housing projects, subways and truck stops for the sake of finding prey they can chase, corner and kill. Invictus vampires, with their dedication to the Masquerade and the stability of the Damned society, have tried to put a stop to many of these brash, new hunt clubs, but some of their founders actually *are* Invictus who feel they are entitled to the same sport as their seniors.

Mere membership in the Most Noble Fellowship is a one-dot Merit. This can be the character's first dot of

Covenant Status, since the Artemids are a prestigious social club within the Invictus. Members who come from other covenants (rare, but not unheard-of) must buy a separate Merit.

If the character can show her skill as a hunter (by raising the three required Skills to at least ••, with at least two more dots allocated among them in general), the esteem of her fellow hunters may allow her to raise her Covenant Status by one, to represent significant numbers of other Invictus admiring her skills. The Orion, Meleager or Atalanta of a chapter always has at least two dots of Covenant Status.

Clans: Kindred of all clans join the Most Noble Fellowship of Artemis. Gangrel find the Fellowship's hunts a civilized outlet for the savagery in their souls, bringing mortal and Beast into harmony; the Ventruue find the mastery of horses and hounds a pleasant expression of their own gift for Animalism. Daeva likewise find themselves attracted to the drama and passion of the chase and the kill. Mekhet tend to approach sport hunts more as a test of skill, and Nosferatu are not immune to the lure of pursuit and the prey's terror as the hunt reaches its conclusion.

Nickname: Artemids

Covenant: Like other hunt clubs, the Fellowship says it's purely recreational — an escape from duty and politics for members of the First Estate. For one night, the Danse Macabre is replaced by the wilder music of hunting horns and belling hounds.

Of course, that's a big, fat lie. Members of the Fellowship do enjoy their hunts, but these outings also serve as opportunities for members and their guests to scheme where other Invictus members cannot watch them. As much deal-making, covert inquiry, one-upsmanship and social warfare goes on during a Fellowship hunt as at any Elysium.

In some cities, all the most important discussions and decisions happen during hunting parties. Everyone who is anyone joins the club, and anyone who isn't a member has a real hole in her power — even if she has a fine title such as Primogen or Seneschal. The Invictus has no problem with hiding the real power structure in this way. Anyone who can't figure out the real nexus of power is too feeble or too stupid to matter.

Hunt clubs often invite movers-and-shakers in other covenants to join, too, or at least become the club's guests at hunts. Other Kindred enjoy civilized, ritualized hunts as well, and the Invictus likes to keep all power close to itself. Kindred who would stay suspicious during an Elysium or other formal meeting might let down their guards and talk more freely in the excitement of the chase and the relaxation later. After all, they're just being social, right?

Appearance: Hunt clubs often adopt a uniform. Members of the Most Noble Fellowship used to wear a short-skirted,

frogged coat of green velvet with a leather belt bearing a crescent moon on the buckle. The left breast of the coat carries a badge of a rearing stag within a crescent moon, surrounded by a laurel wreath. Sturdy brown trousers with green piping (or a divided riding skirt of brown satin for female members), cavalry boots, soft leather gloves, an Elizabethan pleated ruff and a cavalier's plumed hat completed the ensemble.

Of course, this outfit is terribly conspicuous for urban hunts. The Fellowship restricts this outfit's use for grand hunting parties in the country. During any sport hunt, though, Artemids identify themselves through a stag-and-moon badge somewhere on their clothing.

Haven: A large Artemid chapter owns multiple buildings, including a stable and kennel. The grand hunts require some place to train ghoul horses and hounds; this usually consists of a few acres on the fringe of small towns outside the city proper. A chapter also needs a clubhouse in town where the members can plan their hunts, socialize and discuss prospective new members or guests. A chapter's pride, however, rests with a hunting lodge well outside the city. Such a lodge has space for all the members to sleep comfortably and perhaps enjoy a blood feast after the hunt, plus room for servants, dogs and horses. Hunting lodges tend to be magnificent structures.

The usual cover story given to people in any nearby small town is that an out-of-state tycoon owns the lodge and visits a few times a year to hunt. A privileged ghoul gets to drive through town and be seen during the day, playing the role of the visiting tycoon. In fact, the ghoul may shoot some deer or ducks during the day, in case any mortals should pass by. The lodge is remote enough, however, that the local mortals are not likely to notice the much larger hunt that happens at night.

Background: Hunting may not be a necessary part of life in the developed world anymore, but remains a popular hobby. Any Kindred community numbering more than several dozen probably includes a few sport hunters of various ages. These can form the start of a hunt club (though not every city's Kindred have such a club). Building up a full-scale Fellowship chapter may take decades: acquiring kennels, stables and a country lodge take a lot of time and money. By then, the club becomes as much about backroom (or backwoods?) politics as about hunting. Every club begins, however, with a few genuine sportsmen: the Kindred have easier ways to conduct private meetings.

Once a club forms, Kindred who hunted when they were mortals obviously have an easier time joining. Vampires who have never hunted before may want to join for the social benefits, but this may not be easy. Some clubs merely ask members to pay their dues and let them learn the art of venery after they join. The Most Noble Fellowship takes a stricter course. Members must already have some skill at hunting and riding. Anyone who wants to join the Artemids needs a sponsor willing to

vouch for his abilities. Neonates who don't yet know how to ride and shoot have to find someone willing to teach them — which usually means a vampire who's already a member. The Artemids do allow members to invite guests on hunts or to use their facilities, so the barriers to membership are not very high.

Faction Disciplines: Animalism, of course, is the most useful of all Disciplines for a hunter. The Artemids consider it rank and shameful cheating to use Animalism upon the quarry, but the Discipline is acceptable for locating suitable game. Artemids also use Animalism to train their horses and hounds, and to direct them during a hunt. Being able to control your horse and dogs without the need for bridle, spurs, horn or voice brings great prestige to an Artemid.

Auspex is the other favored Discipline among the Fellowship. At the basic level, keener senses help reveal signs of likely quarry and help follow the prey through the night. Master huntsmen use the Spirit's Touch to learn exactly what animal left a footprint or bit of dung, and how recently. Other Disciplines are not much use for sport hunters — though on some hunts, a few of the "hounds" may actually hunters in wolf-shape, using Protean.

Organization: Each chapter of the Most Noble Fellowship has up to three officers. The senior male member takes the title of Orion and bears principle responsibility for organizing hunts. He is also the member the Prince calls onto the carpet if hunters endanger the Masquerade. The next-most senior male member receives the title of Meleager. He typically handles the chapter's finances and sees to the upkeep of properties. The senior female member (for most Kindred hunt clubs accepted women long before their mortal counterparts) is addressed as Atalanta. Though some chapters foist post-hunt party duties on their Atalantas, the faction has no strong traditions about this. An Atalanta can choose her own role in the chapter without much trouble. Fellowship chapters seldom bother with other offices, or they invent their own, such as Master of Hounds (in charge of selecting or breeding dogs) or Secretary (keeping the records for the club).

The Fellowship shares one old tradition with many mortal hunt clubs: the bleeding of the novice. On his first hunt, a guest or new recruit has his cheeks and forehead smeared with the blood of the kill. Fellowship members call this the "baptism of Artemis" (a name not used by other hunt clubs).

A full-scale hunt may take two or three nights. The hunters may schedule a full night just to reach the lodge: the actual trip may take just a few hours' drive, with dogs and horses carried in trailers, but the cautious Kindred like to plan lots of extra time for safety, in case a car breaks down or some other unforeseen emergency crops up. Some cities, however, are close enough to deep wilderness that the Artemids can drive out to their lodge, hunt for four or



five hours and drive back to the city before dawn. Especially dedicated hunters may turn their dogs and horses into ghouls for the hunt, so they become as strong, fierce and tireless as the Kindred themselves.

Given such animals, ordinary prey may not present enough of a challenge. Some hunt clubs prefer to ghoul the prey as well. For instance, every year a Washington chapter of the Most Noble Fellowship sends ghoul hunters to capture a bear or cougar. A senior member infuses the animal with his blood to turn it into a ghoul, then sends it back to the woods. A few nights later, the hunters arrive to chase a beast that's stronger, quicker or tougher than any mortal animal. If their ghoul beast should happen to slay a merely mortal hunter or wander out of the Cascade Mountains and attack a child — well, such things happen without vampires, too.

For “the most dangerous game,” thrill-seeking hunters pursue other supernatural creatures. In the Most Noble Fellowship, a chapter hasn't really attained bragging rights until it's collected a werewolf “pelt” — even if that opportunity to kill is given to them in treaty by other werewolves. The Fellowship, though it has a somewhat self-important view regarding itself and Lupines, isn't about to go breaking peace with werewolves just for sport. Sometimes, however, Fellowship members become the willing participants in plots of one werewolf pack against another.

Hunt clubs trade stories about spectacular and deadly hunts against other supernatural creatures, too. Some stories go around the world and become part of Kindred legend.

Supernatural prey may also include other vampires. Clubs like the Artemids always strive to take the lead when the Prince calls a blood hunt. The Most Noble Fellowship also sometimes conducts an “Actaeon” hunt, named after a mythical hunter whom Artemis turned into a stag so he was slain by his own dogs. In this deadly game, a Kindred volunteers to become the Fellowship's quarry for one night. If the Actaeon can run from a release-point to a pre-set terminus before the hunters catch him, the club members grant him a boon — a *big* boon, something only possible for a group of fabulously rich, politically connected Invictus members. If the hunters catch the Actaeon, of course, his unlife ends rather quickly. Actaeon hunts are forbidden in many Kindred domains, but Princes often wink at them. After all, the quarry is at least nominally a volunteer. (If the Actaeon has been maneuvered into some impossible situation, where “volunteering” for a hunt is the only way to escape utter disgrace or to save mortal loved ones, well, that's the Danse Macabre for you.)

Desperate mortals can also be recruited for an Actaeon hunt. The club finds some mortal who would do *anything* for money, a transplant for a sick relative or some other great prize. The Artemids feed their Actaeon some Vitae and invest him with a ghoul's strength, speed or toughness (depending on the donor Kindred' clan), then release him into the woods with a one-hour head start to make the chase more sporting. As might be expected, the Invictus frowns on mortal Actaeons because this breaks the Masquerade, so

a mortal Actaeon who survives to win his prize remains watched by the Invictus forever after. The Prince may order an Artemid to place the mortal under a Vinculum or take him as a permanent ghoul Retainer. Sometimes, the Prince simply orders the mortal's execution — but not by the Most Noble Fellowship. The Artemids made a deal and offered patronage; honor demands they keep their deal and protect their mortal client.

Some of the more degenerate hunt clubs chase human prey without seeking a volunteer — by kidnapping a mortal no one's likely to miss. Unlike in an Actaeon hunt, the mortal has no finishing line to offer safety: the Kindred hunt him until they catch him or dawn forces them to break off the hunt. These hunters do not turn their victim into a ghoul, however. Even when the prey is a vicious mortal criminal, however, hunting a mortal to his death like an animal is an appalling surrender to the Beast. If the Invictus finds a hunt club playing such games, the club might not last very long. The members are probably spiraling into complete degeneration and becoming a danger to other Kindred and the Masquerade. Of course, sufficiently influential hunters can probably get away with anything.

Grand hunts in the country are not the only club activities. In fact, full-scale hunting parties seldom take place more than once or twice a year. The lodge doesn't stay vacant the rest of the time, though. Throughout the year, club members visit the lodge in ones, twos or threes. These smaller excursions are more like the hunting vacations of modern mortals. The hunters go on foot, not on horses, and they bring one or two dogs, not a whole pack. The hunters' rifles or shotguns are quite ordinary. These smaller parties are opportunities for a few Invictus members to talk very privately — but these parties usually happen because the participants do, in fact, want to hunt and take a vacation from the Danse Macabre. For one night, they can forget about politics and duty and just kill a goddamn deer.

Private hunts do not completely escape the Danse Macabre, of course. Sometimes a hunter doesn't come

back. When two or three set out and one doesn't return with them, any story they offer — mortal witch-hunters, a werewolf, simple accidents in the dark or hazards of travel — come under intense scrutiny from other Invictus. Maybe the survivors are telling the truth — or maybe the hunt was a setup for a murder. If the Sheriff's investigation leads to a verdict of Final Death by innocent misadventure, some Kindred will conclude the murder was especially clever or that the survivors have the Sheriff in their pocket. Clearly, the survivors are worth watching — if only for one's own protection.

Sometimes a lone hunter never returns. In these cases, the Kindred can only speculate. Misadventure? Did the Prince order an out-of-the-way execution? Did the lost vampire have an enemy who can't account for her actions during the hunting trip? Then again, Kindred sometimes want to disappear. A popular ancilla in the York chapter of the Artemids disappeared during a hunting trip in 1979. The other York Artemids suspected a plot by the ancilla's enemies in the Circle of the Crone. The recriminations and denials almost escalated into a civil war. Two years later, the ancilla, suing another name, turned up in Manchester. He said he was hiding because he knew about the Mekhet Primogen of York's Vitae addiction; the Primogen accused the ancilla of various other crimes. Correspondence between the officers of the two cities has been cool ever since.

Most hunt clubs also sponsor low-key hunts in their cities. In this case, the hunt is a test of Kindred skill at finding, stalking and feeding from mortals; see Chapter Five for information about this sort of sport hunting. Every year, most Artemid groups sponsor a "scavenger hunt" open to all Kindred, in which the contestants have a week to try to find and feed from all the sorts of mortals on the list. The vampire who achieves the highest score wins a trophy and the acclaim of the city's Kindred. (No cash, though. That would be bourgeois.)

Concepts: Kennelmaster, stablemaster, murderous dandy, grizzled sportsman, fanatical hobbyist, Great White Hunter, Lupine expert, master tracker

"Don't fall off your horse, childe! We won't come back to find you!"

THE OCTOPUS

Invictus attempts to rig elections go back as far as the covenant itself. Elders say factions in the First Estate promoted different noble candidates for Holy Roman Emperor and tried to control the minds of the aristocratic electors. In England, the Invictus placed its first pawn in Parliament the year after that body held its first election. Centuries later, Invictus agents helped place

Britain's first prime minister in power. (Other Invictus agents worked against him.)

Many Kindred in the First Estate believe, however, that the golden age of vampiric political manipulation came in the cities of 19th-century America. Millions of immigrants flooded into the cities. They knew little of politics, but they wanted to vote. The result was the

growth of political machines. Poor immigrants and their children voted for the candidate who gave them a turkey at Christmas, helped them out of jail when they were drunk and attended their marriages, christenings and funerals. These politicians found jobs for the immigrants' sons. Tammany Hall was the most famous of these machines, but it was hardly the only one.

Every city in the United States had its own machine — or two, one for each major party — buying votes for small favors and skimming off government money for its cronies. Politicians called this the spoils system: as in “to the victor go the spoils” of assigning cushy government jobs, construction contracts and other favors to supporters.

Naturally, the Invictus could not ignore such a rich source of political power. The Carthians had a head start in infiltrating the political machines, but the First Estate slowly placed its own agents in the parties. Members of the First Estate had the money the political machines needed and powerful influence over the vast new corporations that government had to work with. The political machines were fundamentally practical organizations, run by practical men who didn't care about ideology. The Invictus subverted the machines one by one. Quite a few Carthians switched sides and joined the Invictus.

Reform movements of the early 20th century weakened many of the political machines. Politicians couldn't hand out jobs so freely. New Deal entitlements meant that poor people didn't have to beg the ward boss for an extra bucket of coal in the winter. In some cities, however, the machines never completely died — and the Invictus still exploits them. As electoral democracy spreads from Western Europe and North America to Latin America, Eastern Europe and other parts of the world, machine politics come too, and unabashed cronyism remains very strong in much of the world.

The Invictus calls its experts in machine politics “the Octopus.” The name comes from an image much older than Tammany Hall. An early edition of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan, Or the Matter, Form and Power of a Commonwealth* was graced with an illustration of an octopus wearing a crown and bearing in its tentacles an orb, scepter and other symbols of royal power. The Invictus loved Hobbes' arguments for royal absolutism, seeing in them justification for the covenant's own power over Kindred and kine. Some of the covenant's political masterminds took to calling themselves “Leviathans.” As street-level politics assumed greater importance, the Invictus gained new generations of political manipulators who kept the image of the royal Leviathan but didn't care to vex their street-smart mortal minions with book-learning analogies. These Invictus members simply called themselves “the Octopus” and said the eight arms represented how busy they were.

The Octopus still has chapters in many cities around the world. In each city, the Octopus works through a

different front organization of mortals. In one city, the Octopus calls itself the Progressive Democratic Caucus. In another, it's the Conservative Leadership Committee. In a third, it's the Worker's Socialist Union. Democrat, Republican, Labour, Tory, Socialist — it's all the same to the Octopus. No matter what national party platforms say, every Octopus chapter has the same goals: bring in the votes, pay out with favors and keep the city government obedient to the Invictus.

OTHER POLITICAL MECHANICS

The Octopus is not the only faction of political mechanics and operatives in the covenant — but the Octopus is quite large. Most groups of political mechanics are much smaller, however. Some are private collections of like-minded monsters working to change their domain to suit their needs; others are carefully assembled coterie designed to maintain the status quo or quietly, gently influence mortal laws and attention. The single most important issue for virtually every faction of political operatives and strategists in the Invictus, however, is the Masquerade.

As might be expected, most “influential coterie” are highly specialized, focused on just one or two local goals. It's not uncommon for a coterie — or even a faction — of political mechanics to work together only when projects arise; some assemble for a few years of work every decade or so. Some work toward a single goal (the disgrace of an enemy Prince, the ascent of a Society Primogen member, the acquisition of a coveted estate) and then never work together again. Ultimately, what makes a faction of political mechanics different from any other politically savvy, self-serving collection of Kindred is the focus on the philosophy in action, the politics, rather than the success of any one participating Kindred. Political mechanics work for the success of the covenant and the domain, rather than the coterie alone.

Faction Benefits

To become an Octopus member, a Kindred needs at least Allies •• or Contacts •, plus Politics ••. That gets a character into the Organization. A character needs at least Politics •••, Allies •••• (including at least one elected official or important bureaucrat), Contacts ••• and Resources •••• before the Committee invites her to join.

Membership in the Organization does not give a vampire any Status in the Invictus, but it's a good start. Unless a character makes a powerful enemy in the covenant, she can buy her first dot of Status with no impediment. Members of the Committee can have Covenant Status • or •• but seldom much more than that. The Octopus is not popular with the First Estate's elders, who block members' further advancement.

Parent Clan: The Ventrue and Daeva naturally excel in the Octopus, thanks to their special facility at controlling mortals' thoughts and emotions. The Mekhet's affinity for secrets makes them effective political manipulators, too. That's not to say the Gangrel or Nosferatu never join the Octopus, though. The only real prerequisites are an interest in power and a keen eye for what people want — or fear.

Nickname: The Hands

Covenant: Ever since the 19th century, the Octopus has been an important faction within the Invictus. The golden age of machine politics has passed, but the faction retains control of the political process in many cities. That gives the Octopus great influence in the covenant as a whole.

In fact, some elders think the Octopus has too much influence. The faction's particular brand of street-level politics offends some elders who prefer a more remote and classically aristocratic power elite such as, say, themselves. Especially hidebound elders say the Octopus is still part of the Carthian Movement and should be purged from the Invictus. The Octopus has powerful enemies who want to see it fail, so power can pass to their hands instead. However, enough other Invictus members find the Octopus useful enough that no city has seen open attacks on the faction — yet.

Appearance: Members of the Octopus dress down. One of the faction's cardinal rules is never to give voters an impression of putting on airs. No member of the

Octopus wears anything fancier than a polyester-blend sport coat and slacks from Kmart; the faction's leaders tell new recruits they'd better learn to feel comfortable in blue jeans and T-shirts, if they aren't already. Octopus members play a double Masquerade: they pretend to be living, instead of undead, and they pretend to be men and women of the people, instead of a ruthlessly exploitative elite.

Haven: Octopus members need to stay in close contact with their constituents. That means no fancy houses or luxury condos in the good part of town. A small bungalow in the suburbs, or a townhouse in the inner city, is good enough for the Octopus — a home like their constituents live in or can reasonably aspire to. Octopus members cannot allow any hint of their undead nature to show in their havens, because they have to invite the neighbors in for party caucuses and other political meetings. A lightproof basement with a locking door, however, does not stand out as anything unusual.

Each Octopus chapter also has a headquarters used by its front organization. Some chapters own a whole building, though not a very large one. Other chapters rent space in the sort of elderly, down-at-the-heels office block found in most modern cities. The building might have been a Masonic hall several decades ago, but now it holds a dance studio, a publisher of religious tracts, a coffee shop and several small businesses with "Enterprises" in their names. The building has a small auditorium, though, which the Octopus can use for its meetings.



Background: Most Octopus members come from lower-to-middle-class families and neighborhoods. They learned their politics by doing. Many began by doing volunteer work for an election campaign or through an activist group, and became good at hustling for votes, money and access to people already in power. If the members went to college, they were more likely to get degrees in law or business than political science (though the Octopus does recruit the occasional policy wonk). By the time the Octopus notices a potential child, she's already an experienced campaigner. The Octopus never Embraces people who actually hold political office: an elected official has to work during the day. Instead, the Octopus chooses campaign strategists, media experts, activists and other people who make it possible for candidates to run and win. Other Kindred can join the Octopus if they love politics and are willing to work like dogs to see that the faction's chosen candidates reach office.

Octopus members favor high Social and Mental Attributes. The most important Skill is, of course, Politics; but members also frequently excel at Investigation (to find what potential allies and enemies want), Empathy (ditto), Persuasion (to convince people), Streetwise (to know who has influence) and Subterfuge (to lie convincingly, know when they are lied to and for dirty tricks in general). The faction does not scorn Expression or Socialize, but members usually leave the public speaking to candidates.

Disciplines: Dominate and Majesty obviously have the greatest use for molding minds. With a little creativity, though, most Disciplines can be used to aid in political scheming. The Animalism power to possess animals, for example, enables Octopus members to spy on opponents (or potential allies). Auspex reveals mortals' true opinions and emotions, and may reveal past events useful for blackmail or dissimulation (for instance, pretending you have a personal history resembling that of a community leader who could give a useful endorsement). Nightmare can frighten an opponent's supporters. Obfuscate lets an Octopus member attend an opponent's strategy meeting and hear the plans; a Kindred especially skilled in the Discipline's use can even impersonate an opposing candidate to create scandals to order. Protean is only useful at the highest level of mastery: a vampire can enter the opposition's headquarters in mist-form to rummage through their files, looking for damaging information and people counted on for support.

Celerity, Resilience and Vigor find the least use of all, unless something has gone very wrong and the campaigns have begun attacking each other's operatives physically. In the developed world, this hardly ever happens. In cities of the developing and Third World, however, beatings and outright assassination attempts still take place in attempts to influence elections (far more so in the World of Darkness than the real world).

Weakness: If the Octopus has one weakness, it's that the faction underestimates the force of ideology. Time and again, voters have blindsided the Octopus over issues these technicians of power didn't think could interest anyone but a few cranks. Octopus members were slow to latch onto the civil rights movement and the environmental movement; by the time they understood the opposition to the Vietnam War, the war was over. Currently, they ignore the backlash against globalization and Christian conservatives' outrage at gay rights, abortion and other cultural issues. Intellectually, Octopus members may know that people care about transcendent values; but even the members who came from activist groups tend to be out of touch about the latest issues.

On a deeper level, the Octopus isn't very good at *solving* anything. A little help with the rent doesn't lift the working poor out of poverty. Helping a church get a new roof doesn't improve public morals. All too often, the Octopus trades one problem for another: for instance, the Octopus might attract a new factory to a city for the sake of jobs, but offer so many tax concessions and environmental waivers that the city government becomes poorer and the pollution worsens.

Organization: The Octopus works chiefly on the scale of city governments. The faction's chapters never coordinate on a statewide or provincial level, let alone nationally or internationally. Octopus chapters routinely rig elections for state or national offices, such as congressional representatives or members of Parliament — to bring tax-money pork to their city, not for any wider purpose. The Octopus has no conception that it could, or should, attempt any political action beyond its separate municipalities.

Each chapter is led by a group of Kindred called the Committee. (The Octopus takes a practical approach to naming.) The Committee decides who to support for public office and divvies up neighborhoods among Octopus members. A single chapter of the Octopus seldom includes more than a dozen Kindred, with four or five of them on the Committee, and another dozen or so Retainers who know they work for vampires. The chapter's political front is called the Organization. The front group consists of up to 100 mortals who are in the dark and any remaining Kindred. The mortals do most of the street-level work, of course, but every vampire in the Octopus has intensive contact with the public as well.

The Octopus engages in many activities to rig elections and keep its pawns in power. First and foremost, members of the Organization called "runners" stay in close contact with voters. In some cities, junior members of the Organization take responsibility for a single block or housing project. The mortals spend their days attending weddings, christenings, funerals, bar mitzvahs and other family festivities, passing on the best wishes of the Organization and the party it claims to represent. As mentioned, they also bail out drunks,

pay speeding tickets, persuade landlords to put the rent off just a few days until payday and help kids fill out their first job applications — and make sure everyone they help becomes registered voters. When election day comes, the rank-and-file members of the Organization visit everyone they've helped during the year and make sure they get to the polls (or, in some regions, mail their absentee ballots). The Organization kindly supplies proxy voters for loyal party members who unfortunately cannot reach the polls because they are shut-ins, passed out from drink or drugs, out of state, in jail or dead.

Other members of the chapter work with local businesses, churches and community groups. Octopus members talk to business owners and managers to find out what they want from government and promise them they'll get what they want. Octopus members visit preachers, priests and rabbis — any religion, any denomination — to tell them how the Organization's favored party appreciates their work and their place in the community and how much they'd like to help. Ditto for secular community groups. Kindred generally handle the important meetings with people who can supply endorsements and mobilize voters.

Of course, a political party could not legally *buy votes* by promising specific favors to businesses, churches and other groups — but the Organization is not actually a party. It's just a group of private citizens who happen to support a particular party. As private citizens, they can pay to fix a community center's leaking roof, help a church re-pave its parking lot or ask a city selectman to help a particular local businessman. Or they can ask their wife's best friend's brother to do it for them. Nothing illegal here And there's nothing illegal if a businessman should just happen to make a large donation to the party recommended by the nice fella who introduced him to the city councilman. And there's nothing illegal if the church's preacher gives a sermon in favor of a certain policy the party advocates, without mentioning the party by name. And there's nothing illegal if the workers at the community center tell people who fixed the roof and who they think would make a fine mayor, county councilman or planning commissioner.

Sometimes, the candidates backed by the Organization are members themselves. In the great old days of Tammany, this was often the case. (Tammany boss George Washington Plunkitt held four elected offices in a single year.) Now, the Octopus can't be so obvious. Nobody pays much attention to low-ranking, obscure officials like water district commissioners or school board members, but mayors, county auditors and state representatives can't show such obvious connections. The local party leaders, however, are strongly encouraged to join the Organization, and the Organization uses its masses of registered party members to

place its candidates at the heads of party organizations, too. An Octopus chapter can usually gain such a grip over a local party's chapter that the two institutions become one and the same. The Committee decides who the party should support; the Organization lines up the campaign funding, endorsements and a lot of voters, and the party goes along.

Politicians elected by the Organization do favors for it. Members who are in business get tips about upcoming government contracts and projects. For instance, the city might decide to knock down some rotting old slums and build a park; it turns out that several members of the Organization recently bought the buildings and are willing to sell them to the city (for a lot more than they paid). The city needs to fix potholes; a company owned by an Organization member submits the low bid.

More precisely, members of the Committee own the property or submit the low bid. The Committee members supply most of the funding for the Organization's efforts, and they reap most of the spoils in return. Committee members may also pass tips to other Invictus members so they too can profit from government contracts and sweetheart deals — and no one can prove collusion or graft, because the connections between the Organization and the contractor are invisible. Most importantly, Committee members sell other Invictus members access to the politicians the Committee places in office. It's not that other Invictus members can't cultivate politicians of their own; it's just so much easier to ask the Octopus for favors, since Octopus members work with politics full-time.

Octopus chapters offer patronage to everyone connected to them, though, not just Kindred. Octopus members know a lot of people and look for ways these mortals can help each other. For instance, city and county governments cannot disburse make-work jobs as freely as they did in Tammany's heyday, but Committee members can recommend that one supporter give a job to another supporter's relative. A community leader with Organization ties has better access to Organization-backed politicians, and so his neighborhood gets more police and the potholes are filled sooner. Once an Octopus chapter establishes itself, the Committee members don't have to rely on their own money to buy favors; they act as middlemen between people allied to the Organization and buy favors with other people's resources.

Unlike some Invictus factions, the Octopus has no Kindred-specific ceremonies of its own and no formal procedures for membership. A Kindred who wants to join an Octopus chapter simply approaches a Committee member and says she wants in. The Committee member asks what this Kindred can do for the Organization. The applicant says what votes she can line up or which useful mortals she can influence — and

she's in the Organization. If, after several years, she shows she's a skilled political operator, the other committee members might invite her to join their ranks.

On national holidays, though, the front organization meets at its headquarters for a day and evening of speeches, eating and drinking, flags, bunting and patriotic displays. The Committee members arrive after dark and speak last, of course. Octopus members do not attend Kindred functions that happen on the night of an election day; they're too busy analyzing election results and planning what to do with the winners.

Concepts: Neighborhood spokeswoman, business lawyer, old-time ward boss, political gangster, opposition researcher, campaign consultant, legitimate businessman, secretive kingmaker, pavement-pounding party activist

THE REAL WORLD AND THE WORLD OF DARKNESS

Players and Storytellers should note that machine politics thrives in the World of Darkness to a greater degree than in the real world. The Octopus works the way Tammany Hall actually did. Nowadays, however, few American or European cities' politics are locked in by a single party's organization. Laws make rampant political patronage far more difficult; for better or worse, local party organizations don't maintain the intense connection to individual voters that Tammany achieved. In the World of Darkness, however, attempts to reform politics may have been less successful — in part because organizations like the Octopus fought them, with support from the rest of the Invictus.

"Mister Mayor, remember who put you into office. Haha, the voters, right, you made a funny. No, seriously, bubbeleh, Chlor-Chem funneled a lot of money into your campaign and it's only fair they receive something in return. They want a re-zoning in Belltown so they can build a new factory. I know, the NIMBYs would go nuts. But I also know the folks in Clover Heights would love to have a factory or anything that could bring in a few jobs. I think we can work something out that makes everybody happy."

THE MOST HONORABLE ORDER OF THE THORNED WREATH

When Invictus Kindred are threatened and trouble looms from without, it is the Knights of the Most Honorable Order of the Thorned Wreath who inevitably step to the fore and defend the Kindred. Professional soldiers and rescue specialists bound by a strict oath of humble self-sacrifice, these Knights are feared and admired in equal proportion.

Founded as a small martial Guild in the ninth century by a Daeva named Artus Le Jumel, the Order is said to have grown from his teachings, taking on the trappings of Knighthood some 400 years later as chivalry came into full fashion. It is said that Le Jumel was an unparalleled swordsman in his nights, yet he lived with a humility and unfailing civility that astonished many. For centuries, he dedicated himself to the service of his Invictus kinsmen, always coming to their aid in times of want and always putting their needs before his own. He made his home in Rouen, in the Haute-Normandie region of France, and though his fame would eventually grow well beyond the borders of the domain, he never left it.

Le Jumel became a figure of renown after tensions between the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum in his home domain flared into violence in the year AD 866, all centered on a dispute regarding the dispensation of territory. Although battle broke out on more than one occasion, Le Jumel and his two apprentices were the only Invictus Kindred who are said to have shed blood. These three faced the enemy with fierce and fervent energy, defending the covenant as its champions and drawing all attacks to themselves. All three were grievously wounded on more than one occasion, but none would surrender the fight. Le Jumel himself slew the Sanctified Bishop who had initiated the conflict, putting an end to it and securing the supremacy of the Invictus in the domain for some time thereafter. Le Jumel followed this act with a diplomatic pledge to the Lancea Sanctum, promising that he would never again raise his sword to them unless they struck at the Invictus first. For his actions, he was endowed with the coveted title of "Marquis of Rouen" by the Inner Circle of the domain. No other Kindred has held the title since.

Le Jumel is said to have been sent to his Final Death by an unknown enemy some time around AD 1350. Records of the event have been lost to the ages, but it is known that he perished on the field of battle with sword in hand. Competing accounts of his final battle have surfaced on more than one occasion, but all so far have been hotly disputed by at least one prominent member of the Order, and none have been accepted as truth. Depending on which “unverified” version one reads, Le Jumel met his end either at the claws of a mad unaligned Gangrel, a mortal mob intent on slaying one of his charges or another Ventrue swordsman looking to best him for notoriety’s sake. Some say that it is best left unknown, since identifying his killer could engender prejudice within the ranks of the Order, and might even lead to a call for vengeance. This is not a frivolous worry: the Order has twice exploded into violent crusade, in two different domains, for precisely this reason. In the early 18th century, based on the research of an Invictus Steward in possession of certain archaic texts, the Thorned Wreath Knights in Florence initiated an aggressive campaign to wipe out one particular Gangrel line, convinced that it was descended from Le Jumel’s killer. The attacks led to an escalation of conflict that cost the Invictus a significant amount of territory and led to the suicide of several shamed Knights. Later, near the close of the 19th century, “evidence” was once again unearthed by a scholar, this time in Moscow, pointing towards a certain Ventrue and his line. The Knights were prompted to action once more (against the orders of their Meister) and actually managed to slay the entire line in that domain. Later research proved that the accusation was false — made only to further the ends of the scholar involved.

Despite these occasional errors in judgment, Le Jumel’s Order takes his teachings and his motto (“courage, courtesy, loyalty”) seriously and pass them faithfully down through the Guilds founded by the Order’s members. The teachings have been carried with the Order wherever it goes, throughout the territories of the Invictus. Modern variations on Le Jumel’s personal fighting style (named *la guirlande épineuse* for the distinctive stance and concentration on parry-riposte tactics) are still taught even now, with surprising adherence to the philosophy of the original. Tonight, the Most Honorable Order of the Thorned Wreath (as it has become known) numbers its membership in the high hundreds, with chapters all around the globe. Certain chapters of the Order have been instrumental in the conquest of domains, while other chapters have become the linchpins of Invictus defense strategy in cities of rule. A good many Knights earn the titles of tribute afforded only to great heroes and conquerors.

To join the Knights, a vampire must endure the schooling of one of the Order’s martial Guilds — extremely rigorous programs of tactical and physical exercise without rival. Harsh battle training is intertwined

with impassioned treatises on the virtues of a soldier: courage, honor and strength of will. Any students who demonstrate a mercenary outlook are weeded out, as are those who fail to face the challenges of their schooling with passionate force.

Those who graduate are Knighted in an elaborate ceremony, taking on the renowned Oath of the Thorned Wreath: a declaration that the unlife of every “civilian” Invictus vampire (i.e., all who are not members of the Order) is more important than one’s own and that the oath-taker will readily sacrifice herself unto Final Death for any one of them. Furthermore, the Knight promises that she will stand with her compatriots when the Invictus is challenged, becoming the impassable wall, the “thorned wreath” that surrounds the covenant and destroys any who would bring it harm. The Knight also promises that she will not fail to respond if called upon and will dedicate herself in undeath to the defense of the covenant.

To realize this oath, every Knight is joined with two others in an operative cell and instructed to make her membership in the Order known to the Invictus of the city, so that the covenant may call upon her in times of need. This cell operates as a quick-response unit, its members always prepared to drop whatever they’re doing and rush to the aid of their charges.

The Knights can be expected to provide protection during delicate negotiations with members of other covenants, to escort Kindred on dangerous travels through enemy domain (or even outside the city limits) and to join battle when a violent threat presents itself to a member of the Invictus.

No Knight should ever complain that a call is frivolous or unnecessary. Every call to assist must always be heeded. It is left to the Kindred outside the Order to discipline any vampire who calls upon the Knights without need. They are, after all, a valuable tactical resource, and can only respond to one call at a time. While it might be fantastic for a neonate to have three of the toughest vampires he’s ever seen coming around to his neighborhood once a week and scaring off a rival, nobody wants to be the one to explain why he was occupying a cell of Knights while an elder was being attacked across town.

The Knights are, however, often used as a powerful recruiting tool for the Invictus. Many a neonate who has to choose between fending for himself on the city streets or enjoying the capable protection of the Order will jump at the chance to join up. In this case, a simple demonstration is usually arranged — a threat averted when the Knights “happen” across the neonate’s path often gets the message across quite well — especially if the Knights threaten to stop intervening when they “realize” the neonate is not yet a member of the covenant.

The fact is that the Knights don’t care if they’re being used, so long as it strengthens the Invictus. They understand

that although the covenant is not founded on warlike precepts, it must be prepared for war. The Knights believe that they must step up to the threats presented by outsiders, ensuring that the Kindred of the Invictus are free to better themselves in peaceful pursuit, unencumbered by the hostility of strangers.

As the Order has grown, its character has begun to change. While the French chapters are notoriously strict in their adherence to the chivalric principles laid out by Le Jumel, some of the more far-flung chapters are very different in quality. Knights of the Order in the American Southwest seem to have thrown most of the traditional trappings of the faction away, preferring a New World pickups-and-shotguns approach. These Knights hold onto the basic fundamentals of honor and courtesy, though, as do all units, no matter how outlandish they may seem to their founder.

Since *la guirlande épineuse* is a sword-based martial art, the members of nearly every cell tend to rely on archaic weaponry in combat. A few surprising variations have arisen, though. One cell in England has begun teaching a firearms-based form of the art, working a trigger-pull into the complex parrying maneuvers.

In modern nights, the members of the Order are a comfort to Invictus Kindred. Standing proudly at Elysium or patrolling the streets, the Knights act as both a deterrent to would-be enemies and a dedicated service to every member of the covenant, no matter how weak or insignificant.

OTHER KNIGHTHOODS

The association of Knighthood with soldiering and defense has not been as diluted among the Damned as it has been among kine. Still, not all Invictus Orders of Knighthood are truly martial societies. For a time, it seemed that every other domain in New England had a Knighthood dedicated to the diplomatic defense of Invictus ideals in the face of crass, new revolutionaries. These Orders were more orders of thinkers and debaters than anything else; certainly the members were not swordsmen. Britain has seen more than a few Knighthoods dedicated to protecting artists and the arts come and go. It was briefly popular for Princes of Quality to create Knighthoods for “agents errant” — that is, nomads — who would seek to protect the Masquerade in the spaces *between* domains, but it was never popular to join or be a Knight in such an order; most shortly died out.

Historically, Invictus Knighthoods have straddled the lines between covenant loyalty and individual vassalage as well. Especially in the nights of the Middle Ages — but often tonight, as well — a Knight may have territory and authority bestowed by “the Invictus,” when her loyalty is truly to just one particular lord or faction. In theory and in polite discussion, it is perilously seditious for a landed Kindred to maintain a coterie of Knights for himself; in fact and in practice, it is quite common. Some Invictus Knights receive privilege from the First Estate in exchange for service to the Sanctified of the Second Estate. Some Knights are little more than diplomats or spokespeople.



Clans: Originally exclusively Daeva, the Order is now made up of members of all clans.

Nickname: The Line

Covenant: Every member of the Order of the Thorned Wreath is pledged to the Invictus with all her heart and soul. To abandon the covenant is to betray the Order. Those few who do leave the Invictus are invariably stripped of their Knighthoods and treated with absolute contempt.

There is rumored to be a single cell of former Knights of the Order who defected in the early nights of the 20th century to join with the Lancea Sanctum in the south of Spain. It is believed that they have established an underground Guild, seeking to translate Le Jumel's vision to the service of the Sanctified Church. Any such Kindred, if they do in fact exist, cannot reasonably refer to themselves as Thorned Wreath Knights unless they're looking for open war with their former compatriots.

Appearance: The Knights of the Order of the Thorned Wreath are the paragon guardians of the Invictus, and they generally dress themselves in a solemn, well-tailored style appropriate to that designation. A Knight is free to choose the mode of her appearance, though, and some Knights become quite flamboyant. It's rare to see Knights with extremely loose-fitting or heavily accessorized garments though, since they can't risk getting tangled up in a battle. For convenience, almost every Knight makes it a practice to conceal any weapons he might be carrying, so fitted overcoats, trick canes and specially rigged sleeves are not that unusual.

Every member of the Order wears the symbol of the thorned wreath somewhere on her person, placed so that she can display it if necessary. Some choose rings, bracelets, or pins, while others are tattooed with the mark. Over the last century, younger Knights have adopted a fashion of approximating the traditional wreath with a loop of barbed wire. The response from elder Knights has been mixed, but there has been no official move to put a stop to the trend.

While the thorned wreath is clearly the favored symbol of the Order, it isn't the only one. Some Knights wear a stylized ALJ badge or tattoo, referring to Artus Le Jumel. Individual units will often create their own symbols, usually referring to some kind of impassable barrier. Flames and hooked blades are common. Finally, Knights of French heritage often wear the *fleur-de-lis* as well.

One other feature that marks every member of the Order is a thorough dedication to polite conduct. The Knights never taunt or curse their enemies, and will show unflinching courtesy, even unto their own destruction. The Knights don't let etiquette hamper them on the battlefield — since less scrupulous enemies would take advantage of such an obvious weakness — but Knights are never rude. Nor will they wear any symbols, accoutrements or equipment that is likely to cause offense in their communities.

Haven: Since the Line usually operates in units of three, each unit tends to share a single haven. A central location is of paramount importance to these Knights, since they may be called out to a developing threat anywhere in the city. Many prefer understated homes, choosing a humble existence in line with the oaths of the Order.

Domiciles of the Knights do need to be somewhat spacious so that the cell can train together and practice their coordinated techniques. Gyms and warehouses make obvious sense, but theaters, garages and even shopping malls can provide the necessary environment for the cell's "drills."

In cities ruled by the Invictus, some of the Knights of the Order may actually make their homes in buildings adjoining the haven of a powerful vampire. There are a few Princes out there who work to make sure that at least three Knights are made welcome in their havens just to keep them close at hand.

Background: Knights of the Line look for two things when embracing new members: physical fitness and a self-sacrificing spirit. Soldiers, police and paramedics are obvious choices, but athletes and criminal gang members can be just as promising. Survivors of catastrophe are often singled out for Embrace as well, most especially those who show a will to assist others in need.

It is a great shame if a childe of a Knight fails to qualify for the Order (or, worse yet, chooses not to petition for membership). Because of the pressure to create successful candidates, some Knights will go so far as to subject their childer to the Vinculum so as to guarantee loyalty. This practice is neither encouraged nor discouraged. The Order is not troubled by tyranny, since most members firmly believe that freedom of choice leads to degradation.

There are a number of Knights who are so fanatical in their dedication to the Invictus that they will commission full genealogical studies of any candidate for potential Embrace. Not only will this study demonstrate whether the mortal is descended from a noble family (which is always a plus), but it also ensures that no connection whatsoever exists between the subject and a vampire with loyalty to another covenant. The detailed study is unnecessary in very nearly all cases, but every once in a while it does catch a link, however tenuous, that could be exploited.

In some domains, the Knights of the Order adhere to a very strict interpretation of Le Jumel's teachings and have translated his personal prejudices into their way of thought. In these domains, they will not Embrace a mortal of English descent or a non-Catholic, no matter how good a fit the mortal appears to be.

Disciplines: The preferred Disciplines of the Order vary depending on the member's clan. The Knights do tend to focus on physical disciplines, and *la guirlande épineuse* is a fighting style that employs both Celerity and Vigor in most schools. As a result, vampires of the Order who do

not possess these Disciplines naturally will often undertake to learn them in the martial Guild schooling.

Weakness: The weakness of the Order lies in the bonds of duty. No Knight of the Order of the Thorned Wreath may refuse a call for help from any Invictus vampire, no matter how insignificant or inconvenient it seems. No task of assistance may be abandoned until completion, either. If another call for help comes in while one call is currently being answered, the Knight must pass it on to the next available member of the Order. If there is none, he must “queue” it, responding as soon as his current mission is complete. It is not possible for a Thorned Wreath Knights to overrule any Invictus’ vampire’s request for help; the Knights must rely upon the officials of the Invictus to intervene when a call is inappropriate. There is no stricture on reporting abusive demands, but the Knight must still come to the aid of the vampire in question until that vampire withdraws the request or is satisfied. Thus is the nature of the Oath of the Thorned Wreath.

Because of this Oath, most Knights of the Order are kept very busy. They may have trouble maintaining Allies or Contacts that aren’t actively assisting them, and many Knights are forced to completely abandon friendly interaction with mortals. This can, of course, have a detrimental effect on the Knights’ Humanity.

Character Creation: Priority is assigned to Physical Attributes and Skills in all cases: Athletics, Brawl, Drive and Weaponry are most common. The Knights of the Thorned Wreath are trained to put themselves in harm’s way without hesitation, and they need to be able to survive the threats they face. There is no second priority: Mental and Social Attributes and Skills are equally appreciated, as either can prove useful in a crisis. A number of Physical Merits reflect the special training most Knights went through in life: speed and staying power can make all the difference in life-and-death situations, and all Knights are skilled in at least one specialized fighting style. It may be appropriate to sell off Humanity dots to reflect the demands of the character’s background: many Knights have had frequent brushes with death even if they are not violent themselves.

Organization: Almost every member of the Line works in a cell with two others — living, training and fighting night to night. One Knight is the “point,” operating as the commanding officer of the cell, and makes all reports to a locally based Meister (who will also head any martial Guild associated with the city’s Knights). These units are built for quick response and adaptable operations, and are thus composed of Kindred who are so familiar with one another that acting in concert is second nature to them. In some cities, the cell size is larger (up to five, in some cities) or smaller, but most cells keep to the standard because of its relative mobility and the somewhat unobtrusive presence a cell of three warriors presents.

Officially speaking, no single cell is supposed to be honored above the rest, but circumstances (and Status-minded Kindred) can push this rule aside in the event of outstanding conduct. Making claims to superior lineage, however — especially ones that trace back to the Order’s founder — is acceptable, but suggesting that superior lineage deserves special treatment is extremely discouraged.

Some cells are organized around a specialty service such as ferrying and protecting travelers, impersonating potential targets or organizing emergency haven security. These specialists work to perfect their field of focus, laying down a support structure through a network of Allies and equipment stores. These Knights may be called upon to perform the standard tasks of the Order at any time, though, and must respond when they are.

At least once every six months, the Knights of the Order participate in a private ceremony (usually held at Elysium) called the Declaration. Every member of the local Invictus is invited to watch as the Knights of the Order line up and perform a short synchronized drill, followed by a recitation of the Oath of the Thorned Wreath in unison. The purpose of this rite is twofold: to remind the Knights of their purpose, even in times of peace, and to make sure Invictus members know who the Knights are so the members can call upon them if necessary. While the ceremony is a sight to see, most Kindred who go to watch the Declaration do so more out of a sense of appreciation for the service of the Order than a need for entertainment. It’s not an insult to decline the invitation, but it doesn’t hurt to show a little gratitude.

In some cities, most notably those ruled by the Invictus, the Declaration is a pompous, long-winded affair replete with banners, a formation march and imperious speeches. Such is only the case when so ordered by the Prince, though.

The Declaration is very nearly a sacred practice to the Order. Even if the Knights are outlaws (as is not unusual when the Prince is not Invictus and believes she has reason to fear the Thorned Wreath), they find a way to meet and declare themselves to the Invictus who remain. A chapter in Greece was eliminated by mercenary Carthians during one furtive ceremony, but word spread soon after: each Knight met his end proudly, defiantly declaring himself to the covenant before taking up arms.

Once a year, the Knights gather in each city for a ritual exclusive to the Order known as “the Reading.” Each Knight stands at attention in full battle garb, her favored weapon laid at her feet, while the Meister of the local Order names each of the Knights who have fallen in the city’s history. The Knights stand in silent contemplation, remembering their lost comrades. The last name spoken is always Artus Le Jumel, who is paid the same honor as those the Knights have fought beside. If no Knight has fallen in the history of the city, Le Jumel is still named, and the Knights still stand to pay tribute.

When the Reading is done, the Meister ends the silence with a request that each Knight take up his arms and do right by his predecessors. One by one, the Knights lift their weapons from the floor, sheathe or holster them (or, in the case of unarmed warriors, take stance and then return to attention), leaving the Meister the last to do so. When all the Knights are armed and ready, the ceremony is complete and they are dismissed.

In Rouen, the Reading takes two full hours, as 47 names are read, with full title, and each is given a moment's pause for remembrance.

Any and all disputes between members of the Order are handled behind closed doors, away from the eyes of non-member Kindred. In the interest of presenting a unified and capable front, it is considered extremely improper to question or insult another Knight in public. If the Knights in conflict are in the same unit, they are expected to settle their differences in the privacy of their haven. If not, the units of both members must agree to meet and debate, negotiate an exchange of favors or fight until they reach a satisfactory conclusion. If the two units cannot or will not agree, the aggrieved party complains to the Meister, who arranges a meeting. If the Meister is forced to intervene, he is likely to call all

of the local Knights to the meeting and may employ them to ensure a workable outcome.

If a Knight of the Order undertakes a personal vendetta, she can expect her fellow Knights to aid her in the enterprise. If they do not, she can simply call upon them to perform their duties as Thorned Wreath Knights, assisting in the elimination of an enemy of the Invictus. It is noteworthy to mention that any vampire who declares himself an enemy of a member of the Order is, in the minds of the Knights, declaring himself an enemy of the covenant they so love.

Before battle, the Thorned Wreath Knights of some domains enact a purifying ritual meant to prepare the warrior for the possibility of Final Death. Some Knights bathe in a prescribed manner or tie mourning bands to their arms, while others simply meditate for a few moments, clearing their minds of obstruction or worry. Of course, it's not always possible to pause for ceremony before entering battle, but these Knights will take the chance whenever it arises.

Concepts: Battlefield medic, dedicated bodyguard, fanatic self-sacrificing lover, gentleman warrior, grizzled veteran of calamity, suicidal glory hound, sword-toting suit, tough-as-nails emergency rescue driver, vigilant brother-in-arms, willing decoy

"Not to worry, Sir. It looks like a little scrap's coming our way, but we've got it under control. Just stay away from the window there and let my partner take your hat and scarf. You were right to call on the Line. I promise you nothing, and I mean nothing, is going to get to you through us."

DIE NACHTEULEN

Blood magic, bizarre mystical practices and miracles may be the province of rival covenants, but that doesn't mean the Invictus shouldn't know anything about them. One enigmatic faction within the Invictus makes investigation of esoteric technique and the limits of its practice their mission. "Die Nachteulen," as they call themselves, are twisted, shadowy investigators, spies and consultants, delivering crucial support against magical foes in times of conflict.

It is believed that Die Nachteulen were originally a small, secret coterie of Invictus occult specialists, making their home in Hanover, Prussia, during the nights of the mid-17th century. Slowly, the teachings of the group were passed to a number of students who were sent forth with instructions to found their own, similar coterie wherever they chose to dwell. Communication was maintained between groups via a long series of enciphered letters, and a network across Europe was eventually formed. Eventually, many of the coterie broke away from the network, isolating themselves to

minimize potential breaches of security. Just before the complete rending of the messaging system, the mysterious leader of the faction is said to have sent out a final instruction: "Above all things, turn your attentions to the preservation of Invictus and the dilution of any and all supernatural opposition." The assumption is that the founder perished or entered torpor soon after, and since then, no voice has successfully risen to claim supremacy over Die Nachteulen.

Each unit of the faction continues now, as it has for hundreds of years, to follow the final instructions of the founder by application of the skills the unit members learn when joining: intelligence gathering, construction of carefully detailed hoaxes to confound the enemy and the manipulation of true occult secrets. In times of conflict, Die Nachteulen act as spoilers, working to turn the strengths of the outsider Kindred against them. Die Nachteulen labor constantly to trick enemies into expending resources fruitlessly in pursuit of forged artifacts, false phenomena and nonexistent texts as a means of

undermining the focus and power of the mystical forces arrayed against the Invictus.

Several of the great hoaxes in Kindred history have been attributed to Die Nachteulen over the centuries. One of the most notorious involved the apparent re-animation of a mummy and his retinue in an Egyptian domain early in the 20th century. The members of the Ordo Dracul in the domain, who were in the habit of boldly displaying their growing power at the time, were drawn to the phenomenon. So well constructed were the sightings that the Dragons hardly suspected the trap that waited: within a matter of months, the Ordo Dracul lost several key members to Final Death in the twisted corridors of a counterfeit tomb in pursuit of an illusion, while the Invictus managed to push them out of significant territories and strengthen its own foothold in the domain. Only after the activities of the “mummy” came to a sudden, inexplicable end did the remaining members of the Ordo Dracul understand what had befallen them. Whispers arose thereafter: that Die Nachteulen had arranged the affair and that the Invictus was not to be challenged in the domain.

Spirits, hauntings and mystic abnormalities to attract the Ordo Dracul. Artifacts, texts and miraculous manifestations to draw the Lancea Sanctum. And strange energies, blood-hungry glens and rumblings of ancient power to pull the Circle of the Crone. All can be faked. All can be arranged to best effect for the covenant in question, while genuinely powerful truths are located and hidden (or destroyed) to prevent the empowerment of the enemy. Therein lays the expertise of Die Nachteulen, as has been demonstrated time and again.

Rumors that certain cells are almost completely without scruple or shame do seem to be upheld by unverified reports in several domains. One particular Heirophant of the Circle of the Crone in China has accused Die Nachteulen of carrying out a program of location and assassination of mortals with psychic talent. Die Nachteulen's sole purpose, she claims, is to prevent the Circle from making contact with these people and determining whether their talents are gifts of the gods, meant to aid in the delivery of Heavenly insight. Die Nachteulen have never answered these claims. In fact, members of the faction have never officially acknowledged that they even dwell in the domain in question.

One of the striking features of Die Nachteulen is the faction's members' practice of masking: no member of the faction may reveal any part of the top half of his head to outsiders when appearing “without disguise.” Some members prepare elaborately detailed visors, while other members tie simple cloth blindfolds and bandannas. These same Kindred may walk about unmasked in ordinary dealings, but as soon as a message from Die Nachteulen is to be delivered, they must cover themselves. The tradition is, in most cases, nothing but misdirection, sparking fearful rumors of mutilation, unnatural senses

and bizarre ritual telepathy. In truth, it's done to feed those rumors and to help differentiate Die Nachteulen from ordinary spies.

Die Nachteulen make use of complicated coded gestures, intentionally accented languages and nonsense words or phrases to communicate with one another, often employing three or four different identification techniques in a single city. Members are, as a rule, extremely paranoid. And well they should be — infiltration is their hallmark, but they are never so proud as to assume the enemy cannot strike back.

The education of Die Nachteulen is exhaustive, carried out under conditions of intense secrecy. Almost every member of the faction is encouraged to construct a false front concurrent with her actual schooling. Often, the recruits will enroll in ordinary Guilds, dedicating themselves to the pursuit of legitimate professions while fitting in the studies of Die Nachteulen on the side. Recruits are required to familiarize themselves with the various types of Kindred magic, general supernatural phenomena and the identities and personalities of local outsider vampires. The recruits must also learn at least one of the accented languages of the faction and are well advised to learn three or four.

Most of Die Nachteulen are, as a matter of policy, contemptuous of magical practice. They do understand, however, that mystery empowers belief and, thus, are not above using it to their advantage. Many surround themselves with the trappings of believers — astrological charts, numerological texts and the like are common accessories — but employ them in a strictly mundane fashion.

Because of the longtime isolation of the cells, many have grown to interpret the policies of the founder in widely different terms. One particular cell in the Middle East has reversed upon itself, actually encouraging the practice of outsider magic, so long as it serves the ends of the Invictus. One in Australia, on the other hand, has gone to the opposite extreme: actively seeking to eliminate all foreign magics in their home domain as they wage unrelenting war on Kindred of the Lancea Sanctum and the Circle of the Crone.

One thing is true of all cells: they know that there will be no reunification of the faction. Even if the founder were to arise again and make himself known, it would be nearly impossible to re-establish communications with the dispersed units of Die Nachteulen — and convincing those units of the veracity of such a claim would be absolutely unfeasible. The nights of consultation between domains are long past for Die Nachteulen, who are now far more widespread than in the decades of their inception. But then again, the agents have no need to wish for the founder's return. They are more adaptable in small units, more effectively hidden and unlikely to receive orders that require undue sacrifice of territory.

Die Nachteulen are not above manipulating the politics and leaders of the Invictus to ensure their own safety and the protection of the covenant. The faction has the benefit of an advanced understanding of the capabilities of the enemy, after all, and is often better informed than the ostensible leaders. Most faction members restrict their influence to consultation with Princes and Primogen, but some members actively engage in conspiracy to ensure that the leadership is either composed of members of the faction or is simply in thrall to them. As a result, some Princes have actually outlawed Die Nachteulen, preferring to deal with outsider covenants on even ground instead of relying on the scheming “little birds.” One who does so had best be careful, though; he may suddenly find the powerful Kindred in the local Invictus unexpectedly placing support in favor of the faction.

OTHER SCHOLASTIC SOCIETIES

Die Nachteulen is neither the most widespread or most well-known scholastic society among the Invictus. Just as universities, think tanks and institutions of art and learning have been used, assimilated and secretly directed by governments forever, so too have Kindred academic coteries been adopted by the Invictus. In some cases, these are little more than small clubs or casual collections of voluntary tutors and students. In other cases, they are vocational organizations which Society vampires are compelled to take part in for their own growth and betterment (typically so that the student may serve a better use to the local covenant).

It's not wise to assume that most academic and investigative societies associated with the Invictus are bodies used to further its politics or internecine intrigues. Neither is it safe to assume that individual Kindred within all such scholastic groups aren't there to further their own schemes. Some Society vampires seek to make themselves smarter, more educated and more capable of contributing to the culture and society of the domain. Certainly plenty of other Kindred participate in academic circles only enough to make themselves *seem* smarter and more capable.

Because Die Nachteulen take an aggressive, underhanded approach to dealing with outsider Kindred, faction members are reviled by the outsider covenants. Most Invictus Kindred will never openly admit to the presence of Die Nachteulen in a city, as doing so may invoke the wrath of outsiders (who tend, correctly or not, to blame personal failures on the activities of Die Nachteulen when the outsiders know the faction is around). Die Nachteulen are not usually bothered by their reputation. They are not a diplomatic organization, and they see no need to pretend otherwise. Of course, in ideal circumstances, nobody can say for sure whether or not Die Nachteulen actually dwell in a domain until a member chooses to identify himself.

Until then, the outsiders are free to strike out against innocent (or apparently innocent) Kindred as much as the outsiders like — it only makes them look worse.

Despite the unpopularity, Die Nachteulen is growing steadily. There have been more recruits in the last 50 years than in each century previous, and many recruits are moving into new domains and founding chapters of their own. Areas of rapid recent expansion include Russia, West Africa and the Canadian Maritime provinces. Since there is no real communication between chapters, it is difficult to explain the relative jump in membership, except to suggest that increased demand is necessitating an increase in spies.

Clans: More than half are Nosferatu, but there are no restrictions.

Nickname: Among those who are willing to speak of them, Die Nachteulen are known by several euphemistic terms. Most commonly, they are called “little birds” or “the whispers.”

Covenant: All of Die Nachteulen are loyal Invictus Kindred, but a not insignificant number of them have ostensibly belonged to another covenant at one time or another. Some still do, risking their unives every night to learn more about the outsiders and their secret powers. Those who once counted themselves among the Circle of the Crone, Lancea Sanctum or Ordo Dracul bring the experience of their former instruction with them, using it to better inform the Invictus with regards to occult practices. They never teach the actual practice of magics to their Invictus brethren, though. To do so would be to tempt the faction away from its directive.

It must be said, however, that some cells operate in such secrecy and deep cover that they may as well be considered members of another covenant. If they spend decades or even centuries serving the opposition to establish a trustworthy front, one must accept that they are, for all intents and purposes, no longer members of the Invictus. They will return to the fold one night — no doubt — but for now they are outsiders.

Indeed, although many would rather not consider the possibility, it may be that some of the members have lost their way completely, assuming their false identities and making them true. If this is the case, it would be very difficult indeed to identify a rogue cell until it actually strikes against the Invictus.

Appearance: Secrecy and surprise are the cloak and dagger of Die Nachteulen, so they tend to dress and carry themselves in the manner that is most likely to provide camouflage. They work to blend in with their fellow Kindred, often doing their best to appear inferior or addle-headed in public. A lame, muddled or otherwise disabled vampire may seem incongruous among the general population, but it is surprising how many Kindred retain the mortal tendency to overlook such “unfortunate” souls.



In private consultation, “sans disguise,” they prefer to wear dark clothing and always employ some kind of covering on the eyes and top of the head. Low hoods, large sunglasses, even gauze blindfolds and baseball caps are worn, often to disconcerting effect. Rumors that Die Nachteulen bear bizarre ocular scars are popular as a result, and the faction does what it can to promote these fearful stories. Some members go so far as to actually bear self-inflicted scars (or even remove their own eyes) in preparation for “accidental” unmaskings.

Haven: Where do you dwell when you know the truth about the limits of magic? Nowhere special, on the face of it – but Die Nachteulen work to combat any potential mystic assault by apparently amateur or ordinary means that can prove to be surprisingly effective. Their havens are usually cluttered with piles of useless trinkets (meant to distract observers), positioned on or near sites of strong electro-magnetic activity (causing discomfort to psychics) and shored up with materials that help confound concentration. The domiciles of Die Nachteulen are unwelcoming, to say the least: hydro-electric pumping stations, handmade shacks in subway tunnels and junkpiles in rented storage facilities could all provide suitable homes, so long as everything is carefully arranged to make the protective qualities appear at least partly unintentional.

Of course, an assumed identity can make it impossible to live in such a well-defended haven. Members of the faction pretending to be dilettantes or clean-freaks

have to choose homes that seem appropriate to their facades, so as to allay the suspicions of observers. Faction members who work undercover from within the other covenants may even arrange to share havens with their enemies so as to escape notice.

Background: The selection of childer for the “little birds” often goes to reinforcing the apparent identities of the agents rather than empowering the faction directly. A member pretending to be a thoughtless romantic will Embrace a beautiful lover even if he proves unlikely to become a proper member of the faction. Die Nachteulen all hope that their progeny will prove astute enough to learn their secret ways one night, but faction members trust that any benefit done to the faction, however small, is service enough.

Some childer, strangely enough, are Embraced just because Die Nachteulen have reason to believe that the mortals will naturally gravitate towards the enemies of the faction once they are Kindred. Any mortal chosen for this reason is subjected to a careful campaign of misinformation all through his training to ensure that he is incapable of providing the enemy with any useful knowledge. He will, however, provide a link of blood sympathy to the enemy, creating an option of access for his sire. The practice of Embracing a childer for this reason alone can prove risky, but when it pays off it is rarely discovered until the plans of the sire are well underway.

Disciplines: Die Nachteulen appreciate schooling and application of all “natural” Disciplines (i.e., all except

for Theban Sorcery, Crúac and the Coils of the Dragon), but none is more valuable to the faction than Obfuscate. Those members who do not already possess Obfuscate when they join Die Nachteulen are encouraged to learn it sooner or later.

While Auspex is valued, it is not as popular among members of the faction as one might assume. Its use is too easily detected by outsiders with the Discipline, most especially at the higher levels of the power. All it takes to reveal a spy is to notice her looking where she shouldn't. For this reason, those members of the faction who possess Auspex are warned to be careful with its use and avoid directing it at the targets of a mission, if possible.

Weakness: Due to the sensitive nature of all faction messages and the constant danger of discovery, members of Die Nachteulen are suspicious characters. They are not likely to take anything anyone says on faith, and may require that an individual communicating with them prove his trustworthiness again and again (possibly even every time the two meet). Because of this, the communications of Die Nachteulen tend to be slower than normal. They are delivered quickly enough, but must then be verified before one of the "little birds" is willing to take the contents at face value. Each member of the faction has a ritual of verification (exchange of code phrases, gestures or complicated methods of delivery) that must be satisfied before he will receive any official message from his organization. This habitual screening can, of course, prove damaging in time-sensitive situations, but the powerful security it helps to maintain is considered well worth the price.

Character Creation: Mental Attributes and Skills are most appreciated, with attention best paid to Academics, Investigation and Occult. Priority for the rest of the character's Attributes and Skills should be applied based on the preferred method for information gathering: skullduggery suggests a more Physical approach, while espionage would lead to Social development. Mental Merits often benefit maintaining an appearance of ignorance while the character is anything but. Someone with an Eidetic Memory or Encyclopedic Knowledge need not keep incriminating records of her discoveries close at hand, for example, and a healthy Danger Sense never hurts when delving into the fiercely protected secrets of rival covenants. Members of Die Nachteulen must also speak and write at least one obscure (or completely artificial) language for the purpose of coded communication.

Organization: In each city, Die Nachteulen is organized into a strict linear hierarchy, placed in order of the date of each member's acceptance into the faction. The active member who has been with the group for the longest is known as the "Solitary," and presides over all meetings and rituals, examines and approves new members and holds the authority to issue orders on matters that affect the faction. All disputes within Die Nachteulen are settled by judgment of the Solitary, who

cannot be questioned. There is no recourse within the faction beyond the Solitary. Disobedience meets with swift punishment.

Die Nachteulen meet at least twice a year in caucus to discuss the goings-on in their home city, co-ordination of plans and concerns for the future. These meetings are held irregularly, and almost never in the same place twice. Predictability is the death of covert operation, and is avoided at all costs. Meetings are often called off as close to the last moment as possible, and multiple switching of times, locations and the requested manner of approach is common.

The faction is in the habit of choosing its new members, and rarely accepts one who approaches them. (Although any vampire who can accurately identify the members and is brave enough to demonstrate that fact may make a promising candidate.) If a member of the faction wishes to present a vampire as a candidate for membership, she must notify the Solitary, who will then prepare an anonymous interview and/or test. If the prospective member satisfies the Solitary, he will be invited to caucus and there be named a "full member." However, the initiation is only beginning. For a full year, the new recruit is fed disinformation and subjected to a number of pseudo-magical rituals, constructed to convince the credulous that the faction is, in fact, an extremely superstitious group. The recruit is observed carefully by agents of Die Nachteulen while being constantly tested to assess his loyalty, intelligence and gullibility. If, at the end of the year of "full membership," the candidate has proven steadfast and resistant to misdirection, all tricks are revealed to him and he is truly accepted.

Strangely, this mode of recruitment has backfired on more than one occasion. A couple of unsuitable recruits, convinced that they had learned the true path of Die Nachteulen before the end of the year, rushed off to found their own chapters, operating them as mystical branch societies. The existence of these deluded chapters is alternately an embarrassing accident or a beneficial cover for legitimate operations, depending on whom you ask.

Once a year, on a night of the new moon, the Solitary of a chapter organizes a ritual known as "the Chord." Once the local members of the faction are all gathered into a well-insulated room, they stand in a circle at arm's length from one another as the Solitary extinguishes all light, beginning the recitation of a monotonous, rhythmic script designed to lull the listeners into a trance state. Once the trance takes hold, the Solitary allows her voice to fade to silence, leaving the members of the faction without sight or sound to interrupt their meditations. Die Nachteulen stand in silence for an hour without speaking a word or moving an inch. As they do, a sensation of dread begins to grow (whether or not this sensation is artificial, fueled by the Discipline of Nightmare, is a matter of personal belief), but the vampires must remain still, undaunted, for as long as they can. Eventually, the sensation becomes

intolerable to at least one member, and he throws out his arm, placing it on the shoulder of the closest member. The others all do likewise in turn, laying hands on their neighbors' shoulders as a silent comfort. When all have done so, the Solitary lights the room once more and Die Nachteulen all exchange looks, acknowledging that they were all there together in the dark, and that all lent a hand to the next when fear overtook just one member. Afterwards, they withdraw in silence.

Much of the symbolism of Die Nachteulen focuses on operating in darkness, representing the reliance on personal strength and intelligence in the face of superstition and myth. Hence, the blindfolds and the ritual immersion of the Chord. Some chapters extend the symbolism to their members, demanding that they operate blind for a portion of their nights or that they live without artificial light.

In accord with the symbolism of the faction and its tendency to use cryptic language, the magics of outside covenants are almost always referred to in oblique terms: *shadows*, *shadow play*, *dark arts*, *the stain* and *dusk arts* are just a few of the euphemisms applied in faction ritual

and discussion. Likewise, the activities of the faction will often be encoded: *light*, *awakening*, *illumination*, *pure arts* and *cleansing*, for example.

When a vampire of Die Nachteulen travels to a new domain and establishes herself as the Solitary, she must perform a private version of the Chord herself. Of course, there is no one else to reach out to when she finds the darkness closing in, and so she must endure on her own, eventually ending the ritual by returning light to the chamber and vowing to create a chapter of the faction so that no Invictus Kindred need face the terror of ignorance alone, as she has.

All meetings of Die Nachteulen are guarded so as to prevent accidental interruption (or worse, willful intrusion). The guards are most often ghoulish servants, and will fight to the death, if necessary, to prevent outsiders from gaining access.

Concepts: Blind oracle, credulous new recruit, deep-cover faux moron, esoteric cryptographer, expert hoaxer, ex-Sanctified heretic, mutilated spy, professional debunker, scandalously experimental dilettante, skeptical veteran vampire, staunch agnostic

"I care not for the claims of that Sanctified Bishop. Your nightmares are perfectly natural and have nothing to do with his so-called miracles. I've watched him closely as he performs them. The man has a piddling magical talent and is not capable of influencing you or any of us this way. If you so desire it, I can make this fact as clear to him as it is to me."

GHOUL FAMILIES

The relationships between ghouls and vampires can be simple or complex. Some ghouls live alongside their regnants for a few short passionate or brutish weeks. Other ghouls follow their regnants through the centuries. It's not unheard of for whole families of ghouls to become linked to a vampire or a bloodline. Likewise, some ghoulish families are as loyal to their master's covenants as any Kindred of Quality. Thus, some ghoulish families have become important parts of Society over the centuries.

All of the basic information on ghouls that any **Vampire** chronicle needs can be found in **Vampire: The Requiem** (see p. 166). The **Ghouls** supplement for **Vampire** dug deeper into the existence of these strange creatures and introduced the idea of ghoulish families. A ghoulish family is similar to a vampire bloodline in that the family represents a specific, specialized lineage of ghouls whose history with the Kindred has left the ghouls forever altered. Although ghoulish families can become as complex and distinctive as any Kindred bloodline, the following ghoulish families can be used in any **Vampire** chronicle without the benefit of **Ghouls**. Storytellers and

players need to be familiar with the basic mechanics of ghoulish families, however.

Family History

A ghoulish family can begin only in the very rare event that a mortal woman made into a ghoulish when she is pregnant actually manages to carry her child to term. If her child is then born a thrall, a ghoulish family has begun.

Unlike traditional ghouls, a thrall born of a ghoulish family can only truly escape thralldom through death. Persons born into a ghoulish family are predisposed to servility at the hands of vampires. Ghouls born of a thrall family do not have the same relationship with the blood as independent ghouls, either. If a familial thrall fails to receive the Vitae necessary to sustain his thralldom, he simply reverts to his regular state. Without Vitae, individuals born into a ghoulish family find that their bodies age roughly two years for every three years they live — the years of thralldom never come rushing back to claim a familial ghoulish's body. Their minds, on the other hand, age at the same rate as a normal mortal's, Vitae or not.

Familial ghouls almost never manage to fit into human society. Most ghoul families are bizarre, even frightening, in the eyes of most mortals. In part, this is because of the strange Curse born in their flesh and blood — all ghoul families have a unique strength and weakness. This dysfunction with mortal society also comes from the unfortunate truth of ghoul breeding.

For a ghoul family to persevere is very difficult; familial ghouls rarely manage to procreate with persons who aren't of a thrall lineage. Thus, many ghoul families turn to the

only sources of thrall genes they know: their kin. Both of the following ghoul families have been through dark eras of inbreeding over the years, to ensure that their lineages endure. When possible, vampires among the Invictus have seen to it that new genes and blood are brought into the mix. It's been enough to keep the ghoul families in existence, but both have had their brushes with extinction. The so-called Working Dogs, especially, have been reduced to a handful of members at least twice in the last thousand years. Even now, they are quite rare.

HOSTEWICKS

The first of the Hostewick ghouls were born in the 17th century, but they weren't called Hostewicks back then. The first Hostewicks were servants of a powerful English Kindred of Quality — some say the Prince of York — even in life. A handful of brothers and sisters from that pre-Hostewick line were given Vitae and invited to serve in the great house of that vampire and his choice allies in the First Estate in exchange for a comfortable life that would never end. Four of those servile siblings agreed and took their first sip of Vitae.

Little did they know that one of the servant girls was with child. Little did their master expect that she would actually give birth to the child — but she did. That child, a daughter, was the first of the true Hostewick family — the family that was invented when an Invictus Meister claimed the child for his own and set out to cultivate the family line. Within a few decades, Hostewick-born servants were at work in Invictus great houses throughout the British Isles. Within a century, the Hostewicks had a reputation throughout the local Invictus as crack servants with an admirable gift for discretion.

At first, the quiet fame of the Hostewicks inspired their Invictus masters to keep their servants isolated and few. Hostewick servants were forbidden to fraternize with any but their own kin, and only then when they instructed to by their lords. The plan among their Invictus masters was to keep the Hostewicks to a prestigiously small number and protect them against molestation over the centuries. It worked, too, for almost 200 years. From 1709 to 1900 there were fewer than 13 Hostewicks in existence at any one time. Just five Hostewick children were born during that 191-year period, each more than 20 years apart and each in the care of a different Society great house. The Hostewicks lived a quiet, sheltered life of book-learning and servitude and, so far as they remember, they were quite happy.

During the First World War, however, almost half of the Hostewicks were either killed or mysteriously “lost” from the remote country manor houses they tended to for their masters. (Some Kindred speculate that, while the Hostewick masters were hiding in the countryside from the worst warfare they had ever imagined, some of

the employers devoured their servants to stave off torpor.) The reputation of the Hostewicks remained sterling, but there were hardly any left to admire firsthand.

Since then, the Hostewicks have re-populated themselves and broken up into numerous smaller families throughout Europe, India and the United States. Whenever possible, Hostewicks reside in pairs (whether that means siblings, spouses, simple friends or any combination thereof) within the same Kindred haven. Even with the comparatively large numbers of Hostewicks tonight, they are rare and precious servants.

Nickname: Valets (properly pronounced in the English fashion)

Clans: The first ghouls associated with the Hostewicks — those first four blooded siblings — served a Ventrue regnant in the 1600s. For many years the Hostewicks served only that Ventrue and his relatives through Vitae, but eventually a rare Hostewick child was shared with other Kindred of other clans. Tonight, the Hostewick family has a great deal of experience with Kindred of every stripe. Although it's often not considered proper for the Hostewicks to do so, some categorize the behavior of vampires by their clan (e.g., “You know how a Daeva can be near the morning hour” or “All the Haunts behave that way, in my experience.”) This is not considered unreasonable by the strictly formal Hostewicks, however — they simply see their masters' clans as a kind of family, and the Hostewicks assume that most families are as like-minded as theirs.

Covenants: The Hostewick line has always served the vampires of the First Estate and always will. Though even the existence of Hostewick ghouls is unknown to most Kindred, those who know of the Valets think of them as members of the Invictus. Historically, a few Hostewicks have been “loaned out” to allied Kindred of the Sanctified cloth, but these gestures of generosity are exceptions to the rule. A Valet outside of an Invictus household thinks of himself as being “away,” and longs to return home to work.

Appearance: Most Hostewick ghouls have a distinctly British quality to their appearance: pale, narrow and subtly

featured. Valets are all slender-boned, with arms and legs like twigs tied together; when a Hostewick woman gets pregnant, her swollen belly seems almost grotesquely out of place on her waifish body. All Hostewicks have dark hair, and most have gray or green eyes. The small number of Hostewick generations over the years has yielded very little variation in their features as yet.

The Hostewicks dressed like all servants of their time up until the Edwardian era, when the eldest members developed an appreciation for modern servants' uniforms. To this night, Hostewicks favor high-class, elaborate uniforms from yesteryears, especially the beginning of the 20th century. In domains and under circumstances when such formality is startlingly out of place — as is the case with many American domains — Valets tend toward outdated uniforms of a less severe vintage, such as the 1960s or 1970s.

Havens: Very little space is required to keep a Hostewick happy. Most keep small rooms, sometimes little more than cells, in the cellars and attics of large havens. Hostewicks who serve poorer or more modest Kindred of Quality might reside above a garage or in a laundry room. As might be expected, a Hostewick keeps a tidy room, so space is seldom an issue.

Hostewicks cannot abide sleeping far from their charges, however. It's the rare Valet who sleeps under a different roof or on a different lot than his Invictus master.

To this day, Valets think of England as home, even if they were born in another country and have never visited the island. Somewhere in the English countryside is a great house once — or still — owned by an Invictus of note that was promised to the Hostewicks as a gift for retirees. Yet, none of the few Hostewicks who have retired since that promise was made in 1921 have ever been allowed out of the secret manor to report its location or condition.

Valets aren't stupid. They suspect there is no manor house. Perhaps there never was. What's clear is that the Hostewicks should keep working, rather than ruin their simple, comfortable lives in the shadows of wealth and power.

Strengths: All Hostewicks enjoy an uncanny perceptiveness and knack for understanding the behavior of humans and vampires alike that comes from many years of

watching others' lives. Whenever a Valet makes a Perception roll to observe, spy on or scrutinize a human, ghoul or vampire, she gains the benefits of the 9-again rule (see p. 134 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). This rule does not come into play observing animals, objects or any other subjects.

All Valets have two automatic dots in Composure and no automatic dots in Presence as new characters. A Valet pays only four times the target dots in experience points when raising his Composure Attribute. In contrast, it costs a Valet six times the target dots in experience points to purchase a new dot of Presence.

Weaknesses: All Hostewicks, since the first Valet daughter born all those years ago, have weak and deformed vocal chords. A Hostewick cannot speak any words at all during a scene without spending a Willpower point to do so. Even then, the Valet's broken, shallow voice is an unsettling thing to hear.

Organization: Within an Invictus house, Hostewicks organize according to the duties to be fulfilled. Usually, the practice and experience of a servant as prized as a Hostewick earns the Valet a choice position in the downstairs hierarchy of the home. Whether that means a Hostewick is the butler or cook or governess or something else depends on the job the Valet most desires — and the job the master assigns.

Modern nights see fewer and fewer estates in the hands of Kindred of Quality, for such houses are much less common among the kine as well, and the Invictus does not want to attract attention to itself among those simple folk. As a result, there are fewer servants — mortal or ghoul — in the knowing or unknowing employ of Invictus vampires than, perhaps, ever before. The Hostewicks, of course, have no fear of being let go; no servant can match a Valet for discretion, loyalty and expertise. Thus, tonight, many Hostewicks work alone, sometimes even shared by multiple masters. The Hostewicks may not have the downstairs and the staffs they have been proud of for so long, but at least they have their work.

In the eyes of many Society vampires, Hostewicks organize within the covenant in the same ways as any other ghouls, in some variation of the regnant-thrall relationship. In some cases, this is true, but with virtually



all Hostewick servants, the appearance of a normal relationship is like the servant's wardrobe: designed to impress or appease guests. Hostewicks, very often, fulfill the role of a regnant's servant in addition to other, less common tasks.

Many Hostewicks serve their regnants as spies, messengers, protectors, informants, counselors or even lovers. Behind closed doors, a Hostewick enjoys the benefits her ancestors became ghouls for: a taste of finery, a bit of the wealthy life, a shred of inside gossip and a few private moments with her cherished master. Valets, as right-thinking and proper folk, seldom strike up outright affairs with their lords — such things have certainly happened, but the Hostewicks look down on

such behavior — but they do often have much closer relationships than they let on. A Hostewick may give her master a shoulder to cry on or an ear to bend or a vein to sip from, but that is the business of the Valet and her lord and no one else. Hostewicks do not, typically, hide such relationships because they are ashamed of them; these relationships stay hidden because they are the most precious part of the Valets' existence. Such relationships are private treasures, like heirlooms kept locked away in the bedroom, not crass and gaudy jewelry to put on the benefit of the glitterati.

Concepts: Suspicious valet, loyal footman, scheming servant, well-hidden spy, doting toady, traitorous spy on the inside

"Very good, sir."

BULLS

The Bull family is a flesh-and-blood manifestation of the rights the Invictus has awarded itself over ghouls and kine. The Bulls are the property of a handful of Invictus amateur breeders fascinated with the influence they can exert over mortal blood in just a few centuries. Though all Bulls are so-called working dogs, they are as much a hobby for armchair Society biologists and naturalists. Many Bulls are born and raised, used and sent to their deaths with words of their importance and value to their masters, but the truth is that most Bulls are an academic diversion, an experiment for self-important monsters tinkering with breeder texts and human lives.

The origin of the Bull "family" — or breed, in Society terms — begins with an ancestral ghoul family called the Bartons. The Bartons were a mortal family turned thrall in the 1700s who served several landed and titled Invictus members in France, Belgium and Germany. The Bartons were a rather small and unremarkable ghoul line.

In the 19th century, a coterie of Society quasi-intellectuals operating in Paris got the idea to create a "breed of kine to serve us as a hunting hound serves them." Unfortunately for the poor Bartons, these Invictus members were their regnants and masters. From 1820 to 1890, these Society thinkers went about mating pairs of the Bartons, and some outside kine, to produce a desired collection of conformation traits, based mostly on size and endurance.

The early nights did not go well. The Bartons were not only being inbred at an alarming and dangerous rate, producing a sickening number of deformed and stillborn children, but the already small Barton line was dying out in the process, due to communicable illnesses and suicides brought on by awful "kenneling" conditions. To

make matters worse, their breeders revised the list of desired traits time and again, so that any specimen might manifest traits that had been desirable to the fickle eyes of the breeders a few years ago but were not anymore.

Over time, many of the Kindred breeders became bored with their lack of progress and abandoned the work. A handful kept up their efforts, however, through the 1890s and into the 20th century. Though no Bulls survive from that era, it seems that one or two were sent or brought to the Americas, either with a migrating regnant or as gifts to distant and unknown lords as "show ghouls." In those nights, however, the breed was tough but not at all uniform. The Barton family essentially died out in those nights, scattered and deformed out of any resemblance to itself.

The name "Bull" was given not to a family itself, but to any ghoul of the period that was bred for brawling or sport as a part of this gruesome pastime. In time, however, it seems that multiple, independent fads of "fight breeding" took new root among Kindred in cities in New England and the American South as well as Mexico and South America. These scattered fads led to a variety of rare, local breeds of Bulls, most in some way descended from the original Bartons. The key to successfully manifesting conformation points lay in the mating of Barton-descended ghouls with thralls from other families and, sometimes, a dose of mortal blood or mystically empowered Vitae.

Although most Bull-breeders of those nights kept stud-books or registries of the pairings they worked with, a good deal of the information in those books has proven to be erroneous, misleading or confused by modern readers. A great many of the domains in which Bull-breeders once

resided have since given up the fad. Thus, the breed characteristics of all the cousin families of Bulls have somewhat normalized as dominant characteristics go untampered with in new generations.

Bull populations have dwindled dramatically since the 1950s due to their violent and perilous work as guards and participants in pit fights. In many of the domains where the Bulls were once a common sight in Kindred-controlled back rooms and underground fighting clubs, the Bulls have become nothing but fondly recalled tales or bizarre freaks in faded photographs. Most modern Kindred have probably never heard of the Bull families; few have ever seen a Bull in action.

BULL-BLOODING

Sometime early in the 20th century, the practice of pitting Bulls against one another in cage matches was stuck with the name "Bull-blooding," and the name has never really been shaken. At the height of some domains' Bull-blooding crazes, a single night might see a half-dozen matches between two, three or four Bulls. Some matches were fought to the death, some to submission or "defeat" (a term with many, often intentionally vague and crooked definitions). It was not uncommon for Kindred to wager breeding rights or even feeding rights in some domains.

Surely, in a few domains, Bull-blooding still goes on. Pairs of unarmed Strongbacks can sometimes be found fighting for tiny audiences in dry swimming pools or empty parking lots. Many more Bull-bloodings go on in large men's rooms, seedy bathhouses and low-rent health clubs, where blood can be hosed away. Several Bull corpses, beaten into heaps of broken bone and meat, turned up in empty cargo containers from Philadelphia to Baltimore during the summer of 1987. Bull corpses are still sometimes found in spent quarries and abandoned industrial sites throughout the Americas.

Nickname: Working Dogs, Heavyweights or Strongbacks. Also, rarely, Bartons.

Clans: The first genuine Working Dogs were the result of careless, misinformed experimentations by a coterie of Daeva and Ventrue vampires fascinated by what was, at the time, the new theory of evolution. It was the clash of the Daeva fascination with mortals and the Ventrue need to sculpt and control those beneath them that defined the existence of the ghouls from this family. The facts of the family's history show this to be true, but the nature of the Working Dogs doesn't point so obviously to Vitae and Succubi and Lords. Bulls inherited supernatural capacities for strength and fortitude from their vampiric breeders, but seemingly little else. Bulls are blunt brutes and weak-minded followers, for the most part — the vampires who created them may be glad to have them, but Kindred certainly cannot truly respect them.

Since those early nights, Strongbacks have come to serve Kindred of every clan. The relationship a Bull has with a regnant has less to do with common aspects of the blood and more to do with the needs of the vampire.

Covenants: Working Dogs originated with Kindred of the Invictus, and tonight it seems more Kindred of Quality keep Bulls than vampires from any other covenant, but this was not always the case. Bull-breeding as a hobby — and Bull-blooding as a sport — spread more by individual interest than covenant custom or tradition. At one time, in some domains, Bulls were kept by a Kindred of every covenant and the Unbound. The trend of Bull-blooding popped up among American Carthians all along the Mississippi River in the 1920s, for example, who seemingly all independently learned of the practice from a handful of Bull-breeding nomads.



Appearance: Naturally, the isolation of Kindred breeders all over the world means that a Bull in one domain may bear little physical resemblance to a Bull of another generation — and may have little in common genetically with distant Bulls — but a few common characteristics can be found in virtually all Bulls, due in part to the splintered families' common ancestries and due to a somewhat regular list of desired conformation points in later years. Generations of breeding experiments and tampering with the Working Dog blood has given these ghouls a look not unlike that of a pit bull: no necks, tiny slit-like eyes, smooth faces with squarish and sturdy snouts, tiny ears and wide, flat mouths. Most Bulls are virtually hairless, with large hands and squat legs. The original breeding stock — the Bartons — were Caucasian, but years of genetic and mystic tampering have left many, if not most, Bulls with a strangely alien look that doesn't quite fit any single ethnicity and doesn't sit well with most kine. It's not uncommon for a Strongback to be pinkly pale or almost red, like the color of a welt.

Havens: Though modern Bulls may even keep their own apartments and homes in some backwater domains, Heavyweights have historically been penned like dogs, where they cannot be tampered with by rivals and cannot participate in unwanted couplings. Public awareness of simple genetics and human medicine also makes it harder for Bulls to move around in public, particularly in groups. Where once a Bull might have been seen as a freakish carnie or grotesque foreigner by ignorant locals, tonight they're more likely photographed, commented on in the media and pursued by medical students and unwanted weirdophiles. As a result, most Bulls are kept "at home," in havens and private pens where they can't be stumbled upon by outsiders.

Strengths: Working Dogs are abnormally large. All Bulls gain the Giant Merit for free. In addition, a Bull with two or more dots in Strength automatically gains the Strong Back Merit for free (See pp. 112–113 in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*). The specialized breeding that has gone into creating this ghoul family was

designed to make Bulls difficult to fight by hand; all called shots intended to target a Bull's heart, neck, eyes, mouth or ears suffer an additional –2 penalty, to a maximum penalty of –5. Physical Attributes are always primary for a Working Dog, while Mental Attributes are always tertiary. Bulls are unnaturally effective fighters, as well; they gain a free Specialty in the Brawl Skill, typically stemming from their raw, brute power.

Finally, a Bull may select either Resilience or Vigor as his initial Discipline, regardless of what clan made him.

Weaknesses: The human body wasn't intended to support the girth of a Bull. All Bulls over 18 years of age develop problems in their hips, knees and ankles, stemming from their weight. All adult Bulls, therefore, effectively suffer the Lamé Flaw (see p. 219 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*), though a Bull gains no extra experience points when this Flaw comes into play. A Bull cannot gain a dot in Celerity until he has at least one dot in both Resilience and Vigor. Finally, a Bull's Dexterity can never be higher than his Strength or his Stamina.

Organization: In those cities where Bulls are still found, they are typically kept in the employ of very few, associated vampires. Bulls are historically kept in "kennels" of mated pairs or siblings (sometimes called "pups," regardless of age). Rarely does any Bull owner keep just one.

Modern Bulls live much longer lives than their fathers and grandfathers did. Nowadays, the existence of Bulls is as much for show as anything else. Most modern Bull-matches are not fought to the death unless the contest is being used to resolve some matter between the Bulls' owners, whether financial, political or honorary.

In some domains, a Bull may be seen as a breach of the Masquerade waiting to happen. Keeping a Bull may require special permission from the Prince or other lord. Breeding Bulls is probably even more tightly regulated, if not forbidden altogether.

Concepts: Loyal bodyguard, unthinking thug, prudent escort, fearless man-at-arms, fearsome bouncer, cruel ruffian, gentle giant

"If you want."

BLOODLINES

The Invictus respects the power of blood — not just its supernatural power, but the influence it has on mortal and immortal families alike. Nobility, authority and honor can be inherited through the Blood just as it can be learned from fathers and sires. A vampire's lineage is a vital part of his identity and esteem within Society. No Kindred should underestimate the power that can be distilled in blood and passed on from a sire or an Avus.

The majority of Invictus bloodlines are simply lineages of sires and childer, with no special mystic properties outside those

of their clan. Many of the "mystic" bloodlines — those graced with unique powers of the Blood — associated with the covenant are regarded as Society bloodlines due to the happenstances of their origins or the status their founders held in the Invictus, rather than some strict alliance or uniformity of membership. It's a telling trait of the covenant that many of those bloodlines considered to exemplify the Invictus have no unique Disciplines or particularly bizarre social or physical qualities; instead, the figurehead bloodlines of the covenant are either profoundly successful or frighteningly old.

ANNUNAKU

(Elder): "Here I rule. Here I shall stay.
And, you, dear guest, here you too shall stay, for a very long time."
(Neonate): "My turf. My rules."

The Annunaku bloodline's origin vanishes into the mists of ancient history. The Annunaku have no legend about their founder — they say they always existed as rulers of the land. The bloodline takes its name from Mesopotamian gods of the Underworld — or maybe it's the other way around. The Annunaku point to ancient legends about the patron gods of cities, tomb-guardians and sacred caves inhabited by oracular spirits. "That's us," they say.

When the Roman Empire invaded Greece, Anatolia and Mesopotamia, the Annunaku followed the legions home. By the empire's fall, the Annunaku had spread throughout Europe. Instead of inhabiting caves and tombs, they moved into manor houses to rule over remote villages. Generation after generation, the peasants lived in fear of the undead lord who drank their blood, but they dared not leave. He would know if they tried, and become angry.

As civilization and the Renaissance spread throughout Europe, the Annunaku moved into the growing cities. Some Annunaku found their villages burgeoning into towns. Other Annunaku sent childer to seek their fortunes and restore the bloodline's ancient traditions as lords of the cities. A few took the wrenching step of abandoning their rural Demesnes, when their supernatural powers could not defend them from cannon fire. More Annunaku chose to finally die as their ancient manes toppled and burned. Others sank into the ground to sleep away the centuries until they could start anew on kingdoms of animal blood.

Modern cities gave the Annunaku new forms of territory, with new tenants to rule. The Annunaku learned about business and universities, churches and the civil service. They encountered other vampires, and taught them to respect the borders the Annunaku set. Where the Annunaku ruled, they ruled supreme. The land itself bent to their will, revealing intruders and defending its lord, through a Discipline called Tenure.

Territory obsesses these Kindred. A "Landlord" dislikes leaving his Demesne, though friendly company can mitigate the instinctive terror the Landlords feel on unfamiliar ground. These Kindred regard every mortal who lives in their Demesnes as their property. On the

other hand, the Annunaku take great care of their fiefdoms. Annunaku may rule their mortal tenants with utter cruelty, but the Landlords also protect them from any outside threat.

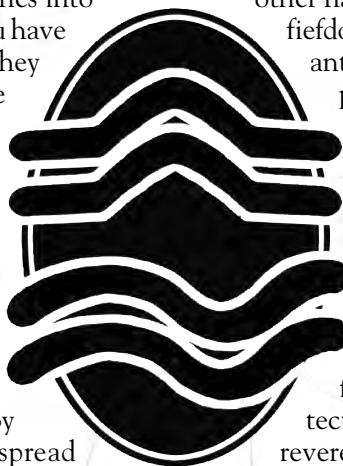
The bloodline's pride in ownership also expresses itself in a code of hospitality. Although Annunaku hate trespassers, many Annunaku adore guests. A guest gives a Landlord a chance to display aristocratic virtues of generosity and etiquette and to show off his Demesne. An honor-besotted Landlord might treat a guest to blood feasts every night and risk his unlife to protect her. A fine line, however, separates the revered guest from the boorish intruder. Any insult might switch a visitor from one category to the other — and each Annunaku can have his own arcane standards of acceptable behavior.

Some Annunaku still dwell in isolated rural fiefdoms, lording over terrified mortal tenants. Other Annunaku dwell apart from mortals, losing themselves in their roles as spirits of the land. Most Annunaku, however, now dwell in cities like other Kindred. These Annunaku, many of them comparatively young, necessarily abandon the roles of feudal lords. Younger Annunaku feel the same drive to possess and master a territory, however, even if their Demesne is just a block of apartments or small businesses that they own.

OTHER ANNUNAKU?

Some legends suggest that in ancient Mesopotamia, the Annunaku were a covenant rather than a bloodline. The members of this early covenant supposedly all acted as minor gods of their cities and learned Tenure to enforce their rule.

The legend is not entirely implausible. Not only have Invictus of other clans apparently learned Tenure in ages past, some Invictus members teach it to their childer as well. A few Ventrue lineages have taught Tenure for generations, and also call themselves "Annunaku." Perhaps they have become a parallel bloodline. Without mystical tests, it may be hard to tell the difference between a member of one bloodline and a member of a similar — possibly sibling — bloodline.



Parent Clan: Annunaku emerge from the Gangrel clan. Unlike some in their parent clan, Annunaku feel perfectly comfortable in cities, without any special longings for personal mobility or freedom. Some Annunaku view their medieval rustication as an unfortunate hiccup in their millennial history as Masters of the City.

Nickname: Landlords

Covenant: Most Landlords join the Invictus, considering it the covenant that most fully appreciates the bond between master, territory and tenant. A few Annunaku — mostly recent scions of the old village Landlords — join the Circle of the Crone, seeing connections between its pagan mysticism and their own mystical connection to the land. Even fewer join the Carthians or Lancea Sanctum, though an occasional Landlord feels the utopian lure of planned communities or sees the church and parish as the contemporary version of the city and its patron god. Quite a number of Annunaku are unaligned, however, because they see joining a covenant as compromising their claims of absolute authority over their Demesnes.

Appearance: Annunaku take childer from both genders and any race, so the physical appearance of the Annunaku is quite diverse. Clothing also varies widely, and often depends on the way a Landlord establishes himself as master of a neighborhood. A merchant who owns several businesses in a neighborhood might dress in a sober three-piece suit, while a gang leader who holds a slum in terrified subjection might choose a black leather jacket, T-shirt, ripped jeans and brightly hued bandanna. When conducting the bloodline's archaic rituals, however, any Landlord might dress in a Babylonian kilt, the sleeveless robe of an Egyptian priest, a medieval noble's garb or nothing at all. Some Annunaku believe that when they act as spirits of the land, they should discard all signs of their mortal origin, including clothing.

Haven: Landlords are similarly diverse in their choice of havens. Most prefer large, handsomely

furnished and comfortable havens, though the details vary with the particulars of a Landlord's chosen role. Whenever possible, though, a Landlord chooses a haven with a plot of earth: a lawn or garden, or at least a cellar with a dirt floor. Even those Annunaku who lack the power to merge with the soil feel uncomfortable sleeping too far removed from the land they rule. Many of them actually like to sleep on the soil they claim as theirs.

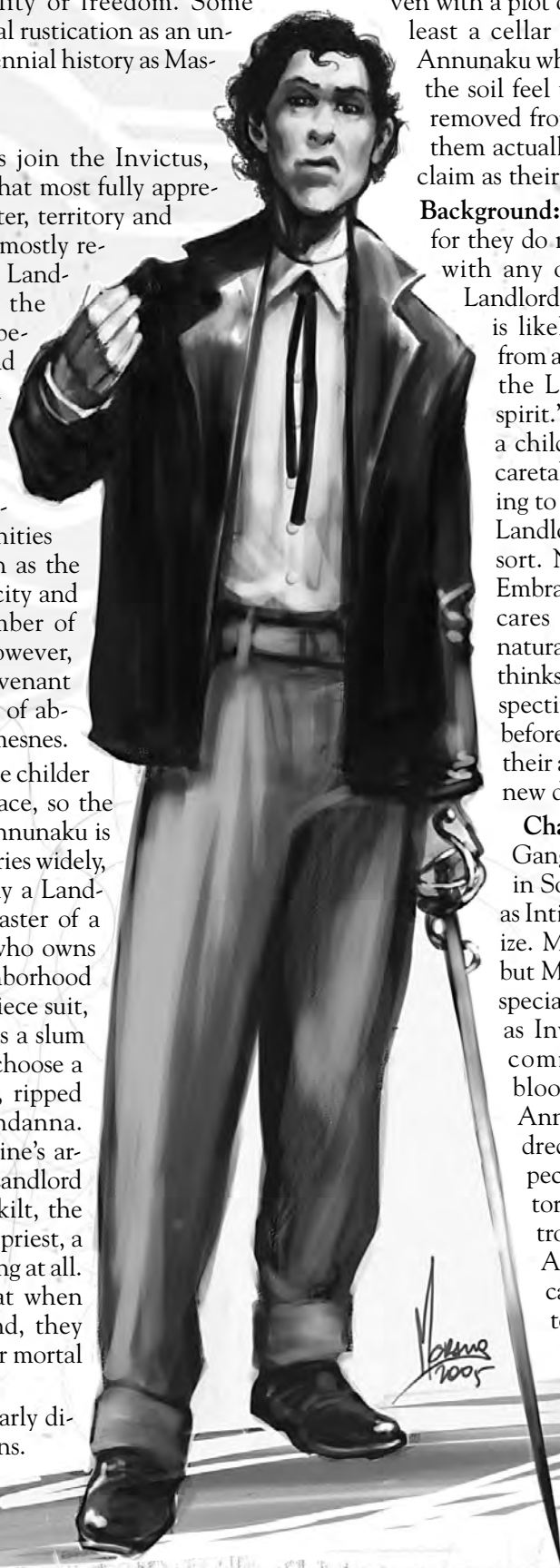
Background: Annunaku rarely sire childer, for they do not like to share their domains with any other Kindred for long. Any Landlord's choice for a childe, therefore, is likely to be idiosyncratic: anyone from a mortal descendant to a stranger the Landlord fancies has a "noble spirit." Sometimes a Landlord wants a childe to serve as his assistant and caretaker during torpor, perhaps leading to a cyclical dynasty; sometimes a Landlord might seek an eternal consort. Now and then, an Annunaku Embraces someone who lives near, or cares for, some great monument or natural wonder because the Landlord thinks the place needs a guardian. Prospective childer often serve as ghouls before their Embrace, as the sires test their abilities and train them for their new duties.

Character Creation: Unlike many Gangrel, most Annunaku are strong in Social Attributes and Skills such as Intimidation, Persuasion or Socialize. Mental Attributes may be high, but Mental Skills tend to be few and specialized. Practical knowledge such as Investigation or Politics is most common, with Occult for the bloodline's mystical heritage, but Annunaku can surprise other Kindred with their mastery of unexpected fields such as ancient history (Academics) or hobby electronics (Crafts and Science). Few Annunaku skimp on their Physical Skills, though; the Annunaku tend to be well-rounded Kindred — perhaps with odd specialties.

Bloodline

Disciplines:

Animalism,
Protean, Resilience, Tenure



Weakness: Annunaku retain the animalistic minds of other Gangrel. The 10-again rule does not apply to dice pools involving Intelligence or Wits, and any 1's rolled are subtracted from the number of successes. This weakness does not apply to dice pools involving perception or reaction to surprise, and subtracted successes do not turn a normal failure into a dramatic failure.

The Landlords' powerful connection to their Demesnes also renders them uncomfortable when they leave. Outside of her chosen Demesne, a Landlord suffers a -2 penalty to all dice pools (including reflexive rolls to resist Disciplines and the rolls of the special Annunaku Discipline, Tenure) because of her anxious yearning for her home turf or her uneasy awareness of being out of her element. This penalty drops to -1 on familiar ground where the character is accepted, such as Elysium. The company of familiar and allied vampires — such as the character's coterie — also reduces the penalty to -1. For another Kindred to qualify as a “familiar vampire,” the Annunaku must drink from her at least once and spend one Willpower point. An Annunaku can only “familiarize” herself with a number of other Kindred equal to her Composure. Attempts to exceed that number result in strained relationships as the Annunaku subtly sabotages her own trusts, growing suspicious and doubtful over several weeks until, finally, she no longer feels the blood-settling comfort of camaraderie with one of her allies.

Kindred who share Status with an Annunaku — such as other Invictus vampires — do not grant the vampire any special comfort. The bonus to Social dice pools afforded by Status does counterbalance the penalties for the Annunaku's unease, but the unease itself is not alleviated by such delicate allegiances.

Organization: Within the bloodline, Annunaku acknowledge no organization beyond the sire and childe. Landlords routinely subject their childe to Vincula, and a childe may remain with his sire for centuries. By tradition, only after tending his sire's domain through a torpor may a childe depart to seek a domain of his own. Concubines remain bound to their sires forever, or at least until they can muster the will to defy the Vincula and escape. Cyclical dynasties are common among this

bloodline, but many Annunaku do not want to be part-time Landlords.

The Annunaku retain many rituals and titles of great antiquity. Forging the mystical bond to the land that's so important to Tenure requires rituals to honor the spirits of the land or gods of the city, so that they accept the vampire as one of their own. The climactic ritual involves a sacrifice of Vitae to bare earth and running water. Annunaku oaths often involve rituals to invoke earth or water, such as participants mixing soil from their territories and then sprinkling it in a ceremonial pool called an *Abzu*. “By the earth of my haven!” is a common pledge or exclamation for older Annunaku.

The most exalted title within the bloodline is *Lugal-Irra*, or “Great Lord.” It is reserved for Annunaku who become Prince or Regent of an extended domain. Landlords do not scorn other Kindred offices, but they don't assign special names to them.

Annunaku who guard tombs, temples or other sacred places are called *Galla-Ki*, “Daemon of the Earth,” or *Abgal-Ki*, “Priest of the Earth.” Modern cities don't have many temples to Marduk or sacred groves, but modern Landlords extend the concept to monuments of civic and national pride such as war memorials and historic landmarks. Even in the New World, some Annunaku dare to dwell outside cities as the guardians of a grotto, patch of forest, mountain or other natural location that seems especially sublime or historic. Of course, rural Landlords need sufficient Protean they can merge with the land they protect. The bloodline's legends say the Old World has *Galla-Ki* millennia old, who transcended undeath to become true spirits of the land.

Landlords also award titles based on mastering particular Disciplines. For instance, a vampire who fully masters Animalism is addressed as *Shakkan* or *Sumaqan*, from Mesopotamian gods who protected wild animals.

Concepts: Feudal relic, tenured professor, odd-shoppe proprietor, community activist, feared gang leader, real-estate tycoon, flophouse night manager, apartment superintendent, phantom of the [fill in the blank], guardian of the graveyard, historic site's caretaker, oracle of the cave

Kallisti

"Don't feel guilty for wanting it. Urges don't lie. Do what you want."

The Kallisti are an old, scattered bloodline. Though their exact origin has long been lost to time and torpor, those Kindred who specialize in such things have assembled documents kept by elders that suggest that these Kindred split from the main clan well over a thousand years ago somewhere along the northernmost edge of Europe or Eastern Europe — Scandinavia, Finland or perhaps northern Russia. They're still strongest in the north of Europe, but a number of Ravagers have also made it to the New World, where Québec appears to be the center of their population.

Icy manipulators of Kindred and kine alike, the so-called Ravagers are destroyers of the social fabric — cultivating isolation, mistrust and paranoia among those who have seen them in action. They take great delight in watching others slowly form bonds of trust and interdependence — and then cutting those bonds and watching the ensuing drama unfold. It is, to the Kallisti, the most fascinating game around, and they are uniquely adept at it.

Cold elegance and frigid beauty all but radiate from these striking Kindred. Others fall all over themselves to serve them, to appease them, to nourish them. The Kallisti may create small cults of personality around themselves. They may direct a business venture of some sort (if such a thing satisfies their narcissistic impulses). They may surround themselves with servants, groupies, worshippers and slaves, but Ravagers pass their Requiems without true intimacy or allies, and they would never dream of compromising themselves by trusting anyone else. They know all too well the consequences of *that* kind of folly, because they are well versed in pitting ally against ally — though mostly as a strategy against boredom.

Parent Clan: Daeva

Nickname: Ravagers

Covenant: Invictus

Appearance: Most Ravagers are strikingly beautiful. Many dress in such a way as to flawlessly emphasize that beauty. They are, to a one, narcissists, intent on being the most beautiful, most desired and best dressed in any room they're in, and, on those rare occasions when they Embrace mortals, it's because they've found ones sufficiently beautiful to carry on the bloodline.

Haven: The Kallisti have stunningly tasteful and well-appointed havens. Ravagers are generally fans of beautiful,

elegant and minimalist decors. Their havens are typically architecturally impressive and clean to the point of sterility, which is just one more factor that enforces their isolation (they would never bring mortals here to feed lest their food sully their chillingly tidy spaces). On those exceedingly rare occasions when the Kallisti *do* allow other Kindred into their havens, it's almost always Daeva or an offshoot of that clan, as Kallisti tend to think of every other clan as unwashed rabble. Only Daeva (and their offshoots) have sufficiently cultivated taste to appreciate the subtle aesthetic nuances of a Kallisti haven.

Kallisti are more likely to emphasize security than convenience in their havens. They're fully aware of their own reputation, and they don't care to have those they've socially damaged show up unexpectedly.

Where a Ravager of important sleeps and where she holds court are two entirely different spaces. These Kindred are likely to hold court in private clubs or in the back rooms of certain exclusive nightclubs where kine discretely compete to be the evening's meal. Some Ravagers keep multiple havens for peace of mind and practicality. If a Kallisti shows off her haven, even to her coterie-mates, it probably isn't the one where she really sleeps.

Background: Kallisti Embrace cold, beautiful people who are socially adept but emotionally distant — only mortals at the peak of physical beauty, and only those with a manipulative bent. When Ravagers get it in their heads to Embrace, they actively look for the most heartless bitches (or bastards) they can find and then gift them with immortality. Some Ravagers cull primarily from the aristocracy (where there is one) or from the wealthiest and most isolated classes where there is no aristocracy per se. Ice queens, workaholics, con artists, heartless aristocrats, sociopaths and others who tend to go through life without establishing close bonds with others are among the favored stock from which Ravagers Embrace. Likewise, actors, models, personal trainers, dancers and other physically perfect specimens are common choices for new Kallisti. They are suave and elegant, cool and slick, and they have no feeling for others whatsoever. In the eyes of the Kallisti, the Requiem is a game — a dance that can be won — and little else. A few have even proved blasé about their own Final Deaths, laughing even as they were destroyed, as though they

felt they'd already beaten life by preserving their beauty for so long.

Character Creation: Social Attributes (and Skills) are always Primary, with Presence being foremost among these. Most Kallisti are gorgeous, but even those who aren't physically perfect are mesmerizing and possess pronounced animal magnetism. Mental Attributes may get emphasized over time as Ravagers come to understand the need to be mentally sharp if they're going to have any chance of surviving in the wake of the kind of the social mayhem

they tend to cause. For all the threat they pose socially, the Kallisti are rarely very physically robust. Physical Attributes are almost always Tertiary.

The most common Merit among Ravagers, by far, is Striking Looks (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 117). Kallisti rarely give the Embrace to those who do not have this Merit. Ravagers rarely trust others enough to have the Allies or Mentor Merits, although Retainer is common enough. Meanwhile, Herd is a common Merit for the terribly beautiful Kindred of this bloodline. Likewise, many Kallisti are modestly rich at the moment of their Embrace — or become so in short order, once they learn to use their Disciplines and their looks to the greatest effect.

Bloodline Disciplines: Celerity, Dominate, Majesty, Perfidy

Weakness: In addition to the weakness of the Daeva, their parent clan, Kallisti have the additional burden of not being able to form the Vinculum in others. Another vampire may taste the blood of one of these Kindred 20 times, and it won't result in so much as a kind thought. It's an appropriate curse for this bloodline, but the ramifications of their curse go far beyond the inability to secure loyalty from other Kindred. It also means that they absolutely *must* not allow themselves to be identified as Kallisti, because there are many hungry elders out there who would love nothing more than to ram a tap into one of these Kindred and feed at will without emotional repercussions. This is one of the reasons, incidentally, that Kallisti are allowed in Invictus domains (despite being antithetical to the social order that the First Estate so aggressively enforces): they represent a safe source of Vitae for elders.

In addition, all Kallisti suffer from the Narcissism derangement automatically and permanently. When a Kallisti's Humanity drops below 5, she automatically develops the Megalomania derangement in



its place. Should her Humanity rise to 5 or higher, however, this derangement settles down to Narcissism again. These derangements are in addition to any gained through the normal consequences for Humanity loss.

Organization: Next to none. Kallisti may watch one another from the shadows, but they rarely form connections or alliances outside of personal compacts. The Kallisti don't trust one another, and they aren't fond of each other's company. It's not that they hate one another, and they're certainly not going to attack one another on sight (unless extraordinary circumstances warrant it), but Ravagers simply don't trust one another enough to have a default organization or familial society to fall back on. Moreover, the power of blood ties makes Perfidy, the bloodline's proprietary Discipline, more powerful when used against Kindred who are "related" to one another and, having seen its effects on others, they don't care to submit themselves to that possibility.

Additionally, they are keenly aware of how destructive they can be to the social fabric of a place, and

they feel that it's better for their numbers to be as spread out as possible. That said, these Kindred *do* have a sense of themselves as part of a bloodline — a rare and beautiful bloodline at that — and even though they may not like each other, they generally dislike other Kindred more. As far as Ravagers are concerned, every one of their number is a precious work of art, and any vampire who develops a reputation for preying on Kallisti will likely find himself marked for vicious reprisals as only these coldest of Kindred can carry them out.

Within larger Kindred society, the Kallisti are happy to pass as Daeva or Toreador, fulfilling the same roles as those Kindred would — at least until they get bored — at which time, they would likely start entertaining themselves with increasingly more elaborate uses of Perfidy, until such time as they get themselves banished or blood-hunted.

Concepts: Agent provocateur, spy, malicious courtier, home wrecker, domain wrecker, subversive Harpy, cold gray eminence, Sheriff's Interrogator, elder's pet

LYNX

"DON'T ONLY CONNECT. DISCONNECTING MATTERS TOO."

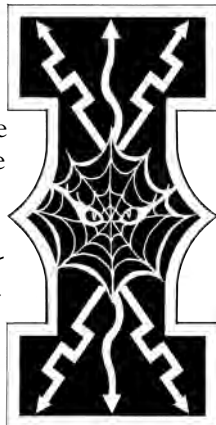
The Lynx are the youngest bloodline affiliated with the Invictus. Indeed, it is a mere matter of months since the first Kindred of this bloodline's third generation manifested the line's distinctive powers, thus confirming that the Lynx truly is a bloodline — and not merely the quirk of a bizarre vampire. As a result, not all Kindred who know of the Lynx know that they are truly a bloodline, and those Kindred who recognize the name are a select, but growing, group.

The Lynx themselves never refer to themselves as a bloodline, insisting that they are a blood *web*, instead. As the line does contain a handful of Kindred who are not direct descendants of the founder, Martin Thomas, there is even some justification for the claim, as the lines of relationship do not all flow straight down. However, that is true of many bloodlines, and most Kindred refer to the Lynx in the normal way, regarding their insistence on different terminology as merely one more manifestation of the bloodline's obsession.

That obsession is networks. Martin Thomas was fascinated by networks, particularly communications and commercial networks, even before his Embrace. He managed to map the physical connections in his local telephone network and was working on a map showing the connections between all local businesses. There were lines showing who bought from whom, who owed money to whom and which businesses banded together to lobby for changes. The shape of the network convinced Thomas that there was at least one player in the scene who had no public face at all. Thomas was careful to make no direct inquiries, concentrating instead on building up a picture from indirect evidence, because the possibility that this player was an outfit of organized crime had occurred to him.

The possibility that it was a vampire had not. Natasha Danilov, a Mekhet, realized that someone was snooping around her business connections and, suspecting an enemy, conducted her own investigations. When she found out that Thomas was independent, and apparently motivated by nothing but curiosity, she decided that he would make a valuable servant, and Embraced him.

The transition to undeath was a major shock to Thomas, and he was not the asset that Danilov had hoped for. He retreated from society, obsessing over the details of networks, trying to discover everything, but with no desire to *do* anything with the information. A few patient Kindred used him



as a source of information, but it took so long to coax anything out of him that there was almost always a faster source for what they wanted to know.

The coming of the Internet changed everything. Thomas was involved almost from the beginning, unable to resist being involved in a worldwide network. In the days before the Web, there were newsgroups, and Thomas found himself fascinated by the social networks revealed in the postings. One day, he was unable to resist experimenting, and posted to a group.

Within a week he was hooked, posting to many newsgroups and spending the whole night posting and downloading over a slow modem. Within a month, he was well known on a number of groups, and after one poster noticed that he only ever posted at night, local time, he was nicknamed "the Vampire."

As Thomas tells it, that was the critical moment. He realized that he was, indeed, a vampire, and could not hide by burying himself in networks. He emerged from his cocoon, re-entered the Danse Macabre and quickly made a name for himself as a purveyor of information. By the time he had gathered enough power to found his own bloodline, the World Wide Web had arrived, and he chose the name Lynx for his progeny. The lynx had, in legend, eyes so sharp it could see through walls, and networks are, of course, made of links. But the original motive was Lynx, an early web browser. Thomas always remained a bit of a geek.

All members of the bloodline share Thomas' fascination with networks of all sorts (particularly electronic and commercial), although social and political networks have received more attention in recent years. Thomas himself is still highly active, maintaining electronic communication with all members of the bloodline, although young and unimportant Kindred do not hear from him very often. Those who meet him in person are generally surprised: Thomas is African American and big. He isn't fat — he is tall and broad-boned, with the result that he looks like he should be a bouncer, not a networking geek.

Parent Clan: Mekhet

Nickname: By popular standards, the Lynx have no nickname (or, by the reckoning of many formal Invictus, they have only a nickname). In some domains, the bloodline is called "the Links," however, and a single vampire of its lineage is known as a Link.

Covenant: Most Lynx are members of the Invictus, primarily because that was the covenant Thomas joined after his Embrace, at his sire's instructions, and he has never left. These Kindred quickly master the networks of loyalty within the covenant, and their mastery of modern technology (or, at least, the Internet) tends to make them valuable to more senior Kindred, giving them an edge when it comes to climbing the hierarchy.

However, the bloodline's philosophy does not tie the Lynx closely to the Invictus. Indeed, the Carthian philosophy is much closer to the Lynx's interests, providing more opportunities for elaborate networks of loyalty that are not constrained by authority from above. As a result, the second-largest group in the bloodline are Carthians, a situation that is already generating some tension and will produce more if the bloodline grows.

Members of the bloodline do join other covenants, but do so for personal reasons. There are, however, very few unaligned Lynx. The Lynx are natural joiners, as that embeds them in yet another network, and, therefore, few Lynx pass up the chance to join a covenant.

Appearance: The appearance of the Lynx varies wildly, depending in large part on the sorts of networks they are interested in. A vampire fascinated by the sewage network of a large city will look, and smell, very different from a vampire mainly involved in the social networks of high society. Racially, they cover the full gamut.

However, as the most popular networks with the bloodline are electronic

and commercial, most members fall into one of two groups. Those whose interest is primarily electronic wear practical clothes and often look rather geeky. These Lynx are never without some form of wireless link to the Internet, even in an area where they cannot make a connection, and tend to get very sulky if guards try to take the link away from them. The commercial side of the bloodline dress in conservative business suits and are slightly less attached to their cell phones.

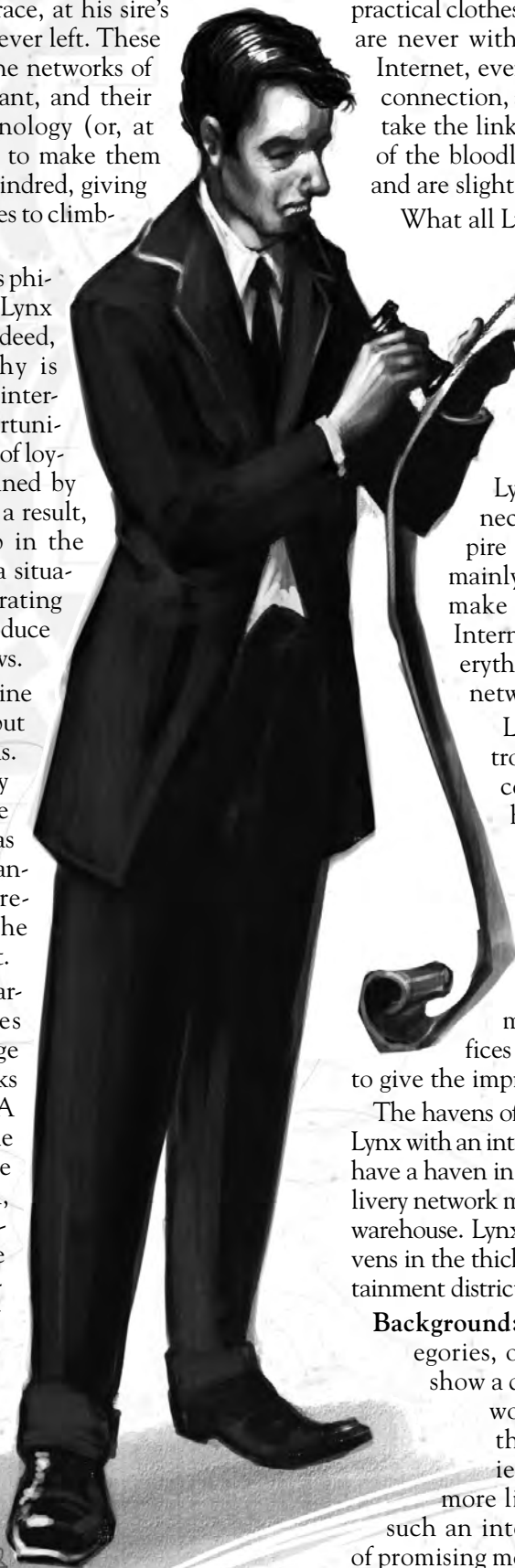
What all Lynx have in common is that each could fit perfectly into a gathering of people with an interest in the same sort of network. In another context the Lynx might stand out, but, on their own ground, they are perfectly at home.

Haven: The truly unifying feature of Lynx havens is a broadband Internet connection, generally the fastest that the vampire can support. Even those Lynx who are mainly interested in other sorts of networks make sure that they are connected to the Internet, because it's useful for just about everything. Beyond that, the haven reflects the networking interests of its owner.

Lynx who are actually most into electronic networks have havens filled with computers and cables. They normally have at least one physical network separate from the Internet, where they can play with new ideas for network geometries and such. Commercial Lynx have havens suitable for entertaining the players in the higher levels of commerce. In general, these havens look more like functional rooms, labs and offices than homes, as the vampires do not want to give the impression that they live there.

The havens of Lynx with other interests vary greatly. A Lynx with an interest in the sewage networks of a city could have a haven in the sewers, while a Lynx studying the delivery network might have a haven in a major distributor's warehouse. Lynx obsessed with social networks have havens in the thick of the city's party neighborhoods, entertainment districts and planned communities.

Background: Lynx children fall into one of two categories, on the whole. The first are those who show a deep interest in a particular sort of network. It is most common for this to be the same sort of network as the sire studies, but this is only because the Lynx are more likely to become aware of mortals with such an interest. Those Lynx who become aware of promising mortals with an interest in different sorts



of network often petition to Embrace them, to broaden their own influence. These vampires usually find that they fit fairly well into the culture of the bloodline, and most choose to awaken the potential of their blood.

The second main group is composed of mortals who have power over part of the network that a vampire is interested in. These Kindred are Embraced purely to further their sires' ambitions and reach, and the childer often find that they do not fit into Lynx society at all: you are not necessarily interested in the precise flows of money through a city just because you are a mover-and-shaker in commerce. Some Lynx, of course, do fit in, but many choose not to awaken their blood and join the bloodline proper.

The Lynx are, as noted above, willing to adopt other Mekhet with no descent from Thomas. The Lynx believe that this makes the bloodline stronger, as extending the bloodline makes it into more of a net and less of a chain. Almost any Mekhet interested enough to want to join the Lynx meets their standards for acceptance.

Character Creation: Mental or Social Attributes tend to be the most important, depending on whether the character's interest is in abstract or human networks. A few Lynx, who are interested in wholly physical networks and like climbing around in them, have Physical Attributes as primary. Social Merits, particularly Allies and Contacts, are extremely common; indeed, it's an unusual Lynx who has no dots at all in these. Computer, Investigation and Socialize are very common Skills, although a Lynx's Skill choices are, naturally, very strongly influenced by his network of interest.

The Haven Location and Haven Security Merits are of great importance to many Lynx, though Haven Size is rarely so valuable. Status is something a Lynx appreciates and studies but doesn't necessarily seek to gain. Merits like Herd, Contacts and Allies are popular with social Lynx, who are fascinated by the social circles and degrees of separation such acquaintances can lead to.

Finally, all Lynx learn Web, as that Discipline is extremely helpful to anyone trying to manipulate networks.

Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Celerity, Obfuscate, Web

Weakness: Like the Mekhet from whom they are derived, the Lynx take an additional point of aggravated damage whenever they suffer injuries from sunlight or fire.

In addition, the Lynx *need* to feel connected. Every Lynx must choose a particular network, and remain connected to that network at all times. The network must extend beyond the Lynx, but may be a network of friends, the Internet or a network of trading contacts. Anything that threatens to cut a Lynx off from his network might inspire a fear or anger frenzy, as described on p. 178 of

Vampire: The Requiem. The Lynx suffers a -2 penalty to dice pools to resist a network-related frenzy. In such a frenzy, the Lynx tries desperately to protect his connection to the network.

The connection need not be currently active; a Lynx reliant on the Internet does not need to be surfing all the time. However, a Lynx does need to check his network every so often, to be sure that it is working. Lynx reliant on their friends might make calls or send text messages a couple of times every night, for example, while a trader would make at least one deal. Frenzy can strike whenever the Lynx believes that he has been cut off. Of course, as with the other possible sources of fear, the visceral reaction of terror comes not from the truth but from the perception of the truth.

Storytellers and players have quite a bit of latitude when describing a Lynx's network. In general, a Lynx's core network can be defined by a Merit such as Herd, Contacts or Allies. A Lynx must possess at least four dots in one of these Merits, to represent his network. If the Lynx loses one of these dots — or is in danger of losing one of these dots — he is immediately subject to a fear or anger frenzy.

Finally, a Lynx's sensitivity to social networks renders him more vulnerable to the ties of blood. Kindred relatives attempting to affect a Lynx with powers subject to the +2 bonus for blood ties gain a +3 bonus, instead.

Organization: The Lynx are, naturally, organized into a network. Thomas studies this network, and ensures that it is always organized so that, if a number of Lynx are destroyed, no more than half that number of Lynx can be put out of contact with the rest of the bloodline. This means that every Lynx must know at least two others, and at least one is generally in a different city. The Lynx expect members to keep contacts between cities alive, but accept the reality that contacts within one city are far more important.

Within the network, there is very little in the way of hierarchy. Obviously, Thomas receives a great deal of respect as the founder of the bloodline, but he isn't the kind to issue orders. Nor, come to that, are most of the other members of the bloodline; they prefer to get things done by the subtle pulling of strings.

Concepts: Internet geek, criminal fixer, owner of a logistics business (trucks, trains, boats, or similar), obsessive sewer rat, nomad always riding the roads or rails, the socialite who is everyone's friend, official at the Prince's court keeping track of all in the city and what they want, alliance-building politician, scion of ancient nobility carefully tracking all his relatives out to the nth degree, urban ecologist studying the food webs of the metropolis (from the top)

Malocusians

"You are under my roof, now."

Many Kindred take their freedom to roam the night for granted. They prowl the Rack, vie for prestige and power in Elysium and return to their havens to feed or pass the day, never realizing that there are others who are not so free as they.

Scattered here and there, on the edges of cities, in withering neighborhoods of failing wealth or in crumbling communities with vanishing populations, there are houses — old houses — that still exude the odors of wealth, nobility and prestige. Occupied and yet not occupied, haunted and yet not haunted, these grand old mansions of brick and oak are lairs for the nigh-sessile Kindred called the Malocusians.

Malocusians are bound to their havens by bonds of blood. Outside of their havens, they are weaker than many Kindred, but, within the bounds of their territory, the Spiders are truly the masters of their domain, and woe unto any Kindred who picks a fight with the Spiders on their own ground.

Parent Clan: Ventrue

Nickname: Spiders

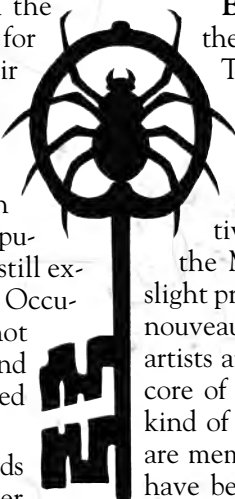
Covenant: Invictus (and, rarely, Ordo Dracul)

Appearance: On the whole, Malocusians represent the quintessential landed gentry. They manifest all the traits common to the erudite and wealthy.

Their sartorial tastes are profoundly conservative, almost to an extreme: Malocusians are known to wear clothes 50, 60 or even 70 years out of fashion. Depending on the dates involved, this might make them seem "retro" or simply crazy.

Haven: Malocusians build their entire unives around their havens. Their sires only release them from their oversight after the childer acquire suitable havens of their own and, to the Malocusians, "suitable" may as well be a synonym for "palatial." Few Malocusian sires would ever release childer who had not found themselves havens with several rooms, a den, a comprehensive library, several salons and, possibly, a ballroom.

Contrary to the assumptions of those Kindred who know the ways of Spiders, however, Malocusians have a much greater interest (and ability) in adapting to modern or decrepit spaces than they may imply. Some Spiders nest in palaces that seem, from the outside, to be bombed-out firetraps or holes in the ground. Outright grandeur is not the only tool a Malocusian has for luring flies.



Background: Wealth, isolation and intellect are the key features of those who become Malocusians.

The son of the wealthy family who didn't have the advantage of primogeniture, the reclusive widow who inherited her husband's fortune and estate after his tragic accident, the eccentric scholar whose work proved unexpectedly lucrative — any of these would be ideal candidates for the Malocusian line. (The bloodline does show a slight preference for families from "old money" over the nouveau riche, however.) Political families, eccentric artists and scions of debauched dynasties comprise the core of the Malocusian line. Ideal candidates for this kind of Requiem are, for obvious reasons, rare, but so are members of this bloodline in general. Some elders have been known to adopt optimistically if they find souls who don't have the estates or the money but who seem to have many of the other traits individual Spiders considers ideal.

Character Creation: Brilliant (if somewhat crazed) minds are a hallmark of the Malocusian bloodline. Mental Attributes (and Skills) are primary. Some of these Kindred pass decades, even centuries, without leaving their havens. As a result, their Physical Attributes are almost always tertiary; it takes a certain kind of mind (and physique) to acclimate to that existence.

Many Malocusians are at least moderately wealthy at the time of their Embrace. Most should have *at least* three dots worth of Resources, and preferably four or more. Likewise, many Spiders already have homes worthy of five dots of Haven Size when they are Embraced.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Domus, Presence, Resilience

Weakness: The Requiem of a Malocusian vampire takes place almost entirely in his haven — and necessarily so. In addition to the weakness of the Ventrue clan, Malocusians suffer from a debilitating dependence on their havens. To even cross the threshold of her haven and enter the outside night, a Spider must spend a Willpower point. Every Willpower point spent in this way enables a Malocusian to operate away from her haven for a number of hours equal to her Humanity. Once those hours are up, she must spend another Willpower point to remain out and about. If the Malocusian does not make this Willpower expenditure, she suffers a -1 penalty to all Mental and Social dice pools until she does.

Organization: Despite rarely leaving their havens, Malocusians maintain tight networks among themselves. Once upon a time, they managed this through written or oral correspondence delivered by animal messengers, although in the modern era they use telephones and the Internet. They're quite aware of the danger this network of theirs presents to the Masquerade, but they're fastidiously attentive to discretion, and a few of them are adept at cryptography. Still, tonight's most sensitive messages are delivered by animals, as the communications were centuries ago.

Due to the time Malocusians spend scouring newspapers and the media for signs of the outside world, the first news of big developments in the mortal lives of other cities often comes through a Malocusian contact, and many Princes (and rumormongers) maintain connections with the Spiders for that reason alone. Outside of that, Malocusians are often overlooked members of the Kindred population, a fact they're happy to use to their advantage.

Concepts: Noble-in-exile, housebound scholar, keeper of the Prince's library, creepy shut-in, scheming spider at the center of an influence web, crippled mob boss



Sotoha

"Blood shed at twilight pledges the heart's true service until dawn brightens."

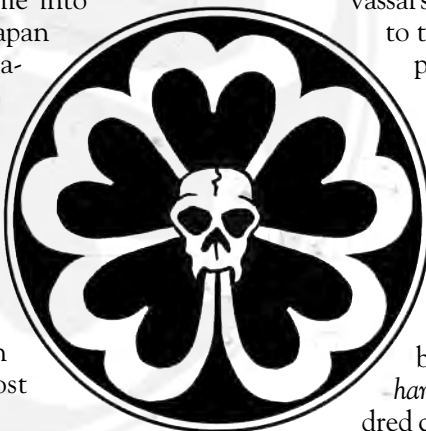
In the 16th century, Europeans came into sustained contact with the people of Japan for the first time and, in turn, the Japanese met their first Europeans. Fujita Kunimasa, the founder of the Sotoha (SO-to-ha), was Embraced some time fairly early in that century. His sire was a Ventrue, but Kunimasa spoke little of him in later years, even less than he spoke of the beginning of his Requiem in Japan. That period is the subject of considerable speculation among those of his blood, but almost nothing is known for certain.

What is known is that in the 17th century Tokugawa Iemitsu closed the country, cutting off almost all contact with foreigners. Kunimasa, who had built up a strong power base among European traders and missionaries, realized that if he remained in his homeland he would be rendered almost powerless — and so he chose to leave. As it happened, his best servants had recently established themselves in the New World, so Kunimasa chose to travel to the Americas, rather than Europe.

There, he found himself alone and in exile. He still had his mundane Retainers, so he was not isolated in that sense, but no one around him shared his culture, his commitment to *bushido* or, indeed, his language. He sired his childer and created his bloodline, the Sotoha or "group of people on the outside," to fill his need for family as much as to increase his power. Kunimasa succeeded in his aims, and while he has not been noticeably active for decades — and may be in torpor — his descendants remain mostly loyal to their founder's ideals.

The most important of those ideals is loyalty. Kindred of the Sotoha are expected to show absolute and unquestioning loyalty to their immediate superior, and this loyalty is supposed to take priority over any claim that a higher authority might have. Thus, if a Kindred's immediate superior rebels against the Prince, the inferiors should support him, even if they have sworn loyalty to the Prince themselves. In theory, this situation would never occur, as the Kindred's lord would maintain his loyalty to the Prince just as the Kindred served his lord; in practice, it is all too common.

Kindred are expected to obey any orders from their lords without question, even if the order is suicidal. A



vassal's Requiem is of no importance compared to the commands of his lord. Lords are expected not to waste the lives of their followers, and those within this bloodline do not, as long as they are in their right minds. While, in theory, even an insane lord is due absolute obedience, this is one place where theory tends to break down in the face of practice.

There are, traditionally, two ways in which a Kindred may legitimately break his link with his lord. The first is *harakiri*, or *seppuku*. In this rite, the Kindred cuts his stomach open with his sword, in front of witnesses, declaring that he is protesting against his lord's decisions. The vampire must inflict enough damage to himself to drive himself into torpor, so the witnesses need to be Kindred, or sometimes ghouls, whom he trusts completely. When the Kindred comes out of torpor, he is freed of all obligations to his former lord, and may freely seek a new lord.

The second protest is more dramatic. A vassal may choose to destroy himself, traditionally by facing the morning sun. This frees all of the lord's other vassals from their loyalty to that lord, and gives the lord's lord proper grounds to renounce him. Such suicides are known as *hinomi* (hee-noh-MEE — "sun viewing"), not *harakiri* or *seppuku*, both of which mean "stomach cutting." Only two instances of *hinomi* are recorded in the bloodline's history. The most famed is that of the Kindred now known as Fujita Yuko ("child of the sun"), a vassal of Fujita Pedro. Fujita Pedro had surrendered almost entirely to the Beast and was a known diablerist, but the vassals he retained from his days of sanity made it impossible for any Kindred to move against him safely. Fujita Yuko's sacrifice stripped Fujita Pedro of all support, and he was staked out over Fujita Yuko's ashes, to face the sun as she had.

The second ideal is constant calm, showing no violent emotions. Obviously, this is extremely hard for Kindred, beset as they are by the Beast, and the bloodline's unique discipline, Kamen (the Mask), is devoted to making constant calm more possible. However, only violent emotions are disallowed. A gentle melancholy at the passing of ephemeral life is permitted and, indeed, encouraged.

In fact, such an appreciation forms the third ideal of the bloodline. All its members are supposed to appreciate the beauty of things condemned to a short life span, such as cherry blossoms (which fall within a week) or cut flowers (which soon wither and die). Fujita Kunimasa's eldest child, Taro, is renowned for a set of poems he wrote reflecting on the greatest tragedy of the Kindred: that their curse robs them of such an ending. Other Kindred suspect that most members of the bloodline do not really believe this, but they certainly claim to be sincere.

Any Kindred who enters this bloodline takes the name "Fujita" to indicate that he has become part of Kunimasa's family. While most such Kindred are Embraced by a member of the bloodline, adoption was a well-established custom in Kunimasa's Japan, and the bloodline is happy to accept suitable Kindred from outside.

Parent Clan: Ventrue

Nickname: Samurai or Outsiders (note that the Sotoha never refer to themselves as Samurai)

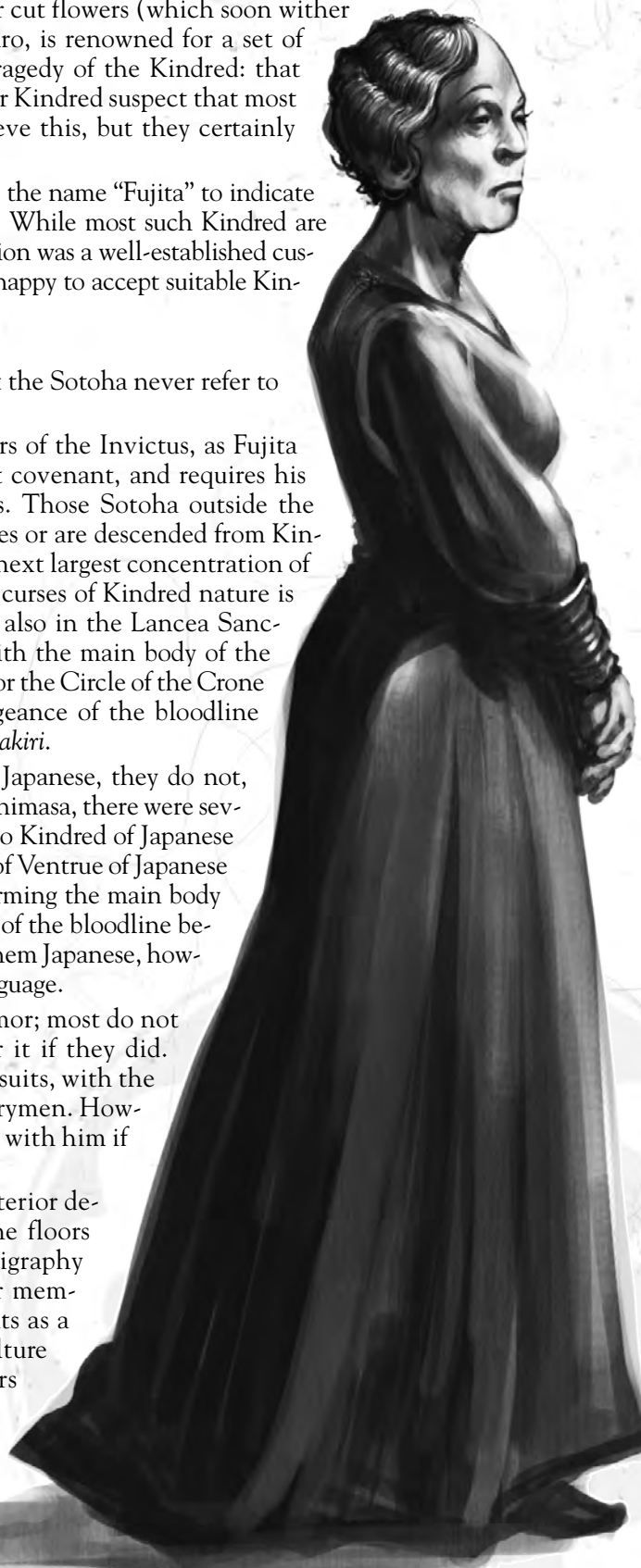
Covenants: Almost all Sotoha are members of the Invictus, as Fujita Kunimasa has always been a member of that covenant, and requires his vassals and their vassals to remain members. Those Sotoha outside the covenant either committed *harakiri* themselves or are descended from Kindred who did. The Ordo Dracul contains the next largest concentration of the bloodline, as the idea of overcoming the curses of Kindred nature is one that appeals to them. A few Sotoha are also in the Lancea Sanctum, and this group has the best relations with the main body of the bloodline. Sotoha in the Carthian Movement or the Circle of the Crone are lone renegades, protected from the vengeance of the bloodline only by the rights granted by their acts of *harakiri*.

Appearance: While the Sotoha think like Japanese, they do not, these days, look like Japanese. Indeed, after Kunimasa, there were several generations of the bloodline containing no Kindred of Japanese extraction. In the last century or so, a number of Ventrue of Japanese descent have chosen to join the bloodline, forming the main body of those adopted into the family. All members of the bloodline believe that sharing in Kunimasa's blood makes them Japanese, however, and most make an effort to learn the language.

The Sotoha almost never wear samurai armor; most do not own any and would not know how to wear it if they did. They dress in formal, subdued clothes, often suits, with the result that they look much like Japanese salarymen. However, every Sotoha has a sword, and carries it with him if at all possible.

Haven: A strong Japanese influence on interior design is very common in Sotoha havens. The floors are often covered in tatami mats, and calligraphy makes for popular wall hangings. The older members of the bloodline regard woodblock prints as a product of the degeneration of Japanese culture under the Tokugawa, but younger members collect this art form eagerly.

Larger havens almost always include a dark garden. Developed from the dry gardens of Zen temples, these gardens include rocks, raked gravel of various



kinds and flowing water and pools. Nothing lives within them. Sotoha Kindred are known to spend hours sitting in their gardens, meditating on their fate.

Background: Kindred of this bloodline prefer to Embrace mortals who have demonstrated loyalty, self-control and an aptitude for the acquisition and maintenance of power. As a result, Sotoha childer tend to be taken from the upper ranks of the civil service and large companies. Leaders are rarely Embraced, as they have not demonstrated loyalty to anyone else, and those in lower ranks are deemed not to have proved themselves.

The Sotoha have no particular preference for people of Japanese descent. Indeed, the Sotoha tend to look down on Japanese kine, believing that these kine have lost the soul of their nation, a soul that is preserved only among the Sotoha. Kindred of Japanese extraction who wish to join the bloodline are, however, welcome.

Character Creation: The Resistance Attributes (Resolve, Stamina and Composure) are the most important to the Sotoha. As the bloodline tends to recruit from the upper ranks of white-collar workers, Social and Mental Attributes are likely to be more important than Physical. Similarly, known Skills are those useful in running an organization, rather than fighting on the ground. This is one reason why the members of the bloodline never refer to themselves as samurai. That said, there is a certain amount of hankering after that element of their past, so Sotoha who have developed substantial combat abilities are not uncommon.

Almost all Sotoha develop at least the basics of Kamen, as that Discipline virtually defines the nature of the bloodline.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Dominate, Kamen, Resilience

Weakness: In addition to the clan weakness of the Ventrue, the Sotoha devote so much energy to suppressing their Beast that, when it emerges, the Beast grabs its freedom for all it is worth. Sotoha frenzies do not end naturally. When the Storyteller decides a frenzy should end, he may instead require the Sotoha's player to make an extended Resolve + Composure roll to bring his character out of frenzy, rolling once per turn or minute, as the Storyteller sees fit. A total of five successes are needed to pull out of an involuntary frenzy. If the character was riding the wave (see p. 181 of *Vampire: The Requiem*), only three successes are needed to pull out.

Finally, a Sotoha in frenzy cannot simply spend one Willpower point to take control of himself for one turn

(see p. 180 of *Vampire: The Requiem*). Instead, the character must earn the right to spend that Willpower point by succeeding on a reflexive Resolve + Composure action. If the roll succeeds, he may spend the Willpower point that turn. If not, he is helpless before the Beast during that turn.

Organization: The Sotoha are one of the most rigidly organized bloodlines. Every Kindred has a lord, and most also have vassals. A vampire's first lord is the Kindred who Embraced him, and the only way to change his lord is through the rite of *harakiri*. The Sotoha enforce this even on Kindred who do not choose to awaken their blood.

As noted above, a vassal is expected to show absolute loyalty to his lord. The lord's orders and interests should take precedence over everything, including the vassal's very survival. If the lord is harmed or killed, the vassals have a duty to hunt down and attempt to kill the offenders, even if that means certain death. The Sotoha, on the whole, take these obligations very seriously. Lords are permitted to order the deaths of their vassals. However, that vassal's vassals then have a duty to hunt down their lord's former lord. As a result, this option is rarely exercised.

Torpor does not normally interrupt the claims of loyalty; the only exception is torpor due to *harakiri*, which releases a vassal from the chain of fealty. Final Death transfers the loyalty of the vassals to the lord's lord, with the exception of death through *hinomi*, which leaves them free.

A Sotoha without a lord, a *ronin* (and the Sotoha do use that term), is accorded very little respect or status, and cannot have any dots in Clan Status as the rest of the Ventrue take this shunning seriously. However, the rite of *harakiri* is respected, and no action is taken against Sotoha who choose to remain *ronin*. The attitude of the bloodline toward a member who swears fealty to someone outside it depends entirely on the attitude to the new master.

Concepts: Fiercely loyal urban samurai, sensitive warrior-poet, power-broker just waiting for the right moment to separate from his lord, trapped vassal of a tyrannical lord, over-enthusiastic Japanophile, idealistic *ronin* Carthian, artist of deaths and endings, a Seneschal as impassive as the traditional English butler, *ronin* searching desperately for a worthy lord, Kindred determined to make his own unlife a brief and glorious thing

Spina

"I should be profoundly grateful if you would permit me the chance to defeat you."

The members of the Order of the Thorned Wreath follow the teachings of Artus Le Jumel. Spina vampires have his teachings in their very blood, for they are of his bloodline. The overwhelming majority of members of this bloodline are also members of the Thorned Wreath; joining the Order is usually a prerequisite to finding a sponsor to awaken the bloodline — and leaving the Order is normally regarded, and punished, as betrayal. Still, the Order and the bloodline are not identical.

Le Jumel explained it thus: "The Order of the Thorned Wreath is a duty, a task that we have taken on. We perform that duty because we have sworn to perform it, but had we chosen to swear a different oath, we would also have chosen a different duty. Our blood is what we are. We fight with courtesy because of our nature, not because of any oath. Had we chosen to swear to bring the Invictus down to the dust, we would yet have done so without descending to boorishness."

Members of this bloodline believe those words even tonight. If anything, the Kindred who have left the Thorned Wreath hold this belief even more strongly than those within. Spina might abandon the Invictus, or even support its enemies, but they are still courteous warriors. They maintain their courtesy and courage as highly public virtues, to prove that they are still Spina, even if they have pledged allegiance to a different organization.

Courtesy is what most Kindred think of when they think of the Spina. It is relatively easy to find a vampire who will claim that a Spina has been rude to him; rather harder to find one who can produce any reliable witnesses to the event. From the night of their Embrace, all potential Spina are taught how to maintain their calm in all situations and the correct polite responses to a wide range of insults. In time, these become second nature, allowing a Spina to belittle another vampire mercilessly without once saying anything that steps across the bounds of politesse.

It is very important to remember that the Spina are polite; they are not nice. One meaning of their name is "thorn," and they see themselves as the thorns in the Thorned Wreath. The Spina are sharp and wounding, and not merely in physical combat. Spina not infrequently become Harpies, dreaded for their satires and respected out of pure fear.



Publicly losing control to frenzy is a source of great shame within the Spina. The Beast is many things, but it is certainly not courteous. Most Spina also try to avoid losing control in private, as you never know who might be watching. The bloodline's greatest contempt, however, is reserved for those who "ride the wave," sacrificing courtesy for a little raw power. Absolutes are dangerous, so one should not say that the Spina never "ride the wave." However, no vampire known to have done so is ever accepted into the bloodline.

While courtesy is more visible, the Spina define themselves equally by their courage. This is primarily physical courage; the Spina do not back down from a fight because it is dangerous. As most Spina are highly trained warriors, this attitude results in fewer losses than might be expected. However, physical courage is not the only kind. Spina are expected to stand up for their beliefs and stand by their wards, even under severe moral pressure. Most Spina live up to this standard, and the bloodline loses more members to hunts called by Princes defied on matters of principle than it does to battles in which the Spina fought despite overwhelming odds.

The importance of courage means that, of all the types of frenzy, fear frenzy is regarded as the worst. Many Spina try to train themselves to react less badly to fire or sunlight, but that fear is deeply rooted in vampire nature, and such training typically has no effect other than to inspire a few unnecessary frenzies. Still, "spina" can also mean "spine," and the Spina like to think that they have backbone.

Indeed, more broadly, they see themselves as providing the backbone of any organization to which they belong. They do not generally seek to rule; Le Jumel was quite clear in his rejection of wide-ranging authority. The Spina do, on the other hand, believe that they have the right, and indeed the duty, to judge the rulers. Criticisms should be voiced, politely, of course, but repeatedly, until they are addressed. The Spina are also happy to enforce the standards of a group on others, and, in many cases, they have the capacity to do so.

For those Spina in the Order of the Thorned Wreath, this tendency to become an Inquisition of sorts is held in check by their oaths of loyalty, which prevent them from moving against any members of the Invictus. However,

Spina outside the Thorned Wreath have no such restriction, and frequently cause trouble for other Kindred.

One group of non-Thorn Wreath-aligned Spina are still members of the Invictus, and have a certain level of notoriety and even respect from the Thorned Wreath itself. These Kindred listen for rumors of vampires who abuse the service of the Thorned Wreath, and then punish these vampires in public, and generally spectacular, ways. It is possible to survive such a punishment, but it is not common. This group takes no name for itself, but many in the Invictus call them the Furies. Their numbers are unknown, and they may not, in fact, be organized in any way. A few Spina, such as the French vampire Martine de Perpignan, have become renowned and dreaded as Furies. Martine cuts the right arms off her victims, and then chains them to watch their own flesh burn. It takes some time to heal an arm, in the best case, but if she feels the abuse was severe she chains the arm to the vampire's chest before setting it afire.

Parent Clan: Daeva

Nickname: Barbs (as in barbed wire, barbed words)

Covenant: The Spina are overwhelmingly members of the Invictus, and fit very well into that covenant's structure. A significant number are also found within the Lancea Sanctum, and these vampires have generally changed because of the strength of their religious convictions. Most of the Spina who have left the Order of the Thorned Wreath without being declared traitors are found among the Sanctified. A handful have joined the Ordo Dracul in an attempt to overcome frenzies and the fears inherent to their natures. The Circle of the Crone boasts maybe one or two Spina.

The Carthians, however, claim the allegiance of a significant group of Spina, Kindred who found their ideals leading them in opposition to their elders, and who took the bloodline's injunction to bravely stand up for their ideals quite seriously. All Spina among the Carthians are regarded as traitors by the Order of the Thorned Wreath, but those who still walk the night are regarded as too much trouble to hunt down. If the opportunity were to arise, these Spina would be killed in a moment, but they have proved well capable of defending themselves.

Finally, a few Spina find that their ideals prevent them remaining loyal even to the Carthians, and these Spina end up among the unaligned. Most of these Kindred affect the pose of the elegant outlaw, although the outlaw part, at least, is generally real enough.

Appearance: Unsurprisingly, the basic appearance of the Spina is very similar to the basic appearance of members of the Thorned Wreath. Those members of the bloodline who are members of the Order of the Thorned Wreath uphold its standards with enthusiasm, and always display its symbol. The barbed wire version is less popular within the bloodline than with external recruits, but some younger members still affect it. The Daeva influence is clear in the strong tendency

of Spina to maintain individual styles, while still contriving to look like warriors of the Order of the Thorned Wreath.

Those Spina outside the Order of the Thorned Wreath generally try to send two signals with their styles of dress. First, they are elegant, sophisticated and utterly confident in their own style. Second, they are clearly and completely distinct from the Thorned Wreath. On the whole, these Spina try to keep their outfits practical for combat, as most Spina see themselves as warriors, but Nur of Zagreb was renowned, during his time in Bremen, for wearing nothing but hundreds of chains, of dozens of different weights.

Almost all Spina carry a "polite" weapon visibly at all times. In Kindred society, this often means a firearm, as the vampire resistance to bullets makes such weapons less of a threat. Antique dueling pistols, or modern imitations of such, are quite popular, combining as they do elegance with near-complete uselessness, which means that there are quite a few Princes who will even permit the Spina to carry such weapons in their presence.

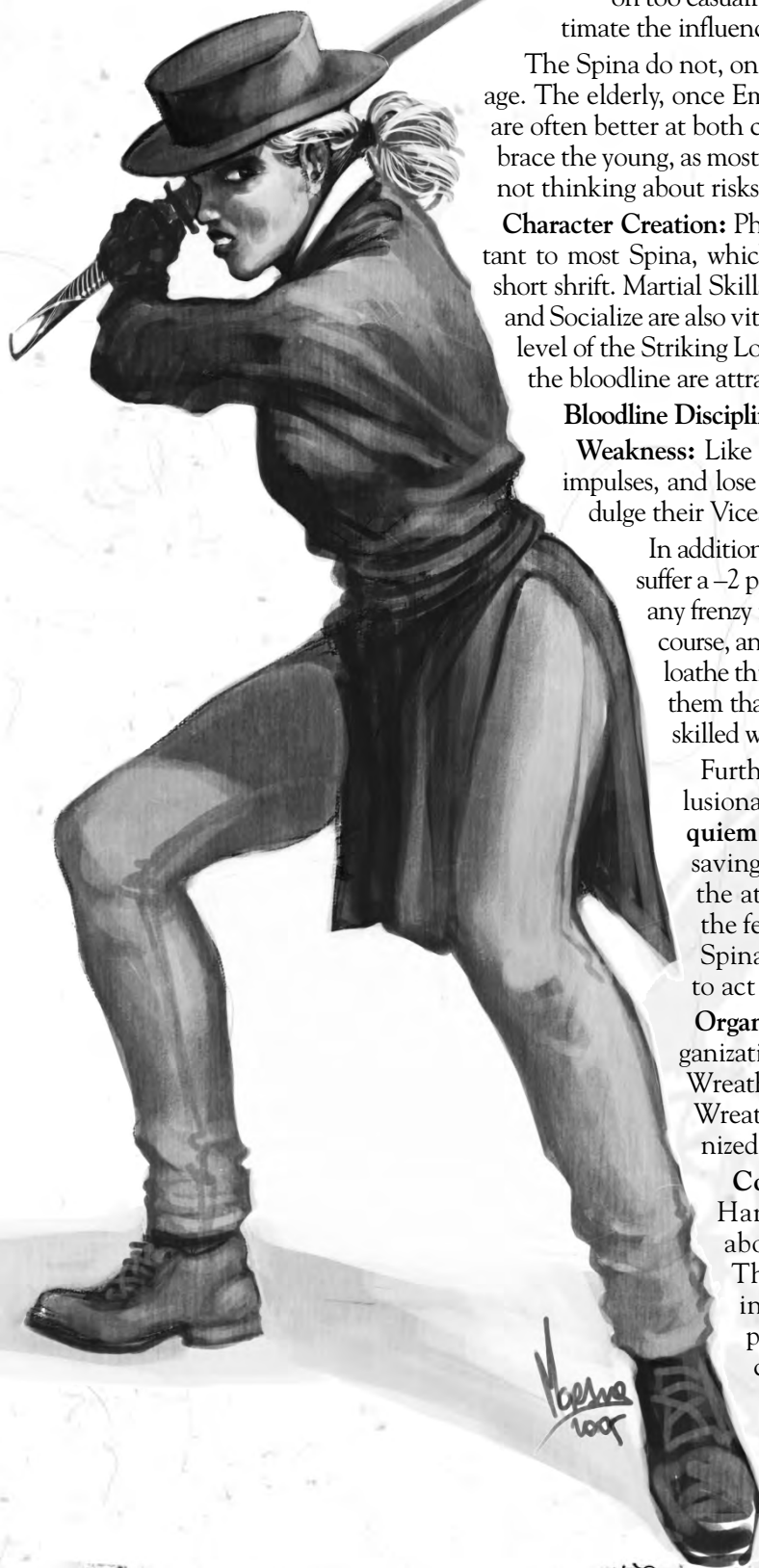
Haven: Spina havens are always elegant, usually beautiful and appointed for polite conversation and high-class soirees. It would be unpardonably rude to ambush someone you have invited to your haven, so those who are not actually enemies of the Spina might learn to accept such invitations when they are offered. The Spina issue such invitations fairly frequently, as well, as invitations allow them to display both courtesy, in treating guests well, and courage, in allowing the locations of their havens to become known.

Of course, the Spina are not stupid. Almost all have at least one secondary haven, where they can rest if their enemies decide to attack the main one.

Almost all Spina havens also include an armory and martial training area. The armory not infrequently doubles as a collection of noteworthy historical weapons, and may be shown to visitors. Almost all Spina armories include a flamethrower, prominently displayed but never mentioned to visitors. Asking whether it is loaded is extremely boorish; many are not, but there are some Spina who refuse to admit that sort of weakness even to themselves, and keep the weapon charged.

The training area may double as a dueling ground, for dealing with guests who are so rude as to require a physical lesson. Guests get quite a bit of leeway, but refusing to leave when asked to do so often provokes a duel, as does attacking the host. Attacking another guest gets you attacked on the spot, as the host defends his own hospitality.

Background: It is important not to forget that the Spina are a Daeva bloodline. They do not Embrace unalluring people, and are drawn to beauty almost as much as their parent clan. However, as the Spina do have additional criteria they are more willing to Embrace those who may fall short of stunning beauty. The primary additional criteria are a natural courtesy and a degree of courage. Spina tend to test both of these, quite deliberately, before deciding on an Embrace, but they do not expect someone to live up to



the standards of the bloodline right away. Some Spina train potential childer while they are still mortals; other Spina Embrace those who have the potential and only accept them into the bloodline if the potential is fulfilled. The first group believe that the second pass the Curse on too casually; the second group believe that the first underestimate the influence of vampirism on mortals' characters.

The Spina do not, on the whole, care about class, race, sex, money or age. The elderly, once Embraced, can be just as strong as the young, and are often better at both courage and courtesy. The Spina very rarely Embrace the young, as most children find true courage (as opposed to simply not thinking about risks) as hard as being polite.

Character Creation: Physical and Social Attributes are the most important to most Spina, which inevitably leads to Mental Attributes getting short shrift. Martial Skills are important, and Social Skills like Persuasion and Socialize are also vital to maintaining a proper level of courtesy. Some level of the Striking Looks Merit is also a good idea, as most members of the bloodline are attractive and admirable, even if not truly beautiful.

Bloodline Disciplines: Celerity, Courtoisie, Majesty, Vigor

Weakness: Like the Daeva, Spina find it difficult to resist their impulses, and lose two Willpower points when they opt not to indulge their Vices.

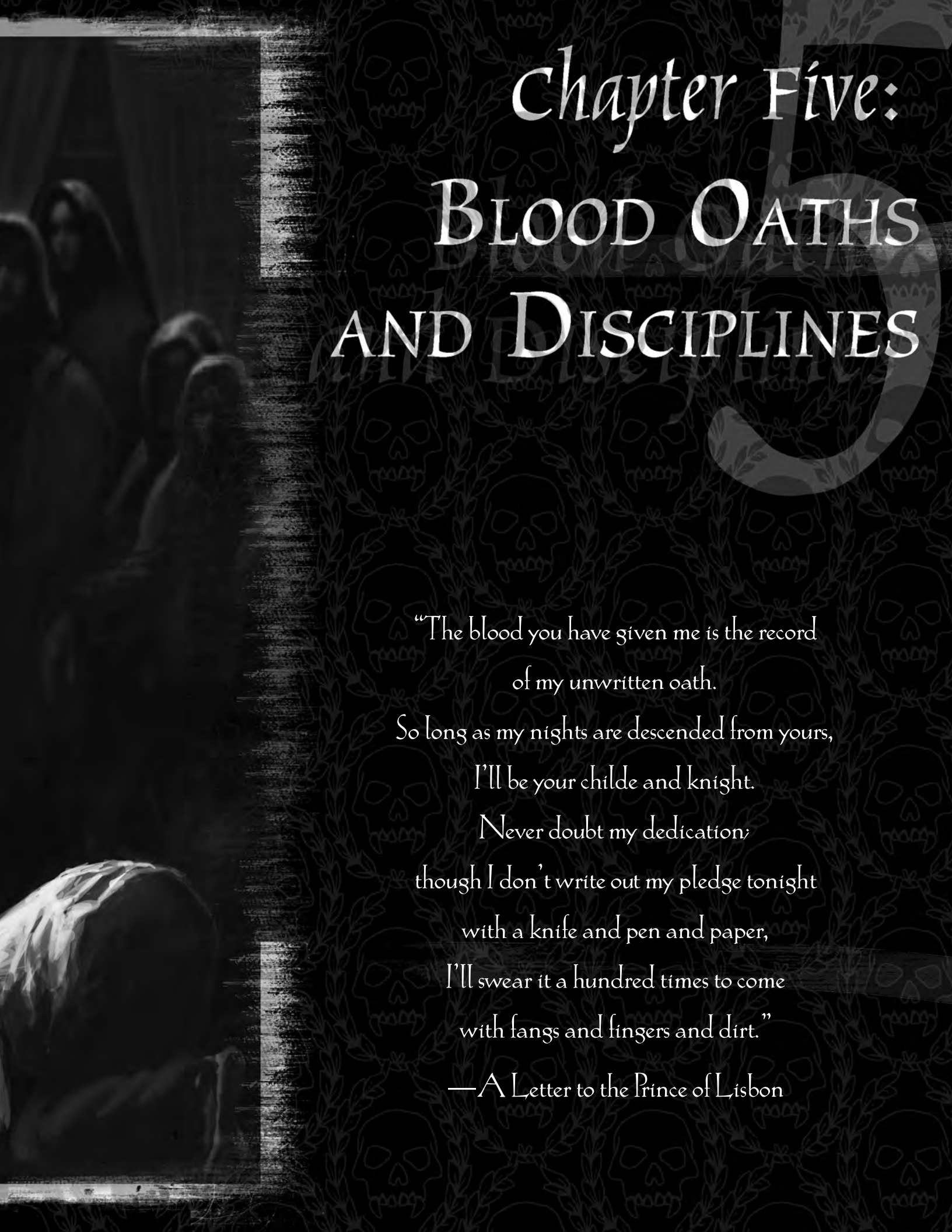
In addition, the Spina simply cannot tolerate rudeness. They suffer a -2 penalty to Resolve + Composure dice pools to resist any frenzy inspired by reckless, crass or insulting behavior. Of course, an anger frenzy is never polite behavior, so the Spina loathe this weakness of their souls. It is perhaps fortunate for them that most Kindred realize that deliberately goading a skilled warrior into frenzy is extremely foolish.

Further, all Spina vampires suffer from a kind of Delusional Obsession (see p. 189 of **Vampire: The Requiem**) built around the concept that courtesy is the saving grace of the Damned. With time and vigilance, the attitude of courtesy may eventually domesticate the feral nature of the Beast, or so say some Spina. A Spina Kindred must expend one point of Willpower to act in a discourteous manner to any creature.

Organization: The Spina, as a bloodline, have no organization independent of the Order of the Thorned Wreath. Those few Spina who are outside the Thorned Wreath may join other groups, but they are not organized qua Spina.

Concepts: Thorned Wreath Knight, aspiring Harpy, Thorned Wreath Knight with doubts about his calling, Fury avenging abuses of the Thorned Wreath, Sanctified vampire spreading his faith with courtesy and obstinacy, vampire struggling to overcome his Beast and become perfectly courteous, bodyguard to a powerful Kindred, puppeteer of a powerful Kindred pretending to be a mere bodyguard, revolutionary concealing his true beliefs in order to strike at the system from within, violent upholder of the social order





Chapter Five: BLOOD OATHS AND DISCIPLINES

“The blood you have given me is the record
of my unwritten oath.

So long as my nights are descended from yours,
I’ll be your childe and knight.

Never doubt my dedication;
though I don’t write out my pledge tonight
with a knife and pen and paper,

I’ll swear it a hundred times to come
with fangs and fingers and dirt.”

—A Letter to the Prince of Lisbon

*'Tis not the many oaths that make the truth;
But the plain single vow, that is vow'd true.*
—William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*

BLOOD OATHS

Oaths are the skeleton of the Invictus hierarchy. While the muscles, nerves and skin are at least as important, oaths give the covenant its basic shape and maintain its strength. As Kindred, members of the Invictus swear their oaths by their own blood. These oaths are held, by all Invictus, to be inviolable, and the covenant knows ways to back up this belief with supernatural power.

STORYTELLER'S OPTION: AUSPEX AND TENURE

Some Storytellers may decide that the legends of the Annunaku are true. Thus, the Storyteller might open up the Discipline of Tenure to all Kindred, not just those of Annunaku blood. In chronicles using that option, the Tenure Discipline may be substituted for Auspex when fulfilling the prerequisites for the Blood Oaths described below.

Symbolic Blood Oaths

The most common Blood Oaths in the covenant are the symbolic Blood Oaths, in which nothing more potent than the honor of the Kindred involved enforces the terms. In most cases, the Kindred who are swearing write the text of their oath in their own blood, and give the text to the person to whom they are swearing. In one French city, the oath is written on parchment made from human skin, in the presence of at least four witnesses, in the last hour of the night. In a city in the United States Midwest, those who break their oaths are made to swear again on parchment made from their own skin, using a pen made from their finger bones and an inkwell made from their ribs. If the Prince is feeling generous, the oath-breaker is allowed to heal the injuries before swearing.

In a Canadian domain, one Priscus has the texts of oaths written and illuminated in gold leaf on parchment, and the completed text is then dipped in the oath-taker's blood. One Central-American Prince, on the other hand, refuses to acknowledge written records of oaths, requiring those Kindred who swear to him to fill cups with their blood and then cast the cups into a fire. The

size of the cup varies depending on the Prince's feelings about that particular Kindred.

These Blood Oaths can be of any of the general types described below, but they have no supernatural effects. If a Kindred breaks such an oath, he suffers only the mundane — yet formidable — penalties imposed by a disgruntled superior.

Oaths of Avoidance

The simplest oath is an oath to refrain from some action. Some types are common: oaths not to attack a particular Kindred, feed in a certain area or enter a certain domain. Other oaths are more unusual. A powerful Invictus member on the West Coast of the United States requires those Kindred who want his help to swear not to feed from mortals who have smoked marijuana in the last 30 days, while a Prince in central Europe imposes strange oaths of avoidance as punishments. One Kindred swore never to carry any sharp object, another never to feed before midnight and yet another never to pass a cat without trying to stroke it.

It is normally obvious when an oath of avoidance has been broken, but there are always borderline cases. Kindred can choose what to believe in such cases, but, in general, supernatural penalties only apply if the Kindred in question believed that there was, at least, a real risk that he was breaking the oath. Accordingly, Kindred with lords known to be somewhat arbitrary may choose to ask to swear a supernatural oath, because if the oath does not think it has been broken, the lord finds it harder to impose punishment.

Oaths of avoidance are not usually directly beneficial to the swearer, although there may be necessary conditions on gaining Status or other temporal benefits. In general, Kindred swear these sorts of oaths because they have to.

Blood-Tell Oath

The Blood-Tell Oath is the simplest form of supernatural Blood Oath. The swearing Kindred writes something in his own blood, expending a single Vitae, and the person to whom he is swearing expends a Willpower point. The text

remains fresh until and unless the oath is broken. As long as the blood remains fresh, it can be consumed to provide one Vitae, or tasted to test a Kindred's qualities of blood. Doing so risks blood addiction in the normal way.

In most places, the swearing Kindred is required to write the text of his oath, but that is not required for the power to work. An Invictus Priscus of a Carthian city in Europe requires those swearing to write their lineage for seven generations back; those who cannot do so are judged unworthy to swear any oath to him.

It is believed that, in the distant past, this power was a Devotion. However, for whatever reason, the trick can now be taught to any Kindred in a single night (for a cost of 5 experience points). Since both the Kindred swearing the oath and the person he is swearing to must know it, this is all but common knowledge within the Invictus, and not uncommon outside it.

NOTARIES

In most domains, and through most of Invictus history, Blood Oaths have been more common than practitioners of Blood Oaths. The mystic properties of Blood Oaths are peculiar in that the Kindred supplying the arcane know-how to activate a Blood Oath Devotion does not have to be a party to the contract ensorcelled by the Devotion. Thus, the costs of such Devotions are often paid by the participants in the contract, rather than the invoker of the Blood's power.

Blood Oaths, then, are specialized knowledge. Most domains have just one or two mystic Notaries who oversee all the covenant's supernatural contracts. Even then, the truth of their supernatural power is often kept secret from all but the most powerful Society Kindred.

Oath of Blood Knives

While the threat, or even certain knowledge, of discovery will dissuade some Kindred from breaking an Oath, others are willing to brave the anger of their superiors, sure that they can run or hide. The Oath of Blood Knives imposes mystical punishment at the moment of violation, ensuring that an Oath-breaker cannot get away without penalty. The power behind the oath comes from a Devotion, which may be used by anyone present at the swearing.

As the Devotion requires knowledge of both Auspex and Dominate, it is far from universally known, even within the Invictus. Many Invictus cities, and many other places with a significant number of members of the covenant, have at least one Kindred who knows the Devotion and serves as a witness for important oaths. This Kindred normally has a title within the covenant hierarchy; "Notary" is favored.

While the Kindred swearing the oath must be doing so voluntarily, he need not be voluntarily submitting to this

Devotion. That is, the Devotion can be used on a Kindred who is swearing an oath by writing a text in his own blood, even without his knowledge. Invictus stories tell of Tadeus the Just, an ancient member of the covenant who travels the world incognito, imposing this oath or its more powerful variant, the Oath of Burning Blood, on Kindred who swear oaths that they intend to break.

The Invictus once took control of a city by forming an alliance with the Carthians to unseat the Circle of the Crone, who were in control at the time. The Carthians' oaths were all, unbeknownst to them, sealed with this Devotion. As expected, the Carthians betrayed the Invictus, dying spectacularly while in a secret conference with the Circle of the Crone. Using this evidence of the Circle's foul blood-sorcery to rouse the unaligned and the Lancea Sanctum, the Invictus propelled itself to power. It is unlikely that such a ruse would work today.

Oath of Blood Knives

Prerequisite: Auspex ••, Dominate ••, Protean •

Cost: 1 Vitae (supplied by the Kindred swearing the Oath)

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Dominate – subject's Resolve

Action: Instant

The Oath of Blood Knives must be sworn willingly by a Kindred who donates the point of Vitae needed to activate the Oath. Such an oath cannot be sworn while under mystical compulsion; the Kindred's will must be truly free. A Kindred can seal his own Oath with the Discipline, but it is normal for the beneficiary of the Oath to do so instead, as otherwise there is no evidence that the Devotion has been used.

As with the Blood-Tell Oath, the Oath of Blood Knives requires a text written in the blood of the Kindred swearing. This blood remains fresh until the Oath is broken or the swearing Kindred suffers Final Death. In addition, if the swearer violates the Oath, he immediately takes a number of points of lethal damage equal to the number of successes on the activation roll, and loses the same amount of Vitae. The damage is caused as the Kindred's own blood forms into jagged shards and cuts its way out of the foresworn body. (A Kindred with insufficient, or no, Vitae remaining still takes the full damage, but cannot lose more Vitae than he has.) There is no resistance roll allowed, as the Kindred voluntarily took on the Oath. The subject of the Oath has no idea how many successes were rolled, and thus does not know how much damage he risks. If the activation roll fails, the Oath functions as a Blood-Tell Oath.

The effect of the Devotion ends when the subject breaks the Oath, thereby taking damage from it, or when the Notary or the lord releases the subject from its effects by blotting out the written oath with one Vitae of his own.

This power costs 10 experience points to learn.

The Oath Unsworn

The Oath of Blood Knives requires the subject to freely swear an oath. The Oath Unsworn is largely the same — but without that inconvenient restriction. This Blood Oath does require the target Kindred to be in the presence of the vampire using the Devotion for as long as it takes to recite the text of the Oath, however, which places some restrictions on it.

A former Prince of New York imposed the Oath only in the most dire circumstances. The subject was brought before all the officers of the city, chained and manacled hand and foot, dressed in black with a hood over his head. All the officers wore white masks and, after the Prince recited each clause of the Oath, they intoned, “It is fixed.” Some of the Oaths imposed in this way took an entire night to recite.

In complete contrast, a Priscus in Brazil simply summoned the offender to stand before him. His audience hall was very long, over 100 meters, and he would start intoning the Oath as the doors were locked behind the target. A subject that could reach the Priscus before he could finish the Oath was normally immune. Needless to say, the Oaths were short and to the point. And the Priscus was renowned for his mastery of Celerity.

This Devotion is not always as useful as it might be. The Prince of an American city, many years ago, imposed this Oath on two feuding Kindred, requiring them to refrain from attacking each other, encouraging such attacks or even undermining one another socially. United by their newfound hatred of the Prince, they allied, overthrowing him, and then were both destroyed shortly afterward, when they discovered that the Oath’s power is not ended by the Final Death of the Kindred who imposed it.

It should be noted that there is no easy way to be sure this Devotion has been used. More than one Invictus Prince has backed up his rhetorical power with a simple bluff.

The Oath Unsworn

Prerequisite: Auspex •••, Dominate ••, Protean ••

Cost: 1 Vitae (supplied by the subject), 1 Willpower point (supplied by the character imposing the Oath)

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Dominate versus Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

The target of the imposed Blood Oath must be in the presence of the user of the Devotion, and must be told what he is swearing in a language he can understand. Eye contact is not necessary, but the Devotion fails if the target manages to flee out of earshot before the full Oath can be recited to him. The user of the Devotion must write the text of the Oath in his own blood, and normally does so while reciting it. However, the text can also be written shortly (no more than an hour) in advance — and since the Devotion does not take effect until the text is complete — this is normal if restraining the target is likely to be difficult.

The content of the Oath must be something that the target can reasonably do; impossible Oaths simply fail to take hold over the swearer. In addition, particularly onerous or dangerous Oaths give the target a bonus of up to +5 to his resistance roll (at the Storyteller’s discretion).

If the activation roll succeeds, the target is affected as if under an Oath of Blood Knives. The Kindred using the Devotion does not, however, immediately know whether he succeeded. If he has failed, the blood of the text dries over the course of an hour or so — thus he soon finds out.

The effect of the Devotion ends when the subject breaks the Oath, thereby taking damage from it, or when the Notary or the lord releases the subject from its effects by blotting out the written oath with one Vitae of his own.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

The Oath of Burning Blood

The Oath of Burning Blood is perhaps the most powerful of the supernatural oaths of avoidance. While most versions of the Blood Oath give a Kindred good reason not to break his Oath, the Oath of Burning Blood actually makes it hard for him to do so, in addition to punishing him severely if he does. Swearing such an Oath is not undertaken lightly, and the lords of the Invictus only impose it in the most serious circumstances. Unlike lesser counterparts, this Devotion is almost completely unknown outside the Invictus, and is spoken of only in rumors.

Even within the Invictus, there are few Kindred who know it, and most of them are Notaries, rather than Princes. As the Devotion costs a dot of Willpower, the Kindred who know the Devotion are very reluctant to use it. Some Notaries have been known to secretly use the Oath of Blood Knives in place of this one, if they do not agree with the Prince that the case merits this more serious oath. Since those under this Oath rarely even try to break it, such deceptions often go unnoticed.

Centuries ago, a human warrior named Richard fell in love with Isabel, a Kindred and an Invictus Prince who did not love him back. After he destroyed the first six Kindred she sent to get rid of him, she decided that he would be a valuable servant, and Embraced him. In her first act, she required him to swear an Oath of Burning Blood never to touch her with body or tool. He swore, and was a devoted servant for years. Eventually, however, Isabel was overthrown, beaten into torpor and left to face the rising sun. Richard broke his Oath to carry her to safety, either dying or sinking into torpor beside her. In some versions of the story, they both lay in the dirt, waiting to re-emerge into the night.

The Oath of Burning Blood

Prerequisite: Auspex •••, Dominate •••, Nightmare ••

Cost: 1 Vitae (supplied by the Kindred swearing the Oath), 1 Willpower dot (supplied by the Kindred activating the Devotion)



Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Dominate – subject's Resolve

Action: Instant

The use of this Devotion resembles the others; the subject writes the text of his oath in his own blood, and then swears to it. As with the Oath of Blood Knives, the swearing Kindred must be acting entirely of his own free will, without supernatural compulsion. As with the other versions, the bloody text of the Oath remains fresh until the swearing Kindred breaks it or dies his Final Death.

If the activation roll fails, the Oath functions as a Blood-Tell Oath. If the activation roll succeeds, record the number of successes.

When the swearer faces some force that could compel him to break the Oath, he gets a bonus to his resistance roll equal to the number of successes on the activation roll. This only applies to resistance rolls, and only against forces that could make him break the Oath. The bonus applies to any relevant resistance roll, however, including rolls to resist frenzy and supernatural compulsion.

On the other hand, if the Kindred wants to break his Oath, he must equal or exceed the activation roll's successes with a Resolve + Composure roll (essentially contesting the roll after the fact). He can make the attempt as an instant action, and can repeat it as often as he likes. If he fails, it takes a single action, as he gathers his will and then fails to carry through on the action he planned. The subject may also break the Oath instantly and automatically by spending a dot (not a point) of Willpower.

If the Kindred breaks his Oath, whether voluntarily or not, he takes a number of points of aggravated damage equal to the number of successes gained on the activation roll, as an equal number of points of Vitae burst into flames within his body and burn their way out through his skin. No resistance roll is allowed, as he took the Oath voluntarily. As with the Oath of Blood Knives, a Kindred with insufficient Vitae still takes the aggravated damage, but only loses as much blood as he had in his body. The fire is visible and tangible in every way, possibly provoking frenzy in onlookers or causing damage to surrounding people and possessions.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

Oaths of Performance

An oath of performance is a promise to take action on behalf of the lord, or at least to devote one's full energy to achieving said action. Such an oath is not broken by continued failure, unless the oath contains a time limit, and although Final Death does break the oath, ceasing to even try to achieve the goal *does* break the oath.

Oaths of performance, like oaths of avoidance, are often sworn because a Kindred has little choice in the matter. In particular, these oaths are a common means of punishment for minor crimes among the

Invictus, forcing the criminal to redress the balance with Invictus society. However, the more powerful supernatural oaths of performance grant some benefits to the Kindred swearing them, and Kindred fully intending to carry out a certain action may swear them voluntarily.

Most oaths of performance are oaths to complete some significant task. Oaths to perform a lesser task repeatedly are normally mutual oaths, as the lord being sworn to customarily offers some prize or power in return. The Ventrue, Amadeo, for example, swore to bring the whole of India under Invictus control at a grand ceremony held in Vienna, attended by all the notable Society vampires of that city, while his followers swore oaths to support him. (Amadeo swore an oath of performance, while his followers swore mutual oaths, as described below.) The nature of the oaths seems to have been of little help, however, as none of the oath-swearing Kindred were ever heard from again.

The Oath of Running Blood

The simplest of the supernatural oaths of performance, like the Blood-Tell Oath, requires a mystic trick that can be taught to any Kindred in a single night. While swearing the oath, the Kindred bleeds a single Vitae into a suitable vessel, generally a clear bottle of some sort, and expends a point of Willpower. When he expends the Willpower, the blood hardens into dark brown glass. As the Kindred nears to the fulfillment of his Oath, the blood becomes more scarlet and more fluid, turning fully liquid when the Oath is fulfilled.

The liquidity of the blood is based on the mind of the sworn subject. If he believes he is close to fulfilling the Oath, the blood becomes very fluid. If he knows in his heart that he is doing nothing to fulfill the Oath, the blood hardens back to solidity. It is thus possible for the blood to become completely liquid even though the Oath has not been fulfilled, if the Kindred in question *thinks* that it has.

If the subject suffers Final Death, the blood turns black and shatters into dust.

In the treasure room of an ancient Invictus of Spain rests a crystal phial, contained in a golden reliquary encrusted with gems. The phial contains the blood of Rhadeghund, a Mekhet who swore to find a way for the Kindred to shake off their Curse. She swore that Oath in the fifth century, and the blood in the phial has streaks of red liquid to this night. Once a year, on the seventh of February, the owner presents the phial to the other Invictus of the city, who confirm that the Oath is not yet fulfilled.

This power costs three experience points to learn, but only one of the participating Kindred — the lord or the vassal — needs to know the power to activate it.

DEVOTIONS OR NOT?

Some Oaths seem to draw on the raw mystic qualities of the Blood — the same supernatural potency that empowers the Vinculum and the Embrace — rather than the refined arcane powers of Disciplines. It may be that these powers are some form of diluted Devotions, thinned to the point where any suitable potent Vitae can unlock their powers. The truth is that not all such powers are fully understood even by the Invictus that employ them.

In terms of game mechanics, treat these odd powers as Devotions with no inherent prerequisite Disciplines. All that's required is suitably potent blood. At the Storyteller's discretion, however, the Blood Potency prerequisite can be replaced with the following: To purchase an Oath of Performance, a character must have at least six dots of Disciplines.

Rumors persist among the Damned of all covenants that the inherent mystic sympathy of the Blood can be exploited, altered or enhanced with other supernatural powers besides these.

Oath of the Bloody Hand

The Oath of the Bloody Hand provides the swearer with minor benefits, but also imposes significant penalties if the Oath is broken. This is one of the more common supernatural performance oaths, and the Devotion necessary to empower it is known by many Invictus Notaries and Society Princes.

An Invictus Prince in North Africa has a room decorated with the hands of those who have sworn performance oaths to him. He requires such Kindred to also swear an Oath of Running Blood, and keeps the hands in the same jars as the blood from the latter oath. Only his Primogen are allowed to see the interior of this room, and they report that there are dozens of jars.

Ali Al-Din, of the Daeva, has sworn such an Oath, and wears the hand on a thong around his neck, as a gruesome talisman. He refuses to speak of the content of his Oath, and the hand is still a vivid scarlet. Al-Din travels between cities, and most Kindred who know of him suspect that his Oath is to enact a terrible revenge on some other vampire.

Persistent rumors hold that some Invictus domains maintain an elite group of spies who infiltrate other covenants. These spies all swear an Oath of the Bloody Hand to enable the Invictus to rule the city, investing as much Blood as is necessary to ensure that abandoning the Oath destroys them. Their normal activities contribute to this end, but if they are hopelessly captured, they can choose to abandon the Oath, facing Final Death before betraying the covenant.

Oath of the Bloody Hand

Prerequisite: Blood Potency •••+, Covenant Status: Invictus •+

Cost: 1 aggravated wound and at least 1 Vitae (all provided by the Kindred taking the Oath)

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary to activate this power.

Action: Instant

This strange power can be applied to an oath by either a lord or a vassal — only one of them must possess this power for it to take effect. The Kindred with this supernatural power makes the activation roll.

The Kindred swearing this Oath drives at least one Vitae into his fingertips and, and the conclusion of his promise, cuts his hand off to seal the oath. This causes an aggravated wound. The Kindred may choose the amount of Vitae to sacrifice, up to the total he currently has available. The Blood Oath may be sworn over a period long enough to allow the Kindred to use all of his Vitae.

If the activation roll succeeds, the Oath takes effect. A failed activation roll means the power fails completely, resulting in nothing but lost Vitae and a severed hand.

If the Oath successfully takes effect, the hand leaks no blood, although it appears a bright crimson. At any time, the Kindred who swore the Oath may spend any of the Vitae in the invested hand as if it were his own. He may do this in the same turn that he spends Vitae from his body, and such expenditure does not count against the amount of Vitae he can expend in single turn based on his Blood Potency. The blood can only be used on actions that contribute directly to fulfilling the Oath, however. Every time he does so, the color of the hand fades a little, becoming stark white when all the invested blood has been used.

Kindred who have sworn this Oath may heal the wound and restore their hands as normal. Most do. This does not cancel the Oath or destroy the invested hand.

If the sworn Kindred fails to perform his duties for one night, he suffers an amount of bashing damage equal to the Vitae initially invested in the Oath; his flesh bruises from within and his bones feel stretched and sore. Every night that sees the sworn subject take action that is directly contrary to the Oath causes the subject an amount of lethal damage equal to the Vitae initially invested in the Oath; his flesh splits and cracks, bloody blisters rise up and burst. This damage strikes the sworn immediately upon waking the *following* night.

If the subject falls into torpor before fulfilling his promise, the Oath is completely suspended until he awakens. Time spent in torpor does not cause the subject to suffer damage. The Vitae in an invested hand cannot be spent by a torpid subject.

An invested hand with no remaining Vitae draws blood from the subject unless the Oath is fulfilled or abandoned. The hand mystically steals one of the subject's Vitae when the subject rises the next night,

even if this would drive the subject to frenzy or torpor. This is the only way to reinvest Vitae into an oath-hand.

If the Kindred abandons the Oath, the hand immediately blackens and crumbles to dust, and the Kindred suffers a number of points of aggravated damage equal to the number of Vitae he invested in the Oath. Abandoning an Oath requires a conscious decision to break the promise — planning to do nothing for 100 years would garner a lot of nightly damage, but none of that damage would be aggravated.

When the Kindred fulfills his Oath, the hand becomes living flesh, and remains vital for one night for every Vitae that remained in it. A hand that come to life with no blood in it withers and rots during the following day. The life-like hand is nothing more than an inanimate, fleshy trophy, however, showing the lord that his vassal's work is done.

A Kindred may only be subject to one Oath of the Bloody Hand at a time.

This power costs ten experience points to learn.

Oath of Blood Focus

Some Kindred wish to fully dedicate themselves to a particular end, and the Oath of Blood Focus is one of the more extreme means of doing so. Uniquely among the Blood Oaths, this Oath is always taken voluntarily. If a Kindred is truly devoted to a given goal, this ritual provides several benefits with few, but drastic, drawbacks.

Some among the Invictus of England once had a long tradition of taking these Oaths, and had built an elaborate ceremony around them. The Oath Chamber was said to be a vaulted, gothic structure discovered underground in London, guarded by ghouls at all times and part of Elysium no matter which faction ruled the city. When a Kindred wished to take an Oath of Blood Focus, all London Kindred who wished to believe they were significant gathered to witness it, and the swearing vampire named two supporters, who verified his Oath before the masses. The Kindred swore in Latin, following a set formula into which his name and his goal were inserted.

One of the supporters must be capable of using the Devotion if the swearing Kindred himself is not.

At the other extreme, the Oath of Blood Focus sworn by Mathilde de Lorgne, quondam Prince of a French city, is still spoken of among the Invictus of France. Her coterie had all been destroyed by the faction ruling her city, and she had been brought before an assembly of tyrannical Kindred to face "justice," though her crime varies with the telling. A sentence of Final Death was pronounced, and she was granted leave to speak some last words. She swore vengeance against all who had conspired against her, sealing her words with this Oath. Using the power it granted, she escaped from the gathering, and hunted her enemies down, ultimately taking their place as the ruler of the city.

Oath of Blood Focus

Prerequisite: Blood Potency •••+, Covenant Status: Invictus •+

Cost: 1 dot of Willpower, supplied by the Kindred taking the Oath.

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary to activate this power.

Action: Instant

The Oath of Blood Focus has both immediate and long-term effects:

On swearing the Oath, the subject's Willpower dots temporarily rise to 10. When the Oath is sworn, she immediately gains enough Willpower points to fill her expanded capacity.

The subject's Blood Potency increases by two for all purposes except for determining viable sources of Vitae.

The subject does not sleep during the daytime, though she must still spend Vitae at nightfall as though she were rising from sleep.

Finally, her Oath temporarily becomes a part of her moral center. Treat the Oath like a second Vice for the character: she regains one Willpower point after any scene in which she draws closer to completing her goal.

However, to take any action that does not contribute to fulfilling the Oath requires the subject to make a successful Resolve + Composure roll. To take an action that goes against the Oath requires an exceptional success on a Resolve + Composure roll. Even if the Kindred manages to take an action outside the scope of the Oath, she cannot spend Vitae or Willpower to augment dice pools to complete such actions.

In general, self-preservation contributes directly to the fulfillment of any Oath. If it is possible to save oneself while furthering the Oath, however, the Kindred must choose that course of action if she fails her Resolve + Composure roll, even if it is more risky than other available alternatives.

These benefits last for a number of nights equal to the subject's dots in Resolve. When the Oath's period is over, the sworn Kindred loses all of her Willpower points, leaving her worn and exhausted. The character cannot regain any Willpower from rest or chapter breaks until she regains at least one Willpower point from enacting her Virtue or her Vice.

A Kindred may only swear one Oath of Blood Focus at a time, and is bound by that Oath until she fulfills it, surrenders all of her Willpower points to break it or the Oath expires.

This power costs five experience points to learn.

Mutual Oaths

Mutual oaths, most notably oaths of fealty, are perhaps the most important oaths among the Invictus. One party to the oath promises a service in return to for a specified benefit. Typically, the superior in the pair gets

the greater benefit out of the arrangement, but that is hardly a requirement of the arrangement. These oaths are usually sworn voluntarily, by Kindred who feel that the arrangement is advantageous (or necessary), even if it's not fair.

It is, however, far from unusual for Invictus lords to demand such Oaths from their followers. Indeed, some Invictus Princes with a stranglehold on their domains require a basic oath of fealty from every Kindred in the domain, no matter what covenant the Kindred supports.

Within the Invictus, it is unusual to accept service *without* an oath of some kind. In most cases, however, the lord takes care to offer a vassal enough in return that no mystic bond is necessary.

The basic oath of fealty is rarely supernaturally enforced, in large part because its terms are normally vague. The Kindred vassal promises loyalty and political or martial support, while the lord promises protection and hunting rights, for example. Nevertheless, Invictus ceremonies are often highly elaborate. Both parties to the oath often write the terms that they swear to in their own blood, each on one half of a piece of paper or parchment. This is then torn in half, and each party keeps the half with the other party's words on it. Sometimes, however, the ceremony consists simply of the swearing Kindred and a witness in an improvised ritual during which this document is written and the parts separated.

One Invictus Prince required those Kindred swearing fealty to him to keep vigil for a whole day in a subterranean chapel, wearing armor but carrying no weapons. Kindred who managed to remain awake for the whole day were treated with increased respect, but that was not a requirement. The new vassal was then led from the chapel by the Prince's Seneschal, into the Audience Chamber, and between the massed Kindred of the city. Before the Prince, the vassal was required to abase himself on the floor, and offer his full and unconditional service. The Prince refused such service, declaring that it was due to no creature, living or undead, and instead offered fealty on certain terms, normally agreed to beforehand. The new vassal would refuse those terms, declaring himself unworthy, and the Prince would insist. A second time, the vassal would refuse and the Prince insist. Finally, on the third offering, the vassal accepted, rose to a kneeling position and wrote his half of the Oath. The Prince himself tore their contract in half and awarded the oath to his new vassal.

Oath of Blood Alliance

The Oath of Blood Alliance is the simplest supernatural mutual oath. The trick to swearing it can be learned by any Kindred in one night, and knowledge of this Oath is ubiquitous among the ancillae of some domains. One party to the Oath swears to perform a service, and the other party promises a reward.

As with many Invictus Blood Oaths, the term of the Oath must be written out in the blood of the swearing Kindred. The text of the contract remains wet for the duration of the night, or for as long the terms of the contract are unfulfilled.

The service must be something that can be performed in a single night, although it is often something that takes a whole night. A Kindred might swear to uphold the other's reputation at an Invictus soiree or to defend the gates of the other Kindred's haven against approaching enemies.

Oath of Blood Alliance

Prerequisite: Covenant Status: Invictus •+

Cost: 1 or more Willpower

Dice Pool: This power is not actively rolled. Instead, it creates a mystic contract between two parties, both of whom must possess this power.

Action: Instant or extended. (The activation action must be extended to invest more than one Willpower point into the contract.)

The Kindred offering the reward grants temporary Willpower points to the serving vampire. To grant these Willpower points, the invoker must spend an equal number of his own Willpower points when swearing the Oath. Willpower points gained are in addition to those points the Kindred has in her normal Willpower pool, but the normal limit of one Willpower point per turn still applies. The serving Kindred may spend the bequeathed Willpower points on any dice pools he likes.

If the serving Kindred abandons the task before it is complete or fails to achieve it that night, he suffers an amount of bashing damage equal to twice the number of Willpower points originally invested in the ritual and loses any unspent, bequeathed Willpower points. The mystic power of the blood contract sears or bruises the servant's flesh in his failure. This damage occurs shortly before dawn, as the Kindred's blood first calls for sleep.

The power of this Oath lasts until the next sunrise.

A Kindred can only be the servant in one Oath of Blood Alliance at a time, and similarly can only grant rewards in a single Oath of Blood Alliance at a time. Thus, a single character can be involved in two Oaths of Blood Alliance simultaneously: once as the servant and once as the lord.

This power costs four experience points to learn.

Oath of Blood Service

The Oath of Blood Service is the most common long-term mutual Blood Oath, and, even so, is very rare. The servant swears to perform a particular service every night for a set period, and in return receives a benefit from the lord. Swearing the Oath is, unusually, more expensive for the lord, which means that few senior Kindred swear these Oaths lightly.

Invictus Seneschals are often bound to their Princes by these Oaths, but as the Devotions supporting these Oaths are very specialized, this is far from universal. There are few Notaries who do not know at least one version, but even fewer who know more than two. In some domains, therefore, these Devotions are never used.

Oath of Blood Service

Prerequisite: Auspex •••, Majesty •••

Cost: 1 Vitae (spent by the lord) and 1 Willpower (spent by the vassal)

Dice Pool: Presence + Empathy + Majesty – vassal's Resolve

Action: Instant

To invoke this Oath, the vassal must drink one Vitae from the lord's veins, with all the risks of Vinculum and blood addiction that entails. The vassal then spends one Willpower point to tap into the power of the Blood.

For every success on the activation roll, the lord can grant the servant a one-dot bonus in a Skill or Discipline, up to a maximum of his own score in the Trait. These bonuses do not subtract from the lord's score. The lord must have at least three dots in a Trait to be able to bequeath dots to a vassal. (As might be expected, Auspex and Majesty are commonly bestowed with this Devotion.) A vassal must have at least one dot in a Trait to receive the bonus.

While the vassal is bound by this mystic contract, his Willpower score is lowered by one dot for each bonus dot received from the lord. The vassal's Willpower may not be raised with experience points while this Oath is in effect.

The service required of the vassal must customarily be one that takes most of the Kindred's time. Basic hunting and similar nightly chores are possible, but, in general, this Devotion involves a full-time job. Seneschals and bodyguards are most likely to swear this Oath, but few other Kindred want to bother.

If the vassal or the lord breaks the Oath, the vassal loses access to dots in the granted Traits but regains his "suspended" Willpower dots. A vassal or lord can slowly erode the effects of this Oath by withdrawing or surrendering the Trait bonuses one dot at a time; each bonus dot cut from the bargain restores one "suspended" Willpower dot to the vassal.

Unlike some other Oaths, the lord has no way of knowing if his vassal has surrendered some aspect of the contract without personally investigating the vassal. Likewise, the vassal has no way of knowing that his mystic largesse has been withdrawn without attempting to use the Trait in question.

Example: *Prince Leopold is entering into a Contract of Blood Service with his bodyguard, Kovacs. Neither of them has the power to invoke the mystic contract, so they call on their Notary to perform it for them. The Notary manages three successes on her activation roll, so Leopold grants*

Kovacs a +2 bonus to Vigor (in which Leopold has four dots) and a +1 bonus to Weaponry, thereby lowering Kovacs' Willpower dots by 3. Kovacs feels that's too much, and immediately surrenders one bonus dot of Vigor to get back one dot of Willpower.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

Oath of Blood Loyalty

The Oath of Blood Loyalty is the strongest mutual oath that two Kindred can swear, and places one forever in a subordinate position to the other. On the other hand, as compared to the Vinculum, this Oath guarantees, as far as is possible, mutual loyalty, and so there are many in the Invictus who regard this Oath as far more honorable than the cruder bonds of simple blood.

This Oath has been sworn only a few times to the knowledge of Invictus historians, and most of the pairs are known. Most famous is Richard of Walsingham, an English Ventrue who was served by no fewer than three other Kindred under such Oaths. Martin of Brest was his bodyguard, Sophie Delisle his Seneschal, and Katherine Cajas his agent. Richard was, for a time, thought of as one of the most powerful Princes in England, thought to four cities with the help of his servants. However, a coordinated attack by his enemies, striking against all of his servants at once, drove him into Final Death over a century ago. It is said that his screams as he fell before blows he could neither see nor defend against can still be heard in the Old Audience Chamber in London. Certainly, that room is no longer used for any purpose, and entrance is prohibited.

Oath of Blood Loyalty

Prerequisite: Auspex •••, Majesty ••••

Cost: 1 Vitae and 1 Willpower point from each party to the Oath. The vassal must also spend 1 Willpower dot. The Kindred activating the Devotion does not need to be a party to the Oath's contract.

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Majesty

Action: Instant.

This Oath can only be sworn by two Kindred whose wills are completely free — at least as regards the mystic qualities of the blood. Thus, this Oath cannot be sworn between a regnant and a thrall, or while one of the parties is influenced by any Discipline. The Oath can be sworn, however, even if one of the parties is misled as to the status or power of the other.

One of the two Kindred is the lord, the other the vassal. These roles are chosen when the Oath is sworn, and cannot be changed while the Oath is in effect. The two Kindred mingle their blood in some container, usually an ornate ceremonial chalice, and then drink it between them. The power of the Devotion

ensures that this does not establish even a partial Vinculum.

The lord may, at any time, use his vassal's senses for a scene by expending one point of Vitae. The vassal cannot resist this power and, indeed, receives no indication that it is in effect.

Conversely, the vassal may, at any time, borrow the use of one of the lord's Disciplines for a single scene, by expending one point of Willpower. The vassal gains full use of the Discipline at the lord's score. The vassal may borrow more than one Discipline per scene, as long as he has the Willpower to spend. Only Disciplines with which both the lord and the vassal are trained — that is, in which they both have one or more dots — can be borrowed in this way.

When the vassal uses a "Discipline of largesse" from his lord, the vassal uses only the lord's dots in the borrowed Discipline in concert with his own Traits. Thus, a vassal who borrows his lord's five dots in Majesty would activate the power of Sovereignty using the vassal's Presence and Intimidation, plus the lord's dots in Majesty. The vassal must pay the cost to activate any power, in addition to the Willpower he spent to tap into his lord's power.

While a Discipline power is borrowed, the lord can still use it, but that Discipline contributes no dice to any dice pool in which it is included. Thus, a lord with Majesty 5 could still use Sovereignty, but he would roll only Presence + Intimidation to activate it.

The lord may, at any time and across any distance, issue a command to his vassal by spending a single Willpower point. The vassal is not supernaturally compelled to follow this instruction, however, unless the lord empowers it with other Majesty or Dominate effects. Such effects work through the mystical connection of the Oath as though both parties were looking in each other's eyes.

The ultimate dissuasion to abuse, however, is the final effect of the Oath. Any damage inflicted on one party to the Oath is echoed in the body of the other party. All wound penalties suffered by the vassal or lord are suffered by his counterpart as well. (A party with the Iron Stamina Merit can only protect himself from the pain of his own actual, physical injuries in this case — the supernatural cries of pain from a vassal without that Merit still hinder a lord with the Merit, for example.)

In the event that either party is dealt his Final Death, the other suffers the equivalent of a –3 wound penalty for a number of nights equal to the destroyed vampire's Blood Potency, plus one point of aggravated damage for every dot of Resolve the destroyed vampire had.

This power costs 20 experience points to learn.

DYNASTIC MERITS

Those Kindred participating in cyclical dynasties often find that the system has benefits far beyond the simple Status boost they expected. Beyond the basic fact of estate protection, the heightened trust and intimacy of a cyclical dynasty often conveys other advantages to those willing to enter such an arrangement. The following Merits represent some of those advantages.

House Membership (. or ...)

Prerequisite: Vampire or ghoul

Effect: This Merit measures your character's involvement in a cyclical House. This Merit reflects his commitment to, and influence with, the other members of the House and is a prerequisite for all other Dynastic Merits. Each level of this Merit represents a different relationship to the character's House.

Trusted (•): Your character, whether Kindred or ghoul, is trusted by the members of the dynasty, possibly being groomed for eventual participation. For all purposes of House law, your character is a participant in the House. Your character can purchase some other Dynastic Merits and enjoy minor benefits of membership, but he does not have access to the House's full assets and is not yet honored or protected by a successor. This level of the Merit confers a +1 bonus to Social dice pools involving members of the same House, similar to Status.

Successor (•••): As above, except your character is a full (though perhaps not equal) participant in the dynasty. This level of the Merit confers a +3 bonus to Social dice pools involving members of the same House, similar to Status.

Torpor Connection (. to)

Prerequisite: Vampire, Presence ••, House Membership •

Effect: The connection between the vampires of a dynastic House allows torpid members to perceive the trusted and familiar voice of fellow House Kindred, even through the rush of frightening visions and memories that come with torpor, like drowned-out shouts through a waterfall of blood. Torpid Kindred are not truly aware of the vague communication they participate in through this connection — the words they hear are swallowed by the shadows of cursed sleep — but they may respond by “talking in their sleep” all the same. Only the voice of a character with this Merit can penetrate the dead ears of a torpid vampire; witnesses to the consultation go unheard by the subject.

A character who purchases this Merit is presumed to have a torpor connection with another vampire, but the connection is one-sided. For a shared connection, both vampires must purchase this Merit. Two-sided torpor connections do not have to be balanced.



Without this Merit, speaking to a torpid vampire has little reliable effect. With it, your character may consult with his trusted, slumbering kin to gain advice, facts and other bits of information. In many cases, this consultation is awkward and imprecise, but straightforward questions may be heard and answered without an action, at the Storyteller's discretion. Generally speaking, the more dots in the Torpor Connection, the clearer the messages whispered by the torpid vampire.

If it becomes necessary to gauge this connection mechanically, the questioning character should make a Presence + Empathy roll. This dice pool suffers a -5 penalty due to the fog of torpor, but each dot the character has in his Torpor Connection reduces the penalty by one. Each success on this roll allows the character to receive the answer to one question asked of his torpid ally.

A character with this Merit also has a chance to rouse a partner in involuntary torpor without donating Vitae of the correct potency. To do so, the character must feed two Vitae of vampire blood to the torpid subject and attempt a Presence + Empathy roll. This dice pool gains a +2 bonus if the character and his subject share a blood bond. If the result is an exceptional success, the torpid vampire can choose to awaken or remain in his dead sleep. Anything less than an exceptional success merely invokes the benefits described above.

This Merit may be purchased multiple times to gain a connection with other Kindred, one per purchase.

STORYTELLER'S OPTION: REPLACEMENT CHARACTERS

Some Storytellers might let a new player take the House Membership Merit free as a means of providing "insurance" in case her first character meets a premature end. When the player's first character is destroyed, her successor awakens to take her place and avenge her. Because this replacement character is of the same House as the initial Invictus character, she can be assumed to have similar allegiances and be easily inserted into an existing coterie. Successor characters may have more or fewer experience points than the initial character, at the Storyteller's discretion.

When using this option, the House Membership Merit can only be exercised once — the replacement character must pay for the Merit herself if she wants to enjoy its effects as well. Even then, the Storyteller should limit the size of the dynasty to prevent players from casually sacrificing one character to decant another.

Speaker for the Eclipsed (. to)

Prerequisite: Vampire, Torpor Connection •••

Effect: The connection between members of a House may become so strong that verbal communication is the

least of the benefits they enjoy. At times, the link between House members is so strong that torpid Kindred can passively project their feelings or wishes onto others of their House. This ability would certainly be invoked if something happened to catastrophically impact the House's holdings or if the waking participant wanted to take another talented Kindred into the House.

The effects of this Merit can only be felt by a character with a Torpor Connection to a vampire that is currently torpid. By spending one Willpower and making a successful Wits + Empathy roll, the character briefly connects with his torpid fellow and becomes aware of his instinctual, emotional reactions to things knowingly perceived by the character. The range of this ability is five miles per dot purchased.

Will of the Dynasty (...)

Prerequisite: Vampire, House Membership •••

Effect: This Merit reflects the degree to which identities begin to merge when Kindred become part of a cyclical dynasty. Telling (or forcing) the Kindred to do anything that would harm or betray a member of his House is tantamount to asking him to perform that same action against himself. Telling him to kill a member of his House is equivalent to telling him to commit suicide, for example. All rolls to compel the Kindred to take an action that threatens or endangers his House allies (through Skills, Disciplines, magic or any other means) are automatically modified as though the character had spent a Willpower point. That is, either the character's dice pool to resist such compulsions gets a +3 bonus or the character's Resistance Trait is temporarily increased by 2. Likewise, the character gains these bonuses when a member of his House attempts to betray, mislead or lie to him.

Virtue's Twin (...)

Prerequisite: Vampire, House Membership •••

Effect: All members of a House must purchase this Merit for it to be effective. For purposes of determining torpor duration, all vampires of the House are considered to share the Humanity rating of the Kindred with the highest Humanity. If, for example, the vampires of the Tremalions have Humanity ratings of 4, 5 and 7, all of them are considered to have Humanity 7 for the purposes of determining the length of a voluntary or involuntary torpor.

If the highest Humanity of the participants drops while one member is torpid, the length of that torpor must be recalculated using the new highest Humanity in the House. Determine the torpid vampire's new torpor duration and subtract the time already spent in torpor; that is the Kindred's rough remaining time to spend in torpor.

Tap the Torpid Mind (. to)

Prerequisites: Vampire, House Membership •••, Speaker for the Eclipsed •

Effect: As the boundaries between the psyches of Kindred in a House blur, the Kindred may develop a truly remarkable ability to channel one another's personalities — and powers of the blood. This very rare benefit of the House connection takes a great deal out of the Kindred who uses this Merit, but it can allow a vampire to pull a trick or two out of his hat that his enemies would never have anticipated. A character with this Merit can gain brief access to one Skill or non-physical Discipline possessed by his House's slumbering member. To invoke the psycho-sanguine connection, the character must spend one Vitae and one Willpower point as an instant action while within range of the torpid member (as determined by his dots in the Speaker for the Absent Merit).

To use a torpid member's Skill, the character then simply forms a dice pool using his own Attribute paired with

the Skill and Specialty (if any) of his torpid partner. Notice that this may allow a character to temporarily access a Skill with more than six dots. For the rest of the scene, the character may take a number of actions using that Skill equal to his dots in this Merit.

To use the Discipline of a torpid partner, the character must use the dice pool of the vampire whose power he is tapping, with a –5 penalty imposed by the murky conduit of the blood. This penalty is reduced by one for each dot the invoker has in this Merit. Only a single Discipline power may be invoked in this way before the connection must be invoked again. Only the Disciplines of Animalism, Dominate, Majesty, Nightmare and Obfuscate can be used in this way. The Discipline power's cost in Vitae or Willpower must be paid separately from the cost for invoking this Merit.

DISCIPLINES

Courtoisie

This is the Discipline of courtly fighting, the power that separates the Spina out from all the other fighters among the Invictus. The masters of this art are preparing for a fight even while they make small talk. They are ensuring their victory even while their enemies prepare for battle. The masters are cordial and honorable even in the midst of violence and are never rude in combat. Why would they be? The more they act with grace and decorum, the more powerful they are.

• *Clarity of Intention*

It is impolite to visit someone without first giving notice of your intentions. How much more, then, should etiquette require of a visitation with the intention to destroy someone? The most basic power of Courtoisie recognizes this need for protocol, and gives the Kindred a bonus if he announces his violent intentions in advance.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Courtoisie

Action: Instant

Announcing an intention in concert with this power requires an action, which means that the Spina gets no attack in the activation round, while he tells his opponent what he plans to do next. The intention must be an attack of some sort, and must be described accurately and in some detail. "I'm going to attack you with my sword," is not enough, but "I'm going to cut you open from shoulder to hip," is. The attack need not be intended to deal damage: "I'm going to cut those gauche buttons right off your jacket," is an acceptable declaration of intent.

The attacking Kindred makes an activation roll for this power and then, on a subsequent action, carries out the announced action. He must attempt to do exactly

what he announced he was going to do or he loses the bonus from using this power. There is no penalty beyond the loss of this bonus, however.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire takes a –3 penalty to his next action, whatever he decides to do. He has given his opponent an understanding of his plans, and she can now counter them extremely effectively.

Failure: The power fails to take effect and the vampire gets no assistance with his next action.

Success: The vampire successfully enhances his precision with poise and forthright dignity. For every success scored on the activation roll, the Spina can reduce the severity of penalties on his next attack by one. This penalty can be from any source. The most obvious possibilities are wound penalties that the Kindred is suffering, his opponent's Defense and penalties for targeting particularly small areas (such as the heart), but this power can negate any penalty, from any source.

Clarity of Intention can never grant a bonus. If the Spina is facing a –4 penalty due to wounds and weather, and he rolls six successes on his activation roll, he gets to roll his full dice pool on his next attack but does not get a +2 bonus from the "spill-over" successes. This power never allows a character to roll more dice than his dice pool otherwise calls for.

This power can only be applied to the next attack made by the Spina, and that attack must be made within a number of turns equal to the vampire's dots in Courtoisie.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success yields no special benefit beyond being able to negate at least five points of penalties.

•• *The Importance of Conversation*

Combat is a very important, even prestigious, activity and it is crass to fight someone to whom you have not





been introduced. Circumstances may mean that a Spina is forced to perform the introduction himself, but the practitioners of Courtoisie do not forgo the chance to talk first if they can help it. This is not a negotiation — it is often already decided that the conversation will end with a fight. A preceding conversation does, however, ensure that the combat is raised somewhat above the level of two beasts brawling in the gutter. A combat that is informed by the wit and passions of its participants has an elevated meaning for both participants and the ideas they represent.

Cost: 1 Willpower per scene

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Socialize + Courtoisie – subject's Composure

Action: Instant

To use this power, the character must engage an opponent in polite conversation for at least a few moments, and expend one Willpower to make the activation roll. A rude, silent or brutish opponent does not make it impossible for the Spina to use the power, but the Spina must not be rude to his enemy in turn. However, if an opponent simply refuses to talk at all, this power has no effect — the Spina must get a sense, a “vibe,” from his opponent to hone his Blood against him. Once the power has been activated, its effects persist for the rest of the scene.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: If the Spina fights the opponent during the course of the night, he is wracked with shame and doubt stemming from his poor performance in the

social arena. He suffers a –3 penalty to all non-reflexive dice pools during the fight with that opponent.

Failure: The vampire gets no benefit from the Discipline.

Success: For each success on the activation roll, the Kindred may invoke one of the following effects in a scene when fighting that opponent:

- Substitute Presence for Strength in a close combat dice pool.
- Substitute Manipulation for Dexterity in a close combat dice pool.
- Substitute Manipulation for Wits when calculating Defense.
- Substitute Manipulation for Dexterity when calculating Defense.
- Substitute Socialize for Weaponry in a close combat dice pool.
- Substitute Intimidation for Brawl in a close combat dice pool.
- Add a +1 bonus to a single attack.

For the purposes of the list above, “a close combat dice pool” indicates the dice pool for one weapon against one target for one scene. The Spina must decide what effects to invoke when he activates the Discipline, not at the time of combat.

For example, consider a Kindred with Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Wits 2, Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Weaponry 2 and Socialize 5. He activates this power, and gets three successes on the activation roll. He expects to be fighting with Strength + Weaponry when he faces this opponent.



For one success, he can opt to use Socialize instead of Weaponry, which increases his dice pool by three. For another success, he can opt to use Presence instead of Strength, giving him another two dice, as Presence is two dice higher than Strength. For his third success, he could opt to use Manipulation in place of Dexterity for Defense, but as his Wits is still lower, it would grant no benefit. Thus, he chooses instead to save that success to add an additional die to an attack later on. This gives the Spina a base dice pool of 12 (4 Presence + 5 Socialize + 3 damage) when using his sword against this particular enemy in this particular fight.

If he had scored four successes on the activation roll, he could have substituted Manipulation for both Dexterity and Wits in Defense, increasing his Defense from 2 to 4.

Exceptional Success: No additional benefit, beyond being able to make at least five choices from the list of options given above.

••• *Fair Warning, Fairly Given*

There are times when it is essential to attack someone at his most vulnerable, and most practitioners of Courtoisie recognize this sad fact. However, it is most certainly boorish to do so and falls short of the highest standards of polite combat celebrated by the Spina. It is far better if the Knight can magnanimously hand your opponent the chance to prepare. This power allows a Kindred to gain some benefit from his magnanimity, as he draws mystical insight from studying his opponent's preparations.

The character may cut the preparations short at any time by announcing his intention to fight now. This can be very brief: "Enough delay, Dragon. Defend yourself," is ample. The character may not, however, attack completely by surprise and retain the bonuses gained from this power.

Cost: 1 Willpower per scene

Dice Pool: Wits + Weaponry + Courtoisie – subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and reflexive. Though the character must take an action to activate this power, he may devote several turns to the study of his opponent between the time of the activation action and the time when the actual activation roll is made. This facilitates advantageous modifiers, as described below.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character gains no benefit from allowing the preparations, and loses the ability to use any other Courtoisie powers for the duration of this combat.

Failure: The vampire gains no benefits from his opponent's preparations. Attacking quickly would be in his best interests.

Success: For every success the Spina achieves on the activation roll, he gains the benefit of insight into the way his opponent moves and thinks. This benefit takes the form of a +1 bonus to the Spina's Defense for each success. This bonus lasts for the remainder of the scene,

but applies only to an opponent who was the subject of this power's activation. If time allows, however, a Spina can activate this power more than once in a scene to subject multiple opponents to his increased Defense.

The Spina must be able to see the subject when this power is activated, but he does not have to maintain sight of her throughout the preparation process.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success yields no benefit beyond a remarkable bonus to Defense.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1 to +5	Each turn the subject spends preparing after the user initiates this power.
–2	The subject declines to make use of the offered preparation time.

•••• *Penalty of Discourtesy*

Many Kindred, particularly outside the Invictus, fail to appreciate the importance of courtesy. They seem to believe that being rude to their opponents makes them seem somehow more formidable or increases their chances of victory over a rattled foe. Spina with this level of control over Courtoisie are most able to show such Kindred the error of their ways, for being rude to such a vampire makes you very likely to lose a fight.

Attempting to dismember someone cannot, in itself, be considered impolite for the purposes of this power since such an action is intended to work primarily in combat. A statement of disgust or disapproval regarding the vampire's actions, Allies or fashion cannot necessarily be considered rude wither. Using foul language, however, or simply slinging insults does qualify as rude. If you wish to criticize a Spina without risking the invocation of this power, you must choose your words extremely carefully.

Formally, a Spina can choose to regard a criticism as an insult and demand an apology for the slander. If the apology is not forthcoming, the criticism becomes an act of discourtesy. An apology in this context can be quite brief, however, and does not need to be sincere.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Resolve + Composure + Courtoisie versus a variety of contesting dice pools

Action: Reflexive and contested. This power is rolled automatically in response to the actions of an enemy to provoke, taunt or intimidate the Spina, in place of any other dice pool that might normally be used to contest the opponent's action. This power can even be used to combat attempts to terrify or undermine the Knight using Dominate, Majesty or Nightmare. For example, if an enemy attempts to goad the Knight's Beast using the Intimidation Skill, the Knight may activate this power as a reflexive action to show his opponent the penalty for discourtesy.

If the action targeting the Spina does not allow for a contested resistance, then a Spina with this power may

choose to substitute his dots in Courtoisie for either Resolve or Composure with subtracting dice from an opponent's dice pools.

This power can only be employed when the Spina is directly involved in a fight. The enemy who provokes this power does not have to be directly involved in the fighting, however.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Spina gains no benefit from the power, and takes a -3 penalty to his next action, as his opponent's insult surprisingly rattles the Knight.

Failure: The Spina fails to muster the righteous mystic verve necessary to activate this power.

Success: The Spina achieves more successes on the activation roll than the provocateur did on his attempt to goad, frighten or humiliate the Spina. The Spina immediately regains one Willpower point, and his opponent immediately loses one. This power does not allow a Spina to store more Willpower points than his Willpower score would normally allow. In the event that a Knight uses this power while he still has all of his Willpower points, he instead enjoys a +2 bonus to Defense for one turn.

Exceptional Success: The Spina wins the contest against the provocateur and achieves at least five successes in the process. The result is the same as above, but the provoker loses two Willpower points and the Spina gains two. If the Spina is unable to regain either of the Willpower points, he instead enjoys a +2 bonus to Defense for one turn per excess Willpower won.

..... *Barbed Words*

At the highest levels of Courtoisie, a Spina's words alone are deadly weapons. Even if his opponents attack with steel, he can turn their blades aside with a few well-chosen quips, belittling their abilities without even resorting to harsh language.

A Spina using this power does not fight physically. Instead, he chastises and demoralizes his foes' very flesh with his words. Victims may cough up Vitae or suffer terrible chest and head pains.

Indeed, it is not even necessary for the Kindred to move, or be able to move, to use this power, as long as he can speak. Ferrand, a European Spina elder, is renowned for dispatching his enemies without raising his body from his chair or his voice above a gentle murmur. On one occasion, he defeated and rendered torpid a Sanctified assassin without leaving the game of chess he was playing against the assassin's employer. He won the chess match, as well.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Courtoisie – the higher of the subject's Composure or Resolve

Action: Instant

The Spina must be able to see his target directly to use this power, but it is not necessary for the target to see the Spina.

The real disadvantage of this power is that it is not possible to use weapons while fighting in this manner, so the vampire does not get the benefit of any weapon bonuses or effects.

This power can only be used on vampires.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character is unable to muster the supernatural presence to hurt his foe. The Vitae spent is wasted, and this power may not be used on that same target for the rest of the night.

Failure: The Spina fails to injure his target. The Vitae spent is wasted.

Success: The Spina's words penetrate the sturdy will of his target. Each success causes the subject vampire one point of lethal damage as his insides wither and split from the destructive force of the Kindred's mystic voice.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success grants no special result beyond the formidable damage dealt to the subject.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-1 to -4	The character is difficult for the target to hear.

Domus

This Discipline reflects a Malocusian's connection to the haven he has bound to himself. As Spiders grow older and more powerful in this Discipline, the distinction between the vampire and his haven breaks down.

Before a Kindred can use any of the powers of the Domus Discipline, he must perform what Malocusians call "the investiture." Investiture requires the Kindred to mark the perimeter of his haven with his own Vitae. The larger the area claimed, the more Vitae the investiture requires. Full investiture (i.e., completely marking a haven's perimeter) requires several nights and a great deal of Vitae. Even a modest haven consequently requires the Kindred to feed much more than he would need to under normal circumstances. The investiture is something of a rite of passage and sometimes the most dangerous portion of a new Malocusian's Requiem. Once it's completed, however, the investiture provides the Kindred with security and power within his haven that other Kindred can only envy.

Each dot of Haven Size requires five human or vampire Vitae for a complete investiture, and the Spider must release this blood from his own body for the ceremony to be effective. The Spider has only as many nights to seed the ground of his haven with blood as he has dots in Haven Size. Spiders with larger havens, worth at least four or five dots, must then acquire and use as much as 20 Vitae in just four nights. Even if the Malocusian has no moral or physical difficulty



with hunting so many targets (or utterly ruining a poor few), the local consequences of such a spree are considerable. Some Spiders cast a large net in those first nights, while others go on a hunting craze in some far-removed neighborhood.

• *The Web Trembles*

So attuned to his property is the Malocusian that he knows when the boundary of his territory is crossed. The land tells the house, the house conveys the information to its master. The very boards and nails whisper the intelligence to him. In time, many Malocusians come to think of this sensation as akin to the ringing of the dinner bell. Most think of it also as something like a brush against the skin — subtle, acute and intimate. Any material creature sets off this territorial sense. If the Malocusian in question has some other ability to sense ephemeral creatures, such as ghosts and spirits, even they are detectable with this power.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Domus versus subject's Composure (+ Obfuscate, if applicable and activated). In practice, this Discipline is considered to be “always on,” even if the Spider is away from his haven. The Storyteller makes the roll on the player's behalf any time he has a guest. Due to the sensual connection the Spider has to his web, the supernatural potency of another vampire's blood

is no help in combating this power. Indeed, Malocusians can instinctually distinguish between the arrival of Kindred and other creatures with this power, in much the same way that the Predator's Taint informs their senses of nearby Beasts.

Action: N/A

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Spider's sense of his web is numbed by the trespass. He has no idea intruders are present and suffers a –2 penalty to all dice pools related to this power for the rest of the night.

Failure: The Spider does not sense the intruder at all.

Success: The Malocusian knows when and where an intruder has entered the ground he has claimed in his investiture. The moment the intruder crosses the Spider's blood perimeter, the Spider feels his blood thrum like a plucked string. This effect occurs whether the Spider is awake, in daysleep or in torpor (though he may be helpless to act). This power senses flying creatures (vampires in bat form, for example) as high up as 100 feet above the ground.

Exceptional Success: Achieving an exceptional success gives the Spider a taste of the power that this Discipline grants at its more advanced levels. Not only does the vampire know when and where an intruder enters his haven, he knows where that individual is at all times

until the intruder leaves. If the intruder is anyone the vampire has ever met, the vampire instinctually recognizes the intruder's identity, too.

•• *The Web Speaks*

Beyond simply knowing when the boundary around his property has been crossed, this power lets the Malocusian sense everything that's taking place throughout his haven, as though the building were a part of his body. He sees, hears and feels everything that goes on within the walls of the house, everything that happens under his dark roof. He senses the rugs beneath an intruder's feet, the dust as it swirls before a trespasser and the rain as it streaks down the windows. There is no surprising him.

Cost: 1 Vitae per scene

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Domus. For mundane tests of Perception against subjects not trying to be stealthy, this power requires no roll; the Spider can observe the trespassers in his mind as though he were watching them directly. For all sorts of covert actions within the haven, the Malocusian rolls Wits + Empathy + Domus in place of any other Perception dice pools he would normally use in the contest. The Spider can even use this dice pool in place of Wits + Investigation + Auspex to contest Obfuscate and other powers, as described in the "Clash of Wills" sidebar on p. 119 of *Vampire: The Requiem*.

Though a Spider has an excellent sense of his lair, he can still be fooled into misreading what he perceives. In many ways, the greatest advantage of this power is the massive sensory organ it gives to the Malocusian — he suffers no penalties for darkness, for distance, for background noise or other similar conditions. The house is his.

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive.

••• *Loyal Web*

This power allows the Spider to inflict a variation of his own blood's weakness in reverse: those within his boundaries experience terrible anxiety, physical weakness and, in the case of mortals, intense nausea. Those who stray into the Malocusian's web often realize too late that they are on cursed territory, where even normally easy tasks seem difficult and challenging tasks become nigh-impossible. Intruders find themselves growing dull and clumsy while they're in the lair of the Malocusian, while he grows more powerful. The house itself seems to oppose all trespassers in subtle yet disconcerting ways: a nail may catch a jacket, a floorboard may give way at an inopportune moment or a bulb may burst when switched on.

Cost: 1 Vitae per subject, per scene. The Spider may continue to apply this power's effects to more and more subjects provided he takes the necessary action and has the Vitae to spend. Any creature within the haven is an eligible subject.

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate. Instead, the Malocusian sacrifices Vitae to the house (usually by opening a vein and bleeding onto the floor or flinging his Vitae across the walls), and the place becomes attuned to his needs and hostile to the needs of others. Subtle effects drive this home: floorboards creak of their own accord to foil a trespasser's Stealth efforts or the air inside the house may grow stale and dusty during a physical confrontation, causing intruders to falter or stumble. For the rest of the scene, the haven grants a +3 bonus to the Malocusian's Physical and Social dice pools as though it were a specialized piece of equipment. At the same time, the haven imposes a -3 penalty on the Physical and Social actions of all targeted subjects.

Action: Instant

•••• *The Spider's Cocoon*

At this advanced level of the Discipline, the Malocusian literally becomes one with his haven, much in the way that Kindred who have studied Protean can become one with the earth, but with much more powerful results. When fused with his haven, the Spider can do more than sense anything that goes on within the place: the actual structure of the building becomes an extension of his undead body. The doors, windows and fixtures become his limbs, the air becomes his forced breath, the pipes become his veins and every nail becomes a fang.

Cost: 1 Vitae plus 1 Willpower per scene

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Domus

Action: Extended. Five successes, plus one success per dot of Haven Size of the subject haven, must be accrued to complete this power's activation. Each roll represents one turn of bloody dissolution.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A dramatic failure at any point of the process ruins the attempt and wastes the Vitae and Willpower spent on the attempt. The Spider is also subject to damage for being forcibly rejected by the haven. Roll the haven's dots in Haven Size; each success deals the Spider one point of lethal damage.

Failure: The Spider makes no headway toward his transformation. If the effort is abandoned, the Vitae and Willpower spent on the attempt is wasted.

Success: The character makes headway towards his absorption by the haven.

Exceptional Success: The character makes considerable progress towards his assimilation into his haven.

As the process progresses, the Spider's body seems to dissolve into blood, which soaks into the haven's surfaces. When the process is finished, the Malocusian's body is nowhere to be seen. In effect, the entire haven is now the Kindred's form. He can sense everything going on within his blood boundary, and the house itself becomes his body. He controls the structure of the house and everything in the house as he would his limbs. The vampire's dice pool for attacks while

merged with his haven in this way is Presence + Weaponry + Domus, plus a weapon bonus determined by the Storyteller based on the fixtures used to attack. Only objects that are installed in the body of the haven may be used by the Spider in this way. For example, chandeliers, doors and shutters may be used to attack, but furniture may not. Enemies within the haven can find little cover and are almost certainly caught by surprise during the initial attacks.

The vampire can use nails in the walls, glass in the windows and any other sharp edges to feed on trespassers in his haven. As with any feeding attempt, the appropriate dice pool must be determined by the Storyteller, but the Spider may attempt to feed blatantly by swinging the sharp edges of broken light fixtures or subtly by extending nails from a hardwood floor.

Damaging the haven does not damage the vampire directly, but it can force him out of the haven's physical structure. Damage to the walls or fixtures of the haven merely rob the Spider of weapons to use. Fire damage to the haven, however, forces the Spider to resume his own form, which he may do anywhere within the confines of the blood boundary, including the grounds outside the house. The precise amount of fire damage varies based on the nature of the haven, as decided by the Storyteller, but a good guideline is this: once the fire inside the haven is large enough to deal damage equal to the Spider's Health + Haven Size, the Malocusian is ejected.

..... *The Living Web*

This power transforms the Malocusian's very haven into the geomantic equivalent of the Spider himself: a vampire. The entire area within the haven's blood-soaked perimeter draws life force and blood from the landscape around it and feeds it to the Spider in his web. When this power is in effect, the Malocusian need not hunt, as he is already passively preying on every living thing in the entire countryside. His haven and grounds maintain themselves perfectly to his standards — his gardens remain in a state of perpetual bloom or naked sorrow, as he sees fit. The whole of the haven estate changes expressions to reflect the master's mood. The haven even discretely repairs itself of any damage and stores blood for its master.

Cost: 2 Vitae plus 1 Willpower per day or night

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate, but numerous actions are affected or made possible through the power's use. The Spider's haven becomes a subtle extension of his psyche, much as the previous power made it a gross extension of his body. The character's dots in Domus become a bonus to all Social rolls he makes in the vicinity of the haven as the garden grows welcoming and colorful for Socialize rolls or falls dark and fierce for Intimidation efforts. The Malocusian might subtly alter the grounds to draw in animals (Manipulation + Animal Ken + Domus) or dramatically alter the grounds to draw in curious schoolchildren (Presence + Persuasion + Domus).

At the Storyteller's discretion, the character's command over the haven grounds can also be used to augment other actions, such as a Stealth dice pool to hide bodies or a Survival dice pool to trap lured animals.

SPIDERS AND WEREWOLVES

If you're using elements of **Werewolf: The Forsaken** in your chronicle, you might suspect that the geomantic forces a Spider manipulates to alter or repair his haven are some form of Essence. Maybe the haven has even become some sort of locus. That's really up to the Storyteller. If you want to attract a few werewolves into the story, it certainly seems reasonable that the evil, predatory home of an aging monster like a Malocusian could alter the resonance of a site over the years. That, in turn, might draw hungry spirits that terrorize or cooperate with the vampire, or it might provoke local Lupines to investigate the site.

If Essence is important enough in your chronicle to be tracked, then it's fair to say that The Living Web uses Essence to repair havens. As a rule of thumb, every time this power is used, all the Essence available at the site is used up, even if only one point of Structure is repaired, even if the haven isn't used for a hunting check. Whenever the mystic properties of the blood are used to tamper with Essence, Essence is sure to be wasted.

The haven also hunts and stores blood for its master, though it has no special ability to alter the nature of Vitae. For example, if the haven is far removed from human society, it may be unable to procure human Vitae. Once a day, while the Spider sleeps, or once a night, while the Spider is out, the haven may hunt for blood from foraging animals, neighbor kids and even errant vampires. As with all hunting actions, no single dice pool is appropriate for this task. However, the haven has the advantage of being able to use its dots in Haven Location or Haven Size to form dice pools as well. As with other hunting rolls, each success brings in one Vitae, which the haven stores within its walls and grounds. Two Vitae may be stored by a haven for each dot it has in Haven Size.

Finally, the haven is also capable of "healing" itself over time by channeling geomantic forces into its form. All damaged surfaces, fixtures and so forth within the haven repair one point of Structure each night this power is activated. Destroyed objects cannot be repaired.

Example: *Dorian, an Invictus Malocusian nesting in a forgotten farmhouse, chooses to activate The Living Web upon his return home shortly before dawn. He's been sensing the crunching of gravel under bicycle tires and the shouts of roughhousing boys in his sleep of late, and he wants his haven to fetch him some of their blood. His player spends the necessary Vitae and Willpower and informs the Storyteller that he'd like to alter the atmosphere of the haven to lure the boys playing on his property closer to the farmhouse with a Presence + Subterfuge + Domus roll — young kids can't resist a mystery. That'll be the haven's dice pool for hunting.*

The Storyteller decides that if the kids can be lured into the farmhouse with a few suspiciously opening and closing doors from the abandoned old farmhouse — or even just by leaving a radio on inside — then they're sure to hurt themselves on something.

Dorian's player rolls the hunting dice pool and nets four successes. One of the neighborhood boys is hurt pretty bad, having gashed open his leg on some broken glass. His blood runs down the dirty jagged edge into the dirt, where the haven stores it for Dorian. Later, the boy's doctor is amazed that he lost so much blood from such a relatively minor injury.

Even stranger, when the kids return the following weekend, they find the window their friend cut himself on is still old and still filthy, but is in one piece again, with no blood to be found anywhere.

Action: Varies

Perfidy

Perfidy is the art of social destruction raised to the level of a vampiric Discipline. It undermines trust, dissolves interpersonal connections and shatters the bonds that hold society together. This Discipline's techniques are relentlessly, insidiously destructive, and its practitioners — at least those who use Perfidy blatantly or with any frequency — are loathed by their own kind. Still, there are Invictus Princes who like using experienced members of the Kallisti bloodline as resistance breakers when unfriendly covenants or coterie act out of line, and Perfidy is certainly well suited to that.

• Sweeten Sin

This most basic application of Perfidy is key to making subjects vulnerable to its more advanced powers. A Kallisti with this power can draw a mortal, ghoul or Kindred out of her normal mores into the unclean thrill of life on the edge. Those who hear the Kallisti's voice find themselves craving the illicit rush of a forbidden act, even if it might hurt their loved ones.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + Perfidy versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant. The Kallisti must only invite or encourage the subject to "let loose," "be bad," "enjoy yourself," or something similar.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Kallisti stirs his own Vice before he can bring his subject's to the surface. The Kallisti must either earn a Willpower point from his Vice during the scene or lose one, instead.

Failure: The Kallisti simply fails to stir the subject to action.

Success: The Kallisti compels the subject to act in accordance with her Vice for the rest of the scene. The actions the character takes are always more base, more immoral, than the actions she would normally consider. For the rest of the scene, the subject's Morality (or Humanity) is lowered by one. When the scene ends, the subject's Morality returns to its original level, but the subject must still make a degeneration check to come to terms with her actions in the previous scene.

A lustful mortal might begin an affair, while a greedy vampire might drain a vessel dry. The specific actions taken are up to the player of the affected character, though the Kallisti almost certainly has something in mind already. If a player is unwilling or unable to make the appropriately irresponsible choices for a character under the influence of Sweeten Sin, the Storyteller should guide the characters actions for the scene.

A subject who indulges her Vice for the scene regains a Willpower point as normal, despite the compulsion.

Exceptional Success: Per an ordinary success, but the sinful impulses last for the rest of the night.

Suggested Modifiers:

Modifier	Situation
+2	The power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see Vampire: The Requiem , p. 162).
-2	The subject's Morality is 8 or higher.
-3 to -5	Subject is interacting with someone she has a strong emotional connection to (e.g., spouse, sibling) when this power is invoked.

•• Indiscretion

A variant of the Majesty power of Revelation, this application of Perfidy causes a vampire to betray, through words only, an individual she is (otherwise) loyal to. She reveals every secret she knows about that individual, including that individual's fears, hopes, failures, plans and any other intimate knowledge she has of that individual. The character simply mentions that individual's name in the course of conversation, activates this power and listens along as the subject casually proceeds to rattle off everything that comes to mind about that individual. For her part, the subject of this power feels relieved and enthusiastic about sharing this information, and the more loyal she is (or has been otherwise) to the individual whose secrets she's sharing, the more eager she is to unburden herself of these secrets. Only after the power has been used will the subject realize the enormity of what she's done.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Socialize + Perfidy versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character's clumsy attempt to draw secrets from the subject is blatantly obvious and offensive. The subject senses exactly what the Ravager was trying to do, refuses to talk to the character any more that evening and likely reports the attempt to the individual the character wanted her to betray.

Failure: The character loses or ties the contested roll. She gains no information, but she may try again.

Success: The vampire wins the contested roll by getting the greater number of successes, and the subject betrays the object of the character's inquiry by rattling off every secret the person in question has ever shared with her (or even hinted at).

Exceptional Success: The character wins the contested roll with five or more successes. The subject betrays every secret that she knows regarding the object of questioning, beginning with the most damning. Not only does she reveal the betrayed individual's every secret in painful, unflinching detail, but she engages in lengthy speculation of the most damning sort about *why* the betrayed individual might have done (or might be *attempting* to do) certain things.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+3	The subject is already under the influence of Entrancement.
+2	The subject is already under the influence of Awe.
+2	The power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see Vampire: The Requiem , p. 162).
-1	There are others around within earshot.
-3	The individual to be betrayed is in line of sight to the subject.

... Familiarity Fear

At this level of power, a Kallisti can twist an emotional connection into a potent but imprecise experience of terror. The Familiarity Fear is a blunt instrument, useful for its purpose — and certainly powerful — but it is seldom the favorite tool in the Kallisti repertoire. By affecting a mortal, ghoul or vampire with this fearsome power, the Ravager plants a bomb of awesome terror into her subject's mind. When an appropriate loved one or cohort draws near, the bomb goes off.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Perfidy versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Kallisti unintentionally stirs up her own Beast with traces of fear. The vampire suffers a -2

penalty on all rolls to resist fear frenzy for the rest of the night. Willpower spent to activate the power is wasted.

Failure: The Kallisti fails to light the fuse, but she may try again. Willpower spent to activate the power is wasted.

Success: The Kallisti insinuates a seed of terror in the subject's mind that takes root in the emotions the subject associates with a lover, coworker, coterie-mate or other associate. The Kallisti may assign this fear to any specific associate of the subject's that she knows ("Matt" or "Ms. Sowards," for example) or she may assign it to a general relationship of the subject's (e.g., "your boss" or "your son").

If the subject sees the flagged associate before the next sunset, she reacts as though that associate had invoked the Monstrous Countenance power of Nightmare (see p. 133 of **Vampire: The Requiem**). The subject must flee the associate's presence entirely, using all available means at her disposal to do so. She continues to flee for one turn per success rolled and will not come within sight of the associate until the next sunset.

Exceptional Success: Unlike the Monstrous Countenance power, Familiar Fear does not reduce the subject to a cowering heap. However, with an exceptional success, it does compel the subject to flee to a site chosen by the Kallisti when the power was activated. Once the subject reaches that spot, she remains there until dark, when this power ends (and, presumably, the Kallisti comes for her).

A subject can only be affected by a single use of this power at a time.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The power is turned on a subject with whom the user has a blood tie.
+2	The subject and the target associate have had a fight within the previous 24 hours.
-2 to -4	The subject and the target associate share a special union, such as marriage or the Vinculum.

.... Passion Fugue

With this power, the vampire nullifies *all* emotional ties her target has to his own social network or even his own *life* in general. Memories of home, friends and family — including Allies, Mentors and the like — are washed away by a tide of numbing amnesia. Moreover, covenant loyalties, job responsibilities and similar obligations all fall away, as the target rips himself from any social pattern he was a part of, letting the Ravager play the part of the Pied Piper, calling her target away from the existence he once knew.

The Invictus *loves* targeting key members of other covenants (particularly subversive Carthians) with this power, as it makes them forget their "cause" along with all their social connections, allowing the subject to be reprogrammed with a more Invictus-friendly mentality.

Some Kallisti even use this power on themselves if they feel they're becoming too hampered by social obligations.

Cost: 1 Vitae + 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Subterfuge + Perfidy versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attempt results in a backlash of numbing, emotional coldness that penalizes all of the user's Social dice pools by -2 for the rest of the night. The subject knows exactly what the character just tried to do and responds accordingly. (Though in some cases, the subject may *welcome* the opportunity to forget his past).

Failure: The character fails to invoke the emotional numbing effect. Vitae and Willpower spent to activate the power are lost. The character may try again in a later scene.

Success: The subject is cut off from all emotional connections to his past and current social network and anything he has an emotional connection to (home, church, hobbies, social causes, even addictions). For the rest of the night, the subject is unable to tap into his emotional background; he cannot muster a desire to return home, affection for his loved ones or any fears for their safety or well-being. They become merely "people he knows." The character instinctually seeks out other means to satisfy his whims, such as new friends, old lovers and dangerous thrill-seeking events, depending on her Vice.

The character suffers a -3 penalty on all Resolve or Composure rolls to resist compulsions, pressure and impulses. When the opportunity arises to act in accordance with his Vice, he must succeed on a penalized, reflexive Resolve + Composure roll to resist his impulses. He cannot spend Willpower to augment actions involving his old friends or family.

Exceptional Success: As a success, but the subject outright forgets everything that has a strong emotional pull for him, including the location of his home (or haven), or the fact that such a place even exists. The subject forgets everyone to whom he has any emotional connection for a number of nights equal to the number of successes rolled by the Ravager's player. He may vaguely recognize their faces, but they are strangers to him in all other ways. He has no memories of them or emotional connection *with* them whatsoever. A target with an addiction forgets about it, to the point that even if he begins suffering delirium tremens from going cold turkey he won't know why or what it is he needs to make them stop. Even the power of the Vinculum is severely weakened, although in the case of such a powerful bond, the subject knows that there's someone out there to whom he is powerfully bound, he just won't remember who it is, even if he encounters that individual face-to-face. If he drinks from that Kindred again, he'll remember her — and the Vinculum — perfectly.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+3	The subject <i>wants</i> to forget his past (even if just in the moment of activation).
+3	The character is using this power on herself.
+2	The power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see Vampire: The Requiem , p. 162).
+2	The subject is intoxicated.
-2	The subject has a Vinculum to someone.

••••• ANÍMUS

This Discipline turns its target's loyalties and affections inside out, transforming friendship into loathing, respect into disgust, trust into suspicion, loyalty into resentment and love into hate. Animus undermines every feeling that ties an individual into his social environment, and poisons his mind against anyone toward whom he was previously on amicable terms, transforming even a well-connected, law-abiding individual into a nearly sociopathic rebel and loner.

This power turns brother against brother, husband against wife, parents against children and child against sire. This is the power that earns the Ravager bloodline its infamous and terrible reputation (where it has any reputation at all). Animus is rare enough that only old or experienced Kindred are likely to have heard tales of it.

This power makes it very easy for Kallisti to extract mortals from their lives and goes a long way to explaining strange disappearances. ("She's been acting hateful to us all week, and finally on Friday she just left, and thank God for that. I couldn't have taken any more."). Some Kallisti have been known to turn this power to ends that are, in the larger picture, constructive — freeing an individual from an abusive relationship, for example.

Cost: 1 Vitae plus 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Socialize + Perfidy – subject's Resolve

Action: Extended. The user must accrue a number of successes equal to twice the subject's Willpower. Each roll represents about 20 to 30 minutes of conversation.

The Ravager can use this power on anyone he can make eye contact with, or on himself. To activate this power, the Ravager and his subject must be able to communicate without severe distractions such as fighting, pounding music or interruptions. Most subjects think *they're* doing all the talking, when in fact the Ravagers are leading their conversations down dark and twisted paths.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Kallisti utterly fails to twist the subject's loyalties. The subject senses keenly exactly what the character just tried to do, and is overwhelmed with a sense of rage at the user that could become a full-fledged frenzy, if the subject is a vampire.

Failure: The Kallisti makes no progress in turning his subject's loyalties.

Success: The character slowly bends the subject's heart through an insidious dialogue.

Exceptional Success: The Kallisti rapidly twists the subject's heart.

After several hours of talking and listening, a successful Kallisti leads his subject to a terrible epiphany. The subject's every loyalty turns inside out. The more love that existed, the more powerful the hatred that takes its place. This effect works on *all* bonds, including the Vinculum, which this power transforms into a malevolent animosity. This power usually affects *all* of the subject's loyalties or emotional bonds, but the Ravager may be more tactical in his approach and sever some bonds while leaving others intact.

As with Fugue, this affects the subject's feelings toward anything he's addicted to, transforming that addiction into a fiery loathing for (and possibly a zealous crusade against) the object of his former addiction. Any ghoul affected by this power is almost certain to become a threat to his regnant, and a dangerously knowledgeable one at that.

When used on an individual under the effects of any Majesty power, this power turns the Majesty effect inside out, replacing adoration with contempt and repulsion: Awe and Entrancement become dislike and disdain, and Revelation is brought to a complete halt as the target suddenly waxes hateful toward the Kindred using that power. This power has been seen to have two different affects on Kindred affected by the Summon Discipline. It either makes the individual flee the Kindred doing the Summoning, or it fans flames of resentment in the Summoned vampire into a white hot rage, turning him into something of a search and destroy weapon targeting the Summoning vampire. Used on a Kindred under the effects of Sovereignty, Animus sends the target directly into an anger frenzy directed at the Kindred using that Majesty power (a mortal would simply lose his temper).

Because of his new, hateful attitude toward everyone who was once loyal to him, a Kindred afflicted with Animus loses one dot from one appropriate Social Merit each night that he's afflicted by this power: Contacts, Mentor, Allies, Retainer and Herd all find themselves alienated by their former associate. The subject's Status also inevitably suffers as the subject alienates those his Status depends on, but the speed at which it dwindles is left to the Storyteller's discretion and the nature of the story.

Dots of these Merits may be purchased again with experience points once the character is freed from the effects of Animus, but if the character wants to re-acquire *the same* Contacts, Mentor, Allies, Retainer and Herd members, he may have to make amends with them first. Entirely new Contacts, Allies, Retainers, Herd members or a new Mentor can be acquired at the standard cost.

A person twisted by Animus suffers a -5 penalty on all dice pools to support old friends or interact positively

with old allies. This penalty drops by one every two nights, until it is finally gone. Then the subject may begin the difficult process of rebuilding her life — unless she's affected by a Kallisti again.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+3	The Ravager is using this on himself.
+2	The power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see Vampire: The Requiem , p. 162).
-2	The subject's Morality is 7 or 8.
-4	The subject's Morality is 9 or 10.

Kamen

Face is very important to the Sotoha. The state of one's true feelings is held to be of little concern to others, but the way that things appear is very important. This has cultural reflections; in particular, the impact of *hinomi* on the Kindred's lord is a result of the lord's serious loss of face.

It also has supernatural consequences. Kamen ("the Mask"), the Sotoha bloodline's unique Discipline, is devoted to keeping the Kindred's outward image intact. This Discipline has little effect on his inner state, but with a mastery of this mystic art, it becomes all but impossible for others to know what that inner state is. At the highest levels, a Sotoha vampire can even present a calm face when his soul is in the throes of frenzy.

• Tatemaie

Tatemaie (ta-TEH-my) is the Japanese term for the emotions that one presents to the world, as opposed to what one truly feels. The first Kamen power allows a Kindred to hide his emotions perfectly.

This power only truly allows a Kindred to suggest that his true thoughts match the ones he is displaying. He cannot choose to look like a loyal servant pretending to be discontent; he must either look like a loyal servant who is displaying his loyalty or a discontent servant displaying his discontent. This limits the subtlety of the deceptions a Kindred with this Discipline can practice.

The emotion displayed is normally quite general, so that the mask remains useful for the whole of a conversation. Thus, it would be normal to fake loyalty, friendliness or sympathy but not amusement at a particular joke. However, faking amusement at a comedy performance would be reasonable.

It is not uncommon for Sotoha Kindred to use this power all the time.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Expression + Kamen



Action: Instant, normally. Characters may contest attempts to use supernatural abilities to see through the Kindred's mask with Composure + Expression + Kamen.

Mundane attempts to assess what the Kindred is feeling always conclude that the facade he is projecting is wholly genuine. Supernatural attempts may also be fooled, unless they can overcome the Discipline in an opposed roll. In addition, the Kindred must attempt to keep the deception up. Actions that clearly break the image also end the effect of the power. Thus, a Kindred faking interest in a lecture would not continue to appear interested if he started reading a book instead. However, the power of the Discipline does mean that the Kindred does not need to make a great effort to maintain the façade.

The Kindred using this power need not be faking his displayed emotion. Even when a Kindred is sincere, it may be to his advantage to definitely appear so. If a supernatural attempt to pierce the Discipline succeeds, the user knows that it has, even if the emotion revealed is the same as the one the Discipline was displaying.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character's true feelings, and the fact that he is trying to hide them, are obvious to everyone. The character does not, however, realize that he is so transparent. He suffers a -2 penalty on all Social dice pools for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The character must rely on his mundane acting abilities to hide his true feelings. He is aware that his attempt to activate the Discipline failed.

Success: The character can maintain one poise perfectly. That is, he can choose to have one emotion look entirely genuine for the duration of a scene. To change the emotion, however, he must activate the power (and the player must roll) again. For example, a character makes his act of friendliness towards a Carthian troublemaker appear genuine. Later, the Prince's enforcers descend, and the character needs to make his show of loyalty to the Prince seem genuine. This requires a new roll.

Exceptional Success: The character can change his mask at will for the duration of the scene. Thus, in the example above, a new roll would not be required to make his loyalty appear genuine.

•• *The Fitting Time*

The first stage of control over the Beast allows a Kindred to delay entering a frenzy. Ideally, this gives her enough time to get somewhere out of sight of others before relinquishing control, but low levels of success may grant her merely a moment to take some action to lessen the likely impact. For example, a Kindred who delays a hunger frenzy might run from her friends, so that she does not feed on them.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Resolve + Composure + Kamen

Action: Reflexive. The roll is made immediately after failing to resist frenzy, to delay the onset of that frenzy.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The frenzy starts immediately, and is less amenable to control than even a normal failure. The Kindred may not spend Willpower to direct the frenzy in any way.

Failure: The frenzy starts immediately, as normal.

Success: The Kindred can delay entering the frenzy for a certain period of time determined by the successes rolled. She may choose to enter frenzy at any point within that time, but if she has not done so earlier, she automatically goes into frenzy when the time period expires.

Exceptional Success: No benefit beyond being able to delay the frenzy until the following night, as indicated on the table below.

Successes Maximum Time

1 success One turn

2 successes Five turns

3–4 successes One scene

5+ successes One night. If the Kindred does not enter frenzy before laying down to sleep at dawn, she wakes in frenzy the following evening.

When the Kindred does enter frenzy, it is the same as any other involuntary frenzy.

... The Wave Is the Man

When a Kindred with this power “rides the wave” of frenzy, she has much more control over her actions and appearance than normal. She may appear as calm as she wishes, and take actions that require thought and deliberate decision, including the use of Disciplines such as Dominate. The benefits of being in frenzy still apply, however: the vampire ignores wound penalties, gets a bonus die to all physical dice pools and gets a bonus to resist attempts at mental domination.

From the outside, it is almost impossible to determine that the vampire is in frenzy. Supernatural abilities such as Auspex can do so by examining the vampire’s aura, but to mundane observation she appears no different from normal. While the Kindred may choose to behave in a wild manner, she need not, and virtually all Sotoha choose to remain icily calm even while they frenzy.

However, she is still in frenzy, and observers may be able to deduce that from her behavior. The frenzied kindred has an absolute focus on the target of her frenzy. She can do nothing that she does not judge to be the fastest and most effective way to achieve her end. As the frenzy was invoked voluntarily, the vampire no doubt has an end in mind.

While the frenzied vampire cannot do anything she does not judge to be the fastest and most effective means to her end, that does not mean she should spend a long time contemplating options. On the contrary, she must decide

quickly from among the options that come immediately to mind. If two seem equally effective, she is free to choose either, as long as she chooses quickly. In certain cases, the fastest and most effective way to achieve an end might require lots of careful planning, which is fine. However, the Kindred cannot be distracted from those plans.

If the frenzy lasts a long time, the vampire may take reasonable precautions when she sleeps and feeds, as long as they do not distract from her target. The same applies to any other needs that she has for survival, since the vampire’s survival is generally essential to achieving the end of a frenzy.

If the Kindred is a Sotoha, the frenzy does not subside automatically when it has reached its end. She must gain a success on a Resolve + Composure roll to end it, as normal.

Fujita Carlos, a Sotoha vampire in Buenos Aires, is rumored to have been in frenzy for over 30 years. His lord, Fujita Juanita, was killed through the machinations of the local Prince and Primogen, and Carlos has been waging an obsessive vendetta against them ever since. While this is not unusual for the Sotoha, Carlos has appeared to shrug off the worst wounds and has seemed almost immune to fear frenzies, leading knowledgeable Kindred to suspect that he has been “riding the wave” all this time. Carlos has sworn not to take another lord until he has avenged Juanita, making him a true *ronin*.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll. It automatically affects any voluntary frenzy that the vampire enters.

Action: Reflexive

.... Face of the Moment

The Kindred with this power can fit perfectly into any social situation, even one of which he was completely ignorant. He knows what the people around him consider to be correct behavior for him in the current circumstances, and thus he never accidentally breaks the local rules of etiquette. If the Kindred is appearing as himself, the power is most useful in a new society. If he is in disguise, however, he knows how the people around him think that the type of person he is pretending to be should behave, and also whether they expect him to behave properly. This is a great help in maintaining a successful disguise.

In addition, lies the Kindred tells to support any act he is sustaining appear sincere to any mundane examination and to any supernatural investigation that fails to overcome this power. This power does not help a Kindred keep track of the lies that he should be telling in a particular situation, however.

Most Kindred with Face of the Moment also use Tatemae at the same time. These two powers may be activated together in a single action, although the rolls must still be made separately, and it is possible for one to succeed and one to fail. It is, of course, also possible to use one power without the other.

As with Tatemaë, some powerful Sotoha Kindred keep this power in effect all the time.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Wits + Socialize + Kamen. Composure + Expression + Kamen to resist supernatural attempts to pierce his lies.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire appears to all around him as an impostor. If he is in disguise, everyone realizes that he is disguised, although they may not immediately realize who he really is, particularly if the disguise is supernatural. If he is not in disguise, everyone who interacts with him becomes convinced that he is either a supernaturally disguised impostor or is possessed by some spirit making his body behave strangely. This effect lasts for a scene.

Failure: The vampire must rely on his other resources to navigate the social reefs of a new environment or to support a deception.

Success: The Kindred can act as if he were long accustomed to his role for a period of time depending on the number of successes rolled.

Successes	Duration
1 success	10 minutes
2 successes	30 minutes
3 successes	One hour or one scene
4+ successes	One night

While the power is in effect, the Kindred suffers no penalties to social dice pools that would normally apply to an outsider in the society. In addition, he knows what the accepted etiquette is. If he is in disguise, he instinctively knows how the person he is impersonating would be expected to behave and what would be the polite behavior for that person. The Kindred's actions are not constrained. He can choose to be impolite or to be just barely polite enough to avoid giving an insult. However, such fine judgments do require a die roll, as they would for someone naturally familiar with the society.

Exceptional Success: The effect lasts for one night, as for four successes. In addition, the Kindred gets a +3 bonus to all social dice pools, reflecting the amazing ease with which he can manipulate the social expectations of the group.

..... *Masking the Beast*

The final power of Kamen functions like The Wave Is the Man, above, but for involuntary frenzies. No matter how deep the vampire may be in frenzy, she can appear completely calm and rational, taking sensible steps to best achieve the ends of the frenzy.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll. It automatically affects any involuntary frenzy the vampire enters.

This power requires some adjudication between the player and Storyteller. It does not make the vampire immune to

frenzy, although there are some Kindred who believe that it does. On the other hand, this power is a major advantage to a frenzied vampire. At the very least, a vampire with this power can use any of her other powers while in a frenzy, regardless of how much calm and concentration they take, and can always appear calm and in control. The vampire also has considerable control over her actions, within the limits of the frenzy.

A vampire in hunger frenzy must feed to satiation as soon as possible. If the only vessel around is her beloved, she drains him dry. On the other hand, if the two of them are in a hotel room, she can charge out and into the next room, looking for another victim. She cannot, however, decide to take her beloved home first and feed later in the evening. If the vampire enters hunger frenzy while feeding, she can still break off to feed from another vessel, as long as she believes that there is another easily available.

A vampire in fear frenzy must get away from the cause of the fear as quickly as possible. A vampire forced into frenzy by another vampire waving a lighter in her face at a social gathering may make a cutting remark as she turns to stalk haughtily from the room, rather than freaking out and running screaming, but she must still leave. A vampire driven to fear frenzy by a candle could blow it out. Similarly, a vampire terrified by the sunlight coming through a window could duck around the light to close the shutters. If they failed to completely block the light, she would have to leave the room. Fear frenzies are possibly the least restricted, as about the only thing the vampire cannot do is bravely endure the threat; and most Kindred would not risk their Requiems in that way in any case.

A vampire in anger frenzy must express her anger. She need not, however, do so through physical violence. If the frenzy was provoked as anger with a particular individual, it must be taken out on that individual. If, on the other hand, it was provoked by general frustration, the vampire can choose how to express it. In no case will a vampire with this power involuntarily attack her friends while in an anger frenzy, unless they are disguised as her enemies. A vampire provoked into an anger frenzy in a social situation could choose to take it out in a stream of highly polished verbal abuse, possibly challenging her opponent to a duel. A vampire who enters anger frenzy in combat gets the bonuses of being in frenzy, but otherwise may continue the combat as if nothing had happened.

Action: Reflexive

Tenure

The power of Tenure gives a vampire an uncanny awareness of his surroundings. He knows where people and things are, even if he can't see them — including any intruders. Everything around him subtly cooperates

to help him and hinder his foes. A Kindred with Tenure simply becomes more effective at everything he does — and other Kindred find the very land turning against them, if they trespass on the Landlord's Demesne.

Annunaku legends tell of elder Landlords who called up storms or earthquakes in their Demesnes, who could hear every word spoken by their tenants or who could appear anywhere in their fiefdom in an instant. Some of these powers may be higher-level expressions of Tenure, attainable only by elders of high Blood Potency. Others sound like Devotions. If such powers exist, they only work within a Demesne mystically bonded to an Annunaku (see the sidebar).

STORYTELLER'S OPTION: TENURE FOR ALL

The ancient Annunaku bloodline takes the credit for inventing Tenure, a Discipline of power over one's domain. Yet Tenure is rumored to have spread beyond the bloodline's ranks. If the Storyteller agrees, other Kindred, especially in the Invictus, might sometimes learn the Discipline from an Annunaku mentor. The Annunaku bloodline is so old and so widespread that such mentors could feasibly be found in any city. Only an Annunaku can teach the powers of Tenure, however. The Discipline cannot simply be "unlocked" from within one's own blood, and it cannot be learned secondhand.

Except for the Annunaku, however, not many Kindred learn Tenure. The Discipline is most effective for Kindred who possess established territory where they hunt and influence mortal inhabitants. Most Kindred simply haven't the wherewithal to build personal domains larger than their own havens. Those Kindred who have, of course, often belong to the Invictus.

Tenure and Obfuscate

Tenure has aspects in common with Auspex. Like that Discipline, Tenure may sometimes penetrate the concealment of Obfuscate, or Obfuscate may sometimes hide a person or object from Tenure. When a character with Tenure attempts to find someone or something hidden by Obfuscate, make a contested roll of the Tenure-user's Wits + Investigation + Tenure versus the Obfuscate-user's Resolve + Stealth + Obfuscate. (See the "Clash of Wills" sidebar on p. 119 of **Vampire: The Requiem** for more about this kind of supernatural contest.) Whoever accumulates the most successes wins the mystical battle. Ties go to the defender. Most of the time, ties result in an Obfuscated object or person remaining hidden (as the Tenure user is the initiator). If a vampire tried using Obfuscate right in front of Kindred with Tenure, however, the hiding character becomes the challenger, since he's trying to hide himself (or some object) in plain sight.



• *Whispers of the Chamber*

A student of Tenure starts by gaining a mystical knowledge of a small area. If she concentrates on some known or well-defined object, she knows where it is and whether it's lost, hidden or disguised. To the Kindred, it's as if a tiny voice in her mind says, "*Here I am!*"

This is good for more than finding lost car keys. Whispers of the Chamber reveals the presence of intruders or another person's hidden valuables. Only other mystic powers can hide someone or something from a vampire with Tenure. The better a character can define the target she seeks, the greater her chance of detecting it.

As a final benefit, a vampire who knows Whispers of the Chamber automatically knows if an unauthorized person enters her haven, at least while she herself is in it. She won't track the comings and goings of Retainers (unless she wants to), but becomes instantly aware of intruders.

Cost: Whispers of the Chamber does not cost Vitae if used within the character's own haven. Anywhere else, it costs 1 Vitae to search for one person or object.

Dice Pool: Wits + Investigation + Tenure

Action: Instant. (Reflexive for detecting intruders within the Annunaku's haven.)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character receives a false indication of the target object's location or believes the object is not present at all.

Failure: The character cannot sense the target object's location.

Success: The character knows the exact location of the target object if it is within a distance defined by the successes achieved. (See below.)

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success grants no special benefits other than an extended range of insight. If this power is used within the vampire's haven, an exceptional success automatically results in awareness of all the space within the haven, regardless of its Size.

Successes Radius

1 success	1-yard radius
2 successes	2-yard radius
3 successes	5-yard radius
4 successes	10-yard radius
5 successes	30-yard radius

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The target is very well known or precisely definable, such as "my car keys," "a golden ring with two square-cut diamonds," "Jacob Fenster's will" or "Loki."
—	The target is fairly well known or definable, such as "any car keys," "a diamond ring," "a will" or "a Mekhet."

-2

The target is in motion.

-2

The target is a vaguely defined class, such as "jewelry," "documents" or "a ghoul."

Anything more vaguely or abstractly defined, such as "valuables" or "people" has no chance of success at all.

•• *Home Ground*

Annunaku are well known for the ease with which they act under conditions other Kindred find difficult. Students of Tenure never seem to trip on roots and stones, slip on ice or lose their prey in darkness, fog or clutter. Their enemies, on the other hand, may suffer such impediments to an uncanny degree. A vampire runs down a hall after an Annunaku, and the carpet slips underfoot; the vampire tries to hide in shrubbery, and a stray beam of light picks him out. Wise Kindred know not to challenge an Annunaku on his home turf, where this effect seems strongest and most omnipresent, but Annunaku can show this uncanny mastery of their surroundings almost anywhere.

Cost: Home Ground does not cost Vitae if used within a character's haven. If used within his Demesne, the special territory he claims and rules (see sidebar), Home Ground costs 1 Vitae. The effects of this power last for a scene.

Dice Pool: Wits + Survival + Tenure

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: For the rest of the scene, the character suffers a -3 penalty on every Physical action he attempts, if there is any way his surroundings could impede him. Storytellers are encouraged to be generous in devising environmental penalties. For instance, slippery floors, smoke or fog, rain, burnt-out bulbs and other such penalties can come into play almost anywhere.

Failure: Nothing happens. All actions for the next scene receive normal dice pools, with whatever modifiers the Storyteller has already defined for the environment.

Success: Each success rolled reduces an environmental penalty to the Annunaku's actions by one. For instance, trying to run on wet ice might call for a Dexterity + Athletics roll with a -3 penalty. A player who scored two successes on her activation roll could spend successes to cancel out some of that penalty, reducing it to -1.

Alternately, the player can also increase environment-based modifiers that favor her character. For instance, a clump of shrubbery might normally grant a +2 bonus to attempts to hide. The player could raise this to +4 for her Tenure-using character, or even increase her chances of spotting another character hidden behind similar shrubbery.

Modifiers from Home Ground apply to just one action, such as running through a garbage-packed alley, finding a concealed person, terrorizing someone in a park or making an attack. Applying Home Ground to

another action requires the power to be activated again. Note that this power does not have to be activated for each *roll* in an extended action.

This power cannot generate any effect without environmental factors to interact with. A featureless room, for example, gives the Annunaku little to work with.

Exceptional Success: Per a normal success, though the character has a remarkable ability to act despite the environment. For instance, with five or more successes, a character might be able to accurately fire a gun in a hurricane.

Suggested Modifiers

The environment itself can make Home Ground more difficult, by giving the power less to work with. Simple or empty surroundings just don't supply many factors that could affect a task. For instance, an empty basketball court offers little or nothing suitable for taking cover. If the Storyteller thinks an environment is simply too bare or empty to help or hinder a particular task, he can impose up to a -5 dice penalty on the Home Ground roll or just decide the power cannot work at all. Players should be encouraged, however, to suggest ways a location could offer a Home Ground advantage to characters.

... Voice of the Castle

As a student of Tenure gains mastery, she can extend her mystical perception over wider areas. Where before she could locate objects or people only in a few small rooms, now she can search an entire building. In olden times, vampires with Tenure really did own castles, and the stones spoke in their minds, warning of intruders. These nights, a Kindred with Tenure can search a skyscraper or shopping mall.

Cost: Voice of the Castle has no cost if used within a building containing the character's own haven (even if the haven does not encompass the entire building). Anywhere else, Voice of the Castle costs 1 Willpower to search for one person or object.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Investigation + Tenure

Action: Instant

The sensory range of Voice of the Castle extends out from the vampire for many yards in every direction. When used within a building, sewers, storm drains, subway tunnels and other enclosed structures that don't technically form "buildings," the Kindred receives even more precise mystic telemetry.

Once the power has been activated, the vampire can prolong her awareness of her target's location for up to a scene. Every "double check" of the target's location in a scene requires another action, but not another activation roll or Willpower point. If the target moves, the vampire knows about it. For instance, one character could follow another character's movements through a skyscraper, even though they stayed several floors apart.

The character knows the target's location in relation to herself, such as "three floors down and fifty feet that way." If she's familiar with the building, she may know that direction and distance means "the men's room," but the power itself does not supply this information.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character receives a false indication of the target object's location or believes it is not present at all.

Failure: The character cannot sense the target object's location.

Success: The character knows the exact location of the target object if it is within a distance defined by the successes achieved. (See below.)

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success grants no special benefits other than an extended range of insight. If the vampire is within a building at the time this power is activated, however, an exceptional success expands the radius of power to include all the space within the building, no matter how large.

Successes	Radius
1 success	5-yard radius
2 successes	10-yard radius
3 successes	25-yard radius
4 successes	50-yard radius
5 successes	100-yard radius

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The target is very well known or precisely definable, such as "my car keys," "a golden ring with two square-cut diamonds," "Jacob F enster's will" or "Loki."
—	The target is fairly well known or definable, such as "any car keys," "a diamond ring," "a will," or "a Mekhet."
-2	Target is in motion.
-2	The target is a vaguely defined class, such as "jewelry," "documents," or "a ghoul."

Anything more vaguely or abstractly defined, such as "valuables" or "people" has no chance of success at all.

.... Watching the Bounds

Experienced users of Tenure gain the mystic power to know if anyone uses active supernatural powers or spills blood within their Demesnes. The character senses if any other vampire expends Vitae or activates Disciplines. The character also detects the special mystic powers used by werewolves, mages, ghosts and other supernatural creatures, as well as enchanted objects. The character might not, however, know the intruder's location or the nature of the power used — only that some supernatural creature is active within his territory. If one of the

vampire's Contacts, Allies, Retainers or other Demesne-defining social connections suffers lethal or aggravated damage, the vampire may sense that as well.

Watching the Bounds only works within a vampire's Demesne, and only when the user is also within his Demesne. A supernatural creature that does not use *active* supernatural powers remains undetected.

As an added benefit, a vampire skilled in this power instantly knows if any unauthorized person enters his haven. The vampire does not have to be within his haven at the time, but must be within his Demesne at the time. If he is on less familiar ground, he becomes aware of the intrusion as soon as he returns to his haven (or his Demesne, if the intruder is still present).

Cost: None.

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Tenure

Action: Reflexive. The character does not need to be watching consciously for any supernatural intrusion.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A dramatic failure is not possible with this power.

Failure: The character does not sense the supernatural power at work.

Success: The character knows someone is using a supernatural power within his Demesne or harming his folk, but not the location or nature of the trespasser.

Exceptional Success: The character intuits the direction and distance to whoever (or whatever) is using supernatural powers or acting violent. He also knows if the magic is vampiric (Disciplines, blood magic, healing or physical augmentation) or something else. He might recognize the magic of other creatures as well, if he has previous experience with them, but he cannot recognize what he has never experienced before.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+4	The vampire's people are attacked by someone the vampire is linked to via blood sympathy.
+2	A Crúac ritual, Theban Sorcery ritual or Discipline power that costs Willpower to activate is used within the Demesne.
+2	The vampire's people are attacked by someone the vampire knows.
+1	A Discipline power that costs Vitae to activate is used within the Demesne.
+0	A Discipline power that does not cost Vitae to activate is used within the Demesne.
-2	A vampire uses Vitae to heal wounds or increase Physical dice pools (the most "natural" of vampiric powers).

..... Master of the Demesne

A master of Tenure can extend his mystical awareness throughout his entire Demesne, inside and out, above ground or below. If a particular person is within his Demesne, he can find her and knows her location down to the footprint.

If the vampire wants, he can track a person for an entire scene. Master of the Demesne surpasses previous Tenure powers in that the character knows the target's actual surroundings, demeanor and bearing, not merely the target's distance and direction. With greater effort, the vampire can even cause his Demesne to hinder or help targets he has located.

By the time a vampire is able to use this power, he knows his Demesne intimately. It does not work anywhere else.

Cost: 1 Vitae per scene (plus 1 Willpower for further effects)

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Investigation + Tenure

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character receives a false indication of the target's location or believes it is not present at all.

Failure: The character cannot sense the target object's location.

Success: The vampire knows the exact location of the target object if it is within his Demesne.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success grants the vampire the ability to affect the area immediately surrounding a detected target with the vampire's raw will. The vampire can now spend 1 Willpower point to activate the Home Ground power through his mystic connection to the target and alter the target's environment for better or worse.

The vampire can impose an environmental penalty to the target's next action equal to the successes achieved on the Home Ground activation roll. For the most part, this penalty applies only to Physical actions, but exceptions abound: a drifting fog might penalize Perception-based dice pools as well as Drive checks, for example. Alternately, streetlights might go out, stoplights might all turn red or cracked asphalt may become especially unstable.

Activating Home Ground in this way requires an action, as usual. The vampire may change the nature and location of the penalties he applies with another action, but his ability to influence his Demesne remotely lasts only as long as he focuses on the target. Once the vampire returns his attention to his own surroundings, this enhanced Home Ground power ends. Another Willpower point and another activation roll are required to invoke it again.

Web

Web, as befits the signature Discipline of the Lynx, is the power of human networks. The individual nodes that make up a network are a secondary concern to the practitioners of this Discipline. It's the connections and flow between nodes that is essential to understand. A Kindred who masters this ability might know more about what your friends and allies think of you than you do, even if she has just met you.

For the purposes of the Discipline, a network is any social construct made up of nodes and the information that moves through the relationships between them. The pattern and type of connections, and the flow of information along the connections, is an important feature of the system. For example, a physical net, as used for fishing, is not a good metaphor for a Web network, because nothing moves along the connections between the nodes. The Internet is a network because information moves between the nodes. The Internet is a Web-compatible network only when that information moves between human nodes according to the whims and wishes of human participants in the network. Thus, any two websites may not be a part of the same network, for purposes of this Discipline, unless their creators and modi-

fiers are specifically interacting with other human participants that they know.

This is an intuitive ability, not a science. A Lynx may be most fascinated with the information between nodes, but the nodes are most often where she gets her telemetry. A Lynx cannot use Web to instinctually understand any change that is not wrought by human motives, but she can intuit (and eventually anticipate) the flow of passion and information between even distant and unknown human nodes. It is a difficult concept to grasp, even for most Lynx. As a result, many Lynx struggle to quantify their experiences with this Discipline and couch the sensations of its use in dry, scientific or technical terms.

The Internet is only the most obvious and plain example of a network. In fact, for the Lynx, it's not truly a kind of network at all. It's really just a medium through which other human networks can be observed. For the purposes of Web, it's an environment, like a highway or a bar.

Networks rarely have well-defined edges. As a rule of thumb, one large network connected to a second large network by only a few nodes is evidence of two different networks. Similarly, the description of some networks gives an idea of its effective boundaries. The roads of Chicago, for example, connect to the expressways that

DEFINING A DEMESNE

Any vampire can command a domain granted by the Prince or some other influential Kindred. For purposes of Tenure, however, a Demesne is more narrowly defined and harder to obtain. Annunaku call this Demesne a *kur*, an ancient word that can mean a mountain, the earth in general, a foreign land or the Underworld of the dead.

To turn his territory into a proper *kur*, an Annunaku must dwell within her hoped-for Demesne for at least a year. She must also obtain significant power over the mortals who live or work within her Demesne. Such power may come from respect, fear, dependence or other means, but at least a large fraction of the mortals must believe the vampire has some power over them (though they don't have to know she's a vampire). For instance, an undead gang leader could terrify the mortals in a neighborhood into accepting that they live on his "turf" and they'd better not cross him or any of his gang members. A vampire who poses as a community activist could obtain similar respect because the mortals in her Demesne expect her to speak for them in civic affairs. A vampire who owns a business can certainly claim it as her Demesne: her mortal employees know perfectly well that they work in a building or grounds that belong to someone else.

In game terms, a character needs at least three dots in Merits that represent her power in her chosen territory. The business owner could fulfill the requirement through Resources, the community activist through Contacts and City Status and the gang leader through Herd or Retainers, representing his gang of thugs. The Storyteller, however, has final say on whether a character has accumulated enough power to turn a region into a *kur* and how far the Demesne extends.

Finally, the character must prepare at least three "border-stones," or *kudurru*, to use the ancient Mesopotamian term. *Kudurru* do not need to be made of stone (though it's traditional): a tree, a metal trash can or a square of sidewalk could work just as well. The *kudurru* must touch the earth to be mystically effective, though. Border-stones must be spaced as far apart from each other as possible, at the end points of the Demesne.

All Annunaku *kudurru* bear scratched or etched markings that an occultist might understand with a successful Intelligence + Occult roll. These are the names of ancient gods, in a distorted form of cuneiform writing. Preparing a single *kudurru* requires six successes on an extended Dexterity + Crafts action to construct the stone. Each roll represents one day or night of work and costs a Willpower point. A character can have a number of *kudurru* up to his permanent Willpower rating (but not less than three may successfully define a *kur*).

If a border-stone is destroyed, the character instantly loses a point of Willpower and instantly knows that his Demesne is under attack. Annunaku usually hide their *kudurru* or make them difficult to reach or recognize. Aside from defining the area of a Demesne, *kudurru* are needed for some of the more esoteric powers based on Tenure.

Two Demesnes can never overlap. If two vampires with Tenure want to expand into each other's territory, they must cajole, terrify or otherwise persuade the mortals in the rival's *kur* to accept their mastery instead — or destroy the rival and be done with it.

lead to Detroit, but the expressways are not part of the Chicago road network any more than Detroit is.

It is harder to intuitively understand a larger network, so Kindred with this Discipline tend to interact with smaller networks they believe that they can become intimately familiar with.

For the purposes of this Discipline, there are the following three types of networks:

Formal social networks are of great interest to most Lynx. These networks are made up of the people in an area who do business with one another. These links are primarily financial: who buys from whom, who borrows money from whom, who delivers to whom. These are also links of competition, determined by who competes with whom. Individual final consumers are generally not part of the network; rather, groups of consumers are considered together, as target markets. The substance that flows around the network is, typically, money. This is a cold network, informed by habit and practiced behavior rather than emotional ties. Even for the living, this is a vague, instinctual thing. Formal social networks exist between commuters on the train and regular customers at the store — they are the surface of human networks. In general, this can also be seen as the network of Mental Traits, though Social and Physical factors certainly contribute to the activity of and between nodes.

Personal social networks are composed of nodes of friends, lovers, sexual partners and enemies. In this case, the links are human relationships, and information, conversation, sex, favors, feelings and personal rivalries are the packets of data that flow around the network. This is a deeper, more private network than a formal social network — this is the heart of human networks. Generally speaking, this is the Social network, though Mental and Physical factors certainly play a large part in social dynamics.

Spatial networks, such as road, rail and sewage networks, can also be interfaced with by a Lynx. These networks are typically more static and evidentiary than social networks, but that's not always the case. Though a Lynx attuned to spatial networks may be able to infer the function and meaning of buildings, roads and pipes constructed by human agents, she is better able to mingle with the movement within those systems, slipping into crowds, influencing the flow of traffic and predicting where a human or car will change direction. This is the most Physical network of the lot, as it casts the actual human body as the information that travels between man-made nodes.

A Lynx can only use the powers of Web in the types of networks with which she is attuned. Every Lynx attunes to one of the three network types automatically upon developing the first dot of Web. Attunement to an additional network types can be acquired by spending five experience points. A Lynx cannot be attuned to more types of networks than she has dots in Web.

Most of these powers work with any creature who participates in human relationships, from ghouls to vampires to mages. As a general guideline, creatures with a Morality or similar Trait rated two or less cannot be affected by this Discipline. Spatial networks may contest eligible powers with a Resistance Trait value that reflects the average traffic through the space, as determined by the Storyteller.

• Scan

The most basic of Web powers, this allows a vampire to “scan” and read one node in a network. If a node could be thought of as a buoy in the sea, chained to numerous other buoys in the dark, then this power can be thought of as shining a light on that buoy, revealing the types of chains that lead away from it and a vague idea of the directions they're headed.

This power doesn't give a Lynx much information on the network in general, but it provides the tools for investigating networks and assembling a map of their nodes. The information the vampire gains is full of strong sensations and mental images, tempered by the biases and experiences of his subject node. Thus the information received is accurate only to a point. However, when tracing a lead on information to an adjacent node in the same network, the Lynx instinctually realizes that she has made contact with a specific associate node.

For example, when a Lynx attuned with personal networks “scans” a mortal woman, she might learn that she is currently infatuated with a blond man and experiencing what feels like a bad break-up with a co-worker. If the Lynx encounters the woman's “blond man” and scans him, the vampire instinctually understands that she has found the man the mortal woman is infatuated with. The Lynx may also learn that the blond man does not love her back.

What constitutes a node of any particular network type is open to some interpretation by the Storyteller. A personal node is always a person, and the interface with a personal node must always be through direct social contact, whether that means a formal interview, flirtations at a crowded restaurant or small talk on the subway. A formal node requires direct observation of the subject by the vampire, though contact is not necessary — trailing the subject is typical. A spatial node must be a junction or intersection on some sort of physical network, such as a freeway interchange, a telephone junction box or a boiler room, and must be visited in person by the Lynx for the scan to work.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Investigation + Web – subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant. Note, however, that while the actual moment of activation requires only an instant action, a character must observe or interact with a node for a number of minutes before this power can be used. In general, a Lynx may successfully scan with only one node

per scene. Thus, at the end of many scenes, a Lynx's player might attempt this power on any one character she was interacting with throughout the scene.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character fails to interpret any useful information from the subject and is unable to use this power again for the rest of the night. Vitae spent to activate the power is wasted.

Failure: The character fails to observe anything useful.

Success: The character uncovers a few leads from the node's behavior. For each success scored on the activation roll, one piece of information is gained about the subject's relationship with its network. This information may seem to be gleaned by subtleties of behavior ("See the way he's eyeballing that dress? He was just thinking about buying it for someone. Someone with red hair.") or attitude ("He's pissed. Look at him. He hates his boss."), but that is often just a trick of the blood. The information is often gleaned directly by vaguely sensing the subject's psychic presence.

Alternately, the character can learn something about the subject's Social Merits. To use this option, the Lynx must select a Merit to gauge — Allies, Contacts, Herd, Mentor or Retainer, for example — and then compare the successes on her activation roll to the subject's dots in that Merit. The Lynx gets an intuitive understanding of the Merit in question, up to a value equal to the successes scored. For example, if a Lynx scores three successes on her activation roll,

she can learn about as many as three of the subject's dots in Contacts; if the subject has five dots of Contacts, two of those dots would go unread by the Lynx unless she tried to scan the subject again and achieved a greater result. Generally speaking, a Lynx first learns about the contacts and connections the subject is most comfortable with.

The information gained about a spatial node involves the human traffic through that node. A Lynx might sense that "around midnight, that bridge fills up with foot traffic," "these vents lead outside, where people sleep on them" or "most of the calls through this box are inbound — and frightened."

Exceptional Success: Extra successes are their own reward, but an exceptional success with this power also reveals information of greater clarity, usually beginning with the subject's name (as she thinks of it).

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The power is turned on a subject the vampire has fed from.
+2	The power is turned on a vampire with whom the user shares a blood tie (see <i>Vampire: The Requiem</i> , p. 162).
-2	The target and the user do not speak the same language.
-2 to -5	The target node is not interacted with properly: a person may be frightened or offended, a spatial node might be visited in a rush.



•• Link

After a Lynx learns to read nodes, he comes to understand how to construct or enhance his own networks of blood. Though the rational mind of an intelligent Lynx might be able to parse the sociometrics of interpersonal relationships, it's the blood that thrums in response to social networks and informs his perceptions. Therefore, a Lynx can only form artificial — or, truly, supernatural — networks through the medium of blood. Contrary to some beliefs, however, a Lynx *can* create links between any blooded creature, whether vampire, ghoul, mortal or other.

Cost: 1 Vitae per link. This cost can be paid by any mix of Vitae from the Lynx and any other Kindred subjects. To form a link with any subjects that are not Kindred, the Lynx must have at least one Vitae from each subject in his system when this power is activated. The qualifying Vitae may be spent to activate this power, but that's not a requirement.

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion + Web versus the subject's Composure + Blood Potency (if resisted)

Action: Instant, if the subjects are willing; extended and contested if they are not. A number of successes must be accrued equal to the highest Willpower of all unwilling subjects. Each roll represents about one minute.

To activate this power, the Lynx must be able to see all the subjects directly — not through a video camera or photograph — in addition to fulfilling the requirements above. If the Lynx is unable to spend enough Vitae in one turn to activate this power, he must spend the Vitae as quickly as he can in the turns leading up to and including the activation roll.

A Lynx does not have to be a member of the blood networks he creates with this power.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire fails to form any links and finds his ability to perceive his attuned networks diminished — he suffers a -2 penalty on all Web activation rolls for the rest of the night. All Vitae spent to activate this power is wasted.

Failure: The character fails to form any links and all the Vitae spent to activate this power is wasted.

Success: The character successfully forges links of blood between the subjects. Each subject can now affect the others as if they shared a blood tie (see "Blood Ties," on p. 162 of **Vampire: The Requiem**). If any of the subjects already shared a blood tie, its effects are doubled. This effect also allows all the subjects to feel the proximity and condition of the other subjects according to the rules for blood sympathy.

This artificial blood tie persists for a number of nights equal to the Link user's Resolve. Subjects who want out after the first night can spend one Willpower point to attempt a Resolve + Composure roll to break their link to

the blood network; this Willpower point does not augment the dice pool but merely makes the attempt possible. The dice pool to break the link is penalized by the Lynx's dots in Web.

A Lynx with this power may add his dots in Web to all blood sympathy dice pools.

Exceptional Success: If the Lynx scores five or more successes on the activation roll (or five more successes than necessary on the extended action), his connection to the subjects is so strong that he may temporarily see through their eyes. To do so, the Lynx simply spends one Willpower point per turn he wishes to spend spying through the subject's eyes.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The power is turned on a character with whom the user shares a real blood tie.
-1	Each subject beyond the first.
-2	The subjects are a mixture of creatures (mortal, ghoul, mage, etc.).
-3	The subjects do not all know each other.

••• Insert/Delete

After a Lynx becomes comfortable reading nodes and understanding her own sanguine networks, she may learn to insert or delete herself from existing networks. To do so, the vampire must first successfully scan a subject node with Web. Once that's done, the Lynx can use this power to pose as a node in a foreign network or diminish her profile in a network she is genuinely a part of. The Lynx becomes difficult to track and hard to ignore.

Cost: 1 Willpower per scene

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Web versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Lynx achieves the opposite of the result she wanted, getting a penalty instead of a bonus or vice versa.

Failure: The character fails to insert herself into a network or delete her presence from a network.

Success: The vampire successfully alters her place in the desired network. The Lynx's dots in Web either become a bonus to dice pools for interactions with the network in question or a penalty to the actions of other nodes to interact with the Lynx through the network. A bonus represents the Lynx interacting the expectations and familiarity of other nodes within the network, while a penalty represents the Lynx shutting parts of herself off from a network she belongs to.

As an example of an insertion, consider a Lynx who uses this power to insert herself into a personal network: she might alter a node's memory subtly so that he ac-

cepts her as a forgotten college classmate or friend of a friend. The malleability of the node's interactions with the Lynx grants her power and flexibility within the network, represented by her bonus dice.

The exact dice pools that can benefit from this power vary with the individual networks; the Storyteller must decide on a case-by-case basis if a dice pool is eligible. An insertion into a personal or formal network could grant bonuses to Socialize, Persuasion and Subterfuge actions. Insertion into a spatial network could benefit dice pools for Drive (other drivers instinctually make cooperate with the Lynx), Computer (the Lynx gleans an intuitive understanding of the jargon and organization of the system) or even Stealth dice pools (the Lynx moves within the flow of daily traffic so as not to attract attention to herself).

As an example of a deletion, consider a Lynx who uses this power to dampen the emotional force put on her by a Kindred "relative" — the penalties applied to the relative's actions more than counteract the effects of a blood tie.

The dice pools that can be penalized by deletion are more restricted, as the Lynx can only affect those that interact with her through her personal and formal networks. Therefore, dice pools that would normally be affected by Status dots may also be penalized by this power. Rolls to sense the link through the blood sympathy are always penalized when this power is active. Likewise, attempts to get information out of affected nodes about the whereabouts and business of the Lynx are penalized, even if the subject is attempting to search her own memory — the subject simply cannot recall all the information she could before.

This power must be centered on an individual subject node when it is first activated, but its effects echo mystically through the network as the Lynx moves deeper into the system. Each degree of separation between the Lynx and the subject node reduces the effectiveness of her bonus or penalty by one. Thus, the Lynx may enjoy a +3 bonus with the mortal she pretends to know from college, but this bonus is reduced to +2 when dealing with his roommate and +1 when dealing with the roommate's friends. Likewise, the Lynx's interface with a spatial network, like a highway, diminishes as she moves further from her entry point.

Exceptional Success: There is no benefit for an exceptional success when using this power.

•••• Edit

After a Lynx understands how to alter a network around himself, he can learn how to alter the relationships between nodes other than himself. With this power, a Lynx can edit the chains of information that flow out of a scanned node, altering emotional states and spatial rhythms with the mystic force of his will. A clever Lynx can use this power to set off much larger changes in a network: a frayed relationship may lead to lucrative political clash or a halt in

traffic may keep unwanted pursuers at bay or dangerous reinforcements away.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Web versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character temporarily loses his attunement to the network type being interfered with. For the rest of the night, all the character's powers of Web are ineffective with that network type. The Willpower spent to activate this power is wasted.

Failure: The normal state of the network is too difficult to alter, so the character cannot make his changes stick. The Willpower spent to activate this power is wasted.

Success: The character successfully alters the natural state of the subject node. If the node is a creature in a social network, the Lynx may alter that node's relationship with another, adjacent node in the system. In game terms, the Lynx may color that relationship with any Virtue or Vice; the behavior of the subject creature changes *only in regard to one other creature* to reflect the values of that Virtue or Vice. For example, if the Lynx alters the Seneschal's attitude towards the Prince to align with Greed, the Seneschal may begin to scheme against his lord or toady for more power. If the Lynx then successfully alters the Prince's attitude to be informed by Charity, the Prince might take pity on his servant and grant him more power.

If this power is used on a spatial network, the Lynx may alter the state of flow at the subject node. For example, the Lynx may mystically compel the drivers on an expressway to slow down and gape for no reason near the subject node or the Lynx might subtly influence pedestrians to clear a path on a busy sidewalk. The exact effects must be adjudicated by the Storyteller, but the general effect is this: the Lynx can attenuate good flow into bad or expand bad flow into good.

Each change persists for the remainder of the scene, but the effects wrought by the changed network may endure forever. For example, car crashes caused by an altered network may lead to very real deaths.

The Lynx must be able to see the subject node with his own eyes when this power is activated.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success yields no enhanced effects, though the changes to the subject node may persist for the rest of the night, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
–2	The character has just encountered the subject for the first time.
–3	The character has never encountered the node to be altered in the subject's perception.

- 4 The Virtue or Vice to be conveyed is strongly out of line with the subject's default relationship (e.g., making an angry widow regard her husband's killer with Charity).
- 1 to –5 The character's own hatred or bias interferes with his ability to subtly project his influence onto the subject.

..... Extrapolate

At the highest level of Web mastery, a Lynx is able to scan live networks through the evidence of their existence alone. By studying letters, emails, photographs, videotapes, purchased gifts and so forth, the Lynx can glean an understanding of some of the nodes involved. Essentially, the vampire is now studying the space between the nodes, rather than the nodes themselves. The amount of insight a Lynx can casually gain through this sort of investigation is truly intimidating. An irresponsible or sinister Lynx with this level of mastery may be a prized asset to the covenant or a terrible threat to the security of the domain.

Cost: 1 Willpower per scene. Once activated, this power may enhance other powers used within the scene.

Dice Pool: This power is not actively rolled. Rather, a Lynx with this level of familiarity is simply better able to employ and understand the other powers of Web. With evidence to work from, a Lynx may extrapolate information on all of the nodes the article has moved between. For example, with access to a person's email, a Lynx may be able to scan both the sender and the recipient remotely, provided they are nodes in the same living network. Junk mail, meaningless trinkets and unimportant correspondence are of no use to the Lynx, however, as they have no importance to the relationship between the subjects.

Not all useful data is created equal. Older correspondence left over from defunct networks is useless — Web only works on active networks. Immaterial evidence, such as computer files, and damaged materials, such as waterlogged photographs, impose penalties from –1 to –5 to the scan attempt based on both their substance and their condition. Ultimately, the ability of any medium to convey information about the relationships that created it must be determined by the Storyteller.

Action: Instant

DEVOTIONS

The Lovely or Loathsome Web

(Domus •• , Majesty ••)

The Spider channels the power of her Majesty through the land to which she has attuned herself. By doing so, she influences the ambience of the place in accordance



with her wishes, manipulating the emotional responses of those who see the place. If she wishes for her haven to seem terrifying, then it appears dark, twisted and foreboding; those who cross the blood boundary of the property feel a strong impulse to flee. On the other hand, if the vampire wishes for her residence to seem attractive, it appears clean, welcome and inviting; passersby will be enticed to trespass through curiosity, fascination or just a sense of being welcome.

This Devotion is an all-or-nothing effect; it affects everyone looking at the Kindred's haven. The Spider can't target some subjects and not others; consequently, a modicum of strategy is required if the Malocusian doesn't want to bring herself trouble.

Cost: 1 Vitae per scene

Dice Pool: This Devotion is not actively rolled. When activated, it simply allows the Spider to use Majesty powers in subsequent turns against subjects who look at her haven, as though her haven were her own body.

Those within sight of the Spider's lair are inexorably pulled to, or repelled by, the Spider's web. Those affected may rationalize their behavior any way they like: "It just feels creepy to me," "I just want to see if it's occupied," "It has a bad reputation," "Let's break in and steal shit" and so on.

Action: Instant

This power costs 9 experience points to learn.

The Knight's Example

(Dominate •• or Majesty ••, plus Vigor •• or Resilience ••)

Countless Invictus Knights in an untold number of domains throughout history have each developed versions of this Devotion on their own. A Damned Knight with the mystic presence of this Devotion inspires bravery and renewed strength among his fellow warriors.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Weaponry + Dominate or Majesty

Action: Instant

If the activation roll is successful, a number of allied subjects equal to the successes rolled may add the user's Majesty or Dominate dots to the next Weaponry or Brawl dice pool they use in the scene. This power may only be used once per scene.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

Rallying Blood

(Majesty •, Resilience ••)

This ancient Invictus power was once common among its Knights and assassins, but tonight it is countered mostly in books and legends. With this power, a vampire is able

to rally allied warriors by persevering through hardship and injury. The Kindred's admirable fortitude inspires others to fight on despite their fears.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Stamina + Intimidation + Resilience

Action: Reflexive

Immediately upon taking lethal or aggravated damage, the character may make a reflexive roll to activate this power. If the roll is successful, a number of allies equal to the successes achieved regain one Willpower point. An ally must have witnessed the attack on the character to be eligible for the Willpower restoration. This power doesn't enable a character to store more Willpower points than her Willpower score would normally allow. Any given character can benefit from this power only once in a scene.

This power costs 9 experience points to learn.

Rumor of Dread

(Dominate •••, Nightmare ••)

The Invictus are no strangers to fear and its uses. This power is useful for beginning a campaign of fear within a domain. With a few words of worry and dread and a single, unwitting subject, a vampire with this power can spread fear among a populace without appearing to be a rumormonger.

Cost: 1 Vitae per scene

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Expression + Dominate versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive.

If the activation roll is successful, the vampire taints the subject with a variation of the Dread power of the Nightmare Discipline. The subject becomes the center point of the Dread effect, but all numerical factors of the power (such as its radius) are based on the vampire's Traits. As the subject moves about, he exposes others to the Dread; these secondhand subjects use this Devotion's activation roll as the benchmark for their contested resistance rolls.

As with Dread, this power is ended if the subject becomes involved in an incident that substantially alters his mindset, such as a fight, a car accident or sex. Some genuinely jarring or horrific incidents — like a car accident — might not alter the subject's attitude enough to break the effects of this power, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Unlike Dread, the vampire may extend the number of scenes the subject is afflicted by spending more than the minimum of Vitae necessary to activate this power. No matter how much Vitae the vampire spends, however, the effects of this Devotion end when the subject finally sleeps.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.





Appendix: ALLIES AND ANTAGONIST

"Hear me, my kindred,
and know again what we knew already,
once, all those nights ago:

That our city is built of blood and walled in bone.

That our castle is loyalty and our arms, traditions.

That no enemy can breach our keep
so long as we know, as we once knew,
that power is ours unless we surrender it.

And our enemies look so much like our friends."

*Heaven forming each on other to depend,
A master, or a servant, or a friend,
Bids each on other for assistance call,
Till one man's weakness grows the strength of all.*

—Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*

No one vampire exemplifies the Invictus. The glitterati of Society are ancient and diverse, more so than most Kindred assume and more so than many Invictus members know. With this Appendix, players and Storytellers alike can further populate the chronicle with Kindred of Quality — and with Kindred with a wide variety of skills. Each of these characters represents a slightly different perception, and permutation, of the Invictus, but all are certainly members of the First Estate. If not, then they are at least all right-thinking vampires.

To maximize the diversity of this gallery of characters, a variety of approaches has been used to define these characters. Some, like the Alliance Builder named Angela Preston, represent a specific vampire with a job that is not uncommon in Invictus domains. Other characters, like the Biased Judex, represent much more generalized concepts. Both characters are ready to be used right away. With a bit of tweaking — a changed name, a dice pool borrowed from another character in this chapter, a reversal of allegiance — these characters can inspire a variety of supporting characters over the life span of a whole chronicle or several chronicles.

Storytellers might cast these characters as servants, supporters, allied rivals, blood siblings, lieges or lords of the players' characters when the story — or the course of the protagonists — takes an unexpected turn. Of course, these characters can also serve as enemies within the covenant, be they outright traitors or competitors for coveted prizes and titles.

Players can use these characters to represent the dots their characters possess in Contacts, Allies, Retainer, Mentor and other Merits. Perhaps one of these characters — or a substantially altered version of one of these characters — is the sire or childe of a player's character?

Ultimately, the key to making the best use of this Appendix is to remember that these are not scripted, starring characters lurking within the game world, waiting to invade your chronicle. These characters belong to you, now. They work for you. They do what you tell them. And if they're any good, they'll hint at ways they can be put to good use.

Non-Combatants

The following characters make excellent recurring contacts and associates within the Invictus of the city. Over time, one of these characters may become so valuable to

the chronicle — or the protagonists — that it becomes worth the time to create complete game statistics for her. Until then, it's enough to know just what these characters are best at or known for, because that's how they'll come to be involved in your stories.

An Alliance Builder: Angela Preston

Quote: "I'm sure I can help you with this. And there's a little favor you could do for me, too."

Background: Accustomed to being able to get anything money could buy without having to wait, Preston was the daughter of a wealthy businessman. As a teenager, she discovered that she couldn't buy friends or allies, and that life without them was difficult. In her early 20s, her looks and social manipulations drew the attention of a Daeva, and fairly quickly Preston found herself in her Requiem. She joined the Invictus almost as soon as she heard of the covenant, seeing herself as a natural member of the aristocracy of any society. She was a little disconcerted when she realized just how far down the ladder she was starting, but quickly turned her talents to building a new network of allies in this new environment. She is doing quite well, and has started acquiring a reputation as "one to watch."

Description: Preston is fairly tall, and kept herself in good shape as a mortal. Her mother was Latina, so



Preston has slightly dark good looks, and her long hair is a rich, deep brown. Her eyes are a startling gray, inherited purely from her father, and look somewhat out of place in her face. Nevertheless, they add to her attractiveness. She prefers to wear elegant designer dresses, with one or two pieces of expensive but subtle jewelry.

Storytelling Hints: Preston is currently trying to build a network of allies, and sort out exactly what she wants to do with them. As a result, she is reluctant to betray anyone, as that will create enemies for the future, and, at the moment, Preston makes relatively few demands on her friends. However, she plans to use her allies as tools, once she has picked a suitable goal, and, at that point, she will have no qualms about dropping those who are no longer of use. At present, she does not want to become Prince, as she is aware that she does not have the personal power to hold such a post safely.

Abilities:

Socializing (dice pool 6) — Preston is good at talking to people, putting them at ease and finding out what they can do for each other.

Empathy (dice pool 6) — She is also quite good at working out what people are not telling her.

Amiable Advocate

Quote: “Come on, love. We’ve got the money, we’ve got the power and we look so damn good having it. Get with us, and you’re on top of the world. How hard do I really need to sell this?”

Background: The Advocate is the city’s Invictus recruiter, and she does a hell of a job at it. Unbound neonates can hardly wait to sign up once she’s through with them, and she’s even attracted a few from some of the other covenants. She loves to convince people to see

things her way and considers rigid holdouts enjoyable challenges. She is relatively young, and as yet unstained by the tragedies of a long unlife.

Description: She is a vampire who puts on the best face of the Invictus, making herself (and therefore, her covenant) as attractive as possible. No expense is spared, no luxury denied. She positively shimmers with jewels, sinks into cushioned seats and plush fur coats and can barely keep herself from smiling in even the most solemn circumstances.

Storytelling Hints: The Amiable Advocate is happy to share her comforts with potential recruits, but knows that holding back can be just as powerful as opening her arms. She’s a strictly look-but-don’t touch vampire, willing to make promises that need not be satisfied until her target surrenders completely. She demonstrates the material wish-fulfilling powers of the Invictus without hesitation. She laughs at poverty and hardship, knowing that their complete elimination is just a loyal oath away.

Abilities:

Persuasion (dice pool 8) — Are you kidding? The way she looks, the clothes she wears, the people she surrounds herself with — this is a vampire who was born to persuade. The Requiem is just better her way, and everything she has, does and is seems to prove her right.

Socialize (dice pool 6) — Having a good time is part of the Advocate’s professional skill set. If she’s happy, it’s not hard to convince other people that they could be happy too. It doesn’t hurt if she’s better at holding her drugs or alcohol than others, too.

Subterfuge (dice pool 5) — A hard target might be able to resist the Advocate’s arguments if she sticks entirely to the truth. Obscuring the facts with some creative language can help to undermine a target’s confidence and set the foundation for an indisputable argument.

Biased Judex

As the final arbiter of disputes in the Invictus, the Judex is a position of great power in the covenant, and one in whom First Estate Kindred invest a great degree of power (if not exactly trust). Ideally, the choice of Judex should be amenable to all Kindred of a domain, or at least all of the Kindred involved in a particular dispute. That sometimes happens.

If a Judex is going to be biased, however, that bias is likely to benefit the domain’s elders. That’s simply one of the realities of unlife in the First Estate. Elders get the benefit of the doubt, neonates do not. Younger Kindred appealing to him can, in general, expect a few platitudes.

Quote: “This will make more sense to you should you survive long enough to become an elder.”

Background: At some point, a century or two ago, the Invictus brought a new member into the covenant. He was a lawyer, the product of a wealthy family, and





though he was somewhat effete, he was brilliant and merciless in his practice of law. In the early nights of his Requiem, he craved the power that comes with age and experience, and, over the course of decades, he has played every game known to the First Estate, and he has finally risen to the position of Judex, the second most powerful position in the domain. In his hands rest the fates of the city's other Kindred, and on the basis of his judgments do Kindred rise and fall.

As he has grown beyond his never-very-humble beginnings, however, this Judex lost touch with the experience of being a young, confused Kindred. The decades of power games have left him with the opinion that young Kindred inevitably bring on their own troubles through their own idiocy and folly. Consequently, on those rare occasions when he has to make a ruling involving an elder and a younger Kindred, he favors the elder every time. After all, the Biased Judex had to put up with the arrogance of elders when he was a young vampire; the modern generation of neonates may as well stop their whining and get used to it. If they're truly dedicated, they'll get what they want one day, but, for now, they may as well get used to their second-class status.

There are likely other attitudes that come with this set of beliefs: a short temper with all neonates or younger Kindred, a pronounced conservatism in dress and mannerisms and an abiding hatred for the lazy revolutionaries who make up the Carthian Movement.

Description: Flawlessly groomed and dressed in luxurious silk suits, the Biased Judex epitomizes the well-heeled elegance of an Invictus elder. This character carries himself with dignity and grace — and hates being bothered by those who can't do the same.

Storytelling Hints: Though you know that condescension really doesn't further your goals any, you have a difficult

time taking Kindred seriously if they're less than a century old. The concerns of younger Kindred are simply too frivolous to take seriously, while the issues that elders wrestle with are *serious* and need serious attention.

Abilities:

Interrogation (dice pool 7) — No self-respecting Judex could possibly function in the shady world of Kindred power politics without being able to draw out information from the parties involved in the cases she is arbitrating. This Ability represents the character's ability to coax information from others that they would rather not share. Sometimes the Judex does this by pretending to be a dear confidante, other times through browbeating. Either way, few Kindred can keep their secrets once the Judex sets her mind to exposing them.

Investigation (dice pool 6) — Should direct interrogation not be enough to provide the Judex with the information she seeks, she's more than capable of getting to the bottom of the situation on her own. She knows how to uncover the truth of a situation through indirect evidence. She's been around long enough to know the standard tricks that Kindred, from neonate to elder, use to hide their indiscretions.

Socialize (dice pool 5) — Not so much a tool of the trade as a prerequisite of the position. No Kindred can aspire to the position of Judex without possessing a comprehensive knowledge of the Kindred social labyrinth. Some Kindred who wind up as Judices hone their social abilities in the role of Harpy for decades before advancing to this position.

Subterfuge (dice pool 5) — It's a pathetic Judex who can't see through a simple lie. A proper Judex can smell deception the way a wolf catches the scent of its prey. And unfortunately for those who get on her bad side, a shrewd Judex can lie with extraordinary conviction as well, resulting in the ruin of those without the advantage of her favor on their side.

Business Shark

Quote: "He's weak, he's desperate. I can smell it on him. Make an offer now — no. Make an offer next week. Tuesday. That's enough time to create a rumor campaign about his impending bankruptcy. Drive the stock down even further. Buy him out for a song."

Background: The Business Shark's sire wanted someone to help her break into the high-flying, fast-paced New Economy of tech stocks, junk bonds and leveraged buyouts. She succeeded in spades. The Business Shark has an Ivy League degree and the instincts of an assassin.

Although just a neonate, the Business Shark has proven himself by amassing a fortune that's impressive even by Invictus standards — for his sire, before his manumission. Now he works for himself and other



Invictus, trading his financial skills for Discipline tutelage, business and political Contacts and favors to be named later. Officially, he's a client to several ancillae and elders. Unofficially, some Invictus members wonder who's the client and who's becoming the patron. The Business Shark acquires jealous rivals as well as potential allies in the covenant. He wouldn't have it any other way, and looks forward to his first real war.

Description: The Business Shark talks fast and leans forward, invading other people's personal space. He jumps to his feet and strides back and forth, never still for long. He's usually in shirtsleeves, with his tie loosened and his tan sport coat thrown on a chair. Often he carries a portfolio of financial analyses and corporate reports. On the weekends, he puts on name-brand workout gear to play night games of racquetball at a high-priced gym. The Business Shark uses Disciplines to win these games against mortal executives, and the Masquerade be damned! His state-of-the-art cell phone is always at hand, though.

Storytelling Hints: Endure the rituals and formalities with ill grace. You don't have *time* for all that. While you recite some flowery formula to the Prince, the stock market is open in Tokyo and your rivals are stealing a march! These old fogeys don't realize that in the New Economy, the time frame is *now, now, now!* Revel in your powers and push the boundaries of the Masquerade and the Danse Macabre: to you they're just more games, and no one wins a game by playing it safe.

Abilities:

Computer (dice pool 3) — Although the Business Shark hires hackers for difficult jobs (i.e., breaking into corporate files and launching strategically-timed virus attacks against business rivals), he can pull information off the Internet pretty well himself.

Finance (dice pool 6) — Bleeding-edge knowledge of commerce and investment, and the instincts to apply that knowledge well, are the Business Shark's *raison d'être*.

Intimidation (dice pool 5) — Yelling and browbeating are all in a night's work as the Business Shark asserts his dominance and tries to make his minions move faster. He speaks in a more quietly menacing manner when he wants someone to make a deal more favorable to him or his Kindred client. This will get him into trouble some night.

Larceny (dice pool 3) — A Business Shark does not personally engage in burglary or other criminal acts, but he knows a lot of financial dirty tricks forbidden by law. Not that he cared, even before his Embrace.

A Counselor: Martin Clearwater

Quote: "Sir, you should be aware that this . . . vampire . . . was connected to the Final Death of the Invictus Judex in Atlanta. I would advise caution."

Background: Clearwater was always a rumormonger, even as a child, and the transition to journalism was a natural one for him. However, his career almost came to an end almost before it had started, when a story he had fabricated about corruption in the mayor's office came within an ace of being exposed. Fortunately for Clearwater, he was able to distract attention with his reports on "the Waterfront Vampire."

Unfortunately for him, the Waterfront Vampire really was a vampire. Clearwater came to the attention of the Kindred, and found himself Embraced by the Mekhet. He adapted fairly quickly, and began carving out a niche as an information broker. After a while, he found that Kindred would listen to his advice, which, with his network of contacts, was usually effective. Clearwater formed a vision of himself as the power behind the throne, and has been working towards that ever since.



Description: Descriptions of Clearwater almost always involve rodents. His face is narrow and pointed, and his mannerisms remind many people of a cornered rat. He would love to project an air of calm assurance, but somehow cannot manage it. His clothes are never as stylish as he thinks they are, and he occasionally makes dire fashion blunders. He is never without his cell phone, which he uses mainly for email.

Storytelling Hints: Clearwater learned an important lesson just before his Embrace, and is now scrupulously truthful. If he isn't sure of the truth of a statement, he presents it as his opinion. This is not to say that he is honest: he has no qualms about omitting facts to create the impression he desires. He has become a master of presenting genuine problems with one course of action and genuine potential gains from another, thus persuading people to act in the way he wishes. His reputation for never telling lies helps greatly with this.

Abilities:

Persuasion (dice pool 6) — Clearwater is good at using selective presentation of the facts to get people to take a particular course of action. He never relies on simple emotional persuasion, in part because his sense of people's emotions is not that good.

Investigation (dice pool 7) — Finding out what is going on is Clearwater's true strong point. He has extensive networks of contacts, and still quite enjoys getting out there and doing some of the legwork himself.

The Disgruntled Slacker

Quote: "After what you put me through? You deserve this."

Background: The Disgruntled Slacker joined the Invictus because of the prestige and glory that he thought went automatically with covenant affiliation. But he never got the recognition and respect that he *knew* he deserved. There may have been too many elders in the city, cutting him off at the knees. He may have undermined his own advancement efforts by unconsciously slighting the Harpy. There may have been other Kindred more qualified for the positions of power that he coveted, or maybe he was just impatient or an idiot. Regardless of why he's bitter, his bitterness is consuming him. Though he has grown in power over the years, his advancement through the ranks of the First Estate has stopped at a very basic, non-glamorous and largely powerless state, and his resentment toward the elders, toward those he feels have "stolen" his advancement and toward the Invictus in general, is damn near palpable.

Ironically, because he's been around for a while, he's probably more personally powerful than his humble place in the covenant would suggest.

The Disgruntled Slacker despises the First Estate, but isn't willing to defect to another covenant. After all, it's taken him *this* long to get where he is, what's the point



of starting over at the bottom of the heap with a bunch of Kindred he doesn't see eye-to-eye with anyway?

But that doesn't stop him from sabotaging the efforts of his own covenant or trying to bring down the powerful Invictus figure whom he blames for his lowly status. If another covenant needs a spy, a saboteur or a fifth column, it have one in this character. He's only too happy to betray his own covenant any chance he gets.

Descriptions: Disgruntled Slackers can fit almost any description, but most of the time there's at least a hint of disaffection in their mien. They may, deliberately or otherwise, give the impression of being bored, vaguely hostile, sarcastic or sullen. Their sartorial choices are generally typical for the Invictus, but worn either sloppily or with some tell-tale hint of rebellion. The older the Kindred, however, the more likely they are to have learned to hide this rebellious note.

Storytelling Hints: Elders may well know more about the subversive habits of the Disgruntled Slacker than they let on. There's a good chance that Kindred who spend too much time in the company of such a Kindred could find their own fortunes plummeting.

Abilities:

Carousing (dice pool 5) — The Disgruntled Slacker knows how to show others a good time. It may be his primary method of feeding, or he might have been a party animal in his breathing days and doesn't care to change. It's possible that he's too fond of it for his own good; it could be that all his carousing makes him a poor candidate for promotion.

Subterfuge (dice pool 5) — The only way this guy gets through his nights without being branded a traitor to his covenant is by lying: lying to his superiors, lying to the other Kindred in his coterie and lying to himself about

the gravity of what he's doing. If the First Estate discovers what he's up to — that he's the information leak, that he's the one who's been killing the covenant's contacts (for example) — then he is well and truly Damned.

Guild Reject

Quote: “I thought I was doing fine. Just, you know, average. Then the Meister tells me that I’m the worst student he’s ever had. I try to stand up for myself a little and wham, I’m out of the Guild. Now my sire says she should never have Embraced me. What did I do wrong?”

Background: This hapless neonate just wanted to make everybody happy. He petitioned a prominent Guild Meister for schooling and was accepted because of his impeccable lineage. It just wasn't the right place for him, though, and by the time anybody figured that out the damage was done. Now he's a disgraced failure, ejected from the Guild and having a hard time getting anyone else to take him seriously.

Description: The Reject isn't wanting for money, so he makes an effort to dress stylishly, making sure to devote resources to looking like an ideal Invictus vampire even if he can't actually be one. He carries himself with a fragile, haughty air, secretly hoping that nobody will point out his failure. He is likely to overcompensate with material goods, trying to associate himself with valuables so as to appear valuable himself.

Storytelling Hints: This guy's had a bad break. He can get over it — even the derision of the local Invictus Kindred will likely fade — it's just taking longer than he expected. He's likely to be extremely thankful if someone in the covenant shows him a little kindness and will go to great lengths to prove his usefulness. He can't stomach approaches from Kindred outside the Invictus, though. The last thing he wants is to fail out of the covenant completely.



Abilities:

Academics (dice pool 4) – The teachings of the Meister weren't completely lost on the Reject. He's got some book-smarts, but his confidence is shot. He's much more likely to blurt out the correct answer to a question — convinced he's got the wrong answer — than he is to offer to tackle a problem.

Drive (dice pool 6) – The Reject has an undiscovered skill. He's a crack driver in a covenant that doesn't much appreciate high-speed pursuit. Even he doesn't realize it, but he would probably advance quickly as a Soldier, perhaps even becoming a Knight if he thought to apply his skill to combat service.

Empathy (dice pool 3) – Cruel example has taught the Reject to be ready for public humiliation. He's learning to spot insincere compliments that are meant to get him to drop his defenses just so that someone can tear a strip off of him in front of other Kindred. He's not quite the easy target some assume, though, and is rapidly getting wise to the wickedness of ambitious neonates.

Indifferent Notary

Quote: “Yes, yes, you need me to witness your oath-taking, and here I am. Can we get started? I have many duties to attend to this night, and yours is clearly the least significant of them all.”

Background: Notaries may be professional observers, but that doesn't mean they all want to see everything. This vampire prefers to witness events that intrigue him and make for great conversation, not the mundane operative functions of the Invictus. He knows better than to refuse to do his job, but he makes no effort to hide his boredom during tedious events. He's well aware that the position of Notary is not a popular one, so he need not make the effort to be more pleasant than the competition — because there likely isn't any.

Description: Notaries often dress in subtle, muted tones to help underscore the seriousness of their position. Since honesty and honor are the watchwords of a Notary, it wouldn't really do to behave flamboyantly or clownishly. They do, however, tend to be as distinctive as possible, so as to alert other Kindred to their presence and function. This one might wear an officious-looking suit and hat as an indication of importance.

Storytelling Hints: The honesty of a Notary is considered his most valuable asset. As a result, his statements will often put an end to disagreements, but he must be careful: disagreeing with a vampire means implying that the Kindred is either dishonest or ignorant. As such, most Notaries are careful with their words. They are also likely to be forced to sit through every one of the ceremonies of the Invictus as official witness, and may begin to find the pomp of the covenant (most especially its ambitious, younger members) extremely tiresome.



Abilities:

Politics (dice pool 6) — The Notary has observed countless official transactions, and has a well-grounded understanding of the effect any new arrangement may have on the Kindred of the domain.

Expression (dice pool 5) — When one is a professional witness, one must learn to be extremely cautious with one's words, even in a relaxed environment. The Notary becomes adept at a particularly useful skill in high society: holding forth on any subject while deftly avoiding concrete statements unless they are absolutely necessary.

Intimidation (dice pool 4) — The mere presence of a Notary suggests that an official version of the events at hand will be reported to the Inner Circle of the domain. That ought to be enough to scare some Kindred onto the straight-and-narrow path, but, for some, the Notary is likely to apply a little effort just to make sure it does.

Insightful Modernist

Quote: “Oh, yes, this is quite complicated. You’re lucky you have me here to explain it for you.”

Background: The Invictus is not known for being particularly up-to-date or making the most out of modern trends. The Modernist, however, earns his status in the covenant by being the best informed and most helpful to those in power. He understands recent politics, popular culture, computers, DVDs, cell phones, the most recent slang — and he knows how to convey it to the First Estate elders who need to know. He’s a translator of sorts, explaining the modern world to very old Kindred, and he trades in his up-to-millisecond currency. It often serves the Modernist to exaggerate the actual difficulty of some of what he does; after all, if elders start to

think that they can understand the 21st century on their own, he’s out of a job.

The Modernist could be useful to the characters by providing them with information, by doing their computer-based dirty work for them, or he could pay *them* to research something new for him. Alternatively, if they piss him off, he could use his favored status with elders to make their unives miserable.

Description: The Modernist is often a relatively fresh neonate, still young enough that he can dress in the styles he was wearing in his breathing days and not stick out. He may have been a computer professional, a run-of-the-mill technophile or a collector of gadgets in his breathing days, and he may still have some of the traits associated with those roles: stunted social skills, an expensive consumer technology habit or an astonishing collection of high-tech wonders.

Storytelling Hints: The Modernist is always happy to help elder Kindred navigate their way through the labyrinth of modern nights — for a price, of course, whether that be prestige, money or something else entirely. For their part, the elders need him, and he knows it. The service he provides is valuable for key elders and for the First Estate as a whole, and he establishes himself on these credentials and often tries to parlay them into something more.

Few Modernists maintain their edge for any length of time. They often find that they know the fads and technology from when they were alive, but may find more recent developments to be harder to keep up with, owing to all the other concerns and distractions of the Requiem. Those Modernists who really push themselves to keep up with the world often find themselves much sought-after by elders — and these Modernists charge accordingly.



Abilities:

Hacking (dice pool 6) — While many elements of the modern world, from slang to pop culture figures to politics, might be a significant portion of the Modernist's skills, computer expertise is often the selling point of his skill set. He understands technology, its uses and abuses, and how to help the elders who provide him with patronage.

Research (dice pool 5) — Anything the Modernist doesn't know, he can find out. This might take the form of a Google search or just knowing how a card catalogue works.

Fast-Talk (dice pool 6) — Not only does the Modernist need to know his stuff, he needs to convince elders that he knows his stuff so they value him accordingly. This ability represents the Modernist's ability to convince elders that they need him (and that figuring out the modern world on their own is likely to be *far* too frustrating.)

Patron of the Arts

Quote: *"Beautiful! Brilliant! A masterpiece! If you do not sell it to me, matters shall go badly for you."*

Background: This ancilla or junior elder made his (or her) fortune decades ago. He neither seeks to multiply his millions further nor acquire political clout or high Kindred office (though he might be a Master of Elysium). Instead, he wields cultural influence as an Angel, a Patron of the Arts. Other Invictus members do not underestimate his skill at intrigue, however, or his ruthless determination to get what he wants.

Description: Male or female, the Patron of the Arts dresses in the height of fashion, with costly but tasteful jewelry and immaculate grooming. A retinue of witty admirers, both Kindred and kine, enhances this character's usual air of bonhomie and airy detachment



from social intrigues. The Patron's opulent haven sees a steady stream of writers, artists and intellectuals.

Storytelling Hints: Give a steady stream of harmless quips about other Kindred's minor foibles. Talk seriously about art, literature and ideas, but not about business or politics (Kindred or kine). Even when someone bars you from an artistic treasure or attempts to wrest away your fortune, keep a smile as you tell him he's made a big mistake. Then use your wealth and Invictus connections to destroy him.

Abilities:

Academics (dice pool 6) — This character knows a great deal about art, literature and culture. Many important Invictus Kindred defer to the character's judgment in these fields.

Expression (dice pool 6) — The Patron of the Arts speaks glibly and wittily, amusing everyone else with a stream of piffle and opinions about art and culture. The character can also issue trenchant views about more serious topics, such as the Prince's policies.

Socialize (dice pool 7) — The character has great skill at putting others at their ease and defusing conflicts — or starting them, without letting either party know who kindled their anger.

Streetwise (dice pool 5) — The Patron of the Arts became rich by mostly legal means, but can hire mortals with a wide range of unusual talents, such as sharpshooting, safecracking and arson.

A Prince-in-Waiting: Sebastian Philipson

Quote: *"I truly appreciate your assistance. With your loyalty, I am sure I shall soon be able to reward you as you deserve."*

Background: Philipson spent his life and his Requiem clawing his way up from the bottom of the heap. Born a slave, he was freed when his master "committed suicide" after "writing a will freeing his slaves." Impressed by the newly freed man's resourcefulness and ruthlessness, a Ventrue vampire Embraced him. For Philipson, there was only one possible covenant: he would join the Invictus, and work his way to the top there. His self-control and willingness to do whatever was necessary to gain power ensured him a steady, although unspectacular, rise. He has spent some time in torpor, and rebuilt afterward, finding the social environment post-civil-rights rather more welcoming to his ambitions. Now a member of the Primogen, many in the city see a potential Prince when they look at him. Philipson carefully nurtures this perception.

Description: A fairly small African American man (although he loathes that term, holding that he is purely and completely American), Philipson wears the most expensive suits, accented with a gold Rolex and a heavy gold signet ring. His hair is short and showing signs of gray; otherwise, he looks to be in his early 30s.



Storytelling Hints: Philipson is headed for the top, and doesn't care whom he steps on on the way. He expects Kindred to show him all the respect that he feels he is due, which amounts to the respect due to a Prince. He gives orders, treats people as his servants and expects to be obeyed with enthusiasm. On the other hand, his experience has taught him the importance of having underlings you can trust. He does not sacrifice anyone whose service he has accepted, and he genuinely does try to ensure that they get the rewards that they merit. He is very picky about accepting service, however, and importunate applicants may find themselves eliminated.

Abilities:

Intimidation (dice pool 8) — Philipson is a master of getting what he wants by scaring people. These days, he normally relies on social threats, but he isn't above using physical intimidation when it would be more effective.

Empathy (dice pool 6) — He assesses everyone who comes before him, making a quick decision on whether they have potential or are to be dealt with as briefly as possible. Those who have potential are subjected to more careful investigation to see whether they are worthy of serving him.

Occult (dice pool 5) — Over the years, Philipson has built up a substantial knowledge of the occult and the denizens of the darkness that blanket the city. Even though a lot of what he knows is rumor, speculation and folklore, it is hard to really surprise him these nights.

Queen of Night

Quote: "I called you here because I want something from you. I have many desires. You can find them pleasant to satisfy — or not. That is up to you."

Background: As a mortal, the Queen of Night may have been an actress, the trophy wife of a tycoon or a nobleman's mistress. She knew her livelihood depended on her looks. She fought time and age as best she could — and she prepared for her inevitable defeat by putting money aside. Then a Master of the Night freed her from aging forever. She was his paramour for a time, but eventually left him to become a power in her own right: a queen of blood and shadows, commanding men through her beauty, draining them dry — literally or figuratively — and throwing them away.

Description: The regal, deadly beauty of the Queen of Night is a perfect fusion of nature and artifice: the Embrace smoothed away the crow's-feet and other hints of age, and artful makeup completes the image of ageless beauty. Her gowns coyly hint at a figure to set a mortal male's pulse jumping. No man with an ounce of brains would dare to touch the Queen without her permission, though. She sweeps through the salons of the undead as if she owns them — because she does. The Queen of Night is at least a Harpy, and may well be a Priscus, Primogen or member of the Inner Circle.

Storytelling Hints: Calculation mastered passion long before your Embrace. You attract talented or powerful men through your looks, power and manipulative skills. You make them work for your favor — the Kiss or the more practical benefits of wealth and social prominence. When the men have nothing left to offer you, or you find someone better able to serve you, cast them out and crush their hearts with your stinging contempt.

Abilities:

Empathy (dice pool 7) — The Queen of Night reads other people like a book, seeing their deepest desires and how they may be controlled.



Intimidation (dice pool 6) — Without lifting her voice or showing the fury of the Beast, the Queen of Night still makes other Kindred and kine feel like worms who should beg her pardon for existing — and the only reason she does not crush them is they would soil her perfectly manicured hands.

Persuasion (dice pool 9) — The Queen of Night commands everyone. With her voice, stance and gestures, she can hold an Elysium spellbound, or make a man her pliant, panting slave.

Relic of Ages Past

Quote: “Don’t waste my time with this newfangled nonsense! I have servants like you to handle such details.”

Background: Neonates wonder how this centuried elder holds onto his high office of Primogen or Inner Circle member, not to mention a net worth greater than some small countries. He refuses to learn *anything* about the modern world. The Relic of Ages Past understands people and power, though. For him, that’s enough. Other Invictus elders treat him with careful courtesy and listen closely to his advice. He might be part of a cyclical dynasty.

Description: The Relic of Ages Past looks old-fashioned even when he must deal with mortals. Among other Kindred, he reverts to the garb of another century: periwig and frock-coat, doublet and hose, perhaps even a Roman toga or the embroidered robes of a Chinese mandarin. The Relic often seems out of touch, but is neither crazy nor stupid: when the Relic believes a situation deserves his attention, other Kindred bow before his penetrating intelligence and fearsome charisma.

Storytelling Hints: Reject any object, activity or concept less than two centuries old. Complain how fast the world changes, and never for the better. Insist that other characters strip any problem, opportunity or question

down to its human (or Kindred) elements: what people want, who they hate or fear, what they can give in return. When you can flense the elements of modernity from a situation, however, drop your querulous manner and reveal your ruthless, manipulative genius.

Abilities:

Academics (dice pool 6) — The Relic of Ages Past knows a great deal about history, art, literature and other general knowledge because he saw some of it firsthand.

Empathy (dice pool 6) — While this ancient monster cares little for anyone but himself, the hearts of others are plain to see to his cold, analytical mind.

Persuasion (dice pool 8) — This character has centuries of experience at negotiating, reading people and telling them what they want to hear.

Politics (dice pool 9) — This ancient vampire’s formal study of political theory ended with Machiavelli (or maybe Seneca), but the Relic has centuries of practical experience at seeing who has power, how they wield it and what can influence them to use it on his behalf.

Subterfuge (dice pool 9) — In the same manner, centuries of experience with the human (and Kindred) heart make him a master of deceit. He is nearly impossible to fool.

Resentful Technician

Quote: “Sure, I can build you a secure communications system. Anything you want, Your Alderness. But it’ll cost you. It’ll cost you a lot.”

Background: The Invictus members searched through a half-dozen college campuses to find the person they wanted. Their choice had superb skills in computer programming, electronics and other engineering skills — and no close family. The Invictus members made their expert disappear from the mortal world. An unlucky ancilla was assigned the task of Embracing and training the covenant’s new technical expert. Now manumitted, the Invictus’ resident master of high-tech works as a free agent — and pushes the boundaries of the covenant’s etiquette.

Description: The Resentful Technician pushes the Invictus dress code, too, dressing in jeans and T-shirts — but always clean, new and with a sport jacket. Hair is cropped short and gelled into spikes. The character also carries trendy electronic gadgets, such as a PDA, MP3 music player and a cell phone that transmits pictures.

Storytelling Hints: Nobody asked if you wanted to be a vampire or part of this crazed, archaic “Invictus,” but your sire said you’d be destroyed if you tried to leave. These old loons seem to need you, though, so you might as well take them for all you can get. Which might be quite a lot: your employers seem lost in centuries past, but they also seem to have more money than God. You still let these “Masters of the Night” know you don’t





like them and they don't impress you. If anyone asks what you're doing, give a long, technical description. If they say they don't understand, sigh, roll your eyes and say it would take too long to explain, but they'll get what they want.

Abilities:

Computer (dice pool 8) — The Resentful Technician has an advanced degree in computer science and considerable "field experience" as a hacker and freelance programmer.

Crafts (dice pool -5) — The character is competent to repair or adapt electronic and mechanical devices.

Science (dice pool 4) — Though specializing in electrical engineering, the Resentful Technician necessarily has some expertise in general physics and mathematics, and can at least venture an intelligent opinion on other natural sciences.

Vicious Harpy

Quote: "Don't think I didn't notice that. And don't think that it won't come back to haunt you."

Background: A cruel social bully, the Vicious Harpy makes a point of knowing, as if by magic, just when every Kindred in the city is going to have a bad night — and then being there with witnesses. By keeping taps on the pulse of the city — who's hanging out where and with whom, whose conflicts are heating up, who's growing desperate and who seems about ready to snap, the Vicious Harpy is able to perform his bizarre brand of sociological calculus to determine when and where in Elysium is going to be the epicenter of drama that he can exploit for all its worth. Worse, if situations teeter a tad too long to suit him, the Vicious Harpy may say or do some tiny thing that's just enough to send things over the brink of catas-

trophe. The Vicious Harpy is an arsonist of reputations, using Kindred passions like accelerant.

A few Kindred wind up in the role of Harpy because they're working their way up the Invictus ladder and Harpy is the office they wound up with. Not this guy. He wants no other office. He takes deep delight in pointing out the failings of others and boosting his prestige by striding up the pile of those Kindred he has sent plummeting into lonely disrepute.

Description: The Vicious Harpy feels obligated to dress to impress. He has an example to set for others, after all. This Harpy's sartorial sensibilities are always highly refined and optimized for his preferred milieu: if he frequents the Rack's kink clubs, he'll be flawlessly dressed in the latest leather, rubber or PVC fashions. If he runs in a more conservative crowd, his three-piece suit will be a tailor-made affair by whichever designer is currently the most in vogue.

Storytelling Hints: What separates this Harpy from his less dangerous peers is his relentless drive to get the dirt on other Kindred. He is likely drawn from the ranks of the Daeva or the Mekhet. In the former case, he uses Majesty to pull secrets from his target; in the latter case, he uses his stealth and investigative abilities to their utmost to dig up the dirt on those Kindred he hopes to expose.

Abilities:

Investigation (dice pool 5) — The Vicious Harpy really loves to get dirt on others. His fascination with the peccadilloes of others often leads him to sniff around where he's not wanted. This can get him in trouble, but it can also get him the most damning information on those whose reputations he seeks to ruin.

Shadowing (dice pool 6) — When he's not immersed in his nightly social games, the Vicious Harpy is keeping tabs



on whichever vampire has made the mistake of attracting his attention. He's an accomplished stalker and takes a perverse delight in monitoring his prey's every move.

Socialize (dice pool 8) — The Vicious Harpy is a trendsetter and a reputation-destroyer. He thrives on the cutthroat social games of the Invictus and knows how to ingratiate himself to those in positions of power — and how to advance his own standing by sending others into ruin. Despite his cruel history, he has a charm that other Kindred find enthralling — even those who hate him find themselves dancing to his tune.

Combatants

The following characters might come up against the principal characters in some future story. Remember that covenant politics and philosophical disputes are not the only reasons vampires conflict. Kindred of the same covenant may come to blows or a battle of wits over very personal, even irrational, matters. These may exist in the story only to be fought (but not necessarily!), but that is never the reason why a character exists in the fictional world of the game. These characters are all planning to do other things — they didn't become vampires just to meet and be defeated by the players' characters.

Likewise, while these characters are all likely to become involved in violence due to their natures or behaviors, they are not all Soldiers. Some fight because it's their duty. Others fight out of desperation — or insanity.

Devoted Steward

Quote: “Stop. You are trespassing on the territory of my sire. Remove yourself immediately or suffer the consequences!”

Background: The Steward has taken it upon herself to care for an elder vampire in torpor, ensuring that nobody interferes with his slumbering form. She defends his territory with fanatic devotion and will not hesitate to violently expel any perceived threat. Her dedication is fueled by true emotional ties, not just the Vinculum, and remains strong even as the years pass into decades. She hates the circumstance that stilled her sire, and she will do absolutely anything to ensure that he returns to her in comfort and safety.

Description: The Steward was not a warrior in life, but she has developed surprising skill in the violent world of the Kindred. Her small frame and meek countenance conceal bone-breaking strength, as interlopers are bound to discover. She is ever-vigilant, assessing everything that crosses her path as a potential menace. Truth to tell, her look suggests a worry verging on paranoia. She dresses in simple, almost matronly black clothes, having vowed to clothe herself in a mourner's garb until the night her sire rises again.



Storyteller Hints: The Devoted Steward is nuts. Over the years, she's withdrawn almost completely from Invictus society, appearing only when politics dictate the necessity. She can't bear to leave her sire's resting place, fearing that he will rise without her to receive him, and spends her waiting time cleaning and otherwise arranging his resting place. She's willing to kill anybody who gets close enough to threaten him, and isn't likely to listen to an intruder's explanations unless the intruder retreat first. If anyone comes too close, she's likely to shoot first and ask questions later anyway.

Clan: Nosferatu

Covenant: Invictus

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

Skills: Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 4, Weaponry 1

Merits: Covenant Status (Invictus) 1, Haven Security 3, Haven Size 1 (sire has Haven Size 3), Resources 3

Willpower: 5

Humanity: 4 (Suspicion; mild, 6)

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Pride

Initiative: +7

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Health: 7

Blood Potency: 2 (Vitae: 11/1)

Disciplines: Nightmare 2, Vigor 3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Shotgun	4	2	9 again	10

Duty-Bound Enforcer

Quote: “I’m the first to say that I wish the things I do weren’t necessary. The truth is, our enemies are out of control. Somebody’s got to put them down before they get to good Invictus Kindred.”

Background: The Duty-Bound Enforcer takes it upon himself to protect the interests of the Invictus. His philosophy is “the best defense is a good offense,” and he applies it constantly, working from the shadows to weaken, damage and even destroy the enemies of the covenant before they can do harm to his charges. He really hates his job, but he knows that he’s the best one for it — and his displeasure just fuels the cold, efficient demeanor he adopts while working.

Description: The Enforcer is a battle-hardened veteran. His eyes are dark, his expression spiked with the pain of a warrior’s unlife. He speaks little, preferring silent contemplation to boisterous company. He’s not the type to show off his combat readiness, generally remaining passive until a mission demands otherwise. This is a warrior who keeps to the shadows, preferring to remain anonymous. Even the weapons he carries are generic and hard to trace: a collapsible baton and a hunting knife.

Storytelling Hints: The Duty-Bound Enforcer strikes without warning, like the sudden touchdown of a tornado. He’s always watching for trouble, but rarely willing to rise to a challenge unless he’s sure he’s in control of the situation. Better, usually, to wait until he can handle a problem away from prying eyes and even ground. The Duty-Bound Enforcer seeks no reward for his actions. There is a sadness in him, however, arising from the solemn existence he’s chosen for himself amidst the extravagance of his covenant.



Clan: Mekhet

Covenant: Invictus

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2, Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Drive 2, Intimidation 4, Stealth 3, Firearms 2, Weaponry 3

Merits: City Status 1, Covenant Status (Invictus) 2, Haven Security 2, Haven Size 2, Fast Reflexes 1

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 4 (Fixation; mild, 5)

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: +6 (+8)

Defense: 3

Speed: 12 (36)

Health: 7

Blood Potency: 2 (Vitae: 11/1)

Disciplines: Obfuscate 4, Celerity 2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Expandable Baton	2(B)	2	-	9
Hunting Knife	1(L)	1	-	8

Armor:

Type/Rating	Defense	Penalty
Reinforced/thick clothing	1/0	0

A Knight: Bartholomew Metcalfe

Quote: “I regret that you find it necessary to make such comments, but I fear that I must demand that you give satisfaction, in blood.”

Background: Metcalfe is a common sight at the Prince’s court, normally standing off to one side and watching for trouble, but quick to intervene if things seem to be moving toward violence. His career was, in many respects, typical of an Invictus Knight: he started as an enforcer, bringing street-level violence when instructed, and worked his way up by proving his competence and loyalty. He never joined the Order of the Thorned Wreath, despite receiving an invitation, and many rumors have circulated as to his reasons. In truth, Metcalfe does not believe that many, if any, individual Invictus members are worthy of his loyalty. Instead, he is loyal to the covenant as a whole, which will survive any change in personnel. The Prince assumes that Metcalfe would always uphold the status quo, and thus far nothing has happened to disturb that assumption. However, if Metcalfe felt that the Prince’s actions were endangering the covenant’s grip on power, the Knight would not hesitate to eliminate the elder Kindred. From Metcalfe’s perspective, it would not even be a betrayal.

Description: Metcalfe looks the part: he is tall, broadly built and has very short dirty blond hair, cropped military-style. He is clean-shaven, and his eyes are a clear blue. Some Kindred have commented that his eyes look almost innocent, and his expression rarely suggests that a razor-sharp intellect is working. He dresses in formal suits, often black-tie when on duty, and normally carries a sword.

Storytelling Hints: Metcalfe has spent years perfecting his courtesy and his fighting skills, and is confident and at ease in both high society and high combat. He is aware that he is a match for most individual Kindred, but knows that he could be in trouble if he faced several opponents. He assesses individuals in terms of what they have to offer the Invictus or how they threaten the covenant, and he takes the long view. He expects to remain in his current role no matter who rules the covenant in his city, and thus is willing to offer some support to young Kindred who show potential as future leaders.

Clan: Ventrue

Covenant: Invictus

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

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Firearms 2, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 2, Socialize 3, Stealth 1, Weaponry 4

Merits: City Status 3, Covenant Status 3, Haven Location 1, Haven Security 4, Haven Size 3

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 5 (Suspicion; mild, 6)

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: +8

Speed: 14



Health: 9

Blood Potency: 3 (Vitae: 12/1)

Disciplines: Animalism 2, Celerity 2, Dominate 2, Resilience 4, Vigor 3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Sword	3 (L)	2	n/a	12

Oath-Bound: Violet Sanders

Quote: “Do not waste my time. Tell me what you know of Damien Forecastle, and I will be on my way.”

Background: Sanders was Embraced locally, and started her Requiem as an ambitious junior member of the Invictus. She formed a coterie with two other Kindred, a group that quickly acquired a reputation for loyalty to each other. Damien Forecastle was one of the other two. In the political dance of the city, he found it expedient to betray his coterie in return for advancement in the service of the Primogen of the city. Sanders survived, and brought charges against him before the Prince, alleging that Forecastle had endangered the Masquerade by revealing the coterie's joint haven to mortals. It suited the Prince to find in Sanders' favor, but Damien's new patron ensured that the vampire “could not be found” when it came time for punishment.

Sanders chose to swear an Oath of Blood Focus, dedicating herself to hunting her betrayer down. The Notary chose to witness the Oath, which irritated both the Prince and the Primogen, but as Forecastle had been declared an outlaw, there was nothing they could formally do. Indeed, both were forced to publicly commend Sanders' decision. Forecastle fled, and, since then, Sanders has been hunting him with all the single-mindedness of her Oath.

Description: Sanders is a small woman with dark hair and skin that tells of a mixed heritage. Her eyes are a very dark brown and always scan her environment warily. Her clothes are always practical and undistinguished, and usually a bit old. She favors jeans, sweatshirts and jackets, even for formal gatherings, unless she is convinced that she has more chance of finding Forecastle if she dresses up.

Storytelling Hints: Sanders is obsessed with finding Forecastle, to the point that she is deranged. The Blood Oath she has sworn merely reinforces that. She does not engage in small talk, nor is she willing to wait to hear what people might know of her quarry. However, if there are clues in a city she might stay for some time chasing them down, possibly interacting with people repeatedly. Her status in the Invictus is very low, as she no longer concerns herself with clan politics.



Clan: Gangrel

Covenant: Invictus

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

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Investigation 4, Stealth 2, Weaponry 2

Merits: Contacts 2 (truckers, PI's), Covenant Status (Invictus) 1, Resources 2

Willpower: 7 (with Oath)

Humanity: 4 (Obsessive Compulsion; severe, 5)

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: +7

Speed: 12

Health: 8

Blood Potency: 1 (Vitae: 10/1)

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Protean 3, Resilience 2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Brass Knuckles	1 (B)	1	Brawl	8
Claws of the Wild	1 (A)	1	Brawl	8

Reconnaissance Knight

Quote: "I'm telling you now, it's going to be rough. If you can't hack it, don't come."

Background: The Invictus is fully aware that it cannot rest on its laurels and still hope to hold its central position in Kindred society. When Spain invaded the New World, the Invictus was there. It was also there when Europe colonized Africa, China and the South Pacific. The First Estate is dedicated to spreading its

midnight nobility to any region where Kindred roam the night, and the Invictus sends its own brand of explorers and scouts, which it calls Reconnaissance Knights, to establish beachheads in regions where the Invictus has yet to make its presence felt.

Small towns, remote locales that have never before known the presence of organized Kindred, cities that have a Kindred population but little or no Invictus representation — these are all destinations of the First Estate's Reconnaissance Knights. As much as Kindred hate leaving the security of the urban environment, serving as a Reconnaissance Knight is often a quick route to advancement in the covenant, as such Kindred often wind up as Invictus "governors" in newly settled domains. Reconnaissance Knights may travel alone or in coterie, and such coterie are often assembled from among the covenant's ranking Gangrel members.

The journey of a Reconnaissance Knight is always one-way; there's no coming back. The goal is found a new domain, not expand the existing one. Therefore, for every Reconnaissance Knight who leaves the city as a settler or pioneer, another leaves as an exile.

Description: Outside of Elysium, Reconnaissance Knights often forego the effete, civilized demeanor common to many Invictus Kindred. Reconnaissance Knights dress for rugged terrain; as they expect trouble, they often travel with small arsenals (assuming they are not, themselves, walking arsenals, as is usually the case).

Storytelling Hints: Reconnaissance Knights are often short on refinement and long on ambition. They may evince more than a little disdain for Kindred too timid or delicate to brave the wilds that surround the cities.



Clan: Gangrel

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

Skills: Academics 1, Animal Ken 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Crafts 1, Intimidation 2, Investigation 1, Persuasion 2, Politics 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1, Survival 5, Weaponry 3

Merits: Allies (Commercial shipping) 3, Covenant Status (Invictus) 2, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Iron Stamina 2, Resources 4, Strong Back

Willpower: 7

Humanity: 5

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: +8

Defense: 4

Speed: 12

Health: 10

Blood Potency: 2 (11/1)

Disciplines: Animalism 2, Protean 4, Resilience 1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Sawed-off Shotgun	4	2	9 again	7
Sword	3(L)	2	-	9
Hunting Knife	1(L)	1	-	7

Armor:

Type	Rating	Defense Penalty
Reinforced/thick clothing	1/0	0



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but only with the best vintner,
cellar and cask
becomes priceless.*

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