

SHADOWS IN THE DARK MEKHET



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How to Discover
Ancient Lore Flowing
Through Your Veins.**

**Easy to Understand:
Ancient Egyptian Secrets!**



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Dev's Apology

My sincerest apology to Mr. Benjamin
Baugh for accidentally omitting him from
the credits in the Gangrel clan book.

Special Thanks

Huge thanks to Rhys James Jones, for
writing music suitable for a Glass
Armonium. Becky Lowe helped out a great
deal in the course of writing this book.
And thanks to my father, who, when he
died, left me the treasure trove of
occult books and magazines that
inspired Frances' misadventures.

-Wood

Here we have it.

I know you didn't expect to receive this from me, but here it is anyway. Don't be too surprised — some of us like to keep up with what you're doing, you know. And I always keep my word.

In the first piece of this, Frances is **Writing On Our Condition** (p. 3). Poor little Hollow, all cold and alone. In **Drowning is Strange** (p. 7), she tells us of her Embrace, and then touches on her interview with wicked old Nitokris in **The Metaphysics of Me** (p. 9). I'm surprised the old mummy deigned to speak with little Frances, to say nothing of revealed the sort of things she did. Then, we have **Messages from the Pyramid** (p. 15), touching on some thoughts relevant to the Mekhet mindset. You'll understand when you read them. Niall provides us the first of a set of letters from a recently awakened Shadow in old Vidal's domain, appropriately titled **After the Flood** (p. 17). From there, we get **A Sense of Place** (p. 23), an essay written by one Vincent Moon — yes, that Vincent Moon. Charming, to be sure.

Speaking of Moon, with all that wrapped up, we move into **The Ancient Psychic and Occult Sciences** (p. 28); I'm sure you'll understand why I call it that when you read it. After a bit of meandering, there's a bit of revelation from Frances, in the form of **Delivery** (p. 31). Naturally, the section **Music** (p. 32) follows — that little instrument certainly does get around, doesn't it? Then we see **Romance** (p. 34), a laughable title, truthfully. Then, another of Niall's **After the Flood** letters (p. 37), revealing a bit more about this Mekhet who awakened to the ruins of the Crescent City — and how deeply the urge to know runs in the thick black blood of the clan. Which naturally brings us to discussions of sanctum and domicile, in the form of **Home and Haven** (p. 41). We end this section with **Another Transcript** (p. 50), appropriately closing it with some words from the one who opened it.

From there, we find **A Guide to Common Superstitions** (p. 51), which starts with a bit of observation from Niall and then shoots right into our favorite little Hollow's **Thirty-Three for Good** (p. 51). Then, I gleefully present to you **Prelude for Glass Armonium Op. 9 in C** (p. 53). Yes, for that Glass Armonium. From there, **Akhenaten** (p. 55) a bit of... shall we call it...mythic history for the clan? Then, more history, in the form of the **Testimony of the Plague Angel** (p. 57) and On the **Contrivance of Conspiracies** (p. 58), both interesting perspectives on the passage of time. From that point, we find **On the Necessity of Atheism** (p. 59), followed by another of Niall's **After the Flood** missives (p. 61). **Concerning the Construction of a Glass Armonium** (p. 66) presents the history of that feared artefact — assuming you can trust the narrative, of course.

In **The Language of Stones** (p. 70), the incessant drive of the Mekhet — the need by one to know, and the need by others to keep the one from knowing — causes the friction that it always causes. That ugly little trait of ours makes the gathering of this last bit somewhat more difficult than its predecessors, but not by too much. Once we begin our chronicles, it is nigh-impossible to stop. **They Only Want You When You're Seventeen** (p. 72) takes Frances to places I don't think she would have dared under my direction, so I am gladened for it. Then, I present to you the last of Niall's **After the Flood** letters (p. 77), followed by **The Queen of Eyes** (p. 77), a fascinating look at the ugly little mythologies that we develop and cloak ourselves in so often, nuance and purpose after we've lost our real identities and sense of self.

The poor child. I'm sure she thinks it's all very important.

In closing, I give you Frances' **Sestina** (p. 79), without commentary. Make of it what you will.

I will be in touch about what you owe me for this.

-D-

All these are indications that our problem has to deal not with a dead, but with a half-dead, person: in short, that the defunct is in catalepsy or some other form of suspended animation. The phantom which sucks the blood of the living appears to the eye, creates noisy and other phenomena in and about houses, and disappears when the corpse is burnt, is an astral, not a physical shape, a body of sublimated, not one of concrete, matter: in short, D'Assier's posthumous phantom, the survivor of the living phantom, or "double," "doppelgänger" or "perisprit," as you like to call it. The vampire, then, is divisible into two factors, the inert corpse and the projectible double, or astral body: it is, therefore, a proper subject of scientific enquiry.

- Colonel Henry S. Olcott, "The Vampire" (*The Theosophist*, vol xii, 1891).

Dying makes you shallow.

I used to pride myself on knowing who I was and thinking about serious questions and taking my part in the democratic process and buying fair trade tea and, you know, caring.

You know what I care about now? Of course you do. If you're dead like me, you understand. It's the same for you, I expect.

My soul's been split in pieces and only part of it remains. I won't go mad in the same way as a Ventrue or become wild and addled like a Gangrel or crazed out of hunger and lust like a Daeva. I won't get fearful and scary and monstrous like a Nosferatu.

I go cold when I'm hungry. It's like my mind slips into the gaps, into this dark, empty pit that's eternally occluded from the light. Except it's not empty. It's full of darting voices, and they whisper to me and they make me do things, and when I come to myself, I've done terrible things. Except, every time I come to myself, I come to myself a little less me, a little less Frances, a little more empty. So I make myself superficial. I care about information above meaning, knowing above understanding, looks over substance.

Because if I start caring, the next time I give into the whispers might

make me stop caring altogether. I have to pretend. To be bright and funny and cheerful. And shallow. Because I have to be.

I might end up like Doe, and be so lost in the whispers that I no longer know my own name, or what it was like to be alive, or even whether I was a boy or a girl, and no one else would, either. It happened to Doe, and Doe made me. It's in Doe's blood, and that means it's in mine.

So I have to be shallow. Because dying made me that way. Because Doe made me that way.

What I remember about the bridge is this: I was on the ledge. I'd been standing there, on the stone

J_Doe207: Write what you like. Write honestly.

J_Doe207: I don't care. I made you to write about us.

J_Doe207: I would like to know who I am as much as you.

J_Doe207: But when you talk directly to me, be respectful.

J_Doe207: Do you understand?

francesrebecca: I understand.

J_Doe207: You have a place. Know it.

I HAVE TOLD THEM ABOUT
YOU. THEY KNOW YOU ARE
COMING TO SEE THEM.

MOTHER ELISABETA WILL
SEE YOU. WRITE TO FRANCIS
ROSE; NAME ME. HE WILL GAIN
YOUR ADMITTANCE.

AN INTERMEDIARY WILL
LEAD YOU TO NITOKRIS. TAKE
NO RECORDING EQUIPMENT; SHE
IS LIKE YOU.

MOON WILL BE IN TOUCH.

rail thing, looking down at the Thames. I could have been there for hours, and you know, all these people walked by and there wasn't one of them who said or did a thing. But I decided that really, tonight wasn't it. It was too cold, and I thought about Mum and Dad a bit, and I think I thought a little about black cherry ice cream – I don't know why – and I thought, oh, stuff-it, not now, and I got down and just sat there, dangling my legs

over the edge and kicking them a bit and I think I sang a little. I forget what it was I was singing, something cheerful, maybe. Living wasn't so bad. The moon was bright, and the lights on the other side of the river were twinkling like stars, and I thought, it's too nice a night for it. It should be colder than it was, and raining, maybe.

I stayed there for ages. It got really late. And then I realized that I could hear footsteps which meant that, ac-

tually, the bridge was dead, and there was only the one other person on the bridge, which is why I looked over my shoulder when I heard.

I think he was drunk. He was in a suit, and he ran right past me, and he didn't even see me. And maybe my balance was off, but he just brushed me as he went past, and I clawed at the edge of the bridge, and then I just fell into the river, whoosh, splash, and the very last thing I thought was, *bugger*.



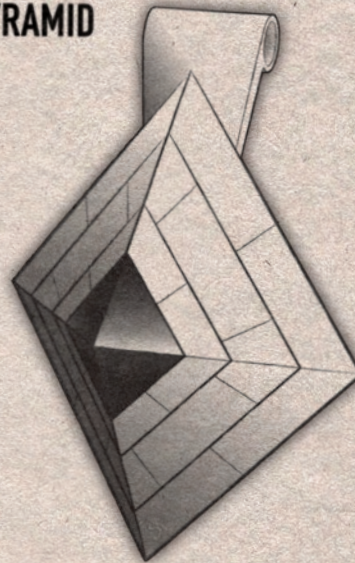
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francesrebecca: I'm very sorry to bother you.

J_Doe207 is busy, and may not reply to your messages.

francesrebecca: I have something.

J_Doe207 is busy, and may not reply to your messages.

francesrebecca: Are you there?

J_Doe207 is busy, and may not reply to your messages.

J_Doe207: I'm here.

J_Doe207: What is it?

francesrebecca: I saw my reflection last night.

J_Doe207: That is excellent news.

J_Doe207: It spoke to you, I take it?

francesrebecca: It did.

francesrebecca: You're not surprised?

J_Doe207: You're special, but you're not unique.

J_Doe207: I was hoping something like this would happen.

J_Doe207: Where did you meet?

francesrebecca: Ladies' toilets. Fiction.

J_Doe207: Fiction?

francesrebecca: A bar. It's in Shoreditch.

J_Doe207: That's outside of your territory.

francesrebecca: Sorry. Yes.

J_Doe207: That's Celia Carroll's turf, isn't it?

francesrebecca: I don't know.

J_Doe207: If she had seen you, you would have suffered.

J_Doe207: It would have reflected badly on me.

francesrebecca: I'm sorry.

J_Doe207: Evidently, she didn't see you.

J_Doe207: What were you doing there?

francesrebecca: I followed someone.

J_Doe207: You were hunting?

francesrebecca: Yes. Sort of. There was someone I wanted.

J_Doe207: I see.

J_Doe207: And you saw your reflection.

I lost myself. I do that sometimes.

I had never seen you before, but oh, oh how I wanted you at once, as soon as you came out of the office and you walked right into this boy — a cute boy, the kind I'd happily talk to, or not — and you cursed him, like he was too stupid to get out of the way of someone who mattered. Someone like you, someone suited and booted and Vuittoned and Prada'ed and polished, acting like you owned the place. Hell, you probably did.

You saw me on the street a hundred times when I was alive and I was invis-

ible to you, an ant, and you walked right into me and called me an idiot because it was my place to move. Or maybe you saw me at an industry party and you named the magazines you wrote for and I named mine and you walked away without a word, because it was enough for you to decide that I was beneath your notice. Or you worked directly across the office from me and signed my pay-cheques and asked me fifty times or more, "sorry, do you work here?"

I saw you and I thought, *I'll have you.* I was so hungry, but it didn't matter. It had to be you.

I walked to the boy and I brushed my fingers against his face. I stole a badge from his corduroy jacket (Camera Obscura; I approved), and smiled sweetly. He started.

"Silly boy," I said, "I'm far too old for you," and then I vanished, and looked for where you were. I sat beside you on the tube. You were so banal. I could see it around you: your aura this solid, oppressive pastel lavender, this wall of unchanging blandness that crushed any other color the moment it looked like it was going to emerge. You noticed a bit of dirt on your patent shoe, and the wall rippled. You glanced to see if your make-up was all right in a little mirror, and the lavender solidified: your self-satisfaction, your complacency affirmed. I bet that every wall in your house is painted in magnolia. I bet all your furniture looks exactly like those IKEA units, only costing about six times as much.

I followed you to the restaurant, where the meals cost more than any day's wages I ever earned and the man at the door has to know you or you don't get in. You ate alone, though I sat across the table from you. You had no clue. But it was funny to see how uncomfortable it made you when you stopped eating to read a text message and I swapped around your cutlery. I had to try very hard not to laugh in your face when I made your dessert fork disappear when you put it down in the dish for a moment, and made it reappear just before the waiter returned with the replacement you had demanded.

You kept your composure. I'll give you that. But I could see it. The dark blue of suspicion; a mottling in the lavender like mold appearing on bread; and just a tiny speck of orange, here and there, just enough for me to know that you were a teeny bit afraid.

Time came for you to leave and go to the wine bar, and you were on the list, as if you had ever doubted it. But you wanted to make sure that the people clustered around the bouncer knew that tonight, and maybe, although you weren't aware you were doing it, you wanted to make me know, too.

As if that would impress me.

So I sat beside you and I listened to you and your identical drinking com-

panions. And you talked about pay scales and editorial decisions and men you slept with and hated and you laughed too loud to make sure that everyone knew you were enjoying yourself.

I was so hungry. You had three drinks, three glasses of something improbable and brightly colored, and then excused yourself and went to the ladies'.

I walked behind you all the way, behind a row of women fixing their make-up and washing their hands, and let you go into the cubicle alone.

It seemed correct to wait for you to finish peeing. It doesn't seem fair

to drink from someone who has a full bladder. Besides, the Kiss makes people wet themselves sometimes, and that's a little bit disgusting.

So I waited outside, and scuffed my feet for a minute, and tried not to think about the wall-wide mirror or the bright fluorescent light.

When I was alive, I used to constantly glance at my reflection in shop windows and bathroom mirrors, as if I thought that one day I might vanish. Now I see nothing except the facing walls, no matter how I try to appear; I see no shadow beneath my feet, no matter how I wish

to occlude the light. I always feared, more than anything else in the whole world, that I would become invisible.

Now, well. It has its advantages sometimes.

I was so hungry.

The flush sounded. I straightened my jacket, ran a hand over my hair. The latch turned and the door opened, and you walked out and straight into me, and I smiled and said "hello," and drove the last precious drops of magic blood into my body and moved so fast that you barely knew I had moved and then I lost myself completely. I had no control over my actions.

Other vampires turn into crazed animals, or gluttons. But this is how vampires like me lose control: we become precise and empty and cold and quick and blank-faced and go click-click-click like clockwork dolls, and we slice and bite and pin and sometimes we run away. Our minds fade to nothingness. We become insubstantial, like the shadows that I don't even cast.

I was so *hungry*.

I pinned your arms to your sides and I pushed you backwards, and I let the door close behind us. I remember going up on my tiptoes and kissing you hard on the mouth and biting into the soft perfumed skin under your jawline, and you breathed in — more like a gasp, really — and your eyes rolled back and your hands flapped at your sides and you began to weaken and eventually, I came out of it with a warm, fluttering feeling in my new-filled heart and you going limp in my arms.

"Oops," I said, and I lowered you onto the toilet seat. As soon as I let go, you slumped sideways. Your head went thump against the partition, and your bottom slid the other way and you fell halfway to the floor, partially draped over the bowl. You looked ridiculous.

Sorry. I thought about going through your bag and finding out your name, but would you have done that for me? Well, would you?

I didn't mean to kill you, but I'm a little bit glad you're dead. I wiped my mouth with toilet paper, crumpled it up. I put it in my bag.

"Time to go, then," I said, to no one. I noticed that in my... episode, I had



bolted the door. It's reassuring to know that even when I go mad, I have some sense about me.

Leaving you behind, I became invisible again and walked out of the cubicle. There was no one else in the bathroom. I walked over to the basins. I looked up, and there was my reflection, looking back at me. It seemed so normal.

I lifted a hand, slowly. Maybe I was wondering if my reflection would too.

She didn't. She smiled sweetly at me. And when the reflection smiled, all I could think was, *do I look like that?*

She looked so pale. There were no lines around her eyes, and they were this strange, opaque shade of green. Her skin looked a little stretched, across cheekbones that were harder and sharper than the cheekbones I remember having. Her lips were red and her teeth were shining white. Her hair wasn't any neater than

I remember mine being (blast), but it seemed to soak up the light.

When she began to talk, I could only stand there. I fell into a sort of trance and listened. I was only dimly aware as the night wore on of the women coming in and out, the screaming and crying behind me, and the paramedics and the stretcher that took you away.

I didn't care about you anymore. And none of them saw me.

DROWNING IS STRANGE

MOON, 23/09/08

It's running? All right.
What is it tonight, then?

[pause]

Doe didn't tell you?

[pause]

Ah. Well.

You must understand, Frances, that you are incomplete. Even if you were to be united with your reflection, there wouldn't be enough for you to be a whole person. You rotted in the grave and parts of you evaporated into everything around.

[pause]

Who wrote that? Dylan Thomas? Yes. I thought I knew it. I knew him.

[pause]

Well, I met him. In the Museum Tavern, I think. He was completely pissed. Wankered. Wasn't all that long before he died, actually.

[pause]

Yes. Incomplete. Yes.

Do you know the story of the graveyard watcher? Of course you do. You were the last to be buried; and so, your ghost was the one to stay. Has Doe put you in touch with Nitokris?

[pause]

Talk to her about that. She may have another point of view. As far as you were concerned, it was your ghost.

While you were there in the grave, she grew hungry, and she fed from the people who came to the cemetery to mourn. Sometimes, I expect, she made the people sleep when they came in the afternoon and she supped a little life. They had it to spare. People imagined they saw a wan little ghost lurking around the stones, and once or twice, the ghost-Frances sat next to them and vanished, or maybe asked for a lift home and smiled, only to disappear from the passenger seat when they left the cemetery car park.

This is what happened to you: the creature without the face came back each night. It was there when they dragged your corpse from the river, Frances. It came on the night after the funeral and sat by your grave and shredded the flowers, so that the following day, your mother and father cried even more when they visited than they had expected to.

francesrebecca: I was there for hours.

francesrebecca: They were closing up. It was almost dawn by the time I got out.

francesrebecca: I had to listen. It was like I had no choice.

J_Doe207: What did she tell you?

francesrebecca: She told me about you.

francesrebecca: Are you there?

J_Doe207: I'm here.

[pause]

No, I don't know why. Like I don't know why it picked you. I suspect that you know that better than anyone. Or will.

[pause]

This is what I saw.

It lay on the grave, Frances. It whispered to you, begging you to be patient, admitting that it had been there from the beginning, that it had read your writing and it had followed you home, night after night; that it had hidden you from sight and isolated you from human contact. It had been in your flat and disconnected your telephone and wiped the messages from your answering machine and deleted your e-mails.

The creature without the face made you lonely, Frances. So very *lonely*. Doe didn't just bring you back from the grave. It put you there.

[pause]

Yes. Your reflection can see things that you can't. She would know that.

Doe lay on your grave each night. It confessed, before it was ready to come to you. And after a few nights of this, it came dragging a sack with a man in it.

[pause]

Christopher Sutton-Jones? I didn't know his name. Who was he to you?

[pause]

It doesn't matter in the end. Doe had already brutalized him somewhat. By the time he'd been dragged into a graveyard in a sack, he was filthy and covered with blood. I imagine that he would have found it hard to cope with the sight of Doe digging up your grave. It prised open the coffin and it held your wan little cadaver close as if it was sniffing at the corruption that had begun to take hold of you.

[pause]

Why, yes I am enjoying this.

You wanted to know.

[pause]

Then, well. You know this part. It slit one of its wrists, and it wiped black blood on your lips, and your mouth moved.

[pause]

Ah, but no. Most of you think you have to have been the one who killed the person you bring back, and you have to do it straight away. But actually, you don't. It's one of the big secrets.

francesrebecca: Were you going to tell me?

J_Doe207: I did it for you.

francesrebecca: You're **how** old, exactly?

francesrebecca: And is that the best you can come up with?

J_Doe207: I think you should remember to whom you're talking, Frances.

Drowning is strange. You panic and you thrash around, and then you go all sluggish, like you can't move, like you're in one of those dreams where there's a monkey or something sitting on you and your limbs go weak and you can't even scream out. It's like that.

It might not be like that for everyone. But then, those of us who are able to tell people what dying is like didn't really die properly. So how can we tell what dying is like?

Anyway. It was like that for me. I drowned. And then I sort of shuddered

and went into this ecstasy I hadn't ever experienced before, and thought, *where's the light?*

And then, I think I must have been dead.

I didn't know it at the time. I've worked that out since. It was like it was imme-

diately afterwards that I started to be aware, still stuck in blackness, but aware of my body stiffening and arching and my arms flailing around in open air and my mouth full of the taste of blood. And it was so powerfully strong, but it was sweet, too, because I started gnashing my teeth and licking them and biting on air and I was screaming and I was so cold, so cold. I flailed my hands around and touched cold earth and grasped handfuls of it. Then there was this tearing sensation, like something was being torn out of me, like ripping cloth, only inside me. It seemed to go on forever, the pulling, the ripping, and it left behind this gaping, gnawing feeling, and I was more hungry than I think I have ever been. I was only this cramping, sucking hunger. But I could see, in this kind of narrowed perspective.

There was a man in front of me. Lying on the ground. A man in a suit. He was all I could see, in that tunnel vision, and I shook myself free of the hands that were holding my shoulders

and I half-crawled, half-jumped across the earth and held him tight and bit him hard on the mouth, on his tongue maybe, and his mouth filled up with blood and I drank it and kissed him hard and I sucked and sucked and he wriggled for a second, and then he stopped and began to kiss me back. And it felt so good. It hasn't ever felt like that since.

His blood got all over me, all over my hands and down my chin, and I sat there on the ground and let him fall sideways, wide-eyed and dead.

Someone had tied him up. I nearly didn't recognize him.

I leaned over, and reached out a hand, and put it under the dead man's chin and turned his head to look at me, and it was Chris Sutton-Jones, and I snatched my hand back and let him fall face-down and I thought, *Oh God. I've just snogged my boss.*

Which is just typical of me. Something significant happens and I have to go spoil it.

I began to feel very conscious of myself. I was outdoors. On grass. In the dark. I was wearing my favorite dress, the one with the embroidery and the little mirrors on the hem, and too much make-up. Apart from Chris's blood, I was mostly dry. A little damp, maybe.

And I could hear everything. The fluttering of a moth by that sharp smelling pine tree. And within its branches I knew there was a bird's nest, with three sleeping chicks in it, and — yes — one dead one. I could feel the paint on my face, the movement of the air on my skin, in my hair. I could feel every individual blade of grass under my fingers, every grain of clay.

But I couldn't hear myself breathing. I couldn't feel my heart beat.

I was next to a hole in the ground, and a little wooden cross with a black-and-white plastic plate screwed to it, like you'd put on a grave before the headstone was finished. It had my name on it.

francesrebecca: Nitokris smells funny.

J_Doe207: Is that really your first impression?

francesrebecca: Yes. I'm afraid so.

francesrebecca: She smells funny. Not bad — kinda nice. But old. Like dried flowers. Mixed in with something else. Something weird. And you smell it. Even if you're dead and you don't breathe.

I can't begin to count how many kinds of vampires there are. There are these hierarchies out there; and sometimes they cross over and get all mixed up. In the Far East, you hear stories about headless bodies and bodiless heads that descend upon the sleeping. Tales are spread about men and women who become bats or monsters by night, who eat unborn children straight out of the womb. Then there are these Moth-Men and goat-suckers that the Americans talk about.

And there's also what some of the vampires like to think of as "us." Some of them have these things that they call "Camarillas." It comes from Ancient Rome. This clan set up a big grand government of the dead. It's gone now — so is the clan, they're all

dead, something awful got them, awful enough that the Lady of London says that you're not allowed to ask any questions about it.

Anyway. We imagine ourselves to be more or less the same, five clans from the same root. And it's true: some of us are undeniably related to one another. While bloodlines and factions muddy the waters, blood from a vampire belonging to one "clan" does much the same thing to humans and vampires as blood from any other. You hear about groups who mix blood from several clans. It's all confused and messy and hard to make any sense of. Because then, there are these near-mindless slave-vampires that vampires make when we botch the Embrace or leave it incomplete. And they're much

the same, no matter which of the five clans makes them. And yet, it's not as simple as that.

For we are not all the same. We came from different parts of the world. And different things made us. Different gods guided us when we crawled from our graves (and we did... the first vampires were like me, ones taken from the grave and made against our will or knowledge — not asked as if someone were proposing marriage — and changed without anyone knowing we had even died).

All of those different gods are dead now. Elisabeta and Nitokris understand, or perhaps understood once. I would like to, but it's hard for me to learn new things now.

It's hard for me to care.

Dying has made me shallow.

NITOKRIS

You should count yourself as honored, Frances. Number yourself among those who stand in two places at once, who walk in the sunlight, who are independent of their image, which yet travels abroad.

Most Mekhet are incomplete. We are also incomplete, but less so, for our Soul of Sustenance is a companion to us.

Not that we can ever join with it, or even do more than sometimes converse. But it exists.

We cannot tell whether a new childe of a Mekhet will be complete or not. A Mekhet creates a vampire, and the childe can be either, although he is more likely to be broken. Incomplete.

It has come to me, through some experimentation, that a Mekhet's condition is a matter of circumstance. The nature of the Egyptian tomb created many more of what our Blood was intended to be. I suspect that the way that the dead were venerated may have been a factor. Does it strike you as odd that your condition should depend on those who mourned you when you died? Perhaps. But then, we have always depended upon the living.

The state of the corpse may also have some effect on the vampire. If your researches have been as thorough as perhaps they should have been, you will know that some of the rules of creation that we tell to neonates are false. Roads to creation exist, but we have secrets. In Egypt, a Mekhet waited by tradition, until the body of his chosen childe had been mummified according to the proper rites and observances.

This, too, may strike you as odd: when a man or woman was correctly mummified, his or her viscera were removed and preserved, that he or she might return them to the body and be whole again when in the Field of Green.

The priests - and I performed the rite myself for the women of Saqqara on several occasions - sharpened ceremonial knives and made a set number of incisions; we removed the intestine, the lungs, the liver, the stomach and the heart. The heart we dried and preserved. Having wrapped it, we returned it to the corpse, packed in the empty body with natron and spices, and wood chippings soaked in fragrant oils. The other essential organs we placed in canopic jars adorned with the visages of the Four Sons of Horus. Imset, with the face of a man, watched over the liver; Hapy bore the face of an ape and guarded the lungs; Duatmutef the jackal-faced son kept safe the stomach; and Qebhsenuf with the falcon face protected the intestine.

The brain we discarded. In all the solemnity of the ritual, I never dared to express how much pleasure I derived from this. From the thrusting of the hook through the bone at the top of the nose. It made such a satisfying crack. The noises the brain made as the bronze sliced it to pieces and pulled it out through the nose, piece by piece. I loved them. We thought it useless, you see. It was simply foul-smelling meat that would corrupt the body if we let it. We rammed natron into the cavity. I found that an enjoyable task, too.

In the end, it was that little private viciousness of mine, that satisfaction I drew from tearing a dead body's brains out, that gained the notice of - I forget his name. The one who made me. He had noticed, so I was killed. And then, when I had been through the same rituals, and had no doubt given another priestess the same pleasure, he stole in and made me walk again.

And it made no difference to the Mekhet. Brain or not, you unwrapped the bandages and spilled a few drops of blood in the corpse's mouth, and your childe gasped and writhed in the wrappings and begged for more.

We are not part of the regular order of nature. We don't have to be complete inside to walk and thirst. In this lovely head of mine is nothing but salt and spices. And yet, I think. And yet, I walk. And yet, if you behead me, I will die.

Think on that.

And you can smell me, even now. Am I not fragrant?

"M'kh't" is, in fact, an actual Egyptian word. As in, a word that living people know about, I mean. As in, something we got from the living that isn't something that's much more recent than we are.

"Gangrel" is English, and goes back to, oh, I don't know, Shakespeare, maybe. "Ventruue" is some medieval French word. No one who wasn't dead used the word "Nosferatu" before the end of the 19th century (but try telling them that, or try asking what they were called before. It's touchy). "Daeva" is an old word. They pronounce that one differently in different parts of the world (apparently, in the US, they say "DAY-va." Weird). Even so, "M'kh't" predates it.

The Egyptians didn't have vowels that we would recognize, so modern-day people don't really know how Ancient Egyptian sounded, and the one or two people who claim to have been there don't remember, either, because your memory plays tricks on you when you're three thousand years old, and their version conflict.

So. Living scholars usually write it "Mekhat," but "Mekhet" with the "e" amounts to the same thing. It doesn't even sound different, and it's less intimidating to write than "M'kh't." Which, I suppose is slightly comforting, because it shows us that dead people are as prone to labor-saving and writing things for comfort as the living people are. Quirks are good. Because people have quirks. And it means we're still people.

I'm digressing.

"Mekhet" means "balance." As in a pair of scales. So, for example, the Egyptians called Saqqara "Mekhet Tawy," the balance of the two countries, because it sat on the border between Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. Egypt was always a game of two halves, to coin a phrase.

For us, the symbolism of the balance, the scales, has one simple significance. The balance measures one's soul on the way to the afterlife.

We, at some point, did not achieve the afterlife. We stopped at the stage of the balance. Our hearts were never measured against the *Ma'at*-feather that ensured our eternal life or eternal

destruction. We remain forever at that point at the gates of death and life, forever waiting for a judgment that's never going to come. We're caught at the cusp of the balance. We wait for the scales; yet we *are* the balance, for we are not alive, nor can we truly die (unless we are destroyed). We are trapped halfway.



With all the evidence in place, we can thus state the following:

That in the Egyptian mind, the human consisted of nine parts. The physical body, the *Khat*, was inhabited by an immaterial double, which was the *Ka* or Soul of Sustenance. The body's shadow was the *Khaibit*, and it too had a counterpart, the *Ba*, or Soul of Mobility, which dwelt in the heart. The heart, which was thought to be the seat of reason, was called *Ab*.

The *Khu* was the spirit-soul, and in the way that the *Ka* sustained the *Khat*, the *Khu*, which was inviolable and self-existent, sustained the *Sahu*, or spirit-body. The *Sahu* entered eternity and dwelt with Osiris in the Field of Green, but only inasmuch as it was inhabited by the *Khu* and only inasmuch as the other parts of the human had been allowed to remain intact for long enough that the *Sahu* achieved the end of its journey to the Field of Green. Since the *Ka* and *Ba* were thought to die when offerings ceased to be given to them, it becomes clear as to why the Egyptians made pains to preserve the bodies of their dead.

Appertaining to all these parts was the *Sekhem*, whose meaning is uncertain, but seems to be some expression of power. Each of the gods had his *Sekhem*, and Amon-Re is said to be the *Sekhem* above all others. Behind all the other parts of the soul lay the *Ren*, the true name, which, if forgotten, would surely spell out the extinction of the human soul.

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In Egyptian religious thinking, at least after the Middle Kingdom, the idea was that when someone died, the constituent parts of their body became separated. A human being was made of all these parts. It's not a question of a person being a body with a soul floating in it like your post-classical westerners think. Mummification was their means of getting the dead human to the borders of the afterlife in a reasonably intact state.

The metaphysics of me, then.

Among the parts of a human are the Soul of Sustenance (the *Ka*) and the Soul of Mobility (the *Ba*). One of them ensures your survival, and the other moves you around, inhabits your heart and keeps your shadow mobile along with the rest of you. While your other parts stayed with you in the tomb, these two went a-wandering, for a season at least, until your spirit-body and spirit-soul (*Sahu* and *Khu*) were ready to go on their journey to the afterlife.

The people who missed you, or who were scared enough of you that the thought of you coming back was not

one they felt they could countenance, left funeral offerings for you. And your *Ka* had enough material form to be able to eat the food that was left behind, if it wanted to.

It had a special anteroom in the tomb, all of its own, and a local priest (or if you were rich enough, one of your own) was supposed to manage the offerings to the *Ka*. Mostly, it didn't bother to eat, and the priest had to sneak in and consume the food. Sometimes the priests got to the food before the hungry *Ka*, which caused all sorts of problems.

A *Ka* without the food it needed tended to go and get itself lost. It left the tomb and began to drink foul water from sink-holes, and rotted carrion. Because it was dead. It was its nature to eat horrible things. It had to be told to eat the offerings. Like a fat kid who knows he's supposed to eat salad and fibre and stuff, only he still stuffs his face with Pringles and burgers and things like that.

Anyway. In order to get onto the boat and travel to the Field of Green, and be-

come one of the *Akhu*, the blessed dead, you had to have both your *Ka* and your *Ba* back. To retrieve only one of them – either, it didn't matter – meant that you became one of the *Mut*, and they were the Unhallowed Dead. Demons. Or ghosts. Or vampires.

And notwithstanding the claims of my friends among the Followers of Seth, no one wanted that.

So, imagine: you have a *Ba* (that moves you about), but no *Ka* (meaning that you are hungry. You are so hungry). Your *Sahu* and its *Khu* wait in the wings but are trapped at the gates of forever, waiting for the measure.

Human, plus Dead, minus *Ka*, equals? It's easy enough to do the sums.

Imagine, if you will, that in the tomb, the *Ka* hung around, fed by grieving or cowed descendants, waiting for the *Ba* to come back from its wanderings. But the descendants die out too soon (the whole process could take decades), or they forget, or there's a war or a plague, and suddenly there's no one to do the oblations.

So the *Ka* ventures out of the tomb, leaving behind the dead body. The *Ba* finally comes back and animates the body. With no Soul of Sustenance, it can eat no food, and must consume life in other ways. It, too, must go.

And how does one bring the *Ba* back when the *Ka* has fled? One Embraces the corpse. See, the Mekhet hung around the tombs of Egypt, those Valleys of the Kings, Queens and Princes, and every so often a *Ka* wandered off and they saw a likely recruit, for otherwise the dead one is no more than one of the *Mut* (which I cannot help equating with the misbegotten results of botched Embraces that I've seen in rare instances). They occasionally made a point of feeding their Blood to the embalming priests, you know, who were willing to take their master's advice on which corpses were to be made ready.

Or maybe the person just got Embraced some other way.

Maybe the vampire sire ensures that the *Ka* wanders off by killing or driving away the people who'd normally do all the rites and rituals that are supposed to make the *Ka* stay.

BASTARD!
BASTARD!
BASTARD!

At any rate, what you have, when you have a dead person without a *Ka* who gets Embraced, is a Mekhet. A whole one. And your *Ka* isn't just your ghost, it's your reflection. It's your image. And your shadow leaves you, too. It goes with the *Ka*. Because your *Ba* takes on some of the roles of the *Ka*, and that means that it sustains the body, and not the shadow. So you have no shadow, and no reflection. You cannot be photographed, and no artificial means of transmitting sound – from tin-can telephones and speaking tubes right down to mobile phones – will ever pick you up. Your voice can never create an echo.

But your reflection and image is still out there. Usually, it doesn't make an issue. It might appear in a mirror, looking over someone's shoulder, just for a moment, as they shave. Maybe it will show up in a photograph, standing next to Auntie Marjory, the one which makes the people who took it say, *I have no idea where she came from. I don't remember her. Do you?*

We're a different species from the other clans. Oh, we think we have the same origin as the others, but we are different. If we seem to think we are the same, divide ourselves into bloodlines and factions in the same way, join the same boys'-club covenants, make ghouls

and larvae and fall asleep for centuries, it's because we choose to be that way. We choose to be the same. But it's when freaks like me arise that we have to confront it: we are not like them.

If you are dead like me, ask yourself: are we the same? There are some things that Moon, Nitokris and Elisabeta have told me, and they make a kind of sense now.

Here's the thing. Why do the Ventruge go mad so easily, and why do the vampires try so hard not to mention diseases around them? And why don't they want to talk about what happened to the Dead Julii? Why do they get so edgy when anyone mentions the stories about the Sabbats? Why are they so scared?

Why are the Daeva so obsessed with language? What is it about the Gangrel that makes them so proficient at changing shape?

You could say the same about the Nosferatu. According to Elisabeta and Nitokris, they used to crawl out of the grave spontaneously. They're partly real, and partly imaginary. Fear is woven stitched into their flesh. Where did that come from?

Freaks like me only make the differences more acute. Nitokris and Moon called me a Mekhet. And when they

said it, there was a sort of emphasis, I suppose. It wasn't just the name for my Blood they were using.

There's something about me that made me different. I'm split into two parts, and we're both independent and hungry. I don't have a shadow. I don't even make an echo when I shout. How does that work?

But all of us, we see things. We hear things. When we sleep, whether it's for a day or for a decade, we dream of people we do not know and places we have never been. And maybe we'll never see the people and places we dream about, and sometimes we do.

Nitokris, Elisabeta and Moon are all old, and they're powerful, and they're evil in ways I can't yet conceive of (although, when I get older and maybe when I've been dead and walking longer than I was alive, I might understand. Sometimes I think I understand now). But none of them objected to my questions. They all knew my name before I met them, which is hardly a surprise, since Doe must have told them something of me, but they all *used* my name as if they knew me. As if they were familiar, and talking to a pupil they had known for many years. They knew me, as if they had dreamed of me.

And I knew them, too.



My own Ka never travels too far away. But her nature - she walks in and out of mirrors and photographs and telephones - means that I can rarely keep track of her. She is not a person, as such. Not that I am. But she is possessed of fewer parts of the living Nitokris, whose name I inherited.

I have the name, yes, but I am, in a way, not all of Nitokris. How can I be?

That my reflection is mobile and self-reliant is a badge of pride: there is more of me than there is of those other Mekhet, although between us we are seven parts whole. It is also something of a problem.

Sometimes the shadow hungers. It has the ability to eat and drink, but unless the proper obeisances are made, its tastes tend to the grotesque. It drinks water from oil-smeared puddles and feeds from animals that lie dead and run-over in the middle of the street. It raids bins. And its favorite food is human meat. Dead human meat, left to rot a few days, certainly, but yes, human meat.

And the older she gets, the more out of hand she becomes. It's easier when I am active: I know the same Rite of Feeding that we used back in Egypt (I can teach it to you if you wish). This appeases her. I leave her the food; compelled, she comes and she eats.

But there have been times when I have slept. The way that we do. Came a time when I slept for nine centuries before the Followers found and awakened me. But my Ka did not sleep.

She went so long without being fed. She turned into a hungry, terrible thing. She lurked in graveyards and abattoirs, supping on rotting corpses and discarded offal. She grew cunning, seeking out her own sources of food. She reached out from reflecting pools and hand mirrors in broad daylight and wrung necks, hiding the bodies and feasting when they had been dead for long enough; she became a well-known demon, a cautionary tale for lonely shepherds and vain young women.

Worse: the Kindred knew her by sight in Egypt, and I had to leave the Twin Lands on a ship, in a crate, rather than face destruction at the hands of the other Mekhet, and the other, foreign vampires who had invaded my country and outnumbered us. Having slept and thinned out my blood, I was no more potent than the weakest of them. I was confused by the way the world had changed. I was addled by nine hundred years of troubled dreams. When I arrived on your island, there were many more kingdoms here than there are now. And my Ka came with me. She is never far away.

London grew in size and the time came for me to sleep once, twice, three times more. And with each slumber, she became a trouble to the living, a horror lurking within mirrors, an echo without a voice.

Consider this, Frances: I was able to see all these things. I knew where Doe was. I knew what Doe had been doing to you over the three years before you died and Doe took you.

Ask me how.

[pause]

Ask me.

[pause]

It's a secret! Hah!

[pause]

What, being dead means you can't have a sense of humor?

[pause]

It's a secret. But then, you have a way with secrets. I've been watching you.

[pause]

Has the package arrived?

[pause]

See? I know things.

You could know things too.

[pause]

I am.

[pause]

Simple. The pyramid told me.

Introduction

As long as we live, we will have questions about our lives. Every facet of existence holds its own questions. Where shall we live? Why are we here? Who will we love? What comes next?

All of these questions have answers. And some of them can be found if you know where to look. The ancient Mayans knew how to find them. And they encoded them in the stones of the great city of Tikal.

No one knows where the Mayans came from, although scholars have tirelessly puzzled over the riddle of their origin for decades. The Mayans flourished in Guatemala until the 10th century, and then they were gone. But dedicated archaeologists have discovered that the Mayans had a remarkable civilization. They may have never worked iron, and their religion was both complex and barbaric, but

Select a question. Say it out loud, and take a deep breath. Say it again. Fix your mind upon it. Own it. Make it the only question in your thoughts.

Now place the temple before you. Close your eyes, and take hold of a pencil in your right hand, blunt end down. Then let the pencil drop on the page. Look at where the end of the pencil hit, at which animal or object it landed upon. Now turn the page and compare the picture to its number.

Finally, find the page that holds the answers to your question and count down until you hit the answer the objects have indicated. So, for example, if the frog was indicated, you turn the page and see that the frog is number 9. If you chose question 38 ("Why does _____ hate me so?"), you turn to the page of answers headed "38" and count down to the ninth answer, in this case

40. Does the person I love reciprocate my feelings?

41. Ought I to consider the plan _____ has proposed?

42. Is there marriage in store for me?

43. Will the situation become more difficult for me than it is already?

44. Are my dreams of fame pointless?

45. Should I offer Frances Black initiation into the Moulding Room?

46. Should I consider changing my lifestyle?





4. Man in the Moon



5. Fish with Ring



6. Horse with Blindfold

44.

1. Who knows? Only you know what is in store.
2. You may not even want fame.
3. You would enjoy the wealth and the praise, but would not enjoy the realities of celebrity.
4. Perhaps not, but only if your situation changes completely.
5. You will not become famous, but you will still find happiness, should you want it.
6. Ask yourself what your reasons for your dreams are.
7. Are your dreams realistic? If they are, you may yet find the fame you desire.

45.

1. Certainly not. Given the chance, she will betray you.
2. By all means do, but know that if you do, she will definitely refuse.
3. Wait and see. If it is right, she will come to you.
4. She will waver, and perhaps regret joining you later, but she will join you. Once she has joined you, she cannot leave.
5. If you do, you may regret it thoroughly.
6. Do so. Although she will refuse you the first time and the second, she will give in the third time.
7. She will join without reservation and serve you well.

francesrebecca: Moon.

J_Doe207: What about him?

francesrebecca: I've had two meetings with him now.

J_Doe207: I trust he proved informative.

francesrebecca: Oh, yes. Very.

francesrebecca: But he has this thing.

J_Doe207: Thing?

francesrebecca: He has a thing about where he gets his ideas about what to do next.

francesrebecca: It's all horoscopes and Mayan calendars and stuff.

J_Doe207: It happens.

J_Doe207: With Niall it's tarot cards. Dice, too, I think.

francesrebecca: This happens to us?

J_Doe207: Sometimes.

francesrebecca: You?

J_Doe207: I don't know.

J_Doe207: It came up, I presume.

francesrebecca: Sort of.

francesrebecca: He had this book. The Mayan calendar thing.

francesrebecca: And it told him stuff.

J_Doe207: Like?

francesrebecca: Like he should ask me to join his "room".

J_Doe207: You said no, of course.

J_Doe207: Frances?

J_Doe207: Frances?

J_Doe207: Are you there?

francesrebecca: Yes.

J_Doe207: Tell me you said no.

J_Doe207: To Moon.

francesrebecca: Yes.

J_Doe207: You said no.

J_Doe207: You said no, Frances.

francesrebecca: Of course.

J_Doe207: I have trusted you with this task, Frances.

francesrebecca: I said no.

Moon isn't alone in his astrological obsessions. The more I talk to other Mekhet, the more I see it happening. It's almost an inevitability.

I put Media Player on shuffle a minute ago, on a whim. I got Nico's "Winter Song".

*You cannot beget all the sins that
you owe
To the people of paradise magic
Pretend to answer passion and form
With foreign rationalizations.
It made so much sense to me.
I just realized what I was doing.
I don't care. I know what to do now.*

Your proposition

From: Frances Black <marbleindexfrances@gmail.com>
To: <undisclosed>
Date: July 1, 2008, 4.01am
Subject: Your proposition

I'll join.

~ My Friend ~

I awakened to His fury.

Wind and rain battered the crumbling brick walls of my resting place, lightning crackled across the sky, and water coursed between the tombs, washing away memory and memoriam, shattering stone and ripping bodies from their graves. It was only pure luck that I was torn from my haven after dark, or I would not be putting these words to paper.

I will not aver that I awoke with any semblance of reason or calm. I do not recall ever feeling such fear in either my life or the existence that came after. My body was tossed to and fro, wracked upon the tombs like a ship upon the Siren's rocks. I had no idea how long I had been asleep and absolutely no way of knowing how much circumstances and events had changed while I lay in torpor.

It did not occur to me until later that all of my journals and relics, all of my bulwarks against the inevitable blurring of memory, were destroyed in the storm. Storm seems too weak a word for what tore New Orleans asunder, nor does hurricane truly approach the scale of what I saw that night. It can only be described as His will and wrath, a cataclysm for a world that has more monsters than saints. The next few days (weeks?) were a blur of survival and shock. Shock over the changes that man had wrought while I dreamed of blood and death, and shock over the scale of the destruction that, at His command, Clermeil had visited upon the city I had once known so well.

The first moment of truly rational thought that I can recall came late one night, as I wandered the streets of the Garden District, trying to reacquaint myself with my home, inasmuch as it even remotely resembled the New Orleans of my youth. Nothing seemed familiar. I cannot say with certainty how long I was asleep, even now, thanks to the destruction of my journals and the foggy merger of dream and memory, but considering the changes I have seen, it could

Haitian loa responsible for flooding.

AFTER THE FLOOD: FIRST LETTER

have been a thousand years. I was a specter, out of time and— for all intents and purposes — out of place. I slipped unseen through the mute neighborhoods, past sodden homes and uprooted magnolia damaged by Clermeil's will, as those quick unlucky enough to weather the storm but blessed enough to survive did what they always do in the face of such catastrophe: they looted. Looters stayed out of my haven. Bad reputation is better than deadbolts.

It was amusing to watch the ragged refuse of the city stumble out of these opulent homes, carrying what looked like extremely elaborate mirrors between them. (I have since learned that these are called televisions, and are even more useless than mirrors in a city without electricity.) The hunger had not gone unsated since my awakening, but watching these humble thieves, it began to unravel in my core and whisper its temptations softly in my ear. It seems sometimes that I am merely a shell, wrapping paper around a solid, churning core of hunger. I did not intend to stalk the boy, you know. He caught my eye, and the next thing I knew, I was standing quietly in an absent stranger's house while he explored in lushed awe, like a sinner in the house of God.

I would hazard to say that he was no more than twenty, though my ability to judge age by appearance has been sorely atrophied. He did not see me, of course, and I did not interfere with him in any way. I merely watched him, glorying in the smell of his blood, the sound of it racing through his veins and arteries, the sacred percussion of his heart. His hair was wavy, not as kinked as mine, and long. It hung limp with grime over his shoulders. His skin was the color of Cafe Du Monde's *cafe au lait*, under the dirt and grime of days without fresh water. Not too far off from my own, in my breathing days. I realized then, for the first time, that I was naked, the clothing I had gone to sleep in had moldered and what had not rotted was torn from me in the flood. I was covered in mud and dust, and my own hair was a matted and tangled mess. I suddenly wanted very much to take a bath, to make myself presentable before I shared in this boy's life. But the hunger raged inside me, its coils writhing and its demands becoming more and more... Surely you know how I felt, Mr. Walker. You are so taciturn, but passion makes poets of us all, and I think you must feel these things, though you may not express them.

I watched him as he explored the kitchen, desperately gulping down bottles of fresh water and wolfing down cold beans straight from the tin can. There were so many things I wanted to ask him: what year it was, what had become of my beautiful city. But mortals see more than they give themselves credit for, and I could not approach him for mere conversation, especially not in my current state. The world may have changed, but I knew without question that the masquerade had not. The boy treated the house with such respect. He was careful not to upset anything, and he tried his best not to stain the carpets or the furniture. He did not seem to be of the same ilk as the other looters. He looked scared and lost, and his aura positively shone with innocence. He was not seeking profit here; merely shelter, and the coiled thing inside me ached for him.

There is a need in us, Mr. Walker, which transcends any paltry mortal notion of love. When I choose a partner, they mean more to me than Helen and Paris meant to one another. My need has a name. I am cheval, ridden by the Baron, lord of the crossroads. Death is as necessary as breath... as sex, for mortals. When we die, our spirits are intended to find their way to Papa Ghede, the night sun, and guardian

Entire thing aimed at me. Not sure what I did to get his attention. Or how he knows how "taciturn" I am.

of the dead and the living. In voodoo, the creation and ending of life are inextricably linked. Is it any wonder that our Kiss gives such pleasure?

I could no longer resist the whispers of my need. I watched him as he slept in someone else's bed, and I slid under the sheets next to him, my lips parted. If I still drew breath, it would have been shallow and quick with anticipation. The others I had fed upon since my awakening were necessary evils, simple sustenance, but this boy was the first thing that felt right since the storm surge had swept me from my tomb. He did not wake as my fangs pierced him and his hot blood flooded my mouth. His languid, sleeping body tensed and surged against me. I devoured him greedily. We play at dignity and class, Mr. Walker, but when we stand exposed for what we are, we are animals.

I tell you this because I have watched you, and I know you are gathering information on our condition. That is the base truth of it, sir. We are as the chimera, with no Bellerophon in sight. I didn't mean to take the boy's life, but once I began, it was too, too easy to get lost in him. The warmth of his skin was as a flame to a moth. I could not be close enough to him, could not get enough of him. When I feed, I am taking my partner into myself, but I always feel like they are subsuming me. I feel an intimacy with them that I have never felt during mere sex. I am, at the same time, taking them and giving myself to them, utterly.

I do not know for sure if you feel the same way I do, Mr. Walker. I would adore sitting and conversing with you about the strange vagaries of fate and blood that make each of us the way we are, though I have a feeling that the conversation would be quite one-sided. But I do not think it's in the cards, do you?

And then I felt him. Another of our kind was near enough to make the beast within me cower in fear, to jolt back and howl for me to run. Only then did I realize how much my long sleep had weakened the twin spirits within me, had diminished us. I still possessed enough strength to fade away, leaving nothing for the other to find but the remains of my boy. I couldn't help but feel a bit angry. I would have preferred not to abandon him so soon. As the fear and pique faded, curiosity swelled to take its place. I could not bring myself to simply leave, with another of my own kind so near. I might learn from him, yes?

But shadows linger, and our kind is not known for their charity. So I took the dead boy's clothes and dressed myself in the unfamiliar fabrics. The whisper of strange threads across my skin was distracting for a moment, but I gathered myself, and remained hidden as I descended to the first floor. There were two people downstairs, one living and one dead. They were nearly as disheveled as I, if not as wary. I am cunning enough that they did not detect me. They went about their business of searching and sealing the house efficiently, if a bit carelessly, discussing many things that I did not understand, but I absorbed it all.

Knowledge is a sort of sustenance that I was sorely lacking. I did not know who the current Prince was, or what the state of things would be in the aftermath of the deluge that had awakened me. So I watched them, and I listened. I learned, for example, that the living one was named Arnold, and carried at least two firearms (my how pistols have advanced since my last memory of them) and kept checking a tiny lozenge-shaped device for "signal."

Why emphasize cards? How long did he watch me?

History with Vidal sounds bad. Have to look into that.

That he knew his companion was Kindred wasn't a question. He continually (and indiscreetly) talked about where his master would sleep when the sun rose. The only thing he never mentioned was his master's name. He only referred to him as "sir." I learned from them that the storm was massive enough to have been named Katrina by mortals. It seems a pagan thing to name a force of nature, and mankind—especially white mankind—was so opposed to pagan things when I still drew breath. Has humanity become that much more open-minded while I slumbered?

I also learned that the Prince was still Vidal. I remembered him, and his name stirred the edges of my recollection. There is something... But I do not remember what it is. Perhaps your employer and I have some history that I cannot quite grasp.

Hurricanes have been named for hundreds of years in West Indies. Used to be named after saints. Started here after WWII. When did this guy go to sleep?

Arnold eventually found the remains of my recent acquaintance, which sparked a much more thorough search of the dwelling. When they did not discover me, they simply carried the boy's body out onto the sidewalk, and covered it with a sheet. I was appalled; my partners deserve a proper send off, of course. But I remember sickness. Death came to New Orleans once before, though I was merely a child. Yellow Fever. I hope you never had to see the black vomit, the jaundiced faces of your loved ones. I may have been young, but of all my living memories, the sweeping horror of those days will never leave me. Bodies left in the streets, or carted away in wagons.

I remember my mother praying over the ill, though I was too afraid to go near them. Late at night, I would sneak to the tents, curious about their suffering despite my fear. I remember the way the dead looked, curled taut from their coughing fits or sprawled limp in resignation. The ill weren't much better, with their yellowed, bruised skin and the corrupt black bile on their chins. One night, I saw a woman moving from corpse to near-corpse, from bed to bed. She either did not notice me, or did not care. I watched silently, awed, as she caressed the pathetic and sick. Then she leaned over them, and kissed them on the neck. When she rose, they were gone.

She came, night after night, and sat with the victims. Then, I was horrified by her, I thought she was an angel of death, bringing this horrible illness upon us. But now, I know she was merely easing their pain. Who can begrudge her for a nip here and there?

Yellow Fever hit New Orleans hard in 19th Century. 41,000 dead between 1822 and 1905. Given dates later in document, subject was a child during the worst of it. 1853-55. Morbus were incredibly active in the city at the time.

Bodies on the streets, left in houses and ignored in the scramble for survival. Mankind is never too far removed from our monstrosity. In extreme circumstances, the horrific becomes common, and the aspects of humanity that many of us strive to maintain become both more rare and even more precious. I was simply left aghast at the Kindred for the nonchalant sloppiness of the deed. That it was not the only body I had witnessed so disposed made me wonder if this was not the death of poor New Orleans, as well.

When they returned inside, they were both more wary, and made a point of investigating the house once more. I stayed out of the way, and neither the Kindred nor

his pet ghoul discovered me. I still had not learned the vampire's name, and it was starting to get under my skin. I was tempted to simply pluck it from his mind, but I didn't want to risk discovery. His ghoul, on the other hand, was, as they say, fair game. Arnold felt no sympathy for the death of the beautiful boy, nor did he feel in the slightest inconvenienced by the recent storm or the unrest that followed. He was having fun. He thought of his master mostly the same way he addressed him, but I finally learned that the Kindred's name was Eloy.

I slipped away to another house in the last fore dawn. I didn't think it would be prudent slumber in the same house with a suspicious and active - Arnold. After I left the two of them for the night, I retrieved my boy from the sidewalk. Already, he had lost the spark that made him attractive. The coolness of him, the sagging of his dead limbs, everything that mattered about him was gone. I no longer wanted to be near him. Still, I carefully laid him to rest in the bed of the second home before creating a nest of my own in the master closet.

The next night was fascinating. I followed - my new friend Eloy as he patrolled his newly claimed territory, and watched as he and his man examined arcane marks painted on the doors of the houses in the area. They would sometimes remove elements from these marks, but they would always add to them.

The markings called to me, but I could decipher very little meaning from them. They resembled simple magical wordplay, an "x" with various letters or numbers in the quadrants created by the crossing slashes. The only part that made any sort of sense to me was the number at the top. That was the mark that Eloy changed most often. After making a kill, he would dump the body in a house and increase that number by one. I later discovered that mortals left these marks. I wonder at the things they create, and how much magic still flows from their ignorant hands?

I quickly lost track of where we were. Every so often, I would recognize a street name, but not the street that it belonged to. New Orleans has changed in unimaginably vast ways in the time I've been asleep. The geography of a city helps to determine its spirit, and even to an extent the attitudes and personality of its residents. An orderly grid of streets necessarily creates a certain structured mindset among its inhabitants, while the chaotic winding roads of New Orleans, well. You know its people better than I, now.

Must be Eloy Hernandez Ventrue. Disappeared during Katrina. Assumed evacuated. Guess not.



Means D-MOR codes.

Tags left on searched houses.

Map stuff
an old idea.
Mekhet see
patterns and
correlations
in everything.

Can't argue that
Philadelphia's a
different city
than New Orleans
or Atlanta, but
does street
layout matter that
much? And if so,
how does that
translate to us?

As we walked, I was acutely aware of the made nature of things. Everything I passed, even the trees and bushes, though left in ruin by nature's hand, still showed signs that it was created or shaped by mortal hands. Eloy and Arnold were quiet due to the signs of nature's wrath. When they did speak, it was to plan or warn each other of some hazard. The signs of mankind's total subjugation of their environment were what awed me. The architect Daniel Burnham once said, "Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us." I am certain that even he had no grasp of the true scope of what he was saying. We consider ourselves powerful beings, and many of us allege that we are somehow above the mortals we depend on for sustenance. However, we do not have the power to create something like New Orleans, Mr. Walker. Our kind may take credit for many things, mostly monstrous, dark things, but the beauty of St. Louis cathedral is unmatched among our kind, and the mortals have only become more industrious and inventive while I was incommunicado.

They deserve our respect. Always give them that, no matter what you take from them.

His thoughts on symbols remind me of something I had just lying about. This is as good a place as any to affix it.

No, Frances, the M25 is not a demonic sigil.

[pause]

That's not what I meant, though, and I do wish you'd be serious.

[pause]

I'm allowed to joke; I already know what I'm talking about. What I meant was that any pattern has power. It's easy to see how the coordination of lines and points work out to a certain magical symbol when it's sitting in front of you in full colour on paper, isn't it? But what about when the lines are miles long, and the only way to really get a good look is on a roadmap or from an airplane?

[pause]

Well of course it's not obvious on the map, but you're a Dragon, you know all about ley lines and dragon nests, yeah? Come on, you must do.

[pause]

Right, then. Same concept, but instead of using it to influence the power of the nests, you use it to influence the people in your neighborhood. Change the lines, change the mood. What do you think that Feng Shui bollocks is, if not an attempt at an aura-altering project? The attitude of the herd is bloody important when it comes to getting yourself some dinner, and just so when hiding out amongst them.

[pause]

London is the city of the Sun. Above London the occult geometry of the city is not designed for us.

It centers around the cathedral, and from there across the whole island.

[pause]

It's true. Go on, laugh, but you know it's true. This is not the oldest city in the world, but unlike all others, its very geography is a spell. Magicians made this place. Is it any

St. Paul's: Crucible of Gemini

By Vincent Moon



St. Paul's Cathedral is an astrological lecture made of stone. It is thought to have been built on the site of a temple to the Sun, in an age long before the arrival of Christianity to the British Isles. The old Britons called London "El-on-don": the "City of the Sun." The temple is revealed to have been built under the sign of Gemini.

The Western pediment of St. Paul's cathedral bears figures representing the four seasonal divisions of the zodiac. Above the pediment is a representation, in hieroglyphic form, of the Sun in the highest point of the heavens, in the constellation of Gemini. The Sun's rays strike at a centaur, who of course represents Sagittarius, Gemini's opposing sign.

Astrological knowledge is buried in St. Paul's foundations. The old records tell us that the first foundation stone of the cathedral was laid "on the day of Castor and Pollux" in June 1675: the day of the Twins, meaning under the sign of Gemini.

In the South Transept of the cathedral, another high-placed relief depicts the figure of Hercules bearing a Saltire Cross on his back. Hercules, of course, is

yet another representation of the Sun, namely its male nature. The Saltire Cross (a cross in the shape of an X) actually depicts a goniometer – a double pair of compasses – showing the exact angle made by the Sun as it crossed the Equator in the year the original temple was built on the site. The nature of the planet's movements, as calculated by Ptolemy, means that the angle decreases by about one minute in every century, meaning that in about 140,000 years, the compasses will be closed and the Ecliptic will be in line with the Equator: and for a thousand years, day and night will be equal, across the world, all year round.

The Saltire Cross is not a sign of the crucifixion. St. Paul's Cathedral is not a Christian temple, although Christian worship may happen there. It was built on the day of the Twins, under the sign of the Twins, and it reveals to us the nature of the Sun.

It is the center of a vast network of occult architecture across London, that stretches above and below the earth. London is the City of the Twins and the City of the Sun.

9 Divination, June 1976

wonder that they are so numerous here? Is it any wonder that they have made this place so utterly their own?

[pause]

Ah, but if a magician wanted you to meet him, he would allow you to meet him. Have you wondered why the Lady of London is so impotent?

[pause]

No. She is impotent. She would rather, of course, you did not know. But she has no power at all. The hunting grounds are chaotic, and the factions in her court reduce her power to nothing.

The true power is underground.

[pause]

Yes, in the tube.

Like London, its growth is the result of an occult confluence, of factors working together under – partly – the influence of the Moulding Room.

Since its creation in 1844, the purpose of travel has been secondary to the final goal: the creation of an alternative geography. We achieved it.

[pause]

Charles Beck didn't know what he was doing when he made his map; certainly, the Moulding Room had existed alongside the Underground since its inception, but we had no notion that our enterprise had been a success.

Beck created an alternative geography. He changed the positions of the stations of the Underground in the minds of the people of London.

[pause]

You can say that, but which is more important: the placing of objects or the psychological position of a place. All of our notions of geography depend upon human ideas of distance and place, of places home and places far away and of travel and time. The Underground is the perfect means of severing those connections and re-making them.

Most Londoners don't really have much idea where their Oyster cards take them. They do not see the outside of their trains; they don't witness their travel. They sit; they wait; they look at their watches; they sigh; they do a sudoku in the newspaper; they arrive.

The more they use it, the more they depend upon it, the less they think about the places in London. The less they understand the original relations between places and roads. The patterns change.

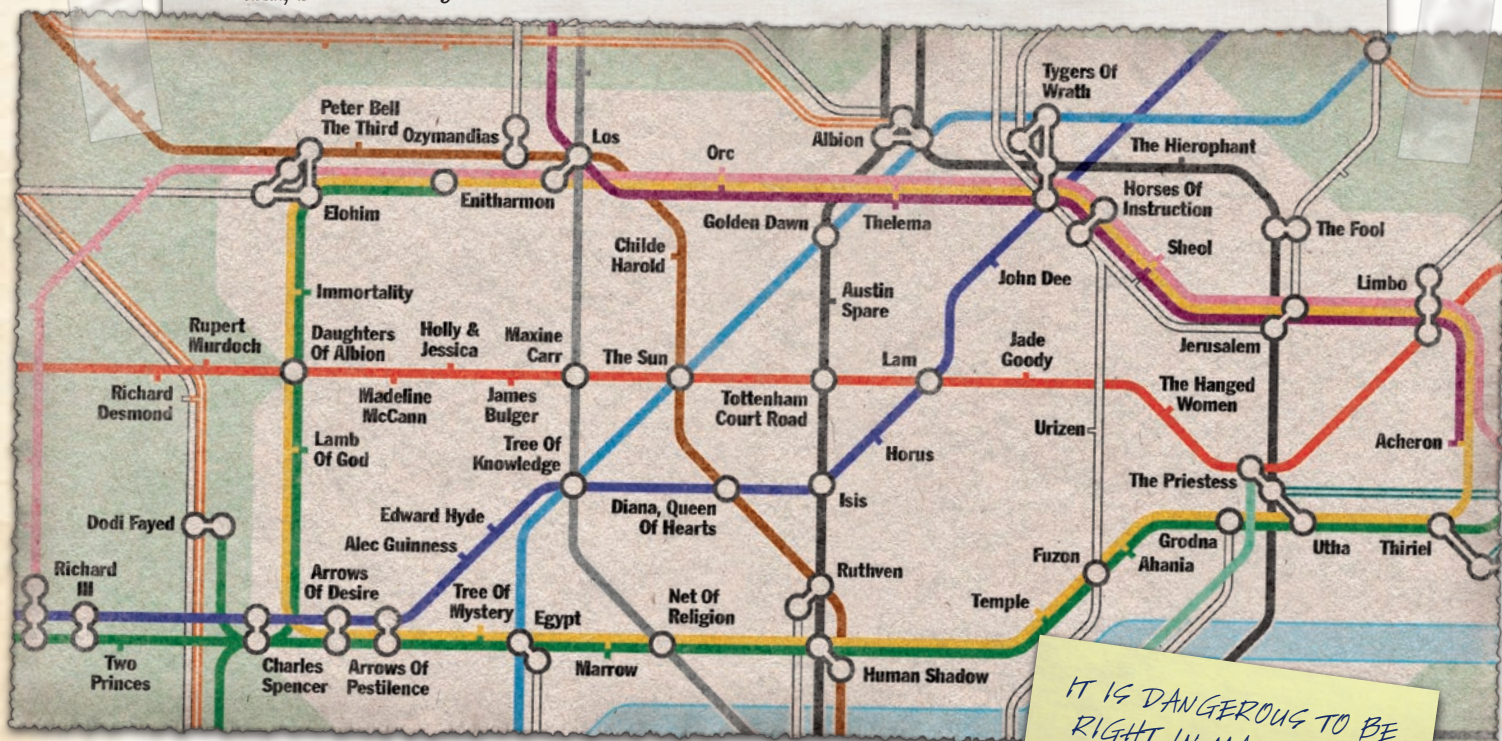
We're unlike the other vampires. All the others have the power to control living creatures in some fashion. We have to find other means, other avenues to make ourselves masters of the living.

We mold the world of the living in our own way. We create geography. The thoughts of the living and the dead have re-made London, and our power is under the ground, where the sun does not reach, where we do not have to awaken.

We have controlled the underground since the opportunity came, when the bombs fell.

[pause]

Ah, but how do you know that? What if we were there all along?



Londoners. When I was still alive, before I moved here, I went to this party. A friend's birthday or something. They hired out the upstairs room in this pub somewhere in Shoreditch.

I hated it. I got introduced to this woman who was the editor of some magazine, and that was how she introduced herself, I'm an editor. And I said who I was, and she asked who I worked for, and I said I was in local journalism,

and she just turned and walked away.

Anyway. So I was at this party, and I ended up at the bar next to this woman, and she bought me a drink, and I said, where did she come from, then? And she said she'd come from Enfield, North London, and I said, you've not come far, then, and she was like, I did come far, I came from North London and it took me nearly an hour on the tube to get here.

I said, I came here from Somerset. And that girl over there? She came from *Canada*. And the woman at the bar just looked at me with this kind of blank look, as if I had said something that somehow didn't compute.

I thought at the time that it was kind of strange. Like the woman's supposed to live in this cosmopolitan city-of-the-world and she couldn't conceive of traveling further than the northern extent of the M25.

When I moved here a couple years later, I found it was the way that people thought across the board. People outside of London think of the British Mainland, the island of Britain, as comprising England, Scotland and Wales. The three mainland countries have counties, regions and cities ranging from Lanarkshire to Devon, County Durham to Carmathenshire. And the capital's London, whether we like it or not.

Which is how things in fact are. But people outside of London are well aware of that weird sort of parochialism that Londoners have, and perceive them as dividing the British mainland into two sections: London, and Greater London.

But once you get to know Londoners better, you realize that actually, that's not how they see things at all. In fact, their world ends entirely at the bounds of the M25. It's not that they view the rest of Britain as part of London. They don't really believe it exists at all.

Their entire world is enclosed inside that motorway loop. I mean, intellectually, they assent to the idea that outside of the City of London is a country, and outside of the country is a world, but really they don't believe it. To them, the world and all there is within it, in all its ethnic variety, in all its cultural variance, is in London. And that is all.

And that's partly because you never actually have to leave London, right. It's all there for you, within the bounds of the road. But it's also partly because of the geography of the place.

The whole of London is a magic spell, a vast incantation of place, the result of a conspiracy that took thousands of years to complete. People born here can't see the city any other way because

they are ensorcelled by the city's profane geometry.

But Mekhet like me – we *see*. We understand. Like William Blake understood. We're made to understand *mind-forged manacles* without ever having the power to make them ourselves.

The Ventrue congregate in the high-up places, the rich places, the places

where the rulers live. They're rarefied, separate. They're like most living rulers: they don't understand. The Gangrel, if they're in the city at all, go to the rough places. The low places. There's Gangrel out there in the estates, in the no-go places. In Mile End. In Tower Hamlets. Some of them have the mark of the Tanner, who as far as I can tell

I WANDER THROUGH EACH CHARTERED STREET,
NEAR WHERE THE CHARTERED THAMES DOES FLOW,
AND MARK IN EVERY FACE I MEET,
MARKS OF WEAKNESS, MARKS OF WOE.

IN EVERY CRY OF EVERY MAN,
IN EVERY INFANT'S CRY OF FEAR,
IN EVERY VOICE, IN EVERY BAN,
THE MIND-FORGED MANACLES I HEAR:

HOW THE CHIMNEY-SWEEPER'S CRY
EVERY BLACKENING CHURCH APPALLS,
AND THE HAPLESS SOLDIER'S SIGH
RUNS IN BLOOD DOWN PALACE-WALLS.

BUT MOST, THROUGH MIDNIGHT STREETS I HEAR
HOW THE YOUTHFUL HARLOT'S CURSE
BLASTS THE NEW-BORN INFANT'S TEAR,
AND BLIGHTS WITH PLAGUES THE MARRIAGE-HEARSE.

- BLAKE

OVER RAILROAD STATION TRACKS
FAINTLY FLICKERS A MODEST CRY
FROM WITHOUT A THOUSAND CYCLES
A THOUSAND CYCLES TO COME
A THOUSAND TIMES TO WIN
A THOUSAND WAYS TO RUN THE WORLD
IN A SIMILAR REPLY

FRIAR HERMIT STUMBLES OVER
THE CLOUDY BORDERLINE
FROZEN WARNINGS CLOSE TO MINE
CLOSE TO THE FROZEN BORDERLINE
FROZEN WARNINGS CLOSE TO MINE
CLOSE TO THE FROZEN BORDERLINE

- NICO

is this vampire bogeyman who you're not allowed to talk about in what passes among the dead for polite company. But what that means is, they taint the ground they're in. They pass through a place, a house, a street... and bang — mold and cracks and urban decay. But that's just a sign they don't understand. They take on the role of urban beasts. They're a principle of decay. But the mold that covers the bread doesn't live in harmony with the bread. It destroys it, it consumes it.

The Nosferatu are too busy inhabiting their own corners, their niches, and hiding there. To them the city is just a place. And to the Daeava, too. Just a place where you make deals and write that incomprehensible graffiti.

But we *see*. We see the patterns, and we link together in our minds the things that must be linked. I think it's true in every city in the world. There are Me-khet in Beijing and New Delhi and New York and Milan and Munich and Addis Ababa and Sarajevo and Basra.

I understand now. I was listening to Nico and she explained it all to me in the songs.

They're about me. They're about me now. It came to me last night. She knew, you see. She knew the future, and knew exactly what she was doing when she sang those songs, she knew that I was going to be here writing this and how I was going to be dead and that Moon would make his offer and that Nitokris would make *her* offer and so she sang to me about how it's all true, it's all about perception.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE FOR MISS BLACK

Three years ago, Miss Frances Black was going through the worst time of her life. Nothing seemed to be going right for her. She was being overlooked for promotion at her place of work and her love-life was going nowhere. She came to me for a consultation to ask if the stars could show her where she was going wrong and if there was any hope for her.

I drew up her chart, and I noticed straight away that Saturn was in opposition to the Venus, meaning that her relationships, both romantic and business-like were going nowhere. The influence of the Moon suggested that there wasn't much else Miss Black could do. Still, there were enough good signs in the charts for me to advise her to take a drastic step in her life that would change everything for her. And she did.

Within months, she came to tell me that her luck had changed and that her old life had practically ended! Over the last few years, Miss Black has kept in touch, and it has been no surprise to me that she has recently been offered a place in a high-ranking government group.

She wrote only a few weeks ago to tell me. I quote:

**"You told me my life to the very last detail...
Your work has completely changed my life..."**

- F.R. Black

Miss Black's story is just one of literally hundreds in my files which prove that astrological advice taken at the right time can utterly change a life. If your own problem involves domestic issues, romance, business, travel, family, or simply an unhappy circumstance, I may be able to help. In any event, what have you to lose? Send a couple of stamps for my replies, your name and address (BLOCK CAPITALS, please!) and full date of birth for my FREE astrological survey of your present and future prospects. The reading is without obligation, but limited to one per household and to those aged over 18.

Please indicate your title (Mr, Mrs, Miss) for me to address you correctly. If you play the pools, mark your envelope "PP" to receive details of my free "PLATINUM PICKS" NUMBERS SYSTEM.

Write to:

Nitokris
Studio 23, Monastery House
666 Cybele Street, Brighton B1
Overseas readers please enclose
money order or 1 dollar bill for

The Moon is ascendant, and as I am sure you know, the Moon is the natural ruler of Cancer, although you were created under Venus in Cancer. Venus, however, has moved into the purview of the Twins.

The signs are clear. You must come to see me again, Frances. Our meeting will be to your advantage.

POWERS OF THE MIND

TELEPATHIC
COMMUNICATION

CLAIRVOYANCE

ASTRAL TRAVEL

AURA VISION

PREMONITION

INTUITIVE INSIGHT

USE YOUR
EXTRA-SENSORY
POWERS

As human beings, we use only a fragment of the power of our minds.

BUT WE CAN USE IT ALL!

Learn to unlock powers you have only ever imagined that you could have. Transform your life. Gain friends — wealth — influence — lovers. Make the 1980s your own.

Send a £2 cheque, postal order or cash to VINCENT MOON (address on coupon) to receive full details of the uncanny powers you already have!

It's true. No, it's not in the words. I mean, it is in the words, but it's *behind* the words. It's inside the words. It's not what's said. It's what's meant. And it's all about me.

And so I know what I have to do.

William Blake was just an ordinary human. But he had something in his mind, in his perceptions, that made him in common with me. With us. He

saw the patterns. He dreamed dreams like a young man. He had visions like an old man. He could see the marks of the mind-forged manacles.

I can, too. Since I died, everything has been brighter and clearer and louder. Sensations are somehow sharper. Smells. Sights. Voices. When I concentrate, I see more things. Like the auras surrounding people. Colors and shapes that show

me what they're feeling. And recently, I found I can put my hands on an object and feel vibrations, emanations through it.

Moon and Nitokris both hint that they can hear thoughts, and both of them claim to have traveled astrally.

Will I be able to do that soon, I wonder?

CONNECTIONS

I'm feeling better now. I went a bit wrong last night. Started seeing patterns, that just weren't there, in things.

The true nature, I think, of "evil" is in essence a lack, a deficiency. Not just a failure to see another person's point of view, but an inability to put yourself in another person's place.

Evil isn't simply an intellectual failing. It's an emotional failure. A failure of sympathy. But sympathy is precisely what I don't have. I used to be so sure of my compassion, and now I try so hard to have that bleeding heart again. I remember once getting into a row with some racist, some BNP activist, who called me a "self-loathing liberal do-gooder." Which was his way of trying to say that he thought that I clearly didn't hate immigrants and asylum seekers because I didn't love myself. And I thought, anyone who uses the term "do-gooder" as an insult clearly isn't good. So I took it as a compliment. Well, why not?

I'm not a do-gooder anymore.

I can't summon up that compassion again because I have to feed. I have to prey on people, and I so have to be unable to relate to people. I can pretend to relate, but I can't. I know what they're feeling when they see me, when they

catch how pale I am, how messy my hair is, and they make their judgments and conclude that they don't want to know me.

I can see how they love each other. Couples holding hands on the street. People with children. I'm never going to be able to have children. I mean, I didn't want them when I was alive, but now I resent people with children so much. They don't have a clue how important that is. They don't understand how valuable a thing they have. They don't know what they've made.

And this vision I have, these senses – I see more, and I feel less. I can hear a rat's breath twenty feet away on a busy pavement, and yet something in me, something in my make-up makes it impossible for me to feel it. I can hear a boy's heartbeat, but I can't feel what that means anymore. I can see his aura, but I'm not supposed to see his aura, it tells me too much. It divorces me from finding out what he's feeling from all the cues and the conversations and the connections, the connections.

The only way I seem to be able to connect anymore is to find the patterns. I listened to *Chelsea Girl* again this evening, and when Nico was singing about going out walking alone, she was

just going out walking alone. But the connections were real last night. What if they're real again for me tomorrow night? What if I'm going mad?

It's hard to think about this. I think, I'm hungry. I think, I'm thirsty. I think, want that dress. Even though I can't see my reflection, I know that I'm the same when I wake up each night that I was the day I died. My clothes are clean. My hair and make-up do themselves forever. I'm like a doll outside, and the longer I'm dead, the more I'm a doll inside. Every time I sleep, the dreams show me things and make me more and more confused about who I am and where I came from and who I was when I was alive. Every time I lose myself in hunger, or anger or fear, I lose a little more of myself to the shadow. How long will it be before it's all gone, and I'm completely empty, everything that was Frances gone away, just a doll made from a corpse, empty-headed and shallow, whispering in the dark with the other shadows, action and appetite running on little clockwork gears click-click-click, no thought, no self-awareness... How long?

I'm scared. I'm really scared. I don't want to be dead. I don't want to be a vampire. It's made me shallow.



AEROMANCY: Divination through observation of the air: weather patterns, the shapes of clouds, comets, lights and other phenomena.

TEPHRAMANCY: Divination through inspection of ashes.

PLAGUE ANGEL

ELISABETHA, 25/09/08

I was good once, daughter. God smiled upon me as His favored child. I was a bride of Christ, one of the first brides of Christ, before there were orders or even convents.

I was in Egypt. The first monks and nuns came from Egypt. I was honored to be a penitent. I was fourteen and I had used my body in sin, and I had paid for it. The child of my sin was born dead and cold, in blood, and I grew ill, and my father threw me away. As I lay in the desert in fever, I saw the Virgin, and the Holy Mother of God told me to stand and walk to the house of Mother Eutropia. I fell to the ground outside the door, and they nursed me to health; and when I was healthy, they locked me in a room with only bread and water, wallowing in my own filth, as I deserved.

And first I screamed at them, and told them I had seen the Virgin and hammered on the door until my hands bled and threw my excrement at the holy sisters who came to bring me water, and I was beaten for my presumption. I was in that room for two years.

I should have been there longer. I wanted to be there longer. I grew to love that room. I saw that the nuns cared for my spiritual welfare. They loved me: each fist, each kick in the small of my back, each application of the rod was my reward, the sign that they loved me, that God loved me and cared sufficiently to discipline His children. I prayed. I thanked them. I became one of them.

And perhaps I sinned somewhat in that. I began to want the beatings. I imagined their fists and sticks across my back and sides as I lay on my pallet at night, and I drew pleasure from the visions.

And one day the Mother Pelagia - Eutropia had died - came into the room and put her arms around me, and brought me among the sisters. And the beatings stopped. I was one of them, but I grew cold, and when I was alone, secretly I touched myself, wanting to be beaten again.

When the Plague of Cyprian returned, I suffered beside the sister cenobites. But I lived, and they died, and only I was left.

I buried each of them under the sands and decided that I must travel, for God had spared me, had kept me from Glory for a purpose. It was my lot to remain in the vale of tears for a little longer. I thought that God had a further task for me.

I traveled North, relying on the charity of a sea captain to take me across the Mare Nostrum to Rome, that I might see the Emperor Maxentius and die a glorious martyr's death.

I died, but I did not die. I arrived in the city and found the persecutor reluctant to persecute, venturing out to go to war. Robbed of my martyrdom, I took to good works in the worse places of Rome. I had lived through the plague, and I could not fall prey to it a second time: this was its way.

I found that the plague traveled like God's scourge through the poor children of Rome. I showed the Romans what kindness I could, and I told them that God had judged them for their arrogance. The Romans nodded, and wept, and more often than not, they died in my arms.

I had been there for a month when the Plague Angel visited me. He was, he said, curious to see who had tried so hard to thwart him. I saw a black man with sickly skin and eyes so deep set and dark, they looked like holes in his face. I knew him to be an angel of death, but he discoursed with me on the subject of God's providence so charmingly, that I could not see him as a child of Satan. The Plague Angel returned on a second night, and on a third. And he spoke so eloquently, that when he explained how God had sent the plague, and he as its vehicle as a means of testing the elect, I could do nothing but agree and ask how I might become a scourge as well. How I might take on his burden alongside my own.

And on the last two visits, he beat me. And on both nights, when he was gone, I touched myself and I sinned. I longed to be beaten again. I had thought that when I became a martyr in Rome, I would cease to do this, but, my martyrdom denied me, I fell into old habits, old sins.

And he knew. The Plague Angel knew, and he told me my shame, and instructed me to embrace it, as he Embraced me. He offered me a new burden.

ASTROLOGY: The highest of the Ancient Sciences. Originally a form of divination.

69 CANCER — (June 21 to July 20)

Powerful Lunar trends offer new opportunities and surprises. This is an excellent time for moving on and experiencing domestic changes. An unexpected new employer will leave you with choices to make, while a powerful and ancient corpse may offer the chance of romance. Although it may well lead to tragedy, these opportunities should be taken with both hands. It's your only chance, Frances. Also, you need to practice music.

Elisabeta frightens me. I mean, Vincent Moon and Nitokris frighten me, but they frighten me in a different sort of way. I know that they're monsters. They're going to screw with my mind and try to use me, and maybe even find a way to drink me dry when they're done with me, because that's what old, dead monsters do. What I'll probably do one day if I don't end up as a meal for something like Moon or Nitokris. Or Doe. But Elisabeta, I don't know. She has the look of someone utterly debauched, all smooth flesh and curves, barely covered by that black mantle, a hood hiding her face in shadow, so there's only those obscene red lips, those teeth, that tongue.



But she carries herself like a nun. She talks like a nun.

Elisabeta is difficult to follow. She seems to jump around, psychologically speaking. She's in ancient Rome. Then bang, she's in the Spanish Inquisition. Then boom, she's in Calcutta and hanging around the East India Company and there she is watching barbarians sack Rome again. Then she's here with me,

looking at me. There are eyes in that hood, old eyes, and I don't know what they see. She makes me shiver – I'm a corpse, I don't shiver – and I don't know if I like it or not.

Yesterday, while I was dead, I dreamed that I was naked too, and that she wrapped her cloak around me and everything melted into blood and ecstasy. And oblivion.

So she wants me, too. They all want me. Why do they want me? What do I have that would make them want me?

The thing with Elisabeta is, that if I'm not careful I'd let her drink me and end me. If she asked.

If she asked.

I just shivered again. Someone walked over my grave.

I mustn't think about it.

francesrebecca: Can I run something by you?

J_Doe207: All right.

francesrebecca: "Plague Angel."

francesrebecca: Does that mean anything to you?

J_Doe207: It does.

J_Doe207: A little.

J_Doe207: You heard this from Elisabeta, I suppose.

francesrebecca: That's right. You know it?

J_Doe207: It's a mythical figure that the Morbus started talking about a couple of years ago.

francesrebecca: The Morbus?

J_Doe207: The diseased. The Plague-Carriers. Elisabeta is one of them.

francesrebecca: Hang on. "Plague-Carriers"?

J_Doe207: It's nothing you can catch. The herd, though. They can catch it.

J_Doe207: It's why the Lady demands that they're all openly known.

J_Doe207: They play havoc with the food.

francesrebecca: I see.

francesrebecca: And this Plague Angel?

J_Doe207: A new thing. Some sort of urban myth.

J_Doe207: I think it started after Katrina hit, over in the States.

francesrebecca: Which is about the time that Elisabeta woke up.

J_Doe207: Quite.

J_Doe207: They claim that the Plague Angel is watching them.

J_Doe207: That he'll bring vengeance on the Morbus's persecutors. In the name of God.

francesrebecca: Which is a little peculiar.

francesrebecca: According to Elisabeta, the Plague Angel was the vampire who created her.

J_Doe207: Really?

J_Doe207: How fascinating.

francesrebecca: He Embraced her about the time of Constantine, apparently.

francesrebecca: She says she was a nun.

francesrebecca: And that he talked to her about theology.

J_Doe207: Of course, you realize she's just addled by the Fog.

J_Doe207: She's like Nitokris. You can't actually believe a word she says.

PICTOGRAPHOMANCY: The art of drawing meaning and divining the future from the reading of old comics.

So I arrived at the warehouse unit, and there I found, sitting in front of the desk and the filing cabinet, two packages, both of ample size, both addressed, as I had been told: *Miss F. Black*. And on the desk, the carbon copy of the delivery manifest, time 1.46pm, all signed for, with my signature.

My writing. And at the bottom, a note, also in my own writing.

Enjoy! -F.

Which is all terribly provoking. If I didn't know me as well as I do, I'd say that she—I—was up to something. I mean, she *must* know about this, because I do, but—well. One of those questions best left unasked, maybe.

But did she know what was in the other package?

Because I had only expected one package. The Old Bat didn't tell me I was getting two boxes. I started wondering if I was going to have to put the blessed thing together.

I really hoped I wouldn't. I've always been rubbish with DIY.

Both with labels marked New Orleans, and labels marked New York, and the international labels and what have you. Both about a metre, one metre twenty maybe, cubed. So, I thought, no point wasting time.

Pick a box:

Eeny, meeny, miney, mo,

Tell a vampire what you know.

If he kills you, let him go.

Eeny, meeny, miney, mo.

So. I took the one on the left, put my hands on the top edges, turned it about a couple of times, and stood up again. Run a housekey along the tape, one, two, three times, struggle with the last bit, inevitably, and hurrah, we're open.

I got a face full of those little polystyrene packing things that Americans always seem to use. Don't they have the faintest idea about the environment?

And I stick my hand in, and touch something cold and not like a glass armonium. Like someone's back, all curled up.

And then it moved.

So I pulled my hand out, like I would if I'd just found a tarantula in the laundry, and then those stupid little polystyrene bobbles all spilled out of

the box and the thing stretched, and I knew inside what it was.

I went a bit wrong again.

One of the worst things about being dead, at least for me, is the way that you *know* you're not supposed to be walking and thirsty and stuff. It's like this constant little weight in the place where your stomach would be if it hadn't withered into a dry little paper bag. You feel *wrong*. You get used to it, and you even forget it's there sometimes.

But every time you're around another vampire, or at least one you haven't met before, you get this little tugging, as if that little metaphorical weight where your stomach is, is actually going to come up and choke you, or shoot up through your throat and into your brain. And usually it doesn't, and you force it back down, and you interact.

But sometimes it does, bang, right up like a bullet into your brain from beneath, which explodes and leaves your rational mind in bloody half-liquid gobbets plastered around the inside of your skull and all that's left is the little clockwork motor in the back that makes you pounce or run. And if the vampire turns out to be a foul-smelling *thing* that looks like walking, talking pandemonium, that just stood up out of a parcel you were not expecting him to be in, with little bits of polystyrene still stuck to his jacket, well. My mind exploded into shreds. And his must have, too, because that face twisted even more and I was super-fast and around him and unlocking the door, but he grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and threw me back across the room and over the desk, and I think I would have broken my neck if I hadn't been, you know, dead.

So I was under the desk and out the other side of it the low way while he was coming round the back, except he reached under and grabbed my ankle, and my back got rammed against the desk front and it really hurt and I screamed like crazy.

I knew I was too hungry to get away from him, and he was hungry, too—I think I know now that *that* was the problem, but right then I was too busy trying to get away from this thing that

I knew was going to hold me down and suck me dry. I hadn't on the way there, and I didn't have enough inside me to get away.

But I kicked and kicked and somehow he let go, and I was under the desk and he was over it, and then I was through the door without unlocking it, bang, and slamming headlong into the far side of the corridor and jarring myself for the split second before the pain went away and I was running out of the unit and into the industrial estate and through alley ways and over a fence and into the half-built unit next door. I found myself vaulting over piles of bricks and dodging

And I could hear him all the time, behind me, I could hear the way his fingernails sliced through the air, I could hear him slaverling and snarling and sounding like no animal that ever lived, like something alien, growling in some guttural kind of glossolalia.

I was, of course, so far beyond conscious reason I'd forgotten what it looked like. The motor in my head made these connections, these click-click-click decisions and they weren't all right because I was leaping off the edge of a building unit and past this pile of scaffolding poles and rusty girders and bang into a dead end, and I turned around and my back was against the wall and I watched him leap off the edge too and—splutch—this horrible noise, the noise you make when you stamp on a snail really hard—he was face down on the poles, and one of them was sticking right through him, a whole two feet out of his back, and he was thrashing about, and the kicking must have knocked another couple of poles and one of the larger girders, one propped against the wall, toppled, and with that same noise, took his head right off. Like an egg under a pickaxe.

And the body decayed, and you had this headless, putrefied cadaver with a girder across where its head should be and a rusty pole sticking out through its back.

And I was myself again. And I thought, *They really need to do something about health and safety here. Someone could get really badly hurt.*

francesrebecca: So it's here.

J_Doe207: Good. Have you tried to play it?

francesrebecca: A few notes.

francesrebecca: I played "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" on it. Just, you know, out of a whim.

francesrebecca: It's pretty. But it doesn't do anything.

francesrebecca: I mean, why the trouble? I can't figure out how you work it.

J_Doe207: Not if you play nursery rhymes on it, you won't.

J_Doe207: Mlle DeFay wrote some music for it.

J_Doe207: The correct music brings the correct result.

francesrebecca: Right.

francesrebecca: So do you have the correct music?

J_Doe207: No.

francesrebecca: Oh.

J_Doe207: I know where it is, though.

ASTRAGYROMANCY: Divination through dice.

Her name is Lucy, and she is a DJ.

I found the club she was working. In Hoxton, again. I loathed it. I never liked electro much when I was alive. It reminded me too much of the 80s and of being a kid. It was all too self-conscious, full of the cool people, the ones who don't have any idea of how

ridiculous they look. Men with smooth, slack faces and ridiculous gelled hair. Women in leg-warmers and New Romantic make-up. All surrounded by ridiculous dry ice.

I recognized the art director of a magazine that had abruptly stopped printing my work. Cal, his name

was. Ten years younger than me. He wouldn't give me a reason why. But I remember how I saw the contempt in his face and how I nodded and went away and cried at home.

So I was a little hungry. I caught him on his way to the bar, navigating around the edges of the club. He got to a corner and I stepped in front of him faster than he could follow, and I allowed him to see me. I said, "Hello, Cal," and I could tell he didn't remember me, but I was leaning up on tip toe, one leg kicked up like a schoolgirl having her first kiss, on his neck and his hands clasped my waist and his fingertips spasmed a little and I let him go and was gone before he even knew I had been there. I could have killed him. I didn't. He'll probably not be up for clubbing for a few nights, though.

In the end, I settled on sitting on the floor invisible, in a corner behind the DJ's booth, hands clasped over my knees, watching the woman behind the mixing desk. She'd shaved her head, and she had about six rings in each ear. A ring in her nose and one of those studs in her top lip. She was wearing these shiny pink plastic trousers and this really tight black T-shirt with "Ladytron" written on it in silver and enough



midriff to show a couple of rings in her navel. She had these tattoos all the way down her right arm, showing pictures of these naked fetishy fairies all tangled up in rose thorns.

I think I stared at the fairies on her arm for more than an hour. It was like I was locked into the patterns etched onto her skin.

She moved with the music. And sometimes she'd turn and dance with her back to the crowd, privately, and smile to herself, all glittery false eyelashes and purple lip-gloss, and she'd pause with the music and open those pale green eyes and look at my corner, or stop for a moment and pull out her phone and take a picture of the crowd, or send a text message.

She couldn't see me.

I couldn't decide whether she was beautiful or hideous.

Eventually the bar closed and the web content executives and art directors and electro band members cleared out and went home and Lucy packed up her vinyl. She put on this enormous fake fur coat in leopard print and a pair of vast sunglasses.

I hopped in the cab and sat beside her, but it wasn't how it should have been. I wanted to nick her phone or mess around with the stuff in her bag. I reached for her bag, and she – coincidentally, naturally – reached for it, too, and pulled out a lipstick. I went for the phone in her pocket and she pulled it out and looked at it before I could get to it.

It was no fun at all.

But she couldn't see me. It was just coincidence. Sometimes it happens when I'm doing this that the people I'm messing with get a sort of sixth-sense about me being there, even if they don't consciously know. So I said to myself, nah. It was just a coincidence.

I gave up in the end. I just sat across from her in the back of the Hackney Carriage, looking at the stubble on her head and the piercings and the tail-end of a tattooed briar-rose you could just see beneath the collar of her T-shirt, and thinking, *why would you do that to yourself?*

So Lucy gets out, and pays, and walks into an N6 house and I follow her up the stairs to a flat and she walks in, and I

CAPNOMANCY: Divination by inspection of smoke, often smoke created through specific ritual means.

CLEIDOMANCY: Divination through observation of a hanging key.

CRYSTALLOMANCY: Divination through observation of a crystal ball.

HARUSPICY: Divination through investigation of the entrails of a slaughtered animal. See also **ANTHROPOMANCY.**

walk in behind her, and I say to myself, "Now. Where do you think it is?"

And she says, "Depends what you're looking for, sweetie," so matter-of-factly that it takes a moment for me to realize that she heard me and she shouldn't have heard me and then, bang, I have to fight down the urge to bare my fangs and run, run, run; I turn around and she's just hanging her coat up with her back to me, and when she faces me, she's wholly unconcerned.

I stand there.

There's a crack, and it's like a spark of static on her scalp, from the fake fur, I suppose, and she's staring at me. I see through to her aura and it's full of sparkles, like little glittery stars over blue-calm that – yes – is wrestling with fronds of orange. She's a little afraid. Not very. A little. It's an act. But it's so beautiful. Magical. And she's looking at me in the same way. She's doing the same. She's reading me. Oh no. Magic. It's magic. She's doing magic.

"Well," she says. "Come on."

I'm Frances. Like I'm me when I was alive. All stammers and silences. The shyness is crippling.

"It's nothing."

"If you had wanted to eat me, you would have tried by now. So what are you looking for?"

She pulls her phone out of her hip pocket and starts fiddling with it. It's really distracting. I'm completely at a loss as to what to do or say.

"I – I don't know."

"That's not true," she says. "You want" – she looks at me with those clear green eyes again – "a piece of sheet music."

"How do you – ?"

"It's true, isn't it?"

"Yes."

I look around.

"I don't know where to put myself, really," I say. "It wasn't supposed to work out like this."

"Sorry," she says.

"How long have you been able to –"

"Since you took advantage of the Barley when he was heading for the bar."

"So when I was watching you – ?"

"Sitting in the corner with that whole twee gothic secretary thing going on? Yeah. It put me off a little."

"Oh." I straighten up. I'm painfully aware of how prim I'm being. "This is terribly embarrassing."

She fiddles with the phone a bit more. "You were getting into it. I didn't want to spoil it for you."

She runs her tongue around her teeth, under her upper lip, causing her piercing to click as she does so. Then she smiles. One of her canines is made of gold. "Look, let's get it over with. I'm not precious about my stuff. We can make some sort of a deal."

She isn't really looking at me. She's pressing buttons on the phone with her thumb, like she's texting someone. Suddenly, out of nowhere, it occurs to me that she's quite likable and reasonable. And sexy. My God. She's so gorgeous. I didn't see it. I develop an instant crush on her... and then the cold dead thing inside turns a wheel and my mind goes *click* and suddenly I'm cold and doll-like and empty and I smile like a dead woman smiles and cock my head to one side and I hear myself saying, "You can't force me to like you."

She looks up. "Oh. OK." She puts the phone away. "Sorry. You understand."

I'm myself again. I move my head around, loosen up my neck. I'm aware that it isn't a natural-looking motion.

"Still," she says. "We can talk about this. I don't think either of us would get much out of the alternative."

"Yes," I say. "All right."

She leads me into a room with a sofa, a couple of chairs, and a dozen or more musical instruments: an upright piano, three violins of different sizes, a bass guitar, a 'cello. One side of the room is covered with shelves full of vinyl records, behind a mixing desk flanked by three-foot-high speakers. She motions me to the sofa, pulls up a chair, sits on it backwards, straddling the seat, arms folded over the back, looking at me intently.

I sit up straight, my hands folded in my lap. I am aware that I am sitting in front of a mirror that stretches across the length of the wall. Lucy makes no sign that it makes her the least

bit uncomfortable; her fear-orange is gone, and all is sparkly calm-blue, with blotches of interest-purple.

We talk. We make an agreement.

francesrebecca: You didn't tell me she was a witch.

J_Doe207: No, I didn't.

J_Doe207: You seem to have escaped, however.

J_Doe207: And the music?

francesrebecca: I got the music.

J_Doe207: You outwitted her?

francesrebecca: I brokered an agreement.

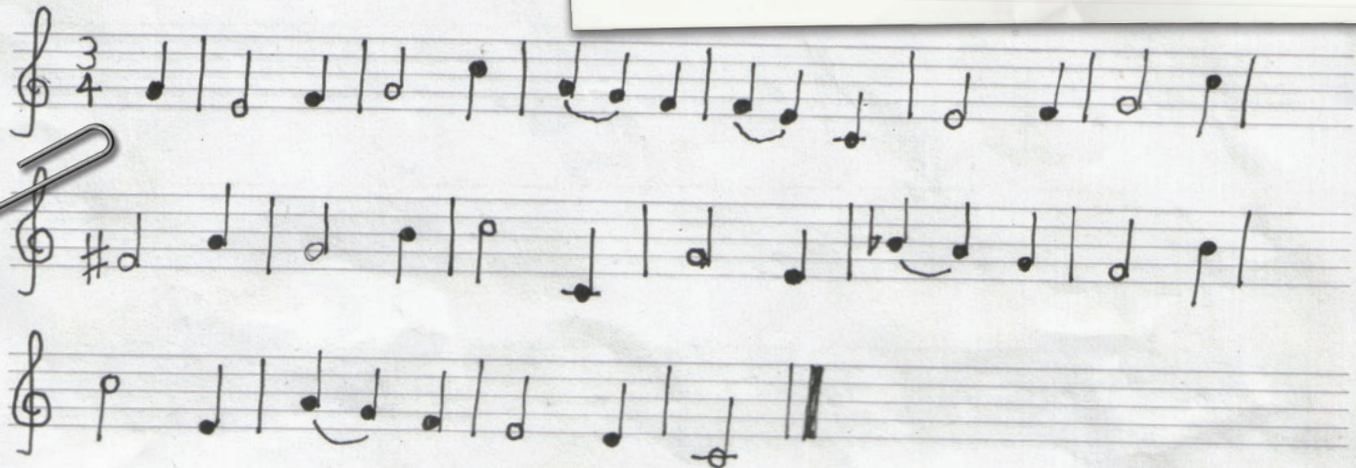
J_Doe207: I see. And your part?

francesrebecca: She wants the original back once I'm done taking a copy. That's all.

francesrebecca: And I owe her a favor. A small one.

J_Doe207: A favor.

francesrebecca: Yes.



ROMANCE

STOLISOMANCY: The art of drawing omens from chance meetings with oddly-dressed people.

There are these two students, young men in UCL shirts, walking along the pavement. They pass me. They don't see me. One of them says: "I have less than an hour to eat, shower and drink."

The second says, "Why don't you just not eat?"

The first says, "If I didn't eat, I'd be a Muslim."

I don't understand. It makes no sense. Should it?

Is it significant?

From the Ancient Chosen of Seth, Priestess of Eternal Tu'at, Mistress Who Holds the Leash of Amemet, Sundered Queen, Hallowed of Clan Mekhet, given the name of Nitokris;

To Frances Black, childe of Doe, True of Clan Mekhet, Sworn to the Dragon;

I trust you are well. When last I slumbered, the Typhon Star spoke to me. The blessed Cradle of Chaos has your interests at heart, and it is auspicious that you come to me.

I require an audience.

When next the sun sets and midnight comes, you will attend my chambers. You will wait until I can see you.

I long that you benefit from my presence once more. I desire to bless you with more than my simple company, however; I have a gift for you.

GRAPHOLOGY: The art of character analysis (and sometimes fortune-telling) through the inspection of handwriting.

I fed again, less because I needed to than because I wanted something to do. It's easy to fall into the role. I see auras; I feel the impressions of people's passing when I brush my hands on stair-rails and door handles.

She was a buyer for some fashion chain. An importer. Her clothes were all livelihoods and materials and her hair was perfect and she died. I left her stuffed in a wheelie-bin. The name on her debit card was Claire. She had pictures of two small children in her wallet. I tried to imagine them crying for their Mummy, because Mummy was never coming home.

I couldn't. The shadow wouldn't let me.

I can't tell if the coldness inside me is because I have done an evil thing or because I am dead. I walk for a while; it is not time for my meeting.

The evening is fine tonight and the air is cold. If I were breathing, I would create little clouds with my breath.

I miss them.

The weather forecast says it's going to snow tomorrow. Maybe it is. It's beautiful. The lights of London, the moon in the sky. It occurs to me that this is very like the bridge on which I was standing when I died.

It might even be the bridge on which I died.

I can't remember.

Then there's a voice.

"Frances?"

I turn, and there's an aura, a vibrant, living one, in happy orangey-red, and there's a darker red in it, and I have to remember what that one is because I don't think I've seen anyone with that one for a while. At least not talking to me.

"Frances!"

CANCER
69 (June 21 to July 20)

Committing a callous murder could cast a shadow of depression over your day; still, chin up. The influence of Venus suggests that romance may soon be in the air.

HYDROMANCY: The art of divination by water, covering the observation of eddies and flows, colors, ripples left behind by pebbles dropped in a pool and sediments left behind when dirty or sandy water is poured away.

I have to look through the aura. I blink and shake my head.

"Sorry, I lost myself," I say.

"How *are* you?" He's tall, and he has this short, messy sandy hair. Little rectangular glasses with the black plastic frames. He's wearing a tweedy coat with badges on it.

Wait. I know him. He's smiling at me.

How do I know him?

"Are you just on your own?" He says. "Because, if you want some company, I could hang around. I'm not really, you know, busy. I mean, there's somewhere I could be going. But I don't have to go there, really." He runs his hand through his hair, pauses, tilts his head to one side. "Although if you don't want company right now, I'd, you know, understand."

He's cute.

"No, no. Stay."

Why did I say that? I think. I have no idea who he is and I'm going to be racking my poor dead brain for his name and thinking, *who is he?*

I'm sort of losing myself. He's talking to me. He's cute. He fancies me.

Wait, he's talking about this morning.

He's got me mistaken for someone else.

But, no, he knows me. He knows I'm called Frances and I like Nico and poetry and what I used to do for a living. I start asking leading questions. He starts talking about himself.

I know him from somewhere.

I know. I stole his Camera Obscura badge. The night I met my reflection. The woman I killed had walked into him and I spoke to him and stole his badge, and it's on my bag right now.

But I met him for about five seconds and he knows me. He knows me.

And, oh God, he's all vermilion orangey-red haze I fancy you.

This isn't right. I mean, no one fancies me. I mean, yeah, he says he talked to me this morning in – the park? – yes, the park, and we walked around a bit and sat on the swings in the sunlight and talked about aspirations and I don't remember that, and I couldn't anyway, because it was in the sunlight. This is *wrong*.

He fancies me.

It's real. I don't understand.

There are the things we tell the food, Frances, and the things we tell the Kindred. You will take the initiation alongside others, and they will be living.

[pause]

You receive a second initiation. Then we tell you a different lie.

[pause]

But no. We could only do that if there was a truth we could tell you.

ANTHROPOMANCY: A variant of **HARUSPICY**, specifically using human remains.

NECROMANCY: Divination through contact with the spirits of the dead, commonly with a ouija board.

PHYSIOGNOMY: Divination through inspection of bumps and shapes on the head.

I told Ryan – his name is Ryan, I picked that up somewhere along the way – that I had to meet someone, and it would be weird if he turned up. But I gave him my number. To text.

I just hope he never tries to call me.

Anyway. So I arrived at the big old house where Nitokris is staying, and the old ghoul in the fez told me that I had to wait outside for a while, in the hall. I could hear murmurings.

At about one o'clock these people came out, ordinary looking people, living people, mostly, carrying what looked like folded up sheets over their arms. Most of them had this look, like they'd seen something they hadn't wanted to. And then a couple of vampires came out, and they had the folded sheets too, but they were carrying these masks that looked like the Typhon-animal, the thing that looks a bit like a wolf and a bit like a donkey, but isn't really either. And then the ghoul said, I could go in.

The room was lit, dimly, by electrical lights that flickered like candles, which I thought was quite clever, actually. Nitokris sat at the far side of the room. She was dressed like a priestess, with the white shift, and the straps over her breasts and the black braided wig with gold woven into it and the serpent at her brow. She had the Egyptian eye make-up, like in the pictures, and blood all around her mouth and all over her chin.

And she was sitting behind this wooden altar which had a corpse lying on it. A woman, dead and naked and with a shaved head (I thought for a moment of Lucy, but it wasn't her) and the Egyptian eye make-up around these staring eyes and with her chest and abdomen opened up. Her innards were spread across the altar, steaming, catching the light; blood all over the altar, running into a kind of moat set into the altar's pedestal. She was still warm. I could feel the heat with my skin.

Nitokris half-smiled in a satisfied way, and said, "I will not be here long. I must sleep soon."

I looked at the corpse.

"She gave her heart to me," said Nitokris, waving a hand. "She did her duty."

"Of course." I took a step back.

Nitokris stood up. "To the point, then. Are you lonely, Frances?"

"I – I don't know what you mean."

"Are you lonely, Frances?" The priestess stood up, took a step towards the altar, ran a blood-covered hand down the sacrifice's leg, stood to one side of it, her hand still on the victim.

"I – ah – yes. Yes I am." I was scared. So scared.

"Then I have a gift for you. Someone to love you."

"Oh," I said. "Um, that's very nice, but I don't –"

"Nonsense. You do." She took a step towards the side of the room and reached out a hand, where hung a little bell. She lifted the bell off its hook and rung it.

"Besides," she said. "He is already yours."

"I'm sorry?"

"I took the liberty of allowing him to meet you. I made a compact with part of you. The part that walks by day, the part that walks by night; it makes no difference to him."

"Wait, you – asked my –"

She smiled. Three fat ghoul-women with the same shaved heads, the same eye make-up, the same priestesses' robes came in and, having covered the corpse with a cloth, wrapped it and carried it away.

I asked what they would do. Nitokris told me they would throw the body in the incinerator.

"But wouldn't that mean she was, by your beliefs, damned forever?"

"She chose damnation willingly. Oblivion was her one desire."

I wondered what the vampire had done to twist her victim's mind so. I wondered if there were siblings somewhere. Or a lover. Or a husband. Or children. Or parents.

I had a flash of the children from the photograph in the wallet, crying. I found it distressing, and my mistress reassuring.

A fourth ghoul came and began to remove Nitokris's accouterments. "I must go now," said Nitokris.

"Wait," I said. "What do you want in return?"

She had turned her back to me, and was walking, now naked, towards the door. Without looking back, she said, "You have already done it. You may leave now, Frances."

He was waiting for me outside, when I left Nitokris's house.

I said, "What are you doing here?"

"I followed you. I'm sorry. Was that creepy?"

"A little, yes."

"You don't mind, though."

"No. I can be a little creepy, too, sometimes."

He looked up. "Nice house."

"Been inside?"

"No," he said. "Who lives there?"

"No one *lives* there."

CARTOMANCY: Divination using cards, either standard playing cards, Tarot cards, or packs of cards specifically designed for the purposes of divination.

CHEIROMANCY: Divination performed through inspection of the palm of the hand. Also known as **PALMISTRY**.



The Two of Swords upright in conjunction with the Two of Cups reversed; Reversed appears central in the spread. Placed upright, the Two of Cups is a card of romance fulfilled, or the fruitful union of two. Friendship. Marriage. Love. Sex.

Reversed, it here denotes either a break of a friendship or romance, or a relationship that shall bring pain. It lies beside the Two of Swords, another card of unions, here indicating union between incompatible forces. Opposites, attracting. Organizations. Political unions. Peace between warring factions. Normally a good omen. But the proximity of the Two of Cups, reversed, sours it.

You are embarking on more than one relationship: a relationship of the heart, and an alliance of some other kind. The affair of the heart will end in pain. The alliance will succeed on one level, but will bring pain on another.

The cards don't lie.



AFTER THE FLOOD: SECOND LETTER

Found this once more. Still no one saw anything. I'd install a camera if I thought it would do any good. Time to think about a new haven, maybe.

My Friend—

There was nothing I could do, you see. The creatures came upon us so quickly. I can say with completely certainty that if I had revealed myself, it would have only succeeded in ending my existence as well. As I hid, the sounds of the carnage frightened a flock of birds from their night's roost. A third of them flew north, and the rest made their way east, which I'm sure you'll agree, is an auspicious omen. I made the right choice.

There are signs everywhere, but most of the others are too blind to see them. I've met a few of the Daeva who were relatively perceptive, and more Nosferatu, but our time in the darkness has sharpened our senses, and we see the occulted meaning that lurks behind things far more readily than those we call our "Killed."

Signs and portents.

I think that a brand of mass hysteria infects otherwise rational Mekhet. We all start to see meaning in coincidence. Tarot cards are my crutch. Seems stupid, but always gets results. So I don't complain.

Never learned what the cards mean. Not formally. Can't do any complicated spreads kids in the Quarter do. Not doing them for tourists though. Guess it doesn't matter. Cards speak to me. Maybe just meditation. Maybe not.

I waited for the children of Marinette to leave, howling for all to hear that their territory had been defended, and approached the bodies. Eloy of course, was rapidly decomposing, turning to dust and sludge before my eyes, but Arnold was merely cooling. His entrails were coiled in the dust, removed from his body by the massive talons of those foul beasts, but they did not speak to me. There was no sign in the scattered viscera. Whatever message it might have held was trampled by the insouciant gamboling of the wolf men after the slaughter. Marinette — loq referred to as "mother of werewolves."

My Sire once told me that every person in the world was the subject of a prophecy. The only problem is that prophecies are easy to miss, and easier still to misinterpret. How many divine messages were lost to the careless marching step of a soldier's boot, or simply overlooked by the apathetic masses? The Mekhet are more likely to augur the future, to pull meaning from the vast and tangled skein of fate, but even our brethren vampires are no more likely to listen to us. In many ways, we are doomed to be the Cassandra of our kin, our warnings ignored until they come to pass. Remembered only in the search for a scapegoat.

I still had no idea how to interact with this world and this time, and now the only Kindred I had seen since I had awakened was no more. But now my curiosity was piqued, and I could no longer abide floating like so much flotsam, aimless and lost. I had to learn as much about this new time, and I had to do so quickly. I began to seek out other Mekhet. The nights that followed were fruitless. Most Kindred had evacuated, like you, to Gretna or Metairie, or even out of Louisiana entirely. The ones that remained were nearly animal. They fed indiscriminately, and reveled in the chaos. In the face of such destruction, the masquerade be damned, I suppose. A few times, I saw signs of fellow travelers, those like us, who tread darkened paths, who do not fear the shadows. A circle painted on the wall of a building on Rue Chartres, with the rune hagalaz placed in opposition to alqiz in the center. A forecast of the coming storm, and a ward of protection against it, I suppose. If you aren't conversant in the Elder Futhark, Mr. Walker, hagalaz is a rune of disruption, forces that necessitate change, and alqiz is protective, used in warding spells. The paint was weathered, and had obviously been painted before the storm, so I had no hope of discovering the artist.

I had to find shelter before the sunrise, so I broke into a library. Got Doppler radar and satellites now. But this guy would probably argue that was magic. Like Clarke said, "any sufficiently advanced form of technology is indistinguishable from magic."

It turned out to be the safest place I could have gone, and the most private. Base looters saw nothing of value in the books, and scavengers ignored everything that didn't have a chance of providing physical sustenance.

Had a backup haven in Gretna, away from levies. Library's not bad second option.

I found my own form of sustenance in the stacks of books that had been stored high enough to survive the floodwaters. I partook of history texts and how-to manuals. In one history book, I traced my last days of consciousness to the 1870s. I remember living in a bungalow overlooking Canal Street while the White League defeated the newly integrated police force, therefore I was active at least as recently as 1874. My mulatto skin would not have endeared me to the white supremacists, and my proclivities made it prudent to avoid the police force.

You are not so old that you could have forgotten your mortal days, but then, you never will be, will you? I can barely remember my antediluvian existence, before Katrina's rage awakened me. I envy you, Mr. Walker. Right.

I envy that remaining in your home like a hermit is your choice, rather than a side effect of your inability to fit into mortal society. I know that envy is a sin, but really, what's one more between friends? We are already sinners in His eyes. We take from His flock that which we should not, and from another perspective, we have eaten the second fruit, from the Tree of Life. If this is what He was hiding from Adam and Eve, it is no wonder he ejected them from Eden. I have a confession to make: I have been invisible for so long, existing on the periphery, that I'm not sure I could make myself seen if I tried. I am voyeur and spy, the shadow cast by people actually living their lives. I have heard stories from old friends of other Mekhet losing their shadow, of that shadow going forth and wreaking its own brand of havoc. Sometimes I wonder if I am me, or if Glislain is someone else entirely, and I am merely his umbral reflection.

I apologize for the digression. I was talking about the library, and my point was actually more precisely a series of books that I discovered there. While I was reading a book of local history, I noticed a symbol in the margins, drawn in faded brown ink, though perhaps it was black at one point. But I recognized the sketch for what it was: a dragon. The dragon was drawn rampant, as in heraldry, but the style was more akin to the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt. Below it was "Hunter 8:14-19," as if it were a Bible quote. There was no book of Hunter in my Bible, so I dismissed it and continued reading. But the dragon kept returning to my thoughts. I had seen it somewhere before, but I had no idea where. Eventually, I searched the stacks and finally happened upon a book by someone named Hunter S. Thompson, called "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas." In the eighth chapter, next to the 14th paragraph was another dragon, this one drawn in the same style as the distorted, splattery illustrations that adorned the book itself. I read the paragraphs indicated, but I'm afraid they made little sense for someone that slept through most of this century. One sentence was highlighted: "There was madness in any direction, at any hour."

And next to it were the names Ginsberg and Solomon. My searches turned up a poem called "Howl," by Alan Ginsberg and dedicated to Carl Solomon. The dragon waited for me in the pages of that book, as well. That one led to... well, you get the picture. A common thread of madness and decay ran through each of the books the little dragon sketches led me to, except for the final book. The last book in the line was called *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. "A translation of an Egyptian holy book. This book was defaced throughout. Every time the name "Set" was mentioned, it was drawn over in red ink, making it appear to bleed on the page. For some reason, I found that quite unsettling, though I could not remember why at the time.

Seth was a good guy. He fought Apep with Ra on his ship every night. But he was associated with foreigners. The Persians invaded Egypt. Seth became associated with them. Went bad because of politics. When Greeks came, they associated him with Typhon because they were both evil storm gods. Typhon depicted as a dragon with a hundred serpent heads. Typhon is connected to the Vedic Asura, Vritra, an evil storm demon. Vritra is a serpent or dragon, too.

I have some other correspondence on the subject.

Asked around: Mekhet active in New Orleans near the end of the 19th century named Glislain La Croix.

found wanting, you know.

Of course we don't always use the Salawa symbol for Seth. Seth has many forms, not all of them obvious, and it is important to pay due respect to all of them. As I'm sure you know, Herodotus recorded Seth as an aspect of Typhon, alternately the last son of Gaia by Tartarus or the immaculately conceived child of Hera. Whichever he was, Typhon does indeed seem to have been another incarnation of Seth's divine presence.

As is so often the case, however, the histories consider opposition to be evil. A shortsighted argument, to be sure. I think you'll agree that it is essential for the powers that be to be surrounded, not by obsequious toadies, but by those who will question their decisions and force them to think things through a bit more thoroughly. It is an artifact of your Christian upbringing that you think of gods as infallible beings, my dear. Gods make mistakes, listen to their heart and fall to hubris as often as the creatures that were made in their image.

When the Greeks and the Romans came to Egypt, they were quick to adopt our gods, to adapt them into masks and incarnations for their gods. A method of finding common ground, they told us. A method of cultural assimilation, to be frank. But we learned a very valuable lesson from them.

As the Followers of Seth spread from Egypt, there was no culture we did not ingest into our rhetorical language. It is a simple thing, really, to find the points of correspondence between two cultures. When cultures touch, it is inevitable that they rub off on one another. Every civilization is an accretion, an aggregate of all the peoples it has met. It is easier than you might think to shoe-horn one god into another.

So we adopted the iconography of new lands and new gods. The hydra-dragon of Typhon became the vast Midgard Serpent J rmungandr or Nidhogg, became Azhi Dakaha the Zoroastrian demon, and yes, became the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Doesn't it strike you as odd that knowledge was the one thing that God didn't want Adam and Eve to have?

I try nightly to recover my memories, to sift fact from distorted and bloody dreams. Are you familiar with the concept of the memory palace, Mr. Walker? I will assume you are not. It is an old idea. The Romans used it. The core of it is tying something unknown to something with which you are intimately familiar. You walk through the "palace" in your mind's eye, and each artifact you come across is tied to some memory. By examining an item, you retrieve the memory. I knew the journals I had buried with me were in danger, even if only taking into account the humid nature of New Orleans. So I attempted to cultivate my own memory palace. The place I chose was the plantation my mother worked when I was a child. Each column, each whitewashed plank of the porch was an unassailable memory. Or so I thought. My memory palace is bleak now, a dilapidated charnel house, ruined and warped by the nightmare visions of my long torpor.

I have no idea how reliable the few paltry scraps that I have scavenged really are. In that way, I am very like the looters who smashed the windows of Canal Street shops and made off with expensive, if waterlogged, electronics. The memories I cling to are simple enough things. There seems to be nothing sinister about them, so I choose to believe that they are truth. In those old days, there was a definite caste system, and unlike mortal society, where I was a half-negro outcast, I was nearly a part of the elite. The Mekhet were numerous and favored at the time. Of course Baron Cimitiere and Prince Vidal were the grand players on the board, but we were highly valued compared to the Nosferatu or the Gangrel.

But even in Kindred society, I was not fully accepted. Vidal's faith was at odds with mine, and we both knew it. I lent my support to Cimitiere, my sire, and my covenant, which was at odds with his precious Lancea Sanctum. Crone?

The more things change... Cimitiere/Vidal still big players. Nosferatu and Gangrel still low class.

We hid from the mortals, naturally, but we also hid from each other in many ways. We did not have telephones, or computers, so we relied on hidden messages and the same sort of system that mortal secret societies do. An arcane lexicon of gesture and counter-gesture, coded call and response. In the case of the Mekhet, it was as varied and full of contradiction as the vast number of occult philosophies and cults that were active at the time.

One of us would leave a sigil carved into the trunk of a tree, and another would modify that sigil to mean something else. Upon meeting another Kindred, one might toe a line in the dirt, and the other would complete the symbol. This served a dual purpose, both password and test. If I began with, say, the alchemical symbol for sublimation, the completion of the symbol was also a sign of their knowledge. If they missed the sign, they had to learn, anyway.

Mekhet still use secret messages. Maybe more than other clans. Maybe not. Symbolism and knowledge are cornerstones of our communication. The Tarot readers in Jackson square advertise with pictures of spreads that carry a message from one Mekhet to another. Stained glass windows. Building keystones containing signs etched in ways so fine and so subtle that only supernaturally sensitive viewers will see. Sequences of numbers that mean nothing in the order presented.

Known other Mekhet who take pride in their messages being missed. Seems pointless to me. I use multiple-image steganography for messages that can't be delivered by hand. Message encrypted and hidden in noise introduced across digital image files. Hacker informant I know sends encrypted messages to me in a programming language called Whitespace. Stupid April Fool's joke language turned real. Made up of spaces, tabs and newline characters. File looks blank until you run it through an interpreter. If it's obtuse and requires cleverness to understand, Mekhet love it.

Also? I wonder why he burns the bottom of his letters?

HOME AND HAVEN

Apantomancy: The gathering of omens through observation of chance encounters with animals, birds and other living things.

GELOMANCY: Divination achieved through listening to the sound of laughter.

He came home with me. It's stupid. It's pointless. But he came home with me.

He looked around my flat. He liked it. He went around a bit, picking things up, and as he did, I thought, I never cluttered my place so much when I was alive, did I? All my stuff got taken away, or given to charity, or destroyed, and I had to start from scratch.

And I made a new place. Doe gave it to me. And now I can't remember what my old one was like.

I stayed in a student house for a while. With girls, six of them. I used to sleep in the attic – the attic they never went into, through the door that

they never saw. They were like students always are. I made sure they never saw me. They'd walk around me as I stood in the hallway. I avoided feeding on them, to begin with. I had other places to go. And there were people I thought deserved it more.

Two of them were called Rachel, I remember. The others were Cat, Sarah, Alice and Kate. One of the Rachels was really nice. I used to like the way she dressed. Her music was good, too. I got a lot of my favorite clothes and CDs from her. The stereo, too, I think. She'd have a thing I liked. Something pretty. A dress. A top. I have this hat with a ribbon. A

fluffy black scarf that was half-way to being a feather boa. A pair of shiny black shoes with these needle-sharp three-inch heels. I'd make her not see it for a while. She'd be going out, and she'd reach for her scarf, but it wouldn't be there. Or her Nico CD was in the rack, but she wouldn't see it, and gradually she'd come round to not having the things I wanted, and she'd not see them without me having to even hide them, and then I'd just take them away. I still have most of what I took from her. I call the scarf "Fluffy." I like to pretend it's a pet.

I suppose I had a little bit of a crush on her. Rachel liked the idea of being



a femme fatale. She tried to develop the look. She'd bring boys back home, funny-looking boys who wore eyeliner and had bad hair. I'd sit there in the corner of the room or maybe on the foot of her bed and I'd watch, sometimes. Sometimes, I'd let one of the boys see me, just for a second, and he'd stop and Rachel would say, what's wrong? And he'd look up again and I'd be gone, of course, except I was still there.

After a while, the girls started to talk about the house being haunted. I'd sit in the lounge with them and listen to them talking about what I was like, and who I was, like I was something insubstantial, or at any rate more insubstantial than I was.

A night came when I passed Alice on the landing the way I always did, and she saw me, just for a second. She stood all open-mouthed and started calling for the other girls and Rachel came and they talked about me and I thought, *maybe I should do something*.

I decided that they should be a little closer to me.

One of the girls would be working on some essay or something, and I'd make a cup of coffee or tea and stir in a drop or two of my blood with the sugar. I'd be invisible and set the cup down, and

she'd look up after a minute or two and see it there and think that she must have forgotten that she made it, and she'd drink it and think no more of it, and none of them compared notes. Or two or three of them would be cooking dinner together and I'd prick my finger on the knife and drop a little of my blood in the bolognese, as it simmered in the pan.

And after that had happened enough times, they still talked about the ghost, but they all decided they liked me, and if Rachel sometimes felt as if a hand was stroking her hair while she was lying in bed, it didn't scare her any more.

Still, I didn't show myself, apart from a few accidents, and even then, the girls would smile and forget me. They were mine.

(Is that wrong? It seemed so natural at the time. But I knew what my blood could do. I brainwashed all of them to like me, drop by drop. When I was alive, I wanted to be liked so badly. And now, give a person a few drops of blood and she *will* like me. Sort of. I would have thought when I was alive that I was better than that. But now I think that maybe I was never that good. I just never had the means to be evil.)

I liked the girls.

After I had made them like me, I looked after them. There was this one time where Cat was being treated badly by a boyfriend. He used to hit her. So I followed the boy home one night and gave him the fright of his life. I went to his room and threw his things around while he was downstairs, and when he ran upstairs and charged in, I vanished, and when he ran out of the room shouting for the housemate he thought had done it, I smashed his bedside lamp, and he stopped yelling and turned around. He was scared. I could see it. He was all surrounded with scaredy-orange. He cleaned up. He was on his hands and knees with a dustpan and brush, and I was right behind him, and you should have seen his face when I ripped down his marijuana-leaf poster. I tore it right down the middle. It made this really satisfying *rip*, and he started crying, he was so scared. So I let him finish. He finally went to sleep in his room, still stinking of antiperspirant and cheap cannabis. And when I was sure he was asleep, I sat on his chest like a nightmare and I pulled my fangs out and made myself a bit stronger and dug my fingernails into his throat and told him to leave Cat alone. I'm not generally very good at being intimidating, but you know, I

think it worked on him. Anyway, he started begging and crying, and I think he soiled himself, which was a little bit revolting, actually. And then I wrote something formulaic and frightening on his mirror. I tried using a bit of blood, but that was a hard, because blood is really sticky, so I used my lipstick instead. I wasn't there when he woke up in the morning, obviously, but I like to think he understood.

He didn't say anything to his mates about what happened to him. But he left Cat alone after that. I don't know what happened to him after he went away. It'd be nice to imagine him as being broken and haunted after that, and as having learned his lesson, but I don't think it really works that way. He was young. I expect he got over it and found some other poor woman to abuse.

It was a mistake to start feeding on the girls. It was Rachel, really. She was my favorite. I had taken to going round the house and kissing each of the girls goodnight, like a good mother, and one night I leaned over and kissed Rachel,

and she smelled so nice. So nice. I can still smell her hair, even now. And I bit her and took a little drink.

I thought, *it won't happen again*, but of course, it did. She got pale and listless and the doctor said it was anemia. Which is more or less true, in a very general sense. She spent some time in the hospital. And the night after she came home from the ward, I went back and drank her again, and she stiffened and sighed, like she always did, and then she made a sad little sound like she was going to cry, and she breathed out, and that was it. I thought, *oops*.

(I suppose that to whoever reads this, it might sound like I'm really careless, all the time, and like I've killed a lot of people. Well. I *have* killed a lot of people. But not as many as most of my colleagues. And I am certainly no more careless than a lot of other dead. My mistakes are simply prone to be more significant. I suffer for them, and they give me stuff I can write about. That's all.)

I thought that maybe I might turn her into a vampire, but I was scared of

what the Lady might do if she found out, and I was *really* scared of what Doe might do. So I got up and walked into Kate's room, and she was asleep, and I whispered into her ear, "There's something wrong with Rachel."

And Kate woke up and went into Rachel's room and found Rachel dead, and they called an ambulance, and after that it wasn't the same. Rachel's parents came and took her stuff away, or what was left of it after I had helped myself to her things. I thought at the time that perhaps she'd have wanted me to have it.

(She would have, actually. She couldn't have thought any other way, because she was basically my slave. Although she didn't know that.)

A couple of weeks later, two of the girls dropped out of university, and while the rest finished their degrees that summer, they didn't do so well. And then they all moved away and went to live elsewhere and my student house was empty for the summer, and I realized I might have to find somewhere else.

~~RE:~~ sex tips

From: punkerkiller

To: marbleindexfrances@gmail.com

Date: August 1st, 2008, 01:07am

Subject: RE: sex tips

> Is there any way I can... you know?

Don't worry. It's easy to keep him happy. Just as he's about to come, give him the Kiss.

It's different. You'll never have the same kind of feelings that you did when you were living. But it's bliss.

A.

So I have all this stuff. Badges. CDs. Mementos I picked up from the girls. Things taken from the street. Underground maps. Books stolen from bags left outside charity shops and from libraries. Bags and hats and scarves and bead necklaces and bits of paper and postcards, dried, pressed flowers and little bits of broken wood and photos lost by their original owners and thrown away or tucked into books. About a thousand other things that I thought were pretty or significant. Sometimes the little clockwork shadow picked things up without me knowing it; I'd leave someone dead

THEY ARE ALMOST IRRESISTIBLY IMPELLED BY LONGINGS TO TRY AND INFLUENCE THE AFFAIRS TO WHICH THEIR PASSIONS AND FEELINGS STILL CLING. THEY ARE BOUND TO THE EARTH, EVEN THOUGH THEY HAVE LOST ALL ACCUSTOMED ORGANS OF ACTIVITY. THEIR ONLY HOPE OF PEACE LIES IN RESOLUTELY TURNING AWAY FROM EARTH AND FIXING THEIR MINDS ON HIGHER THINGS. BUT COMPARATIVELY FEW ARE STRONG ENOUGH TO MAKE THIS EFFORT, EVEN WITH THE HELP ALWAYS OFFERED TO THEM BY WORKERS ON THE ASTRAL PLANE.

ZOLAR, "THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ANCIENT AND FORBIDDEN WISDOM"

or nearly dead and she'd be there inside me going click, click, click and stuffing things in my pocket even as I was tearing out throats or running away.

Everything is significant. All of these things have their links to the greater

truth. All of these things are me.

Since I started working on this weird little project, it occurred to me that perhaps I'm not completely alone in the way I make my home. As Mekhet go, it's pretty common, the collecting.

I think it's because we see things, and the way that bits of auras and psychic impressions cling to objects in all these different ways. We like keepsakes, because they matter. Because they're part of a larger pattern.

DOE'S HAVEN

Doe's place is so nondescript, it's freakish. It's devoid of any kind of feature, really. Just a basement flat in the middle of London with boarded up windows. The bed is plain. The bedclothes are plain beige. There's a cheap pine chair and a table, a cheap pine wardrobe full of identical, nondescript unisex clothes. And that's all there is. There's a drawer in the cheap pine chest by the bed that's got something in it that he or she or it wouldn't let me see.

But apart from that drawer, there's nothing about the place that gives it anything that you could recognize as a feature. It's just the atmosphere it has, the emptiness of it.

Most places you go to have a feeling to them, a kind of spiritual mark. There are bits of aura left behind, and impressions left by people just being there. You are able to feel it even if you're alive. You smell it. Someone lives there, and within a minute or two you can get an idea of what that person is like.

But Doe's place is like Doe. The way Doe's so occulted and hidden, even Doe doesn't know if he's a she, or she's a he, let alone things like Doe's original name. You go in and you have this existential panic, because the place is just void of personality. Of identity. It's got nothing there at all. You forget where the door is. You become lost in the four magnolia walls and the plain beige carpet that's so very clean – it's always spotlessly clean, although no one ever cleans it. Like those things are sucking out your identity. You find it hard to think. I've been in vampire havens which have been vast and filled from wall to wall with rotting corpses, and places like temples to blood-gods and places full of knives and hooks. But none of these have scared me quite as much as Doe's basement flat. It's like being lost in the void.

A clean, well-lit, comfortably furnished void.

TASSEOMANCY: Divination of the future and the present through the reading of tea leaves or, less commonly, coffee grounds left behind in a cup after drinking.

But then, if you *will* buy all your furniture from IKEA, I suppose it's inevitable.

A couple of Doe's ghouls live in the house upstairs. A little old man and a little old woman. They've been there for maybe 70 years, as elderly now as they were in the Blitz. No one bothers them, or even takes the time to think about them much. No one knows their names.

I don't think they even know their own names anymore. One time, I tried striking up a conversation with the old lady (or was it the man? I don't know. It's difficult to tell them apart). We got as far as the weather, and would I like a cup of tea, *no I wouldn't*; oh, been a fair bit of rain today. And that was all. I'm glad Doe got a computer. I don't like going there unless I have to.

Inquiry

From: Celia Carroll <Address Withheld>

To: "Yorak" <Address Withheld>

Date: July 28th, 2008, 03:27am

Subject: Inquiry

Further to your inquiry, it appears that your man was expected.

Given the remains, it appears that the agent met with a swift if not clean execution. Were the culprit human, I would describe the individual as a sadist. As one of us, I would instead suggest an individual with some experience and skill in this area.

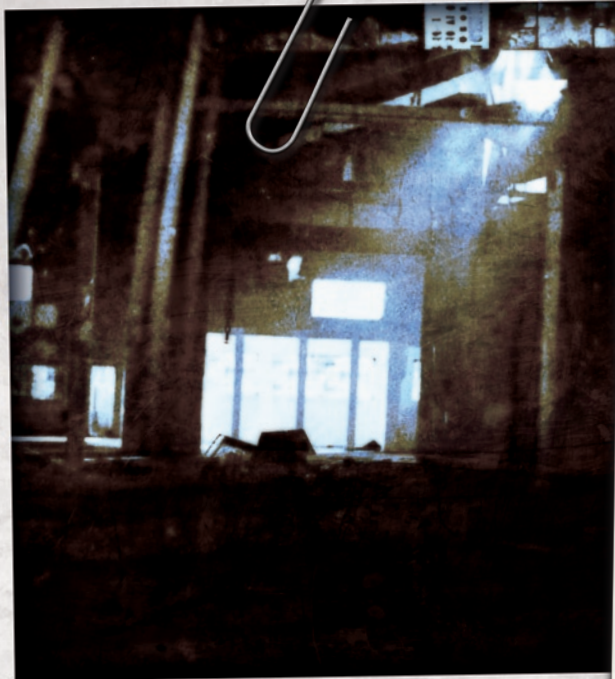
Please find attached photographs of the scene. You should know that whoever opened the package removed any and all address labels from the box.

Your credit with us being however limited, I am sorry to say that an investigation cannot be carried out. Should you wish to pursue the matter further, please be aware that all agents sent by you must report to the court of Lady of London, and, having been vetted, be publicly presented.

This is not negotiable.

Best regards

Celia



SORTILEGE: Divination through casting lots

ELISABETA'S HAVEN

Elisabeta isn't from here. She came to this place because God told her, and when she's done what she wants to do, she'll go away. Exactly like Nitokris, in fact. Elisabeta got the approval of Francis Rose (the Shadow Archbishop of Canterbury – he was reputed to be the oldest vampire in Southern England until Elisabeta and Nitokris showed up) for the right to make a haven in London, which, as I understand it, upset the Lady of London no end. Rose, as the Shadow Archbishop, has the rights to the governorship of the Sanctified in London. And some of the land, while notionally under the Lady's charge, is really Church land, since Henry VIII and that whole dissolution of the monasteries thing he did didn't have any effect on the dead. But I'm getting away from the subject again. The point is, Rose didn't want Elisabeta around because she was far more ancient and deadly than him, and she's from a bloodline that is supposed to be anathema among the Sanctified.

Which is, if she's to be believed, and it's fifty-fifty whether she is, the bloodline to which belonged a vampire responsible for the survival of the Lancea Sanctum through the fall of Rome and the fall of the original Camarilla. No wonder he wants her out of the way.

Also, it annoys the Lady of London. Elisabeta got given an area in the Underground which has been fair game since the Underground vampires went away. So she has rooms in the area around Down Street, which used to be the haunt of the Underground Baroness, about whom I should talk a little later, since she was also a Mekhet.

It's commonly known that Down Street was an underground station. It was closed in 1932, and used as an air-raid shelter by Winston Churchill and his war cabinet during the Blitz. It came into the hands of the Underground Baroness in the 1960s.

I never went down there while she was in charge. I visited Elisabeta once. I'm

not going there again. See, the part of the old underground station where the vampires dwell can't be reached by the train or the surface, which means that you have to go through a service door in a corner of Green Park Station and get into the access tunnels along the track. They're dark, and dark is OK, but it's not the dark. It's the snufflings and the footsteps and the sounds of something hunting. I was invisible, but I swear, I ran most of the distance to Down Street.

Running through filth-covered access tunnels in two-inch heels is not a fun way to spend a half-hour, I can tell you.

A vampire called Burgess, who apparently used to live underground, told me a few nights later that there's a pack of crazy werewolves down in the access tunnels, and they did for most of the vampires. Apart from the ones who could hide. Which, according to Burgess, is a crying shame because there's acres of space down there – untouched by

J_Doe207: Yes, that's right.

J_Doe207: He got here. I trust Ms. Carroll has informed you of

J_Doe207: The accident?

Yorak: What did you do?

J_Doe207: I did nothing. A shame, really.

J_Doe207: No one informed my agent that your man was coming this way as part of the package.

J_Doe207: The Taint took him, unfortunately. His behavior was...

J_Doe207: somewhat indiscreet.

J_Doe207: So my agent had no choice but to dispatch him.

J_Doe207: It was my agent or your agent.

J_Doe207: I do hope you understand.

Yorak: Do I have a choice?

J_Doe207: No.

Yorak: And your agent is?

J_Doe207: That would be telling.

J_Doe207: I'll make reparations, of course.

Yorak: You'd better.

Yorak: But I need to know

J_Doe207: So you can send the boys in?

J_Doe207: I don't think so, old boy.

J_Doe207: You heard how easy it was.

J_Doe207: You don't want to start a war

Yorak: Just like a fucking shadow.

Yorak: Let me tell you

> J_Doe207 is offline and will not receive your messages.

sunlight – that’s completely forgotten by the people living above. As it is, the vampires have to take the train like everyone else. I’m fine with that.

Elisabeta is old enough and dangerous enough that whatever is down there leaves her alone. But vampires like me, we just have to hide. I can close my eyes and remember how I pressed myself to the side of the tunnel at one point, invisible, and something big and four-legged and smelling like a big, wet dog rushed past me. It had the heaviest aura I have ever seen, so bright it made it hard for me to see the shape of the thing, all hate-black and angry-red. And then it was gone, and I was glad it was gone.

Elisabeta’s place has no doors. The light flickers about a hundred yards down the corridor, dim and orange. No doors, just arches. The clockwork shadow began to wind up inside me, and I had to concentrate hard on moving my feet in the right direction. I became very upright, very stiff and proper.

Inside the arch, it was worse: dozens of wrought-iron candlesticks, the kind you see in a church. And hundreds of candles, all burning. And in the middle of it the room, a black altar with the

black-and-red liturgical cloth of the Sanctified on it. I could concentrate on that, but found my other faculties wanting, so much so that when the figure in black passed me and laid the chalice on the altar, I very nearly turned and ran, partly because of the shock, and the naked flames, and partly because of the knowledge that she was old. So old.

I would learn that she hardly ever leaves here. The flames are for her a kind of mortification, a means of suffering. Along one of the walls, a dozen or so mortals hung by their feet, and she drinks from them a little each night until they die. And since they’re all bound to her, they love her for it. Every couple of weeks or so, the two ghouls who brought her into the country, and her lone childe, an Italian who calls herself Lucrezia, bring her a few more, taken from the streets – homeless people, prostitutes, anyone else they can find. The only criterion, really, seems to be that they’re sick. When one of her victims dies, she cuts the body down, and throws it into the tunnels for the monsters to take. They always do.

The tunnel-monsters – werewolves like in the rumors? Something else? –

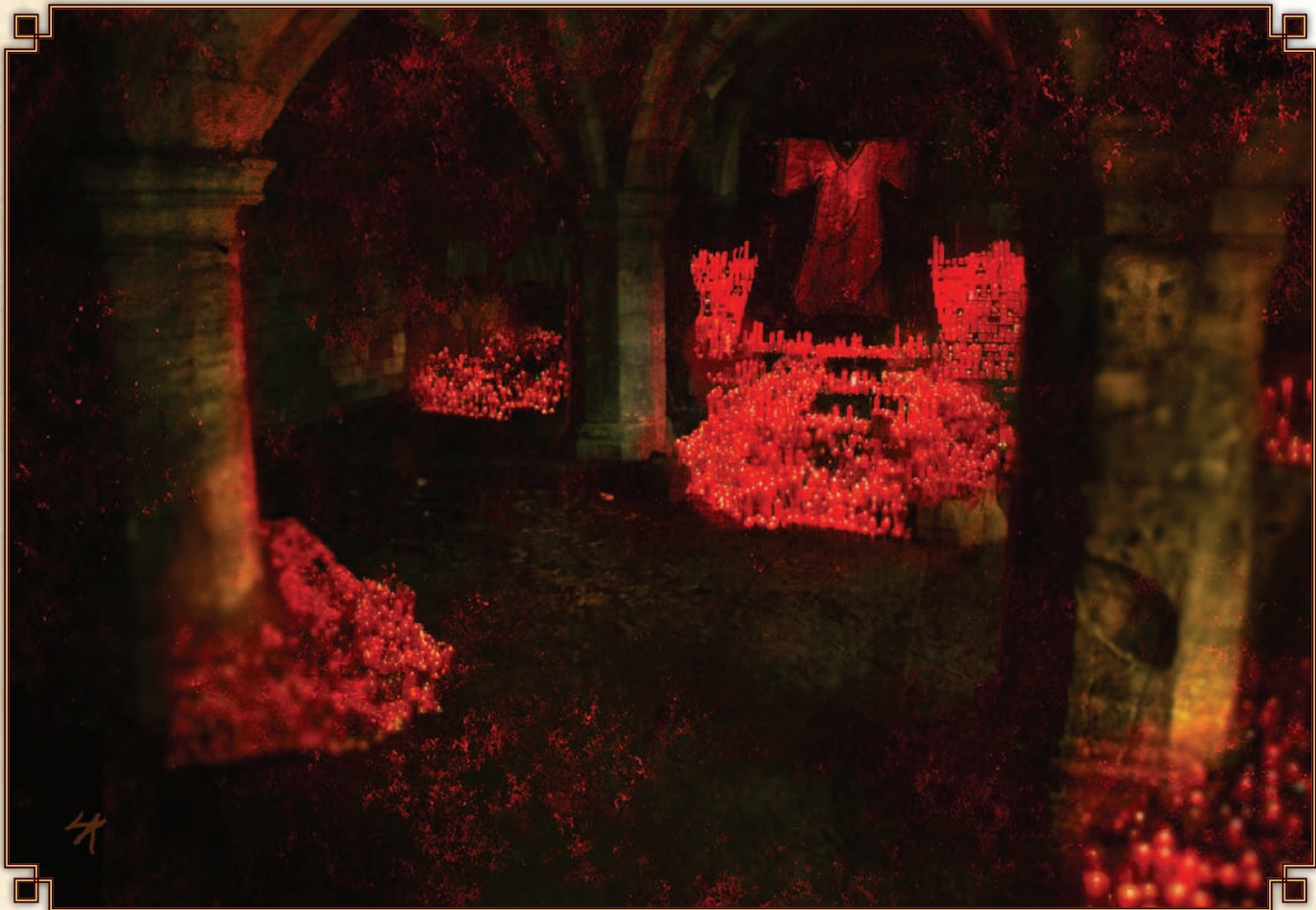
don’t come in here. She doesn’t molest them. They don’t trouble her, or the ghouls carrying their bound and gagged victims. Neither side has exchanged a word, or even seen each other. But they know to leave one another alone.

I’m not sure how that works. It strikes me that if the monsters were able to wipe out the other Kindred court, they could surely destroy Elisabeta. She’s old, yes, but her blood has thinned a little over time and she isn’t what she once was. That’s clear.

Either way, leaving there was almost as frightening as coming. It was only because the Plague Nun wanted to meet me once, face to face, before she began to write to me that I forced myself to do it. She dreamed of me, she said, and so she wanted to meet.

She did all the talking. I was too afraid (and most of what I feel is fear these days. Why is that? It’s no way to exist), and too in thrall to the doll-me to do more than nod, and watch the trickle of blood creep across the curve of her naked breast.

I walked stiffly, briskly, back to Green Park, aware of every click of my heels on the filthy black stones.





Not a lot of people know about the Sethites. Folks who do, think they're all about killing ghosts. Or the Owls they're always talking about. Not wholly true. Thing about Sethites is, they have other things they want. None of them are good for you.

A Sethite smiles and gives you a gift. Or makes a deal with you. Think you have the best of it; rug gets pulled out soon enough.

Everything a Sethite does is for the cause. Whatever that is.

But here's a theory: they talk about Typhon a lot. Typhon's the same as Seth, only wearing the ass-jackal face. Typhon's a metaphor. For discord. Chaos. Sethites talk about Seth being misunderstood. They say it's not like that.

pretty sure I understand perfectly.

ORNITHOSCOPY: The gathering of auguries from the movement of birds.

Like Elisabeta, Nitokris hasn't been in London long. They're both ancient, and both evil. There the resemblance ends. Nitokris is an active member of both the Circle of the Crone and the peculiar little cult she leads. Elisabeta is essentially a hermit. Nitokris is inconsistent and says things that seem obviously false or insane. Nitokris seems blasé or at the very least a little contemptuous of the Masquerade. Elisabeta hides better than anyone has a right to. One would think that two ancient monsters who are, lest we forget, of the same clan, would have something to say about each other, if not to each other. But they don't. Neither seems to be aware of the other. I know that can't be the case. And yet, not a word about Nitokris from Elisabeta; and when I asked Nitokris if she knew about the Plague Nun, Nitokris said, "Yes. So?" and literally nothing more.

Beyond their sex, which at their age doesn't matter much beyond appearances, their age and their clan, the most important thing the two of them have in common is this: they had been torpid for a long time (decades for Elisabeta,

centuries for Nitokris) and woke up on September 1st 2005. They both arrived in London within days of each other, at the end of December 2007. They both say they're going to leave soon, and both have advised me to do so as well.

2005 seems to have been a watershed. A dozen or more old vampires, some of the really ancient, are supposed to have woken up in the last quarter of that year. A majority of these old vampires don't apparently suffer as much from the Fog of Ages as they should. (Why is that?) It was about then that the talk in London of "the Tanner" began, for example.

I mentioned the townhouse. It's owned by human Sethites. I got the impression that some Sethite or other

has owned the place for something like 200 or more years, until Nitokris appeared with an entourage of ghouls and acolytes and took the building over. How she managed to get them into the country, what with the war on terror and all, mystifies me. Presumably, some of the ghouls have access to powers beyond those normally granted to human slaves. It troubles me, too, that the Sethites in London acceded to the sudden, unannounced appearance of an old vampire without any complaint, although Nitokris's power is such that dissent probably wasn't an option. The Sethites in London work for Nitokris now, and will until she leaves.

Which is when she has what she wants. Whatever that is.

The house is lovely, as a London town house should be, and its basement apparently houses the old priestess in the same opulent faux-Egyptian kitsch that fills out the hall and the reception room. All plaster Bastets and gold-paint Eyes of Horus on the walls. As far as I can tell, Nitokris is too addled by the years to be able to tell the difference between fake Egyptian stuff and the real deal.

When I had that first audience with her, she ran her hand lovingly over a statue of Anubis that was clearly made of plaster of Paris and bought in some museum gift shop, and she told me this gore-drenched story about how she acquired it from a dishonest magician in the Middle East back in the time of Cleopatra VII.

VINCENT MOON'S HAVEN

I've been to Moon's place the most, in the last six months, even more than Doe's, I think.

He lives out in Clerkenwell. A terraced house, nice area, well-kept front garden. That sort of thing. He's got enough cash to hire gardeners on retainer. His private secretary, a well-dressed, middle-aged ghoul named Georgina, handles stuff like that.

The thing that always strikes me is how very neat it is. Laura Ashley curtains. Floral carpets. Expensive, but not antique, furniture. Soft upholstery on the three-piece suite. It reminds me a little of the aspirational qualities of a retro Mills and Boon novel, actually, in that the wealthy, powerful, famous people in the novel aren't actually representative of what wealthy, powerful, famous people are like. They're what people who are aspiring to the top end of the middle classes *want to think* that wealthy, powerful, famous people are like. It's the middle class overlaying this banal little concept on the world of the famous, and no one really cares because the middle classes don't ever really have anything to do with those wealthy *etc.* people. Now imagine one of those people with the retro middle-class aspirational tastes: a slightly camp, middle-aged man with the manner of an old-school British tea-and-custard-creams occultist. Now imagine him as being very dead and

Vincent Moon:
Is He a Real Person?

VINCENT MOON IS INDEED A REAL PERSON.
VINCENT MOON IS A TRUE INITIATE.

He follows the path of the Hermit (the Ninth of the Major Arcana). He does not advertise save through word of mouth, and does not permit himself to be photographed. He prefers to shun publicity, but all those who work here see him and receive his instructions daily. Although he appears unapproachable, all True Seekers of the Mystic Way are welcome to write or telephone for a consultation or Personal Dream Reading.

possessed of both actual power and the ability to influence all those people he's not supposed to have met. But at the same time, imagine him as trapped in stasis, unable to really be anything more than a middle-class aspiration, even when lording it over the great and the good and the not-so-good.

Which is tortuous. But that's everything about him. Tortuous.

And the house is just this clean, middle-class residence with a china tea service, and silverware in a glass cabinet, and slightly kitsch china ornaments on the mantelpiece, a book cabinet full of paperbacks by Doris Stokes and Betty Shine, cheap copies of Zolar, *Prediction* yearbooks, the odd Catherine Cookson and Jackie Collins. That sort of thing.

It's like the house of a middle-aged lady. The neighbors think it belongs to Georgina. And Moon, who sits in the lounge and lets me record him, seems as banal as anything here... Georgina's weedy husband. If he weren't cracking rubbish jokes and letting me into a conspiracy to undermine mortal society through surveillance and surgery.

Thing is, like the house of a middle-aged, middle class lady, it's airy and bright. Even with the lights on and the curtains drawn, you can see how much sunlight this place must get. Which begs the question: where do you sleep, Vincent Moon?

I mean, I've only ever been here as a visitor, so there are rooms I haven't seen. I've hardly had the tour. But there

is no cellar in these houses, and the roof, like many terraces of this kind, joins without any division with the other roofs in the terrace: you can stand in the roof of one end of the terrace and see all the way down to the other end. If someone walled up their roof, people would know. I suppose, if he does sleep in the attic, that Moon could have somehow made the fact you can't see all the way through the terrace roof space of no account. It wouldn't have been hard.

But then, that's risky, and Moon, for all his open talk of being at the center of an international conspiracy, is not a dead man who takes risks.

I think he sleeps in the cupboard under the stairs. I'm pretty positive of it.

NIAL'S DIGS

FYI.

I have an apartment. Kind of. No one else lives on the floor. Saw to that a few years ago. Bad part of town. Good people were long gone. Easy enough to get rid of the bad ones. Some were good eating. Some were so scared of living that it wasn't hard to drive them out.

Cold hand on your neck. Dog murdered in your flat while you sleep. That sort of thing. Bye, then.



Came up to an obstacle with the last two guys. Wouldn't budge. Made of stronger stuff. Took a bit of application. Started screwing with their stuff, and their heads. Swapped a few things around. Put some things in places they shouldn't've been. Easy enough.

They ended up shooting each other. Problem solved. Result, a whole floor of my own. Too many people live on the floors above and below to knock the place down. The Murder Floor, they call it. Floor 12B. The one no one stops in, not even the junkies. Not even on the stairs.

Smell doesn't bother me. I keep to my own flat, keep my stuff in good working order — even the dead have to vacuum — and pay the bills. Like the electric company cares where the money comes from.

No one comes up here. No one sees me leave. Suits me.

ANOTHER TRANSCRIPT

We all see things, sometimes. Do you really buy into Niall's idea that our blood makes us loons in the same way? I have my focus and you have yours and Niall's got his lovely little cards, but in the end, it's all one thing.

[pause]

Oh, do pay attention, Mr. Bond, in the wrong hands these auguries could be quite dangerous.

[pause]

Seriously? Not even Doctor No? Ah, well. No, my dear, it's quite simple. We don't just hear things that others miss, or see better than our bloodsucking chums. There are more than five senses, darling.

[pause]

Yes, that's precisely what I mean. Is precognition any more of a stretch than telepathy? You know some of us can read minds. The Savages turn into big dogs, and you're incredulous about occasional glances at the next page? Although I don't know anyone who can really control it. Granted, it's easy to see an omen after the fact, something that helps you rationalize yourself to sleep at night, but what about when you just know, as in know, what's coming?

Do you go out and spoil the surprise for everyone, and let them in on the secret?

[pause]

Of course not, I wouldn't believe me either. Simply everyone knows I'm just some rampant old queen with a magic box. But maybe in hindsight they'll know you were right and finally believe you, give you the respect you've always deserved and perhaps even listen next time... Or perhaps they'll just blame it all on you and roast you on a spit.

So that's the question. Do you tell everyone, or do you keep it secret and use it to your advantage?

[pause]

Well, yes, quite. I know what Id do.

If you smash a mirror, it's seven years bad luck.

Best man to get the books in is Burgess. Deen'll work with him. About the only guy who will. He's a Norwegian, see. No fangs.

Deen's too straight a guy to be bothered by that. He's like me. All that matters is he gets the gear in. No time for vampire dickwaving. Burgess, too. We like Burgess.

A story: Burgess gets set up. Childe of the prince decides Burgess has to go. Got in his way. Territorial thing. Childe gets a gang of ghouls belonging to the prince. Six of them. Not sanctioned by the prince, but the prince doesn't care, because Burgess is scum, OK? Not even a real vampire.

Burgess expects a handover. Payment for a job. Walks into the house. Not expecting a thing. They're waiting for him. Looking to beat him to ash.

Ten seconds later, a man they've got outside sees Burgess walking out wearing one of the ghouls' coats. No movement inside. Spotter waits a while, goes in. Finds six corpses, all stabbed about seven times each, all covered with the ash of the prince's childe. Burgess' clothes in a pile in the corner, torn to pieces.

Prince has to suck it in and accept that the childe got what he deserved. Burgess gets left alone.

Best not to ask how. Just give the man respect. Let him get the books in. Pay up. Get Deen watching his back. As a courtesy.

Not sure he needs the help.

THIRTY-THREE FOR GOOD

It occurred to me last night that the generation I lived in is now preparing for middle age, and yet still is, more than anything else, fixated with play. We never grew up.

Everything we are, everything I *was*, is about play. It's what the people of that generation are made for. Our mothers and fathers, whose own parents had lived through the war, had the importance of duty drilled into them. The moment they had the chance to cut loose, they did, and the sixties happened, which, we are given to believe, was fun for them.

A few years later, they got over it. They settled down, and they got jobs and they rejoined the adult world. When we were teenagers, we sneered at them for it. We accused them of selling out.

It turned out that they had the right idea. They got it all out of their system, for the most part. There were a few mid-life crises, but they didn't

last. The overpaid businessman realizes he isn't happy with the astonishing blond girlfriend and the shiny car, so he goes home to his wife and kids and has a crack at growing old gracefully. It comes naturally. He never really got over the whole duty thing. His mum and dad did that to him.

But what he and his friends did to *us* was to drill into our heads the value of having fun when we were young, an absolute determination never to sell out or settle down. But of course, we got older. We settled down, whether we wanted to or not. Some of us even had kids.

The twenty-eight-year-old man with the skateboard and the Deception T-shirt; the thirty-year-old woman with the Hello Kitty handbag and the Minnie Mouse thong: these are the representatives of the world I came from. Mum and Dad got shot of the toys and finished with games at about the time they gave up on rock'n'roll.

They stopped being teenagers more or less when they stopped being teenaged. They looked back fondly on the days they spent going a bit wild, and they went on about it a bit and maybe had some short-lived midlife crises, but that's all there was. They took a breath, straightened their ties and got on with the business of being adults, and tried not to notice the fact that their kids grew into adulthood wanting to be teenagers forever.

And it occurred to me that the dead (the walking ones and the dead-dead ones, it doesn't matter) are trapped at the moment they died. I am forever 33. Forever stuck at the point of an unresolved crisis. And with a boy who's ten years younger than I was – than I always will be.

He's sweet. He's so sweet. I'm keeping him. I'm not going to let him go away. I gave him his first drink from me last night, and tonight I'll do it again.

It's lucky when a black cat crosses your path.
It's unlucky when a black cat crosses your path.

So we went to the pictures. We were in the queue to get in (I've never bothered to pay for the cinema since I died, but Ryan keeps me honest) and Ryan started talking about something I said at lunch, and I nodded and acted like I knew what he was talking about, and of course I didn't.

He stopped, mid-sentence, and said, "Sometimes it feels like you're a different person when it's dark. Like I'm seeing two completely different people."

"Does it?" I said.

"Isn't that strange?"

"Yes. Isn't it?"

I held his hand, really tightly, and I thought, when we get back to his place, he's drinking the third time. The third time is the charm.

Two nights ago, we made love, and then we lay there and I bit into my wrist, and he drank from me.

The first time I did it, he didn't know what I was, and he was a little edgy, a little nervous, and said he didn't know. It was a bit too kinky, a bit too S'n'M. But we were in the middle of lovemaking, and he was off-guard, and I fluttered my eyelashes and snuggled up against him, and he shivered, because I'm so cold, and he said, all right, and that was it.

And when he saw the wound in my wrist close up, he didn't blink.

The second time I didn't ask. We were in the middle of... you know. It came about as naturally to him as making love to a dead woman can. He was a bit odd that time, and afterwards as we lay there, he stared at me, and stared, and stared. But it didn't last, and when we cuddled up close I could tell from his breathing — the way he would inhale, trying to get my scent, and then exhale, all shuddering — that the blood had him. And tonight, we did it again. I put a little of myself in the blood to make it special, and so I'd keep him forever, and as he drank, he... finished up. And he lay on his back and his eyes opened wide, and I watched the pupils shrink, like they do when someone is dying, though he wasn't dying — but now I think that something was, because when he came to himself, he was different to me.

Like that thing where his words come out faster than he's thinking, and he's about to talk over me, and stops and says sorry and asks me to start again. I thought that was sweet.

He stopped doing it. He always waits for me to talk now. He agrees with everything I say. His opinions are mine. They change to mine, if mine are different. He's as thoughtful as he ever was, but there's something pathetic now in him. He's not my lover. He's my toy. If I told him to call me "mistress," I have no doubt that he would.

I think I've broken him.

(One thing came out of that: he mentioned that the feelings I evoke in him aren't the same in the daytime. Which

is not surprising. But I wonder what she wants with him? I wonder why she is still following him around?)

It's not right. Why do I have to spoil everything? I mean, it's not love. I know it's not love. I can't love. I can remember what love was like, but *the memory of feeling is not feeling*, as a wise man once said. I wasn't going to love him. Not really. But clockwork-doll-love, going through the motions, was the best I could get. I'm a Mekhet; we're colder than the others. We don't have the weight of emotions dragging us down; but we don't have them raising us up.

But I didn't have to *make* him love me. And now look what I've done.



The Ace of Swords, upright in the fifth position, signifies a love affair that is destined to end in disaster.

A true musical taste is soon dissatisfied with the [glass armonica], or any similar instrument of glass or steel, because the body of the sound (as the Italians phrase it), or that effect which is derived from the materials, encroaches too far on the effect from the proportions of the notes, or that which is given to music by the mind.

Coleridge, *The Friend*

francesrebecca: I'm doing it tonight.

J_Doe207: Good.

J_Doe207: It's important that you send an account of your experience to Niall.

francesrebecca: I'm not wholly sure how I can do that.

francesrebecca: I mean, what if I forget it all the moment it's over?

francesrebecca: Or it destroys me when it's done?

J_Doe207: It won't do that, at least.

francesrebecca: But I mean, it's not like I can record myself.

J_Doe207: There are means.

RYAN,

I CAN'T SEE YOU
TONIGHT. DON'T WORRY.
IT'S NOTHING SERIOUS.
STAY SAFE.

LOVE YOU.

F

If you know how, you can imprint some of your memories on a drop of blood. Dragons reckon they know how to do it. But they weren't the first. My folks were first.

Never learned how to do it. The idea is that you take the blood out and inject it into a ghou. He can hold it, can't use it. You send the ghou where you want the memory to go. Bloodsucker at the other end meets the ghou, drinks the memory, remembers. The ghou might get out alive. Might not. Only a ghou, though.

Doesn't matter.

Reverse the evil eye by turning in a circle, seven times clockwise.

It's a stately, sprightly little thing. Except for a moment in the middle where it offers a brief discord. That restless, slightly discordant moment that recurs in those first few bars is what they call the Devil's Interval. While nowadays it's part of the musical arsenal (it's a

major part of Jimi Hendrix' "Purple Haze," for example), back in the late 18th you didn't use such techniques. Stories about the Vatican banning it are apocryphal, but even so. The stories that the tritone evoked evil are not always stories.

MAGPIES: One is sorry, two mirth,
Three a wedding, four a birth.
Five heaven, six hell,
Seven the de'il's ain sell.



THE HERMIT.

The Hermit indicates two things: that you are seeking enlightenment, but also that you are to be alone, whether you want to be or not.

I come to myself, and I find the Glass Armonium packed in its box. A medical kit, involving syringes, is laid out neatly on the side table in front of me, as if to tell me something. I look up; I am not alone. I am standing there in front of me. And I am smiling at myself.

The other me crouches low, so as I get myself sitting up on the side of the bed, she is looking up at my face, and she holds both my hands. Then she is gone, a

wisp of nothing, an image as in a mirror, laughing, and in my hand I am holding a piece of paper, a confirmation of a booking for a flight to America, with Ryan's name on it. The date's tomorrow night.

But my calendar says that it isn't the night I thought it was. It's the night *after tomorrow*. I missed a night.

Where did it go?

What did I do?

What did I do?

Step on a crack, break your mother's back.

Your Message

From: Niall

To: marbleindexfrances@gmail.com

Date: August 25th, 2008, 02:07am

Subject: Your Message

Frances,

Received the package. Many thanks.

Regret that packaging won't be coming back; unfortunate lack of sustenance earlier in week led to loss of self-control and breakage.

Hope that container was not of value to you.

Apologies.

Niall.

Princess Diana dolls have curses attached to them.

Open are the double doors of the horizon. Its bolts are thrown back.


Clouds darken the sky.

The stars rain down. Constellations stagger. The bones of the hell-hounds tremble. The porters are silent when they see this king, dawning as a soul.

Open are the double doors of the horizon. Its bolts are thrown back.

Men fall down. They have no name. Grasp this king by his arm. Take this king to the sky. Let him not die on earth among men.

Funeral text for Amenhotep III



DOE: Burgess apparently liberated this from a Sethite, now ex-Sethite. Unsure as to its value, accuracy, or even as to its age.

AKHENATEN

THIS IS THE TALE OF THE CULT OF THE PHOENIX AND THE CULT OF SETH AND THEIR END AND THEIR BEGINNINGS.

AMENHOTEP, RULER OF THEBES, THE STRONG BULL, APPEARING IN TRUTH, ONE ESTABLISHING LAWS, PACIFYING THE TWO LANDS, GREAT OF VALOR, SMITER OF THE ASIATICS, PASSED ON TO THE FIELD OF GREEN, AND WHEN THE MOORNING OF EGYPT WAS COMPLETE, ALL RECOGNIZED HIS ELDEST SON AMENHOTEP AS PHARAOH.

BUT AMENHOTEP SON OF AMENHOTEP DID NOT HONOR HIS FATHER'S NAME. HE DID NOT HONOR THE GODS OF THE TWIN KINGDOMS, NOR DID HE HONOR THE PALACE OF HIS FATHER, NOR EVEN DID HE HONOR THE HOLY CITY OF THEBES.

AS TIME WENT ON, HE ONLY SOUGHT THE WORSHIP OF THE SUN-DISC ATEN, AND BUILT A CITY TO HIS GOD, AND HE TOOK THE NAME AKHENATEN, STRONG BULL, BELOVED OF ATEN, GREAT KING OF AKHENATEN, WHO BEARS THE NAME OF THE ATEN.

HE PRESENTED THE SLAYING OF AMUN-RE IN THE SIGHT OF ALL. HE PROSCRIBED THE WRITING AND THE VERY SPEAKING OF THE NAMES OF THE GODS.

NOW IN EGYPT TWIN COLTS HAD PROTECTED THE PEOPLE FROM WITCHES AND THE DEAD SINCE THE TIME OF NARMER AND THE GREAT SCORPION. THE CULT OF THE PHOENIX, RISING EACH MORNING LIKE THE DAWNING OF RA, PROTECTED THE PEOPLE DURING THE DAY. THE CULT OF SET, CALLED TYPHON, SLAYER OF THE EVENING SUN AND BRINGER OF DARK, PROTECTED THE PEOPLE IN THE NIGHT. THE CULT OF PHOENIX BROUGHT ORDER WHERE ORDER WAS DUE, AND THE CULT OF SET BROUGHT CHAOS WHERE CHAOS WAS DUE, AND THE MEN OF BOTH WERE UNAFRAID TO SHED BLOOD AND MAINTAIN HARMONY.

BUT THEY BORE THE NAMES OF THE GODS, AND SO AKHENATEN OUTLAWED THEM.

BUT AKHENATEN DID NOT FEAR THEM FOR THEIR NAME ALONE. FOR AKHENATEN HAD ANOTHER PURPOSE IN THEIR DESTRUCTION: HE WAS A WITCH. HE CONSORTED WITH DEMONS AND SPIRITS; HE GAVE THE DAUGHTER OF THE HIGH PRIEST AY TO A CRAWLING THING FROM OUTSIDE DAY OR NIGHT THAT IT MIGHT EAT HER HEART AND HOLLOW OUT HER SOUL AND EXCRETE HER SPIRIT INTO THE TWILIGHT REALMS. AND AKHENATEN TOOK THE

Human historians often consider Akhenaten to be sincere. If not benevolent.

Akhenaten is sometimes identified with patriarch Moses.

EMPTY THING THAT REMAINED, WITH A CRAWLING HORROR INSIDE IT, FOR HIS WIFE, PROCLAIMING HER THE-BEAUTIFUL-ONE-HAS-ARRIVED.

ALTHOUGH NO LETTER, NO SIGNS, NO INSCRIPTIONS, AND NO HYMNS RECORD IT, AKHENATEN MADE THE STREETS OF AKHENATEN RUN WITH THE BLOOD OF HIS SACRIFICES TO THE ATEN. HE CONSTRUCTED GREAT OBELISKS MOLDED FROM THE STILL-LIVING, STILL CONSCIOUS FLESH OF THE PRIESTS. HE TORE OUT THE SOULS OF HIS OWN MEN AND BADE THEM SERVE HIM, EVEN AFTER THEY DIED.

AND AKHENATEN FREELY SPOKE THE OTHER NAME OF THE GREAT FACELESS DISC OF ATEN, THE NAME THAT MUST NOT BE WRITTEN. AND THE PEOPLE OF AKHENATEN DIED, ALL AS ONE, ON ONE DAY, AND YET CARRIED ON LIVING AND WORKING, AND THE CHILDREN OF THE NAME THAT MUST NOT BE WRITTEN DWELT WITHIN THEM. AND WHEN THE BODIES ROTTED AWAY, HE COMMANDED OTHERS TO COME AND LIVE IN AKHENATEN, AND THEY CAME, FOR WHAT ELSE COULD THEY DO? HE WAS PHARAOH.

SO IT WAS THAT THE HOLLOW SOLDIERS OF AKHENATEN LAID THEIR HANDS FIRST UPON THE MEN OF THE CULT OF THE PHOENIX. NOW IT WAS THE WAY OF THE CULT OF THE PHOENIX TO WALK IN THE SUN AND MAKE NO ATTEMPT TO HIDE. BUT THEY WERE OUTNUMBERED BY THE EMPTY MEN, AND THEIR OWN MAGICS COULD NOT DRIVE THEM BACK. MOST DIED IN BATTLE; SOME THE HOLLOW SOLDIERS DRAGGED BACK TO THE PALACE OF AKHENATEN TO SERVE AS A SACRIFICE; THREE, THE GREATEST AND MOST GLORIOUS LEADERS OF THE PHOENIX, WERE HOLLOWED OUT THEMSELVES AND SERVED IN HIS PALACE AS CATAMITES FOR HIS FAMILY. AND NONE OF THE CULT OF THE PHOENIX SURVIVED.

AND THE PHARAOH TURNED THEN TO THE MEN OF THE CULT OF SET. BUT THE MEN OF THE CULT OF SET WERE CUNNING, FOR THEY KNEW THAT THEY COULD NOT DEFEAT THE HOLLOW SOLDIERS OF THE MAD PHARAOH.

THEIR FORTIFIED SCHOOL WAS LAID SIEGE, AND AS THE SIEGE LAY OUTSIDE, THE MEN OF THE CULT OF SET WORKED TWO MAGICS: THAT NO DEMON COULD INHABIT THEIR BODIES OR CONSUME THEIR KA OR BA; AND THAT WHEN THEY DIED, THEIR BURIALS COULD NOT EVER BE AUSPICIOUS. THEIR TOMBS WOULD LIE DES-ECRATED. THEIR NINE-PART SOULS WOULD BE SUNDERED. THEY COULD NEVER REST.

THEY WOULD BE TRAPPED FOREVER ON THE POINT OF THE FULCRUM, THE BALANCE, THE MEKHET BETWEEN LIVING AND DEAD, THE FIELD OF GREEN AND THE JAWS OF AMEMET.

THEY DID NOT KNOW THE CONSEQUENCES OF BECOMING HUNGRY GHOSTS. THEY DID NOT KNOW THE DISEASE THEY WOULD SPREAD THROUGH HAVING NO KA.

THE SIEGE CAME TO ITS HEAD. THE FOLLOWERS OF TYPHON SET DIED, AND THE SOLDIERS OF AKHENATEN LEFT THEM TO ROT. AND THREE NIGHTS LATER, THEY AROSE AND WALKED IN THE NIGHT. AND THEIR KAS WALKED ABART FROM THEM, AND FED ON GARRION.

THE MEKHET TRAVELED THROUGH EGYPT, AND REBUILT THE CRADLE OF TYPHON ONCE MORE. THEY CREATED A GRAND CONSPIRACY TO UNSEAT AKHENATEN FROM HIS THRONE. THE PEOPLE JOINED THEM, AND THEY HID THE PRIESTS OF AMUN-RE AND THE OTHERS FROM THE PRIESTS OF AKHENATEN AND THE WITCH-KING'S DEMONS.

AND IT HAPPENED THAT AKHENATEN GREW OLD AND DIED, AND FOR A TIME THE DEMON THAT HE HAD TAKEN TO WIFE RULED THE LAND INSTEAD OF HIM. BUT WITHOUT THE WITCH-KING, THE DEMON WAS WEAK, AND THE LIVING WHO SERVED THE DEAD MEKHET ROSE UP AND DESTROYED HER. THEY PLACED THE SON OF AKHENATEN ON THE THRONE, AND WHEN THE BOY WAS OLD ENOUGH TO QUESTION THE DOINGS OF THE BAST, THEY KILLED HIM AND REPLACED HIM WITH THE HIGH PRIEST OF AMUN-RE...

Unclear from text whether Sethites created first Mekhet through the ritual or simply became Mekhet (i.e. part of an already existing phenomenon).



I DREAMED OF ELISABETA. I DREAMED THAT SHE PULLED BACK HER HOOD, AND THAT SHE HAD NO EYES, ONLY PUTRID SOCKETS, CRAWLING WITH MAGGOTS, AND I KNEW, AS YOU KNOW IN DREAMS, THAT THE MAGGOTS HAD BEEN THERE AS LONG AS SHE HAD EXISTED, FEASTING FOREVER ON HER CONSTANTLY-RENEWING FLESH.

DOE: From a Byzantine text containing edited and altered versions of several much older books, editor unknown, presumably Kindred and Sanctified. Original writer refers to events on day following the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (October 28th AD 312).

Testimony of the Plague Angel

From the Epitome of the Testimony of Thascius Egnatianus Hostilinus, called Pestilens, Called Numida.

On the night that the Cabarum marched into Rome and the Heathen Usurper died, I saw that God's Plan was indeed good and effective, and that the LORD saw that the proud were cast down and the sinful punished. Hence, I saw to it that I should take to myself childer, that I might be remembered should the time come when God wills that I sleep or be destroyed.

First, I took Georgius, a Christian deacon who had died of the plague. I had watched him, and I had seen how his faith had faltered in the last days of his life, and I had tormented him further, by casting afflictions upon him like unto the afflictions of Job. On the day before he died, I came to him and told him my role in the LORD's great purpose, and how I had tested him, and how he had been found wanting; he wept and repented. I told him that he would remain after death now, his purpose to test others as he himself had been tested. He coughed blood and died then, and made no other sound.

I let them take him to the plague-pit and throw him in, and one night following I came to the pit and found his body beneath the corpses of a pagan augur, a whore-master and a murderer, and I gave his remains some of the blood, for the blood is the life 'Deuteronomy 12:23'.

And he came to be mine, and in time he became an angel of the plague, as I, and I set him to testing the faithful with sore wounds.

Then came a sister cenobite, Elisabeta by name, who had compassion on the afflicted and mortified her own flesh. She had recovered from the plague and it vered her no more, though it had worked its way within her flesh. I conversed with her for three nights, and saw that she had been sinful in her heart, and that she had lusted with her eyes and hands. Mindful of that, I thrust my fingers into her eyes and gouged them out, for if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out (Matthew 18:9). And she died with my hands reaching into her brains. I left her to rot where she lay alone, for three nights, and each night I visited. When the worms came to eat the juices of her eyes, then I came and made her anew, and although the worms remained where her eyes had been, her eyes yet behold afar off; her young ones also suck up blood (Job 29:30). She bore the mark of the plague from the beginning, her blood was strong and rich, and she was eager to do the work of the LORD. I set her

to preach heresy, that the worthless may be taken in and become our provender; for the true faithful may not be confounded.

Third came Gagliauda, a whore. She, too, was diseased, with the common ailment of whores, that brings por and madness, and the por and the madness had not touched her, and I saw that the LORD had used her as a vessel of judgment. I bought her services, which I was not to use. Instead I instructed her, and she agreed without fear or restraint, for she hated the Sons of Rome who had enslaved her into whoredom and saw it only right that she should take vengeance on them. I made her like unto me, in one night, without suffering or pain, that she should ply her trade as an angel of the plague and draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore (Isaiah 57:3).

Gagliauda is my childe: she has been made perfect as an accusation upon mankind in her licentiousness. Georgius is my childe: he preaches destruction upon the impure, and visits it upon those who will not repent. Elisabeta is my childe: she is a snare for the faithless and leads the weak and sickly kine to their end, as an or goeth to the slaughter 'Proverbs 7:22'. She mortifies her flesh, and surrounds herself with fire to remind her of her weakness, and with the bodies of the kine to remind her of her hunger.

Each is an exemplar for the faithful.

Writer almost certainly member of Morbus bloodline.

The good Robyn Hitchcock albums are the ones with the dark green covers.

Laying shoes on a bed heralds death.



DOE: As promised. This apparently liberated from Elizabethan London. Likely sensitive: Burgess unwilling to tell me where he got it. Confused. Doesn't tell anything we don't know. Primary value seems to be in document's attribution to member of alleged Moirai.

On the Contrivance of Conspiracies

The Worms of the Earth hold unto themselves Loathly Fear; and through adopting a Visage of the Liveliest Awfulness, they drive back the furious and the Brave. The Sons and Daughters of the Succubus throw open Arms of False Warmth; Man and Woman alike are compell'd to love them. The Lords are cold Command; they speak, and the herd obeys. Even Gangrel furs have Power over the Beasts of the Field, and the Wood, and the Dark.

But we of the Shadow and Hourglass and Mirror, we have no such Talents. We have the Way of Knowing and Seeing, and the Blood can make Slaves of Men, but we cannot force Will, or Volition. Every Secret over Hell is ours, but for what Purpose if we cannot be Masters?

And yet, Masters we must be. It is the Way of the Dead to desire Dominion over the Living, for theirs is a World Denied to us. Thus, as long as we of the Shadow and Hourglass and Mirror have been, we have used such Talents as we have to find Dominion through more subtle Means. The Living, when forced to clandestine Ends, form Conspiracies and Compacts, the better to have Power unseen by the Eyes of the Mob. We follow suit, and in Truth we wield such Means best, for we are Creatures of the greatest Subtlety. By Night, we walk unseen, and yet see All. We are unheard, and yet hear All.

The Great Conspirators of the Virgin Queen's court had Eyes and Ears in every Place. Dee and Walsingham knew many, blackmailed many more, and used criminals and sorcerers as their hands and eyes. We too beguile the y who would serve us, not through controlling Thought or Humour, but with the Promise of Wealth and Power, and with the sorcerous Knowledge of the Sedgem-It, the Auspex of our Kind.

We bind the souls of Men with chains of Religion. We make promises of Heaven and Hell. We dangle the Keys of Future and Past and Present before the Eyes of the Malleable and the Addled. We predict Power in the Secular Realm to the Noble. We predict Bishoprics for the Clergy. We cast our Auguries.

Our Rule is better achieved, worth more and longer lasting, for we gain it through the Quiet Work. The Future is ours.

Robin Deere,

Seer of the Moirai

Age hot is like a monster to be seen; my hairs
are white, but yet my sins are green.

The Duke, *The Revenger's Tragedy*

Good things come in threes.
Bad things come in threes.

How did this find its way to Burgess?

Three most active periods for promulgation of so-called Shadow Cults: Elizabethan era, Regency period, present day/post-WWII.

On The Necessity of Atheism

The King is mad; a poet begins the decade of the Regency with the publication of a treatise proclaiming the *Necessity of Atheism*. The old order changes. The collective mind of human society shudders.

We are standing here in the shadows of a great age; we have the opportunity to transform this city in which we live, and through it the world, for it stands at the center of the future. Its geometry is suited to be suborned to our purposes, and the minds of its people are ripe to be ours. But *we must be strong, and we must accept that there is no God.*

We may well use the mind-forged manacles of faith to ensorcel the common herd, but we must mind that we are the only Gods this nation allows. That there may be such things as angels and devils does not prove that there is a God. That there are restless ghosts of the dead with and without bodies does not provide evidence of an afterlife. We are weak if enslaved by the same superstitions as the living.

As the poet tells us, it is only by hearsay and by word of mouth passed down from generation to generation, that whole peoples adore the God of their fathers and of their priests. If we are to be priests and are to control the minds of men, we are to take on the role of the transmitters of theism. We do not need conviction or proofs. We need only to speak with authority and confidence; submission and custom will bend the wills of the herd to ours. They will prostrate themselves and pray, because we shall teach them to do so, as their fathers did. But we must not fall into the trap of their forefathers, and pay heed to the words of the legislators and guides who commanded us while living.

"Adore and believe," we shall say, "the gods whom you cannot understand; have confidence in our profound wisdom; we know more than you about Divinity."

And why not? In time, other gods may take the place of the old gods: the City of London is already a god to some, and when we have molded generations of men, they too will worship London and be its servants, and see no world outside.

We will show them that they should come to the God we create. We will tell them that God willed it thus, and it is because God will punish them if they dare resist.

It matters not if this God is really the thing in question, for man has always traveled in this vicious circle. The slothful mind of the living man will always find it easier to accept the judgment of others, and hence, despite our lack of powers to bend wills and command emotions, we wield a stronger power: the ignorance of mankind. We shall found a religion on authority, like all others. We shall forbid examination and shall not permit the herd to reason. It serves us, in our authority, that the herd believe in God; and not their God,



A God made by man undoubtedly has need of man to make himself known to man.

Shelley, *The Necessity of Atheism*

This could apply to any city in the world.

our God, himself founded only on our authority, we who shall pretend to know him and yet who shall not be snared by the temptation of belief. We in our enlightenment shall be tyrants of the ignorant, and so we *must not believe in a God*. A God made by man has need of man to make himself known to man; a God made by the Kindred has need of the Kindred to make himself known to man, but not to the Kindred, for the Kindred shall not believe.

The educated man ceases to be superstitious. It behooves us doubly so, then, to do all we can to hide the fact of there being no God from the herd, and to cultivate those with the intellect to realize this truth despite us that we may use them as favored tools. We suborn these elevated few in different ways. We lie to them with truths we choose to disclose; we privilege them with secrets that are no secret at all. We seduce them with power and blood. We create a chamber

in which we may, so to speak, mold the greater minds, just as we hide the truth from the common mass.

Man shall be too happy if he limits himself to the visible objects which interest him, or if he employs to perfect his real sciences, his laws, his morals, and his education. It serves us not that man is happy.

Religious guides quarrel among themselves. We shall not, for we have not the snare of faith. We shall not fall into senseless disputes. It is the essence of ignorance to attach importance to that which it does not understand, and we shall hence ensure that they do not understand us. We shall hide our God from them: the more an object conceals itself from their eyes, the greater the effort they shall make to seize it, because it pricks their pride, it excites their curiosity... and it appears interesting. We shall promote their differences. In fighting for his God every living man wars only for the interests of his own vanity, and this too serves us. For of all the passions produced by the mal-organization of society, religious zeal is the quickest to take offense, and the most capable of committing the greatest follies.

London is the greatest of all cities. Doctor Johnson wrote that when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life. He was weak; a slave to religion, to both the religion of the Anglicans and the religion of London. He is the kind of man we seek to control; admired, influential, and above all straightforward, the kind of man who could not ever have fallen under our sway. But he was among the first who fell prey to the magic of London.

The geography of the city carries within it a powerful magic, a magic without magic that charms the living and charms the dead alike. Alone among the Kindred, we see the significance of the streets and smoke of the urban expanse. We see its power. And with time and secretive influence over the powerful among the living, we shall make the changes that transform the magic of the city into a magic we can control. We can mold the city. We can mold the future.

It's bad luck to walk under a ladder.



Never walk widdershins around a graveyard.

Hell is a city much like London –
A populous and a smoky city;
There are all sorts of people undone,
And there is little or no fun done;
Small justice shown, and still less pity.

There is a Castles, and a Canning,
A Cobbett, and a Castlereagh;
All sorts of caitiff corpses planning
All sorts of cozening for trepanning
Corpses less corrupt than they.
Shelley, "Peter Bell the Third"

Another letter. Even if I do move, I'm probably going to keep it as a drop site for this Ghislain.

My Friend—

There's a certain fear inherent in communication for Mekhet like myself. To speak, one must draw attention to themselves, and our existence is so heavily predicated on remaining absent. Another aspect is the unfortunate tendency of any collector to amass without using. Stamps are meant to be used for mail, yet a stamp collector would cringe at the thought of posting his beloved rectangles of paper and glue. It is so with collectors of knowledge, as well. Though it is not completely true, it is so that many of us believe the value of a bit of knowledge is inversely proportional to the number of people that possess that knowledge.

Consciously or not, a Mekhet might intentionally occlude a message to the point where it cannot be deciphered. You of all people should understand that secrets are currency, especially to beings that no longer require the trappings of traditional finance to survive. You traffic in knowledge, and use it to enforce your Prince's laws, and you are likely the least forthcoming person I've ever watched.

I'm sorry. I was discussing the memory, not the trivia of day-to-day life in the past. I'm sure there are any number of sources you can use to research that. I'm merely attempting to paint a picture of the world I lived in, and the environment that created me.

In those days, I was somewhat respected, but not really known, by the Kindred, and virtually unknown to the kine, save as a cauchemar, a nightmare given form. I had been dead for long enough to be forgotten. Though to be sure, it didn't take long for a plantation owner's half-black bastard to be swept under the carpet. My Sire made sure of it. I cannot tell you her name at this late date. I think she was female, but I cannot swear to it. The one thing that I will never forget was the desolation that she caused in my breathing life. I was a young man of few prospects, but burning curiosity.

When chasing the vampire who became my Sire, everything disappeared. I didn't matter. Friends didn't matter. I started out to avenge a friend. Can't say that remained my primary objective. Sooner or later, world fell away. Hunt was all that mattered. My parents died. I found out six months later. Sire told me I was dedicated. Noble for defending my friend. I was just stubborn.

My mother was a mambo, a voodoo priestess, and she instilled a respect for the loa in me at an early age. Even then I was shy, but I participated in the rituals held by the slaves in the middle of the night. Technically, voodoo was forbidden, but the foremen turned a blind eye. My father knew that it was better to allow his slaves to find solace where they might, if only to forestall conflict. So I danced around the bonfire with the others, giving my body up to the ecstasy of being cheval to the loa. In the beginning, I absorbed every nuance of my mother's conjurations simply to please her. But eventually I came to long for the way it felt to give myself up to them, to be subsumed so completely that there was nothing of me left.

At the same time, I had taught myself to read by watching the nanny my father had employed to teach his two legitimate children. My presence in the house was, if not tolerated, largely ignored, so I read every book I could lay my hands on. By the time I was fifteen, I could read in French and English, but the grammar of German still eluded me. The War Be-

tween the States had begun, and the proverbial writing was on the wall. I cannot remember the details, but my father gave me a pittance and sent me out into the world. It was barely enough to secure my food and lodgings for a week. I was a sickly child, and frail, so I could not work in the fields, nor could I easily get a job to which I was more suited, because of my color.

Eventually I found work in a tailor's, as an assistant. I was very nearly happy there. The customers ignored me, and my employer left me to my own devices as long as everything was finished. One night, a customer arrived after dark, by appointment, and I was made to stay late. For the first time, someone engaged me in conversation. She asked my opinions on a great many things, and seemed quite interested in the things I had to say. It was a terrifying and exhilarating feeling. She returned a number of times, and each time, we would have wonderful conversations. This customer was the first person I had ever looked forward to seeing.

Then she complained to my employer that I was too familiar, and had me fired.

Without his reference, I could find no other employment, and I quickly became a pauper. I was already friendless, and my mother had passed through the veil just after I left the plantation.

Shadows are ephemeral things, Mr. Walker. Paradoxically, they are intangible, connected to nothing physical, but they can only be cast by the imposition of something physical set against the light. We too, like our appellation, must be formed by daylight society before our sires can separate us from it. I know that the traditional burning of bridges has a pragmatic motive, in that it is easier to survive the changes and hide the secret when you are not being scrutinized by friends who know you on both sides of the cross-roads. But philosophically, are we more or less likely to adapt to our new existence when the only person we can depend on, cling to, aside from ourselves is our Sire? If they stay around. Lot of Mekhet are alone from the get-go.

At any rate, It did not take a herculean effort to cut me loose from the herd. I wandered the streets of New Orleans until my Sire—as you've guessed, the customer—came for me. When I realized what she was, I simply gave in. I assumed she would destroy me.

Obviously, she did not. As I lay dying, the blazing, molten fire of her vitae scalded my throat and flooded my veins. I do not remember my fledgling days. They dim in comparison to that glorious, nearly apothecic moment. Together, we spied on the Canaille, and made sport with the things that we learned from them. She taught me other things, as well. Dark and taboo things. And I taught her everything that I had learned of voodoo. She was particularly interested in the *petra-loa*, the destructive spirits called upon by the *Bokor*. Of course I bared everything to her. She noticed me, she brought me into this existence, and, for all that happened after, I cannot regret the time I was given to explore this great adventure.

Eventually, she pulled away from me. She told me to leave, that she could not longer stomach my weakness. She told me that she despised me for my reliance on the loa, and my companionship with the spirits. So I left.

When Vidal's men came for her, I was not there. She stood accused of a plot to destroy the Prince. He did not believe that she had acted alone. He wanted her to turn on the true conductor of the orchestra,

whom he believed to be Baron Cimitiere. He did not know that it was I that had taught her the voodoo rituals she had enacted. At any rate, she did not betray Cimitiere, if indeed he was behind the plot, or me, if he was not. Vidal had her taken to the bayou and lashed to the cypress trees. He left her for the sun, and the alligators. I could only watch as the creatures tore into her pale flesh. She screamed, and more grotesquely, laughed. I stayed as long as I could, hoping that the Prince's ghouls would let down their guard so that I might rescue her.

They did not. The only coherent thing I heard from her while she was being devoured by the reptilian monsters was the name "Set," over and over. I had to retreat before sunrise, to find safe haven before I joined her in destruction. After she was gone, I went through the motions of participating in vampire society, but there was nothing left that sparked my interest like she had. I cannot say that I loved her. But I missed her keenly. Eventually, the apathy congealed into a profound lethargy, and I arranged for my own crypt. I no longer wanted to even watch, but I was still too afraid of death to end it permanently. I packed the crypt with my journals, and succumbed to the long sleep.

Before I went to sleep, I saw the myriad ways that the loa touched everything. They whispered to me through the ruffling feathers of flying birds. They gurgled to me from the waters of the Mississippi. My Sire taught me to see the spirits of the dead, to hear their faded voices. The lost ones spoke to me, intangible and searching for the crossroads, for the Baron to take them home. In every way that mattered, all of my friends, and most of my acquaintances, were dead. Often, in the thin hours, after the kine had retired and most of the vampires had at least moved indoors, I would walk the balmy streets of New Orleans with the spirits, listening to their tragedies as we strolled.

My sire warned me not to get too attached to the dead, because of their transient nature. Sooner or later, spirits either reconcile and move on, or resign themselves and dissipate. It is only the most angry or righteous that remain to haunt a place for any length of time. Truly, though, I think she was more interested in keeping me attentive to her. Of course, the absolute truth of the matter was that I wanted them to move on, after they had given me what knowledge they had. It didn't matter if it was the location of a secret safe or the name of their husband's mistress. If they could teach me something, I was a willing pupil. After which, I would help them find what solace I could, so that I was the only one with that knowledge.

Used to say "knowledge is power." Truth is, **information** is power. Have hacker stringers keep an eye on local news and blog posts for signs of vampire activity. They send me other bits. Things that don't make sense. News of the Weird type stuff. Never know when it might come in handy.

School Ruins – Post-K

To: NWalker23@gmail.com

From: scar@nocturnis.net

Subject: School Ruins – Post-K

N,

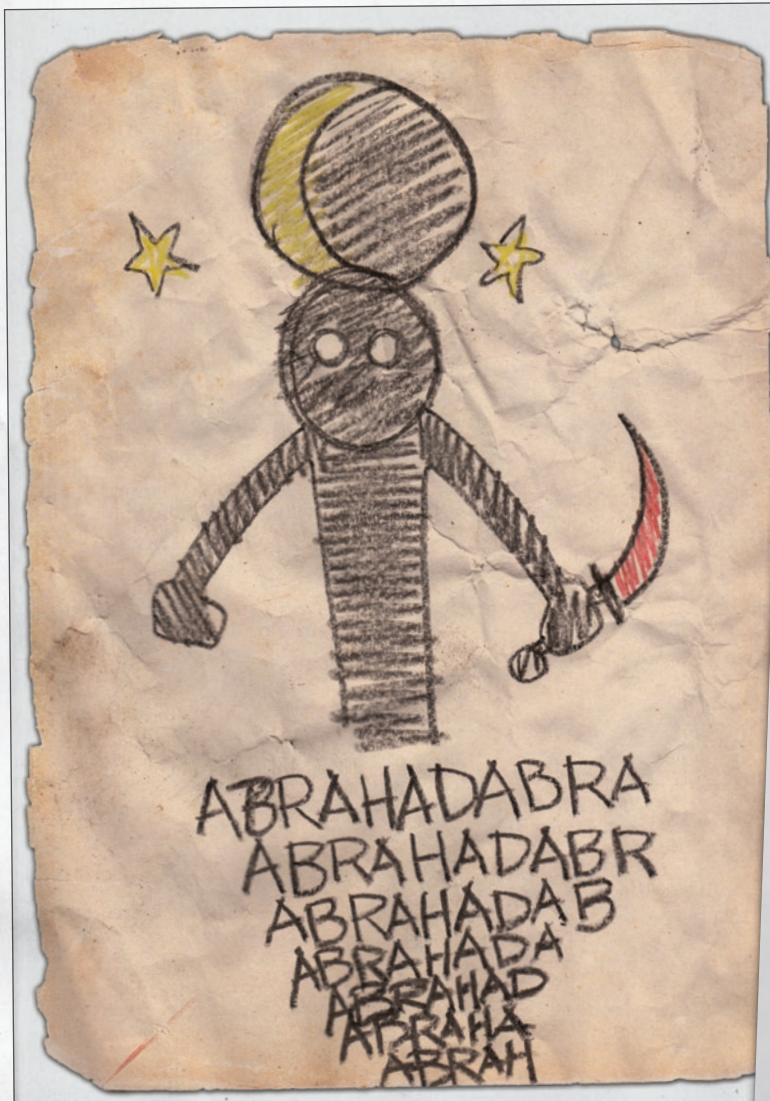
I was doing some urbexp when I ran across something you might be interested in. A friend and I went into the ruins of a schoolhouse in the Ninth Ward. We were mostly just looking for someplace private so I could put the moves on her, right? So we get into one of the classrooms, and all the desks are piled in the corner. Maybe by the flood? We didn't pay attention to them, started fucking around, playing teacher and student, right, and she creeps out. The Drawings on the bulletin board are all waterlogged and shit, but crayons don't wash out like that. Almost all of the drawings are of some kind of shadow outline person with white holes where their eyes would be and blood pooling at their feet. The guy was always surrounded by the same kind imagery.

The kids had to be like, 8, man.

I kept a few, scanned one in and attached it to this e-mail. Any idea what the symbols mean?

Scar

Attachment:



Went to the school he mentioned. The chairs were stacked up against a closet door. Like they were trying to keep something in. Nothing in there, though. Chairs not random, must have been stacked after the flood. No sign of a struggle other than that. Water stain halfway up the wall. Most of the room was underwater during the worst of it. Doubt anyone was in here during the storm or after levies broke, until water lowered. Would have drowned like so many others. Figure the drawings and the chairs aren't directly related. Clarification: whatever kids were afraid of might have been in the closet. Someone might have tried to lock it in there. But the drawings were there before the storm, not after.

"Abrahadabra" variant spelling of old magician's "abracadabra" patter. Used by Thelemic followers. Originated by Aleister Crowley. Supposedly power word of our age. Abracadabra seems to come from Aramaic, "I create as I speak." Kids channeling some weird shit? Or being preyed on by some shadow creature?

and rightfully so, I genuinely believe. But then, who is to say?

Our power comes from within. The blood is merely fuel, not the re itself. Unlike the Catholics, we drink blood and it transubstantiates, distills into vitae. But there is power without as well. Incantations, evocations and ritual, sigils and signi ers. Everything has power in it, Frances, and you can even learn to harness some of that power. Language has had power as long as we have had the ability to speak it. In ancient Sumer, the priest-kings, called en governed over the me, a collection of procedural spells. Holy magic. These me covered everything from planting crops to baking bread. The church governed the basic structures of society. When you needed to do something, you had to approach the en, and he would give you the most appropriate me for your situation. Enlil, who (perhaps coincidentally, perhaps not) seems to be the Mesopotamian analog of Seth, gave the me to Enki, the creator of man, to guard, and Enki hid them away in the underworld. The goddess Inanna who, in some versions of the myth, descended into the underworld to seduce them away from him, retrieved the me, and she returned them to man, giving us the keys to civilization.

Me were recipes, sets of instructions, to do mundane things. They were subject to the awe and wonder of magic and to the populace at the time, they were. But what is magic, except for a set of instructions to focus power and the will to create a result? It is important that you see the distinction, Frances... or rather, that you realize that the distinction is largely arti cial. Everything can be magic, and at one time, everything was. Simply because something has been rationalized and explained or debunked does not mean there is no power in it. Mankind tries to shine their light in every corner, to prove to themselves that the monster in the closet is nothing more than a coat.

But we are still here, are we not?

Nitokris has a point, you know. The Mesopotamians may have gone a bit far with the whole "bread-baking" spell bit, but language is the root of magic. Not insofar as language itself has any real power, but it is a grand focus for meaning, and the truth is, that's all any of it is. You get your athamé, your Tarot cards, your Eucharist, any of it, and every bit of it is a way to focus your will. A way to get at the meaning of the thing, to express exactly what it is that you want the cosmos to deliver. The power of the pyramids is the power of the person. Horoscopes are a wonderful form of interactive, sympathetic magic. You read them and then spend your day looking for things that fulfill them. It makes you proactive. Makes you create your own magic. It all comes from within, yeah?

[pause]

And that's the rub, isn't it? Where she's wrong is exactly there. The me, or whatever, don't really have any power in and of themselves, and neither do any of those things. So no, none of that really counts as "power from without." It's in us, and it's in mortals. All of these things are crutches, like Niall says, but they are necessary, because whatever else we are, we're still essentially human and humans are all scatterbrained. We lack the ability to really hone in on what we want, love, and that's what these things are for.

When I said that we can't control our amazing oracular abilities, that wasn't exactly true. As long as you have the emotional fortitude to stare into the darkness, even when it's crawling, without flinching, you can find ways to call it forth. But most don't have that ability. So we make do with our little divinatory toys.

But even then, it takes a measure of confidence. Even the power we know is within us takes a bit of effort to coax out. If you can't bring yourself to try, why should it bother?

[pause]

It's not like a car, and Nitokris' analogy doesn't really fit entirely. Vitae's not petrol, it's more like oil. Greases the gears, gets things moving, you know? You have to have the will to push. You've got to care about what you're doing, or it isn't worth doing. I hate to sound like a motivational speaker, but hope is essential.

[pause]

Oh, woe is me. Whatever. Kindred are not hopeless. We can easily fall to despair and sorrow. The weight of years and all that, of course the older vampires get knackered and jump in the sack for a few centuries. Eventually, you'll have seen it all before, just like you had when you were twenty. And when that happens, you'll sleep for a bit. Hopefully—oh, there's that word again—when you wake up, you'll be ready for another go.

But sometimes it doesn't quite work out. You'll see them sometimes, and there's nothing sadder than seeing dead eyes staring out of a dead man's face. Particularly when they're still moving.

Unfortunate accident with the ghou. But the memories I drank. Strange. I remember being a dead woman experiencing another woman's memories. Difficult to explain.

I am alive. I can feel myself breathing, feel my heart beating. I am warm. The sun is shining, and I am winnowing grain; a dog lazes on a haywain. Blossoms fly off a tree in the breeze, and catch the afternoon sunlight. I wish I knew the names for the flowers and the trees. I'm all jumbled up; I don't know if the things I think are my thoughts or *hers*.

I am sweating, and I am tired, but I'm content. I'm happy. Sincere emotion is so unfamiliar to me that I have to think hard about what it is. I have to examine myself. But I'm not one to examine myself. I feel and I do, and that's all. My name is Anne.

Here is my brother; he has come to bring me some cider and a hunk of bread. I love him. I sit and he tells me about his sweetheart, and I feel so proud of the boy. His name is Charles.

It's night. I am standing alone now. I don't know how I got here, or I can't remember. I am out of breath, and that's something I can think about, while I bend down and lean on my thighs, while I try to think of what to do. The winnowing fork thing — I don't know what it's called, actually. Besides, I think I'm using French, except it's English now. Obviously, I was speaking English with my brother and it was not really English, it was actually French.

And now I am not her. I am standing beside Anne. She looks at me. She is taller than I am and blond, and brown-eyed, with the kind of healthy sunny skin that goes slightly freckly when it's the Spring and she says to me, "We have to run. We have to get home." A noise comes from the valley below, incongruous in the peaceful moonlight. It's a scream.

I'm her again.

I'm in the house. My father sits, slumped on a chair, a look of surprise on his face, his entrails spread across the floor. He is not moving. My mother

is bent over the far side of the table; her arms are spread, her face lies, one cheek against the wood, her eyes wide, staring blankly out of the window. I run forward to her, slip on the blood slicked across the floor. The scream chokes itself in my mouth. My mother's legs are gone, nowhere to be seen.

I hear a small, sad sound, an *aa*, behind me. I turn. My sister, Claudette. I didn't mean — she shouldn't be here — I try to push her out, get her far away from here.

But Charles is here. I sigh with relief, almost run for him, but something is. He blocks our way. And he's smiling at me, he's smiling this cold, smug smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes. Claudette begins to shriek, to tell him between strangled sobs that Maman and Papa are dead, that something awful has happened. Something dawns on me, as Charles stands there, as four shapes loom in the trees at the edge of Papa's courtyard.

"He knows, Claudette," I say. I tell her to run. She protests. I scream at her, beg her. She goes. I turn to my Charles.

This is not my Charles. Charles is dead.

"What are you?"

Charles's face blurs. I cannot see his companions. I cannot remember, must not remember what is here, what is wearing Charles's face. He lunges for me. I reach out, grab Papa's pitchfork, which is still standing, thrust in the ground, and thump his side with it. One of the things I cannot remember comes for me, snarling and spitting. I have the pitchfork ready and thrust it into a gaping mouth, see a tine emerge from the top of a skull. The thing I cannot remember thrashes around, the thing that is not Charles falls across the courtyard, and I am running.

Things blur.

I am not aware of how I end up here, but I am running now, running uphill through mud and brambles; I hear the sound of a roar, I dive under leaves and branches. A thorn scrapes across my cheek. I feel a drop of blood run down my face.

In the bright moonlight, I can see across the valley from here. There's

Claudette, a half a mile away or more. I can see her running directly for the stream. I nearly get up, try to draw her attention. But then I drop; there is not-Charles and behind him three of the things, a hundred yards behind her, and he is running faster than a man can run, loping on hands and feet like some beast. He gains on her without effort, catches her at the stream. I see him make one motion. He leaps on her, grabs her from behind by the chin, and tears her head clean off, a stream of gore almost a fountain from her body which stays upright for just a moment before crumpling. I sob, once, for her, and look up. They have heard me. They're coming. Up the hill, straight for me.

I slide backwards under the bushes and thorns, tearing my dress to shreds. I do not know where to go. I do not know what to do. I only know that I must live, and when I get out and stand up and see not-Charles and the things, I see with a sort of satisfaction that only three of them are with him. But then, I begin to break down and cry. I have to live. I have to survive.

I feel a hard, wet impact in my stomach. I look down. Charles's hand is inside my abdomen. I cough; blood runs down my chin. And then I die.

I know what dying is like, but this isn't dying. It's the memory of dying. It's like being in an empty waiting room with no features. And you're looking at your watch every minute. A strange, itchy feeling.

And now I'm conscious again, and still dead, but I am covered with earth and lying in a hole, and I panic and claw myself out and I am so hungry, so hungry and cold and ready to fly at the dark-eyed figure before me and tear his throat out with my teeth, not wildly, but coldly, efficiently, as if I were born to it. He catches me, pins my arms to my sides in hands like the traps Papa used to set for poachers — and I remember it like this, but did not think it at the time — and another pair of hands holds my chin. They place a steel collar around my neck and chain me to the inside of a wagon that has no windows. The door opens after a time; a fat woman is thrown in. She is dressed in gaudy clothes, cheap paint hiding

pox and age – I can see it all so clearly. I leap on her, I bite hard into her bare shoulder and begin to drink and she lets out that same *aa* sound. The woman stiffens, and soon she is mine. Then, she is cold and does not move.

Afterwards I am myself; and I am not myself. The door of the wagon opens. A figure, silhouetted by a light of some kind, reaches in and drags out the whore's corpse. A man, the same man who caught me before, steps in and unlocks the chain. The blood I have just consumed ripples within me; I feel the need to run. But where can I run to? I suppress it.

He embraces me, holds me in his arms and speaks cold, soothing words; the words themselves I do not remember, only the feeling. A strange, cold hope. Pictures of money. Fine dresses. Blood. So much blood. And revenge...

I memorize poetry in Italian and Greek and Latin...

I walk across a room in court shoes and hoop skirt, over and over again...

I sit at a harpsichord and play a complex, light-footed piece, and the structures fill my mind; I see the significance in patterns of rhythm and note...

I forget my name...

The Duc D'Assame appears on occasion. He inquires as to my progress. He takes me out for the evening, to walk the bright streets of a city far from my home and smile and laugh and kill...

We are meeting in a room with people who are, unlike me, still alive. We chant strange words that I cannot

remember, cannot believe. We gaze open-mouthed into the steaming entrails of beasts whose shapes I cannot clearly remember...

D'Assame's dead servant is sometimes in my memory – a man named Jean, or was it a woman named Jeanne? I don't think that the servant's own identity is secure, as if he or she is beginning to lose a face, a name, a sense of individual personality...

I am standing in the middle of a forest clearing, and four huge, misshapen corpses lie at my feet. Blood soaks my fine silk dress. Five men, and these men I know will die for me, for they are addicted to my blood, crouch at the edge of the clearing holding smoking muskets. I look down. In my hands I hold something the size and shape of a flannel cloth, except that it is made of skin. It is Charles's face. I am laughing...

Versailles: I am amused that I am here now with my fingertips on the Duc D'Assame's elbow, and I curtsy before the Sun-King in the center of a vast palace of marble and crystal, surrounded tonight by a thousand people who whirl and dance and touch and laugh and glitter, and my dark Duc smirks at the irony here. The King moves on and I stand. I look across the ball-room, through a crowd of golden, beautiful people, and there is a vast mirror. I find the shadowy blur, the reflection of the Duc, his arm crooked and no arm within it, but behind the Duc, behind where I should be standing,

looking over his shoulder, there am I, but it is not me. My reflection raises an eyebrow and smiles ironically. She nods, before bringing her fan in front of her face and turning away into the reflected crowd. I stand rigid. The Duc whispers in my ear, asks me what is wrong. *Nothing*, I say...

I am in a smaller room now, and the King is here with his Queen and a dozen others. I play the harpsichord for them. The patterns of the music fill me, open a thousand tiny locks, turn a thousand tiny cogs like the golden clock that stands over the mantel, that keeps time with me. The King and the Queen-consort Marie-Thérèse and the King's lover Françoise-Louise smile and sway with the cheerful, sunny melody I play, a sunshine song for a Sun-King, and my shadowy Duc smiles, satisfied and unknowing of what awaits him. I glance his way and make a small, sad smile and try not to look at the other man here who stares at me, that saturnine chevalier sitting behind the king, with the widow's peak and the violet eyes. I reach the end of the melody, and my audience applauds, and I nod to the king, and remember now the deal I have made, and what I will lose.

But I must survive. *I must endure.*

The chevalier – he calls himself by a title that I know does not exist, even if the King does not – leans over and whispers something to my Dark, doomed Duc and the Duc excuses himself from the room. The King and Queen follow.

During the hundred years that followed the entrance of Marie Thérèse on the scene at Versailles, many extraordinary women came, shone and passed away. The Hall of Mirrors, had it the power to reflect the past, would afford a gallery of brilliant portraits. There would be, first, the devout Queen herself, virtuous, kind, considerate, loved by all her people and gently resigned to her fate. Then would follow a glittering train of proud and brilliant mistresses, some compelling by their beauty and gaiety, others by their wit and sense.

- Francis Loring Payne, *The Story of Versailles*

Never mention Macbeth by name backstage at the theater.
A howling dog is an omen of death.



The Chevalier comes to me and bows, and offers his arm, and I place my fingertips upon it.

I am cold, like a doll...

I walk with the Chevalier through a portico heavy with the scent of winding flora, and I think that a hundred years ago, I used to know the name of every one of them, and now I have forgotten, and I tell the Chevalier this, and he nods and smiles that satanic smile of his, and says that it is usual, but not inevitable. I do not ask him what he means, for here under the flowers is my Duc, who, cold, demands of the Chevalier satisfaction. The Chevalier says a woman's name, which may have been mine, once, I do not know, and tells how a family of freakish killers were sent to kill her family, so that he could bury her in a shallow grave, and make her a monster of a different kind. The Duc says to me that he did these things out of love for me, but love is not a concept I understand anymore. And besides, I do not see how what he says connects, and I cock my head and say with my mannequin poise, *I do not understand*. The smiling Chevalier looks him in the eyes and says, *You have sinned*, and the Duc falls to his knees, a look of horror and fear on his face as if in the Chevalier's eyes he has seen the eternal cold of the Ninth Circle of Hell. The circle of traitors. My circle.

The Chevalier draws his sword and with a measured, considered swing, he beheads the kneeling Duc, and the Duc crumbles into dust and foul-smelling grease within his fine clothes. His head collapses in on itself like the cold remains of a bonfire in the rain. The Chevalier nods to me and walks away. I stand and look over the remains, and wonder what they were, or who they were. I forget, momentarily, and remember, for I am being watched by Jean who I remember being a man here. He stands at the far end of the arbor and says, *Do you know what you have done?*

I cock my head to one side and say that I do not. And Jeanne, for I remember her now as a woman, bares her fangs and spits, and is gone...

I come to the chamber of Françoise-Louise, and I lie with her, a pretty nightmare in silk and lace, and I sing to her, and I torture her, and she begins to pray...

I am in the bedchamber of the King, for his mistress has joined a convent out of remorse for her sins...

I am in that same room where once I played for the King, and although its decorations are different, the golden clock is the same. The King who has that same soft, haughty cast of feature as his grandfather – for whom I played – watches, rapt, as his Austrian consort runs her fingers over an instrument that is clearer to me than any other remembered thing here: a frame holds cones of glass made from a number of cups, a treadle turns brass fitments which revolve the glass under her fingers, and the vibration makes a strange, ringing music that fills the room and my consciousness. I see more than patterns here. I see survival. In the mirror, my Reflection, held in uneasy accord since we betrayed the Duc to the devil...

I am in a glass-worker's workshop. I am still wearing my high powdered wig, my paint, my vast silken ball gown, attended by a maid and a manservant as hungry and as dead as I and forced to love me by the taste of my blood. The craftsman, in nightshirt and gown, runs his hand over his head and looks at the down payment and says that he will gladly take my work. But he is looking over my shoulder, and I remember that a tall mirror stands behind me, and that I am absent from its reflection, and that my two companions are mere blurs. I decide that he must drink from me, and direct my boy and girl to hold him down...

I am in the workshop, and I am alone in the darkness and dressed in traveling clothes. I prick my finger with a hat-pin and let drops of my precious blood, empowered with every memory I have, drop, drop, drop into the glass-making sand...

I am in my lodgings, and the craftsman removes a covering from my Glass Armonium, which glitters in the candle-light. I ask my Marie-France to fetch me a bowl of water, and when she brings it, I bite my finger and let a drop of blood fall into it. I watch, fascinated, the swirl of red that fouls the water.

The craftsman has not been told to leave; he will not unless I say. But he wants to go. He dreams of me. I remember imagining how he thinks of me while he is having his pretty young wife. But he wants to leave. He is scared. I play a note. A melody, a light, sad melody, springs, fully-formed into my head. The craftsman begins to weep and laugh and knit and unknit his fingers. He has made his finest work. I thank him and tell Marie-France and Huilliamme that they may have him. He dies in ecstasy, knowing that I am grateful...

I play my Glass Armonium in that same salon in Versailles, and thirteen grand lords and ladies take a strange light in their eyes as they leave the room...

I walk through Versailles' corridors now, and hear whispers. Thirteen lords and ladies have hung themselves, or have taken arsenic, or have shot themselves. The others speak to me still, but they also know fear, even those whom I have made to love me...

Marie-France and Huilliamme come to my apartment and speak to me. They say that the court does not know what danger they are in. The money is vanishing. The Third Estate is rising. This is no place for a lady to be. I tell them that they must leave, but that I must stay. I entrust them with my precious Armonium. *It contains my soul*, I tell them. They do not understand...

I walk the length of the Hall of Mirrors, impassive, which I have always avoided, and the courtiers here tonight shrink back from me, for they see full well that I have no shadow, that no mirror reflects me. I do not care. I have seen the auguries. Tonight they will all be dead. I glimpse my Reflection running, haggard and panicked where I am dignified and cold, trying to call for me. I ignore her...

I am in my rooms when the mob comes with fire, and I bare my fangs at them as they advance. They pause; I am backed against a mirror. I must endure. *I must survive...*

I am dead.

I am wearing a nun's habit. I am standing in the shadow of an underground chamber lit by torches in sconces. A priest is applying a brand to the bare chest of a young man. I am watching eagerly, licking my lips in anticipation.

I am dead.

I am walking in the warm night of a battlefield far from my home. Christians and Mohammedans are equal now in the eyes of the crows; I hear a groan, a man whose red cross is nearly indistinguishable from his own blood opens his eyes, raises a hand. I smile and send him on his way in joy.

I am dead.

I see an Owl rise above a walking corpse; I leap forward with my sword; a broken spear-shaft runs through my heart; the Owl comes for me and as it eats my soul, it says, *It was you I wanted...*

I am dead.

I watch the brother I had in life eaten by dogs in the Arena, and the people chanting *Christian!* at him. And

I swear that among the dead, this will not happen again...

I am dead.

I stand beside my new childe, and watch the palace of her old mistress over-run by the minions of the monster Octavian, and I say, *Your name shall be Nitokris...*

I am dead.

I stand with the Tyrant's mistress in the chamber of her children, and I whisper in her ear: *Your husband has betrayed you, and you have no other choice.* She takes up a pillow and begins to smother the children, the girls first, one by one...

I am dead.

I am inside a palace, and I am feeding the high priest of Amun-Re from my wrist, and telling him that Akhnaten is not a good man; I weave a story for him to tell of monsters and demons, and paint his sun god as a creature from Hell. The priest grunts and sighs and my blood runs down his chin, and I clip his ear and tell him not to be so careless as I would chide a toddler...

I am dead.

I run, invisible among the trees of the Great Forest; past snakes and apes and all manner of insect. I leap over a stream and my Reflection hisses at the body that sails over it; the village draws near, and its sleeping daughters will be offered to me, or I will know the reason...

I am dead.

I wait in a cave; I am cold and alien and before words, and the voices outside show the Tall Ones, who with unfamiliar sounds deliberate over stopping for the night. I hiss and begin to croon. They need only walk into the shadow, my tentacles and blades will grasp them and embrace them and make them my food...

I am dead.
I am alive.
I'm awake.

The sun shines in through the crack in the curtains and the alarm goes off and I groan, because it's time to get up. My husband's gone to work and I'm on lates this week. He hasn't bothered to leave me enough bread to make toast, so it's cereal. I huff a little, but I don't mind, really. If he's a bit thoughtless sometimes, it doesn't matter. He makes up for it. Work's crappy, and I'm not looking forward to it. I could drop dead at my keyboard and the boss probably wouldn't notice. Still, it could be worse. The sun is shining brightly, and it's a

school day. There are swings in the play-park – I pass them on the way to the office every day – and I think, maybe if no one's looking, I can take a few minutes and swing in the sun.

Yeah. It could be worse.

I dreamed last night everything was horrible. I was dead, or maybe I was some kind of robot. I didn't have any choice about what I was doing, as if this thing in my head, which was sometimes a ghost and sometimes a clockwork motor, was making me do things. I was a cannibal. A parasite. Like a huge

empty bug. I killed people and ate them and pretended to be nice and sweet, or tried to be, but couldn't. I was evil, and I couldn't be anything else. And I was completely alone. And all my life, this beautiful, messy imperfect life I have, was just a dream. I woke up and took in a deep breath, and wondered, just for a second, if my life *was* a lie, if I really *was* some sort of monster, and thought, if I really was, how I would be unable to bear it. Or how, worse, I would be unable to care.

If you see a four-leafed clover, keep it. It's lucky.

THE LANGUAGE OF STONES



Carnelian is a variety of chalcedony. It is hard, and varies in color from white to red. It soothes aches and pains, and colic in children. Mystics disagree as to whether it is tied to Saturn, Leo, Virgo, Libra or Capricorn.

francesrebecca: I'm not working for you anymore.

J_Doe207: What?

francesrebecca: The job is finished.

J_Doe207: You haven't supplied me with enough.

J_Doe207: I need more.

francesrebecca: It's not what you need.

francesrebecca: It never was.

francesrebecca: It doesn't matter now, anyway.

francesrebecca: It turns out that you weren't the only source for your patron.

J_Doe207: How did you know that?

francesrebecca: I don't owe you this.

francesrebecca: I'm telling you this because I want to.

francesrebecca: You had no idea that your own boss was playing you for a fool.

J_Doe207: Who?

J_Doe207: Elisabeta?

J_Doe207: Nitokris?

J_Doe207: Moon?

francesrebecca: It doesn't really matter. I have protection now.

francesrebecca: Soon, I'm gone.

J_Doe207: I'll find you.

J_Doe207: When I do, you'll be in trouble.

francesrebecca: Clichés.

francesrebecca: You won't. You know it.

francesrebecca: You never really understood what you'd made.

francesrebecca: You won't be hearing from me again.

> **francesrebecca is offline and will not receive your messages**

I'm joining them, then. Like I promised.

I put it off for a while. But what else do I have?

I was stuck in a beautiful dream for a while. I was in this messy, imperfect life. But it was a *life*. A whole life, that I remembered from start to finish. And I remember thinking that I couldn't bear it if my nightmare was real.

But of course, it is real, and that lovely mess of a life I lived was the illusion. And while I was living it, my ghost took over and made things even worse than they were before.

Oh, Ryan. I am so sorry. So sorry. I couldn't love you. You deserved so much better.

And then there was the tape.



Emerald, worn on the left arm, guards against magic spells and curses. An emerald on the tongue allows one to converse with ghosts and spirits. Lucifer carved the Holy Grail from a single emerald before he fell. Hermes Trismegistus called his definitive work on alchemy *The Emerald Table*.

Why is she doing this? What did that achieve? And what can I do? I can't call again. I mean, I can, but it doesn't matter what I do, she'll just hear silence, like she did that first time I tried to call. I can't put it right. I can't fix it.

I can't fix it.

I need to talk to *her* again.

[Sound of a telephone being picked up]

VOICE 1: Hello?

VOICE 2: Mum?

VOICE 1: Sorry?

VOICE 2: Mum?

VOICE 1: Who is this?

VOICE 2: It's Frances, Mum.

[pause]

VOICE 1: I don't know who you are -

VOICE 2: It's Frances. Really. I'm Frances, Mum.

VOICE 1: Please -

VOICE 2: I died, Mum.

VOICE 1: You're -

VOICE 2: Do you remember when I was a kid, and I used to make up stories about princesses and draw the pictures, and you'd help me give them names, Mum?

VOICE 1: I -

VOICE 2: You always told me that Frances was the only name for a princess.

VOICE 1: Oh, no. Oh, God.

VOICE 2: What happened, Mum?

VOICE 1: I don't -

VOICE 2: Why did you abandon me, Mum? Why did you send me to London to die, Mum?

VOICE 1: I didn't -

[sobs]

VOICE 2: You sent me to die, Mum. You stopped loving me, Mum.

VOICE 1: I never -

VOICE 2: You never really cared for me. You lied to me.

VOICE 1: Frances -

VOICE 2: I'll never forgive you. I'm dead now, and I am never going to forgive you.

[Sound of telephone hanging up]

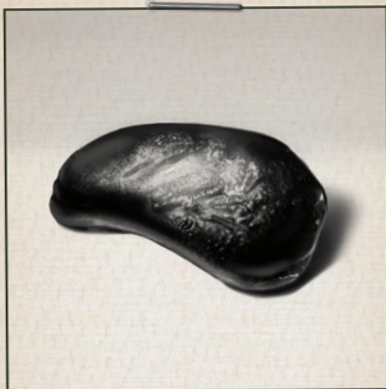


Jade is associated with Venus. It makes one calm.

Frances, I thank you for your missive. But our association is ended. It is time that you spoke to others.

I wish you well.

Nitokris.



Jet, if ground, can be a useful cure for skin diseases, gout and arthritis. Powdered jet mixed with wine can ascertain a young woman's virginity.

Things to do, things to do. Busy, busy, busy.

Bobby Butchers keeps an office. I don't know how he manages it. It doesn't so much smell like something died in here as like something's *living* here, something that doesn't care where it does its business.

Bobby clearly doesn't care where he does his business, anyway. My heels stick slightly to the lino on the floor, spoiling an effect that would otherwise be straight out of a forties detective novel: an orange streetlight

shines through the window as I open the door, and a pair of shoes slides off a desk in the dark, a face half in shadow, framed in cigarette smoke, turns to me.

I step into the half-light. I hope my hair looks OK. Did whatsername in *Farewell My Lovely* care about whether her hair looked OK? I don't know. I think it's probably best I don't try too hard with the Rita Hayworth thing. I'm a rubbish femme fatale.

It's all right, though. Bobby spoils it before I can.

"Fucking hell," he says. "Where did you come from?"

"Um, up the stairs."

"I didn't see you." He motions to a CCTV monitor, showing four pictures: the stairs, the street outside, what looks like a restaurant, and the inside of a gents' public toilet.

"Ah, no. That's a bit of a problem, actually. Sorry."

"You ain't got no appointment. I should chuck you out on the street."

"Yeah. That's a problem too. Can't use the, ah—" I make a "phone" sign with my thumb and forefinger.

"No?"

I shake my head.

Bobby's in a cheap suit that smells of sweat (even though he's probably not sweated for fifty years) and cigarette smoke. He's got greasy slicked-back hair. He looks like one of the Kray Twins' henchmen. That look of dull hardness. The aura says different, says he's dead as a doornail and bright as a button.

"I'm busy."

"No, you aren't."

He shrugs. "Got a lot of irons in the fire. Phone could ring any time. Don't let this laid-back exterior fool you."

He's got me a little off-guard. "I, ah, have something you might be interested in."

"Yeah?"

"Um, yes."

"All right." He motions towards a filthy-looking chair on my side of the desk. "What can I do for you, then?" He winks and clicks his tongue in the side of his mouth.

I really, *really* hate it when people do that. I cringe, sit down, and hope



that whatever's on the chair doesn't stain. "So. You know Doe," I say.

"You could say that."

"You're his child."

"I don't like to talk about that." He runs his tongue around the inside of his lower lip. His aura – he's reading mine, I can see it – reads washed-out interest-purple, a few streaks of crooked-pink, rapidly fading irritated-yellow.

"I'm his child, too."

"So what's this about, then? Family reunion?"

"I have some dirt on him. Her. It."

"You got something on Doe?"

"I know who Doe is."

He leans back and whistles. Then he reaches forwards and picks up a packet of cigarettes. "Fag?"

"I don't. Thank you."

He lights up, guarding his hand as if there were wind blowing, takes a deep, satisfied drag. Then he throws his head back and blows a smoke ring.

Show off.

I have to be cool for this next bit. I don't think I'm going to manage it, though. Because it's brilliant.

"Also, I have the key to his haven."

He nearly spits the cigarette right out of his mouth.

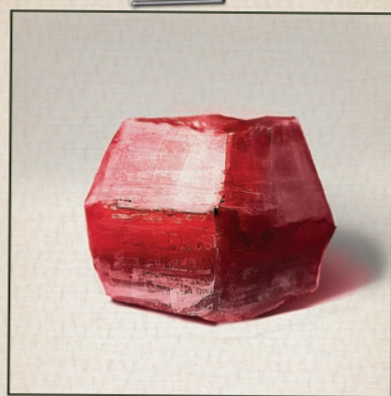
"You what?"

I take it out of my handbag, and hold it up between thumb and forefinger.

"You better not be having me on," he says.

"I'm not. Honestly, I'm not."

His tongue flicks into the side of his cheek. He smirks. "I think we could be in business, princess."



Ruby is a sign of luck and happiness, but if it changes color the omen is very bad. It has an affinity with blood and can cease or prevent bleeding.

I spend about half an hour hanging around Platform 2 at Green Park, being invisible on the wrought-iron bench, watching the last late-nighters getting their trains home.

I had a dream yesterday about the thing that passed me in the service tunnel that time, dressed in a Nike tracksuit and a grubby Burberry baseball cap. A young man dressed more or less like that wanders past. But he's only human: the colors aren't bright enough or angry enough. He stinks. I'm glad he can't see me. He makes me uncomfortable.

Eventually he gets on the train and there's no one else on the platform, until someone sits next to me on the bench, and says, "Hello."

Lucrezia was a student, I think, but like every Italian girl I've ever met, she's really intimidating, really smart, even when she's dressed right down, not a hair out of place, not a crease or a stain or a smear anywhere on her. And she's just fed, I can see that in the colors.

"Hello," I say.

"Elisabeta has a message for you."

I nod. "As long as I don't have to go back down there."

"Oh, God," she says. "I know." She laughs. There's no humor in it. "She won't be here for long, though."

"And then she'll find somewhere less horrible?"

Lucrezia smiles, shakes her head. "No. It'll be just as bad." She leans forward, rests her chin in her hands. "You know what scares me?"

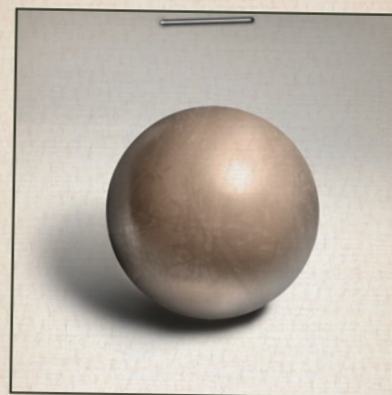
"You're scared you'll stop finding it horrid. You're scared you won't care about how awful it is. You're scared you might even start liking it."

She nods. "You too?"

"Maybe. Maybe I'm already there. Maybe I just remember what it's like." I sound clear and cold. The acoustics of the platform don't affect my voice at all. I wonder if it's true. I suppose I'll know soon enough.

"Ah."

Lucrezia straightens up, folds her arms, twists her body just the tiniest angle away from me. Her aura begins to gain streaks of pale fear-orange. She's scared of me.



Pearl without holes represents female virginity. It protects the teeth from decay and cavities. Pearl dust is an aphrodisiac.

As she should be.

A train roars past the platform, seconds before the automated voice announces that it is approaching, and that it will not be stopping here.

"You have a message for me," I say.

She clears her throat; an affectation. "Elisabeta wants you to know her high regard and respect for you, and her approval for your recent actions."

"What recent actions?"

"What happened to Doe, I expect."

"What happened to Doe?"

"Um, yes. Quite." I find the way she says "quite," in that gentle Italian accent, rather appealing; I like her pixie crop; I want to run a fingernail along the line of her jaw; I am admiring her smooth white throat. It's not like that. Not how I thought it would be.

I look away from her.

Lucrezia continues. "She offers advice."

"Oh?" I am not in control; the clockwork-corpse-doll is driving now. She's doing the driving more than she isn't nowadays. Nowanights. Whatever you call it.

"She gives you two pieces of advice. She advises that you leave London. This is not a place for one such as you, and she would regret if anything happened to you. Find somewhere else to go."

"And the other piece?"

"She asks that you look to the state of your soul."

Here I am, invisible again (there's no way, dressed as I am, I'd get past the bouncers – it's Hoxton fins, EC1 pointy toes and 80s prints all the way around here. Classic twee formal doesn't cut it). The place stinks of ironically-applied Jordan perfume and expensive antiperspirant. And dry ice.

It's not growing on me.

Lucy is behind the desk; she makes no open sign that she's seen me here, but the next tune she puts on is the one that has the mock-eighties synth and the deliberately crap drum machine and the woman fake-laughing over the top. It's called "Miss Black," which Lucy finds hilarious. I really hate it, but it's the signal that yes, we can talk.

When her set's over, she leaves.

She lets me get in the cab first, says, "If we're doing this again, we're splitting the fare."

I give her the money. The cabbie is looking at Lucy in the mirror, making a judgment about her: she's not talking to anyone, after all.

Back in Lucy's flat, we sit down in the music room, and I give her back the music. She asks me if I made a copy of it, and I admit that yes, I did.

She nods. "I still have your number," she says.

"Yeah. You have to text, though."

She's looking at me oddly.

"What?" I say.

"Do you know you don't cast a shadow?"

"I had noticed."

"Yeah."

I sit there, hands folded in lap, and regard her sprawled there on the couch. I'm a little hungry. I wonder what a witch's blood tastes like. I wonder if it's any different.

"I wanted to ask you something else," I say.

"Yeah?" she says, one hand resting on her scalp.

"Yes," I say. "I need a little help. I need to find a ghost."

She nods. "A ghost. OK. Whose?"

"Mine."

I wondered when you'd be coming back.

[pause]

Oh no, I know you'd been busy. The Pyramid doesn't lie. It's fine. We want you, Frances. We were prepared to wait.

[pause]

Sunday night, then. Don't be late, lovey.

We're waiting outside Canada Water tube station until our man comes. He's obscured for a moment by a fiery, shining aura, a swirl of righteously angry red and bright, idealistic yellow. He's tall and slim, Indian, dressed in the kind of clothes that are the more stylish for being plain.

He stares at me. His face is impassive. He turns to Lucy.

"She's dead," he says, matter-of-factly.

"Yeah," says Lucy. "We're doing her a favor."

His voice is absolutely level: "Only favor we can do is to put her out of her misery."

"Hey!" I say. "I'm standing right here."

He looks at me. "Why shouldn't I incinerate you right now?"

Lucy puts a hand on his arm. "Because of how much you owe me," she says. "Because I want to see how this one pans out. Come on, Catesby. Stop

spraying the testosterone about and give me a hand here."

"We're quits after this," says Catesby, not taking those terrible eyes off me, not changing the tone of his voice.


"No, we're not, darling," says Lucy. "Not quite. But we're getting there." She stands behind him and wraps her arms across his shoulders, running a long purple fingernail over one of his ears. He shivers, and he shrugs her off.

She grins. He nearly smiles at her, and his aura suddenly flashes the brightest love-blue and the deepest want-you-red I have seen since I learned how to do this. But hers doesn't change, still pale, calm-blue. Suddenly, I feel a little sorry for him.

They both turn and look at me.

"Back to mine, then," says Catesby.

Catesby's flat has a Karl Marx poster on the wall, and a shelf full of socialist theory tucked in among the occult books. Most of the furniture's



Toadstone supposedly comes from within the head of a toad. To gain a toadstone, force a toad into a hole with a red cloth, and leave it to starve in the sun; before it dies, it will vomit the toad stone. Alternatively, place the toad in an upside-down terracotta pot drilled with holes, next to an ant hill. The ants will strip the toad of its flesh, leaving its bones, and the stone, loose inside the skull. Toadstone, worn in a ring, protects against all kinds of poison.

second-hand and older than him. He sweeps away a half-dozen copies of the *Weekly Worker* from the battered armchair and motions me to sit down. He and Lucy take the sofa. Lucy is thoroughly at ease here, except she isn't, it's an act; but the more she acts at ease, the less Catesby is. He sits up straight, fists on knees.

"What do you want, then?" says Catesby.



Amber wards against curses. It is linked to Leo and the Sun.

"She wants you to call her ghost," says Lucy. "Specifically, she wants to talk to her *Ka*."

I am surprised. "You've been doing a bit of reading."

"A bit, yeah."

"Anyway," I say, "she's right. I want my *Ka*. She's at large. She amounts to a ghost. Lucy tells me you know how. So, ah, would you? Please? I'd be very grateful."

"She's nice, isn't she?" says Lucy. "You don't expect the undead to be so polite."

Catesby ignores her. "Then what?"

"I talk to her."

"What do we get out of it?"

"You get to watch."

Catesby did it. He took out an old pocket watch and held it up above his head in his left hand. Then he began to chant in some language I didn't recognize, like glossolalia, but it made my stomach flip-flop, and I got a sudden sensation of...nostalgia, and felt like I might want to cry. I thought of the old home where I grew up, for some reason. Unnerving. At the end of it, he called her by name, my name, and she came.

She appeared in the living room, right in front of me where I was stand-

ing; one moment she wasn't there and I blinked and there she was, as solid as me. She looked like I remembered myself looking, but her skin was tight over her cheekbones, and she had a pale, china-doll cast to her features, and eyes that glittered like some kind of terrible predator, like the monsters I remember being under the bed when I was a little girl. Her lips were very red.

She cocked her head to one side, and said in a high, sing-song voice like glass being struck, "Hello."

I looked over at Lucy and said, "Do I look like that now?"

She nodded, slowly.

Frances: Why did you do that?

Her Shadow: Do what?

F: Call my Mum. Do that to her.

S: You don't know?

F: No.

S: I did it because I hate you. I did it because I wanted to hurt you. Because I still want to hurt you. Because there wasn't a single thing you could do about it.

F: I don't understand. Why? I just want to know why.

S: There isn't a "why." It suited me to do it. To hurt you.

F: But you're me. She was your mother too.

S: I am not you. She was no more my mother than she was yours. Only you're under the illusion that she was, and it hurt you. It hurt you.

F: She was my mother. I remember...

S: The flesh remembers, but you are not her daughter. Her daughter died. You're only part of her daughter. You're a pathetic dead thing with a face and a body.

F: What does that make you?

S: A pathetic dead thing with a shadow and a voice that you can hear over the phone. But you know what? I know what I am. I know I'm a monster. You're just fooling yourself.

F: I am not.

S: No, maybe you aren't. But if it weren't for me, you would never have reached any point of acceptance.

F: I don't know what you mean.

S: Who brought you the boy?

F: You did. You and Nitokris.

S: Yes. It was her idea.

F: I don't understand.

S: She has her own reasons. She thinks you matter – we matter – in some grand scheme. We're part of some Great Coming Chaos she has in mind.

F: She told you this?

S: She called me into her chambers and gave me a meal. Told me what was what. Told me the plan. I'd seen you looking at that boy. I don't think you realized how many times you'd seen him on your turf.

F: And you...

S: I decided he'd be good for you.

F: You wanted me to do that to him. You wanted me to get him killed. You knew that the music would...

S: I didn't know that. That was just an opportunity. It came knocking. I took it. Just like you would have.

F: I'm not that spiteful.

S: I'm just as spiteful as you are. I'm you, remember.

F: You said you weren't.

S: But you think I am. And as long as you think I am... well.

F: So what now? You're going to try to kill me?

S: No. I need you. I can't survive without you.

F: And I can't survive without you?

S: I'm sure you could, but as long as you're around, I am.

F: How do you know this?

S: I know it. I just do. It's part of what I am. I know you and I know me. Self-knowledge is our defining trait, Frances.

F: So now what?

S: Oh, I won't hurt you. At least not in any way that might hurt me too.

F: Can't we make some sort of a deal?

S: Maybe. But not now.

F: I see.

S: I'm going. See you later, I expect.

Lucy says to me, "That's two you owe me."

"One and a half, surely."

"One big one, one little one, then."

"All right."

"I'll be in touch," she says.

Another letter. I'm actually finding that Ghislain's thoughts are pulling together disparate bits I've collected here and there.

My Friend—

The spirits no longer speak to me, Niall. You'll forgive me the liberty of using your first name, but if this is to be a true confession, I must think of you as a friend and confidant, and I feel I know you well enough to take this step. Since the storm, the spirits have been absent. I'm not sure if that's an effect of Katrina or my long slumber, but I am more alone than I have ever been.

I have learned many things since I awakened. I understand automobiles and airplanes, telephones and television. I have read about the internet, though I cannot grasp computers. I understand what to say to mortals, but I cannot bring myself to say it. I am bursting with knowledge. But I have become the recorder, rather than a participant in the scene. But to add to the list of things that I now know: knowing is not enough. To simply catalog these things is as useful as a television without electricity. We must act on our knowledge for it to have any true worth.

I watch the mortals stumble drunkenly down Bourbon Street, I have even attended these foolish, joyous parades, but I am not of them, and I cannot join them. I have become the weak, and the pack will surely abandon me to my fate if they become aware of me at all. So I remain unseen, forgotten. Except for you.

This is my requiescat, and you are the sole recipient. I had forgotten how beautiful the sunrise could be.

I have to admit that I was saddened, but not surprised, to receive this. Such is the way of things, though. I managed to find someone who remembered him from years past. She was kind enough to channel her memories of him into an image, so there is at least some kind of reminder for me.

THE QUEEN OF EYES

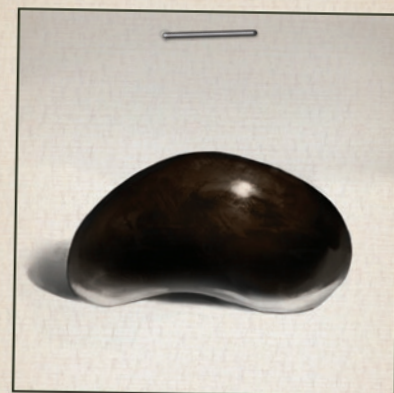
It's time I gave up and let myself be what I am.

Oh, they won't own me. I have the will to stop them owning me. I don't have to become a monster. Or at least, not a monster that I wasn't already. I know that. I know that, I do. And I need to know. It's the task that Doe set me to do, and I'm finishing it, whether I'm shot of him or not. I'm just doing what he/she/it wanted anyway.

I suppose I'm still a journalist at heart. I was too long in that world to let this thing drop without getting my scoop. I'm getting inside the Moulding Room.

I'll join them, and I'll stay on the fringes, finding out what I can, and when I've had enough, I'll walk away. I'll drop it all, and become invisible, and then I'll just walk away.

Simple.



Onyx brings nightmares, but grants humility and calm.

Here stands the applicant for Residence.

[pause]

Do you understand what it is to see?

[pause]

Do you understand what it is to hear?

[pause]

What name were you known as?

[pause]

You were Frances Black, and among the crowd you shall still be known as Frances Black, although this shall not be your true name.

Other voices: Her name is known to us, for knowing is all.

What name shall you take?

[pause]

You are the Queen of Eyes. We bow before you. You reside among us.

Other Voices: She is the Queen of Eyes. We bow before you. You reside among us.

It was, I am told, part of my initiation. Before the ceremony, I must dream.

I dreamed of the Queen of Eyes. I was the Queen of Eyes in the dream and at times I stood beside her: an insect composed of corpse-flesh, her dead skin broken by the lenses of a hundred cameras, a carapace of blood and shiny beetle-shell and plastic.

This is what I have become.

I woke, and entered a kind of trance, a frenzy if you will, and when I came to myself, I'd made an icon of the Queen of Eyes, of myself.

She looks down on me from the wall. A collage, made of photographs of celebrities, clipped from magazines, a many-faced, many-armed Hindu insect: pieces of Britney, Xtina, Jordan, Posh, Paris and Nicole and a dozen others, all pasted together in a mess of hands and faces and breasts. Every eye is torn out, replaced with a camera lens. Her arms hold mobile phones and Louis Vuitton handbags.

Moon tells me that she is my goddess of sort, a concept more than an actual figure of worship, a symbol of surveillance, of observation. I observe. It is all I am.

I am leaving London soon. I have a box in which to hide, and a cult to join, and perhaps one day to lead, in a city far away from here.

I won't be the thing that she wants me to be.

I have my limits.

That's all.



SESTINA FOR FRANCES

DYING MAKES YOU SHALLOW.
YOU LOSE YOUR CAPACITY FOR REFLECTION.
YOU ONLY THINK ABOUT BLOOD.
YOU CAN'T FEEL THE THINGS YOU TOOK
FOR GRANTED. YOUR BREATH. YOUR HEART
BEATING. EVERYTHING'S GONE COLD.

SOMETIMES I GET ALL COLD
LIKE A DOLL. I MAKE SHALLOW
CONVERSATION. I'VE NO HEART
FOR THIS. ON REFLECTION.
I HATE THE WAY IT TOOK
ME AWAY FROM LIFE TO BLOOD.

IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT BLOOD
IN THE END. THE CORPSE-COLD
TRUTH THAT TOOK
AWAY MY LAST SHALLOW
BREATH. MY REFLECTION.
MY ECHO. MY SHADOW. MY HEART.


I TRIED TO TAKE SOME HEART
IN IMMORTALITY. IN BLOOD
MADE STRONG. MY REFLECTION
CAME BACK TO ME. "I'M COLD."
SHE SAID. "AND YOU ARE SHALLOW.
YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT THE LIVES YOU TOOK."

I REALISED THAT IT WAS TRUE. I TOOK
FUTURES AND LIVES. STOPPED A HEART
WITHOUT THOUGHT. BECAME SHALLOW
AS I DRANK ALL THE BLOOD
I COULD. MADE WARM BODIES COLD.
MURDERED WITHOUT PAUSE FOR REFLECTION.

I LEFT MY REFLECTION
TO WANDER OFF. SHE TOOK
SOME MONEY. WENT OUT INTO THE COLD.
SHE LEFT ME HERE WITH MY EMPTY HEART
AND MY THIRST FOR YOUR BLOOD.
I DIDN'T CARE. DYING HAS MADE ME SHALLOW.

YOUR BREATH IS SHALLOW. BECAUSE I TOOK
IT AWAY. YOU ARE MY REFLECTION. MY HEART.
I LOVE YOU. I KILLED YOU. MY BLOOD STANDS. COLD.





YOUR PSYCHIC POWER OF CONCEALMENT: RULES FOR SHADOWS

O MAKE ME A MASK AND A
WALL TO SHUT FROM YOUR SPIES
OF THE SHARP, ENAMELLED EYES
AND THE SPECTACLED CLAWS
RAPE AND REBELLION IN THE
NURSERIES OF MY FACE,

GAG OF DUMBSTRUCK TREE
TO BLOCK FROM BARE ENEMIES

THE BAYONET TONGUE IN
THIS UNDEFENDED PRAYERPIECE,

- DYLAN THOMAS,
"O MAKE ME A MASK"

MNEMOSYNE (BLOODLINE)

I KNOW.



Blood is more than the life. Blood is heredity; blood is memory; blood is instinct. The Mnemosyne don't just know this for a fact: they *are* the fact. Everything they do is tied to the concept of memory. The Kindred are terrified of losing their past. They sleep and fall prey to terrible dreams; they wake and begin to wonder which was the dream and which was reality. History plays tricks on the Kindred. You sleep for a century, and when you wake up, you barely know who you are. Dreams of making love and dreams of drinking the blood of kings; dreams of flying, dreams of devils with the faces of owls, dreams of people who you never met and people who have yet to be born. You wake up; the world has changed. You doubt everything you were before. Each slumber makes you a little less human, a little more dead.

And yet, the Mnemosyne don't seem to have that problem. There aren't so many of them. Their power is simple, potent: they feed on memories.

A Mnemosyne uncovers the truth, shares it, buries it and keeps it secret. The dead value the Mnemosyne for that reason; there are none more efficient at manipulating history. In the hands of a Mnemosyne, history doesn't stand a chance.

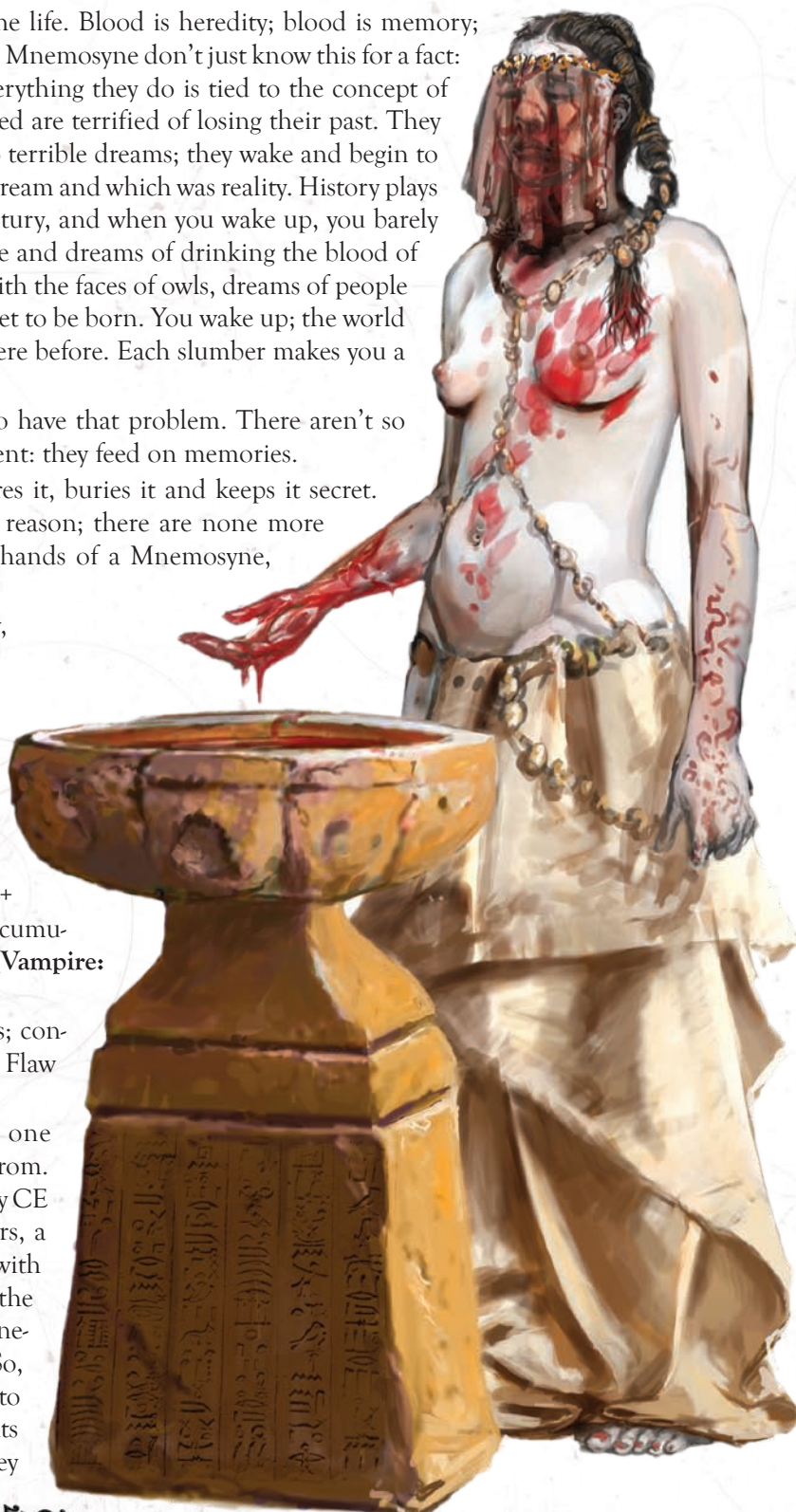
Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Celerity, Meminisse, Obfuscate

Nickname: Keepers

Weakness: The Mnemosyne have their clan weakness also. While the unique power of a Mnemosyne depends upon drinking Vitae, it has the side effect of making the Keeper crave it. A Mnemosyne suffers a -2 dice pool penalty to all Resolve + Composure rolls to resist blood addiction, cumulative with the usual penalties to the roll (**Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 158).

Mnemosyne are prone to derangements; consider taking a derangement as a Mental Flaw when creating a Mnemosyne character.

History and Culture: Ironically, no one remembers where the Mnemosyne came from. They were there in Rome – a second-century CE testament belonging to the Cult of Augurs, a branch of the Roman Camarilla who dealt with prophecy and magic, grants privileges to the childer of a vampire belonging to the “Mnemosynidae” along one stretch of the Tiber. So, clearly, they must have existed long enough to have become a family before that. Documents since that time are rare. Old Kindred say they



were always there, or always talked about if they weren't present. But they weren't ever the movers and shakers. They just existed in the dark, hiding, emerging sometimes to save an elder's sanity, or drive another elder insane.

That's the most anyone can work out. The Mnemosyne don't keep their own histories; they're too busy playing with the pasts of others. Broods of them exist, small families who settle in areas and absorb the local culture. Some vampires, who make studies of such things, identify them with the long-dead Moirai.

But the Moirai are gone now (aren't they?), while the Mnemosyne are clearly here.

The memories they absorb, exchange and alter do strange things to a vampire's mind. The older Mnemosyne don't have names anymore. They're detached, prone to amnesia and madness. Here's a Keeper who is nearly blank, a cipher without a true identity of his own, having washed away the memories of so many others that his own have become lost. Here's another who is so full of other people's memories that she has become taken within the whirl of experiences and personalities. Ireneo Funes, Prince of Buenos Aires, is rumored to be such a Mnemosyne, a creature who long ago lost his individuality, who eats the mind and memory of every victim he feeds upon, gaining a new splinter of personality each day.

A pair of Mnemosyne who were twins in life swap memories (and hence personalities) so often that they become interchangeable. They talk sometimes in unison. They finish one another's sentences. They answer to either name. They can't even tell themselves apart anymore.

While more Mnemosyne are unaligned than belong to Covenants, virtually all of them have duties within the hierarchies of their home towns, and those who don't have some sort of fixed post sell their services to the highest bidder.

Niall works as a Hound for his Prince. Unlike more direct Hounds, he's something of a detective, a methodical worker. He sifts evidence, reads minds. He finds truths. An older Mnemosyne works as more of a psychic surgeon, a detective who heals the memory of his aged prince each time he falls into torpor. A Mnemosyne in one of the larger cities serves as a cleaner of sorts, one who wipes breaches of the Masquerade from the minds of mortals and incriminating information from the memories of ghouls and Kindred.

Reputation: The Mnemosyne are, perhaps inevitably, better known by reputation than by acquaintance. The stories are many and fearsome, and Mnemosyne often find that other vampires have made up their minds before ever meeting them.

Covenants and Clans are ambivalent about the Mnemosyne. They fear them. If they can really steal memories, they say, they can take their own. But at the same time, they find lost memories. They share them. Each of the five great Covenants respects that. The Invictus and Sanctified alike value those who can verify chronicles and genealogies. The Acolytes and Ordo Dracul may take very different approaches to the question, but both Covenants react with curiosity to a vampire who can drink memories through blood. And while the Carthians may care less for history, the conspirators who maneuver their Covenant towards what they see as inevitable control can find uses for a drinker of memories and a thief of minds.

A Mnemosyne who appears in a city, then, may well be showered with offers of patronage and employment from every quarter; but he should beware, for taking sides makes enemies, and refusing to take sides makes more. Often, the choice is between which enemies to make.

NORVEGI (BLOODLINE)

YES. DONE. GONE. PAYMENT, THEN?



Some bloodlines are a matter of honor; others are a matter of shame. Outsiders who know of the Norvegi think them a reproach upon the Kindred, a deformity. The elders of some of the covenants permit them to endure, and if they grudgingly admit the efficiency with which they make other Kindred vanish and clear up messes, they cannot accept the “Norwegian bloodline” as whole Kindred. For they have no fangs. They seem to have no problem finding blood and rarely leave a mess. But if no one pays attention to this strange efficiency, it’s because they think the Norvegi to be beneath their notice.

Among elders of the five great Covenants, it’s received wisdom that a Norvegus or Norvega is a waste of dead flesh, and so prevalent is this idea that few of those wise, far-seeing elders ask if that’s the case; they don’t question why the bloodline is still thriving, more numerous in this over-populated age than it has ever been. The dead have always struggled among themselves for resources – surely, weaklings like the Norvegi would have died out long ago?

The fact is, they’ve found a niche. They do dirty jobs, cheaply and efficiently. Why should an elder ask how all the blood gets so efficiently cleaned away, or how brutally his enemy was dismembered? His only interest lies in the act itself.

And this is their second secret: they may be devoid of fangs, but they have other means of gaining blood. Long ago, they found the secret of warping Vitae and bone. They have the ability to grow, instantly and silently, hollow spikes and plates of blood and bone from their very flesh, extending and withdrawing them at will, if only they have the Vitae to spare. A vampire who underestimates a Norvega finds a pointing fingertip extending in a split-second into a long spike that skewers his eyeball and enters his forebrain. Another turns his back to see a blood-and-bone blade extending through his body. Another thinks he’s got the Norvega assassin sent to destroy him cornered, only to find her transformed into a bristling, thorn-bedecked monster.

The Norvegi, by tradition, keep their trump card hidden. One of the Kindred who sees a Norvegus using his power is likely to be either trusted entirely, or about to be dead forever. They bide their time and strike unexpectedly. They know that other vampires are faster and stronger, and prefer to use their powers of clairvoyance to gain an advantage. The Norvegi allow themselves to be underestimated, knowing that in being beneath notice comes safety, of a sort.

Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Bloodworking, Obfuscate, Vigor

Nickname: “Knives” among themselves; to elders “the Norwegian bloodline,” and to other outsiders “Scum,” “Filth,” and things less printable.



Weakness: A Norvegus suffers from one of the weaknesses of his parent clan, but humiliatingly, he has no fangs. He must either drink blood through having shed it with a blade (although, as a Norvegus, he is rarely without a blade), and cannot administer the Kiss, meaning that aware victims always put up a fight. This is the same as the Flaw: No Fangs (p. 118). Childer of the Norvegi, who have not yet fully developed the bloodline, usually have this Flaw. Any character who has the Flaw: No Fangs and who joins the bloodline ceases to gain experience point bonuses gained from the Flaw as soon as he joins the bloodline, because it becomes in game terms a bloodline weakness rather than a Flaw.

Further, because of the historical prejudice against the Norvegi, no Norvegus or Norvega can ever gain more than two dots of Status in any Covenant.

History and Culture: Sometime in the Middle Ages, the idea arose among the Kindred of Europe that the vampires of the North, members of the alleged Clan Grettir, were in-bred. Tales circulated of a web of Vinculi, and that a tradition of cross-generational diablerie and a dependence on ghouls had weakened them. Although they drank the vibrant blood of the Norse peoples of the age, and brought their own living family members into the fold after death, their deficient blood had taken away their fangs.

Among the bloodlines of the North, they were outcast. They carved out a niche as criminals among the dead. They were killers and thieves. The Renaissance came, and the Age of Reason followed, and the Norvegi gradually spread south, receiving the same prejudice and taking the same jobs, and so it is tonight. Many domains across Britain, Germany, the Baltic states, the former USSR and the northern parts of North America have small families of Norvegi. The members of the bloodline manipulate their living families, and at least one ghoul family depends upon Norvegi blood. Many Norvegi make their havens with their living (ghoul) families, and more than half of the Norvegi active in Europe and North America tonight were their sires' ghouls before they were Embraced, enslaved by the bonds of Vinculi long before they died. And yet, the relationship between sire and childe is not so simple; the tradition of the Norvegi has it that the Elder of the Norvegi allow themselves to be diablerized – painfully, messily – by their childer before old age forces them into torpor, presumably so that their memories remain, rather than be washed away by the Fog of Ages.

A Norvega named Astrid served until recently as the secret assassin of the Lady of London, not caring that the Lady will not acknowledge her publicly, but glad to be left alone when not working. Her disappearance went largely unnoticed. An old, powerful Norvegus operates in the New York Subway system as a kind of unofficial marshal. He preys upon and protects the homeless at the same time, as if farming them for his own personal use. Thanks to his vile-smelling ghouls, he knows everything that goes on underground within a matter of hours, or sometimes minutes. A pair of Norvegi in Anchorage, banned from Kindred society for simply being “less than vampires,” has been taking down the Prince's brood one by one.

Reputation: This is the paradox of the Norvegi's reputation: the Covenants find them beneath their notice, and yet they consider the Norvegi the vampires to hire when something needs to be stolen or someone must be killed forever. The Norvega names her price, freely, and if the paymaster refuses to haggle, she shrugs and walks away. She is not worth talking to and is thrust to the margins of the Kindred night-society, and yet her discretion is expected and her ability to do the job is not in question.

The Kindred know that the Norvegi keep whole stables of ghouls, but leave them to it. The Invictus and the Acolytes will tell you that they're no threat, that they're not worth bothering with. The Ordo Dracul don't even consider them to be Kindred, imagining them to be some sort of mutant sub-vampire and regarding them with mild curiosity before moving on to some more interesting topic of study. The Carthians, who bother, say that they're not really the proletariat of the Kindred, but some other, less developed group, less suited for revolution. And the Lancea Sanctum consider them damned and immaterial. Sure, a Norvegus can join, but he won't rise very far before prejudice rears its head.

ASMUNDARSON (GHOUL FAMILY)

GET OFF MY LAND.

The Norvegi often remain close to their living families and make many of them their ghouls and childer; on occasion, these families are changed forevermore. The Asmundarsons are an example of this kind of process. Originally Icelandic in extraction, they moved farther afield, only to fall into poverty and degradation when the work dried up. They had nowhere to go and the family secret grew too demanding, too hungry.

Maybe they live in several apartments in an inner city tower block, or in a decrepit rural mining village where the mines have long since gone. Perhaps they scrape subsistence on some sick-earth farmland, dwelling in a dilapidated farmhouse.

They are clichés of the poor: they're close-knit, ill-educated, abusive towards their children and siblings, and unwilling to ever forgive a member of the family who somehow escapes.

And, living in each of the three or four dwellings that the Asmundarson brothers call home is one of the great family secrets, a Dark Uncle or Aunt who buys their loyalty with sweet-tasting blood.

Clans and Covenants: The owners of the Asmundarsons are Mekhet, and no other vampire has ever laid claim on a member of this family. If the vampires of the Covenants even know about them, they rarely care. They don't consider the Norvegi to be a threat, and what is it to the Prince if the Norvegi keep to themselves? They're barely even vampires.

Nickname: To the Norvegi, the Kin. To other vampires, nothing at all.

Appearance: The Asmundarsons are the people in the small-town bar or the village pub who go silent when strangers walk in. They're the ones who, eyes narrowed, stand at the gates of their land clutching shotguns, waiting for you to drive past and leave them alone. The kids stand in a row at the fence, dirty-faced, and they all look identical. They're the children in the tenement block in the hooded tracksuits and grubby training shoes. They look at you like they know something, like they want something, like they'll eat you alive.

Strengths: The Asmundarsons survive. They experience desperate poverty, but they don't ever seem to get ill, and they never really suffer the ill-effects they should from bad diets and poor hygiene. Every Asmundarson takes one extra dot of Stamina at character creation.

Weaknesses: The Asmundarsons are so bound to their Dark Aunts and Uncles that they have a lesser form of the common Mekhet weakness to sunlight. In broad daylight, a member of the Asmundarson family suffers a -1 penalty to all dice pools involving Physical Attributes or Skills. Asmundarsons who receive the Embrace never develop fangs (taking the Flaw: No Fangs if they don't join the bloodline).

Organization: The families are abusive, in-bred and living in poverty, and embody every expectation and stereotype of the rural (or urban) poor. Although the brothers who are more or less family patriarchs make most of the decisions for their branches of the family, it's really the Dark Aunt or Uncle who lives in the attic, or the cellar, or the coat cupboard who has final say in the Asmundarsons' movements. The lives of the Asmundarsons are truly miserable for the children, as every hope of escape is thwarted, every dream of the outside world crushed. Sometimes, the family lets one of the younger members of the line start up a relationship with an outsider, hoping that a child will result. A teenaged Asmundarson elopes with a new husband; the Asmundarsons let them go, and then, just as the girl thinks she's escaped, and her life is starting anew in the new town, her Dark Uncle comes for her with the rest of the family. The vampire makes the new husband drink his blood three times, and takes the couple home. They're now part of the family. Young Asmundarson men sometimes go out on the town, hoping to get laid, solely in order that they can impregnate women and bring them into the family.

Because they're literal family to the vampires who often make their havens in their homes, their Mekhet owners are even more possessive than usual. It's not outside of the realm of possibility that a vampire from another clan could make a ghoul of an Asmundarson, but the Norvegi who own him *will* find out and *will* do their best to either steal the ghoul back, or destroy the regnant. Preferably both.

SHADOW CULTS

The Mekhet, unlike the other four great clans, have no innate powers of control over animals or people, over reason or emotion. But it's the way of the hungry dead to subjugate the living. Through the Vinculum, the vampire steals a heart, but it's not enough, and there's only so much blood a vampire can give, when his deepest urge is to take.

The Shadows, from the very beginning, solved their existence through the creation of conspiracies. One man can do little. One dead man can do some things better, other things not at all. But a conspiracy can change a society. A hidden cult can garner devotion and push an agenda without anyone knowing.

The Mekhet seem drawn to make cults around their philosophies. Uniquely among the factions of the undead, the majority of the initiates in the Shadow Cults are ordinary humans, who join for any number of reasons: power, knowledge, companionship, or just to get laid. It really depends upon the cult. Humans can't gain access into the higher echelons of the cult, however, and never really know the full story behind the cult's true praxis. The leaders of these cults know they need the humans, and can depend upon them as muscle. Many become bound to the vampiric masters through Vinculi without even realizing it, as cult rituals often involve all sorts of eating and drinking.

However, cult groups control their followers through means far more subtle than draughts of addictive blood or the mind-crushing powers of the vampire. They lead their followers on with carrot-on-a-stick promises of occult knowledge and supernatural power. They keep wayward followers in control by a firm command of the bonds of affection: join and you're made terribly welcome, but fall out of line and you're persona non grata until you come back into the fold.

CREATING A SHADOW CULT

A Mekhet character can start a Shadow Cult if he so wishes. He needs three things, though: a *Purpose*, a *Praxis*, and some members.

There are some game systems involved, too, but they're not quite so important.

PURPOSE

The *Purpose* is what the vampire wants to achieve through the cult. Actually, a Shadow Cult has two goals: the purpose that the lower-level mortal members (the ones with

only one or two dots in the Initiation Merit) believe that the cult is dedicated to, and the real, higher purpose, which is only open to the vampires who join the cult, may have no idea of the cult's true purpose (for example, Frances Black has no idea what the Moulding Room is really about). Those who ascend to its leadership, however, invariably learn these secrets.

The human members of the Moulding Room are told that they are the secret masters of society, and that through surveillance and the collection of private information they can mold society into their own image, an image of order and control. But really, the whole enterprise is an exercise in subversion. The Moulding Room is a deadly serious quasi-Situationist prank, designed to subvert and transform society through fear of Big Brother and the erosion of taboos, just because Vincent Moon and his dead chums are interested in seeing what will happen.

Meanwhile, the human followers of the Moirai have joined the cult to gain esoteric knowledge for its own sake. The vampires have a further goal: to use that esoteric knowledge as a means of controlling the future.

The two purposes don't necessarily need to be different, although the vampiric leaders of a Shadow Cult always know more than the mortals. The Followers of Seth are dedicated to promoting chaos in the name of Typhon Seth, as a means to working various magical rites. Pretty much everyone who is part of the cult knows that. But the humans don't know about the ghosts, and of course don't know that at least one of their leaders was there in Ancient Egypt when the cult began. Not that she can remember it all that well, but that's beside the point.

PRAXIS

Once you know what a cult *wants*, and what it tells its members, it's vital to work out how the cult achieves its goals. The followers of Seth promote chaos, and its human members cause traffic jams, make trains late, hold up taxis, cut wires, put thumbtacks in tires, and all sorts of small things that have large, knock-on effects as part of the occult plan they believe in. Meanwhile, the vampires look to protect the metaphysical side of their desires by hunting and destroying ghosts, spirits and demons. The human members of the Moulding Room collect and archive data, place bugs and record *everything*. The vampires use the material their minions gather to subvert social structures from the top to the bottom, and they use their powers to subvert individual human bodies.

Remember: you can define Bloodlines by who they are and where they have come from, but cults survive depending on what the members *do*.

SOMETIMES THEY MEAN IT

Much of what follows makes the assumption that a Mekhet vampire is setting up a Shadow Cult because she wants the power, or wants to use it as a tool for some further purpose. And a Shadow Cult *can* be that cynical. But the Mekhet are creatures of revelation. They dream dreams. They see visions. The Requiem does strange things to their minds. They don't go mad like the Ventrue, or become feral demons like the Gangrel. They go... *strange*. They start looking at the world in an odd, inhuman sort of way. Patterns reveal themselves in the night-to-night business of survival. The world develops meanings. And meanings make a man or woman, especially a dead one, look at everything in a wildly different way.

The upshot of this is that sometimes the Mekhet who start Shadow Cults are completely sincere. They believe that what they are doing is right. If they hide the truth from the mortals and the neonates who join them, it's because it needs to be hidden, or because it's too dangerous to be trusted with anyone, or because God told the cult leader *directly* that the faithful should only learn the secrets of existence in time.

GAME SYSTEMS

Having determined the details of what the cult is about, it's time to create it.

In short, a character or coterie of vampires trying to found a Shadow Cult needs to achieve the following:

- Create a cult text (and spend a *dot* of Willpower doing so);
- Create Initiations (and buy all of them at once with experience points);
- Recruit members (and buy appropriate levels of Allies, Contacts and Retainers with experience points).

CREATING A CULT TEXT

A cult needs some sort of text on which to base its teachings. The Moulding Room uses a bastardized form of situationist philosophy. The Sethites have the Writings of Typhon Seth. The Moirai have oral liturgies, passed down through millennia.

The really old cults, such as the Moirai and the Sethites, often developed their writings over time, but a new (or new-ish) cult such as the Moulding Room doesn't have the luxury of centuries of history, and so has to have the whole thing written in one go.

The character or coterie has to work out what form the sacred text will take. A series of scrolls, handwritten on tanned human skin? Ten volumes of work printed by subscription? A web-site with hundreds of sub-pages?

Did the writer experience a wild revelation and have no choice but to write it down, or did he just think it was a good idea to start a religion and reap the blessings?

In the end, that's up to the players.

The length of the writings does matter somewhat. It's a simple, shallow truth. The longer the book, the more authentic the cult looks. The longer the text, the more it looks like the writer *means* it.

Writing The Text

Before beginning, every character involved in writing the "sacred" text of the new Shadow Cult must spend a *dot* of Willpower.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Academics *or* Expression *or* Occult

Action: Extended (ten successes required per 50,000 words of text; each roll represents one whole night of uninterrupted writing or 5,000 words; teamwork allowed).

The book you're reading right now is about 90,000 words in length. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is close to a million words. A diligent human writer does an average of between 2,000 to 5,000 words over the course of a working day; a vampire, with less to distract him (no coffee breaks, no visits to the toilet) can do a little more than that. Other members of the coterie can write parts of the text, too, creating histories, liturgies and other authentic documents. Use the teamwork rules for this, rolling everyone's dice pools once per night (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134). Each contributing character can add 5,000 words to the total for every roll the player makes.

Characters don't have to spend every single night writing, and may not be able to: the dead must feed, and even they have obligations which must be fulfilled.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The writer thinks he's written a masterpiece, when in fact it's evidently the work of a madman or an idiot. If a player of any of the characters involved in the writing of the failed text makes a successful Intelligence + Academics *or* Intelligence + Expression roll, the character recognizes that the text is flawed and useless. Otherwise, the characters are satisfied with it, failing to notice that it confers a -2 equipment penalty to all rolls made to bring people into the cult or to influence people in the cult, cumulative with the bonuses granted by the Initiation Merit.

Failure: The book doesn't work out. The characters know it. Back to the drawing board.

Success: The text is written, and although it's inconsistent in places, that doesn't stop it being a useful tool of control and persuasion. For every 200,000 words of text the cult has, the book grants a +1 equipment bonus (maximum of +3) to attempts to bring people into the cult, and attempts to influence cultists, cumulative with any bonuses conferred by the Initiation Merit.

Exceptional Success: The character or coterie gains 5 or more successes above the total number of successes aimed for. For every 100,000 words of text the cult has, the book grants a +1 equipment bonus (maximum of +4) to attempts to bring people into the cult, and attempts to influence cultists, cumulative with any bonuses conferred by the Initiation Merit.

Suggested Equipment: Access to a library of occult and religious texts (+1 to +3, depending on the size), Auspex discipline (+1 per dot), every dot of Willpower after the first (+1).

Possible Penalties: Characters writing with no research materials at all (-2), characters writing in an unfamiliar style or medium (-2), trying to write a book more than 500,000 words long (-1).

A Shadow Cult's text is often a valuable thing. It should be central to rituals and ceremonies held by the cult, and it contains the cult's teachings. Some shadow cults are quite happy to promulgate their dogma across the internet or hand out cheaply-printed tracts with kitsch illustrations on street corners. Most, however, keep their work strictly private, and behave murderously towards those who let the text fall into the wrong hands.

CREATING INITIATIONS

Cults, particularly ones created by the Mekhet, have layers of initiation, and each initiation brings benefits beyond the simple recognition of status within the cult.

- The first dot brings with it a minor benefit, equal either to one free specialization in a Skill, or an extra one-dot Merit.

- • • At three dots, the character either gets access to a Discipline that he can't normally learn, or gets a distinct mechanical bonus, such as a +1 to dice pools in a specific Skill or a cost break on existing Traits. This commonly works out as the option to gain or improve a Skill at (new dots x2) experience points or two Merits (such as Allies, Resources or Contacts) at (new dots x1) experience points.

- • • • • At five dots, the character gains access to a three-dot Merit or a limited version of a four-dot Merit, even if he wouldn't normally be able to buy it (if, for example, he already had it, in which case it stacks, or if he doesn't have the prerequisite Traits to buy it normally).

It's assumed that the Initiations were laid out in the Shadow Cult's text, so no roll is necessary to create them. However, the player of any character involved in the founding of a Shadow Cult must buy all five levels of the Initiation Merit in the cult at once (at a cost of 30 experience points). If a coterie of vampires is founding the cult, each vampire must gain the full rating of the Merit.

If the founding vampire has more than one dot in Initiations in any other cult or cults, all dots above one are lost, and although the character keeps any Disciplines he may have learned through those other cults, he cannot improve them further.

If the cult allows access to a unique Discipline, one of the cult's founders *must* have that Discipline, and no one in the cult can develop the Discipline to a higher level than the founder (they have to learn it from somewhere).

GETTING A CONGREGATION

A cult is nothing without some cultists. The cultists see membership of the cult as a two-way deal. People don't join a cult if they don't benefit in some way from it, and the leader of a cult, although she may not necessarily admit it, always gets something out of the cult. In the Shadow Cults of the Mekhet, the deal is *always* unequal. They're not New Religious Movements. They're a means towards an end, and that end is usually some sort of influence or control. More than that: the living humans in the cult are almost always in the dark about what the cult is really doing, and usually ignorant of the nature of their leaders. The cultists might get a bit of camaraderie from the Shadow Cult, and maybe some occasional help from influential co-religionists. But the leaders of the cult get so much more than that: money, minions, influence, and even an easy source of food, if the vampire is willing to risk feeding on the cult.

There isn't any one system to cover recruitment. Players and Storytellers should agree on how it's roleplayed. Cults that promise secret power and wealth might recruit, quietly, among the right sort of people. Cults that promise sexual fulfillment may even advertise on TV through a "front" organization (in the manner of the Acolyte-run Love Company).

The first few members of a cult are critical, and it's important to play out how the characters approach them. With enough members, the cult will begin to grow by itself (see below), but until they reach that point, the characters have to do the legwork of recruitment themselves. Do they try the gentle approach or use force? Again, it all depends on the nature of their cult and the characters themselves.

Proselytizing: The Art of Getting Converts

Although some might disagree, it's very rare that people convert to a religion or cult on the spot. Usu-

ally, it takes time, effort and empathy to bring someone around to your line of thinking, combined with the magic of circumstance. The Mekhet, being dead, are a little short on human empathy, but a Shadow knows how to put in effort, and has all the time in the world. Proselytizing is hard work, though, and although its results can be powerful and lasting, few people fall for it, at least not initially.

This is an optional system: if it suits them, players and Storytellers may prefer to role-play these interactions without using dice.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion or Manipulation + Empathy vs target's Composure + Empathy

Action: Extended and contested (15+ successes needed on either side; each roll represents an hour of friendly contact).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The proselyte oversteps the mark, offends the target or just makes herself look like she's nuts. The target not only resists, but becomes hostile towards the proselyte. The attempt fails, and the target automatically resists any further attempts towards converting him.

Failure: The roll results in no successes. If the target gathers 15 successes first, he decides that the proselyte's faith is really not for him, and the attempt at converting the target fails.

Success: The roll adds successes to the total needed. If the proselyte is the first to gain 15 successes, the target accepts what the proselyte is saying and joins the cult.

Exceptional Success: A single roll achieves five or more successes, and the proselyte says or does something that influences the target's thinking. If the final total of successes turns out to be five or more successes higher than the total desired, the target joins the cult without question, becoming even more faithful than the proselyte.

Suggested Equipment: Target has come willingly to a cult ceremony or some sort of membership drive (+1), proselyte has access to cult text (equipment bonus of text), proselyte is a friend (+1) or family member (up to +2), target is depressed, lonely, or actively searching for meaning (+1 to +3).

Possible Penalties: Subject actively hostile to beliefs of cult, or prejudiced against proselyte in some way (-2 to -4).

Brainwashing

Sometimes, when a cult *really* wants someone, they can bring that individual in by force. The Moulding Room prefers to brainwash its mortal members. Without the mind-controlling and influencing Disciplines of the Daeva, Ventrue and Nosferatu, however, the Mekhet must resort to the tactics used by mortal cultists.

Brainwashing sometimes gets called "thought reform" or "mind control," but it isn't direct mind control. Rather, cults who brainwash their members use the repetition of certain phrases, physical abuse, emotional abuse incentives and sometimes extreme peer pressure and bullying to break down the subject's ideas about the world and himself... and to install new ones in their place. Brainwashing often destroys a subject's sense of self: his own individuality crushed, he readily adopts the ideology of the leader.

A Shadow Cult that resorts to brainwashing techniques usually isolates its potential convert. Starvation and sleep deprivation are efficient, time-honored techniques of getting your way – food and times of sleep get granted for giving the correct responses to the recitation of cult slogans and liturgies, and behaving in the correct fashion.

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation or Presence + Persuasion – higher of target's Resolve or Stamina

Action: Extended. Each roll represents three to six hours of active brainwashing. The brainwasher needs a variable number of successes depending on how strongly conditioned the victim is intended to be.

Successes	Degree of Brainwashing
5	Level 1: Variations on previously held beliefs
10	Level 2: Target changes his beliefs, but doesn't change his lifestyle
15	Level 3: Target leaves life behind and dedicates his self to the cult, but will not abandon close ties, or commit crimes for the cult if not already prone to do so
20	Level 4: The target becomes a blind follower, and will kill or die for his cult

Remember that the target may spend a point of Willpower to add two to his Resolve or Stamina for each roll made.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target resists brainwashing completely. No further attempts at brainwashing will work on the target. The target may, if he wishes, fool the individual attempting brainwashing into thinking that he's joined the cult. If the person doing the brainwashing is sincere in his beliefs and the target doesn't attempt subterfuge, the cultist begins to experience doubts as to the validity of his own beliefs if he fails in a reflexive roll of Resolve + Composure.

Failure: The roll results in no successes being added to the total at this time. The only real effect of this is that it draws out the process.

Success: The roll adds successes to the total needed. If the total aimed for is reached, the target accepts the new beliefs imposed by the cultist.

Exceptional Success: If a single roll achieves five or more successes, the target loses a point of Willpower. If the final total of successes turns out to be five or more successes higher than the total desired, the target becomes more fanatical and committed than the brainwasher had originally hoped, adopting behavior described one level more extreme than originally desired.

Suggested Equipment: Psychoactive drugs (+1 to +3), equipment such as chairs, straps, films, isolation rooms and the like (+1 to +4), brainwashing performed by a friend (+1) or family member (up to +2), brainwashing involves abuse or deprivation of food and sleep (+1 to +3).

Possible Penalties: Subject actively hostile to beliefs of cult, or prejudiced against cult members in some way (-1 to -3).

Deprogramming

One of the risky things with brainwashing victims is that their family and friends sometimes go looking for them. It's possible to "un-brainwash" a victim of a cult, and in fact some professional cult deprogrammers exist. Some psychologists consider them charlatans, and some seem to use techniques not wholly dissimilar to the tactics of the original brainwasher. The families of cult members rescued by these people see them as heroes, and if their loved ones are not quite the same after their experience, it's a small price to pay.

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion – target's Resolve

Action: Extended. Each roll represents three to six hours of time with the target. The deprogrammer needs a variable number of successes depending on how strongly conditioned the victim has been.

Level of Brainwashing	Successes Needed to Reverse
Level 1	5
Level 2	10
Level 3	15
Level 4	20

The target, who, being brainwashed, is unwilling to acquiesce to attempts made to dissuade him, may spend a point of Willpower to add two to his Resolve for each roll made.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target's belief in the cult is only strengthened. Perhaps the target sees the deprogrammer as a threat. He might even turn the deprogrammer over to the cult.

Failure: The roll results in no successes being added to the total at this time.

Success: The roll adds successes to the total needed. If the total aimed for is reached, the target is deprogrammed, but gains a mild derangement from the trauma of the process.

Exceptional Success: A single roll makes major progress. If the final total of successes turns out to be five or more successes higher than the total desired, the target regains his old self and does not acquire a derangement.

Suggested Equipment: Use of brainwashing techniques (+1 to +4), deprogramming performed by a friend (+1) family member (up to +2) or former member of cult (+3).

Possible Penalties: Subject has spent more than three months (-1), a year (-2) or five years as a member of the cult (-3).

Modeling Cult Characteristics with Merits

Once the characters have recruited enough individuals to create a group, they can get on with running it, at which point the game systems involved become considerably more abstract.

In game terms, the cult leaders' advantages are best represented through various Merits. If several characters are working together to create the cult, their players can pool Merit dots tied to the cult in the same way as pooling Haven dots (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 101).

Retainers represent the fanatics, the most faithful members of the cult.

Contacts represent members of the group with influence.

The rest of the group is best represented with dots in Allies (Shadow Cult) and, if the vampire chooses to feed on his congregation, dots in Herd.

A group that counts as three or more dots of Allies (Shadow Cult) and Herd amounts to a handful of people, no more than nine or ten at most. The character probably needs to lie to his followers about the size of the cult, perhaps telling them that they are not alone, that there are thousands of faithful ones out there.

With a total of seven or more dots of Allies, Retainers, Herd, or Contacts, the Shadow Cult is a single congregation, no more than sixty members in total, or is spread out across the state or region in small groups. If separated into smaller units, each would number no more than nine or ten members. At this level, the vampire might also think about buying extra dots in Haven, representing buildings that are at the cult's disposal.

With dots in each of Allies, Retainers, Contacts, and Herd totaling no less than 15, the cult has a nationwide spread and between one to three hundred members. Players can tie dots in Haven to the society. Resource dots can represent money gained from the society, and can be pooled between characters.

With 21 or more total dots in Allies, Retainers, Contacts, and Herd, which must include five dots in Allies (Shadow Cult) held by one character or a total of six or

more if pooled between characters, the Shadow Cult has at the very least the potential of an international following, with multiple hundreds of members. The Moulding Room is roughly at this level.

With 30 dots or more in Allies, Retainers, Contacts and Herd (including at least one character in the coterie holding five dots in all of them), the cult's membership is in the thousands. It might have other resources, too, such as vehicles, a small printing press, or a numbered Swiss bank account. This is the level the Followers of Seth, and the Moirai have reached. They're international conspiracies. Few other cults are quite as powerful.

DAMNATION CITY

Players who own the supplement **Damnation City** and who are using the Primacy Play systems found on p. 231 of that book may wish to consider representing important cult members or cult cells with Asset dots.

This works in exactly the same way that Assets are normally described, except that in a Shadow Cult, a small group of (no more than 10) people can count as a single Asset.

THE FOLLOWERS OF SETH THE CRADLE OF CHAOS EVIL IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT.

It was in the time of Akhenaten, the Witch-Pharaoh, that the Cult of the Phoenix died out, and the Cult of Seth became compromised, falling prey to the dead. Even so, the Sethites continued beyond death in their sacred duty to bring about their half of the cosmic balance (the "Mekhet"), even if the upholders of order no longer – to their knowledge – existed.

The Followers of Seth (properly, the Followers of Typhon Seth) make strange agents of chaos, since it's only a very specific kind of chaos that they're really interested in. The god Typhon Seth mandated that things collapse, but that depended on spiritual powers not gaining the upper hand in the material realm. True entropy can only be achieved if no spiritual power takes control. Beings escaped from the spirit worlds and Hells of the Sethite cosmology may seem to cause collapse and trouble, but really, they bring a kind of tyranny. They are the keepers of oaths, the possessors of bodies, the eaters of souls. They bring evil to the world without freedom.

The Sethites believe that true chaos depends on there being no conscious agency maintaining it or controlling it beyond Typhon Seth and his agents, who only set the ball rolling, or push that first domino.

Cultists: The Sethites recruit their mortal members from many walks of life. If an outsider could see their recruiting policy, he'd probably be a bit surprised that the Sethites don't target openly powerful people. The Sethites are quite a large conspiracy, but they prefer to recruit their human members from those who are less in the right position, and more in the right place: technicians, postal workers, mechanics, drivers, and so on. Vampires who join the Sethites vary: a barely-Carthian anarchist uses his powers to foment unrest. A beautiful, pale girl starts fights in nightclubs. Nitokris has adopted the airs of a priestess and the role of a ghost-hunter, but for what purpose? A coterie of ghost hunters with shadowy powers permits no other vampire to see their books. A Kindred historian uses hints gleaned from musty documents to get dirt on the city's elders. An Invictus harpy drops simple friendly hints to a half a dozen neonates, and a week later, Elysium dissolves into violence.

Covenants: The Followers of Seth are the Cradle of Chaos, and disorder is their goal above all, although their brand of disorder is peculiarly ordered, since its purpose is cosmic harmony, part of a cosmology in which chaos is one of many vital factors.

While the Acolytes can understand that, and the Dragons find the idea of promoting chaos – that a greater cosmic order can result – fascinating, most members of the Invictus and the Carthians find it a difficult concept to get their heads around. As a result, the Sethites mainly look for members among the Ordo Dracul and the Circle of the Crone. While it doesn't take much for members of the Lancea Sanctum to see the worth in doing the Devil's work in God's name, it's quite another thing for them to do it in the name of a pagan god, and the

Sanctified would be frankly less than accepting of the creed of Typhon Seth if the Sethites ever approached them with it... which they don't. The Sanctified's ignorance of the Sethites is better for everyone, as far as the Followers are concerned.

Praxis: Typhon Seth demands that chaos come to the earth. The power structures of living man and dead man alike must be destabilized. Their rituals happen when the priests of the Cult (those members with three dots or more of Initiation who are trusted with leading their cult cell) say so. The cultists could go a month or even years without a ceremony, or have three gatherings in the space of a week.

Sethite leaders reserve the right to contact their followers any time and command them to do the cult's work. A train signalman just outside of London messes up some signals and causes congestion on the line, making a train one hour and 45 minutes late. Because of the late train, a certain businessman fails to get into the City in time to make a deal, an international corporation goes bankrupt, several developing nations fall further into debt and two civil wars start, far away. The signalman doesn't know about all that — he just knows that he has to make a train late.

The street lights at one end of Washington DC go out. Every sewage main in Queens backs up, and the whole district stinks. A man slips an hallucinogen in some communion wine, and while a sip isn't enough, the priest who must consume it all at the end goes mad and says and does some things that will, through a succession of events, tear apart a community.

A Los Angeles police detective's car breaks down as he's on his way to make the biggest arrest of his career. He's stuck in a tunnel. All the phones are vandalized or engaged. He's late getting to LAX. The criminal he had bang to rights gets on the plane and is well on his way to Malaga. The detective never makes his arrest. And the criminal is still at large. Later, the man sells arms to terrorists who mount an attack on a great European city. Hundreds die.

The Sethites prefer their cultists to do small, specific things that could cause greater chaos. Small acts work towards greater ones. For want of a nail, a shoe was lost...

The vampires, too, work secretly to destabilize the Prince and the Covenants alike. They trade information, perform pranks and act like they're everyone's friends, offering curses that seem like gifts and help that never seems to work out right (although it's never a Sethite's fault that things don't work out like folks expect them to). Beware the Sethite who tells you who she is. She's up to something.



But at the same time, the Sethites, mortal and undead, collect information about ghosts and spirits, and always seem to be there when these things need destroying. The Sethites know the truth about what happened to the Dead Julii, and some know exactly what to do should the destroyers of that long-gone clan ever rise again. Ghosts and spirits are not part of the Typhonian system of balance, and must be driven back, lest they upset the perfect chaos and freedom that Seth represents.

Ceremonies: The Sethites' ceremonies are formal and alien. The members wear robes and chant magical incantations in New Kingdom Egyptian and Classical Greek while ceremonial presidents (each wearing the mask of the Typhon animal) perform strange, abstract actions over an altar or a sacrificial animal involving knives, smoke and sand. The vampiric presidents sometime perform Crúac rituals in the full view of their mortal followers, knowing that the people in the room will never say anything.

The Sethites' Crúac rituals often involve the killing of cats, dogs and birds (particularly owls and hawks). Very, very rarely the sacrificial animal is a living human being, either a mortal member of the cult, drugged and brainwashed to accept the sacrifice meekly and willingly, or an enemy of the cult, tied, gagged and painfully conscious. It depends on the ritual.

INITIATIONS

Generally speaking, Sethite initiations involve the taking of long ceremonial oaths and the naming of strangely formal threats against one who would divulge the secrets of the order. Failing the Sethites, even in seemingly simple tasks like putting unleaded into the diesel engine of one particular white Mustang on one particular day, is never good for a cultist's health.

- The Sethites steep themselves in occult lore, and knowledge of the spirits and demons that plague the world is something of a prerequisite for advancement in the cult. The character gains one free specialty in the Occult skill.
- • • The Sethite gains the right to use the blood magic of Typhon Seth, meaning that he has access to some (but not all) Crúac rituals (see p. 106). The character can buy dots in Crúac at a cost of (new dots x7) experience points and new rituals at (new dots x2) experience points, even if he isn't a member of the Circle of the Crone. A Sethite who is not an Acolyte should take care to whom he shows his power. Acolytes react with extreme violence towards anyone outside their Covenant displaying knowledge of their blood magic.
- • • • • The Sethite has, by this point, studied a phenomenal amount of lore concerning the demons and gods of dozens of cultures. The character has the equivalent of the Merit: Encyclopedic Knowledge, limited to knowledge about ghosts, demons, spirits, black magic and esoteric religion.

THE KHAIBIT

The origins of the Followers of Seth are sometimes said to be tied up with a Mekhet bloodline called the Khaibit, who, so the lore of the Sethites claims, came into being as the cult's footsoldiers against the spirits and ghosts who threatened the Sethites' vision of divinely-ordained discord.

Very few of the Khaibit who still exist have much connection with the Followers of Seth. Regarded by many vampires as a hereditary caste of lackeys, the Khaibit's original purpose – as the Sethites' destroyers of spirits, demons and, particularly, the Striges – faded into obscurity about the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire and the fall of the Camarilla.

Sethites who meet Khaibit are instructed to sound out whether they would be worthwhile cultists, or are simply potential tools. But they're too precious and rare a resource to simply let go. Sethite vampires can easily go through their entire Requiem without ever meeting a Khaibit.

More information on the Khaibit can be found in **Bloodlines: the Hidden and Fall of the Camarilla**.

THE MOIRAI

KEEPERS OF PAST AND FUTURE

THAT'S NOT A THREAT. IT'S A PREDICTION.

The dead whisper about the Moirai, best-known and most fabled of the Shadow Cults. The Kindred suppose them to own a vast library, containing all history, living and dead. They tell of how their elders can resist the Fog of Ages through sheer force of will. Some stories describe them as a Secret Covenant that pre-dates even the original Camarilla. Others describe them simply as a bloodline, although opinions differ as to whether they come from the Mekhet or Daeva.

Nearly all of the rumors agree on one thing: they're long dead. There are no Moirai left.

Some of these things are true. The last one, however, certainly isn't. The Moirai still exist, and if the dead cannot see them, it's because so many of their rites happen in broad daylight, while their leaders stay hidden.

For three thousand years, the Moirai have traced the threads of the Great Tapestry of history, seeking to divine its patterns. By discovering the recurring patterns of time, the Moirai believe that they can recognize the first signs of these patterns happening again, and manipulate them, placing themselves at the vital point of the tapestry of creation, holding the scissors to cut the threads of lives, grasping the shuttle and changing the picture. To know the past in all its detail is to know the future, and to know the future is to have true power.

Cultists: The Moirai recruit their living members from people who already know something about the occult. Brief classified advertisements in occult or astrological magazines which feature no names, addresses or telephone numbers invite people to "seek true knowledge of past and future." The test of initiation is to find the source of the advertisement with no other information to go on. The seeker who arrives at the door of the Moirai deserves to join.

As for the dead, the Moirai seek the unusual. They look for vampires who exhibit strange powers or interests. Alone among the Shadow Cults, the Moirai recruit among the Daeva as well as the Mekhet. Occult knowledge is prized, but more important is the ability to alter some thread of the Great Tapestry. A high-class prostitute, a Daeva, services powerful clients and changes them subtly from night to night. The court astrologer of an Ordo Dracul or Invictus prince practices more or less openly, without anyone twigging who his masters are. A prophet of the Lancea Sanctum cries out in the name of Longinus and all the Saints, but pursues a goal to control the future. A Carthian policy-maker, a low-level wonk who advises but never openly takes charge, makes startlingly accurate predictions. A Hound of the Prince works as a detective. The Prince smiles and watches his subject, maneuvering faster than any of the others, as if that Hound knew what they were going to do before they even did it. And Doe, a faceless elder who is so occulted, he doesn't know who he is anymore, is manipulating the unlife of his childe, Frances Black, in the name of masters who are even more of a mystery to him than his own self.

Covenants: The mainstream of the great Covenants don't know that the Moirai still exist. The cult's name is never mentioned by the faithful outside of the cult's ceremonies (and, in fact, is rarely spoken in the ceremonies), and even if some suspect a conspiracy, they may not connect it with this ancient cult. The Moirai, for their part, will recruit anyone who they consider useful as an instrument or valuable as a member, no matter whether the individual wants to join or not.

Praxis: The Moirai keep detailed records of histories, oracles, divinations and omens. They seek to find the identities of those individuals who will be somehow significant in the warp and weft of the Great Tapestry. Power comes from knowing the Great Tapestry's patterns. Through knowing root causes, they influence others, steering history to their purposes. The Moirai instruct their members to do things: political policies, financial decisions, relationships, intimidation and murder, the creation of Ghouls, the forging of Vinculi, even the Embrace and destruction of a vampire, all without any apparent motive beyond the ancient plan to alter the Great Tapestry.

Most of the Moirai have no idea why they do what they do. Someone higher up in the cult hierarchy tells them that such-and-such a politician or such-and-such a neonate will be significant, but no one ever says why. Directives appear seemingly out of thin air. The eldest Moirai are reputed to have some vast, intricate plan, but no single Moirai seems to know it. In fact, it might not be known to anyone, since it may well have been conceived by vampires lost to torpor or destroyed.



They're a busy group, and yet all the evils they perpetrate could well be for a purpose that no longer exists, or worse, for a purpose that has moved beyond those who created it, a great plan with no guiding hand.

Ceremonies: The humans who are among the Weavers perform small, private rituals in broad daylight, in boardrooms or public toilets closed for cleaning, or private function rooms, or caravans in trailer parks. They're short affairs, these rites. All stand or sit in silence, until one of the participants sees an omen and gives an instruction to the others (really the result of a Devotion unique to the Moirai).

By night, meanwhile, humans and vampires alike come, hooded, to the same locked public places. These night rituals are irregular. The Fates ordain when it is auspicious to hold them. Together, the Moirai perform a divination, and at its end, each leaves with a single, simple instruction to be carried out before the next rite can take place. The Moirai must do their tasks or die in the attempt. The Moirai don't always succeed, but something always seems to result from what they do.

At no point in either of these ceremonies are the Moirai ever named. Only in the secret rites of the Fates is the name of the Moirai spoken. Some of the Weavers, lowest of the Moirai orders, know the name of the cult, but most don't.

INITIATIONS

Unlike the other Shadow Cults, which very rarely recruit among clans other than Mekhet, the Moirai draw in the Daeva as well, and have done so for as long as the cult has existed. The Moirai recognize three Hidden Orders among their membership, and members of each move on to the next when the time has come, although until the promotion they don't know any higher Orders exist. The Weavers of the Moirai, the lowest of the three orders, is the highest that human members can aspire to. Vampires, however, may pass on to join the Seers of the Moirai, who may one day become the Fates of the Moirai, who have access to the greatest secrets of the cult.

• The Weavers of the Moirai know how to divine. From palmistry and the reading of tea-leaves through to haruspicy and the reading of omens, the Weavers share the knowledge of every way to see the future, the past and the present. The character gains a free specialty in Divination in the Occult Skill. Once per story, a character may use the specialty to take a reading of some kind, rolling Wits + Occult. A success allows the character to receive a single +1 dice pool bonus, which can be used at any point later in the story – as something the character foresaw.

• • • The Seers of the Moirai share their blood and their arts. Mekhet Moirai may learn Majesty at a cost of (new dots x6) experience points; Daeva Moirai may learn Auspex with the same cost break.

• • • • The Fates of the Moirai gain the Mekhet Dreams Merit, whether they're Mekhet or not. If the character already has the Merit, she may use it twice per scene instead of once.

The Fates reputedly know the secret of the Methuselahs, who retain their memories in torpor. Some of these ancients may even be among the Fates. But they'll never tell.

THE AGONISTES AND THE MNEMOSYNE

The Mnemosyne bloodline may have been created by the Moirai. Or the Moirai by the Mnemosyne. No one's sure. Either way, the Moirai seek out the Mnemosyne, valuing them as members.

Another bloodline who shares interests with the Moirai are the Agonistes (from **Bloodlines: the Chosen**). If the Agonistes exist in your chronicle, they, too, may find a valued, influential place among the Moirai.

THE MOULDING ROOM THE EYE BEHIND THE CAMERA I AM NOTHING BUT I MUST BE EVERYTHING.

At some time in the 1980s, the surveillance culture took off in the United Kingdom. No one noticed the way that the cameras began to proliferate until they were everywhere, and it became impossible to walk in a public place without ending up on video. Conspiracy theories abound: they can see everything. If we are seen all the time, how does that change us? What does that make us? Who's behind it?

To their human initiates – who are called *Visitors* – the vampires who sit in the Moulding Room (the *Residents*) say that they know the answer. They are the secret rulers of the surveillance society. They are the masters of exhibition, of a change in human attitude. Join, and you too can see through the cameras that guide us.

Power is found in the eye behind the CCTV lens, the photograph of celebrity flesh, the sex tape on the internet, the speed camera and the flash of the paparazzi. To know these things is power, both temporal power and mystical power. Information allows control; film and image has changed the way we view our selves, our inner lives and our bodies.

The Residents tell the Moulding Room's Visitors that they are fulfilling a plan to transform the bodies and minds of the world – that they will be the new masters.

None of this is all true. The Moulding Room is a quasi-Situationist prank created in the 1970s. Without meaning, all things are absurd. Images supplant human perceptions. Bodies begin to mimic the image on the screen. Human flesh itself is changing, and the mind within the flesh, and the society around it. The New Flesh is governed by the image, and the image is everywhere. The Residents of the Moulding Room had no real influence over the surveillance boom, but see the value in directing the movement of society. Not for any purpose, mind. They do it because there is no meaning. They do it because it's all absurd. *They do it because they can.*

Cultists: About half of the human Visitors to the Moulding Room are rich, or beautiful, or both. They're minor celebrities, politicians, fashion models, pop stars and sports stars. They mingle with paparazzi and gossip columnists, the very people who transmit their private doings across the media. Among the most honored of the Visitors are the *Watchers*, those who have access to the CCTV that covers so much public space in the modern world. These are the eyes behind the camera. The ones who see. Promises of power and influence given to the Visitors are rarely hollow, simply because the Visitors are encouraged to help each other out. The Residents don't need to do anything.

The vampires, meanwhile, are a very different group. About half of them (the ones with two or more dots in Initiation into the cult) are in on the joke. They're mystics, experimenters, and simply those who want to know everything. Frances Black isn't privy to the truth yet, and has joined out of curiosity. She'll find out soon and may give herself wholeheartedly to it. She has little else left. A Carthian revolutionary, equally clueless, sees the transformation of human society and flesh as the first step to transforming vampiric society. An Acolyte who feeds on the blood of porn stars and their parasites understands absurdity, and enjoys the violation of flesh. A former spy, driven mad by constant surveillance and Embraced by an Invictus Prince who wanted him to continue in the same vein, sees how meaningless it all is, and embraces it, collecting all he can to subvert and alter the structures that made him crazy. A celebrity photographer, who was nocturnal when he was alive, fulfills the unspoken transaction between the Moulding Room's members, treating his camera as a sacred eye. Vincent Moon uses mass-market occult trash to govern everything he does, partly because it means no more than anything else. And partly because he's completely insane.

Covenants: Some of the more radical, less reputable Carthians get invited into the Moulding Room because subversion is what they're all about. Sometimes, the Residents will try to sound out a member of the Invictus or the Lancea Sanctum. The Invictus see control of the mortals as worthwhile; the Sanctified see their suffering and understand attempts to lead them astray as tests of faith. Members of the Circle of the Crone who understand the mystic value of dissipation also join. The most fertile ground for recruits is the Ordo Dracul, whose members understand experimentation for its own sake.

Praxis: The longer they're in the cult, the more the Visitors are encouraged to subvert their lives, their industries, their bodies, their selves. They alter themselves with surgery. They implicitly allow recordings of their sexual exploits to circulate the internet. They leak salacious stories about themselves to the gossip rags. Politicians get caught on film with nubile mistresses, denying their sex acts with equivocal language (for example: "I did not have sex with that woman") or allowing the tabloids to plaster the implications across hundreds of column inches. The photographers and low-grade journalists take compromising pictures of their famous colleagues, spying on them with their full knowledge and consent.

Meanwhile, every night the Watchers gather all the surveillance material they can find, handing over hundreds of meaningless CCTV tapes, which will never be viewed, to the archives of the Moulding Room, filling a secret archive in every city the cult operates in with vast amounts of moldering personal information, left to rot.

The Residents watch with amusement and interest. These people want power. They worship it. How far will they go before it stops? To what degree can they subvert and transform this society? How much can they change before society resists? And if they can change it utterly, what glorious horrors will result?

Ceremonies: The neophytes of the Moulding Room meet on Monday nights in the lounge of some opulent residence. Dressed in lounge suits and evening dresses, they perform magical rites using the trappings of the surveillance culture as their focus. They use images of conspiracy theories and celebrity icons as sacrificial elements. They pray over copies of those magazines that keep close tabs on celebrity love lives and private affairs. They re-enact and re-film a notorious celebrity sex-tape, changing it with each iteration, transforming it gradually into a surreal horror of blood and death. They hoard and copy surveillance tapes. A camera stolen from a paparazzo becomes a sacred object. The members degrade themselves, performing all sorts of perversions with each other, as the masters – the vampires – watch. The vampires who participate take this a step further. Come the end of the rites, the vampires take a chosen few to a private, second ceremony, where there are no cameras, and where the subversion extends even to human flesh.

INITIATIONS

The Visitors (and the lowest grade of Resident) are denied the chance to see the full rites of the cult.

- The character understands CCTV cameras, and loves them. She gains a free specialty in Surveillance tied to the Investigation Skill.

••• The character is now a Resident in the Moulding Room. She has access to the unique Discipline of Detournement: the subversion of her own flesh so that society may itself be subverted for (new dots x 6) experience points.

••••• The human members of the Moulding Room have been cherry-picked to be powerful, rich and beautiful. At this level, a Resident of the Moulding Room can use their connections as her own: neophytes must grant her access without question to their own ties and alliances. This amounts to an extra three Contacts chosen from these sources: Government, Print Media, the Police, Medicine and the Entertainment Industry.

THREE MORE MEKHET SHADOW CULTS

The Love Company is controlled by a group of Acolytes in LA, who promote a kind of sex-magick as a personal actualization tool. Most of the human members are employees, the people who make (and appear in) the DVDs and infomercials, and publish the books. The vampires have hit upon a ritual which, if performed by enough people concurrently, will irrevocably alter the spiritual state of the world. They're not sure how, exactly, but a piddling detail like that won't stop them.

The cult, known only as **Samhara**, does its work among a small number of high-ranking generals and admirals in the US defense industry. These hawkish mystagogues meet once a week in a bomb hangar and worship the nuclear warheads. The vampires who lead the cult are just doing it because they like the idea of being able to end the world, not because they actually intend to. But if one of them lost himself to the Beast at the wrong time...

Three Lancea Sanctum Morbus created the **Society of Cyprian** back in the late 18th century. Openly, it's a devotional organization in the Catholic Church, with a similar modus operandi and reputation to Opus Dei. In fact, its mortal followers believe in the redemption of the world through suffering, primarily through plague. For example, the various Catholic priests, deacons, bishops and nuns who comprise the order are among those who lobby for the continuation of the papal ban on contraception in central Africa. Their intention is that the AIDS crisis continue. Really, the vampires just want to make more people sick, because more sick people means more food for the Morbus.



SHADOW DISCIPLINES

The Disciplines listed here are limited to their creators. Few outside their cults and bloodlines know about these powers and even those who do would find it nearly impossible to find someone willing to teach them.

BLOODWORKING

The secret Discipline of the Norvegi is little-known. They're careful to hide it. It sometimes serves their purpose to be underestimated. The vampires who witness this Discipline in use are either gifted with a Norvegus coterie-mate's absolute trust, or about to be his victim. Norvegi who find out that their brothers or sisters have compromised their secret are never understanding. Sensible Norvegi make ample use of the Obfuscate Discipline in conjunction with their powers.

It's a terrifying thing to see. In the space of a second, a Norvegus using the Discipline sprouts wickedly sharp, hollow protrusions made of blood, bone and solidified body fat. A fingertip extends into a spike so fast it can punch out an eye; a hand becomes a mass of foot-long blades, skin erupts in rough, jagged plates. And all of this happens in absolute silence, the only sound the grunts of the Norvegus's victim as he becomes impaled on what was, less than a second ago, a bare hand, and the sigh as his blood vanishes, sucked into the Norvegus's body by countless hungry mouths.

• FINGERTONGUE

The Norvegi learn first how to create hundreds of tiny, hollow needle-sharp points on their fingers. The little plates that protrude from the vampire's fingertips (and which look a bit like a flatter, paler barnacle in texture) aren't big enough to cause damage, but they can pierce skin and suck in blood, meaning that when this power is activated, the Norvegi can drink through her fingers.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: No roll necessary: this power activates automatically.

Action: Instant

In order to drink blood, the character needs to be able to touch and hold her opponent. She can drink through her fingers at the same rate as a vampire with fangs can drink normally – at a rate of one Vitae and one lethal damage per turn (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 165). Because the tiny capillaries on her fingertips don't cause the effects of the Kiss, the vampire may need to grapple

her opponent (as per **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157) in order to keep feeding.

The site of such a feeding is inhumanly clean. The skin where such a wound is inflicted becomes dry and calloused, drained completely of moisture and slightly flaky and dusty to the touch for a few days afterward. Victims drained completely by a hungry Norvegi can leave an entire corpse in such a condition, practically mummified by the experience.

The vampire can also use the capillaries on her fingers to suck in blood from a container or from a puddle on the ground, again at a rate of one Vitae per turn.

•• SKEWER

The Norvegi can now grow blades and spikes from her hands and arms, which look like a weird organic collection of stalactites and bony, serrated knives, all melted into one mess of blades and spikes. After the first time a Norvegus uses this power, the skin on his hands and arms begins to show scars and welts. These cannot be healed.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: No roll necessary: this power activates automatically.

Action: Reflexive

When activated, the blades remain on the character's hand for the rest of the scene or until canceled, and cause 2 extra dice of lethal damage. The character uses Strength + Brawl to attack with the blades and spikes.

Because the blades grow from the muscles surrounding the character's fingers, the character has difficulty manipulating objects with his hands. While these spikes are extended, he suffers a -2 penalty to all Dexterity-based dice pools involving handling or controlling things manually. Really fine manipulation (on a level with sewing or setting a watch, for example) is impossible.

If the character spends an extra Vitae *in the same turn* that he activates this power, he can use it in conjunction with the level 1 power, meaning that the blades can, if held under the skin of a victim, suck in blood. This hurts the one being drained. A lot.

••• BLOODSHELL

Bloody, bubbling ichor bursts through the Norvegus's skin and congeals into a hideous, thorny shell. This is practically impossible to hide (and it completely ruins tight clothing). The Norvegi use this power very sparingly.

Cost: Two Vitae

Dice Pool: No roll necessary: this power activates automatically.

Action: Reflexive

The armor created by this power lasts for the rest of the scene. It grants 2/1 points of armor to the character, but reduces the character's Defense and Speed by 1 point each, since the shell is melded directly with the skin and slows down movement.

•••• FLESHDART

The Norvegus grows a vicious-looking spike of blood, bone and stale, solidified fat in the palm of his hand, which he can eject with lethal force.

Cost: One Vitae per dart.

Dice Pool: thrown attack (the dice pool is Dexterity + Athletics – target's Defense as per normal)

Action: Instant

The dart counts as a normal thrown attack (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook** p. 67). The dart has a damage bonus of 1 and causes aggravated damage. Its short range is equal to the character's Strength + Dexterity + Athletics, medium range is twice that and long range is four times short range.

••••• ERUPTING QUILLS

The Norvega's entire body explodes into an array of blades and spikes, some of which leave her body altogether, like a porcupine's quills. The power shreds her clothes but impales anyone and everyone around her within a range of about five feet.

Cost: Three Vitae

Dice Pool: Strength + Brawl + Bloodworking

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The blades erupt inwards, causing three Health points of aggravated damage to the character.

Failure: The points of Vitae are spent, but apart from a rippling under the skin, nothing happens.

Success: The character takes two points of aggravated damage from the eruption of his flesh. Everyone within a five feet radius of the Norvegus takes points of lethal damage for every success the player rolled. The explosion of blades is so fast, it gives no chance of using Defense, although armor protects against the assault as if it were a close combat attack.

Exceptional Success: The character causes an exceptional amount of harm, but suffers no damage herself.

DETOURNEMENT

The hungry corpses who have inhabited the Moulding Room these last thirty years have dedicated themselves to surveillance and subversion in equal measure, and that subversion extends to the flesh, both their own and others'.

• THE CONTAGION PRINCIPLE

The vampire can disconnect a shred of her fingernail which, on contact with living or undead flesh, burrows just under the skin. The owner feels a sympathy with it, and knows how far away and in what direction it lies, for as long as the effect lasts. A vampire with this power activated will never be able to lose track of the person implanted.

Cost: One Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Stealth + Detournement, opposed by the target's Wits + Blood Potency. The character must first touch the target (as per **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157) to use this power.

Action: Reflexive and Contested; resistance is reflexive.

A handshake or a brief brush is all a character needs to use this power. Unless the character rolls a dramatic failure, the target does not know that anything has come to pass.

A character can only use this power on one individual at a time.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target knows exactly what has happened, and feels a great deal of discomfort. The shred of fingernail itches like hell, but it can easily be removed from the target's skin with a pair of tweezers, like a splinter. The vampire gains no information.

Failure: The character fails to implant the splinter of fingernail.

Success: The target feels nothing, and the character now knows how far away and roughly where the target is. If the character is within a hundred yards of the victim, she knows the victim's location *exactly*. This power has a variable duration, depending on how many successes the character rolled.

Successes

Duration

1 success

One night

2 successes

Three nights

3 successes

One week

4 successes

Two weeks

5+ successes

One month

Exceptional Success: Apart from the enhanced duration, the character gains no extra benefits from rolling five or more successes.

•• THE PLEASURE OF THE TEXT

The vampires of the Moulding Room have a terrifying ability to consume information. A vampire with this power seeps his blood over a book, CD, DVD or video tape. Then, he takes the blood back into himself, leaving the media blood-smeared and completely devoid of any of the recorded material on that medium. In this fashion, the vampire literally ingests the knowledge formerly stored on that item.

Cost: One Vitae to activate the power, though this point is regained when the blood is re-consumed.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Stamina + Detournement

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character's blood rejects the media. Upon consuming the blood once more, the vampire takes a point of aggravated damage. Additionally, the vampire does not regain the point of Vitae used to activate the power.

Failure: The character's blood simply fails to imprint the information, and the vampire does not regain the point of Vitae used to activate the power.

Success: The character instantly knows the information on the media she anointed with her blood, as if she had read it, watched it or listened to it. The object is destroyed by the blood.

Exceptional Success: The character assimilates the information on the media item targeted by this power. Additionally, this process does not destroy the media item – the blood simply wicks away cleanly when the vampire re-consumes it.

••• THE EYE BEHIND THE GLASS

The Residents of the Moulding Room are masters of surveillance, and part of this has to do with their fetishization of the camera, the Eye Behind the Glass. The Residents have turned the fetish into a fact. A resident with this power can literally remove her eye and install it with wiring, Vitae and spittle behind a camera lens or a mirror, meaning that she can always perceive that area as though she were looking out of the lens or mirror herself, wherever she is.

Cost: One Vitae. Also, the power inflicts one level of lethal damage on the character as she gouges out her own eye.

Dice Pool: Wits + Stamina + Detournement

Action: Instant

Anyone who finds the eye can destroy it automatically, causing the vampire intense pain and another level of lethal damage.



Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character gouges too deep, and inflicts on herself a point of aggravated damage. She ruins the eye, and suffers the penalties of having one eye until she heals the damage.

Failure: The character inflicts the lethal damage and spends the Vitae, but cannot empower the eye to see.

Success: The character can install the eye behind a camera lens, a mirror, or in some other vantage point, using her own Vitae as glue. The vampire can now see everything the eye sees. The duration depends on the number of successes rolled.

Successes	Duration
1 success	One night
2 successes	Three nights
3 successes	One week
4 successes	Two weeks
5+ successes	One month

While the eye is placed in this way, the character suffers all the penalties of having the Flaw: One Eye (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 219). If the character heals the damage at any point, the external eye shrivels and ceases to work, while the character grows a new one. If the eye is ever hit by direct sunlight, it combusts quickly and is consumed in seconds, leaving only a slightly greasy blackened area where it once sat.

Exceptional Success: The eye works as above, but the character suffers no damage.

•••• FACE OF NEW FLESH

Faces are everything to the Moulding Room. The face of a celebrity in a gossip magazine, the newsreader, the head of state. Yet the vampire barely has a face at all, a blur at most. Even with the costly application of will, the vampire can only be seen in a mirror, or in pictures, or on film. But with the right application of knives and blood, the vampire can steal the face of a living human, allowing him to appear as that mortal. And the more famous the mortal, the easier that face is to remove – the more one's face appears on screen, the less his face is his own.

With a human face over his own, the vampire has a reflection, and appears in photographs and film entirely normally, until the face withers away. If the character has the Hollow Mekhet weakness, he gains the stolen reflection, but still has no shadow and makes no sound on recordings or through telephones.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Presence + Medicine + Detournement – victim's Stamina + Composure.

Action: Extended; 10+ successes needed. Each roll represents five minutes of work.

The vampire needs a scalpel, and, more importantly, needs the victim to be helpless in his clutches.

The victim is permanently disfigured, if he doesn't die of his injuries, since the skin of his face, his scalp and his hair are torn away, leaving only bloody muscle and tendon open to the air. It's agony, and the victim suffers five points of aggravated damage, and may bleed to death if he doesn't get medical help by dawn.

Using this power is always a sin against Humanity 4 or above. It requires a degeneration roll with a pool of three dice.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire damages the face, so that it is unusable. The victim is scarred for the rest of his life, if the vampire lets him live.

Failure: No successes are added to the total. The vampire makes no headway in removing the face or attaching it to his own.

Success: Successes are added to the total. The final number of successes determines how long the vampire will be able to wear the face.

Successes	Duration
10 successes	One night
11 successes	Two nights
12 successes	Three nights
13 successes	Five nights
14 successes	One week
15+ successes	Ten nights

Exceptional Success: The vampire makes significant headway towards removing the face. No other benefits come from rolling an exceptional success.

Suggested Modifiers: Victim has the Fame Merit (+1 per dot).

••••• THE SOUL TRANSPLANT

One of the founders of the Moulding Room discovered, back in 1976, that the human soul was, in fact, a small organ vaguely resembling a six-inch-long spermatozoon encased within the breastbone.

Or maybe he was making it up. It fundamentally doesn't matter. This, the highest power of Detournement, *makes* it happen. With a scalpel, the character opens up the breastbone of a dead or comatose human and pulls the slithery, still-screaming object out. If the owner wasn't dead, he soon will be. Residents of the Moulding Room with this power keep libraries of "souls," preserved in formaldehyde.

When the time comes, they transplant these "souls" into other mortals, or consume them, in order to gain moral strength.

Cost: One Willpower to remove or transplant

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Medicine + Detournement to transplant or remove; Stamina + Composure + Detournement to consume a “soul.”

Action: Extended to remove or transplant; five successes required to remove; another five to transplant. Each roll represents two hours of work. Consuming an already stored “soul” is an instant action.

The “souls” have their own unique characteristics. For example, the consistency and activity of the organ gives some sign as to the character of the individual. If it is firm, smooth-textured and moves strongly, its owner was someone of high moral character. If it's flaccid and barely moving at all, it belonged to someone weak or evil.

The “soul” organ can be transplanted into another human body, replacing the implantee's “soul.” The recipient of the transplant replaces his own Morality Rating with the rating of the previous owner of the “soul,” along with any derangements gained through degeneration (which, again, replace any derangements he might have). A journalist with a Morality of 6, for example, falls into the clutches of a Resident of the Moulding Room. The Resident drugs and performs surgery on the journalist, replacing his “soul” with that of a professional killer (Morality 2). Apart from the pain of recovery and the scar, the journalist doesn't *feel* different. But later on he discovers that his conscience doesn't bother him at all when he starts behaving callously towards the people he writes about and, later, brutally towards his girlfriend... and he starts hearing voices.

The vampire can also use the “soul” for his own purposes: eating it – and if he has this power, he *can* eat it – grants him an extra Willpower dot for the rest of the night. He can't spend the dot on any power that requires the permanent expenditure of a dot of Willpower (such as creating a childe or joining a bloodline), but he can benefit from the extra points of Willpower the “soul” provides and the advantage of having a bigger maximum Willpower pool. The character can only use a number of “souls” equal to his Blood Potency or less at any one time. At the end of the night, the character vomits a pale, slimy substance as the power wears off.

Dead bodies without “souls” can receive the Embrace, but a new “soulless” vampire is always a draugr, with no dots in Humanity at all.

Using this power is always a sin against Humanity 3 (two dice).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character destroys the “soul,” whatever he is doing, and gains no benefit from it. If transplanting, the recipient of the transplant dies.

Failure: The character cannot remove, transplant or consume the soul, but does not destroy it (and if removing a “soul”, doesn't immediately kill the victim).

Success: The character gains the successes needed, and the operation works as planned, or the character eats the soul.

Exceptional Success: The character gained ten or more successes on the roll to remove the soul or transplant it. The recipient of a transplant does not have a scar. The victim of a removal is sewn up perfectly, and the corpse does not show the signs of having been violated. If the character is consuming a previously stored “soul,” he not only gains an extra dot of Willpower, but his pool of Willpower points is replenished in full.

Suggested Modifiers: The character has access to surgical equipment (+1 to +3), the character is working in an unsanitary or unsuitable environment, or with inappropriate tools (-1 to -3), the victim is not dead (-3), the victim has been dead for more than 48 hours (-1), the victim has been dead longer than a week (-2), the victim has been dead longer than a month (-4).

MEMINISSE

The Mnemosyne draw memories from the Blood, and central to the memory of the Kindred are the ties of blood. The Discipline of Meminisse (the Latin infinitive: “Remembering”) depends on blood-ties. Creating them, breaking them and using them are the hallmarks of the Mnemosyne.

All of the powers of Meminisse from two to five dots gain the +2 blood-tie bonus to dice pools, along with any other bonuses and penalties that come into play. For systems covering blood-ties, see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 162.

• CREATE TIES

The Mnemosyne drinks the blood of another vampire; he tastes it; he transubstantiates it within him. He savors the memories encoded within, the millennia of evil that produced it. He gets to know it. He creates a link with it.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: None; the power is always in effect.

Action: Instant

A Mnemosyne can create an artificial blood-tie with any vampire he has drunk Vitae from: he gains the +2 bonus to Discipline use directed at the vampire he's just drunk from (or +3 if the vampire is from the Mekhet clan, or already has a blood-tie with the character), and can benefit from blood sympathy (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 163).

The Mnemosyne does not have to have drunk the Vitae directly from the vampire; it might have been decanted into a glass, or bottled, for example.

Note that the Mnemosyne still suffers the adverse effects of drinking Vitae: he becomes more at risk of developing a Vinculum, having taken a taste, and, perhaps more dangerously, may very quickly suffer from blood addiction (which is compounded by the Mnemosyne's weakness – see p. 82).

•• DIPPING IN THE POOL

The Mnemosyne can use blood-ties and blood sympathy to gain useful flashes of insight. She looks within herself, and then without; blood calls to blood, and draws on faint memories from other vampires in the area, and from mortals whose blood she has tasted.

Drawing on race memories, memories lost in Vitae and the collective pool of experience shared by the living and the dead through generations untold, the Mnemosyne knows exactly how to approach her next task.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Meminisse

Action: Instant

The Mnemosyne must be within 100 yards of at least one vampire with whom she has a genuine or artificial blood-tie and/or one mortal whose blood she has tasted to use this power.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Mnemosyne draws too much, and becomes overloaded with memories and experiences. She suffers a -1 penalty to all dice pools using a Mental Attribute or Skill for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The Mnemosyne fails to access any memories of use.

Success: For every applicable human or vampire within a 100 yard radius, the Mnemosyne gains a bonus of +1 to a single dice pool using a Mental Skill. For example, if the vampire was within 100 yards of her sire, her childe, a vampire on whom she'd created an artificial blood-tie and a regular mortal vessel, she'd add +4 to her dice pool.

Exceptional Success: The Mnemosyne gains a +2 bonus for every applicable human or vampire in range.

••• SEVER TIES

Just as the Mnemosyne can create blood-ties, so too can she sever them.

Cost: One Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Meminisse, opposed by target's Resolve + Stamina + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive and optional

The vampire can permanently remove an artificial blood-tie or temporarily sever a "natural" one (that is, one created through the sire-childe relationship).

The blood-tie bonus does affect this power. The target can feel what the character is doing, and can elect not to resist.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character not only fails to remove the blood-tie, but strengthens it in a way advantageous for the other vampire, meaning that the target gets an additional +1 to Discipline rolls directed at the character for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The vampire fails to remove the blood-tie.

Success: The target ceases to have the blood-tie in question. If the tie was created by the first dot of Meminisse, the tie is severed permanently. If the blood-tie is "natural," the tie remains cut for the rest of the scene.

Exceptional Success: The vampire cuts the tie. If the tie was "natural," it remains severed until the next sunset.

•••• THE EXCHANGE OF THINGS PAST

Having gained mastery over blood-ties and learned how to read the collective memory of the blood, the Mnemosyne develops the power to access another person's memories, human or vampire.

Cost: One Willpower

Dice Pool: pool

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

The character reaches into the mind of a vampire with whom he has a blood-tie or a mortal whose blood he has tasted.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character accidentally wipes out a chunk of her own memory, losing several years of her mortal memories and the last month of her time as a vampire. She gains the Flaw: Amnesia (*The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 218). This is indefinite, although it can be healed with the Devotion The Restoration of Things Lost (see p. 110).

Failure: The Mnemosyne cannot exchange memories with the target.

Success: The Mnemosyne exchanges memories with the target. He can access any part of the target's memory, but for every memory he takes from the target, he must offer a memory of equal length, which the target suddenly remembers. This lasts about a scene.

The player and storyteller should talk about what memories the character chooses to give up: it could be anything from his wedding day as a mortal, or his first kiss, the death of a parent or loved one, to his death, an

experience of feeding, or any other memory of horror or joy, pleasure or pain. The character and the target both know that these aren't their memories, and become aware of holes in their own memories, even though they don't know what they lost. Targets of this power become confused and frightened. A vampire target of this power must roll to avoid Fear Frenzy.

While the power is in effect, both the character and the target forget the things they exchanged. After the end of the scene, both the character and the target get back their own memories, but don't forget the memories they received from the other. After this experience, the player of a mortal target must roll Resolve + Composure to avoid gaining a derangement.

Exceptional Success: As for success, but the Mnemosyne can elect to exchange some or all of the memories permanently. This can be seductive: the vampire doesn't know what he has lost, and doesn't know if it matters or not. Many elder Mnemosyne become repositories of vast stores of memory, with no memories of their own.

Suggested Modifiers: Target is bound to character with Vinculum (+3), character is bound by Vinculum to target (-3), memories the character wishes to take from the target are repressed, secret or traumatic (-2).

••••• THE THIEF OF MINDS

The Mnemosyne, having perfected the art of exchanging memories through the ties of tasted blood, now learns how to use this art as an attack.

Cost: One Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Meminisse versus Resolve + Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Extended and Contested; resistance is reflexive. The character needs 10 successes to succeed. Each roll represents one turn of effort.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Mnemosyne wipes her own mind clean, gaining the Flaw: Amnesia (*The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 218). She knows she is a vampire, and she knows how to use her Skills and Disciplines, but everything else is gone, even her own name. This is indefinite, but can be healed using the Devotion The Restoration of Things Lost (see p. 110).

Failure: The character fails to add any successes to her total, or the target gathers 10 successes before the vampire. The vampire fails to steal the target's memory.

Success: Successes are added to the total. If the character gains 10 successes before the target, the target loses all memory of who he is or was. Although he retains the use of his Skills, supernatural powers and other Traits, he becomes confused. He doesn't even know his own name.

The target is easily manipulated. Any character attempting to use social Skills such as Persuade or Intimidate on the character, does so with a +3 dice pool bonus.

The duration of the amnesia depends on how many successes the Mnemosyne rolled or until a Mnemosyne (the original character using this power or another) heals the target with the Devotion The Restoration of Things Lost.

Successes	Duration
10 successes	One scene
11 successes	Until sunrise
12 successes	Until the next sunset
13 successes	Two nights
14 successes	Four nights
15+ successes	One week

Exceptional Success: The character gains a final total of 15 or more successes. The target loses his memory for a week; his player must roll Resolve + Composure when the character's memory returns; if the roll fails, the character gains a derangement.

SETHITE CRÚAC RITUALS

The Followers of Seth have worked blood magic for some four thousand years, and if the formal Egyptian rituals they perform are similar to the Acolytes', one has to ask: who learned their magic from whom?

Sethite rituals often involve complicated symbolic formulae, vestments, masks, braziers issuing odd-colored smoke, altars and the like, and imprecations to the powers of Ancient Egypt, particularly to the demon Amemet the Devourer and, of course, to the Lord of Entropy himself, Typhon Seth.

Although the paraphernalia helps (it offers a +2 equipment bonus to the dice pool), the only thing that the Sethites' rituals really require is a blood sacrifice. Having obtained some blood from the sacrifice, the caster mixes it with some of his own, and either burns the concoction in a brazier or uses it in some other way as part of the ritual. One to three-dot rituals require the death of a mouse or similar small animal. Four-dot rituals require a more substantial sacrifice, such as a dog, a cat, a sheep, a bull or a goat. Five-dot rituals require a human sacrifice (and require degeneration rolls if the character performing the ritual has Humanity 3 or above, since it's premeditated murder by any definition except the Sethites').

Sethites can learn Crúac rituals if they have three or more dots in the Merit: Initiation (Followers of Seth). They have access to the following Crúac rituals through their Shadow Cult: Pangs of Proserpina, Rigor Mortis, Cheval, the Hydra's Vitae, Touch of the Morrigan, and Blood Blight.

They can also learn these unique rituals:

GENIUS LOCI (LEVEL ONE CRUAC RITUAL)

The Sethites recognize that many locales bear the mark of Typhon Seth. They're places of ill-omen: shorelines where ghost-villages appear by night, murder houses, graveyards and other places where the borders between the real world and the place of spirits and ghosts are thin. Using this ritual, a Sethite promotes chaos by increasing the supernatural ambience of a place. The Sethite leaves a tiny smear of Vitae somewhere on or near the location, for example on a rock, a piece of furniture or a wall.

A room goes cold. If outside, it starts to drizzle filthy, foul-smelling rain. Witch-fire plays around the trees. Apparitions flicker in and out of vision in the corner of one's eye. Rot and mold spontaneously appear. Urban decay appears briefly to accelerate. All Social dice pools are penalized by -1, apart from Intimidation, which instead gains a +1 bonus.

This effect lasts for a scene.



DAMNATION CITY

If you are using the Attitude and Ambience systems found in **Damnation City** pp. 153-162, this ritual instead moves the Ambience of an area one step towards "Simmering" in either direction for one scene.



AMEMET'S PURSUIT (LEVEL TWO CRUAC RITUAL)

Amemet, a demon combining the attributes of hippopotamus, lion and crocodile, devoured the souls of the wicked; none could escape him. The Sethite who invokes Amemet takes on the role of patient pursuer. She lays a curse upon her victim, smearing blood on a small effigy. This done, whichever way the victim flees, he runs straight into the arms of the Sethite. He leaves a room, and finds himself running back in. He turns a corner, and the next thing he knows, he's turned 180 degrees and he's traveling right back down the street, right back to where the smiling vampire awaits.

The activation roll for this ritual is contested by a reflexive roll of the target's Wits + Composure + Blood Potency. If the caster rolls the most successes, the next time the victim tries to run away from her, he runs in her direction. She need not move, only wait for him to arrive. The power lasts for a scene.

THE HAND OF SETH (LEVEL THREE CRUAC RITUAL)

With this ritual, the Sethite can drive a possessing spirit out of a body.

The body must be immobilized (held down, tied up or chained) within sight of the caster. The caster smears some of the mixed sacrificial blood and Vitae on the bare skin of the target while pronouncing a brief, formulaic imprecation to Typhon Seth. If the roll is successful, the possessing spirit must leave its host, and cannot attempt to possess its original victim or any other for a number of turns equal to the number of successes rolled.

The ritual doesn't damage a spirit, and can only be used on a spirit possessing a body.

THE THRASHING OF APEP'S COILS (LEVEL FOUR CRUAC RITUAL)

The Sethite must perform this ritual in the open air, throwing Vitae and sacrificial blood into the air and screaming for the coming of Apep, the Great Dead Serpent, Bringer of Discord.

Success brings about sudden extreme weather conditions: lightning, freezing rain, hail or snow, howling winds and similar phenomena.

Suggested Modifiers: Weather already poor (+1), weather exceptionally fine and warm (-2).

BLADE OF TU'AT (LEVEL FOUR CRUAC RITUAL)

The Sethite smears a knife or sword (ritually, the Sethites favor the use of the bronze *Khepesh*, the dog-legged scimitar of Ancient Egypt) with the mixed blood of the sacrificial victim and his own Vitae. If the activation roll for this ritual is successful, the blade gains the power to cause aggravated damage to ghosts and spirits, whether in twilight or materialized. The weapon is no more effective than usual against anyone else. The effect of the ritual lasts until dawn, when the weapon rusts or rots away and can never be used again.

THE RITE OF GOING FORTH BY DAY (LEVEL FIVE CRUAC RITUAL)

The vampire walks by night: that is the orderly way. And so, this is the most evil of rituals, for it violates the cosmic order, and needs a life to make it possible. Having slaughtered some conscious human victim, either unwilling or willing (or at any rate, brainwashed into being willing), the vampire cuts out the victim's heart and eats it. Then she retires to her haven. She falls into a deep sleep. Come



sunrise, she leaves her body, getting up and walking about in the broad daylight. Although insubstantial, she appears to be completely solid, and can interact with anyone she meets. She can't make use of Disciplines, however, and can only touch the physical world for a few seconds (to brush a hand across a face, write a brief message on a piece of paper, open a door, or the like) if her player spends a point of Vitae and makes a successful roll of Presence + Occult. Even if the vampire is not a Hollow Mekhet, she has no reflection, no shadow, and does not appear on film, nor does she create an echo or register on any device that records or transmits sound.

The vampire can see ghosts and spirits in this state, and can touch and even fight them, but is under a great deal of risk, since she can bring no weapons or equipment with her and cannot access her supernatural powers.

DEVOTIONS

For the most part, the Mekhet teach these Devotions to their own, and Kindred of other clans rarely have the opportunity to learn them. The exceptions are the Devotion Encode Vitae, which the Ordo Dracul also teaches, but which still tends mostly to be learned by the Mekhet, and the Devotions of the Moirai, who recruit the Daeva as cult members too.

BUTCHER'S HOOK

(Auspex • • •)

Further Prerequisite: Mekhet

A London-based Mekhet named Bobby Butchers became something of an expert at interpreting CCTV records. Even though most vampires only appear as blurs in photographs and film, Butchers worked out a technique enabling him to identify a vampire caught on CCTV or any other kind of video, and in recent years, others have also developed similar techniques.

This power isn't really a Devotion as such; it's a specific application of Auspex. A Mekhet watches a recording (or, if you're a cockney like Bobby, he "takes a butcher's"), and takes note of the blur that signifies the presence of a vampire.

He concentrates on the blur. He places his hand on the screen.

First, he use The Spirit's Touch (Auspex 3), and follows that immediately in the next turn with Aura Perception (Auspex 2). He spends one Vitae to activate each power, meaning that he spends a total of two Vitae over two turns, even though neither power doesn't normally have a cost.

If both rolls are successful, the vampire using this power can identify the vampire underneath the blur, providing



that he has met the vampire before. Of course, this power doesn't work on Hollow Mekhet, since they don't appear on recorded media at all.

This technique costs six experience points to learn.

THE CUTTING OF THE STRINGS

(Auspex •••, Obfuscate ••)

Further Prerequisite: Initiation (Moirai) •

The Moirai teach the power to hide from the auguries of one another, and from other beings with supernatural powers. The proficient vampire can make it very hard for vampires, magicians or other beings with supernatural powers to use divination techniques to ascertain his past, present or future.

Cost: One Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Auspex

Action: Instant

The character awakens, and looks beyond the world surrounding him. Fate's threads envelop him and tie him down. He visualizes a spiritual knife, slicing them away, one at a time.

A character can only attempt to use this Divination once a night, upon waking.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire tangles himself hopelessly within Fate's strands. Any divinations made around the character gain a +3 bonus.

Failure: The character makes no difference to the strands of Fate surrounding him, and does not affect any divinations that target or include him.

Success: Any divinations (including the Devotion Manteia, below, but not the benefits of the first dot in the Moirai Initiation) concerning the character's past, present or future fates suffer a -1 penalty to dice pools for every success rolled.

Exceptional Success: As for success, but the character instinctively knows when someone else is trying to perform a divination that concerns him in some way.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

ENCODE VITAE

(Auspex •••, Obfuscate •• or Auspex •••, Meminisse •)

Prerequisite: Status (Ordo Dracul)• or Mnemosyne bloodline

The Ordo Dracul have, in the past, jealously guarded the secret of Courier Ghouls, but since the Mnemosyne developed the process in the first place, it was in fact a fairly hopeless enterprise, since the Mnemosyne had been doing it long before they showed the Dragons how.

Cost: One Willpower, and one Vitae for each significant memory or item of information encoded.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Auspex.

Action: Extended; each roll is equivalent to one hour's meditation.

The vampire sheds a few drops of her own Vitae into a glass, drinks and swallows it, and then regurgitates; holding it in her gullet, she enters a trance state where she encodes her memories on the blood before spitting it out once more.

This done, she can inject it into her ghoul.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does the vampire fail to encode the memories within his blood, but the process wipes the memories from his mind. He forgets the very thing he was trying to pass on, and can never regain it himself.

Failure: The character gains less than a total of five successes. She fails to empower the Vitae, and it's wasted.

Success: The character manages to gain more than five successes. She can encode one significant memory, one hour of personal experience, or information broadly equivalent to the study of a single chapter of a text book for each point of Vitae so used. The blood doesn't retain its power indefinitely; the length of time it holds the information depends on how many successes rolled.

Successes	Duration
5 successes	One night
6 successes	One week
7 successes	Two weeks
8 successes	One month
9 successes	Three months
10+ successes	One year

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-2	The character is trying to encode complex or academic information, such as a lecture or a meeting in which financial or business information was passed around.
+2	The character has the Eidetic Memory Merit.

The first vampire who feeds from the ghoul remembers the information encoded into the Vitae as if it were his own experience – if the player succeeds in a reflexive roll of Wits + Composure + Blood Potency. If he fails, he can try again, by feeding a little more. Only one vampire can drink memories encoded in a ghoul's Vitae. Once they've been sucked out of the ghoul's blood, they're gone.

The version of this power using Auspex and Obfuscate costs 15 experience points to learn, while the version using Auspex and Meminisse costs 12 points to learn.

MANTEIA

(Auspex •••, Obfuscate •, Celerity •)

Prerequisite: Initiation (Moirai) •••

The power of the Moirai to predict the future has been rumored for centuries. In fact, the great secret of the Moirai is not that they necessarily know what the future holds, but that they can *make* the future happen. Fate bends to their will, making some futures easier to manifest than others.

Cost: One Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Auspex versus target's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Extended and Contested; 5 successes needed, each roll is equivalent to one minute's effort. Resistance is reflexive and optional (a target can choose not to resist).

The character takes a reading of some kind, using a Tarot spread, a palm reading, tea leaves, haruspicy, phrenology, astrology or any other kind of divination the character favors. The target doesn't have to be present at the character's reading but can only choose not to resist the divination if he is present.

And from that, the vampire says what will happen. And Fate conspires with the divination.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character describes an outcome that is especially unlikely. Any roll made to further the result mentioned in the divination suffers a -3 dice pool penalty.

Failure: The roll fails to gain any successes. If the target gains five successes first, the divination fails to find anything conclusive at all.

Success: The character names an outcome, preferably in suitably vague terms, and for the duration of the augury, any dice pool directly relevant to the desired outcome gains a +1 bonus, and any roll which would thwart the purpose of the augury suffers a -1 penalty.

Successes	Duration
10 successes	One night
11 successes	Two nights
12 successes	Three nights
13 successes	Seven nights
14 successes	12 nights
15+ successes	23 nights

Exceptional Success: The character gathers 15 or more successes. The effects of the augury last until the next solstice or equinox, but for the first night the bonus or penalty attached to rolls relevant to the outcome of the divination is +/-2.

Suggested Modifiers: Character using power on self (-1), character has blood-tie with target (+2), target is under Vinculum to vampire (+3), character is under Vinculum to target (-3), augury is based upon a condition ("Should the Prince find himself alone under the full moon, the Children of the Wolf shall sate their wrath upon him") (+2), augury is very specific ("You shall find the Book of Unwritten Names tonight") (-1), augury is very general ("All of your joys shall turn to ash in your mouth; all of your enterprises shall fail") (-4).

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

THE METHUSALEH EFFECT

(Auspex •••••, Majesty •••••, Obfuscate •••)

Prerequisite: Initiation (Moirai) •••

The oldest of the Moirai know how to hide from the Fog of Ages, concealing their memories within their dead hearts, the better to sleep without dreaming, to wake without forgetting.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: None

Action: None; this power works automatically

This power has only one use: the character who learns it does not suffer from the Fog of Ages while in Torpor.

Drawback: The character stays in torpor as if his Humanity were one dot lower than it actually is. When he awakes, he forgets this devotion and must learn it again. If his Blood Potency falls below five dots, he must still spend experience points to re-gain higher-level Traits when his Blood Potency rises again.

THE RESTORATION OF THINGS LOST

(Auspex •••, Meminisse •••••)

Prerequisite: Mnemosyne bloodline

The Mnemosyne always risk losing their own memories, and their powers can sometimes work too well. There are times when memories – their own, or others' – must be restored.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Meminisse

Action: Instant

This power works on all sorts of memory loss, from dissociative fugues and trauma-induced memory loss through to the amnesia inflicted by the use of Meminisse. The character places his hand on the target's face and reaches within her mind, drawing out things hidden and damaged.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire wipes the memories away forever, and they can never be recovered, either by this power or any other means.

Failure: The character fails to find the lost memories.

Success: The character finds the lost memories. They flood to the surface, and the target briefly experiences them all at once. The target's player must roll Resolve + Composure or gain a derangement.

Exceptional Success: The character not only regains the lost memories, but does so gently and gradually, meaning that the target is in no danger of gaining a derangement.

Suggested Modifiers: The vampire is reversing the effects of his own power (+2), the vampire is reversing the effects of a dramatic failure (-2), the character is using the power on himself (-1), character has blood-tie with target (+2), target is under Vinculum to vampire (+3), character is under Vinculum to target (-3).

This power costs 21 experience points to learn.

THE RITUAL OF NOURISHMENT

(Auspex •••, Obfuscate •)

For thousands of years, the Followers of Seth have known the magical formula that calls a Reflection to one place and allows it to feed on a plate of food.

Mekhet who know how to manipulate and perceive the spiritual nature of objects can, with the right formulae and a plate of freshly prepared food and a glass of wine, give a Reflection form and shape, and sate its hunger.

Although the Sethites teach this devotion, anyone can learn it, if the Sethites choose to teach it.

Cost: One Vitae, mixed in with the ingredients of a plate of food

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Auspex – Reflection's Resistance

Action: Extended

The vampire using this devotion can wield it on any vampire's Reflection: he need only know the name of the vampire to whom the Reflection belongs. He has to prepare the food himself, with a drop of Vitae, and lay it out in a formal manner (which means, in the modern West, with a full table setting, accompanied by a glass of wine). Having made the food, lit the candle and sat down at the other side of the table, the vampire using the devotion begins to chant the ancient words.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Reflection does not come, and worse, wherever it is, it goes into an immediate Hunger Frenzy.

Failure: Nothing happens. The Reflection goes its own way and ignores the summons.

Success: The Reflection materializes by the food (even if it doesn't have the Materialize Numen) and begins to eat. It cannot leave the table until it has finished, and can converse with anyone in the room while it does so, if it

elects to. For every success rolled, the Reflection gains one point of Essence, and even if the vampire only rolled one success, the Reflection does not need to feed tonight.

If anyone attacks the Reflection, it vanishes, and any benefit the ritual may have granted is lost.

Exceptional Success: As for success, except that the Reflection gains its full Essence pool.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

SPIRIT SIGHT

(Auspex •, Crúac •)

Some Mekhet are simply too curious to resist peeling back the veil, others simply cannot gain the knowledge they seek in any other way. Through mystical focus, the vampire learns to extend their senses into the afterlife, allowing them to see and communicate with ghosts.

Cost: –

Dice Pool: Like Heightened Senses, this power typically involves no roll. The player simply activates the power, allowing them to see and hear across the veil. This devotion does not give Kindred the ability to see or interact with the spiritual world of werewolves, simply the unquiet dead. If the area is highly populated by spirits, the resulting clamor can overwhelm the vampire unless the player succeeds on a Resolve roll. Failure disorients the character, making him effectively unaware of his surroundings until the end of the following turn.

Action: Instant

This power costs five experience points to learn.

TIMED MESSAGE

(Auspex ••••, Majesty •, Celerity •)

Prerequisite: Initiation (Moirai) •••

The Moirai depend on human cultists even more than the other Shadow Cults do. The Weavers and Fates of the Moirai cultivate the devotion of the faithful by sending them messages in broad daylight. At a predetermined time, the mind of the convert becomes flooded with the voice of his master, and he can do nothing but listen, although no forces in this power compel his obedience.

Cost: One Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Expression + Auspex

Action: Instant

The Weaver or Fate composes a telepathic message and names a time at which a mortal cultist targeted known to the vampire will receive it. The mortal in question must be someone he has seen before the message will arrive (although the mortal doesn't have to have seen the vampire).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The cultist receives a message, but it doesn't arrive at the right time or isn't remotely what the vampire actually wanted to say.

Failure: The vampire can't create a message with the power to linger until the appointed time. He must try again.

Success: The vampire can name a time, within about an hour, when the mortal will receive a telepathic message.

Exceptional Success: The character can, if he chooses, name a condition instead of a time when the message will arrive (for example, when the cultist meets a certain individual, or when the cultist arrives at a certain place).

Suggested Modifiers: Target has no dots in Initiation (Moirai) Merit (-2), target is a ghoul (+1), target is under Vinculum to vampire (+3).

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

SHADOW SYSTEMS

The Mekhet appear to be the most ordinary of the Kindred, the ones who seem to have the least to distinguish them from the other vampires. They watch and hide, and the other Clans don't really take much notice of them. But, as Frances has found out, there's a lot more to the Mekhet. They have their own secrets of the blood. And they know things about other Kindred that the others don't even know about themselves.

THE POST-MORTEM EMBRACE

Not everything Nitokris says is reliable, but one thing at least is true: the Kindred can Embrace corpses they didn't kill themselves, even, under some circumstances, people who have been dead for days. It's a secret of the vampiric condition. It doesn't *matter* whether you killed your childe yourself, or how she died, whether a vampire stole her blood or she was shot, or strangled, or – like Frances – drowned. What matters is the act of will that empowers that drop of blood with the power to bring the dead back to a mockery of life.

Several of the Mekhet know that they can do it, but few of Clan Mekhet's scholars have any idea whether or not vampires of other clans can, too. They can, as it happens, but for most of those other vampires the secret truth of it has been lost, waiting for someone adventurous (or perhaps too clueless to know any better) to rediscover it.

In game terms, any Kindred can give the Embrace to a corpse. It works the same way: the player spends one dot of Willpower and one point of Vitae, and a new vampire appears. The only limit is that no more than one sunset must have passed since the potential childe died for every dot of Blood Potency the sire has. For example, Frances had been dead for a week. Between the night she drowned and the night Doe dug her up, seven sunsets had

passed. Doe had seven dots of Blood Potency; if Frances had been dead for one more sunset, Doe could not have Embraced her.

In Ancient Egypt, the amount of time that could elapse between death and a possible Embrace was much greater, possibly even years, but the reason why that should have been is long lost, along with the conditions (a Nile Kingdom, a hereditary Royal Priesthood, the lore of mummification) themselves.

Additionally, the person must have been touched by the vampiric Curse before they died. Generally speaking, this means that a vampire must have influenced or been involved with the mortal before their death – generally speaking, having fed on the mortal the night they die is sufficient, as is a history of such feedings (the last of which must not have been longer than one day per dot of Blood Potency previous). But this isn't the only fashion: ghouls and those who are addicted to Vitae are under the effects of the Curse, as are those who have had mind- or emotion-altering Disciplines used on them. In game terms, any characters who have had five or more successes of such Disciplines used on them within the last month (which could be all at once, or in several instances) are also considered under the effects of the Curse.

Vampires created through a post-mortem Embrace are often subtly different to other Kindred. Sometimes it manifests in attitude; sometimes they develop different Disciplines, or become prone to entering unusual bloodlines. And sometimes they lose something.

THE HOLLOW

In the days of their early existence, the Mekhet were all what Mekhet elders now call the Hollow, vampires without reflections who cast no shadows and created no echoes. It was how they were made. The parts of their souls were split apart, and, as a result their *Kas* – their reflections,

their spirit doubles – stole their shadows and walked freely in the world, by both day and night.

Back then, it was a part of the vampiric condition for them. They didn't question it. A vampire walked and thirsted for blood, and his reflection ate carrion and sometimes made trouble for him. As time went on, the Mekhet met other vampires. It seemed there were easier, more immediate ways to make a vampire: you drink someone dry, you give them a bit of blood as they expire. The Embrace of the tomb's inhabitants became much rarer. Aside from a few ancient freaks, like Nitokris, the Hollow Mekhet more or less died out, since such Mekhet were created not wholly by the passing on of the blood but, in part, by circumstance.

A MATTER OF CIRCUMSTANCE

It doesn't matter whether a vampire's sire is a typical Mekhet or one of the Hollow. The childe of a Mekhet vampire, Hollow or otherwise, is always an ordinary Mekhet, unless the circumstances of the Embrace are just right.

The body must have been in the grave for at least a day before the Embrace. Nitokris believes that the body must have been given proper funerary rites, which in Ancient Egypt, means mummification and in the present-day Western world means being embalmed, viewed by the family, and given a conventional burial (and not, of course, a cremation). She's actually wrong: in fact, a Hollow Mekhet can be Embraced from any buried or otherwise interred body (even, say, a murder victim left in a shallow grave in the woods).

The only factor that is really important is that something has to have gone wrong with the burial. There must have been something improper or inadequate about the funerary rites. In the modern day, the grave may have been desecrated, or some sort of embarrassing and unworthy scene sullied the funeral in the memory of the dead person's mourners. Hardly anything is right about a victim's cadaver under a couple of feet of loose earth.

It doesn't always happen. But about half the time, the improper burial disturbs the victim's *Ka*, the victim's ghost. In Egypt, the *Ka* got hungry because the post-funerary rites weren't performed. The reflection wandered away.

This was enough for the ancient Egyptians. The thought of an improper funerary process filled any man or woman with any propriety at all with shuddery terror. The expectation of becoming some sort of demon was enough to ensure that an Egyptian *would* split apart from his reflection and rise as one of the Hollow. In the modern day, people don't talk about death, or think about it, and few have any conception of the afterlife (if they have one at all) that is even a fraction as complex as the Egyptian

afterlife schema. And this means that even in the case of all the funerary conditions being met, a Mekhet who Embraces the exhumed corpse still isn't guaranteed to create a Hollow Mekhet.

If the person was happy, and fulfilled, and both loved and aware that people loved her, sure that she would not be forgotten for a time, her spirit double will not wander away after she dies. It stays far longer in the vicinity than the spirit double of someone lonely, or unhappy, or invisible to the people around her. If some Mekhet Embraces this person, she retains her shadow.

On the other hand, it could be that a vampire who Embraces the corpse of some lonely suicide actually *creates* the spirit-double as the trauma of the vampire's hellish resurrection fractures her soul.

Either way, it doesn't really matter.

As Frances discovered, it's wholly possible for a Mekhet to manipulate the circumstances of a person's life, death, burial and the immediate aftermath of the burial. Doe watched Frances and had wished to Embrace her for some time. But the faceless creature was first and foremost an experimenter. It took pleasure in taking its time in grooming Frances for the Embrace. Doe wanted to create a Hollow Mekhet, because it thought that it could. So it followed Frances around, drove her to suicide, ensured that she was buried and not cremated, and desecrated the grave.

And because it was powerful enough to wait, it could.

BENEFITS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE HOLLOW

First and foremost, the Hollow are not beholden to the normal clan weakness of the Mekhet: they do not take any additional damage or other difficulty from sunlight and similar sources of damage.

A Hollow Mekhet has no *Ka*. With no spirit double, no ghost, the Hollow cannot leave any image, shadow or echo, ever.

Most vampires leave a blurry, indistinct image in mirrors, photographs and film, which they can choose to solidify temporarily. The Hollow Mekhet doesn't leave any reflection or image at all, regardless of how much she might wish to do so. She is entirely absent from photograph, film, mirror, magnifying lens or any other visual medium. She can only be seen with the naked eye.

The Hollow has no shadow, no matter how bright the light, and by spending a Willpower point, can choose not even to leave footprints, no matter how soft the ground.

In the same way, her echo has left her. She cannot be heard by any artificial medium, whether telephone or recording equipment, digital or analogue. She can stand

at the edge of a rocky canyon on the clearest of nights and scream at the top of her voice: no one will call back.

This condition is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a Mekhet can hide surpassingly well. She'll never be caught on CCTV. She can trip across deep snow and leave no sign she was ever there. But getting in touch with someone you're not standing next to is hard. And more than that, the Hollow Mekhet has to be very careful when walking out in the world. Standing in front of a mirror and showing no reflection is really weird. It's a huge breach of the Masquerade.

Most living humans, weirdly, don't see it straight away, as if they subconsciously choose to ignore it. But the danger comes when they do look. The player of any character (supernatural or human) who spends time in the presence of a Hollow Mekhet makes a reflexive roll of Wits + Composure once for every thirty minutes of interaction. If the roll succeeds, the character suddenly notices that this person he's been talking to doesn't have a reflection, or isn't casting a shadow, or has a voice that isn't affected by the acoustics of the room, or some other missing thing. What happens then is up to the player and the Storyteller.

And of course, along with all this, the Mekhet's Reflection is active in the world, and possibly quite dangerous.

THE MEKHET'S REFLECTION

The Hollow Mekhet's *Ka* believes that it's not wanted. It wanders off, traveling through mirrors, the backgrounds of photographs and TV screens. It has something of the personality of its original, but like the vampire, isn't complete. It doesn't feel in the same way. It can talk, and reason, and feed. It appears exactly the way the vampire looks; it's always wearing the same clothes as the vampire.

A Hollow Mekhet's Reflection is fundamentally a ghost (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 208), with a number of unique characteristics.

It has the urge to eat. In its most basic form, it's insubstantial, although it can feed. As it gains power (which reflects the power of its vampiric other half), it can learn to do more and more things, and may even learn to gain solid form.

Manifestation: The Reflection has to manifest within some visual medium: a photograph, a TV screen, or any other kind of reflection. If it doesn't have the Materialize Numen, it can only affect areas (or feed within areas) that it can see from the point in which it manifests.

Walking in Daylight: Unlike the vampire of which it is a part, the Reflection can appear by day. If it gains the power to leave its mirror (using the Materialize Numen,

below) it doesn't reflect in mirrors or show up on film, but it *does* have a shadow and it does have an echo. Unlike the vampire, it can be heard through recording equipment and telephones.

Exorcisms, Abjurations and Destruction: Although it's a ghost, the usual tactics that work against ghosts (such as exorcisms or abjurations) don't work against the Reflection in any permanent sense. If somehow a Reflection gets exorcised or apparently destroyed, it reforms in the nearest reflective surface at the next sunset. The only way to destroy a Hollow Mekhet's Reflection is to destroy the vampire. When the vampire dies forever, the Reflection ceases to exist.

Location: The Reflection must always remain within three miles of the vampire's location. While the vampire doesn't necessarily know where her Reflection is, the Reflection *always* knows where the vampire is, and can instantly move to within ten paces of her current location by spending a single point of Essence.

The Reflection knows exactly what the character knows. Each sunrise, it remembers what the vampire did over the course of the night. The character doesn't know what the Reflection knows, however.

Traits: A Reflection's Traits are based on the vampire it came from. The Reflection's Power trait is equal to the best of the vampire's Power Traits (Strength, Intelligence or Presence). Its Finesse Trait is equal to the best of the vampire's Finesse Traits (Dexterity, Wits or Manipulation); and its Resistance Trait is equal to the vampire's best Resistance Trait (Stamina, Resolve or Composure). If the vampire's relevant Traits change at any time, so do the Reflection's.

The Reflection's Size is the same as the vampire's, and its Corpus is equal to Resistance + Size. Its Speed is Power + Finesse + 5. Its Defense Trait is equal to the *higher* of Power or Finesse. Its Initiative Modifier is equal to Power + Resistance.

The Reflection's Virtue and Vice are the same as the vampire's; its Morality begins as the same as the vampire's Humanity score, and although it can be lower, it can never be higher. If the vampire character degenerates enough that her Humanity would become lower than her Reflection's Morality, the Reflection instantly loses Morality, wherever it is, so that its Morality score is the same as the character's Humanity.

The Reflection's maximum Essence pool is the same as the vampire's maximum Vitae pool, although it can spend as many points of Essence in a turn as it needs to.

Feeding: The Reflection gains Essence by consuming food and water. Unless the vampire performs the Ritual

of Sustenance (see below), the Reflection's preferred fare is carrion and stagnant water, and it needs to consume the equivalent of one Size point of meat and water each night for every dot of Blood Potency the vampire has (so if the vampire has five dots of Blood Potency, the Reflection needs to consume five Size points of meat and liquid, which is about the same as an adult human corpse). Having fed, the Reflection regains its whole Essence pool. If it doesn't feed enough, it only recovers one point of Essence. If it doesn't feed at all, it gains no Essence, not even the point that other ghosts recover each morning.

A Reflection with less than three points of Essence remaining becomes subject to hunger frenzy, in exactly the same way as a hungry vampire. It rolls Resistance to avoid frenzying, and needs a total of five successes to overcome the frenzy. Reflections who can't use the Materialize, Telekinesis or Snatch Numina thrash around, flitting wildly from image to image, looking for some rotting meat to eat. Reflections who can take physical form or who can use tools telekinetically find weapons and start to hunt whatever they can find, people and animals alike, until they have some dead meat to eat.

Prudent Reflections with low Morality tend to keep a pantry of rotting corpses to consume not far from the vampire character's haven.

Numina and Communication: The Reflection has one Numen, plus another for every six dots of Disciplines the vampire has, chosen by the Storyteller from the list below. A Reflection, without the Materialize Numen, always manifests in mirrors, TV screens, photographs or similar media and although it can affect the world outside (and has to, in order to eat), when it is outside the mirror, it is invisible to anyone who can't see ghosts or spirits. The Reflection can always communicate with the vampire, but can only talk with anyone else if it has the Ghost Speech Numen.

Combat: In combat, the vampire's Reflection rolls Power + Finesse + Equipment – target's Defense. Its fists cause bashing damage, and it needs to use a weapon to cause any other kind of damage, even when using the Snatch Numen (below).

NUMINA

Mekhet Reflections can use the following ghost Numina from **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 210-212: Animal Control, Compulsion, Ghost Speech, Magnetic Disruption, Phantasm, Terrify.

A Reflection can also develop these Numina:

- **Selective Manifestation:** The Reflection can choose who sees it when it manifests. It manifests in a mirror,



screen or picture as normal, but only the people the Reflection wishes to perceive it can do so without effort. Anyone else trying to find it (perhaps trying to catch a glimpse of what frightened another person in the room so much) must make a Wits + Composure roll with a -2 penalty. The Reflection can never hide from its vampire, who can always see it without needing to make a roll.

- **Materialize:** The Reflection can take solid form, stepping out of its mirror and into the real world. It appears exactly the same as the vampire, except that it can walk in broad daylight, has a shadow and can be heard on telephones and recording equipment. It still doesn't show up in mirrors, film or photographs, however. The Storyteller spends three Essence and rolls the Reflection's Power + Finesse. The Reflection can stay in material form for one hour for every success rolled.

- **Memory Flashes:** This Numen allows the Reflection to use the terrible, painful, gory memories of its vampire as a weapon. It projects them into its target's mind, forcing her to re-live every horrific experience the vampire has been through. The target becomes overwhelmed by these flashes of memory and has to fight to focus on other thoughts or feelings. The Storyteller spends a point of Essence and rolls Power + Finesse – the target's Composure + Blood Potency. The target suffers a -1 penalty to all actions for every success rolled for the rest of the scene. The Reflection can't use this power on someone who has already been affected by it until the original effects have worn off. The Reflection can use this Numen on its own vampire.

- **Voice Message:** The Reflection can project its voice through a TV, telephone or radio, or on answering machine. The phone rings; the radio crackles and goes quiet; the answerphone suddenly shows up that it has a message without the telephone having made any sound. The Reflection starts to speak. The Storyteller spends one Essence and rolls Power + Finesse; each success allows one brief statement before the line goes silent or the radio program resumes.

- **Snatch:** The Reflection reaches out from the mirror, TV screen or picture it has just manifested in and drags someone inside. The Storyteller spends three Essence and rolls the Reflection's Power + Finesse – the target's Resolve + Blood Potency. For every success the Storyteller rolls, the victim becomes trapped within the reflection (banging his fists noiselessly against the glass) or image (stuck in an attitude of terror) for one hour for every success rolled. The Reflection can communicate with an imprisoned victim (and in lieu of any other power to communicate, might use this as a way to talk), or choose to attack. The Reflec-

tion can use this power on its vampire. Should a mortal be killed within the mirror, their remains simply vanish; thus, Reflections cannot use this method to feed.

STORYTELLING THE REFLECTION

The Hollow Mekhet's Reflection wants to feed and wants to survive – it's mostly ambivalent towards its vampire. But at the same time, it feels (as much as it can actually feel) an abiding resentment towards the vampire of whom it was once a part. It's limited to living within mirrors and invisibly eating stinking, rotten flesh. It's imprisoned within a small area of ground, and can never move away. It knows that its existence depends on the vampire, and this causes an tenuous feeling in its own right: your continued conscious existence does not depend on your own efforts.

The Reflection thinks that the Mekhet it belongs to (or who belongs to it) probably has the better deal. Although the Reflection can walk in the sun, in most other ways, it's inferior to the body it came from. The world is insubstantial to it; the only thing that matters is sustenance. Yet, it's just as smart as the character, has the same Virtue and Vice, and, crucially, the same memories.

Sometimes the Reflection tries to keep out of the way of the vampire. Sometimes it seeks out the character, because it wants to talk, or because it knows something essential to the vampire's survival (and hence, it's own), or because it wants to appear friendly, so as to make the vampire suffer.

It wants to hurt the vampire, but it doesn't want to kill her. It wants to help the vampire, but doesn't know how. It cuts a business deal, or starts a friendship, or even begins a romance by day with someone whom it then manipulates into crossing the vampire's path. It gets the vampire in trouble with the local Kindred by leaving hints and clues about the existence of the undead with the wrong people. It appears in a mirror, standing behind someone every morning, just for a split-second, and then arranges for that person to meet the vampire, for good or ill. Or it gets into a fight by day and lets the vampire deal with the fallout that night. Or perhaps, it starts to brutally kill the vampire's human contacts.

Hollow Mekhet are well advised to keep their Reflections a secret from the Covenants, if possible, and to keep them as under control as they can. Mekhet who are lucky enough to know the Followers of Seth may well have a chance to meet a vampire who knows the Ritual of Nourishment (see p. 111), who can then perform the rite for them or perhaps even teach them how to do it themselves, for a price.

BECOMING HOLLOW

Being Hollow Mekhet is actually, in some ways, a kind of default. All of the first Mekhet were Hollow. It's only since the Mekhet realized that they could Embrace in other ways that the Mekhet have been like other Kindred.

Nitokris might believe that the Hollow Mekhet are fundamentally superior, but it's arguable whether having a rogue *Ka* and not leaving any shadow, image, reflection, recording or echo is really a better state to be in.

Still, the big secret is this: any Mekhet can become Hollow. Mechanically, all he needs to do is consume one point of Vitae from a Hollow Mekhet (yes, it does count towards a Vinculum) and spend it straight away, along with a *dot* of Willpower.

When a Mekhet consumes the Vitae of a Hollow Mekhet, he feels it pulling at him, nagging at him. Blood calls to blood, and since blood is really the only thing in him that's even remotely alive, it's a potent, dizzying sensation, unlike any other. He feels like he's being called by something within him, as if a second self wants to come out, to escape the confines of his body. He doesn't have to obey the call or listen to it. But if he does (and spends the Vitae and the Willpower), the weird feeling turns into a pang of agony that quickly goes away. Otherwise, the giddiness subsides, and the Mekhet just feels a bit uneasy. This sensation is gone at the next sunset.

The Mekhet who accepted the change in himself goes back to his haven at dawn and sleeps until the next sunset. During that time, he experiences terrible dreams, and a weird, wrenching sensation. When he wakes up the following night, he's Hollow, and there isn't any going back. Ever.

COURIER GHOULS

The Ordo Dracul, of whom Frances is a slightly reluctant member, studies an occult pseudoscience they call *haemometics*: the study of the relationship between Memory and the Blood (see **Daeva: Kiss of the Succubus**, p. 65). The main field of study for the Dragons concerns torpor and how it, and feeding after torpor, changes or wipes away a vampire's memory. But there's more to the science than that, as Frances demonstrated.

With their preoccupation with dreams, memories and patterns, Mekhet within the Dragons learned how to refine small portions of their memories into Vitae, concentrating little bits of experience and information into the precious drops they shed from their own veins. The Devotion: Encode Vitae (see p. 109) is the least unusual way to do this.

A vampire injects her refined Vitae into a ghoul. She sends the ghoul to a colleague in another city or country. The Kindred who feeds from this ghoul receives the knowledge encoded in the Vitae. Because the Vitae has been in the veins of the ghoul, the vampire isn't in danger of developing a Vinculum, or of becoming addicted.

The receiving vampire isn't really given the information. He shares the *memory* of the information, which has both advantages and disadvantages in comparison with simply passing on the information in some other form. It's risky, because memory is imperfect, and a vampire, particularly one who is hundreds of years old, simply might not remember things perfectly. On the other hand, in passing on the memory of the information, the sender passes on the understanding of that information: the recipient doesn't just get a pile of data, he gains the sender's understanding of it and its significance, and sometimes that understanding can be more important and useful than the information itself. For example, it's all well and good to have access to an enemy's accounts, but it's more important to understand, having read them, that he's fiddled his books to hide the fact he's about to go bankrupt if certain circumstances aren't met, even if it is difficult to remember all of the numbers in the accounts.

The Kindred who know of the technique prize it greatly. It aids in communication. Elder Kindred can teach their younger pupils and childer from far away (and in the case of the Hollow Mekhet, can transmit spoken messages without the problems they encounter).

Ghouls can travel by day, and have many more options. They're also less valuable than Kindred; vampires who know the technique learn to consider them more or less disposable.

More importantly, while a ghoul carrying a written letter or a box might be tempted to peek inside, a ghoul with memories injected into his bloodstream can't know what he's delivering.

Of course, if someone finds out what the ghoul is transporting and catches him, he's more easily beaten than one of the Kindred. Compared to the undead, ghouls are fragile.

And it's unhygienic. Kindred who are prone to carrying or passing on blood diseases (particularly Kindred of the Morbus bloodline) find courier ghouls to be an extremely risky proposition – unless of course, passing on blood diseases is the idea. A number of Ventrue within the Ordo Dracul avoid having anything to do with courier ghouls, whispering darkly about “Malkavia” and other such madnesses.

DERANGEMENTS AND FLAWS

The Mekhet are no more susceptible to madness than any other vampire, and much less prone than the Ventrué. Still, when the Shadows do go mad, their insanity manifests itself in certain unique ways. While any character can develop the derangements below, the Mekhet tend to exhibit them more commonly than other vampires do. Mekhet often experience Fugues (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 99). The Power Fetish Obsession derangement is also common among Mekhet, as is Sanguinary Animism, Paranoia, Irrationality, Delusional Obsession, Fixation and Obsessive Compulsion (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, pp. 189-191).

Mekhet sometimes exhibit these derangements as Mental Flaws. Although it's rare for a Mekhet to Embrace a character with some physical problem, sometimes it does happen. A number of Mekhet do have a humiliating and troubling problem, however: they have no fangs.

DERANGEMENTS

Magical Ideation (mild): The character finds patterns all around him, the signs of some greater plan or intelligence guiding his steps. Whether through song lyrics, advertisements in magazines, lines in films, the state of the weather, the character is sure that these environmental flashes are messages of some sort meant for him. At least once a scene, the player must roll Resolve + Composure. If that roll fails, the character has to perform some action that reflects his obsession with patterns. Perhaps the character starts to explain to his companions the coincidental arrangement of stations on the London Underground, or stops to take an omen from the movement of birds in the sky. Maybe music is playing in the background, and the character pauses and listens to the secret message hidden in the song (like Frances did with a song by Nico on p. 17). Perhaps the character whispers a nursery rhyme, or has to stop and examine the arrangement of cutlery on a dinner table, reading them as if the arrangement of knives and forks and spoons has some higher significance, and some sort of message within it.

Divination Obsession (severe): This is really a sub-type of the Obsessive Compulsion derangement (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 98). The character feels the urge at least once a night to perform some sort of divination. He could read tea leaves, or examine a newspaper horoscope page, or read the Tarot, or get a divination from a 70s mass-market paperback capitalizing on Mayan prophecies. He might perform the *Sortes Virgilianae*, which

is where you take a significant book – a copy of Virgil, or the Bible, or Shakespeare, or Milton, or the *Bhagavad Gita*, or the Qu'ran, or anything else – and open it on a random page, point at a random sentence and take that as a divination. He could shave the head of his ghoul and perform a phrenological analysis of the imperfections in her scalp. He might even find a cat and disembowel it, reading his future from the spatters its guts make on the floor. Players are encouraged to find interesting ways to read the future.

In game terms, it might be helpful for the Storyteller to have some divinations prepared; perhaps having a collection of clipped newspaper horoscopes for this very purpose. Divination methods and sample divinations appear throughout this book.

Essentially, if given the opportunity to act on the divination (to do what it says) in any way, the character will. For example, if the divination says that a fair-haired stranger will bring good luck, the character may put his total trust and confidence in the first blond he meets, even if she turns out to be working for the enemy, and refuse to believe that she is bad news. If the player considers following the divination to be stupid, or dangerous, the player must roll Resolve + Composure with a -2 penalty to avoid doing what the divination says. If the roll fails, the character has no choice but to act on the divination, and will follow the literal word of the divination as closely as possible.

FLAW: NO FANGS

The character has no fangs, and must find another way to drink blood, either through using some kind of weapon, or through biting really hard and messily. Either way, the vampire does not send her victim into the ecstasy of the Kiss when feeding. In fact, it really hurts, and the vampire must restrain or render unconscious her victim. The vampire's saliva cannot heal the kind of wounds a knife makes, or the mangling of someone's skin caused by blunt human teeth.

MERITS

Though all of the following Merits are most common among the Mekhet, they are not forbidden to vampires of other clans.

DOLL FACE (•)

Effect: No matter how badly the character got messed up last night, when she awakens from her daily slumber she is always groomed immaculately, without need for a mirror or a servant to do the work for her. Her hair and make-up are exactly as they were the night before. Her



skin is as clean as it was the night she was Embraced. The vampire instinctively knows this to be the case.

Vampires with this Merit whose Humanity scores fall low enough to severely impact their interaction with mortal humans begin to look like dolls or mannequins. Their uncanny grooming makes them too perfect, too artificial.

Just as normal, it costs a Willpower point for a vampire with this Merit to make a permanent change to her appearance.

DREAM VISIONS (•••)

Effect: More than any other clan, the Mekhet dream. And sometimes, between bizarre, gory, awful dreams of death and transformation and blood, they dream of places they haven't been to and people they haven't yet met. Sometimes, during some later night, they find themselves going to those places or meeting those people (Nitokris, Vincent Moon and Elisabeta all dreamed of Frances before they met her, for example).

With this Merit, your character can make use of his dream-visions. The first time (and only the first time) he meets another person or visits a place, the player can make a roll of Blood Potency. If it's a success, the player can ask one (and only one) question about the person or place, which *must* be phrased so that it can be answered truthfully with "Yes," "No," or "Maybe." The roll can only be made once regarding any individual, and the roll can only be attempted once a scene (meaning that, for example, if the character meets two vampires for the first time, the player must choose which of them to ask the question about, because he won't ever get the chance to ask about the other).

Note: Though this Merit is not restricted to Mekhet characters, it is found among the Shadows more often than any other clan.

HAVEN (OCCULTATION) (• TO •••••)

Prerequisite: Haven Size ••• or less

Effect: Some Vampires become so linked to the places they inhabit that they somehow imbue these places with something of their own being. The Shadows are particularly good at this: consider the boarded-up house that everyone walks past, but no-one ever looks at, or the basement room that everyone forgets, or the attic that Frances used to inhabit, with the trapdoor that no one ever looked at.

This is an extension of the Haven Merit (**Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 100) which works alongside Haven Size, Location and Security. The larger a haven, the more difficult it is to hide: a character with Haven Size of more than three dots cannot take advantage of this Merit.

A haven belonging to a vampire with this Merit simply becomes very difficult to find: characters who have never

been to the haven who try to find a way to access it suffer a dice pool penalty equal to the character's dots in the Merit; characters who don't know it is there at all don't normally notice it, but if it comes to rolling Wits + Composure to notice it, they suffer the same penalty.

HYPNOSIS (•••)

Prerequisite: Medicine • or Occult •

Effect: Many vampires have the ability to control minds through supernatural means; however, those who do not still have the urge to control. Some, especially members of the Shadow Cults, learn how to create trance states in people. If Nitokris' cultists lie so still while she eviscerates them, it's partly because of the brainwashing, but partly because of the hypnosis.

A character with this Merit can hypnotize others using the Occult or Medicine Skills. The character must choose which of the two Skills the Merit is tied to, and writes the Merit down on the character sheet as either **Hypnosis (Medicine)** or **Hypnosis (Occult)**. The character can only use the chosen Skill to perform hypnosis. If the player wants the character to be able to use either Skills, he has to buy the Merit twice, once for each Skill.

Many hypnotists use equipment such as pendulums, pocket watches, simple machines which project revolving spiral patterns and the like. A subject placed in a trance becomes easily manipulated and likely to respond positively to questioning or suggestion.

This Merit is not limited to vampires; it can be bought by any character.

Hypnotizing a Subject

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult or Medicine + equipment (hypnotist) — subject's Resolve + Blood Potency (if target resists)

Action: Extended

The hypnotist requires a number of successes equal to twice the target's Willpower. Each roll represents one minute of work. If the hypnotist succeeds, the target falls into a trance and becomes malleable to suggestion.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hypnotist fails even to calm the subject down, or makes a basic error in the process. The subject cannot be hypnotized again for a number of days equal to his Resolve.

Failure: The hypnotist fails to induce trance in the time allowed, or gains no successes towards hypnotizing the subject.

Success: The hypnotist makes progress, or gathers enough successes to place the subject in a trance.

As long as the trance persists, any rolls the hypnotist's player makes to influence the subject (eg. to induce the subject to impart information or to implant a post-hypnotic suggestion which will make the subject behave in a certain way after the trance has ended) gain a bonus equal to the hypnotist's dots in Manipulation.

Exceptional Success: The hypnotist makes speedy headway towards hypnotizing the subject.

Equipment: Pendulum or pocketwatch on chain (+1); audio visual stimulation (+1 to +3); white and featureless room (+1).

Possible Penalties: Unfamiliar with subject (-2); language barrier (-3); distractions nearby (-2).

OCCULTATION (• TO •••)

Prerequisite: no Fame Merit dots

Effect: Some vampires — especially the Shadows — become so adept at disappearing into the dark that something of the dark attaches itself to them, and they become surpassingly difficult to notice. After a while, an occulted vampire becomes so forgettable that it becomes hard even to remember even if the vampire was male or female, let alone details like dress, or hair or eye color. Old vampires with Occultation (such as Doe) even begin to forget who they themselves were.

A vampire using Auspex •• to read the aura of a character with this Merit aura suffers a dice pool penalty equal to the character's dots in Occultation. Likewise, uses of Auspex ••• on items last touched by the character suffer the same penalty.

Further, the character gains a bonus on uses of Obfuscate equal to her dots in the Occultation Merit.

Drawback: If the character ever somehow gets dots in the Fame Merit, she loses her dots in Occultation. More importantly, a character with Occultation who has dots in the Majesty Discipline always suffers a dice pool penalty equal to her dots in the Occultation Merit: Majesty is about being noticed; a supernatural tendency towards Occultation flies in the face of that.

CROSSOVERS — MAGE: THE AWAKENING

This is fundamentally the same Merit as the Occultation Merit found in **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 86, and works in exactly the same way, so that the benefits the Merit gives to mages (eg. an defense against sympathetic magic) apply to vampires with the Merit; likewise, mages with the Merit gain the appropriate benefits listed here, such as the defense against Auspex.

SHADOW CULT INITIATION (• TO •••••)

Prerequisite: Mortals can only take one dot in this Merit. Ghouls can take up to two dots. Only Kindred can take the Merit at three or more dots.

Effect: Your character has received initiation into one of the Shadow Cults of the Mekhet (for example, the Moulding Room, the Followers of Seth or the Moirai). On the first occasion you meet another member of the cult, you gain a bonus to Social rolls for the duration of the scene, equal to your dots in this Merit. Interacting with that individual from that point on is based solely on your own abilities.

Other benefits come from Initiation into a Shadow Cult, depending on the cult and the number of dots the character has gained in his or her Initiation.

Drawback: Initiation into a Shadow Cult carries with it duties, and failure to perform those duties can cause dots in this Merit to fall, although benefits gained from initiations (such as access to the cults' proprietary Disciplines) don't go away once learned or otherwise paid for. A character with more than one dot of Initiation into any Shadow Cult can become initiated into others, but can never gain more than one dot in any other cult.

BY INVITATION ONLY

Anyone who joins a Shadow Cult must have been invited first, and very few Kindred outside Clan Mekhet have ever been asked to join.

What that actually means in game is that if you play a Mekhet vampire and you'd like your character to join the Moirai, or the Followers of Seth, or the Moulding Room, you ask your Storyteller about it, and you both agree out-of-game on a story element to introduce one of those conspiracies in-game. So that when the time comes for your character to do a favor for one of those shadowy conspirators, or gain their trust, he can – at which point they invite him, and he goes through the initiation in the story, and you spend the experience points out-of-story.

MEKHET CHARACTERS

A “typical vampire” can never be anything more than a fiction. A vampire is an aberration from the order of life and death. Some of these Mekhet are old; some are not. All might meet your own characters as allies or antagonists.

FRANCES BLACK



Quote: “Dying makes you shallow.”

“There are no mirrors around here, are there? Oh. Right. That’s all right, then.”

“That wasn’t me. Technically, I mean.”

“Oops.”

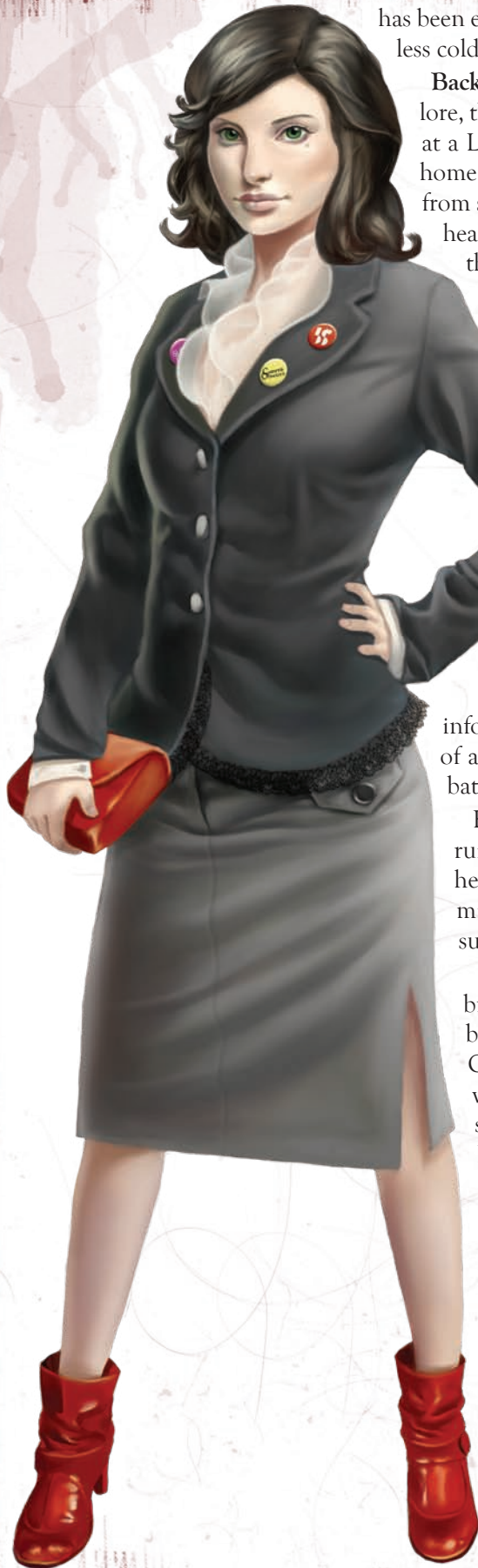
Embrace: 2004

Apparent Age: About 30

Description: Frances is small; she often escapes notice entirely, even when she’s not invisible. Her angular, pretty face has the marks of someone who smiles a lot. A couple of strands of gray run through wavy, shoulder-length black hair that never seems to wholly behave, even when it’s neatly combed. Green eyes, hidden beneath heavy lashes, miss very little of her surroundings. Frances dressed like an eccentric, even when she was alive: she would wear a suit with a frilly blouse and at the same time wear buttons from bands like Camera Obscura and Belle and Sebastian. Since she died, she wears a lot more black. Lucy Sulphate called her a “twee goth secretary,” which is pretty accurate, really.

She leaves no reflection at all in mirrors; she casts no shadow.

Her voice is high and sweet-sounding; she speaks in perfect Received Pronunciation English, although she says little around those she doesn’t know or trust. She’s still cripplingly shy, but her natural vulnerability and sweetness



has been eroded by her Requiem, to be replaced more and more with the ruthless coldness of death.

Background: Even before “WH” asked Doe to find a complier of Mekhet lore, the occulted old vampire had his (or her) eye on Frances. A sub-editor at a London evening newspaper, Frances was single, lonely and far from home. Doe began to manipulate her life. Frances found herself vanishing from sight. Disconnected from the rest of the world, she attempted a half-hearted suicide that proved far too successful. Doe dragged her out of the grave, and bade her join the Dragons. Then Doe made her begin on her task, a simple one: find out what it is like to be Mekhet.

Storytelling Hints: Frances’s main personal asset is her self-knowledge. When she was alive, she watched people and understood them, despite her terrible shyness. Now that she is dead, she understands monsters. She continues to learn about herself, aware of just what she is capable of doing, of becoming. Maybe it’s right for her to be a monster, she thinks, but she doesn’t have to like it.

Even so, she does have fun with what she is. She makes a point of feeding on the kind of people who might have bullied or humiliated her when she was alive, and enjoys playing tricks on them (such as following a victim around for an evening and messing with her stuff) before taking their blood.

Frances is an excellent contact for characters seeking to find information. She may not have the contracts, but she has the training of a journalist, and knows *how* to find information, and that’s half the battle.

Frances’s biggest obstacle is her spiteful and clever reflection. Doe ruined her life, and her reflection is more or less dedicated to ruining her death. The reflection is careful never to put Frances in danger, and might sometimes even pretend to be her friend, all the better to make sure Frances is lonely and unhappy forever.

Playing Frances: Frances is funny, apparently sweet-natured and breezy. Her manners aren’t perfect, but she charms the few people who bother to show an interest in her with her frankness and perception. Characters who meet Frances should find her immensely likable, which only adds to the shock when the mask slips for a moment, and she’s suddenly colder and more ruthless than anyone the characters have met.

Frances’s Reflection

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 3, Resistance 2

Willpower: 6

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Corpus: 7

Morality: 5

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Envy

Numina: Selective Manifestation, Materialize

LUCREZIA



Quotes: "I'm sorry. Really. I promise, it won't hurt."

"I have... a message for you. You know who from."

"I'd rather not, if it's all the same."

"It's probably better you don't go down that way. It's not so safe."

Embrace: 2005

Apparent Age: 20

Description: Lucrezia is a tall, slim, Italian girl with clear olive skin, dark, heavy-lashed eyes, full lips and black wavy hair cut in a pixie crop. Her swan-like neck and graceful hands captivate. Her smile entrances, even if it never reaches her eyes.

Her clothes and make-up are always pristine; she dresses in a stylish, classic, understated way.

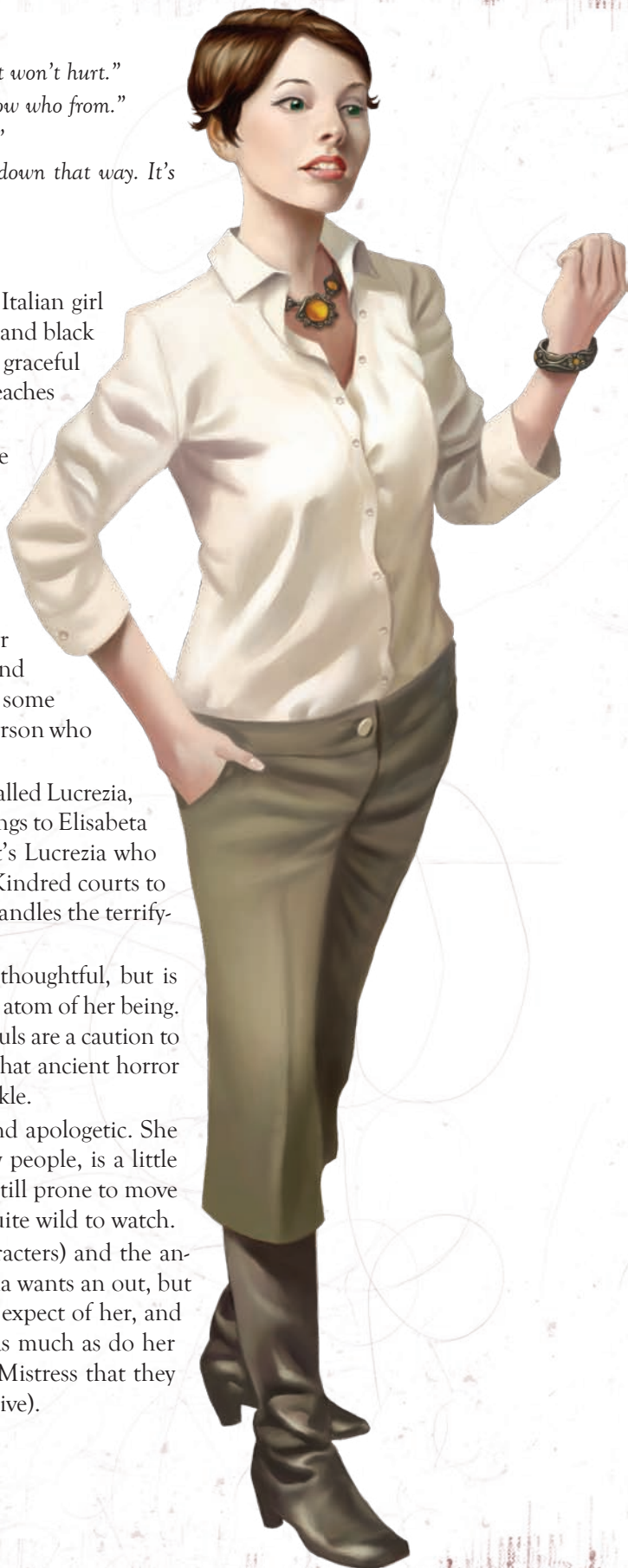
Background: Anna Pezzaioli was a nursing student in Milan. She was a few months into her final academic year when something terrible awoke beneath the Catholic hospital where she was on work placement. The Plague Nun who had slept there for so long could have picked anyone to be her childe and agent; Anna, sent to the basement in order to find some blankets and never seen again, was simply the first person who found the vampire.

The Plague Nun decided that her childe would be called Lucrezia, and would be free, to an extent. It's Lucrezia who brings to Elisabeta all those who would be ghouls or provender, and it's Lucrezia who is the go-between between the Plague Nun and the Kindred courts to which she travels (and it's Lucrezia who ultimately handles the terrifying logistics of travel).

Storytelling Hints: Lucrezia is softly-spoken and thoughtful, but is perhaps too easily read. She hates Elisabeta with every atom of her being. She wants to be free, but Elisabeta's blood-bound ghouls are a caution to her: the thought of losing her free will and... loving that ancient horror makes skin that's not even able to crawl anymore prickle.

Playing Lucrezia: Lucrezia is friendly, pleasant and apologetic. She knows she is lovely to look at, and like many lovely people, is a little vain about that. She says perhaps too much, and is still prone to move her hands while talking. When angry, she can be quite wild to watch.

In play, Lucrezia is a go-between courts (and characters) and the ancient monster she serves. It's easy to see that Lucrezia wants an out, but at the same time, she's cautious of what others will expect of her, and of the ever-present devoted ghouls who watch her as much as do her bidding (since it is only the current order of their Mistress that they follow Lucrezia – and time might change that directive).



THE GLASS ARMONIUM OF CHANTAL DEFAY

Durability 2, Size 3, Structure 5

Description: A Glass Armonium, or Glass Harmonium, is a peculiar musical instrument which uses an effect similar to that of a wet finger on the rim of a wine glass to create haunting music. It looks like a vaguely conical arrangement of concentric glass cups, suspended on its side on a hardwood frame.

Both Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Benjamin Franklin were said to have owned examples of the instrument (Mozart, in fact, wrote some music for his). Glass Armoniums were never popular. The word got around that you could go mad from hearing one, and the ringing sound a Glass Armonium created was at once as haunting and frightening as it was beautiful.

This Glass Armonium is a fairly typical example. Although well-crafted, its frame is plain and solid, the glass has no chips and the varnish has no scratches or dents.

Background: Frances Black explored the story of the Glass Armonium's creation. What she couldn't know is what happened after Chantal DeFay was destroyed, how Chantal's two children, aided by the mysterious Jean/Jeanne, transported the instrument to the Americas, and how it traveled the length and breadth of the USA before finally vanishing. It has resurfaced three times in the last two centuries. Before it appeared again in New Orleans, no one had seen it for 60 years.

Storytelling Hints: The Glass Armonium is essentially a McGuffin, an object that vampires want and the Storyteller can use any way she wants. The music matter, too. Different tunes might imbue the Glass Armonium with other powers than the ones described here.

Maybe other people with supernatural powers can play the Armonium. It might have an effect on mages (perhaps it teaches them magic, or temporarily allows access to the spirit world), werewolves (a werewolf might be able to drive away spirits, or it might reveal the state of the spirit world to the player in a depth not normally accessible to a werewolf), changelings (does it call the True Fae? Does it banish them?) Prometheans (perhaps it gives a Promethean a taste of what it is like to be human, or call on one of the enigmatic *qashmallim*?) or others.

EFFECTS

Anyone can play the Glass Armonium, but its effects only manifest when a vampire successfully plays it using one of the original pieces of music written for it by Chantal DeFay (successfully rolling Dexterity + Expression or Wits + Expression).

Anyone who hears a vampire (including vampires, mages, werewolves, changelings and Prometheans) successfully playing one of the songs below on the Glass Armonium must roll Resolve + Composure at a penalty equal to the Expression of the one playing it or suffer the effects of a derangement until the next sunset, unless the specific song indicates another effect. Each of the songs below has a different effect on the one playing the piece, as well.

• Prelude for Glass Armonium Op. 9 in C

This is the most powerful of the melodies. A Mekhet playing this tune gains the benefit of an extra dot in Auspex (maximum five) until the end of the night.

Whether Mekhet or not, the vampire playing this piece may re-live the experiences of any *destroyed* Mekhet vampire existing before Chantal DeFay; if others are listening, they may find themselves sharing the hallucination.

Frances experienced scenes in the life and death of Chantal DeFay, and then went further back. You may wish to prepare a game session set in the past, where each of the players takes on the role of a vampire in some historical setting, about to experience events not dissimilar to the difficulties the modern-day characters are facing. The vampire playing the Armonium becomes the Mekhet; listeners take on other vampire roles. If you own **Requiem for Rome**, you could use the Glass Armonium to play through a session set in the time of the Camarilla.

A Hollow Mekhet who plays the melody finds herself temporarily reunited with her Reflection for 24 hours after the hallucination has ended. The Reflection and the vampire make opposed rolls of Presence + Composure vs. Power + Resistance. The winner has complete control over the vampire's body. If it's a draw, the two sides must roll again until one side has gained more successes. While the Reflection is in the vampire's body, the character has the

traits and weaknesses of a Common Mekhet. At the end of the 24 hours, the Mekhet and her Reflection separate again. If the Reflection gained control, the character has no memory of what her Reflection did while in possession of her body.

- **Sonata Op. 7 in G “Amoreuse”**

This slow, romantic piece incites passion. A Daeva who plays it or hears this melody being played must roll Resolve + Composure or inadvertently spend a point of Vitae to take on the “blush of life” (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 156).

The player of any Daeva vampire hearing the melody being played must not only resist gaining a derangement, but must also roll Composure + Stamina at a penalty equal to the Expression of the one playing the Armonium. If the roll fails, the character’s Vice changes to Lust until the following sunset. Meanwhile, the vampire playing the Armonium gains a +3 to all perception dice pools until the next sunset.

- **Nocturne Op. 5 in A flat**

This piece changes time signature twice within two minutes, and follows no appreciable structure. If the player of a Ventruue hearing the melody fails to make the roll to resist gaining a derangement, the character gains *two* derangements.

(Alternatively, if you have **Lords Over the Damned**, the Ventruue whose player makes a failed Resolve + Composure roll suffers from the effects of Malkavia, including the gaining of one dot of Dementation, until the next sunset and now counts as having been exposed to the disease. See p. 110 of that book.)

- **Sonata Op. 6 in D Minor**

This bleak, slow, mournful piece fills a listener with fear. Nosferatu who hear this melody aren’t in danger of gaining derangements, but must use the highest level of Nightmare they have, on themselves (that is, the player must both roll to use the power and to resist, and if the roll to use the power overcomes the character’s own resistance, the character suffers the effects of his own powers).

- **Fantasia-Impromptu Op. 3 in A Minor**

This melody is fast and discordant, at times angry. Gangrel who hear it aren’t in danger of gaining derangements, but players must roll to avoid anger frenzy (5 successes needed). A Gangrel who succeeds internalizes the fury. The player must make a further roll of Stamina + Resolve; if the roll fails, the character gains some sort of bestial feature (yellow eyes, a hairy back, pointed ears, or some other feature redolent of a beast) until the next sunset.

- **Sonata Op. 4 in E Minor**

This melody is insistent and urgent, like waves. If a spirit or ghost is in hearing of the Glass Armonium while it is being played, the character playing the instrument may use it as a tool to exorcise that spirit or ghost. The exorcism is performed as per **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 214, except that the character need not fulfill any of the usual requirements to perform it.





MEKHET

SHADOWS IN THE DARK



NAME: *Frances Black*

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: *The Ghost*

VIRTUE: *Charity*

VICE: *Envy*

CLAN: *Mekhet*

COVENANT: *Ordo Dracul*

COTERIE:

ATTRIBUTES

POWER

INTELLIGENCE ●●●●○

STRENGTH ●●○○○

PRESENCE ●●●○○

FINESSE

WITS ●●●○○

DEXTERITY ●●○○○

MANIPULATION ●●○○○

RESISTANCE

RESOLVE ●●○○○

STAMINA ●●○○○

COMPOSURE ●●○○○

SKILLS

MENTAL

(-3 unskilled)

ACADEMICS *Religion* ●●●○○
COMPUTER ●○○○○
CRAFTS ●○○○○
INVESTIGATION ●●●○○
MEDICINE ○○○○○
OCCULT ●○○○○
POLITICS ●●○○○
SCIENCE ○○○○○

PHYSICAL

(-1 unskilled)

ATHLETICS ○○○○○
BRAWL ○○○○○
DRIVE ○○○○○
FIREARMS ○○○○○
LARCENY ●○○○○
STEALTH ●●●○○
SURVIVAL ○○○○○
WEAPONRY ○○○○○

SOCIAL

(-1 unskilled)

ANIMAL KEN ○○○○○
EMPATHY ●●●○○
EXPRESSION *Music, Writing* ●●●○○
INTIMIDATION ○○○○○
PERSUASION ●○○○○
SOCIALIZE ○○○○○
STREETWISE ○○○○○
SUBTERFUGE ●○○○○

OTHER TRAITS

MERITS

Doll face ○○○○○
Haven - Location ●●○○○
Security ●○○○○
Size ●○○○○
Initiation (Moulding Room) ●○○○○
Mentor ●○○○○
Status (Ordo Dracul) ●○○○○
○○○○○

FLAWS

DISCIPLINES

Auspex ●●○○○
Celerity ●○○○○
Obfuscate ●●●○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

SIZE *5* [5 for adult human-sized kindred]
DEFENSE *2* [lowest of dexterity or wits]
INITIATIVE MOD *4* [dexterity+composure]
SPEED *9* [strength+dexterity+5]
EXPERIENCE _____
ARMOR _____

HEALTH

●●●●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□□

WILLPOWER

●●●●○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

VITAE

□□□□□□□□□□
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

VITAE/PER TURN *10/1*

BLOOD POTENCY

●○○○○○○○○○○○

HUMANITY

10 _____ ○
9 _____ ○
8 _____ ○
7 _____ ○
6 _____ ○
5 _____ ●
4 _____ ●
3 _____ ●
2 _____ ●
1 _____ ●

EQUIPMENT

Attributes 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Clan (+1 bonus Attribute; see p. 92) • Covenant • Blood Potency 1 (May be increased with Merit points) • Disciplines 3 (Two dots must be in-clan) • Merits 7 • (Buying the fifth dot in Attributes, Skills or Merits costs two points) • Health = Stamina + Size • Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = 5 for adult human-sized Kindred • Defense = Lowest of Dexterity or Wits • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity + 5 • Starting Humanity = 7 • Vitae = d10 roll





MEKHET

SHADOWS IN THE DARK



NAME: *Lucrezia*

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: *Resentful Child*

VIRTUE: *Prudence*

VICE: *Wrath*

CLAN: *Mekhet (Morbus)*

COVENANT: *Lancea Sanctum*

COTERIE:

ATTRIBUTES

POWER

INTELLIGENCE ●●●○○

STRENGTH ●●○○○

PRESENCE ●●●○○

FINESSE

WITS ●●●○○

DEXTERITY ●●○○○

MANIPULATION ●●○○○

RESISTANCE

RESOLVE ●●○○○

STAMINA ●●○○○

COMPOSURE ●●●○○

SKILLS

MENTAL

(-3 unskilled)

ACADEMICS *Catholicism* ●●○○○
COMPUTER ●○○○○
CRAFTS ●○○○○
INVESTIGATION ●●○○○
MEDICINE *Nursing* ●●○○○
OCCULT ●○○○○
POLITICS ●●○○○
SCIENCE ○○○○○

PHYSICAL

(-1 unskilled)

ATHLETICS ○○○○○
BRAWL ○○○○○
DRIVE ●○○○○
FIREARMS ○○○○○
LARCENY ●○○○○
STEALTH ●○○○○
SURVIVAL ○○○○○
WEAPONRY ●○○○○

SOCIAL

(-1 unskilled)

ANIMAL KEN ○○○○○
EMPATHY *Beside Manner* ●●○○○
EXPRESSION ○○○○○
INTIMIDATION ●○○○○
PERSUASION ●●○○○
SOCIALIZE ○○○○○
STREETWISE ●○○○○
SUBTERFUGE ●○○○○

OTHER TRAITS

MERITS

Mentor ●●○○○
Striking Looks ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

FLAWS

DISCIPLINES

Auspex ●○○○○
Cachexy ●○○○○
Celerity ●○○○○
Obfuscate ●○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

SIZE *5* [5 for adult human-sized kindred]

DEFENSE *2* [lowest of dexterity or wits]

INITIATIVE MOD *5* [dexterity+composure]

SPEED *9* [strength+dexterity+5]

EXPERIENCE

ARMOR

HEALTH

●●●●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□□

WILLPOWER

●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

VITAE

□□□□□□□□□□
□■□■□■□■□■□■

VITAE/PER TURN *11/1*

BLOOD POTENCY

●●○○○○○○○○○○

HUMANITY

10 ○
9 ○
8 ○
7 ○
6 ●
5 ●
4 ●
3 ●
2 ●
1 ●

EQUIPMENT

Attributes 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Clan (+1 bonus Attribute; see p. 92) • Covenant • Blood Potency 1 (May be increased with Merit points) • Disciplines 3 (Two dots must be in-clan) • Merits 7 • (Buying the fifth dot in Attributes, Skills or Merits costs two points) • Health = Stamina + Size • Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = 5 for adult human-sized Kindred • Defense = Lowest of Dexterity or Wits • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity + 5 • Starting Humanity = 7 • Vitae = d10 roll





MEKHET

SHADOWS IN THE DARK



NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT:
VIRTUE:
VICE:

CLAN:
COVENANT:
COTERIE:

ATTRIBUTES

POWER

INTELLIGENCE ●○○○○

STRENGTH ●○○○○

PRESENCE ●○○○○

FINESSE

WITS ●○○○○

DEXTERITY ●○○○○

MANIPULATION ●○○○○

RESISTANCE

RESOLVE ●○○○○

STAMINA ●○○○○

COMPOSURE ●○○○○

SKILLS

MENTAL

(-3 unskilled)

ACADEMICS _____ ○○○○○
COMPUTER _____ ○○○○○
CRAFTS _____ ○○○○○
INVESTIGATION _____ ○○○○○
MEDICINE _____ ○○○○○
OCCULT _____ ○○○○○
POLITICS _____ ○○○○○
SCIENCE _____ ○○○○○

PHYSICAL

(-1 unskilled)

ATHLETICS _____ ○○○○○
BRAWL _____ ○○○○○
DRIVE _____ ○○○○○
FIREARMS _____ ○○○○○
LARCENY _____ ○○○○○
STEALTH _____ ○○○○○
SURVIVAL _____ ○○○○○
WEAPONRY _____ ○○○○○

SOCIAL

(-1 unskilled)

ANIMAL KEN _____ ○○○○○
EMPATHY _____ ○○○○○
EXPRESSION _____ ○○○○○
INTIMIDATION _____ ○○○○○
PERSUASION _____ ○○○○○
SOCIALIZE _____ ○○○○○
STREETWISE _____ ○○○○○
SUBTERFUGE _____ ○○○○○

OTHER TRAITS

MERITS

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

FLAWS

DISCIPLINES

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

SIZE _____ [5 for adult human-sized kindred]

DEFENSE _____ [lowest of dexterity or wits]

INITIATIVE MOD _____ [dexterity+composure]

SPEED _____ [strength+dexterity+5]

EXPERIENCE _____

ARMOR _____

HEALTH

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□□□

WILLPOWER

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

VITAE

□□□□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□□□□

VITAE/PER TURN _____

BLOOD POTENCY

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

HUMANITY

10 _____ O
9 _____ O
8 _____ O
7 _____ O
6 _____ O
5 _____ O
4 _____ O
3 _____ O
2 _____ O
1 _____ O

EQUIPMENT

Attributes 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Clan (+1 bonus Attribute; see p. 92) • Covenant • Blood Potency 1 (May be increased with Merit points) • Disciplines 3 (Two dots must be in-clan) • Merits 7 • (Buying the fifth dot in Attributes, Skills or Merits costs two points) • Health = Stamina + Size • Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = 5 for adult human-sized Kindred • Defense = Lowest of Dexterity or Wits • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity + 5 • Starting Humanity = 7 • Vitae = d10 roll



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It's simple, really. On some level, you need to see us as innocuous. As beneath your notice, really. We're the ones who "just lurk" while you and yours are "taking action," right? But answer me this — when it all comes down to it, who is it that you're meeting with in secret, trying to get that upper hand?

What? Oh, yeah. I know all about that.

— Frances

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