

the SUCCUBUS CLUB

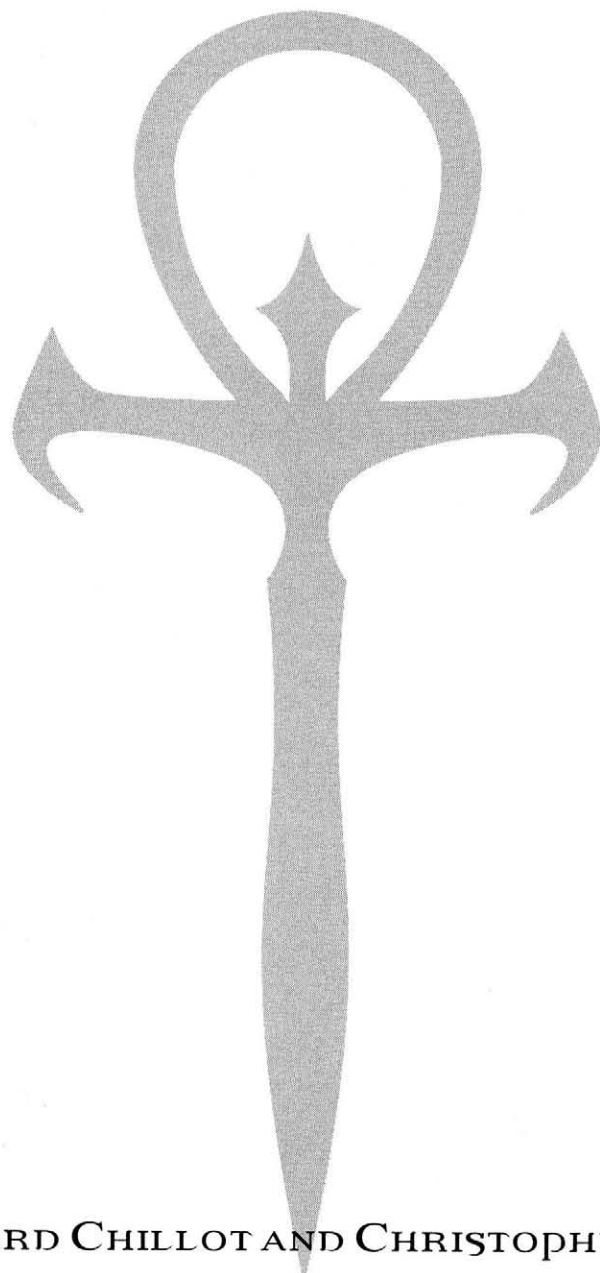
dead man's party



A sourcebook on scheming and society for vampire: the masquerade®



the Succubus Club dead man's party



BY RICHARD CHILLOT AND CHRISTOPHER KOBAR
VAMPIRE CREATED BY MARK REIN • HAGEN



He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god.

— Aristotle, Politics

The unlife of a Kindred is a solitary curse, yet one that by its nature demands fellowship. Perhaps it's because misery loves company, as the old saying goes, or perhaps it's something darker — that the Kindred gather, hobnob and pretend at society to foster in themselves the illusion that they are something other than monsters. Whatever the answer, society as the Kindred know it is fraught with peril, and every step in the halls of the undead bears the potential for disastrous reception among one's Damned peers.

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DEDICATION

Cattle die, kinsmen die, all men are mortal.

Words of praise will never perish nor a noble name.

— From the *Havamal*, a Norse Edda

For Robin Strahan, one of the noblest souls we ever knew. You are missed, and remembered.



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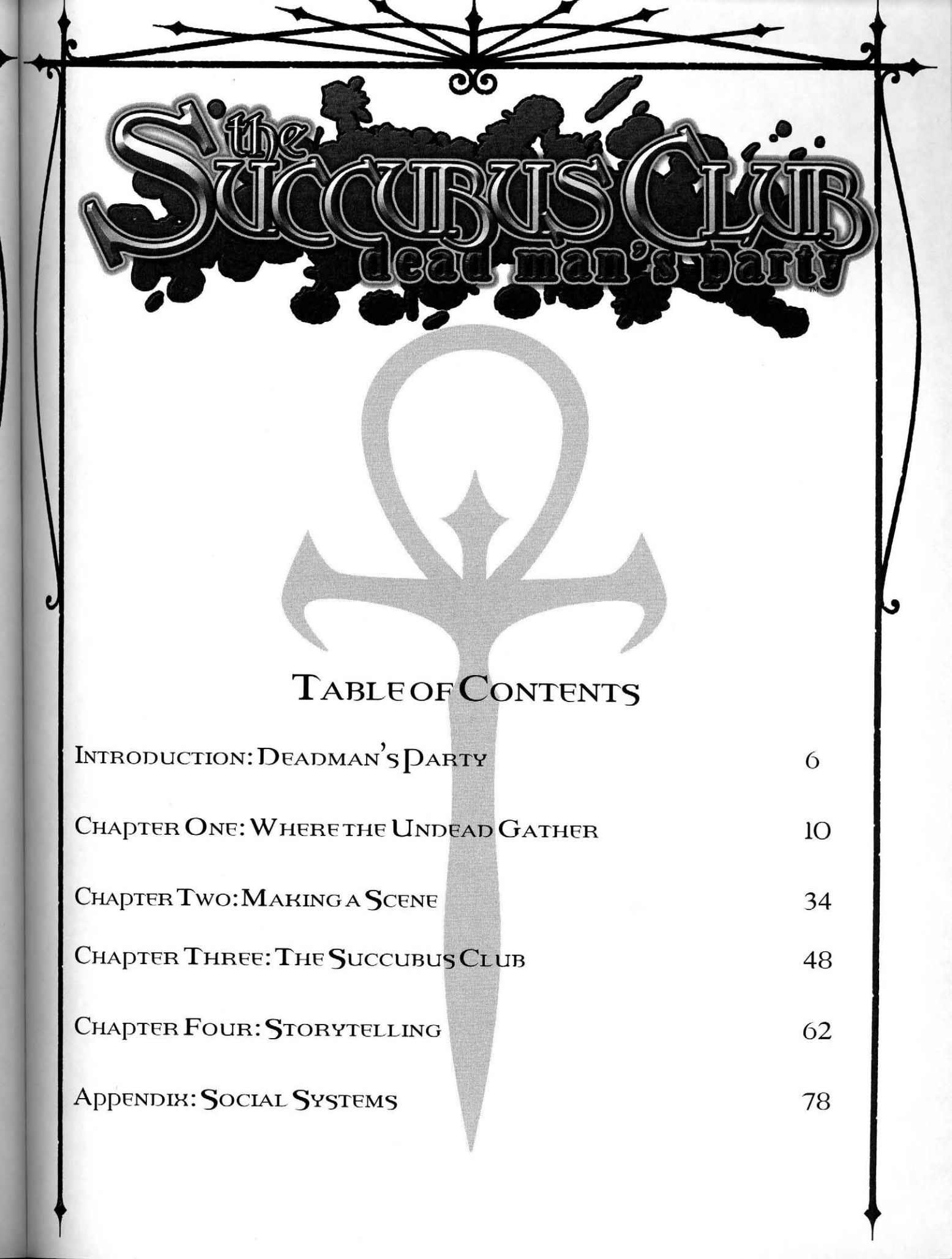
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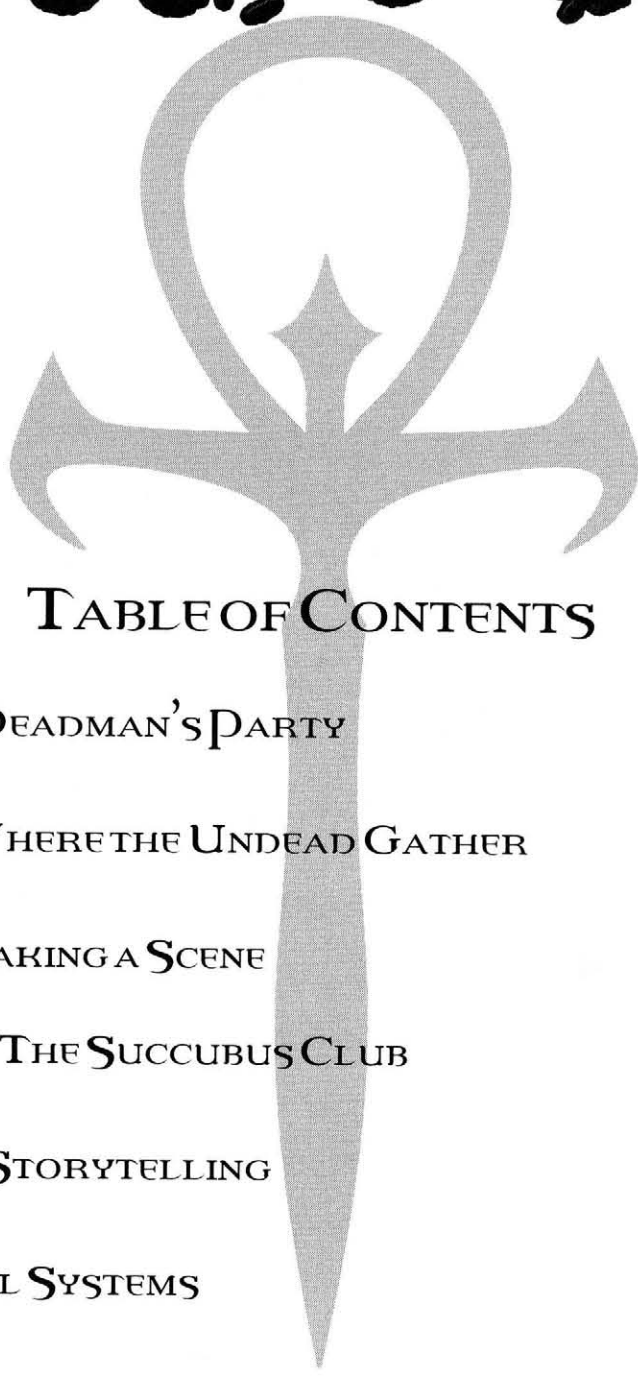
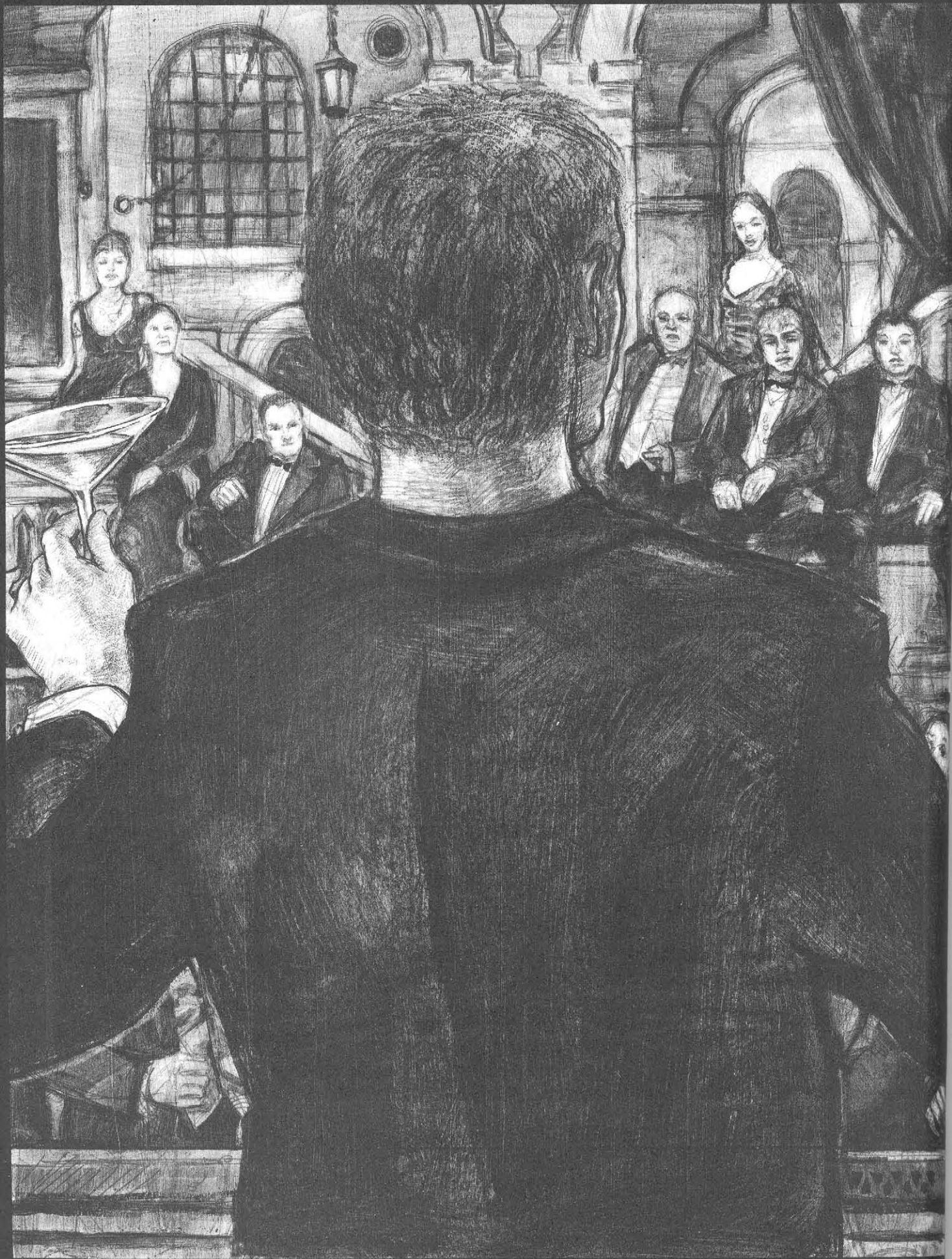
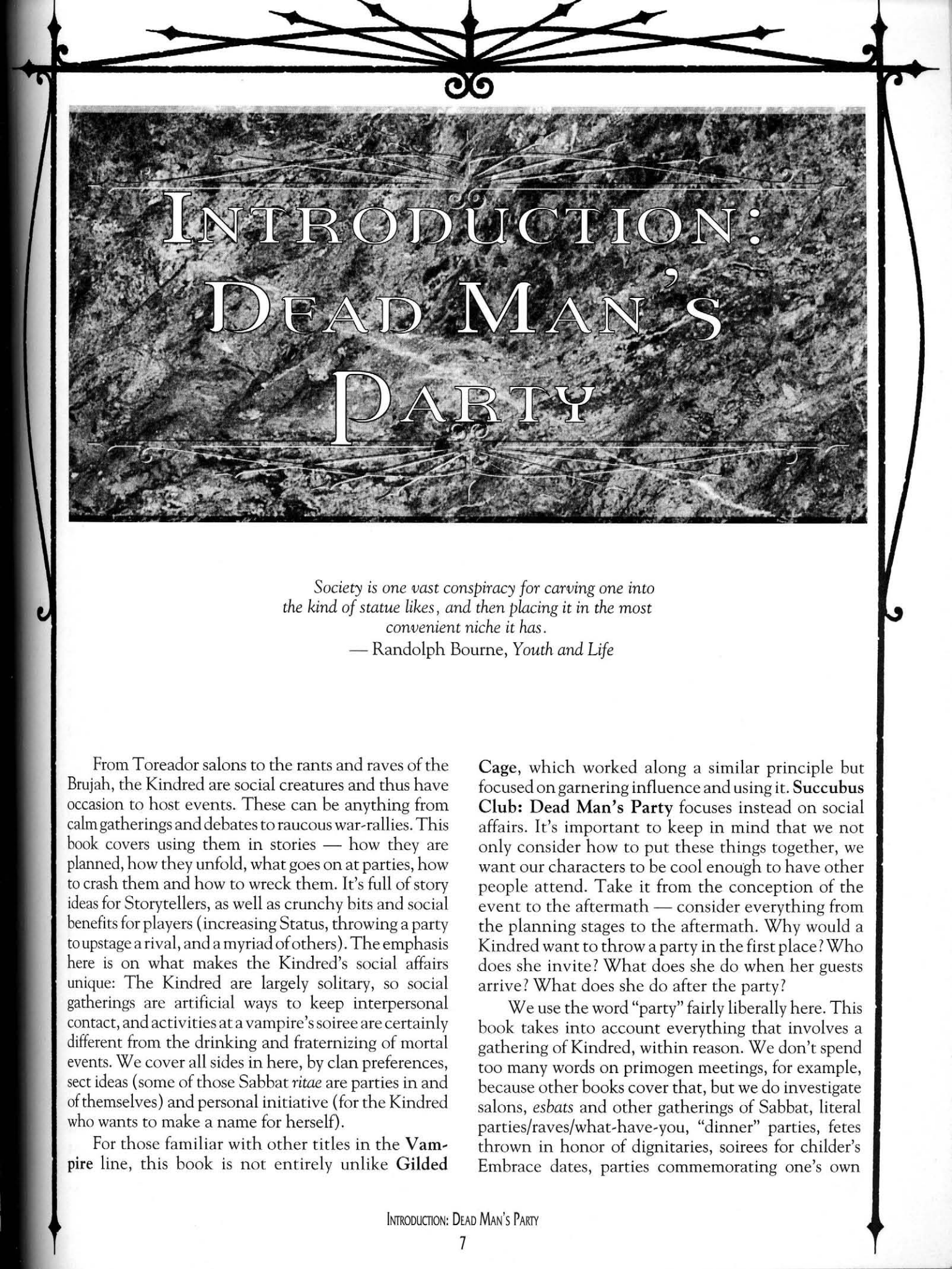


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INTRODUCTION: DEAD MAN'S PARTY

*Society is one vast conspiracy for carving one into
the kind of statue likes, and then placing it in the most
convenient niche it has.*

— Randolph Bourne, *Youth and Life*

From Toreador salons to the rants and raves of the Brujah, the Kindred are social creatures and thus have occasion to host events. These can be anything from calm gatherings and debates to raucous war-rallies. This book covers using them in stories — how they are planned, how they unfold, what goes on at parties, how to crash them and how to wreck them. It's full of story ideas for Storytellers, as well as crunchy bits and social benefits for players (increasing Status, throwing a party to upstage a rival, and a myriad of others). The emphasis here is on what makes the Kindred's social affairs unique: The Kindred are largely solitary, so social gatherings are artificial ways to keep interpersonal contact, and activities at a vampire's soiree are certainly different from the drinking and fraternizing of mortal events. We cover all sides in here, by clan preferences, sect ideas (some of those Sabbat *ritae* are parties in and of themselves) and personal initiative (for the Kindred who wants to make a name for herself).

For those familiar with other titles in the **Vampire** line, this book is not entirely unlike **Gilded**

Cage, which worked along a similar principle but focused on garnering influence and using it. **Succubus Club: Dead Man's Party** focuses instead on social affairs. It's important to keep in mind that we not only consider how to put these things together, we want our characters to be cool enough to have other people attend. Take it from the conception of the event to the aftermath — consider everything from the planning stages to the aftermath. Why would a Kindred want to throw a party in the first place? Who does she invite? What does she do when her guests arrive? What does she do after the party?

We use the word "party" fairly liberally here. This book takes into account everything that involves a gathering of Kindred, within reason. We don't spend too many words on primogen meetings, for example, because other books cover that, but we do investigate salons, *esbats* and other gatherings of Sabbat, literal parties/raves/what-have-you, "dinner" parties, fetes thrown in honor of dignitaries, soirees for childer's Embrace dates, parties commemorating one's own



achievements—the whole ball of wax. If vampires are getting together and it's not a formal meeting of a sect to set policy, it's in this book.

This is an important book because it gives a chronicle a reason to bring these social affairs into being. For many troupes, social events are simply a background for whatever plot thread they're chasing at the moment. Go to the Brujah rant and meet the elder; pick up the fragment of the *Book of Nod* at the *Palla Grande*; find out who the Setites are dealing with at the Succubus Club. This book expands the role of the social affair so it is its own reward. Players and Storytellers, think about your own life: You don't just go about the "missions" that make up the greater "plot" of your existence. You go to bars. You visit parties. You go dancing, out to dinner, on dates, out with friends. Such is the context of the book. A vampire's unlife isn't just waking up, fighting with Enemy X and finding McGuffin Y. If all the characters do is "work," why do they even bother with unlife at all? Those social affairs are a place to relax, have (what passes in the Kindred world for) fun and interact with others.

In addition to the social interaction, though, social events have other intangibles. A good host is going to build some Status. It's a good way to introduce oneself to Kindred society (say, if one is a neonate or new to a given city). They're a place to exchange and discuss ideas, as with a salon or a rant or a political rally. Oh, and, hey, let's not denigrate the social-event-as-setting, either, provided we understand that's not the be-all and end-all of it.

When storytelling a grand event or portraying a character who seeks to hold or attend one, give consideration, also, to the roles non-Kindred will play in them. Prominent characters may bring ghouls, etc., but what about *really big* events that are frequented by mortals? A city of 2,000,000 people can host maybe 20 Kindred, and a "nightclub" attended by 20 vampires (assuming they all want to go hang out with each other) is a bit desolate. That's fine for a large salon or other party, but different venues have different scales. How do the mortals fit in? How do the Kindred get away with being Kindred at an event that is attended by non-Kindred?

THEME AND MOOD

The theme of this book is the weight of undeath. Kindred get together to stave off loneliness, ennui, or to stoke their excitement by meeting new rivals to play at Jyhad with. If the world were made up just of statistics, there would be no need for social interaction, but because we share a World of Dark-

ness populated by actual characters with personalities, they need to do things in their spare time. This book covers some of those things. Without social interaction, why would a vampire bother to rise for the evening unless he was working on some project of his own?

As to the mood, notice the sense of up-tempo “something’s happening” blended with the Final Nights’ omnipresent menace on the verge of arrival. Remember that this is a horror setting in which the main characters are vampires. Something’s going to loom on the horizon and it’s probably not good. Work with this carefully in your stories, as our salons and intellectual debates don’t necessarily need to have action-movie pacing, but they do need to have some contribution to the story.

TONE AND STYLE

When interacting with a story environment that involves a social setting, your tone should vary a bit by subject matter. Of course, you’re going to be conversational, but descriptions of high-society/the-mayor-is-coming soirees shouldn’t have the same feel as the illegal warehouse parties taking place at the docks. Build your setting not only with the words you choose, but with the manner in which you present them to the troupe, or to the members of your coterie.

For style, you’re going to have a mix again. High society should feel different from low life. You should definitely create some contrast among elders, ancillae and neonates. You don’t have to break these out in flashing neon every time you make a point to the players or Storyteller, but give consideration to the full spectrum of Kindred ages. Also, you may wish to mix and match cultural level with the age of Kindred. For example, a young Ventruue Embraced from a wealthy family is probably going to have a “stodgier” sense of social decorum than a Brujah who’s spent his three centuries of unlife among the rowdy outcasts of society.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Readers familiar with *Vampire*’s format will no doubt be already well versed in the sectional breakdown of the information in this book.

Chapter One discusses the wide world of Kindred social affairs. What do they mean to the Kindred? How do they use them? Are Kindred behind the scenes of these things often (as with certain private parties), are they only occasionally involved (nightclubs), or are they just convenient places for Kindred to meet and be considered faces in the crowd as far as their privacy is concerned (nighttime festivals, concerts, etc.)?

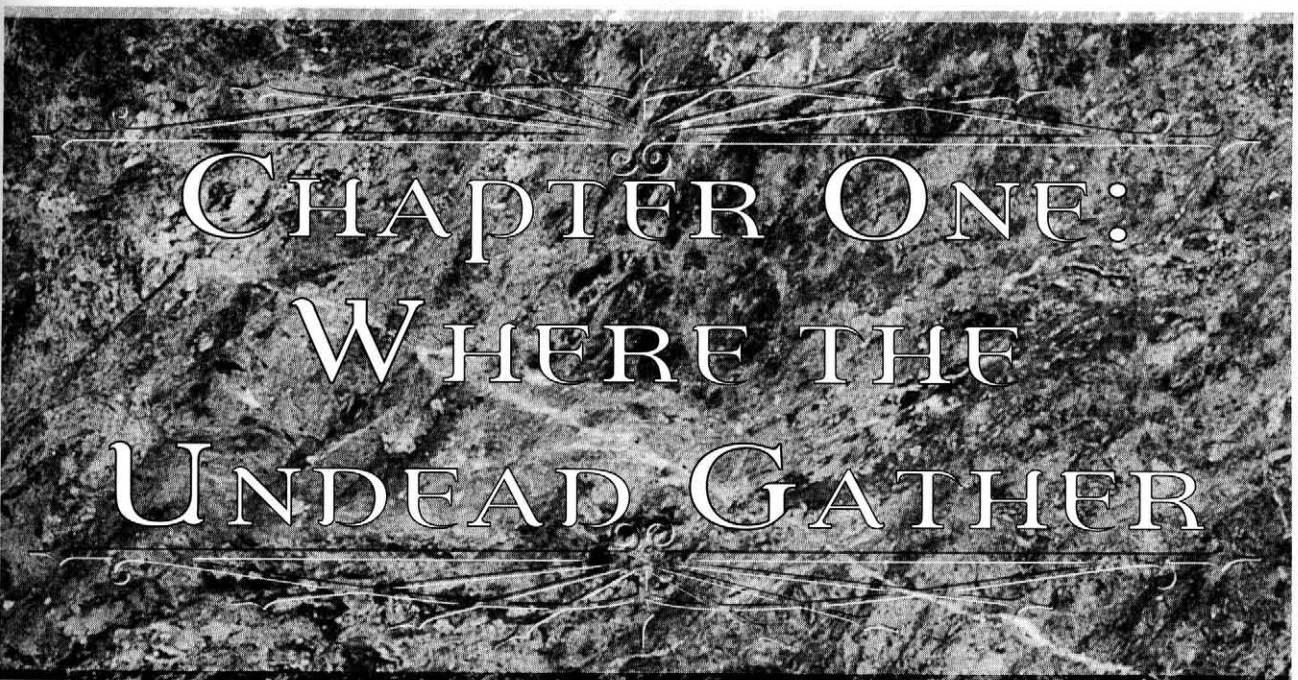
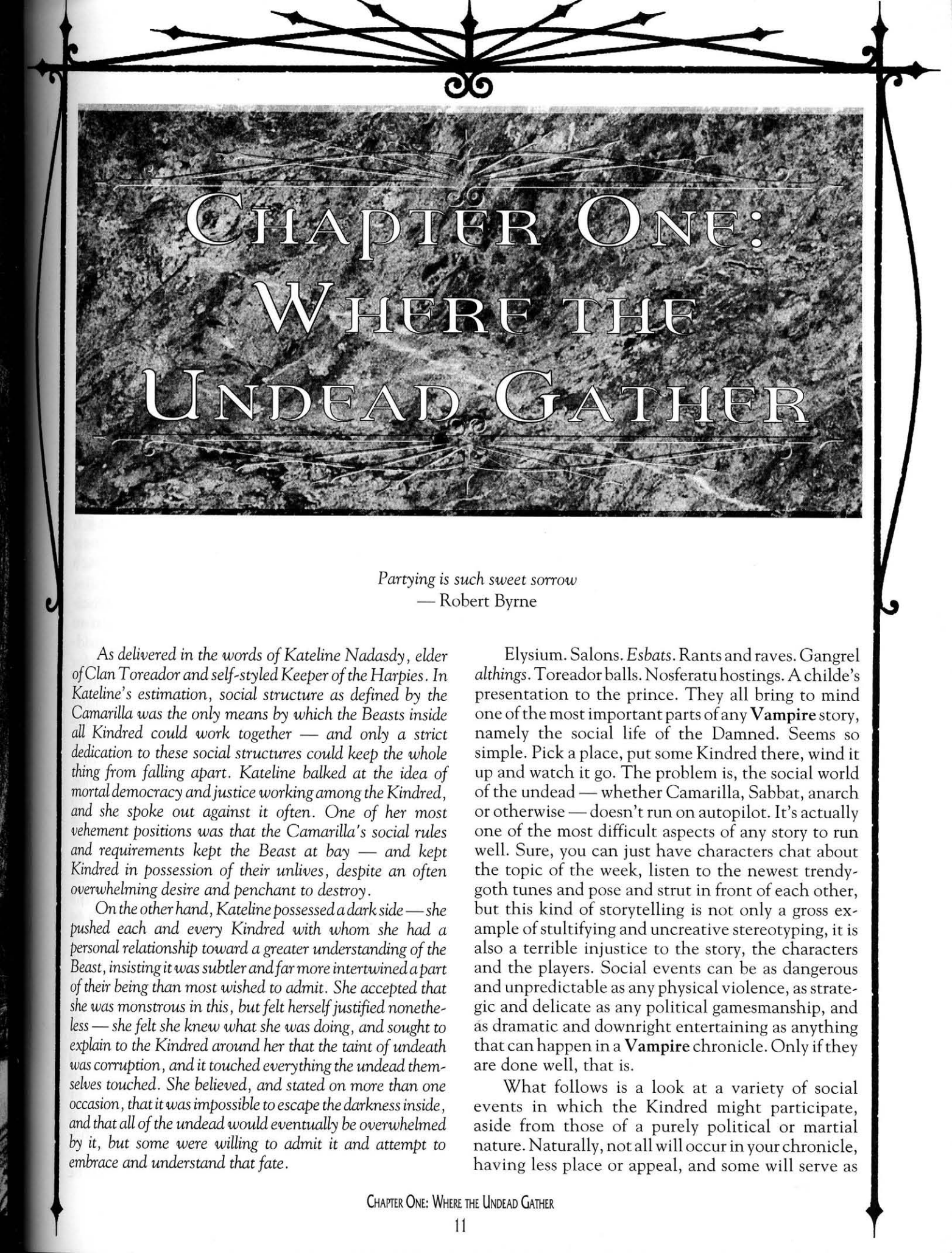
Chapter Two focuses on making things happen — the “how” to Chapter One’s “what.” It includes information on planning social events, observing the proprieties of them once they’re underway and even dealing with their conclusion (and occasional aftermath...).

Chapter Three is sort of an illustration of this book’s principles in action. The Succubus Club is a setting in which vampires may meet. It’s taken the form of a nomadic nightclub, a traveling rave that moves from city to city bringing its web of intrigue with it.

Now that we have all this advice on how to put a social affair together, **Chapter Four** discusses how to use it in a story. This chapter logically takes the form of advice directly to the Storyteller — while the rest of the book is equally digestible to players, our intent is to discuss running stories and adjudication here.

Finally, the **Appendix** presents systems and mechanical suggestions by which a smoothly flowing chronicle with social affairs might evolve. It includes an optional system by which players more or less savvy than their characters can resolve social conflict, as well as an examination of Backgrounds and application of this book’s ideals to sects other than the Camarilla.





CHAPTER ONE: WHERE THE UNDEAD GATHER

Partying is such sweet sorrow
— Robert Byrne

As delivered in the words of Kateline Nadasdy, elder of Clan Toreador and self-styled Keeper of the Harpies. In Kateline's estimation, social structure as defined by the Camarilla was the only means by which the Beasts inside all Kindred could work together — and only a strict dedication to these social structures could keep the whole thing from falling apart. Kateline balked at the idea of mortal democracy and justice working among the Kindred, and she spoke out against it often. One of her most vehement positions was that the Camarilla's social rules and requirements kept the Beast at bay — and kept Kindred in possession of their unlives, despite an often overwhelming desire and penchant to destroy.

On the other hand, Kateline possessed a dark side — she pushed each and every Kindred with whom she had a personal relationship toward a greater understanding of the Beast, insisting it was subtler and far more intertwined a part of their being than most wished to admit. She accepted that she was monstrous in this, but felt herself justified nonetheless — she felt she knew what she was doing, and sought to explain to the Kindred around her that the taint of undeath was corruption, and it touched everything the undead themselves touched. She believed, and stated on more than one occasion, that it was impossible to escape the darkness inside, and that all of the undead would eventually be overwhelmed by it, but some were willing to admit it and attempt to embrace and understand that fate.

Elysium. Salons. Esbats. Rants and raves. Gangrel althings. Toreador balls. Nosferatu hostings. A childe's presentation to the prince. They all bring to mind one of the most important parts of any **Vampire** story, namely the social life of the Damned. Seems so simple. Pick a place, put some Kindred there, wind it up and watch it go. The problem is, the social world of the undead — whether Camarilla, Sabbat, anarch or otherwise — doesn't run on autopilot. It's actually one of the most difficult aspects of any story to run well. Sure, you can just have characters chat about the topic of the week, listen to the newest trendy-goth tunes and pose and strut in front of each other, but this kind of storytelling is not only a gross example of stultifying and uncreative stereotyping, it is also a terrible injustice to the story, the characters and the players. Social events can be as dangerous and unpredictable as any physical violence, as strategic and delicate as any political gamesmanship, and as dramatic and downright entertaining as anything that can happen in a **Vampire** chronicle. Only if they are done well, that is.

What follows is a look at a variety of social events in which the Kindred might participate, aside from those of a purely political or martial nature. Naturally, not all will occur in your chronicle, having less place or appeal, and some will serve as

little more than background; but many may be just what the doctor ordered and perhaps even become the center of your characters' social world.

ELYSIUM

Elysium: This single word conjures many things in the minds of players and Storytellers alike, but for every idea that seems to epitomize what Elysium is, others contradict or muddy that concept. Is it a place? A tradition? A set of rules? Elysium is all those things and more, but the most important thing to understand about this hallowed term is that it is the hallmark of what society *should be* among the Kindred as seen by the movers, shakers and wannabes in the Camarilla.

It is best to first make clear the distinction between Elysium and other gatherings in a Camarilla-held domain. While Kindred may congregate anywhere their dead little hearts desire for any purpose they choose, Elysium is an institution that means so much more and, therefore, commands more attention, even from those Kindred who scoff at its continued practice. Although it has many forms — from dry salons to heated political debates — they all have certain things in common that set them apart from other gatherings outside of sacrosanct Elysium.

The most important distinction is that Elysium is defined in part by those particular places that have been officially declared to be Elysium, almost always by the local prince. If not so designated, a place and the events held there are simply not Elysium. The Keeper of Elysium is under no obligation to safeguard these premises, the sheriff does not concern herself with protecting the Kindred there, and there's nothing stopping those who gather from supernatural manipulation by those standing next to them. In essence, outside the sacred grounds of established Elysium, it is something like the Wild West, with only the Six Traditions themselves (and the prince's interpretation or enforcement of them) demanding any kind of respect. For those who rightly fear the abilities of their peers or superiors, this would make Elysium the place of choice then, if they were to gather at all. Whether a city has a single site designated as Elysium or two dozen, these places always play a preeminent role in where the Kindred may go night after night, once their personal affairs have been attended to.

Another thing that sets Elysium apart from other social settings is that more than any place else, the requirement to observe the complex and dangerous rules of Kindred etiquette and conversation is absolute. Any significant deviation from or defiance of these rules brings immediate and lasting consequences

of the direst sort. For this reason, despite the physical safety that Elysium offers, neonates and less experienced ancillae find the salons of their elders to be akin to minefields, strewn with pitfalls and fatal traps that they must navigate at their own risk. Those who dare this merciless game and survive are accorded all-important status and recognition; those who fail or simply avoid the game altogether find themselves shut out of any real position of influence and cut off from the best sources of information and assistance. Learning the rules of appropriate social conduct and staying afloat in Elysium is not something accomplished overnight, either. Unless one has the benefit of a socially skilled mentor to show the way, it can easily take years, decades and even centuries to become masterful enough to tread without fear in Elysium and turn the opportunities present to one's advantage. And even a mentor is not going to be too protective, for how will his student defend himself when on her own? The most important thing to remember is that while etiquette and dignified manner are welcome in many situations, in Elysium it is the only acceptable way to act. Kindred are routinely ostracized for the slightest mistakes, if only to teach them a lesson.

The convention prohibiting the use of Disciplines in Elysium is also a notable exception to other social interaction. Although always considered rude, threatening or even a sign of weakness for a Kindred to flaunt her undead gifts before others, the use of these powers is understood to be wholly forbidden within the sanctuary of Elysium. Certainly, it is impossible to guarantee that no Discipline is used, particularly when it comes to those of a discreet, passive or psychological nature. However, unless truly skilled enough to use such talents with the surety that none shall recognize their use, the Kindred almost never take the chance and exercise these powers here. The punishment for violating this custom varies from being viewed as a treacherous cur for the next few years, to the guilty party's destruction, if the Kindred was foolish enough to target one of the primogen or other dignitaries. It might seem to reduce gatherings in Elysium to little more than a lot of bark with no bite, but it is very far from the truth.

Elysium is the battleground of choice for most Kindred, the place where the elders and others with the requisite gumption usually face off and engage in their eternal struggles for power and position. This social conflict is sometimes referred to as *esgrima* by certain lofty elders, who see it more akin to dueling than simple repast. A great deal of seemingly innocent chit-chat occurs along with the more dramatic exchanges that turn all heads present, but it would be

foolhardy to think that things said or done in the confines of these cultured gatherings is not done for strategic advantage, excepting, of course, the feeble attempts by those new to the scene who have yet learned to appreciate the infinite levels of social war taking place all around them.

The Kindred well understand that were they to simply confront one another with the might of their own vitae and throw the weight of their retainers and resources at one another, there would be no society to speak of. The Camarilla would, in all likelihood, crumble overnight. In fact, it was in large part for this very reason that the Camarilla was conceived in the first place. Surely it was important to enforce the Masquerade, but equally important was the need to ensure that Kindred would not be distracted from this purpose by warring openly on one another. The Beast clawing to get out of each and every one of them needs little provocation to burst onto the scene and reap its crimson reward, so it is in the best interest of all Kindred to do their utmost to avoid this. The tradition of Elysium is the most practical way to achieve this goal, for it essentially provides a ritualized way for the Kindred to still feed their unquenchable need to compete with, dominate and usurp the place of their peers without risking all in a zero-sum bloodbath.

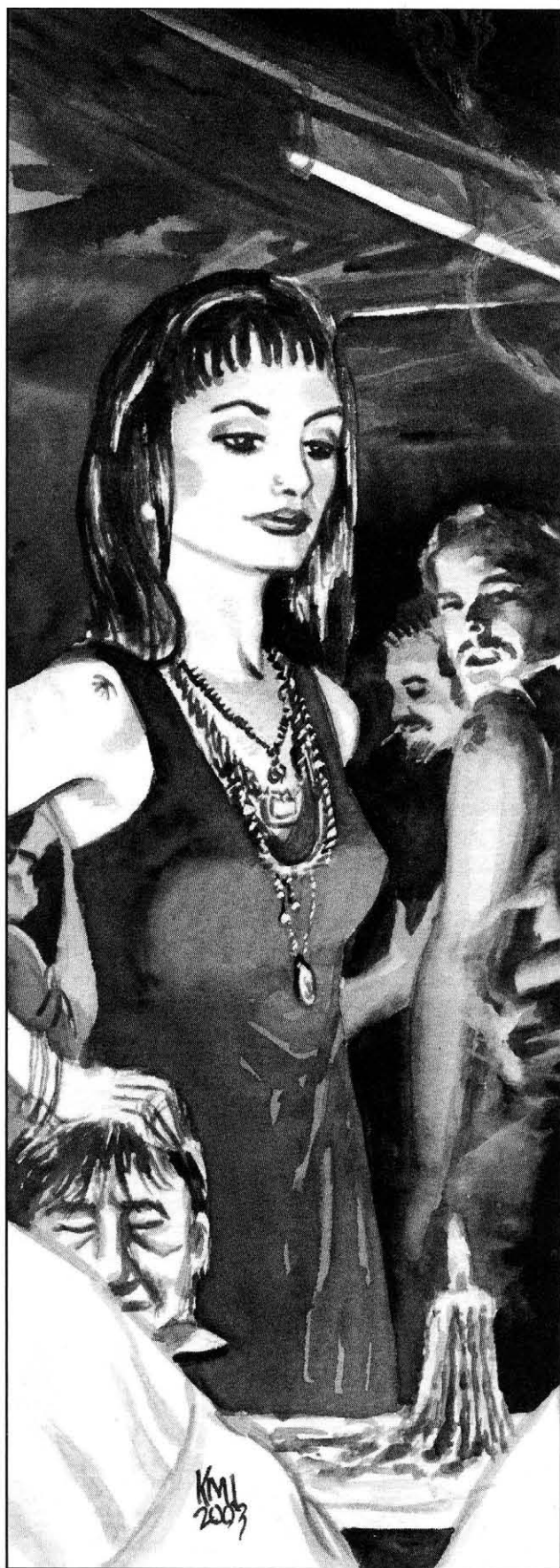
Elysium is where this cold war of *esgrima* is not only allowed to rage, but is encouraged to do so. Certain rules of etiquette must be observed, but these aside, everything is fair game. It is not uncommon during a single evening of apparently uneventful schmoozing for an important strategic battle to fully play out, altering the balance of power among the elders in a lasting way. Even the most innocuous repartee can serve as the means by which two or more social combatants can duke it out over territory, resources, boons and status. Those not directly involved in the match watch like hawks to learn what is at stake, identify the winners and losers, and size up the strengths and weaknesses of the antagonists in order to be better prepared for the time when they will have to meet them on the field of battle. Every type of martial tactic is employed during these exchanges, from simple feints and parries to the most complicated *derobements* and *moulinets*. From the very moment a Kindred steps foot inside Elysium he has effectively declared himself ready to take on all comers and to seize what he can until the sun rises to force a temporary end to the contest. Young Kindred do not fully understand this and often end up learning the hard way.

By limiting their conflicts to Elysium and choosing to wage war using social versus physical weapons,

the Kindred have built a system whereby the status quo can also be safeguarded. Those who are best at these kinds of engagements will win most conflicts and remain atop the social heap. The elders will continue to share status and privilege among themselves, keeping real power out of reach for most others, which is exactly how they want it. So long as this situation does not change, most tooth-and-nail outbursts can be contained, and survival into the Final Nights is more assured. The rank-and-file neonates and a fair number of ancillae don't always agree with this assessment and do their best to rock the boat. However, unless they are willing to risk an actual blood hunt or worse, these malcontents usually keep their comments to themselves and accept the way things are.

THE KEEPER OF ELYSIUM

So how do the Kindred enforce the multitude of rules, customs, prohibitions and expectations that are part and parcel of Elysium? The first method is the appointment of one Kindred to act as the official Keeper of Elysium. Fully responsible for making sure Elysium is safe from physical harm and that the Masquerade remains in force at all times, the keeper is also the one who must create an environment conducive to the kinds of social events that will take place there. Although the individual playing host to an affair is certainly involved in setting the mood and choosing decorations, it is the keeper who pays attention to the more crucial requirements. Ensuring that vessels are available as needed is important if the Beast is to remain sated, and making sure that open flames pose no hazard is no less necessary. Less obvious is the task of managing the seating arrangements, whether the guests will be at a table or gathered in a casual fashion, perhaps in a drawing room with couches, chairs and ottomans. Pecking order must be taken into careful consideration here, with those Kindred most apt to fight kept at arm's length, if possible. Those attendees of greatest stature should be provided the most comfortable and strategically situated seats, while places for uninvited guests are suitably located to make clear the insignificance of those who might be given these seats. Similarly, ease of access to vessels, perhaps the provision of goblets, proximity to light and windows, and other such concerns must be given the proper attention by the keeper. All these subtle decisions can make a real difference in the tone that is set and the way in which that tone is maintained throughout an evening's celebrations. For these reasons, the selection of a keeper is not a matter to be taken lightly.



HARPIES

In addition to the keeper, the harpies have a great deal of responsibility in Elysium. Although not appointed by formal decree, these self-made luminaries nonetheless are nothing less than the social police, watching all present for breaches of custom and actions that demonstrate a lack of respect for one's elders, Elysium or the overriding social institutions of the Camarilla. Where they smell trouble, they don't hesitate to swoop in and pounce on their prey, quickly abandoning their role as mere cops and becoming judges, juries and executioners. While most lesser harpies defer to the judgment of the preeminent harpy, if there is one, they all play the same role to some degree, and it should not be forgotten that every harpy aspires to assume the top spot eventually, at nearly any cost. However, it is usually enough for the harpies to simply be present to keep social transgressions to a minimum. Their discerning stares and acid words are more than enough to keep most Kindred in line. Only the prince can expect a general reprieve from the scalding pronouncements of the harpies, but even powerful princes must tread with care, for enough "bad press" can lead to a swift downfall. One now-former prince lost his hold on power as a result of a propaganda campaign by a minor harpy who, if rumor is to be believed, ran him out of town simply because he refused to attend the piano recital of her new childe. And few can forget the disastrous coup that took down a German prince in 1977 after his rude treatment of a visiting Finnish harpy. A prince who sees the harpies as an inherent threat but wishes to hold onto his praxis recognizes their value and is wise to suffer them with a practiced smile.

The harpies are not exclusive to the rarified chambers of Elysium, but it is here, more than any other place, that they are able to exercise their greatest power, their ability to build or ruin a reputation. Like it or not, a Kindred's reputation is a precious thing and, unlike one's overall status in society, which is more a matter of age and experience, one's reputation can rise or fall dramatically in a very short time. It may take half a century for a neonate to be accorded the status of ancilla by the city's elders and, once given, that Kindred's status is unlikely to change for hundreds of years, barring some heinous crime or astonishing rise to power. However, a primogen of sterling reputation found guilty of a single, ghastly error in judgment by the harpies can find her reputation in tatters overnight. Although still a primogen and still granted all the rights of the position, she suddenly finds that she is no longer approached by her former allies for favors, and her opinion no longer holds much weight among

her peers. Like a hot potato, a Kindred who has become the victim of the harpies finds herself doubly damned — not only a monster to mortals, but also pariah to her own kind. More than a few autarkis have chosen their path after making enemies of the local harpies.

THE KINDRED

Finally, it is the guests themselves who enforce and reinforce the traditions of Elysium and make it the all-important institution that it is. It is in the interest of all who attend the soirees in the opera houses, libraries, museums and other places of cultural esteem to ensure that the rules of conduct and etiquette remain unchallenged. If tomorrow evening these things were to change, no one would know what the effective score was. Chaos would ensue and, given the lack of uniformly recognized rules, the threat of physical violence would soar. No civilized Kindred wants to imagine such a situation, and so, even those who believe they have the short end of the social stick, continue night after night, year after year, to observe, respect and go along with these centuries-old conventions, if only because it is the lesser of two evils.

Those who do not attend Elysium do so at their own risk. Yet when one is a mere neonate there is not that much to lose. These Kindred are not usually welcome at their elders' little shindigs in the first place and attending a salon though incapable of surviving the vicious games being played is an invitation to disaster. This maddening catch-22 seems without solution, but not so. It must be remembered that only the rarest of neonates can boast a reputation of real significance. There is only so much harm that can be sustained should the harpies do their worst. It is only when one's reputation has already risen to a meaningful level that one must really be concerned about losing it. Those neonates who recognize this and are willing to take a few hits, however problematic this might be in the short term, gain valuable skills that will serve them long into the nights ahead. Despite the difficulties a neonate faces in infiltrating Elysium and surviving the social onslaught, the reward is worth it. Most ancillae have already learned this lesson and, though even they continue to suffer the fate of having to kowtow to those who exceed them in age and privilege, they often spend a great deal of effort mastering the skills necessary to one night become a Kindred to be reckoned with.

Those Kindred with greater standing who do not choose to make themselves known in Elysium usually suffer far greater difficulties. By avoiding Elysium altogether, they may be able to sidestep any direct conflicts with their peers, but this does not

keep them safe from harm. Unable to defend themselves in person, their reputations are easily damaged and even turned against them. Kindred are quick to recognize the value of a good, old-fashioned backstabbing, and they engage in this practice without reservation. Naturally, these kinds of attacks are veiled under layers of less obvious pettiness, but it happens nonetheless. Few harpies are so morally superior as to let an opportunity pass to exploit the weakness of another. Because these Kindred are not present, they also cannot earn the spoils of social conflict, in terms of boons, favors and a strengthened reputation, and enable their fellow Kindred, each a potential enemy, to fortify their own might without interference.

KINDRED SALONS

Many of a city's more socially inclined undead residents belong to distinct cliques or salons that form around common social interests or shared pastimes. The more politically motivated Kindred might be drawn to a salon established for the purpose of discussing, debating and resolving political issues, while another Kindred with a greater interest in cultural achievement might find more value attending a salon that spent its time planning an elaborate party, critiquing artistic performances and generally keeping conversation focused on cultural topics. The Kindred who seek an outlet for their baser desires might organize a *divertissement* salon that showcased outlandish spectacles to keep themselves appropriately entertained. Many other kinds of salons might exist in a given domain, including so-called chess salons, martial salons, scavenger-hunt salons and others, depending on the personal tastes and passions of the local Kindred.

While on the surface, a salon seems similar to a coterie, this is not the case and the distinction is important to make. Where a coterie is a group of Kindred who keep each other's company to one degree or another for any number of reasons — safety, shared agendas or beliefs — a salon is merely a gathering of like-minded Kindred, usually in a suitably chosen locale and for a particular purpose. It may be the case that a similar group of Kindred organizes and attends a salon for the purpose of keeping tabs on unexplained local phenomena, but these Kindred need not belong to the same coterie.

Most Kindred who consider themselves avid film buffs have heard of The Screening Room, a semi-regular salon organized every few weeks in the private residence of an elder named Dane Caulfield for the purpose of showing and discussing little-known independent films. Since the early 1970's,

when the salon was established, the guest list has grown, with Kindred from as far away as Europe who flew to partake of Dane's hospitality on occasion just to attend the next salon. Some of the more regular attendees include a small coterie of Toreador who make the short trip from surrounding cities, but most find themselves on the guest list simply because they share the host's passion for celluloid expression. One particular draw that keeps members of the salon returning again and again is Caulfield's unfailing ability to procure one of the film's actors for the evening, to serve as a source of artistic insight as well as nourishment for the guests. What outsiders fail to realize is that the salon is much more than it appears, for its more important purpose is to bring the best anarch intellectuals together to share ideas and to pass on information to their fellow rebels across the Western world. However, because of the potential for spies, The Screening Room etiquette forbids open discussion of policy, leaving it up to the attendees to find subtle ways to communicate their true agenda over the course of the evening, most often couching it in the language of film and art.

Some salons take place in the halls of Elysium, for many of the reasons discussed above. However, in most cases, the elders and other social climbers who choose to host a salon usually prefer to invite their guests to a place that they have more control over, and that serves as a better backdrop for the evening's planned entertainments. Hosts may use the same place again and again if it serves their purposes, and it is not unheard of for such places to be eventually submitted to the prince as a candidate for Elysium the next time he decides to expand his domain's sanctuary. Such recognition would almost guarantee the host's own status as a harpy, if not already of such esteem, which is something not lost on neophyte party-throwers. Though some salons would no longer be of much interest to their clientele if they became so public. In such cases, it is common for location to be secret, with guests understanding that should that information become public knowledge, it might mean an end to the nocturnal activities that go on at the salon.

Salons are most often thought of as being the purview of the elders, for who else has the social influence necessary to ensure good attendance and, when necessary, is able to persuade the Keeper of Elysium to allow access to the sacrosanct locales required? When a group of neonates decided to start holding their own "X-Box Salon" every Tuesday night at the local Gangrel's apartment in a tenement basement in the seedy part of New Haven, they recognized that their use of the term is technically improper — not that they care. The very word

"salon" infers a degree of social elitism that doesn't often apply outside of elder (and some ancilla) circles. This distinction may be a fine line, but it is one that carries a great deal of weight, particularly to the elders, who look down on most any other application of the term as absurd, if not downright slanderous.

It is the custom that attendance is by invitation only, with the salon's host exclusively responsible for the guest list. In some cases, established members may be permitted to bring a guest of their own, but this should be arranged beforehand. Any such new guests are measured up and down by those present to determine how well they will fare among the group, with those who pass initial inspection likely to find themselves the recipient of their own formal invitation to the next party. Not all salons are so exclusive, however. Some salons may be declared to be open to any Kindred with the chutzpah to step into the ring. For example, a primogen may announce that she will host a salon in her own haven (or at least the one she makes public) for the purpose of discussing the benefits and threats posed by the most recent scientific and technological advancements, declaring it open to any and all Kindred who have something to contribute. The host may be more interested in hearing every possible point of view, regardless of the stature of the speaker, than in the reputation of her guests. This by no means suggests that reputations cannot be bolstered and crushed at such an affair, but rather that the host will not likely play the part of social arbiter and may even discourage those harpies who are present from exercising the full extent of their power, especially if it would silence a Kindred. In this and other cases, the host may welcome any who wish to participate, provided they do not disrupt or diminish the proceedings.

Declaring a salon to be open rather than closed in nature has other advantages. A public event gives the host and regular attendees a chance to learn more about those Kindred they may see very infrequently, and to learn what they can about them. This opportunity is tremendous and one that most Kindred relish, even if only now and then. For all the benefits, an open salon can be trying and even ruinous. The best-laid plans of the local Nosferatu whip for a special tour of the city's historic underbelly can quickly go awry if some Ravnos bastard decides to actually accept the open invitation and uses the opportunity to create illusions that turn what should have been an instructive and eye-opening walkabout into a frenzy-inducing horror show. My, how simple it is to use Chimerstry to make the group suspect that they are being stalked by a pack of underground Lupines. For this and more personal reasons, most salons are of a private nature.

OTHER FORMAL AFFAIRS

While traditional salons may consume much of an elder's social calendar, other types of festivities of interest to the local movers and shakers also take place. As is the case with most social affairs devised by the elders, up-and-coming ancillae and those prodigal neonates seeking to tout their lineage, these events are usually quite formal in nature. The only real difference between a salon and most other formal affairs is that the latter tend to be more celebratory or commemorative in nature, rather than simply put together so that like-minded Kindred can have a reason to socialize. The following are suggestions for the kinds of formal parties that might exist beyond the limited scope of the salon. Note that these are not all exclusive of each other; a Storyteller should allow crossover where it seems appropriate. Social functions can be complex, and even the most formal of affairs can stray from their stated purpose, particularly if the host is not a master of her craft.

DINNER PARTIES

The sharing of a meal with peers and other guests is a powerful ritual that can be used to celebrate any event or accomplishment, or just be an excuse to congregate. Because of the powerful role blood plays in their unives, the Kindred delight in now and then being able to satisfy this unnatural hunger with others of their kind, rather than always seeking out and feeding from their prey in solitary fashion. Not all Kindred wish to feed in the presence of others, of course, but many do find a perverse pleasure in it at times, and these are just the kind of individuals who delight in receiving an invitation to a dinner party. Some are held in lavish surroundings, very comfortable and formal, with rich decoration, atmosphere-enhancing lighting and, of course, a suitably large table. Goblets of precious metal or manufacture are sometimes provided, accompanied in rare instances by other handsome instruments used to slice, pierce or otherwise open the veins of the vessels. Other dinner parties are thrown in almost haphazard fashion in a basement or in the dining room of an unfortunate family of kine who had no idea that they would ever be served up as dinner on their own Ethan Allen table. Whatever the tastes of the host, so long as there is blood to be shared.

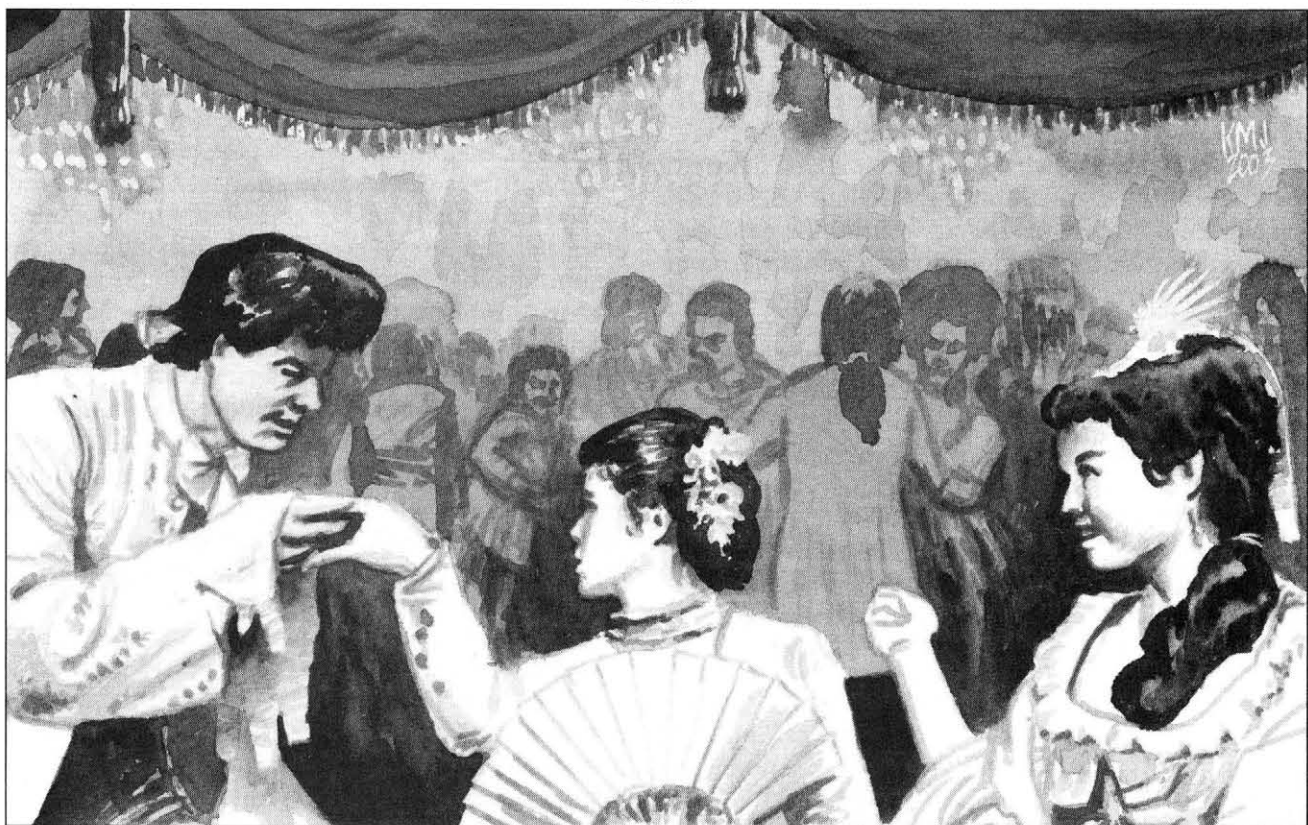
Naturally, there is no such thing as a dinner party without blood, so the provision of kine is an absolute must. A host will usually go to great lengths and spend prodigious funds to procure delectable prey, often requesting guests to RSVP their prefer-

ences well in advance to be sure no one is dissatisfied with their portion. Where certain guests may have reservations about revealing their particular tastes, it is commonly acceptable for them to bring their own. So long as the host is aware of this ahead of time, this is not seen as an insult. Some dinner parties are actually held by so-called "vintage clubs," groups of vampires who enjoy identifying, locating and producing the most satisfying flavors and aromas in their victims. When this is the case, the dinner guests can expect to taste the lifeblood of a number of different mortals during the course of the night, taking only a small amount from each in order to leave room for more.

Sometimes, especially when the affair is held far from prying eyes, the feast may be precipitated by an actual hunt. This might be like a fox hunt, with the host releasing the prey and giving them a running start before the Kindred are allowed to give chase. Other times it is more like a scavenger hunt, with the vessels hidden all over the property and left for the Kindred to find them. It is common for the number of kine to equal the number of guests and for at least one of the kine to be of clearly inferior stock (a filthy bum, a sickly old woman), while one may be truly outstanding (a celebrity, a perfect physical specimen), making the hunt even more fun and allowing one hunter to claim a special trophy, while one will be left to effectively feed on table scraps.

To many Kindred, these kinds of activities cross over the line of what is and is not morally acceptable behavior. It is one thing to feed out of necessity, it is another to play with one's food and delight in the victim's terror. However, there are plenty of elders so jaded and desensitized to the world around them that they feel that were it not for such occasional diversissements, they would soon be devoured by the weight of their own ennui. In their own minds at least, they believe they are actually keeping the Beast at bay by effectively throwing it a bone now and then. Of course, this is just the sort of hubris that underscores the true curse of the Kindred and illustrates why it is we are called the Damned.

Certainly, the Sabbat has a long tradition of throwing so-called dinner parties. From the hoary elders of the sect who use such events in part as pretext for insidious politicking to the younger rank-and-file Sabbat who see such events more as primal celebrations of their vampiric nature and pseudo-spiritual affirmations of their role as the soldiers of Caine, blood feasts are so important to the sect that are one of the 13 great rites, or *Auctoritas Ritae*. Even the most depraved Camarilla elder has a thing or two to learn about what it means to



celebrate the unholy power of vitae from his cousins on the other side of the political aisle. Hunts are commonplace, with packs hounding their prey on secluded estates and across entire cities. The whole thing is akin to foreplay before the final feeding, which often takes place in orgiastic fashion with no chance of survival for the victims.

COMING-OUT PARTIES

When a sire first presents his childe to Kindred society, the event is often recognized as an affair deserving of real celebration. The Ventrue, Toreador and Tremere customarily host a party to mark the occasion, but this is not necessarily a hard and fast rule, especially in cities of lesser notice and in the case of sires who buck tradition. Cotillions both flaunt the childe and remind all present of the stature of the sire, for it is rare to be granted permission to Embrace another in the first place. Partygoers fawn over the fledgling, prodding the newly recognized neonate with questions and presenting him with opportunities to demonstrate his possible failings. Slip-ups by the childe reflect poorly on the proud parent, so Kindred only throw these events when they are sure that their childe is ready to be presented to Camarilla society. A coming-out party is a chance for a sire to truly shine and polish her reputation in the process, if the childe is truly ready for his debut and impresses his new peers.

Sires of other clans may throw a party, too, but if so, these parties may take very divergent forms, from wild raves in honor of the new neonate to inscrutable ceremonies that remind the fledgling that he has entered into a new world indeed.

The most crucial test of any cotillion, however, is whether or not the prince will accept the childe as a full-fledged member of her domain and, by extension, the Camarilla. When a sire feels it is time to present his childe, the wise Kindred will first arrange a more private meeting with the primogen or prince, if possible, to obtain permission beforehand rather than risk possible rejection in public. Like all things the Kindred do, this whole process is one that usually entails a slew of favors and boons being traded before any such nod is given. Prestation is the grease that makes sure the formal presentation in Elysium goes as planned without any snags. The reputation of many sires has been dashed with alarming speed when their childe's coming-out party was ignored by the prince and important elders, leaving the whole matter of presentation unresolved and the childe still formally unrecognized.

Some princes prefer to have a particular date set aside every year, two years, five years or more, at which time a regular cotillion is held. This works well in larger domains where there may be a handful of new Kindred joining society at a time, released from the authority of their sires for the first time. This sometimes reduces the amount of behind-the-

scenes wrangling that goes on to have one's childe presented, but moreover it can make a far more interesting affair, with the simultaneous presentation of a number of neonates at once. In all cases, the guest list almost always includes the sire's sire, clan dignitaries and Kindred whom one hopes to impress, in addition to those local Kindred who have any claim to status of their own. To not be invited to such an event is a clear snub that can ignite, or further enflame, a serious feud.

Formal presentations may be free-form affairs, with no set agenda, or they can be very structured events with long-standing ritual setting a regal tone and further impressing the newly recognized childe with the full tradition and power of the Camarilla and those dignitaries present. For those of a more formal nature, it is not unknown for props, such as swords, scepters, candles and other ritualistic paraphernalia to play a role in the ceremony, turning the cotillion into something far closer to a secret society's induction ceremony. This requires that the sire teach the childe what to expect beforehand to make sure the progeny will make the best impression on those Kindred who attend. Sometimes a cruel primogen may provide false information to the prospective presenter so that the childe will be improperly prepared in order to cast the horrified sire in a bad light. Though most of the time the affair runs smoothly as it is usually in the best interests of the local Kindred to show all visitors that their domain and prince are portrayed as the highest examples of Camarilla society.

Coming-out ceremonies are not exclusive to the Camarilla. The Sabbat has its own share of Cainites who place value in this sort of introduction for their childer, especially among the Lasombra, Tzimisce, Ventrue *antitribu* and similar clans traditionally known for clinging to at least a veneer of respectability and culture, however twisted and foul it may be. Fiendish elders relish an evening of ceremonial depravity welcoming another knight into the ranks of the Sword of Caine, especially in the case of a childe who demonstrates a willingness to do anything for the cause of the sect and its wicked masters. As might be expected, Sabbat cotillions are bloody affairs where ritual, myth and atrocity serve to create a tableau of rebirth and damnation uniquely devised to instill in the neonate an unshakable sense of the epic importance of her place in the eternal order of things. Those Cainites "lucky" enough to earn such a party in their honor are accorded a certain prestige that will either aid them in building their own power base within the Sabbat or else mark them as an easy

target by those who see such grandiose recognition as exactly the sort of garbage the sect is supposedly determined to stamp out.

PROMOTION CEREMONIES

Half the battles the Kindred wage against one another are for the prized titles granted them by their prince, and when a Kindred earns such a privileged station, the moment is often marked by appropriate festivity. Regardless of the title attained, such celebration will be almost always be open to all the city's Kindred, mostly so that it is clear to all residents just who the new dignitary is, whether sheriff, whip, keeper, primogen or somebody else. The open nature of these ceremonies also allows the elders to learn who is pleased and who is not with the new appointment, providing them a nice list of their own to use as they add more schemes to their to-do list. Those who choose not to attend these kinds of events are typically noted by the harpies and the newly promoted Kindred, a distinction any wise Kindred would prefer not to have. Imagine skipping out on the party thrown for the new sheriff and then finding yourself getting caught in a bind for possible breach of the Masquerade. What's a sheriff to do? Or perhaps even worse, not showing up when a new Keeper of Elysium is named and then being so foolish as to think you will ever again be granted access to Elysium the next time you wish to host an event there?

A promotion or award ceremony is very much that, a ceremony. Ritual and tradition are observed and honor is bestowed on the Kindred who has attained new standing. The prince dominates the affair and directs the night's festivities, overseeing all with an air of authority. It is expected that all Kindred present recognize the favor the prince has bestowed upon the guest of honor and, at least for the night, treat the new celebrity as if she were truly worthy of her new title. Speeches are considered a useless contrivance that only highlight ego, not achievement, and they are rare, but the prince may remark as to why the individual in question has been awarded their position. Should the previous titleholder be present (in more than a few cases, they no longer exist), they are treated with grace and thanks for having served the prince in that capacity for their term of office. Using this affair as a chance to tear a former keeper or sheriff down is almost certain to backfire on the fool who thinks it's the right time to kick someone when he's down. The harpies are eager to pounce on such egregious errors in judgment.

A very similar event, though with vaster grandeur and more importance, is the acknowledgment of a new prince. As with similarly regal ceremonies

among the kine, this is the most unforgettable of affairs because of the consequences it has for all local Kindred. The precise manner and atmosphere of a new prince's formal declaration or acceptance of praxis vary from one prince to the next, but they are usually very serious affairs, even if on the surface they smack of pomp and circumstance.

Every Kindred is aware of how significant a realignment of power is. In some domains, it is customary for the local elders and other Kindred to present their new prince with a token both symbolizing their acknowledgment of his authority and reminding him that they too can offer him things he may need if he wishes to remain in power. Such gifts should be commensurate with the status of the Kindred who presents them and they are usually of a personal nature. The Nosferatu primogen might offer the prince a very rare book on Etruscan sea power, knowing from conversations with the prince's childe of his interest in the subject. One notable ancilla rose quickly to the rank of primogen after an especially welcome gift to her new prince that was a locket with a photograph of a young man. It apparently meant a great deal to the prince. An artistically gifted Kindred might perform a song or write a special poem, but a full performance can suffer backlash, appearing to be outright flattery. Because information is power, some simply present an envelope containing pieces of vital data the newly installed prince can use. The smirks from those who see a simple letter being handed over to their prince quickly turn to intense looks of curiosity, fear and newfound respect as the prince reads the offering, and his expression makes clear that he has been given something of profound significance.

ACCOMPLISHMENT PARTIES

When a Kindred accomplishes some great success or achievement that is recognized as such by others, it is quite common for her to throw a party highlighting the accomplishment so as to boost her own reputation. This is to be expected and, in and of itself, is not necessarily seen as overly egotistical or snobbish. Because it is quite often the case that the Kindred may not socialize with certain other Kindred in the same city, these kinds of parties are a way for the undead to make clear to others just what they have done and what it might mean for everyone. An example of is when a Brujah finally succeeded in securing the obedience of a majority of the members of his city's Light & Power Commission after more than two years of bribery, threats, coercion and attempts at supernatural domination. The gloating elder staged a demonstration during his self-congratulatory party whereby he made a single phone call to have a section of the city's

power completely shut down for a precisely 11 minutes to back up his claim. His Kindred guests were duly impressed and had no choice but to recognize the incredible influence this represented, showering the Brujah with a new level of respect. The rebel's favorable reputation did not last long, however. Within a fortnight he was brought to heel by a certain Tremere ancilla with a few applications of blood magic. Rumor has it that the Brujah has since remained a fawning thrall to this particular warlock and has lost any reputation he once had.

A self-aggrandizement party can run the gamut from the most formal to the most informal, though most tend to lean toward the more formal type of affair, as it serves to present the host in a better light. Depending on the preferences of the host and the type of achievement being spotlighted, these events can be held in Elysium or just about anywhere. Most hosts expect to cull at least a few small boons by sunrise, so long as their great accomplishment has practical value to other Kindred. However, even when it serves no practical value, an achievement can be worth celebration. A troubled Degenerate who has been absent from the social scene for more than a decade and suddenly declares a wild bash to celebrate his completion and performance of a sadistically difficult cello piece has reason to crow. And he will probably find his invitations well received if for no other reason than because the locals wish to see just what the reclusive artist has been up to.

The Tremere and Toreador are known for throwing these kinds of parties. The former do so in an insular fashion, inviting only fellow Tremere or close members of their coterie, for they are usually about to demonstrate a new bit of arcana that they have devised after long practice and study, and wish to limit outsiders' knowledge of this new capability. Due to the nature of blood magic, victims are often required, and sometimes the effect is subtle or slow in coming, and may require a follow-up party in order for the full effect of the glamour to be fully appreciated. The Toreador, of course, may find any number of reasons to throw such an affair, and often do. Just as often as they may toast their own achievements, the clan as often throws a soiree to applaud the accomplishment of a mortal, usually a retainer or other who has earned their nocturnal attentions. The Toreador may use such a celebration as a way to "mark" a mortal, essentially informing their fellow Kindred that this person is their personal property and may one night even become their childe. Any interference with the individual by other Kindred is usually viewed as a blatant attack on the Toreador and dealt with most harshly.

Similarly, any Kindred may throw a fete in honor of another Kindred's achievement. Despite how it might seem, the host need not even like the guest of honor, and in some cases throws such a party in order to subtly impugn the Kindred under the glare of the limelight. This must be done carefully, for crass humiliation can swiftly turn around to bite a mischievous host in the ass, especially if the guest of honor is able to see and avoid the social pitfalls and actually gain the upper hand in the estimation of the guests. Of course, this kind of deadly social ambush and repartee is precisely what the other Kindred have come to see.

MEMORIAL SERVICES

In the eyes of some Kindred, it is the height of rudeness to not host a memorial service in honor of a sire, childe, consanguineous sibling, coterie-mate or even just a fellow Kindred who has met his Final Death. Most Kindred care little for such displays, but to those who do, they have their place. These affairs honor the fallen Kindred and demonstrate the respect the host and other guests had for that individual. They also provide a time and place for any loose ends related to the lost Kindred to be taken care of. The services held range from somber remembrances held in the deceased's own haven to raucous celebrations in their honor in a crowded nightclub after sprinkling their ashes over the unwitting partygoers from a catwalk above. The idea here is not to show remorse, but to demonstrate an understanding that "immortality" is not necessarily that, and to celebrate the fact that everyone else continues to enjoy the fruits of the ages.

Certain clans have a predilection for turning these services into very formal affairs — the Ventrue, Giovanni and the Assamites to name three. The Clan of Kings makes quite a deal of the death of another of its bloodline and its members are in the habit of throwing smaller, more private annual remembrances for many years after their clanmate has passed away. The Necromancers organize much-ritualized ceremonies that rumor has it involves the summoning of the spirit of the dead Giovanni in order to bind it into continued servitude even though trapped on the other side of the wall of death. The Assamites perform a religiously oriented ceremony that can involve fasting, tests of endurance and even the sacrifice of something that the still-unliving Kindred value.

Whatever the manner of ceremony, it is a sure thing that after or during the service, Kindred of influence — the prince, primogen, other elders, etc. — gather to discuss the division of resources formerly possessed by the destroyed Kindred. The sudden and

complete disappearance of a vampire who leaves behind a home with coffins, odd weapons, ancient artifacts and other things that are very out of place for a mortal to own lead to a breach of the Masquerade. Just as important is the determination of what to do about any ghouls or other thralls the Kindred commanded. In some cases, the prince may decide it is the best policy to eliminate some of these kine, especially if they possess Disciplines or knowledge that might pose a serious threat to the Masquerade if made public. Others may be co-opted by other Kindred, especially in the case of those retainers of merit. No need to throw away a good minion, is there?

PUNISHMENT PARTIES

When a Kindred is scheduled to receive some form of punishment beyond a mere verbal rebuke or fine, like carrion crows, the Kindred cannot help but gather to witness the spectacle. It is completely acceptable at such functions to show disdain for the guilty party and to demonstrate satisfaction in their suffering, especially if their crime somehow involved the Kindred witnessing the punishment. However, it is just as justified to show some measure of compassion and to offer to help the one being punished. What better way to gain a quick boon? Punishments range from the stripping of privilege — loss of a personal feeding ground, loss of title — to physical punishment — loss of hand, branding, torture — and might even result in outright exile from the city or execution on the spot for the most egregious sins. Only the most jaded and antisocial of Kindred are able to ignore their morbid curiosity and not attend. As after a memorial celebration, the victim's spoils may have to be divvied up, which is another reason why these grisly affairs are a draw for most Kindred.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Most political functions are also formal affairs, such as primogen meetings, conclaves and less important gatherings and planning sessions. While clearly focused on city and Kindred politics, these events also have their share of social sparring and are worth a brief mention.

A typical primogen meeting might consist of only a half-dozen Kindred and usually includes the prince. All sitting members are considered elders, however you wish to slice it, making this the event with the greatest concentration of actual and perceived power to be held with any regularity in a given domain. Each present Kindred probably has vast resources at his disposal, of every kind imaginable, and most view their peers as a potential threat first and foremost, no matter what else they might think of them. More than a few also believe that one night they shall be sitting at the head of the table,

and many spend every moment of their waking unives considering how they are going to make that happen. Their debates and discussions tend to stick to the practical matters at hand that they ostensibly meet to consider — politics, that is — but a battle also wages from the moment the meeting is called to order until the last primogen leaves the chamber to retreat before the rising sun.

The Sabbat does not differ greatly from the Camarilla when it comes to political meetings, using them as much for social gain as it does to resolve the important issues at hand. Because of the Vaulderie and because the Sword of Caine at least pretends to be more of a meritocracy than the Camarilla, the social feuding that does take place during these get-togethers is less nefarious and aimed at improving one's overall popularity than in actually achieving a crucial advantage over a particular foe. The Sabbat certainly has its political masterminds, but most of its members find it far more effective to simply rouse the rabble, as it were, seizing the soapbox and shouting down those who oppose their views. This kind of firebrand politics can be quite effective at putting the kibosh on the subtle tactics used by the traditional Sabbat elders, equating their machinations to the methods used by the Camarilla elders to maintain their hold on power. Only at the highest levels of the sect, among certain prisci and archbishops, for example, does this type of drum-beating prove largely ineffective, for these Cainites are ultimately concerned with their own personal agendas before those of the sect. They are not easily swayed by simple emotional entreaties.

INFORMAL SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Despite appearances, the vast majority of Kindred do not spend much time attending formal functions. The elders make up only a small, though significant, minority; the greater number of ancillae and neonates are rarely on the dance card of enough of these elders to be welcome in convocations of primogen or at the rarified salons. Instead, they carry on in their own fashion, finding their own reasons for socializing with their peers and their own ways and places to do it.

The most common get-togethers are those arranged by various coteries for the sole satisfaction of their own members. No invitations are needed and guests are usually acceptable unless strictly forbidden by the most influential members of the group. Some coteries are trusting enough to open up their own haven to their companions and host informal parties with some frequency. Others prefer a neutral location for their fun and games, perhaps a favorite club in the

Rack or some place even less likely to draw attention. A coterie of neonates in a coastal city uses the rusting hulk of a cargo ship for their get-togethers, though an abandoned warehouse in the Barrens is more common. Culturally sensitive coteries may meet in art galleries or museums, emulating their elders, but they must exercise extra caution when doing so, for they never know if such a place might also be favored by a certain elder for his own salons.

Even the most formal soirees can be reproduced by the less socially connected Kindred in an informal manner. While the presentation of the Malkavian sheriff's new childe is a notable affair held in Elysium, a neonate may wish to present a new ghoul to her coterie, throwing a private bash and then taking the party on the road and into the heart of the city's club scene where all manner of fun might be had.

More casual celebrations are less fraught with social danger, though certainly they are not without some level of hidden intrigues and maneuvering for advantage. It does not require lush crimson curtains, crystal chandeliers and the ephemeral strings of Vivaldi to inspire social conflict, it is only that such things are more conducive to limiting outbursts and, therefore, serious trouble. Where ancillae (especially neonates) are involved, the art of prestation and social assassination does not reach the same level as it does with the elders. The agendas and emotions of those squaring off for position are more plain to see, which is only to be expected, for it is here outside of the marble-floored Elysium that these younger Kindred hone the social skills they need if they are to one-night stand on their own among the elders. Blunders are a matter of course, but at least one's failings are likely to remain confined to one's coterie and will probably not reach the ears of the harpies. What concern do they really have over the bickering of a few fledglings?

Aside from mimicking the salons and fetes of their elders, a host of other kinds of social functions exist that serve to satisfy the needs and desires of the Kindred, night after night. While nearly any kind of event is possible, the following are the more common types of gatherings that deserve some small attention.

INSTRUCTION AND PRACTICE

Every vampire possesses at least a few Disciplines, and most aim to increase both their mastery of those they already have, as well as learn how to use new ones currently beyond their ken. Some Disciplines require only some amount of private

practice, in particular those of a more physical flavor. To improve one's skill at using Celerity, a Kindred need only keep using it and pushing it to an even higher limit. But one can learn only so much on one's own. In most cases, the time will come when a Kindred realizes that any further achievement will require an instructor. Whether a fellow member of a coterie or clan, or perhaps an elder mentor or sire who deems it appropriate, a teacher will have to spend some time demonstrating the Discipline to be learned and personally oversee the practice and progress of the student. Because of the significant power that any new supernatural ability represents, privacy is very important and so instruction usually takes place in a personal haven or some other place that can be secured and kept from prying eyes. Many Kindred do not want others to know what they are truly capable of, so at least some degree of paranoia is helpful. There need not be any kind of formal procedure laid out for the instruction, but any student understands that no matter how equal she may be in status or reputation relative to her teacher, she must show the utmost courtesy and respect if she expects to ever achieve the mastery she seeks. Even the smallest slight or inappropriate act can mean abandonment by the instructor, and maybe even damage her reputation.

Ghouls also require instruction in the use of Disciplines if they are to fulfill their potential as truly useful servants. Because of their mortal weaknesses — easily excitable passions, the tendency to suffer severe emotional swings when they imbibe and later need more vitae — they must be handled with care and along with the power they might attain, the responsibility that goes along with that power must be suitably hammered into them using whatever means is most appropriate. One foolish kine desperate to show off his ability to exercise supernatural power can bring the entire Masquerade crashing down, signing the regnant's death warrant at the same time.

Disciplines are not the only thing a Kindred might seek to learn, however. Many Kindred regularly enjoy lecturing others on all manner of things, from the most ancient myths of the Kindred to something mundane like basic carpentry, or something useful, such as how to clean a crime scene to avoid having the police pick up your trail after a wild night of debauchery. Every sire must teach his childe and ghouls about unlife from the very first, but this kind of instruction does not automatically end just because the student has learned the most important things. Kindred with an interest in firearms will haunt gun ranges that stay open late, or head out into

the city's darkest underbelly for some less structured target practice. Those with an artistic bent hold discussion groups or lectures in the fine arts, hoping that their knowledge will bring an even greater degree of cultural enlightenment to the domain. The Tremere sometimes hold their own classes in the occult, which are even more formalized affairs with thousand-year-old curricula that continues to be used without deviation as the best means for passing on the secrets of blood magic.

HUNTING AND FEEDING

The Kindred are predators and one way or another, they are going to have to find and consume blood on a regular basis. There is no need to discuss all the methods of hunting or the kinds of prey sought, but it is worth mentioning how this fundamental need is a prime instigator of Kindred social life.

Sometimes Kindred prefer to hunt in groups, the Sabbat being an obvious example, but other "hunt clubs" are common, some even achieving a substantial degree of notoriety. These are like-minded Kindred who want to share the thrill of the hunt — or kill — with their coterie or others. Aside from the whole orgy angle, there is actually some benefit to hunting in this fashion, assuming that all participants are not simply raging beasts intent on mayhem and bloodshed. If the hunters are level-headed, one or more of the group can act as lookouts to ensure that their activities are not witnessed by kine who might decide to look into the matter further. They can also act to clean up the scene afterward, either disposing of evidence or convincing witnesses who have seen too much to forget or keep their mouths shut. If the group seeks to bring down one or two people for the purpose of entirely draining them instead of locating many victims and taking only a bit from each — the latter is a far more efficient use of their numbers — then using pack tactics will make it much easier to entrap victims and whisk them away without commotion.

Even when hunting alone, the habit of Kindred to seek prey in similar places, like the Rack, brings the Kindred into regular contact with one another. There are likely to be certain clubs, bars or other establishments in the Rack that are favored on account of the variety of clientele, the atmosphere, the dim lighting, ease of access and availability of nooks and crannies where a quick sip of blood from a half-drunk patron won't cause a scene. Aside from serving as a place to pick up a meal, a place like this quickly becomes a meeting place for the regular hunters, giving them a place to socialize before satisfying their baser hungers. All but the most antisocial Kindred finds it at least worthwhile to sometimes drop by to see who's there and perhaps pick up news about the city's other Kindred.

There is usually one such place in a city that becomes unofficially recognized as the place to go to get in touch with other Kindred, sort of a post office and union hall combined into one. Sometimes referred to as *conciergeries* by elders, or "post offices" by more vulgar Kindred, these places boast one or more flunkies on staff who recognize the local Kindred and ghouls. Messages, invitations, goods and general announcements are entrusted to these concierges for safekeeping until the intended recipient shows up to retrieve them. Sometimes a concierge is a ghoul and blood bound to ensure loyalty, but it is more likely that a concierge is a kine who is paid well to ensure the privacy of his clientele.

Even the elite elders make an appearance at such places on occasion, stepping out of their closed drawing rooms and mixing with the kine from a need to feed their accursed hunger. However, these Kindred know that they are somewhat out of their element here and tend to avoid social entanglements with the kine as much as possible, preferring to glide among them and for just a few hours to remember what it was like to be human. Even the vaunted harpies recognize their limited power here, having few of their usual toadies and fawning sycophants to support their pronouncements, even if they run into socially inferior Kindred. This does

not mean that Kindred can say whatever they like to others they meet here, but it does make it somewhat less worrisome for those who are still struggling with the intricacies of the Machiavellian social games prevalent in elder society.

More than a few Malkavians take advantage of this and turn it into something of a game, perhaps arranging a "chance encounter" in the Rack with an elder that has disparaged them in the past. The Lunatic proceeds to make a terrible scene, maybe pretending to be the jilted girlfriend of the elder and screaming all sorts of invective at the horrified elder. With the kine watching in rapt fascination as the scene plays out, the elder is completely astounded and unsure as to how to deal with the upstart without risking frenzy and the breaking of the First Tradition. The elder is often forced to go along with the Lunatic's impromptu skit in the hopes of calming her and removing himself from the limelight. However, before he can escape the situation and pay back the Malkavian for her outlandish assault, the Malkavian all too conveniently disappears into the crowd, leaving the elder standing like a fool for all the mortals to stare at. Ultimately, the elder slinks away, fuming and determined to get his revenge, but at the same time is reminded that despite all his influence among the undead, he is powerless when among the very herd from which he feeds.



THE SUCCUBUS CLUB: DEAD MAN'S PARTY

ENTERTAINMENTS

It would be absurd to think that just because the Kindred are no longer breathing and have access to fiendish powers, they would no longer have any interest in the unlimited variety of entertainments enjoyed by the kine. All Kindred were once mortal and, except for the eldest who wallow in a sort of ennui that precludes most enjoyment, they still like to be entertained, even for the sake of escape from their monstrous unlife.

Ignoring those activities that really are beyond their interest or need — dining at restaurants, throwing bachelor parties, observing Sunday morning mass — the Kindred partake of the entire gamut of leisure activities, depending on individual tastes and preferences. Attending concerts, shooting pool, jamming on the guitar, watching television (the recent arrival of digital video recorders has been well-received by Kindred couch potatoes), catching the latest movie, taking a scenic cruise up the coast, writing that screenplay, sitting in on an interesting lecture, completing a sculpture, shopping for new clothes and even fishing are all perfectly viable ways for Kindred to spend their time.

Aside from the practical difficulties presented by often having to associate with the kine when engaged in leisure activities (see below), other problems present themselves that make even the most mundane fun complicated. First, imagine trying to play a round of golf when the course is closed and the only light is from a frequently obscured half-moon. Being limited to the hours of darkness is a major impediment, if not a total deal-breaker. It might be possible for the Kindred to arrange special “late-night hours of operation” or settle for some changes in how they participate in the activity, but sometimes this is not an option, and certain hobbies may have to become nothing more than fading memories. This can also mean that the Kindred’s pursuit may draw an unwanted amount of attention, which is obviously a bad thing. Hmm, that’s odd. Why are the lights on at 3:30 am in the jewelry store? Police who happen to pass by and notice this kind of stuff would at least be inclined to give it a closer look, if only to make sure that there is nothing of a criminal nature taking place.

Finally, Kindred do not always seek entertainment alone. Members of a coterie often do something together, not only because it’s nice to have someone who shares the same personal eccentricities, but also because it’s easier to protect the Masquerade if someone is helping you keep an eye out for possible threats or lapses in judgment.

MINGLING WITH THE KINE...

It is worth mentioning the types of complications and special considerations that the kine present because many types of social pursuits involve being in the presence of mortals or actively interacting with them.

If the vampire is hungry or possesses weak virtues, the likelihood of frenzy can become too great a risk for the Kindred and force him to abandon or alter his social plans in order to stave off any danger. Consider how hard it would be for one of the Kindred to enjoy live concerts with all the pushing, drunkenness and overflowing passions assaulting him if he suffers from lack of self-control or conscience? And let’s not forget how jumpy a Kindred could be if not courageous enough to ignore the possible danger from the eruptions of lighters and casually brandished cigarettes that are common at such events.

Those Kindred well along the path of damnation exhibit subtle and not-so-subtle traits that mark them as being something other than human. As a Kindred’s Humanity erodes, her complexion becomes increasingly pallid and her features take on a feral cast that eventually make all pretense of being mortal impossible. Unless the Kindred is skilled at masking these signs of undeath and, even better, at mimicking the unconscious habits of the living — breathing, sneezing, feigning tiredness or arousal — close association with the kine may lead to awkward situations. People tend to keep their distance from the Kindred and experience real discomfort and fear, their own subconscious alerted to the presence of a predator. This problem is one of the main reasons that the older the Kindred, the less likely she is to continue her involvement in many of the things she once enjoyed. When it is no longer feasible to play darts every evening at the pub or read the day’s newspaper at the late-night diner, greater interaction with other Kindred becomes the most attractive option.

Kindred must also do their utmost to refrain from demonstrating their true nature as much as possible. It is sometimes helpful to resort to using a Discipline to preserve the Masquerade, but these arts are generally kept to a minimum, like reading auras or heightening one’s perceptions. Routinely relying on Dominate to influence the kine or using other vampiric powers to deal with them is a surer way to reveal one’s supernatural identity than using more ordinary means. Having semi-hypnotized or terrified people around night after night is not very subtle or effective.

Finally, no matter how much fun a Kindred is able to enjoy when in the company of the kine, the pleasure can never again be what it once was. The undead are just that; they're forever removed from the world of the living except as predators and destroyers. Even an uncaring Kindred is capable of feeling a twinge of loneliness and longing for the things he is now denied, particularly the sharing of emotions and experiences with family, friends and lovers who mean him no harm. Except for those who have lost or forsaken their Humanity, these feelings can always surface. A lot of Kindred have sacrificed favorite pastimes and cut off social ties in order to avoid this possible pain.

CLAN FUNCTIONS

ASSAMITE *DIWA'KHAN*

An ancient custom among the Arabic tribesmen and other peoples from the cradle of civilization was the nightly gathering of the men that served as the primary social ritual for the group. The men would exchange news, share tea or coffee and discuss all matters that needed to be discussed. Never a formal political get-together, this important social tradition has lasted until the modern nights in one form or another throughout the region among every racial, religious and political faction. As a clan, the Assamites have also adopted this custom, which they call by its old Kurdish name, the *diwa'khana* (pl. *diwa'khan*). The practice is not universal, but particularly among those with Islamic roots, it holds a place of social importance.

In the last few hours before the sun rises, those Assamites who carry on this custom — the schismatics who have joined the Camarilla are a good example — who are in close proximity to each other, whether permanent residents of a city or visitors, seek each other out and share the *diwa'khana*. Whether partaking of a traditional water pipe and enjoying its aromatic fumes, or simply speaking quietly in a place reminiscent of the *hammam* or an Arabic café, the Children of Haqim use this time to keep up on affairs and create a sense of community, wherever they may find themselves. Outsiders are not welcome, though should another Kindred ever find himself invited to join the assassins in *diwa'khan*, they know that they have gone where few have, and are probably as close as they will ever come to being considered one of the *rafiq*. Female Assamites also participate in *diwa'khan*, but do so separate from the men, as tradition has long dictated.

BRUJAH RANTS AND RAVES

Few have not heard of the ubiquitous rants and raves of the hot-headed Brujah, outrageous screaming sessions and magnificently chaotic

mosh pit-esque parties where blood and music are the only thing on the agenda. However, while these views are not wholly off the mark, the stereotype does not do justice to these powerful clan institutions.

Rants can run the gamut from the most mind-boggling and measured exercise in forensic debate to something akin to an open-mic def poetry jam, with more hooting and hollering than you'll find in the locker room of the winning team after the Super Bowl. Anyone can organize one and is welcome, if they can handle it. Sometimes the Brujah attempt to stay on topic and accomplish something aside from venting emotions. The policy rants and the more interesting debates can resolve issues that need to be addressed, as well as building a sense of clan, but many rants become too rowdy for anything recognizably productive to be achieved. Brujah don't try too hard to keep things on track anyway; they are fully aware of their own attention spans and rejoice in the fact that enough fellow Kindred cared enough to show up in the first place.

The raves, mostly held after a rant, are a means of celebration and play out as uncontrollable parties where the Kindred can let themselves go and drink in the pleasures of the night. Because these parties-gone-berserk are usually well attended by like-minded kine drunk on booze and passion, the temptation to feed is almost impossible to resist. Raving Kindred do not forget the Masquerade just because they are having a little fun, but they don't reign themselves in as much as they normally might, knowing that whatever does happen will probably not be remembered by their victims as anything more than the price to pay for all-night, ecstasy-fueled debauch.

GANGREL THINGS

The Clan of the Beast has few traditions, as befits a line of wanderers, freebooters and loners, but two social practices have lasted across the centuries and remain staples of the more transient members of the clan in the modern nights.

The first is the "thing," which is a meeting between fellow Gangrel. A thing is informal in nature, with no overt violence being the general rule. The Gangrel provide each other with whatever information that might make passage through or survival in the area less dangerous a prospect. Names, secrets and one's political leanings are rarely asked and infrequently offered, for they could lead to a disposition that might cause parties to withhold more practical information. When the Gangrel first encounter each other, they remain silent for a short period in order to give all concerned a chance to

"smell each other out." It is not considered rude at this point to show fangs, extend claws or display — but not use — other potential weapons; this is all part of the "I'll show you what I got, you show me what you got" phase that enables both to simultaneously demonstrate strength and the willingness use it. To not do this is to suggest that the Kindred might be hiding something, which is never a way to build trust. Things don't often last long but are a valuable means of staying clear of real dangers in addition to providing a kind of a mail system. With the greater clan even more fractured than ever before, this system is the only reliable means of passing on news of the many happenings within the clan in and Kindred society.

Much less frequent are the "althings," which are seasonal gatherings of a somewhat more formal nature. Some of these have become so regular that all the Gangrel in the region know when and where they will be held next, and make at least some effort to attend. Others are more impromptu, but word is quickly spread. An althing is like a tribal council, though no actual recognized leader presides, unless some legendary Outlander decides to make an appearance, and even then the ancient does not try and assume any formal dominance over her clansmen. Althings are usually held outdoors and far from prying eyes and can last more than one night if enough stuff of importance is to be discussed.

When the eldest Gangrel present feels the time is right, the althing will be called to order in a fashion, sometimes with a chant or other ritual "opening" performed by one or more participants. Other times, the althing begins when an elder begins speaking. It is customary for those who attend to not speak until this moment, but instead wait in silence until their turn. This time of silence can last more than a night, especially if an important speaker is expected. Nearly any type of business can be dealt with here, from the most political to awards of recognition of Gangrel who have done something deserving of such an honor. When all business concludes, a brief closing ceremony may take place, then the Gangrel depart, each taking what they heard with them to pass on to others in future nights.

GIOVANNI *BACIO DELLA MORTE*

Given their incestuous nature and their morbidly ritualistic proclivities, the Necromancers have social habits within their crypts that assist in keeping the family as close-knit as possible through the ages. Dinner parties, twisted little celebrations and disturbing practices shared by the mortals and Kindred of the clan fill the calendar. The most important of these, if only because every single member of the

clan experiences it, is the actual Embrace, the *bacio della morte*, or Kiss of Death.

The creation of a childe is a very serious affair presaged by many nights, even years, of scheming, deliberation and political intrigue. Eventually, however, all of that means nothing when the elders finally approve the bestowing of the *bacio della morte*. Although often a private affair between sire and would-be childe, the actual Embrace is of such importance that it is celebrated as a semi-public event, with a number of other close Giovanni in attendance, including those who approved the act. The childe-to-be is brought forward in her best outfit as if attending her First Communion and she is informed of her place in the clan and of the "gift" she is about to receive. After all the hocus-pocus, she removes her garb and kneels before her sire-to-be, willingly offering herself to the monster before her. If, for any reason, the sire disapproves at this final moment, he may destroy her on the spot, for his fellow Kindred will assume he has recognized some flaw and saved them from future problems. However, if this does not occur, the sire falls on his chosen progeny with savage abandon, allowing her to experience all the agony possible for one last time before she becomes something much less... empathetic. After the deed is done, she is given a robe and provided her first vessel, a mortal brought for that purpose. She is then welcomed by all gathered and a blood-soaked formal dinner is held in a nearby hall at which time she is likely to begin learning more of her new state and forming her first alliances with those who have come before her.

MALKAVIAN TIME

It would be an exercise in futility to try and make meaningful observations about the social habits of the Lunatics, but one facet of their nature does deserve some slight attention. Some of these madmen claim that at times they hear what a few refer to simply as "the Call," which is a beckoning to a certain place at a certain time. The precise nature of this message varies from Malkavian to Malkavian, but those who can hear it know only that *something* is going on. Those who choose to heed the call — and some don't even claim they heard it, and just show up — find themselves joined by others of their clan, just as unsure as to why they even came. One of those present may seize the opportunity to exchange news and address certain issues, which results in some semblance of a meeting being observed. But sometimes the Malkavians may just leave, following their own garbled psychoses wherever they may lead them, confused as to the point of the Call. A belief held by many of the "moon-struck" suggests

that these times are arranged by the ancient of their clan, hoping to bring their childer together in order to force them to recognize some situation or action that should be taken. Whether this is true or not remains a complete mystery; so far no such being has been helpful enough to step out of the shadows and explain what he hoped his younger clanmates might do once they gathered. Perhaps given the growing omens and other auspices, the night that this does finally happen is not too far off.

NOSFERATU HOSTINGS

Deep below the rain-spattered streets of urban blight lie the terrifying hellholes and bowel-like tunnels favored by only one clan, the Nosferatu. Whenever one of these crawlers feels it necessary to meet with others of his kind, he may announce a "hosting," which is a gathering of the putrid at a place and time of his choosing. Invitations of any kind can be sent out, but walk-ins are just as welcome: If you are willing to swim through the effluvia of the city's deep black underbelly, then no one's about to deny you a seat at the table. The host supplies the ambience and agenda, but beyond that, anything's open for discussion. The sewer rats show respect and hospitality to one another at a hosting, for once being able to have a bit of support from others who understand their plight.

Hostings are sometimes more than mere bullshit sessions. Some give the host a chance to show off some artistic accomplishment or other labor of love that has consumed the Sewer Rat's attention for years. Some hostings are thrown as preludes to some other action, whether a wild scavenger hunt that winds from one end of the city to the other, or a sweep through the dregs of humanity to dig up certain information necessary to all of them. These events are also used for storytelling, both of personal exploits and of the more allegorical tales of their mythical ancestors. The clan bogeymen, the Nictuku, are also brought out of the closet now and then to scare the neonates, or to remind all present that not everything is as safe as it might seem.

RAVNOS PRACTICES

The past few years have brought this mysterious clan nearly to the point of extinction and have also brought them out in the open, dispelling some long-held myths. Not all Ravnos were Gypsies, as most Western Kindred had come to erroneously believe. The ruination this clan experienced during the Week of Nightmares has exposed the variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds found among the Ravnos, making it ultimately impossible to say anything accurate about the social habits of the Deceivers. The realization that many more of them

are (and were) of Indian and Asian heritage rather than of the Roma blood makes clear that the depth of their social traditions is truly profound. Which social customs they practice depends much more on the culture they were raised in as mortals than anything else, with the complexities of Indian society dominant. Caste recognition, the idea of "untouchables," religious gatherings, the tradition of the *kumpaniya* and a couple dozen other practices still form the basis for most social interaction among the deceivers, and they should be looked to for ideas as to how these endangered Kindred spend their remaining nights.

SETITE SERVICES

The Followers of Set distinguish themselves from their fellow Kindred not only by their reputation as lorekeepers or snake charmers, but by their religiosity. As worshippers of a god, their social habits form around concepts of religious observance and service for more than secular reasons. These snakes create and minister to cults of progeny and mortal fanatics like it is second nature. It is the myriad ritual practices of these cults that define their clan culture.

Cult services usually take place in a secret temple and begin with an assembly that is led in sermons, reinforcing the cultists' beliefs and moral righteousness. The precise practices vary, but most are ritualistic and involve some display of supernatural power signifying the power and presence of the Red God (or whatever other deity they profess to idolize). Sacrifice is also common, with the destruction of an animal as well as a personal offering of vitae. After the formal service ends, usually in an hour, the Followers often spend time in a more casual fashion, taking a mix of business and pleasure and strengthening their resolve to continue along whatever practical, personal and philosophical paths they tread.

TOREADOR BALLS

Of all the clans, the Degenerates are the ones for whom social esteem and one-upmanship is most common and admired. This is not always the case, of course, but the majority of those who claim membership in the Clan of the Rose adore a good party and spend more time primping and practicing their social artistry than any other Kindred. The Toreador frequently host so-called "affairs of the clan," which range from salon-like gatherings (where petty infatuation and flashy finery is all the rage) to formal dinner parties and cultural events.

In those cities where enough Toreador can be found, they form guilds — either as a clan or based on



different interests — and establish monthly soirees called balls (frequently scheduled to coincide with the full moon). Like the other affairs, balls are even more ostentatious and overstuffed with ego, razor wit and grandeur. Sometimes a Grand Ball is organized for Halloween, which is again another step higher in terms of scale and social gamesmanship. The most overblown party of all is the Carnivale, a week-long sensory overload that takes place every 23 years, attracting Toreador of every stripe to a single, carefully picked location. Aside from all the expected celebration, *esgrima* and every other sort of socializing that takes place at Carnivale, it is customary for one mortal from among those invited — none of whom really know what is going on — to be selected at the end of the week for the Embrace. The “lucky” kine is welcomed into the world of the Damned by the preening Kindred, and the whole affair shuts down for another 23 years. The various Degenerates return to their own domains to fret about the prestige lost and gained as a result of the fun. Individualistic members of the clan ignore these extravagant parties. And when they do wish to socialize with their clanmates, they prefer to host and attend smaller, less organized affairs. Yet even these wallflowers can get sucked into the fashion parade occasionally, intoxicated by the tantalizing beauty put on full display at such lavish affairs.

TREMERE SECRET SOCIETIES

On the surface, the Tremere might not seem overly social, as they do not place as much value on social advancement as they do on thaumaturgical knowledge and political power. Even so, social power is the means to these other goals and is used and abused by the blood sorcerers. Within the clan, social power is used to gain favors, put someone in a Warlock’s debt, earn a promotion, secure an artifact or ritual, fend off a rival’s schemes or accomplish just about anything else desired. It is not a swirl of parties and salons that enable this, but it is instead the ceremonial and cliquish gatherings hosted by the many secret societies, orders, houses and other fraternities that exist more or less in the shadows.

Each secret (or not so secret) society has its own ceremonies, rituals and style of social gathering that best embodies its aims and that have come about as a result of ages of tradition and history. Imagine the Freemasons and you’ve seen the tip of the iceberg. Most useful is the sense of camaraderie that membership engenders. Not to say that all Tremere who secretly swear allegiance to the Order of the Rising Eye are close friends and hang out on Saturday nights together, but the sense of community, especially among the ominous and forbidden societies, provide a network of like-minded individuals who will listen and share resources with their fellow occultists.

SECRET SOCIETIES, GEHENNA CULTS AND SIMILAR CLIQUES

Regardless of clan, status, age and political affiliation, membership in a secretive order can bring one into contact with many other diverse Kindred. From the most outlandish Gehenna cults to the most hedonistic vintage vitae clubs, each and every one of these groups has its own courtesies, customs and expectations. Some go to great lengths to completely disavow their existence outside of their private parlors, with members never acknowledging one another unless actively participating in the society's affairs. Others are not so paranoid and recognized, even by outsiders, as bound by some sort of fraternity, with favors and privileges being traded more easily between them than even with those Kindred who, except for a lack of membership in the same society, are traditionally peers.

Some of these groups establish regular salons so that they may participate in whatever habits and purpose have brought them together. Others, particularly the ones most concerned about being discovered, rarely do so, preferring to avoid detection by sacrificing convenience if necessary. These Kindred use seemingly ordinary social events as fronts for their surreptitious agendas, relying on elaborately clandestine means of communication

to pass along information to fellow members of their cult, and right under the noses of unwitting peers. Subtle hand gestures, body language, code words, allegorical conversation and even certain Disciplines are examples of how these Kindred might carry on the work of their group even while pretending to be discussing literature or medieval trade routes with a few stodgy Blue Bloods.

Membership in a secret society can pay off at times, especially when influential Kindred also belong to the same group. Even while some fellow conspirators may do everything they can to deny any affiliation in public in order to better protect their secret, some use their power to protect or aid a comrade, so long as the assistance can be disguised or artfully justified. Ironically, it is this kind of seemingly unexplained social charity that makes many Kindred paranoid, believing that there is some kind of conspiracy going on, even when there may be none present.

If such a group plays an important role in your chronicle, it might be useful to assign a special Background, Secret Society Status to member characters. This replaces ordinary Status when dealing with their fellow cultists, openly or in private.

While not always an important part of a Kindred's unlife, another Tremere social custom worth mentioning is the tradition of dialectical forums. Of a semi-casual nature, these are pedagogical contests where one or more elder Tremere will engage in a formal argument with each other for the sake of their younger observers. The point is to demonstrate how various thaumaturgical theorems and ritual formulae develop. The concise ideas that lead from one sorcerous conclusion to another, more complex and useful one, are disguised as questions and answers so that even the most dull-witted apprentice can see why things work the way they do. Attending apprentices are welcome to participate at any time but should expect to be used as much for example as to increase their own understanding. Proving able to keep up with the logic of those hosting the forum, and reaching an advanced conclusion, is duly noted for future nights when the apprentice is being considered for possible promotion.

VENTRUE CEREMONIES

The Clan of Kings celebrates a number of special events that other clans pay little heed to or just don't recognize. The night of one's Embrace, or deathnight, is often the subject of a big to-do, with gaudy fetes and hobnobbing soirees being the order of the night. Sires lavish favors on the childe being celebrated, and a childe likewise presents his sire with a handsome gift on the sire's deathnight, throwing as big a party as possible. Toasts, roasts and other festivities of a mirthful nature are commonplace.

The presentation of a childe to Kindred society pales into comparison with the importance of a Blue Blood's formal acceptance into his clan at the end of his long period of education, or *agoge*. When the time has come, the candidate appears before a full board meeting of his elders and recites a lengthy amount of information about his lineage, his clan and his upbringing. If everything is acceptable, the board ritually votes on the matter and declares the neonate to be a full member of the vaunted Ventrue. At that point the real party begins, with every manner of delight laid before the guest of honor, including a vessel chosen specifically to satisfy his rare tastes. These affairs are usually held in opulent and secure locations, intended to make the most powerful and lasting impression on the new clan member.

THE ANARCHS

The various stripes of anarchs that exist — from bored ancillae to fanatical revolutionaries seeking to shake the foundations of the Ivory Tower — observe social traditions and institutions similarly to the Camarilla, if a bit less formal or fashion-conscious. In large and stable cities, some barons have even gone so far as to establish the custom of an “anarch Elysium,” which is little different from the traditional Elysium, designating a keeper to keep order if necessary. This trend is still a rarity, however, and where it does exist, just as many anarchists turn their noses up at the conceit. This middling acceptance means that less emphasis rides on the subtleties of the institution as on the mere attempt to create a place where violence is formally prohibited.

A widely adapted convention is that of the salon. Older and philosophically motivated anarchists have found it to be a useful forum for the debates, discussions and intellectual challenges so important to them and the advancement of the anarchist cause. Although sometimes a bit dry and businesslike, salons have their share of social strutting and petty *esgrima*, but those who drop in on sessions with the hope they can use it as a launch pad for social celebrity in the Movement are often sorely disappointed.

Similar to the Brujah institutions of the same names, the anarchists frequently play host to raucous rants and raves, which are usually open to all Kindred, regardless of affiliation or demeanor, though a few anarchists or ghouls usually play lookout to make sure that outsiders are there to enjoy themselves, and not use the opportunity to wipe out local troublemakers. Mortals are as welcome as the undead, just so long as none of them leave the place screaming about vampires to every person they meet. For this reason, these wild parties become all-you-can-eat buffets. This doesn't mean they show off their fangs and yell, “Look at me, I'm a vampire!” to the party-going kine, but they probably find opportunities to grab a sip or three while they have the chance.

THE SABBAT

Let's look at some differences between the formalized celebrations of the Sword of Caine and their Camarilla counterparts. While the Sabbat recognize no Elysium per se, their special havens (and anywhere else that suits their mood) serve much the same purpose. Where Elysium comes with a set of rules and traditions regarding etiquette and prohibitions of vampiric displays of power and violence, the Sabbat creates highly ritualized forms that ensure the night's festivities do not explode into antics that threaten the

participants and shatter the pseudo-Masquerade that the sect unofficially observes.

The most formal of Sabbat affairs are those held by the bishops, archbishops and their superiors, but even the lowliest pack priest can organize an elaborate event with all the genuflection and liturgical protocol one could imagine. Recognize that Sabbat society is not dominated by chaotic random behavior and devil-may-care rambunctious mayhem. Sure, this stuff plays a role, providing a useful outlet for the Beast and giving the Sabbat a way to celebrate superiority over the mortals it feeds on. However, it does not hold the same level of reverence as the *auctoritas* and *ignoblis ritae*, the sect's sacred and at times quite elaborate ceremonies. Without these community-building and strengthening rituals, the Sabbat would be little more than disorganized maniacs with no sense of righteousness and destiny. This important fact is the greatest distinction between Camarilla and Sabbat society.

The following are the most recognized Sabbat social events. Though just as much as the Kindred of the Camarilla, the Sabbat partake in numerous other amusements, ranging from a night at the slot machines to fine-tuning the engine of a '66 Corvette with packmates.

HANGIN' WITH THE PACK

The most fundamental of the sect's many social institutions is the esbat. It is the regular meeting each pack holds to maintain camaraderie and identity. These gatherings are open only to pack members and take place as often as a few times a week. The pack's priest usually opens the esbat with a prayer to Caine or some other ritual and then leads her fellow Sabbat in observance of the *ignoblis ritae*. Because each pack creates its own rituals, they can consist of nearly anything, from the most spiritually hallowed reverence to a wild race through the city. The esbat is also a time for sharing. The pack participates in the Vaulderie then moves on to pack business when gripes, problems, plans and concerns are all aired and addressed.

Bestowing of the Creation Rites upon a fledgling is very memorable, and it can take nearly any form, from a test of wits to an impossible physical challenge. But the vampire who survives gets to see another sunset and earns the title of a True Sabbat. Packs spend a great deal of time prior to the event devising creative and entertaining Creation Rites in anticipation of enjoying every moment of the craziness.

When the pack is about to embark on a new scheme or dangerous mission, it throws a party to build morale and make sure it has one last blast, just

in case it doesn't make it back. The Fire Dance, where pack members leap over a blazing bonfire, is a favorite, as are sparring matches that terrorize the kine. Sometimes other Sabbat join them and entire packs are invited to make the event as raucous as possible.

A Sabbat may throw down the gauntlet and challenge a fellow packmate to combat to assume the place of the ductus, or pack priest. Monomacy, the ritual duel, is always a great spectator sport but is sometimes put off a few nights to allow other Sabbat to hear about it and attend. Like a boxing match, the actual confrontation may not last very long, but the wild parties beforehand, and those that honor the sole surviving Cainite, are even more anticipated. When truly esteemed Sabbat are involved — bishops, templars, prisci — the whole thing takes on a greater level of participation. Packs travel across country to be able to say they were there when so-and-so got his due, and also to take part in the insane mayhem that is certain to accompany the main event.

Some Sabbat have completely forsaken whatever humanity they once claimed and have dedicated their undead existence to a "higher" Path of Enlightenment. These Cainites often gather apart from non-followers to hold private meetings, with sermons, instruction, *ignobis ritae* and other practices. They create a unique and unmistakable sense of spiritual togetherness. How often such services are held, and what exactly happens at them, depends on the particular Path in question and the preferences of those Sabbat who lead the services. Despite the inability to be more specific, for those who cling to these alien philosophies, these meetings are extremely important, and in some cases mean more than their own pack's esbats. The Path followers sometimes share the Vaulderie, producing blood ties that may even prove to be stronger than those they share with their own pack.

Similarly, members of the Sword of Caine who have sworn allegiance to the insular Black Hand have pledged to serve a sect leader as a paladin, or they have committed themselves to rooting out infernal practices in the sect. All observe their own special social functions. Storytellers are urged to come up with evocative practices for those characters involved in such organizations, adding another layer to the many strata of loyalty, servitude and expectation.

MAJOR CELEBRATIONS

Beyond the social conventions and practices of individual packs and subsects within the Sabbat, the Sword of Caine has its own celebrations open to all Sabbat who want to join. The Mack-daddy of all these parties, the *Festivo dello Estinto* always takes

place the second week of March in every city where the sect has a significant presence. All covens flock to the bash, as well as any nomadic pack near enough to attend. Nothing is off limits, and orgiastic blood feasts and nightly Vaulderies keep the revel as high-strung as possible. During this time, the pseudo-Masquerade that the sect unofficially upholds comes close to collapsing. The death toll of kine in the city skyrockets as the vampires drop any pretense of civility and gorge themselves on the frightened, helpless mortals fleeing unsheathed fangs. The opportunity to associate with Sabbat from distant cities is rarely overlooked by those whose personal to-do lists can be cleaned up a bit, if only to have a little *tête-à-tête* with the priest from this town or the bishop from that other town.

A more important event is the *Palla Grande*, which is an elaborate celebration held in major Sabbat strongholds on All Hallow's Eve and attended by any Sabbat that can make it, near or far. This one-night-only affair is much more formal than the *Festivo dello Estinto*, with that party's unlimited bloodshed and madness replaced by a more cultivated display of debauchery and cruelty. Social games are the order of the night and every faction and political trick is taken out of the closet and used to gain advantage and score a point or two. While the fleshcrafters show off their latest macabre creations and the more exhibitionist members of the sect display their death-defying talents for the pleasure of their audience, many of the guests in full masquerade costume secretly (and not so secretly) plot and connive for position. Because the Sabbat has the audacity to stage this ball in a public venue, unwitting mortals often wander in and find themselves the flavor of the moment, becoming part of the glorious Blood Feast at the height of the whole celebration. The night ends with an over-the-top Blood Bath, followed by a crescendo of pulse-pounding music meant to drive the gorged vampires into a last exhaustive frenzy. No Sabbat likes to miss this annual party, seeing it and the March affair as the two annual events not to be missed.

The sect does hold many other socially oriented functions throughout the year that all offer the opportunity of fun, as well as social and political warfare. Promotion ceremonies, victory "dinners" after a successful War Party, and the conclusion of a Crusade demand public celebration. The Sabbat leadership is only too happy to oblige, providing the rank-and-file with something to keep their minds off the many problems the sect privately experiences. Storytellers are encouraged to create whatever new social functions and obligations they can to add flavor and

complexity to Sabbat stories. Let the players contribute to the process as much as possible, too; Sabbat packs are always inventing new reasons to celebrate, and creativity is not the responsibility of the Storyteller alone.

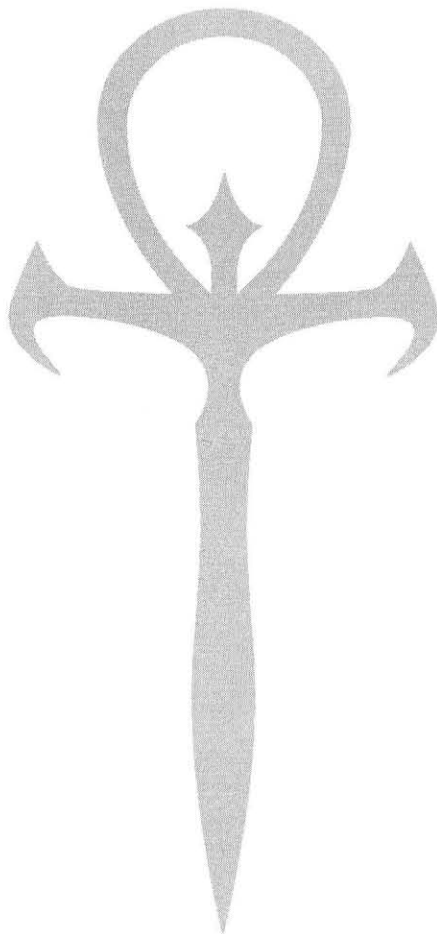
ANTI-SOCIAL KINDRED

Despite all the examples of social activity, not all Kindred participate in these affairs. Some, for whatever reason, resist or never even feel a need to interact with their kind, except when absolutely compelled to do so for reasons of survival. Others are made to feel unwelcome by their fellow Kindred, perhaps as punishment for some sin of society, or because the individual is unpleasant to be around. These Kindred — the autarkis — have a difficult time of it. The loneliness, lack of meaningful social intercourse and knowledge that any number of threatening things could be going on behind their back make it crucial for these pariahs to either busy themselves with the kine or cultivate an unlife that keeps them personally motivated. If they do not,

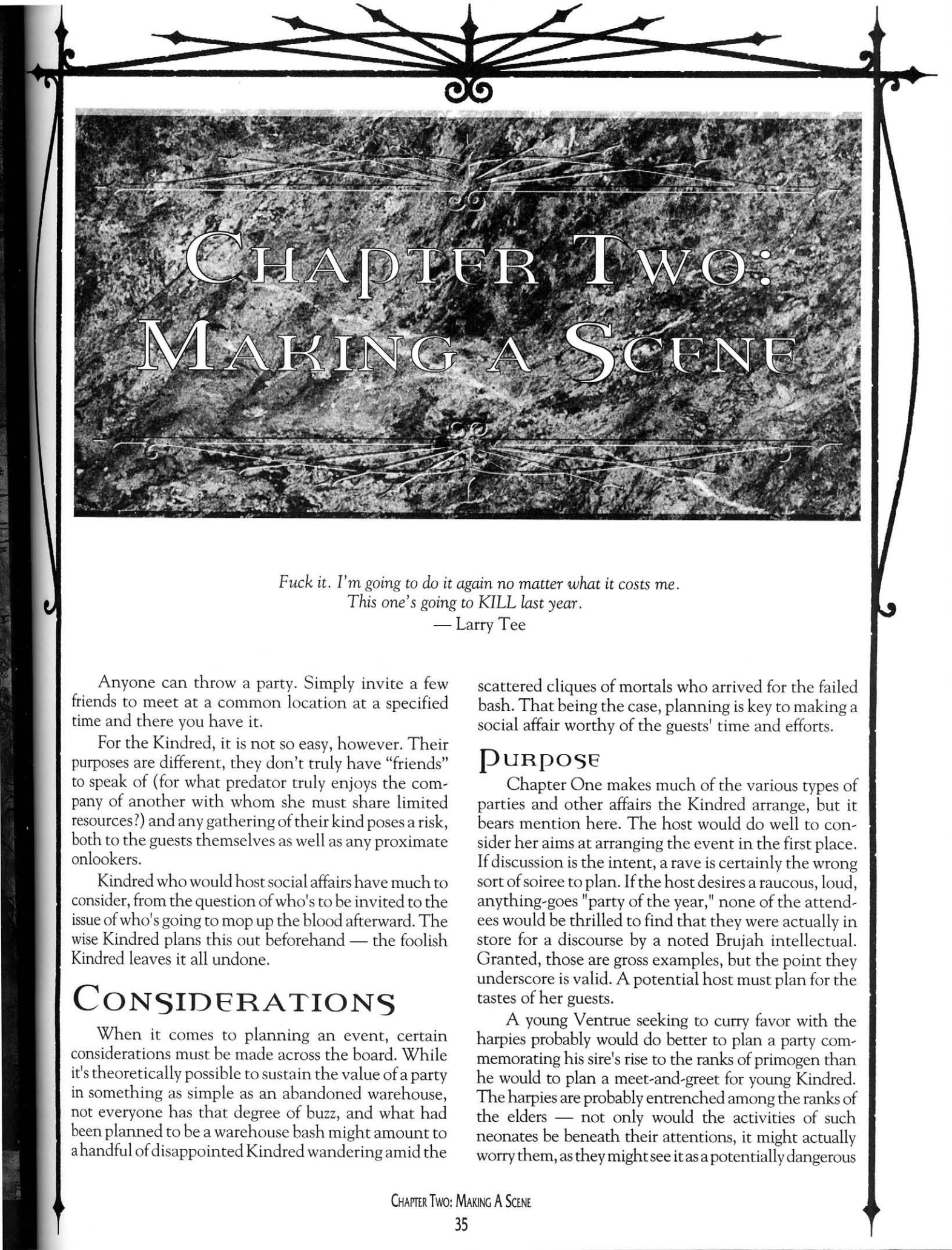
the aim of survival will overtake them and the Beast will eventually dominate the Kindred entirely.

Aside from this danger, the worse consequence for the autarkis is not having anyone to turn to when things get ugly. Without any of the common ties the Kindred have — shared debts, a consanguineous lineage, political responsibility — the autarkis must accept that should the time come when she may be forced by necessity to deal with another of the undead, she is at a distinct disadvantage. It is absurd to think that being polite and offering other Kindred something of value — information, money, a promise to repay the debt — will be an acceptable substitute for a relationship built on years (or centuries) of prestation, *esgrima* and social acknowledgement.

Ultimately, autarkis must come to terms with their extremely fragile ability to accomplish anything that might garner them even the smallest bit of influence with other Kindred. By choosing to cling to the fringe of society and limit their activities to the barrens and less frequented parts of the Rack, the autarkis suffer a possible eternity of solitude broken only by the inadequate company of the kine, if even that.







CHAPTER TWO: MAKING A SCENE

*Fuck it. I'm going to do it again no matter what it costs me.
This one's going to KILL last year.*

— Larry Tee

Anyone can throw a party. Simply invite a few friends to meet at a common location at a specified time and there you have it.

For the Kindred, it is not so easy, however. Their purposes are different, they don't truly have "friends" to speak of (for what predator truly enjoys the company of another with whom she must share limited resources?) and any gathering of their kind poses a risk, both to the guests themselves as well as any proximate onlookers.

Kindred who would host social affairs have much to consider, from the question of who's to be invited to the issue of who's going to mop up the blood afterward. The wise Kindred plans this out beforehand — the foolish Kindred leaves it all undone.

CONSIDERATIONS

When it comes to planning an event, certain considerations must be made across the board. While it's theoretically possible to sustain the value of a party in something as simple as an abandoned warehouse, not everyone has that degree of buzz, and what had been planned to be a warehouse bash might amount to a handful of disappointed Kindred wandering amid the

scattered cliques of mortals who arrived for the failed bash. That being the case, planning is key to making a social affair worthy of the guests' time and efforts.

PURPOSE

Chapter One makes much of the various types of parties and other affairs the Kindred arrange, but it bears mention here. The host would do well to consider her aims at arranging the event in the first place. If discussion is the intent, a rave is certainly the wrong sort of soiree to plan. If the host desires a raucous, loud, anything-goes "party of the year," none of the attendees would be thrilled to find that they were actually in store for a discourse by a noted Brujah intellectual. Granted, those are gross examples, but the point they underscore is valid. A potential host must plan for the tastes of her guests.

A young Ventruë seeking to curry favor with the harpies probably would do better to plan a party commemorating his sire's rise to the ranks of primogen than he would to plan a meet-and-greet for young Kindred. The harpies are probably entrenched among the ranks of the elders — not only would the activities of such neonates be beneath their attentions, it might actually worry them, as they might see it as a potentially dangerous

gathering of rebellious whelps. A party honoring one's sire, however, affords that level of society the respect it deserves, which just happens to be the same level to which the harpies belong. Additionally, it shows that the young Ventrue has his priorities in the right place — he wants to exalt the higher levels of the Ivory Tower rather than agitate the other fledglings around its lower echelons. A Kindred like that could go far in the Camarilla....

On the other hand, a Kindred who does want to build a bit of an edgy mystique or an iconoclastic reputation might plan a "high society ball" as an open parody of elder culture. While this would certainly draw a few wary glances and murmurs of disapproval from the higher ranks, it would certainly be attended by several other young local Kindred, who more than likely feel the same sorts of frustrations with the undead glass ceiling as the Lick planning the event. Indeed, some of the higher tiers of Kindred society might hear through the rumor mill that such a parody party is going on and drop by just to see who's being spoofed (and probably have a fit of righteous indignation if they find themselves to be the object of ridicule).

Whatever the case, the warning to consider the purpose is largely advice to the Kindred to think about what they're doing in the first place when they decide to host some sort of affair. Quite simply, social events are much more work than they seem, and a Kindred wishing to undertake such a thing must understand every detail of the process, from the logistics of making it happen to the possible ways other Kindred might interpret the affair to the damage or exaltation that could affect her reputation in the aftermath of the whole thing.

THE GUEST LIST

While this may seem to be a common-sense consideration, all too many Kindred fail to keep it in mind.

Don't invite people you don't want to attend.

For many Kindred, the pecking order of their home domain intrudes upon the realities of event planning. Imagine the woe of the Toreador who invited "all Kindred in the domain" to attend the 20th anniversary of her release from her sire's protection — only to be greeted midway through the night by six packs of bat-swinging Sabbat.

Granted, that's another extreme case, but it doesn't take much among the selfish and caustic Kindred for things to go awry. Unless you *want* to see old rivals go for each other's throats during your otherwise well-mannered fete, don't invite two Licks whose enmity is the subject of city gossip. Some princes take this to an exclusive degree — they don't invite anarchists to gatherings of the domain's residents but still regard them as beholden to any policy handed down that night. Primogen likewise occasionally snub those of their

clan who are "on the outs" if they're the sort of clan leader to call meetings of consanguineous Kindred.

Those Kindred who own or are affiliated with concert venues, nightclubs, prestigious bars and the like know the ins and outs of guest-list management. Anyone who's entirely unwelcome can have any sort of bullshit (or real...) reason given as the impetus to exclude — a particular Lick doesn't meet the dress code, the fire marshal has been watching crowd capacities and the club's full right now; the cover is more than the would-be guest can afford. The ruck and run of Kindred and mortals can wait in line and pay the cover just like anyone else. The true paragons of the scene (or the owner's favor) skip the line and the door girl — though being a scenester of this caliber is as much knowing who it's a good idea to be friendly to as it is being some sort of fashionista.

Control over the guest list is one of the single most potent positions of power that a Kindred can wield, provided her name and reputation is sufficient to cause people to want to be on it. Even for Kindred who aren't necessarily at the forefront of the domain's A-list, holding the keys to a good time is an admirable position in which to be. So the Who's Who of the Damned isn't coming to your party — who gives a damn? In fact, since they're not, you'll be able to enjoy the party a bit more and worry a bit less about whether or not some bigshot socialite is having a good time or panning your bash.

In some ways, this aspect of event planning coincides with the purpose consideration, above. If high-Status attention isn't what the Lick wants, she doesn't have to plan for it. Much like the parody party also discussed above, a vampire might consciously desire *not* to have the sort of soiree the society-page capes enjoy, anyway. A party thrown among the elites of the anarch scene will have a decidedly different timbre than one hosted to recognize the valor of a gangrel who chose to remain with the Camarilla after the rest of his clan fled the Ivory Tower. A Sabbat priest presiding over two packs' joint observance of the Sermons of Caine may ask an archbishop to take part in the ceremony or he may not; it all depends upon his desires, how much clout he has and whether or not he wants the archbishop to know what the packs are up to.

In the end, the best advice when a guest list matters is never to assume. Extending an invitation to all of the local Licks with the belief that "the rabble know they're not truly welcome" maybe truly mean that — but it also means that the rabble know where all their hated nemeses are going to be that night.

SECURITY

Someone has to enforce the guest list, don't they?

In many cases, the host plays his own security. He may be answering the door at his own haven or only tell key Kindred where the party's going to be. In situations

like these, security isn't really a concern, as the guests will probably act civilly and be few enough that if they do grow rowdy, the host can simply declare the party over and throw everyone out. In fact, security usually becomes a concern only in one of two situations.

First, when sensitive information is the topic or purpose of the function, only a fool would skimp on security. This statement actually applies a bit more broadly than it seems at first glance, however. "Sensitive information" is a subjective idea. Some princes may post security when all of the domain's Kindred convene for whatever reason, the better to prevent hostile vampires from learning anything they shouldn't. "Sensitive information" might also mean discreet or privileged entertainment, as with a harpy who throws a soiree intended for only the *crème de la crème* — and hires security to club any lesser Kindred who try to crash the party into torpor. Sensitive information might apply to a policy salon, a clan debate or even a war council, so that secrets don't leak to inappropriate ears. Primogen might impose security on their meetings with or without the prince, hoping to keep word of the policies they're considering quiet until they actually come to a decision.

Secondly, security serves to help keep things orderly in the case of large-scale events. If the affair is a large party, the host is almost guaranteed to have someone indulge himself a bit too much and start a brawl. It's also likely that in a "party of the year" event, someone's going to be selling drugs, and someone other than the host is going to be resentful of his being there (this could be gang activity, or it could simply be independent dealers out for each other's blood). Some guests grow a bit more amorous as the night wears on, and a person who becomes too "friendly" with the other guests might need to be ejected before he becomes a problem. (See page 36 for more discussion of security.)

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The issue of what kind of affair to host goes hand-in-hand with considerations for where to host it, as might be expected. The setting of a social gathering helps to establish the tone or theme of the party, allowing guests to determine what sort of night they'll be in for. If a black-tie event takes place at a country club, it's probably going to be a fairly traditional affair (though traditional has different meanings to the Kindred and mortals). If a black-tie affair is scheduled to occur at a warehouse with no street address just inside the Barrens of a city, well, something uncommon is probably going to take place. Guests should expect to be surprised.



THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Using a tried-and-true location for a party is a matter of logistics and planning, and is rarely seen as a lack of creativity on the host's part. Ballrooms in elegant hotels, country clubs, the parlors of social clubs, reserved rooms in prestigious restaurants — these are all fine places to host a gathering because that's what they're designed for. These establishments have servants on staff to assist a host with the duties concomitant with social events, and if the planner would rather not bother with such things herself, why should she bother? Let the Kindred make as big a mess as they want, and the help will clean it up. Granted, it may take a bit away from the security deposit... but so what?

The downside with using a relatively public location is that it limits what the Kindred will be able to get away with once the affair is underway. With mortal servants scurrying about (be honest, is any Kindred going to spend the time and effort to use Conditioning on every spoon-polisher at Delmonico's?), conversation should be limited to un-vampiric topics or else geared toward allegory as to make the value of the whole thing suspect. Settings like these are far more valuable for simple social affairs, where the Kindred may come out and show their plumage, converse (as vampirically as they wish) in small cliques and otherwise just "be seen." Kindred have the self-preservational sense to stop talking vampire business when a waiter comes around to offer champagne. A host should be rest assured that the gathered Kindred will also have enough sense to avoid ostentatious use of Disciplines, thereby limiting the potential of her party degenerating into unpleasantness. In many ways, the "public party" is largely an exercise in maintaining the Masquerade, and it remains in favor because it shows how masterfully the undead can maintain the subtlety required to survive in the modern nights. Many harpies, in particular, love these types of parties and eagerly wait for some hapless Lick to make a minor slip, whereupon they lambaste him ruthlessly, for "If he can't maintain the Silence of the Blood in the presence of his peers, why would we believe he can do it when left to his own devices?"

TRULY PUBLIC PLACES

Taking "the usual suspects" on step further, many Kindred plan their social affairs in genuinely public locales. The ubiquitous art museum Elysium after hours is an example of this, as is the anarch rally held in the recesses of a public park. While public places might seem to be a strange choice of places to hold a gathering of the undead, a few principles make them prime selections.

A party held in a public location may be "hidden in plain sight." The anarchists gathered in the park, for

example — such an obvious collection of tough types in public is liable to keep away anybody who would have an issue. Those who *are* drawn to the spectacle are likely to end up as part of the buffet at the post-rally party later... or as new anarchists themselves. This doesn't give public revelers free license to rampage around acting "like vampires" but it does build a certain amount of blasé reception, given that no truly heinous activity could be going on right in front of more mundane folk. Few princes look too kindly on blatant public gatherings, but what's a prince to do? If he cracks down on the event then and there, he risks a precarious result, as it might come to violence. Unless things have gone beyond the pale, the wise prince lets public gatherings play themselves out, giving the revelers a chance to blow off steam. If it becomes necessary to end a public gathering, a prince should be connected enough to call in discreet police to disband the affair, and have enough sway with the media to make it look like a protest riot. This is precisely what the assembled Kindred *don't* want, as it places public scrutiny on them afterward, which most Kindred understand and thus put on what passes for their best behavior in situations like these.

In other cases, events held in "public places" really aren't that. The museum Elysium is a good example. During the hours in which the Kindred might frequent the museum, it is closed to the public. While it uses public facilities, an event such as this doesn't use them at a time during which the public would have access to the Kindred within. The night staff and cleaning crew are probably unsurprised to see certain Kindred skulking about the halls of their building, but these are the very people with whom arrangements have been made so that the Kindred might use the facilities in the first place. Still, the Kindred must be discreet in any sort of public environment, and talking about one's plans to murder a primogen is likely to raise the security guard's eyebrow if he overhears any furtive whispers. Make no mistake, few mortals who are aware of the Kindred's presence at such places know that they're dealing with vampires, and those who do are likely the ghouls of someone important. For the most part, the vampires are just another strange and distant social group to the mortal infrastructure of public locations. Moving away from the Elysium example, since not every function in a public place is a recurring or constant affair, the undead can host no end of other events in such places. Assume the art museum is *not* Elysium — it would make a fine venue for a Toreador to unveil his new progeny. The library is an excellent place for Kindred scholars to debate or discuss their latest findings. A city's monument or historical site makes an admirable location for

a reception or party and even the less glamorous of public assets, like the sewers, can play host to a variety of Kindred gatherings. Again, Kindred are going to have to be on their best behavior, but since they should compose themselves in such a manner any time they venture into the public, it should be second nature. And those who can't... aren't invited to further gatherings.

SECURE FAVORITES

Some locations are ostensibly public, in that their facilities are open to anyone, but they offer an added degree of exclusion from the ruck and run of the world. For example, a Ventrue might have access to a conference room that could serve as a good location for a meeting to discuss clan or primogen policy. A function space or hall at a convention center works well, and many modern facilities aren't so sterile as one might expect. Anywhere a Kindred has influence or contacts might work as well, from furtive meetings planned from the shipping deck of the local newspaper publisher to the back room of a gas station or liquor store.

Even a Kindred's haven could serve as a secure favorite, as it's likely she's the one who moderates access to her home (unless she shares a communal haven, a Nosferatu den or something similar). The problems with inviting others of the Damned into one's own haven, however, are myriad. First, they see firsthand the host's standard of "living." While this isn't a problem for the affluent (or the proudly destitute), those who want to maintain an air of doing better than they are will have nothing to hide at this point. Secondly, it allows all those present access to the numerous little "dirty secrets" that everyone keeps hidden in their own private space. How embarrassing for the Kindred whose party guests turn up the copy of *Hustler* he uses to stimulate his mortal fetish — and woe to the host whose home contains the missing journal from the torpid Tremere regent's chantry. Needless to say, inviting others into one's haven is tantamount to inviting them to plant false evidence there as well. Next, and more obscure, is the fact that a few Kindred have the ability to scry or physically intrude upon a place once they have been there in person. It's an outside concern, sure, but what sane Kindred would err on behalf of trusting her fellow undead? Hand in hand with this, it gives a host's guests firsthand knowledge of the place where the Kindred goes to be safe from the sun and the other threats posed by the world. Still, a few Kindred persist in hosting parties at their

own havens, but these Kindred are usually wealthy who have multiple havens (one of which might be designated the 'party haven'), or those who just don't care (certain transient Kindred), those who maintain pack or coterie havens, or the legitimately stupid.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Those truly committed to the notion of hosting a memorable event sometimes plan for one of their affair's unique attributes to be its location. This is an excellent way for an up-and-comer to put her name on the lips of all the Kindred who attend, as it doesn't (necessarily) require a great deal of money to produce (though significant influence or contacts can certainly aid the process).

Imagine a Kindred scavenger hunt held citywide, in which the entire city becomes part of the event for the duration of the hunt. Perhaps a Malkavian hosts a party with a private performance of a traveling circus, or a Brujah invites everyone to an exclusive night at an amusement park. A Kindred might book a "party bus" and drive his guests through a neighboring rival domain; a vampire may host an affair at the uncompleted construction site of an enemy's new condominium building. The possibilities here are endless, beginning with subtle twists on standard Kindred ideas and moving utterly into the realm of "no one has ever done this before." Even decidedly un-vampiric affairs can take on a sinister note with the introduction of the undead: a Super Bowl party, a stripper's performance akin to a bachelor party, a poker game, a bar mitzvah. The key is to plan for how one's fellow Kindred would react. It is unlikely that many Kindred, no matter how jaded their tastes, would want to attend a Tupperware party. Change "Tupperware party" to "snuff filming" and a few of the creepier Kindred may slink to the event. Change it to "Thanksgiving dinner" and they'll likely be crawling out of the woodwork to see what the host has planned for such a wholesome occasion.

The problem with moving too far away from the standard fare is the Kindred may be overwhelmed by the event. How should they dress? How should they act? What if someone gets out of hand and blows the Masquerade? Should the Kindred plan to have a good time herself? Or should she plan to use the affair as a public opportunity to humiliate another Kindred? If she *does* plan to enjoy the event, what's to say someone else isn't coming with the intent to humiliate her? What's the agenda, anyway?



REFRESHMENT

This is always a sensitive subject, and one for which the host's best course of action is to plan on *someone* being upset with whatever decision she makes.

Note that when we say "refreshment," we speak, of course, of precious vitae. This can come in any variety, with presentation making one of the boldest comments on the host's tastes. Granted, *the* boldest comment on the host's tastes is the nature of the blood itself — keeping a barrelful of rats for the guests to dine on isn't going to please anyone but the starved or the depraved. Suspending a human vessel from the ceiling, to be raised or lowered as thirst takes a guest is grandiose and baroque, but bound to have its own complications, not the least of which is an unexpected guest stopping by (police, mortals, one's still-living brother) and being completely unprepared for the environment.

If the host doesn't provide refreshment, he appears thoughtless and incapable. So long as other Kindred know beforehand that the event is "BYOB," the host can avoid this embarrassment. After all, the Kindred do not constantly need to slake their thirst, and asking a guest to take care of herself beforehand or keep her urges in check during an event is reasonable, especially at a shorter gathering.

If the host provides refreshment by having a wide array of mortals present, so that Kindred may select one of their own tastes, is the most common method, particularly at larger parties. In some cases, these are blood dolls, people who know of vampires and desire to experience the Kiss — who are themselves breaches of the Masquerade, particularly if left unaccounted for. Other vessels are hapless partygoers, oblivious to the predators around them, so feeding must be done with standard discretion.

If the host's refreshment takes the form of bound vessels (vulgar Kindred occasionally call these "keggers") or other captive sources of vitae, decadence is certainly possible, if not mandated. At such an event, no mortals may be present (and do you really want to consort with the type who are?), except for a few favored ghouls or blood bound lickspittles.

It is important to remember that unless the host has planned a dinner party, it is not her duty to feed the guests. That's why the Kindred refer to it as refreshment and not repast. Much like mortals occasionally smoke or order drinks to have something to do with their hands at social gatherings, so do the Kindred occupy them in the same sorts of situations. It is a common behavior all Kindred must indulge in, and the act of feeding works like an equalizer and as an opportunity to take a break from the rest of the party's activities.

PAPARAZZI

The easiest solution here is *don't*. The Kindred are a small enough society that word of mouth serves better than photography or other journalistic endeavors, and is far less permanently damning. If a harpy says the host is a boor, so be it. If some photographer catches the host striking a guest or in the midst of some supernatural action, you can imagine what happens next.

It occasionally serves the event's interests to have some media present, such as with a charity event (vampires do host them, if only to further their own purposes) or other large public affair (such as with the Succubus Club's one-night appearance in a given city), but they should be treated with caution. Luckily for them, most vampires understand the importance of this and comport themselves with wary dignity — though one must always watch out for the reckless.

THE ART OF PRESTATION

The various boons and debts changing hands among the Kindred can be a serious burden to keep track of. To make this easier to handle, first remember that only major life boons have a mechanical effect on character interaction. This is not to say that minor boons are irrelevant, just that few Kindred demand or are expected to be treated differently by their fellow Children of Caine for the sake of a small favor. Remember also that terms like “major boon” are game constructs — the Kindred don't have any formalized terminology regarding boons. A vampire owes another vampire a favor, and the magnitude doesn't fit into a neat category; the vampires agree what the nature of the debt may be. The following systems will help manage all these debts in a workable and meaningful manner.

MINOR BOONS

Because of their nature and the frequency of their being bestowed and spent, it is rare that the accrual of such a boon is announced with any public formality, unless the situation is so unusual that it would be of interest to others. The recipient of a boon usually acknowledges its existence to the debtor and reminds him now and then of the debt until it is repaid. Should a debtor's attempts to repay the favor be unreasonably spurned, the debtor can appeal to society for redress. As a result, the creditor may suffer for flaunting social convention, which holds that repayment of minor debts should be straightforward and accepted without too much trouble.

MAJOR BOONS

Unlike their lesser cousins, major boons are almost always deserving of public acknowledgment to ensure that should there be some misunderstanding about the terms of repayment. Society can use its weight to keep

things from boiling over and turning unnecessarily ugly. The frequency of brutal blood feuds over unpaid debts spilling over into mortal society were commonplace, so it has become accepted practice to do whatever is possible to avoid them.

When a Kindred receives a major boon, it is expected that soon after the boon has been granted — meaning that the actual benefit of the boon has been received by the debtor — she will present herself to her creditor in Elysium in formal fashion. The tradition entails that before engaging in any other necessary social conduct (like acknowledging the prince, if present), the debtor briefly kneels before the individual to whom she owes the boon and openly acknowledges it. For example, “I am in your debt and submit to the oath of blood should my honor be false.” This is occasionally spoken in Latin, but colloquial language is acceptable, though it may not win any admirers among traditional elders. Naturally, few welchers really expect to have to accept a blood bond to a creditor they have refused, but the customary offer of such submission is enough to make it clear the importance of the Kindred's indebtedness.

Note also that this is simply how it's *supposed* to happen. Much of this formality falls by the wayside, and many Kindred keep their boons private.

A major boon sometimes comes about as a result of an accumulation of minor debts that remain unpaid. In these cases, it is not unheard of for the creditor, rather than the debtor, to formally declare that the debt owed has grown to such a significant degree. How this is handled varies, but it is frequently done in Elysium with plenty of witnesses and can be a tense scene with the social acumen of both parties being put to the test. It is not unusual that the creditor fails to have society recognize this formal change in the boon he is owed, but the burden of proof most often lies with the debtor to prove that the debt is not as great as it is being portrayed.

When a major debt is finally paid off — or the debtor believes it to be the case — the Kindred may again present herself to her creditor in Elysium and again kneel briefly. This time the debtor proclaims the debt absolved, such as with the statement, “By the Mark of Caine I offer you this boon borne of my labors.” Tradition then dictates that the debtor present her creditor with a chaff of wheat, symbolic of Caine's own first offering to God, though this, too, has fallen out of common practice. If the creditor takes the wheat, the debt is formally repaid. If not, the creditor has indicated that the boon is unacceptable and the debtor is expected to piously rise and depart the premises for the remainder of the evening.

Repayment or the attempt to repay a debt is a dangerous game with subtle and not so subtle implica-

tions. First, no Kindred should formally ask to be released from a debt until she is sure that she has done enough to properly repay that obligation. Whether this means doing one important thing for the creditor is the result of many lesser favors over a significant period of time is inconsequential. If the boon falls short, the debtor's appeal fails and results in the debtor's reputation taking a blow. Secondly, if no one else knows what the boon actually is, it is helpful to declare its nature after the traditional words of offering. If this is not done, some devious Kindred have been known to impugn the real value of the boon and refuse it without further comment. This can certainly backfire, but then the whole affair becomes a matter of deadly *esgrima* that might not be the debtor's forte. However, if the boon is fair and is generally known to society, then it behooves the creditor to discharge the debt or face serious problems from his peers.

EVEN MORE SERIOUS BOONS

Nothing is more important than a full life boon, earned by saving another from Final Death. In the rare cases when a Kindred finds himself so indebted, custom requires the debtor to act in a fashion similar to acceptance of a major boon. However, the terms are much more serious, with wording like, "My heart's blood is yours until the fires of Gehenna shall claim my soul" being common. When a life boon is considered paid off — and it is expected that it *eventually* will be — it is up to the one holding the boon to announce its discharge, and considered the height of audacity for the debtor to ask for release.

AFTERMATH

When the party's come and gone, the meeting has adjourned or the ceremony concluded, it's time for the Kindred to cover their tracks. Ignoring the necessary details that follow an event's occurrence can be leaving evidence at the scene of the crime, and such things attract attention that the Kindred don't want.

SO, ALWAYS CLEAN UP

The host doesn't have to do it personally, but leaving the scene without any trace of the Kindred's passing is important. Mop up blood, dispose of bodies, and take out the trash. As to the mundane concerns, some Kindred may want to pay a cleaning service to do it — and that's fine. But nobody wants the janitor to find an exsanguinated body stuffed into a closet, so be thorough.

TIE UP LOOSE ENDS

Cleaning up takes care of the messes that have already been made; tying up loose ends prevents future

mistakes from being made, which may include exposing a reporter's film before it makes it to the darkroom, erasing damning digital media (wise Kindred do not overlook security-camera footage), convincing witnesses to supernatural events that they did not, in fact, witness any supernatural events, and making sure that no tale might survive to be told. A host gains a reputation for a memorable event, even if it gets raucous. A host gains infamy for events that include murder, gunshots, and crazed vampires hurling limousines aside in their haste to flee a burning venue. That infamy can soon turn into detectives asking questions or hunters wielding stakes.

TIP EVERYONE

It is a decidedly American custom, true, but when in Rome.... Before the staff goes home, make sure they're taken care of. Tip bartenders. Tip the doorman who hails cabs. Tip servers and the busboys. Tip the manager who made sure all his people were where they needed to be and tip the off-duty police you hired as security for being attentive but not *too* attentive. If, over the course of planning the event, any cash would have made it into the hands of a person who helped the party take place, tip that person. Hell, even tip the drug dealers, because that'll keep them coming back next time. Don't tip, say, the business manager of the hotel from whom you booked the ballroom or the other functionaries who see to the business side of things — you may have bribed them to let this party happen, but don't be so gauche as to hand them an envelope full of cash in front of everyone. Now go back and tip the caterer, the DJ or MC, and the manager of the janitorial staff, because you know you made one hell of a mess. Don't tip the band, if you had one, because they've already helped themselves to a tip's worth of booze at your open bar. Every palm you grease makes those people more amenable to working with you in the future, and also builds a rapport that goes just beyond your established business relationship. That means they may be willing to do more for you in the future, or they may come to appreciate that tip and shut up when they see you bite the senator's daughter's neck in hopes of earning another one. Just don't let a tip become blackmail money.

EXALT IN YOUR REPUTATION

Provided you've done everything right and no one else has done anything wrong, you've just built a name for yourself. The Kindred will soon be asking about what your next party will be — and you don't want to disappoint them, do you?

SOCIAL UNLIFE

Let us consider the vampire, or Kindred, as they almost universally prefer to be called. Long before my present situation, I knew little of these creatures, except to borrow from popular literature and myth. I reasoned that if it were true that the Damned require mortal blood to sustain their undead, nocturnal condition, then the greatest driving force in their unlives must be to seek and acquire this horrid nourishment before all other concerns. Later, after my first-hand education as to the truth and errors of these assumptions, I discovered I was not wholly incorrect: The Kindred are predators of the first order and blood is a fundamental imperative. However, they are not mere beasts. Most have spent many years, in some cases centuries, perfecting the art of the kill. Few require more than an hour or so each evening to satisfy their unholy hunger. Perhaps another hour or more is spent maintaining their haven, wardrobe and possessions; and for those who keep retainers such as myself — and most do, it seems — maybe another similar stretch of time conveying instructions and overseeing the activities of these servants. The math leaves the Kindred with at least a few hours to do with as they please. Much of this “free time” is spent mingling with mortals in order to bend their wills to the desires of the Kindred, whether by direct force or supernatural influence or by less overt means. However, not all of the Damned harbor the ambition to gain a degree of influence over humankind and their institutions; but most do, and this can be an important and time-consuming pursuit. Still, even the most power-mad Kindred find that they are left with many hours of darkness to do with what they will: to hone their supernatural gifts or educate themselves in mundane fashion; to stalk the streets, drinking in the blood-thick air and reveling in their supernatural nature; to waste the night away in solitary amusement, watching television, surfing the Internet or reading up on their favorite authors’ latest works.

If this were the extent of their existence, the Children of Caine, as I’ve heard some call themselves, would seem to be loners by design or by dint of their unnatural state. Any behavioral scientist will tell you that a predator is a solitary hunter at the very core. Yet except for those rare monsters said to have forsaken any semblance of their lost humanity and to participate in orgiastic witches’ sabbats in the most despoiled urban hellholes, the Kindred I have met — and in my 70-odd years, it has been a significant number — struck me as far too

individualistic and wary of other Kindred to hunt in a pack. My own domitor has oft-repeated a maxim about his kind that goes to the heart of the matter: The only Kindred you will meet are those who wish to be met. The Kindred are loners, but because of their unique predicament and their necessary removal from human society, they find themselves driven time and time again to seek each other out and share each other’s company. In fact, in all my years of service to one of these splendid godlings, there is nothing I can think of that better defines them and says as much about what they are not (as about what they are) than their social lives.

The social world of the Damned, when examined with academic scrutiny, reveals just how truly removed these creatures are from the humanity that was once theirs. Certainly, it can be said without much debate that the myriad salons, parties, meetings and other gatherings that make up the bulk of undead society consist in large part of petty games, feral discourse, disconcerting amusements, political machinations and strategic social warfare. Yet this observation is in some ways merely peripheral to the real monstrousness that is revealed, which is this: Kindred socialize first and foremost because they will do anything to hang onto even the faintest echo of their lost *humanitas*. All the posturing, patronage and partying is akin to a ritualized dance of habit that allows them to pretend to themselves that they are still more or less human, albeit an evolved form of human, if you will. Kindred do not deny for an instant that they are not the same as those of us who still breathe the air by necessity. Even so, they desperately cling to the illusion that they are not monsters; they are more than the archetypal Beast, which many of them claim lurks in the shadows of their unbeating hearts. By whiling away their nights in the company of other Kindred, they can play at being little different from the people they once were, trading witticisms, exchanging precious tidbits of wisdom and experience and staying on top of what their peers are doing.

Of course, it would be foolish in the extreme to suggest that their social gatherings exist only to help them to maintain this pretense of humanity. These events have other useful purposes, artificial though they may be. Aside from the most politically regimented affairs — the Kindred seem to be as interested in political as well as social artifice — most get-togethers provide ample and welcome opportunity for them to build up, manage and master the terrifyingly complex world of status, prestige, influence and downright power that inarguably dominates the unlife of a

meaningful majority of the Damned. The eternal struggle for these commodities is an effective substitute for the boredom and loneliness that would likely overwhelm them if they were otherwise unengaged in an intellectual or social fashion. And boredom and loneliness are, if nothing else, an open invitation for the aforementioned Beast to supplant what remains of the Kindred's higher personality, a fate none would welcome. Regular social interaction also serves a more fundamental function: survival. Whether a Kindred likes it or not, he is eventually drawn into the games of more experienced Kindred, and rarely is that a good thing. Even those Kindred who abhor social interaction with others of their kind find it hard not to attend a social function now and then if for no other reason than to keep tabs on their peers. How are you to know if your strings are being pulled if you have no idea what kind of games are being played by those in a position to take advantage of you? Even more importantly, how do you protect yourself and your interests from other Kindred if you don't even know who the other Kindred are?

It is often incorrectly assumed that in any given domain where the Kindred gather that they all know each other, or at the very least are aware of each other. It is as if there existed some special Who's Who list that all the local Kindred have access to and enables them to be familiar with everyone else. Wrong. In my own experience, even in those cities where the number of Kindred can be counted on a single hand, it is never the case that the Damned are all similarly informed as to the identities of their fellow undead. In fact, in most places I have had the benefit of visiting as a consequence of my master's travels, it is the rare Kindred indeed who can give an accurate accounting of the local Children of Caine. In many domains, even the established prince will concede that there might exist unannounced Kindred or "autarkis" somewhere in the area, eking out a quiet existence by steering clear of those places where the Kindred are wont to spend their time. To be sure, it is often the praxis of the elders to rid their domains of such interlopers, but when can one honestly declare complete victory? And it is not just those who have wholly turned their backs on their kind who can claim this kind of anonymity. I have heard of many Kindred who, while perhaps recognized at some point in time by the local prince, have since been as good as gone for all intents and purposes, frequenting only those places that suit their personal needs and making no effort to mingle with other Kindred. Even those who do not make a point of being an outsider can find the years slipping by faster than they might

imagine and months and years may pass between public appearances. This aspect of their nature means that unless one makes a concerted effort to remain socially active, it can be a difficult prospect to even know who the other Kindred are in town — not to mention their names, personalities, interests and any threat they may pose.

THINGS TO DO IN DENVER WHEN YOU'RE DEAD

So there are many reasons why the Kindred find themselves drawn together, but what do they do when they do gather? Again, it would be easy to say that they socialize in the same general fashion as the *canaille*, as I've heard one decrepit elder call us mortals. Maybe they talk about blood or who they are going to destroy next or they argue and laugh and share experiences; they let their hair down and let themselves enjoy the fruits of their many plots and schemes. There is certainly a measurable bit of truth to this supposition, but it is only a small measure and one that, if taken to be more than it is, would paint a false picture of how the Kindred spend their social hours.

First, except in the most private of circumstances, the Kindred rarely ever openly discuss the more vulgar aspects of their precious condition. They do not chatter about blood, hunting, their fear of sunlight or any other consanguineous or personal weaknesses, habits, failings, limitations or problems. In fact, they simply do not discuss matters of the Curse in general. Such talk is not only too personal and in most cases already intimately understood by all to need open discourse, but it also spoils the show in a sense. The Kindred all know what they are deep down inside. They socialize in part to forget about all that for at least a little while now and then. This kind of talk is seen as crass, rude and an obvious giveaway that the speaker is little more than a whelp with no real understanding of what he or she is. The same goes for all but the most philosophical allusions to those preternatural gifts that the Kindred have been granted as some sort of compensation for the difficulties they face. Talk of these so-called Disciplines is not well received for these same reasons. Also, because the actual use of these powers on or in the presence of other Kindred is, in most cases, taken instinctively to be a threat — and often is intended to be — and the Kindred go to great lengths to avoid the possibility of giving the Beast within any excuse to come out to play, even the mere mention of these unnatural talents in social company can heighten the tension of all present. Finally, what Kindred is so foolish as to discuss her own

potential capabilities or let it be known that she seeks to learn more about another Kindred's?

While on the subject of what is and is not acceptable conversation, I should mention that during those times when I was privy to the discussions of the Kindred in a social setting, I was struck time and again by the astonishing degree of civility that prevailed, whether the talk was about enforcement of the Masquerade or concerned the rumor of the discovery of a new fragment of the legendary *Book of Nod*. Excepting only the most private and informal of get-togethers, the Kindred as a whole prefer to maintain a definite mien of cultural attainment. Etiquette and social tradition are actually of more importance than the topics being discussed, for it is by the degree to which they observe social convention that the Kindred judge one another. Given their deathlessness, such judgments usually last longer than a mortal might imagine, giving added reason for the Kindred to carry on so civilly with each other.

THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

Because the Kindred population of most domains is generally sparse for reasons of personal safety, few of their social affairs are overblown or designed for large numbers. Whereas mortals may expect 50 or more friends and guests to attend even ordinary parties, Kindred events are almost always geared toward a small crowd. Even when Kindred from beyond the city limits are expected to show, rare is it that these guests will outnumber the locals, if for no other reason than basic security. Given the proclivity of the Damned to seek some advantage over their peers, inviting outsiders, no matter how trustworthy they seem, to a function where they will outnumber resident Kindred is not the most sensible way to throw a party. Most gatherings I have had the fortune to attend ranged from four or five to about a dozen Kindred. I don't doubt that some of the largest domains might showcase salons that make these numbers seem paltry, but this is not the norm. It should also be remembered that few social gatherings are ever attended by all of a city's Kindred population. Although I would hesitate to provide some rule-of-thumb as to what percentage might be typically represented, it's probably not too far off base to suggest something close to half. This is, of course, not the case for the more ceremonial occasions, such as when the prince wishes to present her own child to Kindred society or when a Camarilla dignitary deigns to pay a visit and is honored with a full-blown fete to highlight the esteem the local prince accords this figure. In these instances most Kindred will

probably go out of their way to not only attend, but to make a good and lasting impression. It may even be the case that the local sheriff and his deputies beat the bushes to ensure that everyone is present. Those who don't show up are sure to become the target of a thousand nights of gossip.

The Kindred prefer to hold functions in places that afford them comfort, atmosphere, culture and security, the last being most important of all. They also like to have access to the vitae that they crave, not only to avoid problems that might arise, but even more because blood is so central to who they are, even as they won't openly speak of it. Whether in a private room in a crowded nightclub in the Rack or in a luxurious reading room in the rare books wing of the city's library, these things are essential when settling on the right location for where to meet. Naturally, the personal preferences and character of the local Kindred, in particular the elders among them, will play an important role in the final selection. However, regardless of whether the prince enjoys mingling with his subjects in the vast wine cellars of a former monastery or it is the harpies who have chosen the petit ballroom atop their city's historic hotel for their weekly "blood klatches," the needs listed above are always there and given serious consideration. Tossing off invitations to a reception for the visit of one's sire without giving thought to these things is a sure recipe for a gaffe of catastrophic proportion.

It is simple enough to understand that a place must be comfortable. Suitable furniture, room to move (including places where small groups of guests can withdraw to for at least the impression of slight privacy), ease of entry and egress and similar attributes are a must. Atmosphere is provided in most cases by virtue of the place itself, whether it is the surreal lighting provided in a city aquarium, the leathery mustiness of a private library, the din of a rave in a warehouse or the echoing vastness of a major museum after hours. Most of the time, the host will still make at least some small contribution to the mood by introducing his own selection of art, music and vistas. I was quite surprised when I learned how important aromatic atmosphere is to the Kindred. Given their supernaturally heightened senses, few hosts are so forgetful to not ensure that along with all the visual and aural decoration there is equal weight given to what scents will greet the evening's guests. I can still recall with clarity how a particularly mad primogen in Kansas City tormented his most sensitive guests by burning a stick of something that I dare not elaborate upon, knowing full well that these



guests had come to specifically ask him for an important boon and dared not show displeasure.

THE "C" WORD

Culture is part and parcel of everything one finds at a Kindred soiree, so long as one is willing to accept a very broad definition of culture. The host of any social affair usually goes out of her way to either present a cultural reflection of those things she prefers or to create a cultural flavor to please one or more of her guests. This can mean selecting a time period or a national, ethnic or religious motif for the entire event, or it could be as simple as choosing a "main event" that defines the culture, like a viewing of *The Godfather*. It might seem that the Kindred would constantly be changing this and other aspects of their celebrations if for no other reason than to battle boredom. Truth be told, the Damned are creatures of habit and change is all but anathema to them, especially to those elders most often responsible for organizing such things. Even when it might serve to impress an important guest, few party-throwers deviate too much from what they are most comfortable with. Keep in mind that any change is also an additional chance that the event will never meet the expectations of those it was intended to impress,

a risk that almost no Kindred is willing to take. Better safe than sorry, as the saying goes. Despite this predilection, each Kindred does make an effort to ensure that his get-togethers are as different from those of the other Kindred as possible. Risk is bad, but unoriginality is worse, and if your party is similar to another's, then only one can be the best, and what's to guarantee it is yours? So to avoid these kinds of comparisons with other salons, most events are usually quite different. Although I cannot claim to have seen all there is to see of their social world, I still marvel at the distinctly unique nature of Kindred festivities.

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Finally, security must be addressed. Ultimately, nothing is more important, despite all the pretense of escaping reality for a little while. Kindred must be able to protect the Masquerade before all else. Whether gathering on a private balcony for a long vigil mass in a packed cathedral, or meeting in an abandoned subway station far below the city streets, the need to hide their true nature from mortal perceptions is of primary concern. Naturally, when the chosen Elysium is a place normally devoid of mortal visitors and witnesses, precau-

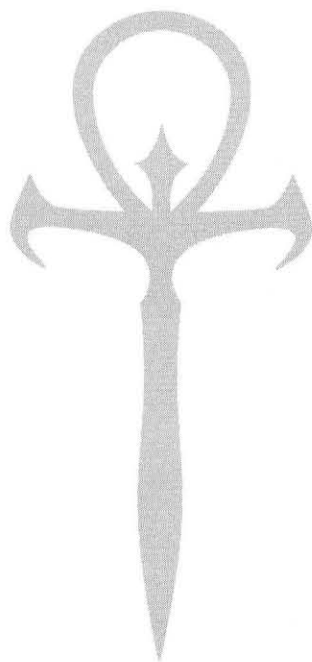
tions are minimal, though ever-present. Drawing the curtains, keeping voices low enough not to leave the premises, having a few retainers on the perimeter to warn of danger and steer accidental interlopers away; these are all simple and common practices. When an event is held in a more public location, however, things get complicated and may require even more attention by the Keeper and her minions. If a salon is to be held in a private chamber off the city's grand ballroom during the Annual Halloween Ball, for example, there might be as many as a thousand or more kine in the very near vicinity. Certain, less-monstrous Kindred will probably wish at some point in the evening to mingle with the mortal guests, even if only to bask in the heady scent of their blood, but more likely to select a vessel to whet their tastes. These situations require vigilant lookouts and the added necessity of keeping the private celebration of the Damned very un-vampire-like, at least to the casual observer, in the unfortunate case that security fails to keep out all intruders. Rare is the time when the Kindred would openly employ one of their blatant Disciplines so close to the very mass of humanity that could so easily rise up as in nights of old to put an end to their shadowy predators.

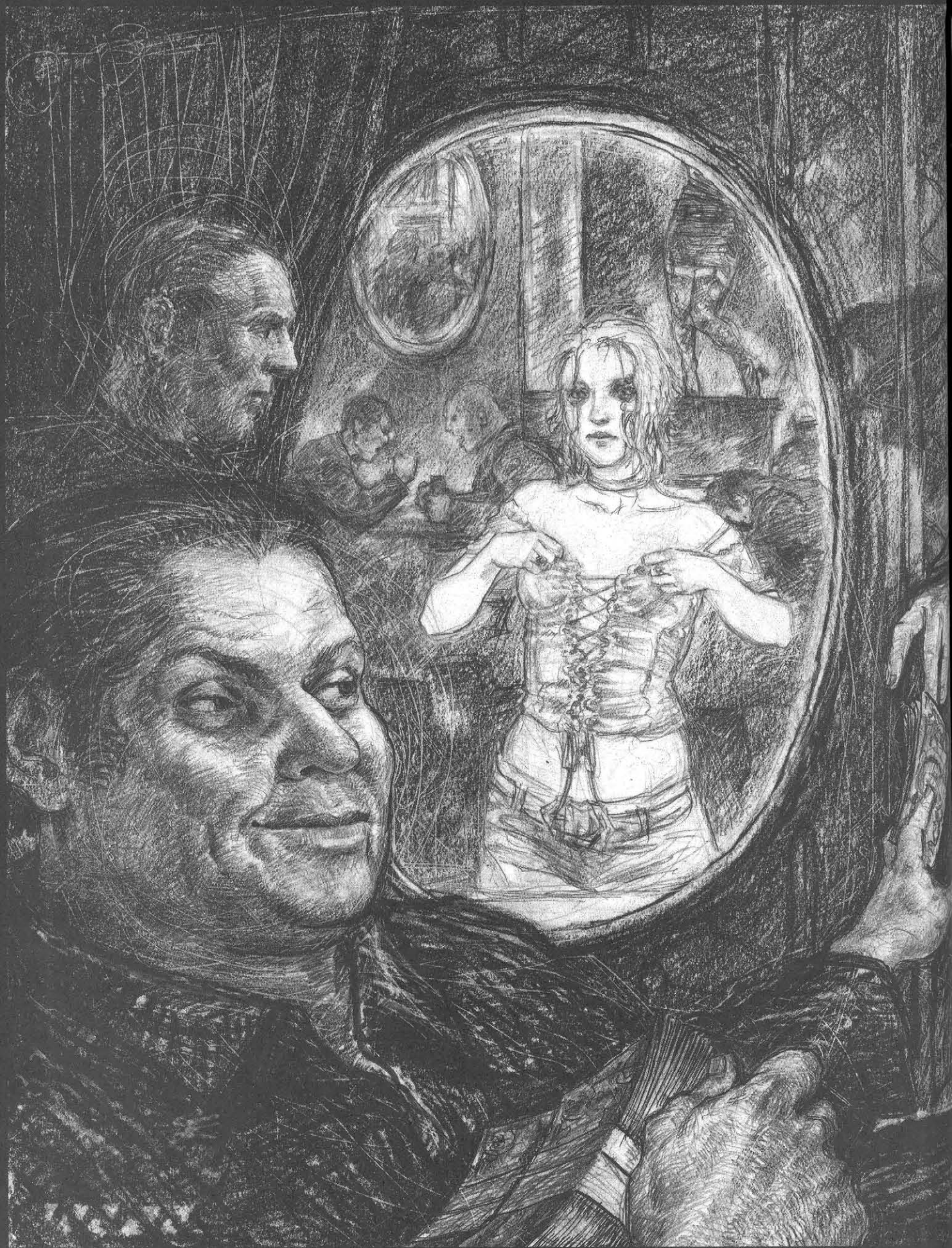
Similarly important for any affair is the need to safeguard those gathered from any threat that might present itself, whether from something as rare as a full-blown Sabbat or Lupine assault or from the more common, though no less terrifying, danger of fire, sun-

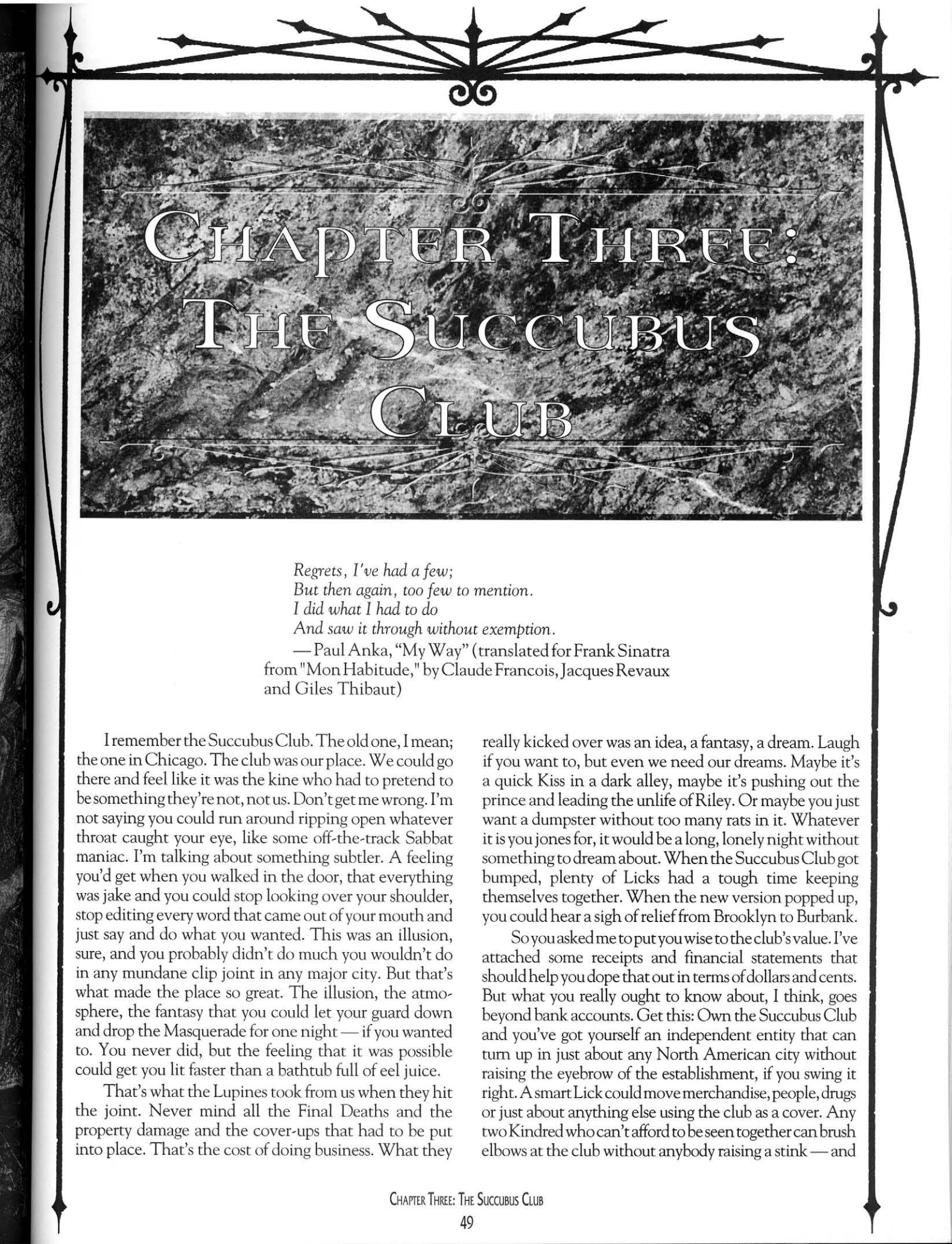
light or other traditional banes. Like the tale of the Three Little Pigs teaches us, the Kindred do not seek shelter in a place unable to withstand the elements and their enemies. Multiple escape routes, tools and resources for fighting and resisting fires, the means to block out sunlight and sometimes even a cache of handy weapons are all must-haves if the Damned are to feel safe. Because of the prohibition against violence among the guests at Elysium, and because of the long-standing tradition of keeping all artistic and precious furnishings and artifacts present from harm, Keepers and hosts must also do their utmost to ensure that the celebration remains calm enough that the Beast is not provoked. To be ejected from a gathering for posing a risk to others or the place itself is a slap in the face that is almost never forgotten.

There is so much more to say about the social activities and affairs of the Damned, but I shall leave it to my reader to learn more on their own. No words can replace first-hand experience, of course. Suffice to say that the Kindred are paradoxes when it comes to society: deadly, scheming beasts on the one hand, yet actors of the greatest skill, who seek to preserve and wallow in the heights of cultural attainment on the other. I do not believe I shall ever truly understand these beautiful gods, but what I do understand provides me equal parts rapturous pleasure and quivering terror. May your experiences be likewise.

Nicholas Cardiff, Valet and Thrall to Lictor
Quentin Rand Gray







CHAPTER THREE: THE SUCCUBUS CLUB

*Regrets, I've had a few;
But then again, too few to mention.
I did what I had to do
And saw it through without exemption.*

— Paul Anka, "My Way" (translated for Frank Sinatra
from "Mon Habitude," by Claude Francois, Jacques Revaux
and Giles Thibaut)

I remember the Succubus Club. The old one, I mean; the one in Chicago. The club was our place. We could go there and feel like it was the kine who had to pretend to be something they're not, not us. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying you could run around ripping open whatever throat caught your eye, like some off-the-track Sabbat maniac. I'm talking about something subtler. A feeling you'd get when you walked in the door, that everything was jake and you could stop looking over your shoulder, stop editing every word that came out of your mouth and just say and do what you wanted. This was an illusion, sure, and you probably didn't do much you wouldn't do in any mundane clip joint in any major city. But that's what made the place so great. The illusion, the atmosphere, the fantasy that you could let your guard down and drop the Masquerade for one night — if you wanted to. You never did, but the feeling that it was possible could get you lit faster than a bathtub full of eel juice.

That's what the Lupines took from us when they hit the joint. Never mind all the Final Deaths and the property damage and the cover-ups that had to be put into place. That's the cost of doing business. What they

really kicked over was an idea, a fantasy, a dream. Laugh if you want to, but even we need our dreams. Maybe it's a quick Kiss in a dark alley, maybe it's pushing out the prince and leading the unlife of Riley. Or maybe you just want a dumpster without too many rats in it. Whatever it is you jones for, it would be a long, lonely night without something to dream about. When the Succubus Club got bumped, plenty of Licks had a tough time keeping themselves together. When the new version popped up, you could hear a sigh of relief from Brooklyn to Burbank.

So you asked me to put you wise to the club's value. I've attached some receipts and financial statements that should help you dope that out in terms of dollars and cents. But what you really ought to know about, I think, goes beyond bank accounts. Get this: Own the Succubus Club and you've got yourself an independent entity that can turn up in just about any North American city without raising the eyebrow of the establishment, if you swing it right. A smart Lick could move merchandise, people, drugs or just about anything else using the club as a cover. Any two Kindred who can't afford to be seen together can brush elbows at the club without anybody raising a stink — and

they'll pay you for the privilege. And unlike these old-time groups that have been around since the dark ages, the club is popular with neonates and anarchists. So some careful listening can clue you in on what's happening on the streets, and what the trouble boys are grumbling about.

But that's all small potatoes. Here's the main course: If there's anything like good will among the Kindred, the Succubus Club is one of the few establishments that's managed to tap into it. Which means, among other things, running the club gets you lots of leeway when it comes to questions of territory and propriety. You get comped a lot, especially when someone's hoping you'll bring the club into their domain. You get invited to parties that would never be open to the likes of your raggedy ass. The square truth is, running the club gives you status. Nobody's really sure where the club fits into the nocturnal social structure, but nobody will say so, so everybody gives it the benefit of the doubt.

1. THE CLUB TODATE

I tell you, brother, the Chicago club had style. People turn up dressed to the nines, tuxedos and furs, the whole magilla. Yeah, there was the basement where the trash hung out, but mostly the place was a class act. I used to wish there was Sinatra and Basie getting pumped out of those speakers instead of rock 'n' roll, or moe rock, or whatever they called it, but the club wasn't really about the music. It was a place to see and be seen. Then the joint got knocked over and that broad Sennuwy took the act on the road. Her version of the Succubus Club, well, at first glance, it seems a poor copy of the original. It turns up in neighborhoods that could pass as war zones. Half the people on the dance floor look like they're too young for algebra class, and their faces carry more metal than the Capone gang on a hit. The music. You can't tell where one song ends and the next takes off. Then there's the smoke and those lasers... give me a break. And the clothes. These kids dress like they were homeless on Mars.

But take a closer look, and you realize Sennuwy understood what the club was about. She knew how to create the right feel, a sense of collective interest in keeping the place together. The club was everybody's and nobody would screw with it because they'd be screwing themselves. I once saw a Bruno and a Degenerate who'd been hammering each other with lead pipes the night before just glance at each other across the floor and go back to their business. And Sennuwy hit on a gimmick that you could take to the bank: The club could pop up anywhere, and even though it was usually in some low-rent hellhole that would probably be demolished a week later, the buzz that built up made it the only place to be for that one night.

Nobody knows exactly where Sennuwy was the night the Deceivers went off the track, but she hasn't been seen since. Seems pretty likely she was zotzed along with most of her relatives, but if she did survive she's probably in no great shakes. Wherever she is, I tip my hat to her. She made off like she was some kind of flighty, artsy-fartsy bohemian, but the fact that the club's still up and running shows that she was a pretty savvy broad. She built a solid organization, one strong enough to keep going after she was out of the picture.

WHO'S THE BOSS?

The new top dog of the SC is this Lick by name of Hiram DeVries. He's one of these up-and-coming Blue Bloods who got the bite back in the early '90s, when the Ventrue gobbled up all those start-up companies and were desperate for middle managers to run them. Hide — so they call him — was smart enough to see the writing on the wall and started looking for a new playground before the Internet bubble popped. He hooked up with Sennuwy and turned out to have a real talent for juggling the 8,000 little details that keep a lay like the Succubus Club in the pink. Hide's the kind of guy who can talk both your ears off, just bury you in a huge pile of words until you give him what he wants just to get him to shove off. He's also what you call a good networker, so he can get the club just about anything it needs with a phone call or two.

My snitch tells me Hide's doing pretty well as the club's operator. He's probably pulling in twice as much coin as what Sennuwy was paying him, and he was doing most of the legwork already so it's not much more work. But I also hear he's having some doubts about staying in the driver's seat. The way I figure it, Hide is a numbers guy. Doping out how to cut three percent off the bar budget, or locating the one bureaucrat in Portland who can arrange an electric hookup with 48 hours notice for one night — that's the kind of challenge he likes. But deciding which band should play the back room, or what colors to spray paint the stairwell, or figuring out the difference between Chicago House music and Deep House and House Dub, that just ain't his bag. He's been able to coast by following the patterns Sennuwy set down, but styles change, tastes change and keeping the joint on the cutting edge is starting to become a headache he can do without. Smart money says he'll take on a partner soon, or sell his interest outright and move on to something else. Bad news is he's got a fair idea of what he's sitting on and how much it's worth, so he's not likely to let you low-ball him. Good news is he's distracted until he comes up with a game plan, which means it's a wise time to muscle in and knock him off his pile.

When Hide runs into a wall he can't climb, he turns to his go-to guy, a sour little Nosferatu by the name of Thing. This mook can't be an inch over four-and-a-half

feet tall, but he's got arms that reach the floor and hands big enough to palm a wrecking ball. And unlike Hide, he's not afraid of getting them dirty. Thing's got his own crew, a kind of low-class mob of Sewer Rats, drifters and low-lives who handle the stuff that would get alley dust on Hide's Armani tie. Thing's network is a street-level equivalent to Hide's string of connections, and the combination of the two could be real meaty. What I hear, though, is that Hide and Thing aren't exactly the best of friends. Back in the day, Thing used to work for Sennuwy directly, and he's none too pleased that Hide's in the big chair now. The way he sees it, Hide treats him like shit. For now, though, Thing is choking on his temper and counting his share of the take.

STORY IDEAS

- The players' characters are hired — or blackmailed — by Hide to gather information on a potential buyer for the club. The buyer turns out to be a Sabbat vampire who's not happy to be spied on. He and his allies will attempt to capture and eliminate the characters before they can get word to Hide or anyone else.
- Thing is tired of being treated like Hide's lapdog and has plans to take over the club. He offers to cut the players' characters in on the deal if they'll get rid of Hide and make it look like an accident. The characters get caught by Hide's security and Thing denies all involvement. Later, Thing will try to arrange an "accident" to get rid of the characters to keep them from convincing Hide of the truth.
- Hide is negotiating with the sire of one of the players' characters for a partnership in the club. The sire vanishes just as negotiations reach a critical point, and the coterie has to figure out if it's Hide's doing, or a third party, or isn't related to the negotiations at all.

PRESENT TENSE

Hide may be a stuffed shirt, but you gotta hand it to him. He had the club up and running again just two months after Sennuwy vanished. Maybe you remember how tense things were back then. A lot of Licks weren't sure it was such a hot idea for Kindred to be getting together in public, and everyone was waiting to see what kind of disaster would happen next. But word got out that the club was back on tour, that old buzz just started to rise. In the end the crowds couldn't stay away. Some turned up just to see who didn't have the stones to show; others went to prove they weren't afraid.

At first it seemed that things were back to normal with the club. But a little gumshoeing and some surveillance make me think otherwise. Spend any time at the Club watching and listening instead of dancing or flashing your fangs, and you pick up the scent of desperation. It's stronger on some nights than others, but it's always

there, hanging over everything like smoke. I see Kindred come through the door all twitchy, just frantic to shrug off whatever's weighing them down. If they dance, they dance like they'll never get another chance. If they're on the prowl, they're not satisfied until they find the tastiest dish in the place. And if for whatever reason they don't get the release they're looking for, things get ugly. They start shoving people around, picking fights, harassing the staff. You ask me, it's Gehenna in the air. Used to be that the Joes and Janes who come to the Succubus Club weren't the type to swallow the whole Final Nights fairy tale. Now they're not so sure.

Hide is savvy to this trend, especially after some fledgling punk ripped the top off a bar and clocked three guests with it. He uses a lot more security these nights, with at least one ghouléd-up torpedo at the front door, plus some specially trained floorwalkers who give troublemakers the bounce. If he's feeling particularly nervous, Hide will have everybody who goes in patted down for iron, or install metal detectors (the rubes love that, it makes them feel like they're really living on the edge). He's also raised ticket prices, shortened the guest list and won't sell tickets at the door anymore. And last week I found out that wherever the club sets up, Hide makes sure there's an escape route known only to him and select staff, and a safe room with video monitors that cover the whole place. Even with all these precautions, there are nights when the place feels less like a nightclub and more like a barrel full of gunpowder.

STORY IDEAS

- The players' characters are hired as extra security on a particularly tense night at the club. They eject a belligerent Cainite who has powerful friends and plots vengeance.
- An enemy of the coterie smuggles a gun into the club, fires off a few rounds on the dance floor and (using Celerity or another appropriate Discipline) places the gun into the hand of one of the players' characters. The club has to close down early, and the framed character's name is mud as far as the local Kindred community is concerned. Until she can clear her name, the character will be a pariah in her social usual circles, a target for revenge by Hide, possibly in trouble with the prince and perhaps wanted by law enforcement.
- A Sabbat pack takes refuge in the club after assaulting the players' characters. In a few hours their allies will arrive and the pack will be able to leave unmolested, so the characters have the much time to retaliate (or be seen as weak in the eyes of enemies and rivals). They must figure out how to do it without getting tossed out by security or affronting the Kindred who are there to have a good time. Alternately, the characters are the Sabbat pack and have to get out of the club without being spotted and pursued by their enemies.



KILLING TIME

When you mix loud music, alcohol, money, kine and Kindred, there are bound to be a few bodies on the floor when the sun comes up. The Succubus Club is no exception. On any given night, Hide's team of sweepers is likely to come across a teenager who has OD'd on designer drugs, a disemboweled Caitiff who pissed off the wrong Camarilla Lick, a drug dealer shived in the back by a desperate junkie, an exsanguinated stiff left behind by a clumsy fledgling, a gang-banger caught wearing the wrong colors, even a tripping Cainite who dipped his bill into one drugged-up club kid too many. Hey, you want to play the game, you gotta clean up the mess. But in the recent months there's a new angle forming that's got Hide pretty bugged.

Someone, or a group of someones, seems to be using the club as their own personal savings and loan — as in, they're paying back some heavy debts. In the last three months, five Kindred took the Big Sleep in "accidents" while at the club, and two more have vanished. As far as I can dope it out, there's no obvious connection between the victims. All the incidents seem to have occurred shortly before dawn, just before the doors close. So far Hide has kept the issue quiet, but if rumors leak out it could be bad for business to say the least. I've done a little sleuthing on this, and I'd say

whoever's behind it has a fair knowledge of how the club works. I'd suggest an inside job, except that so many people go in and out of the place that it would be simple for anyone to observe it for 10, 20, or 100 nights in a row until they learn the routines well enough to do what they gotta do.

STORY IDEAS

- Hired to investigate the latest death at the club, a Tremere found at the bottom of a stairwell with a broken neck, the characters find out that there was a mortal witness to the incident. She's so traumatized by whatever she saw, though, that she's blocked out all the details of the event. Attempts to invade her mind or use Disciplines only cause to suppress her memory all the more, so the characters must find another way to get at the truth.

- The characters find out the killer is Sennuw, who bears considerable mental and physical scars after narrowly escaping diablerie during the Week of Nightmares. Resentful that the unlife of luxury she'd created for herself was ripped away from her, she's taken up a deranged vendetta by which she seeks out and destroys Cainites of exceptional physical beauty. When the players begin to pick up her trail, she makes a plan to burn down the club and destroy everyone in it.

2. ANATOMY OF A RAVE

In some ways, keeping the club on all eight is a piece of cake; in others, it's as tangled as a bowl of spaghetti. First of all, if you think of the Succubus as some kind of wandering circus that rolls into town, does its thing, and then packs up and rolls out again, get that out of your noggin. It's the idea of the club that's nomadic. But the physical club is built out of local material, to the extent that this is possible. That's the only model that makes sense, really, from the standpoint of expense and practicality. Between them, Hide and Thing can buy, rent, scrounge, crib or borrow just about everything they need in any city, so why truck it all around creation, dodging Lupines and paying gas and tolls?

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Near as I can figure, each night of revelry in the Club takes about two months of prep time. It all starts with the location. Hide favors buildings that are currently unoccupied. His favorite tactic is to find a warehouse that's just been vacated by a company that's taken a dive (no shortage of them tonight), knowing the owner will be desperate for some scratch and more than happy to rent the place out for a "private party." Sometimes he'll go after a large dance club or banquet hall that recently folded, so he can take advantage of any licenses and permits that are still active. Once or twice he's leased a building that's just been bought and gutted for renovation; usually the owner's got no beef with picking up some extra cash before he starts his own project. Occasionally Hide will purchase a building outright and sell it when the festivities are over, but he prefers to rent or borrow rather than buy.

Hide likes a building that's well away from any residential neighborhoods. Failing that, he'll pick one near a high-crime area. Both choices are meant to keep squares from complaining about any noise or traffic. He pulls all the necessary strings to keep Johnny Law off his case for the night. But even so, you never know when some well-meaning flatfoot might take upon himself to follow up on a complaint from Mr. and Mrs. Nine-to-Five. So it's best to have some distance between the club and general public. For the same reason, the club usually sets up shop well away from other nightclubs or gin mills. If you have a neighborhood that looks like it's been through the Great Depression, a couple of world wars and an

earthquake or two, you've got a perfect locale for the Succubus Club.

The club usually sets up in a building with at least three floors, one of which is a basement. The first floor holds the main dancing area and is usually just one large space broken up with a few partitioned staff-only areas (like bar storage and a coat check). The second floor will house a VIP room, a few private rooms, what they call a "chill-out" area, a staff lounge, and sometimes a second performance space. The basement is for storage, Hide's safe room, a second secure room for cash and valuables, and a place to rough up anyone who needs roughing up. Hide also keeps a few light-tight hidey-holes nearby in case he's stuck in the building at dawn.

Once negotiations on the building are settled, Hide's next angle is electricity. If the place has been recently occupied, and isn't too old, it may only need minor upgrades to handle the club's needs (some of that sound and light equipment really pulls in the juice). But sometimes the only building that's suitable needs some major electrical jimjams to bring it up to snuff. Hide has a couple of specialists he flies in for the job; they have the authority to hire any local talent they need to get the job done. This is one area Hide won't skimp on — not only are power failures bad for business, bad wiring could spark a fire, and I don't have to tell you what a disaster that would cause.

Plumbing is next on the list, but not as critical. The club can get by with stored water and porta-johns if necessary, though it usually doesn't come to that. Heating and cooling is also a concern, though Hide can take the edge off this by picking the right city at the right time of year. If there haven't been any deal-killers by this point, Hide will arrange for whatever carpentry is needed to get the place up to speed. Usually this entails building some room dividers to set off the bar, storage areas, coat check, rest rooms, a DJ booth, and a simple stage if any live performances have been planned. They also board up and paint over any and all windows in the building.

Hide has a carpenter who always does the planning, hiring and supervising. I'm reasonably certain the guy's a ghoul, though I've never seen him. The reason I think this is my source tells me that when the main carpentry's finished, this supervisor always stays on site and does additional work in the basement. From what I can piece together, Hide has him create one or more false walls and floors, giving Hide a place he can duck into if the worst happens. It also seems that the guy disguises one of the exits, or creates a new one if needed, so Hide can take off if the main door is blocked.

The final steps of prepping the building happen just a few nights before the club opens. As you may or may not know — probably not — these rave things usually have some kind of theme to them, and the Succubus Club has always followed this tradition. (My favorite was Sennuwy's "Back to the Womb" Rave. She had the whole first floor covered with some kind of red, warm, pulsing fabric, walls and floor. To get in you had to walk through a long, dark tunnel. You get the picture.) Hide usually delegates the choice of the theme and the decorations to a kind of ad-hoc committee made up of the kids who follow the club around.

STORYTELLING IDEAS

- Hide's latest choice for a club setup happens to be a building where one or more of the players' characters have their havens. Because of the number of delays, he's eager to get started building and can't afford to find another location. The characters are in danger of being discovered by the construction crew during the day. At night, Thing and his henchmen will show up to forcibly evict them.
- A property-owning Ventrue who's a long-time rival of Hide's wants Hide to rent out one of her buildings at an exorbitant price. To that end, she hires or forces the players' characters to render three other possible locations unsuitable. The players must figure out how to do that, which could involve sabotaging or demolishing the buildings, calling media attention to the other sites, forcing the owners to turn down Hide's offers, or even filling the buildings with squatters.

SUPPLY LINES

Very early in the prep process, perhaps just after the building's been acquired, Hide starts thinking about sound. Sound is everything in this racket. People don't just want to hear the music, they want to feel it. It's not just a matter of finding a top-of-the-line sound system — which Hide does. What makes the whole thing run on all eight is matching the sound to the site. For this, Hide pays some Toreador broad named Lark who supposedly is an expert in acoustics. She usually shows up before any wiring or electrical work is done and spends a good couple of hours walking around taking measurements and waving some kind of electronic dingus in the air. Then she recommends to Hide what kind of set-up will work best in the space. I don't know what their past history is, but Hide seems to trust her without question. She usually DJs one or two sets during the night. And I recently found out that she comes in a few nights before the club opens to set up the security system, including the video cameras Hide monitors from his safe room. Food for thought.

Speaking of food, while Hide doesn't offer meals to his patrons, he does need supplies for at least three full bars, including a good dose of bar munchies, catering for the staff and any mortal performers, and potable water (not to mention ice). All this has to be arranged in advance. Ordering that much beer and liquor tends to attract the attention of civil authorities (more on them later), but otherwise it's not usually a big deal. Hide also brings in some blood for special guests if he's got supplier he can trust. The food, as well as the bar equipment, lighting, sound system and everything else that didn't come with the building, is usually bought or rented locally (though a few critical items are shipped). Hide also hires local crews to unload and install the mundane stuff. I've noticed that Hide doesn't screen these people too carefully. An ambitious planner could get more than a few of his friends into the right places, if you know what I mean.

STORY IDEAS

- Lark is conducting ongoing experiences on the effects of certain sound frequencies on states of altered consciousness. To that end, she collects and records unusual sounds and mixes them into her performances. She's willing to pay the players' characters a great sum of money, provide them with something they desperately need or do them a valuable favor, if they'll record certain sounds for her: the chanting of a Tremere blood contract ritual, the speech of a Malkavian using the Voice of Madness, the sizzle of Kindred flesh burning in the sun, the grinding of bone being reshaped by Tzimisce bonecraft, the death-cries of a mortal undergoing the Embrace. Lark can provide the recording equipment, but the rest is up to the characters.
- A courier who was scheduled to deliver some special vitae for Hide's private party failed to show up. With just three nights before the club opens, the players' coterie is hired to find out what happened. They find that the courier, a ghoul, was diverted off the interstate due to a traffic-blocking accident, tried to take a shortcut and got lost. What they don't know is that he wandered into a small town infested by Lupines and was captured. The werewolves expect someone to come looking for him eventually and will be prepared for the players' characters to arrive.

RED TAPE

Which brings up the issue of permits, ordinances, variances, zoning laws and all that annoying jazz. This is where Hide really thrives. His cranium holds a working knowledge of just about every municipal regulation in the country, and how to get around them.

The simplest approach, of course, is to just ignore the law and let the chips fall where they may. You might think this would be a cakewalk when you're only in operation for one night. But by now you get the idea that a single

night's rumble is dependent on weeks or months of prep time. The downside of using local talent for so much of the preparation is that people talk. You get some local carpenter who hasn't put hammer to nail for six months, and suddenly he lucks into a few days of work that pays like a few weeks, under the table and no questions asked. Sooner or later this mook is sitting in a bar buying rounds for all his buddies and bragging about how flush he is. Before you can say Jack Robinson, word gets around to some union boss or a code enforcer who's got the ear of City Hall.

Hide would much rather grease a few palms than take a chance on some inspector showing up and gumming up the works. But believe it or not, there are times when he can put up his tent without shelling out any bribes at all. Usually this means renting a dump where the dues are already paid: construction's already been started, or is all set to go, or the place is already licensed as an entertainment venue. Or he can make it look like he's holding a private party, and fudge on the numbers here and there to get the paperwork through. Or he'll just find that corner of the city that's so far gone that not even the zoning bureaucrats pay attention to what goes on there. That last one is an itchier situation than you think. Just about every square inch of any major burgh is the jurisdiction of some city hall paper-pusher, and they're awfully keen to suck whatever they can from their patch of territory. Sound familiar?

If Hide can't sneak in under the radar, he'll bend law his way with some top-down or bottom-up attention. Top-down means dealing with whoever's sitting on top of the particular bureaucratic dog pile he has to contend with — a city councilman, a mayor, a police chief, what have you. There's not much time for subtlety, so Hide usually finds someone he knows — or a friend of a friend of a friend — and turns the screws until he gets his way. If he hasn't got a contact high up, he'll work the back end and dangle something shiny in front of the cops, code inspectors or whoever's supposed to implement the inconvenient statutes. One of his favorite tricks is to make some sap think he's got the upper hand, that Hide will have to keep paying and paying to keep his place in business. Of course, when the mark comes around, sniffing for more lettuce, the building's empty and he's left scratching his head.

As you know, one of the joys of the eternal nightlife is that you get to deal not just with one bureaucracy, but two. And again, when it comes to dealing with the local Kindred, Hide can operate on two levels. The neonates, ancillae and riff-raff who hold the territory where Hide sets up shop are not usually a problem. At some point they'll make a noise, Hide will offer them a cut of the door, and they'll back off (if not, Thing and his associates will show them the error of their ways). Once they're on board, they'll act as unofficial security, keeping the neighborhood trash, street gangs or whoever from harass-

ing the paying customers. And since they have no way of knowing how much dough Hide rakes in, they end up working cheap and not knowing it.

As for the local elders, things can play out a few different ways. Oddly enough, the two extremes — a powerful, well-established prince secure in his domain, and a new prince struggling for order — usually call for the same treatment. The old-time princes could care less about some one-night saloon where the rabble gather. The newer ones are too busy watching their backs to worry about it. In either case, Hide just goes in and does what he wants. He might send a token request to the prince but he doesn't have to worry about serious repercussions. It's the in-between situation that he mostly sweats over: A prince who takes a hands-on approach to his domain is easily offended and has the wherewithal to make trouble. Hide handles this on a case-by-case basis, calling on contacts and connections to smooth the way if he has to, asking for official permissions, jumping through the right hoops and offering a piece of the take (again, not revealing what the true take really is).

STORY IDEAS

- Hide miscalculates and schedules a club opening too close to a local election. The incumbent mayor is running on a "stop the blight" campaign and has changed the zoning laws in the area where Hide has prepared the site of the club. It's become impossible to get any work done, so Hide hires the characters to persuade the mayor to grant an easement for his project. Because the mayor is a public figure, and the media (and his opponent) are closely following this issue, any blatant actions by the players are certain to gain wide attention and are thus out of the question. Even if the mayor grants Hide his permits, if he doesn't have a credible reason, the press may well take notice.

- Despite reassurances by Hide's local street contacts, a full-scale gang war erupts during the night that the club opens. Hide takes some of his henchmen to deal with one of the two clashing factions, and the players' characters are drafted to put down the other group. After clashing with increasingly tough street punks, the characters find that the gang's being directed by one of Hide's rivals, hoping to discredit him and the club. She'll give them one chance to throw in with her, or consider them obstacles to be removed.

- The local prince is unsure whether or not to grant Hide permission to bring the club to his city, so he sends the players' characters to explore the neighborhood where Hide wants to set up. Their assignment is to talk to the local Kindred and get a sense of their resistance to letting an outsider operate there. What the characters find is a group of belligerent anarchists who have open contempt for the prince and his edicts. They misunderstand the characters' intentions, thinking they're there to force them to accept the club, and they respond with hostility.

THE BUZZ

More important than food or alcohol, more important than plumbing, electricity, music, even the building itself, there's the buzz. That unspoken snap in the air, that feeling that something's going to happen, something's coming, something unusual. Something to actually look forward to. If the club didn't have that kind of buzz, nothing else would matter. With buzz like that, it could run out of hole in the ground if it had to. The buzz is the club's number one asset, and it's the one that's both hardest to touch and hardest to manage.

First, of course, there's the air of mystery. Hide does his damndest to keep word from getting out about where the club will show up next. His main tactic is a smokescreen. He's always got feelers out in a dozen different cities, he makes ten times as many inquiries as he needs to, and when he starts getting close to making a final decision, he covers his tracks with a blizzard of intermediaries, fake names and a few false identities. Of course, once he starts fixing up a site, word gets around that something's going on. But he's always got different real-estate deals going in a dozen cities at the same time. Some will turn out to be used for the club at some point, others will be sold off or traded for favors or used for some scam or other (one time he bought a parking garage and convinced a bunch of investors he was building a new kind of restaurant where people would be served 4-star meals in their cars... what a pip).

Just about the time that it would be hard to keep hiding the truth, Hide lets it be known that the Succubus Club coming to town (this is the same time that he starts negotiating with any local Kindred). He never does it in quite the same way twice. He's got this strange coterie working for him — they call themselves the Broken Glass Collective, and they come up with a sort of campaign that puts out the wire. They've done some tricky stuff over the years. Once their Warlock generated a kind of self-repeating dream that caused half the Kindred in one city to dream the club was coming to town. Another time they went around putting rave kids into trances and writing subway and street maps on their arms leading to the site of the club. And then there was the time they sent fancy letters to all the upper-class schnooks in the city, explaining why they and their sons and daughters had been removed from the Succubus Club guest list. You can bet that got people tripping all over themselves to get in.

About two weeks before the doors open, Hide releases a bunch of tickets. This batch he mostly passes out at raves and underground-type clubs, and the price is pretty cheap. The idea is to make sure there's a good dose of real club culture at the opening. I don't have much use for their music or their clothes, but the truth is, these ravers really inject some life into the joint. If only the upper crust showed up, the club would be about as exciting as a glass of water. You'd have an empty dance

floor and a crowd of stuck-up swells giving each other the eye. So Hide makes a point of getting these cheap tickets into circulation, and he's got a bunch of club groupies who get comped and bring their friends. They also bring big drug trade into the club's environment. You know — for those Licks who make their money off that shit and for the Licks who like drinking blood polluted with it.

Just a few nights beforehand, more tickets go out, this time to the high rollers who by now have been pestering and cajoling Hide and his staff for weeks. These tickets cost more — a lot more — but they include access to the VIP room, to any live performances going on in the second stage (if there is one), and to whatever other events Hide has cooked up — fashion shows, performance art, gambling, auctions, you name it. To tell you the truth, even if they knew that they'd been charged 10 times as much as some unemployed rave rat, most of these snobs wouldn't care. They figure that the more cabbage they spend, the better time they'll have.

STORY IDEAS

- The Broken Glass Collective extends an offer to an appropriate member of the characters' coterie, if there's one who's particularly artistic or creative-minded, to join them. The Storyteller should make this a significant and desirable goal by demonstrating that the Collective has resources, status or influence that would benefit the character. In order to be accepted by the Collective, though, the character must come up with a strategy to generate excitement about the club's latest appearance and then implement it successfully. Details are left to the player's imagination; the Collective may assist in the execution of the plan, but the bulk of the work should be on the characters' shoulders.
- Word about a "nomadic rave club coming to town" has reached the ears of an entertainment writer from the city paper, who intends to visit the club and write a detailed review. Hide thinks the press could be good for the club, so rather than try to kill the story, he recruits the players' characters to baby-sit the writer and make sure she doesn't see anything that could be problematic. The Storyteller should throw a series of increasingly bizarre events at the players, challenging them to cope, cover-up or explain them.

THE BIG NIGHT

You might expect the doors of the club to open at sundown, but clever as that might be, it wouldn't give Hide a chance to inspect the premises. So the gates stay shut for a few hours while he walks the floor. Usually he's already been in town for a couple of weeks, making sure all the construction's done, the proper people have been talked to, the equipment's installed and everything works. He talks to each member of the staff personally, gets the names of anyone he doesn't know, works his charm to put

everyone in a good mood. He talks to the DJs to get a load of their plans and set lists; even though he doesn't really know the music, he wants to know that everybody's ready to roll.

About an hour before the doors open, Hide sits down with Thing to talk about security. The two of them discuss the local situation, the mood on the street, and decide how heavy-handed things are going to be. They've always got some boys on standby who they can call in if they decide there's trouble in the air. If no extraordinary measures are needed, they'll divvy up assignments — who watches the door, who's on the floor, who baby-sits the cash room, who makes the pickups from the registers, and so on. Doing this at the last minute makes it harder for someone on the staff to try any funny business.

Officially, the club opens up at 11 pm, but Hide never gives the door staff the nod until there's some kind of line outside. The ginks at the door are handy with their mitts, usually pack a few heaters, and include at least one ghoul, plus three or four guys who could kick over a fire hydrant if they felt like it. Used to be that you could pay at the door, but lately Hide's changed the policy, so they won't let in anyone who doesn't have a ticket or who isn't on the guest list. And Hide's been cracking down on the staff lately, so you can't bribe your way through either. A side effect of this

is that there are always some enterprising scalpers hanging around, ready to sell their tickets at three times the original price. Oh, and bribing your way in still works, of course, but you just have to be discreet and know which of the security and door crew are crooked.

As far as the club goes, there's not much left for Hide to do at this point but stand back and let the thing run itself. But you know how it is with some of these young Licks, they always have to keep busy or some unpleasant realities start to sink in. Hide spends the first hour or two in the lobby, or whatever passes for one, greeting guests and trying to get a feel for the crowd. After that, he wanders through the club for a while, touching base with the staff and making sure everything's running smoothly. He also spends time watching the security monitors, going over paperwork and brokering any back-room deals he's got scheduled for the evening.

I can't tell you what Thing does during the party; mixing with the beautiful people isn't really his style. He's been known to prowls the neighborhood on particularly rough nights, but that seems to be the exception. Usually he just takes a powder and doesn't turn up again until Hide has more work for him. Maybe Hide gives him a few nights off to deal with personal business, or maybe he just doesn't enjoy the sight of people enjoying themselves.



There's a lot that can go sour on any given night, but the kinks that concern Hide the most are the fights. Like I mentioned before, he's got a security squad who keeps an eye on the main dance floor. These guys are good; at the first sign of a scuffle, they'll swarm in, separate the combatants and pull them off the floor and away from the guests before anyone notices there's been a problem. They're authorized to deal with troublemakers however they see fit, which usually means working the offenders with brickbats, then tossing their beaten, moaning heaps into the back alley. Besides five or six guys who watch each dance floor — some of whom are Kindred — there are also up to a dozen other security types roaming throughout the building. Usually they work in pairs, but they all have radios to call for backup or to contact Hide if they run into a ruckus they can't handle.

One of the jobs of the security teams is to pick up cash every hour from the bartenders. Believe it or not, Hide pulls in more dough from selling liquor than he makes at the door. The prices are twice what they'd be anywhere else in town, but when you're in the only joint with electricity and heat in the whole block, where else can you go to get loaded? So the social butterflies pay through the nose and don't blink. The kids who got in with the cheap tickets will buy from the so-called "smart bar." The drinks are cut-rate, but since they're basically water, fruit juice and bulk vitamins, the mark-up's still pretty sweet. And anyone who wants it gets free bottled water, which cuts down on people dropping from dehydration after dancing for an hour or two without a break.

Now we're getting to the part of the evening that I don't really understand. I mean, it's old news that Caine's sons and daughters get off on eyeballing each other, seeing who's still around, schmoozing and keeping an ear open for gossip. And I get the appeal of spending a night surrounded by rich, good-looking kine who get progressively drunker and stupider as the night goes on. What I don't savvy is that a significant portion of the Cainites in the crowd don't seem to show up looking for blood or gossip. They turn up all jazzed and eager for something called "the vibe."

What happens is, sometime between one and three A.M., there's a critical mass on the dance floor. You got a mob that's been out there for an hour, maybe two. You've got music that's been pounding longer than that, with no break between songs, no songs at all really, just one kind of sound bleeding into the next. The DJ's been speeding up the rhythm, then notching down, then pumping it up again, taking the crowd right to the edge, then pulling back. And then, wham, instead of slowing things down he speeds it up, then goes even faster. And the crowd's right there with him, not even dancing anymore, just moving. I see their faces and it's like they're in a trance. I guess some of it's drugs and

exhaustion combining with adrenaline, but damned if the same thing doesn't happen to Kindred as well as kine. And this happens in every room set up to handle sound from a DJ or live performer.

I asked a Brujah I know about this, after watching her cavort on the dance floor for a half hour. All she would say was that she caught "the vibe" and how it unites everyone with the music and all this kind of crap... I couldn't get a straight answer out of her. But I wouldn't be too quick to dismiss this mojo, whatever it is. At least some of the Cainites who turn up at the club are looking for the vibe experience, and I'll go out on a limb here and say some of them are hooked on it.

Usually there's one peak "vibe moment" (which can stretch out for a half hour or more) per night, and occasionally there's a second, smaller peak. After that, things start winding down. Everybody senses it. The DJ starts putting out slower music. The dancing crowd breaks into smaller groups and people start drifting off the floor. The place starts emptying out. By about six A.M., there's less than 200 people left in the building. This is the best time to feed, if that's why you're there, since it's easier to catch someone alone in a stairwell or a bathroom. Plus the security's not as tight, people are tired and things get a little lax.

An hour before sunrise (which varies by the season — you should remember that, since Hide certainly does), Hide clears all the patrons out of the place and sends his guys to do a thorough sweep of the building to catch any stragglers. Then he'll tally up the night's receipts, pay the staff and send them home. He'll have several cars waiting for him and his assistants; one of them will take the money to the back while the others act as decoys. If he's feeling particularly insecure, he'll use clan connections to get a security escort, but he doesn't like to do this since it comes at a hefty fee.

By the time Hide's ready to lam out for whatever fancy hotel room he's booked himself, his day team will have arrived and started working. These are not locals, but a specially trained and screened group of regulars. They'll strip the joint down in a matter of hours, hauling out whatever's not nailed down and dismantling whatever is. Working from Hide's detailed instructions, they'll return rented equipment, put anything that can be salvaged or reused into storage, and clean up any "unpleasantness" that might have been left behind by unruly guests. It may sound like overkill, but Hide understands that the club lives or dies on its mystique. If any guests come around the next night, he wants them scratching their heads and wondering if they maybe imagined the whole thing.

STORY IDEAS

- The players' characters are enjoying an evening at the club when one of them is enticed by a blood doll who offers herself as a willing source of vitae. Unfortunately, she's already been fed on at least once that night, and the character accidentally drinks her dry. Worse, she turns out to be an extremely popular DJ who was the headline performer of the evening and is due in the booth in 10 minutes. If Hide finds out....

- An informer brings word to the players' characters that sheds light on Thing's absence during the club's openings. Apparently his granddaughter once attended the club, caught a glimpse of him, and was able to recognize him despite his disfigurement. Now she turns up at almost every opening in the hopes of finding him again. If the players can figure out who Thing's granddaughter is, they'll have valuable information that could be used against him or sold to someone else.

- The players' characters overhear a strange rumor circulating among the Cainites who frequent the club regularly. Apparently an unnamed Malkavian claims to have experienced an almost Golconda-like state while immersed in the vibe of the club one night. According to the rumor, an evening of non-stop dancing released the vampire in question from the influence of the Beast for several hours afterward. While no one else has made such an outrageous claim, several other club regulars have stepped forward to they've had say brief flashes of such freedom after losing themselves in the music and motion. Attendance at the club is surging, wild rumors are flying and Hide is worried that he'll be inundated with Kindred looking for something he can't provide. He uses his connections, the players' characters, their sires or elders to get them to find the Malkavian who started this whole mess.

3. PARTY CRASHERS

Okay, so the Succubus Club holds a special place in the dead hearts of many Kindred, at least those who've heard about it. That doesn't mean everybody's a fan. The club has its enemies, who would just as soon see the place get 86'ed in a big way.

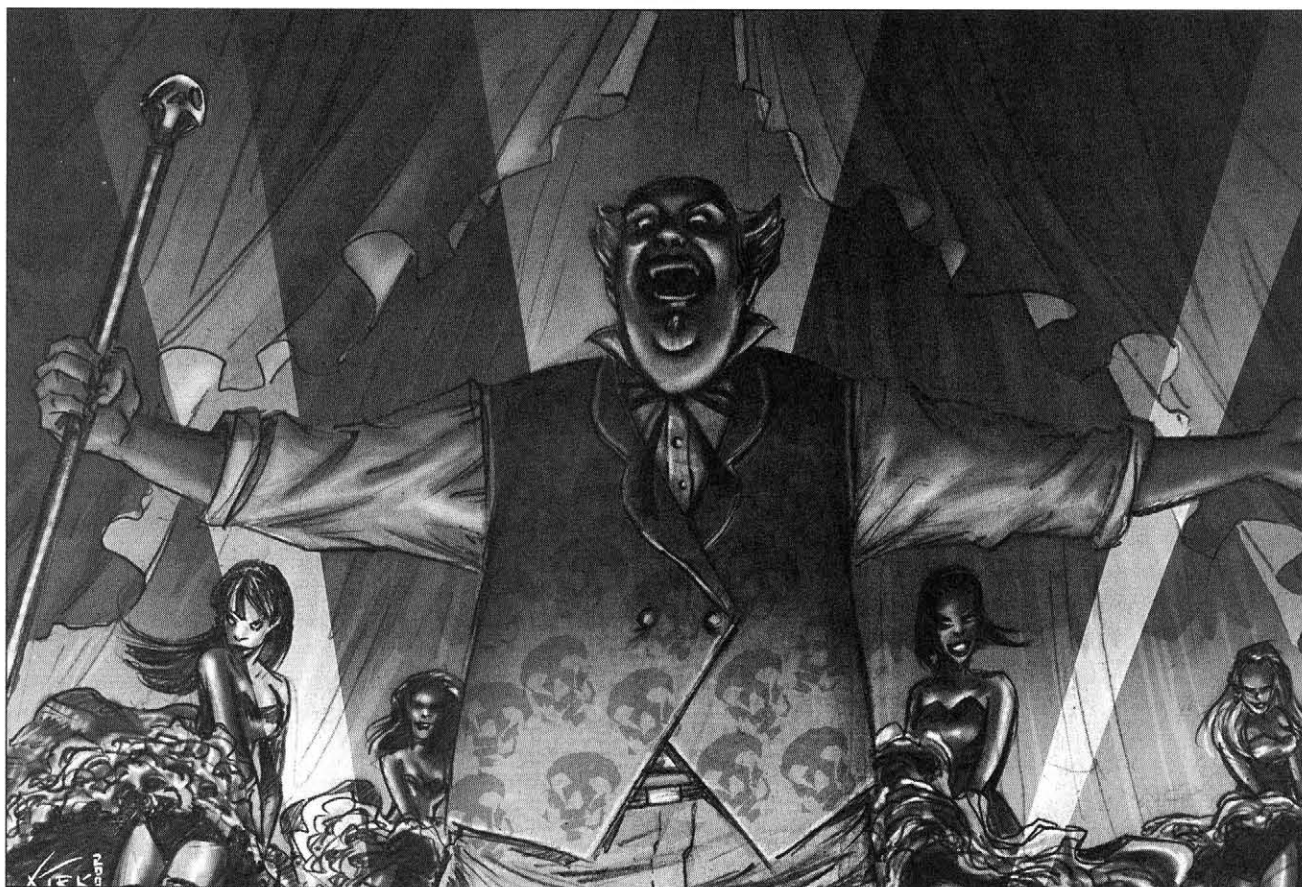
THE OLD GUARD

You don't find many traditionalists standing in line the night the club's in town (though I'm not going to say it never happens). To tell you the truth, if you didn't know better, you might think the SC was specifically designed to piss off the primogen. First of all, it overtly embraces — if I can use that term — the present over the past. The music, the clothes, the language, everything about the club is alien to those elders who spend most of their time reminiscing about the Hanseatic League, Montesquieu and the nights before moveable type and pasteurization. So naturally, they're going to distrust the club, if not despise it outright.

Its modern style alone wouldn't draw much fire from your typical world-weary Machiavellian types, but the other thing that gets under the skin of the elders is the way the club kind of plays the edges of the Masquerade. The way they see it, a social event that encourages Kindred to let their hair down in the company of the living is against the rules. It's one thing to use a mortal hangout, whether an opera house or a strip club, as a feeding ground, but a club that makes off as a Kindred institution should be reserved for Kindred alone, they say, or sooner or later some kine is going to get an eyeful of something he shouldn't.

And then there's the fact that the club's never under Elysium. Now this goes back to the nights of the Chicago club, and it's a smart move: If safety's guaranteed, you lose the element of danger and the club loses its edge. The way the elders see it, though, put so many Cainites in a room with no Elysium and eventually some hot-headed neonate will settle a score right in front of half the social register. Or something. Add the fact that it's a popular diversion for anarchs, fledglings, Caitiff and others who don't know better, and it's a powder keg ready to blow a hole through the Masquerade. So they say.

There are some princes who dislike the club as well. It's not hard to see why. You've got an outsider interested setting up shop in your city, bringing who knows what along with it. Some suspect — correctly, I might add — that the club is used as a cover for fencing stolen goods, drugs sales or anything else that someone wants to keep on the Q.T. I know of at least one prince who's convinced the club is a front for the Sabbat; I have no evidence of that, but that doesn't mean some Sabbat agents don't use the club as a meeting place (and Camarilla pigeons could do the same thing in Sabbat territory). Hide has a pretty good idea which princes are opposed to the club, which is why it's never turned up in certain cities.



STORY IDEAS

- The Succubus Club is coming to town and a faction among the elders isn't happy about it, including the sire of one or more players' characters. To discredit the club, they send the characters to start a fight or cause some other kind of trouble. What they don't tell the characters is that their prince will be at the club that night. Her bodyguards will take a hand in quashing any violence that breaks out, and she'll call a heavy penalty on anyone who ruins her evening out.

- Hide approaches the players' characters and offers to pay them handsomely if they'll deliver some a package to the site of the next club opening. It's not too hard to figure out that the package in question consists of stolen goods. After accepting the offer, the characters are faced with three challenges. First, the "package" is bulky and difficult to disguise, let alone move (details are left to the Storyteller, but the item could be anything from a grand piano to a cage of live animals). Second, they have to move it not within a single city, as Hide implied, but from one city to another. And third, the item was stolen from the prince of the city they're moving to (a fact they learn when the prince's agents come looking for it and presume the characters stole it).

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

So far the Succubus Club has been the only game in town, at least the only game of its kind. But lately a few wise heads have glommed on to the idea and are starting up ventures of their own. They've got a lot of ground to cover before they can catch up to the SC, but stranger things have happened. Here are the main contenders.

CLUB ILLUSION

Like the SC, Club I is trying to be a nomadic nightclub that caters to the in-crowd, both kine and Kindred. Its angle is that it stays in business not just for one night, but for seven. At first glance that may seem like a good idea, but the way Hide sees it, staying open for a week is more than seven times the headache. You draw more attention from the local elders and anyone with a grudge. You have to clean up the place every day, and you have to worry about last night's troublemakers coming back with a grudge. Plus you have to be more careful about working things through with the local law enforcement; there's less chance of staying under their radar.

Club Illusion has had two runs so far, and from what I hear they haven't been too impressive. The

first time out, the floor to the warehouse they were using collapsed, ruining a few thousand dollars' worth of rented sound equipment and forcing the place to close three nights early. Their second outing was almost shut down when some Giovanni backers pulled their support away at the last minute; somehow the promoter managed to scrape up some cash to keep the doors open for the full week. But now he's in debt up to his ears and might not be able to afford another go at it. Time will tell.

NOD

This is an interesting one. Apparently it started out as a tax shelter for a Toreador named St. George who came into some cash when her sire "retired" and left the country. So eventually the IRS comes sniffing around, wondering where this non-existent "entrepreneurial enterprise" is located and she slaps together some dive to cover her tracks. And damned if people don't start showing up, and the more she tries to keep people away, the more they start knocking down her door. Eventually she decides that running a nightclub is a nice diversion.

Nod is, in a lot of ways, the opposite of the Succubus Club. It's real low key, or "minimalist" if you want an egghead term for it. There's no frills, no decoration, not much more than a bunch of empty rooms, some simple sound equipment and a couple of small bars. You're much more likely to find live — or undead — entertainment at Nod than at the Succubus Club. As you'd expect, the owner knows plenty of musicians, some more famous than talented, not to mention poets and performance artists and mugs I won't even try to classify. So the place is getting something of a rep for showcasing acts that are beyond the curve.

Last year the lease on the club ran out and someone — Hide blames an ex-business partner of his — put the bug in St. George's ear to take the act on the road. Here's another big difference between Nod and the Succubus: St. George has a lot more support from members of her clan than Hide ever did. Basically, if she wants to move the club to any city with a strong Toreador presence, some Degenerate will probably do the legwork for her (I think it's a pride thing, though I wouldn't be surprised if the clan bigwigs have their claws in the till). Usually the club puts down roots for a month or so, then disappears for another month and turns up somewhere else. So far it's a penny-ante operation, and like I said, much more low-key than the SC. But it could very well snowball into something bigger, and I can see the worry lines in Hide's forehead when somebody mentions it.

STORY IDEAS

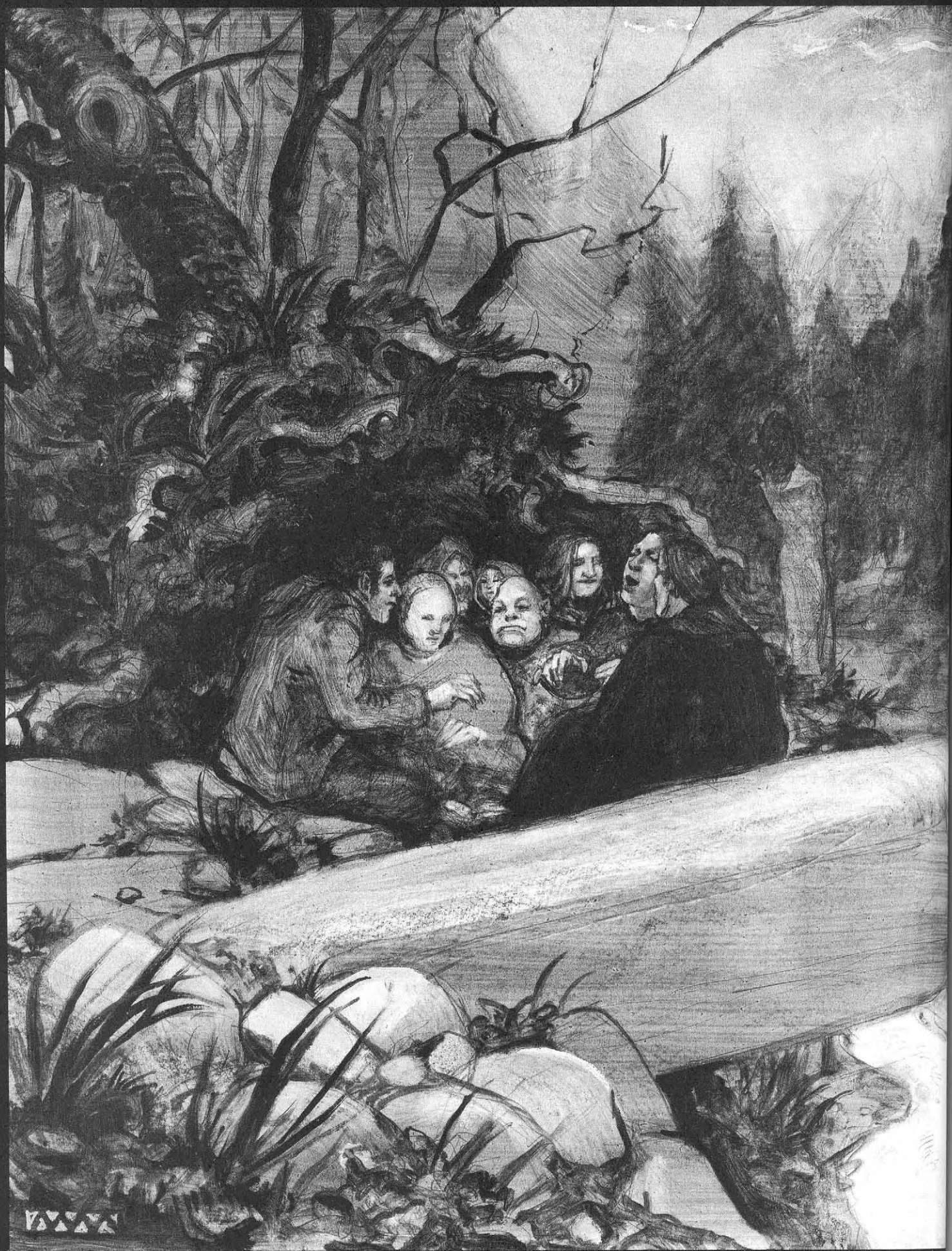
- The players' characters are approached by the owners of Club Illusion with a proposition: Find out where the Succubus will be appearing next, and we'll cut you in on our profits. The trick is, they have to find this out at least two months before the tickets go on sale, so Club I can make arrangements to open first in the same city.
- If one of the players' characters has any talent or inclination for performance, St. George approaches her and offers her the stage at Nod (as an opening act or as the headliner, whatever's appropriate for the character). Soon after, a representative sent by Hide (or possibly Thing) will try to persuade the character that it's in her interest to turn down the offer. As the concert date draws near, Hide uses increasingly nasty tactics to keep the character from performing.

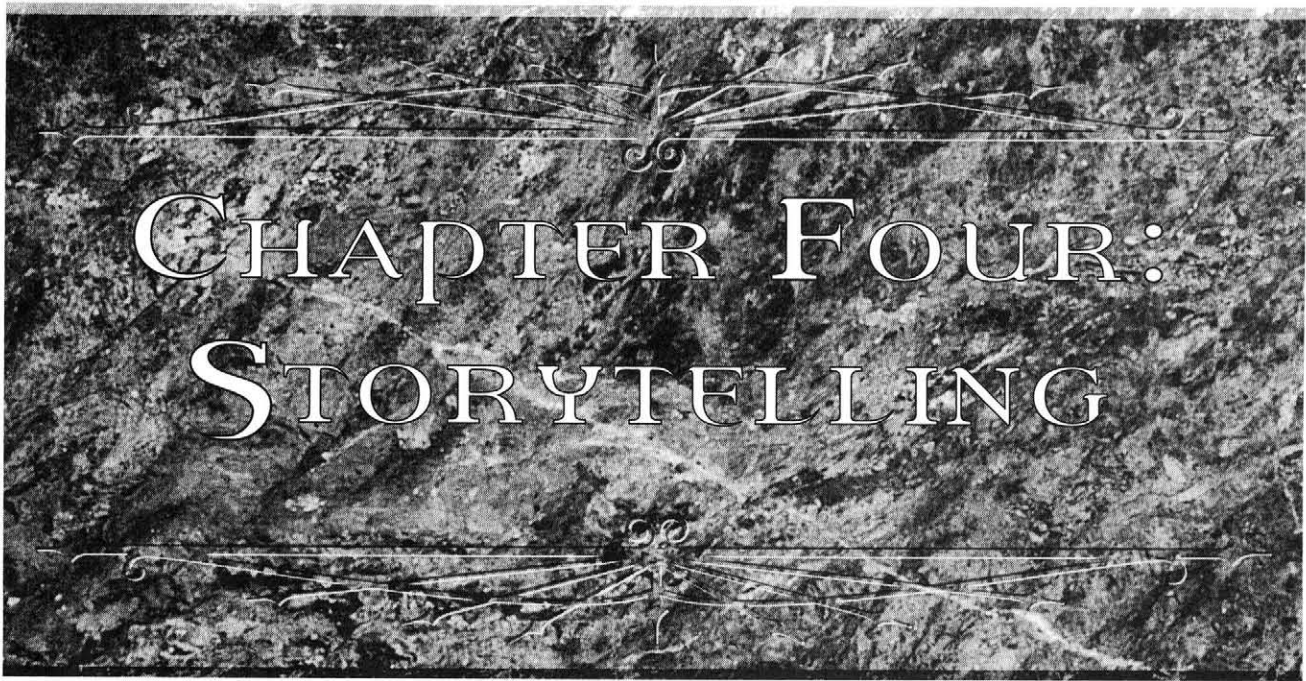
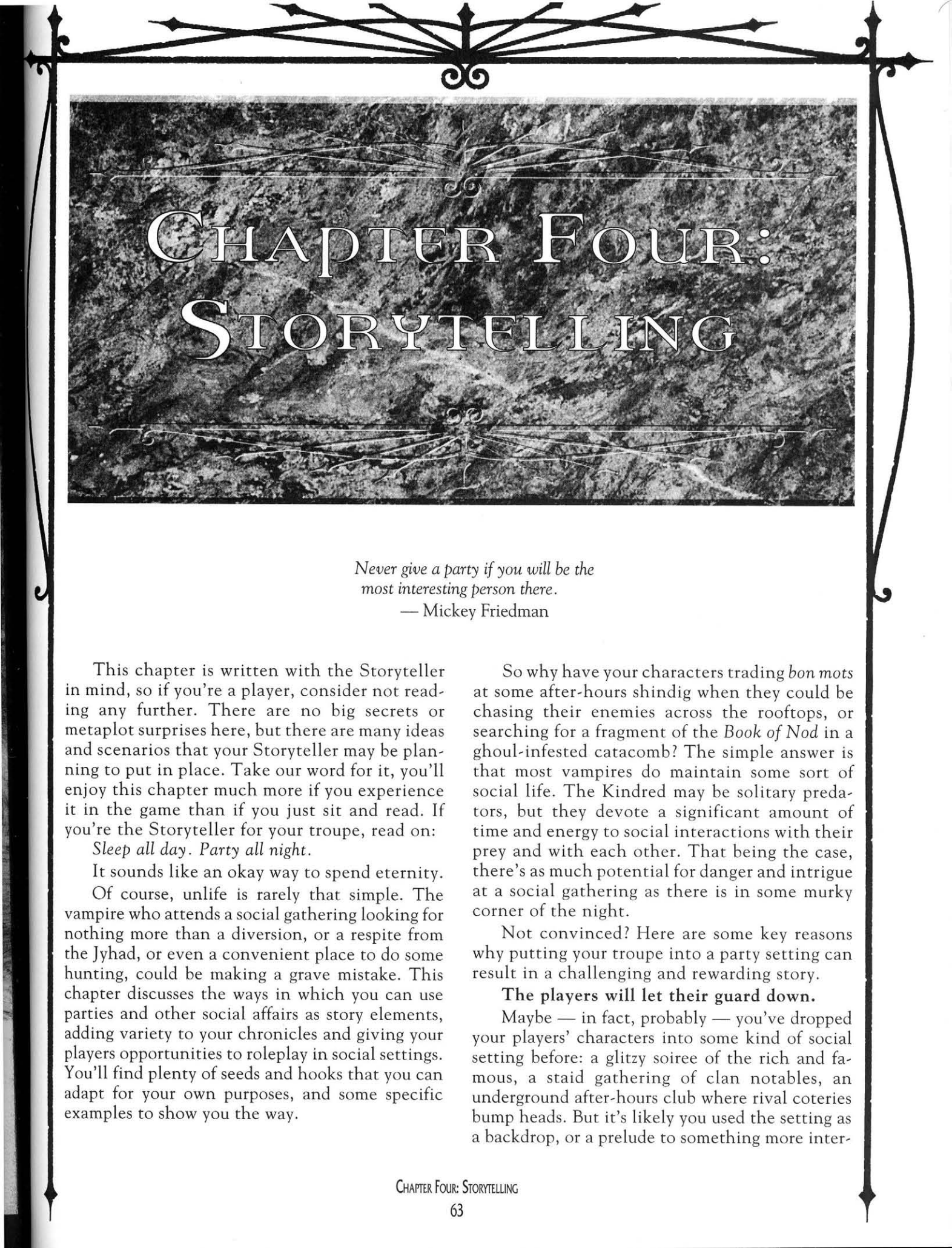
FINAL THOUGHTS

So now you've got the full Monte. You know everything I do about the Succubus Club. What you do with it is your business. I'll just dish out one last plate of advice before I shut my head: Don't think of the Succubus Club as a nightclub. Think of it as a library, one whose books only come together for one night at a time. Or maybe as a jigsaw puzzle, where certain pieces fit together and give you a picture you'd never see anywhere or anytime else. Just about every time I spend some time in that place, I manage to dig up some juicy fact that keeps me in the swim. Maybe it's the gumshoe in me — it'll take more than a few decades of nightcrawling to make me stop thinking like a private dick. Like, just the other night I bumped gums with a harpy I used to know and learned something real interesting. Seems a certain sheriff, who disappeared a while back and didn't leave a forwarding address, was spotted in the club the night he supposedly up and left the planet. And this harpy tells me he was with somebody she didn't recognize, but her description tells me exactly who it was. Now it seems to me that this unnamed person was the major suspect when this sheriff did his vanishing act. The only thing that saved him was that he had an airtight alibi.

Until now.

Keep that story in mind when you send my fee.





CHAPTER FOUR: STORYTELLING

*Never give a party if you will be the
most interesting person there.*

— Mickey Friedman

This chapter is written with the Storyteller in mind, so if you're a player, consider not reading any further. There are no big secrets or metaplot surprises here, but there are many ideas and scenarios that your Storyteller may be planning to put in place. Take our word for it, you'll enjoy this chapter much more if you experience it in the game than if you just sit and read. If you're the Storyteller for your troupe, read on:

Sleep all day. Party all night.

It sounds like an okay way to spend eternity.

Of course, unlife is rarely that simple. The vampire who attends a social gathering looking for nothing more than a diversion, or a respite from the Jyhad, or even a convenient place to do some hunting, could be making a grave mistake. This chapter discusses the ways in which you can use parties and other social affairs as story elements, adding variety to your chronicles and giving your players opportunities to roleplay in social settings. You'll find plenty of seeds and hooks that you can adapt for your own purposes, and some specific examples to show you the way.

So why have your characters trading *bon mots* at some after-hours shindig when they could be chasing their enemies across the rooftops, or searching for a fragment of the *Book of Nod* in a ghoulish-infested catacomb? The simple answer is that most vampires do maintain some sort of social life. The Kindred may be solitary predators, but they devote a significant amount of time and energy to social interactions with their prey and with each other. That being the case, there's as much potential for danger and intrigue at a social gathering as there is in some murky corner of the night.

Not convinced? Here are some key reasons why putting your troupe into a party setting can result in a challenging and rewarding story.

The players will let their guard down.

Maybe — in fact, probably — you've dropped your players' characters into some kind of social setting before: a glitzy soiree of the rich and famous, a staid gathering of clan notables, an underground after-hours club where rival coterie bump heads. But it's likely you used the setting as a backdrop, or a prelude to something more inter-

esting, not as the central element of the gaming session. And that's what your players will be expecting when you introduce the next social event — only things will be different. This time, the music and laughter hides a significant threat of some sort, one the characters may not see coming.

Crowds are dangerous.

A vampire who attends a classy art opening or a fraternity kegger may think of herself as a wolf surrounded by cattle. But even a wolf is vulnerable to a stampede. Loss of self-control is much more dangerous in the ballroom than in some shadowy back alley. One may dominate (or eliminate) a single witness to a feeding, but what happens when a character fails to take proper precautions and is seen by a whole clique of party guests? Beside the risks of being caught in the act, there's an increased likelihood that a guest will pass on the effects of drugs or alcohol through her blood. For vampires, every party is a Masquerade party, with no unmasking permitted. You can use a social event to demonstrate that the players should not underestimate the vulnerabilities of their characters. If they don't specify that they're taking appropriate measures when partying, make sure their characters suffer the consequences.

Other Kindred are present.

Another major advantage of using a party setting in your story is that it's an excellent chance to bring your players' characters into contact with other Kindred. Furthermore, you can use this opportunity to plant some ideas into the players' heads about their antagonists. Does the Ventrue importer whose office the characters ransacked last night glare at them suspiciously, make a joke at their expense or simply ignore them? Does the Toreador hosting the event look nervous, confident or distracted? Don't spoon-feed the details to the players, but be prepared ahead of time to reward clever observations and questions with information that will advance the story (which could mean feeding the characters misinformation or lies!). Of course, while the characters observe their enemies, their opposite numbers will be observing them. So take note of any slip-ups the players make that could inform their foes.

It's a chance for good roleplaying.

Any player can improvise action-movie dialogue while putting his claws through a

cantankerous ghoul. But can your players come up with an answer to "So, what's your take on the anarch problem?" or even "Haven't seen you around for awhile, what have you been up to?" Players who truly enjoy bringing their characters to life will appreciate the opportunity to engage in dialog with supporting characters. It also gives you, the Storyteller, a chance to have fun acting out more roles than you might if the story was set elsewhere.

It can add pathos.

Kindred often use social engagements to distract themselves from the horrors of unlife. But sometimes a gathering can have the opposite effect: It becomes a torturous reminder of enjoyments forever denied to the children of Caine. You can use social events as a tool to remind the players' characters that for all their power and deathlessness, they can't enjoy simple pleasures like a slice of birthday cake or a flirtatious kiss under the mistletoe. You can add additional tragic overtones by using a social affair to reacquaint a character with some aspect of her mortal existence: a chance encounter with a childhood friend, a party guest who resembles a long-dead lover or family member, a toast that recalls the speech her father gave at her wedding. Kindred are not just mortals with unique abilities, they're not mortal and they're not alive. That point is never clearer to a vampire than when she's surrounded by the living.

PARTY AS SETTING

"I thought you said you were the best safecracker in the business." Flyte checked his watch then glanced at the short stretch of stairs that led up and out of the crypt. He could hear faint music and laughter drifting in the night air.

"That was when I was alive," the Nosferatu growled back at him. "I haven't cracked a box in 10 years." He crouched over his bag of tools, making it easy for Flyte to see how Beetleman got his nickname. His rounded back, bald head and stick-like limbs made him look positively insectoid. "Besides," he went on, "This isn't a safe, it's a mausoleum."

"A mausoleum built like a safe." Flyte checked his watch again. Time would be tighter that he thought. He had to get back to the party soon. In the moonlight, his body-double could fool anyone. But once everybody went back inside, the imposter would be obvious and his alibi would be blown. If only he could trust Beetleman to open the safe alone. But the



greedy thief would scuttle away with whatever he found. "There's no telling what 'His Eminence' is hiding in that back chamber," Flyte muttered.

"That's it," Beetleman said suddenly. "The charges are set." He walked backwards towards the staircase, laying cable as he went. "Say the word and we blow it."

Flyte licked his lips. He looked up at the roof of the mausoleum, just a few inches over their heads. "You're sure those explosives won't bury us in here?"

"Better to risk that than to be on the lawn with fireworks exploding overhead, if you ask me," the Nosferatu snapped. "But, yes, I'm sure. Ready?"

"Wait, quiet," Flyte said. He closed his eyes and listened. Then he heard it, a low rumble like a thunderclap in the distance. Then another. And another. "Right on time. There it goes, the finale. Five solid minutes of explosions. Nobody will hear us. Go."

Beetleman squeezed the gadget in his hand. "Ten-second fuse," he said. "Nine, eight, seven..."

Something was wrong. Flyte ran up the steps and raised his head into the cool night. He could see the party guests across the lawn, silhouetted against the sky. But aside from the distant mutterings of the crowd, there was no sound.

The fireworks had stopped.

"Three," Beetleman was saying. "Two, one..."

...BY ANY OTHER NAME

We use the term "party" quite often throughout this chapter, but don't get the wrong idea. Most of the concepts discussed here could be applied to just about any kind of get-together. Parties, yes, including formal balls, open raves, dances, galas, receptions and festivals, but also, to a greater or lesser degree, assemblies, openings, rituals, contests, salons or conventions. Any event at which Kindred choose to gather with themselves or with mortals is fair game for the treatments described on these pages.

The simplest way to use a party or social gathering in your story is to set a scene there. But don't just start by saying something like, "So you're at this cocktail party in a swank uptown condo, when suddenly..." Ask yourself if the scene could just as easily take place in a library, at the supermarket or at a bus stop. If it could, you're missing an opportunity to draw on the special qualities of a party setting and make the event more important to the characters. Here are some ways to do that:

UNLIFE OF THE PARTY.

Even at a small gathering, there's an unlimited range of interactions that might take place. By all means, use the setting as a chance to fill in your players on clues and information that are important for moving the story along. But also take the chance to feed them false leads, conflicting data and fun encounters. Here are some suggestions that you can modify to fit your scene.

- A young woman approaches one of the players' characters and insists that she's met him before. The player has never seen her before in his life (or unlife). Unless he takes extraordinary measures, the woman will not leave the character alone for the length of the party.

- One of the players' characters notices a nervous looking stranger loitering by the door. Careful observation will reveal he is a vampire. The stranger will not want to engage the characters in conversation, but if they are persuasive and clever enough to keep him talking, they may pick up clues that he's a Sabbat fledgling abandoned by his sire to find his way out of Camarilla territory (or the reverse, if the event takes place on Sabbat turf). The characters can react as they wish, but if they give him a little help he will pay back the favor at a later date. On the other hand, they could turn him in and reap a reward... if they can prove he's Sabbat.

- One of the characters is engaged in conversation with a tall, bearded man who wears a ring with a distinctive sigil engraved on it. Characters with even a passing familiarity with Thaumaturgy will recognize that the engraving is an obscure, but valid, occult symbol. If asked about the ring, the man will make a veiled reference to being a magician of some sort. If a character speaks to him for 15 minutes or more, it will become clear that the man is not a true sorcerer, just a mortal who's read many, many books.

- A nondescript party guest bumps into, and accidentally spills wine on, one of the players' characters. She apologizes profusely. A half hour later, she does the exact same thing again. About an hour after that, she does it *again*. There's no ulterior motive here, just bad luck, but the players don't know that.

- One of the characters notices someone leaving the party wearing her (the character's) coat. By the time she pursues, the person with the coat is nowhere to be found. It was an honest mistake, but one that could be inconvenient, depending on what the character keeps in her coat pockets.

- After spending some time at the party, a player's character notices the same person staring at him again and again, always standing just within his peripheral vision. When the character looks around to see who this person is, the stranger is gone. Later, the stranger is once again visible in the corner of the character's eye. No one else can see the stranger. Apparently it's some type of spirit, who may or may not follow the character when he leaves the party (your choice).

- One of the characters meets a mortal who's almost her exact double. The resemblance is purely by chance, and not as perfect as a twin's. But clever characters might see some useful possibilities in having a mortal look-alike.

- There's a bright flash of light, and then the character realizes his picture has just been taken. Someone's making the rounds of the party and taking pictures of the guests. Depending on the character's history, it may or may not matter that he's been photographed.

- One or more players' characters overhears a conversation between some of the mortal guests, one of whom is a doctor. The physician describes two or more puzzling cases that she's seen in the ER in the past few months, in which people died from loss of blood with no obvious wounds. The deaths occurred near one of the character's havens; the Storyteller should leave it unclear whether they're the handiwork of that particular character.

- A drunk, belligerent mortal approaches one of the characters and tries to pick a fight. The drunk is such an obvious weakling that no one could possibly consider him a threat, but he won't back down and will hassle the character for as long as he's at the party. If the character overreacts, the partygoers are likely to sympathize with the drunk, and Kindred will quickly spread the word about the character's lack of subtlety.

Use the party to set the tone.

If you're using the scene at the beginning of a new chronicle or story, it can help you generate a mood that will serve the story in the subsequent scenes. Suppose your characters are about to be put through the wringer. You've got a story lined up that will cause them to lose everything they have, set them running for their unlives or threaten all the resources and status they've worked so hard to earn. Start the story off with a fabulous revelry, at which the characters are treated like honored guests and the toast of kine and Kindred alike. Get them to think everything's going their way, and later they'll be all the more blindsided when disaster strikes. Alternately, use the party to create a sense of impending doom. Nothing goes right: The band's equipment breaks down, the roof leaks during a thunderstorm, the Kindred present are edgy and itching for a fight.

Use the party to sketch out supporting characters.

As mentioned earlier, a social gathering is a good chance to influence the players' perceptions of other characters in the story. Fewer scenes make the point about a character's wealth and status than a huge, decadent bash with a crowd of celebrities, rivers of champagne and mountains of caviar. What conclusions might the characters draw if their Kindred host provides them with willing kine freely offering vitae, or states explicitly that no feeding is to be done on the premises? If the prince hosts a reception, do the players' characters hear assembled elders openly complain about the accommodations, or do the elders thank him profusely even though the lighting is bad and the building smells like fish? A party is an excellent opportunity for players to exercise their powers of observation, and for you to practice the "show, don't tell" approach to storytelling.

Make the party an opportunity.

Sometimes a party is just a party. But other times, it's a confluence of events that might not normally occur. Because of where, when or with whom the affair takes place, the party might give the players' characters a chance to accomplish a specific goal. Perhaps it's a fundraiser at the Museum of Antiquities, the perfect opportunity to get into the building without having to deal with the complex alarm system that's usually in place. Or suppose this particular Brujah rant is likely to attract every rabble-rouser in the city, making it an excellent opportunity to find that one with the scar who broke into the Nosferatu's

haven last week... much easier than searching every seedy bar and underground club in town.

Use the party to complicate the characters' unlives.

The flip side to the scenario above. Don't hesitate to use a social gathering as a monkey wrench in the characters' plans. A party usually comes complete with bright lights, noise, and lots of potential witnesses — three things most Kindred would prefer to do without. What if they arrive to kidnap the senator's daughter only to find that there's a huge party going on — and a costume party, at that? Perhaps the hated enemy they've followed to a remote part of town isn't returning to his haven at all, but has taken refuge in an underground club and is now surrounded by allies.

Even mundane kine-centered events can be a thorn in a Kindred's side. You can ratchet up the nuisance level of the party as you see fit. Most Kindred are unlikely to be perturbed by a neighbor having a raucous all-night bash; they'll probably be out most of the night, after all. But what if there are still people wandering around the decrepit apartment building just as the sun's about to rise? What if the neighbors throw their son's birthday party during the day, and a nosy child finds an open window in the mysterious house next door? Or what if some teenagers decide to throw a keg party in what they think is an abandoned building — and they start setting up in the character's haven before the sun goes down?

PARTY AS CHALLENGE

Sirena clutched her coat tighter around her shoulders. That smell, she thought. I'll never get it out of my hair. I wish I'd thought to stop breathing before we came down here. In life, she'd hardly ever left her hometown; now here she was spending the 10-year anniversary of her Embrace thousands of miles from home, in the middle of South America, her not even able to speak Spanish. It was almost too much to take — the long journey, always rushing to get to the next haven before sunrise, risking the consequences of delayed flights and missed transfers — just to end up here, standing around in a sewer waiting for something to happen.

She looked at her sire, who wouldn't take his

eyes off the horde of Nosferatu lumbering out of the main tunnel. "What are they doing?" she asked at last. Maximillian answered while keeping his eyes locked on the Sewer Rats as they bore their huge burden toward the gaping hole in the center of the chamber. "Watch," he told Sirena. She watched the vampires carry the statue right to the edge of the abyss, then push it, tumbling, into it. A strange, mournful song rose up from the vampires as they watched it fall.

"What was that?"

"That," Maximillian said, finally turning to look at her, "was a 2,000-year-old idol, a stone carving of the fourth aspect of the demon Baal-at. A priceless work of art, and one of the most valuable artifacts possessed by any Kindred on this continent."

"But why did they—"

"It's called a potlatch, my dear. A tradition native to the ancient tribes of this area. It involves the ritual destruction of one's most prized possessions."

"But — but why?"

Maximillian sighed in that tired way that made Sirena feel like she was back in grade school. "It's a way of improving status. The participants keep destroying their most valuable possessions, upping the ante until no one dares to continue. Whoever's last to sacrifice is declared the victor."

"Well, that's the stupidest thing I ever heard."

"On the contrary, sweetie, it's eminently logical. Whoever has the nerve, the willingness to sacrifice everything and anything, that person is most worthy of the obedience and respect of the others. This ceremony takes place every 10 years, and the victor holds great status until the next ceremony. It's remarkable, really. That these who hold so few comforts are willing to sacrifice them in this way."

"They — they're staring at us."

"Yes. It's our turn. I went to considerable effort to earn the right to participate in this year's ceremony."

"You did? But why?"

"This is an old, old bloodline. They hold many secrets, Sirena. I've seen only hints, but they're enough to make me do anything to gain influence here."

"But how? You didn't bring anything valuable, did you?"

"Come closer to the pit."

Not all parties are simple matters of standing around, eating and drinking (or pretending to) and making small talk. Some get-togethers require the guests to be active participants in the

evening's entertainment. When the guests are young (and mortal), games like pin the tail on the donkey, musical chairs, or later, spin the bottle, added an element of competition, challenge and unpredictability to the affair. In the World of Darkness, party games go far beyond Twister or Trivial Pursuit. In a party-as-challenge scenario, the social event includes a contest or trial of some sort, anything from a "battle of the bands" to armed combat. The characters must accomplish a task to earn a reward, or to avoid punishment. Their success will bring them renown, respect, or material gain, but failure will be a humiliating experience witnessed by a crowd of their peers and betters at the very least.

Let's get physical.

From tribal gatherings to family picnics, tests of strength and skill have long been considered an important part of social intercourse. Some challenges are informal and optional, but the character who can beat that big Brujah at arm wrestling or outrace the fastest Gangrel at the gathering might earn vital esteem that will help them reach a greater goal. In other cases, you might have the characters arrive at an event expecting an evening of (uneaten) finger foods and small talk, only to find that they're obligated to undergo ritual combat or contests of strength and endurance. The Sabbath is notorious for mixing violence with pleasure, but in any given city, there's always the possibility that some arcane Camarilla tradition is being revived (perhaps the elders miss the nights of Roman gladiatorial matches). Or maybe the leadership of an anarch group have decided that the best way to keep their members on their toes is to institute a Kindred "fight club."

A useful way to bring physical danger into a social setting is to subject the characters to some sort of initiation. An initiation ceremony is often part ritual, part social event: an ordeal for those being initiated and a chance for those already in the club to enjoy each others' company and dish out some of the punishment they themselves once endured. Be sure to add to the characters' torment by surrounding them with a suitable audience. Perhaps a character seeking to join (or infiltrate) a Sabbath pack or Gehenna cult must not only prove how much fire she can handle without succumbing to Rötschreck, she has to do it while

enduring the jeers and laughter of the initiated who want to see her fail miserably.

Characters who don't understand the implications of an initiation ceremony, or don't realize that they're being tested and not just hassled, can make missteps that will have serious consequences. What makes an initiation different from harassment is the reward for besting the challenge, or the consequences of failing to do so. The stakes are higher. Success doesn't just earn respect or admiration, it brings the character into the group (or at least proves he's worthy of admission). And failure earns not just humiliation, it alienates the character from the collective. After all, they gave him a chance only to see their time and effort wasted. You can complicate matters by disguising the motivations of whoever's challenging the characters. If they're not certain what's going on, the characters might react in anger or outrage when all the Kindred in the room start pounding on them, proving to those assembled that they're a bunch of pitiful crybabies. On the other hand, if they stand fast and take it, maybe they're accepting a beating that's wholly unrelated to the true initiation, which comes later at the hands of a different group.

Performance Anxiety

Not all challenges need to involve Physical Attributes. A social gathering is an excellent chance for your players to flex those Traits that just don't come into play when they're battling Lupines or investigating a haunted cemetery. A careful look at your players' character sheets should enable you to come up with a contest that makes a player rely on (or wish she had) Skills or Knowledges that don't relate to physical combat.

These kinds of trials are less likely to be overt, "I challenge you to a duel" scenarios (though storytelling contests, musical showdowns and poetry slams are not unknown in kine or Kindred subcultures). Be creative in how you draw your players into the competition. You may be able to dangle an opportunity to gain status in front of a character's nose: Her sire has been planning this gala for six months, and now the soprano she booked has come down with pneumonia the night of the event. But wait... didn't the character sing in nightclubs before her Embrace? In other cases, performing may be the cost of admission to the event, even if the character doesn't know this in advance. When you've been enjoying the clan's hospitality for a few hours, and the other Gangrel all grow silent and wait for

you to step forward and tell a story, you'd better have something to say for yourself.

The challenge need not be a formal one. Perhaps there's a lull during a Toreador salon, when the host looks to a player's character and says, "Well, new guy, you haven't said much. What can you do to entertain us?" Rising to the occasion will ingratiate the character to the host, while failure will bring titters of laughter and lasting embarrassment. Initiations can also follow this kind of informal model. For example, the members of a social coterie might have a tradition of subjecting a new associate to a withering evening of put-downs, condensation and goading to see how she handles herself.

The right social challenge also gives players an opportunity to exercise their characters' Natures (and perhaps regain some Willpower). Bon Vivants, Competitors and Gallants are obviously in their element during social challenges. But what about the Deviant whose shockingly outrageous poetry captures the imagination of the jaded partygoers? Or the Traditionalist whose knowledge of Sabbat rituals allows her to upstage a bishop who tried to embarrass her in front of her peers? The ability to play piano, tell jokes or

GETTING INTO THE ACT

If your players are up for it, a social challenge is a chance for your players to express their own creativity and not just rely on their characters' dots. You could have them actually write out the haiku that's required of all guests at an Asian-themed ball, or challenge them to come up with riddles clever enough to impress the Malkavian who's trapped them at a tea party in an insane asylum. Players who can sing or play a musical instrument might enjoy the opportunity to combine their talents with some roleplaying. As the Storyteller, you can get into the act yourself by enacting the performance of one or more characters. You might offer extra experience points to players willing to act out their performances in this way. Just make sure that players who opt not to participate get a chance to earn bonus points in other ways. Also, it's usually a good idea not to let the quality of the real-life performance affect the outcome of the performance in the game. After all, most players won't be virtuoso guitarists or master jugglers. If you are going to hinge the character's success on the player's performance, make sure everyone knows and agrees to this in advance.

make witty banter are obvious assets when trying to prove one's worth to the in-crowd. But a masterfully executed sketch scribbled on a cocktail napkin might be particularly impressive to an art-loving Ventrue who's tired of talking business all night long. Perhaps a facility with languages allows a character to converse with an influential Tzimisce in her native tongue, gaining her trust. Someone well versed in the occult might make a favorable impression on the mysterious Tremere regent who expected to be bored by trivia from a know-nothing fledgling.

PARTY AS WEAPON

"I must say, Danielle, you surprised me with this invitation." Hera flicked a stray hair from her shoulder and handed her car keys to the valet. "When I outbid you for the Strad, you looked positively livid, dear. I thought your eyes would pop right out of your head." She held the violin case loosely by the handle, as if it was a 20-dollar purse containing nothing more than eyeliner and a few sticks of gum.

Danielle laughed as she gestured for Hera to enter the lobby first. "I was disappointed, of course. But what could I expect? No one can stop Hera when she wants something. Everyone knows that."

"Poor baby," Hera cooed as they stepped into the elevator. "But this violin looks so good on the shelf in my drawing room, just as I knew it would. Almost makes me want to take lessons."

"Yes," Danielle agreed, "you should do that." She pressed the button for the penthouse. "In any case, I appreciate you bringing it tonight. The music lovers at my little soiree will be quite impressed to see it."

"They can look but not touch," Hera replied. "Ah, the penthouse already? This building has fewer floors than I thought."

When the pair reached Danielle's apartment, Danielle opened the door and stepped aside for Hera to enter. Hera rounded the corner of the entryway and stopped short. The spacious living room of the penthouse was almost wall-to-wall with guests. Almost immediately, Hera spotted several Kindred in the crowd, including more than a few elders. She sensed Danielle coming up next to her.

"Danielle," she said calmly, "did you not say this was an intimate gathering of a few friends?" She shifted the violin case from one hand to another.

"Did I say that?" Danielle purred. "Well, you know me. Always changing plans at the last minute." She patted Hera on the shoulder. "Wait right here, dear, there's someone I want you to meet."

Hera struggled to keep a confident, almost-bored expression on her face. A nagging feeling rose within her that this was her one chance to walk away from whatever snare was being laid. But several partygoers had already seen her enter, to turn tail now would be....

"Hera," Danielle said, approaching with a tall, European-looking gentleman on her arm. "I don't believe you've met Klaus Metternich."

Hera forced herself to smile. Metternich — the new seneschal. Widely believed to be just weeks away from pushing that doddering prince out of the domain. She shifted the violin case to her left hand and extended her right.

"Charmed," Metternich said smoothly, giving her fingers the slightest of squeezes. "Thank you so much for attending my welcoming party." His eyes stared, unblinking like a lizard's, then focused on the violin case. "I have received many magnificent gifts tonight, but none as generous as the one Danielle tells me you have brought. It has been many decades since I have played a Stradivarius. May I take it now?"

It's been said that if you want to throw a party, you should first consider how many people you want using your bathroom. To put it another way, parties usually mean making one's private spaces accessible to guests. Few Kindred, save the most the most foolish or confident, are likely to host a major event at their primary haven. But it's still likely that they'll use a space that's of importance to them. This raises some interesting possibilities for your chronicle.

In the Spider's Web

It could be that attending the event in question places the characters into the hands of their enemy. They're walking willingly onto his turf, where he has the advantage and they probably have no allies or means of easy escape. Maybe they have reason to be suspicious, but can't afford to refuse the invitation of a well-connected elder. Or maybe they don't even realize the event is being thrown by that Lasombra paladin they outsmarted so handily three years ago. If you're using a social event to put the characters in this kind of jeopardy, be sure there's valid, in-game justification for why their adversary chose this means for enacting her vengeance, rather than simply having them jumped by an Assamite in a dark alley. Is the event a way to draw the characters away from their own, well-defended territory? A ploy to get them to drop their guard? Or was it just sheer happenstance that the characters turned up at the event, in which case their enemy has limited time to take advantage of their

misfortune? Perhaps organizers of the event are not Kindred, but vampire hunters bringing a long and careful plan to fruition, or independent ghouls seeking Kindred vitae.

Of course, most Kindred are too subtle to simply invite their enemies to tea and then slaughter them while passing out scones. Why do that when a social gathering offers an unmatched opportunity to humiliate the enemy? Manipulating your rival into committing a *faux pas* can do far more damage than a sharp blade. The scale of the victim's embarrassment can be a simple annoyance — the host neglected to inform the characters that the cocktail party is a black-tie affair. Or it could cause

outright disgrace, like the time a disguised Ravnos used her Disciplines to goad her Giovanni adversary into frenzy during a family conclave.

Pulling an Inside Job

Sometimes it's the host, not the guest, who becomes vulnerable during a social gathering. A Sabbat pack may have little hope of sneaking into the estate of a powerful Camarilla ancilla, but passing themselves off as party guests could enable them to smuggle their stakes into the heart of the building, and perhaps take out a cluster of enemies in a single night. Just by keeping her eyes and ears open, a character can learn much about the layout and security of the premises, enabling him to break

HOSTILITY OR HOSPITALITY?

Traditions of hospitality exist among both kine and Kindred society. In previous ages, allowing a guest under one's roof was an implicit agreement that the host would look out for the guest's safety and allow no harm to come to her. Many of the bloodiest ancient myths describe the dire consequences of violating the rule of hospitality. Although the Fifth Tradition speaks more to the guest's responsibility to the host, elder Kindred are likely to maintain some semblance of honor regarding the well-being of those whom they've accepted as guests. And from a practical standpoint, gaining a reputation as a party-thrower whose guests don't survive the affair makes it hard to maintain relations and build alliances. Here are some ways that Kindred can balance their duties as host with their need to send a particular guest to his Final Death, and some advice a Storyteller might feed to her players if they're in need of some guidance.

Just be a bastard. If anger or necessity make it unavoidable, a murderous host might just forgo convention and do what needs to be done. Her reputation will suffer, perhaps for centuries, but sometimes that's a price worth paying. Hence characters accepting an invitation from an enemy should carefully consider just how hotheaded or desperate their adversary is.

Arrange an accident. "Yes, it's a real shame that the masonry crumbled and a 500-lb. block of stone landed right on that Toreador's head. But this is an old castle, after all. I really will miss our little rivalry." To lessen the opportunities for this gambit, smart characters will stay alert, stick with the crowd (as the wise host avoids causing collateral damage) and watch each other's backs.

Do it somewhere else. When an event takes place in a neutral space — a rented banquet hall, an after-hours club, an abandoned warehouse — there's less stigma associated with foul play on the part of the host. So paradoxically, it can be even more important to be on one's guard when an adversary invites you to some place other than his own territory.

Use a proxy. If one guest takes a stake to the other, it's regrettable, but such things happen. And if no one finds out that the guest who instigated the fight happened to be in the host's employ, her reputation remains intact. Characters who focus too much on what their host is up to may be particularly vulnerable to the danger posed by a third party.

Get them on the way home. Suppose the players' characters spend a tense evening at a Giovanni reception, completely on guard for an attack that never comes. They're heading back to a safe haven, congratulating each other on having intimidated their adversary into inaction, when they're caught off guard by an attack of shambling corpses. Clever players will have their characters take precautions against being followed, and won't go home by the obvious routes.

Attack their status, not their corpus. It can be much more satisfying to publicly humiliate an enemy. You can always kill them later, so why not make them suffer a while? The character's adversary may choose to make his guest the victim of her own foolishness — perhaps by causing her to overreact to an anticipated attack that turns out to be a harmless party game. Pulling this off can enhance the adversary's reputation while ruining the character's.

in more easily at a later date for robbery, surveillance or other purposes.

Of course, Kindred are well aware of the risks they run by allowing other vampires into their havens or any other space that houses something of value. Don't give your players a free ride if they're planning to take advantage of their host. Guests who wander away from public areas may be politely asked to return to the party, with the implication that strict enforcement can be brought into play if necessary. Video cameras might be strategically placed or alarm systems engaged. Guard dogs, armed watchmen and ghouls are among the defensive measures the characters might encounter. Magical wards, death traps and Kindred defenders might also be appropriate if the stakes are high enough. Even if the host is mortal, distrust of his fellow man is likely to inspire some kind of security measures against larcenous party guests. Smart characters will try to bribe or co-opt one of the host's household staff, or place one of their own coterie on the inside, to help them identify and bypass kine or Kindred defenses.

PARTY AS REWARD

"Tell me again why we're doing this?"

Not for the first time that night, Mitchell shook his head and rolled his eyes at his large companion's stupidity. "Look, Dean," he said, "this city is no place for Caitiff. I don't know about you, but I'm tired of getting shoved around and spit on by every Lick with a chip on his shoulder." He wiped his hands on his shirtsleeves. "They say things are looser on the coast, so that's where we're going. But we'll never make it if we have to fight off Lupines the whole damned way. Everyone knows that the Gangrel know how to keep the Lupines off their back. If we can get an invite to one of their meetings, I'm sure I can make some kind of deal with somebody and get them to cover us."

"But..." Dean frowned, and Mitchell could almost see the wheels turning in his brain. "But why do we have to do this..."

"Okay, try to pay attention, because I am not telling you this again, get it?" Dean nodded. "I convinced Hairy Dave that we've got some Gangrel blood in us," Mitchell went on. "So we do this job



for him, he gets us in to the gathering. Then we can get the hell out of this town and find our own place. Some patch somewhere, where nobody can push around anymore."

"But are you sure this is right, Mitchell? Are you sure what we're doing is right?"

Mitchell looked away. "It's just what we gotta do. Now shut up and squeeze tighter. That one's still alive."

We've already seen how the right party can be a chance for characters to better their situation, as well as an opportunity for larceny or violence. Consider what might happen if you make the occasion worth more than short-term gain. What if it could change the characters' unlife forever? In this scenario, the story that leads up to the big night becomes as intriguing as the main event. If the reward is great enough, you've got the makings of an important challenge to the characters' Humanity. How far will they go for entry to the affair of their dreams?

Don't put that question to them directly, of course. Feed them a series of obstacles, each causing a greater strain on their morality. Perhaps their first task is a straightforward challenge — do the host a favor by tracking down a rare composer's masterpiece that will be performed at the party. But the composition turns out to be in the possession of elderly collector who has a heart attack when the characters interrogate her. Her eight-year-old grandson knows where the music is, but in trying to find him they draw the attention of another coterie, also out to find the composition. Do they take steps to keep the boy safe from their rivals after they get the information they need? If the boy witnesses combat between Kindred, how do they keep him silent? Suppose the characters deliver the composition and their benefactor demands they eliminate all witnesses to the theft?

In the end, the characters may find that they've sacrificed more than they've gained. Here are some ideas for motivating the characters to make the tough choices that make for a memorable chronicle.

Connections

The chance to rub shoulders with the high and mighty of the Damned is a valuable resource for any Kindred. Access to influential mortals can also be a strong temptation for an ambitious vampire looking for a celebrity, senator or CEO to

hustle. A player's low-status character may have no hope of getting an audience with the local prince, elders or primogen. But suppose, in return for "a small favor," an acquaintance will seat him in a strategic location at the upcoming opera opening? If you drop hints that the elder in question is known to be looking for a new protégé, or an up-and-coming captain of industry is, as yet, uncorrupted, the character has even more motivation to go out on a limb while pursuing his goal.

Status

Maybe just attending this function is enough to mark the character as one of the in-crowd. After all, only the cream of the crop ever make it past the doors, so the character is automatically treated as a peer by those in attendance. Or it could be street-level status that a character is after: Imagine a Caitiff who thinks he can finally gain acceptance from the gang coterie that claims his neighborhood. If you, as the Storyteller, want attendance at a social event to be a high-stakes goal, let the characters know that an invitation, if they can get it, could easily become an introduction, or will serve as an initiation into bigger and better things.

Resources

Using a party as cover so you can break into the host's safe is one thing, but suppose the affair itself includes a bequest of a significant nature to all the guests, no questions asked? Or perhaps a recurring event has the potential to make a character's unlife much easier by granting access to a coveted resource. Perhaps the host is fabulously wealthy and showers his guests with gifts. Maybe the party is the function of a blood cult that will grant the character a reliable opportunity for guilt-free feeding. Perhaps a Kindred social club provides vitae to all members — including the hard-to-get variety that a Ventrue character feeds on exclusively. The Tremere at a convocation of scholars may share information and insights that enable a character to advance along a thaumaturgical path much more quickly.

Diversion

For characters struggling to maintain their humanity, attending the event may be a way to maintain contact with a part of their existence before being Embraced. Perhaps in life the character was an avid music lover. Now she has a chance to become a member of a private jazz club frequented by her favorite musicians. A chess-loving Nosferatu just wants to enjoy the

challenges of the game the way he used to, but can't join a chess club until he finds a way to hide his deformities. Or perhaps the event is a way for a character to cope with the prospect of an eternity of vampiric existence: A Malkavian's seething madness is soothed by participating in master-level Japanese tea ceremonies. To regain her calm after being outmaneuvered by a rival, a Setite attends invitation-only sessions with a particular yoga master. These intangible benefits can be the most tempting prizes of all, especially if your players are good roleplayers.

The Big Night

After the characters jump through the right hoops, come up with the right tribute or perform the proper task — whether a night's work or a yearlong quest — what then? You could simply have them attend the affair of their dreams and bask in the glory of their success. But does unlife ever work that way? Perhaps their long (or short) struggle was just a prelude to greater difficulties. After you've played out a party as a reward scenario, consider complicating matters by laying out one of the other scenarios discussed in this chapter. The characters may still reach the goal they were after, but first they have to cope with an unforeseen physical or social challenge. Or, just as they're patting themselves on the back and getting ready for the payoff, they find out that the event is being hosted by their greatest adversary. Another approach is to give the characters the status or resource they expected, but with a catch (isn't there always a catch?). Maybe to stay in the club, they have to perform services for the senior members. Maybe they do get a chance to speak with and impress that elder, just as they hoped, but now they've become targets of her enemies. Whatever you decide, give your players some reward for their accomplishment, but make sure it's not quite the bonanza they were hoping for.

PARTY CRASHERS

"Look at them," Lucas whispered. "They walk in there as bold as they please, openly defying the prince's edict." He handed the binoculars to Asha, who turned them around in her hands, sniffed them, and dropped them onto the rooftop. "They fear the prince, but they fear Gehenna more," she replied. "Such is the consequence of unlife in the End Times. Or that's what they say; I personally

don't believe in that sort of thing. Can I go now?"

Lucas edged a few inches away from the Malkavian. "Not 'til we see if these 'friends' of yours fulfill their part of the bargain. And don't you want your payment?" He was growing tired of Asha's affectations. It seemed to him she was just play-acting at being insane, not exhibiting true madness. Killing her to cover up his involvement in this would be not just a practical matter, but a pleasure.

"Payment, that's a funny word for it," Asha said. "But don't fear, we have several agents among the cultists. They'll start up any minute now, and then everyone will forget all about this charismatic leader of theirs."

I hope so, Lucas thought. He recalled the time he himself had attended one of this cult's assemblies. As he'd expected, most of those attending were anarchists and street-dwelling fledglings, attracted by the promise of free vitae and easily manipulated. But to his surprise, the cult leader was not a raving madman who shouted ultimatums at the crowd, but a soft-spoken, almost charming stranger who held brief conversations with a few guests at a time. Lucas himself had found himself carefully considering some of her well-reasoned arguments....

His musings were broken by a piercing wail that rose up from the building across the street. There was another, then another... it sounded almost like chanting. "What the hell is that?" Lucas demanded.

"That's the disruption you ordered," Asha said proudly. "They'll tear through that group like shrapnel!"

Lucas grabbed the binoculars and tried to see what was happening. He caught flashes of motion through one of the windows, and when he focused the lenses...

"Oh my God," he whispered, then, "oh my God! What have you done!"

"I have to go now," Asha told him. "It's time for my 'payment.'" Lucas saw her step off the rooftop just as, at the edge of his vision, the Sabbat burst through the stairwell door and came at him.

Characters may want to attend a social engagement for various reasons. But what if they're in opposition to it? Maybe it's not personal: They're simply hired by someone to sabotage, disrupt or ruin the event. Perhaps it's a way for them exercise vengeance or discredit a rival. Whether it's their own initiative or an assignment, here are some forms that the story could take.



Stop It Before It Starts

The consequences of letting this event take place make it a priority to prevent it from happening. Usually this means eliminating or gaining control of some crucial item, person or resource. Perhaps characters have been warned that a Giovanni conclave will culminate in a group ritual that will unleash a horde of angry ghosts into their neighborhood. The characters don't have the strength to contend against the Necromancers directly, but maybe they can intercept ghouls that are delivering the bones needed for the ritual. This strategy usually has two phases. First, the characters must come up with ways to gather information about the affair so they can determine the best way to derail it. Then they have to implement their plan before their adversaries get what they need to put the event into place.

Embarrass the Host

If their adversary has enough resources, she may find it easy to counter whatever sabotage the players' characters attempt during the preparations for the event. So why not let her

complete her preparations, only to have the whole affair blow up in her face? This is not just a case of making the host look foolish, but of doing it in a way that will cast a pall over the entire evening or will motivate the guests to go elsewhere for their kicks. Tampering with the food or drink, paying off the entertainment or upsetting the guests with "unpleasantness" are all gambits that can bring the party to a crashing halt. The Toreador who's been bragging for months about the new painting he's going to unveil may find that there's something else behind the curtain. The Brujah coterie seeking to impress their fellows with a blow-out rave finds the crowd drifting away when the sound system fails. The trick to pulling off this strategy successfully is to make it seem that it's the host, not the characters, whose stupidity turned a fine evening into a disaster. If the other guests realize who it was that robbed them of a good time, they're likely to turn against them.

Cause Mayhem

Kick things up a notch and you don't just embarrass the host, you cause damage to her, her

property or her guests. It's a less subtle, more dangerous, strategy, but sometimes a heavy hand is appropriate. Perhaps the prince wants to send a clear message to the anarchs who are flaunting their independence, or a Sabbat pack is ordered to stir up terror as a prelude to a turf war. The downside is that the host of the evening is likely to have defenses and countermeasures that will be called into play: bodyguards, weapons, security systems. The other guests, if they're Kindred, might also respond to violence with violence. If mortals are caught in the crossfire, it's possible the characters will be pursued by law-enforcement agencies as well as their enemies. For these reasons, it's particularly important that the characters don't get caught in the act, and that they have an effective escape route.

GUEST LIST

Dakota shifted from one foot to the other as she watched the Setite runway model chat with her guests. Then she turned toward the wall and whispered, "I've been here three hours and all I see are the same boring ancillae who turn up at every other black tie affair in this city."

"Keep looking around," came the soft voice over the cell phone. "There's got to be some reason why this meeting was kept so hush-hush. Who's there that you don't know?"

Dakota frowned and wished that Lawrence wasn't so phobic about crowds. Then maybe he'd be here under false pretenses and she'd be sitting in a comfortable suite somewhere else in the hotel. She scanned the partygoers, pretending to be looking for someone specific. There was that twitchy Tremere lord who claimed domain over the museum last month. In the corner, that Ventrue entrepreneur who'd been buying up waterfront property like mad was talking to some Toreador media big shot. Someone was with them, a vaguely Asian-looking stranger. She looked familiar, where had she seen that face before?

Then Dakota turned away to hide the expression on her face. She's seen that woman once before, in Hong Kong. She was Cathayan.

Dakota turned, slowly, to survey the rest of the room. There were several other guests with Asian features, and they were all dressed in the same severe, unadorned business attire. Were they all Cathayans?

Her mind struggled with the implications. Mid-level Camarilla and unknown Cathayans, in a meet-

ing arranged by an unaffiliated Setite. That explains the extreme secrecy. Was some kind of deal being brokered? Or was it some kind of an ambush? Perhaps if she struck up a conversation with one of the ancillae she could figure out what was happening. "Lawrence," she whispered....

She felt a hand on her shoulder. "Hello," the Cathayan she'd recognized was saying. "There are plenty of guests here — you're being a bit rude." The phone vanished from Dakota's hand before she could react. "You look familiar," the Cathayan said to her. "Come with me to a more private room and we'll try to recall where it is we met."

Creating the guest list for a party is an art form in itself. There are always obvious choices, of course. But inviting the same people every time can lead to boredom and stagnation. Good parties need an element of unpredictability, especially when some of the guests may be centuries old. Many party hosts make a pointing of inviting at least a few troublemakers, or including a few guests who would just as soon be at each other's throats. A character who demonstrates a propensity for saying or doing the unexpected might find herself invited to an event that her betters can't gain entry to.

Here are some other ways in which you might use the guest list to drive your story.

Who's On the List?

Depending on the nature of the event, the roster of those invited might be a well-guarded secret or an important clue. The players' characters might be commissioned to find out who exactly has been attending the parties of a certain primogen who's preparing to unseat the prince — or they may want to use the information for blackmail purposes. Perhaps a string of assassinations appears less random once the characters realize the killer is eliminating everyone who attended a certain inter-clan summit (but do they warn the other guests, or let the assassin thin out the local competition?). Maybe finding out which Nosferatu weren't at the gathering last night will make it easier to find the Sewer Rat who attacked one of the character's vessels. There's ample opportunity for detective work here, since the guest list may not actually exist in the form of a written record. The characters may have to drag the information out of someone's head if they need it before the fact, or they may

have observed who attended the event and then try to match faces to names.

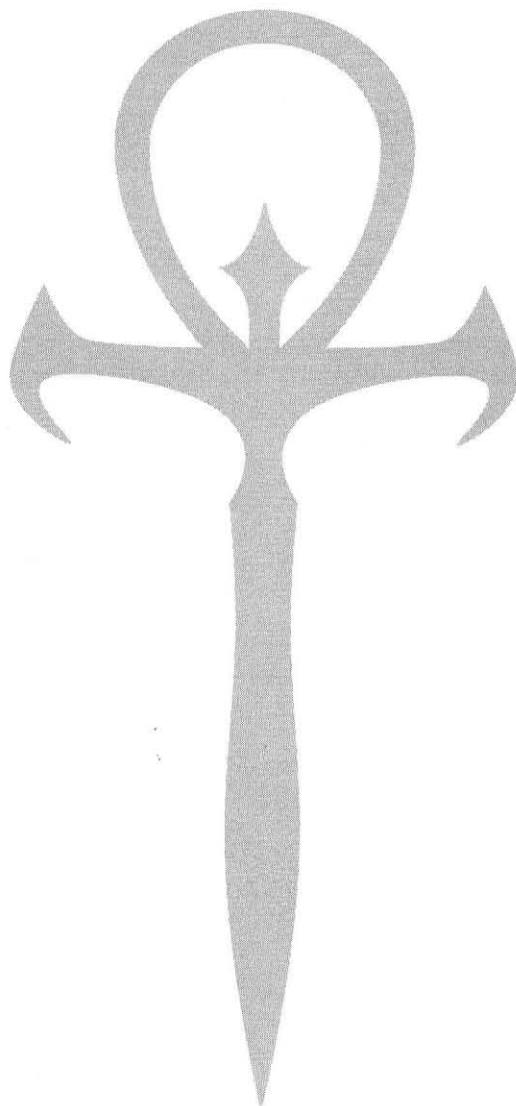
Who's Off the List?

Sometimes who's *not* on the guest list is as interesting as who's on it. Suppose the characters want to stoke a rivalry between two factions, both of whom are vying for favor from the elder council. If they can manipulate the guest list for an upcoming event, the faction that's cut from the list may blame their rivals and take retaliatory action. Or what if the characters themselves are no longer welcome at the Kindred nightspot they've been frequenting since their Embrace. Is it a sign that they've committed some offense without realizing it? A warning that someone's

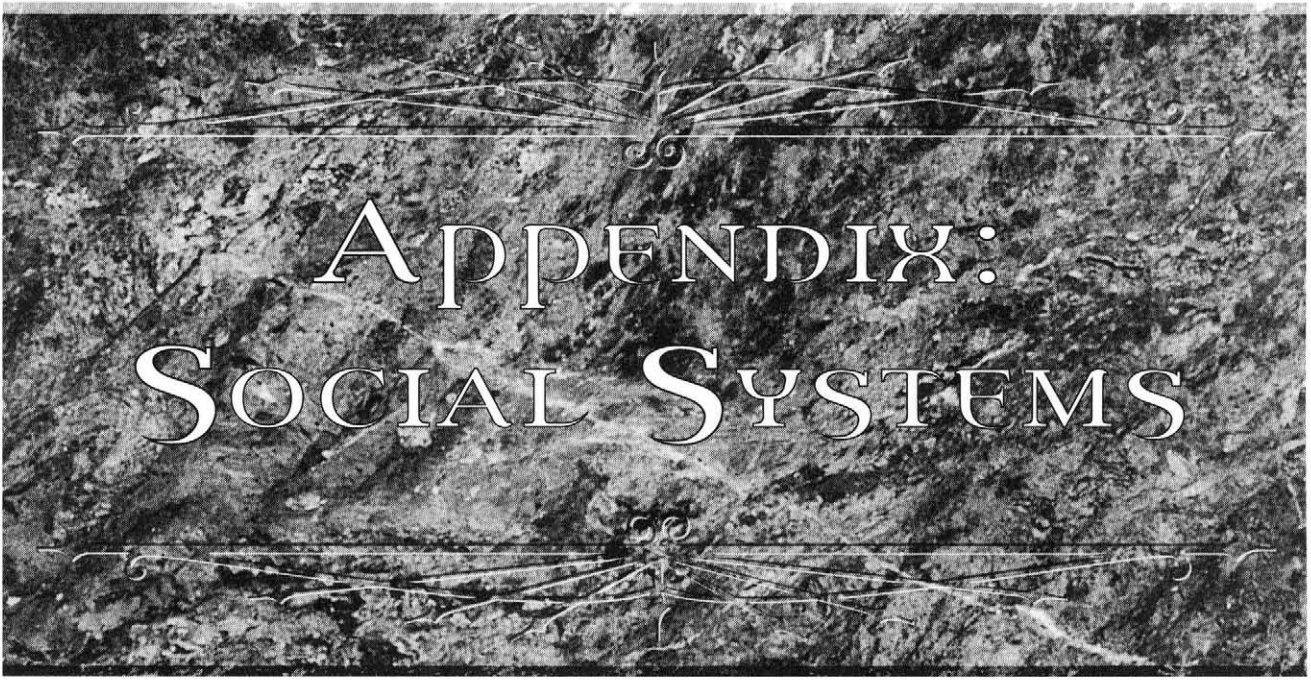
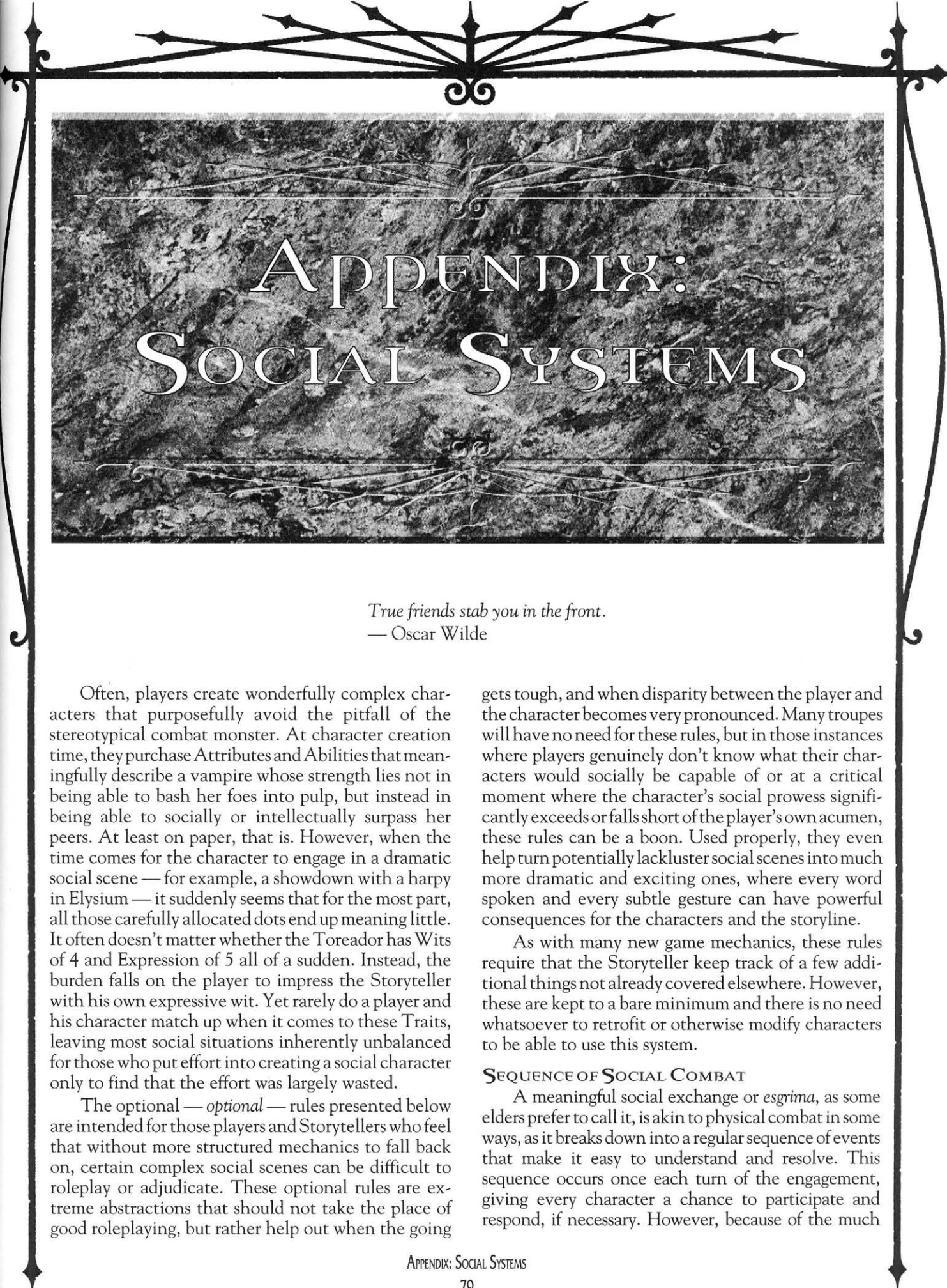
moving against them? An indication that a new power has moved into their territory?

Identity Theft

If there's no way the characters can get themselves onto the guest list, the next best thing is to take the place of someone who is. For a large affair, it might be easy to pose as an invited guest without being spotted as an imposter. But smaller, more intimate gatherings, where everyone knows everyone by sight, require more cleverness on the part of the characters. If impersonation isn't possible, a character might try to blackmail, dominate or otherwise co-opt a guest to accomplish their goal.







APPENDIX: SOCIAL SYSTEMS

True friends stab you in the front.
— Oscar Wilde

Often, players create wonderfully complex characters that purposefully avoid the pitfall of the stereotypical combat monster. At character creation time, they purchase Attributes and Abilities that meaningfully describe a vampire whose strength lies not in being able to bash her foes into pulp, but instead in being able to socially or intellectually surpass her peers. At least on paper, that is. However, when the time comes for the character to engage in a dramatic social scene — for example, a showdown with a harpy in Elysium — it suddenly seems that for the most part, all those carefully allocated dots end up meaning little. It often doesn't matter whether the Toreador has Wits of 4 and Expression of 5 all of a sudden. Instead, the burden falls on the player to impress the Storyteller with his own expressive wit. Yet rarely do a player and his character match up when it comes to these Traits, leaving most social situations inherently unbalanced for those who put effort into creating a social character only to find that the effort was largely wasted.

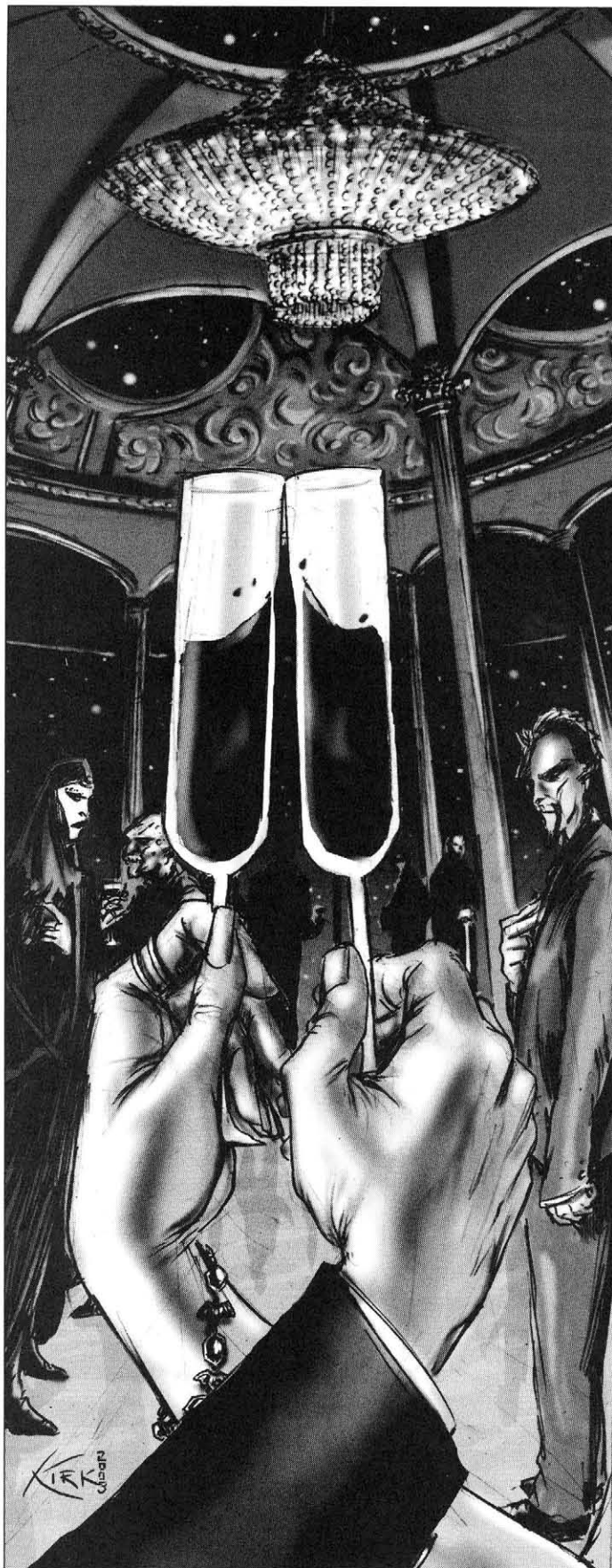
The optional — *optional* — rules presented below are intended for those players and Storytellers who feel that without more structured mechanics to fall back on, certain complex social scenes can be difficult to roleplay or adjudicate. These optional rules are extreme abstractions that should not take the place of good roleplaying, but rather help out when the going

gets tough, and when disparity between the player and the character becomes very pronounced. Many troupes will have no need for these rules, but in those instances where players genuinely don't know what their characters would socially be capable of or at a critical moment where the character's social prowess significantly exceeds or falls short of the player's own acumen, these rules can be a boon. Used properly, they even help turn potentially lackluster social scenes into much more dramatic and exciting ones, where every word spoken and every subtle gesture can have powerful consequences for the characters and the storyline.

As with many new game mechanics, these rules require that the Storyteller keep track of a few additional things not already covered elsewhere. However, these are kept to a bare minimum and there is no need whatsoever to retrofit or otherwise modify characters to be able to use this system.

SEQUENCE OF SOCIAL COMBAT

A meaningful social exchange or *esgrima*, as some elders prefer to call it, is akin to physical combat in some ways, as it breaks down into a regular sequence of events that make it easy to understand and resolve. This sequence occurs once each turn of the engagement, giving every character a chance to participate and respond, if necessary. However, because of the much



greater emphasis on role-playing as a component of *esgrima* in comparison to physical combat, a single turn can last anywhere from 10 seconds to a full hour or more. The duration of a turn should be established at the beginning of each *esgrima* and should be dictated by your troupe's style of play, personal preferences and dramatic need. Sometimes a very tactical "skirmish" can be fun, with every single word spoken having a real impact, while other times it might be better to simply allow the entire evening in Elysium consist of only five turns. This affords everyone a few chances to accomplish something without the story being bogged down unnecessarily.

A single round of a social exchange consists of four distinct phases:

Posturing: At the beginning of every round, a Charisma + Etiquette roll (difficulty 6) is made for each character participating in the social exchange. If at least three successes are scored, that character is awarded one point of Favor. If the roll fails, the character receives nothing, while a botch results in a point of Disfavor. This roll is not an action and is, therefore, not affected by the character's current number of Favor or Disfavor points. Favor and Disfavor points are explained below.

Initiative: Once posturing has been resolved, each player rolls one die and adds the result to the total of her character's Wits + Alertness. The final score is that character's social initiative for this round of the exchange.

Action Declaration: Each character's social action for the current turn is declared in order of initiative, beginning with the lowest score. As with physical combat, most actions require that a particular target also be identified at this time. If a player wishes to split his character's dice pool in order to take multiple actions, this is also stated now.

Action Resolution: Each character now resolves her chosen social action in order of initiative, from highest to lowest. If a Kindred wishes to resist another character's action — whether directed at himself or another individual — that Kindred can abort his previously declared action to do so. Unless the aborting Kindred had declared multiple actions, his other action this turn is lost. Once the results of all actions are applied, the turn is considered ended.

Note about Turns: If the social exchange is a tactical one where each turn is equivalent to a combat turn in duration, then in addition to those new social actions detailed below, nearly any kind of action can be taken, from using a Discipline to physically attacking another character. If a more strategic turn is being used, these kinds of actions are better represented on a case-by-case basis, with some being resolved tactically, others perhaps merely influencing the social exchange by modifying the dice rolls as determined by the Storyteller.

TYPES OF SOCIAL ACTIONS

The five types of social actions available during a social exchange are:

Favor: When one character attempts to repair or boost the reputation of himself or another character. Defending another's actions, complimenting someone, paying respect (due or otherwise), offering assistance, inviting someone to a party and even demonstrating a keen interest in and appreciation for another's tastes are all excellent examples of Favor. Additionally, whenever a Kindred tries to impress another, crow about his own achievements or otherwise seek praise, he is also attempting a Favor action.

Disfavor: When one character seeks to harm the reputation of another character. Making unkind remarks, subtle insults, blatant accusations, snide comments and sarcastic asides are all examples of Disfavor, just as is giving someone the cold shoulder, making a show of boredom when someone is talking, "accidentally" bumping into someone, interrupting a speech and coming to someone's party improperly dressed.

Compel: When one character attempts to make another character respond in a particular fashion or take a particular action. Some Compel actions are unwelcome, such as embarrassing another into silence, humiliating another enough to cause them to leave and even intimidating someone into doing you a favor. Others are more neutral, such as persuading the sheriff to tell you what he knows about the Malkavian neonate or moving the harpy to tears in response to your tragic tale.

Observe: When one character chooses to initiate no social action this round. Should the observer later decide to resist another Kindred's action, he may do so by aborting this action.

Withdraw: When one character attempts to exit the social exchange entirely, usually by physically leaving the premises.

ACTION RESOLUTION

Most social actions are resisted actions. The basic procedure for resolving social actions is for the acting character's player to first describe in suitable detail the method the character will use to accomplish the action. Bestowing Disfavor by making a subtle quip about someone's sire is quite different from openly pointing out her disgraceful fashion sense. The method described will determine the most appropriate Attribute and Ability to be used, at the discretion of the Storyteller. In most cases, the roll has a difficulty of 6, but both this and the dice pool can vary depending upon a number of considerations presented below.

If another character wishes to resist the action, a roll is made for this character using the same Attribute and Ability used for the acting character. The character to score the most successes wins. However, should the

acting character achieve three or more successes, the action is considered a complete success and a point of Favor or Disfavor is awarded to the target of the action accordingly. Even if there is no resistance to the action, three successes are still required for the action to be a complete success and for Favor or Disfavor to be awarded.

Botching a social roll indicates that the character in question has committed a grave social *faux pas* in the eyes of her peers, elders or whomever is present and nothing good can come of it. The character is immediately awarded one point of Disfavor and may not take any further social action for the remainder of the turn unless it is an attempt to exit as quickly as possible.

The particular rules for each type of action are as follows:

Favor: When the acting Kindred scores a complete success (three successes on the dice roll as described above), the target of the action is awarded one point of Favor. The difficulties of all social actions attempted in society are reduced by 1 for each point of Favor a character possesses. Favor points are cumulative and no character can ever have more than three such points.

FAVOR AND DISFAVOR POINTS

Those Kindred with points of Favor are said to have a favorable reputation, while those with one or more points of Disfavor are said to have an unfavorable reputation. Because these are incompatible, points of Favor cancel out an equal number of points of Disfavor, and vice versa. No character can ever have both points of Favor and Disfavor at the same time.

Also, because Kindred are spiteful, vengeful creatures who do not forget grudges or slights, favorable and unfavorable reputations do not just change of their own accord. The only way to be rid of Disfavor points or to gain more Favor points is to initiate or be the target of another social combat action.

Finally, no points of Favor or Disfavor are awarded as the result of a social action that occurs outside of meaningful society. This means that if there is no appropriate audience — Kindred who actually care about such things are able to communicate their opinions as to who they think is cool and who is deplorable — or if the exchange takes place only in the presence of Kindred too distracted to care about such distinctions — they might be incapacitated, dead, satiating their hunger, etc. — no points are received regardless of how many successes are scored on social actions.

Storytellers might also consider adjusting characters' reputations between stories and even chapters to reflect social actions going on "behind the scenes." Not everything that happens socially needs to take place in the presence of the players' characters.

Disfavor: When the acting Kindred scores a complete success, the target of the action is awarded one point of Disfavor. The difficulties of all social actions attempted in society are increased by 1 for each point of Disfavor a character possesses. Like Favor points, Disfavor points are cumulative and no character can ever have more than three such points.

Compel: When a complete success is scored, the target of this action is Compelled to respond in the fashion desired by the acting Kindred or else earn a point of Disfavor for choosing to ignore the social compulsion.

While a Kindred may certainly be Compelled by another to do nearly anything, society does not recognize the validity of a compulsion that is considered self-destructive or otherwise beyond the pale of decorum and propriety. Trying to coerce the city's scourge to apologize for an off-color remark to a thin-blooded Caitiff is about as unlikely to happen as pressuring the prince to abdicate his title. The power behind the Compel action, like other social actions, comes not from the acting Kindred, but from the other Kindred nearby, in particular, the harpies, who lend social and political support to the effort. So long as the compulsion is one that is considered by these witnesses to be socially appropriate, the action has the weight of society to enforce it. When this is not the case, a Compel action lacks real strength and, as such, no point of Disfavor awaits the Kindred who chooses to defy the compulsion. Yes, Storytellers, this requires a lot of you, but enforcing it fairly will allow you to better tell stories with logical outcomes as opposed to radically changing the political scenery just because some neonate got lucky with a die roll.

Withdraw: Departing a social function without properly thanking the host and bidding adieu to the necessary elders is a serious failure to pay proper respect. To leave the scene, a character must make a simple Wits + Etiquette roll versus a difficulty of 6 or risk negative consequences. Only a single success is required to depart without further delay, but failure means the character finds himself trapped by conversation or obligation and unable to make his getaway this turn (however long it may last). If the character decides to leave despite the failure, treat this as a botch instead.

COMPLICATIONS

Group Actions: In situations where more than one Kindred intends to perform the same social action and target the same character, the Traits of the character with the most advantageous dice pool will be used for the roll. One additional die is added to this dice pool for each additional acting Kindred, up to a maximum of three dice. This might seem like a great tactic, but there is a danger. Each participating Kindred suffers the same penalty as the acting Kindred if the roll is botched.

Similarly, a Kindred may come to the aid of another character to help that character resist an action targeting him. The bonus and risk is the same as when helping someone initiate an action. However, any character can abort his declared action to do this at any time he feels it would be a better use of his turn.

The Rumor Mill: A character does not have to be present to be targeted by a Favor or Disfavor action. Spreading dirty rumors or complimentary gossip are commonplace tactics used every night by the Kindred as well as the kine. The obvious advantage is that there is no one to resist the action, so the chance for success appears that much easier. However, backstabbing someone or kissing too much ass is risky. A failure on this roll removes 1 point of Favor from the acting character, if he possessed any (though this cannot cause the character to gain Disfavor). If the gossipmonger actually botches the roll, he loses any points of Favor that he might still have, gaining one point of Disfavor if he had no Favor before the botch. The Rumor Mill cannot be a group action.

STATUS AND STATION

A Kindred's Status is more precious than almost anything else and is an overall measure of how important he is in the eyes of his fellow Kindred. Unlike one's reputation, which rises and falls with relative frequency, Status changes less fluidly. It is also the primary indicator as to how much respect a Kindred deserves. To reflect this, a Kindred may add one die to all social actions for each dot of Status possessed.

In addition to the benefit of a larger dice pool — which is no small thing — Status is also important in dictating codes of conduct. Kindred are often expected to address their betters in a formal manner, must not interrupt them, should demonstrate deference and should never openly contradict them under any circumstances. These rules of etiquette maintain the status quo, ensuring that in general elders socialize only with elders, ancillae with other ancillae, and neonates with their own kind.

Certain official Camarilla stations come with special privileges that have an effect on social exchanges as follows:

Prince: The prince of the city can automatically bestow one point of Favor or Disfavor on another Kindred by spending a temporary Willpower point. He is not limited as to how frequently he can do this and this cannot be directly countered or resisted. This does not count as an action and occurs whenever the prince wishes.

Seneschal: The seneschal may exercise the same power as the prince. However, at any time the prince may countermand the seneschal's action and rescind any points of Favor or Disfavor bestowed by her subor-

dinate. As a consequence, the seneschal gains one point of Disfavor for his poor judgment but does not immediately recover the spent Willpower.

Harpy: A harpy possesses a power similar to the prince, except that a Kindred can be given a single point of Favor or Disfavor only once per evening in this fashion. If one or more lesser harpies exist, they may use the power also. However, if they make an error in judgment, the most prominent harpy may repeal the effects of their actions, resulting in a point of Disfavor being awarded to the lesser harpy being countermanded.

Not even the prince can directly counter this power of the harpy, for to do so would be akin to a politician deriding his most supportive contributor in a public forum. Though a harpy does not contribute money to the prince, her social support and her efforts to reinforce the social status quo is absolutely critical to the prince's continued claim to domain; to damage this is political suicide. The only sensible option a prince has in dealing with a troublesome harpy is to use proxies to erode her influence and to elevate another to succeed her from behind the scenes.

Keeper of Elysium: The Keeper has a special responsibility bestowed upon him by the prince who enables him to exercise the following power when in Elysium. Whenever the Keeper believes that a character has violated the traditional code of Elysium, he may award the transgressor a point of Disfavor at no cost to himself. In addition, anytime the keeper wishes to Compel a Kindred to Withdraw from Elysium, his dice pool is increased by two.

Host of the Party: Not actually a formal position, the Kindred hosting the night's affair has a special perk, but along with it comes added responsibility. First, the difficulty of the posturing roll that takes place at the beginning of every round of a social exchange is reduced to 4, for it is very difficult for the host to not be appreciated at his own party. In addition, the host may substitute the Ability called for when resisting a social action for another that he possesses that might be just as appropriate, such as Expression or Performance; anything that the Storyteller deems suitable is allowed.

Not everything is all moonlight and roses for the belle of the ball, however. If the host is so unfortunate as to botch a posturing roll during the affair, the entire evening is considered an unmitigated disaster, with anyone of importance making a beeline for the doors. No Withdraw action is required to leave in this case. Worse, the host should have his dice pool reduced on future attempts to Compel others to attend any other party he throws (assuming this optional system is used to guarantee others' attendance). Only when another event that he hosts goes off without similar incident will this penalty be removed.

Promotions: Whenever a Kindred is first promoted to a new station of any kind, the recipient of the promotion receives 2 points of Favor. If the character suffers the misfortune to one night have the title stripped from her, she suffers 2 points of Disfavor and may not gain any Favor for the remainder of the story. So serious are such things in the eyes of Camarilla society. Note that this does not apply to voluntarily vacated positions. Indeed, in many cases, princes and other luminaries offer errant title-holders a chance to leave their positions gracefully rather than strip them publicly of the title's esteem. Then again, sometimes, making a public example of a rogue scion is exactly the point.

In cities held by the Sabbat or anarchs, Status is treated similarly, though it refers, of course, to social standing in those particular sects, rather than the Camarilla. A Sabbat bishop or her superiors, as well as an anarch baron, possess the same privilege as a prince in terms of their ability to bestow Favor or Disfavor. However, because deeds count for more than honorary status in both these sects, there is usually no equivalent to the Camarilla's harpies.

OTHER BACKGROUNDS

In addition to Status, other Backgrounds can also influence the mechanics of social exchanges. The following are some of the best examples:

Fame: Celebrity among the kine does not necessarily mean anything to the Kindred. In some cases, however, a character's Fame can affect her interaction with other Kindred. This usually occurs when the famous Kindred is recognized because of some accomplishment in a field for which another Kindred has a personal respect or interest. An ancilla who has just published a breakthrough book on the real history of the Civil War (under a pseudonym, of course) might find that the Brujah primogen who spent his mortal life in Charleston is easier to impress because of his long-time interest in that conflict. When applicable, the famous Kindred can replace Status with Fame, if the latter is higher, when dealing with true admirers.

Resources: Money and material wealth are, without question, very effective as tools to enhance one's reputation and increase one's ability to achieve social aims. The catch is that some cannot be swayed by mere baubles and might, in fact, see it as a poor excuse for real power. Like Fame, a character's Resources can be used in place of Status when dealing with those Kindred who respect the almighty dollar. Exactly who these Kindred might be is up to the Storyteller, but usually includes those Kindred who also have a significant investment in Resources, as well as those from clans or backgrounds that traditionally place a great deal of value on one's financial portfolio — or those fallen on hard times who stand to gain from a sudden infusion of lucre.



Clan Prestige: If this optional Background is used in your chronicle, it replaces Status whenever a member of a particular clan or bloodline is engaged in social situations with another of consanguineous lineage. Because most Sabbat and anarchs care more about their reputation in their sect than they do about the opinions of Kindred related to them by mere happenstance, the Storyteller might rule this inappropriate for members of those sects.

ABILITIES

A character's Talents, Skills and Knowledges play a very important role in social combat, largely determining just how capable a Kindred is when it comes to playing the game of *esgrima*. As has already been noted, a handful of these abilities are "must haves" for Kindred who wish to make Elysium their haunt of choice. Clearly, Etiquette is necessary when dealing with one's social superiors, but Expression, Subterfuge, Intimidation, Empathy and Leadership also come in very handy. Some helpful suggestions for how to use these and other abilities can be found in the Dramatic Systems section of **Vampire: the Masquerade**.

In addition, a number of Secondary Abilities are of a distinct social nature and are appropriate in many situations. Grace and Style are good examples of how non-verbal action can affect the opinions of others. Diplomacy is an obvious choice when involved in negotiations of any kind, especially Kindred from another sect. Interrogation does not require that the subject be duct-taped to a chair under hot lights, but can refer to almost any manner in which a Kindred asks questions of another, which is a useful skill to have at times. Style and Grace can be a great help when trying to impress others in a social setting. Many other Abilities can also be used, so long as their application makes sense. When Player X tells you that his Caitiff will be using Charisma + Firearms to impress a shallow-minded harpy, intending for his character to chat her up about his ability with guns, it is time to put your foot down.

DISCIPLINES

Just because the use of Disciplines is a major breach of etiquette in Elysium does not mean it doesn't happen, and outside the hallowed halls of the elders it almost goes without saying that the Kindred will use whatever Disciplines they can to gain an edge in social combat, just as they would were the confrontation of a more physical nature. Dozens of Disciplines can affect the outcome of a social action and are capable of altering the entire playing field, as it were, thus it would be impossible to give a comprehensive listing of how each one can best be handled. Instead, the guidelines below are intended to help Storytellers and players better determine what general kind of effect, if

any, the use of a Discipline will have on social combat, focusing on those Disciplines most likely to be used in such situations.

Presence: Without a doubt, the most obvious social Discipline that comes to mind is Presence and its various — and theoretically unlimited — applications. Even the simple use of Awe can have a tremendous impact on those subject to its power, causing the staunchest foe to at least be receptive to the vampire exercising his Presence. Given its flexibility, one way to treat the use of Presence is to make those who fall subject to its power unable to initiate Compel or Disfavor actions against the Kindred using the Discipline. Additionally, the number of successes rolled might be used to supplement that Kindred's social dice pools when interacting with his newfound admirers. For example, some extra dice might be warranted to increase the pool of a Toreador scourge who uses Dread Gaze upon a couple of neonates and then attempts to Compel them to drop their weapons and tell him where their sire is. A hard and fast rule is inadequate; Storytellers should feel free to find what works best for their chronicles. No matter what works in your story, Presence, when used, will definitely have an impact on all social engagements.

Auspex: It would be foolish to overlook the potential of Auspex in social combat, especially given how relatively easy its use is to conceal, making it the easiest Discipline to use in Elysium despite traditional prohibitions. Other Kindred with similar perceptions may be able to detect its use if alert enough, so using Auspex still entails some risks, but the benefits can far outweigh them. Detecting an individual's mood, emotions and thoughts is a significant advantage when trying to Compel them or curry Favor with them. Depending on how much information they can gather, the player might be able to choose which modus operandus is best for the situation. The Storyteller can perhaps suggest the best combination of Traits to use against the victim in question, or allow the acting Kindred's player to add a number of dice equal to the successes rolled to the social dice pool in order to reflect the insight gained from using Auspex.

Dominate: Of course, Dominate can also have a dramatic and immediate effect on those Kindred unfortunate enough to find themselves under its power. Most of the time, because of the Discipline's commanding nature, successful use of Dominate should make a social combat roll unnecessary. If the Storyteller still believes one is called for, follow the suggestions for Presence. The biggest difference is that once Dominate's hold over a character fades, the individual is very likely to have an extreme negative reaction and will probably be much harder to deal with socially in the future, further

uses of Dominate notwithstanding. To simulate this backlash effect, the Kindred using Dominate may suffer a one- to three-dice penalty on social actions when dealing with her former thrall in a non-threatening manner. (This same thing applies to exploitive uses of Presence, if a Kindred once subject to its power later recognizes that fact.)

Obfuscate: While it is expected that Kindred make the proper farewells before leaving a social engagement, the ability to simply vanish from sight and mind is very useful when it is just time to go. Because this Discipline affects mental as well as physical perceptions, even an observant host may not realize that the Nosferatu or Malkavian has left for his haven until after the party is over. As long as the Kindred using this power does so successfully and does not draw any undue attention to himself, he may Withdraw automatically without penalty, or at least should have an easier time of it.

SPECIAL KINDRED RELATIONSHIPS

Personal relationships always have a powerful impact on how Kindred relate to each other in a social setting. Some examples of the more important relationships and suggestions for roleplaying them are:

Sire and Childe: The relationship between a sire and her childe is one of the strongest that can exist between the undead. Even after a childe is released into society and the sire is free of any further official responsibility, barring some momentous social exception, the two are considered in the eyes of most to be forever bound, their social fates inexorably intertwined for better or for worse. This means society expects that the childe always respect his sire; any display to the contrary is severely frowned upon. The flip side of this is that the sire is expected to speak well of and defend her childe insofar as it is reasonable to do so. It is fine for a sire to scold a childe in private or even acknowledge that childe's failings among peers, but to actively disfavor one's progeny or expose them to the disfavor of others is unbefitting of the more esteemed Children of Caine.

A Storyteller may wish to have this special relationship reinforced by the rules. If so, whenever the sire or childe gains a point of Favor or Disfavor, the other may also. Roll a number of dice equal to the Status of the one whose reputation has changed versus a difficulty of 6. Success means the character's own reputation has followed suit and the Kindred gains the appropriate point of Favor or Disfavor, while a failure indicates there is no change. This roll cannot be botched.

Blood Bonds: In the case of a full blood bond between a regnant and a thrall, the thrall suffers a full three-dice penalty on any social actions that might injure the regnant's reputation or coerce her to take an

action against her will. At the same time, the regnant gains three dice that can be used for any social actions directed at her thrall. If the Storyteller wishes, the same system can be used when only a single step or two steps toward the blood bond exists, using a modifier of one and two dice respectively.

A similar system can be used for the Sabbat's Vinculi. A Cainite adds or subtracts a single die from her social dice pools for purposes of actions involving a character with whom she shares a Vinculum for every three full points of the Vinculum score.

Prestation: The exquisite art of prestation can in many ways be as important a factor in how two Kindred treat each other as anything else. A Kindred possessing a significant boon will always have one additional die to use for social actions involving the debtor, while the Kindred in debt will suffer a reciprocal -1 die to any social actions that are targeted at and would not be welcomed by his creditor. Kindred also respect minor boons, but as they can change hands so frequently and are thus not always as well advertised to other Kindred, they have no real mechanical effect.

While on the subject, it should be noted that if a Kindred is so dastardly as to default on a debt, other Kindred will hound him and he may quickly find his reputation in tatters. There is little mercy reserved for a welcher and it is probable that he will find it impossible to secure another debt for many years to come, if ever again. No system is required to portray this response; a Storyteller need only have the harpies, elders and most other Kindred go to town on the scoundrel at every opportunity in order to teach him a very important lesson. A character who may once have thought it really no big deal to walk away from a debt will now think twice when he finds all future social actions effectively blocked at every turn and no one willing to listen to him anymore, let alone invite him to the Halloween Ball.

THE SABBAT

The above rules have touched on some of the ways social mechanics can be used in Sabbat chronicles, using Sabbat Status in place of the usual Camarilla Status, for example. Storytellers and players alike should feel free to adapt other facets of the Sword of Caine into these rules wherever it might better serve the story and the appetites of the troupe. Here are a few suggestions that can be incorporated for Sabbat characters:

Tests of Courage: From leaping over fires to helping corral a nasty Lupine, the Sabbat would not be the Sabbat without the terrifying tests of courage and mettle that they subject themselves and others to time and time again. As it is expected for a Sabbat to participate, there is no particular reward for doing so. However, should a Cainite decide to sit out the next

challenge without a reasonable excuse while his fellow packmates grab it by the horns, the individual usually gains a point of Disfavor (at the Storyteller's discretion). Sometimes a test is devised that is considered so ridiculously dangerous that only the most fanatical thrill-seekers would attempt it. These insane Sabbat should earn a point of Favor if they survive unharmed; trying but failing, especially in a spectacular fashion, will probably only result in the onlookers bursting out in hysterical laughter at their unfortunate comrade.

Performing Ritae: The *auctoritas* and *ignobis ritae* are the spiritual backbone of the sect and those Cainites who can perform them well earn a special place among the Sabbat. A Rituals roll used to perform a *ritus* is simultaneously treated as a Favor action, meaning that if 5 or more successes are accumulated, a point of Favor is earned by the Sabbat leading the ritual. Certain very important rituals, such as presiding over a Blood Bath or leading the sermon during the *Palla Grande* might result in even more points of Favor, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Path Exemplars: The sect's Paths of Enlightenment are revered as sacred philosophies that are understood and adopted only by the most dedicated Cainites. Among one's fellow adherents, a Path practitioner may substitute half her Path rating for Status, if the former would provide a greater dice pool advantage for social situations. This means that even the lowest of the rank-and-file are capable of commanding tremendous respect from those who follow the same Path of Enlightenment, provided they are faithful to the beliefs they espouse.

THE ANARCHS

Just as the Sabbat differs from the Camarilla in terms of social institutions, conduct and expectations, so too do those Kindred who claim membership in the Anarch Movement. For the most part, however, the differences are not as drastic, for the vast majority of the anarchs are disillusioned members of the Camarilla who have a beef with some of its traditions or political trappings. Only a small minority are full-blown anarchists dedicated to the complete destruction of the Ivory Tower.

The most significant difference, and a very telling one, is the Movement's denouncement of age being the primary factor determining who shall lead and who deserves respect. Many anarchs cleave to the ideal of a meritocracy, where personal accomplishment is valued above all else. This does not mean they treat their elders as unworthy of admiration, but rather that achievement will always count for more. An anarch's Status relies on how he uses his power and what he's learned from his experiences, not about the fact that he is technically a neonate or ancilla. Most of his

Status is derived from what his fellow anarchs know about what he has accomplished in the name of the cause, which is one very important reason why anarchs like to throw parties to announce their victories. If the anarch frequently moves between Camarilla and anarch society — perhaps he is an intermediary or diplomat of sorts — it might make sense for two separate Status ratings to be recorded, one for each sect to reflect the very different recognition the anarch may receive in each.

Also, because of their backgrounds and similar philosophical outlooks, the minutiae of Elysium is often meaningless to those dedicated to the Anarch Movement. Dressing at the height of fashion or coming to the weekly rant garbed in thrift-store chinos has little effect on how one is treated. In most cases, certain abilities, such as Grace, Style and even Etiquette should be disallowed for the purpose of social actions.

Other special rules can be created to take into account the particular flavor of the local anarch establishment. Since the Movement does not formally recognize any shared rituals, traditions or codes of conduct, every city and every barony may have its own etiquette that newcomers must learn before being able

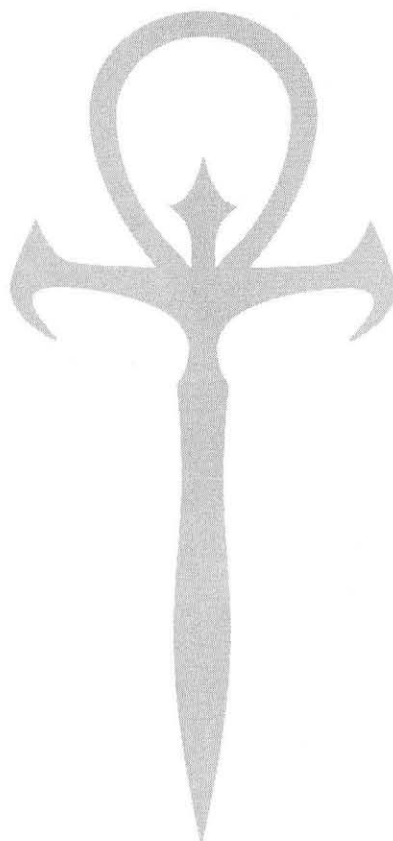
to make an impact on the locals. No mechanic can do justice to this situation, but a good Storyteller considers the implications when Kindred meet other anarchs for the first time and attempt to socialize with them.

INDEPENDENT CLANS AND BLOODLINES

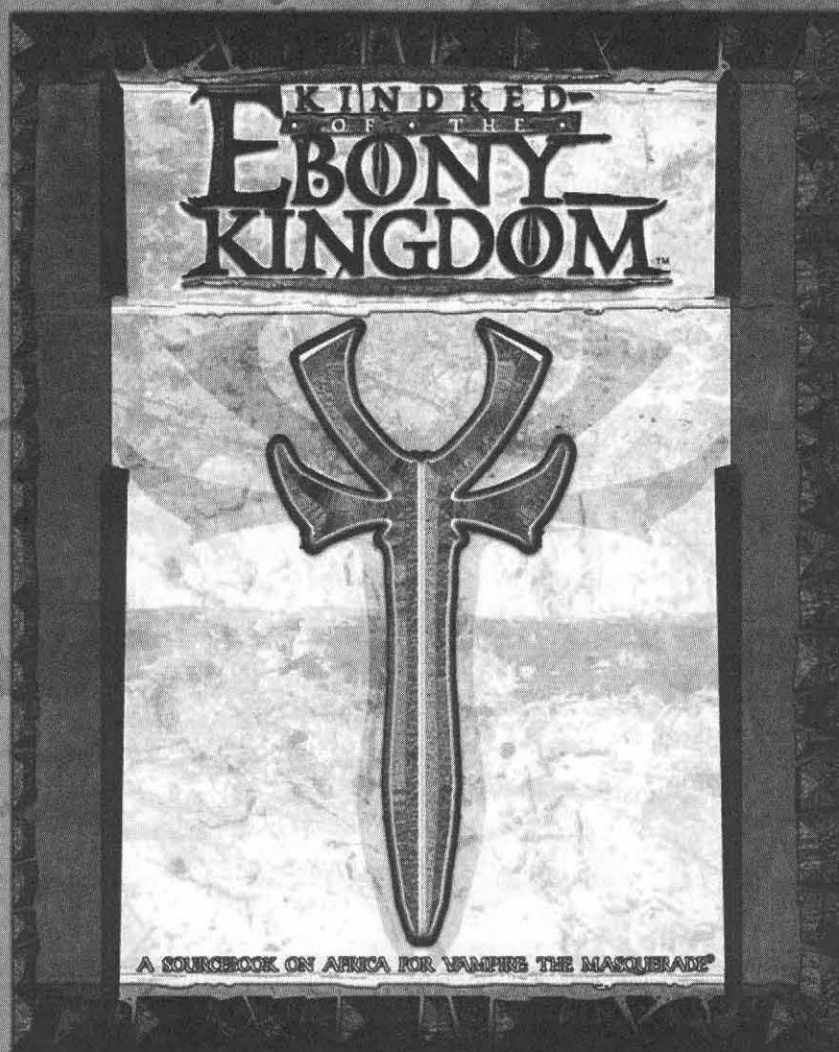
As with the Sabbat, the independent clans and bloodlines are often insular in nature and pay little heed to the codes of conduct promulgated by the major sects. Most have their own proprietary rules of etiquette that vary widely and seem quite confusing, if not outright bizarre, to outsiders. Many good ideas for how these exclusive societies might function can be found in the respective clanbooks, as well as in the write-ups in the core rulebooks.

AULD LANG SYNE

The rules laid out here are meant to make your chronicle and the entire storytelling experience a better one, not bog it down with an endless flood of minutiae and mechanics. Feel free to adopt some, most, or all of the above if it will bring additional drama and enjoyment to your game, or to modify it to make it fit just right. Keep the Golden Rule in mind and have fun discovering that social combat can be every bit as dramatic, deadly and memorable as the most visceral physical battles, perhaps more so.



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