

Blood TREACHERYTM



THE WAR BETWEEN HERETICS AND TREACHER FOR IMAGE: THE ASCENSION®

Blood TREACHERY

AWASH IN BLOOD

Centuries ago, House Tremere splintered from the Order of Hermes to become a cabal of vampire warlocks. The two settled into an uneasy truce in succeeding years — until now. Desperate to reclaim its heritage, the Order of Hermes declares war on its errant kin, while the vampires hope to trap the mages with their blood sorcery. Is it the end for both, or the beginning of an unholy alliance?

IMMORTALITY'S PRICE

Long have mages known that vampires have power, but at a great cost. Now the Traditions go to war against the undead. Explore rules for mage ghouls and look into the original development of vampire sorcerers and their secret expatriates among House Tylalus in the Order of Hermes. Unearth the secret magic that can be fueled by the Curse of Caine, and the consequences of daring to war against the undead.

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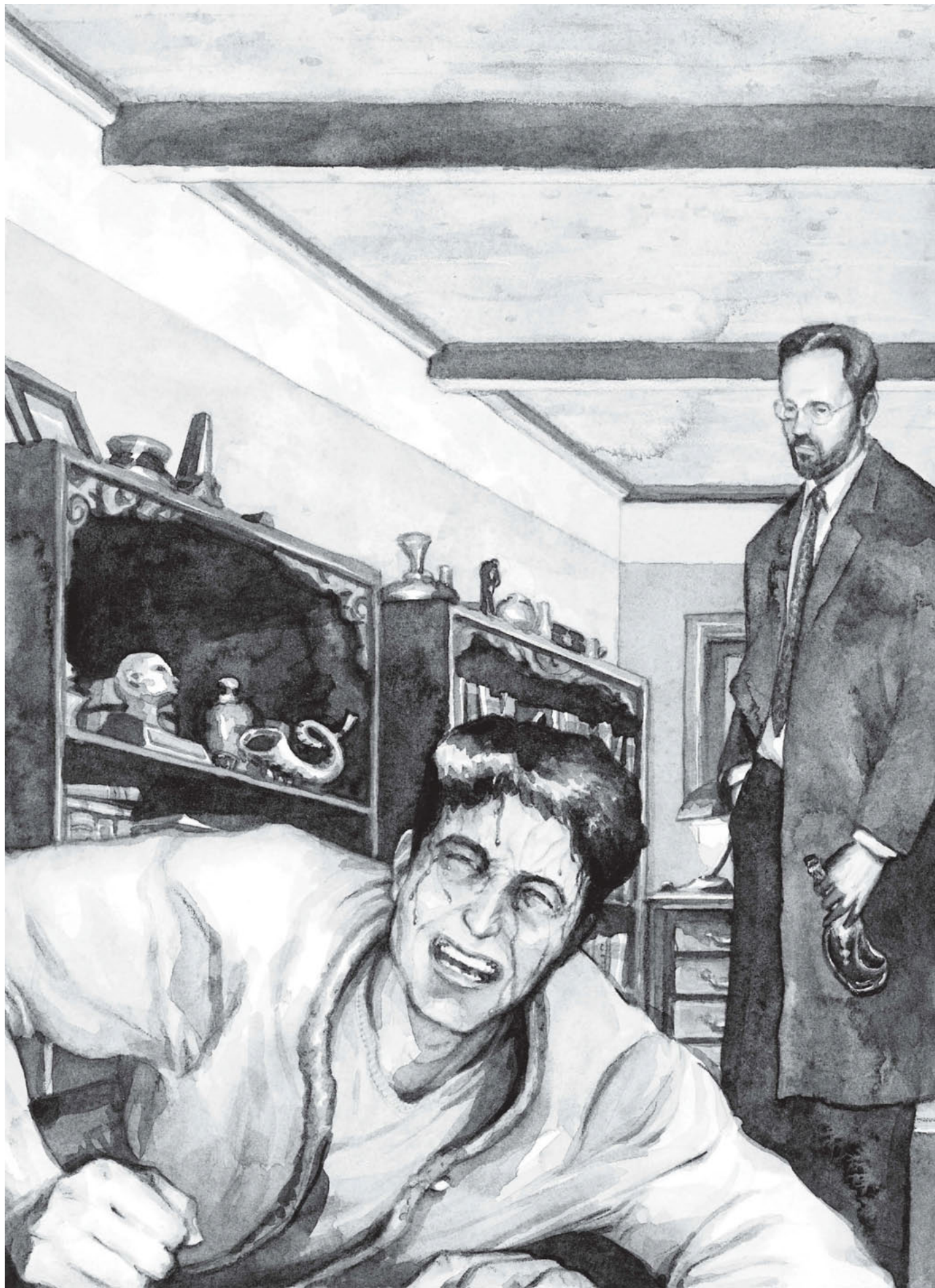


BY SCOTT COHEN AND STEVEN MICHAEL DIPESA

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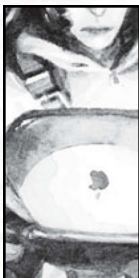
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PRELUDE: ENTHRALLED

*Now, now however accidents have begun. Like the first faint
Twirls of smoke we see all the old signals: cloudy air, a swarming
As if in frantic haste against the great thinning to come, those whiffs
Of the monitor's breath, the shadow which trailed our father from
The halls of his brothers, the judas, the cain, the great opposing
whisper force to matter itself, the challenge to the magician's act, the rage
TO PROVE IT WAS, IS, ALL DONE BY MIRRORS.*

— the Archangel Michael, as recorded by James Merrill in *The Changing Light at Sandover*



The hunger was everywhere and nowhere at once, not centered on his stomach, but rather a fevered, twisting nausea that screamed from every cell. It was nothing but absolute desire and necessity. The drive was overwhelming, and it was all Kurtzweil could do to keep his sanity. He wanted to scream, he wanted it more than anything in the world — simply to let the monstrous thoughts that plagued him out, get them out, get them out!

A thin, reddish sheen of sweat coated his body as he stumbled toward the bathroom. He splashed water on his face, drank from the faucet—

No, it's not the right liquid.

—and looked in the mirror. His face was flush and gaunt at the same time. The eyes seemed different somehow. They were weak; more needy. He looked like a giant that was about to crumble. The faint outline of his Avatar, reflected in the mirror, looked thinner, less substantial. Her white dress seemed tinged pink. He could hear her voice in his head.

I want more.

He tried to steel himself. No more, it has to end, it has to stop.

MORE. NOW.

The imagery — the blood in a vial, swirling around, slow-motion vision where the crest of the edge of the blood beckons like a lighthouse — assaulted Kurtzweil, kicking him in the back of the knees. He fell to the floor, unable to think of anything but the blood, the blood, the blood!

I am a magus of the Order of Hermes, he thought as he tried to get on his feet. I am a Tytalan. I can overcome any obstacle. My will is indomitable. Reality bows to my command. Through strife, power. Through strife, power. Power, damn it, POWER!

• • •

The memory comes back unbidden, engulfing him and obliterating the present.

“It is vampire blood,” Marcus says with his characteristic detachment. They are in his Sanctum — Marcus and he — and Marcus holds a vial of reddish-brown liquid between thumb and forefinger. Even with his rudimentary training in the *Ars Vis*, Kurtzweil can sense the Quintessence in the vial. It looks like rubies, glistening within the fluid matrix.

“Where did you get it?”

“It was given to me by one of them.”

Kurtzweil looks at Marcus in shock. “Given?”

Marcus allows a faint smile. “In exchange for certain tactical information.”

Kurtzweil’s face flushes with anger, but before he can say anything, Marcus continues. “Please, Johann, let me explain my position. You will call me a traitor to the Order, but look at the situation. The Order is almost destroyed. This war against the undead is a last-ditch effort to try to reclaim some sense of glory. While the other houses may be content to throw themselves off the cliff, House Tytalus is not. We need to survive this, Kurtzweil. The greatest challenge” — here the smile widens into a smirk — “our house will ever face.”

“But the old House Tremere—”

“What crime did it commit, Kurtzweil? It survived. It saw an opportunity and took it. Granted, that opportunity backfired, but we’ve learned from that lesson.” Marcus gestures with the vial, and Kurtzweil’s eyes follow it involuntarily. “This is foolproof. This is power, concentrated into easy-to-drink form. We cut a deal with the undead warlocks — we give them some information, they give us blood. We take control of the Order, we stop the war, and we get access to the vampire sorcerers’ libraries and all the old texts. Mission accomplished.” Marcus offers the vial to Kurtzweil, and Kurtzweil cannot help but accept it.

"We trust you, Kurtzweil. We need your strength, your insight, your magic. We — and there are quite a few of us — we want you to have this gift. We need you to join us."

Kurtzweil considers the vial, then pops the top off. "Just drink it?"

Marcus nods. The smell is simultaneously repulsive and tempting. Kurtzweil lifts the vial up in a toast. "Ave Tytalus."

With a gulp, the blood runs down his throat — The blood is in me, I can feel it — in an ecstasy unlike any other. His Avatar expands with power. The power courses through him, the strength multiplies, his mind...

• • •

He wept, and that forgotten taste filled his mouth. It was not just blood, but the taste of power, dark murderous power over life itself, as if he were the judge, holding the scales and deciding what would live and what would die. Now it was gone and out of his system. The murder needed to be replenished.

Please, MORE...

"What do you want of me?" he screamed at her. "What the hell do you want me to do?"

I want MORE. I need more.

"No, I can't, it's changing me. It's changing us..."

Of course it's changing us. It's the power. You can feel it. This is what you have always wanted, isn't it? This is what you have craved. You know the power of the blood. As do I. As does everyone else who has tasted it.

A red-tinted teardrop rolled off his cheek and landed in the sink. Kurtzweil just stared at it, watching it trickle down toward the drain. How much blood had he consumed that it now leaked out with his tears?

It is beyond us, this power, and yet we have harnessed it. What else could we want? The essence of a god runs through our veins now. We are one step closer to Ascension, you and I.

He stopped to consider it. Ascension? It was a magic Word that brought the color back to his cheeks. He had felt the ancient power of the blood from the start. He had never pieced together, though, that this act was at least semi-divine. This blood was descended from a being that could rival the Celestines themselves. Was such a thing possible?

You know. You sense the truth of it.

The more he thought about it, the more Kurtzweil realized that this was simply another challenge. Could he handle the power of a god?

You can. Your will be done.

Kurtzweil pulled himself up. He straightened up, wiped his eyes, and began a breathing exercise. He emptied his mind until one thought came unbidden:

Through strife, power.

• • •



"The warding on this place is nuts to the extreme," said Wendy Milne, bani Thiğ. She hunched over her bizarre laptop computer, watching Enochian sigils dance across the screen, over the image of the mansion that also loomed in the background. "I'd say they're warded against spirits, scrying and Ars Mentis. There's some sort of bizarre Life warding as well."

"Can you get through it?" Kurtzweil asked, fists clenched in his jacket pockets.

"Half a second... Okay, the best I can get is a faint Life reading. I'm showing about 15, er, signatures, consistent with those of vampires. Not counting whatever that thing on the roof is."

"We've scoped it out," Ayara said. Behind her, the members of the Flambeau strike team stood, waiting like hawks for the moment when they could unleash their aggressions. "Some sort of strange massasa, with a composition like stone. If I didn't know better, I'd call it a garçoye."

"Is your team ready?"

"We just have to warm up, and we'll be set."

"Go. We launch in 15 minutes."

The team gathered around Ayara and began a Kabbalistic exercise. Wendy began running base-level algorithms, trying to contact the glass and electricity elementals within the vampires' haven. It was all going according to plan. The Verbena coven in Salem had been warned of the imminent assault on the bloodsuckers, and the witches were available if the team had casualties. Kurtzweil's team, all highly trained

assistants, would back up the Flambeau frontal assault, taking out the vampires from a distance. The Hermetics had discovered that bullets were reasonably effective against the undead — less so than against humans, but far from useless. Meanwhile, Wendy would run surveillance and try “alternative” tactics that the undead would never anticipate. It was flawless.

Chris, the Fortuna, approached Kurtzweil. “There’s something wrong with this situation.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I don’t know, but I feel probability stacking against us.”

Kurtzweil snorted. “Then change it. That’s your job, isn’t it?”

Chris didn’t take the bait. “The waveform is off. There are too many unknown variables to compute. I can estimate to compensate for the unknowns, but there’s something else affecting the equation, some huge possibility that will severely impact the odds for success.”

“Well, we’ll be on guard for it once we’re inside,” Kurtzweil said with a gesture of dismissal.

“Kurtzweil, we don’t know what’s going on!”

Kurtzweil turned to face Chris, his face a mask of anger. “You are not the one going in there, Fortuna! Your duty is to ensure that fortune is on our side! Are you shirking your duty?”

“What? No!”

“Then what is it?” The other mages stood by watching the show. “You’re still a Hermetic, regardless of what house you joined, and we do not bow to anything, especially the whims of fortune! We create fortune, do you understand?”

“But... but...”

“Now remove that block so we can begin!”

Kurtzweil stormed off, suppressing a chuckle. A classic Tytalan rant, sure to leave everyone intimidated and ready to follow him. He knew what the block was. After all, it was he who informed the Tremere of their attack. After a brief flurry, the Hermetics would pull back, left to ponder the worth of a continued war against the massasa. Tytalus would take control of the Council on these doubts, get their books and blood, and refocus on the Technocracy.

Like clockwork.

• • •

The first explosion took off the doors of the mansion. The second one blew a hole in the roof.

The Flambeau team stormed in, guns at the ready. They were ordered not to rely on magic, but that order could go out the window at any time. Kurtzweil and his team followed them in.

Instantly, a telekinetic blast hit the entire group, knocking everyone to the ground. The Flambeau opened fire on the hapless figure gesturing on the stairwell. Some of the bullets swerved to avoid him. Enough bullets hit, and the vampire fell, gurgling blood. The team advanced, but Kurtzweil hesitated a second, staring at the blood

The blood, it is yours.

Kurtzweil shook himself out of it and headed into the main hall of the mansion. The teams spread out beneath an onslaught of blood magic. Vampires moved everywhere, shooting, throwing fireballs, creating lightning.

One of the Flambeau suddenly jerked. From his mouth, a shining stream of blood erupted and flew toward one of the vampires. The Flambeau fell, dead and desiccated. Kurtzweil hesitated for a second, and a bullet caught him in the shoulder. He went down, stunned and disbelieving:

They're trying to kill all of us! This is for real!

"Pull back! Pull back!"

Ayara didn't hear. She stood up, shouting an Enochian spell. It was a standard *Ignis* conjuration. Not only was it vulgar, it was one of the main spells that had been erring. Kurtzweil braced himself for a Paradox Backlash, thinking this was a horrible way to die.

The spell went off. The fire elemental erupted and went wild, engulfing several people. The other Flambeau, buoyed by the success of the Effect, started spreading out. One of Kurtzweil's men erupted into blood, falling.

Blood, blood everywhere, and not a drop to drink.

Kurtzweil spun, sprouting claws as he tore into the stomach of a servitor approaching from behind. As the vampire minion fell, Kurtzweil saw his hand coated in blood, coated in —

The roof crashed as a nine-foot-tall monstrosity of living stone, badly burnt, fell to the floor. A few troops finished the creature off. Suddenly, two of Kurtzweil's men struggled inside a cube of water, drowning in a surreal prison.

Kurtzweil scanned the room, reaching out to the minds in the building, looking for...

Him. The vampire in charge. Their eyes met, and the warlock ran. Kurtzweil waded after him through the carnage. The vampire ducked down a stairwell. Kurtzweil readied his shotgun, turned the corner, and barely had time to see the library he'd entered when a cold, dead hand grasped his arm and his blood began to boil.

Screaming from the agony, Kurtzweil could not feel his arm rise and level the shotgun at the vampire. A deafening roar overtook him, and he was on the ground, in pain, singed from powder burns. He looked up, and most of the vampire's left shoulder was missing. Shocked, the undead thing tried to crawl away as its useless arm twitched on floor and crumbled into dust.

Kurtzweil propped himself up on the shotgun and staggered toward the vampire. He leveled the shotgun at the vampire's head when he heard it mutter something. It was Enochian.

"Gods, protect me... gods, protect me..."

Kurtzweil flipped the vampire over. The shoulder was already knitting itself. "Who are you?" he demanded.

The vampire was barely conscious. "Cordova... bani... bani Ex Miscellanea..."

Kurtzweil stood frozen, stunned for a moment. Then, his face twisting in rage, the Hermetic hammered away on the vampire's head with the butt of the shotgun until the monster lay still. The vampire didn't collapse into dust, which was good — Kurtzweil had quite a few questions to ask him.

"Kurtzweil."

He spun, aiming the shotgun at a bloodied Ayara.

"Jesus, Ayara..."

"The place is secure. All resistance has been neutralized. We can start searching for the goodies now."

Kurtzweil saw that her right hand was missing. He forced himself not to notice. "What are our losses?"

"Three maŕi, seven custos. We have quite a few wounded, but the Verbena will take care of that."

"Get them to the coven, then. Take Chris with you. Call in the Bonisaŕi, they'll want to go over this place with a fine-toothed comb. Wendy and I will head back to the Chantry." He pointed at the vampire on the ground. "We have a prisoner to take with us."

"A prisoner? I thought this was a sweep-and-clear."

"This one's special. He might have some information that could help us."

"Hey, it's your show. I'll round everyone up and head out."

As Ayara walked out of the room, Kurtzweil focused his breathing, forcing himself to consider the situation. It was nearly a catastrophe, an utter failure. Either these warlocks didn't know it was supposed to be a show, or there was a deliberate double-cross on their part. Regardless, this vampire — this poor fucking Ex Miscellanea — would provide the answers.

He found himself staring into a pool of blood that was coagulating on the hardwood floor. Without thinking, Kurtzweil knelt down, dipped a finger into the pool and tasted it. He reveled in the rush, the tingle on his tongue, the power that coursed through him.

Ecstasy was matched by self-loathing as he realized what was happening.

I am sending people to their deaths for this blood. Not for the Order; not for Tytulus. I do this for the blood of a vampire.

Kurtzweil forced himself to his feet and ran up the stairs, away from his negation.



INTRO⊕DUCTION

Whoever delves into mysticism cannot help but stumble, as it is written: "This stumbling block is in your hand." You cannot grasp those things unless you stumble over them.

— The Sefer ha-Bahir



Tremere.

To most mages, the word means nothing. Those who study the more obscure secrets might learn that some vampires call themselves by that name, but most researchers are discouraged from following that path. To the Order of Hermes, however, the Tremere are a stain, an embarrassment and the shadow that follows every ambitious mage in his quest for Ascension. That group is the albatross that has hung around the neck of the Order for the past 800 years.

Once, the Order and its exiled, undead cousins warred openly. The consequences of the war were devastating for both sides. Since then, the skirmishes have been few and far between, with each side wary of the other. As both looked to other concerns, the battle subsided. The Order focused on the Traditions and the Ascension War; House Tremere disappeared into the mists of history.

Now, however, Fortune conspires in these Final Nights to throw the ancient adversaries together again.

LET SLIP THE DOGS OF WAR

Welcome to **Blood Treachery**, the story of the Order of Hermes in the Final Nights. This book is intended as a supplement to the revised edition of **Mage: The Ascension**. In the twilight of the World of Darkness, the shadow of the Final Nights falls over everyone, and the vaunted Order of Hermes reaps the consequences of its past hubris.

The main portion of the book deals with the renewed war between the Order of Hermes and the Tremere. For too long, the rivalry between the two factions simmered. Now, the war has begun anew, and the consequences for the Hermetics are in your hands.

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW WILL KILL YOU

Experienced **Vampire** players will probably gawk with disbelief at some of the deliberate misinformation in this book. Most of the information that the Hermetics have is wildly inaccurate, based on folk legends, hopelessly out-of-date or specific to some particular vampire. Also, keep in mind that everything in **Mage** comes from a wildly subjective viewpoint; there is no one “truth.” It makes perfect sense to a Hermetic that the descendants of the Dark Ages’ Tremere are in control of all the world’s vampires. After all, they’re former Hermetics, aren’t they?

But doesn’t the Order have a ton of information on the *massasa*? Sure it does, but locating that information is another matter entirely. Doissetep and its libraries blew up. Horizon’s libraries are huge. Almost all the files the Order has on vampires are either in the hands of eccentric Bonisagi, destroyed, missing, lost or on loan. The rest have been “appropriated” by House Tytalus. Many files are just plain *wrong*. Getting access to any surviving files on vampires requires an extended research task, plenty of in-game time and a lot of patience. Mages aren’t always the most organized people. Indeed, a quest to recover files about vampires might make a subplot on its own.

The point is that just because you’ve read **Vampire** backward and forward doesn’t mean your *characters* have. In order to get into character, you have to be willfully ignorant about vampires. Forget what you know and dive into the unknown. Bringing your out-of-game rules knowledge into a chronicle will only ruin the fun for you.

This book is more than a simple **Mage/Vampire** crossover, however. It is about how the Order — and the Traditions — can renew themselves in the World of Darkness. For too long, stasis has replaced innovation, wounds have festered without healing, and dead weight drags the Traditions down into the mire. These three factors are the sparks that re-ignite the 800-year-old conflict between mage and *massasa*.

The aftermath is up to you. Will the Order emerge from the ashes, newborn, or is this act the final mistake, the tragic coda to a flawed and dead system of belief?

DISCLAIMER FOR ANGRY GAITIERS

Blood Treachery charges forward with some heavy developments. The Order of Hermes, already weakened by the Reckoning, finds itself thrust into a conflict from which it might not survive. Such is the pitfall of pride.

However, there are always a few people who don’t like the story, don’t want to fit it into their games or just feel that it doesn’t work for them. Players and Storytellers alike from this camp will decry the latest developments, screaming that this or that completely ruins their game. To which we say, “Ignore it.” If you have a better idea for a Tradition-vampire war, that’s cool. If you don’t want to run with the Final Nights plot, that’s cool. If you just want to use this book as a resource for a crossover game, that’s cool. If you want nothing to do with vampires at all and are simply looking for new Hermetic spells, that’s cool.

Even though this book is “canon,” you can still change anything in here at will. You certainly don’t have to change every aspect of your current chronicle to adjust to it. Go nuts. Have a blast. Remember, the idea of playing roleplaying games is to have fun, not to follow slavishly every word the developer says. This story is “official,” but it doesn’t have to supplant *your* story.

Take from this book what you will, and use it in good health. If something doesn’t jive with you, junk it.

THE ORDER OF THE DAY

Blood Treachery may not be what you expect — a tale of tragedy, told through the eyes of the Order of Hermes. It’s a play, a drama in which well-meaning would-be heroes are ground to dust by their own faults along with their allies, both good and bad. These things happen in a war.

More importantly, **Blood Treachery** is a warning to mages against the pitfalls of rashness, toryism and

hubris. If you don't want to use the story as told in **Blood Treachery**, use it as a model of things that *could* go wrong for *any* Tradition.

Act One: Wizards' March details the circumstances that lead up to the renewed war against the *massasa*: the frustration, the panic, the intrigue and the declaration.

Act Two: Hidden War details the specifics of the war: battles, retaliation, mistakes and the eventual stagnation as the Hermetics find themselves in over their heads.

Act Three: Blood Treachery focuses on one Hermetic house that refuses to submit to either side and grabs for control — with disastrous consequences.

Act Four: Pawns and Bishops explains the position of the Order of Hermes — and the Traditions in general — in the Final Nights, the desperate actions of Traditions struggling against Armageddon and how they must adapt to survive.

Appendix: The Blood Curse gives rules for ghouls, mages, a few ways to wing it with **Mage/Vampire** rules systems, some Hermetic High Umbrood who might be interested in these goings-on and Effects old and new.





ACT ⊕ ONE: WIZARDS MARCH

DRAITIATIS PERSONAE

Marcus De Allegresse, Master of the Ars Mentis, bani Tytalus — The Tower
Johann Kurtzweil, bani Tytalus — The Hanged Man
Augustus Pembroke, bani Tytalus — Judgment
Ingmar Strohmman, bani Bonisagus — Strength
Ishaq Ibn-Thoth, Primus of House Quaesitor — Justice
Jeremy Chastam, bani Quaesitor — Temperance
Sharad Osei, would-be Primus of House Thig — The Star
Lord Edward Gilmore, Deacon Primus of Mus, in exile — The Emperor
Nicodemus Mulhouse, Chief Archivist of Horizon — The Fool
Sophia Chevallier, bani Tytalus — The Empress
Various mages, vampires, ghouls, custos, and others
Tremere — The Devil
The Oracles of the Nine Sacred Emanations of The One — The World
The Cabal of Bright Wisdom:
Rebecca Mitsotakai, bani Fortunae — The Wheel of Fortune
Josiah Lamb, bani Ex Miscellanea — The Sun
Edward Grey, bani Bonisagus — The Magician
Aurelien Archambeau, bani Solificatus — The Lovers
Paul Corbin, bani Flambeau — The Chariot

INVOCATION: SHADOWS OF THE PAST

The solar system. In the center, the Earth. The ORACLES, one for each Sphere, stand at their places on the appropriate planet. CONNECTION stands on Mercury, LIFE stands on Venus, PRIME stands on Earth's moon, FORCES stands on Mars, MATTER stands on Jupiter, TIME stands on Saturn, SPIRIT stands on Uranus, MIND stands on Neptune, and ENTROPY stands on Pluto. While each of the ORACLES is robed in appropriate garments, none of their faces are visible behind blue masks.

ORACLES: (together) Hail, O Fortunes and Fates, attend! Hail, Fellow Elements, attend! By the Glory of the Creator, attend! Hear our words and know their truth. Know that we keep this record for the One, of which we are now cousins, for it is ordained that there must be an accounting of what here transpires. Such is our station, and we shall not neglect our duty. Hail!

CONNECTION: There, below us, the stage beckons, the brilliant blue-green orb, our former home. Father Sun watches from a distance, wanting to help his children but cowed, abashed as they grow proud and neglect him. Sister Moon vies for their attention, but they tread upon her flesh and say she is nothing now, merely a rock in a void.

LIFE: And poor, angry Mother Earth afflicts her wayward children with her rage, as earthquake, volcano, flood and typhoon try to stem the tide of expansion, to send a message to these proud monkeys. The message is clear from my vantage: *You are swarming over me, and I can no longer nurture all of you.*

PRIME: Here is the stage, and on it? The players, mortal and Awakened, some of whom try to make sense of it. Most just swim blindly in the fog of ignorance, of unbelief, and the Sleep of Ages threatens to extinguish the light of knowledge forever. Magic is sluggish, slowing, mired in the mud as reality becomes more and more exhausted. Soon, I fear, all motion will cease. Soon, the tired and worn-out Tellurian will collapse and end.

ENTROPY: And from above, that red eye, counter to Father Sun, watches and waits for something.

FORCES: But I see before me with my newfound sense another act unfolding. I see those I loved and gave my life for, gathering one more time before the coming onslaught.

PROLOGUE: ENTER THE PLAYERS

TIME: Here is the script, as a Tapestry of all events, past, present and future, all of space-time united in an Einsteinian sphere for anyone to read. Entering stage right,

the venerable and indomitable Houses of Hermes stand on unstable ground. Venerable, certainly — they trace their heritage to the dawn of civilization. Indomitable, however — surely only Sister Entropy could answer why Fate has dealt them such crippling blows. Perhaps, however, the answer is more obvious than anyone will admit.

Once they reigned supreme over Europe. The High Mythic Age was one of terrible grandeur, when the will of magi literally shook the Earth. The Houses of Hermes came together to guard the sacred knowledge they had acquired, for the enemies of the Art — the pagan hordes, the zealous priests and the monsters watching from the shadows — were numerous. Alone, the houses were targets; united, they created the dominant magic of Europe for over six centuries.

As FORCES recites their names, the Primi of the Houses of Hermes enter wearing purple masks.

FORCES: Look, here comes Bonisagus, books bristling with wisdom! Ah, proud Tytalus, stalwart against all opposition. Jerbiton, surveying the scene, taking it in, as Guernicus weighs the options. Fair Diedne, dancing with dreams, and Criamon, dark-eyed visionary from the East. And there is Flambeau, laying to waste the enemies of the Order! Mercere, quick as death, uniting the houses! Verditus, cunning crafter of wondrous Treasures! And...

Well, who is this? A magus, shorter in stature than his brethren, not as powerful in the Art, yet with a cunning and savvy that his fellow magi have not cultivated. The other magi look at him and scoff, for he appears to be the weakest of the Primi. And yet Tremere, poor, pitiable Tremere, holds nothing in his heart but ambition and patience.

MIND: I wonder. Did the other magi never see the deception? Did they not discern the godlike ego that lay behind that placid mask? Perhaps. Or perhaps they recognized something of themselves in Tremere — something that they could never acknowledge — and they shunned him for it.

Regardless, the treachery is carried out. Poisonous Tremere tricks Guernicus into sanctioning death for the Diedne. Tremere takes what he needs and begins his transformation. He has felt the decline of magic; he knows the constriction that waits on the horizon. He sacrifices his soul for immortality, power and an escape from the fate he is certain will engulf the Order. And finally, along with his seven closest disciples, he becomes undead. Massasa. Vampire.

TREMERE's mask turns blood red.

ENTROPY: Did the other magi know that this would be their undoing? Did the houses — or Tremere himself — know what downfall this simple, defining act

would cause? For it was a century-long war against the rogue House Tremere that depleted the Hermetic Quintessence stockpiles, killed scores of magi and distracted them from their duties as guardians of the Sleepers and keepers of wisdom. This distraction cost them dearly, for when the Craftmasons took Mistrudge, the Order had no response. The magi could not see the implications of such an act, so focused on revenge were they.

FORCES: Thus the fall. History turns a page, and suddenly the world belongs to Science. The tragic flaw of the Order of Hermes is that it is always fighting the wrong battle. The Primi bury their heads in books, too proud to concern themselves with petty affairs like the fall of their empire.

MATTER: The centuries following see the Artisan taking center stage. Now the magi are antagonists, fighting a losing war against an inevitable enemy. Soon they aren't even *the* enemy any more. They are relegated to a lesser role as merely one of nine deluded Traditions fighting the monolithic inevitability of the new Science. The magi burn with resentment — and Paradox — as they are reminded, over and over, that they were once kings. Some fancy themselves leaders in exile, soon to return to their rightful station. But everywhere, the crushing weight of stone and chains of cold iron encircles everything, squeezing the life from the Earth.

SPIRIT: Yes, the Hermetic philosophy survives, and it occasionally breaks into this new Tapestry the Technocracy has woven. Nothing is ever truly lost, after all. But now, as before, the knowledge is hidden, and only a select few have the patience, wisdom and intelligence to unearth it. And fewer still have the courage to bring the light back into the darkness, that the world might shine again.

And all through the long sleep of wisdom, the last survivors of House Tremere thrive in the darkness. I can see their poisoned souls multiplying, planning for the Fall.

THE STAGE IS SET

FORCES: Now the Order is closer to destruction than it has ever been. Mus, Doissetep, the disappearance of the most powerful magi... if things continue as they are, the light of knowledge and wonder will disappear from the world once and for all. The play will, indeed, become a tragedy.

ENTROPY: But endings are never written. And things never continue as they are.

TIME: The catalyst, once again, will be that crafty Archmagus Tremere, the Order's shadow of the past, the other snake on the caduceus, the constant reminder of a mage's failure.

FORCES: Come now. The play begins.
The ORACLES descend to Earth.

THE STATUS OF THE HOUSES OF HERITIES

A lot has changed since the old days of the Order of Hermes. With Doissetep destroyed, several major mages dead and the tightening of magic around the world, the Order has been shaken to its foundations. How the individual houses have dealt with the chaos ranges from outright terror to wonder at the possibilities of new beginnings.

Bonisagus — Since the deaths of the Fraternal Society of Bonisagus, individual Bonisagi have emerged from their myriad hiding spaces throughout the Tellurian to try and save the day. The theories they propose range from the sublime to the ridiculous. However, the desperate infusion of new ideas is fundamentally disconnected from reality, considering the isolation for which the scholars of this house are famous.

A new movement among the Bonisagi proposes a new vector for the house. Composed mostly of younger Bonisagi, this movement disdains the “solitary wizard” stereotype and instead calls for a more active role in the Order — including the pursuit of new lines of research. They have made overtures to

House Thig in the hopes of gaining new perspectives on old techniques. Perhaps a mixture of old ideas and new practices can counteract the situation at hand.

Ex Miscellanea — Trying to get a unified front from the Hodge-Podge is an impossible task. After all, there's a reason they're called the Hodge-Podge. However, the mages of Ex Miscellanea have begun reexamining their role as a house. First of all, the near-collapse of the political structure has prompted many of them to wonder — loudly — what role the house will play in rebuilding the Order. Second, mages who wouldn't deign to speak to one of them before are sheepishly asking for advice now that “proper” formulae are proving less successful. Ex Miscellanea is now basking in the prestige of its fellows and wondering how best to handle it.

The only members of the house who aren't enjoying the limelight are the Criamon. Ever since July of 1999, the remaining members of this once-strong house have been going insane. A few have recovered, but many more have succumbed to Quiet or died. One who did emerge from insanity remembers

something about a cannibal king and a typhoon in Asia, but that's about it. The Order has no current hypothesis for this unfortunate happening.

Flambeau — The flame mages are angry. (Surprise.) With the fall of Doissetep, the death of Porthos Fitz-Empress and the further constriction of their God-given right to blow shit up whenever they desire, a renewed fatalism has overcome them. Now more than ever, they are willing to sacrifice everything for one great offensive against the forces of the Technocracy—even if it means the destruction of the Order.

Flambeau is the single most active house now, with nearly half of all Hermetic applicants transferred to the house. Flambeau operations against Technocratic, Nephandic and other supernatural strongholds have increased fivefold. The attrition rate is reaching unsustainable levels, with mages falling to weapons, Paradox, Quiet or the Cauls. The Flambeau's motto is "Unto Death We Charge," and they appear to be reaching this goal faster than ever. How long the carnage will last is anybody's guess. The desperate Flambeau lust for battle may drive these mages to extinction.

Fortunae — Between recruiting new Hermetics, managing the Order's finances and just living their lives, mages of House Fortunae are the busiest mages in the Order. The demand from Flambeau for new recruits (cannon fodder) is straining the breezily efficient Fortunae to the breaking point. It's bad enough that they don't have enough time to publish new and astounding proofs; now they have to find the least-qualified mages in the Tellurian and convince them that dying in the name of Hermes is a good idea.

Still, Fortunae has mostly escaped the tightening of magic that plagues the other houses. Its magic never relied heavily on Umbrood protocols, and its praxis consists of either divine mathematics (which is so ancient it can never be eradicated) or the cutting edge of new math (which manages to keep one step ahead of the noose). Even in these troubled times, Fortunae is lucky.

Janissary — With the death of Caeron Mustai, House Janissary became a house in search of a mission. Many of the cabals and individual mages that were Janissary agents continue to spy and collect information, but to whom they report is a matter of speculation. More than any other house, Janissary is indicative of the new chaos that has engulfed the Order. It is rudderless and flailing for a purpose, and it dreads the future.

A new leader, an Adept named Ali Ben-Shamazz, has attempted to steer the sinking ship, repeating desperately the need for orthodoxy within the Order. The fact that so many mages have followed Shamazz and his extremist philosophy is less a cause for hope than evidence of the doubt and uncertainty that plagues the Order. If the *Ianisari* persist in this course, they may find themselves relegated to Ex Miscellanea before too long.

Quaesitor — Now, more than ever, there exists a need for judgment and a practiced eye to discern what should and shouldn't be. House Quaesitor seems like the perfect candidate to take control of the Order, as it has a strong, unified structure, unassailable integrity and a common vision of Ascension. However, while individual Quaesitori might jockey for position, the house as a whole must keep its objectivity. It will not move forward and jeopardize its entire reason for being just because it can.

Strange rumors surround the Quaesitori these days, most of them prompted by the mages' refusal to take the reins of leadership. The Quaesitori will not discuss such rumors with anyone, especially the ones concerning their magic. People wonder—sometimes aloud—how the tightening paradigm is affecting the Quaesitori. This speculation leads inevitably to a question almost too horrifying to comprehend. Has the Quaesitori punishment ritual of Gilgul been compromised? If it has, what can be done with those Awakened mages judged worthy of it? And what has happened to those mages whom the Quaesitori have tried to Gilgul and failed?

Shaea — The House of Records is currently bugging the other houses embroiled in the crisis, because it doesn't seem affected at all. While the rest of the Order is panicking and screaming about the End, Shaea sits back calmly and continues with research. The Seshati attitude is simple: These things go in cycles. Having the whole of human history at your fingertips gives one a more relaxed attitude when a crisis hits.

Of course, the Seshati aren't entirely idle. They are watching carefully to see if this event is, indeed, the final turn of the screw. They doubt that such is the case, but it is certainly a plausible possibility (at least, more so now than at any point in the past). However, as history has borne out for millennia, everyone is certain that the apocalypse predicted within their lifetime is the *real* one. In the meantime, House Shaea is busy researching old texts for other Hermetics, a duty that is racking up favors by the day. And the Seshati continue to chronicle the past so that they may preserve it for the future.

Solificati — The Craft formerly known as the Children of Knowledge (and the Tradition formerly known as the Solificati) surprised everyone by accepting the Hermetics' offer of membership, including the Hermetics. After all, the Alchemists were holding out for their own *Tradition*, hoping to sweep in as the 10th Seat of Unity, unite the Traditions and go for the gold ring of worldwide Ascension. Why, then, be subsumed into the Order instead?

Besides obvious political reasons (i.e., they didn't have a chance of making it past the Choristers and Verbena), the Solificati had to choose a side before they fell through the cracks. They had contemplated long enough, and they realized that this chance was their last best one to create the unity they desired. By joining the Order of Hermes, they became the tenth house in the Order. In so doing, they bring unity to the Order itself, and they will help the Order bring that unity to the rest of the Traditions.

The Alchemists find themselves coming in with a very strong position. While their classic alchemical knowledge is pure gold (so to speak), the newer breeds of alchemists (see **The Book of Crafts** for information about the division) bring a revamped and recharged Hermetic philosophy back into the Order. With both the old and the new in one house, they are in a position to purify the Order — and the world — from within.

Thig — The so-called “technobrats” have reached puberty. They were forced to look at their own mortality when Altimeas Cowling and his cabal in Doissetep

fell. Now an older and wiser — but no less bewildering — House Thig is burning to take the fight directly to the Technocracy. While its scholarship may not compete with most Hermetics, its ideas and strange praxes lend the Order a much-needed edge.

Currently Thig is the second-largest Hermetic house after House Flambeau. Its strange take on classical Hermeticism appeals to a generation whose education was sabotaged by a variety of factors. What's more, Thig's magic, unlike that of the other houses, has not backfired. The house's constant drive to improve, refine and discover more of the secrets of the universe has been a lifeline to the rest of the Order, keeping it from falling totally into obsolescence.

Tytalus — How far the mighty have fallen. The Tytalans were once one of the strongest houses of the Order, dominating the other houses and pushing them toward their goals. However, as time went on, the constant challenge the house advocated degenerated into useless antagonism. Now the house is a shadow of its former self. Apprentices are rare, put off by the unrelenting pressure the house puts on them.

The Tytalans are unsure of how to remedy the situation. Some advocate a return to the past, an entrenchment into the tried-and-true Tytalan mentality. Others look forward, trying to scry the house's part in future events. Some get depressed, some plot new stratagems, some go insane. And, as Act Three of this book illustrates, some decide on a novel approach that might win the day... or seal the house's doom.

GUNS, GUNS, GUNS

A lot of blood and gun-fighting and dying goes on in this play — it's a regular action-fest. But aren't mages and vampires more subtle than that? Well, of course they are. However, that subtlety is — by definition — the part you don't see.

Remember, just because some minions are running around with sub-machine guns doesn't mean that nasty influence wars aren't going on in the background. Mages use their powers to alter the plans and resources of the

vampires subtly; the vampires infiltrate human society and manipulate records, police and finances discreetly in order to shut down Tradition Chantries and cut off their allies. The Traditions liberate vampire servitors, and the vampires use their blood-powers to control the minds and spirits of Tradition allies. So remember this: If your character wants to survive, he'll need to pay attention to the man behind the curtain.

SCENE I

The lights rise on the Sanctum of one ABRAHAM THE WHITE, a mage of House Bonisagus. It is a crowded room filled with arcana of all manner. Wearing a purple mask, ABRAHAM sits within a pentacle that has been etched in the floor. A smaller pentacle faces him. Candles surround him. Unseen by the Bonisagus, the ORACLES observe from their appointed stations.

ABRAHAM: (in Enochian) ...in the name of all things sacred and divine, and by the oath I have sworn with thee, I compel thee: Appear.

Nothing happens.

Appear!

Again, nothing.

Appear, damn you!

FORCES: Spirit, sibling, why do you weep?

ABRAHAM stands up in a rage, knocking over candles, disrupting the circle.

ABRAHAM: This is inconceivable. Five times I have attempted the Greater Ritual of Summoning; five times I have etched the circles, lit the candles, walked the tree and uttered the invocation, and nothing! NOTHING! How is this possible, that these most ancient of rituals no longer work, even within the confines of my Sanctum? What is happening?

I must be doing something wrong. I will go back to the grimoire to make sure I have not done anything wrong — although I believe I have not — and try again.

And it will be all right. It will be all right.

SCENE 2

The libraries of Horizon. ABRAHAM follows a doddering NICODEMUS MULHOUSE, who also wears a purple mask.

MULHOUSE: ...and the Latin translation, which came to us in 1104, from an eccentric magus in the Swiss Alps who had sequestered himself for some time.

ABRAHAM: Dear Mulhouse, I already have the Latin translation. What I need is the original, the very first edition of the book.

MULHOUSE: Well, aren't we feeling industrious today? The original, eh?

He thinks then starts cackling.

ABRAHAM: What? Is the tome lost?

MULHOUSE: Oh, I believe so. I believe it is indeed lost.

ABRAHAM: It was on Doissetep, wasn't it?

MULHOUSE: No, no, no, it wasn't destroyed, as far as I know. But as I recall, the book in question was

last possessed by an expatriate-turned-vampire later stricken from our records, in the 10th century.

ABRAHAM: So there's no way to get it.

MULHOUSE: You could always ask the vampires. I'm sure they'd love to assist you.

MULHOUSE exits, laughing.

ENTROPY: (recoiling, almost as though struck) Dear Mulhouse, know you not what you have uttered?

Dark clouds are drawn across Horizon's bright sky.

SCENE 3

In the library of the Exeter Chantry, in London, around 3 A.M. . AURELIAN ARCHAMBEAU, PAUL CORBIN, REBECCA MITSOTAKAI, EDWARD GREY and JOSIAH LAMB (all masked in purple) speak in hushed tones over liqueur.

AURELIEN: People are beginning to panic, my friends. These events are no longer idle mishaps, but something happening on a larger scale. Even my simplest experiments have fallen prey to this unfortunate affliction. I have been able to compensate, for alchemy is quite versatile, but for those who do not practice the Royal Art...

PAUL: Yeah, we know, all right? Not all of us can sit around our labs and make potions and unguents. Hell, I have Constructs to raid, and if my magic's fucking up on me... I mean, it's bad enough most of my shit's risky when I'm in a Construct anyway. Now with this bullshit going on, I might as well not even be a mage.

REBECCA: Is this happening across the board? I know that I haven't experienced too many troubles myself. Then again, I deal with math, not ritual.

EDWARD: It's not like *nothing's* working. We're still able to accomplish things. But what's unsettling people is how the formulae, the rituals, the seals are no longer reliable. These teachings have been with us for millennia. My pater, Abraham, has fairly driven himself into Twilight over this.

JOSIAH: Is it possible that the rituals have been misinterpreted? After all, we're dealing with translations of translations. Can't we just go back to the originals and make sure we're not doing something wrong?

EDWARD: That's impossible. The original texts we had were in Doissetep. The books in Horizon are translations. The Order didn't want to give away the secrets to the other Traditions. And every time we try and find other originals, we keep running into the same name — House Tremere. It appears they absconded with quite a few texts.

PAUL: Then why not take them back?

Bemused chuckles from everyone except PAUL. TIME and ENTROPY hide their faces.

PAUL: No, I'm serious. If they have the books, why not take them back from them?

EDWARD: Because we have no idea where they are. It's been a thousand years.

REBECCA: Besides, I have better things to do than chase after myths that may or may not have something to do with anything.

Resigned pause.

JOSIAH: Any word from Matthew?

Awkward silence.

PAUL: Nothing. Still.

AURELIEN: It has been well over three months. Has no one attempted to locate him?

JOSIAH: Of course. Scrying, telepathy... I even went to the police. He's completely vanished.

EDWARD: He was always good at hiding, though. He'll be fine. I'm sure of it. He'll be just fine.

PAUL: What if he's—

EDWARD: He'll be *fine*. He will. I'm sure of it.

SCENE 4

The Grand Tribunal of the Order of Hermes, temporarily housed within the Quaesitor Ancestral Chantry, in the Black Forest of Germany. SHARAD OSEI, flanked by two other Thigs (all masked in purple), stands before the assembled council (likewise masked), reading a report.

OSEI: We were first alerted to the possibility that this was more than a simple typhoon not only by the unnaturally high death toll of the storm, but also from the huge surge in Technocratic traffic that coincided with it. At first, we weren't sure what was going on, but after several months of digging through ill-secured Technocracy records, we've managed to put together several of the pieces. What we found does not bode well for us or the world. Please pay careful attention, here; many Bothans died to bring us this report.

It appears that there was a gi-fucking-normous Technocratic operation that went by the code name of Ragnarok. And yes, all the implications of that word are spoken for in this operation. What went on in Bangladesh was apparently the work of a vampire. One. As in single. As in one vampire is responsible for millions of deaths, untold damage and worldwide insanity, as well as the deaths of scores of mages from other Traditions and the current state of the remaining Criumon.

To put things into perspective, let me show you what it took to kill this one, solitary God-damned vampire. Pages 23 through 27 of your copies will show you the authorization codes for the deployment of solar mirrors. We didn't even know the Technocracy had solar mirrors, but I guess



they felt this a worthwhile waste of trillions of dollars. They reflected the sun into that precise spot, but apparently this creature had control of the weather, because the typhoon sprung up about a minute after deployment. Coincidence? You tell me. I'm just the Thig.

The typhoon lasted until the date of the memos detailed on page 39. When the mirrors proved ineffective, Technocracy Control apparently gave authorization, under this Code Ragnarok, for *nuclear* fucking deployment. The Technocracy had to drop three nuclear warheads on this damn vampire, and that only seemed to weaken the thing, because the Technocracy reports that the creature died only after the typhoon weakened enough to allow the reflected sunlight to break through the cloud cover. Three nuclear warheads *weakened* this creature, after untold numbers of Sleepers, mages and supernatural what-have-yous died trying to take it down.

What conclusions can be drawn from these findings, class? No good ones. I don't know that much about the ways and wherefores of vampires, but I know that any creature that is this powerful can only be bad fucking news. My fellow Primi, I realize we have our own problems. But if the *massasa* are this powerful — if, indeed, the house that got away back in the Stone Age is this powerful — then we have a horrifying new front to the Ascension War to consider.

SCENE 5

Exeter Chantry. REBECCA, AURELIEN, JOSIAH, and PAUL sit in the study.

AURELIEN: I've had some success with the newer theories my fellow Solificati have provided, as well as incorporating some formulae Rebecca gave me. I even did some research with a Dreamspeaker friend, and his insights are astounding. I think we may have something new coming up soon.

PAUL: That might help you, but that ain't doing jack-shit for me. I have a scouting job coming up, and I'm screwed. My people have been going off like Roman candles from the 'dox. It's insane. Everybody's flipping out.

REBECCA: And talking about the *Massasa* War.

JOSIAH: What? What about it?

REBECCA: Where have you been? Everywhere I go, people are talking about all the books the Tremere have, the amount of knowledge the vampires must've accumulated over centuries or how they sent a vampire into Bangladesh to kill everything. I'm hearing some truly far-fetched theories.

AURELIEN: And yet, the one thing that everyone seems to agree on is that they have a treasure trove of texts. Texts that can reinvigorate our praxes.

PAUL: So why aren't we grabbing them?

AURELIEN: More and more people seem to be asking that question.

Split scene — the streets of London. EDWARD walks along under the moon, until he spies a familiar figure — but one who wears a blood-red mask.

EDWARD: Matthew!

MATTHEW turns, sees EDWARD and freezes in horror.

EDWARD: Matthew! What the hell?

MATTHEW bolts. EDWARD chases after him. MATTHEW is faster. After a while, EDWARD falls behind, winded and tired. MATTHEW runs for a door, but he turns around to face EDWARD before entering.

EDWARD: Matthew... what... what happened to you?

MATTHEW: They took me, Edward. The undead. They took me, and they destroyed my soul.

EDWARD: No... no...

MATTHEW: No more a magus, Edward. Now I'm one of them. Please, go. List me among the dead. This (*indicates the door*) is where I dwell now. Forget me. Make sure they all forget me.

The door opens, and a GENTLEMAN, also wearing a blood-red mask, exits the house. EDWARD quickly pulls the shadows over him to hide.

GENTLEMAN: Matthew. Is everything all right?

MATTHEW: Yes, yes... I was... startled, I thought someone was following me, but I think I just panicked. Saw something that wasn't there.

GENTLEMAN: You're still getting used to your power. It's a common occurrence. Come, you're expected.

The GENTLEMAN and MATTHEW enter. MATTHEW doesn't look back. EDWARD emerges from hiding, saddened and furious. He watches the door, then enters the Exeter scene.

REBECCA: Edward, what's wrong? What happened?

EDWARD: I found Matthew... I found... I...

JOSIAH: Is he dead?

EDWARD: Worse! His soul... his soul, destroyed... the...

AURELIEN: Calm down, Edward.

EDWARD: The vampires took him! He's one of them now! They drank his soul and turned him into a monster, and now he's one of them. He's a worthless... They *killed* him and kept him around for their... They just wanted him, and they took him. They killed him, the bastards.

Everyone is stunned while EDWARD weeps. Then:

PAUL: Vengeance.

AURELIEN: Paul, calm—

PAUL: No! (*The air around PAUL momentarily shimmers with flame.*) Fuck this! They grab one of ours, our friend, they destroy his soul and turn him into just another bloodsucking piece of shit? And we're just supposed to take it? We get shit on by the undead, we just take it. We get shit on by the Technocracy, and we just take it. When are we gonna start acting like mages? When are we gonna stop hiding and come out swinging, huh? When, Aurelien?

Tense pause.

AURELIAN: We do not have the power to face them! We already reel from broken magic, the press of technology and the loss of Doissetep. We cannot risk picking yet another fight right now.

PAUL: Maybe *you* can't handle it, but *I* stand up for my friends. I know I'm not the only one either. If you're not going to support me, I know plenty of Flambeau who will.

Paul exits.

REBECCA: (*whispering*) He's right. This fire's about to rage out of control.

SCENE 6

The Grand Tribunal chamber. It is filled with mages who all wear purple masks. REBECCA, JOSIAH, PAUL, EDWARD and AURELIEN sit at the Table of the Advocates. MARCUS DE ALLEGRESSE, bani Tytalus, speaks, with his second, JOHANN KURTZWEIL, who stands nearby. JEREMYCHASTAM, bani Quaesitor, faces MARCUS, and ISHAQ IBN-THOTH, bani Quaesitor, sits in judgment.

MARCUS: We are not asking for anything that is not already binding to us. House Tremere was tried *in absentia* for its crimes, and its members were all sentenced to Requital. That judgment has never been countermanded, it has never been overruled, and it has *never been enforced*. The Massasa War dwindled to nothing, and these snakes have been allowed to fester in our garden for over 800 years. Surely seeking justice is not merely the act of finding someone guilty of wrongdoing, but of carrying out the appropriate punishment. Now is the time for the undead — and for any of our escaped, errant brethren — to face their punishment.

JEREMY: While you may be correct in the guilt of the historical House Tremere, I cannot understand why you request punishment at this time. Surely, one does not need to look very far to see the chaos that is engulfing our Order. The Ars Arcane are shaking apart, unlike anything since the vaunted Scourge was first reported in the 15th century. The Technocracy — our *true* enemy —

comes closer and closer to domination. It eradicates the supernatural on one hand, and these mad fanatics walk the street, ready to destroy anything they perceive as “different” on the other. And now, in our moment of crisis, you wish to distract us with a war against the undead? What madness is this? We must solve our problems, not uncover new ones. This is distraction at best; suicide at worst. I pray, Master Ibn-Thoth, let calmer heads prevail.

MARCUS: You speak of the problems that beset the Order currently. What you fail to realize is that these vampires have been jealously hoarding knowledge that was never rightfully theirs. You fail to understand that the traitors have continued to kidnap, kill and convert Hermetic mages and consors for their own purposes over these long centuries. With a victory over the undead comes a victory for all of humanity. We have read House Thig's report. If one vampire can destroy Bangladesh, what could a house of them do? Who knows what plans these vampires have for the world, sending their pawns to war? They are a cancer that must be expunged at all costs!

JEREMY: Now is not the time to expunge them! We fought the *massasa* once before, during our time of strength. We are weakened now. There is no sense to another war, especially one that could finish us. We must survive and gather our strength. To chase down a few remaining vampires who were cast from our Order centuries ago — to hunt the undead wantonly, to incite them further — is to bring ruin down upon our own heads.

MARCUS: And to stand aside is not? These expatriates have already struck at us. They steal from our ranks and destroy the very Avatars of those they claim. When one mage makes war against them, they make war against us all. Do we stand together as unified houses against their threat, or do we allow them to crush our brethren, separate and weakened as they may be? Master Ibn-Thoth, I hereby formally petition House Quaesitor to reinstate the Wizards' March against the rogue House Tremere, and to expand this battle to the undead who unjustly hoard the stolen resources and powers of our Order.

ISHAQ: The Council will consider the arguments. This Tribunal will stand under recess.

People file out.

REBECCA: Master De Allegresse... Once again, thank you so much for agreeing to speak for us.

MARCUS: Not at all, my dear. I agree with your cause and your passion. Don't worry, I have a feeling we'll win.

REBECCA: (*somewhat distracted*) Thank you again, sir. *Exeunt all but MARCUS and JOHANN.*

JOHANN: I still don't understand it, Magister.

MARCUS: What is there to understand?



JOHANN: Your advocacy for this cause. What good will it do the Order?

MARCUS: Ah, dear Johann, you're still not thinking along the right lines. Think of it this way. The Order is in a panic. Everyone starts looking for a scapegoat. They find these Tremere, but what can be done? By a stroke of luck, a young cabal discovers that one of their friends has been Embraced. One strikes at the undead, and the bloodsuckers push back against others who know nothing about the little conflict. This is nothing new, Johann. They've been poaching us for centuries, but an issue was never made about it. The attacks have been only rumors for as long as many of us remember. Now, suddenly, this cabal discovers that the rumors are true, and they drum up a groundswell of support for vengeance. Enter the friendly Tylalan Master with the connections to get their case heard.

JOHANN: But what if it doesn't work?

MARCUS: It'll work, believe me. People are too passionate about it already. This impulsive Flambeau, Paul, has infected many other members of his house with his cry for vengeance. Ishaq, despite his claims

of objectivity, is too smart to ignore the voices of such a large house. So if we play our part well — act as the enabling friend, the counselor, the guide...

JOHANN: And if the war doesn't work? What if we start losing?

MARCUS: We won't. Here's the trump card: Master Hortemone had the old Massasa War-era House Tremere figured out. No one else knows this, but I discovered his private journals in his Earthbound Chantry. He was double-crossing the vampires for about 20 years. According to his notes, they're easy targets. There aren't a lot of them, and there's so much back-stabbing between them that they couldn't mount a united defense against a termite infestation.

JOHANN: But he publicly advocated reinstating House Tremere in the Order!

MARCUS: A pawn is still a pawn, even if it's undead, Johann. There are too many levels to this game. You'll have to get better at playing. Stay by my side, and you'll learn the rules soon enough.

Exeunt.

SCENE 7

REBECCA, PAUL, EDWARD, AURELIEN, and JOSIAH in their private chamber.

JOSIAH: I don't like this. There's too much blood-lust in the air. When Marcus was talking, you could practically hear the Flambeau drooling.

PAUL: Hey!

EDWARD: Do I have to remind you that Matthew—

JOSIAH: No, you *don't*, Edward. I know full well what happened to Matthew, and I'm as pissed off as you are.

PAUL: Then what's the fucking problem? We're gonna take care of them.

AURELIEN: I believe dear Josiah's problem is not with the matter of revenge, but with how big our revenge has become. I myself did not expect things to get this far. After all, there's a difference between a cabal solving a murder and an entire Tradition declaring war against vampires.

REBECCA: It's out of our hands now.

PAUL: Not necessarily.

REBECCA: No, it is. I can feel it, I can see the fractals in the air. We're not steering the boat anymore; we're being carried into the rapids by the current.

PAUL: Bullshit. I'm totally in control of my destiny.

REBECCA: Of course you are.

AURELIEN: But this matter *is* out of our hands. It is a Tradition-wide issue now. Either we will go to war, or we will not. And every one of us will be expected to do his part.

JOSIAH: I'm not sure what I could do to help.

EDWARD: You're a healer. We'll need plenty of that.

PAUL: Are you kidding? This is gonna be like Desert Storm. I've heard so much bullshit about these vampires, but you know what? I bet they're like the Republican Guard. Remember them? The *Elite* Republican Guard? Well, let me tell you how elite they were. When we were rolling towards Kuwait, the Iraqi army practically gave us an escort there. Same thing with the bloodsuckers. The enemy always seems so much worse than it actually is.

REBECCA: I really hope you're right, Paul, and that I'm very, very wrong. Because I have such a bad feeling about this.

AURELIEN: Even though you played your part in bringing this situation about?

REBECCA: Especially because of that, Aurelien. Especially.

SCENE 8

The Tribunal Chamber. Everyone as before. ISHAQ stands in the center.

ISHAQ: ...Furthermore, in its ruthless campaign of enslaving, corrupting or killing magi of the Order of Hermes, and possibly of our fellow Traditions, these undead sorcerers and sympathizers to the outcast House Tremere have set themselves in a state of war long after the original hostilities had ceased. It is an act of aggression that can no longer be tolerated.

Therefore, let it be known that on this day, the twenty-first day of January, A.D. 2000, the Order of the Quaesitori hereby declares Wizards' March against House Tremere and all members and associates therein, living or undead. Their lives, property and souls are forfeit. Let the wrath of the Order of Hermes lay waste to our enemies. Ave Hermes.

The scene freezes. The ORACLES appear.

ENTROPY: There. It is done. The corner is turned. There is no going back.

FORCES: Oh, my proud cousins, how could you have fallen so far? You know not how you have encompassed your doom! How could you not see the pit beneath your feet?

MIND: Fear and panic dwells in their hearts. You can read it on their faces — the exhilaration of acting without forethought. They are not the confident magi they would like to believe they are. They are terrified of the future.

TIME: As well they should be. I have seen the road beyond.

SPIRIT: But Brother Time, is not the future unwritten?

TIME: Perhaps. But from this valley, I only see the stream dying in the distance.

FORCES: Then someone should lift them from their gully.

CONNECTION: Poor Hermetics. They have lost the wings on their feet! Someone will have to remind them of what their Name means!

LIFE: Not before we carve away the sickness, though. I can smell it — blood, gore, disease. Death lies ahead.

ENTROPY: Does that bother you, Sister?

LIFE: All things die, Sister. Whether they live again... I doubt even you could say whether the Cycle will continue.

FORCES: I can feel the stirring of the lightning, the burning of the fire of hate within them. Come. We must attend to the war.

Exeunt.



ACT TWO: HIDDEN WAR



SCENE I

The lights come up slowly, revealing broken bodies and smoking ruins. Here, a WRETCHED SURVIVOR in a purple mask drags his shattered form toward a destination he no longer remembers, nor will he ever reach. There, a YOUNG VAMPIRE in a red mask — too wounded to flee or even lap the blood that pools mere yards away — awaits the arrival of rosy-fingered dawn. Saddened by the carnage, the ORACLES enter and take their places.

CONNECTION: The blood between close kin runs hot. The crimson Branch forgets not the Tree, nor the Tree the Branch. Alike in their desires, they see only the differences that move the killing hand.

TIME gestures to the YOUNG VAMPIRE, a blood tear rolling down its ruined mask and onto its corpse-white cheek.

TIME: Was it any different with the first of their kind?

ENTROPY: No, it is not the same, Brother. Surely, a curse follows this dark endeavor, but it is a curse of man's pride and folly. It is the ambition that is both the rot in the root and the worm that cultivates it.

SPIRIT: Indeed. Two Caines stand at this altar, each yearning to butcher the other upon the block.

FORCES stands over the WRETCHED SURVIVOR, who strains for a moment to see the Oracle, then expires.

FORCES: Your plowshare, O Caine, has become your sword, and with it will you reap a bloody harvest.

MIND: But wait! There is a glimmer of hope.

The sun breaks over the horizon. Suddenly, the YOUNG VAMPIRE bursts into flames, as do several other red-masked bodies on the field. An acrid pall fills the air.

MATTER: I cannot see it for the smoke of burning corpses.

Obscured by the thick smoke, the lights dim slowly and fade to darkness.



SCENE 2

The scene begins with darkness, lingering and thick. Slowly, a single shaft of light comes up, illuminating TIME within. The Oracle holds a cracked hourglass from which drips a crimson liquid.

TIME: The stage is set, but there is no living player upon it. You have seen the pain linger after the first blow, and perhaps now you wonder who were those broken wretches on the bloodstained earth. Come. Attend, and all shall be made clear.

TIME turns the hourglass over and the present gives way to the past. The lights come up on a cabal of Hermetic mages made up of ADAM BELL, bani Janissary, WILLIAM UNDERWOOD, bani Flambeau, SOPHIA CHEVALLIER, bani Tytalus, and TAKEDA MURAMASA, bani Thig. In the distance, another cabal is visible and, further off, yet another. All wear purple masks. TAKEDA is typing on a notebook computer.

TAKEDA: What's the program again, Adam?

ADAM: First priority is to raid the library, second is a sweep-and-clear. Pretty simple.

WILLIAM: How many are we looking at?

ADAM: No more than three, according to intelligence. Most of them have left to attend some sort of mandatory *massasa* function. Beyond that, there will probably be some minimal resistance from mortal servitors.

MIND approaches and stands between ADAM and SOPHIA, taking heed as a telepathic contact is initiated between them.

MIND: What is this? A deception...

SOPHIA: (telepathically to ADAM) No matter what, we get the books, right?

ADAM: (telepathically to SOPHIA) Correct. Don't slow yourself down trying to save the wounded. This place is full of vampires, and any hesitation or delay will ruin our mission. It has been determined that we must gauge the strength of these *massasa* in a head-on assault scenario. We anticipate upwards of 40% attrition on our side.

SOPHIA: (*telepathically to ADAM*) Fair enough. And their Node?

ADAM: (*telepathically to SOPHIA*) It must be heavily warded against detection; we haven't been able to locate it yet. When we get inside, I'll attempt to pinpoint their source of *vis*.

SOPHIA: (*telepathically to ADAM*) Looks like it's almost time. See you on the other side.

The contact is severed as the cabal runs in low and quickly toward the vampires' building. Left alone with TIME, MIND gestures for the other ORACLES to gather around. They approach.

PRIME: O heirs to Hermes, seek you not their corrupted power! The barest sip from that well is death everlasting.

ENTROPY: And yet, the lots are thrown. They shall find what they seek, only to discover that it is both more and less than even the learned Order could conceive. What say you, brother?

TIME: Truly, it is better to be ignorant than it is to perceive such deadly half-truths.

LIFE: I weep that they shall know the corpse-dark nectar of murder and make of it a Cray.

CONNECTION: So eager are they to pursue this thread to its end that they see not Atropos' shears looming.

FORCES breaks away from the others and looks off whence the cabal departed.

FORCES: My dear children, I pray you burn brightly against the night that now rises to consume you and see through to the break of day.

SCENE 3

Within the chantry. A smoldering hole has been burnt through a wall, and just beyond it lies the incinerated form of WILLIAM. ADAM and SOPHIA meet up, each carrying a knapsack full of books.

ADAM: I haven't been able to locate their Node. I keep getting brief flickers of a vast well of *vis* being tapped, and then it fades. But it's never in the same place twice.

SOPHIA: A mobile warded Node? I suppose it's possible.

Suddenly, a VAMPIRE in a blood-red mask materializes out of the air, grabbing ADAM's arm. Tendrils of electricity course between the VAMPIRE and ADAM, licking at the floor, ceiling and walls. ADAM screams, convulsing in the VAMPIRE's grip. The VAMPIRE throws ADAM's agonized form to SOPHIA's feet. ADAM gestures to the VAMPIRE, who approaches slowly.

ADAM: (*hoarse with pain*) Good God, that's the Node.

ADAM turns to SOPHIA.

ADAM: Help me, Sophie.

SOPHIA helps ADAM to his feet as the VAMPIRE closes the gap between them. Quickly, SOPHIA wrenches the knapsack from ADAM's shoulder, throws ADAM into the VAMPIRE and runs with the books. The lights dim everywhere else, following SOPHIA's flight, as a bloodcurdling scream rends the darkness.

SCENE 4

A dim parlor in the Salamanca Chantry. JOHANN KURTZWEIL and SOPHIA CHEVALLIER sit across a small table from one another. On the table between them sits a small stack of books and a sheaf of papers.

JOHANN: So he claimed that the vampire itself was the source of *vis* he was detecting?

SOPHIA: Yes.

JOHANN: And what became of Adam Bell, bani Janissary?

SOPHIA: Our orders seemed clear as regarded the wounded.

JOHANN: So, you are then the only survivor who knows of this?

SOPHIA: Yes.

JOHANN: Excellent. Keep silent on this matter. This is a point of Order security now. Your involvement in this endeavor and the information you've returned with is most appreciated by the Order, Sophia. Your potential has not gone unnoticed, and the Masters of the house want you to have these.

JOHANN removes the sheaf of papers from the table and pushes the books across to SOPHIA. As SOPHIA accepts the books, JOHANN places the papers in his briefcase. The covers of the books bear the titles of rare and wondrous tomes penned by long-dead Masters.

JOHANN: Though most of the books your raid acquired are needed to replenish the Order's lost library, these are either already in the Order's possession in their original form, or they are first or second translations. We trust that your receipt of these ancient treasures will be kept discreet and that you will protect them against our enemies. You should feel honored, Sophia. You now have the attention of the highest levels of power within House Tylalus, and your undoubtedly spectacular ascent will be watched closely.

SOPHIA: I am indeed honored, and I shall endeavor to be worthy of my house's favor.

JOHANN: Wonderful. However, even though I truly wish to stay here a while and discuss these developments with you, I'm afraid I have to be going. I, too, have superiors to report to, and their time is far more precious than mine. Congratulations, Sophia, and adieu.

SOPHIA: *Adieu, monsieur.*

Both rise and shake hands. SOPHIA then tucks the books under her arm and departs. JOHANN watches her leave and then departs through another door. For a moment, silence and stillness. Then, JOHANN returns with MARCUS DE ALLEGRESSE, and both take seats at the table.

MARCUS: So, it is as we suspected. Hortemone's experiments are borne out. Their blood is a source of vis.

JOHANN: It would appear so. Ms. Chevallier claimed that the Janissary mistook the most powerful of them for a mobile Node. It seems a rather ideal situation; they need no Nodes as they carry their Quintessence with them.

Struck suddenly by an idea, MARCUS leans forward, places his elbows on the table and steeplés his fingers. He bows his head a bit to touch his lips to them. A moment later, he looks up and locks eyes with JOHANN.

MARCUS: I will need to perform a few experiments in light of this discovery. The old books should help, especially the ones written during the war. Good work, Kurtzweil. Let's keep this matter quiet for now.

JOHANN: I expected no less. Are we all set, then?

MARCUS: Yes. I'll meet up with you in Melbourne in a month.

JOHANN nods silently and moves toward the door.

MARCUS: Oh, and one last thing, Johann.

JOHANN: Yes, Magister?

MARCUS: Make sure the next raiding party extracts a surviving vampire for me. I have my own experiments to perform.

SCENE 5

A battle. Chaos envelops all as mage and vampire, custos and ghoul, fall into the timeless rhythms of war. Flanked by a gray-masked GARGOYLE, a red-masked vampire ELDER emerges from the melee and surveys the scene.

ELDER: First, rumors of a Crusade, and now this!? Is there no end to such madness? What do you make of it?

GARGOYLE: Not understand, master. Break any who try hurt you. *(suddenly, the GARGOYLE turns)* Master, someone approaches.

A cry comes out of the darkness as five mages charge the clearing. The GARGOYLE roars and strikes the first man to arrive, snapping bones like twigs. Two shotgun blasts answer the attack; one peppering the GARGOYLE's right arm, the other nearly ripping the ELDER in half.

GARGOYLE: *(ignoring the wound)* Master!

ELDER: *(as he is borne to the ground by two Hermetic mages)* Flee! Quit this place! Tell the others of our fate!

Torn between loyalty and duty as heavily armed Hermetic mages and custos begin to close on him, the GARGOYLE takes flight. A few shots are fired, but they only glance off his stony skin.

SCENE 6

Half the stage stands in darkness. The other half reveals MARCUS DE ALLEGRESSE's dimly lit laboratory. The vampire ELDER is strapped down to a metal table. The ELDER's mask is cinched tight to his head by a leather and metal apparatus that keeps one steel pin driven through his tongue and one into each of his eyes. The wound in the ELDER's midsection is almost healed, although it remains raw and ragged. Strangely, the wound is almost bloodless. Enter MARCUS.

MARCUS: And how are we this evening, my friend? I see that you have initiated the healing process with my generous gift of, how do you call it... *(sifts through a few pieces of paper on a nearby table)* vitae? I see that you have also discerned that I did not leave you with enough of the precious substance to heal fully while staving off... *(once again, MARCUS refers to the papers)* torpor.

ELDER makes an inarticulate sound, growls and begins thrashing against his bonds.

MARCUS: Really. Must you make such a scene?

MARCUS attaches a small contraption, rather like a guillotine, to the table above the ELDER's neck. He then tugs on a cable, raising the blade an inch or so, before removing the pin holding the blade in place.

MARCUS: An ingenious device, if I do say so. If you should speak any of your massasa charms, my friend, rest assured that the blade suspended over your neck will fall. At best, it will bite into the bone and silence you. At worst... Best not to think of that.

MARCUS removes the pin from the ELDER's tongue and sets it aside, taking up a small vial of blood and pouring the barest of trickles into the ELDER's mouth.



MARCUS: There. Now, heal your tongue that we might discourse like civil men.

The hole in the ELDER's tongue closes.

ELDER: I am Gerald Windham of the Fourth Circle and my first and only loyalty is to House Tremere.

MARCUS: Indeed. Name, rank and serial number? Is this to be the way you'd rather we do this? Very well, then...

MARCUS takes up a wicked-looking, barbed instrument and the lights on that side of the stage begin to dim. As the lights begin to come up on the other half of the stage, screams erupt and trail off quickly into silence. The lights on the other half of the stage then come up fully on the study of the Bonn Chantry. INGMAR STROHMANN bani Bonisagus, URSULA SCHWARTZ, bani Quaesor and ALEXANDER BERTHOLD, bani Bonisagus are seated. Each wears a purple mask. BERTHOLD reads a book in silence as the other two converse quietly.

INGMAR: While I agree that the Pymandic Ideal is an attainable goal, I must nevertheless defend my stance that it is far more important, in the Initiate's earliest days, as a symbol.

URSULA: It seems to me that such coddling is, in great part, what has brought us to the difficulties we now face. We allow our Apprentices far greater latitude to pursue mundane concerns, rather than the all-important pursuit of enlightenment. A worthy student rises to meet the demands of the master.

INGMAR: (turning to BERTHOLD) Berthold, what say you?

BERTHOLD sets his book down and opens his mouth to speak. Suddenly, the door is kicked in, and a VAMPIRE [in a red mask] and two GHOULS [each in a red-streaked white mask] enter. GHOUL 1 unloads a full magazine of ammunition from a sub-machine gun into BERTHOLD. Without even time to scream, BERTHOLD dies. URSULA utters a few clipped phrases in Enochian and thumbs a carnelian set in the pendant around her neck. INGMAR, oblivious to the bullet that strikes him in the shoulder, rushes to cradle BERTHOLD's body. The VAMPIRE approaches URSULA threateningly.

VAMPIRE: Stop!

But it is too late. The carnelian bursts outward, releasing a bound fire spirit. The VAMPIRE and GHOULS recoil, bracing for what promises to be an agonizing death. However, just as the elemental expands to its full dimensions, the magic lashes back, and the fires flow like water onto

URSULA, clinging to her body as she thrashes and screams. The GHOULS shoot at her, if only to throw her burning body further away from them. Sensing the commotion dimly, INGMAR turns to face the VAMPIRE.

VAMPIRE: What is your Praxis? Who is your Master? Speak!

INGMAR: (regaining his composure a bit) What are you talking about?

VAMPIRE: Don't play games with me. To what Pontifex do you owe fealty?

Taking everyone by surprise, burned beyond recognition, URSULA lunges to grapple GHOUL 2's ankles. He falls, discharging his shotgun into nearby GHOUL 1. Sensing his opportunity, INGMAR shoulders past the VAMPIRE and just manages to escape the room as shots are fired after him. Disentangling himself from URSULA's frail grip and rising quickly, GHOUL 2 levels the barrel of his gun at her head and pulls the trigger. He then moves for the door.

VAMPIRE: Quickly! After him!

Exit the VAMPIRE and GHOUL 2 in hot pursuit as the lights dim. The lights then come up on the other side of the stage as the sound of shots fades. Once again, MARCUS' laboratory. The ELDER's head lolls. Nearly insensate with pain, he wriggles weakly in his bonds. MARCUS stands beside the table, setting the guillotine-like object aside with one hand and depositing the ELDER's tongue on a metal tray nearby with tongs held in the other. Several other "samples" — fangs, bits of skin, hair and tissue — also lie on the tray. MARCUS then removes a small hunk of tissue from the tray and turns to a set of alchemical equipment.

MARCUS: (to the sample) What secrets do you conceal?

MARCUS uses tongs to hold the sample over a wide-mouthed beaker, depressing the tongs to squeeze a few drops of blood out of the cold flesh.

MARCUS: What more did Hortemone know that he never put to paper?

MARCUS turns once more and holds the beaker up to the light, rocking it in slow circles with his hand to swirl the crimson fluid about. Suddenly, the ELDER thrashes, startling MARCUS. MARCUS drops the beaker, and it shatters.

MARCUS: Damnation!

MARCUS stoops down to pick up a few of the larger shards. As he touches the third one, MARCUS hisses with pain and draws back, standing to inspect his finger's where he's cut it. He watches, mesmerized, as a drop of the dark, dead blood rolls into the furrow of the wound,

and the wound closes. He shudders as though from a lover's touch. As the moment passes, MARCUS turns back to the ELDER. The Tytalan rolls a tray next to the table and places a shallow basin on the tray. MARCUS then unshackles the ELDER's left hand and, holding him by the forearm, forces the limb down to the basin. The ELDER tugs once or twice and gives up, as MARCUS takes a cleaver to the ELDER's right hand.

MARCUS: Yes... Hortemone's final secret...

The lights fade followed by a fleshy "thud" and a quiet curse. A few seconds later, metal chimes on metal. Across the stage, the illumination of a single nightlight comes up. INGMAR crouches behind a metal counter in a restaurant-style kitchen. Heavy breathing and the rhythmic thumping of a heartbeat are audible. Even as he clutches his wounded shoulder, INGMAR mutters a simple Rote, and the breathing and heartbeat fall absolutely silent while light and darkness bend to obscure his form slightly. Just then, the shadows of two pairs of feet move across the slit of light beneath the double-doors. The voices of the VAMPIRE and GHOUL 2 (from earlier in the scene) are audible within.

VAMPIRE: Let's check it.

GHOUL: Now!

Each one kicks in a door, and both spray some random gunfire into the room. Although INGMAR opens his mouth in a scream, his magic keeps the attackers from noticing him. Both characters step fully into the room as the doors swing shut. The VAMPIRE sets his gun down on the countertop and flicks the light switch.

GHOUL: It's almost exactly like one of ours.

VAMPIRE: You mean the fortress?

GHOUL: Yeah. I mean, bigger kitchen, but otherwise pretty much like one of ours.

VAMPIRE: I guess so. Come on.

The VAMPIRE picks up his gun. Both turn and walk out of the kitchen.

GHOUL: Nice kitchen, though.

The lights fall dim as INGMAR begins to shudder uncontrollably with pent-up terror. On the other side of the stage, the lights come up, revealing MARCUS, holding the ELDER's arm — hand removed with two messy chops and tossed aside — just over the shallow metal basin. A thin sheen of dark blood has gathered in the basin. Finally satisfied with the quantity, MARCUS releases the ELDER's arm, picks up the basin, and turns from the table. Setting the basin down for a moment, MARCUS places a broad funnel into a slender vial and pours the blood into it. When the thick, dark liquid finally settles into the vial, there are perhaps two ounces of it.

MARCUS holds the vial reverently in both hands and brings it close, that he might inspect it with mystic sight. The deep redness in the vial reflects a pale shadow of the same onto MARCUS' mask.

MARCUS: I can see it. I understand.

He raises the vial up to an overhead light, entranced by what his Awakened perceptions reveal, casting a darker redness onto his mask.

So beautiful. Hortemone spoke of the power of the blood, true, but no words could describe this. The Tree of Life. The Water of the Grail. Now, in this wine-dark tempest of power, Caine, do I know you. You were the first Tytalan. Strife... And Power.

His eyes unfocused as though in a religious ecstasy, MARCUS tips back his head and drinks the contents of the vial. Slowly, MARCUS' eyes flutter shut as he falls to his knees, dragging a few papers and instruments off a nearby tabletop while grabbing for support. Sighing with satisfaction, MARCUS' head droops as all lights dim, leaving only a spotlight focused on the mage. Striations of red run down through his mask, leaching some of the purple out of it. Time stops. The ORACLES enter, stepping into the very fringes of the shaft of light.

FORCES: How could you, scion of He Who Struggles? How could you surrender so easily to the temptations that beset the Path of Thorns? The fire in your blood races white-hot, and because of it, you cannot sense the fire in your soul dying.

LIFE: I cannot bear to look at him. Life. Death. Interwoven, married in a legacy of dark lust and murderous betrayal. All else was the symptom; here is the disease.

ENTROPY: No. More problems and worse assail the Order than one, or even a handful of its own, marching merrily unto annihilation. They are cracks in the pillar, true, but not the only ones.

TIME: And yet, tomorrow remains unwritten.

PRIME: Are you saying there is hope, brother?

TIME remains silent.

MIND: Gaze upon him. How like Caine's his exhilaration at the first true taste of murder.

SPIRIT: (to MARCUS) Listen! Do you not hear the voice at your shoulder crying out to you? Look! Do you not see the thousand hungry demons gathering to feast on you?

CONNECTION: Drunk with power, his eyes are blinded. His ears hear only what he wishes to hear.

MATTER: Let us hope that wiser spirits prevail to navigate this sea of blood.

The ORACLES remain in a semicircle around MARCUS, spotlight undimmed, as the lights come up on the other half of the stage. INGMAR, a strip of cloth tied crudely about his left shoulder, gun in hand, crouches in what looks to be a basement book depository. About 10 feet away, GHOUL 1 [previous scene] lies torpid, impaled in 10 places by what appear to be smashed pieces of chair propelled at great speeds. It still bears signs of the shotgun blast that tore into it earlier, as well. Slowly, INGMAR rises, apparently satisfied that all is safe. As he does so, the gun passes across a shaft of moonlight filtered in through a tiny window, revealing Ars Essentia sigils of amplification and fire hurriedly etched into the metal as if with a nail or other improvised implement. INGMAR reaches the door and steps out into the corridor. Never leaving the other half of the stage, the ORACLES appear.

MIND: I can feel his hate. Where once was a gentle scholar, here now is something else.

FORCES: Oh dear child of wisdom, why have you put aside your book and staff to take up shield and spear?

LIFE: And still, here comes something more for the drama. Just beyond the next door. Undeath.

MATTER: Unlife.

Never seeing the ORACLES, INGMAR continues toward the next door.

ENTROPY: It is too much to see! So many threads, spiraling off into nothingness!

INGMAR steps through the door, followed by the ORACLES. As the last of the ORACLES enter the next stretch of corridor, the VAMPIRE and remaining GHOUL turn the corner. Neither has a weapon at the ready. Trembling with rage and anguish, INGMAR raises his gun. Wisps of flames escape intermittently from the barrel and no one moves.

CONNECTION: Forged of razored iron and quenched in blood, I see the final thread racing to connect them.

A shadow passes over INGMAR's mask as something begins to die in his eyes. Resolutely, INGMAR takes aim at the VAMPIRE, keeping the gun trained on its head for a long moment. Then, the shadow subsides, and the Bonisagus lowers his weapon.

INGMAR: A scholar... I am a scholar.

He drops the gun, and tears begin to run down his mask. Both attackers stare for a moment, uncertain of what to do. The GHOUL draws his gun, but does not take aim. A long, tense silence ensues. Finally, the VAMPIRE takes a step forward.

VAMPIRE: Why did you attack us?

INGMAR: I don't know why the Order attacked you, and I wish to God we never had. I could give you the official reasons.

A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

A little ignorance is a dangerous thing. A lot can be deadly.

Just as the Order is scrambling to determine who the Primi of the undead are and why exactly the Biblical Methuselah figures so prominently into this demented Caine mythos, the vampires are attempting to locate the Order's supreme authority and interrogating captured Hermetics about their Circles, lineages and blood magic. In short, neither side has a particularly good grasp on the affairs of the other. Not anymore, anyway.

Certainly, the few survivors of the medieval House Tremere have probably kept enough tabs to know a *zelerator* from a *Magister Mundi*. Lord Gilmore's extensive research during his tenure at Mus has likely kept him appraised of such important terminology as *Blood Oath* and *Lextalionis* as well, but these bits of knowledge are exceptions to the norm. It is to be expected that the power players in their respective factions will wield more and more accurate information than any chump in the trenches would. However, knowledge is a valuable commodity both among the Traditions and the undead.

Most educators on both sides are simply too young to know many details about the Massasa War, the last big chance for each side to size up the opposition's strengths and weaknesses and discern crucial information about its internal workings. Those who are of sufficient age and knowledge are difficult to locate and often unwilling to part with the key to such clout without suitable recompense. Bonisagus or vampire, it doesn't really matter. Once you hit 500 years of age, the suffering of the youth often seems a distant and not-too-pressing thing.

In short, it is *highly* unlikely that your Fortunae will ever hear about any sorts of "clans" or "Disciplines," or that your freshly turned vampire will ever find herself in possession of a thorough and accurate history detailing the previous incarnations of current-day House Solificati. Ignorance and fear of the unknown started this war, and more of the same contributes greatly to sustaining it.

VAMPIRE: Save it. Living or dead, a few things never change. The "official reason" is always bullshit to justify someone's agenda.

GHOUL: (*jokingly*) Yeah, we don't know anything about that sort of thing, do we?

The VAMPIRE chuckles grimly, shaking his head. He then turns and begins to walk away, taking the GHOUL with him. INGMAR continues to stand in place as all lights around him dim, leaving only a spotlight trained on him. The ORACLES approach and flank him in the same manner as with MARCUS.

TIME: An instant suspended in time; perhaps a glimmer of recognition, of forgiveness, of understanding. Who can say? But today, three have parted paths, rather than two or one or none. The River of Yesterday has given way to the dying Stream of Today. Who can say how tomorrow travels? Who can say what the unfolding of history will reveal over the next hill? Only the Now is written and, today, it is penned with scholar's ink and not spilt blood.

Darkness falls on both halves of the stage.

SCENE 7

A few torches light a large cabal of Hermetic mages [all masked in purple] and their allies [masked in white], weapons drawn. Many are clearly nervous, never having fought in their lives. Signs of a struggle are barely visible around them.

MAGE 1: Seems quiet. Be on your guard.

MAGE 2: You smell that?

MAGE 3: No, asshole. I'm immune to the stench of death.

MAGE 1: Hold on, I'll give us some light.

MAGE 1 mutters an incantation. Light appears, and with it several darkly garbed, red-masked strangers, most of Middle Eastern extraction. They hold blades to all the mages' throats. Here, a wall is swathed in blood; there, a deep cut is seen in a desk. One of the strangers, with skin like onyx, steps forward.

STRANGER: So, what have we here? (*His eyes focus on one of the mages.*) Not the bastard children of my enemies, I see. I can feel your blood racing with fear. Tell me, what brings you to this house of the dead?

MAGE 3: It's a God-damned vampire! Kill—

A blur of wind, a rustling of drapes and a disruption of loose papers surrounds MAGE 3. The only motion perceived, some 10 feet away, is one of the strangers sheathing his knife. MAGE 3's head slides off his body. Papers settle. The other mages drop their offensive stance.

STRANGER: You came armed. Why?

MAGE 2: We... We came to kill the dead. The Tremere.

STRANGER: I see. Know this, Wise One; this journey is not yours alone.

Begins to walk away, fading from view a bit more with each step. Other strangers follow suit.

Shall we then consider that (he gestures toward the body of MAGE 3) fair recompense for your interference in this matter and part in peace?

MAGE 2: Yes.

The STRANGER, now the last of the strangers visible, finally fades from view, and a few lingering words echo from unseen lips:

STRANGER: What is it that is said of my enemy's enemy?

SCENE 8

The view turns to a candlelit room. A man, with a bearded and careworn face, sits at a desk, calmly paging through a book recently acquired from a raid on a Hermetic Chantry as the sounds of distant fighting filter in from beyond. A blast resounds, and the stone chamber itself trembles for a moment, dislodging chips of rock and a fine dusting of mortar. A frantic YOUNG VAMPIRE in a red mask barges in.

YOUNG VAMPIRE: Councilor, we must take action!

The man continues to read, looking up only after he finishes the paragraph he is on. As his red-masked face comes up fully into the light, the man is revealed as an aged and weathered vampire, with an aquiline nose and glum demeanor, one of the FORMER TREMERE.

FORMER TREMERE: Yes. I suppose we must.

YOUNG VAMPIRE: Excellent, Councilor. I will summon the gargoyles and gather our other forces.

FORMER TREMERE: Of course.

YOUNG VAMPIRE: I go at once, then, Councilor.

Exit the YOUNG VAMPIRE.

FORMER TREMERE: We are thieves, liars and kin-slayers all. I gave Mistridge over to the farmer's pitchfork and the woodcutter's axe eight centuries ago because I grew sick with the sight of pride. Eight hundred years later, we are no different. A long time, indeed, for wise men to remain foolish. The Art. The Blood. Hubris. Selfishness. Nothing.

Horrid screams come from the courtyard below. First one voice, then several, raised in anguish. There is

another blast, this one lesser in intensity. Several more cries of pain. The FORMER TREMERE's face takes on a tormented aspect, as his sharpened senses take in every rattle of pained breath, every grinding of bone on bone, every quiet plea of the dying.

No. No more. Someone must defy this. I must reform this Mistridge or die trying.

The FORMER TREMERE's consciousness reaches out to every vampire in the chantry.

FORMER TREMERE: (telepathically to all vampires and minions present) We are retreating.

Murmurs of shock and amazement ripple through the FORMER TREMERE's mind and many stray thoughts question his decision, citing superior numbers and the advantage of familiar terrain.

Shall we then kill simply because we can? If it is books and a crumbling keep they desire, they are welcome to have mine. I will not waste further blood — and risk further conflict — over yellowed parchment and a handful of rough-hewn towers.

A VOICE protests.

VOICE: (telepathically to all vampires and minions present) The elder will not be pleased.

All of the undead recoil from the forcefulness of FORMER TREMERE's reply:

FORMER TREMERE: (telepathically to all vampires and minions present) I will deal with the elder. Withdraw.

Compelled by blood, fear and loyalty, all of the vampires assent. Severing the contact, FORMER TREMERE smiles faintly.

FORMER TREMERE: What now, elder?

Darkness falls on the stage as the sounds of fighting grow fainter. As the last of the light vanishes, a grim but sincere chuckle gives way to silence.

SCENE 9

A phone booth somewhere near the Swiss Alps. An UNKNOWN PERSON in an overcoat and fedora is in the midst of a conversation. Otherwise, the street is empty.

UNKNOWN PERSON: (whispering hoarsely) Yes. I would very much like to meet with you. Yes, of course. I, too, believe that we might be able to assist one another. Excellent...

The UNKNOWN PERSON shields his face with his hand, as one might in bright sun, despite the lateness of the hour, and looks about. Apparently contented with whatever he does or does not see, he turns back into the booth and lowers his head once more.

I understand your concerns. Rest assured, *that* was an unfortunately necessary first step toward the initiation of these talks. Oh, most assuredly...

Once more, the UNKNOWN PERSON raises his head to look about. This time, he removes his hat for a moment to wipe sweat from his brow with the back of his sleeve, despite the chill in the air, revealing himself to be MARCUS DE ALLEGRESSE. The striations in his mask are the same size, but they are much more pale. Lines of pink streak his otherwise purple mask. Quickly, he replaces the hat and turns away.

I will be looking forward, then, to meeting with you in person. I believe we will have a great deal indeed to talk about. Yes. Two weeks, then.

MARCUS waits until he hears the other party hang up, then squeezes the receiver until it splinters in his hand.

Two weeks! Already, I can feel the strength fading! (pause) But this must be a test. A trial. Remember, Marcus; this power is an augmentation, a supplement, not a substitute. Besides, it is only for the Order that you do this at all. Soon enough, the need for all of this will be over. Until then, perseverance...

MARCUS walks away from the phone booth and into the night, cinching the coat tightly around him and ducking his head into the shadows of his hat.

SCENE IO

Two red-masked entities communicate on the Astral Plane. The first bears the distinctive mien of the FORMER TREMERE. The second remains unknown.

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: What was the matter, Councilor? You left Rome three years ago. Did you find these accommodations unsatisfactory also?

FORMER TREMERE: No. Nothing was unsatisfactory with the chantry.

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: Why is it, then, that I find myself holding this conversation with you?

FORMER TREMERE: We needed neither the books nor the resources. There was nothing there that could not be replaced. Indeed, we kept no resource there that we do not maintain in a dozen places besides!

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: And so you do not see the principle of the thing.

FORMER TREMERE: Principle? No, I am afraid that I am indeed blind to the "principles" behind this slaughter. I have never understood—

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: And you do not understand now. Still, I am not without mercy. I am offering you a chance.

FORMER TREMERE: Your beneficence astounds me. What else were you going to do? Kill me? You did that 800 years ago. I have not yet fallen down.

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: You would do well to mind your tongue with me, Councilor.

FORMER TREMERE: I am not afraid anymore. Not of death. Not of you. I fear only that it is too late for me to appease the ghosts of the past and make this right.

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: Yet that is precisely what I am offering you, Councilor.

FORMER TREMERE: What do you mean?

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: You will lead an assault on the wizards' stronghold in London. Before you interrupt, let me explain. You may handle this affair in any fashion you see fit. If they surrender peacefully, you may feel free to offer them a chance to end these hostilities.

FORMER TREMERE: And if they do not surrender?

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: Then you are to take the location or destroy it. In any case, this battle will decide our stance for the remainder of this war. Congratulations, Councilor; you will be the only creature in history to decide the fate of the Order of Hermes twice in his lifetime. The first time, you laid it low. Mayhap this time you will raise it up from its deathly slumber. Now go.

The FORMER TREMERE is dismissed, his Astral form receding from the MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE as though compelled beyond his power. A 2nd PRESENCE, veiled in the aether, steps out of Astral mists to present itself before the MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE. Its mask is similar in design.

2nd PRESENCE: Master, should we not monitor him? It is dangerous enough to give him leave to plan this matter himself.

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: No. He will attend my will in this. He has to. He believes he can end this war. Perhaps he is right. I've no wish to waste resources on this inane conflict. His rebelliousness can be dealt with later, if at all. His honest hatred is far more valuable to me than one soul falsely devoted for every star in the sky.

2nd PRESENCE: As you command, Master.

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: One last thing, my valued companion.

2nd PRESENCE: Yes, Master?

MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE: Make the preparations to wake me, should all else fail.

Darkness falls on the stage.

SCENE II

Night over the London Chantry of the Order of Hermes. At first, all seems to be in order, but slowly, the persistent observer begins to note the pinpricks in the veils of illusion woven over the mighty conflict unfolding within. As the view moves in through a broken window, the glamour is fully penetrated and the scene, in all its horror and mystic splendor, is revealed. In the library, a red-masked VAMPIRE summons the very blood out of a purple-masked Hermetic APPRENTICE's veins. Suddenly, he is stabbed with a stake, graven with arcane sigils. He laughs only for a moment at the white-masked CONSOR who missed his heart, before the stake itself erupts into flames. In a hallway across the Chantry, a small wyvern wraps its sinewy coils about the massive frame of a GARGOYLE in a gray mask, as mage and massasa assail one another with powers spun from the elements themselves. Enter into this chaos, in the central courtyard of the Chantry, the Cabal of Bright Wisdom.

JOSIAH: (obviously near exhaustion) Has anybody seen Master Prescott?

AURELIEN: Regrettably, I believe that she is already dead.

JOSIAH: What about Master Be—

A nearby stone wall shatters, as the figure of DARIEN VALLARD, *bani Ex Miscellanea* is hurled backward through it. JOSIAH turns almost instantly and begins to dash toward the man, who is slowly rising. A VAMPIRE steps through the hole in the wall as VALLARD rises to his feet.

JOSIAH: Master Vallard!

VALLARD: Stay back, child! I will handle this.

VALLARD incants a potent *Ars Manium* spell, and the air between he and the VAMPIRE flares with dangerous spiritual energies. The VAMPIRE counters with his own invocation, calling upon the name of a yet more powerful angelic entity. VALLARD replies in kind as the two move to face one another in the center of the courtyard.

EDWARD: Uh, guys, this doesn't sound very good.

AURELIEN: Those summonings should not be intoned without proper warding and hours of preparation!

PAUL: Shit!

PAUL dashes across the courtyard, just past VALLARD, as a GARGOYLE, nearly invisible against the slate wall, scrambles toward the Hermetic Master on all fours. He intercepts the GARGOYLE, taking the blow meant for VALLARD. PAUL roars, and bones



crunch. The rest of the cabal watches, stunned, as the enraged GARGOYLE throws the Flambeau, rather accidentally, into the VAMPIRE across the courtyard to get at VALLARD.

REBECCA: Paul!

The GARGOYLE strikes VALLARD, breaking his concentration long enough for the VAMPIRE to attend to PAUL. Hauling the Flambeau to his feet, even as the cabal closes the gap, he speaks a few clipped phrases in Latin, and PAUL begins to writhe in agony. PAUL looks to his cabal as the GARGOYLE pummels VALLARD mercilessly.

PAUL: Get the fuck back!

PAUL reaches into his coat, even as a froth of boiling blood trickles from his nose and mouth, and a fine crimson steam escapes his pores. Gritting his teeth in a grim smile, PAUL steels his will and locks his arms around the VAMPIRE's body, revealing a strange Hermetic artifact, something like a spirit bottle with arcane sigils and a captured presence, clenched firmly in his right hand. Knowing only that something is very wrong, having not seen the weapon, the VAMPIRE releases PAUL from his grip and tries to push him away, obviously surprised by the strength left in this broken man. AURELIEN pulls REBECCA away, even as EDWARD and JOSIAH move to aid VALLARD.

REBECCA: Oh God, no! PAUL!!!

PAUL's final smile, tender despite the pain, lingers in the flash of an explosion. Nearest the blast, AURELIEN and REBECCA are thrown to the ground, both with minor burns from howling spirits released from the bottle. Recoiling from the heat of the flames, the GARGOYLE flees in primal terror. JOSIAH stoops down to aid VALLARD. EDWARD turns to face AURELIAN and REBECCA.

EDWARD: This is wrong. It can't be meant to be like this.

REBECCA: It... no. Yes — but it's all wrong. Not this way. Paul...

REBECCA turns and begins to cry, even as AURELIEN holds her tightly.

JOSIAH: (rising from VALLARD's side and obviously not looking at the smoking crater where Paul used to be) Vallard's not as bad as he looks. He'll be fine, with a little rest. Anybody else n—

MATTHEW enters the courtyard wearing a blood-red mask.

EDWARD: Matthew, what —

From a set of double-doors slightly flanking MATTHEW, several vampires and their servitors emerge, leveling weapons and focusing deadly enchantments at the cabal. As the vampires discharge their armaments at the

Cabal of Bright Wisdom, JOSIAH lets out a scream of rage, anguish and desperation, a scream echoed audibly by his Avatar. Threads of raw magic lash out, grabbing hold of the strands of the Ars Manium enchantments still hanging heavily in the air, and the air itself is rent asunder in a halo of blazing light. Bullets melt in mid-air, Thaumaturgical spells erode under the unassailable power spilling forth from the breach. As the curtain of light dims, only slightly, the warrior form of Archangel Michael hovers over the combatants. Vampires shriek in pain as the Archangel's blazing mantle sears them. Only MATTHEW, brilliant red tears of pain flowing down his cheeks, stands in place, a fine smoke rising from his unliving form. Archangel Michael continues to burn brightly, knowing only that he must cleanse, unaware of the drama below.

REBECCA: We've got to help him...

EDWARD: Matthew!

MATTHEW: (whimpering) I'm burning...

Behind MATTHEW, the light begins to distort, refracted by unknown magic. A figure materializes within the shifting globe of shade and steps forward to embrace MATTHEW like a son as he slowly crumbles to dust. As the gray cloud of powder floats on the breeze, some of it sticks to the bloody tears at the corners of the unknown figure's eyes. As the man looks up, the bearded face of the FORMER TREMERE comes into the light, somehow unharmed by Michael's solar radiance.

FORMER TREMERE: Save your tears for yourselves, Children of Magic. Your friends are beyond pain now.

AURELIEN: Who are you?

FORMER TREMERE: I am a ghost of the past, haunting the present. I am no one, and thus I cannot make this madness end. And so I turn to you who can.

JOSIAH: Us? We have no power to stop this...

FORMER TREMERE: You hold tomorrow in your hand, child; *nothing* is beyond you. *That* is your magic. Now leave this doomed place. We will destroy it rather than let you keep it.

REBECCA: Why would you help us?

FORMER TREMERE: Ask the peasants of Mis-
tridge, child.

EDWARD: Wait... you're — we can help—

FORMER TREMERE: I am a walking corpse. I am a man 800 years dead. Do not concern yourself with who I am — who I *was*. Save yourselves, children; you are the future. Only life begets life, and those who steer your Order down this path are no more alive in their hearts than I.

The walls around the courtyard begin to fall and rain debris. The FORMER TREMERE begins to fade away.

REBECCA: What do we do?

FORMER TREMERE: Save your Mistridge, child.
Save your Order from itself.

The FORMER TREMERE disappears, but not before sending a wave of force outward to destroy a nearby wall. With nothing left to say and the place coming down around

them, the survivors of the Cabal of Bright Wisdom pick up the unconscious VALLARD and run through the breach made for them. Gas mains beneath the Chantry detonate, sending ribbons of flame to twist briefly in the night air and vanish. The cabal flees the scene, as the London Chantry collapses in flames. Those mages and vampires who could not escape in time lend their voices to the Chantry, screaming out its demise, as the stage falls dark, like a dying ember.





ACT THREE: BLOOD TREACHERY



SCENE I

The ashes of the Exeter Chantry in London. Police tape wards off the curious. An errant breeze drags a sheet of newspaper through the charred remains, smearing with soot the headline "GAS MAIN EXPLOSION DESTROYS BUILDING, KILLS DOZENS." Picking their way through the ruins, the ORACLES enter.

ENTROPY: The pendulum swings wildly. On this hand, forgiveness and redemption; on the other, naught but dust and ashes.

FORCES: Now that the conflagration has died down, I see with clearer sight that the elusive glimmer of hope, that rarest and most wondrous of lights, remains.

SPIRIT: Speak not so soon, Brother. From where I stand, this place echoes only with the mournful sighs of the dead.

CONNECTION: And yet it cannot be argued that *this* caused ripples that may yet herald the dawn of something better.

TIME: Or something far worse.

A powerful wind, swirling upward, carries soot into the air in a great column. The black dust is whipped about, obscuring all light. Quickly, it settles into another scene, forming shadows where it falls thickly and casting a grayish pall upon all else. The ORACLES, untouched by the ashes, maintain their places and observe as MARCUS DE ALLEGRESSE sits down at a table in an elegant Swiss estate with a HANDSOME MAN in a red mask.

HANDSOME MAN: Master De Allegresse, we are duly honored by your decision to meet with us.

MARCUS: You seem to know my name, sir, but I must ask you now who it is *I* am addressing...

HANDSOME MAN: I am no one in particular, Master De Allegresse. I am simply here to act as a

facilitator for parties above me who do not wish to meet with you as yet. At least, not until the sincerity of your intentions is determined.

MARCUS: Fair enough. Is there at least something I might call you?

HANDSOME MAN: Call me James, if you need a name.

MARCUS: Very well then. Shall I be bluntly honest with you, James?

HANDSOME MAN: If it pleases you.

MARCUS: I am here to continue the relationship forged by Master Klaus Hortemone some decades past. As your people are undoubtedly aware by now, he has met with an unfortunate end.

HANDSOME MAN: Yes. We gathered as much from his abrupt disappearance. But what do you mean by “continuing the relationship”?

MARCUS: I wish to maintain the exchange of goods and services he established.

HANDSOME MAN: You will, of course, understand if we are a bit leery of continuing to trade information with you, now that we are at war.

MARCUS: I am not referring to the trade of information, although that will certainly be a facet of these dealings.

HANDSOME MAN: Information *was* the extent of our—

MARCUS: Please, James. I am not so ignorant of these matters as you might think. I am aware that Master Hortemone was providing information and magical assistance to powerful associates of yours in return for access to certain of your mystic texts and a monthly allotment of vampiric blood.

MIND: (*Unheard, to MARCUS*) Oh, you proud fool! Full of bluster and confidence, so certain that the Order *must* emerge victorious, you do not perceive the spider’s web, even as you abide in his den.

MARCUS: We will, naturally, require a greater quantity of the blood to fill more cups than Hortemone’s, but we can promise you that actions will be taken to provide you with leniency from the Order’s vengeance.

TIME: He has draped the chains about himself. His doom is at hand.

MIND: Witness, the demon plays his ruse. I hear the venom in his thoughts, and I see him lashing out at the proud Master with tendrils of deception.

HANDSOME MAN: I do not wish to give you the impression that we are weak or in need of your charity, Master De Allegresse.

MARCUS: Of course.

HANDSOME MAN: *However*, such a drawn-out conflict could tax the resources of both of our factions needlessly. Naturally, I will need to speak to my superiors on the matter, but I believe that we might be amenable to this arrangement, should you be *absolutely* certain that you can divert the wrath of the Order from us. Although the blood is precious to us, I doubt that our leaders will be averse to providing you with a small amount.

MARCUS: James. *James*. I think that we of the Order will need more than just a *small* amount of this blood. We are offering you a chance for survival. Do you not consider that chance to be worth more than the meager trickle you are proposing?

HANDSOME MAN: That is not mine to decide, Master De Allegresse. I am merely the messenger. That said, I shall convey your message to my masters.

MARCUS: Excellent. (*rises to his feet and shakes the HANDSOME MAN’s hand*) I look forward to hearing from you soon, James, and I thank you for your time.

HANDSOME MAN: And I look forward to speaking with you soon, Master De Allegresse. Once again — although, I am but the messenger — I am certain that this is the beginning of a very beneficial relationship for both your Order and us.

MARCUS departs, escorted to the door by a BUTLER in a red-streaked white mask. Some time after his departure, another SERVANT [masked similarly] enters the room and speaks to the HANDSOME MAN.

SERVANT: Call for you, Milord.

HANDSOME MAN: I’ll take it in here.

SERVANT: Did all go as expected, Sir?

HANDSOME MAN: Without a hitch. Tell the others to put off that new candidate; I shall need the blood for something else, I suspect.

SERVANT: Very good, Mr. Diamond. I’ll fetch you the phone.

The SERVANT leaves the room, and darkness spreads like a stain, devouring the light.

SCENE 2

A single shaft of light shines on the stage. MARCUS DE ALLEGRESSE sits within it, in the Order’s Quebec Chantry. Several vials of blood rest in notches in the thick padding inside a heavy briefcase at his side. He speaks on the phone and pauses occasionally to hear replies from the party on the other end of the line.

MARCUS: Yes, David, that’s right. Yes. Yes. No risks are involved. You could practically see the fear

in his eyes. They would have parted with 10 times the quantity I demanded if they had believed it the only way to end the Wizards' March. What? That's because Hortemone was a shortsighted fool. I understand all these concerns. Of course. Try it once for yourself. That's all I ask.

The light goes down on that part of the stage, with MARCUS' voice fading away slowly. As that light dims, another shaft of illumination comes up elsewhere on the stage. Adeptus DAVID GRAHAM, bani Tytalus, talks with his Apprentice, GREGORY REEVE. DAVID wears a purple mask that is streaked with red; GREGORY wears an unblemished purple mask.

DAVID: That is why, of all my Apprentices, I chose you, Gregory, to be a part of this secret organization within the House. Do you accept?

GREGORY: But the *massasa*, Pater? Doesn't this seem excessive?

DAVID: Surely, you can see that this a trial, Gregory? The powers this elixir imparts will make you a greater force within the House, the Order and the Traditions. We need your strength, Gregory. And we need you to challenge yourself to be *stronger*. Isn't that what you asked me to help you to realize within yourself when you joined the House?

DAVID holds up a vial, and GREGORY takes it hesitantly.

GREGORY: Yes, but I—

DAVID: I know you can handle the power, Gregory. I trained you well enough for this and *any* power. I know that you will do the right thing.

GREGORY raises the vial and, with a nod from his pater, uncorks it. Darkness falls on that spotlight, as another comes up on the Moscow Chantry. VLADMIR BOLES LAV and MARIA DEL FUEGO — both of House Tytalus, and both wearing purple masks — converse. They await the arrival of another anxiously.

MARIA: My investigations into this conspiracy within the House are revealing some unsettling facts.

VLADIMIR: Yes. Necromancy. Vampirism. And still other rumors, each less pleasant than the last. I even heard that the last Criamon who snapped out of his coma grew fangs and screamed in Sanskrit for blood before killing two custos and escaping. Perhaps the conspirators had something to do with this unfortunate, as well.

MARIA: Hopefully, Magister Rossi will be able to shed some light on all of this for us. He told me that he had found new evidence for the Quaesitori.





VLADIMIR: Good. It's about time that someone got to the bottom of—

Suddenly, the door opens and **ANGELO ROSSI**, *bani Tytalus*, enters the study, finishing off the last of a glass of white wine as he does so. He sets the glass down on the mantle and turns to face the two younger mages. His purple mask is streaked with dim red lines.

ANGELO: We do not have much time to speak. I believe that Velasquez is involved and that he is having me watched.

MARIA: Tomas Velasquez?

ANGELO: The same. Come, I will take you to my Sanctum.

ANGELO inspects the room quickly as **VLADIMIR** and **MARIA** move for the door. Just as the two younger Tytalans pass him, **ANGELO** draws two guns from holsters at the small of his back. As the light begins to fade there and come up elsewhere on the stage, **ANGELO** levels a barrel each at **VLADIMIR** and **MARIA**'s heads. As the Athens Chantry is fully illuminated, twin gunshots sound

out from the darkness newly fallen on Moscow. In Athens, **THEOPHILUS MARLOWE**, *bani Tytalus*, slowly stirs brandy from a decanter into a small glass, half-filled with a thick red liquid. **GISELLE VAN SANT**, also of House Tytalus, enters the room, empty glass in hand. Both characters' masks are purple, streaked with red.

GISELLE: That's vile, Marlowe.

THEOPHILUS: You're right, Giselle. This is much worse than choking down the blood of an ambulatory corpse straight up. Sorry, I don't really relish that "morning after getting punched in the nose" taste.

GISELLE: I'll give you that. But still — brandy?

THEOPHILUS: I'm sure as hell not going to chase it with a beer. And I refuse to shoot it up like some kind of Ecstatic junkie. This isn't smack, after all. (He downs his glass.) So, how long 'til everyone gets back?

GISELLE: I figure they'll be gone until at least eight o'clock. Probably later.

THEOPHILUS: Good, I'm getting another. You want one?

GISELLE: Maybe in a minute. (*THEOPHILUS looks at her with friendly mock scorn.*) Oh, all right. But just one more. For both of us. Understand? One.

THEOPHILUS nods and departs, laughing. The scene freezes in place, and the lights come up on Moscow, with two still bodies lying in pools of their own blood. In another shaft of light, suspended in time, DAVID GRAHAM stands with an empty vial in his hand while GREGORY REEVE leans against a nearby desk for support. GREGORY's mask now shows livid red streaks. Another spotlight shines on the Ontario Chantry, where LILLIAN DUPUIS receives her induction into House Tytalus from her mater, DAHLIA WALSINGHAM. DAHLIA and LILLIAN both wear purple masks. DAHLIA's mask shows red streaks.

DAHLIA: And do you, Initiate, pledge your life in service to House Tytalus, to the Order of Hermes and to the Council of the Nine Mystic Traditions?

LILLIAN: I do, Magistra.

DAHLIA holds aloft a chalice, offering it to the four directions and calling upon the names of the Archangels as she does so.

DAHLIA: With this cup, then, I draw the Blood of Sacrifice out of the Well of Knowledge and offer it to you.

LILLIAN accepts the chalice and drinks deeply, her eyes betraying only a hint of distaste at the flavor. Tipping back her head, LILLIAN empties the cup of its contents, handing it back to DAHLIA as she closes her eyes and licks the crimson stain from her lips. Livid red streaks through the purple of her mask as well. Time stops and the light comes up once more on MARCUS DE ALLEGRESSE, yet again on the phone.

MARCUS: This is best explained in the flesh, Johann. No. Just meet me at the Amsterdam Chantry. What? Yes. The utmost secrecy. Hmm? I don't care how you explain it, just make it plausible. We don't need anybody looking into this. Very good. Three days.

MARCUS also stops in time, in the middle of hanging up the phone. All five spotlights sputter slowly. They burn dimmer, then reddish, and then die away altogether.

SCENE 3

The Traditions Chantry in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A general clamor. MICHAEL SOERING, bani Euthanatos, is pointing at PETER HAGUE, bani Fortunae, and yelling in an accusatory tone. Each interrupts the other frequently. LYNDON SMYTHE, a powerful Bonisagus, sits as a mediator. Many other mages, including AUGUSTUS PEMBROKE, bani Tytalus, are in attendance. Every mask

is plain purple save for one worn by a nameless HERMETIC who stands back and watches. His mask is streaked with red.

MICHAEL: It was a fucking vampire, Hague, and it demanded to know *where the Hermetics were*. It was practically on your street.

PETER: Yes, we've been over this.

MICHAEL: Don't get flippant with me, Hague; I'm burying two friends next Tuesday because of your shit-sucking vampire. All I want to know is—

LYNDON: Order!

MICHAEL: What's your problem?

Voices are raised, and the assembly disintegrates into a shouting match. Finally, when it seems that the original point is hopelessly lost, a single voice resounds powerfully above the din.

AUGUSTUS: Enough!

The upraised voices die down and not a few upraised fists are lowered. All eyes regard AUGUSTUS.

This is lunacy. You (*points at LYNDON*) are dividing the Traditions to keep a secret we no longer have any right to keep. People are *dying*, Smythe, and not just our people anymore. What is won if we preserve the Order today, only to sunder the Traditions tomorrow, and fall alone, drawn too thin across the many fronts of our battlefield, the day after? It's best to cut out the sickness *now*.

MICHAEL: (*to LYNDON and PETER*) What is he talking about?

AUGUSTUS: I'm saying that the Order of Hermes is concealing a dire threat to our world and to our Nine Traditions, and that I will no longer stand for it.

LYNDON: Mind your tongue, Adeptus.

AUGUSTUS: I'll do no such thing. If you've a mind to challenge me to certámen, old man, remember that I received my instruction at the hands of Lord Edward Gilmore and that I survived the fall of Mus. When was the last time you were out of your lab, Smythe?

The Bonisagus falls silent.

MICHAEL: What's this all about, Augustus?

AUGUSTUS: In its most basic sense, this is about an 800-year-old war with a sect of vampires that has roots within the Order of Hermes. I suspect it was one of those vampires, or one of their many pawns, who killed your friends. But beyond that — deeper beneath the obvious meanings of this confrontation — is a crucible wherein the unity of the Traditions is being tested. Our very worthiness to *survive* is being challenged. And we are *failing that test*. We're failing because of our petty

divisions, our lack of trust and our insistence on these narcissistic inter-Tradition politics. But here, now, today, we're failing because the Order of Hermes is purposefully dividing all of you so that no one bothers to look for our hand in this carnage. We are threatening the very unity we set out to create 500 years ago for the sake of passing the buck.

Time stops and the ORACLES appear.

TIME: Here now is the turning point.

MIND: Founded in idealism and nearly drowned in a Promethean lie that even they have begun to believe, some few are beginning to penetrate the illusion.

ENTROPY: I cannot say whence it moves, but the Wheel of Fortune — nearly ground to a halt for the venerable Order — has begun to move once more.

TIME: Bear witness, Brothers and Sisters. Attend! Even now there is a viper in House of Hope.

Time moves again, with AUGUSTUS beginning to rail passionately about inter-Tradition unity and hope for victory in the Ascension War. As he does so, the HERMETIC with red streaks in his purple mask breaks away from the group and dials JOHANN KURTZWEIL's number on his cellular phone.

SCENE 4

A quiet alley, lit only by a quarter-moon. JOHANN KURTZWEIL is smoking a cigarette. The large, red streaks in his mask stand out against the purple. After a few minutes of JOHANN repeatedly checking his watch, AUGUSTUS steps into the alley.

AUGUSTUS: What cloak-and-dagger bullshit have you called me here for, Kurtzweil?

JOHANN: Please, Adeptus Pembroke, the matter I need to discuss with you is of the utmost significance. I must make you an offer. You will receive this offer only once. *(He withdraws a slender glass vial from his coat pocket.)* Inside, you will discover a small quantity of vampiric blood. If you were to consume it — and you continued to do so regularly — you would find yourself immortal, capable of feats beyond the ken of ordinary men, Sleeper or otherwise, and party to a secret and elite brotherhood within House Tytalus.

As AUGUSTUS accepts the vial at arm's length, JOHANN's eyes dart nervously upward. AUGUSTUS drops the vial, and it breaks. The sound draws JOHANN's gaze back instantly.

JOHANN: No!

With seeming precognition, AUGUSTUS dives to one side as KURTZWEIL stumbles forward, toward the small

pool of blood soaking into the garbage underfoot. A muffled gunshot narrowly misses AUGUSTUS' head and blasts through JOHANN's knee. AUGUSTUS rolls onto his back and JOHANN pitches forward, suppressing a scream. AUGUSTUS, sigil of Solomon already in hand, releases a peal of flame into the white-masked SNIPER overhead. The SNIPER plummets from the roof to impact noisily with a fire escape landing. AUGUSTUS jumps up and begins to run from the alley, dialing a number from the memory of his cellular phone as he does so.

AUGUSTUS: Julian, now!

A black Ford Fairlane plows through its veil of invisibility, screeching to a stop in front of the alley. JULIAN ST. GERMAINE, a devilishly handsome Ecstatic in a bright purple mask, leans over to open the front passenger door as AUGUSTUS dives for the vehicle. The scene leaves the groaning KURTZWEIL in the alley as AUGUSTUS departs with JULIAN.

JULIAN: Are you all right?

AUGUSTUS: Better than all right. I've cracked the first layer of this conspiracy. Call the rest of the cabal; this is going to get dangerous.

Darkness falls as the car squeals around a corner and disappears into the night.

SCENE 5

MARCUS DE ALLEGRESSE alone, speaking on the phone in a darkened room. On the wall, shadows play unnaturally, mocking a battle between Traditions and vampires.

MARCUS: Yes, that's right. There will be a Flambeau strike team and a team of custos led by Kurtzweil. There will be a few others on the outside, but they'll be of no consequence. What else do you need to know? I thought Johann apprised you of most of this.

MARCUS looks up, his features drawn and haggard. He dabs his forehead with a handkerchief, listening to the party on the other end of the line.

Are you intending to kill them? This is not part of the deal!

Suddenly, MARCUS cramps up, doubling over and clutching at his stomach. With trembling hand, he pulls a small metal flask out of his robes and unscrews the cap, dabbing a tiny crimson drop onto his tongue and swallowing with a shudder. His breathing is wet and ragged. Although he recaps the flask, MARCUS does not put it away. Some of the streaks in his mask become a darker red.

Yes. You're right. I suppose we can afford to lose a few. But only a few.

BREAKING BREAD WITH FIENDS

Let it never be said that the Order of Hermes in general, and House Tytalus in particular, wastes any useful resource. Ever since the early days of the Massasa War, the generals of the Order have maintained a tenuous relationship with a few vampire allies of their own. Hatred shared, after all, sometimes makes for strange alliances, and the Carpathian fiends know how to hold a grudge like a Hermetic.

Indeed, some Tytalans find much to admire in this vile and sinister family of *massasa*. Vampires are monstrous, to be sure, but a few cultivate that monstrosity with precision, discipline and restraint — honorable characteristics in either man or night-devil. Like Tytalans, they understand the ideology of total war, and they are studious and noble besides (in their own dark way). Many of the elders and a handful of the youth are also capable sorcerers, trafficking with spirits and rousing the elements with the familiarity of those who understand and appreciate the subtle nuances of true power.

Of course, a few Tytalans have gone off to break bread with the undead and never returned. Many likely violated some arcane stricture of proper etiquette observed by the bloodsuckers and paid for the error with their blood. Others were possibly taken by one or more of the monsters that lurk within the vampires' decrepit palaces. Some few could have fallen under the dangerous fetters of the Blood Oath, the administration of which is seen as an art form among many of the older undead. Others could have been ambushed by enemy warlocks along the way or killed by the elements in the often isolated and forlorn places where the eldest undead typically lair.

Still, these dangers have not proven sufficient to dissuade certain Masters within the house from training an Apprentice or two every generation to keep company with monsters in the pursuit of a mutual vendetta. Perhaps now — with large-scale aggressions against the renegade warlocks resurrected after centuries of neglecting the initial declaration of Wizards' March — the wisdom of such Masters will be made apparent, and their alliance with the fiends become accepted among the Houses of Hermes.

If such is the case, God have mercy on every soul in the Order.

SCENE 6

The burning ruins of a vampiric haven. An elegantly attired CARPATHIAN VAMPIRE in a deep red mask speaks cordially with a TYTALAN MASTER in a heavily streaked purple mask, as a terrible wailing emanates from the shadows beyond the fire's light. Visible are several purple-masked HERMETICS, most of whom are plainly horrified.

CARPATHIAN: Now that our business here is complete, Magister, I will order the packs to withdraw.

TYTALAN: Have you the books you require?

CARPATHIAN: Yes, my mistress will be most pleased. These usurpers are useful for their blood-witchery if nothing else.

A FORTUNAE drags a completely hysterical QUAESITOR away from the rubble of the Chantry and past the conversing pair.

QUAESITOR: Devoured! Oh, Holy God, it was... it was... I can still hear him screaming!

FORTUNAE: (to the TYTALAN) What does she mean by "devoured"? (glancing at the CARPATHIAN) What kind of monsters are we dealing with?

CARPATHIAN: (to the TYTALAN) It is plain that we are not wanted here, Magister, so we shall depart. My mistress sends her regards and wishes me to inform you that knight takes rook. She looks forward to your next move.

The CARPATHIAN bows low to the TYTALAN with preternatural grace and turns — with a smile and a nod to the FORTUNAE — to walk away. The scene falls dark with the FORTUNAE screaming at the TYTALAN, who chops the air with his hand and departs in another direction. He leaves the young Numismancer to cradle the trembling QUAESITOR.

SCENE 7

An apartment in Boston. AUGUSTUS PEMBROKE sits across a spacious parlor from the remaining members of the Cabal of Bright Wisdom. AUGUSTUS' own cabal, the Seekers of Unity, stands a careful watch.

REBECCA: But that still doesn't explain why you've asked us to come here.

AUGUSTUS: Because you are the cabal who was there for the beginning, and you stand a much better chance of making it into Horizon alive right now than I do.

AURELIEN: Horizon? Whatever would we be doing there?

AUGUSTUS: You would be attached to the group escorting the captured *massasa* before the Council of Nine — or what is left of the Council, in any case.

JOSIAH: Captured *massasa*? Council of Nine?

AUGUSTUS: Yes. The Nine Traditions intend to get to the bottom of this ridiculous shit, and enough people know enough now that the Hermetic high rollers can't bury the issue in red tape.

REBECCA: But why do we have to be there?

AUGUSTUS: Because the man who captured this vampire — who will undoubtedly go to Horizon with it once he discovers that Lord Gilmore is moving his captive there — is part of a secret faction within House Tytalus that is consuming vampire blood for the power it apparently bestows. His name's Johann Kurtzweil.

AURELIEN: You mean Master De Allegresse's aide?

AUGUSTUS: Yes, the second of the man who argued so eloquently for the renewal of Wizards' March. A man who is using this slaughter to feed his unnatural hunger.

EDWARD: We should tell—

AUGUSTUS: Tell no one! Not your mentors. Not your Chantrymates. Not even Lord Gilmore. I tried to root out this conspiracy on my own, and members of *my own house* tried to kill me. If you want to live, make sure the truth reveals *itself*. Have it happen in a public place and in a way that cannot be traced back to you. You will be less likely to wake up to the barrel of a gun in your face.

REBECCA: How are we supposed to do that?

AUGUSTUS: You're Hermetics, Rebecca; think of something. You wouldn't have come this far if you lacked intellect and cunning. Consider it a challenge.

JULIAN ST. GERMAINE enters from the bedroom.

JULIAN: Augustus, we've got three or four minds, very aggressive, coming this way. I *think* they're vampires.

AUGUSTUS: Thanks, Julian. (*turns back to the Cabal of Bright Wisdom*) They're probably here for us but, all the same, we'll guard your departure. Get to the Gediz Caves and meet up with Lord Gilmore's contingent there. I've already secured you a place in the entourage. The fewer people you talk to and the fewer stops you make en route, the better.

REBECCA: I don't know what to say, Mr. Pembroke.

AUGUSTUS: Then don't waste time thinking about it. You're going to have a hard enough time

figuring out how to pull our asses out of the fire, Ms. Mitsotakai. We're fighting a war against a cancer within our very Order, a cancer that seems to have the upper hand. We'll do what we can here, but it will be for nothing if you can't pull off your end on Horizon.

JOSIAH: Will all of you be all right?

AUGUSTUS: (*smiles wickedly*) Against four vampires? When I die, I intend for it to be at the hands of a *real* enemy. I'll contact you when you get back from Horizon. Now go.

The mages of the Cabal of Bright Wisdom depart swiftly as AUGUSTUS readies his magic and the Seekers of Unity slowly file out of the apartment to intercept the approaching threat.

SCENE 8

MIGUEL CORDOVERA sits in a dank, windowless cell. He wears a very pale red mask. Although his body shows no sign of injury, his robes show the evidence of a shotgun blast. With a rusty squeak of protest, a key turns in the ancient lock and JOHANN KURTZWEIL enters the chamber with a thermos in hand. The streaks in KURTZWEIL's mask are pale red against the purple.

CORDOVERA: Have you come to torment the Misker turncoat again?

JOHANN: No. I'm very sorry about what I did to you, but you *were* killing me, after all. (*takes a long, nervous moment's pause*) Here. (*offers the thermos to CORDOVERA*) It must have taken a lot to put yourself back together.

CORDOVERA accepts the thermos and opens it, suppressing a shiver from the familiar scent of blood within. He regards the contents for several minutes with a mixture of despair and abject revulsion. Biting back his hunger, CORDOVERA sets the thermos aside.

CORDOVERA: I don't want it. Take it away. Let me at least die with some dignity.

JOHANN: (*staring, wide-eyed at the thermos for a moment, licking his lips, before continuing*) We're not going to kill you. We're going to try to — oh, please. Please. Just a taste.

CORDOVERA: What? What do you mean?

JOHANN: I need... just take a taste, yes? Your masters, they told you, didn't they? Just a little taste before we go to Horizon.

CORDOVERA: Horizon?

JOHANN: Never mind that. A trifle. I'll be there for you, yes. Take care of you. Yes. (*swallows hard, on the verge of losing it*) So. Just a sip. Yes? For me?

Realization dawns on CORDOVERA.



CORDOVERA: Friend, would that I could part with it, you would be welcome to every drop of this cursed ichor that I have left. But I am what I am now. You don't want this. From where *I* stand, it is worth nothing next to what you have to lose.

JOHANN: (now trembling as though beset by illness) But we lose nothing for just tasting it. *That's* what he said. Your mistake for going too far. We were smarter. Yes. Your blood. Power. And strife. But a magus still.

CORDOVERA steps forward to grasp both of **JOHANN**'s arms, kicking over the thermos of blood as he does so. **JOHANN** begins to stoop down to the puddle at his feet, but **CORDOVERA**'s gaze transfixes him.

CORDOVERA: Look at yourself. You look like the walking dead. You are becoming one of us by degrees. Your soul is drowning, you poor fool.

JOHANN: But I—

CORDOVERA: No. No objections. Together, we will go to Horizon, and I will meet my fate like the magus I once was. I will tell no one of what has happened here, but you must struggle against

these chains or you will lose everything. You are *Awake*; do not be so quick to descend into the Sleep of the Damned.

JOHANN raises his gaze upward, his face streaked with tears, as shadows fall.

SCENE 9

An interrogation chamber in Horizon. **MIGUEL CORDOVERA** stands before a great number of purple-masked magi, including the hastily convened *de facto* Council of Nine. The masks of several of the mages are streaked with red. The Cabal of Bright Wisdom is present, as are **JOHANN KURTZWEIL** and **LORD EDWARD GILMORE**. **GILMORE**'s mask is deep purple and devoid of any streaks. It appears as though **CORDOVERA** has been answering questions for quite some time.

GILMORE: And how many Hermetic mages have you yourself... ah... transformed, Mr. Cordovera?

CORDOVERA: One. I was commanded to do so.

GILMORE: Why are your allies capturing Hermetic mages and turning them into vampires?

CORDOVERA: I don't know. Perhaps for the same reason that they first captured vampires when they were magi. I do not pretend to make excuses for the actions of the undead any more so than I make excuses for the crimes I have committed.

CORDOVERA scans the assembly, sighing heavily.

I have consumed the blood of the innocent. I have taken lives, ruined them, shaped them. Whatever served my purposes, I did without hesitation. I could say now that I never did so without regret, but of what comfort is that to the children I've murdered? Or to the starving families whose jobs I've taken away in order to snipe at my rivals? Or to the magus whose Avatar I put to death?

A crimson tear falls from CORDOVERA's cheek.

I am no longer a magus. My soul was taken from me, shattered into a million pieces. As the blood seized hold of my dying body and I felt it suffuse every pore of my being with its unwelcome gift of life everlasting, I heard the death-throes of the Angel who had guided me all my years in the Order. I heard her crying out, falling apart.

CORDOVERA, smiling sadly, meeting eyes with each mage in turn. His gaze lingers over those whose masks show red streaks.

Ever since the day I learned I would live forever, I have wanted it to end.

Pause.

Before he can say more, CORDOVERA's eyes spout fountains of blood. He screams. Guards rush to help, but bolts of electricity shoot from his body, stunning them. CORDOVERA's face begins twitching, and his clothes begin changing. A massive telekinetic wave sends every mage sprawling. CORDOVERA's hands erupt into flame. And then, suddenly, it is no longer CORDOVERA, but a figure that wears the blood-red mask of a VAMPIRE ANCIENT. The masked figure, a spirit projected through undead powers into the very heart of the Traditions, radiates authority that will not be questioned. The mask bears a striking resemblance to that of the MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE in Act Two, Scene 10.

The assembled magi stand, stunned. One FLAMBEAU rushes toward the ANCIENT. The mask turns to face the FLAMBEAU, and the FLAMBEAU is frozen in place. No one else dares to move.

ANCIENT: No welcome for the prodigal son, then? More's the pity, I suppose.

The ANCIENT surveys the Council Chamber.

My, my, my... what a lovely retreat you've constructed for yourselves! Tell me, is this then where you

have been hiding for all these years? I certainly haven't seen you out in the world, after all. I almost believed you were all destroyed.

JOSIAH: He broke the wards?

ANCIENT: Blood knows blood, young man. You were foolish enough to bring one of mine into your Sanctum. If I learned nothing else from our adversaries in the Carpathians, I learned that one never invites the *vampyr* into one's abode.

REBECCA: Release Cordovera.

ANCIENT: Oh, he will be released, don't worry about that. He will be granted the release he so desperately craves. But not until I am through with him, of course.

He turns to GILMORE.

I assume you speak for the assembled?

GILMORE: I am the representative for the Order of Hermes. I am Lord Edward Gilmore, Master of the *Ars Essentiae*.

ANCIENT: You may dispense with the formalities, Gilmore. I merely wish to know which head of the serpent I should address. And thus, you find yourself as the subject of this brief interrogation. My question for you is this:

The air around the ANCIENT grows dark and poisoned.

Why, after so many years — after we have gone our own ways — do you children insist on pressing this vendetta? Have you naught else to do save resurrecting a centuries-dead war?

GILMORE: You are criminals and infernalists. You are guilty of murder, of Gilgul, of atrocities—

ANCIENT: You insist on pressing an 800-year old criminal finding?

GILMORE: —of atrocities up to and including the murder of millions in Bangladesh.

ANCIENT: Bangladesh? I have never even — Ah hhhhhhh. I see. You refer to the little war there that drowned the poor *rakshasa* in his own monsoon. He was out of control when he awoke, that much I will allow. But how is it that we have become the inheritors of his indiscretions?

GILMORE: You were controlling this "*rakshasa*"! You are as guilty as it is.

The ANCIENT stares at GILMORE, unbelieving. Suddenly, he starts laughing.

ANCIENT: Could it be? Could it truly be that you literally know nothing of what you have stumbled into? Let me tell you what I see. I see a ruined home, gutted by you, and do I see it burned down? Do I see the earth

salted so that nothing like it will rise? No, I see an empty library. Clamor about atrocities and criminal acts, but the only crime I see is the Hermetic Order murdering people for books! Of course, we *have* taken something in return. Isn't that right, Mr. Kurtzweil?

KURTZWEIL: What? I have no—

ANCIENT: Come here.

Irresistibly compelled, KURTZWEIL obeys and falls to his knees.

GILMORE: What are you—

ANCIENT: You have something that belongs to us, don't you, Mr. Kurtzweil?

KURTZWEIL: Please... don't...

ANCIENT: Acquired a taste, have we?

The ANCIENT gestures idly, and KURTZWEIL freezes in place. The red streaks in KURTZWEIL's mask turn bone-white all of a sudden, and the mage collapses, sobbing.

GILMORE: What have you done?

ANCIENT: He will live — for the moment, at least. The lure of power is a most seductive addiction. It would certainly seem to be rather a *popular* one nowadays within House Tytalus. I suppose you could ask Master De Allegresse of the matter were he here, or if indeed you survive this night. This is war, after all, is it not?

The flames encircling the ANCIENT's hands begin pulsing and growing. The mages react, ready to press the charge.

GILMORE: You think you can defeat us?

ANCIENT: I look at you, and I see a roomful of broken, pathetic idiots who have squandered their gifts in a fool's crusade. You could no more stop me than undo the destruction of Mistrige. Eradicating you would be a service to the world.

REBECCA: Wait!

All eyes turn toward her.

You won't destroy us.

The ANCIENT regards her with interest.

REBECCA: I know it. This isn't how it ends.

The ANCIENT scrutinizes her carefully.

ANCIENT: A fate-weaver. I see. What it is you perceive, child?

REBECCA: This is a nexus, isn't it? A point of crucial consequence. You can't destroy us, because that would destroy you too. We're not your enemies.

ANCIENT: Aren't you? Wasn't it your Order that started this war?

REBECCA: But we each have our parts to play, do we not? We can go any way we want. We can destroy each other, and everything is lost. But we need each other, in some sort of sick sense. You have your enemies, and we have ours. If one of us is lost, so goes the other. You can dispute me, you can kill us all, of that I have no doubt. But this will encompass your doom.

Pause.

ANCIENT: I have lived... No. I have *existed* for over a thousand years, and that is a great deal of time to ponder one's actions. Most of all, I dwell upon the fortunes that brought me to *this*. If I had any cause left to believe that Hell had power over me, I might fear for my decrepit soul. More than anyone else, I can appreciate the chains of the flesh and the yearning to escape upward.

I knew full well what would happen when I drank that potion, brewed from the blood of a monster. I knew even then that I sentenced my Daemon to death, that I would lose my magic and be forever outcast from the light of day. Oh yes, I knew the consequences of my actions. However, I knew the mysteries of Fate also, child. The secrets of the Ars Fati were no less compelling in my day than in yours. When the *vis* began to die, I, like many others, looked to the mysteries contained in unraveling threads. What we discovered, all of us, pleased no one. The cowardly retreated from the world. The proud denied the truth until it ground them underfoot. The brave perished, raging against the turning of Fortune's Wheel. The resourceful? You look now upon the last of them.

I have outlived many enemies. I have deceived Death. I have cheated even the fall of magic. I have usurped the legacy of the First Murderer and supped on souls until my own empty heart grew heavy with the echoes of their anguish. Who, or what, speaks through you, child, that I who may yet see the unmaking of Time, hear in your words that distant stirring of the mystic sight I and my kind murdered a millennium ago? Who, or what, indeed?

I am old and tired, and perhaps it will come to pass one day soon that Fate cuts down the monster it has made. However, until such a day, I have my own responsibilities. So hear me, Gilmore—press this matter at your own risk. For there are worse fates than death, and better enemies to fight... are there not?

The ANCIENT smiles, barely visible under the mask. Flames burst from his garments. Within seconds, the figures of the ANCIENT and CORDOVERA are engulfed

in flames. Soon, nothing remains but ashes — and the lingering impression of the ANCIENT's mask that hangs, impossibly, in the air.

No one moves.

EDWARD: What now?

REBECCA: We walk away from the chasm. We bury the dead.

GILMORE: Child, we can't —

ENTROPY embraces REBECCA and splits into the Three Fates.

REBECCA: We failed, sir. Not this war, not this struggle; we failed the world. We were supposed to keep the sacred wisdom of the world, protect those without the Gift and realize the City of Pymander. But we've failed and lost the war. Instead of facing that fact, we decided to pick a fight with some vampires who nearly destroyed us. But yet, somehow, with all our fuck-ups and mistakes, for all our blindness and arrogance, we survive by the grace of Fortune.

I'm tired of dodging bullets. I'm tired of hiding in the shadows while the Technocracy strangles the world. All this time, I haven't felt angry. Even when I heard what happened to Matthew, I wasn't angry. Now I am. I'm angry that we nearly threw ourselves into the maw of oblivion for the sake of a vendetta and someone's political agenda. I'm angry that we've been running for 400 years while our enemies feast on the soul of the world.

The Tytalans — the ones with the blood habit — let them die. We're better off without them. A sentiment I'm sure you can appreciate, sir; survival of the fittest, right? We have better things to worry about.

We failed the world. You and me and all the mages of every Tradition that came before us. We failed because we forgot our duty. Now we can either hide and let the world continue its slow-motion slide into Hell, or we can ask the world to forgive us and try to save it from the steel talons of the Technocratic Union.

We fight and we win, or we are all lost.

ENTROPY returns to the ORACLES as they all bow their heads before REBECCA.

SCENE 10

Darkness, broken only by a single shaft of light. Within that shaft of light, MARCUS DE ALLEGRESSE kneels. The ORACLES stand in a semicircle, at the edge of the illumination. MARCUS is shaking as though in the throes of illness, craning his head about and speaking to — and

WHAT HAPPENED TO HOUSE TREMERE?

As the beginnings of this play indicate, House Tremere turned to vampirism a thousand years ago, a crime for which its founder was cast out and the house itself stricken from the Order's rolls. The Massasa War pitted mages against vampires across eastern Europe for decades. Tremere himself, the founder of the House, was never caught. Eventually, the Order declared the matter closed. All of the errant Tremere-turned-vampires were thought destroyed.

Hundreds of years give rise to change. For the few former Tremere who may have survived, evolution into the undead state severed them from their former Order. As vampires, they are creatures that the Order no longer understands. Without the power, training and support of the Order, they no longer have any of their old skills or heritage. The ancient House Tremere is no more. Now there are only the undead — some, perhaps, who remember days as mortal wizards in the Dark Ages, but for whom magic is part-and-parcel of the curse of undeath. Vampires have their own magic and society, it seems.

And Tremere himself? Well, that founder was a magician of great skill, yet not nearly the equal of the other Houses' founders. Limited by happenstance, he bartered his forceful personality and organizational skills into a leadership role. Still, his own magic was not so potent as that of many other, more gifted, magicians. Driven by ambition, he built rules and strictures, then finally gave up life and magic so that he might rule among the undead. His daring and psyche were forceful, the likes of which mages have not seen again. Better to rule in Hell....

occasionally pausing to hear a reply from — an unseen presence. The amount of red streaks in his mask almost equal the amount of purple.

MARCUS: No. No! It is not making us stronger. It is killing us!

The ORACLES take a step closer as MARCUS begins sobbing. He looks up — nearly meeting the eyes of the ORACLES — and holds up his hands, almost as though in supplication.

I can bend steel in these hands. I can batter stone to dust with them. But I cannot hear the call of the elements. I cannot weave a flame from the vis like any common Disciple.

FORCES steps forward, as if to place a comforting hand on *MARCUS* as the *Tytalan's* head sinks and tears fall from his cheeks. The *ORACLE's* trembling hand rests

a scant inch from MARCUS' head for a long moment and then, reluctantly, it is withdrawn. Darkness begins to fall.

My Will be done. My Will be done. My Will be done....

MARCUS DE ALLEGRESSE's form is swallowed by the shadows, and the light fades away.

— FIN —





ACT FOUR: PAWNS AND BISHOPS

*Everything flows, out and in; everything has its tides;
all things rise and fall; the pendulum-swing manifests in ev-
erything; the measure of the swing to the right is the measure
of the swing to the left; rhythm compensates.*

— The Kybalion



Drama's over; it's time for talk.

The Hermetics and their allies are now going from here to there. Where you take them after that, how they get there and what they learn along the way is up to you. This chapter will hopefully help both players and Storytellers cope with the wizards in the new **Mage** universe.

THE SLEEP OF AGES

The first question to ask, of course, is, "What's going on?" Why is magic tightening? Why are tried-and-true formulae no longer working? Why are the Umbrood so much more difficult to summon?

The easy answer is that the Final Nights are upon the World of Darkness, and everything's going to Hell.

That's not the whole truth, but that's a good place to start. Mages are not exempt from the chaos that engulfs the world. If anything, they're more vulnerable to it than most supernatural creatures. After all, reality shapes mages as much as mages shape reality.

Let's think about consensual reality—the Tellurian—in these Final Nights. Reality, as the Oracles said, is becoming exhausted. First of all, the Technocratic paradigm increasingly limits possibilities. Reality is starting to believe the Big Lie of the Technocracy. Spirits are keeping their distance or disappearing altogether. Ancient rituals and philosophies no longer matter in the scientific world. While the embers of knowledge may be guarded by the Traditions, most people couldn't care less.

The reason for this apathy leads to a second way to read “exhausted.” Reality is tired. It's pooped. Progress, human innovation and technological breakthroughs get faster and faster—swamping traditional values and schools of thought—and people simply can't keep up. In the end, the increased speed of technological advance convinces people to give up. They surrender their will in the onslaught of overwhelming progress. And since reality depends on the dwindling will of the Sleepers, reality itself has lost its will. Things feel heavy, leaden and gray. In metaphysical terms, Stasis is knocking on the door, and it'll let itself in if people don't care enough. And then, truly it will all be over.

THE HERMETIC RESPONSE

Now, let's step into the shoes of a Master who has been studying the Hermetic Arts since the mid-18th century. He has mastered the *Ars Essentia*, granting him insight into the primal forces of the universe. He has spent the last two centuries learning everything he can about the Art. He has spent years tracking down texts that were written millennia ago. He has researched the Five Elements to the point of exhaustion. He has made extensive pacts with angels, demons and other High Umbrood. His entire unnaturally extended life has been devoted to one thing and one thing only: Mastery of all the Hermetic Arts, with the hopes that if he masters reality, he will Ascend.

Now imagine that he woke up one day, and none of what he had learned worked anymore.

No words of power. No chalices. No scrolls in ancient tongues. No dragon's blood. None of it worked, and he could not perform magic.

And let's say he has some training in Prime magic, and he can actually sense reality tightening around him. Every thread of the Tapestry turns into an iron net. Everything he has dedicated his life to studying and understanding is now worthless.

What would he do?

He would probably do what the rest of the Hermetics did: He would panic.

Hermetics, for all their power and ego, are still human. And when the shit hits the fan and suddenly the fourth pentacle of Mars wouldn't call up a fire elemental like it did last Tuesday, they panicked. And when people panic, they make bad decisions. Like trying to track down and destroy the holdouts from House Tremere for old books. The Order as a whole is not dumb; it understands its own weakened position and need for allies instead of enemies. But not every *individual* sees things the same way. When one mage makes a bad decision, the rest of the Order—and indeed all the Traditions—can feel the results.

Hermetics aren't the only ones panicking, of course. All mages are feeling the pinch, including Technocrats (victims of their own success). Each Tradition is coping in its own manner, some better than others. The world is choking, and the dynamism inherent in all mages is being attacked. It's been bad before, but never *this* bad. Marauders spring up every day, simply because what is considered “insane” is becoming so much greater. All realities are colliding against the meta-reality of apathy.

The one Hermetic's original theory—that the formulae need to be revamped from the original ancient texts—is a good one, but it's ultimately the wrong one. Traveling backward in time, it misses the point. Examining the foundations will not stop the house from crumbling. Despite the ravings of several Hermetic Masters in the grip of Twilight, the High Mythic Ages will not return. The clock cannot be turned back. It is a sad fact to acknowledge, but the Traditions have looked too long on a past that cannot be reclaimed.

THE FOUR WINDS

Should the Order give up on the Traditions? Are those ancient and venerable ways dead and gone? Has the Technocracy finally eliminated all opposition? As the Reckoning heads toward its climax and

Armageddon looms, Tradition mages usually find themselves in one of four different states of mind. These examples are obviously the extremes a mage can reach, but in these days, the extremes are becoming more and more normal.

The Broken. Despondency is a hard thing to deal with. These mages have thrown in the towel in the belief that the war is lost and nothing can be done to stem the tide of Stasis. Destroyed beyond hope of recovery, suffering the traumatic scars of a war fought and lost — at least in their minds — these mages desert the Traditions in favor of one of the other factions, or a retreat from the struggle entirely. While the Nephandi prey on the hopelessness that these mages exude, some such souls still find comfort in the secure arms of the Technocracy. (And the Technocracy is happy to “rehabilitate” them.) Even if these shattered souls manage to find safety in the Union, however, it’s usually only a matter of time before suicide or the Cauls claims them.

The Webcutters. The strange mages who subscribe to this belief decide to use the Technocracy’s weapons against that organization — without realizing what they are doing. Abandoning long-held beliefs or simply ignoring them from the start, they use the Technocratic paradigm to fight the Technocracy. They abandon wonder for hard science, the fireball for the machine gun and Umbrood for aliens. The irony of this position is unmistakable. While their actions might do physical harm to the Technocracy, they end up doing nothing more than reinforcing its paradigm. The most desperate of these mages form pacts with strange Stasis entities, becoming all but automatons in their fight. Ultimately, however, their actions only strengthen the material and deny the spiritual.

The Transcendentalists. As the struggle for personal enlightenment becomes more and more difficult under the stratification of magic, some mages simply seek to rise above it all and escape. This mindset stresses personal Ascension above all else as a means of avoiding the coming strife. While Ascension is certainly a worthwhile goal (perhaps the only goal worth fighting for), these hermits pursue it under questionable motives. Strangely enough, these mages usually have no direct experience in the former Ascension War or its aftershocks, and they want to keep it that way. Whether any of them has reached this goal is unknown, but fear of the world is usually not a good reason to attempt Ascension.



The Bombs. The War will not be lost without a final fight! Exemplifying the attitude of House Flambeau, these mages are getting themselves ready for the last great battle of the Ascension War. No cost is too high, no action is too small, and no ethic can stand in the way of total victory. The repressed rage of the Traditions made manifest, this faction enjoys the numerical advantage as mages act on the anger they have buried for so long. In their quest to win the war, however, they lose sight of the goal, and they forget what they were fighting for in the first place. Sadly, a disproportionate number of these people end up trapped in Quiet, going Marauder in their mindless rage before exploding in a blaze of Paradox.

THE MIDDLE PATH

So what is a Hermetic to do in these troubled times? Continuing along the same stagnant road only leads to destruction. Attempting to re-engineer the old formulae has turned into a catastrophe. The Archmasters can't help, and even if they could, they'd have only the same old formulae and prejudices to regurgitate. The other Traditions view the Hermetics with even more suspicion than before. There is no going back.

The Four Winds are the extremes of what people believe in these interesting times. You can give up, give in, seek escape or go out fighting. Those options seem to be the only ones. However, like the elements, the four united creates a fifth option: the Middle Path.

It is a tricky compromise. To fight without giving in to total rage; to transcend without turning callous and uncaring; to acknowledge loss without being overwhelmed by defeat; to work in the new world without succumbing to it. Not many people could try. It takes an extraordinary person to balance these four extremes in the Final Nights.

Of course, being an extraordinary person is what **Mage** is all about. You can tell compelling stories as Traditional mages succumb to the pressures of the world around them and burn out, or make doomed decisions that "seemed good at the time." Some mages make it; some get crushed in the gears. The Traditionalists can't dash down the Technocracy and bring forth a world of magic (and the Technocrats can't give humanity the will to be something better), but there are many important things that can be done in between. The very scope of events in **Blood Treachery** explains what can happen as a result of the actions of just

one person. The next great leap — or crash — could come from any single mage, even one of the players' characters. Hopefully, the players have a good time along the way.

ROLEPLAYING AND STORYTELLING THE ORDER

The Order of Hermes is one of the toughest Traditions to portray. While there are several Traditions that a novice player could leap into and fake his way through right off the bat, it's nearly impossible to do so with a plausible Hermetic character. A **Mage** player doesn't just write up an 85th-level magic-user and slay some kobolds, after all.

Furthermore, most Hermetic philosophy runs counter to what a modern person has been educated to believe. After all, it's hard to simply forget about, oh, atomic theory or biology and start talking about the four humors and their relations to the elements. Hopefully, these tips will help you get into the proper frame of mind to tackle a unique roleplaying challenge.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK!

Hermetic philosophy is a strange mishmash of belief systems that began in Egypt, got fused with Greek philosophy, picked up Gnostic, Neo-Platonic and Eleusinian flavors, absorbed Jewish Kaballah, incorporated alchemy, revived astrology and the Tarot, and extends nowadays into esoteric belief systems such as chaos magic and ontological anarchy.

In other words, the prospective player of an Order of Hermes character has a lot to learn.

Nevertheless, you don't need to buy a ton of books at the occult bookstore just to play a game. That would kind of defeat the purpose of having a good time, wouldn't it? So, what *do* you need to learn?

Astrology helps, especially if you go beyond basic sun-sign astrology (the kind you can find in any newspaper) and explore the planets and the houses. The Tarot helps as well. Get yourself a deck, and just play around with it to get a feel for the symbolism of the cards. Learning Golden Dawn-type ritual, however, is probably a bit excessive. We're trying to play a game here, after all, and yelling at your Storyteller because he made a mistake in numerology will not help. Besides, these tools add great flavor to the game, but whether you actually *believe* in them is your business.

The suggested-reading list at the end of this book gives several sources that either espouse a Hermetic philosophy or are Hermetic works of art. We haven't listed any "how-to" guides back there, because it's more important to understand poetry and metaphor—which are essential ingredients in magic—than it is to know how to perform a minor summoning ritual.

And if worse comes to worst, just bluff. Magic is based on belief, after all, and if everyone in your group agrees with a praxis, then who are we to tell you what to do?

PRAXIS ESSENTIAE

Pageantry, drama and nobility are the hallmarks of the Hermetic praxis. Let the shaman howl at the sky until the heavens answer, let the witch mingle humors in her cauldron; *Magus Rex* commands the Elements, summons the celestial hierarchies to attend his will and holds in sacred trust the wisdom that shakes the earth and exalts the spirit. The Hermetic mage *does not* simply grasp his shewstone and plumb the cosmos using Correspondence. He conducts his rituals within circles inscribed to specifications made exact in the days of Solomon the Wise; the Names he calls upon are echoes of the Thoughts of God. High ritual Magic is a time-consuming thing of pomp and circumstance that requires the utmost dedication to even grasp, let alone master. It is precisely this ethic that the Hermetic carries over into his day-to-day dealings with other Awakened.

Lest you begin to believe that Hermetic arrogance is simply a standard attitude problem issued at the door upon graduation, remember that the average Hermetic's mindset stems not from a childish mentality, but rather from a sense of mystical superiority. The Hermetic acts out of a *noblesse oblige* and an undying commitment as a seneschal in the house of divine knowledge. When she says to her compatriots, "You wouldn't understand," the Hermetic mage is not copping the attitude of a self-centered teenager dealing with concerned parents. She is divining numerological significance, pondering symbology and thinking back to similar circumstances from the Hornbook and other instructional texts. In short, she is drawing upon a font of magical knowledge beyond her cabalmates' experience. Do you think you might be a bit peeved if someone bugged *you* in the middle of a 17-part calculation in which you were using the numeric correspondences of Enochian glyphs?

Often, the sheer complexity of Hermetic praxis and the amount of time and effort the mage must put into it constantly leads others to perceive Hermetics as terse, intolerant and self-important. In reality, belief in the Hermetic paradigm is a constant effort of will, it is an exercise of intellect, an aspiration of spirit. To become the Word, to scale Hermes' caduceus, to climb the Ladder to Heaven and to realize the City of Pymander are not things that happen only when the player picks up dice to roll Arete. More so than perhaps any other Tradition, the Hermetics realize that magic is not an act or even a thing, but instead a *state of being*.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Hermetic mages are creatures of rigorous discipline. Further, it should also be unsurprising that they are inclined to demand the same kind of discipline from others. Magic is the mightiest tower, the headiest draught and the most dangerous weapon. You do not trust a weak-willed fool with the defense of the castle, any more than you hand a chimpanzee a loaded gun. These things are not done by the wise, nor does the fool often have the opportunity to repent of his error in doing so. With years of torturously intense training behind him and a relentless resolve to continue to pursue this Path of Gold—no matter the hardships, as years become decades and centuries—the Hermetic mage *cannot* but challenge his companions. "When I see that the strength and depth of your conviction mirrors my own," he asserts, "only then will I honor you as I demand you honor me."

While any common Sleeper can blunder through a peyote-vision or justify her existence with fearful supplications to some external divinity, a Hermetic makes a reality of his own vision and justifies himself by his Will. Anyone who demands less of himself is no better than a Sleeper moving fearfully through a world that he lacks the power to command, alter and suborn. To a Hermetic, if reality is clay, it is supreme precision and the greatest possible understanding (not merely the Awakening) that gives one the right to sculpt.

The Hermetics' foci are not just the tools needed to create sufficient belief to allow for magic. They are barriers with which to distance oneself from the power of the Art, even as one shapes it. The Ecstatic, lost in bliss, is ridden by his magic; the Chorister, singing down her angels, is subordinate to hers. It is the Hermetic who *commands* the magic,

fully accepting the exultation and the blame without fear. As in all other things, the Hermetic must dominate her magic and define it, shaping it with utmost discernment. A vision is irrelevant without a seer, and a deity worshipped by none might as well not exist. The force of a Hermetic mage's Will gives her relevance. She needs the approval of no god, for she carries Divinity within herself. She needs only refine and purify it in the crucible that is the ongoing process of Ascension.

BREAKING DOWN OTHER MISCONCEPTIONS

Hermetics are not the bad guys. They have made mistakes, to be sure, but they are not the villains in this drama. And surely whatever crimes can be laid on the heads of the Hermetics pale in comparison to the atrocities committed by the Technocracy in the name of Progress. Speaking of which...

Hermetics are not Technocrats with magic wands. While a Hermetic may look as stagnant and broken as a Technocrat in the eyes of the more freewheeling Traditions, to think that the Order has the same goals as the Union is just plain wrong. The Technocracy idealizes a world of *flatness*, the souls of their sheep ground into meal so that Progress, Safety and Perfection can rule the land. Hardly a world that has room for dragons, basilisks and miracles.

Furthermore, the Order does not encourage the "truth" of democracy, that all people are equal to others — a "truth" that the Technocracy itself doesn't even believe in. (If it did, would there be a ruling Elite?) Man is a hierarchical animal, and to pretend that the Great Chain of Being doesn't apply in this day and age is folly. Hermetics are elitists, but they're honest about it. And, in truth, they've earned the right to be.

Hermetic respect must be earned. Just because you're Awakened doesn't mean you're worth anything in the eyes of the Order. If you want to be seen as worthy in the eyes of a Hermetic, you had better have your shit together. That worth doesn't necessarily correspond to paradigm, either. The Order will respect the visions of the wildest Cultist of Ecstasy or the fantastical inventions of the Sons of Ether, *as long as the mages in question have the right attitude.*

Hollow Ones, Virtual Adepts, Orphans and any other mages who whine and complain that the Order is elitist and should give them a break is missing the point. Magic is not an entitlement. You have to earn

your birthright, and the Hermetic works hard to ensure that right. The Hermetic's famous discipline is not mere stasis, but the necessary framework to change reality. It's as necessary as an Akashic's *kata*, a Son of Ether's math skills or a Virtual Adept's binary code. If a mage isn't willing to do the work to perfect his Art, the Hermetic wants no truck with him.

"Well, screw them! I don't care what the Merlins think, anyway!" That's right, you're a young techno-Orphan who's Hell-bent on doing whatever the fuck you want, and no way is some old geezer in a miniver-trimmed robe gonna try and tell you differently! Well, good luck to you, then. In the meantime, the Hermetics have 5,000 years of wisdom to peruse and refine. Just don't complain when they don't give you the respect you think you deserve.

Hermetics do set Tradition policy. Let's face it, the Order of Hermes pretty much founded the Traditions. Sure, the Cult of Ecstasy's seers predicted the organization, the Batini put the right notes in the right hands at the right time, and there wouldn't even be a Council without all of the Traditions together. In the end, though, the Hermetics had the most organization, the most codified ways to describe and trade magic and the most political will.

That hasn't changed. The headstrong Hermetics do often set Tradition policy, even if it's just because it's not worth the trouble to fight them over some little matter of protocol. The typical Verbena or Cultists just don't *bother* to fight the Order over political goals, so the Order can push its agenda. Not every mage follows that agenda, but the Order does create the foundations of the Traditions.

THE NECESSITY OF SACRIFICE

The undying quest for perfected knowledge does not come without price. Beyond the ever-growing temptations of hubris, stasis and the Path of Screams lies a less tangible (yet more important) decision that all mages must face. Each mage must ask, "What will I give up in order to work toward Ascension?"

Mages are scholars, researchers and keepers of arcane knowledge in a world that treats those vocations as second-class. In the World of Darkness, it's all too easy to focus on the visceral, the here-and-now, and to dismiss anyone who wastes time on such petty knowledge. In this respect, the Syndicate has already won: Why learn anything that won't make you fabulously wealthy? The Order's

universities become the Syndicate's degree mills, churning out endless MBAs instead of true scholars. Besides, learning isn't cool; it's much more important to concentrate on superficial details than to try to expand your mind.

By this virtue, Hermetics (and most other mages) are already removed from most of humanity simply because they crave knowledge. They're nerds, geeks, bookworms, brainiacs and every other epithet you could think of. Even the Fortunaes, the Order's social butterflies, are scholars first and foremost. So forget the pop-culture references, the snide cynicism and the laissez-faire attitude that seems to have characterized most of the 1990s. Hermetics are not tragically hip slackers who watch MTV and believe in nothing. They are passionate students who don't give a damn about what's tops at the box office. Is their attitude one of elitism or recognition of the dead pap the Technocracy spoon-feeds to most of the "civilized" world in the form of "culture"? Hermetics don't waste time with petty bullshit. Although this image isn't totally accurate to other Traditions, it's at least more common. One must have extreme dedication in order to prosper in the Art.

Then, one must consider human relationships. As a mage becomes more and more involved in his or her magical studies, it becomes harder and harder to have a normal relationship with other people. What's more important, magical might or falling in love? This bittersweet choice should never be played lightly. Does a mage neglect his duty to himself (and possibly the world) by having a personal life, or are love and friendship merely distractions on the road to Ascension?

But what of ethics, convictions, virtues and morals? At what point does the mage offer principle upon the altar of magic? If mages are at war, when does a mage begin justifying horrors because of it? When does principle conflict with the absolute need to win? Or, to take another tack, what of personal Ascension? At what point can certain experiments and dealings be justified as necessary for one's own personal gain? And in the end, is victory "by any means necessary" worth it? By determining where to draw the ethical lines — both in a character and in a chronicle — you define what is possible. A Flambeau mercenary might have no compunction about torching a roomful of Technocrats, but a Seshati historian will probably have a very different opinion.

More than Sphere levels, more than Arete, these choices determine the Path your mage walks. Be sure to choose carefully. And if you try to choose everything, good luck keeping everything in balance! Magic is defined by belief, and your beliefs in what is worth fighting for will determine your magic. Walk appropriately.

The core conflict in **Blood Treachery** revolves around mages who essentially sell out. They refuse to recognize their faults and weaknesses, and instead they cast blame on others. They grasp at flimsy solutions because they do not wish to accept their own problems or shortcomings. They're arrogant, fearful, prejudicial, prideful and petty. One must rise above these failings in order to Ascend, yet many such mages justify their actions in the pursuit of knowledge necessary for Ascension.

Even if you ignore the events of **Blood Treachery**, you can put these ideas and themes to good use. Many people would argue that the events of **Blood Treachery** don't make sense. No smart Tradition would declare war during its weakest hour! No sensible mage would sacrifice enlightenment for politics! But mages are human, and they're just as flawed as any other human. They make mistakes, they construct rationalizations, and sometimes they just fail miserably. Awakening isn't selective; the Awakened are not a chosen few with a higher standard than the rest of humanity. Their only higher standard is the bar that they set for themselves. Otherwise, there wouldn't be Nephandi, Marauders or even a war between the Traditions and the Technocracy.

Mages are not perfect; they can and do make mistakes. When those mistakes are backed up with monumental power and massive hubris, they become the cornerstones of cosmic tragedy.

POWER POLITICS

Here's a tip for everyone: Politicos don't Ascend. Here's another tip: Politicos control a lot of the Traditions' resources.

They don't leave this world, and they control a lot of stuff you'll need.

Don't politics suck?

Yes, they do, but someone has to do it. These days, it's easy to blame the viper's nest of intrigue within the Order for causing the Traditions' current woes. And, yes, the string-pullers deserve their fair share of blame.

Now, however, many of the worst power players are dead. Doissetep is gone, leaving one less place for clandestine activities to occur. There are vacuums to fill.

The political game can be either a pain in the ass or a sublime joy, depending on your scenario. While it doesn't carry the unique joy of incinerating your enemies with a vulgar Forces Effect, being a mover and shaker has its own set of rewards. Those rewards include the following points:

- You're necessary. The Order's other mages simply don't have the time to worry about administrative details, like managing the Order's finances or keeping tabs on occult bookstores. Moreover, other mages might not have access to the same rumor mills that you do, or have the necessary tact and diplomacy to negotiate an alliance. By interposing yourself as a convenient middleman, you curry favors that can be used later to get a little something for yourself.

- You're underestimated. By and large, the political mages are the less powerful ones—magically speaking, that is. Since value in the Order is often predicated on magical knowledge, no one's paying attention to you. That's fine. While you may never Master a Sphere, you know exactly what all the cabals in your Chantry are up to. And if the Pointy Hats want to know that, they have to come to you.

- You have the potential to do some good. The Order is in shambles, and study groups are not going to save the day. The other Traditions are in pretty sorry shape, too. Only someone with the charisma, the vision and the balls to reach for the brass ring can pull the Order out of this mess. After all, Baldric LaSalle wasn't much himself until he pulled the Traditions together....

When playing the political game, however, be sure not to step on too many toes. In the past, excess greed might have been tolerated. With the urgency of the Final Nights, however, anyone who impedes salvation in order to make a personal profit will soon find himself on the wrong end of a fireball.

THE WIZARDS' MARCH



The Wizards' March against the Tremere and renegades of the Order soon sucks both sides into a bloody conflict that could destroy both organizations—or be the crucible that means salvation. It could turn the world on its ear or provide an unparalleled opportunity for rebirth. It's also a chance to have magical duels the likes of which haven't been seen since the High Mythic Age.

Here's a helpful guide on how to run the **Blood Treachery** plot for yourselves. Remember, though, that *you* are the ultimate arbiter of what goes on and what's best for your game. We don't know what your players use for their characters, or where your joys lie in storytelling, so tweak as you will to make it *your* game.

TONE

First of all, the tone of the game should be one of desperation. The Order of Hermes is on its last legs as enemies assail it from all sides. For the first time in centuries, confusion, chaos and *disorder* reign. Most of the Masters and Archmages died along with Doissetep, and most of the Order's magical knowledge went up in flames with that Chantry as well. The Technocracy seems unstoppable, the Nephandi lick their lips in anticipation, and Marauders bloom like weeds. These psychotic new hunters

are becoming more than a mere annoyance; they are almost a real threat. And all at once, magic seems to be dwindling as wonder drains from the world.

Players' characters should walk into an atmosphere of confusion, desperation and hopelessness. They should then ask themselves the following question: What are we going to *do* about it? The debates should rage as theory after theory is proposed, shot down, agreed upon and thrown out. Meanwhile, the encroachments on the Hermetics' reality creep. Sooner or later, a choice will have to be made.

IGNORANCE

Remember: Mages don't know everything, and they're human. From all the evidence gathered by the Traditions, vampires seem like the prime culprits in the strangling of reality. The leveling of Bangladesh was simply the first blow that the sinister undead unleashed upon the world. Who knows what will be next? Encourage the atmosphere of conjecture, rumor and sheer bullshit that rages around the cabal.

MOTIVES

Why the Tremere? Why now? Everyone has reasons for wanting to destroy vampires. The occult books held by undead scholars are certainly valuable to the Order—one of them might hold the key to reversing reality's

THE RED STAR

For a magical society that believes in astrology, the sudden appearance of a red star that coincides with the Order's descent is not a coincidence — it's a dire omen. The exact role of the star is unknown, but Hermetic astrologers are certain that this new celestial entity bears malevolent tidings.

stagnation. As the character Marcus demonstrates, there are plenty of mages willing to slaughter a cabal of vampires if it'll increase their own political standing. And the Tremere have been poaching Hermetic Apprentices and mages, destroying their Avatars in the process. All of these reasons are good enough to motivate the Order to renew the *Massasa* War. None is *the* reason, however.

The Order is in a blind panic, and it's looking for someone to blame for its misfortunes other than itself.

It's as simple as that. No other reason can account for the hasty consensus reached regarding reality's stasis and its solution. How many Hermetics could look in the mirror and realize that their own pride, vanity and lack of action in the face of the wall of reason caused this mess? The Technocracy has won, and the Order can't admit that. So, rather than confront the real enemy, it finds a convenient scapegoat.

Keep in mind that this motive is not conscious. No secret cabal of Hermetics is sitting around a fire, cackling as to how it's going to blame those damn vampires for everything. Strong undercurrents of guilt, regret and despair sweep the mages toward a bloody war that will not help them in the least. No one realizes it; nobody *wants* to realize it. The players' cabal, as the center of a chronicle, can be either the group that suffers tragically for this oversight, or the one that forces the Traditions to wake up and face their problems.

USING BLOOD TREACHERY AS A VAMPIRE STORY

The story here is told primarily in **Mage** terms. After all, it's the Order of Hermes that sets events in motion for the second *massasa* war and it's the hubris of the Order that leads to death and damnation. That's not to say that **Blood Treachery** can't be used to tell a **Vampire** story, but first and foremost this tale concerns mages. Vampires are victims and reactionaries here, because this story isn't centrally about them. If you *want* it to be, here's what you do.

First off, remember that **Blood Treachery** doesn't have impact on **Vampire** on a real global, shaking-the-earth, antediluvians-are-dying sort of scale. Some vampires die and some mages get converted; business as usual. Certainly the elders regard this as little more than a nuisance that'll pass in a few months. That's not to say that this can't be important to your group — a neonate who has mages coming after him will certainly regard it as important! — but this tale doesn't have a wide-ranging, long-lasting effect on Kindred society. The Sabbat and Camarilla aren't going to put down their weapons and join forces just because a few upstart wizards whack a couple of neonates. Perspective: To the vampires who're large and in charge, these events are just a drop in the Jyhad.

Secondly, figure out right quick whether you're coming at this from a **Mage** perspective or a **Vampire** point of view, and set up your rules accordingly. If you're playing this as a **Mage** game, you get to play with the themes of hubris, overconfidence and the like. For vampires, it's more important to look into the effects upon Humanity, the need to survive and the conflict of grappling with an enemy who can't be appeased or understood. Thematically the elements are quite different, and the rules

from the two games support these different elements. To try to just mix them hodgepodge is to invite disaster (or at least, cries of favoritism from your players — after all, if your vampire characters risk losing Humanity from combat but mages have no such compunctions, then matters are a little one-sided.)

Last, you need to decide what the vampires' courses of action and reaction should be. Unlike the mage side, where players' characters can be in from the start of the war, vampires are unlikely to find themselves in the midst of **Blood Treachery** until they're under fire. Tremere characters will probably get hit first, but other vampires can get targeted by mistake (or even on purpose, if they seem to have useful occult knowledge). What happens next is up to the vampires' reactions. Unless they're incredibly diplomatic, the vampire characters won't be able to stop mages from prosecuting this war; they'll just have to look for shelter and try to keep themselves alive. Once matters heat up the vampires may gain specific goals, like converting individual mages or smashing up Tradition chantries, but they don't have a driving McGuffin the way that the Order of Hermes "wins" when it captures valuable occult tomes and resources.

With a **Vampire** story of **Blood Treachery**, you can look at how the characters react to getting thrown out of their element, how far they'll go to try to make peace (or war), what they'll do when even the most humane and pacifistic Kindred is assaulted without provocation and how they survive against an enemy whose powers can match their own Disciplines. That's a lot of room to explore motive, characterization, theme and a little bit of high-action violence.



THE BATTLES ARCANÉ

Once the war begins, the battles that occur will move the earth in the most literal sense. Throw magic and vampirism at each other, and you have quite an explosive combination.

The scope of these battles should not be minimized. Vampire sorcery may or may not alter reality in your chronicle, but it does wreak havoc. If your cabal hosts five people, and they and their allies storm a hideout that hosts 10 or 15 vampires, the sheer pyrotechnics of the affair should dazzle people.

Go epic. These battles are chances for Hermetics to invoke the Arts they're most famous for — the *Ars Essentiae*, Umbrood-summoning and sheer wizardly power. The vampires aren't slouches, either. They've had hundreds of years to develop exceedingly versatile blood magic, to hone their own powers and to set in motion plots to defend their own interests. So feel free to go nuts with the battles. The mages have come out of the shadows, and they're angry.

PARADOX

What of the tightening of magic? And what of every mage's bane — Paradox? Fear not, it still exists. Your Hermetics have as much chance of killing themselves

as they do of killing vampires. Certainly the mages can't go all out with the ever-encroaching shadow of Paradox everywhere!

Well, yes and no. True, the Arts are tougher to pull off. And Paradox is still a potent threat. But remember that vampires do not count as Sleepers when it comes to determining whether an Effect is vulgar. And Hermetic magic is coincidental inside a Hermetic Sanctum — and, quite possibly, inside a vampiric one. After all, don't vampires believe in the occult?

Therefore, a battle inside a Chantry of either side is probably the only opportunity a Hermetic has in which he can get away with coincidental high ritual magic. This freedom should not be underestimated. If warrior mages suddenly realize that their destructive Arts are coincidental whenever they purge the vampires, won't they try to keep the purges going for as long as possible? Despite all its carnage, this war is popular because *mages can use their Arts without fear*. This popularity generates a positive feedback loop, encouraging more assaults against the Tremere.

RETRIBUTION

Vampires, who have other concerns at the moment (and have had them for thousands of years), will most

likely be taken completely by surprise by the Traditions' offensives. After all, the real planners and schemers think in terms of centuries or millennia, and they aren't used to the sudden wrenching threat that these *mere mortals* pose. It is possible, however, that the vampires have spies within the Order and might be tipped off. Either way, when the retaliatory strike comes, it will be big, and it will hurt. This war isn't a cakewalk. The *massasa* have already survived an attempted purge by the Order, and they've also survived centuries of intrigue, backbiting and outright hostility in their own world. They aren't simply going to be punching bags for pissed-off mages.

Mired

After the initial flurry of battle, the war bogs down into a stalemate, with the Hermetics realizing that the crusade might have been a Bad Idea. The obvious solution has not worked, and now things are much, much worse.

Compare the events in **Blood Treachery** to some of the United States' international conflicts like Vietnam. The Order of Hermes expects a quick and simple war. As masters of the *Ars Essentiae*, the Hermetics believe that they can stride in quickly, wipe out a bunch of bloodsuckers and go on their merry way richer for the trouble. There aren't any 800-year-old Hermetic Masters left to tell them the perils of the first *Massasa* War; the young novices can and do make the same mistakes as their elders. When the war isn't fought on the Hermetic terms, and when the vampires' formidable defenses become apparent, matters quickly spiral downward into a hellish nightmare. Suddenly Hermetic mages who've never raised a weapon in their lives must be prepared to defend against angry vampires who blame all wizards for the trouble, while the vampires must develop ways to counter these terribly dangerous magicians. Neither side will best the other quickly or cheaply. The Hermetics' belief in their superiority leads to violence and death for both parties, even for those who had nothing to do with the initial conflict.

A Tangled Web

Once it becomes apparent that the Hermetics aren't going to waltz in, cap a few vampires and solve all their problems, the political situation within the Order will explode. Blame will be laid, accusations will be made, certámen challenges will be issued, and the already tenuous political framework within the Order will nearly collapse.

How will the players' characters deal with the chaos? Will they be hawks or doves? Will they attempt a politi-

cal takeover? Will they try to bring about the end of the war? The Storyteller should present a multitude of options from which the players may choose. If the players decide on their own path, so much the better.

Other Interested Parties

As much as the Hermetics would like to ignore this fact when it becomes inconvenient, their actions do not exist in a vacuum. When a Tradition declares war on some supernatural faction, the repercussions should shake the World of Darkness. (*Note: If you don't want a huge crossover game, keep these aftershocks simple. If you're going more epic in scope, start throwing in repercussions as you see fit.*)

First of all, how will the other Traditions take to the idea of the Order attempting to annihilate a group of vampires? The Hermetics will almost certainly attempt to enlist other Tradition mages — Akashic warriors, Celestial priests, Verbena healers and Euthanatos assassins — in their quixotic crusade. It's up to the individual mages, of course. No Tradition will endorse the Order's actions unilaterally, since it's not the others' concern.

What will be of concern to the Traditions is the inevitable assault upon them. After all, vampires don't understand the different Traditions any more than the Order understands the undead. If vampiric lackeys misidentify a Verbena coven as a Hermetic Chantry, things will get ugly very quickly. Once other Traditions come under fire, they will demand to know why the Order has brought this carnage upon the Council. And the Order had better come up with a very good reason, or its already shaky standing within the Council could be jeopardized permanently.

And what of the Technocracy? The Union certainly wouldn't mind having two groups of Reality Deviants wiping each other out — as long as they do so quietly. The instant a huge battle gets out of control, however, the MiBs will be out in force, looking to put away any creature brandishing a ritual dagger. Considering the scale and power of Hermetic magic, the odds of the Union taking an interest in the affair are very good indeed.

Orphans who don't have a safe hiding place will almost certainly get pulled into the mess. The Hollow Ones, with their fascination with all things undead, are particularly vulnerable. But any Orphan tied into the occult underground stands a very good chance of becoming a pawn — or victim — of either side.

Nephandi who hear about the conflict will encourage it, of course. There might even be a Fallen Hermetic still within the Order, pushing mages subtly to make deadly decisions. How individual Nephandi deal with the war is up to the Storyteller, but they will not pass on an opportunity to deliver the killing blow to the Order. Marauders might be attracted to the sheer dynamism of a fierce pyrotechnic battle, but by and large, they have bigger fish to fry.

The potential exists for other repercussions, as well. After all, once mages begin laying siege to the established order of vampires, the full weight of all the undead should come to bear on the Order. Again, vampires don't get to live forever by rolling over or standing around clueless; they'll set up their counterstrikes, especially when the Order's haphazard strikes start landing near important, influential and paranoid vampires.

And you can be damn sure that everyone who deals with the undead will be sure to take advantage of the mess. Vampires have to steal blood to survive, and they must lie, cheat and kill to hide themselves among humanity. A society of such creatures must, perforce, subsist on treachery. When one vampire dies, others may rush in to take her position and power. Vampires will approach the mages to make hesitant alliances or to bilk mages into taking care of the vampires' problems. The undead will even use the opportunity to expand their own ranks; chop off one head of the hydra, and two more show up. The more that mages become threats, the more that the really old, powerful vampires will turn their attention to the wizards. The war naturally escalates until one side or the other has nothing left to give.

This escalation leads hunters, both mortal and supernatural into the fray. The Inquisition should fairly wet itself at the chance to rid the world of both living and undead heretics. The Arcanum will duck and cover when the fire starts flying, although its investigators might sift through the ashes. Governments will certainly want to know why houses all across the world are suddenly devoured in flame. The dangerous fanatics, the new hunters that are emerging, are having a conniption fit trying to figure out which ones to kill first.

Again, how far this escalation goes is up to the ambition of the Storyteller. But keep in mind that this war is not a self-contained conflict; it will spill over.

THE MORTAL WORLD

The conflict of wizards and vampires will, of course, spill over into the everyday mortal world. Both the Order and the undead have vast influence on the mundane world, notably in the occult, university and financial realms. What happens when the puppet strings start getting cut?

The occult community will be more or less paralyzed by this war, as neither vampire nor mage can devote the time to manage contacts effectively. Each side will almost certainly attempt to take out, subvert or steal the other's influence as well. The universities will feel the recoil, and the Order and the vampires will certainly try to bankrupt each other.

It is during this struggle that the political character will come in most handy. Mages who keep ties to their mortal contacts can have a field day. Vampires must use human intermediaries for much of their work. (It's unavoidable when you can't go out during the day and you can't figure out a car's transmission — much less a computer — because you were educated during the 1600s.) Therefore, mages just need to make a couple of pokes at the bloodsuckers and then watch to see whose strings get pulled. Of course, the double game is the most dangerous. Vampires have had years to put their minions in place. The crafty ones will happily let a few pawns fall in order to draw the mages into their traps, or to put the mages into position against their own enemies.

Also in the mortal world, mages need to watch out for friends and family. Vampires are killers; few of them have any compunctions about using and discarding the friends, family or lovers of their enemies. Mages aren't so lucky. A cabal must watch out for not only its influence and interests, but for the mortals it protects or relies on. Some vampires relish the irony of transforming the hapless mortals into monsters. Mages aren't the only ones who can suffer that fate either. A mage's family may well join the ranks of the undead, and perhaps even betray her and make her into a vampire as well!

TEMPTATION AND FALL



The horror that is unleashed when a few foolhardy Tylalans explore the mystery of vampire blood cannot be minimized. The Appendix lists the exact rules mechanics for dealing with ghoul mages; this section deals with the dramatic implications.

INTIBIBING THE BLOOD OF DEITIONS

Vampire blood is *compelling*. It beckons, it calls, it is the siren song of dark power. Any mage who comes in contact with it can hear that song. It's easy to say that any mage who drinks blood is stupid. It's harder to hold a vial of that crimson liquid — sensing the ungodly power contained within — and deny the urge to consume it.

Again, players may know that vampire blood is the worst thing in the world to ingest, but their characters should have every opportunity to rationalize their decision. After all, what could one vial do? It's just a liquid Quintessence matrix, right?

Vampire blood creates a high beyond any mortal drug. Moreover, the physical effects — strength, healing, endurance — are almost instantaneous. These benefits should be more than enough to convince any mage that one little taste is the ultimate free lunch.

For those who are insistent that they'd never take that trip, it's not untenable for the Storyteller to place temptations along the way. A persistent and cunning mage can solve most problems, but becoming a ghoul is so much *easier*. It's quick, it's painless, the taint goes away after a turning of the moon, and it can be used to solve so many difficulties. Need to heal an injury quickly? Need some extra strength? Need that little boost of magical energy? It's tempting — so don't be afraid to put mages into places where they *are* sorely tempted. People are tested all the time when they have something they dearly want and an easy means to get it. Give the mages that chance, let them find ways to mitigate or minimize the problems, then let life spring its little twists on them so that they regret taking the quick and simple path.

EXPOSED

Once House Tylalus' dirty little secret is exposed, things will come to a head. Most Quaesitori will interpret their actions as Diabolism, punishable by death (or possibly Gilgul). Those Tylalans who

have vampire blood in their veins will be declared criminals. The rest of the house must make a decision between House Tylalus and the Order itself: Which is more important?

ALTERNATIVE VIEWPOINTS

Although the Order of Hermes is central to the events in **Blood Treachery**, there are a number of different ways to run such a chronicle. The Order isn't the center of the universe, after all, no matter what its mages want to believe.

OTHER TRADITIONS IN THE WAR

As noted previously, the other Traditions can't and won't be left out of the Order's little police action. Paranoid vampires may well start campaigns to find and eliminate any sorts of wizards. If a few unlucky Akashics and Verbena get caught in the crossfire, then that's just an unfortunate side effect of the battle. It does, however, tend to mobilize the other Traditions quickly.

No matter what they may feel, the other Traditions have to defend themselves against the undead, especially once vampires start fighting back and causing casualties among all the Traditions. In some cases, the results seem preordained; in others, matters are a little muddier.

The Celestial Chorus, Akashic Brotherhood, Verbena and Euthanatos come out as the Order of Hermes' allies in the whole venture, simply because they either find vampirism repugnant to start with or because they suffer too many hits from the vampires. Choristers use their faith to drive back and slay the undead; Euthanatoi hope to return vampires to the proper cycle through the Good Death. Akashic Brothers, appalled at the perversion of life and Do, use their formidable combat skills to counter the natural resilience of the undead. And the Verbena command potent life magic while they also suffer the attacks of vampires who can't tell a witch from a wizard. In each case, the Tradition contributes its support heavily (if not unanimously) in the war, but it also suffers corresponding losses.

Cultists of Ecstasy tend to skirt the edges of the fray. Most vampires can't tell a Cultist from any other artist or extremist. Thus, the Cult suffers correspondingly small losses. With their Time magic, the Cult can also



get a hazy picture of the vampire-Tradition war and recognize the perils of the horrid mistake before diving in. This foresight keeps them largely out, except where individual allegiances call a cabal together.

Dreamspeakers are divided on issues of this nature. On one hand, vampires clearly violate the natural order. On the other hand, many of the more outspoken Dreamspeakers would be just as happy to let the Order finally die for its arrogance. The Dreamspeakers probably have more to fear from werewolves than vampires anyway. Once magicians and shamans get a reputation for attacking other supernatural creatures, the uneasy *détente* between groups evaporates into suspicious hostility.

The Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts remain involved in the Hermetics' war only on individual levels. That is, vampires don't generally know enough to go after these Technomancers. In return, the two groups usually don't care what vampires do. Some few might find the undead interesting subjects of study, but the majority would rather keep their necks intact. Ironically, the Order often lacks the technological resources that it would like when fighting modern vampires — which, in turn, gives House Thig all the more prestige for its position.

TECHNOCRACY VS. VAMPIRES

The Technocracy usually leaves vampires alone. The bloodsuckers are a danger to humanity, of course, but most of them lie low, don't seem to cause much trouble and cover their own tracks just out of a need for survival. A single rogue wizard can cause much more trouble, and the Traditions tend to be more flamboyant than the undead. Of course, such was the case *before* matters got out of hand in Bangladesh.

At this point, the Technocracy is really starting to eye vampires and to notch them up as a major threat. "Project Sunburst" is the new Technocratic initiative to catalog, survey and eliminate the undead. However, the Technocracy is way behind the curve. Progenitors are convinced that they can find a rational, scientific explanation for the vampire syndrome. The idea of 10,000-year-old beings of phenomenal power just hasn't really sunk into the heads of the Technocrats yet. Technocrats are scientists, after all, not people who buy into crazy legends!

So what does this mean for the Technocracy? Well, it's divided. Some Technocrats — like those involved in the whole mess in India — are rabidly convinced that vampires represent a far greater threat

than the dying Traditions. Others believe that vampires, as relics of the supernatural past, are well on their way to dying out or disappearing. (These last sorts generally don't have a clue about exactly how skilled vampires have become at hiding among the Masses.) Considering the lack of solid Technocratic leadership in the wake of the Reckoning, Technocracy groups wind up having to set their own local policies regarding vampires.

Obviously, Technocrats are most likely to engage vampires if the vampires stumble into them inadvertently, or if vampires show up while the Technocrats are annihilating some errant Traditionalists. The sorts of conflicts that occur vary with the Technocrats. New World Order and Syndicate agents tend to use money and political connections to smoke out the vampires and force them into untenable situations. Progenitors study them, and Iterators and Void Engineers either watch them carefully or actually hunt the predators.

Much like the Hermetic crusade against the undead, a fight of Technocrats versus vampires can devolve into a nasty battle. However, where the Traditions tend to rely on individual daring and flexibility, the Technocracy counters vampiric subtlety with its own influence. For the most part, Technocratic operatives don't have the centuries of experience that jaded vampires do, but they do get to pull on the strings of mortal organizations that have been in place for hundreds of years. Better still, the Technocracy can often claim legitimate direct control over some government

branch or investigative agency, while vampires must move through much more subtle channels. What does this mean for the fighting? A vampire or group of vampires will tend to lay plots to feel out the enemy and lead it into a vulnerable position. By contrast, once the Technocracy thinks it has the measure of the undead, its troops — Awakened and otherwise — leap in for the kill.

Obviously, the Technocracy isn't going to be in the know the minute the Order decides to fight vampires. (It's not like the Union gets memos from the Traditions.) Rather, Technocratic investigation will crop up once the fighting lights up a few properties on both sides. Patterns of unnatural disasters, influential politicians assassinated and entire families wiped out will eventually lead Technocratic statisticians to the fact that some sort of secret war has heated up. More than likely, though, given their current disarray, the Technocrats will stay out, let both sides kill each other and just clean up the resultant mess before the Masses catch wind of the disturbance.

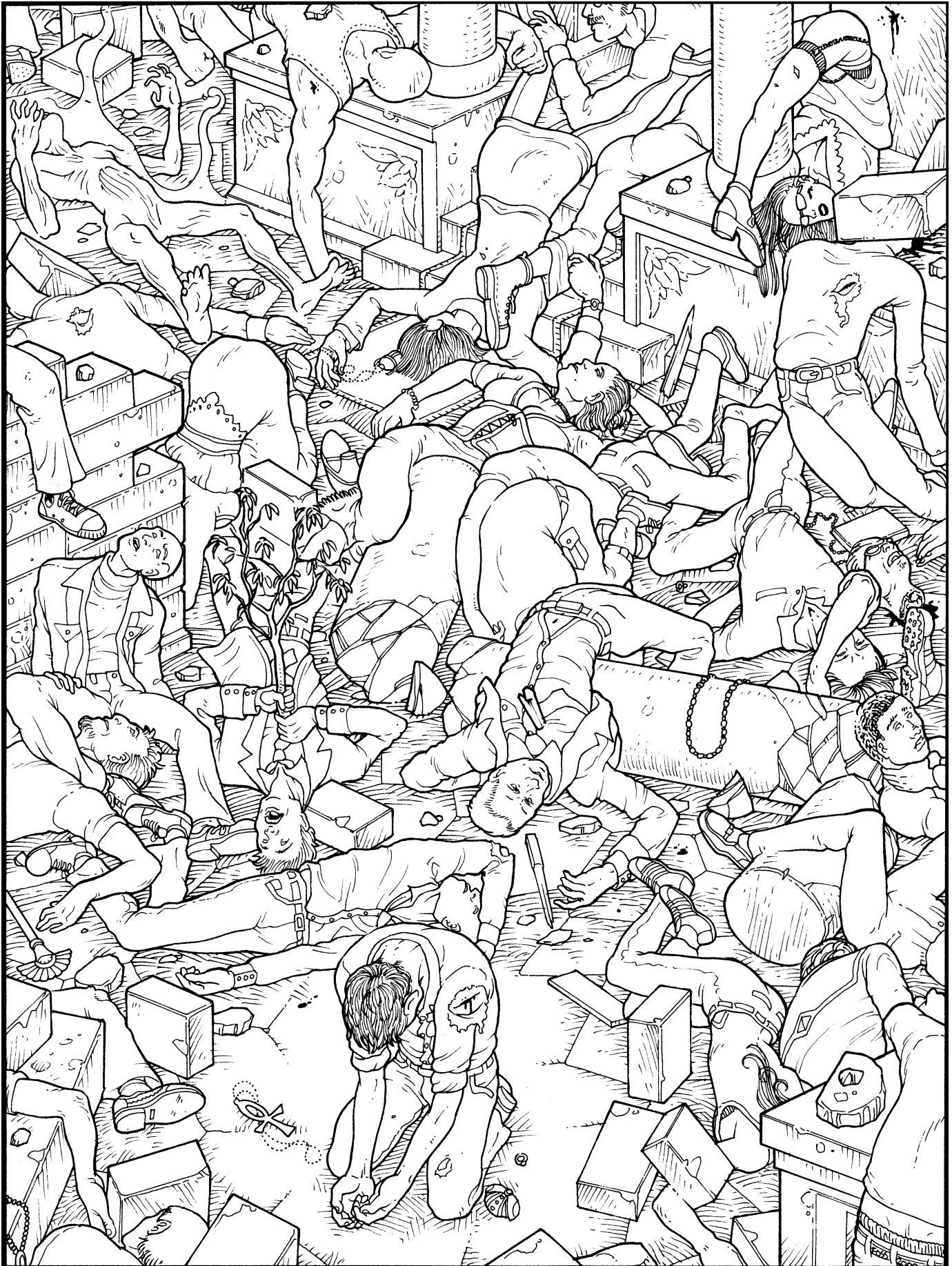
Of course, if your players have Technocratic characters, everything can go to Hell that much more quickly....

AFTERMATH

What happens afterward is up to you, of course. Does the Order shatter? Will a strong leader emerge to save the day? Will the old guard be abandoned? Does the Technocracy win? Will wonder and knowledge be restored to the darkness?

As the lady said, endings are never written....





APPENDIX: THE BLOOD CURSE

*In tombs of gold and lapis lazuli
Bodies of holy men and women exude
Miraculous oil, odour of violet.
But under heavy loads of trampled clay
Lie bodies of the vampires full of blood;
Their shrouds are bloody and their lips are wet.
— W.B. Yeats, “Oil and Blood”*



These are the game mechanics for everything that's been covered so far — ghoulish mages, the ancient formulae, spells specifically for use against vampires and new Hermetic spells to break the chains of Stasis that bind them. You can also find details on some of the Umbrood — new

and old — that Hermetics deal with in the course of the second Massasa War. Remember to use them at your discretion; if they unbalance your game, change or ignore them as you see fit. This is knowledge, after all, and if there's a lesson to be learned from this book, it's that knowledge is only good if it's alive, active and evolving.

GHOUL MAGES: SERVANTS OF THE DEAD



So, you've been dying to insert a ghoulish mage into your game, eh? Seems like the ultimate in kickassitude! Magic and Disciplines, plus regeneration and a semblance of immortality! Way-unbelievable-cool! How come every mage isn't hopped up on vampire blood?

There is a downside, but we'll get to that in a second. Patience, young thrall — er, accomplice. Don't you want to know what the benefits are first? Yes.

AN INQUISITION OF CAPTIVE VITAE

Needless to say, the war with the *massasa* stimulates a lot of research into the nature of vampires. The Bonisagi have recovered quite a few gems from the sorcerous vampires' chantries, including two copies of an ancient text. While neither seems complete, the two combined form an illuminating quasi-history of vampiric legend.

This text, referred to as *The Book of Nod*, claims that all vampires are descended from Cain (whose name, according to the Celestial Chorus, is misspelled consistently throughout the text), who was not a Biblical metaphor but an actual man, the son of Adam and Eve and the first murderer. For his crime, God cursed him into darkness forever. Now, Judeo-Christian references aside, if a Celestine, one of the Pure Ones, or the One Itself cursed a being, and the curse lasted untold millennia later, how much power resides in the blood — the vessel of the curse?

Furthermore, the Resonance of vampire blood is hideous. Analyses of the samples taken by the Hermetics yield one finding consistently: There is power in the blood, but it is the dark blood of death, not the fluid of all life. Every ounce of vampire blood is life stolen from another creature. If the Resonance from this substance is the residue from a curse placed upon the first murderer, it represents every primal, base, profane urge in the world.



POWER GAITERS ATE MY VAMPIRE METHUSELAH

Remember: *It's your game*. We've put these rules for ghoul mages in to add depth to the game. We did not put these rules in so that power gamers everywhere would have an excuse to run roughshod over Storytellers, destroying everything in their path with Forces 3, Prime 2 and giga-Celerity.

If you have problems with players who insist on loading their characters up on vampire blood every chronicle, you have two options. First of all, use the disadvantages of ghouldom to your advantage. The negatives of being a sycophant to an undead monster far outweigh that extra Strength success. If they really want this kind of addiction, make sure they pay for it.

The second option is simple. If you find that ghoul mages are unbalancing your game, don't allow them. Ignore them. Use them as Storyteller characters, for an unexpected twist.

If your players get uppity, just ghoull their characters to some of those old vampires who are into torture, mind games and a little judicious random bloodshed. That'll solve a lot of problems real quick.

In game terms, vampire blood is disgusting. It doesn't matter if the sample comes from the saintliest vampire weeping for lost mortality — it is blood ripped from living creatures to sustain the unnatural existence of an abomination. The aura that emanates from it is black as death. But death has its own perverse appeal, does it not? It's abhorrent, yet compelling. Be sure to emphasize the dual nature of the blood in the game. If players treat vials of vampire blood like shots of Jagermeister, then there's a problem. Then again, a character who treats the blood so cavalierly is probably too far gone to care.

THE SILVER LINING

Oh, but we don't mean to *frighten* you — after all, love and death, Eros and Thanatos are concepts that Hermetics can appreciate, and they're rolled up into one wine-red package for easy consumption. Plus, imbibing this substance certainly brings with it its own unique benefits.

Please, relax. When you hear what this blood will do for you, any misgivings you have will evaporate like snow in the sun.

ONE SINGULAR SENSATION

When a mage first drinks vampire blood, the sensation is like nothing he has ever before experienced. It is a rush *par none*, one for which a Cultist of Ecstasy would give his right kidney. It is concentrated power, and even the weakest mage feels that power running through his body. In fact, players might need to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to ensure that their characters don't get the *Addiction* Flaw to represent the psychological dependency that might instantly form from the rush.

For starters, mages who've drunk of vampire blood are now ghouls, with all the benefits thereof. They can use the ingested blood to heal injury at a rate of two levels of bashing or one level of lethal damage for about each pint imbibed. Furthermore, for as long as they drink vampire blood, mages on the blood bag do not age. Other mages who sense the ghoull with Life or Entropy magic will notice this stasis.

A mage may also spend the blood he has ingested as if it were Quintessence. Essentially, the mage harnesses the magical properties of vampire blood to fuel his Effects. Of course, you can't just meditate at a Node to regain vampire blood.

On your character sheet, keep track of how much vampire blood your mage currently has in his system. Mages, like humans, can ingest up to three pints of blood above and beyond their normal human blood capacity, although this amount will cause a mage to feel bloated and nauseated. (It's a small price to pay, we guarantee.)

POWERS OF DEATH

A ghoull mage gets an automatic success for all actions involving the Strength Attribute, such as lifting or punching. (Yes, this does apply to damage rolls.) The mage can even inflict lethal damage with his bare hands. Indeed, a mage who gains this rush may at first have difficulty controlling his newfound strength. (If you use **Vampire: The Masquerade**, all ghoull mages get the first level of the *Potence* Discipline.) Mages also have the opportunity to develop other Disciplines, but doing so takes a lot of time and training.

The powers easiest for vampires to learn are the physical ones. With time, the mage's strength may increase to superhuman levels. Ghoull mages also tend to become tougher than normal mortals. Better still, a mage who manages to survive quite a bit of punishment while "under the blood" may become so unnaturally resilient — i.e., his flesh may become so corpselike — that he can resist even Pattern damage. (In game terms,

a mage can gain an extra soak die that's usable against any damage for 15 experience points. As long as a mage is a ghoul, he gains a full Stamina soak roll against lethal damage as well as bashing damage.)

Vampires have other mystical means to hunt and trap their prey as well. A mage could develop paranormal senses, unnatural stealth or phenomenal charisma, all tainted by the fact that these "powers" are the tools of predators who feed on intelligent prey. Typically, such powers are extremely difficult to develop. Most vampires only have a few such powers, and a mage can only learn the few that are already known to a vampiric "blood donor." On the flip side, these powers often give the wielder a quick and easy way out, a temptation to deal with situations through power instead of personality. It may be simple to make someone like you, for instance, but it is also manipulative; it may be easy to hide in plain sight rather than face up to responsibility. (Each such power costs 25 experience points, and it performs a simple feat similar to a first or second level Sphere Effect, without Paradox.)

The catch, of course, is that someone has to teach these powers, and vampires aren't especially known for their generosity. Physical strength and resilience may develop naturally, given time, but for something like shapeshifting or shadowcasting, the mage had better be willing to find a rare vampire who studies esoteric powers, and the mage had better be extraordinarily persuasive. Remember, vampires tend to be pretty edgy about people who can find them in their hiding places.

Finally, excessive vampiric powers sap the mage of Willpower. They're a temptation to take an easy solution to problems instead of working through life's difficulties. Worse still, they're the tools used to hunt humans, deceive them and steal their life. That little bit of extra strength comes free. The next vampire power a mage picks up — hey, that comes free as well. But the third power of the undead — *any* power — requires the *permanent* expenditure of a Willpower point in addition to experience point costs. In essence, your mage has grown overly reliant on the strength of undead blood, and he no longer exercises his human judgment and will. Every additional trick or power from three onward requires this Willpower expenditure. Therefore, if you have a mage with five different powers of the undead, he loses three permanent Willpower.

Not that it matters, of course, since you'll be able to move at light speed and shrug off bullets. All without the threat of Paradox. Sounds good, doesn't it? And all from a little bit of vampire blood. Who would have thought?

Why, you don't seem as enthused as you were beforehand....

THAUMATURGY, NECROMANCY AND OTHER VAMPIRE MAGIC

This sidebar assumes that you use **Vampire: The Masquerade**. Naturally, all Disciplines are magical, but some are more magical than others. That is, most Disciplines help vampires to hunt and kill their prey. The more strange Disciplines tend to have more to do with manipulation of the blood through intense study and a twisting of the undead curse.

Thaumaturgy, Necromancy and certain other Disciplines from **Vampire: The Masquerade** cover effects generated by enforcing the user's will and ritual upon the power inherent in vampire blood. They're not all-consuming, but they are flexible. The problem is that they don't fall into the same category of inherent magic as most other vampire powers: They're mutations of the undead curse, not natural capabilities.

For **Mage** purposes, treat vampire Chimerstry, Quietus, Thaumaturgy and Necromancy as magical Disciplines of this sort. The latter two naturally come from the use of modified magical ritual to use vampire blood for mystical ends. The former two are a little more esoteric; they stem from ancient magical principles that have existed for so long that their vampire users now tend to consider the powers natural outgrowths of the undead condition. Nevertheless, they're magical manipulations.

Mages who drink vampire blood cannot learn to use these powers. Such things tread closely upon the boundaries between static and dynamic magic. The interference of the vampire curse with a mage's Avatar is bad enough; trying to twist the curse into some other bizarre shape against all expectations of Awakened magic just doesn't work. A mage might study these effects as curiosities, but he can't use them.

Consider this rule carved in stone. If a mage wants flame-conjuring powers, that's what Forces and Prime are for. *No exceptions.*

THE UNFORTUNATE SIDE EFFECTS

Yes, believe it or not, drinking the unholy ichor that fuels a corpse has its downsides. Even if you're a mage. *Especially* if you're a mage.

FROZEN IN TIME

A human ghoul needs to ingest about one pint of vampire blood a month in order to maintain his "immortality." If a ghoul goes more than a month — actually, one full cycle of the moon — without drinking vampire blood, he reverts to a normal human again.

This problem isn't so big if a person drinks just one pint. However, a ghoul who has been hooked for months or longer finds that quitting the blood has unfortunate physical consequences. Once a person stops drinking blood, her heretofore suspended aging process rushes to catch up to her actual age. Therefore, a five-month ghoul will age five months within the span of one. A 20-year ghoul will age two years in a month.

If a human (or mage) remains a ghoul for a period of time longer than her natural life span, losing the blood is fatal. Once she is off vampire blood, her body will age decades in the span of a month, killing her. Mages can forestall this problem with Entropy 4/Life 2 magic, but such a ritual requires constant upkeep. This Effect will allow the caster to resume a natural aging cycle; it will *not* freeze her age as the vampire blood once did. Indeed, the mage may well suffer Pattern Bleeding or Paradox as her Pattern rushes to catch up with the demands of the universal cycle and is unnaturally held static. (For immortality Effects, **Masters of the Art** offers some solutions.)

A SOUL IN CHAINS

Besides the aforementioned sapping of Willpower through excessive power-use, vampire blood blocks the will of a mage in another way: addiction.

You see, vampire blood is not physically addictive — the biochemical properties of the blood are similar to normal human blood. However, it is psychologically addictive. Worse yet, psychological addiction appears to be a secondary effect when compared with the blood's strongest detriment: spiritual addiction.

Vampire blood doesn't attach itself to neurotransmitters — to use Technocratic terms — it corrupts the very soul of an individual. When a human consumes vitae, the human soul becomes addicted and stunted. (As a side note, normal ghouls almost *never* Awaken; their souls are too weak to arise. Those rare few who manage

to Awaken are usually poached by the Nephandi.) This addiction manifests physically in the halt of aging and the physical craving for blood, but its root is spiritual. The decay of the soul freezes the body.

Now, one might think that a mage, with an Awakened Avatar, would be less susceptible to the perils of addiction, but one's propensity to become addicted depends on both the mage *and* his Avatar. A self-aware Avatar might be utterly repelled by the notion of consuming dead, corrupting blood. On the other hand, the rush of power can hook a cagey Avatar easily. Any way you slice it, the more blood a mage consumes, he runs a greater risk of corrupting and addicting his Avatar. Again, this addiction isn't physical. However, a five-point Avatar going through withdrawal can make a mage's life a living hell.

In game terms, a mage can drink a number of pints of vampire blood up to his *Avatar* Background rating without worrying about getting his Avatar addicted. This count is cumulative, though. If your character has a three-point Avatar, she can drink vampire blood three times in her life without fearing addiction, barring the results of the Willpower roll that determines whether she herself is addicted. But keep in mind that buying a five-point Avatar isn't necessarily the best way to prevent blood addiction. After all, if said Avatar is on drink number three, it might have ideas of its own.

Once a mage's Avatar is addicted, it will go to any lengths to feed its need, forcing the mage down paths he never thought he would traverse. The more powerful the Avatar, the worse it gets. A one-point Avatar will be addicted easily, but it won't force a mage to deal with the lowest of vampire pushers to get its fix.

Once an Avatar is addicted, the mage cannot increase his Arete *at all*. All magical progress halts. A mage cannot learn Spheres, as the Avatar starts insisting that the mage learn vampiric powers instead. After all, the mage has an external power source — why should the Avatar exert itself? Furthermore, the mage can no longer regain Quintessence by meditating at a Node. The only way to fuel one's personal Quintessence is to drink vampire blood. (The mage can extract Quintessence from vampire blood using Prime 3, but *only* from vampire blood.) An addicted Avatar is a neon beacon for demons, Nephandi, infernalists, malefic spirits and every other corrupt and foul entity in the World of Darkness. The Avatar will go out of its way to attract attention from any source that might feed its cravings.

The true horror, however, comes after years of ingesting the poisoned liquid. Add the mage's Avatar and

Arete. That's how many years the Avatar can survive addiction. Once those years are over, the mage loses a point of her *Avatar* rating for every year after that. Once the *Avatar* rating reaches zero, the mage starts losing Arete. If the mage is reduced to both zero *Avatar* and Arete, she is effectively Gilguled. Her soul has wasted away into nothing. Her magic is gone, and she is reduced to a hollow, blood-addicted servitor of whatever vampire she can score from.

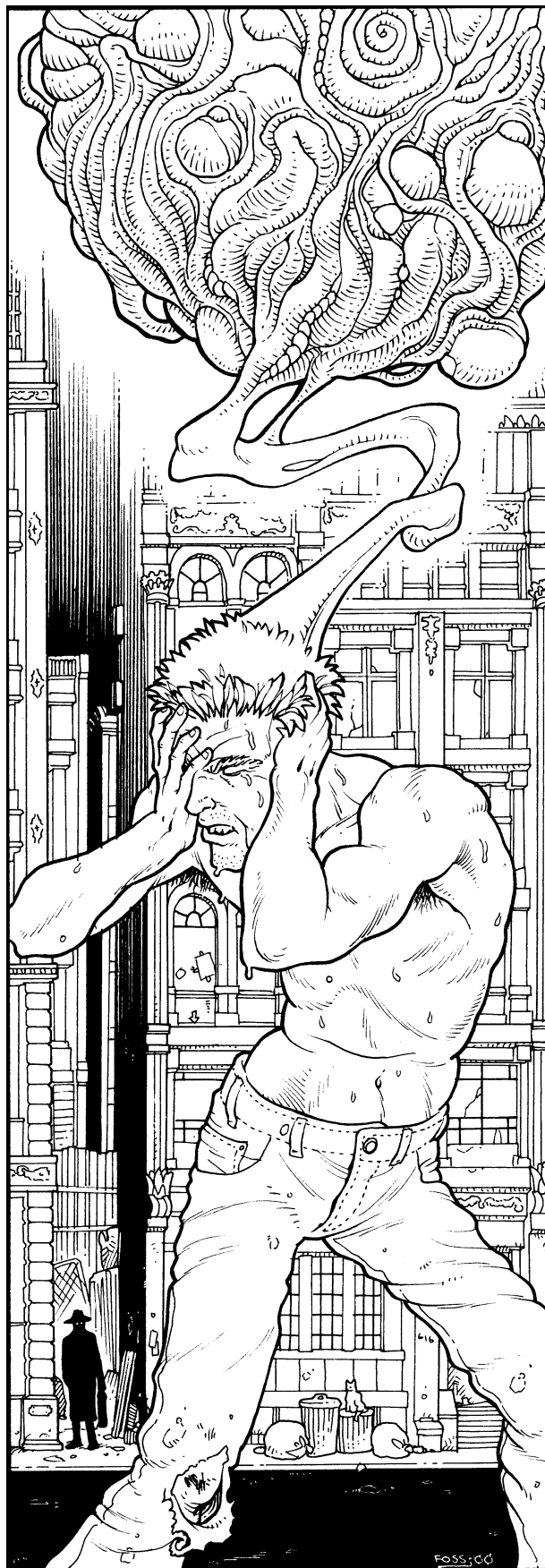
Is all lost? Not necessarily. Getting one's Avatar off the blood is an incredible task, but it's not impossible as long as the mage hasn't reduced her *Avatar* and Arete ratings to zero. Avatar addiction cannot be bought off with experience points or cured with magic; *only a Seeking can cure the mage*. The Storyteller is encouraged to take advantage of this unique opportunity — think *Naked Lunch* or *The Lost Weekend* in Hell — and the mage will probably not succeed without a titanic effort of will. If the mage should succeed, he will have to be wary of vampire blood constantly thereafter. If a recovered addict is ever presented with the opportunity to consume vampire blood, his player must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 10). If he doesn't succeed on this roll, his character lapses instantly into Avatar addiction once again.

THE BLOOD BOND

Perhaps the only fate worse than Avatar addiction is the blood bond. If a mage drinks from the same vampire three times, he is bound. A mage who could have shaken the world is now the groveling pawn of a monster.

Under the bond, the mage suffers all the penalties of Avatar addiction. Furthermore, he is the utter and complete servitor of the vampire in question. It's not merely a matter of a vampire controlling the mage, however; the mage *wants* to serve this vampire, because the bloodsucker has become the most important focus of the mage's life. Ascension, the war and his magical studies all fall by the wayside as the mage devotes his life to serving his new master.

If a mage is bound, his Willpower is effectively halved when dealing with his blood donor. To even think of disagreeing with his master requires an extraordinary effort of the will (i.e., a roll of difficulty 9); defying or attacking his master is almost unthinkable. The bond may be stronger or weaker, depending on how the vampire treats his toy, but even if the vampire is merciless with the mage, the mage has no choice but to stay with him.



Breaking the bond is a Herculean feat; only the most strong-willed mages could ever hope to escape the chains of servitude. There is a magical solution (Prime 1, Entropy 3, Mind 3, Life 4), but it requires years of work, tremendous study into the secrets of vampire occultism and anatomy, and permanent expenditures of Willpower. How much effort is ultimately up to the Storyteller in question. And then the mage has to deal with his Avatar, who *wants* the mage to stay so it can get its fix.

AWAKENED REVENANTS: FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS TWINK OUT

For those who have not heard of them, revenants are some rather disgusting little cousins to vampires. Feed a human family with vampire blood for generations, perform some occult manipulations on its children and throw in a dash of sheer revolting anti-social tendencies, and you get revenants. They're self-perpetuating semi-ghoul beings that are mortal and largely human, but who inherit extended life-spans, a few vampire powers and a hellish mindset born of an inbred, vampire-dominated family.

Assume (generously) that 1000 revenants exist in the World of Darkness. Of these 1000, assume (even more generously) that one percent possesses that certain special something needed to jaunt them out of ordinary

perceptions and Awaken. Those parameters leave 10 living Awakened revenants.

Scratch seven who go off to the Cauls. Those who venerate the first murderer or cultivate sadistically jaded pleasures religiously do not make for upstanding Awakened. They instead shore up the ranks of the Fallen. Three to go.

Scratch one more. Call it Paradox, Technocrats, vampires, werewolves or what-have-you. At least one of these uber-revenants will get offed by someone or something offended by her very existence. Eight down; two standing.

Of these two remaining — obviously both saintly and discreet revenants — scratch one. Either this revenant's Avatar is obliterated by the Embrace, or he himself dies slowly and blissfully under the Blood Oath. That leaves one living, un-Fallen, Awakened revenant — under our *very* generous interpretation — who might see age 40 as an Awakened mage before his own body Gilguls itself.

You do not get to play him.

An Awakened revenant is a power-gamer's wet dream. He's got Spheres, vampire powers, a life-span (before magic) measured in centuries, a bit of perspective on two major factions in the World of Darkness and a built-in character history that's guaranteed not to make anybody think too hard. Why be a simple, studious revenant or a Hermetic scholar when one can *combine* the two into an unassailable fortress of dots on a character sheet?

The question pretty much answers itself.

If, however, you are the sort of masochist who actually caves in to players who request this kind of stuff, be aware of your rights. First of all, require the player to purchase the 7-point Merit: *Revenant*. Second, have the player record a Path of Enlightenment (for the purposes of an Awakened revenant, only the Path of Humanity is truly appropriate, although one *might* scrape by on Harmony or Honorable Accord). Although the Path will not have a rating, we encourage the Storyteller to do fiendish things to the Awakened revenant who defies her code of morality continually. (One who cannot remain true to herself will find her mystical Path of Thorns assailed by hardship on all sides.)

Also, feel free to inflict any horrors you see fit on this creature without providing any extra points at character creation in exchange. *Dark Fate*? Sure. *Nightmares*? Go for it. *Echoes*? Have a blast. Revenants are the bastard cousins of those cursed by God. The

THE UGLY TRUTH

Players and Storytellers might be asking themselves, "Why are these rules so strict?" Why are we taking such a negative position against ghoulish mages? The reason is that being a ghoul — even if your character is not a mage — is a horrifying existence. A ghoul is a parasite sucking off of a parasite. A ghoul's entire focus in life is the next bit of blood he gets to ingest. A normal enthralled human is bad enough. For a mage to throw away his Avatar, his Path and the dream of Ascension to beg at the feet of a walking corpse for a corrupting sustenance that will annihilate his soul is almost worse than walking gleefully into the Cauls. At least Nephandi can delude themselves into enjoying their existence as destroyers; a ghoul mage only cares about the foul blood that will sustain him for another month. Being a ghoul mage isn't a super-cool way to kick Technocratic or vampire ass; it's one of the worst fates a mage can bring upon himself.

blossoming of a shard of the Divine in such a being is not likely to be the blessing one might initially envision. Think of these little punishments as ways of actually paying for the character's many and potent abilities.

Honestly, the best advice for anyone who actually wants to play one of these things, however, is to let it go. You're much better off with a character whose history, personality and motivations (rather than her dots) define her.

MAGIC AND VAMPIRES



Inevitably, in chronicles that focus on the interactions between the Order of Hermes and the remnants of the bastard Tremere (or any group of mages and any group of vampires, really), questions will arise about how Supernatural Power X interacts with Supernatural Power Y. Perhaps the two most significant questions of this sort are the following: How does Sphere magic

stack up to Disciplines (most especially Thaumaturgy, Sphere magic's closest cousin in the Kindred world)? What can Sphere magic do to the vampiric state *itself*?

Note that this document isn't an iron-clad be-all-end-all to the interaction of such powers. Hell, your vampires need not even have Disciplines *per se*; they could just have a collection of mythical capabilities in your **Mage** game. Furthermore, a **Vampire** game probably won't see much use for this material. If vampires are the center of the game, they'll dominate the spotlight over those puny magicians. In other words, take a big grain of salt and then check out the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook**, which has a look from the other side. Figure out whether you're trying to tell a story in **Mage** terms or **Vampire** terms, then go for it. If you don't recognize the terms and game-speak in this section, *ignore them*.

SPHERE MAGIC VERSUS THAUMATURGY

A chronicle based on the events in **Blood Treachery** will almost certainly involve magical dueling. It will see titanic, epic battles of wizardry that could shake the pillars of heaven — literally. But the question arises of which style of magic works best?

Certainly, in **Mage**, Sphere magic is ultimately more powerful than vampire spells, but vampire spells have the benefit of not being regurgitated back onto their wielder by the Tellurian. Prime 2, Forces 3 sets you on fire as surely as a vampire's conjuration of fire, and a thaumaturge with the ability to decay wood or exude acid is no stranger to the more vicious applications of Entropy. But still, considering the events in

this book, victory will come down to who has the advantage when the dice fall.

A thaumaturge's player may spend a blood point and roll dice equal to the character's highest Path of Thaumaturgy to use what is essentially anti-magic (as per Prime 2) against Sphere Effects *in the Hermetic high ritual paradigm only*. Likewise, a Hermetic mage with Prime 2 may spend a point of Quintessence and roll his Arete, just like anti-magic, against *Thaumaturgical Paths and rituals only*. The case is essentially that of Hermetic versus undead Hermetic. Although hundreds of years of refinement and the twisting of vampire blood have made vampire Thaumaturgy quite different from Hermetic ritual magic, at least a few common bases exist, and the two can contest on a perpendicular sort of conflict. The vampire empowers his effect with blood, the mage uses Quintessence, and both set about burning that energy for their desired ends. The vampire uses its blood to impose vampiric stasis on the Hermetic's magical working, causing it to crumble; the Hermetic hurls the weight of his empowered will at the vampire's power and overcomes it with dynamism. The historical connections between early Hermetic research and early vampire magic make this contest possible. It is precisely the compatibility of the Hermetic and vampire paradigms of sorcery that makes each one so vulnerable to the other.

An important side note to this conflict is that vampiric Necromancy — essentially a specialized form of communion with the dead — might be countered in a similar fashion by someone who understands its roots. Of course, no Tradition mage indulges in the perverse necrotic principles that vampires use to enrage and shackle the dead, so such interaction is unlikely at best.

No other vampiric powers can thus affect, or be affected by, Sphere magic *directly*, although the clever character will certainly find other ways to compensate. A vampire with phenomenal strength (high Potence) is going to be in for an unpleasant surprise the first time she encounters a mage with a penchant for the **Better Body** Life Sphere Effect and a pressing need to be

very strong, very quickly. Likewise, vampire telepathy will batter down a mental shield as surely as another mage's **Telepathy** Effect will. In such cases, compare the resultant end effects. A tremendous telekinetic Effect can probably beat a super-strong vampire, while a rudimentary mental shield is unlikely to keep out a determined vampire's telepathic assault.

UNDOING THE CURSE (GOOD LUCK)

Sooner or later, a mage who associates with vampires might ask the question, "Can I change this vampire back into a human being?"

Mages who have attempted to bring some life back into the undead find their efforts ultimately for naught. A Life 4/Matter 2 Effect can bring about nearly any change the mage wishes. The atrophied organs will grow back. A heartbeat will resume, blood will flow, and the undead being will be alive again. For the night. Inevitably, no matter how many successes one rolls, no matter how well the Effect performs, the magic fades at the next sunrise. A few vampires, flush with new life, have greeted the sun, overjoyed with their new existence, only to discover that the magic doesn't quite last.

Prime magic doesn't work all that well, either. Any attempts to negate the power of the blood either fail, send the vampire reeling into a comatose state or cause the Final Death.

Why doesn't this solution last? The answer is simple: Vampirism is a curse from God. Can you roll more successes than God?

It is nearly impossible for a mage to have any lasting effect upon the state of vampirism. Only the vampire can attempt to change his cursed state. A mage's interference would be as fruitful as having a werewolf go on a Seeking for a mage would be — it just makes no sense whatsoever. Such a fundamental change must come from inside. The idea of a mage snapping his fingers and turning a vampire into a normal human being completely undermines the horror of the World of Darkness. From a storytelling perspective, it is a Bad Idea. From a game-mechanics perspective, it's more trouble than it's worth.

The **Vampire Storytellers Handbook** mentions a possible means to restore vampires to mortality, but it requires Archmastery in the Sphere of Prime, as well as several other ancillary Spheres. Essentially, the mage must look back in time to the vampire's mortal state, rebuild her dead flesh, reanimate the body, restore the spirit from its corrupted state, halt the progress of undeath and fundamentally rewrite the vampire's soul and Pattern into a wholly different form. And every step of this process needs to be justified in some fashion through the mage's paradigm. Once again: Good luck.

THE HIERARCHY OF THE CELESTIAL UMBROOD



The **Book of Worlds** states that all mages view the High Umbra differently. But if an entire Tradition shares a viewpoint, its members can determine a clear pattern in the frequency of spirits. So, while individual Umbrood may come and go, the Hermetics deal with a regular, structured hierarchy of spirits.

Please keep in mind that while the Hermetics believe in these beings, other Traditions have completely different viewpoints on the nature of the High Umbrood. The Celestial Chorus overlaps with the Order somewhat on this knowledge, but that's about it.

ELEMENTAL ANGELS: THE FOUR BROTHERS

Representing the Four Elements of classical Hermeticism, these unearthly powers are the divine representation of Air, Earth, Fire and Water. As beings of power beyond imagining, they are timeless, endless and utterly archetypal. They exist beyond dots and statistics. Whatever a Brother wants to do, he can, *as long as he has domain over it*. Raphael can't deal with fire, but both Raphael and Gabriel could be hovering over a volcanic eruption.

Mages will most likely never deal with the Archangels directly, and that's fine. The lesser avatars of the

Brothers — seraphim, cherubim, gregori, etc. — are dazzling enough in their own right. However, it is nearly impossible to bind even a Jaggling of the Archangels into service. They will make pacts with mages, certainly, but any attempt to coerce or force an angel can backfire much too easily. Not even the most potent Master of Spirit would attempt to bind an angel into a Wonder. It is better to negotiate with them and respect the pacts rather than attempt to bend primordial cosmic forces that have existed since the beginning of time to one's will.

MICHAEL, the Angel of Light — The Sun King, also known as Apollo or Ra, is a warrior of the light. Throwing his seven-shafted bow into a scene that is stumbling along in the dark, Michael is the principle of godhood, holiness and divine intuition. The perfect form of idea, Michael is the guiding force of pure mind manifest.

Correspondences: Air, light, the Sun, electricity, the electromagnetic force, the photon, sky, rational thought and inspiration, Mind, the color yellow

RAPHAEL, the Angel of Earth — From the *Prima Materia* emerged Raphael, titan of the Earth. Powerful, everlasting, stable, he brings forth both Nature's bounty and the metals and jewels that humanity treasures. He represents the unchanging, eternal virtues of matter.

Correspondences: Earth, mountains, jewels, metals, ores, the strong nuclear force, the proton, earthquakes, health, Matter, the color green

EMMANUEL, the Angel of Water — Mutable, protean, ever-shifting, yet never-changing, Emmanuel is the eternal engine of the sea, churning with the dreams of humanity. If you have skill, he will bear you upon his back. But be careful — although the surface seems safe, one could easily drown in his splendor.

Correspondences: Water, salt, the Moon, fluids, gravity, the neutron, primordial life, dreams, visions, Spirit, the color blue

GABRIEL, the Angel of Fire — The Shy Brother, as he is called, is both destruction and possibility. The Promethean archetype that gave humanity the means to elevate itself, he is also the reluctant destroyer, bearing his double-edged sword with humility. Where Michael is inspiration, Gabriel is an awesome vision of raw power.

Correspondences: Fire, destruction, energy released, radioactivity, the weak nuclear force, the electron, the Phoenix, willpower, Forces, the color red

THE ELEMENTAL COURTS AND THE ARCANA

The Elemental Courts lie beneath the Four Brothers. Any and every variation on the elements resides here, and just because a character's been to one Water Court doesn't mean he knows what the next one will entail. Attempting to give game rules for the infinite variety is an exercise in futility.

"Oh, no you don't! You're not gonna worm out of that one so easily!" We know, we know, we've never given straightforward rules on the High Umbral Courts, and, damn it, you want some! Consider this vagueness an opportunity for your imagination to run wild. However, while we can't (and don't want to) give rules on how to create a world, we *can* give you some pointers:

- Do your homework: Watch movies. *Read.* Research different cultures. Hermetic thought derives from a dizzying amalgam of mythologies and belief systems. Get ideas on what you want *your* Sky Palace to look like. The idea may be archetypal, but you have to bring your own imagination to bear on the details.

- All Umbral Courts are affiliated with the Brothers. Most pay homage to one, although some owe fealty to two. Both Michael and Gabriel oversee Lightning Courts, for example. The politics between the courts can be truly disorienting.

- The Courts are all about correspondences and associations. If you can find a reason why an Air Court should have a river — e.g., ancient Egypt, which focused almost exclusively on the Nile yet worshipped a sun deity — go for it. The lines drawn between the Four Brothers are tenuous at best and man-made contrivances at worst.

- The Arcana — the 22 archetypes of the Tarot — also have their own Courts. Some of them intersect with the Elemental Courts, while some inhabit strange Realms of their own. The interplay between the Arcana and the dukes and counts of the elements can be the focus of an entire chronicle in and of itself. Needless to say, the Arcana are extremely powerful Umbrood, and a mage should exercise caution when attempting to invoke them, as they have an unnerving knack for possession.

PSYCHE-NATURE-CHAOS: THE TRIPLE FACE OF THE GODDESS

The Eternal Mother — Moon and Earth and Life in one being — the Goddess is the supreme feminine principle of the Universe. The Great Mother, the Horned Goddess, Gaia, Selene, Lilith, Hecate, Isis, Ishtar, even the Virgin Mary is embodied by the Goddess.



Her exact place in the Hierarchy is unknown. Whether she ranks equal to God or underneath the Brothers depends mostly on the attitude of the mage. She is the chaos of the jungle, the Breath of Life and the raging storm in one uncanny package. She is the Nine Muses, the Three Fates and the Sirens. She is Empress and Priestess and Lover. She is Maiden and Mother and Crone. She is both Shakti and Kali. She is the eternal trine of Love-Creation-Destruction.

When dealing with the Goddess and Her hand-maidens, humility is suggested. Attempting to order her about will inevitably end poorly for the willworker in question, as she will be sure to punish such presumption. Ask nicely, and you might get on Her good side. But, like the ever-changing Moon, Her personality shifts from day to day. The benevolent, virginal maiden you spoke with a week ago could be a tempestuous Amazon tonight.

Correspondences: Nature, weather, blood, fluid, the Moon, the tides, Life

(Note: Yes, this is the High Umbral reflection of the Celestine, Gaia.... Or is Gaia the Middle Umbral reflection of the Goddess? Either way, a Hermetic who has had extensive dealings with Her might find shape-shifters more inclined to work with him. Conversely, the werebeasts might find the mage's presumption intolerable. Perhaps the werewolves just don't care in a **Mage** game. It's up to you.)

THE SERVITORS OF THE ENDLESS WHEEL: THE ZODIAC

The 12 constellations of the zodiac, in league with the Brothers and the Goddess, rule the destinies of humanity. Tied in both with the seasons and the stars, they mark the passage of the planets and manipulate the threads of Fate.

Dealing with zodiac spirits can be a trying experience, since they have an inherently dual nature. On one hand, they are what they are, more than any other Umbrood. Libra is masculine cardinal Air. He sits in judgment, he weighs options, he can be frightfully indecisive and so on. On the other hand, how a mage relates to a certain spirit is entirely dependent on her natal chart. A mage with her Sun in Aries will have no trouble dealing with the Ram, but without any of her planets in Scorpio she will have difficulties with the Scorpion.

Zodiac spirits are usually called upon to answer a question of destiny. Each has his or her own particular insight into the workings of Fate. Standing in their Realm — a High Umbral intersection with the Deep Umbra,

one of the most breathtaking views of the universe that a mage can have — is bound to be a memorable experience, as each constellation speaks in turn, debating the import of a given subject.

Mages can also make pacts with the Umbrood of the zodiac and their servitors (each rules a house, after all). The exact benefits that zodiac spirits confer are best left up to the individual Storyteller. Bear in mind, however that they possess a truly unique advantage over other Umbrood; everyone acknowledges them. Just check the horoscope in the local newspaper. Truly, they are potent allies to cultivate.

From an out-of-game perspective, using this system can be really simple or amazingly complicated. The simple way: A mage can deal with any zodiac sign, but she will favor (and be favored by) her birth sign. While this system might be easier, most of the nuance of astrology disappears in so doing.

Our advice? Do a little homework (“Again!?”), make up a natal chart for the character (there are plenty of websites out there that will do so for free — make up a birth date and place of birth for the character and go from there) and discover the interplay of the planets, the signs, the houses and the aspects. Doing so will determine exactly how various zodiac spirits view your character. It’s a bit more work, but it’s infinitely more rewarding. And since when did a Hermetic shy away from work?

Correspondences: Destiny, insight, Entropy and Time

THE TREE INVERTED: CIRCLES OF THE DAMNED

Mandatory Disclaimer: White Wolf does not condone dealing with the avatars of evil, be they real or imagined. Any delusion that you are actually communicating with Satan is your own psychosis that you and your state-appointed therapist get to work through. Evil is a Bad Thing for your character to latch onto; it is even worse if you believe it in real life.

Contrary to Hermetic law, the will of Heaven and common sense, a scant few Hermetics do deal with the angels’ fallen Brothers. Whether through antinomian praxis (working against your Word to better understand it), sheer balls or outright stupidity, the secrets of evoking demons, devils and other malefic beings are still in circulation throughout the Order. You thought drinking vampire blood was bad? Try negotiating with Asmodeus.

Trafficking with the Damned is almost always bad for the mage. First of all, if you try it before your

mage achieves Adept rank with the Spirit Sphere, *he will get fucked*. Demons feel no particular obligation to honor pacts with amateurs. Second of all, even if your character does have the magical will to bind a demon into service, the mage had better speak legalese like a Quaesitor to make sure the demon doesn’t screw him in the deal. And lastly, any demon bound successfully in this manner will *always* look for an escape, and it will hate its tormentor forever. When a demon says *forever*, he means it.

Furthermore, this sort of magic is infernalism and diabolism in the most literal sense. If your mage’s clandestine activities are discovered, you can be reasonably certain of a swift verdict of Requitall — possibly Gilgul, just to ensure that your tainted soul doesn’t further pollute the Tellurian.

That being said, the Hierarchy of the Damned is exactly the inverse of that of the Blessed, save that it is a tyranny of one (the fallen seraph, Sammael) and not a council of four that sits at the bottom. We’re not going to give specifics about any of these beings or Realms. Dante Alighieri’s works (as well as **The Book of Worlds**, **The Book of Madness** and **Infernalism: The Path of Screams**) should be fuel enough for this fire. And yes, should you opt to play with this blaze, you will almost assuredly get burned. Beyond recognition.

THE UMBRAL COURTS, THE TRADITIONS AND THE SECOND MASSASA WAR

Right, so what are pages of Umbral Court descriptions doing in a book about mage-vampire battles? Simple — when mages go to war, they need all the allies that they can get. Spirits are some of the few allies that the Traditions can claim who aren’t co-opted by the Technocracy and the vampires. That being the case, Hermetic spiritualists and other Tradition spirit-speakers inevitably drag their spirit allies into the war.

Umbral Court allies in the second *Massasa* War help immeasurably. First off, most spirits dislike vampires intensely. As static, flawed creatures of corruption, vampires represent monstrous forces in the Tellurian. They’re just no good, and spirits hate things that don’t fit in the natural order. Furthermore, vampires have little to do with the spirit world, probably for similar reasons. Therefore most undead are ill-equipped to deal with spirits.

The natural problem, of course, is that summoning spirits relies on sending a message through the Avatar Storm across the Gauntlet, or on traveling to the Umbra in order to deal with spirits directly. Either process is

risky and uncertain. Mages will tend to rely on their old, pre-existing pacts, since trapping spirits in new deals is harder than ever. But the benefits — spies or allies that vampires have trouble detecting and countering — are worth it.

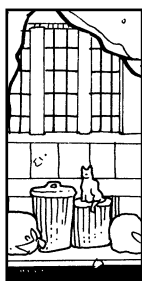
See, vampires show up as blights against the backdrop of the spirit world. The Umbra reflects the presence of emotion and intensity in the material world. Vampires seem like sinkholes of evil, vortexes that suck in life and give nothing back. A little spirit sight or a good spirit ally can sometimes spot such signs. The older and more monstrous the vampire, the more clearly it shows

up. Of course, it isn't particularly *easy* to hunt vampires from the Umbra, but it's definitely simpler than trying to pick them out of crowds of humans.

Also, since spirits have a natural antipathy toward the undead, it's often a little easier for mages to make pacts with them if the vampires are on the victim end. Since a spirit doesn't garner Paradox for using its powers, it can attack the vampires while the mages defend, or vice versa. Such a system frees up the mage to create more terrifying Effects or to have a better shield against vampire machinations.

All in all, not a bad deal.

THE WHITTIS OF FORTUNE'S WHEEL: MERITS AND FLAWS



The circumstances in which the Order finds itself in these Final Nights have brought with them their own unique trials and boons. While they function just like the Merits and Flaws found in other **Mage** material, these Merits and Flaws also come with the obligatory warning that min-maxing is hazardous to your character's approval.

DRIVEN (2 PT MERIT)

The world is falling to Hell, and the Order is crumbling. Few mages have the spiritual resilience to endure the punishment being heaped on the Traditions in these End Times and keep on going. Your mage is one of them. Once per game session, when the survival of your character's Tradition is at stake, you gain an additional free point of temporary Willpower to spend on any one roll in defense of your mage's Tradition.

CELESTIAL AFFINITY (3 PT MERIT)

Your mage has an exceptional instinct when it comes to dealing with High Umbrood. While certain shamans excel at interactions with their totemic spirits, and necromancers find truck with the dead a simple matter, your mage's talents make converse with the noblest and most refined of ephemeral entities easier. You receive a difficulty bonus of two to all rolls to summon, compel, coax, bargain with and otherwise influence such beings. This bonus applies as much to Social rolls as it does to Spheres, since trafficking with High Umbrood is often

as much a matter of finesse and force of personality as it is one of sorcerous might.

NEPHILIM (7 PT MERIT)

This Merit is exactly what it sounds like. Your mage is the direct progeny of a native of the High Umbra and a human being. Perhaps your character's conception secured a pact, or possibly the reasons were somewhat less pragmatic. In any case, the mage is the intersection of Heaven (or Hell, or the Vulgate, etc.) and Earth. Like the Biblical Nephilim, your character's body cannot fully contain the massive spiritual energies coursing through it, so she has one or a small handful of deformities (at least 3 points worth of Physical Flaws, for which you receive no additional points). Also, she tends to embody certain characteristics of your High Umbral parent (almost certainly her father). An angelic parent whose domain is Fury will result in a short temper and a desire to solve problems with one's fists, whereas an incubus' child will have... darker appetites. Reflect this tendency by starting with *three* dots of Resonance instead of just one. This heritage does, however, bestow certain advantages upon your character. Mind and Spirit Sphere difficulties pertaining directly to the High Umbra decrease by one, and she is capable of entering the High Umbra *physically* with a conjunctional Spirit 3, Mind 4 Effect. Also, the entities of the High Umbra fear their bastard half-breeds, and so you receive two bonus dice in all rolls to intimidate, command or make demands of such creatures. (Unless you are *very* powerful, however, or the creature you are dealing with is *very* weak, doing so is high suicidal.) This

Merit cannot be taken with *Celestial Affinity*; the Nephilim are neither well-loved nor well-received by the Angelic Hierarchies and their like.

INGLORIOUS PEDIGREE (1 PT FLAW)

The Order of Hermes has traditionally stood on the might of its great houses. Even Ex Miscellanea has always had, at any given time, what might be considered its more significant houses. Although your mage hails from the Hodge-Podge, hers is a minor sub-house of little regard with only a handful of members. In fact, she (and quite possibly her mentor) might currently be the only living Awakened members of her praxis within the house. She could be one of the four or so mages of fallen Criamon currently conscious, sane and coherent. Or, she could belong to a sub-house that has never been of any great prominence, always getting by with the barest trickle of Apprentices. In the latter case, you should delineate a very specific set of duties or line of research important to the foundation of your sub-house and choose an appropriate name for it. You suffer a difficulty penalty of two to all Social rolls among mages of the larger houses of the Order when your mage tries to impress them or just get them to take her seriously. In addition, she may sometimes find herself cut off from some of the perks that other mages of the Order take for granted (such as access to surplus Tass or audiences with Masters), simply because she has no powerful fellowship to back her up.

RENUNCIATE (1 PT FLAW)

Your mage was indoctrinated into the Order from without. Unlike most, he did not have to endure the grueling three-to-five year period of tutelage (at least, not from a mentor approved by the Order of Hermes). He was instead wooed over to the cause by House Fortuna's frantic recruitment drive. He may have been an Orphan practicing his own brand of Hermeticism, or perhaps he was a convert from another Tradition. Regardless, he is looked down upon by many within the Order for his lack of "appropriate instruction." Your character suffers a difficulty penalty of two on all Social rolls dealing with traditionalists within the Order (i.e., the better part of the Order of Hermes). Most Fortuna, Solificati and Thig (as well as certain mavericks within the other Houses) cut your character slack, but he is never allowed to forget his "inferior heritage." This Flaw differs from the previous one in that a mage with an inglorious pedigree finds it difficult to be taken seriously, while one with this Flaw finds it hard simply to be accepted.

BLOOD-HUNGRY SOUL (2-5 PT FLAW)

One of your prior incarnations (likely one alive during the original *Massasa* War) fell under the seductive spell of vampiric vitae. Your mage was "born" into his Awakened life an addict (as were all of his incarnations after the unfortunate imbibing of the accursed nectar). It is only now, however, with the rekindling of the war, that his Avatar remembers the desire for the blood that so fulfilled it.

For two points, your mage's Avatar remembers its addiction as a long-recovered addict might; it was a bad choice, made long ago and foolishly. Nevertheless, the hunger whispers to his soul every so often, prompting a Willpower roll (difficulty 5) to resist temptation whenever an opportunity to potentially get vampire blood presents itself. Failing that, you must make another roll (difficulty 6) to turn down the stuff if the initial opportunity proves fruitful.

The three-point version of this Flaw is identical to the weaker version, save that the first roll's difficulty is 6 and the second increases to 8.

The five-point variant awakens within the character all the wracking agonies of a ghoulish lust for his unclean sacrament. Players of these unfortunates must roll Willpower (difficulty 8) to stay the hell away from a chance to lay hands on the sweet venom of Caine's Curse. Should that roll not prove sufficient, make a second roll (difficulty 10) to thrust it away and flee from this self-annihilating lust. (A few Thig have taken to referring to this Flaw as having a "crack-baby Avatar.")

MASSASA CONTACT (3 PT FLAW)

Your mage has committed one of the direst sins of war: She has gotten in bed with the enemy. She numbers a *massasa* among her associates, and (for whatever reason) she cannot or will not terminate either her relationship or the vampire. Maybe the creature is a friend or loved one, cruelly Embraced, or maybe it is a source of intelligence against the enemy *massasa*. In any case, though, a scant few in the Order would look the other way were they to chance upon such ties. Many, however, would denounce and persecute the mage out-of-hand. Remember, most mages of the Order take for granted that all *massasa* fall under the ancient schism of House Tremere, so most would see your mage as a dangerous liability were they to find out.

If this vampire is useful to your character, she should also be taken as an ally (as per the Background). At the other end of the spectrum, a very few vampires have been approved for dealings by certain higher-ups within the Hermetic chain of command (such as

it is). Therefore, it is not absolutely necessary to take this Flaw if you wish to purchase a vampiric ally. This Flaw is necessary only if you want a vampire ally whose camaraderie could prove dangerous.

FAUST'S BURDEN (3-6 PT FLAW)

Either your mage or one of her prior incarnations cut a deal with a potent Umbrood, and now she must uphold her end of the bargain. This creature need not be a demon. Mammon, after all, is likely to be much friendlier (in the short term, at least) about the matter of a debt owed than, say, Uriel. If it was a previous incarnation that forged this ill-advised pact, the entity remembers your mage's soul (read: Avatar), and it will begin hounding her soon after the Awakening for its due.

For three points, your mage owes a significant service to this creature. This service might include a dangerous quest in its name, the freedom to possess you *at any time of its choosing* thrice in your life, or frequent sacrifices of property or Tass. For four points, this Umbrood may demand more significant sacrifices. For example, it

might compel your mage to undertake a potentially life-threatening quest, demand that her magic always be worked in ways that create a Resonance pleasing to it, or impose significant strictures on her life. The five-point version of this Flaw grants the spirit leave to send the mage into a virtually certain-death scenario, to claim her firstborn, or to force her to use her magic at any time in any way it sees fit.

In the case of these first three variants of this Flaw, failure to comply will be punished accordingly (the Storyteller is encouraged to be a genuine bastard). For the full six points, your mage owes the being in question her immortal soul. It may command her, possess her, use her powers, senses, knowledge (et cetera) at will, and it is perfectly within its rights to do its damndest to collect as quickly as possible, short of killing her itself.

In theory, an awe-inspiring number of successes on a Prime 2, Entropy 5, Spirit 5 Effect *might* break this obligation. It is much more likely, however, that a combination of cunning, bravery, sheer willpower and luck will overcome the bargain.

ANCIENT KNOWLEDGE: RECOVERED MAGIC



These Rotes are some examples of the original Hermetic spells lost before or during the Massasa War, now seen for the first time in nearly a millennium by living willworkers as they were first penned. Although they are not subject to the bastardization of multiple translations, none of these Rotes are particularly resistant to the slow constriction of magic that first drove the Order to its hasty call to arms. (This realization comes much to the consternation of those who have risked much and lost much to regain them.) Still, when such spells *do* work, they are potent additions indeed to any Hermetic's arsenal.

⊕ATHBREAKER'S LASH (• ENTROPY, ••• FORCES)

With this Rote, a canny Quaesitor may visit upon a liar the fruits of his falsehoods. As a lie leaves the subject's lips, it is literally transformed into a web of electricity and amplified, reflecting back on the oath-breaker and inflicting grievous harm. A Seal of Solomon and an invocation of Uriel, Angel of Judgment, are the implements by which the Quaesitor divides the deceiver from the honorable.

System: As per the Entropy Effect, **Ring of Truth**, this Effect's successes subtract successes from a liar's Subterfuge roll. If the liar still has successes left over, or if both sets of successes cancel one another out, nothing happens. If the Quaesitor's player scores more successes, however, his excess successes are applied as Forces damage as the liar's words are transformed into strands of electricity that snap back to scourge his body. (Add the extra damage success for Forces only after both sets of successes have been compared.)

Alternatively, the mage may opt for the "pain and incapacitation" version of the Rote, rather than causing real damage. In this case, the damage successes are applied as normal, but they only count for the purpose of determining wound penalties for the duration of the scene. If the subject drops below Incapacitated as a result of this application of the Rote, excess successes strip points of temporary Willpower. In this case, the subject may continue to speak (with great pain and difficulty), but further lashes will work automatically if the subject speaks a lie. He no longer has the presence of mind to conceal the truth effectively.

A subject reduced by this process to zero temporary Willpower will tell the whole truth as he knows it about any subject desired, and he will probably volunteer more and more elaborate information than is requested. Note that **Oathbreaker's Lash** works against only a knowing liar and that, as his concentration is bound up in the Rote, the Quaesitor casting it will only detect a spoken lie if the Effect is triggered successfully.

BOOK OF WHISPERS (•• MIND, ••• MATTER, ••• TIME)

Originally taught to Roderigo Melanzanno, bani Bonisagus, by his mentor, this Rote found use by the old man as a handy substitute for a scribe and a useful tool for self-examination. By keying a blank book to oneself, a mage can enchant it for a time, causing the very substance of its pages to manifest his surface thoughts verbatim. Needless to say, Melanzanno made himself famous by using the book for less studious pursuits. Keying such books to others by inscribing their names upon the covers, Melanzanno became a rather successful blackmailer. Thus, while the discovery of his body floating in a Venetian canal came as no real surprise to his contemporaries, the secret combinations of pentacles in which he wrote his subjects' names found great favor among other Order mages more capable of balancing ambition with wisdom.

System: Mind 2 reads the surface thoughts of those without mental shielding, Matter 3 transforms the substance of the pages into words corresponding to those thoughts, and Time creates a duration of Effect (thus allowing the mage to perform other tasks, even use other magic, while the Rote maintains itself). The book must be within the subject's immediate vicinity to be effective, but it need not be obvious (one of a few books tucked under a mage's arm, for example, or one of the hundreds on the nearby shelves in a library). As the Rote *does* leave that telltale echo of willworking obvious to those with Awareness, it is best used on the Awakened in places like Chantryes, where there are likely to be several magical Effects in place at any given time, serving as a sort of "magical cover."

THUNDER'S GAUNTLET (•• CORRESPONDENCE, ••• MIND, AND EITHER •• PRITIE, ••• FORCES OR ••• MATTER, OR ••• LIFE)

Developed by Wolfram von Gruenberg, bani Tytalus, over a century before the siege of Mistridge, this Rote

allowed the Teuton to call out his enemies, no matter how distant, with a telepathic certámen challenge and a painful blast of thunder for good measure. Those wizards who came later refined and altered his pentacles of Mars and invocations of Gabriel slightly to allow for fire, cold, spikes thrust from the floor and even internal hemorrhaging to act as the Gauntlet's exclamation point. While perhaps not as commonly used for its original purpose today as when Wolfram created it, it still sees some use among certain sadistic bastards in the Order who like to taunt an enemy or ruin him with a particularly horrible bit of news before killing him.

A dubiously reliable story also exists about a Janissary who used this Rote while fleeing Quaesitor persecution to deliver a brief testimony to one of his pursuers and kill him. The Janissary later sent a coded message to a friend in another house containing only the dead Quaesitor's name and instructions to summon and interrogate the man's spirit. Truly, the Order is resourceful.

System: Correspondence 2 allows the mage to locate and scry a person known to him, and Mind 3 delivers the message. Prime and Forces deliver an energy-based attack. Prime and Matter deliver a physical one, and Life creates an assault similar to **Rip the Man-Body**. With time to plan and prepare, the mage may dictate a maximum amount of damage to be inflicted, allowing him to pull his punch deliberately if he wishes to be certain that the subject survives. A good Correspondence ward can negate the whole Effect, while a strong Mind shield will simply block the telepathic message.

GABRIEL'S EITIBRACE (•• CORRESPONDENCE, •• MATTER OR ••••• LIFE, •• PRITIE, ••• FORCES)

This horrifically brutal Rote transforms the air around a subject (or, in the case of the Life 5 variant, the subject's own flesh) into a flame that burns until the victim is reduced to ash. The mage does so by calling upon Gabriel, Archangel of Fire, and keying a pentacle of Mercury to the victim (whether with a name, a possession or line of sight).

System: Correspondence 2 allows the caster to fire this Rote from a distance and keep it locked on the victim. Forces holds the flames generated by the transformed Pattern tightly to the subject, and Prime keeps those flames fed (requiring a point of Quintessence per turn, but inflicting damage equal to that generated by the initial casting of the Rote automati-

cally). The Matter version of the Rote inflicts damage as a normal Forces Effect, while the Life variant adds to that damage a number of aggravated health levels (as per a normal Life Effect) appropriate to the number of

successes scored. Incidentally, casting the Matter and Life components of this Rote conjunctionally allows a mage to use the second variant of this Rote successfully on a vampire.

SWORDS AGAINST THE NIGHT: ARTIFACTS OF THE MASSASA WAR



With the rekindling of the war, a number of spells designed with the *massasa*-hunter in mind have been rediscovered in moldering tomes hidden in the far corners of libraries and in books pried from the cold hands of the vampires themselves. Preying upon the weaknesses of the undead, these spells are frightfully efficient instruments of battle.

GLORIOUS SWORD OF HEAVEN (•• CORRESPONDENCE, •• FORCES OR •••• CORRESPONDENCE, •••• FORCES)

From the arcane texts of the bizarre House (and family) Castrovinci comes this weapon against the Race of Caine. Pentacles of Mars and Enochian supplications to Michael, warrior Archangel and patron of the Sun, draw a lance of sunlight from elsewhere in the world with which to attack a vampire. More powerful mages can summon a literal shaft of light from Heaven, searing scores of *massasa* with holy illumination. Although the Rote is vulgar almost anywhere in the 21st century, it remains a valuable, if dangerous, trump for those members of the Order who have truck with vampires. (Mages who are known to use this Rote have a tendency to get tracked down and wiped out by potent vampire servitors, as they are obvious threats.)

System: The Correspondence 2, Forces 2 version of the Rote summons a single slender beam of sunlight that must be directed at a vampire's exposed flesh in order to harm him. The more powerful variant of the Rote can draw a shaft of sunlight, around a city block in size, to the mage's location, spelling almost certain doom for any vampire in the vicinity (as well as decreasing the mage's odds for a long, happy life drastically thanks to Paradox). Note, however, that the mage must draw the light from somewhere, and he should familiarize himself thoroughly with the Time Zones before attempting this Rote.

OAK OF SANGUINE ROOT (•• CORRESPONDENCE, •• PRIME, ••• LIFE, ••• MATTER)

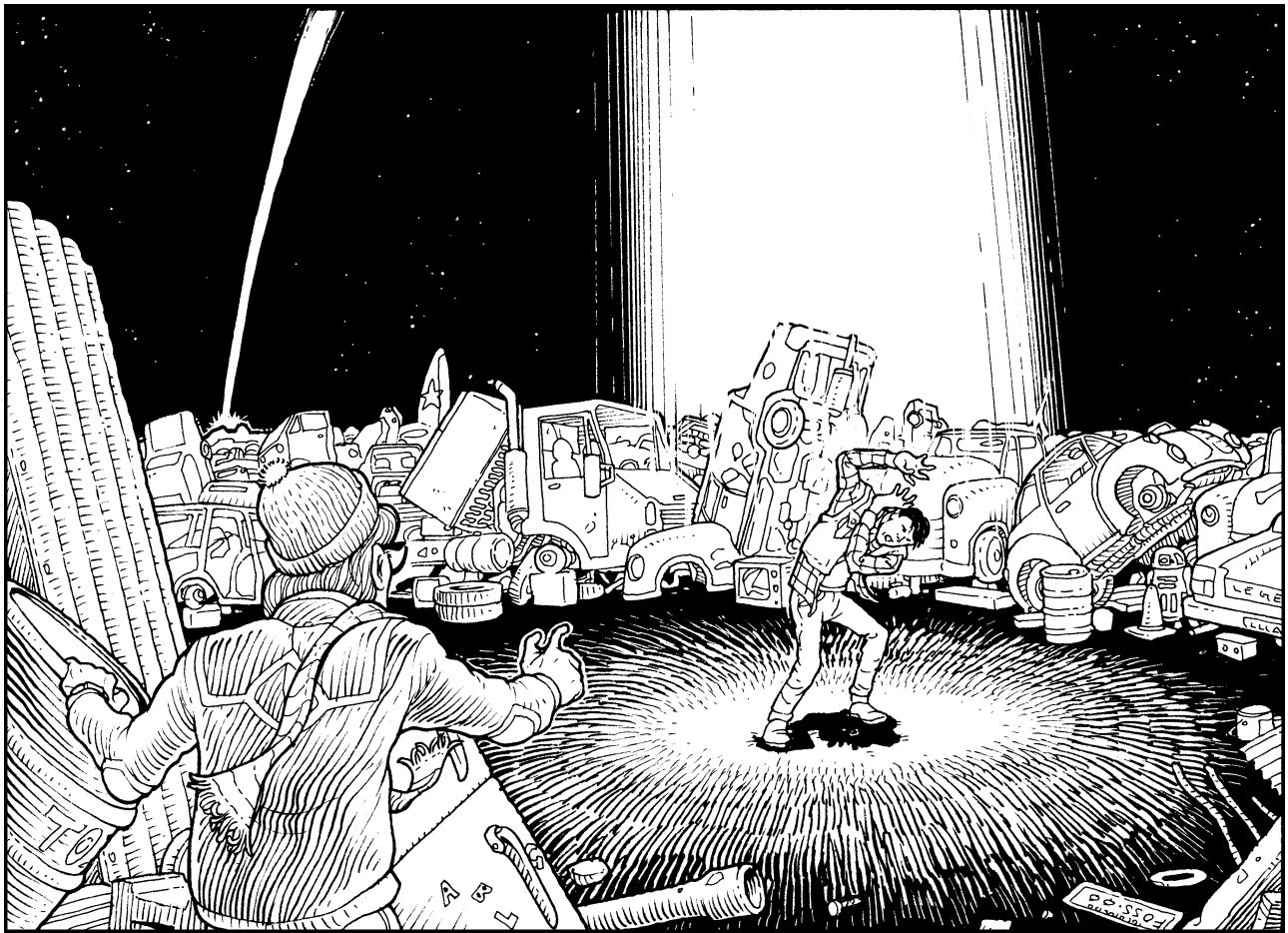
Subverting the power of the blood, this Rote creates life out of death, paralyzing a *massasa* with the legendary bane of the wooden stake. A sapling of oak springs with frightful swiftness from the vampire's own flesh and bone, and out of the mystic power of her blood, spreading its roots in the heart and splitting free from the torso to sprout bloodied branch and leaf.

System: Correspondence 2 and Prime 2 allow the mage to latch onto the power of Quintessence in the vampire's heart. Life 3 and Matter 3 build the Pattern of the swift-growing sapling out of that Quintessence and unliving flesh. If successful, this Rote inflicts standard damage for a Life Effect, in addition to transfixing the vampire's heart with wood automatically. Without the normal nutrients needed by trees, the sapling will eventually die. Removing the "stake" will almost undoubtedly inflict an additional health level or two of lethal damage, as the heart is gouged and bones are split to free the roots.

HERMES' BRAND (• ENTROPY, •• PRIME, ••• FORCES, •••• TIME)

A vicious weapon forged in the darkest days of the *Massasa War*, the **Hermes' Brand** Effect delivers an insidious and final punishment unto a vampire. By introducing a "sleeping fire" into the blood of a mortal creature, a mage may cause the *vis* synthesized by the vampiric "biology" to explode into flames, consuming the *massasa* from the inside out.

System: The mage uses Entropy 1 and Time 4 to enchant his own blood (or that of another living creature), essentially creating a "hanging" Prime 2, Forces 3 Effect that takes place a specified amount of time after being ingested by a vampire. The Rote



uses the blood that the vampire gains from his feeding as the Quintessence to fuel the Effect. The more the vampire drinks, the bigger the burn. If the vampire does not drink the enchanted blood, the blood does not explode.

When the appointed duration is reached, each pint of blood consumed explodes into flame, inflicting two health levels of aggravated damage. Provided the vampire survives, he also loses one blood point per health level suffered (on top of the ones that fueled the magic, all of which are consumed), as it literally burns away.

A mage may only have one **Hermes' Brand** in effect at any time, but it lasts until it is undone or triggered. Also, this Rote remains active even after death, provided the blood is fresh enough to retain the mystic energy vampires require. Thus, it is possible for a mage killed by feeding (or killed in a fight and then fed upon) to have his vengeance from beyond

the grave, as it were. This Rote may be placed on any living subject, willing or no, and, when combined with memory manipulation, is a truly exquisite surprise to bestow upon a member of a vampire's usual feeding circle.

As an important aside, however, it is possible (if highly unlikely) that the mage casting this Rote specifies an exceedingly long time before the explosion or that the vampire runs through all of her blood very quickly. In this case, it is important to keep track of exactly which blood was drawn from the enchanted individual, since they may be purged from the system before the specified duration elapses. An extraordinarily fortunate vampire might mitigate her punishment somewhat, or perhaps avoid it altogether, in this fashion.

Finally, if your character is enchanting his own blood, make sure you don't botch the roll. Talk about heartburn...

THE REBORN PATH: TOMORROW'S HERMETICISM



Weaving together strands of old praxes and new ideas, the magic of the cutting-edge Hermetic knows the caduceus as the DNA double-helix and the search for Ascension as Campbell's Hero's Journey. Used almost exclusively by House Thig, these Rotes and others like them are nonetheless finding increasing favor with the youth of the Order, whose hearts and souls are not so invested in the old spells as their mentors' are. Younger Hermetics are more willing to simply abandon those spells now that that magic has become unreliable. Although this neo-Hermeticism seems a crude bastardization to many purists, it may be the only hope the Order has left for salvation.

CHAOS BUTTERFLY

(•• ENTROPY, •• PRIME, •• SPIRIT)

Chaos theory states that a butterfly flapping its wings in China can be the trigger that causes a hurricane in the Caribbean. Thigs (and the occasional Fortunaes) use this understanding to twist reality to their own desires. They might not be able to call a hurricane with the *Ars Essentiae*, but it just might happen with the right assistance.

The mage inscribes a sigil, focusing his intent upon it. A minor Umbrood — a butterfly with wings of fire — then materializes. The mage must then forget completely about the desired effect and let the butterfly flutter away. Somewhere down the line, what the mage desired will come to pass, albeit in the most unexpected ways.

System: Entropy, Prime and Spirit fix a starting point of probability in the Tellurian, giving that point form in the butterfly. Essentially, the mage creates a probability singularity. From that point, probability begins branching out into myriad different possibilities. What happens afterward depends on the mage's desires and the number of successes the player rolls. A minor Effect — say, ensuring that the mage chances upon a malfunctioning ATM — will occur within a day or two and then dissipate. Effects that attempt to

duplicate other Sphere Effects take days of intense concentration, vast amounts of successes and the willingness to deal with the karmic payback of being the root cause of, say, someone's death. Should the player botch, take the desired intent into account when computing Paradox. Needless to say, there are just certain things that are beyond the scope of this Effect. This Rote is not a platform from which to do just anything, and the Storyteller should ignore any requests to attain divinity, slay an archangel or whip the Technocracy's ass single-handedly. The Effect, regardless of size, should always take the character — and player — totally by surprise.

THE GOLDEN APPLE (•• MATTER, •• MIND OR •• MATTER, ••• MIND, ••• PRIME)

Long ago, the gods of Olympus threw a party. They didn't, however, invite Eris, Goddess of Chaos to the banquet, and she was understandably pissed. Furious, she grabbed a golden apple, carved "KALLISTI" ("To the Prettiest One") on the side and threw it in. Athena, Hera and Aphrodite all claimed it for themselves, and their bickering grew so intense that Zeus appointed a mortal named Paris to decide. The three goddesses each offered Paris something, but Aphrodite won when she offered him the most beautiful mortal in the world — Helen of Troy. So the Trojan War started, all because of a Golden Apple.

Modern Hermetics use this principle to imbue mundane objects with a magnetic pull that is nearly irresistible. No matter what, they are compelled to focus on *that object*. Some Hermetics claim television works in much the same fashion.

System: The first version of **The Golden Apple** pulls attention toward the imbued object. For the duration of the Effect, those affected must fixate upon the object, reacting with envy, hate, lust or any other emotion the Hermetic cares to create. The more advanced version is even more insidious, as the Effect channels the victims' desires to fuel itself. It's a vicious cycle; the more they want it, the stronger the Effect becomes.

AFTERWORD FROM THE AUTHORS



The drama is over, but it has only begun.

Obviously, some of the details in the **Mage** universe are extracted from real life practices and events. However, the silver strings connecting the fictional game counterparts to the real structures sometimes get lost in the mix. It's all too easy to pretend to fight the Technocracy while ignoring the lack of imagination that seems to pervade the real world. It's easy to see blood-drinking monsters responsible for every sin against humanity. It's much too easy to literalize the monsters.

Magic is a creative act. No matter what kind of mage you are, all your rituals, foci, apparatuses and procedures are expressions of you. There's a reason Hermetics call magic the Art. The artist, the lover and the mage are all aspects of each other. They all create, whether their works are a symphony, a summoning or ecstasy. Even a scientist can approach his work as an essential creative force that enriches the soul of humanity.

The Final Nights might not actually be upon us, but there's a sense of unease, disinterest and general apathy in the air. It's easier, quicker, and less worrisome to hook ourselves up to The Machine than to create our own happiness. Vampiric sorcerers don't pull the strings of the world, but there are too many people siphoning power from misery.

This is your world, and this is your reality. Cast out the vampires and create anew.

— Scott Cohen

I have no sage wisdom to dispense save this; every belief is a choice.

The acceleration due to gravity, the value of a dime and the degree to which the Divine exists are all values

we choose either to embrace or deny. For the most part, we embrace those "truths" that are approved for common consumption. In so doing, we empower those who bring us this information without ever really questioning their motives or the validity of their mandates. We have no desire to find out for ourselves anymore. Chained to the mundane, we surf the 'net, read the paper, watch the news and buy our favorite magazines, devouring their contents and taking on faith the fallible (and oftentimes, darkly self-motivated) Law of the Masses.

If coming into such proximity with the Order has helped to cement anything in my mind, it is that we *must* elevate ourselves. If we do not, the dream of something better vanishes, replaced by an unending mediocrity and a steady descent toward the lowest common denominator. The world you have been accepting is without any value beyond that which you bestow upon it. Remember, somewhere, an unseen architect of the reality we too often take for granted profits whenever a miracle of the modern world is unveiled and we reply, "Amen."

Believe whatever you desire, and never let anyone call you crazy for it. *As ye harm none, do as thou wilt.* The image-obsessed, bloodthirsty, sensationalistic world outside your window is the real madhouse. Silent assent is a security blanket, and it's time to put that blanket aside and face the monsters before there are no heroes left to do battle with the dragon. It takes a supreme effort of will to put aside what the rest of the species takes on faith, in favor of forging one's own path toward one's own truth.

Hey. You there, with the **Mage** book...

I don't suppose by any chance you know anything at all about that?

— Stephen Michael DiPesa

SUGGESTED READING



The Changing Light at Sandover by James Merrill — An extraordinary work. Merrill spent 20 years receiving the bulk of this poem from an Ouija board. The book is epic in scope, touching on every aspect of existence, and it's the best example of an artist mediating between planes of consciousness ever written.

The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats — Yeats was poet, magician, historian, folklorist, and hero. His work sought to re-create the Irish myths, as well as the imagination in all of us.

Psychology and Alchemy by Carl Jung — While a ponderous read, the ideas in this book are everything a Hermetic could ever hope to realize.

Daimonic Reality by Patrick Harpur — A fascinating analysis of unexplained phenomena that links UFOs, faeries, the *Anima Mundi*, and magic into one mercurial realm.

The Essential Kaballah by Daniel Matt — Not a “how-to” guide, this book collects the best writings on the arcane art of Jewish mysticism.

The Cosmic Serpent by Jeremy Narby — While the book deals with Amazonian shamans, the underlying theme — the unification of science with magic — is an inspiration for neo-Hermeticism.

The Hobbit, *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy, and the *Silmarillion* by J.R.R. Tolkien — Throw away fantasy-dork preconceptions and look through to the symbolism beneath. Try to understand the very essence of the Order's epic sensibilities and the all-pervasive sorrow

of a noble war (both in the books and on the part of the author himself) to save a dying dream.

The Art of War by Sun Tzu — This is how you fight a war for Reality. Ruthlessly pragmatic, Master Sun draws up a battle plan that would make any Tytalan proud.

A Dictionary of Angels by Gustav Davidson — A thoroughly approachable work on the attributes and correspondences of more High Umbrood than you can shake a stick at.

The Prince by Niccolo Machiavelli — Yes, everyone recommends this as the quintessential handbook for the ambitious vampire. However, over the course of its long history, the Order has taken to heart a page or two of this text on the necessity of a ruler's willingness to do anything in order to maintain his power.

The Secret Language of Birthdays by Gary Goldschneider & Joost Elffers — Astrology made easy. An ideal resource for picking an auspicious birthday for your Hermetic character.

Key Words for Astrology by Hajo Banzhaf & Anna Haebler — This book is one of the best astrology works on the market. More than a “find your love partner” text, this explains the metaphors, symbolism and interactions between the signs and the planets. A must-read.

And who could forget...

The Corpus Hermeticum by Hermes Trismegistus — Here it is, the cornerstone of Hermetic thought. It's long, ponderous, at times boring as can be and positively invaluable in understanding much about the Order of Hermes.



This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

WHAT IS THE ONYX PATH?

WINTER 2011-2012: (VTM) V20 COMPANION

SPRING 2012: (VTM) CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION

SUMMER 2012: (VTM) HUNTERS HUNTED 2

FALL 2012: (WTA) WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE – 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

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