

# BLOODLINES: THE HIDDEN

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# BLOODLINES: THE HIDDEN™

*By John Goff, Jess Heinig, Christopher Kobas, Brand Robins,  
Dean Shomshak and Chuck Wendig  
Vampire created by Mark Rein-Hagen*

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# PROLOGUE:

## BLOOD KIN

The winter moonlight ebbed and flowed amid the scudding clouds high over the town of Wormwood. From the grimy, circular window in the attic of the old Stokes mansion, Edward had a panoramic view of the wooded hillside and the road leading down into town. A bitter wind whistled through the window's broken panes, riffling the pages of the small book in his pale hands. The vampire paid it little heed. He'd been cold as the grave for nearly a hundred years, and cold he would remain.

Once again, he tried to focus on the small, blocky type cramming the book's small pages. It was one of nearly a half-dozen books he'd managed to save from the moldy library downstairs. Not a one of them had managed to hold his interest for more than a few pages. This one was full of poems by a woman he'd never heard of. As the moonlight waxed brighter he tried to find where he'd left off, but after a few moments he gave up the attempt and tossed the old book away in disgust.

The wind whistled and the decrepit house settled on its foundations, creaking and groaning like a bitter old crone. The lonely little town at the base of the **hill** was dark and seemingly desolate, its narrow streets devoid of life. It was as if the night belonged to Edward alone — and in a sense, he supposed it did. Once upon a time, the notion might have thrilled him, but not any more.

A twinkle of lights and a hint of movement on the twisting **road** drew Edward's eye. A car was working its way up the **hill** to where the Stokes Mansion sat. He checked his watch. It was nearly midnight. Frowning slightly, the vampire rose from the rickety old chair by the window and picked his threadbare suit coat from the floor. He slipped the coat on with care, checking his starched collar and tie much as he'd once done while alive, and then made his way to the attic's narrow stairs. His limbs felt stiff and it seemed as though his veins were pulled taut like cords. He hadn't fed in several nights, unable to stomach the taste of cow's blood or to chase after rats in the mansion's cellar. Now he regretted going without.

Edward slipped effortlessly amid the debris of the rotting house, finding his way in utter darkness with supernatural ease. He descended the narrow servants' stairs at the back of the manor and passed through the wreckage of the huge kitchen, then beyond a sagging door and into the refuse-strewn yard. After almost a year since returning to his family's ancestral home, he knew the house and its grounds intimately. In his bitter moments he recalled how much he once longed to live here, but

had to move on in his mortal days. *All things come to those who wait*, he thought with a rueful shake of his head.

The wind rattled the bare branches of the sycamore trees and banged the shutters on the carriage house out back. Thin wisps of snow raced across the weed-choked driveway. Distantly, he heard a car door swing shut. Edward crossed the faint outline of the driveway and slipped into the darkness beneath the rustling trees, making his way **downhill** to the **cemetery**.

His spirits lifted a bit as he descended — it felt good to be back out in the woods again. *Stalking prey*, came the unbidden thought, and Edward ruthlessly pushed the urge away. Truth to tell, he missed the joys of the hunt even more keenly now that he'd left the city behind. Towns like Wormwood were too small for people to disappear, night after night. The wilderness was no place for beasts like him, he thought ironically.

The **cemetery** was only a few hundred yards from the manor, surrounded by trees on all sides. As he reached the wrought-iron fence, Edward could see a slim figure in a dark coat wandering among the weathered **headstones**. The sight of her made his dead heart beat, and the scene took on a sharp-edged quality. It was desire of a sort; his cold hands clenched, and he became aware of the fangs pressing against his lips.

Before he knew it, he had found the gap in the fence and was sliding like a shadow over the frozen ground. The wind masked the faint sound of his footsteps. It was so *easy*. Her face was turned slightly to the right. The skin of her pale cheek seemed lit from within, like warm candlelight. He could almost taste the warmth there, and he was so cold.

*Stop... stop... STOP!* His mind raged while the Beast inside him raged back. For a moment he was paralyzed as conflicting impulses fought for control of his body. Then Charlotte happened to glance over her shoulder and let out a startled cry, her gloved hand going to her mouth. Her eyes were wide with fear. The shock of her expression gave him the strength to fight his hunger down for a little while longer.

"You're... you're late," he said, a little shakily. "I was afraid you weren't going to come."

"I nearly didn't," Charlotte Dean said, her voice muffled by her glove. Wisps of auburn hair trailed from beneath her knit cap and fluttered in the cold wind, and her neck was wrapped in layers of blue woolen scarf. Her large, dark eyes still regarded Edward a little fearfully. "Daddy had me working at the house all night, gettin' the place ready for company. I had to wait 'til he went to bed, and snuck out my bedroom window."



Edward gritted his teeth, forcing down the last of his hunger, and realized that Charlotte was watching his every move. He reminded himself once again to not be taken in by her thick, West Virginia drawl. She was smart and very perceptive, easily one of the sharpest people in town. He made an effort to compose himself and took a step forward, reaching for her wrist. Gently, he pulled her hand from her face. "I'm glad to see you, Charlotte," he said, and gave her a smile. "I was just lonely, that's all."

Her dark eyes narrowed suspiciously, then twinkled with mirth. "I missed you, too," she said, her rosebud lips quirking in a faint smile. "You were all I could think about today."

Edward nodded. "Have you thought about what we discussed last Friday?"

Charlotte's smile faded. "I... I don't know...."

The vampire took her hand in his. He could see her resolve finally starting to waver, after weeks of patient effort. "Charlotte, this is a gift I want to give you. You don't have to live like this anymore. You don't *want* to live like this. You've told me so yourself."

Charlotte looked away, her face troubled. One gloved hand unconsciously rubbed her upper arm. Edward wondered if that was where her father beat her, night after night. "Daddy says he's making me strong," she said, almost in a whisper. A look of fear passed across her face, and she looked like a lost child instead of a young woman. "He says I've got to get married soon, and that I'll have to be tough."

"You are strong, Charlotte," Edward said, stepping closer. "You've lived with that bastard long after your mother couldn't. You deserve to be free of him, and I can give that to you." He reached out and touched her cheek. "You've suffered long enough. That's why I came to you."

She thought of him as her angel. Evidently she'd been sneaking away from her father's house for years to visit the old Stokes mansion. She walked the old family graveyard and combed the mildewed halls of the manor, dreaming of the day she could escape Jared Wallace Dean's brutal clutches.

The first week Edward settled into the house, he'd awoken one evening to the sound of footsteps on the attic stair. Later she said she'd come to the highest part of the house hoping to throw herself out of one of the broken windows. When she saw him, wearing some of the threadbare clothes left in the old place, she thought him a ghost.

Thinking back, Edward couldn't explain why he hadn't killed her that night. Instead, he'd asked her name, and then listened to her talk about the violent episodes of her life. She longed to escape, even if it meant her death, and that stirred something inside him. It was only later that he realized what he felt was loneliness. So he kept up his charade and became her confidante. She told him about the town and its inhabitants, and in time he realized that this was *his* domain. There was no Prince to challenge him, no Prisci to whom to kowtow. He could do with this place — these people — as he saw fit. If he chose to create a child, there was no one in Wormwood to stop him.

"But I don't want to leave my home," she said, her voice surprisingly strong. "That was my momma's house. That was where she died. When I get married, daddy says it'll be mine." Her expression darkened. "It would almost be worth it, just so I could throw that son of a bitch out."

Edward smiled. "That's just it, Charlotte. You don't have to leave. You can keep the house. Your father can even stay there — *only he would serve you*. You would be the one in charge. He'd never lay a hand on you again. Think about that."

"I know, I know. You've said it all before," Charlotte said. She looked long and hard into the vampire's eyes. "What's the catch? All you talk about is how strong and tough I'd become, and how daddy would do anything I asked. But nothing like that ever comes free. What do I got to give up in return?"

Edward reached out and touched her cheek once more. "Does it really matter? Honestly. What would you give to be free of the life you've lived?"

Charlotte took a deep breath. A tear ran down her cheek. "Anything," she whispered.

He felt a thrill race through his bones. "Then let me help you," he said, drawing her to him.

Suddenly a shaft of bright light reached across the graveyard, playing fitfully over the broken **gravestones**. Without thinking, Edward leapt away from the girl, ducking behind the moss-covered wings of a mourning angel. Charlotte turned as the light swept over her, raising a hand to the glare.

"Charlotte Ann? What in God's creation are you doin' up here?"

"Sheriff?" Charlotte squinted into the flashlight's beam. "I didn't mean no harm—"

"It ain't you I'm worried about, girl," Sheriff Henry Waugh said, his voice gruff as gravel. The beam of the flashlight played about the graveyard again. Charlotte and Edward heard the jingle of keys as the heavyset lawman approached. He wore a thick green nylon jacket with a fur collar and the patches of the Randolph County Sheriff's Department on his shoulders. He carried a shotgun in his left hand. "You get back in that little car of yours and get right home 'fore your daddy knows you snuck out again, or he'll have your hide *and* mine."

"Yes, sir," Charlotte said, her voice bleak. She crammed her hands in her pockets and walked past the sheriff, her shoulders hunched. Waugh stood in the biting wind, watching her exit through the gate and work her way down the narrow access **road** to her car. He waited until he heard the engine start and saw the headlights turn back toward town before he looked back to the statue of the angel. "Come on out," he snapped. "I know you're back there."

Edward rose smoothly from behind the **gravestone**. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" He said angrily.

"Shut up and get in the fucking car," Waugh growled. "We've got a problem."



\*\*\*

Before Edward Stokes came back to Wormwood, Henry Lee Waugh was the meanest man in town.

He'd become a soldier in '69, serving two tours with the Marines in Vietnam and killing his fair share of "gooks." He went to work in the sawmills when he got back, and after watching the old sheriff crack skulls and skim money off the local moonshiners, he realized he was missing out on his true calling. In 1975 he unseated old George Baines in the local election and had been sheriff ever since. At 52 he was a burly man who'd put on a gut from too many free meals at the local diner, and all the beer he could drink at the taverns in town, but he had hands like anvils and no qualms about using them.

Waugh had hunted all his life, and was a deadly man in the woods. Edward came to Wormwood the previous spring, running on fumes and with a dead hitchhiker in the trunk of his car. He'd stopped by the side of the **road** in the middle of a forest and dragged the body off into the trees. When he came back, Sheriff Waugh was waiting for him.

He and the sheriff had reached an understanding then and there. It was either that or kill the man, Edward knew, and he was loath to have the blood of Wormwood's protector on his hands. He needed someplace to lay low for a while, and returning to the old family home seemed like an ideal plan. With Waugh on his side, no one in town could touch him. What's more, he could feed off the local drunks every few nights in the town jail with no one the wiser. In return, Edward watched the sheriff's back every time he shook down one of the local 'shiners or pot growers up in the **hills**. There were Kindred back in Pittsburgh who would have sneered at such an arrangement, but it was a small price to pay for sanctuary.

So far, Waugh had refused every offer to taste Edward's blood, and the vampire knew better than to force the issue. Waugh wasn't getting any younger, though. Sooner or later he'd start to feel his strength slipping away. It was just a matter of time.

Waugh guided his patrol car through Wormwood's empty streets. Nearly all the storefronts were dark. Only the Honkytonk Tavern, just off the square, showed any signs of life. He eased the car past the bar, eyeing the four men loitering out front. "What the hell are you doing with Charlotte Ann Dean?" Waugh finally asked.

Edward glanced at Waugh from the shadows of the backseat. "She found me. I didn't seek her out."

"That doesn't answer my question. Her daddy's the mayor of this town, and also happens to be a cousin of mine, so you need to find someone else to pass the time with, you hear?"

The vampire shook his head. "Christ almighty! Are all you people related in the sticks?"

Much to Edward's surprise, Waugh seemed to take the jibe seriously. "Most of the old families are," he said solemnly. "And people stick to their own. It ain't like down

in the city," he said, plucking a styrofoam cup from the dashboard holder and spitting a thin stream of tobacco juice into it. "Blood runs thicker than damn near anything else up here. You'd best remember that."

"I know more about it than you can imagine," Edward said coldly. He hadn't told Waugh that his own kin once lived there, too. "Now, what's this problem of yours?"

The sheriff turned in his seat and fixed the vampire with a baleful eye. "You'll see," he said after a moment, and then turned his gaze back to the **road**.

They drove on in silence, heading east out of town. Mountains loomed on the horizon, and snow began to settle on the windshield. After almost half an hour they turned off the narrow two-lane **road** onto a rutted dirt track that led back into the trees. Edward caught a glimpse of a rusted old mailbox leaning at an angle at the mouth of the track. "Whose **house** are we going to?" he asked.

"The Hardy's," Waugh replied, easing the car down the rough path. "They've lived down here for more than 50 years. Got a call from their cousin Marie this afternoon. She lives over in Erwin. Said she hadn't been able to get anybody on the phone for a week, so she asked me to check things out."

Edward leaned forward. "And?"

Waugh edged the cruiser around a bend and pulled into a yard crowded with the rusted hulks of old cars and pickups. Beyond the wrecks, Edward could see a low, single-story **house** with a peaked roof. Lights were on behind a number of curtained windows.

The sheriff climbed from the driver's seat and went around to open Edward's door. "See for yourself," he said.

Edward climbed from the car. He felt the freezing wind on his face, but otherwise the woods were deathly still. Standing up, he could look over the hood of an old El Camino and see that the **house's** front door yawned wide, spilling yellow light onto the muddy yard.

He could smell blood from where he stood.

"Maybe you'd better stay here," Edward said, feeling his guts lurch in hunger.

"Maybe you should kiss my ass," Waugh growled. Edward realized the sheriff was carrying his shotgun again.

Slowly, carefully, Edward made his way to the **house**. Just beyond the last wreck he saw a pair of hounds that had been torn to pieces, their limbs and organs scattered across the ground. He eyed black pools of congealed blood and his tongue worked hungrily in his mouth.

There were bloodstains on the porch. Handprints, and shoeprints leading away from the **house**. Up close, Edward could see that the door had been kicked in.

Waugh cleared his throat and spoke. "When I first saw the hounds, I figured they'd fought a pack of coyotes. But then I saw those." He pointed at the prints. "What kind of shoe do you wear, Edward?"

Edward turned on the man. "You think I did this?"



Waugh's face was grim. "It wasn't anybody human, that's for sure."

Gritting his teeth, the vampire put his foot down next to one of the footprints, demonstrating that his show was at least two sizes smaller. Vindicated, he stepped into the **house**. The front door hung on a single hinge. Holes from shotgun pellets dotted the reverse side.

A naked man lay spread-eagle in the center of the living room, nailed to the floor. It looked like dogs had torn at his body. His eyes were wide and pleading, and his genitals hung from his mouth.

He'd been alive until the very end. After the dogs had been at him. After his balls had been cut off and jammed into his mouth. Edward could tell by the way the blood pooled around the body. That was something he knew well.

Streaks of blood and feces smeared the walls. Shelves had been smashed and tables overturned. Magazines, framed photos and knickknacks littered the floor.

"Rufus put up a fight, I reckon," Waugh said bleakly. "For what little good it did him." He brushed past Edward and headed to the rear of the **house**. The vampire tore his gaze away from the mutilated body and followed. They walked down a narrow, dimly lit hall and emerged into the kitchen. Broken plates crunched under the sheriff's boots as he surveyed the scene.

"I figure he thought he could hold them off at the front door while the wife and kids ran out the back. But somebody was waiting for them."

The back door hung open and the kitchen table lay in a broken heap on the porch. All of the chairs had been broken, save one. In it, a woman sat, strapped in place with layers of shiny duct tape. She was as pale as porcelain. A terrible wound gaped at her throat, but her glassy eyes were fixed on the two corpses lying across the room. Two boys, 13 and eight, lay atop one another, almost in a brotherly embrace. Both had been bitten multiple times, but they weren't the marks of angry dogs.

"She watched while they died, and then it was her turn," the sheriff said. He stared hard at Edward. "Someone drank their blood. So you can see why I'm a little fucking suspicious."

Edward stepped warily around the room. Bloody paw prints crisscrossed the tile, and more handprints smeared the walls. "You're out of your goddamn mind," Edward said angrily. One person couldn't have done this. It was a *pack* of people, and they had dogs." His mind reeled.

"Well, you tell me what happened then!" Waugh staggered to the back door and leaned against the frame. "You said there weren't any... people... like you within a hundred miles of here!"

"There aren't. We stick to cities. That's where the... food is." Edward's mind raced, trying to come up with explanations. There were stories of monsters that hunted in the wilderness — werewolves, among other things — but nothing that drank blood like the Kindred.

Waugh looked out into the darkness, shaking his head. "Something's come down out of the mountains," he said. It was the first time Edward had ever heard the burly sheriff sound afraid.

"Don't be stupid, I told you there aren't any of us out here."

"How the fuck do you know, city boy?" Waugh snarled, spitting a stream of juice out the door. "I've lived here pretty much all my life and there's parts of those hills I've never seen. Parts I've never *wanted* to see." He hung his head, ashamed of his own display of fear. "There's stories of places, towns that no one comes or goes from. I've heard stories from my granddaddy not even *you* would believe. You ain't from here. You don't know a damn thing about the hills or our ways."

Edward bared his teeth, fighting the urge to knock the insolent man to the ground. *Maybe I should have killed the idiot when I first saw him*, he thought. In truth, Edward didn't remember the local stories from his long-past mortal days. "Listen to me," he finally said. "There are no vampires in the hills. None. You have your ways. We have ours. We have laws and traditions that are older than you could imagine. Vampires could no more prosper in those mountains than you could live on the moon." He planted his hands on his hips and surveyed the wreckage. "It's got to be a pack of nomads."

The sheriff raised his head. "Come again?"

"We travel just like you do, but we don't care much for planes. Some vampires have been known to wander like gypsies, despite the dangers." He nodded to himself. That sort of made sense. "They needed to eat, and found an out of the way place to feed. They could be hundreds of miles away by now."

Waugh stared hard at Edward. "You think so?"

"Nothing else makes sense."

The sheriff straightened with a sigh. "What the hell am I going to tell Marie... the cousin?"

"Tell her there was a fire," Edward said flatly. "Is there a propane tank out back?"

\*\*\*

When Edward rose the next night, Waugh's car was waiting outside the old manor.

"You were wrong," Waugh said after the vampire emerged from the **house**. "There's hill folk in town. I saw them in the general store this afternoon."

"If they were out in the *daylight* I guarantee you they aren't vampires," Edward snapped.

Waugh didn't give any ground, planting his fists on his gun belt. "Well if you're so goddamned smart maybe you can tell me why they're laying up at the Crowder farm. I followed 'em after they left the store and they're as thick as flies all around the old homestead."

Edward glared angrily for a moment, debating what to do. "All right," he said at last. "Let's go get some answers."

The old Crowder farm was just south of town and had been abandoned for at least 10 years, after the eldest Crowder died picking tobacco and the kids moved their mother to nearby Erwin. The fields all lay fallow and the old clapboard **house** sat beneath the shade of a huge elm tree.

There seemed to be no lights inside as the patrol car pulled up to the **house**, but a **bonbonfire** was burning in the yard. Three old pickups sat in the yard in a loose semicircle around the blaze. Silhouettes of people moved at the edge of the firelight.

Edward felt his dead heart lurch at the sight of the flames. He ground his teeth and glared at the shifting light until the surge of panic subsided. "Fucking hicks," he snarled. Somewhere near the back of the **house** he could hear the yammering of a pack of dogs.

Several of the silhouettes stepped in front of the fire and faced the dark police car. Waugh took a deep breath. "Well, they know we're here. Now what?"

Edward shrugged out of his coat. "We lay down the law," he said. "If they're nomads, I tell them who's boss and we send them on their way. If they're just hicks squatting on an old farm then we crack some heads."

Waugh nodded. That was something he understood. "You sure you're up to his?" he asked, reaching back for his shotgun.

The vampire smiled, showing his fangs. "Remind me to tell you one of these nights why I got run out of Pittsburgh."

Edward's body changed even as he climbed from the car. He summoned the fury from his desiccated veins, drawing upon the potency of his stolen blood. His fingers lengthened into vicious, black claws, and his muscles trembled like taut steel cables. He called upon the Beast and let it radiate from his body, showing him for the true predator that he was.

*It's been a while*, Edward thought with a savage grin. *These bastards better step and fetch or someone's going to die tonight.*

Edward headed right for the fire. The closer he got, the better he could see the men shadowed by the flames. They wore overalls or jeans and stained shirts. Not a one of them was shorter than six feet. The hill folk had weathered skin and scars on their faces and hands. Some wore their hair

long, while others were shaved bare. They watched Edward with the kind of soulless interest typical of a hunting dog, but they gave way as the vampire approached. They were mortal. Edward could almost taste their blood.

Waugh stayed close beside the vampire, shotgun held ready. If the presence of the gun or the lawman troubled the hill folk, they gave no sign.

The door to the **farmhouse** hung open and dim light shone inside. Convinced that the mortals around the fire were no threat, Edward stepped onto the porch and proceeded inside.

It was nothing like the Hardy **house** within. It was much, much worse.

The stench of rotting meat hung heavy in the air. Blood was spattered and smeared over every surface. Someone had even scrawled crude letters on the plaster façade of one wall: *Blood comes first. Never betray the blood.* Carcasses of animals littered the floor, their entrails heaped together.

In the middle of the room, surrounded by carrion, sat a woken corpse.

The creature stared at Edward with bright, glassy eyes. Its skin was withered and leathery, pulled back from its mouth and eye sockets like that of a mummy. Wisps of white hair fringed a skull browned with age, and the figure's hands were curled into twisted claws.

Edward looked into the monster's eyes and knew that he was in the presence of another vampire.

Waugh let out a shriek, his shotgun clattering to the floor as he staggered back into the night. A groaning, bubbling sound welled up from the withered vampire's throat. It took a moment for Edward's stunned mind to realize that the thing was laughing. Then its jaws moved and the creature spoke.

"Boys! Get in here," the creature grated. "*We got us a visitor.*"

Edward fought for self-control, his feet rooted to the spot. His mind reeled. "What... what in the name of God are you?" he asked.

There was the faintest whisper of wind against his face, and then a fearsome blow struck him in the side of the head. As he crashed to the floor, a voice behind him said, "Show some respect to yer elders, boy."

Edward rolled onto his back. Another vampire loomed over him. Though the newcomer was younger looking than the withered thing sitting in the room — this one's hair was jet-black — his skin was also deeply tanned and wrinkled. He wore engineer's boots and frayed jeans, topped by a worn flannel shirt. Like Edward, his fingers were tipped with vicious claws.

"Well, lookee here," the new vampire said, smiling cruelly. His blue eyes were dead as stones. "You must be that city boy we heard about."

"This is my domain," Edward growled, surging to his feet. "The Traditions—"

The black-haired vampire struck with blinding speed, raking his talons across Edward's face. Edward screamed, reeling backward, and the man grabbed him by the



throat. "Traditions? That your city law, boy? We only got one law here." He spun Edward around and pointed to the writing on the wall. "Blood comes first. If you ain't kin, you're just meat." The vampire spun Edward around again. "And you ain't no kin of mine."

Edward roared as the Beast within him flared. A red rage roiled up and he lashed at the sneering face before him. Claws cut and blood flowed, and he remembered nothing more.

\*\*\*

When Edward came to his senses, he realized how badly he'd been hurt. His body was a mass of torn tissue and shredded flesh.

He tried to peer through crusted lids. The hill folk had tied him to a post outside. Something heavy surrounded his lower legs. Looking down, he saw that it was a pair of old tires.

Edward heard a man's laughter nearby. He'd heard that voice before. He forced his eyes open a bit more and realized that he wasn't at the Crowder farm any more.

He was back in town, in a grassy backyard surrounded by a high fence. A tall **house** loomed up in front of him, its windows dark. People milled about in the shadows, hill folk and locals. As his head moved, he heard murmurs from the gathered figures, and they drew closer.

Amid them was a figure in white. Edward tried to focus. The first person he recognized was Sheriff Waugh, his face a pale mask of terror. He was wearing a suit, complete with a carnation in his lapel.

Beside Waugh was a heavysset man with a florid face and knobby knuckles. Edward's mind worked, trying to place the face, and then he remembered. It was the mayor, Jared Wallace Dean. He moved as though in a dream, his face both beatific and dreadful at the same time.

Then the figure in white resolved, and Edward realized that it was Charlotte. She wore a silk wedding dress streaked with blood. Her eyes were glassy with shock.

Wild cheers echoed across the lawn, and the hill folk raced around Dean and his kin. They surrounded Edward, shouting Charlotte's name. One of the burly men held a pine bough wrapped in rags. As Edward watched, he pulled out a lighter and the **torch** flared to life.

Terror sang along Edward's limbs. With the last of his strength he fought against his bonds, but his ruined body betrayed him. As he struggled, he saw the black-haired vampire step into view.

The vampire's weathered face was a ruin. Edward's claws had torn deep furrows across his cheek and had put out his right eye. Much of his nose was gone, too. For all that, however, the creature managed a white-toothed smile.

Waugh moaned and fell to his knees. "I tried to tell you. I tried!" he whimpered. It took a moment before Edward realized the sheriff was talking to him.

The black-haired vampire shook his head and looked at Waugh. "You're wasting your breath, cousin," the creature said. "He ain't kin. Not like *us*." Still smiling, he turned to Charlotte and took her hand, then looked back at Edward. "We're all one family. Soon me and this pretty little wife of mine will make us a brood, and you'll be a proud *uncle*, Sheriff Waugh."

The vampire held out Charlotte's hand and the **torch** was pressed into her grip. "But first there's a little something you got to do for me, sugar," the monster said, showing no apparent fear of the deadly flame. "Your daddy told us how strong you are. Now show me."

He stepped away. Charlotte looked at the torch, then to her father. "Go on," the mayor said. "The family ain't got no use for weaklings. After all, he's just some city boy."

Charlotte turned. A slow smile spread across her face, and she held out the torch to the tires. Edward writhed and screamed.

"All I ever wanted was a family," she said, watching Edward burn.



## *Lineage of the Blood*

The clans of the Kindred are as aged as vampires themselves. Initiation into the night is synonymous with being Embraced as one of the Daeva, Gangrel, Nosferatu, Mekhet or Ventrue. It goes without saying that a mortal cursed with unlife joins his sire in the blood of his clan. That has been the reality of the Danse Macabre for millennia.

And yet, Kindred aren't strictly bound to a single fate once they're reborn. While they're turned into, say, Gangrel or Mekhet, that blood does not necessarily define who and what they are and always will be. The nuances of the Requiem are more subtle and mysterious than that. The ages have shown that if a vampire undergoes traumatic, grueling or obsessive abuse or effort, he may literally change the very nature of the Blood. A Ventrue's insanity could take such a bizarre or compelling turn that its victim emerges as something else. A Nosferatu's single-mindedness in pursuing a goal could alter his very supernatural identity, turning him into something different from his clanmates.

Such transformations, while they almost always begin with individual vampires, can result in whole lineages of Kindred who deviate from their parent clans. The result is a bloodline; an offshoot, derivation, distraction or refinement of recognized vampire ancestry. How such divergences are defined — with praise or derision — is merely a matter of the originator's perspective, or that of the brethren he leaves behind.

Of course, whether the founder of a new strain is able to foster a new and unique bloodline is subject to a variety of factors. While the conditions that changed him obviously give him new capabilities and possibilities, they may not translate to his progeny. The values that he upheld may not be important to his childer. Or other undead, jealous or afraid of what a vampire might be capable of, could commit him to Final Death before his "blasphemy" can spread. Or the founder's amazing transformation could be so alien to others that they actively avoid following his path. In these cases, a new "bloodline" is nothing of the sort. It's a single aberration

that lasts only as long as the Kindred who achieves it.

A true and lasting bloodline flows from the single vampire who changes his Requiem. He Embraces childer who are forced or who choose to follow in his footsteps, adopting his blood and learning the capabilities that their altered Vitae awakens. When these progeny Embrace in turn, a full-fledged lineage emerges, whether it's welcomed or condemned in wider undead circles.

A bloodline gains true independence, however, when other vampires of the clan seek out members to be indoctrinated into the brood. They seek to align their blood with that of the lineage, forever throwing their lot in with line members. That is the watermark at which a bloodline achieves acceptance, or is the sign that a blood hunt must be called to wipe it out once and for all.

The Bloodlines series explores the established and secretive lineages of the undead. Vampires of such varied heritage may be recognized and prominent members of their domains, or outcasts or exiles who are sooner persecuted than tolerated. The Hidden focuses on lines that have gone unknown, that have been kept quiet and out of sight, or that have only just emerged in recent decades and that have yet to find their place in the World of Darkness. Players may create characters who join these lines shortly after the Embrace. Storytellers may introduce their members as freakish and mysterious acquaintances, antagonists or allies in a chronicle. Or players may withhold bloodline choice in an ongoing game in anticipation of ones here or in other Bloodlines books truly raising their characters' blood. After all, blood calls to blood.

## *Vagaries of the Blood*

A dozen broods are presented in this book for use in Vampire: The Requiem. Each has its own compulsions, vulnerabilities, obsessions, fears and most importantly intentions. For complete information on joining a line and the rules for doing so, see Appendix 1 of Vampire.

**Alucinator:** Inheritors of this line are afflicted with the same tormented dreams and visions of their originator, who is said to have been haunted by victims of diablerie.





These Sandmen extend their Requiem into the realm of dreams through the Insomnium Discipline.

**Anvari:** Not even the vampiric Embrace allows some undead to escape the embrace of drug addiction. Bearers of this blood suffer obsession with altered states, whether for themselves or by inflicting them upon others through the unique Nepenthe power.

**Architects of the Monolith:** Megalomania compels vampires of this lineage to deviate from even the dementia of other Ventrue. Recognizing themselves as veritable gods in their urban domains, so-called Masons make the gilded cage a Discipline in and of itself.

**Bohagande:** Luck follows these wayward Gangrel wherever they go, but so does trouble, jealousy, suspicion and paranoia. Reportedly altered by an encounter with the spirit world itself, these traveling lodestones push their luck and test the tolerance of fellow Kindred.

**Gethsemani:** Blessed and chosen in life, those indoctrinated as Ecstatics have nothing but affliction and abuse to spread in undeath. Reaped from among stigmatics, they curse unfortunate mortals to exhibit twisted signs of divinity, which feed the vampires' unholy appetites.

**Khaibit:** Quiet and unseen, but omnipresent, the vampires derided as mere servants bear a far more important heritage and duty than even they know. Their unique Obtenebration Discipline is only a hint of their higher calling.

**Morotrophians:** Reclusive, isolationist and even shut in, the vampires once known as Monks lurk in the cor-

ridors and cellars of the looming institutions of the world. Their domains are wards, prisons and care facilities where prey are weak, tired, sickly or held hostage for private dining.

**Nahualli:** Originating in Mexico, the derisively named Jekylls search for balance between what they perceive as the two sides of the Kindred spirit: the cultured and genteel, and the ravaging Beast. Manners and mayhem are their stock and trade.

**Nelapsi:** Gluttonous and horrifying hunger defines the Locusts, and makes them a nightmare and threat to even elder Kindred. That this line is largely confined to eastern Europe is cold consolation to vampires who have heard whispers of its legend.

**Oberlochs:** Not all undead choose to haunt the world's cities. Some prefer backwater towns and isolated communities that they call their own. That's where the inbred and reclusive Brood sets up house with its kin.

**Qedeshah:** The self-proclaimed mothers of the undead, the Hierodules claim the religious right — no, duty — to spread their supernatural race. Challengers of the Second Tradition, these vampires are either condemned by Princes or turned to for protection by supplicating wards.

**Rakshasa:** Mysterious strangers from the East, the Demons allude to divine heritage and a heavenly mission, but show only grace and favor to vampires of the West. The temptations of the foreigners' services are great, but what ultimate price do they charge?



# ALUCINOR

YOU PROBABLY HAVEN'T SEEN ME WATCHING WHILE YOU SLEEP,  
BUT YOU FEAR ME WHEN YOU'RE AWAKE. IN THOSE MOMENTS BETWEEN SLUMBER AND AWARENESS,  
WHEN YOU'RE PARALYZED BY ALL THE HIDDEN THINGS AROUND YOU, BEFORE THEY RESOLVE INTO THE MUNDANE.

The rapacious, cannibalistic nature of Kindred lends them a nightmarish quality in fiction, but the Alucinator reside within those horrid dreams. This is not to say that they are nothing more than figments of imagination. Rather, the Alucinator have a powerful sensitivity to dreams and nightmares. While the potent psyche of the Beast allows some Kindred to invade the minds of mortals, the mind of a "Sandman" roams the dreams of other beings, collecting imagery and sometimes encroaching on mortal slumber with a restless, crawling sense of horror.

While evidence points to the foundation of the Alucinator sometime around A.D. 450, the bloodline has always remained small in numbers. For the most part, Sandmen have remained behind the scenes, using their curious oneiromancy to advise Princes or embarrass enemies. The most prominent, recent and known Alucinator appearance focused on one Ariadne Metaxas, a Greek Cypriot Mekhet, who created a stir in 1931 when she evidenced the unusual capabilities of the line. She was alleged to have sent dream-images to several of Paris' established Kindred before she arrived at her first salon in the city, conveying a recognizable image of herself before they'd ever met. Ultimately, Metaxas proved to be little more than a social butterfly who'd attuned herself to the Blood after a series of haunting dreams. By 1935, she succumbed to increasingly traumatic nightmares. After becoming little more than a shattered husk of her former self, obsessed with the then-nascent writings of Carl Jung, she disappeared from the social scene. Sightings of Alucinator have remained uncommon since. Perhaps a dozen have made their way through American cities in the last decade.

Alucinator generally fall into one of two social categories: those whose obsession with dreams leads them into inward-focused detachment, and those who retain a keen insight into others' psyches. The former rarely interact with other vampires, shunning contact because the fever-dreams of torporous Kindred often convey powerful, terrifying imagery. The latter tend to be hangers-on at courts, using their peculiar insights to play on the hidden fears and desires of the undead. More than one Alucinator has parlayed her visions into a useful advisory position, educating a Prince or elder about his enemies in exchange for protection and favors.

Even more so than most Mekhet, the Alucinator have a bent for prophecy. Their ability to interpret stolen dreams

gives members of the line an edge in fathoming the hidden motives of mortals and Kindred. Overexposure to others' dreams can cause problems, though. Alucinator suffer from occasional intrusions of dreams into their waking moments. Their own nightmares can also warp due to the influence of strong emotions from other sleepers, causing them to experience false memories. Much like Kindred who spend too much time in torpor, Alucinator can be uncertain of what memories are fact and what are imagined. Sandmen who become highly attuned to dreams are often withdrawn and cryptic, given to conclusions based less on logic than on hallucinatory insight. Most fear torpor and the inevitable nightmares that it portends.

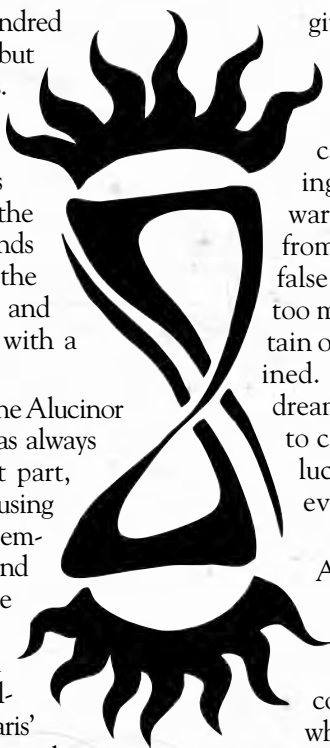
On one recent occasion, an exclamatory Alucinator demanded audience at a Kindred gathering in order to give dire predictions based on the hidden tensions of the city's political elite. His warnings proved at least partially correct. He suffered Final Death within a week when a particularly torrid nightmare gripped him and sent him sleepwalking during the day.

**Parent Clan:** Mekhet

**Nickname:** Sandmen

**Covenant:** Those Alucinator who focus on dream symbolism tend to avoid the social trappings of Kindred society and remain nominally unbound. Nevertheless, the Kindred need for social acclaim (or the pressure of politics) sometimes drives a Sandman into sporadic contact with certain others. The Ordo Dracul has the most contact with the Alucinator. The Order goes out of its way to puzzle out occult symbols in Alucinator dreams, while Sandmen appreciate the society's focus on exploring the mysteries of the vampiric condition. Members of the Ordo Dracul suspect that Alucinator attunement to dreams may reflect a higher level of consciousness, and could be a stepping stone in the process of relieving the undead condition.

Some Princes of Carthian or Invictus bent seek the Alucinator out for their insights into the Kindred psyche, a role that the unscrupulous Sandman may even relish. Line members who don't eschew society often fall into one of these camps, because resultant political contacts are useful in night-to-night survival. The worldly focus of both covenants also helps to ground the Alucinator in affairs of the present.





At least one line member has taken his dreams as divine messages and sought out membership in the Lancea Sanctum. The Spear as a whole has not yet decided whether the Alucinator are touched by holy insight or haunted by demons. Nevertheless, a significant faction argues that Alucinator dreams may be a sign of divine inspiration, or possibly visions of Heaven and Hell, so they merit further investigation.

The Circle of the Crone sees Alucinator insight as a feminine aspect, but the bloodline itself is equally composed of males and females, and the Sandmen generally have no special interest in the philosophies of Acolytes in any case. Some Alucinator believe the Circle may have a means to control nightmares, and seek out that information, but Kindred occultism being as jealously guarded as it is, no remedies have been revealed.

**Appearance:** Although young line members tend to dress in a manner suited to the time of their Embrace, the toll of an existence half-dominated by fantasy and whimsy causes them to become eccentric over time. New Alucinator favor tasteful, relaxed clothes from the mortal world. Eventually, the pressures of nightmares cause these undead to develop a distracted air. They give up on following kine fashions, instead becoming stuck in the same styles they wore when they joined the bloodline. Some go so far as to eschew care for their appearance completely, becoming haggard and unkempt. Alucinator who delve deeply into Insomnium sometimes become so distanced from their physical states that they wear only tattered nightgowns, worn-out ensembles or threadbare antiques, perceiving the physical world as somehow less real than their own dreams. Sandmen who remain tied to Kindred politics favor the dark, forbidding attire more common to the Mekhet in general.

**Haven:** Young and old Alucinator alike prefer secure, secretive lairs where they can conduct their studies of psychology in seclusion. For Alucinator with a bent toward politics, this means a compound in the city, usually in an academic, upper-class location. A few Alucinator even take up residence as “permanent guests” with their patrons. Sandmen who eschew politics gravitate toward rural estates, where they can avoid dealing with other Kindred. Rustic Sandmen focus ever more deeply on peeling back layers of meaning from their odd visions. Alucinator are as likely as any other Kindred to have (or not have)



various servants in their homes. Most line members avoid using traps or heavy security; a single hallucinatory episode might be enough to kill oneself in one's own haven.

**Background:** The Alucinator bloodline has no moratorium on membership; Mekhet become Sandmen by personal predilection rather than by some sort of initiation. Exact membership numbers are impossible to determine, as the Alucinator would never congregate as a whole. Rather, they tend to spring from Mekhet who have an attraction to symbolism. Those who give themselves over to fantasies, flights of fancy or twisted imaginings. Alucinator often quest for the cryptic meaning hidden in some form of art, whether by seeking the underpinnings of James Joyce's writing, by searching for connections to reality in Salvador Dali's paintings, or by whispering prayers to every Catholic saint over a reliquary saved from destruction during the Dark Ages. These perustrations through abstraction can lead to insight or madness. A vampire, whatever his reason to attune to the bloodline, tends to become consumed with symbolism to the point of losing functionality. For most would-be Alucinator, this is simply a journey into understanding a greater aspect of their own nature and subconscious urges.

When an Alucinator creates a new Kindred (a rare event), the convert is as likely as not to go his own way. Choices of progeny can range from the lures that attract normal vampires — utility, sensuality, camaraderie — to esoteric choices based on a moment of symbolism. Childer are not coerced into joining the lineage, although those who go out of their way to direct their blood in a different direction generally drift away from their sires. Outsider Mekhet who force themselves into alignment with the lineage may garner some degree of scorn or respect, depending on their approach. Those who don't appreciate the significance of dream interpretation are often rebuffed, on the rare occasion of a bloodline meeting.

**Character Creation:** Most Alucinator are startlingly insightful, although the practicality of their erudition is another matter. As questers seeking self-knowledge and understanding of symbols, line members usually have sharp, intuitive minds. Mental Attributes tend to be high, with Social Attributes well-rounded and Physical Attributes ranging from frail to average. Many Alucinator have a low Resolve, though, stemming from their inability to separate fact from fancy. The Alucinator also tend to rely on Mental and Social Skills, while Physical Skills atrophy to rudimentary levels. Alucinator who've been around for any length of time often invest a great deal of effort into supporting a proper Haven, so that they can remain closeted away in safety.

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

**Weakness:** As inheritors of Mekhet Blood, Alucinator bear the burden of their parent clan. Whenever Sandmen suffer damage from sunlight or fire, they take an additional point of aggravated damage from that source.

Yet, strange dreams and nightmares also trouble an Alucinator with every day of corpse-like rest. Over time, these visions intrude on the vampire's waking hours. Sandmen sometimes have difficulty remembering whether a particular trauma was real or just a hallucination. An Alucinator never regains Willpower as a result of a day's sleep. The vampire can also have difficulty distinguishing whether she is currently awake or asleep and dreaming. One scene per chapter (game session), the Storyteller may inject a piece of delusion into the Alucinator's experiences, such as an overheard snatch of conversation that doesn't seem real, or a brief glimpse of an event that may or may not actually happen. These hallucinations rarely last more than a few seconds and usually inject only a single object or phrase into the Alucinator's mind. When they happen, however, all rolls made for the character suffer a -1 penalty for the remainder of the scene.

From time to time, Alucinator also experience bits of dreams creeping into their conscious moments as a side effect of the Insomnium Discipline, which can lead to even further confusion. Not even powers such as Auspex help alleviate this problem (the subject's mind excels at tricking itself, after all).

**Organization:** There's no organization to the Alucinator beyond their shared connection to dreams. Of course, Sandmen in reasonably close proximity become aware of one another quickly; use of the most basic Insomnium powers can let them sense the mélange of dreams that afflict any of their own kind. The Alucinator are probably one of the few bloodlines with a motive to actively discourage interaction with others of their blood. These vampires dislike being reminded of their particular burden, and tend to be embittered when forced into the company of others who represent their own shortcomings. Even Alucinator sires and childer tend to become estranged after a short time.

**Concepts:** Dreamtime shaman, information broker, lunatic, political analyst, oracle, psychologist, sleep therapist, surrealist artist

## HISTORY

In spite of the Alucinator low profile until 1931, their history reaches back much further. Unreliable but recurring nightmares in the lineage suggest that the line founder was female, and she diablerized a much older vampire some time during the era of the Roman Empire. The imprint of the elder's personality permanently twisted the psyche of the then-fledgling, leaving her sensitive to others' strong emotions and personalities while she slept. A few Alucinator even speculate that the diablerized elder's personality has fragmented and resides in every Alucinator, emerging during slumber to look for tiny pieces of dreams that remind it of its former self. Since the founder remains hidden away, the brood uses the name Alucinator from the Latin term for the world of dreams. No other proper name is known.



Legend aside, the Alucinator definitely predate the modern era. The effects of their Insomnium Discipline may contribute to medieval stories of succubi. (Indeed, the Lancea Sanctum is quick to caution that this possible influence reinforces the possibility of demonic influence in the bloodline.) During the Renaissance, when artists called upon Muses and dreams for inspiration, the Alucinator may have had a hand in some of the disturbing (and later surreal) art that came out of the period.

If there is a founder from ancient times, her actual identity remains shrouded. Ariadne Metaxas supposedly aligned herself to the lineage after several months of communion in dreams, chasing after a barely visible image of an androgynous figure. This figure, presumably the line's progenitor, has never been met in person in the modern age — at least, as far as anyone knows. Alucinator who commit diablerie reportedly suffer intense nightmares in which a shrouded figure beckons to them, accusingly or hungrily. It is even remotely possible that the first Alucinator has herself become nothing more than a roaming nightmare, limited to communion with her line through rare glimpses into their sleeping psyches.

Alucinator history in Kindred society primarily concerns the few who sell their services for political gain. This practice gives the Alucinator something of a mercenary reputation. As far as anyone knows, there has never been an Alucinator Prince, but there have been multiple Alucinator advisors to the throne.

## SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The Alucinator lack a coherent organization of their own. They usually retain their mortal habits and dress for a time, those behaviors falling away until only bits and pieces are left and a line member cannot even remember why they were important. Each Alucinator's outlook on society, mores and personal morality is therefore an unconscious amalgamation of her mortal experiences, her vampiric urges, and the jarring images that lurk in her dreams. The danger of running afoul of another Alucinator in dreams means that the Sandmen tend to give one another a wide berth.

### THE DREAM DANCE

Thanks to hallucinations brought on by waking dreams, Alucinator sometimes experience "events" that aren't real, or misremember events in twisted ways. Ultimately, the burden is upon the player to portray the unique flaw of the bloodline, but players who insist on refusing to do so should certainly suffer its effects by Storyteller decree — and chronically. Alucinator can, after all, be victimized while asleep by the Insomnium powers of other Sandmen, or caused to misremember crucial facts. Since the Storyteller is the only arbiter on what any given character sees and hears, she can selectively edit a character's experiences. Maybe a line member can puzzle out what's true

or false with enough reasoning and careful records, but who's to say that some cherished memory isn't anything more than a fantasy? This weakness could be handled as something like the Amnesia Flaw (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 218), but without any experience point rewards for portraying the trait.

## INSOMNIUM

The signature Discipline of the Alucinator indicates not sleeplessness, but rather the tendency of dreams to intrude upon the Sandmen, even while they're awake. The Alucinator wield a subtle power over dreams, but this subtlety also means that it is sometimes impossible to determine what effects, if any, a given manifestation of Insomnium may take. Like dreams themselves, effects of the Discipline are often transitory and ephemeral. Even an Alucinator of immense Blood Potency can rarely exert fine control. The elder's powers have sublime influence on his consciousness, instead.

Of course, the Alucinator ability to manipulate sleep and dreams has its shortcomings. Insomnium cannot change one's own dreams; a Sandman can reach out to tug at another's dream and give it a specific tenor, but she remains the servant of her own terrors when trapped in a personal nightmare.

### • DREAMS OF THE MANY

The first sign of alignment with Alucinator blood is manifestation of this basic capability of the Insomnium Discipline. The vampire becomes attuned to the dreams of people around her. Since the Alucinator is generally active at night, the dreams of mortals are a constant, subconscious flood, one that is usually ignored. Other vampires tend to weave dark dreams from their own personal vices, and these can impact an Alucinator during daily sleep. A line member is especially sensitive to dreams of her own lineage, their visions seeming to merge into powerful nightmares.

While the pressure of outside dreams is usually a mere distraction, an Alucinator can also pull bits of emotion from them. By concentrating on the fleeting impressions left by dreams, the vampire can discern useful information or gather currents of thought from nearby sleepers. The mind defends itself, however, even while subjects sleep; deciphering the dreams of individuals with great mental fortitude can be a challenge.

An Alucinator can attune to dreams of only people who are asleep, and only to those within a number of miles equal to the character's Insomnium dots (which is the range for all the powers of this Discipline). As with all vampiric capabilities, this range is subject to vagaries. On rare occasions, an Alucinator may fail to notice the blissful slumber of someone nearby, or may sense the anguish of a powerful dream from a greater distance. Gazing into the Dreams of the Many does nothing to give a character a sense of a subject's location. The Sandman simply "swims" through a sea of dreams until

he finds pieces of identity that conform to his notion of the desired subject. On some occasions, an Alucinator even gleams bits of prophetic insight from collective dreams.

Although swimming through dreams requires nothing more than a few moments of concentration, many Alucinator find it helpful to hold and caress an item of some value to an intended subject. A favored childhood doll, a vial of Vitae or some similarly personal memento can act as a focus that aids in chasing down the dreams of an individual.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Reading the dreams of others uses Wits + Empathy + Insomnium versus the subject's Resolve + Blood Potency. Oneiromancy (see below) uses Wits + Occult + Insomnium.

**Action:** Dream-reading is contested; resistance is reflexive. Oneiromancy is instant.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Pieces of dreams wash over the Alucinator's mind, causing hallucinations and figments of imagination. These hallucinations may include strange noises, changes in scenery, distant voices or other haunting effects. All rolls involving Resolve or Composure suffer a -1 penalty for the remainder of the scene. Multiple dramatic failures in the same scene cause a cumulative penalty, as your character becomes more and more absorbed in fantasy.

**Failure:** Your character loses or ties the contested roll. He senses only incoherent babble from the subconscious minds of the world's sleepers. A successive attempt may be possible at the expense of more Willpower.

**Success:** Your character wins the contested roll. The Alucinator garners a symbolic moment from the dreams observed, briefly stealing a glimpse of the deeply held feelings of the subject. Your character may learn of an item or person of value to the subject, or of a hidden fear. The Storyteller decides what is seen and what significance it holds. In practical terms, you gain a +1 bonus on Social rolls in regard to the subject for the next month. This bonus is not cumulative for multiple successful uses of the power.

Alternatively, the Alucinator may simply sift through the tide of dreams, gleaming insight into the future. Interpretation is often difficult, but it sometimes gives a startlingly clear image of some upcoming event. Performing this sort of "oneiromancy" grants a re-roll on any one dice pool for the remainder of the night. No more than one re-roll can be achieved per night.

**Exceptional Success:** Peering into the subject's innermost fears or desires, your character immediately learns one of the subject's Virtue, Vice, Morality or Humanity score, or that the subject is a diablerist (your choice). Repeated applications of the power and repeated exceptional successes in a single month do not allow other pieces of information to be learned. If the Alucinator applies Dreams of the Many as a prelude to using a greater Insomnium power on the subject, a +1 bonus is also gained on the activation roll of that power,

as long as it is within a month. No more than a single +1 bonus is gained to other activation rolls against a target.

An Alucinator who swims the sea of dreams is still aware of her own surroundings. If she performs an action aside from meddling in dreams, the connection to her subject is broken immediately.

### Suggested Modifiers

#### Modifier Situation

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| +2 | Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie ( <b>Vampire</b> , p. 162) |
| +1 | The Alucinator holds an item of special significance to the subject                        |
| -1 | The Alucinator does not know, has never seen or has never met the subject                  |
| -1 | The Alucinator cannot see the subject when the power is used                               |

## .. LUCID DREAMING

With this power, an Alucinator learns to apply her will to others' dreams. The vampire can determine their course or be a primary participant in them. Of course, this is all merely a matter of changing a subject's imaginary world, but it can still have profound effects, whether by sending messages, creating nightmares or simply disorienting the subject is his waking hours.

Before manifesting in the dreams of another, an Alucinator must first sense the subject through use of Dreams of the Many. After a successful attunement, the Sandman can exert pressure to change those dreams. In almost every case, the vampire herself makes a fleeting appearance in the dreams at the time of the change. This appearance is usually subtle; dreamers may experience oddities in the landscape, the sudden appearance of a strange animal or person, or an unrecognized item — most often, this is something that has significance to the Alucinator in question. Many Sandmen take on certain "signature" themes and use them repeatedly when communicating through or haunting a subject's visions. The strange dream-appearance of an albino cat or the recurring vision of an ancient ceremonial glaive need not be simple coincidence.

Some old vampires who have suffered the ravages of torpor whisper that the Alucinator use this power to manipulate the nightmares of slumbering Kindred. By repeating false scenes over and over again, elders claim, bloodline members can cause other vampires to come to unrealistic conclusions about their past, accentuating the effects of torporous hallucinations. If the Alucinator have any motive in doing so, it remains a mystery.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Subterfuge + Insomnium versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

**Action:** Extended and contested, resistance is reflexive (a number of successes is required for each party equal to the opponent's Willpower dots; each rolls represents one turn)



## Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** All accumulated successes are lost by the Alucinator. Nightmarish images flirt with the vampire's waking senses and cause distraction, fear and paranoia. The Alucinator suffers a -1 penalty to rolls involving Resolve or Composure for the remainder of the night. Multiple dramatic failures with this power in the same night cause a cumulative penalty, as your character becomes more and more absorbed in fantasy. A dramatic failure rolled for the subject automatically awards the Alucinator with successful application of the power, regardless of how many successes have been accumulate for him.

**Failure:** No successes are accumulated at this time. The Alucinator is not yet able to guide the dreams of the subject.

**Success:** Successes are gathered or the number required to overcome is accumulated. If the subject wins, the power has no effect. If the Alucinator wins, he makes a subtle change to the subject's dream. The Sandman can pick one element and add or change it in subtle way. For example, the sky might suddenly become overcast or dozens of feline eyes might peer out from the dark corners of the dream. The Alucinator's control is not great enough to cause radical alterations, such as turning an otherwise normal daytime sky into a green pastiche, or setting the entire dream in a raging bonfire. Alternatively, the Alucinator could intentionally interject herself or some item or creature of significance to her (any item connected to her or to one of her derangements, Merits or Flaws would be appropriate). The Alucinator can choose to exert a direct message of three words while in the dream, whether by speaking or writing. Symbolic messages, such as appearing as a black cat to suggest bad luck, have no such limit on size, although they're open to interpretation thereafter. Effects wrought in a dream persist until the dream ends or for a number of turns equal to the vampire's Insomnium dots, whichever comes first.

Because dreams leave only fleeting memories, a Wits + Investigation roll may be required for the subject to fully remember what happened. The subject certainly remembers the Alucinator's appearance on an exceptional success (even if the Alucinator did not intend to be recognizable). The Alucinator can also cause a sudden start that immediately awakens the subject (although it

cannot awaken a vampire in torpor). Attempts to influence the subject can alter the subject's mood and cause an uncanny sense of déjà vu that grants a +1 bonus or -1 penalty on the next degeneration roll made for the subject.

**Exceptional Success:** Major headway is made toward achieving or defying influence. Or, five or more successes are gathered than needed for the power to take effect (or to resist the vampire's efforts). The Alucinator takes firm control of the dream and can reshape elements of it in prominent ways. This could mean changing

the existence of gravity, removing a person from a sequence, or suddenly transposing the dreamer into a new scene. If the Alucinator chooses to insert herself in the dream imagery, she can deliver any message she desires in that time (a paragraph of useful information is possible, but a lengthy dissertation would not be). Whether the subject remembers it all correctly or acts upon it is another matter. By twisting a dream in unpleasant ways, an Alucinator can also temporarily cause the subject great discomfort. She inflicts the Phobia or Paranoia derangement, which persists until the subject sleeps again the next night (or day for another vampire).

An Alucinator who influences the dream of another is still aware of her own surroundings. If she performs an action aside from meddling in a dream, the connection to her subject is broken immediately.

## Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie ( <i>Vampire</i> , p. 162)
+1	An exceptional success was recently achieved in a previous use of Dreams of the Many
-1	The Alucinator does not know, has never seen or has never met the subject
-1	The Alucinator cannot see the subject when the power is used



## ... CHAIN THE ENSLUMBERED MIND

In medieval literature, victims of succubi often describe the sensation of paralysis combined with a malevolent female presence. Although modern psychology considers such night terrors to merely be a product of the mind on the edge of consciousness, the Alucinator can inflict this state on a sleeping victim. The Alucinator simply concentrates on the subject's dreams and blends that fantasy into a subject's reality. Executed properly, Chain the Enslumbered Mind allows a victim to be awake and aware, yet hampered by lingering sleep.

This power can be inflicted only on a subject who is already sleeping and who was first detected through Dreams of the Many. Most Alucinator use this power while near a mortal victim, to keep the subject from resisting during feeding, but it can be used on anyone whose dreams can be sensed.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Empathy + Insomnium versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The Alucinator causes the subject to awaken immediately and he behaves normally. Vitae must still be spent for a vampire sleeper to awaken, as usual (although no Humanity roll is required; see **Vampire**, p. 184). A vampire in torpor does not awaken.

**Failure:** The character loses or ties the contested roll. The Alucinator does not influence the subject's sleep. A successive attempt may be possible with the expenditure of another Vitae.

**Success:** The most successes are rolled for the Alucinator. The victim's muscles grow sluggish and his mind slows, even as he struggles to wake up and act. A victim suffers a -1 penalty to all conscious actions (reflexive ones are not usually affected) for a number of hours equal to the successes gained on the power's activation roll. This penalty applies as soon as the power is triggered, not based on when the subject rises. So, if it's used early in an evening, the power could fade before a subject even wakes. Ideally, an Alucinator uses the power just before a subject would rise, or uses his connection through Dreams of the Many to awaken the subject just after Chain the Enslumbered Mind takes effect. Multiple applications of the power on the same subject are not cumulative. The effects of one application must pass before another can be performed.

**Extraordinary Success:** The most successes — five or more — are rolled for the Alucinator. He causes the subject to be overwhelmed with sleep paralysis. The victim is physically immobile for a number of turns equal to the successes achieved on the activation roll. His Defense cannot be applied to any incoming attacks. Nor can he dodge. Once the initial period of paralysis passes, the victim remains groggy for hours, as per the results of

a success. A paralyzed victim can use mental capabilities and powers, but they still suffer a -1 penalty.

### Suggested Modifiers

#### Modifier Situation

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| +2 | Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie ( <b>Vampire</b> , p. 162) |
| +1 | An exceptional success was recently achieved in a previous use of Dreams of the Many       |
| -1 | The Alucinator does not know, has never seen or has never met the subject                  |
| -1 | The Alucinator cannot see the subject when the power is used                               |

## .... BLISSFUL SLEEP

As gatekeepers between the waking and sleeping worlds, and frequent travelers of both, the Alucinator have the capacity to ease that transition upon others. For mortals, this means a descent into rest and sleep. For vampires, this power brings forth the sluggishness of the day.

Most Alucinator hum a quiet lullaby while evoking Blissful Sleep, but it's not necessary. An Alucinator need only be able to physically see or touch a subject for this power to be used.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Persuasion + Insomnium versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The Alucinator not only fails to hypnotize the subject to sleep, he causes the subject's subconscious mind to become wary to his tricks. The vampire cannot attempt this power again on the subject in the same night.

**Failure:** The character loses or ties the contested roll. The Alucinator fails to make the subject drowsy, but a successive attempt may be possible with the expenditure of another Vitae.

**Success:** The Alucinator influences the subject toward drowsiness. A mortal falls asleep and remains asleep for the remainder of the scene unless he suffers damage (the act of feeding does not wake the subject).

When this power is used successfully against another vampire, dice-pool limitations apply as if it were daytime (dice pools cannot exceed Humanity dots; see **Vampire**, p. 184). These effects on another vampire last for the remainder of the scene. Vampires who do not suffer penalties for daylight activity (for any reason, be it a Merit, a power or a high Humanity) are immune to this power.

The effects of this power are not cumulative with those of other Insomnium capabilities. So, Blissful Sleep and Chain the Enslumbered Mind cannot both apply to a vampire at the same time, for example. One power must run its course before another can be applied.

**Extraordinary Success:** The most successes — five or more — are rolled for the Alucinator. A mortal victim remains asleep for a number of hours equal to the



Sandman's Insomnium dots, unless harmed in some way (again, feeding does not wake the victim).

Another vampire's Humanity dots are reduced by one to determine his dice pool limits for the remainder of the scene. So, a vampire with a Humanity of 6 is limited to dice pools of five.

### Suggested Modifiers

#### Modifier Situation

- +2 Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (**Vampire**, p. 162)

## ..... TRAVAILS OF MORPHEUS

Legend holds that if a sleeper fails to wake from a dream in which he dies, his body dies. This power makes that legend a reality. Once able to sense someone's sleeping mind through Dreams of the Many, an Alucinator exerts sudden, terrifying and *painful* changes on the dream sequence. The sleeper may find that a soothing rainstorm becomes a hail of razors, or that a smoky room turns into an inescapable inferno. Every way the victim turns, the dream continues to twist in improbable fashion to horrify him. His own worst fears come forth to murder him.

Fortunately for sleepers everywhere, the mind reflexively tries to wake when threatened in this fashion, but it is still an uncomfortable experience at best. Combined with another vampire's torpor, this power can be a fearsome attack.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Subterfuge + Insomnium versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

**Action:** Extended and contested; resistance is reflexive (a number of successes is required for each party equal to the opponent's Willpower dots; each roll represents one turn)

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** All of the Alucinator's accumulated successes are lost and the power cannot be used again on the same subject until the next sunset. A dramatic failure rolled for the subject means the power succeeds automatically, regardless of how many successes the Alucinator has accumulated so far.

**Failure:** No successes are accumulated at this time.

**Success:** Successes are accumulated. When the required total is achieved first by the Alucinator, he causes the victim to suffer one Health point of bashing damage for each dot of Intelligence that he has. A subject can be victim to this power no more than once per night (for a mortal) or day (for a vampire).

**Extraordinary Success:** A participant makes significant progress toward the total successes required. If five or more successes are gathered than the Alucinator needs, damage caused is lethal.

An Alucinator who influences the dream of another is still aware of his own surroundings. If he performs an action aside from meddling in a dream, the connection to his subject is broken immediately.

### Suggested Modifiers

#### Modifier Situation

- +2 Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (**Vampire**, p. 162)
- +1 An exceptional success was recently achieved in a previous use of Dreams of the Many
- 1 The Alucinator does not know, has never seen or has never met the subject
- 1 The Alucinator cannot see the subject when the power is used

## DEVOTIONS

The following power is a capability evolved by the Alucinator bloodline. Indeed, abilities such as this arise among strains of that lineage, as only some members manifest the specific powers required to achieve these finely honed capabilities.

### SLEEPWALKER (DOMINATE .., INSOMNIUM ...)

Kindred who practice the Dominate Discipline enjoy use of secret triggers that force victims to perform unusual behaviors. Combined with the Insomnium Discipline, such triggers work on the sleeping mind, being used to impose commands while a subject slumbers.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Expression + Insomnium versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

The Alucinator can impart a command for later use, as with the Mesmerize power of the Dominate Discipline, but causes it to occur while the subject is asleep. (Establishing the command requires eye contact as with other Dominate powers; it cannot be established while a subject sleeps.) The subject's sleeping mind can obey only very simple tasks, so the order cannot be more complicated than a simple noun-verb combination such as "Get up and open the door" or "Unlock your window." The trigger can be the moment the subject falls asleep, when the subject first dreams, or when the subject hears some outside noise, voice or speech (remaining asleep all while). The subject does not undertake any act that would be dangerous or fatal (such as a vampire going outside in daylight). Nor can a subject undertake complex actions that require intricate thought (such as assembling an item and mailing it, or hunting down a particular person and attacking him). This command may be overridden by normal uses of Mesmerize, and can potentially be unearthed with Telepathy. The subject has no memory of the command or of performing the required action. The activity is performed only once per application of this devotion, and no more than one trigger and command can apply to a subject at one time.

If the power is applied to a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie, a +2 bonus is gained on the activation roll.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

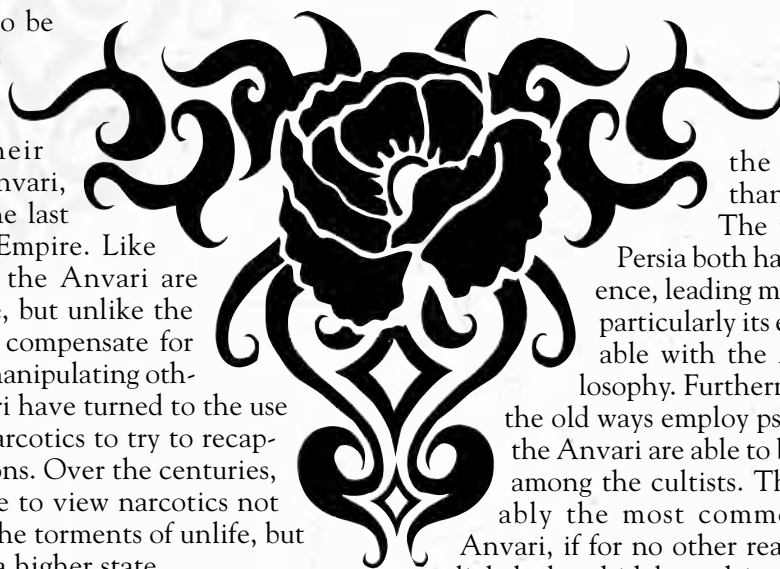
# Anvari

*Take it. Consider it a free sample. C'mon, what are you afraid of? I'm not going to bite...*

The Anvari claim to be one of the oldest bloodlines walking to-night. According to their legends, their founder was Sepehr Anvari, an opium-dealer in the last years of the Persian Empire. Like their Daeva parents, the Anvari are very sensual in nature, but unlike the Succubi, they do not compensate for their lost passions by manipulating others. Rather, the Anvari have turned to the use of opium and other narcotics to try to recapture their dead emotions. Over the centuries, the Anvari have come to view narcotics not only as a way to ease the torments of unlife, but as a way to ascend to a higher state.

The bloodline also relies on the addictive effects of narcotics to tie others to its members. Building herds of pliant kine is not only acceptable to the Anvari, but necessary. The line is so intertwined with drugs that a "Pusher" has difficulty feeding from a vessel who isn't coursing with opiates. Such drugs tend to quickly addict their users and ironically lead them to rely on the very beings that feed on them. It's a double-edged sword, though. The Anvari themselves are incapable of enjoying the euphoria of narcotics except through the blood of drugged vessels, leaving them tied in turn to their herds.

Other Kindred tend to view the Anvari with distaste at best, and as a constant threat to exposure among mortals at worst. The rest of the Daeva view Pushers as substandard members of the clan who are incapable of seducing prey through beauty and talent alone. That Anvari are not above feeding on addicts in slums and alleyways only reinforces Succubus opinion. Other vampires tend to consider Anvari use of addictive drugs to coerce kine as little more than a poor Kindred's Vinculum, and indicative of lazy or inept hunting. Some Kindred fear that the Anvari risk exposing undead society as a whole. After all, heroin addicts are always heroin addicts. Who knows what one might say to get a hit, or what a vice cop might uncover during a raid? So, to participate in the Danse Macabre as equals, most Anvari keep their heritage hidden from their undead peers.



**Parent Clan:** Daeva

**Nickname:** Pushers

**Covenant:** More

Anvari are drawn to the Circle of the Crone than any other covenant. The myths of Sumeria and

Persia both have a strong female presence, leading many of the bloodline — particularly its elders — to be comfortable with the Acolytes' general philosophy. Furthermore, as some rituals of the old ways employ psychotropic substances, the Anvari are able to barter influence readily among the cultists. The Carthians are probably the most common choice for young

Anvari, if for no other reason than members are slightly less hidebound in their viewpoints than more staid covenants. The Invictus enjoys its share of Pushers as well, whether they are established elders with a secure power base or up-and-coming dealers building fortunes in the drug trade. The Ordo Dracul may interest the occasional Anvari who seeks to escape the Curse or addiction through covenant strictures, but by and large its rites and practices require more self-discipline than most Pushers are willing to devote. It is the rare Anvari indeed who heeds the call of the Lancea Sanctum, as the very nature of the bloodline's relationship with narcotics is offensive to many orthodox followers of that group.

**Appearance:** While the lineage is originally of Middle Eastern descent, one can now find examples of nearly every ethnicity and race among its members, thanks largely to the global reach of narcotics. The Anvari aren't as bound by physical appearance as are members of their parent clan. Nonetheless, few (if any) of the bloodline could be described as unattractive. The Anvari are also as in touch with the most recent trends and fashions as the Daeva, but are more likely to dress according to their surroundings, whether it's an upscale social gathering or an inner-city crack house.

**Haven:** Anvari refuges are generally comfortable in their furnishings and insulated from the rest of the world in some manner, whether by location, construction or design. Most are also well-appointed, thanks in no small part to the fact that the majority of Pushers



see sizeable profits from the drug trade. Many Anvari havens are well protected by security measures, ranging from hired guards to closed-circuit cameras to advanced intrusion-detection devices. As a result of drug seizure laws in the U.S., most Anvari there are careful to keep their havens far removed from any serious drug trafficking.

**Background:** The Anvari Embrace from all levels of society, but tend to favor those of upper-middle-class or higher financial status. Part of this predilection is due to the lingering influences of the Daeva, but it's largely because the Anvari actually seldom have direct contact with poor segments of society. (Their agents and "employees" do the selling.) Among the Anvari who actually deal, many build sizeable herds among the lower social strata, where drug use provides an escape from the drudgery of existence. These street dealers are usually looked down upon by their "high-class" brethren.

Contrary to what one may assume given the bloodline's close association with drugs, the Anvari rarely (if ever) Embrace an addict or even a frequent user. Experience has shown that addicts are ill suited to the bloodline's weaknesses, quickly succumbing completely to the lure of opiates. Few Anvari suffer the Vice of Gluttony. A Kindred addict is a tremendous liability, risking not only business ventures, but also exposure to mortals. Pushers therefore tend to seek individuals with exposure to narcotics who've proven resistant to the lure.

**Character Creation:** Pushers call upon all aspects of their identity to perpetuate their existence and trade. Social Attributes and Skills are most useful for influencing the spread of opiate use, and can be used for such base activities as dealing drugs directly. Mental traits are only slightly less important in observing modern mortal society and perceiving ways to ensnare more and more users, and to then prey upon them. Wits is particularly useful for reacting to situations quickly, whether it's recognizing that a city

councilman could be lured into obedience through addiction, or to anticipate police presence before it makes itself known. Physical Attributes and Skills are pursued last but still important for self-defense and holding one's own amongst competitors or drug-crazed vessels.

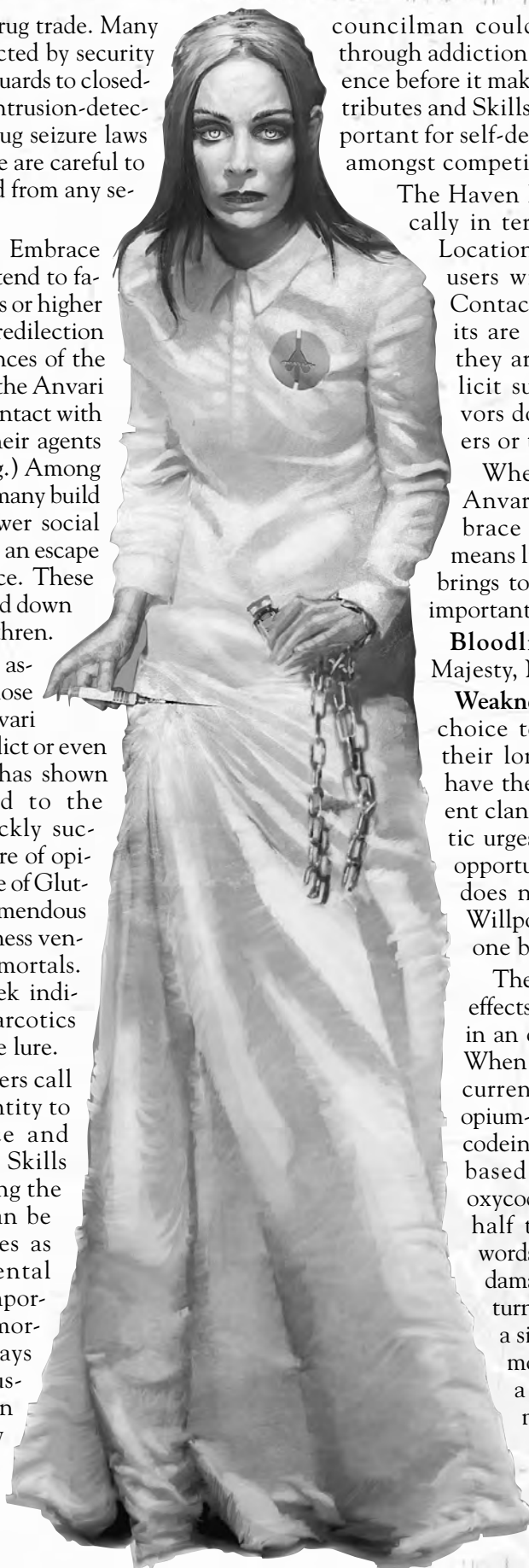
The Haven Merit is invaluable, specifically in terms of Security but also for Location in terms of access to drug users without immersion in them. Contacts, Allies and Retainer Merits are equally useful to Anvari as they are to mortal purveyors of illicit substances, be it to have favors done, to anticipate challengers or to win protection.

Whether a Daeva revels in her Anvari blood soon after the Embrace or well into her Requiem means little to the lineage. What she brings to the collective table is most important to fellow Pushers.

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

**Weakness:** Not surprising given their choice to pursue a replacement for their long-lost passion, the Anvari have the same difficulty as their parent clan in restraining their hedonistic urges. Any time a Pusher has an opportunity to indulge her Vice but does not, she loses two points of Willpower (as opposed to gaining one by partaking in its pleasures).

The Anvari fascination with the effects of narcotics has also resulted in an odd effect on line physiology. When feeding from any mortal not currently under the effects of an opium-based drug (heroin, morphine, codeine, opium) or a designer drug based on opium (China white, oxycodone,), a vampire gains only half the normal Vitae. In other words, for every two points of lethal damage she inflicts or for every two turns that she feeds, she gains only a single Vitae. If she feeds from a mortal under the effects of such a drug, she gains Vitae at a normal rate. Of course, if she does so, she also suffers the effects of the drug that currently afflicts her victim.



**Organization:** The closest the Anvari come to any formal organization is when two or more work together in a drug distribution scheme. Such deals are handled largely as in any criminal enterprise, although an elder member of the bloodline is granted respect regardless of his position in the arrangement. Otherwise, relationships among Anvari are largely limited to vampires with blood ties to each other. The very nature of their activity makes line members a paranoid lot on many levels, and most fear that any concentration of their number just begs to be exposed (if not as Kindred, then as drug dealers). Still, among elders — and a few young, traditional members — a simple ceremony of greeting is practiced when one member enters another's domain. The host presents the guest with a single poppy, which the two then ritually cut into 12 separate pieces.

The strongest Anvari presence is currently in the United States. While the U.S. has only four percent of the world's population, it consumes over 60 percent of its illegal drugs. Western Europe, particularly the Netherlands and Italy, are also home to several Anvari. There are more than a few members in the Golden Triangle region of Southeast Asia. Few remain in Middle East countries, as the current climate there isn't as favorable to their pursuits as in ages past. There are also reports of isolated members in Mexico, Colombia, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

**Concepts:** Drug dealer, pharmacist, pimp, cartel kingpin, corrupt vice cop, substance-abuse councilor, musician, porn producer, burned-out veteran, research chemist

## *History*

According to Anvari histories, the bloodline was founded sometime in the 4th or 5th century A.D. by an opium merchant named Sepehr Anvari in Ctesiphon, now a suburb of Baghdad. Anvari's sire was an unnamed Daeva whose attraction to the man was apparently due in no small part to the fact that the vampire had become addicted to opium through feeding on drug-tainted vessels. Anvari's Embrace may well have been an effort to establish control over the relationship between the two. Regardless, legend has it that the Daeva collapsed under her addiction and came to Final Death by falling into a drug-induced daze on a Babylonian rooftop before sunrise.

Anvari himself also indulged heavily in opium. He found it provided some relief from the loneliness of unlife. His customers also provided him with a readily available herd from which to feed. Anvari soon discovered he had no need to hunt or even use charm to seduce victims. More vessels than he could desire came to his lair every night to partake of his drug. By feeding from them while they languished,

he introduced the drug into his system virtually every night.

It's unclear even to elders of the bloodline if Anvari Embraced any childer prior to founding the lineage. It is believed by most that he became glutinous in the years between his Embrace and the foundation, slipping into torpor numerous times. Even the duration of this period is a subject of debate, as no elder active in the western world claims to have been Embraced prior to the 16th century, although many assert they've met Anvari from the East who are far older.

The truth of the bloodline's origins will likely remain a mystery as Anvari himself has not been heard from in nearly 500 years. What's known is that his constant exposure to opium changed his Vitae in some fashion. He fed so frequently from vessels under the effects of narcotics that his addiction achieved supernatural magnitude. He ceased to be able to effectively draw nourishment from blood that lacked opiates. He could still feed, but it required much larger quantities of blood to sustain him.

In addition to an actual physical preference for opiate-laden blood, he was able to use his affinity for the substance to grant him a unique ability to induce narcotic effects in others — both mortal and Kindred. At that point, Anvari diverged from the Daeva. By the 14th century, opium use reached Europe and suitable vessels were plentiful. Anvari had Embraced more than a few childer, who had followed the opium trade west, hoping to find a climate more hospitable to them than that of their now primarily Muslim-controlled homeland.

Their parent clan soon came to regard the line with disdain and not a little fear. More than one vampire fell victim to the same trap that had caught Sepehr Anvari's sire. The Anvari might not control the flow of opium, but they did hold sway over more than a few influential mortals who did — and they were willing to exploit any Kindred who fell under the drug's power. Naturally, elders didn't cherish the thought of some Anvari upstart achieving leverage over them.

## *The Inquisition*

The coming of the Inquisition nearly dealt Final Death to the bloodline in Europe. Not only did Kindred themselves have to fear the Church's Inquisitors, but opium itself became taboo. To the eyes of Inquisitors, anything from the East was tainted by the Devil's hand. Thus, once-plentiful herds of opium users dwindled to a scattering of wary addicts.

It didn't take long for more paranoid members of the Ventrue and Daeva clans to decide that the Anvari needed to be brought firmly under control. It was for the good of



all. Indeed, the bloodline's weakness provided a powerful tool to do just that. There was no need to risk exposing the Kindred as a whole. Culling the Anvari's herd of vessels would serve just as well. A few years — and quiet accusations to Inquisitors by Ventrue and Daeva servants — later and the Anvari found themselves largely bereft of suitable victims in Europe. The clans then moved secretly against any of the bloodline that still persisted. In the end, the line effectively ceased to exist on the Continent. Only a handful in the Middle East and a rare, isolated member or two in the Far East remained.

### *Rebuilding*

During the height of the Enlightenment, opium was reintroduced into Europe through a number of means. The medical community began widespread use of it as a painkiller. Laudanum, a mixture of opium and alcohol, became a popular remedy for a variety of complaints. Finally, the New World introduced Europeans and later easterners to the pipe, a Native American invention that made smoking opium — a practice discovered by Portuguese sailors — far easier.

At the same time, recreational use of opium became popular in Persia and India. The Dutch exported the drug — along with the pipe in which to smoke it — to China. British shipping spread the drug from India across southeast Asia. While conspiracy minded Kindred sometimes lay this explosion at the feet of the Anvari as a power grab, the truth is the bloodline had nothing to do with it. Certainly, they benefited from it, but at the time it's unlikely they numbered more than a dozen or so due to the lingering effects of the Inquisition and the rapid spread of Islam. The truth is that mortals longed for euphoria as strongly as any Kindred, and opium could supply it on demand.

Regardless of the reason, the Anvari profited substantially from the expansion of the opium trade. Yet survivors of the Inquisition remembered all too well the dangers of their fellow Kindred. While they remained tied closely to the drug trade, they were careful to keep their involvement at arm's length to defend against any return to harsh times. When they interacted with other vampires they presented themselves as Daeva. Only rarely did they coerce other Kindred through addiction. As the bloodline extended tendrils this time, members were careful to remain behind the scenes.

Over the centuries, opium use waxed and waned, but always remained a part of mortal culture. Indeed, kine proved innovative in finding new ways to use the poppy flower. Laudanum gave way to morphine and morphine to heroin — each more addictive than the last. Society was woefully slow to recognize the dangers of narcotic addiction. Heroin was marketed by Bayer as a

cough medicine as late as the end of the 19th century, and opium dens were so prevalent at the same time that San Francisco alone had over 300.

By the time mortal governments realized the dangers posed by narcotics, the demand was too widespread to stop. Laws and active enforcement served only to drive up prices and increase the power of the criminal element. In the end, the attempt to stem the tide of opium created a thriving black market that in turn financed powerful drug cartels.

This period also marked the greatest growth in the bloodline's numbers, with the Anvari swelling to over a hundred throughout the world.

### OBSESSION

Although the word "narcotic" is often used tonight to mean any illegal drug, it actually refers specifically to opiates and opioids. When used in reference to the Anvari, it *always* means opiates and opioids.

### *Tonight*

In spite of increased legal powers and more sophisticated technology to combat illegal drugs, the percentage of the population addicted to narcotics in the western world is nearly identical to what it was over a century ago. To the Anvari, who've resisted the temptation to swell the bloodline in response, suitable vessels are more plentiful than ever. While Pushers as individuals seldom seek to rise in the ranks of a drug cartel, fringe involvement in the narcotics trade has benefited them enormously.

Nonetheless, they have not forgotten the lesson learned during the Inquisition. Though they must take care to not draw mortal attention, perhaps their most dangerous foes remain other Kindred who fear their pervasive influence.

### *Society and Culture*

The fulcrum on which all Anvari actions rest is opium. They need it to feed satisfactorily, they use it to bind their herds to them, and most use it to provide for at least some of their financial strength. It's possible for an Anvari to exist without narcotics, but why?

For most members of the line, opiates are more than merely drugs. They represent a way to recapture a portion of what was lost through the Embrace. Throughout much of mortal history, opium has held an almost religious awe for mortal society. Every culture introduced to it has proven willing to use all of the drug available. The Anvari believe that this craving is due to more than simple chemical craving. Most view par-

taking of opium as an almost sacred ritual, made all the more poignant by the fact they can no longer enjoy its effects directly. Even the most jaded and cynical Pushers regard it as more than just a drug.

Bloodline elders teach that Sepehr Anvari eventually achieved a state of sublime bliss through his communion with opium, becoming something more than Kindred or mortal. Some lineage members of both the Ordo Dracul and the Circle of the Crone believe their founder may have discovered a “backdoor” to Golconda. No proof is offered of either claim, but the Anvari maintain that they know at least the first step down the path to true enlightenment.

### *Doing Business*

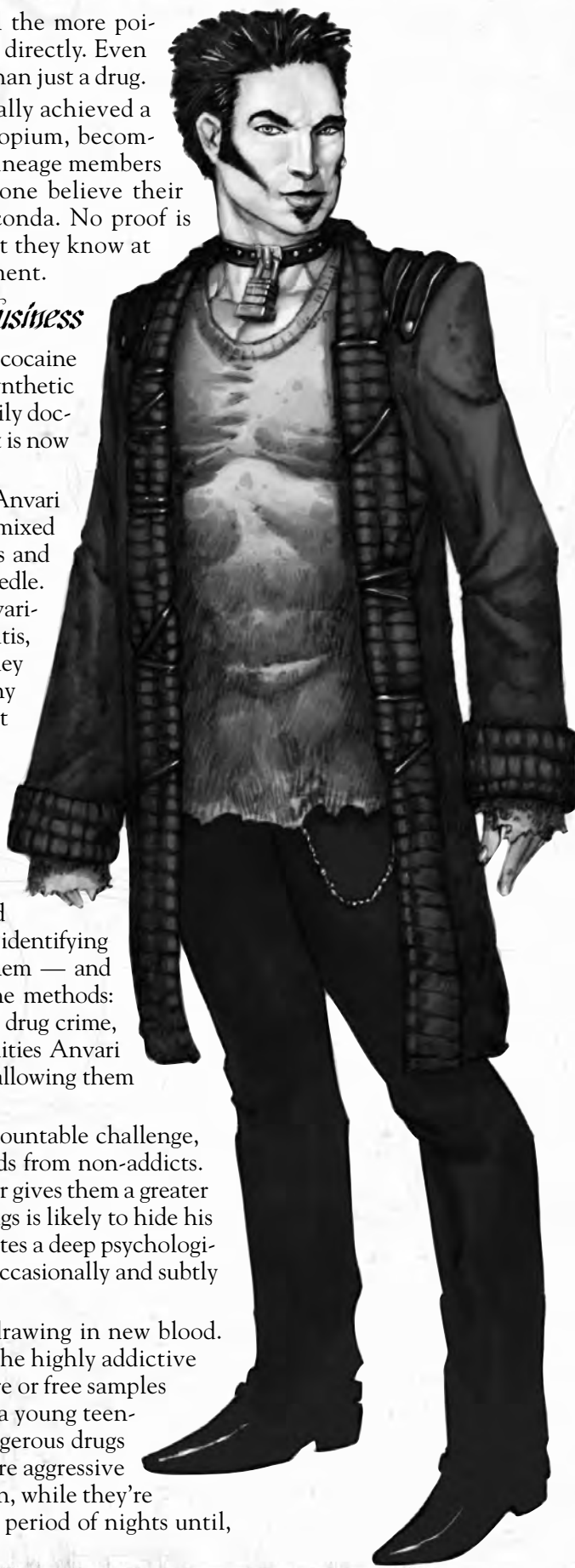
Narcotics tonight are plentiful. Heroin has overtaken cocaine in many areas as drug of choice. Oxycontin and other synthetic narcotics flood the market from legal sources, from family doctors to dentists to internet pharmacies. In many ways, it is now easier to get narcotics on the street than alcohol.

Despite a variety of options, the drug of choice for both Anvari and their kine is heroin. The supply is plentiful, it's often mixed with other street drugs, and it can (contrary to movies and TV) be taken through a variety of means, not just by needle. New heroin users tend to shy away from injections for a variety of reasons, such as fear of contracting AIDS or hepatitis, a desire to avoid telltale track marks, or the fact that they simply don't like needles. The purity of the drug from many suppliers has risen to the point that users can simply snort it. As a result, it appeals to a more affluent clientele, especially since upwardly mobile professionals have discovered that after the initial euphoric sensation they can function in the workplace and home without the telltale signs of other drugs.

The Anvari don't have to work too hard to find addicts. Nearly one out of every 200 U.S. citizens is addicted to opiates in one form or another. Since few show signs identifying themselves as illegal drug users, the trick is finding them — and even that isn't too hard. There are numerous mundane methods: criminal contacts, frequenting clubs or areas known for drug crime, prostitutes and even the internet. One of the first abilities Anvari develop is a sense for opiates, even in another's blood, allowing them to locate suitable prey quickly.

While finding existing addicts is far from an insurmountable challenge, many of the bloodline prefer to “grow” their own herds from non-addicts. These vampires claim that turning a non-user into a user gives them a greater hold over the victim. Someone who's avoided hard drugs is likely to hide his new problem from family and friends. This secrecy creates a deep psychological bond in the vessel, particularly when the vampire occasionally and subtly reinforces any feelings of guilt in the subject's mind.

Mortal dealers employ a wide range of tactics for drawing in new blood. The Anvari know all of those tricks and then some. The highly addictive nature of narcotics makes their work easy. Peer pressure or free samples are often enough to get someone started, particularly a young teenager, down that slippery slope. Spiking other less dangerous drugs to build addictive chemistry is another method. A more aggressive approach is to get victims to take a single dose and then, while they're reasoning is clouded, keep refreshing the dose over a period of nights until,



by the time the dealer allows the effect to wear off, users are addicted. The innate Anvari ability to manipulate blood chemistry also gives line members a powerful tool for establishing a pool of vessels.

## Dealing

It's almost unheard of for an Anvari to rise very high in a drug cartel. Drug lords draw too much attention to themselves and their organizations. Colombian cartels are frequently the target of Colombian, British and U.S. military action. The entire opium industry in Afghanistan has been attacked by the former Soviet Union, the Pakistanis, the Taliban and most recently the U.S. Southeast Asian cartels contend with government troops, guerillas and bandits all at the same time. None of this attention stops the industry, but only a reckless Kindred would thrust himself into the middle of that intensity.



### TALKING THE TALK

Very few people associated with drugs on a regular basis refer to them by their formal or chemical names. The street names for drugs change faster than virtually any other slang, often in an attempt to stay one verbal step ahead of the authorities. Using the wrong name for a drug is a dead-giveaway that one is either a poser or a narc.

**Amphetamine:** Amies, bennies, black beauties, bumblebees, speed

**Cocaine (powder):** Blow, booger, candy, coke, dust, flake, girl, snow

**Crack or free-base cocaine:** Apple jacks, bad, ball, bazooka, bones, breakfast of champions, bullion, caviar, pasta

**Hashish and opium:** Black hash, black Russian, soles

**Heroin:** AIP (from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan), antifreeze, brown sugar, China White, garbage, junk, Persian, smack

**Heroin (Mexican tar):** Black pearl, chocolate, Mexican mud, tootsie roll

**Heroin and cocaine:** Belushi, speedball

**Heroin and free-base cocaine:** Chasing and basing

**Heroin and PCP:** Alien sex fiend

**LSD:** Acid, Alice, Bart Simpsons, battery acid, blue heavens, Chinese dragons, windowpane

**Marijuana:** Acapulco Gold, African bush, airplane, baby, Barbara Jean, blanket, blunt, chronic, ganja, grass, herb, joint, pot, weed, 420

**Marijuana and heroin:** Atom bomb

**Methamphetamine:** Crank, crystal, meth, yaba

**Meth and crack:** Ice

**Opium:** Auntie, black, hop, laudanum, op, Paragoric, poppy

**PCP:** Angel, animal tranquilizer, blue star, Cadillac, cyclones, dust, fresh, hog, jet fuel, peace, shermies, surfer, tranks, zombie dust



At the other end of the scale, few Anvari stoop to directly dealing drugs on the street. It's not from any ethical code, but rather a survival instinct. So many law-enforcement agencies line their pockets with drug and property seizures that dealing is a high-risk venture. Cops look for chances to grab a nice car, boat or house. Most U.S. states allow an agency to keep half the profits of any sale of seized material. With that sort of reinforcement, it's no surprise that most departments keep a careful eye on traffic. Not that it works that well to stem the sale of drugs, but it is a lottery ticket few Kindred want to play.

Those who do deal directly do so on a small scale, say at an exclusive party or members-only club. Not only does this limit their exposure to law enforcement, it helps keep their herds manageable. A small clientele base allows an Anvari to keep track of who's a habitual user and who uses only on occasion. "Social" users are usually cut off soon after the vampire identifies them. They're unreliable as vessels and also less reliant on the Anvari as a supplier.

While the bloodline needs narcotic-laced blood to survive, those Anvari who deal often diversify their offerings. They may find that a new buyer hesitates to shoot up, but is willing to sample ecstasy. Or maybe just a dime bag of marijuana to start off. As time goes by, with a little sales talk and misplaced trust, the Pusher creates a heroine addict and vessel.

Anvari dealers frequently keep costs to their herds below street value. Doing so makes it more likely that a vessel keeps coming to the vampire for her supply. The Anvari also hopes that by keeping the product cheap, the user buys — and uses — more. And a low cost makes it less likely that an addict has to resort to crime to fund her habit. This last reason doesn't arise out of any concern for society's laws or even the wellbeing of the addict, but from the fact that if the user gets busted, there's a good chance she might turn her supplier in to cut a deal with the cops. Ultimately, even at a reduced cost, the profit on narcotics is considerable.

Most line members deal through third parties. The Anvari may provide a location suitable for transactions, such as a club or hotel, but otherwise keeps his hands clean of any connection. That approach keeps suitable kine handy without the risky legal entanglements. The drawback is that the vampire doesn't have as much direct control over addicts, but for many the safety factor outweighs the convenience.

Others remain as removed as possible from the narcotics trade. They keep only a small supply on hand and distribute it to only a few close and trusted vessels. Although U.S. drug laws don't differentiate on the amount of heroin or other narcotic in one's possession, most law-enforcement agencies are so focused on numbers and statistics that a low-key operator can usually fly under the radar.





One of the biggest dangers to Anvari Kindred is that they develop a personal addiction to narcotics. It's inevitable given their need to frequently consume narcotic blood. While some show no trepidation for this fate and a few actively seek it, some take steps to avoid it. After all, they're well aware of the power opium offers over their vessels. Few are willing to allow another to have that hold over them.

When feeding from a vessel under the influence of a narcotic, an Anvari suffers the full effects of the drug, just as if she had taken it herself (see "Drugs," p. 176 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

A common practice among the Anvari is to feed from a clean vessel every two to three nights. Since a Pusher has to take more blood than normal means she usually has to have more than one clean vessel from which to feed, or she needs to allow one time to recover before returning to him. Some solve the problem by maintaining a few non-user members in a herd, while others simply take to the streets and hunt like most Kindred.

Another way in which Anvari avoid addiction is to feed heavily one night and then fast for a night or two. The drawback is that a vampire may find her Vitae reserves short on one of the fasting nights should she have to fuel Disciplines or perform other supernatural feats.

Regardless of how a vampire chooses to deal with addiction, an Anvari walks a fine line. The source of the bloodline's unique power constantly threatens to cut members as deeply as it does their vessels. Many Anvari are consumed with loathing for brethren who succumb to deep addiction, perceiving them as weak or traitorous to their "higher calling." It's not unheard of for Anvari to occasionally embark on unsanctioned hunts to eliminate a badly addicted member of their kind.

### WITHDRAWAL

Any character addicted to narcotics who avoids taking a drug for more than one or two nights suffers withdrawal. The character experiences nausea and vomiting (of blood), cramping, tremors and anxiety. All dice pools and Resistance traits such as Defense suffer a -2 penalty. Furthermore, a Willpower point must be spent each night that the vampire wishes to take any actions other than stay in her haven, fighting symptoms. Assuming the character continues to avoid taking the drug, withdrawal effects last for seven nights and then subside. Psychological addiction to drugs may last years, however.

The name of this Discipline refers to an opium-and-alcohol mixture given to Helen of Troy by an Egyptian queen. The drink was said to lull all pain and anger, and bring forgetfulness of every sorrow. Although Anvari use of this Discipline may predate the time of Helen, the bloodline could have used this name for over a millennium.

The Discipline arises from the bloodline's familiarity and close association with opium and other narcotics. Through it, an Anvari can manipulate the very nature of a subject's blood, inducing euphoria, desire and even debilitating pain — despite the connotations of the Discipline's name. A common use of Nepenthe is to set mortals on the path to narcotics addiction, providing a Pusher with both a suitable vessel and a contact she can blackmail or coerce.

Not surprisingly, Nepenthe is more effective against mortals than Kindred. Perhaps this is due to the subtle differences in Kindred and mortal blood, or because vampires have more control over their own bodies in many ways, or because one is still alive and the other is dead. Regardless of the reason, nearly all of the Discipline's effects are contested, allowing a vampire's Blood Potency to provide him with an often-decisive advantage.

A mortal can resist the effects of certain Nepenthe powers for a turn with the expenditure of a Willpower point and a successful Stamina roll (the Willpower point does not add three dice to this roll). The roll is reflexive. If it fails, the Willpower point is spent and the mortal remains under the effects of the power. If it is successful, the victim can act normally for one turn with no modifiers to traits or dice pools. A vampire with a higher Blood Potency than the Anvari using Nepenthe can resist a specific power for the remainder of the scene with a Willpower point and a successful roll.

### • *Fragrance of the Hal Gil*

In Sumeria, the opium poppy was known as the *hal gil*. With drugs and drug-users playing such an important part in Anvari existence, being able to identify likely vessels is a necessity. Sampling allows an Anvari to detect any drugs in her presence.

**Cost:** —

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Streetwise + Nepenthe

**Action:** Instant

**Roll Results**

**Dramatic Failure:** The character receives completely false or misleading information about the presence of drugs. Storytellers may make rolls on players' behalf for this reason.

**Failure:** The character receives no information at all about the presence of drugs, but a successive attempt may be possible.

**Success:** The character gains a sense of the location of any narcotics within 30 yards for the remainder of the scene. As this power can provide information with senses other than sight (smell, touch, taste), the Anvari does not necessarily need to have direct line of sight to the substance as long as she can somehow sense it. Fragrance of the Hal Gil also allows an Anvari to determine if someone in her line of sight is *under* the influence of a narcotic.

**Exceptional Success:** As per a success, and the character can identify all types of drugs in her presence. An Anvari can also use Fragrance of the Hal Gil to identify any Kindred who has fed on a vessel under the influence of a narcotic since sunset. Use of Obfuscate defies this power just like it does normal senses.

This power does not detect individuals who suffer an addiction, only those who currently have a narcotic (or perhaps any drug on an exceptional success) active in their system. Combining this power with that of Heightened Senses (Auspex; *Vampire*, p. 119) extends the range to 60 yards.

#### Suggested Modifiers

##### Modifier Situation

- +2 Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (*Vampire*, p. 162)
- +1 Subject has used drugs in the past hour
- 1 Crowded room or area
- 1 Numerous drugs or other addicts in area

#### .. *Inflict the Empty Soul*

This power allows an Anvari to instantly strip himself or another of the effects of a narcotic substance. It is most often used as a punishment for a disobedient vessel than to cleanse

the Anvari himself (few members of the bloodline willingly give up the euphoria of opium once they're in its thrall). In an emergency, however, the power does allow a vampire to return to his senses quickly. Recently, some Kindred have found it useful for hiding overdose deaths from forensic scientists by using it immediately after a user passes.

The Anvari must be able to see the subject with the naked eye to use this power. The vampire does not need to be able to see himself to apply it to himself. Note that this power eliminates the effects of drugs in a subject in the moment. It doesn't alleviate him of drug addiction, or eliminate the effects of drugs taken in the future.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Medicine + Nepenthe versus subject's Stamina + Blood Potency

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The vampire's attempt fails and the subject is immune to any other uses of the vampire's Nepenthe until the next sunset. If a dramatic failure is rolled for the subject, the Anvari is considered to get an exceptional success.

**Failure:** An equal number or the most successes are rolled for the subject and he remains affected by the drug. Successive attempts might be made at the expense of more Vitae.



**Success:** The most successes are rolled for the Anvari and the subject is instantly cleansed of all traces and effects of narcotics.

**Exceptional Success:** The most successes — five or more — are rolled for the vampire and the subject suffers the effects of a success. Any efforts on the subject's part to resist the effects of toxins or drugs are also at a +1 bonus until the next sunset.

A subject cannot restore the effects of drugs in his system with the expenditure of a Willpower point and a successful Stamina roll. He needs to dose himself up again.

### Suggested Modifiers

#### Modifier Situation

- +2 Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (**Vampire**, p. 162)

### ... *Crave the Caress*

This power stimulates a powerful desire in the subject for a hit of a specific drug — usually a narcotic, but not necessarily — as chosen by the Anvari. Nothing more than a gaze in person is necessary to inflict this desire. Members of the bloodline make frequent use of *Crave the Caress*, whether to quickly produce a vessel suitable for feeding, to provide themselves with an edge in a negotiation, or to start someone down the path to addiction.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Seduction + Nepenthe versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The Anvari's attempt to stimulate a desire for a drug is so clumsy that the subject finds the substance repulsive. The subject is immune to further uses of Nepenthe by the vampire for the remainder of the night. If a dramatic failure is rolled for the subject, the Anvari is considered to get an exceptional success.

**Failure:** A tie is rolled or most successes go to the subject. The vampire may try again in a successive attempt if more Vitae is spent.

**Success:** The most successes are rolled for the Anvari and the subject is overcome with a powerful desire for the drug in question, which persists for the remainder of the scene. The subject readily accepts and immediately takes the drug if anyone provides it. Alternatively, the vampire may use the subject's desire as leverage, gaining a +2 modifier to any Social rolls involving her.

**Exceptional Success:** The vampire wins the contested roll with five or more successes and the subject reacts as per a success. In this case, however, the desire for the drug lingers in the subject for the remainder of the night.

To take full advantage of this power, an Anvari should have ready access to whatever drug for which he inflicts a hunger. Once the drug is taken, the subject suffers all its normal effects. A wise Anvari therefore withholds the drug until the subject is of little further use.

### Suggested Modifiers

#### Modifier Situation

- +4 Power is turned on a subject who has *both* the Gluttony Vice and Addiction (narcotics) Flaw
- +2 Power is turned on a subject who has the Gluttony Vice or Addiction (narcotics) Flaw
- +2 Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (**Vampire**, p. 162)
- +2 Power is turned on a subject who already is or used to be addicted to narcotics

### ... *Kiss of the Hal Gil*

An Anvari with this power is so familiar with a narcotic's effects that she can reproduce them in another at will. A single touch allows the vampire to affect the chosen subject's blood, inducing the effects of a drug in his system. (See "Touching an Opponent" on p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Presence + Medicine + Nepenthe versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The power inflicts the vampire, not her chosen subject, with the effects of the narcotic until sunrise. If a dramatic failure is rolled for the subject, the Anvari is considered to get an exceptional success.

**Failure:** An equal number or the most successes are rolled for the subject. The character is unable to affect her this turn, although successive attempts may be possible at the expense of more Vitae.

**Success:** The most successes are rolled for the Anvari and the subject immediately suffers the effects of the narcotic, becoming euphoric and relaxed. The subject's ability to feel pain is greatly reduced. He does not suffer wound penalties for the duration of the power, but all his dice pools and Resistance traits such as Defense are reduced by two for that time. (See "Drugs" on p. 176 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

**Exceptional Success:** The character wins the contested roll with five or more successes and the subject reacts as per a success. The subject is also overcome by the initial rush of the drug's effects and loses his next action if Initiative has been rolled.

Use of this power satisfies the hunger for a narcotic created by other powers (such as *Crave the Caress*) at least temporarily, giving the Anvari a powerful carrot-and-stick bargaining chip.



The Kiss of Hal Gil does not usually last as long as a natural dose of a narcotic. The duration depends on the number of successes rolled.

Successes	Duration
1 success	Two turns
2 successes	Five turns
3 successes	20 turns (1 minute)
4 successes	10 minutes
5+ successes	One hour or the remainder of the scene

#### Suggested Modifiers

##### Modifier Situation

+4	Power is turned on a subject who is currently addicted to opiates
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie ( <b>Vampire</b> , p. 162)
+2	Power is turned on a subject who used to be addicted to opiates or who is currently under the effects of the Crave the Caress power

### ..... *Blessed Drowning*

Even the Anvari recognize that there are limits to the beneficial effects of a narcotic. A mortal vessel can take only so much exposure before he suffers damage and could die. The more resilient bodies of vampires aren't as susceptible to harm, but even they can feel the effects of an overdose. A Pusher need simply look at an intended victim directly to apply this power.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Strength + Medicine + Nepenthe versus subject's Stamina + Blood Potency

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Use of the power against the intended victim fails and she is immune to further uses of the character's Nepenthe until the next sunset. If a dramatic failure is rolled for the subject, the Anvari is considered to get an exceptional success.

**Failure:** The contested roll ties or the most successes are rolled for the subject. The vampire may make a successive attempt if another Vitae is spent.

**Success:** The most successes are rolled for the Anvari and the victim is affected as if he had suffered a potentially lethal overdose of a narcotic. Stamina + Resolve is rolled once for the victim to resist the effects of a poison with a toxicity of 5 (see **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 180). The power inflicts damage a single time, but the victim's dice pools and Resistance traits are reduced by three and he does not suffer wound penalties for the remainder of the power's duration.

**Exceptional Success:** The Anvari wins with five or more successes and the victim is affected as per a success, but the toxicity of the poison is 7.

Since the primary effects of a narcotic overdose restrict breathing and heart functions, other Kindred are immune to damage from this power. The lingering narcotic effects have normal consequences (the vampiric victim's dice pools and Resistance traits are reduced by three and he does not suffer wound penalties for the remainder of the power's duration).

While the victim resists the toxicity of this power only once, the duration of the lingering narcotic effect depends on the number of successes rolled when the power is invoked.

Successes	Duration
1 success	Two turns
2 successes	Five turns
3 successes	20 turns (1 minute)
4 successes	10 minutes
5+ successes	One hour or the remainder of the scene

The effects of this power cannot be ignored temporarily with the expenditure of a Willpower point and a successful Stamina roll.

#### Suggested Modifiers

##### Modifier Situation

+2	Power is turned on a subject who is already under the effects of a narcotic
+2	Power is turned on a subject who is or was at one time addicted to narcotics
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie ( <b>Vampire</b> , p. 162)

# Architects of the Monolith

*The mystical design, once recorded, will never die, but will become an immortal thing that asserts our will with ever-growing urgency. Master the monolith, the city, the undying design and master the world.*

Since the first temples were built, mankind has been fascinated with the meaning of buildings and the power of architecture. Standing stones erected to face the sun at the equinox, and palaces built to impress and cow the populace were combined with cosmology and sacred geometry to create complex and powerful forms and ideals for the glory of God, king and self. Nearly every culture has used these principles to one degree or another, shaping its world while shaping itself. The vampiric Architects of the Monolith emerged from this impulse as it coiled into the fevered torpor-dreams of the bloodline's megalomaniac founder. From this brew of madness and art, the "Masons" have conjured a form of undead sorcery that gives them power over cities, inspiring them to consider themselves the ultimate masters of the gilded cage.

It is such vainglory that drives the vampires of the line to form a grand conspiracy that they claim spans continents and centuries, a sweeping plot for dominion that will supposedly bring the world under their sway. The same vanity has incurred the wrath of the Lancea Sanctum and other undead to the point that the Architects have nearly been scourged from existence. Remaining Masons linger not with humility, but with an understanding that they must keep their true plans and powers concealed, lest the jealousies of "lessers" be their undoing.

In the modern nights, those few Damned who know of the Architects of the Monolith think of them as an eccentric brood of Ventrue. Those who have had any direct contact may know that the line clings to antiquated notions of architecture, following Napoleonic ideals of city planning and ritual to keep the kine pacified. An even smaller number know that the brood is actually a bloodline, begun in Paris in the late 18th century, closely linked to the Ordo Dracul and known for producing brilliant Guardians and Kogaion. Those who have had direct experience with the Architects speak of darker things, of madness and destruction, and the sensation of being looked upon as a god would a flea.

Although all of these rumors have an element of truth, the last are most accurate. Every member of the bloodline believes she can literally control the world by channeling mystical energy through the focus of looming architecture.



The line's founder even believes her lineage can make cities the focus of reality, turning both God and nature into mere trivialities banished to the shadow of her monolith. Bound by this mad and impossible vision, the bloodline works secretly and circumspectly. The result is a cult motivated by madness, backed by visions of conquest, and powered by esoteric sorcery. Though members' insane visions of dominance are only so much torpor-delusion, the harm they can cause is very real. After all, individuals sacrificed for their plans aren't any less dead, and communities wracked by their "progress" aren't any less ruined.

**Parent Clan:** Ventrue

**Nickname:** Masons

**Covenant:** Most of the few extant Architects are affiliated with the Ordo Dracul. It was from the Order that they arose as a conspiracy and bloodline, and their ties with the covenant remain. It is even said that the line founder is a leading member of the Sworn of the Mysteries.

While the Dracul see the Architects as too concerned with power and not attentive enough to personal transcendence, Masons still occupy a privileged position in the society. An unusually high proportion of Architects act as Kogaion. The fact that the Order expects and even encourages its members to conduct private investigations and occult experiments makes it a perfect home for the Architects. This hardly means that all Dragons are comfortable with the Architects, as the Order suspects the depths of the line's madness, but the covenant is generally willing to give the Masons a chance to overcome their limitations — within reason.

Other Architects tend to be members of the Invictus. Though they often lack the formal occult teaching of Order members, Invictus Masons are still valuable to the bloodline for the political clout and connections they wield. Since conspiracies of power are the bread and butter of the First Estate, insightful Invictus Princes enjoy having Masons under their thumb in the urban night. A smart First Estate Prince or Priscus can even ply an Architect without causing himself too much harm, so long as he's careful to play upon the line member's madness to keep her under control.

Very few Architects become Princes themselves; it's too public a position. They tend to do well in a

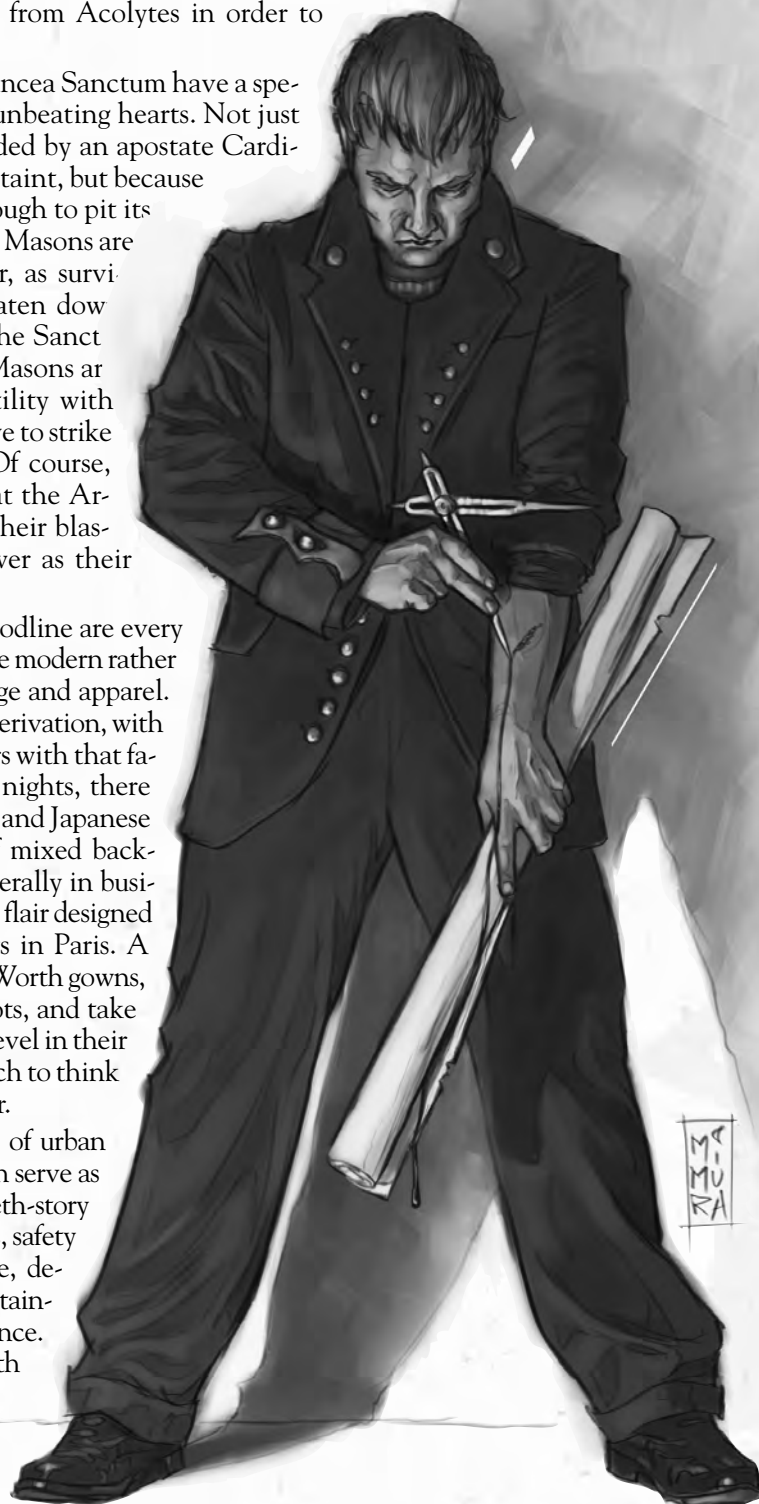
Primogen capacity and often take Regencies over domains of construction, city hall or other areas that allow them to affect urban development. The rank and file of the Invictus are leery of Masons, uncertain of their occult dealings and put off by their overt madness.

There are very few Architects in any of the other covenants. The Carthian mindset doesn't sit well with the ideals of control and mystery that dominate the bloodline. The unaligned often lack the power and connections valued by the Architects. The Circle of the Crone has no Architect members, as the phal-lus-centric paradigm of the Masons puts them fundamentally at odds with the Crones. And yet, the Architects would very much like to seduce knowledge of Crúac away from Acolytes in order to forward their own interests.

Longstanding members of the Lancea Sanctum have a special place for the Masons in their unbeating hearts. Not just because the Architects were founded by an apostate Cardinal and carry their founder's blood-taint, but because the bloodline was once foolish enough to pit its sorcery against the Sanctified. The Masons are nearly as loving toward the Spear, as survivors remember (or have been beaten down with stories of) the nights when the Sanctified fell upon the lineage. While Masons are smart enough to avoid open hostility with the covenant, they would dearly love to strike back for their past humiliation. Of course, should the Sanctified find out that the Architects are still fully engaged in their blasphemous plans to take God's power as their own, history could repeat itself.

**Appearance:** Members of the bloodline are every inch Ventrue, though they tend to be modern rather than conservative in their personage and apparel. Most old members are of European derivation, with a preponderance of French members with that famous Gaelic nose. In the modern nights, there are increasing numbers of Hispanic and Japanese members, as well as Americans of mixed background. All Masons dress well, generally in business attire, sometimes with a French flair designed to remind them of their glory days in Paris. A very few elders yearn for the days of Worth gowns, swashbuckling cuffs and hussar boots, and take formal parties as an opportunity to revel in their golden age, but few are so out of touch to think such apparel suited for nightly wear.

**Haven:** As the would-be masters of urban civilization, nothing but the best can serve as a haven for one of the Masons. Sixtieth-story penthouse condos with secret rooms, safety vaults and full security are possible, designed to be impregnable while maintaining the image of powerful nonchalance. Sprawling villas or small mansions with perfect French gardens in the high style of Le Notre are popular, though Masons in young and populous cities have had to give





them up to maintain the Masquerade. Other than quality and elegance, the common feature of all Architect havens is that they are in some way imposing, impressive or mystically significant. Be this a fine historical pedigree or an avant-garde sense of space, something about a haven makes it “mystically powerful” in a twisted interpretation of sacred construction. Many Architects keep truly eye-catching elements confined to the interior of a haven, so as to avoid notice, while others ensure their havens disappear into the cityscape, despite their haute couture.

**Background:** Being Ventrue, the Architects take only childer who seem the best to their skewed perceptions. The main traits considered desirable are a craving for personal power and control; extensive knowledge of architecture, urban studies, city planning or the occult; and the ability to exist independently and quietly. This combination of requirements leads to many members being from mixed corporate and academic backgrounds, with a preference for those who are both well-educated and successful in businesses, such as in real estate and urban development. Above and beyond all else, each prospective Architect must prove her ability to keep a secret. The Masons have a natural flair for secrecy and dissembling to rival that of the Mekhet.

Other Ventrue who meet Architect standards can be adopted into the line. An Architect most likely approaches a prospective member, and then only after the candidate has been circumspectly but thoroughly tested on his initial sanity, ability to keep secrets and compatibility with the bloodline’s goals. These tests are generally hidden in the nightly politics of the Requiem, with false alliances and information being given and fake agents sent to trick, bribe or coerce information from the potential recruit. He is deemed of merit only if he can impress his assailant-adopters. Once a subject has been found worthy, the Architects approach obliquely, carefully sounding him out and making him take fear-some oaths before bringing him into their august ranks.

**Character Creation:** Chosen and groomed for mental acumen backed by social strength and secrecy, Architects tend toward high Mental and Social traits. Members have above average Resolve, Intelligence and Composure. It’s a rare Mason who doesn’t have a deep interest in and knowledge of the mysteries of sacred and mystical architecture, leading to a high level in Occult. Just after the mystical comes immersion in the theory of Academics, the practice of Crafts and the knowledge of Science as each relates to architecture, construction, gardening, demolitions and urban planning. Politics and Socialize are considered practical tools needed to impose one’s vision on the world, without being a primary focus.

The splendid mansions, penthouses and castles of the Architects require a high level of Haven. Connections with urban-development offices, city government, architectural firms and construction companies require dots in Allies, Contacts, Resources and Status (among mortals).

Despite social connections and Ventrue blood, few line members have Status in vampiric circles, due to their low profile and the madness that makes others shun them.

Any character who immediately starts down the path of an Architect rather than as a mere land-speculating Ventrue needs a second dot of Blood Potency.

**Bloodline Disciplines:** Auspex, Dominate, Gilded Cage, Resilience

**Weakness:** Architects are corrupted by their power even more so than their Ventrue cousins. They retain the clan weakness, suffering a –2 penalty to Humanity rolls to avoid acquiring derangements after failing a degeneration roll.

The Architects’ specific weakness is deeper seated, though no one is sure if it’s a flaw in their nature or a curse passed down from their founder. All Masons are afflicted with the Narcissism derangement upon the Embrace, and gain Megalomania as their first severe derangement. (How the latter is acquired doesn’t matter. It could be the result of a failed Humanity roll or the result of a traumatizing experience in the Danse Macabre.) The twist to line members’ Narcissism and Megalomania is that neither focuses on the bearer alone, but extends to the line founder Ermenjart and her vision (see below) as well. That is, Architects do not just believe they are unquestionably superior, they believe their founder is as well, and that her plans for world dominion will come true. Unlike many megalomaniacs, Masons have learned to keep quiet about their certainty. The madness drives them, it just does so silently and subtly.

**Organization:** The Architects of the Monolith is a group of madmen and women overseen by a demoniac. From her palatial Parisian haven, Ermenjart la Charpentière rules her childer with power, fear, oaths and blood bonds. The elder has been active and alert, avoiding torpor for the existence of the bloodline, and her grasp on it is sure. In order to maintain control of her brood and to allow her to pursue her insane goals, she has turned the bloodline into something between a cult and a corporation, parsing out control and authority through a series of grandiosely titled subalterns.

Ermenjart herself is recognized as “The Carpenter” (“la Charpentière”) and does everything in her power to turn herself into a messianic figure for her childer. She promises them a new world based on their creations, a vampiric Zion in which all power will flow through urban channels to feed the Architects. Due to the weakness of the bloodline, almost every member accepts this goal wholeheartedly.

Under the Carpenter is the Main de Gloire, the trio of her eldest childer who govern the line when Ermenjart is too busy “bringing about the new salvation of steel, concrete and blood.” Decorated with titles and ranks, this triumvirate should have great authority, but the truth is the Main de Gloire is too divided by its own vision and

madness to be effective in coordinating any united action of the line. The three are, however, extremely effective at punishing any Mason who betrays them or Ermenjart.

Beneath the Main de Gloire, the organization breaks down by location. Most cities are still beyond the reach of the bloodline's limited numbers; many major cities are home to only a single Architect. Such a solo operative is known as a Lion de Zion. Lions work directly for the Main de Gloire, receiving bizarre and often contradictory orders that are supposed to further the great work. These representative tend to get very good at interpreting the Main de Gloire's orders to fit their own particular madness, and spend much of their time furthering personal goals.

About a dozen of the most important cities in the world — New York, London and Moscow among them — have a cabal of Architects known as a Section d'Or. Each group is lead by a Clef de Voûte, who answers to the Main de Gloire and who ostensibly works with other cities' Clefs de Voûte. A Clef de Voûte leads other Architects in a city, coordinating their individual projects toward the greater plan. Each member of the Section d'Or is theoretically responsible for her own domain, but in some cities the Clef de Voûte micromanages every aspect of Architects' operations. Of course, groups and individuals have also become very good at interpreting mad orders from above to fit their individual delusions.

The Architects are most powerful in Europe and on the American East Coast. European Masons still rebuild from the carnage that the world wars inflicted, which has allowed American members in Chicago and New York to catch up. In the last 30 years, a few radical Lions have managed to gain the approval of the Main de Gloire with daring work in developing nations in South American and southeast Asia, taking credit for achievements such as the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur (which they in fact had very little to do with). The bloodline also has aspirations of expanding into Japan, where megacity and neocity research and development promises massive rewards.

**Concepts:** Ruthless real-estate mogul, urban studies or geology professor, demolition expert, creepy architect, necropolis designer, urban-renewal politician, science-fiction writer/futurist (specializing in super-cities and arcologies), public-works engineer, master of traffic and transit, feng-shui mystic, ley-line tracker, urban spiritualist, landscaper/gardener, Napoleonic throwback

### *History*

In the late 17th century, Ermenjart la Charpentière was a heretic against the Lancea Sanctum. She was newly risen from torpor and tormented with half-understood memories of building Louis IX's Parisian Sainte-Chapelle, and working with great mystics in Prague. Her quest for comprehension brought her to the Ordo Dracul and they taught her about ley lines and mystical correspondence. Synchronicity brought her in contact, however briefly,

with André Le Norte, architect and gardener for Louis XIV, and from that meeting Ermenjart gained vision.

Her newly inspired dream was of necropoli that would channel and control energy, using it to provide sustenance for the vampiric condition. For nearly a century she influenced and was influenced by mortal necrographers, resulting in mystical influence over the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris. Upon the opening of the cemetery in 1804, Ermenjart realized that not only did construction of the place affect interior ley lines, it warped the flow in the surrounding city, changing the behavior of kine in surrounding neighborhoods.

This realization brought Ermenjart to her full vision: the manipulation of ley lines through sacred architecture to control cities, turning them into the center of reality. It was a megalomaniacal dream of nightmarish proportions, and Ermenjart knew she could neither accomplish it alone nor trust outsiders with the plan. (It's also possible that some deep-seated part of her knew her vision was impossible, and she would not share it for fear of being confronted with the truth.) So it was that a bloodline emerged from la Charpentière's efforts to see her plan to fruition, yet to keep it secret among trusted childer.

The early Architects used their Ventrue ties to gain influence and standing with the builders, planners, contractors and mystics of Paris. When Georges Haussmann began his renovation of Paris under Napoleon III, the bloodline was behind the scenes, learning and manipulating. Members were convinced that they had mastered the ley lines of Paris when they unlocked the secret sorcery of the Gilded Cage. That marked the golden age of the line, when the most members were Embraced and inducted, a time that elders now remember with nostalgia bordering on idolatry. To this day, the Paris of the Napoleons is upheld as an example of what the Architects can do, and of the world the Carpenter would create. Glittering, decadent, beautiful and utterly corrupt.

The golden age came to a crashing end when Ermenjart and the Main de Gloire overreached themselves and used sorcery to destroy a handful of Lancea Sanctum Bishops whom they felt opposed their plans. This outrage led to a backlash that shattered the Architects in London and Vienna, and left even the Paris faction decimated. The Carpenter learned her lesson and slunk into the shadows, letting the Sanctified think they had put and end to her machinations.

After years in hiding, the Masons spread slowly and quietly through many of Europe and America's greatest cities. The dangers of travel and the still-angry Sanctified claimed several of the less cautious, but Section d'Or were soon established once more in London, New York, Chicago and Vienna. Meanwhile, young Lions established themselves in any city where they felt they could make a mark. With every new Gilded Cage ritual discovered, the bloodline was convinced it moved that

much closer to world domination, and so continued plotting. The brood weathered the world wars and “great enemies” such as Daniel Burnham (who probably never knew the Architects existed), and moved into the age of skyscrapers and urban development with a grace that few other Ventrue could match.

As of the 21st century, the Main de Gloire estimates that the “great work” still has 450 years left until its completion, putting it slightly ahead of its original A.D. 2600 projection. Ermenjart herself wonders if she may have been overly conservative, however. With “triumphs” such as the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur and the possibilities they open in developing Third World nations, perhaps the plan can be accomplished sooner. In these nights, the founder dreams of a world with cities as reality itself, wilderness reduced to mist and ash, and all the power of ley lines flowing into her hands. Perhaps it can all be accomplished before the turn of the next century! From her, the force of these dreams spreads through the bloodline, urging members to further madness and power, demanding that they become masters of their cities, no matter how much blood must be used as mortar for the bricks.

### *Society and Culture*

Ermenjart is the undisputed master of the Architects. Elders are blood bound to her, giving her a tight grip on the most powerful Clefs de Voûte. They, in turn, often blood bond their childer to make sure that the line’s mission proceeds without dissension in the ranks. A few young members see no need for such draconian measures, as they find the carrot of power, coupled with their own inherent madness, more than sufficient to keep their ambition in order. The selectivity with which new members are initiated also contributes to making the Architects a tight lineage. While it bears all of the usual rivalries of undead existence, each member knows where he stands. No matter how intense hatred from within becomes, anyone on the outside is automatically an enemy and potential inquisitor.

Nightly activity is mostly occupied with the politicking and hunting that dominates vampiric existence. Members also work toward

the fulfillment of their great, deluded dream, building their imagined monolith brick by brick. How exactly an individual answers this call depends on her place and roll in the line. A Clef de Voûte’s time is occupied with keeping her Section d’Or coordinated. Members of a Section d’Or focus on their individual areas of talent, attempting to interweave the mortal, mystical and vampiric through all levels of their portfolio. They also spend a great deal of their time politicking, as they are the Architects most likely to battle over esteem and territorial disputes with other vampires. Not to mention that they often have their eyes on the Clef de Voûte’s position, either in their own city or in another. Lions de Zion have to do all of the above, acting as both Clef and Section for a city, without the direct backing of others. It’s a rare Lion who can actually advance his plans, as it takes both great subtly and vast aggression.

They types of projects that receive the nightly attention of Lions and members of the Section are wide and variable. Members of the Ordo Dracul focus on causing, dealing with and tracking ley-line shifts. That can include anything from studying the effects of wind dispersion from a new skyscraper to the energy created by a sewer or subway line. It also means playing shadow games with mortal mystics or Crone witches, and devising new, more complex and bloodier rituals. Members of the Invictus focus on playing power politics with other vampires, manipulating city resources and fiefs to manage both vampiric and mortal zones of influence, and keeping Mason activities beneath the notice of Prince and Primogen. In addition, there is any number of seeming illogical and random demands thrown into the mix, driven by the particular focus of any Mason’s madness.

Every bloodline member is involved in architecture and city planning in some way, though it need not be a directly obvious connection. Some specialize in coercing and bribing city planners into rezoning areas for development, or to allow construction of buildings that violate zoning laws. Others focus on gaining resources and funding for such construction, or stirring up fear and paranoia in neighborhoods so as to make them easier to rezone and keep the herd’s focus off encroaching expansion. Others put on architectural fares and exhibitions, trying to pick mortal minds for new ideas, or they infiltrate college faculties to gain access to the newest and brightest as potential blood members.





Others focus on less obvious endeavors, such as using origami to find more efficient building models, doing studies on how various materials channel mystical energy, or inquiring into how television shows influence the mental terrain of a city. How much respect Architects are given for such enigmatic pursuits depends on their ability to convince others of their utility. If a member can convince peers that her study of eggshells will yield great results 200 years down the line, she garners almost as much respect as the Mason who influences the construction of a 110-story skyscraper. If she can't convince anyone of her purpose, she may quickly be reduced to obsolescence.

## Gilded Cage

The grandly titled Gilded Cage is a form of ritual magic known only to the Architects of the Monolith. Born of a combination of Theban Sorcery, Ordo Dracul rituals and sacred geometry, the art form focuses on controlling aspects of architecture and urban development to gain mystical power over a city. Most of the rituals have a Victorian Masonic aspect, with implements and precise performance required for their use.

To date, no non-Architect has ever learned the Gilded Cage, as it is one of the bloodline's most closely guarded secrets. Very few vampires know of its existence as anything other than an odd power, often assuming it a path of the Coils of the Dragon. Teaching an outsider not only gives away power, it gives away secrets that could lead to the bloodline's undoing. Nearly as importantly, elders use their knowledge of line rituals to keep younger members under their thumb. The only way to learn a new ritual is to be taught it by an elder who has mastered it, so progenitors use the careful doling out of power as a potent method of control.

**Cost:** Using Gilded Cage always costs one Willpower point. The whole Discipline is based on the idea of imposing one's will on the world through mystical-scientific research. Willpower spent in this manner does not add three dice to activation rolls. Also, because only one Willpower point may ever be spent in a turn, another cannot be spent to augment a Gilded Cage roll unless specified otherwise.

Furthermore, Gilded Cage rituals require that specific items be used or that a caster be in a certain place in order to activate a power. Items, known as Means, are foci that align the will with the forces channeled. Places, known as Ways, are sites where a pre-existing tendency toward certain phenomena already exists. Any attempt to invoke a Gilded Cage ritual without proper Ways and Means fails automatically. Unlike other forms of vampiric sorcery, however, the Ways and Means used to activate Gilded Cage rituals are not consumed. They can be reused unless specifically noted otherwise. This fact has led some to suggest that Ways and Means are simply props to undead will and not actually mystical tools, but such conjecture defies the Carpenter's teachings....

Like Crúac and Theban Sorcery, Gilded Cage does not have a linear progression as other Disciplines do. A character's mastery (dots) dictates the highest level of rituals that he may learn. Rituals are bought with experience points. For example, a character with Gilded Cage 2 can know an unlimited number of one-dot and two-dot rituals (provided the experience points are paid to learn each), but he may not learn any three-dot rituals until his Gilded Cage trait increases to 3. Each time a character acquires a dot in Gilded Cage (including at character creation), he gains a ritual of that level at no additional cost.

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Occult + Gilded Cage

**Action:** Extended. The number of successes required to activate a ritual is equal to the level of the ritual (so a three-dot rite requires three successes to enact). Each roll represents one turn of casting. Note that each point of damage suffered in a turn is a penalty to the next casting roll made for the character.

If a character fails to complete a ritual in time (such as by being sent into torpor before accumulating enough successes) or he decides to cancel the performance before garnering enough successes, the effect simply fails. Spent Willpower is not recovered.

## Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The ritual fails spectacularly, either inflicting some aspect of itself as a detrimental effect upon the caster or causing a reversed effect.

**Failure:** No successes are accumulated toward the required total.

**Success:** The number of successes rolled is accumulated toward the total required. Once that total is met, the ritual takes place as described.

**Exceptional Success:** Five or more successes are gathered than needed to perform the ritual. The effect takes place as described. In many cases extra successes are their own reward, conferring additional duration or capacity.

## Suggested Modifiers

### Modifier Situation

- +2 Power is used in the downtown/center of a major city
- +2 Power applies to a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie
- +1 Power is used in the downtown/center of a minor city
- The character is unaffected by threats or distractions
- Power is used in a moderately sized urban environment
- −1 Power is used in the downtown/center of a town
- −1 Per Health point lost to an attack
- −1 to −3 The character is rushed or distracted, such as by invoking a ritual in combat or while trapped in a burning building. This penalty is cumulative with multiple distractions (such as by casting a ritual in combat during a hurricane). Successes gained on a meditation roll for the night (see p. 51 of the) offset interruption penalties on a one-for-one basis.
- −2 Power is used in a small urban area
- −3 Power is used on the outskirts of civilization

*Paths of the Prey*  
(Level-One Gilded Cage Ritual)

This ritual combines an ability to read ley lines with intimate knowledge of the traffic flow of a city to make it much easier for a vampire to find mortals suitable for feeding. While any Damned knows she can find someone drunk in the Rack, someone using this ritual can find a ready, willing vessel in the downtown business core on a Monday night by following the flows of energy and probability, and by knowing of places where the city's layout clouds mortal minds. Successes achieved on this ritual are added as bonus dice to the hunting roll made for the vampire that night (and for that night only). Only one casting of this rite can affect a user at a time. The rite can be performed on another vampire after a "consultation" with the caster in person.

**Ways and Means:** A detailed city-planning map of the area to be hunted

*Red Light*  
(Level-One Gilded Cage Ritual)

Traversing a well-planned city should be effortless, while crossing a poorly planned city is a daunting task. Using this ritual, an Architect is able to increase the amount of time it takes a subject to get from one point to another by invoking the random functions of the city to plague him. Victims of this ritual hit every light red, are caught behind trucks that break down in the middle of the street, are detoured by construction and are unable to find parking. A victim must be in the same city as the caster, and the caster must specify what location (typically about a five-block area) is made difficult to access. Each success on the ritual increases the base time required to get to that location by 25%. Exceptional success simply triples the travel time required. So, if normal transit requires 30 minutes, two successes increase that by 50%, for a total travel time of 45 minutes. Five or more successes make it a 90-minute trip.

No more than one casting of Red Light can apply to a single subject at a time. If the subject gives up trying to reach one destination and heads to another in a different part of town, a new casting must be performed to befuddle him again. The Direction Sense Merit has no benefit for the subject. He knows where he needs to go, he just can't get there.

**Ways and Means:** Specification of the inaccessible locale

*Green Light*  
(Level-Two Gilded Cage Ritual)

The opposite of Red Light, this ritual enables an Architect to use secret detours, lucky coincidences, clear roads and traffic lights to help hurry someone from one point to another. Each success (getting only one doesn't count) cuts travel time by 10%, down to a minimum of 50% of the base time. So, if a trip normally takes an hour and three successes

are achieved, 18 minutes are shaved off the trip. (Accumulating only one success before the rite has to be terminated nets no results.) If the ritual is cast on someone else, the Architect must be in the same city as the subject, and must specify to what destination the rite applies. If the subject changes destinations for any reason, the ritual no longer applies and travel time returns to normal. Another casting is required for the subject's new destination. If the ritual is performed on the Mason himself, the effects last for an entire night, making *all* travel for the evening faster. Note that a subject's actual Speed does not increase. No more than one casting of Green Light can apply to a subject at a time.

**Ways and Means:** A planner's triangle, a map of the city and a current schedule of the city's public transportation

*Aura of the Monolith*  
(Level-Two Gilded Cage Ritual)

Great architecture inspires compelling emotions, be they of awe, reverence or fear. This ritual allows the caster to link herself symbolically to a great structure in order to enhance her personal aura, giving her something of the authority and radiance of the structure itself. For each success achieved on the activation roll (accumulating only one nets no result), one bonus die is gained on Social rolls that involve the same emotion or premise that the building invokes. Intimidation and Persuasion rolls are most likely to be affected, but Expression rolls could be affected if a building is an arts hall, for example. The effect works only as long as the caster has direct line of sight to the structure in question, and the rite can be called upon throughout the night in which it is cast, as long as the same building comes into view again.

Changing buildings requires a new incantation. No more than one ritual can be active at the same time. The inspirational structure must be directly visible to the naked eye, not through binoculars or on television.

**Example:** Marie wants to enhance her personal aura of rightful authority, so casts *Aura of the Monolith* with a link to City Hall. Her player gets three successes. So long as she is in line of sight to City Hall, her player gains three extra dice to likely Social rolls, such as influencing others with Intimidation or Persuasion. If the Storyteller agrees, even Subterfuge rolls could be affected.

**Ways and Means:** Line of sight to the structure in mind

*Gather the Herd*  
(Level-Three Gilded Cage Ritual)

A well-planned city not only makes it easy for citizens to move through its streets, it actually guides and influences that movement. This ritual allows the caster to usher a group of people to a certain location at a certain time, using the complexities of transportation, mapping and herd mentality. Each success allows the caster to gather 100 people in an area the size of a parking lot or small park over the course of an hour. (Accumulating only one or two successes be-

fore the ritual is terminated nets no results.) The ritual does not allow for control of specific individuals, nor does it compel subjects to travel to the site against their will. A multitude of people who were already in transit simply end up there despite their intentions to get elsewhere. On an exceptional success, the ritualist can specify a specific group of people, such as ravers, senior citizens or gang members.

A caster can have only one application of this ritual in effect at a time. The user must be within the city and need not be at the designated location for people to arrive there. Only mortals are influenced by this power; ghouls, vampires and other supernatural beings are not. Once the ritual has been performed, the caster cannot dispel it; people continue to gather within an hour and may then disperse under their own power.

**Ways and Means:** A park, parking lot, stadium or other structure/area where people might normally gather. A formal invitation to the “event” written in the caster’s blood (invokes no Vitae cost).

*Eye of the Pyramid*  
(*Level-Three Gilded Cage Ritual*)

One of the reasons monumental architecture is so powerful is that it can be seen from almost anywhere, and thus has a mystical correspondence to perception. A Mason using this ritual gains sensory powers over the building on which it is cast. Each success rolled allows the character to see or hear anything that occurs within the building for one hour. (Accumulating only one or two successes before the rite has to be terminated nets no results.) The Architect sees all and hears all, from a whisper in the basement to the numbers turned on a penthouse safe. Auspex abilities may be targeted at the building through this mystical connection and gain a +2 bonus, possibly allowing the viewer to penetrate Obfuscate powers (*Vampire*, p. 119). The user must be within the same city as the building.

A ritualist may cast Eye of the Pyramid on a number of buildings at the same time equal to her Gilded Cage dots, but cannot focus on more than one building at a time. While the ritualist focuses, she is deaf and blind to events in her physical presence. Physical contact of any kind with a projecting vampire brings her senses back to her body immediately.

A caster need not specify where her broadcast senses actually lie in a building. She’s aware of everything that goes on inside and can filter it all down to one spectacle and one word spoken. Events *outside* the building cannot be perceived through a window.

**Ways and Means:** A whole brick from the building

*Lock the Gilded Cage*  
(*Level-Four Gilded Cage Ritual*)

The poetic term that Kindred use to describe their reliance on the city has been one of Masons’ fascina-

tions since the bloodline’s inception. This ritual allows the caster to make a city into a literal cage for a subject. Every way out of the city is blocked. Cars break down, trains derail and roads are cut off by construction. With exceptional success, police barricades, sinkholes and floods may block a subject from leaving.

The action to activate this power is extended and contested, pitting the caster’s Intelligence + Occult + Gilded Cage against the subject’s Resolve + Blood Potency (resistance is reflexive). If the victim acquires four net successes before the caster, the ritual fails. Another attempt cannot be made against the same subject for four nights. If the caster gains those (or more) successes first, each success blocks the victim from leaving the city by mundane means for one day and night. The subject is unaware of the power applied to him, and does not know why her existence has suddenly become so difficult. Superstitious victims may suspect sorcery, of course, but have no proof of it. The power applies to even a vampire whose ghouls seek to escort (or carry) her from town.

If a subject has extraordinary or supernatural means of travel or escape (such as magic), the ritual blocks one use of that power per success accumulated in the activation roll. So, if a subject has the capacity to will herself from a spot in one city to a spot in another city, and four successes are gathered for the vampire in keeping the victim rooted, four attempts at the escape power fail. The fifth allows the subject to leave normally. Use of Celerity to move quickly to escape a city does not apply as “extraordinary.”

**Ways and Means:** Access to a legal building such as a courthouse or police station, and a picture or belonging of the victim

*Metropolis of the United Diagram*  
(*Level-Five Gilded Cage Ritual*)

This ritual is the newest creation of the Main de Gloire, having come about in Chicago in the 1930s. Its utility has put it in high demand ever since, and it has spread rapidly throughout the ranks of Architects capable of performing it. The ritual requires a longer than normal activation: one minute per roll rather than one turn. The ritualist opens himself to the connections among the powerful monuments of his city. The vampire then vanishes from his current location and appears at another. When the required successes are accumulated, the performer travels instantaneously from one spot to another within the same city. The caster must have visited the new site previously. Only items worn and that can be held in hand go with the ritualist. No one can be brought along. Nor can items that cannot be held or lifted.

**Ways and Means:** A map of the city and a diamond of at least two carats



# Bohagande

It might seem like you've got me where you want me and my game is up, but luck is a funny thing. I hope you know how to laugh, because things are about to get real funny.

Kindred folklore is replete with tales of unusual bloodlines and the loathsome powers that are theirs to command, but few lineages are surrounded by as much exaggeration, misinformation, skepticism and trepidation as the Bohagande (or simply the "Jonahs"). According to stories, these Kindred are jinxes. Wherever they go, bad luck is sure to follow as certain as the sun will rise. Each telling relates different tragedies, from havens catching fire and their occupants burning to ash, to an ancilla's entire financial portfolio crashing overnight, to the trespass of a Lupine in the halls of Elysium.

Many dismiss these stories as the product of overactive imaginations. These "Jonahs" are dismissed nothing more than shadowy bogeymen meant to worry neonates. Others wonder if there might not be such a brood after all, especially when they're confronted by an extraordinary confluence of tragedies.

A rare few claim to have actually met one of these mythical Kindred. Although they cannot agree on specifics such as parent clan or where the bloodline originated, witnesses agree that the Bohagande are cursed, and that anyone who crosses their path is at great risk. They also claim there is more to the Jonahs than stories suggest, something even more inimical than the line's telltale curse, further compounding the mystery that surrounds the lineage.

The Bohagande themselves tell progeny that they are the descendants of a Gangrel wanderer whose fateful encounter with a medicine man in the American West led to their creation. According to the most common account, the medicine man was cursed for a terrible crime against his people. Wherever he went, an ill wind blew and those around him suffered. Forced into exile, he sought revenge upon those who had cursed him, and he called upon the ancient spirits of the land to help him. One came to his aid, teaching him how to turn his curse to an advantage by taking the luck lost by others. When the medicine man met the Gangrel, the mortal mistook the vampire for the spirit that had

once helped him. Seeking to impress his former mentor, the native demonstrated all he had learned and offered his blood as payment for his debt, thereby passing on his curse *and* his magic.

Due to their notoriety, the Bohagande rarely announce their presence, preferring to pass themselves off as ordinary Gangrel. It's not usually long after arriving in some new domain, however, before use of their special Discipline draws unwelcome attention, forcing them to choose between denying their birthright or fleeing. Those who waffle are usually forced to accept the latter if only to avoid a blood hunt.

Aside from their habit of moving from place to place and their shared origin, little else defines members of this bloodline. Jonahs may come from anywhere and have nearly any personality, although some become thrill-seekers as a side effect of their Discipline. With time and fortune on Jonahs' side, even the most improbable feats are within their reach and few things give a Bohagande as much of a rush as succeeding at the seemingly impossible. And yet, such accomplishments made public make line members' intolerable to other Kindred. Few Prisci want to entertain a vampire who is prone to dangerous risks that might bring the Masquerade crashing down.

**Parent Clan:** Gangrel

**Nickname:** Jonahs

**Covenant:** Given their tendency toward anonymity and the response they can expect from many Kindred, Bohagande tend to avoid involvement with covenants. When they are drawn to the supportive and philosophical benefits that a society offers, it's usually to those that recognize the value of these dangerous undead. The Circle of the Crone may boast the most Jonahs, but even then that number might be counted on one hand. Some Acolyte stories are reminiscent of bloodline origins, and curious Jonahs may explore a connection between their own Discipline and Crúac.



The Ordo Dracul can be alluring to Bohagande who hope to shed their line's reputation through self-denial, or to transcend their curse. The Carthians may harbor a couple of these pariahs, but rare is the Jonah who's so driven by politics to risk all by joining these blatant free-thinkers. Even so, a Bohagande in Carthian ranks could be a powerful weapon if directed properly, giving the covenant an edge over its competitors.

If the Invictus or Lancea Sanctum harbor a Bohagande, it's unlikely that they're aware of it. A Jonah's membership depends on how well she can keep her true nature hidden. Neither of these groups would welcome a jinx in its midst. The First Estate would see it as a threat to stability, and the Sanctified would view her as an abomination, cursed by God and perhaps even an agent of the Devil himself.

By and large, the Bohagande prefer to remain unaligned, the better to maintain their cover and to pick-up and leave easily should the need arise. It almost always does.

**Appearance:** A typical Jonah appears no different from any other Gangrel who's Embraced in the United States. Despite some connection to Native Americans in line origins, there is little evidence to suggest that the Bohagande especially prize those people as childer. In fact, the opposite may actually be the case, given the role the Shoshone played in first casting the hex that the line still bears. Still, a few Bohagande have adopted the practice of tattooing themselves — even beyond the grave — with Native American iconography as a way to at least forge some identify with their semi-mythical past, with the image of a crow figuring prominently in the decoration.

**Haven:** Knowing that in most cities their stay may be brief, Jonahs tend to seek out the most practical and least complicated havens possible. Abandoned homes and structures are typical choices, although due to their extraordinary luck, some members may be flush with cash and decide to live it up for a time in a penthouse apartment. No matter where they choose to stay, these undead invariably go to great lengths to ensure that they always have at least one means of escape in case the local Sheriff or Hound comes

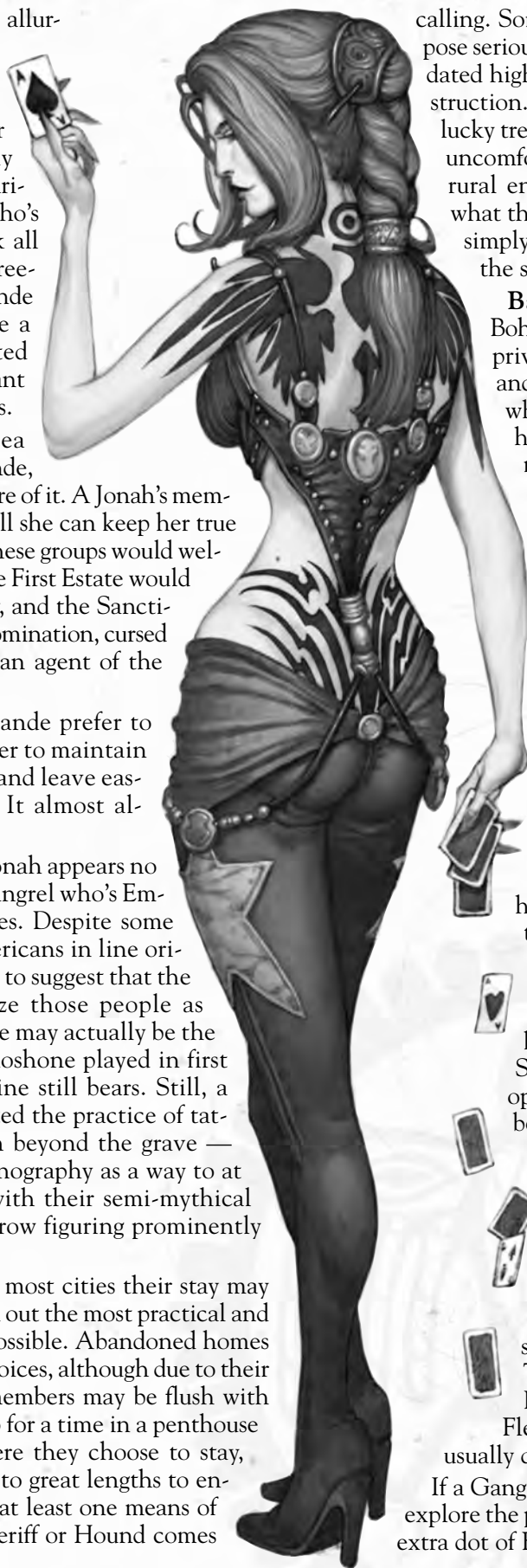
calling. Some choose a location that might pose serious risk to interlopers, like a dilapidated high-rise or a place undergoing construction. The kind of place where an unlucky trespasser may find himself in a very uncomfortable position. In suburban or rural environments, the vampires take what they can get, those who are able to simply slipping into the earth to avoid the sun's rays.

**Background:** The majority of Bohagande are individuals who value privacy, who cherish their freedom and who are drawn to risk. People who have nothing to lose and who have no problem packing up and moving on at a moment's notice are typically chosen. Daredevil types are not uncommon, and those who find a thrill in putting it all on the line are similarly favored. Drifters, gamblers, killers, grifters, extreme athletes and fugitives make up the bulk of the bloodline, but it's not unheard of for a Jonah to choose, say, a simple roadhouse waitress who's down on her luck.

**Character Creation:** Mental traits are perhaps admired most in prospective line members. While Social traits are definitely helpful in getting into and out of trouble, plying them makes for mundane means of interaction and survival. *Anyone* can have a silver tongue, so where's the challenge? Mental Attributes and Skills are respected more for the opportunities and angles that can be perceived; plots and schemes to pull from which the lineage's trademark can be used to escape. Physical traits are a close rival to Mental, simply for the backup they provide in getting out of a scrape.

Merits that lend themselves to solitary survival are also prized. Those include Direction Sense, Danger Sense, Unseen Sense and Fleet of Foot. Social Merits don't usually qualify among such traits.

If a Gangrel Embraced to the line seeks to explore the potential of his blood early on, an extra dot of Blood Potency initiates him.



**Bloodline Disciplines:** Animalism, Protean, Resilience, Sunnikuse

**Weakness:** Jonahs are subject to the weakness of their parent clan. The more they feel the call of the Beast, the more bestial they become, and the more their minds become those of less principled animals. With regard to dice pools based on Intelligence and Wits Attributes, the 10 Again rule does not apply. Additionally, any 1's that come up on a roll are subtracted from successes. (The latter part of this weakness does not affect dramatic-failure rules.) This weakness does not apply to dice pools involving perception or reaction to surprise (see p. 151 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), or to the Resolve Attribute.

In addition, Bohagande are permanently marked by their accursed legacy. Their auras appear not unlike black holes, seeming to soak up the colorful auras of others in a unsettling manner. Those able to perceive auras do not need to be familiar with the Bohagande to recognize this as the radiance of someone best avoided. Jonah image might suggest some kind of rampant diablerie, which it is after a fashion.

**Organization:** It's rare for more than one Bohagande to be found in a single domain. There are hardly enough line members as a whole to constitute anything that could resemble a formal gathering. Their proclivities and concerns preclude all but the most informal and temporary organization, with the sire-childe bond the only one that's commonly observed.

One Jonah in a given city can cause enough trouble. The presence of two or more could result in catastrophes that even the luckiest Bohagande might be unable to escape. The bloodline holds that whenever members encounter one another, the eldest may claim the right of residency. The younger must leave immediately, unless she wishes to challenge the elder. If that happens, the eldest chooses a single test of luck in which each competes. The winner may stay and the loser is bound to depart. Those who go unbeaten long enough are accorded special status among the bloodline. The Bohagande who has gone the longest without being bested is given the title Storm Crow. There's some disagreement as to the identity of this figure at any given time, and some claim the position is more rumor than reality.

The founder of the line is also recognized as particularly deserving of respect. Lucas Harwood does not wield any authority over his brood, but his voice carries special weight. Because few claim to know where he is or even if he still exists (and fewer still can honestly say they have actually met him), respect is usually shown through reverence to the words ascribed to him. A body of stories about Harwood's travels, his personal experiences and his advice to his progeny exists and is passed from Bohagande to Bohagande, albeit in no fixed form.

More fable than dogma, these tales are important to the bloodline and are perhaps its strongest connection to its origin.

Jonahs are found most frequently in North America and generally outside large cities, where they avoid persecution. The line's numbers are few, since there's no significant advantage to siring given the conflicts that arise with one's own childe. Members found elsewhere are true rarities, but they have a distinct advantage. Few Kindred outside North America have heard stories of the Bohagande and the curse that follows them. Jonahs who travel to a distant land may find it easier to hide their true nature and may even fit into vampiric society by adopting less nomadic and paranoid ways. Yet there is still the challenge of avoiding the wrath of undead who suffer chronic bad luck.

**Concepts:** Drifter, card sharp, small-time grifter, traveling carnival act (The Luckiest Lady in the World!), thrill-seeking biker, wandering preacher, carefree rock guitarist, eerie fortune teller, professional art thief, stock market "day" trader, street vigilante, freelance photographer

## History

Few Bohagande are terribly concerned about their origins. Even though they tell similar (or different stories), rare is the Jonah who actually considers them anything more than entertaining folktales. One story is as good as any, providing just enough history to answer the most nagging of questions. Even those who claim to be familiar with the bloodline's founder exhibit skepticism about the details of their origin, admitting that he may be guilty of more than a little fabrication. The Bohagande are who they are. Given their more pressing concerns, such as avoiding blood hunts, the specifics of their creation pale by comparison. Still, a similar story is passed on to new members if for no other reason than to provide some sense of shared identity.

In 1848, somewhere on the edge of the hellish expanse known today as Death Valley, a Gangrel named Lucas Harwood met a man who changed the Savage forever. Harwood had spent the bulk of his unlife prowling the burgeoning cities of the East, preying on the increasingly urbanized masses, or on their cousins in the small towns that had arisen between the Atlantic and the Mississippi. And yet, Harwood was most tempted by those he perceived as his mortal counterparts: Native Americans. Their primitive ways, ancient roots, fearsome medicine and savagery in battle struck a chord and drew him to their rich blood. The Shawnee, Chickahominy, Rappahanocks, Lenape, Cherokee, Saponi, Chicora and other tribes became his favored vessels, but their numbers dwindled and many tribes were only a shadow of what they had once been.



Harwood longed to drink from a well undiluted by the taint of European civility, and so in the early 1830s he turned his back on his former hunting grounds and set off for the unsettled West to quench his desire.

He traveled with a single retainer, a rugged scout of French extraction who claimed to have heard from Meriwether Lewis' own lips of lands and people that stretched to the distant shore. Trusting his guide to keep him from harm, Harwood joined the flood of wide-eyed settlers, prospectors, charlatans, prostitutes, soldiers, entrepreneurs and fugitives seeking fortune, adventure and sanctuary in the nation's western reaches. The journey showed the vampire things he could not have dreamed, and dangers that nearly sounded the last note of his Requiem. Harwood was enslaved by the experience. He roved across the land, led by the Beast that he had caged for so long.

For a decade, Harwood stalked natives for the challenge they posed. The fearsome kine were not easily caught off guard, and because they suffered under no Masquerade, they did not hesitate to accept the existence of the creature that harried them. Skilled hunters, some braves tracked the Gangrel by day and discovered his haven, brutally murdering his retainer. Only the Disciplines of his parent clan saved him from a similar fate. The myriad dangers that Harwood then faced did not deter him, however. He thrilled to solitary existence and honed his predatory abilities to new heights. Eventually he even learned to take the form of a coyote and crow, the better to go where he pleased.

It was in bird form that he came upon a lone mortal one night, high upon a rock overlooking Shoshone land. The individual was a gifted medicine man — a *bohagande* in his own language. Once named Seeing Star for his knowledge of the heavens, the man was now an outcast. He had slain an innocent child in order to work a great rite, which had been forbidden by his elders. Seeing Star was brought before a tribal gathering, judged guilty and sentenced to exile from his people.

To ensure that the medicine man would never again haunt them, the three wisest of the tribe laid a curse upon him so that bad luck would come to any who took him in, a curse that turned his hair white. Finally, the name Seeing Star was stripped from him, robbing the man of his identity and thereby denying him the power he once commanded. From that point forward, he was no longer Shoshone and was forced into the wastelands to meet whatever fate the Great Spirit held for him.

Word of the curse and its nameless bearer spread across Sogobia, the tribal homeland. Everywhere he went, disaster was at his side. Left to places deemed desolate, he struggled to survive and railed against the heavens themselves, swearing revenge. When the man

was at wits end and with nowhere else to turn, Crow agreed to aid him. Laughing, the spirit told his petitioner that he did not possess the power to remove so great a curse. Angered, the medicine man tried to grab the bird, but Crow had luck on his side and escaped. The spirit told the wretched Shoshone that he was not laughing at the man's misfortune, but because the outcast was too blind to see the powerful gift he had been given.

"There is no such thing as bad luck," Crow said. "What some call bad luck is only luck's absence. Wherever you go, men around you are the cursed ones, not you. Your gift steals the luck they all carry with them, leaving them empty. If you knew how, you could take their luck and have it for yourself. Instead, you let it fall through your fingers like sand. That is why I laugh at you. You shake the fruit from the tree, but you leave it on the ground to rot."

The medicine man realized the truth in Crow's words. The suffering of others could be his strength. He threw himself before the wise spirit and begged Crow to show him how to master his curse, offering everything he had as payment. Crow accepted, saying that the price would be to one day teach the spirit something that the man had learned. The deal struck, Crow showed his pupil a new path. He also gave the man a new name — White Star, inspired by his hair — to restore the power he had lost.

Then Crow took flight, leaving the medicine man no longer eager for death's comforting welcome. White Star quickly mastered what he had learned and went among men again, exacting his revenge. Each of those who had cursed him died in a terrible accident. The elders that had condemned him met their end, and any other who crossed his path found catastrophe to be her new companion.

When Harwood alighted on a bluff near White Star, still in the form of a crow, he first thought the man was quite old because of his hair. Perhaps this mortal had come out here, far from his people, to seek a vision, a desire with which Harwood was familiar. Although wary of some hidden danger, Harwood approached, his unquenchable hunger overriding caution. Before he could shift form and pounce, the man turned and proved himself to be younger and more capable than Harwood guessed. The native was grim and exuded a power that belied his calm demeanor. Fearful that the man might be a Lupine or worse, Harwood maintained his feathered seeming and prepared to escape. He had spent enough time around the tribes to understand native tongues, and was surprised when the man spoke to him as if he was an old friend.

"Many seasons have passed since we last spoke, Crow," the man said. "Your medicine is strong and with it I have had my revenge. I know why you have

come back now. It is time for me to repay you as I agreed. Tell me what you wish to learn and I shall teach it."

Startled by the mortal's manner, Harwood didn't know what to do. He was intrigued by the prospect of a gift, but the Beast had other plans. The vampire shed his winged guise before the man's eyes and leapt for his throat. To the Gangrel's chagrin, his foot caught on a stone and his wicked claws barely grazed his intended victim, drawing only a trickle of blood that the attacker licked clean. Now White Star was ready, and when the Savage lunged again, his blow went wild. His Beast enraged, Harwood snarled his determination and made what would surely be a killing blow. But the medicine man was favored by fate once again and the assailant was almost sent over a precipice. Misfortune plagued the vampire's every move. What should have been the simplest thing was a harsh lesson in futility. When the first rays of sunlight shone across the flat land, Harwood, so focused on his intended prey, was taken by surprise. Howling his frustration, he sank into the cold earth, still desperate for nourishment.

When the Gangrel crept from the ground the next sunset, he was amazed to find the white-haired man still there, clearly awaiting his return. Unwilling to repeat the same mistakes of the night before, Harwood pushed his hunger as far down as he could and sat across from the Shoshone, respectful of the man's evident power. White Star still believed that Harwood was Crow, regardless of the form the spirit took, and wanted to know why Crow had tried to kill him. "I had promised to teach you as you had taught me. Our bargain was not for my life."

Harwood was confused, but caution kept his tongue. The outcast *bohagande* awaited an answer, but when none came, he offered his own interpretation. "Ah, you have forgotten who you are, Crow. So it is when you wear the skin of another for too

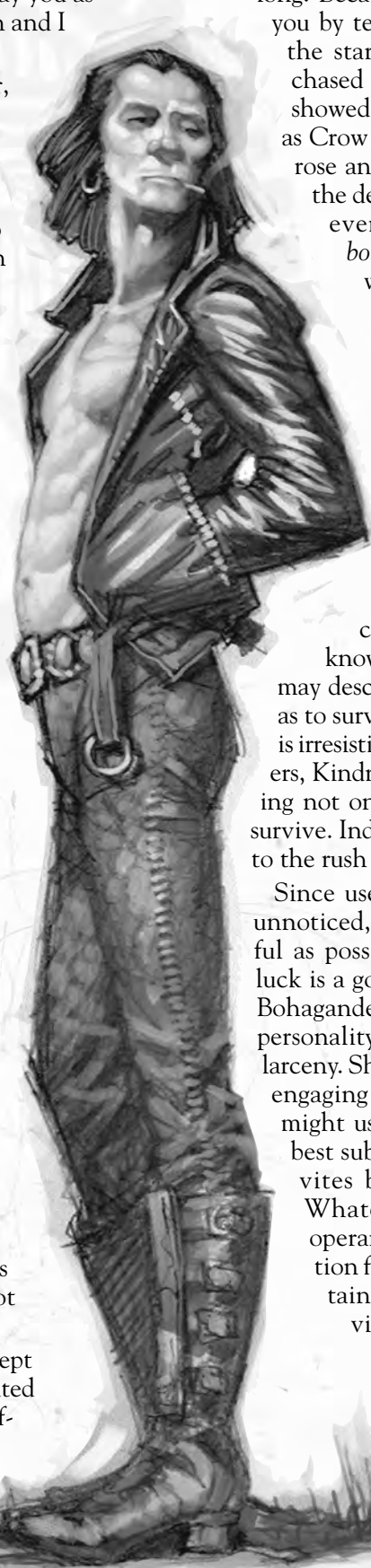
long. Because you have forgotten, I shall repay you by teaching you what you have lost." As the stars wheeled in the heavens and Bat chased Moth across the valley, White Star showed Harwood how to use spirit medicine as Crow had once taught him. Again the sun rose and once more Harwood slept beneath the desert. When he awoke this time, however, he was alone. The curse of the *bohagande* and the medicine of Crow were now his.

## Society and Culture

Treated like lepers and hounded by their fellow Kindred, yet possessed of a power that enables them to accomplish the seemingly impossible, the Bohagandes' Requiem is like no other. The temptation to exercise the line's special Discipline is difficult to resist, especially knowing that the hammer of a Prince's law may descend without warning. Being so lucky as to survive such a surprise is as practical as it is irresistible. Jonahs therefore tend to view others, Kindred and kine alike, as vessels containing not only blood, but the luck they need to survive. Indeed, many line members are addicted to the rush of stealing another's fortune.

Since use of Sunnikuse does not go entirely unnoticed, Bohagande are forced to be as careful as possible. Simply going around, stealing luck is a good way to call down persecution. A Bohagande thus finds a gimmick that fits her personality and special talents as a cover for her larceny. She might stick to something overt, like engaging victims in a game of chance, or she might use straightforward psychology as the best subterfuge, suggesting how a victim invites bad luck and then offering proof. Whatever method she uses, her *modus operandus* provides just enough justification for ill events. Such deceptions are certainly not necessary, but without one a victim is likely to lay blame outward rather than inward.

When two Bohagande cross paths, the elder has the right to command the younger to move on. If the younger wishes to challenge, the older declares a contest, with the



winner claiming the right of domain. The challenge can take nearly any form, so long as its outcome depends primarily on luck. Even if the contest requires substantial physical exertion or a particular test of skill, the ultimate criterion hinges on whether or not luck can prevail.

Shortly after entering a city, a century-old Jonah may discover the presence of another of his bloodline, a neonate who has made his haven there for a dozen years. Unless the senior Bohagande simply wishes to move on, he can challenge the younger and declare the terms. There is no shame in the neonate acquiescing without a contest, but if he does accept it's considered terribly bad form to withdraw prematurely.

The challenge might be as simple as a game of Russian Roulette or as outlandish as a 100-mph race in the wrong direction on a busy highway. Most of the time, the more dangerous the contest the more respect the winner receives. Given the risks involved, it's not uncommon for Bohagande to meet Final Death in these contests. It's also perfectly acceptable for participants to use Sunnikuse against each other before and during a challenge. Thus, a normally fortunate Jonah may discover herself robbed at the worst possible moment. Eventually, luck does run out, even for members of this line.

Besides Lucas Harwood, the only other Bohagande to claim any special recognition is the one known as the Storm Crow. This individual has supposedly never been defeated in a challenge and is deemed the luckiest Kindred walking the earth. Some stories claim that the current Storm Crow is a particularly feral Gangrel named Becky Finch, the moll of a successful Kansas City mobster before her Embrace. Some disagree, saying that she was finally bested by another, or that her claim was never legitimate.

The name Cameron is bandied about as the possible identity of the Storm Crow, but few can agree on any details about this little-known figure. Ultimately, the concept of Storm Crow is more tall tale than reality to most, a character suitable for yarns and emulation. That doesn't stop some Bohagande from actively seeking out a master of luck, however. These competitive Jonahs hope to challenge and defeat him, claiming the title for themselves. Equally motivating, rumors ascribe strange powers of Sunnikuse to a Storm Crow. Would-be usurpers hope they can learn these tricks for themselves.

Every Bohagande possesses a secret that he protects over and above all else. Upon a Gangrel's initiation, a sire or Avus bestows a Shoshone name that makes the new Bohagande known to the spirit Crow, who's held as the true father of the line. The name is written on the newcomer's chest in the Avus' blood, but is never again recorded or spoken, not even between

these two Kindred. Anyone who learns this name and understands it for what it is has a powerful charm over the subject, whose use of Sunnikuse against that individual is compromised.

Some Bohagande seek out the names of others of the line in order to give themselves an advantage in future confrontations, but most Avus are loath to part with such knowledge. Should a betrayal be traced back, they run the very real risk of having their own names revealed, effectively robbing from them of their own power. Other Kindred who discover a Jonah's Shoshone name may not know the power that comes from sharing it. Few if any outside the lineage are aware of this Achilles' heel.

## Sunnikuse

The Bohagande regard their inheritance in much the same way that a man living on the frontier might have viewed his rifle. Used properly, it can be the difference between unlife and Final Death. To others, it's a weapon that seems to inflict harm indiscriminately. Sunnikuse (or "medicine") is the bloodline's unique ability to direct the hand of Fate, as dangerous as this practice is. Gifted in the art of stealing luck from others, twisting the outcome of situations to their advantage, and even hoarding good fortune, Bohagande are as deadly and feared as any gunslinger of old. They have an uncanny ability to sense the presence or absence of luck in an individual, and use that knowledge for their own good.

Every application of Sunnikuse, whether it involves a simple touch (as with Jinx) or a momentary gaze (Evil Eye), leaves a victim with a discernible sense of doom. The victim may not always know the source of the sinking feeling (most Bohagande seek to camouflage their depredations with some justifiable charade, such as a game of billiards or Three Card Monty), but she always experiences a terrible sense of unease and impending failure. The greater the potential loss, the more powerful the impression received. Successive uses of Sunnikuse against the same subject only amplify her sensation, eventually convincing any but the most obtuse victim that a Jonah is somehow responsible for her bad luck.

Each time Sunnikuse is used, Wits + Occult is rolled for the subject to recognize that the Jonah is somehow behind her sense of doom. A normal success suggests that there is some vague connection between the Bohagande and the bad luck. An exceptional success fully exposes the Bohagande's complicity. Perhaps the vampire is even caught with a hand in the proverbial cookie jar, actively doing something strange near or in regard to the intended victim.



There are ways in which a potential victim can protect herself from this Discipline. Most cultures believe that certain items, expressions or practices provide a measure of defense against bad luck. The more involved or complicated the charm, the greater the protection granted. It's important that the individual truly believes in the power of the charm, however. It is this belief that staves off disaster, not the object itself.

To a Bohagande's benefit, a host of events, items and circumstances — crossing the path of a black cat, breaking a mirror, walking under a ladder — are ascribed with the power to cause bad luck. If a subject of Sunnikuse is in the vicinity of such circumstances or performs such actions, she is easier to affect with the Discipline. Some Jonahs exploit these superstitions and try to arrange for such ill omens to be present when they use this power, both to increase its usefulness and to provide sources of blame for the ill fortune that befalls a victim.

The following is a list of some factors that might make it easier for a Bohagande to use Sunnikuse, as well as examples of charms that can undermine the Discipline.

#### Suggested Modifiers

Bonus	Condition
+1	A black cat or broken mirror is nearby
+2	Target is under a ladder
+3	It's Friday the 13th
+4	A fortune teller told the victim that something terrible would happen this evening
+5	The victim is already convinced he is jinxed or cursed
Penalty	Charm
-1	Target has a lucky rabbit's foot or mouths a protective prayer
-2	Target received a blessing from a holy authority that same day
-3	Target knows the truth about what the Bohagande can and cannot do
-4	Target has a rare artifact that legend ascribes with miraculous powers
-5	Target knows the Bohagande's secret name

Luck stolen through use of Sunnikuse cannot come from or later be used for Humanity or degeneration rolls made for either the Bohagande or a target. In essence, while the Storytelling System may call for a dice roll to determine Humanity and degeneration, luck does not play a factor in whether a character retains his morality or sanity.

#### • Jinx

A Bohagande can snatch small amounts of luck from others that he can then use for himself. By making physical contact with another — even the lightest touch is sufficient — the character can acti-

vate this power. If successful, the victim's next action fails, while the Bohagande's next action automatically succeeds. The power of Jinx lasts only one scene, so if the Bohagande takes no further actions that scene, the benefit is forfeit. Consult the rules for "Touching an Opponent" on p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** to determine if a Jonah successfully makes contact with a resisting target when this power is used. If a target does not resist, assume that contact can be made automatically under some context, such as through a handshake, sleight of hand or seeming to stumble.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Subterfuge + Sunnikuse

**Action:** Instant to touch target; reflexive to activate power

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character's Jinx is turned back on him. The next action the Bohagande performs in this scene is failed automatically.

**Failure:** No effect. A successive attempt to use the power may be made, but contact is required again, as is another Willpower point.

**Success:** A subject is jinxed upon being touched. The next roll made for the subject is automatically a failure, regardless of how improbable that might be. If the action normally calls for a chance roll, the victim automatically suffers a dramatic failure. The Bohagande fares much better. The next roll made for him is an automatic success. If he attempts no further actions for the remainder of the scene, he receives no benefit from Jinx. If the subject attempts no further actions in the scene, he is spared failure.

**Exceptional Success:** Similar to a normal success, except the stakes are much higher. The victim's next action results in a dramatic failure, while the Bohagande's next action is automatically an exceptional success.

A subject can be under the influence of only one use of Jinx at a time, and a Bohagande can have no more than one "unused" success at his disposal at one time. Once it's fulfilled, this power must be activated again to acquire a new guaranteed success.

#### .. Evil Eye

This cursed ability can wreak all manner of havoc on a victim. By drawing on the power of her Vitae, a Bohagande no longer needs to touch her victim to affect him. So long as she is in close physical proximity and can see him directly, even if only momentarily, she can turn the Evil Eye on him. (Looking through a TV or at a photo doesn't apply.)

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Presence + Intimidation + Sunnikuse

**Action:** Instant

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The intended target is unaffected and *all* rolls made for the Bohagande against that individual suffer a -2 penalty for the remainder of the scene.

**Failure:** The power has no effect, but successive attempts to use the power on the subject may be made as long as he is in direct sight.

**Success:** The victim suffers a -2 penalty on all rolls. In addition, the 10 Again rule to re-roll 10's doesn't apply to the subject. Both of these effects apply for the remainder of the scene.

**Exceptional Success:** The victim suffers a -3 penalty on all rolls for the remainder of the scene, in addition to the proscription against the 10 Again rule.

A victim can be subject to only one use of this power at a time.

### ... Calamity

A Jonah has honed his abilities such that he may cause victims' efforts to have tragic results. A personal possession of the victim is needed to level this curse — anything from a necklace to a comb to a lock of hair to a tooth. The Bohagande taints the object with his cursed Vitae, usually by opening a small wound in his hand. The vampire murmurs a few brief words and as long as the character holds the bloodied item in hand, the subject is plagued by disaster.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Empathy + Sunnikuse

**Action:** Activation is instant; application can be contested

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The next roll made for the Bohagande that scores even a single 1 is a dramatic failure, regardless of the number of successes actually achieved on the roll.

**Failure:** No effect, although successive attempts to activate the power can be made if the object is still held and more Vitae is spent.

**Success:** After the power has been activated and the item is held by the vampire, a subject's action fails automatically if any die rolled for him ever turns up a 1, regardless of how many successes are actually rolled. Indeed, if successes rolled for the victim are lower than those rolled for the vampire when this power was activated, and a 1 turns up on a die, the victim's action is automatically a dramatic failure.

**Example:** Three successes are rolled for a vampire using this power. Later on, a dice pool is rolled for the subject. Four successes are achieved, but a single die in the pool turns up a 1. The action fails immediately, regardless of the four successes rolled. The victim is somehow robbed of an easy victory. If only one or two successes had been rolled for the subject — less than the vampire's three — and a 1



had turned up on another die, the effort would have been a dramatic failure.

**Exceptional Success:** As per a normal success, except any 1 rolled for the subject indicates a dramatic failure no matter how many successes are otherwise achieved in the roll.

Should the Bohagande release the possession from hand for even a moment, Calamity is dispelled. It's possible for more than a single item to be held in order to affect multiple victims simultaneously, assuming the items are small enough. For each dot in Sunnikuse, a Bohagande can utilize one such personal item at a time. Multiple items from the same subject do not increase the intensity of this power over him.

Gloved hands deny use of this power, as does merely having an object close by (in a pocket, around the neck). Rings are particularly sought after by the Bohagande. The item must have a solid connection to the subject for it to be valid. This can be due to an emotional attachment (a pearl earring given by a loved one, a dead father's pocket watch), due to a lasting relationship (a wallet owned for a dozen years, a childhood teddy bear), or because the object was actually part of the target (a lock of hair).

The Bohagande need not be able to see the victim of this power for it to be effective.

The victim of Calamity does not receive any special hint as to the source of his affliction. Even if near the Bohagande, the victim does not have any overt way to identify the vampire as the responsible party. If a connection is somehow made (maybe the Jonah takes credit), the victim or anyone else can attempt to liberate the personal object from the vampire's grasp by grappling. See "Disarm Opponent" on p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. If the effort is successful, the Bohagande loses contact with the object and the effects of Calamity are terminated.

### .... Twist of Fate

Sometimes, no matter how great one's odds are or how likely one is to fail miserably, the fickle hand of Fate steps in. Bohagande who excel at Sunnikuse learn to control freakish turns of events for their own purposes.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Subterfuge + Sunnikuse

**Action:** Reflexive

This power effectively increases or decreases the degree of success or failure of a single action taken by the Bohagande or by any other character within direct sight. The Bohagande's player must declare the power in use immediately after a dice pool is rolled, but before the results are declared.

## Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The very next roll made for any character (even one not nearby the Bohagande) that is made to cause harm or disadvantage to the Jonah is improved by one degree of success. Say, from dramatic failure to failure, failure to success or success to exceptional success. This can mean a homeless man's feeble effort to resist the vampire is suddenly overwhelming, or a Hound's efforts across town to unearth information about the Bohagande reveals his very haven! If increasing the degree of success of the effort by category is too vague, as in a combat attack, add three to any successes rolled against the vampire. Thus, a roll of one success becomes four, and a failure becomes three successes.

**Failure:** No effect, although successive attempts to apply the power to other dice pools be made if more Vitae is spent.

**Success:** The result of the roll can be made more successful or less successful by one degree. That is, a success can be turned into an exceptional success or a failure, while a dramatic failure can be changed to only a regular failure. If altering degree of success by category is too vague, as in a combat attack, add or subtract a number of successes equal to those achieved in the power's activation roll. So, if three successes were gained, up to three can be added to or subtracted from those achieved in the affected roll. A targeted roll that is reduced to zero successes is a simple failure; it's not made a dramatic failure with "negative successes."

**Exceptional Success:** The Bohagande is able to twist fate to such a degree that the result of the target's roll can be changed two full steps in either direction. An exceptional success can be turned into a failure, while a dramatic failure can become a regular success. As with success, if altering degree of success by category is too vague, actual successes achieved in the activation roll — five or more — can be added to or subtracted from those of the affected action.

Twist of Fate can be used on only instant actions. Extended and reflexive actions are unaffected. When used on a contested action, the power is directed at only one contestant, but can affect the outcome for both. Someone who should have won or lost the contest suddenly does not.

This power can be used at any time during a turn, regardless of a character's Initiative, and does not count as the action the Bohagande is normally allowed that turn. The power can be used only once per turn.

### ..... Gift of the Crow

Up to this point, a Bohagande is unable to hold onto the luck she steals for more than a brief time. It must



be used quickly or be lost to the ever-changing winds of Fate. Now, however, the character understands how to hold onto her precious lot.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Occult + Sunnikuse

**Action:** Instant; resisted if used against another Bohagande who also uses Gift of the Crow

Gift of the Crow allows a Bohagande to steal luck from others and use it to improve her chances of success on future rolls by taking advantage of the 9 Again and possibly the 8 Again rules. This benefit lasts a number of nights equal to the successes achieved on the power's activation roll, until the Jonah suffers a dramatic failure, or until the user is rendered unconscious or falls into torpor (whichever comes first).

This luck comes at a price to someone else, of course. Someone within distance to carry on a normal conversation suffers a dramatic failure on his next action, regardless of how many successes are rolled for him. One such dramatic failure is imposed for each success achieved on the activation roll of the power. So, if three successes are rolled, the next three actions performed by others are dramatic failures. These tragedies may all be heaped upon a single victim or assigned to various victims within range, as the character chooses. Three mishaps could befall three separate people, or three could plague one

victim. If a Jonah is not careful with this power, he could soon be at the epicenter of tragic events or pitfalls, from which he emerges unscathed. If he comes away "lucky" too many times, others may notice.

If no one is in sufficiently close proximity to steal their luck, this power cannot be activated. A valid victim must be human or humanoid, whether alive or undead.

See "System Permutations" on p. 134 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for details on the 9 Again and 8 Again rules. A Bohagande cannot be subject to the effects of more than one use of this power at a time.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character does not steal any luck and is not subject to the 10 Again rule until the next sunset.

**Failure:** No effect, although successive attempts to activate the power can be made if more Willpower is spent.

**Success:** For each success rolled, the character enjoys the 9 Again rule for one night (including the remainder of the current one). So, if three successes are rolled, the 9 Again rule applies for three nights. Each 9 or 10 rolled at that point is re-rolled to improve the Bohagande's chances of success.

**Exceptional Success:** Similar to a normal success, except the Bohagande now has the benefit of the 8 Again rule for a number of nights equal to the successes achieved. Each 8, 9 or 10 rolled by the player is re-rolled.



# GETHSEMANI

YOU CLAIM TO BE DAMNED, YET YOU KNOW NOTHING OF SUFFERING. UNTIL YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED THE ECSTASY AND AGONY OF THE PASSION, YOU SHALL BE DENIED TRUE DAMNATION AND ITS RAPTURE.

The Gethsemani are an enigma that brings out the best and worst of the Kindred. Named for the place of Christ's crucifixion, the bloodline is an offshoot of the Nosferatu that possesses an uncanny ability to cause others to exhibit the wounds suffered by Jesus on the cross. More disturbing, the stigmata that appear on victims seem to be imbued with a portion of divine — or diabolical — power. Those who drink from them gain access to miraculous capabilities. So controversial is the source of the bloodline's unusual power that members find themselves the objects of fanatical devotion or damnation as blasphemous servants of the infernal.

In some domains, these Ecstatics may find quick acceptance, especially if the local Bishop or other authority chooses to recognize the Gethsemani as instruments of the Almighty blessed with the power to recreate the sacred works of Longinus. Even if the Sanctified don't have a significant presence, a small community of faithful may offer a Gethsemani sanctuary, keeping the ward safe from other vampires. Indeed, keepers' fanaticism can be so extreme that a Gethsemani's Requiem is little different than imprisonment. The Gethsemani is followed everywhere in case some miracle occurs on her account, and to forestall any conceivable danger to her person.

Elsewhere, the Lancea Sanctum may look upon the Gethsemani as vile corrupters and seeks to run them from a city, or even destroy them outright. It's not unheard of for the hysteria around a line member to become so great that a blood hunt is called to cleanse the unholy taint ascribed to this odious spawn of Satan. Only where the Spear is particularly weak and the Kindred in power do not hold a strong opinion one way or the other do Ecstatics find a real measure of personal freedom.

The bloodline has its origins in Europe of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, when a pious Nosferatu was so taken by the religious devotion of an elderly nun (who was renowned for having demonstrated stigmata) that he Embraced her, hoping that his own curse might be lifted. Instead, the nun discovered that her saintly touch caused others to suffer ecstasies and bleed as she once had. So inspiring was her passion and the wonders she could perform, she became nothing less than a saint among local undead. Her later canonization by the mortal Church in Rome only increased her Kindred standing.

She became the Archbishop of Florence and established a special monastery for her progeny beneath her old convent in nearby Prato. Choosing only other, mortal stigmatics for the Embrace, her line grew slowly.

Although their numbers are assumed to still be few tonight, the Gethsemani can be found nearly anywhere. Most seem to cleave to their religious origins and accept their role as agents of the divine where they are so received. They maintain the practices taught in the Prato monastery and seek out mortal stigmatics where they can to bolster their numbers.

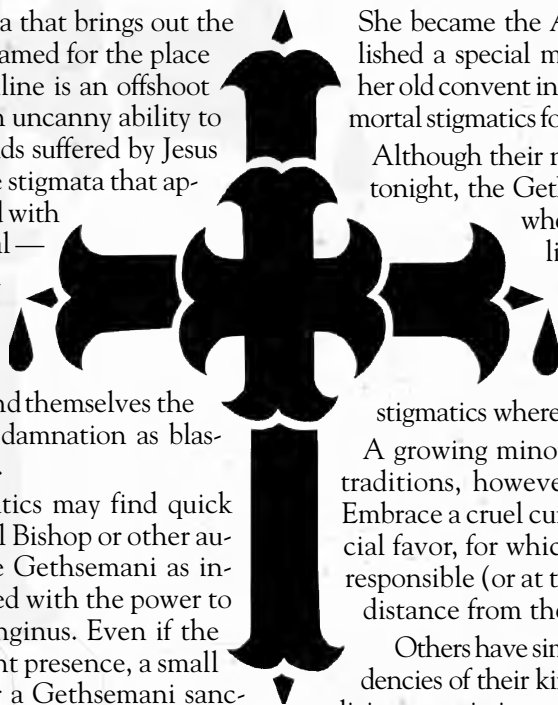
A growing minority of Gethsemani forsakes such traditions, however. These naysayers consider the Embrace a cruel curse that robbed them of God's special favor, for which they have in turn cursed those responsible (or at the very least have sought as much distance from them as possible).

Others have simply been subverted by the dark tendencies of their kind, allowing their previously strong religious convictions to be trampled under their addiction to blood, the howl of the Beast, and what they see as the necessities of the Danse Macabre. These disillusioned Kindred no longer place importance on religion or its trappings and see the Lancea Sanctum as more prison than pulpit. No longer sure of God's role in their Requiem, they cannot fully explain what it is they do, but given the nightly demands imposed on all Kindred, they don't dwell on it too much. Some of these apostates have joined the Invictus, with its similarities to the Lancea Sanctum, while others have turned to the Ordo Dracul to better understand their nature and perhaps transcend their curse. A rumor circulates that a few have thrown in with the Circle of the Crone, which is not entirely unlikely given the central role blood plays in the covenant's philosophy. Finally, some whisper that one or more Gethsemani have become members of Belial's Brood and are influential in that diabolical sect.

Parent Clan: Nosferatu

Nickname: **Ecstatics**

**Covenant:** The Lancea Sanctum claims the lion's share of Gethsemani, coveting them as saintly figures who must be adored, emulated, idolized and protected from harm in those domains. A Gethsemani may be granted a ridiculous degree of influence that he can easily turn to his advantage. This is the primary reason why most Ecstatics join the covenant, or at least choose to remain within its



parochial reach. The downside is that Ecstatics are rarely allowed much freedom, as they are hounded from sundown till sunup by Kindred desperate to be near them, whether to receive some special blessing or out of fanatical devotion. Where the Lancea Sanctum is of lesser standing, Sanctified may be even more smothering, terrified that their unliving saint may come to some harm by non-believers.

Of course, not every scion of Longinus accepts the Gethsemani as specially touched by God. In those infrequent domains where the covenant sees Ecstatics as a danger — to its faith, its political power or both — a Gethsemani's Requiem can be hellish. Inquisitors seize every chance to harass and perhaps torture an Ecstatic in hopes of demonstrating to all the diabolical nature of the bloodline.

The Invictus typically follows the lead of the Sanctified when it comes to the Gethsemani, though the First Estate is rarely as extreme in its veneration or demonizing. If the Lancea Sanctum has a relatively insignificant presence or if it is openly at odds with the First Estate, the Invictus is likely to suffer a Gethsemani, accepting him as little more than an unusual Nosferatu. For line members not entirely convinced of the virtue of the Sanctified, or who are labeled infernal, the First Estate can offer a suitable welcome. Even so, not even the most apathetic members of the Invictus are so blind as to overlook the instability that an Ecstatic can cause. Covenant members therefore take care to watch over a Gethsemani for any sign that his presence may threaten their power. Rarely is an Ecstatic granted any true political standing, either.

The Carthians are rarely of interest to members of the bloodline. The covenant's potential lack of hierarchy offers the Gethsemani little

protection, and few Carthians are likely to become the kind of adoring devotees that so many Ecstatics count on for support. Only the most apolitical and irreligious of the line are typically drawn to this group.

Gethsemani are creatures of deeply mystical significance, regardless of whoever or whatever else they may be. The Ordo Dracul recognizes this reality, even if the covenant might downplay religious connotations, and takes an active interest in learning more about the lineage. The covenant's relatively clinical approach to stigmata holds a strong appeal for a minority of Ecstatics. Those individuals can be themselves in such circles, rather than be what's expected of them.

The Circle of the Crone has its own appeal, too. Blood is central to pagan rituals, and Ecstatics certainly encourage bloodletting. Line members might find sympathy rather than adulation within the covenant, but may also find themselves the objects of rituals rather than participants.

Those Gethsemani who forsake the community and protection of any covenant are rare in the extreme. These few pariahs tend to have lonesome Requiems, pursuing personal goals far from the prying eyes of other Kindred.

**Appearance:** The Gethsemani are no different physically than other Nosferatu. They suffer the same horrible disfigurements or nauseating demeanors. Most stigmatics hail from cultures where Christianity has had some lasting influence. They're mainly of European stock or were Embraced in the Americas. Those who are particularly religious tend to dress in a way that reflects their devotion, whether that means rich vestments or the threadbare garb of a pious ascetic. The minority who have fallen from grace dress in whatever fashion best fits their personality and position in Kindred society.

**Haven:** Where a Gethsemani is treated as an unliving saint, a haven is likely to be provided by her true believers. If followers are few, the haven may be a humble dwelling. If admirers are many, the Gethsemani may enjoy a ridiculously overwrought home, possibly attended by a few zealots who dedicate their





Requiems to the Ecstatic's protection. In either case, the haven is decorated with appropriate religious paraphernalia, from small icons, crucifixes and candles to full-blown biblical murals, exquisite artifacts of precious metal, and possibly even an ornate throne. Gethsemani who do not enjoy this kind of adulation or who seek some measure of privacy prefer havens that do not belie their true nature. Town homes, apartments and ordinary houses are all possible.

**Background:** The Gethsemani Embrace only mortals who have demonstrated stigmata at some time in their lives, even if it was only for a brief period. They go to great lengths to discern the veracity of any reports of miracles, relying on Church records of witness testimony and clerical investigation. Because a new childe cannot claim her full inheritance until the potency of her blood is demonstrated (she joins the bloodline), a sire is often unsure of whether a fledgling was a true stigmatic. Only when the postulant's potency has grown sufficiently can the truth be known.

Those who were not genuine stigmatics in life (victims of the Stigmatica Discipline do not count; their stigmata are not spontaneous) are never able to join the bloodline, remaining ordinary Nosferatu. There is no chance for them to become Gethsemani (though they may seek to join another bloodline in the usual manner). In the case of a true, mortal stigmatic, her long suffering ends upon the Embrace and she never bears the mystical wounds again. The stigmata are now hers to inflict. There are no known cases of vampires displaying genuine, spontaneous stigmata, at least none that have been made common knowledge.

Most childer are of European or American origin, given that most cases of stigmata are concentrated in those regions. It is traditionally accepted that only extremely pious kine can bear stigmata, but there are enough exceptions to conclude that while most Gethsemani were very religious in life, a handful were relatively agnostic and did not accept their experiences as spiritual. Similarly, some who were once paragons of Christian faith did not remain so. All were (and are) still viable as initiates to the bloodline, but the Requiem exacts a terrible toll on a Kindred and Ecstatics are no different. Some turn away from their faith after the Embrace, and a few actually turn against it, cursing God for delivering them into damnation.

Regardless of their beliefs or cultural backgrounds, nearly all Gethsemani feel a heavy loss after becoming the undead. The pain they endured from the stigmata was intense. Even if not considered to be of religious origins, it was supernatural nonetheless and marked them as someone special. This fact was a profound part of their psychology and their identities were permanently tied to their suffering. The hunger that haunts them as Kindred is not quite the same as the agony of the stigmata, no matter how difficult it is to bear. Unlike the stigmata, the hunger can be quenched, even if only temporarily. The agony that came with the wounds could not be. Within a few years of becoming Gethsemani, a Kindred experiences a growing need to reclaim the suffering that once defined them. Before long, he feels emotionally satisfied only

through masochistic practices. This self-abuse can be extreme, with flagellation, piercing or even more outrageous self-injury. Sadism is not far away on the spectrum of derangement. A number of Ecstatics find fulfillment in the torment of others. Miracle workers or depraved torturers, the Gethsemani can be truly terrifying.

**Character Creation:** Given the unpredictability and inexplicability of stigmata and its manifestation in mortals, would-be Gethsemani sires have little choice in whom to choose for the Embrace. No one outlook or skill set is ideal for childer. The line can't afford to be that choosy. Thus, no particular Attribute and Skill group prevails among Ecstatic characters. Individual Skills can be common, though. Any of Academics, Investigation, Medicine, Occult or Science is often possessed thanks to explorations of who and what stigmatics are. Empathy, Expression, Intimidation and Persuasion can arise from efforts to cope with manifestations and others' reactions to them.

The Fame and Inspiring Merits may have arisen from days or nights spent reveling in religious conviction or influence. Haven and Retainer may be possessed by a vampire now venerated by followers. And, of course, an extra dot of Blood Potency is required at character creation for a seemingly "ordinary" Nosferatu to be eligible to join the line right away.

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

**Weakness:** As members of the Nosferatu clan, Gethsemani demonstrate their forebears' weakness. With regard to dice pools based on Presence or Manipulation Attributes in social situations, the 10 Again rule does not apply. Additionally, any 1's that come up on a roll are subtracted from successes. (This latter part of the weakness does not affect dramatic-failure rules.) This weakness does not apply to dice pools that involve the Intimidation Skill, or to the Composure Attribute.

The pain of the wounds once experienced by stigmatics is also integral to a Gethsemani's psychological makeup. To recapture the missing agony, Ecstatics engage in all manner of masochism, from the mundane to the truly horrible. Upon a character's rise, a Composure + Resolve roll is made for her to avoid inflicting harm upon herself that night. If the roll fails, the character loses one Vitae to represent whatever bloody injury she inflicts. On a dramatic failure, the character loses two Vitae as she wantonly indulges her masochistic urges. Penalties to this roll could include being under great stress (-1 to -2), having recently suffered a significant loss or humiliation (-2 to -4), or being or feeling trapped by circumstances beyond her control (-3 to -5).

The actual performance of self-abuse can take anywhere from minutes to hours. Many Gethsemani routinely recreate the same wounds they experienced as mortals, piercing their palms, cutting their forehead or flagellating themselves to draw blood from their backs. Players are encouraged to describe these practices during play to heighten a game's mood of personal horror. Otherwise,

masochistic activity is assumed to occur between scenes, most likely in private. (Any Vitae lost are marked off your character sheet upon your Gethsemani's rise.)

**Organization:** In places where more than a single Gethsemani can be found, the bloodline usually organizes as an exclusive and secretive monastic order within the Lancea Sanctum's existing hierarchy. The eldest Ecstatic assumes the title of Passionente, essentially the head of the order, and her word is law in the community. This individual is usually one of the Anointed, but rarely assumes the responsibilities of the covenant's leadership. (There are no reports of Gethsemani Bishops or Cardinals.) The Passionente dedicates herself to inspiring other Kindred to recognize the *Testament of Longinus* as sacred, and to abandon agnosticism in favor of the doctrine of the Sanctified. The rest of the domain's Ecstatics perform their sanguine miracles before unbelievers, demonstrating what they claim is the divine power that God has seen fit to bestow upon them, Damned though they may be. The Passionente leads her community in private prayer and oversees opaque rites carried out within the impenetrable privacy of the Gethsemani cloister. Some communities obey strict rules of conduct that can include oaths of silence, blood fasting, a proscription on all light, and assigned labors, the last performed primarily as a show of spiritual devotion. Besides Passionente, other titles may exist, usually created based on the designated role of an Ecstatic, such as the Epistolarian or Tabernacula. In those domains where asceticism is the predominant flavor of worship, Gethsemani titles are typically eschewed.

Line members who have abandoned religion stand outside these communities, left to seek their own places among Kindred however they might. To the rest of the lineage, they are seen as the worst possible traitors, for they have turned their backs on God, who in His mercy has marked them as special among the Damned. For these individuals, there can be no clemency.

As mentioned, rarely do the Gethsemani claim full authority within a domain. This is in large part because the Lancea Sanctum, as much as it might venerate the Ecstatics, also fears them. Covenant leaders do what they can to keep the bloodline from gaining meaningful political authority, concerned that its secretive and tight-knit ways might threaten their own standing. This paranoia is not completely unfounded. Some Gethsemani, particularly where their numbers are significant (three or higher), do indeed seek to enforce upon their fellow Sanctified what they see as acceptable religious policy, feeling that they more than any other Kindred are close to understanding the true Will of God. More than one Passionente has studied the Danse Macabre and has used this mastery to advance her views throughout the Lancea Sanctum. Most are smart enough to do so with cautious subtlety. They're all too aware of the calamity that might befall them and their followers should their actions be perceived as a direct challenge to the established order. One fearful Priest spreading rumors of infernal

rites can bring a quick and merciless end to all that the Gethsemani have accomplished.

The bloodline is understandably concentrated in areas with a rich tradition in Church influence. Cities in Mediterranean Europe and France, parts of North Africa, and North America are the most likely places to find Ecstatics. The largest known population is at the Convent of San Vincenzo in Prato, Italy, where the founder continues to minister to her descendants. Some say as many as a dozen Gethsemani make that place their haven. Outside such gatherings, Ecstatics are itinerant. They're some of the most devoutly religious members of the bloodline, ready to risk their unlives to pursue God's work far from the security of their own.

**Concepts:** Kindred saint, obsequious penitent, visionary hermit, violent iconoclast, suicidal basket case, sideshow miracle-worker, deluded Christ-figure, ritualistic serial killer, inspired artist, diabolical cult leader

## HISTORY

In 1522, young Alessandra Lucrezia Romola was baptized in a chapel in Florence. For her, life would not take its usual course. God had marked her as his instrument for the duration of her mortal years, and for all those that would follow. Her father, Pier Francesco de' Ricci, was descended from a long line of wealthy merchants and bankers, but it was her stepmother who instructed her in faith, assuming responsibilities when the girl's birth-mother died. Fiametta da Diacetto was fascinated by Alessandra's habit of spending hours each day in solitary prayer, and did what she could to nourish the child's sense of devotion.

So certain of her calling, Alessandra declared her desire to join a convent at a very early age. An atmosphere of relative laxity pervaded the monastic orders of the time, however. Alessandra would settle only for a place that demanded the strictest observances, the better to serve God. She found her convent at San Vincenzo, a rigid religious enclave established in 1503 by nine sisters devoted to the teachings of the controversial prophet and reformer Girolamo Savonarola, a Dominican friar whose sermons relied heavily on Revelations and the threat of damnation. From the moment she set foot in the convent, Alessandra's destiny was clear.

First condemned by the community for the stigmata (or "Ecstasy of the Passion") that she suffered, Alessandra's humility and piety eventually won over all around her. She took the new name Catherine de' Ricci and was appointed to a succession of increasingly important offices, eventually serving as prioress until her departure from the mortal realm on February 2, 1590. Her holiness was such that she was eventually beatified by Clement XII in 1732 and made a saint 14 years later by Benedict XIV. The kine of Tuscany still celebrate her feast on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February, holding a special mass at the covenant, now called Santa Caterina.

Catherine de' Ricci did pass from the realm of the living, but an unidentified Nosferatu did not allow her to depart

from the world. The Haunt had traveled far to gaze upon the prioress, risking all in the hope that her blessing might transform him physically and spiritually. The Requiem was difficult for this misshapen creature. His once-staunch faith had all but fled him, bludgeoned by the demands of unlife and the sinful urges that claimed his trembling, dead flesh. Hearing of Catherine's miracles, he found his way to the convent, desperate for some final shred of mercy from on High. His devilish talents allowed him to penetrate the inner chambers without disturbing the sisterhood, until he entered the private apartments of the Madre Sanguigna of San Vincenzo. He found her alone and bent in prayer, and such was her holy presence that his deceit failed and he stood before her unveiled, body and soul. Catherine had been waiting for his visit for more than a year, for she had already been made aware by the Holy Spirit of how she would serve next. She had been one of His most heavenly children and now she would be one of his most damned.

To the dismay of Kindred theologians, no further mention of Catherine's sire is found in scripture or oral history. As he came to her, invisible and unknown, he left her. Some apocryphal texts hint that when he saw that he had Embraced a creature already certain of her place in Hell, he retreated in horror. Unable to face what he had created, he left her and in some cases is said to have destroyed himself at sunrise.

Whatever the case may be, the experience transformed Catherine in more than just the "usual" ways. The suffering that she had lived with for so long was now hers to give with but a touch. Others would come to know the Ecstasy of the Passion as she had, and would be redeemed in their agony. They would come to understand through the stigmata that to be close to God one must first suffer as God. It was her holy purpose to bring others to God, and so she set forth on this labor. She sought kine throughout Europe who were rumored to be ecstasies, testing each until she was pleased with the purity of their wounds. These she Embraced them, sharing the rapture that was already hers and instructing them in the strict monastic rules she established. Her childer stayed with her at Prato, where she oversaw the construction of a subterranean cloister to provide a haven for her new order, the Gethsemani. As in life, she presided over the community, and only those who proved their devotion were allowed to continue her holy purpose in the world outside the walls of San Vincenzo.

## SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Gethsemani carry on the traditions and mission of Catherine de' Ricci — respectfully referred to as the Madre Sanguigna — wherever they're found (with the exception of those who have turned away from their religious origins, of course). The bloodline is both a family and monastic order, and is therefore unusually tight-knit. The Passionente is father and mother to his community. In places where the Lancea Sanctum is not particularly influential, the Passionente may even serve as the highest spiritual authority among the Gethsemani.

Nothing is done without permission of the local elder of the line, who dictates the precise rules for the group. All observances and proscriptions are his to decide, and in many cases can be quite harsh. Few Nosferatu not sired by an Ecstatic ask to join the bloodline; fewer still have the bona fides required. One has to have been a true stigmatic in life. Two to four Gethsemani is typical when they are found together at all. When procreation is forbidden or difficult, an Ecstatic is prone to recruit ghouls from the ranks of stigmatics, instead. Even so, the deficit of actual stigmatics in a world where faith has largely evaporated means that few congregations ever number more than a half-dozen members, Kindred or ghoul.

The strict rules promulgated by the Passionente regulate nearly every aspect of a Gethsemani's Requiem. Feeding is particularly restricted. Kine are often brought to a convent where they serve as blood dolls, providing sustenance even as they serve as subjects for repeated use of Stigmatica. Vessels are usually so overwhelmed by the repeated experience of inhuman pleasure and pain that accompanies their blood loss that they cannot be allowed to return to the day-lit world. Most survive only a few years before their bodies collapse under the tremendous physical and emotional abuse. By tradition, Gethsemani are permitted to drink their fill only at scheduled times, commonly an hour after sunset, at midnight and an hour before sunrise. These are communal feedings; an Ecstatic in a community may feed elsewhere or at other times only with special dispensation. Individuals abroad feed alone, of course, but at the prescribed hours.

Clothing is also governed by rules set forth by the local Passionente. All members in a domain might be required wear a similar outfit, perhaps a simple robe or something more elaborate. Other times, rules might proscribe certain particularly offensive elements of fashion, such as wearing of anything on the head. Language may be regulated, with one convent requiring use of Italian for all conversation, while another may actually disallow any speech, perhaps providing an hour's reprieve once each night. Gethsemani can be restricted in what they may possess, as well. In very rigid environments, ownership of even a book might be a violation. In general, the community relishes this kind of self-denial and structure. Although members are Damned, religious structure presumably brings them closer to God. This does not mean there isn't regular disobedience, only that it is usually in the form of minor illicitness, not wholesale rebellion.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> night of February is celebrated by the bloodline to venerate the Embrace of the Madre Sanguigna. In most domains, Gethsemani go to great lengths to fortify themselves for the all-night mass known as the Passion of the Damned. From dusk till dawn, they abandon all restraint and visit all manner of abusive horrors on themselves, fellow Ecstasies and on hapless kine gathered for the occasion. It's a night of unimaginable pain and pleasure, not to mention bloodletting. The use of Stigmatica is crucial to the experience, as blood from victims' wounds is imbued



with a power that fuels even greater ecstasy. Few kine survive the night, and it is not unknown for line members to fall into torpor during the Passion. Some have even been destroyed, so great was their suffering.

Not every Ecstatic spends her waking hours in meditative prayer, menial labor or masochistic exultation. In an increasing number of cities, community rules are quite relaxed, possibly even informal and left to the discretion of each individual Gethsemani. A Passionente is still recognized and his word is still binding, but that's because he chooses not to apply strictures to each Gethsemani's Requiem. Ascetics, hermits and "reformed" Ecstatics are likely to apply a light hand to their communities, putting emphasis on practice and mystical understanding of Stigmatica rather than on governance. This lenience leaves a Gethsemani to do as she pleases so long as she doesn't blatantly violate a Passionente's general instructions. She is free to congregate with other Kindred, pursue personal affairs and even become involved in the mire that is Kindred politics. This is especially true where Gethsemani presence is minimal. Here, one can capitalize on the curiosity and fervor of other Kindred and make a place for oneself. Of course, an Ecstatic may still remain a pious devotee to the Madre Sanguigna. The individual is just outside a community of her own kind.

Regardless of the Requiem of a given Gethsemani, all conduct themselves with care. Not so much to avoid falling from the path of holy purpose, but to avoid the ever-present dangers posed to figures of such religious controversy. Even where she is adored, the wise Ecstatic keeps her true nature

known only to those she can trust. She may have a congregation of devotees and admirers, but outside this circle she typically presents herself as nothing other than a particularly spiritual Nosferatu.

Too many Kindred eye Stigmatica and its practitioners with measured skepticism. Even if they do not see it as a blasphemy to be crushed, they might easily spread word of Gethsemani to those who would. Most Ecstatic groups are therefore advertised to other Kindred as nothing more than unusually private coteries of strong religious persuasion. Many remain entirely hidden within the hierarchy of the Lancea Sanctum, obfuscating their nature to avoid the kind of response that sometimes arises from detractors. This secrecy is even more important to lone Gethsemani who have no community to turn to for protection. A solitary member is likely to be exceptionally private, practicing Stigmatica only when he is sure to be safe from prying eyes.

## STIGMATICA

This Discipline enables the Gethsemani to cause others to suffer wounds similar to those borne by Christ at the time of the Crucifixion. With a single light touch, a Gethsemani seems to imbue a target with a sense of religious rapture that most obviously manifests as open wounds. The Gethsemani, or any other, who imbibes the blood from these wounds discovers that along with any nourishment gained, certain special abilities are passed along. In most cases, the blood augments the drinker's Strength, Stamina or Dexterity, but the enhancement from some wounds can be less visible, though



no less substantial. Gethsemani of exceptional potency are said to have developed even more miraculous uses of Stigmatica, making statues weep blood and similar wonders.

Stigmatica is known to work on mortals alone, though higher levels may be able to affect Kindred and ghouls. To use the Discipline, an Ecstatic need only place his hand briefly on the target and the player spends a Willpower point. (Making such contact invokes the “Touching an Opponent” rules, p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, assuming a subject resists. If the subject doesn’t resist, touch can be assumed to be automatic if within reach.) The Willpower is still lost if the activation roll for a power fails.

The exertion passes a spark of divinity from the Gethsemani to the target, whose body is overwhelmed by the spiritual transference. One or more wounds spontaneously open and blood begins to flow. The experience is a traumatic one for the kine, who not only endures pain but loses a significant amount of blood. The flow provides certain benefits to vampires or ghouls who drink it, depending on the location of the wound and how much blood is consumed. Typically, the number of successes achieved on the Stigmatica roll determines how many Health points a victim loses to lethal harm. After the equivalent in Vitae has bled, the wounds begin to heal normally. If they are reopened by anything other than a subsequent use of this Discipline, any blood is considered normal and confers no special benefit.

The Gethsemani using a power may not conceal the stigmata he inflicts by licking the wounds after taking his fill. The injuries remain evident and can be healed only naturally or via a supernatural curative proffered by someone or something other than one of the Damned.

A victim of a Stigmatica power is not necessarily forced into acquiescence to feeding. The horror and excessive blood loss of the event can allow him to struggle to survive. For a mortal to resist this kind of Kiss, two or more successes must be achieved on a Resolve + Composure roll, instead of the normal three.

Regardless of how much Health a victim loses — how many successes are rolled for the Gethsemani — the victim does not shed more than the equivalent of one Vitae per turn. If five successes are achieved on the Stigmatica roll, the victim suffers five lethal damage and bleeds for five turns. Thus, no more than one Vitae per turn can be consumed from the victim by means of this power. If blood lost is not consumed in the same turn, it loses its supernatural efficacy. After that point, it is a powerless liquid (it does not even restore spent Vitae if consumed later).

The special benefits gained from drinking empowered blood last for the remainder of the evening, vanishing with sunrise. If an Ecstatic awakens during daylight hours, he does not retain any special powers gained the night before.

Any vampire or ghoul — including the Gethsemani herself — who drinks the blood from a Stigmatica wound may gain its benefits. Only one blood-drinker may do so in a

single turn. So, a victim could be passed from drinker to drinker from turn to turn for multiple Kindred to enjoy the results. A mortal victim can be subject to only one Stigmatica power at a time (assuming he survives the first).

No more than one of a drinker’s traits may be enhanced by the Discipline at a given time. A drinker might increase his Strength multiple, cumulative times in an evening by consumption of mystical blood. But if his Strength is currently heightened by Palms of Blood, and he consumes blood ushered by The Dolorous Nail, he loses all bonuses to his Strength and gains only the benefit of the second power (a Dexterity increase). The most recent drinking takes precedent over previous ones where different Attribute increases are concerned. No Attribute can be increased beyond the limit allowed by a character’s Blood Potency as a result of drinking stigmatic Vitae. A vampire with a Blood Potency of 3 is still limited to five Attribute dots.

Despite the claims of most of its practitioners, no definitive proof of Stigmatica’s divine nature has been revealed. Certainly there’s a preponderance of evidence to support such a claim, but even Gethsemani who declare no faith in God and who deny the spiritual origins of the Discipline appear to be able to use it. The religious devotion of kine subject to the power seems to make no difference, either. While the faithful find it easy to dismiss such discrepancies, others see them as evidence of something less wholesome at work. Hysterics are quick to lay the blame at the Gates of Hell and regard any application of Stigmatica as an insult and challenge to God. Others of a less fanatic bent simply see a mystery worthy of scholarly consideration. Whatever the opinion, this Discipline creates controversy wherever it’s practiced.

Storytellers may wish to make Stigmatica rolls for players in some cases. For example, on a chance roll, a player is unlikely to know if the stigmata that manifests will benefit his character or if it’s tainted.

The following modifiers can apply to uses of this Discipline.

**Suggested Modifiers**

Bonus	Situation
+5	Victim is a “natural” stigmatic (without use of this Discipline)
+4	Victim is especially prone to experiencing supernatural phenomena (sees ghosts, has ESP, has done real magic). Possession of the Unseen Sense Merit does not necessarily qualify a subject for this classification.
+3	Victim has frequently been subject to this Discipline
+2	Performed in a holy or supernaturally powerful place
+1	Victim is particularly religious or has already been subject to this Discipline before
Penalty	Situation
-1	Victim is a fervent non-believer
-2 to -4	Performed in unsuitable and/or irreverent circumstances, such as during combat or when people are laughing

**• THE SCOURGING**

With a touch, the Gethsemani causes a mortal to experience an almost unbearable surge of pain as the flesh of the

king's back opens spontaneously as if in response to a score of cruel lashes. The bleeding can be enough to render the victim unconscious and possibly even result in death. The blood that seeps from the horrid wounds is not ordinary. Not only can it provide the usual sustenance that a Gethsemani craves, but it's imbued with a mystical power that supernaturally fortifies the Stamina of the Kindred or ghoul who consumes it, providing the kind of endurance that Christ required to bear his cross while suffering the sting of Roman whips. The Scouring cannot be used on Kindred or ghouls.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Stamina + Intimidation + Stigmatica

**Action:** Instant for activation of the power, though the full effect of the blood is conferred only after each turn of drinking. Devouring the blessed blood requires an action each turn.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Wounds appear on the victim and they bleed, but they're poison to drinkers. After all possible Vitae has been consumed from a victim, the blood turns to ash inside the drinker, inflicting a point of lethal damage per Vitae consumed. No Vitae or other benefits are gained, either.

**Failure:** No wounds are inflicted on the intended victim, although a successive attempt may be made with the expenditure of another Willpower point.

**Success:** The mortal bleeds, losing a number of Health to lethal damage equal to the successes achieved on the activation roll. For each Vitae consumed by a Kindred or ghoul, the individual receives an additional dot of Stamina that lasts until sunrise. That also means a temporary increase in the character's Health dots. Rules for dealing with this increase and what happens to injuries sustained when the benefit vanishes are detailed in the "Temporary Health Dots" sidebar on p. 173 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

**Exceptional Success:** Numerous successes rolled are their own reward.

## .. PALMS OF BLOOD

In classic fashion, the mortal touched feels as if nails are hammered through her palms and she watches in rapt horror as blood flows from a puncture in each hand. If this blood is ingested, the recipient discovers a miraculous vigor lent to his limbs. This power is highly controversial. Scientists and anthropologists have declared that Christ would have been nailed through the wrists, not the hands, if expected to hang on the cross for any length of time. Many Kindred point to this as evidence that Stigmatica is only a blasphemous imitation of the Passion. Believers declare that the manifestation of the stigmata depends on faith, not fact, so the wounds emulate those that Christ is believed to have suffered. Whatever the case, there is no doubting the invigorating benefit of the blood that seeps from the wounds. Palms of Blood cannot be used on Kindred or ghouls.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Resolve + Empathy + Stigmatica

**Action:** Instant for activation of the power, though the full effect of the blood is conferred only after each turn of drinking. Devouring the blessed blood requires an action each turn.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Wounds appear on the victim and they bleed, but they're poison to drinkers. After all possible Vitae has been consumed from a victim, the blood turns to ash inside the drinker, inflicting a point of lethal damage per Vitae consumed. No Vitae or other benefits are gained, either.

**Failure:** No wounds are inflicted on the intended victim, although a successive attempt may be made with the expenditure of another Willpower point.

**Success:** Each success achieved inflicts one point of lethal damage and releases the equivalent of one Vitae per turn thereafter. Each of these Vitae consumed provides a Kindred or ghoul with an additional dot of Strength for the remainder of the night. Note that a drinker's Speed increases accordingly. The injuries make it difficult for the victim to perform manual actions. A -2 penalty is applied to all dice pools involving use of the hands until the wounds are healed.

**Exceptional Success:** Numerous successes rolled are their own reward.

## ... THE DOLOROUS NAIL

The last and longest nail driven into Christ's mortal flesh pierced both his feet and sank deep into the cross that bore him. Victims who experience this stigmata are crippled, so great is the agony that courses from their bloodied feet. For those who partake of the resulting blood, the experience is one of ecstasy. The drinker is able to move faster and with more agility than ever before. The Dolorous Nail cannot be used on Kindred or ghouls.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Dexterity + Empathy + Stigmatica

**Action:** Instant for activation of the power, though the full effect of the blood is conferred only after each turn of drinking. Devouring the blessed blood requires an action each turn.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Wounds appear on the victim and they bleed, but they're poison to drinkers. After all possible Vitae has been consumed from a victim, the blood turns to ash inside the drinker, inflicting a point of lethal damage per Vitae consumed. No Vitae or other benefits are gained, either.

**Failure:** No wounds are inflicted on the intended victim, although a successive attempt may be made with the expenditure of another Willpower point.

**Success:** Each of the victim's feet is suddenly punctured all the way through as if by a large spike, leaving the stigmatic unable to support his own weight. Each success rolled inflicts a point of lethal damage and liberates the equivalent of one Vitae per turn thereafter. The victim's Speed is reduced by two for every Health point lost, to a minimum on zero. Each Vitae consumed lends an additional dot of Dexterity to the drinker until sun-



rise. The result increases the drinker's Speed and Initiative accordingly, with a possible increase in Defense.

**Exceptional Success:** Numerous successes rolled are their own reward.

### .... CROWN OF THORNS

The Gethsemani is able to cause a mortal touched to experience a rush of pain accompanied by the opening of dozens of small wounds on the scalp. In some cases, only a small trickle of blood seeps forth, but sometimes the bleeding is profuse and can result in unconsciousness or worse. In any case, the blood can make it difficult for the victim to see, as it streams down her forehead and into her eyes. Any Kindred or ghoul who consumes this blood experiences a sense of unearthly calm. Crown of Thorns cannot be used on Kindred or ghouls.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Composure + Intimidation + Stigmatica

**Action:** Instant for activation of the power, though the full effect of the blood is conferred only after each turn of drinking. Devouring the blessed blood requires an action each turn.

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Wounds appear on the victim and they bleed, but they're poison to drinkers. After all possible Vitae has been consumed from a victim, the blood turns to ash inside the drinker, inflicting a point of lethal damage per Vitae consumed. No Vitae or other benefits are gained, either.

**Failure:** No wounds are inflicted on the intended victim, although a successive attempt may be made with the expenditure of another Willpower point.

**Success:** The victim responds as if a wicked wreath of thorns were forcefully placed on her head. She suffers a number of points of lethal damage equal to the successes achieved on the Stigmatica roll, and an equal number of Vitae are shed, one per turn. Each Vitae consumed from these wounds by a Kindred or ghoul provides an additional dot of Composure that vanishes at dawn. Both a drinker's Initiative and Willpower are enhanced by this increase. For each Health point lost, the victim also suffers a -1 penalty to all rolls that require sight until the bleeding stops. (See "Fighting Blind" on p. 166 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

**Exceptional Success:** Numerous successes rolled are their own reward.

### ..... SPEAR OF LONGINUS

The last and most dramatic of the traditional stigmata is the injury caused by Longinus' spear in Christ's side. Not only is the wound extremely deep, but it also has extraordinary spiritual significance. To the Lancea Sanctum and others, it is this act more than any other that establishes the divinity of Christ and the special place of Kindred in God's Creation. The fact that the act marked Longinus as a Dark Messiah adds further weight to the legend. Those who take Vitae from such a wound experience an ecstasy unlike any other. Kindred find their own blood far more potent, while

ghouls discover their physical Disciplines suddenly amplified. Spear of Longinus cannot be used on Kindred or ghouls.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Resolve + Empathy + Stigmatica

**Action:** Instant for activation of the power, though the full effect of the blood is conferred only after each turn of drinking. Devouring the blessed blood requires an action each turn.

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Wounds appear on the victim and they bleed, but they're poison to drinkers. After Vitae has been consumed from the victim, the blood turns to unholy ash inside the drinker, inflicting a point of lethal damage per Vitae consumed. No Vitae or other benefits are gained.

**Failure:** No wounds are inflicted on the intended victim, although a successive attempt may be made with the expenditure of another Willpower point.

**Success:** A deep wound opens in the victim's left side, causing lethal damage equal to the successes rolled +2. A number of Vitae equal to the total is also lost, one per turn. In addition to sustenance gained for each Vitae consumed, a vampire's Blood Potency increases by one for each three Vitae ingested. So, if three Vitae are drunk, three Vitae are gained and Blood Potency increases by one. If five Vitae are consumed, five Vitae and two Blood Potency are gained. If a ghoul drinks the blood, his highest physical Discipline is increased by one dot for every three Vitae swallowed. These effects last until the first rays of sun appear.

Increased Blood Potency allows a recipient of this power to gain higher Attributes and Skills than before (at least till sunrise), but higher Discipline powers cannot be acquired. The drinker is still limited to powers based on his normal Blood Potency. Even if a Kindred were to use this power to drink Vitae for months, she would be unable to master a Discipline that required a Blood Potency higher than what she officially has. She is able to spend more Vitae per turn, however, and to have more Vitae in her system overall.

Extra Blood Potency gained by a vampire is not conferred to one who diablerizes him. The victim's original Blood Potency determines any rewards of diablerie.

**Exceptional Success:** Numerous successes rolled are their own reward.

### STIGMATICA DEVOTIONS

#### TEARS OF BLOOD (MAJESTY .. STIGMATICA ..)

History is replete with stories of statues and religious icons that seem to weep tears of blood. This power enables a vampire to lay hands on any depiction of a religious figure — it need not be Christian — and cause the statue to secretly, painlessly steal minute quantities of Vitae from those who pray at it or touch it. Laying on hands again causes blood to well up and flow from the eyes of the figure. Any medium can be subject to this power, from stone to canvas to a photograph, so long as the object is Size 3 or larger.

The blood that comes from this manifestation possesses the ability to heal all manner of ailment and to work similar miracles. As with the blood produced from lower levels of Stigmatica, one Vitae flows each turn.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Presence + Empathy + Majesty

**Action:** Extended to invoke. The total number of successes scored is the total number of Vitae the chosen effigy will be able to yield back over time; a statue cannot be imbued with the vampire's mystical power until it has fully delivered on an existing use of this power (or its power is somehow exorcised by true faith). Each roll represents an hour of solemn contact with the object. A player may stop rolling for new successes at any time.

Once the object has been cursed with this Devotion, subsequent rolls are made each month to determine how much Vitae the object collects for the vampire. These rolls are modified as the Storyteller sees fit. Guidelines are listed below.

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The Gethsemani suffers terrible agony in her eyes and is blinded for the remainder of the scene, in addition to suffering a -2 penalty on all dice pools. See "Fighting Blind" on p. 166 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

**Failure:** The effigy gains no power from the Gethsemani, although a successive attempt may be made with the expenditure of another Willpower point.

**Success:** The object infused with the Gethsemani's power collects Vitae from mortals who come into contact with it or pray with it. The amount of Vitae mystically stolen over a month is equal to the number of successes rolled. The Gethsemani may withdraw as much or as little of this Vitae at a time as she desires, by laying on hands and consuming the blood which flows out from the object. Each Vitae consumed by a vampire provides sustenance as normal.

The Vitae yielded by this power has no vampiric provenience, and so cannot cause blood bonds or any other similar effects. It is essentially commingled human Vitae.

Once the object has yielded an amount of Vitae equal to the successes accrued during the original activation action, it can collect no more until the Devotion is performed anew.

**Exceptional Success:** An exceptional amount of blood is harvested by the cursed object.

#### Suggested Modifiers:

Modifier	Situation
+1 to +5	The object is exposed to a large number of pious mortals who regularly pray at or superstitiously touch it.
—	The object sees only occasional visitation, but by a large body of visitors, such as a churchyard statue genuflected to Sundays.
-1 to -5	The object is secular or remote and not often regarded with reverence or respect.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

## TRANSUBSTANTIATION OF THE STARVED (PROTEAN ... STIGMATICA ...)

The Gethsemani is able to invoke a cursed mockery of the miraculous power of transubstantiation, in this case turning mundane liquids into her own Vitae. The miracle is usually performed to nourish a growing congregation of Kindred or ghouls where mortal stigmatics are unavailable to sustain a flock. By placing a single drop of personal Vitae in a volume of any liquid that could be safely consumed by mortals, that substance is mystically transformed into the Kindred's own blood, capable of providing whatever benefits her own Vitae already does. (A volume of liquid equal to at least a jug of wine is required. A drop of water doesn't do it.) Other Kindred who taste this transformed blood recognize it as belonging to the invoking vampire, as there is no effective difference between it and the character's own Vitae. As with any exposed Vitae, the usefulness of this blood diminishes rapidly, becoming inert only a few minutes after its creation.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Composure + Occult + Stigmatica

**Action:** Instant

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The liquid is transformed into what appears to be blood (as per a normal success), but is in fact a bitter poison. The liquid burns and causes a number of points of lethal damage equal to the Gethsemani's Stamina to anyone who drinks it.

**Failure:** Vitae is spent, but the liquid to be changed remains the same. A new attempt may be made with the expenditure of another Vitae.

**Success:** For each success achieved on the activation roll, a single Vitae is produced from the quantity of liquid, to a maximum amount of Vitae equal to the vampire's Blood Potency. The entire volume of liquid is transformed into the achieved sum of Vitae, whether it was a single vessel of wine or a cistern full of water. In order to gain the benefit of the Vitae, an appropriate volume of liquid must be available to be transformed. Excess liquid is reduced to the amount of Vitae created. Too little liquid produces only as much Vitae as the Storyteller judges appropriate, regardless of the successes scored.

This power can be used only on liquid held in an inert container, such as clay or glass. A vampire cannot use it to transform the blood or other liquids inside a mortal into her own Vitae, for example. Nor can she transform a puddle of water.

A mortal can become a ghoul by imbibing newly created Vitae, so long as the mortal drinks within a few minutes of the Vitae's creation and a Willpower point is expended as usual. Some Kindred use this power precisely for that purpose, often working its effect into a high ritual where supplicants are already prepared. Since this Vitae is normal for all intents and purposes, Vinculums can also be forged with it. The notable exception is that a mortal cannot be Embraced with the use of Vitae created with this Devotion.

**Exceptional Success:** The vampire is able to produce a large quantity of Vitae.

This power costs 20 experience points to learn.

# KHAIBIT

DO NOT THREATEN MY MASTER. YOU RULE FROM THE SHADOWS. I AM THE SHADOWS.

The ancient Khaibit bloodline is dying out. This Mekhet offshoot seems to have lost its reason for existence. Traditionally, members of the lineage have served blood magicians in the Circle of the Crone. A Khaibit procures victims for his master to feed upon, manages her worldly affairs and generally frees her to concentrate on her mystical research. When necessary, a Khaibit also serves as bodyguard, thief or even assassin.

A Khaibit's favored Disciplines make him an excellent guard: Auspex to notice a danger, Celerity to react quickly and Vigor to strike hard, replacing the Mekhet's usual penchant for concealment. Khaibit also carry an aptitude for a rare Discipline, generally believed to be the line's invention long, long ago. Other Kindred call the Mekhet "Shadows," but the Khaibit can develop actual power over darkness. Indeed, their power to evoke, shape and become darkness led to the bloodline's name — the ancient Egyptian word for "shadow."

Now, however, few people accept eternal service to another, living or undead. Old Khaibit seldom find childer willing to carry on the bloodline's traditional role. Young Khaibit refuse to serve and sometimes join covenants other than the Circle. Disgusted sires may refuse to initiate such "disobedient" neonates into the bloodline's power, or elect to teach childer who awaken Khaibit blood on their own. Increasing numbers of Kindred think of line members simply as "Mekhet with shadow powers." Indeed, many young Khaibit see themselves that way.

Very few neonates ever learn their bloodline's true, original purpose. Then again, few elders remember it, either. The Khaibit were not always "undead butlers." The lineage's true history is hidden by time and geography.

Long ago, Mekhet vampires led a secret cult dedicated to Set, the Egyptian god of war, desert, chaos and darkness. Some Mekhet also became warriors of the cult. Their symbol was the asp — a silent, deadly killer, and one of Set's totem animals.

As Christianity spread, the Cult of Set declined, even among the undead. By A.D. 1000, the Dark God's cult was nearly extinct. Tonight, some Khaibit protect the few ancient Kindred who still revere the Dark God, and tend to the cult's long-hidden subterranean temples. They also protect other ancient sites that the world

has forgotten. On rare occasions, they travel in order to recover artifacts of the cult and other potent magical relics. Most of the bloodline, however, abandoned their duty with the Cult of Set's demise. Remnants of the group joined the Circle of the Crone and brought many other Khaibit with them. Over the centuries, the line became procurers and valets, leg-breakers and guards, a veritable emotional compensation for the higher duties their blood once demanded, but which were lost.

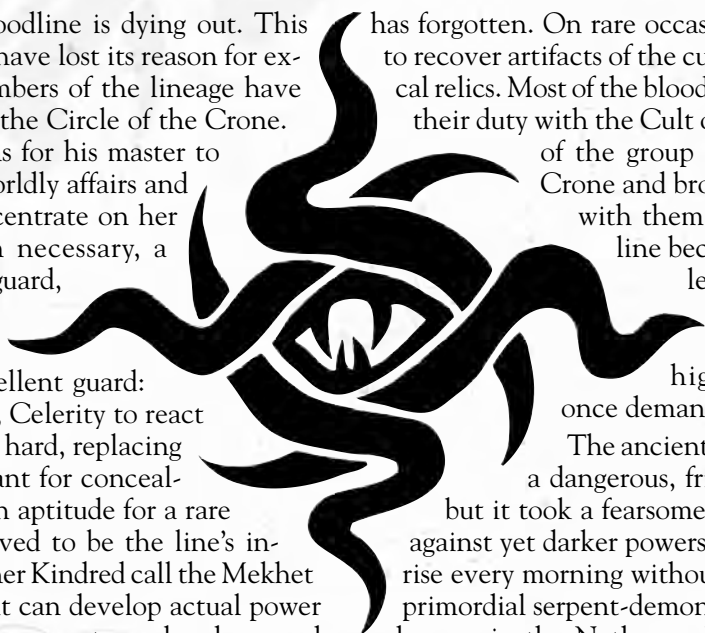
The ancient Egyptians regarded Set as a dangerous, frightening and evil god... but it took a fearsome god to protect the world against yet darker powers. The Sun God could not rise every morning without Set to battle Apep, the primordial serpent-demon of darkness. Set kept the demons in the Netherworld, where they belonged. The "Asps" aided Set's work. They walked shadowy places where other Kindred feared to go, and made darkness their servant. They fought entities from beyond death and before time began, creatures that would have destroyed Creation or remade it to suit their own malignant desires. Some Khaibit still maintain their ancient duty, watching gates that must remain closed, and hunting the servants of the Eldest Powers. Few of them remain, however. So few to keep the sun rising, a sun they can never see themselves.

**Parent Clan:** Mekhet

**Nickname:** Asps (ancient role), servants (modern role)

**Covenant:** In the last thousand years, the Khaibit have served the Circle of the Crone almost exclusively. More than half the bloodline sticks by this old bond. Indeed, some Asps have become competent blood magicians in their own right, instead of merely serving them. In the last two centuries, some Asps took service among the Invictus, the Ordo Dracul or to a much lesser degree the Lancea Sanctum and Carthians. Now, Khaibit who don't know or care about tradition join whatever covenant suits their personalities or goals.

**Appearance:** As with the parent clan, there's no such thing as a typical Khaibit. Line members can be male or female, young or old (in mortal appearance, anyway), or of any race. Asps dress to blend in with the kine around them. Those who fulfill roles as Retainers





often prefer their clothes either loose-fitting or carefully tailored to hide protective armor or amulets.

**Haven:** Khaibit who serve as Retainers do not possess havens of their own. They dwell with their masters. Asps who serve as Creation's unseen defenders keep their havens well hidden, and often underground. These dwellings tend to be small and bare, since a line member may need to abandon it if it's compromised. The Khaibit who protect the Cult of Set's long-hidden fanes in Egypt (see below) dwell in cabal temples. These magnificent subterranean complexes include shrines, dormitories for Asps' mortal servants and vessels, training arenas, libraries of ancient lore, and vaults full of salvaged artifacts of the Cult of Set.

**Background:** The Khaibit look for potential childer who share their ethos of respect and support. They typically Embrace mortals who already serve a master or some allied Kindred. Tradition holds that a prospective Asp should first honor his sire and his sire's master as a ghoul, learning the skills needed to serve and protect. Modern Khaibit often forego this requirement, along with the rest of the bloodline's calling, siring whomever is useful. These rogues are in for a surprise if the bloodline's past ever catches up with them: Some Khaibit ancient enemies remember the bloodline and still hold a grudge.

The few Asps who carry on the ancient duty of guarding the world from ghosts, demons and worse things were often mortals who fought the supernatural, or who were victimized by it. The Khaibit do not always ask such a prospective childer's permission before Embracing him. When a neonate is simply taken, a sire spends at least seven years training and indoctrinating the childer.

**Character Creation:** The majority of line members who serve as mercenaries or agents got other vampires typically offer a forte that's most useful to a master or employer. A Kindred who seeks a bodyguard and protector typically needs an Asp with primarily Physical traits. Someone who needs an assistant or proxy makes Mental or Social traits a criteria. A character's relative strengths and weaknesses can therefore suggest the type of role he might play as an agent-for-hire. Appropriate Physical, Mental and Social Merits only further specialize a Khaibit's appointed role. Expertise in fighting styles, sense for the supernatural or relationships in mortal affairs makes a servant all the more useful in a particular regard.

A Khaibit Embraced to the world's defenders ultimately seeks as much balance as possible among Attributes and Skills. While Physical Attributes might be primary at character creation, Physical Skills might be tertiary, for example. Such well-rounded capabilities are called for since no supernatural being that threatens to invade the world can be defeated in only one way. It takes all of a defender's faculties to prevail.

If a character is initiated directly into the line shortly after the Embrace, an extra dot of Blood Potency is required.



**Bloodline Disciplines:** Auspex, Celerity, Obtenebration, Vigor

**Weakness:** The Khaibit retain the same weakness as their Mekhet forebears. Whenever Asps suffer damage from sunlight or fire, they take an additional point of aggravated damage from that source.

Their affinity with darkness also renders Khaibit less able to resist an instinctive fear of sunlight, anything that burns like sunlight, or anything that could be mistaken for sunlight. As a result, a character suffers a -2 penalty on rolls to resist Röttschreck (fear frenzy) in regard to light.

**Organization:** Those Asps who still protect the relics of Set's cult and who hunt monsters form tiny, cult-like, militant coteries that protect torpid members, record their rule, and preserve their traditions through the centuries. Most Khaibit, however, never meet any other Asps other than their own subservient sires and broodmates.

**Concepts:** Bodyguard, valet, detective, assassin, modern knight, Hound, business manager, vengeful ronin, Lupine-hunter, hospice night manager, personal trainer

## HISTORY

For most Khaibit, their bloodline lacks any history beyond the personal. A member may learn the background of his sire and sire's sire, but that's all. The problem is like that of writing a history of the English monarchy's butlers. For centuries, no one thought the people or their experiences were worth recording. When Khaibit appear in chronicles and legends of the Damned, they usually do so as the lackeys — loyal, treacherous or victimized — of more famous Circle of the Crone members.

## LEGENDARY ORIGINS

The Khaibit emerged from the Mekhet so long ago that history has passed into legend, and few now remember even the legend. Asps who want to hear stories about their bloodline's origins must seek the most erudite loremasters of the undead, or find one of the tiny, long-isolated Khaibit coteries that still guards a site of mystic power.

What's more, a dedicated investigator discovers multiple stories, not one. Each legend may contain bits of history, but not even the coteries that claim to preserve the ancient ways can tell which details are fact and which are fancy. Tales of the ancient Khaibit and Cult of Set drip with romance. Even vampires who know they are not the world's only supernatural denizens cannot believe these legends of gods, ghosts, wizards, were-creatures and otherworlds.

### The Cult of Set

Legends cannot assign a beginning to the Cult of Set. Crumbling scrolls and moldering tomes say the Egyptian god Set founded the group himself before history began,

making it the first "covenant" of Kindred. These purported histories do not mention any events earlier than Hellenistic times, though, and even those stories may be fabrications. (No one has ever scientifically dated any of these manuscripts, which may be copies made later.)

The most consistent myths say the cult existed to protect the world from perils far worse than vampires. The Damned had to dwell in the world and needed live humans to sustain them. Other creatures did not. The warriors of Set therefore fought evil and powerful ghosts that wanted to drag the living into the world of death. They hunted malignant cults and crazed enchanters who served gods of madness, destruction and oblivion. They battled spirits and monsters from beyond the stars and below the depths of Hell. Things so foul and alien that their very presence warped and eroded reality.

The cult's greatest strength lay in its homeland of Egypt. After Rome conquered Egypt, the cult spread throughout the Mediterranean world and the Middle East. The scrolls and inscriptions in the cult's long-lost temples say that Set's paladins of the night saved the world (or at least provinces) many times.

Entertaining stories, if one can believe any Kindred could act so selflessly.

### Dark Power

The lost myths of the Khaibit ascribe the bloodline's genesis to contact with various spiritual or magical forces. The simplest story merely says the god Set gave the lineage's first members their command over shadow. He supposedly gave that gift so the Khaibit could penetrate the deepest darkness, even unto the deathly realms where light could not shine, and to fight creatures that were shadows themselves.

Another story ties the line's Obtenebration power to the blood of a god. In this romantic myth, a mortal coven summoned Seker, the god who ruled the deepest region of Duat, the Egyptian underworld. Seker sought to bring all Egypt into his realm. Three cunning and mighty Mekhet warriors forced the death-god to return to Duat. They tasted the god's spilled blood, conferring upon them a measure of dark, divine power.

A variation on the same story says a Mekhet warrior fought an enchanter who served Seker. The sorcerer called on Seker's darkness to destroy the Mekhet. As shadows curdled around the vampire, however, he seized the enchanter and sank his fangs into the mortal. When the shadows dispersed, the enchanter was gone and the Mekhet's blood had changed.

A quite different story says the Khaibit began with the efforts of a great Mekhet sorceress. This blood-witch conjured water from the River of Death that flowed through Duat. She chose the three greatest mortal warriors who served the Cult of Set and gave them the water to drink along with their Embrace. The Water of Death changed the childers' Vitae, making them the first Asps.

Other myths present minor variations on these stories. Sometimes three Mekhet become the first line members (or sometimes seven, or only one). Instead of Seker's divine blood, supernatural identity comes from feeding on a demon, a ghost or a Nameless Thing. Instead of an undead sorcerer, a mortal mage enchants the founder and changes his blood. Instead of the power coming as Set's gift, the nascent Khaibit steal the secret of Obtenebration from Seker or learn it from Thoth, the god of magic.

After more than 2,000 years, the truth probably doesn't matter.

## SEGUE TO SERVANTS

Legends about the Cult of Set describe a number of conflicts with ancient covenants. The Camarilla is now the best known of these elder groups. The cult did not disappear because of war with another sect, however. The Egyptian gods simply went out of fashion. By A.D. 200, Egypt was firmly Christian. By 400, Christianity was the official faith of the Roman Empire. Never mind finding childer who still worshipped the Egyptian gods. The Cult of Set had increasing difficulty finding recruits who could treat Set as anything but a fable from pagan times.

The Cult of Set was never officially destroyed. It simply withered away. Remaining members joined the Camarilla (assuming that elder covenant was not mythical itself). From the Camarilla, the cult's mystical secrets passed to the nascent Circle of the Crone.

Like the cult, its enemies seem to have declined as well. Perhaps the ghosts, demons and nameless horrors found it more difficult to invade the material world. Perhaps their depredations simply weren't recorded in the chaos and ignorance that followed Rome's decline and collapse. Whatever the truth of the matter, the fading sect ceased to chronicle epic battles against its otherworldly foes.

The Khaibit followed other Cult of Set members into the Circle of the Crone. And yet that group bestowed its greatest honor unto blood magicians, not warriors. The Khaibit continued to fight enemies of the old cult, such as Lupines and hostile vampires, but they fought at the blood-sorcerers' command. Gradually, the bloodline shifted from a lineage of shadow warriors to a lineage of bodyguards and minions. Khaibit seldom appear as the protagonists of Circle history or legends. As magic slipped from the world and the covenants established their new balance of power, the bloodline's martial prowess became steadily less important. Now, even the warriors' tradition of service is a quaint anachronism. Nobody really needs the Khaibit anymore.

At least, they won't until the gates to the Other open again, and the spectral enemies return.

## SOCIETY AND CULTURE

At least half of all Khaibit serve other Kindred. As far as other Damned are concerned, their servants are a

bloodline of just that. The Khaibit receive some respect for their capabilities, especially those who are masters of Obtenebration who can take the form of a shadow. Many Kindred would be astonished to learn that the Asps once defended the world from unholy forces. Most Kindred wouldn't care, though. What could an ancient fight against ghosts and demons matter now?

## AN UNLIFE OF SERVICE

Even if a Khaibit chooses not to follow his line's tradition of service, many do. The lineage's historic role influences who becomes a Khaibit, why, and how other Kindred treat members.

### RETAINERS AND RETAINEES

A Khaibit character might serve another vampire, or even another player's character. Playing a Retainer deserves special discussion.

As a supernatural creature, a Khaibit is a five-dot Retainer. If the Khaibit's master is a Storyteller-controlled character, this cost doesn't matter much. Supporting cast members have as many dots to spend as the Storyteller wants. Of more practical importance, the Khaibit player must buy the character's employer as a Mentor. As usual, the master's value as a Merit depends on her power and willingness to help the character. A Circle Hierophant who treats the servant as a valued agent costs five dots. The Hierophant's spoiled childe who treats her Khaibit bodyguard as a slave costs only one.

What if a Khaibit's master is another player's character? In this case, the players themselves work out the relationship, and the Storyteller decides how to represent it in terms of Retainer and Mentor. If the players decide their characters are master and servant in name only, and actually treat each other as equals, neither needs to buy a Merit. If the master intends to exercise real authority over the Khaibit, and the servant feels some obligation to obey, players must buy suitable Merits for their characters.

### Employers

Most Khaibit work for prestigious and powerful members of the Circle of the Crone. In some cities, a Khaibit major-domo is a badge of honor for an Acolyte. In such cities, some Kindred may retain at least a subconscious awareness of the bloodline's ancient purpose. Master magicians know that when a Crúac experiment goes wrong, it's good to have a Khaibit on hand to deal with whatever arrives in response. A few practitioners of Theban Sorcery or other blood magic seek Asps as well. The desire to co-opt anything the competition values brings Khaibit into the Lancea Sanctum and Ordo Dracul, not to mention among the Unaligned.

Some Invictus elders (and those of other covenants to a lesser degree) also seek Khaibit servants. These employ-



ers don't care about blood magic, but they like the idea of a servant as eternal as themselves. Not many Kindred ever accept an eternal unlife of servitude; the Khaibit offer it as their *raison d'être*. One could always keep a few ghoul retainers, of course, but some elders prefer a servant who doesn't crumble to dust if you forget to feed him personally and on schedule. A ghoul's emotional dependence on his regnant also irritates some elders who prefer a cool, professional relationship with an agent.

A Khaibit's employer is not necessarily some moldering elder who tries to uphold the customs of centuries past. Some sires believe their childer deserve perpetual lackeys of their own. The vampire sires a childer, and the elder orders her Khaibit minion to sire one as well. On rare occasions, parallel lineages of Khaibit and members of another clan may be traced back for generations.

Most often, a vampire simply hires a Khaibit. Once upon a time, Asps swore oaths to serve their masters. Sometimes an Asp had to accept a blood bond to seal the contract. Very few Princes enforce this tradition anymore (or even know about it). If no Khaibit look for work, a vampire might strike a deal with an Asp's master. In return for some boon, the master orders his servant to sire and train a childer. Of course, a vampire can also approach a Khaibit and simply try to lure him away from his current master.

In some cities, a Khaibit servant comes as part of an office. A leading Acolyte may receive a Khaibit servant along with his appointment as Hierophant. Primogen or Prisci may receive a Khaibit's service as well. This happens most often among the Mekhet, but can occur for leaders of other clans, too.

### Making of a Khaibit

A century ago, Khaibit had no problem finding prospective childer. A sizeable portion of the kine population still lived as some kind of servant, especially in Europe. Mortals would not rebel against the notion of serving one master forever. Now, matters are very different. Even a professional butler or live-in valet thinks of himself as a contractor, not a retainer. He provides a service, not servility.

Some employers and Khaibit sires accept this change in social attitude. They seek childer among mortals who possess valued talents: professional bodyguards or security guards, secretaries or business managers. Other Asps look for prospects with an emotional need to serve. Nurses, people who have spent years caring for sickly relatives, employees at non-profit and charitable organizations, and all sorts of volunteer workers attract their attention. Quite often, a would-be sire finds a childer among immigrants from the Third World. A Guatemalan *au pair* or Nigerian waiter may lack the talents to assist a blood magician or to defend a Primogen, but he or she is willing to serve. Knowledge can come later, and the Damned have plenty of time for training.

Sometimes a sire tells a prospective childer she has a job offer with unusual opportunities. Only later does the mortal learn that her "job" requires the Embrace. Other times, a sire merely Embraces a mortal, tells her she can't go back to her old life, and gives her a choice between service and destruction. (Such childer quite understandably show little loyalty to their sires or masters.) Some Asps prefer to blood bond a mortal and train her for several years before delivering the Embrace. When a would-be master contracts for a Khaibit childer, the master may blood bond and train the mortal instead. An Asp sire supplies the Embrace, but may have no other contact with his own childer.

### Duties

A Khaibit's master defines the extent of his agent's duties. Common roles include:

- **Assistant:** Khaibit who serve a blood magician often learn something about their master's dark arts, so they can prepare materials and contribute to rituals. (Such an assistant is traditionally called a *famulus*.) Just as important, a good assistant knows when *not* to intrude on a mystic rite.

- **Bodyguard:** An Asp is often expected to protect his master from her enemies, whether they be mortal witch-hunters, marauding werewolves or rival vampires.

- **Crime:** In addition to defending his master, an Asp might attack his master's enemies. Experienced Khaibit become very good at slipping into a location, administering violence and slipping out again. An agent's master may also send him to spy on mortals or Kindred opponents, or to steal items needed for rituals (or just items the master wants). Requesting (or demanding) such tasks requires a certain degree of loyalty in a servant, of course.

- **General Factotum:** An elder might spend time scheming against rivals and not worry about the trivialities of her Requiem, while a blood magician might not want to take time from research to manage his household or connections to the mortal world. A Khaibit Retainer might serve as secretary, chief of staff overseeing mortal servants, or business manager, in addition to any other duties.

- **Hunter:** A blood magician trying to devise a new ritual doesn't want to waste time seeking sustenance. Instead, she can send her servant to bring her a vessel. Afterward, the agent can make sure the mortal doesn't know what happened — or if it comes to it, dispose of the body.

All in all, a Khaibit servant can find his unlife as exciting and unpredictable as any other vampire's. One night, he delivers a bribe to a city councilman. The next, he sneaks into the Primogen council as a shadowy spy. The night after that, he defends his master against an out-of-control demon. On top of this, a modern Khaibit can also find whatever personal interests and entanglements he chooses... or that choose him.

### Terms of Service

Modern Khaibit expect something in return for an unlife of dedication. Many receive a straightforward salary. Like mortal cooks and housekeepers, line members often demand and receive regular nights off duty. A Khaibit (or any similar Kindred Retainer) receives a traditional privilege to hunt in his master's territory, or to feed from her herd. He may also dwell in his master's haven. In fact, that's usually part of his duties.

Princes often extend a limited immunity to Khaibit or other Kindred Retainers. If a Khaibit commits an offense against other undead at his master's behest, the master bears the responsibility. Of course, that assumes anyone can prove the master gave the order... or that the master is not too powerful or too valued an ally to make prosecution a solution. A Khaibit who becomes the fall guy for his master, and other Kindred know the truth, may suffer lighter punishment than another vampire would (at least in some cities). Such dispensation of a servant usually ends the Khaibit's service, though, unless the master has some other hold on his Retainer, such as a Vinculum or a threat to mortal loved ones. Unfortunately, some elders don't realize that modern servants are not willing to fall on their swords for their masters' sake. Modern Khaibit can strike back at treacherous employers and teach other Kindred to fear the shadows.

### Shadow Warriors

A fraction of the Khaibit bloodline does not serve other Kindred or operate as "Mekhet with shadow powers." These few secretly preserve the bloodline's ancient duty as the world's guardians. Some of these Asps tend the last, long-hidden shrines to Set, or guard weak points in reality where Things From Beyond can break through.

Most of the Cult of Set's so-called fanes are located in Egypt, but a few secret shrines survive in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. These temples hold the cult's records, written on papyrus and parchment scrolls, or inscribed on the walls in classic Egyptian fashion. Anyone who finds one of these shrines learns a great deal about the Kindred of the ancient world. How much of what they learn is true is open to conjecture. Members of the Cult of Set were just as likely as any modern Kindred to misremember the past after a long torpor, and to rewrite history to serve their own interests.

More importantly, fanes are treasure-troves of elder magic. The Cult of Set practiced a form of Crúac based on Egyptian ritual magic, concentrating on the use of wax or clay images, hieroglyphic inscriptions, blood offerings, and invocations to Egyptian gods. Any vampire who could retrieve such ancient lore would win great fame in the Circle of the Crone and the Ordo Dracul. (The Sanctified might seek to destroy this "pagan" sorcery, though you never know. Power is power.) The shrines also hold items that ancient cultists regarded as magical. Perhaps some of them still retain

their power. Exorcistic sand from the deserts of Duat, blades enchanted to kill spirits, amulets to protect against possession, Dominate or fire — it's anyone's guess what wonders a fane might hide.

A few other Khaibit keep watch over places where ghosts, demons and stranger things once erupted into the world, and where they might break through again. Sometimes mages in search of knowledge or power deliberately open gates to realms beyond. Khaibit guards make sure no one else foolishly dares these portals, and watch for dark things that slip through. Every century, one or two Khaibit discover their historic role and accept their duty. If they among the undead don't protect the world, who will?

Typically, a small group of Khaibit (or other vampires descended from Cult of Set members) guards each post. Some members lie in torpor while others remain active. If a member suffers Final Death, the others look for a mortal they can Embrace and train to join them. When a shrine or breach-point is far from a major city, the Khaibit might assemble a blood cult of mortals to serve as their herd and additional guards. Some of these little cults have persisted for centuries.

Guardian-coterie don't usually know about each other. Each believes its members are the last to keep the old ways. They have simply lost track of each other over the ages. At most, a coterie might know of one other guard post, thanks to sending mortal allies in search of other lost shrines or breaches.

On very rare occasions, Khaibit risk their unlives in quests to retrieve mystic artifacts or to stop spiritual invasions. These Asps seek relics of the Cult of Set for practical and cultural reasons. A ceremonial rod from the old cult might bear some useful enchantment. It might also set mortal archeologists to asking dangerous questions. No Kindred wants the kine learning about ancient cults supposedly led by vampires. Rumors of curses or hauntings may also lead an Asp to seek items or places where outsiders invade the world. If a Khaibit finds such an object or place, he cleanses it or takes it back to his shrine for safekeeping. Discovering a new portal in the world may prompt an Asp to stay and sire a new brood of guards.

## DISCOVERING HERITAGE

Any vampire might serve as another Kindred's Retainer. The Khaibit stand out because of their secret heritage. You can play a Khaibit without ever bringing in that demon-hunting background, but that background is what makes an Asp more than just a vampire with shadow powers.

Most players know a lot more about the World of Darkness than their characters do. The Khaibit just push that distinction a little further. Part of the fun of playing an Asp lies in discovering the character's heritage as a shadow-warrior. You and the Storyteller may

conspire to build a story arc around the discovery, and how your Asp responds to the knowledge that she has a rare power to fight spiritual foes. Does she accept her power and destiny? Does she try to avoid her duty? How do other Kindred — especially a Khaibit's master — react when they learn the truth?

## THREAT REVEALED

If a Storyteller wants to incorporate Khaibit heritage into her chronicle, she needs to establish a danger that Asps are uniquely qualified to fight. Perhaps Kindred come under attack by incorporeal spirits. Maybe vengeful ghosts possess a coterie that lairs in an old mausoleum. A bungled (or successful...) experiment in blood magic could release shadow-creatures that feed on vampires the way vampires feed on mortals. Workers digging the foundations for a new skyscraper could break open a long-sealed and buried portal to a nether-realm. There's no shortage of possibilities.

Next, a Khaibit needs some reason to believe he can do something about such a problem. The easiest way is to have some knowledgeable Kindred say so. Very few vampires know Khaibit ancient history. What luck that one of them dwells in the city! Or a Khaibit from a guard-post coterie might arrive and ask the character to help deal with a problem.

For a less blatant approach, an Asp character might receive clues when he uses Obtenebration. He could see a spirit while using Night Sight in total darkness and realize that he can see things that other vampires can't. Maybe those invisible, incorporeal creatures have some connection to the strange events that so frighten the Kindred community? A Khaibit who has mastered Shadow Form can even touch spirits. An Asp conducting an errand in shadow form might encounter a ghost or demon by chance, suffer an attack, and discover that he can fight an enemy whom no one else can see or strike.

Or a spiritual foe might seek out a Khaibit. Kindred have forgotten the Asps' role in expelling evil spirits from the world, but otherworldly beings have not. The Khaibit is the antagonist's first target, which gives any "sensibly" paranoid vampire a clue that someone considers him a special threat. But why?

## IN SEARCH OF LOST SECRETS

Once a Khaibit realizes Obtenebration makes her unusually qualified to deal with spirit foes, what does she do about it? She may try to avoid the situation, of course. Once other Kindred learn of her power, that probably ceases to be an option. Vampires want protection against the invisible, intangible menace, and put pressure on the Asp to defend them. Whether the character selflessly accepts or extorts every concession she can is her choice.

The Khaibit quickly realizes that she needs to know more. What is the enemy? How can she fight it most effectively?

Have other Khaibit done this before? Is the ancient connection between the line and the Circle of the Crone mere coincidence? Does Obtenebration offer greater powers that are perfectly suited to fighting spirits?

When a character learns everything local vampires know about the lineage's past (which is not much), she can seek information elsewhere. Local Acolytes can contact savants in other cities. The Asp can offer favors in return for information, or even ask for a letter of introduction so she can ask questions in person. A coterie may travel more safely than a lone vampire, so all characters can embark on a thrilling journey and see how the Kindred govern themselves in another city.

Then again, a character might tap non-vampiric sources of information. Masters of Crúac or Theban Sorcery might be able to summon oracular spirits to answer questions. Naturally, such covenant members demand favors in return, which can hook an Asp and her coterie into further stories.

Ultimately, a line member might find a long-hidden, guard-post coterie and discover her "deathright." If players want to make Khaibit heritage a major story arc, the coterie might travel all the way to Egypt. (Perhaps with the help of a Rakshasa smuggler? See that bloodline's description.) This would be a quest worthy of an ancient Khaibit champion.

## DARK HEROES

A Khaibit who battles for the sake of the world receives no gratitude from mortals (they can never know a fight took place), and very little from her fellow Kindred. Some vampires surely try to exploit a spiritual threat for their own ends. Never mind the danger to the world, as long as they can use the crisis to discredit their rivals! Such Kindred might oppose a would-be shadow warrior, because they don't want the danger to end on any terms but their own. Other vampires could simply loathe the thought of a servant gaining such power and influence. Still others try to make a Khaibit their own servant, so they can extort favors from other Kindred. In the end, saving the world from nether horrors may be easier than finding a reason to save it at all.

## OBTENEBRATION

The Khaibit trademark Discipline deals with darkness and shadow, the natural habitat of creatures slain by sunlight. Obtenebration enables its possessor to act more easily in darkness, alter and generate shadows, and to even become a shadow himself. The Discipline has little effect on solid objects, so it requires some ingenuity to use.

Obtenebration is as old as the Khaibit themselves. Over the centuries, plenty of Kindred have had opportunity to learn it. The Discipline remains largely confined to the Khaibit, however, since most Kindred don't see much use for Obtenebration's basic powers. It's easier





to hire a Khaibit spy who can turn into a shadow than to spend years mastering the Discipline so you can turn into a shadow yourself.

## • NIGHT SIGHT

A student of Obtenebration first learns how to see in total darkness. Vampires innately see better than mortals do but Night Sight enables Kindred to see without any light at all. The fainter any ambient light, the stranger the world looks through Night Sight. Under moonlight or equivalent illumination, a user can see as well as he can in a well-lit room with normal color vision. By starlight, colors fade to leave shades of silver and gray. In complete darkness, a vampire sees different shades of black — ebony, jet, sable and hundreds more than mortal language can name, each with its own tint and texture. While using Night Sight, a Kindred's pupils expand until her eyes are completely black.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** This power requires no roll

**Action:** Reflexive

The player simply activates the power and explains to the Storyteller what his character does. The vampire suffers no

penalties for acting in darkness. He can still be blinded by other means, though. Night Sight does not counteract visual impairment caused by tear gas or the opacity of a dense fog, for example. Nor does it help when a vampire's eyes have been removed! The effect lasts for the remainder of a scene.

When in complete darkness, a vampire using Night Sight gains one additional minor power: She can see invisible and incorporeal entities such as unmanifested ghosts (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 208). The slightest hint of light blocks this application of Night Sight.

## .. SHADOW PLAY

The user can manipulate shadows that already exist. They can grow, shrink, fade or intensify, change shape or even detach from the objects that cast them and move about. In dark surroundings, the vampire can create whatever shadowy images she wants. All these images remain shadows, though. A person who can see clearly could never mistake figures created through Shadow Play for anything solid or real. (Although, seeing one's own shadow reach out to strangle the shadow of another person could prove quite disturbing.)

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Intimidation + Obtenebration

**Action:** Instant

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character fails to manipulate a shadow and cannot use this power again until the next sunset.

**Failure:** The character cannot manipulate shadows with this attempt, but a successive attempt may be made if another Vitae is spent.

**Success:** The character can alter shadows cast in a 16-square-yard area, but he may locate that area anywhere within line of sight. The zone of Shadow Play can itself be moved as a reflexive action, if the user so desires.

**Exceptional Success:** As per a normal success, except the area affected can be up to 25 square yards in size.

Shadows can be manipulated for the remainder of the scene, their activities or behavior being modified by the user as a reflexive action. No more than one use of the power may be active at a time. Thus, shadows in two separate areas cannot be affected simultaneously. The user may leave shadows alone whenever he desires. They return to normal if he is knocked unconscious, sent into torpor, destroyed, if he leaves them alone or if he loses direct line of sight to the area of effect.

### Suggested Modifiers

#### Modifier Situation

- Moving a shadow in a manner different from what the object casting it would suggest or be capable of (making the shadow of a statue dance, for example)
- 1 Causing an object to cast a shadow unlike what its physical shape would suggest
- 3 Truly complicated Shadow Plays, such as detaching a shadow from its host or making it undertake elaborate or wholly unnatural actions

## ... SHROUD OF NIGHT

As a student of Obtenebration gains skill, he can generate his own darkness to conceal his deeds, to frighten victims or to animate through Shadow Play. Shroud of Night swallows and suppresses light, so a Kindred could darken a brightly lit room to dim twilight, or spread utter darkness throughout a city street at night. Electric lights still work and fires still burn, but they fade and their light doesn't cast the way it should. So, a 100-watt bulb shines no brighter than a candle. Shroud of Night provides no protection from sunlight. The sun's direct light instantly burns away such eldritch shadows.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Crafts + Obtenebration

**Action:** Instant

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character fails to create shadow and cannot use this power again until the next sunset.

**Failure:** The character is unable to manipulate shadows with this attempt, but a successive attempt may be made if another Vitae is spent

**Success:** The character can darken an area of about 16 square yards (a room) for a scene.

**Exceptional Success:** As per a normal success, except each success at five and over multiplies the maximum possible area by three. So, five successes darken a 48-square-yard area (3 x 16), and seven successes affect a 144-square-yard area (9 x 16).

The degree of darkness that can be achieved depends on the starting illumination.

Starting Illumination	Limit of Darkness
Bright as day (but not real sunlight)	Shadowy, dim light
Well-lit room	Twilight
Poorly lit room	Moonlight equivalent
Twilight or well-lit city street	Starlight equivalent
Moonlight or poorly lit city street	Complete darkness

The user does not need to reduce lighting as much as the power allows. He could dim a well-lit room merely to poorly lit, instead of going all the way to twilight.

Darkness persists until the remainder of the scene, unless the effect is dispelled early. Brighter light sources introduced once the power is in effect may increase ambient light. The user may dispel darkness whenever he desires, and it fades completely if he is knocked unconscious, sent into torpor or destroyed. Only one area may be affected by darkness at a time. The user need not be in the area affected. He can dim an area at a range as long as he has direct line of sight to that area. If line of sight is ever broken, normal light returns.

### Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
Moonlight or poorly lit city street	+2
Twilight or well-lit city street	+1
Poorly lit room	—
Well-lit room	-1
Bright as day (but not real sunlight)	-3

## .... PERAMBULAM IN TENEBRIS

An expert practitioner of Obtenebration can step into one shadow and step out of another instantly. This power enables a character to travel very quickly, but only for limited distances.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** This power involves no roll

**Action:** Instant

The character merely needs to see the shadow where he wants to emerge. (Direct line of sight is required; seeing the spot on TV does not qualify.) The distance

between shadows does not count toward the distance the character can move in a turn based on his Speed. So, if he travels his Speed to enter a shadow and dedicates the turn's action to using this power, he emerges in the other shadow all in the same action.

Clothes and objects that can be carried in one hand can travel with a vampire, but other people and objects that require two hands cannot.

### Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
Moonlight or poorly lit city street	+2
Twilight or well-lit city street	+1
Poorly lit room	—
Well-lit room	-1
Bright as day (but not real sunlight)	-3

## ..... SHADOW FORM

A master of Obtenebration can literally become a shadow. In this form, a character can slide across walls, through a crack under a door or through a window without breaking the glass. No physical force can harm her because she isn't solid. She looks just like a shadow of herself (and can use Shadow Play separately to make herself even harder to recognize). The character can also "peel" herself off the floor, wall or ceiling to assume a three-dimensional form of semi-transparent darkness, but doing so demands great concentration.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Subterfuge + Obtenebration

**Action:** : Instant

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character does not become a shadow of herself, but rather "roots" her shadow self to some object in her vicinity, becoming its "shadow" until the scene ends or until a Willpower point is spent as a reflexive action to free herself. Shadow Play can still be used in "trapped" shadow form.

**Failure:** The character is unable to transubstantiate herself into shadow, but another attempt may be made in a subsequent turn if another Vitae is spent.

**Success:** The character becomes a shadow-like form, with all of the benefits and only some of the drawbacks.

**Exceptional Success:** As per a standard success, plus a three-dimensional form can be assumed with a Willpower cost.

The character becomes a two-dimensional shadow, can move at normal or running Speed, and can defy gravity, but must always move across a surface such as the ground, a wall or a ceiling. She can pass through any object which a shadow could be cast through, such as a window, a paper wall or a mesh screen. She cannot exist as a free-standing, two-dimensional shadow.

The character is a shadow-like ephemeral form, existing in the material world but intangible. This state is not unlike that of a ghost anchored to the physical world (a state called "Twilight") — in fact, a character in Twilight can interact normally only with other creatures in Twilight. She cannot speak or affect anything physically. Punches, bullets, mundane fire and other material attacks cannot harm the shadow-like form of the vampire any more than they could damage a normal shadow. Sunlight, however, remains deadly.

If an exceptional success is rolled when the power is activated, the character can choose to become a free-standing, three-dimensional figure of darkness with visible eyes (whether they appear as flesh, as pinpricks of light or as holes in the shadow is up to the character), but doing so requires significant concentration. (One Willpower point must be spent as a reflexive action; it does not confer a +3 bonus to any roll.) In this form, the character can speak normally into the material world and make use of her other Obtenebration powers. She is still considered an ephemeral form in the state of Twilight, however, and cannot otherwise interact with material things. A vampire in either kind of Shadow Form cannot use *any* other Disciplines against material targets. She can, however, use Disciplines against ephemeral targets, such as another vampire in Shadow Form or against a ghost or spirit.

Surrounding a character in Shadow Form with light, so that no shadows can exist, forces the vampire to resume corporeal form.



# MOROTROPHIANS

GO AHEAD AND BITE HER. TEAR HER UP. DON'T BOTHER TO LICK THE WOUND.  
SHE CAN'T MOVE IN THOSE STRAPS. BETWEEN HER THERAPY AND THE PROPRANOLOL, THIS WILL ALL LOOK LIKE A RELAPSE.

In the darkest moments of the night, when the halls and corridors of hospitals have fallen quiet, monsters come out. Creeping from their dark holes and hiding places, they assail the old, infirm and mentally ill. While liver-spotted hands are tangled in IV tubes and mad eyes roll like those of panicked cattle, bodies restrained by straps and masks, these victims are abused again and again, their very lives made forfeit. Worse still is when survivors babble their stories through tears and lips flecked with spittle, and their caretakers laugh at them, mock them or slap them until they fall silent. Sometimes, however, caretaker and dependant look into each other's eyes and see that the same fear haunts them both.

The perpetrators of these horrid abuses are the Morotrophians, leaches who prey upon the lost, desperate and mad during victims' greatest weakness. For hundreds of years, the bloodline has focused its attention on dominating enclosed institutions where captive and voiceless populations are turned into a constant, constrained and inconsequential buffet for their wicked appetites. Even other Kindred are repulsed by the "Monks" habits, though such revulsion is not enough to preclude them from retaining the offenders' services. The liberty to access an imprisoned vessel for weeks on end is a profane joy that few Kindred have experienced in centuries, and the Morotrophians can offer such delight on a nightly basis.

Contrary to perception, not all Morotrophians haunt the sterile halls of mental institutions and retirement homes. Though such havens do make for a majority of the bloodline's domains, members' focus is wider. The Monks slip through the cracks and hide in the shadows of any enclosed, controlled facility. In medieval nights, the then "Abbots" preyed on monks or nuns trapped behind monastery or convent walls. Some still follow that tradition, though in modern nights they're more likely to lurk in the gloom of cult houses where mortal pawns use charisma and religion to bind kine with dependence and the need for acceptance. Others dip their withered fingers in the pies of orphanages and rehab clinics, and a few have even

managed to infiltrate prisons (though the last are dangerous places for any Kindred, given tight government control and constant surveillance). Any place in which there is a restricted, contained and mostly voiceless population is prime territory for members of this lineage.

And yet, in the modern nights, Morotrophians face a new challenge as the Malkovian bloodline spreads into one of their traditional seats of power — the mental asylum. The few Kindred who know of both lineages think of them in much the same way (or as one!), but the truth is the two could not be more different.

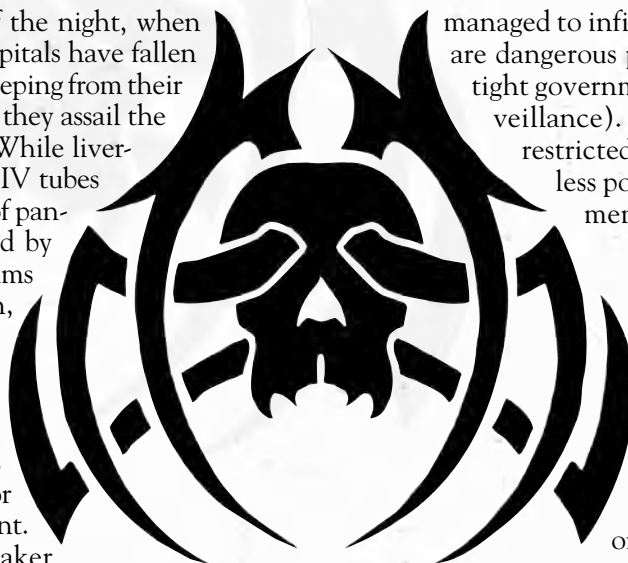
Where the Malkovians are mad, the lunatics running the asylum, the Morotrophians are stone-cold sane. They use the madness and dependency of others and hold Malkovians in contempt. While it may come back to haunt them, the Morotrophians are certain that it will be they, not the Lunatics, who will rule the roost.

**Parent Clan:** Nosferatu

**Nickname:** Monks or Abbots, Abbey Lubbers (insulting)

**Covenant:** The majority of Morotrophians are members of the Invictus, as that group's insularity and respect for rank and position suits the Monks' institutionalized mentality. The normal lack of advancement that troubles young Invictus neonates strikes the Morotrophians less severely. They expect to have to earn their place with years of work, and need the security of belonging to a group more than they need immediate opportunity for progression.

The Lancea Sanctum numbers the second most Monks, as the old religious ties of the bloodline have not faded completely. Those Abbots who still fraternize with cults and secluded religious institutions often join with the Sanctified, seeing themselves as brothers in monstrosity. Not all in the Lancea Sanctum share this bond, however, as some orthodox view Morotrophians as particularly noxious abusers of faith. Some Monks have overcome this stigma by assuming the role of "invisible angel," punishing the wicked on their hunting grounds and bringing death to those in pain. These angels



consider themselves to do God's work, and gain respect for it.

The Morotrophians have a minor presence in the other covenants. There are a few powerful if not respected Abbots in the Ordo Dracul. These Monks bitterly resent their weaknesses and limitations, and strive to overcome them. In doing so they often attain great mystical understanding, but their reliance on human weakness offends many members of the Order, and attempts to escape the bloodline's history insults brethren. The Carthians tend to be too idealistic and egalitarian for the manipulative and cloistered Morotrophians, though a few reformers whose ideals outweigh their vested interests occasionally join up. The Circle of the Crone includes almost no Morotrophians. The wild, mercurial nature of the Crone is at odds with the conservative, siege mentality of most Abbots. Occasionally, a line member whose influence over a particular institution has brought down condemnation has decided to spend his Requiem alone and unaffiliated, to enjoy his self-proclaimed haven and hunting grounds for himself.

**Appearance:** Unlike some of their Nosferatu kin, Monks are rarely outright monstrous in appearance. The mark of the Blood is more subtle than that, and perhaps more damaging in the long run. Every Morotrophian has a look about her that most people instinctively associate with a doctor who does lots of unnecessary surgery. It's a look that combines certain aspects of inbreeding and dead fish — bulging eyes, sallow skin and long, thin fingers that twitch and fidget. Thinning hair, balding pates and over-pronounced, bobbing Adam's apples are also common.

Monks tend to dress according to their assumed roles, donning costumes that suit their surroundings. An Abbot in a mental hospital, for example, may dress like a nurse or staff member, in a rumpled



suit and a (stolen) clip-on nametag. It's uncommon for a Morotrophian to attempt to appear to be upper management or part of an institution elite. They attempt to blend into the undifferentiated middle ranks, posing as mid-level staff, interns or guards. Some find practicality better than pride and dress the part of the lowest level of employee — janitor, orderly or something similarly faceless that allows them to be anywhere they need to be. Very few Monks assume the roles of inmates; doing so would make them victims, not predators. Those who pose as prey are viewed with a mixture of contempt and horror by their brethren.

**Haven:** Morotrophians tend to make havens in the bowels of their pet institutions, or in nearby, accessible areas. The most common locations are mental institutions, old folks' homes, cult houses, monasteries and occasionally prisons or prison-supply houses.

Elder Morotrophians often have secret chambers, hidden in the maze of halls and access corridors of a large institution, constructed during the building or renovation of the place. Some of these hidey-holes are hundreds of years old and are taken for granted as part of a building. No one has any idea that they're there, they overlook them in plain sight, or they don't consider what such places are for.

Young Abbots and those who have to infiltrate a foundation do not usually have this luxury, so have to work to maintain their security. They typically chose places deep in the heart of a compound, in cellars and access corridors, where there's no chance of accidental exposure to sunlight. These areas are then guarded and warded through a mixture of ghoulish servants, influence over mortal inmates, and judicious use of the Institutionalize, Nightmare and Obfuscate Disciplines. Given enough time, even a young Morotrophian can make a small area

in a secluded corner into a place where no one goes and no one discusses. (This last represented by a Haven with considerable dots in Location and Security, but typically few in Size.)

Most Monks are obsessively attached to their havens. The sites are difficult to set up (finding a secure resting place in the midst of a human institution is no small task) and take time to secure and control. There are tales of Morotrophians whose monasteries were closed a hundred years past, yet they still haunt the ruins, slowly starving and giving in to the Beast. Woe betide the Kindred who attempts to unseat a Morotrophian from his home.

**Background:** Elder line members were often religious heretics, monks or nuns in their mortal days. These Abbots are the source of the line's old nickname. Many still have a medieval bias to their worldview, and they influence whatever institution they haunt to be run like a monastery, with strict observance and routine that turns obsession into dogma. It's not unknown for such elders to regulate how many times a day those under their power may blink, going to extremes such as taping eyes open to control the "willfully disobedient."

Young Morotrophians tend to be chosen from among psychiatrists, psychologists, health-care workers, prison guards and orderlies. Humans who have a personal understanding of institutionalization and the closet society of compounds tend to do best as Monks, and already have access to the resources they will need as members of the line. Combined with the obsessive and controlling nature of lineage elders, these backgrounds lead to young Monks being just as fanatical as their progenitors, simply with a different focus. Where elders may concentrate on isolation and flagellation, young line members use drugs and psychological torture. The results are generally the same, but neonates and ancillae have an easier time passing unnoticed in modern, secular nights.

New inheritors of the line's blood are also important to elders. The more Morotrophians who are spread through institutions, the greater their collective ability to influence the mortal organizations that control such institutions. Where a single Morotrophian working alone has trouble swaying the kine in charge of an institution, especially if the outside world interferes, a group of line members can collectively blackmail, coerce and intimidate on a wider level. For example, many of the standards and praxis for mental institutions are decided by panels that dictate terms to all locations. A single Morotrophian might be able to coerce only a few mortals on such a panel, but a brood spread through several dozen major foundations may be able to intimidate and Institutionalize a majority of the board.

Mortals who already have such influence over councils and administrations thus make ideal candidates for the Embrace.

**Character Creation:** Morotrophians who lurk within mental institutions and old folks' homes are an intelligent lot, used to getting their way by force of mind. Their focus on psychiatry and psychology (or at least on passable sounding quackeries of such) leads to a focus on Mental Attributes and Skills, with Academics, Medicine and Politics being common. Those who still infiltrate cults and cloistered religious communities tend to rely on Social Attributes and Skills, despite the fact that they do not come naturally. Empathy, Intimidation and Subterfuge are likely. Such Monks focus on understanding and exploiting the social weakness of others. Line members' own weaknesses are obvious enough, so they spend a great deal of energy making sure everyone else's are as well.

Almost all Monks have some level of Contacts and/or Status to represent their ability to infiltrate and manipulate private, enclosed institutions. Herd represents their victims in those places. Abbots who live on facility grounds need sufficient Haven to cover their security, and many have dots of Retainer to represent a ghoulish guard or assistant.

Finally, any character who starts play as an Abbot needs a second dot of Blood Potency to be able to join the bloodline. Without it, a character is not given aid in finding her own institution. Nor is she allowed to shelter with her sire. The Morotrophians take care of their own, despising wayward children who don't shore up the foundations of the system.

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

**Weakness:** As with their parent clan, the Morotrophians are disturbing and difficult to be around. Very few Monks are outright monstrous. For most members of the line, the curse manifests as an aura or look that most would define as somewhere between "inbred" and "fishlike." There is simply something about their bugging, leering eyes and twitchy, secretive manner that causes others to react unfavorably. The 10 Again rule does not apply to rolls involving Presence or Manipulation in social situations. Additionally, any 1's that come up on such a roll are subtracted from successes. (This latter part of this weakness does not affect dramatic-failure rules.) This vulnerability does not apply to dice pools involving the Intimidation Skill, or to the Composure Attribute.

In addition, Morotrophians have a weakness inherited from their founder, the very deficiency that drove him to feed on the dangerous grounds of monasteries, and the greatest secret shame of the bloodline. Morotrophians are as institutionalized as those on whom they prey. They need confining walls and



rules to make them comfortable. Whenever a Morotrophian is in a situation where there are no strong social or physical boundaries that are recognizable as an institution, dice pools for all actions suffer a -2 penalty due to stress and fear (the dice pools of most reflexive actions aren't affected). For guidelines on what counts as an institution, see the Institutionalize Discipline, below.

**Organization:** Morotrophians are insular and don't deal with each other on a nightly basis. Occasionally two Monks share domain over an institution of considerable size, such as a state mental institution that deals with 20,000 cases a year, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Most Morotrophians are obsessed with being lord of the manor and have no desire to allow anyone to compete for their power (much less someone with the same powers and capabilities). When a Monk decides to create progeny, he typically does so by creating a ghoul and seeing how well his servant takes to the ways of the line. The ghoul is taught the ways of Monks, and her ability to survive and thrive under the difficult conditions of an institution are tested. Needless to say, if this indoctrination was discovered by other Kindred it could lead to a blood hunt as a Masquerade breach, but Morotrophians are quiet and careful. If a ghoul ever slips up, she's destroyed. If she proves her worth, she's Embraced and sent off to find her own institution. Most sires do a thorough job of setting up a childe, with even the stingiest calling in of favors and using Disciplines to start a neonate off right. Once the setup is complete, however, the childe must stand on her own. The exception is if the childe does not join the bloodline, in which case she is disinherited and never receives any help from the lineage unless she repents and returns to the fold.

Beyond the sire-childe bond, Monks who infiltrate similar institutions maintain a network of correspondence and alliance that they use to manipulate the systems that organize and control their realms. Members who lurk in mental institutions, for example, conspire to intimidate and corrupt groups such as the National Medical Accreditation Committee and State Departments of Mental Health. This cooperation is largely ad-hoc and a matter of common sense. If mortals allegedly in control of such institutions actually bothered to work at controlling them, the Monks would be in very grave danger in very short order.

Favors done outside the shared system (say, a Monk who resides at a prison arranging to have a patient transferred to another Monk's asylum) are recorded meticulously, and debts owed are one of the few really binding forms of social interaction that occurs between Morotrophians. Every Monk in an area of control knows who owes what level of favor to every other member in

and out of that field (old folks' homes, for example). Anyone who bilks on a debt finds himself out in the cold. Repeat offenders may even be chastised by suffering a government-agency or news-crew investigation of their fief, possibly resulting in the Abbot having to flee his haven for a period.

**Concepts:** Cruel psychologist, doctor who performs unnecessary surgery, abusive orderly, prison guard, power behind a charismatic cult leader, lurker in the basement, orphanage director, trauma counselor, the thing that watches without being seen, death-row haunt

## HISTORY

In early 16th century Northern Italy, a young German monk named Ludoldus Bischoffshausen, who was helping to run the *pazzarella* in Rome, was Embraced by a Nosferatu. Who this mysterious sire was has never been determined, even though many Abbots have spent years researching the subject. What is known is that his childe soon discovered that he had a crippling weakness. He was unable to leave the walls of the *pazzarella* or his monastery without suffering crippling bouts of nausea and panic. After a breach of the Masquerade that nearly sent Ludoldus to the flames, he fled to France, where he coerced and bound an old friend into giving him refuge.

Ludoldus found that the youths of his new abbey, young and cut off from the world, made a perfect source of sustenance. Shame, fear, force and isolation silenced them about his nocturnal visits. Within a year, Ludoldus had turned his old friend into a personal ghoul, and ruled the roost from behind one abbot or prioress after another.

Eventually Ludoldus created childer, an act born of loneliness and despair. It quickly became obvious, however, that he could not live under the same roof with his progeny. While the feeding of one vampire could be hidden behind closed doors, the feeding of more could not. So he used the influence he had gained to allow his childer to infiltrate abbeys and monasteries of their own. Over the course of a century, perhaps a half-dozen sacred houses were so corrupted, with greater and lesser degrees of success and control. Ludoldus' brood seemed to establish a solid power base.

Members of the line have different explanations for what happened next. Elders say that events were a punishment meted out by God. While Ludoldus always fed in the walls of sacred houses, he took sustenance only from those who sinned. He would watch from the shadows and come forth to punish those who partook of lust, gluttony or pride. (It was believed that for this scourging, God allowed the vampire a place in His home.) Ludoldus' childer were not so pious, however, and took without caring about acts committed, turn-

ing innocents and sinners alike into vessels. In His anger, it is said that God swept His Inquisitorial hand to smite them and teach the brood humility.

Young, secular members of the lineage say the purge was a simple matter of too many institutions with too little influence over space and occupants. It was inevitable that the unscientific methods of control used would fail, especially in an atmosphere of paranoia and hatred.

Whichever interpretation of events is correct, the Inquisition recognized that something was foul in the abbeys of Aix-en-Provence and Bamberg. In the midst of witch and heretic trials, signs of "Devil's marks" left by the Monks' feeding blazed a trail that could not be escaped. Half the bloodline was wiped out in a decade, some surviving only by forcing ghouls and patsies to confess for them. (Some Abbots' control of Institutionalization had grown to a point that dupes feared removal from their own prisons more so than death.)

The Inquisition may have been the end of the bloodline if not for the actions of Ignace Loix, one of Ludoldus' youngest childer. Following a witch trial in which a doctor convinced the court that the accused was innocent, that it was insanity and not possession that led to the accusations made, Loix attached himself to the doctor and followed him to the growing mental asylums of France's Great Confinement. There, the vampire recognized thousands of vessels, often chained to beds and unable to move, all of whom were known to be mad and who thus had no voice. It was, in short, a perfect feeding ground for the bloodline, where the terrified tales of madmen would bring only silencing beatings rather than Inquisitorial torches.

Over the next hundred years, the lineage spread throughout mental asylums, finding shelter and protection as confinement and punishment of the mad gained momentum. Though the Great Confinement ended, the asylum as an institution prevailed, and the insane remained victims. It was during this period that the Discipline of Institutionalization saw full flourish. Under its auspice, members of the lineage spread to other foundations: prisons, "homes" for embarrassing members of upper-class families, and the charismatic cults that grew up around the Great Awakening.

By the 18th century, the Morotrophians had spread throughout Europe and achieved a strong hold in America. It was in the New World that the next evolution came, as mental institutions were increasingly used to house the elderly who could no longer take care of themselves. Monks found that the aged made nearly as ideal victims as madmen. For almost two centuries, the Morotrophians were unchallenged and comfortable, lurking in the dark places of vast asylums.

The greatest blow since the Inquisition was dealt to them as late as the 1960s, when a new movement for de-institutionalization of mental patients swept the United States and parts of Europe. Vast state hospitals were closed down or nearly emptied. The number of patients under state care dropped from 500,000 to 100,000 in less than a decade. Many Morotrophians elders were unable to adjust to the decline and were forced into torpor as their Vitae supplies were reduced to a trickle.

Young members of the bloodline adapted quite handily, though, assuming positions that elders' failure had opened. Morotrophians simply moved from state-controlled hospitals to privately run and funded shelters, taking their place in the cottage industry of care that arose. Many even found the new arrangement to be superior to the old. Though their havens held fewer victims, there was less governmental control and regulation at work, giving the predators greater freedom and power than ever before.

The latest trend — eagerly adopted by the youngest members of the line and feared by the eldest — is Monk influence of deprogramming and rehabilitation clinics. Lax laws in many jurisdictions allow the manipulators to virtually kidnap victims off the streets and hold them long enough to feed at will. With sway over psychiatrists and lawyers, it's fairly easy for a modern line member to arrange forced hospitalization of victims for reasons of "danger to self or society." Some Monks have even made a nocturnal business of it, offering specific victims or types of victims to other vampires with special feeding requirements or jaded pallets. Line elders fear such open manipulation. Rising court cases and public attention reminds them of the scrutiny that preceded the Inquisition.

## SOCIETY AND CULTURE

After Ludoldus went into torpor in the late 1970s, there has been no current leader of the Monks. Ignace Loix is the most influential member still active, but his power is limited to line members who work with mental hospitals, and mostly only in America and France. While that covers a large portion of the lineage, members outside that group are vocal and independent. Indeed, even Abbots under Loix's patronage consider him more a figure to be respected in a distant way than a power player to be obeyed. Tom West, the infamous Prince of Bedlam, is the most important British Abbot and is only slightly under Loix in stature thanks to the massive number of favors his "generosity" has accrued over the past five decades.

In general, Monks are not overly concerned with patronage within the bloodline. (Favors owed is their greatest commodity.) Each member is a solitary power, lurking in a cage. Except when dealing with

mortal oversight groups, a Monk has little reason or interest in working with others. Members do worry about their status with the Nosferatu overall, as their cousins can often get favors or information not available behind sheltering walls. For that reason, it is not uncommon for a Monk to have a closer (or bitter) relationship with local Nosferatu than with his own bloodline. Abbots often trade other members of the clan shelter, access to Vitae, and a place where Haunts need not feel like freaks or outcasts in exchange for information or services outside a compound. This exchange is often rewarding for both sides. Abbots can be other Nosferatu's only source of strength and civilization, while Haunts are Abbots' main line to the outside world.

A Monk seldom steps out of her shelter to play a part in city or covenant politics. If it happens, it's a result of another vampire intruding on the Monk's territory, a threat that makes any Morotrophian take extreme measures. He uses all his power and connections with the Nosferatu to force the intruder to back down. The normally retiring Monks can even be driven to physical violence and murder by such invasions, so few Kindred are willing to cross them that way. A few Monks have also found that the undead society of many cities, especially Invictus cities, are incestuous and cliquish enough for the Institutionalize Discipline to function on local Kindred. In such cities, an Abbot may become a political player, parlaying reliable access to blood and the ability to make problems vanish by having mortals committed or imprisoned.

## INSTITUTIONALIZE

Born from Morotrophians' study, infiltration and dependence on isolation, the Institutionalize Discipline manipulates the psychology and physiology of inmates. It's a proven phenomenon that prisoners and patients can rely so much on the rules of a foundation that they are unable to cope with life on the outside. From ex-cons who commit crimes to get sent back to jail to psychiatric patients who go into convulsions when removed from a hospital, the reaction has been the focus of intense mortal discourse for over a century. No one has studied or understood it more than the Morotrophians. By using the potency of their undead will and blood, Monks are able to control and manipulate this reaction to a degree that mortal tyrants and wardens can only dream of.

Institutionalize is a limited Discipline in some ways; it works under only specific conditions and on specific targets. No Institutionalize power can affect someone who is not part of a confined, defined and regimented social group. Thus, the Discipline cannot be used on a random mortal on the street. Exactly what makes a group vulnerable to

Institutionalize is subject to Storyteller interpretation, but there are some general guidelines.

- Being bound to a specific and fairly small geographical area with a central meeting/housing location, with ongoing attendance mandated by walls, the will of a leader or by a personal fear.
- Being dependent on other group members in a cyclical love-hate relationship in which certain figures are supposed to act in fairly specific ways (each is assigned a role or duty as in a religious institution, for example).
- Being bound such that a major part of group membership does not have legal control of some major aspect of their own lives. Examples include prison inmates or the mentally ill who are fed, bathed and put to bed on a schedule over which they have no control.

If the majority of these factors apply to a group, chances are good that Institutionalize works on its members. It's worth noting that many vampiric groups are defined by these guidelines. The courts in Invictus- and Lancea Sanctum-dominated cities can be textbook cases, except for their city-wide size, which imposes a -1 or -2 modifier to activation rolls. (It's important to note that an individual vampire's haven does count as an institution.)

Storytellers are encouraged to apply circumstance modifiers to represent how formally institutionalized a group is. An asylum filled with lifelong inmates that's presided over by an abusive staff may grant as much as a +3 bonus to uses of Institutionalize. A college fraternity with a campus house and a tradition of hazing might barely qualify with a -3 penalty. The cultish and/or tribal groups of other supernatural beings may qualify, depending on how tightly knit and controlling they are. In general, such organizations are esoteric enough to impose a penalty (-2 to -3) to Discipline rolls.

When Institutionalize works, its effects tend to be pervasive. Many of its powers are able to affect multiple targets without penalty. Applications also combine power with subtly. Most targets are never aware that they've been affected by a mystical phenomenon. Those with knowledge of psychology, brain washing or group politics may recognize that some kind of manipulation is at work, but probably have no reason to suspect that it's "magical" in nature. Short of using Auspex on an Abbot while he uses Institutionalize, there is very little that can be done to prove the mystical nature of Discipline effects. They're simply an exaggeration of phenomena already at work.

The Nosferatu clan weakness does not apply to any roll made as part of activating or using Institutionalize powers.



Once a vampire has had a chance to observe the interactions of various members of an organization, she can mystically understand the connections and exchanges of power that make the institution run. After only a few moments, the Kindred can unravel even the most complicated social dynamics, figuring out who owes what to whom, who loves whom, who hates whom, and most important of all who has power over whom. How specific this information is varies, but the power never reveals secrets that involve more than basic relationships and power dynamics. For example, an Abbot using Halls of Power could learn that the Prince is afraid of the Mekhet Primogen, but not why. Similarly, it would be obvious that all of the doctors in a hospital acquiesce to the will of a nurse who intimidates and blackmails them, but it takes further, separate investigation to determine what she holds over them.

**Cost:** —

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Empathy + Institutionalize – the highest Composure in the group examined

**Action:** Instant (Note that though this is an instant action, it takes more than just a fleeting glance to understand the permutations of the group. A character must scrutinize her subjects for a full minute to glean information, though only an instant action is necessary to determine if she reads them successfully.)

## Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character gets drastically wrong information, confusing or completely misunderstanding the situation. She may think that the Sheriff is the weakest person in the room, when actually everyone is terrified of him. Storytellers might make activation rolls on players' behalf for this reason.

**Failure:** The character cannot distinguish any information, although a successive attempt may be possible if the same people remain together in sight for another minute.

**Success:** Each success allows the character to gain one piece of information about the social dynamics of the subjects observed. Generally, the character has some influence over what is learned by where subjects focus their attention, but as some interactions are more subtle than others, the obvious ones may be learned first.

**Example:** Merrian uses Halls of Power while spying on a meeting at her hospital. Her player gets three successes on the activation roll, and tells the Storyteller that Merrian looks for people whom the chief of staff is afraid of, or from whom he backs down. The Storyteller relates that the chief is clearly in love with one of the nurses (one piece of information), but that she treats him with mild contempt (a second piece), and that the chief is overly solicitous of the opinions of one of the interns (a third piece). If Merrian wants to learn why the chief gives special favor to the intern, she has to conduct further investigation.

**Exceptional Success:** As with a success, plus the character gains one extra piece of information in response to any specific question asked or information sought about the subjects' dynamics.

The Monk using this power must observe subjects directly. The power doesn't work through a monitor or photograph. Only relationships among subjects observed can be discerned. Studying three prison guards indicates the relationships among them. It doesn't indicate anything about the warden if he isn't present. This power can be used successfully on an individual only once per scene, regardless of with whom she interacts. If a subject happens to belong to two groups read in the same scene, nothing is learned directly from that individual in the second reading.

## Suggested Modifiers

### Modifier Situation

- +1 The character has extended contact (at least six hours) with the group before attempting the roll
- +1 The character has an Academics or Politics Specialty that would apply to Skill rolls made with the current group
- 1 to -3 The group is particularly subtle or careful to conceal its motives and interrelations

## .. SOCIAL CENSURE

This power allows a Morotrophian to force subjects to behave according to the social rules of their current situation, be those rules stated or unstated. The character must have line of sight to her subjects. A victim must behave in a manner fitting his role in the social order of the institution, regardless of what his personal desire or intent is. So, a prisoner attempting to escape returns to his cell, or a rebellious neonate kneels before the Prince and accepts punishment. The Monk has no specific control over the subject's actions; the victim simply has to follow protocol as it's understood by the group or in the situation.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Presence + Intimidation + Institutionalize versus the highest Composure + Blood Potency in the group

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The impetus to conform rebounds upon the user and she must behave according to the rules for her station for the remainder of the scene (short of doing herself harm). If a dramatic failure is rolled for the subject, see Exceptional Success, below.

**Failure:** The same or the most successes are rolled for the subject. The target or group is unaffected, although a successive attempt can be made if another Willpower point is spent and the same people are still within line of sight.

**Success:** The most successes are rolled for the vampire. The target must behave as expected of his rank or role in the institution, but maintains a sense of self-preservation. He goes about his duties without concern for personal matters, but doesn't walk into a burning building to do so.

**Exceptional Success:** The most (five or more) successes are rolled for the vampire. The target behaves as demanded of his role or station, even if it results in his humiliation or harm. In this case, a subject would enter a burning building to do his duty. Vampiric subjects gain or lose five dice to frenzy rolls (depending on whether it would be socially acceptable for them to frenzy or not) for the rest of the scene. If an Exceptional Success is rolled for the subject, all further uses

of Institutionalize against him are at -1 penalty until the next sunset.

The Monk using this power must observe subjects directly. The power doesn't work through a monitor or photograph. If more than one member of the institution is looked at when the power is used (i.e., subjects are in a group), all may be affected depending on the contested roll made. Duties performed or actions carried out are followed through on for the remainder of the scene, at which time a subject may perform other actions as desired. This power can be used successfully on an individual only once per scene. If a subject happens to belong to two groups targeted in the same scene, that individual is immune to the second application.

## Suggested Modifiers

### Modifier Situation

- +2 The social rules the target is supposed to follow are crystal clear and/or promise punishment if not followed
- +2 The power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see **Vampire**, p. 162)
- +1 The social rules the target is supposed to follow are well defined
- The power is used on a single target
- 1 The power is used on multiple targets up to and including 20 of them, all of a single "class" such as a group of prisoners or a group of doctors, but not both
- 1 The power is used on targets of different "classes"
- 1 The social rules the target is supposed to follow are not clear
- 2 The power is used on more than 20 targets
- 3 The power is used on more than 50 targets
- 3 The social rules the target is supposed to follow are arcane or contradictory
- 5 The power is used on more than 100 targets

## ... OFF LIMITS

The control of space is important in all institutions. In prisons and asylums, inmates aren't allowed to leave restricted areas, and limits are imposed on where staff can go. In cults and religions, holy areas are proscribed to members of certain rank, and there could be taboos about leaders entering other places. A Morotrophian uses this power to keep victims in or out of specified areas. A locale must be physically defined and marked as being off limits in some way, which can mean police tape, a velvet rope or a "no entry" sign. That could mean something as small as a closet or as large as a sub-basement. An activation roll is made for the character to create a "ward" that stops anyone without proper authorization (which must be declared when the ward is set). Those stopped are not physically barred. Their attention is simply turned elsewhere as their subconscious accepts that the area is denied to them. This power stops only physical intrusion, not any power that

projects senses or spirit alone across the line. (There is rumored to be a Devotion that mixes this power with the Nightmare Discipline to create living-terror areas that *do* affect the spirits and senses of intruders.)

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Resolve + Intimidate + Institutionalize versus the subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

**Action:** Instant to establish a ward. Contested when an intrusion attempt is made. Make the intruder's roll during the attempt and compare the result to the successes achieved for the vampire when the power was used. Resistance is reflexive

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Not only is the ward not created, no attempt can be made to ward the same area by the same vampire again for a month. If the roll made for a would-be intruder is a dramatic failure, he cannot enter any area warded by that vampire for a month.

**Failure:** The ward does not take, although a successive attempt may be made if another Willpower point is spent. Failure also arises if the same or more successes are rolled for an intruder and he passes. Once an intruder is in, he may re-enter that area as he desires as long as the same application of Off Limits is in place.

**Success:** The ward takes effect when the power is used. It also applies when the most successes are rolled for the vampire and an intruder is denied access. He will not try to enter again for a month. At that time, another contested action is required to pass.

**Exceptional Success:** As with a success, plus a Willpower point must be spent for anyone who tries to enter. This point does not add +3 to the contested roll. An exceptional success rolled for the intruder allows him to ignore any of the vampire's wards for the remainder of the month.

Off Limits persists on an area for one month before it must be renewed with another Willpower point and an activation roll. Would-be intruders must perform contested actions to pass with each new application of the power, even if they had overcome in a previous month.

A Monk can maintain as many wards at one time as he has Institutionalize dots. To exceed that number, he must abandon an old one. Repeated applications of the power on the same area do not have cumulative effect. A ward can be dispelled at will, before its normal termination, and a new application requires a new use of the power.

If some members of a group are able to enter a warded area and others are not, those who failed their contested rolls refuse to pass, even while their companions proceed. If dissenters are forced to enter, they do everything in their power to resist, even throwing punches, but they stop short of attacking with weapons that do lethal damage. An unconscious person can

be carried into a warded area and is not subject to the power once inside.

### Suggested Modifiers

Modifiers apply to the roll made for the Morotrophian.

#### Modifier Situation

- +1 The ward is in an area controlled or owned by the character
- The ward is over an area that would sensibly be restricted by legal or social mores
- 1 The entrance to the area is larger than 10 square feet
- 1 The area has more than one entrance
- 2 The area is only marginally separated from surrounding areas (such as by tape or a velvet rope)
- 2 The entrance to the area is larger than 20 square feet
- 3 The area is public or semi-public and has no obvious reason to be restricted

### .... PANOPTICON

A Morotrophian with this level of mastery is able to see anything and know anything that happens inside an institution. The secrets, actions and dealings of those under the character's eye are laid bare. This power does not allow the character to read minds, but it does allow him to see and hear actions and activities, whether they occur now or happened in the recent past. The character witnesses the scene laid out as though watching it through one-way glass, letting him see and hear from a fixed vantage point. The vampire must be inside the institution when the power is used.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Politics + Institutionalize

**Action:** Activation is instant, but use involves a prolonged period of time

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Use of the power fails so badly that no other attempts may be made until the next sunset.

**Failure:** The character cannot activate the power, although a successive attempt can be made if another Willpower point is spent.

**Success:** The character can watch any chosen scene for up to five minutes per success rolled. The chosen scene can be changed as though the entire institution were monitored by security cameras. The character can thus switch from one scene to another at will.

**Exceptional Success:** The character can watch for up to an hour per success rolled and gains a +3 bonus to any surprise rolls made for him in the facility while the power is active.

While this power is in use, the vampire's body lies in a torpor-like state on the spot where he left it. He is unaware of what occurs in the vicinity of his body, and his body can perform no other actions. A successful



surprise roll alerts him to trouble in time to return his consciousness to his body to act normally. Any contact made with his body returns his consciousness instantaneously. If the body is subjected to torpor or Final Death, the mind is pulled back immediately.

This power confers no special ability to perceive another vampire using Obfuscate, although possession of Auspex can still be used to try spot such a being. Other Disciplines such as Dominate cannot be used remotely through this power.

While a vampire can look back at events that occurred in the recent past, those events must have occurred at night. The user cannot witness events that happened by day.

This power can be used to witness locales and events within the confines of the institution in question. That typically means within its walls. The parking lot is not valid. Nor can the vampire see outside windows.

### Suggested Modifiers

#### Modifier Situation

- +1 A location or subjects are in an area controlled or owned by the character
- The scene happens now
- 1 The scene happened one night in the past
- 2 The scene happened one week in the past
- 2 The character does not control or own the building/area in which the scene occurs
- 3 The scene happened a month in the past

### ..... LORD OF THE MANOR

The Morotrophian no longer simply influences the people who make up the institution, she controls the central building itself. Be it the wards of a mental hospital or the cellblocks of a prison, the character can remotely and perfectly control the structure and its functions. She can lock and unlock doors, control security apparatuses, trigger alarms, set off traps, control lighting and use any other building systems — such as heating and cooling — to their full effect.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Crafts + Institutionalize

**Action:** Activation is instant, but use involves a prolonged period of time

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character's mind is absorbed into the building, but she does not gain control over it. She enters a coma for an hour, instead, returning to her body early only if her body is touched.

**Failure:** The character cannot merge with the building, although a successive attempt may be made if another Vitae is spent.

**Success:** The character gains control of the building for five minutes per success rolled. While possessing it, her Intelligence + Wits is rolled to perform actions such as using the building's normal functions, slamming doors or causing accidents such as falling equipment (treat as an armed close-combat attack with a bonus equal to the weapon equivalent of the item used). Each act is considered an instant action.

**Exceptional Success:** The character gains control of the building for one hour per success rolled. A +2 bonus is also gained on all Intelligence + Wits rolls to manipulate the structure, and on rolls to resist abjuration (see below).

This power can be used in conjunction with Panopticon so that the vampire may see what occurs elsewhere and can respond to it remotely. The powers must be activated in separate turns and might not have the same duration. If Panopticon fades first and is not reactivated, actions performed with Lord of the Manor occur at a -2 penalty or as if the vampire fights blind (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 166).

While her consciousness fills a building, a vampire's body lies in a torpor-like state on the spot where she leaves it. She is unaware of what occurs in the vicinity of her body, and her body can perform no other actions. A successful surprise roll alerts her to trouble in time to return to her body to act normally. Any contact made with her body returns her consciousness instantaneously. If the body is subjected to torpor or Final Death, the mind is pulled back immediately.

A projecting vampire may be exorcised from merger with a building with an abjuration (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 213 — replace Power + Resistance with the vampire's Stamina + Resolve). A banished vampire cannot use this power or Panopticon again in the same building until the next sunset.

This power can be used to affect locales within the confines of the institution in question. That typically means within its walls. The parking lot is not valid, for example. Although Panopticon allows a vampire to witness past events, Lord of the Manor does not allow her to affect them.

### Suggested Modifiers

#### Modifier Situation

- +1 The character owns or is intimately familiar with the building
- The building is owned by the state/government/institution as a whole
- 3 The building is privately owned by someone other than the character or someone under her direct control

# Nahualli

*Don't be silly! I ask nothing in return. The deed itself is its own reward.*

The Nahualli is a relatively recent bloodline, barely more than a century old. The lineage was founded near the end of the 19th century in Mexico, by a Ventrue of Spanish descent named Vinicio Peralta de Mosquera. Taking inspiration from certain aspects of Aztec religion, de Mosquera came to the conclusion that a Kindred was in effect a dual being, a dark soul and a light soul, sharing a single body. The Beast was one aspect of this nature, and the conscience remaining from before the Embrace was the other. Only through the acceptance of both could a Kindred attain a perfect existence.

Tonight, the Nahualli have splintered into two factions, each led at least nominally by de Mosquera's two childer, Roca and Bellido. Roca's followers pursue the founder's teachings under the guise of religion, while Bellido's group takes a more studied, almost clinical approach.

In keeping with de Mosquera's dictates, those of his lineage usually appear cultured, even genteel. They not only invite the Beast's urgings freely, however, they practice ritual murders that chill the Vitae of even the most jaded Kindred. The "Jekylls," as they're known in undead circles (where they're known at all), hope that such extreme, dichotomous behavior will somehow further their progression to the perfect balance of their dual natures.

The Nahualli are shunned in traditional vampire society, not only because of members' grisly practices, but because they tend to be volatile and a risk to the Tradition of secrecy. Of the few Kindred aware of the line's existence, most believe the Nahualli are simply Ventrue who have a weakness for multiple-personality disorder... and serial murder.

**Parent Clan:** Ventrue

**Nickname:** Jekylls

**Covenant:** Nahualli who regard their condition as primarily one of philosophical choice gravitate toward the Carthians, who represent a political allegory to line members' own personal condition. Those who walk a



more spiritual road are drawn to the Circle of the Crone, their theology being readily adaptable to that of the Acolytes. The Invictus draws members across the bloodline, no doubt due to the lingering effects of Ventrue parentage. Remaining Jekylls tend to go unaligned, as they prefer not to adopt a single set or communal goals. While a few join the Ordo Dracul for its dispassionate analysis of what would otherwise be regarded as horrific abuses, few members find a home in the Lancea Sanctum. Conflicting theology or a specific lack of spirituality is simply too great an impediment to being Sanctified.

**Appearance:** The Nahualli originally Embraced only childer of Mexican-Spanish heritage. Virtually all elders are of such origins. This tendency is more a result of geography than any racial preference, however, and the line now has representatives of most races. Like the Ventrue, Jekylls tend to dress as befits their status, although their attire is often less ostentatious than that of some in their parent clan, because many Nahualli have an academic background.

**Haven:** Line members, like the Ventrue, favor well-appointed retreats. A Nahualli's abode is more likely to be stocked with texts on religion or psychology, or with archaeological artifacts than with designer furniture. Elders of the lineage often favor stonework over other building materials, perhaps as a reminder of the havens of their early days. Due to the nature of their practices, most choose shelters isolated from society to lessen the likelihood of discovery. Those who don't have such a luxury usually find a separate location where they're safe to conduct their rituals. If not without fear of discovery, they can at least go without fear of compromising their havens.

**Background:** The Nahualli are exceedingly particular about indoctrinating new members. The very nature of their rituals would draw the attention of mortal authorities, so discretion is mandatory. The only time a would-be sire Embraces is when a new cabal of members is founded, and even then careful consideration is

given to any choice. Philosophy is also central to the very being of the Nahualli and requires a certain mindset in a prospective inductee. Those of Roca's following choose childer who might be described as charismatic, but naïve, with few social ties (the very sort targeted by religious cults). The more studious members descended from Bellido focus primarily on academics who've proven capable of entertaining unusual premises, or who are simply amoral in their pursuit of knowledge.

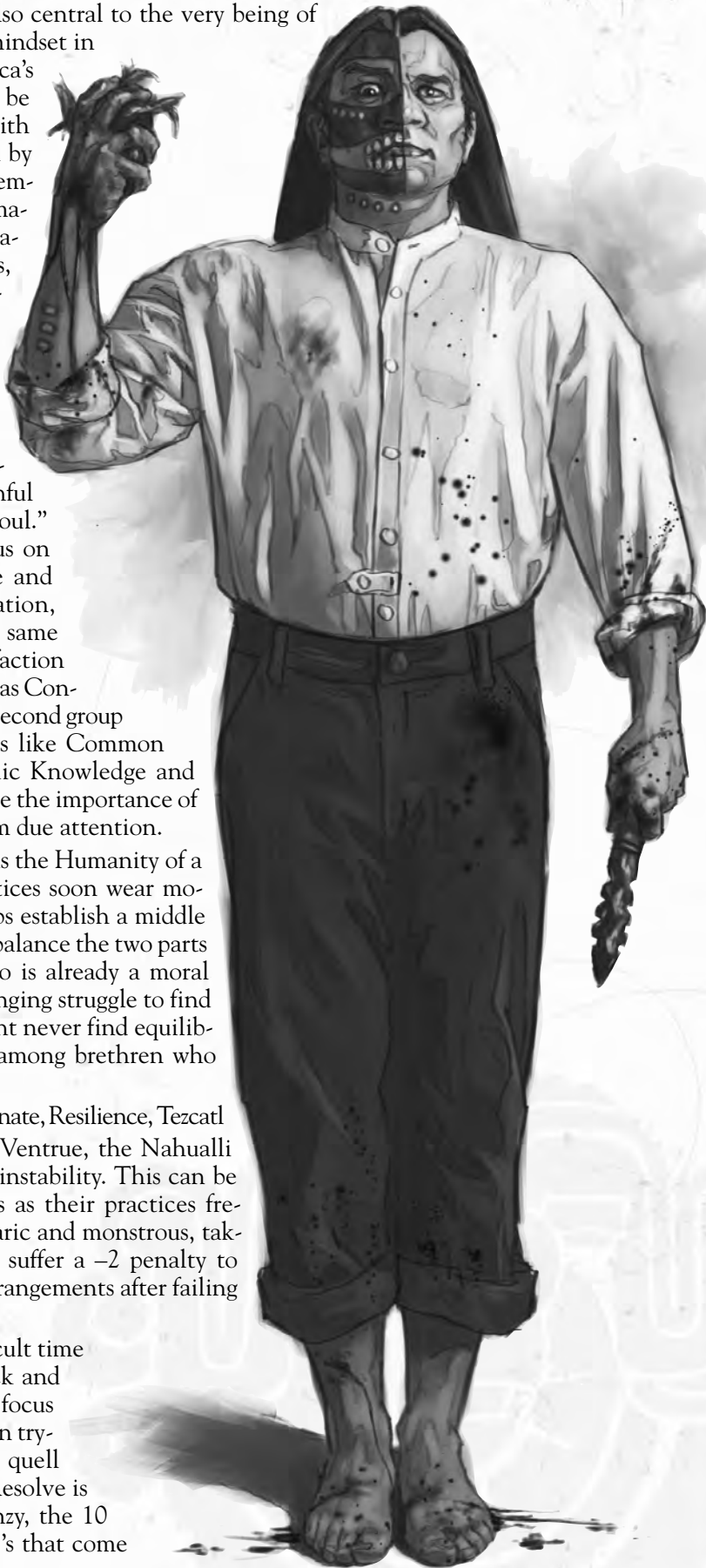
**Character Creation:** A character's faction in the bloodline is influential to the qualities that he's likely to possess. Roca's initiates favor Social Attributes and Skills, the better to pursue and spread the gospel of their faithful interpretation of the vampiric "twin soul." Meanwhile, Bellido's colleagues focus on Mental Traits, primary Intelligence and Skills such as Academics, Investigation, Medicine, Occult and Science. The same can be said of Merits, with the first faction putting emphasis on Social ones such as Contacts, Mentor and Resources, and the second group seeking immersion in Mental Merits like Common Sense, Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge and Meditative Mind. Both sides recognize the importance of Physical traits, though, and give them due attention.

Highly prized across the bloodline is the Humanity of a newcomer. While the lineage's practices soon wear morality down, a strong foundation helps establish a middle ground with the Beast in an effort to balance the two parts of the soul. Someone who joins who is already a moral degenerate faces a much more challenging struggle to find balance. Indeed, a wanton killer might never find equilibrium and makes a target of himself among brethren who decide he's lost his way.

**Bloodline Disciplines:** Auspex, Dominate, Resilience, Tezcatl

**Weakness:** As a bloodline of the Ventrue, the Nahualli share the parent clan's weakness for instability. This can be particularly dangerous to the Jekylls as their practices frequently delve into the realm of barbaric and monstrous, taking performers with them. Nahualli suffer a -2 penalty to Humanity rolls to avoid acquiring derangements after failing a degeneration roll.

Additionally, Nahualli have a difficult time resisting frenzy (including Röttschreck and Wassail) and riding the wave. Their focus on a dual nature handicaps them when trying to control the Beast, whether to quell or summon it. When Composure + Resolve is rolled to either resist or initiate frenzy, the 10 Again rule does not apply and any 1's that come





up on the roll subtract from successes achieved. (So, if three successes are rolled but two 1's also turn up in the same roll, the result is reduced to one success.) Nahualli cannot use Willpower to augment any frenzy rolls, though they may spend a single Willpower point to control themselves for a single round when already frenzying (see *Vampire: the Requiem*, p. 180).

**Organization:** Roca's religiously motivated group is formally structured. That isn't necessarily surprising, since the bloodline is similar to a cult in many ways, and Roca is at the top. All of her followers in a given city belong to a group referred to as a *calpulli*. There are nearly always three to five members in a *calpulli*, unless it is still formative. Fewer than three are unable to properly complete the bloodline's ritual practices. More than five are not only unnecessary, but often pose a risk of exposure. Seldom are all the members of a *calpulli* Kindred. One or two might be vampires and the rest ghouls bound to the eldest line member. The eldest Nahualli in a *calpulli* serves as a leader in rites, and is sometimes referred to as Tlamatinime (the Knower). For bloodline matters within a *calpulli*, the Tlamatinime's word is law. Needless to say, no Prince would smile upon such usurpation. All the more reason why Nahualli typically present themselves to Kindred society as "mere" Ventrue.

For Nahualli who take Bellido's intellectual approach, no formal organization exists. Seldom more than a single Nahualli of this sort is found in a city, and little communication occurs between them. Each pursues his study on his own, sharing little for fear that his brethren will steal any "discovery" he makes and claim it for their own.

**Concepts:** Actor, archaeologist, cult leader, museum curator, psychologist, smuggler, surgeon, theologian

### *History*

The bloodline's founder, Vinicio Peralta de Mosquera, was Embraced by an unnamed Ventrue sometime during the late 16th century in Seville, Spain. De Mosquera was an instructor in theology at the university, which attracted his sire's attention (himself a fairly well-placed member of the Lancea Sanctum). De Mosquera joined his sire's covenant, but also continued to follow his own studies.

De Mosquera remained Sanctified for over a century, but had increasing difficulty reconciling the teachings of the covenant with his own inclinations. Why, for example, would God choose to set up as an example of wickedness a being more powerful than a righteous mortal? The mortal Church insisted that God did not tempt mankind, yet it seemed to de Mosquera that the immediate power of undeath posed exactly that to short-sighted kine. Even worse, the prospect of true damnation seemed distant to a being who could easily exist for centuries — and possibly longer. De Mosquera found it harder and harder to accept the Spear's doctrine as the truth of the Kindred condition.

While De Mosquera was inquisitive, he wasn't foolish. He understood all too well what the fate of any outspoken critic would be. (Especially one whose arguments could cite book, chapter and verse of a long list of contradictions in Scripture.) By that time, Spanish colonies in the New World had considerable size and population. Seville, the main port of call for vessels traveling to and from the colonies, provided de Mosquera with the opportunity to escape the oppression of his covenant.

### *New Spain*

De Mosquera departed for the colony of New Spain, what roughly corresponds to modern Mexico, near the end of the 18th century. He settled in Mexico City, which by that time had a population of well over 100,000, the vast majority of whom were poor, indigenous people. Easy prey for one of the earliest Kindred in that region.

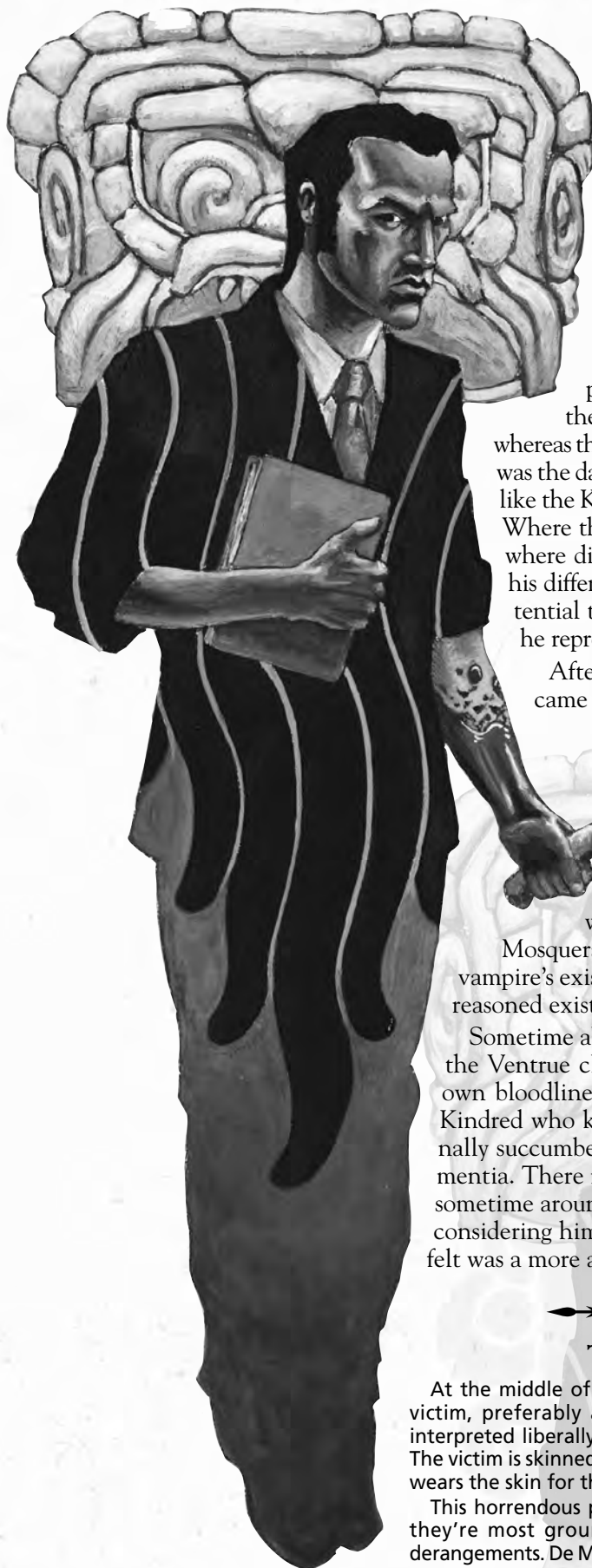
For years, de Mosquera existed virtually alone, devoid of contact with other undead, and interacting with mortals only to feed. The New World had not drawn many of his kind for fear of travel and lack of vessels. De Mosquera therefore distracted himself by studying the Aztec culture still in evidence. Remnants of an older city, Tenochitlán, the capital of the fallen civilization, occupied the same site as Mexico City, and remains of it were apparent everywhere. Street vendors sold Aztec relics, pottery and jewelry. The very stones from Aztec buildings were used to erect new structures in the contemporary city.

Even after decades as an inhuman predator, de Mosquera was shocked by the apparent viciousness of Aztec religious practices. Ritual sacrifice was practiced regularly in a manner that seemed almost gluttonous in its excess. He found evidence of mass killings that reached into the thousands. Beheading, flaying, the drowning of children, and the cutting out of hearts from living victims were practiced in regular cycles to appease the gods, both benign and malignant.

The sheer brutality of the culture captivated the vampire. He made numerous nighttime visits to the University of Mexico where the Spanish viceroy had ordered most Aztec artifacts to be stored. The Church, and thus the viceroy, believed the relics could instigate anarchy by their very presence, and the public needed protection from them. Perhaps there was some foundation to these fears, for de Mosquera felt his blood stir just being in their presence.

### *The Nahualli*

One of the elements de Mosquera found most intriguing about the Aztec religion was the concept of deities having multiple aspects. The chief god of the pantheon, Tezcatlipoca, was a dark and primarily evil god. He was



the deity of night and deceit, famine and disease. His name meant "The Smoking Mirror," for he represented all that was veiled in the world.

De Mosquera noted, however, that Tezcatlipoca also had other aspects. To the Aztecs, another identity wasn't merely another focus or realm of authority, it was for all purposes another entity. Tezcatlipoca, could also appear as Quetzalcóatl, the Plumed Serpent, god of knowledge and light. The concept was foreign to de Mosquera's western philosophy, but he saw a parallel to the Kindred's unliving yet immortal existence.

The Ventrue recognized Tezcatlipoca as a more appropriate patron for the Kindred than the righteous God of the Lancea Sanctum. Tezcatlipoca was lord of the night, whereas the Christian deity was associated with the sun. Tezcatlipoca was the dark reflection of life, a smoking mirror of perception. But, like the Kindred, there remained aspects of good within his being. Where the difference came, in de Mosquera's view, was that nowhere did he find evidence that Tezcatlipoca tried to reconcile his different aspects. In his evil aspect, Tezcatlipoca had the potential to destroy existence itself. But when in his good aspect, he represented renewal and protection.

After decades of studying Aztec spirituality, de Mosquera came to the conclusion that his elders had led him down a path doomed to failure. Since he had been Embraced, he had been taught to control the Beast, similar to the way in which he had been taught as a human to avoid mortal sins. Were it necessary to protect the Tradition of secrecy, perhaps he could have understood it. Yet most Kindred spoke of the Beast as though it were an alien creature to be feared and avoided. De

Mosquera recognized that the Beast was merely an aspect of a vampire's existence, neither to be feared nor preferred over the more reasoned existence most Kindred sought to lead.

Sometime about the mid-19th century, de Mosquera diverged from the Ventrue clan by the force of his new convictions, initiating his own bloodline. Or at least that's the story the Nahualli tell. Other Kindred who know of the lineage claim that's when de Mosquera finally succumbed to Ventrue fragility and plunged into full-blown dementia. There may be some truth to both accounts. Regardless, it was sometime around the middle of the century that de Mosquera stopped considering himself a Ventrue and took the name Nahualli, which he felt was a more appropriate descriptor for his new course.

### THE RITUAL OF FLAYING MEN

At the middle of March, a *calpulli* or solitary Nahualli captures a male victim, preferably a warrior of some type (the term "warrior" can be interpreted liberally if necessary; a fireman or police officer might apply). The victim is skinned alive and the regional Tlamatinime or other performer wears the skin for the remainder of the night.

This horrendous practice is ironically performed by line members when they're most grounded — they're fed and avoid possible triggers of derangements. De Mosquera began this tradition in tribute to Aztec practices,

making offerings of his own to the Beast, what he came to call the Smoking Mirror. De Mosquera believed that by performing such gruesome acts while in a rational state, he honored the irrational aspect of the vampiric condition. Thus, he recognized the two sides of undeath, but distinguished them from each other. Tonight, outsiders point to the Ritual of Flaying Men and others like it as proof that the lineage founder had gone raving mad. That his childer still perform the rite might be testament to their own instability.



### *Early Nights*

De Mosquera Embraced his first two childer at the end of the 19th century. Perhaps still influenced by his Ventrue heritage, he chose both from influential backgrounds in Mexico City. Luis Valdivia Tavares Bellido was a prominent philosophy professor at the University of Mexico who was intrigued by the radical theories of psychology developing in Europe. Beatriz Quadros Roca was the only remaining member of a family that claimed to trace descent from Moctezuma, one of the last great Aztec emperors. The fact that Roca had inherited a small fortune from her family's silver mining concerns probably influenced the choice as well.

In time, de Mosquera found his childer receptive to his teachings. Neither balked at the ritual murders to which he exposed them (but then again, prior to their Embrace, neither had to drink blood to survive, either). Given their isolation from established Kindred society, the childer had no other frame of reference from which to view their new reality.

The small coterie practiced all manner of ritual murder. Victims were beheaded, skinned, burned, drowned or had their hearts removed while they still lived. De Mosquera taught these gruesome practices, he said, to allow the neonates to honor their own Smoking Mirrors. The rituals were planned to coincide loosely with Aztec festivals, initially only as a matter of form. When rites were not performed, de Mosquera required his childer to exhibit benevolence toward mortals. His requirements did not prohibit feeding, but he stressed that such should be as gentle and painless as possible. Only by so dividing the aspects of their Kindred nature could the childer realize their potential as dual beings.

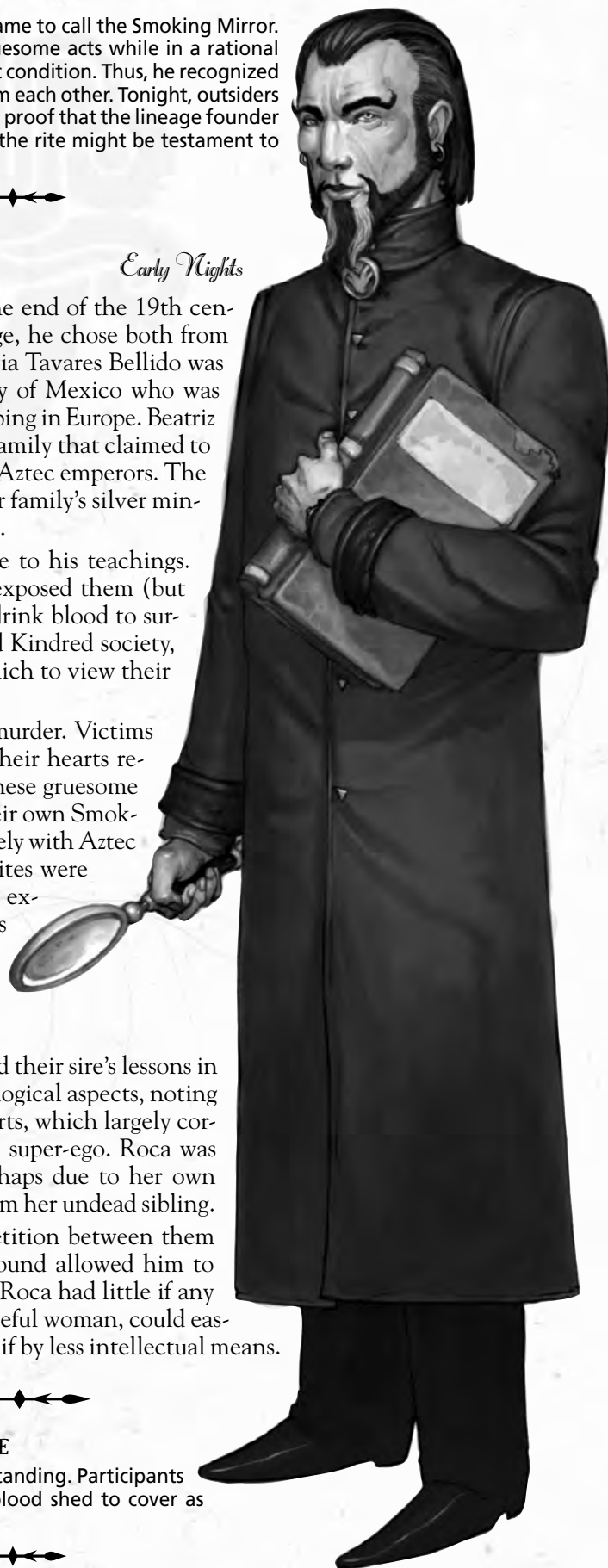
Although both were receptive, the two approached their sire's lessons in drastically different ways. Bellido focused on psychological aspects, noting that the Aztecs believed the soul resided in three parts, which largely corresponded with Freud's concepts of the id, ego and super-ego. Roca was drawn to the religious aspects of her training, perhaps due to her own claimed heritage or simply to differentiate herself from her undead sibling.

This divergence between the two led to a competition between them for their sire's approval. Bellido's academic background allowed him to converse with de Mosquera about matters to which Roca had little if any knowledge. Meanwhile, Roca, an attractive and forceful woman, could easily hold her own in gaining de Mosquera's attention, if by less intellectual means.



### THE GREAT FEAST DAY RITE

In this ritual, a female captive is beheaded while standing. Participants push her body around until it falls, allowing the blood shed to cover as much ground as possible.





### *Final Death*

By the time de Mosquera founded his lineage, his blood had grown in potency to the point that only other Kindred Vitae could sustain him. The three solved this problem in a fashion that traditional Kindred society decries as both repulsive and incestuous. The coterie Embraced new childer for the sole purpose of appeasing the elder's hunger.

In order to avoid the risk of the Vinculum, de Mosquera drained newly created vampires completely. As a further safeguard, he instructed Roca and Bellido to impose Final Death on any who happened to survive his ministrations. While he informed his childer that such measures were simply meant to limit the strain that more vampires would inflict on the city's mortals, both suspected there was another reason.

Each sought to pry the answer from their sire, and both were able to piece together much of the truth from the partial answers they received and from their own observations. Roca recognized the potential to gain control of the coterie. Knowing her own weakness in resisting the Beast, it took little effort to stage feedings for de Mosquera with "half-full" vessels. If her sire succumbed to Was-sail, she simply made sure that she was the first he reached.

De Mosquera took no notice of his childe's manipulation. Some modern Nahualli believe he had separated his aspects so thoroughly that the two had no knowledge of each other's actions. His rational self was unaware that the Smoking Mirror risked Vinculum. Other more cynical Kindred are of the opinion that de Mosquera was a victim of multiple personality disorder, likely triggered by frenzy. Either way, the end result was the same.

Roca's sibling Bellido was not as blind as his sire. Some time after de Mosquera fell under Roca's influence, one of the two childer inflicted Final Death on the sire. Two stories are told about how the founder was slain, depending on which faction tells the tale.

Those of Bellido's ancestry assert that the relationship between the men was close, and Roca feared that Bellido would alert the sire to the woman's treachery. She therefore drove de Mosquera into torpor with a stake through the heart and had mortal underlings drag him into the daylight.

Roca's followers claim that Bellido murdered the sire because de Mosquera favored the woman more. They freely admit to Roca's attempts to trap de Mosquera by the Vinculum, and insist that proves the truth of their account. Bellido's only choice was to be damned to the bottom of the coterie's pecking order or to eliminate his creator.

### *The Nahualli Divided*

Not surprisingly, the two remaining members of the bloodline split. They had already drifted considerably in their interpretations of de Mosquera's teachings. More and more, Bellido focused on the psychological aspects of differentiating the Beast from the more controlled portion of the vampire psyche. Roca continued down the spiritual road, adopting de Mosquera's concept of the Smoking Mirror as not only a separate entity outside a vampire, but she elevated it to almost godlike status.

#### CEASING OF WATER

By Aztec tradition, this ritual is performed in mid-February. The ritual victim is beaten until he cries. At that point, the beatings cease and participants hold the victim under water until he drowns. Staying true to Aztec practices, the Nahualli prefer to subject a child to this atrocity.

For a short while, the two Nahualli continued to exist in Mexico City, but grew increasingly hostile. Both realized the need to build their own coterie, not only for protection against each other, but to assist in performing the rituals that de Mosquera had taught them. Roca was determined to remain in the city; she claimed her ancestry gave her that right. Furthermore, the nearby ruins of Teotihuacán, the City of the Gods, held tremendous importance to her beliefs. Bellido, looking on Roca as primitive and uneducated, ceded Mexico City, insisting that his enlightened view was not tied to the "geography of superstition."

Over the decades that followed, both factions grew significantly and extended from central Mexico. The surge of population in the United States drew their largest numbers, although some (primarily those of Roca's faction) traveled to South America. By the 1940s, they had increasing contact with other members of Kindred society as more and more traveled north.

Some foreign Kindred were initially confused by the Nahualli's seeming gentle nature. Other vampires quickly saw the newcomers as dangerously unpredictable and a threat to the Traditions. Not only was the bloodline apparently susceptible to frenzy, few of its members even attempted to resist the urges of the Beast. Their ritual practices were horrifically violent, apparently for the sake of violence itself, and they left the bodies of victims in their wake.

Nahualli cabals were soon considered a danger to Kindred as a whole, regardless of whether they violated secrecy or not. In some cities, Princes declared blood hunts to eliminate the bloodline. Others exiled Jekylls, hoping that others would find a way to

deal with the problems the outcasts posed. Only in a few cities, usually those where the Circle of the Crone held considerable influence, did Kindred leadership tolerate the Nahualli (unless their activities posed an unmistakable threat).

### *Society and Culture*

Tonight, the Nahualli have learned to keep a low profile among mortals and other vampires. Nearly half a century of blood hunts and exile has taught them that the average Kindred is too bound by tradition or too narrow minded to accept a dual nature. When dealing with other undead, Jekylls usually present themselves as simple Ventrue, if the subject arises at all. They don't see this as a deceit, but just another aspect of their faceted nature.

Nahualli are generally very civil, bordering on kindness to both mortals and other vampires. Elders stress such decorum as necessary as willingness to accept the Beast. To those unaware of line members' dual identities, Nahualli often seem to be moral exemplars (or naïve fools who look like easy victims).



### **DAY OF THE DEAD**

Traditionally, this festival is recognized by the bloodline sometime in mid- to late August. A victim is lowered into a fire pit or placed on a pyre and burned alive. Before the victim expires, she is pulled from the fire — usually with chains so the Nahualli avoid the flames — and her heart is cut out.



As a whole, Nahualli seldom become as involved in Kindred politics and infighting as their parent clan members. They find such endeavors distracting from their higher pursuit. Such dissociation is probably a survival trait as well. A Nahualli is ill prepared to take a Harpy's barb in court without loosing the Beast.

During their many of their rituals or when in frenzy, the veneer of Nahualli benevolence is torn asunder. Any acts committed during frenzy are "the province of the Smoking Mirror" and a line member professes no remorse over them. Likewise, no matter how vile a ritual turns, it is the dark side that's served, not the light. Or so the brood claims. Simply saying it doesn't necessarily make it so, however.

Humanity usually dwindles quickly in the Nahualli soul. No one, no matter how pious or how caring they once might have been, can perform such acts of cruelty without suffering. And loosing the Beast freely just reminds it how it hates to go back into its cave. Weak-willed Nahualli can succumb to their inherited weakness for mental failings in short order. For the strong willed, it may take longer, but the ultimate outcome is

rarely in doubt. In either case, the once-benevolent face of a Nahualli becomes nothing more than a mask for the madness raging beneath.

### *The Two Factions*

Both Roca and Bellido's factions exist tonight. The Nahualli, never a wide lineage, was significantly reduced by backlash from traditional Kindred society. Neither faction is represented in more than a handful of cities. Together, total membership may number a few dozen.

Each group insists the other is not truly Nahualli, but a degenerate offshoot. Both continue to practice the same rites that de Mosquera taught. Each also maintains the belief that by separating the aspects of their vampiric nature, they can somehow attain a pure state of being.

Roca's faithful approach the line's tenets with a religious reverence and have gravitated toward traditional Aztec trappings, using obsidian blades and even wearing ceremonial garb. They deify the Smoking Mirror (their Beast), and understand frenzies to be a form of divine possession. By extrapolation, bestial impulses are merely the gods' aspects made manifest. It therefore falls to the individual to perfect the light aspect of her nature when a god is not upon her.

Bellido's students take a clinical approach, although their efforts are no less supernatural. They use modern implements to perform de Mosquera's rituals and refer to the rites as "exercises." They insist that the Beast is an external manifestation of the id and that repression of it is damaging to the undead psyche. Likewise, the superego — that part of the self that is often associated with a "conscience" — must be cultivated. Given the dual nature of the Kindred condition, the perfect model is a dual-natured mind.

While factional differences seem vast to the Nahualli, their conflict seems semantic to an outsider. In fact, to other Kindred, the Nahualli can be an erratic and volatile menace.

### *Rituals of Damnation*

The Nahualli do not murder with wanton abandon, contrary to the claims of other Kindred, and contrary to seeming evidence. Following their interpretation of de Mosquera's teachings, the factions practice grisly but highly regimented murder. Specific acts, approximate times of year, and appropriate types of victims have long been decreed. The founder derived each from Aztec tradition, because he believed it to in some way strengthen the demarcation between light and dark aspects. Samples of those rites are scattered throughout this bloodline write-up.

To the modern reader, Aztec sacrifices read like something from a horror novel. While archaeologists and

historians argue about the exact nature of these practices, the fact remains that the Aztec population accepted them as a part of life, without necessarily sinking into depravity as a culture. Social and religious tenets allowed them to accept and even celebrate rites that tonight seem abhorrent to all but the most bestial.

And yet, de Mosquera's followers do not have the Aztec's unique viewpoint on ritual sacrifice infused into them. In spite of the progenitor's teachings and claims to the contrary, the Nahualli do risk loss of Humanity and degeneration. Thanks to the power of the bloodline's belief, however, degeneration rolls made for acts committed in rites do receive a +1 bonus. The performers believe (to varying degrees) that a part of themselves becomes "pure" as a result of such actions. This bonus applies to *only* degeneration rolls called for by acts committed during a Nahualli ritual.

Despite this emotional reinforcement, many of the bloodline rapidly slide into the depths of depravity. A few draugr arose early during Nahualli expansion, complicating relations with other Kindred. Tonight, the bloodline keeps a close eye on its members, quickly and quietly dispatching any who sink too far into the Beast. These fallen individuals are considered to have lost the balance of their aspects, forever indulging in the Smoking Mirror alone.

The potential for a Nahualli to frenzy during a ritual is great. The presence of vast quantities of blood is often unavoidable, and some rites involve fire. While the bloodline in general does not restrain frenzies, members are aware of the potential for disaster. It's standard practice for all participants to have fed fully before beginning a killing, at least reducing the chance of Wassail.

Nahualli groups that survive more than a short while in a city have a secured location for their repugnant practices. It may be an abandoned portion of a subway or a maintenance tunnel, although the presence of Nosferatu or other undead who also lurk there makes such a choice a risky proposition. Others rely on wealth to protect their "temples," hiding them atop penthouses or on country estates. Finding a suitable location is the first priority of any Nahualli *calpulli* in a new city.

### TEZCATLIPOCA'S GIFT

Some Nahualli groups practice a year-long rite that requires them to hold a male captive the entire time. Young, male Kindred are ideal subjects. During the year, the victim is confined but granted any luxury short of freedom. At the end of the year, the group takes the victim to a designated shrine and removes his heart, preferably before administering Final Death. Needless to say, this ritual alone is likely to turn most of Kindred society against the bloodline.

### Tezcatl

The Nahualli take the name of their unique Discipline from the Nahuatl word for "mirror." The term ties closely to the bloodline's belief in the aspected nature of undead existence. Each side of their being, civilized individual and raging Beast, is considered a mere reflection of the other.

The Nahualli claim that Tezcatl isn't truly a Discipline at all, but a manifestation of their ascension toward duality. The powers can seem to lend credence to that





assertion, allowing users to mask certain elements of one side of their nature or the other.

The line's founder met Final Death fairly early in Nahualli history. That combined with the brood's fairly specific focus and relatively young age limits the number of powers developed so far.

A mortal can resist the effects of a Tezcatl power for a turn with the expenditure of a Willpower point and a successful Stamina roll (the Willpower point does not add three dice to the roll). This roll is reflexive. If the roll fails, the Willpower point is lost and the mortal remains under the effects of the power. If the roll is successful, the subject can act normally for a turn. A vampire who is the victim of a Tezcatl power, and who has a higher Blood Potency than the Nahualli, can resist the power for an entire scene if a Willpower point is spent and a successful Stamina roll is made.

#### • *Conciliation*

This aspect of Tezcatl more than any other lends some credence to Nahualli beliefs. The user obviates the effect of Predator's Taint (**Vampire**, p. 168) when encountering other Kindred. It does not mask the fact that the line member is a vampire. It merely prevents the usual urges of frenzy or Röttschreck.

**Cost:** —

**Dice Pool:** Presence + Persuasion + Tezcatl

**Action:** Instant

#### **Roll Results**

**Dramatic Failure:** The vampire encountered is immune to further uses of Tezcatl by the character for the remainder of the night. A roll must be made normally for the Nahualli to avoid frenzy or Röttschreck as appropriate to the encounter.

**Failure:** The vampire encountered is unaffected and Predator's Taint applies to both vampires normally.

**Success:** Neither the Nahualli nor the subject is affected by Predator's Taint. Checks for frenzy are not required. Each is, however, aware of the other's Kindred nature.

**Exceptional Success:** The effect occurs as a reflexive action. Another activity can be performed in the same turn in which the power is used.

A Nahualli can use this power immediately upon encountering another Kindred — quickly enough to avoid triggering the effects of Predator's Taint. The user must be aware of the other vampire to activate it. So, if the Nahualli is caught off guard in a surprise situation, it's too late to use this power to avoid frenzy rolls. Not even an exceptional success allows use of the power when the Nahualli is caught completely off guard.

Since Predator's Taint arises only when Kindred meet for the first time, subsequent uses of the power on the same vampire are probably unnecessary. If more than

one foreign vampire is encountered when this power is used, successful activation avoids the effects of Predator's Taint for the whole group.

A Willpower point and successful Stamina roll, as discussed above, cannot resist the effects of this power once contact between undead has been made. That is, once two vampires have encountered each other and the meeting is civil thanks to use of this power, the Kindred met cannot "reset" the meeting and invoke Predator's Taint again.

#### •• *Life's Reflection*

Through this power, a Nahualli is able to draw some of the negative effects of the Beast from herself. The vampire does not inspire the usual repulsion that mortals feel around one of the Damned with a low Humanity. The power causes the vampire's flesh to suffuse with Vitae and counterfeit life, generating an almost palpable aura of calm and trust.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Composure + Empathy + Tezcatl

**Action:** Instant

#### **Roll Results**

**Dramatic Failure:** All Empathy, Persuasion and Socialize pools suffer a -2 penalty for the remainder of the scene, and Life's Reflection may not be attempted again in that time.

**Failure:** The power has no effect, but a successive attempt may be possible at the expense of another Vitae.

**Success:** The Nahualli receives the benefits of "the blush of life" (see "Counterfeiting Life," **Vampire**, p. 156). In addition, Empathy-, Persuasion- and Socialize-based dice pools are not limited by the character's Humanity dots.

**Exceptional Success:** The character receives all the benefits of success. Empathy, Persuasion and Socialize pools also receive a +2 bonus for the remainder of the scene when dealing with non-vampires.

This power affects all non-vampires who come into contact with the Nahualli for the duration of the power. It has no effect on other Kindred. Life's Reflection does not grant the vampire the ability to consume food or drink. That requires a separate Vitae expenditure. The effects of the power persist for the remainder of the scene.

#### ••• *Focus the Aspect*

The Nahualli assert that all beings, mortal or Kindred, possess aspects. According to them, all emotions are merely expressions of a particular facet of identity. Focus the Aspect allows a Nahualli to impose a subtle and temporary change on another being. The bloodline claims it has learned to amplify the emotions of others to free their aspects. Other Kindred argue that this power is merely a result of Nahualli tinkering with Dominate.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Subterfuge + Tezcatl versus Composure + Blood Potency

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The power fails and the intended subject is immune to further uses of the Nahualli's Tezcatl until the next sunset. If a dramatic failure occurs for the subject, an exceptional success is considered for the Nahualli.

**Failure:** An equal number or the most successes are rolled for the intended subject. The power has no effect, but a successive attempt may be possible at the expense of another Vitae.

**Success:** The most successes are rolled for the Jekyll. He may intensify any emotion that the subject currently feels such that it becomes a driving force to the exclusion of all other concerns. A new Virtue or Vice is chosen for the subject and it takes precedent over the subject's normal one. The subject could even regain Willpower by performing acts in keeping with his new trait.

**Exceptional Success:** The most successes — five or more — are rolled for the Nahualli. The user actually creates a new emotion in the subject and makes it all-consuming.

When successfully employed, the emotion chosen becomes the focal point for any of the subject's decisions. Exactly what effect that may have on her actions depends on the situation and the emotion, as determined by the Storyteller. The Nahualli cannot dictate the specific actions that a subject takes, only the inspiration behind them.

This power normally intensifies only an emotion that a subject already feels. Happiness could be turned into the Hope Virtue, for example. A Nahualli could not create Hope in a subject who grieves or is in pain. He cannot change the object of an emotion, either. Love could not be transferred from a mortal wife to a Kindred enemy. With an exceptional success, however, any emotional response is fair game. A subject could be made to feel pity for an enemy he tried to kill a moment before, acquiring the Wrath Vice temporarily.

This power cannot trigger a frenzy, Wassail or Röttschreck roll in another Kindred (not even with an exceptional success). It can, however, complicate another vampire's attempt to remain under control. If a Nahualli successfully uses this power against a vampire exposed to an event or object that requires a roll to resist frenzy, Röttschreck or Wassail, rolls made for the subject suffer a -2 penalty.

The Nahualli must be able to see a subject directly to use Focus the Aspect. Looking at him on TV or in a

photo does not apply. The subject's amplified emotion persists for the remainder of the scene, unless a Willpower point is spent and a successful Stamina roll is made to gain some control (see above).

### .... The Smoking Mirror

Regardless of the covenant to which a Nahualli belongs, the focus of her philosophy is being an "aspected" creature. One facet is civilized and even benevolent. Balancing that state is the Beast. This power allows a Nahualli to harness her dark aspect, intentionally hurling her into an anger frenzy for a limited time.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Empathy + Tezcatl

**Action:** Instant

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The power fails and the vampire cannot attempt to frenzy voluntarily — whether by this power or by "riding the wave" (*Vampire*, p. 181) — until the next sunset.

**Failure:** The power fails. A successive attempt might be possible at the expense of another Vitae.

**Success:** The character immediately enters an anger frenzy, with effects listed on p. 179 of *Vampire*.

**Exceptional Success:** No additional effects beyond extended duration.

The duration of the effect depends on the number of successes obtained on the power's activation roll.

Successes	Duration
1 success	Two turns
2 successes	Five turns
3 successes	20 turns (one minute)
4 successes	10 minutes
5+ successes	One hour or the remainder of the scene

A controlled frenzy can be ended sooner than indicated if the Nahualli wills it.

Repeated use of this power in the same night does not impose a penalty to subsequent uses, as riding the wave does. Nor does it impose penalties on or is it penalized by actual attempts to ride the wave.

This power cannot be activated to control a frenzy that occurs spontaneously, say by being confronted with fire. After the Smoking Mirror is active, phenomena that would normally provoke a frenzy, Wassail or Röttschreck have no effect; the vampire is already in the throes of the Beast and (in this case) his own identity. A vampire can be subject to only one use of this power at a time. The effect cannot be applied to other Kindred.

# Nelapsi

*You'll find that stake isn't so effective as you planned...for you. I'll be sure to make good use of it.*

Spawned in Czechoslovakia, the Nelapsi are an odd breed. Their appetites are legendary, as are their tendencies toward obsessive and quirkish personalities. Indeed, given their extreme thirst, it's probably fortunate that few have spread beyond the Zemplin region, where they first emerged. Even other Kindred consider the Nelapsi something of a plague. This impression, and their moniker, relates to line members' monstrous hunger, which is sufficient to depopulate a small community in short order. Despite their proclivity for charming personality and political savvy — no doubt due to their Daeva lineage — “Gluttons” often find themselves accused of endangering the delicate blood supply for all undead. And matters aren't helped by rumors of the Nelapsi taking pleasure in “haunting” areas that they frequent, primarily by inspiring feelings of dread in the mortals whom they stalk.

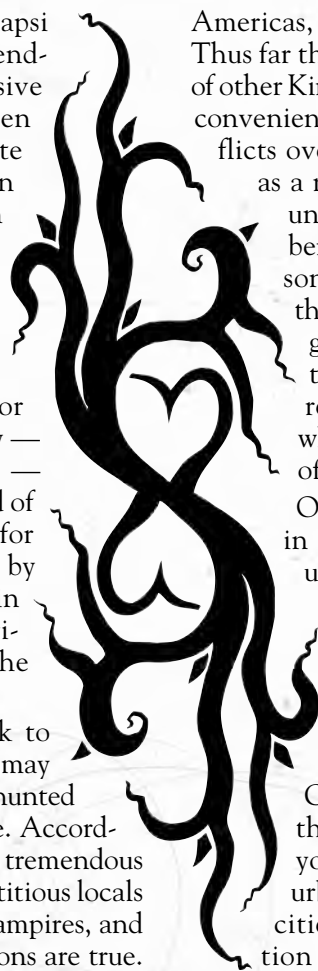
Records of the Gluttons stretch back to folktales of the Dark Ages, many of which may be the result of just a few of the brood who hunted and thrived in and around eastern Europe. According to the stories, the Nelapsi mixed their tremendous appetites with cunning and charm. Superstitious locals ascribed all manner of hauntings to the vampires, and it's sure that at least some of those assertions are true. Unlike certain other Kindred (such as the early Invictus) who sometimes took up a mantle of authority among humans, the Nelapsi often indulged in curiously anarchic behavior. Many a tale relates how one decided to prey on a particular village, but instead of exercising authority through the powers of undeath, he let strange sightings and ghostly sounds work the villagers into a pall of fear. By influencing the minds of the herd with nightmares and hallucinations, the Nelapsi sowed confusion, distrust and misdirection, thereby hiding his own part in the chaos. A Nelapsi who does the same in modern nights could seem like an unflagging, stoic individual in the midst of widespread terror, drawing mortals to himself through his stability and apparent dauntlessness.

Tonight's Nelapsi have spread somewhat from their ancestral home. Still, they're uncommon in the

Americas, and this situation is unlikely to change. Thus far their predation has not drawn the full wrath of other Kindred upon them, but the Gluttons do make convenient scapegoats when feeding problems or conflicts over herds arise. Nelapsi are not widespread as a result, and groups of them are particularly unusual. While in earlier nights, line members would have inhabited towns with a reasonably large populace, the better to slake their tremendous thirst, there's too much danger of running into another Kindred in tonight's major cities. Many Nelapsi take residence in outlying towns and villages where they can be sure to avoid running afoul of competition.

Old World line members take some pleasure in cowing mortals into submission through use of indirect fear, triggered through their special Devotions. Modern Nelapsi usually avoid confrontation altogether if possible, but still keep a territorial watch over their own small fiefdoms. The presence of even one other vampire in an area can be a serious problem, since the Gluttons have enough trouble dealing with the difficulties of their own feeding. A few young members establish residence in suburban areas and occasionally drive into larger cities, but they don't receive a warm reception from resident Kindred and rarely make their way into the society of the undead.

Modern Nelapsi often exhibit skittish behavior around other vampires, which isn't surprising given their inherent tendency to threaten the Masquerade. Choices of childer (when the Embrace is granted at all) reinforce this manner. While siring is a dangerous proposition for straining an already stretched blood supply, Nelapsi can sire for any of the reasons that motivate other Kindred: jealousy, loneliness, anger, remorse. As a Daeva bloodline, they sometimes pick childer who resonate with a sire's own vices. Old Gluttons often exert a powerful influence over their neonates, repeatedly hammering home the necessity of caution in dealing with other Kindred. Those rare vampires who align themselves to the bloodline out of personal predilection soon discover that other Nelapsi are quick to watch and slow to trust newcomers. All of these conditions







combine to make new Nelapsi uncommon. The lineage has little more than suspicion to offer outsiders who join, and no compelling reason for a young Daeva to seek the blood out. A few would-be Nelapsi childer resist their sires' influence and go their own way or even join a different bloodline, but such rebellious youth are scorned by their progenitors and former cousins.

**Parent Clan:** Daeva

**Nickname:** Gluttons

**Covenant:** Nelapsi relations with covenants tend to be extreme, based primarily on how a vampire society views Gluttons' insatiable hunger. Most Nelapsi gravitate toward the Invictus, whose feudal model appeals to the old European sensibilities of the line's origins (which are also passed from sire to childer). While Nelapsi don't seek out positions of authority in the First Estate (it draws too much attention), they usually have the social graces, appreciation of authority, and sense of decorum that helps them to integrate well into that stratified group. Elder Nelapsi who make their peace with other Kindred (uncommon though such a thing may be) also gravitate toward the Invictus. They find a certain comfort in Invictus attitudes toward hierarchical control, which mirrors the Nelapsi tendency to exist as secretive monsters presiding over whole villages through a combination of terror and awe.

The Carthian Movement, by contrast, is a subject of bitter divide for the bloodline. Old Nelapsi consider the Carthians little more than peasant rabble, not worthy of their own Vitae. Age, cunning and strength, elders proclaim, should be the basis of rulership. Some young line members aren't so sure. Since gathering a herd poses special difficulties for Gluttons, modern converts assert that blending in with mortal institutions and adopting their policies is the best way to avoid drawing unwanted attention. More importantly, quite a few young Nelapsi chafe at the bonds imposed by their sires.

Constant communication and over-the-shoulder interference by distant masters causes more than a few neonates to seek a more egalitarian society.

The Ordo Dracul and the Nelapsi have ties stemming from mutual geography, but the transmutative practices of the covenant have a limited benefit to the bloodline. Nelapsi have a cordial relationship with the Order, but rarely work their way up its ranks or delve into its affairs. There's just not enough reward for the Gluttons, compared to the gains that other Kindred make. Young Nelapsi can try

to honor the tenets of the Ordo for several years, but often give up in frustration when the Coils of the Dragon cannot slake their thirst.

The Circle of the Crone doesn't overtly recruit Nelapsi, who for their part usually consider the covenant archaic and absorbed in ridiculous pagan idolatry. Nelapsi with memories of the pre-Christian days of eastern Europe are the most likely to deal with Acolytes, but even they consider the covenant needlessly brutal and steeped in self-mortification. The Circle's magic, for all that it works with blood, does little good for the Nelapsi, whose hunger costs them too much Vitae to waste any. Some members of the Circle believe that the lineage's feeding problem has metaphysical significance, but are split on its meaning. Some say the Nelapsi should consider it another challenge of vampirism to overcome and thus treat it as a valuable lesson. Others argue that the line's hunger simply wastes precious blood, and is evidence that the Nelapsi are little more than sieves who should be destroyed for the sake of preserving the herd.

The Lancea Sanctum often views the Nelapsi as frivolous tricksters and troublemakers, but does not overtly turn them away. After all, God's righteous judgment afflicts all Kindred, and all should bow to His grace. Nelapsi who lived during the religious Middle Ages and early Renaissance tend to gravitate toward the Spear, finding the message of penance and holy retribution appealing in light of their curse. Sanctified Gluttons consider their condition a double curse. One erudite Nelapsi claims that every member of the bloodline houses a demonic soul as well as a former human one, and that the lineage's thirst is a burden handed down by God to scourge the demonic soul for its pride in coming to Earth. Young Nelapsi tend to scoff at these fables, but the unusual Devotions common to the line lend at some credence to such claims.

**Appearance:** Like the Daeva stock from which they come, the Nelapsi often have a refined, genteel bearing. To better avoid notice among their prey, Gluttons tend to suffuse themselves with Vitae in order to maintain the appearance of mortality. After all, since they have to acquire large amounts of blood to survive, a little bit more won't hurt when it helps them blend in. Eastern European styles of apparel are most common, with old members wearing finery reminiscent of ancient nobility. More recent arrivals appear in anything from tailcoats to the faded jeans that sell so well in former Soviet Bloc countries. Jewelry, especially silver, is a staple of Nelapsi wardrobe. Abstract or pattern designs predominate, and sires are quick to dictate appropriate choices to childer who seek to style themselves in garish or "low-class" garb.

**Haven:** Many Nelapsi relish their immortality and surround themselves with art, fine furnishings

and sumptuous apparel. Security is always a concern, of course, but so is comfort. Perhaps because they're used to being feared by mortals, Nelapsi tend to feel that they deserve a fine existence. Line members have a tendency to adapt the places where they lived as mortals, turning them into acceptable havens. This trend stems from their old habit of remaining cloistered away in a familiar area where they can hunt with relative safety, away from other Kindred. Poor neighborhoods rank low on their list of possible haven locales, despite the presence of humans who won't be missed, because Gluttons tend to have an aversion to "slumming."

To avoid running into other Kindred, Nelapsi pick an odd assortment of havens. Some find comfort in isolated communities, especially areas where residents are suspicious of outsiders. With their Majesty powers, Gluttons can easily make themselves fit the "accepted though eccentric neighbor" stereotype. These parasites slowly sink their influence into local families through a stick-and-carrot combination of Majesty and Nightmare, causing people to fear change and the outside world while simultaneously making themselves out to be a comforting, familiar (if cold) presence. A few Nelapsi, as befits the quirky nature of the lineage, take up residence in abandoned places where their Nightmare powers can make full use of the surroundings. That includes haunted manors, decaying amusement parks and old, worn-down or abandoned strip malls. They cause outsiders to shun such places as haunted (or at least unwholesome), while they cruise nearby neighborhoods for prey, sometimes even setting up local groups of ghouls who reside in these same decrepit pits to intensify to the unwholesome décor.

Nelapsi familiar with modern business are extremely likely to finance or otherwise have a hand in any local Rack, both for personal use and to watch for potential competitors.

**Background:** Nelapsi take care to Embrace individuals who show enough raw ingenuity in life to turn that innovation to the problem of excessive feeding. Even then, the Embrace is rare. Too many gluttonous vampires around is simply too dangerous for all. Those chosen therefore possess high social acumen and similarly high intelligence. All the better to be creative and to be able to match wits with belligerent vampires. Or so it goes in theory. In practice, the challenges that Nelapsi sires face are passed down to their progeny. The oldest tend toward various obsessive neuroses, and pick would-be childer with similar quirks. The tight bond of training between sire and childer means that many elders pass on their peculiarities, habits, mannerisms and prejudices. This inheritance puts pressure on new Nelapsi to conform to the line's long-held curiosities. Indeed, some Gluttons

don't even realize that their fears of "magic herbs" or their terror of being nailed into their coffins are purely psychological, not mystical.

Old Nelapsi come almost exclusively from Slavic stock. The lineage branched out only in the 19th century, so non-Europeans are rare.

**Character Creation:** As a Daevas bloodline, Nelapsi usually have high Social Attributes and Skills. Some cling to attachments with mortals they knew in life in order to find shelter from the abuses they inflict. Others rely on sophistication to convince mortals that they couldn't possibly be the root of local troubles and fears. Wits is prized by the breed, while Resolve tends to lag, if only because line members don't bother fighting their bloodlust after a few years. Physical Attributes and Skills aren't very important to most Gluttons, who rely on their powers of misdirection and preternatural speed and might to carry them through.

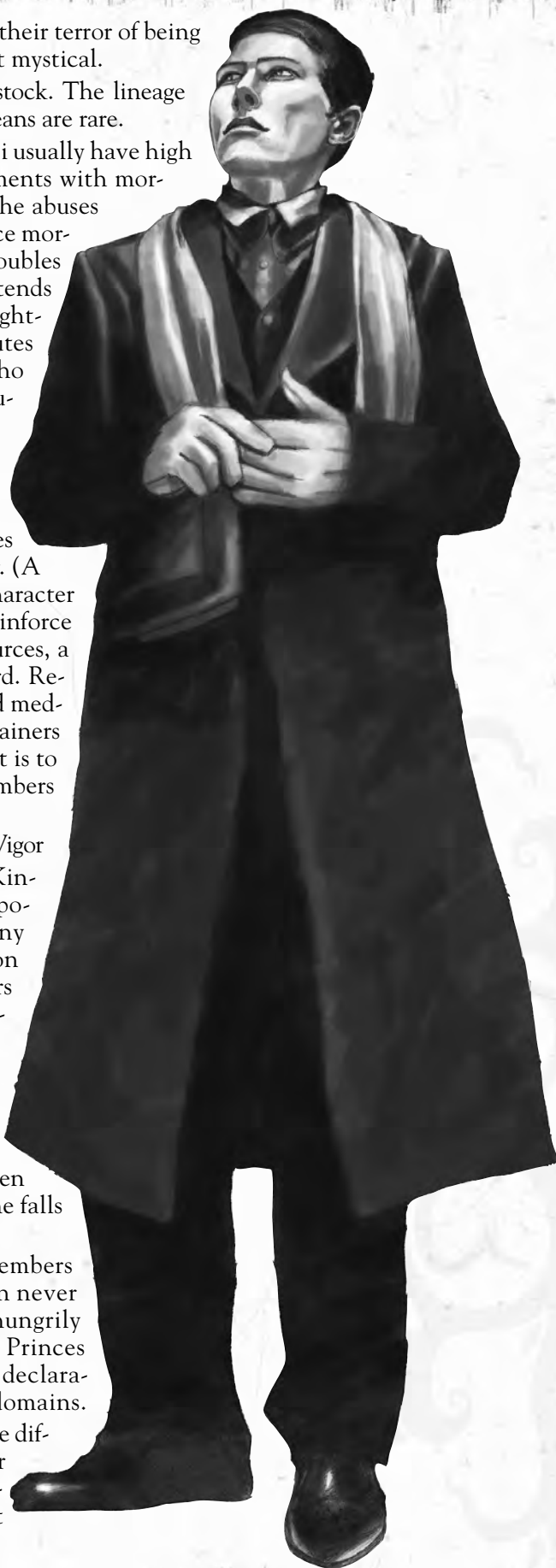
Members tend manifest supernatural oddities, even for Kindred. Legends tell of a vulnerability to blessed herbs or an inability to cross a line of poppy seeds. Such foibles of the psyche are not isolated; Nelapsi sires tend to reinforce their own psychoses in their childer. (A derangement could be taken as a Mental Flaw at character creation, or mental ailments acquired in play could reinforce existing peculiarities.) Merits usually focus on Resources, a secure Haven with a good location, and a large Herd. Recently Embraced members tend toward influence and meddling in mortal affairs, so Contacts, Allies and Retainers are helpful. Status is less important to Nelapsi than it is to other Kindred, although they certainly scrutinize members of their own narrow lineage.

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

**Weakness:** The thirst for blood that plagues all Kindred is especially strong in the Nelapsi. The more potent a Glutton's Vitae, the greater his thirst. Any Nelapsi of age invariably becomes a severe strain on the local supply of mortals, and any elder rightly fears a Nelapsi who becomes so potent as to require Kindred sustenance. When a Nelapsi rises for the evening, an amount of Vitae equal to his Blood Potency must be expended, instead of the usual one. Spending this Vitae to awaken is subject to the usual limits on points spent per turn, which can make it difficult for a Nelapsi of high Blood Potency to awaken quickly. If a character lacks sufficient Vitae to rise, he falls into torpor as usual.

Due to the tremendous Nelapsi hunger, line members are unwelcome in many domains. After all, one can never be sure if a Glutton is a Vitae-addict who watches hungrily for another vampire to satisfy his cravings. Some Princes who are aware of the bloodline make a standing declaration that they will not suffer its presence in their domains.

Even Nelapsi who study the Coils of the Dragon have difficulty moderating their blood intake. If a character would normally lower his consumption of blood to every few nights, Vitae equal to his Blood Potency must





be expended over the increased span of time. The character may do so in any combination of Vitae spent per night that results in the appropriate amount by the end of the period. Say, two Vitae one night, and a single point the next for a total of three Vitae spent (Blood Potency 3) across two nights (2 Resolve).

As a Daevas bloodline, the Nelapsi still suffer from the usual tendency to indulge their Vices, and lose two Willpower points whenever they fail to do so.

**Organization:** For a bloodline that strains feeding capacity and relies on tricks and illusions, the Nelapsi have a curiously rigorous hierarchy. That may stem from the fact that creation of new members is rare. Any Glutton potent enough to create others is unlikely to want competition for blood, so he seeks standing by presiding over his lessers rather than actually creating them. As a result, the Nelapsi didn't expand from Czechoslovakia until the 19th century, when the introduction of railroads and ironclads made long-range travel feasible. Even with such transportation, though, rumors of Gluttons rarely surface outside of eastern Europe. While it's possible that Nelapsi have gone anywhere in the modern world, it seems unlikely. There's little incentive to travel outside one's domain and risk insufficient blood, insufficient security and insufficient space to avoid other Kindred. The founder of the line presumably still resides in the Zemplin region. His brood has spread, but they typically remain in contact through letters or occasional telephone conversations, sharing information about their travels.

Nelapsi sires realize that they will be blamed if a line member imposes too much strain on an area's blood supply, so they take pains to ensure that lessers are cautious and astute. That means frequent check-ups in twisted parent-child relationships, with all the turmoil that one would expect from an archaic parent trying to control an undying child who's already left home and grown up. Yet, frequent contact does help the Nelapsi avoid some trouble. They address their own before other vampires do, and Gluttons use their information network to alert kin to tyrannical Princes, trouble spots or blood hunts that could be problematic for all.

**Concepts:** Club owner, charlatan, corporate financier, eccentric millionaire, Old World noble, pres-tidigitator, socialite

## History

Oral reports of the Nelapsi date back to the 12th century, and if the bloodline stretches back past that, any prior activities are unknown. The reclusive founder, likely responsible for many early legends of his brood (also called *upir*) in Czechoslovakia, is presumed to be

in torpor. The last reliable reports of contact between he and his childer ended in the 17th century.

Before the advent of modern transportation, the Nelapsi were little more than a curiosity. Less than a dozen existed, and all confined to eastern Europe. The line has not increased much in number even with the advent of rail and air travel. Sightings and stories pop up every few decades in distant cities, but it's hard for members to see the benefit of leaving behind their caches of blood, useful contacts and well-established herds. Since the Nelapsi spend a great deal of time in torpor as well, they are generally less mobile and less accustomed to changing technology than even other Kindred.

Although the Nelapsi scrupulously keep track of their own kind, reports of the bloodline's malcontents and rising stars are plagued by the fact that any Glutton of reasonable Blood Potency is at high risk of disappearing into torpor. The threat of excessive thirst drives some into self-imposed slumber, if only to escape the possibility of Vitae addiction. Others struggle on and simply cannot remain active from night to night. Such trends make Nelapsi hauntings cyclical. A Glutton rises from torpor, preys upon an area and a disproportionately large number of victim, returns to torpor and the whole matter is pushed aside until it happens again.

## Society and Culture

The Nelapsi have a fairly rigid structure of sire mentorship and childe responsibility. Every one recognizes that an untutored line member could have disastrous feeding habits, so customs of indoctrination are strongly ingrained. Nelapsi use the term *predek* ("predecessor" or "ancestor") to refer to sires, and the young are called *operit* ("fledges") until they demonstrate capability with the Nightmare Discipline (until they gain three dots in it).

Since Gluttons face dire problems if their hunting grounds overlap, they consider the Second Tradition the most important of the three. Nelapsi almost never Embrace out of spur-of-the-moment passion. If they do, they often destroy the hapless childer. Each Glutton holds to a sort of "extended accounting" by which she considers the actions of any childe or grandchilde to reflect upon her. Since it's presumed that no sire would be so rash as to leave an uneducated *operit* and thereby risk the reputation of the line, any mistake by a childe invariably reflects ill upon his creator(s). Failure to blend into society and to follow the Traditions haunts a Nelapsi forever, but also leaves a permanent stain on the reputation of his progenitors. For this reason, Clan Status is extremely important to Nelapsi. Gluttons pay close attention to troublemakers, and spread rumors of poor behavior through their correspondence network.

Daeva outsiders who for some inexplicable reason attune themselves to Nelapsi blood have a difficult time finding acceptance. The responsibilities of a cautious predator, old Nelapsi proclaim, are far too important for an untutored Daeva to risk the whole bloodline with his clumsy flailing. A Nelapsi *ope'rit* who runs into another Glutton of no apparent traceable lineage is almost certain to send a message about the individual back to his sire. Similarly, a Nelapsi elder is likely to confront an unknown line member to make sure the stranger understands the risks inherent to his "condition." Such a confrontation is unlikely to be physical. The elder probably sends agents or possibly even an *operit* to intervene and set the matter straight. A Daeva Kindred who aligns himself to the lineage for some unfathomable personal reason had best be prepared to face a host of suspicious investigations, feints from ghouls testing defenses, and run-ins with "natural born" Nelapsi who make certain that the newcomer won't bring ruin upon them all.

## Devotions

The Nelapsi lineage does not have a signature Discipline of its own, but does manifest several unusual Devotions. These powers accentuate rumors of line members' haunting capabilities, and offer several tricks that help to overcome the brood's inherent challenges. Gluttons do not teach these Devotions to outsiders. It's more rewarding to demonstrate a few powers here and there and let others speculate about the range of strange capabilities at a line member's disposal.

### Churchtower Gaze (*Nightmare* .., *Majesty* ..)

The Nelapsi are credited with a countenance that can terrify or awe onlookers, driving them off or rallying them to a vampire for the protection he seems to offer in an

otherwise terrifying world. Doubtless, the church tower part of the legend stems from Nelapsi seeking a high point from which to use this power.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

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

**Action:** Reflexive for activation. Contested for application; resistance is reflexive

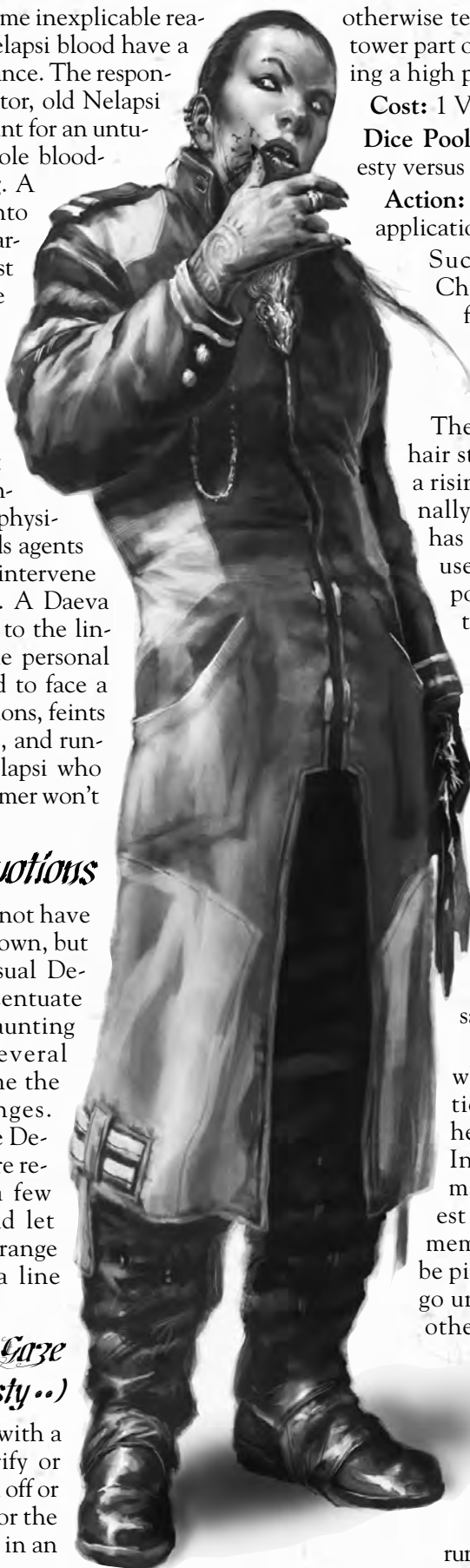
Success when manifesting the Churchtower Gaze inspires a mounting feeling of dread in anyone whom the user can see with the naked eye, and culminates in the subject turning and looking upon the Nelapsi.

The victim typically experiences chills, hair standing on the back of his neck, and a rising heartbeat (if mortal), before he finally, inexorably turns. While this effect has little other result, it does facilitate use of other Nightmare and Majesty powers as intended subjects look upon the vampire. The reflexive action of this Devotion allows other powers to be used in the same turn as long as total Vitae costs for them do not exceed the limits imposed by the user's Blood Potency.

Churchtower Gaze must be resolved successfully through a contested action before another power can be activated in the same turn. If the intended subject cannot be made to look at the vampire (the Nelapsi loses the contested action), another power might not be applied in the same turn.

The Nelapsi can select one subject whom he sees, or command the attention of multiple subjects (as long as he can see them all at the same time). In the latter case, a contested roll is made for the group based on the highest Composure + Blood Potency among members. Specific individuals can also be picked out from a group, while the rest go unaffected; some turn and look while others do not.

Churchtower Gaze may cause a subject to look at a Nelapsi, but the victim suffers no direct mind control as a result. He can perform actions normally, unless another Discipline used by the Nelapsi in the same turn dictates otherwise. Someone running away from the vampire might look



back over his shoulder, for example. Or one in a fight might look to the vampire momentarily, but long enough to be subject to another effect plied on him.

Naturally, a Nelapsi must be able to see his target to exert Churchtower Gaze. An Obfuscated vampire who isn't spotted goes unaffected, even while others around him are.

Churchtower Gaze cannot be applied more than once on a subject in a scene, whether used successfully or not.

According to legend, Churchtower Gaze can be reflected if a subject (or someone in a group) raises a silvered mirror to his eyes. Doing so requires the intended victim to have the mirror in hand, and to delay his action in a turn until the Nelapsi uses this Devotion. If the subject manages to best the Nelapsi in the contested roll made for this power (the roll made for the subject gets a +3 bonus), then the Nelapsi suffers a -3 penalty to all actions for the remainder of the scene as he recoils from the horror inflicted upon himself.

This power costs 10 experience points to learn.

### *Quicken the Slumbering Vitae* (Celerity .. Vigor ..)

Given their need for excessive amounts of blood, Nelapsi have mastered a trick of storing Vitae and re-awakening its dormant potential at a later date. While perhaps similar to the magic of Theban Sorcery, this Devotion has the advantage of being less well known. Thus, a Nelapsi can easily hide caches of blood in or around his haven or in likely traveling spots for quick use in times of need. A few Nelapsi keep odd bits of statuary in their havens that are actually objects of stored Vitae.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Stamina + Survival + Celerity

**Action:** Instant

To store blood, a Nelapsi tears open one of his veins with his fangs (causing a point of lethal damage automatically), and the player spends a Vitae to activate the power. Hardened by the Glutton's unnatural Vigor, the blood released oozes out as a thick, black substance not unlike pitch. The emulsion can be stored in jars, buried, or even be shaped into sculptures. One point of Vitae is drawn forth and saved per success achieved on the power's activation roll, although the user can summon less if he likes.

To revert the blood, the Nelapsi must cut himself and bleed again. (No measurable damage need be done this time; existing, open wounds don't count. Nor is there a Vitae cost for reactivating stored blood.) Spread over the hardened emulsion, the newly drawn blood is absorbed and returns to a liquid state for consumption. Blood calls to blood. Only the Nelapsi's own fresh blood can reawaken stored Vitae. Of course, the stored substance had best be in a container of some sort or it's spilled. Such spilled blood is spoiled and turns inert.

Saved and restored Vitae can be consumed by the creator or by another vampire or ghoul. The Vitae is "neutral"; another drinker is not subject to a Vinculum with the creator, although blood addiction is still a risk.

Emulsions from separate uses of this Devotion can be combined to form a larger store of Vitae, all of which can be re-awakened at one time. If all Vitae is not consumed, however, any left over is wasted. Stores can also be broken off to be saved for another time. Preserved blood from separate Nelapsi cannot be combined; it is all corrupted and wasted in the attempt.

Exposed directly to fire or sunlight, preserved blood is burned to ash instantaneously.

Failure on the Devotion's activation roll simply means that no Vitae is drawn forth for preservation. Successful attempts can be made, but at the expense of another Vitae each time.

When stored blood is consumed, as many Vitae can be gained by the drinker in one turn as he has Blood Potency dots. The one-Vitae-a-turn limit of normal feeding does not apply to blood taken by means of this power. Reawakened blood goes inert after five turns, no matter what container it's in.

This power costs 13 experience points to learn.

### *Shadow Heart* (Nightmare .. Vigor ...)

One of the more unusual Nelapsi legends refers to line members as creatures with two hearts. On at least one occasion, a Nelapsi has shrugged off a hawthorn stake thrust squarely into his chest, removed the offending implement himself, and chastised his startled attacker before destroying her. Shadow Heart relies as much on misdirection as it does on sheer toughness. By creating a momentary distraction at the moment of impact, the Nelapsi causes the attacker's blow to land slightly askew, missing the vital target while harm is diminished by undead sinew and bone.

Nelapsi never teach this Devotion to an unproven *operit*. By tradition, only a *predek* can teach this trick and only to his own childer.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Survival + Vigor

**Action:** Reflexive

The Nelapsi activates this Devotion at the moment of taking a stake in the chest. Doing so is a reflexive action, possible even if the vampire has performed another action in the turn. (Note, however, that only one Willpower point can be spent per turn. If a point has already been spent for the Nelapsi this turn, he cannot activate this power.) The Glutton causes a momentary shift in the attacker's perceptions, while calling upon Vigor to help resist the blow.





**Cost:** 1

Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Wits +

Occult + Nightmare

**Action:** Instant

Normally, trying to impale a vampire imposes a  $-4$  penalty on the attack and requires three points of damage to be inflicted. When the Nelapsi activates this Devotion, a  $-5$  penalty is levied against the attack and five points of damage must be done. If these criteria are not met, the stake misses by a fraction of an inch. It still inflicts normal damage, it just doesn't send the Nelapsi into torpor.

If the vampire is taken by surprise or doesn't foresee an impaling attack, this power cannot be used in the first turn of combat. It can be used thereafter.

This power costs 14 experience points to learn.

### *Witch Lights* (*Majesty •, Nightmare ••*)

Ghostly sounds, cold spots and floating lights are all common manifestations of a Nelapsi's haunting — or so stories tell. By creating an aura of looming dread and focusing attention on tricks of the mind, a Nelapsi can cause various sensory manifestations that unsettle mortals or make Kindred wonder if a place is inhabited by more than just vampires.

Although Nelapsi refer to these manifestations simply as "witch lights," the effects aren't limited to light alone. They can include a sudden stench, a brief moment of cold, the sound of creaking floorboards or a colored illumination equivalent to a candle — a veritable cornucopia of ghostly effects.

A Nelapsi can cause distracting and disturbing phenomena to occur anywhere he can see with the naked eye. The actual area of effect is four square yards per success achieved on the power's activation roll. A subject surrounded by manifestations suffers a  $-2$  penalty on all dice pools due to distraction, if not fear (rolls made for reflexive actions are not affected). Leaving the area of effect terminates the penalty, but it resumes if exposure is resumed. The penalty does not apply to the creator himself.

While manifestations aren't detailed enough to assume specific shapes, sounds or messages, they're certainly eerie. They don't show up on any recording device or are distorted in some fashion and unrecognizable when they do. (A Willpower point can be spent for a Nelapsi to make all such signs recordable for a short time — see **Vampire**, p. 170.)

Manifestations persist for the remainder of the scene, unless the Nelapsi decides to dispense with them, he can no longer see the area of effect, he is rendered unconscious or torpid, or he is destroyed. A Glutton can maintain one application of this power at a time, but it doesn't require any active concentration beyond continued observation. The center of Witch Light activity can move at a Speed of 3, as directed reflexively by the creator. Phenomena do not cause damage and cannot make objects invisible or alter items' appearance. They can, however, be a distraction to the creator's own activities.

This power costs nine experience points to learn.

# Oberlochs

You're either part of the family or you're food.  
I know we ain't kin, so where does that leave you?

Most vampires haunt cities, making the urban landscape their hunting grounds. Few are willing to dwell outside metropolitan areas. Not only are the dangers abroad unseen and untold, but the feeding is meager.

The vampires of the Oberloch bloodline purposefully choose to stay away from cities and suburban sprawls. This choice is made partly out of ignorance (only a few Oberloch kin are even aware that other vampires exist, let alone in cities), but it's also a strategic choice. The "Brood" opts to spend the Requiem in towns far from city lights, existing only in small burgs and hamlets many miles from any highway. They're self-made rulers of these places, for such rural towns provide wide-open territory and self-contained fiefdoms.

The Oberlochs began as a bloodline in the most literal of senses, as an actual mortal family. The human clan, running a successful coal-mining company in Pennsylvania, grew wealthy on the blood and suffering of immigrant laborers. The workers had their revenge in 1869, forming a mob and murdering some of the family after dragging members down into the mines. The rioters, shepherded into fury by a Gangrel vampire, unknowingly left a few Oberlochs clinging to life. The Savage decided to "test" the family's survival skills by Embracing the survivors. He didn't stay around to shepherd his childer through those first nights. Left with little understanding of the curse levied upon them, the remaining family were forced to endure.

And they did. The undead clan not only grew, but its blood changed in subtle ways, deviating from that which created it. The vampiric Oberlochs continued to consider themselves a family. Indeed, they did so obsessively. They believed that the blood that sustained them, while technically dead, still carried their lineage, regardless of its bodily origin. They sired more "members of the family," gathering runaways and castoffs, and brought those chosen mortals into the unliving fold of the Brood. By selecting miscreants and outcasts with cruel, tough demeanors, the bloodline grew slowly but constantly. The family couldn't remain local, though. Wanderlust combined with growing numbers forced some from their original home and out to the dark corners of rural America.



Now, the growing Oberloch family lives at the edges of civilization in small towns just far enough from big cities, watching private herds with a protective, ravenous eye.

**Parent Clan:** Gangrel

**Nickname:** Brood

**Covenant:** This bloodline is largely hidden and ignorant of vampire society outside its own grim, backwoods niche. Categorically speaking, the lineage is almost universally unaligned. A rare number of Oberlochs have purposefully escaped the family's clutches, fleeing to parts where they can't be found or won't be sought. Such fugitives are any covenant's game, often hiding anonymously among the ranks of whatever group seems the most capable of sheltering them.

**Appearance:** Family members are almost exclusively Caucasian. The Oberlochs, originally of Swiss blood, generally reject the concept that someone from another race can truly share their lineage, even through the Embrace. The family has a few members of "color," but only because those mortals seemed exceptionally suited to the clan and its ways. Oberlochs tend to dress in whatever clothes they pilfer from whatever wayward travelers mistakenly come through their small towns. The family favors modest dress, rejecting fancy clothes as a mark of self-importance and frivolity (essentially, "the city"). Their garments tend to become dirty and tattered over time.

**Haven:** When the family moves into a new town, spreading its influence, members start off by securing the biggest house around, whether it's a crumbling mansion, an old farmhouse or a doublewide trailer. The occupants are killed, Embraced or made the first members of the herd. Initially, all family members present dwell in this single location. As time passes, however, young Oberlochs may move out to small satellite homes in the immediate area. Should any overcrowding occur, some lesser family members may leave the sanctity of home to move on to another small town.

**Background:** The family has no interest in growing bigger than its britches, so to speak. Embracing new kin is allowed only when approved by the Grandmother or Grandfather of a given territory. Each family member is

expected to Embrace at least one other at some point in his Requiem, however. Fostering new children is the only way the family remains strong.

These vampires Embrace only those suitable to carry the Oberloch name. Candidacy typically requires an individual to be tough as nails, a true survivor. The Oberlochs also choose those with few connections to the wider world. In other words, so no friends, family or law enforcement comes knocking. Prospective childer are often town members (spinsters, hermits or single mothers) with few temporal connections. Yet, some of the Brood like to Embrace from those who come from outside of town, such as runaways, wayward vacationers or hitchhikers.

The Oberlochs verify the aptitude of a future family member through a variety of homespun tests. Such rites are often made up on the spot, but involve survival-based challenges. (A mortal may be kidnapped and left in the middle of a forest, for example, or be set on by a pack of starving dogs.)

**Character Creation:** Oberlochs value family members of keen mind and strong body. Either Physical or Mental Attributes are dominant. Social Attributes fall by the wayside as the Oberlochs feel that social graces are a needless luxury that don't apply to them. As rural predators, what does it matter if you say "Please," or "Thank you," or know which goddamn spoon is the proper one for soup? What matters is a sharp eye, a hunter's instinct and a strong back.

The family prides itself on choosing "kin" with prominent Physical Skills, as well (Athletics, Brawl and Survival being chief among them). A handful of other Skills are also seen as indications of "good breeding," such as Animal Ken, Intimidation, Crafts and Subterfuge.

The most prized Merit among the Oberlochs is Haven. Most family units pool dots in the Merit to equate whatever large shelter is taken over and occupied.

**Bloodline Disciplines:** Animalism, Dominate, Protean, Resilience

**Weakness:** When the surviving mortal family members were Embraced and left for dead, they were forced to wander like nomads, succumbing to the same animal urges that burn in Gangrel blood. Oberlochs feature the same weakness as their parent clan, their minds slowly breaking down as feral cravings overtake them. With regard to dice pools based on Intelligence and Wits Attributes, the 10





Again rule does not apply. Additionally, any 1's that come up on a roll subtract from successes. (The latter part of the weakness does not affect dramatic-failure rules.) This weakness does not apply to dice pools involving perception or reaction to surprise (see p. 151 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), or to the Resolve Attribute.

Vampires of the Oberloch "family" are also subject to physical breakdown over time. They understand their condition to a point, recognizing that they defy the laws of God and biology by existing at all. Yet, they still understand themselves as family — specifically as a *mortal* one, despite all evidence to the contrary — and this backward belief is a curse.

While undead, *the Oberlochs still age*. Their skin becomes sallow and wrinkled, their muscles atrophy, joints fuse and ligatures tighten over time. A family member Embraced at age 50 who exists as a vampire for an additional 50 years appears more or less as a 100-year-old person. An Oberloch who has spent 200 or more years on this Earth looks exactly like a 200-year-old might look: skin desiccated like sun-dried vellum, face pressed tightly to a withering skull, fingers curled in like the legs of a dead spider. For every 50 years that an Oberloch exists as a vampire, a single dot is removed from each of his Physical Attributes. Physical Attributes may not be reduced below 1, though.

This weakness leads some of the Brood to speculate that they are not indeed vampires, or dead in any sense, but exist with prolonged lives whose inevitable march is slowed to a freakish crawl. It's for this reason that many choose to Embrace young men and women, often teenagers. (Few Oberlochs ever Embrace children. A child's body may appear young for a long time, but it also never grows past the stunted frame of early youth.)

**Organization:** Oberlochs organize somewhat like a mortal family. "Parents" hold authority over their childer, and their own sires hold authority over them. All members in a given territory are beholden to the rule of the single oldest predecessor (always referred to as "Grandmother" or "Grandfather"). Beyond that, the only authority figure is (according to some family members) a myth. Family legend holds that one of the original progenitors still lives in the coal-saddled hills of upstate Pennsylvania. This matriarch, the Oberloch known only as "Old Alice," is said to send her own childer out from time to time to "check up on" family members in the wide world. Her legend mainly makes for a boogey man story told to keep young kin in line, but enough evidence of family condition, structure and tradition suggests that the story could be true.

**Concepts:** Teen runaway, town mayor, lost traveler, unsuspecting vacationer, store owner, park ranger, hillfolk, deer hunter, miner, hermit

## History

In the 19th century, coal mining was a reliable — and deadly — profession for men in places like Pennsylvania,

Ohio and West Virginia. Miners (typically immigrants) were subject to constant risk while ferreting out anthracite coal deep in the earth. Mines could collapse, gases could suffocate or burn workers, and as if the chance for instantaneous death wasn't enough, the long-term hazards of black lung made the career terminal. Thousands upon thousands died mining black-diamond veins, perishing from unmitigated dangers.

And yet, conditions above ground were as bad as those below, but in this case the danger was to a man's coffers. A miner in a given town was subject to the whims of his employer, a so-called "coal baron," who owned and operated the company. Initially, pay for a miner was based on how much coal he was able to bring to the surface, and that compensation did little more than keep he and his family afloat. Coal barons realized, however, that their own families could gain far more if they exploited their workers even further.

Barons — already the owners of coal-town markets and stores — decided on a system of economy that bypassed the federal dollar. They established markers or "chits" that served as payment to miners. These chits were good only at marketplaces owned by the barons. And while chits were valued at roughly the same as a dollar, prices in stores were elevated unreasonably. Miners were paid the same, but in limited funds, and costs skyrocketed.

The Oberloch family, of Swiss-German descent, arrived in America in the early 1800s. While most immigrants who weren't English or Welsh were relegated to gutter jobs (such as coal mining), the Oberlochs were fortunate enough to bring much of their family wealth with them. Within two decades, the family (changing its name to the more American "Overlock") was owner of its own industry. In 1826, the A.A. Overlock & Brothers Mining Company was founded under coal baron Alfred Alexander Overlock and his wife Alice.

## Blood and Black Dust

The immigrants — mostly Irish and some Polish — who worked for the Overlock family struggled to keep their own loved ones fed. The chit system destroyed their livelihoods above ground, while the hazardous conditions of the job murdered them below ground. Still, few immigrants entertained the idea of revolt. It meant a complete loss of income (and thus food and shelter). Meager earnings were better than none, and with an ever-growing population of migrants ready to replace the dead or dismissed, most miners settled into the futility of their situation.

That is, until Bartholomew Ahern came along. Ahern, a Gangrel vampire, kept watch on his mortal family from the forests surrounding the Pennsylvania hills. He checked up on his mortal kin every few years, who had had come to work for the Overlock company, and their living conditions were deplorable. They were practically starving, and two brothers had died (along with 75 others) in a subterranean explosion. The Overlocks did nothing to compensate the families, and

went so far as to fire the men who were only injured in the accident. Ahern recognized the greed and exploitation at work, and chose a path of brutal vengeance. Over a period of weeks, the Gangrel organized many of the émigré miners, stirring their emotions into a grim frenzy. Such agitation soon erupted and the workers revolted.

They stormed the Overlock mansion — the biggest on Millionaire's Row — and kidnapped the family members. The mob, lead by a feral Ahern, dragged the Overlocks into the mines. The family men were beaten, cut, stabbed and dragged across jagged outcroppings of black rock. The women were raped. The children were whipped with axe handles. All were left for dead.

The eldest Overlock brothers, Gerard and Jacob, died from contusions to the skull. Alfred's sister Katrina and son Theodore both died from multiple wounds. An elderly uncle, Konrad, suffered a fatal heart attack, although that didn't stop the mob from breaking his body.

There were unexpected survivors, however. Patriarch Alfred lived, as did his wife, Alice. Their 14-year-old daughter, Sophie, also managed to survive. All barely clung to life and might have passed yet if not for the further intervention of Bartholomew Ahern. The vampire, surprised that the parasites could weather such horrific treatment, decided to visit the curse of the Requiem upon them. He thus expended a great deal of his own power to extend his vengeance on a permanent level. He left the remaining Overlocks, alone and starving, to their own devices and suffering.

## Princes to Paupers

The three surviving family members were not shepherded into their condition. They were given no instruction, no clue as to what had befallen them. Left to their own survival, they learned lessons the hard way. No sunlight. Blood for food. Mad, unquenchable urges. They could not return home. After the revolt, the mansions of Millionaire's Row were burned to the ground. No one would accept or help them. Seeing no other choice, they fled under the cover of night.

The next 20 years passed in a hungry blur. The three vampires — only partly cognizant that they were *blautsauger* at all — stayed to the edges of existence, traveling from town to town and farm to farm. They fed on livestock or any unfortunate individual who stumbled too far from the mortal herd. They stole clothing, slept in abandoned houses and kept to less-traveled roads. Few of the mortals they encountered were allowed to live. When they were, the family went by the old name Oberloch, to avoid being identified and to paint themselves as destitute immigrants.

## Paupers to Predators

It was not patriarch Alfred who worried over his family's condition. He seemed curiously content to remain at the margins of human existence, numbly feed-

ing off pack animals and wayward victims. It was wife Alice who shook clear of her bloodthirsty fog after almost three decades. She began to see the truth of the family condition, recognizing just how far they had fallen. At that point she had some comprehension of their abilities and curse, and wondered if they could do more. Didn't their curse afford them some benefit? They were once the royalty of a small but comfortable castle. Could become such again?

Alice decided that sleeping in mud and dirt (or at best, in the husk of a burned-out barn) did not suit her clan. With that decision, she marched into the nearest town, a place called Harmony that boasted less than a 100 citizens. Now, like before, she saw the townsfolk for what they were — resources. Except now they were not beings who could be exploited for money. They were bags of fat and muscle who could be exploited for their blood, and with blood came strength. Alice found great delight in doing what she wanted, when she wanted; her family could exist like kings again. But she also saw the potential for even more freedom than before. Alice felt that her family was still human to a point, only without any need for morality or mortal law. She saw the town of Harmony as the first stop on the road to reclaiming her family's wealth and power.

## Family Legacy

After a couple decades spent in Harmony, Alice could see what was happening to her. She was growing old. The effect was barely noticeable to others, but the faint stench of entropy wafted from her flesh and bones. Her hair lost some of its luster. The skin around her eyes tightened.

Alice felt revulsion at the notion. If her loved ones still aged, were they truly immortal? Or were their lives only extended, their days multiplied until an ineluctable death? The family couldn't be allowed to suffer such a fate. Time could still destroy them, it seemed, and so she set them to breeding.

Of course, "breeding" involved the Embrace and bringing chosen humans into the fold. The first adopted Oberlochs were selected for their hardness of body and cruelty of intention. Unfortunately, extending the family came with the unanticipated consequence of the clan growing too big for its tiny town. Food supply was limited, so Alice sent her new children away to make a "life" of their own a few towns over. She gave them the latitude to choose their own paths and set them off.

Since that night, the Oberlochs have carried on the family tradition, unknowingly honoring the decisions made by the Brood matriarch so many years ago. The family spreads to new towns, driven by wanderlust and that slow-burning need to procreate, and there it sets up shop. If blood runs dry or family gets bored, they move on. Over the years, some have considered going to the city where food would be more plentiful, but whispers of other creatures and a general disgust for all things urban have kept them to the backwater burgs of North America.



## OLD ALICE

The family matron now known as Old Alice is still around, despite suggestions that her existence is nothing more than a fable. She still dwells in the first family haven of Harmony, Pennsylvania, contained mostly to a single room where she rants and raves about what she believes is prophecy, and what her keepers believe is mad gibbering. Her tenders (old members of the line) take her out from time to time to "visit" with other Oberlochs. Such ancillary family rarely meet Old Alice's expectations, and end up as either food or ash.



## Society and Culture

The Oberlochs are unlike most other Kindred. The unique features and attitudes of the line keep its members isolated — both physically and socially — from other vampires. The Brood maintains its own tenets and traditions, many of which are detailed below.

### Ties That Bind

Oberloch vampires are obviously not family in the strict sense of the word. Vampires may not be able to breed biologically, but they do have the ability to create progeny by supernatural means. Any mortal found to be a candidate for membership is introduced to undeath. Prior to the Embrace, however, mortals are put through a grisly initiation.

Qualification involves no one thing; initiation customs differ from town to town. For the most part, tests cultivate the tragic bond that can arise between battered wife and abusive husband, or hostage and hostage-taker. The family creates in the mortal a sense of "learned helplessness." The Oberlochs strip everything from the victim: money, possessions, transportation, family, friends. The Brood assumes control of his resources or replaces them. In the case of money, the Oberlochs take it and offer to spend it sparingly on the victim's needs (on food, for instance), provided he "stays put." In the case of friends and family, the vampires attempt to subsume those roles. When the subject needs something, the family may indulge it — or may inflict violence. The mortal is deprogrammed through a cycle of intermittent reward and punishment. Months pass and the subject's life becomes the property of the Brood. Provided he remains sufficiently debased, but strong enough to be worthy of the family name, he is Embraced.

Establishing bonds doesn't end there, though. Family is the cornerstone of the bloodline. Members hold no actual love for one another (attempts at manifesting the emotion result in little more than funhouse mockery of the sentiment), but they do maintain powerful bonds of loyalty and protectiveness over those "of the blood." It's therefore critical to ensure that the newly inducted are faithful to flesh

and blood. The family inflicts several tests of loyalty over the first few years of a neonate's existence. Such tests are meant to reveal just how far a vampire is willing to go to fulfill the family's greater good. Will she kill a puppy? A human child? An adult? Will she risk Final Death to obtain an old Oberloch heirloom or sepia-stained photograph? Family members are encouraged to come up with new tests and challenges on the fly, all in an effort to gauge a neonate's fidelity. (Sometimes, these tests manifest as blood bonds with one another; some Oberlochs do mistakenly associate this supernatural devotion as some kind of twisted "love.")

A neonate who fails a test is not cast aside or destroyed. After all, the family doesn't bolster its ranks by senselessly punishing transgressions. Family is family and each member, young or old, deserves some latitude. Should enough tests (or one important one) fail, however, the transgressor is sure to be punished beyond the rational thresholds of education and pain. The same goes for any Oberloch of any age who attempts to betray the line's heritage. Treachery against the Brood — which might be as simple as fleeing the family or cursing the Oberloch's good name — is forgivable, provided the offender is duly punished and makes up for such duplicity. Serious betrayals (such as killing a Grandparent or calling down mortal authorities on the family) are met with a slow and arduous Final Death.

### Small-Town Horror

The villages and hamlets of the world are largely unoccupied by Kindred. Most vampires flock to cities because they offer both anonymity and an unending supply of blood. The Oberlochs have little interest in traveling to cities. Not only are they filthy places, dens of the kind of corruption that corrodes family ties, but members see little reason to be the little fish in a big, stagnant pond. They'd far rather be the biggest — the only — predators in a given area, so they choose the small towns of America to settle down.

The Brood looks for a few key characteristics when attempting to stake its territorial claim in a new place. First, a town has to be self-contained. A tiny burg of 200 or so people usually does the trick, but some members have been known to settle down in towns populated by just under a thousand. Second, a town can't be too close to urban civilization. Not only does such modernity make old Oberlochs uncomfortable, it doesn't lend itself to the tried and true techniques of domination that the clan has established. Thus, a chosen town must be at least 10 miles from a major highway, and at least 50 miles from a major city. Places located between cities are ideal. Such locales can attract travelers who stray from the beaten path, and they make for good, untraceable blood sources. Oberlochs also select new members from the ranks of these wayward folks.

Most Brood members are completely ignorant of vampire society, so know nothing of the Traditions. And yet, the line upholds a loose version of the Masquerade. Such a rule has no name and no Oberloch is techni-





cally bound by it, but the experience of old family members makes it clear that lording too openly over humans is likely to get one beaten or destroyed. That said, the Oberlochs don't hide, either. Mortals living in a town with these backwater monsters tend to sense that *something* is wrong, even if they don't know what.

The family tells of a few towns — locations hidden far from cities in states such as Alaska, Colorado and Maine — where Oberlochs live openly as vampires, ruling human herds as a rancher does cattle. Such stories may be legend, but some Brood swear they've been to these promised lands.

## Generations

The bulk of the family far and wide consists of neonates and ancillae. It counts only two or three known elders, and few have ever encountered these Oberloch forebears.

As mentioned, neonates are put through sporadic examinations of loyalty, but that's not to say they're distrusted completely. New vampires of the blood — usually called “striplings” or “saplings” — are treated as if part of something far bigger than a normal, mortal existence. While they receive nothing that could be termed love or compassion, striplings do enjoy an occasional modicum of respect. They're treated better than other mortals who wander into town, for example.

Such consideration is simply tempered with a dose of caution for new blood, as a newly Embraced member technically remains “undeclared” until her Blood Potency reaches 2. Until that time, the neonate is watched askance to make sure she doesn't bolt for the hills. As the months and years pass, neonates are given longer leashes by their sires (or “parents”) in an effort to engender faith.

(Note that the Oberloch family does not allow other vampires to become part of the Brood. While a Gangrel can enter the family at Blood Potency 4, no Grandfather allows such a violation of familial trust. Other vampires are seen as weak-willed cousins at best. At worst, they're perceived as diabolical outsiders worthy of a “burnin' out back of the house.”)

## Duties and Traditions

The following is a brief list of potential obligations observed by many Oberlochs. This list is hardly exhaustive. Nor is it codified in any way. Any Brood in a given town may adhere to these customs as if they were handed down by God, or may ignore them altogether in favor of a different set of practices.

- The oldest Oberloch in town is called Grandmother or Grandfather. His or her will supercedes the judgment of all other local family members.

- Those vampires below Grandmother/Grandfather who have sired childer are called father or mother.

- Neonates are allowed to Embrace another when their Requiem has reached 10 years. At that point, they gain what is typically referred to as “breeding rights.” An

Oberloch may sire only one childe every 10 years (and are, in fact, expected to). Excess breeding results in the destruction of a new childe... or of an old one. Sire's choice.

- Neonates are expected to fetch food for the oldest Oberloch in town.

- Should family members choose to ghoulish local mortals, such people are called “cousins.”

The only rule in place that's considered inviolate is what the family calls “The First Law.” This obligation, taught to potential Oberlochs even before their Embrace, is simple. “Blood comes first. Never betray the Blood.” While the law is purposefully vague, it implies that any treachery against the Brood will be met with the harshest of punishments.

The First Law often adorns signs posted on or around family property, sometimes scrawled in blood, paint or feces. Some rebuke such disgusting ways, instead making cross-stitched wall hangings or wooden carvings with the message front and center.

## Horror Houses

When select members of the family branch out and attempt to settle down in a new town, the first thing they do is seek out an appropriate familial haven (referred to as a “homestead” or “rooming house”). This group dwelling is usually the biggest and most obvious building in town. It could be anything from an antebellum old-money mansion to a crumbling old sewing mill; from a run-down amusement park to a doublewide. The Oberlochs kill the occupants or keep them alive (for food or to become future Brood members), establishing a “safe” place from which to pursue family endeavors. In these horrid sanctuaries, the Oberlochs acquire food, raise grotesque pets, Embrace new childer and even hold violent parties and gatherings.

Despite the family's auspicious and mannered origins, havens tend to run toward disheveled and disgusting. Some actually refer to these places as “horror houses” (as a point of pride). Over time, the places can become models of chaos and fear. Pictures are torn off walls, claw-foot bathtubs are stained with blood, human and animal carcasses are buried haphazardly in the yard. Some havens don't maintain utilities (although wise members know to steal money from travelers or townsfolk, which can be used to pay power and water bills). Some may even have animals (feral cats, possum or bats) living in otherwise unoccupied rooms. Not all the Oberlochs exist like this, though. Young members tend to preserve a greater semblance of humanity. It's the older, stranger Brood who often reside this way, making lurid hell-houses out of once-stately manors.

## Moving in

When one or several Oberlochs move into a town and establish a new home, they apply a loose-but-effective strategy in “claiming” the area. The first move involves gaining control over a few prominent townsfolk. These

could be deputies, reverends, ministers, teachers or clerks. The means of influencing such people varies. Clever newcomers dig up dirt on mortals, hoping to gain some kind of blackmail leverage. Bribery or threats also work. Some Oberlochs go so far as to kidnap a loved one, using the victim as a semi-permanent bargaining chip. Beyond that, other methods include use of Disciplines (specifically Dominate) or making targets into ghouls. Only under extreme circumstances do Brood members Embrace significant townsfolk this early on.

From there, the Oberlochs choose their homestead for at least the initial stages of settlement. Some make this the first step, but many recognize the need to have a few "fish on the line" first. After all, taking over a house by murdering its occupants could attract local police. It helps to have one or several officers already under thumb.

A homestead provides a place to plot how to claim more of the town as a hunting ground. Is there a bus depot that brings in the occasional runaway? Does the police station have holding cells that might contain a few drunks who won't be missed? Where do the bad kids, small-town criminals or hermits live? As the months go by, the Oberlochs scheme to take control of these areas. Of course, "control" is an ambiguous term. It could mean simply putting one of the family nearby to stalk such places and bring back food, or it could involve actively Dominating or ghouling appropriate parties to claim new turf.

Oberlochs may stay in a given town for six months or 60

years, depending on how secure the family's hold is. Should the Brood feel that it's losing control, it may move on. The family may also pack its bags for other reasons, such as if law enforcement threatens dominance, if other supernatural beings intrude, or if the accursed city encroaches upon rural existence. Any of these are reason enough to skip town. The world is full of meaningless little villages, each one practically bursting with unclaimed blood.

The Brood rarely chooses territory that's already claimed, whether by blood kin, other vampires or other creatures. The clan prefers fruit that's free for the picking.

Too many conflicts from the get-go only serve to weaken the family unit.

That's not to say, however, that members don't accidentally settle down in someone else's backyard. The Oberlochs aren't omniscient.

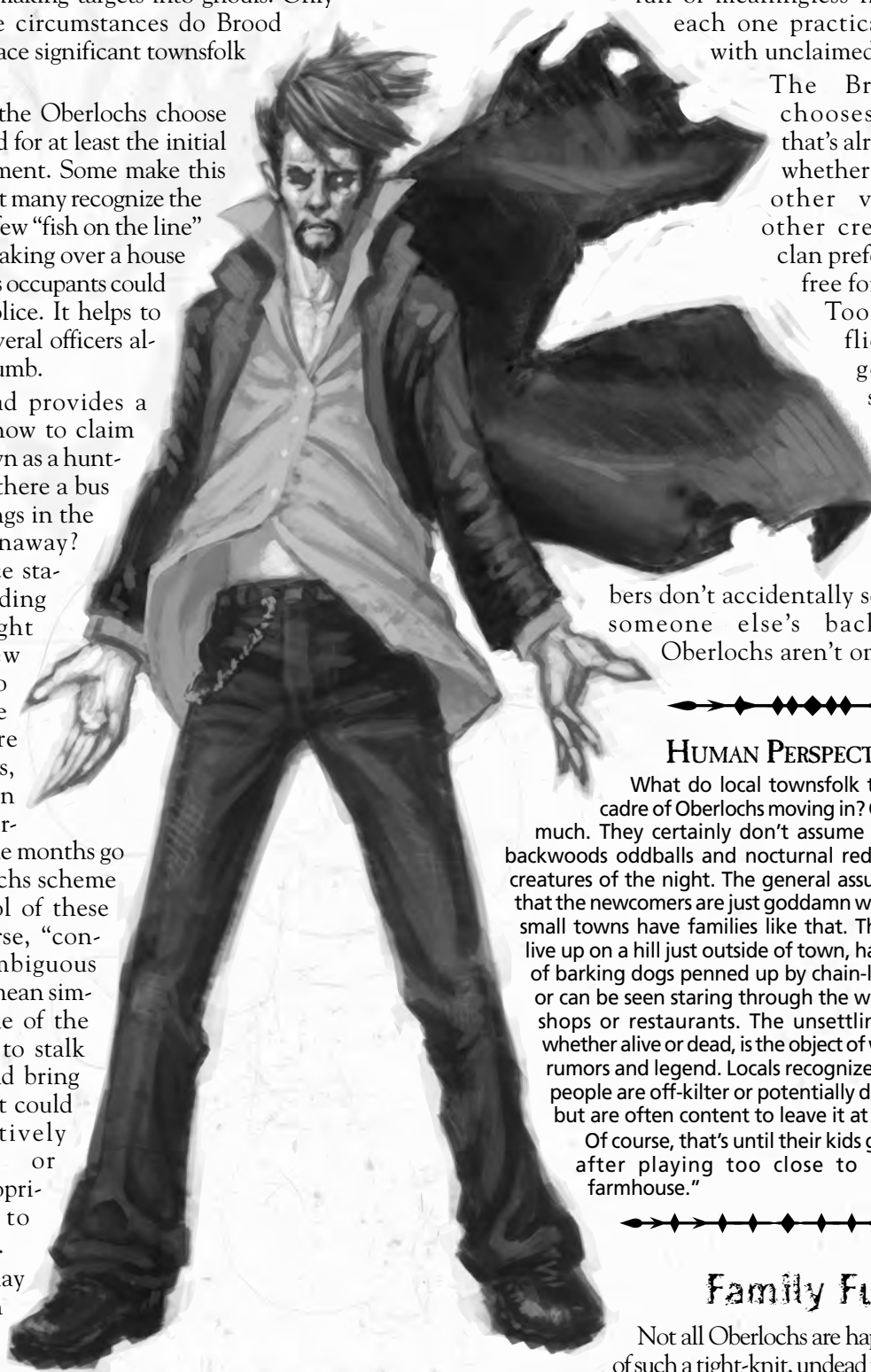
### HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

What do local townsfolk think of a cadre of Oberlochs moving in? Often, not much. They certainly don't assume that such backwoods oddballs and nocturnal rednecks are creatures of the night. The general assumption is that the newcomers are just goddamn weird. Most small towns have families like that. They might live up on a hill just outside of town, have a pack of barking dogs penned up by chain-link fence, or can be seen staring through the windows of shops or restaurants. The unsettling family, whether alive or dead, is the object of whispered rumors and legend. Locals recognize that such people are off-kilter or potentially dangerous, but are often content to leave it at that.

Of course, that's until their kids go missing after playing too close to "the old farmhouse."

### Family Fugitives

Not all Oberlochs are happy to be a part of such a tight-knit, undead family. Truth is,



most neonates are frightened and appalled at what they are, but are made to see the error of their ways by parents and elders. Happy or not, few Oberlochs ever escape the family's clutches. Oh, most try. Few are able to succeed for long, though.

Members who go over the fence often make it one or two towns down the road, maybe getting as far as a couple counties away. The Brood doesn't take to such treachery, and goes through Hell and high water to bring escapees back. The clan organizes what's commonly called a "rabbit hunt." Most times the escapee is found, corralled and returned, whether willingly or by force. The fugitive faces whatever justice the Grandmother or Grandfather deems appropriate. Punishment is usually harsh and torturous, but rarely involves destruction unless this isn't the first or even second attempt. Under those circumstances, getting the offender to cut himself his own switch has obviously taught him nothing, and the next "switch" is driven into his heart.

A handful of the Brood has managed to escape completely. They find relative safety in cities. While a hunting party may attempt to track a "rabbit" into the urban press, hunters lose much of their power in the city. Not only are family members uncomfortable or ignorant about metropolitan areas, but their allies there are few and far between.

Those rare Oberlochs who make it to the outside world of vampire society find it quite surprising. The sheer presence of a city may not be shocking (some individuals came from cities), but the existence and nature of other supernatural beings — especially other vampires — is often unforeseen. Leaving the relatively simple rules of the Brood behind means entering a realm with infinitely more complex social and political entanglements.

It's important to note that any Oberloch character who goes to the city as a fugitive is ignorant of most of vampire society, and may run afoul of the Traditions. Resident Kindred who come across such a newcomer may try to learn more about this aberrant bloodline (and may be surprised to discover that the countryside harbors more of these back-road bloodsuckers). Or they could try to put the Oberloch to Final Death should the rube breach the Traditions too often or too blatantly.

## Ignorance

"No man is an island," or so the saying goes, but the Oberlochs try very hard to make that proverb true. Family members have little interest in interacting with the outside world. Extending a hand to the unknown is an invitation to have it bitten off at the wrist. The Brood would rather remain insular and regionally powerful in the small towns it has infested.

This isolation translates into a general ignorance about other supernatural beings. Publicly, the family knows enough about Lupines (see below), very little about other vampires, and nothing about the existence of witches or wizards. Such ignorance is not applicable across the board, though.

While neonates almost certainly go dumb, old Oberlochs (some ancillae and the scarce few elders) know more than they're willing to share. It's inevitable that over a period of nearly two centuries some members have run into Kindred from other clans and covenants. While such run-ins haven't yielded a great deal of information, providing only a piecemeal understanding of vampiric existence outside the family, some Oberlochs at least realize that they're not alone in their condition. Obviously, the bloodline's progenitors (Old Alice, specifically) had awareness of other vampires, but none ever anticipated the scope of Kindred existence.

Some old family members have also had encounters with supposed witches. Most of these hypothetical snake charmers were just as isolated as the Oberlochs — women of the Jersey Pine Barrens capable of casting hexes, or Appalachian men who could tell the future by throwing turkey bones and reading animal droppings. It is as yet uncertain if the lineage has ever encountered "real" mages.

No matter what, the Oberlochs keep the existence of other supernatural creatures hidden from most family. Elders find it useful to keep the majority in the dark, making the oldest the be all, end all of the unearthly world. This code of silence does, however, leave elders alone to speculate about the connection between them and the world's denizens. Most are content to dismiss other Kindred as nothing more than inferior cousins, but some wonder if they themselves are the true aberrations.

It's rumored that some of the Brood have kidnapped a few "city" vampires, and keep them contained in old root cellars to learn more about the deviant relatives. Since none have ever witnessed such outsiders, it's hard to tell if such tall stories are just that, or if victims simply have yet to escape.

## Lupines

The Oberloch line has had its share of contact with werewolves. The first encounter was in 1922 in the small town of Henley, deep in the Jersey Pine Barrens. Local family members clashed with the brutish wolf-men over the course of several nights, engaging in a bloody, protracted game of cat-and-mouse. The vampires didn't know what the hell they were dealing with. Obviously, monsters existed; the Oberlochs were proof positive of that. But these things were different: savage and unkempt, coordinating attacks with a feral intelligence. The family didn't fare well. Only one member escaped, one-armed but with his unlife intact. That vampire, said to be a Grandfather of the Daniel clan, passed on what little he could discern to family members a few counties over.

It has since been an implicit family directive to learn more about shapechangers. Specifically, how to kill the Godforsaken predators. Some family members aren't quite experts on the subject of Lupines, but know more than most. The Brood asserts many "truths" that are actually homespun superstitions (the beasts are men who fornicated with



the Devil, or that werewolves aren't men at all, but vengeful spirits). One piece of Lupine lore that's both superstitious *and* accurate is that these creatures can be harmed by silver. (Indeed, the occasional Oberloch can be found in the cellar of his haven, smelting the previous owner's silverware down into weapons.) Curiously, many Oberlochs know more about werewolves than they do about other vampires.

### TEXAS SILVER

The western town of Fort Assumption is home to an old collapsed silver mine called the Babyhead Mine, named for the dried-up creek bed it parallels. The town, once booming, is now mostly devoid of a populace, being counted among the throng of ghost towns in the American West.

The town does have a few temporary occupants, though: three Oberloch vampires who subsist in a broken-down RV. These undead (two men by the names of Martin and Uriah, and a recently Embraced teenage girl who goes by Dani) travel to and from the ghost town for one purpose — to collect silver meant for those “damned critters.” These three single-minded Brood members cater to no discussions or alliances with werewolves, and hope to put every last one of them six feet under.

Despite the family's ancillary obsession with Lupines, they don't care enough about the beasts to get too close. The Oberlochs have little interest in a bloody territory war. If there's proof that werewolves are in an area and could potentially threaten a power base, the vampires are likely to pack their bags and get out of town. There's no reason to tempt fate. After fleeing, the family may return a few weeks later to test the waters again. If found secure, they probably settle down. If the Lupines continue to loom, that town becomes more or less “dead” to the clan. Only a rare few Oberlochs have attempted to defend their territory against werewolves. The family can relate even fewer success stories.

## Devotions

The Oberloch bloodline does not possess its own unique Discipline. The vampires don't really know enough about their condition, even after a hundred or more years, to truly manifest any unique strains of power. The fact of their deviance from the Gangrel clan is as much demarcation as they are intuitively capable of.

The family has, however, managed to evolve a few special tricks in the form of Devotions. These powers are largely secret and are meant for the bloodline alone. While it's not impossible that outsiders would or could learn these powers (see “Family Fugitives,” above, for an idea on how another vampire could encounter Brood members), it's unlikely. Besides, while these Devotions serve the family and its needs well, they may not be much good to other Kindred.

The following capabilities are only a sampling of what the Oberlochs know. The family is spread far and wide, but also very thin. Some clusters may know these tricks or be altogether ignorant of them. Others may have concocted their own home-brewed powers meant to suit the specifics of their nightly existence.

### Beloved Pet (Animalism ...., Protean ....)

One unspoken family tradition is that many Oberlochs keep pets. Different members keep critters for different reasons. Some prefer the company of animals to mortals or each other. Some raise and train animals for the purposes of being guard or pack animals. Others even keep beasts as an emergency source of Vitae. Most pet-keepers gravitate toward fairly mundane animals, usually dogs like Shepherds, Dobermans or Bull Terriers. The occasional Oberloch raises something unusual like a goat, hawk or mountain lion, but such exotic creatures are rare.

One thing is true for most pets: They're part of the family. Animals are loyal. More so than most people, the Brood believes. While pets may not be treated like royalty, they're granted a place approaching equality.

Of course, the downside of animals is that they die. Living things perish, and ghouled animals may still have a limited existence, one that typically falls far shorter than the span of its Oberloch master. Line members don't take well to their pets dying. It's like losing a brother or daughter.

Some Brood have devised a way to preserve beloved animals from the clutches of death. This Devotion, while far from pretty, actually brings an animal back to limited life, animating rotted flesh and splintered bones into a reasonable facsimile of the once-living creature.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** This Devotion requires no roll

**Action:** Special

The ritual required is not simple, demanding a considerable amount of time and preparation. The Oberloch sheds his own blood into the animal's rigid mouth. He must also destroy something sacred to him (perhaps a faded picture of his mortal mother or a trusty pocketknife), scatter the useless debris into a hole with the animal, and bury everything before sunrise. The element of sacrifice has become synonymous with raising a dead animal, but no one's really sure if it's a mystical/occult contributor or simply an offering to some unknown force. Regardless, at the rise of the next moon, the animal crawls free from its grave.

“Reborn” animals are quite unpleasant. Their forms are frozen in whatever stage of decomposition they were in before revivification. A beast's skin is patchy and mangy, and may bear festering wounds. A creature also reeks of putrefaction, like a day-warmed road kill.

A resurrected pet possesses a number of advantages and disadvantages. Aside from its hideous appearance, it's slow.

The animal's original Speed and Initiative are halved (with fractions rounded up), and any rolls involving Dexterity suffer a -1 penalty. Finally, the creature is highly vulnerable to flame; damage from fire is aggravated.

And yet, the creature gains a dot of Strength and two dots of the Resilience Discipline. It can regenerate one point of bashing damage per turn and one point of lethal damage per hour, reflexively. (This healing does not remove a creature's undead scars. The animal still retains the physical flaws and rotting flesh intrinsic to its unholy existence.) Reborn animals are immune to wound penalties, as well, and are not subject to unconsciousness rolls when their last Health boxes are filled with bashing damage. Health levels lost to lethal damage batter and tear a creature's flesh, but its parts continue to operate as it struggles to reassemble.

A creature reborn in this manner is unflinchingly loyal to *all* members of the Brood. A "beloved pet" never attacks an Oberloch unless manipulated by another vampire's use of Animalism. All attempts by non-bloodline members to manipulate a creature through Animalism suffer a -2 penalty.

An Oberloch can maintain a number of undead pets equal to her Animalism dots at one time.

This power costs 25 experience points to learn.

## Indomitable Aura (Dominate ..., Resilience ..)

Oberlochs utilizing this Devotion wear their preternatural toughness on their sleeve, so to speak. The vampire exudes an appearance of being unbeatable, as if his fortitude is so intense that any and all attacks against him are futile. He becomes frightening to behold, an undefeatable bully and monster. Oberlochs of particular Blood Potency (4 or higher) appear to grow taller and darker, whereas Oberlochs who possess Protean may appear to have skin made of stone or wood. (A combination of the two is possible.)

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Presence + Intimidation + Dominate versus the subject's Composure + Blood Potency

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

One roll is made for the vampire performing the feat, and successes are recorded. All beings who can see the Oberloch may be subject to the power (a contested roll is made for each, with successes achieved compared to those for the Oberloch). If the line member has the most successes, an onlooker is overwhelmed by a sense of futility in challenging him physically. Attacks of all affected beings suffer a -3 penalty. That includes use of Disciplines that inflict physical damage.

The Oberloch's Resilience dots are also added to any rolls involving Intimidation or Dominate, assuming actions are performed against those who lost their contested rolls.

This power remains active for one scene. So, newcomers can also be affected by the Oberloch's demeanor. Tak-

ing Mental- or Social-based actions against the Brood member is not penalized. Physical attacks against him are likely to fail, but use of deceit or Majesty is unaffected.

A vampire who uses the Auspex power Aura Perception to look at an Oberloch applying this Devotion observes a gun-metal gray aura. The image suggests nigh invincibility and makes the observer subject to a contested roll like any other onlooker.

The Devotion user may terminate this effect prematurely, and it ends if he is sent into torpor or destroyed.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

## Man to Beast (Protean ..., Dominate .., Animalism ..)

With this power, an Oberloch is able to reduce a subject's mental acuity to that of a common animal's. The victim's higher brain functions give way to base, feral needs (i.e., the reptilian urges of food, sex, sleep and shelter). In some cases, a subject can even be made to manifest bestial features, further degrading identity.

The Oberloch can suggest a type of animal to the subject, but the influence is not necessarily followed. A victim could react based on the kind of animal to which he feels most connection. How an animal behaves is also open to interpretation. (People might have different opinions on how a hog acts, for example.)

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Expression + Protean - subject's Resolve

**Action:** Instant

**Roll Results**

**Dramatic Failure:** The Devotion fails and the subject may not be affected by any uses of Dominate (including this and other Devotions that require Dominate) from the character until the next sunset.

**Failure:** Willpower is consumed, but the power fails with no effect. A successive attempt may be possible.

**Success:** The subject is reduced to feral, bestial behavior. Each success on the activation roll removes one die from the victim's Social and Mental dice pools for a number of hours equal to the Oberloch's Animalism score.

**Exceptional Success:** The victim also manifests animal features. One quality is gained for each success rolled at and in excess of five. (Five successes means one animal feature, six means two, seven means three, and so on.) A single feature could be a pig's snout, ears, tail or hooves. In addition to the dice-pool penalties imposed by a success, the victim suffers a mild derangement based on the experience that can be overcome only through roleplaying or therapy.

A victim of this power can be subject to only one application of it at a time. The target must also be within direct earshot of the user. Trying to use the power over the telephone has no effect.

This power costs 21 experience points to learn.

# QEDESHAH

YOU ARE MY CHILD NOW. MY BLOOD IS YOUR BLOOD. WE WILL SHARE THIS WORLD TOGETHER,  
BOTH ITS HORRORS AND ITS BLESSINGS.

The maternal instinct needn't die with the body in a vampire's Embrace. It is not a thing driven by love. It's something altogether more biological, more innate. Many mortals cross the threshold between life and the Requiem and leave any parental inclinations behind, choosing to dwell in the darkness of unlife and adopt complete and total self-interest. Vampires of the Qedeshah bloodline, however, do not choose such selfishness. At least, not from their perspective.

This lineage — composed purely of women, for men suffer a grotesquely failed Embrace — began just after the Judaic Babylonian exile of ancient nights, or so the story goes. Once temple whores and priestesses to a purported deity known as the Queen of Heaven, the bloodline has shifted and adapted over the ages, joining the modern Danse Macabre as very different creatures from their progenitors.

The Qedeshah, also known as Hierodules, see themselves as the mothers of all the Damned. Nursemaids to the Kindred. The Embrace is a curse to be sure, but the Qedeshah prefer to see it as closing one door and opening another. The Requiem does not end their matronly duties, they say. Nor does it kill the capacity for unfettered creation. The Qedeshah understand that they can have children, and while creating offspring now involves a considerably different process than before, both acts are still wet with blood and wracked with pain. The rules of larger Kindred society deny a vampire's act of procreation without a temporal Prince's permission, but the Hierodules ask doesn't such a ban deny the freedom that God Himself granted? He obviously allows for the proliferation of the Damned through the Embrace. Isn't that permission enough?

**Parent Clan:** Mekhet

**Nickname:** Hierodules

**Covenant:** The Qedeshah belong to all — and none — of the covenants. As a bloodline, they do not hold literal allegiance to any of the factions, for none of those groups espouse precisely what members of this bloodline are taught to believe. The Hierodules mask themselves as members of all covenants, however, because they need to remain hidden (their flagrant denial of the Traditions would get them destroyed). Most tend to gravitate toward the populist Invictus or the religious

Lancea Sanctum. The women would like to have more members hidden among the Ordo Dracul and Carthians, but so far such attempts have yielded little fruit.

The Lancea Sanctum is a curious conundrum for the Qedeshah. In a sense, it's easy to hide among the group's ranks, in part because belief systems are at least similar enough on the surface. Both pay homage to God and agree that He is directly behind the existence of vampires. Of course, the Qedeshah have a number of "alternate" theological beliefs, too, including the existence of the lesser divinity the Queen of Heaven. Such conviction makes the

Qedeshah directly heretical to the Spear. Elder Sanctified may even recall standing orders to drag these "vampire mothers" before Archbishops for persecution. Thus, Qedeshah who mask themselves as Sanctum members walk a thin line. It's easy enough to take part in some of the Sanctum's rites, but should a Qedeshah be revealed, her Requiem may be cut painfully and prematurely short.

Of all of the covenants, the Hierodules have most in common with the Circle of the Crone. At least, that seems to be the case. Both groups recognize that undeath is an unnatural but powerful state, forcing a once-living thing into a lifeless existence. Both also revere a semi-mythical feminine being. The similarities end there, though. The Qedeshah do not count themselves as sorceresses or witches, and maintain that their origins are Judeo-Christian, believing in a patron goddess from Hebrew tradition. And yet, Acolytes do believe in a kind of "Kindred empowerment," which allows the Qedeshah to exist somewhat easier (though still hidden) among such vampires.

**Appearance:** Virtually all Qedeshah are female. Almost no male members of the bloodline exist. The Hierodules do not care about uniformity in physical characteristics. It is far easier to stay hidden when shape, age and dress are heterogeneous.

**Haven:** Different Qedeshah choose different styles of haven. Many see themselves as humble matrons (even martyrs), choosing simple, minimalist affairs that require only minor rent and upkeep. Other women, more interested in eternal potential, lean toward opulence and luxury. One common factor is that Qedeshah tend to choose havens near other Kindred. Not only does this allow them to act





appropriately as “mothers” of other vampires, but it’s far easier to remain hidden in the crowd than apart from it.

**Background:** The Hierodules covertly reject the Second Tradition, Embracing more often than most Kindred. God has granted them the right of creation, they believe, and the women do not reject His will lightly.

The single requirement for a Qedeshah’s Embrace is that the Requiem must unquestionably be better than a life of continued suffering. It is in this way that the curse becomes an endowment. The Hierodules choose women who are beaten and diminished by life, whether they have suffered at the hands of abusive husbands or fathers, or have been driven to addiction, homelessness or mental illness. It isn’t necessary for a newly sired Qedeshah to have the characteristics of a “good mother.” The limitless time of the Requiem can be devoted to instilling such qualities.

**Character Creation:** Social Attributes are favored among the Qedeshah, not only for the practical purpose of remaining hidden, but because such traits suit motherhood more than any others. Curiously, many Qedeshah also prize mortals in good bodily condition, with strong Physical Attributes. Some Hierodule understand the need to protect their “children” (whether such offspring are technically ghouls, childer or simply “adopted” Kindred depends on the vampire), and such protection sometimes requires violent contact. Like a mother lion guarding her cubs, a Qedeshah may need to rely on some manner of physical being to keep her “babies” safe.

In regard to Skills, a Qedeshah may have dots in Survival (the once-mortals were survivors in some fashion or another), but probably favors Social Skills such as Expression and Socialize. Merits tend to manifest as Allies and Contacts, for a Hierodule needs these to survive and remain protected throughout the Requiem. Many also have dots in Haven that go toward a well-placed and convenient home, or that contribute to a sanctuary (see below).

**Bloodline Disciplines:** Auspex, Celerity, Embro-cation, Obfuscate

**Weakness:** The Qedeshah suffer the same weakness as their parent clan, the Shadows. The women take an additional point of aggravated damage when suffering wounds from sunlight or fire.

Unfortunately, Hierodules also have frailties intrinsic to their own bloodline, birthed when their supposedly divine progenitor laid the Curse upon them. When a normal vampire drinks from a mortal, that human is lulled into a lost and pleasurable state. When one of the Qedeshah drinks from a mortal, the human feels no such physical rapture, only extreme pain. The human suffers no wounds (the pain is more spiritual than tangible), but it causes him to scream or potentially thrash about. (Storytellers are encouraged to roll Wits + Composure



for potential witnesses to a Hierodule's attack.) For a subject to willingly undergo the Qedeshah's ministrations costs him a Willpower point to endure the pain.

A Qedeshah's bite has other consequences, as well. She may Embrace only women. Any and all attempts to Embrace males have met with disastrous results. Men spend 24 hours in extreme agony, which doesn't allow them to do anything, not even eat or sleep. After that period, the man expires in a gory display. His skin splits, his teeth fall out and he vomits gallons of blood and fluids. When the man finally expires, the Embracing Hierodule automatically suffers two points of aggravated damage as her blood burns within her desiccated arteries.

**Organization:** Formal meetings are difficult for a persecuted bloodline. And yet, they're encouraged whenever possible. These meetings, held in places referred to as "sanctuaries," are offered on days corresponding to most Judeo-Christian holidays (Easter, Christmas, Good Friday, Rosh Hashanah). No Qedeshah is required to attend, but most make the effort (if only to maintain Status).

The only official position within the bloodline is that of the *Dea Nutrix*. This rank, literally translated as "nurse goddess," is granted to any member who maintains a place of sanctuary (which is usually a haven located outside a city, such as in a closed-down church or abandoned schoolhouse). The *Dea Nutrix* calls, holds and directs meetings. This is a position of honor within the bloodline and requires at least Clan Status • and Haven ••• for both the position and the location of the sanctuary.

**Concepts:** Prostitute, homeless woman, battered wife, teenage runaway, addict, Cancer patient, nun, nurse

## HISTORY

What the Qedeshah believe about their origins and what is true differs in many places. The history of the bloodline is marred by legend and inaccuracy. For the most part, the Hierodules believe what they believe, and hold negligible interest in the "reality" of their birth.

## WHORES OF THE TEMPLE

This is what the Qedeshah claim as their history: Before the Babylonian exile, the temples of Judea were presided over by men. Hebrew priests and officiates were almost exclusively male. Women were not consistently allowed to venerate Yahweh in any formalized manner. As a result, many women honored both the religion of the Hebrews and the beliefs of multifarious fertility cults. They usually merged the two devotions, forming a syncretic agglomeration of faiths. Yahweh was believed to be the divine patriarch of heaven and man, but the women also accepted the existence and worship of one or several subservient goddesses.

Those who believed in one goddess often maintained that this fertile matron was literally the second "half" of Yahweh, and they called her Shekhina or simply the Queen of Heaven. Others accepted that this goddess was one of

many cultic mothers, such as Ishtar, Astarte, Ashareh, Anath and even the dark Sumerian queen Ereshkigal. Whatever the specifics, women were allowed to offer faith in this system unhindered. They were also allowed to be priestesses, and the class chosen to be such officiates was the temple whores, called Qedeshah or Hierodules.

The holy prostitutes served many functions within the temples and towns of Judea and beyond. Aside from the core purpose of cultic sexual practice, the Hierodules were counselors, singers of lamentation, nurses and priestesses of the Queen of Heaven. They prayed to idols of the goddess (usually wooden or clay pillars called *dea nutrix*, indicating a goddess of nurture) and provided aid to those who suffered. The temple harlots could not marry, as such practice was forbidden by Judaic law. Women who were considered unsuitable brides for Hebrew men — specifically, women who were no longer virgins through wanton behavior or rape — were accepted as Hierodules without question, inducted into serving the holy needs of the Queen of Heaven.

Temple prostitutes were allowed to serve in such capacity until the time of the Hebraic exile into Babylonia. After the exile, everything changed.

## DENIAL OF THE GODDESS

The time of syncretism was over. No longer would any deities other than Yahweh be observed. In an effort to wipe clean any pantheistic influences, the Hebrews delivered the Deuteronomic laws that proscribed any functionary — specifically the Hierodules — who served "immoral" purposes or who worshipped outside the accepted Lord God.

The priestesses were targeted as blasphemers and given little chance to change their ways. Altars and statues were destroyed. Sacred groves dedicated to worship were burned. The homes of the Hierodules were razed, and many of the temple whores themselves were imprisoned, exiled or murdered in secret. Such slashing and burning took place over a period of years, and the house of the Lord was duly "cleansed."

## PRESENCE OF THE QUEEN

Not far from the hills of Megiddo and the town of Nazareth sat a fallen village that was once a royal Canaanite city. This town, called Taanach, was the location of one of the few remaining goddess temples. The shrine — actually at the bottom of a large, long-forgotten cistern — was home to a handful of lingering Qedeshah, who prayed to the Queen of Heaven to save them. The women gathered around the altar made of baked earth and old blood, and waited for a savior — or an executioner.

Initially, no savior came for them. Men from nearby Nazareth came to punish the blasphemous women, instead, and dragged them into the night where they would be killed under the open sky, where God could see.

But then, she came. A woman, radiant of form and with bright, flashing eyes silently crossed the plain with

surprising speed, murdering the men in one fell swoop. She spoke to the Qedeshah with a commanding voice, claiming to be the very being they venerated — the Shekhina, the Queen of Heaven.

The goddess did not reward her disciples. She did not present words of divine gratitude or holy accolade. Instead, she spat invective at her priestesses, accusing them of laxity in worship and impurity of soul. She called them dogs, insects and a host of other names, and each slight and slur wounded the Hierodules.

It was then that she gave them their new charge. The world, she said, was mired in suffering. Mankind endured much pain, but some men had become monsters, and those monsters suffered most of all. She told them they must become monsters to fulfill their purpose, which was to be mothers to all the demons of the world, helping to soothe the anguish of the Damned. The Qedeshah would be the secret matrons and nurses of Hell itself.

This woman — this *goddess* — Embraced the temple whores, and then left them.



### IDENTITY OF THE GODDESS

Who was the “goddess” who created the vampiric Qedeshah by sheer force of will? Was she really divine? And what do the Hierodules truly know of her?

Young Qedeshah of little faith suggest that she was not a goddess at all. They say she was divine in no way beyond being a mad vampire caught in the throes of a tortuous Requiem. Others say it’s all just a tall tale, and even then is inconsistent, the story changing from teller to teller. The town may change (“Was it Taanach or Lachish?”), as may the creator’s name (“She was Anath, bride of Baal, daughter of Yahweh,”). And yet, regardless of perspectives and details, believers in the story never question their creator’s divinity.

Those Qedeshah who are simply resigned to their reality accept that the so-called Queen of Heaven was likely a Mekhet vampire, potentially a woman who was once a temple whore herself. Was she scorned by the patriarchy of the religious order? Was she persecuted and destroyed, but saved by some other vampire? Her reasoning and story remain hidden behind that impenetrable curtain of history, and stand little chance of ever being revealed. Nobody is even sure if she is around anymore to ask. And even if she were, could her account be relied upon after all these ages?



### SOCIETY AND CULTURE

As a scattered, disparate bloodline that attempts concealment from the rest of Kindred society, it’s difficult for the Qedeshah to maintain any kind of unified society or codified laws or beliefs. Line members make every attempt, however, to teach some presumed universal truths and

behaviors. Such information is passed along as a function of pseudo-spiritual philosophy and simple pragmatism.

### MOTHERHOOD OF THE DEAD

The Qedeshah teach one another that they are quite literally meant to be the mothers of Kindred. These women believe that they belong to a singular lineage, one created by the actions of God and the Queen of Heaven. They’re meant to be the matrons of vampire society. It goes beyond that, though. They believe the motherly instinct drives them, their blood literally urging them to act in accord with matronly duties. Even if a Hierodule was raised in a vacuum with no contact with others of the same blood, she would feel the same instinct.

Of course, being a “mother” among Kindred is not only a difficult proposition, it isn’t concretely defined. Technically speaking, motherhood isn’t possible as a vampire. Such parentage is supernatural, not natural, and undead birth can only come from death. The Qedeshah, unlike other Kindred, see these realities not as a denial of maternity, but as a “second chance” at it. Some even see the Embrace as an advanced means of procreation, a form of reproduction that comes with choice and control, whereby parents do not perish and children do not abandon their blood relations.

Regardless of the beliefs and blood-borne impulses of the Hierodules, Kindred society maintains firm disdain — if not violent reproach — for Kindred creating offspring. The Second Tradition, while clearly an oft-ignored convention, can still get Qedeshah destroyed or exiled for their flagrant disavowal. Some women find other ways to express their incontrovertible motherhood. Others are willing to take the chance.

### THE EMBRACE

The first — and in a sense the last — choice a Qedeshah comes to in regard to expressing her matronly instinct is the Embrace. Hierodules believe that the Embrace’s mere existence proves that it’s sanctioned by God. Most Qedeshah wish to create many childer, but they recognize that such brazen disregard for the Second Tradition would do them and their progeny little good. Prevailing Kindred society simply precludes such creation.

Some, however, defy the Second Tradition as a violation of their rights, both biological and spiritual. Qedeshah who actively snub the Second Tradition tend to Embrace freely and without care. Such a Hierodule may drag only a single mortal into the Requiem over a 10-year period, while another may bring three or four into unlife in a single night. Of course, any Prince or Priscus who catches wind of such treachery is sure to take quick action. Qedeshah who choose to Embrace without caution are often exiled outside of their city or are destroyed outright. Some escape unharmed or are able to hide their children, but such luck doesn’t usually last long.







## EUNUCHS

The Qedeshah cannot Embrace men. Any attempt to do so fails miserably, and harms the mother as well. The bloodline is still home to a rare few male members, though.

How is this possible? When a Mekhet from outside the bloodline reaches Blood Potency 4 or higher, he may choose to join the ranks of the Qedeshah (provided one of the bloodline allows it).

Unfortunately, such a choice has a grim consequence. Once a male vampire becomes part of the line, his Vitae is sterile and dead. His blood no longer carries the curse; he cannot Embrace or turn mortals into ghouls. His blood functions properly in all other ways, though. He can instigate or become part of Vinculums, he can exhaust blood to heal wounds or activate Disciplines, and he can drink blood and feed his own to others. But no Embrace and no ghouls. (Any pre-existing ghouls or childer remain; they do not explode or disappear in an exhalation of blood.)

Under these circumstances, few men are willing to join the bloodline. The few who have joined over the last several centuries have done so *because* of those very consequences, hoping to destroy some small part of their awful selves, guaranteeing that they will never be able to drag another into the never-ending horror of the Requiem.



## ADOPTION

Fortunately, many Qedeshah are willing and able to control their urges and restrain themselves from creating offspring left and right. Procreative energy is simply diverted so that a line member may still fulfill her matronly passion.

One option is adoption. Ultimately similar to the human practice, it involves a Qedeshah choosing another vampire to be her “child.” Qedeshah usually choose neonates for this role (after all, the term *neonate* implies *infant*), and in most cases both vampires agree to this pseudo-familial relationship. And yet, some Qedeshah choose Kindred who may decline the opportunity — or worse, who may not even know that such an opportunity exists. Targeted neonates can be kidnapped and taken away, potentially to a Qedeshah’s haven, where the young vampire is “mothered” by whatever standard the Qedeshah upholds.

The reasons for adoption vary. Some Hierodules simply find other vampires that need their aid. Cries for help go a long way toward drawing a Qedeshah’s concern. Many line members came from the lowest levels of mortal society, so are sympathetic to someone with similar needs. A member may even try to rescue a neonate from an abusive or outright sadistic sire (though what the Qedeshah perceives as “sadistic” may be very different from the neonate’s opinion).

Most (though not all) adoptions are sealed with the blood bond. The resulting sense of love between the

two vampires isn’t precisely genuine, but it helps a Hierodule fill the void.

## GHOULS

A lesser form of expressing motherhood involves creating ghouls. Subjects are chosen from any of society’s strata, but most come from the same pool of down-and-outs from which the bloodline’s members might have originated. The poor, the destitute and the used and abused. Curiously, many Qedeshah also choose men as ghouls, if only because they cannot Embrace men into the blood.

Qedeshah ghouls manifest a few subtle but noticeable quirks. Many become meek and seemingly helpless (thus allowing a Hierodule to enact her matronly instincts all the more). Some are also feminized, even men. Female ghouls seem almost exaggerated in walk, voice and demeanor, while males tend toward androgyny. Nobody is precisely sure why this is, but common sense suggests it’s because of the overtly feminine nature and population of the bloodline.

Occasionally, particularly desperate Qedeshah ghoul children, emulating motherhood from life, but also to empower beaten or defeated children to oppose their parents or oppressors.

## DEGREES OF DARKNESS

On the surface, the Qedeshah are ultimately compassionate beings. They certainly intend to be; motherhood is not meant to involve cruelty or brutality. Most are capable of expressing such gentleness, repressing the darkness of their Kindred souls long enough to attempt some good for other vampires. Acting as surrogate mothers allows them to help the Damned find some kind of center, even aiding all involved to hold onto their Humanity when all else seems lost.

And yet, the road to Hell truly is paved with good intentions. While Hierodules may perceive their motherly intentions as best for all, the sentiment may not be reciprocated. Sometimes maternal instincts get out of hand, doing more harm than good. A Qedeshah who Embraces a handful of teenagers in a given night may overestimate her ability to handle and parent these wayward neophytes. The poor young vampires enter unlife guideless and without the firm hand of a strong mother, which may ultimately get them sent to an untimely demise. Alternately, a Qedeshah who takes a neonate away from an abusive sire may not fully grasp the consequences of her action. Rescuing him may seem right at the time, but it may call all manner of trouble down upon both their heads, even if that trouble comes from the furious sire alone.

Harm done by a forceful mother could also be devastating. Some Hierodules — perhaps old vampires who have long suppressed themselves, or ones who were particularly frail mortals — just can’t handle their compulsions. Breakdowns may be temporary and last only a few



nights, or could last decades. In such a period, a Hierodule takes irrational and even violent actions. A few Qedeshah have actually kidnapped other vampires (again, usually neonates) with the intent of raising them. The mother's mental faculties are unfit to allow any kind of real care, however. She typically ends up torturing a neophyte psychologically or physically in an effort to express her "love."

One infamous Hierodule called herself Mother Mary. She didn't kidnap just one neonate. She traveled from city to city, managing to survive long enough to abduct *dozens* of newly sired vampires. She finally settled in a country haven, where she conditioned her victims through grueling periods of reward and punishment, pausing long enough to line them up like dolls and dress them in outfits that she had sewed. It took years to track Mary down. By that time her "babies" were too deranged to be fit for Kindred society. Rumor suggests that her awful children are still out there somewhere.

## REMAINING HIDDEN

Some vampires are aware of the Qedeshah. The bloodline has not been able to conceal itself completely over the ages. The few elders who remember the Qedeshah believe them to be lunatics. What vampire chooses a path of motherhood, attempting to empower the Curse? Not only are line members regarded as insane, they're decried as heretics to Kindred society.

It isn't altogether too difficult for Hierodules to remain hidden. At least, not at first. They tend to mask themselves as Mekhet. The problem of staying hidden arises when a member wanders afield, running afoul of the Second Tradition. A solitary mother who's determined to protect her own family might turn a blind eye to the persecution of a fellow line member. That isolation is ultimately shortsighted, though. Some elders understand that where there's one of the line, there could be many, many others, and a purge gets underway. Thus, where one Qedeshah is endangered, solidarity tends to endanger them all. Fortunately for the bloodline, its kind are little known and therefore escape casual notice until some mother over indulges her impulses.

## WORSHIP AND VENERATION

The Hierodules accept that they owe their existence to divine intervention, believing that their bloodline literally spawned from the Vitae of a goddess. Having almost no written account of their beginnings, most of what the bloodline tells its childer is oral legend. This story — which may change in the telling from

woman to woman — almost universally includes the goddess as Hebraic in origin and as half the Judeo-Christian God or as a being subservient to Him. Regardless of the story, the current conclusion is that the patron goddess and her offspring (i.e., the Hierodules) serve Yahweh. None are equal to the King of Heaven, and the Queen of Heaven is his second.

In the past, much of this legend was the focal point of the bloodline's very existence. While motherhood was certainly important, it was possible only because the Queen of Heaven begat the bloodline and gave it purpose. Hierodules were once very spiritual as a result. They engaged in prayer circles, offering praises and hymns to Yahweh and then to Shekhina. Such faith was not only encouraged, but expected.

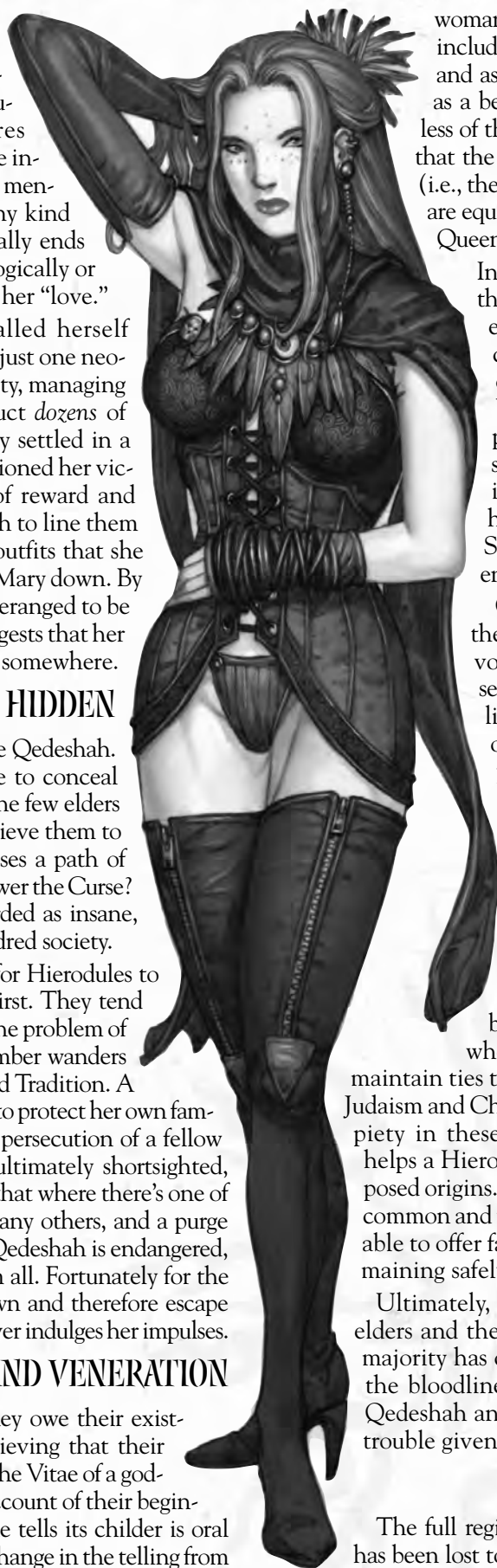
Over the past hundred years or so, the bloodline has lost some of its devotion, becoming predominantly secular. Most Qedeshah tonight pay lip service to the religious aspects of the line, saying the occasional prayer or using religiously loaded greetings ("May the Mother of Heaven see you safe"), but only elders offer any real piety or devotion anymore.

This transition has occurred in part because modern vampire society is overcrowded. Venerating such ancient and syncretic beliefs would reveal Qedeshah for who they are. Some Qedeshah also maintain ties to the more common practices of Judaism and Christianity. Achieving some small piety in these overarching religions at least helps a Hierodule show deference to her supposed origins. By venerating Yahweh in a more common and unexceptional manner, she is still able to offer faith to God the Father, while remaining safely in the larger fold.

Ultimately, the rigorous religious beliefs of elders and the diffused practices of the young majority has caused something of a schism in the bloodline. The rift has yet to cause the Qedeshah any lasting harm, but it may bring trouble given enough time and conflict.

## RITUALS AND BELIEFS

The full regimen of the bloodline's doctrines has been lost to the ages. Elders are incapable of



remembering them, and the young Qedeshah don't care enough to practice them. A few customs are perpetuated, mostly by elders, and some modern Hierodules take the time to pick and choose from these as befits their Requiem.

- Offer prayers and libations first to Yahweh, the Lord Father

- Offer hymns and incense second to Shekhina, the Queen of Heaven

- The Embrace is holy and sanctioned by God. To not Embrace is to defy God.

- Anoint your children's foreheads with a tincture of blood and oil

- Never kill a human in hunger. Motherhood brings life, not death.

A few Qedeshah also practice strange, more extreme rituals. Some elders cut themselves once a month, letting Vitae spill in an effort to simulate the menstrual cycle. Others may feed on only children and infants in hopes of growing more "in touch" with their maternal instincts.

Some also establish small altars to the Queen of Heaven in their havens. These shrines take many forms: wooden pillars with female figures carved in them, clay fertility figures and even icons representing the biblical Mary.

## SANCTUARY

One practice that remains strong in the bloodline is the maintenance of "sanctuary." A sanctuary is meant to be a safe house for condemned Kindred (usually women, though not necessarily). This vampiric "half-way house" is a communal haven established by an old Qedeshah (called *Dea Nutrix*, or "nurse goddess") as a place for victimized Kindred.

If a Qedeshah finds a neonate who suffers torture at the hands of his sire, she may offer him succor in the form of sanctuary. Some Hierodules don't ask, acting on the principle that some beings simply don't know what's best for them. With that in mind, a Qedeshah abducts the vampire in a supposed act of "goodwill" and "motherhood."

The conditions required for a Kindred to be allowed entry into a sanctuary are subjective, given to the whims and interests of the founding Qedeshah. One may believe that an ancillae hunted by the Lancea Sanctum as a heretic deserves asylum, while another may feel that such a reckless creature warrants whatever suffering he brings down upon himself. If terms of welcome into a sanctuary are too broad, vampires crowding together could lead to blood-soaked conflict. Needless to say, doors are always opened to fellow Hierodules, especially when they and their childer are subject to a blood hunt.

Some Qedeshah create sanctuaries away from cities, but near some kind of blood source, like a town. A remote sanctuary might be founded at an old hotel, a derelict schoolhouse or even in an abandoned mine. Distance from cities offers some respite for refugees, but also little avenue for escape if inhabitants are hunted down. Sanctuaries

established in cities could be located anywhere: the sub-basement of a tenement, deep within an old subway tunnel, or in a well-guarded mansion should a *Dea Nutrix* be wealthy (or cruel enough to take the place from its mortal occupants). Such urban retreats are often launch points for refugees. They can't stay (too many vampires in one place would reveal the location), but escapes from undead authorities can be prepared and initiated from these sites.

Sanctuaries aren't strictly halfway houses, though. They serve as general meeting places for line members. Gatherings are usually held on holy days. Services were once overtly religious, but are now opportunities for Qedeshah to drop all pretense and be what they believe themselves to be — mothers. Meetings also allow them to teach other, newly sired Hierodules exactly what such a calling means, and what's involved in offering motherhood to accursed creatures.

Of course, some sanctuaries are not the places of peace and safety that they're advertised to be. They've been twisted into menageries by Qedeshah mad with the urge to procreate. Such locales are less about asylum and more about trapping "pretty bugs" in a jar so that the presiding *Dea Nutrix* can take care of them.

## EMBROCATION

Once, the temple harlots used the act of embrocation to salve the suffering of the wounded. The process involved concocting a balm or petroleum of various oils, herbs and animal milks, and applying it to injuries and abrasions. Other acts fell to the priestess-whores, as well. The harlots ritually washed the men and women of the temple, bathing them in sacred waters (feet, in particular, were the focus of such consecration). The women also sang lamentations for the fallen, offering whorls of burning incense to both Yahweh and the Queen of Heaven. All of these deeds were meant to call the attention of the divine pair, and focus it on the supplicants. Hebrew priests were the link between God and mankind, and the Hierodules were the link between humanity and Shekhina, the female half of Heaven.

When cast into the damnation of the Embrace, Qedeshah faith and practice manifested in the Blood as a Discipline. Most of the powers involve calling up some of a Hierodule's own blood (though it doesn't always look like blood, depending on the nature of the capability) and applying it to another being. Some of what Embrocation entails can be masked as nothing more than odd behavior on the part of the performer; most vampires shrug it off as the strange behavior of another of their kind. Yet, a Hierodule using this Discipline in front of others runs the constant risk of being noted as something other than what she claims to be. Many Hierodules consider the risk worthwhile, but should be wary of the consequences.

## • MASAHA ("TO ANOINT")

The Qedeshah, as mortals, were known for their succor. Such aid granted strength (even if it was more metaphori-



cal than physical). This Discipline grants something similar. The Hierodule expends a small portion of her own blood, which oozes from pores on her palms and fingertips (no cutting is necessary, this seeping of Vitae is automatic). The woman then daubs the blood across the forehead of another creature, granting him temporary strength of spirit and will in the coming night.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Medicine + Embrocation

**Action:** Instant

**Roll Results**

**Dramatic Failure:** The subject of the Discipline (human, Kindred or otherwise) suffers a point of bashing damage automatically.

**Failure:** The Vitae is spent, but the Hierodule is unable to affect the subject. A successive attempt may be possible.

**Success:** Any  
Resolve +  
Composure  
rolls made  
for the

subject before the next sunrise receive a bonus equal to the Hierodule's own Resolve dots. (For vampires, this benefit is particularly useful in resisting hunger and fear frenzies.)

**Exceptional Success:** The Hierodule's Resolve + Composure is added to the dice pool rolled for the subject.

The number of subjects who can enjoy the benefits of this power at one time equal the mother's Resolve dots. Only one application of the power can be used on a subject at a time. All those attempted after the first fail, regardless of successes rolled. A Hierodule cannot bestow this gift upon herself. She can rescind it at will from a subject, though, even before the full duration elapses. If the Hierodule is sent into torpor or destroyed, her gift persists until the next sunset.

If a subject resists being touched for any reason, the systems of p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** apply to make contact.

## ..LEBHONAH ("WHITE INCENSE")

Incense figured prominently in some rituals performed by the whores of the temple. This power perpetuates the tradition through the Blood, in this case smoldering from the user's very blood. She vomits up a mouthful of Vitae, which burns and

boils (doing no damage to the Qedeshah). White, bitter-smelling smoke curls from her mouth and nose as a result.

All who smell the smoke are subject to a feeling similar to drunkenness, coupled with a dizzy languor. Those close by suffer vertigo and lose focus. Hierodules typically use this ability to steal the tension from a room, preventing or interrupting violence.

Vampires do not breathe, but are still capable of inhaling and are thus subject to the effects of this power.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Subterfuge + Embrocation versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive



## Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The blood does not turn to smoke. The Hierodule simply vomits up blood, perhaps publicly. A dramatic failure rolled for a subject is treated as an exceptional success for the Hierodule (see below).

**Failure:** A point of Vitae is spent to activate the power, but no effect occurs. A successive attempt might be possible. In the contested roll, an equal number or the most successes are rolled for a subject and he is immune to the effect for the remainder of the scene.

**Success:** The most successes are rolled for the Qedeshah. A human, vampire or other being finds it difficult to take actions or think clearly. All dice pools for that victim suffer a penalty equal to the Hierodule's Embrocatation dots for the remainder of the scene.

**Exceptional Success:** The most successes — five or more — are rolled for the Qedeshah. In addition to the results of a success, all mortals affected fall into a deep sleep for eight hours. They awaken if touched or harmed in any way.

When this power is used, an activation roll is made for the Hierodule and the number of successes achieved is recorded. The range of the power is a number of yards radius equal to the Hierodule's Wits + Subterfuge dots. A contested roll is made for anyone in that vicinity, and for anyone who enters the area after it's established. The user herself is not affected by the power, but any allies may be.

The area of effect must focus on the creator. It persists for the remainder of the scene unless dispelled early, and moves with her as if a wind blows it. Maintaining the cloud requires no concentration. The mist is not thick enough to hide anyone or to obscure observation.

## ... MASHKEH ("TO DRINK")

A Hierodule can help soothe the physical wounds of another, but only through the vampire's bite. The Qedeshah must literally sink her fangs into the flesh of the subject, and she "drinks in" his suffering as if it were Vitae.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** No roll is required to activate this power. The Hierodule must bite the subject. If he resists, a grappling attempt is necessary — see, *Vampire*, p. 165). Once the Qedeshah successfully bites her target, she may "drink" up to one Health point per turn. Each point of damage is removed from the subject and transfers as Vitae to the Hierodule.

**Action:** Instant to activate

A subject's injuries are healed from right to left on his Health chart, starting with bashing, then lethal and then aggravated.

If a Hierodule consumes the bashing damage from a target, each point becomes one Vitae in her system. If the Hierodule consumes lethal damage, she gains a Vitae per Health point restored, but also suffers a point of bashing damage herself as she feels sympathy pain from the

subject's injuries. Draining aggravated damage from a target is difficult, but not impossible. The same application of points as for lethal damage applies, but use of the power now costs a Willpower dot rather than a Willpower point. If damage healed moves progressively from bashing to lethal to aggravated without interruption, any Willpower point spent early on may be exchanged for a dot. A Willpower dot is spent for the act of healing aggravated damage for a whole scene, for any number of subjects in that scene. It's not spent per wound or per subject healed.

This ability can be used only once per 24-hour period. It cannot be used on one's self. A subject can be healed, but not brought back from the dead.

Note that even while this power does a subject good, the Qedeshah bloodline weakness still applies. The rapture of the Kiss does not lull a subject into acquiescence. Rather, the experience is painful and he struggles against it. For a subject to willingly undergo the Qedeshah's ministrations costs the "patient" a Willpower point to endure the pain.

## .... BERITH ("THE COVENANT")

The Qedeshah use this power to create a different sort of bond between Kindred, something altogether separate from the traditional Vinculum. By simply touching a subject, a Hierodule may pass her blood to the individual. The blood literally flows from the pores of the Qedeshah's flesh and into the flesh of the target. It doesn't need to come from her hands, either — any part of exposed flesh does (some Hierodules seal this so-called covenant with a kiss). The power works only one-way; a Qedeshah may not take blood, only give it. The power does not require the target's consent.

The forcing of blood into another is actually not the primary reason for using this power. Many Hierodules seek the connection that results. Recipients of blood gain a sense of the Hierodule's location at any given time. The Hierodule is also granted a vague sense of where the target is. The power is not precise; no true vision is granted as to exactly what the other does. Berith does provide a direction sense, however, regardless of how far apart vampire and subject are, and confers a general sense of how distant they are from each other. This sense doesn't take into account obstacles, streets or other obstructions, it only causes the two to have an intuitive feel for where the other is.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** No roll is necessary to activate this power

**Action:** Instant

The Hierodule must make skin-to-skin contact with the target. (If the subject resists, the touching rules apply — *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 157.) In addition to the Willpower spent, the Qedeshah sacrifices a number of Vitae up to her Blood Potency, which is automatically conferred to the subject. If a recipient vampire can contain no more Vitae based on his Blood Potency, extra Vitae are wasted.

A recipient is one step closer to a Vinculum with the user and may be subject to blood addiction. If the recipient is a ghoul, he can make use of the Vitae as normal, to the usual limits that he can contain.

Blood donor and recipient both gain the Direction Sense Merit in regard to one another. They have no idea of the other's relative health or mentality, but generally know in what direction and how far away the other is.

A Qedeshah can maintain the bond of distance and direction with as many subjects at one time as she has Blood Potency dots. Once that limit has been reached, no more can be added unless a previous one is disconnected. (An abandoned subject literally loses the Direction Sense Merit in regard to his benefactor.) Breaking an old relationship does not undermine the power of the Vitae shared. A subject doesn't suddenly lose Vitae or cease to be blood bound or ghoul. Even if a Hierodule can maintain no more bonds of distance and direction with a new subject, she can still share blood with him.

If another Discipline is used on a subject with whom a Qedeshah currently shares a directional bond, a +2 bonus is gained on that power's activation roll.

If the Qedeshah is ever sent into torpor or meets Final Death, connections to her are severed seemingly inexplicably.

## .....TAHARAH ("RITUAL PURITY")

"Cleanliness is next to godliness." While the old saying is often used lightly, the Hierodules consider the precept vital. Cleanliness ultimately equals purity in their minds. Purity was often achieved through various washing rituals and consecrations. Some rituals affected the soul through the body. Others were broader, capable of sanctifying things rather than people. Objects could be consecrated, as could entire rooms.

Many Qedeshah operate out of what could be considered "second" havens or sanctums (though some unwise Hierodules use their own havens as places for counseling). Here, Qedeshah meditate on what it means to be one of the Damned, and how best to answer the calling of the Shekhina. Indeed, many Qedeshah bring others into their sanctums in an effort to counsel them and alleviate some of the anguish that assails the Kindred.

For the most part, a Hierodule's sanctum is nothing special — some place away from public view and other vampires, and peaceful enough to offer solace. Qedeshah with this level of mastery are capable of turning a sanctum into a very special and protected place.

This power involves a ritual in which a Hierodule's own blood is painted on the walls. What she paints matters little; only that she decorates the area with her own Vitae. Some apply handprints, others writing. The blood disappears into the walls, invisible without supernatural perception (such as possession of even the one-dot Auspex power).

The rite "purifies" the room, bolstering the Hierodule's self and protecting the domain from without. Several benefits are gained.

- No vampires within the sanctum are subject to frenzy, Wassail or Röttschreck. A vampire under one of these influences when he enters is immediately calmed.

- No vampires may enter the sanctum without first being invited in by the Hierodule.

- No one may be inside the sanctum and attack the Hierodule without a Willpower point being spent. Attacks from outside the locale directed in or on the place occur normally.

- Vampires who spend more than an hour in the sanctum may manifest the blush of life (see "Counterfeiting Life," **Vampire**, p. 156) without the expenditure of Vitae. This appearance persists for eight hours after a vampire leaves the place.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Expression + Embrocatation

**Action:** Extended (20 successes required; each roll represents an hour's preparation of the site). Vitae is spent at the beginning of the performance and is lost even if the activation fails.

## Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** All accumulated successes are lost and the locale is permanently ruined as a possible site for a sanctum. It may remain a personal haven, but cannot be consecrated as anything more.

**Failure:** No successes are gathered in the current period. If 20 successes cannot be accumulated, the attempt as a whole fails. A successive effort may be made no sooner than a week later.

**Success:** Successes are accumulated for the period. If all 20 are gained, the sanctum is established.

**Exceptional Success:** Five or more successes are added to the running total for the current period. Or a total of 25+ successes are gathered. A point of spent Willpower is restored to the creator in the latter case.

A Hierodule may perform this ritual only on an enclosed space (a room, house, apartment, chamber or small building). A sanctum persists indefinitely, or until its structure is destroyed, the creator dispels the effect, or the Qedeshah is subject to torpor of Final Death. The rite is often performed by old *Dea Nutrix* to create and enforce the peace in a sanctuary. No more than one application of this power can affect a place at one time.

A sanctum can be a vampire's own haven (acquired through the Haven Merit), or it can simply be a locale on which the Discipline's rituals are performed. In the latter case, the setting gains none of the benefits that an "official" haven bestows, beyond the rewards that the power itself confers. The Storyteller might also decide that a character can possess multiple havens, each paid for with different Haven traits maintained for each setting.

A Hierodule can maintain the Taharah rite on only one locale at a time. If a new locale must be established, the old one reverts to its normal self.



# RAKSHASA

I WILL STRIVE TO OBEY YOUR LAWS, BUT I MUST FULFILL OTHER DUTIES AS WELL.

In the last decade, several cities throughout Europe, the Americas and Australia have received immigrants from India. Hideous vampires called Rakshasas, who have petitioned Princes to accept them among local Kindred. Although few in number, these self-styled “Demons” present themselves as members of a large bloodline, a Nosferatu offshoot so old and pervasive that Indian Kindred treat it as a clan unto itself.

Hindu, mortal mythology describes rakshasas as a sort of demon. The horrific and evil monsters of those stories are deadly enemies of humanity and the gods themselves. They supposedly exercise their murderous malice with the help of a power to assume both human and animal form. The Indian Nosferatu claim they are the inspiration for the legend.

Vampiric Demons can fight as well as their mythical namesakes, and proudly claim the rank of Kshatriya (warrior) in the Hindu caste system. Indeed, some emigrants have traded on their martial prowess. Rakshasas who have taken up physical professions such as bodyguard or Hound distinguish themselves through great courage and loyalty. Others, however, offer to sell Kindred access to the realm of influence these vampires have established: shipping, specifically of the undead. Kindred who want to smuggle cargo into or out of a city can hire the Rakshasas and their ghoul minions. The Demons also claim they can safely ship other Kindred anywhere in the world... though few vampires are brave or trusting enough to accept the offer. Meanwhile, most Rakshasas seem genuinely concerned about building a reputation for honest dealings.

**Parent Clan:** Nosferatu

**Nickname:** Demons

**Covenants:** The covenants in India bear no relation to those known in Europe and the Americas. Rakshasas who come west describe themselves as Kshatriyas, or members of a warrior caste. In India, castes seem to play a role among the undead not unlike they do with mortals.

Of all western societies, the Lancea Sanctum offers the least to Demons and treats them with antipathy. The immigrants do not believe Sanctified quasi-Christian myths about the origin and purpose of vampires.



The Invictus and Carthians treat the Rakshasas as just one more faction to recruit in their political and business struggles. Members of both groups cultivate alliances with Demons in hopes of monopolizing their shipping services. Some Acolytes want to learn the mysticism of the East, though the Rakshasas pay little heed to magic. The Ordo Dracul likewise sees the Demons as possible routes to whatever occult lore the Kindred of India might possess. As yet, few western Rakshasas show much interest in joining the covenants, remaining unaligned.

**Appearance:** These Nosferatu tend toward grotesquely inhuman appearance, extreme even by their parent clan's standards. Rakshasas have skin colored pustulent yellow, rotten green or bruised blue. Their arms or legs may be too long or too short for their bodies, while their claws and fangs never retract.

Rakshasas often carry a dagger, a custom borrowed from mortal Sikhs as a means of demonstrating their status as warriors. While they may adopt turbans on formal occasions, emphasizing their difference from other Nosferatu, these immigrants prefer modern business suits (tailored for their misshapen forms) to traditional Indian garb.

**Haven:** The aristocratic Demons refuse to dwell in filth. Crypts and abandoned cellars are the humblest havens a line member may accept. Rakshasas who have enough talent at Obfuscate to pass for human may dwell in posh hotels, handsome townhouses or mansions. The Rakshasas say that back in India, their elders and leaders dwell in ancient palaces, fortresses, temples and royal tombs. Demons with sufficient skill at Protean often sleep while melded into earth or stone, but prefer to rest in the wall or floor of a pleasant, well-appointed haven.

**Background:** All Rakshasas come from the Indian subcontinent, particularly southern India and Sri Lanka. Players should consider what specific circumstance prompted a character to make the difficult passage to a distant land. The few line members Embraced in the West come from mortal stock of Indian descent,

though this tendency results in part from mere propinquity; Demons tend to dwell among their mortal countrymen and favor them as vampires and ghouls.

Most would-be Demons spend several years as ghouls before being Embraced. Rakshasas value hard work and street smarts, as well as aggression and ambition. They select their servants, and therefore their childer, from the full range of mortal society. In life, many Rakshasas were laborers, petty tradesmen, beggars, gang members or outright criminals. Other Demons select childer from the police or military, as the modern warrior elite. Like their parent clan, however, Rakshasas sometimes use the Embrace to punish mortals who take great pride in their looks, standing or wealth. Such nascent line members must endure years of humiliation and abuse, and must work twice as hard as any other childer to gain acceptance in the lineage.

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

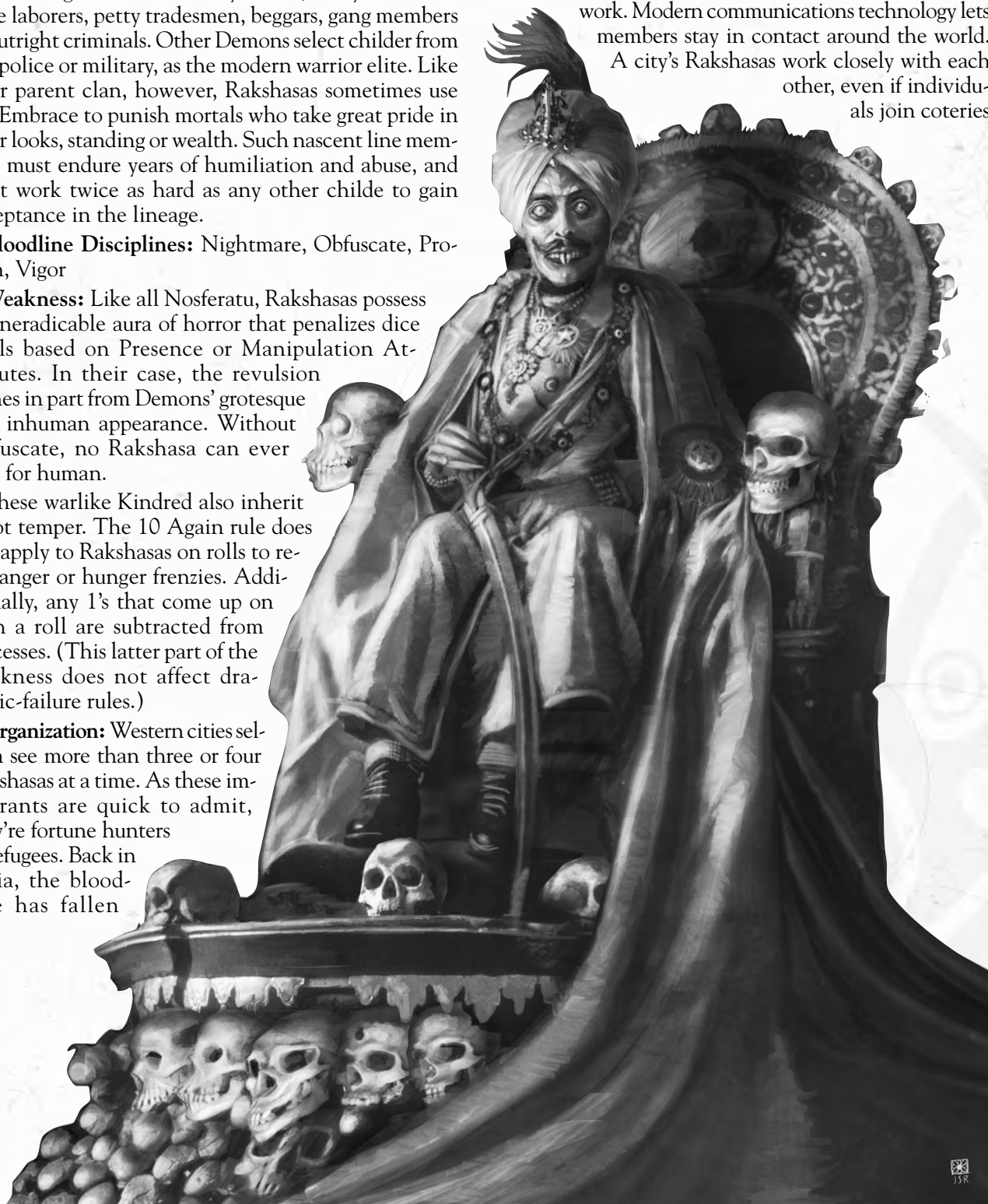
**Weakness:** Like all Nosferatu, Rakshasas possess an ineradicable aura of horror that penalizes dice pools based on Presence or Manipulation Attributes. In their case, the revulsion comes in part from Demons' grotesque and inhuman appearance. Without Obfuscate, no Rakshasa can ever pass for human.

These warlike Kindred also inherit a hot temper. The 10 Again rule does not apply to Rakshasas on rolls to resist anger or hunger frenzies. Additionally, any 1's that come up on such a roll are subtracted from successes. (This latter part of the weakness does not affect dramatic-failure rules.)

**Organization:** Western cities seldom see more than three or four Rakshasas at a time. As these immigrants are quick to admit, they're fortune hunters or refugees. Back in India, the bloodline has fallen

into a feud so vicious that migrant Demons prefer the risk of transcontinental travel. Brood members tend to have at least one ghoul servant, while some keep multiple ghouls as well as assorted blood bound, mortal minions. (In part, this is simply because a vampire needs such servants to travel.) Most Rakshasas maintain contact with sires or older Demons back in India, who coordinate the bloodline's fledgling transportation network. Modern communications technology lets members stay in contact around the world.

A city's Rakshasas work closely with each other, even if individuals join coterie



of other vampires. They even share their ghouls, as a common asset of their private corporation.

**Character Creation:** Mental Attributes and Skills are often primary among Demons who are entrepreneurial, all the better to recognize opportunities or to create them where they don't exist. Social traits are important to those line members who seek the wider world, so that they may ply their trade among the Kindred. The failings of their Blood might make deal-making a challenge, but Rakshasas seem to believe that the quality of their services wins out where their own demeanor founders. Physical traits may be primary to those Demons who pursue their martial calling first and foremost, putting emphasis on personal combat before ranged combat. No matter what, Physical Attributes and Skills are at least secondary among line members when another class of trait takes precedence.

Haven is an important Merit for Demons, specifically Location or Size. Retainer is also common in the form of ghoul servants who may or may not receive the Embrace one night.

Of course, if a Nosferatu of Indian heritage is to join the bloodline shortly after the Embrace, two dots of Blood Potency are required. It is highly unlikely that a non-Indian Haunt would be accepted into the line.

**Concepts:** Loan shark, urban legend, warrior poet, guardian monster, guru, spy, modern Robin Hood, security consultant, man about town, personal-combat trainer, tech-support night manager, gambling-den proprietor, former professional athlete

## HISTORY

According to legends told by Indian mortals, the god Brahma made the rakshasa-demons from his foot. Indian vampires consider this story allegorical at best. Eastern Kindred tell several myths about their origin, all just as unverifiable as the legends of western undead.

Most Rakshasas believe their bloodline descends from the arch-demon Ravana, the legendary king of their race. The story of Ravana and his struggles against the gods is told in the *Ramayana* and other myths. The *Ramayana* says the hero Rama, an incarnation of the god Vishnu, killed the Demon Emperor using an arrow fashioned by the creator-god Brahma. Vishnu incarnated as a mortal because Ravana used magic to become invulnerable to gods, beasts and all the powers of nature, but not to mere men.

Because Rama was actually a god and used a god's weapon, however, the Rakshasas say his victory was a deception. Once the gods bent their own rules, the demons could too, and became flesh and spirit. They could incarnate as mortals and then regain their demonic powers through the Embrace. Ravana is said to have been the first to reincarnate this way, transforming into a vampire through his own spiritual

power. He became the first Rakshasa vampire, and supposedly one of the first Kindred. The Rakshasas say the other Nosferatu bloodlines in India split off from Ravana's brood. His brother Kumbhakarna became the first of the Sudra, or common Nosferatu. Prominent Rakshasa sub-lineages claim descent from Ravana's son Meghanada, his sister Surpanakha, and his minister Maricha.

The Rakshasas believe Ravana ruled their bloodline-caste for more than a thousand years, and Demons ruled the night in southern India.

## THE KSHATRIYA ASCENDANCE

In truth, the Rakshasas cannot *prove* they existed before a thousand years ago. As with all Kindred, their early records have been corrupted through self-serving forgery and revision, or were destroyed in ancient conflicts. Their legends first intersect mortal history in 500 B.C., when India underwent political and religious turmoil. Around that time, India's mortal Kshatriya aristocracy adopted Buddhism and suppressed the Brahmins' religious authority. Kindred tradition holds that this period saw great strife among Indian vampires.

The bloodline was confined to southern India. The Rakshasas fought a long series of battles with other clans and bloodlines to become the dominant lineage of the region. The Rakshasas' traditions say they Embraced mortals from aristocratic families, and so were Kshatriyas from birth and from the "second birth" of the Embrace. Many Rakshasas also clung to Buddhism from their mortal existence. Indeed, the bloodline preserves a substantial body of legend about members who became "wrathful protectors," battling monsters and demons on behalf of mortal monasteries, and even escaping undeath through Buddhist devotion (which is perhaps the origin of the Kindred myth of Golconda, which bears the name of an Indian city).

And yet, other accounts claim the early Rakshasas were vicious, almost mindless beasts that roamed the forests and villages, slaughtering mortal prey at whim. The stories say that in the centuries before the Common Era, undead Brahmins trained some Rakshasas into a reasonable approximation of civilized humanity. These disciples founded the Rakshasa lineage of southern India.

Regardless of content, all of these accounts date from centuries later, and credit the undead Brahmins with all the achievements of Kindred society in Indian. Whatever the truth of their origins, the Rakshasas spread from southern India until they dwelled throughout the subcontinent. Their expansion occurred through adoption as much as through the Embrace. Many Nosferatu are said to have joined the line and contributed their own childer to its growth. The lineage used the promise of higher rank to recruit low-caste Nosferatu as warriors for the cause.



## THE BRAHMINICAL REVIVAL

After A.D. 400, Buddhism lost its grip in India and Hinduism reasserted itself — but a Hinduism extensively rewritten to favor Brahmins. The caste system hardened for Kindred as well as kine. For the next four centuries, Brahmin vampires mobilized other Hindu undead to suppress the Buddhist Rakshasas and install Hindu Rakshasas as local leaders. Rakshasa tradition claims that at that time the Brahmins had mastered the potent blood magic that became their hallmark and key to power. (Brahmin Kindred, meanwhile, claim they always possessed it.)

As Brahmin vampires achieved greater power in Indian cities, they discouraged the practice of adoption between bloodlines. Nosferatu (and other Kindred) who dwelled in villages continued the custom, but India's urban undead came to regard it as indecent... unless sanctioned by a Brahmin. In fact, the Brahmins established an opposing custom of expelling bloodline members who disgraced themselves by violating their caste duty, or by showing insufficient respect for Brahmins. Through a variation on the adoption ritual, a Brahmin with powerful blood could strip a Kindred's Blood power, turning him back into an ordinary member of his clan. Such degraded Kindred were deemed Untouchable. The most powerful blood-magicians could even curse disinherited vampires to force them into new Untouchable bloodlines of their own.

Rakshasa immigrants to the West cannot provide any details on this potent rite. The Brahmins supposedly keep it even more closely guarded than the rest of their blood magic, assuming it exists at all or the secret has not been lost altogether.

## NEW INVASIONS

The Rakshasas paid little heed to the early Muslim invasions of India, which began as early as the eighth century A.D. In the 13th century, however, Demons in the Sultanate of Delhi began Embracing Muslims, and many old line members converted. Rakshasa tradition ascribes spreading conversion to a Muslim holy man who showed the supremacy of his faith by requesting the Embrace, and then restoring his own humanity. This saint, remembered as Nur-al-Hayy ("Light of Life"), also performed various other miracles before he disappeared as mysteriously as he had appeared. Continued Muslim invasions and conquests, such as Timur's sack of Delhi and Babar the Great's founding of the Mughal Empire, led to more northern Rakshasas accepting Islam. They saw it as a faith of conquerors. Smaller numbers of Demons converted to Sikhism, a new faith combining aspects of Hinduism and Islam, and which enjoined all men to consider themselves warriors.

The 16th century saw a new factor enter Indian politics, when the Portuguese and other Europeans established trading posts such as Goa. India's Kindred largely ignored such visitors until the 18th century, when the British subjugated Indian kingdoms. In response, the Kindred of many domains attempted a campaign to expel the British as defiling foreign conquerors. Once again, the Rakshasas clashed with several Brahmin bloodlines. Demon elders saw the Brahmins' call for a pan-Indian alliance of vampires as a scheme to subvert Rakshasa independence. Although Demon groups had fought over hunting territory and prestige for centuries, they found a common purpose in asserting their right to fight each other free of Brahmin interference. The Rakshasas also fought against other Kshatriya lineages that joined the Brahmins for reasons of their own. Such infighting (the Rakshasas were hardly the only group to oppose the plan) rendered local Kindred irrelevant to India's war for independence. Many vampires supported the movement against colonialism, but they did not drive the struggle or play a crucial role.

## THE 20TH CENTURY

The infighting of the 19th century led to a powerful alliance of Rakshasa leaders in southern India. This pact sought a return to tradition in the face of cultural change among Kindred and kine. For instance, the new Indian government supported British attempts to break down the mortal caste system, which led to some young Kindred to challenge the old ways as well. Although Rakshasa elders welcomed any movement that weakened Brahmin authority, they did not want to accept undead from lower castes as equals. Elders also condemned the minority of Rakshasas who supported the undead Brahmins' anti-colonial campaign, saying they were not worthy of Ravana's blood. Some pro-Brahmin Rakshasas had been adopted from other Nosferatu stock, or descended from adopted sires or grandsires — enough of them for elders to link adoption with disloyalty and impure blood.

Naturally, proud Rakshasas resisted attempts to be degraded into second-class members of their bloodline. Some Demons left their cities and returned to the lineage's tradition of rural hunting. Others schemed with fellow Kindred to overthrow the elders, or to at least reduce their power. Sometimes these plots worked, but they inevitably led to more suspicion in Rakshasa communities.

By 1990, undead conflicts escalated to all-out war. In some cities, Rakshasa elders sought to destroy all Demons who lacked a sufficiently ancient pedigree. Others offered Demons of "impure" blood amnesty — if they would submit to blood bonds. Young Rakshasas fled north if they could, but other Indian cities were already overcrowded, and existing residents did not care for the upstart newcomers.

The most desperate Rakshasa tried to leave India altogether. Some already owned or exploited trading companies. They used their cargo vessels, ghouls and mercantile connections to ship themselves out of the country, risking everything for a chance in a new land. The first would-be expatriates suffered Final Death as often as they succeeded, but each Rakshasa who sent word of his success back to his allies inspired a dozen more to seek their fortune abroad.

The journey west remains dangerous, but the Rakshasa gradually become better at it with practice. The full implications of this diaspora remain to be seen — as does the potential emergence of a system that enables vampires to cross continents.

## SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Until recently, as the undead reckon such things, western Kindred weren't sure India had vampires. Thus, they feel they cannot take anything about the Rakshasas for granted. Demons do not display any supernatural powers unknown to western vampires, but their culture presents many puzzles... and what seems straightforward often becomes strange when looked at more closely. The Rakshasas say they are warriors, but they do not merely fight mortals or other vampires. They claim to exist to fight the gods themselves.



### CASTE AND DHARMA

Hinduism divides humanity into five classes technically called *varnas* ("colors"), but they're more often called castes. Not only does Hinduism forbid intermarriage between castes, but people born into a particular caste can perform only certain types of work. Other occupations defile them. Each *varna* includes numerous specific castes and sub-castes. Some represent occupations, while others began as tribes, religious sects or other divisions. One ethnologist compared the caste system to dividing the population of Britain into "families of Norman descent, clerks in Holy Orders, noblemen, positivists, iron-mongers, vegetarians, communists and Scotsmen."

Priestly *Brahmins* perform sacrifices and claim most of the educated professions for themselves.

*Kshatriyas* were the land-owning, warrior aristocracy of old India, and rivals of the Brahmins as India's ruling caste. After centuries of religious and political conflict, the Brahmins eradicated the old Kshatriya families. Over the centuries, however, the Brahmins awarded Kshatriya status to one conquering military elite after another as a way to curry favor with the new ruling class.

*Vaisyas* began as farmers and tradesmen. They eventually claimed many of the middle class, mercantile and artisan occupations.

*Sudras* are peasants and menial laborers.

The *Pariahs* or *Untouchables* consist of all the people (and their descendants) who have fallen off the bottom of the caste system: aboriginal

tribes; non-Hindus; criminals; slaves; the offspring of forbidden, inter-caste unions; and people who perform jobs the Brahmins thought especially degrading, such as sweepers and garbage men. The very lowest castes were believed to defile high-caste people by proximity or merely by being seen.

Brahminism defines separate and distinct codes of conduct and ethics, called *dharma*s, for each of the castes. A Brahmin who acts like a Sudra sins as greatly as a Sudra who acts like a Brahmin. Indeed, deviation from caste duty threatens the very order of the cosmos. The world will end when it reaches a state of complete *adharma*, when no one obeys the purity taboos and codes of conduct set by their castes.

Jainism, Buddhism and ascetic Hinduism challenged the caste system by positing *universal dharma*s: codes of conduct, ethics and supernatural merit that applied to all people, regardless of caste. Even Demons could gain merit as ascetics, or convert to Buddhism and turn their violent natures to good use as "wrathful protectors" or "guardians of the dharma." Islam and Christian converts rejected the caste system, but it has survived every challenge.

Indian Kindred possess their own versions of the mortal castes. Each clan possesses lineages in one caste or another. The Rakshasas began as a Kshatriya division of the Indian Nosferatu. Other Haunts belonged to other castes. After centuries or millennia of separation, bloodlines barely recognize each other as members of the same clan. To a large degree, castes take the place of covenants for Indian vampires.



## THE DHARMA OF DEMONS

Some Kindred wonder how creatures who consider themselves actual demons can treat their fellow Rakshasas and other Kindred with honor. Rakshasas appear in tales as murderous monsters, eagerly committing every crime imaginable against mortals and gods. The Rakshasas do not deny such portrayals. They say that as demons, their *dharma* or caste duty is to prey on the living and to fight the gods. As warriors, however, they have a duty to show martial virtues of courage, loyalty and honesty to their own kind... and they say *all* vampires are demons. Their creed says the Rakshasas were incarnated into mortal flesh for a time, but the Embrace revealed their true nature, as their destiny foreordained. Other Kindred merely retain a greater semblance of humanity, but none of them were ever really human. After Final Death, Rakshasas believe they may reincarnate as higher creatures, such as mortals of higher caste, if they fulfill their *dharma*s in undead existence.

As enemies of the right and proper order of the world, Rakshasas know they should try to work evil and disrupt mortal institutions. In practice, they know that

constant savagery toward mortals would quickly send them into the madness of the Beast. Their creed describes feral behavior as full acceptance of vampires' demonic nature, a fulfillment of their dharma (which makes it right for other Rakshasas to destroy a rampaging vampire, so he can pass to his next incarnation). In practice, most Rakshasas seek to delay this holy consummation while paying lip service to it as a goal.

Rakshasas can attack the world by other means than murder, though. Orthodox Hinduism sets forth a sacred order in which everyone takes his father's occupation, obeys authority and observes the rituals and taboos that sustain reality. Violating that order threatens reality itself. A Rakshasa can strike against the gods by disrupting a religious ceremony, or by leading a mortal to act like someone from another caste. Crime, rebellion and chaos all bring the world closer to ruin.

Indian philosophy also lends Demons the notion of universal dharma, which can counteract caste dharma. Indian Kindred have developed a large body of moral philosophy on how to resist the Beast while remaining technically evil. Every Rakshasa seeks his own balance between the universal dharma of maintaining Humanity, and the caste dharma of performing evil. For instance, a Rakshasa struggling to resist frenzy might pit greed against the Beast by concentrating on the financial harm he can cause. Another Rakshasa might turn "Robin Hood," using crime to attack the distinction between rich and poor, a distinction much valued by the rich.

The mortal world doesn't care as much about caste taboos and religious rituals as it once did. Emigrant Rakshasas react to modern society in a variety of ways. Some believe their traditional duty is irrelevant in the West. In a society with no castes, where people value self-expression instead of keeping their place, where mass media celebrates greed and lust, and faith is a lifestyle choice, what's left for a demon to do? Like many immigrants, they try to assimilate into their new land as quickly as possible, perpetuating the sins already performed there.

Other Rakshasas continue their traditional practices as best they can. Many American and European cities now have Indian minorities and at least a small Hindu temple. A Demon can torment people from the old country, vandalize the temple and spread chaos in the community.

Still other Rakshasas believe the West has its own gods and dharmas — different from India's, but just as sacred to western mortals. These Demons believe their duty lies in attacking and subverting the sacred order of western culture, whatever it may be. Business, politics, public morals — all have their own codes of virtue and disgrace. Instead of killing a prince a vampire can rig an election. Instead of vandalizing a church, he can

cause a schism in the congregation. He can spread chaos by destroying reputations and trust in institutions.

Demons cunning enough to evolve such schemes are usually clever enough to realize how much western Kindred depend on mortal institutions. An immigrant doesn't tell Kindred that he intends to bankrupt the Prince's corporation, or ruin the reputation of the Ventruie Primogen's city councilman. Once the brave, honest and very polite Rakshasa gathers his own power base, other Kindred simply suffer a shock when they learn how that power base is applied.

## CAREER CHANGES

A Rakshasa's activities and occupations depend on his mastery of Obfuscate. Without that Discipline, no Demon can pass for human. Seen in his true form, he terrifies mortals and breaks the Masquerade. Such a scandal matters somewhat less in India than in the West, since many mortals there still believe in evil spirits of monstrous appearance. Until a Rakshasa learns to cloud the mind and delude the eye, he cannot engage in any normal activity among mortals.

Thus, before they master Obfuscate, many Rakshasas exist as pure predators, completely cut off from human society. They may stalk the countryside, relying on Haven of Soil to shield them from the day, or they may slink through the night as urban terrors. Young Rakshasas work especially hard to gain acceptance among other vampires, because other Kindred provide the only social interaction they may enjoy. A Demon can act through blood-bound mortal proxies, but overseeing ghouls is a poor substitute for a calling of one's own. A few Rakshasas find companionship as well as feeding stock by setting themselves up as the demon-gods of blood cults, but the tradition-minded frown on the practice. It strikes them as more suitable for Brahmins than for warriors.

Once a Rakshasa gains proficiency with Obfuscate, he may at least move among the kine unseen. Some Demons find solace in being near people. Others find that walking among mortals, unseen and ignored, makes them feel all the more isolated. A Rakshasa's choice of havens expands, though, once he can enter and leave without fear of mortals seeing him.

Rakshasa tradition teaches childer to accept their complete separation from humanity, because they were never really human to begin with. Nevertheless, Demons who learn The Familiar Stranger often devote great effort to creating an ersatz mortal identity. Then a line member can dwell in a comfortable, somewhat public haven, with mitigated concerns of exposure (except for preventing mortals from seeing him asleep during the day). Demons take great pride in their power to pass for human. Rakshasas can spend years practicing their social graces with other vampires so that they can pose as gentlemen and ladies once they rejoin mortal society.



## YOU CAN'T SHOW YOUR FACE IN PUBLIC

Playing a Rakshasa (or any other vampire who cannot pass for human) presents special challenges. Such characters cannot interact with mortals as much as other vampires can. A number of strategies may help Rakshasas function when showing their face means breaking the Masquerade.

- **Blood Cults:** Some Hindu gods take a monstrous appearance at times. A daring Demon might be able to convince Indian immigrants that he's an incarnation of a god, recruiting them to a blood cult. This gives the Rakshasa a pool of mortal lackeys, as well as a Herd. Running a blood cult takes as much work as running a business. Or a clever Demon might run his cult as a business, combining the roles of company owner and god.

- **Concealment:** Unfortunately, people who wear masks or bandages all the time attract more attention than a vampire would like. Wearing a ski mask and an oversized coat, and sticking to dark rooms and alleys may enable *brief* contact with mortals.

- **Coteries:** A Rakshasa *really* needs allies among other Kindred. A coterie can explain the customs and etiquette of western vampires, so the Demon won't cause offense through ignorance. When a Rakshasa absolutely needs something done among mortals, it helps if he can ask another vampire to do it for him. A wise Rakshasa seeks every opportunity to do favors in advance, using whatever assets and abilities he has.

- **Ghouls:** A ghoul doesn't care how his master looks. A Demon can use a ghoul Retainer as his proxy for dealing with mortals. Prudent Rakshasas treat their ghouls well (or at least watch them closely) to forestall any chance of resentment or rebellion. The danger is that a ghoul character may become more active and interesting than the vampire character.

- **Urban Legend:** Many regions have persistent legends of monstrous humanoid creatures such as the Mothman, the Jersey Devil or Spring-Heeled Jack. A clever vampire might deliberately create such a legend by showing himself to drunks or known tellers of tall tales, giving them a harmless scare and perhaps pulling an odd prank or two. Once the tale is established, the authorities probably discount any further reports of the vampire.

## WARRIOR-MERCHANTS

Rakshasas know how to fight. They prove it when they meet hostile receptions in the West. The Demons escape more often than not, and then take lethal revenge on their attackers before departing for some other city. Like most Nosferatu,



## MODERN INDIA

they combine great strength with supernatural stealth, but Rakshasas add the bestial prowess of Protean as well.

When immigrants come to town, they don't look for fights. They show utmost courtesy when petitioning a Prince for the right of residence. Quite often, they send a ghoul ahead to make an initial request. Once accepted into a Prince's domain, Demons often go into business with the help of their servants.

Many Rakshasas plan to form a loose mercantile co-op, centered on India and extending around the world. Colonies usually include at least one Demon or ghoul who works to set up a shipping business. In addition to legitimate cargo, Rakshasa-owned companies smuggle everything from counterfeit clothing to pirated DVDs to people. The vampires form a small but growing syndicate within the billion-dollar racket of smuggling illegal migrants from Third World countries. The profits are secondary, however, to the experience gained at moving bodies covertly. The capabilities they develop at moving mortals help them move Kindred.

Rakshasas smuggle themselves along with mortal cargo, and offer the same services to Kindred who want to travel. They charge thousands of dollars for transportation (as well as promises of favors in return). A Rakshasa "travel agent" does his best to provide light-proof hiding places for sleeping through the day, and a ghoul steward to deal with emergencies, to bribe customs officials when necessary, and to see to a traveler's comfort. Sometimes Demons send Kindred with a group of mortal migrants. The kine make excellent provisions along the way, and no one complains if a few don't survive the trip. A long journey may require a partnership between Rakshasa shippers in different cities, but modern communications makes that easy to arrange.

As yet, only the most desperate Kindred entrust themselves to the hideous strangers from the East. Anyone who questions the Demons closely learns they haven't perfected their travel arrangements. Kindred shipped around the world still face great danger from customs officials, accidental exposure to sunlight and other hazards. Not everyone shipped by a Demon survives. If the Rakshasas can perfect their techniques for smuggling vampires, the bloodline will have a powerful and precious service to vend.

Kindred who dig a little deeper find the Rakshasa network incongruous. Line members describe themselves as warriors — aristocrats, even — but India's caste tradition does not regard commerce as a suitable occupation for knights or lords. The Rakshasas point out that moving people and goods is *logistics*, one of the military sciences. A Demon who engages in other sorts of commerce must also find some military aspect to it, or he loses the respect of his brood. Demons also claim that smuggling adds criminality to their work, and therefore an element of danger.

The Rakshasas seen in western cities are a small fraction of the bloodline. Most stay on the Indian subcontinent, their culture, history and conflicts unseen and unknown to western Kindred. Their greatest strength lies in southern India. In their homeland, Rakshasas follow a quasi-feudal hierarchy, with ranks analogous to squires, knights and nobles.

• **Rajah:** All the Rakshasas of a province bow to an elder called a Rajah, who combines the role of Priscus with some powers of a Prince. The Rajah adjudicates disputes and orders punishments for members of the line. He also allocates hunting territories, along with promotions of rank. In many parts of southern India, the Rajah is a Prince for all practical purposes, and Kindred acknowledge his rule. In other provinces, the Rajah merely serves as leader and spokesman for local Rakshasas, with no authority over any other vampire.

Occasionally, a Rakshasa gains enough power or reputation to force other Rajahs to swear fealty to her. These higher nobles adopt imperial titles such as Sultan or Nizam. The little "empire" may encompass several cities, but such a realm seldom lasts for more than a few decades before the difficulties of travel and command break it up. No Rakshasa in a thousand years has dared to call himself Maharajah. Only Ravana himself may claim the title of Demon Emperor.

• **Nawab:** Respected elder Rakshasas receive this aristocratic title. Nawabs, as the principle vassals of the Rajah, receive limited authority over young, low-ranked Demons. They allocate feeding territories and decide when a childe receives promotion to neonate status and full membership in the bloodline.

• **Praharan:** The title for the lowest rank of Rakshasa society translates variously as "fighter," "hero," "murderer," "destroyer" or "debaser." It corresponds loosely to a western neonate. A Rakshasa childe starts by serving his sire, much like he did as a ghoul, and remains almost a slave until his sire grants him the rank of Praharan. Sometimes, a Nawab or the Rajah himself may order a childe's promotion if a sire is unreasonable in recognizing his progeny's competence.

A Praharan owes many duties to his sire, like a squire to a knight. The neonate must show respect; assist his sire in battle; tithe a fraction of any loot he acquires; and accept whatever feeding territory his sire grants, subject only to the will of the Rajah. War-loot matters less in modern nights than it once did. Modern Rakshasas observe the tradition by saying a Praharan must give his sire a cut of any profits, however obtained.

Once a Rakshasa becomes a squire, he can petition a Nawab or Rajah to transfer his fealty from his sire to some other Demon. This is a small loss of face for the young vampire, since it implies disloyalty or weakness,

but it also marks the sire as a martinet who treats childer as if they were mere ghouls. A proper knight shows respect for the warriors under his command.

• **Rawal:** A Rakshasa gains full independence and responsibility for his actions when a Rajah promotes him to Rawal, or knight. This never happens until a Demon learns the rudiments of Protean. Demons may have to wait decades for this promotion, making most of them ancillae by western standards. Neonates who cannot or will not accept their bloodline's powers and costs remain squires forever, or risk expulsion to become Untouchable outcastes (unless some other Nosferatu bloodline adopts them).

Although India's cities hold the greatest concentration of Rakshasas, line members depend less on urban prey than do many eastern Kindred. Once a Rakshasa learns the Haven of Soil power, he can hunt in India's myriad villages, or out in the country. Demons esteem sojourns in the wilderness as tests of hunting skill and courage. Their willingness to travel extends Rakshasa domains from single cities to whole provinces. Kindred who fear being caught without a haven — even among India's close-packed villages — often hire Rakshasa couriers when a mission is too important to entrust to a ghoul.

Not all Rakshasas can claim an equally prestigious heritage. The more generations back a Rakshasa can trace his private lineage, the more pure and noble is his blood. Other Nosferatu can petition to join the Rakshasas, but they never achieve any formal rank higher than a junior knighthood, and they never receive the same respect as a Rakshasa by Embrace. Indeed, their childer also receive less respect from elders. In southern India, any Rakshasa whose parentage in the bloodline extends back less than a thousand years may be derided as “new blood” by Demons with longer pedigrees.

And that's why young Rakshasas leave the homeland. In the last 200 years, the bloodline has split into higher and lower subcastes. Conflicts with other clans and castes has weakened the bonds of loyalty. In province after province, the elite of “old Rakshasas” — or as they like to say, “true Rakshasas,” supposedly descended from Ravana or other legendary founders of the line — systematically exclude “new Rakshasas” from councils, deny them promotions, honors and financial opportunities, and assign them the worst hunting territories. Allies among Kindred Brahmins endorse the elders' claims of pure blood and perpetual dominance.

Such insults outrage Demons of recent origins, especially neonates whose attitudes have been shaped by a century of mortal efforts to end the caste system. Night-time wars of assassination have erupted between Rakshasa factions as a result.

As the civil war has escalated, some Rakshasas have decided they've had enough. Why waste their unlives fighting for scraps of hunting ground? Southern India isn't the world. Mere mortals have left India in droves to seek their fortunes abroad. Should the heirs of Ravana, the greatest enemy of the gods, fear to follow? The first emigrants had tremendous courage. No vampire in memory had dared to cross oceans or continents. The success of survivors encouraged more to follow, including Muslim and Sikh Rakshasas grown weary with their second-class rank in Brahmin-dominated cities. Young Rakshasas often require the help of wealthier, older Demons to leave India and establish their companies. In return, they send shares of their profits back to their sponsors, enabling elders to fund still more emigrants. The expatriate network grows steadily.

As more Demons flee India, the old Rakshasa elite grows more afraid. Increasing numbers of Rakshasas plow their wealth and influence into the expatriate network. Who knows what allies might be imported from distant lands? Already, sponsors are known to make deals with strange foreign vampires. Other Kindred spread rumors that oppressed young subcastes plan a mass exodus once the travel system can handle dozens of vampires at a time. If the rumors prove true, hundreds of Rakshasas might surge into the West, scattering across dozens of cities. What might happen then is anyone's guess.

### *Rakshasa Customs*

In their millennial history, Demons have accumulated an elaborate, courtly culture, most of which expatriates leave behind. Along with the classic military virtues of courage, self-discipline and loyalty, Rakshasas esteem the arts and fine manners. A Demon who spent his living days as a mugger might work mightily to change his accent and at least pretend to appreciate painting and poetry. Rakshasas like to think of themselves as sophisticated monsters.

Each Rajah holds court once a month, typically at the dark of the moon. Rakshasas present their disputes, petition for hunting territories in a city, curry favor, and raise other concerns they feel deserve the bloodline's attention. The assembly also makes deals and engages in the same sort of intrigue found in any Elysium or Prince's court. Other Kindred may attend these courts if a Rakshasa sponsors them and takes responsibility for their conduct.

At least once a year, a Rajah hosts a spectacular party for his subjects. These gatherings combine religious rites, blood feasts, music, poetry recitations, contests of Discipline use, athletics and combat prowess. Participants flaunt their grotesquery through gaudy costumes, Obfuscate illusions or ornaments made from parts of their human or animal victims. No Rakshasa is



compelled to attend a Rajah's court, but the yearly festival is the best possible time and place for line members to meet, negotiate and scheme. The Rajah may grant knighthood or Nawab's rank at the festival. Some Rajahs permit small numbers of other Kindred to attend — a very great honor, although any sponsoring Demon must ask his Rajah's permission beforehand.

Sires generally wait for the festival to present their childer to the Rajah, acknowledging them as Rakshasas by blood, and to ask for a childe's promotion to Praharan. Adopted Nosferatu are also inducted during the festival. A new childe stands in a circle of 10 flaming braziers. He recites the story of how Ravana meditated among 10 fires for ten thousand years, and at the end of each thousand years cut off one of his 10 heads and cast it into a fire as an offering to Shiva. Just as the Demon Emperor was about to cut off his final head and destroy himself, the god appeared to grant him the power he desired. As the recently Embraced vampire tells the story, he cuts himself nine times and shakes blood into the braziers. Just as he's about to cut his own throat, his sire steps in, playing the role of Shiva, and proclaims him a true heir to Ravana. The presiding Rajah then gives the new Rakshasa a taste of his own potent blood, to initiate the vampire's transition from ordinary Nosferatu to a member of the lineage. Nosferatu of non-Rakshasa origins require a more elaborate ceremony, in which the Rajah or a designated Nawab plays the role of Shiva, and assumes the duty of Avus to give the recruit blood.

The Protean Discipline not only helps distinguish Demons from other Nosferatu, it gives them greater freedom of movement than most Kindred. As a Rakshasa learns each new Protean power, he is expected to demonstrate it before his Rajah or a Nawab. No Rakshasa receives his commission as a Rawal before proving that he knows at least the rudiments of the Discipline.

Tradition further holds that once a Demon learns the Haven of Soil power, he should spend a year in the country, hunting beasts and villagers. During this time, the Rakshasa is enjoined to reflect on his existence as a predator and a demonic force of chaos. The Demon also collects trophies of his exploits. This *wanderjahr* isn't mandatory, but a Demon who puts it off too long or who cuts it short may gain a reputation for weakness.

Once a Rakshasa graduates to Rawal, he can accumulate other honors based on Disciplines learned, enemies or fierce animals slain (the bloodline has a tradition of hunting for sport as well as for sustenance), or on winning a Rajah's favor. Each domain has its own system of honors, but titles often refer to gods and legendary Rakshasas. For instance, in Mysore province a Rakshasa who achieves five dots of Vigor is called a Valiant Son of Ravana, while a female Rakshasa who achieves five dots of Nightmare wins the title Handmaiden of Kali. Any Demon of Rawal or higher rank may be addressed as *subhadra*, or "strong-armed," a traditional epithet for Ravana as a general term of respect.

Demons see nothing inconsistent in worshipping the gods they claim to oppose. They direct most of their worship to Shiva, the god of enlightenment and destruction, and to the deity's roles as Rudra, the god of hunting, wild beasts and storms; Bhairava, "the Terrible"; and Mahakala, "Lord Time," who brings destruction to all things. Ravana is said to have written a collection of hymns to Shiva that remains well known even among mortals. It's the only known work of Indian Kindred literature to achieve this distinction. Rakshasas also worship Shiva's consort Shakti in the form of the battle-goddess Durga, and Kali as the Death-Mother. And of course, they revere their progenitor Ravana.

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