



the World of Darkness

A SOURCEBOOK FOR
Vampire
THE REQUIEM

Chafar

When Pierce said "speak," people spoke. When Pierce said "answer me with the truth," people didn't lie. Kindred and kine alike, all human mortals obeyed Pierce's. This was how Pierce earned his keep with the Senechal, how he got his sweet haven and feeding grounds and how he ended up getting called into the Senechal's shop with less than two hours' notice.

The shop was a room Victor kept as an interstitial cell between the street and his ultimate questions of the Prince. As the Senechal, it was Victor's job to keep unnecessary questions of the Prince from confusion, lies and misinformation. The shop was a room of peeling green paint and shattered linoleum tiles on the third floor of a blacked-out brick office building in a peeling and shattered neighborhood. The building still had walls here and there, but most of them had been smashed to reveal copper pipes and electrical lines. Rooms were lit only when they were inhabited, usually by caged work-lights or battery-powered hand-helds. They revealed halves of signs painted onto walls. The light they gave out was swarmed by the kind of place that captured sound and held it fast. Elms of activity echoed weirdly through rained walls and piles of 1960s-style metal office furniture, but the building always went quiet again.

When Cernak and Stark dragged in their limp captive, the building thrummed with slamming metal doors, screeched with nudged desks and cracked with crunching glass. Once they'd dropped his dead weight into a desk chair and chained him down, the shop slumped up the sounds. In a second, it was like they'd never been made. Their captive, pale, gaping and pierced through the heart with a broken pallet flat, looked like a corpse left behind for days in the dark.

The captive's mouth was smeared with blood like it was jam. A black gash ran from the tip of his nose, through his lips, almost to his chin. The lifeless flesh of his slashed lips curled out like the corner of a magazine, pulled by tight skin and gravity. A sticky red sang pinned one half-lip shut.

Cerznak and Stark went back into the faux-wood foyer to check in with the Senechal and Pierce. They were leaning up against a heavy metal desk with the Victor looked like a yuppie called out of bed in the middle of the night in his unbuttoned dress shirt and miscreased suit. Pierce looked like an absurd professor in his white linen suit and thin tie. Cerznak and Stark, both square and denim, looked much more at home in the shop, though it was really Victor and Pierce who worked there.

Stark sucked in a breath, like a person stiff catching sight of an ugly wound, when he came in. Despite any need, he took a few cooling, commanding breaths. Inside, he was petting a panther at the end of his tether.

Victor was smelling an unlit cigarette as he talked towards the ceiling. "...and your subject is the only attacker who didn't take off. We're shy on witnesses, but I'm not sure if I buy this Seven' shit. Poke around and tell me what you can get out of him." Victor slid the cigarette from under his nose like he was drawing a sword, then looked at Cerznak and Stark. "We all see."

"He's in there good and tight," Cerznak said. "He's not getting out of there."

"All right. We've got maybe an hour to do this. I've got to get back to Elysium and brief the Prince about all this before morning. So let's get all this straight as quick as we can."

Victor made a V with two fingers and pointed at his heavier. Stark still had blood on his lips. "You two keep that sick under wraps until Pierce is ready for the shake to come out."

"Sure thing."

"Pierce, get in there and get your thing started," Victor wagged his cigarette at him.

Pierce nodded. "Give me a minute to get this whelp's story so we have something to confirm." Victor nodded his chin between Cerznak and Stark toward the torn, vinyl couch wedged in one crumbling cement corner. The thin, young vampire slumped on it with trash grease and smelled like rotten food.

"What's your name again?" Victor asked.

"Lester," he said to the floor. Then he glanced at Cerznak and Stark, then looked at Victor. "I'm Lester."

"All right, Lester," said Victor, "Pierce here's going to ask you just one question."

"Lester," said Pierce, "Look at me."

He did.

"Pay attention."

Lester sat still.

"Are you paying attention?"

Lester nodded.

"Okay. Now concentrate. Lester. Are you concentrating?"

Lester nodded.

"Tell Victor what happened tonight."

"I was underneath the train tracks, where the alley left out behind Pepper, talking with Helton — he's my fire. Was my fire. A lot of us go, ah, hanging down there, off the sport bar crowd cutting through the Wells Street alley to the train stop. I'm sure you know that already.

"Anyway, we're waiting for the closing-time crowd to let out when Helton spots this guy standing by the, uh, the pylon. I guess, the leg of the train tracks. Watching us. I didn't even notice him, but I swore he was mortal. That he didn't sniff him out earlier 'cause he was mortal. But the light from the train platform hit his eyes this way, this guy, this mortal. I swore he was mortal. That I hear the other two dudes behind us in the alley. We're at the T intersection, right, and so we've got three guys coming at us from two sides. I figure we're about to get mugged, and I think that's pretty funny, but that one guy from the train tracks, he crosses those last few yards in, fuck, just like a second, right? Like a blink. One step, he's right in my face and he's got me by the chin here, but he's staring at my forehead. Staring hard, right

"So, I'm pulling back, right, and I'm like, 'Get the fuck off of me!' But this guy — the guy you got — this guy's got a grip. Already, though, I can hear Helton trying to pry the kibosh on these other guys. I don't, I mean, he was talking to them, but I don't remember what he was saying to them. Let him go, I think he said. This place is crawling with us. I remember he said, 'Crawling with us. I figure he meant, you know, Kindred.'

"I don't know what language he's speaking, but the dude who's got me by the face says something to his other guy, and one of them says to Helton: 'The injector always forgets the wrong.' Then Helton says: 'Spare me your seven routine. Or something else that's when the fang, they...'

"That's, ah... that's when the fang, they... That's when they bit Helton. The one who's going after Helton, he had this short hair and a, what, a widow's peak. I don't know why I remember that. Anyway, he and Helton start snarling and fighting and rolling all over the ground. And I guess I started screaming then, 'cause that's when this dude on me starts trying to hold my mouth shut.

"A lot happens right then, and I don't think I really, uh, know all of that. The gry who's watching Helton fight, the third gry, says something like, 'He doesn't have it.' Meaning me, but I don't know what I don't have, right? All I'm thinking is that there's a couple of twif-watching Howndz around somewhere and I hope they hear Helton snarling all over the ground there."

"So this third gry's got like a fire-axe or a hatchet or something, and he starts helping Widow's Peak with Helton. I'm trying to get out from under this one asshole, and they're ganging up on Helton! One's got his teeth in his neck — in his neck! — and the other one's chopping at his chest. 'I couldn't see what happened next, down there, but I can't hear Helton anymore then. Just what sounds like that one gry slamming his axe into gravel a couple of times. They're on me again, speaking I don't know what language, and pressing their fingers on my forehead, like tapping on my head. 'That's when Stark and Cerznak showed up. The gry on me, again, like dis-

appears and reappears right next to Helton's corpse. From there I can see down into the gravel right next to Helton's corpse. The gry on me, again, like dis-

"That's going to happen, but they're definitely running. Definitely leaving. They had their knives out and I don't know exactly what they did, right, but in a second Stark had this gry around the arm and was biting into the back of his neck. Cerznak slashed that fuckin' board right into his chest. It was, like, then he started jamming that fuckin' board right into his chest. It was, like, two or maybe three swings and that gry was out. I know Stark and Helton, though... Helton was chopped up and I don't know where he is now. In the truck, maybe? Anyway, Helton's gone. I couldn't even recognize his body. His rotten body."

"So Cerznak called you. Said it happened on open territory, so there was no other Regent to call but you all. Then we came here."

Victor put his unlit cigarette into his mouth while Lesler talked, rolled it back and forth a bit when Lesler was done, and now finally plucked it out, nodding to himself. While Lesler talked and Victor listened, everyone else went into the other room, down a black hallway, to put Pierce to work on the prisoner.

"Okay," said Victor, "Lesler, I'm going to ask you to say everything you just said to me to the Sheriff. Tonight."

"Okay," said Lesler.

"All right. Then why don't you clean yourself up a bit." Victor pulled out a shiny blue handkerchief, monogrammed V.V., and gave it to Lesler. "I think this VII talk is a bunch of bull, to scare us. I think Helton knew it. But we're going to see what your fella tells Pierce, and then we're going to see the Sheriff. Get yourself together and we'll get out of here in maybe half an hour."

Victor walked out of the glaring white floodlights into the black hall and arrived in the interrogation room with a clap and a "Let's get going."

Lesler, left alone, sat on the plastic sofa for a while, staring at the floor and aching in the naked glare of the worklights. Getting up, he edged them into the hall with his foot, turning the outer office space into a soothing brown shadow.

With Victor's handkerchief, he tried out his reflection in a broken medicine cabinet mirror on a pocked concrete wall behind the office. Porcelain wreckage and vertical pipes like metal bamboo said this used to be a proper bathroom. Lesler stood in the concrete dust, listening to the wordless sounds of Victor and Pierce through the broken walls.

In the medicine cabinet, Lesler's face a pale blonde mirage, fuzzy and grainy like an underexposed photograph. Even through the lens of the Cvrse, though, he could see red smears across the white fields of his chin and cheeks. A single bloody fingerprint had been stretched across his forehead.

Bloody. Forehead. Helton was gone, destroyed, after a hundred years. Somewhere, down below, on a street younger than he was, his severed head was turning to slap of dry flesh and dusty bone next to plastic tarp and a tire iron.

Lesler tried to concentrate, tried to focus on the broken tiled wall — clearly reflected behind his distorted face — and replace himself with it. Slowly, as Lesler let out a useless breath, his face vanished from the mirror.

"I think Lester's story is bogus. I think it's what we're supposed to hear." Victor's voice came through the pipes and broken concrete, suddenly louder and then suddenly quiet again, like he was pacing and talking past a hole in the wall. Lester went to the pipes and leaned between them. From there, he could see right through a hole into the interrogation room. Cerznak's back took up most of his view, but he could see his attacker unshaken, bound to a metal desk chair with brown chains, and Pierce standing next to him. Pierce had one finger on the prisoner's mouth — a gentle "hush now."

Victor must have been standing up against the wall by Lester's listening-hole. When he talked, it was clear. "This 'Seven' stuff plays fine in front of the crowd and gets the fledglings trembling, but we're working on a different level here, sir." Victor was talking to the prisoner. "If you want to make your Requiem worth while, if you want to get a word to the Prince and get your agenda onto his radar for real, now's the time. Give up this terrorist shadows crap and talk like you mean it. This mystery act might have gone over with the Invictus, but we're past that these nights."

Pierce took his finger off the prisoner's mouth. "If we wanted to ransom you, who do we talk to?"

The prisoner looked right at Victor, but he was on autopilot, maybe under some hypnotic trance of Pierce's, when he said, "I am a soldier. My king is Seven."

"If we take you before the court, for trial, how are you going to defend yourself?"

"I am a soldier of Seven. I'll be free on the Sabbath."

"If I let Stark here cut you half, right here, tonight, who's going to miss you?"

"I am a soldier of Seven."

"Is it working? Pierce? Is this the best you can get?" Victor said.

Pierce made an uncertain movement and said something Lester couldn't hear. It looked like, "I'll try again." Pierce crouched down in front of the prisoner, grabbed him by the ears, and looked into his eyes for a long while. Cerznak shifted, looked at the ceiling for a bit. Something rattled in the skylight and glass, like a wind before the rain.

"Pierce?" Victor said. "Is it possible you're just not getting him? How long can he keep this up?"

Pierce didn't answer. He was moving something to the prisoner, but Lesler couldn't hear. After several minutes of it, the prisoner twisted his head in Pierce's hands to look over the interrogator's white linen shoulder. Cerznak turned his head, too, and his whole body's weight changed. Tightened.

"Who the hell—" Victor started to say, but it suddenly got too loud for Lesler to hear words. The interrogation room went from the pale white of a hanging bulb to the warm, lively orange of fire. Cerznak spun and ran out of view towards the spot that had the prisoner's attention. He was low, mouth-first and fang out, like a bear, when he went.

In the light that sent Lesler dashing through the pipes back into the bathroom, he saw what looked like Stark's ponytailed head tumbling, smoldering towards Pierce. The flash of fire, though, made Lesler's skin feel pricked by needles. He wanted darkness but his legs wanted distance. In the outer office, he made peace with his Beast and scrambled through a hole in the wall into a room piled with chairs and file cabinets. No windows, no way out. Through the hole, Lesler could see the entrance to the hall leading to the interrogation room. The flare of the worklight on the floor hid the hall itself.

He could feel a gun blast, then a half dozen more, rattle through the concrete walls. A sound that must have been Cerznak bellowing came punctuated with metal-on-stone banging sounds. Trails of thick, dark smoke slipped through the glare of the worklights. Cerznak went quiet.

A figure, black in the corona of the worklights, emerged from the smoking hallway. Lesler spun in his closet, pushing himself up against a wall away from the light. He could hear people — several people — walking over the sliding, broken linoleum. Voices spoke in a language he didn't know. Maybe Chinese.

A high-pitched sound came through the quiet. Porcelain hitting a metal pipe. More voices.

The shadow of a crouching body blotting out the light through the hole in Lesler's closet. The worklights went out.

Was he still hidden? Could they see him? Lesler didn't know how to tell.

The crouching body slipped into the dark with him. Lesler didn't move. He was suddenly aware that he had no breath to hold, which brought an odd panic of its own. But Lesler felt oddly calm in his limbs. He didn't feel the tension in his leg, the urge to pace, the need to look away like he usually felt around vampires.

A flashlight came on between them, aimed at the ceiling like a torch. It was Widow's Peak. He turned his head right at Lesler. In his hand, with the flash light, he had Victor's bloody handkerchief from the bathroom. His mouth was loose and the flashlight showed two yellow, bloodied fangs with a tongue pressed between them.

There was a terrible moment when Lesler could only stand there, pressed up against the wall like an idiot. Widow's Peak looked him over, searching him, like he was reading a plaque. He made a sound, like a "f're enough."

"Yor were right, Ym. No mark," Widow's Peak said.

A voice came back through the hole. "He doesn't have the mark," Widow's Peak said. Lesler looked from him to the hole and back again.

"But he will."

"Not until he has the mark, Ym." Widow's Peak reached out and grabbed Lesler by the arm, turned him a little where he stood, and moved the neonate's head around with a grip at the base of his skull. Widow's Peak's fingers were slick with blood. He smelled like turpentine.

"Yor love your Prince, Kindred?" Widow's Peak let go of him, but he talked into the air. When Lesler didn't answer, he went on. "Either yor go and yor tell him about us," Widow's Peak touched his tongue to the bloody handkerchief, then pocketed it.

"Warn the court." He leaned over and sniffed the air around Lesler. "Or yor take off, save yourself, and he doesn't know we're coming. I don't much care which, Kindred. But it's an hour 'til dawn and that's your thing to decide."

Widow's Peak waited a moment, then crouched to go back through the hole. The smell of blood on him made Lesler's gums ache. His teeth crept into fangs. He couldn't master the nerve to speak, but the Beast lent it to him. "The injurer always forgets the wrong," Lesler said.

Widow's Peak stopped and looked at him. "Yes," he said. "But the injured never does."



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Introduction

"THE MISTAKE WE'RE MAKING WHEN TALKING ABOUT VII
IS THAT WE'RE ASSUMING THEY KNOW THE TRUTH
ABOUT THEMSELVES.

YOU SAW THIS GUY'S FACE —
DID IT LOOK LIKE EVEN HE UNDERSTOOD
WHAT HE WAS SAYING'?

WE'VE GOT PROOF THAT THEY KNOW ABOUT US,
BUT I DON'T THINK THEY MUCH ABOUT THEMSELVES.
WHAT IF THERE'S NOTHING ELSE BUT THE MYSTERY'?

WHAT IF THERE IS NO SECRET'?

I THINK WE'RE ALL THEY HAVE.

I THINK HUNTING US IS ALL THEY HAVE LEFT."

*It doesn't matter who my father was; it
matters who I remember he was.*

— Anne Sexton

The vampires known only as “VII” are a riddle with no right answer. No single truth to the mystery of VII exists in the World of Darkness. This book gives you three possible truths to choose from for your own **Vampire** chronicles — or three more legends for VII to hide behind.

Like so many enticing mysteries, VII is something of an empty box waiting to be filled with whatever you and your fellow players bring to the table. Within the fictional cities of the World of Darkness, there may be a definitive truth at the center of the mystery, but in your own stories, what's ultimately behind the curtain is you. VII is what you bring with you. VII is what you build using the tools of the Storytelling system and the materials in this book. We'll show you how.

How to Use This Book

This book explores and expands on the ideas first presented in **Vampire: The Requiem** of mysterious and deadly vampires known, collectively, only as VII. The concepts, stories and game mechanics contained herein are intended to be used — to any degree the Storyteller sees fit — in any **Vampire** chronicle dealing with VII, whether as protagonists or antagonists. A good deal of this material builds on themes, ideas and rules found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** and **Vampire: The Requiem**.

Each of the different concepts of VII in this book is intended to be the only one at work in a chronicle. The unique and elaborate history of these possible Sevens makes it impossible — or at least unbelievable — for more than one of these organizations to exist, *truthfully* exist, in your World of Darkness at a time. As you play through more and more chronicles in the World of Darkness, you'll have more and more opportunities to re-examine the mystery of VII and redefine the truth.

This Book and the World of Darkness

Because the versions of VII described herein are meant to be mutually exclusive, inspirational and optional, the authors of this book were given the go-ahead to tinker a bit with the assumed norms of your **Vampire** chronicle. At the same time, each was allowed to exercise his particular voice to an extent that's usually not possible in a collaborative work.

What this means to you, as a reader, is that you may find one chapter making an assumption about your favorite covenant that you don't agree with. Don't sweat

it. Everything in this book is an example of what *might* be in your World of Darkness.

Information in this book is not necessarily an indicator of how future books in the **Vampire** line will look at things. Future **Vampire** supplements will continue to assume that the truth of VII is commonly unknown.

If you don't like the way the Ahranites in Chapter One have assessed the Ordo Dracul, either change the way the Ahranites think in your chronicle or prove them wrong by playing a Dragon contrary to their estimations. If you don't think the Betrayed should be so strictly organized by region, change it. Every chronicle is yours.

It's easier to mix things together than it is to organize them, so this book strives to create structures for you to use, mimic or add to. If none of that suits you, tear those structures down and build what you want from the parts you get.

Overview

In a way, **VII** is presented like a collection of small books. Each of the following chapters presents a different version of the truth behind the vampires of VII, broken down into subsections focusing on history, culture, unique powers and the like. Though each of these different incarnations of VII can be used in your chronicle just as they are presented, straight from the book, they've all been designed to work as a collection of smaller components that can be disassembled and recombined into your own unique version of the truth.

This **Introduction** is your guide to using the mystery of VII in any **Vampire** chronicle. In the following pages you'll find advice for introducing VII into a new or established chronicle and guidance on expanding and preserving the mystery (and the truth) of these enigmatic monsters. Using this advice, you'll be able to create distinctive and unpredictable versions of the truth for all your future **Vampire** chronicles, so that the mystery of VII can stay mysterious. As you play more and more **Vampire** chronicles, you'll be able to solve the mystery again and again.

Chapter One: The Princes of the Fallen City presents an ancient and epic origin of VII rooted in the ill-fated Biblical city of Gomorrah. These VII are the heirs to a city of sin, children of a demon's wicked wife and the practitioners of pagan sorcery. As protagonists, they are tragic and noble warriors who have made a deal with a devil to restore their ruined glory. As antagonists, they

are zealous soldiers of sin from a time before history bent on the bloody resurrection of their damned city, no matter the cost.

Chapter Two: The Betrayed tells the tale of a broken pact between a king of the day and a lord of the night and the unforgiving hunt for vengeance that carries on in its wake to this night. These VII are haunted avengers waging a secret war on the monsters that betrayed them — the very monsters they have themselves become. As protagonists, they are a proud family born of tragedy and wrath, haunted by their own mistakes and sinning out of love for those they failed. As antagonists, they are greedy, insane traitors on a mission of genocide against their cousins and former allies.

Chapter Three: The Sleepers describes a clandestine, hundred-year-old experiment in science and the occult that has been warped by sin and the pursuit of righteousness into an uncontrolled program of errant assassins and hidden personas. These VII are the secret agents of a rudderless operation whose goals have warped into self-mockery. As protagonists, they are desperate victims held hostage by a hypnotic psychosis hidden in their own blood. As antagonists, they are a secret army in our midst, brainwashed toy soldiers wound up and let loose as judges and executioners in a world of monsters.

Theme

Many themes are at work behind the scenes of this book. VII, the book, is about the sometimes subtle, sometimes invisible but always meaningful relationship between perception and identity — between the truth and the image. Are we who we appear to be or who we think of ourselves as being? Do our pasts make us real or do our relationships? What really defines us, our actions or our motives? Does the truth of VII really matter more than the way it is perceived by the rest of the World of Darkness?

This book doesn't answer those questions. This book assumes that no sure answers exist to these questions. The multitude of answers is yours to explore in your **Vampire** stories. The mysterious vampires of VII are simply one tool you can use to bring up the question, whether you're a player or a Storyteller.

But the mystery of VII is big enough to hold many more themes and many more questions. Each of the three incarnations of VII in this book deals with different themes and looks at the questions above in different ways. Each is also designed to ask questions of its own, or to inspire you consider different answers. Two of the following variations on VII focus on the themes of betrayal, loyalty and restoration hinted at on p. 71 of **Vampire: The Requiem**; the third augments the mystery of VII with questions of sanity, sin and the self.

The VII described in **Chapter One: The Princes of the Fallen City** raise questions of loyalty and righteousness. These vampires, known as Ahranites, have created

a new clan of vampires by joining forces with an ancient and evil demon. By mixing the trappings of an ancient civilization with the tactics of modern terrorism, this incarnation of VII asks questions about sacrifice and idealism. How far are you willing to go to get what you want? Is your mission worth your soul?

The VII shown in **Chapter Two: The Betrayed** embody wrath and fanaticism. Their quest for vengeance is based on a philosophy of hypocrisy: their hatred has made them into the same monsters they despise. Though the Betrayed are certainly a good fit for themes of betrayal and loyalty, these monsters look at them through a one-way mirror. For the Betrayed, family and honor trump decency and peace. What do hate and greed and wrath really get you? How can a cycle of vengeance ever end? If you can't let go of the past, how can you move forward?

The VII explored in **Chapter Three: Sleepers** exemplify the broader themes of this book. In this variation, VII isn't a hidden culture but a dangerous idea. Themes of identity, suspicion and judgment are intermixed with questions of personal responsibility to create a unique addition to the themes of **Vampire**. How well do you really know yourself? Who do you choose to trust? What are the consequences of responsibility — or power — without control?

Mood

No matter what the truth behind VII is, the atmosphere created by their presence — even just the rumor of their presence — is always palpable and dark. Though each of the various truths presented in this book emphasize a slightly different mood, a sense of tension, suspicion and paranoia surrounds the mystery of VII in all Kindred domains. VII is a lurking menace, a hidden threat behind the façade of civility erected by Kindred society. VII is a nemesis.

Stories involving VII may shift the focus from tension to terror or from suspicion to suspense, but when VII enters the stage, the vibe should always be one of fear — be it fear of destruction, fear of loss or simply fear of the unknown.

A Toolkit

This book is sort of a sampler, containing different kinds of VII for use right away in your chronicle. It's also a toolkit, full of parts you can use to assemble your own version of VII. If the Praetantia Discipline seems too direct or powerful for your tastes, then remove it from the Ahranites in your World of Darkness. But there's more to using the options in this book than adding and subtracting.

By intermixing different components of each incarnation of VII presented herein, you can create a unique take on these vicious vampires that's right for your chronicle. You might, for example, start with the back story of the

Ahranites, but have them haunted by the ghosts of the Betrayed instead of the demon Shaddad. In place of Praestantia, you might give some of these hybrid VII the telekinetic powers of the advanced Sleepers, disguising it as the work of the ghosts, rather than the work of a supernatural mind.

Don't limit yourself to tinkering with the mechanical aspects of VII, either. Perhaps you like the personal tragedy of the Betrayed, but want to base it in ancient Egypt or 19th century California instead. Consider altering the themes used by a version of VII, too. What if the Sleepers are all volunteers, aware of their dual nature but willfully unaware of their "other half's" deadly deeds? That changes the theme of the Sleepers overall from frightened victims haunted by their secret selves into frighteningly insidious accomplices harboring their own homicidal ambitions. By changing one of the themes of the Ahranites from sacrifice to traditionalism, they might go from modern-minded demonic terrorists to nobly traditionalist fanatics. Even if most of their game mechanics stay the same, their presence in the chronicle changes substantially.

Disassemble, Reassemble

Clues are an essential part of any mystery. It's the clues that give a mystery shape, that tantalize at the possibilities and hint at the truth. They are pieces of the puzzle, and the intrigue and satisfaction — and the fun — of solving a mystery comes from analyzing the meanings of clues, exploring the spaces between them and imagining all the different ways the puzzle might look when it's completed.

Creating the solution to a mystery can be just as stimulating and satisfying in much the same way. Even better, *you* get to decide how the puzzle should look, so you can add your deductive satisfaction to your creative satisfaction when you set out to select or devise the truth of VII for your chronicle.

The clues contained in the legend of VII in **Vampire: The Requiem** (the Roman numeral, the Sabbath, a wronged king, the "mark of the Betrayer") are building blocks a Storyteller can use to assemble her own truths behind the myths. Are the legends true? All of them? Are they metaphorically true but factually incorrect, or are they outright wrong? Of course, you can add your own clues and hints, true or false, into your city's legends as well.

Each of these core clues, drawn from the legendry you know from **Vampire: The Requiem**, went into the design of the three Sevens in this book. Some versions of VII make greater use of one of these "building blocks" than another, and you certainly don't need to use them all when creating your own version of VII, but consider all the different ways you (or an investigative character) could interpret these simple ideas when puzzling out the truth of VII.

Behind the Scenes

When you go about settling on, or creating, the right incarnation of VII for your chronicle, you're following in the footsteps of this book's authors. For some **Vampire** players and Storytellers, this kind of behind-the-scenes work is something new. To give you an idea of the thought processes that went into each version of VII in this book, here are a few words from each creator about their ideas. Compare these to their finished versions throughout the rest of the book.

Greg Stolze's Ahranites

"I actually submitted seven possible explanations for VII. These presented VII as: Descendents of the seven princes of Irem; the unlikely result of a vampire attempting to diablerize a demon and winding up with the demon as a spiritual parasite; Merovingian kings, destined to kill all vampires until Longinus Embraced some of them; a covenant of Kindred who believe they'll become mortal again when all other vampires are gone, and who use Devotions to do all the crazy VII stuff; the result of desperate spirits fusing themselves with two clans that were about to get wiped out, resulting in a hybrid whose numbers are fixed and who can only be put down for good by diablerie; a covenant with diablerie as a sacrament and some unique blood sorcery; and the option that they're broken and inferior Kindred from Gomorrah, motivated by envy, and planning to wipe out the other Kindred because then they can take over the world. As you can see, elements from several of these got melded together for the final product."

Christopher Kobar's Betrayed

"Upon first inspection, VII conjured up images of the boogeyman, but upon second thought, it struck me that these guys were not just a bunch of hoary badasses lurking under the stairs to snuff out their fellow vampires one by one. No, they were organized, they had an agenda and they had a culture. Whoever they were, they were a community — a family. What's more, they must be burning with righteousness, wrath or insanity — or a bit of all three — to carry on as they do, believing in lost legacies, kings, enigmatic glyphs and so forth. This drove my vision. I saw vampires motivated by this kind of thing even more than the Beast or ravenous hunger. And the only thing that could create such hatred and keep it burning through the ages had to be something personal that happened to these guys — or their founders — at the hand of other vampires. That their very *raison d'être* was forgotten by their enemies seemed fitting. To the Kindred, VII is not the noble foe locked in an eternal blood feud. Rather, it is nothing more than, well, a boogeyman."

Chuck Wendig's Sleepers

"One of the chiefly horrific elements about **Vampire** is your character's locus of control. Is her locus internal; does she believe her thoughts and actions are her own?

Or, like many vampires, is it external, dominated by any number of outside factors (clan, covenant, Vitae, the Beast)? The most frightening part about **Vampire** to me is when a character *believes* she has control over herself when, in reality, she has no such power. With the Seventh Day, this paranoid horror is realized. The puppet strings are nearly invisible but totally invasive. This is the entrenched paranoia of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* or *The Manchurian Candidate*. This is the modern fear of terrorists and insanity. A character is forced to ask, 'Do they walk among us?' And worse, 'Do I walk among them?'"

How to Use VII

As described in **Vampire: The Requiem**, VII is a mysterious and active enemy. Stories involving them intuitively revolve around scenes of suspense or violence. Most encounters with VII might seem to hinge on attacks, fighting and pursuit — trapped in a crumbling house with a vengeful killer, stalked in the smoky streets by an unshakeable stranger, ambushed in your haven by masked assassins — but that doesn't have to be the case. Don't surrender your control over VII to assumptions and clichés.

Perhaps your chronicle begins right after the players' characters have learned the truth about VII, and so rather than tales of investigation, suspense and revelation you explore stories of conflict, tense negotiation and resolution. Or you might choose to make your chronicle about vampires of VII, who know the truth already. In this case, stories involving VII may be about secrecy more than mystery, and perhaps more about anger than fear. You could even cast VII as just another covenant, once mysterious and fearsome, but now exposed. Are they using their frightening reputation to take control of the Danse Macabre in a hidden war and rule Kindred society or is their terrifying aura beginning to fade as the truth spreads?

In each of the following chapters, you'll find ways to incorporate VII into all kinds of **Vampire** tales and advice for telling many types of stories using VII. The themes of each chapter can inform and inspire numerous other dramas.

The mystery of VII is like an open hatch through which you can import new ideas into a story. Whatever you choose to place at the heart of the mystery will find its way into the stories you tell about that mystery.

Leads & Rumors

When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. The information a character learns during an investigation of VII depends on their methods. If the vampires of VII are as individually distinct as other Kindred — though they might not be — the intelligence an investigator gains through narrow channels is going to reveal just a narrow peek at the truth.

The following methods of investigation allow for characters of many different stripes to participate in what might otherwise be a matter for just one character. If the players' characters weren't created to be investigators or the pursuers of VII, it might seem difficult to introduce the mystery of VII into the chronicle without just attacking them from the dark. Having hints of VII's existence in the city appear gradually, from many different avenues of Kindred society, can create a great sense of dread and encroaching danger.

Characters don't have to be investigating VII to hear word of it from other vampires. If you want to introduce VII, drop hints as parts of other Skill tests or roleplaying scenes. Contacts and Allies may make mention of rumors they've heard from others, or a Mentor might decide that tonight's the night to share the legend of VII. One way to decide what Storyteller characters might know what is to organize it based on their Skills.

To use these Skill leads another way, you might base the individual agents of VII in your chronicle on them. Word of an assassin that's preparing an arsenal for an upcoming attack might come to the attention of a character with plenty of dots in Weaponry or Firearms. Sources suspecting a Storyteller character of being VII might assume that all VII vampires are like her. Alternately, they might simply assume that a vampire out to destroy other Kindred is a part of VII.

What's really important in the following list of ideas is that you learn to find inspiration everywhere — that the definitive traits of VII can be organized along virtually any line. Likewise, any character can be brought into a story involving VII, depending on the VII you use. Therefore, the right VII for your chronicle can depend on the characters in the chronicle.

If you're bold, you might even choose not to define the truth of VII until the characters start looking. Let the choices the *players* make — to have their characters inquire at court, to research old legends, to scrutinize VII's fighting style — guide you towards the truth for the chronicle. If they dig up secrets about the weaponry of VII and seek out knowledge of their mystic rites then the truth, as far as they're concerned, will be about swords and spells. If they go prying behind VII's campaign of fear and try to identify covert assassins, they'll find VII to be an order of deceit and stealth above all else. Whatever the characters find, then, is sure to be the truth, because *they* found it, and why waste time with dead-ends and red herrings? The story is where the players' characters are, after all.

This method isn't satisfying for all players — it seldom works if the players are on to it, anyway — but it guarantees that they'll find the boogeyman they most fear: the one they sought out. At the very least it produces a truth to VII that matches the interests and focus of the players and their characters.

Mental Approaches

The value of information on VII obtainable with Mental Skills may depend on the quality of records they leave behind. All vampires are careful to leave little trace of their existence where others might go looking for it even decades and centuries later. VII, as an unknown factor even to the secret practitioners of the Masquerade, might not leave behind anything at all for a researcher or occultist to discover.

In practice, of course, that can't be true. Not only is it unlikely, given the elaborate and aged back stories suggested in the following chapters, but it's bad storytelling. Some shreds, some flakes, some whispers of evidence must remain, waiting to be uncovered. The trick lies in recognizing clues for what they are (using Wits) and in piecing them together into something valuable (using Intelligence). Yet, even when clues can be found and understood, a character may have difficulty finding the will (or Resolve) to continue an investigation despite danger and difficulty.

Academics

Basic research could take characters into ancient libraries or the secure vaults of the Ordo Dracul to locate

centuries-old accounts of VII attacks, but that's not the only way for Academics to reveal secrets. A character lectures on VII at court (Presence + Academics), at the Prince's request and gets the attention of a Mekhet scholar that's been tracking VII for centuries. An old Kindred legend from Rome could take on new meaning when a character reinterprets it as a metaphor for VII (Wits + Academics).

Occult

While discussing the occult history of the Middle East with a Dragon theosophist, a character misspeaks (a Manipulation + Occult failure), but the words he accidentally strings together spark a revelation into the meaning of VII's history. A vital package meant for the Acolytes has gone missing, and its ghoulish courier has been found killed by VII — what would they want with the Mesoamerican artifact the local Hierophant was importing?

Alternately, a VII focused on the occult could be striving to protect their kingdom from outside influence and the curious probing of nosy Kindred.

Medicine

As a favor to the Primogen, a character examines the disintegrating corpses of neonates slain by VII (Wits + Medicine) and comes to the conclusion that the bodies'



insides were searched by the killers. During a psychiatric session with a shrink she's been feeding from, a character realizes (Composure + Medicine) that the psychiatrist is attempting to fixate her on VII.

Alternately, a version of VII involved with Medicine might be harvesting parts of other vampires to study, in hopes of finding a cure to the Curse.

Physical Approaches

Physical actions rarely reveal information directly, but they can easily lead to valuable revelations. Surveillance and intimidation often rely on Physical traits as well as Mental or Social Skills, and years of experience with weapons and violence are certain to provide some insight into a culture as bloodthirsty and dangerous as VII. Even if Physical Skills don't shine a light into the shadows of VII, they may facilitate an encounter with them.

Larceny

While lifting a stolen painting out of its protective frame (Dexterity + Larceny), a character discovers a message in an unknown language — punctuated by the Roman numeral VII — etched on the inside of the frame. After being hired to case a suburban mansion for a later B&E (Wits + Larceny), a character begins to understand that the vampires paying him aren't looking to rob the place, they're looking to attack it.

A version of VII based on Larceny might suggest an organization more interested in material gain than a spiritual quest. What if VII picks its targets based on rare artifacts they possess — perhaps once belonging to their ancient kingdom?

Stealth

While conducting surveillance on another enemy (Resolve + Stealth), a character witnesses an attack by vampires of VII. While fleeing from the Hounds, a Gangrel spots a storm drain he can hide in (Wits + Stealth) and finds himself crawling into a former VII haven adorned with Roman numerals, maps and strange idols.

Weaponry

A mortal sword-smith reveals that the sword shown to him with insider lingo (Presence + Weaponry) — which was recovered from the site of a VII attack — is an old-fashioned weapon used during the Qin Dynasty. While sparring with an acquaintance in a night-time martial arts class, a character notices his opponent uses a fighting style legendarily associated with VII (Wits + Weaponry).

A version of VII based around Weaponry might consider themselves to be soldiers in an unending war for a king who will one day arise and declare peace. Alternately, the vampires of VII might be seeking out vampire blood to feed to their demonic weapons, which hold them hostage in an arcane pact — if the vampires of VII stop fighting, they'll lose their eternal existence.

Social Approaches

There may be no better source of information on VII than the mind of a Kindred who has faced them. Even among the Damned of the common covenants, information on VII might not be recorded at all. Just how much of the VII legend exists only in oral histories and spook stories? Just how accurate are those tales?

Social Skills can be useful for uncovering old fragments of history, little-known stories and legends of old, but they can also tap into the new rumors that flow through Kindred society like gossip and float across the ballrooms of the Danse Macabre like tales of scandal. Social Skills can be employed through methods both subtle and gross, from casual blather so airy a speaker doesn't even know he's parted with something valuable to brutal interrogations so bloody the victim doesn't know what he said at all



THE IMMACULATE SCAPEGOAT

VII is made up. The stories are lies. They're fake. All of them. There is no VII.

It's sort of a lousy trick, pulling off the killer's hood to reveal Old Man Brown underneath, but if VII were an elaborate fabrication invented by some other well-known Kindred organization (a covenant, the Primogen), it could certainly be a surprise. Though a twist of this sort is often *not* what players want to see when they finally penetrate a long-running mystery, it can serve a valuable purpose if employed with care.

The real value in using VII as a red herring is to redirect the chronicle back to the core of the drama, to a recurring nemesis or enemy in disguise. After wandering throughout the city for several stories, dodging or facing vampires of VII in a myriad of exciting locations, the revelation that this legendary sect of murderers isn't an outside force at all can bring renewed focus to the chronicle. The breadth of world seems to shrink, and the characters suddenly see that their conflicts are much more personal than they had perhaps thought.

When the myths of VII turn out to be lies, their true motives can finally be known. Were the assassins called VII a hidden layer to a long-running mystery or were they the result of a conspiracy between factions the characters *thought* were opposed to each other? Is VII just a phantom used by Princes to keep a fearful undead populace in check? What sort of social control must be mustered to perpetrate such an elaborate fraud? What prize or threat could be so serious to make it worth while?



Expression

While admiring a painting in the Prince's office parlor (Wits + Expression), a character recognizes it as a copy of a painting tagged by VII in an attack a few months earlier.



Alternately, a version of VII based on Expression might view the destruction of Kindred as an art form intended to be appreciated by God Himself.

Socialize

While discussing the surge in Kindred violence in the city, a character accidentally gets an Invictus vampire to reveal more about VII than he should know (Manipulation + Socialize). A character finds himself being subtly questioned by a person he thought was mortal (Wits + Socialize), possibly singling him out for later attack.

Streetwise

A character attempting to fence an artifact he bought from a desperate mage (Manipulation + Streetwise) is told by a mortal antiquarian that it represents “the Sabbath” and that, originally, there would have been seven such statues. While on the hunt in free turf, a character notices unusual graffiti painted in hard-to-see locations (Wits + Streetwise); seven nights later, a local Kindred is destroyed in his haven, hidden near the strange graffiti.

Bled from the Covenants

When a shot rings out, everybody thinks they were the target. When a killer is on the loose, everyone thinks they might be next.

The Kindred covenants of some domains think of themselves as the true center of vampire society. The Bishop believes the Lancea Sanctum is the hinge with which the city turns. The Hierophant sees himself as the point on which philosophies pivot. The Prefect knows it all boils down politics. If VII wants revenge, surely it’s against the most meaningful covenant: your own.

Although Kindred in a particular league may be just as likely to shift the blame for VII’s wrath onto another covenant, every vampire faction has its own theories, stories and rumors about VII. What’s true? What’s not? That’s up to the Storyteller.

The following rumors can serve many purposes. They might be heard with a successful Skill check, as described above, or they might be declared publicly for all to hear. The Storyteller might use them to build up tension before VII makes an appearance in the chronicle, or she might select a few to be known by each player’s character at the start of the game. One of these might be true — the inspiration for a custom version of VII — or they might all be nonsense.

Remember, too, that even if all of these are fiction in your chronicle, a well-funded Prince or zealous Bishop

with starving Hounds and crusade-minded paladins might think one of these rumors is true. VII may not need to set foot in the city at all — sometimes the specter of VII is enough to spark a disaster. The protagonists might be the spreaders of disinformation, they might be paladins or they might be mistakenly marked as VII. Once the torches are lit, it may be too late for the truth.

THE CARTHIAN MOVEMENT

“VII’s an example of what happens if we don’t keep our society moving forward. They hold a grudge against us because of something our forefathers did a billion years ago, and why shouldn’t they? It’s easy to mistake us for those forefathers, ‘cause nothing’s changed since then. We keep making the same mistakes and VII keeps coming after us for vengeance.”

“You ever hear that those guys think they’re the descendants or heirs of some kings? I believe it. Except they’re not the heirs, they’re the kings, right? They’re still fighting some war from the old nights, and the elders will tell you they don’t know what it’s about, but that’s bullshit. It’s all old wars, man. Somebody else’s wars.”

“It’s a myth. A stale old campfire tale meant to keep uninformed whelps frightened, in line and cowering within the Invictus’s city walls. Or the Sanctified’s churches. Within that rusted old system. When the peasants get uppity, when they start sniffing around the edge of the yard, troublemakers get set on fire and ‘VII’ gets painted on a few walls. That’s all VII is — I don’t care what else you heard. It’s just more old-blood tyranny, yo. Tyranny of fear.”

THE CIRCLE OF THE CRONE

“They are ancient warriors fulfilling a sacred duty. Ages ago, when the Curse was new, the Seven swore an oath to a god now dead to slay all their damned cousins until only they remained. One night, perhaps not far off now, they will be the only vampires left in our world. When that night comes, they’ll divide the world — and all the riches we think of as our own — up amongst themselves and rule the night as demigods themselves.”

“Despite what you may have heard, VII is not out to destroy us. They are out to cull us, to prune our society until all the Kindred are balanced and harmonious, like primeval gardens. They are cultivators of our civilization, sword-bearing oracles with instructions from on-high. We should be afraid, but we should not hate them. If we are magnificent, if we are exemplars of our ways, then they will include us in their bloody utopia.”

“In the medieval nights, we called them the Hydra. Back then we knew them as a single creature with many heads and many more hands. They devoured Kindred by the handful. Back then, we didn’t know why. Tonight, we know better: the Hydra was the war hound of the Sanctified Inquisition — possibly even supported by radical monster-slayer factions within the mortal Inquisition.”

The Invictus

“VII’s ‘king’ is a cardinal, an archbishop, a pope. They share their ‘Sabbath’ with witches and mortal wizards. VII’s opaque mission is a crusade. A holy war waged against the Sanctified and the followers of the Crone. We are simply caught in the middle of religious fanaticism — again — as are all the Kindred under our watch. We cannot let this strife endanger our peace or our power.”

“All of this is merely the epilogue to the last intrigue of the Camarilla. They were assassins sent to destroy the leaders of the Kindred of Rome, and when they took on the task they swore a blood oath to complete it. And still they try. With the blood of the Roman Damned still trickling down untracked through the ages, they can never be sure they’ve burned every drop of it.”

“Nonsense. Kindred are being killed in this city, but there’s no ancient grudge or mystic curse involved. What you’re seeing is a campaign of fear, the work of desperate and immoral terrorists willing to ruin Requiem and destroy existences, sometimes centuries old, to undermine what we’ve built. VII is a bloody sheet worn by psychopathic and deluded ‘revolutionaries’ who consider assassination a reasonable alternative to discourse. VII is a fatal fiction.”

Lancea Sanctum

“The damnable fanatics of VII worship the Devil, my children. They are no different than the demons of Belial’s Brood — not just blind to the will of God and the wisdom of the Testament, but active enemies of our faith. They hide from us like evil spirits hide within the flesh of the kine. It is high time we stop our cowering and our waiting for them to bring their sin to our doorsteps. Let us take the fight to them! Let them fear us! Let them fear Longinus and the fires of God!”

“The blood of the VII vampires has been boiled by hellfire. Their bodies have become the receptacles of heathen gods who use them as instruments in their pagan plots. In the ancient nights, these shreds of pagan gods were hidden in Damned bodies to combat the rise of Longinian culture and the spread of the Testament. The wicked kingdom they’re pursuing is a realm in which the Kindred exist in ignorance of the Curse’s purpose.”

“The VII feed on us. They imagine themselves the predators of predators, the feeders upon the feeders, but that is more than arrogance, it is sin. They are vampires, like us, and no matter what they think their motives are they are pursuing their own kind as if we were mortal. They are cannibals.”

ORDO DRACUL

“Each Kindred of VII — and there are not as many as you might think, with the number of stories floating around — was meant for something else. Each was Embraced before they could become. They would have been werewolves or witches or leaders of mankind if they’d had their days in the sunlight. But if they destroy all Kindred, then they destroy the Curse as well and spare all others from their fate.”

"Ever heard a Dragon tell you that 'the way out is through?' That sort of thinking is what leads to gruesome disasters like VII. There's your transcendence through strife — murder and chaos. The Cursed of VII think of themselves as being above their kind. They look without for what's really within. They want to change others to change themselves, and that's folly. They don't understand change, but they think they can drive it across the night. They think they can drive the dragon. They are why we need the Coils. They are what happens to vampires without them."

"The Kindred of VII are a force of damnation. Like a thunderstorm in the night, like a weather system of blood and fangs. My mentor told me that documents uncovered in Rome after World War II revealed VII to be the remains of vampires who had escaped their physical forms. They're just empty shells, they're just what's left over. Tanks without drivers, careening through the city. Standing in their way's just gonna get us fucking killed, but following in their wake is like *Following the Dragon*. 'Looting chaos,' the Philosopher said. 'Looting in the wreckage of chaos.'"

The Riddle of Sevens

Think about the frequency with which the number seven appears in mythology, superstition and folklore. Think about how often it comes up in religious texts and traditions. Any of these may be a source of inspiration for your version of VII, either as the spark that produces some particular detail or the fuse that explodes a familiar concept into something extraordinary. If nothing else, the volume of sevens in mythology, history, geography, numerology, astronomy and religion can create an excellent smokescreen for your mysterious VII to hide behind.

The significance of seven as a sacred number has been filtered from the traditions of western Asia into countless world cultures. It appears time and again in religious texts and customs as a symbol of spiritual order and unity. In many cases, seven is also associated with the completion of a repeating, and often natural, cycle.

The number's status as a symbol of natural — even cosmic — significance may stem from the observations of early astronomers. There are seven celestial bodies in the solar system that are visible to the naked eye (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, the sun and the moon), and the moon's seven-day-long phases are the basis for the lunar calendar's seven-day week. Four seven-day weeks make a roughly 28-day month; coincidentally, the numbers one through seven total 28 when added together.

These septenary observations are thought to have first been made by the ancient peoples of Mesopotamia (specifically, Babylonia). Mesopotamian cosmology divides heaven and earth into seven zones (or the "seven directions of the world") and attributes seven branches to the Tree of Life. Ancient peoples from the Mesopotamians to the Greeks recognized seven climates in the known world. These, too, were based on the seven visibly mobile

celestial bodies in the ancient sky, which were sometimes thought of as the gods themselves and may have led to the construction of seven-tiered Babylonian ziggurats and cities formed of seven concentric walls.

Significant appearances of the number seven are common throughout a wide variety of later religious beliefs. Seven was the number of immortality in ancient Egypt, the number of emblems or "appearances" of the Buddha and the number of faces on the world mountain in Hinduism. In Judeo-Christian and Islamic faiths, seven appears with great frequency. Consider the seven Pillars of Wisdom, the seven branches of the Menorah and the seven Noahide Laws for all humankind in the Jewish faith. (Coincidentally, the first verse of the Torah is seven words and 28 letters — Kabbalah is not light on numerology.) In Islam, there are seven heavens, earths, seas and hells, seven gates into paradise and the number seven symbolizes completeness and perfection (just as it does in Judaism). The Seven Sins and Seven Virtues are well-known to **Vampire** players, but Christianity also attributes seven heads to the beast of Revelations, in addition to numerous other well-documented sevens.

Significant secular usage of the number seven is just as common. Rome and Jerusalem are both said to have been built across seven hills (and many cities have since made similar claims). In the Roman calendar, September was the seventh month, hence its name. The Japanese code of *bushido* is made up of seven principles. There are seven Wonders of the World and seven colors in the rainbow. Seven is a lucky number in many cultures, but not all: Portuguese and Galician folklore claims that a seventh son may be a werewolf. Other European myths claim that the seventh son of a seventh son will become a vampire



SEVEN DIRECTIONS

By some reckonings, the orientation of one's self in the universe can be expressed using the so-called seven directions. North, south, east, west, up and down are the six linear directions of travel. The seventh "direction" is not a direction at all, but the point where the six directions intersect, the point of origin. This "seventh direction" is the point from which the world is always perceived — the self.



The Seven Against Thebes

Aeschylus' classical play, *Seven Against Thebes*, tells the tale of the civil war between Oedipus' sons Eteocles and Polyneices, who claimed rule over Thebes after their father's exile. (Eteocles' and Polyneices' sister is more well known: Antigone.) The brothers, unable to peacefully share the throne, battled over the city. Polyneices brought seven armies to attack the seven gates of Thebes and take the throne from his brother. Each army was led by a different

commander: Amphiaraus, Capaneus, Hippomedon, Parthenopeus, Tydeus, King Adrastus of Argos and Polyneices himself. These were the Seven Against Thebes.

The brothers Polyneices and Eteocles slew each other during the siege of the city. Over the course of battle, all of the Seven were also killed — except for King Adrastus, who returned to Argos. After the Seven failed to take Thebes, the city fell under the rule of King Creon. (It's worth noting that Creon was known for receiving warnings and insight from the blind prophet Tiresias — see **Chapter Three**.)

The Greek city of Thebes is, of course, not the same city that lends its name to the miraculous and damnable powers of the Lancea Sanctum, but there's no reason to assume that the domain's rumored vampires are educated enough to know the difference. If VII were somehow descended from Adrastus (or one of his slain comrades), it's likely that confusion would lead to erroneous myths about those Oedipal undead and their relationship to the Church of Longinus. Perhaps Thebes is the kingdom that VII seeks to reclaim. The confused legendry of vampires over thousands of years leaves room for Oedipus, Adrastus, Eteocles, Polyneices and even Creon to be the king referred to in the myths of VII, if that's what you choose to do



SEVEN AGES OF MAN

In the play *As You Like It*, William Shakespeare makes a reference to the once-common folk notion of the "seven ages of man." ("And one man in his time plays many parts,/His acts being seven ages.") Though there are no specific names or lengths for these ages of life, the broad roles a man was said to play throughout his life were, in rough order: the infant, the child, the lover, the soldier, the adult, the old man and, alternately, the senile or the dead.



The Seven Sages

Several of the world's cultures have legends involving a group of "seven sages." In Hindu folklore, seven sages were cursed by Muruga, an aspect of Siva, to be born on earth and live through many sufferings as punishment for their improper treatment of their wives. A popular medieval tale in the West, also called *The Seven Sages*, involves a prince who is falsely charged with rape after he declines the romantic advances of his stepmother; he's saved by seven sages who tell seven tales of evil women to the prince's father, convincing him that the lusty stepmother is a liar.

Perhaps the best-known collection of seven sages are the philosophers and historians of Greek legend, known simply as the Seven Sages of Greece. These seven thinkers were widely renowned for centuries and honored with

inscriptions of their insight on the walls of the temple at Delphi. Though Plato once put forth a specific list of philosophers to be regarded as the Seven Sages, many more than seven men have been counted among the ranks of the Seven Sages since antiquity. One of these was even a representative of the barbarians: Anacharsis, a Scythian philosopher from the lands near the Black Sea that would one day become Ukraine (see **Chapter Two**)



THE SEVEN SISTERS

Countless figures have been organized together under the title of Seven Sisters. Some of these are groups of mythological characters, such as the Greek Pleiades and Hesperides, but many sites and geographic features throughout the world have been given the name as well. In the United Kingdom alone, "the Seven Sisters" might refer to cliffs in Sussex, a village in Wales or an underground station in London. Mountains in both Canada and Norway bear the name, as does a collection of states in the northeast region of India. Moscow is home to a collection of skyscrapers known as the Seven Sisters, while in America the term is sometimes applied to the nation's first major film studios. Above the earth, there is also a star cluster known as the Seven Sisters — the Pleiades.



Seven Sleepers of Ephesus

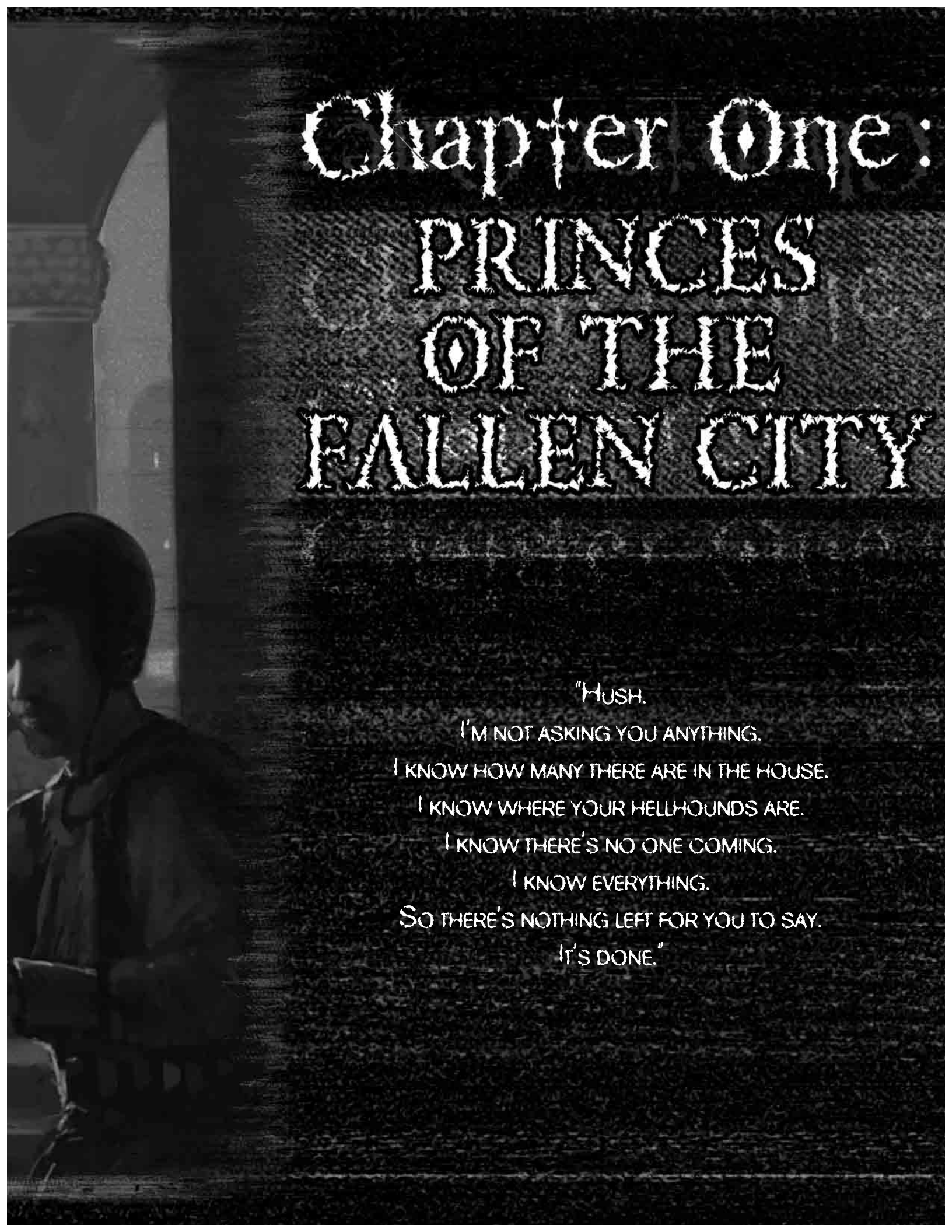
The old Christian legend of the Seven Sleepers tells of seven young men, whose names vary with the telling, persecuted for their celebrations of Jesus in the time of the Roman Emperor Decius. The Christians hid in a cave on Mount Celion, near Ephesus, in what is now Turkey. Eventually they were found by agents of the Emperor, and walled up within their cave to die as punishment for their heathen disobedience. Afraid, but unshaken in their faith, the seven men prayed to God for the strength to endure and then fell into a deep, simple sleep.

They awakened hundreds of years later, when local masons opened the cave while collecting stones, but the Seven Sleepers thought they had slept just one night! The Seven Sleepers were stunned and delighted to find themselves in a world where Christianity was thriving. The local bishop, however, didn't quite believe their tale, so the young men showed him their cave and told of their miraculous salvation by God.

In later centuries, the Seven Sleepers' cave on Mount Celion became a site of many burials and, later, a church. Pilgrims still visit the site. For a time, the Seven Sleepers' story was well known; they were entered into the Roman Martyrology and celebrated with a feast day on the 27th day of July. Yet eventually the story of the sleepers became a proverb, and the proverb became a legend.







Chapter One: PRINCES OF THE FALLEN CITY

"HUSH.

I'M NOT ASKING YOU ANYTHING.

I KNOW HOW MANY THERE ARE IN THE HOUSE.

I KNOW WHERE YOUR HELLHOUNDS ARE.

I KNOW THERE'S NO ONE COMING.

I KNOW EVERYTHING.

SO THERE'S NOTHING LEFT FOR YOU TO SAY.

IT'S DONE."

If man were immortal he could be perfectly sure of seeing the day when everything in which he had trusted should betray his trust, and, in short, of coming eventually to hopeless misery. He would break down, at last, as every good fortune, as every dynasty, as every civilization does. In place of this we have death.

— Charles Sanders Peirce

Most humans never hear of VII, naïve lucky things. Even many Kindred go through their Requiems without ever hearing tell of VII, its mysterious comings and goings, how it zeroes in on troubled cities and, just as their problems ignite, it comes down like a foul, agitating wind to turn that hot spark into a consuming holocaust.

It must be said that Kindred who've never heard of VII are among its easiest victims. Said, anyhow, by Kindred who are old enough to know better or who claim sufficient knowledge to hypothesize. Even those theorists seem to do little better than mutter about blood-crusted cauldrons found abandoned, eerie resistance to mind reading or control, graceful warriors who seem to dance even as they kill. The theorists speak of a force perhaps more cunning than the Beast and thereby more malevolent. They scratch strange sigils in the dirt, unwilling to commit them to stone or even paper; they shrug and shake their heads and cast uneasy glances sideways as they speak.

This fear, so perfect for beings themselves fearsome, inflames skeptics who dismiss VII as neonate claptrap, an urban legend grown large on Ventrue paranoia, even an insidious plot of the Lancea Sanctum (or the Acolytes, or the Ordo Dracul) to keep the rank and file spooked and docile.

Conjecture can gain one a limited respect among the gullible, and disbelief can do the same among the cynical, but those who *know* — those who've fought VII or interrogated one of its members, those who've survived an attack or have even attempted diablerie just for the chance to drink in memories — those who know are regarded with suspicion and fear. For vampires are mysteries themselves, and a mystery to mysteries is something dire indeed.

What is the truth behind the skepticism, the dread, the uncertainty, the destruction? What is VII?

VII is a modern covenant, with doctrines as fiercely debated as those of the Lancea Sanctum, with methods as thorough as those of the Invictus. Its members are dedicated to the removal of all Kindred for vastly disparate reasons, but VII works because it has to, because the pieces that don't fit don't last long, and because there are more who welcome their deeds — more Kindred *and* mortals — than the other covenants suspect.

VII is a separate clan, one aloof from the other five, equal parts contemptuous and jealous, with hatred overshadowing scorn and envy combined. VII is a fam-

ily whose loyalty to each other is unquestioned, indeed unquestionable, even though they are riven by savage philosophical rivalries.

VII is blood, and it's politics. VII is ordained by God but sleeps out the day beside a demon. VII is a secret that cannot be uttered, guarded by a name they dare not speak, in pursuit of an ultimate goal that no two describe the same.

VII is all these things, and, once inside it, there is no turning back.

History

Modern Kindred history extends back to the Camarilla in the great days of Rome. The history of VII extends back farther than that — though, as with all vampires, events are harder to verify the deeper they lie in the past. The vampires of VII understand that their history goes like this.

The Doomed City

Thousands of years ago, the great King **Ahran** became dissolute and corrupt. Instead of ruling his city with justice and mercy, or seeking the greatness of martial conquest, he indulged his gluttony, lust and appetite for excess in all things.

He consumed the delicacies of many lands but, in time, tired of them. He took many concubines, beauties of all nations, but, in time, his flesh weakened, and they became only a reminder of his flagging desire and tepid lust. He drank, and sought herbs and potions to give him ecstasies of madness, but, inevitably, they disappointed him as well.

Then, by night, a dark stranger came and taught the King new delights. The stranger won the love of the King through the perverse joys of his unhallowed blood, and, when the King was deeply enthralled, the stranger brought forth his despicable brood and fastened them, like a tick, upon the people of the city.

The King's youngest son, **Tarshad**, from the first spoke out against the stranger. "The cast of sin falls upon his visage," Tarshad declared, "for his image is inconstant. Father, repudiate him, for that which he offers is unclean and unnatural."

"Unnatural perhaps," replied King Ahran. "But thereby unsurpassed. I have sampled every natural pleasure and find myself unsated. My friend gives me a bliss for which nature left me unprepared."

"Man was not meant for such pleasures," Tarshad insisted. "In truth I tell you this: If you continue on this path, you will turn your hand against your sons, and your sons will turn their hands against you. Your city will lose you and, in time, be lost to you. The pleasures you crave will lead you to the grave."

Uneasy at his son's words, the King bade him be silent, and, when Tarshad refused, King Ahran threw him into a lightless prison.

Then the King's second son, **Ishoab**, came to his father and said, "It is well that you have clapped Tarshad into prison, for he lacked the discretion and respect that are the hallmarks of a true Prince. His words were foolish. I could never turn against you. Yet I must admit I am uneasy with the position the stranger occupies — he sits at your right hand, where formerly your sons were placed. Although we must surely honor him as a guest, perhaps it is better to give him his own dwelling apart from ours, some distance from the palace, that we may go to him as we please, and not have him come and go as he wills. For he came by night unheralded. Might he not set forth in silence too?"



WHERE'S BIRSHA?

Readers of Genesis will note that the King of Gomorrah described therein — the king who made war with Kedorlaomer and has to flee a rain of bitumen even before the fall of the city — is named Birsha, not Ahran. Ahranite scholars offer several explanations for the seeming discrepancy.

First, some believe that after Birsha was defeated his city was given to a conquering general and that Ahran was that general. Thus, the Ahranite claim to the throne of Gomorrah was suspect from the beginning, and only by virtue of their epic quest can the children of Ahran deserve the crown.

Second, some believe that Ahran was simply Birsha's son, who took over after the wars, though it would be difficult to reconcile Lot having daughters young enough to bear children if he were in the city of Gomorrah under both Birsha and Ahran.

Finally, some Ahranites claim that the Bible is simply wrong.



At this, the King was greatly troubled, for he had not thought the stranger might leave him. But rather than listen to Ishoab's words, the King heeded the spell within his heart, placed by the stranger, which compelled him to trust and adore. He then berated his son Ishoab, calling him unworthy and casting him out of his dining hall. Ishoab groveled, and apologized, and made fine gifts to the stranger. But in his heart he nursed a wound.

The oldest son of the King was named **Jepshiel**, and he was a mighty warrior. He kept his own counsel about the

stranger while Tarshad was imprisoned, and he remained silent while Ishoab was humiliated, and he said nothing when the stranger brought his court of fellow monsters to the palace. But one day, as dawn rose and the King lay in repose, Jepshiel and his men attacked the stranger's room with sword and torch.

A fierce battle ensued, and the foreigners used many strange sorceries on the followers of Jepshiel. By noon many had died, but not all, and not the stranger, the strongest of their number. The King had been awakened by the call of horns and the screams of the dying, and he led his own soldiers forth. He castigated Jepshiel for violating their hospitality and for daring to make war from ambush on a sleeping guest. Jepshiel cut his father with the sword, and, seeing this, the Prince's own men abandoned him. Jepshiel was thrown into prison beside Tarshad, and, even more, the stranger and his survivors were given him to have their way.

Now, with Tarshad imprisoned and Jepshiel under torture and Ishoab disgraced, the stranger could work his will fully on the King. He told the King that his wound could be healed, and the King agreed, and thereby was bound even tighter to the foreigner. Then the King ruled in name only, and in truth the stranger and his court made law. They threw down the old gods of the temple, and declared themselves gods in their place, and they took many sacrifices of blood.

But during the day the blood gods slept, and, by noontime's light, Ishoab came to his brothers in secret.

"They are too powerful for us," he told Jepshiel and Tarshad.

"The people will rise against their excesses," Jepshiel said. "They will fight by day when they are shown their weaknesses."

"No," Ishoab said. "They have taken the army as they have taken the King. All that remains is for us to flee. We can find favor in a foreign city, raise an army there to conquer."

Then Tarshad spoke.

"We are the princes of the royal blood," he said. "If we turn our backs on this city, it will spell its ruin. But I have seen signs and heard voices."

His brothers were still, and listened, for had not Tarshad's first prophecy come true?

"I have here been chained in the darkness, with walls of stone to hold back all natural light, but my first night I saw a secret light, pale like the moon, and with the light came a reedy whisper. 'You and your brothers can be the downfall of this evil,' the voice told me. 'But the path is hard, for so long as even one of the blood-cursed walks the earth by night, neither you nor your sons will come into the kingdom. But if you swear an oath before all gods and all nature, to scourge these beasts until not one remains, then your city shall once more be free, and it shall be your own.'





"The second night, the darkness cleared again, and a second secret light came upon me, bright and crimson and flickering, like the greatness of fire, and the voice that came was like the roar of a lion. 'You and yours will wander,' it said. 'And suffer, and strive. Yea, you will know sacrifice as only Kings without land can know it. You, Tarshad, would take up this burden, but, if you do, know that it means destruction and wailing and death, yea, death unto a multitude, innocent and guilty alike, and it will be a death of fire. And if your brother Ishoab takes up the burden, in time another kingdom will fall, another people will be consumed, the iniquitous and their victims together, and that city will be swallowed by the depths of the earth. And if your brother Jepshiel takes up the burden, in the fullness of time a third city, greater by far than the first two and less stained by sin, it will fall with all the people in it, devoured by the sea, and only one in ten will escape. Three sons sworn, three cities ruined, three golden crowns cast down. This is the price of your mission.'

"Hearing that," said Tarshad, "I was afraid, and I wept, for I knew the voice spoke truth. I knew the price to free our world of the stranger and his ilk would be high, and be paid the same by the knowing and the ignorant. But on the third night I saw a third secret light, and this light was pure and clear and cast no shadows. It was like the noontime sun, and a third voice like song brought words of comfort. 'If all who have your blood should pledge,' the voice said, 'and you remain true to your covenant, and

you gain by your efforts victory, you shall be restored and a child of Ahran will sit once more upon the throne. For the first city lost will be restored, and the second city lost will be found, and the third city lost will be rebuilt and remembered until the end of time. If you swear you shall have allies of power great and strange, and you shall know by three gifts. First, upon your pledge, the stranger and his court will fall. Second, in your time of greatest need a leader shall arise from your blood and rally your family to war. Third, when the first two cities are found anew, you will find allies from the sea and from above the sky, whose prowess will meet and overmatch your own.'

Hearing these prophecies, Jepshiel and Ishoab were silent for some time. Then Jepshiel spoke.

"If not unto us, unto whom should this decision fall? For it is always the lot of the King to choose for the multitude, though he be only one lone man."

"Yes," said Ishoab. "The choice before us is harsh, yet already the stranger raises up more of his kind, like ants unto ants and weeds unto weeds. It is beyond human strength to contend with him. With this pledge, we may escape and reclaim our birthright in time. Without it, we are doomed, and our city is as well."

With those words, the three brothers were decided, and they pledged their oaths before all gods and all nature. No sooner had they spoken the words than the earth shook, and the walls of the prison gaped wide, and they

came forth to see fire and brimstone streaming up from the ground and raining down from the sky. The bitumen and pitch struck the houses of the dead, and the three sons fled the destruction of their city.

Ever since that time, the name of that city, the name **Gomorrah**, has been invoked as a warning against defying nature and defying God.



THE FATE OF THE KING

It's presumed that King Ahran perished in the flames that consumed his foul masters, but, of course, no one can be sure. Some of the more superstitious Sevenites point out that the death god of the Celts, Arawn, has a name suspiciously close to that of their progenitor. Likewise, Ahriman, the lord of darkness and opponent of Azura Mazda in the Zoroastrian religion is suspiciously similar. Vampires from the more pragmatic wing of VII roll their eyes and ask if he founded the country of Iran and was responsible for the smelting of iron as well.



The Great Leader, the Great Corruptor

The three sons of Ahran set forth as they had promised, each one in a different direction, pledging to meet every year in the ruins of Gomorrah to share what they had learned.

After five years, they began to understand the enormity of their task and the impossibility of completing it in one lifetime.

After ten years, they had taken wives and pledged their sons to the task as well.

After fifteen years, Ishoab's son came in his father's stead, saying Ishoab was too ill to travel. The next year brought tidings of Ishoab's death.

After twenty years, Tarshad's son came and told of his father's disappearance. Tarshad had, in the lateness of his years, begun to hear voices again, and what's more, had begun to seek after miracles and doers of miracles.

After twenty-five years, Jephshiel's son brought his father's shield and told, with tear-streaked eyes, of the last son of Ahran's final battle. By that time, the sons of the Princes had sons of their own, and their lineage was spreading throughout the land.

So it went for decades, and then centuries, with the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Ahran becoming wealthy merchants through the region, the better to let them travel, spy out their prey and strike without warning. In those days, the lineage was strong within them, and they all could recognize the cursed blood drinkers on sight.

In this fashion, over a thousand years passed, and many began to doubt the prophecies of Tarshad. But others kept true to their oaths and never faltered in their faith.

In their role as warriors against the night, the children of Ahran learned that the world was crowded with darkness and mystery. Blood-drinkers were not the only dangers in the shadows. Sometimes the Ahranites made common cause with mysterious spirits, and sometimes they judged strange creatures to be as monstrous as their sworn enemies. Through many generations they learned many dire mysteries, and three were more foul than the others.

One foul secret was found in the city of **Irem** in the deserts of North Africa. A city of pillars and splendor, it hid at its center a fell god, worshipped in secret by the city leaders, whose powers, both bold and subtle, undergird its prosperity. Called **Shaddad**, the demon was more than a match for the Ahranite family who confronted it, and those of Ahran's blood gave Irem a wide berth thereafter. But to their salvation, or their enduring regret, they did not forget the name Shaddad.

The second foul secret was the Camarilla — a group of vampires who sought to unify and regulate their numbers, the better to strike from concealment and work their will on unsuspecting mortals. Entwined like a weed around Imperial Rome, the Camarilla battled the sons of Ahran for generations. The Ahranites allied themselves with the Visigoths and later the Tatars in an attempt to harm this dark conspiracy, but the Ahranites were more successful at striking the beast of Rome than the shadow it cast. The Camarilla, in turn, killed many with Gomorran heritage. But their greater success was to scatter the Ahranites and cast doubt on their lore and traditions. This two-fold attack — murdering the zealous and nurturing doubt among the naïve — divided and weakened the family. Though it had spread far, the Camarilla was spreading it thin.

The third secret was, to many, the foulest. It was simply this: Ishoab never died.

Before the fall of Gomorrah, before the imprisonment of Jephshiel, Ishoab had sought the favor of the stranger in their house. Though the kind words he spoke were false, he played at remorse. The stranger was not taken in, but, knowing that possessing a King and a Prince was better than having either alone, it gave Ishoab its occult blood to drink and thereby shielded him from age, as it had done with his father.

So long as he had the unholy blood, Ishoab would not wither, as man was meant to do. Even after the fall of the city, he craved the blood. With his oath-gained power to seek out the hidden, Ishoab took it by force for over two thousand years.

As his brothers learned of this perverse enchantment of youth, they also learned that the blood of their quarry could create dependencies. Ishoab had to hide himself from Tarshad and Jephshiel, but, after their death, he emerged from hiding, posing as his own grandson. His children aided him in this ruse, and in this fashion he guided a third of the Ahranite line for generations. Always among the sons of



Ishoab, there was a group who knew their ancestor's secret, and who brought him his sustenance.

Ishoab was old and crafty, and he applied his wiles to the preservation of his hidden shame. But the Camarilla held those who were stronger and more subtle. When they learned of Ishoab's need, they did not reveal their knowledge to him, but rather to the descendents of his brothers. The lines of Jephshiel and Tarshad did not want to believe, but their history had taught them that the blood of the unclean can stain even the most powerful.

Under the weight of the deception unveiled, the family broke apart and warred with itself. Its fragments were easy prey for their Roman foes.

The family's history of treachery to kin had, once more, blighted the line of kings. Yet, at that dark hour, the promised leader arose, and, had things been different, the divisions might have healed, and the Camarilla might have been scourged forth into daylight hundreds of years before its eventual decline.

But the leader, while strong and wise, did not heal the family. Her name was **Ansuara**.

The lineage of Tarshad produced her, and her exploits were undeniably great. But many proud sons of Jephshiel refused to bend knee to a woman, and the tribe of Ishoab was split between those loyal to their patriarch and those who sought to cleanse the family of his dishonor. Yet, even with only a fraction of the family rallied to her banner, Ansuara's wisdom and might were such that she dealt a mighty blow first to the Camarilla, destroying the vampires of Zeugma and creating a safe haven there for her followers. Next she showed her strength against her renegade cousins, razing the fortress in which they kept Ishoab's "herd" of captive monsters.

These triumphs rallied more to her cause, both those with Ahran's blood and others who knew of the night hunters. Their pressure sent Ishoab into the wilderness, hungry and pursued.

Ishoab allied himself with the Romans, and, with his knowledge of the family, turned the tide once more against the followers of Ahran.

Desperate and despairing after this betrayal, Ansuara made a fateful bargain. She called upon the demon Shaddad.

Ansuara and many Ahranites had fled to the desolate Empty Quarter, and were a day's march from Irem. In the years since their last confrontation, Shaddad had suffered much resistance within the demon's own city, and had foreseen that its enemies were preparing a fate for Irem that would rival the fall of Gomorrah.

The demon begged Ansuara and her followers to give it refuge, and in return promised that it would make them equals to their foes in strength and patience, and even surpass them in grace and skill. Ansuara had little choice against the coming Camarilla onslaught, just as Shaddad had little choice to escape the doom of Irem.

Thus it was that the savior Ansuara married the demon king Shaddad, and they became one body, and the soul of Shaddad merged with the blood of the Kings of Gomorrah.

The demon's bargain was true, for Ansuara and her closest followers were made into monsters like those they battled. With this new strength, they lured the Camarilla into Irem just as the earth gaped wide and swallowed the city whole. Then the cursed children of Ahran left the desert and shook its dust from their feet — condemned to drink the blood, just like those they had sworn to destroy."



TWO THOUSAND YEARS?

The idea that any individual could survive awake and aware for two thousand years strains the credulity even of vampires, whose Requiems far outlast mortal lives. The idea that Ishoab — a ghoul without recourse to long torpor and dependent on seizing Vitae by force — could survive for *millennia*, especially millennia before Christ, when large settlements were rare and Kindred even more so, is beyond belief for many Ahranites.

Rather than accept the story of Ishoab as literal truth, many who study the legends suggest that Ishoab's line had learned of ghouling and that it was a sect within his family that made a practice of it. Thus the texts used Ishoab as a metaphor for the corrupt members of his family. This more plausible story gains favor with the intellectual believers. The most fervid insist that it's literally true.

On the other hand, many other Sevenites privately or publicly consider the unbelievable lifespan of Ishoab to be essential to the legend. Ishoab was a singular creature of cunning whom no man or monster could anticipate in ages past or believe tonight. It's easy to doubt the tale. It's easy to underestimate Ishoab.



The Dark Ages

Armed with the power of Shaddad and the guidance of Ansuara, the Ahranites struck back decisively, even going so far as to threaten the Camarilla with Gomorrah glyphs and symbols.



In the old language of Gomorrah, it reads, "As the ground swallowed the city of pillars, so will we devour you." It was the Roman vampires who assumed the symbol had something to do with their numbers V and II.

While the Ahranites, now being called "Seven" for the first time, continued to strike the Camarilla, Rome



itself was failing and the loss of empire was harming the vampires as much as the hunters. (More, perhaps.) The children of Ahran might have even succeeded in eradicating the vampires of Europe, if their own ranks had not been divided.

The whispers of Shaddad were strong, and the gifts of power the demon gave those who listened were undeniable. Already the mortal family was mistrustful of the vampires, even though Ansuara personally had their support. Now some within the vampire branch started to whisper about what would happen when the Camarilla fell. Would they, too, need to be destroyed in order for Ahran's line to return to the throne?

Shaddad told them of another way. Shaddad told them that when they were the last vampires on Earth, it could rise once more from their blood and return to its former might. Those who helped the demon in this quest would be rewarded with a new Gomorrah — a city of victims, willingly supplicant to the blood gods of Ahran's line, as they had been in Ahran's time. Their Sabbath needn't be a humble march to their own graves. It could be a celebration of fullness and power, unmatched by any mortal!

Those who listened went deeper into Shaddad's power, and in time returned to the ruins of Irem, where they removed from the demon's temple the brass wreckage of Shaddad's great idol. Carrying it away to the Malakul monastery, they held it safe for the day of his return.

But Ansuara was not ignorant of this movement among her own followers. She confronted them with words, and then with warnings, and, when her warnings went unheeded, she struck.

By night she and twenty of her followers assaulted Malakul. They overcame the twelve sorcerers within and carried off the brass idol, but at great cost. For Shaddad's power had grown, and only through sorcery of her own was Ansuara able to defeat it.

It is not fully known what she did or how. Her students passed on fragments of their understanding, but many of them were of shaken mind after the events of that night.

One drew a symbol:

VIII

She said it was Ansuara's seal, placed upon Shaddad with her own blood, cursed by the demon and blessed by all gods and nature. By this seal, Shaddad would sleep as Ansuara slept and wake when she awakened.

Another spoke of the World Tree, the Holy Cross, the trials of Odin for the Runes. He said that Ansuara had pierced herself through the heart, not with dead wood

but living, that she might hold Shaddad in torpor until the end of time.

A third, who had seen the most and was the most maddened, muttered only of other worlds, other guardians, saying over and over, "We were not meant to cross the border."

In the end, the great demon slumbered, and the great leader was lost.

Unto the Modern Nights

Sevenite scholars are known to call the battle over Shaddad the event when the legend of VII became its history. In time, leaders replaced Ansuara, but there was no leader as great as she had been. In that ignorant age, communication between the children of Ahran decayed, just as messages between churches became less and less frequent, just as mortal society localized into feudalism.

The mortal line of Ahran diluted further into the mass of humankind. Few of Ahran's scions were born with the ability to instantly know their enemies — only a handful in each generation. The vampires of VII made their assaults, but sporadically and with little coordination. Ideology changed greatly without exterior debate, and insular covens of VII sometimes made war by proxy with each other over the meaning of the Sabbath and their relationship to Shaddad.

In time, a new dawn eased the darkness. First came the merchants of the Renaissance, and a few Ahranites remembered their long past as travelers. They joined themselves to these brave mortals, and communication among family members, which had been a scant trickle, became a thin stream. After the merchants came the builders of empires, and the stream became stronger, more reliable. With the railroad and the telegraph and the advances of the world wars, the messages among distant VII cliques became a torrent, then a flood, and, without any real plan or intent, VII went from being a scattered collection of vampires to being, once more, a unified and, eventually, global organization.

At first, the only tie was the blood of Ahran, the curse of Shaddad and the hatred of the other five clans. But that was enough, especially the last. VII vampires from different lands and cultures agreed that the others must be destroyed, and, even if they differed over questions of why, they were pragmatic enough to compromise on how. The practices of VII in the twenty-first century arose by consensus and have been tried and found true.

Even now, the sense of urgency that led them past their misgivings unites them still. There are many contentious issues in VII, and, among themselves, they argue bitterly. But they come together in the face of one indisputable fact: the five clans are stronger now than they've ever been. VII is losing, inch by inch — and if they resist one another, they could fall into destruction before another decade passes.

Akhud

Yovr sire killed yov. I'm jvst here to finish the job.

As mysterious as the Mekhet, as proud as the Ventrue and as feared as the Nosferatu, the Akhud clan is small, secretive and dedicated. Ordained by God and empowered by a demon, they have within their numbers passionate, self-martyring, would-be saints and profoundly selfish diabolists hoping to create a New Vampire Order with themselves firmly on top. The Ahranites as a culture contain a broad spectrum of philosophies, goals and beliefs, but the Akhud as a clan are all relentlessly loyal to one another. Indeed, they have no choice but to be so.

At first blush, the Akhud curse of fealty might seem to be a blessing in disguise — a thin disguise at that. What Kindred of the five clans wouldn't long for a supernatural assurance against treachery, such as that enjoined on the children of Ahran?

The curse of fealty may be a blessing for individuals, but it is a curse for VII as a whole, for the simple reason that it *ensures* ideological variety. That's good for a pluralistic nation, but it's awful for a militant organization with a difficult goal. With no violent purges (or meaningful threats of them), the open devil worshippers are forced to tolerate the God-fearing wing of the covenant, and vice versa. Unable to remove one another by force, they're in stalemate on every issue save that of the destruction of the Camarillas. This makes VII efficient hunters, but at the organizational level they're hard-pressed to do anything else.

Far from being a cozy, tightly knit family, VII is a seething mass of partisan rivalries that can *only* be resolved through talk, debate and politics. Given the foul temper inherent in the curse of vampirism, that's very close to hell on earth. Fortunately for VII, they can freely vent their wrath on the five clans.

Nickname: Ahranite

Appearance: The blood of Ahran (and the curse of the Unnamed One) is never shared lightly, never hastily and never for any reason but to further the VII crusade. This means that targets for Embrace are chosen for their personal accomplishment and ability — everyone in VII is expected to pull his or her weight, so there's no point in Embracing someone who won't be able to hit the ground running. Consequently, while Akhud come in all human shades, are fat or thin or tall or short or plain or lovely, most of them have a posture and carriage that comes from self-respect. They may disguise themselves as lowly, dirty or shamed, but typically they dress well, carry themselves with dignity and remain presentable.

Background: Akhud choose their progeny from those who have not only demonstrated survival skills but who have more — the survivor mentality. While fighting ability is sometimes sought, it's a convenience more than a necessity: what they're looking for is more a matter of internal strength and drive. They can teach a neonate how to shoot a gun. They can't teach him how to drive himself onward when a normal person would give up.

Character Creation: Physical Attributes and Skills are often paramount. Depending on the role for which the individual was chosen, Social or Mental traits may be equally valuable. Akhud looking to create a front-line fighter often look for someone with *low* Presence or Intelligence (though high Wits) because such individuals are less likely to make waves among the Ahranites or resist their mission. That said, some Akhud are groomed for leadership after they prove themselves in the field and learn, by doing, how VII really operates. Regardless, characters almost always have the Weapon Finesse merit or learn it soon after their Embrace.

Favored Attribute: Strength or Wits

Clan Disciplines: Celerity, *Praestantia*, Obfuscate

Weakness: No Akhud can deliberately harm or betray another Ahranite. Confiding dangerous information — even under torture or compulsion — is impossible. The Akhud's mouth simply refuses to form the words, or her hand fails to write them. Similarly, any attempt to strike, shoot at or trigger a trap that will harm a brother or sister of the blood is physically impossible. If an Akhud knows that a particular unmarked switch will electrocute one of her fellows, or even just *believes* it, she finds herself unable to flick that switch. On the other hand, if she doesn't know, she could be tricked into doing it.

Grappling, pinning and similar struggles do not violate the weakness, with the notable exception of staking (because it does damage in addition to immobilizing the target). Directing someone else to attack a fellow child of Ahran is likewise impossible, though giving encouragement or indirect aid is not. Knowingly giving a weapon to the enemy of a rival Ahranite does not violate the clan weakness, but telling that armed enemy where to find his target pushes the scenario across the line and is, therefore, impossible.

This protection extends to the mortals descended from Ahran. Although the Akhud have no instinctive recognition of their living kin, once a person has been identified as such (with convincing proof) no Akhud can bring her to harm.

Furthermore, Akhud hear the whispers of Shaddad, urging them on to acts of evil and wickedness. The whispers can be heard whenever the character makes a degeneration check. Ahranites suffer a -1 penalty to Humanity rolls to avoid acquiring derangements after a failed degeneration roll as a result of Shaddad's goading.

The whispers of Shaddad can also be heard for the remainder of any scene in which an Ahranite speaks the name "Shaddad" aloud, writes it, reads it or hears it. As long as Shaddad continues to whisper in his blood, an Ahranite suffers a -2 penalty on all rolls to resist frenzy.

Unique Traits: The presence of Shaddad in the blood of the Akhud, and the demon's role in the creation of the clan, differentiates their blood from that of other Kindred in six important ways.

First off, their minds cannot be read. Because Shaddad is present within their blood, and Ansuara is psychically entwined with the demon, any attempt to read an Akhud mind picks up the strong dreaming thoughts of either the demon (expressed as the seal that trapped it) or its jailer (expressed as the image of "VII"). An exceptional success might yield a greater sense of what one of those two is dreaming about: ravening destruction in the demon's case and a desperate need to protect something precious from the other. In either case, making mental contact with such ancient and alien minds is enough provoke a mild derangement from those who fail a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll.

Second, the Akhud neither provoke nor suffer from the Predator's Taint. Being created by a demon instead of sharing the sources of other Kindred, they do not seem to register as "real vampires." For the purposes of mortals (and other Ahranites) with Unseen Sense, however, they *do* register as vampires. (This discrepancy has provoked philosophical and occult debates within the covenant for hundreds of years.)

Third, the blood of Ahran — as distinct

from the perverse transformation of Shaddad — gives them the Unseen Sense Merit. Their Unseen Sense is universally focused on vampires. (Normally, supernatural beings cannot possess the Unseen Sense Merit — Ahranites can, but only to detect vampires.)

Fourth, they cannot be diablerized. When an Akhud dies, her soul goes to Shaddad and is imprisoned by the demon.

Fifth, they cannot raise their Blood Potency by diablerizing others, and, therefore, cannot absorb dots of Skills and Disciplines. The Akhud can perform the action and feel the bliss and regret of Amaranth, but the artifacts of souls consumed feed the demon instead of the vampire. For Ahranites, diablerie is just a thrilling form of murder.

Sixth, drinking Akhud Vitae does not affect mortals in any supernatural fashion. The Vitae doesn't satisfy the craving of Vitae addicts or cause addiction, and Vitae cannot be used to create ghouls. Ghouls who drink the blood of an Akhud cannot use it as they would use normal Vitae.

Bloodlines: Only three bloodlines have developed from the already rare Akhud clan. The **Rexroth** strain is found mostly in the United Kingdom, where they have developed an unhealthy fascination with a hidden spiritual world in which they insist that Ansuara is hidden. The **Dunia** comb the desolate Empty Quarter of North Africa, using their strange affinity for territory and soil to search for the ruins of the Unnamed One's city. Finally, the **Stawa** bloodline of North American nomads prowls the in-between lands in search of Kindred messengers and wanderers.

Concepts: Combat veteran, bank robber, hostage negotiator, smoke-jumper, para-rescue diver, terrorist, rescued castaway, long-shot survivor of serious illness, professional athlete, escaped kidnapping victim



Praestantia

To be undead is to be beyond the physical limitations of the human body. Kindred who master the Disciplines of Celerity, Vigor and Resilience often do so by forgetting the barriers under which they labored while living. But there is another, subtler element of physical accomplishment, and the Ahranites of VII are its masters.

The Greeks might call it *epidexiotitia*; a modern neurologist would call it “kinesthetic sense.” It is an instinctive ability to comprehend and calculate the position of one’s body in relation to other nearby objects. Someone with poor kinesthetic sense is not going to be able to hit a fastball, no matter how strong or how swift he is. Someone with excellent kinesthetic sense can make a casual three-point swish.

The Akhud Discipline called Praestantia is an inhuman amplification of that instinctual feeling for distance, location and movement. Not only are Kindred who know Praestantia able to perceive bodies in space with superhuman acuity, they also are able to control their own movements with equivalent control.

Praestantia doesn’t help a vampire shrug off bullets, outrun motorcycles or flip over dumpsters, but it does allow her an endless series of “lucky shots” and “near misses.”

Cost: 1 Vitae per scene

Dice Pool: Praestantia is unlike many other Disciplines in that it is not actively rolled. Rather, it provides a group of benefits, many of which affect other rolls.

When a character has Praestantia active, her dots in Praestantia are added to any Dexterity-based rolls made with the following Skills: Athletics, Brawl, Firearms, Stealth and Weaponry. Note that Strength-based rolls with those skills are not enhanced.

Secondly, a character using Praestantia can choose to abort any failed action involving the Praestantia Skills, even if the dice pool was based on Strength. This means that, after rolling, the player can choose to do nothing that turn, rather than deal with the consequences of a failed (or dramatically failed) roll. This is the benefit of Shaddad’s insight — it’s a brief, prophetic glimpse of the future.

For example, if an Ahranite is using Praestantia to jump a chasm between two tall buildings, the player can roll and see if he makes it. If he succeeds, fine. If he fails, he can abort, halt at the edge and take no action. Similarly, if the character is going to throw a hatchet at someone, the player can roll, see the failure and choose to keep hold of the weapon rather than throw it, miss and lose the hatchet.

When a character with this Discipline active takes the Dodge action (as described on p. 156 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) his Praestantia is added to his Defense score in addition to any other Defense improvements. However, this doesn’t offer any bonus to threats that disregard Defense, such as firearms attacks.

Praestantia cannot be invoked more than once per scene. That is, you may not spend a second Vitae to double the benefits of Praestantia.

Action: Reflexive

Praestantia Devotions

As with all Disciplines, Praestantia can be combined with other powers to create Devotions. VII is far more open about teaching these abilities, and Devotions in general, than other clans or covenants.

Hair-Thin Dodge

(Auspex ••, Praestantia ••)

Generally, in a fight, people try to get as far away from the incoming blow, stabbing or kicking as much as possible, blocking it far away from themselves or moving to provide a large margin of error. To a student of Praestantia, however, avoiding that chainsaw by an inch isn’t a “near miss” — it’s a miss in which nine-tenths of an inch was wasted effort. With sufficiently keen perception, the combatant can conserve enough movement to act with eerie efficiency.

Cost: 1 Vitae per turn

Dice Pool: This Devotion is not rolled. If the character performs a Dodge maneuver, her full Defense is applied to every attack made against her in a turn, as long as she can perceive the attacker. This power does not allow the character’s Defense to be applied against firearms attacks. A character must already have Praestantia active to use this Devotion.

Action: Reflexive

This Devotion costs 12 experience points to learn.

Perfect Weapon

(Vigor •, Praestantia •)

Some people fight with brute force, and some rely on skill and technique. The most dangerous warrior, however, is the one who can perfectly balance both.

Cost: 1 Vitae per attack

Dice Pool: This Devotion is not rolled. Through rigorous weapon training, the character’s mastery of both his strength and his precision are honed to the point that he doesn’t have to choose between them — he can use each to improve the other. When striking with the Fighting Finesse Merit, he can use either his Vigor or his Praestantia dots to attack.

For example, without Perfect Weapon, he can only use Strength + Weaponry + Vigor or Dexterity + Weaponry + Praestantia, in addition to any weapon bonus. With Perfect Weapon, his pool becomes Strength or Dexterity + Weaponry + Vigor or Praestantia + the weapon’s damage.

This Devotion can only be used with a weapon for which the attacker has the Fighting Finesse Merit.

Furthermore, he must have both those Disciplines already active for the scene to use this Devotion.

Action: Reflexive

This Devotion costs five experience points to learn.

Vaporous Step

(Celerity •, Praestantia •)

Although the Discipline of Obfuscate reigns supreme among the devotees of stealth, there are still times when it's more desirable to make *no* sound than to merely make one's sounds unheard.

Cost: 1 Vitae per scene

Dice Pool: This Devotion is not rolled.

Action: Instant

Vaporous Step allows a Kindred to move at a normal walking pace, making *no* sound louder than that produced by a closing eyelid — even if moving through dried leaves or up a creaky staircase. Thus, microphones and recorders detect nothing and, when walking on a normally quiet surface, even Auspex users need an exceptional success on a perception roll to perceive the approaching Sevenite.

This Devotion costs five experience points to learn.

Ahranite Sorcery

The blood sorcery of the Ahranites is limited and narrow when compared to the fecund research of Crúac or Theban Sorcery, but it is indisputably powerful.

Perhaps in the past, more Ahranite Sorcery rites were known, but with the destruction of the Malakul monastery in 1612 and the mysterious disappearance of the 12 most learned students of Shaddad, the Ahranite Sorcery Discipline has become largely stagnant. It's not that there's no one trying to further its mysteries, it's that the loss of those scholars and their documents has dropped the available level of knowledge below the critical mass needed for advancement. Although it's suspected that the band who destroyed Malakul torched the papers as well, if they still exist and could be recovered — then things might be different. Alternately, starting over by studying the unhallowed images and statuary in Shaddad's original temple might also produce some movement. But no one knows where the cursed city's wreckage lies.

Cost: 1 Willpower. Ahranite Sorcery rites can only be performed over what's called a Cauldron of Shaddad. Such a cauldron needs to be large — about the size of a bathtub — and must have the Seal of the Unnamable carved in it and then damaged. Next, fresh human blood is added — about 10 Vitae worth. Finally, five Kindred Vitae are required. When that's done, the leader of the rite expends a Willpower point while chanting the demon's name. (Note that this immediately produces the Whispers of Shaddad effect in Ahranites — it's described on p. 33.)

As the magic begins to work, the blood within the cauldron boils, eventually turning black, foul and useless. When the incantation is done, the mixture dries into tarry black ash, whether the effect succeeded or failed.

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Ahranite Sorcery. The Nosferatu clan weakness does not apply to these rolls.

Action: Extended. Each ritual requires a number of successes equal to its level (that is, its dots). Each roll represents an hour of ritual chanting and invocation. A ritual is activated on the first turn when the necessary successes have been accrued. The Willpower point spent on the first roll does not add any dice to the pool. Additional rolls, if necessary, do not cost additional Willpower, but may benefit from the effects of spent Willpower points.

Teamwork (see p. 134 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) can apply to Ahranite Sorcery incantations if all the cooperating sorcerers have dots in Ahranite Sorcery and are willing to expend a Willpower point on the first roll. A ritual's level is the maximum number of Ahranite sorcerers that may cooperate in its activation.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The primary caster becomes possessed by Shaddad for a number of nights equal to her dots in Ahranite Sorcery. The effect of the ritual may succeed, as the demon has every reason to conceal its control of an undead pawn. The possession victim remembers nothing while under the demon's control, and Shaddad does everything in its power to free itself fully. While in possession, Shaddad is still constrained by the clan weaknesses of the host and the curse of loyalty common to those who've been through Initiation, but Shaddad is able to use any Disciplines the host possesses, along with all Ahranite Sorcery rituals and (at the Storyteller's discretion) weakened versions of other demonic powers.

Failure: The ritual fails, the Willpower point is lost, but there are no other ill effects.

Success: The ritual takes place as described.

Exceptional Success: The ritual takes place as described, without any other effects.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1 to +4	The caster is in a temple decorated with images and symbols pleasing to Shaddad, or is using particularly elaborate ritual paraphernalia.
—	The caster is unaffected by threats or distractions.
-1 to -4	The caster is hungry, distracted, plagued by hallucinations or other dismaying elements.

Initiation

(• Ahranite Sorcery Ritual)

Although Ahranites know the touch of the slumbering demon from the moment of their Embrace, others

who wish to join VII are required to undergo initiation in order to share fully in the ties that bind the group together. This rite is the culmination of those ties, as it infects a willing Kindred with the demon's essence while simultaneously infusing the demon with the inflexible loyalty of the sons of Ahran.

To perform this rite, the Kindred undergoing the transformation must consent to it (though it's certainly possible to be tricked) and must enter the cauldron under his own power. If the rite succeeds, the Kindred gains some of the traits of an Ahranite while retaining his normal clan strengths and weaknesses.

The traits he gains are as follows. First, he's plagued by the Whispers of Shaddad. Second, Shaddad's presence protects him from mind reading (as described on p. 33). Third, like an Ahranite, he becomes unable to attack or betray those who have undergone Initiation or who possess the blood of Ahran. As he now possesses that same blood, he is similarly protected from assault and treachery. Fourth, he is unable to diablerize others or be diablerized. Fifth, he can learn Praestantia at the cost of an in-clan Discipline.

Note that this means that the transformed initiate still suffers from the Predator's Taint and triggers it. On the plus side, he can still make ghouls, and his blood is still addictive.

Seek the Wise Blood

(• Ahranite Sorcery Ritual)

The primary caster of this ritual must immerse herself in the cauldron while the rite is being performed. If it succeeds, all the Vitae currently in her system gains an additional property: she is aware of her Vitae wherever it is once it leaves her body. Thus, if she gives it to a ghoul (whether the ghoul can use it or not) she knows where that ghoul is until the ghoul spends the blood for a Discipline or to resist age. If she puts her Vitae in a bottle, she knows where the bottle is. If she smears her Vitae on someone's car, she knows where that car is, until washing or normal wear removes the Vitae.

Sevenites who have performed this ritual often write false but tantalizing "VII Scriptures" in their own blood and allow mainstream Kindred to think that the false Scriptures are the lost secrets of the sect. In fact, these false Scriptures are beacons that lead a VII strike team to the researcher's library.

Draugr Curse

(•• Ahranite Sorcery Ritual)

This ritual works only on Kindred who are not Ahranites and who have not been through Initiation. The Kindred is immersed in the cauldron (usually by force or while immobilized) and, as his Sevenite captors chant, drops into a deep torpor. He spends a number of days in that state equal to his Blood Potency. Upon awakening, he finds

himself weakened and badly confused — his memories of the ritual are especially scrambled — but usually free and often somewhere near his haven. Or near Elysium.

He acts and feels normal until he is next subject to the Predator's Taint, at which point he immediately enters frenzy. The focus of his ferocity is the Kindred who provoked the Beast. This frenzy can be mitigated as any other sort of frenzy once it has begun but it cannot be averted.

Thirsting Dagger

(•• Ahranite Sorcery Ritual)

This ritual focuses on a brass dagger. The dagger is immersed in the cauldron as the spell is cast. If it succeeds, the dagger drains a point of blood from its target each time it hits, in addition to any other damage done. This means that Kindred targets lose one Vitae per blow, while humans take an extra level of Lethal damage. The blood so drained goes directly to the hungry maw of Shaddad, so there's no way to extract it from the weapon.

The dagger retains its thirst for a number of nights equal to the successes rolled on the ritual.

Restored Image

(••• Ahranite Sorcery Ritual)

This conjuration works only on Kindred, and the spell's intended recipient must get into the cauldron while it's performed. If it succeeds, the vampire — Ahranite or not — permanently regains his reflection. It's as if he spent a Willpower point (as described on p. 170 of *Vampire: The Requiem*), only the spell is always on and does not cost any Willpower points. However, an image on recording media does erode with time, as usual.

Visage of the Nameless

(••• Ahranite Sorcery Ritual)

The target for this ritual must be an Ahranite or Initiated Kindred, but (interestingly) forcing an unwilling Ahranite to undergo it does not violate the Ahranite weakness. It is possible to cast this spell upon oneself though, as with all Ahranite Sorcery rites, immersion is required.

Visage of the Nameless lasts a number of nights equal to the successes rolled. Much of that time is usually spent behind a veil or mask.

If the ritual succeeds, anyone who looks upon the target's face sees, instead, the visage of the demon Shaddad. This may include the caster (or casters) of the ritual but not anyone who looks in a mirror, at a broadcast or at a photograph. In those instances, they see what they'd usually see.

Mortals, ghouls and vampires who look on the Visage of the Nameless must attempt a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll, minus the successes scored on the

ritual's activation roll. The results of this roll determine the onlooker's reaction.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character flees, screaming, until she can no longer see the transformed face, then collapses into a ball and sobs for the rest of the scene. This may be enough to provoke or exacerbate a derangement, at the Storyteller's discretion. This is a temporary affliction, lasting for about a week.

Failure: The character loses one Willpower point and flees until she can no longer see the Visage of the Nameless.

Success: The character is shaken, and is at a -2 penalty to resist other frightening powers or Röttschreck for the rest of the scene, but is otherwise able to keep it together.

Exceptional Success: The character is disturbed and startled, but not to the extent of complicating her actions.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1 to +2	A fleeting glimpse or a look in dim light.
—	The viewer sees the face from 2 to 20 yards away.
-1 to -2	The exposure is sudden and extremely close.

Sinner's Skin

(•••• Ahranite Sorcery Ritual)

To perform this rite, an individual person — living, dead, Kindred or other — is immersed in the

cauldron during the ceremony. At the end, if the rite succeeds, the person's skin floats off, all in one piece, and rises to the top of the cooling ash. (Note that being boiled until your skin comes off inflicts eight levels of lethal damage.)

It is possible for a human of any size to climb into this suit of skin by stretching the mouth. Once inside, the wearer's appearance — size, body shape, weight and even personal fragrance — changes to match that of the skin donor. The disguise is almost perfect — the wearer looks, smells and feels to the touch like the donor. If the donor was mortal, the wearer can pass for mortal. If the skin was Kindred, a mortal wearing the skin provokes Predator's Taint in others as if he were the original vampire. (This same effect applies to Ahranites wearing the skin of normal Kindred.) Anyone, not just the Ahranite Sorcery caster, can wear the skin. The spell lasts for a number of weeks equal to the successes rolled. At the end of that span, the skin crumbles into dust.

Wearing the skin does not grant any abilities, Merits or Skills possessed by the donor, with the exception of the Striking Looks Merit. Wearing the skin does not alter the wearer's Health or Defense — it is simply a frighteningly effective disguise. A Sinner's Skin grants a +5 bonus to dice pools involved in disguising a character as the skin donor.

The disguise is not perfect, however. It does not alter the voice or provide any memories. While wearing the skin, fingerprints are those of the donor, but retinal scans read the eye-prints of the wearer. (Few Sevenites know this, however.)



The Mantle of the Demon (••••• Ahranite Sorcery Ritual)

This rite is performed over a full-length garment, such as a cloak or long jacket. If the rite succeeds, the robe offers diabolical protection to the rite's primary caster. While the robe is worn, anyone who uses sorcery of any type on the ritualist suffers one automatic point of aggravated damage per attempt. It doesn't matter if the arcane effect is a Crúac ritual, an Uratha rite, a mage's wizardry or something else. If the subject created the robe and is wearing it, an opposing caster takes a point of aggravated damage when targeting the subject, whether the supernatural effect succeeds or fails.

Disciplines and other supernatural powers that are not ritual-based are not affected by this ritual. (It's up to the Storyteller to decide when powers such as werewolf Gifts qualify. When in doubt, they don't qualify.)

The protection of the mantle lasts until the garment is physically destroyed or until it has dealt out a total of five points of aggravated damage, whichever comes first.

Shaddad's Vengeance (••••• Ahranite Sorcery Ritual)

The primary caster of this rite is also its target. Immersing herself in the cauldron, she uses her wits and wiles to make her body precious to the confused and dreaming mind of the demon Shaddad. Moreover, she makes her body a channel for Shaddad's destructive power.

If the rite succeeds, the caster's eventual destruction is met with fiery retribution. A reflection of Shaddad's burning and unbound form appears coterminous with the killer. Thus, whoever destroys the caster of Shaddad's Vengeance is immediately struck with a number of levels of fire damage equal to the successes rolled while casting the rite. This fiery retribution hits the killer no matter where he is — even those who use long distance attacks like rifles. It doesn't matter how high the character's Defense score is, and Celerity offers no protection (although Resilience can downgrade the damage as normal).

The burning avatar of Shaddad appears only for a few seconds, but the sight of it is enough to shake the sanity of any who behold it. A Kindred so attacked must resist the Röttschreck, with a -3 penalty to his roll. A Kindred wounded by the fires of Shaddad automatically gains or exacerbates a derangement until he is healed.

Creatures who merely see the face of Shaddad unshielded, even for a moment, must make a Resolve + Composure roll with a -5 penalty to resist gaining or exacerbating a derangement. Such derangements persist for a number of nights equal to 7 - the subject's Resolve.

Culture

Like every covenant of Kindred, VII has its own culture, and, like every Kindred covenant, that culture

varies greatly from city to city and domain to domain. This seems like a contradiction, but all it really means is that, although coterries and factions within VII have some very different organizing principles, there is nevertheless a set of unchanging factors common to all in the covenant.

VII is somewhat more uniform than the standard covenants, simply because its members are more likely to roam (regionally, if not nationally or farther). Nevertheless, VII collectives in the US are more likely to have democratic features than those in the Middle East, which incline to religion-based factionalism. VII in Europe looks as feudal as the Invictus, while in Africa VII is often organized into small cultural or tribal groups based on mortal life experiences. In China, it has something of the flavor of a commune, and in Japan and Australia, it's a meritocracy-by-deed.

These differences are real, not just cosmetic trappings, but they are not the core of VII. Underneath and supporting specific cultures is a set of beliefs and behaviors, and those are the same throughout the world.

The first principle is loyalty to VII, which is taken as a matter of course. Given the weakness of the Akhud clan, loyalty is imposed on any recruits from outside who are told anything of value so that members of VII can let down their guard among their fellows — to a point. While treachery is far from impossible for the creative, it is undeniably complicated by Ahranite mystic compulsion.

It's true that some Ahranites leave VII, though it doesn't happen often. Where are they going to go? If they can find a city whose Kindred are naïve enough about VII (one where a dominant ideology purged those who believed in such "non-canonical" vampires, for example), these renegade Ahranites might be tolerated, if not trusted, by clan Kindred. But that's a weighty "if." More commonly, renegade Ahranites attach themselves to mages or werewolves or other entities as companions, but even that's rare. Far more often these Ahranites are out in the cold, alone. Commonest of all, of course, is Final Death, either at the hands of vengeful (or prudent) Camarillas, or simply by falling prey to the perils of nomad existence.

The second principle of VII is the war, the necessary destruction of "ordinary" Kindred. Although there are agnostic Sevenites who would be happy just to rid the world of Kindred covenants and return any vampires who survived to "the good old days" of being lone, rare predators without some perverse *ethos* or *philosophy* of vampirism, most mainstream Sevenites mean just what they say. "Destroying the Kindred" means the eradication of every last one of them, regardless of clan, beliefs or good intentions.

The third principle is active pragmatism. The above-mentioned destruction is a practical pursuit — indeed, the entire rationale for VII's existence. Certain coterries

of Ahranites, or even entire collectives, have fallen into the more typical Kindred pattern of infecting a region, kicking out or destroying their competition, and then — getting by. They keep a low profile, uphold the Masquerade, try to keep a lid on Embraces and generally behave just like sensible Carthian vampires would in their place.

This sort of laziness is not tolerated in VII. Granted, there's nothing *direct* that other Sevenites can do about it, but family shame is a powerful force, even among the undead. When that fails, the havens of "lazy" coteries (or entire "lazy" towns) rapidly become destinations for Sevenites on the run from the clans or anything else. The havens of these children of Ahran who won't go out and look for trouble become de-facto fortresses, hospitals and safe houses.

Those three principles are the fundamentals of the VII identity. But it's a big tent — surprisingly big to those outside or those who know how numerically small VII actually is.

The Followers of VII

VII cabals do things differently in different countries (or even different states), but certain groups tend to have significance regardless of the locale or the mortal cultural setting.

One set of breaks falls along the grounds of involvement: someone who was Embraced into VII probably has a very different outlook on it than a mortal who chose to join the crusade or a Camarilla who was seduced away and Initiated. This can be considered the "sociological" split.

The other set of divisions is "ideological," and its broad strokes are presented on p. 49. These two sets overlap: There are Fervent mortals and Fervent clan recruits and Fervent who were Embraced as Akhud. The same goes for the Pragmatists and the Listeners. Though some members of each sociological group belong to every ideological faction, some ideologies appeal more to one group than the other. There are almost no mortals in the Listener faction, for reasons that should become amply evident.

The Princes of the Blood

It's doubtful that Ansuara, the mother of Akhud vampires, ever intended for the bulk of her family's enterprise to become undead. (The demon father? Well, who can tell what it thought, hoped, planned or intended?) Nonetheless, the history of the clan indicates all too well that her diabolical bargain was a good idea. The most persuasive evidence is that so many VII vampires have survived, while so many of their mortal associates have perished.

Purely Embraced Akhud vampires are the largest single group within VII, and although the official covenant doctrine is that the mortal heirs are the most important,

that's not believed in the stilled heart of every Ahranite. After all, with the vagaries of descent, there's no way of telling who's going to manifest the Unseen Sense of the Gomorrahan royal line. It could easily be some jumpy, nearsighted, asthmatic klutz. It's random, you take what you get. Investing the blood through Embrace, on the other hand, allows the covenant to pick and choose. Marines, police officers, elite athletes — these are the people best suited to VII's work. At least, that seems to be the opinion of all such people who've been Embraced.

The Duty and the Sabbath

The duty of the Ahranites is to destroy all other Kindred. This may seem like re-stating the obvious, but this sort of repetition is common in VII. The desirability and necessity of a genocidal pogrom against clan Kindred is pounded in, propagandized, repeated over and over, stated vehemently, argued persuasively and, ultimately, taken utterly for granted.

The Ahranites repeat it, the converts repeat it and, when it's audible, Shaddad the Whisperer insists on it.

The last thing VII wants is a member getting soft in her purpose. There are powerful psychological reasons for this. Ahranite vampires who've given up their humanity for the quest aren't very open to the idea that they died for a fool's errand. Rescued clan Kindred can't very well back out and are equally unhappy to hear that the permanent choice they've made is the wrong one. As for Shaddad, again, who knows? It could be that the demon dislikes the competition from other vampires whose blood can addict and preserve. It could be that the Lancea Sanctum is right and that clan Kindred serve some inscrutable holy purpose, which the demon inscrutably wants to foil. Maybe it's just pissed off and crazy like a Ventrue. Who can tell?

There are any number of good arguments for the eradication of the Kindred (Sevenites included, as often as not). Arguing from outcomes, it's hard to see the Kindred as anything other than a bane: if human life is any kind of value to you, the deaths caused by Kindred (be they intentional, by spreading disease, or just through carelessness) void the collective vampires' right to exist. That's without considering the value of freedom, and vampires' corrosion of it with addiction, Disciplines and plain old ruthless manipulation. On the other side of the scale, Kindred contribute little except vague promises of stability and security that, upon closer examination, usually mean "things stay the same, the way Kindred like them."

Judging the Kindred by intent, and putting the best conceivable interpretation on their collective action, nevertheless condemns the vampires to doom. Even the most benevolent vampire, who tries to mitigate his harms and maximize his goods, has impure motives. To be blunt, he's got the Beast, and it's not benevolent at

all. The best of the Kindred, the saints among them, are *still* plagued by immoral compulsions that even average human beings lack. The Kindred start the moral ball game with two outs and two strikes. Sure, there are some who beat the odds. But, as likely as not, those “moral paragons” pursue virtue how? *By reining in their fellow vampires.* Almost universally, you find “good” vampires spending their Requiems contending with “bad” vampires. VII is doing the same exact thing, only on a grand scale of cities and centuries, instead of night by night and bastard by bastard.

Are all clan Kindred evil? They’re all evil enough, and the few who can keep it in check deserve little more than a chance to join VII and be a part of the solution.

That, ultimately, is how the average Ahranite sees himself: part of the solution, and not a clean part, either. They’re necessary evils and they know it, which is why they can be clear-eyed about Kindred who claim virtue. That sort of tearful repentance may fool a mortal or two — hell, the penitent may even fool himself. But the Sevenites have a Beast of their own and know *exactly* the measure of possible vampire virtue.

That’s why they work toward the cleansing, the goal, the Sabbath. Many of them pray to God, “Let the last vampire I kill be myself.” On the Sabbath, they will rest. Their Requiems will end, and they will lay their burdens down.

The Children of the Second Son

Ishoab isn’t discussed much, except as a cautionary example of how incredibly sneaky and corrupting the Camarillas are. Nevertheless, there are mortals working with VII who appreciate the positive effects of Vitae on the human frame. Longevity and Disciplines and rapid healing? For that payoff, these mortals can live with the drawbacks of blood addiction and the Vinculum. That’s what they tell themselves, anyway.

In fact, most ghouls in VII don’t live with their condition for more than a few decades before being Embraced, usually into the Ahranite line. Although being Embraced is usually presented as a “promotion,” a reward for good work, that line only persuades the most gullible. What’s really happening is that the Ahranites want to weaken the connection between the ghoul and his VII domitor — who is, necessarily, a clan Kindred convert.

Ahranites can’t make ghouls, can’t addict, can’t create blood bonds and, although bonded ghoul servants are swell, it just galls the Ahranites to put that much power in the hands of Camarilla converts. The Ahranites know very well which side the ghouls are going to be on in a conflict: they invariably side with the candyman who gives them their drug and holds their Vinculum. Add on a ghoul’s notorious reputation for going nuts *and* his slavish desire to please master, and what do you get? A leaky powder keg.

Here’s a reasonable scenario. An Ahranite has some dispute with a former Camarilla, who complains about it to the ghoul, and, like a good knight in the cathedral, the ghoul goes and attacks the Ahranite because he thinks it will make his master happy. The master, being an Initiate, can’t order the attack or carry it out himself, any more than the Ahranite can betray the Initiate. But ghouls in these situations often follow their intuition. Their blood-crazed, lust-distorted intuition.

This sort of thing has happened more than once in VII history. In fact, it’s happened at least a dozen times, somewhere in the world.

Rather than let that powder keg leak, then, the smart Ahranite “rewards” the ghoul with Embrace — and with the Ahranite curse of loyalty. Then everyone’s happy. Except, of course, the domitor, who’s lost a useful tool. And, of course, the ex-ghoul, who usually gets sent somewhere a thousand miles away where his Vinculum won’t get him into trouble.

The End of the Masquerade

There are some radical thinkers within VII who feel they’ve got the anti-Kindred magic bullet in their hands, if someone just had the guts to fire it. That bullet is, of course, the supposedly fragile Masquerade.

That’s the five covenants’ major phobia, right? The common wisdom is that if the Masquerade falls, humankind wells up and overwhelms the Kindred. So why shouldn’t VII do that? Why not trash the system, let the mortals do the dirty work and get the party started at last?

There is the instinct for self-preservation, of course. That isn’t much of an issue for those hammerheads who plan to kill themselves after they kill everyone else. But most Sevenites find it a lot easier to talk the suicide talk than walk the walk.

Or there’s snob appeal: many would-be martyrs think that destroying the Kindred is *their* job and having mortal hordes do it is — well, it’s like cheating. You don’t cheat God. It never turns out well.

Shaddad seems to be pretty keen on the Masquerade too, from what the Sevenites have been able to glean from the demon’s demented mutters. Although that’s all the Listeners need to hear, the demon’s opinion is actually a counterargument for those Ahranites who aren’t active devil-worshippers. But again, countering a voice in your head is easy when you’re sitting in the armchair discussing matters and a lot harder when you’re actually trying to bell the cat. Bringing the Masquerade down is a long-term project, and the opposition of the Camarillas doesn’t leave a lot of room for error. Having a demon screaming in your mind the whole time you’re trying to go about it is a powerful distraction.

It’s also a sad fact that the Masquerade is more durable than it might initially appear. People are *very* used to

a no-vampire world. They've been taught skepticism by very persuasive people, most of whom *aren't* creepy vampire lackeys. No one's going to do a vampire autopsy because the body turns to ash. No one's going to record the proof for a wider audience because cameras won't cooperate. The Ventrue and Daeva have far more access to mind-warping powers than VII ever will and far more experience applying them. It's easy to compromise any expert witnesses.

After all, it's not like no one's ever gone public and declared that vampires are real. It's just that almost everyone who has done so looks crazy. Even if they didn't start crazy, they usually end up that way. So taking a "real vampire" position puts any politician or academic in very sketchy company, and that same sketchy company is going to drown out any sensible arguments about the reality of the Kindred.

Under those pressures — duty, difficulty and demonic interference, not to mention a generous helping of self-preservation — VII has bowed to the Masquerade. VII is not going to destroy all the Kindred by revealing their existence to the herd.

The Living and the Heirs

Not everyone who's part of VII is dead. Most are, of course, but there are mortals within the covenant. Mortals who provide crucial services, in fact.

Any vampire who's been dead more than a year appreciates what the quick have to offer. They can operate freely by daylight, get the kind of photo ID you need to open a bank account and travel by plane without worrying about the red-eye flight getting delayed to mid-morning. Plus, they can top a vampire off if he's a quart low and snacky.

Camarillas often meet their daylight needs by applying the addictive powers of their Vitae, maybe ghouling the most useful servants to keep them preserved. The blood of the Ahranites lacks these properties, so they are forced to fall back on alternative incentives to rally mortals to the banner of Gomorrah.

One such incentive is cash. While VII doesn't have the ready cash access of many Princes, there are always ways for a vampire with Obfuscate and sticky fingers to turn some coin, particularly if she can justify it as part of a "higher mission." Many mortals who work for VII are hirelings — attorneys and financial planners, private detectives and security guards.

It is VII policy to never tell anything meaningful to mortals whose loyalty is only due to money. It's just too easy for the enemy to bend them, either with Disciplines or threats or larger sums. That architect may ask why the building he's designing has such peculiar features, but if VII can't think of a plausible lie, they tell him nothing — or they kill him and hire someone with less



curiosity. No matter how brilliant a hired hand is, VII doesn't mention the word "vampire" until they've got some other kind of bond on him.

Some mortals are bonded with Disciplines or Vitae, sure, but far fewer than is typical for any other covenant. This is not only because it's a minority in VII who can apply a Vinculum; it's also because those converts who can do it aren't fully trusted. Ahranites sometimes learn Majesty or Dominate from other recruits, but it's hard enough to be uncommon.

If VII want to really put the clamps on a mortal, they can do it through more traditional addictions, or they supplement bribery with blackmail or, in extreme cases, they use threats. But rather than be served through fear (which can lead to betrayal without constant reinforcement), VII prefers willing allies. Ideological allies.

Such allies are sometimes found and sometimes made.

Born Unto Ahran

VII has a file. It's not kept on computer, not even on an isolated PC with no Internet connection, because documents like that are too easy to copy. It's written in code by hand. It's written in a light blue ink that doesn't show up on many photocopiers. It's kept in a fireproof vault in their central fortress, and the 20 Ahranites who can read it can use it to name mortals who have been identified as descendants of the mortal line of Ahran.

Those 20 Sevenites are called the Searchers.

Twenty vampires sounds like a lot, doesn't it? Especially for a small covenant like VII, especially when there's one vampire for every 50–100,000 people worldwide.

Parts of the file have been replicated, of course. Hand-copied by Searchers before they begin their long trek home to the US or Canada or Colombia, to China or Catalonia or Cyprus. The guardians of that knowledge do their damndest to keep track of every birth of those of Gomorrhan royal blood.

According to legend, every child of Tarshad, Ishoab and Jepshiel was born with the Sight. But as the blood became diluted, over the course of generations, a few were born unable spot vampires on sight. It was considered a great shame, a weakness, then. But that weakness became increasingly common, despite hundreds of years of cousin-marriages to try to keep the strain pure. By the time Ahran's family encountered the Unvoiced Name, nine out of ten children born to the family were blind to their enemies. By the time of Ansuara's marriage, only one in a hundred had the instinct.

Today, it's one in a thousand, if not less. But, periodically, the Sight pops up, and when it does, it's the duty of one of those 20 to find out about it, travel to that newly found scion, usually rescue him from the local Kindred, and explain to him the destiny that God has thrust upon him.

Twenty Searchers monitor the entire world for incidences of the Unseen Sense. Seen from that perspective, the number is very small.

Even applying vast resources to the search, it's not easy. Private detectives and news-clipping services looking for suspicious fires in an area only go so far. Many of the 20 periodically travel to check up on the heirs in their area, hoping to get a response as they themselves show up to the Sense. Perhaps once or twice a generation, they find an heir that way before the Kindred do.

More commonly, heirs are found when they've taken it upon themselves to find out just what these people *are* who affect them so mysteriously and so profoundly. Smart or lucky heirs have careers as zealots (see below) before VII finds them.

Commonest of all, of course, is for these investigations to end in tragedy before VII ever has a chance to locate its "lost lamb." The heir of Gomorrah dies for the Masquerade, or worse, is enslaved by some canny Kindred who can find all sorts of uses for a mortal from whom the undead cannot hide.

Heirs are welcomed into VII, celebrated, fawned over — but not given a chance to refuse the honor of their destiny. Searchers typically take a circumspect approach at first, explaining the nature of the Kindred and perhaps hinting at the role VII plays in the war against them. The Searchers offer a false choice, presenting the duty of VII as a noble and necessary battle — a war fought to purify the world. Indeed, the Searchers believe this. If the heir chooses to join, he can serve for years before finding out what would have happened if he'd refused.

Refusal is, of course, not tolerated. Heirs who reject their destiny must be ... persuaded."



GOMORRAH AND THE UNSEEN SENSE

Whenever VII encounters a mortal who possesses the Unseen Sense, they take it as *prima facie* evidence of Ahran's blood. There are many pragmatists in VII who suspect that the entire myth of the Gomorrhan legacy is fantasy, or that it might as well be for all the impact it has on the world tonight. To them, the Sense just crops up randomly. Maybe there are a few families in which it's more common, but, privately, the pragmatists suspect that the Searchers would do just as well stalking *any* mortal family — that if the branches are followed long enough, they're bound to find someone with the Sight.

The truth of the issue will really only matter if VII achieves the Sabbath. If you, as Storyteller, think that's going to happen, you may want to decide whether they're right or just deluded. In practical terms, a canonical answer doesn't mean much.



It's not done with Disciplines or corrupting Vitae, of course. That would be a travesty. But recalcitrant children of Ahran are abducted and taken to another country — ideally one where they don't speak the language — and there, they are imprisoned at one of VII's fortresses. It's a gentle or even luxurious durance, but they are not permitted to leave and they are subjected to constant indoctrination. The mission of VII is pressed upon them day in and day out. Evidence is presented, increasingly graphic and horrifying evidence. Passionate argument alternates with laudatory tales of their great ancestors, interlaced with contemptuous tirades about how the heir is squandering a priceless gift, letting the family down, letting humanity down, letting God down.

Eventually, most crack. They become zealots.

Zealots

Clan Kindred make jokes about mortal hunters. Kindred call them "housewives from hell" and sneer and dismiss the threat, but, for all but the most arrogant, this is like whistling past the graveyard. That vast and amorphous edifice called the Masquerade is, after all, a monument to the power of collective mortal knowledge. Kindred make their supercilious comments about individual mortals who know, but there's a fear there, even among the mighty.

Think of it this way: You're a diner at a Chinese buffet, all you can eat. You're making your leisurely way past the steam trays, spearing a wonton here and an egg roll there, maybe deciding the Triple Happiness Beef looks a little sketchy, when suddenly General Tso's Chicken lunges out and blows your face off with a shotgun.

For a vampire, of course, the only buffet is humanity, and General Tso's Chicken is a witch-hunter. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, there are no repercussions. But to survive, a vampire has to feed a lot more than a hundred times. Eventually, some meal is going to try to fight back.

Kindred just have to accept that risk. The alternative is starvation. There are endless ways to reduce the danger, but even the best get careless or just have some bad luck. They sow the seeds of their own demise, and, if their luck turns or they start paying attention, they whack their self-created nemesis before that zealot (that's the VII word for "witch-hunter") can go from seeking one Kindred to making war on the Kindred race.

It looks a lot different on the other end of the shotgun, of course. Witch-hunters get one charge from surprise and if they don't make it good, well, then it's *their* turn to rely on good luck, and lots of it.

The best luck they can have, from a mission perspective, is for VII to find them before any of the other covenants are alerted.

VII loves zealots, almost unconditionally. That doesn't mean VII tell them all the secrets about vampires and

demons and trying to recreate a city that, for Christians, is synonymous with earning the wrath of God. A parent loves her young child, but doesn't tell him how babies are made until he's ready.

But, while the parental metaphor may seem a little insulting to the mortal, it's apt in a lot of ways. VII protects, encourages and instructs living zealots. It makes them better killers. From the clans' point of view, perhaps the wickedest thing VII does is match zealots up with one another, building witch-hunter coteries, sometimes to the point of funding a cross-country move so that a zealot can escape pursuit in his city in order to meet up with other hunters elsewhere in the nation — or elsewhere in the world.

VII calls these gangs of clued-in mortals "hunting packs." Building hunting packs is a dangerous game, of course. VII has as much to lose as the Camarillas if the Masquerade collapses (though that doesn't stop radicals within the sect from advocating just that). Building groups of zealots forges a potent weapon, but it's one that points at the Masquerade just as much as at the clans — and they're no small threat to VII, either. Typically, hunting packs are told that going public doesn't work — no one listens to an anonymous crank ranting about vampires, and having an identity is like painting a target around oneself, with all one's relatives and loved ones sitting in the rings around the bull's eye. Better to strike from concealment, act locally, try to create safe cities from which to cleanse others.

Most times the packs buy it.

VII's tightrope-balance is to keep the hunting pack large enough, armed enough and informed enough to do real damage to an area's Kindred entrenchment while still keeping the pack under control.

Letting a hunting pack know anything true about their patrons is usually out of the question. There are any number of bullshit ruses that VII can use to hook a zealot: we're from the government and we're here to help you, we're angels, we're from the Vatican, we're the Knights Templar, we're from Atlantis — whatever is going to sound most plausible to a given group. If the lie starts to fray around the edges (and VII has lots of time and intelligence invested in maintaining these lies — they can show persuasive "Atlantean outposts" or send their recruits to a "government training camp" if they need to) they can just switch to another. "We couldn't tell you we're really the heirs to the Merovingian Kingdom, you wouldn't believe us, so we *pretended* we were from the NSA. But you were just too smart for us!" Or vice versa.

It's not impossible for hunting packs to figure out that the mysterious benefactor who luckily knows *so much* about Kindred is a vampire herself, of course. When that happens, VII has three choices.

First, they can see if the pack is okay with that. Some are pragmatists, just like most Ahranites, and they're

willing to deal with the devil they know to fight the devil they don't.

But many zealots won't compromise. In that case, VII can burn the pack by tipping the local Kindred, and hope that their mortal buddies at least go out in a blaze of glory. Often, they gather evidence of the pack's demise and have it ready to show the next pack that thinks dropping the Masquerade is a terrific idea. VII show them the photos and news clippings and tell them, "these chumps thought the same thing."

Finally, VII can Embrace the zealots who know, thereby inflicting the curse of Ahran's loyalty. Problem solved, leak plugged, welcome to the machine.

Leeches

Ghouls are rare in VII because Ahranite blood can't create them and clan Kindred converts are only a fifth or less of the covenant's vampire members. The Akhud, most numerous in VII, don't trust ghouls and think (with damn good reason) that the ex-Camarillas exercise undue influence over them. Since ghouls lack the back-handed protection that Shaddad gives all VII's vampires, they're seen as an unnecessary exposure and are not to be trusted with sensitive missions or data. Too damn easy for the enemy to compromise the ghouls with promises of fulfilling their addiction.

Thus, ghouls who came into VII when their domitors converted are usually regarded with suspicion — not to say, contempt. They serve their masters but not the covenant, and are kept far out of the loop about covenant business. Eventually, if the ghouls irritate or concern an Ahranite enough, they may get Embraced — in the spirit of "better safe than sorry." After that, they're reassigned far from their domitor (who has little choice but to put up with it), and they begin a career as proper Ahranites in VII.

Most ghouls fall into that category. But there are a few "free ghouls" in VII, and the Ahranites actually like them a lot.

Free ghouls — those whose domitors died, leaving the ghouls to fend for themselves — usually feed by taking down vampires, just as vampires feed off mortals. The difference is that your typical Kindred is substantially more dangerous than your typical ghoul. Thus, free ghouls are obliged to be sneaky and cunning and remorseless, all traits that endear them to VII when they're applied to clobbering Camarillas. Furthermore, many free ghouls kill every vampire on whom they feed — otherwise, they risk forming a Vinculum to the very entity they're abusing, and that's poor strategy. There are a few, a very, very few, free ghouls with complete Vinculums to vampires in long torpor, but VII isn't going to go out of its way to get ones like that: such ghouls have no motive to kill for freedom, and when the masters awaken, the loyalty contest will be very one-sided.

No, VII goes for the free ghouls who are addicted but without a forced affection for any particular vampire. VII use them as strikers and keep them ignorant of anything compromising — after all, they're *ghouls*. They have no protection against mind reading, and a couple nights of attention from a Daeva is likely to turn them into somebody's fawning Renfield. So they're regarded as untrustworthy and expendable weapons.

Most free ghouls are okay with that, for the simple reason that VII can help them get fed. The lot of preying on Kindred is incredibly difficult, and any assistance is more than welcome. When that assistance comes from Sevenites who can give them a map of their target's haven, assure them that they'll have cover at nightfall, hide them after the job and provide them with money and weapons — hell, let the snobs be as secretive as they like. Soup's on!

The Rescued of the Damned

VII has a ritual of Initiation that converts a normal clan Kindred into a Sevenite. Well, not really. The rite's effects are imperfect, but, broadly, it allows clan Kindred to enjoy the protections against mind control and mind reading that VII members have, though at a cost.

VII *can* recruit from the clans. Actually *doing* so is a tender point.

Some of the most hidebound Sevenites believe that their mission is to *eradicate* Kindred, not work side by side with them. To these Sevenites, the Initiation ritual is a trap set by Shaddad to further corrupt VII, and it's working.

The pragmatists majority are more likely to see the benefits of recruiting a Daeva or a Ventruel, because such Camarilla Kindred possess powers that the Ahranite clan does not. But even the pragmatists hardly endorse the idea without reservations. They know those powers can turn against them. Recruits should very much be exceptions, made of the most useful and qualified. It's not something VII want to do *often*.

Recruiting is an uncommon tactic because clan Kindred are assumed to be the enemy. Turning an enemy is a lot more complicated than just destroying him, and it involves dangerous exposure — especially if the attempt fails. Therefore, recruiting is only an option when the gains are drastic enough to offset the risks.

How Recruiting Works

There are three stages to recruiting clan Kindred. The first is identifying a likely candidate.

Likely candidates possess at least two, preferably more, of the following traits: They've got a grudge against a more powerful Kindred. They've got a beef against an entire power-bloc in their area. They possess great personal power. They have access to other Kindred when those Kindred are vulnerable. They are in a position to gather a lot of intelligence. They can be threatened,



blackmailed or otherwise manipulated by VII. They're suicidal, psychotic or have nothing to lose.

Naturally, the combination has to be right. A Prince has access to vulnerable Kindred and great personal power, but a Prince is probably the Kindred least likely to sell out the local court, almost by definition. New recruits must be motivated to make radical changes, and that motivation must make them willing to risk destroying everything Kindred in their home city. (Ideally, they're actually *enthusiastic* about destroying their hometown Kindred, but VII recruits a lot of Kindred who think they can make a phony pledge, use VII to bash on the clan or covenant or coterie they despise and then back out. They think they can use VII as a scalpel instead of a flamethrower. Once Initiated, Shaddad and the curse of Ahran usually dispel that notion.)

If a local Kindred (or, rarely, a coterie) seems disgruntled enough and has sufficient potential, a Sevenite agent approaches and tries to gain her confidence. This is the second stage of recruitment, and it often involves an exchange of favors. Possibly the Ahranite bails the Kindred out when she's in trouble or helps her attain some goal that was frustrated by the local power structure. Once a tie is established, the Ahranite feels her out about radical revolution. He doesn't reveal his allegiance by any means, but by acting as an ally he can usually get a sense of how amenable she is to violent overthrow of the current system.

If he thinks she's good for it, he tries to arrange some kind of test in which she has the opportunity to destroy

some local rivals, usually for personal gain. If she ruthlessly seizes the opportunity, he offers to let her in to his revolutionary cabal through the use of Initiation (see p. 35). That's the final step. After she's Initiated, he tells her she's in VII.

If she doesn't want to join after destroying the enemies, he double-crosses her and uses the ensuing commotion as part of Phase Two of operations. The same thing happens if she refuses to take the bait: he either destroys her or selectively presents facts about her relations to her surviving rivals in order to propagate conflict.

Once the Kindred are in, of course, it's time to apply them to whatever phase of the strategy their talents and inclinations indicate.

Positioning by Former Covenant

Kindred don't choose their clan, so personality stereotypes by clan are on shaky ground. Kindred generally *do* pick their covenant, just as mortals pick political parties. Thus, covenant stereotypes are more likely to be accurate. Just as Democrats have all had abortions and favor terrorism, and Republicans are invariably religious fanatics who'd prefer to see the poor chopped up for golf-course fertilizer.

When VII does decide to pull in an outsider, and when they succeed at their recruitment effort, they usually tell their new partner nothing significant (or, alternately, they load him up with plausible misinformation) and keep him in position. After all, that's where a mole is most damaging to the clans and most useful to VII. A

traitor to the Carthian Movement or Invictus remains at the reins of his mortal teams — he just drives the wagon of oppression for the benefit of new masters. Kindred from the mystic orders are tapped for passwords and quizzed about the locations of hidden sanctuaries. Recruits from any faction are pumped for information, of course — any simmering resentments that can be brought to the fore, any barely stifled conflicts that can be reactivated, any vulnerabilities of *any* covenant, coterie or elder in their region.

That's what backstabbers do in Phase One (see the "Strategies" section on p. 54).

In-town betrayers may be Initiated for Phase Two or not, depending on how well they've operated, how honest they seem to have been with VII and the intensity of scrutiny VII expects during Phase Two. If they think their new pawns are going to get interrogated, VII may Initiate them in order to keep their secrets concealed. On the other hand, Initiation ensures that the new targets *know* VII is on the prowl. If the VII team has access to good Dominate, they may fill in layers of false memories to make their recruit *think* he's been brought in from the cold by VII, but then, underneath, a second layer makes him *believe* he's been tricked — by whichever local faction the Ahranites want to frame.

When in doubt, they don't Initiate, because an Initiate is a lot harder to deny to the enemy.

Phase Three occurs when the clan Kindred brings along do or die. If they've served VII loyally and well, they get Initiated and are expected to serve as guides for strikes against their former clan, covenant or coteriemates. (Some Sevenites prefer to have their traitors strike against old enemies, under the theory that they traitors will be more enthusiastic, but asking them to kill their sires and allies is seen as a better test of true allegiance.) If Phase Three succeeds, clan converts are often left in their hometowns to pick up the pieces and forge new VII fortresses. If the clan converts signed on to become the new power players on their home stages, they get just what they wanted. They are the new rulers — though, admittedly, rulers of drastically reduced population and violently chaotic power structure.

The Unaligned

Unaligned Kindred are the Kindred most commonly sought for induction to VII, and, depending on their reasons for being unaligned, they're either the most or least likely to agree.

The most likely are those who are unbound due to abuse or prejudice from a city's dominant covenants (or individuals). If, for example, they're Gangrel in an Invictus town that has declared the entire clan anathema, they're probably snuffling around the outskirts and eager for anyone who'll help them take their oppressors down a notch. Exiles, fugitives from blood hunts, skulking refugees who got on the Prince's mean side — these are

mantra for Sevenites because they're motivated to kick out the jams, and their knowledge of the region, while dated, is still far from useless. (Bridges, power transformers and good sniper perches don't move around much. Neither do the opinions of aged Kindred.)

The drawback to the unaligned-by-force is that they were usually exiled, rejected or hunted for a reason. If the reason is treachery, an Initiation can offset *much* potential mischief — but incompetence, an inability to cooperate or pointless viciousness are all as big a pain in the ass for VII as they are for more traditional covenants. (Yes, even VII despises the pointlessly vicious. They're a Masquerade threat and tend to get attention before the covenant is ready to act.)

None of these flaws mean that VII won't make some kind of offer to the unpalatable unaligned. It just means that they won't Initiate him, won't tell him anything of value and won't hesitate to flame him out with the other locals once his usefulness runs out.

At the other end of the stick are the unaligned who like it that way. Although they're generally badass enough that VII would love to get them doing something constructive (or constructively destructive), they also tend to be free spirits who see any kind of cooperative order as a cage. In other words: if the Unholy isn't going to join the Carthians for connections or the Invictus for influence or the Lancea Sanctum for meaning — why the hell would she join VII for kick murders when she can do all that she wants on her own?

THE CARTHIANs and *the* Invictus

Carthian and Invictus Kindred look very much the same to VII. This would doubtless incense both covenants if they knew (which they don't) and if it were possible for them to despise VII more than they already do (which it probably isn't). The distinction between elitist "top-down" Invictus structures and populist "bottom-up" Carthian organizations is lost on the Ahranites. In both cases, the Ahranites see a set-up controlled by a small clique of grizzled, politically astute elders who've got a variety of leashes on a large gang of younger, clueless pissboys and receptionists.

Recruiting one of the power elite from a political covenant is just about impossible. After all, if temporal power is the temptation, VII doesn't have much to offer. There's the Shaddadite "rule the world like vampires ruled Gomorrah," line, but that's pretty theoretical, and the barrier of " ... after killing all the *other* Kindred" makes it sound rather farfetched, especially when compared to becoming Prince in a mere fifty years or so.

Very occasionally, someone who has attained great authority within the Invictus or the Carthians does have some kind of spiritual crisis, and, if caught at the right moment, he may turn to VII instead of to the Order, the Circle or the Sanctum (all of which offer their own versions of "spiritual solutions"). But while this is a great

coup when it happens, it's so rare as to be prohibitive. Besides, this sort of philosophical turmoil seems most common after a long torpor, which is exactly when an Invictus or Carthian elder has the least to offer VII.

Scraping a layer off the bottom is far easier, as both covenants attract more than their share of fair-weather fiends looking for a quick and dishonest road to comfort and power. Once they sign on the dotted line, they usually realize that their new bosses were once lazy opportunists like themselves, and therefore know just how to squeeze out the most work for the least compensation. Bitter and resentful, they have little choice but to lie in the bed they made — unless they burn down the whole house. Most have been tempted with *just enough* progress that they're willing to stick with the devil they know. But a few who have shorter fuses or crueler bosses throw in with VII just in the spirit of ruining the game because they're not winning.

As with the unaligned, the disgruntled and disenfranchised among the Invictus and the Carthians are quite possibly outsiders for very good reasons. As with the unaligned, this only encourages VII to make extravagant promises, use their new "friends" as expendable patsies and then dispose of them with appropriate dispatch once their usefulness has ended. While they may be promised an Initiation (once they prove themselves), the cauldron they enter is more likely to be filled with sulfuric acid than mystical blood.

The Lancea Sanctum

The Lancea Sanctum is not a covenant noted for tolerance. They are particularly intolerant of chumps who join up, learn a few Theban tricks, then throw them over for some other group of bloodsuckers with better stock options. They *really* hate that and take stern measures to ensure loyalty. Depending on local theology, that can include Dominate conditioning, Vinculums (or the threat thereof) and the use of mortal hostages. Certainly there are dire threats and solemn oaths involved.

This doesn't mean that no one betrays the Lancea Sanctum. It just means that betrayers are careful to either (1) be adequately prepared to cross-betray, so that they can claim to have been double agents all along, (2) cover their tracks well enough that the Lancea Sanctum can't find their Judas or (3) make sure they burn the fucking temple to the *ground* with every last Inquisitor in it, so that there's no one left to wreak vengeance.

VII admires that kind of thoroughness. Unfortunately, the kind of person (or vampire) who'd have her act together so completely is likely to be in charge of the local Lancea Sanctum brood, rather than looking for a way to reduce it to ash and flinders.

Kindred do jump the fence from Longinus to Ansuara. It's not common, but it does happen — and when it does, it's a cause for great rejoicing. Not just because Theban Sorcery is so cool (though, let's face it, Vitae Reliquary,

but because the Lancea Sanctum upper crust is often more insular and defensive than political leaders — and because the rare Lancea Sanctum betrayers are often more experienced than defectors from the Carthians or Invictus.

Sure, the bulk of Lancea-Sanctum-turned-VII backstabbers are junior members who were crammed into the Church at their sire's insistence. But a mid- or high-level Invictus or Carthian officer almost never rebels, because at that level he's just starting to really enjoy the freedom of his authority. A Lancea Sanctum member of similar level is still under the thumb of religious doctrine. Most, by that time, are fanatics, or at least can resign themselves to it. But there are a few — mostly Kindred who signed up with the Lancea Sanctum as passionate young pups, eager for an explanation and purpose in their Requiem — who have found that the Centurion let them down. They've finally progressed far enough in the Church to get all the answers they're going to get and — it's not enough.

When you've put decades into a faith and find that it can't meet your needs, you have two choices. Most choose to alter their needs, become cynical opportunists and get by. But for the furious few who want to destroy the hypocrites who made such glittering promises and delivered only emptiness — oh, VII is there, ready to help them make their payback epic.

On the other hand, there are a very few of the Sanctified who join VII for the exact opposite reason. It's not that they find their roles as the Punishers of Humankind to be philosophically bankrupt: they find their roles meaningful and fulfilling and believe they can better persecute the mortals with the assistance of other, equally reprehensible entities. How these red-eyed creeps found out about Shaddad is anyone's guess, but they think diabolism and vampirism go together like chocolate and peanut butter. Needless to say, they've all joined the Listeners to the Unvoiced faction within VII.

THE CIRCLE OF THE CRONE

The Circle of the Crone is often the toughest covenant to crack, even harder than the Invictus. People who want to see themselves as part of a supernaturally determined order are unlikely to buy the VII line that Kindred are a flaw of the cosmos, destined to be cleansed with fire so that a new dawn can start. Circle pagans aren't "new dawn" types. They see the world cyclically, progressing through its seasons as it always has. This is directly opposed to the VII idea that there will be an Armageddon for the Kindred and a new Eden for the mortal sons of Ahran.

In other words, the Circle is mostly full of Kindred who are fine with things as they are (at least, on the cosmic scale) while VII is all about provoking a radical and global change.

Of course, that sort of acceptance, while terribly attractive in the abstract, can be hard to maintain when

you come out of a Wassail and you're standing over a pile three-deep of exsanguinated bodies. It's easy to say, "They're sheep, I'm a wolf," but when the sheep have human faces it's hard to believe.

The Lancea Sanctum's counterargument is that Kindred are unnatural. They're a curse on mankind, and mankind is asking for it good and hard. That's the antithesis to the Circle's acceptance, and it has some appeal.

But if that three-deep pile contains your own sister and her eight-year-old twins, the "humanity deserves us" tack seems hard to swallow as well.

Enter VII, with a third path. VII says that Kindred *aren't* part of a bigger whole, they *aren't* a holy ordained punishment, they're a cancer on the fair face of the globe and, even if it leaves a scar, it's time to start cutting.

The recruits from the Circle, then, tend to be idealists who tried resigning themselves to being predators and who just couldn't do it. They understand that Kindred are the problem, and they want to be part of the solution. Unfortunately for the Sevenites, Acolytes with lots of exposure to the soul-eroding powers of Crúac seldom have such idealistic awakenings. Instead, VII recruits neonates who get cold feet after seeing what prolonged exposure to Crone witchery is going to do to them.

Still, even a dewy-fresh recruit offers substantial advantages over coming in cold, and even someone with low levels of Crúac can make herself very useful, whether for the Phase One tasks of gathering information (when the ability to see through another's eyes has its obvious uses) or the more blatant Phase Three assaults (in which paralysis is equally easy to apply).

There's more to the Circle than just their blood witchcraft, of course. While the Invictus and Carthians are the covenants most likely to sign formal treaties with local lupines or awakened mages, the Circle and the Order are the ones most prone to actually *do* stuff with them — and in the Order's case, "do stuff" often translates to "try and jump their metaphysical claim." The Circle of the Crone, then, can sometimes provide a decent "back channel" to other local supernatural factions. If VII can horn in on that communication, they're far more likely to find allies who are down with the "global Kindred pogrom" concept (or even a much more limited "local Kindred pogrom" proposal). As an added bonus, lupine allies don't even need to be whacked after use, like many of VII's Kindred patsies. Just as well, since that's a big job even with Praestantia.

THE ORDO DRACUL

The Ordo Dracul is in the middle, in terms of vulnerability to poaching by the Ahranites. This may be a surprise: in terms of being secretive and fanatical and (let's face facts) snooty, the Order's as thorough as any other covenant. The difference is that, like VII and unlike any other major Kindred group, the Order of the Dragon sees vampirism as a fundamental detriment to

be overcome. (The Lancea Sanctum says it's a problem deserving of vigorous pursuit, while the other covenants tend to regard it as a mixed bag at worst — and quite possibly a better deal than rusting out at age 70 with no teeth or knee joints.)

The Order tends to attract the selfish. That's a statement that carries some baggage, if one assumes that selfishness is a negative trait. For the Order, that just isn't so: if a vampire can't take care of himself (says the Ordo Dracul), he's a damn fool to expect anyone else to take care of him. Similarly, enlightenment doesn't come to groups, even groups who lend one another texts and serve one another as sounding boards. Enlightenment comes to individuals.

Those who really, truly and deeply believe in Dracula's Illumination tend to stick with the Order through thick and thin because, after all, no one else is closer or even trying to get there. Those who betray the Order for VII (which is far more communal and in which membership necessitates a certain degree of forced loyalty) are therefore those who've soured on Dracula's final escape — or those who've decided they're about as Illuminated as they're going to get.

The first case resembles the disgruntled cast-offs of the Circle or the Lancea Sanctum as much as anything. They were promised a rose garden and got, instead, a few magic tricks and the possibility of spending decades playing Jeeves to some crusty old monster who keeps all the cool books locked up. (In the Order, new members are literally called "Slaves.") Rather than endure medieval fealty in order to learn how to negotiate with the Beast at a decreased disadvantage, some just get fed up and decide that the answer is to turn their hatred for what they've become in a more destructive direction — eradicating everyone else who have become it too, instead of trying to pare down its power one thin shaving at a time.

On the other hand, there are some Order deserters aren't fledglings who got impatient or (even rarer) grew a conscience. There are some who've learned all the Coils they feel they need. They have remade themselves and they're ready to remake the world. For Kindred of such might and ambition, eradicating the competition seems like a good first step. Some such Ordo Sevenites are genuine altruists who foresee a better future without Kindred. Others have simply evolved to a more perfect selfishness and would prefer a future in which they are the last vampires on earth.

The "young worm" Dragon refugees are generally useful without having any specific task for which they're better suited. More efficient blood use or resistance to Kindred freak-outs is useful whether one is trying to be a spy, an agent provocateur or just the guy with the axe who helps chop up the local Hound.

Old and connected Dragons are something else entirely. When VII convinces one of *them* to come in from

the cold, it's not just that VII gets access to Coils (if the new member deigns to teach them) and gets an inside track on local Dragon politics. They also get information about at least some Wyrms' Nests, and when your goal is taking down all the Kindred of a city, data on wild cards like those are huge. Want werewolf allies? They might be interested in recovering a Nest that used to be theirs. Hey, VII's going to leave its gang tag and move on when the Kindred are gone, what do they care? Or maybe there's a property dispute over some site that the Ordo Dracul has and the Circle wants, or vice versa. Nothing gets a Phase Two off to a good start like a land war. Or, just maybe, a Nest is so highly defensible that it's worth taking in a surprise assault (the kickoff for Phase Three, perhaps?) and using as the local garrison. Particularly if that surprise assault is led by someone who has the keys, and the passwords, and knows where you have to sacrifice a black goat to appease the *genius loci*.

Ideologies

The Fervent of Gomorrah

"Do not glory in your newfound might, for your role is not to take, but to give, even unto the utmost. We shall toil unto the end of our kind, even as we must be that end. Only then, on the Sabbath, can we rest."

The Fervent of Gomorrah are the most traditional Sevenites. They believe the history of Gomorrah and Irem, Tarshad and Ansuara, God's blessing and Shaddad's pact — all of it is literal, gospel truth. They carry the blood of King Ahran, either by lineage (for those mortals identified as being scions of the family) or through adoption (by Embrace).

Fervent Sevenites tend to adhere to some sort of code of behavior — often one based on Christianity or Islam. Between the Beast and the Unvoiced Name, they don't trust their own gut feelings to guide them to the right decision. Instead, they follow inflexible commandments like "Never kill a mortal who is unconnected to the Kindred" or "Feed only from the willing" or "Never use the Kiss while feeding." They are by-the-book, uptight and generally quite grim. But, by the same token, they are also disciplined, steady and often courageous.

Whether a given area's Sevenites choose leadership by merit or seniority or election, the Fervent are often found in those high positions. It's a chicken-and-egg question: Does a high position in VII tend to lead one toward religion? Or does following the religion tend to push one upwards in VII? Perhaps it's a bit of both, but in any event it does seem that Fervent neonates survive long enough to gain power, while those who rise in power without fervor tend to find it later in their Requiems — perhaps as a tonic to keep them active in their task, perhaps as a balm to rationalize certain deeds required for their excellence.

To understand this ambitious warrior asceticism, it helps to understand what makes someone Fervent. It's a very stark explanation for the Ahranite condition — "You have a duty to God, but, in pursuit of that, you have become the very evil that you oppose" — but then again, *all* undeath is very stark. When one is banished from the sun and compelled to feast upon the blood of the living, something that places that reality on a spare, black-and-white, right-between-the-eyes continuum explains a lot.

The Fervent see vampirism as a plague, and themselves as infected physicians. Every attempt to cure necessarily risks contagion. But if they do nothing, the sickness becomes a pandemic.

What does a doctor do in those circumstances? She tries to stay as healthy as possible, keeping her disease in check. Just so, the Fervent deny themselves the seductions of Kindred power — sometimes physical pleasures like the Kiss, but more importantly the subtle temptations of lording their deathlessness and mystic abilities over humankind. All Kindred are monsters. The Fervent recognize themselves as such, but refuse to accept that they must therefore *act* on their monstrosity, or accept it or, most tempting of all, enjoy it.

Deciding to follow the orthodoxy and strictures of the Fervent provides a framework for a Requiem. It gives them rationales for resisting their vicious instincts, and, while reasoning with the Beast is hardly an infallible course, the weak weapon of logic is better than facing the Beast unarmed. Being Fervent provides a function (destroying other Kindred who are far more pestilent), a goal (a purified world free of vampires) and even a reward (the Sabbath).

That reward, that Sabbath, is often the cause of the Fervent's painful mixed feelings of longing and terror. Longing because it's what justifies their existence, it's what excuses their crime of *being* (along with any incidental murders, maiming, arson and thefts they almost certainly commit in the course of their crusade). But also terror because surviving a long time, even in a Requiem half-life, can strongly accustom one to existing. If they are the monsters who slay monsters, the Sabbath is when they themselves are slain. Their victory parade serves also as their funeral wake. Terror, too, that their Sabbath may not be what they hoped for and trusted. The hatred of the Fervent for Shaddad's willing followers is (rationally) because the demon's might is a necessary evil (if it were, indeed, necessary) and not something to be wholeheartedly endorsed. But that hatred is fierce and pure because those followers say the Sabbath will be the triumph of their dark god, the perfection of vampirism instead of its elimination. No Fervent believes in that Sabbath, but many secretly fear it.



Or there's the most unmentionable fear of all: that the Sabbath is a fool's errand. It doesn't exist, and all their struggles are meaningless.

But those fears, while strong, are hidden. The Fervent loudly proclaim their desire as if it were unmixed, and, if they disagree about *exactly* what the Sabbath will be, well, that just gives potential Fervent converts a menu of options from which to choose.

The most conventional Fervent view is that the Sabbath is literally what was promised to Tarshad. Gomorrah (believed by modern archaeologists to be located in Numeria) will be rebuilt. The mortal descendants of Ahran will (through some means or other) come to power there. Irem, too, will arise from the sands, but the Fervent don't care much about the City of Pillars. No, what matters is that Gomorrah will be restored and forgiven by the vengeful power that struck it down.

Hopeful Fervent vampires believe they may be restored to life upon the destruction of the last clan Kindred. More realistic ones hold that the Sabbath won't occur until they, too, are ash — preferably at the hands of Ahran's living children, but suicide is presumed to be an acceptable alternative.

The Pragmatists

"If you want to believe in stories about Horshack and Tubesock and all those other old-time people whose names

sound like anxiety drugs, fine, okay, whatever gets you through the night. Me, I'm more concerned about Carthian influence on state-level politics in Tennessee."

In terms of belief and philosophy, the great majority of VII fall into the Pragmatist camp. Rather than debate whether the Sabbath will be the Fervent's solemn martyrdom or the Listener's glorious debauch, the Pragmatists prefer to table that discussion and *do* what needs to be *done*, here, today. It's not that they have no beliefs or opinions on these matters. It's just that they find them irrelevant to the immediate (and often desperate) demands of their grim and giant task.

Rather than plan for a party that may not happen for centuries, they want to gather intel on Chicago, find a way to scout Paris without getting spotted, try to come up with a plan to support the rivals of the Lancea Sanctum in New Orleans without ultimately making the city harder to conquer after the inevitable (well — hopefully inevitable) confrontation.

While some Pragmatists rise to positions of high authority, they're more often found in the middle and lower ranks of the covenant. As with the Fervent, there's a question of whether this attitude places them or whether the place creates the attitude. Whichever took precedence, the short-term and immediate focus of the Pragmatists serves them well on the front lines. Like soldiers in the trenches, they're more concerned about



taking the next hill than about finding a deeper meaning or broader strategy in the battle. Concentrating on the current city, current targeted group or current individual Kindred haven makes the Pragmatists efficient problem solvers. Given the difficulty of their tasks, they need every advantage they can get.

That's not to say that the Pragmatists don't have input into the process. Some of them have titular authority, but the power of the Pragmatist faction is bureaucratic power. Suppose a Fervent leader forges some asinine strategy — say, a grandly symbolic gesture that exposes VII in order to strike fear into a city they're otherwise unable to infiltrate. When he tells his Pragmatic followers to carry it out, they're going to drag their feet, make excuses and eventually do something half-assed and similar that doesn't put them at as much risk. It's an unofficial veto, and it's not the result of conscious thought. Rather, it's just the aggregate result of collective mistrust or apathy for a given course of action. When that same leader proposes something in keeping with the Pragmatist philosophy — an overwhelming one-night strike at a small Kindred court *near* that intractable city, with options in place to pull out fast in the face of a counterstrike or to bunker down and fight defensively — he is usually delighted with the unexpected focus his followers bring to bear.

Pragmatists are necessary to carry out any significant task, and getting them on board can often mean the difference between having a thing done well and having it done poorly. Getting them on board means showing that the action in question is going to kill a lot of Camarillas (either immediately or indirectly) without undue risk to the Sevenites. Pragmatism doesn't mean cowardice, but, like most Kindred, the Pragmatists don't have old age staring them in the face and would usually prefer to survive and fight another day.

While their silent-majority status gives them nearly total control over the speed and intensity of any VII strategy, they almost never *originate* strategy. They're not big picture people, almost by definition. The sweeping goal-setting is done by the ruling classes, who are usually Fervent, sometimes Pragmatists, rarely Listeners. But within the Pragmatists' subordinate purview, their discretion is great. Although the leaders of VII might decide that this is finally the year when they gather a great force from all over the US and crush New Orleans once and for all, it's the Pragmatists in various cities and fortresses who decide just how many of their members they can spare for this crusade. It's the Pragmatists who decide when to strike, and how, and which covenant they'll try to drop first. Ultimately, it's the Pragmatists who can drag their feet and ensure the failure of the mission — especially if they've arranged, in their typical no-fuss practical fashion, to have the mission loaded up with individuals they dislike but are personally unable to strike at because of Ahran's Curse.

The Listeners to the Unvoiced Name

"It's tragic that so many cling to the pleasures forever denied to them — even at the cost of forgoing the new vistas that lie before us."

The smallest philosophical faction of VII is regarded with great suspicion by the majority. It's no wonder. The Listeners to the Unvoiced Name are devil-worshippers.

Instead of revering traditional VII heroes like Ansuara, Tarshad and Jepshiel, the Listeners hold that the true soul of the covenant is Shaddad, fallen lord of Irem, the whisperer in the blood that will lead them to glory when they overrun their rivals.

Listeners are generally low-Humanity brutes, possessed of a cold ruthlessness that would do an Dragon scholar proud, married to an unshakable faith that an Acolyte of the Lance might envy. But, as distasteful as the Listeners are, the curse of Ahran prevents VII from taking direct action against them. Even indirect action is unlikely — hell, the Fervent may despise them, but they can't even cut them out of the covenant's business.

The Listeners are, of course, by far the most advanced students of Ahranite Sorcery. Any Sevenite who wants a Sinner's Skin or one of those cool Thirsting Daggers is probably going to have to treat with the Listeners to get it. Learning any Ahranite Sorcery ritual beyond the second levels almost certainly involves a Listener instructor, and *no one* learns the level four and five rites until the Listeners are sure that the student is as dedicated to Shaddad as they are.

So there they are. Effectively, they're a monopoly on the higher levels of Shaddad's power, and, since the Ahranite line has already paid the high price for the demon's favor, they're unlikely to just quit using it over something as intangible as an ethical scruple. (At least, that's the Pragmatist perspective. They pull along the Fervent because, without the spells of the Listeners, it's a lot harder to get things done.)

While many Listeners are plagued by derangements, the more presentable members of the faction tend to act as spokespeople and keep the wilder Listeners cooped up in regional fortresses.

Those spokespeople are often a surprisingly low-key lot. Their perspective is that God's will shows few signs of being worked on Earth as in Heaven, and that's a *good thing*. At least it is if you're a blood-sucking monster who does not, if she plays her cards right, have to *ever* die and face Heaven or Hell. Instead, smart vampires can have an endless existence in *this* world and, with sufficient power, make it into one hell of an Earthly paradise.

The Listeners, after all, don't want to rule the world or destroy it or do any other crazy batshit stuff that you'd expect from evil sorcerers in black robes. They want to rule Irem and Gomorrah. That's not so horrendously bad, is it? Two cities, which currently don't even exist?

Before condemning the Listeners, weigh the two cities — one ruled by a demon, yes, the other under the thumb of undying blood drinkers — against the plague of Kindred across the entire *globe*. Just about *every city* worthy of the name has at least one, battenning on blood, usually the blood of the weak and defenseless, don't kid yourself. The Listeners don't give a fig about doing good, but neither are they into being evil just for the thrill of it. They are looking out for their own safety, pleasure and power, no denying it, but there's also no denying that the triumph of their evil lord is the greater good for Earth and humankind.

That's what the spokespeople say, anyhow. That caveat — that Shaddad's goals are so modest, compared to the grandiose designs of the Invictus — is sufficient to bring along an awful lot of Pragmatists. Especially when it's backed up with offers of Restored Images or a quickie Visage of Shaddad right before that haven burn-out.

Until their Sabbath, the Listeners act very much like other members of VII. They're right at the forefront, working the phases of cleansing, fortifying strongholds and fighting the good fight. Because they're distrusted, they've got a lot to prove, so they're often *more* courageous and work *harder* than Pragmatists — especially on projects that lack the unofficial Pragmatist stamp of approval. Eighty percent of the Listeners are careful to live surprisingly open Requiems with nothing to hide.

It's the other twenty percent you have to watch out for. They're the ones on the Quests.

The Quests are not discussed with outsiders. There are three Quests.

The first is to find lost Irem and delve into the fallen temple of Shaddad, hopefully there to expand their knowledge of Ahranite Sorcery, find a way to clarify contact with their master or learn something that might ease the torment in which Shaddad is trapped.

The second Quest is to locate the ruined shards of the great brass idol that was taken from the City of Pillars and then stolen again from the Malakul monastery. In 1822, the Listeners unearthed a description of the idol and, from that, were able to piece together the fragments of a model they recovered in 1774. If they can get the original pieces, they can re-forge the idol and give their lord a body free of the interference of an Ahranite mind or spirit. The old idol could talk but not move; some of the wilder Listeners think this one could be articulated and powered with a diesel or electric engine. Calmer heads (well — what passes for "calm" among the Listeners) have reservations about giving a heavy robot body to Shaddad while the demon master still trapped in an endless nightmare.

That nightmare is the substance of the third Quest, which is to find where Ansuara entered torpor and pull the stake from her heart. Shaddad cannot awaken until VII's greatest heroine does as well. The Listeners are betting that years in torpor have only made her weak and

confused, while the demon prince has glutted on blood and souls. They expect the awakening to be a re-match, and, this time, they expect a mercilessly swift victory for the demon of Irem.

Operations

The culture of VII shows who they are, and the philosophies explain what they believe, but what matters most to all those beliefs and individuals is what VII *does*. This is, not coincidentally, also the matter of greatest interest to their enemies.

VII strikes at Kindred, whether one by one or in battalions. But it's not random flailing about. (They leave that to Belial's Brood.) No, VII's got a method.

Ensnecement

Most clan Kindred are solitary predators or, at best, operate most often in a small coterie. The Predator's Taint, not to mention centuries of Kindred tradition, allow for few other options. Most Kindred are responsible for their own feeding, their own haven, their own protection — all of their own Requiem, really.

VII, on the other hand, is communal. Instead of the Taint, they've got Ahran's Curse. Instead of a history of competition and treachery, they have one of family and co-operation. Although they compete for prestige, leadership and position, on everything else they work together.

That's why the typical Kindred havens alone while the typical Sevenite holes up with a dozen companions — and that's when they're on the road. Their fortresses can contain as many as twenty or thirty vampires.

Now, "fortress" means something a little different to VII than it does to a modern army tactician or a medieval laird. You probably won't find VII in some moldering castle on the hill, though their homes are usually tough. The most common VII fortress is a cattle ranch.

Why a cattle ranch? Because while VII is ensconced in their hard point, the feared and awesome Sevenites consume cattle blood.

This may seem like they're taking asceticism a bit far, but they have little choice. Sure, they can lure out a few blood dolls with the Kiss, but, without addiction to ensure loyalty, that's a risky strategy just for *pleasure*. VII get by on cattle and what they can drag down off the highway when they're safe at home.

This, of course, is the perfect motivation for Sevenites to leave the fortress and make things happen in the city. While they're in the city, they can eat *people*.

Fortifying themselves on a cattle ranch (or, less commonly, a hog, goat or even chicken farm) has advantages other than providing unsatisfying succor. Animals also serve as a protective screen against other Kindred. Obfuscate is believed to have a diminished effect on animals by nature, and animals get easily spooked by

the undead. A literal herd provides hundred of nervous eyes on the lookout.

Animals aren't the only useful things found down on the farm, of course. It's also perfectly reasonable to expect dogs and guns. In the case of VII, those dogs may be ghouléed by initiates, and the guns may be rather more military in character than the typical fowling piece. The hired hands are typically zealots — if it's a big or lucky fortress, there's an heir with Unseen Sense on hand. If they're *really* lucky, he's there voluntarily.

The typical VII ranch is a series of concentric circles. The outermost ring is an electric fence with some well-hidden cameras — nothing too challenging, even to an average Kindred, let alone one optimized for stealth infiltration. There may be some trip wires or motion detectors too, but it's not hard for a canny vampire to get past that perimeter unnoticed.

Inside that radius lie the cattle barn and kennel. By night, the dogs are out, while by day there are cows. But they're not alone. By day, there are ranch hands on horseback with binoculars, and probably sidearms. By night, Sevenites patrol with shotguns or heavy rifles — often protected by Obfuscate.

Any night-time brouhaha is going to scatter the dogs: unless they're conditioned with Animalism, they're just looking for an excuse to get as far from the undead as they can. A local Gangrel or Ventrue convert, of course, can change that equation radically, just as the presence of a dozen large dogs can change a fight.

Both day and night patrols usually carry flare guns in addition to rifles. Being shot with a flare gun isn't terribly dangerous, even to Kindred — getting hit with a flare is considered contact with a small fire for the guidelines on p. 172 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. While the flare does aggravated damage to Kindred, even a direct hit isn't going to do more than one point of damage, no matter how many successes the attacker rolled. If the attacker rolls only one success, the flare does no damage, though its flames still torture a Kindred target. The damage is low is because flares are designed to be bright, not hot.

Sevenites don't carry flare guns to kill their enemies but to provoke the Red Fear. Getting hit with a flare is like having a flashbulb go off in your face (requiring 3 successes on a frenzy roll to beat entirely) and the first roll against the frenzy is at -3 dice because it's sudden and painful. Even a near miss (that is, a single success that does no damage) is resisted at -1 on the initial frenzy check, because of its sudden, startling nature.

The other nice thing about flare guns is that they're excellent for making heightened senses into a problem instead of an advantage, and converted Mekhet dislike carrying them for that very reason.

Flares are also used to pinpoint the locations of intruders, summoning reinforcements rapidly — either on ATVs or at a Celerity-enhanced run.

Getting past such guards (or Mekhet converts with enhanced senses of their own) is far from impossible for Kindred intruders, which places them at the main house, which is where the going gets a little tougher.

VII houses don't appear formidable. They blend in. They're typically rustic and unexceptional in design, with a normal complement of doors and windows. Those doors are usually steel (Durability 3, Size 5, Structure 8, Damage 3), and the windows are bulletproof glass (Durability 2, Size 3, Structure 4, Damage 2). There are burglar alarms and motion detectors and that's about it. The house is where the humans live and, while it's secure, it's nothing to brag about.

The hard nut to crack is the crypt.

The crypt is not the basement. VII fortresses have basements like other basements, though usually much cleaner from more attention. There's storage and maybe a sump pump, the water heater and furnace and usually the washer and dryer. But somewhere, hidden under a staircase or behind a false wall in a closet, well concealed or barely disguised at all, there's a serious door, like a bank vault (usually something like Durability 8, Size 5, Structure 12, Damage 8). There's a combination lock, but if you open it from the outside with the lock there are very loud alarms, no matter what. Typically, entry is granted from the inside, because behind that door lies the crypt where the children of Ahran slumber.

Usually, the door is opened from within at sunset and not sealed up again until sunrise, unless there's an attack or other emergency. There's a camera over the door and Ahranites asking for admission when the crypt is sealed need to solidify their images and utter a password to get in. (Remember, an Ahranite can't be Dominated to reveal the password, and it can't be pried out of his mind with telepathy.) While open, the door is crossed by a tripwire (or sometimes a laser sensor), so that it's difficult to enter without alerting those within.

The crypt is usually a somewhat schizophrenic area. On one side, there are the private rooms of the Sevenite leaders (and the barracks for the underlings) along with a locked armory of Kindred-effective weapons, conference rooms and a situation room/command center from which all the alarms and detectors are watched. Radio communications from agents on the premises go through the command center, and this is often where intel is analyzed, campaigns against cities are planned and tactics against individual havens get discussed.

On the other side is the temple to Shaddad.

The size of the temple depends on how heavily the enclave depends on Ahranite Sorcery. The largest temple that the five covenants have uncovered so far was in the Black Forest region of Germany. Entirely subterranean, it featured thirty-foot vaulted ceilings, revolting frescoes (badly damaged with hand grenades by fleeing Sevenites before the Ordo Dracul's Sworn of the Axe could secure

the temple) and ten manacles on each of the side walls, positioned so that human prisoners could watch the action in the central cauldron.

That sort of grandeur is rare, however. Far more typically, the temple is a small chapel the size of a suburban living room. For all its small size, such a place still has a mean and repulsive air. Often the claustrophobic environs only enhance the evidence of human sacrifice and the close aromas of blood and shit and misery.

Most crypts also have a door marked "Treasury" on the temple side of the complex, most often at the end of a short corridor. This is a bit of a cruel joke. Opening the treasury door usually triggers some sort of closure at the beginning of the hall — anything from a giant stone slab to a dropping steel plate to the entire collapse of the hallway. Then, depending on the budget and architect, the greedy intruder is charbroiled, electrocuted, dissolved in acid — or just held, awaiting a group of Ahranites to administer the Draugr Curse.

That's it for the standards, but Sevenite warrens rarely conform to a standard. Depending on the clans and proclivities of their recruits, the buildings may have additional guards in the form of gargoyles, homunculi, ghouléd animals or low-grade ritual protection. If the Sevenites are well funded, the crypt may be a labyrinth of checkpoints with keypad codes, built as a series of modular chambers that can be isolated and flooded with acid from the situation room. Or there are some old gothic piles still in use (particularly in Europe, Africa and South America) that are laced with decidedly low-tech defenses. Of course, for an intruder it's no consolation at all to be torpored by a rusty blade on a pendulum, triggered by a sinking floor panel, instead of getting riddled with shotgun blasts after breaking a laser line.

The Strategies of Cleansing

The reason VII has such heavily defended fortresses is that they can rarely control a city or even a town. In all but the most fanatical realms of the traditional covenants, other points of view are tolerated, but VII is genocidal. If they take Cordoba, then *no Camarillas* are permitted to survive in Cordoba.

Clearing a city of the more numerous clan vampires, who have a broader spread of abilities and usually have their entrenchments set — that's no easy job. It takes time, effort and guile. Fortunately, the children of Ahran have plenty of all three.

Phase One: Infiltration and Scouting

The first phase of a VII campaign is to determine what they're up against. To clean out a city's Kindred, those Kindred must first be found, which isn't always as simple as it sounds, since Kindred are secretive by necessity. But Unseen Sense is the Ahranite ace in the hole, along with some common-sense understanding of

vampiric behavior. It doesn't take a genius to figure out areas that are likely feeding zones: the scouts start there and, if and when they spot an enemy, they shadow him and watch for more.

Some scouts come in solo, to minimize exposure. Sometimes several come in and operate individually but share information and haven together for safety. Or sometimes surveillance is done in teams, usually with less-experienced or less powerful Ahranites, so that trails can be passed off between two or three vehicles or on-foot spotters.

Mortals who know anything about VII are almost never used in the scouting phase. Rich or charming Ahranites recruit local patsies, but keep them ignorant or actively mislead them, leaving clues that would lead other Kindred to suspect the Ordo Dracul or some obscure bloodline like the Burakumin. The actions of clan Kindred initiatives vary from the typical VII pattern because they may be able to make extensive use of Presence, Dominate or Animalism to gather their data, but Sevenites without such resources fall back on Obfuscate for concealment, Celerity for pursuit and evasion and Praestantia as the ace in the hole (remember — it works with *Stealth and Firearms*).

The Sevenites are looking for answers to any and all of the following questions, in no particular order:

- Who are the local Kindred?
- Who's the ruler?
- Where are the Elysiums?
- Which factions are in control?
- Which factions are on the ropes?
- Who are the weakest members of each faction?
- Who are the strongest members?
- Where are the local havens, of any Kindred, located?
- Who are the ghouls, the blood dolls, the mortal agents?
- Are there any outsiders interacting with the Kindred factions? If so, who are they?
- Is there any insurgent group in place?

After the Sevenites have gotten answers, they begin the process of infiltration, which is to say, the hard part. Sometimes it's possible for bold Sevenites to simply introduce themselves, passing as Mekhet or Nosferatu who've mastered the Mask of Tranquility. This is typically an option in smaller towns or at smaller Elysiums, where a newcomer isn't going to get mind-scanned simply out of curiosity. In big cities, the Sevenites approach weaker locals who won't have recourse to high-level Auspex. In particular, VII seeks out the disenfranchised — the low covenant on the totem pole or, if they're fortunate enough to find one, an active rebellion against the current order. It is essential for VII to avoid appearing too eager — often they feign reluctance until the revolution

recruits *them* for some treasonous plot or underhanded scheme. Then they move on to Phase Two.

If the situation is highly stable, they may withdraw and move on, intending to check back in a decade and see if things have gotten more slippery. There are always plenty of cities in crisis, so VII has little interest in the hard task of home-growing disaffection among the content. Luckily for them, Kindred cities with stable politics are so rare as to be scarcely worth discussion.

Phase Two: Manipulation and Inflammation

The first phase ends when a small group of Sevenites has been accepted (or better, recruited) by an “out group” in the city — ideally neonates or other weak Kindred, ideally *not* Mekhet, ideally very angry and/or rebellious.

Phase Two begins with the arrival of more Sevenites, usually a cut above the initial infiltrators. The first phase plants need to be good at fooling others, but their primary purpose is gathering information. The second phase plants need to be *great* at fooling others.

These manipulators filter in over the course of a couple years, or even over a decade if things progress normally. About a third join up with the already-primed “out group,” and it’s not unheard-of for the infiltrators to actually become leaders (or at least respected voices in the clique). The remaining manipulators are assigned to penetrate the *in* group — the covenant or covenants that already have power and authority.

The infiltrators don’t aim for leadership roles, and they don’t aim for perfect success. Sometimes they even script safe betrayals of each other in order to look more loyal or useful. Their goal is not be in charge (though if the opportunity arises, great!). Their goal is to be in a position to incite and inflame.

The game of *agent provocateur* isn’t new, but it’s still in use because it works so well. All VII has to do is encourage prejudices already in place, aggravate rivalries that are already present and subtly (or even blatantly) undermine any attempts at reconciliation. Although Kindred are devious, they’re also instinctively solitary and distrustful: making them struggle with one another is far from an impossible task.

The goal of all this provocation is to create some kind of factional war, but not just arguments and ill feeling with occasional hotheads beating one another into torpor. The Sevenites want an organized conflict with the leaders of both sides on board, planning how to decimate or, better, utterly eradicate the other.

This is *not* so easy. Vampires tend toward conservatism, and they don’t like getting in fights unless they’re certain of winning. Kindred politics are often a delicate balance, and, although that makes it easy to tip one way or the other, it also means there are lots of people who are good

at tipping it back and who aren’t in the habit of doing anything they can’t undo.

But pogroms, jihads and crusades are not alien to vampires, and while the Man may crave stability the Beast craves blood. (Particularly vampire blood, if the Beast can get it. Every Kindred whom VII can get addicted to Vitae tips the scales a little more toward their desired conflagration.) It’s a struggle to get to that tipping point, but, once at it, things tend to crash very hard and very fast.

The Sevenites like the “hard.” They aren’t so fond of “fast.” They want war, not victory. They want to support the underdog as much as possible, and, since they’ve been working both sides and secretly planning this for months or years, that’s often quite a lot of help. Unexpected betrayals, information leaks, mysterious infusions of cash, weaponry or trained human fighters — all these can even the odds, and VII wants the odds as near to even as they can make them.

The reason for this is that the more protracted and bitter the struggle, the more damage the eventual winner sustains and the more thorough the destruction of the eventual loser. VII has no favorite: they just want both sides to be as weakened as possible, because that makes Phase Three much, much easier.

Phase Three: Open Conflict

When the midnight fights of a covenant-on-covenant war have taken their toll and are showing signs of winding down — that is, when one side is clearly winning — VII prepares for Phase Three. Ideally, they want to strike the night *before* the victors declare their triumph, when things are at maximum confusion and exhaustion. If they’ve got a lot of zealots in the region, Phase Three may start by day, especially if the war has not involved a lot of daylight assaults up until that point.

Otherwise, the biggest strike force VII can assemble travels to the beleaguered town and, in a single night, goes after the biggest, toughest targets the spies of Phases One and Two have been able to spot. At this point there’s rarely any reason for those infiltrators to hide their true colors, so they spend any trust capital they’ve built up in an orgy of treachery and bloodletting.

Anyone who tries to hold out is fried where he stands. That’s the plan, anyway, and VII has gotten *really* good at digging through tough havens.

Anyone who tries taking the fight to VII has the unenviable task of finding them, since they *just got there*, have had no chance to leave a paper trail and are probably out ransacking someone else’s haven while the counterstrike force is sniffing around.

Those who flee are often let go — for the moment. In Phase Three, VII is interested in real estate more than body count, and they know very well that Kindred who hit the road are often destroyed when the road hits back

— especially Kindred with no travel experience or plans. Fleeing in panic is almost as dangerous as staying in town with VII during Phase Three. Almost.

Some cities have beaten back VII even during Phase Three, even in the eleventh hour, but in every instance that's come at high cost on both sides. In any event, by the time VII's infection of a court reaches Phase Three, the local Camarillas' security and influence have waned drastically, flogged from pillar to post by each other and by VII's manipulation. Cities that survive such an assault usually continue to lose neonates over the course of years or decades, as increased police attention, mortal scrutiny or depredations from opportunistic mages or werewolves take their toll.

If VII wins, on the other hand, they stay and clean up until they cannot find one single surviving Kindred. Then they have a choice.

Sometimes, if the site is isolated and valuable, they make the entire city a regional fortress and use it to strike at other towns in the area. This gives them the advantage of *human* feeding, greater protective camouflage, more mortal business to skim — all the stuff that drives *normal* Kindred to cities. The drawback is that it sets them up as a target for a counterattack. There's very little that can get Princes of different cities to agree across clan and covenant bonds to send a group of their most loyal followers (because, honestly, no one else is going to do it) to a strange city in order to try and kill a weird and powerful enemy. But the notion of having VII camped out on your back doorstep — that just might do it. So if VII succeeded at destroying the Kindred court of Syracuse, New York, the courts of Buffalo, Ithaca, Rochester and Albany might set aside their differences to take care of it. Even the Kindred as far as the Big Apple might get involved.

The possibility of that sort of counterstrike makes it reasonable for VII to conquer some cities and then just *abandon* them. They place a dozen trusted mortals in place to keep an eye out, and they have strikers show up if there are any signs of a daring coterie sneaking back in, but, given the mixed horrors of travel *and* VII, any vampire who would travel to such an empty city to set up shop would have to be highly motivated indeed.

The Tactics of Assault

Sometimes VII makes it to Phase Three and gets to eradicate all the vampires in an entire city. Far, far, *far* more often, VII makes hit-and-run raids here and there. They do this to keep their enemies off balance, or because the target is vulnerable and low risk. VII does it to maintain the VII mystique, or to frame another area covenant (perhaps priming the pump for a future Phase Two) or because a particular coterie has offended their sensibilities. Sometimes they do it just to get their ya-yas out.

Whatever the Sevenites' phase or motivation, they often approach their attacks in one of four ways. To understand those methods, it helps to take a step back and consider the targets.

Kindred tend to nest like spiders. They hole up in their haven, which (like the spider's web) is safely navigable for the resident but constructed so that anyone else is (if not outright stuck) at least slowed down and weakened before confronting the blood-drinker at the core who has (again, thanks to the careful structure of the haven) been amply warned of what's coming.

Havens provide a substantial home-court advantage to the defender, but that's paid for with one drawback upon which VII relies: havens only work when you're *in them*. Obvious, one might think, but when the Ahranites have been watching a haven for a year or more, they can offset or at least anticipate the defenses. Exactly which tactics they apply depends on which approach, of the four, they decide to use.

The four basic tactics depend on a concept of *inside* and *outside* — meaning, inside or outside the haven.

Inside to Inside

An inside-inside job is just what it sounds like: confronting a Kindred predator in her own home, where she's strongest and has the greatest protection. On the face of things, it sounds pretty stupid, right? There's a reason there are all those old slogans about not bearding the lion in his den, right?

Well, yes and no.

It's true that havens are, by and large, as secure as their residents can make them. But that also means that when you jump a Kindred in her home, you can be pretty sure she doesn't have any better place to run and hide. Furthermore, most haven defenses are focused on keeping mortals out by day, for the simple reason that pesky mortals are the most frequent threat. Poison gasses, trained animals and armed guards are pretty commonplace — and all far more dangerous to normal humans than to Kindred who don't breathe, who can deal with beasts using Animalism, Nightmare or their own native creepiness and who can suck up a couple gunshots before Dominating a guard into giving a guided tour (or before draining the guard and ending up stronger than before the fight).

Digging out an entrenched vampire is no picnic, to be sure, but an inside-inside strike tends to put its target on a last-stand footing, for good or ill.

A strike team sent into a haven is usually Kindred-only. Mortal backup is unreliable against vampire foes who may know Dominate or Majesty — or who may just have the combat and Obfuscate chops needed to drag the mortal off and hide while using him as a refreshing Vitae canteen.



Strikers for inside-inside assaults tend to be optimized for in-your-face combat. They specialize in hand-to-hand attacks (usually supplemented with Praestantia and Weapon Finesse, or with other close-in fighting Disciplines). If the strikers are not sure what they're going to face, they often bring someone with Auspex along or, failing that, some trained animals of their own to sniff out Obfuscated foes.

Most dangerous is a mixed coterie, and for that VII responds with numbers. An inside-inside strike is almost always performed with a numerical advantage. Ideally, the strike team contains a lot of variety in terms of abilities and Disciplines, to offset the variety of the target group. For instance, you want a Mekhet to spot a Nosferatu, you want a Gangrel to offset a Ventrué's damage resistance and (really) nothing fights a Daeva as well as another Daeva. But in practice, VII is 70% Ahranite or more. Strike teams reflect that demographic out of necessity (and because it's hard to seduce in members from the five clans if they suspect they're going to do a disproportionate amount of the heavy stuff).

Inside to Outside

Inside-outside tactics are the ones VII rarely *wants* to use, as they're defensive tactics. When an ensconced fortress gets discovered, it usually means that *all* the local covenants set aside their infighting to root out the VII infestation. That, in turn, means that the numerical advantage is on the other foot — often a foot that's trampling the Ahranites' faces. The methods VII uses to reinforce against Kindred assaults are minor but significant variations on the ways clan Kindred protect their havens against mortals. For a more thorough discussion, see "Ensconcement" above.

That said, inside-outside tactics find fresh value when applied to entrapment. It's simple, really. VII sets out bait. When Kindred come sniffing around, the trap springs shut. You'd do the same with any vermin. It's axiomatic that it takes a ripe piece of cheese to catch the biggest rat, and the nature of the bait is usually covenant-driven.

The Ordo Dracul is the easiest to entice, because of their lust for paranormal real estate. VII looks for a house with some interesting history or, if the Order's already bought out all the old spooky shacks in the area, VII makes some up. They buy farmland on the recently developed outskirts and do their best to turn it into a Kindred kill-box. When the Sevenites have got their incendiaries well disguised and a fireproof panic room from which to detonate them, they just plant some eerie-looking artifacts for local mortals to find and start playing spooky-boojums on the neighbors — Nightmare's a perfect fit for the job, but Obfuscate and imagination really work just as well. From the outside, the Order sees some weird native artifacts turning up, with odd paranormal

effects following hard upon. Suspecting a Wyrms Nest, the Order sends a team to investigate, and VII applies their defensive advantage to whack 'em. Ironically, the loss of the first team often makes the Order *more eager* to acquire what now seems like a very powerful site.

The only real problem with the Ordo Dracul bait structure is that freaky haunt-zones are also catnip for curious mortals, and worse — more than one Sevenite clique has set its hook for Dragons and wound up reeling in a pack of werewolves or enchanters.

The Lancea Sanctum and the Circle are harder to lure, since their location focus is usually on places they already control — temples, sacred groves, desecrated graveyards and so forth. While it's possible to fraud up a "lost temple," a far more common tactic is to infiltrate a library or long-established antiques store and start leaking interesting-looking documents. Both groups notice when a copy of *The Chronicles of Longinus* is offered at auction and announced by name in the local paper. If local universities suddenly start listing *Aequitas Fatalis* in their special collections catalogue, or even something with serious occult heat like *The Art of Astral Negotiation*, any group that studies blood sorcery is going to want to know how the hell a bunch of breathers got it before they, the Kindred, could. It's usually not too hard for them to isolate the source, since it's designed from day one to be trackable. As with the phony Wyrms Nest, it's just a question of when to spring the trap.

Fishing for the Invictus and the Carthians is a longer game entirely, as what lures *them* isn't property or possessions but intangibles like financial power or political influence. It's still doable — a big construction project can be subtly presented as a good investment opportunity, maybe even a place where an impregnable haven can be built. The haven is built to the lured Kindred's specifications, of course. But VII has all the keys and passwords, and just needs to wait for a propitious time to spark an unfortunate gas fire. Alternately, a well-funded VII speculator can build a nightclub in an otherwise-undesirable location and just lose money hand over fist until it becomes an attractive rack. (Friends with mind or emotion control can make this much quicker by hitting the local college campus and programming the students to think the new place is cool, but buckets of promotional money can work just as well.) When the Kindred come in to take advantage, they find that the security at this particular meat market is meatier than anticipated.

Outside to Outside

Open combat has its appeal, certainly. VII can plan an ambush without concerns about inventive traps and escape routes, and can even try to tilt the terrain advantage toward themselves. The problem with fighting in the streets is that it has, by far, the biggest chance of a Masquerade rupture. That's bad for two reasons: the

first being that (as with the discovery of a VII fortress) a thinning Masquerade tends to be one of the few things that can unify, at least temporarily, warring factions of Kindred. The second reason is that VII wants the Masquerade intact as badly as the clan Kindred do. VII has no illusions that they'd be spared in a general human holocaust. If anything, they might get hit harder because the five clans would gleefully aim mortals at their old Sevenite enemies, while using the Predator's Taint to identify and protect one another.

That said, there's no reason that an attack in uncontrolled territory can't be carried out in a Masquerade-friendly fashion. Humans murder each other in the streets all the time, and Praestantia's synergies with firearm attacks can make an Uzi far more dangerous to a typical Kindred target than it would be in mortal hands. In fact, the bog-standard drive-by can be a fine VII tactic, especially if no bystanders get hit. After all, when guns start going off, any witnesses are going to dive for cover. Even if one babbles something about the guy who got hit and "turned to ash" it's going to be dismissed as some kind of hysterical delusion, unless that camera at the ATM shows . . . Ah, nope, it's all blurry. One Camarilla down, and, in a major metropolis, the police have crimes with verifiable victims to catch their attention.

Outside-outside attacks are unpredictable by nature. VII can try to have the advantage of numbers; they can try to pull aside weak Kindred for a fast takedown, but you never know who's going to be talking to whom. VII can try to set up an ambush, but you never know if this is the night when the intended victim's car blows a seal, or she has to tend to an antsy ghoul — or maybe just decides to stay home, listen to some old Four Tops records and reminisce.

Perhaps the biggest problem with outside-outside attacks is that, even when they work, they generally take down only two to three Kindred at most. Solitary predators like vampires generally don't walk down the streets gabbing. If they're going to *chat*, they do it in a guarded Elysium. A neonate coterie might collapse under such a blow, but in the long run — so what? The branches got a little trim, but the roots remain intact. Elders shun exposure because they've probably seen lots of vampires get smoked when they stuck their heads up. In the long run, swatting a clique of neonates or ancillae may be viscerally satisfying, but all it's really done is alert the smarter locals that someone in the area has a bone-on for blood drinkers.

Outside to Inside

The most common approach by human hunters is "outside-inside" — they stay outside the haven and, most commonly, attempt to burn the house down and crisp their enemy without ever getting close enough to fall prey to the mind- or emotion-controlling powers of the

Kindred. This can work and has worked, but VII finds that it's a tactic that works best on the young. Older targets are far more likely to have a haven with (1) an escape route, (2) elaborate fire-defenses (remember, fire needs oxygen and Kindred do not), (3) some kind of impervious blast chamber that can't be cracked before the curious mortals (or heavily paid-off cops and firefighters) show up or (4) some combination of any or all of the above. Chump neonates crash out in old tinderbox shacks. Canny ancillae have defenses (or Resilience, or the ability to drop into the Haven of Soil).

The good thing about an outside-inside attack is that there's low exposure and it's easy, if it works. With the advantage of surprise, the target doesn't have a chance to fight back. Hell, even if he sees it coming he may be too busy surviving to mount any kind of counterattack.

One drawback is that the traditional burnout (as practiced by generations of mortals) is done by day, which leaves out the Ahranite vampires — or at the very least puts them at the same substantial disadvantages as their quarry. Although mortal associates of VII (ghouls, heirs of the blood and others who've just joined up for whatever reason) can use this tactic as well as anyone, it's not as favored by VII as other approaches for this reason.

Another reason for VII's hesitation is that it's difficult to confirm the kill. With a perfect arson job, the hunters and the prey never even set eyes on one another. This is what makes it safe, but it also makes it uncertain. Getting up close and personal puts the attacker at greater risk, but he can see the enemy crumble with his own eyes.

When VII does an outside-inside, they do it one of two ways: all-out or half-baked.

A team of four to six ghouls or mortals carries out the all-out attack, with one as the "driver" and the rest as "watchers." They start early in the morning on a clear day. The watchers infiltrate the area before the strike. By high noon, they've got it surrounded, watching from the best vantage points they can find. Then, at the pre-ordained time, the driver rolls up in a car packed with whatever the team can get that goes boom. Although C-4 or other sophisticated munitions are preferred when they can be had, an SUV with a couple of fifty-gallon drums of gasoline in the back works pretty well too.

The driver bolts, one of the watchers remotely triggers the bomb and they blow the house down. Then the watchers watch. Hopefully, they see nothing, and to that end many watchers perform their duties unarmed: they're more concerned with the cops catching them than with facing a vampire in broad daylight. Therefore, they carry nothing that would indicate they're anything other rubbernecks watching the fire.

If the target survives, the watchers track him to his bolt-hole and either gather weapons to finish him before nightfall or target him for when the Ahranites awaken.

Of course, the denser the haven, the less likely this is to work. A reinforced house isn't going to fall over from an inexpert blast. A place with a high wall or security guards with cameras isn't going to be vulnerable either — the car-bomb just won't be able to get close enough before someone intercepts it. This is why a hard outside-inside is only used against weak havens.

Against a strong haven, the same approach works as a *half-baked* attack — only the purpose is different. A half-baked outside-inside attack is really only a feint. Because it's not really a threat, it distracts the Kindred target and directs her attention away from the real danger. For instance, while a car-bomb may knock over her wall and put a scare into her, what it really does is get her out of her compromised haven so that an outside-outside attack gets her while she's off-balance. Or the half-baked attack gets her to flee to a less sturdy backup lair for an inside-inside attack.

Alternately, VII might identify a tougher Kindred who's relying on her Disciplines to make up for a less secure haven. The half-baked attack in this case is a couple of Molotov cocktails flung at nightfall. The Kindred protects herself from the fire in one way or another and then, while she's out of her element or expecting another *human* attack, she gets whacked by the Ahranites.

Storytelling

Biblically cursed demon-hosts turned twenty-first century monster hunters — that's a concept with some interesting bulges and angles, but it can take some adaptation. Storytellers who wish to include this version of VII in their chronicles may want to consider the following issues: First, is VII present to serve as allies, antagonists or something more ambiguous? Second, no matter which roles the characters take in regard to the Ahranites, what purpose does VII serve thematically?

Fighting VII

VII is an antagonist covenant: it pretty much says so in **Vampire: The Requiem**. They've got a pretty good spread of combat Disciplines, so it's not hard to throw the Ahranites at characters and create conflict on a physical level. But used properly, the Ahranites can go to war with the characters in the service of deeper issues and more thought-provoking stories. The presence of VII, its aggression and its beliefs can engage the characters and put their own behavior, beliefs and aspirations into sharp relief.

Ahranites as Vicious Monsters

Perhaps the most straightforward way to use the sons of Ahran is simply this: They're vicious brutes, they're racists, they want to kill you and they've got a no-fooling *demon* in their *blood*. They are evil and must be destroyed. They're something so wicked that they make

the regulated depredations of the Invictus look like the greater good.

Although **Vampire** is a game of personal horror, the introduction of uncomplicated Bad Guys can serve several purposes. The most obvious is a change of pace. If your characters have played through several sessions of unrelieved personal misery — dealing with the negative consequences of their actions to their families or loved ones, doing the right thing at high political cost, doing the *wrong* thing at high *emotional* cost — then a straightforward “VII is here, and they’re gonna murder us all if we don’t stop ‘em!” subplot can provide some welcome relief from intense interior drama. A good meal doesn’t have dessert at every course: even when your chronicle is intended to mainly play out on the interior stage, having some exterior challenges can keep things fresh and provide useful perspective.

On the other hand, some groups like lots of action, and the Sevenites can certainly provide that in spades. People may tell you that you’re wrong for enjoying a bashy-smashy “VII attacks, and we make the world safe for Elysium!” chronicle. Screw them. It’s a game. If you’re having fun, it’s working.

But even for games focused on character exploration, the presence of unrelenting monsters can provide some useful grist. While standard vampires are monsters, it’s not hard to make the children of Ahran more monstrous still — particularly by emphasizing the Listener faction. Maybe your players have heroic vampire characters — they resist the Beast, feed as humanely as they can and attempt to do some kind of penance or serve some sort of useful purpose to the world to offset the threat they pose. Like a John Ford gunslinger, they’re the problem that fights other problems, the social outcast who is society’s only hope against *worse* outcasts.

See where this is going? A gang of demon-infused badasses who want to recreate *Irem* and Gomorrah, cities so vile that they were struck down by the hand of the Almighty, make for pretty compelling antagonists. In this setup, you want the more dutiful Ahranites to be patsies, either deluded by their Shaddadite cousins or deliberately looking the other way. (After all, with the clan weakness, it’s not like they have another choice.)

Alternately, a game that plays more in shades of gray can also make use of VII because there are both “good” and “bad” wings of the covenant. Is destroying a stronghold that’s sick with the miasma of Shaddad worth it if, in the process, the characters have to take down a load of righteous Ahranites who would otherwise be offsetting the hideous strength of the local Circle human sacrifice league? Having the characters play kingmaker can make for compelling arguments and decisions, and the combativeness of VII can provide deeds that complement their choices.

Or, even if your structure is “penitent vampires fight Shaddad’s minions,” you can dig at a really entrenched moral issue: that of ethical relativism. “Yeah, I do some bad stuff, but I’m not as bad as *them*.” That’s how ethical relativism works. I cheat on my taxes, but *Henry* cheats on his wife, so compared to Henry I’m a good guy. Henry cheats on his wife, but Stalin killed millions of innocent civilians, so Henry can consider himself a good guy.

Faced with VII and the prospect of a new Gomorrah, the characters may feel pretty good about themselves. They may be seduced into taking the easy path with other issues — maybe they feed more rapaciously, maybe they chisel a local business out of an honest man’s grasp so they can junk it for funds, maybe they blackmail a cop with evidence of her father’s sins. Compared to VII, that stuff’s small potatoes. They’re still the good guys, right?

Maybe not. Maybe lying next to black doesn’t make gray into white. Maybe the cop, the honest businessman and the victimized foodbags don’t see it that way. The contrast with VII can blind the players as effectively as it does their characters, such that they *choose* their own damnation freely. When it all comes due at once, it can be a far more personal horror than that faced by vampires whose only concerns are selfish.

In the same spirit, pure evil Ahranites can serve as the setup for Faustian bargains, literal or figurative. How bad are you willing to be to stop something that’s certainly worse? To keep VII from cleaning out a city and becoming the new dominant gang, would a Circle true believer be willing to empower a Carthian agnostic at the cost of her own covenant? How about allying with mortal hunters, giving them information about the weaknesses of all Kindred so that they can fight VII? It doesn’t take a genius to see how that could backfire, but which is the lesser evil? Depending on how potent and unrestrained you portray VII, just about anything could be “the lesser evil.” If Kindred characters reluctantly do horrible things to stop the horrible Ahranites, is that really a victory? If they listen to their squeamishness and draw back from scorched earth tactics, is it their fault when VII makes a hell on earth of their home city?

These are valid questions for a chronicle. I can’t answer them. Neither can you, and neither can your players. But you can reach those answers through play.

Ahranites as Wake-Up Call

On the other side of the fence, the Ahranites can be played as straight-up *good* guys, if that’s what you need. Some players like to walk on the dark side, and (of course) without some light contrast, the dark side’s not nearly as moody. Mortal hunter-types are a good contrast, but their purview is often “pure and doomed” — they’re naïve and brave, and their essential trust in the universe makes it poignant when the Kindred characters saw their

heads off and use them for punchbowl. That's one good contrast with darksome characters.

Sometimes, however, you need a virtuous antagonist with some teeth. (Get it?) Pure-line Ahranites are anything but naïve and unstained, but they're on a no-kidding Mission From God, and they're willing to make some serious sacrifices to get the job done. Give up their crowns? Sure. Sacrifice their homeland? Okay. Give up their humanity, their souls, their sanity, all for the power to complete their heaven-ordained task? Done and done.

In this role, VII is the force for virtue that's willing to get down, dirty and vicious. They're as merciless in the pursuit of their holy Sabbath as most Kindred are in the selfish quest for power and continued existence. If your characters are villains being villainous, they can ask for no challenge more fitting than a clash with the mad dogs of the Most High.

This sort of "martyr for the Lord" tone can also work with characters who aren't playing "Humanity-limbo **Vampire**." In the case of characters with good intentions, the presence of VII — a group willing to sell its collective souls on behalf of good intentions — can play as a cautionary example. If you're willing to compromise every ethic on behalf of some nebulous good (or, in the case of killing all vampires, a rather concrete good), is that really a good outcome? Can the means taint the end? Or — since the elimination of all Kindred is unlikely to happen in your chronicle unless that's something you've really turned it toward — is it worthwhile to sacrifice everything just for a chance you might, possibly, maybe get a few steps *closer* to that distant good outcome?

Maybe the characters will decide that no, you can't burn the village to save the village. Maybe they'll seek some Buddha-style compromise course, and wind up in the middle of the road with political moderates and dead armadillos, getting clobbered from both sides.

Or, just maybe, they'll decide that fanatical martyrdom has a certain appeal . . .

Joining VII

A chronicle in which all (or a few) of the characters are members of VII is certainly not typical for **Vampire: The Requiem**. That said, it isn't really alien to the themes and mood of the game, either.

It has plenty of potential for intrigue and politics, both internal and external. The external politics involve spying on clan Kindred in order to set them up for the next strike — and possibly to find any worthies who can be turned in the hand and brought over to the VII side. (Hey, even though they're evil scum, condemned unto doom by God, those clannies have Disciplines and information that VII can put to use.) As for internal politics, there's always the question of the Shaddad priests (who are icky and yucky and polluted and necessary because of their Ahranite

Sorcery powers) versus the unsullied Ahranites. Or, if you prefer, the Embraced Ahranites who regard themselves as the true core of VII versus the clan Kindred initiates — who justifiably argue that they *chose* VII and have sorely needed abilities, so how about some respect, huh? The very fact that none of them, Ahranites or recruits, can settle matters through violence or direct betrayal make the political battles all the fiercer and more necessary.

Another hallmark of **Vampire** is an emphasis on tough moral choices. On first blush, a VII campaign seems weak in that regard. After all, VII is the good group dedicated to wiping out the cruel Kindred and then, as the final act, destroying themselves when no longer needed — right?

In fact, you can play it that way. If your players are amped up about playing vampires with cool powers and dark atmosphere, but are happiest without big painful emotional ethical riddles slapping against their faces — fine, have fun. VII can be the good guys.

Or, they can be the heavily tainted heroes who leveled the playing field at the cost of their humanity. The Whispers of Shaddad serve as a forceful reminder that VII is far from pure. On top of all the usual Kindred karmic baggage (the Beast, having to feed through harm, spiraling inhumanity) there's now a *demon* offering more power if you just give it what it wants — which is really what you want too. Add to that your standard **Vampire** tropes of moral ambiguity — such as the elder who uses his power to quell crime in his neighborhood, not from virtue, but because it's *his* neighborhood and he doesn't want crimey yahoos luring cops around or accidentally burning his haven — and weighing these matters in the balance can become quite tricky indeed.

Finally, there's the core **Vampire** concept of a character-driven game. Once more, VII seems to let the Storyteller down in this regard: the anti-vampire vampire seems to be very much a *plot* trope, after all — an antagonist to hurl at the characters, either to show them how debased they've become or how much farther they've yet to fall. But questions of comparative debasement work just as well on the inside as on the outside, and a good plot is a better tool for delineating, developing and displaying character than a series of weak, solipsistic scenes of empty pouting and meaningless gesture. If your characters are making gestures within a VII framework, they're gestures with resounding impact on themselves, or others or both. Or, to put it another way, Hamlet not only displayed character through speaking soliloquies but also by partaking in the deaths of his girlfriend's whole family, not to mention his own.

Granted, Hamlet was created by a renowned literary genius and professional playwright. Shakespeare could easily handle having this character both shown and described. Amateurs like you and me are probably better off just showing through action.

From this perspective, a VII chronicle doesn't need to scare off a Storyteller, whether he's been running games for years or just started last week. In fact, VII can be easier because the weakness shared by Ahranites and initiates means that Storytellers don't have to worry about players throwing the ever-popular curve ball of assassinating their mentor (or each other). The clear demarcation between "people we fight" and "people we *can't* fight" makes running the chronicle easier — and, if handled right, makes it *more* intriguing and convoluted.

With those generalities expressed, on to the nuts and bolts.

Embraced into the Battle

The simplest way to get into VII is to be Embraced into it. Some Ahranite observes a mortal with desirable characteristics (like a cool head in a crisis, or a keen eye with a carbine or a deep and reliable understanding of security systems) and decides to recruit him to God's army.

While this sounds very cookie-cutter, there are as many variations on the theme as there are Ahranite sires. The method of Embrace can have a huge impact on the Sevenite neonate's attitude to her covenant, herself and the "enemy" clans.

Depending on how your group plays best, the Storyteller may decide on just how the Embrace happens, or it could be the player's choice or they could work together

on something mutually agreeable. However you do it, there are some intriguing possibilities.

The Gentleman. Best suited to one of the Fervent, possibly once of the mortal family, the gentlemanly approach is a consensual Embrace. Talking a human being into becoming a demon-infested vampire is no picnic, of course, so the gentleman sire generally has to demonstrate to his prospective childe just exactly how deep the shit of vampirism goes and just how badly it stinks. If you're in no hurry, you can fork this off from a "mortal investigator" game. The mortal characters stumble across the Kindred, have a plot arc in which they get an idea just how bad the situation is and then a mysterious lurker-type approaches *one* of them and essentially makes the same offer Shaddad did: sell your soul, get the enemy's weapons. For groups of experienced characters, this can lead to an interesting mixed gang of mortals and Ahranite (or Ahranites, if more than one member of the group makes an impression — or if the first one Embraced turns to an old comrade and passes it on . . .)

The Reluctant Mentor. This is similar to the previous possibility, only with the motivation on the other side. Instead of a shadowy researcher targeting a mortal for conversion, crafty mortal investigators notice that there are two warring Kindred factions and figure out that the goals of VII are congruent with their own. Perhaps they join VII as mortal allies but want more and are willing to



do whatever it takes to make their dream of a cleansed world real. If you want an example of plot displaying character, the guy who begs to have the Unvoiced Name pollute his spirit just so he can pound vampires harder can provide it.

The Project. This one's cruel (by which I mean "fun" — hey, it's a horror game) to sic on the character with Unseen Sense. As Storyteller, you set it up that she has the opportunity to hook up with a mystery mentor. Whether she takes it or not, eventually said mentor (an Ahranite vampire, of course) decides the time is ripe and Embraces her. In this case, it doesn't matter if the girl *wants* to become what she's beheld or not: it's her destiny, and VII's need is great. The fun part (which I mean "cruel") is that no matter how much she hates her sire, there's very little she can do directly. Characters like *this* understand just how severe the Ahranite clan weakness really is.

Straight-up Conversion

Rather than start with mortals who convert to VII (either on the covenant's terms or their own), the same choice can face clan Kindred. Many character coterie fit the description of an "out group." They're the rebels who want to tear down the system and seize power for themselves. Or maybe they're ostracized because they're fighting their monstrosity instead of getting with the program. Either way, they're likely to come to the attention of VII during Phase One of a city strike — especially if they are unusually effective (as characters tend to be since, hey, the story's about them).

All three phases of a VII cleansing can be played through with a great deal of interest — investigation at the start, intrigue in the middle and immolation at the end. It's a fine plot arc, and it's possible to delay the characters' realization that, "Good grief, it's VII!" until the very last chapter, if that sounds fun. A heretofore unrealized alliance with the devil can be a hell of an ultimate reveal.

Alternately, they can get recruited into an insurgent group, one whose outlines are honestly described. ("Yeah, we think the vampire condition is a scourge on humankind, and we want to wipe it out even though we're infected ourselves.") Then the characters learn the identity of that group in Phase Two, once they're initiated and have all the strings attached. At that point, it's up to them to decide whether they want to spend their Requiem on Ahran's watch or find some way to eel out of it.

Finally, characters of superior sharpness, wit and talent may uncover the VII infiltrators before the deal's on the table. If these characters offer to join up with VII at that point, it'll be unorthodox — but maybe all the more respectable because the choice is clear and open and free of tricks.

Very few Kindred seek out VII in order to join up and fight the good fight, but if they find the right VII coterie — meaning, one that's desperate for easy clan Disciplines and Vinculum powers — these Kindred can get inducted at their own request.

Infiltration

Or, way on the outside, there's the most dangerous game of all: infiltrating the infiltrators. After all, the mainstream covenants are bigger, stronger, and (if you think all that stuff about Gomorrah is hokey horseshit) they're probably older. They could get a step ahead of VII and set up their own group of watching deceivers to deceive and watch the Sevenites who've been dispatched to a city in order to deceive its Kindred and watch them. (If you decide to run a chronicle like this, keep good notes. It can get tangled pretty fast.)

Gaining a small measure of trust from VII is easy for characters who can put up a good front as a desirable and vulnerable "out group." (Nothing is simpler than looking like rebel exiles when you've got the Powers That Be helping you with the façade.) As long as they act like superb pawns, VII trusts them to act like such. But remember that VII tells nothing of real meaning or value to anyone who hasn't been initiated. Infiltrated characters may learn the truth without being told, but that certainly involves a lot of intrigue, investigation, probably culminating with raids on VII fastnesses — wow, sounds like a lot of fun action, doesn't it?

On the other hand, players can surprise you. Maybe they'll find some way to circumvent the restrictions of Ahran's Curse — it's tight, but hardly impregnable. Maybe a powerful Vinculum can provide the motivation to betray VII once admitted, though it's still a challenge for the players to really betray without physically striking or telling concrete secrets. All that, while behaving enough like a VII loyalist to avoid arousing suspicion — *and* without actually helping to overthrow their hometown.

Fooling the demon-bound from within their own realm — indeed, from within the demon's grasp — that's a good trick, if you can manage it. It's something any covenant would brag about for decades, not least because it's never successfully been done.

Mason Flavell, Ahranite Striker

Mason is fairly typical for a member of a strike team, excluding a leader who's usually older and tougher. Mason's well balanced for close-in work (such as an Inside-to-Inside scenario) and long-range tactics (like any approach involving Outside). Sevenites who specialize on inside jobs may decrease his Firearms skill in exchange for greater Weaponry (or Brawl, for Gangrel). Those who work best as snipers are likely to shift the balance in the other direction. Similarly, his Obfuscate may be dropped for something like Nightmare, Celerity, Fortitude, Vigor or more Praestantia, depending on approach.



Clan: Akhud

Covenant of Embrace: VII

Embrace: 2002

Apparent Age: 25

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Investigation (Kindred Traces) 2, Occult 1.

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Drive 2, Firearms 2, Stealth 2, Weaponry (Knife) 2.

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge (Play Dumb) 1.

Merits: Barfly, Fighting Finesse (Knife) 2, Quick Draw 1, Stunt Driver 3

Willpower: 5

Humanity: 5; Fixation (6)

Virtue: Faith — Initially in the form of American patriotism, he's gradually transferring that loyalty to VII.

Vice: Gluttony — He had big appetites in life, and VII's rhetoric about saving humanity has let him convince himself that humankind owes him his meals.

Health: 8

Initiative: +6

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Blood Potency: 1 (Vitae: 10/1)

Disciplines: Obfuscate 1, Praestantia 2

Mason was doing okay, for a guy who got blown up.

VII caught wind of Mason when they were combing through the lists of servicemen coming home from Baghdad after seeing action. The name "Flavell" caught some attention because an identified Ahran descendent had fled his Mississippi hometown in 1933 after getting a woman named Jennifer Flavell pregnant. Although Mason was from Tennessee and was not (ultimately) of the Ahranite lineage, this wasn't determined until a VII investigator had interviewed him and, frankly, been delighted with what she found.

Mason was a running back and a shortstop in high school, joined the Marines after 9/11 and, according to the reports from his colleagues back in Iraq, acquitted himself excellently during the ambush. Despite his injuries, he got himself and another Marine free of the wreckage of his Bradley, took cover and returned fire until a second grenade shredded much of his left side.

Equally impressive were the documents from his physical therapist. Despite a grueling regimen, Mason's attitude was generally good and he accepted his injuries with a fair degree of stoicism — often speaking of getting better so he could go back to his unit in Iraq.

Before that could happen, however, his sire decided to remove him from one war to recruit him for another. Initially angry at being taken away from his family, the Marines and everything he'd known, Mason ditched VII for six months in 2003 — but a barely survived encounter with a clique of Acolytes convinced him that his choices were to go back to VII or to be someone's experimental subject for the rest of his Requiem. Mason, being practical, chose VII.

He and his sire both regret that his Embrace had to occur before he'd fully completed his recovery — every night he misses the easy strength he once possessed. But he's confident he'll get it back, with time. Meanwhile, he's working the eastern seaboard of the US, picking off Acolytes and feeding mainly on anyone he sees wearing a turban.

Someday, he wants to go back to Iraq. He's heard all kinds of crazy stories about the Invictus being in bed with Saddam, and he believes them. His controllers are telling him he needs to get more experience, and Mason ruefully admits that they're right.

Weapons:

Type	Damage	Ranges	Clip	Strength	Size	Dice Pool
Mini Uzi	2	25/50/100	15+1	2	1	7
Taurus revolver	3	20/40/80	6	3*	1	7
M-700 rifle with silencer, scope and laser sight	5	200/400/800	5+1	2	3	10
Combat knife	1L	—	—	1	1	6

Armor:

Class	Rating	Strength	Defense	Speed	Special
Kevlar vest	1/2	1	0	0	bulletproof

Sonja Daley, Rescued Scout

Sonja is at the lower ends of the power levels VII likes to observe before they leave a member dangling out in the open, working solo. Scouts and spies often work alone, simply because a single operator leaves fewer tracks and necessitates less exposure. Sonja, and Sevenites like her, are typically escorted into a city with a group of bodyguards who immediately fall back to some nearby town (something with little Kindred attention) or to a regional VII stronghold. A scout then gathers information about the local Kindred — how many, where they meet, factional alignments and so forth. Sonja doesn't make contact, and, if discovered, she flees — those are her orders.

The last thing she wants is to engage the enemy. Once she's done her work, spies can be sent in (if necessary) or the striker team that initially dropped her off can come back to execute an assault. The scout may go on the assault — typically Sevenites at this level are competent enough in a fight, and she certainly goes if the knowledge she has is crucial. On the other hand, some fights call for more than just "competence," and VII isn't about to waste a good scout when another head-knocker or two will do the job just as well. This is particularly true if the first assault is only one of several. After all, if the initial foray goes wrong, the scout is the one best able to analyze what failed.

Clan: Mekhet

Covenant of Embrace: Lancea Sanctum

Embrace: 1961

Apparent Age: 33

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Theban Sorcery) 2, Computer 1, Investigation (Lancea Weakness) 4, Occult 4.

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Larceny 3, Stealth 3, Weaponry (Sword) 3.

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1.

Merits: Language (French) 1, Language (German) 1, Language (Latin) 2, Language (Aramaic) 2, Language (Hebrew) 1, Weapon Finesse (Sword), Haven Security 3, Haven Size 2, Resources 3

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 4; Suspicion (5), Avoidance (6) (based on the Sanctified)

Virtue: Prudence — She knows her strengths are intellectual, so in that area she's bold. She also knows her weaknesses are physical.



Vice: Pride — While she's fairly sanguine about insults to her person or her prowess, when it comes to intellectual or cultural insinuations, she gets mad.

Health: 7

Initiative: +7

Defense: 3

Speed: 9

Blood Potency: 1 (Vitae: 10/1)

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Theban Sorcery 1, Obfuscate 3, Ahranite Sorcery 1

Rituals: Vitae Reliquary, Initiation

Possessions of Note: Exquisite golden cup with symbols of Shaddad (+2 equipment bonus to Ahranite Sorcery rites)

Sonja didn't much care about the beatniks and specter of Communism. The shy youngest daughter of a wealthy Montana family, she just wanted to learn languages, read and be left alone with her studies. Unfortunately for her, her aggressive bidding on an unidentified (to the seller) text in Aramaic put her afoul of a ghoulish serving the Lancea Sanctum.

Her next few years were extremely dismaying and exciting as the Lancea Sanctum tried with increasing fierceness to acquire what she was translating as "The Grail and the Spear." When they finally got her, she was half done — but her work was sufficient that the leader of her pursuers Embraced her instead of destroying her, much to the displeasure of his superiors.

Weapons:

Type	Damage	Ranges	Clip	Strength	Size	Dice Pool
Sword	3L	—	—	2	2*	7
Browning pistol	3L	30/60/120	15+1	3*	1	8

Making the church elders look dumb and then becoming a living reminder of one congregant's willingness to flout Tradition made the Requiem very, very unpleasant for Sonia, which was why her studies of the Theban Rites rapidly took a backseat to her studies of avoiding people. To someone used to being the smartest, richest and best-informed, this cringing existence was mortifying. Thus, when VII made a probing attack on her temple, Sonia was just desperate enough to contact them and try out for the role of Judas in their planned Lancea Sanctum passion play.

They trusted her only until she'd undergone Initiation — and Sonia's occult studies meant she had a greater-than-normal understanding of just what the acceptance of demonic aid, even the slightest aid from a trapped and restricted spirit, could mean. But she did it. She looked at Shaddad and the Sanctified, and picked what she considered the lesser evil.

As a member of VII, she specializes in finding the weaknesses of Lancea Sanctum temples. She doesn't go undercover — her repugnance for her old covenant is too strong to hide. But her infiltration abilities make her a valuable scout.

Sonia Daley has just recently come to the attention of the Disciples of the Unvoiced Name — her ability to remain unnoticed was *that* advanced. But now that she's on their radar, they can't help but see how that very furtiveness would be an asset for one whose loyalty to Shaddad outweighed any loyalty to the Children of Ahran. After all, if she's betrayed the Lancea Sanctum once, who's to say she would not betray again? Especially for the voice that whispers, so insistently, of the greatness that could be hers . . .

Ravi Boronovski, High Priest of Shaddad

An elder of the sect such as Ravi Boronovski does not leave his home. As is typical of an Ahranite Sorcery master, he stays at the fortress, where his powers can benefit the group to the fullest. Due to his age and experience, he's a local leader. Any group that could take Ravi down would not only deal a serious, possibly crippling blow to an entire area's VII infrastructure, they might (if they got hold of his library and torpor journals, and could decipher the latter) gain some important information about Shaddad, Ahranite Sorcery and VII's methods and membership. Of course, to do that, one would need to overwhelm a VII fortress, something that's only happened three times since the fall of Irem. There's also the small matter of Shaddad's Vengeance . . .

Clan: Ventru

Covenant of Embrace: Carthian

Embrace: 1788



Apparent Age: 20

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Crafts 2, Investigation 4, Medicine (Violent Injuries) 2, Occult 4, Politics 2.

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Larceny 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3, Weaponry (Dagger) 3.

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Cats) 3, Empathy 2, Expression (Passionate Diatribe) 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4.

Merits: Allies (black market antiquities) 4, Contacts (museums, tourism, finance) 3, Haven Security 5, Haven Size 5, Holistic Awareness, Language: English 3, Language: Arabic 3, Language: Latin 2, Language: Greek 2, Language: Aramaic 2, Meditative Mind, Resources 4, Status (VII) 4, Weaponry Dodge

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 4; Vocalization (5), Narcissism (6)

Virtue: Fortitude — No matter what else has failed him, Ravi has never failed himself. He has the strength that comes from total self-confidence and self-reliance.

Vice: Sloth — Not the typical sloth of laziness, but the sloth of easy alliances. Ravi has always sided up to whichever side seemed strongest, until it was time to take what he could get and leg it.

Health: 8

Initiative: +5

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Blood Potency: 4 (Vitae: 13/2)

Weapons:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Dagger	2L	1	Thirsting dagger (p. 36)	9

Disciplines: Animalism 5, Ahranite Sorcery 5, Dominate 2, Resilience 2

Rituals: All Ahranite Sorcery

Possession of Note: Temple to the Unvoiced Name (+4 to Ahranite Sorcery rituals)

Ravi has the unenviable distinction of having killed his mortal father and his sire in one fell swoop.

Said father/sire, Constantin Boronovski, was a Russian soldier of fortune who wound up in India in the late 1760s. Working both sides of the Mughal/Maratha conflict, the self-styled “Commander” Boronovski (or, sometimes, “Prince”) got involved with a local girl. The exact nature of the involvement was never settled to Ravi’s entire satisfaction: Possibly the Russian raped her. Or maybe she was an innocent who yielded to his foreign charms. Or, just possibly, she was a prostitute, and the entire transaction was completely mercantile. However it began, it ended with her coming home to her parents pregnant and in disgrace, a shame which was compounded heavily when her son was obviously a half-breed.

No matter how much Ravi suffered from prejudice as a child, he’s pretty sure his mother suffered more, because she committed suicide and he didn’t. He was twelve when it happened, and he found her, and it didn’t make things any better for him.

At sixteen he ran away from home determined to find this mysterious Russian who had set into motion such a calamitous life. After a series of hair-raising adventures fit for a pulp serial, commingled with humiliations, torments and setbacks more suited to the most grimly accurate historical novels, he succeeded in tracking down Commander Boronovski, only to find that his long-sought father was a blood-drinking monster, stalking the hours between sunset and dawn.

Boronovski had been Embraced in 1769, by a local Carthian who saw a brawny foreigner, good with a saber and with no moral center. Liking the cut of Boronovski’s jib, the Carthian brought the Russian into the fold, where

Boronovski served faithfully until 1788, when he defied his sire’s commands by Embracing his son Ravi. After that it was bitterness and recrimination until the “Commander” killed his own sire in 1813, suffering sufficiently grievous injuries in the process that his own resentful offspring Ravi could ash him in turn.

All this was part of a particularly vicious Carthian/Ordo Dracul/Different Carthian *Faction* battle that was raging through the nights of Mumbai. Ravi, sick of the whole thing, chartered a boat, left town for Oman, got hijacked and taken to Aden where he regained control of the ship and a couple of pirate vessels as well, which he then sailed up the Red Sea to Suez. In Suez he and his ships became a factor in local politics (which were Invictus vs. Circle of the Crone) until all *that* turned ugly, costing him his allies, his ships and his mortal herd.

Into that chaotic mess came a VII squad who, with admirable efficiency, made things far worse and then mopped up the winners. (The Circle “won” and was in power for a year and a half before VII eliminated them.) Ravi was one of the first to encounter the VII squad and, much as his father with the Carthians, he impressed them as useful and, because he had little of value left to lose, open to treachery. (Though nominally Invictus at that point, Ravi had never had anything resembling real “loyalty” to any Kindred faction. After the Invictus/Circle war cost him a decade’s worth of work in five months, he was ready to cry “A pox on both your houses.” Which was, as it turned out, a pretty good description of the coming VII attack.) Initiated into the covenant, Ravi went off to a fortress in Egypt and spent about a hundred years studying, spying on Camarillas and killing them. (There was a nasty couple decades of torpor in there too, coming around 1889.)

By the twentieth century, he’d made quite a name for himself, to the point that a portrait of him was being circulated among the regional Kindred (mostly Lancea Sanctum at that point) identifying him as a known VII provocateur. Eventually Egypt when to war with Israel, things took unexpected turns, the VII fortress was destroyed in passing during a battle and Ravi fled for more welcoming climes — Europe, or Africa or the United States, depending on where you set your chronicle.





Chapter Two: THE BETRAYED

"LISTEN TO ME.

THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A HALF DOZEN OF THEM AT LEAST,

WITH AXES AND GUNS AND FIREBOMBS,

OUT BY THE INTERSTATE.

I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG THEY'VE BEEN HERE,

BUT THEY'RE THE ONES WHO TOOK DUTCH.

TOLD ME TO TELL YOU.

SAID IT WAS A 'HEAD START.'

THEY'RE COMING.

TONIGHT.

AND IT'S NOT AN ATTACK, YOU HEAR ME?

IT'S A GODDAMN HUNT."

*To know a man, observe how he wins his object, rather
than how he loses it; for when we fail, our pride supports;
when we succeed; it betrays us.*

— Charles Caleb Colton

In some vampires, the Blood changes over decades to reflect the focus and beliefs, the motives and soul of the monster that claims it. Most often it is a tremendous or persistent exertion of the will by a being of thickening Vitae that causes this remarkable alteration. In some Kindred circles it is a well-known fact that the Blood may ripen over time — like wine in a casket of flesh and bone — into a distillation of power that can be passed on to childer and grandchilder in time. Certainly God is capable of inflicting such a change upon the Damned as well.

Sometimes — just sometimes — the Blood is changed in an instant, stirred up with a dose of malice or brought to a boil by passion. Sometimes the Blood is twisted and tainted along with the heart. Sometimes the Blood is burnt and scorched black in the veins in a flash of wrath.

So it was with the unique family of vampires that calls itself “the Betrayed” but better known to the Kindred as “VII.”

In the lands that would become Russia and Ukraine, long before they were known by those names, a ghoulish King was betrayed by a vampire whose line had sworn an oath of peace. The vampire and his childer, after many years of cooperation with the King’s people, slew seven members of the royal family. Already aged and influenced beyond his natural means by the vampire’s blood, the King found himself unable to contain his wrath. Terrified that the most beloved members of his household would die a ghastly death if he did not act with haste, he set out to destroy the vampire. Mad with the power of the Blood, the King devoured the ancient vampire’s heart while he slept. Perhaps cursed by the vampire’s last earthly thought, perhaps damned by a sinful pact and a sinful betrayal, the ghoul-king was somehow transformed into a vampire himself in that moment.

Although he was now Damned like his ruined nemesis, the King and his followers kept the fires of their hatred for the undead alive. The childer of the diablerized vampire declared war against the royal family, and the royal family accepted the invitation. The royal-blooded families of the betrayed King — collectively called the Betrayed — battled their treacherous cousins for decades, destroyed most every enemy who knew of their war and then disappeared into the so-called Fog of Eternity.

But the wrath of the Betrayed wasn’t cooled in the Vitae of the Damned. The wrath was stoked like a fire, and the ghosts of those seven loved ones slain by the

Betrayer were drawn to the flame like moths. The hatred of the Betrayed lives tonight like fire, spreads like fire among the undead borne of the King’s Blood — and the Kindred are its fuel.

Tonight, the vampiric descendants of that furious King have drifted so far into the shadows of Kindred society that even the Betrayed cannot be sure of the facts and the fictions in their past. They have become a strange reflection of the Kindred, disparate in their ways but singular in their motives. Like the Kindred, the Betrayed have expanded and changed over time; but, unlike the Kindred, they cannot change their Blood through will alone — that change was made ages before by their vengeful King.

Tonight, the Betrayed see themselves as a breed of vampire distinct from the Kindred. They consider themselves to be the seven branches of a distinct family tree, the noble heirs to seven royal houses and the bold avengers of seven woeful ghosts. They believe themselves to be the usurpers of the night — when the Kindred are gone, the Betrayed will reinstate their ancient pact with the living, and the world will exist in peace.

Tonight, the Betrayed hunt the Kindred.

History

The vampires of the seven houses rely on conflicting, personal accounts of the Betrayal (as it is known), which have been passed down through uncounted generations of undead avengers. These accounts began as an oral history, and it is still common for the elders among the Betrayed to tell the tale of the old kings. The specifics of the story therefore vary from house to house — and, indeed, from vampire to vampire — but this version contains most of the commonly acknowledged truths (not facts) of the tale.

Before the barbarous Tatars swept in from the East like a howling pestilence of savagery, before the con-
quering Rus established dominion, and even before the Church brought Christ to the banks of the Desna, the Kassovich family ruled the valley people. For more than a century, our ancestors protected their subjects from danger and bestowed upon them prosperity and peace rare in those dark times. The bravery of the Kassovich kings was renowned and even in Rome tales of their courage and ingenuity were known, delivered by merchants who braved the treacherous conditions to trade in the fine furs and metals produced by the

craftsman of the Kassovich kingdom. Our long reign had much to do with the legendary stature attributed to our family. The founder of the dynasty was Kassov, a capable warrior who felled a great and hungry beast that had terrorized the village of Kozelsk. For nearly 350 years a Kassovich sat upon the throne in the Great Hall erected on the very spot that the first King slew the rampaging monster.

History books, if they record anything at all about our achievements, enumerate 28 rulers in our line, beginning with Kassov I and ending with Timofey IV. Such histories are in error, however. Only 13 Kassoviches ever wore the crown of the Kings of Kozelsk. More importantly, it was not illness or warfare or old age, but the Betrayal that brought an end to our legacy, a legacy we shall forever work to restore.

The 12th King, Stepan II, was killed in a riding accident when his eldest surviving son, Timofey, was only a boy. Timofey I took the throne at a providential time. No serious intrigues threatened his rule, and no neighbor posed a danger to his lands. This relative peacefulness provided the young King a rare opportunity to educate himself, and he spent a sizable portion of his personal coffers on pursuing that end, hiring foreign tutors and acquiring what written works he could. By the time he reached adulthood, Timofey was deemed the most educated of Kozelsk's rulers, and his court was visited by travelers of all races and nations.

It was a time of excellence for the people under Kassovich dominion — their King seemed to be a blessing upon the land, and they adored him in word and in deed. Despite the good fortune Timofey enjoyed, he was unsatisfied with his achievements. He read the epics of old and longed to have his name added to the rolls of heroes. He grew tired of life at court, of only reading of adventure and far-off places, of admiring the courage of others. In short, he wished to be something more, someone who would never be forgotten. In the end, he got what he wished for, though not in the manner he had naïvely conceived.

In the tenth year of his reign, darkness settled upon the kingdom. At first, its appearance was mistaken for less unwholesome things, things that could be dismissed with ease and did not require the full attention of the King. Livestock was found drained of blood. Despite the excited warnings of peasants regarding the unnaturalness of the killings, few who were not witnesses gave the stories much heed. Wolves were blamed, and hunting parties were sent out to track them down. The hunts produced dozens of wolves and many fears were put to rest, but the killings continued unabated. When the farmers' representatives beseeched the King for further aid, he finally ordered all livestock to be kept under an around-the-clock watch until the scourge that plagued them was forced to slake its hunger elsewhere. To the initial delight of the livestock owners, the plan worked



precisely as intended. Whatever foul creature had been stalking their herds chose to seek nourishment from some other source and no longer fed upon the cattle and goats. To the horror of all, it was soon discovered that the bloodthirsty fiend had not abandoned the realm as had been hoped for, but instead had simply chosen other, even more valuable prey: people.

One night, a maiden went missing from her chores. Another night, a young man gathering charcoal disappeared. A week later, a woodsman living alone in a forest cottage couldn't be found. Word quickly spread that the Devil himself was afoot — not the gilt Lucifer of Christian teaching, but *chërt*, a pagan evil, a diabolical horror as old as the land itself — and he was snatching up souls.

The King could not ignore this problem. Indeed, he hardly wanted to! Here, finally, was a challenge fit for a hero. Freeing himself from the idleness of court, Timofey gathered his best men and rode in search of the monster. Winter held the land in its icy grasp and travel was difficult, but this gave the King hope. With heavy snows blocking all roads into and out of the tiny realm, the Devil was trapped. It was only a matter of time before his hiding place was discovered, and the King would have his opportunity to prove his worth. The hunters traveled by day, when the sun warmed their faces, stopping at every village and questioning the inhabitants. Twice, they arrived only hours too late to catch their prey, but the wise King began to learn more and more about the creature he hunted with every close encounter. He no longer believed it was actually the Devil he was after, but rather an *upyr*, a particularly vicious monster, not alive and not dead, forced to sleep by day and stalk its victims by night.

Convinced of this, the King sent word to every village to search every home, every barn and every other structure that might offer the *upyr* shelter from the sun. Villagers swept across their communities, overturning barrels and carts in the hope of finding the monster. Men swarmed into the forests and set fires in the caves to smoke out the fiend. Priests performed ceremonies to flush out the evil in their midst.

The slayings and vanishings lessened. By mid-winter they had come to a complete stop. A week passed without a death or disappearance, and the King declared victory over the *upyr*. A great celebration was held in the palace. Songs of praise were sung. Gifts of furs, bread and amber were showered upon Timofey for saving the kingdom from the vampire's thirst for blood.

But even as his men feasted around him and his young wife smiled for the first time in weeks, the King worried. In a nearby wood the year before, he had been met by the witch Baba Yaga. He had told her of his desire for greatness, and she had promised him that it would be his. However, she warned him that it would not be without a heinous price — one that he would not understand

until it was too late. He demanded that she tell him more but she only laughed, as was her way, saying that even a King cannot demand to know what has not yet come to pass.

Now, as he cast his gaze over the celebrants dancing and drinking before the roaring flames of the royal hearth, he wondered what that price would be . . .

Deal with the Devil

Late that night, when most of the guests had gone and those who remained slept the sleep of the drunk and the sated, when only a few men remained on duty, the King was awakened from his sleep by a sense that something important, something terrible, was about to happen. He made his way to the Great Hall but saw nothing amiss — only snoring guests and twin guards waiting at the door for the sunrise.

Concerned and confused, Timofey took his seat on the chair carved for Kassov I nearly two centuries before. The blazing fire was now little more than glowing embers, the only light aside from a single torch near the heavy doors that kept out the howling cold and the other dangers of the night. This night those fires were to fail in their duty to keep darkness at bay, however, for no sooner had the King fully settled himself on his throne than a knock came on the door. The guards, startled in the late hour, looked to their liege for instruction, though the men and women strewn upon the hall's floor remained undisturbed by the intruding sound.

The King nodded for the doors to be opened, sure that whoever or whatever was about to enter his hall would demand the price Baba Yaga had spoken of. The guards raised the wooden bar from its brackets and, spears at the ready, pulled the doors open.

The creature that entered appeared to be a man. He was strangely pallid and underdressed for the cold, however, and possessed eyes of fire, but otherwise seemed like an ordinary man. But it took only his gaze and a single soft-spoken word to cause the guards to drop their spears and fall to their knees in fear — or was it respect?

The King simply waited for the stranger — the *upyr*, certainly — to approach and seek audience. What else could he do? Baba Yaga had warned him of this moment.

The *upyr* approached like any civil visitor, but he did not kneel or bow. Instead, he spoke in a tone befitting one used to being respected by men of all sorts, including kings. His voice was accented in the ways of Rome, but his words were clear and sure. He introduced himself as Mstislav and told the King that he was responsible for the recent killings of the men and women. He admitted without fear or threat that he was one of the undead and that he had killed for blood. Mstislav congratulated the King on his hunt and explained that the thoroughness of his hunters had left the *upyr* no place to hide from the sun that would destroy him. Soon, despite his many

lifetimes of travels and experience, Mstislav would face a true death, from which there would be no return — unless the King helped him.

Timofey measured his enemy and his words. Mstislav was clearly clever — he knew that in the Great Hall all visitors were guaranteed the honest protection of the King, even if they were enemies or criminals. Although the *upyr* was at he wits' end, he was possessed of a might that no mortal man could command, powers that were the stuff of legend. The monster asked for the King's aid, yet it was clear that the *upyr* would not bow down to obtain it. The King recognized that the creature had not come to beg, but to bargain, as an equal, despite the glaring differences in station and nature between the two of them.

Timofey thought back on the words of Baba Yaga again and decided that there was little risk in negotiation. The *upyr* had come to him to ask for help, not the other way around. He was in charge of any deal and any price to be paid would be dictated by him. He had power over this monster, and with it came an opportunity that Timofey could never have imagined — and could not ignore.

The King asked, "Why should I help the very monster that has preyed upon my people?"

Mstislav's answer intrigued him. "Because in return you will realize a greatness that cannot be denied," he said. "One which you have long been waiting for." The

monster told Timofey that he would not only make the King's legend immortal, but the King himself immortal as well, truly immortal.

When Timofey refused to spend eternity as a blood-thirsty *upyr*, Mstislav laughed a devil's laugh. "I'd never offer you that, your majesty!" Mstislav said he could offer the King true immortality as a living man and would teach him how to master some of the magic spells that Mstislav knew. In return, the King would offer protection from all dangers, natural or otherwise, and would allow the creature to feed when necessary.

The King objected at first, but the negotiations did not end. The King was not about to let this momentous opportunity vanish into the night! He pressed for terms and conditions that would best serve him.

The discussion continued in the hushed hall while Timofey's people slept until just before sunrise, when the King and the vampire finally came to an agreement and made their promises. Mstislav was shown to the family crypt, where he was secretly given refuge from the day. At first, only Timofey and Mstislav knew of their arrangement. Later, the agreement was codified and became known as the Compact of Day and Night. This pact contained the terms of the King's bargain with the vampire and governed the ways in which the living and the dead were to interact.

It was the foundation of the Betrayal.



THE COMPACT OF DAY AND NIGHT

The Compact of Day and Night was formed by Timofey I, King of the Kassoviches, and Mstislav, Prince of the Upyrs. Though no original copy of the Compact exists (and many doubt whether the Compact was ever formally written out by Timofey or Mstislav), modern Betrayed recognize one version of the Compact as the accepted stand-in for the historical agreement. Little reliable provenance for this draft of the Compact can be demonstrated, however — it was written in Russian, apparently in the Middle Ages, as a means of escaping or solidifying the oral traditions of the Betrayed up to that point. The full, translated text of that Compact follows.

By the authority of the Kassovich throne, and in recognition of the similar authority vested in the blood of Mstislav and all who carry his blood, we are agreed on an alliance between the powers of day and night, living and unliving. This Compact shall be observed for all time by all who are party to its terms, all who bear the blood of either lineage. Should any part of this Compact be broken by those bound to its authority, it shall be dissolved. And woe unto the betrayer, for neither day nor night will offer sanctuary to him and a great curse shall fall upon the house of the betrayer that will hound it unto the final days. So we swear by our blood upon this night, upon the throne of Kassov.

I. It is the duty of every person, living or not, who bears the blood of Kassov or Mstislav to cease from all violence against the other; to offer the other sanctuary and protection; to render aid when requested, against any and all threats.

II. The eldest of the Kassov lines shall be recognized as King and shall hold full authority over the living. The eldest of the Mstislav bloodline shall be recognized as Prince, sworn vassal of the King, and shall hold full authority over the undead.

III. In return for the children of the Mstislav line's obedience to the King's authority, the King shall permit Mstislav's line to sup on the blood of those not bound by this Compact, so long as such predations do not pose a direct threat to the King's authority or abilities as sovereign.

IV. In return for recognition as Prince, the eldest of the Mstislav line shall provide a draught of his own blood to the King each month on the night of the full moon to sustain the eternal life of the King.

V. Additionally, the King may select one of his line each generation to receive the same gift of eternal life to be provided by the Prince.



The Years of the Compact

Bound by the terms of the Compact, King Timofey I and Prince Mstislav cleaved to one another as allies. Mstislav was given sanctuary beneath the palace and was allowed to sate his bloody hunger on those who did not bear the King's blood. In return, the King was made immortal by the blood and will of Mstislav and each month was provided another drink in a ceremony that, over time, became quite elaborate. The *upyr* Prince also taught his mortal liege some of the dark magics he possessed knowledge of, giving the King an extraordinary advantage over those who whispered of "the King's monster," or "the King's deal with the Devil," and those who sought to usurp his throne. Enemies and traitors were handed over to Mstislav. In fact, the King preferred to punish felons by gifting them to the vampire, for it kept Mstislav from preying too often upon the innocent souls who looked to their King for protection.

Years passed, and the Compact was upheld. The King fathered many children with several wives, and one son from each mother was chosen to join his fraternal order for eternity. Mstislav abided by the agreement and made these children ghouls like their father, each month giving a taste of his Vitae to the King's growing circle of sons.

Mstislav did not while away the years. As the King's line grew, so too did the Prince's. He Embraced his own childer, for a Prince without vassals is truly little more than empty title.

Each family grew and prospered, but, as generation gave way to generation, the complications of the expanding families threatened the security of the Compact. The King's line grew quickly, each generation spawning far more offspring than the previous one. The Prince's line grew slowly, with only a few childer adding grandchilder to its ranks each mortal generation. The gradual expansion of the King's lands and subjects should have produced ample food for the Prince and his line, but the terms of the Compact complicated matters in ways that would eventually contribute to its demise.

The royal family grew so rapidly that, after a century, it became increasingly difficult to find mortals within the Prince's reach who did not possess some scant trace of Kassovich blood. Proud of their heritage — and to ensure that their vampire tenants would recognize them — the King's descendants were branded upon the hand from an early age with the family seal, a simple glyph whose original meaning was long forgotten. Unfortunately, because of the symbol's simplicity and the valuable protection it offered, counterfeiters were common. Pretenders to royal blood had their hands cut off as punishment, making them especially easy marks for the vampires who prowled the night, but that did not stop the practice. The majority of the King's subjects knew nothing of the Compact or the monsters in their midst,

but to those aides, allies and friends who *did* know, the benefits of counterfeit brands were worth the risk.

Mstislav's progeny petitioned him — some say begged him — to speak with the King, to renegotiate the Compact, but the elder vampire could do little but persuade his liege to crack down even more on counterfeiters. The vampires were forced to go to greater lengths to ensure that they drank only from permissible vessels — creating their own tightly knit herds, enforcing bans on sexual relations with nobility out of wedlock and even hunting in rural areas where the likelihood of stumbling upon a distant relation to the King was small, but being lost or attacked by peasant mobs and other monsters was more likely.



OF KINGS AND VINCULUMS

As Mstislav's ghoul and a frequent drinker of his Vitae, it would be expected that Timofey I would have become the vampire's thrall from early on, subject to a Vinculum and, therefore, easy for Mstislav to manipulate if he desired. The King had no way to know of the Vinculum and no way to prevent its effects.

Each of the Kassovich bloodlines has its own theories explaining how Timofey escaped Vinculum — or if he even did. Some suggest that it was Timofey's kingship alone that protected him and his progeny, suggesting his divine right to rule prevented him from being subject to the sway of the Blood. Others believe that Baba Yaga gave the King a charm or blessing that protected him and all his offspring from the accursed Vinculum, possibly as part of a scheme of her own. A few wonder whether Mstislav may have been incapable of enforcing a Vinculum, perhaps due to a flaw in his Vitae or his character.

Newer vampires of the Betrayed, who cannot deny their wrath but may have less love for their absent King, suggest Timofey may simply have been too stubborn and proud to bend to the effects of a Vinculum he almost certainly felt. Perhaps Timofey's desire for power, his need to be recognized as a great ruler, was more potent than the artificial love conjured by the Blood.



Betrayal

In time, seven generations of royalty were born to the King, who changed his name and identity every generation or so on the advice of Prince Mstislav. This allowed him to honor and emulate his ancestors, but also ensured that outsiders would not grow suspicious of the King's unnaturally long life and investigate further. The man born as Timofey I actually ruled the Kassovich lands in the guise of many kings — the whole of the Timofey dynasty was, in fact, one man.

Each generation provided the King with another son to receive the gift of immortality from Mstislav, per the terms of the Compact. In the final nights of the Compact,



every full moon saw eight ghouls — the King and his seven sons — gathered to receive their drink of Vitae from the vampire and his childer.

One summer evening, Mstislav came to the King, who now publicly went by the name of Timofey IV, and told him that the weight of the ages had grown too heavy. It had been nearly three centuries since he turned his back on mortality and his own hungers had become impossible to satisfy. The Prince told his liege that he would sleep come dawn, but he would not awaken for years, perhaps much longer. In his stead he would appoint his eldest childe as his Seneschal, and it would be the Seneschal's Vitae that would sustain the King and his ghoulish sons until Mstislav awakened. The King was shocked, even frightened, but could do nothing but accept the change. A great ceremony was held in the crypt that evening with each of the ghouls, members of the royal family and each of Mstislav's progeny present. The eldest vampire formally anointed his first childe, Tvorimir, to rule in his place and to swear to observe the Compact, then lay down in his tomb and fell into a torpor from which he would never escape.

A few nights later, news came to the King's ears that one of his blood had been slain by a vampire. He expected the victim was probably some pretender, but could not afford to be lax about any violation of the Compact. His investigation revealed that the victim was indeed a young woman of Kassovich blood. The King was outraged at this clear violation and sought immediate recompense. He demanded an audience with Tvorimir, who came shortly before the sun rose, but the Seneschal paid little heed to the King's accusation, declaring that it had become impossible for his line to feed within the bounds of the Compact, which he implied was purposefully crafted by the King to trick Mstislav into a difficult position. The upstart Seneschal went so far as to even accuse the King of secretly promoting the now rampant practice of counterfeiting the royal brand, for the very purpose of slowly choking off the vampires and forcing them into torpor or flight.

The King upbraided the impudent Tvorimir, but could do little else while night lingered. Come morning, however, when the sun was full in the sky, the King descended into the crypt and ordered his men to slay one of the sleeping vampires as retribution for the murder of their own. With swords bearing the royal sign, the King's guards hacked one of the sleeping vampires apart. Some say Timofey himself soaked its blood up in rags and drank it up.

Tvorimir stormed into the throne room that night, snarling and hissing like a beast. The King told him that justice had been served. "The balance of the Compact is now restored," said Timofey.

Tvorimir trembled in rage, but the King warned him that if he could not control himself and accept this



resolution, then it would mean the end of the Compact. Tvorimir and his family would then have nowhere to hide from the morning sun. Barely able to restrain himself, Mstislav's child stalked away, staring over his shoulder at the King and licking his fangs.

When next the full moon rose in the sky, the King and his long-lived kinsmen gathered to receive their Vitae as usual. Tvorimir arrived in the place of his sire as expected and he opened his veins for the King's progeny, but when it came time for the King to drink, the vampire withdrew the offer of blood.

"I am not as powerful as my sire was," he claimed. "Especially not now that hunting has become so difficult. Perhaps tomorrow or the next night," he said, "when I have taken the blood I need from my childer, who are fetching it even now from your sisters and your daughters and your wives." Tvorimir licked his wrist shut. "One of your line died, and that's regrettable, but she was young. The Kindred you destroyed had lived seven times as long as she — known seven lifetimes of the world. Tonight my brothers restore the balance by adding six more of your line to the pans. But their life — their Vitae — will not be lost! We will give it back to you, and you will continue to live forever. But you will also see that, although we have an agreement, we are not matched." With that, Tvorimir left the shocked King and his seven ghoulish children alone and unfed.

Stunned at this betrayal, the King commanded his children to take soldiers and find Tvorimir's "brothers" and stop them before they took any royal lives. At their father's order, they swept out into the night with their torches and axes. Quietly, as they did so, Timofey wrapped himself in his fur cloak and slipped away on his own mission.

Terrified of what would happen if he should not receive his monthly draught of Vitae, the King set upon a desperate course of action. He descended into the Kassov family crypt and opened Mstislav's tomb. For a long while he only stood and gazed at the helpless, sleeping monster.

Nearly mad with fear, the King then took the vampire's arm and bit deep, but no blood came forth. Again and again he sank his teeth into Mstislav, hoping to taste the blood he needed, but not a drop would come. Already the King could feel the weight of his stolen years settling on him, drying his flesh and turning his organs to dust, sapping him of strength and vitality.

Howling with horror, the King took his knife and plunged it into Mstislav's chest, sawing at bone and flesh until he had exposed the vampire's black heart. With the last ounce of strength remaining in his weakening limbs, he tore the organ from its cavity, brought it to his mouth and bit through its rotten flesh.

Finally he had found the Vitae he'd sought, though only a small amount. Desperate and terrified that it wouldn't be enough, Timofey crawled into Mstislav's

coffin and sucked every smear and trace of blood from the monster's insides. Gradually, crouched there in the darkness of the crypt, filthy with gore, he was overcome by a tremendous surge of power, a rush of both agony and ecstasy.

Mstislav's body crumbled into ash like a burnt branch, and the King lay exhausted in his remains — succumbing to a sleep that lasted all day.

In the sunless chambers of the Kassov castle, his sons fell into a slumber of their own.

That night, the King climbed the staircase into the Great Hall. He was now like Mstislav — but not the same. He summoned his family to his side and told them that the Compact was broken. The line of Mstislav had betrayed them and for that their kind would be doomed and destroyed to the last.

His seven immortal children revealed that they, too, had been suddenly changed. Each had been struck to the ground with spasms of pain and ecstasy, and each had been carried back to the Kassov castle, where they had slept away the daylight hours. Their mission to stop Tvorimir's brothers had failed. Six women of the Kassov family line were found slain in the morning, their bodies unhidden, their blood stolen.

When Mstislav was ruined, it seemed his numinous power and his dark authority exploded across the Kassovich land and somehow passed to the King's line, settling in the ghoulish blood of Timofey and his children. As Timofey and his children saw it, the blood of Mstislav's kind was forfeited — it rightfully belonged to the Betrayed now. And so they would take it.

Soldiers were sent to the nests of the other Kindred, to open the tombs and set fire to every vampire, but they were empty. The scions of Mstislav had fled as all guilty souls do. So that night the Betrayed vowed to find Mstislav's childer — and his brothers, and his elders and his cousins in blood — and usurp them as the lords of night



SEVEN SONS,

SEVEN HOUSES, SEVEN GHOSTS

Timofey's ghoulish offspring are known among the Betrayed as the Seven Sons (although two of them, in fact, were daughters). They are the founders of the Seven Houses and, clearly, the origin of the family's reputation as "Seven." Within the culture of the Betrayed, however, the phrase "the Seven" is used to refer to, variously, the Seven Sons, the houses and bloodlines they begat or the ghosts of the seven victims of the Betrayers.



The Hunt

Soon after the so-called Seven Sons were Damned — Dubrov, Petrovna, Semeon, Alexander, Grigor, Irina,

and Marisov — they took up the hunt for the spawn of Mstislav, scouring the realm in search of those who bore the stigma of betrayal. The work was bloody, with many innocents slain to sustain combatants on both side of the battle, yet within a year they had succeeded in cleansing the kingdom of the foul taint of the Betrayers. The victory cost them dearly, however. Their progenitor, the last of the Kassovich kings, was nearly destroyed in a great conflagration that burned his palace to the ground and forced him into a deep torpor. The Seven rallied around their fallen sire-king and built a new stronghold in place of the old, excavating far beneath the old royal cellars in order to fashion an impregnable haven that would provide lasting protection for their sleeping progenitor and any other of their blood who sought refuge.

Although the kingdom was emptied of those who betrayed the Kassovichs, the Seven were unable to rest easily. A number of Mstislav's craven offspring escaped punishment by fleeing the realm, and the Seven hungered for justice. Even in torpor, their founder howled for vengeance and the blood of his childer boiled with his wrath. The Seven felt that until the world was cleansed of the issue of the Betrayer — until every last one of their accursed number was destroyed — the House of Kassov would remain stained with dishonor. Therefore, they swore to restore honor to their creator and his legacy by pursuing their enemies, no matter how long it might take or where it might take them. Leaving the eldest behind to watch over the torpid form of the last Kassovich king, the other six of the Betrayed turned their backs on the only home they had ever known and set out on their hunt.

For a time they traveled together, stalking their prey as a pack hell-bent on exacting revenge. They sought out Mstislav's progeny and descended on them without hesitation or mercy, tearing their victims limb from limb and dedicating each death to their sire-king. Their hunt was not easy, however. Increasingly, they were met by resistance from other vampires who were either allied with Mstislav's descendants or were simply unwilling to allow the bloodthirsty hunters to conduct their brutal campaign on their turf.

Unwilling to give up their prey on account of the desires of "meddlesome" vampires, the Betrayed engaged any who hindered their hunt with the same ferocity they had once reserved for their true enemies. Before long, word of the Betrayed and their atrocious activities spread among the Kindred. Whispers of "a coterie of diablerists hungry for the blood of all the Damned" circulated wherever the Kindred dwelt. To stoke the fears of those they hunted — in the hopes of creating chaos among their enemies — the Betrayed sometimes delivered a letter to one or more important Kindred in the city they visited. It consisted only of the royal seal of the House of Kassov and their collective signature, The Seven Sired

by He Who Has Been Betrayed. Now the Kindred had a name for their nightmares: the Seven.

By 1127 the hunt had changed dramatically. The Betrayed were faced with increasing difficulty locating their prey and spent more and more effort destroying other Kindred who got in their way or hiding from them. Those they pursued had also spread far and wide, and a single cabal of hunters was no longer practical if the hunt was to ever be concluded. Consequently, the group parted ways, each of the six taking a different road in pursuit of different prey. To aid them in their mission, each Embraced childer of their own and passed to them the legacy of their own sire, so that each felt that she was a true heir of the Betrayal.

Dubrov, the eldest who remained behind to guard their sire-king, did likewise, for it became ever more difficult to protect the last Kassovich king from danger. In essence, seven distinct bloodlines sprang from the veins of the original seven Betrayed, each a house unto itself yet bound by the same purpose. Each lineage took after its founder, and each established its own hidden estate where its elders could rest in safety when the weight of the hunt became too great. Some houses maintained regular contact with others; others pursued their enemies alone, needing nothing but the wrath of their Kassovich procreator to help them avenge the treachery of the Betrayer. All chose to cling to the shadows, however, undertaking their mission in secrecy to protect their bloodline from retribution by the far more numerous Kindred.

For more than a thousand years, the Betrayed have continued their fight against those who bear the Mark of the Betrayer, striking without warning from the shadows and retreating just as suddenly. The populations of the Betrayed's houses have grown — but far more slowly than other vampire lineages.

At the same time, most of the Kindred who once knew the truths of the Betrayed have been consumed by fang or fire. This has left the Betrayed little more than an urban legend among the Kindred — the stuff of misremembered rumors and fragments of legends.

The Betrayed have no interest in educating their enemy. The descendants of the Seven are a hidden race of monsters existing beneath the world known to the Kindred, just as the Kindred are hidden from the kine.

Culture

The Betrayed are divided into seven separate bloodlines and seven houses, each claiming one of the original seven ghouls Embraced by the last Kassovich king as its founder. Despite their differences — and there are many — each bloodline remembers its origins and is unified with the same common purpose: the destruction of all vampires who are not of their blood.

From the Betrayed's point of view, all vampires aside from themselves are treacherous monsters who should

pay for the sins of their forebears. Most Betrayed believe that, should they succeed in accomplishing this daunting task, they will restore honor to their legacy for having fulfilled the word of the Compact of Day and Night, which spelled out the punishment for betrayal. It is their duty, as they see it, to exact full justice. Until this is done, the Kassovich name is stained by dishonor and, accordingly, is forbidden to be used by the Betrayed. Instead, they use the name of their individual house or, as is increasingly common, take other names altogether.

Their enemies are many and resourceful; if they are to survive and have their vengeance, every caution must be taken. Only when the last of the Kindred is gone can the scions of the House of Kassov reclaim their rightful name.

The Betrayer

For the vast majority of the Betrayed, the individual responsible for their condition, the loss of their kingdom and the breaking of the Compact of Day and Night is Mstislav, the vampire who made ghouls of the Kassoviches in the first place. Younger members of the seven bloodlines sometimes question why Mstislav is so reviled, since it appears that his eldest childe, Tvorimir, was the one to actually betray the Kassoviches; at the time of the Betrayal, his sire was in torpor. Yet ultimately, Mstislav is blamed. Tvorimir was merely his Seneschal, first of all, meaning that despite Mstislav's torpid state, Mstislav was still technically responsible for upholding the Compact. In fact, the elder vampire fully accepted that responsibility, supposedly telling the King that he had ensured Tvorimir's obedience.

Some argue that Tvorimir was subject to a Vinculum to his sire, and so his treachery was, in fact, acceptable to his sire. Even those who argue against Mstislav's ability to enforce a blood oath to his childe agree that the ultimate burden of guilt must lie at Mstislav's feet. He swore to the terms of the Contract, which include a clause placing upon his shoulders full responsibility over all his line. Finally, some go so far as to say that Mstislav planned the Betrayal before submitting to torpor. According to these theorists, he ordered Tvorimir to do as he did, knowing full well that the King would be driven to drink from Mstislav's heart. Supposedly, this ghoul-ish diablerie was enabled — for normally no ghoul can commit diablerie — by some ritual or unknown sorcery enacted beforehand by Mstislav.

When asked for a reason why Mstislav would manufacture his own demise at the King's hands, supporters of this theory answer that the elder sought all along to damn the entire royal line to suffer the same Curse he did. He did not choose to simply sleep away the ages, but had chosen to escape his Requiem by passing it on to another, the very man who had once hounded him and dared to claim authority over him as King over Prince. In short, it was for revenge.

The precise lineage of Mstislav remains a mystery, though speculation never ceases. It would seem a simple thing for the Betrayed to just examine their own weaknesses and the Disciplines they have learned for clues, but that has not settled the issue. The Seven did not seem to all master the same Disciplines, and, clearly, whatever clan weakness Mstislav may have possessed was not passed on to the Seven, as each suffered from his or her own unique flaw of the blood. Reading the old tales in order to examine Mstislav's personal use of Disciplines is just as fruitless, for few stories are in full agreement on such matters. Even focusing on his unusual demise is misleading. Proponents of a ritual or the use of another form of blood sorcery cannot find anything like it among the tales of those who use Crúac, Theban Sorcery or even the Coils of the Dragon. Just as many of the Betrayed believe Mstislav was Ventrue as those who are certain he was Daeva or Mekhet; most are undecided and ultimately put little importance on the issue. As far as they are concerned, Mstislav was a vampire, an *upyr*, and so all are guilty of the same sins as the Betrayer. To look for greater distinction only complicates the hunt, which is already difficult enough.

Common Threads

Despite their many differences, each of the seven bloodlines descended from the last Kassovich king shares a great deal in common. First, and perhaps most important, is their driving purpose. Every last one of the Betrayed is bound by an oath to aid the greater family in restoring their legacy by fulfilling their duty to destroy every remaining vampire who bears the slightest relation to the Betrayer. This is almost universally deemed to mean any vampire not of their own blood. Therefore, most Betrayed also understand that they will likely never succeed in completing this epic crusade. Instead, they accept their mission in order to give meaning to their bloody existence, knowing that they will never doubt their purpose and that they will never fail to understand what it is they must do. For them, at least ostensibly, all else takes a back seat; as long as one of the Betrayers remains standing, there is work to be done.

How each bloodline fulfills this overarching purpose may vary, but all adopt certain common tactics. Most importantly, they observe their own special form of Masquerade. For them, it is not enough to simply hide their unliving nature from mortals — though they do this with as much care as other vampires; they are just as aware of the problems that would arise if they made public who and what they were. Even if a public pogrom to wipe out all vampires would drastically hasten the fulfillment of the Betrayed's overall goal, it would certainly mean their own destruction. Because of their activities, the Betrayed must also hide from those they hunt. In most cases, this means they literally do not reveal themselves at all, seeking refuge far from the so-called Kindred and

hunting in places and ways that will not alert their enemies to their presence. The Betrayed learn what they can of their victims by careful observation and daring reconnaissance missions, and frequently use mortals as both bait and sources of information about those they hunt. When they have learned enough and can arrange a proper ambush or other appropriate assault, they strike, lashing out from the shadows and then retreating just as quickly. Sometimes, some of the Betrayed, especially the younger members, leave graffiti in order to strike fear in their foes.

The Roman numeral “VII” is common among all of the families, symbolizing their unity and their origins, and is especially effective because a few elder Kindred still recall tales of the shadowy “Seven” responsible for the destruction of so many vampires so long ago. However, the unique glyph or crest of each of the seven bloodlines is also used at times to mark territory and claim glory for its dark deeds. Whether left at the scene in spray-paint, drawn in the victim’s blood, written on a note, carved into the victim or burning in gasoline, all of the symbols serve the same purpose: to create terror. The more frightened the vampires being hunted, the more likely they are to make mistakes, to forget to cover their trail, and to walk into a trap set by the Betrayed. The Betrayed also know that fear and paranoia are an integral part of the nature of every vampire who bears the Mark of the Betrayer, and by stoking those emotions they might instigate a feud among the hunted that will result in setting vampire against vampire, making the Betrayed’s job that much easier.

A second and just as universal commonality among the Betrayed is their identification with their royal origins. Even the most depraved and degenerate of the bloodlines sees itself as the heir of kings and its members the rightful claimants to a proud legacy of nobility and dominion. In fact, so powerful is this identity that the bloodlines are usually referred to as “houses,” to reinforce this regal air. This aristocratic posture flavors everything the Betrayed do and think and even occasionally gets in the way of their singular purpose. Some of the houses are rife with internal rivalries and blood feuds that would shame the Borgias and Medicis, and some houses spend more time battling one another than their common foe. A few of the bloodlines even view each other with an openly sinister eye, holding grudges that at times coalesce into ruthless conspiracies to humiliate or weaken the other, disputes that sometimes spill over into outright violence. More common, however, is for such ill will to be displayed by rendering subtle indignities to one another. When such conflicts threaten the real purpose of the Betrayed, however, elders usually step in and put the disputants in their place. Although the Betrayed do not use the term themselves, every house of the Betrayed has its own *Danse Macabre*.

The tradition of identifying each bloodline as a distinct royal household has special significance for the Betrayed. First, it allows them to see themselves first as the heirs of a figure of unquestioned and rightful authority over a territory and a people. The founder of each bloodline is the undisputed head of his or her house and his or her honor and legacy must be forever protected if the house is to survive as anything more than a brood of degenerates who have forsaken their right to nobility. Second, a house is larger than the bloodline that founded it and so encompasses far more than the Betrayed who carry its founder’s *Vitae* in their veins. In addition to those granted the Embrace, each house claims others who are deemed to be members. These include trusted retainers as well as candidates for the Embrace who must first prove themselves fully worthy of that tremendous legacy. In some rare instances, a house may even adopt a Betrayed who belongs to another bloodline. Such individuals are eyed with great suspicion, however. Unless there is a very clear and acceptable reason for such a petition — perhaps one house owes another a favor and the petitioner is payment for that favor on account of her particular skills or knowledge — this is usually frowned upon. Clearly, the last person a house would welcome is someone who might be guilty of betrayal or treason.

A third reason why the Betrayed identify themselves as distinct houses is because each assumes domain over a particular geographic region. Unlike the Kindred, the Betrayed do not lay claim to individual cities or tenurial domains within those cities. With as few as six houses in existence and their prey spread across the globe, each house considers a much wider swath of land to be its own private hunting reserve. Within each of these vast domains, every house maintains a single, primary familial estate — a haven closed to all but those who belong to the house or other Betrayed specially invited by the head of the household, usually the eldest. The location of these properties is zealously guarded, for were the Kindred to learn the location of even one of these places, they would surely bring whatever force they could muster to bear upon the estate, threatening the entire bloodline, especially those who lie in torpor within its normally secure walls. These estates are part ancestral home, part resting place, part meeting hall and part royal court. Most members of a house do not reside at their faction’s estate, but all know of its location and visit whenever the need arises. Normally, however, traffic is kept to a minimum to aid in protecting the secret of its existence.

The House of Dubrov

When six of the Seven departed Kozelsk in the early 12th century to pursue their foes beyond the kingdom’s borders, the eldest, Dubrov, remained behind to found his own bloodline dedicated to protecting the slumbering sire-king and his legacy as the rightful ruler of Kozelsk. The House of Dubrov maintained varying degrees of



contact with the other houses for the next century and welcomed the occasional Betrayed who sought rest and spiritual recharging at the most important of the seven familial estates. However, in the 13th century the Mongols invaded the region and sent emissaries to Kozelsk to negotiate the peaceful surrender of the city. The House of Dubrov executed the diplomats in brutal fashion, certain that the Mongol army was merely a tool used by the hated progeny of the Betrayer to once and for all destroy the last remnants of the Kassovich kings. In response, the Mongols swept into the valley determined to show all there the punishment for slaying the negotiators.

Despite the Mongols' overwhelming force, the city withstood their assault for a full seven weeks, largely due to the House of Dubrov and the power it could command. Still, the city could not hold out forever, and, in the end, the Mongols crashed through the final defenses and unleashed their bloodthirsty rage upon Kozelsk. So thorough was their destruction that every last citizen was slain, every home destroyed and the House of Dubrov shattered. When the slaughter ended, no buildings stood and Kozelsk became known to chroniclers as the City of Woe. From that time on, no further word from the House of Dubrov has ever been received. On more than one occasion, the Betrayed have visited in hopes of discovering something of Dubrov's fate, but the familial estate is no more.

The fate of the last Kassovich king, the first of the Betrayed, is of even greater importance. The eldest among the Betrayed claim to know nothing; they cannot sense whether the Otetsar remains in torpor buried far below the modern town of Kozelsk — an important Soviet and now Russian nuclear missile silo site — or whether he was fully destroyed by the Mongols or some other threat.

What the Betrayed do know, however, is that the Otetsar's legacy lives on in their blood just as strongly as ever. They can sense his wrath whenever they are in the vicinity of their enemies or should they consider betraying their fellow Betrayed, and they can draw upon his strength whenever they are beset upon by their foes. Some believe he continues to sleep and will not awaken until his honor is fully restored and every last blood-brat spawned by Mstislav is sent screaming into the pits of Hell. Others wonder if the Otetsar might be awake, hunting down the Betrayer's progeny as his own descendants do. A few fear that the Otetsar may be no more and wonder if their great hunt has any real meaning if he is truly gone. These last rarely voice such thoughts, of course.

It is possible that the House of Dubrov survived the Mongol invasion; even a single member would be able to continue the bloodline's legacy. Perhaps the house does still exist and still guards the sire-king, but does so in even greater secrecy than ever before, the better to protect



its charge. If so, descendants of the house probably left Kozelsk and set up shop elsewhere, anywhere. This house is purposefully left a mystery so that Storytellers might use it to create interesting stories for Betrayed characters. See the “Storytelling” section for some ideas on how to use the House of Dubrov in a chronicle.

Titles and Responsibilities

Because of their self-identification as nobility, titles as well as the privileges and responsibilities that attend them are of especial importance to the Betrayed. Some of the houses have dozens of titles that are granted their most esteemed members, while others have only a few that they consider worth using. The following titles are recognized by all the Betrayed, regardless of house, who hold titles to be an essential ingredient for maintaining their identity down through the ages.

Otetsar

The sire-king of the Betrayed and the last of the Kassovich kings — known also by his 16 royal names, of which Timofey is the most popular — is also called the Otetsar. The title is an amalgam of *otets* (father) and *tsar* (king). Some elders prefer to use the original title, keeping the two words separate. The Otetsar is also sometimes referred to as the Eldest or simply *the* Betrayed, distinguishing him as the true victim of Mstislav’s treachery.

None know for sure whether the Otetsar still walks the earth or remains lost in slumber, victim of the treachery of the Betrayers. It is just as likely that he was destroyed by the Mongols during their rapacious assault upon Kozelsk in the 13th century, a siege that decimated the population and utterly demolished the resting place of the Otetsar. (See “House of Dubrov,” p. 79, for more about the fate of the Otetsar.)

Knyaz/Knyazhna

One of the Seven, literally a prince or princess of the royal house of Kassov. It is not uncommon for local equivalents (like “prince”) to be used in place of the original Russian. For example, Grigor is the Prince of House Grigorovich, but Irina is always said to be Knyazhna of House Irinavici. Within each house, this Betrayed is absolute; her word is always obeyed without question. Even when she lies in torpor she is treated with reverence and unmitigated obedience, and her safety is deemed to come before all else in importance. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Knyazhna to safeguard her house and to lead the hunt against the spawn of the Betrayer.

Golos (pl. Golosa)

Literally “the voice,” the Golos is similar to both a Seneschal and a Herald. This Betrayed is chosen by the Knyaz to speak on his behalf to the rest of the house and to rule in his stead when he is in torpor or otherwise unavailable. The Golos is often the child of the Knyaz, but

this is not always the case. In addition, should the Golos slip into torpor, the title is passed to another. The title can also change hands for other reasons, each time at the discretion of the Knyaz. Interestingly, unless the Knyaz is actually incapacitated, the authority of the Golos is minimal; he is to be respected, but only because he speaks for the Knyaz. He has no actual ability to command the Betrayed until the Knyaz is unable to directly do so.

Silent One

The Silent Ones are those Betrayed who lie in torpor, usually on account of their advanced age. These elder vampires are given special reverence, for torpor is seen as a time of rest from the unending hunt, a time when the most dedicated hunters can gain renewed inner strength to continue the battle against the enemy. The Silent Ones are also somewhat akin to saints in their house. Their exploits are regularly recounted, and their names are recited before a hunt for inspiration and success. While they rest, these Betrayed are guarded with every precaution; they are routinely watched for any sign of stirring. When they are ready to awaken, the entire household gathers in ceremonial fashion to welcome them back from their repose and to inform them of any and all matters of importance that have taken place during their slumber.

Master of the Hunt

Every coterie or “hunting circle” of Betrayed is led by one vampire known as the Master of the Hunt, usually the eldest among the group or the one closest in lineage to the Knyaz. This individual is similar to a knight-commander and has undisputed say over any actions of the circle that are related to the hunt or survival. The Master of the Hunt decides where the circle will seek haven, which Kindred they will target, how they will conduct the hunt and the duties of each of the Betrayed. The Master of the Hunt also acts as the arbiter of disputes and metes out punishment when necessary to ensure the safety and success of the circle.

Orphan

Before a mortal may fully join the ranks of the Betrayed, he must first serve his house as an Orphan. An Orphan remains mortal and is never made a ghoul or otherwise given Vitae, but he is considered a member of his house and is given all manner of tasks to test his worthiness. Most Orphans serve for two to seven years before receiving the Embrace, doing everything from menial household labor to serving as lookout, errand-boy and even bait to one or more Betrayed “in the field.” Those Orphans who are seen as unworthy after this period of time are usually made ghouls and will never be given the Embrace. Instead, they will spend eternity serving the house unhindered by the Curse of the blood. Candidates for the Embrace are always selected by the Master of the Hunt or, if at the familial estate, by the Knyaz or Golos.

Customs and Practices

There is more to being one of the Betrayed than merely sharing the blood of the unliving Kassovich king and hunting down those who are born of the Betrayer. To maintain their sense of nobility, purpose and identity, the Betrayed celebrate and recognize certain traditions across house lines that distinguish them as truly apart from other vampires.

Feast of Betrayal

The most important observance of the year is the Feast of Betrayal, four nights of remembrance memorializing the tragic events that led to the breaking of the Compact of Day and Night and the creation of the Betrayed. The first night, two days before the full moon, is the **Violation of the Oaths**, commemorating the death of a young woman of Kassovich blood by one of Mstislav's brood. The Betrayed kidnap an attractive young woman of noble appearance and brand her flesh with the symbol long ago used by the Kassoviches to identify themselves as off-limits to the Kindred. Then they release her into the night and, after an hour's head start, they hunt her down and drink her dry, emulating the foul deed that shattered the sanctity of the Compact.

The next evening is called the **Price of Punishment**. The Betrayed seek out one Kindred, usually a neonate or loner, and destroy her, reenacting to some extent the Otetsar's destruction of one of the Betrayer's progeny in retribution for the breaking of the Compact. On the night of the full moon, the Betrayed remember Tvorimir's refusal to give his Vitae to the Kassovich king as the Seneschal was bound to do each month. The third evening, known as the **Denial and the Consumption**, the Betrayed do not allow a drop of blood to pass their lips until an hour before sunrise. Then, they devour every last drop of Vitae from a captive Kindred, cutting out her heart and consuming its valuable life-blood. The eldest of the hunting circle then completes the act by committing diablerie, celebrating the sire-king's transformation from ghoul to vampire.

The last night of the Feast is the **Passing of the Legacy**, the commemoration of the Embrace of the Seven. This is the preferred night for the Embrace of Orphans, although expediency often demands their promotion beyond mortality at other less auspicious times. Even if no Embraces take place, the Betrayed mark this evening by telling tales of the Seven, especially of their own Knyaz. They also honor to some degree the youngest of their circle, reminding them that, like the Seven, they have been given a tremendous privilege by being allowed to partake of the Vitae passed down from the Otetsar. These young Betrayed are the unliving legacy of the Kassovich sire-king, and this night they are celebrated as his heirs in purpose and in blood.

Requiem of Silence

One of the most solemn of ceremonies is the Ritual of Silence, a somber event that celebrates the deeds of one of the Betrayed who has entered into torpor, or is about to do so voluntarily. The entire house — or, at the very least, those members who are not actively engaged in the hunt far from the familial estate — comes together at the behest of the Knyaz and spends an entire night honoring the new Silent One. Beginning with the second-eldest Betrayed and working down through the ranks, each vampire takes a turn speaking of the heroic deeds of the Silent One. When each is finished with his homage, he places an item of personal value before the sarcophagus prepared for the Silent One, a token of tribute to a fellow avenger. The Knyaz speaks last. He gives no offering but his promise to awaken the Silent One should she be required to take up the hunt before her sleep has run its course.

If the Silent One is already in torpor due to violence or deprivation, her sarcophagus is then closed amid a litany from the entire house. If she is to enter torpor of her own volition, she addresses the house briefly, usually naming one vampire present as her primary protector or "lesser Golos" and swears an oath to all to arise again to take up the fight for honor before allowing herself to be sealed in her sarcophagus. As at a funeral, the sarcophagus is shouldered by specially chosen Betrayed and the entire house descends into the most impregnable portion of the estate, the crypt.

The sarcophagus is placed with the others, and a final prayer of sorts is spoken by the Knyaz, after which the assembled house leaves the Silent Ones to their sleep. The items offered up to the Silent One are put into a specially prepared storage area for the Silent One upon her awakening. It is often customary for the Betrayed to undertake a particularly lethal hunt the very next night, one dedicated to the Silent One. Each individual or circle departs the estate and seizes whatever opportunity they can to bring down as many Kindred as possible.

Hunter's Horn

If a Betrayed's descent into torpor is a time of serious tribute and reflection, her re-awakening is a time of dark jubilation heralded by orgiastic celebration and inhuman debauchery. The return from the silence of torpor means one thing to the Betrayed: the addition of another hunter to their ranks and the destruction of more of their foes. The "lesser Golos" or another of the house assigned to keep watch over the Silent Ones alerts the Knyaz at the first signs of wakefulness, and preparations are immediately undertaken to welcome the Silent One back to the ranks of the hunters. How each house celebrates varies, but a few things are universal.

A horn is always blown to signal the moment the former Silent One actually rises from her sarcophagus. Upon rising, she is met by the Knyaz and other notable Betrayed who present her with at least two vessels upon

whom she may satisfy her hunger. She is then taken to a special apartment where she can bathe, collect her thoughts and is brought up to speed on the most pressing matters attending her house. While she is thus occupied, the rest of the house procures a suitable number of mortals and whatever else they deem appropriate for the night-long festivities. The rest of the evening is basically a limitless frenzy of blood, hedonism and inhumanity, during which time any pretense to aristocracy is forgone in favor of satisfying carnal and violent urges. The awakened Betrayed is treated as a near-god throughout, and it is customary to give her whatever she may ask for that evening, so long as it is within reason. Even the Knyaz pays special respect to the newly arisen vampire, and to some extent cedes authority to her for the remainder of the night.

Tally of Seven

Not every Kindred slain by the Betrayed is celebrated with a swath of blood in the shape of VII. Many successful hunts have been hidden from the Kindred by refraining from the tell-tale signs of the Betrayed. Customarily, however, every seventh Kindred ruined must be tallies for the ghosts of those betrayed. Every seventh vampire burned or beheaded completes a cycle of retribution and puts the Betrayed in touch with the ghosts of vengeance lurking within their blood. To celebrate this cycle of wrath and manifest these minor victories in the world, the number VII is painted, carved, burned or otherwise left in the world at the site of the successful hunt, not as a warning to the Kindred but as a message those they killed all those years before.

Trophies

Every victim slain brings the Betrayed one step closer to fulfilling their promise to avenge their sire-king and restore the Kassovich legacy to honor. Just destroying Kindred is not enough to many of the Betrayed, however. Many make it their habit to collect some memento from each victim, usually something of material value that will not only remind them of their deed, but will aid them further in the greater hunt. Typical trophies include things that are unique to the victim: money is well and good and is certainly pocketed, but the Betrayed want something more personal. Clothing, jewelry, weapons, wallet photos and ID cards, even motorcycles and cars are commonplace. Sometimes the hunter will actually visit the victim's haven in order to find a truly special trophy, such as a piece of art or something that meant something special to the victim, like a diary or other heirloom. Those Betrayed who do collect trophies will go to almost any length to get one, even putting themselves in danger in order to add to their macabre collection.

The Hunt

Each night the Betrayed rise from their day-long slumber hungry for vengeance upon those who, through

treachery, have made the Betrayed what they are: blood-thirsty, undead monsters. Nothing, not even their lust for blood, is a more powerful imperative to the progeny of the Otetsar. The sire-king's hatred of the Betrayer and his spawn courses through the Betrayed like fire and lessens only when they are overcome by the rising sun or the pull of torpor. Yet the Betrayed can neither simply run through the streets howling for revenge and hope to succeed nor just knock the doors of Elysium off their hinges and throw themselves at the amassed throng of Kindred society. Such tactics would not only be suicidal, but they would be largely ineffective. In short order, the Betrayed would become the hunted, and any hope of one night accomplishing their righteous task would be obliterated by the overwhelming numbers of Kindred who would take up that hunt. In order to succeed, the Betrayed must take a different tack, one that enables them to protect their own kind even as it exposes their enemies to their wrath.

The Master of the Hunt has many ways to pursue the enemy, and it is his call as to which ones will be employed. The most common tactic is the same used by mortals who are aware of the presence of vampires and choose to undertake hunting them down. The Betrayed watch the news media for reports that are indicative of a vampire's involvement and then hit the streets with good, old-fashioned detective work, chasing down leads until hitting pay dirt or finding a dead-end. This is the safest course of action, as it minimizes the chance that the Betrayed's presence will become known to their prey. Of course, this type of hunt can also be the most time-consuming and the least productive. Even in the largest cities crowded with Kindred, few stories of their predation will reach the news outlets. Too many Princes and other canny Kindred are able to shut down any such stories before publication or broadcast, and too few journalists will risk their careers on stories that border on the preposterous. For this reason, most reports that do involve a vampire (murder, unusually horrific assault) contain no tell-tale signs of supernatural involvement, leaving the Betrayed to sift through countless stories and then go with gut instincts and plain guesswork.

Even when the Betrayed have good contacts in city morgues and police departments who might pass on word of an exsanguinated corpse or a suspect who could not be caught on film — perhaps even a cop who swears he saw something truly unnatural take place — little evidence is usually left behind to follow up on. Still, this kind of approach to locating prey does pay off at times and more than a few Kindred have been put to death because of a sloppy feeding or uncontrollable frenzy.

A better way to find Kindred is to simply get closer to the enemy. The Betrayed do not carry the Predator's Taint and, therefore, need not worry that their proximity to another vampire will alert their prey to their

presence. Yet, at the same time, the Betrayed are able to sense the enemy by entering a semi-trance-like state they call the Eyes of Wrath which is somewhat akin to a low-level frenzy. By spending Vitae, the Betrayed may perceive the presence of any nearby Kindred, who are clearly identifiable due to the Mark of the Betrayer, which literally causes them to appear to the Betrayed as cadaverous, blood-hungry monsters prowling among the herd of humanity for their next victim.



MARK OF THE BETRAYER

Mstislav's legacy of betrayal that marks all his progeny as targets of vengeance to the Betrayed is not only moral but, in the eyes of the Betrayed, physical. When employing the Eyes of Wrath, the Betrayed see Kindred as truly monstrous creatures, caricatures of the blood-drinking predators they are, twisted by their dark urges as well as by their duplicitous and degenerate nature.

A Daeva who appears to most eyes as the epitome of physical beauty, good grooming and even charming appeal is cast in a vastly different light when seen through the Eyes of Wrath. The Mark of the Betrayer becomes clear as daylight as every inhuman lust, conceit and vile intention of the Kindred is made visible, obliterating any vestige of humanity that she might wear. This mark is not only the province of those Kindred who are direct descendants of Mstislav, either. All Kindred appear similarly under the Eyes of Wrath. This might confuse some fledgling Betrayed, but the elders have no such concerns. Mstislav was a creature of betrayal from the moment he was Embraced, long before he and his progeny turned on the Kassoviches. It is in the nature of all Kindred to wield treachery, deceit and wholesale depredation, just as it is their mien to drink blood and sleep while the sun passes overhead. In this sense, the Mark of the Betrayer is both the signature of Mstislav and of all his kind, proof of their true monstrous nature.

The Betrayed, though surely vampires, never appear differently under the gaze of the Eyes of Wrath. They may be doomed to survive on blood and hide from the sun just as the Kindred, but, in essence, they are creatures of noble vengeance, not merely bestial predators. More than anything else, this distinction reminds the Betrayed again and again of just how different they are from their prey, no matter what the similarities. .



The Betrayed head for the Rack, well aware of its allure to their prey and one or more of the group activates the Eyes of Wrath, scanning the sidewalks and bar patrons for Kindred, and then alerting his fellow Betrayed. The rest of the evening will be spent tailing the target, hoping to find a convenient time and place to ambush the vampire. Of course, they remain on the lookout for other Kindred she may be with or whom she may come in contact with and take notes about these others, but the Betrayed will



maintain their focus on the original victim so as not to get sidetracked and lose sight of one guaranteed target. When the opportunity presents itself — or when they can create the right opportunity — they will strike as quickly and as forcefully as possible, putting an end to one more Kindred.

Among the Betrayers

The third and most risky method of identifying prey is for the Betrayed to walk right into the midst of the Kindred as if they were no different. Because the Betrayed are vampires, albeit of a decidedly different sort, it is relatively easy for them to demonstrate to Kindred their affinity. They have no problem drinking a mortal's blood, miraculously healing wounds and demonstrating various Disciplines, all clear evidence of being one of the Damned. But the Betrayed must be careful. Because they do not register as vampires to the predatory senses of the Kindred and because they may lack knowledge of some things deemed fundamental to local Kindred — who the Prince is, which covenants are in power, who controls which feeding grounds — every moment the Betrayed spend with Kindred is time spent on the knife's edge. Many Kindred have access to Disciplines that allow them to read auras and surface thoughts and control minds and hearts. Betrayed who are not prepared for such invasive techniques will be quickly recognized — if not as hunters of Kindred, at least as pretenders of a sort and, therefore, dangerous.

Despite the inherent dangers and complications, playing at being a Kindred — or an entire coterie of Kindred — has clear advantages that may outweigh the troubles. Even a few nights spent among the Kindred can reap the Betrayed huge rewards. They can quickly learn names of future victims, the location of Elysium and possibly even havens, and they can get a basic “lay of the land” that will help them plan future attacks and escape detection. One of the greatest prizes the Betrayed can gain is enough knowledge about local Kindred politics to enable them to turn Kindred against Kindred in the most violent manner possible. This takes tremendous planning, understanding, wits and a good dose of luck, but, if they can pull it off, the Betrayed can sit back and watch the Kindred do their work for them. Even better, while the Kindred are turning

on one another, the Betrayed can pick off those Kindred on the fringes of the conflict, the ones not directly involved that no one else is paying attention to. Who is going to notice a quiet Mekhet scholar go missing when two of the Primogen are literally waging war?

Capture

Not every vampire targeted is simply put out of commission, however. Because of the vast number of Kindred in larger cities, taking out a few stragglers without knowing their place in the Kindred order can be wasteful and even dangerous. Destroying one of the Unbound or a fledgling may be fine; few other Kindred will notice her loss and there is little to gain by interrogating her. More prominent Kindred are quite another matter. If the Betrayed want to maximize their ability to decimate the local Kindred population, then intelligence is a necessity. Smart hunters will spend nights, weeks, even months just observing a handful of identified Kindred in order to learn as much about them and their fellow undead as possible.

When the Betrayed feel there is little more to gain from their stakeout, they will seize these Kindred and subject them to truly gruesome interrogation, if possible. There is no limit to the extremes the Betrayed will go to in order to extract useful information from their prisoners. To the Betrayed's way of thinking, the end always justifies the means; since the destruction of all Kindred is the end, what's wrong with roughing them up a little before they meet their maker? This practice can wreak havoc on a Betrayed's Humanity, of course — few are able to maintain a strong sense of morality after a few decades of hunting Kindred using these tactics.

The Houses of the Betrayed

The Betrayed organized into seven houses and seven families in the earliest nights of their hunt for the kin of the Betrayer. Each family is like a parent clan and bloodline in one, with an associated noble house of the same name growing out of the common traits of the family's members. These are the only sanguine organizations of the Seven — they have no clans and no bloodlines besides these. And tonight, only six of the original seven houses remain.

House Petrovnavich

House Petrovnavich imagines itself as the most important of the houses and will brook no suggestion otherwise. Its members feel it is their place to guard the family legacy and ensure that, when the hunt is ended, the restoration of the Otetsar to his throne will be an occasion unlike any other and the Kassovich name will be heard around the world. For this reason, the Petrovnaviches — sarcastically referred to as Anastasias to poke fun at their noble airs — take it upon themselves to command the other houses (if not directly, at least in implication). The Petrovnaviches will not take second place among the Betrayed, but always make a point of claiming the best seat in the house whenever possible. Even young members of Petrovna's line carry themselves as if they were due greater respect than their fellow Betrayed of other houses. This attitude can, and has, caused all manner of problems for the house, but that's not about to make these Betrayed change their ways. True nobles are always despised; the trick is to earn adoration and loyalty along with the envious hate.

Nickname: Anastasias

Appearance: The Knyazhna makes clear her preference for additions to the house to embody the essence of nobility, physically as well as intellectually. Most Petrovnaviches are attractive and carry themselves with a semblance of good breeding. Clothing of a classic cut that speaks of wealth and power is the norm. These Betrayed are almost always of Russian or Slavic backgrounds in order to keep the blood pure, but, while rare, people who truly stand out as the cream of aristocracy from other ethnic backgrounds have also been welcomed into the house.

Haven: The familial estate is about a two-hour drive from Moscow, in a small town known more for its pastoral scenery than for its suitability for vampires. The property is an old castle that is recognized as a historic landmark but is off-limits to the public. It is said to have been the private property of a high-ranking Communist party member and is now an occasional residence for a member of the new Russian technocracy. The estate is protected by a cadre of former Soviet military officers who are paid well for their services as well as by substantial bribes and less natural forms of persuasion that keep the government from prying. Petrovnavich circles almost always seek out havens that reflect their self-image as the aristocracy of the night. Mansions, handsome townhouses, penthouse apartments and sprawling lodges are favored. Most would

rather spend the day in torpor than have to put up with less-than-suitable surroundings.

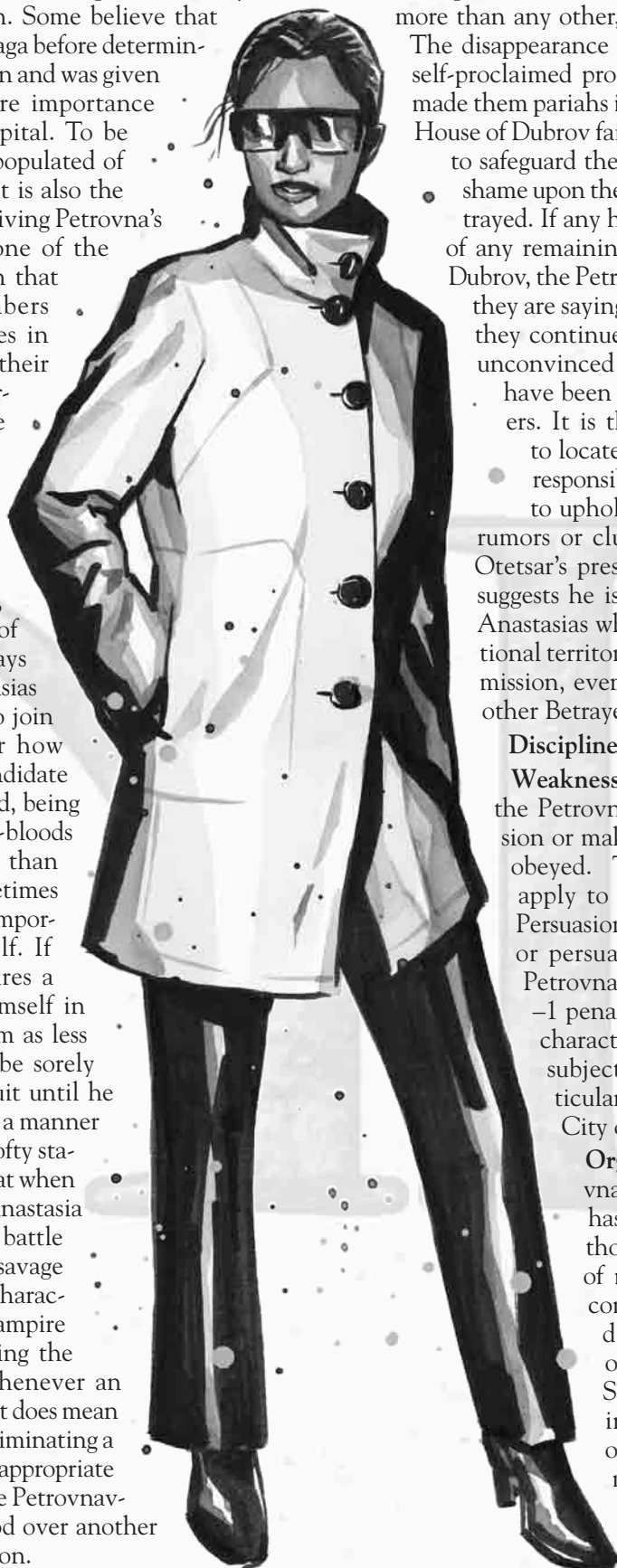
Background: Petrovna was the second child of the Otetsar and a Kassovich Princess like no other. Proud, self-assured and convinced that her noble station in life placed her above ordinary people, she was the epitome of the haughty aristocrat. Her beauty only exacerbated her own self-importance and made her both hated and loved by the people of Kozelsk. She saw her grandfather as more than a king and certainly more than a ghoul whose unnatural lifespan depended upon the graces of a vampire. She worked to become his favorite, dotting on him and doing all she could to enhance the prestige of his throne and the realm. When she was selected to join her uncle Dubrov as the sole member of her generation to live beyond her mortal years, her dreams were fulfilled. With death and the burdens of old age no longer a concern, she became a creature of even more beauty and power. She took the leading role in putting down any hint of insurrection that arose among the peasants; more than a few were fearful of the dark patina that the royal household had taken on and conspired to expose it to the light. She took numerous lovers too, using sex and threats to bring any serious opposition into line.

The Embrace did nothing to warm her increasingly cold disposition. As a vampire, she swiftly joined her kin in calling for and seeking the destruction of the line of the Betrayer. More than any other of the Seven, she saw her transformation into one of the undead as more gift than curse. Its numerous drawbacks were overshadowed by the access to supernatural power it afforded her, and she came to believe that she was truly on the verge of divinity. The living should worship her as their blood-stained goddess and aid her family in their quest to slay the Kindred. More importantly, she came to see herself as the only one of the Seven who remained true to the Kassovich legacy. The other houses grew lax in their observance of tradition and in their bearing, lowering themselves beneath the mantle of nobility that was theirs by blood-right.

House Petrovnavich did not go far from home when the great hunt began, choosing to remain in the Russian sphere of influence. This xenophobia allows them to claim greater proximity to their roots while bolstering their claim of staying true to the Kassovich legacy that was founded in the Desna Valley. The familial estate

was established only a few hours from Moscow, a place that at the time seemed to have no greater destiny than any other small town. Some believe that Petrovna consulted Baba Yaga before determining where to build her haven and was given some glimpse of the future importance of the current Russian capital. To be sure, the city is the most populated of any in the region, and so it is also the most overrun by Kindred, giving Petrovna's offspring easy access to one of the richest hunting grounds in that part of the world. Members have numerous safe houses in Moscow and many spend their entire unlives there, gathering information about the enemy and leading assaults upon Kindred havens.

The Petrovnaviches tend to Embrace individuals who are, or at least possess the bearing of, aristocrats. Again, those of Russian heritage are always preferred, and many Anastasias will never allow another to join the bloodline, no matter how otherwise suitable the candidate might be. To these Betrayed, being recognized as the true blue-bloods of their kind means more than almost anything, and sometimes can even take on greater importance than the hunt itself. If pursuing the enemy requires a Petrovnavich to lower himself in a way that would mark him as less than noble, then he will be sorely tempted to forgo the pursuit until he might re-engage his prey in a manner more fitting for one of his lofty station. This does not mean that when faced with easy prey an Anastasia will not throw himself into battle with as much ferocity and savage fury as any other Betrayed character; an Anastasia is still a vampire and still dedicated to slaying the Betrayer's foul progeny whenever an opportunity presents itself. It does mean that if given the choice of eliminating a foe in a fashion that is more appropriate to one of noble standing, the Petrovnavich will choose that method over another less patrician course of action.



Central to the Petrovnaviches' claims to gentility is the figure of the Otetsar, who favored Petrovna more than any other, according to house dogma. The disappearance of Dubrov and his line, the self-proclaimed protectors of the sire-king, has made them pariahs in the eyes of this house. The House of Dubrov failed in their nigh-sacred duty to safeguard the Eldest and so have brought shame upon their house and shame to all Betrayed. If any house knows of the existence of any remaining members of the House of Dubrov, the Petrovnaviches should know, but they are saying nothing. At the same time, they continue the search for the Otetsar, unconvinced that so divine a being could have been destroyed by Mongol invaders. It is the Petrovnaviches' purpose to locate the Otetsar and assume the responsibility that Dubrov was unable to uphold. As such, they pursue any rumors or clues that could point to the Otetsar's presence, even if the evidence suggests he is far beyond Mother Russia. Anastasias who travel beyond their traditional territory are usually involved in this mission, even if they don't reveal this to other Betrayed.

Disciplines: Auspex, Dominate, Vigor

Weakness: Arrogant and demanding, the Petrovnaviches hate to ask permission or make a case. They expect to be obeyed. The 10-again rule does not apply to Presence, Manipulation or Persuasion rolls made to ask, beg, plea or persuade others. What's more, a Petrovnavich with no Status suffers a -1 penalty to Social dice pools with characters who would normally be subject to bonus dice from a particular category of Status (such as City or House).

Organization: Knyazhna Petrovna rules her house as she always has, exercising her rightful authority through equal amounts of motherly concern and fear, complemented by her extraordinary beauty and strength of will. Unlike some of the Seven, she involves herself in even the smallest affairs of her house, weighing in on matters that would not seem to require her opinion. She keeps her Golos busy as

both spy and herald, not only carrying her words to the rest of her house, but also reporting back to her on the activities of those who bear her blood. In order to retain her Golos' usefulness, she names someone new to the position every half-century or so; being known as a snitch for too long will ultimately cause the Golos to be excluded from matters the Knyazhna would want him involved in. Underneath Petrovna in authority are the Silent Ones. Upon rising from torpor, they are bestowed tremendous honors by their cold mistress. These Betrayed serve Petrovna as a Privy Council, offering her advice and helping her understand the goings-on outside the familial estate which she never leaves.

True to their nature, the Petrovnaviches see themselves as knights in service to their Knyazhna, and every mission — whether destroying Kindred or seeking clues as to the Otetsar's whereabouts — is a quest that has as much to do with pragmatism as it does with semi-romantic notions of honor and duty. More than any other Betrayed, House Petrovnavich is obsessed with these things and conducts all its affairs with this in mind. Petrovnavich circles don't just fight the enemy; they "crusade" against the Betrayers. Trophies are returned to the familial estate and often given to the Knyazhna in a sign of adoration and servitude, each member of the house seeking her favor as she sought her own mortal grandfather's.

Concepts: Modern crusader, the youngest son of a forgotten noble house, fashion model, Muscovite "Eliza Doolittle," ex-KGB officer, nouveau-riche daughter of a Russian mob boss, high-society scam artist, Romanov historian, ultranationalist involved in the overthrow of the current government and a return to a tsarist monarchy, foreign playboy slumming with the "new Russians"

Relations: The Petrovnaviches seek to maintain contact with the other houses in order to learn more about the possible fate of the Otetsar and to remind the others that it is Petrovna and her line who are the true guardians of the Kassovich legacy, even if others think otherwise. Each house is invited to send diplomats to

the Petrovnavich estate to represent their bloodline and to ensure that the greater purpose of all Betrayed is not allowed to fall by the wayside. By playing host to the collective houses, the Petrovnaviches hope to demonstrate that they are what they claim, the leaders of the all the Betrayed. Unfortunately, the Petrovnaviches' intentions are somewhat misplaced. The other houses have no desire to reinforce the Petrovnaviches' assumption of authority, and, although the houses do send diplomats, they come more to keep an eye on the heirs of Petrovna than to boost this bloodline's self-esteem. The façade of fashionable gentility that is enforced among the Petrovnaviches barely hides the disagreement and rancor that ultimately defines the relationships between this house and the others. The greatest contact is with House Alexander and House Semeonovic. The Anastasias generally detest the former house, viewing them as little different from the House of Dubrov, another failed line that is only barely more sufferable than the Betrayers. The Semeonovics are in better standing. Their orthodox ways are understandable to Petrovna's progeny, even if they don't share their religious bent. The other houses fall somewhere in-between; they are welcomed, but looked down upon.

This house will not dirty itself with contact with the Kindred. From the Petrovnaviches' point of view, any such interaction is contamination and a betrayal of their principles and legacy. The only relationship this house will permit is that of adversary. Fully believing in their nobility of purpose, the Petrovnaviches believe that destroying the Kindred is their greatest duty; the only good Kindred is a pile of ashes. The Anastasias' relationships with mortals are akin to lord and peasant. These aristocrats will brook nothing but absolute respect and obedience from the living. The Petrovnaviches are perfectly comfortable with flattery and adulation, of course. But they are smart enough to know that it is usually only a mask to hide the fear their "subjects" actually feel toward them. And this suits the Petrovnaviches just fine.

*Quote: The right to rule is passed through the blood but,
unless it is properly exercised, it may pass
as easily as the blood spills from the veins of the kine.
Only those who put it to use can claim it as theirs forever.*

House Semeonovic

In every family there are those who cleave closer to religiosity than others, who see all things in a spiritual light and who cling to their faith as both shield and sword. The Semeonovics believe that the Eldest ruled by divine right, that God appointed him King and that his betrayal was not only treachery against a man and his people, but against the Almighty. This house sees itself as the necessary moral arm of the Betrayed — spiritual counselors, confessors and crusaders who turn what others view as a purely personal quest for vengeful justice into one of holy righteousness. Not as fervent or dogmatic as, say, the Lancea Sanctum can be in Kindred society, House Semeonovic is nonetheless preoccupied with the religious importance of their hunt. Their beliefs provide them with a justification for what they do that is strong enough to overcome many doubts or distractions and sees them through to the next night and the next kill.

Nickname: Priests

Appearance: This house adopts Orphans of nearly any background, so long as they demonstrate a real piety that goes far beyond regularly attending church. Because of this, there is a tendency to Embrace people who have a few more years under their belt than most Betrayed, people who have come to religion not by rote but because life has shown them the truth as they see it. Not all are studious or monkish, however. The house has just as many skilled killers in its ranks as any other, vampires who are at ease with their role as merciless avengers even as they look to God as their savior. Most wear or carry on their person religious symbols — necklaces, crucifixes, rosaries. To the Semeonovics' surprise, their accoutrements, which seemed out-of-place when hunting during the atheist regimes of the past decades, are now commonplace. The nightclubs are rife with patrons adorned with garish religious paraphernalia, something that some Semeonovics see as confirmation of the righteousness of their mission.

Haven: The Sanctuary is in a small town near Prague. It is a vast underground structure mostly built a half-century ago and enlarged as needed. Interestingly, despite its moniker and its clearly religious nature, the Sanctuary is not deemed to be a holy place. Until the Sabbath, when all Kindred are destroyed, the Semeonovics are forbidden from treading upon holy ground; their familial estate is merely a safe retreat from the enemy, where they can regroup and prepare for the next hunt. Similar, much

smaller havens exist throughout Eastern Europe, many unused by Betrayed vampires for decades, but maintained by mortal members of the house for the time when the havens may be needed.

Background: The young Prince Semeon was chosen by the Eldest to join him in eternity as a bulwark against the darkness that he knew could bring down the Kassovich throne. Semeon was a pious man whose early years were spent at the side of men learned in the ways of divinity and morality. Later, he became an indispensable advisor to the last King of Kozelsk, offering insights as a guide to the monarch haunted by his “deal with the Devil,” Mstislav. It was Semeon who heard the King's confessions and counseled him to bear his burden not only for his own sake, but for that of his family, his people and his kingdom. God had chosen him to lead, had sent the Betrayer to tempt him and had used that archfiend to show him the path to righteousness, a road that led through the depths of Hell before it would emerge into the light of grace. Semeon did not think twice when offered the blood of the Betrayer, for he knew it was his place to stand at his King's side, to endure the same torments and unholy gifts and to lead him along the path to God no matter the difficulty. Likewise, Semeon accepted the Embrace, all the while knowing it to be the very taint of damnation. He would suffer anything so long as the Eldest suffered, a childe in blood twice over, and the only hope to a dynasty now cursed. Semeon's house follows in his footsteps, trusting that God will protect their legacy so long as they serve their King as obediently now as in the nights when he reigned openly. For them, there is no rest, no Sabbath, until the last of the seed of the Betrayer is scourged from the face of God's earth. Only when that holy purpose is accomplished and the glory of the Kassovich King restored to its rightful place will the scions of Semeon put aside their bloody ways and kneel before King and God in judgment. Until that night, the Semeonovics will visit upon their foes the fury of Heaven that burns within these unbeating hearts, howling for righteous vengeance. Semeon's heirs know they are cursed, but that curse they lay squarely at the foot of the Betrayer. When the last of his blood is gone, then their curse will be lifted and the gates of Heaven will open for them.

The Semeonovics claim Eastern Europe and parts further east as their rightful domain. Within that province, the unlife of every Kindred is theirs to snuff out,

not only because they choose to do so, but because it is their divine duty. The familial estate, which they call the Sanctuary, is situated only a short distance from Prague, in the Czech Republic. More than 90% of the entire structure is below ground, with only a few seemingly insignificant apartments at street level. The place is a veritable shrine, with priceless religious relics throughout and an atmosphere of disquieting solemnity at all times of night and day, when the mortal members of the house carry out housekeeping and other duties. Two services are held every evening, affairs far more reminiscent of the medieval church than anything more modern. These nightly masses are small things compared to the infrequent observances of important religious occasions, which include those celebrations common to all Betrayed. The bloodline is divided into those who are members of the Ordination and those who are not. The former preside over all services and counsel their fellow Betrayed. No circle of Semeonovics is considered complete without the inclusion of one of the Ordained in its midst. Semeon, who at this time lies sleeping, is most frequently called the Metropolitan. His Golos oversees the house in the interim, speaking for her torpid sire until he is ready to return to his place as the holiest of this holy house of Betrayed.

While men and women of religious vocations are common among the scions of Semeon, the Priests Embrace many more who were not so occupied in life. Still, a strong religious identity is a prerequisite for Orphanage. The Semeonovics are not impossible taskmasters, however, demanding slavish observance of every religious principle. Their condition has given them some ability to look beyond much of the dogma of mortal faiths and demand only a fundamental obedience to God and his divine mission for them. In fact, many Priests enjoy theological debate and spend a great deal of time marrying seemingly problematic doctrine and belief to their own view of Heaven and Hell fashioned on an altar of blood and betrayal. The Semeonovics offer potential childer something beyond a mere vampire hunt — they offer spiritual nourishment, hard as that may be for some to see. This goes a long

way toward stemming some of the worst excesses of the house. So long as the Semeonovics can make sense of their cursed existence, they can avoid frenzy and madness better than others of their kind.

The Priests largely adhere to an Orthodox take on Christianity, though their conception of who they are and what their holy mission is certainly gives it no small spin on its head. Their highest spiritual authority is actually the Otetsar, as they believe that he was a true King, one whose right to rule was divinely granted. As such, Semeon is of secondary importance. Still, because the fate of the Eldest is unknown — the house fervently believes he was not destroyed but rests far beneath the earth until the long-awaited Sabbath arrives — the Metropolitan is the de facto leader of the Betrayed. His

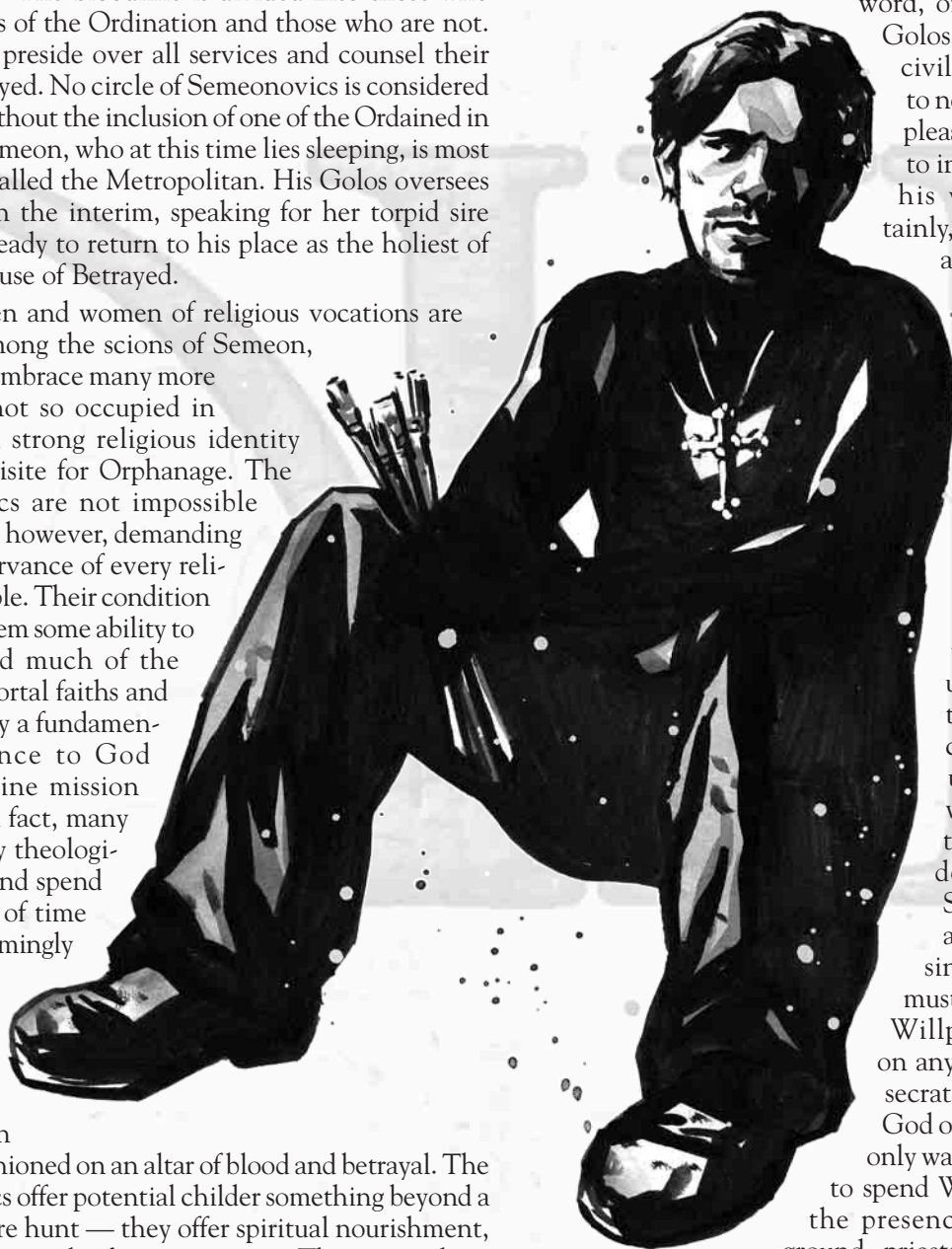
word, or the word of the Golos, is both canon and civil law. To disobey is to not only risk the displeasure of Semeon but to insult God and earn his wrath also. Certainly, few Semeonovics are willing to incur that kind of bad blood.

Disciplines:

Auspex, Majesty, Resilience

Weakness:

Convinced of their role as monsters of the cloth, the childer of Semeon are unable to set foot upon ground that they believe is sacred to the Him until the Sabbath, when all the Betrayer's spawn are destroyed and the Semeonovics have atoned for their sins. A Semeonovic must spend a point of Willpower to set foot on any holy ground consecrated in the name of God or Allah. This is the only way for a Semeonovic to spend Willpower when in the presence of consecrated ground, priests, rabbis, mosques



and the like. All other expenditures of Willpower are impossible, as though the character suffered from the Depression derangement.

Organization: When a Silent One awakens from torpor of any substantial duration, he is brought before a council that consists of the Metropolitan and/or Golos and a consistory of other Betrayed known as the Ordained. This Ordination engages the recently awakened vampire in religious debate, questioning him on his beliefs, his understanding of the house and God and what he learned from his experiences in torpor. If his answers satisfy the Ordination, he is welcomed into their ranks by way of a very elaborate ceremony. As one of the Ordained, the Silent One is understood to be beyond question by all but the Metropolitan himself — even the Golos cannot second-guess one of the Ordained (of which she too must be a member). This does not give the Ordained sweeping authority, but it does mean that their words must be heard and their opinions carry great weight. Ultimately, however, each Priest is expected to obey God first. Those who engage in activities frowned upon by the Ordination, however, and repeatedly use the “God told me to do it” excuse will find themselves meeting their maker sooner rather than later.

House Semeonovic is made up of more mortals than any other, largely because it is far easier for this house to find a mortal willing to submit himself to the frightening life that is a servant of the Betrayed. The religious nature of the House Semeonovic works strongly in its favor here, providing many people with a strong sense of purpose beyond their previously empty lives. Sure, the things they see and do are horrific in large part, but they find it surprisingly easy to rectify all that with the belief that they are doing God’s work. Moses turning his staff into a snake and one of the Betrayed repairing a seemingly grievous wound in seconds are both miracles, so why shouldn’t they both be God’s doing?

Concepts: Fallen priest, abused housewife, professor of theology, born-again convict, enlightened artist,

genocidal soldier who believes he is God’s instrument, recovered flatliner, drug addict, former cult member disillusioned with the all-too-mortal failings of the cult leader, delusional old woman

Relations: The Priests are on fairly good terms with most of the houses. They are especially close to House Petrovnavich, though they don’t ascribe to the Anastasias’ claim that they are the rightful rulers of all Betrayed. Rather, the Semeonovics believe that their founder’s role as spiritual guide to the Eldest makes them the real leaders of their kind. They don’t push this belief on others too often, however — rarely does it get them anything but trouble. Instead, they simply make it their point to demonstrate the righteousness of that belief by cleansing Eastern Europe of as many vampires as possible. They also have frequent contact with the Irinavici, whom the Semeonovics see as too concerned with temporal affairs to earn their full respect. Still, if collaboration brings the Sabbath even one night closer, most Priests are able to forgo their personal distaste to make that happen.

One thing the Priests completely agree with the Petrovnaviches about is the Kindred. The Betrayer and all his kind are nothing less than demons that cannot be trusted in any matter, no matter how earnest they may appear to be. Like the most brutal instruments of the Spanish Inquisition, the Semeonovics will not suffer a Kindred to live, so to speak, even one night longer than is necessary. The Priests’ suspicion that the Irinavici may have some dealings with the Betrayers that are less than lethal contributes a great deal to the Priests’ distaste for the Italian bloodline. As has already been mentioned, the Priests are quite open to working with mortals, with one caveat. Those who lack strong religious faith will never be entrusted with anything, even to serve as menial lackeys. If the kine are to aid the interests of the House of Semeon, they must possess faith in God and demonstrate that faith to the Priests. Kine who pass this test, however, and who can stomach the atrocities that are part and parcel of existence as the Betrayed, can earn a great deal of trust and privilege.

Quote: God chose the Eldest to be his instrument on earth.

*In turn, the Eldest chose the Metropolitan to be his counsel,
his confessor and his proof against darkness.*

*That duty is now ours to bear, serving all those who are
Betrayed until our work is done and the Sabbath is upon us.*

House Alexander

In many ways, the Betrayed who can trace their blood back to Alexander Kassovich are the most honest of all their kind. The other houses pretend at nobility, piety and power and justify their ways by pointing to necessity and circumstance. They fancy themselves the true lords of the night and see all Kindred, let alone the kine, as worthy only to grovel at their cold feet. On the one hand, the members of House Alexander are not that much different, but at least they don't kid themselves about what they are. Everyone of this debauched bloodline and its greater house fully admits that they are no less monsters than the vampires they hunt. The members of House Alexander don't hide from the pleasure they feel when they drain a mortal of his lifeblood, when they are consumed by frenzy and when they use their Disciplines to terrify and rend a foe. No, Alexander's house doesn't pretend. Instead, the members revel in their accursed nature, enjoying the stolen fruits of the night even as they suffer all the banes of the undead. Members of the House Alexander embrace their monstrous side, drawing strength from it and believing that it, not some pretense at righteousness or salvation, will see them through and save their legacy from complete extinction.

Nickname: Harridans

Appearance: What most distinguishes these hedonists from their fellow Betrayed is a look of decayed decadence that seems to cling to these hedonists no matter how they dress or behave. Rakish, disheveled and predatory, the Harridans embody the licentious side of the patrician class. Whorish attitudes, tattoos, piercings, scandalous jewelry and a decidedly "who gives a shit" sense of style are as much an insult to the otherwise expensive clothing these debauched wear as they themselves are to anyone who dares to take them to task for their get-up. Like the spoiled spawn of kings and princes — which, in a great sense, is exactly what they are — the Alexander at once display their privileged station even as they thumb their noses at the pretense.

Haven: A large chateau on the outskirts of Orléans in France serves as the ancestral haven for House Alexander. This place plays host to regular bacchanals that are closed to all but those who receive the rare invitations to discover what *really* goes on inside the chateau's baroque walls. Orgiastic fetes the likes of which would stupefy the mind of most Kindred are not uncommon, parties that always end in blood and return far fewer guests to their homes than they welcome. Prince Alexander

watches over his brood still, leading his house in their debaucheries. Beyond the borders of this property, the rest of the house finds similar, if far less expansive, places to set up shop. Wherever the Harridans make their home, however, sin and death are sure to be found.

Background: Like their founder, the Alexander are proud of their heritage and their place above others; also like him, they care little about any responsibility to those they are born to rule. Such concerns only waste precious time that can be spent destroying Kindred and sampling the world that they have inherited. What good is lordship if one cannot do as one pleases? To the Alexander, the answer is obvious: nothing. If they cannot enjoy the night, then they are no better than the vile Kindred who play at society in their overdressed Elysium, all the while depriving themselves of the things that can be theirs. As far as the members of this house are concerned, one of the best reasons to kill the Kindred is not to right an ancient wrong, but rather to get rid of the competition so that the house can have uncontested access to the bounty they already see as rightfully theirs. Destroying the Kindred only makes sense when looked at this way. However, this reasoning also leaves open the door to possible cooperation with the Kindred or at least some degree of careful interaction that works to the house's benefit. If the Alexander can promise an influential Kindred to focus the Harridans' hunt on a certain clan or covenant in a given city, that deal, however temporary, might gain them a meaningful degree of security and success that they might otherwise not be assured of. To Alexander and his brood, the ends justify the means, even if that sometimes means working with the enemy.

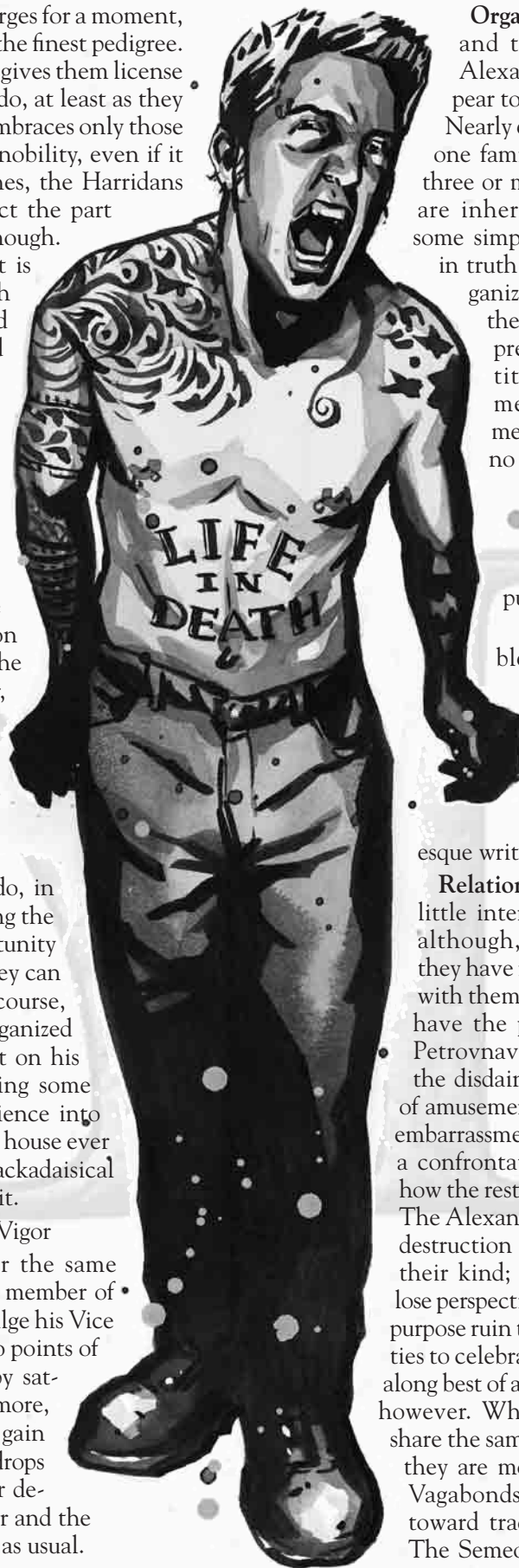
The Alexander see Western Europe as theirs, especially since the departure of the House Grigorovich more than a century ago. Centered in France, these Betrayed can be found anywhere in this part of the continent, stalking their prey and indulging in those things that only a vampire can fully appreciate. They are particularly fond of large urban centers, even when they know there may be easy prey in smaller towns. Less populous areas have little to offer the Alexander once the hunt is over. Still, the promise of diablerie and its rapturous benefits is hard for even these degenerates to resist for long. So long as there is something to satisfy their most carnal, selfish and inhuman lusts, the Betrayed of House Alexander will be there, taking down a few Kindred while they're at it.

Putting aside all their hedonistic urges for a moment, the Alexander are still aristocrats of the finest pedigree. In fact, it is their rarified lineage that gives them license to lead the degenerate unives they do, at least as they see it. As such, the house typically Embraces only those who have some small claim to real nobility, even if it is distant. Unlike the Petrovnaviches, the Harridans could care less if the individuals act the part of the aristocrat — the blood is enough. What they do with their birthright is for them to decide. Of course, as with all Betrayed, those who have suffered some painful betrayal are favored over others.

If there is any philosophy or principle that defines House Alexander it is simply their unshakable conviction that responsibility does not have to accompany power. Might, whether acquired by virtue of birthright or by some victory in battle or the boardroom, is its own reward and may be wielded by its possessor in any fashion he sees fit. If one wishes to take on the burden of duty as part of that power, that is fine — but it is a voluntary choice, not a requirement. What's more, there is nothing morally wrong with eschewing any and all responsibility. This philosophy frees the Harridans from having to do anything they don't wish to do, in essence. If they don't feel like pursuing the enemy tonight even when an opportunity presents itself, they don't have to; they can always do it another evening. Of course, this also makes the house a very disorganized affair. Even the Knyaz cannot count on his wishes being heeded without offering some kind of motivation to prod his audience into action. However, should the circle or house ever be in true danger, even the most lackadaisical Harridan will take action to protect it.

Disciplines: Nightmare, Protean, Vigor

Weakness: The Harridans suffer the same weakness as the Daeva. Any time a member of this house has an opportunity to indulge his Vice but chooses not to do so, he loses two points of Willpower instead of gaining one by satisfying his sinful pleasures. What's more, vampires of this family automatically gain derangements when their Humanity drops below 5 and below 3. The particular derangements depends on the character and the circumstances of the Humanity loss, as usual.



Organization: To other houses and to new members of the Alexander, this house can appear to be the most hierarchical. Nearly every Harridan has at least one family title, and many claim three or more. Some of these titles are inherited, some granted and some simply adopted. Despite this, in truth the house is the least organized. The Alexander enjoy the decadent implications of prestige and authority that titles lend them, but few mean anything; they are mere decorations that carry no responsibility whatsoever, and that's exactly how the Harridans prefer it. Too much structure impedes their eternal pursuit of pleasure.

Concepts: Bankrupt noble, royal pretender, society party crasher, prep school dropout, retired bullfighter, porn actor, secret-society member, burned-out rock-n-roll musician, Henry Miller-esque writer, deviant psycho-killer

Relations: The Alexander have little interest in the other houses; although, when the need arises, they have no issues with cooperating with them. It's the other houses that have the problems, especially the Petrovnaviches. To the Harridans, the disdain shown them is a source of amusement rather than a source of embarrassment or the spark to kindle a confrontation. What do they care how the rest of the Betrayed see them? The Alexander are as dedicated to the destruction of the Kindred as any of their kind; the Harridans just don't lose perspective and let that one overall purpose ruin the numberless opportunities to celebrate their unives. They get along best of all with the Grigoroviches, however. While the Alexander don't share the same restlessness of their kin, they are most comfortable with the Vagabonds' generally lax attitudes toward tradition and self-restraint. The Semeonovics are more difficult

to work with, given that house's philosophy of morality and the Harridans' very liberal definition of the same.

The Betrayed of House Alexander are not above cutting deals with some Kindred if it will ultimately make the Alexander safer while still advancing their overall cause: to destroy vampires. The Alexander are smart enough to know that most Kindred don't have the power or the wherewithal to make such deals, however. Neonates who think they can talk their way out of becoming a pile of ash are disabused of that presumption quickly. Should more experienced Kindred wish to make some kind of mutually agreeable arrangement, most Harridans will at least entertain the notion. Of course, they will check out the vampire in question before agreeing to

anything and, above all, they will reveal nothing about their true nature. These Betrayed are no different from their fellows and have no desire to suffer the pangs of the Burning and the fangs of their kin by becoming betrayers themselves. Similarly, the Harridans are more open to working with mortals than most other Betrayed. To the Alexander, mortals are necessary not only to sustain the Harridans' unlives, but to provide all manner of pleasure beyond sustenance, whether carnal, depraved, sadistic or comedic. The parties thrown by House Alexander are overflowing with mortals who seek an escape from their own sad lives. Some of these same kine provide direct support to the house, even in combat. Blood addiction works wonders, and the Harridans are masters at using it to their advantage.

*Quote: We are not the children of the night;
we are its parents.
We give it meaning
and celebrate its dark wonders.*

House Grigorovich

The descendants of Grigor don't view the hunt for Kindred and the restoration of family honor as something to be undertaken when the opportunity strikes. For this restless house, these things consume every hour of every evening. Driven to move from place to place without pause, the Grigoroviches have no chance at establishing roots in any particular location. Instead, they embrace their nomadic nature and throw themselves into their only important cause: destroying other vampires. Armed with Disciplines that give them an advantage over most of their prey, the Grigoroviches ambush their foes wherever they find them, striking from the shadows and vanishing as quickly as they came. These Betrayed claim the vast North American continent as theirs, giving them more than enough room to satisfy their itinerant urges. Once limited to the British Isles, these Betrayed now travel great distances without concern, crisscrossing the United States and its neighbors ever in search of their next victim.

Nickname: Vagabonds

Appearance: The members of this house are the most varied of all the Betrayed. Any generalization would be inappropriate, except for the preference for people who have suffered betrayal — but even this is not a given with the Vagabonds. To them, pragmatism and the ability to survive constantly changing situations and challenges is most important. Grigorovich Orphans who cannot adapt swiftly enough will not be tolerated; they only slow down the already dangerous hunt. Race, pedigree and religious belief mean little to this house when it comes to choosing a childe. All that matters is the ability to aid the Betrayed in their hunt for Kindred.

Haven: Once based in the United Kingdom, House Grigorovich now calls the United States home. In fact, this house ostensibly claims domain over the entire continent. Even if that claim is a stretch, the idea that they can go nearly anywhere helps them avoid the claustrophobic feelings that once led the house to abandon their much smaller domain in Europe. Because of their special weakness, rarely do the Vagabonds possess anything they can truly call their haven. Every place they stay is really only a temporary arrangement; the next evening they will probably be gone. Even the familial estate in Pennsylvania has few long-term residents. Most Grigoroviches simply visit for a few nights and then pass on, returning to the hunt. The only ones who stay for any duration are the Silent Ones and human retainers to

watch over them. Even the Knyaz does not remain there for any length, preferring to move about North America aiding his bloodline in their war with the Kindred.

Background: Of all the Seven chosen to share eternity with the Eldest, Grigor was the most traveled. Even in the cold of winter he preferred to hunt in the wilds of the kingdom rather than settle before a roaring fire with a mug of warm wine. He served his King as diplomat, courier, spy and huntsman, rarely staying any place more than a few nights. The restless young noble was rewarded for his service, loyalty and value to the throne with the Embrace, and, as his blood changed with the experience, it took on something of his restless nature, something that has been passed to each of his lineage. The Betrayed of House Grigorovich find themselves haunted by their founder's disposition, unable to remain in one place for very long even if relocation exposes them to unknown dangers. Consummate hunters of Kindred and kine, the Vagabonds move from place to place, night after night, relentlessly pursuing their prey. They are able to adapt to new environments and situations with ease, thriving in an ever-changing world that would horrify most other vampires. Wherever the hunt leads them, the Grigoroviches are prepared to go, no matter what the road ahead might hold in store for them.

The Vagabonds established their first estate in the British Isles and spent centuries terrorizing the Kindred there. These Betrayed became bogeymen to the undead, striking from the darkness and vanishing just as quickly. The Vagabonds' signature Disciplines made them perfect assassins and their habit of rarely staying in the same place twice made it nearly impossible for the enemy to find them, leading to their status as more myth than fact in that part of the world. However, eventually the verdant islands off the western coast of Europe proved too small for these footloose vampires. In the early 1800s, they abandoned their ancestral home for a new one in the United States, a place that was, until that time, untouched by the Betrayed. Turning their backs on Europe, the Grigoroviches established their primary haven near Philadelphia. Because of their purpose and unique predilection, the Vagabonds quickly spread across the continent in search of prey. Though small in number relative to their foes, tonight the Grigoroviches can be found, planning their next attack, nearly anywhere that the Kindred dwell. The Vagabonds change havens almost every night, relying upon their Disciplines to protect them from detection

and to aid them against the enemy. Despite their wandering nature, the progeny of Grigor are not prone to rural adventures; these Betrayed are urban predators who are most at home in the crowded cities, moving from abandoned crack house to boarded-up school building each morning in search of sanctuary.

The move from Europe to North America was the most significant event in the history of the house since its founding. The first of the Grigoroviches arrived on the shores of the United States in 1826 and the last of the house made the trip a century later, leaving the British Isles to the Alexander and the Kindred who plagued the cities. The immense size of their new domain breathed new unlife into the Vagabonds and exposed them to a variety of environments never experienced before. The continual influx of foreign immigrants into their hunting ground, the drastic technological and social changes and the impressive growth of urban centers as well as metropolitan sprawl has continued to whet the Vagabonds' appetites for change. Similarly, their prey is typically more varied than in Europe, making the hunt a challenge that beckons to the childer of Grigor like never before. With so much territory, it is also easy for them to find new lodging each night, a must given their bloodline's flaw.

Disciplines: Celerity, Obfuscate, Protean

Weakness: Grigorovich vampires cannot possess the Haven or City Status Merits, as they are seldom in one place long enough to do so. A Grigorovich vampire loses one point of Willpower every day he sleeps in a setting (e.g., room, campsite, abandoned car) that he has slept in within the last 101 days. This point of Willpower is spent upon rising in that place in much the same way that Vitae is spent upon rising each night.

Organization: The nature of the Grigoroviches makes it next to impossible for the house to establish and enforce a strict hierarchy. Titles, except the most commonly recognized ones, are rare, and, when they do exist, are

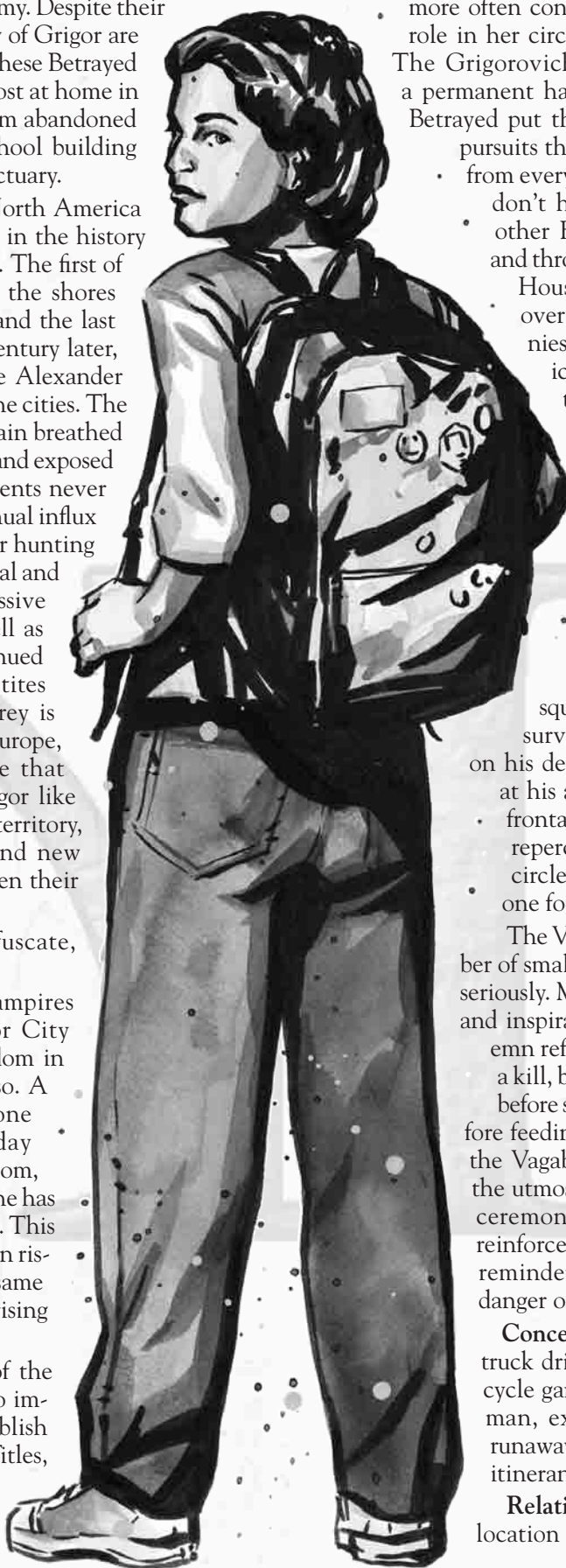
more often concerned with the Betrayed's role in her circle than her age or lineage. The Grigoroviches' inability to maintain a permanent haven also means that most Betrayed put their energies into practical pursuits that demand full cooperation from every member of the circle; they don't have the kind of idle time other Betrayed enjoy. Organizing and throwing lavish bacchanals like House Alexander or presiding over elaborate religious ceremonies common to the Semeonovics is out of the question for these pragmatists. With no assurance about where the Grigoroviches are going to spend their next day, survival comes first. Even the hunt takes a backseat to the necessity of securing suitable lodging.

The Master of the Hunt oversees this with an authority akin to an army squad leader. The success and survival of the circle depends on his decisions. Betrayed who balk at his authority, even if non-confrontationally, can expect serious repercussions from the rest of the circle, who are not about to let one fool bring down the group.

The Vagabonds do observe a number of small rituals that they take very seriously. Most of these are devotional and inspirational in nature: brief solemn reflections before undertaking a kill, before committing diablerie, before sleeping for the day, even before feeding. Like Native Americans, the Vagabonds take their hunt with the utmost seriousness and use these ceremonial traditions as a way to reinforce this and serve as a constant reminder of the full meaning and danger of their undertaking.

Concepts: Hitchhiker, long-haul truck driver, urban samurai, motorcycle gang member, traveling salesman, ex-convict, grifter, teenage runaway, spy, undercover vice cop, itinerant laborer

Relations: In part because their location is far from the Old World



home of most Betrayed and in part because they are more focused on the hunt and their own survival than on other, less demanding matters, the Grigoroviches don't usually prejudge the other houses. Individuals, however, are quite another matter. A Betrayed who is unable to put aside what the Vagabonds see as lesser concerns in order to first deal with the necessities, as it were, is viewed as largely worthless. Whether a Semeonovic preoccupied with prayer, an Irinavici consumed by political ambition or an Alexander concerned with his next source of pleasure, their inability to focus on what the Grigoroviches see as important makes those Betrayed next to worthless in the Vagabonds' eyes. Betrayed who can adopt the same priorities, on the other hand, are treated respectfully and given every opportunity to prove their trustworthiness. Others who can contribute something that improves the unives of the Grigoroviches are especially valued. A Marisovich whose occult knowledge provides the Vagabonds with an edge against their enemies or a Petrovovich whose connections make it easy to find a new haven on short notice would gain the acceptance of any Grigorovich circle.

The Vagabonds are hunters in the truest sense of the word, but they are not fools. Should an opportunity

to improve their situation arise that demands some intercourse with the Kindred, the Vagabonds may be persuaded to accept the risk in order to reap the potential benefit. Such situations are almost always very short-lived, however. Agreeing to turn their backs on a Nosferatu's feeding one night in exchange for information about where a coterie of neonates is gathered that same evening might be prudent, but that's not going to stop the circle of hunters from putting the Haunt on the top of their hit list once the neonates are disposed of. Some circles even pose as Kindred for a few nights, accepting the dangers in the hope that by adopting the façade the Vagabonds can swiftly gather enough intelligence about their foes to improve their overall mission before they can be identified as intruders. The house's relationship with mortals is of a similar vein. If negotiation and involvement will aid them in the short term, most Vagabonds are willing to take the reasonably small risks involved. Because of the habit of constantly being on the move, however, few long-term relationships are made. Only those trusted mortals who are made members of the house travel along with the bloodline in their search for Kindred.

*Quote: Like cockroaches, the monsters we hunt
can be found everywhere, hidden in the cracks,
coming out at night to feed.*

*As with any good exterminator, we will go anywhere
and crawl into the smallest spaces in order to find
and destroy these foul vermin.*

House Irinavici

Not every one of the Betrayed approaches her duty to destroy Kindred from the perspective of a hunter. The members of House Irinavici prefer to battle their enemy using many of the same tools the Kindred use, believing that by fighting fire with fire they will be far more successful and more easily hide their presence at the same time. The so-called Machiavellis immerse themselves in mortal society and do their utmost to gain influence over urban institutions and organizations that will fill their coffers and provide them the means to tighten the noose around the Kindred. Like puppet masters, these Machiavellis pursue their foes from darkened boardrooms, using mortals and even other Kindred to do their dirty work. Only when push comes to shove will they throw themselves into the fray. House Irinavici is skilled at inserting itself into Kindred society and posing as the foe even as it works to bring the Betrayers down. House Irinavici can dance the Danse Macabre with the most skilled Ventrue, manipulate like the most devious Daeva and strike fear into their enemy with the same degree of success as the Nosferatu. This house's only downfall is an obsession with control and influence that can overpower even the most prudent Irinavici.

Nickname: Machiavellis

Appearance: Most Irinavici are of Southern European extraction, natives of the lands the house claims as its own. They are usually well-to-do types, with strong personalities, keen intellects and a talent for sizing up people and using that knowledge to twist people to their will. Large homes, expensive un-lifestyles and numerous mortal contacts and associates typify the members of this house. Still, many are not so materially endowed, and some even eschew such ostentation as an obstacle to their favored *modus operandus*. Canny gypsies, conniving beauties and deviant hermits all belong to the Irinavici, defying tradition, yet offering their house advantages that its more stereotypical members cannot.

Haven: For more than four centuries, the Machiavellis have called their Tuscan estate their home. For the last sixty-plus years, the founder of the house, Irina, has maintained her status as one of the Silent Ones, resting beneath the palatial property under close guard along with the rest of her progeny who sleep the same fitful sleep. This ancestral estate is protected not only by those within its vast grounds but by the entire town, which both fears and all-but-worships the Betrayed who come and go in their black cars at the oddest hours. Nothing,

it is said, can happen within 20 miles of the haven that is not known by its residents — and no one who is not welcome will ever make it as far as the gate, let alone inside the house proper. Individual Irinavici and their circles choose havens that best let them fit into their environment without arousing undue interest. Given their close relationships with mortals, the Irinavici also prefer havens where they can entertain at least a few guests regularly.

Background: Irina was the youngest member of the ruling Kassovich family and the only female to ever be invited to join the King's Privy Council. Her impressive political acumen, along with her innate talent to put that knowledge to work, earned her enough respect that on her 16th birthday she was offered the blood of the Betrayer. After she and her fellow Betrayed left Russia, she learned the hard way of the dangers of the hunt. Nearly destroyed after a terrible misstep in the Rhineland, she decided that she was better suited to playing the Kindred against one another than confronting them directly. So good did she and her childer become at this very dangerous game, that by the 18th century more than two dozen Machiavellis were leading dual unives and holding high stations among the Kindred. Even more importantly, the degree of information gleaned from these spies gave the house the tools it needed to plan a long-term strategy for destroying their foes. Emulating the methods and madness of the Danse Macabre, the Irinavici undertook a careful campaign to gain financial, political and personal influence over the same mortal institutions that the Kindred sought to control. This plan allowed these Betrayed to discover their enemies by watching the normally invisible hand of the Kindred over the kine and following its moves. It also enabled these Betrayed to manipulate these institutions in ways that could directly hurt the Kindred where it counted most: their assets. The Irinavici could neutralize Kindred retainers, destroy Kindred wealth, bring Kindred activities to the attention of the authorities and otherwise cause the Kindred incalculable grief. Distracted by these attacks upon their assets and exposed for what they were, the Kindred would never see the real attack coming, the one that would end their Requiem on a final, mournful note.

House Irinavici holds domain over Southern and Central Europe, specifically Italy, where as many as half its members reside. The influence of the House Irinavici, however, extends far beyond its physical hunting ground.

Numerous corporate, financial and political interests held by the Machiavellis are global in nature and provide the house opportunities to keep an eye on fellow Betrayed and involve the Machiavellis in the Betrayed's affairs. This, compounded by the Irinavici's unique weakness, has earned them an enmity that sours their relationships with others of their kind. On the other hand, the information the Machiavellis collect has enabled them to gain even greater control over the institutions they wish to manipulate. Even more, it has exposed Kindred in places they never imagined, news the Machiavellis can and do "sell" to other Betrayed in exchange for some benefit. This distant reach also provides the house with the motivation and justification for traveling beyond their traditional domain, and their typical wealth usually enables them to do so with a good degree of safety. It is not uncommon for Betrayed in the United States, Western Europe and even the Middle East to work with the Irinavici, even if only until the Machiavelli's reason for traveling is accomplished.

It would be false to assume that these Betrayed are cowards who are afraid of a fight. Although they prefer to squeeze the Kindred into a corner using indirect and usually anonymous methods — or making the Machiavellis' tactics appear to be the work of another Kindred — there is always a time when no more squeezing will accomplish anything and the target must be eliminated. Many Irinavici use mortal hunters, often members of their house, to take care of this matter, but many more prefer to be on hand for the final deed, even if it places them in great danger. Diablerie as well as the simple, irrefutable rush of drinking their enemies dry is strong enough motivation for most Machiavellis to put aside any lingering worries and take a direct role in the slaying of their prey.

Disciplines: Auspex, Majesty, Nightmare

Weakness: The progeny of Irina are uncontrollably driven to manipulate and exploit others at all times. An Irinavici must gain some measurable benefit or achieve some small victory in every scene or lose a point of Willpower. A "benefit" need not be selfish — a benefit to the whole

coterie, or even a single close ally, is a benefit to the Irinavici. Benefits include the promise of future favors, a service, material gain or a scrap of valuable information. For game purposes, the Storyteller must work with the player to decide if a benefit is sufficient to satisfy the character.

What's more, if an Irinavici ever spends a point of Willpower to augment a dice pool and then fails to roll any successes, the character cannot spend Willpower for the rest of the scene. If a Willpower-enhanced action fails, but the character's roll still produced at least one success, Willpower may be spent as normal.

Organization: The Machiavellis are obsessed with titles, privilege and station — but only because it helps them create an environment more easily prone to manipulation and exploitation. Many of the Irinavici are granted responsibilities and/or special authority in exchange for favors; others gain such boons due to blackmail and extortion of fellow house members. The idea is, if you can get away with it, all the more power to you. The most important title most aspire to is that of "Graf." These Betrayed are usually over 100 years old, have destroyed enough Kindred to draw attention and have mastered the unique Danse Macabre their house plays. Regardless how they attained the title of Graf, those who do are equivalent to elders in Kindred society. However, even these dignitaries are not safe from the diabolical machinations of their less-august Betrayed and more than a few have been brought low on account of a more scheming Machiavelli.

This house is the least prone to operate in the traditional hunting circles prominent among most Betrayed. Lone Irinavici are commonplace, and, when circles do exist, they tend to be more like corporate cabals than hunting parties. Circles primarily share information and work together to bring down some Kindred asset or expose their enemies to situations that will force them to let down their guard. The title "Master of the Hunt" is rarely used among these crafty vampires. Instead, the eldest takes charge, or else one of the Grafes, if there is one in the group. Decisions are collaborative,



with the leader largely serving to settle disputes and keep order. Some younger Irinavici will form actual hunting circles no different from those of other houses, but few last long once they realize that they have far better ways to further their overall goal.

Concepts: Milanese fashion designer, gypsy scam artist, political advisor, consigliere for the Sicilian mafia, jet-set computer hacker, heir to a wine fortune, young entrepreneur, art collector, high-class escort, Vatican insider

Relations: This house is viewed with more than a little suspicion by the others, mostly because it is seen as doing little to advance the cause of all Betrayed, namely destroying Kindred. If the house's close contact with the enemy were known (even if that contact is aimed at ultimately aiding the Betrayed), it is likely that open accusations of consorting with the spawn of the Betrayer (i.e., treason) would begin to aimed at these members. The fact that the Irinavici are so good at hiding their true intentions and the actual details of their stratagem has protected them from such difficulties so far. To help turn attention away from their secretive activities, they have no qualms about bad-mouthing other houses — thought it's always done with care, however. House Alexander is a frequent target of this tactic — an easy mark given its already soured reputation with many Betrayed. The only house with which the Irinavici have openly had bad relations is House Petrovnavich. The Machiavellis resent the Petrovnaviches' claims of noble superiority and see the Anastasias as little more than xenophobic pretenders who make their claims in the failed hope that the rest of the Betrayed will see them as having some worth. That doesn't stop the Irinavici from having regular relations with that house, however. On the contrary, the Irinavici have more dealings with them than any other Betrayed; they find the anachronistic Anastasias useful tools to be used to further their own house's ambitions.

Kindred are the enemy to be sure, but simply banging down the doors to their havens or mugging them on the streets is no way to win a long-term war against overwhelming numbers. The Machiavellis respect the tremendous temporal power the Betrayer's kind have garnered and believe that dependence on that power has become the real weakness of the Kindred. Therefore, in order to defeat them, their ways must be learned and the very things they depend on most must be turned into a trap that can be used against them whenever it is most beneficial to do so. This leads a number of Irinavici to wade into Kindred society, playing the role of just another ladder-climbing vampire seeking to compete with the masters of the Danse Macabre. The Irinavici learn the game from the inside, earning what confidence they can and making whatever deals they must, always maintaining the upper hand, of course. The relationships they forge are valuable as they can pay untold dividends for centuries; so the Machiavellis often wait a long time to strike at those Kindred they know, only doing so after the Irinavici have used them in every conceivable way. Naturally, should the Machiavellis' cover be blown, they either retreat quickly and hope to ride out whatever storm comes or they move fast to strike down the Kindred who know of the Irinavici's existence.

It has already been said how useful mortals are to this house. As the Kindred do, the Machiavellis use the kine for nearly anything, from personal protection to errand boys and everything in-between. Rarely, some Machiavellis even have mortal companions, though the weakness of the Irinavici usually destroys any burgeoning trust that might grow between the two. In the end, everyone is a merely another resource to be exploited by this house, whether for blood or something far more substantial.

*Quote: Ah, I see you have considered my offer. Good.
I believe you will find that the terms will benefit you
tremendously. Should you feel I have been less than generous,
I hope you will not forget your niece. She is so innocent
and could have a very bright future ahead of her.
It would be a pity for that promise to be cut short too soon.*

House Marisovich

Of all the houses, the Betrayed of House Marisovich are the least like the others. Early on, this house departed Europe and set their sights on North Africa. They realized that their task of cleansing the earth of the Kindred was a futile one if they meant to pursue it by simply hunting down each and every vampire on the planet. Their founder held the belief that there was a better way to accomplish their mission and restore the Otetsar to his rightful throne. Marisov, a student of philosophy and a devoted occultist, was convinced that if he could locate the source of vampirism — whether a single, original vampire or some object or ritual that produced the first vampires — he would be able to destroy that thing or otherwise use it to end the long-standing Curse that was necessary for continued unlife. With one blow, all vampires would be destroyed. Of course, that would mean his own extermination and possibly that of the Eldest of the Betrayed. To avoid that fate, Marisov felt he must master the esoteric arts in order to fashion some protection that would guard his line from destruction. His investigations led him to the conclusion that what he sought lay in Carthage, and so his house made that their home. Although centuries have passed and their grail has not yet been found, the Marisovich continue to hold out hope that their Knyaz is still correct. They scour the region and beyond for clues that will gain them this prize, even as they strike down those Kindred they encounter while on their treasure hunt.

Nickname: Antiquarians

Appearance: The house tends to Embrace individuals who have specialized knowledge in the occult or another related field of significant value, like Ancient History — the better to advance their work. Most Marisovich are of North African extraction, but a sizable number are not and may hail from any part of the world. Ostentation is not a hallmark of the Marisovich, though some members do prefer overly comfortable surroundings, particularly if they enjoyed that environment in life. Males usually outnumber females by a wide margin, but, with the youngest generation, that ratio is notably changing.

Haven: The Marisovich established their central haven near the ruins of Carthage in modern-day Libya less than two centuries after departing Russia and have safeguarded that place ever since. It not only serves as a resting place for the Silent Ones and a formal setting for dealing with house matters, but it is also an invaluable place of learning and a storehouse of many of the

occult artifacts gathered by the Marisovich over the centuries. Its library is a marvel that would cause most mortal researchers to sob with ecstasy were they to learn of its existence, and the relics and items of power secured in its depths are beyond priceless. What's more, the collection of writings specifically dealing with the Kindred and their origins is not only impressive in its volume of information about the enemy, but would send shockwaves through Kindred society if they were to pore over some of the secrets the Antiquarians possess. Personal Marisovich havens are usually located near academic institutions in order to allow the Betrayed easy access to its resources, including those professors with an interest in the occult.

Background: The Antiquarians seek mortals who have not only been betrayed but who have some affinity for the supernatural. Mediums, psychics and others who have more than a suspicion about the existence of “another world beyond the visible” are most prized; some even retain their gifts after the Embrace, making these Orphans especially valuable members of House Marisovich. More commonly, Orphans are simply individuals whose personal interest in the supernatural has led them to acquire a vast amount of knowledge of such things. Offered the chance to learn the truth — or at least some bit of it — via the Embrace, most Orphans jump at the chance. Armed with their Disciplines and their natural drive, few secrets remain out of their hands for long once they join the Betrayed.

The quest to identify and locate the theoretical “First Vampire” or whatever agency was responsible for the creation of vampires in the first place is one that most every Antiquarian pursues to some degree. When not actively engaged in that quest, the Antiquarians fill up their time acquiring other occult secrets. Some Antiquarians may focus on Christian relics, others on Egyptian sorcery, and others on Sumerian necromancy. Many Antiquarians are devoted to more than one field of study in the hopes that by looking at the larger picture of occultism they will uncover truths that more narrow research will miss. A few Antiquarians have committed themselves to wresting from the Kindred the secrets of Theban Sorcery and Crúac — but so far to little avail. Too much prying will surely bring too much undesired attention.

The most dangerous activity of the Marisovich does not involve destroying Kindred or seeking to steal their mystical secrets. These Betrayed are very aware of the

ley lines that weave this way and that across the globe. The Antiquarians know of the power in these lines and are very interested in those places where they cross, what the Ordo Dracul calls Wyrms' Nests. Of course, such sites are frequently already claimed to some degree by Kindred, ghosts, werewolves or, worse, other creatures also drawn to the supernatural power that wells up, ripe for the taking. The Marisovich realize that any attempt to hold such a place is doomed to failure when others come to seize the asset, but they do believe that even brief access can provide them raw power and possibly knowledge that may advance their cause by sudden leaps. To this end, the Marisovich pay close attention to Wyrms' Nests whenever they can, noting activity and learning all they can about the history of the place and those who visit. Luckily, the Antiquarians' Disciplines provide them with the tools they need to more easily locate these places as well as hide from notice. One night, the Marisovich hope that the streams of mystic energy flowing through a Wyrms' Nest might contain some echo of the First Vampire, some hint that can be traced to his resting place.

The Marisovich may be concentrated in Libya, but their number can be found scattered throughout Africa and the Middle East in search of lost secrets. Because many Antiquarians travel alone, actively seeking out and destroying Kindred is rarely on the top of their list of things to do. Most Antiquarians are prepared for dealing with those vile spawn of the Betrayer who get in their way or discover their presence, but these Betrayed prefer to avoid detection when they can. Even one missing Kindred in a city can raise the level of alertness of all Kindred and make the Antiquarian's business that much more difficult. There are numerous circles of Marisovich, and these bands of relic hunters are usually experienced in dealing with Kindred and more likely to eliminate any threat than just slip into the shadows, especially if the Kindred pose an obstacle to the investigations. For the most part, however, such Marisovich groups spend

more time studying together and sharing their diverse fields of knowledge with one another than slaying slaving vampires.

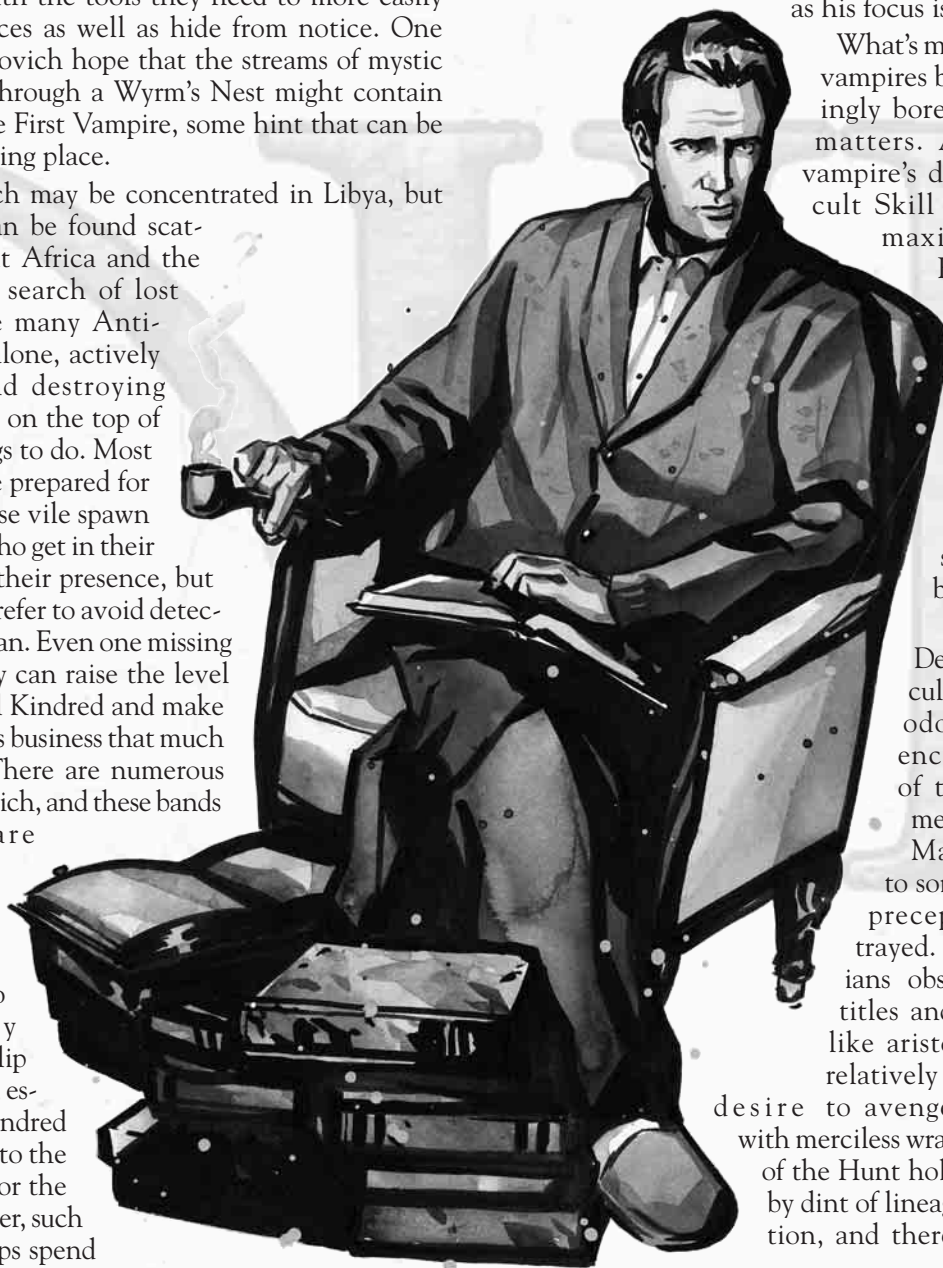
Disciplines: Auspex, Dominate, Obfuscate

Weakness: Preoccupied with the occult, the Marisovich Betrayed are unable to concentrate on other matters when in the presence of mystical artifacts, historical records and antiquities. A Marisovich must spend a point of Willpower to avoid investigating such objects, locations and creatures during the scene. All manner of occult and mystic phenomena, from Disciplines to a mage's spell, fascinate a Marisovich. Unless the Marisovich spends the point of Willpower to resist the phenomena, he suffers a -2 penalty to all actions not directly related to the investigation of the phenomena (including actions to escape or combat it) as his focus is diffused.

What's more, Marisovich vampires become increasingly bored by mundane matters. A Marisovich vampire's dots in the Occult Skill "blot out" his maximum possible Humanity rating. That is, for each dot of Occult a Marisovich character has, his maximum possible Humanity score decreases by one.

Organization:

Despite their many cultural and methodological differences with others of their kind, the members of House Marisovich cling to some of the oldest precepts of the Betrayed. The Antiquarians observe traditional titles and roles, behave like aristocrats (even if relatively eccentric) and desire to avenge the Betrayal with merciless wrath. The Masters of the Hunt hold their position by dint of lineage, not nomination, and there is little room



for political advancement for most Antiquarians. They do not organize in the sense of a secret society, however; what rituals they do observe are largely esoteric and directly related to their individual studies. Large, overblown ceremonies for the sole sake of tradition are uncommon. The Marisovich know where they stand in their house, they heed the word of those who hold authority and they put the rest of their attentions to their pursuit of mystical lore.

Concepts: Archeologist, weird occult scholar, writer of strange fiction, mystical hermit, college professor, dignified eccentric, psychic haunted by nightmarish visions, unscrupulous charlatan, professional thief

Relations: Like the Grigoroviches, the Marisovich have less regular contact with other Betrayed than those based in Europe. In fact, the Antiquarians probably have less to do with their kin than any house, concerned as they are with matters that are beyond the purview of their relatives. The Marisovich have made no real enemies but are viewed with especial suspicion by the Semeonovics, who see the Antiquarians' quest for occult knowledge as not only misplaced but borderline heretical. The Antiquarians point to the involvement of Baba Yaga in their own past and other anecdotal evidence that suggest that the last Kassovich king relied on so-called sorcery to both gain and hold his throne in defense of the Betrayed's interests, but these arguments win no favor with the dogmatic Priests. To support some of the Antiquarians' explorations, the house offers hard-to-get information about the occult to other Betrayed who desire it; of course, rationing it carefully and only revealing what the Marisovich Knyaz permits. Members will even join another house's circle for a time in order to aid them in

their hunt if it promises them the opportunity to further their own knowledge of mystic secrets.

Because these Betrayed believe that they can accomplish their goal of destroying all vampires via what amounts to a shortcut, the Antiquarians spend relatively little time battling the enemy in the more traditional, direct fashion. This makes them less of an obvious threat to the Kindred of the region and gives the Antiquarians the opportunity to infiltrate the society of the undead for short stints, should they feel it might provide them useful clues as to the location of some piece of occult lore or expose to them the secrets of blood magic. However, the Marisovich will never reveal their own identities, and, if they detect that their disguises have been compromised, they will fade into the night without hesitation. If directly confronted, the Marisovich will first attempt to extract themselves safely; otherwise, they will strike with all the force they can muster, taking advantage of any occult items or secrets they possess to provide them even the smallest edge.

The Marisovich do utilize mortals to a degree, but prefer to do so only for the most essential purposes. By and large, the Antiquarians' only other regular interaction is with mortals who possess information that is useful to their treasure hunt. Antiquarians pose as fellow occultists and will cultivate these relationships in order to have dependable sources of news they can tap into whenever they wish. Most Antiquarians take care to first observe their potential contact for a time to determine whether a Kindred has already "claimed" the individual. Accidentally bumping into a Mekhet ancilla while seeking to procure the same tome from a rare bookseller is not something a Marisovich would welcome.

*Quote: Thjs js just one pjece of the puzzle,
but when jt js complete you will wonder
how our kjnd ever survived wjthout jt.
It will be as jf we've been dwelling in the dark.
Thjs will be our sun and salvation.*

Systems and Powers

The Betrayed are vampires, true, yet they are quite unlike their Kindred cousins, no matter how similar they may at times appear. The Betrayed require blood to survive, they must sleep during daylight hours and can be destroyed by the merest touch of the sun's rays, and most importantly, they are neither truly alive nor dead, but rather unliving creatures that seem to defy the natural order. Compared to mortals, they are extremely difficult to injure, let alone destroy, and they have access to an array of supernatural Disciplines that allow them to perform feats simply not possible according to the tenets of science.

Even so, the Betrayed are fundamentally different from those they seek to destroy. If the Betrayed's stories are true, they were created by a ghoul committing diablerie upon a torpid Kindred elder — something impossible according to traditional Kindred reckoning. Perhaps as a result of this unorthodox creation, the Betrayed do not feel the Predator's Taint, nor do they alert Kindred to their presence via the same mechanism.

On the other hand, with small effort they can recognize other vampires with ease, seeing them as the monsters they truly are through the Eyes of Wrath. In addition, should any Betrayed be forced to divulge secrets against her will, the Kassovich blood that courses through her fortifies hers against the coercion, ensuring that she does not become like the enemy: a betrayer. The flip side of this is that should she voluntarily choose to betray her kind, she will be visited with excruciating agony and other horrors that should dissuade her from her treasonous course of action. The Betrayed may be vampires, but they are most certainly not Kindred.

Character Creation

A Betrayed character uses the basic character-creation process from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** and **Vampire: The Requiem** modified in the following ways.

Add Betrayed Template

The Betrayed do not have clans or covenants like Kindred characters. Instead, they have bloodlines and houses, which in many ways are synonymous but are technically distinct. In addition, the Betrayed have different rules for Favored Attributes, Disciplines and Blood Potency that set them far apart from Kindred. The most remarkable differences, however, are those mystical qualities that stem from the unique damnation of the Betrayed: their specters of vengeance, the Eyes of Wrath and the Burning.

Bloodline

Every Betrayed who receives the Embrace (after a period as a mortal Orphan) becomes a member of her sire's bloodline or "family." The seven bloodlines can each trace their origin back to one of the Seven ghoul-childer

of the last Kassovich king who were Embraced shortly after his own miraculous transformation via diablerie. The unusual circumstances of their Embrace seemed to stamp their Vitae with each of their personalities in a way that has forever marked them and all they have created. In essence, each Betrayed character belongs to a single bloodline — only the Otetsar, if he still exists, can claim no such affiliation. Betrayed characters cannot choose a bloodline after the Embrace nor can they switch bloodlines later; from the moment of their Embrace, they are forever a member of their bloodline.

A character's Weakness, Favored Attribute and Disciplines, as well as social tendencies and customs, are determined by the chosen bloodline. Unlike Kindred bloodlines, the Betrayed do not gain an additional Discipline and weakness for becoming a part of these bloodlines.

Because each bloodline tends to operate in its own geographic region, a hunting circle made up of different bloodlines may require the approval of the Storyteller and have a good reason for being together. See the "Storytelling" section in this chapter for some help with making a heterogeneous circle fit into a chronicle.

These are the Betrayed bloodlines:

Petrovnavich: Aristocrats of the first order, Petrovna's lineage is as obsessed with its own self-importance as it is with destroying the enemy.

Semeonovic: The progeny of Semeon believe they are God's chosen and that it is their religious duty to cleanse the earth of vampires.

Alexander: The most degenerate of the bloodlines, the descendants of Alexander often forget their true prey and simply enjoy the hunt for its own sake.

Grigorovich: Pragmatists who are able to adapt to any circumstances, Grigor's heirs will go to any length to bring down another of their foes.

Irinavici: Political masterminds, the line of Irina excels at intrigues and complex conspiracies that put the Danse Macabre to shame.

Marisovich: Occultists and scholars, Marisov's progeny scour the world's ancient places for secrets and relics as well as the Betrayer's offspring.

If your Storyteller allows it, your character may instead belong to the "lost" bloodline, the Dubrov. It is up to the Storyteller to decide the precise nature and rules for that bloodline if used.

House

Most Betrayed use the terms "bloodline" and "house" interchangeably. In fact, there is an important difference between the two. A house is one's extended family, of sorts, but the bloodline is the real "blood" family. Mortals as well as those Embraced can belong to a house, and, on rare occasion, a member of one bloodline can be invited to join — usually on a temporary basis — the traditional house of another bloodline.

Of course, each house is named for the bloodline that founded it, and so there are as many houses as there are bloodlines in your game (six or seven, depending on the availability of the Dubrov). Like some covenants, houses offer their members special costs on Merits that can only be lost if the character is cast out of the house. Each house also has its own estate, its own tradition, and its own attitude toward other Betrayed. As with bloodlines, each Betrayed character begins the game as a member of his bloodline's house and remains so unless circumstances arise to change the situation.

These are the Merit benefits available to each house:

Petrovnavich: These Betrayed may purchase the Inspiring Merit as if it were only two dots and the Herd and Retainers Merits at half the usual experience-point costs (rounding up). A Petrovnavich needs only a Presence of 3 or greater to purchase the Inspiring Merit. The cost breaks on Herd on Retainers do not apply during character creation.

Semeonovic: These Betrayed may purchase the Allies, Herd and Retainers Merits at half the usual experience-point costs (rounding up). This cost break does not apply during character creation.

Alexander: These Betrayed may purchase the Danger Sense and Iron Stamina Merits at half the usual experience-point costs (rounding up). This cost break does not apply during character creation.

Grigorovich: These Betrayed may purchase the Danger Sense, Encyclopedic Knowledge and Holistic Awareness Merits as if they were each one dot cheaper. This cost break does not apply during character creation.

Irinavici: These Betrayed may purchase the Allies, Contacts and Resources Merits at half the usual experience-point costs (rounding up). This cost break does not apply during character creation.

Marisovich: These Betrayed may purchase the Contacts, Danger Sense, Language and Mentor Merits at half the usual experience-point costs (rounding up). This cost break does not apply during character creation.

Favored Attributes

As with the Kindred, Betrayed characters experience a tremendous physical, mental and even spiritual rush when Embraced. This is so profound as to literally transform certain aspects of the formerly mortal character, augmenting them in a fashion dictated to some degree by the pedigree of the Vitae that changed them. Choose one Attribute from the pair listed below for the character's bloodline and add one dot to it on your character sheet.

Bloodline	Favored Attributes (choose one)
Petrovnavich	Intelligence or Wits
Semeonovic	Presence or Resolve
Alexander	Manipulation or Stamina
Grigorovich	Composure or Wits

Irinavici	Intelligence or Manipulation
Marisovich	Composure or Resolve

Disciplines

The Betrayed are able to use the same Disciplines as other vampires and acquire them in the same way. Each character begins the game with three dots of Disciplines, which can be allocated as the player chooses. At least two of these dots must be devoted to the character's bloodline's Disciplines. The third dot may be spent on any non-covenant-based Discipline available to Kindred during character creation.

Humanity

Upon their Embrace, every Betrayed is overwhelmed by a sense of painful betrayal and a wrathful sense of vengeance that blots out her former mortal emotions. The strength of these urges subsides quickly, but they are always with the Betrayed, forever coloring her thoughts and feelings. For this reason, the Betrayed begin play with just six dots in Humanity. Players may trade in one dot of Humanity in exchange for five experience points, dropping their characters' Humanity scores to the minimum of five.

Traits

Unless described below, the Betrayed use the same traits as other vampires as detailed in **Vampire: The Requiem**. Some of the traits listed below are simply modifications to traits that already exist, while others are unique to the Betrayed.

Blood Potency

The potency of a Betrayed's Vitae determines the Attribute, Skill and Discipline maximums; maximum Vitae and Vitae that can be spent per turn; and the types of vessels that can provide nourishment per the "Effects of Blood Potency" table on p. 99 of **Vampire: The Requiem**.

All newly Embraced Betrayed start with two dots of Blood Potency, regardless of their sire's potency. One additional dot of Blood Potency can be purchased during character creation as a Merit (at three Merit-equivalent points per dot). Any purchase of additional Blood Potency at character creation must be justified before play begins. This may be easier for the Betrayed than for other characters as explained below.

Similar to the Kindred, the Betrayed have constraints placed by Blood Potency when feeding, as only blood of potency a certain degree lower than a character's can provide any meaningful sustenance. Also similar to the Kindred, as a Betrayed's Blood Potency increases so does the likelihood that the vampire falls into torpor, during which time the blood thins as the Betrayed is visited by feverish visions that seethe with raw emotion and distort memories and thought.

House Status

House Status represents a Betrayed's standing among her house members; there is no separate distinction between house and bloodline in terms of Status. An increase in Status is rewarded for two reasons: age and service to one's house. In this case, service is often a measure of the Betrayed's success on the hunt for Kindred. Standing among the Betrayed is a formal matter, and any change in Status is accompanied by ceremony whenever possible. Even Betrayed far from their estate hunting prey will celebrate the promotion, with the Master of the Hunt deciding the most proper way to do so. On those rare occasions when a Betrayed loses Status, the humiliation is made just as public to ensure that all Betrayed understand the seriousness of failing their house.

- A Betrayed who has been Embraced. All characters start with one dot in Status unless they begin the game as Orphans who have not yet been Embraced.
- "Accomplished individual," usually by dint of slaying numerous Kindred (typically in a multiple of seven).
- The Master of the Hunt or the individual who has racked up the most kills of anyone in her hunting circle.
- Golos or elder Betrayed, one who has survived for more than a century or done serious damage to Kindred society.
- Knyaz or Knyazhna, the eldest of the house.

A character's dots in Status acts as a bonus to dice pools for social interactions between Betrayed. In general, interactions with members of other houses are treated the same as interactions between members of the same house. However, it is not uncommon for two houses to treat each other as less worthy of respect; in these cases, Status should be considered one less than normal for purposes of dice pools.

Specters

The blood of the Betrayed is haunted by the ghosts of wives, sisters, mothers and daughters slain by the Betrayer, trapped within the Curse of the Betrayed until the Sabbath, when they will be avenged for all time. Some Betrayed consider the mystic properties of the "seven specters" to be nothing more than aspects of the Burning (described below), but even they pay honor to their lost kin by referring to these aspects as "the specters."

The specters are not ghosts in the traditional sense. They have no free will, no bodies, no Essence and barely any aspect of personality. They are little more than desperate impulses and insight echoing within the empty spaces inside every Betrayed. In the mythology of the Kassov families, the specters dwell within the blood, in

the spaces between Betrayed, and are capable of being everywhere at once. Yet each Betrayed is considered to be haunted by only one specter at a time.

Migration of Specters

Upon the Embrace, a Betrayed character is immediately inhabited by one of the specters. This mystic force resides within the vampire's undead blood until the vampire is destroyed or until he eliminates seven Kindred and symbolically avenges the murder of his spiritual ancestors. Every seventh Kindred destroyed at his hands allows a Betrayed to welcome a different specter into his blood, if he so chooses.

Betrayed of Blood Potency 1-5 are haunted by one specter at a time. With a Blood Potency of 5 or more, the Betrayed's blood can be influenced by as many as two specters. No matter how many specters a Betrayed is capable of communing with, specters can only be gained or changed when the character has destroyed another seven Kindred.

Example: *The Grigorovich drifter named Alec has been listening to Varvara whisper in his blood for decades but now, with a fledgling Kindred fluttering Vitae turning to ash in his mouth and others coming to his "rescue" any minute, he decides he must beg his first love, Xenia, for help. As the Kindred beneath his knees collapses into layers of dry and flaking flesh, he feels Varvara slip away, too. Xenia — young, quiet, meek — slips into him with the shreds of his victim's soul. "Xenia, Xenia," Alec says to himself. "If they find us here, this'll be the end of me." Xenia, of course, says nothing, but Alec thinks he can feel her hands on him, on his prickling skin. All at once, he turns the color of asphalt and vanishes from sight.*

Powers of Specters

Each specter is the shadow of a mortal from the time of the Otetsar. Each grants a character it haunts a supernatural benefit emanating from beyond the physical world and a spiritual affliction born of deathless grief. These effects are as much a part of the character as any Merit or derangement for as long as the specter resides in his Vitae.

The derangements imposed by a specter are not tied to the character's Humanity, and so cannot be treated or "bought off" with experience points. A Betrayed who gains a derangement of his own may find his mind influenced by the presence of his haunting specter, however. Thus a Betrayed may find a derangement belonging to his specter becoming exacerbated in his own mind by the moral echoes of his own actions in her name.

The Seven Specters

None of the seven women slain by the Betrayer and his followers had supernatural powers. Most of them were healthy, ordinary people. But in the anguish of betrayal they have been twisted and exaggerated, until only the

brightest light and deepest shadow of their being can be felt by those in the material world. Each of them has been twisted by grief and cursed, in a way, by the Betrayers.

Sofia

She was smarter than most of the men in court, smarter than her father and her brothers to be sure. She was also superstitious and traditional, however, and few folk in the Kassov lands could really understand what went on in her head.

Benefit: The Betrayed gains all the effects of the Magnetic Disruption Numen (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 211), based on his Intelligence in place of Power. This benefit can be activated with 1 Vitae.

Derangement: Power Fetish Obsession (**Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 191)

Varvara

She was a woman of the farm country, unapologetic and hardy. Her beauty was in her guile, her sharp tongue and her strength of will. She was also stubborn as rocks and unwilling to compromise for any man or woman.

Benefit: The Betrayed gains all the benefits of the Iron Stamina Merit at its maximum rating.

Derangement: Megalomania (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 97)

Rada

She would have been a soldier, if the King had allowed it. She was quick and energetic, and her excitement often got her into trouble.

Benefit: The *higher* of the Betrayed's Wits or Dexterity is used to determine Defense and he gains a +2 bonus to Initiative.

Derangement: Bulimia (**Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 188)

Klementina

Her children were lost in a winter storm, and she was never the same. She was terrified of losing her husband and the rest of her family after that, but it was they who lost her.

Benefit: The character can heal other Betrayed by smearing his blood on their wounds, without the risks of Vitae addiction or the Vinculum. The Betrayed can spend one more Vitae than his Blood Potency would normally allow, but this extra Vitae can only be used for healing himself or others.

Derangement: Anxiety (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 98)

Anfisa

She was the Otetsar's niece, a savvy and compassionate woman that he believed would one day be a diplomat for the kingdom. She understood how people fought and made peace, but was slow to pass judgment herself.

Benefit: The Betrayed may attempt a Wits + Composure roll as an instant action to "get a read on"

another character. This roll is reflexively contested by the subject's Resolve + Composure. With a success, he can identify the subject's derangements. For each derangement identified for a subject, the Betrayed gains a +2 bonus on Social rolls made against the subject.

Derangement: Vocalization (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 98)

Xenia

She was the younger sister of a Marisov ancestor, a quiet and simple woman who sang sad songs and pined for romance. But none of the men at court ever took notice of her. She was sweet, but forgettable, poor Xenia.

Benefit: By spending one Vitae, the Betrayed becomes partially intangible and virtually impossible to see or hear. Attempts to see, hear or track him suffer a dice pool penalty of -5 as long as he remains still. Objects, but not creatures, of Size 1 and smaller pass through him as long as he remains motionless and unnoticed.

Derangement: Melancholia (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 97)

Liliya

Some say she was in the Great Hall when Timofey made his deal with the Betrayer. She was always putting her nose where it didn't belong, and though she was a gossip and a meddler, she was also a keen observer and honest advisor.

Benefits: The Betrayed gains Liliya's eyes and ears on his side. The 9-again rule applies to all the character's Wits-based dice pools.

Derangement: Obsessive-Compulsive (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 98)

Legacy of the Betrayed

The various "Properties of the Blood" presented on p. 156–181 of **Vampire: The Requiem** largely hold for the Betrayed. Just as those they hunt, the Betrayed *are* vampires, despite any differences. Even so, the differences predicated by their own tragic legacy are important and clearly set them apart from other vampires. The following are changes or additions to those properties unique to the Betrayed. Where no mention is made of a particular property — waking up, for example — the rules in **Vampire: The Requiem** should be used.

The Burning

In the heart of every vampire is said to reside the Beast, counterpoint to the Man. The Beast is blamed for the monstrous urges that course through every Kindred and is destined to overthrow the Man completely and transform Kindred into little more than a slaving, well — beast, unless the Kindred manages to cleave to her battered sense of humanity. The Betrayed, too, are bedeviled by something akin to the Beast, but it is something possessed of far more purpose than a mere rampaging



monster. When the Otetsar Embraced his seven childer, he passed to them not only his Vitae but also a portion of his anguished soul. The Seven were imbued with his agonizing sense of betrayal (the hollow pain that reverberated within his own heart) and his seething hatred that screamed for vengeance against the Betrayer and his evil kind. This spark of their creator was like an enraged wraith that lodged within the Seven and gripped each of them in its fiery embrace. Every Betrayed is haunted by this same demon, which is most commonly called the Burning. Part Beast, part broken heart and part avenger, the Burning defines the Betrayed and forever sets them apart from those they hunt.

The Burning is as much a curse as it is a boon. Similar to the Beast, the Burning can cause a Betrayed to frenzy or flee in terror from fire and sunlight. The Burning can push a character to seek blood like a predator even if the Betrayed wishes to pursue more human goals. Unlike the Beast, the Burning is not a mindless thing; it has a purpose beyond mere animal self-preservation. The Burning drives each Betrayed to find and kill Kindred. This comes before any other urges, no matter how strong or necessary for survival. Luckily, the Embrace does not rob the Betrayed of their sense of humanity, at least not immediately. The Man remains strong in the Betrayed and curbs the vengeful appetites of the Burning (for the most part). Of course, should a character forgo morality and let slip the reigns of humanity that allow the Man to maintain the upper hand, the Burning eventually overtakes any semblance of rational free will and the Betrayed becomes a creature hell-bent on the destruction of vampires with nary a care in the world about the consequences. Such a monster might succeed in making a sizable dent in the local Kindred population in short order, but his own nights are numbered as the surviving Kindred re-trench and visit their own brand of retribution upon the Betrayed.

Resisting Coercion

Another way the Burning can be voluntarily used to aid a Betrayed character is to fortify the character's ability to resist coercion. Whenever a character is subject to physical, mental or supernatural coercion that could result in divulging any information about the Betrayed, the character may call upon the Burning to help him avoid betraying his own kind.

By expending a point of Vitae, the character is able to shield his mind from intrusion — and even from himself. For the remainder of the scene, the character's thoughts and memories are effectively wiped clean, making it next to impossible for others to gain any useful information from him. What's more, the character is unable to spit out secrets to his interrogators, as his conscious mind has no access to such information. The Betrayed is temporarily supplanted by the betrayal itself and the mind is given over to the Burning. All thoughts

are simply replaced by a nightmarish tableau of blood and fire, anguish and anger.

All attempts to coerce a Betrayed under the control of the Burning automatically fail. A mind-reader or other mystic interrogator may detect glimpses of the Betrayed's symbols — a house seal or the Roman numeral VII — but little else. A Betrayed's body deals with mundane interrogation as if it were controlled by the mortal being it once was — as if it knew nothing of vampire society or the story of the Otetsar.

Guarding Against Betrayal

The invocation of the Burning is not always voluntary. If a Betrayed character ever chooses to divulge a valuable secret about her house or legacy to a non-Betrayed character, the Burning works to stymie that betrayal. The treacherous character finds herself unable to divulge any secrets without an extreme effort of will. The Burning activates its defenses against coercion, as described above, automatically when necessary. If the character cannot spend Vitae on a turn when the Burning flares its defenses — because the character has spent her Vitae for the turn or because she has no Vitae left — the Burning inflicts one point of aggravated damage instead as the cost of activation.

A character may spend a Willpower point to betray her kind in word or deed for one turn. When this turn is over, the Burning activates anew at the cost of Vitae or aggravated damage, as usual.

The Storyteller must determine whether an action is betrayal or not. As a general guideline, if the information the character wishes to publicize would reveal specific details about the history, nature or location of the Betrayed in particular, the Burning seeks to guard it. The Burning has access to the character's conscience — if she knows her fellow Betrayed would consider it a betrayal, then the Burning knows that, too. If the character says she's expected at Joe's Coffee Shop at 11:30 p.m. or that she hunts Kindred, that would not trigger the Burning's defenses unless it implied or confirmed, for example, that she were expected at the coffee shop by VII. Information about the Betrayed is certainly a betrayal.

Eyes of Wrath

Related to the Burning is the ability of every Betrayed to recognize the so-called Mark of the Betrayer upon vampires. By expending one Vitae, a character may “turn on” the Eyes of Wrath for the duration of the scene. When this power is used, all Kindred appear according to their true nature; that is, they appear as ravenously hungry, undead predators.

All Kindred still retain their unique characteristics — facial hair, tattoos, clothing, familial characteristics — but they all display similar telltale signs of vampirism. Most look like prowling corpses with distended fangs,

sunken eyes, claw-like hands and a distinct inhumanity that reveals them for the monsters they are. In situations in which there are few people, no roll needs to be made to identify the Kindred among the kine. In other places, such as crowded nightclubs and the streets of the French Quarter during Mardi Gras, a perception roll should be made to spot the vampires in the throng (perhaps Wits + Socialize or Wits + Empathy, with a penalty based on the activity of the crowd).

Blood Addiction, Vinculum and Diablerie

Vitae possesses just as strong a physical, emotional and supernatural allure for the Betrayed as it does for any other vampire. A sip of a Kindred's Vitae is a rapturous thing that enflames a Betrayed character's desire for more, despite the very dangerous complications involved in further consumption. The Betrayed can become addicted to the taste of Vitae as easily as anyone else, whether that Vitae comes from Kindred or other Betrayed. Given their overarching purpose, the Betrayed see blood addiction as a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, blood addiction can greatly increase one's desire to seek out Kindred in order to consume their precious Vitae, an act that most certainly will end in the destruction of one, if not both vampires. To some Betrayed this is not a bad thing — it's just one more powerful urge to ensure that they pursue the enemy despite any second thoughts.

On the other hand, the gnawing need for Vitae above and beyond the ordinary craving for mortal blood can prove disastrous. An addict may forgo the kind of caution that ordinarily protects the Betrayed from discovery and orchestrated retribution by the Kindred. Few circles wish to have one or more of their number calling undue attention to them, especially given that they are usually outnumbered by the enemy and on unfamiliar turf.

What's more, an addict is more prone than other Betrayed to allow herself to fall prey to the Vinculum. For these reasons, addiction to Vitae carries a great stigma that most Betrayed guard themselves against. Before a hunt, most gorge themselves on mortal blood to ensure that they do not become overly tempted to seek sustenance from the veins of their prey, and they watch one another with care, stepping in to stop a fellow Betrayed from supping on a victim's Vitae whenever possible.

There is nothing so vile to the Betrayed than having one of their own under the sway of those who bear the Mark of the Betrayer. Addiction to Vitae is bad enough, but to become thrall to one of the Kindred is the greatest of weaknesses, for it places the Betrayed character in almost certain danger of betraying his own kind. Even the power of the Burning that normally protects the Betrayed from giving up their secrets under duress is hard-pressed when the character is bound by a Vinculum to a Kindred who wishes to know about the Betrayed. In the mind of a

Betrayed character, there really is no more difficult position to be in. The struggle between the Burning and the Vinculum is epic and will make the usual unpleasanties of undeath seem tame by comparison. Those Betrayed who face this inner turmoil are tormented creatures who are unable to do little but exert their every ounce of resolve fighting against the Vinculum even as it seductively whispers in their inner ear.

The easiest way to avoid this fate is to avoid the blood of the Kindred, of course. But when the Vinculum has already taken hold, the only realistic escape is the immediate destruction of the Kindred who holds power over the enthralled character. This becomes the number one priority of any circle facing this danger, and most circles will go to any length to finish the job as quickly and completely as possible. Until the grisly task is accomplished, the Betrayed watch the thrall with extreme care as if she were a Manchurian Candidate, capable at any moment of betraying her circle to the enemy. The Master of the Hunt may order her to be restrained while she remains under the influence of her regnant to keep her from doing harm to her fellow Betrayed — perhaps even staking her until the puppet master is vanquished. Others Betrayed may force the victim to take the lead role in the hunt, even ordering her to deliver the killing blow, as it were, despite the tremendous emotional toll it will take on her. This kind of “tough love” is seen as a way of strengthening the circle — should it fail, the targeted character may discover that her nights are numbered. No circle will allow itself to be hobbled any longer than it must by a weak link in its chain — too many dangers already exist to have to add one of its own members to its list of enemies.

Diablerie is not a crime to the Betrayed — at least not when practiced on the Kindred. It is the ultimate reward for a successful hunt. The possible benefit of gaining insight into the enemy and learning more ways to use the blood — from an additional dot in a Skill or, even better, a Discipline — is a meaningful advantage to a hunter. Not only do the Betrayed improve their own capabilities, but they acquire an even greater understanding of those they pursue. Knowing which Disciplines their prey might wield can be the difference between a successful hunt and an utter failure. Even more important is the increase in Blood Potency that can result from the act of diablerie. Nothing improves a vampire's chances of surviving a violent confrontation than access to the power of the blood, and diablerie is the best way of boosting this advantage for the long term.

It is customary for the character most directly responsible for the defeat of a Kindred to be given the opportunity to drink the victim's soul; should that individual pass — perhaps he fears blood addiction or his blood is already potent enough — the Master of the Hunt decides who will benefit from the act, usually choosing

the weakest among the circle in order to improve the overall strength of the group.

Self-serving Betrayed do exist, but if their Blood Potency increases too quickly, they will face the same difficulties as any other vampire, including a rarified appetite and the approach of torpor. Diablerie also imposes the same risk of blood addiction on the Betrayed as it does for Kindred, and a Betrayed character's aura will be stained with black streaks just as easily and for the same duration. Luckily, only the perceptive practitioners of Auspex recognize this signature of the diablerist. Because the Betrayed are not detected by the Predator's Taint, their diablerie is also far less likely to be discovered.

The Predator's Taint

The Betrayed's Curse has seen fit to aid them in their purpose of hunting down and destroying Kindred by helping them hide more easily from their enemy. Betrayed characters do not bear the Predator's Taint as other vampires do, and, as such, the Betrayed's presence does not register to the senses of the Kindred any more than the presence of a mortal might. Of course, should a vampire be able to discern a Betrayed's aura, the vampire might note the pale color that gives away the Betrayed's undead nature, but, by simply not triggering the normal impulse to frenzy, most Betrayed can usually avoid such careful inspection.

Keep in mind that this is a two-way street. Even as the Kindred are not automatically alerted to the presence of a Betrayed vampire, the characters are likewise not immediately aware of any Kindred that might be nearby. Only by activating the Eyes of Wrath or through mundane observation can the Betrayed recognize the Kindred for what they are.

It should be noted that the Betrayed are afflicted with the same occultation of their reflection as any vampire and so cannot be seen or recorded with clarity in mirrors, cameras and so forth. Kindred who make a habit of regularly glancing at mirrors and windows for reflections to spot other vampires have no greater difficulty recognizing a Betrayed character. Storytellers should beware, however. Because of the Predator's Taint, very few Kindred would be likely to be in the habit of doing such a thing. Even if they are inured to the urge to frenzy the Predator's Taint can incur, they still feel the presence of other vampires with ease and would have little reason to use other, more active means, to identify vampires among the kine.

Storytelling

Whether the Betrayed are used in your chronicle as mysterious hunters of Kindred characters or as contributing characters who associate with the Kindred in the less-than-lethal sense, these characters can add a degree of drama that can change everything for the better, if

used appropriately. They are not two-dimensional assassins who leap out of the shadows to rain hate and doom down upon the Kindred as the next “monster of the week.” The Betrayed are characters, vampires even, who are subject to many of the same problems facing the Kindred. Moreover, the Betrayed are haunted by their own substantial burdens, from their quest to restore the honor of a lost King by destroying those who betrayed him to the unique properties of the blood that sets them apart from other vampires. The Betrayed can be used as the focus of a chronicle, with the players taking on the role of the Betrayed and experiencing the special horror that they endure night after night or they can be antagonists for a Kindred chronicle, dangerous strangers whose motives and nature remain a mystery to unravel. However they are used, they are more than simple killers and that point should remain uppermost in the Storyteller’s and players’ minds.

Betrayed Chronicles

Running a chronicle in which all the players roleplay Betrayed characters can be a fun and exhilarating change from a typical **Vampire: The Requiem** chronicle. For starters, the overarching purpose of the Betrayed is very likely going to mean that violent confrontation and down-and-dirty combat is going to be par for the course. Not every game session may be spent rolling for damage

as the characters jump one vampire after another, but confrontation and combat are probably going to play a role, perhaps a very significant one. Players who feel that the proclivities of the Kindred to assiduously avoid violent situations — at least ones that pose a real threat to their unives — can at times limit the potential for some serious action will probably jump at the chance to play the Betrayed. The greatest danger, of course, is that combat overwhelms any other Storytelling potential and suborns any carefully planned subplots and drama until nothing but gunshots and blood loss dominate the story. With attention to whom the Betrayed really are and a creative Storyteller, a rich chronicle that will last more than a single story can be crafted. Even if this chronicle is only a break from a Kindred chronicle, it can and should be more than a simple shoot-‘em-up game of vampire slayers and their victims.

Themes

As with any chronicle, its primary themes should be chosen before the rest of the details are locked down. Without this kind of planning, chronicles can very easily meander thematically, leaving each story feeling disconnected from a greater whole. In general, the themes of a Betrayed chronicle and the stories it contains are very similar to those common to other **Vampire** chronicles. Loss, damnation, family, power, inhumanity, addiction



and friendship are all stirring themes that can serve as a solid foundation for a lasting series of stories. Perhaps the most obvious one for the Betrayed is betrayal, the very source of their creation and something that has personal value to all of these vampire hunters. Most Betrayed have experienced some kind of betrayal as mortals, usually something powerful enough to leave lasting psychological scars and to shape their lives. This betrayal is often what brought them to the attention of the Betrayed in the first place and what marked them as potential recruits for one of the houses. Players whose characters have experienced betrayal should think carefully about the details of the betrayal and work with the Storyteller to find a way to work it into the ongoing chronicle. Perhaps in every story the Storyteller will slip something in that cannot help but remind the character of the pain and anger that still lingers in her unbeating heart. These past experiences should be compounded, of course, by the greater curse of the Betrayed, their legacy that drives them still to seek out and destroy every Kindred — every “betrayed.” The Kindred they hunt are not just vampires who should be slain; these Kindred are viewed really as individuals who have betrayed the characters and the undead family that has adopted them. The curse that afflicts all Betrayed is theirs also, and, so long as they feel the Burning inside, these characters can never forget what it feels like to be betrayed.

Betrayal is more than just a feeling inside. Chronicles that highlight this theme should focus on its external effects also. For one thing, the Betrayed find it very difficult to trust anyone, even their fellow Betrayed. Screw me once, shame on you; screw me twice, shame on me. This may not be the official motto of these vampires, but it is largely how many feel. They are all paranoid to a degree, unwilling to count on anyone else for too much and even more unwilling to open up to anyone and exposing their greatest secrets. Betrayed characters have been burned as individuals and burned as a “race,” if you will. The rage of the Eldest simmers in their breasts although they are otherwise dead, hungry for vengeance and ready to see betrayal around every corner. Storytellers should skew things a bit to dramatize this, describing the words and body language of others in a way that promotes feelings of paranoia and unfounded suspicion. The guy who runs the newsstand on the corner doesn’t just “glance” at the character as she walks past on her way to her haven; the man “eyes” her and then quickly averts his gaze if observed. Don’t lie outright to the players, but use descriptive words to heighten the mood and drive home the feeling that the characters can trust no one. Everyone is a potential betrayer.

Another theme that works well in a Betrayed chronicle is futility. For all their vaunted Disciplines and supernatural advantages, the characters are faced with an all-but-impossible task, at least in the long term. How can a minuscule number of Betrayed wipe out all the world’s

Kindred? It takes a great deal of personal fortitude and faith not to feel exasperation in the face of such a daunting goal. Every night the Betrayed push themselves on into the fray, believing that if only they can continue to do as they do, one night they will succeed and the ultimate goal of restoring the Kassovich legacy will be realized. This is not an easy thing to do, however. They are not fools, and they can do the math as easily as anyone. While the Marisovich don’t face this feeling of futility as strongly as the rest of the Betrayed on due to the Vagabonds’ unique approach to the problem, even they have their doubts often enough. The Kindred use political sniping, social climbing and satiation of their inhuman lusts to stave off the ennui that is a part of their Requiem. The Betrayed indulge in these things too, to a lesser extent, but most simply try and throw themselves into the hunt for the enemy, hoping that the demands of battle will keep their minds occupied. Futility can be illustrated in a story by focusing on the Embrace/attrition rates of the Betrayed and the Kindred they hunt. Perhaps a chronicle that takes place over a long period of time can serve best for this, with each story moving forward in time and making clear the ever-worsening odds of defeating all the local Kindred.

Chronicle Ideas

Betrayed chronicles can run the gamut from gritty panoramas of blood-soaked streets and Kindred in the crosshairs to much more subtle ones where the Betrayed weave themselves into the tapestry of Kindred society and spend every night on the razor’s edge. Personal horror is as much a part of a Betrayed chronicle as one focusing on Kindred characters and, no matter what type of chronicle is favored by the troupe, should always play a role. Ignoring personal horror just to focus on a videogame-like battle, for example, would be a shame given the many themes and subject matter that a good Betrayed chronicle can encompass.

Some examples of interesting chronicles for Betrayed characters are the following:

Comfortably Numb — Every Betrayed is a creature of pain, someone who has had his trust shattered and who can never recover from the agony of that betrayal. This type of chronicle focuses on that pain, on how it haunts the characters and can never be overcome. The characters are each tormented by betrayal or perhaps another tragedy, and seek to escape the pain every night of their unives. Violence is one method of escape, of course, and, so they throw themselves into the hunt, not only killing their foes, but savagely enjoying it in the hopes of forgetting their real suffering. The characters may also overindulge when feeding, caring little for the mortals they injure or kill. The Betrayed characters wallow in their lusts, seeking anything to help them forget (even if only for an hour) the hurt that forever burns inside.

Against All Odds — The characters' circle has sworn an oath to cleanse their city (or one they choose to visit) of every last vampire who makes its haven there. They realize the difficulty they face, but, if they cannot do this thing, then what chance have any Betrayed have to fulfill their destinies? The characters must first set out to learn all they can about the local Kindred, even if that means (and it probably does) meeting and interacting with the enemy, possibly even posing as Kindred to get close and earn some trust. Once the basic groundwork is accomplished, the chronicle becomes decidedly more lethal, as the characters begin systematically destroying Kindred. Eventually, the Betrayed's presence is enough of a threat that the Kindred retaliate in whatever fashion they can and the characters are forced to either succeed or flee.

Lonely is the Night — Unlife is hard enough for any vampire, separated by an unfathomable gulf from the mortals and cursed to hide from the sun, but for the Betrayed it is especially difficult. Even as the Kindred claim to abide by their Second Tradition, compared to the Betrayed they are as numerous as cockroaches in the crumbling cities of the 21st century. No matter the hardships the Kindred endure, no matter the sense of isolation and "otherness" that makes it all but impossible for them to have anything but the most insignificant and fleeing relationships with mortals, at least they have each other. Any city of good size is home to a dozen or more Kindred who can at least turn to one another for companionship, no matter how shallow it may be. The Betrayed are not so lucky. Even in the largest cities there may be only a handful or fewer, bound together by blood and the necessity of survival. That is a very small circle within which the needs for company, social discourse and psychological support can be met. After a time, even the closest Betrayed face frayed relations, constant tension and creeping insecurity. Ultimately, each is alone, without a larger society to support him, facing eternity by himself. The characters discover that their greatest enemies are themselves and the fractious relationships they share with their fellow Betrayed. All secretly hope to find ways to fill their needs for meaningful social interaction, but each finds that quest even more impossible than the one set before all Betrayed by their creator.

Story Ideas

As with the overall chronicle, stories featuring Betrayed characters can be similar to those used for Kindred characters. The Betrayed characters may have to avoid discovery by mortals, secure a haven, fend off a lupine or other unnatural threat, locate a valuable artifact or simply deal with the inner turmoil that gnaws at each of them. On the other hand, there are a few stories that are tailor-made for the Betrayed, stories that are typically not as suitable for ordinary vampire characters. The following are examples of these kinds of stories:

Vampire Slayer — Perhaps obvious, the characters have identified their next Kindred victim, probably an

ancilla or even an elder vampire. They made the discovery by accident, so they have no further information other than their encounter and possibly a few instrumental clues that will provide them with the opportunity to learn more. The characters realize that their prey is not a simple neonate (perhaps after a first, failed attempt), and now they must race against the clock to destroy the Kindred before others are alerted to their presence. The story is taut, violent and promises danger around every corner as the characters do all they can to either succeed at eliminating their target or flee the city before the Sheriff sends out the posse to turn the hunt on them.

The Burning — Every Betrayed character can rely on the Burning to protect her from divulging secrets, but putting that to the test is altogether different from believing in its efficacy. One or more of the characters is captured by the Kindred and is subjected to varying types and degrees of *persuasion*. The characters must do their best to resist revealing anything to their captors by whatever capacity they possess until the rest of the circle arrives and is able to rescue them.

Who Can You Trust? — Betrayal is at the heart of everything the characters do, and, when it takes root in their own ranks, nothing else matters until the traitor is discovered and punished. The characters (or at least one of the group) discover evidence that seems to strongly implicate one of the other characters in nothing less than a betrayal of the circle or, even worse, all the Betrayed. Perhaps the accused is a Marisovich who appears to have traded family secrets to a Kindred in exchange for an ancient scroll or a Harridan who outed another Betrayed to the Kindred in return for introductions to the city's elite. The characters must work to identify the culprit (if there even is one) and take proper action to ensure the security of their secrets, without the entire circle exploding with finger-pointing and hysteria that could jeopardize them all.

Kindred Chronicles

Your troupe may wish to incorporate the Betrayed into an ongoing **Vampire: The Requiem** chronicle, using these mysterious vampires as dangerous antagonists whom the Kindred characters must overcome, strangers who wish to work with the characters or a bit of both. In the former case, the characters will all be Kindred, but in the latter types of chronicle the coterie may be a mix. Even if the characters work together, however, serious issues remain. Given the innate defenses, let alone the psychological apprehension, the Betrayed have against revealing their true nature to others, how will they explain themselves to the Kindred they associate with? Can the Betrayed control themselves from destroying Kindred when the opportunity is all too easy? What will other Betrayed do if they discover the Betrayed characters in close contact with the enemy? These are sources of great drama and can fuel entire chronicles.

Themes

If the Betrayed are to be used primarily as nemeses for the characters. As hunters the Kindred must survive and hopefully defeat (possibly even uncovering these characters' true identities), the Betrayed work best with themes such as fear, the unknown, loss, and the horror of violence. Fear is present in all chronicles, of course, as are the others, but bringing fear to the forefront can completely change a chronicle concept. The Kindred believe that, by and large, they are the baddest badasses in town, but when they suddenly find that they are the prey and that the hunters are possibly even more dangerous and capable, fear becomes a palpable thing. The Beast struggles to lash out at the threat regardless of the consequences, even as the Man trembles in terror and seeks to avoid having to face the frightening cabal known only as "VII." Suddenly the Kindred's havens no longer seem safe; when feeding, they find themselves looking over their shoulders; and, even in Elysium, they cannot help but cast the occasional glance out the window, dreading that they might see the shadowy assassins who haunt them.

If "the unknown" is the major theme, then play up the strangeness of the Betrayed. Leave small clues for the characters to find but clues that only deepen the mystery rather than easily unravel it. Instead of merely seeking to rid themselves of the Betrayed, the characters work to learn what they can, not only to satisfy their own curiosity but for the sake of all Kindred. Imagine the status the characters might gain among the Ordo Dracul, the Circle of the Crone, the Lancea Sanctum and even the Invictus by learning the truth about "VII." The violent nature of the hunt cannot only pose an ongoing physical threat to the characters, it can also cause their own penchant for violence to rise more easily to the surface and push their Humanity even lower as they become accustomed to bloody outbursts and the need to fight or die.

In chronicles in which there is some regular interaction between the Kindred and the Betrayed, trust, the bonds of friendship and duty make better themes. Can Kindred characters ever truly trust their Betrayed compatriots, and vice versa? Even if the Betrayed succeed in hiding their true nature from the rest of the coterie, their differences will ultimately breed suspicion and real friction between the two factions, especially when the Betrayed are unable to reveal anything substantial to their so-called friends. The bonds that brought the group together in the first place and hold them together throughout the chronicle can become the focus of the chronicle. Is there one overriding reason that forced the characters to ally with one another, or did their coterie form for less formal reasons, like sheer boredom or shared interests? Can these bonds prove stronger than the troubles that might bring the Kindred and Betrayed to a violent confrontation? Can the bonds be strengthened to avoid that kind of breakdown?

Finally, the theme of duty is especially fitting. Every Kindred has some duty, whether it is to sire, to covenant, to clan or to somebody else. At the same time, every Betrayed has a duty that transcends the individual: the Betrayed must destroy all Kindred. Trying to reconcile these responsibilities can become the basis for a very introspective chronicle. Will the Betrayed eventually forgo any relationships they may have forged in order to fulfill the duty of all who bear the blood of the Otetsar, or will they literally betray that duty for the sake of survival, to advance another cause or merely to avoid the mournful agony of loneliness?

Chronicle Ideas

Adding the Betrayed to an ongoing chronicle as bogyman characters is easy enough and may be all that a Storyteller wants to do with the Betrayed. However, even if they are merely meant to be used as antagonists, the Betrayed can lend much more to a chronicle. First, instead of just having them show up for a one-shot story, the Betrayed may have been in the city for years already, probably engaging in careful and very thorough reconnaissance prior to their actual attacks upon the Kindred. The characters can pick up clues to this early in the chronicle and discover more and more as it progresses. Perhaps one of the Betrayed is even posing as a Kindred, maybe even someone of influence, in order to learn what he can, and lines up his targets like dominoes so that when the Betrayed finally strike the task will be that much easier. The Betrayed may actually have infiltrated the characters' own circle (if it contains more vampires than just the players'). Should these infiltrators be discovered by other Kindred before the characters are aware, the entire coterie might be suspects and face a blood hunt.

Chronicles that allow camaraderie between Kindred and Betrayed characters will be different, of course. For these, enemies are everywhere, both within and without the coterie. Other Betrayed may take an interest and even seek to destroy the Kindred characters, unaware that they are associates of the Betrayed characters. Worse, if they discover the connection, the Betrayed characters may be labeled betrayers and hunted down by their own houses for all time. All the usual **Vampire** chronicle ideas are available too, especially if the Betrayed are able to hide their true identity.

The following are some sample ideas for chronicles with mixed characters:

Sleeping with the Enemy — One of the Betrayed becomes emotionally attached to one of the Kindred characters, who does not know the truth about her companion. The special bond they share grows over time until they are inseparable. When another group of Betrayed strike the city, they demand that the Betrayed character aid them; he is torn between emotion and duty. No matter which decision he makes, the consequences will shake up

the entire coterie and possibly the entire city.

Double-Agents — A more difficult chronicle is one in which the Betrayed pose as a strange Kindred bloodline — which they technically are — and aim to learn all they can about the city and its undead residents, using the Kindred characters as their entrée. Throughout the chronicle, their secret is always at risk of exposure and they must work to keep it hidden, even from their own coterie. Eventually, the Betrayed will believe they have enough information to launch their attack upon the city's Kindred. Do the Betrayed recruit the other characters? Do the Betrayed blackmail them into helping or keeping their mouths shut? Do the Betrayed strike the other characters first?

Betrayal — The Betrayed have had enough. Whether from a need for companionship, an inability to continue a fight that seems impossible to win or because of some other reason, they wish to simply join Kindred society and face unlife on their own terms. To ratchet up the drama a notch or two, the characters are offered access to a rare Discipline or some other boon if they expose the truth about themselves and all Betrayed. To do this, however, they must face the Burning that torments them as well as the interference of other Betrayed, should they discover the truth. Now the hunters become the hunted, and they can only hope that they have made the wisest choice.

Story Ideas

Besides the usual gamut of vampire tales, some new avenues can be explored by the Storyteller that involve coteries with a mix of Kindred and Betrayed characters. A few examples of different kinds of stories include the following:

Friends and Family — The Betrayed characters learn that a circle of Betrayed who know them are coming to the city to “join the hunt.” The visitors essentially invite themselves to hang out with the Betrayed characters, who must figure out how to keep their “family” from their “friends” for the duration of the visit. Do the characters really aid the visitors in wiping out a Kindred or two, or do the characters turn traitor and do what they can to run the visiting Betrayed out of town (or even destroy them!) before the rest of their coterie and any other Kindred learn the truth?

La Femme Nikita — The Betrayed characters' relationship to their coterie is discovered by other Betrayed who threaten to spread word of their betrayal throughout the family unless they shape up fast. To show their loyalty, these characters are forced to serve as assassins and are provided Kindred targets to slay. They must find a way to complete their missions and not tip off any Kindred or else face retribution from their family.

Not on My Watch — The characters learn that another Betrayed has decided to destroy a prominent

Kindred, one who is essential the future plans of the coterie. The Kindred want to destroy the killer, but the Betrayed want to find another way to quash the assassination plot. They must settle on a plan and launch it before the assassin finishes his job.

Reawakened Elder

Quote: “I have given them too many nights of freedom to rest now.”

Background: After more than a century of torpor, he's back. Since the Middle Ages he has been hunting the Kindred and in that time he has come to learn much about the world. He has come to know many of the specters. Yet, while he waned in sleep, it seems his brothers among the Betrayed have done little to stem the tide of blood that flows across the globe. The Kindred are everywhere. There is much work to be done.

Description: The Betrayed do not let this warrior loose on a city. Though he is brilliant and fierce, he has never acclimated himself to the modern nights and has no interest in doing so. Like a battlefield general from the Dark Ages, he devises attacks against the enemy from the safety of a fortified lair, then leads them himself. When his beard is thick with ash and his flesh is sticky with blood, that is when he knows that he has served his King.

Storytelling Hints: Fearless, bold and brutal, this medieval barbarian is everything the Kindred fear in VII without the typically mysterious appearance. Everything about him — from his wardrobe to his words to his weapons — says he has come to destroy and be destroyed.

Clan: House Semeonovic

Covenant: VII

Embrace: 1390



Apparent Age: 30-40

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (History, Military) 2, Crafts (Carpentry) 3, Medicine (Torture) 2, Occult 3, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Athletics (Sprinting) 4, Brawl 4, Firearms (Musket) 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3, Weaponry 5

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Horses) 4, Empathy 1, Intimidation 5, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 1, Haven Location 1, Haven Size 1, Haven Security 4, Iron Stamina 3, Resources 2, Status (House) 3, Strong Back, Weaponry Dodge

Willpower: 7

Humanity: 2; Suspicion (5), Delusional Obsession (3)

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Wrath

Health: 10

Initiative: +7

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Blood Potency: 4 (Vitae 13/2)

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Majesty 4, Resilience 4, Vigor 1

Specter: Rada

Weapons:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Sword	3 (L)	2	—	13
Large Axe	3 (L)	3	9 again, two hands	13

Modern Knight

Quote: "This is your night, my man. This is our night. We are the monsters they fear. We rule this night."

Background: As an Orphan, he was taught that the most noble thing any vampire can do is destroy another vampire. After the Embrace, he found that it wasn't just a solemn act of righteous wrath, but an unearthly rush. It's not enough to destroy the Kindred. Those that survive each night must be made to fear the mystery of VII, and those Betrayed who hear of a hunter's success become better hunters in the process.

Description: Young, cocky and cool. In life, he was a weekend star in Moscow discos. In undeath, he is that as well as a calculating and ruthless assassin of the Damned. Deep down, where the specters are, he's as terrified of losing eternity to a length of steel or a flicker of fire as any other vampire. But on the outside, where it matters, he's invincibly cool.

Storytelling Hints: The modern swagger gets it seen. The old-fashioned talk gives it meaning. The number



of Kindred brought down matters less at the end of the night than the number who will hear about it later. A bullet is powerful, but so is a stride and so is silence.

Clan: Petrovnavich

Covenant: VII

Embrace: 1975

Apparent Age: 25-30

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 2, Crafts 1, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Drive (Motorcycle) 3, Firearms 3, Larceny 1, Stealth 2, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Intimidation 4, Persuasion 3, Socialize 3, Streetwise (Guns) 3, Subterfuge (Lie) 2

Merits: Allies (Gun Runners) 3, Haven Security 3, Haven Size 2, Herd 2, House Status 2, Quick Draw, Resources 3, Stunt Driver

Willpower: 5

Humanity: 3; Paranoia (5)

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Health: 7

Initiative: +7

Defense: 4

Speed: 11

Blood Potency: 2 (Vitae 11/1)

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dominate 2, Vigor 2

Specter: Xenia

Weapons:

Type	Damage	Range	Clip	Size	Special	Dice	Pool
SMG, small	2	25/50/100	30+1	1	Autofire	9	
Pistol, heavy	3	30/60/120	7+1	1	Strength 3	9	
Knife 1 (L)	—	—	—	1	—	5	

Armor:

Type	Rating	Defense	Penalty
Motorcycle jacket	1/0	0	

Stidious Strategist

Quote: "I call it a disaster, Marcus. The four you burnt tonight would have led us to one of the Primogen in a month. Now they're going to lock up the castle gates and we'll have to wait them out. Again."

Background: A late-comer to the tale of the Betrayed, she began with a dream to bring university savvy to down-trodden towns betrayed by the capitalist market. Then she heard tales of her ancestors, of riches lost and enemies escaped. Then she thought of the changes she could make with more than just years of research and investments — whole lifetimes of work. That would be a real difference. With that kind of time, she could change the night.



Description: Serious, uncompromising and precise. The image of VII often comes with blazing fires or razor-sharp edges. She has those, but they're features of her intellect, not her hardware. A strong hunter might claim a handful of ashed vampires in a year — her genius takes down three or four times that many. And she's building momentum. Give her a few years and she'll bring down a Prince. Give her a century and she'll get to checkmate.

Storytelling Hints: Everything is important. Little victories are made from the unfinished pieces of bigger victories. Be patient, bear the echoes of the specters for now, and one night the Betrayed will see the Sabbath. Whittle away at the Betrayed piecemeal and the hunt will never end.

Clan: Irinavici

Covenant: VII

Embrace: 1901

Apparent Age: 30's

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (History) 4, Computer 3, Investigation 3, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Politics (Strategy) 4, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Drive 2, Firearms 1, Larceny 1, Stealth (Surveillance) 3, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Empathy (Spot Lie) 2, Expression 2, Persuasion 4, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (INTERPOL) 2, Allies (Travel Industry) 4, Contacts (Police, Livery, Print Media) 3, Covenant Status (Invictus) 1, Haven Location 3, Haven Security 1, Haven Size 1, House Status 3, Inspiring, Resources 3, Retainer (Researcher) 2

Willpower: 8

Humanity: 5

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Pride

Health: 7

Initiative: +6

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Blood Potency: 3 (Vitae: 12/1)

Disciplines: Auspex 4, Majesty 2, Nightmare 2

Specter: Liliya



Chapter Three: THE SLEEPERS

"VII'S HERE, KYLE.

IN HERE, WITH US, RIGHT NOW.

SHUT UP AND LISTEN. YOU AND ME,

WE'RE NOT ALONE IN HERE.

IT'S JUST YOU AND ME AND I'M TELLING YOU

THEY CAN HEAR US. SIT DOWN.

WE'RE GOING TO FIND THEM.

TONIGHT.

WE'RE GOING TO FIND THEM."

*Authority forgets a dying king, laid widow'd
of the power in his eye that bow'd the will.*

— Lord Alfred Tennyson *Morte d'Arthur*

Kindred fear VII. Those who know of VII believe them to be boogeymen and murderers — spook stories that happen to be true. Kindred are right to fear them — and yet, the Damned only have half of the picture. They assume that the VII vampires can be dealt with, somehow. VII surely must be just another covenant of Kindred with their own — albeit radical — ideas, yes? Certainly, if caught unaware, any wise or resilient Kindred with a honeyed tongue or a grotesque visage could turn away these strangers? Surely the vampires of VII can be drawn out of the shadows and neutralized — can't they?

The answers to these questions come time and time again. The answers are there every time a local Kindred goes missing or ends up in a blood-soaked sewer tunnel as a smear of pale ash. The answer is painted on the concrete wall over that ash, scrawled in blood and filth: VII.

Many Kindred make their first mistake by assuming VII to be a unified covenant of vampires. These Kindred believe that VII — like the Lancea Sanctum or even Belial's Brood — has a unified purpose for which members unite. They believe that VII's agenda is unquestionably strange and undeniably dreadful, but they still see it as an agenda — a system of belief that can be examined and dissected and eventually understood. VII are vampires who destroy other vampires, that much is clear. But nobody, outside of a rare few vampires, knows what *truly* drives the agents of VII. Perhaps the most frightening discovery of all is that even the agents of VII do not know what drives them — or if anything drives them at all.

VII is *not* a covenant. It is not a cadre of vampires bound together under a hateful banner. No leader directs their movements, no holy book informs their mission, no rituals or observances give them purpose.

Vampires do not come to VII willingly. The poor creatures are sleeper agents, twice-Damned, for their minds and bodies are no longer completely their own. VII is not something they join — it is forced on them. Each Sleeper's blood and mind is violated by other vampires of the so-called Seventh Day, and they are unwittingly called to serve.

But how? VII is a program, an encoded set of rules and procedures burned into a vampire's very blood. The program lies dormant until it needs to awaken. When it becomes active, it overrides the vampire's personality and takes control, driving the Kindred to sniff out the

sin in his peers and cut, slash or burn it out. If not called to destroy, the Sleeper may instead be driven to abduct other Kindred, to make more Sleepers. Indoctrination is painful, as the mind and body break down, as the captive's resolve is overcome by the Sleeper program. A Sleeper's blood is forced down the captive's throat as her mind — even her *brain* — are operated upon, weakened, diminished, conquered. If the process works, her mind belongs to the program. If the process fails, she is destroyed like any other iniquitous fiend.

When a Sleeper is finished and the program is satisfied, the encoded Vitae once again grows quiescent, and the vampire's mind is freed for a time. She goes back to her Requiem “with no memory of her attack,” for false memories are left to live in the gaps of her conscious mind. But the program always lies waiting in her subconscious, watching for the right moment to go active once again.

In the end, the Kindred are right to be frightened of the Seventh Day. But their fear is misguided. They are afraid of being destroyed, of being cut to pieces and burned to smoldering cinders. But such obliteration is the mercy of the Seventh Day — it is the loss of one's own soul that all Kindred should fear when VII comes.

History

VII has a history that goes back to the late 19th century, but few vampires have even an inkling of its origins. Even the Kindred within this so-called covenant are for the most part oblivious to its beginnings. This is because most of the vampires within VII are hardly aware of what VII is, much less what it *was*.

A rare few have uncovered the truth about this mystery. Those who know what they're looking for — who are willing to dig deep — may find the answers.

Victorian Science

In the 19th century, the embers of what would become modern science began to glow hot and red. Established fields of study began to separate into various sub-disciplines. Science was no longer the domain of gentleman of luxury; it left the realm of hobbyists and the professionally curious and instead became publicly recognized as something greater, something better. Science was seen as a key part of the future in an age when futurism was a popular marvel.

But science was not perfect. Scientists and doctors alike struggled with procedure and identity. Explorations wandered across fields, wild and untamed. While science was certainly not lawless, it sometimes felt that way, as if its participants were partaking in an unforeseen adventure. Explorers and pioneers in various groups and branches of learning would rise and fall during this time, all coming into the light to see if they could be a part of understanding and categorizing the world around them.

Phrenology

During this time, a practice arose that was shared among scientists, doctors, but also such men who called themselves psychics or “swamis.” This process did not necessarily have roots in pure science, but that didn’t limit its acceptability among both Europeans and Americans. It was called *phrenology*, and involved feeling and measuring the skull to determine a person’s temperament, character, intelligence quotient and even the individual’s capacity for mental illness. The practice was based on an assumption that the brain is a constantly growing and shifting organ with various “sub-organs.” These sub-organs purportedly controlled various parts of the personality — language, intellect, violence, urges — and the stronger a facet of one’s personality was, the more that part of the brain grew. This growth was said to then affect the shape of the skull by barely detectable margins. A genius should have a larger “intelligence organ” than a fool, and a trained phrenologist could detect such a faint bulge in the skull over that supposed organ. Similarly, a murderer would have a large “violence organ” and a corresponding lump on the skull beneath the hair. Hence, the subtle topography of a person’s cranium became a roadmap to the entire personality — though only to one trained in such *delicate* readings.

Phrenology was a practice that, unsurprisingly, drew in a number of charlatans, but what *was* surprising was the fact that a number of reputable scientists and doctors latched onto the practice as well, giving it more credit than it was perhaps due. These men of science and medicine often modified their regular practices to include phrenology to bring in additional money and popularity. In this way, it became somewhat “in vogue” to have an attending phrenologist. Not all doctors were driven to it out of a hunger for status or money, however. Some truly believed that phrenology was something of a philosopher’s stone, a “key” to the science of the mind.

The nucleus of VII grew here, within one of these groups. A small cadre of doctors in London decided to pursue the field of phrenology, not to uncover new mental illnesses or make a few pounds, but to explore one untapped possibility the mind may possess: *psychic ability*. After all, the mind was truly labyrinthine; new discoveries were made about the brain and body constantly, but the mind was larger by a thousandfold. In it was the power to heal or to destroy, the abilities to deduce

or intuit new information. Psychic ability was something that was talked about in rumor and conjecture, but never proved. These doctors set out to change that.

Enter Iznang

Coming to the group from Germany was a man named Erich Iznang, a protégé of the late Franz Anton Mesmer, the creator of theories on “animal magnetism” and what would eventually become hypnotism. Iznang brought to the table a wealth of knowledge beyond mere phrenology — he also utilized anthropometry (the identification of hidden characteristics through examination of the facial structure) and, of course, hypnotism, whereupon subjects are lulled into deep sleeps and are able to have their personalities “magnetized” in one direction or another. Iznang, along with a handful of other prominent doctors, formed this exploratory cabal in secret, meeting only on every seventh day (Saturday) to test the boundaries of the human mind.

Phrenology and anthropometry were used to identify “potentials,” those individuals believed to possess latent psychic capacity. (The traits Iznang claimed were critical were a slight largeness of both one’s cranium and eyes. The combination of these two characteristics were said to indicate a brain with more “frequent” use as well as a curious and intuitive nature.) When such an individual was identified, Iznang and the others would surround the subject with heavily magnetized rods and lull him or her into a hypnotic state. From there, they would attempt to sway the personality toward opening the mind and allowing the shriveled psychic sub-organs to swell and regain power. Iznang believed that although humankind had long ago let their psychic minds atrophy with disuse, their psychic minds could be healed and brought again to the forefront with the appropriate magnetizations and suggestions.

The group achieved limited success. Subjects were left pliable and open to suggestion, and many displayed minor psychic abilities after the procedure. Some could accurately predict which card would be drawn off the top of a deck with an 80–90% success rate. Others could identify secret objects hidden behind dark screens or accurately discern a number that a doctor had written down in another room. None of it was true clairvoyance, and, worse, not a single one had showed the tiniest hint toward other more “advanced” psychic potential such as psychokinetic movement or actual ESP. The doctors were disappointed. Time and time again, Iznang and his cohorts tried to produce something beyond a mere tremor on the psychic scale, but it was not to be. It wasn’t until a few years later, when a railroad tamping iron was fired through a man’s skull *but did not kill him*, did the group find its future.

The Story of Phineas Gage

Phineas Gage was a railroad worker who was famously injured when a detonation charge he was planting went

off prematurely. The force sent a sliver of iron nearly four feet in length and an inch and a half in diameter through his face. The sharp metal pierced his cheekbone and came out through the top of his skull. The rod flew 30 yards, covered in blood, but, to the surprise of those nearby, Gage was not only alive but conscious as well. In fact, Gage was taken to the doctor, treated and soon recovered.

The notable thing about this case was the fact that although Gage's physical body survived intact, his mind and personality did not. Gage was said to be normal before the accident — a hard worker, a man of reason. But after he recovered, Gage was surly and deceptive, prone to tantrums and fits of whimsy and boastfulness. He could not hold his job. He became lazy and listless. His social skills were practically non-existent. Physically, Gage was the same man. Mentally, he was someone entirely new.

The truth of the matter was that the tamping iron damaged Gage's frontal lobe as well as the piece connecting the two hemispheres of the brain. While doctors at the time were certainly unaware of the correlation between the specific parts of the brain and certain elements of one's personality, what did become clear was that the physical brain and a person's character and behavior were intimately tied. Affecting the first meant changing the second.

This conclusion was not lost on Iznang, who followed the case quite closely. It seemed that the example of

Phineas Gage provided an opportunity unforeseen by Iznang and his fellow doctors. They had been studying the personality from the outside. Perhaps it was time to study it from the inside.



WHY PSYCHIC POWERS?

Some have suggested that Victorian England was deeply in need of meaning. The country was at a critical point in the evolution of a modern, industrial world, caught in the middle between immortal God and mortal Man. From this confusion, people from this era sought to reach out to any sphere that could offer the possibility, however small, of providing answers. Mysticism and science met in a strange amalgam, resulting in practices such as spiritualism, phrenology, physiognomy. Psychic potential was yet another bridge between the two worlds. Divination, ESP, levitating objects with one's mind — all of these were mystical and super-normal, but could be explained in the words of science (or pseudo-science) and did not necessarily require only religious or spiritual understanding.



Psychosurgery

True psychosurgery did not reach the medical mainstream until around 1935, when Yale scientists operated on



the frontal lobes of chimpanzees to make the beasts more docile. From this, the logical jump was to operate upon the human brain for the same effect — murderers could be made tame, the mentally ill could find their inner demons quieted by just a few modifications to the forebrain.

The truth is, such brain surgery had been in practice (in far less sophisticated terms) for thousands of years. Trepanning was the process of boring a hole in the skull to release the pressure of “demons” in violent or mentally ill patients. In fact, brain surgery goes back even before that — to Romans like Aulus Celsus or the Byzantine Oribasius. An entire *school* of brain surgery prospered in the Muslim world for nearly 400 years after being founded in the early 9th century. All of this was a matter of historical record for those willing to look deep enough. Erich Iznang was, of course, quite willing.

This research opened a new path for Iznang and the other doctors. Gage’s accident proved that the group was wasting time on a handful of exterior minutiae, when in reality they needed to go straight to the source and study the brain itself. Modifications to the brain were clearly modifications to the personality, to the very *animus* of the subject. If true psychic abilities were to be found and fostered, they would be uncovered only by changing the fundamental organ itself. While many in Victorian England had gone beyond phrenology and physiognomy and into more esoteric realms (spiritualism and the occult), Iznang took his group toward a more scientific direction.

Iznang enlisted the aid of a blacklisted doctor. The man, John Keighley, had been a prominent surgeon, hosting a number of surgical lectures in which an audience looked down upon into the operating theater, where a surgeon such as Keighley performed an exploratory operation for the enlightenment of the spectators. But Keighley overstepped the law when he chose to perform a public operation upon the brain — an act that was outlawed by the courts and carried a kind of obscene stigma. The medical authorities took away Keighley’s ability to practice medicine and surgery. He later took a job as the head of the Chadwick Asylum in the north of London. Iznang saw Keighley as a walking opportunity. Not only did Keighley have experience in operating upon an exposed brain, but he also managed an institution with what was conceivably an unending supply of test patients. Moreover, the lunatics in the asylum were potentially not lunatics at all in Iznang’s mind — no, many people labeled “insane” were potentially just strange geniuses or, more importantly, odd individuals with psychic aptitude.

And so, long before any established doctors began looking seriously at the practice, this group of doctors carried out a series of psychosurgeries. In the beginning, the surgeries were purely investigative, with no overarching goal beyond mapping the brain. After all, such an

organ was mostly a mystery, with the only answers coming from ancient Greek and Muslim texts. But over time, the group advanced its techniques. Not only did they begin to modify personalities — making men more docile or more violent with a few snips of surgical scissors — but they did so without the use of any kind of drugs. In fact, they were able to induce a hypnotic state (per Iznang’s training) in the patients and operate while they dwelled in a state between waking and sleeping.

Many subjects perished, of course. Those who didn’t perish were potentially made worse, their minds and bodies ruined by the process. Some hemorrhaged blood into the brain, others were given terrible epilepsy or narcolepsy. Several patients experienced drastic and devastating personality changes — wild mood swings, fits of rage and profanity or inconsistent comatose states. It was unfortunate work, to be sure, and many doctors felt uncomfortable with the practice. But Iznang and Keighley were there to shepherd the others away from such guilt and discord, assuring them that the doctors were true leaders. Yes, some patients had to sacrifice themselves for the greater good, but that’s how things were accomplished in the world. Only with a scientific and utilitarian mindset could one truly carve a path through ignorance. Or carve a path through such gray matter.

This Secret Cabal

This group of doctors did not initially choose a name by which to identify themselves. They had a few nicknames for themselves (“The Chadwick Boys” was one, a name used because most of the doctors took peripheral jobs at the Chadwick Asylum up until a fire destroyed it in 1871), but nothing deeply distinguishing. What the group *did* have, however, was a motto that also served as a secret “code phrase” when such mystery was necessary. The phrase is a passage paraphrased from Dickens’ novel *Dombey and Son*, in reference to Mesmerism: “The intenseness of the wish gives me power over another,” said the first. “Though the wish is unexpressed,” said the second. To this day, some of the Sleeper Kindred of VII find themselves reciting this passage upon waking some nights, or writing it down without realizing it. A few have unknowingly carved the phrase into their arms with a box cutter.

As the years went on, however, the small core group of doctors and occultists grew. Their nickname invoking the Chadwick Asylum was fitting, but some felt it was in “poor taste.” Erich Iznang was to give the group another nickname, this one of a more tasteful (and perhaps relevant) nature. Iznang had quite a bit of interest in mythology, and had occasionally taken to invoking the name of his “patron spirit,” the prophet of ancient Greece called Tiresias. To Iznang, Tiresias represented the doctor’s work implicitly. Tiresias had spent life as both sexes, embodying all of humanity. It was this fact that lead Tiresias to weigh in on an argument between

Zeus and Hera, a quarrel about which gender experienced the greatest pleasure from sexual intercourse. Tiresias, knowing the truth, said that Zeus was correct and that the *man* experienced the lion's share of pleasure during sex. For Tiresias' knowledge, Hera made him blind, but in his blindness he found further power. Tiresias discovered that he had the power within himself to prophesy future events, and that power allowed him to be Greece's most renowned soothsayer.

These elements appealed to Iznang intensely. He saw himself and his collective very much like Tiresias — struck blind because of too much knowledge, but struggling desperately to find a power higher than mere corporeal sight.

It was from this association that Iznang began to call the group the "Tiresian Society," after the blind prophet. It is said that Iznang even had a bronze plaque hanging on his wall with a quote from Tiresias found in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*: "How terrible it is to have wisdom when it does not benefit those who have it."

The Booth Boy

The group did not begin to see useful, measurable results until nearly a decade had passed. They had some success during that time; their practice wasn't completely devoid of progress. Not only did hypnotism when combined with brain surgery grant them ways to modify (or destroy) a subject's entire personality regardless of psychic ability, but some small growth in the paranormal realm as well was achieved. Some patients, after having operations upon their pre-frontal lobes, showed growth in both ESP and clairvoyance. And yet, such results were not enough — the group pursued its goals with dogged determination. Both Keighley and Iznang, now older, neglected all aspects of a normal life in the hopes of achieving the critical breakthrough that would change everything.

That change came in 1880 with a subject named Tom Booth. Booth was a criminal, caught trying to break into Chadwick Asylum. Two of the doctors discovered him and brought him to Iznang. Booth wasn't *just* a criminal — he was one of London's perpetually downtrodden, a scavenger and thief who spent a great deal of time in the sewers looking for coins or scraps of clothing to sell, and who also was a "corpse-hunter," seeking out corpses in the river and in back alleys to rob. Booth was also a 13-year-old boy.

He was unwashed, was without any social graces and was prone to fits of violence and self-abuse. More importantly to the doctors, Booth claimed that both his parents were dead. Nobody would miss him if he disappeared; for all intents and purposes, he had already vanished from any kind of public recognizance.

The Society chose to operate upon Booth. Some members held objections to the practice of operating on

an unwilling child. But Iznang was a convincing man, and noted that not only was this an important surgery, but that they had *already* engaged in such operations upon unwilling participants. The point was that such participants were sadly without their own cognitive reasoning skills — they were lunatics, criminals or both. Booth might have been only a boy, but he was bound for Chadwick or prison within a few short years. The Society could only be doing him a favor. Iznang's words did the trick; all objections were silenced.

With Keighley leading the surgery, Iznang used hypnotism to anesthetize the child, and the doctors sawed open the top of the boy's skull. They operated upon the various professed "sub-organs" of the brain, concentrating most of the scalpel-work upon the frontal lobe and on the bridge between the two hemispheres. It was a long operation, and, at one point, they feared they had done irreparable harm when the boy's body was seized by fits. But, nearly 12 hours later, they emerged from the procedure and allowed the boy to recover.



THE IZNANG PROTOCOL

It did not have such an official-sounding name at first, but over time the Iznang Protocol would be codified and adopted by the group in an effort to identify those subjects who best exhibited the raw potential for surgical psychic advancement. This protocol essentially states that the ideal candidates are young, without formalized education and have depressed egos and limited (or negative) self-image. Some level of mild to moderate mental illness was similarly advantageous to the process. Likely patients, the protocol said, tend to come from areas of poverty and cultural ruination. Such subjects were believed to have the mental and emotional voids necessary for any psychic capabilities to take root. This protocol informed much of the group's operative activity for the subsequent 60–70 years.



Tom Booth not only recovered — it quickly became clear that his personality had changed drastically. He was no longer an aggressive, angry boy. Now, he was calm and seemingly content. While his cognitive skills didn't seem altogether improved, his mood seemed completely stable.

But it wasn't until months later that doctors realized that the operation was *truly* a success. (After all, fixing his hostile demeanor was never the true aim of the surgery.) Before the operation, Booth had shown *zero* ability or potential in regards to psychic talent. Months after the operation, however, Booth began to demonstrate signs of precognition. Moreover, he was also able to *move* things without touching them. It was nothing extreme: he could not lift a chair and hurl it across the room with the power of his mind, but he *was* able to nudge an ether bottle and



knock it over or move a lancet across a table, inch by inch. For the first time, the doctors had achieved their goal of fostering psychic abilities. The only thing to do now was to hone the process and duplicate their results.

The 20th Century

The coming of the 20th Century saw a number of shifts within the Tiresian Society. The first shift was simply a case of success versus failure — the group's rate of success was better than its rate of failure. Second, success brought on board a number of new members: doctors, psychologists, hypnotists, occultists. Moreover, the group also claimed a number of new psychics among its ranks after the relative accomplishment with Tom Booth. Of course, success wasn't without its downside. In this case, such success and growth made it difficult for the group to longer sustain itself financially. All the easy crutches were gone — Chadwick had closed, Iznang was older and ailing and the "throw scientific caution to the wind" attitude of the Victorians was dwindling. The group could not continue, not without some kind of funding.

This resulted in the third shift in the Society's practices and principles. No longer did the members believe that they must explore psychic phenomena for the sake of doing so; such preternatural abilities had to be put toward some kind of function. Function would then lead to income and funding, and the group would be allowed to survive.

The few psychics they had fostered were all overly tractable individuals. They were obedient to a point, exercising free will only when it didn't countermand the larger group's desires. So came the question, could the psychics be made even more obedient? Could they be truly controlled, made to comply even when it went against their ethical coding and fear thresholds? Control over such psychics was more than merely having them as useful members of a group. No, this meant creating human tools, even weapons.

The question was, how to program these psychics? The Tiresians attempted cult-style programming, with systems of reward and failure and adherence to some ambiguous higher ideal. With Iznang's help, they also bolstered such "training" with hypnotic suggestions. Unfortunately, it wasn't quite enough. Yes, the programming took hold and the few psychics were made all the more submissive, but still they resisted any actions that went against their moral encoding or that put them in bodily harm. And so the decision was made that the Tiresians would attempt further surgery in the hopes of modifying the mind once again to open the door to complete tractability.

Psychic Surgery

It's worth noting here that in the years prior to this decision, Tom Booth became a truly powerful psychic.

In many projects, the first test case is often the least successful, but, in this case, Booth's powers would remain unparalleled throughout the group's history.

The boy demonstrated a wide range of abilities. He exhibited limited clairvoyance, could read surface thoughts from individuals within line of sight, was able to move or even levitate small objects with the power of his mind. None of these powers was particularly potent, but revealed a wide array of possibility. However, one ability Booth displayed was one that was not only powerful, but would eventually come to great use to the group.

This ability was discovered when one of the doctors broke a glass phial in a simple slip of the fingers. The glass went into the doctor's hand in multiple places. Tom Booth was nearby, and a curious thing happened. Booth approached as the doctor was attempting to clean the wound and failing to remove the glass with tweezers. Booth reached out and grasped the doctor's wrist gently — the doctor would later recount that the pain in his hand then ceased. He watched as Booth reached in as casually as one might reach down to pick up a penny and inserted his fingers *into* the flesh upon the doctor's palm. The psychic's fingers literally entered the flesh where no wounds existed, and plucked out each piece of glass as if it were nothing. The doctor experienced no pain, and, when Booth had finished, the wounds were red and puffy but *sealed*. The doctor also experienced no subsequent infection and minor scarring.

It was this ability (one that would be labeled "psychic surgery") that the group considered quite advantageous. When the time came to operate once again on the psychic brains to invoke deep-seated obedient programming, Booth was asked to assist with his singular talent.

Sleepers

Keighley and the group discovered that, with the faintest of corrections to those nerve endings connecting the frontal lobe to the rest of the brain, the doctors created the foundation for true submission. (In fact, the group soon learned that Booth's skills in this were particularly useful, for they did not even need to open the skull. Booth was able to quite literally thrust his fingers past the eyeball and through the layers of bone past the socket, and surgically modify the brain by only a fraction. This left no scarring, and could be done with the patient fully awake and aware.) Iznang reinforced this process with long hours of hypnotic programming, thus creating a fully biddable psychic human being.

The process, however, was not precise. Damaging the personality was necessary; destroying it only made the psychic a brain-dead invalid. Controlling the psychics through hypnotic suggestions *usually* worked. The psychics could be made to harm others or themselves without a moment's hesitation. However, once in a while, the psychic's core personality would come to the

forefront and cause a great deal of cognitive dissonance. The subject would become violent and uncontrollable.

To curb this unfortunate side effect, Iznang created something that would later be referred to as the Sleeper Effect. Through hypnosis, Iznang left the core personality at the forefront and instead kept the programming buried in the subject's subconscious mind. The hypnotic encoding only surfaced under certain circumstances, such as at a particular time and date or when the individual encountered very specific stimuli. In this way, the core personality remained fractured only for a limited period of time. When the program was in effect, the original persona was then submerged or "slept." Then, when the programming was finished (i.e., when the subject had completed the goal laid before her), the mind was allowed to return to the original personality with limited repercussions.

Mind Control

It was in this way that the Society was able to find its function. Not only did the group have a stable of individuals with limited psychic ability, but each individual was subject to specific mental programming that allowed him to perform clandestine tasks regardless of ethical or religious coding. During the first half of the 20th century, the group found a number of "sponsors" within multiple countries. Despite the deaths of both Erich Iznang and John Keighley, the group thrived. It opened offices in Edinburgh, Washington, DC, San Diego and Cairo. Although not an official part of any organization, the Society saw clandestine funding come in from several government-sponsored agencies.

In Britain, they were first financially endowed by the Committee of Imperial Defense in 1910, and, after World War I, money came in from England's intelligence service, MI5. In America, the precursor to the CIA, the Office of the Coordinator of Information, helped subsidize the group's efforts on the sly. Other smaller world governments contributed in "black operations" capacity, all with the intent of utilizing the Sleeper agents in undercover procedures. Mind-controlled psychics were, at least in theory, particularly valuable. They were capable of seeing things other agents might miss, if only by the nature of having the gifts of precognition or clairvoyance. Moreover, if any of these agents were identified or captured, the elaborate but hidden programming of their minds would stop interlopers from gaining useful information. By and large, such Sleeper agents were little more than highly functional automatons, allowed to live "normal" lives for the most part, but occasionally called upon to "sleep" and enter service.

The majority of these subjects were made to forget any connection to any group (including the original hypnotists and surgeons), and were often made to forget that they even *had* psychic abilities — that is, of course, until they were awakened for temporary use.

The agents were used for several decades by many governments or secret agencies. The Tiresian Society "enhanced" the Sleeper condition in a number of ways — some useful, some not. But the experiments to make a more pliable and functional subject continued. The Society introduced drugs, predominantly psychotropic, into the mix. The group also tested a number of so-called truth serums, combining their use with such things as electroshock therapy and self-hypnosis (usually achieved by having the agent listen to his own voice through headphones).



SLEEPERS IN THE REICH

Those rare few aware of the group's veiled history have long suspected that the Society received funding and supplied agents not only for Allied nations, but also for some of what would become the Axis nations in World War II, specifically Germany. Curiously, this was a rumor *within* the group, as well as within those investigating the group's history. The fact is, the group became so spread out and unwieldy that it's possible that a splinter group aided Germany before and during World War II. Further evidence for this theory came in the mid-1940s, whereupon an ex-Nazi doctor became an "advisor" to the group's movements and research



Dark Enlightenment

It was in 1951 that the Society discovered the existence of vampires. Or, at least, it discovered the existence of a *single* vampire, a monster among monsters calling himself Mr. Morning. They discovered Morning out in the United States capital, and at first believed him to be a psychic with nocturnal tendencies. He was capable of controlling the minds of others, and seemed preternaturally attuned to his extant senses. Already this threw the group into panic mode — to their knowledge, psychics did not *truly* exist outside those the Society had fostered. Yes, rumors swirled about other "bona fide" psychics, but investigations always revealed such subjects to be liars or madmen. Here was what appeared to be a legitimate psychic operating outside the margins. The first fear was, of course, that some other group was operating in parallel, cultivating psychic potential in agents. The immediate suspicion was that the CIA had begun its own experimentations, and had freed their agents from the moral strictures that bound most individuals. (After all, this nocturnal psychic was able to kill with seemingly no remorse, and even command others to destroy *themselves*.)

This discovery of the vampire would be the death of the group, though they did not know it yet. In an effort to uncover the truth of this potentially rogue agent, the group sent out a team (assisted by Tom Booth, now an old man) to psychically corral the rogue and bring him



in for interrogation and examination. They were able to subdue him telepathically, or so they believed.

The group was able to hold onto the vampire for the better part of a year, a year that unfortunately yielded very little information aside from what the creature wanted them to know. Booth, old as he was, sat in on most of the interrogations, attempting to go beyond the surface thoughts and discover more about this anomaly. The creature allowed them to know his name and what he was. He gave them some understanding into the depth and origin of his abilities. And, just when they were finally in the stages of deciding what to do with him (even considering trying to duplicate the creation of vampires), Mr. Morning decided that his time with them was done, and he murdered all members of the team local to the area.

All except for Tom Booth. Booth was special, Morning could see that. Booth's age belied his abilities, and the vampire could see past that. Morning Embraced the aging psychic, realizing that he now had a vehicle for his desired transcendence.

Morning

Mr. Morning was a monster among monsters, a vampire hungry for the blood of other Kindred. He had once been a seminal member of the local Sanctified, but time — and perhaps madness — changed that. (His clan, to this day, remains unknown, though lingering rumors about the madman suggest he belonged with the Mekhet regardless

of his blood-borne allegiances.) Like some Kindred, Morning sought to undo his Damnation instead of accepting it as God's determining plan. The Sanctified, of course, accepted that vampires were predators exacting divine will, and, to a degree, Morning still believed this. The key difference is that while Morning believed *himself* to be an arbiter of judgment, he did not necessarily accept that other vampires were deemed as such from on high.

As such, Mr. Morning decided to seek the mystical state of Golconda, but not by consulting any moth-eaten parchment or mad mentors. No, Morning set his own presupposed course for transcendence, which involved enacting God's will by cutting free the sin that spread like a cancer within the vampire population. The Damned were called such for a reason, and deserved nothing but Final Death for their proximity to sinful transgression. On a local level, Morning had little problem hunting down those Kindred deserving of destruction — but while he was eternal of flesh, the population of the Damned grew night by night in other cities, and there was nothing he could do about it. Salvation was a far cry, a distant echo unable to be heard.

That is, until Morning was "captured," and took control of the Sleeper organization with Tom Booth as the Kindred's first step.

Swift Demise

Morning wasted little time. With Booth as his agent, the vampire made swift motion to dismantle and destroy

whatever infrastructure he could find of this paltry human organization. Mortals were of little interest to him — yes, they could be utilized, and, in a few cases, some were kept as ghouls. But for the most part, humans were not capable of abetting this much-needed scourge against the sinful Kindred. Humans were weak-skinned bags of blood and sinew, and, for this task of transcendence, Morning would need other Kindred.

By the end of the following year, Mr. Morning had begun to abduct his first Kindred. With the help of Booth and a few enthralled surgeons, Morning would help to re-write not just the minds of the captured vampires but the programming of their very *blood*. With their personalities fractured and their Vitae containing a hidden code of operations, Morning soon had a small number of Sleeper Kindred, who were unaware that they had been changed in anyway — that is, until the proper stimuli were administered. When the Sleepers “awakened,” they took to the task of hunting the sins and obliterating the sinners. When destruction was not on the agenda, conversion was the goal. The Sleepers themselves were capable of kidnapping other appropriate Kindred (such as those in the coterie of these unknowing agents) and administering the proper programming to these abductees. In this way, the vampires became a self-replicating machine, working together without realizing it in an effort to purge the stain of wickedness from all Damned, everywhere.

This Broken Machine

Mr. Morning utilized the gutted husk of the Sleeper project to fulfill his needs, and, for a time, he was the shepherd directing the movements of his flock. But it would not last forever.

One night, not long before dawn, they came for him. Entering his chambers were a number of Kindred, each of them one of his Sleepers. Together they whispered and counted upward to the number seven, and told him that upon his soul they could sense the stain of the sin called Pride.

What little rumor surrounds that night suggests that Morning did not resist, did not fight against his agents. It is said that he gave himself to them, realizing that he was as broken as the rest of them, and that transcendence would only come with a long and final rest.

Ah, but the destruction of Mr. Morning did not end the scourge of Sleepers. Their programming continues, aimless and ceaseless. They are Kindred who remain unaware that their blood is a secret cipher commanding them to the untoward destruction of their peers. These Kindred destroy those who smell of sin, and those who can be saved are converted, kidnapped and programmed. And, from that, their numbers slowly grow toward some strange and unforgiving transcendence.

Culture

VII is not a covenant. Not precisely. Covenants come together based around some kind of known ideal or goal, whether it be political, social or religious. The Kindred of VII do not knowingly have a goal, and, in fact, generally do not know that they belong to the “organization” in the first place. Those Damned who are aware of the existence of VII like to think of it in such simple terms, accepting that while it purportedly espouses monstrous principles, it is a covenant like the others. But VII and its vampires are not so easy to know, not so simply categorized. So what is it, and how does it work?

The Seventh Day

The majority of vampires who “belong” to the ranks of VII do not realize it. VII, or what is sometimes known as the Seventh Day, is not something a Kindred *joins*. VII does not hold recruitment drives; they do not disseminate propaganda. VII is so clandestine and under the cover of shadows that even its members do not realize that they are members. That is because they are *Sleepers*, vampires who have been captured by other members of VII and unknowingly indoctrinated into the group. It is a self-propagating and largely uncontrolled process, creating cells of unaware vampires whose programming remains “dormant” until the proper stimuli are encountered.

Indoctrination

Sleepers are programmed through a grim process that is an amalgamation of hypnotic suggestion, psychic surgery and other vampiric Disciplines. By and large, this procedure takes the better portion of an entire night, sometimes longer if the vampire is particularly resilient (or if the “programmers” are not precisely skilled at the task of conversion).

Vampires chosen for conversion instead of destruction tend to demonstrate a few key characteristics. First, chosen Kindred must not be “too far gone” — that is to say, they are not yet monsters, not yet debased and devolved. Second, most Kindred selected for programming are not particularly old. Neonates and ancillae are favored; elders are not, for not only are they able to resist the encoding far more easily than others, but their age tends to cause their humanity to degrade. (As such, elders are generally targets for destruction, not conversion.) Third and final, those Damned sought for programming are not loners. While loners might make easily accessible targets (who won’t be missed), they are also not generally useful. Loners aren’t trusted in the Danse Macabre, and VII Kindred must be trusted, must be allowed to get close to potential targets for destruction or conversion. Moreover, loners do not have any kind of built-in social connections. Loners do not belong to coterie, they forego any clan affiliation beyond name alone and they do not attend the functions of city or covenant. No support system means the loner

will not be particularly functional with regard to the goals of the Seventh Day. A recluse's lack of proximity to other Kindred means she can not get close enough to destroy or convert. Those vampires with reasonably (though not extreme) social support are Kindred who can further the goals of VII. Coterie members in particular make excellent targets for conversion. After the Seventh Day is able to program a single coterie member, collecting the members for conversion one by one becomes all the more simple, until the group is a fully functional cell operating toward the transcendent Sabbath of VII.

Indoctrination itself is never pleasant. The target must first be abducted, which is done according to the skill sets of the attacking Sleepers. If the Sleepers are highly trained in the mental Disciplines, they may be able to "convince" the target to come with them. If the Sleepers have only their physical abilities upon which to rely, then they will perform whatever acts of violence necessary to capture the victim. (In this case, staking is usually the preferred result.)

The Sleepers take the target to an isolated room, one that is both plain and an eyesore — anywhere from a condemned building with cracked walls, a carpet of roaches and leaking pipes or, alternately, an office building closed for the night with stark white walls, gray carpet and brutal fluorescence. The location is meant to be kept away from interlopers and remain unsettling or unpleasant to the victim. The further afield the target is from his comfort zone, the better.

Comfort is, of course, not an option. The victim is strapped down somewhere — a table, a chair, even pinned to a wall while standing — and the indoctrination begins. (Perhaps creepiest of all is the propensity for many Sleepers to wear masks of various sorts during this procedure, be they surgical masks or Halloween costumes.)

The only step truly required in this process is that the programmer must feed the victim some of his blood. The Vitae of Sleepers is infected with VII's programming, and this delivery of blood into the subject's system causes the invasive programming to take hold — at least, in theory. While this is the only requisite step, it is not one guaranteed to carry the process to success. It is for this reason that the Sleepers bolster the indoctrination procedure with a number of other methods to ensure that the encoded Vitae gains dominance over the abductee.

One tactic is simple brainwashing. One or several of the captors rail at the victim with the ideologies of VII. Some repeat the same information over and over again, others choose to engage in a one-sided discussion with the target and berate his values and diminish his ego. Threats are common, too, especially if the victim still attempts to maintain some connection to his mortal life — threats against friends and loved ones are one powerful way to help chip away at a Kindred's will.

Another, more advanced tactic (and one that is likely combined with brainwashing) is hypnosis. Sleepers trained in either psychology or the occult may know how to implant hypnotic suggestions into an unwitting individual. While not the cornerstone of the conversion process, hypnosis does help to deliver information straight to the victim's subconscious mind, which is the very level of consciousness where the Sleeper program hides. Such suggestions usually help to winnow the victim's self-image — he is base, he is vile, his values are weak and depraved, and so on.

When available, Disciplines also come into the procedure, for such supernatural will is of great assistance when shattering a victim's mind in order for the Sleeper program to infect him. Dominate, Majesty and Nightmare are of particular use, for each of these works upon the subject's mind in a number of ways. Whether working on a one-to-one level like Dominate or simply infusing the victim with an overarching feeling of fear or wonderment (Nightmare and Majesty, respectively), the Disciplines all help to destabilize the target's core persona.

One Discipline is of particular use. The Psychogenics Discipline allows a Sleeper to perform psychic surgery in the same fashion as Tom Booth. This Discipline is driven by the program, and is performed in the same way it always has in an effort to damage the victim's frontal lobe and hence reduce the mind's defenses against the invasive code of the Seventh Day. The Sleeper performing the psychic surgery thrusts his fingers past the corners of the eyes and through the layer of bone past the eye sockets. Beyond this lies the victim's frontal lobe. The surgeon is guided by the program here, and requires no medical training as his fingers pierce, pull and pinch away an almost insignificant portion of brain tissue. Provided all goes well, the target becomes tractable and the brain is unable to heal that most trivial of incisions.

This procedure, when taken from the beginning and factoring in the number of variable methods that are potentially involved, is simply too much for a single Sleeper. It is for this reason that most Sleepers convert vampires with three or more of their own kind, all preferably with different abilities to wage war upon the victim's psyche. (It's also due to pragmatism — it's far easier for a Sleeper to abduct a single vampire when accompanied by others.)

When the process begins to take hold, the victim's mind and senses begin betraying him. A number of things may happen at this point. He may experience visual or auditory hallucinations (the walls may drip with blood, children may be heard screaming in the next room or the target might see or hear his friends and call out to them). He may also be revisited by any number of unpleasant memories (his Embrace, any purposeful or accidental murders he committed, the deaths of any loved ones).

The mind plays tricks upon the victim as the parasite program worms its way into his blood and brain.

Once the process is completed, the subject's mind is wiped clean of the memory, and replaced with something mundane and explicable. (The program handles this for the most part, but any capable Sleepers will attempt to ensure that this happens properly.) The convert is relinquished and may not be contacted again by these Sleepers. He is given over to his programming, unaware that anything has changed.

Should the procedure fail, or should the victim be able to resist in some manner (or even escape), that vampire is no longer seen as a viable candidate for conversion. The priority instead becomes total destruction.

The Program

The Sleeper program is a parasite. It lives within the blood of the Sleeper, watching and waiting. It exists symbiotically with its host, for the most part — for the host's health and security is important to the program's mission at hand, which is to obtain transcendence and enter the Sabbath. Still, the program knows when it must put the Sleeper in harm's way for the greater good. The Sabbath cannot be achieved without sacrifice. The program also knows when it must spread to maximize its potential.

And yet, for all this talk of the program being a parasite, it is not entirely separate from the Sleeper, as well. The program uses the Sleeper's personality to develop itself — without a personality, it is just a mystical inscription of the Priorities emblazoned upon every droplet of blood. It must have an engine, and the Sleeper's persona is that engine. Sleepers are not robots; they do not engage in tasks as mindless pawns. While the program maintains true autonomy, it does so with the judgments (both good and bad) of the Sleeper's own personality, fueled and driven by her own prejudices and urges.

Over time, it perhaps becomes unclear where the separation lies between the Sleeper and the Sleeper program.

Unfortunately, the encoding of Vitae is both potent and subtle, providing of course that it was done correctly. The blood, which truly drives every vampire, changes. A subject's Vitae shifts, almost as if whatever mystical DNA lies within those dead red blood cells has been broken down and recombined into new parameters for action and survival.

For the most part, this encoding remains dormant. The vampire's core personality does not change in any obvious manner (though there are some minor elements that come to the surface, as discussed below). Most of the Seventh Day Damned spend the majority of their nights "Sleeping," that is to say they act normally, with no overarching goals related to the needs or desires of their VII programming. They go to covenant meetings, hunt and feed with their coteries and enjoy (or despise)

all parts of their never-ending Requiems. Few are ever the wiser. However, from time to time, the programming goes from passive to active, and the Sleeper "awakens."

Finally Waking

The process of going from Sleeping to Waking may happen several times in a month, or a vampire may go years without ever having her programming go active. It all depends on the local needs of the Seventh Day and how often the Sleeper Kindred encounters suitable stimuli.

Such stimuli come essentially in two forms. One is internal, meaning that the dormant programming in the vampire recognizes potential priorities in furthering the goals of the Seventh Day. It is in this way that the vampire makes a subconscious decision whether or not to go "active." For instance, if the Sleeper encounters another Kindred who demonstrates a strong adherence to sin, the Sleeper may go active one of the following nights in an effort to destroy the offending transgressor. Alternately, if the vampire and her programming subconsciously determine that a local vampire is suitable for conversion, she may similarly go active in an attempt to bring this particular Kindred into the ranks.

Rarely does a vampire attempt any of this alone. Solo attempts are only made when absolutely necessary, such as when a Kindred has no other Seventh Day brethren nearby, or when an area is small enough or the target is weak enough to allow such a possibility of success. Largely, however, VII vampires gather together in limited coteries to perform the tasks at hand as demanded by their programming. This leads to the second type of stimulus received.

When seeking assistance, the local Kindred of the Seventh Day contact one another surreptitiously. The nature of this call-out is not universal, and can be quite different city to city, group to group. All of it, however, is decided somewhat by programming. Meaning that when the appropriate VII vampires convert another, during that conversion process they input the proper coding telling the subject exactly how to contact others and where to look for messages as well. Again, the means by which VII members contact one another are not in any way congruous with the members in other cities. In one region, VII Kindred may know to turn to a local AM station at 7 p.m. every evening to listen for coded missives. Or they may be programmed to check the local bulletin board outside a nearby church every Tuesday night at midnight. Others communicate through more common channels such as email or cell phone (though such communiqués are always coded so only the Seventh Day can easily understand). Sleepers are hardly aware of these changes in behavior, and the core personalities often compensate by filling in the gaps with inaccurate but believable information. The vampire who checks the church bulletin board may convince himself he's

doing so because he's looking for potential sources of food, or maybe he's "looking to buy a piano and hopes that someone at the church will eventually sell one." Or the Kindred who checks that AM station for a couple minutes every night does so because she likes listening to the Art Bell show, or perhaps the white noise helps to "wake her up" at the start of the night. It's even possible that the Kindred isn't really aware that he's checking these sources at all, that his mind simply refuses to question the process in the first place.

The goal of most Seventh Day vampires is to avoid any and all of this clandestine messaging by being part of a coterie that works together when *Sleeping and Waking*. While such secret missives (whether tagged on a wall in graffiti or encoded in a JPEG file sent over email) are generally foolproof, they are still decipherable codes to those diligent enough to look and notice such oddities. It is instead safer to skip such risky attempts at communication, and having a coterie that works together in all "modes" is critical to this safety. It is for this reason that the Damned of VII prefer to convert coterie mates whenever possible. Those who cannot be destroyed are either used as pawns to get at higher-ups (a sire for instance) or are destroyed for fear that such creatures will stand in the way of the group's desired transcendence.

The Seven Priorities

When Mr. Morning (with the help of Tom Booth) seized and converted the first vampire into the ranks of the Seventh Day, he encoded a specific set of priorities as part of the programming driven into the blood. These Seven Priorities drive agents *while they are active*. While the programming remains in place during a Sleeper's ignorance (i.e., "rest"), it lies dormant and does not directly influence the actions of that vampire. This means that it is certainly possible for a vampire to unknowingly betray his subconscious encoding while existing in the normal passive state. Though, as seen below, too many violations of these existing unwitting precepts may cause the vampire to attempt to destroy himself when he becomes active again.

Achieve Transcendence

This is the first and most important priority of any VII vampire. All the other Priorities, in effect, add up to and attempt to directly maintain this original precept. Transcendence means, for all intents and purposes, Golconda. Sleeper agents, however, are not directly aware of exactly what this entails, beyond the fact that it involves keeping themselves pure while eradicating contrary impurity in other vampires (ostensibly by destroying said Kindred). Beyond that somewhat ambiguous mission statement, Sleepers when active do not know the elements and rewards of transcendence. Whether it means achieving some kind of personal enlightenment, gaining mortality or destroying oneself after eradicating all of vampirekind is not known.

The vampires merely work toward this vague notion of perfection for all Kindred in the *Danse Macabre*.

Collect Intelligence

Missions of information-gathering and reconnaissance are critical to the vampires of the Seventh Day — more critical than any other, because only with accurate information can they determine an appropriate course of action. When active, agents of VII compile as much information as possible during that time, especially specific data regarding the local Kindred. Such records attempt to note each vampire's parent Clan, interests, known abilities, weaknesses, allies and enemies. (All of this is of course filtered through the individual vampire collecting such information, and has no guarantee of being accurate.) Other supernatural entities are also catalogued when known. In addition these "personnel" records, agents tend to keep on hand any other pertinent information — data regarding local Elysiums, havens, territories, routes, etc.

In an example of how a Sleeper agent quite literally has a fracture in her personality, she most likely keeps all of this information hidden from her passive "origin" personality whenever possible. She may keep it locked away in a safety deposit box or in a password-protected and encrypted file on some FTP server out in the uncharted wasteland of the Internet. This system is unfortunately imperfect, and occasionally a vampire will awaken the following night with a strange scrap of paper caught in the cuff of her jeans detailing a weird bit of intelligence from her unwitting gathering as an agent of VII. Something as simple as this might cause her to begin unraveling the knots that tie up her submerged programming.

Eliminate Sin

Vampires are, in many ways, the very avatars of traditional sin. They exemplify those darker urges, for the Requiem deepens the ennui and discards the buffering shell of morality, bringing to the surface all those sly and selfish whims that humans might normally have resisted. Mr. Morning, the original programmer, was a zealous member of the Lancea Sanctum whose own fervor outgrew that of other Sanctified. The covenant espoused that vampires were purposefully and rightly cursed by God, but Morning began to see beyond this. He began to see an eschatological "end game," whereupon the sin was scraped clean from the Kindred and transcendence would finally be possible for these wretched undead.

VII became Morning's vehicle for this transcendence, and a deep priority in the programming is to find any and all sin within vampires and burn it out. The manner this takes is almost inevitably Final Death; the encoding offers little flexibility in this regard. If a vampire isn't too far gone, however, she may be a candidate for conversion into the Seventh Day as opposed to outright destruction. Sometimes, the partial destruction or modification of the personality is enough.



Identify and Convert

Of equal importance to hunting down and extinguishing the fires of sin is identifying other Kindred who would be suitable for the Seventh Day to aid in the task of achieving the Sabbath. Yes, all vampires are base and vile creatures, but not all of the Damned are so deeply mired in sin that they cannot be pulled free and given a higher purpose. Alternately, not all Kindred are useful enough to require indoctrination into VII. The determination of this is left to the individual Sleeper (or that Sleeper's coterie, presuming all are of the Seventh Day). If a vampire is found to be too sinful, too tainted, he is marked for eventual (rarely immediate) destruction. If a Sleeper identifies another vampire as being within the margins and without too much adherence to sin, the Sleeper must then determine whether that vampire will be *useful* to the cause. Kindred who are foolish or inept will only betray the kingdom through their incompetence. (In the grand bell curve that is the Danse Macabre, the largest population of Kindred fall into this middling, non-functional group.) For the most part, such Kindred are left alone until the time comes when they either descend too deeply into vice or become otherwise useful and, hence, targets for conversion.

Maintain Purity

Obviously, if sin is the greatest enemy of transcendence, it stands to follow that a Sleeper should not then welcome sin into her Requiem. For the most part, this works. The programming stays submerged when the vampire is pas-

sive in her night-to-night existence, but the programming may have echoes. Moreover, many vampires chosen for conversion are those who do not show obvious potential for backsliding. This doesn't imply that VII vampires are paragons of virtue, but they certainly tend to appear more virtuous than some other Kindred. Regardless, sometimes this priority fails. The nature of its failure is that, when a Sleeper is in passive mode, she is arguably free to do as she chooses. If tempted by the Beast within or perhaps even tempted by other Kindred, she may certainly begin to grow comfortable with her vices and appropriately begin to lose Humanity in the process. This is fine up to a point — there exists a certain leeway in this situation whereupon a Sleeper may continue her mission when active despite the faint stains of sin upon her soul. However, once those margins are exceeded, a curious thing happens, one unforeseen and without contingency. The Sleeper "turns" — she no longer hates and hunts sin, but instead grows to loathe virtue. No longer are the sinful standing in the way of transcendence in the vampire's mind — at this stage, it's those righteous vampires who are roadblocks to enlightenment. And those righteous Damned must be destroyed. This is not a common shift — but when it happens, it can infect all of the Seventh Day vampires in a given city.

Protect Identity

This precept is twofold in its meaning. The first obvious goal of this priority is for an individual Sleeper to go undiscovered. The second purpose, one that's tied into



the first, is for the overarching group and mission of VII to remain hidden. On the individual level, a Seventh Day vampire goes to great lengths to keep his cover and to maintain total secrecy. The Sleepers must enforce their own Masquerade over that of the first to remain utterly hidden, but breaches are an inevitable reality. Sometimes, an active Sleeper is caught red-handed in the midst of cleansing some poor vampire's sin or capturing another for surgical and hypnotic conversion. Other times, a Sleeper is her own worst enemy, as the core persona uses her time "asleep" to begin to follow the tiny thread toward the truth of her programmed condition. Sometimes, such discovery leads only to the single Sleeper, other times it begins to lead toward other Sleepers of VII as a whole.

Whenever this seems possible, a Seventh Day vampire goes into something of a programmed panic mode. When the kingdom becomes compromised, desperate actions must be taken. If the Sleeper can identify normal Kindred who may be close to the truth, those Kindred must either be immediately converted or destroyed. There can be no waiting, no patience to see how it works out — the Sleeper is driven to urgent action. If another Sleeper is identified as the problem (one who is most likely unaware of his own vulnerability), the local Sleepers come together and attempt to destroy the weak link. If a Sleeper discovers that he himself is the problem, then things get a little tricky . . .

Failure Equals Abort

The programming is not unclear about what happens when a Sleeper discovers that he is inadvertently endangering the coming Sabbath: he must remove himself from the equation. The margin for error here is *supposed* to be incredibly slim; the vampire destroys himself dispassionately, no questions asked. He chains himself outside just before morning, he leaps into a burning building, he voluntarily wanders into werewolf territory with raw meat hung around his neck, whatever does the trick.

Unfortunately, the inclusion of this single piece of programming is also potentially the largest weakness a Seventh Day Sleeper has, because at least half the time, this priority utterly *fails*. The core persona has its own programming, in a manner of speaking, and at the center of that programming is a desire for self-preservation. And, at least 50% of the time, that preservation instinct wins out over the encoding of the Seventh Day. The programming offers no fail-safe in this regard, no backup plan to guarantee the destruction of the unintentional offender. Worse still, the failure of this single priority tends to derail all the other Priorities.

This, in effect, makes the programming useless, and, while it doesn't outright destroy the Sleeper program, it does stop it from taking control. The Kindred does not gain any instant enlightenment from this — that part of her Requiem remains hidden unless she uncovers it with

external evidence, but it's not as if a flood of suppressed memories come rushing back. She is left ignorant and unaware, with only the lingering feeling that something terrible has happened. And, most likely, it has. Because when this priority fails, any other Seventh Day Kindred who learn of it will seek out this "broken arrow" and destroy her utterly. (For more information on this, see p. 148, "Breaking the Program.")

Vice and Virtue

The Seven Deadly Sins nicely encapsulate the range of indulgences found in all Kindred. Envy, Gluttony, Greed, Lust, Pride, Sloth, and Wrath? These sins (correspondent with the vices used as a crutch by both mortal and supernatural) must be overcome to achieve transcendence. But it is not enough to overcome them individually — such a triumph is nice, but ultimately meaningless in the grand scheme. The body politic of all Kindred is a macrocosm representing each individual vampire. Sin exists within each individual, but it stains the larger whole, as well. Only by removing sin from the entire body is the individual able to truly be cleansed (or at least, so the Seventh Day programming says).

According to Mr. Morning, the Damned could not be merely swayed from sin. The Sleeper programming suggests that it is not enough to convince such creatures to turn from sin in their unlives and anchor themselves with virtue. The Beast is a sickly thing, angry and subtle in the same turn — raging one minute, whispering seductively the next. The Requiem is potentially ceaseless, and over time the Beast worms its way into the notes and flourishes of this endless dirge. Inevitably, the Beast wins, and sin prevails.

Therefore, Kindred must be forced away from sin and vice. They will not turn themselves, and so VII is the hand that wrenches them free from such dependence. If the Kindred are too far gone and cannot be moved, then for the good of the world (and the coming Sabbath), they will be destroyed.

Does this mean that VII vampires are particularly virtuous? Not necessarily. It's certainly true that some Sleepers already attempt to hold on to their lingering humanity and, therefore, lean more toward a virtuous unlives than one smeared with sin and selfishness. Neonates in particular are more likely to hold onto their more human sides and maintain stronger morality, and this fits nicely with VII's ideals. However, the Kindred of the Seventh Day aren't necessarily virtuous. Although they may not actively go out and steal or violate that which they covet, they also will not necessarily go out of their way to help a crippled man cross a busy street. Also, as mentioned above, Sleepers are only unswervingly opposed to sin *when active*. When passive (i.e., the majority of their Requiems), they are essentially free to engage in whatever behavior interests them. Although

they're more likely to resist the Beast and engage in any kind of depraved revelry, they don't have a guarantee against such backsliding. If this happens too much, the Sleeper program may turn against its original purpose and become corrupted. Instead of hunting the sinful, the vampire accepts wickedness and then attempts to destroy the virtuous. (None have yet seen whether or not this reversal can in turn be reversed. It is as yet unknown whether a corrupted Sleeper can be turned back toward the path of the Sabbath.)

Identifying sin and vice (or virtue, for those corrupted Sleepers) is perhaps the trickiest part of a Sleeper's existence, because he has no perfect system upon which to rely. Younger or recently turned Seventh Day vampires must rely on instinct or training in distinguishing which vampires should become targets for destruction, which should be indoctrinated and which should be left alone. Some Sleepers rely purely on intuition, whereas others have some professional training to help them in this regard (whether they're psychologists, guidance counselors or even drill sergeants). Those Sleepers trained in the Seventh Day Discipline of Psychogenic Instrumentation (or just "Psychogenics") have an inbuilt ability to help them detect more accurately the nature of those Kindred they encounter.

That said, none of these systems are perfect, and sometimes, Sleepers make mistakes. In some cases, they convert vampires who are already too far gone in sin, and, in other cases, the Sleepers mistakenly destroy those Kindred who were perhaps undeserving of VII's priority programming.

Sleeping Versus Waking

The differences between an active Sleeper and a passive one are small but critical. Vampires of the Seventh Day do not turn into monotone automatons upon becoming active. While the programming takes over the core personality and modifies it, it still leaves the personality *largely* in place. From a distance or during a brief social encounter, the vampire may seem unchanged. The vampire speaks in the same voice, appears to hold the same opinions and doesn't mysteriously forget conversations or events that happened when the Sleeper was passive. (This does not, however, go the other way — passive Sleepers rarely remember anything from the time when they were active, for the programming is sure to create a number of simple, false memories to fill in the blanks). That said, minor changes do come to the surface. Active agents often lose some of the idiosyncrasies that make their core personas unique. The vampire might normally rely more heavily on slang or profanity in her normal speech patterns, whereas the programmed personality sometimes edits such inefficiency out. Or, if the Kindred sometimes slouches or nervously snaps her fingers, those physical tics might also fall by the wayside. The mask is good, but not perfect.

The programmed personality is generally aware of this deficiency, and often compensates by staying out of social situations that would make it vulnerable. If she can avoid Elysium that night, she will. If she knows a number of allied (and unconverted) Kindred are down at a club dancing and "drinking," she can simply stay away from that club or even that area of town. That said, sometimes such evasive maneuvers are simply impossible. If the Sleeper must go active on a night when the Sanctified are holding a Midnight Mass — and she herself is a member of the Lancea Sanctum — then it would be more dangerous *not* to show up to a function where she is expected. Moreover, sometimes the priority dictates being around other vampires and engaging them socially. After all, key to the mission is the gathering of intelligence on local Kindred. Some of this can be done from afar, but much of it must be done face-to-face. So, the active agent will occasionally involve herself in social situations and will attempt to cloak herself as best as possible, often only speaking when absolutely necessary (for it is easier to claim restlessness and disinterest than it is to cover up unconventional speech or body language).



BREAKDOWN

Sleepers remain passive — that is to say, bearing their original persona — most nights. Part of this is simply practical, for maintaining VII activity night after night and keeping it concealed would be considerably difficult. However, it's also necessary for reasons of function. Few Sleepers can handle more than a few nights at a time in active mode. The mind simply cannot handle it, and the division between brains combined with the focused intensity of the VII programming can cause small fractures in both personalities, bringing to the surface small-but-noticeable mental ailments (obsessive-compulsive disorder, for instance). Such mental instability only draws unwelcome attention.



Masks

One other part of the culture worth mentioning is the use of masks. Active Sleepers do not rely on masks at all times — when attempting to collect intelligence, for instance, masks can be an obvious distraction. However, when engaging in missions of destruction or conversion, some Sleepers have taken to wearing masks or other costume elements in an effort to keep their identities hidden if discovered. The types of mask worn are not consistent from Sleeper to Sleeper — one Sleeper might wear a medieval plague mask with the beaklike proboscis jutting from the eerie face, whereas another may favor something as simple as a rubbery Richard Nixon mask. Some also wear cloaks or other outfits odd for the Sleeper — black suits and hats or yellow raincoats, for instance.

Structure

Part of the Seventh Day's crucial advantage is that has no built-in structure and relies upon no given hierarchy. They do not have titles, they are not shepherded by local leaders, they do not attend grand convocations whereupon they discuss the goals and plans of the sect. The only "leader" they have are the directives granted from the original programming, and that is all. It is this neglect of any kind of structure that helps VII survive and ultimately remain hidden.

The vampires of the Seventh Day are similar in design to terrorist cells embedded in a foreign country. A terrorist cell is generally driven by some overarching goal, potentially religious (or at least cultural) in origin. Cell members have a known directive to cause fear and bring violence. This directive generally only comes to them once — after that, the group (which is likely two or more individuals) is on its own to achieve that goal. More importantly, they are not the only group working toward that vague or specific task — others are out there, unconnected to one another, attempting to fulfill whatever mission of fear guides them. One cell does not know what the next is doing — actually, one cell doesn't even know who, what or where the other cells are, or even if there *are* other groups. And although, unlike VII, terrorist cells have some kind of leadership, they are unconnected to these leaders after being put in place and set to action. The advantage of this is that no one thread connects each member. The only connections are local, and, even then, such regional threads are tenuous. Some organizations can be toppled by working one's way up the chain — arresting or killing the lackeys, then the lieutenants and eventually the leaders. Terrorist cells (and by proxy, the cells of VII) do not work that way. Like the hydra, cutting off one head doesn't destroy the body, and won't even lead to other heads. It just means that another head will sprout in its place somewhere else.

A single Seventh Day Sleeper agent has very limited connections to any other agents. If he has formed a coterie with other Sleepers, then he is aware of them. If he has taken part in the conversion of other Kindred into the fold, then he is aware of them. And that's it. A single Sleeper may not even have *these* connections, and may operate alone and oblivious to any other single Seventh Day vampire. A coterie of VII agents is almost never aware of any other coterie, whether local or far away. Again, this means that should the local Damned uncover a Sleeper, they cannot follow a trail of breadcrumbs to uncover many (if any) other agents. It may allow the Kindred to expose or destroy a local cell of Sleepers, but more are always out there.

This is where the group's own secret Masquerade is advantageous, as well. If the local vampires are truly able to rout a single Seventh Day coterie, those vampires are likely to feel that they have successfully quashed the

threat. By following the thread as far as it can go, maybe to one or a few other Sleepers, they likely feel like they have found the source of the threat and excised it. The reality is, VII is like a cancer — it spreads, and is rarely so easily removed.

Coteries

As said, an ideal condition for the vampires of the Seventh Day is to collect in coteries that exist both in passive and active status. This isn't something coded as one of the Sleeper Priorities (see below), but the programming does encourage it for reasons of survival *and* success rates. A number of vampires working together know one another's strengths and weaknesses, and can adjust strategies accordingly. Dwelling together in the normal night-to-night existence of the Requiem helps build that kind of rapport with one another — while such Kindred aren't likely to become "friends," they do establish bonds with one another.

When a coterie of Sleepers then go active, they do so together, carrying those established bonds into whatever task (intelligence-gathering, conversion, destruction) is at hand that night. Of equal importance is the fact that this manner of operations doesn't draw unwanted attention. A coterie working together isn't unusual, since that coterie has worked together in the past. If this system isn't in place, a VII vampire is likely to call attention upon herself as the other locals wonder precisely why this Kindred is socializing with others with whom she hasn't socialized before. Damned who don't have the luxury of coterie mates both in and out of active status must be far stealthier to minimize the risk of other vampires asking undesirable questions.

Forming a coterie in this manner is often done by either forward or backward engineering. In the first method, a Seventh Day vampire works at converting and programming his coterie mates one by one, over a period of weeks or months. This is difficult if the vampire is the only VII Kindred in the area and cannot contact others outside the city (and this is a common predicament). Of course, it's easier if other Sleepers are able to come and aid in the process. Moreover, the conversion becomes easier and easier as each coterie member is crossed over and brought into the fold. Should conversion fail, the unwitting coterie mate is then targeted for Final Death.

Unfortunately, this method may not be an option. It's possible that intelligence suggests that a Sleeper won't be able to capture and encode the members of his coterie. Perhaps they are too old and powerful, or maybe their social habits make it such that getting them alone proves more difficult than its worth. It's also a possibility that none in the coterie are valuable targets for conversion. If they are too mired in sin (or virtue, see below), they aren't viable targets for programming and are instead tagged only



for destruction. Alternately, some Kindred just don't *have* coterie. Neonates tend to band together in like-minded groups, but the longer vampires dwell in the Requiem, the more likely they are to shirk such social trappings.

In these cases, a bit of backward engineering is necessary. In essence, the Sleeper will go operational and lay the groundwork for a new coterie with other Seventh Day Kindred (and these other Kindred do the same). The Sleeper effectively drops hints and leaves clues behind for the core (passive) personality to find in subsequent nights. This combined with the appropriate fabricated memories allows the Sleeper to work toward this new coterie without being active. She begins to see that she has had successful dealings with these other Kindred (and they see similarly). The fabricated memories and left-behind indicators (an email or parchment thanking the vampire for aiding him the other night, for instance) push her to deepen the social connections with these other vampires. Even if they don't form together in an "official" coterie, they at least establish normal nightly associations between what previously might have been disparate and isolated Kindred.

Responsibilities

While it's true that Seventh Day vampires follow no leader (whether it be local or distant), they do at times assign responsibilities. After all, no vampire is the same

as another vampire, as much as the programming might like that to be the case. Each Kindred has a number of strengths and weaknesses unique to her, and the agents would be fools not to come to some kind of terms with this separation of ability. Vampires, when active, are expected to primarily fulfill those tasks that are most suited to their skill sets. Such tasks and skills are essentially broken down to correspond with the appropriate Priorities.

Gather Intelligence

Key to the mission and obtaining the Sabbath is wiping out sin, yes, but such sin must first be identified. (Otherwise, the local Seventh Day vampires engage only in wanton violence, which is sure to end their activities in short order). Hence, as noted in the Seven Priorities, collecting intelligence is critical. Sleepers chosen for this tend to have more mental or social acuity than anything combat-related. Such vampires are connected to the local Kindred populace (without being overly tied to it) and are sharp enough of wit and mind to be able to not only efficiently gather information, but to know which intelligence is *useful* with regard to the mission. These Kindred are predominantly used for reconnaissance and record keeping, and often have high Mental attributes and Disciplines such as Auspex or Obfuscate.

Conversion

Not all Seventh Day vampires are suited to the task of conversion. Programming cannot simply be



done by cracking open the braincase while swinging a reflective pocket watch in front of the subject's eyes. Programmers have a number of skills and abilities that help them to convert others — among those abilities is some mixture of the Dominate, Majesty and Psychogenics Disciplines. Even better are vampires with some medical training (modern or antiquated) and at least a moderate understanding of psychology and potentially hypnotism. All of these elements form a recipe — a somewhat rare one among vampires, frankly — and that means that the conversion process isn't easy or common. What it does mean, however, is that Kindred with this fusion of abilities outside the group are quite often targeted quickly for conversion, provided they fit the other characteristics. After all, it's far better to bolster the ranks with able Damned than to continue on with such a glaring vulnerability. It's important to note, however, that sometimes the most adept indoctrinators are also the most unexpected — a mathematician with a penchant for the Psychogenics Discipline or an actual computer programmer with high levels of Dominate. Rumor suggests that one of VII's strongest converters was an autistic man — a Gangrel, no less. Whatever the case, the act of conversion is not a process that belongs in just anyone's hands, and the task is performed only by those with the expected capability.

Destruction

The act of destroying a sinful vampire is, at first glance, the simplest of the three tasks. While the act itself might be hampered by obstacles, the idea itself at least appears uncomplicated: Find target. Destroy target. Game over. It's for this reason that sometimes the Sleepers choose obvious converts for this task. Such converts tend to be powerful in physical Attributes and related Disciplines, and aren't often much more than combat-capable brutes. The problem with this approach is that such Sleepers are almost sure to be short-lived. They may take out a single target, but they do so with such overt attacks that it's easy for the target's allies to destroy the Sleeper either on the spot or within a few nights. The obvious assault works; it's also risky and short-lived. Better instead to choose assassins who will utilize stealth and patience to get the job done, and hence be able to perform the task time and time again without being caught or destroyed. Candidates in this vein tend to be Dextrous with ability in one or several weapons, and rely on Disciplines such as Celerity and Obfuscate.

Mediating Disputes

It is assumed that the programming takes care of all problems. The programming provides rules — a directive, matters of conduct, methodologies. Therefore, Sleeper cells should operate at maximum efficiency and without issue. In essence, each cell should be a well-oiled perpetual motion machine. This is sadly not the case.

The programming never counted on the variation of personality. The encoding does its best to eliminate free will and level the playing field, but it wasn't enough. The program could not afford to have each member operating as some mute, robotic assassin — these creatures needed to *blend in*, to appear normal under brief scrutiny. That unfortunately meant letting the core personality echo in active mode, and that means that in those instances when Sleepers must deal with other Sleepers, they have no mode of conflict resolution. The program contains no overriding protocol of dispute mediation, and, since the program similarly identifies no central leadership in any way, there exists no default manner of action. While, generally speaking, Seventh Day vampires operate on similar wavelengths (this is more the case when they have seen to one another's conversion in some fashion), this isn't always the case. An ardent Sleeper clearly engineered for the destruction of sinful Damned may have a different view of the Seven Priorities than, say, a more dispassionate collector of intelligence. The intelligence-gatherer may feel it necessary to be patient and tabulate more data, whereas the zealous Sleeper may want to forego further caution and execute the sin-laden transgressor.

What happens when such a dispute arises? Because the programming dictates no course of operations in this regard, the vampires have no easy answer upon which to fall back. It's possible that the two Sleepers may come to an easy agreement, a compromise of sorts. However, it's just as possible that the conflict will result in either violence (in which case the more violent party tends to gain the advantage) or a combat of mental Disciplines (whereupon the stronger of the two in Disciplines such as Dominate, Majesty or Psychogenics will gain advantage). The third and perhaps most desirable solution to such a dispute is that each party goes his own way and takes on the mission in whichever way suits him. The reason this is particularly desirable is that it creates something of a contingency in the mission. If the executioner fails at his mission and perishes, it doesn't bring the other, separate Sleeper down with him. The splinter agent still exists, untied to the other party, and may continue acting in accord with the mission toward transcendence. In this way, the mission itself gains a kind of abstract "survival of the fittest" protocol, whereupon the most efficient tactic in a given area (which is likely different from city to city) wins out and remains the dominant mode of action.

This lack of potential resolution is also the reason why many Seventh Day vampires unconsciously gravitate toward like-minded creatures when converting. Ideally, the programming would not allow this, for diversity is key to survival — but again, the programming does not always take into account the variables of personality, and hence a violent Sleeper may in turn seek to convert Kindred of similar abilities, characteristics and even clan or covenant.

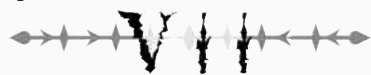
Havens and Territories

Religious Outlook

Active Sleepers do not go out of their way to change any of the elements in the life of the core persona. Sudden and drastic changes are sure to bring attention, and hence they are avoided. If the Kindred had an established haven and/or domain pre-conversion, then she is likely to keep that setup post-conversion.

If the time comes for the Kindred to establish a new haven, she will most likely take one that is unassuming but defensible, such as a warehouse, an old bank vault or a water tower. An ideal haven keeps her close to the action but out of harm's way.

Territories are special considerations only for those Seventh Day vampires who have formed duplicitous coteries both in and out of VII. If these vampires manage to come together as a group, it is possible that they will attempt to steer themselves toward having a communal territory to maximize their strategy within the city. Like havens, though, such territories should not be obvious or overt. In fact, many vampires like to take territories just outside the city, such as in nearby suburbs or on the fringes of the urban sprawl. Such territories are less likely to be claimed, and, moreover, help the Sleepers to have a defensible point of return after active missions.



LOCAL VERSUS WIDESPREAD

While VII isn't by any means a "traditional" covenant, it does share some characteristics with traditional covenants, and one of those characteristics is the nature of *local covenant elements versus global covenant elements*. The other covenants are not relegated to a single city or region — the Ordo Dracul, for instance, is largely worldwide. That said, the Order does not share universal characteristics across the globe. The Order in Budapest is different from the Order in Atlanta, and from Tokyo, and so on and so forth. The Seventh Day is no different. It exists across multiple cities and regions, but the anchored nature of the Kindred means there is incredibly little crossover between VII agents of different cities.

Therefore, the local Sleeper population acts differently from region to region, regardless of programming. In one city, it's possible that the Seventh Day vampires are far more aggressive in their tactics, attempting to carve a swath of destruction across the fields of sin. In another, consider that the VII members might be far more subtle, comprising a number of vampires who value prudence and temperance over rash action. It's even possible that an entire cell of VII in a single city has become corrupted to hunt only the virtuous, making the Seventh Day vampires in this area *far* different from those elsewhere. It's important to consider precisely what characterizes the VII vampires and operations in your given city or region



VII is a curious aberration. Its origins are both humanist and scientific, but its current incarnation borrows only the shell of that initial creation. As soon as the ardent Mr. Morning became involved, the group's entire focus shifted to one that involved only vampires and was soundly based upon distinct religious ideas. Morning was quite clear in his intentions — he saw the world as a stinking pit growing deeper every night, its nadir sinking ineluctably toward Hell itself. Vampires were not just a part of this world, but were perhaps the very vehicles of sin itself — or, at least, were tipping the scales toward irrevocable sin and depravity. Morning was once Sanctified, but his zeal went beyond that, and he believed that cleansing the sin from all Kindred was the only way to save the individual souls of each vampire. It was not enough to turn the other cheek and avoid sin on a personal level; others had to be made to *see*, to adhere to this plan.

Once that was complete, Morning believed that God would forgive all of the vampires. Vampires themselves had betrayed the holy condition of life and gone against the very desires of Heaven — they were Damned, and this was not "meant to be" as the Sanctified suggested. (Morning called the stench of predatory instinct upon each vampire the "Mark of the Betrayer," for each Damned was disloyal to God in his dead and dusty heart.) No, Morning believed that vampires had to turn away from their instincts, their natural proclivities toward sin.

Once this turning away was complete, Morning envisioned his own version of Golconda, a thing he nebulously referred to as the "Kingdom," or the "Sabbath." This idea was both literal and metaphorical — the Kindred could literally be resurrected into living flesh again, and allowed once again to enter the Kingdom of Man. The Sabbath was perhaps a more important ideal, for it tied into Morning's own notions of numerology (and his reliance upon the number seven). The Sabbath (or the Seventh Day) was traditionally the day of rest, the day after all had been completed. This represented the eschatology of the Kindred — quite literally, the end of all vampires and a world cleansed of that curse. Morning was fond of numerous Biblical passages, one of which was from the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus invokes the Fourth Commandment and says that "The Sabbath was made for *man*." The Sabbath was not meant for the cursed wretches called Kindred, but only for mortal man. Once Morning's goal of mystical transcendence was complete, vampires could once again *be* mortal, and would enter the true Sabbath. (Morning also noted something of a double entendre in regards to the term "Sabbath." It indicated a day of rest or sleep, and the agents he eventually came to use were considered to be Sleepers. To him, this was spiritual parity at its highest, and he enjoyed the idea immensely.)



The curious part of all of this is that VII as it exists is not particularly religious. The programming as put in place by Mr. Morning is certainly based on spiritual desires (however twisted), but the individual Sleepers are not religious by necessity. They do not pray, they do not invoke God or any other spiritual figure, they do not hold sermons and they do not attend services. The only dogma they follow is the program written into their Vitae, which again has religious foundations but invokes no current spiritual conditions or behavior. It's certainly possible that an individual Sleeper is spiritual in some way or another (perhaps belonging to the ranks of the Sanctified or the Acolytes), and that vampire may color his active VII goals in the light of whichever covenant he belongs to. But this isn't common — for the most part, Seventh Day vampires are dead to any kind of spirituality. Certainly a grim irony considering the intentions of their Kindred founder.

Numerology

The Seventh Day's vampiric progenitor, the now-destroyed Mr. Morning, was obsessed with the power of numbers. Numbers, to him, were of particular power and importance. Numbers (and the languages of numbers, such as numerology and mathematics) were pure, in his mind, a way of communicating without nuance and ambiguity. Moreover, such numbers purportedly held secret truths — deciphering these truths meant understanding what numbers meant, how they could be put together and what they did when invoked properly. Numbers were both scientific and mystical, and, for this reason, Morning saw them as a bridge between worlds.

The number seven was of particular interest to the elder vampire. In some mythologies and numerological studies, seven represented a significant change or transition on the way to completion. The number seven always revealed a mystical and magical connotation, one that segued into a kind of purity or transcendence. Perhaps more importantly, the number was found throughout mythology and religion. Sumerian gods were grouped in sevens. Celtic gods and goddesses were similar, and often had seven sons or seven magical cattle or some other mystical appropriation of the number. To get through the journey, Gilgamesh needed to enter seven gates, cross seven mountains and fell seven trees.

The number seven is even more prevalent in Hebraic and Christian lore, something that Morning found particularly appealing. Jewish lore holds that seven is a significant number in purification and consecration. There are seven branches of a menorah, seven “clean” animals taken by Noah onboard the Ark, seven altars built by the patriarchs. Seven also shows up heavily in the Book of Revelations: Seven cups, trumpets, seals, archangels, bowls and churches. All related to the scourging and subsequent purification of the world.

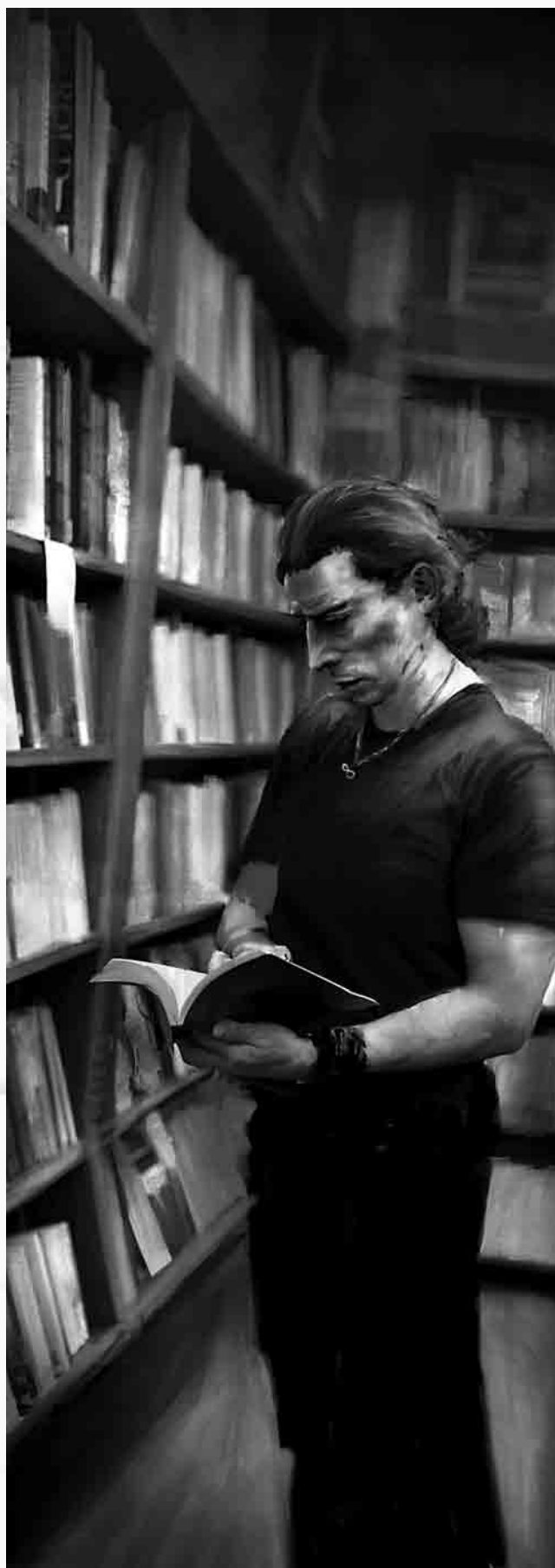
Perhaps most important of all, however, is the relation of the number seven to time. It took God seven days to create the world, and, on the seventh day, He rested (much as the Sleepers “rest” until called again to purify themselves and the world). In Jewish lore, the fields were meant to lay fallow (*Shmitah*) every seven years so that the lands may rest and rejuvenate. All of this adds up to Morning's ideas of cleansing and transcendence. One of his favorite quotes was from the Book of Daniel: “Seventy ‘sevens’ have been decreed for your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity.”

What this adds up to is the fact that this obsession with numerology and the number seven in particular then translates into the individual programming of Sleeper agents within VII. For one, an interest in numbers is one of the few characteristics that Sleepers gain not long after conversion. Such an interest may not be overt, but those who know the vampire may find it curious that she has gone out and bought books on numerology or occasionally quotes obscure (and number-significant) passages of the Bible or other religious books. It's said that some VII vampires who attempt to unconsciously resist their programming descend all the further into this interest, making an obsession on par with Morning's original mania. Such Kindred might scrawl the number seven all over her haven or etch it into her arms or whisper it over and over again.

The other obvious inclusion (aside from the very name of the group, given in reference to the Biblical “day of rest”) is the hard-coded icon that is burned into the psychic manifold of all VII vampires. Anyone attempting to invade the mind of an active VII agent receives little more than the Roman numeral for seven emblazoned upon the darkness. No other thoughts are gleaned except that one iconic image. Perhaps even more disturbing are the representations of the number left behind at the scenes of destruction. Seventh Day attackers sometimes leave the number behind in some fashion or another after a notable kill — most do so subtly, carving a small Roman numeral seven in the alley wall where the Final Death happened, or perhaps leaving behind seven matchsticks. Others leave more egregious displays — the Roman numeral sprayed in blood on a cement sidewalk, a pile of seven bones or passages from the Book of Revelations with all the references to seven highlighted or circled.

Other Symbolism

One other symbol that seems burned into the minds of Sleeper agents — so much so that attempting to probe the vampire's mind returns either the Roman numeral seven or this figure — is an icon called the lemniscate. It is the symbol of infinity, and, somewhat ironically, is the number *eight* turned on its side (∞). Some Sleepers seem to consider *this* the actual “Mark of the Betrayer”



(mentioned above), as it represents the infinite curse of the Damned, revealing the ceaseless timeline that stands in the way of reaching the Sabbath.

Aside from direct symbols, Seventh Day Kindred also seem to unconsciously collect literature or other media associated with the Seven Deadly Sins. Such vampires might, over the month or two after conversion, go out and purchase books by Dante, Chaucer or Aquinas. Some have Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* on their shelves (it depicts the sins as characters) sitting next to a more modern book like Dan Savage's *Skipping Toward Gomorrah* (a liberal treatise on modern indulgence with seven chapters, each headed by one of the aforementioned sins). The Bible is obviously also key, despite the lack of any direct naming of these seven particular sins. Curiously, if pressed on the issue, few Sleepers can actually remember reading these books, or even purchasing them in the first place.

Relations

Relations with the Seventh Day are essentially one-sided. Very few vampires have a full picture of what VII is, and hence have a rather incomplete idea of what to think about this "covenant" or what to do about it. Most seem to think of VII as a collective of boogymen — monsters who just as likely aren't real in the first place. Still, VII has ways it prefers to deal with the various groups in the World of Darkness, and those groups have their own opinions, ignorant and limited as they may be.

Vampires

VII sees each and every vampire in one of three ways. A single Kindred is either a *potential target*, a *potential convert* or *insignificant*. Meaning, they are either exceedingly sinful (or virtuous, if corrupt) and need to be destroyed. They are useful to the Seventh Day and should be forcibly converted. Or they are inconsequential either way, being without excessive sin but alternately being of no direct use to the Sleeper program. That is it. No Kindred falls outside the margins in this categorization, for such categorization is absolutely necessary for the programming to do its job. (Of course, such categorization is left up to the individual Sleepers, and may vary from agent to agent or coterie to coterie.)

From the other side, few vampires know what to think about VII, if they think anything at all. Many Kindred are simply unaware that such a group even exists, either as a clan, covenant or something else entirely. Some Damned believe VII are truly monsters among monsters, vile fiends that come attached to a number of grisly legends — they are the ancient progenitors of all vampires, they consume the hearts of other Kindred, they are demons in flesh, they have monstrous countenances that would make a Nosferatu whimper like a kicked puppy). In this

same vein, many ancillae or elders use VII as the chief element in cautionary tales to young Kindred. They tell “bedtime stories” about how a foolish vampire broke the Masquerade or committed diablerie or walked down the wrong alley. The ending is always the same: the monsters of VII come from the shadows to destroy the offending fool. (Ironically, this isn’t particularly far off from VII’s purpose, which is to punish the wicked.)

Not all vampires dwell in complete ignorance regarding VII. Some cities know more about this group than others. Such information is usually gleaned from capturing an active agent. Of course, few Kindred have much luck uncovering any real information about VII from the captive, other than the fact that the detainee isn’t some monster from another city but is instead one of the region’s own Kindred (and who may even be well-known to the local ruling vampires). Beyond that, most vampires hit the same mental wall when trying to extract information under protest — the Roman numeral for seven or the lemniscate symbol, each branded into the darkness of the assassin’s mind.

Because of this, many Princes have unspoken or announced “rules” on how to deal with VII vampires, and usually those options are either to destroy them on sight or to stake and capture them so more information can be gained. Few vampires have had any success in this regard. (However, it has been whispered that a few Seventh Day vampires have not only been captured, but were successfully *deprogrammed*. Of course, such a process is only so valuable, because once deprogrammed the vampire doesn’t know anything more than her captors about what she was or what she was doing.)

Clans

The Seventh Day maintains no direct relationship with any one clan over another. Within VII, each clan has a relatively even representation and fills any number of functions. Daeva make competent programmers and assassins. The Gangrel and Nosferatu are both useful in gathering intelligence and smiting the sinful. The Ventruue are excellent at collecting intelligence and indoctrination. The Mekhet are perhaps the only clan with a slight edge in numbers, if only because its members are ostensibly competent in all three areas, whether they be subtle assassins, agents of reconnaissance or gifted indoctrinators.

VII also doesn’t maintain any priority over which clan is more likely to feature sin than others. Vampires are vampires, all the same at their core, with a Beast driving them ever toward debasement and depravity. That said, the Daeva seem more likely to become targets for Sleepers than any other — the clan’s reliance on hedonism and manipulation seems to bring its members into the crosshairs for their observed transgressions. The Gangrel, too, seem to make more common targets, if only because

some VII perceive that these Damned are precipitously close to the Beast, so much so that they wear their sin upon their deformed, feral bodies. It’s important to note that any kind of prejudice against clan members can be carried over to individual Sleepers, whose core personas still maintain old grudges and preconceptions.

The clans themselves have no formal opinion of VII, as few know much, if anything at all, about the group.

Covenants

No one covenant’s vampires are more useful or abhorrent to VII than any other. Vampires are vampires; no matter which group they belong to, they are blood-drinking brutes with a predilection toward sin. VII’s programming does not distinguish between covenants, for it doesn’t need to.

That said, in reality, covenant membership *can* matter. For instance, consider the vampires of the Lancea Sanctum. The Sanctified are generally concerned with the salvation of their own souls. Yes, they’re consummate predators with little care for the mortal realm, but, by the same token, they’re not instantly indulgent beasts of sin, either. The Sanctified don’t revel in their condition — they understand that the Curse is a curse, a punishment given from on-high. This means that, in *most* cities, VII ultimately marks fewer Sanctified for destruction and alternately marks *more* of them for conversion. (After all, Mr. Morning was once of the Spear, and the two mindsets aren’t completely incongruous with one another.)

At the other end of the spectrum, consider the Acolytes of the Circle of the Crone. These vampires do not even conceive of sin — indulgence to them is natural, a form of expressing life in the face of endless death. While *they* don’t see an acceptance and engagement of lust as a problem, the vampires of the Seventh Day certainly do. Hence, Acolytes are more likely to be targeted for destruction than the Sanctified in many areas. The Circle and the Spear are arguably the two most religious covenants, and hence have the most important relationship with VII. The rest (Invictus, the Ordo Dracul, the Carthians) tend to have relatively equal members marked for destruction, conversion or avoidance — though it is worthy of note that VII seems to ignore a disproportionately large number of unaligned vampires. For the most part, it seems as if such unconnected vampires seem to fall off the radar when it comes to the needs and ideals of VII’s programming.

On the other hand, some covenants have particular interest in VII. The Sanctified hold special interest in capturing VII members for a number of reasons. First, the Sanctified are interested to know whether or not VII vampires truly do punish the wicked. If that is the case, it seems as if this “rogue covenant” (as VII is often seen) is concerned with the state of the vampiric soul, and that means the Spear wants to know about it. (Though

many Sanctified differ on whether that means making VII natural allies or stomping such poseur competitors out of existence.) Second, some Archbishops are privy to a certain rumor that one of the founders of VII was once a follower of Longinus and a member of the Lancea Sanctum. These elders are quite interested in knowing whether this is true or not.

The other covenant with vested interest in VII is the Ordo Dracul — but the reasons of its members are based very much in reality. The Order maintains the largest collection of information on the Seventh Day. Having put pieces of information together, the Order has a more complete picture of the group than any other. Although their picture is still woefully deficient, they still are cognizant of the fact that VII vampires appear to be incredibly well-hidden assassins — so much so that the Order correctly suspects mind control is involved. The Order cares little for VII's motives, but it *does* care to know whatever arcane, pseudo-scientific secrets the group possesses, and it makes every effort whenever possible to discover them.



BELIAL'S BROOD

Members of the Brood revel in wickedness. They have no interest in keeping their sin contained — they explore violence and debauchery at every turn, believing that such behavior is a vampire's diabolical right. Of course, this puts big targets on the heads of Brood members, and gets them destroyed in short order.

Because of this, it seems that Brood members fall in disproportionate numbers to Sleeper agents. Whether this happens merely because the Brood is blatant in its iniquity or because there is something larger at work remains unclear, but the fact remains that a lot of Brood fall to the hands and blades of Seventh Day vampires.

Unfortunately, the Brood has begun to take notice of this — their scattered nature hasn't helped them come to this conclusion, but slowly their members have come to see the reality. VII, while subtle, sometimes leaves behind clues of its involvement — the Roman numeral figures in a nearby stretch of dust, seven finger-bones laying nearby, a lemniscate painted on a wall with the destroyed vampire's ashen body. The Brood has taken note of this, and rumors grow that this covenant of devils and lunatics seeks to discover more about the Seventh Day — and destroy it utterly.



The Traditions

Active Sleepers follow the Traditions religiously. One, breaching the Traditions is a way toward depravity, and two, the Traditions are damn good advice. Maintaining the Masquerade is of obvious value, perhaps more so for the Sleepers who must maintain secrecy on two fronts.

Siring a childe is similarly a bad idea, because it attracts attention. It goes against the laws of the night, and will bring the authorities down upon the Sleeper in short order — even if the transgression is allowed to slide (as it so often is, evidenced by the sheer numbers of Kindred extant in each city), it still brings scrutiny to the Sleeper that endangers the Sabbath.

However, it's important to note that in some rare cases, VII vampires have found that creating progeny is an advantageous strategy. If the vampire is incapable of converting local Kindred or merely finds no Kindred worthy of VII, then siring a childe is a surefire way to gain an built-in ally. Moreover, no "new" programming is necessary, for the programming directly carries over to the progeny. (Also important to note is that this adherence to the Traditions is relevant only for *active* Sleepers. Sleepers who are in passive mode and dwelling in the nightly existence of the Requiem are ultimately free to do as they will, and could certainly break the Traditions despite the programming lying dormant in her blood.)

The Tradition forbidding diablerie is crucial as well. Again, drinking the heart's-blood of another vampire is not only a crime that draws unwelcome notice, but it also brings the Beast closer to the surface. Seeing as how the Beast is neatly equated with sin in the programming, it only makes sense to attempt to tamp the Beast down and not invite it to come raging to the surface.

Ghouls and Thralls

Ghouls represent a curious conundrum for the Damned of the Seventh Day. The ghouls of *other* vampires — targets in particular — are insignificant. Such broken humans, addicted to the satisfaction of ingesting a vampire's puissant Vitae, are little more than vehicles for lust and gluttony. Therefore, those ghouls are completely and unequivocally expendable. Although from time to time they can be used as tools to gain information or access to particularly difficult or elusive targets, by and large they are obstacles — obstacles that require removal by any means necessary.

The difficulty comes into play when a Kindred marked for conversion has a ghoule (or ghouls) of his own. For a vampire of VII, a ghoul represents both a powerful asset and a dangerous liability. The ghoul is an asset because she can travel during the day and go places that the Kindred cannot — essentially the same advantages exploited by all vampires, whether they belong to VII or not. A Sleeper with a well-heeled ghoul can send that thrall into the world to do his bidding remotely. That might mean the ghoul performs much-needed reconnaissance on a target's haunts and haven, or may mean that the ghoul duct tapes two gallon jugs of potassium chlorate explosive and attempts to *obliterate* the target's haunts or haven.

A thrall is a liability because she is just one more thread that leads back to the Sleeper. More importantly, a ghoul

is the thread that a *Sleeper* can follow back toward her own clandestine, mind-controlled activities. A thrall could be a *Sleeper*'s method of some very unpleasant self-discovery if the thrall's own behavior and proximity to the vampire isn't monitored and controlled with great caution. A ghoul who isn't aware that there are essentially two personalities (with two separate agendas) present could make a problematic slip of the tongue. (Some have found a simple way around that problem, and have cut out their pet's tongues, but that's an imperfect solution.)

Like many other things extant in a vampire's Requiem, the *Sleeper* program does not have any contingency plan regarding ghouls. Hence, handling them is up to the individual Kindred (colored of course by the cold encoding of active mode). Many Sleepers choose to eradicate their ghouls, believing that the risk outweighs the value. Others walk an indistinct line and try to keep the ghouls as separate as possible from any VII-related activity, thus maintaining the illusion that the core personas are the ones truly in control. This way, the ghoul is none the wiser, and, more importantly, neither is the vampire. The third option — and only some have reported actual success with this — is to use the same indoctrination and conditioning techniques to “program” the ghouls according to the designs of VII. Such programming is not as fail-safe as that which lies in the blood of *Sleeper* vampires, but this programming still goes a long way in keeping a tight leash on the thrall. While difficult, this is probably the ideal solution for Seventh Day vampires with powerful ghouls. Why? Because the ghoul is then the ultimate mole, *more* aware of the mission than even the *Sleeper* because, technically, the thrall's programming never goes passive. The thrall acts nightly to control the vampire, steering the *Sleeper* away from anything that would endanger the overall goal of reaching the glorious Sabbath.

Mortals

Whether the Seventh Day recognize it or not, mortals represent something very special to the group. Humanity is the unspoken goal of their mission. Regaining mortality will be the true time of rest, a permanent trumping of infinity and the invocation of the Sabbath. It's what the vampire Mr. Morning wanted, and this plan is the very core of VII's programming whether or not the Sleepers realize it.

This creates a very unique relationship between Seventh Day Kindred and mortals. When passive, Sleepers treat mortals as they always have — as cattle, allies, tools, scum, whatever. But when *active*, Sleepers treat mortals with almost delicate sensibility. Sleepers work extra-hard to minimize mortal casualties and go out of their way to feed very lightly, if at all. Some Sleepers even go so far as to treat humans with a queer reverence, as

if the mortal were a representative of the divine instead of some two-legged meat-bag. Stranger still is that nothing in the programming directly calls for this behavior. Nothing in the Priorities demands that a *Sleeper* handle humans with kid gloves, and yet many do. Is it because the Sleepers see unknowingly mortality as the holy light at the end of the tunnel? Or is it because acts of sin are almost directly tied into the abuse and suffering of human beings? None know for sure.

Other Supernaturals

Active Sleepers offer no special considerations for the other creatures in the World of Darkness. Although it may be true that werewolves and sorcerers seem to go against the expected will of God, nothing in the *Sleeper* program gives any singular attention to such beasts. Vampires are the plague that must be cursed; other entities are incidental. So, for the most part, Sleepers ignore such creatures when necessary, although some active agents see potential in the “others” and strive to include them as allies against the sinful Damned. Some Sleepers have even gone so far as to manipulate and manufacture conflicts between the others and their Damned targets in an effort to maximize destruction while keeping their own noses clean.

Systems and Powers

The Damned of the Seventh Day are different from other vampires. For the most part the Sleepers don't realize this, existing in ignorance regarding the encoding that lays waiting in their Vitae. Such ignorance doesn't make it any less true.

The following section details precisely what makes a VII vampire different from the common Kindred. Also detailed are specialized systems unique to these mind-controlled creatures.

Special Systems

Sleeper characters are subject to a number of systems that do not apply to most other Kindred. These variations come from the malefic programming coursing through the vampire's veins. Unless stated otherwise, these systems apply to Seventh Day Kindred whether they exist in active or passive mode.

Properties of the Blood

Within a *Sleeper*, the Vitae is different, changed. It's still red and sticky, and is still the only thing that can make a vampire feel warmth — but below the crimson surface, at a level both mystical and microscopic, the blood is unlike the blood of other vampires. It comes pure from mortals, but within the crucible of the *Sleeper*'s body it transubstantiates into the program control that drives the vampire's existence from that point forward. In every drop of blood lays the merciless code.

These differences make the way the vampire handles the blood — or the way others handle it *for* him — different. Things are not so simple for the Sleeper as they might be for other Damned . . .

Blood Coding

Is VII a bloodline? Do the Kindred who belong to its ranks — whether knowingly or unknowingly — truly belong to a separate and specific lineage of vampire blood? The answer to that is not easy; consider, for instance, that when most Kindred speak of bloodlines, they refer to deviant lineages separate (only in part) from a single parent clan. Some bloodlines are purely social and without any sort of preternatural designation, but most are specifically caused by some fundamental change in the extraction of the Kindred blood. It is this alteration of the mystical and physical state of the blood that causes much of the variance in weaknesses, Disciplines and behavior.

So, what of VII? In the Kindred of VII, the blood *does* change. It is literally programmed on a mystical level in order to complement the hypnotic suggestions planted in the mind and any psychic surgery performed on the brain. But the blood most certainly *shifts* away from its original state (and intrinsic to that change are variant characteristics often found in bloodlines, such as a unique Discipline and unique strengths and weaknesses). That said, the vampires of VII do not descend from a single clan, unlike the other Damned. The Bruja universally come from Gangrel stock, but VII does not have such a unanimous clan of origin. Therefore, it's inaccurate to proclaim that the Kindred of VII belong to a specific bloodline, despite the similarities of the process. Let it be said, however, that VII is not merely a covenant — it is a mystical and physical state not unlike that associated with vampiric lineages.

Note that, despite any apparent similarities to a vampiric bloodline, there are no such mechanical requirements for a character to “join” the ranks of VII.

Diablerie and the Program

Diablerie is both an abhorrent crime and a sweet equalizer. Consuming another vampire's blood — and, subsequently, her soul — in the Amaranth is potentially an offense punishable by Final Death. But those who get away with diablerie find themselves empowered in a way that they perhaps didn't expect as their blood becomes more potent and their powers grow from only a few moments' worth of work.

As previously mentioned, VII vampires tend to avoid diablerie, as it attracts attention and pushes the distant goal of mortality all the further away. Ah, but what happens when another vampire decides to consume the soul of a Sleeper vampire? The diablerist is in for a few unexpected surprises.

As usual, if the consumed Sleeper was of a higher Blood Potency, the diablerist's own Blood Potency increases by one. Also as usual, the diablerist's Humanity decreases by one automatically, and he risks possible blood addiction.

However, drinking the blood and the soul of a Sleeper doesn't mean that VII has one fewer puppet among its ranks. Why? Because the programming transfers over to the diablerist, who now for all intents and purposes is a Sleeper with the same encoding and priorities as any other Seventh Day vampire. The diablerist doesn't realize it, of course — the sole purpose of the Sleeper program being that it remains unknown to the controlled vampire — but his blood is now changed. This process also has a few of the following other notable differences:

First, the diablerist does get the “single dot” from the consumed Sleeper, but the vampire has no choice what that single dot is. The dot is *always* the first level of the Psychogenics Discipline. As all Sleepers have at least the first dot of that unique Discipline, this is what transfers over when the diablerist drinks the soul of the Seventh Day vampire.

Second, the diablerist is not subject to the black veins that stain the auras of such criminals. The programming, forever seeking to remain hidden in all ways, masks this discoloration of the diablerist's soul in an effort to keep him (and more importantly, VII as a whole) hidden.



EVEN A TASTE?

Vampires who drink just a little of a Sleeper's Vitae do not immediately become secretly foresworn to the Sleeper program, but they do experience some unusual effects when drinking from a Seventh Day Kindred. Drinking any of a Sleeper's blood causes a painful headache, on par with an awful migraine. The amount of Vitae consumed lengthens the period of this headache. The drinker's headache lasts for one hour per Vitae consumed. During this time, he suffers a -1 penalty on all dice pools.



The Embrace

Creating vampiric progeny is the same for a Sleeper as it is for any other vampire. The subject must be drained of blood and fed some of the Sleeper's; the Sleeper also sacrifices a full *dot* of Willpower in the process as she imparts some of her undying soul to the dying mortal.

The difference is, of course, is that by doing this, the childe is now a Sleeper of the precisely same programming as the sire. She is subject to all the encoding and rules permutations relevant to any VII member. Additionally, one of her Discipline dots *must* be given over to the Psychogenics Discipline.



Broken Ties

Although a Sleeper is generally unaware, the Sleeper program takes precedence in the blood. Any weaker connections are forced out by this coding, for such bonds only impede the journey toward the Sabbath. When the blood is converted by the program, the following effects take place regarding the vampire's connections to other Kindred:

The rule of blood ties (see p. 162 of **Vampire: The Requiem**) no longer applies. The Sleeper does not gain the +2 bonus when attempting to affect close “relatives” with Disciplines. Likewise, such “relatives” do not gain the bonus when attempting to affect the Sleeper.

Blood sympathy (p. 163 of **Vampire: The Requiem**) also fails. The Sleeper, whether active or passive, may not make the appropriate Wits + Occult roll to feel the proximity of a “relative” or the events surrounding that related Kindred. The “relative” similarly becomes unable to invoke blood sympathy in regard to the Sleeper.

When converted, any Sleeper gains the *chance* to break any Vinculums she may have that link her to other vampires. This only potentially breaks the bonds if the Sleeper is the thrall — it does nothing for those vampires enthralled to the Sleeper. When converted, the Sleeper makes one Resolve + Composure roll for each partial Vinculum bond she has with a regnant. Each drink taken towards the Vinculum imposes a -1 penalty to the dice pool, with a maximum penalty of -3. Success means the bond is broken. Failure indicates that the bond remains in place.

Predator's Taint

Most vampires are unable to deny their predatory natures, especially when coming into contact with one another. When two vampires see each other for the first time, the two rival Beasts surge within the vampires, howling to be freed from their cages.

Sleepers do not suffer from this taint — the programming overrides it. Upon seeing another vampire for the first time, the Sleeper doesn't need to check for any sort of frenzy. The Beast stirs, and the vampire can still feel that ferocity rising to the surface, but the Beast never gets beyond the threat of manifesting. (This means the Sleeper can still use the Taint to identify other vampires on sight despite the fact that she is never in danger of any sort of frenzy because of it.) This is true for Seventh Day vampires whether they are in active operation or in passive ignorance.

Other vampires meeting the Sleeper still suffer the Predator's Taint as usual.

Not manifesting any signs of frenzy during a first meeting with another vampire is theoretically advantageous. It helps to ensure that the meeting will not devolve into a hissing bout of blood-soaked violence until the Sleeper decides it should.



However, the Predator's Taint is instinctual, something *all* Kindred are meant to manifest. When a Sleeper doesn't show even the slightest sign of threat or frenzy, that separates the vampire from the norm and can attract attention. It's certainly possible that any opposing Kindred will see the Sleeper and believe her merely to be of strong will or stubbornness, and discard any notions otherwise. But vampires are a paranoid lot, and seeing anything outside the scope of average behavior might ring an unwelcome bell.

That said, some Sleepers try to mimic the obvious effects of the Predator's Taint. Active Sleepers do so in an effort to directly conceal their nature. Passive, unaware Sleepers do so only because they know something is strange, and it does little good to stand out among such suspicious creatures.

Emulating the pangs of frenzy means that the Sleeper in question allows her fangs to show, engages in brief hissing, balls her hands into fists or displays other signs of temerity and aggression.

Imitating the Taint

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Subterfuge versus Wits + Subterfuge or Empathy. (Storytellers may even allow characters to use a Skill like Intimidation in place of Subterfuge.)

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: It is painfully apparent that the faker is acting. The character may not make any more Subterfuge attempts against the opponent for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The character fails to exhibit convincing characteristics of a vampire experiencing the Predator's Taint.

Success: The faker character convinces the opponent that he is affected as normal by the Predator's Taint.

Exceptional Success: The faker actively strikes fear or awe in the opponent, convincing her that he is on the verge of frenzy.

The Sleeper Program

A Sleeper's blood is her best friend and worst enemy. The program does its best to protect the Sleeper, but only in the way that a parasite seeks to keep the host alive. It is advantageous for the Sleeper to remain protected, but such self-protection goes out the window when the program sees a way to inch ever closer toward the holy Sabbath. In this way, the program has a number of permutations that drive the Sleeper.

Passive Mode

The majority of a Sleeper's Requiem is spent in passive mode. The program only needs to be active at certain points — constant activity is simply unnecessary, not to

mention dangerous, for the vampire.

While passive, the vampire goes about her nightly business, relatively unchanged by the conversion (not to mention completely unaware of it). Her behavior is natural. Her actions are normal. She is driven by the same urges and maintains the same habits as before.

A couple of things are worthy of note, however. First, the Sleeper is beholden to all the same rules in passive mode as she would be in active mode. Her behavior is one thing, and can be turned on or off by the program when necessary. But the blood cannot be changed — the encoded Vitae does not have a switch.

Second, the Sleeper program may not always be active, but it is always *aware*. It lies dormant in the subject's subconscious mind, and any information that passes through the Sleeper is processed by the program. Hence, anything the vampire knows, the program knows. (Note that this does not go the other way — a Seventh Day vampire in passive mode does not know anything that happened while working in active mode. The program recycles memories to cover up such activity.)

Active Mode

Sleepers largely go "active" upon waking on a given evening, and use the entire night to act in accordance with the program, whether this means destroying a target, collecting intelligence or engaging in forced conversion. Going active in this way costs nothing.

A Sleeper *can* go active in the middle of a night after waking if the proper stimulus is observed. Such stimulus might include the following:

- Seeing a piece of information worth collecting.
- Identifying an immediately vulnerable target.
- Coming across another Sleeper who requires assistance.

A Seventh Day vampire may go active in this way for five minutes (perhaps to quickly pocket a potential target's safety deposit box key) or for the remainder of the night (if a protracted task such as elimination of a specific target must be completed). Going active in this way is not without cost, however. The player (whether she controls the character or the Storyteller invokes the change) spends one Vitae *and* one Willpower point for the Sleeper to go active.

Sleepers are not meant to be active for more than a single night. Therefore, the program avoids, when possible, forcing the Sleeper into active mode twice in two nights. Sometimes the program deems it a necessary risk, and forces the Sleeper "awake" for multiple nights in a row. This is not without consequence, however.

As mentioned, Sleepers in active mode do not act overly strange, but may seem cold, distant or otherwise "off" to observers. For every night after the first that the Sleeper is active, she begins to act more unusual, further

separating herself from the normal perceived actions of her core persona. For every night after the first, observers gain a +1 bonus on any dice pools used to notice oddities present in the Sleeper's behavior. This effect is cumulative up to a +5 bonus. (See below for more information on outsiders identifying Sleepers.)

Mental Disciplines

Using any of the mind-based Disciplines against a Sleeper is a complicated affair. For the most part, when a Sleeper is passive any of the Disciplines that affect the mind (Auspex, Dominate, Majesty, Nightmare) can be used against him as normal, and will succeed or fail based upon the standard systems. When a Sleeper is active, however, she gains an automatic +3 bonus to her Resistance traits and dice pools to resist or contest all supernatural mental influences. Also, creatures attempting to use supernatural mental powers on an active Sleeper do not gain the benefits of the 10-again rule on activation rolls. The reason for this is that the Sleeper program is already in control, and provides an additional stratum of defense within the vampire's mind.

Attempts to break into a Sleeper's memories, whether the interloper uses Telepathy to read surface thoughts or The Forgetful Mind to mangle whole swaths of memory, is incredibly difficult. One attempting such a manipulation of a Sleeper's memories suffers an automatic -5 penalty on the activation roll of such powers. And even then, should the Discipline roll be in any way successful, the first (and probably only) piece of information gleaned is one of the stark symbols associated with the Seventh Day: either the Roman numeral VII or the sign of infinity, the lemniscate. Note that vampires attempting either of these two abilities encounter this difficulty whether the Sleeper is active or passive. The Sleeper program denies access to the subconscious mind at every turn.



OPTIONAL RULE: VICE ANATHEMA

Seventh Day Kindred loathe sin, even when they themselves manifest it. Thus, the Vice taken at character creation represents one of the Seven Deadlies, and therefore should be anathema to the Sleeper. With this optional rule, a Sleeper (whether passive or active) cannot regain Willpower by indulging in or acting in accordance with his Vice.

Alternately, if the character is a Corrupted Sleeper, she may not regain Willpower when acting in accordance with her Virtue, but performing actions appropriate to her Vice allows her to regain *all* spent Willpower



Targets and Humanity

The first level of the Psychogenics Discipline helps to reveal the nature of another Kindred's Humanity score. It

is this number that helps a Seventh Day vampire gauge her reaction to another vampire.

Humanity	Reaction
Humanity 10-6	Convert if useful; ignore if not.
Humanity 5	Subject is on the line; observe but do nothing more.
Humanity 4-2	Observe and target for eventual destruction.
Humanity 1-0	Go active and destroy target.

False Memories

Active Sleepers must purposefully conceal their exploits from their passive core personas. If time is not taken to construct a series of false memories, the Sleeper will re-enter "normal" existence with nothing but a black spot covering those gaps. So, a Sleeper works quite literally against himself in this process, attempting to build up a false façade of memory that will hold up against scrutiny — primarily from himself.

Concocting such memories is easy on the surface — whatever memory is put in place will convince the passive Sleeper, at least for a time. The core persona won't examine such memories unless inspired to do so by odd circumstances. He may find an external discrepancy (such as a coterie mate who claims she saw the Sleeper at the Hellfire Club when the Sleeper's false memories do not include this piece of information) or may be otherwise driven to examine his memories by a series of nightmares (see below). That is where conjuring false memories becomes difficult — they must be strong enough to withstand whatever scrutiny should occur.

Any number of dice pools are appropriate for concocting false memories in one's own mind. A Sleeper that knows Medicine might rely on believable details to make an imagined hospital visit seem real, for example, while a Sleeper that knows movies might convince herself that she spent the night watching familiar films. Some Sleepers concoct elaborate tales for themselves, using Skills like Expression and Subterfuge, while others try to overpower their own will to wonder with a smear of banal pseudo-memories using Resolve + Composure.

As a general rule, a dice pool to fool one's self should be based on either Resolve or Manipulation. Dice pools based on Intelligence might also be possible, but typically it is easier to fool or dissuade one's self than to outsmart one's self. If the Sleeper has no other tricks to fall back on (or doesn't think of any), the default dice pool to convince one's self is Resolve + Composure.

Smart Sleepers may even write notes to themselves, collect matchbooks and receipts or collect other props to add weight to their lies. These items grant equipment bonuses as the Storyteller sees fit.



Seeing Through

Sometimes, a passive Sleeper becomes suspect of her own thoughts. It's possible that a coterie member uncovers the truth and shares the painful reality with the Sleeper or perhaps the Sleeper herself uncovers the nature of what lies hidden in her blood. Whatever the catalyst, this doesn't immediately cause a breakdown of the program. What it does mean, however, is that the Sleeper is now engaged in a nightly battle for her own memories.

Any time the Sleeper attempts to dissect her own memories and separate what is real from what is not, the player must make a contested roll against herself. The player rolls Wits + Composure versus the success achieved on the action to lie to herself. Sleepers with the Meditative Mind Merit gain a +1 bonus to the Resolve + Composure roll to convince themselves. Sleepers who have the Eidetic Memory Merit gain a +2 bonus on dice pools to see through their own lies. Wounds and other evidence not accounted for in her lies may grant bonus dice to her own investigation.

At the Storyteller's discretion, other dice pools might be appropriate for the self-examination, based on the dice pools used to concoct the cover story. A character who used Manipulation + Medicine to fool herself might use Wits + Medicine to notice gaps in her own story, for example. As a general rule, the dice pool to challenge one's own memories should be based on Wits or Intelligence, though the ultimate dice pool must be determined by the Storyteller based on the unique circumstances of the scene.

If the Wits + Composure roll is successful, the Sleeper is able to differentiate between which memories were constructed by the program and which are real. With an exceptional success, she can recall fragments of what really happened on the "missing night." If the false memories hold up, the character cannot penetrate her own lies and cannot try again to sort out the same night in her mind. Still, her suspicion might not be put down.

Resisting the Program?

Sleepers who are aware that they are being mind-controlled may make a roll to resist going active. (It's possible that unaware Sleepers could make a similar attempt at the Storyteller's prerogative.) To resist going active for an entire night, roll Resolve + Composure in an extended action. A number of successes must be achieved equal to the character's Willpower (which is also the Willpower of her active self) plus two. Each roll represents ten minutes of concentration and attempts at self-control, but no more than *three* rolls may be attempted in this way. If the character does not succeed within three rolls, the resistance attempt fails. If the attempt succeeds, the programming will not "go live" for the remainder of the night.

Breaking the Program

The Sleeper program is not impenetrable. At its foundation, it's an incredibly sound piece of mystical-scientific encoding. However, the program is only functional when coupled with an individual's personality, and, like snowflakes, no one persona is the same as the next. Thus, thousands upon thousands of permutations exist that the Sleeper program cannot account for. The program certainly handles a number of them — Mr. Morning was not so foolish as to leave wide margins of error — but perfection in this regard was simply not possible. What this means is that the encoding is vulnerable to breakdown. Sometimes, when this happens, it must simply be recovered. Other times, it deteriorates completely, and no amount of work can re-build the program within the blood. A number of ways exist for programming to change from its original intention or fail altogether.

Corrupted Sleepers

The corruption of programming is a relatively new phenomenon, though few vampires in or out of VII would have a way of knowing that. Corruption and reversal of programming happens when a passive Sleeper allows his Humanity to drop below "accepted" levels. Once, the progression of programming dictated that such a shift in a Sleeper's Humanity was unacceptable. That Sleeper then defaulted to a fail-safe suicide mode, attempting to destroy himself in whatever way was deemed simplest and quickest (typically trapping one's self in the path of a sunrise). This is no longer the case, however. The programming has failed in this regard, and it has failed universally. The Sleeper does not destroy himself — he simply becomes the opposite of what he was, per the program's own permutations.

The program itself demarcates a clear line between which vampires are capable of salvation and reaching the Sabbath and which are not. That line lies squarely in the middle of the scale, at Humanity 5. If a Sleeper's Humanity goes below 5 for any reason, the programming does not destroy itself or the host, but instead reverses and becomes corrupt. The concept of sin as a negative changes and indicates that *virtue* is negative. Sleepers no longer strive to identify the Vice of other vampires, but instead seek to distinguish their overarching Virtue. Corrupted Seventh Day vampires don't try to convert redemptive vampires, but instead try to convert those Kindred who are base, vile, mired in sin. Most importantly, the tainted program no longer targets the sinful for destruction, but instead seeks to put all virtuous to their Final Death. Use the following chart for corrupted Sleepers to determine the value of any given Kindred target:

Humanity	Reaction
Humanity 0	Attempt to convert immediately.
Humanity 1–5	Convert if useful; ignore if not.

- Humanity 6–8 Observe and target for eventual destruction.
- Humanity 9–10 Go active and destroy target.

Deprogramming

In a rare case in which a Seventh Day Sleeper is captured and not destroyed, the captors (be they coterie mates or simply Kindred with a vested interest in uncovering the truth) might make an attempt to “crack” the Sleeper program. This may take the form of cult deprogramming, torture, manipulation with some of the mental Disciplines or something else entirely.

Deprogramming a Sleeper is not an easy or painless task. Normal mind probes yield nothing but the symbols of the Seventh Day — the Roman Numeral seven and the Möbius strip lemniscate. Moreover, many attempt to deprogram a passive Sleeper — which is only so useful, because such an individual is completely ignorant of his condition. Torture and standard deprogramming techniques don’t really work if the subject is unaware of what’s going on in the first place. It isn’t enough to simply wear the Sleeper down. While that’s part of it, the larger part is exposing the program, and then having the Sleeper recognize — and then dismantle — it.

Deprogramming requires an extended contested action, using a dice pool of Manipulation + Intimidation versus the subject’s Resolve + Composure. A total of 20 successes must be achieved to break the subject’s programming. Successful rolls to break the program accumulate successes, while successful rolls on behalf of the subject subtract successes from the total. Each roll represents a full night’s work. (A deprogramming attempt can take weeks of time.)

Note that most Sleeper subjects resist attempts to crack their own program if only because most are unwilling to believe the truth of their condition. Even those that do believe their psychic diagnosis find themselves compelled to resist by the insidious defenses of their programmed will.

A number of factors can modify the deprogrammer’s dice pool:

Modifier Situation

- +2 Successfully using Entrancement (Majesty 3) on the subject weakens the program
- +1 The deprogrammer is a coterie-mate.

A number of factors can modify the subject’s dice pool as well:

Modifier Situation

- +2 The Sleeper is well-fed (nine or more Vitae).
- +1 The Sleeper has the Meditative Mind Merit.
- 1 to –3 The Sleeper has been given drugged Vitae (hallucinogens, depressants, etc.).
- 2 The Sleeper is starving (two or fewer Vitae).

Remember that any of the blood-related effects that might affect normal vampires (blood ties, blood sympathy) do not work on the Sleeper. Other bonuses or penalties are certainly possible at Storyteller’s discretion.

If a single night’s worth of deprogramming ever ends up in a dramatic failure, the process must be started over again. At the point in the procedure in which 10 successes are accumulated, the Sleeper grows to recognize that he is being controlled from within. Before this point, however, it is unlikely he is even aware of VII’s programming.

Torpor

A Sleeper who falls into torpor runs the chance of having her program fail utterly. Torpor can, in fact, not just cause the program to fail, but actually cause it to leave the body and the blood entirely. While this is simple, it is incredibly time-consuming. The vampire must rest long enough to reduce her total Blood Potency by one, which means she must be torpid for at least 25 years. If this happens and the vampire awakens, the Sleeper program is eradicated. The vampire is not made aware of the programming, but may be left with the oddities of memory and the other “residue” from her Requiem as an agent of VII.

She can be re-programmed again if the Seventh Day finds her and successfully makes another conversion attempt.

Hypnosis

Sleepers of VII make use of a number of specialized skills related to the mind. Ideally, VII is able to convert Kindred who already know these abilities, but reality is not always so simple. Many Sleepers are either driven to learn these abilities in bits and pieces when active — or the programming may urge them to explore such training when passive.

A character with the Hypnosis Specialty (for either the Occult Skill or Medicine) and the Hypnosis Merit may attempt to implant a hypnotic suggestion in another character with an extended Manipulation + Occult or Medicine roll, with the +1 bonus for the specialty. However, a character without the Hypnosis Merit and Specialty is considered untrained when attempting deep hypnosis, and suffers the associated –3 dice penalty as a result.

Hypnosis Merit (•••)

Prerequisite: Medicine • or Occult •

Your character can put another character into a trance using either the Occult or Medicine Skill. The trance is unique in that the subject remains conscious, but her mind becomes open, like a box, and will accept or reveal most things that are asked of it. Many hypnotists use specific equipment to help induce the trance (a dangling pocket watch or pendant, a television screen showing static, a sound machine emitting a single tone). Once

the subject is carried into a trance, she becomes pliable and more likely to respond to questions or suggestions.

Upon purchasing the Hypnosis Merit your character automatically gains the Deep Hypnosis Specialty for either the Medicine or Occult Skill. Without this Merit, the Deep Hypnosis Specialty cannot be purchased.

Deep Hypnosis Specialty

Dorian's mind was clean and clear like the tinnabulation of silver bells. He very much enjoyed when the program was awake within him because it gave him glorious focus. If only others had such focus — but then, he figured, that's why we're here today, aren't we? He let the platinum pendant dangle from his fingers and let it sway lazily in front of Rachel's eyes, and he watched as her pupils followed it as if it were made of candy. Or blood. He whispered to her to sleep, sleep, sleep — and her eyelids fluttered like the wings of a dying moth. The trance was taking hold, and soon the program would too.

Possessed By: Entertainers, Psychologists, Magicians, Occult Investigators

For Skill: Medicine or Occult

Invoke Trance

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult or Medicine + Deep Hypnosis Specialty (1) + equipment (hypnotist) versus Resolve + Composure (if subject resists)

Action: Extended and contested; resistance is reflexive. The task demands a number of successes equal to twice the subject's Willpower. Each roll represents one minute of work. Resistance is voluntary. Deep hypnosis is not subtle, however, and free subjects unwilling to go along with the hypnosis can easily ruin attempts by breaking the atmosphere or leaving. Involuntary subjects cannot be hypnotized unless restrained.

Putting another in a trance opens the door to that individual's mind as he falls into a daze. If the hypnotist succeeds, the subject falls into a deep trance. If the subject wins, he remains focused and unfazed.

When a subject is successfully put in a trance, his mind becomes malleable. All rolls the hypnotist makes to affect that character's mind are now made with a bonus equal to the hypnotist's Manipulation dots.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: If the hypnotist fails spectacularly, the subject cannot be hypnotized by the character again for a number of days equal to her Resolve.

Failure: The subject does not enter a trance.

Success: The subject enters a hazy trance and becomes more tractable. The hypnotist gains bonus dice equal to his own Manipulation dots when trying to influence the subject.

Exceptional Success: The hypnotist makes exceptional headway towards the trance state.



Suggested Equipment: Shiny pendant or pocket watch (+1), sound machine or other audio-visual stimulation (+1 to +3), white and featureless room (+1), medications (+1 to +3)

Possible Penalties: Distractions nearby (-2), lack of familiarity with subject (-2), language barrier (-2 to -5)

Psychogenics Discipline

Tom Booth was the most powerful psychic within the Tiresian Society. The power of his mind was unparalleled among his peers — he could read surface thoughts, move small objects with mere thought and plunge his fingers beneath skin and bone without even a moment's worth of pain. The Society called this Psychogenic Instrumentation — Booth was, after all, their instrument, and they had tuned his mind to an entirely new neurological frequency. It was this preternatural attunement (later shorted to Psychogenics) that was the greatest achievement of the Tiresian Society, along with their grim innovations in mind control.

The vampire Mr. Morning changed all of that. He destroyed the Society and its work, and from the ashes he created his own program. Key to that program was Tom Booth, whom Morning sired. Kindred blood is already powerful; its crimson puissance carries a great deal of ingrained supernatural possibilities. But Booth was the carrier of his own strange powers. His body was weak, but his mind was frighteningly strong. And, with the emptying out of his mortal blood and the infusion of cursed Vitae, his powers not only became stronger, but they could be passed along to others, coded with the very Sleeper program that was Morning's transcendent legacy.

This practice of Psychogenics lives on now in the blood of Sleepers as a Discipline available only to them. This Discipline is about the psychic potential of the mind. It is not merely about extrasensory perception or one mind's power over another. It is about raw *potential*, about the strength of one's own psychic control over his environment, his body and even the bodies of others. It is deeply ingrained in the Sleeper program, and is well suited to the dark needs of the Seventh Day.

A vampire afflicted with the VII program automatically gains one dot of Psychogenics. A vampire whose programming is broken loses all access to the Discipline. Should a freed Sleeper be subject to the Seventh Day mission again one night, all her knowledge of Psychogenics comes rushing back to her.

Active Versus Passive

Psychogenics is unique to the Seventh Day Sleepers, and is only available to programmed Kindred. Of course, Sleepers are not active at all times (and, in fact, remain passive *most* of the time), so what happens to this Discipline and the vampire's knowledge of it?

A passive Sleeper has access to the Discipline, but may not *know* she has access to it. This creates a number of interesting scenarios. First, under a time of stress or great need, the Storyteller may make a roll (or allow the player to do so) to active one of the levels of Psychogenics. The character then realizes she has some untapped reservoir of ability that she had not previously witnessed.

Second, this then becomes a good story hook for the characters to begin unraveling just what this means — after all, sudden access to a strange new Discipline is worthy of some investigation. Note, however, that such investigation should in no way immediately point to VII or mind-control. It's not as if the local libraries contain an encyclopedia of vampire powers and their associated covenants and bloodlines. New Disciplines are rare, but often talked about in occult circles — consider that bloodlines may have their own signature Disciplines that go unknown among most Kindred for years. Access to Psychogenics should only be the *beginning* of a Sleeper's quest to unravel the Gordian Knot of her own memories.

• Read Soul

The nature of the vampire soul is of particular importance to the Sleepers of the Seventh Day. The soul is where the truth of the creature dwells. On the surface, a Kindred may be all smiles and helpful gestures, but below the flesh and deep within the mind lies the reality of that fiend's broken and tainted soul.

Sleepers must determine the nature of the Kindred around her before deciding upon a course of action with regard to them. This ability is what helps her (or specifically, her programming) determine the depth of sin that hides in a creature's mind.

The character must make eye contact with the target. Touch is not necessary. This ability instantaneously plumbs the mind and searches out the darkness dwelling there. Concrete images and thoughts are not gained in this way, but the subject's Humanity comes across as shades of pale red (higher Humanity) to deep black (low Humanity).

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Psychogenics versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character interprets inaccurate information (i.e., if the target's Humanity was 8, the Sleeper believes the target's Humanity is 3).

Failure: The character gleans no information at all.

Success: The character receives a sense of the subject's relationship to the Beast. The player learns the exact Humanity score of the target Kindred.

Exceptional Success: The character not only learns the target's Humanity score, but also learns of any derangements the target suffers from.

This power may be used on any sentient creature — not just vampires. The same rules apply. When used on mortals or ghouls, for example, this power reveals the subject's Morality. When used on werewolves, this power reveals the subject's Harmony.

•• Movement of the Mind

Psychokinesis is the ability to move objects without touching them. Such a skill was highly sought-after by the Tiresian Society, and they were elated to foster such a talent in the inimitable Tom Booth, their only successful telekinetic mind. Psychokinetic power is not extreme — its invisible strength is limited to small or light objects, and it doesn't last long or reach far. But it can still be incredibly useful — flipping a light switch, for instance, or levitating a key or knife across the room to a hidden ally.

Only a moment's concentration is necessary to use this power. The object to be moved must be in sight and within the character's Intelligence + Resolve in yards.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll to activate. The Sleeper's Intelligence score counts as her mental "strength" and is used to determine exactly how heavy an object she is capable of moving with her mind:

Intelligence	Weight of Object
•	Up to 1 lb.
••	Up to 2 lbs.
•••	Up to 5 lbs.
••••	Up to 10 lbs.
•••••	Up to 20 lbs.

No roll is necessary to move simple objects with simple actions — nudging a chair, hitting the power button on a television, slamming a window shut, etc. If the Sleeper wishes to affect something or someone or perform a more precise action, make a roll as if she were performing the action physically, but replace any Physical Attribute in the roll with the corresponding Mental Attribute. Example rolls might include:

- Throwing a knife at an enemy: Wits + Weaponry
- Hitting a target in the face with a lamp: Intelligence + Weaponry
- Aiming and firing a revolver from afar: Wits + Firearms
- Precision actions, such as loading a revolver, threading a needle or unlocking a door with a key, may require both finesse and stability: Intelligence + Wits

Action: Instant

••• Psychic Surgery

Psychic Surgery demonstrates an eerie control over the flesh of another. With it, a Sleeper can perform surgical maneuvers with her bare hands — fingers sink through

flesh, muscle and bone and receive little-to-no resistance in doing so. Moreover, the subject at the receiving end of this power feels no pain and can, in fact, hardly feel the operation at all.

When activating this power, the Sleeper's hands grow slick with his own blood and exude a pungent and almost medicinal odor.

Cost: 1 Vitae and 1 Willpower per scene

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll to activate. A character using this power adds his Psychogenics dots to Medicine actions he performs with his own hands.

With this power, the Sleeper can literally operate on the body of another (mortal or supernatural) to perform tasks like excise tumors, remove bullets, even stitch up wounds inside the body. This ability is also often a part of the fundamental programming process when indoctrinating another Kindred into the Seventh Day (see "Conversion," p. 154).

This ability cannot be used in combat situations — the concentration required to keep this talent active is impossible to maintain during the stress of combat. That said, this power *can* be used to wound a target that is subdued, prone or otherwise taken by complete surprise. An Strength + Medicine + Psychogenics roll can also be used to harm the victim, twisting his insides or burning his innards with the Sleeper's own Vitae. Each success on the Strength + Medicine + Psychogenics roll inflicts a point of lethal damage on the subject.

Psychic surgery with the intent to heal is utterly painless — though remarkably odd-feeling. Psychic surgery with the intent to harm is excruciating.

Action: Instant

•••• Consume Mind

Psychogenics presupposes that the mind is stronger than most expect. Each thought can be a scalpel, a hammer, a leash, a whisper. Every thought can also be currency. Some of the early psychics of the Tiresian Society — including Tom Booth — would become tired and listless after exercising their psychic talents over time. Such fatigue would dwindle over time and with appropriate rest, but Booth figured out a way to circumvent such a process and regain his focus more quickly. Booth learned how to "feed" on unsuspecting non-psychic mortals, taking their own untapped psychic resources and stealing them for his own use. It required only minimal effort on his part, and didn't cause any lasting effects in those he affected. It brought great reward for only minor exertion.

This ability has been carried down from Booth to some Sleepers. For the most part, it works the same for the undead as it did for Booth. The Sleeper maintains eye contact with a victim, and "drinks" the subject's thoughts into her own mind. When drinking, she hears a

babble of surface thoughts from the victim and may even experience a kind of weird synesthesia (smelling sounds, tasting sights, seeing music as color or texture).

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy + Psychogenics
– subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Instant

For vampires, this has a few different benefits and drawbacks from its original form. This process was once without extreme drawbacks for the victims — afterward, they merely felt restless and fatigued after suffering the psychic attacks — that is no longer the case. This ability has become somewhat darker within the crucible of the Kindred mind, and causes a number of problems in the victim. After such an attack is made, the victim suffers headaches, minor hallucinations and dizziness.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire overexerts herself and suffers a debilitating headache that causes –2 dice penalty to all rolls for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: Nothing happens; the victim is unaware of any attack.

Success: The user gains one of the subject's Willpower points. The user also gains one of the following benefits:

Every success made on the psychic attack roll causes a –1 penalty on all of the victim's Mental dice pools for the rest of the scene.

Alternately, the character may use one of the subject's Mental Attributes and one of the subject's Mental Skills for the rest of the scene. This is an imprecise and impersonal form of telepathy, but it can afford the user access to vital information the subject possesses.

Exceptional Success: Psychic attacks that generate five or more successes create a mild derangement in the subject (or upgrade a mild derangement to a severe one) in addition to the selected benefit for success. This derangement persists for the rest of the night.

This power can only be used on a given subject once per scene. After that, the distress in the subject's mind interferes with the mystic Psychogenic connection.

••••• Psychic Dampening

The mind of a Seventh Day Sleeper is a powerful thing. The sheer strength of a psychic's mind can be like a hammer — or a closed door. With this power, the Sleeper can dampen or even utterly negate the usage of another vampire's mental Disciplines. Her own mind overrides the will of the opposing vampire, either hampering her efforts or quashing them entirely. The Sleeper simply exudes intangible, psychic interference from her own mind and those nearby find their mental Disciplines harder to exploit.

Cost: 1 Willpower



Dice Pool: Intelligence + Intimidation + Psychogenics

Action: Instant

Successes gained on the activation roll become penalties to any vampire in the vicinity trying to use the Auspex, Dominate, Majesty, Nightmare and Obfuscate Disciplines. This power works in a radius around the Sleeper equal to the Sleeper's Intelligence + Resolve in yards.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does the psychic interference fail, it has a reverse effect: the character can no longer use Psychogenics powers for the rest of the scene.

Failure: Nothing happens. Vampires nearby can use Disciplines without any penalty caused by the Sleeper.

Success: The activation rolls of all Auspex, Dominate, Majesty, Nightmare and Obfuscate powers within the character's radius are penalized by one for each success scored on this power's activation roll. Even the user of this power suffers the effects of her own interference.

Exceptional Success: The character achieves five or more successes. Any vampires caught within the dampening range when the power is activated suffer interference penalties for the rest of the scene, even if they move out of range.

At the Storyteller's discretion, this power also affects psychic Numina, werewolf Gifts and mage spells dependent on powers of the mind.

Conversion

When a vampire is indoctrinated into VII and the programming is coded into his Vitae, it isn't easy like flipping a switch. It is a long and grisly process, best done in complete isolation because the screams of the victim are sure to be loud. The procedure can involve torture, surgery, mind-rape and hallucinations. It takes the length of a single night, and, by morning, the captive will either be converted or destroyed.



SHOW, DON'T TELL

It will be your job to make the dice rolls mean something in the context of this ghastly scenario. The system will mean more to the characters and story if it goes beyond mere mechanical dice rolling — explain to them that they're strapped into an old, rusty dentist chair with scarred leather bands that seem to have *teeth* marks in them. Describe the harsh fluorescent lights, the incessant dripping on a pipe nearby, the way the programmer's fingers *feel* when plunging past the character's eye socket and wiggling numbly in the poor bastard's frontal lobe. Good (and, by good, we mean *bloody awful*) narration here will make the conversion a memorable experience outside of the dice rolls, which is exactly how it should be



Whether or not the characters involved are the captives or the captors in the situation, running a forced conversion in your game will require numerous dice rolls to determine whether or not the process was successful or not. These rolls add up to a relatively simple system, but do not take that to mean that the procedure in-game should be of equal simplicity. Note that when running VII's indoctrination in-game, it is up to you to take the characters through this horrific journey, whether they're strapped to chairs or holding scalpels.

The Process

Seventh Day programming requires only two specific steps. The first step is spending a Willpower point to cause the blood within the Sleeper to become infused with a powerful dose of active programming. The second step is the feeding of that single point of encoded Vitae to the captive. That blood is "programmed" inside the Sleeper's dead flesh before feeding it to the captive. Then the conversion rolls can be attempted.

Conversion requires an extended and contested roll between the captors and the captive. The captor rolls Manipulation + Intimidation or Persuasion versus the captive's Resolve + Composure. The first to accumulate a number of successes equal to twice the captive's Willpower wins the contest. Each roll represents one hour of time.

Only one captor makes the required roll. That captor is the vampire who feeds her blood (and, by proxy, the Sleeper program) to the captive. Though the blood carries the program into the subject, it still requires some facilitation if it is to take full effect. If the captor succeeds, the subject's will is weakened enough for the program to get inside. If the captive succeeds, the Willpower and Vitae have been wasted and the program rejected.

With more Willpower and Vitae, however, the process begins again.

Indoctrination and the Bloody Meme

Why doesn't this work outside of indoctrination? Couldn't a Sleeper simply feed her blood to any number of vampires and let the programming do its work? No. The program can be planted in a subject's mind with Willpower and Vitae, but it may not take root unless the subject can be made to accommodate it (using Persuasion) — knowingly or not — or overcome by conditions conducive to the program's entrenchment (using Intimidation).

Though the Willpower point and the Vitae are the only *necessary* ingredients, they are by no means the only possible parts of the process. In fact, those two elements by themselves are unlikely to actually overcome the captive's own strength of mind. This is why the programming allows (and expects) other variables to come into play. Such factors might be Disciplines (Dominate,

Majesty, Nightmare and Psychogenics are of particular use) or the use of other skill specialties (Hypnosis, for instance). All of these factors can contribute aid (in the form of dice bonuses) to the conversion process. A subject under deep hypnosis, for example, has already surrendered his defense to the indoctrination process and is ready to drink Vitae at the hypnotist's command.

That's the insidious truth of the VII program — it is frighteningly easy to employ. Every Kindred subjected to the indoctrination process believes that she can endure it, that she can outsmart the program, but no vampire can. Sooner or later the program wins.

Storytelling

Running a game that showcases this version of VII is a little tricky. The reason being that Sleepers — whether they are controlled by players or are instead Storyteller characters — require two levels of control, and within those two levels are a seemingly endless number of variables. This section should help you decide how best to handle the duplicitous, mind-controlled pawns of the Seventh Day.

The Meanings of VII

Using VII in your story means that your story will take on a certain *feel*, and the events of the tale will potentially add up in a way that they might not in a different **Vampire: The Requiem** game. You don't necessarily need to think about how the game will feel and what it will mean before beginning, but, if you do, it may help you to guide the narrative and affect the players more ably.

Themes

VII has a number of potential themes that come with it — these themes are by no means set in stone, and you may have your own ideas about the overarching message or lesson.

If you're playing a game where they are investigating the Seventh Day or have been granted an unusual glimpse into the truth of this so-called covenant, your theme may be "Trust no one." VII is so subversive that it lives in the minds of vampires who don't even know they *belong* to the group. In this kind of game, anybody could be the enemy, including members of the coterie.

If the focus of your game is on VII's treatment of vampires — i.e., the destruction of the sinful, not the clandestine mind-control — then the theme might be something obvious about "We all pay for our sins." You might also show something less clear, seeing as how Sleepers clearly involve some manner of sin to accomplish their task of obliterating the wicked — in this, you might show that "Morality has many shades of gray."

Whichever theme you choose, it will stand as your story's thesis, the idea that serves as the groundwork for the entire game.

Mood

While theme is the central message in your story, mood is the essential *feel* of the tale. With VII, a number of moods can be evoked. "Paranoia" is one — reminding characters that it always feels like eyes are upon them, having the players roll Investigation rolls out-of-the-blue but not having them find anything, showing the characters moving shadows just in the periphery of their vision. In the same vein but more specific, this version of VII is well-suited by a film noir atmosphere. Dark, gritty images fueled by a story in which corruption and conspiracy start at the bottom of the barrel and get worse and worse until they reach the very top. Alternately, you may wish for a "fire and brimstone" feel, whereupon all vampires are seen as iniquitous fiends deserving of punishment. This mood evokes a lot of religious imagery — plus, showing the characters a lot of fire helps (homeless guys hanging around a barrel fire, a haven burning down, even the lit cherry of a cigarette hissing in the darkness).

Using Sleepers

Why use VII in your story or chronicle? Aside from attempting to evoke the themes and moods noted above, one of the primary reasons to use the Seventh Day in your game is that it's unexpected. VII is a mystery — an unexplored possibility with a number of enigmatic variables attached. Sleepers are a good way to mix up what may appear to be an otherwise "normal" game of **Vampire: The Requiem**. Characters continue along in their nightly existence, playing out their Requiem through the requisite Danse Macabre, and suddenly Sleepers come along and change the whole picture. Murders happen. Kindred go missing. Whether the characters discover Sleepers in their midst or find out that they themselves *are* the Sleepers, VII adds another horrific layer to the game to keep the players guessing.

How you use the Seventh Day, however, is up to you. Are the Sleepers unstoppable monsters from the outside? Are they unwitting members of the local Kindred population? Or do the players themselves control such poor, unsuspecting vampires, each of them encoded with the cancerous Sleeper program?

Sleepers as Antagonists

If VII has a presence in your city, it's easy to use them as antagonists. They're certainly insidious — these puppet monsters operate in the very shadows of the Masquerade, abiding by sinister programming and threatening those Kindred who stand in the way of their strange Sabbath. It's important, however, to consider all the ways in which Sleepers can be used as antagonists.

Black Hats

The most direct way to use VII in your story or chronicle is as a persistent and undeniably malevolent enemy.

In this manner, the enemy is relentless in its clandestine crusade to destroy all vampires. The programming takes control and doesn't let go. Anyone could be subject to the dark code of this so-called covenant, and characters should be made to feel that they and everyone around them are in constant danger. When Sleepers attack, they do so mercilessly and cruelly — not to mention with frightening precision. The enemy attacks from the shadows, hard and fast, and characters should recognize that this enemy appears limitless and unstoppable. Here, the Sleepers are the bad guys without question, on par with the menacing alien flesh thieves of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. The other way to make Sleepers particularly diabolical is to have them be “Corrupted” Sleepers — i.e., those Seventh Day vampires whose programming has gone south and causes them to now engage in depravity and hunt the virtuous. These guys are truly degenerate, and aren't much for generating sympathy or ethical uncertainty.

Shades of Gray

Perhaps the best way to portray the Sleepers is as enemies who are morally ambiguous. Consider the fact that VII predominantly attacks wicked vampires — the truly monstrous among the Kindred. Such a thing might not be obvious at first, because the sinful Damned are not always so obvious with their transgressions. Persistent characters should, however, be able to uncover the truth about the victims of VII attacks, and this truth might put some characters in a bit of a moral quandary. Seventh Day attacks seem to actually help the local Kindred population, if admittedly in a “greater good” or “Pyrrhic victory” kind of way. Characters might feel sympathetic toward the Sleepers, especially once the characters determine that the Sleepers aren't some vengeful cabal of elder vampires, but are simply local Kindred whose minds have been fettered by the strange Seventh Day programming. Of course, just as characters grow comfortable with their sympathy, it might be best to offset such mercy with a particularly brutal VII attack. The Seventh Day might be doing good work at times, but that doesn't stop the fact that its tactics are without clemency and any who stand in its way are so much fodder. Moreover, what happens when VII begins to forcibly convert those near and dear to the characters? How will they reconcile the moral ambiguity once their friends or allies are taken hostage by the Sleeper program?

White Hats

It is difficult, but not impossible, to portray VII as a positive force. Seventh Day programming is brutal — it rapes minds and forces unwitting Kindred to commit acts of atrocity against their peers. And yet, as Storyteller, you get to spin it however you'd like. Plus, seeing as how VII is a little bit different in any city, it's possible that the Sleepers in your game are characters with a greater and

stronger moral code. Their attacks may still be precise and extreme, but committed instead with a kind of pity. Moreover, if you make their victims the true fiends of the Kindred world (child-killers, bestial elders, murderous Sanctified), the characters' picture of VII is likely to be more sympathetic. The Seventh Day is not meant to be a “good guy” organization, but their work is ostensibly positive, and characters may grow to see them as a force for good, despite the group's horrific underpinnings.

Discovering Sleepers

Whether your Sleepers are the most fiendish puppet masters or disturbed paragons of virtue, you should decide how the characters might first come across Sleepers in your story, for this will arguably be the “jumping off point” for such a plot. The following story hooks are just a few possibilities:

- The characters hear muffled screams in the distance. Further investigation uncovers an abduction taking place or an actual indoctrination procedure. The Sleepers (all wearing their masks) escape — but did characters perhaps notice important features such as a tattoo, physical build or a strange gait?
- The characters come across a particularly brutal VII slaying. The room is torn to pieces, and blood is flecked all across the overturned furniture. The dead Kindred's ash is smeared across the wall in the telltale Roman numeral VII.
- The characters attend an important Elysium (or Midnight Mass), whereupon the Prince reveals evidence that VII is active in the city and has declared a blood hunt upon the vile assassins.
- The characters all have similar dreams. These dreams or nightmares show a city on fire and vampires burning beneath the scourge of flame. Flame may be raining from the skies and other apocalyptic imagery might be involved that specifically involves the number seven (seven angels, trumpets, seals, etc.). Alternately, the players may have dreams less about the end of the world and more about the Seven Deadly Sins portrayed in rather extreme and abstract fashions.
- The characters are accosted by one of the city's local neonates because he doesn't know “who else to trust.” He tells them that he no longer believes he is in control of himself, that he thinks he maybe has some kind of split personality or is being Dominated by a local Kindred. He wants to be watched and followed whenever possible. (He is, of course, a Sleeper.)

Sleepers as Protagonists

This is where it gets complicated. Using VII as antagonists is relatively simple. Involving the Seventh Day as one or several player characters means that both the Storyteller and the players have a number of questions to answer before even attempting such a thing.

Control

The first big question that the Storyteller asks is, who will control the Sleeper character when she is in active mode? The Storyteller and player have a number of options here:

- The Storyteller controls the Sleeper character when she goes active, but assumes that such nights exist during “downtime,” and never directly controls her in-game. The character and her coterie are left with clues after the fact. The advantage is that this creates a deeper sense of mystery. The disadvantage is using downtime potentially glosses over nights when players want a greater character focus.

- The Storyteller controls the Sleeper character when she goes active, literally playing the character during this time. The advantage is that the VII mind-control is genuinely represented. The disadvantage, however, is that the actual player who created the Sleeper is given little to do during this time, and may not wish to relinquish total control of his character.

- The player controls the Sleeper character, whether during downtime or during the normal period of gameplay. The advantage is that the player has autonomy over his character. The disadvantage is that, not only does this reduce the mystery for the player, but he may also need guidance from the Storyteller in playing a character whose programming may cause him to betray himself at any given point. (Despite disadvantages, this is the recommended choice for most groups.)

Awareness

The next question is a matter of awareness. How much do players know regarding their characters’ involvement with this shadowy, parasitical organization? You have the following three essential choices here:

- Players are completely unaware that one or several of their characters were secretly converted to VII. This necessitates that the Storyteller control their characters in downtime, only showing the results of that downtime later in the game (perhaps by showing something subtle like some ash on the hands of one character or obvious like revealing a wake of ashen bodies from the night previous).

- The players who are controlling Sleepers are aware that their characters are mind-controlled, but the other players are not. This necessitates the players controlling their Sleeper characters, because, in this fashion, none of the other players suspect anything overtly out of the ordinary.

- All players know of the involvement of one or many characters in VII. This reduces some of the potential mystery, but can still offer paranoia and horror as characters work against themselves with effectively two different personalities.

Sleeper Coterie

It’s also important to determine just how many of the players are going to handle Sleeper characters. If only one character is controlled by Seventh Day programming, it helps to maintain a sense of suspicion and strangeness, but threatens to leave out the other players. Alternately, having a whole group of Sleepers helps the group work together, involves all players in the central mystery and helps to coordinate all the characters. (The best way to handle this might actually be to go from one extreme to the other — start with one player controlling a Sleeper, and have that Sleeper convert the others one-by-one, until all are brought into the fold.)

One Sleeper in a coterie is interesting, because it means that when active, that character is subtly working against the group. He may go missing from time to time, or may occasionally seem “off.” Moreover, it’s possible that the Sleeper may target one or several of his coterie mates for destruction. What happens when one night that character suddenly goes ballistic, attempting to cut the head off a friend or ally? Or, creepier still, what happens when the rest of the coterie uncover the Sleeper’s blueprints to destroy them *all* in one fell, calculated swoop? This plays well to the theme of “Trust no one,” to be sure. (For a real switch-up, have the rest of the coterie secretly know that the one character is a Sleeper, but keep that information from the Sleeper’s player. When that truth finally comes to light, it becomes an unexpected “tables are turned” scenario.)

Alternately, a whole Sleeper coterie works best together. They can remain unaware together and go active together. This type of game is really about getting things accomplished and having a unified front working against — well, itself. Players might enjoy the dual-layer existence of the entire coterie, making allies and brokering deals six nights of the week, and on the seventh going active and hunting down those very same allies.

Story Ideas

The potential stories you can tell involving VII’s puppet-master program are not limited to what we list here. What follows are just a few options for the kinds of tales you might tell when focusing on this bizarre, self-replicating “covenant.”

If you plan to turn these ideas into chronicles, simply plot a longer arc in which to reveal the plot points. A chronicle might best be served by involving some or many of the ideas below, pairing them together in a seamless flow of events.

Trail of Breadcrumbs

When the Seventh Day operates, it *tends* to do so under the cover of its own Masquerade. It serves the Sabbath little if Sleepers are caught every time they



step out of their havens and engage a target. Hence, when VII acts, it leaves little more than mystery in its wake, a frightening gulf filled with a body count but no easy information. Still, for those astute enough to find them, Sleepers inevitably leave clues behind (usually by mistake, but sometimes on purpose).

In this story, the characters pick up the pieces of the Seventh Day's depredations and attempt to put the scattered fragments together into a cohesive whole. Their motives for doing so can be that they are doing work for an important local Kindred (Prince, Priscus, Bishop), or perhaps they're only looking out for their own necks since Kindred close to them seem to be disappearing.

The idea behind this story is to leave behind a number of concealed clues that industrious characters could uncover. Characters may find a boot print left in the ash of the fallen Kindred, a book of matches used to burn the transgressor, a set of chains and shackles used to bind the demised vampire to a roof for the sun to rise. Little clues lead to bigger clues (testimony from a nearby homeless man, visions gleaned by using Auspex), and soon the characters may be able to circumvent future crimes and even uncover the identity of the Sleeper (or the whole cell).

If using this story, you could incorporate any or all of the following elements:

- After destroying the latest vampire, the Sleeper assassin leaves behind one of the Seventh Day's trademark sigils: the Roman numeral VII written in blood on a

page of the Book of Revelations, pinned to the earth near the pile of Kindred ash. Can the characters make some use of this? Could they play forensics, or perhaps use The Spirit's Touch to determine where the assassin purchased the Bible? (Perhaps the Sleeper took it from a hotel room or bought it from a ratty, used bookstore near his haven?)

- When investigating the crimes, at the same time the characters investigate the backgrounds of the destroyed Kindred. What happens when the characters find out that the targets were potentially deserving of their Final Deaths? Do the characters grow more fearful, knowing that they themselves count among the ranks of the truly wicked? Do they try to improve their own moral standings (whether for appearances or for real)? Do they pursue the assassins more diligently, or do they back off the search or neglect the hunt entirely?

- Investigating VII is a surefire way to become a target. Do the characters take precautions to stay below the radar? Or, alternately, do they establish one or several of themselves as bait? When VII comes calling, are the characters ready or taken completely off balance?

- What happens when the characters learn that the assassin is one of the city's local Kindred? What if it's someone important in one of the local covenants — or worse, what if the Sleeper is the very vampire who asked them to investigate in the first place? Or, the most horrifying option of all, what if the characters learn that one of them is responsible for the killings?



Program Breakdown

Seventh Day programming is strong but not flawless. Sometimes, it breaks down on its own — other times, it is broken down by the will of the Sleeper or by other Kindred. Whatever the case, a failure of programming doesn't necessarily mean the program *goes away*. In this story, one or several of the players control characters who are now aware that they are being mind-controlled. Of course, this isn't as easy as finding out you're being Dominated by a Kindred from across town. In this scenario, characters will soon realize that their strings aren't being pulled by any one puppet master, and are instead being controlled both by the program itself and potentially by other Sleepers in town.

In this story, you may choose to utilize any of the following ideas or questions:

- When a Sleeper uncovers any part of the truth about her mind, she doesn't have any piece of information to help her. No rulebook exists; if she had cancer, she could consult any number of doctors or patients to help determine how best to handle her condition. Sleepers don't get that luxury. Thus, what misconceptions do characters have about this situation? What misconceptions and misdirection can you put into play as Storyteller? Are Sleepers made to believe that someone out there really is pushing their buttons and pulling their switches? Do the Sleepers believe that by starving themselves and getting the corrupted blood out of their bodies that they can perhaps be free? Can a blood transfusion help, or, worse, is the Sleeper told that she can only free herself by diablerizing an elder?

- Who does the Sleeper turn to? If she goes to the Prince, will the Prince protect her and aid her — or will he drag her out before Elysium and destroy her before the assembled vampires? Does she turn to the Lancea Sanctum to help save her soul or to the Ordo Dracul to help get to the bottom of this mystical-scientific condition? Do her coterie mates know — or are they all in this together, each now aware that their minds are not their own? Perhaps the most frightening option of all happens, and the poor vampire turns to another for help — only to find out that they themselves are clandestine members of VII. Which leads to . . .

- Sleepers are not immediately attuned to one another, especially if they don't belong to the same coterie both in and out of active mode. If one Sleeper goes "rogue" or has his program waver or fail, other Sleepers do not immediately know. But they might eventually become aware of such a breakdown. Do these other Sleepers try to "re-program" him? Or do they instead decide that he could've told anyone, and that he — and anyone he's been in contact with — must be destroyed? The Sleepers may mount a vicious and ceaseless campaign of destruction against him. Or, is it possible that the other Sleepers are insidious enough to wage a war of deception and

propaganda, putting information out among the Kindred that the character is a liar or lunatic? Will anybody even believe his story after that?

- Program deterioration can have other side effects as the mind struggles to adapt. Perhaps the character is plagued by hallucinations or nightmares of her actions as an agent of VII. Or, perhaps she gains a single new derangement — or worse, maybe that derangement changes every evening she wakes from her slumber.

Ignorance is Bliss

The story discussed above is one in which the Sleeper program begins to deteriorate and break down. In this story, the Sleeper program *doesn't* break down, and in fact remains stable and soundly in place. This story involves a bit of meta-gaming with players, because it means that, to a point, each player is going to be playing *two* characters — or, at the very least, one character with two similar but separate personalities. Players knowingly assume the roles of Sleepers who, for most nights of the Requiem, exist as "average Kindred" (if there is such a thing) participating in the Danse Macabre. Of course, as is the nature of Sleepers, from time to time these characters "go active" and work toward the goals of VII — converting other Kindred, destroying the sinful and otherwise furthering the Sabbath. In this game, players quite literally work against themselves, crafting false memories for their passive personas, possibly indoctrinating or destroying close allies and likely betraying their clan or covenant. This is a difficult story to tell, but it's meant to be. Such conflict, if players are willing to accept it, can make for a very interesting tale. Some (or all) of the following elements may come into play during this particular type of story:

- Have the players create characters suited to the various molds of VII — reconnaissance, indoctrination, destruction. The characters may be a mix of all three or all of one type. Encourage the players to create such molds from unlikely passive core persona templates — a VII assassin, for instance, who is normally a quiet and potentially cowardly Ventruue. Or a gatherer of intelligence for the Seventh Day who, when passive, is a blustery fire and brimstone Gangrel of the Lancea Sanctum.

- Make players roll against themselves, and have them specifically craft their own false memories. (Because who knows the character better than the player?) Or, in a bit of a switch-around, have each player create the false memories for the other characters in the coterie, not their own.

- What happens if the characters are appointed as agents of the local Prince with the specific goal of tracking down and uncovering any Seventh Day members in the area? Do they have to work against themselves even more so, hamstringing their own efforts at every turn? Does the program need to "go active" more often

to compensate for all the work the characters do when passive? Does the program then target the vampire who gave them the task in the first place — will they have to attempt to destroy the Prince?

- Can the active Sleepers set little “traps” for their passive selves? Establishing ghouls to verify false memories, sending fake emails from fictitious accounts, even spreading rumors or lies about the core persona in an effort to undermine his credibility should he decide to go to another vampire for help?

- Does the program in the Sleepers’ subconscious work to put them in places that are advantageous for pursuing the Sabbath mission? For instance, might a Sanctified character over time leave the fold and join the Acolytes in an effort to hunt down pagan sinners? Does the passive character actually believe herself to be a born-again neo-pagan vampire, or does such a switch in belief and allegiance seem strange, even to her?

A New Morning

The vampire Mr. Morning was the original controller of the Seventh Day. With the help of the psychic Tom Booth, he put in place his own program over the one started by the Tiresian Society. The program was his child, his design, his road to Golconda. But when he died, the program was no longer controlled externally, and it ran purely on its own devices. The encoding was strong enough to carry it further without the need of a puppet master — it was self-replicating, a perpetual motion machine going on forever.

In this story, however, that is no longer the case. In every area, the operations and Sleepers of the Seventh Day are a little different, but in this area, they’re very much so. Because here, someone has figured out the program and has cracked it. Worse, he has *changed* it. The once-guideless programming now has a new controller.

The following are a few possibilities that may or may not come into play when running such a story:

- Who figured out how to do this? The most likely choice seems a member of the Order of the Dragon. They have been the most concerned about the nature of VII, and they certainly have the wherewithal and occult training to perhaps make a go at it. But what if it’s someone else? Some mad elder of the Sanctified who views the Requiem much as Morning once did? Could the new controller even be a descendent of Morning or of Tom Booth? Or is it possible that the group is now controlled by a rogue Sleeper who wants revenge on the “group” that enslaved his very soul? Alternately, perhaps the Acolytes control the local Sleepers now in an attempt to undermine the workings of the powerful Sanctified, or maybe it’s a greedy Invictus ancilla who merely wants his enemies gone. Which leads to . . .

- Why? Taking the effort to break programming and change it to gain control over Sleepers is certainly

advantageous, but it also might involve more effort than its really worth. Is it one vampire seeking vengeance and power over his enemies? Or has the entire local covenant taken control of this in an effort to get the respect it finally deserves? Using the Sleepers might be a tool for violence or merely a distraction while the puppet master does something else entirely.

- What new rules does this new controller put in place? Any of the Priorities encoded into the blood will stay in place unless specifically altered. What do they become? Destroy all Acolytes on sight? Convert only the local Nosferatu? Undermine the local Primogen to give the Prince more power? Is it possible that the new puppet master fails to encode the program properly — and it begins to fail spectacularly? Perhaps Sleepers try to burn themselves alive, or break the Masquerade at every turn. Or maybe all Sleepers simply go mad, their minds shattering with faulty encoding, their lunacy far worse than that of the Malkovian bloodline.

- Unlike other Seventh Day cities, the Sleepers here have a local puppet master — in other words, the hydra has only one head, and cutting it off doesn’t necessarily mean another grows in its place. If the characters are the Sleepers, can they deny their programming long enough to track down the vampire responsible for their vile acts? Does destroying him even matter, or is it similar to when Morning was murdered and the program simply — continued in place?

- One possibility to consider is that one or all of the characters aren’t the Sleepers, but are instead the ones who figured out how to track and hack the program. They are in control of the Sleepers. What do they do with it? Do they use it wisely, or are they clumsy and bring the authorities knocking down their haven doors?

Advanced Techniques

You have available to you a number of unique narrative tools that can enliven a story and deepen its richness. Some of these are found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 194–195). Listed here are a few other options that may help you when telling a story involving the mysterious mind-controlled vampires of the Seventh Day.

Nightmares and Fugues

The Sleeper program is sturdy, but in its foundation lie a number of tiny cracks. A vampire’s mind may unknowingly exploit these cracks, likely without the Sleeper ever knowing that she’s doing it. The result of such explorations are often unwanted mental breakdowns — small breakdowns, to be sure, but fractures in the mind nevertheless. Such fractures usually result either in nightmares or fugues. Neither of these are systems-based, and don’t require dice rolls. They’re simply narrative tools for you to use. As Storyteller, simply decide when

best to tell a player that his character experiences such a small moment. Describe it vividly. Don't just spill it all out like it's out of a textbook. Also, don't overuse this convention. These items are meant to give a character a moment of panic — and, moreover, a brief look past the program into the reality of her puppet existence.

Nightmares are as they say they are: bad dreams. A Sleeper experiences such bad dreams while she slumbers during the day (perhaps calling them *daymares* instead). It is up to you whether to play through a nightmare in-game (possibly even making the player think the character isn't in a dream at all) or whether to simply describe the horror of the dream. Sleeper nightmares are usually of the same variety, showcasing abstract morality plays whereupon the character gains small insight and flashbacks into her behavior when in active mode. Nightmares provide distorted images of the reality of the Sleeper's concealed actions, and may show her briefly at the scene of a recent crime (such as the recent destruction of a neonate), which should be more than concerning. Alternately, nightmares might instead show darkly conceptual representations of the Sleeper's true condition: dreams in which the vampire is bound with marionette strings, for instance, or in which her brain sits in a jar on someone else's shelf.

Fugues are a little different but serve the same basic function. Instead of happening when slumbering, a vampire experiences such momentary visions at night, while awake. These usually take the form of *petit mal* seizures. The character simply pauses unnecessarily for a period of one to thirty seconds. Her speech stops (sometimes in the middle of a sentence), and she more or less stares ahead, mute and numb. The character during this time blacks out for a moment, and against the dark backdrop of her mind is treated to a brief horror show. Such a show usually shows a vivid and upsetting memory from her time as an active Sleeper. Another difference between a fugue and a nightmare is that such memories aren't nearly as abstract during this waking blackout. Here, the memories are clearer, but also briefer. The vampire experiences no lingering aftereffects such as confusion, and may snap immediately back to her speech or action, only remembering the memory from the fugue later.

False Memories

False memories are one of the cornerstones of the Sleeper program. They are used to shield the Sleeper from the reality of her actions when active. They are usually relatively mundane and simple — the less complicated and flashy, the harder such memories are to disprove.

In the story, however, you can pull an interesting trick on players, especially players who don't know that their characters are secretly Sleeper agents

for the Seventh Day. The trick is to let the players play through the false memories as if they're really happening. Run them through whatever amount of time the persona is truly active — except, they don't roleplay through the active moments, they roleplay through the structure of the false memories, none the wiser. The character acts normally, going through the motions with the player believing that this is normal game time. The reality becomes clear later, as the character tries to confirm things that happened and notices variances between what she remembers happening and what other characters say happened. While the Sleeper program does its best to incorporate all memories together into a seamless whole, such seams still show. Players are in for a real head-trip when they start learning that one night of game time may not have happened at all.

Storyteller Secrets

A story involving the Seventh Day is already a game about mystery and secrets in which the wicked are punished and paranoia reigns supreme. But, as Storyteller, you're allowed to take it as deep as you'd like. In true film noir fashion, the characters rarely know just how tangled a web you're really weaving. Just when they think they've figured out the true nature of VII, you're free to turn their expectations on their heads or introduce whole new elements that send their fear and horror spinning off in whole new awful directions.

What follows are just a few "secrets" about this version of VII. These secrets are purely optional, and are for you to use in your game or reject out of hand.

Corruption

Corrupted Sleepers no longer hunt the wicked; the virtuous become the targets. For them, sin becomes admirable, and morality is a lamentable and detestable weakness.

The thing is, it wasn't always like this. For decades, when a Sleeper's Humanity dropped below "acceptable" levels, that vampire either destroyed herself or offered herself to other Sleepers for the same purpose. It was only within the last 10 years or so that this part of the program failed not only in individual Sleepers, but started doing so among countless Sleepers. What happened?

Tom Booth happened. Morning was destroyed, but Booth was not. He, in fact, set the programming in motion that destroyed his sire in the first place. Booth was a slave, pliable and weak-minded, but he was not a slave to his sire; he was enthralled to the *program*. Booth — never a passive agent, always an active Seventh Day participant — established his own Sleeper cells among various cities, setting them up and moving on. But over time, his own Humanity weakened as his Beast drew ever closer to the surface. His own Humanity failed him, and

his coded Vitae *should have* pushed him to seek his own Final Death. But, in a strange way, Booth was not just controlled by the program — he *was* the program.

Therefore, the Sleeper program could not abide its own destruction. With help, Booth changed the programming in the only way that seemed suitable to his maddened mind. And so, the program became corrupted. Booth continued setting up Sleeper cells from city to city, except these cells featured the broken program — a program that would spread like a virus among already extant Sleepers whenever possible.

Rumors suggest that Booth is still out there somewhere, a boogeyman among the worst bedtime tales.

Exodus

Slaves often have their resistance, and the Sleepers of VII are no different. The Exodus is a small covenant of vampires who have either broken the Sleeper program completely or rail against it at every turn. They are few and far between, but they attempt to make their presence strong in whichever areas show overt Seventh Day operations. From city to city, their purposes are different but with the same core idea — to undermine that self-replicating monster that once enslaved their souls (or, for some, *still* enslave them).

In some cases, this means simply attempting to undo VII's work. The Exodus stand in the way of assassinations, thwart abductions and attempt to hunt down and destroy Sleepers whenever they can be found. Other Exodus see their goal only as freeing the slaves. These Exodus Kindred track down Sleepers and abduct them in a manner similar to VII — masks, isolated rooms, bondage. From there, the Exodus attempt to undo the programming, or, at the very least, try to make the Sleeper aware of what has truly happened to her mind. They do their best to make visible the puppet strings leading right back to the invasive encoding of the Seventh Day. From there, "free" Sleepers are encouraged to join the ranks of the Exodus and help cut out the heart of VII and eliminate the program wherever it breeds.

It's important to note that the Kindred of Exodus are not necessarily the "good guys." While many of them maintain a kind of rogue's honor, a similar number are simply happy to be allowed to engage in that which is anathema to most Sleepers — *sin*. Thus, many Exodus members tend to be rather debauched and immoral. (The group's very purpose is based in the sin of Wrath, after all.)

The Archangels

The Archangels, like Exodus, are the Damned who have broken the shackles of the Sleeper program. But, where the Kindred of Exodus see only the violation of the minds and souls, the vampires calling themselves

the Archangels see the glorious road to Golconda. These vampires have recognized or broken the programming, but, after the fact, come to believe that the Seventh Day was the true way to a very real and attainable transcendence.

Therefore, although these Kindred have potentially thrown off the Sleeper program and are no longer under its thrall, they continue to engage in the methods and ideals of the Seventh Day. They hunt and track wicked Kindred and destroy them. The Archangels also locate suitable converts and abduct them. While they themselves can likely no longer pass on the encoded Vitae, they will take their captors to known active Sleepers and even assist in the grisly indoctrination process. Moreover, the Archangels find and support any known Sleepers whenever possible, whether that means aiding in assassination attempts or covering up the Sleeper cell's activities.

Perhaps the most dangerous element of the Archangels is that the majority of them are elders. Moreover, they choose to reject any old identities they have and claim new identities based on the names of the seven archangels of the Book of Revelation (usually believed to be Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Raziël, Izrafil and Zophiel, though other angelic names are used). They are hoary, pale creatures bent on eradicating sin with a swift and judicious hand. They are frightening in their determination.

The few legends surrounding this group suggest that one of them believes himself to be — or really is — the purportedly destroyed Mr. Morning.

Other Secrets

VII is perhaps the most clandestine group of Kindred extant in the world today. Therefore, the potential secrets surrounding this "covenant" are positively labyrinthine. What follows are a few other optional "secrets" you may wish to use in your story:

- The scattered remnants of the Tiresian Society have re-formed. How long before these doctors and occultists begin their research again? Moreover, how long before they re-learn of Mr. Morning and the legacy of VII?
- Belial's Brood is really just a cadre of Corrupted Sleepers.
- VII is actually watched over and shepherded by a number of elder Lancea Sanctum Cardinals.
- Members of the Ordo Dracul have learned how to harness the Sleeper program for their own ends.
- VII no longer hunts only vampires. Werewolves, mages and other monsters are all sinful abominations worthy of destruction — or conversion.
- Mr. Morning was not truly destroyed. It is said he spends his Requiem existing as a Sleeper agent in various different cities

Inverted Sleeper

Quote: "One day... this will stop... they'll see..."

Background: The Seventh Day's message sometimes gets damage on its way through the world and into a Kindred's mind. Every mind has a tipping point, a point where one thought turns into another. For this mind, the stress of the program has turned his thinking completely upside-down. Now he hunts the virtuous and upholds vice on the nights he is given over to the program. Soon, that same stress will grind his mind to pieces and the debris will destroy him.

Description: Pale, exhausted and out of it. In his mind, this subway commuter is miles away from anyone and everywhere — too far to really hear what any other Kindred says to him. In the subway car he rides every night to and from the building that was the scene of his mortal job, he is like a rubber band stretched to the limit, waiting for one last tug or poke to set him free.

Storytelling Hints: These interstitial nights are a long and boring night between brief, bloody flurries of life. During the day, he's dead; at night, he's an insomniac. Every hour is just another hour, until the program's hours come. Then the Requiem falls away, replaced by a new life — a new world of thunderous screams and blood pouring like rain. Everything else is just the time until he lives again.

Clan: Nosferatu

Covenant: VII (seemingly Unaligned)

Embrace: 1981

Apparent Age: 39-45

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 1

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2



Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer (IT) 3, Crafts (Electronics) 1, Politics 1, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Jogging) 2, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Larceny 1, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Contacts (Wholesale Electronics) 1, Eidetic Memory, Haven Security 1, Haven Size 1, Iron Stomach, Resources 1

Willpower: 3

Humanity: 4; Fixation (6), Power Fetish Obsession (5)

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Sloth

Health: 7

Initiative: +4

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Blood Potency: 1 (Vitae 10/1)

Disciplines: Nightmare 2, Obfuscate 1, Psychogenics 1, Vigor 1

Weapons:

Type	Damage	Range	Clip Size	Special	Dice Pool
Shotgun	4	20/40/80	5+1	2	9 again, 8 Strength 3

Sleeper Executive

Quote: "If you want this, you've got to act now, my man. Can't move forward if you're looking back."

Background: The desirable face put on by successful and powerful people often hides the deformities of the mind that got them where they are. The control he demonstrates hangs by a counterweight in his mind. The power he wields over others hides the power that wields him against them. He has no idea that the time he loses takes him with it. The program moved into his mind in the molding men's room of a gruesome nightclub, through the fangs and words of another vampire. The next night he was back on his cell phone, selling real estate.

Description: Confident, personable and in control. He knows what's what and if you can keep up, he'll take you along for the ride. Business is all about knowing what people want — want you can make them want — and then getting them to reach for it themselves. "To be good at it," he says, "you have to be able to make some sense out of a customer right away, with very little time to read them. That doesn't leave a lot of time for yourself."

Storytelling Hints: He's too busy to see how frightened he is. The smooth exterior he's refined and solidified is too rigid to show off his growing distress. If he has a problem, he'll have to keep it under wraps until things calm down. There's no time to pause and look inside. Keep



the exterior together, American psycho, and everything will be fine. No one will know.

Clan: Ventrue

Covenant: VII (seemingly Invictus)

Embrace: 1929

Apparent Age: 30-35

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Business) 3, Computer 1, Investigation (Forensic Accounting) 1, Politics 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Drive 2, Firearms 1, Stealth (Sneak) 3, Weaponry (Decapitation) 3

Social Skills: Empathy (Sales) 3, Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 4, Socialize 4, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (Real Estate) 3, Allies (City Government) 2, Barfly, City Status (Corporate Executive, Real Estate) 3, Contacts (big business, accounting, contractors) 3, Covenant Status (Invictus) 3, Haven Location 2, Haven Security 3, Haven Size 4, Herd 3, Meditative Mind, Resources 4, Retainer (Driver) 1, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 7

Humanity: 5; Narcissism (6)

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Greed

Health: 7

Initiative: +5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Blood Potency: 3 (Vitae 12/1)

Disciplines: Dominate 4, Majesty 2, Psychogenics 1, Resilience 3

Devotions: Veridical Tongue

Weapons:

Type	Damage	Range	Clip	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Pistol,	2	20/40/80	17+1	1	—	5
lt.						
Fire	3 (L)	—	—	3	9 again	7
Axe						

Programmer

Quote: “Listen to me. You can hear me. Hear me. You can’t shut it out. That doesn’t work. You can hear it. If you don’t hear it clearly, you won’t come out right. You don’t want to turn out wrong, do you? Look at me. Do you?”

Background: He found the texts in a burnt-out hospital building he was sleeping in. He always read what he found in those places, but in this case it was the pictures that got his attention — pictures of people with their brains showing. He wasn’t very good at that, in the end, but eventually he learned that he didn’t have to be good with scalpels if he was good enough with his fingers. He thought of that after he drank up the vampire he found in the cellar. If he was slow and steady, a little nudge here or there was enough to get through flesh and skull.

Description: Enthusiastic, serious and unsure. The papers were unclear, but he’s pieced together enough of it now. The seventh nights are the best, and the other six are for making preparations. Most people aren’t willing to dedicate more than one night to the therapy, but he’s intent on helping people. To get through to most people, he has to be firm. The pages are too complicated for most people to understand. If they won’t understand, he’ll have to do everything by hand.



Storytelling Hints: This medical procedure was almost forgotten about in that old hospital. If he hadn't come along and found it and learned it out of that other fella's blood, no one might be performing this therapy anymore. It's a good thing he can along. A lot of people wouldn't be getting better without the therapy. It helps them, if they'll just listen. It helps them, if they'll just sit still. Where would they be if he hadn't read those pages?

Clan: Mekhet

Covenant: VII (seemingly Ordo Dracul)

Embrace: 1966

Apparent Age: 40-50

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (Sociology) 4, Computer (Programming) 2, Crafts 2, Investigation 3, Medicine 3, Occult 2, Science (Neuroscience) 1

Physical Skills: Brawl (Grapple) 3, Drive 1, Stealth 4, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (Drug Trade) 2, Contacts (Medical supplies) 1, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 1, Haven Security 4, Haven Size 2, Resources 2

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 3; Manic-Depression (4)

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Envy

Health: 6

Initiative: +4

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Blood Potency: 2 (Vitae 11/1)

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Obfuscate 3, Psychogenics 3, Coils of the Dragon 1 (Chastise the Beast)

*I'm sure you've all heard the old wives' tale
that no hypnotized subject may be forced
to do that which is repellent to his moral nature,
whatever that may be.
Nonsense, of course.*

— Doctor Yen Lo, The Manchurian Candidate (1962)





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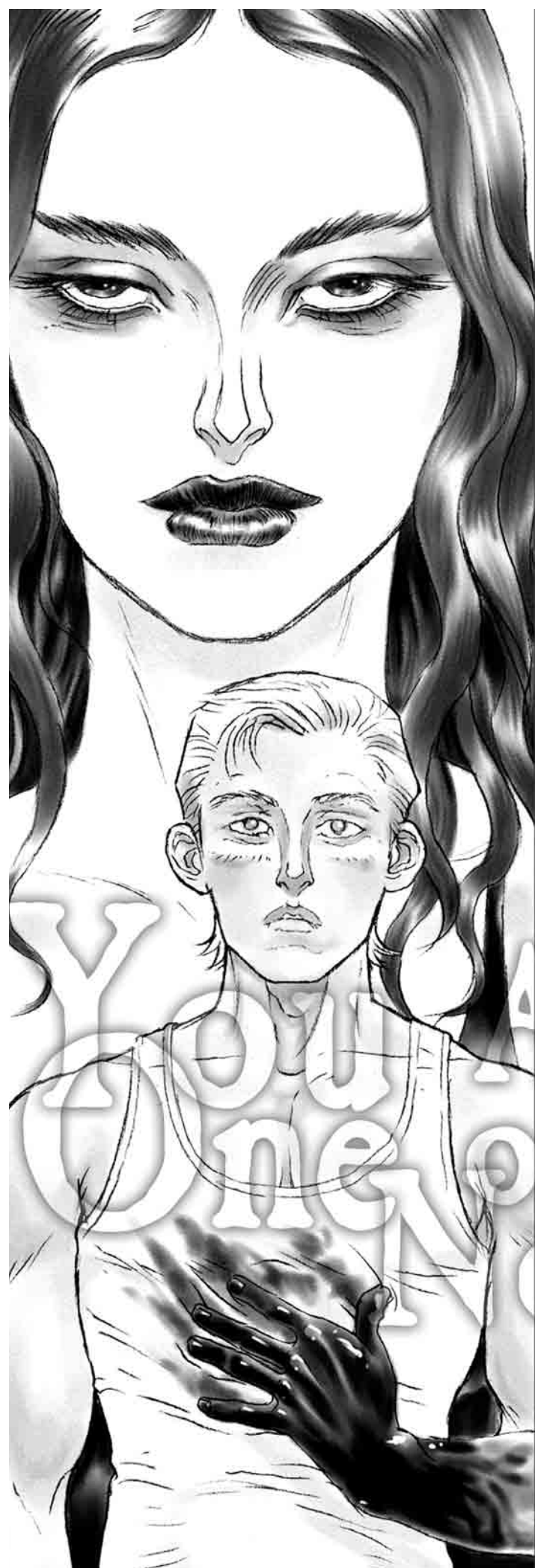
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You don't believe me?

You think I'm lying?

You think I'd lie to my Prince about something like this?

Seven did this to your people, my liege.

Here, tonight, the truth was in this room.

*It stood here and it cut up your subjects — my sire! —
to speak to us, and still you doubt it?*

Seven is real.

This is the proof.

They're here and they're not finished with us yet.

—Virgil Saint George, Seneschal to Prince Lyons

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