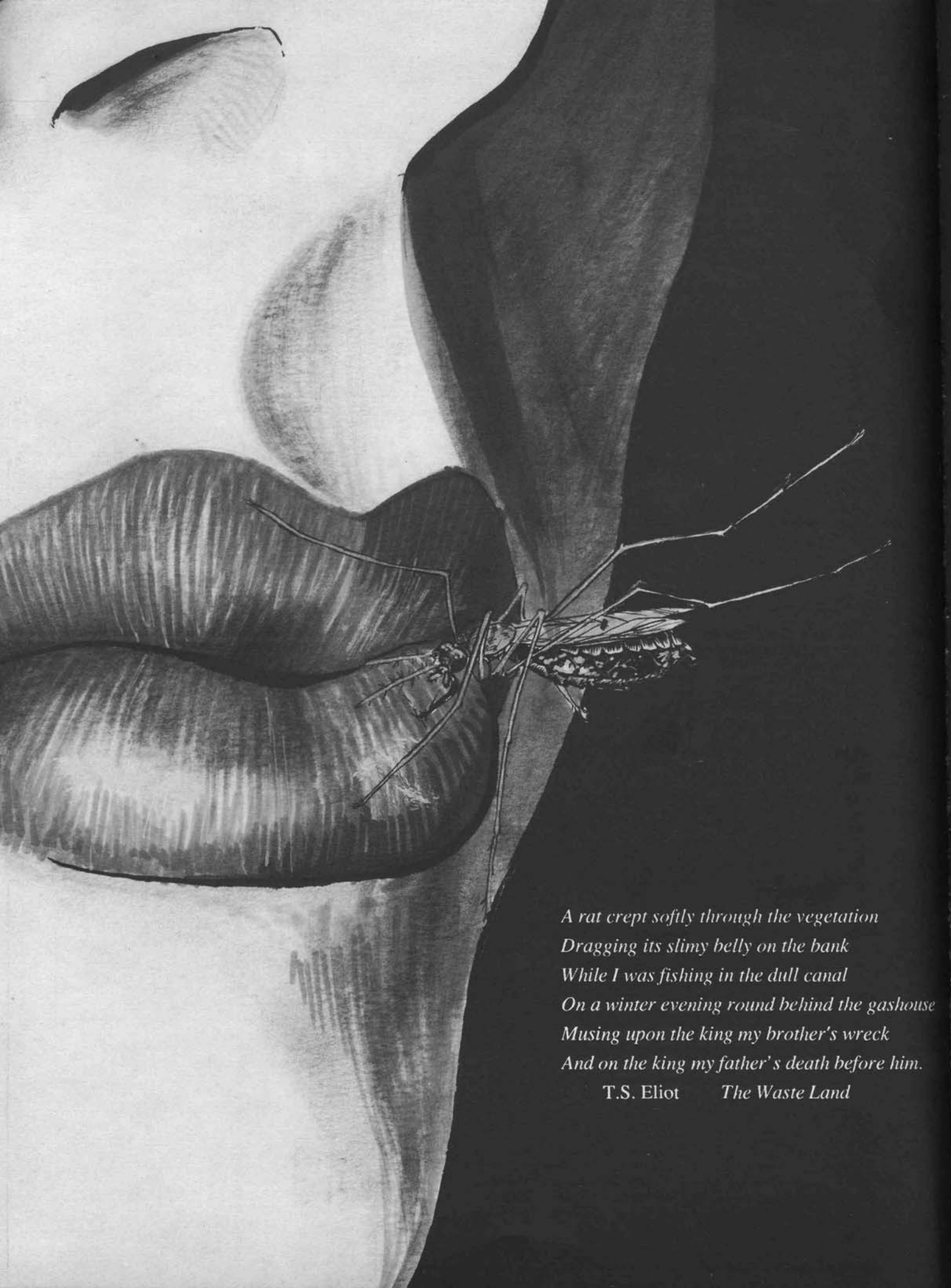


Awakening

Diablerie: Mexico

BY NIGEL FINDLEY





*A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.*

T.S. Eliot *The Waste Land*

Pietr lowered the limp body of his drained Vessel to the pavement of the noisome alley. He licked the last traces of blood from his lips.

Yes. He could feel the thin vitæ of his victim as a churning incorporated into himself. Refreshing strength flowed through his limbs until his very skin began to tingle. He raised his eyes from the crumpled body of the would-be mugger — how foolish the boy had been to choose as his intended victim a far more lethal predator — and smiled at the cloud-streaked moon hanging distended over the high rooftops of Chicago. His eye teeth — his killing teeth — were still extended, and glinted evilly in the cold moonlight.

Something glittered at his feet — the mugger's switchblade, with which he'd threatened to take his killer's life. How foolish the weapon had seemed to Pietr. How easily he had brushed it aside, before reaching in to shatter the youth's jaw with a single, hideously strong blow. He laughed as he kicked the weapon aside.

The exhilaration of the fresh vitæ was a thin siren-song in Pietr's ears. Even though it had tasted thin, only slightly stronger than water, it still carried with it its full curative and restorative powers. That was interesting, Pietr noted, and valuable. Even though his tastes had become somewhat ... jaded by his recent diet, the blood of mere kine could still serve him. Yes, interesting, and good. Although he would continue in his set path, seeking out and draining those Elders foolish enough to leave themselves vulnerable, Diablerie was not Pietr's sole course of action. The kine could support him in time of need, as they always had in the past.

His tongue and lips tingled — burned, almost — with the memory of the last time he had drunk Kindred vitæ. In France, it had been. Through his research, he had unearthed the Haven of an Elder. By cunning and courage, he had overcome the creature's defenses, and drained that Vessel dry. His heart pounded, and his spirit leapt as he recalled the fierce joy of the Inspiration, the piercing death-yet-not-death of the Rebirth. How he longed to taste once more the savage, hot blood of his own Kindred ...

It was that longing that had brought him at last to this city. Here, his research had told him, he would find a prize beyond price — one of the Kindred who knew the ancient blood-magic, the Ritual of the Bitter Rose. And with that Ritual — when Pietr had obtained it, by whatever means it might take — the Diabolist would gain powers that would elevate him to near-godhood. He would become the ultimate threat to the Camarilla, and the ruler of all the Kindred.

With a harsh laugh of exhilaration and anticipation, he vanished into the night.

Credits:

Written by: Nigel Findley

Editing: Rob Hatch

Development: Andrew Greenberg

Layout: Sam Chupp

Production: Josh Timbrook

Maps: Brian Blume

Art: Sam Inabinet, John Cobb, Seri Mohm, Josh Timbrook, Richard Thomas

Cover: Jeff Starling

Back Cover: Chris McDonough

Vampire: The Masquerade™ was created by Mark Rein•Hagen

Dedication:

This book is dedicated to all the characters who died in the playtesting of this story.



735 PARK NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 128
CLARKSTON, CA 90021
USA

© 1997 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages and Mage the Ascension are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Aeon, Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Werewolf the Wild West, Diablerie and Awakening are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. Reader discretion is advised.

Check out White Wolf online at

<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Special Thanks To:

Mark "Next Week" Rein•Hagen, for his efforts to get **Werewolf** out to playtesters in time.

Stewart "Judge Automaton" Wieck, for being so Dreddful in four square.

Ken "Fisherman" Cliffe, for not finding his fauna among the local flora.

Josh "Whine, Whine, Whine" Timbrook, for having to abandon **The Masquerade** at 2 a.m.

Andrew "Bring 'em back alive" Greenberg, for saving Josh and Wes from all those bloodthirsty Georgia peaches and getting them home by their bed time (whine...whine...whine)

Wes "Fixer" Harris, for bringing his waterpump bill from \$280 to \$20.

Sam "Dark Foe" Chupp, for turning evil while worming his way to the kingship.

Rob "Hypochondriac" Hatch, for saving up all his illness until he came to work for us.

Chris "Walkies" McDonough, for knowing how to get us worried in **Werewolf**.

Travis "Hunt and Peck" Williams, for getting his **Ars Magica** work done so close to the deadline.

Brian "The Whiz" Blume, for cranking on some jammin' cartography.



Awakening

Diablerie: Mexico

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER TWO: DIABLERIE; A DISCUSSION	9
CHAPTER THREE: THE WANDERER	17
CHAPTER FOUR: INVOLVING THE NEONATES	27
CHAPTER FIVE: THE PYRAMID	35
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	55



Introduction

We do not merely feed upon the Mortals; some of us feed upon one another. Some do it out of need; they can no longer survive on the thin mortal vitæ. But others do it out of desire, for they seek the power of their elders. The war between my people is a cannibalistic and horrific conflict indeed. The young hunt the old, not for wisdom, but for power.

— Critias, Clan Brujah

Awakening is a supplement for the **Vampire: The Masquerade** storytelling game. Within it, you will find information on one of the more powerful Methuselahs in the New World — Mictlantecuhtli, known to many as The Wanderer — and details about his resting place. Lying in torpor, he represents a treasure almost beyond price for ambitious Neonates (and what Neonates are not ambitious?). So great are his age and the potency of his blood that by incorporating a powerful ritual with the drinking of his vitæ, not one but several Neonates could advance in Generation!

Of course, nothing of value ever comes easily, and the worth of a prize can be measured by what price those who desire it would risk to obtain it. The price that must be paid for this prize is great indeed. Any Kindred who attempt to attain the goal must face the very real risk of being extinguished, of facing the death that they thought would never come for them.

For the Wanderer does not sleep unprotected. Far from it. His defenses have destroyed uncounted Kindred over the two millennia and more that he has lain in Torpor. What matter a handful more?

CONTENTS

Diablerie consists of six chapters. The first chapter serves as an introduction and explanation of the rest of the book. Chapter 2 offers a discussion of the practice of Diablerie, or the Amaranth. Chapter 3 provides background material on Mictlantecuhtli, the Wanderer, including his history and capabilities. Chapter 4 contains suggestions for how to involve the Neonates in this story and ways in which the Storyteller can drop the hints that will lead them on to their appointment with destiny. Chapter 5 describes the Wanderer's Haven, a Mayan pyramid located in the Quintana Roo province of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, as well as information on its many defenses — living, inanimate and undead. And finally, Chapter 6 discusses ways of

concluding the story, of tying up loose ends and bringing the dramatic flow of the story to a suitable close.

THE STORY

Diablerie is a one-chapter story for Vampire, intended for a group of 3-6 Kindred. It is a stand-alone story, with no direct links to any other Vampire supplements.





HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This supplement can be used in two ways. First, it can be used merely as background information. The book provides the Storyteller with important background on the practice of Diablerie — the game mechanics, particularly with reference to when Kindred drink the vitæ of exceptionally old and powerful Vampires, and the philosophy and body of beliefs that the Kindred have built up around the practice over the millennia. It also describes one of the greatest of the Methuselahs, Mictlantecuhtli, who has lain in torpor since before the time of Christ. Although the location of his resting place is known to few — if any — so great was his power that Mictlantecuhtli is probably the core of many myths and legends among the Kindred. Storytellers, then, can use this supplement for information on Diablerie, and for “deep background” that they can release in hints and rumors, to enhance and deepen the atmosphere of the Chronicle.

Second, if the nature of the Chronicle is suitable, Mictlantecuhtli the Wanderer can be presented as a target for Neonate characters bent on acquiring power through Diablerie, the drinking of an Elder’s blood. Since the

Wanderer is so old and so powerful, he represents an opportunity for several player characters to advance in Generation. Here, the rules on Diablerie itself take on more immediate significance, as do the details on the Wanderer’s Haven and the precautions he has taken to protect himself. In this case, the Neonates must “run the gauntlet” if they wish to drink of Mictlantecuhtli’s vitæ.

TIE-INS

There are no direct tie-ins between this supplement and any other product for *Vampire* ... apart from the *Vampire* rulebook, of course. While *Awakening* could be used in a Chronicle based on earlier Chronicles, such as *Ashes to Ashes* and *Chicago by Night*, the events in this supplement are so far removed from Chicago and Gary that there will be little connection with matters in Illinois and Indiana (unless the Storyteller decides otherwise, of course; suggestions for such complications can be found in Chapter 6). Of course, Kindred from Chicago may journey with the Neonates to Mexico — to assist them, hinder them or just observe, as the case may be. Otherwise, *Awakening* can be considered a stand-alone product.

Chapter Two:

Diablerie;

A Discussion

The bigger the cap, the bigger the pealin'

— Ice Cube, *Steady Mobbin'*

Diablerie is the name that the Kindred apply to draining the vitæ of another Vampire, driving the victim to the Final Death as his very life force, and the potency associated with it, is transferred to the Diabolist. Regardless of the fact that most Kindred consider it a foul and perverted act — and of the Sixth Tradition's condemnation of any Kindred who would slay another — Diablerie is practiced by, and touches on, Vampires of all generations.

There are many who think that the later Generations of Kindred — those of Fourth and subsequent Generations — were created for one purpose, and one purpose alone: to feed the hunger of their Sires. After all, it is known that as Kindred attain ages in excess of a millennium, the vitæ of mortal Vessels becomes too thin to support them as it once did. Some Kindred extrapolate from this that the true Antediluvians — those of the Third Generation, and Caine himself, should he still exist — would be unable to gain any sustenance from mortal blood. They could survive only by feeding from Vampiric Vessels. The Antediluvians knew that this would occur, and — before they slipped into Torpor — they made sure sufficient Vessels would await them on their Awakening. In essence, then, according to this view the entire population of the Damned, so concerned with its own petty squabbles and rivalries, are nothing but a Herd awaiting the resurrection of the Antediluvians. If this is the case, then Gehenna is something truly to be feared ...

It must be admitted that not many of the Kindred believe this (or admit that they believe it, perhaps). Even if this apocalyptic view is not the truth, there certainly have been — and probably still are — Vampires who sire Get for the sole purpose of later feeding on them. Most Kindred view this kind of situation with a deep personal revulsion, possibly because it would be too easy for them to imagine the horror of being such a Get. How would it be — particularly for a

natural hunter such as a Vampire — to realize that one's inescapable destiny is to become the prey of the Sire who created one? Certainly, the fact that such Get are bound to their Sire by Blood Bond would partially mitigate the horror, but still some of the terrible knowing would remain.

Then, too, there are the few "rogue" Elders who have developed a taste for the blood of their Kindred, even though the vitæ of mortals would still support them admirably. The ecstasy, or Rapture, associated with the moment when a Vessel meets the Final Death must be addictive indeed. Why else would Elders, who could gain no concrete benefits from feeding on Neonates, risk extreme consequences to do so? Obviously, Neonates — the prime targets for such Diabolists because of their relative weakness — are among the most fervent when it comes to bringing rogues to face the Prince's judgement.

Conversely, of course, there are many "younger" Licks — those of the later generations — who covet the vitæ of their Elders for the very real boons it would bring them. Most ambitions of this type remain ambitions, since by their nature any Kindred of earlier generations are much more powerful; however, there are those Neonates and Ancillas who do hunt their Elders for their blood. Through cooperative action, through trickery, or simply through falling on an Elder in Torpor, such Diabolists have sunk their teeth into enough victims to make the fear many Elders feel toward their Progeny a reasonable thing.

Many Elders take reasonable caution much too far of course, letting it blossom into paranoia and hatred. There are those Elders whose outspoken concern that the Ancilla will shatter the Masquerade is merely a cover for their fear that those same Ancilla will one night come to drink their vitæ.

Tales among the Kindred tell of those few ambitious Vampires who hunt the greatest prize of them all: the vitæ

of the Antediluvians themselves. Most of the Damned believe these stories to be nothing more than folk tales, with no truth to them whatsoever. After all, the Havens of the Antediluvians are hidden so well that none may find them.

But still the stories recur, accompanied by whisperings about Neonates who have somehow determined the locations of those hidden Havens. Those individuals who have acted on this knowledge have — so the stories tell — never returned to Kindred society. Does this mean the Antediluvians (or the protections with which they would have hedged around their Havens) have destroyed these challengers? Or have the Neonates joined the Antediluvians, in one sense or another? To most of the Damned, this possibility does not bear thinking about ...

THE PROCESS

The basic process of Diablerie is as described in **Vampire**. First, the Diabolist must totally drain the Blood Pool of the Vampiric Vessel. When the Vessel's Blood Pool reaches zero, she slips into Torpor. Thereafter, the Diabolist must roll Strength, with a difficulty of 9. For each success, the Vessel loses one Health Level. This represents the draining not of blood, but of the Vessel's very life force, that which animates his undead body, and its transference to the Diabolist.



Kindred refer to this stage of the process as "Inspiration" or as the "Fire Within". Once the Diabolist has drained all the target's Health Levels, the Vessel passes into the darkness of the Final Death. And, if the Vessel is of an earlier Generation than the Diabolist, then the feeder advances (at least) one Generation, gaining all of the associated benefits. This is a very simple description. Although accurate, it misses some of the most significant elements of Diablerie.

Specifically, it has nothing whatsoever to say about the sensations involved in drinking the vitæ of another Kindred, and their consequences. These sensations must be extreme, to explain those Vampires who feed upon Vessels of later generations.

The initial stage of Diablerie, the Feeding, is when the Diabolist is actually draining blood from the Vessel. Vampiric vitæ is as different from mortal blood as blood is from water. The sensations of drinking such hot, potent vitæ are often almost overwhelming. The Diabolist experiences transports of ecstasy unlike any sensation he or she has felt before.

If the Feeding is euphoric, then the experience of the Inspiration, or the Fire Within, is transcendent. Once the Vessel is drained of blood, the Diabolist begins absorbing the very life force of the victim. To the feeder, it seems she is still drinking blood, but blood so pure and powerful that it could well be liquid fire. She feels a burning within her own veins, spreading outward from her throat and through her entire body. This burning is indescribable: pleasure so piercing it becomes agony, or pain so sweet it becomes ecstasy. Diabolists say that throughout the Inspiration, they can hear a sound like the tolling of a great and distant bell, slowing down and diminishing in volume until, at the moment the Vessel suffers the Final Death, it falls into silence.

And at that instant, the ecstasy of the Inspiration blossoms, almost impossibly, to even greater heights. So wracking is this pleasure that the Diabolist is incapable of muffling a cry of exaltation. Diabolists refer to this moment as the Rebirth. Somewhat predictably, the magnitude of these sensations depends on the Generation of the Vessel; the earlier his generation, the more intense the sensations.

On the other side of the equation, the Vessel undergoes a profound experience as well, although not a pleasant one by any means. During the Feeding, the Vessel — if conscious — is able to fight back in any way possible. At the moment that the Vessel's Blood Pool is reduced to zero, however, he becomes totally paralyzed. It is as if he slips into Torpor, except that he is completely and horribly conscious throughout the Inspiration that follows, but is unable to do a thing to stop it. As the Vessel's life force begins to leave his body, he is possessed by terror, and a panic that no reason can hold at bay. As the Vessel loses Health Levels, and the Final Death approaches, this panic grows until it is all-encompassing. Even for those Kindred who seek the Final Death, Diablerie is the most horrible way of attaining it that can be imagined.

CONSEQUENCES

So overwhelming are the sensations associated with Diablerie that they can have very real, physical consequences. For the Diabolist, there is a chance of Frenzy, which arises from the sheer magnitude of the experience. To avoid Frenzy, the Diabolist must make a Self-Control roll against a difficulty of 12 minus the Generation of the Vessel. (Thus, if the Vessel is of the Tenth Generation, the difficulty is only 2; if the Vessel is Third Generation, however, the difficulty is 9!) If the Diabolist fails the roll, he suffers Madness (the usual result of a Conscience Frenzy); so great was the ecstasy that the Vampire will try anything to regain it. If the Self-Control roll is botched, however, the Vampire gains a Terror Derangement; the experience was so literally overwhelming that it has shaken the Diabolist's sanity.

Further, the Diabolist must make a separate Self-Control roll against a difficulty of 7 minus the Vessel's Generation. If this roll is failed or botched, the Diabolist gains the Derangement, Delusions of Grandeur. This is in addition to any Derangement gained through Frenzy.

It is possible that the Vessel may survive the experience of Diablerie. Perhaps the Diabolist is dragged off or destroyed before she can drain all of the Vessel's Health Levels. Once the Inspiration has begun, however (that is, once the Vessel has reached zero Blood Points) there is a very real risk that the Vessel's sanity has been shaken by the terror of the experience. The Vessel must make a Courage roll against a difficulty of 4 plus the number of Health Levels drained. (For example, the Diabolist drained 4 Health Levels before he was stopped. The Vessel's Courage roll is against difficulty 8.) On a failed roll, the Vessel gains a Terror Derangement; on a botch, he gains two Terror Derangements.

BENEFITS

Rise in Generation

The Vampire rulebook states that only one character can rise in Generation by drinking the vitæ of a senior Kindred. For millennia, most Kindred thought this to be an absolute truth. Most Vampires "knew" for a fact that only the Kindred who actually drained the last Health Level from the victim would experience the Rebirth.

However, during the occult Renaissance that occurred in Europe during the latter half of the 19th Century, members of Clan Tremere discovered that this "truth" was in fact just another of the many myths surrounding the Undead. There is a way in which more Kindred can experience the Rebirth, and advance in generation, from the vitæ of a single victim of Diablerie. A very specific technique must be employed for this to work, however. This technique became known as the Ritual of the Bitter Rose.

It is interesting and important to note that the discovery of the blood-magic incorporated into the Ritual of the Bitter Rose did not come as a surprise to all Vampires. There were those (few and far between) who had heard myths and legends telling of ancient days when Diablerie was more widely practiced: harsh and dark days, well before the dawning of the Christian Era. Back in those deadly times, certain myths related, many of the Elders knew the secrets of the blood-magic now called The Ritual of the Bitter Rose ... or at least some of the secrets. The myths told of great Damned thaumaturges throughout the world who had somehow developed blood-magic rituals of immense power. One such mythical thaumaturge was known only as "The Wanderer." Today, few believe the myths and legends, and fewer consider the Wanderer to be anything but a fictional figure.

Myths aside, once they had developed the Ritual of the Bitter Rose, Clan Tremere decided to keep their new knowledge inviolably secret. This was for several reasons.

One was fear. If it became known that multiple Kindred could experience the Rebirth from a single victim, how much more attractive would the practice of Diablerie become for the Anarchs? Until that time, one of the major limitations on the practice of the Amaranth was that normally only a strong band could hope to defeat an Antediluvian, and then





only one member of that band could benefit from the act. Jealousy, and the very real consideration that participants in such a move would risk the Final Death for something that would benefit only one of their number, held many back. The Elders of Clan Tremere quite reasonably feared that if knowledge of the Ritual of the Bitter Rose became widespread, the risk to their august persons in the form of roving bands of Diabolists would drastically increase.

The second reason, of course, was a desire for personal power, and power for the Clan. Knowledge that the Ritual of the Bitter Rose existed could, the Elders believed, be used as a major bargaining chip in the infighting and squabbling that dominated the Camarilla at the time. If need be, it could be a powerful weapon. The Seven Elders, based in Vienna, could — if the necessity presented itself — turn to Diablerie themselves, using the Ritual to so advance their own generation so that none could stand against them.

Unfortunately, that plan — if such vague ideas could in fact be termed a plan — came to naught. To this day, nobody within Clan Tremere knows how it came to pass, but the secret of the Ritual of the Bitter Rose got out. Other members of the Camarilla learned that the Ritual existed, and took the Tremere to task both for developing the blood-magic in the first place, and for trying to keep it themselves. In response to the overwhelming pressure from the other members — escalating, at times, to threats of destruction by a coalition of the other Clans — the Seven Elders grudgingly destroyed all records of how the Ritual is performed. Those who developed the Ritual, and those within the Clan who had subsequently learned of it, were either destroyed or had their memories wiped clean by the Seven Elders. As far as the Camarilla knew, the Ritual of the Bitter Rose had effectively ceased to exist.

Somewhat predictably, this belief turned out to be little more than wishful thinking. As many other groups have discovered down the corridors of history, destroying knowledge once it has been gained is much more difficult than developing it in the first place — so much more difficult that it might well be impossible. Rumors of the Ritual of the Bitter Rose had begun to circulate through the length and breadth of Kindred society. Although nobody admitted to knowing how it might be performed, it could not be denied that knowledge of the Ritual's existence was no longer a secret.

Today, it is thought that no more than half a dozen Vampires know how to perform the Ritual of the Bitter Rose. How they gained this forbidden knowledge remains a mystery. Perhaps when the Seven Elders of the Tremere destroyed all records of the Ritual, someone within the Clan preserved some writings on the topic. Or perhaps the "mind-wiping" magics used to obliterate the knowledge failed in some cases. Or, maybe, the Seven Elders did not carry out the complete eradication they described to the Camarilla, and saved records for themselves — records which were subsequently stolen or otherwise disseminated. At the present

time, the Camarilla considers possession of a description of how the Ritual is to be performed to be identical, in the face of the Traditions, to be equivalent to actually performing Diablerie, and thus punishable by death.

There are many Anarchs who are searching for knowledge about the Ritual of the Bitter Rose. Exactly how they plan to use this knowledge, if they should gain it, is not precisely known ... although the Elders are sure they can make an unpleasant guess.

Even the Ritual of the Bitter Rose has serious restrictions when it comes to elevating multiple Kindred through Diablerie. With Kindred of Fourth Generation or later, the Ritual is generally useless, in that even with its use only one Diabolist can experience the Rebirth and subsequent elevation. The only exceptions lie in the case of extremely — and abnormally — powerful Vampires, or those who are exceptionally old. The vitae of a Fifth Generation Kindred who is highly skilled at Thaumaturgy, or who is two millennia or more old, might have sufficient potency to raise two or perhaps even three Diabolists in Generation through the use of the Ritual.

For Generations earlier than Fourth, the number of Diabolists who can benefit through the Ritual increase. An average Third Generation Kindred would have sufficient potency to elevate three Diabolists; an average Second Generation Kindred (if such still exist) could theoretically elevate nine Diabolists. In the case of Kindred of the Second and Third Generations, relative power and age must also be taken into account, as with Vampires of later Generations.

The Ritual of the Bitter Rose (Level Three Ritual)

The Ritual allows multiple Kindred to experience the Rebirth and to elevate in Generation from the blood of a single Diablerie victim. (As discussed above, the number of Kindred who can be elevated depends on the Generation and power of the victim.) The procedure is as follows.

First, a single Diabolist must feed on the vitae of the victim, draining all of the victim's Blood Points, and all but one of his Health Levels. (The experiences and consequences of this Inspiration are detailed above.) Then, when the victim is reduced to a single Health Level remaining, the Diabolist must stop drinking. So euphoric is the experience of the Fire Within that stopping it requires an immense effort of will: the Diabolist must make a Self-Control roll against a difficulty of 10 - the victim's generation. If the Diabolist fails or botches this roll, she drains the victim's last Health Level and alone experiences the Rebirth and elevation. (There is no further consequence of a botched roll unless the Storyteller wants the botcher to attack her comrades after the Rebirth.)

The heart of the victim must then be cut out using a dagger forged of cold iron. This brings the victim to the Final Death. The heart is placed in a clean earthenware bowl, where it is



crushed to a pulp using a mortar of marble, and mixed with a small amount of red wine. To this mixture is added the residue of an alder stake that has been burned to ash. Finally, one pint of pure water is added to the concoction. Traditionally, this water must come from an untainted mountain stream, although contemporary experiments have proven that distilled water will work just as well.

The character performing the ritual must make an Intelligence + Occult roll against a difficulty of 6 (the Storyteller should make this roll secretly). All characters wishing to experience elevation must then drink of this concoction. If the roll is a success, each drinker (up to the maximum number of Kindred specified in the previous section) experiences Rebirth, and is elevated by one Generation. If the character performing the Ritual fails the roll, the concoction is inert, and no character is elevated. If the character botches the roll, the concoction is rendered extremely poisonous, inflicting three aggravated wounds on the drinker. The number of wounds suffered is decreased by one for each success the character achieves on a Stamina + Fortitude roll against a difficulty of 5, but only if the drinker has Fortitude. (Yes, this makes the Ritual a calculated risk. But what great boon can ever be gained without at least some risk?)

There are many unsubstantiated yet recurring rumors that sometimes the Ritual of the Bitter Rose has gone decidedly and horribly wrong. Many rumors tell of a failed Ritual destroying the potency of the vitae totally and utterly, while there are some that describe cases where the vitae's potency has been drastically increased. In these latter cases, the



supernormally potent vitæ has elevated Diabolists by more than one Generation, although usually at great cost: the draught has inflicted hideous aggravated wounds on the drinkers, and has sometimes caused the Diabolists to suffer extreme and unusual Derangements. There are also tales of Diabolists spontaneously bursting into flame and being destroyed on drinking the treated vitæ. It is not known whether this was caused by a severe failure in the Ritual, or whether the potency of the vitæ was so increased as to be deadly to a drinker of relatively late Generation.

There are also rumors — again unsubstantiated — that vitæ treated by the Ritual can somehow be stored. Thus those Diabolists present can benefit by the blood of an Antediluvian, but any blood remaining can be kept potent to be used by others at a later date. There are even rumors that claim that a single Diabolist can store portions of the Ritually treated blood and drink them later, elevating one Generation each time. Most Kindred who understand at least a little about the workings of the Ritual claim that this latter story is nothing but wishful thinking. The vitæ, these “experts” claim, must be quaffed immediately on the completion of the ritual, and any stored blood will immediately become inert and useless. Still, however, there are many who believe that the Ritual can be used in this manner. How much more valuable, then, does the Ritual become. Theoretically, if this rumor is true, then a single determined Diabolist might produce from a single victim of the Third Generation enough treated draughts to elevate himself by a full three Generations. Those who believe this rumor claim that its denial by those

who understand the Ritual is simply a self-serving act with no other real significance.

Whatever the truth of the matter, it cannot be denied that the blood-magic involved in the Ritual of the Bitter Rose remains largely mysterious, and highly risky to those who would try to gain by it.

Curative Powers

Although not all Kindred believe them to be true, there are tales that of the curative powers of vitæ taken from Vampires of Fourth Generation or earlier. These tales relate that this vitæ, if stored in airtight vials or flasks, can be drunk by Vampires as healing draughts. Further, this blood is said to be efficacious against even aggravated wounds. And finally, it is claimed that the vitæ can also temporarily raise a Vampire’s strength and physical prowess. The same tales tell, however, that the potency of such stored blood remains only for a short time, even if it is kept from contact with the air.

It is only rarely that a Vampire of Fourth or earlier Generation is actually drained of vitæ, of course, and those who have achieved such a thing would rarely speak of it. This explains why so few among the Damned know for certain the truth or falsity of these tales. In fact, most of them are true, at least in part.

Healing

The blood of a Vampire of Fourth or earlier Generation can act as a kind of healing draft if quaffed by a Vampire. One Blood Point will heal a number of Health Levels equal to five minus the Generation of the Vessel. (Thus, drinking one Blood Point from a Third Generation Vessel would heal two Health Levels.) This vitæ can either be quaffed from a vial or flask — as described later — or directly from the body of the Vessel. If a wounded Vampire is drinking the vitæ directly from the Vessel, she can decide whether or not she wants to experience the healing properties of the draught. If so, a Blood Point used to heal is not added to the feeder’s Blood Pool. Note that the feeder cannot “split” the effects — i.e., using one Blood Point to heal incompletely, and adding all other Blood Points to his own Pool. If the Diabolist decides to heal at all, he is healed totally; any Blood Points only partially used for that purpose are lost. (For example, a Diabolist who is Mauled (-4) drinks five Blood Points from a Third Generation Vessel, and decides to heal himself. Each Blood Point heals two Health Levels. The first point heals two Health Levels, raising the Diabolist to Injured (-2); the second point raises him to Bruised. A third point heals the remaining one Health Level. The Diabolist can add only two points to his Blood Pool.)

To have this additional healing effect, the blood must be drunk directly from the Vessel, or from a suitable container. Even if she fully replenished his Blood Pool by feeding from

an Antediluvian, a Diabolist can only heal one Health Level for each point spent from her own Blood Pool. In other words, once the vitæ has been absorbed into the Diabolist's body, it is no different from her own blood in its effectiveness.

Increasing Physical Attributes

A Diabolist who drinks one point of blood directly from a Vessel or from a suitable container can raise any one of her Physical Attributes by an amount equal to 6 minus the Generation of the Vessel, for the duration of the scene. (Thus, if the Vessel is Fourth Generation, the Diabolist can drink one point of blood and raise any Physical Attribute by two.) These increases cannot be split between Attributes; all of the points of increase from one Blood Point must be applied to the same Attribute. A Blood Point drunk and used this way is not added to the drinker's Blood Pool. A Vampire can use only one Blood Point per turn in this way. The same rules apply as with healing once a Vessel's vitæ has been added to a Diabolist's own Blood Pool.

Aggravated Damage

Blood from an Antediluvian of Fourth Generation or earlier can heal aggravated damage if drunk directly from the Vessel or from a suitable container. One point of blood can immediately heal one Health Level of aggravated damage; the Blood Point used this way is not added to the Diabolist's Blood Pool.

Only one Health Level of aggravated damage can be healed this way in any 24-hour period. If a Vampire drinks and uses another Blood Point for this purpose less than 24 hours after the last such use, she loses an additional Health Level; this is aggravated damage.

Preservation

It is possible to collect vitæ from a Methuselah or Antediluvian and store it in vials or flasks, and to expect it to retain its efficacious qualities. Any amount of blood can be stored in this way, but vitæ drunk after being stored is lost at the rate of one point per day (this is figured after the character marks off the one Blood Point Kindred lose normally each day). Remember, one Blood Point from a Fifth Generation Methuselah might represent several ounces of liquid, while one Blood Point from a Third Generation Antediluvian might be a single drop!

Only glass containers can be used to store the blood. Each container must be totally empty, must have been washed out with rainwater before use, and must never have been used for another purpose. Once the blood is decanted into the container, the container must be closed with an airtight stopper. If the stopper is removed, allowing air to reach the blood within, the vitæ loses its efficacy in less than five seconds (long enough for a Vampire to drink it, but just).



CONSEQUENCES OF DIABLERIE

In all but the most extreme subsections of Kindred society, Diablerie is considered one of the most heinous of crimes. But what risk does this represent if the criminal carries out his actions without being caught in the act? Unfortunately for would-be Diabolists — and fortunately for those Elders who depend on the threat of social sanction as a deterrent — there are several ways in which other Kindred can sense that an individual has perpetrated Diablerie.

Firstly, the Thaumaturgy Path The Taste of Blood will definitively tell the user whether or not the subject has ever drunk the blood of a Vampire of earlier Generation. This "taint" is permanent; even millennia later, a Diabolist can be detected in this way. If the Diabolist has drunk the vitæ of a Vessel of his own Generation or later, the taint is not permanent, but obeys the time limit discussed below.

The aura of a Vampire who has practiced Diablerie is tainted with flickering rays of black; this taint lasts for the time limit discussed below. Any Kindred capable of seeing the precise color shade of an aura — requiring two successes with the Auspex power Aura Perception — can see the black tinges. Not everyone automatically understands what it represents, of course ... although many Elders certainly do!

Finally, any other Kindred coming into close contact with a Diabolist may sense "something wrong" about the individual. This requires a Humanity check against a difficulty of one-third the number of months since the Vampire practiced Diablerie (round fractions up) multiplied by the Generation of the Vessel. If the Diabolist has fed from more than one Vessel, the check should be made for the incidence that gives the lowest difficulty; further, the difficulty is decreased by one for each incidence of Diablerie in the past 12 months. (For example, a particularly dedicated Diabolist has performed Diablerie four times in the past year; the most recent incident, six months ago, saw him draining the life force of a Fourth Generation Methuselah. The difficulty for any other Vampire to detect the "taint" is equal to 4 — one-third the number of months since the incident (6 ÷ 3) times the Generation of the victim (4) minus the number of incidents in the past year (4).) Vampires who make this roll do not sense much more than a vague discomfort, a feeling that there is something unpleasant about the Diabolist. Most Kindred will not understand exactly what the feeling means, although some Elders might be able to interpret it correctly.

Note that the results of The Taste of Blood or Aura Perception are considered by most Princes as proof of Diablerie. The queasy feeling discussed in the preceding paragraph may be indicative, but it certainly is not proof.

Time Limit for Detection

The taint on a Vampire's "soul" that arises from Diablerie is permanent only with regard to a Vessel of earlier Generation, and then only with respect to The Taste of Blood. The other "stains" are temporary.

If the Vessel was of an equal or later Generation to the Diabolist, The Taste of Blood will discern the taint only within 40 weeks minus the Generation of the Vessel. This is also the time that the black flecks remain in a Diabolist's aura.

LAWS AGAINST DIABLERIE

To the vast majority of the Damned, Diablerie is considered to be against the all laws, natural and otherwise. The Sixth Tradition is a specific injunction against the destruction of other Vampires in most cases. Depending on interpretation, only a Sire has the right to destroy his Progeny, or only the

Prince has the right to destroy Kindred in his territory junior to him. Whichever is the correct interpretation, it is obvious that the Sixth Tradition automatically excludes those incidences of Diablerie when a Vampire drains the life force of a Vessel of earlier Generation. Based on the Sixth Tradition alone, most Princes will call a Blood Hunt against any Kindred proven guilty of Diablerie.

Interpreting the Sixth Tradition strictly, it would seem that Sires are free to perform Diablerie upon their Progeny if they so wish. Most Princes, however, promulgate strict laws forbidding any form of Diablerie. Again, the performance of Diablerie against such a law can be punished by a Blood Hunt.

There have been tales of Princes who themselves have created Progeny simply to serve them as Vessels. This is allowed according to a strict reading of the Sixth Tradition, and obviously such Princes would not bring in laws forbidding Diablerie, or would place themselves above such laws. Even a powerful Prince who acts in this way does so at significant personal risk. Most Vampires believe the words of a Tremere Elder, Troius, who once wrote, "The laws against Diablerie are unwritten on paper or parchment, but they are graven on the heart of every Kindred." The vast majority of the Damned find the concept of Diablerie as repugnant, and will refuse to associate with a known Diabolist. If Diablerie is against the laws of the local Prince, many Kindred will respond by turning the known Diabolist over to that Prince for judgement. If there are no such laws, or if it is the Prince himself who is the Diabolist, certain Kindred may take matters into their own hands. Kindred traditions contain several stories of unofficial Blood Hunts, where "lynch mobs" of outraged Vampires hunted down a known Diabolist and brought him to the Final Death in punishment for his crime. Even the most powerful of Princes will fall if all Kindred within his territory turn against him.

Whether or not there are any local laws forbidding Diablerie, the Inconnu have been known to take unilateral action against Diabolists. This kind of action on the part of the Inconnu could simply spring from fear that the Diabolist's next victim might be one of their own number. Alternatively, it could be intended as a kind of "object lesson", to discourage other would-be Diabolists, and to prevent the "taint" of Diablerie from spreading throughout Kindred society. The fact that many such "removals" are widely discussed after the fact hints that the Inconnu has actively disseminated information, which in turn lends credence to the "object lesson" theory.

Chapter Three:

The Wanderer

*When green buds hang in the elm like dust
And sprinkle the lime like rain
Forth I wander, forth I must
And drink of life again*

— A.E. Houseman

Still they called him a god. It would have been humorous, had it not been so tragic. They worshipped him for his powers — very real powers, not the overblown hyperbole of the people's myths — and they envied him. The priests, first among his worshippers, frequently begged him for the boon of immortality. (Who knows how they first guessed that he had the power to grant it?) From the outset he had refused, which had angered them. He knew — even though they believed he did not — that at the heart of most of the rituals supposedly dedicated to him were attempts to gain directly what he would not give them.

He had never granted the priests the boon they sought, though he had fed upon them from time to time. But that was not to say he had sired no Progeny. It was just that he had chosen simple peasant farmers on whom to bestow the Embrace. Certainly, he could justify his choice in other ways, but he had to admit the truth if only to himself. He had chosen them purely as a slap in the face to the oh-so-deferential priests; he had given them immortality, while denying it to the priests.

Those Progeny he had sired rewarded him with their total, unquestioning loyalty. But still they thought him a god, which prevented them from giving him what it was he really

wanted — friendship. The moment that he had realized this was the moment he began considering repeating the murderous journey that had brought him to this place, but this time from south to north. Impossible though it may have seemed to him at the time, he had to face the possibility that he was the only true and free-willed Kindred in this area of the world. (He was not counting his Progeny as such; their life-long indoctrination in obedience to the priests and the gods put true free will forever beyond their reach.)

The journey ... again? His will quailed at the thought. The first time had brought him face to face with the Final Death more times than he cared to recall. And he had been stronger then. His own Sire had never hinted at such a possibility, but it certainly seemed age was weakening him. Even the two or so centuries he had spent in this place seemed to have leached energy from his body. His physical strength seemed undiminished; the weakness he felt encroaching was more of the soul than of the body. For the hundredth — or the thousandth — time he considered simply falling upon the priests that so bedeviled him, draining them to husks but not offering them the Embrace they so coveted. Killing them all — all but his loyal Progeny, of course — in his own very personal image of Gehenna. But then he



discarded the idea. Unworthy it was... but also too exhausting to even contemplate.

Sleep. Perhaps that was what he needed. A century or two — or even more — of sleep. To rest his soul as every morning's sleep rested his body. Yes, that was the answer.

But that answer simply posed more questions. Where? Where could he sleep undisturbed? He had found himself incapable of merging with the earth. He had no choice but to find another Haven that might survive for centuries undisturbed. But where? He looked around him idly.

Angular geometric shapes were silhouetted against the sky, black and deeper black. He smiled slowly. Yes, that was the answer. Within a few weeks he could make the necessary preparations.

And then he could rest.

THE MAYAS

"Maya" is the name applied to a group of related Indian nations or tribes belonging to the Mayan linguistic stock,

who lived in the Mexican states of Campeche, Chiapas, Tabasco, Veracruz and Yucatan, as well as portions of Guatemala and El Salvador. Traditional history relates that the Mayan civilization began in the 7th Century BC. The multiple Mayan tribes enjoyed political unity between AD 200 and 600, the period commonly called the Old Empire. Another period of importance and power was the New Empire, between AD 1000 and 1200. A time of wars with the Toltecs and later with the Aztecs, and growing internal dissention weakened the Mayan Empire. With the Spanish conquest in the 16th Century, the Mayan empire effectively came to an end, even though it took the Mexican government until 1901 to conquer the last independent Mayan community. Today, Mayan stock — short, dark and muscular, with broad heads — make up the majority of the peasant population in their former territories.

During its heyday, the Mayan civilization produced some remarkable architecture, of which great ruins exist throughout the region. Major ruins can be found at Chichen Itza, Mayapan, Palenque and Uxmal. In some areas, the forest is now so thick that it is vaguely possible major ruins may exist that have yet to be discovered. (In fact, as will be discussed later, this is the case with the ruins of Tzental.) Most of these sites comprise pyramidal mounds, often topped by temples or other buildings, grouped around open squares or plazas. The pyramids are built in successive steps, unlike the pyramids of Egypt, with steep staircases running up one or more sides. Most of these pyramids have cores of rubble or broken limestone mixed with mortar, which are then faced with cut stone blocks. As a consequence, most — but not all — pyramids of this type had no internal chambers or rooms.

MICTLANTECUHTLI, "THE WANDERER"

The man who would later be known as Mictlantecuhтли was born in the Pacific Northwest in the year 67 BC, in a small fishing settlement situated near the natural harbor that would eventually become the city of Vancouver. His true name was Mictantecle, a member of the native American tribe that would, centuries later, take the name Musqueam. At the time of Mictantecle's birth, they simply called themselves "the People" ... as did most tribes in the region.

Mictantecle was born into a hard life, and he grew up quickly. By the age of 15, he was more than five-and-a-half feet tall — taller than his father — and very muscular. By dint of his skill as a fisher and a hunter, the band chief granted Mictantecle permission to marry his only daughter. This was a signal honor, particularly since the band chief had no sons, and was already in his early forties — an incredibly advanced age or one of the People. It seemed obvious to all that within a handful of years Mictantecle would find himself in the position of chief, probably before he was 20.



The Stranger

It was in Mictantele's 16th year that the stranger arrived. Nobody knows where he came from; he spoke a language even the band elders had never heard before. Even though he seemed unable to learn the language of the People — and the People, predictably, were disinclined to learn his — he managed to ingratiate himself with Mictantele's band. He achieved this through an eloquent language of gesture, and through an almost supernatural ability to sense what people were thinking. The People valued strength and speed in a man, and the stranger was well endowed with both; in fact, he far outstripped everyone else in the band in both of these attributes. Mictantele — and others — came to envy him his prowess, so much so that they were undismayed by the fact that the stranger was seen only by night, and seemed to vanish during the daylight hours.

The young Mictantele, in fact, found himself obsessed with the mysterious stranger. Even though the youth found something disturbing about the older man — particularly when the stranger's troublingly steady and cold gaze settled on him — he spent many nights following the mysterious figure. To Mictantele's surprise, the stranger seemed undisturbed by this attention. Even though they never exchanged a single word — impossible, because of the language problem — Mictantele came to believe that the stranger liked him, or perhaps respected him, in some way.

The stranger had been living in the People's village for several months when the first strange event occurred. Mictantele had been following the silent figure through the nighttime forest outside the village, but had lost sight of his quarry. Disgusted, the youth struck off through the forest in the direction in which he thought his home lay. He was passing through a clearing when he heard a voice speak clearly; the voice said the one word guaranteed to strike fear into the youth: "Grizzly." Mictantele had been told many times by his elders that the correct thing to do when one encountered a grizzly bear was to collapse to the ground and play dead. In the night-black forest, alone, Mictantele forgot his training, however, and broke into a run. Behind him he heard a roar, and a crashing in the underbrush. The cold realization of impending death washed over him.

Even at this point he could possibly have saved his own life by dropping and lying still. But the adrenalin was in his bloodstream, and he fled through the forest in panic, as he heard the bear quickly closing the gap behind him.

His recollection of that flight would always be hazy — perhaps fortunately so. When the bear first struck at his back with its massive paw, the impact was enough to send him tumbling. He screamed as the grizzly's claws ripped through the flesh of his back and side. He rolled, and fetched up against the bole of a great tree. The flash of agony was gone, and his torn back was cold and numb. As he lay, watching the black mass of the grizzly rear up over him, Mictantele knew that the wound to his back was mortal, even if the bear did not strike at him again.

But it seemed that the bear would strike again. Mictantele closed his eyes, and braced himself for the blow that would certainly end his life.

That blow never fell. Lying there, unable to move, Mictantele heard the bear's angry growls take on a new pitch, a tone that he could only describe as puzzled. He opened his eyes.

A tall, thin figure stood between him and the bear. It was the stranger, standing like a statue, his cold stare locked with the bear's gaze. The bear fell silent, tilted its head on one side quizzically. Then it lowered itself heavily to all-fours again, and shambled off into the night. As the stranger knelt beside him, the shock overcame Mictantele and he fainted.

When he came to himself again, it was still night, but he was now in a small cave near the village. His back was no longer numb; in fact, the throbbing pain was enough to make him cry out. The stranger was kneeling beside him, and laid a cold hand on the youth's forehead. At the touch, the agony in his back seemed to ebb slightly.

"You are dying." The words sounded clear and crisp, and Mictantele knew the stranger was speaking to him. Yet the





mysterious figure's thin, white lips were not moving. It took Mictantele some seconds to realize that the words had sounded directly in his brain — and, further, that the warning about the grizzly had been communicated to him in the same way. He looked up into the hard eyes of the stranger, and a new fear washed over him, colder than the mere fear of death.

"You are dying," the stranger repeated voicelessly. "Would you accept that? Or would you live?"

The choice at first seemed meaningless to Mictantele. Such was the philosophy of the People that death was inevitable and would come to all eventually, with no choice involved. But the steady gaze of the stranger seemed to tell him that this was a very real choice he was being offered. Even though his back was flayed to the bone, and his spine broken, he had to believe that the stranger could somehow grant him the boon of life.

"I would live," he gasped out, the salt taste of blood in his mouth.

The stranger nodded silently, and bent forward.

Mictantele fainted at the start of the feeding. He would never remember the sensations of his Embrace.

Damned

When he came to himself once more, he was alone. The sky was pink; at first he thought it was dawn, but then realized it was sunset, and knew he had slept a full day. He rose cautiously, found his back free of pain, and seemingly unwounded, although his clothes hung in shreds across his shoulders. As he made his way back to his village, he somehow knew, deep in his soul, that he would never see the stranger again.

He almost faced the Final Death at his first sunrise. Having returned to the village and suffered the weeping attentions of his wife and mother, both of whom had thought him dead, he prepared to join the fishermen who would be going out with the dawn. But as dawn approached and the sky lightened, he felt his skin itching and stinging painfully with the pinkening sky. Embarrassedly claiming sickness, he returned to his place in the wooden longhouse to sleep. The logs of the longhouse were not perfectly seated, however, and there were many small gaps. When the sun rose, its first rays shone in through one of those gaps, and fell on Mictantele's bare hand. The light pierced his flesh-like lances, and he screamed with the pain, as bright and strong

as if he had plunged his hand into a cookfire. He spent the rest of that first day wrapped like a cocoon in many blankets.

Some of the folk tales of the People described individuals who had "passed through the Land of the Dead" and emerged changed, but unscathed. Mictantele quickly decided that this was what had happened to him. The fact that the sunlight was painful — and perhaps lethal — to him seemed to be a small price to pay for his life. The folk tales all stated that a "night voyager" — as they called people such as himself — must leave his village and his band and strike out on his own, living on the blood of the animals of the forests. Accordingly, at the next sunset, Mictantele slipped away from his village, never to return.

Without any guidance whatsoever from his Sire — who was, somewhat predictably, of Clan Gangrel — it took Mictantele months to discover the abilities and limitations that his new form had given him, and years after that to discover his true nature. For the first year or so, he subsisted purely on the blood of animals, even though he felt almost overwhelmingly drawn to taste the *vitæ* of the mortals he sometimes saw moving through the nighttime forests which had become his home.

His first taste of human blood — and his first Frenzy — came when he felt himself drawn to approach a fishing village very much like his home. The fishermen and hunters were sitting around the cookfire, singing and telling folk tales very much like those Mictantele grew up with. Apparently he came too close, because two hunters reacted to his presence. They must have sensed something moving in the trees around the village; they took their spears, and came searching for him. Even though he realized that discretion would be the best choice, Mictantele's pride was still strong, and he refused to back down before their threat. Instead, he stayed still, expecting them to just pass him by.

But one of the hunters seemed able to sense Mictantele's presence. Unerringly he drew near to the Vampire's hiding place, and started probing the underbrush with his wooden spear. Somehow Mictantele sensed that this wooden shaft represented a very real danger to him. Fear, mixed with proud anger, made him leap at the hunter. His initial intention was solely to disarm the man, but so fast were the hunter's reaction that he sensed the Vampire's leap and swung his spear around fast enough to tear Mictantele's side. The pain — coupled with hunger — triggered a Frenzy. Mictantele tore into the hunter, breaking his bones and drinking him dry, then hunted down and drained his partner. When he emerged from Frenzy, Mictantele found himself gore-spattered and sated. Horrified as never before by the true nature of what he had become, he slunk off into the night.

Setting Out

It took Mictantele years to come to terms with his "life" as one of the Damned, years during which he tried to track

down the stranger who had been his Sire. Perhaps his Sire, as is the way of the Gangrel, had intended to return to meet Mictantele when he had "matured" as a Kindred. But something had obviously prevented this, for Mictantele never saw the stranger again. Occasionally the Neonate was sure he "heard" distant echoes of his Sire's mental speech, but he was never able to track them down.

As a mortal, Mictantele had never felt any desire to travel; for him, the meaningful universe consisted solely of the oceans and forests around his village. In his new form, however, his curiosity about the greater world about him steadily grew. Perhaps the Gangrel heritage had something to do with it, but whatever the reason Mictantele became a wanderer. It took him decades to cross the region that would eventually be Canada. On the Atlantic coast, he met for the first time more of his kind — other Kindred derived from an unnamed ancient who had somehow made the perilous crossing from Europe. These Kindred were of very different mortal backgrounds from Mictantele, and none were of Clan Gangrel. For these and other reasons, Mictantele never felt comfortable with them. He did, however, learn much more about the nature of the Damned; he also gained considerable skill at learning new and different languages.

After a decade or two, he heard the wild geese calling again, and continued his wandering — south, this time. He started his journey making good speed, but as years turned to decades, he began to slow down. Even though he felt little kinship with the Atlantic coast Kindred, now he found himself missing their company. There were no Kindred in the areas through which he travelled — or, if there were, he did not find them. But his pride was still strong, so he pressed on.

By the time he reached the Gulf Coast, Mictantele had been a Vampire for almost two centuries. Even though his body showed no sign of aging, in his soul he had begun to feel ancient. But still he continued.

His journey took him across a river that would centuries later be called the Rio Grande, and south into Mexico. Again, there were no Kindred, and Mictantele began to feel he would always be alone. In retrospect, he realized during this period that his solitude — in terms of those of his kind — had unhinged his lonely mind.

In central Mexico, near what would become Veracruz, he encountered an Indian tribe calling itself the Huastecs. There were no Kindred among them, but by now even the company of mortals seemed of great value to him. His vaguely formed intention was to live among them, learning their language, and pretending to be one of them.

Unfortunately for him, the Huastecs had some previous experience with Vampires. (Presumably, another of the Kindred had passed through this region in the past, and the Huastecs still remembered the depredations of this creature.) Somehow the priests recognized him for what he was, and brought down upon him the wrath of the whole tribe. By night, volunteer warriors willing to die dogged his steps; by

day, the women searched for whatever Haven he had scraped out for himself. It was only through sheer luck that Mictantecle managed to survive. More cautiously now, he pushed on south, and then turned northwest onto the Yucatan peninsula.

Arrival

By this point, Mictantecle's sanity had definitely fled. In retrospect, he may well have developed a death wish, because he showed himself to the natives of the region — the Mayas — and even demonstrated his true nature to them. Had the Mayas been like the Huastecs, he would have been destroyed. As it was, however, they welcomed Mictantecle among them, revering him for his powers, seemingly unconcerned about his dietary predilections. In later years, Mictantecle could not recall his first decade among the Mayas, or his "ascension" to the state of godhood ...

Thus the Mayas quickly came to worship the Vampire as a god — a cruel and terrible death god, of course, but a god nonetheless. They were unable to pronounce his true name, and so bastardized it into Mictlantecuhli (Mikt - lahn - te - kut' - li:), and it was as Mictlantecuhli that he would thereafter be known. He tried to explain to them where he had come from, but his grasp of the language was still incomplete. His explanation of having come from the north was misinterpreted as his having come from the north star, and this tradition continued despite his attempts to change it. (In fact, this misunderstanding was perpetuated and overgeneralized such that many later legends describe all Mayan gods as having come from the stars.)

The Vampire had arrived in the Yucatan just before the beginning of what historians class as the Old Empire of Mayan culture. He was able to see civilization rise around him to heights that his contemporaries among the People — now all long dead — could never have even imagined. The town in which he had settled, called Tzentel, grew into a great city, and the priests raised pyramids and temples dedicated to the great god Mictlantecuhli.

Slowly Mictlantecuhli's sanity returned, and he realized that his existence in Tzentel was as close to paradise as one of the Damned could expect. He was revered as divine, which meant that anything he wished was acceptable simply because he wished it. He never had to hunt; each night, if he wished it, the priests would bring him a Vessel on which to feed, and on the night of the new moon they would bring him two score or more sacrifices from among his worshippers. His priests and his worshippers were obedient to his every wish. Interestingly enough, he discovered that his priests were actually highly skilled in the occult arts.

Blood Magic

Although the priests of the Mayas specialized in forms of thaumaturgy little used by the Kindred, such as fertility and

astrology, they had considerable skill in blood-magic. Somewhat predictably, Mictlantecuhli found himself fascinated by their studies, and dedicated himself to learning as much as he could of their abilities. Most interesting of all, he discovered that the priests knew a magical ritual, involving wood ash, pure water, and the heart of a victim, that seemed to concentrate the potency of a Vessel's blood, making it even more delicious than usual and endowing it with mildly narcotic properties.

Over the years, Mictlantecuhli learned much concerning the practice of thaumaturgy. Some of the rituals performed by the priests he could use unchanged; others, however, required him to significantly redraft the procedures to align with his Vampiric nature. He recorded his learning and the results of his research in a codex, a great book in which he wrote using a combination of Mayan characters and the simplistic symbols used by the People of his home. Over time, he researched and further refined the ritual that increased the potency of blood, until it became the centerpiece of the written work that would eventually be called the Codex of the Damned.

The Stranger, Part II

Even though his sanity had returned to him, Mictlantecuhli still felt the familiar weariness deep in his soul. This weariness was only increased when his priests began petitioning him — always in the most respectful ways possible — to grant them the boon of immortality. For his own reasons, he refused to bestow upon them the Embrace, however. Soon thereafter he discovered that the priests were performing blood sacrifices of their own, with the obvious goal of achieving immortality without the intercession of their "deity." Mictlantecuhli found this inexplicably aggravating, and swore to himself that he would never Embrace the priests. Thus he spent his nights restless, with no one he considered an equal, no one he could respect and no one who could relieve his boredom.

Then, one night as Mictlantecuhli studied in his chambers, he felt a presence behind him. Turning, he saw a figure more horrid than a corpse leaning against a stone wall. Then the same "mind speech" which his master has used and he himself had learned rang out in his head.

"You are the Wanderer," it said. "Others have spoken of you with respect. I would learn what it is they found so fascinating. Talk to me."

Every night for a month the two spoke. At first overjoyed by the opportunity which had come from nowhere, Mictlantecuhli soon found the other's thoughts worrisome. The Nosferatu (for that is what he called himself) spoke of a great war among the Kindred, a war between good and evil. When the Nosferatu asked him to come fight on his side, Mictlantecuhli knew fear for the first time since fleeing the Huastecs. To be caught in such a Jyhad was the only thing

he could picture worse than his isolation. Thus he plotted the death of his new companion.

It came on the night of the Mayan sacrifice to him. Mictlantecuhltli presented the newcomer to his worshippers as another god, and demanded that they both have sacrifices. Mictlantecuhltli drank first and, when the Nosferatu bent to take his victims, leapt at his throat. The battle was as quick as it was deadly. Mictlantecuhltli had ensured his visitor was thirsty before the sacrifice, and he managed to channel the power his own recent feeding had given him. Soon Mictlantecuhltli heard bells tolling, and then it was over. Overcome by the Rebirth, he fled back to his chambers, where he spent the remainder of that night, as well as the next 12.

The Weariness

After the first night, Mictlantecuhltli found the glories of the Rebirth fading from his memories. He felt stronger in body, but his act against one of his own kind left him feeling far weaker of spirit. Additionally, when he finally found the strength to leave from his chambers, he discovered the story of what he had done was being spread among the Mayas by his priests. They told the people he had slain a demon who had come to destroy them. Horrified that his act of infamy and treachery against one who had offered him friendship

had become a legend of good versus evil, Mictlantecuhltli felt his hatred of the sycophantic priests grow. As a form of revenge against them, he Embraced several of the peasant-farmers who worshipped him, thus snubbing his priests. These Neonates were totally and unquestioningly loyal to him, but so constrained were their minds by tradition that they could never give their "god" the friendship he wanted.

Over a period of several years, Mictlantecuhltli experimented with drinking the vitæ of his Neonates, even going so far as he full practice of Diablerie. (He felt few qualms in taking from them the immortality he himself had bestowed, and the Neonates themselves would gladly do anything for him, even die.) He also experimented with "enhancing" their vitæ using the thaumaturgic ritual he had developed. Over time, he discovered that this ritual had even stronger effects on Vampiric vitæ than it did on human blood. As usual, he recorded his results in his codex. Although he was of course unaware of it, Mictlantecuhltli's research had elucidated many of the principles on which the Ritual of the Bitter Rose would eventually be based.

The Lupines

During this period, Mictlantecuhltli discovered that there were other inhuman creatures in the region — not Kindred such as himself, but Lupines. Perhaps it was because Mictlantecuhltli had never been taught about the "traditional" enmity between Vampires and Werewolves, or perhaps it was his Gangrel heritage. Whatever the reason, he established amicable and respectful relations with the Lupines of the region. In fact, over the decades, the tribes of Lupines came to consider Mictlantecuhltli as their liege, and even paid the city of Tzentel tribute!

The stability of having an immortal "divine" ruler strongly benefitted the city of Tzentel. It climbed the ladder of civilization faster than anywhere else in Mayan territory; and, as other Mayan cities began to slip downhill around AD 600, Tzentel remained at the apex of culture. By this time, however, Mictlantecuhltli had been a Vampire for over six centuries, and his soul-weariness was becoming intolerable. He needed to sleep.

In the year 615 he made his decision. He would sequester himself away in the pyramid that bore his temple, and enter Torpor for a century or two. When he rose, he expected that he would feel rejuvenated. His people, his tributary Lupines, most particularly his loyal Get — all bowed to his will. After all, he was a god, and if a god wanted to sleep beneath his temple for hundreds of years, who were they to say anything against it? The priests resisted, but Mictlantecuhltli solved that problem by decreeing that they would share his centuries-long sleep as well ... but only after he'd Dominated them into magically warding his Haven.

Mictlantecuhltli's Get begged to share his sleep too, and he gladly granted them their request. After all, when he was



ready to arise he would have to have someone loyal to him available to feed him the vitæ he needed to revive.

And so it was on Midsummer Night, 615, with great ceremony, that Mictlantecuhlti the God of Death descended into special chambers beneath his temple prepared specially for this purpose. He was accompanied by his willing Get, and by his less-than-willing priests. At the hour before dawn, the great stones were moved into place to close the entry. And Mictlantecuhlti slept.

Tzentel Falls

Over the next decades, the travails that had caused the fall of the cities elsewhere in Mayan territory also affected Tzentel, and the great city slipped back from its peak. For centuries the stories of "the Sleep of Mictlantecuhlti" continued, and the inhabitants of the Tzentel region awaited his return.

But Mictlantecuhlti did not return. Around the year 1000, the New Empire arose, but the new growth of power failed to affect Tzentel. The great city began to decay, and the forests encroached on its wide plazas and triumpharies. Slowly but surely the people moved away, until the relentless jungle had totally conquered the great city. By the time the Conquistadors arrived in the 16th Century, Tzentel had been forgotten, and the god Mictlantecuhlti had become a figure of myth and legend, with no more reality than other Mayan deities like Kukulcan, Quetzalcoatl and Itzamna.

To this day, Mictlantecuhlti sleeps, presumably undisturbed. Virtually the only thing that hints at the truth of the legends concerning the "god" is a scrap of poetry, translated from the Codex Tro (an old Mayan document):

*Cold is bone and iron thew,
Old when stone and earth were new,
In chambers measureless and deep,
The Wanderer sleeps his silent sleep
Alone, but not forgot.
Beasts in man-form guard their lord,
Eyes that watch by night [Here the fragment ends]*

Mictlantecuhlti

Sire: ?

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Leader

Generation: 4th

Embrace: 51 BC (born 67 BC)

Apparent Age: Late teens

Image: About 5 feet 7 inches, with broad shoulders, broad head, and very well-developed muscles. His skin is naturally golden-brown and somewhat leathery. His hair is shoulder-length, black and straight. His eyes are dark, and alive with intelligence. As a Gangrel, his appearance includes animalistic carry-overs from his Frenzies: his incisors and canine teeth are pronounced, his finger- and toenails resemble the claws of a beast, and the backs of his hands and feet are covered with black pelt that does not look at all human.

Roleplaying Hints: You speak no modern languages, but your manner makes it clear that you are used to wielding power and enjoying instant obedience. You will not hesitate to fight if you believe your life is in danger.

Haven: The central pyramid of Tzentel.

Notes: Mictlantecuhlti's traits reflect the many years he has spent in torpor. If he survives his encounter with the characters, add 2 dots to each of his physical Attributes and 1 to his Perception. His sixth level of Animalism allows him to communicate with a group of animals as long as they are of the same species.

Puissant Shield

This level four ritual establishes an invisible kinetic shield around the caster, at a distance of one foot, which blocks all inanimate projectiles — bullets, thrown knives, etc. Such projectiles visibly deflect from the shield. This shield cannot stop a character — mortal or Kindred — from closing and meleeing with the caster, nor has it any effect on a melee weapon (a spear, perhaps) in the grip of an attacker. Neither will it stop the effects of Thaumaturgy or other Disciplines. Fire, air, sunlight, water, etc. will all pass unaffected through the shield.

Establishing the shield requires one minute of concentration while the caster blows on a strip of cowhide and it lasts for one hour. Mictlantecuhlti has focused the essence of this ritual on a hollow crystal he wears on a leather throng around his neck. All he (or anyone) has to do is blow on the crystal and the shield will protect him.

Quenching the Lambent Flame

Mictlantecuhlti learned the basics of magical practice from his priests, but extended their teachings with his own research, which allowed him to develop abilities more suitable to his Vampiric nature. When he was considering retreating into torpor, he intuitively understood that his Vampiric attendants — the peasant farmers he had Embraced — were of a sufficiently high Generation that they would be unable to subsist for long on the blood of animals. Since it was his intention to keep these attendants within the pyramid with him, as personal bodyguards and servants, he developed this ritual to solve the problem.

This ritual increases the effective Generation of a Vampire to 13th. Blood Pool and all other characteristics are altered to reflect this change in Generation. Attributes higher than the maximum allowed to a 13th Generation Kindred are decreased to those maxima. The effect of this ritual is permanent.

The ritual takes one hour, during which time the subject must lie motionless — or be immobilized — in the center of a circle drawn with his own blood. If the subject is willing, no roll is required. With an unwilling subject, however, an Intelligence + Thaumaturgy roll against the subject's Willpower is required, with the caster needing three successes.

It might seem that no Kindred would ever submit willingly to this ritual. In point of fact, however, there are some advantages to being of a later Generation — most notably the fact that much less blood, and animal blood at that, is required to sate the subject's hunger. It is only in a stratified society based on power — like Kindred society in Chicago — that Generation and physical prowess is a significant issue.

Physical: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 6, Intelligence 9, Wits 8

Talents: Alertness 7, Brawl 8, Dodge 7, Empathy 6, Intimidation 8, Leadership 9

Skills: Melee 5, Stealth 4, Survival 5

Knowledge: Linguistics 3

Disciplines: Animalism 6, Auspex 2, Celerity 3, Dominate 2, Fortitude 5, Potence 5, Presence 3, Protean 2, Thaumaturgy 5 (Taste of Blood 5, Movement of Mind 5, Lure of Flames 4)

Rituals: Quenching the Lambent Flame, Puissant Shield, any others you want him to have.

Virtues: Conscience 0, Self-Control 3, Courage 3

Humanity: 0

Willpower: 9

The Codex of the Damned

Mictlantecuhtli recorded the details of his thaumaturgical research in a book that came to be known as the Codex of the Damned. The Wanderer kept the codex close to him at all times — not really from fear that anyone would take it, but simply to protect it from accidental harm. He also kept its contents secret.

Many of the priests in Tzentla were investigating blood-magic themselves, trying to find a way of making themselves immortal like Mictlantecuhtli. They knew their "god" was exploring realms of thaumaturgy that might help them, and so they decided to gain access to the Wanderer's codex. Using their magical abilities, they brainwashed one of Mictlantecuhtli's mortal aides into helping them.

Every day for months, when Mictlantecuhtli lay asleep, sheltered from the burning rays of the sun, the aide brought the Codex of the Damned to the priests. Unable to translate the mysteries of the codex directly, the priests copied it symbol for symbol, so that they could decrypt it at their leisure. Mictlantecuhtli never learned that the priests had made a copy of his precious codex. For their part, the priests were never able to translate the codex into something they could comprehend or use.

When Mictlantecuhtli descended into the pyramid to slip into Torpor, the mortal priests were imprisoned in the stone crypt along with him. With the priests dead, the copied codex passed from owner to owner. Although they were unable to decipher it, the codex's owners protected it for generations.

How the codex left the Tzentla area is unknown, but leave it did. Still untranslated, a copy of the codex appeared in Zurich during the Renaissance. Other copies — more or less corrupted by repeated sloppy copying — appeared elsewhere around the world.

Nobody knows who first translated the codex. Some Kindred believe it was the Seven Elders of Clan Tremere who managed the feat, using the contents of the codex to develop the Ritual of the Bitter Rose.

There are thought to be two true translated copies of the codex still in existence. One, translated into Latin, is thought to rest with Clan Tremere. The other, translated into English, has vanished from Kindred ken.

False translations appear from time to time, attracting flurries of interest. These false translations are all useless, however.



Chapter Four:

Involving the Neonates

I couldn't help it. I can resist everything except temptation.

— Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*

Before the Neonates can visit the Tzentel pyramid and encounter Mictlantecuhltli the Wanderer, they must discover the existence of both. Certainly, the Storyteller could simply tell the players what he or she wishes them to know, then let them proceed from there. Taking this one step further, the Storyteller could even begin the story with the characters already in Mexico, near to the ruins of Tzentel. This option denies both players and Storyteller one of the more interesting aspects of this story, however: actually getting from wherever the Chronicle is taking place to the Yucatan without being unmasked or destroyed along the way. It is therefore much more appropriate for a one-shot story that is not part of an ongoing Chronicle.

Further, if more than one character is to benefit from performing Diablerie on Mictlantecuhltli, the Neonates will have to learn about the Ritual of the Bitter Rose. Again, the Storyteller has several options here. Firstly, she can just declare that one of the Neonates — probably a Tremere — has learned the Ritual from his Sire. Alternately, the Storyteller can allow the Neonates to learn the Ritual from any of the more powerful Kindred they may know in their home

city. A more dramatically satisfying means of allowing the Neonates to learn the Ritual of the Bitter Rose is through the Codex of the Damned, discussed in the preceding chapter.

Following is a brief list of ways in which the Storyteller can introduce the material in this story, and engage the interest of the players (as well as of their characters).

PLANTING THE SEEDS

In an ongoing Chronicle, it is a relatively simple task for the Storyteller to drop hints that will, over time, build up into a body of myth and clues that the Neonates will be unlikely to ignore or resist. As was described in the chapter on Diablerie, there are recurring legends circulating throughout Kindred society concerning the resting places of the Antediluvians and those Methuselahs who have sunk into Torpor themselves. Throughout the course of play, the Neonates should hear a number of these — true and false — mentioned casually, in passing, or for other reasons by characters in the Chronicle.



One or more of these legends should mention a mythical Vampire figure known variously as the Ancient or the Wanderer, who is claimed to have walked throughout North America over a period of several centuries. Different tellings of this legend should have significant variations: in one the Wanderer was destroyed around the time of Christ; in another the Wanderer is equated directly with Caine himself; in yet another the Wanderer is said to lie in Torpor somewhere in Mexico or Central America.

THE LURE OF MEXICO

After the myth of the Wanderer has been firmly planted in the Neonates' minds, they should stumble across something that confirms the myth's historicity. If you are using *Chicago by Night* as the basis for your Chronicle, then you can use the following plotline. If you are not using that supplement, then this sequence can easily be adapted for any city. There are three Kindred in Chicago who have heard the same rumors and myths as the Neonates. Possibly unlike the Neonates, these other Vampires have determined to their satisfaction that the Wanderer actually does exist. The three Kindred in question are all described in *Chicago By Night*; they are Johann Weltmann, Erichtho, and Wendy Wade. These individuals do not know much, just that there is enough evidence to convince them a Methuselah lies in Torpor somewhere in Mexico or Central America. They have checked all the sources of information available in Chicago — in other words, the sources that the Neonates will probably seek out — and will have informants (possibly Dominated) in place to inform them if anyone else seems interested in the same material.

Once these powers have learned the Neonates are following the course of their own research, they will probably try to contact them. Their major motivation is to discover if the Neonates have learned anything of value that they themselves have missed. They will be extremely subtle when it comes to finding this out; they do not want the Neonates to believe they are on the trail of anything important. If the Neonates know nothing new — which is the most likely situation — they will then try to convince the young Kindred that any rumors they may have heard about the Wanderer are just that: rumors. Again, they will be extremely subtle in this.

The most likely reaction is that the Neonates will come to believe that there actually is some truth to the rumors. After all, if the myths were meaningless, why would important Kindred like Weltmann, Graves and Wade be so interested in convincing them not to waste their time?

The Archaeologist

There is one individual in Chicago who knows a lot about myths and legends concerning Mictlantecuhli, the God of Death. He is a mortal, an old man called Samuel Clearwater,

who lives on 58th Street near the University of Chicago. Clearwater is the Midwest's premier expert on the Mayan culture, and on its folklore. He has researched many myths revolving around the God of Death, and has become convinced that they must be based on some historical event or personage. Of course, as a mortal, he knows nothing of the Kindred, and it would never occur to him to guess that Mictlantecuhli was actually a Vampire.

At one time or another, Weltmann, Graves and Wade have all visited Clearwater, to expand their knowledge of Mayan folklore. The old man was glad to be of whatever help he could — not much, unfortunately. All he could do was confirm to them that there was something interesting — historically and mythographically speaking — about Mictlantecuhli.

If the Neonates are serious about investigating Mexican folklore, they will eventually be referred to Clearwater. Although most "conservative" historians believe the old man to be eccentric to the point of senility, they cannot deny that his knowledge of such matters is encyclopedic.

The most logical tack for the Neonates to take is to contact Clearwater by phone, and arrange a meeting. He will answer simple questions to the best of his knowledge over the phone, but if the Neonates ask more complex questions, he will insist they visit him so that he can show them certain entries from books in his library.

Unfortunately for the Neonates — and for Clearwater himself — Wendy Wade has been keeping a close eye on the old academic. She will know that the Neonates have contacted him, and will decide that it would be best all around if Clearwater were not available as a resource for the player characters.

When the Neonates arrive at Clearwater's house, they find him dead — stabbed through the heart with a Mayan ritual dagger from his collection. When Wade killed him, she did not drink his Vitae, so there is no direct physical evidence that a Vampire did the deed. The Neonates can learn a little more by using the Psychometry power of *Auspex* on the dagger. The difficulty is 5, and the number of successes the character rolls determines the amount of information gained, as follows:

1 success At the time that Clearwater last touched the dagger (when it was driven into his heart) his aura was mottled, rapidly shifting between violet, brown and silver, indicating a mixture of fear, confusion and sadness.

2 successes The owner of the dagger was Samuel Clearwater himself, age 72.

3 successes At the time of his death, Clearwater was confused: he thought he was alone in his house, when a figure seemed to appear out of nowhere and stabbed him.

4 successes The character receives a mental "snapshot" of the event. The individual who killed Clearwater was a woman, but her features are very indistinct (Clearwater did



not have time to notice more). Her eyeteeth are slightly extended, indicating she may well have been a vampire.

5 successes Clearwater acquired the dagger on a trip to the Chichen Itza ruins in the Yucatan.

Note that the only important revelation here is that Clearwater was killed by a Vampire.

Again, the fact that someone is trying to stop the Neonates from learning more about the Wanderer should confirm to them that there is actually some truth to the myths and legends they have heard.

If the Storyteller wants to make life a little more interesting—and challenging—for the Neonates, the police can arrive on the scene scant minutes after the Vampires reach Clearwater's house (Wendy Wade called in an anonymous report of the academic's murder). The Neonates will have to be quick if they want to avoid getting arrested for killing Clearwater.

If they take the time to search Clearwater's house, they will find a photocopied tract from a research book lying on the hall table (Clearwater copied this to give to the Neonates when they arrived). It is the fragment of poetry from the Codex Tro quoted at the end of the last chapter. Scrawled beneath the fragment, in Clearwater's handwriting, is the notation:

Wanderer = Mictlantecuhtli

FURTHER RESEARCH

This should give the Neonates something more on which to base their research. The next step might be for the Neonates to hit the libraries or the on-line data sources. With the hint from the Codex Tro to guide them, they should have little difficulty digging up further information. Neonates with any Skills that incorporate some research-related components—such as History, Computer, Investigation, etc.—would be able to find in a library or on-line database the fact that the Mayans had a death god by the name of Mictlantecuhtli (this would require a Skill check with a difficulty of four). A little more digging (another Skill check with a difficulty of five) would turn up a description of the “mythical” god Mictlantecuhtli that would seem to imply that the real subject of the myths was actually a Vampire. Further research—and yet another Skill check, this time with a difficulty of 6—would reveal that worship of the god Mictlantecuhtli was at its peak during the Old Empire of the Mayan civilization, and centered around the city of Tzentan in the Yucatan, the ruins of which have yet to be found. At the Storyteller's option, further research—in a wide number of different areas, requiring considerably higher difficulties

—could give the Neonates further clues as to the exact location of Tzentel.

THE STRANGER

The Neonates can gain further clues about the resting place of the semi-mythical Wanderer from a new Kindred who comes to town. He is a stranger, known to no one in Chicago (or in Gary, for that matter), and nobody has the faintest clue as to his origin. He initially avoids all contact with any of the Chicago Kindred, eventually making careful — almost furtive — contact with the Neonates while they are pursuing their research into the Wanderer and the Yucatan. It seems that the stranger has learned of their interest in the topic, and wishes — like Wendy Wade and the others — to learn how far their work has progressed. Unlike Wade *et al*, his intention is not to prevent them from reaching their goal, but to actually help them ... and, perhaps, receive some help in return.

Initially, the stranger will do whatever he can to discern the Neonates' progress — and motives for proceeding — without telling them anything about himself. After he has a rough idea of how far they have gotten, however, he will introduce himself as Sheaffer, and tell them that he has information that may be valuable to them in their search. He will try to arrange a meeting with them the next night at his temporary Haven, a rooming house in Evanston. The Neonates will almost certainly press him about what he can tell them. He will not divulge anything right away, insisting that they meet him as he requests; he will tell them, however, that he has personal evidence that the object of their search actually does exist, and that he knows the Wanderer's resting place. He will tell them no more. Although the Neonates might not believe it at first, Sheaffer's circumspect behavior does not hide some covert plan. In fact, he fears for his very existence.

The Codex of the Damned Comes to Chicago

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, there is thought to be one correct copy of the book in which the Wanderer



recorded his thaumaturgical research. In point of fact, it is now in the possession of the Vampire who calls himself Sheaffer. He purchased it from another Kindred who was unaware of its value; who had in turn received it from a friend to hold for safe-keeping. This friend was sent to the Final Death under mysterious circumstances, so Sheaffer's contact kept his possession of the Codex secret to all but Kindred he trusted. Sheaffer has, so far, been unable to retrace the path of the Codex beyond the first two links of the chain.

A Malkavian with some theoretical knowledge of Thaumaturgy, Sheaffer has analyzed the text. Combining the Codex's contents with mythical descriptions of the Ritual of the Bitter Rose, Sheaffer has reconstructed the research that led to the original development of the Ritual. He has added his conclusions to the book as marginalia written in a tight, precise hand.

Sheaffer has no intention of ever performing the Ritual. He has no desire for power or advancement; all he cares about is the advancement of knowledge.

In addition to the contents of the codex, Sheaffer has tried to divine its origin. Although multiple translations and paraphrasing have pressed much of the "cultural subtext" from the work, Sheaffer has found enough clues to convince him that the original was written in ancient Mexico or Central America. He believes, although he is not totally certain, that the writer was a Mayan — perhaps a priest. The marginalia he has scrawled in the Codex contain these conclusions as well.

Sheaffer has come to Chicago to continue his research. He learned that Samuel Clearwater was reputed to be the person who could best help him out. Unfortunately, as described earlier, Clearwater was killed (If the Storyteller decides not to involve the Neonates in that complication, Wade killed the academic to prevent him from speaking with Sheaffer, and the characters may have learned about it through normal news sources.). Furthermore, Sheaffer has come to realize that he is being followed. It is obvious that his "shadow" is one of the Kindred — nobody else could manage it — and he concludes, quite reasonably (although incorrectly) that the Vampire on his trail also murdered Clearwater.

Sheaffer

Sheaffer is a Malkavian, and so suffers a major derangement. Fortunately, perhaps, his derangement is Intellectualization, which does not prevent him from functioning in night-to-night life. In fact, the derangement is only a slight exaggeration of Sheaffer's mortal personality.

He was fascinated by knowledge in all its forms, but history and philosophy held special fascinations for him. He would have happily spent his entire life researching some piece of esoterica far beyond the grasp — or interest — of

anyone else. Unfortunately, he was foolish enough to wander into the wrong part of Los Angeles, and was cut down in a drive-by shooting. The last person he saw before his "death" was a strangely-dressed old man with wild eyes and slightly enlarged canine teeth...

To Sheaffer, knowledge and understanding are everything. Power and wealth are nothing, except when they can be used to enhance discovery (e.g., to buy new books). He fears destruction, but mainly because the Final Death would put an end to his researches.

Sire: ? (a wandering Malkavian, never known to Sheaffer)

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Pedagogue

Generation: 10th

Embrace: 1944 (born 1910)

Apparent Age: Mid 30s

Image: A short, slender man with thinning sandy hair. Behind thick glasses his eyes look weak and watery.

Roleplaying Hints: You are much more interested in knowledge than in anything else. You have learned that sometimes it is valuable not to let on everything you know ... but you have never learned how to conceal it.

Haven: No permanent Haven in the Chicago area. Temporary Haven is a cheap rooming house in Evanston.

VAMPIRE™

Shaeffer

Attributes

Physical

Strength 0000

Dexterity 0000

Stamina 0000

Social

Charisma 0000

Manipulation 0000

Appearance 0000

Mental

Perception 0000

Intelligence 0000

Wits 0000

Abilities

Talents

Acting 00000

Alertness 00000

Athletics 00000

Brawl 00000

Dodge 00000

Empathy 00000

Intimidation 00000

Leadership 00000

Streetwise 00000

Subterfuge 00000

Skills

Animal Ken 00000

Drive 00000

Etiquette 00000

Precious 00000

Melee 00000

Music 00000

Repair 00000

Security 00000

Stealth 00000

Survival 00000

Knowledge

Bureaucracy 00000

Computer 00000

Finance 00000

Investigation 00000

Law 00000

Linguistics 00000

Medicine 00000

Occult 00000

Politics 00000

Science 00000

Advantages

Disciplines

Auspex 00000

00000

00000

00000

00000

Backgrounds

Contacts 00000

Resources 00000

00000

00000

00000

Virtues

Conscience 00000

Self-Control 00000

Courage 00000

Other Traits

History 00000

00000

00000

00000

00000

Combat

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage

Humanity

0000000000

Willpower

0000000000

Blood Pool

0000000000

Health

Bruised ☐

Hurt -1 ☐

Injured -2 ☐

Wounded -3 ☐

Mauled -4 ☐

Crippled -5 ☐

Incubated ☐

Experience

Attributes: 7/5/3 Abilities: 13/9/5 Disciplines: 3 Backgrounds: 5 Virtues: 7 Freebie Points: 15 (7/5/2/1)

The Diabolist

In fact, the Vampire following Sheaffer is a Brujah called Pietr, a dedicated Diabolist driven by a lust for power. He is, strictly speaking, 12th Generation, but he has advanced to become effectively Ninth Generation by drinking the blood of Elders. He learned about Mictlantecuhli the Wanderer

from his own sources, and immediately travelled to the Yucatan to drink the Antediluvian's Vitae. As it was, however, he was defeated and almost destroyed by Mictlantecuhli's defenses. Among other injuries, he bears hideous scars from the claws of one of the Wanderer's loyal guardians. He came very close to the Final Death at that point, and just managed to flee. Unfortunately, he did not manage to keep his sanity intact. He suffers from an Obsession with tracking down the Ritual of the Bitter Rose and learning to perform it. When he can do so, Pietr believes, he will be able to increase the potency of a Diablerie victim's Vitae, giving him enough power to go back and destroy the Wanderer. (This is not particularly logical, but Obsession rarely makes much sense. In fact, of course, he is focussing on his search for the Ritual to avoid dwelling on his close brush with destruction in Mexico, and his overwhelming fear of facing it again.)

Pietr has learned that the Codex of the Damned may contain enough background material for him to learn how to perform the Ritual of the Bitter Rose. He has also learned that an English translation of the Codex is in the possession of a Kindred named Sheaffer, and that Sheaffer has come to Chicago. What better opportunity to acquire the Codex?

Involving the Neonates

31

Dead End

If the Neonates go to Sheaffer's rooming house as arranged, they find a horrible sight awaiting them. A body lies in the middle of the floor, burnt totally beyond recognition, with a blackened and charred stake still protruding from his chest. It is, of course, Sheaffer himself. Evidently someone immobilized Sheaffer with the stake, then left the curtains open so that the rays of the morning sun would destroy his body. The room has been torn apart, as though someone were searching for something. There is no way of discovering whether they found it or not. (In fact, it was Pietr, looking for the Codex. As it turns out, the book was not in the room, and Pietr was foiled.)

The Neonates might investigate the scene of the crime. The room's door is locked, but the window is unlatched and slightly open. The room is on the third floor of the four-story building. Climbing into the window from below or above would have been difficult for a mortal, but relatively easy for a Vampire.

If a Neonate tries Psychometry on the stake, the difficulty is 6. They can discover the following information:

1 success The subject — Sheaffer's killer — has an aura of pale purple and green (in other words, an angry and obsessed Vampire).

2 successes The subject is Pietr — male, and over 110 years old.

3 successes The subject was thinking of great gain, of how he would get what he most wanted once Sheaffer was out of the way.

4 successes The subject climbed in the open window last night, stunned the surprised Sheaffer with a blow to the head, and then staked him so the light of dawn would fall on him.

5 successes The subject picked up a piece of wood on the street and sharpened it into a stake.

Pietr

Pietr will say nothing about his background; in fact, he suffers from traumatic amnesia after a run-in with a Methuselah several decades ago. His greatest goal, with which he is Obsessed, is acquiring the Codex and learning how to perform the Ritual of the Bitter Rose.

Note that Pietr has performed Diablerie on a Seventh Generation Elder within the last six months. The Neonates may well be able to detect this "taint" on his aura, or otherwise sense that he is a Diabolist.

Sire: ?

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Visionary

Generation: 9th

Embrace: 1907 (born 1880)

Apparent Age: Late 20s

Image: A muscular man of average height with black hair and dark eyes. His head and face are hideously scarred.

Roleplaying Hints: You never let on everything you know. You are a master at subtle hints, insinuation and leading statements.

Haven: No permanent Haven in the Chicago area. Temporary Haven is a condemned church.

VAMPIRE™		
Pietr		
Attributes		
Physical	Social	Mental
Strength.....●●●●●	Charisma.....●●●●●	Perception.....●●●●●
Dexterity.....●●●●●	Manipulation.....●●●●●	Intelligence.....●●●●●
Stamina.....●●●●●	Appearance.....●●●●●	Wits.....●●●●●
Abilities		
Talents	Skills	Knowledge
Acting.....●●●●●	Animal Ken.....●●●●●	Bureaucracy.....●●●●●
Alertness.....●●●●●	Drive.....●●●●●	Computer.....●●●●●
Athletics.....●●●●●	Etiquette.....●●●●●	Finance.....●●●●●
Brawl.....●●●●●	Firearms.....●●●●●	Investigation.....●●●●●
Dodge.....●●●●●	Melce.....●●●●●	Law.....●●●●●
Empathy.....●●●●●	Music.....●●●●●	Linguistics.....●●●●●
Intimidation.....●●●●●	Repair.....●●●●●	Medicine.....●●●●●
Leadership.....●●●●●	Security.....●●●●●	Occult.....●●●●●
Streetwise.....●●●●●	Stealth.....●●●●●	Politics.....●●●●●
Subterfuge.....●●●●●	Survival.....●●●●●	Science.....●●●●●
Advantages		
Disciplines	Backgrounds	Virtues
Aversion.....●●●●●	Contacts.....●●●●●	Conscience.....●●●●●
Dominance.....●●●●●	Resources.....●●●●●	Self-Control.....●●●●●
Obsessive.....●●●●●		Courage.....●●●●●
Other Traits		
History	Humanity	Health
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●	Bruised..... <input type="checkbox"/>
.....●●●●●		Hurt.....-1..... <input type="checkbox"/>
.....●●●●●		Injured.....-2..... <input type="checkbox"/>
.....●●●●●		Wounded.....-3..... <input type="checkbox"/>
.....●●●●●		Mauled.....-4..... <input type="checkbox"/>
Combat		Crippled.....-5..... <input type="checkbox"/>
Weapon.....Difficulty.....Damage.....		Incapacitated..... <input type="checkbox"/>
Blood Pool		Experience
.....●●●●●●●●●●		

Attributes: 7/5/3 Abilities: 13/9/5 Disciplines: 3 Backgrounds: 5 Virtues: 7 Freebie Points: 15 (7/5/2/1)



The Codex

Two days after Sheaffer's death, an envelope arrives in the mail at one of the Neonates' Havens. The envelope is from Sheaffer, and contains both the Codex and a map of Mexico. In fact, on his last day of existence, Sheaffer believed that the Vampire following him was planning him harm. It seemed logical to the scholar to protect his research from theft. He knew nobody he could entrust it to in Chicago ... except for the Neonates. His plan, of course, was to regain

the book from them when things had settled down. Thus, the Codex was not in Sheaffer's room when Pietr came to call.

The Codex includes Sheaffer's marginalia as described earlier. On the map, a line has been drawn between two cities in the Yucatan — Campeche on the west coast of the peninsula, and Chetumal on the east coast, right on the Guatemalan border. Near the middle of the line is a black dot, next to which is scrawled the word "Tzentel". This should be the final clue the Neonates need to locate the Haven of Mictlantecuhltli the Wanderer.





Chapter Five:

The Pyramid

Protection is not only dead, but damned.

— Prime Minister Disraeli, *Life of Disraeli*

This chapter describes Mictlantecuhтли's Haven and its various defenses — living, unliving and inanimate.

PHYSICAL LOCATION

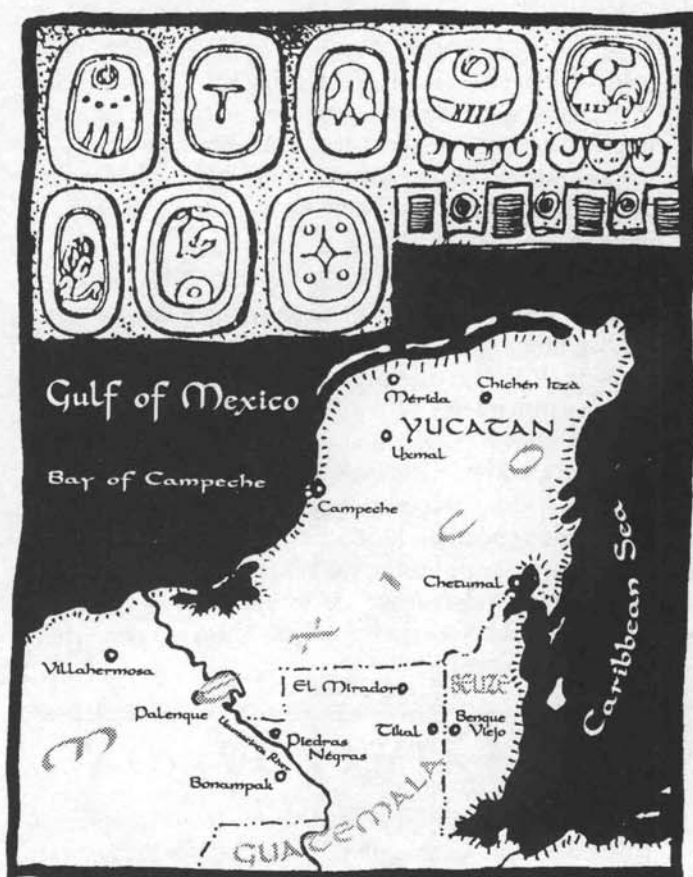
Mictlantecuhтли's pyramid is located in the center of the ancient Mayan city of Tzental. In the centuries since Mictlantecuhтли went into Torpor, Tzental has been forgotten by historians and by the natives of the region. After Mictlantecuhтли's disappearance, the city was deserted, and soon thereafter it was swallowed by jungle so thick that the ruins cannot be spotted from the air.

Tzental is located almost exactly halfway between the towns of Campeche, on the west coast of the Yucatan peninsula, and Chetumal, on the east coast, right on the Guatemalan border. Both towns have airports, if the Neonates decide to risk travelling by plane.

There are no roads through the jungle that lead to Tzental. The nearest settlement is the small town of Dzitbalchen, in the Campeche province. From Dzitbalchen, Tzental is a tough 35-mile hike through jungle so dense that machetes are absolutely required to make any progress whatsoever. Neonates would be well-advised to hire — or Dominate — native guides to help them find their way to the city. Survival skill will be of vital importance; even though Vampires will be largely unaffected by conditions that could kill mortals, the journey to Tzental will still be an incredibly difficult and taxing one.

Travelling the Jungle

The jungles of the Yucatan which surround the lost city of Tzental are heavy going for any traveller. For the Kindred,



who cannot travel by day, the journey can be even more arduous.

First, navigation is a significant problem. There are no landmarks, and it is almost impossible to navigate by following topographic features like ridge-lines. Even with a compass, it is frighteningly easy to become lost, simply because the direct route is frequently impassable due to heavy concentrations of trees and underbrush. Travellers must frequently detour from their route, and are sometimes led miles out of their way.

Second, the undergrowth is frequently so thick that a route must be hacked out using machetes. Travellers often find that their rate of progress decreases to one mile per hour or even less. Even where conditions are better, speeds greater than four miles per hour are almost impossible to attain.

Then there are other risks. Predators like jaguars prowl the jungles at night. Although they will only rarely attack Kindred once they have recognized them as such, predators will sometimes leap from the trees above onto passers-by, and inflict damage before the beasts realize that their prey is actually something unnatural.

If the Kindred have managed to protect themselves from the rays of the sun — by the Invulnerable Weakness ritual, perhaps — the high daytime temperature of the jungle still poses a significant risk. Vampires have no need to drink water, and most are incapable of doing so. This means that they cannot sweat normally to moderate their body temperature. Unless the Kindred can find some other way of combatting the heat, protracted exposure to high temperatures causes them to lose both Strength and Dexterity temporarily.

When the temperature is above 100° F — which it frequently is in the Yucatan — a Vampire can normally survive unscathed for as many hours as he has points of Stamina (If he is engaged in strenuous activity — such as cutting a path through heavy jungle — however, this “grace period” drops by as much as half). After this period, the character loses one point each from Strength and Dexterity per hour (two points per hour of strenuous activity). If the character reaches 0 in either Strength or Dexterity, he must immediately sleep. Lost points are regained at a rate of one — in each of Strength and Dexterity — per two hours of sleep. This sleep costs the Vampire a Blood Point just as does normal sleep.

THE CITY OF TZENTAL

At its peak, the city of Tzental housed 10,000 people, and covered several square miles. Most of the buildings were wood or light stone construction, and have not survived to the present day. The center of the city was reserved for the priest class, except on days of important ceremonies when worshippers were allowed to fill the central concourses.

The “temple region” was centered around the Pyramid of Mictlantecuhli, from which four wide avenues extended along the cardinal points of the compass. Around the central pyramid were smaller pyramidal buildings: the Pyramids of the Sun, the Moon, the Earth and the Sky.

Tzental has been totally swallowed by the forest, so the city is invisible from the air. The paving stones of the four cardinal avenues have been broken up by centuries of plants growing through them and tree roots spreading beneath them, but the radial layout can still be discerned. All of the pyramids are covered in vines, moss and other growth, making them appear as large, green alluvial humps. The four minor pyramids are 200 feet high, and their square bases are 200 feet on a side. The Pyramid of Mictlantecuhli is 300 feet high, and 300 feet on a side.

The Subordinate Pyramids

The four “subordinate” pyramids are built along standard Mayan lines. Their cores are rubble and broken limestone, faced with stone blocks. They once had small temples, shrines and altars atop them, but they have no internal chambers.

As with most Mayan pyramids, these were created in two major steps. First, the builders created a huge pile of earth and rubble in the approximate shape they wanted the completed pyramid to take. Then they constructed the outside of the pyramid using slabs of stone as facing. This stone was transported to Tzental from quarries many miles away. The stone facings on the pyramids are only two or three feet thick; beneath the stone is rubble. Thus, Mayan pyramids are very different in construction from the Egyptian pyramids, which are built from huge blocks of dressed stone. Unlike Egyptian pyramids, the Mayan constructions generally have no interior chambers, since the standard building technique does not allow for this.

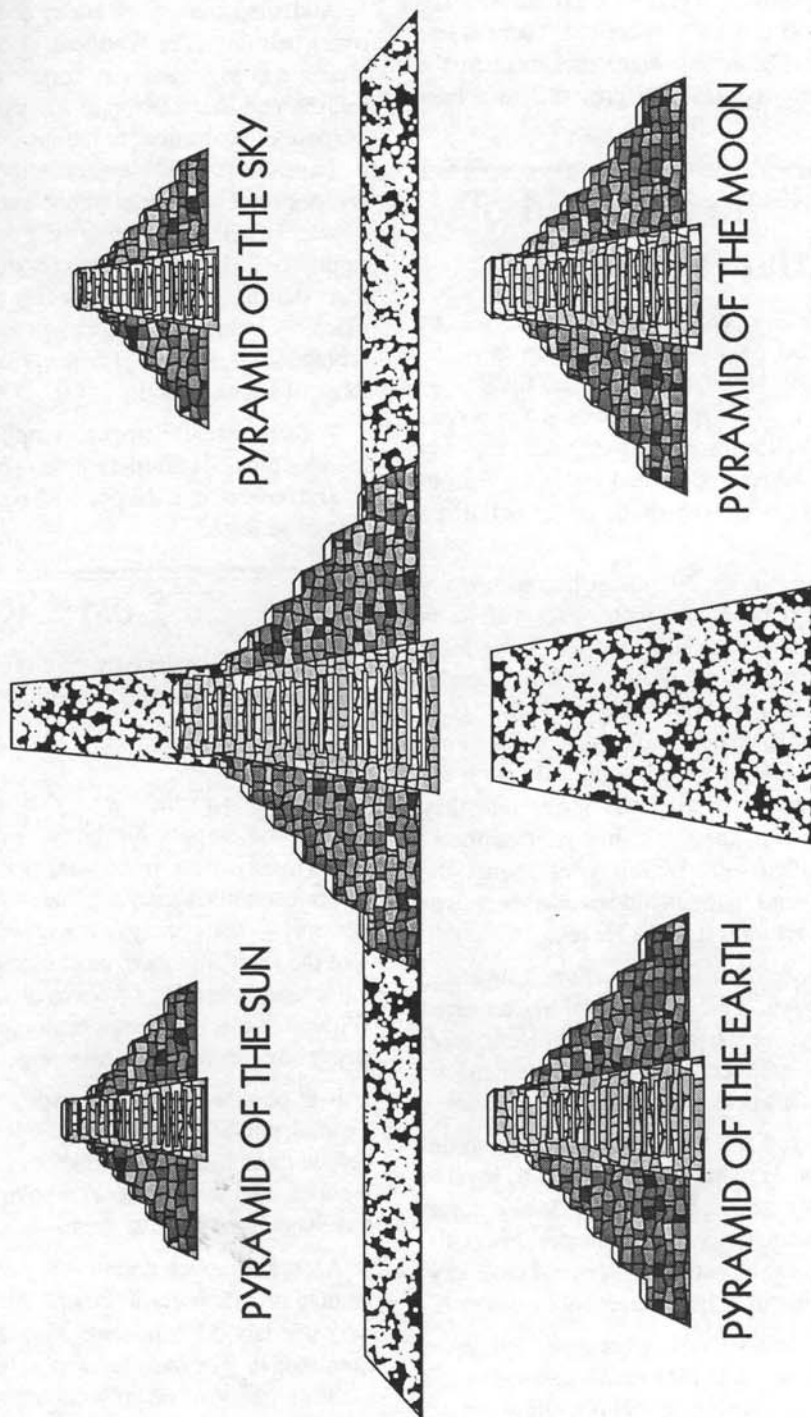
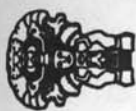
The facing stone is elaborately carved, with religious symbols, scenes from myth, and representations of the gods to whom the temples were dedicated. Over the centuries, of course, much of the embellishment has been weathered away. The stone is pitted and discolored, and only the largest features of the carvings still remain visible.

The Central Pyramid

At first glance, the central pyramid appears to follow the same design paradigm as the other four, simply on a larger scale. In fact, however, the Pyramid of Mictlantecuhli was built over and around previously existing stone buildings. In other words, typical Mayan buildings were constructed from blocks of dressed stone. When they were complete, rubble was piled on top of them. Finally, when the pile of rubble and earth was complete, the pyramid was faced with stone as usual.



TZENTAL



PYRAMID OF THE SKY

PYRAMID OF THE MOON

PYRAMID OF THE SUN

PYRAMID OF THE EARTH



These buildings are now chambers and rooms within the rubble of the pyramid's core. Contrary to most people's perceptions, the entire pyramid is not networked with passages and chambers; in fact, only a small percentage of the space is taken up with rooms. (Of course, the pyramid is 100 yards on a side, so there is a lot of space ...) There is one ground-level entrance connecting these chambers to the outside. Details of the pyramid are provided in a later section.

History of the Pyramid of Mictlantecuhltli

When the Wanderer first reached Tzentel, there was no central pyramid. Instead, the four smaller pyramids — the Pyramids of the Sun, the Moon, the Earth, and the Sky — framed a central plaza. This plaza was used for certain religious pageants, as well as for sporting events. It was only after Mictlantecuhltli had arrived — and had been “recognized” as a god — that plans were discussed for building a central pyramid.

Throughout his journeys, the Wanderer had seen many fascinating structures: giant wooden longhouses with many rooms; temples and sanctuaries built into the living rock, either carved out over decades, or constructed from already-existing caves. In his still slightly insane state, the “god” Mictlantecuhltli demanded that his followers build him a similar sanctuary — a Haven all his own. Although the construction that their god demanded was like nothing they had ever done before — a pyramid with internal chambers? — the people set to with a will. Within several years, the Pyramid of Mictlantecuhltli, with its hidden chambers, was complete. The Wanderer took it as his Haven.

As the tide of Mictlantecuhltli's madness turned, he added new features to his Haven. The ground level he converted into a temple, a place where the priests could come to meet with their “god.” The smaller sublevel, or basement, he reserved for himself as his personal retreat.

Circumstances changed for Mictlantecuhltli, and so did his mind and intentions. He Sired Get — peasants, loyal to their god—as vengeance against his priests. He also began to experiment with thaumaturgy, and expanded his skills. Now the lower level became more than his personal sanctuary; it also became something of a thaumaturgical laboratory.

Over the decades, a soul-sick weariness fell upon Mictlantecuhltli, and he began to look on his Get somewhat differently. Instead of simple symbols of his feelings toward his priests, now he came to view them as creations — as tools, as weapons. Tools and weapons must be honed, he decided. Using his newfound thaumaturgical skills, he created tests for his Get — tests that would plumb the depths of their souls and show their true mettle.

No one knows how many of Mictlantecuhltli's Get were destroyed by his tests. Those who managed to survive them

were refined by the experience — tempered, as a sword blade is tempered by heat and cold oil. They were, Mictlantecuhltli believed, much more worthy to survive, and to serve him.

And then the soulsickness became deeper and more overwhelming. The Wanderer decided that the only logical choice was to retreat into Torpor and rest. Once more, he refashioned the interior of his pyramid, this time for the purpose of protection, of defense. He feared that invaders, perhaps allies of the Nosferatu, might break into his sanctuary and destroy him. Initially, his fear was focused on mortals — warlike nations invading the Yucatan region. But then the Lupines who lived in the area (discussed below) warned him that other Kindred might one day come seeking his resting place. Using his magical prowess, he created arcane protections designed specifically to ward his Haven against those of his own kind.

With the final changes complete, Mictlantecuhltli surrounded himself with his retinue — both willing and unwilling — and ordered that the pyramid be sealed. Within, in peace at last, he rested.

Lost Cities

Some may wonder why the city of Tzentel has never been found by explorers or archaeologists, or why the natives of the region have never reported it. There are several very good reasons.

The jungle in the vicinity of Tzentel is exceptionally heavy — not impassable, but very difficult to traverse. The city is totally overgrown, making it impossible to spot from the air (certainly, survey satellites with ultraviolet and infrared cameras — and perhaps even down-looking radar — could spot the ruins, but there has never been any reason to train those high-technology devices on this area of the Yucatan). Without some very good reason, nobody would consider struggling through the heavy vegetation.

It is possible that some explorers have stumbled upon Tzentel, but failed to survive to tell their tales. As described below, there is a small “tribe” of Lupines (werewolves) in the area, and these may well have killed any mortals who have wandered into the area.

As for the natives, the entire region of Tzentel is considered an area of extremely ill omen. No one alive today knows why this taboo might have arisen, but conversely nobody questions it. The natives simply stay away from this region of the jungle. Various anthropologists have picked up on this taboo, but have concluded that the evil omens actually arise from the fact that the region is a breeding ground for malaria and other diseases. (Some anthropologists might have questioned this conclusion and investigated, but — again, thanks to the Lupines — none have lived to discuss the matter.)

THE LUPINES

Centuries ago, when Tzentel was at its peak, Mictlantecuhтли established amicable and respectful relations with the Lupines who lived in the area. The Lupines, in fact, swore a binding oath to protect the interests of Mictlantecuhтли against outsiders (the fragment of poetry from the Codex Tro hints at this).

Lupines, if nothing else, are creatures of their word. Although their agreement to protect Tzentel from outside marauders dates from the second century, they still consider it to be in force today — regardless of the fact that 17 centuries have passed and that Mictlantecuhтли himself has been in Torpor for over 1,300 years.

During the decline of Tzentel, the Lupines transferred their loyalty and responsibility from the city to Mictlantecuhтли himself. There are only two Lupines still in the region — a mated pair, resembling aged natives — but they believe wholeheartedly that it is their right and their duty to allow their liege lord to sleep uninterrupted for as long as he likes.

The Lupines are suspicious of mortals. In the past, when there were more Lupines in the vicinity, the creatures would kill anyone who wandered into the region. Now things are

different. Although isolated, the Lupines understand that the world has changed since their ancestors swore their oath to Mictlantecuhтли. Channels of communication are almost magically swift. Before, the world at large would never even realize that explorers had gone missing in the Tzentel region. Today, however, mysterious disappearances would attract to the area the very attention the creatures wish to avoid.

Therefore, rather than killing mortals on sight, the Lupines would watch them closely for signs of interest in Mictlantecuhтли's Haven. If they were to evidence any such interest, the Lupines would try to lead them away or perhaps drive them off, all the while being very careful to make the events as unremarkable as possible. Only if no other option was open would they slay mortal explorers, and even then they would try to find some way of avoiding notice. (Perhaps they would drag the bodies elsewhere, leaving them to be found. This way, anyone following up on a "lost expedition" would conclude that the explorers died elsewhere, thus diverting attention from the Tzentel area.)

Kindred visitors, however, are a totally different case. Their agreement with Mictlantecuhтли has not diminished the Lupines' traditional enmity toward Vampires, and the creatures would gladly destroy any of the Damned who stumble upon this place. The Lupines would gladly destroy one or two Kindred who reached Tzentel; if the creatures believe that they could overpower a group of Vampires, they would attack and fight to the death.

Although they consider the discharge of their oath more important than their lives, the Lupines are realistic. If there are more Kindred than they can defeat, they will use other means. In human form, they will approach the Kindred, and volunteer to serve as guides ... and then, of course, lead them far from Tzentel. Alternatively, they may carry on guerilla warfare against the explorers, destroying their camps, killing their guides and porters, and generally doing whatever they can to drive the Kindred off. If they can, they will split up the group, and attack any stragglers. If intruders enter the pyramid, the Lupines will not follow, but will set up an ambush and await their reemergence.

Although relatively primitive, the Lupines are not stupid, and should represent a very real danger to the Neonates when they visit Tzentel. The Lupines will use stealth to observe the actions of the Neonates, possibly learning where they have set up their temporary Havens. Since the Lupines are able to operate by daylight, the easiest way they have to destroy the Vampires is to find them in their Havens during the day!

The Lupines of Tzentel are the descendants of Mayan peasants, and retain that appearance in human form. They live a simple existence in the Tzentel region, frequently engaging in banditry. They each have a bolt-action hunting rifle and a handful of shells. The Lupines speak Mayathan, the traditional language of the Mayas, as well as pidgin forms of English and Spanish. Refer to the *Vampire* rulebook for more information on Lupines.



Cobb

VAMPIRE™

Lupines

Physical

Strength.....●●●●●

Dexterity.....●●●●●

Stamina.....●●●●●

Social

Charisma.....●●●●●

Manipulation.....●●●●●

Appearance.....●●●●●

Mental

Perception.....●●●●●

Intelligence.....●●●●●

Wits.....●●●●●

Talents

Acting.....●●●●●

Aerobics.....●●●●●

Athletics.....●●●●●

Brawl.....●●●●●

Dodge.....●●●●●

Empathy.....●●●●●

Intimidation.....●●●●●

Leadership.....●●●●●

Sneakiness.....●●●●●

Subterfuge.....●●●●●

Skills

Animal Ken.....●●●●●

Drive.....●●●●●

Elusiveness.....●●●●●

Paincurses.....●●●●●

Melee.....●●●●●

Music.....●●●●●

Repair.....●●●●●

Security.....●●●●●

Stealth.....●●●●●

Survival.....●●●●●

Knowledge

Bureaucracy.....●●●●●

Computer.....●●●●●

Philosophy.....●●●●●

Investigation.....●●●●●

Law.....●●●●●

Languages.....●●●●●

Medicine.....●●●●●

Occult.....●●●●●

Politics.....●●●●●

Science.....●●●●●

Disciplines

Celerity.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

Backgrounds

.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

Virtues

Conscience.....●●●●●

Self-Control.....●●●●●

Courage.....●●●●●

Other Traits

History.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

.....●●●●●

Humanity

●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

.....●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

Health

Bleeds.....☐

Hurt.....1 ☐

Injured.....2 ☐

Wounded.....3 ☐

Mauled.....4 ☐

Crippled.....5 ☐

Incapacitated.....☐

Combat

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage

Willpower

●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

.....●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

Blood Pool

.....●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

Experience

Attributes: 7/5/3 Abilities: 13/9/5 Disciplines: 3 Backgrounds: 5 Virtues: 7 Freebie Points: 15 (7/5/2/1)

Vampires and mortals have come to Tzentel before, presumably seeking Mictlantecutli. In all but one case, the Lupines drove them off or destroyed them. Less than a month ago, one Vampire, accompanied by a ghoul, managed to get by them and enter the central pyramid. The Lupine's oath prevented them from following, so they waited outside for the pair to reemerge. Reemerge the Vampire did... fleeing as though the very devil were at his heels. He was so torn and mangled as to be almost unrecognizable. His aspect was so hideous that it shocked the Lupines into inaction for long enough for him to make his escape (This intruder is

Pieter, the Diabolist described in Chapter 4.). The ghoul never re-appeared, and the Lupines assume that he has been destroyed.

When they approached the central pyramid, the Lupines found that the intruder had removed the heavy stone blocks that closed the entrance. They replaced these to block the portal once again.

THE PYRAMID OF MICTLANTECUHTLI

Unless otherwise specified, all walls within the pyramid are of the same dressed stone blocks that face the outside of the pyramid. The floors are paved with flat slabs of the same stone. Ceilings are about twelve feet high (unless otherwise specified), and walls are about a foot thick (refer to the rules in the **Vampire** rulebook; breaking through such a wall would require a dice pool of 13).

There is no artificial light within the structure (of course!). In general, the air is still, dry and musty, about 70° F (day and night), and redolent with the odor of decay — mainly vegetation, but with a trace of something else.

Entering the Pyramid

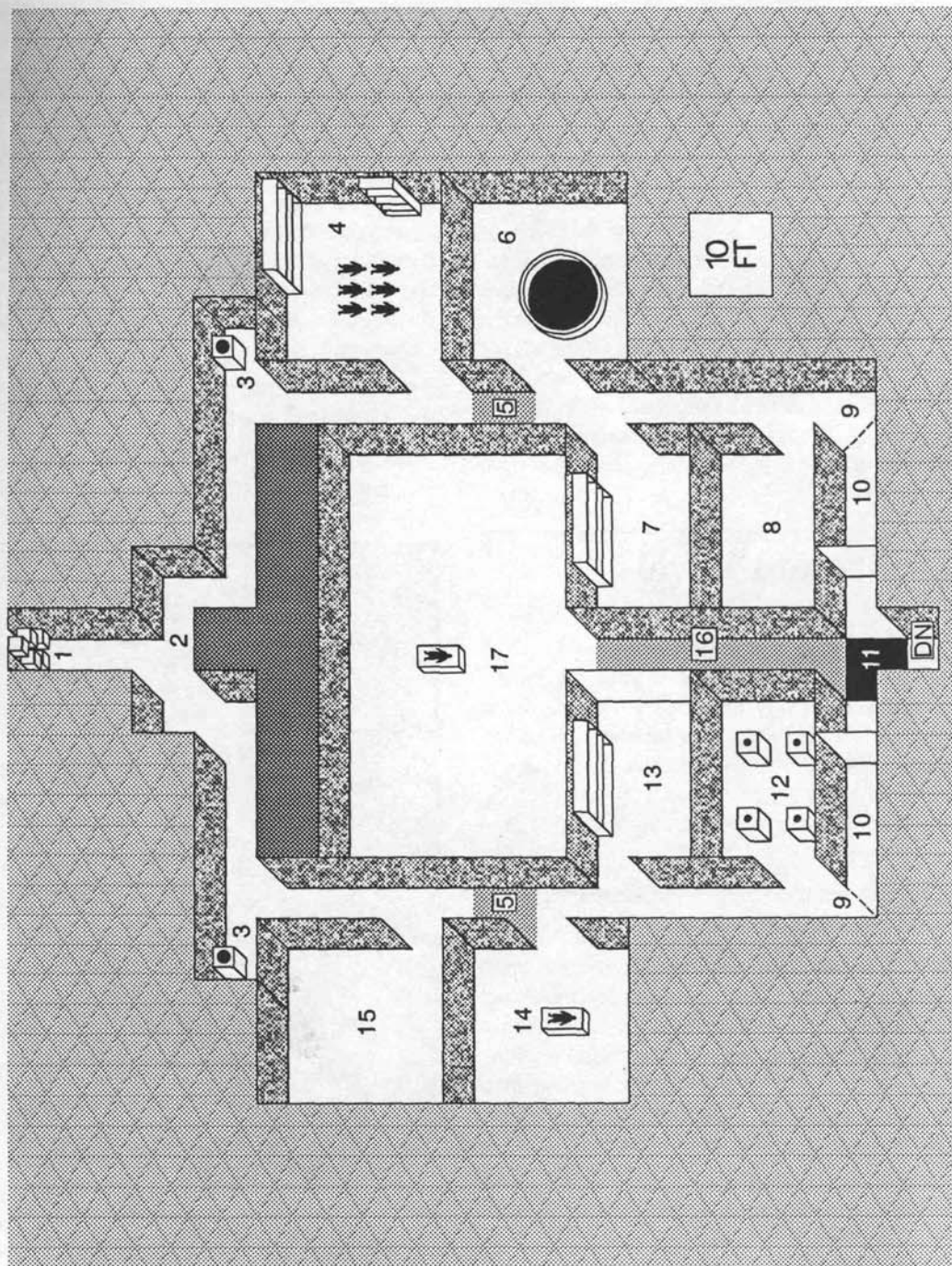
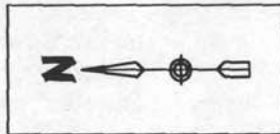
There is one entrance to the chambers within the pyramid, halfway along the northern side of the base, at ground level. Most of the pyramid is covered with tangled lianas and other plant growth; this webbing of vines has been torn away from the area of the entrance.

The entrance itself is a square doorway, 10 feet high but only three feet wide. Large cubic blocks of stone have been piled like children's blocks to close the entrance. There are eight such blocks, each about two feet on a side and weighing 1,500 pounds. The blocks are positioned in such a way that there are gaps between them; these gaps range from less than an inch wide to about six inches.

Refer to the **Vampire** rulebook for rules on feats of strength. Of course, the Neonates do not have to dead-lift the blocks; there are many other ways of removing them, but they will take time — time the Kindred may not have if they are being attacked by Lupines, for example.

The Mayas never learned how to build arches, either for doorways or ceilings. Instead, they created overheads by stacking blocks of stone in a step-wise manner; the blocks offset toward each other on each layer until they finally met at the top. This led to high ceilings and doorways, with narrow rooms and doors. Most surfaces were carved showing naturalistic and mythical figures of people and animals. On the outside of the pyramid, these carvings have largely weathered away. Within, however, they are untouched by the elements. Inside Mictlantecuhtli's pyramid, the carvings

PYRAMID OF MICTLANTECUHTLI GROUND LEVEL



depict Mayans at work and at worship. A recurring motif depicts priests, with elaborate headdresses, holding large goblets. (These, of course, contained the blood of human sacrifices.) There are no direct representations of the God of Death, Mictlantecuhltli, except as specified below. Some of these carvings were embellished with red and green dyes, but over the years the colors have faded. All stone surfaces are medium grey — rough and gritty.

The interior of the pyramid is claustrophobic, even with the high ceilings. The floors are earth or stone. Much of the stonework is covered with moss and lichen-like growth.

A Note on Frenzies

Any Kindred is going to find the exploration of an ancient pyramid — particularly one that is haunted and the Haven of a Methuselah — a frightening and emotionally-charged experience. The Neonates will be under extreme emotional tension, making it significantly more difficult to resist Frenzies. To reflect this, increase all difficulty numbers for resisting Frenzy by one (This increase has already been taken into account in the difficulty numbers quoted in this chapter. For potential Frenzies caused by other events not specifically described below, the Storyteller should keep the penalty in mind.).

Ground Level

1. Entrance Corridor

The portal from the outside is only three feet wide; immediately within, however, the corridor widens. In the light of the Neonates' torches, the floor seems to writhe and shift. After a moment, the characters realize the corridor is home to dozens of rats. These rats will try to avoid the Vampires; the Vampires, for their part, may want to use the rats to sate their hunger.

2. Mosaic

A mosaic of incredibly intricate design covers the south wall. Using multi-colored stones, some little larger than grains of sand, it illustrates how the city of Tzentel looked in its heyday. Above the central pyramid is a depiction of the "god" Mictlantecuhltli, a dark-haired, dark-skinned man drinking from a golden goblet. The liquid in the goblet is dark red, and could be either fine wine or blood.

The intricacy of the mosaic is such that no human could ever have constructed it; it is obviously of Vampiric creation. The mosaic is so intricate, in fact, that it can have a hypnotic effect on Kindred. Any Vampiric character who so much as glances at the mosaic must make a Willpower roll against his or her Perception + Auspex (the difficulty for Toreadors is two higher). On a failed roll, the character is entranced by the mosaic and will remain motionless, staring at it in wonder, until he is dragged away by companions, or his view of the

mosaic is blocked. On a botch, the character will become catatonic; this condition will last for 10 minutes after the character can no longer see the mosaic.

The mosaic was originally created by Mictlantecuhltli's Get. Its hypnotic qualities are a consequence of the level of detail, not something that the designers strove to achieve from the outset.

3. Cleansing Fonts

Each alcove has a stone font that used to contain pure water. Now they contain dust, rat skeletons, and the bloodless bodies of one or two rats. The fonts are carved from the same igneous rock as the rest of the pyramid. They have square bases, and stand about three feet high. Shallow, circular depressions have been carved into their tops. When the pyramid was used as the temple of Mictlantecuhltli, priests and Mictlantecuhltli's Get would use the water here to ritually cleanse themselves before passing deeper into the chambers.

4. Priests' Room

There are six perfectly-preserved male bodies, lying peacefully on the floor. All are dark-skinned and dark-



haired, wearing short linen robes. So well preserved are they that they look as though they might just be sleeping. In fact, however, a close examination will show that all have been drained of blood through wounds in their throats. These are the bodies of some of the priests who Mictlantecuhtli decreed would share his repose in the pyramid.

Two of the priests, while alive, had such powerful wills, that upon death their spirits remained to haunt this room. Their hatred of their god — who denied them the boon of immortality, and who in fact decreed that they should die when he went into Torpor — remains, and has grown over the centuries. Now, however, their hatred has generalized and turned to madness. They hate and envy the living — or those who can still move freely and experience the world. Driven by this undying hatred, they will fall upon any intruder — mortal or Kindred — who enters, gibbering and screaming their hatred all the while.

These spirits are totally incorporeal, appearing as transparent apparitions. They have a “touch” attack which allows them to drain Willpower. They attack with seven dice against the victim’s Wits + Dodge. Every success drains one Willpower point from the victim. If the victim has Fortitude, the drain can be resisted by a Courage + Fortitude roll with a target of 9. For every success, one less Willpower point is lost.



The spirits cannot be harmed by any attack, whether physical, mental or magical. The only way to destroy the spirits is to burn their physical bodies to ashes. Instead of fighting them, the Neonates can simply avoid them by leaving the room; the spirits have bound themselves to their bodies and unable to leave the room, even to pursue the objects of their hatred.

In life, the priests spoke only Mayathan, and have had no opportunity — or desire — to learn any other language since their deaths.

5. Dart Traps

Each symbol represents a square slab of thin stone on the floor of the corridor. The stone has been covered with a thin layer of dirt and soil, making it difficult to notice they are different from the rest of the corridor (characters may make a Perception + Wits roll against a difficulty of 7 to notice the stones). If a weight of more than 80 pounds is applied to the stone, the trap is triggered. Ten sharpened wooden darts — each about six inches long, and wickedly barbed — are fired from holes in each wall, creating a lethal “crossfire” in the corridor. The holes are small, less than 1/4 of an inch in diameter, and are worked into the carvings on the wall to make them harder to spot. Noticing the holes requires the characters be studying the walls and make a Perception + Wits roll against a difficulty of 8.

A character who triggers the trap by standing on the stones will be struck by 2-20 darts, each of which has a damage rating of 1. The target of these darts can only dodge if he or she has previously spotted the holes in the walls (whether or not the character has realized their significance). After they hit, the darts combine to do their damage. Thus, if a character was hit by 10 darts, she would take 10 dice of damage.

Once the traps have been triggered, they cannot be reset. Obviously, since the stone slabs — the pressure sensors — are only 10 feet wide, the easiest way to avoid the traps (for Kindred, at least) is to jump over the area.

These traps were installed long after the remainder of the pyramid was completed. In fact, they were among the final additions to the structure, created just before Mictlantecuhtli retreated into his Haven to slip into torpor.

6. Pool of Blood

In the center of the room is a shallow pool surrounded by a low stone lip a foot high. When the civilization of Tzentel was at its peak, blood drained from human sacrifices was brought here and poured into the pool as a symbolic offering to Mictlantecuhtli (symbolic because the “god” rarely if ever drank the Vitae so delivered). Mictlantecuhtli appreciated the symbolism: the life-blood of his worshippers brought here into the heart of his temple.

One of the results of the Wanderer’s thaumaturgical research was a ritual designed to prevent the putrefaction of

script. The intricacy of this work is nowhere near as great as that in area 2, so the hypnotic effect does not recur. If a Neonate can read the hieroglyphs, they relate the history of Mictlantecuhli, providing the background information from Chapter 3.

The room is occupied by a single ghou, Anton. This is the poor creature who accompanied Pietr the Vampire into the pyramid. Pietr was badly mauled by Mictlantecuhli's defenders, but the attendant Vampires did not destroy this ghou. Instead, they have allowed him to cower within the depths of the pyramid, fearing the sounds of their movements. (This, they decided, was an even crueller punishment for his trespasses than destroying him.)

The ghou was already slightly insane when he accompanied Pietr to Tzentel; now he has lost all touch with reality. In the weeks since his arrival here, he has felt the pangs of hunger for both food and blood as the potency of Pietr's blood in his veins has begun to fade. He knows, instinctively through his madness, that unless he drinks the Vitae of a Kindred again soon, he will become fully mortal once more ... and then he will die. He is too afraid of the Vampiric attendants of Mictlantecuhli to attempt to feed from them, but any other Vampire who enters the pyramid is another story.

If the Neonates have lights or make noise, the ghou will be warned of their approach, and he will hide himself around the corner just within the room. As the Neonates approach, he will fling himself upon the closest character and try to drink his or her blood. The ghou is by now so insane that he will fight until he is destroyed.

Anton

Image: A wild-eyed man in torn clothes, hair awry, gibbering with fear, madness and bloodlust.

Roleplaying Hints: Scream wildly, and attack the Neonates in a frenzy.

9. Fire Traps

The dotted line diagonally crossing each corner is a tripwire three inches off the ground. If the tripwire is pulled, a square, barred cage — seven feet high and open at the bottom — drops from the ceiling, trapping within it the character who triggered the trap. The cage has a large stone slab on top of it and weighs approximately 1200 pounds, requiring a dice pool of 9 to lift it. Bending the bars — to allow the victim within the cage to escape — requires a dice pool of 6.

Once the cage has fallen, the floor beneath it bursts into magically-created flames. These flames start at about 6 inches in height, and increase in height by one foot each turn until — after the seventh round — the cage is filled with flame. The fire lasts a total of ten rounds, then vanishes.



The victim in the cage must make a Stamina + Fortitude roll to resist damage from the fire, against a difficulty of 5. On turns one and two, the fire inflicts one wound per turn; on turns three through five, it inflicts two wounds per turn; and on turns six through 10 it inflicts three wounds per turn. Note that this is aggravated damage.

Apart from the damage — which is deadly enough — the situation of being trapped within a fire-filled cage is immensely terrifying to a vampire (or to anyone else!). Each turn, the victim must make a Courage roll against a difficulty of 8 or enter a Terror Frenzy — a potentially lethal development, since a victim in Frenzy can do little to save himself!

Obviously, once the trap has been triggered, it cannot be reset. Again, as with the dart trap, the easiest way to avoid the danger is to notice the tripwire and step over it. The fire traps were installed immediately before Mictlantecuhli went into Torpor to protect him from those who would invade his Haven.

10. Mirrors

The dotted line crossing the corridor represents a floor-to-ceiling mirror of metal, polished on both sides. The mirror is six feet wide in a 10-foot-wide corridor, meaning that there is a gap of two feet on either side — enough space for individuals to slip by. The metal is soft, and bullets will



penetrate it (successful damage dice are reduced by 10). (Note that the mirrors are intended merely as aggravations for the Neonates, and were originally intended to give the pyramid's defenders warning as to the invaders' location. Now it is quite likely characters will open fire on lights they see ahead of them — unaware that they are their own lights, reflected in the mirrors — thus wasting precious bullets.)

11. Pit Trap

This is another 10-by-10 foot pit, 10 feet deep, concealed by a magical illusion of floor. Characters watching the floor ahead gain a Wits + Occult roll against a difficulty of 8 to notice that the image of the floor shifts slightly, somewhat like a mirage. The illusion vanishes as soon as a material object passes through the plane of the floor.

As soon as an object weighing more than 100 pounds lands on the floor of the pit, a cubic block of stone just a little less than 10 feet on a side is released from the ceiling. Theoretically, this stone should drop free, instantly crushing anyone inside the pit, and completely filling it. Over the centuries, however, earthquakes have shaken the pyramid a little out of alignment. When the block is released, it falls about four feet, then stops with a loud grinding noise, dropping rock dust into the pit. The block is too heavy to remain stuck like this for long, however. The Neonates have two turns in which to pull one or more of their number out of the pit; at the end of the second turn, the block of stone falls free and slams into the pit. The top of the block is approximately level with the corridor floor.

A 10-by-10-by-10 block of stone weighs on the order of 90 tons. Any character caught beneath this block when it falls is Extinguished, and any equipment they may be carrying is unrecoverable.

12. Shrine of Friendship

When Mictlantecuhtli reached his agreement with the Lupines, the treaty was sealed with the exchange of items of value to both sides. Mictlantecuhtli bestowed upon the Lupines items of worked gold, which the werewolves have secreted somewhere safe. In return, the Lupines gave to Mictlantecuhtli four huge emeralds.

In this room there are four stone pedestals, carved from the same grey rock as the rest of the pyramid. Each pedestal bears an emerald the size of a man's fist, each of which is worth approximately \$200,000 to the right buyer.

Mictlantecuhtli placed the gems on display here largely as a reminder to his followers of the binding treaty with the Lupines. He also thought they would serve to remind his mortal priests that there was more to the world than they knew, and that he had ties to forces they did not understand.

Further, the gems represented yet another test — for both his Get and his mortal priests. Obviously, the gems were incredibly valuable, and thus a significant temptation. He

was interested in finding out whether greed would outweigh the fear of punishment, and prompt his followers to steal the gems.

Symbolically, Mictlantecuhltli thought it would be fitting if such a lapse in self-control were punished — at least in part — by further loss of self-control, to bring home to the thief the enormity of his or her weakness. Thus he cast various powerful rituals, in the form of a curse, on the stones. Anyone who carries one of these stones on their persons for more than six hours is subject to this magical curse.

For a mortal, the curse manifests itself as progressive loss of self-control, leading quickly to homicidal rages with little to no provocation. For a Vampire, each six hour period the character keeps one of the stones on her person, she temporarily loses one point of Self-Control. When the character's Self-Control score reaches zero, she immediately and automatically Frenzies. The character can terminate the Frenzy by making Willpower rolls as normal, but when the Frenzy ends she automatically gains a Rage Derangement. Lost Self-Control points return at a rate of one point per day, starting the day after the character has disposed of the stone.

13. Robing Room

This is another room where the priests of Mictlantecuhltli robed themselves before conducting ceremonies in his honor. The entire eastern wall is a sheet of silver metal polished to mirror-brightness. A spell has been cast on the metal mirror so that any Kindred who looks in it will see an image of himself consumed in flames, dying in agony. Any Kindred who views himself in the mirror must make a Courage roll against a difficulty of 6 or lose one point of Willpower. On a botch, the character loses two points of Willpower.

This magical mirror was created as yet another way of tempering Mictlantecuhltli's Get: by facing them with one of their greatest fears, he intended to develop their courage.

14. Crypt

In the center of the room is a low bier of intricately-carved limestone on which lies a motionless male figure. Like the bodies in room 4, he is dark-skinned and dark-haired, wearing a white linen robe. This figure is, in fact, the most trusted of Mictlantecuhltli's Vampire attendants (see *Dramatis Personae* below for statistics), currently lying in light Torpor. He is currently down to only two Blood Points, not the four Blood Points as stated below for the other attendants, and the scent of Kindred Vitae — whether from wounds suffered by the Neonates, or just the faint odor secreted by their skin — will be enough to rouse him. If unfamiliar Vampires — i.e., the characters — approach within six feet, he will rouse instantly and enter Frenzy, falling upon the stranger and trying to drink her blood. He will continue to Frenzy until he is destroyed, or until he has drunk eight Blood Points.

This attendant has a knife in a sheath at his hip. This knife has been imbued with magical powers, so that any wounds

it inflicts are considered Aggravated Damage. A character using Psychometry can learn that this weapon was created by Mictlantecuhltli himself and bestowed as a gift upon a loyal servant.

The room and the crypt were constructed as a personal Haven for Mictlantecuhltli's favorite attendant.

15. "Empty" Room

When the Neonates first entered the pyramid, their lights and the sounds of their movements alerted a Vampire attendant who was in this room to their existence. Using Obfuscate, he conceals himself in the northeast corner of the room. If detected, he will fight to the death to destroy the intruders. If the Neonates do not spot him immediately, he will follow them, attacking from behind when their attention is elsewhere (pushing one or more characters into the various traps, for example).

Before Mictlantecuhltli entered Torpor, this room was used as a small "chapel", a room in which ceremonies of lesser significance were performed.

16. Corridor of Fire

This hallway is magically warded against Kindred. Mortals can pass through it unhindered; when a Vampire reaches





the middle of the corridor, however, flames burst from the walls in a silent concussion of fire and fill the entire hallway for a period of one turn. Any Kindred within the hallway suffers two Health Levels of damage; victims can roll Stamina + Fortitude against a difficulty of six to resist this damage. After the fire has been triggered once, the warding is totally discharged and Vampires can traverse the corridor safely.

A character with senses heightened by Auspex is entitled to a Perception roll against a difficulty of eight. If he achieves one or more successes, he senses an aura of magical power blocking the hallway, although he gains no more information about what that power might be capable of doing. The only way a Vampire can traverse the hallway without triggering the warding is if he or she is wearing — not carrying — one of the black stone rings worn by the Vampire attendants of Mictlantecuhltli.

17. High Priest's Tomb

Lying on a low stone bier in the center of this room is another perfectly-preserved, dark male figure. This was, in life, the high priest of Mictlantecuhltli. There is a wound in his throat, and his body is drained completely of blood. Around his neck, on a fine gold chain, is a black stone pendant in the shape of a rayed sun, about as big as a man's palm. A character who uses Psychometry on this pendant will sense that it is imbued with faint magical energy, although the nature of its powers — if any — is unclear. This

Discipline will also indicate that it was the high priest himself who imbued it with its magic.

During his life, this black sun symbol was indicative of the man's position as high priest of Mictlantecuhltli. As such, it allowed him to gain entrance to the "god's" Haven on the sub-level of the pyramid, and this was a matter of great pride to the man. Even death was unable to eradicate the priest's pride in what the pendant represented.

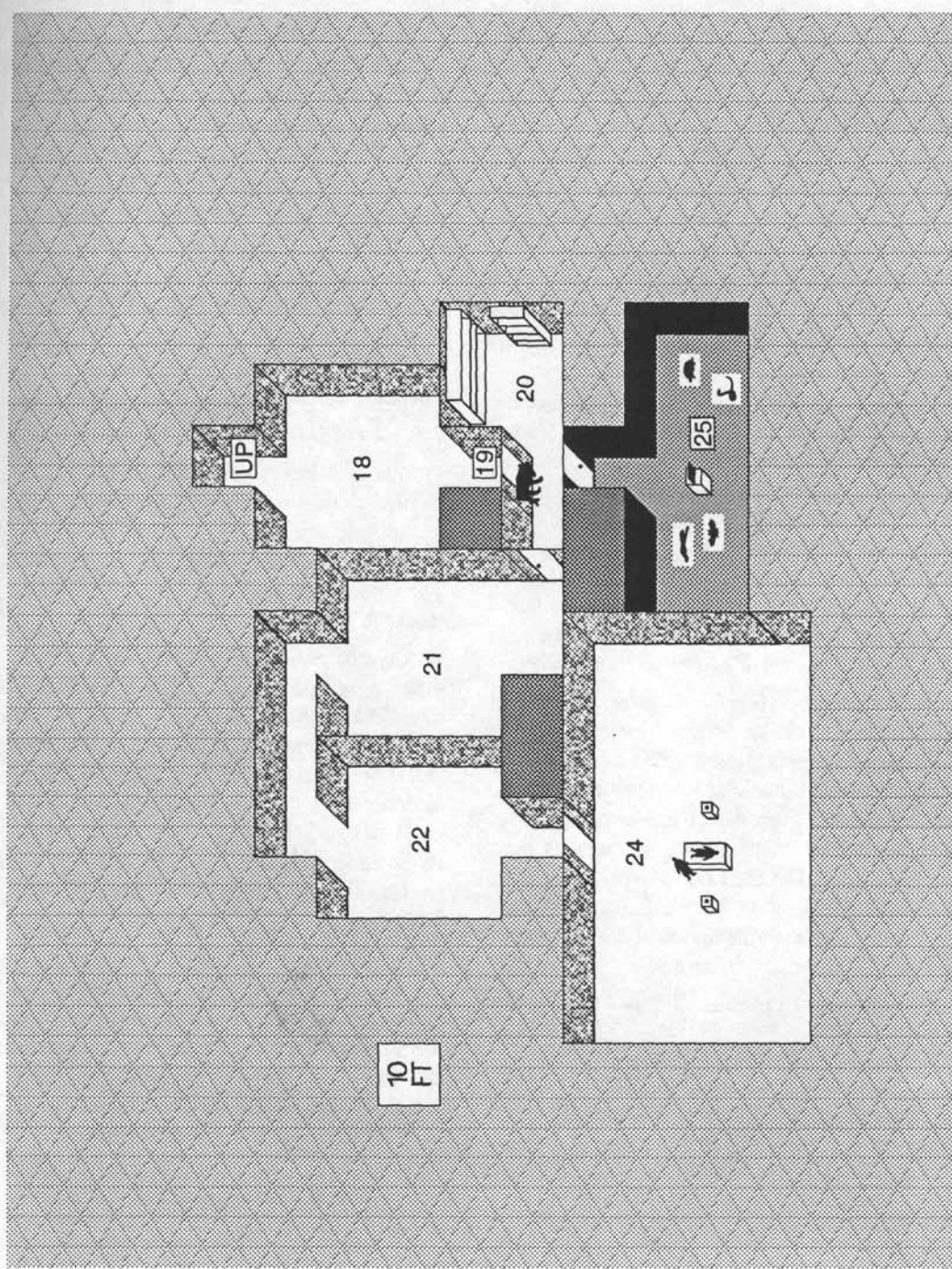
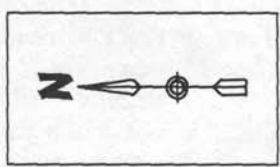
If anyone removes the pendant from around the priest's neck, his spirit will manifest itself as an insubstantial figure, and attack whoever possesses the pendant. This spirit has a "touch" attack which allows it to drain Willpower. It attacks with eight dice against the victim's Wits + Dodge. Every success drains one Willpower point from the victim. If the victim has Fortitude, the drain can be resisted by a Courage + Fortitude roll with a target of 9. For every success, one less Willpower point is lost. In addition, the spirit has a three rating in the Lure of Flames aspect of Thaumaturgy.

The spirit cannot be harmed by any attack, whether physical, mental or magical. The only way to destroy it is to burn the priest's body to ashes. Unlike the other spirits in room 4, this apparition is not bound to this room, and will pursue the Neonates until it or they are destroyed.

Originally, before the construction of the lower level, this room was Mictlantecuhltli's personal Haven. As his soul-weariness grew, he became concerned that other Kindred might seek him out and attempt to destroy him. Using his growing Thaumaturgical prowess, he enchanted the Corri-



PYRAMID OF MICTLANTECUHTLI SUB-LEVEL



The Pyramid

Graphics Copyright 1992 by Brian J. Blume

dor of Flame as a defense mechanism. Since he and his Get needed free run of the entire pyramid, he created the black stone rings as tokens of passage to prevent the fire trap from harming those who had a right to be in the chambers.

Sub-Level

On this level the floors are all packed earth, and the ceilings are much lower — no more than seven feet. Again, there is no artificial lighting.

18. Hall of Fear

This room has been enspelled with powerful magics affecting the mind of any Kindred who enters. As soon as the characters enter this room, their minds are possessed by its enchantment. Each character suddenly finds himself alone, or so it seems; to each character, it appears that the others have suddenly vanished, and that he is alone in this room (This will probably require that the Storyteller handle each player individually, in private.).

Once he is alone, the character is faced by a physical foe who embodies what the character most fears. The Nature chosen by the player for the character might well give the Storyteller a clue. A Bravo might be faced by an even bigger bully than he is; a Deviant by a representative of authority; a Plotter by someone who knows all his secrets and will tell them to the world. If the character's Nature or behavior does not give the Storyteller a clue, something generic — like a humanoid being consisting entirely of flame, or one who burns with the light of the sun — would be appropriate.

No matter what appearance this foe takes on, its Physical Attributes and combat skills are exactly the same as the character (although the player should not know this). The foe immediately attempts to make the character Frenzy, in whatever way seems the most effective: insults, taunts, attacks on the character's deepest fears, or perhaps even outright physical attack. The foe knows everything about the character, and so knows his or her weaknesses. (This is because the foe is actually a manifestation of the character's own subconscious fears and death-wish.)

If the foe enters combat, it uses its teeth and claws. The character must fight it hand-to-hand; the only weapons allowed to the character are melee weapons that have somehow been imbued with magical powers. The character is free to use Celerity, Fortitude or Potence (if he has them) to better his odds against the foe, but neither combatant can use any other Disciplines.

The character fails the Test of Fear if he is driven to Frenzy. If this happens, the wounds he suffered are healed, but he permanently loses one point of Courage. A character reduced to zero Courage can never again resist a Terror Frenzy. (This loss is in addition to any consequences of the Frenzy itself.)

The character is considered to have passed the Test of Fear if he avoids Frenzy and manages to defeat the foe (The meaning of "defeat" depends on how the foe approached the character, and is up to the Storyteller.) Once the foe is defeated, it vanishes, and any wounds the character may have sustained are healed. Furthermore, the character temporarily gains one point of Courage and one point of Humanity; these temporary points last for 12 hours, a reward for the character conquering his fear.

Each character must experience this encounter the first time he or she enters this room. From the point of view of a character standing outside the room, watching another character, the encounter is invisible and instantaneous. One moment the character in the room is normal, the next he or she could well be in Frenzy, with no immediately apparent precipitating factor.

Obviously, Mictlantecuhli created this room — and the Hall of Dark Dreams and Hall of Victims described below — as part of his campaign to test and temper his Kindred followers.

19. The Jaguar Door

This is a heavy door carved from a beautiful amber-colored wood. Worked into the door is an intricate carving of the face of a jaguar. The two eyes are highly-polished black stones that catch and reflect any light that falls on them. The work is so intricate and beautiful that the jaguar almost seems to be alive.

Any character who examines the carving closely must make a Willpower roll against her Perception (possibly modified by Auspex). On a failed roll, the character is entranced by the carving and will remain motionless, staring at it in wonder, until he is dragged away by companions, or his view of the carving is blocked. On a botch, the character must make a Self-Control roll against a difficulty of five or fly into a Rage Frenzy. If a character has been entranced by the carving, the Storyteller should make a note of it.

On the other side of the door, a creature is prowling: a jaguar that has been turned into a ghoul by the Vampire attendants (see below). This creature will attack intruders on sight, and will fight until it is destroyed. Any character who has been entranced by the jaguar door must make a Courage roll with a difficulty of seven when attacked by the jaguar ghoul, or Frenzy. The sounds of combat will immediately summon the Vampire attendant from room 20 to join the fray.

The Jaguar

Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Alertness 5, Brawl 4, Dodge 5, Potence 3, Celerity 2. It attacks physically with a bite and a claw attack each turn. In both cases it attacks with six dice; difficulty is five for bite and four for claws. A bite inflicts damage 7, while a claw attack inflicts damage 6.

20. Storage Room

Once a storage room, this is now used as a Haven by the Vampire attendant to whom the jaguar ghoul is Blood Bound. If the attendant defeats any intruders, it will be here that he retreats to tend any wounds he has suffered.

21. The Hall of Dark Dreams

The enchantment cast on this room affects the minds of any Kindred who enter it, in much the same way as did room 18. Again, each individual to enter suddenly believes himself to be alone ...

But only for a moment. Suddenly he is surrounded by insubstantial images of people from his past who witnessed or otherwise were aware of his greatest failures. Maybe the shades surrounding him were victims of these failures, or caused them. In any case, the shades start taunting the character about the failures, laughing at him and deriding him, trying their best to totally humiliate him. The character is unable to do anything physical to stop the taunting; the shades are completely insubstantial and cannot be harmed in any way. Any attempt to physically harm them will automatically fail, giving them yet another thing to taunt the character about.

This is a good opportunity for roleplaying. The Storyteller should pull embarrassing incidents out of the character's past, and ridicule the character's — not the player's — actions. The ridicule will continue until the character realizes the shades are playing on her sense of self-doubt, and decides to steadfastly ignore the taunting, or stands up for her actions in a forthright and honest way. At this point, the player should make a Perception + Empathy roll against a difficulty of 7. On a successful roll, the character temporarily gains one point of Self-Control; this temporary gain lasts 12 hours, a reward for confronting self-doubt. On a failed roll, she permanently loses one point of Self-Control, and must immediately make a Self-Control roll — using her new level — against a difficulty of 6 or fly into Frenzy. On a botch, the character Frenzies and gains a Rage Derangement. A character reduced to zero Self-Control can never again resist a Rage Frenzy. Each character must experience this confrontation

the first time she enters this room. Again, from the point of view of a character standing outside the room, watching another character, the confrontation is invisible and instantaneous.

22. Hall of Victims

In this room, Kindred undergo another mental test in which they must come to terms with the many deaths on their conscience. The set-up is similar to that of the previous room: each Kindred who enters the room suddenly finds himself alone, then an instant later is surrounded by shadowy figures of his many victims. These insubstantial shapes wail



◊obb 92

and cry, blaming the character for sending them to the hell they currently inhabit. The shades swarm around the character, buffeting at him and blocking his vision. There is no way of physically attacking these shapes or driving them off. They will not listen to his justifications or his anger, and react as though they simply don't hear him.

After this has continued for a short time — during which the player should be encouraged to roleplay his character's reaction — require a Perception roll against a difficulty of 6 (possibly modified by Auspex). On a successful roll, the character spots the figure of a child, standing motionless just beyond the chaos of the swirling shapes. This child, staring wide-eyed and fearful, looks exactly as the character did when he was a child. The character must now make a Wits + Empathy roll against a difficulty of 6. If the roll is successful, the character realizes that — in some way — this small figure is the child that he once was, frightened and horrified now by what he has become. The child needs to be accepted and welcomed, the character senses.

It is up to the player how his character responds to this child. If he reacts in any accepting or nurturing way — hugging it, speaking soothingly to it, greeting it as a lost friend, etc. — he has passed the test. He temporarily gains one point each of Conscience and Humanity; this temporary gain lasts 12 hours, a reward for coming to terms with his own lost innocence.

If the character fails either roll, or reacts negatively to the child, he instantly and permanently loses one point each of Conscience and Humanity, and must immediately make a



Conscience roll — using his new level — against a difficulty of 6 or fly into Frenzy. On a botch, the character Frenzies and gains a Madness Derangement. A character reduced to zero Conscience can never again resist a Madness Frenzy.

Each character must experience this confrontation the first time he or she enters this room. Again, from the point of view of a character standing outside the room, watching another character, the confrontation is invisible and instantaneous.

23. The “Black Sun” Portal

The door is heavy and strong, carved out of light-colored wood. Carved into the door is an emblem of a multi-rayed sun (the same symbol as that worn around the neck of the priest in room 17); this sun symbol is almost three feet in diameter, and is stained black. Inset into the center of the sun is a smaller copy of the symbol, about the size of a man’s palm, made of polished black stone. (This stone symbol is exactly the same size, shape and material as the priest’s pendant.) Psychometry will indicate to a character that this stone symbol — but not the door as a whole — is imbued with magical energy. (If the character has already assayed the priest’s pendant symbol, on a Perception + Occult roll he can recognize that the patterns of magical energy in both symbols are virtually identical.)

The door has no handle or doorknob, and is securely locked from within. There is no apparent locking mechanism, however, and no keyhole. (Thus it is impossible to “shoot out the lock”.) Breaking down the door requires a Dice Pool of 5 (see page 145 of the Vampire rulebook), but the commotion will definitely give everyone within room 24 one turn (at least) to prepare for action.

In fact, the door is magically secured, and the symbol that the priest from room 17 was wearing as a pendant is the key. If the rayed sun symbol from the pendant is placed in contact with the similar symbol set in the middle of the door, the door will unlock and silently swing open. The Kindred — and other creatures — within room 24 will be surprised and unable to act for one turn.

This magical portal is the last defense Mictlantecuhtli created to guard his resting place. He recognized that when he awoke from Torpor he would need assistance in regaining his strength, and so designed a door with a magical lock, rather than a portal only he could open from the inside.

24. Mictlantecuhtli’s Haven

The room has a 12-foot-high ceiling, and the floor is paved with slabs of the same stone that makes up the walls and ceilings. Much of the wall-space is covered with intricate mosaics. (This is human work, and hence has no hypnotic or magical effect.) The room is lit by two bronze braziers set on stone pedestals. In the center of the room is a low stone bier on which lies a sallow-skinned, dark-haired



figure wearing a long black robe, bedecked with gold jewelry; this figure is Mictlantecuhtli himself.

Standing beside Mictlantecuhtli is a Vampire attendant, wearing the familiar white robe. He has a “black sun” symbol — like the one worn by the priest interred in room 17 — worn as a pendant around his neck. In addition, he has a knife in a sheath at his hip. This knife is similar to the one possessed by the attendant in room 14, in that any wound it inflicts is considered Aggravated Damage. The attendant has self-inflicted wounds at his wrists, and Mictlantecuhtli has blood on his lips and chin.

If the Neonates have opened the door silently, then they will catch the attendant in the midst of his activity: carefully feeding Mictlantecuhtli blood from his wrists to re-establish his own Blood Pool. (This was a dangerous activity, but the Methuselah managed to avoid Frenzy during the early stages of the process.) The attendant will be surprised for one turn when the door swings silently open; on the next turn, however, he will leap to the attack. The turn after, Mictlantecuhtli will slowly sit up and stare at the Neonates with eyes that look blood-red in the firelight.

If the Neonates had to break down the door, the attendant within will be alerted to their presences. As soon as they open the door, the attendant will fall upon them. On the next turn, Mictlantecuhtli will sit up and stare at the Neonates.

The stare of a Methuselah like Mictlantecuhtli is a terrifying thing to behold, even without factoring in his Dominate and Presence disciplines. This is particularly so since the Neonates were probably expecting to find him safely in Torpor when they arrived to drink his vitæ ...

Presumably, the Neonates will be armed with guns, and will start pumping rounds into the attendants. As soon as Mictlantecuhtli sees this and realizes that the strange objects in the intruders’ hands can inflict damage at a distance, he will establish his Puissant Shield (see Chapter 3) to protect himself. He will then enter the fray, using his powers to their best effect. Each time a Neonate is wounded, Mictlantecuhtli must make a Conscience roll against a difficulty of 5 or Frenzy.

If the Neonates manage to defeat Mictlantecuhtli, they can drink his ancient and potent vitæ.

Mictlantecuhtli wears gold rings, chains, bracers and earrings worth about \$50,000 on the open market. Further, around the Methuselah’s neck hangs a large iron key on a fine chain. This is the key to the treasure room, room 25.

25. Treasure Room

The door is securely locked. The key to this lock hangs around the neck of Mictlantecuhtli himself. The door can be broken down; this requires a Dice Pool of 4.

Within this room are some of the treasures of Mictlantecuhtli. The walls are painted unrelieved black, while the ceiling and floor are painted blood-red. Clay effigies of various mythological creatures stand about the floor. These range in size from a foot-high representation of a lion-headed dragon to a full-size replica of a jaguar. So fine is the workmanship that the figures almost seem alive. These effigies range in weight from about 20 pounds up to several hundred pounds, and would prove valuable to the right

Chapter Six:

Conclusion

There can be several interesting consequences of this story. If the Neonates succeeded in drinking the Vitae of Mictlantecuhtli, then one — or perhaps more, if they used the Ritual of the Bitter Rose — will have advanced in Generation. To have defeated Mictlantecuhtli, they would also have had to destroy or drive away his servitors within the pyramid, which means that there will be no Kindred left to complicate the unlife of the Neonates in the future. (Storytellers can certainly add such complications if they like, of course. Some suggestions are provided in a later section.)

The Neonates might not have succeeded, however. They might have been driven off, or outright destroyed, by Mictlantecuhtli, his servitors and his other defenses. If he has not been destroyed, Mictlantecuhtli will continue the slow return to full activity and power that he has begun. When he feels healthy once more, he will emerge from his pyramid, possibly with the intention of reestablishing a Mayan empire in the Yucatan with him as its divine leader (The Mexican government would not look too kindly on this, of course. Neither would the Inconnu, since Mictlantecuhtli's actions would probably be a severe threat to the Masquerade.). If he survives, Mictlantecuhtli's future plans are entirely up to the Storyteller. Should the Neonates have been driven off rather than destroyed, they might decide that it is their duty to see the Wanderer eliminated, and try to gain assistance from other Kindred they know. A surviving Mictlantecuhtli can be the center of many future stories.

The Return of Pietr

Pietr, the Diabolist who destroyed Sheaffer in Chicago, is obsessed with the idea of drinking Mictlantecuhtli's Vitae. It is possible that he learned of the Neonates' journey to Tzentel, and followed them. His hope in this was that they would fail in defeating the Methuselah and be Extinguished, but that they would weaken the Wanderer's defenses in so doing — weaken them sufficiently for him to finish what they started.

If the Neonates have defeated or driven off the Lupines from outside the pyramid, there is no reason why Pietr could not be waiting in ambush for them to emerge. Even if they

have already destroyed Mictlantecuhtli, Pietr has much to gain from destroying them — namely, access to whatever treasure they might have found within the Wanderer's Haven. If he is waiting in ambush, Pietr will have armed himself with — at the very least — a powerful hunting rifle. He could also have hired or Dominated unscrupulous mortals to help him gun down his rivals.

Complications

The Storyteller can make many changes and add countless twists to this story. Following are several simple suggestions that Storytellers can use as "seeds" from which to build their own complications.

Perhaps other Kindred from their home city are on the trail of the Neonates, attempting to head them off before they can drink the Vitae of the Wanderer, or planning to destroy them should they succeed. The possible motives behind this are various. The pursuers might be Elders, or even members of the Inconnu, who wish to stamp out all Anarchs who perform — or even plot to perform — Diablerie. Alternately, they may be Anarchs who fear the Neonates will become direct threats to their plans, or the pursuers might have the same intention as Pietr: letting the Neonates operate as unwitting "point men", tripping the defenses of Mictlantecuhtli's pyramid and then moving in themselves to drink the Antediluvian's blood. (If Pietr is waiting for the Neonates outside the pyramid, this could lead to a three-way battle.)

Even after the Neonates have succeeded, the story does not have to be over. Some of the Kindred from their home city (especially if it is Chicago) might have figured out what the Neonates were planning when they went to Mexico, and could well have passed on their conclusions to the Prince. The Neonates could return to find a full-scale Blood Hunt awaiting them. Even if nobody knew beforehand what their intentions were, if they return to Chicago having drunk the vitae of a Fourth Generation Vampire, many Kindred will detect the "taint" of Diablerie on their souls, and react accordingly. The Neonates could well discover that their efforts have earned them not only an advance in effective Generation, but the undying animosity of Chicago's entire Kindred society!