Ordo Dracul
a sourcebook for:
Vampire
THE REQUIEM

Dragon Fire

by Will Hindmarch and Christopher Kobar

The dragon was born when she died. When Price killed her. It slipped out of her body with her blood and took off running through the streets of the city. It was a living thing now, just like the elders at the Order said it would be. It vanished into the asphalt and the orange lights of the city, so Price had to follow its tail to keep up with it. He caught sight of it when it doubled back to the crime scene — when the police found her body. He caught a glimpse in the newspaper — when her obituary was printed. He watched it stalk the pallbearers and circle around her house after the funeral. He followed it back to the streets, where it sniffed after the homicide detectives and ran with them as they flushed three low-rent hoods out of a crack house like quail from a dead bush.

Price was there that night, when the detectives and their uniformed muscle climbed chain link fences to keep up with those hoods. The dragon was on their heels that night, breathing the fire of fear at their backs.

The hoods stumbled through an overgrown yard littered with rusted swing sets and crashed into the closed remains of an abandoned Catholic school called St. Anthony's. Price crouched down on a dumpster outside the yard and pumped hot blood into his ears and eyes. A spot of blood wetted his nostril. The cracks in the school windows became clear in his eyes and the yard separated into a million tiny green swords. He could hear the echoing voices of the hoods inside now. Screams. Sudden, repeated and terrified shouts.

The uniforms were coming up on the school now, slowly, with their flashlight beams like probing white lances in the dark. They didn't hear the first screams, but they heard the last ones, when the hoods came charging back out of the school onto the points of the police lances.

The dragon is insidious. It doesn't just hunt, it lures and herds and traps its prey. It sometimes drives victims into its own lair. Or so the elders said. Price was seeing it now for the first time — the wyrm had lead them to its nest.

"You have the right to remain silent," one of the uniforms said. Price could hear her voice across the yard in his blood-warmed ears. "You have the right to an attorney."

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The attorney was a second-hand cannibal. He drank the blood of his fellow man, but he didn't have the grit to get it himself. It was served to him by a friend he'd known since law school, when they were both alive and their good looks had been boyish and real. They were fraternity brothers and roommates back then, sharing an apartment on the South Side near Hyde Park.

The attorney was Dwight Holcomb. His friend was Edward Price. Now they divided the two halves of the day between themselves, seeing each other only in downtown bars during the talkative early hours after work, when Holcomb's time turned into Price's time, day into night. Holcomb bought Islay single-malt scotch by the glass for Price to smell and, sometimes, swish around. Price gave Holcomb mouthfuls of his blood in the marble-floored men's room stalls of swank hotel bars.

Holcomb brushed his hands through his hair in the picture-framed bathroom mirror while Price buttoned his cuff and licked his wrist near the door, as far from the mirror as he could get. "The uniforms confirmed their story," Holcomb said over his shoulder. "Those guys wanted out of that school enough they picked jail over it."

"Sure they didn't pick it over a pissed boss?" Price asked as he watched Holcomb make faces and scrutinize his five o'clock shadow in the mirror.

"The cops I talked to said these guys aren't the first. The uniforms don't go in that school. Guy I talked to said their psych benefits aren't that good." Holcomb pulled on his ears. "I'm thinking of growing my sideburns back in."

"What were the words he used?"

"The 'banger?"

"Yeah."

"He said he heard a voice, a kid's voice. His buddy said he saw eyes open up. He said 'in the wall.' He said 'the eyes were in the wall.'" Holcomb looked back at Price. "Is that something for the Order?"

"I don't know." Price had been looking for something he could take to the elders at the Order of the Dragon chapter house, something that would get him noticed. "I'll see what the Philosopher says."

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The Philosopher had a name. But the Dragons called her simply "the Philosopher." She had the severe voice of a school marm and hands like bird feet.

The first thing she ever said to Price was "Why?" She kept an office in a small, round room of the chapter house. It was a cellar room, but the brick walls and circular floor made it feel like tower to Price. She sat behind her desk, surrounded by waist- and shoulder-high stacks of newspapers and books with yellowed pages. The wall behind her was a layer of maps depicting Chicago as a grid of streets criss-crossed by lines like escapees from a mariner's chart. The room was cold and wet like mold.

"I'd like to look at the history of St. Anthony's middle school," Price said. A note from the Philosopher could get a Dragon into the Historical Society archives after hours, when a Dragon could make use of them. Price wanted a note.

The Philosopher nodded. "The stories about St. Anthony's are old ones, but I don't know that any Dragon has ever given them a good look. You think they might suggest the location of a Wyrm's Nest?"

"Yes, ma'am. I hope so."

"Give it a look, then, Supplicant." The Philosopher leaned forward on her desk. "I'm relieved to see you pursuing our Great Work, Edward. We'd been concerned that you would never move beyond your rank. If this goes well, you might be able to attract a mentor for yourself." Her wooden chair squealed as she leaned back. "Tell the archivist your name and title. Are you going tonight?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then tonight you are Inquiring. Tell the archivist that you are Inquiring."

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The archivist was a wad of a man, like an oily rag. The little hair he had was grown long and splayed across his mottled head. He had wide glasses, stiff untamed whiskers and food on his face. He left a mark on the glass like a huge fingerprint when he leaned against it to get a look at Price.

"We open at nine in the morning," he said through the glass.

"Mr. Laskowitz, I'm Edward Price, Dedicated and Inquiring Supplicant of Hunger," Price said too loudly into the window. He didn't want to shout but he wanted to be heard.

Laskowitz squinted at him. His face was dubious but his hands were slaves to the Order — while he scrutinized Price, he unlocked the door. "Good evening, Supplicant," he said as Price stepped in.

"Good evening, Slave." Price didn't want to look at him anymore. He craned his neck to see into cases displaying World's Columbian Exposition photos and an old policeman's hat.

"That's not appropriate, Dragon," Laskowitz spit back, locking the door. His eyes went to Price's hands and throat. Price knew that look. Holcomb had that look. "I'm no Slave." Laskowitz waggled a fat finger at him. "If anything, you should call me Mister Laskowitz." He stomped off to a basement door and lead Price down the stairs.

Both the filing cabinets and the filing system were historical relics. The ceiling of the room was made of metal pipes and the floor was painted cement softened by worn-out throw rugs. The shelves and filing cabinets were so close together that Price wedged himself against either side of an aisle to prop himself up when he found the articles he was after.

St. Anthony's caught fire in the 1970s. A child burned to death inside. The *Tribune* article reported a principal's theory that the young boy had started the fire. The final straw for the school came later, though, when cleaning crews discovered things in the basement furnace room. Underwear, photographs. Though investigations suggested the things that happened in that basement happened between teachers, the school was scandalized and out of money. The following June, summer break started and never ended. That was it for St. Anthony's.

Price was folding the papers back into the filing cabinets when Laskowitz came over to do it correctly. "You here for the Kaga—"

"Kogaion. No, I'm here on my own."

Laskowitz grunted.

"Mr. Laskowitz, do you know much about regency? About territory rights around St. Anthony's?"

"That whole neighborhood is spill-over feeding ground for the Nosferatu. Or was."

"So if I wanted to go poking around over there—"

"Scratch." Laskowitz shoved the file cabinet door shut and grunted again. "You'd have to see Scratch."

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Scratch arrived at the chapter house an hour late and seventy years out of style. He was a Dragon, ranked and unsworn, with slim ties to the Order. His heart, it seemed, was in the baser aspects of his Requiem — blood and talk. He wore it on his sleeve. Scratch came in a ridiculously cut black, but almost green, suit and a camel hair overcoat. A fedora capped off his fashions and clashed with his sickly white, filthy flesh. His skin was caked and dry. A wet moth stuck to his neck near his ear.

"You Price?" he asked as he leaned into the Academy's dark brown foyer. He seemed impatient.

"Edward Price, Dedicated Supplicant—"

"Yeah, all right. I'm Scratch. Scholar, Terror, et cetera." He stepped in and shut the front door behind him. Outside, rain was splashing down the cellar stairs and pooling outside the door. "Philosopher says you want to see St. Anthony's."

Price frowned. "That's right."

"That you're looking for ghosts. A haunt."

"A nest, but I'll take whatever I get."

Scratch sniffed. "Yeah you will. Shadow?"

"I'm sorry? I mean, am I—? Yes."

"You have the sight?"

"I... well, I'm unpracticed. But yes."

"Guess you're all set to be disappointed by urban legends, then. Who's your mentor?"

Price didn't want the conversation to go this way now. "Well, the Philosopher suggested you might be, Scholar." Scratch just stared at him. Price could hear the rain rattling outside. "I don't have a mentor right now."

"You and me both. Only I don't really want a student." Scratch plucked the moth from his neck and flicked it to the floor.

"I'm just fine without a mentor," Price lied. He was just fine without Scratch as a mentor is what he meant.

"Great. Then we'll just play house for a couple of nights, make the Philosopher happy and get on with our Requiems. I'll show the little ropes I know, but you gotta make me a promise." Scratch's yellow-white eyes digging into Price's face. The Nosferatu craned his neck forward like a vulture.

Price wanted very badly to avoid promising anything. "What's that?"

"You don't ever turn that sight on me. Not ever. I don't trust that nonsense and you'd do well to second-guess it, too."

The were both quiet for a long moment. Finally, Price said, "All right." Scratch nodded and opened the door again. "We go now?" Price asked.

"No," Scratch said, adjusting his fedora. "First we're gonna buy a recipe."

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The recipe-seller's shop was a used bookstore underneath a converted warehouse building in Printer's Row. It was packed tight with modern best-sellers and old-fashioned folios, stuffed under the squat brick building like papers shoved under a bed. It's low, beamed ceiling and tiny aisles was a place for books, not people. Price and Scratch had to walk sideways and hold their jackets shut to get around in it.

But it was exactly the kind of place Price wanted to find. It was easy to believe the dragon's tail had passed through the shop many times. It smelled like licorice and incense. Framed etchings dangled on the walls.

The recipe-seller was a friendly secret kept by Dragons and Acolytes alike. As they walked up to the little green door that lead into the shop, Price noticed a bit of Dragon graffiti — a serpent eating its own tail.

Price caught Scratch by the sleeve. "This guy's a Dragon, right?"

Scratch yanked his arm away. "No. Kim's mortal." Price put on a poker face and Scratch rolled his eyes. "Calm down. He's in on it. They say he's a mage."

"Really?"

"Probably bullshit. Either way, he does *great work.*"

"That's funny."

Kim was younger than Price expected, maybe thirty years old. He had Korean features but an English demeanor. His right side was held up by a metal elbow-crutch. He and Scratch whispered together a time while Price waited by the door. Scratch held a finger up to him — "hold on," it said — before finally waving Price up.

"Kim says he's got a recipe for ghosts. Gets 'em out of the woodwork. It's not cheap, but Kim's reputation is worth it. I say. You're buying right?"

Price looked at Kim. He was flipping through a card catalogue, ignoring the Dragons in his shop. Scratch drummed his fingers once. "Yeah, all right," Price said.

"Swell. We'll take it, Kim. What are we gonna need to bake this cake?"

Kim slid an index card onto the counter. It had been typed on both sides by an old manual typewriter. "Your ghost is a burn victim? You'll need a fire. The book says you'll get his attention with a fire," Kim said in a London accent.

Price held up a hand. "A fire? Wait a minute—"

Scratch waved him off. "It's fine. I can play with fire."

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Scratch waggled the bottle of lighter fluid over the linoleum floor. Inside, the classrooms still had books on the shelves, posters on the walls, and writing on the chalkboards. When the place was abandoned it was just left as it was. The principal or whoever just locked the door and tried to forget the place ever existed. Almost half the building, however, had turned into a flaking black mass in the fire. Smoke stains reach up the hallways like black hands. To find something that would really burn, Scratch and Price had to sort through the second-floor classrooms.

When Scratch snapped open his Zippo, Price jumped. The spot of light from the little flame made the rest of the room darker. Scratch lit a chalkboard eraser on fire and tossed it onto the fluid-soaked teacher's desk. It whooshed into a yellow brick of fire and the whole room lit up, orange and hot.

Price and Scratch hadn't spoken since they got inside. Price read the recipe card twice while he waited for Scratch to get the fire ready. For the most part, it suggested the appropriate way to speak so as to avoid offending a ghost. It also described how to spot a person possessed by a ghost. It also said that the ghosts of burn victims could sometimes be seen by firelight.

But after a while, the desk's fire weakened and Price got tired of pacing the room. He headed for the hall. "Don't go out there," Scratch said. "If we don't see him in here, we're not going to see him. Be patient."

"This isn't working," said Price. He leaned into the blackened hallway, his shoes sticking on the softened linoleum. Looking into the dark, he instinctually pushed blood into his eyes. "There's got to be something in here," he said to himself.

"Just wait," said Scratch.

Without really meaning too, Price stirred the blood in his eyes again and flexed his vision, pulling the colors out the walls and the air. To his eyes, everything in the school began to smoke with a halo of light.

When Scratch pulled his gaze away from the fire again, he found Price staring at him. His head moved like he was watching bugs in the air. "What are you doing?"

Price stopped, looked away, then looked back at the fire. "I thought I saw something. In the fire."

"Show me," said Scratch, pointing at the fire.

Price stepped closer to it, stiff and hesitant. "It's, uh, it's gone now."

"What did it look like?"

"A child's face. It was... a child's face," Price lied. What he'd seen was rippling black lines growing out from the Scratch's halo, like the black snakes Price used to light up on the Fourth of July. His sire had told him what that meant — he said it was the "bleeding out of a Kindred's soul." Scratch was a diablerist.

"What did it look like?"

"It was a, uh, white kid. A boy. Wearing a school uniform."

"Uh huh," said Scratch. "Funny I missed it." He walked over to one of the small, metal student desks.

"Maybe it was my imagination."

"Maybe it was the sight, Price. Maybe it was—" Scratch hurled the desk into Price's back, knocking him against the burning teacher's desk. The fire was resurrected in a flash. Price's human grunt as he was hit became an animal shriek. He started to stand, to get away from the desk, but Scratch was on him, pinning him down with the legs of a student's desk, like lion tamer. "Maybe it was your fucking *promise*, Supplicant!" Scratch hollered at Price and waggled his head.

Price was gone. In his place was a burnt-black figure, oozing steaming blood and hissing behind long white fangs. Its eyes were sealed against the flames, stuck shut with burned blood. It flailed and kicked in a useless panic, until it got its feet flat on the ground. In a rush it pushed Scratch back with enough force that the student's desk's metal legs punched through Price's burnt chest like it was plaster, dry and brittle. The Price-Beast pushed the two of them across the room to the blackboard, where half a lesson was still written out in chalk. Scratch snarled as his back his the chalk tray. He could see it in Price's legs, though. He just had to hold out for another second or so.

He summoned up sounds, any sounds, and shouted them over the terrified roar of his Beast. With a feeling like swallowing his guts, Scratch pushed his Beast back into its cage as Price's corpse broke apart at the fingers and feet. Its shins crumbled into ash and its fingers turned to soot on Scratch's coat. When he dropped the desk that held it back, it pulled Price's flaking corpse to the ground. It dried and split apart, like burnt wood.

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The eyes appeared in the scale-like black burns on the wall. Two blue disks on clean white fields. The rest of the boy was charred black and bald. Standing against the wall, he looked like part of the building. Scratch supposed he was.

"This probably does it, boy," Scratch said. "What did I say? The stories can only get told for so long before somebody comes looking. Believe me." Scratch stumbled to the door. "The dragon has a long tail. Others will come."

The boy lowered his jaw. A mouthful of wrinkled flame burned on his tongue.

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It has come to my attention that in the process of completing **Bloodlines: The Hidden**, I did not give proper credit where credit was due. Jean-Sebastien Rossbach produced some amazing illustrations for **Bloodlines: The Hidden**, and I am sorry that he was not listed, as he should have been, among the other artists that worked on the book.

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Introduction

Everything perfect in its kind has to transcend its own kind, it must become something different and incomparable. In some notes the nightingale is still a bird; then it rises above its class and seems to suggest to every winged creature what singing is truly like.
— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The Requiem is a difficult thing to bear alone, and so the Kindred turn to the covenants, societies of their own kind, in order to make their existence less horrific. Some, like the Invictus, invest their time and energy in the edacious pursuit of temporal power, honing their political acumen on the backs of their fellow Kindred with nary a care for the consequences of their actions so long as they personally benefit. Even the Carthians are willing to sacrifice some principles as long as they can score a victory over their ideological rivals. Others, like the Lancea Sanctum and the Circle of the Crone, concern themselves first and foremost with matters spiritual, using religion to ease the souls of those within their ranks as well as to condemn those who will not adopt their canon. Political influence is still important, but it becomes merely a tool by which these covenants' dire faiths can be spread and their doctrines made the unquestioned law of the night. Politics and religion are easy to understand for even the most obtuse Kindred. For this reason, these covenants are regarded as relatively open books. Few Kindred wonder as to their true aims, for even if their particular short-term purpose remains obscured by all manner of subtle maneuvering and deception, their overall objective in the Danse Macabre remains the same.

This is not the case with the Ordo Dracul. Historically, the covenant has not spent its considerable capital in pursuit of political or religious goals. When it moves to improve its political standing or to enter the theological fray, it does so in a measured and limited fashion, seemingly retreating from competition when its specific purpose has been achieved. This stratagem has left most outsiders unsure as to the real intentions of the covenant. There is little question that the Dragons regard scholasticism and intellectual achievement as especially worthy aims. Most Dragons are exceptionally erudite and often express a penchant for cerebral discourse and debate, particularly on the subject of matters philosophical and scientific. It is also well known that the Ordo Dracul possesses a wealth of occult knowledge that, for the most part, it makes accessible only to its own members. More importantly, it is clear that the Dragons understand how to use this cache of secret wisdom to startling effect. The Coils are the best evidence of this — proof that somehow the Dragons have unlocked what may be the greatest mysteries of the Kindred condition and, thereby, are able to shrug off the most troublesome consequences of undeath. However, the covenant's unwillingness to share its discoveries with outsiders causes many to wonder as to its true intent. The other covenants share their gains in return for political support or religious alignment, but few can agree upon what the Ordo Dracul asks in return for access to its accumulated scholarship; fewer still claim to know precisely what the Dragons hope to achieve with it.

Theme

The primary theme embodied by the Ordo Dracul is discovery. The Dragons are explorers before all else, seekers after hidden truths that might enable them to transcend their damnable condition and become something greater. A Dragon's Requiem is an unending series of efforts to unlock some secret, gain possession of some helpful text or relic or protect his discoveries from the unworthy. A chronicle that features the covenant should always offer the players an opportunity to discover something of momentous value, usually something that is far more difficult to acquire than a Primogen's scandalous secret or the proper technique required to master a unique Devotion. These are all well and good, but of far more interest to the Dragons are the kinds of things that can't be discovered by any-

one else. Arcane rituals thought lost to the world, maps to the resting places of torpid ancients, the key to deciphering a wizard's grimoire and bloodcurdling revelations that would rock Kindred society to its accursed foundations are far better suited to an Ordo Dracul chronicle.

Just as discovery brings its rewards, it should always be fraught with difficulty and outright danger. The path taken by the players to reach their goal ought to be labyrinthine, with various dead-ends and pitfalls confronting them throughout the course of their journey. The end itself, whether it is the discovery of a new Coil or a fuller understanding of the weaknesses of the Lupines, should also be something of a crap shoot. This doesn't mean a Storyteller should serve up lemons to the players after all the hard work on the part of their characters just to teach them this harsh lesson, but it does mean that not every significant discovery will be without its drawbacks. For example, the true motives behind werewolf activities in the city would make for a valuable discovery, but that discovery might also mean that a werewolf has picked up the player's scent and may, some night, come calling.

Another theme that is best embodied by the Ordo Dracul is skepticism. The Dragons take nothing on faith alone, accepting as fact only those things of which they can have direct proof. Empiricists all, the Dragons need to be able to see, hear, taste, touch or feel something to know it is real. Even this is often not enough to satisfy them. Sometimes, unless a thing can be demonstrated again and again without deviation it will remain purely theoretical and, therefore, of little consequence to a Dragon. This refusal to accept what other Kindred may already conclude is fact is a distinguishing trait that can lead to all sorts of trouble. Religious Kindred will find it difficult to get along with, let alone understand, a stalwart skeptic, and they might even see such stubbornness as verging on heresy. Politically minded Kindred might discover that a certain, essential Dragon will not go along with a carefully laid-out scheme because the Dragon remains unconvinced that the plan will work as envisioned. Smart Storytellers should be wary of Dragon players who become lazy, too readily allowing their characters to accept things not thoroughly tested. Allow such characters to learn the hard way that there is a reason for healthy skepticism. On the other hand, also let the players dig their own graves by swinging too far in the other direction, their characters becoming so unbending that their progress is slowed or even set back.

Mood

If a chronicle about vampires is already replete with gothic imagery of a modern world gone dark, a chronicle that highlights the mysterious Ordo Dracul is one that is additionally permeated with an unsettling miasma of fear that speaks in hushed tones of things even the Damned are not comfortable with: obscene sorceries wrested from forbidden tomes, blasphemous oaths incanted during bizarre ceremonies, pseudo-scientific experimentation conducted with an alien disregard for any semblance of morality and Kindred for whom even God is no more than a temporary obstacle to their selfish and inscrutable ambitions. Every dark alley, every dilapidated tenement, every boarded-up storefront and every secluded mansion harbors a foul secret that awaits the bold and the foolish. Beneath the concealed sniping of the Harpies in Elysium, beneath the bird-like chatter of the kine in their coffeehouses, beneath the shuddering moan of the woman whose slim frame convulses as her blood is drained away, there drones a subliminal whisper of hideous revelation that beckons to those whose perceptions are keen enough to hear. This faint, discordant susurration is ever-present, even if the characters refuse to hear its call, a maddening disturbance that promises things even the undead would be wise to shun.

In a chronicle that features the Ordo Dracul, an individual's demeanor masks another, often far more sinister side, *à la* Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. An example might be the gracious Dragon who displays impeccable etiquette to his guests each Tuesday in his fashionable parlor, but later conducts fiendish experiments on the surviving members of his own mortal family in a secret sub-basement, ignoring their whimpering pleas for mercy and the wretched screams that accompany his dispassionate *investigations*.

But this duality is not limited to the covenant. As Victorian alienists posited, everyone has a dark side. Even the smiling waitress who works in the restaurant a block from the characters' haven has her "evil twin," the one who leaves her infant unattended in her rat-plagued basement apartment while across town she ghoulishly sups on the intoxicating Vitae of the Primogen's eldest childe. Madness, too, is always lurking over the shoulders of the characters. Some of the secret truths that may be discovered are simply too much for all but the most disciplined mind to accept without breaking. Surreal encounters with individuals that cannot be, lurid visions of nightmarish vistas, spectral occurrences that defy explanation and other Fortean phenomena lie in the shadows, waiting to intrude upon the relatively comprehendible world the characters are familiar with and challenge the very foundation of their beliefs.

Finally, because the Ordo Dracul is an anachronistic organization, outmoded social conventions and values creep in wherever the Dragons are found. Victorian views of sexuality — public repression, private licentiousness and clinical Freudian explanations — may color the attitudes of a Dragon's feeding habits, causing her to only feed from kine who are clothed in an especially prudish fashion. That same Dragon may also cling to the period's almost obscenely rigid rules of visitation and correspondence, so that if another character stops by her haven while she is out but fails to leave the obligatory calling card announcing his visit, he could later find himself

the subject of a deleterious social thrashing by the Dragon in Elysium — which would probably leave the character confused as to what he did to earn the ire of his castigator. Such things should not lead to the absurd or the entirely crackpot; nothing kills the mood like the unintentionally comical. However, eccentricities, anti-social behaviors and inexplicable mannerisms and routines can add a flavor to the story's personalities that make them uniquely suited to an Ordo Dracul chronicle.

How to Use This Book

Storytellers who wish to use the Ordo Dracul in their chronicles will find this book to be an invaluable resource. More than merely expanding upon the information provided in **Vampire: The Requiem**, herein are revealed the greatest secrets of the covenant, secrets that none but the initiated would be privy to. Because the covenant may be more difficult to grasp for many Storytellers and players alike than the other major covenants, a great deal of attention has been paid within these pages to providing a look at the Dragons not only from an objective standpoint but also from their own perspective. The covenant's practices and purposes depend upon philosophical concepts that may not be as easy to digest for those unused to unorthodox and esoteric beliefs; therefore, to this end, special attention has been given to not only clarify the ideology of the Ordo Dracul but also to offer as much material as possible to better understand who the Dragons are and just how they spend their Requiems.

Despite the central tenets and organizational observances that bind them together as a covenant, there is a tremendous degree of individuality among the Dragons. This is encouraged by the Ordo Dracul; hence a variety of alternative and sometimes radically different schools of thought, practical methodologies and social and political factions are detailed here to allow for the greatest possible incorporation into any chronicle. Storytellers may wish to emphasize certain aspects of the covenant more than others in order to craft the best possible story. Feel free to ignore some of the offerings within if they are inappropriate, but don't let the contents limit what the covenant can be. Use the possibilities here to inspire additional stories; make the Ordo Dracul not just another covenant in your game but one that adds something unique to the stories you wish to tell. Ideas and characters that do not seem to fit well within the other major covenants may be perfect for the Ordo Dracul, given its proclivity for variety and eccentricity. Take advantage of that, and let your fellow players discover that there is more to the Dragons than any single Kindred can truly know.

Players will find a rich trove of subject matter to draw from when designing or playing their own characters. Like all secret societies, what outsiders know about the Ordo Dracul is relatively little, and often erroneous. In this book, players are given the truth about unlife as a Dragon and the opportunities their characters can pursue — in theory; the Storyteller might always have a new or unique truth hiding further inside the chronicle.

One of the nagging questions for many players during a game session, as for any good actor is, "Why would my character do this?" The Storyteller presents them with a plot hook, and the player doesn't understand why his character would bite. To a Dragon, this question is paramount, as the covenant sees any action as pointless without a worthy purpose driving it. This book gives the player a host of worthy purposes that can be summoned as needed to justify why his character would take the bait that the Storyteller has chosen to use to bring the troupe into the story. Players will learn what sets the Dragons apart from other Kindred, not only in the more obvious ways, but also in regard to how they think, how they feed, how they associate with non-Dragons and how they treat the kine. In an important way, this book is a lens through which players may see the World of Darkness through a Dragon's eyes.

In addition to its utility in helping players take on the role of a Dragon, this book also provides a wealth of ideas that can influence character creation. Players who consider characters who were formerly a man of science, an academic, a seeker of mysteries, an occultist, an explorer or a philosopher are likely going to see their characters as good candidates for the Ordo Dracul and will find ideas inside this book that can make those concepts even better. What's more, players will find that the covenant can also be an excellent fit for a host of other, less obvious types of characters. The canny politician and the ruthless executive both have their places within the Order, but so too does the student of yoga, the martial artist and even the lion tamer. To understand the Ordo Dracul is to understand that it has much to do, and it therefore has many needs. Even a feral Gangrel who is unable to comprehend anything but the most rudimentary theosophical concepts can feel welcome in the ranks of the Dragons.

What's In This Book

This book opens with this **Introduction**, including a lexicon of Dragon terminology to help you play the part (and make sense of this book). In this lexicon there is also a rundown on the ranks and titles of the Ordo Dracul, which you'll want to use as a reference as you begin to explore the complex hierarchy of this covenant.

Chapter One: A History of the Ordo Dracul reveals the secret origins of the Order, from its initial formation by the infamous impaler, Dracula, to its spread across the globe as a pseudo-scientific secret society of forward-thinking vampires.

Chapter Two: Unlife in the Ordo Dracul examines the basic philosophies and activities of the covenant. In this chapter you'll find articles on Dragon policy and society, guidelines on thinking and operating like a member of the Order and information on how the covenant deals with the rest of the World of Darkness — and its own members.

Chapter Three: The Ordo Dracul and the Danse Macabre tells you what to expect as you climb the ranks of the covenant hierarchy, known as the Dragon's Tongue. Take the psycho-spiritual personality test the Order administers to many of its new members, then see what the covenant expects of vampires at different levels of responsibility and status.

Chapter Four: Factions and Bloodlines looks at subcultures within the covenant, as well as vampire lineages with histories irrevocably bound to the Order. You'll also get a glimpse of two secret sub-societies hiding within the covenant, and find out why those societies must stay secret.

Chapter Five: Coils and Disciplines gives you new Coils of the Dragon to use in your **Vampire** chronicle, plus new Disciplines, Devotions and Merits.

The **Appendix: Allies and Antagonists** is a catalog of characters for Storytellers to use in a pinch. If you're a player, you might look here for new character ideas, or petition the Storyteller to cast one of these vampires as your character's Mentor or Ally.

Ranks and Titles

The Ordo Dracul may have the most meaningful titles of any Kindred covenant, though the Invictus give them some competition for "most elaborate." What few outsiders truly appreciate is how the titles of the Dragons form a sort of cipher. When you understand the real meaning of a Dragon's title, you are able to discern quite a bit about the Dragon himself. Savvy Dragons can even convey secret messages to one another via their titles.

An official title of the Ordo Dracul is made up of three grammatical components. The first component is the Dragon's "rank," the second is his "domain" and the optional third component is made up of "decorations." A Dragon's rank is an expression of how much he knows about the covenant's mystic philosophy. His domain and decorations describe what he knows.

The proper presentation of a Dragon's title follows this formula: [*The Dragon's name*], [*the Dragon's rank*] of [*one or more decorations*] + [*the Dragon's domain*] + [*one or more decorations*]. For example: "Alexander, Scholar of the Sanguine Terror." In practice, a Dragon has a great deal of flexibility with the grammar, provided he gets the vocabulary right. So, "Alexander, Sanguine Scholar of Terror" conveys the same information as the previous example.

First, find the proper vocabulary for your character. Then assemble it into a title that suits your taste (or his).

Rank

Determining rank is simple: it all comes down to how well a Dragon knows the philosophies of the Coils of the Dragon. The more dots your character has in Coils of the Dragon, the higher his rank within the covenant. Unlike some other covenants, rank and Covenant Status are not innately linked in the Order. It is possible for a Dragon to be well advanced in the Coils but have very little esteem among his peers and few responsibilities within the local covenant chapter.

As far as most Dragons under the level of Initiate know, these are all the ranks there are to be had within the Order.

Total Dots in Coils	Rank
0	Slave
1	Supplicant
2	Scribe
3	Scholar
4	Initiate
5	Adept
6	Master
7	Philosopher
8	Illuminus
9	Architect

Domain

A Dragon's "domain" indicates the Coil in which he is most advanced. The association of a Dragon's knowledge with the traditional term for Kindred territory is intentional: this is the character's area of authority. A Dragon with the same level of advancement in two or more Coils should pick the territory that best describes his ambitions, philosophies or area of focus. If all of a Dragon's Coils are equally advanced, she may choose the domain "…of Equilibrium."

Coil	Domain
Blood	…of Hunger
Banes	…of the Curse
Beast	…of Terror
Flesh	…of Pain
Soul	…of the Void
All Equal	…of Equilibrium

Standard Decoration

Decorations are optional, but many Dragons use them to convey more information, or appear more impressive, to their peers. The most common decorations indicate the Dragon's second-strongest Coil, but other decora-

tions, and even ranks and titles, are sometimes used to convey hidden messages to other Dragons.

Meaning	Decoration
Blood Coil is secondary.	"Sanguine" or "Bloody"
Bane Coil is secondary.	"Burning" or "Fiery"
Beast Coil is secondary.	"Wild" or "Untamed"
Flesh Coil is secondary.	"Carnal" or "Vital"
Soul Coil is secondary.	"Rarefied" or "Elysian"

Honor Titles

Some titles, when used in the company of the covenant's general membership, have meanings appreciated only by the most advanced and honored Dragons. These titles are used primarily to set covenant icons apart from common Dragons, but they are also used to intimidate less-impressive colleagues and rivals.

Meaning	Title (Type)
Rank 10 ("I know 10 tiers of Coils.")	Visionary (Rank)
Rank 11+ ("I have 10+ ranks in Coils.")	Immortal (Rank)
("I have studied a fourth Coil.")	Invisible (Decoration)

Cipher-Titles

The standard titles of the Ordo Dracul were set forth in *Rites of the Dragon*, and most members of the covenant learn to use and recognize them very quickly. Over the centuries, however, additional layers of meaning have been added to the titles in use in some domains. Secret titles serve as a kind of "house cipher," conveying sensitive information or hidden messages through dummy decorations used only among the knowledgeable.

In some cases, a Dragon is given a title by his tutor, mentor or superior without any explanation of its hidden meaning (or even if it has a hidden meaning). Thus, a Dragon who believes he is being rewarded or promoted may find he is being humiliated (or worse) in front of his betters. How a Dragon wears such a title is as much a test of his character as any of the covenant's other social games. Some titles, on the other hand ("Scribe of the Dedicated Hunger and the Fourth Darkness"), are a test of much more than character.

The following decorations represent just a sample of the many cipher-titles in operation throughout the covenant and across the globe. Some titles see use in a single domain, while others have become virtually ubiquitous. Players and Storytellers should devise new titles for use in the coterie and domain in your own chronicle.

Meaning	Decoration
"I know only one Coil."	"Dedicated"
"I know rituals of another covenant."	"Questing" or "Tested"
"I'm showing off for the audience."	"Sublime" or "Transcendent" or "Dreadful"
"I am here against my own will."	"Terrible"
"I am lying or disguised."	"Forgotten" or "Withered"
"Outsiders are listening."	"Subtle"
"Enemies are listening."	"Invincible"
"I need immediate aid."	"Esoteric"
"We are in immediate danger."	"Sterling" or "Omnipotent"
"I am favored." or "I am to be protected."	"Renewed" or "Remarkable"
"My master wants you to destroy me."	"…of the Fourth Darkness"

Titles in Action

Here are some examples of assembled titles that you can use when devising your own. In these examples, Coils are extremely abbreviated, for simplicity.

Blood •••, Banes •, Beast 0: *"Initiate of the Burning Hunger"*

Blood 0, Banes 0, Beast •: *"Supplicant of the Dedicated Curse"*

Blood •, Banes •, Beast •: *"Scholar of Equilibrium"*

Blood •, Banes ••, Beast ••• and showing off in front of onlooking Invictus vampires: *"Philosopher of the Sublime and Fiery Terror"*

Blood 0, Banes 0, Beast •••• plus "I need some immediate help, but stay calm because a traitor who doesn't know the code is listening": *"Adept of the Invincible and Esoteric Terror"*

False Titles

Because the titles of the Ordo Dracul are so rigidly structured, some titles are obviously impossible or nonsensical to an informed listener, such as "Supplicant of the Bloody Terror" or "Adept of Sanguine Hunger." These sorts of titles may still see use, however, as a means of bluffing would-be infiltrators. ("I'm sorry, only Adepts of Sanguine Hunger are permitted in this area. You're not one, are you?")

Lexicon

Most fields of study and professional societies develop specialized phrases and jargon to facilitate the discussion and summation of complex concepts. Criminal organizations, secret societies and abstruse sub-cultures

typically develop their own lingo to conceal the meaning of their conversations from outside eavesdroppers and to reveal their membership to others in the know. Many social hierarchies use buzzwords to separate the knowing from the naïve.

The Ordo Dracul is all of those things: a clandestine organization, a secret society, an academic alliance and a social subculture. As a result, the members of the covenant have a colorful and arcane vocabulary.

Academy: All the members of the Ordo Dracul in a local geographical area. Dragons congregate in "Academies" the way that birds gather in a flock or battleships travel in a fleet. Also, a *chapter* (q.v.).

Blood Coven: A coterie of Dragons.

Caucus: A monthly meeting of all the Dragons the city or area. It is traditionally held on the night of the new moon.

challenger: In a combat trial governed by the *Code Duello* (q.v.), the challenger is the person who initiates the duel by claiming injury against the *minuend* (q.v.).

chapter: The local covenant membership. A chapter may meet in a *chapter house*. Some domains may be divided into more than one chapter. Also, an *Academy* (q.v.).

chrysalis: A mentally, physically and spiritually indeterminate or liminal state in which a Dragon can transform herself through a new mastery of a Coil of the Dragon. Also, the moment of the change itself.

Code Duello: Rules, similar to the Irish dueling code of 1777, which govern trials-by-combat within or involving the Sworn of the Axe.

Convener: The highest-ranked unsworn Dragon in an *Academy* (q.v.) is given the title of Convener and is responsible for arranging the monthly *Caucus* (q.v.).

defendant: Someone who has been accused and is on trial before a *Dragon Jury* (q.v.).

disputant: Kindred who issues a challenge to decide a dispute via *Mystery Debate* (q.v.).

Dragon Jury: A jury of three members of the Ordo Dracul, convened to issue a ruling on a personal or legal issue. Also known as a *Juris Draconis*, this legal body needs at least one Oathbound of the Dying Light in order to be legitimate.

Fate Card: One of 49 Tarot-based archetypes arrived at via the *Paths of Fate* (q.v.). Proponents of the Paths believe a Fate Card indicates an individual's true nature and personality.

fontal: A category of Wyrm's Nest that produces intangible but appreciable energy of a specific type or "resonance" and often recharges itself over time. E.g., "That site is a fontal nest, so I doubt those mages have truly depleted it." Also, a *wellhead*.

haunted: A category of Wyrm's Nest inhabited by one or more ghosts. E.g., "That old school is a haunted nest, and we'd best keep away."

Hungarian Marriage: When two Dragons with the third tier of the Coil of Blood enter into a cycle of mutual feeding. The laws of the Ordo Dracul forbid it in most domains.

interlocutor: The challenged party in a *Mystery Debate* (q.v.).

Judge of Division: The primary authority of a *Dragon Jury* (q.v.), selected by the other two judges.

Juris Draconis: See **Dragon Jury.**

mediator: The judge at an Axe-Sworn trial by combat. The mediator's task is to determine when a damaging hit has occurred. When it does, it ends a *pass* (q.v.).

Minor Judge: One of three judges on a *Dragon Jury* (q.v.), he is supposed to be of lower status than both parties in the dispute, if that's possible.

minuend: The person to whom a combat challenge has been issued, following the rules set down by the Sworn of the Axe.

Mystery Debate: An intellectual challenge whereby disputes can be settled between members of the Sworn of the Mysteries.

Parliament: A local collective of the Sworn of the Mysteries. The deliberative body that passes laws for an *Academy* (q.v.).

pass: In a duel, one of three attempts to draw blood.

Paths of Fate: A Tarot-based system used to predict behavior and to show students which natural inclinations give them spiritual strength.

perilous: A category of Wyrm's Nest that is dangerous to visitors, or especially Kindred of the Ordo Dracul. E.g. "Don't go there. It's a perilous nest."

plaintiff: The person who calls for an inquiry by *Dragon Jury* (q.v.).

proctor: The Kindred who oversees, adjudicates and (often as not) benefits from a *Test of the Dying Light* (q.v.).

second: When following the Axe-Sworn's rules for trial by arms, seconds are allies of the combatants who try to keep the fight fair and clean.

Superior Judge: One of three judges on a *Dragon Jury* (q.v.), she is supposed to be of higher status than both parties in the dispute, if that's possible.

Test of the Dying Light: A formal means for settling differences practiced by the Sworn of the Dying Light. A *proctor* (q.v.) sets a task for two quarreling Kindred and judges in favor of the one who completes it first. The tasks range from the petty to the epic.

tutor: A member of the Ordo Dracul who has been formally recognized as an instructor for another member in one or more of the Coils of the Dragon.

wellhead: A Wyrm's Nest that channels or emits spiritual or magical power at a steady or nearly steady rate. Such power is typically of a particular type or "resonance." Also, a *fontal nest*.

Chapter One: A History of the Ordo Dracul

"Stoker was no threat.
He certainly wasn't a spy or a warlock or
whatever other bullshit you heard.
I say Stoker was a gift to all of us, from Dracula or God or whoever.
His great work was a dragon given to the world
so that we could watch what it did,
chase it across the globe,
and get a glimpse at a
world without the Masquerade."

— Newcastle,
Remarkable Scribe of the Dedicated Curse

I shall then make known to you something of the history of this man,
which has been ascertained for me.
So we then can discuss how we shall act, and can take our measure according.

— Bram Stoker, Dracula

The Ordo Dracul prides itself on thorough research, careful application of the scientific method and strict adherence to rules of secrecy. Throughout the covenant's existence, the members have tried to combat the Fog of Eternity by carefully transcribing their experiences, their breakthroughs and their thoughts, leaving those notes in the hands of childer or capable assistants.

And yet, for all their best efforts, the historians of the Ordo Dracul have many of the same problems that mortal historians face. While the covenant might include elders who remember the Order's early nights, the effects of Vitae on memory clouds even the sharpest mind. Even the best notes do not fully compensate for differences in culture, language and context, and this can lead to faulty assumptions and outright falsehoods about the covenant's past membership and practices. The Ordo Dracul makes its records available to all of its members, but scholars grudgingly admit that much of what the covenant holds as "history" requires a bit of faith.

This chapter provides a look into the covenant's history, but the reader should be warned: the further from the present, the less verifiable the history.

The Early Nights

The Ordo Dracul emerged as a potent and legitimate covenant in the 19th century, but all Dragons agree that the Order's history stretches back four centuries before that point, back to the time of Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia. Also called Vlad Tepes ("the Impaler"), he is better known to the world as "Dracula."

Vlad Tepes was a monster long before he was a vampire. Born in 1430 or 1431 in Transylvania (then part of Hungary, now part of Romania), Dracula was the son of Vlad II, also called Vlad Dracul. The name "Dracul" is translated either as "devil" or "dragon" —Vlad II was inducted into a society called the Order of the Dragon in Nuremburg during that same year. Vlad Dracul's Order of the Dragon, founded in 1418 by Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg, listed "fighting infidels" among its various goals, and bore no resemblance in ideology to the vampire covenant that Dracula would found more than a century later.

Vlad Dracula ruled Wallachia during three different periods: in 1448, from 1456 to 1462 and briefly in 1476. About his first reign we know little, as it lasted for only a few months and came to an end due to the region's turbulent politics. What most of the world knows of the historical Dracula comes from his second reign.

Policy and Atrocity

One of Dracula's first official acts as prince was to murder most of the *boyar* (noble) class of the region. One famous story states that he gathered 500 of these nobles together and asked how many princes' reigns they had survived. Some had survived as many as 50, but even the younger men had seen seven princes come and go. Dracula then had most (or all, depending on which version of the story one hears) slain, claiming that they had seen so many reigns because they caused the deaths of the princes with their own politicking. He was probably referring specifically to the deaths of his father Vlad II and brother Mircea, who had been betrayed and assassinated in 1447.

Other tales of Dracula's cruelty abound, and members of the Ordo Dracul are quick to point out that the worst excesses of brutality attached to his name were committed long before his death and return as a vampire. However, Dragons do mention that Dracula was a unique ruler in other, more benign ways as well. When a noble was imprisoned or executed for a crime, it was traditional for the ruler to give the noble's lands and goods to a member of his family. Dracula, however, often gave such lands to someone entirely new, sometimes even someone from the peasant class, and in this manner created a new nobility that owed its existence to him. His personal police force followed similar lines — most of these men were battlefield heroes whom Dracula had respected and granted status. Vlad Tepes was a brutal man, true, but he knew how to inspire loyalty both with and despite that brutality.

Dracula, Touched by the Unseen?

Some stories accuse Dracula of being the "son of the Devil" or otherwise linked to the infernal or supernatural during his mortal lifetime. Pursuit of proof of these stories is popular among neonate members of the Ordo Dracul, who know that a quick route to status in the covenant (in addition learning the Coils) lies in discovering details about Dracula's life and Requiem that have heretofore eluded mortal and Kindred historians. Such enthusiasts usually run into dead ends, with two notable exceptions.

The first was a story that dates back to 1447 or so, discovered by a member of the Ordo Dracul in Turkey

in the late 1930s. The tale, scribed by a Turkish chronicler in Egrigoz, in Asia Minor, speaks of a "young man with light skin, but dark eyes, and his brother, who at first blush appeared to be a woman. I watched them together, and the older one said to the younger, 'I have remained pure and kept my mind and heart free of these infidels' rantings, while you are one short step from bending knee to their God. But know this: Nightly our brother and father visit me, and tell me of dark and terrible things in my future. I shall see the day when the unconquerable shall fall and the circle is broken, but you shall die upon broken promises and in great agony.'"

This tale seems to refer to the Invictus ("the Unconquerable") and the Circle of the Crone ("the Circle"), and as the *Rites of the Dragon* indicate, Dracula would later have dealings with both covenants, though of course they did not suffer any kind of defeat at his hands. More interesting is the reference to Dracula's father and brother visiting him and telling him of the future. While it's possible that Dracula was simply lying to his brother in order to frighten or shame him, the fact remains that Radu the Handsome did indeed die of a "broken promise." According to the *Rites of the Dragon*, Dracula impaled his brother upon a stake after promising, falsely, to Embrace him once he died.

The second piece of evidence linking Dracula to the supernatural, indeed to the Kindred, while he was mortal comes from an extremely dubious source. This incident supposedly took place in 1911. A Kindred historian of the Libitinarius bloodline attended her sire, along with two other observers of different clans, while the sire lay in torpor, recording his fevered dreams through the use of Auspex. One of them later stated that "she [the historian] began to convulse, her nose and eyes leaking profuse amounts of blood so dark it resembled pitch in the dim light. As she did so, her hand continued to work upon the page, but instead of writing fragmented sentences culled from her torpid sire's mind, she wrote in clear, precise script, albeit in a language with which I was unfamiliar. At the end of the script was a signature that filled me with dread: DRAKULYA, A.D. 1459."

What the "Libitinarian script," as it is known among the Dragons, actually said was never revealed. All four Kindred — the sire, the childe and the two observers — perished in a fire later that year, and the script itself vanished. Rumor has it that the Kogaion of an unknown city has part or all of it in her possession. If this is true, surely some members of the Libitinarius bloodline would give much to obtain it.

Dracula's Death and Rebirth

Vlad Dracula died, as far as the mortal world knows, in 1476 near Bucharest. As with many famous leaders, fantastic stories and conspiracy theories about his death abound. The most famous is that he dressed as a Turk to escape his enemies and was subsequently killed by his own men. In any case, his story doesn't end there.

Dracula rose up as one of the Kindred that night, and claims in the *Rites of the Dragon* to have no sire, but was given the curse of undeath directly from God.

What Really Happened?

Vampire players might read accounts of Dracula's "spontaneous Embrace" and wonder what *really* happened. After all, 1476 is hardly outside of recorded history, so this quasi-mythological tale of a vampire with no sire might seem somewhat out of place. Members of the Ordo Dracul have been stating the same thing since the late 19th century, and asking an important and frustrating question — who was Dracula's sire?

In the *Rites of the Dragon*, Dracula writes of his final battle as a mortal and talks of fighting against the Turks. He describes a fight with a "thick brute" who seemed to seek him out particularly: "My other hand found his throat as his face eclipsed the moon, his nose and mouth bleeding into me — or was it my own blood, spat upon him, dripping back?"

Some members of the Ordo Dracul who read these words immediately leap to the conclusion that this "thick brute" must be Dracula's sire — but it isn't so simple. If that warrior were, in fact, Kindred, why did he Embrace his enemy and never once try to contact him? Dracula speaks of crushing the man's throat, but such an injury is an inconvenience at most to a vampire. Where was he while Dracula slew the Turks the next night, or when Dracula made a ghoul servant of his brother Radu? Where was this sire when his childe formed the Ordo Dracul? The obvious explanation is that he met Final Death soon after Dracula's Embrace, but this doesn't explain why Dracula's childer are credited with knowing a wide variety of Disciplines and never once respond to blood sympathy with any clan.

Ultimately, the truth of Dracula's undead parentage is one of the greatest mysteries of the Ordo. In over five centuries, no better answer than the one Dracula himself provides has ever surfaced, although of course Kindred historians have hosts of theories, which range from laughable to entirely plausible.

From there, Dracula went on to become intimately involved with Kindred society, running afoul of the Invictus, making a puppet ruler of his brother Radu the Handsome and Embracing the first of his brides, whom he named Mara. At this point, Dracula had already decided that change was necessary to escaping the curse that God had laid on him, but wasn't sure exactly how to proceed. As the years wore on, he came into contact with other Kindred, first of the Lancea Sanctum and then of the Circle of the Crone, and learned the sorcery of each. But with both covenants, he found the teachings lacking. They could enact change upon the world but not upon themselves, and that was what the Impaler truly desired.

The Brides

Rites of the Dragon state that Dracula Embraced three times, and that his three "brides" went on to help him found the Ordo Dracul (with some persuasion). But this again raises questions of lineage. If Dracula was clanless, what did that make his brides? The Ordo Dracul upholds the following four main theories as to the true nature of Dracula's brides:

• **Dracula belongs to a clan.** Many Ordo Dracul scholars believe that Dracula did, in fact, belong to one of the five clans and that his perspicacity with various Disciplines was simply indicative of his intelligence and supernatural ability. If this were the case, then his brides could well have been his childer, and likely have created childer of their own.

• **Dracula belongs to no clan, and did not Embrace his brides.** This theory supposes that Dracula was cursed directly by God, and was incapable of creating childer. That simply means that his three brides were Kindred of other clans, who came into Dracula's service after their respective Embraces, and came to follow him. It is also possible, if unlikely, that Dracula Dominated these women into believing he was their sire. Proponents of this theory have various beliefs about which clans the brides belong to, which usually depends on the clan of the theoretician in question.

• **Dracula belongs to no clan, but could sire childer.** The weakest theory, but most popular among *Rites of the Dragon* purists, is that Dracula Embraced his brides, but, for whatever reason, they could not create childer of their own. Some proponents of this theory spin elaborate tales of the brides attempting to create childer and watching in horror as these Kindred devolved into ash and slime before the brides' eyes. In any case, this theory leaves many questions unanswered.

• **Dracula was/is beyond clan.** This theory posits that Dracula was either Embraced into a given clan or cursed directly by God, but Dracula's mastery over his own blood was such that he could Embrace childer into whichever clan he chose. Dragons who specialize in the Coil of Blood favor this theory, and strive to achieve this effect themselves. Proponents of this theory go on to explain that Dracula and his brides had such control over their own Vitae as to render identifying them through their childer or grandchilder impossible (proponents of other theories point out exactly how convenient this notion is).

This chapter assumes only what is written in *Rites of the Dragon*: that Dracula did not have a clan that he knew of and that he Embraced his brides himself.

The Ordo Dracul Factory

In the 16th century (the exact date is a subject of debate in the Ordo Dracul), Dracula and his three childer set down the first laws, terminology and structure of the Ordo Dracul. It was then that the Sworn were first named, with each of the brides acting as the first of each order. The membership at that point probably numbered fewer

than a dozen Kindred all told, despite later claims that vampires across Europe were prepared to join the nascent Ordo. Indeed, although the Ordo Dracul and most of its terms and practices were in place by 1600, the covenant entered something of a "dark age" thereafter, not coming into its own until almost 300 years later. Why was this?

Infighting

Dracula entered torpor not long after codifying the Ordo Dracul, leaving the leadership and maintenance of the covenant to his three "brides," named in the *Rites of the Dragon* as Mara, Anoushka and Lisette. This was a dangerous move to make, as the three women had vastly differing views of the Coils and their uses as well as the nature of God and the Requiem in general. Indeed, they had originally refused to work together, but Dracula (again, according to the *Rites*) tricked the three of them into cooperation based on competition. Each one would strive to prove her way correct.

Ordo Dracul historians disagree on what happened after Dracula fell into torpor. Covenant histories from the 17th century, what few still exist, are wildly skewed in favor of one branch of the Sworn. Some state that the Sworn of the Axe (under Mara) ruled that many members of the other two branches of the Sworn were unfit to learn the Coils and should be destroyed, while other histories state that the Sworn of the Dying Light (under Anoushka) ruled much the same thing. Clearly, some sort of schism occurred within the Ordo Dracul, and current popular theory has it that only the Sworn of the Mysteries remained true to the purpose of the covenant for many years.

Whatever the truth, none of the three brides have been seen in many years. Mara was the first to vanish. No reliable records of her exist past the American Revolution. Anoushka is said by some to have traveled to India when England began its colonization and never returned. Lisette, the youngest of the three, was an active member of the Ordo Dracul up until 1889, when she boarded a ship from London. To her attendants (whom she forbade from following her), she would only quote William Shakespeare: "I have a journey shortly to go/My master calls me, I must not say 'no.'" The ship was bound for "parts East," but that is all any Kindred historian has ever discovered of it.

Kindred Persecution

The greatest threat the young Ordo Dracul faced probably was not its fractious leader caste, however. As the teachings of the Ordo Dracul slowly spread, they became farther removed from the three brides, and pockets of the covenant slowly began to arise in various places in Europe. As the Ordo Dracul attracted scholars (as it continues to do tonight), the logical places for these pockets were in cities that boasted large communities of learned peoples, i.e., university towns.

Unfortunately, such cities provided ample feeding for the Kindred, a fact not lost on members of the other covenants. A university town was usually a hotbed of conflict, especially between the Lancea Sanctum and the Invictus, and neither covenant took kindly to an upstart faction of vampires taking up valuable resources in "their" cities. This, coupled with the fact that the Ordo Dracul claimed Vlad Tepes as its founder (stories of his cruelty circulated among mortals long before Bram Stoker's time, and Dracula's vampiric career was a subject of much discussion among the Kindred), drove many Princes and Bishops among the undead to refuse admission to their city to any vampire with a known association to Dracula. When the infighting between the brides and their respective factions worsened, it wasn't uncommon to see Kindred exposing their enemies to hostile members of other covenants and then attempting to fill their positions or usurp their knowledge. This, of course, did not aid the covenant's progress.

Lack of Focus

Finally, the Ordo Dracul suffered from the myopia of its members. While some of the Kindred who joined the Ordo Dracul were forward-thinking vampires who followed the agenda Dracula (or his brides) prescribed, many only wished to partake of the fantastic knowledge that the members supposedly had. Intelligence, then as now, does not necessarily mean that a given vampire had the right tools to learn the Coils, but the young Ordo Dracul, already in chaos in many ways, had to work with what it could. Ordo Dracul historians theorize that until the scientific method became prevalent, the Dragons had to rely on incomplete notes, word of mouth and sheer luck in experimenting with the Coils. This is dangerous, and probably hampered the growth of the Ordo Dracul in many places.

Without clear leadership, without a clear method, the Ordo Dracul fell into chaos in the early nights of its existence. The Impaler had provided a set of terms and a vision, but had slipped into torpor without taking the time to solidify his dream. All across Europe, isolated chapters of Dragons arose and struggled, but if their enemies in Kindred society and in even their own covenant didn't destroy them, their slipshod experimentation with the Coils often did. Communication with other chapters was rare. It had to be, as the risks of frequent communication were too great. A missive might fall into enemy hands, a messenger would vanish between chapter houses or domains, or, worse, provide an "ally" the tools she needed to advance. The spirit of academic cooperation, then as now, proved fatal to many Dragons.

This isn't to say that the Ordo Dracul kept no records, but the records the Dragons kept were often incomplete and laden with references that only a select few Kindred could understand. Originally, this was done to prevent enemies or rivals from using the information should it be captured, but it also had the effect of robbing the Ordo Dracul of much of its early history. Even tonight, caches of documents are sometimes discovered, usually near Wyrm's Nests,

that clearly bear Ordo Dracul symbols and terminology but are so vague that not even the elders of the covenant can reliably interpret them. Some of these documents, if properly decoded, contain information about the events pertinent to the covenant at the time the information was written, some are maps to Wyrm's Nests or other places of interest, and some are primers on learning the Coils.

Witchcraft and Maleficium

Witch trials and executions were very much in vogue during the first century of the Ordo Dracul's existence. While any vampire might conceivably be called a servant of Satan by a "witch-pricker," the Circle of the Crone and the Ordo Dracul made for especially convenient targets (the Ordo Dracul was nominally Christian, but many members didn't so much practice Christianity as take it for granted). Members of the Invictus, and especially the Lancea Sanctum, steered witch-hunters toward enemies in these covenants when possible. In places where this persecution grew especially intense, the Dragons, often cut off from their own covenant and in danger, fell in with the Circle of the Crone.

The Ordo Dracul in general is aware that some ideological exchanges took place between the Dragons and the Acolytes, but has no idea to what degree. Rumors occasionally surface, however, of a sub-culture of vampire "witches" that has passed on to its members the secrets of both Crúac and the Coils of the Dragon for over 250 years. Such rumors have created tensions between Dragons and Acolytes in many domains, especially in America, but the Ordo Dracul has encountered no credible evidence that the practice of sharing either covenant's secret mystic rites thrives outside of odd transgressions perpetrated by a few independently operating traitors.

Dracul's Dream Realized

In the 19th century, the Ordo Dracul experienced its greatest boom in membership and progress, as well as its greatest threat. The covenant emerged in the new century confused and on the verge of collapse. Two of its three leaders had vanished, and, as the 18th century ended, Lisette was spending much of her time locked away, buried in deep study. Many of the membership had "plateau'd" in their knowledge of the Coils. Clearly some major breakthroughs were necessary if the covenant's chapters were to survive.

As the saying goes, it never rains but it pours. Over the next hundred years, the covenant would experience its most tumultuous time.

Membership Increases

Beginning in about 1820, Ordo Dracul chapters throughout Europe, North America and Asia experienced surges in membership. Dragon historians cannot point to any one specific event that triggered these surges, but records and eyewitness accounts suggest several key factors.

Spiritualism

The practice of contacting ghosts through séances grew in popularity during this time, first in England and then in the United States. The other covenants of Kindred were uneasy with the notion of séances, for a variety of reasons. Few Kindred, apart from a few rare and exotic bloodlines, have any facility with the ghosts of the departed, but vampires of all stripes can *create* ghosts by killing mortals. While few Kindred ever voiced their concern, many of them feared the night when they would attend a séance with mortal acquaintances and be exposed by an angry shade. Members of the Invictus and Lancea Sanctum lent their support to religious and secular groups decrying spiritualism for one reason or another, but the Ordo Dracul found a great deal of support within the ranks of spiritualists. People who believed in ghosts, after all, and were willing to search for answers in the hereafter sometimes had the necessary temperament, the ability to think outside what they had been taught, to benefit the Ordo Dracul, either as members or as "consultants" (many such consultants were killed after their work was complete). Mediums, too, could sometimes serve as guides to Wyrm's Nests, especially those situated on haunted places.

But just as the spiritualists had much to offer the Dragons, so did those who sought to discredit spiritualism.

Scientific Method

What we now think of as the scientific method has, of course, been around for many centuries. Muslim scholars and scientists were testing hypotheses long before the birth of Christ, and Roger Bacon presented the scientific method to the West in the 13th century (though he was imprisoned for heresy for his trouble). But if mortals are fearful of new ideas and methodologies, the Kindred are much more so. It took centuries of observation, stubbornness and stagnation before the Ordo Dracul was ready to truly apply methods of experimentation to its work, and, in the end, it took the Industrial Revolution to convince the Dragons to do it.

Once the covenant embraced these methods, though, the Dragons found a wealth of knowledge waiting for them. Scientists of the era helped the Order (without knowing, of course) to determine which areas of mystical study were dead ends and which might bear fruit. The Ordo Dracul used skeptics to determine which mediums were frauds and which ones could actually help the covenant — or, sometimes, which ones could *harm* the Dragons, and therefore needed to be removed. This new method of approach to the Coils provided the covenant with a much-needed renaissance.

Learning from the Masons

Most Kindred of other covenants know little about the Ordo Dracul's activities during much of the 19th century. While all of the other Kindred covenants had their own concerns (a major one being the emergence or expansion of the Carthian Movement), the Ordo Dracul's secrecy

stemmed from other factors as well. One concerns a mortal organization with which the Ordo Dracul is occasionally (and usually incorrectly) linked — the Freemasons.

The Freemasons are believed by some to have evolved from a much older organization of monastic soldiers called the Knights Templar, but their incarnation even in 1717 (when the Mother Grand Lodge of Freemasons opened in London) bore little resemblance to the Crusader knights of old. The Masons were not warriors or monks, but men who came together with only a reverence for truth and individuality binding them. The Ordo Dracul was less interested in the Masons' origins or ideology, however, and more interested in their information network. Masons from all over the world could recognize each other with a handshake or a gesture, and the organization's membership included leaders, scientists and artists of the highest caliber.

If the Ordo Dracul ever made a serious attempt to penetrate or gain influence over the Masonic Order, current records do not speak of it. Over time, however, the Ordo Dracul did gain advantage from studying the rites and practices of the brotherhood, and, by the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign in 1837, the Ordo Dracul had withdrawn from Kindred society almost entirely. For the next six decades, the covenant remained quiet, its members never advertising themselves as such. The Ordo Dracul had become a secret society rather than an open covenant, and, for a brief time, it was possible for a vampire to claim membership in the Lancea Sanctum, the Invictus or even the Circle of the Crone as well as the Ordo Dracul. Just as their unholy ancestor Vlad Tepes had supposedly done, Dragons could learn the secrets of blood magic as well as the Coils of the Dragon.

In short, for much of the Victorian period, the Ordo Dracul did very well for itself. The leaders of the covenant took the codes and titles that they had inherited from Dracula and his brides, and worked this ideology into the extensive practices that the Ordo still follows tonight. The covenant probably would have been happy to remain a secret society, a quaint fable from the "land beyond the forest," remembered only in the torpid dreams of elders. But in 1897, Bram Stoker introduced Vlad Dracula to the world.

Exposure

Vampire legendry was and remains a staple of life in Romania, the birthplace of Dracula and the Ordo Dracul. All cultures have taken half-remembered encounters with the Kindred and turned them into tales of horror, complete with proscriptions and remedies that seldom have any other effect but to make their undead targets laugh. The Gothic literature movement that produced *Frankenstein* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* also produced several other works about the undead. John Polidori's story "The Vampyre" saw print in 1819, and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* was published 53 years later. The Kindred of some domains reacted with mild interest, but the Masquerade had seen and survived the circulation of tales of horror, even of vampires, before. Such tales seldom reflected enough of reality to be worrisome outside of a few unfortunate domains.

Stoker's Masterpiece

And then, in 1897, an Irish writer named Abraham Stoker published a novel about Count Dracula and his travels from Transylvania to England. The mortal audiences loved it; a stage version of the novel, four hours in length, was being performed before the novel actually saw print. The Kindred, of course, were somewhat less than amused.

As with any reaction to a mortal phenomenon, the undead were slow to react to *Dracula*. The novel didn't immediately inspire mortals to grab torch, rifle and Bowie knife and go hunting through the abbeys of England for wayward vampires, after all, so it didn't seem to do much harm. But as news of the novel filtered back to some older Kindred, alarms sounded. Although the Ordo Dracul had been out of sight for decades, some Kindred did remember a blasphemous society of vampires named for the title character of Stoker's novel, even if none of them remembered Dracula himself.

The Ordo Dracul did its best to avoid exposure, but there was precious little the Dragons could do. Members of other covenants performed their own "investigations" in many domains, flushing out the hidden members of the Order into the common sight of Kindred society. The Ordo Dracul realized that wasting energy hiding was no longer useful, so the Dragons simply declared their allegiance formally. Thus the Ordo Dracul transformed, in many domains, from a secret society within the hidden world of the Kindred into a covenant of its own.

In many domains, the emergence of the Order shook the solidarity of other covenants and broke the bonds of trust between many Kindred. Loyalties shifted, allegiances collapsed and suspicion spread like spilled ink in many cities. Some Kindred kept their status as Dragons secret, or quietly withdrew from the Order. Those Dragons who had held joint membership in the Ordo Dracul and other covenants often became sacrificial lambs during those nights, though some of them retreated from Kindred society and became Kogaions. This was the beginning of the modern incarnation of that position.

What Did Stoker Know?

Bram Stoker took inspiration from several sources: Romanian legends, historical accounts of Vlad Tepes, the works of Le Fanu and Polidori and discussions with Hungarian professor Arminius Vambery, thought to be the inspiration for Abraham Van Helsing. Some evidence exists to suggest that Stoker also studied the history of Elizabeth Bathory, the "Blood Countess" of Hungary who murdered hundreds of young women in the 18th century. It is not at all beyond the realm of possibility that he made

the connection between "Dracula" and "vampire" with no help at all from any supernatural entity.

Even so, it's a bit of a coincidence, and the Ordo Dracul has been searching for evidence of supernatural tampering in Stoker's life ever since his novel first saw print. While true evidence eludes them (and talking to Stoker directly became impossible once the novel saw print, as members of the other vampiric covenants maintained constant surveillance of the author until his death in 1912), one very interesting fact points to Stoker having sources beyond those available to normal mortals. He was a member of the Golden Dawn, an occult organization that dabbles in theosophy and Tarot — much like the Ordo Dracul itself.

Was Bram Stoker an occultist of any skill, perhaps a mage? Did he learn something of the Ordo Dracul, and if so, from whom? He reported that the idea for *Dracula* came to him after a conversation with Arminius Vambery and a nightmare. Was Vambery, then, the tool of some occult society, pushing Stoker to discover the truth about Dracula? Did Stoker, in fact, die and undergo cremation in 1912? Or is he among the undead even now?

The Ordo Dracul does not know the truth.

The 20th Century

Following the end of the Victorian era in 1901, the Ordo Dracul found itself exposed in the Kindred world again, but this time in a position of much greater power. In the wake of Stoker's novel and the subsequent attention, more Dragons fled to the United States, searching for Wyrm's Nests and other secrets that lay untouched there. Although these "New World Dragons" followed the same methods and rituals as their European predecessors, as time passed and the United States developed, the Ordo Dracul there took on many more American traits. The dogmatic approach to covenant structure chafed newer members, and the Ordo Dracul found itself in danger of losing members to the Carthian Movement. As the mortal herds drifted to America in search of new freedoms and opportunities, so did the vampires that preyed upon them.

Changes and Advances

The early years of the 20th century saw science progress faster than ever. In 1916, blood was first refrigerated for transfusion purposes. Blood that could be preserved would concievably negate the need to hunt mortals altogether (this realization was met with some reservation from many Dragons who enjoyed the act of feeding, however).

Meanwhile, the Great War in Europe brought with it advances of a different kind. New weapons and new tactics brought a body count of unprecedented proportions. The politics of the time caused nations' borders to be redrawn again and again, and this meant that the Dragons

in Europe, carefully safeguarding Wyrm's Nests, had their hands full stopping battalions of soldiers from stumbling across these places of power and ruining decades of work. Kindred throughout Europe and the United States had to cope with the loss of mortal herds (though of course those in Europe had much more direct problems), and scholars within the Ordo Dracul made a special study of what the Great War and the influenza pandemic that followed it were likely to do to the world's Wyrm's Nests and mystical energy flow.

What they found was that the worst was yet to come.

World War II

The Ordo Dracul sprang from a man years ahead of his time in terms of psychological warfare. Vlad Tepes understood all too well that brutality could be used as a method of control. During his time, he ordered the deaths of 100,000 people within his principality (the population of which was about half a million). But Dracula would have been amazed by the Nazis.

Hitler outlawed Freemasonry during this reign in Germany, as any secret society was a threat to his rule. The much-publicized fact that Hitler dabbled in the occult didn't do much to help the Ordo Dracul survive those years. A selection from the journal of a Kogaion from Poland speaks of the Ordo Dracul's activities in Nazi Germany:

"We had our chance. Had we ingratiated ourselves with the Third Reich at the beginning, when Hitler was first made Chancellor, we might have stood a chance of retaining our Wyrm's Nests in Germany and Poland. We might have made Hitler our puppet as our founder's diaries say he once did to his own brother. But we were afraid, or lazy or both. We had our own balance of power with the Invictus, and if they did not corrupt leaders with their blood, why should we?

"We had our chance, but when Hitler's secret police found our Wyrm's Nests and scattered our notes to the wind, burned the ancient writings (which they, of course, could not decipher) and exposed our havens to the light, we saw that we had lost it."

Theories in the decades since the war state that Hitler did indeed have several secret projects dedicated to finding what the Ordo Dracul calls Wyrm's Nests, as well as summoning demons, recruiting ghosts to spy for the Reich and learning the secrets of magic. Very few of these rumors bear enough evidence to seriously consider. What is known, however, is that many of the Wyrm's Nests in Germany, Poland and even Romania fell out of the Ordo Dracul's hands during the Second World War, and many of them have not yet been recovered.

The Ordo Dracul Tonight

After the war, the Ordo Dracul in Europe took to secrecy once again; in the United States, it remained as visible as any of the other covenants. As such, members of the Ordo Dracul are thought to claim domain in a greater number of cities in the New World than in the Old, but the overall number of Kindred who claim membership in the Ordo Dracul is probably larger in Europe.

Some major modern areas of concern for the Ordo Dracul, both geographic and ideologic, follow.

Academic Competition

The Ordo Dracul includes some of the finest Kindred scholars in the world — but like mortal scholars, the desire for glory and credit for a find sometimes outweighs the find itself. A Dragon might share news of a mystical breakthrough with her fellows, only to discover that one of her contemporaries claims the accolades. The ruling bodies in most Ordo Dracul domains try not to get distracted by this sort of petty politicking, but when individuals and coteries keep secrets from the rest of the covenant to make themselves appear more powerful, the problem grows. Outwardly, Dragon chapters may claim that mages, werewolves and other covenants are the primary rivals for the acquisition and understanding of occult sites and artifacts, but in truth the Kindred of the Order are often each other's most dangerous rivals.

Imagination

The Dragons might strive for change, but they are still vampires. The mortal world around them is changing faster than ever. Many Dragons see the staggering pace of technology and cultural shift as a good thing — it forces them to keep up, to keep changing themselves and studying their world, or else retreat to a haven and wait for torpor. Unfortunately, as members of the covenant strive to keep up with mortal innovations, they have little time remaining to study the Coils, which, of course, are the main source of renown within the Ordo Dracul.

The Middle East

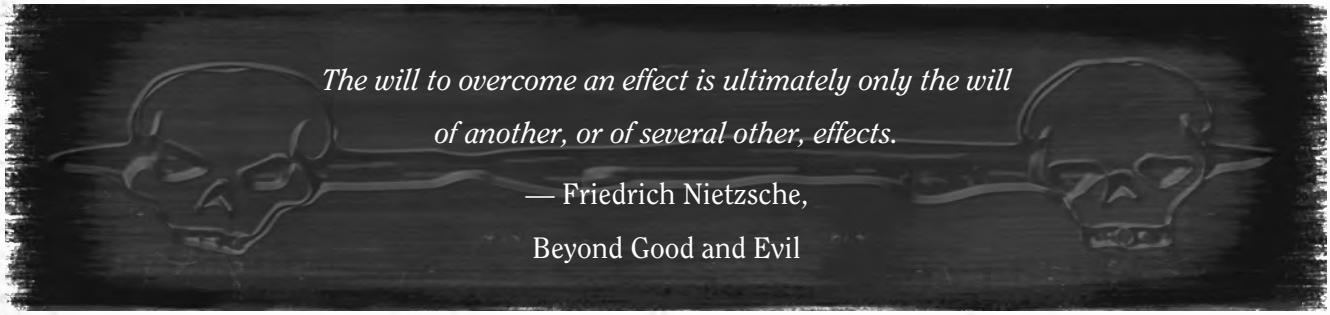
Historically, the Ordo Dracul has been weak in this region of the world, due to the lingering bias of its founder. In recent years, however, much of the world's attention has been focused on the Middle East, and the Ordo Dracul has recognized that the area of the world that birthed the three major monotheistic faiths probably has secrets still left uncovered. Dragons Embraced in the 20th century care more about the covenant's pursuits than the out-dated bigotry of the Impaler. Although the region is torn by war, corruption and fanaticism, a growing number of Dragons are exploring the ancient mysteries that hide therein.

Rumors circulate, too, that Anoushka, the second bride of Dracula, walks the Earth again. Some tales place her in Egypt, some in the Sudan and some in Turkey, but almost all state that she is somewhere in the Middle East, and that she is gathering members of her covenant.

Chapter Two: Unlife in the Ordo Dracul

"You're not seeing it
because you're not listening to me.
Give me a short while — give me a decade —
and I'll show you.
You are the Great Work."

— The Second Shining Philosopher
of Sanguine Terror



The will to overcome an effect is ultimately only the will of another, or of several other, effects.

— Friedrich Nietzsche,
Beyond Good and Evil

The Ordo Dracul is perhaps the most difficult of the covenants for players to understand, because its main concerns are entirely vampiric. The other covenants focus on religious faith, temporal power or political ideology — all concepts that players can identify with and understand in abstract terms, at least, if not in the specific ways that their characters see them. But the Ordo Dracul formed because of one vampire's desire to move beyond his unliving state, not for redemption or revenge, but because he believed it was his right to do so. Understanding the members of the Ordo Dracul, therefore, can take a bit of work.

The Philosophy of Change

As stated in **Vampire: The Requiem**, the central tenet of the Ordo Dracul is that nothing is permanent. Everything changes, vampires included, and understanding that change is necessary for transcendence. This precept is so basic that many Dragons initially take it for granted. Of course everything changes. After all, they themselves have changed from mortal to Kindred in the space of one night, trading everything that they knew for an existence in the shadows of humanity.

This kind of reasoning tends to lead to maudlin poetry if allowed to continue, and Dragon mentors are quite willing to step in and correct a pupil before she reaches this stage.

Understanding Change

Change must be observable to be of any use. Waving one's hand through the air changes the environment but not with any easily measurable effect (with the right instruments, even such subtle change can be observed, but more on this in a moment). When a new Dragon is given her first lessons, the focus is not on the Coils of the Dragon, not on the history of the covenant, but on simple, mundane observation. Dragons *must* be perceptive, and must be able to think outside normal strictures. This takes some effort. The human mind works in a set fashion, and breaking those patterns (or at least learning to recognize and subvert them) is the first thing a nascent Dragon must learn.

Different mentors have different ways of hammering this point home. Some take their charges to Elysium and ask them to record how a given vampire changes over the course of the night. Does her clothing appear rumpled when she leaves? Is her skin tone the same? The mentor cautions the Dragon against making assumptions. If the subject ventures into a private room with a mortal associate for a time and emerges looking disheveled, that *could* mean that the two of them were indulging in sex behind closed doors. But what other possibilities exist, and what evidence exists to support them? Does the mortal look pale and disoriented, or is he flushed and warm? Did others in the room begin whispering or react when they left, or appear to be listening? What was happening while the two of them were away?

Some mentors encourage their charges to shun Kindred society altogether, and join the nightlife of mortal society instead. After all, vampires are creatures of routine and stagnation, meaning their changes are so slow and subtle that they make for poor beginner's lessons. Mortals can change so quickly as to be unrecognizable from one night to the next, and so make for easier study subjects than Kindred. A Dragon might take her student(s) to a nightclub, an opera, a party (of any social stratum) or a church service and instruct them to note changes in behavior, appearance and bearing of a few select people during the course of the night. She instructs her pupils to keep themselves unobtrusive, but if they *are* noticed, to take special note of changes they elicit in their subjects. She also instructs them to note not only what changes take place but also any obvious causes for those changes.

If a man who has been the life of the party suddenly grows withdrawn and sullen, there must be a reason. Often, it's as simple as having too much to drink or having his advances rejected by a woman, but sometimes a more sinister cause is at work. Did he fall prey to another vampire while no one was looking? Is he suddenly ill, perhaps from the food (meaning that other patrons will soon feel the effects as well)? The point here is that even the most minute changes might signal events that the Dragon would do well to acknowledge. Some Dragons scoff at the wisdom of watching mortals, saying that while mortals might change quickly, they are ultimately nothing more than food and cover. The Dragon mentors often respond

to this sort of arrogance by assigning the pupil to spend a week interacting only with mortals. Humanity might be food and cover, but even the most inhumane Dragon knows that Dracula himself stood on the shoulders of mortal alchemists and scholars when developing the Coils of the Dragon. Humans might be ignorant, but human society has much to teach.

Many mentors take elements of both of these approaches when teaching their students how to observe change. After all, excluding Kindred from early lessons can lead to Dragons identifying too closely with mortals, which isn't conducive to understanding and shaping the vampiric condition. Likewise, shying away from humanity and delving much quickly into the Kindred condition may make the pupil incredulous that vampires can change at all. Thus, the best situations for initial observance of change come from situations in which both vampires and mortals congregate. Hunting grounds, especially, draw Dragons and their students, lying in wait like naturalists watching a herd of zebra for the eventual lion attack. Of course, the hunters in question don't usually appreciate this sort of scrutiny, and that in itself can provoke changes that the Dragons find most interesting. (Mentors who advocate this kind of observation should teach their students to have an escape route planned out in advance.)

The point of these exercises is to teach the students to observe change with all methods at their disposal, but to avoid enacting change accidentally. Dragons aren't necessarily taught to be dispassionate in their observations, however. Dracula himself was hardly a stoic or impassionate figure, as a mortal or a vampire. The covenant's more recent developmental roots, however, teach that observers may feel strongly about a discovery but should endeavor to keep those feelings from interfering in the process of discovery.

By way of example, consider a neonate Dragon and his mentor perched on a fire escape watching the human drama of the streets. (Assume they are both skilled enough to remain hidden from that drama.) As they watch, they see a young woman assaulted by a pair of thugs. The neonate might well feel outraged and wish to intervene, but then he would lose the opportunity to observe the changes in the woman and her assailants. Suppose they murder the woman, for instance. The disposal of her body might provide an interesting object lesson for the Kindred, useful in the nights ahead. If the thugs merely injure or rob her, she might report them to the police. Then the Kindred would be able to see an investigation in action, which is also good exposure (or the pupil might see exactly how little the police care). If the vampire jumps into the fray and kills or drives off the attackers, he provides change, as well, but if the neonate has not progressed to the stage of wisely enacting change rather than studiously observing it, he is unlikely to truly appreciate the effects of the changes he sets in motion himself.

Of course, a possible consequence of remaining impassive in the presence of such displays of immorality is a withering of the Man. Some mentors regard this temporary loss of ground to the Beast as an acceptable and inevitable form of change, endemic to the vampiric condition.

Young Dragons

This section refers to "pupils" and "young Dragons," but it's important to note that not all Kindred new to the covenant are also new to the Requiem. Indeed, a great many vampires only come to the Ordo Dracul after experiencing the Requiem for several years, as Dracula himself did. It is only after developing some degree of comfort with the very state of undeath that a vampire can wonder about moving beyond it.

On the other hand, some Kindred are Embraced directly into the Ordo Dracul or find their way to it shortly after their descent into undeath. A coterie of Kindred new to the covenant might include vampires of various ages and levels of power and experience. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

The Solitude Paradox

One of the main lessons that Dragons seek to teach their charges, and one that the covenant learned long before Heisenberg expressed it mathematically, is that by observing and measuring something, one also changes it. Observation is interaction, and therefore has an effect on what is being observed, even if that effect is immeasurable. Some mentors never express this truth to their pupils, but praise them when they figure it out for themselves. "Observation is a fact of the Requiem," the mentor then explains. Someone is *always* watching the Kindred, be it other Kindred, restless spirits or God Himself. The Dragons call this principle the Solitude Paradox — a member of the Ordo Dracul seeks to change herself and must thus turn her focus inward, but must take for granted that she is never truly alone or unnoticed.

The Solitude Paradox serves two purposes for the covenant as a whole. First, it drives home the idea that the scientific methods of the covenant and the existence and acknowledgement of God are not mutually exclusive. Second, however, this principle is designed to make Dragons comfortable with the notion that they cannot keep secrets. No matter what they do or discover, the Ordo Dracul will eventually discover it, so it's better to disclose their findings to someone they know and trust (usually their mentors or

other members of their coteries) than to arouse suspicion by holding on to information for too long.

Skills and Knowledge

Understanding change requires observation, and observation requires a frame of reference. While some Kindred hunt in the cities of their mortal births (or at least, the cities in which they lived until they were Embraced), others undergo the Embrace during travel or otherwise find themselves in unfamiliar environs. Learning the geography, history and sometimes even the language of the area is therefore crucial in understanding any change taking place therein. Likewise, if a mentor takes a pupil to see Beckett's *Endgame* in order to watch the audience for change, that pupil must have some prior appreciation of the play to have a hope of understanding any changes it engenders in the audience.

Therefore, during the early nights of a Dragon's apprenticeship, the mentor tries to feel out her student for gaps in her schooling or knowledge and fill them. What is considered a gap depends entirely on what the mentor intends to teach. Not all of the knowledge thus imparted is as limited in scope as theatre of the absurd, of course. Many mentors discover that Kindred Embraced within the past two decades often have poor combat skills, and teach their charges how to fight, stalk and hunt successfully.

Character Creation and Skills

The preceding discussion on skills and teaching provides a good justification for a character having Skills that might be useful in the chronicle but don't otherwise fit the character concept. Many modern mortals have never held a gun, for instance, much less fired one, yet any Dragon mentor knows the dangers of the World of Darkness and might insist that her pupils learn at least the rudiments of Firearms. If you're creating a character who has already completed the basic schooling of the Ordo Dracul, ask your Storyteller what Skills (or Specialties) your character's mentor might have imparted to her, then put some dots in those Skills.

This can also apply to Merits. A character who takes well to the lessons her mentor teaches might wind up with dots in Status, Influence, Resources or Haven, depending on what her mentor requires of her. And, of course, the Mentor Merit should be a serious consideration for any Ordo Dracul character, as the Dragons are meant to be constantly learning from their elders.

Auspex

The proprietary Discipline of the Mekhet, Auspex is essential to the studies of the Dragons. Many Dragons learn at least the basic powers of Auspex before progressing on to the Coils of the Dragon, and some Mekhet mentors make a point of teaching their students how to sharpen their natural senses in order to better observe minute changes. Further progression in the Discipline grants access to greater levels of scrutiny, of course, as well as several Devotions involving the Discipline that the covenant has developed over the years (some of which can be found in Chapter Five).

Of course, since most Dragons know this Discipline, and since most new Dragons discover very quickly that other members of the covenant usually know this Discipline, Dragons become masters of communicating without making a sound. Gestures, facial expressions and other non-verbal cues are quite useful when someone standing out of mortal earshot can still hear a whisper. Other Dragons compensate for this by learning uncommon or dead languages.

Greater Precision

After a Dragon has learned to observe without judgment, her mentor typically ups the stakes a bit by allowing the Dragon access to the methods of measuring and observing the world beyond the five mortal senses. The Auspex Discipline, as discussed above, is one possibility, but more mundane methods exist as sense Wyrm's Nests takes time and practice).

Because so many ways of measuring the world exist, the methods of measurement and the specific results obtained aren't the most important lesson here. The lesson is that *all* change can be measured, even spiritual change, if one has the proper tools and knowledge. How "evil" or "godly" a mortal or vampire is should be measurable as well. Doing so only requires a method of measurement and an appropriate scale — that not all methods are currently available to the Order is irrelevant to the philosophy.

This revelation frightens many young vampires, especially when they reflect on how far they have fallen since their Embrace. But that is precisely the point — the Dragons are reminded, as with the Solitude Paradox, that by measuring the world they must themselves be subject to measurement, and should be ready to accept that. This precept isn't necessarily a spiritual one (the Dragons long ago realized that the notion of doing unto others as they would have others do unto them was a death wish), but a realistic and scientific one. In order to change, they must understand their current situation and be able to recognize when something *has* changed. Another related lesson is one that any scientist knows: absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. If a Dragon observes no change in a subject (even herself), this does not mean no change has occurred, but only that she has not observed it. The favored students of the Ordo Dracul are the ones who take the least for granted, and remain open to all possibilities when considering change.

Enacting Change

Once a Dragon has learned to observe change reliably without interfering, her Ordo Dracul mentors will allow her to enact change. Different mentors have different ideas about whether it is best to allow Dragons to begin by changing the world around them or to focus on changing themselves first.

Changing the world is a daunting proposition, but that's why the early stages of training are designed to help Dragons gain some perspective. Deliberately enacting a change on a grand scale is difficult, and tracking the ripples such a change causes even more so. Even minute changes have far-reaching effects, however, and so mentors typically instruct their students to take some action not easily traceable to a particular being and then follow the chain of events. For instance, a vampire might sabotage a stoplight, causing a car accident. The Kindred then waits as the police arrive (and paramedics, if necessary), the mortals glower at each other, the cars are towed away, and so on. The Kindred now chooses one of the mortals involved and follows him to see how this change of "fate" has impacted his life. The target could be one of the mortals involved in the accident itself, one of the cops, the worker driving the tow truck or even a witness. (If a student coterie is involved, they might each choose a subject and then later compare notes.)

Some very thorough Dragons choose one mortal in the beginning of the evening and arrange the events to involve him, watching carefully to see his reactions to the calamities in his life. (Sometimes Dragons arrange for positive changes, but it's widely believed in the covenant that tragedy causes more educational changes.) Sometimes the Dragon only watches the mortal at night, reasoning that what happens during the day is out of the Kindred's purview. Other, more ambitious members of the covenant believe that this sort of thinking isn't at all conducive to transcendence and arrange for ghouls or other servants to watch their target while the Kindred slumbers.

Following the Dragon's Tail

As mentioned in **Vampire: The Requiem**, one of common lessons in enacting change involves killing a single mortal and then following the chain of events his death causes. This lesson has many variations, however, depending on the mentor and student in question.

A mentor might assign a coterie to kill one mortal, and then "follow the dragon's tail," noting as many changes and reactions as possible. Several Kindred being involved allows the students to check each other's findings, pursue avenues of investigation not open to a lone vampire and, if necessary, protect one another from retribution.

Another lesson suitable for a coterie of Dragons is sometimes called the Counting the Dragon's Scales. In this rare exercise, the coterie kills a mortal, and focuses tightly on the effects of that death for a predetermined amount of time (usually one month). Then, two members of the coterie commit similar murders, at the same time but in different parts of the city. Again, the coterie observes for one month. This continues until finally each member of the coterie commits a murder at the same time and in the same manner, in locations scattered around the city, or until the threat to the Masquerade becomes too great, whichever comes first. The coterie — and usually any other Dragons in the city (most mentors consider this experiment too interesting to miss) — watches the city carefully.

What mythology springs up about the deaths? Do they appear to be accidents or murders? Do the city officials bring in special federal agents to help solve it? Where is the panic most concentrated in comparison to where most of the deaths took place? Obviously, Counting the Dragon's Scales only works well in cities in which the Ordo Dracul holds a great deal of power. Attempting it in other cities usually brings down swift retribution, unless the coterie is careful to remove any trace of vampiric activity. Even then, the students remember their early lessons — anything can be measured, if one knows how.

If the Kindred belong to a coterie that includes members of other covenants, the mentor usually instructs the Kindred to pay special attention to the effect the death has on them. Depending on the particulars of the death, the other Kindred's superiors in their covenants might hear of it and call for a cessation of hunting in that area or a search for the vampire in question, but it might just pass beneath their notice. If the Dragon kills the mortal while in sight of the others, she has the opportunity to record their reactions to the death, and then perhaps kill some time later and see if those reactions are any different.

Mentors aren't above using this "experiment" as a way to play politics, of course. An older Dragon in a city where (for example) the Invictus holds power might instruct her charge to kill a mortal in a manner that endangers the Masquerade and in a location that implicates a member of the ruling covenant. The neonate is then instructed to observe the effect that murder has on mortal society, while the mentor watches the Danse Macabre for changes resulting from the act. She rarely informs her pupil of her intentions, of course, for fear of tainting the experiment. If the city's Kindred trace the crime back to the student, the experience serves as a test of the student's loyalty.

The Purpose of Change

A principle that mentors occasionally reference at all points of a Dragon's training — but comes into sharp relief as the student enters the phase of enacting change upon the world — is that change must always have a purpose. Even when Following the Dragon's Tail or engaging in similar instructive exercises, Ordo Dracul teachers caution their students to remember that change with no purpose is chaos, and chaos is the woodland of the Beast. Murdering someone just to watch the ripples his ended life creates might have no further purpose beyond its teaching value, and that's fine, but if those ripples aren't followed and appreciated, the death is pointless.

Note, too, that most Dragons don't engage in a great deal of existentialist discussions when discussing the purpose of change. Change must have a purpose *to them*, not in some grandiose cosmic scheme. A hurricane destroying buildings is pointless chaos — as the Order cannot control — but the Order can benefit from the changes that follow in its wake. A vampire lost to the Beast is likewise a random element in the world, beyond the careful designs of the Ordo Dracul.

In every action a Dragon takes, she is advised to consider her desired goal. Short-sighted goals aren't necessarily discouraged — sometimes, satisfaction of vengeance or lust is all one really needs for a while. Mentors do require that their charges acknowledge such goals for what they are, however, rather than cloaking a desire to slay a rival in any self-righteous blather about slaying a degenerate Kindred or doing God's will. The Ordo Dracul knows God's will — God tests the Kindred, and the Dragons test Him in turn.

Acts of God

A lively debate among the Dragons, particularly those of a more theosophist bent, is how much to look for the hand of God in otherwise random-seeming events. Natural disasters such as the aforementioned hurricane is one possibility, but riots, shooting sprees, strange election results and other events that no one could have logically predicted also fall into the category of what the Ordo Dracul considers "acts of God." Ordo Dracul scholars search for meaning in this seeming chaos, trying to determine if such events are truly random or the result of mundane weather patterns or insanity, or if the Creator is still taking a direct hand with the world. Each possibility has implications for the Ordo Dracul.

When searching for meaning in acts of God, the first question Dragons ask is *cui bono* — who profits? A hurricane is damaging to everyone it touches, but suppose it destroys the haven of a particularly diabolical Kindred and his childer, paving the way for more reasonable vampires (say, of the Ordo Dracul) to take his domains? A shooting spree might kill good people but might also slay someone who, in his private life, was a closet occultist or scholar who might have had something to teach the Ordo Dracul. Follow every tragedy long enough and it will lead to a boon for someone.

In every change of the world, the Dragons must consider whether the change affects them — and whether it was *meant* to.

The Great Work

A Dragon who firmly grasps the Ordo Dracul's philosophy of change and embraces both its practical and metaphysical principles is prepared to embark upon the covenant's most important undertaking: transcending the Kindred condition. Most often referred to as the Great Work in order to distinguish it from less portentous investigations or Lesser Works, the Dragons' quest for transcendence has much in common with the aim of the medieval alchemists. The common man of that period believed the alchemists sought to turn base metals into pure gold via something known as the Philosopher's Stone, a kind of universal solvent. Alchemical experiments were not only incomprehensible to the uninitiated, but they were also deemed to be borderline blasphemy. Critics believed that God had not intended for man to be able to transform the basic materials of Creation for selfish purposes and, therefore, any *mestruum universale*, if discovered, was perceived to be the work of the Devil.

The alchemists saw their efforts in an entirely different light. To them, the Philosopher's Stone was not simply a precious metal of economic import but a substance capable of curing illness, restoring youth and even prolonging life indefinitely. While they had no proof that the Philosopher's Stone existed, they were convinced that it did. In fact, they were certain that God had hidden it so that only those truly worthy to possess it might do so. As might be expected, the alchemists felt that by dint of their rare knowledge of natural philosophy and their disciplined methodology, they were the only people worthy of discovering and using the grail they sought. Through effort and unwavering dedication, they were sure that the Philosopher's Stone and all it promised would be theirs.

The Dragons, too, have their Philosopher's Stone, but outside the Ordo Dracul its true nature is rarely understood. Most Kindred believe that the Dragons seek merely to transcend the curses of the Kindred condition: hunger, frenzy and the agonies of flame and daylight. By doing so, the Dragons will be able to enjoy the benefits of undeath without the suffering. From the perspective of most vampires, this seems purpose enough. Of course, because the Dragons do not share their discoveries with outsiders, they are also seen as selfish and

notably dangerous. Freed of the pains and limitations of undeath, they would make formidable opponents.

This kind of reasoning leads some to suspect that the Ordo Dracul's true goal is political in nature — that one night the Dragons will make their move in the Danse Macabre and thereby seize power for themselves in a way that the most cunning Prince cannot foresee. Those who still crave Vitae, fall to frenzy and are forced to flee the touch of sunlight would stand little chance against such conquerors. Other, more religious Kindred are concerned not so much with the political implications of the Dragon's activities as with the theological ones. Many Sanctified see the Coils as proof that the Ordo Dracul is nothing less than a nest of witches and foul sorcerers whose real intent is to defy God's judgment. The Almighty did not intend damnation to be an easy thing to bear; every attempt the Dragons make to lessen or eliminate one of the telltale banes of the Damned is another slap in the face of God.

The Great Work is about more than vampires inoculating themselves against the drawbacks that come with their accursed condition. It is about unlocking the very door of undeath itself, wrenching it wide open and plunging beyond into another state of existence. The covenant's philosophies, its organization and methodologies, and even the Coils are but the tools and products of this unprecedented quest. To complete the Great Work, to transcend the Kindred condition, is to become a veritable god among all creatures that walk the earth, living or unliving. Precisely what the Dragons will become when that happens remains a thing of great debate within the Order, but all are convinced that they will become something that is superior in every regard to animals, mortals and Kindred alike.

Nature of the Curse

Before one can set out on a journey, two things must first be known: where does the journey begin and where does it end. The Ordo Dracul's Great Work ends when the Dragons have transcended the curse of vampirism and passed beyond the suffering that defines the Requiem. However, until they understand where they are to begin, the journey cannot take place. The beginning for the Dragons is vampirism itself, from the moment of the Embrace, when mortality slips away and undeath settles in to take its place. More to the point, no Dragon can progress along the path leading through the Coils to transcendence unless she first has a solid conception of the Kindred condition. Certainly, vampires are quite different from the kine in many ways, but it is not enough to just say so. A Dragon must become fully conversant with her condition, knowing her strengths and, even more importantly, her weaknesses. She must examine herself, test herself, and determine with exacting certitude what she is and what she is not. Each flaw she identifies must be studied both in isolation and again as a part of the whole if it is to be surmounted. To ignore these things, to not recognize the importance of this, is to ensure that greater achievement will forever be beyond the Dragon's reach.

If the Great Work is a sturdy door, then it is secured with locks that must be defeated before it can be opened. Dracula himself identified these locks, classifying all the banes of Kindred existence into three fundamental curses in order that they might be more easily understood and vanquished.

God and Damnation

Reconciling the existence of God with the tale of how Dracula was damned for his sins by the skepticism that is a hallmark of an academic is not an easy thing. An academic's mindset demands evidentiary phenomena, which flies in the face of raw faith. However, Dracula claimed he was specifically damned by God for his sins against the Almighty. Denying God and His role in the creation of vampires would all but declare the First Dragon a liar. As a consequence, most Dragons at least pay lip service to God, acknowledging that He is at least complicit in their damnation and therefore deserves a modicum of due respect. This is not to suggest that the Dragons adore or worship God, but only that they generally recognize His power and treat it with the same caution they would a fiery brand. They study God and His works, but more for the sake of curiosity than reverence.

Acknowledging the existence of the biblical God suits many Dragons. Dracula's own words bear out just such a notion, and it succinctly solves the riddle of the Kindred condition: they are the Damned, cursed by God for the sins of the individual and of humanity as a whole. Dragons who accept this definition of God don't typically buy into Longinian philosophy, of course, but they do maintain a particular reverence for the divine. God may have turned His back on them, but He's still there and He sees all.

An even more popular conception of God among the Order is the Gnostic approach, in which God is somewhat more abstract, albeit no less central. Knowledge is seen as the supreme spark of divinity, and, with it, one can literally transcend one sphere of existence and enter another, higher one. However, denied this divine *gnosis* on account of some spiritual failing, the Kindred are unable to die and, therefore, damned to remain in this sphere forever, never passing on to the next. Gnostic types value knowledge over everything else and see that the only escape from the Requiem lies in learning all they can.

The Theosophical Movement influenced a number of prominent Dragon scholars and continues to color the thinking of the Order tonight. To the theosophists,

God is transformed into something wholly abstract and becomes the Universal Spirit or Prime Mover. Damnation is a form of karmic justice that is not caused by God in a direct sense, but is more the necessary consequence of the cosmic Law of Retribution.

While these are the most widespread beliefs, numerous less common views are also held, from the esoteric and numerological to the more freakish and even sinister. Officially, the covenant takes no position, except to point to the *Rites of the Dragon* and the words of their founder recorded therein. Knowing the true origin of the Kindred may be interesting, but the practical nature of the Ordo Dracul also makes it less than essential to the Great Work. So long as the Dragons can transcend their condition, the matter is just as valuable as an eternal, driving mystery as it might be if answered.

Craving

From the moment of the Embrace, every Kindred becomes plagued with an unceasing desire for blood that grows only more difficult to satisfy with age. The weak blood of a dog or ox may quench this hunger at first, but soon only the lifeblood stolen from the kine becomes palatable. With the passage of years, even this becomes unsuitable and only the rich Vitae of other vampires is able to quell the all-consuming craving — but only for a time. With each sunset and with every significant exertion, the demands of the addiction call out for satiation once again. Only the most disciplined Kindred can resist submitting to this terrible thirst for more than a brief time; however, in the end, all eventually give in, no matter how strong-willed.

Dracula theorized that this craving for blood was indicative of the incomplete state of undeath. A complete being would not suffer in this piteous fashion. Such a being might take blood if it so desired — to enhance its capabilities or for the sheer joy of the sensation — but it would not need to do so to survive. However, the Kindred are subordinate to their blood-thirst, so they must be missing some essential component required to be complete.

Those Dragons who pursue the Coil of Blood focus their attention on this imperfection. They seek to replace the need for blood with something else, filling the gnawing void with something that is far less demanding than blood — practically and psychologically. Some Dragons experiment with narcotics, powerful medicines and all manner of potions and elixirs of their own manufacture. Others see that path as a circular one that will only replace one addiction with another. Instead, they take a more holistic view and seek to use intellectual pursuits, meditation and even self-hypnosis to quell their bloodlust. A few turn to even more esoteric solutions, hopeful that their incompleteness can be resolved by enacting a restorative ritual or concluding a complex procedure. Whatever the *modus operandi*, success will make the Dragon complete, removing her dependence

upon external things and freeing her from perhaps the strongest of the chains that prohibits her from transcending the Kindred condition.

Stagnation

Dracula believed that the agony vampires experienced at the slightest touch of sunlight or flame was because of the largely unchanging nature of undeath. The Kindred do not age, they do not die, and they do not grow or find it easy to alter their enduring form in any real way. The reason is, Dracula argues in the *Rites*, that all these things are the province of the living. The sun encourages life and fire destroys, but only to promote renewal. The cycle of the life is one of constant and unstoppable change, but the Kindred are barely able to make progress along that cyclic path; when they do, it is only as the result of great effort. Even the act of procreation is a formidable one that saps the sire physically and mentally. The Dragons recognize that stagnation is a significant impediment to the Great Work, one that can only be defeated by pushing themselves to change as frequently as possible, even if only in small ways. If they push hard enough, they feel they can overcome the friction of undeath and build up enough inertia to eventually keep the cycle of change going of its own accord, without strenuous intervention. When this happens, fire and sunlight will be rendered benign rather than the malignant banes they are now.

Dragons tend to be some of the most deviant Kindred not only in terms of their philosophies, but also their appearance and mannerisms. As they study the Coil of Banes and work to wrench themselves from their stagnant condition, they use their own flesh as one means to achieve their end. Tattoos, piercings, scarification and other physical alterations are popular tonight, with many students going to horrific extremes. Self-mutilation followed by rapid healing is not uncommon, a practice believed to "teach" the Kindred's body how to quickly and repeatedly change. Physical change is often accompanied by a change in wardrobe. If the expression "the clothes make the man" holds any truth, then a radical departure from usual dress can aid the Dragon in modifying her one sense of self-identity. This belief is institutionalized in the garb donned for Order ceremonies. Upon attaining a new title or responsibility within the covenant, a Dragon is sometimes given a new set of clothing to not only symbolize to others the change in status but also to better help the just-promoted Dragon see herself as a truly different individual.

This philosophy extends beyond mere attire. Dragons often purposefully examine their habits, their speech patterns and even their smallest mannerisms, from habitual gestures to gait and posture. Like an actor taking on a role, they then work to eliminate or notably modify some or all of these things, becoming quite different in the process. Other Kindred may find this kind of metamorphosis disturbing, and many suspect it is a symptom of mental instability, not understanding that it is an intentional change manifested for a very specific purpose. Dragons who hold influential and highly visible positions in the domain can cause great stirs when they undertake this kind of makeover, but politics and social gossip are insignificant when compared to the Great Work.

Unreason

Inside each vampire is a Beast, the monster that makes the Kindred the superlative predators they are and, in times of trouble, ensures their survival and victory over all threats. Primal and instinctual, the Beast is the one who ensures a steady supply of blood and defines the vampire as distinct from the kine. However, the Kindred are not just feral hunters whose entire existence is focused on hunting, feeding, fighting and sleeping. Because every vampire was once a mortal, the Man survives alongside the Beast that arises with the first pangs of the Embrace. All the memories, beliefs, preferences, desires, needs and fears remain and must struggle every single night for supremacy against the bestial urges that frequently oppose them. This mental strife colors every moment of the Requiem, causing a silver-tongued ancilla of one moment to become a snarling fiend the next.

The Kindred are condemned to spend eternity engaged in this exhausting battle, knowing that even if the Man is able to claim victory for the most part, the Beast can never be fully destroyed. Time and time again it will surge to the fore, overrunning the Man and doing as it pleases with no regard to the concerns of the vampire's more human side. Consequently, the Kindred often seem to be unreasoning creatures, sabotaging their own best laid plans. Experience has also shown that as the years pass, this siege takes its toll on the Man, who increasingly collapses under the strain. For some Kindred, the effort becomes entirely too much, and their animal passions finally strike a fatal blow to the last vestiges of the Man. These Kindred become revenants, ghastly reminders of what lurks within the breast of every vampire: a Beast always seeking to claw its bloody way to the surface despite every attempt to push it back into its cage.

To any thinker, the curse of an unreasoning mind is an unwelcome thought — to those who hold scholarship and intellectual achievement to be the highest purpose, it is the height of damnation. To conduct productive investigations to further the Great Work, a Dragon must be able to think clearly, to rely upon deductive conclusions, and to make keen observations untainted by strong biases and distractions. To overcome the curse of unreason the Beast must be chained at a minimum, but ultimately it must be subjugated entirely to the rational mind. Some suggest it should be eliminated entirely, that what the Dragons one night can become will

no longer have any need for "fight or flight" instincts. Some approaches tend to mimic those used for mastering wildlife. Outright cruelty, Pavlovian techniques and empathetic bonding are commonplace. The Coil of the Beast demonstrates the effectiveness of these procedures, enabling the Dragons to shackle their primitive instincts in a way that gives the Man the greatest amount of control possible, even as it benefits from the presence of the domesticated Beast.

Principia Draconis

Dracula laid down three primary principles by which a Kindred would be known to be worthy of studying the Coils and being a member of the Ordo Dracul. It is the duty of every Dragon to obey the following principles above all else:

A Dragon has no loyalty above his studies. Even the commands of a superior ultimately come second to the transcendent perfection each Dragon seeks for herself.

A Dragon must understand, accept and embrace purposeful change. Those who are unable to trust change have no hope of ever transcending their accursed state.

A Dragon is responsible for all she is and all she does. Because vampires are beyond death and fear, there remain no excuses for what one does or becomes. Moreover, not seizing an opportunity to improve one's self is unforgivable, for it is a sign of cowardice and the denial of one's own transcendence.

These principles are taken to be as important to the Ordo Dracul as the Commandments were to the Canaanites. Dragons who fail to live up to the *Principia Draconis* are ostracized by their peers and can even be dismissed from the ranks of the covenant if their lapses are significant enough.

Methodology

The majority of Dragons concur that the Great Work can only be successfully realized if the method by which it is achieved is as reliable as possible. Adopting an empirical stance, the results of an experiment are only taken as trustworthy if they are consistently reproducible under similar conditions. The knowledge of how to do this should also be easily recorded and transmitted to anyone with a basic understanding of the experiment. Assumptions, faulty materials, flimsy rationale and procedures reverse engineered in order to produce a certain outcome are *verboten* to members of the Ordo Dracul. Finally, the Dragons demand phenomenal results, something they can perceive with their natural and Kindred senses. If they cannot observe, measure, record and examine it, it remains only theoretical and useful only for intellectual diversion. In sum, the Dragons apply the scientific method to all their endeavors.

Because most Dragons come from a scientific or academic background, this methodology is already ingrained in the covenant's members. Accolades are awarded to those who dedicate themselves to the strictest definition of the scientific method, double- and triple-checking all their results, repeatedly testing their procedures under all possible circumstances, and working tirelessly to eliminate every subjective or corruptive influence that might lessen the reliability of their findings. Healthy skepticism and productive self-criticism do not go unnoticed in the Order — the best and brightest almost universally display these virtues.

Not every Dragon obeys the principles of the scientific method as fully as her peers, of course. Some become lazy and allow themselves a little flexibility, at times sacrificing methodology to expediency. Minor flaws and lapses are usually tolerated, especially when the work is of a mostly personal nature that is not going to be subject to the scrutiny of a critical mentor or the review of others. Flagrant disregard for scientific orthodoxy is another matter altogether and is seldom tolerated except in domains where the covenant's presence is small, or the covenant is rife with internal strife and ruthless competition. Ignoring the proper methodological guidelines leads to irreproducible results and the very real possibility of harm — not only to the reckless Dragon, but to the Ordo Dracul overall. A vampire does not play haphazardly with fire, and some of the things the Dragons subject to experimentation can be far more dangerous than fire.

The maxim that there are many ways to skin a cat is one the Ordo Dracul ardently embraces. If the end result is achieved, the method by which it was obtained is relatively insignificant, so long as it is rigorous and proven scientifically reliable. Clinging stubbornly to one approach and refusing to consider others is not only short-sighted, but usually detrimental to success. However speedily progress is being made, a Dragon must always ask whether there might be a more efficacious way to pursue her goal.

This concept is an essential one for every fledgling Dragon to grasp and remember. The straight path may appear the most direct, but it is often littered with obstacles that will make further progress difficult if not altogether impossible. The crooked path, on the other hand, allows the Dragon to change course whenever obstacles are encountered, to select an alternative way to proceed despite any seeming incompatibility with past methods. This conviction colors everything about the Dragons and is the ethical touchstone upon which all other things are judged. To the Ordo Dracul, the ends always justify the means.

The history of the Ordo Dracul and the variety of experiences its members bring with them have opened

the door to almost as many approaches to the covenant's scientific pursuits as there are Dragons. An Initiate in Berlin might employ a scientific methodology that relies heavily on Darwinian and Malthusian theory, Gray's anatomical explorations and modern gene therapy. Another Dragon in Los Angeles might put her trust in Tesla's principles of electromagnetism, Mesmeric technique and studies that propose a strong correlation between earthly resonance and psychic ability. A third practitioner might delve into the phenomenon of spiritual manifestations and ectoplasmic emanations, hoping to wrest some secret from those who have already passed beyond undeath into the lands of shadow. A fourth Dragon might rely upon the power inherent in words and numbers, using complex phonic and mathematical formulae to unearth truths that would cause a sane man to tremble at their implications. So long as the tenets of the scientific method are observed, there is no limit to what the Dragons might utilize to achieve their aims.

Morality and Ethics

One of the reasons that the Ordo Dracul tends to earn a sinister reputation in Kindred society is because its code of morality seems alien to outsiders, and the unknown always engenders fears. The Dragons are far less concerned with traditional moral virtues that emphasize social altruism and conduct than they are with the ethical pursuit of the Great Work. It matters little to a Dragon that she stole the manuscript that helped her solve a scientific riddle that has stumped her for the past decade; it matters little more that she resorted to killing the old man who possessed the book in order to avoid his alerting the authorities. This is not to suggest that she is unconcerned with theft and murder, but does imply that for most Dragons, such things will nearly always take a backseat to more scholastic concerns. There are always more old men, but only one copy of that manuscript.

Scientific ethics are important to the Order, however. Falsifying research, making unfounded logical leaps, sloppy recordkeeping, vague observations, incomplete conclusions, plagiarizing and interfering in another Dragon's investigations are all viewed as serious ethical transgressions. They may not go to Hell as a result of these sins, but they will certainly draw condemnation and possible sanction by the covenant.

No Dragon is perfect, however. Minor violations are commonplace and are routinely swept under the carpet; better to get back to work than spend time focusing on things that resulted in no real harm. However, when a major crime is committed, and it is no longer an easy thing to look the other way, the Ordo Dracul formally confronts the matter and usually makes an example of the violator. Those who accuse the covenant of immorality would be surprised at how seriously it takes what it perceives to be the commission of real crimes.

See "Schools of Methodology" on p. 118 for details about the various ways the Dragons approach the Great Work.

Wyrm's Nests

Places of mystical power fascinate the Ordo Dracul, and the covenant is always looking for such areas that might have shifted or escaped their notice. Most other vampires don't understand why the Dragons wish access to such places, but the Kindred of the Circle of the Crone and sometimes even the Lancea Sanctum have an idea. Wyrm's Nests, holy ground, nexuses — whatever name one attaches to them, the places hold power. Most vampires aren't equipped to make use of that power, but those that are shudder to think of the fearsome Dragons and what unholy effects they might wreak in a Dragon's Nest.

Of course, the Ordo Dracul doesn't consider its efforts unholy per se. The Dragons believe they have the greatest right to places of power because they use them correctly. The Circle of the Crone, the Dragons argue, might be able to conjure some impressive feats, but the Acolytes' magic is external, affecting (or infecting) the world around them with their Beasts, rather than enacting change from within. The Lancea Sanctum occasionally seeks to capture a Wyrm's Nest that, to them, feels like sanctified ground, but the Ordo Dracul scoffs at such arrogance. There are much better uses for such sites than mere reverence.

The Ordo Dracul has specific methods and protocols for finding, cataloguing and using the Wyrm's Nests.

Finding the Nests

The Ordo Dracul has been mapping Wyrm's Nests and ley lines in Europe since the beginning of the 19th century (actually for much longer, but notes before then are unreliable; see Chapter One), but during the World Wars the energies of that region shifted so dramatically that many of the surviving maps were hopelessly inaccurate. Mapping of ley lines and Nests in the Americas proceeded slowly, as the covenant moved across the nations, but by the middle of the 20th century had become fairly consistent. Still, ley lines shift, and the Ordo Dracul doesn't have a presence everywhere, so the search for ley lines can never truly be finished.

The ease of finding Wyrm's Nests depends on the Nest in question. Some Wyrm's Nests bleed with spiritual energy, detectable even to relatively insensitive mortals. Most are more subtle and require a mortal or vampire with special perceptions to detect them. All Wyrm's Nests have a particular "flavor" of

energy that they give off, a resonance that colors any feelings a sensitive mortal or vampire receives from the site. As such, Wyrm's Nests aspected toward violence, blood or anger are the easiest for vampires to stumble across unaided. Some such Nests even trigger a sensation similar to the Predator's Taint. By contrast, Nests that give off feelings of life, vibrancy or other benign feelings tend to slip below the Ordo's notice. This is just as well, for the Dragons can make little use of such places.

Mystical Extrapolation

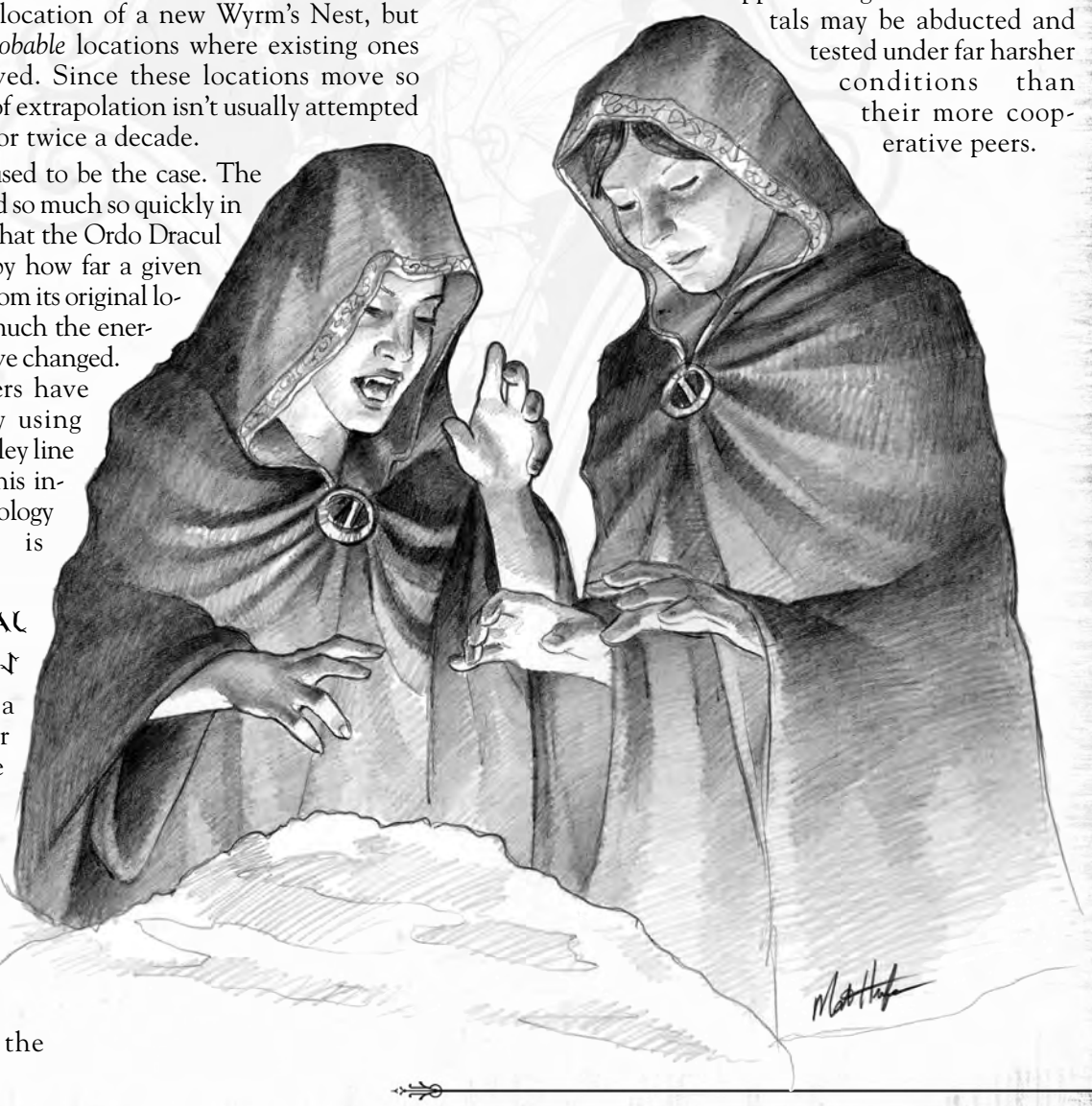
Skilled geomancers of the Ordo Dracul can make educated guesses as to how ley lines and Wyrm's Nests have shifted over the years. This is in fact the primary method by which the covenant narrows the areas to search. Different Kindred have different styles of research. Some use paper charts that incorporate astrological movements, some study mortal demographics (if a great number of people of a given persuasion suddenly leave an area, for instance), some use carto- or geomancy. In any case, this kind of study rarely pinpoints an exact location of a new Wyrm's Nest, but instead shows *probable* locations where existing ones might have moved. Since these locations move so slowly, this kind of extrapolation isn't usually attempted more than once or twice a decade.

At least, that used to be the case. The world has changed so much so quickly in the past century that the Ordo Dracul is often amazed by how far a given Nest has shifted from its original location and how much the energies it gives off have changed. Newer researchers have compensated by using computers to plot ley line movement, but this integration of technology and mysticism is hardly seamless.

Mortal Eyes

Dragons keep a sharp lookout for mortals who are sensitive to the supernatural and use them as "bloodhounds" to find Wyrm's Nests. They prefer to do this without calling the mortal's attention to the Ordo Dracul's true desires and status as vampires, as this breaches the Masquerade and may require the Dragons to either kill the mortal or make her into a ghoul. Often, the Ordo Dracul sends ghouls posing as researchers to the mortal, asking her questions about her sensitivity, what she believes it to be, what triggers her feelings, and so on. After this, the ghouls bring her to several locations, most mundane, but one a known Wyrm's Nest. This is done after dark so that a Dragon can witness the test, but the vampire remains a safe distance away so as not to taint the experiment. If the mortal is able to identify the Wyrm's Nest as supernatural, she is subject to further "tests" as the Ordo Dracul refines her sensitivity, and eventually finds herself being taken on a tour of the area, pointing out any location that she notes as supernaturally significant.

The Ordo Dracul customizes its approach as necessary, of course. Some mortals respond better to ghouls claiming to represent agents of the mortal's religion, be it the Catholic Church or a local Wiccan coven. Others are sensitive enough to detect even the ghouls approaching them. Such mortals may be abducted and tested under far harsher conditions than their more cooperative peers.



Acolytes of the Crone

Another avenue of approach offers more information, but carries greater risk. The Acolytes of the Circle of the Crone long ago developed methods of perceiving magic at work in the world, and, while the Ordo Dracul has no knowledge of the secrets of Crúac, the Dragons are aware of the advantage it poses to the covenant. The Ordo Dracul sometimes makes bargains with members of the Circle who can help them find Wyrm's's Nests. The terms of these bargains are specific to the individual Kindred involved, but normally involve feeding rights, traded favors and shared access to the Wyrm's Nest in question. The two covenants have *never* traded magical knowledge as a matter of policy, but every now and then the suggestion does come up. As a rule, the Dragons of some domains don't mind Acolytes using "their" Wyrm's Nests, provided that everyone displays respect for both covenants' goals.

Another, more insidious method is for a Dragon to join the Circle of the Crone and learn something of Crúac, and then use this magic in the service of the Ordo Dracul. The problems with this approach are obvious, of course. For one thing, how can the Ordo Dracul ever be certain that the double agent's loyalties don't truly lie with the Circle? If she is taught the Coils of the Dragon, might she not use them to further the Acolytes' agendas or, worse, teach them to those outside the covenant? But if she isn't taught the Coils, she is not a true Dragon anyway.

Perhaps the best use of Crúac to find Wyrm's Nests comes from Kindred who did at one point claim membership in the Circle of the Crone, but for whatever reason abandoned it for the Ordo Dracul. The Ordo Dracul doesn't think ill of such Kindred — not by default. After all, if the *Rites of the Dragon* are to be believed, Dracula himself once studied with the Circle before discovering that true wisdom lay within.

Priest of the Spear

The Lancea Sanctum, however, is another matter. These Kindred take interest in only one type of Wyrm's Nest: holy ground. Like true zealots, they aren't interested in hearing that any Wyrm's Nest could conceivably give off the same feelings or that energy flows respond to the world around them, not the reverse. Such informative tidbits pale in comparison to the vindication of their faith they feel when standing in a churchyard so holy that it burns their undead feet.

Mystic Extrapolation

The system for finding Wyrm's Nests works differently depending on the method used in the search.

A Dragon with access to maps of ley lines and local Wyrm's Nests stretching back at least 10 years can attempt to calculate the most likely location for new or moved Wyrm's Nests. This requires a roll of Intelligence + Occult with a Specialty in Ley Lines, Wyrm's Nests, Geomancy or some other suitable method of mystical calculation, modified as follows:

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	Detailed records stretching back more than 15 years.
+2	Detailed records going back more than 50 years.
+1	Researcher has some skill in Auspex or Crúac and has personally perceived ley lines/Wyrm's Nests.
-1	Incomplete/altered records.
-1	Researcher uses a computer.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character concludes that a new or moved Wyrm's Nest is present, but her calculations on the location are off by at least 10 miles.

Failure: The character cannot determine any change in ley lines or Wyrm's Nests.

Success: The character is able to guess with reasonable certainty whether a new or moved Wyrm's Nest is in the area she is studying, and where it would be (within roughly a three-mile radius) if it does exist.

Exceptional Success: The character knows for certain whether there has been mystical change to the area and can locate the epicenter of that change within a one-mile radius.

A mortal searching for a Wyrm's Nest requires the Unseen Sense Merit (see p. 109 of the World of Darkness Rulebook). The Merit might be specialized toward places of power, ghosts or any other phenomena that a Wyrm's Nest might encompass.

The Auspex/Crúac Devotion Arcane Sight (see p. 150 of **Vampire: The Requiem**) can also be used to find Wyrm's Nests, as can the Sample the Earth Devotion (p. 200).

The Ordo Dracul finds this strange, but accepts that the Sanctified are prepared to take on faith some notions that, to the Dragons' minds, require proof and experimentation. The Dragons accept the existence of God because their own existence requires a higher power, since vampires fly in the face of many of the laws by which the rest of the world works. The Sanctified take this a step further, as the Ordo Dracul sees it, by stating that God desires one thing or another. The Ordo Dracul doesn't claim to understand what God is trying to say by designating one place or another as "holy," and then allowing those "divine energies" to slip away in a decade or so. It only knows that holy ground is an extremely effective bargaining chip when dealing with the Lancea Sanctum, even when the ground isn't useful to the Ordo Dracul directly.

If the Lancea Sanctum claims dominion over a territory that includes a Wyrm's Nest that *doesn't* seem

to be holy, the Ordo Dracul makes it a priority to find out why. Often, such areas were once holy ground, and the energies have simply shifted. Sometimes, though, the Wyrm's Nest houses beings or energies that the Lancea Sanctum considers unholy and feels the need to protect. This, of course, only arouses the Dragons' curiosity. If the territory lies within a city where the Sanctified hold power, the Ordo Dracul typically sends in a coterie instructed to stay out of sight, map and investigate the Wyrm's Nest, and leave before drawing attention. If another covenant holds power, the Ordo Dracul instead sends in a diplomatic coterie to negotiate an investigation of the area, and, if that fails, resorts to skullduggery. Research is much easier when one doesn't have to look over one's shoulder constantly, after all.

Cataloguing Wyrm's Nests

Rather than try to make sense of the myriad types of energy and resonance that Wyrm's Nests emit, the Ordo Dracul categorizes places of power by their utility to the covenant. Therefore, part of reconfiguring maps that contain ley lines and Wyrm's Nests is checking to see if a Nest that the Ordo Dracul previously had no use for has changed status.

The Ordo Dracul divides Wyrm's Nests into the following four categories: haunts, fontal nests, crucibles and perilous nests.

Crucibles

The Ordo Dracul defines a Wyrm's Nest as a *crucible* if it gives off energies that aid in learning, developing or implementing the Coils of the Dragon. Such Nests are easily the rarest of all Wyrm's Nests, and the Dragons guard those they find fervently. Unfortunately, the covenant has found that crucibles often result from places associated with faith, and this means conflict with other factions, most notably the Lancea Sanctum and the Circle of the Crone.

Not all crucibles are sacred to one faith or another, however. Areas associated with chaos, including sites of riots, mass hysteria or even large fires can aid in studying the Coils. The Ordo Dracul must take care, however, in researching or enacting the Coils in places associated with unbridled chaos. Change, after all, must have a purpose, but the energies left in the wake of such events aren't bent toward any particular goal.

Perilous Nests

A *perilous nest*, to the Ordo Dracul, is a Wyrm's Nest containing energies or entities that are actively harmful to interlopers in general or Kindred in particular. Of course, the Dragons acknowledge that danger is a matter of degree. An abandoned building that for some reason is defended by a pack of werewolves presents a much

greater danger than a corner of a graveyard in which the dead sometimes rise hungry. Just because a Wyrm's Nest is dangerous doesn't mean that the Ordo Dracul has no use for it.

The Ordo Dracul isn't comfortable with a perilous nest unless they know why the area is dangerous. Therefore, young coteries sometimes have the unenviable task of investigating such areas and determining what, if anything, the risks are in using it. While this sort of mission is sometimes used as a punishment, usually mentors see it as an opportunity to let their pupils shine. After all, the work might be risky, but it isn't trivial — the covenant needs the information.

Fontal Nests

Many Wyrm's Nests are aspected toward spiritual or magical energies that most Kindred are no better equipped to deal with than common mortals are. These Nests surge with mystic powers tantalizingly misunderstood by most Dragons. The Ordo Dracul calls these areas *fontal nests* or *wellheads*.

Fontal nests aren't typically dangerous to vampires, though the creatures that are drawn to their power often are. The primary value of a fontal nest lies in its use as a bargaining point with other occultists and supernatural beings. In some cases, Kogaions have also been able to use the existence of fontal nests to extrapolate the locations of other Wyrm's Nests or verify the truths behind arcane myths. Fontal nests are thought to influence and be influenced by pivotal events and powerful emotions (as well as other, unknown forces). The presence of a fontal nest might verify stories of a lost battlefield or ancient disaster — or they might foreshadow such an event.

Every fontal nest is different. Most seem to "vibrate" or "resonate" with a kind of mystic spiritual harmonic, though Dragon theories vary on whether these harmonics affect the living or are effect by them. As emotional creatures, Kindred seem to be no less susceptible to the (often slight and subtle) influences of such resonance. Some mystically sensitive vampires claim to be able to feel the power of spirits and resonance in their blood, stirring or electrifying their Vitae.

Haunted Nests

The Ordo Dracul defines a *haunted nest* as any Wyrm's Nest containing at least one human ghost. Such places give off spiritual energy, but this radiation is subtle, almost unnoticeable as such even to those sensitive to the supernatural. Most such mortals, and even Kindred, perceive haunts as touched by the unknown but inert. The energy therein doesn't seem to change much, even over long periods of time.

The Ordo Dracul has theories about why this seems to be the case. Just as vampires enter a kind of stasis after the Embrace, ghosts enact that stasis upon their environments, forcing them to remain — on a spiritual level — as they were at the time of the mortal's death (or at least, at the time that the ghost came to inhabit the area). The Dragons recognize that not all ghosts have this kind of effect, but there are those that do create Wyrm's Nests in the form of haunts, and these haunts are useful to the Ordo Dracul.

Creation of Haunts

It sometimes occurs to the Dragons to create their own haunted nests. After all, the only requirement is for a human ghost to reside in an area, and human ghosts are simple enough to create, in theory. Brutal deaths create more potent hauntings, and so sometimes a Dragon steers a near-mindless Kindred or another monster such as a werewolf toward a group of humans in an attempt to create a haunt.

This ploy rarely works, however. For one thing, haunts take time to gain spiritual power. Even if the vampire succeeds in creating a ghost, it can take years until the ghost has changed the area's spiritual frequency enough to make it a true haunt.

More importantly, though, the human soul, as the Ordo Dracul has noted to its frustration time and again, is the most mutable metaphysical force on the planet. Mortals are capable of finding grace and inner peace at the moment of death even if they have lived lives of deprivation. Likewise, mortals whom one would expect to pass quietly into the beyond sometimes flare with anger at their deaths, returning as especially vengeful shades. Humanity is simply too unpredictable to be manipulated this way.

Haunts tend to be the easiest of Wyrm's Nests to find. Sensitive mortals are capable of seeing or sensing ghosts much more commonly than other types of spiritual disturbances. Of course, haunts are by nature already inhabited, and the spirits of the dead are usually unwilling to share their space with the undead. The Ordo Dracul has protocols for coping with this problem, of course (see "Using Haunted Nests," p. 46).

Using Wyrm's Nests

Which immediate use the Ordo Dracul puts a Wyrm's Nest to depends on its type. Haunts have practical applications very different from crucibles, which, in turn, provide challenges different from perilous nests. The four categories and their immediate uses are discussed below. Beyond those, however, the Dragons have greater plans for the Wyrm's Nests of the world.

Change always has a purpose. Nothing, therefore, is truly random, and the elder members of the Ordo Dracul know this. The Wyrm's Nests of the world change, their ley

lines slowly shifting like the beds of rivers, the world's mystical "waterways" eroded or flooded as time goes on. These facts are enough for a Dragon to base an unlife's work. If the shifts in the world's mystical energies happen according to a grand plan, where does that plan end? Can it be subverted, or is God truly omnipotent? Or perhaps He *means* for the Ordo Dracul to change His designs, and that is the test upon which transcendence hinges.

Another possibility is that Wyrm's Nests change because of isolated incidents, but do not change in any overarcing pattern. A murder here, a war there, and this sort of mystical geology shapes the world in ways imperceptible to humanity. Then again, it could be argued that humanity shapes the flow of magic by their actions. In either case, the Ordo Dracul recognizes that one crucial element could be added to the mix, and that element could literally change everything. That element is *purpose*.

God might have a purpose, but no one on Earth truly understands it. Humanity certainly doesn't have a collective purpose. The Ordo Dracul does, however, and if the covenant could find a way to wash mystical energy into one direction, perhaps they could create a grand crucible in which all of the Kindred of the world (or, more likely, a select few) could be reborn.

Is this the only dream of the Dragon elders? No. But upon meeting with the Kogaions, young Dragons are often introduced to the notion. Kindred who spend their unlives studying mystical cartography can and do go mad trying to break God's code or trying to work out a way to control it.

Meanwhile, more pragmatic Kindred have concrete uses for Wyrm's Nests.

Using Crucibles

Wyrm's Nests that foster change see the most aggressive defense from the covenant. While the Ordo Dracul doesn't risk valuable Guardians trying to secure Wyrm's Nests in enemy territory as a matter of policy, a crucible is another matter. These embodiments of mystical change are holy sites to the Ordo Dracul, not that it would ever admit this. But normally, only a few vampires at a time can draw on a crucible's energy, and this means that some of the most vicious backstabbing, infighting and politicking in the covenant takes place over securing time to study and practice the Coils of the Dragon at a crucible.

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that crucibles, by their very nature, are the least stable of Wyrm's Nests. While haunts and fontal nests can retain their mystical properties for decades, or even longer if handled carefully, crucibles move, shift focus or "burn out" within a matter of years. If the Ordo Dracul does not manage its use of a crucible carefully (and it rarely does), this time can fall to months or even weeks.

All of that said, crucibles are invaluable resources in studying and mastering the Coils. Exactly what benefit a crucible provides depends on the Nest in question. Some suggestions follow:

The Beauty Butcher

This now-abandoned basement served, until recently, as the base of operations of a back-alley doctor performing plastic surgery and liposuction. The floor is permanently stained red from the blood he spilled here. Any Dragon attempting to learn the Coil of Blood finds his undead body more receptive to the changes. The player receives a +2 modifier to the Resolve + Occult roll to learn any tier of the Coil of Blood, if using the optional system put forth on p. 50. If the Storyteller is not using this system, the player pays 3 fewer experience points for learning this Coil instead. To gain these benefits, the character must meditate in the basement for at least one hour per night for a number of nights (not necessarily consecutive) equal to the level of the tier she is trying to learn.

The Summit

High above the city streets, this skyscraper's rooftop holds energies of the industry, the boom and decline of the entire downtown area. A Kindred who meditates here for the hour before dawn and the hour after dusk gains bonuses to learn the Coil of Banes (as described above). Obviously, a vampire courageous enough to attempt this should have servants or allies willing to transport him safely to and from these meditations.

The Circle of the Forsaken

The ways of the werewolves are, for the most part, inscrutable to the Kindred. The Ordo Dracul does not know why these shapeshifters choose to gather in the concrete riverbed beneath the old bridge, but the Order does know that, except for occasional meetings, they seem to avoid the area. After their meetings, though, the area under the bridge is charged with anger and bloodlust, and makes for a perfect crucible to hone the Coil of the Beast. Two or more vampires can gain the benefits described above when learning this Coil, but they must engage in a brief combat using no weapons beyond their own bodies, and must resist frenzy during this fight.

The Graveyard and the Playground

Due to some extremely strange urban planning, a large new playground at an area public park sits just across the street from a cemetery. The cemetery is still in use, and the energies of grief and loss mingling with the exuberance of youth and life from the playground have created a unique crucible on the street dividing them. To make use of this crucible, a Kindred must spend at least two hours in both the cemetery and the playground, and then walk in the middle of the street away from the area. (The neighborhood sees little traffic at night, but the vampire is still advised to be careful). Doing so for at least three nights bestows the aforementioned benefits for the Coil of the Soul.

Using Fontal Nests

Fontal nests are more useful for living creatures such as mages and werewolves than for the undead. That in mind, fontal nests can make for useful bargaining chips if the Ordo Dracul must negotiate with such creatures. Fontal nests are also useful because they sometimes attract mortals, so the surrounding area sometimes makes for a good hunting ground. Kogaions advise finding prey in this area and then luring the mortal away to avoid tainting the fontal nest's energies.

Some Academies of Dragons have uncovered rituals and occult ceremonies capable of tapping into the arcane power of fontal nests, however. The blood rites of vampires abuse fontal nests, however, in ways that other mystic ceremonies do not. Virtually all of the fontal rituals known to occultists of the Ordo Dracul are thus seen as despicable practices by Lupines, mages and other users and protectors of fontal nests. (Game mechanics for fontal nest rituals can be found in Chapter Five.)

Using Perilous Nests

A Wyrm's Nest can be classified as both perilous and haunted and a crucible (or even a fontal nest, theoretically), and such dangers see the same uses as safer examples of those Nest types. A perilous nest can serve as a trap for unwary Kindred, too. Sometimes the Dragons use them to dispose of spies from other covenants or vampires who defect from the Ordo Dracul.

Other uses for a perilous nest depend on why the Nest is considered dangerous. If the Nest is the claimed territory of another being, could that being be slain or driven off? If it is dangerous for environmental reasons (say, little protection from sunlight), is the energy within worth the effort of correcting those concerns? If the peril stems from a biological agent (a mold that consumes undead flesh, for instance), can that agent be harvested, studied and used? If the very energy of the Nest is harmful in some way, the Guardians usually focus on keeping Kindred (or Dragons, at least) away from the area and monitoring to see if the Nest changes in time. Otherwise, student coteries can often be found performing research on the Nest, regardless of danger.

Using Haunted Nests

The Dragolescu bloodline has the most obvious use for ghosts (see p. 150), but the covenant as a whole finds ghosts instructive on a theoretical level. After all, they are very similar to vampires: they are dead, ruled by emotion in the same way that Kindred are slaves to hunger, they do not change except by extreme force of will, and they suffer the passage of time badly.

Another, little-known use for haunts is that they may provide passage to a place called the Underworld. In this shadowy realm, the dead await their final reward (or punishment), and a vampire finds herself free of several of her most deadly banes. Very few haunts actually contain gateways to the Underworld, but for the most part, the Dragons aren't interested in traveling there anyway. A haunt that *does* contain a gateway to the Underworld, whether or not that gateway is actually open (most such gateways only open under certain conditions), provides a +1 modifier to all uses of the following Disciplines: Auspex, Dominate, Nightmare and Obfuscate. Any Devotions incorporating those Disciplines are subject to this bonus as well.

Coils of the Dragon

The Coils of the Dragon are the most impressive advantage of the Ordo Dracul, the system of powers that the founder and his brides spent their unlives unlocking, the method by which the Dragons can, perhaps, transcend their condition.

Learning the Coils is a formative moment in the career of a Dragon. It demonstrates to the Kindred that vampires *can* change and can even mitigate their curse somewhat. Up until a Dragon experiences her first chrysalis, she might well have doubted the truth of the Coils, viewing them as wishful thinking. But the Coils of the Dragon are not prayers, but scientific precepts in action. A vampire does not have to be devout or reverent to use the Coils, merely diligent and persistent. The belief in God and in the vampiric curse is taken as read. Studying the Coils requires the vampire to know and understand her condition, not simply believe it.

Diablerie and the Coils

A diablerist *cannot* learn any of the Coils of the Dragon by diablerie. The Coils are based on forcing change to one's self, not on gaining knowledge. A diablerist might absorb enough knowledge to attempt a chrysalis (by taking a dot of Occult if the victim had a Specialty in the Coils of the Dragon, for instance), but attempting a chrysalis without proper instruction has dangers of its own.

Each of the Coils requires different techniques and practices from the Kindred, but once a Dragon has passed a chrysalis and achieved a given tier, she never has to "relearn" that tier and will never forget it. A vampire who progresses in a Discipline or in blood sorcery like Crúac might, over time, forget what she has learned, because these powers are based on knowledge. The Coils of the Dragon are permanent changes to a vampire's body, mind and soul (and in that regard, are more similar to the physical Disciplines of Resilience, Vigor and Celerity than to the others).

Seeking the Chrysalis

What does a vampire do in order to prepare herself for the Coils? Over the centuries, Dragons from across the world have developed techniques for changing themselves based on various mortal religious and secular practices, but a few points remain constant. The first step is to understand and enact change upon the world, and these topics have already been discussed in this chapter. With enacting change, however, comes internalizing that change, altering one's self. This, to the physically inert Kindred, is the first and hardest hurdle to overcome.

Changing one's self is difficult for mortals, especially adults. Once a mortal becomes set in his ways, changing even everyday routines becomes difficult. It isn't impossible by any means, but it does require constant concentration, at least at first, until whichever new patterns he wants become habitual (and even then, he must often watch to make sure he doesn't slip back into previous behaviors). This kind of change applies to "simple" things like giving up addictions or improving work habits, neither of which are endemic to the condition of being human.

Vampires attempting to learn the Coils of the Dragon are trying to change some of the physical realities of their existence. Put another way, a vampire learning, for instance, the first tier of the Coil of Blood (Blood Seeps Slowly) is comparable to a human being learning to go a week at a time without food. It's not impossible, but it flies in the face of the way the human (or vampiric) body is designed.

So how does a Dragon go about this? Where can she start?

Changing the Body

Ordinarily, the Kindred body does not retain change after the Embrace. A haircut, tattoo, piercing or scar fades during the day as the vampire's body "resets" itself to the moment of death. With effort, though, a Kindred can keep such changes. A Dragon preparing for a chrysalis is encouraged to make and keep small changes to her body, and high-ranking members of the covenant (especially the Sworn) often have many tattoos and scars on their bodies, marking their control over their own forms.

Sampling different kinds of blood is another way to loosen the tight grip that the curse of vampirism exerts upon the Dragon. Mortal blood laced with various kinds of drugs or even the blood of mortals of different heritages provide subtle differences in "flavor" (the former can provide considerably more than that). Truly daring Kindred seek out more exotic sources of Vitae, sampling the blood of mages or even werewolves in an attempt to shake their undead bodies from stasis.

Learning certain Disciplines can also help. If a Dragon is having trouble with the notion of changing herself on a physical level, a mentor can instruct her

in Vigor, Celerity, Resilience or Protean. These Disciplines can act as "gateways" to the Coils.

Changing the Soul

Changing the body isn't enough, however. The Coils of the Dragon are alterations in the Kindred's metaphysical as well as physical makeup. To wit, the vampire must be ready to change herself on a mental and spiritual level as well.

Changing the mind isn't normally difficult, especially for neonates. The vampire begins by learning a new skill, such as a musical instrument or proficiency in a new weapon. This puts the Kindred in the right frame of mind to learn the Coils, and usually has some practical applicability as well — the Ordo Dracul hates to waste time.

Spiritual change is much harder. The Ordo Dracul spends a great deal of energy teaching young Dragons to learn to *perceive* spiritual changes, rather than enact them. This is because a spiritual change alters one's entire outlook on unlife, which is often so jarring that the vampire loses progress toward the chrysalis rather than gaining it. Learning to sense ghosts, honing control of the Predator's Taint, and developing Disciplines such as Dominate, Majesty and Nightmare are all accepted methods of preparing one's self spiritually for the Coils.

A third method of inducing change, normally used only for students having an extraordinarily difficult time with the concepts involved, is deliberately causing a drop in Humanity. Killing a mortal is enough for most neonates, but then, neonates don't normally require this kind of "assistance" because their proximity to their mortal lives mean that they remember the comparative mutability of that state. Kindred who come to the Ordo Dracul later in their unlives are more likely to require this kind of shock to their systems, but by that time, Humanity has usually dropped to a level that requires a truly horrific act.

Instruction

As has been stated, all Dragons are considered students for their entire careers in the covenant. While outsiders theorize (not altogether incorrectly) that the focus on the mentor's role in a vampire's life is a control tactic as much as anything, the risk and difficulty of learning the Coils of the Dragon makes it a necessity. When a Dragon is nearing a chrysalis, the mentor records her progress, makes suggestions and generally ups the ante on any lessons the learner is currently undergoing. This can involve a more stringent series of questions, demands of fasting or combat or increased attention to the state of the vampire's soul (and, therefore, Humanity).

Rituals

Dracula based his initial delving into the Coils (if the *Rites* are accurate) on mortal alchemy and theosophical teaching. Other Dragons, over the centuries, have developed other methods that work equally well. A student might receive pages of Latin text to memorize and recite, books full of chemical formulae that she must learn to prepare or a series of movements resembling martial arts *kata*. Whatever the exact nature of these rituals, they are designed to unlock the undead body's potential, to loosen the vampire's soul from its earthly moorings for a few seconds. A formula might be ingested along with a dose of Vitae or the Latin phrases repeated to a fever pitch, but whatever the form of the ritual, it must become second nature to the Kindred. No mistakes are possible if the vampire is to successfully advance her understanding of the Coils.

The exact nature of the rituals varies depending on which of the Coils the vampire is attempting to learn, and on the age and bent of that vampire's mentor. Mentors Embraced prior to the 1960s or so favor harsher methods of preparing the student to experience chrysalis, while more recent Dragons (what few there are) favor "softer" methods such as psychoanalysis and hypnosis. A few suggestions and examples of these rituals follow, listed by Coil:

Coil of Banes: Trials by fire or sunlight, day-long vigils, hours spent staring into bright lights, beatings with metal clubs (to facilitate development of Resilience Discipline), consuming chemical mixtures containing gasoline, meditation in chambers filled with flammable gas, psychoanalysis involving free association and desensitization therapy, ritual branding or scarification (the pupil is advised to never heal these scars), walking on coals.

Coil of the Beast: Ritual combat (more recently, martial arts has come into vogue as a training method), sensory deprivation, fasting followed by "tempting the Beast" with fresh blood, primal scream, hunting mortal prey through a forest, rigid mathematical formulae or precise balancing of dangerous chemicals (fosters attention to detail and the ability to shut out distraction), lobotomy (three nails are driven into the vampire's skull, dislodging the brain; this damage can be healed normally, but is meant to knock the Beast loose from the conscious mind).

Coil of Blood: Periods of fasting, entire weeks spent in the blush of health, training in any Discipline that requires Vitae expenditure, feeding to capacity and beyond for several nights at a time, learning to bleed on command (first from a cut, then from an orifice, finally from any point on the body), learning to differentiate between blood sources (animal and mortal, male and female, mortals of differing races or habits, etc.), study of hematology and virology as well as the mystical and religious properties of blood, religious service involving blood (including Communion), sex with mortals.

Coil of the Soul: Shunning contact with Kindred for a certain amount of time, feeding only on animals, deliberate acts to lower Humanity (only for young or especially devout Kindred), crucifixion, psychoanalysis (Freudian or Jungian, often coupled with dream interpretation), periods of torpor induced by staking, sensory deprivation, deliberate manipulation of memory via the Dominate Discipline or emotions through Majesty (assumes an *extraordinary* relationship between mentor and student, or an extremely gullible pupil), immersion in a closed mortal circle (sometimes a Dragon takes up residence in a large house where she can avoid notice, just to watch the inhabitants).

Meditation

Dragons preparing for a chrysalis spend as much as half of every night in deep meditation, bringing themselves as close to torpor as possible without actually falling into the deathsleep. Some Kindred even pierce their chests with sharp chunks of wood to simulate staking (and usually have a ghoul or a coterie-mate nearby to rescue them if something goes wrong), fighting through the pain and fear to achieve a state modern Dragons call "corporeal malleability" (older Dragons refer to someone in this state as having a "soul of clay"). A Dragon who can reach this state is prepared to enter a chrysalis and learn a Coil.

Achieving the Chrysalis

When the Kindred is ready, she performs her rituals and simultaneously meditates to achieve the soul of clay. If she is successful, she enters the chrysalis and may change her undead condition just slightly, learning a tier of the Coils of the Dragon.

The chrysalis, according to the Dragons, feels initially like returning to the womb. Everything is dark and warm, and, for a short time, the vampire feels comforted. It is in this brief moment of control and safety that the Kindred must exert her will and change herself, for to wait too long in this state is to invite disaster.

In the chrysalis, the vampire's consciousness is separate from her soul and body. This state of affairs is what allows her to make changes to her condition, rather like making adjustments to the workings of a machine. If she successfully makes these changes, she can restart the machine (returning her mind to its proper "place"), and return to consciousness with the changes, the Coil, in place. If the vampire waits, however, she feels the darkness close in around her. She is not alone. Her Beast lurks here as well, waiting for the opportunity it needs. During every second the Dragon waits, her Beast attempts to escape from the cage of her mind. If the character waits too long, she might return to consciousness to find that her Beast has corrupted one or more of her Disciplines, even her other Coils.

Experiments

The Ordo Dracul has long years of studying the Coils behind it. Even discounting much of the unreliable writings that predate the covenant's "renaissance" in the 19th century, the Coils of the Dragon have been the Ordo's primary focus the world over, and some truly brilliant Kindred have studied the process. Therefore, mentors know what to do — and more importantly, what not to do — when instructing their students.

Sometimes, though, mentors deliberately mislead neonates with the intent of causing them to lose control during a chrysalis. A Dragon might commit this heinous act for a number of reasons. The Ordo Dracul does not relish the notion of the Coils being circulated outside the covenant, and sometimes uses this method as a particularly harsh means of control. Sometimes a mentor takes on a student with the express purpose of destroying her soul, usually to illustrate to other, more promising students what will happen if they aren't careful (and, though it's rarely stated outright, what can happen if they betray the Ordo Dracul). Finally, sometimes an especially cruel Dragon does this out of sheer, callous curiosity.

In any case, willfully tricking a vampire into becoming lost to the Beast requires a degeneration check. It is considered a planned, callous crime.

This doesn't happen often, however, because Dragons are warned of the possibility every step of the way, taught how to avoid it and given the best possible conditions for avoiding such unpleasant mishaps. A vampire's coterie, mentor or both look after her when she enters the chrysalis, though some Kindred insist on being alone during this vulnerable time. This caution stems in part from loyalty (or at least professional courtesy) toward the Kindred, but mostly from the knowledge that if a vampire's Beast infects her, the damage is normally irrevocable. The Dragon must then be destroyed, but because the fall to the Beast was the result of one failed attempt at change rather than a long series of inhuman acts, the vampire is much cannier than a vampire lost to Wassail would normally be. While a vampire that has been given over to the Beast is normally a ravening monster with no urges other than sleeping and killing, a vampire who loses her mind through a botched chrysalis is somewhat more intelligent. Though she degenerates quickly, she is capable of wreaking a great deal of damage on the mortals and possibly the Kindred of the area if not caught and destroyed.

Storyteller's Option: Chrysalis Mechanics

A version of the optional rule also appears on p. 56 of the Coteries sourcebook. The rule appears here, with some minor alterations, for the sake of convenience.

What if the Storyteller would like to impose this kind of danger on Ordo Dracul characters in her chronicle? As stated, the player simply needs to spend the necessary number of experience points, but if you would like to add the chance of failure to the process, here is a suggested system. Be sure players know beforehand if you wish to employ this system. While the *character* doesn't know the rules that affect her in the game world, it's not fair to spring this chance of failure on a *player* without warning.

Using this system, paying experience points to increase one's knowledge of the Coils of the Dragon costs the new dots x 6, not the new dots x 7 as listed in **Vampire: The Requiem**. When the player wishes to purchase a new Coil of the Dragon, she rolls her character's Resolve + Occult with the following results (though the Storyteller may choose to make the roll herself, in order to better hide certain bonuses and penalties):

Dramatic Failure: The character's undead nature attempts to reject any changes she has already made, much like a transplant patient rejecting a new body part. The player must spend one experience point per tier the character already possesses *or* two dots of Willpower, or these tiers disappear.

Alternately, the character's Beast escapes her control and infects her mind and soul. This can have any number of different effects. The Beast might taint the character's Disciplines, forcing her to turn any suggestion into a command (Dominate), making her a permanently seductive predator (Majesty) or crushing anything she touches (Vigor). She might lose control of previously learned Coils of the Dragon, as well. The exact effect depends on which tier the character was attempting to master, as some tiers are better suited to this than others. For example, a character attempting to master Blood of Beasts might lose the ability to feed from animals at all, but only if her Blood Potency is so low that she could otherwise subsist on animal Vitae. A character with a higher Blood Potency, who cannot feed on animal blood, would be unaffected by this limitation, so the Storyteller would do better to inflict the experience point or Willpower dot penalty on the character. On the other hand, any character would be affected by a reversal of the Perspicacious Blood tier — the vampire receives only two Vitae for every three he takes from his subject.

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Experience points spent to learn this tier are lost.

Failure: The character simply fails to learn the new tier. Experience points spent to learn this tier are lost.

Success: The character learns the new tier without anomaly.

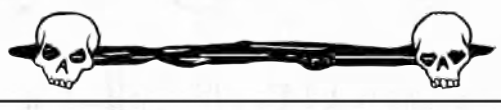
Exceptional Success: The character gains an intuitive understanding of this particular Coil and need not make this roll again when advancing on it. For instance, if the character learns Conquer the Red Fear and the player rolls an exceptional successes, she need not make this roll if the character later attempts to learn Surmounting the Daysleep and/or Sun's Forgotten Kiss (even if the character attempts to learn them at different times).

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The character is taught by a mentor (as per the Merit) with at least two more tiers mastered than she has.
+1	The character is part of a coterie of other Kindred studying the Coils of the Dragon, and at least one of those other characters is trying to increase her own mastery of the Coils of the Dragon at the same time.
+1	The player has roleplayed the character introspectively or with otherwise noteworthy devotion to the ideal of changing her vampiric form.
—	The character hasn't been exceptionally diligent in pursuit of the chrysalis, but hasn't been exceptionally distracted, either.
–1	The character indulged her Vice at any time in a story in which she earned experience points that would be devoted to learning the new tier. This penalty is cumulative.
–3	The character has repeatedly acted outside the interests of the chrysalis or has consistently eschewed introspection and mystic devotion. (An example might be a character who earned a lot of experience points overcoming challenges but didn't bother conducting any meditation or mystic study.)
–1 to –3	The character has been given deliberately bad advice about the chrysalis. This penalty can range anywhere from a single die to a –5 modifier, depending on exactly what her saboteur has told her.

This roll occurs in downtime, as per normal experience point expenditures. It is also an abstraction. The character doesn't suddenly receive a burst of insight that allows him to use the Coils of the Dragon. Rather, the downtime roll represents the character's study, exploration and any epiphanies during the downtime. See p. 230 of **Vampire: The Requiem** for more information on spending experience points.

This problem is exacerbated among coteries, particularly practical ones, because each individual Dragon is surrounded by others who can accomplish the same things. Elders warn their students against this kind of recklessness, sometimes applying punishments of sunlight, fire or forced frenzy or starvation, just to remind the Kindred of the power that the Dragons truly wield.



The First Coil

The first time a Dragon learns one of the tiers, her relationship with the Ordo Dracul changes. Before this, she was a Slave, an ignorant in a society based on knowledge. Now, she has a margin of status, but the margin between Slave and Supplicant is extremely wide. The first member of the student coterie to enter the chrysalis and gain a Coil can look forward to special treatment from her tutor thereafter — unless, of course, her learning sputters and stalls, which is occasionally a problem. (More on the social implications of knowing Coils can be found in Chapter Three.)

The difference that even a single Coil makes in a Dragon's psychological makeup, however, is immense. She has proven to herself that she can change her vampiric condition. A mortal might feel the same kind of elation after a religious epiphany, after losing 100 pounds, after the birth of a child or some other undeniably life-changing event. Learning more Coils reinforces this feeling, but nothing matches the intensity of a Kindred emerging from the chrysalis knowing that she is *different*. Even a vampire who has become disillusioned with the Ordo Dracul by this point, tired of bowing and scraping to those of greater status and following the arcane rule of propriety cannot deny the simple truth: the Coils of the Dragon are real, and provide a path out of the curse of vampirism.

Learning a Coil is one of several rites of passage for young Dragons, and mentors normally make a point to honor, or at least acknowledge, their student's achievement. Announcing to the covenant as a whole that a given Kindred has achieved her first Coil isn't always wise (manipulation of the Ordo Dracul's system of propriety is more difficult when one doesn't know where other Kindred stand, after all), but a mentor who oversees a student coterie usually performs a brief ceremony to mark the occasion. That ceremony can resemble a religious rite, a scholar's dissertation or a simple meeting of the Kindred involved, but it serves to foster academic and mystical competition in the coterie. That's the idea, anyway. Just as often, it fosters murderous jealousy and underhanded dealings, but those methods work quite well to enact change, and that's how Kindred society works, anyway. A "Supplicant ceremony" is just as much a warning to the new Supplicant as a celebration of her achievements.

Mechanics

Learning the Coils of the Dragon can be as simple as the player spending the appropriate number of experience points and marking the new trait on her character sheet. But the process can be considerably more interesting and rewarding than that, from a story perspective. The preceding sections mention the dangers inherent in learning the Coils of the Dragon. If your Storyteller doesn't wish to make that danger a real consideration for your character (fair enough), she may feel free to assume that your character has been taught well enough that she avoids that possible fate, and can simply use the notion of failed chrysalises as a plot device rather than a potential doom for your character. In particular, we recommend that the possibility of becoming completely lost to the Beast shouldn't be considered for a player's character, unless that player is interested in retiring her character and beginning with a new one.

If you would like to add the chance of failure to the process, see the Storyteller's Option: Chrysalis Mechanics sidebar on p. 50.

Lost to the Dragon

A vampire who loses herself to the Beast during a chrysalis is sometimes said to be "lost to the Dragon." This condition is incurable, and unfortunately requires the Kindred in question to be hunted down and destroyed. Such Kindred are more intelligent and capable than most vampires who reach Humanity 0, however, at least initially.

A vampire who becomes lost to the Dragon immediately loses any previously known Coils of the Dragon. The vampire's Beast "resets" its body, rejecting the changes the character has made. As the Beast slowly worms its way through the vampire's consciousness, the character's behavior changes to reflect this rapid decline. Beginning at the behavioral and appearance descriptions listed for Humanity 4 (see p. 186 of **Vampire: The Requiem**), the character's Humanity drops by one after every interval of nights equal to her dots in Resolve. For example, a Dragon with Resolve 3 who becomes lost to the Dragon spends three nights as though she had Humanity 4. She can still function around humans, but cares only for the practical consequences of her actions and looks corpselike and pale. After three more nights, her effective Humanity falls to 3. She becomes more predatory and sadistic, driven by her Vice. This continues until, after 12 nights, her Beast has destroyed any residual thought and self-awareness. Note that during this time, her Humanity trait is actually 0, with all of the concordant penalties that levies. The character's body and mind simply haven't caught up with her soul yet.

Redemption

Is it possible to save a vampire who has become lost to the Dragon? Scholars of the Ordo Dracul aren't certain. It doesn't happen often, after all, and when it does, the priority is normally placed on destroying the Kindred rather than trying to save her. That said, Dragons who have made the attempt (or

at least toyed with the theory) agree that if it is possible, the rescue must be performed within the first few nights (in game terms, before the character's effective Humanity drops past 4). How exactly a rescuer would go about it is a murky topic, but mental communication, perhaps aided by the Auspex Discipline, might be useful.

Interestingly, Ordo Dracul diplomats have come across evidence that the Lancea Sanctum possesses rituals that can cure Kindred "in a special state of Wassail, wherein the Beast is not a ravening monster but a plotting fiend." The Sanctified don't seem to know what state these rites refer to, however, but if the rumors are true, they date to the 16th century — about the time that Dracula allegedly had dealings with the covenant.

A Secret Society

More than the just a fraternity of like-minded scholastics and occultists, the Ordo Dracul is a formal society established by Vlad Tepes to encourage and support its membership in their endeavors, to protect their persons and the knowledge and resources they possess, and to advance the cause of the Great Work in every way possible. As with numerous similar mortal societies, the Ordo Dracul places heavy emphasis on Oathbound secrecy; strict, if not crushing, obedience to those who know best; and adherence to established methodologies intended to ensure that the Dragons' activities produce the best results and do not endanger the covenant.

However, first and foremost it is still a brotherhood of academics who find fulfillment in each other's company — or at least a welcome reprieve from the oft-times grueling demands of the Requiem. This is frequently forgotten by the Dragons as their substantial intellects are all too capable of exploiting the Order's complex hierarchy, myriad laws and the power they have at the ready to not do so. Those who are able to retain a clear sense of the covenant's fundamental purpose are usually the same Kindred who are able to maintain their own humanity, while those too easily swayed by the worst of their predatory instincts tend to miss the forest for the trees and are far more ruthless politicians and taskmasters than pedantic scholars. The Ordo Dracul counts each kind of Dragon among its membership.

The Academy

Every secret society is organized along lines that typically embrace and bolster the very purpose and activity of its members, as well as conforming to the strength of its numbers. An Academy — the collective term for all Dragons in a given domain — in a small Slovakian industrial town, for instance, is not going to organize itself or function in the same fashion as another in a vast English metropolis. Each will certainly adopt similar approaches to constituting itself, borrowing heavily from the practices of other Academies its founding members are familiar with. However, the Slovakian Dragons may not recognize all the same titles as the Dragons in London, choosing to consolidate some, eliminate others and even create new ones appropriate to their circumstances. Over time, this need for different types of Academies has led to the creation of various "Draconic Rites" (not to be confused with the similarly named document). Each is distinctly different, yet each remains true to the vision of Dracula and is viewed by the other Rites as no less authentic a version of the Ordo Dracul than itself; circumstance demands change and no Dragon would argue that. For more on Rites see p.68.)

No matter where the Ordo Dracul lairs are or what forms they take, there are more similarities than differences. Every Academy places great significance upon which secrets it parcels out to its members and what degree of authority it will grant them. The Ordo Dracul may not have as many degrees as the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, but what it lacks in stratification it makes up for in the kinds of secrets its ranking members are privy to. At least from the perspective of another Kindred, the ability to go without blood or to walk unharmed in daylight are beyond all valuation, and these are just some of the things the most accomplished Dragons are familiar with. Less august members of the covenant may not have access to such knowledge and the power it represents, but they are nonetheless rewarded richly for their services to the covenant. Even the lowliest student has an understanding of truths that would shake up Kindred society if they were known by outsiders. With each advance in the Ordo Dracul, a Dragon is also granted greater authority — over knowledge, artifacts or other Dragons. Being able to decide who will be told what secrets, who can borrow a certain tome, or who can come and go is very real power. Responsibility comes with the mantle of authority, however. The Dragon entrusted with a certain secret who accidentally lets it slip to someone deemed unworthy is ultimately responsible for anything and everything that happens as a consequence.

Chapter House

The Ordo Dracul's activities require not only keen eyes, brilliant minds and able hands, but also privacy, equipment and security — both to deny intruders and to contain *mistakes* that can and do result from the myriad experiments the Dragons routinely conduct in the name of the Great Work. Some of the covenant's members rely on their private havens to provide them these things, but most Kindred are not flush with the kind of money needed to provide the proper haven. Performing a dangerous ritual in a basement apartment is not recommended, and even an ordinary home is not outfitted for the

Plot Devices: Mentors & Students

The best stories are those that make use of the relationships between the main characters to create compelling drama. The mentor-protégé relationship is an excellent plot device that should not be overlooked.

All but the most aloof Dragon is someone's mentor, protégé or both. Newer members of the covenant are always taken under the wing of at least one more senior Dragon; if more than one, there is still usually one who is most important. The newcomer's entire future in the Ordo Dracul can depend heavily on her relationship with her mentor, especially if her mentor is notably influential, such as a Sanguine Philosopher of Terror. Which secrets she will be entrusted with, what relics and resources she will be given access to, how quickly she will rise through the ranks, and when and in what manner she will be permitted to study the Coils all hinge on who her mentor is and the nature of the relationship she has with that individual. If that relationship is strained, the protégé is likely to discover progress slow and possibly even forestalled forever. If it is a strong and active relationship with open communication and frequent contact, she may be rewarded with unusual access and a speedy promotion.

Storytellers could treat the mentor as a signature character who can and should be involved with the characters (most often, a coterie of new Dragons will fall under the aegis of a single mentor). The mentor makes demands of the group, sometimes menial and sometimes quite demanding, but in return she offers all the things that drew the characters to the Ordo Dracul in the first place. Should the players neglect the mentor-protégé relationship, the consequences should be real and should be of a nature that causes the players to realize just how important it is to repair and maintain their characters' relationship with their mentor. Characters who demand too much from a mentor (actually, any demands are unwelcome) should discover that is not how things work. It is just as much the mentor's responsibility to teach their protégé how to be a proper student as it is to teach her the covenant's secrets.

Characters that have been members of the Ordo Dracul for some time probably still have a mentor, but the relationship is no longer so demanding. By and large, the characters are left to their own devices, but should their activities result in problems, most mentors will involve themselves if for no other reason than to protect their own reputations. Most, however, actually do feel a lasting responsibility for their protégés — former or current — and will take an interest in any of their actions that can bring trouble. Just as important, mentors will continue to provide support and guidance when the protégés need it. Should the characters achieve something worthy of recognition, the mentor will be the first to notice and publicize the achievement. The flip-side to this is that some unscrupulous mentors will seek to share in the recognition, or even steal it for themselves — possibly threatening their former charges with some form of blackmail should they object.

Older characters make good candidates for being mentors. Their protégés should be treated with just as much care and attention as the characters' mentor. They require time and attention from the characters, and often require their interference if and when a protégé happens to go astray or otherwise become ensnared in some trouble. Saving a foolish protégé who chose to get too close to a secret werewolf ceremony can become an entire story on its own. Just as the characters began as a coterie, so too can one or more of them have their own small coterie to mentor. This can become the basis for the entire chronicle, with the onus now on the characters to teach the fledglings and defend them against intra-covenant rivalries and schemes, let alone all the other dangers inherent in the Requiem. Storytellers can easily ratchet up the drama by introducing elements familiar to espionage: spies, double agents, bribery, extortion, theft and propaganda. Doing so is not only dramatic but also allows the full scope of the Danse Macabre to be explored by characters who may sometimes feel entirely too steeped in mundane academic concerns.

kinds of scientific equipment and precautionary measures required by the work of many Dragons.

A chapter house is essentially a dwelling or other structure that is large enough and otherwise well-suited to provide the city's Dragons a place to gather, secure their valuables, conduct their research and spend the day if necessary. Similar to Masonic lodges or granges, chapter houses provide the Ordo Dracul the secrecy it craves as well as a sense of community acceptable to even the most xenophobic Dragons. Most domains house only one chapter house, but large cities may have a few situated in a way that provides either geographic convenience or exploits the nature of the area's ley lines. Few are actually established on an actual Wyrm's Nest, however; doing so invites too much unwanted attention from a variety of possible threats, and a dozen years later that node could shift, leaving the chapter house high and dry. Where multiple chapter houses exist, one is deemed the Grand Chapter House while the others are named for their location. Technically, a Dragon's haven can be termed a chapter house, but unless the place is large, the conceit is usually dropped.

Old churches, academic buildings and even archaic private residences built in the heyday of gargantuan Gothic mansions are most frequently converted for use as a chapter house; some pretend publicly to still serve their former function, but most simply pose as private clubs or societies. A close inspection of many of these properties might reveal a host of indications of their true use; that is, that they serve as places of unorthodox study or interest. Incorporation of astrological, occult, mystical and just plain unusual architectural

elements are common, and many chapter houses are specially chosen or renovated in order to take advantage of the local ley lines or other mystical points or directions. The interiors are usually reminiscent of both Victorian gentlemen's clubs and occult laboratories, and all set aside a large proportion of space for the Academy's library. Security may be archaic or state-of-the-art — or a mixture of both. The Castellan usually uses the chapter house as her haven, but, space providing, any other Dragon may join her. Many neonates, yet unable to outfit their own secure haven, take advantage of this. Given their relatively lowly status, however, they usually find their sleeping arrangements spartan, if not cramped. At least one Guardian is also in the habit of spending the day in the chapter house, in case of trouble.

Despite the Ordo Dracul's emphasis on security and secrecy, it is not uncommon for an Academy to open its doors to at least some of the more prominent — or selectively important — Kindred in the city on occasion. The intent is partly to quell suspicion of grand conspiracies and Devil worship, but it is also in part to tease the guests by allowing them a glimpse of some of the treasures the covenant possesses. A momentary glimpse of the chapter house's vast library, for instance, can generate a lust for access within a Primogen that can later be used to negotiate some important matter in the Dragons' favor. It need not be said, but during such visits every precaution is taken to hide truly important assets and to ensure the guests penetrate only those areas cleared for their perusal. Given the Disciplines that such visitors may possess, this is not often an easy thing to do.

Mentor and Protégé

No relationship better defines the Ordo Dracul than that which exists between a mentor and her protégé. At its very core the covenant is a practical school, and every member is both student and teacher, each striving towards the same end. It is the duty of the student to be respectful of her mentor, to listen to her words and observe her actions, and to learn something from the experience. The mentor's role is to act in a way deserving of respect, to show the student something enlightening and explain it in a way that will ensure that the lesson will be learned. Even in places where the covenant is informal and few titles are necessary, the relationship between mentor and protégé will endure and the quality of that relationship will define the very nature of the Ordo Dracul. In large metropolises where the number of Dragons may be in the dozens and the covenant's hierarchy is complex, even the elder Illuminus, seemingly so far removed from most matters, is still a mentor before all else, duty-bound to pass on what she knows to other, worthy Dragons.

It is most common for a Dragon to have a single mentor, usually, but not always, an older vampire who possesses a greater wealth of knowledge of the Coils and the Great Work in general. The mentor typically chooses her protégé or protégés, but sometimes a more senior Dragon may direct the choice, especially if the candidate seeking a mentor has political value. Once the relationship is established, it can last for decades and even centuries. Most end because the student has learned as much as she can from her mentor, and the two often maintain a cordial peer relationship. Sometimes, one or both displeases the other in such a fashion that the relationship is severed entirely; the ill will that results can become the basis for a rivalry that has the potential to tear the covenant apart if allowed to fester for too long. Where a mentor accepts more than one protégé, the competition between them can grow just as fierce, with each seeking to become the primary or even sole protégé. This kind of personal infighting can also cause a great deal of unrest that can ultimately hamper the Ordo Dracul's aims.

Few formalities exist in the mentor-protégé relationship, unless the mentor feels it necessary. Lessons can take nearly any form, from private lectures and study assignments to more public discussion and dialectic. Most protégés are also expected to attend to their mentor regularly, to observe all she does and says, and to demonstrate an understanding of the lesson. Protégés are always being tested, also. A good mentor questions she own biases towards she protégé and will regularly seek ways to quantifiably measure the student's progress. Not only does this improve the mentor's ability to educate she protégé, but it can improve the mentor's standing in the covenant. A talented protégé reflects well upon the mentor, just as an incompetent one can tarnish she reputation. Mentors are always eying the accomplishments of their peers' protégés in order to size up the competition. Outsiders may believe that the Ordo Dracul is merely a collective of scholars too concerned with their studies to involve themselves in politicking, but the rivalries that exist in the covenant can be as ambitious, fearsome and devious as anything in the Danse Macabre, making many Dragons skilled political manipulators.

Finally, it has become common practice for a Dragon to demonstrate her appreciation for her mentor, usually on an annual basis — but sometimes after she has accomplished a great thing that would have been impossible without proper mentoring. She might present her mentor a suitable gift, such as a written work she has been unable to procure for many months, or something less practical, yet no less appreciative, like a rare painting by the mentor's favorite artist that she can hang in her haven. Dragons may be more hidebound than most Kindred, but they aren't blind to the value of things unrelated to their studies. Often a protégé

instead chooses to honor her mentor by providing her clear evidence of her accomplishments. She might challenge her mentor to a game of Go that requires her full attentiveness throughout the day, showing her her mastery of the Coil of Banes or she might decide to handle fire in a way that by rights should send her into Rötschreck even as she remains placid. Regardless of the manner in which she displays her thanks and respect, it is, as they say, the thought that counts. A protégé who brown-noses too much is still less worthy in the eyes of most mentors than one who excels as a student, even if she may not observe this custom with as much regularity or zeal.

Guardian

The Ordo Dracul may possess more written works, occult artifacts, ancient relics and mystical resources than any other group, not to mention the inestimable number of dangerous secrets it hoards. These things must be protected from all those who might wish to steal them or use them for private gain. Even an innocent mistake in handling these treasures can result in terrible tragedy, and so only those deemed responsible enough can be permitted to handle the covenant's most precious property. The Guardians are tasked with keeping these things out of the hands *and minds* of unauthorized Kindred. From protecting a Wyrm's Nest to keeping alert for evidence that the Dragons' secrets have been leaked, the Guardians dedicate their Requiems to helping the Ordo Dracul remain secure in order that the Great Work might be accomplished.

Even the smallest Academies make use of Guardians, even if there is only one and he wears various hats, so to speak. Where the Ordo Dracul is better represented, the Guardians are treated as a distinct class of Dragon and are highly respected. Most are dedicated to the protection of a particular Wyrm's Nest, but there are usually at least a few whose primary function is to guard the Academy's chapter house and its material possessions. Should enemies attempt to storm the gates of the Dragon's "castle," it is the Guardians who sound the alarm and are the first to meet the threat head-on, with the Sworn of the Axe engaging the enemy soon thereafter. These Guardians, sometimes referred to as the Academy's gatekeepers, also serve as personal escorts to ranking Dragons when requested, alert for any attempt to interfere with their superior. In places where the rancor between the Ordo Dracul and other covenants is strong and outright assassination is not unheard of, this practice is common. It also boosts the standing of the elder Dragon. When she enters the Prince's court to discuss matters with her fellow Primogen and is accompanied by three well-armed and notoriously martial Kindred, her status within the domain at large is as effectively protected as his own flesh.

Loose-lipped and outright treasonous Dragons are also the focus of the Guardians. True, it is every Dragon's duty

to keep alert for violations of secrecy and signs of treason, but few have the attention to commit to such things, focusing instead as they do on their cryptic studies. For this reason, rooting out traitors and dangerous fools falls to the Guardians, particularly those attached to a chapter house. Like unsettling shadows, they move among their fellow Dragons, watching, listening and seeking any clues as to a possible violation. This activity creates an atmosphere of paranoia that makes even a seemingly cordial gathering of Dragons in a communal library one where voices are kept low, and every newcomer to the room is eyed with at least some small measure of suspicion. Because of the difficulty inherent in this kind of secret policing, the Guardians charged with the work often enlist the aid of low-ranking Dragons to assist them. Making a good impression upon a Guardian can be an important thing, but it can also cause the junior spy to be regarded unkindly by other Dragons who might potentially hold out an offer of even greater reward.

Kogaion

Perhaps the most honored member of the Academy, the Kogaion is the pre-eminent Guardian, entrusted with full knowledge of all the Wyrm's Nests and ley lines in the area. Every domain that claims at least one Dragon has its Kogaion; even if the title is not used, one of the Dragons will take on similar responsibilities. Most are quite adept with the Coils and are Masters and above, but it is not a prerequisite. Being able to memorize or map all the places of mystical importance in the domain is necessary, however. Whatever else happens to the Dragons, their chapter house and the covenant's artifacts, nothing would be as great a loss as that one. Kogaions are also tasked with maintaining a complete list of all the Dragons in the local vicinity; many actually go one step further and keep a roster of all the local Kindred, to the extent that they can. This is not done for genealogical purposes, but for reasons of security. Should a plot be set in motion that threatens the Academy, a comprehensive list of each Dragon, her status and her achievements can prove very useful to have.

Few Kogaions mingle with the rest of the Academy with any regularity. Their work not only requires them to constantly move about in order to observe and record all changes to the mystical landscape, but the knowledge they possess makes them easy targets for outsiders and traitors. Because they do spend so much time near nexuses and other mystical places, they also tend to draw the most attention from Lupines, ghosts, mages and other beings that are drawn to such locations. With so many potential enemies noting their passage, few Dragons have any desire to hang around with the Kogaion. In similar fashion, the Kogaions have no wish to visit upon the rest of the Academy the kind of horrors that they attract, and so usually keep their haven and most "domestic" activities far from the chapter house, the Rack, Elysium and other places the Dragons and other Kindred prefer to congregate.

Mapping the Mystical

It is left entirely to the discretion of the Kogaion to decide the manner in which she will map the area's ley lines, nexuses and other mystical treasures. The only imperative is that the Kogaion do so in a way that protects the identity and location of the things she records, but that also allows another Dragon — usually the highest ranked Sworn of the Dying Light — to be able to recall the information if necessary — for example, if the Kogaion should be destroyed. Consequently, the Kogaion always encrypts her trove of knowledge in some fashion and provides a key (or at least the means to find or create the key) to her backup. Should the Kogaion have memorized all he knows and suddenly disappear or if her records are destroyed, of course, even the key is worthless and the next Kogaion will have to begin again, first consulting the Guardians and going from there.

The ways in which Kogaions record their secrets run the gamut from the expected to the highly unusual. Ordinary two-dimensional maps are probably most common, although they rarely denote natural or manmade features in any clearly discernible way; that would too easily give away the position of the Wyrm's Nests and other places of importance. Instead, less obvious features are used for reference. An Invictus vampire poring over a map depicting the city as irregular regions of temperature variance recorded on a certain date, yet displaying no streets, land contours or elevation is likely going to find it unusable — which is the point. Three and four-dimensional maps are also used, as are even more cryptic media. Mathematical charts, complex musical notation and even poetry are adopted by appropriately adept Kogaions. Every feature, particularly those representing Wyrm's Nests and valuable artifacts, is given a codename or alias — sometimes even just a formula or glyph. Without the key or the Kogaion's help, whoever gets her hands on these maps will be left with little of use.

A Kogaion is elected upon the destruction or retirement of the previous officeholder by a body of the most august, Oathbound Dragons, where at least one member of each of the Orders of the Sworn is present. The investiture ceremony is one of the most solemn, baroque and well-attended events the Ordo Dracul holds. Kogaions and certain ranking Dragons from other Academies are frequently present at these ceremonies, one of the few times when foreign Dragons risk the dangers of travel to gather in numbers outside their own domain. Should the Kogaion ever be shown to be untrustworthy

of the office, she can be removed by a vote of a special Dragon Jury. However, no Kogaion can be declared untrustworthy except by his fellow Kogaions. No fewer then seven other Kogaions must register a vote of no confidence in the accused, an extremely rare thing even aside from the obvious logistically difficulties involved in bringing seven such hermits together for a referendum. A Kogaion no longer able to resist the pull of torpor and who expects her sleep to endure for any considerable time is expected to step down in order that her replacement may be found. Those who do not do so leave the Ordo Dracul in a difficult position should the Academy require their knowledge while they are unavailable.

Castellan

Unless the domain has no official chapter house — for example, with only two to four Dragons present, they may choose to simply meet in one another's private havens — one Dragon is given responsibility over the premises. Called the Castellan, this individual is akin to the domain's Master of Elysium, for she must not only secure and maintain the property, but it is her job to police it for minor infractions and to ensure that the chapter house is not abused by careless Dragons. The Guardians confront real dangers, but it is the Castellan who sees to the more mundane troubles like controlling noise, collecting and disposing of refuse, the use and assignment of rooms and ensuring that the place is safe from conflagrations. Ghouls and other mortals are often used for the lion's share of this work, but the Castellan is ultimately in charge. If she deems a Dragon's activities to be too dangerous or simply too disruptive for the chapter house, her privileges can be revoked, and she will be forced to practice her vocation elsewhere until the Castellan can be convinced to reconsider. Castellans are appointed by a simple majority vote of the Sworn and may be recalled at any time should they fall short of expectations. Naturally, if she plays her cards right, a Castellan can gain all manner of favors from her fellow Dragons. Being allowed to use a certain particularly suitable chamber for one's research can spell the difference between rapid success and lengthy, difficult work. A Castellan who ignores the realities of politics can be assured of a short tenure. Denying an Adept something without good reason, particularly if the Castellan is unsworn, is a surefire way of making dangerous enemies within the covenant.

Grand Wyrm

The Dragon who has taken her oath to the Ordo Dracul earlier than any other member of the Academy is accorded the title of Grand Wyrm. This status is a simple recognition of the fact that the Dragon so-honored has pursued the Great Work as one of the Sworn longer than any other, and is largely ceremonial in nature. The Grand Wyrm is not necessarily the most authoritative voice in the Academy (although she certainly can be and many often are), but when it comes to the myriad ritual functions open to all Dragons — excepting the monthly Caucus (see below) — her word has special significance. Among the Dragons, questions of ceremony and protocol are the Grand Wyrm's bailiwick. Although she does not actually possess official authority over the particulars of a ceremony, she is considered to be the most esteemed Dragon in such matters, and her recommendations are nearly always adopted with little or no alteration. While some Grand Wyrms don't make much of this recognition and offer their advice only when consulted, others use the position to their advantage as best they can. Some intercede in order to influence a proceeding to better favor one faction over another; others use it to simply bank political capital. Ignoring the Grand Wyrms' recommendations is permitted, but there is little benefit and much to lose by spurning the counsel of one of the covenant's eldest.

Convener

Each month on the night of the new moon the Academy holds a gathering of all Dragons known as a Caucus. It is an opportunity for the Dragons to openly discuss issues of concern, to make announcements, to set policy, to recognize accomplishments and to share their discoveries with their fellow Dragons. Debates and procedural bickering are common, but because issues of true import or those that require greater secrecy are not permitted to be brought to the floor during a Caucus, this is not a serious problem. The Caucuses are organized by the Convener, the highest-ranked unsworn Dragon in the Academy, who must also go to lengths to ensure that the customary ritual and ceremonial flourishes that accompany most all Ordo Dracul events are dutifully observed. The Convener often consults with the Grand Wyrm as to the best way to ensure the Caucus proceeds properly, but in the end it is the Convener's sole responsibility to conduct the Caucus.

It is not, however, the Convener's job to act as bailiff or to ensure the procedural integrity of the affair. Unruly Dragons are dealt with by the Sworn of the Axe (or, more commonly, simply by the pressure of their peers), and it is up to the highest-ranking Dragons as well as each student's mentor to ensure compliance with whichever rules are in observance. In many ways the Convener also acts as the covenant's ombudsman, frequently representing the unsworn in a variety of matters before the Sworn as the eldest of their number. This role can be particularly rewarding if performed well, but it can also make a Convener's Requiem more horrific than usual. Caught between those who essentially serve and those who command, the unprepared Convener can make enemies faster than most any other Dragon.

Confessor

One of the oddest titles within the Ordo Dracul is that of Confessor. As the name implies, it is the role of the Confessor to provide moral and spiritual counsel to others. However, the Confessor is not responsible to the Academy as a whole, but is typically attached to a coterie or, in some cases, a particularly troubled, ranking Dragon. What's more, even though the Confessor is technically a member of the covenant, she might not be a vampire, but rather a trusted ghoul or ordinary mortal. So long as the Dragon or Dragons are willing to entrust their darkest and most personal thoughts to the individual, her true nature is irrelevant. There are even tales of Dragons who claim to confess their troubles to the ghost of a relative or victim — comfort can come from almost anywhere. However, if it is a Dragon — and they *usually* are — the Confessor must be one who has forsaken the path of the Coils. Learning the Coils demands too much from a Dragon and is the primary reason for the need for Confessors in the first place. As such, a proper Confessor is either a Dragon who has never studied the Coils or one who has voluntarily quit further mastery. Abandoning the possibility of personal transcendence in order to tend to the needs of others still pursuing the Great Work is a sacrifice indeed, and, for this reason, Confessors, no matter who or what they are, are greatly respected insofar as they can be; no mortal Confessor is ever going to receiver greater respect than a true Dragon.

Kindred outside the Ordo Dracul who hear of the covenant's Confessors are often confused. Most see it as evidence of a strong religious foundation upon which the Dragons have built their society, and some even argue that if this is true, it vindicates the Ordo Dracul of the worst accusations of deviltry. Others say it is merely another indication of the blasphemous nature of the secretive Dragons, who use the title only to parody the Lancea Sanctum. The truth is a little of both. The Dragons *are* concerned about their souls, and, even more importantly, are worried about their ability to continue pursuing their scholarly aims. If they too quickly fall prey to the Beast that nightly threatens to rise and undo all they have worked so hard to build, they may never know transcendence. The nature of their experiments and studies frequently calls into question their morality as well as the extent of their ethical boundaries. The more they cross those lines in order to effect some hoped-for scientific accomplishment, the more they risk demolishing what remains of their humanity. By having a Confessor to watch for those dangers, counsel the Dragon how best to avoid them and be there to help her when things go south, the Dragon's Requiem will be marked less by tragedy and more by achievement.

It is worth noting that Confessors have no official voice in the covenant aside from what they may already have by virtue of their other services to the Ordo Dracul and their mastery of the Coils of the Dragon, if any. Even unofficially, few Confessors enjoy any special respect beyond that given them by the Dragons they are attached to. The Requiem of a Confessor can be a thankless one, but for the right individual, it can be more fulfilling than even the Great Work.

Other Positions

Beyond these Academy-wide positions, there are usually a number of others that vary greatly depending on location. Some Academies hand out titles like they were going out of style, unable to resist creating an official position out of even the lowliest of duties, especially in large domains. Butlers, Librarians, Watchers, Antiquarians, Armorers, Cartographers, Houndsmen, Notaries, Couriers, Ambassadors and Scryers are just some examples of the kinds of titles used. Storytellers should feel free to invent as many positions as they wish to create type of Academy that exists in your chronicle, using whichever titles best suit the intended flavor.

Dragon's Tongue

The most recognized achievement in the Ordo Dracul is mastery of the Coils of the Dragon. Given that every Dragon pursues the same Great Work — even if they dedicate more time to other, Lesser Works — and the Coils are proof of further progress towards that goal, only the most loutish Dragons do not feel respect for a fellow Dragon who has surpassed them in this sphere. However, the covenant has concerns that often must come before the meritorious achievements of its membership, no matter how impressive. For this reason, it is just as often politics, economics, security and personal influence that determine the chain of command within an Academy. What's more, not every bookish genius is fit to be in charge of a complex organization that faces all sorts of challenges night in and night out.

Therefore, while a Dragon's esoteric progress is worthy — nay, demanding — of respect, it does not automatically determine one's rank. This has led the path to political power within the covenant to become known as the Dragon's Tongue. All Dragons set out on that path by following a similar route, serving and learning from mentors and pursuing the Coils of the Dragon, but before long they will recognize that the path divides, and a host of possible routes to power are available to them. Which route they choose not only determines much about their future role in the Ordo Dracul, but it says even more about the Dragons themselves.

Despite this, the ranks of authority the Ordo Dracul typically recognizes — ranks devised by Dracula himself — are still technically defined by how many Coils one

has learned. This is usually interpreted only as a suggested guideline. Also, because it is so difficult to prove whether a certain Dragon has or has not demonstrated sufficient mastery of a particular Coil, many Dragons are promoted to ranks they would never deserve if Dracula's original criteria were still used. Some of these individuals are outright pretenders, lying about their capabilities in order to a better position themselves for promotion. Rarely are such shysters punished by revocation of rank, in part because the Coils are no longer a requirement, but also because it would likely result in too much turmoil for the entire Academy. In addition, the pretender might actually be well-suited for her new duties, even if her mystical talents are lacking. When it comes down to this, most Dragons show themselves to be pragmatists.

In addition to a Dragon's rank, the covenant recognizes the particular direction a Dragon takes as her work progresses. Called a domain, it announces the Coil the Dragon is most expert in. Domains are seen by many to be a key to a Dragon's nature that provides further insight beyond what the Tarot can offer. More than simple decorative titles, they are treated as important by most Dragons. In much the same way as some people impart great meaning to one's astrological sign and make decisions based upon that, the Dragons tend to cede the same kind of significance to the domains. Duties assigned to an Initiate of Hunger will likely be different than those given to another Initiate whose domain is of the Curse; each is seen to have its own strengths and weaknesses and decisions are made accordingly whenever practical.

Many Academies also recognize the use of so-called "decorations," descriptive flourishes added to a Dragon's title to emphasize things like the subject's second-most favored Coil, her mentor's rank and even clan or bloodline. Each Academy has its own precise rules for use of these heraldic devices, and, while many are common, many more are unique to the particular domain. In London, a Master of the Curse who also is quite accomplished in the Coil of the Beast is called an Untamed Master of the Curse — in Los Angeles, a Dragon of similar rank and achievement is a Master of the Furious Curse.

A sample list of ranks, domains, titular decorations and honorifics is provided on p. 15.

The Sworn of Dracula

When Dracula established the Ordo Dracul with his *Rites of the Dragon*, he recognized that the covenant would only endure if it were as carefully and strictly organized as the Dragons' experiments were approached. Achievement in the Coils was the original litmus test for advancement in rank, but the covenant would require very different kinds of strengths that would complement, rather than confront one another. The Dragon's Tongue calls for not only a distinction between members of the Order based on which Coils they pursue, but even more importantly it divides all those Dragons who have sworn a solemn, unbreakable oath to the covenant into three different branches. Each is given specific areas of authority as well as duties so that those Dragons best suited for one type of service to the Academy are put to that use and not wasted on occupations they are ill-fit to assume. Together, the three sub-orders would have authority over the greater Order of the Dragon, open to all Kindred. Ostensibly, each Academy is answerable only to Vlad Tepes himself, but given his failure to appear and utter pronouncements for more than a century, this is little more than a formality tonight, with the elders of the Sworn, as these Oathbound Dragons are known, effectively ruling the roost.

The Sworn of the Axe, the Sworn of the Dying Light and the Sworn of the Mysteries are each led by its ranking members. Within their sub-order's sphere of influence, these elders are the final authority for the entire Academy. If the highest-ranking Sworn of the Axe declares that all Dragons must destroy a certain Mekhet Crone who is accused of stealing a certain manuscript from the Kogaion, a higher-ranking Sworn of the Mysteries has no right to countermand that order, for martial matters are the domain of the Axe. When something seems to fall within the sphere of two or even all three sub-orders, the highest-ranking Sworn has the final voice. Most importantly, regardless of rank, the Sworn always have higher standing than those who have not taken an oath. A Sworn Scribe may command an Adept despite the Scribe's relatively low status. However, as with just-commissioned military officers who go around barking orders to senior NCOs with 20-plus years under their belt, what goes around comes around, and one night their comeuppance will come due.

Sworn of the Axe

All the efforts of the Ordo Dracul are for naught if it cannot protect itself from those who would do it harm and steal its secrets. Those Dragons who swear the Oath of the Axe are the covenant's most honored members, the first among equals according to the *Rites*. To them go the first spoils of battle: first choice of victims and first claim to properties seized. In return, the Sworn of the Axe are expected to place their unlives on the line for the Academy. If vampire-hunters are on the trail of a fellow Dragon, the Axe is Oathbound to intercede and defend their fellow Dragon no matter the cost to their own number. In times of violent conflict, the word of these martial vampires is supreme; a Dragon who disobeys them in matters of war and defense can expect to suffer immediate destruction. If exceptional mercy is shown, the miscreant can still look forward to an unusual amount of pain and suffering that will forever burn the memory of her insubordination into her flesh and soul.

Simple Oaths and Great Oaths

Among the Dragons, the taking of oaths is of tremendous importance. It is a promise to take on responsibilities, to safeguard secrets and to serve the Order. A Dragon who breaks her oath is more detestable than any other Kindred, a traitor whose word no longer has value and whose Requiem is best ended. For this reason, Dragons do not proclaim oaths lightly.

Two oaths are recognized by the covenant. Simple Oaths are usually unceremonious and take place between two Dragons. The mentor-protégé relationship, for example, is normally cemented by a Simple Oath, but Dragons just as frequently swear Simple Oaths to one another when partnering on some investigation or Lesser Work, when transacting business, and when borrowing and lending their most treasured possessions. Violation of a Simple Oath is a serious matter, but it rarely rises to a level of importance demanding a formal trial or other adjudication.

Great Oaths are usually between individual Dragons and the entire covenant, or less frequently the Academy, a coterie or another subset of the greater Ordo Dracul. Joining the ranks of the Sworn requires a Great Oath, and most involve elaborate ritual and are taken before more than one Dragon. An individual who breaks a Great Oath can be certain that her crime will be dealt with swiftly and formally. In some instances a Dragon may argue before a *Juris Draconis* that an oath she has made has been breached by the group she swore the oath to in the first place. If one's coterie turns on her, the oath she took when joining the coterie may be ruled null and void, and any further obligations she had are absolved.

Great Oaths are almost always recorded in the Academy's books, with signatures of the oath-taker, the administer of the oath, and at least three witnesses completing the record. The rolls also record all violations and the names of the oath-breakers, so that their sins will not be forgotten even through the Fog of Eternity.

The Sworn of the Axe looks to Mara, Dracula's first bride, as their founding member. Strong, cunning, and sated only when blood runs hot and deep, she ruled the Axe until the late 18th century, at which time she vanished from the covenant's records. No Dragon claims to have seen her since, but she is not forgotten. On the contrary, Mara is revered by the sub-order she once ruled in a manner not unlike Joan of Arc. Images depict her as a fearsome beauty drenched in blood and wading into the storm of battle assured of victory, regardless of the nature of her foe. She is the Dragon rampant, noble and true, yet at the same time brutal and unfamiliar with mercy. Many of the Sworn of the Axe seek to emulate her ways, particularly female members of the Axe,

who often see themselves as incarnations of Mara. Dedications to the first bride are also common, usually before battle, but also when weapons are being cleaned or stowed away. This kind of religiosity is not unusual for a military order, but the Sworn of the Axe recognize the unease it sometimes creates among other Dragons and tend to keep their most visible veneration private.

Teaching the Coils to Outsiders

Of all the crimes one might commit against the Ordo Dracul, giving away to the unworthy its greatest secret of all — the Coils of the Dragon — is the most heinous. Any Dragon who dares to do this, whether successful or not, is subject to terrible retribution by the Sworn of the Axe. If only a single Coil is revealed to someone outside the covenant or even another Dragon not yet deemed worthy of the treasure, the guilty is condemned to drink two heady draughts of Vitae from her own mentor. If she herself learned the Coil without permission, then it is the mentor's own teacher that the vile student must drink from, binding herself to that superior with the power of the blood. For each additional Coil illegally taught, the guilty Dragon must take another two drinks from a different Dragon. Unless the convicted has previously drunk from one of these individuals, no full Vinculum can actually be established. However, two drinks is usually enough to create a powerful pull, and a Dragon who experiences this simultaneously from multiple Dragons is going to discover just how hellish the Requiem can be. Of course, once a true Vinculum is formed, these other bonds dissipate entirely.

If a Dragon is found guilty of this crime, she may forgo the traditional punishment. Instead, she may ask to be impaled in the manner of one of Dracula's own mortal victims and left to the searing justice of the sun. Strangely perhaps, this choice is not an uncommon one. In the eyes of many Dragons, nothing is worse than bondage, and it is just possible that with their burning destruction they may discover the kind of secret that they have spent their unlife seeking.

Membership in the Axe is by invitation only. A prospective candidate first and foremost must be an exemplary warrior, able and willing to launch herself into the most gruesome skirmish with her only concern being the task at hand. She must not balk when told to kill, no matter who the target is, and she must stand in the way of any enemy who dares to threaten the Ordo Dracul or its members, regardless of the circumstances. If an Axe is told to murder the Prince, there should be no hesitation and no delay. Once a candidate has impressed two Sworn of the Axe, her name will be put to a vote at the next muster — the monthly meetings the group holds to conduct its private business. A simple majority of "yeas" is needed, though the highest-ranking Axe reserves the right of veto. If an unsworn Dragon is invited to join the ranks of the Axe and rejects the offer, officially there are no consequences. "It is better to pass the cup of valor untasted than to poison the chalice with unclean lips," wrote Dracula. In practice, however, there can be all types of subtle recrimination; and, given the complex nature of covenant politics, even the smallest cruelties can cause ripples in the Danse Macabre.

Stations of the Axe

The Sworn of the Axe have their own special offices that are modeled in large part on those typical in a religious fighting order of old. Although variations and other offices certainly exist, the following are the most commonly found:

Companion: The lowest rank in this branch of the Sworn, Companions make up the majority of the Axe in most places. Their duties are as varied as there are things to be done, with most volunteering for difficult missions in order to prove themselves and rise above this lower tier of the Sworn.

Dragon Knight: The Knights are the Axe's upper echelon, vampires who have not only proven themselves in battle, but who have destroyed at least one other Kindred in the course of fulfilling their duties. (For this purpose, destroying a vampire in order to "chase the Dragon's Tail" does not count.) Knights may command a Companion in all things (an exception follows) and are usually each assigned a particular type of command, whether authority over a coterie or location or perhaps some less concise assignment, such as rooting out traitors.

Commander: This title only exists in time of actual battle, when three or more Sworn of the Axe must engage a foe. A Dragon Knight or above declares who shall be named Commander, and depending on the challenge, may even select a junior Axe for the office. Until the operation is completed, the Commander has complete authority over those she commands, regardless of generation or rank. After the task is finished, the office is eliminated.

Vigilant Dragon: The Sworn named to this office is responsible for recording all proceedings, activities, and judgments of the Axe. Some use paper and pen, but more and more are using modern technology to capture the inner workings of the Sworn of the Axe. Because of the difficulty inherent in capturing images of Kindred (and the danger such pictures would represent to the Masquerade), audio devices are preferred, with some Vigilant Dragons even digitizing the recordings for computer archiving, retrieval and transmission. The nature of their duties makes most Vigilant Dragons excellent historians also, and they are often consulted by the Academy at large for such purposes. Finally, they serve as the Axes' heralds, bestowing coats of arms and ruling on their proper use.

Rising Dragon: This is the Grandmaster's second-in-command, a capable warrior who must stand ready to take the Rampant Dragon's place should any harm befall her. Rising Dragons also frequently act as the Axe's liaison to the other factions of the Sworn, a role that requires the office-holder to not only know how to kill, but how to be a good diplomat.

Rampant Dragon or **Grandmaster**: The ranking member of the Axe, this battle-scarred Dragon is not always the eldest. The higher than usual likelihood that a Sworn of the Axe is in torpor or has spent time in torpor results in many younger Grandmasters, as their Vitae may actually be more potent than their elders' and enable them to be better warriors. Still, it is usually the wisest of all the soldiery who commands the Sworn of the Axe. In all matters within their sphere of influence, her word is final.

Warden: This Sworn is responsible for any and all prisoners or non-Dragons captured or permitted on covenant property. In many domains, the Warden is also the Academy's Castellan, but this is only due to the relatively small numbers of the Axe and the natural overlap in the duties.

Custom and Ceremony

The Sworn of the Axe values honor and martial ability above all other virtues and is in the habit of staging events to shower glory upon those who deserve it. Some of these ceremonies can be quite elaborate and may be open to the entire Academy, but the majority are private affairs intended only for those Dragons who have taken the Oath of the Axe. Simple commendations are usually incorporated into the monthly muster, but truly noteworthy service is rewarded in a special ceremony in order to ensure the honored Dragons receive the full attention they deserve.

The most important ritual is the promotion of a Companion to a Dragon Knight. To prepare for her elevation to knighthood, the Companion must first hold vigil for a full 24 hours, from sundown to sundown, without lapsing into slumber. She remains alone — but observed — and is expected to meditate upon the meaning of her promotion in a manner similar to preparing for a chrysalis. If she is unable to remain vigilant, she is expected to excuse herself and wait at least one year before she may (or may not) be summoned again to the knighthood.

After the vigil is completed, the Companion takes a special bath to wash away all that remains of her former existence. She then dons a pure white robe and enters the ceremonial hall where the rest of the Axe Sworn await her. She kneels before the Rampant Dragon, who then speaks to the gathering. The Grandmaster puts a series of questions to the knight-to-be, who answers them in the affirmative, essentially taking a second Great Oath to the Sworn of the Axe. Once done, a mortal victim is brought forth, and the Grandmaster decapitates her with a special axe. The victim's head is then held over the kneeling Companion and shaken so that the white robe is drenched in blood as the Grandmaster speaks the ceremony's final words, dubbing the former Companion a Dragon Knight. The newly-made Knight rises and is permitted to consume the victim's blood, which has been consecrated to the Axe, to Mara, to Dracula and to the Ordo Dracul.

The Axe-Sworn also observe the following special traditions:

Awards of Weaponry: Besides promotions and verbal commendations, the Sworn of the Axe honors its greatest warriors by awarding them weapons — something they can use to further their cause. In more traditional Academies, swords, knives and axes are most common. These are usually made specifically for the intended recipient, but are sometimes old weapons of great value or significance; one Dragon Knight in Toronto was supposedly given a Samurai's blade appraised at $1.8 million (before it was stolen from the museum where it was displayed). Less traditional Axes sometimes give gifts of rare or expensive firearms, though, given the limited lethality of such weapons, blades are still more common.

Heraldry: The Sworn of the Axe make much use of heraldic devices, and each Dragon Knight is granted her own coat of arms upon promotion to that position, one that usually includes elements from the Knight's clan and possibly the mentor's and sire's. The rules governing the use and display of a Dragon's blazon are complex and very specific — one Axe Sworn is usually assigned the duty of herald. Most allow it to be worn on the flesh, and so tattooing one's coat of arms on the chest or arm is relatively commonplace.

Red or Scarlet: The color of the Axe is red, for it symbolizes the blood they draw and the Vitae that burns with fire in combat. Only the Sworn of the Axe are permitted to wear red when formally attired (such as for ceremonies — not just puttering about the chapter house). Dragons who violate this rule can expect to have the offending garments or accessories immediately removed and destroyed on the spot by any Axe who happens to notice.

Sworn of the Dying Light

Dragons who have taken the Oath of the Dying Light dedicate themselves more than any others to unlocking the secret of transcendence by pushing the envelope of what is possible with the Coils. They work only to improve upon what has already been discovered, but to go much further, eventually introducing a fourth and possibly final Coil to the Ordo Dracul. True visionaries, the Blue Dragons — an allusion to their sect's signature color — are also given authority over the direction that other Dragons' studies take. Most of the time they exercise great care in doing this, usually intervening in another's

pursuits only when and if the studies pose some danger to the covenant. However, it is the Blue Dragons' prerogative to involve themselves at any time, declaring a Dragon's efforts to be wasteful and assigning her more "productive" work instead, for example. In addition to this broad power, whenever the question of authority arises within the Ordo Dracul, it is the Dying Light's word that takes precedence. These Dragons are the covenant's judiciary, passing judgment whenever called for, but also offering their learned voices when only counsel is necessary.

Dracula appointed his exotic second bride, Anoushka, to lead the Dying Light. Her inquisitive demeanor, her critical intellect and her passion for discovery made her the perfect choice. What her sire did not foresee was the danger her compassion and altruistic tendencies might pose to the Order. Mara and her closest supporters were seen as too naïve by most others; they were accused of exploiting their judicial authority by taking a moral high road that was inappropriate for the covenant. The Great Work required a focus and dedication that would be sacrificed by too much moralizing, Anoushka and her followers thought, and their views and those of Mara's faction were deadlocked over this point. The result was nearly a century of infighting that at times threatened to tear the young covenant apart.

When Anoushka departed for her Indian homeland in the late 1700s, rumor held that it was on account of her exasperation with and resignation from the ideological struggle. The fact that she was never been heard from again subsequently led many to believe that she was destroyed by a cadre of her enemies — the Sworn of the Axe are most often mentioned — to ensure that the strife that surrounded her would never again threaten the Ordo Dracul. Recent whispers that she may have risen from the fog of history and be seeking to reestablish her authority within the covenant have already caused ripples within the Dying Light and the rest of the Ordo Dracul. If the stories are true, great trouble might lay ahead. More importantly, what if during her absence she succeeded at her efforts to master a fourth Coil, or even more shocking, completed the Great Work and has transcended undeath?

The Dying Light extends an invitation to join only to those Dragons who have already contributed to the Great Work in a meaningful way, either by recovering some occult artifact, securing a place of mystical power, or unearthing a secret of considerable arcane worth. The ranking members of the Dying Light consult, and, if the offering is determined to be noteworthy and the postulant of a suitable nature and character, the individual is welcomed into their esoteric society. Most new members are already capable of wielding at least one Coil, but this is not a prerequisite — some extraordinarily gifted newcomers were chosen because they simply demonstrated credible potential. Once a member, the Twilight Dragon (as the Sworn of the Dying Light is also called) is given access to secrets that only the scions of Anoushka are privy to, dread truths that forever change she who learns them. From that point forward, a transcendence of sorts has already taken place, making the ultimate transformation seem that much closer.

Forbidden Studies

It is one thing to push the limits of occult investigation and explore things that verge on the truly blasphemous in order to gain useful knowledge; however, it is quite another to step beyond that limit and embrace the truly anathema for the sake of saving time and effort. From the perspective of the Dying Light, nothing is more unforgivable or unbearable than a Dragon who literally sacrifices her very soul and the transcendence she seeks in exchange for some momentary gain. Trafficking with spirits, ghosts, angels and demons is not uncommon in the Ordo Dracul and, while often suspect, is not proscribed. However, a Dragon who opens herself up to the true black arts and invites possession or otherwise submits herself to such a being has embraced the utterly forbidden. No excuse can ever justify such a thing.

This crime is so ghastly that even bald-faced treason pales in comparison. For the black magician, the Dying Light reserves the most final and terrible of all punishments: sanctioned Amaranth. The guilty party is staked, and a fellow student, nearly always another member of the sub-order, is granted permission to drink her blood and consume her soul. It is rationalized that it is a far better thing to allow another worthy Dragon to gain strength from the soul forsaken than permit it to be the plaything of a capricious demon or other spirit. This act is clearly acknowledged to be a violation of the Traditions, but these Dragons have few qualms about this. All arguments aside, who outside their Oathbound brethren will ever know?

Initiation of the Dying Light

Whereas the Sworn of the Axe arrange themselves as a military order, those who have taken the Oath of the Dying Light draw upon the traditional structures of guilds and courts for their hierarchy. The most common titles include the following:

Apprentice: The first few years a Twilight Dragon serves as an Apprentice and is expected to do nothing more than watch, listen, ask questions and learn. It is the duty of an Apprentice to assist one or more Masters of the Dying Light (*q.v.*) in their studies — performing research, maintaining their libraries and assisting with their experiments as needed. It is never the place of an Apprentice to give

commands or pass judgment. While technically any Sworn of the Dying Light possesses the authority to weigh in on matters of covenant authority, an Apprentice who thinks so highly of her own opinion that she would do this is swiftly disabused of this notion, and can even be ejected from the Dying Light. Very few apprenticeships last more than a couple of years — so long as the Apprentice demonstrates no egregious character, she will eventually be promoted to Journeyman status.

Journeyman: Most Twilight Dragons are Journeymen, a position that affords them a great deal of freedom to pursue their own personal Lesser Works in a manner they find most satisfactory — so long as no superior rules their endeavors impermissible. A Journeyman is considered a full member of the sub-order, and many have no desire for further political promotion, preferring to spend their Requiems engaged in their work rather than be burdened with the responsibilities of the ranking Sworn.

Master of the Dying Light: To become a Master of the Dying Light — which should not be confused with the similar title of Master available to all Dragons — a Journeyman must present a Master Thesis to the collective body of Dying Light Masters known as the Twilight Council. The Journeyman must defend her thesis, which will be rigorously questioned and challenged. This is a closed session in order to protect whatever secrets the Journeyman may have uncovered while preparing her thesis, but word of a truly poor defense has a tendency to spread and can mar a Journeyman's reputation for decades. At this rank, the Sworn has the authority to make overall policy regarding the scholastic efforts of all Dragons. The political ramifications of this are obvious, as a petulant Master of the Dying Light could ride a junior Dragon who personally displeased her, forbidding her to pursue those things that she most desires to explore. To stir things up more, she could later permit another, more favored Dragon to undertake the work forbidden the previous individual. This kind of activity is certainly frowned upon, but that by no means stops it from happening with frightening regularity.

Twilight Judge: The first of two, theoretically equal leaders of the Dying Light, the Twilight Judge has the very last word on any question of authority in the Ordo Dracul. She may intervene in any dispute that is not already clearly adjudicated and pass judgment without invitation. Once she has said her piece, the matter is considered resolved, and it may never again be revisited — unless the Twilight Judge herself chooses to do so. Of course, most Twilight Judges reserve this privilege for only the most necessary situations, preferring to let lesser Dragons resolve the dispute whenever possible. However, parties can and do appeal to the Twilight Judge, but it is also the right of the Twilight Judge to refuse to rule on a matter, effectively returning it to the judgment of the "lower court" or parties to handle.

Provost: The second of the two ranking members of the Dying Light is the Provost, whose primary responsibility it is to organize the Twilight Council. This official acts as the chairman of the Twilight Council, bringing its sessions to order, setting the format of its meetings, and holding veto power on all issues brought before that body. She also personally represents the Dying Light to the Sworn of the Axe and the Mysteries, informing them of significant discoveries and providing them the esoteric boons they might require in performing their own responsibilities. Some Provosts are literally pushed into this position by the Twilight Council, who see it as a way to distract an academic competitor in a way that will reduce the threat she poses to their own accomplishments. Others are political wunderkinds who use it as a platform from which they can take the best achievements of others and use it to gild their own scholarly crown.

Gaillard: In order to ensure that the Ordo Dracul does not become a slave to repetition, becoming hidebound and stagnant, its policies, its methods, its hypotheses and its studies must be questioned and challenged. The Gaillard is a Journeyman chosen for her insight, her critical thinking, her creativity, her wit and her diplomatic skills. It is her job to question even the eldest Dragons, to point out alternative possibilities, to identify potential dangers and benefits, and to force the Ordo Dracul to think twice before doing something that could end up being wasteful or dangerous. The individual is expected to play Devil's Advocate in a polite and respectful fashion, but to nevertheless be proactive in exercising her duties. Rude, unobservant or banal Gaillards are dismissed in favor of another without hesitation; the covenant cannot let itself fall prey to stagnation and straight-jacketed thinking if it is to unlock the greatest mysteries of all.

Custom and Ceremony

The Sworn of the Dying Light are no less bound to ritual and tradition within their ranks than the Sworn of the Axe, though the Dying Light's emphasis is far more scholastic. Most of their affairs are open to the entire Academy, including their graduation ceremonies and frequent symposiums. The former are typically gaudy affairs that elevate the graduate by providing her superiors a public forum to make known the student's achievements. Symposiums are held on a weekly basis and usually consist of a few speakers of at least Journeyman status relating the fruits of their labors or discoursing on some occult mystery, solved or not. These sessions usually end with open discussion that can become quite heated exchanges, especially when the presenter argues for a particularly unorthodox point of view.

Demonstrations showcasing a Dragon's progress in the Coils or introducing a discovery that has the potential to literally shake the foundations of the Ordo Dracul and perhaps all Kindred society are almost always held in private. Called *practicums*, such meetings take place in the most secure part of the chapter house, in case a disastrous accident occurs. Attendees are limited only to the highest-ranked Twilight Sworn and the presenter, of course. Various additional precautions may be taken, depending on the precise nature of the demonstration, and a careful record is kept of the proceeding. All attendees are required to take a Simple Oath before the meeting commences, ensuring the utter secrecy of the affair. Practicums are uncommon and can only be called by a Master of the Dying Light who is convinced that the demonstration or revelation is worthy of such import. Naturally, the lengths to which the attendees go to keep the practicum secret only increase the rumors that are already part and parcel of unlife in an Academy.

Languages: One of the most important requirements of a good researcher is the ability to understand the works she is examining. The study of foreign tongues, particularly the archaic and even esoteric languages used by the world's greatest occultists and scholars, is a necessity and consumes much of a Twilight Dragon's nights. Latin, Ancient Greek and Arabic are of primary importance, but nearly any language or dialect can prove valuable. Many rely on their fellow Sworn of the Dying Light to provide translation services, but given the secretive nature of their work and the inherent academic competitiveness, it is far better to be self-reliant in this capacity. The sub-order's cumulative linguistic skills make them an invaluable resource in the domain, and they are frequently consulted by other Kindred for their expertise.

Curators: Commonly, the Sworn of the Dying Light employ one or more kine to serves as their personal librarians, housekeepers and research assistants. These individuals are usually intellectuals and academics chosen for their particular realm of knowledge and induced into service by a combination of fascination, blood addiction and fear. Most serve their master full-time, but continue to maintain at least some connection to a university, museum or important library in order to take advantage of its facilities and resources. Curators are valued assistants, and many become ghouls to enhance their capabilities. Exchange of curators is rare, but it does happen — the gift of a particularly gifted curator can be a very canny move for a Dragon wishing to improve her position in the Danse Macabre.

Blue or Azure: It is the privilege of the Dying Light to claim blue as its own color as the Axe claims red. No other Dragon may wear this color when formally garbed, and even informally dressing in blue is taken as a slight to the Dying Light. The color is believed to have been chosen as reflective of the twilight sky, but

this is only conjecture — its original meaning has been lost. On account of this hue, the Sworn of the Dying Light are often referred to as the Ordo Dracul's Blue (or Azure) Dragons.

Sunset: Most of the Dying Light's ceremonies begin at sunset, a testament to their facility with the Coils. Naturally, not every Twilight Dragon can attend such events, so the first order of business is often perfunctory, with weightier matters addressed only once darkness has fully descended.

Sworn of the Mysteries

The third part of the Sworn is given perhaps the most difficult duty of all: It is their place to set the course for the entire covenant, making decisions for all Dragons that will benefit their collective purpose. The Sworn of the Mysteries have no authority over the actions and fate of individuals, but in matters that affect the overall Ordo Dracul (or, more specifically, the local Academy), their decisions are law. It is their responsibility to look forward into the unknown and find the best path for the covenant. They, more than any other Dragons, look at the big picture and consequently involve themselves in the political machinations of the Prince, the Primogen and the other covenants. The Seers, as they are called, are the covenant's "philosopher-kings," enigmatic figures who reveal nothing of their true intentions as they guide the ship that is the Ordo Dracul through the treacherous, black sea of the Danse Macabre.

The first of the Seers was Dracula's youngest bride, his beloved Lisette. It was her influence that tempered the Impaler's animosity towards God and focused his purpose on personal transcendence. She recognized the need for the covenant to be steered by those with the broadest view of its destiny, not the narrow concerns that consumed the Sworn of the Axe and the Dying Light. When the covenant tossed and turn from internal turmoil, the Sworn of the Mysteries stood above the fray, keeping their attention focused on the overall form of the Ordo Dracul as well as its survival. Time brought tremendous change inside and outside the covenant, and only those with the broadest and farthest-reaching vision could ensure its continued existence and ultimate success. When she bid adieu to London and set out for "parts East" in 1889, she left behind a cabal of Dragons well-suited for their task as the covenant's navigators and lawmakers. If trouble existed within the House of Mysteries, none outside its closed doors knew anything. This discipline has kept the Ordo Dracul on course, even though Lisette has not surfaced again to take the helm.

The ranks of the Sworn of the Mysteries are closed to all but the most acclaimed Dragons. Membership requires that half of the chapter's other Dragons formally affirm their support for the candidate. Traditionally, candidates do not campaign for induction into the Mysteries, but the practice is not uncommon. Most who seek out membership do so quietly, aware that too much stumping is only likely to lead to a few Dragons speaking out against the claimant. If even a single Dragon of the lowest rank should declare her opposition to the candidate taking the Oath of Mysteries, the candidate's hope is dashed and she cannot be sworn. At one time, this meant the individual was forever forbidden from further consideration, but in some domains tonight the proscription is limited. In some cities, for example, one must wait a dozen years before one may again seek admittance to the Sworn of the Mysteries; however, each subsequent failure to succeed doubles the period one must wait before applying again.

Those who are welcomed into the Mysteries are usually Dragons who take the long view of things, rarely getting caught up in the details. They set law for the Academy and make important decisions such as where to locate a chapter house, which other covenant to ally with and how to interpret the *Rites of the Dragon*. The Seers are valued as advisors to influential Kindred outside the covenant and spend much time building, working and tearing down relationships with other Kindred, all with an aim to aid the Ordo Dracul.

Because of their grave responsibilities, the Sworn of the Mysteries are expected to remain free from all outside influence; they are married to the Ordo Dracul body, mind and soul. For this reason, their oath forbids them to drink — nay, even *taste* — the Vitae of another Kindred for any reason whatsoever. They may have tasted their sire's blood upon their Embrace, but they are sworn to never again sample the blood of another vampire. If they break this trust willingly, their destruction is assured. Should they be forced to do so, they are expected to escape their shame by facing the sun. Those who are unable (or unwilling) to do this are cast out of the covenant and exiled — forever after they are viewed as beneath all other creatures for their weakness.

Stations of the Mysteries

In part because its numbers are smaller than those of the Axe and the Dying Light, the Sworn of the Mysteries has few broadly recognized titles.

Seer: Upon taking the Oath of the Mysteries, a Dragon is named Seer. It is her duty to aid the Oracles in setting policy, which usually means carrying out all manner of research and investigation to ensure the Oracles have the information they require to make important decisions. A Seer could be assigned the task of discovering what the Archbishop is up to or learning if a chantry of mages poses a threat to the covenant. Seer characters have lots of opportunity to engage in dangerous missions and to work outside the covenant for extended periods of time. So long as they recover the information the Oracles seek, they are usually trusted to use their own judgment in how they go about their work.

Oracle: The upper ranks of the Mysteries are the Oracles, Dragons whose vision, dedication and facility with legal and political issues has been proven time and time again. Every seven years the current Oracles hold a special, closed-door session to discuss possible candidates to join their ranks. It is not unusual for no suitable candidate to be nominated; not only must *someone* be around to do the scut work of the vaunted Oracles, but it takes a long time for a Seer to convince her superiors she is worthy of becoming their peer. It is not atypical for a Seer to be passed over for more than half a century before being made an Oracle — some never make it. Oracles are the covenant's law-givers, a position that makes them targets of Dragon lobbyists who seek some change in covenant law that might benefit them. Outsiders who recognize their place of importance also seek to influence the Oracles in order to use the Ordo Dracul to their own advantage, perhaps by turning it against an enemy. In all matters, it remains the Oracle's primary responsibility to look to the long-range shape and destiny of the entire Ordo Dracul. This has even led some Oracles to literally sacrifice their entire Academy in the belief that its loss would actually prove helpful to the overall covenant. Rarely are Oracles this selfless, however — even the most high-brow visionaries fall prey to temptation and selfish desire.

Parliamentarian: This individual is selected from among the Oracles by consensus and is responsible for leading each session of Parliament. It is her duty to set the schedule, ensure order is maintained and permit or forbid issues to be brought up for discussion. The Parliamentarian also has a partial-veto power: If at least one other Oracle supports an Oracle's veto, the measure being opposed fails to pass regardless of how many other votes may favor its passage. In small domains, this forces the Parliamentarian to be far more agreeable to compromise than in places where the officer need only have at least one close ally.

Navigator: A Dragon who has voluntarily entered torpor in order to wrest the secrets of the Kindred from the nightmarish Fog of Eternity. Unknown to outsiders, Navigators are esteemed members of the sub-order and may be Seers or Oracles. The more times they submit to torpor and the longer they remain in that hellish state, the greater the respect they gain.

Custom and Ceremony

Of all the Sworn, those who have taken the Oath of Mysteries are the least public and least opulent when it comes to ceremony and ritual. Instead of an elaborate display of rank, achievement and responsibility, the Seers prefer to present themselves even to their fellow Dragons as veritable enigmas, using decoration and overt ritual only in a way that further deepens the cloak of mystery that surrounds them. Few outside their own membership are even familiar with their customs, and most assume they have a more expansive hierarchy than they do. Even the Parliamentarian does nothing to announce her authority, dressing no different from the other Mystery Sworn for formal events.

Mysteries and Morals

Seeing through the Dragon's Eyes is an action never taken lightly by those about to do it. At anytime during their inner journey, they might come to harm from bodily threats and from actions taken against their personal, political and financial interests. Even when watched closely, they risk memory loss and even madness, so terrible is the experience. One of the most common dangers of all, however, is simply the unintended passage of time. Even when entered voluntarily, torpor can stretch far beyond its intended limits, and Seers who hope to slip into torpor for only a month or two can wake to discover that years have actually passed. Because they are Oathbound to never taste the blood of another Kindred, they cannot rely on their fellow Mystery Sworn even to wake them if they don't rise on time.

The only way to guard against this is for a Navigator to maintain as high a Humanity as possible. Lisette was a very devout moralist, and so it is only fitting that her followers also abide by a strict set of morals to protect them when Seeing through the Dragon's Eyes. They tend to call upon the services of a Confessor more than other Dragons, regularly questioning their own actions and seeking to maintain a sound moral footing. They don't see themselves or their pursuits as particularly good *per se*, but they do recognize the tremendous danger posed to them and to the entire Ordo Dracul if they suddenly find themselves out of commission much longer than anticipated.

The most secret and controversial tradition practiced by the Seers is known as Seeing through the Dragon's Eyes. One Dragon from their ranks is chosen to voluntarily enter torpor. She is watched over by the entire Parliament to ensure her safety and to revive her should it be needed. When she awakens, usually of her own volition, she relates everything that she experienced to the Oracles, who record her words and then attempt to decipher them for meaning. It is their theory that when in torpor a vampire has access to the collective subconscious of all the Damned and is not only given glimpses of the past and present, but also of the future. These oracular visions are debated at length in the hope of wringing some useful truth from them, truths that can aid the Mystery Sworn in charting the course for the Ordo Dracul. For instance, should the visions convince them that the Prince may be destroyed soon, they may choose to begin a campaign to ally the Academy with

another influential Kindred who seems best poised to replace the Prince. Although the precise nature of this tradition remains unknown outside the Mystery Sworn, rumors have leaked out, and there are occasional whispers of a hidden torpor cult within the covenant, though its purpose remains, well…a mystery.

Heights: It is customary for the Sworn of the Mysteries to be given the highest apartments in a chapter house for their own use, a tradition that respects their roles as Seers and Navigators by giving them the greatest vantage point in the Academy. Similarly, most Mystery Sworn prefer havens that are located high above ground if possible. Lighthouses, high-rise apartments, churches with steeples and homes or mansions that have cupolas or towers are favored — but more for symbolism than for practical reasons. Few will ever make their haven in a basement, or at least they will not spend much time in subterranean chambers. Some actually pretend claustrophobia as a precaution; should their enemies ever come calling, they can hide below ground with a much greater likelihood of being overlooked.

Compass: The compass — also sextants and other archaic navigational devices — is the most important symbol of the Sworn of the Mysteries, emblematic of their role in the covenant. The symbol is used in bookplates, garments and ritual paraphernalia. It is also customary for each Oracle to receive an antique compass upon promotion to that rank.

Black or Sable: The color black is reserved for the Mystery Sworn, but only in the sense that they are the only Dragons allowed to dress completely in that color without adornment or decoration. Also, all meetings of the Sworn of the Mysteries begin in absolute darkness with the invocation spoken without the benefit of light. Only when the invocation is completed is the darkness vanquished so that the business at hand can be addressed. This symbolizes the Seer's ability to gaze into seeming darkness and find truths hidden within.

Eclipses: Every lunar and solar eclipse is a portentous time for the Mysteries. A session of Parliament is always held on such nights in a place where clear observation of the phenomenon is possible. This is also considered the favored moment for a Navigator to enter or rise from torpor. In the aftermath of an eclipse, the Mystery Sworn go to extra lengths to discover what changes have taken place in the domain, seeking to tie those things together and better see their own destiny.

Geography and Rites

In the last four centuries, the Ordo Dracul has spread its wings wide, its shadow reaching far across the globe and touching most regions where blood and mystical power are found. The covenant may have its origins in the craggy mountain passes of Transylvania and the fog-shrouded cobblestones of London, but tonight Dragons pursue the Great Work in places as far-flung as a secluded mansion in a Los Angeles canyon, a crumbling church in the slums of Buenos Aires, an underground cave complex in the heart of Calcutta and a high-security penthouse soaring above teeming Johannesburg. War, social movements, technological innovation and the unending quest for mystical knowledge have boosted the covenant's numbers and enabled it to establish a presence most anywhere Kindred claim domain.

Despite the covenant's penchant for orthodoxy in its methods, its laws, its structure and its purpose, its growth invariably resulted in differences of opinion and practice. Most of these were very minor and easily dealt with, but some were more troublesome, and the stubbornness of various Dragons in the Ordo Dracul's earlier years resulted in deadlocks that could not be reconciled. This could have led to serious fractures in the covenant that might have spelled its doom, but instead the eldest Dragons turned to their roots for a solution. Change could be tolerated so long as it was with purpose, and so, with purpose, the most egregious differences were dealt with by codifying them as various forms or Rites by which the covenant could organize itself. While some animosity remains between the different Rites even still, most are able to work together if necessary for the greater good of the Ordo Dracul. In most domains, a single Rite is represented and determines the nature of the local Academy. In the very largest cities, there may be multiple Rites present, each with its own hierarchy and each acting to a large degree as a separate Academy.

The covenant officially recognizes only a handful of Rites, but other unofficial ones have arisen in localities where considerable differences exist for adoption of a recognized Rite. The following are the most common, sanctioned Rites of the Ordo Dracul:

Damascene Rite

Officially the Sacred and Ancient Rite of the Scaled Dragon of Damascus, this Rite is the oldest still recognized by the greater Ordo Dracul. It was founded not, as its name implies, in the Middle East, but rather in Paris by Michaud Al Yahuudi, Elder Architect of the Weeping Sands of the Untamed Blood and Rampant Dragon of the Axe Sworn. In 1719 he was ordered by the Sworn of the Dying Light to curtail some of the demands he placed upon subordinates and reduce his emphasis on obedience. The first of the Principia Draconis is clear that a Dragon's personal labors come before all else, but Al Yahuudi, a Jew in life, believed differently. He felt that until a Dragon had achieved the rank of Master and has taken a Great Oath, she should effectively remain a servant of her elders. Her own desires and pursuits would have to wait until she had proven over time her absolute loyalty to mentor and covenant. Unwilling to lose so skilled and useful

an ally — the Architect had more than a few times saved the Ordo Dracul from disaster — the Oracles blessed the creation of the covenant's first Rite, which he named for the magnificent sword he carried, a blade of precious Damascene steel.

The chief difference between Al Yahuudi's version of the Ordo Dracul and others is the strong emphasis on submission and obedience. The influence of the Sworn of the Axe is also felt in numerous other ways, with additional titles and honorifics available to recognize any Oathbound Dragon's exploits. Pomp is quite common in such Academies, with a notably Middle Eastern flavor to covenant affairs. Oracles are instead referred to as Jinn and all members of the Academy carry a dagger of Damascene steel during ceremonial events. (In Spain, blades of Toledo steel are often substituted.) The Sworn of the Axe also have greater say in matters pertaining to the entire covenant where this Rite is practiced.

The Damascene Rite remains popular in parts of Europe, particularly in France, Spain and Italy. A Paris chapter remains powerful and, like many Old World Academies, does not announce its presence to other Kindred. Al Yahuudi has not been seen in more than a century, but some say he merely sleeps and will rise again to lead this most oppressive Orderial Rite. The Rite is also very popular in both North and Sub-Saharan Africa. The frequent violence in African domains seems suited to the Rite's martial ways. In the Middle East, the Rite is also well-represented, but, perhaps strangely, it is often overshadowed by other, more politically adept Rites — most notably the Oriental and Wallachian Rites. Al Yahuudi's loyalists have had little luck in North America, but have had some success in Central and South America.

Palatine Rite

The Illuminated Teutonic Rite of the Hidden Palatinate was founded in the Rhineland shortly after the Damascene Rite, in 1738. It was established by a trio of German Sworn of the Mysteries who were particularly dedicated to halting the growing power of the Circle of the Crone. They forbade Dragons to associate with the Crones and specifically sought to crush the pagan covenant wherever it existed. It was widely believed outside the Palatine Rite that the real purpose behind this crusade was to steal the secrets of Crúac for themselves in the hopes that the blood magic would benefit the Great Work of the Ordo Dracul. Whether this is true remains unknown outside the Rite's inner circles, but rumors of Palatine Dragons wielding Crúac-like powers continue to this night.

The Palatine Rite remains vehemently opposed to the Circle of the Crone, and when a domain harbors Kindred of both covenants there is sure to be a campaign of extermination underway, openly or, most often, hidden within the intricate movements of the Danse Macabre. The Palatine Dying Light is also the most accepting of the so-called "black arts" of all Rites, though these members maintain that they still view personal submission to another entity as an unforgivable offense. Despite these claims, a few anecdotal tales of Palatine Dragons opening hellish gates and inviting unspeakable *things from beyond* to take possession of their bodies and souls — or at least allowing the unspeakable the freedom to roam the halls of the chapter house — circulate outside the Rite.

Occasionally referred to as the covenant's "German witches," the Dragons of the Palatine Rite are also said to have possession of some of the Ordo Dracul's most potent occult relics. Whispers of the Holy Grail, Hector's Sword and even the Lancea Sanctum's revered Spear of Destiny are not uncommon, especially given the close ties some Palatine Academies supposedly had with the Thule Society, the Ordo Templi Orientis, the Luminous Lodge of the Vril Society and other secret orders associated with the Nazis and their occult ambitions.

Tonight the Palatine Rite remains active throughout central and eastern Europe, despite the purges of mystical sites and treasures during the Second World War. In fact, many Dragons openly accuse their Palatine brothers of using that tragedy as cover to hoard what they could for their own selfish purposes. The Palatine Dragons, of course, deny this, and say they only did their best to survive and protect what they could from further destruction, activity that they say is the primary reason the covenant continues to exist at all in these parts of the world.

In Hungary and Romania, the Palatines also have a presence, but they have been unable to gain a greater foothold given the prestige of the Wallachian Rite there. The Ordo Dracul in Russia and a few of the smaller former Soviet states seem dominated by the Palatine Rite, but since the fall of the Iron Curtain their supposed monopoly has been challenged by the Wallachian and Philadelphian Rites.

Wallachian Rite

The Loyal and True Rite of the Impaler Prince of Wallachia developed as a reaction to what some Dragons felt was a growing unorthodoxy that threatened the very principles upon which the covenant was originally built. The creation of the Damascene and Palatine Rites (as well as a few other, smaller Rites) worried many Dragons that those Academies that did not formally declare themselves to be organized as a formal Rite would become weakened and far more prone to fragmentation and chaos. The concerned parties held a unique Grand Dragon Council in London in the summer of 1782 that was attended at least in part by both Anoushka and Lisette. When the

councilors concluded their work, they each left with a copy of the *Code of Wallachia*, the document they produced that laid out the specific orthodox Rite of the covenant. The councilors returned to their own domains and many of their Academies adopted the Wallachian Rite. By 1900, many non-denominational Academies had done the same, swearing to obey the Wallachian Rite and remain true to the original vision of Vlad Tepes. Tonight, perhaps half of the world's Academies still heel to this Rite.

Because of its aim to restore authenticity to the covenant, the Wallachian Rite is the standard by which others are compared in terms of orthodoxy or lack thereof. Technically, the Wallachians adhere almost verbatim to the *Rites of the Dragon*, with few notable exceptions. For example, while a few Dragons are granted a rank above what they have earned by virtue of their mastery of the Coils, this is very rare — especially as compared to the Philadelphian Rite. The Wallachian Rite also maintains a very heavy cloak of secrecy not only on its activities and membership lists, but on its very existence. Officially, it does not exist. In the aftermath of Bram Stoker's novel, the Wallachians learned that so long as they remain invisible they hold out the best hope to continue their all-important work without interference. Of course, this secrecy is not 100% and many urban legends of Dracula's progeny, diabolical ceremonies and grand conspiracies still center around the existence of the Ordo Dracul in the Old World.

Hungary and parts of Romania are the covenant's spiritual heartland, but the Wallachian Rite is not assured of dominance. While the Ordo Dracul as a whole has a strong influence on the region's vampires, it is engaged in a power-struggle within its own ranks from the Carpathian Mountains to the Danube River. The Wallachian Rite claims perhaps half of all Academies, but it is threatened by the Palatine and Oriental Rites, to the west and east respectively — even the Damascene Rite has made some inroads in the south. The peace these various Rites maintain elsewhere — even outright cooperation in some places — does not exist here, where each Rite seeks to proclaim itself the true heir of Dracula by seizing control of his historic homeland. Elsewhere, many believe that this battle is a serious threat to the real purpose of the covenant and in the past decade some have spoken of formally ostracizing those Dragons involved in the "Transylvanian Issue" until they set aside their open differences and re-dedicate themselves to the Great Work that all Dragons ostensibly pursue.

Throughout the rest of Europe, notwithstanding the German-speaking regions, the Wallachian Rite is relatively commonplace. A few American Academies are organized according to the Wallachian Rite — mostly in New England — and these tend to place emphasis on maintaining the orthodoxy of the Old World.

Philadelphian Rite

When the publication of Stoker's *Dracula* exposed many of Europe's Dragons, fueling paranoia and hysteria among their fellow Kindred, many Dragons chose to leave the Old World for the New rather than face likely extinction. Some were prominent Dragons who were saddened by the sad state of the American Ordo Dracul, little more than a broken network of Kindred who had learned what they could of the covenant from sires and third-parties. The newcomers immediately set about rebuilding the Ordo Dracul the right way in their chosen cities, largely through emulation of the Old World Academies. However, in order to avoid the very troubles that drove them out, they chose to make their presence known to Kindred society, rather than working to keep it a secret. While they did not simply divulge their true aims and activities, they did make known their general purpose and invited Kindred with a similar bent to apply for membership.

Among the most successful of these early Academies was one in Philadelphia, which boasted a large and well organized population of Dragons before the year 1920, and lent its name to the Illustrious Rite of the Sojourn Dragon of the Temple of Philadelphia. The interest in spiritualism, psychology and the occult so popular at the time helped tremendously, and their public façade of simple academics and scholars organized like the secret societies common of the time appealed to many. They also maintained a relatively lax atmosphere, at least for the unsworn, in order to better guard their secrets. A few fledglings were even invited to join and then purposely driven away so that they would tell others "the truth" about the Ordo Dracul. Of course, these dupes revealed only what the wisest Dragons wished, and so protected the covenant's secrets even better.

The Philadelphian (or American) Rite differs most from the rest of the Ordo Dracul in its relatively public posture. American Dragons openly admit the existence of the covenant to other Kindred and make no excuses for belonging to the secret society. They argue that the rumors and accusations are merely propaganda to discredit the Order, which they claim is dedicated only to a better understanding of the Kindred condition so that all vampires might be able to ease the hardship of the Requiem. To the question of why they don't share the Coils with outsiders, they answer by explaining that without the proper dedication a student can inadvertently harm or even destroy herself. The Coils are certainly powerful, but they are far more complex than simply learning a Discipline like Auspex or Majesty. Therefore, unless a Kindred is willing to first undergo the physical and mental training necessary to grasp the Coils, the Dragons feel it is their responsibility to hold back that knowledge so that they don't accidentally unleash further suffering upon the already damned.

The greatest concentration of Philadelphian Dragons is, of course, in North America. The city of Philadelphia is still considered to be home to one of the most esteemed Academies. There has been a movement in some Academies for the Philadelphian Rite to rectify its differences with the Wallachian Rite and bring itself more in line with traditional orthodoxy, but so far it has gained little traction, partly because it is believed the movement is instigated by European Dragons who really seek to gain greater access to Wyrm's Nests and other mystical sites in the Americas. In New England, where the Wallachian Rite still holds significant influence, the Philadelphian Rite is a target of regular harassment and ridicule.

Oriental Rite

The most recent of the Rites is the Esoteric Society of the Ancient Oriental Rite of the Third Invisible Rajah of the Middle Realm, established in the 1930s. The founders — there are several different Academies that claim to be the first of this Rite — sought to re-emphasize the importance of mysticism and non-Western ideas to the Ordo Dracul. Certainly, the covenant already made much use of such things regardless of Rite, but the Oriental Rite was created to ensure that these ideas were given even greater priority over the practical sciences. While the scientific method was still deemed a worthwhile contribution to the Great Work, the Orientals felt that other, far more ancient methodologies and beliefs could serve equally well. Too often the Dying Light had interfered and directed these Dragons away from such things in favor of more Western approaches. With the creation of the Oriental Rite, this would no longer be the case and, the Orientals argued, the Great Work would be advanced far more quickly.

From the perspective of many Dragons who do not belong to the Oriental Rite, it is barely recognizable as the Ordo Dracul. Seemingly outlandish ideas are given unprecedented respect, empiricism is under attack or is already completely defeated in some Oriental Academies, and a hierarchy that seems wholly incomprehensible replaces the one devised by Dracula. This perception is partly skewed, of course, but the Oriental Rite does allow itself significant leeway to depart from orthodoxy, which it philosophically challenges. If an unchanging orthodoxy limits progress, then it must be changed to benefit the covenant. From where they stand, this is not only necessary, but is ultimately in-line with the most essential fundamentals of the Ordo Dracul. For this reason, they often argue that they, not the other Rites, are the most true to the real vision of Vlad Tepes. They usually maintain a semi-secret façade, admitting the existence of the Ordo Dracul in domains where its members reside, but maintaining that it is less a covenant than an extended coterie of philosophers and intellectuals who are organized simply for the purpose of sharing

resources — mostly books and knowledge. To eastern Kindred used to cultural ideas like transcendence, astral travel, meditation, karma, nirvana and spiritual fulfillment, the Oriental Dragons don't seem too exotic at all, and their cover story often holds.

Clan Roles in the Ordo Dracul

A vampire doesn't choose her clan. While it's possible to draw distinctions between the lineages based on the sort of mortal they choose and the properties that the blood imbues, at the core each vampire is unique. Covenant is a much greater force toward shaping a Kindred than clan, and the Ordo Dracul's demands of obedience do much to mold its members.

That said, we can draw certain conclusions about a vampire based on the combination of her clan and the choice to join the Dragons.

Daeva Dragons

The Succubi who join the covenant often do so looking to reclaim what they have lost. As Daeva are often Embraced out of infatuation (they would say "love"), many of them enter the Requiem passionate and smitten. It tends to go downhill from there. The Requiem kills passion and leaves many Daeva spiritually hollow, but some among the clan have the mental fortitude to seek out the Ordo Dracul in an attempt to change themselves.

The problem, of course, is that reclamation is a step back, and that isn't what the Ordo Dracul is interested in. They wish to move forward, to leave the Requiem behind and discover what transcendental reward awaits. And this often scares the hell out of young Daeva. They watch as Dragons mutilate themselves learning the Coils, spend weeks or months locked away from human or Kindred contact in their research, and venture out into the night searching for "places of power" in locales that are so far removed from what a Daeva would consider "powerful" that some Succubi start waiting for the punch line.

Daeva do find niches within the covenant, however. As sensualists, they latch on to the Coil of Blood easily, looking for new ways to experience their only true passion. Their social prowess means that they play the part of diplomat well, and when the covenant needs to represent (or misrepresent) itself to the Kindred in power in a new city, their choice envoy is often from this clan. As superb political and social animals, Daeva do well within the vicious obedience-based structure of the covenant, but they also tend to get so wrapped up in manipulating the system that their research into the Coils stagnates. That said, an Initiate or Adept of this clan might find a place in the clan as a broker of favors or an

advisor of sorts — enough status to be taken seriously, but not enough to be a threat.

The Sworn of the Axe and the Sworn of Mysteries have good numbers of Succubi among them, but the Sworn of the Dying Light receives little of its membership from this clan. This isn't to say that the Daeva are incapable of understanding and advancing the Coils of the Dragon, simply that many Daeva are Embraced for reasons other than their capacity for lateral thought and ambition.

Gangrel Dragons

For obvious reasons, the Gangrel are the most respected clan in many Ordo Dracul domains. In a covenant built on the precept of change, a clan with the inborn affinity for change naturally garners attention and admiration. Those Kindred who theorize about Dracula's clan (rather than just accepting that he had none) often place him as a Gangrel.

But not everyone in the covenant treats the Savages as royalty. Some Kindred point out that while the Gangrel can change themselves, they change themselves within a prescribed format: first the claws, then the Beast, then the mist. Gangrel may tend to grasp the precepts of the Coils faster than other Kindred (and Savages don't seem inclined to master any one Coil more easily than the others), but once a Gangrel learns her first Coil the curve tends to fall. The Gangrel, their critics within the Ordo Dracul say, have the lucky happenstance of being shapeshifters, but all that does is give them a brief edge. It doesn't put them any closer to enlightenment. In fact, as their minds erode as they grow older, it could be argued that their facility is for *devolution*, rather than change.

The clan has a long and glorious history in the covenant, and their fearsome Moroi bloodline is one of the most dangerous weapons of the Ordo Dracul. All three Orders of the Sworn have Gangrel among their ranks, and their affinity for Protean and the concordant ease of travel they enjoy make them superb Guardians and scouts for Wyrm's Nests. The Gangrel are, it seems, a backbone of the covenant.

And yet, few Gangrel may seem to ascend to senior leadership roles in the Ordo Dracul. One is more likely to find Savages acting as Kogaions. Gangrel who can look objectively at the covenant and its practices may see that the best word to describe their choice isn't "essential" but "useful."

MEKHET DRAGONS

Like the Ordo Dracul itself, the Mekhet are enigmatic. A Shadow might be a spy, an assassin or simply a vampire who values her privacy. The reasons that members of this clan have for coming to the Ordo Dracul are as varied as the clan itself, but the most common reason is probably that the Mekhet *see* things.

Other vampires are no strangers to the mysteries of the World of Darkness, of course. A Kindred of any clan might run across something that she can't explain. For the Mekhet, though, their heightened perceptions and propensity for lurking in the hidden places of the world often means that they come face to face with more of the secrets of the domain than any other clan. Mekhet of faith might gravitate toward the Lancea Sanctum or the Circle of the Crone, but those who want answers, or, better yet, the power to do something with their knowledge, seek out a Dragon.

Like the Gangrel, the Mekhet are much prized in the covenant. Unlike the Gangrel, the Shadows probably find positions of leadership much to their liking. Kogaions are more likely to be Mekhet than any other clan, it seems, and many members of the clan wind up as Sworn of Mysteries or Dying Light. Lower-level members of the covenant often seek out coteries that wish to practice the Coils, rather than simply study them, or become Guardians or investigators of Wyrm's Nests. Shadows seem to have an affinity for the Coil of Banes, though it might be that they simply study this Coil first in an attempt to mitigate their innate vulnerability to light.

NOSFERATU DRAGONS

Someone once joked that the fearsome Nosferatu might join the Ordo Dracul just so they could call themselves "Dragons." It's unwise to make such quips within earshot of the Haunts, but it's not an entirely unfair observation. Much of the Nosferatu identity is bound up in being terrifying, and the Ordo Dracul has a fearsome reputation of its own. Some members of the clan seek the covenant out merely because they wish to inspire fear.

Such Nosferatu don't last long. The Ordo Dracul has no room for meaningless showboats, and older members of the covenant are long past being terrified or even disgusted by a vampire without real power. While any intelligent vampire respects the physical strength and mental power the Haunts can wield, the Ordo Dracul has little interest in fear for fear's sake.

The Haunts who excel in the covenant are those who realize that they are already set apart from humanity and most Kindred by dint of their monstrousness. Dracula was a monster, to be sure, but his inhumanity allowed him to do great things and begin the journey toward transcendence. Why does the Nosferatu blood set them apart? Is it a curse, in truth, or the first step on a road to power and greatness?

Within the covenant, Haunts often gravitate toward the Coil of the Beast and the Sworn of the Axe (and occasionally toward the Moroi bloodline, but this indicates a different kind of Kindred). The latter tendency is simple to understand. The Nosferatu naturally possess

effective martial prowess (or at least the potential for such). Their propensity for the Coil of the Beast, however, is something of a mystery. The most common theory, however, is that their clan weakness already sets the Beast in sharper relief than in most Kindred. This allows the Nosferatu to better see the Beast and better set herself apart from it.

Another interesting facet of Dragon Haunts is that they often fill the role of Confessor within a coterie. They aren't necessarily humane, but understand humanity because they can view it more objectively (or so the thinking goes). Some Nosferatu Confessors consider themselves "sin-eaters," becoming monsters so that their fellows do not have to. This leads to younger Kindred existing in fear of their Nosferatu comrades, as the Haunts take on the task of killing, sometimes brutally, any mortal that the coterie deems necessary. After all, the Nosferatu might reason, no need for the entire coterie to give ground to the Beast when the Haunt is a monster already.

Ventrue Dragons

The clan of leaders and tyrants, the Ventrue seem a natural fit for a covenant founded by a dictator who claims no sire. For the most part, this is true, but the reasons the Lords have for coming to the covenant vary depending, largely, on the age of the Ventrue.

Neonate Ventrue who seek out the Ordo Dracul often do so out of a desire to ingratiate themselves to one of the greatest enigmas of the Requiem. Many Kindred don't really *believe* that Dragons can cheat the curse of vampirism — if there was a way to, say, endure sunlight, wouldn't the rest of Kindred society have seen it by now? Surely the Ordo Dracul is merely a secret society. A powerful one, to be sure, but not hiding anything in the way of arcane secrets. These Ventrue see the Ordo as a ticket to power, an elite club of scholars and possibly influential Kindred leaders. These young Lords are sometimes rather put off by the amount of obedience and servitude, to say nothing of *work*, that low-status members of the covenant are expected to put in (they're even called Slaves!). But at the same time, these Kindred discover that the Dragons really do have a claim to power in the Coils, and that the power is there for the taking if the vampire is ambitious enough. Young Venture don't usually suffer from a dearth of ambition, and so many of them advance in the Coils and in the covenant by sheer determination.

Older Ventrue come to the Ordo Dracul for very different reasons. They seek out the covenant to avoid losing their minds. The Lords can prattle about breeding and *noblesse oblige* all they like, but the truth is that they grow crazy as they grow older. While all Kindred might go mad with the years, for the Ventrue this madness isn't a matter of chance, but a matter of time. The Ordo Dracul, supposedly, can help the Kindred mitigate some of the curses of undeath. Perhaps, then, it can help the Lords keep control of their minds?

Relations with the World of Darkness

The Ordo Dracul descends from a vampire who was a tyrant in life and became a leader in undeath. Dracula himself was used to brooking no challenge from rivals, Kindred or otherwise (although according to the *Rites of the Dragons*, he received quite a rude education in comparative power levels when still a neonate). The Ordo Dracul, for a time, could have become a military power. As the covenant progressed, however, they focused more on their academic goals than any notions of martial prowess, though of course the Sworn of the Axe still remains a force with which to be reckoned.

As a primarily scholarly organization, however, they don't often usurp cities and seize praxis. (At least, they are not perceived of doing so with the frequency of other covenants.) Instead, they often do what they can to work alongside the Kindred in power, pursuing their own agendas and remaining, for the most part, outside their notice. This doesn't always work, of course, but the Ordo Dracul has several advantages when dealing with Kindred society and the rest of the World of Darkness that other covenants usually can't match.

Focus

The Ordo Dracul knows what it wants and focuses on its goals. Furthermore, its goals aren't as intangible as the Lancea Sanctum's divine mandate or as ongoing as the Invictus' desire for stasis. The Dragons want transcendence, and this means that they have an achievable goal (at least, they think it can be achieved) rather than a situation to maintain. This focus also allows them a great deal of flexibility in matters not pertaining to their overarching goals. Areas of temporal concern can be abandoned with much less detriment to the Dragons than to, say, the Invictus.

Lateral Thinking

The very nature of the Coils of the Dragon requires a style of problem-solving and thought that most people (and most Kindred) aren't readily equipped to handle. The Dragons take very little on faith, but are superb at bringing unconventional and effective means of dealing with crises to the table. The other covenants know this, and a proverb among the Sanctified even advises, "The Dragon attacks from all sides at once." Ordo Dracul strategists are much prized as allies, and justly feared as enemies.

The Coils of the Dragon

Kindred outside the Ordo Dracul do not understand the Coils of the Dragon, in theory or practice. They are

likely to have heard wild and improbable stories about vampires siring or mothering living children, walking in full daylight or taking sustenance from the very air around them rather than from the blood of the living. What's worse, the Coils are nearly impossible to detect magically (this is also a concern for the Ordo Dracul itself; see Chapter Three), and the Dragons put the greatest of mortal secret societies to shame when it comes to concealing their practices.

The Covenants

The Ordo Dracul has methods and basic opinions when dealing with the other covenants of Kindred. Remember, though, that the covenants are not monolithic organizations that remain unchanging from one city to the next, to say nothing of one continent to the next. Young Dragons who have formed a particular idea of what it means to be "Carthian" or an "Acolyte" are encouraged to take correspondence from Dragons dwelling in other areas (or, if they are particularly brave, travel to meet them) and see how a change of venue and history warps the ideal. Dragons are also reminded that the same thing happens within their own covenant.

The Carthian Movement

Many Dragons regard the Carthian Movement as the covenant with the most potential (aside from the Ordo Dracul itself, of course). After all, the Carthians embrace change with almost as much zeal as the Dragons, even if their attitudes toward change are a bit different. The Ordo Dracul sees change as a means to understanding and transcending the vampiric condition, whereas the Carthians' understanding of the phenomenon of changes seems to the Ordo to stop with the platitude "change is good." Change, argue the Dragons, isn't good or evil in and of itself, but therein lies the main point of contention between the two covenants. The Ordo Dracul is a scientific and scholarly covenant, while the Carthian Movement is political. Therefore, their attitudes regarding when and how the status quo must change are necessarily different.

When members of the two covenants figure this simple truth out, they can come to a frighteningly effective accord. After all, the Ordo Dracul is, by matter of practice, not much of a threat to the Carthian Movement. The Ordo Dracul doesn't have a vested interest, as a covenant, in keeping those in power from falling (although of course those in power *do* have a vested interest in staying there). As such, the Ordo Dracul isn't necessarily opposed to the Carthians' methods of determining government. In cities where the Carthians hold power, the Ordo Dracul often outwardly supports the Movement's rhetoric and participates in their "elections." In cities where the Ordo Dracul holds praxis but where courting the favor of the Carthians is advantageous, the Dragons sometimes use elections or other somewhat democratic methods for determining their leaders. (These elections are often rigged, of course, but that's not the point.) In other cities, the two covenants might agree on an oligarchy or a meritocracy. Both forms of government are similar to what the Ordo Dracul practices anyway, and in matters not pertaining to the covenant's research, the Dragons often don't have a problem sharing temporal power.

Even the Ordo Dracul, not an ancient covenant as compared to the Lancea Sanctum, the Circle of the Crone or the Invictus, was fairly well established when the Carthian Movement began. That said, the Dragons do understand revolution. As students of change and history, they can point to many times when the only option for escaping an oppressive ruler's thumb was open revolt and bloodshed. Most Dragons are intelligent enough to realize that the Carthians aren't the true "underdogs" in Kindred society, however — they are simply a unified voice. Dragons who have made a study of the life of their founder, Vlad Tepes, note that he was something of political visionary himself. He killed off many of the nobles who preceded his principle reign and installed a new aristocracy, largely drawn from the ranks of the common folk. A Dragon taking the reins of power in a new city can win great support from the Carthian Movement by doing much the same thing.

One of the biggest points of contention between the Ordo Dracul and the Carthians is probably the former's emphasis on manners and propriety. While not all Carthians are boors or loudmouthed rabble-rousers, enough of them ignore decorum to irritate traditionalist and conservative Dragons.

The Circle of the Crone

Many Dragons find the Acolytes interesting, but not out of idle curiosity. Despite the facets of the Circle of the Crone that annoy or amuse some Dragons, the Circle's abilities, philosophy and history make the Ordo Dracul unable to dismiss the potential power of the Acolytes.

The two covenants share some history, or more accurately, the Ordo Dracul takes some of its history from the Circle. According to the *Rites of the Dragon*, Vlad Tepes actually joined the Circle for a time (how long is a matter of debate) and learned at least some of the secrets of Crúac before deciding that that blood sorcery would not teach him what he sought to know. Even tonight, a sizeable number of Dragons begin their Requiems with the Circle before "converting" to the Ordo Dracul. Both covenants, after all, offer mystical paths to power, but the Circle of the Crone is deeply rooted in worship and the past while the Ordo Dracul is dedicated to scientific experimentation and the future.

The Circle of the Crone certainly looks askance at some of the Ordo's assertions. Notably, most Acolytes do not know (or believe) that Dracula was ever part of their covenant, and certainly don't believe that he was able to make any particular headway with Crúac. Some Acolytes do assert that one of Dracula's childer joined the covenant and very nearly broke away from the Impaler's tyranny, but Dracula seduced her back to his side. Many Acolytes also do not believe for a moment that Dracula became a vampire through direct divine intervention. (Privately, some Dragons who doubt their founder's spontaneous Embrace buy into the Acolyte suggestion that a warrior of the Circle, probably a Gangrel, was responsible for Tepes' Requiem). Some among the Circle even believe that Dracula was a blood-sorcerer of some stripe *before* his Embrace, and somehow managed to magically eradicate any trace of clan before ever siring his childer.

These two covenants do have some points of similarity, of course. Both seek to empower their members, if to different ends. Both recognize that suffering and tribulation can be a means to enlightenment, although the Circle focuses on this much more strongly than the Ordo Dracul. The Dragon faction called the Impaled, however, effectively straddles the divide between the Order and the Circle. While the Ordo Dracul agrees that creation is an act of power, the Order feels that virtually any act of change is also a demonstration of power. The ultimate goal of the Order, the transcendence of the Curse, has been seen as a noble pursuit by more than a few Acolytes — can't the Great Work be considered an attempt to create a new state of existence? The pursuit of mystic secrets and the exploration of Kindred history are enough to bring some Circle and Order vampires together.

The Acolytes and the Dragons often share interests in Wyrm's Nests, and this is probably their greatest practical point of conflict. The Dragons note, however, that because the Acolytes attach religious meaning to their classification of Wyrm's Nests (while the Ordo Dracul classifies such places by utility), leaking information about a potentially perilous Nest to the Circle of the Crone provides a method of discerning how dangerous the area really is.

Invictus

Like the Carthian Movement, the Invictus is concerned with more temporal matters than the Ordo Dracul. Unlike them, however, the Invictus is concerned with maintaining the status quo, with blocking change. This, obviously, flies in the face of Dragon philosophy. The Invictus potentially holds the most power to change the world of any of the vampiric covenants. Their influence in matters corporate, legal and political give them the ability, if they so desired, to alter the world so drastically that Kindred of other covenants would be scrambling to catch up. This amount of power is tantalizing and a bit frightening to the Ordo Dracul. Some young Dragons who discover how deep Invictus influence really goes in some cities sometimes wish that the First Estate would simply turn Kindred society on its ear so that the Order could study the effects.

In practice, the two covenants can work alongside one another with little problem. The Ordo Dracul doesn't meddle in mortal affairs often, and the Invictus, while discomfited or intrigued by the notion of the Coils of the Dragon, is for the most part comfortable letting the Ordo Dracul have its privacy. (Better, anyway, to have the Dragons in their private parlors when the time comes for discussion on the philosophy of change). The Ordo Dracul respects the Invictus' emphasis on traditionalism and propriety, and Dragons dwelling in Invictus cities often adopt some of the First Estate's conventions of etiquette into their own observances. The Ordo Dracul especially favors the Recitation of Lineage, although the Dragons usually list mentors and students in place of sires and childer.

The Invictus don't much care about Wyrm's Nests, and so the Ordo Dracul doesn't normally have to contend with competition from the covenant on a mystical level. In the unfortunate instance that a Wyrm's Nest is also a desirable locale to the Invictus for some other reason, months of negotiation might ensure (meaning that the Ordo Dracul must sometimes violate the Invictus' territory — Wyrm's Nests don't wait for diplomacy). On the other hand, the great value that Dragons place on Wyrm's Nests can *make* them a prized property to the Invictus who wants something from the Order.

If the Ordo Dracul envies the Invictus anything, it's their rapport with mortals. The First Estate is often better suited to dealing with mortal organizations than with individual people, of course, but the result is still impressive: the Invictus of many domains command great webs of temporal power, encompassing Kindred Regents and manipulators, ghoul agents and mortal dupes all across the world. The Dragon who wants access to mortal technologies, secure locations or protected artifacts may have to go through Invictus channels to get what she wants. Thus the Order works hard to not make an enemy of the Invictus on any grand scale in most domains.

The greatest point of contention between the two covenants is, of course, their completely contradictory philosophies regarding change. Some Dragons despise the Invictus on general principle, wondering how any Kindred, especially neonates, could be stupid enough to join the covenant knowing that the chances for advancement are so slim. Others note how the lofty seat of many Invictus leaders affords them an excellent vantage point the of Kindred and mortal worlds and how that magnificent position is wasted on stagnant elders desperately avoiding any change to their Requiems.

The Lancea Sanctum

The Ordo Dracul has its difference with all of the other Kindred covenants, but the conflict is the most pronounced — and most often violent — with the Lancea Sanctum. The conflict doesn't stem from the two covenants' mystical practices. After all, the Theban Sorcery of the Lancea Sanctum is much more visible, pronounced and versatile than the Coils of the Dragon. Their respective methods don't necessarily clash, either. While Kindred of the Ordo Dracul and the Lancea Sanctum might both seek certain types of Wyrm's Nests, the practice isn't nearly common enough among the Sanctified to be a widespread point of contention. The main conflict between the covenants is purely ideological, and has dogged the Damned for years. It is the classic conflict of reason versus faith.

Many powerful Dragons consider the Lancea Sanctum an object lesson in both what can be gained from practical application of occult insight, and everything that is wrong with organized religion. Putting value judgments on what God wants or what He expects of vampires, however, is the same as making assumptions without sufficient evidence. The dogma of the Lancea Sanctum makes the Great Work a sin, and so many Dragons avoid Sanctified temples like a group of church-labeled mortal sinners would avoid the church that branded them.

The Sanctified exalt the role of the Damned, while the Dragons seek to escape it. The Sanctified see the Curse on their figurehead as the embodiment of a divine mission, whereas the Dragons see their forefather's Damnation as a divine prison. The Sanctified pursue the eternal refinement of a singular, mandated existence while the Dragons explore the possibilities of personal choice over a dozen lifetimes.

The conflict between the two covenants is virtually ever-present. It simply varies in degree. In one city, historians and scholars of the Lancea Sanctum might meet for debates with theosophists and theoreticians of the Ordo Dracul. In another, Guardians might hunt down and burn any Sanctified Kindred within the city limits.

The Lancea Sanctum believes that vampires are inherently superior to mortals, even in their Damnation. The Dragons, on the other hand, are well aware of the many advantages that living people possess over vampires. The simple mortal ability to see the daylight and the darkness is enough to make many Dragons sneer at Sanctified claims of superiority. The two covenants' origin stories also produce a great deal of strife. To the Ordo Dracul, Longinus was a mythological figure, or at best a simple Kindred who managed to form a religion for vampires out of one for mortals. Dracula's existence and mortal life, however, is a matter of historical fact, and his distant descendants still live in Romania tonight. When the Sanctified quote the

Testiment of Longinus to godless Dragons, they might just as well be quoting a political tract.

Of course, covenants vary greatly from place to place, and the Lancea Sanctum isn't at war with the Ordo Dracul by any means. The two covenants have a shared history, much like the Ordo Dracul and the Circle of the Crone. Supposedly, Dracula studied among the Sanctified for a time, just as he did with the Acolytes. Unlike the Circle of the Crone, which is often unwilling to accept this possibility, many Sanctified scholars feel that Dracula very well might have joined the covenant briefly, but certainly not long enough to learn, much less master, any facet of Theban Sorcery. The crisis of faith that drew the Impaler away from the Sanctified church continues to this night, but the Sanctified will continue to wait for those Dragons who find their faith again.

The Ordo Dracul doesn't find that open conflict with any other group is conducive to its goals, and thus prefers to approach the Lancea Sanctum from a position of debate, discussion and ideological exchange rather than aggression or defensive paranoia. The Sanctified, for their part, would rather try to convert the Dragons than destroy them, if possible, and so coteries with members of both covenants occasionally form in which the Sanctified Kindred attempts to convert the Ordo Dracul Kindred. This serves to sharpen the minds and beliefs of both vampires, and if one of them caves in and converts, then she wasn't strong enough for her covenant anyway. The fact that the Ordo Dracul seems to lose more members in this fashion than the Lancea Sanctum is a cause for some concern to mentors and Kogaions, but it is an oddity rather than a crisis — the Order requires brilliance over sheer numbers. The Great Work will continue.

Other Factions Among the Damned

Of course, not every vampire belongs to one of the five main covenants. Some are undecided (or reject the entire notion), and some choose a much more sinister path. These Kindred, many Dragons feel, are useful in the Great Work, if only by marking the terrible ends that can befall those who pursue false philosophies. That said, the Order does like to stay informed.

The Unaligned

The Ordo Dracul draws a clear distinction between Kindred who simply haven't joined a covenant, either because they have not had the opportunity to do so or because they have not found one that suits their needs, and those who consciously choose to eschew Kindred society. The former are potential recruits, free of other covenant influences, considered on an individual basis. The latter may have a spark of determination and independence in the face of eternity that the Dragons find impressive.

Unaligned vampires often regard the vampiric condition as one of solitary predation. The Ordo Dracul doesn't necessarily agree, but at least these Kindred are thinking about the vampiric condition at all. Many vampires, without the benefit of a sire's or a covenant's guidance, perish soon after the Embrace, either at the hands of other monsters or from meeting the sun in dogged refusal to accept what they have become. The unaligned who endure, however, often have the ability to look into the face of their Curse, to examine it, to challenge it and question it — and that the Ordo Dracul finds impressive.

Of course, the Ordo Dracul is well aware that an unaligned Kindred who deliberately chooses his independence probably isn't going to cope well with the strict rules of the covenant. If the Dragons offer membership to such a vampire, they make it very clear that they offer no special treatment, no allowances for showboating, "being a lone wolf," "doing your own thing" or any of the other liberal claptrap from recent mortal generations. The Ordo Dracul was founded upon discipline and meticulous attention to detail. While this attitude drives many potential recruits away, some discover that the rigors of the covenant are just what they needed to find a place in the Danse Macabre.

These sorts of unaligned Kindred are subjected to the heaviest indoctrination the Order can muster, long before they are allowed to study the Coils. The Ordo Dracul makes it very clear that once a vampire becomes a Dragon, she should expect to remain a Dragon — quitting the covenant is tantamount to betrayal, The Ordo Dracul does not wish to risk even one lesson of one Coil being carelessly spread across the world by a wayward ex-Dragon.

Belial's Brood

Despite the fearsome reputation of these Satanic outlaws, many Dragons find the riddle of Belial's Brood fascinating. Is their philosophy so basic, so obvious that it acts as a sort of vampiro-sociological constant? In the absence of other covenants and other ideas, would all vampires assume themselves to be servants of the Devil? Or is their desire to commit mayhem and indulge the Beast simply so basic that if a group of enough weak-willed vampires come together, this is the path they inevitably take? The Lancea Sanctum, of course, is perfectly prepared to accept infernal forces at work — and so, after a fashion, is the Ordo Dracul.

The Ordo Dracul catalogs the supernatural strangeness in the World of Darkness as they search for the means to lift them out of their undead state. Along the way, they have discovered witches, ghosts, werewolves, the walking dead, horrors that mankind has forgotten and some no creature has ever known before. That demons exist isn't something the Ordo

Dracul disputes (though their information about, and even definition of, "demons" is admittedly inconsistent). It is possible, they admit, that while Belial's Brood isn't organized, there might still be a coordinating force behind their efforts.

Every so often, a Dragon makes a special study of Belial's Brood, trying to pin down their origins and solve the riddle of their continued existence. One theory postulates that a particular demon (and demonologists among the Ordo Dracul have discovered scores of possible names and identities for this being) can escape Hell briefly through the frenzy of a vampire, and uses its brief time on Earth to find followers and whip them into a whirlwind of blood and death, hoping to find true freedom through the carnage. Another theory speculates that a specific and rare type of Wyrm's Nest — a gate to Hell, not to put too fine a point on it — occasionally opens and drives the nearby Kindred to acts of murder and madness. Despite some interesting and even well-supported ideas, however, the Ordo Dracul admits that it does not know the truth about the Brood, and isn't likely to figure it out anytime soon. When a new "outbreak" of demonic activity occurs, though, an investigative coterie is soon to follow.

VII

The Ordo Dracul occasionally suffers accusations of being associated with VII, due to their secret methods and occult bent. The Ordo Dracul responds to such accusations harshly and often violently. As with Belial's Brood, the Ordo Dracul is no closer to understanding the VII than any other Kindred. In the case of the mysterious Kindred-slayers, however, the Ordo Dracul doesn't wish to understand them. The Ordo Dracul has a long list of torture and execution methods made infamous by their founder, Vlad the Impaler, and each member of VII has a special regimen of pain awaiting her upon her capture by the Dragons.

It comes as a surprise to Kindred who know anything about the Ordo Dracul's methods that the Dragons aren't attempting to capture, interrogate (and, some mutter, imitate) members of VII. After all, the Kindred of VII have remained secret for years, and somehow manage to keep their methods and motives hidden from every other order of vampires in existence. Surely this band of murderers knows something the Ordo Dracul would be interested in examining in great depth?

Vampires who suggest this to the Dragons sometimes receive a surprising, icy glare in turn. All some chapters of Dragons want from VII is long, slow, bloody revenge.

Why this vitriol? VII has been responsible for the destruction of Kogaions across Europe and in parts of the United States. While this in itself is a tragedy, VII often doesn't burn the records that the Kogaion keeps — sometimes they take the Order's records, sometimes they leave them for the Prince's Hounds to find. This means that for every exalted Dragon these monsters have slain, they may have the names and records of every Wyrm's Nest and every Dragon in that Kogaion's city (provided that the Kogaion in question didn't memorize this information rather than writing it down). Granted, such information is always written in code or otherwise obscured, but this only postpones the threat of VII's future discoveries. The greatest outrage is the knowledge and skill, lost forever to these barbarians.

Other Creatures

A vampire might exist a hundred years and never see a werewolf or a mage…or she might meet one the night of her Embrace. Other supernatural beings share the night with the Kindred, and all of the covenants have their own opinions about them and what they mean to the undead. The Ordo Dracul, of course, wonders what such beings could teach them.

Werewolves

According to European legend, a werewolf is a man who sold his soul to the Devil and gained the ability to change shape. The Ordo Dracul is intimately familiar, however, with the accuracy of such legends in regard to vampires, and is therefore unwilling to take them at face value when it comes to shapeshifters. While the covenant doesn't know much about these bestial creatures, it has learned a few very interesting facts.

First, werewolves are not confined to changing shape under the full moon. Second, while they are certainly brutal killers, they don't seem to relish eating human flesh (although the Ordo has certainly found evidence that it happens). Third, they sometimes claim Wyrm's Nests, and when they do, they defend them with an absolutely horrific territorial zeal (fortunately, they seem to favor fontal nests, which the Ordo Dracul doesn't have as much use for). Finally, and most fascinating, the werewolves are inherently spiritual creatures. They have a relationship with God that the Ordo Dracul cannot fathom. Brief conversations between Dragons and werewolves seem to indicate that they hold a somewhat animistic worldview, that they see God in *everything*, from the sky to the sea to the ground. Furthermore, they see vampires as completely soulless, devoid of the presence of God entirely.

While depressing, this rather confirms what the Ordo already believed: God exists, but He has forsaken the Kindred.

The Ordo Dracul knows that werewolves have their own society and would love to know more about it, but given how insular and secretive Kindred society is, they

recognize that the shapeshifters aren't likely to give up any important information. Still, the shapeshifters represent a constant source of intrigue — if these beasts understand the Divine on an instinctive level, what does that suggest about the Kindred Beast?

The Dragon and the Wolf

As presented here, it might seem as though the Ordo Dracul's natural curiosity and singular focus might make them superb crossover characters, willing to cope with the strangeness of associating with werewolves and mages provided they can obtain some useful insight or information in return.

It's true. They are. It is completely feasible for a Dragon to hold conversations and even be cordial with such beings. The Ordo Dracul has no consistent idea how mages and werewolves fit into their worldview — Are they cursed? Blessed? Outside God's purview entirely? Despite these creatures' strangeness, the Ordo Dracul would like to know the truth.

This doesn't mean, however, that the Dragons necessarily consider such beings friends, and it certainly doesn't guarantee there's any real trust extended by either party. The relationships between vampires and werewolves cannot be generalized any more than relationships between "mortals" and "other mortals." Every dynamic is unique. Even generalizing the attitudes and interplay between Ordo Dracul vampires and werewolves is largely pointless, as both the Order and the cultures of Lupines are too broad and varied to be easily summarized. A Dragon and a Lupine might be nemeses, rivals, allies, secret partners, colleagues, honorable opponents, lovers or anything else. And like ordinary mortals, their relationships are rarely static.

The Ordo Dracul wants to know all it can, but isn't always interested in *trading* information. As such, Dragons who have occasion to associate with werewolves or mages sometimes stay quiet, ask questions when it seems appropriate and always have a good escape route. An honest exchange of information would be the most fair, polite way to go about things — but these are not honest, fair or polite monsters.

Mages

Mortals can and do use magic. The Ordo Dracul understands that much, but very little else about mages. They would greatly like to know whether vampires could conceivably learn to wield the same powers, but most Dragons doubt it. After all, a mortal mage, no matter how skilled, is unlikely to be able to learn Crúac or Theban Sorcery (and of course, there would be no point in a mortal learning the Coils of the Dragon), so if mortal magic is predicated as much on the practitioner being alive as Kindred sorcery is on her being undead, vampires learning mortal magic is a lost cause.

Still, the fact that humanity can empower itself through wizardry is interesting to the covenant. If humanity can transcend *without* making the step to vampirism, perhaps in the theory of human magic lies the key to the final change. There the theory breaks down, however, because if there is a single magical theory by which mortals perform sorcery, the Ordo Dracul hasn't found it. If anything, magic seems cultural. A *voodooienne* might produce results, but so might a Kabbalist. They can't possibly all be right, and so the Ordo Dracul feels it must look deeper into the phenomenon of mortal magic to gain any real insight.

The problem, however, is that mortal mages are difficult to find. The Ordo Dracul hasn't discovered any reliable way of detecting them, although the covenant has noted that mages seem interested in some Wyrm's Nests. Limited dealings with mages have led the Ordo Dracul to believe that they are capable of drawing power from Wyrm's Nests in some capacity, but beyond that, their interest seems to vary from mage to mage. In any case, the Ordo Dracul wavers on its view of mages as opposed to other Kindred covenants holding Wyrm's Nests. On the one hand, if mages claim the territory the Ordo Dracul can be fairly sure that they are using it, thus changing the magical flow of the area, which in itself might bring about some interesting mystical phenomena. On the other hand, the Dragons understand so little about mages — and some prefer the devil they know to the devil they don't.

Ghosts and Spirits

The Ordo Dracul understands that not every spirit-like entity is the remains of a human being, and attempts have occasionally been made over the years to classify other spirits into categories that vampires can understand. These attempts often fail due to the Kindred in question sinking into torpor or disappearing altogether, leaving behind only a haven infested with strange, unnamed spirits, or simply because most vampires are ill-equipped even to perceive, much less understand, such ephemeral beings.

Thus, most of the ephemeral creatures that the Dragons encounter are ghosts. Normally, the Ordo Dracul deals with ghosts in pursuit of a haunt. The Dragons know that human spirits linger under certain conditions, and long years of observing what sorts of people become ghosts has led the Ordo Dracul to a fairly accurate body of information on the matter. They know that ghosts vary greatly in their abilities and temperament; some don't know

they are dead, while others have been watching the Kindred for years and know more about them than the Ordo Dracul finds acceptable. The Ordo Dracul occasionally instructs a coterie to find a ghost's anchor — the object or mortal keeping it from passing on — and destroy it, thus ridding the whole of a troublesome or dangerous spirit (this doesn't always work, due to the fact that some ghosts have multiple anchors, but clever coteries find ways to overcome such obstacles).

The most important thing about spirits and ghosts for Dragons to remember, however, is that they are *never* to act as masters to the members of this covenant. The *Rites of the Dragon* are very clear on this point (though why exactly Dracula thought this was so important isn't quite as clear). Violating this rule was enough to change the mighty Dragolescu bloodline from one of the ruling powers in the covenant to a despised shadow of its former self in one short decade. The Ordo Dracul will not submit to otherworldly masters.

Ephemeral Language

In game terms, ghosts and spirits are two different sub-categories of *ephemeral* beings. Ghosts are best explained in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, while spirits are examined in-depth in **Werewolf: The Forsaken**. Mechanically, these two kinds of beings have many common traits and many important differences.

In practice, not all chronicles need to distinguish between ghosts and spirits with the maximum level of possible detail. The Dragons certainly don't have the clear-cut distinctions between spirits and ghosts that you have access to as a player of the game. This book strives to use the most atmospherically appropriate term for a spirit or ghost when such beings are discussed. In game mechanics, the distinction is clear and sure, but in more colorful passages of text you may find words like "spiritual" and "ghostly" used to describe either type of ephemeral being. Don't be confused. This is intended to evoke an atmosphere of Victorian spiritualism and modern paranormal studies, not to indicate the necessary presence of a particular sort of ephemeral being. When this book is vague on the subject of spirits and ghosts, it's an indicator that beings of either type might be at work.

Storytellers should feel free to use either ghosts or spirits in stories involving such aspects of occult spiritualism. Players should never know what to expect.

Chapter Three: Ordo Dracul and the Danse Macabre

Let them go, Supplicant.

If you follow them, you'll be the same.

Nothing will change. You'll see why immortality

is hell as you work for the same thing every

night.

Come with us and you'll see

that everything can change.

They'll endure but we'll flourish."

— Marjorie Walker,

Invisible Master of Questing and Pain

Something made me start up, a low, piteous howling of dogs somewhere far below in the valley, which was hidden from my sight. Louder it seemed to ring in my ears, and the floating moats of dust to take new shapes to the sound as they danced in the moonlight. I felt myself struggling to awake to some call of my instincts. Nay, my very soul was struggling, and my half-remembered sensibilities were striving to answer the call.

— Bram Stoker, Dracula

The Paths of Fate

The Order's inner explorations aren't only mystical or intellectual. They have a spiritual (or, some say, quasi-psychological) dimension as well. For more than a century, a Tarot-based inquiry has been used to unveil the inner selves of potential Order members. Those who believe in the system claim that by understanding one's Fate Card, a vampire can gain self-knowledge that ultimately yields an inner strength that surpasses that of most mortals and vampires alike.

The Dragons calls this process "walking the Paths of Fate," and many Kindred who seek to join the covenant are faced with this test before any significant decisions are made about their future position within the Order. The Paths of Fate are, if nothing else, a personality test designed to reveal certain facets of a Kindred's psyche to the Dragons considering her petition for membership. If the most faithful supporters of the Paths of Fate are to be believed, the test is more of a psycho-spiritual gauge of a vampire's "true self." Such spiritualists believe there are no coincidences during the test — every card that is turned over has a mystical significance for the test-taker. Throughout the covenant, however, no single means of interpreting that significance has ever been agreed upon.

How It Works

Most Dragon "sages" who've learned the paths use Tarot cards as a prop during questioning, but the questions are not really tied to any particular card. Some hard-core literalists *do* have a system whereby each question has a card dedicated to it — in fact, they have bitter debates over which question gets assigned to the Ace of Wands, or whatever — but the system works just as well if you pull a card at random, present the first situation, pull another and present the second, and so forth.

There are 21 questions in what is called the first course, or the "Course of Light" to very formal path of fate devotees. A like number of questions also make up the second course, or "Course of Darkness."

Each question asks the subject to choose between two moral qualities, in the Course of Light, or two moral temptations, in the Course of Darkness. When it's hard to choose between two attractive options, the querist is encouraged to go with her gut instinct. Similarly, when both options are distasteful, it's best to follow the path of least resistance. After all, our flaws are often not what we seek, but what we fall into for lack of anything better.

The Player and the Character

Players and Storytellers alike may scratch their heads at this introduction of mechanical game elements (capital-V Vices and Virtues) into the story space of the fictional game world. Typically, a player is expected to run her character as a *character* first, and for mechanical advantage second. More practically, the player is often expected to ignore "meta-game" information that her character has no way of knowing.

Virtues and Vices already straddle the line between game mechanics and story elements, however. They're aspects of characterization that have concrete effects on the rules by interacting with Willpower and, sometimes, other effects. As written, they're essentially a descriptor of how you see your character, not necessarily how the character sees himself, but they are also descriptors of the character's nature — central, critical elements of his motivations within the narrative of the game. Gaining self-awareness, be it through psychoanalysis or some quasi-spiritual hokum like the Paths of Fate can genuinely affect a character's effectiveness, as reflected by Willpower gains.

Remember, though, that your character doesn't quantify the rewards his actions get him in Willpower points; he doesn't think in game terms, and neither do the vampires of the Ordo Dracul. Your character might simply learn from the test that his even-temperament would make him a good mediator within the covenant. You and the Storyteller may choose to substitute other names for the Virtues and Vices when administering the Paths of Fate to a character. Thus, the Dragon administrator reports that a character is "above all else, compassionate and arrogant," rather than describing the character in game terms. (You can find other names for each Virtue and Vice in Chapter Four of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

It's entirely possible that your character's results during the two courses of the Paths of Fate won't match the Virtue or Vice you chose to describe him. You might choose to see your character's results as a reason to rethink his Virtues and Vices, but you don't have to. You are the authority on your character, not some imaginary vampire headmaster.

The Paths of Fate are an exercise designed to create an atmosphere of introspection, to encourage you and your character to reflect in a manner that jives with the philosophies of the Ordo Dracul. The Paths of Fate are only a roleplaying *tool*. You are still the craftsperson.

There are seven qualities and seven temptations, and at the end of each course one virtue and one vice generally rises to the top. Ties in which two (or more) virtues or vices receive an equal number of cards aren't uncommon, however. When this happens, the questioner either uses her personal judgment ("Is this person greedier, or lazier?") or simply asks the subject point-blank if, for example, she feels she's more just or more charitable.

Who Administers the Test?

Most commonly, the Paths of Fate are "walked" by a student in the presence of a prospective mentor, so that the instructor can get some idea what she's signing on for if she takes her under her wing. Some tutors keep the results to themselves, some blab. Sometimes, those who administer the test immediately share the yield of their queries, but it's far from universal. In other domains, the results of the test are shared with the mentor but not the pupil. Many instructors find it useful to know their students better than the students know themselves.

Few chapters of the Ordo Dracul have one Kindred who is responsible for administering the Paths of Fate to would-be Dragons. Rather, the test is most often conducted by a neutral vampire who is, if possible, unknown to the supplicant. In a few domains, however, it is customary for the test to be administered by a Dragon familiar with the initiate, to minimize pressure and promote honesty. More often, however, Dragon administrators believe that pressure is the true promoter of honesty.

In some domains — particularly those in which Order leaders or a Dragon Prince really believe in the paths — tests are mandatory for all who join the Order. In Venice, they say the old Prince even briefly made the test mandatory for all new Kindred.

The Course of Light

The first course of the test is the Course of Light. To prepare for the test, the Dragon administrator marks seven spots on a table before the hopeful student. Each spot is marked with the name of a different Heavenly Virtue. As the test-taker answers the questions of the Course of Light, she lays cards from the Tarot deck on one of these seven spots.

To begin the test, the Dragon administrator hands the Tarot deck to the student. When she is ready, the administrator poses one of the following situations to the student, then explains her choices. Once the student has made her choice and placed her card on the appropriate space on the table, the administrator moves on to the next situation. This process is repeated until the student has faced all of the situations in the Course of Light.

The language used in the test is decidedly archaic. In part, this is a conceit of the Kindred who devised the test. In practice, however, the language has been retained for the atmosphere it creates: students hearing these archetypal situations described with archaic language imagine themselves in another place or time. As a result, they are more likely to make choices based on ideology rather than practicality. That's what the Order wants — the Paths of Fate are meant to be a test of the student's *self*, not her judgment.

When all of the following situations have been faced by the student, the administrator determines which of the Heavenly Virtues has received the most cards. That is considered the student's defining quality. The deck is then reassembled, and the second course is begun.

Liar!

There's nothing stopping a supplicant from lying in response to these questions. A liar might be motivated by a desire to please the questioner, a need to conceal her true weaknesses or simply a bloody-minded contrariness. As long as the questioner doesn't have the means to penetrate the subterfuge, a lying pupil can easily get away with it. There may, after all, be advantages to being in a position intended for "another type of Dragon," whether the Kindred simply seeks a role more exciting than what she can expect to get through honest answers or whether she's a spy from the Circle of the Crone attempting to infiltrate the ranks of the local Guardians.

On the other hand, there are disadvantages to being shoved into a role meant for someone else — and to being caught in a lie by an elder Dragon.

Situations in the Course of Light

• Your leader commands you to torture a captured prisoner so as to intimidate his comrades.

If you obey, put this card on Faith. If you refuse, put this card on Charity.

• You have pursued a traitor against your king for many years. At long last, you bring her to bay, only to have everyone around her swear solemn oaths and offer persuasive evidence that she has amended her ways and now leads a righteous and loyal existence.

If you punish her for the crimes she committed long ago, put this card on Fortitude. If you give her a second chance, put it on Hope.

• You have evidence that a powerful lord has committed treason. He is ensconced in a fortress, and removing him will be difficult and dangerous. But it will cost him time, men and money if you make your attack, so he offers riches, titles and territory to your master if you will overlook his previous betrayal.

If you attack, place this card on Justice. If you accept his terms, place it on Prudence.

• You know a woman has been falsely imprisoned.

If you implore the judges to reconsider her sentence — a process that may take months — place this card on Temperance. If you offer to take her place as a surety, place this card on Charity.

• You have sworn total loyalty to your master. He orders you to rob a poor man for the benefit of a rich one.

If you remain true to your oath, put the card on Fortitude. If you refuse, place it on Justice.

• You are sent to parley with a violent and intolerant tribe. Their customs call for the imbibing of strong drink. You have chosen to abstain from such liquors.

If you drink in order to make peace with the tribe, place this card on Prudence. If you decline, place this card on Temperance.

• After a lengthy pursuit, you catch up with your enemy, only to find that a fall from a horse has left both his legs and one of his arms useless forever.

If you avenge yourself, place this card on Fortitude. If you decide your enemy is no longer a threat and let him live, place this card on Charity.

• You have confessed a sin, and your priest imposes a penance upon you that seems disproportionately harsh.

If you meekly perform the penance, place this card on Faith. If you avoid the penance and pray for forgiveness and understanding despite it, place the card on Hope.

• It is war, and you are on the defensive. You see a much larger force fast approaching.

If you retreat by stealth, place this card on Prudence. If you entrench yourself and prepare to fight, place this card on Fortitude.

• A debtor has defaulted on your loan. He promises that if you but wait six months until his caravan returns, he will pay you triple what he owes.

If you take possession of his home — the loan's collateral — place this card on Justice. If you grant him the extension, place this card on Hope.

• Your cousin is in danger of being sentenced to debtor's prison.

If you lend her money, with little hope of repayment, place this card on Charity. If you let her suffer the sentence, place this card on Prudence.

• You are dedicated to a noble cause, but your organization is perilously low on funds.

If you think stealing to uphold the larger cause is justified, put the card on Faith. If you would rather see the cause fail than dishonor it with theft, put the card on Justice.

• A fellow lord despises you, but you are enamored with his daughter. He is a master swordsman.

If you risk his wrath to woo his beautiful daughter, place this card on Fortitude. If you don't, place this card on Temperance.

• Your feckless retainer, though unquestionably loyal, has failed you again.

If you give him another chance, place this card on Hope. If you dismiss him for incompetence, place this card on Prudence.

• You have a store of seeds, and your family is starving.

If you grind up the seeds to make meal for your hungry children, place this card on Charity. If you plant the seeds in hope of a greater yield in the spring, place the card on Hope.

• Your innocent friend is falsely accused of a dastardly crime.

If you perjure yourself to free him, place this card on Faith. If you remain silent but honest, place this card on Fortitude.

• A beautiful woman, whom you've loved from afar, offers to abandon her second husband and elope with you.

If you accept, place this card on Hope. If you refuse, place this card on Temperance.

• You are judging a man accused of stealing a horse and running it until its leg had broken. It emerges that he stole the horse to get his ill child to a doctor, lest she perish. He cannot pay the horse's value.

If you lighten his sentence, place this card on Charity. If you obey the letter of the law, place this card on Justice.

• After a hard war, you are ordered to break bread and make amends with old foes.

If you remain wary of your enemies and scrutinize them for any sign of treachery, place this card on Prudence. If you make a concerted effort to obey your orders and forgive, place this card on Faith.

• You have been rewarded for your courage with lavish and extravagant gifts bestowed by a figurehead of the court.

If you keep the gifts, place this card on Justice. If you give them away to people who will use them more wisely, place this card on Temperance.

• You are given the honor of hosting a feast on a beloved holiday.

If you splurge and spend to your very limit, place this card on Faith. If you hold back and spend the barest minimum, place this card on Temperance.

The Course of Darkness

The second half of the test — the Course of Darkness — is carried out in the same manner as the first half. For this course, however, the seven spaces on the testing table are labeled with the Seven Deadly Sins. In this course, test-takers are often taken aback by the assumptions made in the proposed situations — the student *will* steal, the student *does* lie. Unsettling as it may be for some Kindred, these are not such bold assumptions. In the span of eternity, most vampires can be expected to steal or lie or kill eventually. The test-taker's reaction to that assumption is just another cue for the administrator to measure and consider.

When all of the following situations have been faced by the student, the administrator determines which of the Deadly Sins has been marked with the most cards. That is considered the student's defining temptation.

Situations in the Course of Darkness

• Your neighbor, preparing for a trip, leaves her car momentarily unattended. You can steal a bottle of fine brandy, or a small box of jewelry.

If you take the jewelry, place this card on Greed. If you take the brandy, place this card on Gluttony.

• You meet a beautiful and desirable woman who treats you with haughty disdain.

If you trick or intimidate her into bed, put this card on Lust. If you earn her admiration so that you can reject *her*, put this card on Envy.

• Your honor is being besmirched with ridiculous calumnies.

If you spare no effort to find the source of the rumors, place this card on Pride. If you consider it unimportant, put the card on Sloth.

• An irksome associate has invited you to a lavish feast.

If you gorge yourself at her expense while ignoring her company, place this card on Gluttony. If you ply your host with drink, hoping she will humiliate himself, place this card on Envy.

• A colleague offers to recommend an expert assassin-for-hire to slay a slippery foe of yours.

If you pay the killer's high fee, place this card on Wrath. If you search for a less expensive alternative, place this card on Greed.

• Would you crawl and beg like a spaniel to please a new lover?

If you would, put this card on Lust. If you wouldn't, put the card on Pride.

• A man who has wronged you flees across the ocean. He is no longer a threat, but he is now beyond your reach.

If you pursue him, put this card on Wrath. If you forget about him, put this card on Sloth.

• You are planning a burglary that will ruin a rival, when you learn that he's earmarked the money for a new business venture. In a few weeks, his vaults will contain even more cash, and his other assets will appreciate as well.

If you wait to rob him until after his investment pays out, earning you more and hurting him less, place this card on Greed. If you ruin him immediately, earning yourself less but hurting him more, place this card on Envy.

• Your sworn enemy has hidden herself in a town under quarantine.

If you adopt the humiliating disguise of a leper for a chance to kill your foe, put this card on Wrath. If you insist that your enemy know he was slain by you, put this card on Pride.

• You have come to possess a rare and renowned drug.

If you keep it for yourself, place this card on Gluttony. If you give it to a paramour to make her yield to your advances, place this card on Lust.

• You have conquered an enemy town and pillaged the treasury.

If you quietly slip the treasure back to your own vaults, place this card on Greed. If you spend the treasure on a triumphal celebration of your own glory, place the card on Pride.

• You stand to learn embarrassing gossip about your rival, if you can endure the endless prattle of a courtier.

If you endure the chatter, place this card on Envy. If you don't bother, put the card on Sloth.

• The opulent clothes you've ordered to impress the Emperor arrive, but they're too small. You're expected to meet the Emperor at a lavish soiree in three days.

If you starve yourself for three days to fit into the clothes, put this card on Pride. If you simply wear something you already owned, put this card on Gluttony.

• A courtesan of notorious skill and beauty insists on an outrageous price for her services.

If you gladly pay, put this card on Lust. If you haggle shamelessly, put this card on Greed.

• You are at a wedding feast when you get word that a bankrupt debtor of yours is trying to flee town.

If you let him go savor the celebration, put this card on Gluttony. If you leave to thrash and imprison him, put the card on Wrath.

• You behold a high priest in a disgraceful state of drunkenness.

If you believe you're better than him, put this card on Pride. If you believe you're worse than him, put the card on Envy.

• You have an opportunity to moonlight for extra money without your master's knowledge, but to do so you must sneak out each night.

If you enrich yourself dishonestly, put this card on Greed. If you don't bother, put the card on Sloth.

You have slain an enemy and plan to hang his severed head from your castle wall. His lovely widow comes to you and begs that her husband's corpse be released unmolested for a dignified burial. Desperate, she offers to give herself to you for one night in exchange.

If you agree to her proposal, put this card on Lust. If you turn her down, put the card on Wrath.

• You are invited to a bounteous feast, but it is to be held many miles away, and the road is arduous.

If you take the journey, put the card on Gluttony. If you decline, put the card on Sloth.

• You are defending a captured palace, and the gates have fallen. You must flee.

If you burn the palace behind you as you flee, place this card on Envy. If you leave it intact so that you may retake it in the future, place the card on Wrath.

• A tedious, gossipy old nurse is the only servant allowed access to a beautiful young maiden whom you've been eyeing.

If you feign friendship with the nurse to get access to the girl, put this card on Lust. If you can't be bothered to tolerate the tiresome hag, put the card on Sloth.

Storytelling and Fate

As a Storyteller, you might see the Paths of Fate as an elaborate waste of time. After all, you and your players already know each character's Virtue and Vice. Why bother with the ceremony? The first answer is: "You shouldn't." If the Paths of Fate sound like a bother, ignore them. The second answer is: "For inspiration."

Every situation in the Paths of Fate is a potential story idea for you to use in your chronicle or in your character's history. With the character's choice during the test as the foundation, you have the perfect dramatic context for a story. Will the character who chose Wrath over Lust in the Paths of Fate make the same choice on the street? Is a character willing to grant mercy to a hypothetical enemy willing to grant it to a real enemy? Choices are dramatic. Stories built around difficult choices are often the most satisfying.

The Paths of Fate give you a glimpse at the sort of decisions a character (or her player) find difficult to make. They show you where the dramatic

choices are for the character. By playing out the Paths of Fate — or just presenting a "best of" selection of the test's hypothetical situations — you reveal information that can prove to be invaluable when you're designing the chronicle's future stories. Use that information to create stories that get at the heart of your players' characters.

Finding the Fate Card

Once one exemplary quality and one enduring temptation have been determined to stand out for the student, the questioner determines and presents the student's Fate Card.

The Fate Card is that which lies at the intersection of quality and temptation on the following chart. Through a combination of traditional wisdom, spiritualism and experimentation, the Ordo Dracul has come to define each combination of quality and temptation with a Tarot card that exemplifies that intersection. This card symbolizes the nature and personal strengths of the student, and may be used as a shorthand description of her personality by Dragons who trust in the Paths of Fate. In some domains, this card is associated with a vampire only for her first few years within the covenant, until her actions can be measured as well as her words. In other domains, this card follows the Dragon for decades, coloring her reputation and influencing her assignments.

Often, the possible cards are laid out, face down, in the proper arrangement beforehand. Thus a dramatic revelation occurs when the supplicant's Fate Card is finally turned over.

Interpreting the Fate Card

For a Kindred who believes in the test, the card she is given becomes a welcome badge of recognition by the covenant — a symbol she can identify with. It's comforting and affirming. For a vampire who regards the Paths of Fate as a pseudo-psychological ritual blown way out of proportion, the card she is associated with is a meaningless summation of abstract nonsense — an unwelcome label she may never escape. It's limiting and annoying. The majority of Dragons fall somewhere between these extremes.

A Dragon may be referred to by her Fate Card much as a mortal might be described by her zodiac sign. For example, one young Dragon might say to another, "You must be a Hermit. That is such a Hermit thing to say."

The traditional meanings of the 49 Fate Cards are as follows. In modern nights, more and more Dragons have taken to reinterpreting these meanings based on the context of the Kindred being labeled. Still, the stereotypical image of a Dragon of a particular card is informed by these definitions.

0: The Fool

The Fool persists in his folly until he becomes wise — or until it leads him to his ultimate doom. Whichever fate lies in store, your great strength lies in persistence and relentlessness, whether it leads you to defend your beliefs or sacrifice them to follow your pleasures. The Fool cannot compromise, which is why so much progress is made by the foolish.

While many tutors are reluctant to instruct Fools, the Sworn of the Axe and (more surprisingly) the Sworn of the Dying Light often find that Fools can contribute, if their appetites are appropriate.

I: The Magician

You are never happier than when seeking a shortcut or better method. Your search for efficiency is not a matter of laziness, but of impatience, and you are happy to burn both ends of your candle to yield twice as much light. Unfortunate results do not deter you as much as delayed conclusions: it is better for you to make a mistake and immediately set about repairing it, than for you to somberly contemplate the best course.

	Charity	Faith	Fortitude	Hope	Justice	Prudence	Temperance
Envy	Queen of Cups	3 of Coins	Knight of Rods	5 of Rods	XI Justice	Knight of Cups	2 of Rods
Gluttony	9 of Cups	II High Priestess	0 Fool	X Fortune's Wheel	King of Cups	XVIII The Moon	5 of Cups
Greed	IV Emperor	V Hierophant	VII Chariot	King of Coins	King of Rods	7 of Coins	7 of Cups
Lust	Queen of Coins	6 of Rods	Knight of Swords	I The Magician	7 of Rods	VI The Lovers	XVII The Star
Pride	XII The Hanged Man	XIX The Sun	III The Empress	XXI The World	XX Final Judgment	Queen of Swords	XIV Temperance
Sloth	6 of Coins	Queen of Rods	VIII Fortitude	4 of Cups	2 of Swords	Knight of Coins	IX The Hermit
Wrath	9 of Swords	XVI The Tower	XIII Death	XV The Devil	King of Swords	5 of Coins	10 of Swords

As one might expect, the Sworn of the Dying Light love Magicians, while the other Sworn generally do not. Many instructors are reluctant to adopt a "mad experimenter" — unless the instructor is, herself, a Magician.

II: The High Priestess

You need not fear having your faith tested: rather, beware of its excesses. With your devotion to a cause or belief greater than yourself, you find it easy to indulge to a degree greater than any individual can. Boundless loyalty is often wedded to boundless appetite, in the form of a sense of entitlement. Great tragedy can result if your personal obsessions conflict with the institution you serve.

These obsessions can stand in the way of a Mysteries Oath, but the Sworn of the Axe are always interested in loyalty, as are most teachers.

III: The Empress

The arrogance of your demands for approval and your self-aggrandizement is mitigated by your genuine ability to lead and contribute. You have the capacity for intense loyalty to a cause or an individual, but your powerful sense of self can interfere with this. It is best for you to directly associate yourself with your cause or intention, so that your pride and courage are like horses pulling in harness, and not against each other.

The Sworn of the Mysteries tend to find Empresses easy to accept (except for individual Sworn who are, themselves, Empresses). The same can be said for the other Oaths, to a lesser degree. But many instructors shy away from someone so headstrong.

IV The Emperor

For every hundred people who claim that they are gathering funds for their righteous cause, there is one person who is genuinely doing so. You can be that person. When you labor to improve the lot of yourself and others, you are at your strongest. When you are conflicted between helping others and your own comfort or security, you are at your weakest.

Tutors like the helpfulness of Emperors, especially since they can offer rewards that play into the Emperor's self-interest as well. The Oathbound, however, may look askance at one who has trouble making hard decisions between the self and the collective.

V The Hierophant

Your craving for control is the natural fruit of your belief in the rightness of your cause. You have difficulty trusting anything of value to others, because their weakness may lead them to selfish indulgence. Beware that you do not fall prey to the very hypocrisy you despise in others, for when you gain the power you seek, it is easy to conflate the glory of your cause with your personal enrichment. Clutching for more is in your nature, and if you do not do it from belief, you will do it nonetheless.

Hierophants make good students, as they are often greedy for knowledge. But the Sworn are leery of anyone who has the traits of an embezzler.

VI: The Lover

You are empty and bereft without strong feelings for someone. You can be the most resolute and ardent of suitors, wooing your paramour with constant thoughtfulness, flattery and kindness. But if your feelings darken, your passion can be a punishment, degrading and debasing your victim until your gradual blackmail, or unceasing deceit or remorseless cruelty allows you recast her as you wish.

Instructors and Sworn all have the same reaction to a Lover: they stay far away if they lack the confidence to think they can earn her adoration. But if they think they're worth her worship, they eagerly embrace a new worshiper.

VII: The Chariot

You are insatiable, a conqueror by nature. When you are making progress you go from strength to strength, pressing on in pursuit of goals personal, political or philosophical. Your personal bane is stagnation: if you are not struggling, you are getting weaker. Triumph is good for you. Comfort is not.

Strong teachers like Chariots because they get where they're going quickly, while weak teachers worry about falling under the wheels of their student. Sworn of the Mysteries and the Dying Light tend to embrace Chariots when they're underdogs, and throw roadblocks before them when they're on top and don't want to share power. The Sworn of the Axe like fierce competitors.

VIII: Fortitude

You do not see the mountain, but each stage of the climb. You do not see the mile, but the steps you must take to walk it. Anything that can be reduced to small, predictable tasks is surmountable. You play to your strengths when you avoid drastic choices or single, epic tasks. Take your measured steps, leave the glory to others and be satisfied with inevitable success.

Teachers and all of the Oathbound tend to like the service of Fortitude, but they do not necessarily reward or encourage those beneath its aegis. It's a good fate for acceptance, not for support.

IX: The Hermit

Your nature disposes you to solitary efforts and contemplative pursuits. Considering every side of a problem is your great strength. Being unable to choose between options is your great weakness. You work best with time to consider, study and find a compromise between all factors. Anything that forces you to rush, guess or make do will drain you.

Instructors who value patience, value Hermits, as do the Sworn of the Dying Light . (Often a Hermit makes a

good counterbalance to a Magician.) The other Oaths have no time for a Hermit's dithering.

X: Fortune & Wheel

A sensualist, you see the pleasures of the world as a reward for the hopeful. Luck can lay you low, but it can also turn bounteous at a moment's notice — for those with the wisdom to recognize opportunity and clutch it with both hands. Needless to say, there's no point in pursuing success if you don't also enjoy success' most direct rewards. There's no point in despair, cowardice or timidity. You are a creature of experience.

Fortune's Wheel is the most neutrally regarded card. Very few instructors or Oathbound find this fate decisive, either for or against its carrier.

XI: Justice

To be a just man in an unjust world is to suffer deeply, and the balm for your suffering is to lay low those whose might and grandeur is built on lies, theft and corruption. As an avenger you are tough and resolute, at your best when aiding the downtrodden and wronged. But there are two situations that can send your strengths at cross purposes. First, you must avoid the temptation to pull yourself unjustly up to the level of those you punish, for you can fall and you can become everything you despise. Perhaps worse, you must avoid those whose comfort and power and wealth are theirs by right, for you will covet their joy no matter how well deserved.

An ostracized teacher who wants to tear down the cliques that spurn her will delight in a Justice student. The only other teachers who like Justice are those who have a strong bent in that direction themselves. As for the Sworn, the Mysteries are often receptive to Justice, though not to the point of accepting someone who can't be popular. The Sworn of the Dying Light and the Axe are beyond concern for those fixed on righting wrongs.

XII: The Hanged Man

Wealth, indulgence, the pleasures of the flesh — these are nothing to you compared to the rare nectar of adoration. You can suffer any indignity for a chance to show your quality. Be bold, make no small plans and prepare yourself to endure for others what they cannot. You can survive anything except insignificance.

Instructors dislike students who are likely to die in some dramatic crusade before the teacher can even get any benefit from them. But the Sworn can all find uses for willing sufferers.

XIII: Death

Locust warrior, crusader, insatiable devourer — you can sustain, indefinitely, a fury that would exhaust weaker creatures in an instant. But your path is a lonesome one, for any who would walk beside Death risk falling into her shadow.

Nobody likes Death except the Sworn of the Axe, but some of that Oath will welcome a Death-aspected Kindred almost sight unseen.

XIV Temperance

You have labored much for your purity, and for that you are rightly admired. But do not take too much comfort in the adoration of others, for often a zeal for purity masks an urge to possess and defile. At your finest, purity itself is its own reward and that cloaks you in glory. At your worst, a longing for glory leads you to sully and cheapen yourself to your lessers.

An instructor can expect great things from Temperance: either they sell out for personal renown, or they diligently apply themselves. Either way, the teacher probably gains something. The Sworn of the Mysteries are often welcoming; the other Oathbound are less so.

XV The Devil

Cruelty untempered by fear produces the most vicious of monsters. In the pursuit of your dreams, you can spark a thousand nightmares. Heedless of any pluck of conscience or any sting of regret, you move from one triumph to the next, or are they atrocities?

Nobody likes the Devil. Or, at least, no one's willing to admit it.

XVI: The Tower

You possess the faith of an angel — an avenging angel armed with fire and the sword. There is no point in speaking treaties with infidels or rivals, because you lack the patience or humility to believe their promises or stomach offering them honor. Your destiny is conflict and destruction, and you defy it at the price of all that makes you strong.

Teachers who are looking for a bully and don't care if he's well leashed or not adopt Towers: few others do. The Sworn of the Axe can always find a place for an uncompromising butcher, but the other Oaths are usually reluctant — unless they're involved in their own power struggles, particularly against the Axe…

XVII: The Star

Your distance makes others doubt your commitment, but they do not comprehend how the banked fire can blaze hot in an instant. You have a rare understanding of the depth of your own passion, and that gives you respect for it. Others glut themselves insensate and, in doing so, cheapen their pleasures. Through reticence and judgment, you savor your delights more profoundly than they ever can.

Taciturn teachers may appreciate a quiet student who still cares a lot, but others prefer more immediate displays of enthusiasm. The Sworn of the Dying Light and the Mysteries both find quiet intensity attractive. The Sworn of the Axe seem to lean more towards blatant intensity.

XVIII: The Moon

As the moon's visage changes, so does yours. You are comfortable living two lives, showing two faces, indulging in private what you publicly disdain. While you do not necessarily have to be a hypocrite, you do need to strike a balance between your consuming urges and your need to maintain discipline.

The Sworn of the Axe recruit Moons for their infiltration and scouting arm: the Sworn of the Dying Light tend to look askance at them, while the Mysteries are neutral. Few tutors value discipline at the price of obsession, but those who do, *really* do.

XIX: The Sun

The glory of the cause is your glory — whatever cause you choose. You have the heart of a true believer, but you will never be content to labor in humble obscurity. Be the paragon of your creed, or your soul will starve. Be a saint or a great sinner, but never permit yourself to be eclipsed.

All the Oathbound like to recruit someone who can grow to be the fulfilling embodiment of their cause, but very few instructors crave a student who is quite likely to outshine them or die trying.

XX: The Last Judgment

Even before the trumpet of heaven and the gates of hell, you show no doubt. Questioning your judgment is the most perilous thing you can do, far worse than actually being wrong. You must never doubt yourself, any more than you would tolerate the doubt of others.

As they are charged with judicial chores, the Sworn of the Dying Light are often interested in someone whose fate is The Last Judgment. The Sworn of the Axe appreciate their steadfastness, but often find them insubordinate. The Sworn of the Mysteries are least interested in someone who can't compromise — unless you consider instructors who have no taste for being evaluated by their apprentices.

XXI: The World

You can win the world and deserve it. Even in the face of setbacks, you keep your eyes on your ambition. Your destiny is to be the heir apparent — for even if you rise to the greatest height in your chosen endeavor, you will always seek a way to transcend it and become something greater still.

Oathbound and instructors alike are more likely to react to a hyper-ambitious Kindred from personality rather than ideology. Having The World at your feet is appealing, but you don't want the weight of The World on your shoulders.

King of Cups

While others find pleasure in work, you are generally more inclined to work for your pleasures. You have great appetites, thankfully mated to great discernment. If you deny yourself to pursue your virtues, you lose the will such quests require. If you seek delight heedlessly, it is hollow. Only by deserving rewards can you enjoy them fully.

Every instructor and faction likes the Kings of Cups because their desire to earn rewards in a system makes them perfect assistants.

Queen of Cups

You are generous to a fault, except your own faults. Kindness is easy to those who have less and are of lower station, but you are ill at ease with those who neither want nor require your largesse. You are at your strongest dealing with inferiors, whose gratitude you can sculpt and mold. Guard yourself around those who have authority over you: hate for them comes easily.

The inverse of the King of Cups, Queens of Cups are universally disliked because they tend to be surly and resentful underlings.

Knight of Cups

Your abilities make you an able courtier, herald or advisor, but a poor commander. When given time to consult and consider, you bring wise counsel, but not when burdened by urgency. This rational calm serves your

ambition well — and your ambition is boundless. Mark well that your hunger for greatness does not eclipse the prudence that can help you gain it.

The Sworn of the Axe disdains those slow to decide, while the other Oaths favor those who ultimately decide wisely. But both the Mysteries and the Dying Light tend to hold back Knights of Cups from the positions they ultimately covet. Tutors, on the other hand, favor this fate as they study well and often remember with kindness the teachers they surpass.

Nine of Cups

The pleasure you give others is exceeded only by the pleasure you seek for yourself. Debauchery incarnate, you wound your spirit when you cry "Hold, enough!" either to the indulgence of others or to restrain them from provisioning you to excess.

Though the Sworn of the Mysteries and the Axe know that it's probably wiser to pass on a Nine of Cups, they often offer admittance just for the sake of camaraderie. The Dying Light (and most teachers) disdains the Nine of Cups as "disruptive influences."

Seven of Cups

Gathering is your joy. Draw together that which delights you and lock it away, storing it for a time of need or simply because its safety gives you pleasure. It may be best for you to keep your collection secret, whatever it is: let others befriend you for the other fruits of your moderation, but your most precious treasures should be hid from envying eyes.

The secrecy and selfishness associated with this fate give most tutors and Oathbound pause — with the notable exceptions of those who have, themselves, something to hide.

Five of Cups

You are capable of making your life a monument of effort, and then sacrificing it all on an altar of obsession. Know this: your tendency to vice can become all-consuming, and your considerable foresight can equip you with a great deal to lose. You must either battle against your needs, or on their behalf, and the latter option will make you stronger — until it destroys you.

The only teachers or Oathbound who recruit a Five of Cups are those who want a focused agent who can be controlled through some weakness or addiction. Many with this fate, however, are content to serve a master who understands and meets their needs. For a while, anyhow…

Four of Cups

Your most powerful weapon is your helplessness. If you have not already mastered the art of permitting your situation to become so dire that others feel compelled to rescue you, it will certainly come to you with little effort. Your premier role is that of ingénue, hapless slave or impotent adornment.

No one with any sense or position in the Ordo Dracul wants to adopt such a sponge.

Fate Cards and Storytelling

For Storytellers and players participating in a chronicle focused on the Ordo Dracul, Fate Cards can be a valuable bit of color. They can also be valuable storytelling tools with uses both subtle and gross.

Storytellers can use the Fate Cards as hooks for narrative techniques like foreshadowing: How accurate is a character's Fate Card? Does it foretell future events or reveal some inner secret of the Man or the Beast? The Fate Card is also a tool for thematic emphasis or suspenseful misdirection. When a story reveals an important Storyteller character to be a King of Coins, what significance might that suggest? Does it reveal the character's true nature and motives or is it a red herring on the part of the Storyteller — or the character herself! — to set up a later surprise?

Players can use the Fate Cards to talk "in-character" with other Dragons ("That bastard is *such* a Nine of Swords."). The Ordo Dracul has plenty of jargon based on sub-sects within the covenant, but Fate Cards can be commonly understood by all Dragons in the domain. Beyond that, the statements by Fate Cards can be a great source of internal conflict for a character. A devoted Dragon who truly believes in the test might struggle with her failing as a Tower or her personal expectations as a Queen of Cups. Alternately, a character might use a Fate Card to justify her actions to other Dragons and thereby get away with acts that would normally be suspect or troublesome.

King of Coins

Your faith in a better future ably equips you to build for it, and even when you fail you can start over with good cheer. With some luck and discernment, you can accumulate great wealth and power, and that is when you must choose. Will you spend what you have in pursuit of that brighter future? Or will you decide the bright future has arrived?

Unless there's some strong negative factor, most tutors and the Oathbound as well will compete to recruit someone with such a positive spirit.

Queen of Coins

You are by nature inclined to give much and take much. You instinct is towards generosity, but you expect and sometimes demand love, adoration or simply a gesture of respect in return. At your best, you are a mover, a driving force who accomplishes much and helps others accomplish. At

worst, you're a slattern, drawing everyone you meet into tangles of morbid desire.

The Sworn of the Dying Light and the Mysteries both find the energies and social movement generated by a Queen of Cups to be useful. The Sworn of the Axe, and many Coil instructors, find it chaotic.

Knight of Coins

Every great endeavor has a middle layer of those like you. Between the great deciders on the top and the faceless plebes who labor or battle at the bottom, there lies the realm of the functionary — staid, steady, never exceptional either for good or ill. You can swim indefinitely in the tepid waters of bureaucracy, but you imperil yourself when you try to rule or to directly act.

All the Oathbound take on Knights of Coins when their ranks are thin, but the competition for one of this fate never rises above "tepid." That's also a good word for an instructor's attitude towards a student who neither blossoms nor fails.

Seven of Coins

You love money and ought to seek a place where you can watch over it. If you find yourself as a treasurer, watchman or tax collector, you should excel — as long as you content yourself with only that which is yours to watch over. You may be tempted to steal through deceit, and admittedly you are ably constructed to do so.

Few teachers want a proto-embezzler clasped to their bosom. Many of the Oathbound are more willing to take the risk for an able collector — as long as they've got someone to provide oversight.

Six of Coins

You are not one to set forth and strive to change the world, but rather one who is well able to change herself to fit the world as he finds it and — perhaps more importantly — to help others change themselves to be more fit as well. Indeed, your greatest triumphs are likely to be those you achieve through others.

This is another popular fate among teachers and the Sworn alike. Every organization needs people who serve as social lubricant, especially the Sworn of the Mysteries. The exception is an instructor who wants a one-on-one relationship.

Five of Coins

The thoroughness with which you can grind down an enemy, whether the cause be personal, political or philosophical, is breathtaking in its awfulness. Never act rashly — such passion is not you. Instead, make your plan with care, plot each deed with foresight and step by step you can produce total ruin.

Few tutors want a Five of Coins, unless it's one who wants someone to engineer an elaborate revenge on some rival. On the other hand, few tutors are willing to rudely dismiss someone of this fate. All the Oaths find it safer to have a Five of Coins as an ally than an enemy, though this can backfire in cases of internal division.

Three of Coins

Through obedience to a higher authority you can justify any vengeance, petty or grand, against any who harm you or merely have the misfortune to be temporarily better situated. Know this, because your loyalty *is* genuine, and it is tragic when jealousy poisons true fidelity. Make sure that you are working for your cause, not using it as an excuse for personal vendetta.

Tutors who can get a Three of Coins on their side have a powerful ally, but getting respect from this fate from above is a difficult task. The Oathbound are more likely to recruit a Three of Coins, particularly if they need someone to keep the local unsworn in line. In all cases, those above a Three of Coins keep their eyes peeled for anger.

King of Rods

The power of the sword is the power to destroy, but the power of the rod is to build. It is your power. You long to have more than all you survey, but it will be empty to you unless you deserve it. Labor without ceasing to develop your kingdom, but do so by paying honest due to friends and honest ire to foes. In that way you will rule with a steady hand.

The King of Rods is popular with tutors and the Oathbound — as long as they are certain that others, and not themselves, will bear the cost of construction.

Queen of Rods

The hard way is not always the best, nor the easy way the worst. Do what you can, support and cultivate and advise — these are your routes to strength. You need to be part of a cause to be fulfilled, but you are no fit leader, no firebrand, no martyr. Instead, you are the gentle builder without whom no ideologue or rabble rouser can succeed.

This fate is good for admission to any Oath, but poor for advancement: such is the lot of those with a bureaucratic destiny. Most teachers are looking for someone more impressive, unless they have a large class to manage, or unless they are themselves Oathbound.

Knight of Rods

Bullish and stout, your spirit faces true foes with the same brashness it levels against shadows and phantoms. Keep your promises, obey her to whom you are pledged, and do your best to tell true challenges from false ones. You will find great joy in despoilment, but be sure to reserve that wrath for your foes, and not your rivals in service.

This Knight's tendency towards hard work endears her to instructors, especially those who think competition

is the tide which raises all students' ships. The Oathbound are often less eager for a Knight of Rods, who can be as rough on a rival in her own army as on an enemy from without.

Seven of Rods

Raise your weapon against anyone, great or small, who represses you. A life of insurrection is fraught with difficulties, so you must choose carefully. Any time you refrain from striking the oppressor, no matter how overmatched you are, it is a taste of your own death. But while flying heedlessly into an ideological battle has rich inner rewards for you, be aware of its more material dangers.

Nobody likes a rebel — except other rebels. Only outsiders crave the company of this congenital insurrectionist.

Six of Rods

Yours is a soul in torment, stretched tight between the immediacy of your impetuous desires and the intensity of your longing for a higher and purer path. Strike the difficult balance and use your lusts to fuel your faith, or else resign yourself to being incomplete — either as saint or sybarite.

One-on-one instructors may lean towards a Six of Rods, hoping that their lessons will catch fire with either element of this card's passion — or better yet, both at once. The Sworn of the Mysteries and the Dying Light tend to shy away from such impetuousness, but the Axe can always find a place for a zealot.

Five of Rods

Your hopes for betterment most often rest upon the possessions or accomplishments of others. Thus you are driven to strive and compete, less for material gain or for personal glory than for the knowledge that you have done your best and bested your rivals. Find a situation in which your urge to win can be expressed without fatal consequence and you will prosper.

The Sworn of the Mysteries are particularly drawn to those who prefer positional and titular rewards, while the Dying Light fear that partiality can poison true judgment. The Sworn of the Axe are indifferent, but those who teach in groups can find a competitor valuable.

Two of Rods

If you could but view the whole world, and know thereby the deeds, good or foul, of all who walk the globe! Seek this unflinching knowledge, for you are often just as content to know a thing is done as do it yourself. Two eyes are not enough for you, so recruit many who will see hear and do on your behalf. Just take care to keep your underlings in line, lest you be tempted to risk yourself duplicating their daring.

Every Oath needs its spymasters, but few teachers want one.

King of Swords

You mete out judgment, stripped bare of any soft garb of mercy. Your nature is to be harsh and stern, doling out second chances only if they are earned, not as a matter of course. While you pride yourself on clear sight because you are unswayed by begging, make sure that you are equally clear when it is necessary to hold punishment back. Your natural tendency towards heavy-handed vengeance can overwhelm your urge for justice.

The Sworn of the Dying Light seek a King of Swords if they need to have a "hanging judge" to use as a threat. The Sworn of the Axe actually steer away from them, because they are as hard on their own troops as they are on the enemy, and rarely inspire through appeals to honor or personal loyalty. The Sworn of the Mysteries are similarly cold to them, but tutors often find their silent and grim intensity a welcome rest from the chatter and scheming of students with other fates.

Queen of Swords

Your place is not wielding the rod of authority, but sitting beside the one who does. Balanced between prudence and pride, you can be a schemer, a usurper or a slave to ruthless ambition. But your better place is as counselor, cautioner and mediator. Accept that your rewards must come from a higher authority, and you will support that authority well. Envy your master, and you can become the most poisonous of traitors.

The Sworn of the Axe, like most tutors, have little patience for those of this fate, but the other two Oaths find them useful — especially if they're looking for someone to insert as a spy or saboteur into another covenant (or clan or Oath).

Knight of Swords

Brave but impetuous, you are the first to fly into a fight — be it for good or ill, be it wise or foolhardy. Your spirit is one of vast fierceness, and if you follow your heart it will lend you great strength — which you will assuredly need. Your greatest challenge will be choosing between your soul and the counsel of calmer, wiser friends. Assuming, of course, that you make such friends.

The Sworn of the Axe see this fate as a shining endorsement. Everyone else seeks it only if they need a bodyguard — which, of course, everyone needs sometime.

Ten of Swords

You possess a wrathful soul that can be at war with your innate temperance. The balance for you is to smile, and put money in your purse, and be a villain in secret to those who wrong you. Like the mill of the gods, grind slow and thereby grind exceedingly fine.

This poison dagger finds a sheath in any Oath, though the Axe are uneasy with its deviousness, and the others

are uneasy with its wrath. But it's an unusual teacher indeed who wants to clasp such a viper.

Nine of Swords

The most damning thing you can do to yourself is to deny pain. Pain is your core, whether you choose to alleviate it or inflict it. Either course nourishes your inner self, though neither so much as finding a way to wed both impulses. Just be sure to never avoid it: it is your fate, and it will find you.

Both the Mysteries and the Axe find the perspective of a Nine of Swords useful, either as a tough healer or as someone willing to confront tough issues. The Dying Light in modern nights tend to regard them as "drama queens," as do many tutors.

Two of Swords

We are all of us blind, but you at least have the guidance of knowing your blindness. Make no sudden moves in the darkness, give no shout that could betray your position, but instead move quietly, gradually, like water seeping through a wall. Wait for your chance. In time, in darkness, it will stumble upon you. If you have kept ready, it cannot escape you.

The Sworn of the Dying Light find the patience and calm of this fate to be a splendid match, both for research and for legal judgment. The other Oaths tend to find them a little too taciturn and gradual. But most tutors are happy with a student who is unlikely to fly off the handle and do anything strange, even if she's equally unlikely to do anything brilliant.

A Faster Alternative

Instead of going through the courses question by question, it may suit you better to just gloss over the process with some die rolls. This dice-based system generates three possible results: if the questioner succeeds, she determines the student's true Fate Card (defined in this case by the character's Virtue and Vice). If she fails, the Storyteller selects a Fate Card "adjacent" to the student's true Fate Card on the chart. If the student succeeds in lying to the questioner, she is labeled with the Fate Card she desires. Here's how it works.

The Dragon asking the questions rolls Manipulation + Academics. A particularly evocative, handsome or intimidating Tarot deck or a ceremonial room decorated and dedicated just for the purpose of hosting this test can each grant a +1 or +2 bonus to the questioner's dice pool.

The student answering the questions chooses either to answer honestly or deceptively. If she answers honestly, her Intelligence is added to the questioner's dice pool. If she answers dishonestly, she rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge to contest the questioner's action.

Each course of questions is a separate action. First, the questioner rolls to determine the student's quality. If the questioner succeeds, the correct quality is determined. If the questioner fails (or the questioner *and* the student both fail) a quality to either side of the student's true Virtue is incorrectly determined. If the student succeeds (because she was contesting the questioner's action), she chooses whatever quality she wishes to represent. Once the student's quality has been determined, the process is repeated to determine her temptation and, therefore, her Fate Card.

Obedience

The Ordo Dracul is a *rigid* hierarchy predicated on the obedience of a subordinate's position to superiors. If a Sworn Adept gives an order to an Initiate, the Initiate must obey. In theory.

In practice, the demanded obedience is less than total.

Countermand

The most common reason that an underling disobeys a command is that someone of even higher rank told her to. An unsworn Scholar tells a Scribe to carry a message to a local Harpy, and a Sworn Scholar tells the Scribe not to. The Scribe should therefore leave the message unsent, because someone Oathbound always outranks someone with no Oath. If the Scribe has been given orders to discuss (or refuse to discuss) the delivery of the message, those orders ought be obeyed. If no such orders have been given, discussing the topic is left to the Scribe's discretion.

Contradictory Command

One Sworn Master orders an Initiate to set out to Milwaukee immediately to fetch a fleeing ghoul. Another Sworn Master tells her to hit the library and prepare a translation of *The Requiem of Fouchard the Elder* into Hebrew as soon as possible. If the Initiate can't delegate one task or another, and can't persuade one of her Masters to give her a break, she has the right to choose who she's going to obey. It should be obvious that such decisions can have a serious impact on the underling's future career. Negotiating these obligations is doubly important if each Master can teach her something that the other Master cannot.

Unreasonable Command

Decades of debate among the Sworn of the Mystery, and an emergent body of legal precedent, has forbidden certain classes of command. While not every chapter of Dragons even agrees that legal precedents matter (in some cities, they just consider every legal case

to be utterly unique) and while some Philosophers (or Dragon Princes) make exceptions, the following classes of orders do not usually need be obeyed.

Learning the classes of unreasonable commands isn't that difficult. Someone who discusses the matter with informed Dragons can learn of one type of forbidden command for every success on a Wits + Politics roll. Similarly, any character with access to a library of Dragon history and philosophy can figure them *all* out with a successful Intelligence + Academics roll. If the library has a section on legal texts, the roll gets a +2 bonus.

Self-Destruction

Regardless of authority differential, no Dragon has the right to order another to cast herself into a blast furnace. This injunction also applies to indirectly self-destructive orders such as "go pick a fight with those Lupines" or "go spit in the Prince's face." Of course, not every case in which an underling invokes the self-destruction clause to defy a command is quite so clear-cut. An order to perform a dangerous task is often acceptable, as long as the dangers are not so obviously overwhelming as to constitute near-certain death. Furthermore, someone Sworn of the Axe who refuses a command that's "too dangerous" is unlikely to progress much further in the Order.

Undue Sacrifice

Ordering a wealthy underling to liquidate all her worldly goods and hand them over is unreasonable. Ordo authorities can issue commands on behalf of Order business: they do not have carte blanche to rob anyone who happens to be have inferior rank. Similarly, Ordo authorities cannot summarily take possession of underlings' havens, herds or other hard-won rewards.

In many (but, importantly *not all*) areas, superiors also cannot compel underlings to disclose information that was given in confidence, nor to coerce instruction in secret matters (usually disciplines or devotions) either for themselves or their underlings. The attitude that "we must respect clan secrets if we expect our members to respect covenant secrets" is more widespread in America than elsewhere, but it's an idea that gets more and more play in modern nights.

Once more, the restriction against undue sacrifice has room for debate. "Give all your money to me" is obviously beyond the pale. "Take control of Darrow Biotechnical," however, is probably okay — even though the Kindred getting the order is going to have to expend a great deal of her resources to complete the order.

Treacherous Commands

All levels of the Order agree that under no circumstances should any Dragon betray her betters or the Ordo Dracul itself — even if given a direct command. Thus, an order to teach the Coils to someone of another covenant is invalid, as is a command to assassinate a higher- (and, in some domains, lower-) ranked fellow Dragon. The uncertain elements with this injunction all come down to matters in which the value of an act or datum to the covenant's "enemies" is ambiguous. Giving the Carthians a list of all the Sworn of the Axe in a city is certainly wrong. But if a superior gives the command to escort one Carthian to one haven of one Axe-bearer, is that acceptable? It may be up to the judgment of the individual — and if he decides to refuse, it may then be decided by jury.

Violation of Personal Sovereignty

In all but a few chapters, no Dragon has the authority to order another to apologize for anything. Of course, that doesn't stop many elders from suggesting it to underlings in the strongest language possible. An elder cannot arbitrarily command a subordinate to make love with her, or drink her blood, or offer her blood to her. (Or rather, if the older vampire does so, it's not a command backed by the Ordo Dracul.) Perhaps most importantly, no member of the Ordo Dracul can command another to accept her, or anyone else, as an instructor. The choice of tutor is legally protected for all in the Order (though, it must be said, many in the upper ranks neglect to inform underlings of this decision — especially underlings they've personally Embraced).

Disobedience

A structure so predicated on obedience needs systems to deal with questions of insubordination. The Ordo Dracul has them in spades.

The Juris Draconis

The most universal means for resolving a dispute in the Ordo Dracul is to convene a *Juris Draconis*. Anyone who refuses an order, and anyone who has an order refused, has the right to demand a hearing, but it is not necessarily something to do lightly.

For a Dragon Jury, the **plaintiff** is defined as the person who calls for the inquiry — it could be someone who believes an order is unreasonable and wishes to have that belief formally confirmed or dismissed. More commonly, a Dragon of higher status whose order has been ignored, failed or performed in a negligent fashion calls for a jury to impose some form of official punishment on the disappointing underling. (Many Dragons impose private and "unofficial" reprimands, often more severe than a Dragon Jury can rightfully declare. But the formal verdict is *final*. It is the judgment of the Order. A personal punishment is just that — individual,

personal, possibly just a caprice.) Other judgments are weighed by Dragon Juries, but they're rare. In all of them, however, the party who stands accused is called the **defendant**.

The court that hears and judges the case is composed of three Order members. One is to be of lesser rank than either plaintiff or defendant, if that's possible. That member is called the Minor Judge. One is to be of greater rank than both parties, if *that's* possible. That functionary is the Superior Judge. The third member of the jury can be of any rank, and is the Judge of Division.

At least one judge must be Sworn of the Dying Light. Otherwise, the *Juris Draconis* has no formal standing. Most commonly, the Judge of Division is Sworn of the Dying Light. Not infrequently, two or more judges have taken that Oath.

The plaintiff submits three candidates for Superior Judge, and the defendant chooses one. The defendant then submits three candidates for Minor Judge, and the plaintiff chooses one. Once the Minor and Superior Judges are selected, their ranks are considered to be exactly equal for the purposes of the trial, and they together select the Judge of Division. For trial matters only, the Judge of Division is superior in rank to both the other judges, the plaintiff and the defendant.

The Minor Judge is expected to initiate the proceedings by describing the case in neutral terms, to keep scrupulous notes of all that is said before the jury and to formally announce the verdict at the end.

The Superior Judge is responsible for all scheduling matters — deciding when the trial begins and ends each night, and deciding the order in which any witnesses are deployed.

The Judge of Division has no duties save to mediate the cloistered discussion between the other judges after the material of the case is presented.

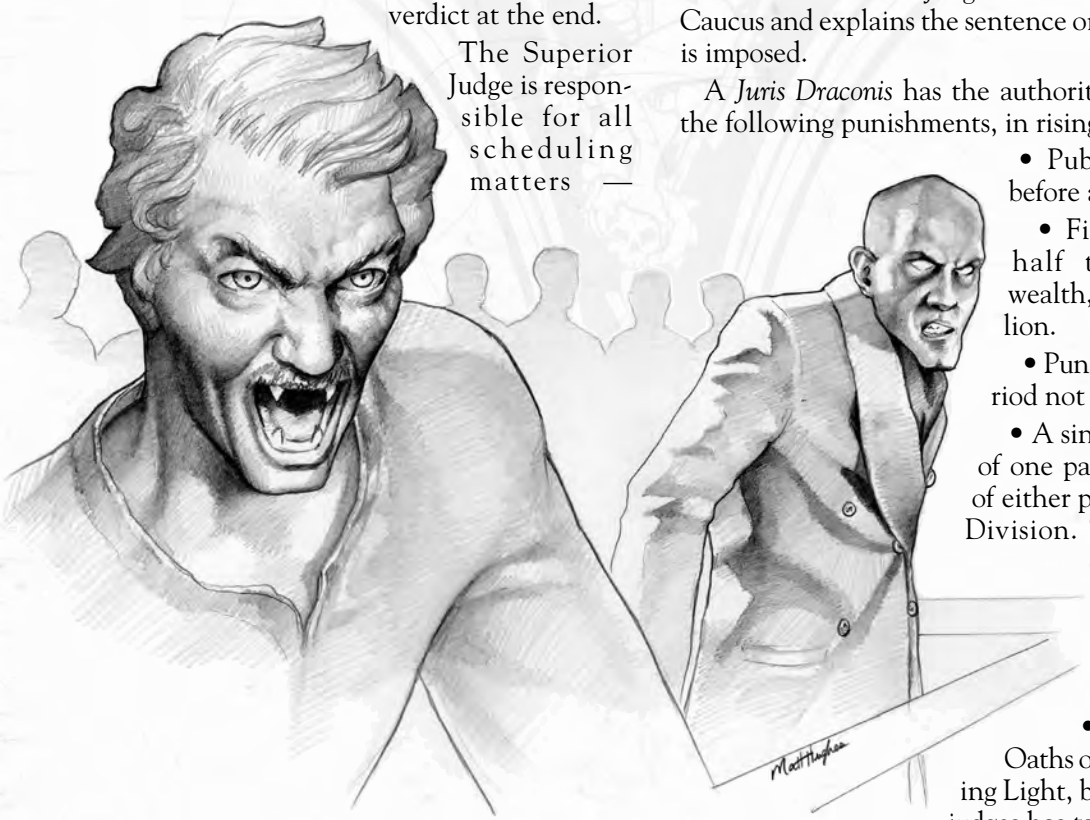
The structure of the trial is as follows. First the Minor Judge describes the case. The defendant speaks next, giving her version of events. Then the plaintiff does the same. After that, the jury cross-examines both parties. This, the first phase of the trial, usually takes one to three days.

If a witness phase is necessary, that comes next, with the Superior Judge deciding the order in which witnesses are called. Each witness presents her testimony in her own words, uninterrupted. Afterwards, each submits to questions by the plaintiff and defendant (in whatever order the Superior Judge decides) and then by the judges themselves. The witness phase can last for months, or it can be omitted entirely, depending on the nature of the case.

Third, the plaintiff and defendant present their closing arguments, with the plaintiff again speaking first. After that, the judges get a final bout of questions before they are cloistered to debate their verdict. While the judges are recused, the principals of the trial are absolutely forbidden to see one another, speak or exchange messages.

The judges are given no more than thirty days to reach a verdict (though typically it doesn't take that long) after which the Minor Judge reads the decree at the next Caucus and explains the sentence or punishment, if any is imposed.

A *Juris Draconis* has the authority to impose any of the following punishments, in rising order of severity:



- Public condemnation before an Order Caucus.
- Fines not to exceed half the party's total wealth, or US$1 million.
- Punitive torpor, for a period not to exceed one year.
- A single-stage Vinculum of one party to the other, or of either party to the Judge of Division. The exception, of course, is for those Sworn of the Mysteries, who are not subject to punitive Vinculums.
- Ejection from the Oaths of the Axe or the Dying Light, but *only* if one of the judges has taken the same oath,

and *only* if the court was convened specifically on the grounds that the defendant was Sworn under false pretenses.

• Removal from the position of Guardian, but *only* if the court was convened on the specific grounds that the Guardian is unfit for the job.

A unique feature of the *Juris Draconis* is that it allows for a limited suspension of the usual ranks of obedience. Until the sentence is announced, the Judge of Division is the highest authority over plaintiff, defendant and the other judges — but *only* for matters germane to the trial. It is traditional for the Judge of Division to begin each recusal with a formal command that the other two judges vote their conscience — thereby voiding any orders they may have received to cast their vote for one side or the other before the proceedings began.

Of course, those who are Sworn have access to other means of resolving disputes.

Mystery Debates

The Sworn of the Mysteries who wish to formally settle matters, either legal questions or personal conflicts, can challenge other Sworn to a Mystery Debate. Furthermore, unsworn Dragons can challenge Oathbound of the Mysteries to such a debate, and the Oathbound has no right of refusal. (However, she does have the right to convene a *Juris Draconis* to decide if the challenge was frivolous.)

Mystery Debates are held before a panel of three Kindred, all of whom must be Sworn of the Mysteries and all of whom should (if possible) be of higher rank than the debaters. The Kindred issuing the challenge is called the **Disputant**. The one being challenged is the **Interlocutor**. As with a Dragon Jury, each participant proposes three candidates for the panel to the other, and those thus impaneled select the third.

The third member of the panel chooses a topic on which the two Kindred are to debate. The Interlocutor decides if she wishes to argue for or against the proposition. The Disputant sets a date for the debate, which must be at least 24 hours, but no more than three days, after the challenge.

All Mystery Debates begin at noon. They are scheduled as follows:

• Disputant states her case: 12:00-12:07 p.m.

• Interlocutor cross-examines: 12:07-12:10 p.m.

• Interlocutor states her case and rebuts the Disputant: 12:10-12:20 p.m.

• Disputant cross-examines: 12:20-12:23 p.m.

• Disputant presents her rebuttal: 12:23-12:33 p.m.

• Interlocutor has final rebuttal: 12:33-12:40 p.m.

There are no exceptions. Kindred who can't wake up and get there at the appointed time forfeit their speeches. Those who cannot do their best during their own allotted time are stuck trying to make their case with halfhearted words.

The panel has 20 minutes to decide who made the most persuasive case and then declares the winner in unison, both at the debate and the following night before an assembly of local Dragons.

Historical topics of debate include the following:

• The current Prince should be overthrown.

• The Carthian Movement is preferable to the Invictus.

• The Circle of the Crone is more dangerous than the Lancea Sanctum.

• Servitude is the only rational course for Kindred who lack the Order's belief in transcendence of the Curse.

Tests of the Dying Light

The researchers of the Dying Light generally spend less time and attention on challenges of personal honor for the simple reason that, while the duels of the Axe are more violent, the testing structure of the Dying Light Oathbound is statistically more likely to destroy one or both of the disputing Kindred. Having studied the odds, most of the Sworn of the Dying Light are willing to let things slide and get on with their research. It has to mean something that they're the only group of Oathbound who are permitted to ignore challenges from the unsworn.

However, if one of the Sworn of the Dying Light does accept a challenge of this sort (either from another Oathbound or from someone unsworn — the Sworn of the Dying Light are not permitted to initiate challenges against the oathless) the matter immediately goes to the highest-ranked Sworn of the Dying Light available in the region, who is declared **proctor**. (If that person is one of the disputants, the next-highest ranked Sworn becomes proctor. If the disputants are the two highest-ranked Sworn, the duty keeps moving downward.)

The proctor gets one full night after the issue has been presented to decide upon a test. At dusk after the second full night after the challenge is issued, the proctor announces the test, either to the two disputants or in front of a larger assembly. The nature of the test is up to the sole discretion of the proctor, and any material benefits from the test accrue to her.

The proctor has the right to demand from the disputants the delivery of one unique item, the presentation of some obscure fact or the solution to some riddle or question. The first Kindred to deliver the object or information in question earns a legal judgment in her favor. If the matter is personal, the loser is expected to publicly apologize, admit that the winner is the better

Dragon and bear no further grudge. In some domains, winners of lower rank than the loser are exempt from orders from the loser for terms ranging from a year and a day to perpetuity.

The proctor ideally bases the test on a fair judgment of the abilities of the disputants and a balanced view of the severity of the argument. For something petty, a proctor might simply declare that whoever first correctly completes a Sunday *New York Times* crossword puzzle is the winner. For a severe matter — or if the proctor is tired of the disputants and wants to get rid of them — she might issue an outrageous command, such as "Bring me the Spear of Destiny."

Disputants can drop out of a test at any time, thereby forfeiting victory —which still may be preferable to the alternative if the test is something akin to "bring me a Lupine in silver chains." The issue is considered to be in abeyance as long as the test is ongoing, which means that a pair who are ordered to perform a foolish or all-but-impossible task may implicitly agree to forget the test and leave the issue undecided, rather than embark on a lengthy and dangerous quest. Some Dragons have actually found it advantageous to let their opponents *win*, if the quest is difficult enough — what may be accomplished in the months or years that a rival is off on her errand may outweigh the penalty of losing the test.

The Code Duello of the Sworn of the Axe

For the Oathbound of the Axe, trial by combat is an acceptable way to adjudicate differences, be they legal or simply questions of personal honor.

One who is Sworn of the Axe may challenge another Oathbound (of whatever Oath) to a duel. By doing so, the Sworn becomes known as the **challenger**, reasonably enough. The person from whom satisfaction is demanded is called the **minuend**, for reasons that are obscure, largely forgotten and the subject of much tedious debate. (A *minuend* is defined as "the number from which another number is subtracted.")

The minuend is given the choice of proceeding with the trial by combat, or, if she is Sworn to a different Oath, she may provide satisfaction through a debate (if she's Sworn of the Mysteries) or an intellectual test (if she's Sworn of the Dying Light).

It is also possible for someone who is unsworn to challenge one who is Sworn of the Axe to trial by combat. In that instance, the Sworn is the minuend and has no right to refuse and no right to order the unsworn challenger to withdraw.

Once both parties have agreed to trial by combat, they choose their **seconds**. These close friends of the combatants are expected to work together to ensure a fair contest and to bear witness of events as they occur.

The minuend is entitled to choose the type of weapon to be employed in the duel, which may be anything from sabers to bare hands, from pistols to crowbars (in the case of one celebrated duel in Houston in 1977). Seconds and principals customarily provide a selection of weapons of the appropriate type, at a time and location chosen by the challenger. The challenger must permit at least 24 hours to elapse between challenge and battle.

On duel day, there are traditionally four sets of weapons: one from each second, one from the minuend, one from the challenger. The minuend chooses which set of weapons is to be used, and the challenger picks which of those two weapons he will use. The minuend gets the remaining weapon.

Two witnesses (ideally neutral to the issue) and a **mediator** must be present at the duel, according to tradition. Often, mortals are brought as well — bound or drugged — to feed the duelists.

A duel is divided into **passes**. Starting at the agreed-upon distance (historically 20 paces for pistols, five for close-quarters weapons), the principals clash when the mediator cries, "Begin!" They fight until one principal or the other has suffered a lethal wound. As soon as the mediator sights a suitable wound, he calls "Halt," the pass ends immediately and the duelists part. A fighter who strikes between passes forfeits the duel, no matter the circumstance.

After each pass, both fighters can refresh and restore themselves if they have the means. Then the next pass begins. This process is repeated until one contestant has been suitably wounded three times — that contestant is the loser. Duelists may agree beforehand that the loser will endure a first-stage Vinculum to the winner, but deeper bonds than that are not sanctioned for duels by Order law. And, of course, no one Sworn of the Mysteries would agree to anything that might result in a Vinculum.

In some cases, the *Code Duello* is invoked upon someone who is believed to have been Sworn to the Axe falsely. If such a minuend is defeated in combat *without leaving a single mark on her accuser*, she can be stripped of her Oath. Otherwise, even if she loses, she has proven herself and remains Sworn.

Once a winner is declared, the feud is expected to end. Demonstrating continued animosity is considered disrespectful of the Order; in some domains, it's considered insubordination. There is often substantial social pressure for duelists to put away their rivalries when a duel is completed, especially among the Sworn of the Axe — the Dragons have more important things to do than squabble amongst themselves. A feud cannot be tolerated for long among the deathless Dragons; eternity is

too long to let rivalries ferment. Thus, duels are intended to signify the end of an ordeal, and the participants are expected to obey the symbolism of the affair.

The Lowly: Status 0 to •

Many Kindred enter the Ordo Dracul. There's a great deal of variety among initiates, from neonates inducted out of custom into their sire's covenant, to elders who abandon independence (or betray other beliefs) to pursue the Order's esoteric enlightenment. Newcomers arrive with vastly different levels of personal ability and worldly experience, as well, but they all start at the bottom of the Order and work their way up, from the sternest elder to the most callow neonate.

What This Status Means

The official title of a Dragon with no Coils is "Slave" and for many, that pretty much covers it. There are exceptions, however. A vampire with no dots in Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) and no Coils, who has joined the Ordo Dracul, is a Slave. A Kindred who knows one or more tiers of Coils but has no Covenant Status within the Order is also a Slave, and a Slave she remains until she demonstrates her Coils and reveals which Dragon is teaching the Coils to vampires outside the covenant.

Within the strict letter of Order law, anyone who knows even one Coil, or anyone who is Sworn, can give orders to a Slave. In practice, there's slack. A Supplicant who has been undead for only a couple of years may hesitate to boss around a Nosferatu Slave who's spent half a century honing her mystic powers and surviving the night. This is particularly true for Kindred old enough to know that vampires can't be bullied like mortals can; the Beast doesn't discriminate between a savage challenge and a fraternal hazing.

On the other hand, when that same Supplicant politely requests that a Nosferatu Slave harass one of her rivals in the chapter house, the Nosferatu had better have a good excuse if she refuses. A smart Supplicant not only states her request clearly and politely, but also includes in her instructions a clause that the Slave report to her any contradicting orders that would invalidate her command. This, in turn, is why smart Scholars often add boilerplate instructions to *their* written and verbal orders — instructions such as "tell no one of lower rank than me of this, and tell no one of higher rank unless they order you to do so."

The goal of every Slave is to find a tutor. If that is not a Slave's goal, one night it will be. What Kindred can tolerate an eternity of lowly servitude in a society that celebrates and encourages individual betterment and power as much as the Ordo Dracul does?

One dot in Covenant Status typically describes a Dragon who has found a tutor or made a positive impression on the local chapter of the Order as a collective. A character with Covenant Status • has a title appropriate to the level of Coils she has demonstrated. Note that this does not mean the level of Coils she *knows*, but the level of Coils she's *known to know* — a finicky but important distinction.

It's distressingly common for a Dragon to master a Coil but be unable to convince superiors of her competence. Quite often, this is because said superiors have some vested interest in keeping their underling at a low level. As soon as it's useful for the tutor, or for the whole covenant, to have student get promoted, the "scheduling conflicts" or "subjective uncertainty of the test," or whatever excuse was being leveled, rapidly evaporates.

In many — perhaps most — cases, however, superior Dragons feel no need to make excuses. A subordinate is promoted when her mentor and her would-be peers agree she is ready to be promoted, and not before. Even if a Dragon has met all of the official criteria for promotion, she may have to wait. The Ordo Dracul is a fraternal, scholastic organization, and promotion follows respect.

It's not unheard of for vampires to fake (mystically or otherwise) knowledge of Coils they do not actually possess and, thereby, gain Covenant Status higher than they have earned. Though it is possible to get away with such subterfuge, it is a strategy fraught with peril. A vampire who lies to the Ordo Dracul had better be a spy, for when she's found out she will treated like one.

Duties and Expectations

Dragons of low Status are expected to devote their Requiems to the betterment of their superiors, full stop. They are permitted to pursue their own designs and agendas, but only to the extent that they do not conflict with the goals (or whims) of their superiors. (It may be helpful to think of a young child and her parent. The parent doesn't care which particular toy the child plays with, as long as she plays quietly. But when bath time rolls around, any toy is going to be set aside, no matter how much the young one cries.)

Low-status Dragons who want a predictable Requiem should try to attach themselves to a highly ranked master, because then they'll be carrying out orders that have little chance of contradiction by someone even higher. But a powerful master is not an unalloyed good, because Dragons tend to gain authority by being strict, demanding and intolerant of failure. To become the tool of a master, you must be a masterwork tool.

On the other hand, if Reya Valorian is known to serve Blake Dumas, Philosopher of the Sanguine Terror, most within the Order aren't going to try and countermand her. Those of a level lower than Philosopher know there's no point if she's acting on Blake's orders, and

those who could pull rank on her probably have their own pawns to employ and don't care to show her their business (or piss her off for no good reason). Thus, even when she's doing her *own* thing, Reya is unlikely to get capriciously bossed around, because people *assume* she's doing Blake's bidding.

Serving a lower-status master means you may get yanked off this mission or that by someone who pulls rank. On the other hand, lower-status masters are often more respectful with their vassals. At the very least, a Supplicant who has two Slaves working for her is going to be much less comfortable sending them into terrible danger than an Illuminus who has more underlings than she can readily count.

That said, there *are* low-status bosses who are terribly cruel to those lower still. This is most common in those who have been promoted recently or quickly, because they're still smarting from their time as a humiliated dogsbody and are eager to salve the hurt by passing it on.

Pre-Mentor Slaves

The lowest-ranked Slaves are neonates who have petitioned to join the Order but have not yet found a tutor. If they have no personal rep, influence or other means to flyswat petty requests, they quickly fall into the role of "covenant errand boy." Any Order grouping of significant size has at least several (often more) of these "punks" or "wannabees" attached, doing the chump chores that no one else wants to do. Being in this position requires a careful balancing act: clearly available neonates get inundated with requests, each more trivial (or repulsive) than the last. On the other hand, Slaves who make themselves scarce are hardly going to attract a mentor.

Mentored Slaves

A mentored Slave is one who has found a tutor willing to give her the knowledge she needs to shed her Slave status — though "give" is perhaps a misnomer, as most tutors exact as high a price as they can get for their instruction. On the other hand, no tutor can *force* a Slave to study with her, which means that canny Slaves can incite bidding wars between rival mentor candidates. (A desirable Slave has a better negotiating position, but even a rank neonate may incite a bidding war between Supplicants who are only a little better than their potential student.)

It's not uncommon for the tutors of Slaves to keep their students cloistered, or at least try to limit their exposure to other members of the Order. While the students may chafe (especially if they have friends or coterie-mates outside the covenant), this restriction is there to protect their studies. The less they're exposed to other Dragons, the fewer bullshit errands they have to run.

Mentored Supplicants

In general, Supplicants have more breathing space than Slaves because they've pretty much "arrived." They may get harassed or bossed around by their betters, but usually it's either because of a personal beef, or because the superior genuinely wants the task performed. The casual abuse and petty demands that get thrown down on Slaves because they're Slaves and that's what you do — it goes away. The period of hazing ends with the promotion to Supplicant status.

A Supplicant with a mentor is regarded as being on the fast track — it's a sign that she wants to progress within the Order and gain power and authority over her fellow Dragons. The bond between tutor and student has hopefully matured by this point, so that they can work together efficiently. If there isn't full trust, at least both parties feel they can predict the other's behavior.

It's ambitious, but not uncommon, for Supplicants with mentors themselves to become tutors to Slaves. This is perfectly kosher, though the Slaves who can't get a better tutor tend to be the scrapings from the bottom of the barrel — getting them out of trouble is sometimes a bigger issue than getting use out of them.

Liberated Supplicants

Some Supplicants stop studying after they learn their first Coil. Maybe they find the Coils hard to learn and decide their efforts are better rewarded by other studies. Maybe they think they have a better chance of getting Sworn if they act for the benefit of the covenant, instead of holing up to study for their personal gain. Hell, maybe one Coil is all they want.

Since they're no longer Slaves, they are exempt from Order hazing, but without tutors to back them, they may quickly find themselves beset by demands from superiors who see an expendable and unprotected pawn. Relatively weak free-agent Supplicants (or, more to the point, those who *seem* weak) can get solitude if they want it: anyone who could order them around presumably can find a Slave who's almost as good, easier to locate and more willing.

Promotion

In an organization as rank-conscious as the Ordo Dracul, one critical question must be: how does one gain rank? There are procedures in place for getting Sworn, as laid down in *Rites of the Dragon*. But other than the prime division of Oathbound and unsworn, it all comes down to rank, which in turn comes down to recognized knowledge of the Coils.

The key question, then, is, who has the authority to recognize knowledge of the Coils?

For the first three ranks, the answer is "anyone two or more ranks higher than the student." That is, a Scholar can promote a Slave, and an Adept can promote anyone from Scholar on down. There's a formal investiture ceremony at the next Caucus, and the new Dragon's status spreads from there, largely by word-of-mouth.

At that low level, there's no way to promote someone else to one's own rank, and that holds for ranks 4–6 — Initiate through Master — as well. There, a Dragon must be promoted by a vampire at least two ranks higher, but with an additional restriction: a student cannot be promoted by her own tutor.

The highest ranks, Philosopher through Architect, do permit promotions to equal rank, simply because there is often no other way for such promotions to occur. A lone Architect can promote a Philosopher to an Illuminus, but it takes two Illumini to promote that same Philosopher, and it takes two Architects to permit an Illuminus to join their number. Often times, promotion to the highest level requires travel, either of the test-taker or its giver. Considering the Kindred's reluctance to leave home, big favors often get exchanged just to make an examination possible.

Those who joined the Ordo Dracul a little later in their Requiem are often in higher demand, simply because they're more likely to be effective. Depending on their reputation, their superiors may find it worthwhile to dig them out of their holes and send them scurrying on a job. Kindred who've spent decades mastering the Coils instead of learning to fight often seem to take disproportionate pleasure from sending combative underlings to scrub down a tough enemy. Handling this poorly may result in said underling turning on her uppity master and seeing if she's got a Coil that protects her from being torn to pieces by Feral Claws and Potence. But again, the smart superior takes the sting out of orders by behaving respectfully — or by offering some sort of reward as a token of esteem to her servant.

Benefits

There may not seem to be many benefits to being a Slave, but there are some. For one thing, although the Order tends to treat its lowliest members poorly, it also tends to close ranks when *others* abuse Slaves. As the Chicago Dragon Scratch explains it, "It's like, that Slave is *my* freshman, rushing *my* frat. I get to fuck with her any time I want, but no one else does. You try and fuck with my frosh, you and I have a problem. Get me?" This unofficial rule is sometimes seen in a new light by local Dragons when they feel a fellow Dragon is mistreating a Slave, however. All Slaves will, presumably, become peers some night; they should be taught to be Dragons worthy of camaraderie and respect. Thus, Slaves are considered worthy of protection — even from other Dragons — at the same time that they are hardly considered worthy of respect.

Interestingly, this protection erodes as Kindred climb the ladder. No one expects a Master to need the Order to swoop in and save her: presumably, she can just instruct less experienced Dragons to take care of her business. Supplicants may actually be in the lowest spot of Order protection. They've learned enough that they're no longer considered fragile "property" that must be defended, but they aren't regarded highly enough that other Dragons necessarily drop everything to come to their aid. Furthermore, unlike the errand-boy Slaves, higher-ranking Dragons sometimes just aren't really *aware* of Supplicants.

Slaves are permitted to attend monthly Ordo Dracul meetings called "Caucuses," the import of which varies from region to region. In some cities, a Dragon Caucus is little more than a social hour. In others, it's a vital hotbed of political debate. Whichever, they're closed to outsiders.

Another, less tangible benefit to Slave status is that the Order is pretty easy to understand, once you grasp the hierarchy. From the outside, it's complicated, but from the inside one can usually figure out who the boss is pretty quickly, just by listening to titles being recited. This means that a Slave is much less likely to accidentally antagonize someone with lots of covenant clout.

Finally, there's access. There may be other covenants with as much collective mystic learning, but there are none with more. It goes beyond the Coils: the Order has, in its span, run across a lot of weird things, and, because they have a curriculum for studying it (unlike the Acolytes of many domains) and they don't instantly interpret everything through a religious lens (like the Lancea Sanctum), they have an orderly and objective grasp of what much of it really means. Best of all, learning this stuff is *expected*, and practically demanded. Mentors gain prestige and influence through prominent students, so while they may make a show of forbidding certain studies, it's sometimes just an act to keep the student grateful.

Goals

There are two goals expected of low-status Dragons: learn the Coils by getting a tutor, and swear an Oath. Learning Coils is the slow way to advance. Getting Sworn is the fast track, but is substantially more hazardous.

Finding a tutor is a chore with many, many elements. Dragons who are skilled or have clout or anything else valuable to offer a potential instructor have an easy time finding one. Those who are poor and not trusted and weak are unlikely to get a teacher, and when they do it's probably someone who's only a little better off. Teaching the Coils is an investment of time and energy, and every tutor expects a good return on that sweat equity. Otherwise, what's the point?

The Paths of Fate often (but not always) influence potential tutors. Someone who is otherwise unattractive but who has a good fate — it may earn her a second chance, though probably not automatic acceptance unless the tutor is a real zealot. Similarly, a desirable student with an unattractive destiny may not get rejected outright, but if accepted is likely to be watched closely.

In the same vein, the Paths can (but don't necessarily) contribute to receiving Oaths. If they are a factor, they're less of a factor than the candidate's actual completion of the prerequisites, which are as follows:

To take the Oath of the Axe, one must possess "utmost martial prowess" and have risked destruction to protect the Order, its members or its secrets. There's clearly some vagueness in the wording there — "utmost martial prowess" is really in the eye of the beholder, and some domains leave it to the judgment of Axe-bearers while others have concrete tests (such as dropping the candidate in a pit with three or more hatchet-wielding mortal blood addicts). Furthermore, who is to really say that this Kindred has risked destruction while that Kindred has not? Clearly anyone who took a beating into torpor qualifies on the risk front, but can one get in without getting hurt? It should be possible, but unless reliable witnesses were present, who's to say? Also, somebody who saves *one* Dragon at personal risk — is she qualified to join? Some domains say yes, some no, some judge case by case.

Getting Sworn of the Dying Light and becoming a combination judge/researcher is attractive to many neonates. Typically the Dying Light has contained the best tutors. It's in the interests of each Oath to have as many high-ranked members as possible — the Dying Light's tutors give it an edge on promotions. On the other hand, gaining admission is tough. To get into the Axe, you just need to nearly die and be a badass. To get into the Dying Light, you must get some magical thing for the Order that it lacks — and decades of researchers, spies and library thieves have made that an increasingly tough nut to crack. Conquering a new Wyrm's Nest is often seen as the *easiest* route into the Dying Light, which should tell you how complete the Order's overall library is. (Grumbling neonates imply that some in the Dying Light simply suck up the fruits of new research, tell the outsider, "Yep, already knew that," and then present it as their own work to their comrades.)

Finally, there are the Sworn of the Mysteries, who make the laws for the whole covenant. Getting in requires elder sponsors, which doesn't sound so very tough, except that *any member* — even those bitch-ass Slaves who get sent to the store and have to clean out the boss' Lexus every week — can black-ball a candidate. The *Rites of the Dragon* doesn't specify whether these vetoes are anonymous or public. Public vetoes from low-status members are rare, because the candidate deferred may seek retaliation afterwards. If private vetoes are permitted, however, they drastically change the social dynamic, as any vampire who might want to get into the Mysteries one day is trying to be nice to everyone.

Opportunities

The opportunities for low-status Dragons are understandably slight, but they exist. Beyond learning Coils, getting Sworn and having some access to the Order's archives, there are opportunities of a more mundane nature.

Some within the Order devote their time to study, almost to the exclusion of everything else. Such devoted students tend to climb the ladder rapidly by mastering more Coils. When unsworn, they're the leaders of the unsworn. Once they get an Oath — look out. But lacking the time and attention for mundane details, they do what every smart executive does: they delegate. A canny and competent majordomo (particularly one whose Fate is something like Fortitude or Temperance or The Star) can be entrusted to manage her boss' estate, her herds, even her portfolio. Skimming from someone who's distracted by occult study has its risks, but the rewards are real. Such a position is ideal for someone who has learned all the Coils she wants but needs a high-status master to deflect requests from other Dragons. As a manager, she has a lot of autonomy to deal with piddly details so that the scholar isn't bothered, which means she has autonomy to pursue her own goals as well. Such an underling dreams of the day she gets a vague order like "Just take care of it."

Academics are always particularly prized within the Order, and the position of "research assistant" can provide the same freedom as "manager" — except that a researcher is skimming knowledge, rather than money or blood or influence. There are dangers to unguided mystical research, of course, but skipping ahead in one's studies can provide a path to the Oath of the Dying Light. For geniuses.

The Majority: Status •• to •••

Most members of the Ordo Dracul fall in the middle territory. They're high enough that they're listened to with respect, they have clout appropriate to their responsibilities, and they have generally left the "infant" stage in which they need guidance. They're in an undead adolescence in which they determine their own fates. By and large, this majority has authority for most day-to-day operations for the Order. To really set policy or control the Dragons within a city, however, one needs more.

What This Status Means

Covenant Status •• indicates someone who is unsworn, and who holds the ranks of Scribe through Master (that is, someone who knows between two and six dots of Coils). That's a pretty wide stretch: a Status •• Scribe is someone who is well known, respected, liked, maybe even trusted. A Status •• Master is someone who's burned a lot of bridges and pissed on a lot of birthday cakes. Furthermore, as with all levels within the Order, the tiers of Coils you know matter less than the tiers you've demonstrated to someone's satisfaction. A Status 2 Initiate may be someone who knows two Coils and put on a good show faking two more.

Covenant Status ••• is appropriate for someone who is Sworn and who knows no Coils. (This happens more often than one might initially think, especially during wartime when the ability to master the inner Beast matters less than the ability to tear somebody a new one protecting the bosses.)

Covenant Status ••• is also appropriate for an unsworn Dragon who is an Adept, Master or Philosopher — that is, knows five to seven dots of the Coils of the Dragon. It's hard to attain the rank of Philosopher without being Sworn, however. Learning that many tiers of Coils is difficult for someone who's deeply unpopular, but, by Master stage, an ambitious Dragon may be able to get plenty of younger Dragons to support her political ambitions in exchange for instruction. This means that many unsworn Dragons of Covenant Status ••• remain that way because they're brilliant but untrustworthy — usually due to demonstrable failures or forbidden actions, not just because the vampires have a Devil or Five of Cups card associated with them — or because they do not *want* an Oath and the responsibilities thereof.

Lying, Cheating and Stealing

The Coils are a series of internal practices that ease the constraints of the Kindred curse. Most of them are highly subjective: a student can certainly feel it when she gains control of her Beast or can take greater advantage of blood. Is she really using a Coil? Or has she got some other trick up her sleeve that lets her cheat undeath a different way? Is it, in fact, possible to *cheat* on the test of how well one cheats Damnation?

In a word, yes. The Order contains many who have passed tests despite imperfect mastery of a Coil, or even downright ignorance. Many instructors try to weed out the cheaters with oral examinations that test knowledge of underlying philosophy and theory, but rote memorization (or mind reading or writing the answers on your sleeve) can get around quizzes. In the end, the watching judge usually calls it on gut instinct. The exceptions are few — and scary. Rumors persist that the Dragons have mystic abilities that allow them to scrutinize other vampires, discern their mystic abilities and, with the covenant's catalogs of lore to reference, even understand a Kindred's supernatural powers better than she understands them herself.

Players who wish to purchase higher Covenant Status without the concomitant Coils can spend the experience

points to do so once they've played through some fraudulent demonstrations. Some suggestions follow.

Blood

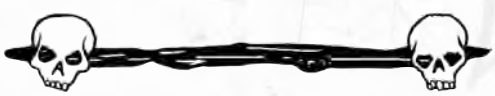
The second Coil of Blood is rarely tested because blood potency is hard to judge. Sure, there are elders who join the covenant and clearly can't use animal blood until they've studied, but for someone who's been dead less than a hundred years and doesn't have diablerie streaks, the instructors are just going to have to take it on faith. As for the first and third Coils, the easiest cheat is the Theban Sorcery ritual Vitae Reliquary. Learning Theban Sorcery is probably more work than just getting the Coils formally, but any vampire can drink from a reliquary, even those who don't know how to make one. Hiding it is a problem, but hardly an insurmountable one with something like the powers of Obfuscate to draw on. The bigger issue is dealing with the Lancea Sanctum, either as an apostate who's jumped ship for the Ordo Dracul, or as a Dragon who trusted one of the Sanctified enough to get help cheating on a critical test.

Banes

This Coil is a little trickier to fake. The first tier, sure — how can anyone tell if courage comes from an occult trick or from raw gumption? Same for the second tier, though a moral vampire with enough Humanity to last the full day is a rare creature. The third tier is probably a write-off — even Kindred with plenty of Resilience would show the effects of lethal damage. The Iron Façade Devotion could do it, but that's a secret more rare and more protected than the third Coil in some domains — even then knowledge of that Devotion is hardly common.

Beast

This Coil primarily bolsters inner strength to help the Kindred resist her darker instincts. Some Kindred simply have sufficient inner strength to demonstrate this mastery even without the Coils. To some extent, the Dragon who attempts to fake a mastery of this power is serving her own Beast despite herself. In theory, a vampire with the inner strength necessary to maintain some control of his Beast also has the capacity to become a genuine master of the Coil. Choosing to fake that self-control — or choosing to struggle with it every night in place of learning the Coil — begs a question about the Kindred's true attitudes. Does she not want control over her Beast?



Hungarian Marriage

It has not escaped the notice of canny Dragons that two Kindred with the third Coil of Blood can feed off one another *indefinitely*. It seems to be a sort of closed cycle, in which neither need ever feed from a mortal again.

This is true. Two practitioners of Perspicacious Blood can, in fact, create this kind of "feeding loop" — what the Hungarian cult that first demonstrated the dangers of such a cycle dubbed "the bottomless crimson fountain."

The two problems with mutual cannibalism are Vinculums and Vitae addiction.

A Hungarian sect splintered off the Ordo Dracul in the 1890s and practiced this sort of enlightened feeding, only to collapse under the weight of those drawbacks. The initial framework was that each member of the cult had a "designated domitor" with whom that member would develop a full Vinculum. In this fashion, the cultist could feed from others without danger of additional, partial bonds. To keep one "top Kindred" from enslaving all others, each cultist was supposed to bind herself to only one fellow cultist and have only one fellow cultist fully bound to her. With this daisy chain of adoration, the cult members imagined their relationships would remain stable, feeding from one another whenever needed and being unstoppably powerful.

The problem with this model was that as soon as one member snapped and drained another completely (and the more members there were, the sooner a fatally weak link emerged), another member became crazed with a thirst for revenge — while possibly psychotic with addiction — upon the murderer of her domitor. At the same time, that grieving monster became free of her mandatory Vinculum and could begin collecting bonds of blood from others in order to take control of her peers — until she inevitably formed another full Vinculum, while insane with addiction. And all that discounts the dangers of diablerie, which just greased the slope from enlightened feeding society down to mad feeding frenzy for the ill-fated Hungarian cult.

The second iteration of the cult was made up of pairs that fed exclusively on each other. That was more stable: instead of a critical mass in which one weak link sent the entire chain going ape on each other, the worst-case scenario was only a Mexican standoff between the two mutually adoring (but still addicted and frenzy-prone) members. These so-called "Hungarian Marriages" often sated their addiction on other vampires, with the predictable result that they'd get hunted down like rabid dogs.

It is now Order law in many domains that no two Kindred possessing the third Coil of Blood should feed upon each other "habitually or repeatedly." If such a pairing is found, and both are judged to have voluntarily participated in the Hungarian Marriage, the local penalty they may face ranges from the minor to the severe. For example, the only such pairing every uncovered in Miami was penalized with a sentence of "separation from the partner for a period of no less than 20 years." By contrast, in Warsaw, the stated penalty is supposedly "that the pair be sealed up, awake, together, in a box of steel or stone and cast away from the domain, into the sea or into the ground."

Duties and Expectations

If the high-status Dragons are the Ordo Dracul's head, and the Slaves and Supplicants are its feet of clay, the hefty mid-rank is its strong and healthy torso, the vital organs and bulk that keep it going. Solicited for input on decisions they aren't empowered to make, the mid-range are expected to take the vague orders of their masters and refine them into foolproof concrete measures fit for underlings and others in the middle tiers.

For example, suppose a chapter is being muscled out of prime territory by local Carthians. The Covenant Status •••• and ••••• leadership (probably from the Axe if the action's been violent, maybe from the Mysteries if it's all been threats and politics) decide the broad strategies for pushing back. A mid-Status Dragon (Sworn or not) may be pointed at a particular Carthian authority or a specific coterie with orders to "take care of her" (or them). Whether that means kidnapping her mortal family or blackmailing the coterie or bankrupting them, killing their herd so that they have to hunt or go hungry — or plainly destroying them — that's up to the person getting the order. There's a lot more slack and vagueness for Status ••• and •••• Dragons: they've shown that they can handle themselves, so they're given more freedom.

If the commands issued lack the legalistic detail that chucklehead Slaves and Supplicants expect, that's because there's an unspoken expectation that an Adept or Scribe (or higher) isn't going to mess around. By Covenant Status •••, Kindred are expected to understand the spirit of their orders. Following the letter and not the meaning can be a fine way to screw with a superior, and it may even hold up in a Dragon Court, but unless it really cuts that Illuminus or Philosopher down to size, the repercussions of such smart-ass behavior can be severe. The defied superior may issue some form of challenge to one of the Sworn, or he may start issuing ironclad orders calculated to make the uppity underling's Requiem an unliving hell.

Wyrm's Nests

This is the lowest-level Status at which a Dragon may take custody of a Wyrm's Nest, though this is uncommon. Typically those at this level who monitor, inhabit or preside over such a site are those who discovered, uncovered or conquered it themselves. The most minor sites are entrusted to the mid-range Dragons. More powerful sites are held by those of greater authority and learning, while the most potent (and dangerous) Wyrm's Nests are overseen by large groups of Dragons, often consisting of one coterie that does nothing but control and

investigate the site while three or four others provide protection, research and backup as needed.

The most common Wyrm's Nests are thought to be haunted houses (or haunted stretches of road, haunted playgrounds or other areas blighted by the attentions of the restless dead). The more arrogant Dragons find little of interest with "mere" ghosts, but it should be noted that the Sworn Architects and Philosophers tend to be humbler in their approach. As described in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, ghosts are intangible personalities who can't, or won't, move on from the mortal world. While rituals exist to wring the spiritual essence out of a ghost, or to trap it inside an object, the Ordo Dracul generally steers clear of such brute tactics. In their opinion, destroying a ghost for a one-time gain is like chopping down a tree to get the fruit.

The studies of the Order are focused inward, on transformation — rituals to bind or compel ghosts are as likely to be found among the Sanctified and the Acolytes. Yet the Ordo Dracul is the covenant with the most traffic with the restless dead, at least in many domains, which just might prove which tactics ultimately work best. Instead of demands or attacks, many Dragons approach ghosts with reason and politics. Ghosts have needs they can't meet themselves, and have powers that Kindred lack. Canny members of the Order start from there and press forward, forming equitable deals or mystic contracts with the dead.

The first stage of exploiting a haunted Wyrm's Nest is to determine whose ghost is there, how sentient it is and what it wants. If it's obsessed with the site and wants to keep its home intact, then the Order Kindred are in clover: they have to make contact, buy the place, maybe get it on the registry of historic sites and get the ghost to agree to frighten away any mortals who poke around while the Kindred are sleeping in the restored basement. The ghost gets immortal guardians for its home, and the Kindred get an immortal guardian for their haven. Everybody wins.

Other situations are more complex, and other Dragon Kindred are more aggressive in their dealings. Some might (for example) find a ghost who is concerned with her children, and then blackmail her into doing their daytime dirty work by alternately benefiting and threatening the kids. Hey, no one wants to watch her daughter die of old age, right? Becoming a ghoul can cure that, and then the vampire has a devoted servant who is also an anchor for a protective spirit. This works just fine until the ghost figures out how addictive vampire blood is. Then the situation can turn a bit more dramatic.

Haunted objects are beyond the strict purview of the Ordo Dracul, but the Order eagerly seeks them all the same. Sometimes a ghost has an object and a location as separate anchors. Finding a ghost's anchor-item can build trust between the dead soul and the undead Dragons. The ghost, in turn, might lead the Kindred to a Wyrm's Nest. Plus, a ghost with a portable object as an anchor can have her range of existence altered by moving the anchor; Dragons might agree to help a ghost reach a distant locale, or they might bring a ghost's anchor back to the local chapter house so that the ghost can be interrogated or consulted by mediums.

All this assumes that the Kindred *can*, in fact, communicate with the ghost enough to wheedle, threaten, posture, expound and use all the other tools of persuasion by mouth. One vampiric tool for ghost communication is Auspex. Kindred in a state of Twilight can converse with ghosts in Twilight, and vampires with Telepathy may be able to receive messages from the dead more easily. But even the lower-level powers of Auspex help: viewing the past of an object (especially an anchor) can provide clues to a spirit's motivations and history, while Aura Sight makes a ghost's nimbus perceptible even when they ghost itself is unseen, and Heightened Senses can help pick out ghostly whispers from TV static or catch a fleeting, altered image in the frame of an 8 mm movie. All this is possible without even counting the unsought visions with which the Sighted are blessed or cursed.

Without a Mekhet or other Auspex user, the task of negotiating with the dead comes down to hard work and cleverness, like anything else. Séances, ouija boards, consultations with mediums, high-tech gadgets to seek out cold spots and magnetic disturbances — Dragons have tried all these and more. Sometimes, Dragons even go to mortals and mages with reputations as ghost-hunters. In a few domains, such experts have even been brought into the fold as "associate members in the Order of the Dragon," thinking that the society is an old-fashioned gentleman's spiritualists club. These living members teeter on the edge of the Masquerade — the night they learn, discern or piece together too many shreds of truth about their fellow club-members, they become an intolerable threat to the Order.

More than one Dragon has been in Embraced in such a situation.

Hosting

Tradition dictates that the highest-ranked unsworn is given the title **convener** and is tasked with coordinating or hosting monthly meetings of the Order. Held, customarily, on nights of the new moon, these meetings are known as **Caucuses**. Often they are held at an Elysium that has been closed for the night to all but the Order, but some Caucuses are outside Elysium and, therefore, beyond its guarantee of nonviolence.

Caucuses vary greatly from domain to domain. In places where the convener is scatter-brained or simply doesn't care much for her job, the meetings are informally held at rented halls or theaters. A casual Caucus has no roll call, Kindred are expected to show up or not according to whim, and security is fairly lax. Attendees

see to formalities like recognizing new Oathbound, granting new titles or making public legal or duel-related announcements. Little of true import is discussed in such a loose atmosphere, however.

A convener who cares about the job hosts Caucuses with tight security, sensitive Kindred (or others) present to ensure that no Obfuscated outsiders pry into Order secrets and plenty of decoration, pomp and ceremony to make sure that the Dragons take the meeting seriously. Roll calls are taken, oaths administered, tests or passwords used to ensure that each attendee really is who he claims to be.

The nature of a domain's convener often changes the flavor of local politics. Sloppy Caucuses lead to backroom oligarchies because there isn't a secure or dignified forum to solicit the input of the junior members. With a strict Caucus, Order policy is much more likely to be publicly debated among all ranks, though of course it's the Sworn with the high titles who ultimately decide matters. This means that conveners are often targets of removal schemes — either by factions that want greater openness (and therefore a more uptight convener) or those who prefer to keep their dealings hidden (and want ill-disciplined meetings as an excuse for their secrecy). Assassinating a convener isn't beyond the pale, but the more common scheme is to try to get her Sworn — with or without her cooperation. This is simpler than trying to take down someone who's probably pretty tough and experienced, especially if she's actively seeking an Oath.

On the other hand, conveners often get stuck as high-ranked unsworn for a reason — even if that reason is no better than "once she gets Sworn, she's going to jump to the front of the established power structure." Perhaps assassination is the easiest course after all.

Benefits

Mystic research is far more open to those with sufficient status. While the Slaves and Supplicants get introductory materials and access to Order documents that the Circle and the Lancea have already pirated, those of higher status belong to a wider research network and can access more sensitive materials. Really hot stuff like cutting edge Wyrm's Nest theory, or texts on how to summon "angels and demons" or books on Theban Sorcery that the Lancea Sanctum doesn't know the Order has copied — those sorts of items are still off limits.

Between the open (texts like *Rites of the Dragon* or *The Testament of Longinus*) and the deeply secret (something blasphemously powerful like C.M. Barrie's *Conversations with the Injury*) there is a middle ground of potent texts that are available to Scribes or low-level Sworn when they have a demonstrable need for them. For example:

- Alfonso Zanos' necromantic text *Ghost Homes* can be lent to those who have need of guidance with restless spirits.
- *Dîb Armili*, an anonymous and fragmentary text on Lupines and their beliefs, may be shown to those unfortunates who need its counsel. Copying is not allowed, and it's never permitted outside of a library or archive, since it seems prudent to keep it secret from the creatures that are its subject.
- *Some Brief Observations on the Contests of Nature Spirits* is, sadly, now possessed only in an English translation that is believed to lack much of the nuance of Mme. Dupain's original text. Nevertheless, it provides some flickers of insight for those who must deal with spirits that never lived, especially in their own domains.

Goals

Unsworn Dragons in the mid-range want to get an Oath, of course, and often it's easier than when they're low-status peons. Often, but not always: with enough time in the covenant, they've had time to make enemies as well as friends. With the Axe and the Dying Light, that's not as much of an issue, but it pays to consider *any* Kindred foes at one's back when trying to assault a Wyrm's Nest or defend the Order at great personal risk.

It's not uncommon for Dragons at this level to change tutors, as well. A student who has learned all a given teacher has to offer, or who has simply been promoted as high as that instructor is capable, often leaves to find someone with greater knowledge. It's the same damn thing as finding the first tutor, except that the instructor (being wiser) probably has higher standards (or something *really* wrong with her). But it cuts both ways, since the student is probably a better agent, gofer and assistant to the master.

This is also the point in a Requiem when a Dragon can reach out to those outside the covenant with a bit more assurance that the Order has her back. Many Kindred who have mid-level status within the Order have higher status in their city or clan. This can be a comfortable level to settle at within the covenant, and making oneself useful as "the guy with the Invictus connections" or "the vampire who can put together a Nosferatu wrecking crew" is a niche that can get a Dragon respect from those who have focused their energies solely on covenant politics.

While possession of a Nest at this level is rare, that doesn't mean the desire for one is. Indeed, ousting the other (non-Dragon) tenants of a Nest is frequently a way to rise in status — as long as the Nest remains intact under new ownership. Gaining a haunted house at the cost of exorcising the ghost inside it is a zero-sum game, if it's not regarded as an actual failure.

Opportunities

In addition to advanced study, one prime opportunity at this stage is the chance to command. Any Oathbound can give orders to *anyone* who is unsworn.

That penniless Nosferatu bruiser who got the Oath of the Axe with no Coils can go to an unsworn Master and say, "I need you to help me become rich." Without a good lawyerly argument (or a Sworn backer) that Master's officially appropriate response is "Very well." The major traditional exception to this rule involves instruction: no one in the Order can force another Dragon to accept her as student, nor as teacher. Outside education, though, it's pretty open. In theory, however, a Dragon can also decline such orders with the approval of a third, even higher-ranking Dragon. And in practice, Dragons skirt and avoid each other's orders with some regularity when other, more pressing problems would go unmanaged as a result.

From this side of the rank divide, however, things look different. Being a harsh taskmaster and governing underlings by fear has its appeal — and indeed, some in the Order make that work just fine. But the iron-fist approach works best for tasks that don't require finesse, judgment or commitment. Being a martinet works fine for micromanaging a pack of bullies to help become the power behind a mortal gang boss, but blustering and threatening and shouting, "I know you know kung fu; teach me all of it!" almost never gets an instructor's best efforts.

Furthermore, while having underlings to take care of petty stuff works fine when it's properly managed, trusting a Kindred of lesser experience with important or risky tasks is always attended by the possibility of failure. Maybe they fail through no fault of their own, but subordinates are subordinate for a reason. The more a commander equips and prepares them for their task, the less likely a humiliating failure occurs — but at some point it may be easier to just take care of it personally. The old saying is, "if you want a thing done right, do it yourself." Failing that, delegate wisely.

The Commander: Status •••• to •••••

After the nights of study, the icy political infighting, the humiliating Slave state and the interminable apprenticeship, a Dragon can, at last, rise to the heights. With enough study or effort or sheer, mad, balls-out *courage*, Kindred within the Order can become one of the elite, one of the chosen few who steer the covenant in its domain, in its Nests and beyond.

What This Status Means

No unsworn Dragon has Covenant Status ••••, nor does anyone ignorant of the Coils. Oathbound with the titles from Supplicant through Initiate (one to four tiers of Coils) are likely to reach Covenant Status ••••, along with those somewhat higher who are despised or mistrusted for some reason. Covenant Status ••••• is appropriate for Oathbound with five or more levels in the Coils — that is, Adepts and above.

Duties and Expectations

The elite of the Dragon's Tongue are expected to perform those duties appropriate to their Oath, plain and simple. Within their political domain, each Oath is supposedly pre-eminent. But of course, gray areas abound.

The Sworn of the Axe defend the covenant. They provide the cold, murderous bodies who stand between the Order and the police, the FBI, the CDC, the other covenants, mortal warlocks, shapeshifters, ghosts whose anchors have been disturbed (or stolen) and the wrathful relatives of slain mortals.

While, in theory, all Kindred with the Axe Oath are expected to defend any Dragon, there are limits. No one is permitted to be sloppy with the Masquerade and get unlimited cleaning from the Axe — though it must be said that the higher one's status, the more tolerant the Axe-Sworn are of tidying any unfortunate business. On the other hand, dumb feeders rarely achieve high status.

Calls for defense by Dragons who can't defend themselves can lead to turf battles between the Axe and the Dying Light. If an Axe-bearer accuses another Dragon of frivolously invoking the Axe's protection, it's a court matter. Typically the Axe makes a challenge, but not every Dragon is open to a martial challenge and if it goes to a *Juris Draconis*, the Dying Light are necessarily involved. This can turn very ugly if the accused carries that Oath, whether the jury finds for or against her.

Similarly, the Axe sometimes conflicts with the Mysteries over leadership roles. The Axe is supposed to run the show during emergencies, while the Mysteries legislate at all other times. But who decides when disaster is imminent? In areas where the Mysteries dominate, they often pass laws that only *they* can decide when to put the Axe in charge. In other areas where the Axe is larger — typically more *dangerous* areas, of course — the Axe may have the ability to declare martial law, suspend any Mystery decrees and take any steps necessary to "deal with the crisis." At least one Ordo city in Ecuador has been under "crisis conditions" for 110 years — the length of the reign of its Axe-Sworn Prince.

The Sworn of the Dying Light are never supposed to set the agenda for the Ordo Dracul. Their duties are mystic research and resolving disputes. But again, there are areas of ambiguity. Suppose Dying Light researchers locate a Wyrm's Nest that's infested with some sort of malevolent supernatural beasts? A case can be made that, as Wyrm's Nests are part and parcel of "occult research," the Dying Light should be able to order the Axe to charge in and clear out the monsters so that the researchers can then move in and set up shop. If the Axe argues against this reasoning, just who's going

to necessarily be involved with deciding who's in the right? Why, the Oathbound of the Dying Light, taking off their lab coats and changing into their judges' robes.

Depending on politics and power balance, such conflicts can work out in a variety of ways. The Dying Light may be dominant (or may form a coalition of oppression with the Mysteries) and force the Axe to win the prize, which the Dying Light then enjoys. Or they might try to seize the Nest themselves, only going to the Axe when rebuffed (and therefore offering the site to the Axe-bearers as "first pick of victims, lands and the rewards of honor"). Or they might cooperate with the Axe, each applying their strengths to acquiring the site and exploiting its benefits. Hey, it happens.

Finally, there's the Oath of the Mysteries, the legislative branch of the Ordo Dracul. They make the laws and decide policy, but there's a catch: it's plainly stated in *Rites of the Dragon* that they make law for the Ordo Dracul, "though not for any member within it." Individuals with the Mystery Oath can challenge other Oathbound, they can slap the unsworn into a *Juris Draconis*, but the collective of the Mysteries cannot take any action against a lone Dragon. Remarkably, many Ordo Dracul chapters are agreed in the belief that the Sworn of the Mysteries can pass laws concerning individuals *outside* the covenant. So if the locals want to pass a law saying The Unholy is anathema and should be destroyed if she shows her face, that's binding and local Dragons are expected to observe it. Meanwhile, doing the same thing to anyone in the Order, even a lowly Slave, is off limits.

It is tradition for the highest-ranked Oathbound of each chapter to initiate every vote by commanding the Sworn of the Mysteries to "vote your conscience" or "vote as you think is best for the Ordo Dracul." Some domains simply have this supreme Dragon issue that command in perpetuity to each Mystery-bound as she is formally recognized at Caucus. In this fashion, "do what you believe is best" becomes an enduring order.

While they are restricted from detail work, they have tremendous power when it comes to broad-brush strokes. The Sworn of the Mysteries can (and have) passed laws exiling members of bloodlines, or even entire clans, from the Order in certain cities. Of course, it must be said that Dragon chapters that go so far as to ban a clan usually weaken themselves against less bigoted covenants. They can declare that no one who's ever been in the Lancea Sanctum can join, and they can make that law retroactive in order to kick out all the former Sanctified. Again, this is rare, because a mass excommunication of that sort practically guarantees

Coil leakage, which puts the Order in the position of going to war, when its numbers are depleted, against its own former members. As long as it's not a state of open warfare (when the Axe assumes leadership), the Sworn of the Mysteries decide the Order's stance towards clans, other covenants and any other power structure the Dragons encounter.

Benefits

One benefit is another increase in access. Dragons with high Covenant Status are finally permitted to learn about the existence of secret Coils and, possibly, new tiers for well-known Coils. With appropriate finagling, a Dragon of newly increased Covenant Status can even learn such Coils within her first few nights of her new station.

The quickest way to get the most advanced knowledge is to be Sworn of the Dying Light. While the high-level tiers and other benefits are supposed to be available equally to all the Oathbound, in practice it's the Dying Light who get there first. It's not all a matter of politics, either: in many cases, the Oath of the Dying Light appealed to the people who were most passionately interested in occult learning. Therefore, they're the ones with the background necessary to quickly grasp the obscure philosophies involved with new or advanced Coils. Mystic researchers tend to learn mystic material quicker, for the same reason that plumbers rarely have leaky faucets.

At this level, the Oaths tend to subdivide a bit with their rewards and perquisites. The Axe are, in the most obvious ways, the cream of the crop. It's right there in *Rites of the Dragon* that they get "first pick of victims, lands and the rewards of honor." In conflicts over who takes possession of a given Wyrm's Nest, or who has feeding rights at a prime rack or who gets appointed ambassador to the Circle of the Crone, the Sworn of the Axe are often quick to invoke that passage of the *Rites*. While it may be the Dying Light who judge which claimant takes precedence, or it may be the Mysteries deciding who's qualified for an appointment, the "first pick" rule often swings a big stick.

A "benefit" to being in the Dying Light rarely comes into play, but sometimes a Dragon is found guilty of subjugating her soul to an angel, demon or other entity. In those cases, the penalty is annihilation through diablerie, and that dire (but-oh-so tempting) sentence is universally carried out by the Sworn of the Dying Light.

In the same spirit, a rarely invoked but very real benefit to being Sworn of the Mysteries is that one has a perfect legal excuse to refuse a Vinculum. If it's from someone outside the Order, the Dragons almost certainly close ranks to protect one of their legislators from the blood's false ardor. If someone inside the Order attempts to place the Vinculum, any *Juris Draconis* is likely to find in favor of the Mystery-Sworn. (Though there have been cases where Dragon Juries found in favor of the binder, essentially sentencing the Oathbound to death.)

Guardian Status

Guardians — the Dragons tasked with protecting specific Wyrm's Nest sites — are generally high status and almost always Sworn. It's possible to be appointed Guardian of a very minor site at Covenant Status •••, but only if there's a strong personal claim. Being assigned guardianship is an honor and, as such, it often goes to an Axe-bearer. Or maybe it usually goes to an Axe-bearer because Guardian positions tend to open up violently.

In any event, the Guardian of a site has considerable discretion when it comes to administrating that site. She can decide who is permitted entry, she can set the schedule for any experiments and she leads negotiations with resident spirits. If the site is under attack, she makes the tactical decisions and she decides when to cut and run. When things aren't so hectic, the Guardian distributes any benefits that result from site control. All these decisions are subject to review by Dragon Jury, but the burden of proof is heavily on the accuser.

Becoming a Guardian isn't simple or straightforward. First, when a new Wyrm's Nest is recognized, the person who discovered, conquered or created it is declared Guardian pro tem. (If there's a disagreement over which Dragon was there first, it goes to a Dragon Jury or is settled with a challenge, but such cases are rushed because *someone* has to mind the store.) Then the local Kogaion is informed, and she gives the site a code name — usually a descriptive title that does not give away the location of the Nest. After that, she selects a committee of Mystery-Sworn to set Guardian criteria — factors or traits that the ideal site Guardian should possess. For example, the rural home of a corrupt spirit that expresses its wrath through swarms of bees is going to require a much different Guardian than a closet in a bank skyscraper that opens into a non-Euclidian space haunted by dozens of victims murdered in an occult ceremony. Desirable traits for the first site might be: connections to Lupines in the local wilderness, knowledge of nature spirits, ability to rough it, combat prowess and, if possible apiarian skill. The criteria for the second site's Guardian could be: nearby haven, plenty of pay, geomancy knowledge, stealth and familiarity with the history of the building.

Once the legislature sets the profile of the Guardian, the criteria (but no details about the Nest beyond its name) are announced at the next Caucus (or possibly earlier if the Kogaion feels there's need). Local Dragons who think they have what it takes may apply for the position, and a committee of Dying Light weighs their merits. Once again, the committee is hand-picked by the Kogaion. Guardians can be removed if the Mysteries change the criteria (which is tricky to do without

reason) or if a *Juris Draconis* is convened on an accusation of unfitness for duty and finds that there's reason to strip the Guardian of her job.

Kogaion

Being declared Kogaion is a mixed blessing. It is a great honor, and it places its bearer in a position that's nearly above reproach. A city Kogaion can only be removed on the order of seven other Kogaions, and since it's one to a city that indicates a nearly absurd level of intra-city communication and (to be blunt) interest. The only other ways out are to die or retire.

The Kogaion knows about all the regional Dragons and is the only one who knows the details about all the local Wyrm's Nests. Another Dragon may know of several, even the locations of as many as half if he's well-connected; there may be sites that every local Dragon knows and there may be Dragons who know the code names of all the region's Nests — but *only the Kogaion* knows all the details of *all* the Wyrm's Nests. (Or at least, only she is *supposed* to know.) To protect that knowledge, she is immediately consulted when a new Wyrm's Nests is occupied, so that she can decide who among the Oathbound is permitted to know about it. By picking the committees of Oathbound who select Guardians, she has a heavy hand in determining who controls the Nests. Indeed, Guardians tend to be the only peers who feel anything resembling comfort around a Kogaion.

While the Kogaion retains her Oath (and no one unsworn has ever been elected Kogaion), she is exempt from all challenges and cannot even be bound by a Dragon Jury unless she willingly submits to its judgment. She is stripped of the duties of her Oath, whatever it is — a Dying Light Kogaion does not sit in judgment, a Kogaion of the Axe does not fight, a Mystery Kogaion does not vote for or propose laws. The only exception is that all Kogaion are permitted — indeed, encouraged — to engage in mystic research. Their unique position of knowledge makes them invaluable students of the unknown.

Kogaions are forbidden from attending Caucus, for fear that an attack on a Caucus could wipe out both the Kogaion and much of the chapter's membership in one attack. Other than their authority over Nests, they have little formal power, but the respect a Kogaion commands is enormous. Often a Kogaion has to do little beyond express an opinion or a desire in order to see her wishes fulfilled.

Goals

At this level of status, most Dragons' desires change. It's rare to get this high in the Order without a strong desire to gain power and prestige. But from the top, where does an ambitious, powerful and lauded vampire go next?

Typically their goals change from personal advancement to covenant advancement. This doesn't mean

high-level Dragons suddenly become infused with community spirit. It means that vampires powerful enough to run a covenant naturally want that covenant to be the most powerful around.

Sworn of the Axe generally have military ambitions, because those who like axes want every problem to be a tree. They tend to try to amass greater military power for the Ordo Dracul, preferably at the expense of other covenants, and — when they feel strong enough — they try to provoke some kind of physical conflict.

This game of provocation and reprisal is actually pretty tough to manage. Kindred with the potential to survive indefinitely are notoriously averse to risking their skins. Plus there's the Masquerade to consider: any covenant that breaches it as a group probably unites the others against it. This does, however, mean that the crazier covenant can often bluff the others with the implied threat of a Masquerade rupture. Like playing chicken on the highway, the Invictus (for example) may be *pretty* sure that the Ordo Dracul isn't going to risk a bloodbath that would get loads of mortal attention. But that's the kind of thing every vampire wants to be *very* sure about.

Constant saber-rattling may convince itchy outsiders that the Ordo *is* eventually going to break the First Tradition, and that in turn may result in a "pre-emptive strike" — which is, of course, exactly what the Sworn of the Axe *wants*, because they become the authorities during wartime *and* because fierce battles give them an opportunity to swell their numbers and gain a greater proportion of influence within the covenant. This is why many with the other Oaths frequently shy away from placing Axe-Sworn into ambassador positions — even though this, in turn, clashes with the Axe's claim of first pick of honored titles.

The Sworn of the Dying Light tend to seek power for the Order in a different way. Rather than crush other Kindred covenants until the Order is greatest, they seek occult power and revelation. Their goal is often to exalt the Kindred of the Order until other covenants are simply irrelevant. In this they are most true to the transcendent goals described in *Rites of the Dragon*. The problem is, few Kindred, if any, have actually *achieved* that transformation.

Their quest for forbidden knowledge is most likely to bring the Dying Light into conflict with the Lancea or the Circle (among Kindred) or with other supernatural creatures and forces. They are often the Oath least likely to have mortal trouble, because their focus is so far beyond typical mortal concerns and authorities. Their desire to understand cursed places and haunted objects keeps them out of the path of mortal politicians, cops and power-brokers who would just as soon stay away from eerie sites so that they can make money, get votes or keep the peace.

Oaths and Stories

The structure of Oaths in an Ordo Dracul chronicle has a powerful effect on the kinds of stories that get told. If the characters all accept the Oath of the Axe, the Ordo is going to apply them to missions in which danger is expected and force is, if not *the* solution, certainly a strong possibility. A coterie of Dying Light Sworn, on the other hand, are going to spend the bulk of their time investigating the unknown and trying to get to the bottom of court cases. Like a combination between an occult detective and a mundane jury, their primary concern will be discernment. As for a group of Mystery-bound, their business is going to be politics, politics, politics.

Players should realize that being offered an Oath is a chance to steer the future of the chronicle in one of those three directions — towards conflict, mystery or intrigue. Similarly, Storytellers should recognize that the Oaths sought by the characters indicate a vote from the players about what kind of game they want to be playing. Players who busted their humps to get into the Dying Light are going to be less happy with a game that's all fighting, even if the fights are brilliantly conceived and described.

It's quite possible, of course, that a Blood Coven that starts out as Slaves together could rise to get an even spread of all three Oaths. In that case, it's simply a matter of the Storyteller providing the balance of challenges which the players collectively desire.

As for the Sworn of the Mysteries, they're in the bloodiest thick of Kindred politics, seeking to acquire through guile and negotiation what the Axe would seize by force. No few Mystery-Sworn see themselves as the masters of the Order, and regard their rise through its ranks as training for conflict with political covenants like the Invictus and the Carthian Movement. Just as a pro-baller has to make a name for herself on high school and college teams before she gets drafted, so must a Dragon prove herself in conflicts within the Order before she has the skill to battle on its behalf.

Opportunities

Listing opportunities for the leaders of an entire covenant doesn't take much space — not because the opportunities are limited, but because they are so expansive. From the top of the Ordo Dracul, the challenges faced are primarily external. Anything within the reach of the Order is within the reach of its leaders.

Many leaders try to immediately line their pockets (or ensconce themselves against attack or expand their

mystical prowess) but strangely, those who seek only personal improvement often wind up stymied. True, the advanced Daeva who persuades underling Nosferatu and Gangrel to teach her Protean and Nightmare is going to become personally terrifying in combat, but is unlikely to rise higher in the Sworn of the Axe than an Oathmate who puts an equal degree of effort into investigating the weaknesses of rival covenants.

The truly powerful Dragons are the influential ones. That is, the Sworn Philosopher who simply takes a rich, unsworn Master under her wing is unlikely to suffer the pangs of poverty. Why would a Dying Light Illuminus who has focused on occult learning suddenly switch to learning martial skills and Disciplines when she can, instead, simply smile at an Axe-Sworn Daeva Initiate and say, "I seek a security coordinator"? Instead of personally managing wealth or warfare, the wise commander delegates those tasks to someone who already *has* everything she needs for them. This frees up the commander to concentrate on her own personal strengths — or on her personal transcendence, the one Order goal that cannot be delegated.

The drawback of relying on others is that Kindred are notoriously unreliable — unless they're defending their selfish, personal interests. An Architect or Immortal, however, can find plenty of ways to appeal to the selfishness of an underling. Becoming a tutor is one obvious way — indeed, a way that can often be further delegated. Similarly, promises to exert influence on court cases, or to propose the underling as Guardian or to help the subordinate become Sworn — all these can buy loyal actions from someone who's completely self-interested. Finally, those who've attained the dizzying heights of Illuminus or Visioner shouldn't underestimate the power they have to offer lower ranks *freedom*. There is a world of difference between a Master who is making money for herself, and a Master who is making money for herself on the orders of a Visioner. The biggest difference, of course, is that in the second instance few can order her to *stop* and do something different.

Wise leaders of the Dragons become the font of freedom for their underlings. In the straitened hierarchy of the Ordo Dracul, freedom is a precious commodity.

Chapter Four: Factions and Bloodlines

"Nicholas tried to show me,
but I didn't understand him back then.
I'm starting to get it, now.
I figure that, with another thirty years of school
and finished doctorates in psychology and chemistry,
I'll be ready to change
my Blood and follow his lead.
Then I'll understand what he was trying to tell me."

— Alexander Florescu,
Honest Scribe of the Whispering Beast

He with a smile did then his words repeat; And said, that, gathering leeches, far and wide
He traveled; stirring thus about his feet The waters of the pools where they abide.
"Once I could meet with them on every side; But they have dwindled long by slow decay;
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may."

— William Wordsworth, Resolution and Independence

Kindred not privy to the secrets of the Ordo Dracul have a very difficult time agreeing on just who the Dragons actually are and what it is they spend their nights doing shuttered up in their eerie sanctums. Aside from a common creepiness and a suggestion of madness — as if they have glimpsed mind-shattering vistas and learned truths that will haunt them even in their waking hours — most Dragons seem to share only an intellectual or bookish mien. Every clan is represented in the covenant, with only the Mekhet seeming to be drawn in slightly greater numbers, each finding its own niche within the inscrutable society. In addition to some of the more common bloodlines that find their way into the Ordo Dracul, the covenant seems to have spawned a number of its own uniquely qualified lineages, some that are truly disturbing to those who are unschooled in the covenant's history and purpose. This diversity makes it nigh impossible to conclude much useful information about the covenant merely from knowing the genealogies of its members.

To make matters even more confusing to Kindred keen on learning more about the Ordo Dracul, each Dragon seems to share very different beliefs from her fellow Dragons. For a covenant that appears to be semi-religious or at least orthodox in a practical sense, this makes no sense at all. One Dragon is consulting the Kabbalah and spends her Requiem consumed by what she is convinced is a revelatory formula hidden within an epic Phoenician poem, while another toils away night after night in a laboratory more appropriate to a Hollywood mad scientist, apparently intent on discovering an 11-part disharmonic tone that is supposed to cause spontaneous cellular activity in Kindred. A third is believed to be offering up human sacrifices to some demonic fiend in exchange for the missing part of a Chaldean invocation capable of slowing the orbit of the Earth itself. Normally, three such individuals would seem incapable of finding common ground, let alone working towards a common purpose. Yet the Dragons not only seem to refrain from ridiculing each other's methods, but they actually seem to share their discoveries and somehow make sense of it all.

Although outsiders are left with the impression that the Ordo Dracul is strangely unified despite all these differences, the truth of the matter is something else entirely. The various Rites are often at odds with one another, even if not in a public way. Transylvania is a battleground upon which the Wallachian, the Palatine and the Oriental Rites strive for supremacy, and elsewhere bad blood between Rites can lead to all sorts of fractious trouble. Numerous lesser-known Rites exist across the globe, and because many are not officially recognized by the covenant as a while, their presence frequently creates a tense and sometimes openly violent situation. Finally, the covenant is home to a host of exclusive factions that pursue their own private ends, often at odds with the mainstream Ordo Dracul. Many of these hide their existence from the covenant at large, preferring the cloak of secrecy to better conceal their activities and, at the same time, aware that exposure could result in a brutal witch hunt. What is certain is that the Ordo Dracul encompasses an extremely broad range of Kindred and philosophies. So far the different clans, bloodlines, methodologies, Rites and factions seem to have strengthened the covenant, but all too often it is only because near-disaster has been averted on account of the watchfulness of the Dragons. As some elders say, even the most vigilant dragon has to sleep sometime, and when it does, woe be unto the wyrm, for even if it is not slain while it slumbers, it may awaken to find all its treasures stolen.

School of Methodology

Generally speaking, as long as a Dragon observes the Principia Draconis and adheres to the scientific method, the precise way in which she approaches the Great Work — as well as any Lesser Works she is engaged in — matters little. So long as she does not submit to demonic possession, a blood bond, or similar external control, she is free to rely on any methodology she prefers. It is results that count, not the means to those results. Consequently, if one character chooses to utilize a type of psychic research that involves using semi-scientific devices to measure "mental force waves" and discover how to use noted variances to enhance the her use of the Coils, so long as the player has some conception — crackpot though it might be — of how this would produce useful results, the Storyteller should allow it in the game. If, on the other hand, the player is just spouting out a riff of pseudo-scientific and occult words with no real idea of how the character can actually put them to practical use, the player should be coaxed to think more carefully about her character's chosen methodology. Think of a television

series about a hospital emergency room, and how utterly ludicrous it would be if one of actors playing a surgeon had no working knowledge of medicine, even if only rudimentary. His character would sound silly sputtering out meaningless medical terms, and the entire show would devolve from one of high drama to pathetic comedy.

It should never be forgotten that the philosophy of the covenant embraces purposeful change, even radical change if necessary. A Dragon that has depended almost entirely on Mesmerism since joining the Ordo Dracul might suddenly choose to dive into Egyptian summoning rituals one evening, seemingly abandoning one methodology in favor of an entirely different one. This shift in gears is not always drastic, however. More common is the adoption of multiple, seemingly incongruous methods.

Good Weird and Bad Weird

Storytellers are cautioned to be careful how to introduce the methodologies of the Ordo Dracul in a chronicle. It is one thing to say that a certain Dragon's laboratory is filled with beakers and Tesla coils and hope this comes across as appropriately creepy and dark. It is quite another thing to make the players interpret the scene the same way. Consequently, while the Storyteller is imagining a nightmarish tableau that would make moviegoers shudder in their seats, the scene from Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein* is rolling in the players' heads. This kind of thing can ruin not only the scene in question, but the entire chronicle by turning the Ordo Dracul into an absurd caricature of itself.

The only real solution to this dilemma is to rely upon detailed descriptions of the Dragons, their chapter houses and the actual work they are involved with. Don't just think visually, either. Relay to the players the sounds and smells their characters perceive, and don't forget things like temperature and the humidity of the environs. Describe the sinister equipment the Dragon utilizes, and add telltale clues as to the less-than-humane purposes that the machines, instruments and other devices are put to. Just a brief mention of a muffled moan, the intermittent sparking of raw wires, the acrid stink from a strange spill or the heaviness in the air can provide enough kind of color to the scene. The Dragons may do some weird things, but it is weird in the skin-crawling sense, not the comical.

For example, a Dragon may use a gas centrifuge to combine various ethers and then an argon laser to superheat them in order to produce the essential alchemical salts she needs. These she mixes with quicksilver and ghoul's Vitae while reciting a harsh verse in proto-German until the proper consistency results. This concoction is added to a larger mixture of fish oil to create a viscous flux that is finally poured into a large, hand-blown cauldron of leaded glass that will serve as the artificial womb for the fetus she intends to "Embrace" via verdigris-encrusted, copper tubing submerged in the flux.

Remember, to the Ordo Dracul, the manner in which the Great Work is achieved is secondary. If a method gets results, it is used, regardless of how bizarre, gruesome or incomprehensible it is to others.

The following are reasonably detailed presentations of the methodologies most frequently practiced by the Ordo Dracul as well as suggestions of how to use them in a chronicle in order to enhance the atmosphere and the story. Storytellers and players alike should be familiar with the methodology used by their respective characters.

Alchemy

Perhaps the most stereotypical and yet simultaneously appropriate scientific paradigm is the ancient practice known as alchemy. It was popularized in the late medieval and Renaissance periods when Geber, Avicenna and Bacon established themselves as renowned scientists, but the art is generally held to have much older origins. Its very name is derived from Arabic, which borrowed from Ancient Greek, which in turn may have adopted the term from dynastic Egypt (*khemeia*, "the preparation of the black ore"). The Egyptians were skilled metalworkers and were conversant with the principle of transmutation, separating precious metals using quicksilver. The chemicals that were produced as a consequence of the process were ascribed with miraculous powers; black powder oxides were thought to have come from the Underworld and were, therefore, the province of Osiris. Consequently, most unnatural metals, alloys, fluxes and powders were concluded to be magical and, used properly, could produce all sorts of benefits.

It wasn't until the Hellenistic period that alchemy became a true science. During this time it was attributed to Hermes Trismegistus and was believed to be his contributions to science. The Alexandrian school, even after its usurpation by Arabs, continued to explore and codify alchemy, applying a real method to its application. Spain became enamored with the art, and it was from here that it was finally spread to Europe proper. From the 7th century until the 17th, alchemy flourished. It wasn't until the advent of modern chemistry that it finally fell into general disuse and ultimately became regarded as a crude and erroneous primitive science that had no further contributions to make.

Few Dragons tonight can truthfully claim to have been around during alchemy's heyday, but the Ordo Dracul never ceased using alchemy for its own pursuits. It mattered little that the kine had found a new methodology that seemed to offer them more practical benefits; many Dragons had achieved astonishing results using alchemical methods, and, in their eyes, it was foolish to thrown

the baby out with the bathwater, as it were. Adopting the more rigid scientific method was a godsend, but there was no need to dismiss alchemy simply because it was not a new thing — rarely are Kindred so fickle. So long as alchemy could prove useful to the Great Work, it would continue to find its supporters in the covenant.

Basic Theory

Traditional alchemy sought three particular aims, depending on the alchemist. The common goal was the transformation of base metals into pure gold. A second and somewhat more esoteric goal was to combine or transform chemical substances in a way that produced the *mestruum universale*, or the Universal Solvent. This rarified substance was believed to possess near-miraculous properties that a knowledgeable alchemist could use to cure illness, perfect the human form, and even extend man's years beyond the allotted lifetime, allowing near-immortality. Finally, the most spiritually inclined alchemists sought the so-called Elixir of Life. Not only would it make a man immortal, but it would also restore youth and vigor to any who consumed it. Clearly, to the Dragons, there is much here worth investigating.

The basic principle of alchemy is that every natural substance can be classified according to certain key chemical properties, such as acidity, density, magnetic attraction, malleability and the manner in which it reacts to certain base elements, like fire, ether, carbon, etc. The alchemist studies the various properties and finds correspondences and opposites and then mingles or otherwise combines pairs until a noteworthy result is achieved. Heating or burning substances to free the "phlogiston" — a peculiar speculative substance that seeks to conceal itself in other substances — and reduce the substance to its baser components is especially important. The ultimate aim is to arrive at the most fundamental properties and, therefore, elements. The final element, the Universal Solvent, would be the foundation upon which these exist.

The Ordo Dracul, of course, has little concern for making gold or curing illness. Instead, its proponents believe that alchemy is well-suited to being put to their own quest for transformation and transcendence. Instead of studying metals, for the most part the Dragons examine and combine fluid and biological substances, especially those that can be found in vampires. Vitae is studied most, but even flesh, bone and brain and other tissues are obtained and used for alchemical experiments. Those focusing on the Coil of the Beast believe that the Beast itself may be nothing more than a property of vampires, one that can be understood and controlled by a possible elixir or other additive. The hunger for blood is a sign that vampires lack something, and so the alchemists work to discover what this missing thing is in the hope of restoring it. The Coil of Banes is approached most often by studying the elements and examining how the various substances that make up the Kindred body react to them. Submitting a fang to low heat over an extended period is nothing unusual for such alchemists; sometimes it is the least interesting experiments that produce the greatest results.

Tools of the Trade

Kindred alchemists use many of the same things that a traditional alchemist might. First, they need laboratory space that is appropriate. It must not only be large enough for all their other paraphernalia, but it must be easily safeguarded against conflagration and similar disaster. Even if the Dragon is in no danger, small explosions can quickly bring curious neighbors and even the authorities to the door, jeopardizing the Masquerade or at least making further use of the facility impossible. The space will be mostly filled with long, broad tables and plenty of shelves for all the equipment not being currently used. Sinks and safe places to dispose of possibly dangerous substances are necessary, as are burners or other apparatuses to produce flame. No Dragon in her right mind would use a gas burner, however — the chance of it accidentally leading to a major fire is too great. Instead, small furnaces or even bellows-powered burners are preferred. Every conceivable kind of glass and metal container fills out the place, with various contraptions to hold the beakers, vials, test tubes, flasks and other glassware in use. Books on alchemy, chemistry, mathematics, physics and the natural sciences are required, as are works on hematology and related biological and forensic matters. Finally, the alchemist will have different gloves, goggles and protective coats or robes on hand to complete the scene.

Playing an Alchemist

Alchemical Dragons are first and foremost archaic creatures. Their chosen field of study requires them to distance themselves from modern thinking, not only in a scientific sense, but in a much larger manner. Believing as they do that they can reduce all things to some fundamental and universal form that possesses magical properties forces them to see the world around them as a collection of composite materials and objects. Even a woman with child is nothing more than the elements and substances that make up her flesh and blood. This clinical view is not merely one used when directly involved in an investigation, either. At all times the vampire finds herself thinking this way, wondering at the alchemical and natural forces at work beneath and behind all she surveys. To other Kindred, she frequently seems distracted, especially when an event occurs that embodies alchemical principles, such as a car backfiring, a fire igniting or even the ink on a piece of paper running down the page when raindrops soak it. These kinds of fundamental reactions are the alchemist's bread and butter, and she is fascinated by such things. Alchemists are prone to giving off strange odors on account of the multifarious chemicals and odd substances they work with, and are usually unaware of this unless it is pointed out. It is not unusual for a Dragon employing alchemy to go out hunting only to find

that mortals avoid her in a very obvious way; they can smell the strong odors and prefer not to be close to the character.

Methodology and Story

Storytellers should consider each character's methodology not only as window dressing, but as a source of plot-hooks and story ideas. Consider a Dragon who uses the alchemical method. Alchemists are always seeking rare substances for their experiments, many of which can be quite dangerous to handle, let alone subject to rigorous alchemical testing. Because of the nature of the Great Work, Dragon alchemists are particularly looking to get their hands on all kinds of blood, vampire or otherwise, as well as tissue from the undead. Few students in the Ordo Dracul would be willing to offer up their own flesh for such investigations, and rarely are they compelled to do so. This means the alchemists will have to get their hands on other Kindred, either inducing them to make a small sacrifice in the name of science or forcing them to do so. A Dragon who believes that she needs the heart of a diablerist to further her work will be hard-pressed, but in the end will likely do whatever it takes to arrange a suitable donor.

Characters could be pressed into service either arranging such a scenario — it can't be easy getting one vampire to commit diablerie without the plan backfiring — or retrieving the heart when the deed is done; clearly, an even more complicated prospect. Storytellers can even inform an alchemist character that her own studies have come to a standstill, and, until she gets hold of a certain substance and successfully combines it with something she already has on hand, she will be unable to complete the work necessary for the second Coil she desperately desires. This turns the simple expenditure of Experience Points into an entire story that can alter the shape of the chronicle.

Catastrophes are another way to add some drama to a story. The work alchemists do is usually not as carefully controlled as, say, genetic research. As a result, it is all too easy for a fire, an explosion, a biological hazard or something else entirely undesired to occur during an experiment. A disastrous chemical explosion can send the characters into a frenzy, causing them to wreck their laboratory, and years worth of work along with it. Even if the explosion occurs when they are away — a chemical mixture in a stoppered flask reacts unexpectedly — the laboratory can be destroyed, and mortal authorities will come to put out the fire and seek the cause of the blaze. Now the Masquerade is threatened, and the characters are left not only picking up the pieces of all their long work, but the Prince demands to see them and forbids them from further experiments. How they get around this insufferable proscription can make for an interesting chronicle indeed.

As with any scientist, alchemists are also in the habit of using terminology appropriate to their work in inappropriate situations, such as in conversation with a Harpy in Elysium. Rambling on about the wisdom of Eugenius Philalethes' *The Marrow of Alchemy* and how one of the chief difficulties with his transcendental view of the congelation of the male and female seeds of base solvents is its reliance upon putrefaction of spirit as well as base elements is not about to win the alchemist an invitation to the next salon. This kind of eccentricity is common to most scientist types, but the particularly archaic nature of alchemy makes discussion of the subject that much more awkward for listeners.

Modern and Pseudo-Science

Those Dragons still young in years are most familiar with the modern science they grew up with. As a consequence, the school of modern scientists is the fastest growing in the covenant, though it has yet to win over significant numbers of the Ordo Dracul's ancillae or elders. Those vampires remain wary about the complex fields of computer programming, genetic engineering, nuclear physics, and cutting-edge biology, to name only a smattering of possibilities. They may want to accept change on a philosophical level, but putting that principle to practice is often a much harder thing to do. Sure, there are alternatives that might offer new insights, but is the cost in time to master that new method worth the gain? Despite this reticence on the part of the covenant's older members, modern science has become an invaluable tool that continues to prove its value to the Great Work.

Just as popular as the so-called hard sciences are an array of pseudo-scientific methodologies and fields of study that, while they have been for the most part debunked by the kine, have shown a surprising ability to produce useful results for the covenant. Not only that, but every vampire is capable of doing things that already smash through the barrier of acceptable science, so exploring phenomena and theories that don't quite meet the standards of the *Journal of Science*, for example, is hardly unusual.

It is impossible to give any reasonable introduction to the nearly limitless array of subjects studied, but a brief rundown of some of the more common ones include: Torsion Fields and Etheric Mechanics, Geodesic Resonance, Savantism, Perpetual Motion and Free Energy, Cryptobiology and Exobiology, Tesla's Electrostatic Coils, Kirlian Photography, Cryogenics and Reanimation, Levitation and Antigravity, Bioluminescence and Photoelectric Phenomena, Déjà Vu and Time Travel, Crystal and Pyramid Power, Spontaneous Combustion, Meme Transmission and Hive Mentality, Hollow Earth and Microtectonic Anomalies, Hemomagnetism and Biological Navigation, Teleportation and Matter Transmission, Junk DNA and Revolutionary Mutation, Aura and Shadow Phenomena, Fetal Instruction and Conditioning, Climatic and Lunar Biointerference, Antimatter and Dark Matter, Cross-Species Grafting and Breeding, Twin Phenomena and Extremely Low Frequency (ELF) and Harmonic Theory. Just about any unusual phenomenon or theory can become the focus of a Dragon's studies. More importantly, if the pseudo-science can be applied to the study of the Coils and the Great Work, it is worth examination.

Basic Theory

For the hard sciences — biology, chemistry, physics, mechanics, electromagnetics, etc. — there are a vast number of theories and specific fields of study that have gained widespread acceptance. From Einstein's general theory of relativity and Bohr's model of the atom to Darwin's theory of evolution and the Watson and Crick's double-helix, these fundamentals form the basis for all modern science. Common to all, of course, is the scientific method itself, the very roadmap by which the Ordo Dracul pursues all its efforts, regardless of whether the Dragons do so according to established theory or so-called crackpot science. The scientific method consists of four basic steps: observation and description of phenomenon, formulation of a hypothesis, prediction of new phenomena based on the hypothesis and, finally, experimentation to discover whether the hypothesis was correct or not.

The greatest accusation heaped upon the modern scientists is that they are too skeptical and don't allow for "extreme possibilities," meaning they never devise hypotheses that step out of the bounds of the already accepted realm of science. This is where the Dragons diverge greatly from the kine. Pseudo-science is nothing more than daring to make traditionally unacceptable leaps of genius when fashioning a hypothesis. The Ordo Dracul's "mad scientists" are not mad at all: they are simply more willing to take intellectual risks in the hopes of essentially leap-frogging over the much slower achievements of their less radical compatriots. As ever, if their efforts can produce results that have real application and advance the Great Work, the risk is fully justified and the method exonerated.

The particulars of the pseudo-scientific theories are too varied to summarize here. Storytellers are encouraged to visit a good bookstore or search the Internet for some of the topics mentioned above to get a much better understanding of the popular pseudo-sciences.

Tools of the Trade

Modern scientists and pseudo-scientists require extensive facilities, even more so than their arcane alchemical counterparts. Not only must they have modernized and more varied access to utilities such as electricity, water, gas and heat and cold generators, but they use far more and diverse equipment. A Dragon studying gene therapy as a possible solution to transcendence

will require tools that are highly specialized, very expensive and relatively difficult to obtain. Another Dragon, sure that controlled bursts of lightning will hasten the Great Work, may need to erect very large Tesla coils that demand god-awful amounts of electricity and are likely to raise the suspicions of neighbors when their hair begins to stand on end at odd times.

It is more than mere price and difficulty in arranging the proper space that is a challenge to Dragon scientists, however. The equipment they employ requires regular and very special maintenance that even the most brilliant Dragon is highly unlikely to possess. The tools and knowledge needed by a gas-centrifuge technician or an MRI scanner are going to be very hard to come. It is more probable that the Dragon will do as most scientists do — hire outsiders to attend to her equipment. This opens up a whole other can of worms, however. How well can the Ordo Dracul manage the regular intrusion of technicians in the chapter house without raising suspicions as to their activities and true nature? Even forcing the technicians into a blood addiction is iffy, as they probably are not independent contractors and could be fired or replaced by their employer with ease.

For this and a host of other reasons, many Dragons who engage in the modern and pseudo-sciences instead perform their work in academic or corporate facilities at times carefully arranged for their activity to go largely unnoticed. Bribes to security staff, Vitae-addicted student assistants and probably some kind of control over a key administrator or senior scientist can ensure a relative degree of privacy and provide the Dragon with the kinds of equipment and materials that would be almost impossible to have access to in her own haven or chapter house.

Playing a Modern or Pseudo-Scientist

Hard scientists are some of the most skeptical empiricists in the Ordo Dracul, but their ability to easily converse with and gain influence over kine scientists and researchers more than enough makes up for their curmudgeonly attitude with their fellow Dragons. Most were probably doctors, chemists, biologists and science professionals before their Embrace, and the ability to now devote eternity to their former pursuits is a godsend to most. Even as they strive to unlock the secrets of transcendence and an escape from their Kindred condition, many continue to explore the very subjects that interested them in life, whether that be astrophysics or neonatal chromosome manipulation. Oftentimes, they discover unexpected connections between these Lesser Works and the covenant's primary focus of study, discoveries that vindicate all their efforts and provide a satisfying sense of accomplishment despite the tribulations of undeath.

Their pseudo-scientific partners are little different, though they are far less skeptical in a knee-jerk sense. Traditionally, they are more creative thinkers, far more willing to give "crackpot" ideas a chance, if only for the sake of entertainment. Many actually enjoy discoursing on wild theories and speculation for the sole purpose of aggravating their more staid peers, even if they have no real intellectual interest in the theories. They also tend to be a bit more eccentric than most Dragons — and that's hard to do. The creativity needed to be able to think up the kinds of wild-eyed things that they regularly do is usually difficult to constrain to the realm of science alone. Some are also avant-garde artists, fiction writers, and political radicals on the side, and many appear flamboyant or outlandish in both demeanor and garb, an expression of their fringe personalities.

The Digital Dragon

The computer is still mostly used as a research tool by those Dragons familiar enough with the technology to employ it in their studies. Doing searches on the Internet, computing complex calculations and monitoring experiments is increasingly common in some Academies, especially among the covenant's neonates. However, a very small but growing number of Dragons are actually putting computers to use in a much more radical fashion. These radicals wonder whether transcendence can be helped along by computer science in a very literal sense. They theorize that just as kine can hone things like hand-eye coordination and their ability to mentally organize and compute information — like knowing what words will produce the best results in a search engine — by using computers, the Kindred might be able to similarly produce intentional and transformative changes in their physiology and mental state.

This idea is still purely theoretical. To date, no Dragon has come forward and demonstrated a quantitative change that has taken place as a direct result of computer usage. Proponents are not about to give up, however. Instead, they are investing in software and hardware companies, gaining influence over developers and engineers and seeking to determine the most effective applications that might produce the desired outcome.

If nothing else, computer modeling enables Dragons to visualize pseudo-scientific concepts and decrypt ancient documents with much greater speed and efficiency. In some domains, Kogaions have specialized software creating theoretical patterns of ley line movement. The Great Work is an endeavor that depends on information, and computers are the most powerful information-handling machines ever seen by even the most ancient Dragons.

Mesmerism and Parapsychology

The idea that a substance could invisibly pull or directly influence another unrelated object across a distance was an astonishing thought for early rationalists, and it gave birth to fields of study that span the spectrum from spiritualism to modern science. The so-called magnetists of the 16th century accepted something called "animal magnetism," which was essentially the belief that celestial objects produced emanations of a kind that directly influenced the human body and mind. The magnetists hoped to discover the underlying theory of these emanations in order to use them for healing.

Continued interest led to Paracelsus's milestone sympathetic systems of science, which concluded that a certain action in one thing could produce an affect in another seemingly unrelated thing. This thinking later resulted in Franz Mesmer's understanding of a "universal fluid" that acted as a medium for this sympathy or animal magnetism, and ultimately to the idea that by manipulating this fluid people could be cured, made to perform certain actions or respond in nearly any fashion desired by the mesmerist. The existence of Dominate and Majesty lend tremendous (though mystic) credibility to Mesmer's work even if it is given little shrift among modern scientists.

Parapsychology grew out of the observation that numerous strange phenomenon — clairvoyant visions, telepathic transmission, mental levitation, etc. — seemed to occur in tandem with certain changes in an individual who has a connection to the phenomenon, whether due to physical proximity or a sympathetic relationship. Taking the idea of animal magnetism one step further than the Mesmerists, parapsychologists concluded that the human mind is capable of causing direct changes to the environment by perhaps using Mesmer's universal fluid as a conduit. The Dragons have plenty of evidence to support these ideas, with Auspex only one example. If by using the mind a Dragon can force change on the world around herself, then it is only a small step further to force similar changes upon her own form and so pave the way for complete transformation.

Basic Theory

A concept key to understanding both Mesmerism and parapsychology is that each recognizes the role of a certain force or emanation to bring about change, whereas modern psychologists dismiss the idea of mental forces and universal fluids as pure malarkey. For the Mesmerists, it is a matter of learning how external forces affect the mind. They rely heavily upon the sympathetic theory and seek relationships between the individual and those things she perceives, consciously or otherwise. By discovering these connections and being able to predict how they will affect a subject, the Mesmerist can figure out how to alter those forces to result in different changes in the subject. For example, if a Dragon concludes that lunar radiation seems to have an influence on the likelihood of a subject frenzying when presented with fire, the Dragon can schedule her own efforts to master the next Coil of Banes to coincide with the lunar cycle in order to take advantage of its influence. Parapsychologists focus on the forces the mind can generate, and how those forces can be turned to good use. First, they seek to discover all the things the mind is able to do with these forces, then they work to hone the mind so it can exercise these forces with skill. Once the mind is able to do this, it is then turned inward, and these same forces are applied to the Dragon's own body to effect desired changes.

Tools of the Trade

Neither Mesmerists nor parapsychologists require much physical space for their work. So long as they have a subject (which could be themselves), one or more objects to study — either the source or the target of various forces — and the tools to measure any changes with, they have what they need. Generally, a place that is free of distractions is all that is important. It is exceedingly difficult to read slight changes to objects or a subject's behavior or physiology if there are constant noises, vivid paintings on the walls, uncomfortable furniture or bothersome odors present. Mesmerists may need to observe celestial objects, weather phenomena and other things that affect the subject, so they might require special facilities or equipment to do this, such as telescopes, barometers and Geiger counters.

Parapsychologists are usually equipped with the kinds of things associated with extra sensory perception and television psychics: Rhine-Zener cards to test precognitive ability, spoons or other objects to bend or move telekinetically, microphones to record clairvoyant visions, flammable objects to combust pyrokinetically, etc. Rarely do these Dragons need access to specialized facilities or particularly rare or expensive equipment, making it relatively easy for them to practice their interests nearly anywhere.

Playing a Mesmerist or Parapsychologist

Dragons who engage in Mesmeric and parapsychological methodologies tend to be far more outgoing than those who study the material sciences. Because there is far less need to spend time preparing complex equipment and extensive pre- and post-experiment documentation, and because most tests are generally over in a short period of time, these scholars tend to have far more time on their hands for social activity, whether among their peers in the covenant or out among the rest of the Kindred. But their strong penchant for observing behavior and its relationship to the environment can make

them seem somewhat preoccupied at times. Instead of going off on some mumbling discourse on electrical theory, however, they are the individuals who stand in the middle of the crowd and seem to fixate on someone else, staring uncomfortably and seemingly oblivious to their *faux pas*. They have a habit of carrying out impromptu experiments wherever they go, for it is difficult for them to not apply their hypotheses when there are so many ripe subjects all around them.

Another troublesome habit they share is their desire for an audience. A parapsychologist in Elysium may find some way to draw attention to herself so that she can demonstrate the power of the mind over matter, and a Mesmerist at the same event is going to find it hard to resist manipulating some aspect of her surroundings in order to determine what affect it has on those present.

Theosophy and Pseudo-Psychology

At the height of the Victorian period, Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society was all the rage. In many ways, its teachings were an extension of much older Gnostic ideas — theosophy literally means "the wisdom of God." The basic premise of the theosophists was that every religion was really only a localized fragment of a universal religion from which they all derived. This universal "wisdom religion" contained all truths about life and matter, and was selectively distributed to humanity by Prometheus-like beings that transcended the mortal race and collectively were what monotheists refer to as God. According to Blavatsky and her followers, the mélange of Buddhist, Brahminist and Kabbalist philosophies that comprised theosophy taught that by virtue of a real physical, mental and spiritual transformation a person could transcend one state of existence and enter another. After a series of reincarnations, the theosophist could eventually ascend to a plane of pure spirituality and effectively join the corpus of the divine, achieving nirvana. Karma plays an important role also, for one is prohibited from spiritual progression so long as one still has sins to atone for, even ones from a previous existence. While some particulars of theosophy are overlooked or modified to better suit the Kindred condition, the fundamentals of theosophy are especially appropriate to the Ordo Dracul's quest for transcendence. Consequently, even Dragons who focus more exclusively on other methodologies find enough in theosophy that is worth respecting.

The work of Kraepelin, Jung and Freud reinvigorated the study of mental illness and introduced the idea that even seemingly ordinary people could live better lives if various denied or subconscious mental problems were resolved. Alienists abounded by the early 20th century, and the fields of psychoanalysis and psychological profiling became famous for their ability to seemingly cure people and help authorities locate menaces to society. Behavioral studies took an interesting turn in the latter half of the century when various new "visionaries" announced that the now-acceptable practices and theories of psychology were horribly flawed. People like Hubbard introduced their own theories that attempted to replace the so-called "soft science" of psychology with something that would be able to stand toe-to-toe with the rigorous hard sciences. By positing the existence of things like engrams — quanta consisting of recorded memories and experiences — these pseudo-psychologists claimed that a person need only eliminate harmful engrams in order to literally achieve physical, mental and spiritual perfection; essentially a very technical form of theosophy. Once an individual is "clear" or perfect, she is supposedly capable of extraordinary things, such as using telepathy, suffering no disease, thinking faster and with more agility than a computer and even being able to heal and teleport. Again, as with theosophy, this idea of a transcendent "clear" state of existence fits nicely with the aims set down on paper by Vlad Tepes, despite its radically technical flavor.

Basic Theory

Theosophists and pseudo-psychologists alike agree that once a person is able to eliminate those things that trouble her, whether she is aware of their presence or not, she will be able to transcend and become something greater. For the theosophists, this is accomplished by ascribing to a variety of ideas that have their basis in Eastern mysticism, such as the aforementioned reincarnation, karma and nirvana. Most important of all are the three essential truths that theosophists proclaim.

First, the soul of man and Kindred is immortal in the truest sense, for it can never be destroyed or diminished. Diablerie, from their vantage point, is merely the theft of the physical vessel which carries the soul — the soul itself remains intact. Secondly, life exists within and without all beings, even if cannot be perceived, and it is eternal. The undead and even cadavers still possess the spark of life according to theosophists — it is merely very difficult to identify. And lastly, each person is her own final authority and is ultimately responsible only to herself. The Requiem is a karmic punishment that each Kindred deserves on account of some action she performed in one of her previous incarnations. To escape it requires paying the price or otherwise rectifying those sins.

The pseudo-psychologists take a slightly different approach. For them, there are no sins per se, but each false action taken is recognized as such by the Man within, and this guilt is stored subconsciously if not consciously. Also stored are the memories of horrible experiences, such as being abused or injured. The accumulation of these memories of guilt, fear and suffering eventually affects the mind and body in a perceivable way.

The Embrace is a particular type of event that amplifies the effects of these memories. Dragon pseudo-psychologists

seek to discover the source of these memories, which many adherents believe exist in a kind of collective Kindred subconscious. They believe that, sometime long ago, the first vampires were actually perfect beings, having already transcended mortality. However, on account of some terrible actions or events — Did one of those progenitors kill another by immolation? Was one forced to drink blood to survive, perhaps his own? — their perfection was marred as they were saddled with powerful memories that eventually produced the terrible banes that all vampires suffer from tonight. If these can be removed, either from the individual Dragon or from this collective subconscious, the Kindred can be restored to the flawless state their progenitors had once achieved.

Tools of the Trade

The needs of the theosophist are minimal. She needs only to be able to meditate and be able to focus on personal transformation, radically altering her motivations, actions and personality to become more in-line with the state she hopes to achieve. She must also focus on her moral transgressions, using past-life regression and historical records to identify them if she is not already aware, and then seeking ways to rectify these errors. Meditation is a large part of this practice, and things like yoga and physical exercises that enhance the mental state are also popular. Out-of-body travel is also important, as is lucid dreaming and so-called vision quests, none of which require anything more than a little peace and quite. Pseudo-psychologists dispense with the mysticism and rely on frequent consultations and therapeutic sessions. They develop and use devices — usually small and easily portable — to measure changes in a subject, changes that indicate the presence or absence of the negative memories or engrams. They usually keep more orderly records than theosophists also, using all sorts of specialized terms to describe their observations and studies as technically as possible.

Playing a Theosophist or Pseudo-Psychologist

Theosophical Dragons are some of the most enigmatic individuals in the Academy. The influence of Eastern mysticism combined with their absolute belief in their own ultimate authority give the theosophists an aura of haughty invincibility that can rub others the wrong way, particularly non-Dragons. In areas where mysticism is not the cultural norm — in most of the Western world, for example — they are rarely understood, if for no other reason than their regular usage of words and concepts that have no basis in Western tradition. In the East, this is less of a problem, of course. However, no matter where they are, their hubris remains. There is no God above to judge them, help them, or hinder them; they are their own god in a sense. This kind of thinking empowers them to achieve all they can and to never blame others for their circumstances, sometimes making them excellent counselors and supporters. The flip side is that those of a religious bent are likely to see them as heretics and vile atheists who dare to suggest they are or will be gods themselves.

The pseudo-psychologists are much less haughty and actually are some of the most evangelical members of the Ordo Dracul. They reason that by helping others they can better eliminate their own problems. By eschewing mysticism in favor of the mien of modern science, they are also far more accessible. They may have their own lexicon, but it is usually not too extensive and they tend to use layman's terms whenever possible in order to not discomfit listeners. Pseudo-psychologists also believe strongly in the doctrine of never overburdening others with more than they are ready to understand and accept. Only when another Kindred has known a pseudo-psychologist for a long period of time and has become comfortable with her theories will greater secrets be revealed, in particular about transcendence. Trying to explain that to a neophyte is simply jumping the gun.

A Theosophical Lexicon

Devachan: The state of existence experienced by the ego when it is between incarnations. Ghosts exist in this place.

Ecstasis: A state of the mind and spirit that induces a physical trance and allows access to visions and precognitive knowledge.

Ego: The self or "I." The ego consists of a lower and higher form.

Esoteric: Hidden or occluded.

Exoteric: Public or revealed.

Karma: The Law of Retribution that ensures a cosmic balance in all things.

Mahatma: A particularly enlightened theosophist.

Manas: The "mind," Higher Ego, or Man. It is the manas which separate humanity from the animals. It is the principle of sentient reincarnation.

Monad: The One or Unity; what is often called God. The monad is that part of every individual that ties him to the universe and leads him towards nirvana.

Nirvana: The place where the manas goes after an individual has achieved worldly perfection and then meets true death. Sometimes it is possible to reach nirvana while undead or even alive.

Samma Sambuddha: The spontaneous remembrance of all past incarnations.

Self: Every person has a Higher and Lower self, an Impersonal and divine and a Personal and animal self.

Part psychiatrist and part Scientologist, this type of Dragon relies primarily on psychoanalysis and behavior modification techniques to understand her subjects and "cure" the mind of its illnesses and injuries. Hypnosis, memory regression, isolation therapy, dream analysis and unceasing observation are the tools employed for success. Some of these Kindred actually subject other vampires and, later even themselves, to torpor in order to pursue a type of "lucid dreaming" that may unlock hidden thoughts or allow access to a consensual subconscious shared by all vampires. In their pursuit of the Great Work, they also regularly seek to confront their worst fears and better understand the patterns of their own minds. More so than the Mesmerists, the psychoanalysts prefer to approach their subjects in isolation, whether that be in the comfort of the subject's haven or locked in a cell in a secret basement with only the glaring eye of a camera for company; however, even the seemingly casual private conversation a Dragon has with his coterie's Confessor may actually be a methodological examination and therapy session. Sometimes it is best to not let the subject know she is being used as a guinea pig.

Ritual Invocation and Spiritualism

The origins of ritual magic are lost to use, but invocations spoken with the intention to produce an immediate and profound physical result have been part of human culture since the earliest times. Ritual magic differs from religious invocation in that it does not ask a divine being for aid — at least not a being determined to be worthy of worship — but primarily relies on the will of the spell caster for its efficacy. Traditional occult methodology is all over the map, and there is no single accepted curriculum for the practicing sorcerer. One might choose to use the wisdom of Egyptian wizards to raise the dead, while another might rely upon Russian hearth incantations to curse a neighbor or protect herself from a violent storm. Although the Ordo Dracul's ritualists would vehemently deny that most of what they do is essentially sorcery, their defense is really only a matter of semantics. A Dragon might claim that what she is doing when she utters an hour-long formula in a dialect of Sumerian in the middle of an elaborate, hand-drawn circle decorated with Hebraic and Indonesian characters is merely a complex procedure that takes advantage of her understanding of harmonics to produce certain desired vibrations in the blood.

Most observers, however, would probably not be able to differentiate it from traditional magic. To that, the Dragons say so what. It is of no concern to them that the ignorant cannot distinguish between exacting ritualistic procedures devised and performed with even greater result than the celebrated arts of Paracelsus, Agrippa, Dee and Gilles de Leval. The Ordo Dracul is

quick to point out that prior to the development of their own systematic, occult methodologies, most self-proclaimed sorcerers relied entirely on the "hit or miss" approach; when the spell actually produced an effect, it was more due to chance than any actual understanding on the part of the one invoking its power.

Spiritualists differ sharply from the invocationers. Popularized in the mid-19th century, the investigation of phenomena attributed to ghosts, demons and otherworldly creatures is a familiar and useful venue for many Dragons. Slate-writing, fluid emanations, apparitions, levitation, aural phenomena and the manifestation of apports — objects that seem to appear out of thin air — are all subjects of study to Dragon spiritualists. From their point of view, these things are a strong indication that the unseen or spiritual has far more power over the physical than is readily apparent. They consult Ouija boards, hold séances and study all leads that suggest the presence or the influence of spiritual entities. This knowledge allows them to then exert the force of their own spiritual aspect over their physical form, mimicking the wraithly visitors they have observed. This kind of research brings the Dragons to haunted locales, to graveyards and to places where records of the dead can be obtained. Not all spiritualists believe the unseen agents are ghosts, however. Many see them instead as astral beings or a type of creature that has never possessed a physical form. They do what they can to open lines of communication with these beings, hoping to learn more about what they might become upon completion of the Great Work.

Basic Theory

The practical rituals enacted by the Dragons (as opposed to those used for ceremonial purpose) are as thoroughly devised, tested, dissected and reworked as any other type of experimentation. Only the most foolish Dragon would simply intone an incantation from a musty grimoire and trust that it will produce the outcome described in the book. The identity of the original author must first be closely studied to understand how he came to construct the ritual, and for what purpose. The degree of his occult education must be known, as well as his other successes and, just as importantly, his failures. Each word, each letter, each glyph and each instruction has to be giving careful scrutiny to ensure that the Dragon who intends to exploit the ritual is fully aware of all possible dangers.

The language of the ritual must be considered too. Was it penned in 13th century Mandarin for a special reason? Material components must also be subject to inquiry. If a flawed amethyst boiled in wormwood is called for, what are the implications? Once all this preparatory work is completed and all ritual components gathered and properly prepared and arranged, the Dragon recites the proper words and can expect the desired result. With the knowledge gained, the Dragons can use ritual invocations to change themselves in addition to using them for less august purposes, such as fending off intruders and safeguarding their persons.

Spiritualists theorize that the spirits of the dead are meant to travel beyond this realm of existence to another, more appropriate place. While the nature of this "final resting place" is regularly debated, what is agreed upon is that many of these spirits become trapped or otherwise impeded from reaching their final destination. The reasons for this are many, but typically include great emotional distress, tragic circumstances or spirits who in life were particularly ghastly people. By contacting these ghosts, mediums can not only discover the precise manner in which the living become ghosts, but they can also learn how to avoid this fate while at the same time seeking to move beyond undeath. Logic would argue that if life comes first, followed by undeath, then death must be next; but if this is so, how can one transcend? Spiritualist Dragons seek the answer to this apparent quandary by interviewing the dead or whatever the entities are that haunt the physical world yet are not entirely a part of it. They do so using objects and entreaties of significance to the summoned spirit in the hopes that it will serve as a beacon to draw them forth from their shadowy places. With every spirit called and interrogated, the Dragons get one step closer to understanding what comes next for them once they transcend.

Tools of the Trade

Occult sanctums usually cleave closely to the traditional image of the sorcerer's workshop, with sturdy tables, large glyphs and arcane symbols scrawled all over the floor, and a bewildering assortment of herbs, powders, potions, braziers, knives and caged vermin cluttering the chamber. No other methodology demands such a vast array of unusual equipment, and, because many things called for can be extremely hard to procure — the eye of a king murdered by his son, a sphere of pure gold inscribed with the 77 names of a certain demon, a chalice that has been used only once and specifically by a child who has been visited three times by a ghost — Dragon sorcerers spend a good portion of their Requiems attempting to locate and get a hold of the things they need for their next experiment. This can also lead to all sorts of problems with the kine, as obtaining seven mummies, for example, might require robbing museums or universities.

In addition to all the material components, spell-casters absolutely require the proper books, scrolls and other written works that contain the knowledge they hope to utilize and improve upon. In many cases only a few copies of a certain tome exists, necessitating either a laborious copying job or acquisition of the work. Books on traditional sorcery, witchcraft, necromancy, numerology, astrology and demonology are typical, but frequently a sorcerer will find usefulness in manuscripts about herbs,

beasts, gems, swordsmithing and, of course, every conceivable language and system of glyphs ever devised.

Spiritualists are somewhat more modern in that they most often require only a room or other space where they can work their summoning without interference. They often have bells, candles or other objects on hand to better indicate when the spirit called is present. More and more are using modern recording devices to capture the entity on film and digitally, not to prove the spirit was there, but to better analyze the summoning when it is over in order to learn more about the wraithly visitor.

Playing a Ritualist or Spiritualist

Dragon ritualists are best conceived as individuals who are willing to risk all, to push the limits of the unknown in order to not only gain knowledge, but gain the tools they need to make themselves more powerful in every sense. They all have invariably strong wills and stomachs, both of which are required to prepare and carry out the ritual effectively. Most have very strong personalities, and many are filled with more hubris than their theosophical brethren, convinced that by virtue of arts once-lost they can move the Ordo Dracul forward in a way that no other method can. If that takes 10 human sacrifices, if it means they must sacrifice a bit of their sanity to do so, if it means opening some doorway to the beyond in order to learn from the things that lurk there, so be it — such is the price of progress and power.

These characters are some of the most sinister in aspect, for despite all the precautions they take in readying their invocations, they are always aware that nearly anything can happen. They are mentally fortified and little surprises them; in fact, given what some have witnessed in pursuit of the Great Work, even the wrath of the Prince himself is almost inconsequential. This attitude goes a long way towards making others step aside when a sorcerer enters the room and yet also earns them enemies, Kindred who have no desire to suffer the presence of a "witch" any longer. It is worth noting that Dragon ritualists have a keen interest in Crúac and Theban Sorcery. When an opportunity presents itself to gain knowledge of these guarded magics, the ritualists do so without hesitation. They recognize the magics' power and hope to be able to understand how they fit into their own conception of ritualism in order to use them in heretofore untested ways.

Mediums and other spiritualists are far less inimical. True, they have seen things from beyond and speak regularly to these entities, but they rarely seek anything more than information. Only the most foolish spiritualist desires to play master to these beings and force them to do

her bidding. For the most part, spiritualists are relatively social creatures. Frequently, they farm out their services to Kindred and kine for monetary gain and what social and political influence they can earn. Some are outright frauds and perpetrate all sorts of hoaxes in order to profit by them, but most are honest and use this side-work as a way to only improve their own abilities and knowledge of the afterlife. They spend a significant amount of time reading histories, especially personal ones, in order to learn as much as they can about the spirits they speak, for the more they know the more they can ultimately discover.

The Journal of Hezekiah Ainsley

19 November

Soughte to burne ye essential Saltes accord'g to ye antient Liber Occulus, but Saturne is in Trine and am harde putte to it to make goode. That I remain desirous of ye Result I shal seeke again upon return from my traffick in Towne imploy'g ye other Chymical substances suggest'd by D.L., think'g it may prove more efficacious, especialy shoulde they first be infus'd by ye Emanations in ye Wyrm Neste discovr'd by M. on ye Equinox.

23 November

I rejoice ye Result and can now make ye partial Transformat'n in the Subject's subtle Shape, yett awaite with fearfull Clarity ye Change in ye fundamental Acids, such as they are loth to burne in ye manner need'd for ye Pentagram of Borellus call'd for. I am dipos'd to doe as I did on Roodemas, bring'g together ye Primarie Oils and Vitae by ye olde Formula, but R. sayes ye Vibrations will be too weake to unlocke ye Gate and free me to speake the requir'd Words. Must acct. for ye Humours also, soe ye Worke is not spoil'd and tonight's Findings can be putte to greater Purpose before ye nexte Invocat'n.

Transcendental Camps

Every Dragon possesses her own conception of what she will become *next*, upon completing the Great Work. That idea often rests in large part on the religious and philosophical beliefs the individual first held as a mortal, and later after transcending that fragile state for the more enduring one of undeath. Still, to become a Dragon and, moreover, to have gone so far as to have succeeded in mastering the Coils requires a phenomenal degree of intellectual realignment and mental fortitude that forever alters the Dragon's former beliefs.

Despite the many divergent theories that exist about transcendence, most Dragons seem to fall into one of several prominent camps. These are not formal organizations by any means, but they do differentiate the Dragons from one another in terms of how the see transcendence, and what they believe it will mean for themselves and for all Kindred.

Angelics

The Kindred are damned, the foul result of an unintended co-joining of mortal imperfection and immortal perfection. Sometimes referring to themselves as the Nephilim, these Dragons are convinced that they must eliminate the stigmata of spiritual imperfection that is the source of their physical weaknesses and their psychological torment. For them, transcendence is about quite literally becoming semi-divine creatures — angels — albeit not in a strictly biblical sense, but rather in a much more Gnostic one. Few believe they will become the kind of winged beings traditionally celebrated in religious, iconic imagery. Instead, they imagine they will become something certainly beyond their present state, something far more beatific to be sure, but still relatively similar to what they are now in form. In fact, most are convinced that their transformation will only bring them a single step closer to an even greater transcendence. Through further evolution, they can one night achieve the final goal of apotheosis: godhood.

The Angelics are not overly religious, despite their moniker. Their true dedication is to knowledge — *gnosis* — for that is the path to transcendence. Many seek their way by turning to Kabbalist, Gnostic and Sufi writings as well as even more elusive works. Others can find knowledge just as easily in the methodology they prefer, from pseudo-science to spiritualism. The key is to gain as much information as possible, for God is nothing more than a term used to represent the collection of all knowledge. Godhood is not so much about omnipotence, but omniscience.

Devourer Worms

Man's ability to use tools and outsmart animals makes him superior to lower forms of life and justifies his consumption of those lesser creatures. A vampire's ability to use Disciplines and defy death makes her a successful hunter of kine, and therefore worthy to subsist on their lifeblood. To the Devourer Worms, transcendence is nothing less than reaching the pinnacle of the food chain. Once achieved, no other creatures — living, dead or undead — no matter how ancient, intelligent or skilled in the hunt will be able to stand before them. Even the eldest Kindred, able to command all they survey, are naught but mewling prey to the Devourer Worms, predators the likes of which the earth has never seen. The camp takes its name from the mythical figure of Apophis, the great serpent that literally consumed the sun each day, bringing darkness to the world.

These Dragons understand the Beast — the ultimate predator — to be their better half. Its true nobility has been corrupted by lingering vestiges of human weakness, robbing the Kindred of their destiny: it is their goal to

purge themselves of that corruption at all costs. They are not savage fools, however. On the contrary, they respect animal cunning and the understanding of when it is better to flee than fall into a bestial frenzy. Losing themselves to violence, while satisfying in many ways, is viewed as nothing more than chaotic idiocy. Beasts that revel in blood all the time are assured a very brief span of existence. Instead, they hone their perceptions, study their prey as much as possible — this includes the kine and Kindred — and perfect the art of the hunt. One night their need for study will be ended, and they can spend all their time slaking their thirst on whatever they desire.

Arahat

The concept of reincarnation is central to this school, which believes the Embrace is a type of karmic punishment for sins committed in past incarnations, including the most recent mortal one. This Oriental view holds that the Great Work represents the final stage of enlightenment, which can only be accomplished when karma deems that the "time served" by the reincarnated individual is completed. At that point, the Kindred enters nirvana, Golconda or some similar state and becomes a figure not unlike the Buddha. He stands outside the world of the living and undead, unaffected by either, but still of this world, and able to serve as a guide to the unenlightened. At the same time, the Arahat is omniscient and no secret remains hidden from him, not unlike the Angelics' understanding of transcendence. Drawing heavily on Eastern thought, those who anticipate this destiny embrace meditation and mastery over the inner self as much as the physical form.

Naturally, this particular viewpoint is embraced with the most fervor by Dragon theosophists and those of the Oriental Rite, but others also find the Arahat camp a good fit. Even a Dragon whose entire life and later Requiem has been spent engrossed in biomechanical engineering can suddenly recognize how all her work makes more sense when looked at from the Arahats' perspective. Particularly moral and altruistic Dragons are also drawn to this idea of transcendence, especially if they have had any exposure to Eastern teachings. The Arahats should not be confused with pacifists at all, however. Many of them pursue the perfection of their physical form and excel at the martial arts — a significant number of the Axe Sworn ascribe to this camp's beliefs. Achieving pure enlightenment is not about being good, but about becoming the best. How that is interpreted is up to the individual Dragon.

Liches

Animals have no control over the elements that constitute their world, and must obey its whims. The kine, on the other hand, are able to exert significant control over much of the earth, manufacturing things and interfering with natural processes with near impunity. However, despite their vaunted ability to master the world around them, they remain limited in the control they have over the minds and wills of others, relying on substitutes like bribery, blackmail and drugs to coerce their fellow man. The Kindred have no need of these things for their Disciplines permit them to directly exert their will on all creatures and to transform themselves as needed to overcome difficult challenges. The liches are convinced that transcendence is fundamentally about control. By transcending, a lich will finally gain complete and unassailable control over all beings and all things around her, as well as control over her own mind and body. No longer will she need ritual, blood or devices to empower himself and enable her to change all that he wishes to change. The only limitation for a lich will be imagination and desire.

To gain this degree of control — to transcend — requires first that the Dragon understand how things work. It is not enough to know about biology, physics, math, and chemistry, though they are important; the lich must also understand the hidden reality behind the perceivable world. The phenomenal world is but an illusion behind which the noumenal world lays bare the final truths of existence. A lich dedicates her Requiem, her Great Work, to discovering this backstage of reality and learning how to bend it to her purposes. Similar to puppetry, by changing the fabric of reality even in slight ways the lich can affect tremendous change in our illusory world. Those who cleave to this view believe that a number of others, including many mortals, have come close to discovering the truth, even if only glimpsing it briefly. The journals and notes of these various arcanists, visionaries, crackpots and wizards are of particular importance, for if read carefully they can be coaxed to give up their secrets.

Eleusinians

Mortality is an illusion that limits the potential of an individual, constricting her ability to perceive truths and act accordingly. Undeath is a place just beyond mortality in which the façade of life can be seen for what it truly is: a fleeting experience that deludes those too attached to it. Freed of life, the undead are able to act in ways that mortals cannot and gain a wisdom that is impossible to achieve when tied to the mortal shell. Even so, undeath is not true death, and so has its own limits — the hunger, frenzy and susceptibility to sunlight, for starters. This camp, which takes its name from a Greek mystery religion, is sure that only true death will free them from those lingering constraints and weaknesses. However, they also believe that unless they die in a very precise fashion, they will not fully transcend and will be instead be doomed to spend eternity as a mournful spirit forever denied rest. Therefore, the Eleusinians put their energy into discovering the perfect death, the one that will permit them to transcend the Kindred condition and become something better.

Euthanasia and necromancy are part and parcel of the Eleusinians quest. By putting others to death and then summoning back their spirits in order to learn of their fate, the Eleusinians move closer and closer to their goal of transcendence. Some do so using ancient methods — ritual knives, incantations, black candles rotting corpses; others use more modern techniques, causing subjects to flatline for a precise period of time and then reviving them using resuscitative equipment. Sometimes more extreme means of reanimation are necessary, but one way or another, the Dragon is going to find out what happened to the subject at the moment of death. Eleusinians are notoriously in search of new subjects for their work, using any method that works to induce or force kine (and occasionally Kindred) to submit to their research. Of course, in theory the Eleusinian will eventually have learned enough to euthanize herself — if any have done so yet, no one is talking.

Chthonian

There are more things in heaven and earth than man or Kindred have dreamed of, even when in the throes of the most feverish or hallucinogenic nightmares. Beyond the realm of the world we know, beyond this plane of existence or perhaps far out on the fringes of the universe, are *things*, alien entities that are of such a manner that to even gaze upon them, assuming that is even conceivable, would shatter the mind of all but the most iron-willed witness. Some of these beings are so dire that not only do they defy rational description, but to utter a single syllable of just one of their thousand names will render the speaker unconscious and can draw the thing's attention — something only the truly mad would welcome. The Chthonians insist that upon transcending undeath they will join these cosmic horrors in whatever Luciferian realm they dwell. When that happens, the concerns of Kindred and kine will no longer be theirs, for to the *things* beyond, the accumulated bulk of humanity is as a nest of ants to a mammoth — utterly beyond their notice.

The Chthonians spend much of their time poring over dark passages in certain profane texts that provide hints and clues as to the nature of these *things*. What is clear is that they possess intellects too alien for all but the simplest guesses as to their real purpose. So far, very little else is known, so the Chthonic Dragons consume their Requiems delving into what hoary secrets they can gain. They also dabble in drawing the attention of the *things* in the hope that they can discover more about what they will become when the Great Work is completed, using living and unliving sacrifices to bait these entities. A Master of the Sanguine Terror in Providence supposedly vanished one night after attempting to summon something he referred to as Ool Gaharsht, leaving behind a scene of such ghastliness that his haven was put to the torch by the Prince in order that no other Kindred attempt to recreate his work again. Chthonians accept such risks, however. They are

convinced of their destiny and find it impossible to not learn as much about it as they can.

In addition to these transcendental camps, there are a host of other suppositions bandied about by the Ordo Dracul. Not every Dragon cleaves to a particular camp, however. Many prefer to take a more agnostic approach. They believe that by transcending undeath they will simply improve their lot, and so they pursue that goal with all the vigor of their more opinionated peers. For the most part, they are less concerned with what they will actually become when they have succeeded. In their eyes, escaping damnation is paramount — the details are of secondary concern.

Example Factions

The following factions are specific examples of the ways in which mystic philosophizing and fanaticism have created extreme sub-cultures within the Ordo Dracul. The Sworn of the Ladder push the covenant's identity as a secret society to the limit, while the Impaled demonstrate how the Order's exaltation of its founding father can affect the nightly Requiem of more common members. The Kindred of these factions are undeniably Dragons, but are also somehow distinct within the ranks of the Order.

It's likely that the Ordo Dracul has many other unique internal factions like these in cities all across the globe. The social and philosophical trends of the hidden Kindred do not spread from domain to domain like mortal memes, so vampire sub-cultures have not become homogenized as mortal sub-cultures have. Local customs and practices may develop for decades without external influences. As a result, local interpretations of common covenant ideas are as distinctly slanted and peculiar as any remote dialect or local legend. Most domains probably do not have representatives of these specific factions dwelling within their borders, though they may have Dragons from factions similar to — or splintered from — these factions. Even in domains with large Dragon populations, a faction might consist of a mere handful of participating vampires. If its members are all Dragons but are unlike the other Dragons of the domain, it can be reasonably called a faction. A faction might be nothing more than a single coterie, or it might be made up of Kindred from many different coteries.

Don't be fooled by the nature of these descriptions. Though the Sworn of the Ladder is said to organize itself into three tiers of membership, there are probably very few domains wherein the full extent of that organization is put to use. In some cities, the three tiers of membership may be populated by just three vampires. In most cities, there are no Sworn of the Ladder at all.

The Impaled

One remarkable faction of the Ordo Dracul has grown out of an almost serpentine tangle of philosophical extremism and historical idolatry. The sub-culture of the Dragons that calls itself the Impaled has coiled the Dracula legend back onto itself with a gruesome ceremony of torture and exaltation, cruelty and remorse, that casts the followers of Dracula as both tyrant and subject, monster and victim. In the eyes of the Order, the rite of the Impaled feeds the dragon its own tail.

The Impaled revere and revile Dracula's legendary role as the Impaler. Vlad truly was a monster in life, but what modern Kindred can truly say what motivated his heinous cruelty? Was the Impaler insane or inspired? What drove him to spear and raise up thousands of victims? Perhaps more importantly, what *kept* pushing him to torture and abuse? What did the Son of the Dragon get out of his own horrific acts?

At the same time, the Impaled revere and regret Dracula's victims. Those who were slaughtered by his hand or at his order had a kind of uniquely intimate relationship with the Impaler. They were the prized prisoners who looked down on him from above, they were the ones whose blood soaked his bread, they were the souls that sealed his fate. What insights, both horrible and unimaginable, must the slow anguish of the spear bring on?

The Impaled use the strengths and weaknesses of their undead bodies to experience both perspectives of Dracula's atrocities. They subject themselves to his own torture to better understand him — and themselves. In the process, the Impaled believe they can further Dracula's later work by twisting the Curse to a unique end. The Impaled experience that which Dracula never experienced himself: the terror of being impaled.

History of the Impaled

The origin of the so-called Movement of the Impaled (as it was called in the 19th century) is sketchy and somewhat circumstantial. Though the faction's philosophical beginnings seem to have grown from the eastern European

lands that once held Dracula himself, the fad of physical mutilation that gave the faction substance in numbers grew out of Scandinavia and northern Europe. The Impaled are an intertwining of these two concepts, introduced as they were through the experiments of Dragon Academies and the efforts of Kindred in search of crucibles.

The philosophical roots of the faction began as a purely spiritual subject for meditation among the Dragons of Prague and Bucharest. The questions of Dracula's relationships to his victims and the unknowable and unique experiences of his sins and their pains was used by some mentors in eastern Europe to inspire discussions with students. Originally, the Impaled was a symbolic title — high-minded Dragon mentors pretentiously suggested that students should "run themselves through with the difficult admissions and ugly questions of our past, so as to raise themselves up to a new perspective." The appeal of this abstract philosophy and overwrought rhetorical effort was only strong enough the keep the idea of the Impaled alive until it met the self-mutilation rituals of the Circle of the Crone and some small Dragon Academies in Scandinavian cities.

Acolytes in northern Europe had been torturing their own deathless bodies in numerous grotesque rituals for centuries when the concepts of the Impaled were introduced into the mix in the 1830s. The concept of exploring multiple torturer-victim perspectives lent a new intellectual credence to the physical experimentation of the Acolyte-inspired "tests of the body." More accurately, the Circle's tradition of taxing physical rituals inspired some of the philosophers to take action. Though other ceremonies drawing the actions of Dracula and the philosophy of later Dragons were no doubt performed earlier throughout the region, the first covenant-hosted Rite of Impaling was performed in Germany in 1840 with fewer than six Kindred said to have participated.

Following the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* novel and its gradual expansion across the English-speaking world, interest in the Impaled grew. Throughout the 20th century, more and more Kindred came to idolize Dracula as (often erroneous) word of his legend spread well beyond the membership of the Ordo Dracul. In the latter half of the 20th century, as body modification became more visible and more popular among mortals of Westernized nations, so did the Impaled become more appealing to the recently Damned.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as young vampires brought aspects of the punk and goth scenes into the faction, the focus of the Impaled began to shift from one of insight through multiple perspectives and unnatural anguish to one of personal strength through tribulation. In many domains, the Victorian enlightenment sought through the subjugation of the self by last night's Impaled has been replaced by a desire to toughen of the soul and the body through the exploration of the flesh. In practice, as the faction's newcomers interact with its immortal elders, the philosophy of the Impaled is expanding more than transforming.

The Rite of Impaling

The so-called Rite of Impaling is brutally simple and largely open to interpretation. The Impaled of no two domains perform the ceremony in exactly the same way, and most Impaled Dragons feel little pressure to perform the Rite the same way twice in a row.

If possible, all the local Impaled Kindred are brought together to perform the Impaling Rite — in most domains, the faction's members are few enough that gathering them together for the key ceremony is not so difficult. The Kindred then spear themselves on lances, spikes, spears or other instruments capable of making it through the body. Traditionally, one of the Impaled fulfills the role of "The Impaler" and spears his fellows on long wooden poles, to mimic the work of the living Dracula as closely as possible. These poles are driven through the torso of the Impaled and are carefully placed to keep the participant's body in place and out of torpor. The Impaled are then left to suffer, often in darkness but seldom alone, until torpor or the Beast takes hold.

Impaling Rites are performed indoors or underground, so that participants may be left for several nights of meditation, suffering and bleeding. Because sufficient height isn't always available to perform the ceremony in a manner that duplicates Dracula's towering "forests of the dead," participants are just as likely to be speared to walls as floors. The participants should be unable to touch the floor or remove themselves from their torturous position.

Modern Impaling Rites explore many variations on the traditional ceremony. Some groups of Impaled require participants to skewer themselves, pulling themselves down the length of their own spikes until it has passed completely through their bodies. More flexible collections of Impaled Dragons allow any form of physical torture, including hanging, stretching, scourging and flaying, in place of the traditional impaling.

Whatever the particulars, the experience of the Impaling Rite is always inhuman, monstrous and horrific. The Impaled are expected to avoid communication with others while performing the Rite. Feeding is forbidden while the Rite is being performed; a Kindred who must be brought blood to avoid (or end) frenzy must end his impaling afterward. Though the Impaled may shame such a vampire, she may well be allowed to participate again in the future. The Rite of Impaling isn't meant to be easy. The goal of the Impaled is to upset themselves — to emulate the Impaler enough to terrify themselves as his victims must have been terrified. Some Kindred have the wherewithal to endure several nights of the Rite, only to later look out on the writhing, hanging forms of his wounded and agonized

kin struggling to slide their bodies down their spikes and surrender to their fears.

Game Mechanics and the Impaling

The Rite of Impaling doesn't confer any supernatural power on its practitioners, but it is a terrifically gruesome way to frame other elements of game mechanics. The Kindred of the Impaled enjoy the kind of fellowship that comes from shared agony, so the Rite of Impaling is a great way to convince an Impaled Dragon to take a character on as a student or share knowledge of a Discipline. The Impaled have, through their hours suffering on the spike, devised a few of their own Devotions as well (see page 200). At the Storyteller's discretion, participation in the Rite of Impaling may earn a character a discount on the experience point cost of such a Devotion. In some domains, the Rite may also serve as a method of chrysalis, for learning new Coils.

The pain and gradual starvation brought on by the Rite taxes the will of every participant. Some resist the Beast as best they can, but others hang on their spear until the Beast arrives. Some among the Impaled learn how to "ride the wave" through the Rite of Impaling. The Coil of the Beast is, not surprisingly, the Coil most often associated with the Rite of Impaling.

The Beast on the Spike

Storytellers who want to test the mettle of a character participating in the Rite of Impaling — perhaps to determine if the character will be eligible for an experience point discount when learning an Impaled Devotion — can use an extended Resolve + Composure action to represent the character's time on the spike. This roll can represent a character attempting to control the Beast and avoid frenzy or a character attempting to goad the Beast and ride the wave (see p. 181 of **Vampire: The Requiem**). If this action is being used to represent part of chrysalis or the learning process, it's a good idea to have this action take place between chapters (game sessions) or as part of a sort of "time-lapse montage" illustrating the characters nights on the spear. Each roll should represent a long, drawn-out period of willful control — probably one night. The total number of successes necessary must be determined by the Storyteller on a case-by-case basis, though five successes for every one experience point saved is a reasonable estimate. Should the character ever fail a roll during this extended action, however, his concentration and control is lost and he cannot start again. (Thus, in many Impaled circles, the last vampire to come down from the spike earns a reputation for toughness and self-control.)

Humanity and the Spike

No truly sane creature could subject itself to the Rite of Impaling. The experience is truly inhumane. The trauma of the Rite should tax the mores of both the torturer and the victim. Because the Impaled play both of these roles, they are subject to degeneration or derangement rolls at the discretion of the Storyteller. Start with three dice for the roll, modified by the character's Virtue, Vice and individual motives and circumstances as appropriate. Characters of Humanity 4 or less might not be required to make a degeneration roll, as the Storyteller sees fit, but may still have to make a derangement roll after facing prolonged torture at one's own hands.

Kindred from the ranks of the Impaled are prone to suffering the delusional obsession derangement (see p. 189 of **Vampire: The Requiem**). The overwhelming emotional and physical pain of the Impaling Rite leads many participants to an emphatic and irrational belief that the experience changes vampires in ways it simply doesn't. Participants may believe themselves to be temporarily invincible or strong, for example. Some claim to converse with Dracula while on the spike, while others believe their ceremonial spike to contain a portion of their soul. The specifics of individual derangements are many and sundry, but common threads (supernatural durability, the presence of Dracula, a spiritual bond to the spike) appear with some frequency among the Impaled.

Storyteller's Option: Humanity and Experience Points

One simple way to represent the trade-off Impaled characters make between personal insight and monstrous degeneration is to allow participants in the Rite of Impaling to exchange a dot of Humanity for experience points, as described on p. 93 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. This option makes both the cost and the benefit of the Impaling much more severe, but by subtracting the random factor it presents players with a more tempting and difficult choice.

When using the option, consider how you'll limit its application. How many nights must a character spend on the spike to exchange Humanity for experience points? One night per dot of Humanity is a fair estimate. In this case, only characters with four or more dots in Humanity should be able to gain any insight from the Impaling. Likewise, once a character has sacrificed a Humanity dot for experience, he should never be able to sacrifice that dot for experience again — using any method — even if new Humanity dots are purchased with experience in the meantime.

Damage and Blood

For the Rite of Impaling to have any meaning to the participating Damned, it must be an excruciating experience. The damage done by the ritual spike isn't as random as an attack in the heat of a fight; it's precise, severe and

prolonged. Any character that participates in the Rite must therefore accept the damage that is dealt as part of the ritual: mark all but the character's right-most two Health boxes with lethal damage, so that he is suffering a –1 wound penalty. (Characters with the Iron Stamina Merit or some other wound penalty-countering trait get good use of it here.)

Impaled characters cannot heal this damage until the spike is removed. Traditionally, Impaled Kindred remain on the spike until they're overtaken by Wassail or fear (possibly of their fellow Impaled).

Impaled Dragons

Nickname: Spears

Covenant: Though the Impaled are a faction unique to the Ordo Dracul, they have a number of connections to other covenants that many Kindred consider unusual, not only because of the faction's extreme practices but because of the number of vampires that, at one time or another, have experimented with those practices. It's a historical peculiarity that the Impaled has been, in the European and North American domains where its membership roster has gone uninterrupted over several decades, a popular Dragon faction for the Kindred of other secular covenants to get involved with.

Invictus and Carthian vampires who maintain simultaneous membership in the Ordo Dracul are more common than dedicated Impaled Dragons in several domains. In a way, this makes sense because even though the philosophical origin of the Impaled is tied to the hideous practices of a 15th century Wallachian prince, its emotional territory has expanded beyond the core dogma of the Dragons. Some vampires think of themselves as members of a secret society of the Impaled in their domain, rather than as Dragons. The Impaled offers members of these sorts some of the personal advantages of membership in a gloriously bloody, introspective cult — camaraderie, ceremony, mystic power — without the kind of religious devotion the Circle of the Crone demands. In some domains, depending on the methods of the mentors among the Impaled, membership even affords limited access to knowledge of the Coils of the Dragon and the resources of the Order without the Victorian stylings of a secret gentleman's club. That is, the Impaled can sometimes be seen as an extreme faction of fringe Dragons gathered from less arcane covenants.

The Impaled, as mentioned before, are thought to be a direct result of interactions between the Circle of the Crone and the Ordo Dracul. Some Kindred wonder if the faction isn't simply descended from the idea that Dracula sampled the Acolyte faith or if the philosophy of the Impaled comes directly from Dragons originally of the Circle. Certainly the Impaled in any domain are likely to attract converts from the Circle and, perhaps more likely, noncommittal vampires with a degree of involvement in both covenants.

Contrary to the expectations of many Dragons, the Impaled are not universally reviled by the Sanctified as a pagan display of secular ancestor worship or blood-witchery. Rather, by avoiding direct associations with the tests of the flesh encouraged by Acolytes, the rites of the Impaled can be seen as secular festivals of uniquely vampiric bloodletting for the sake of personal enlightenment and revelation. No Kindred can participate in a ceremony of the Impaled and continue to deny the truths of his monstrous nature. The Impaled teach Kindred that what would terrify, torture and kill a mortal can provoke epiphanies in the Damned which no mortal has a chance to survive. Thus, the Sanctified of a few domains encourage young Kindred to participate in an Impaled ceremony, and sample the methods of other philosophies, before completely devoting themselves to the Church of Longinus.

Appearance: The stereotypical image of the Impaled Dragon is that of a scarred and pierced extremist. Many Impaled were

etched with tattoos and ritual scars in life, run through with iron bolts and shiny metal rings before the Curse froze the canvas of their flesh in a single state. The stubborn resilience of undead flesh is both a benefit and a maddening curse to such creatures — their dead bodies endure experiences previously impossible to survive while refusing to be reshaped without a considerable exertion of the will.

Thus, some among the Impaled put forth the effort to make a single grotesque and drastic modification to their bodies after the Embrace, often following a great deal of experimentation. Some pierce their guts with foot-long metal studs or run delicate silvery rings through their throats. In some European chapters, the Impaled insert hollow spacer tubes into their bellies — like a tunnel right through the vampire — through which lances can be slid during impaling ceremonies. Kindred authorities may well consider some such physical displays to be breaches of the Masquerade, however, so Impaled Dragons must find a way to balance discretion with their displays.

Despite the stereotypes, plenty of Kindred among the Impaled do not indulge in scarification, tattooing or less drastic body manipulation. To those vampires for whom the Impaling is foremost a spiritual pursuit or a philosophical challenge, the focus in not where the spike sticks out from the body, but where it lays within. Such Kindred internalize the experience of the impaling and may have no interest at all in broadcasting their status as Impaled to others. Like the yuppie businessman who joins an underground, after-hours fight club to feel alive, these vampires appear "ordinary" outside of their gatherings.

Haven: The havens of the Impaled are as varied as the faction's individual members. Most of the Impaled do not define themselves solely by their participation in faction rituals. Their havens are more likely to be determined by other factors of the Requiem, like any other Kindred.

Those Dragons for whom the work of the Spears is a nightly facet of the Requiem, however, may keep havens that can also serve as sites for Impaling rituals. Such locations must be able to accommodate a handful or more vampires, possibly for several consecutive nights, without risk of intrusion or sunlight. Sunless underground chambers with high ceilings, such as empty warehouses and abandoned indoor pools, are prized for such uses. Areas with collections of smaller spaces, such as public showers or rows of private storage lockers, are also useful.

Background: For the most part, the Impaled do not recruit members. Word of Impaled rituals spreads as it does among the mouths of the Damned and those who wish to participate must follow that word back to the Impaled to participate. The Impaled, in general, are more interested in the emotional and philosophical qualities that attract someone to the faction — what does the vampire hope to get out of the Impaled rites?

Some Kindred come to the Spears looking for spiritual or philosophical insight through pain and meditation. By enduring a horrific torture that no living person could survive, some vampires believe they can get a better understanding of what their undead body truly *feels* like, what its limits are. Some pursue this sensual proximity to death to make contact with the Beast and, in the process, come to better understand it.

Other Kindred have more emotional reasons for enduring the Impaled rites. These monsters come to resolve matters within themselves — or absolve themselves of past matters — rather than to spark new changes in themselves. For some, the Impaling is a gruesome apology to the victims of the Impaler (or to God) for the sins of the covenant's father. The torture of the spike is therefore an almost biblical sentencing, an excruciating torture for an excruciating torture. Other Kindred undergo the Impaling as a kind of uniquely Dragon flagellation in recompense for their own sins. The trauma of the ritual is a cleansing renewal for some, who imagine themselves to be killed on each spike and resurrected by the Curse afterward, and an unforgettable reminder for others, who can always summon up the terrible memory of their nights on the spike to guide their future moral choices.

Organization: The Impaled have essentially no overarching hierarchy within the covenant as an external body. The Impaled of each domain organize slightly differently, depending on the needs of the Kindred in the local chapter. In practice, the Impaled often operate like a kind of solemn or reveling social club in members collaborate to put on a good show for all attendees. One's age, both as a Kindred and as an Impaled Dragon, is to be respected, though in some circles the number Impaling ceremonies endured is considered more important.

Not all the participants at an Impaling are necessarily considered Impaled. Many are simply guests, especially first-timers. To the dramatic and extreme minds of the Impaled, enduring a few nights of torment and anguish is merely dabbling. To truly be counted among the Impaled, the time spent upon the spike should lead to meditations and exercise that fill the nights between ceremonies as well. For the most hard-core of the Impaled, the Requiem becomes a collection of two kinds of nights: those spent on the spike and those leading up to the spike. Not all the Impaled are so extreme, but the spectrum of extremism may be the only organizational tool the faction really recognizes.

Concepts: Body-modification artist, draculista, guilt-ridden Dracula apologist, pagan flagellant, performance artist, punk-goth druid, shamanistic sadomasochist, twisted trauma surgeon, war re-enactor.

Quote: *"You're not being broken, you're being added to. The pain is a new part of yourself. You're more now."*

The roots of the Locust-Sworn lie with Dracula's first Kindred companion, his offspring Mara. Consumed by

hatred for humanity even before her transformation, as a vampire she was truly a monster. Mercy and kindness were not merely matters of indifference to her; she had an actual repugnance for anything that might be deemed moral, just or righteous.

During her Requiem, she acquired a number of like-minded followers whose essential philosophy was that they could best transcend God's curse by spiting Him through unrepentant malice. Unlike Anoushka, who hoped for forgiveness through right action, Mara and her coterie felt that forgiveness was beyond their reach and, in any event, a worthless goal. The removal of physical impediments was desirable, but some intangible blessing from the Lord? Mara found even the idea of such a thing insulting.

The Sworn of the Locust

At their inception, the Oath of the Locust had little more sophistication than the modern thugs of Belial's Brood — with the added flaw of a leader whose madness grew year by year and, eventually, night by night. The Locusts survived as a secret organization within the Ordo Dracul, mainly on the basis of Mara's authority, lineage and force of personality. Her demise sent them into slow decay, which was only arrested by another forceful personality — one who took the Locusts in an entirely new and ultimately more successful direction.

That new leader was Ione Kepke, a member of the Romanian intelligentsia Embraced for his ties to a now long-forgotten, insurrectionist underground. While he never sparked a political revolution while alive, he can be credited with a philosophical revolution after his death.

Kepke was an atheist and stubbornly remained one in his Requiem. When he became aware of the local Locust clique, he demanded admission on threat of revealing them and then, by dint of sheer logical debate, persuaded them that either God did not exist or that, if He did exist, He was irrelevant to life on Earth and to the Kindred in particular. The goal of the Locusts, then, was no longer to rail against a foe that was either omnipotent or non-existent. Their goal was to escape the snares and toils of the Kindred condition by any means necessary. Instead of acting in deliberate opposition to the morality of the Church and mortals, they would become amoral and perform any action — good, evil or indifferent — that would exalt them personally and improve their individual state.

Kepke had his Romanian colleagues in thrall. With their support, he became Mystery-Sworn and, eventually, a local Guardian. He could have wound up as Kogaion, had not the local Invictus allied with the Circle of the Crone to smash the power of the Ordo Dracul and exile its members. To this day, Ione Kepke's home city lies under orders to stake and exterminate any who espouse Dragon philosophy — which, in the locals' understanding, means something much more like Kepke's philosophy than the mainstream Ordo tenets.

The exile that seemed Ione's downfall was, in fact, the salvation of the Oath of the Locust. Spreading out as Dragon refugees, his followers made contacts with old-style Locusts in other cities. Sometimes they were rebuffed, and sometimes they reinvigorated the organization — just as Ione had originally revitalized his Locust band. But it was one of Kepke's followers, who fled as far as Italy, and provided the Locusts with what they'd need for the next phase of their growth.

The Locust Oath

I pledge to set aside all previous loyalties and oaths should they conflict with my loyalty to my Locust brethren, our secrets and our ways. I further pledge to set aside those previous bonds when they defy my true will, my ambitions and the perfection of self as I define it.

I pledge to blanch at no deed of darkness, nor sneer at any gift of aid or courage, so long as they are the actions of an individual's sole judgment, and not craven submissions to a higher power either present or implicit.

I swear to seek myself and to set my needs and goals above all others, with the aid and full support of my fellow Knights of the Locust. I swear to aid them, my brethren, in any and all ways concurrent with my personal quest.

I make this oath, not before some farcical notion of divinity, not upon a personal "honor," which is in truth only a personal shackle defined by society. Instead, I swear on the only thing truly mine, truly inviolate, truly sacred above all else. I swear upon myself.

That follower (whose name comes to the present night only as *L'anguilla* or 'the Eel') administered the Oath of the Locust to a previously unsworn and unimpressive neonate named Lucina Caracciola. Lucina went on to

create the Way of the Locust, a set of esoteric processes whose results indicated that the Locusts were in fact *succeeding* at getting beyond the typical limitations of the Kindred — and that the key to freedom lay not in the pursuit of humanity, but in its theft.

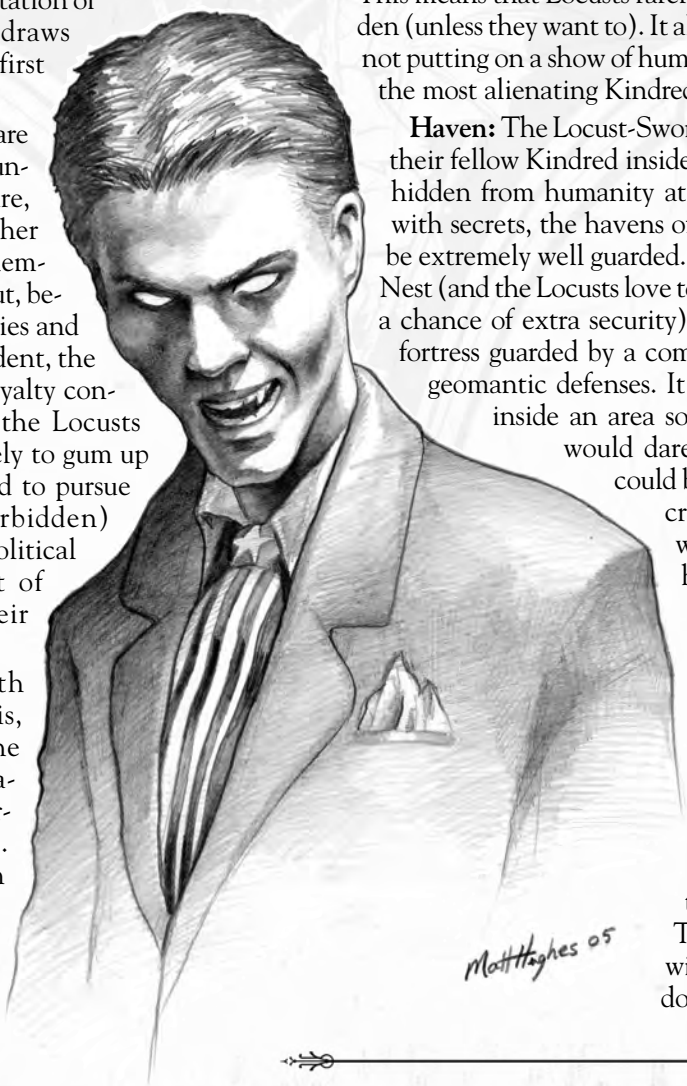
With the Way as an inducement, the Locusts could recruit more selectively, and bring higher quality Dragons into their orbit. Ione Kepke's philosophy that God did not matter made the Locusts appealing to a small circle of European thinkers. Lucina Caracciola's occult powers made it appealing world-wide.

Nickname: Locusts

Position Within the Covenant: The Oath of the Locust is secret, administered in secret and kept secret under pain of Final Death. (Given the proclivities of the Locusts, it's often under pain of Amaranth.)

They're secret for good reason: The other Oathbound consider it treachery to take any pledge that claims precedence over Dracula's three Dragon-Tongue oaths.

Were it not for that provision, however, the Locust oath, as written, might actually be tolerated within the Ordo Dracul. After all, the Dragons' central goals are hardly incompatible with the Order's tenets: escape from Kindred limitations and exultation of the self are exactly what draws many to the Order in the first place.



It's not like the Locusts are tampering with the smooth running of the Order, either. Sure, they look out for one another the way Freemasons and members of Skull and Bones do, but, between coterie ties and clan ties and the bonds of teacher and student, the Order isn't exactly free of loyalty conflicts. If anything, joining the Locusts makes an individual *less* likely to gum up the works. The Locusts tend to pursue their own (admittedly forbidden) esoterica at the expense of political finagling and the pursuit of blackmail material on their Covenant fellows.

The trouble is not with what the Locusts are (that is, rational egotists) or with the larger goals of the organization (facilitating the personal goals of its members). The biggest problem is with what they *do*. While the Ordo Dracul isn't as obsessively disgusted with diablerie as (say) the Lancea Sanctum, that doesn't mean it's acceptable or that the Order is comfortable around Kindred who think it's the golden road to unlimited freedom.

It varies from domain to domain, but most regional Parliaments of the Mystery-Sworn have, unfortunately, had to legislate about diablerie. Most chapters of the Order have some punishment on the books for the crime of Amaranth. Punishments range from blood-bonds to Final Death to the ironic punishment of the diablerist being diablerized.

Many Academies make exceptions that permit the diablerie of soul-sellers, as proscribed in *Rites of the Dragon*, but the revulsion most Kindred feel for the crime is so great that a few Academies have actually overturned the *Rites* and declared that diablerie is *never* permissible. The pull of the Third Tradition is just that strong.

Into this climate come the Locust Knights, who not only violate the Third Tradition, but who have put great effort into finding new ways to violate it. That's why they're so secretive.

Appearance: While the Locusts recruit from a wide variety of Ordo Dracul members, they generally make selections based on power, prominence and ruthlessness. This means that Locusts rarely look shabby or downtrodden (unless they want to). It also means that when they're not putting on a show of humanity, they are often among the most alienating Kindred in the Order.

Haven: The Locust-Sworn are a society, hidden from their fellow Kindred inside the Ordo Dracul, which is hidden from humanity at large. Being double-dosed with secrets, the havens of the Locust-Sworn tend to be extremely well guarded. If it's not an actual Wyrm's Nest (and the Locusts love to recruit Guardians if there's a chance of extra security), it may be a virtual urban fortress guarded by a combination of high-tech and geomantic defenses. It could be a secret building inside an area so polluted that few mortals would dare go inside. Alternately, it could be a place of tremendous secrecy, perhaps the bolt-hole where the Locust conducts her experiments separate and distant from her more typical haven of repose.

Background: The Locust-Sworn are very careful about recruiting. Individuals whom an outsider would peg as obvious candidates for an evil conspiracy are actually unattractive to the Locusts. They don't want a badass with no self-control, and they don't want a puling brawler

who rails against morality as if she's secretly hoping it will punch her down and prove it exists. They are looking for Kindred who are actively amoral — those who have transcended typical philosophies of right and wrong, not those who embrace 'wrong' to avenge themselves on some distant creator-God.

Rather than a hot, angry flame, they seek those whose souls are cold, detached and dead. That said, there are a number of converts from the Oath of the Axe, simply because they're the element of the Order most likely to commit diablerie (in the heat of battle, presumably). That addiction is a cause for concern, but the Locusts also believe that there is nothing like Amaranth to viscerally teach the Kindred that there is no inherent value in the soul and that it is ultimately a consumable commodity just like blood, money or anything else. When that sense of the inherent worth of each individual human falls away, the Locusts feel a candidate is ready to be shown something greater than morality, something greater than being a monster cursed by God — something greater even than goodness.

This same detachment often emerges among the Sworn of the Dying Light, where constant gazing into the twisted realms of occult thought can do much to snap a mind's connection to instinctive repugnance for evil deeds (or, in the case of the Kindred, instinctive attraction) just as it nullifies the desire to be kind or gentle or even right.

The Sworn of the Mysteries are the most resistant to the Oath of the Locust, often because the glad-handing and favor-swapping involved in getting that oath requires engagement, drive and desire. Those things are at odds with the distance, detachment and self-absorption required to advance along the Locust path. There are some Mystery-Sworn who have made the pledge, but, by and large, they were ones who got into the Mysteries through hypocrisy, betrayal and deceit in the first place.

Many in the Locust organization who follow the Paths of Fate make a point of seeking out those with the Devil as their Fate Card. They find that such individuals often make excellent Locust Knights.

Organization: There are no formal ranks among the Locust Knights. Theoretically, they're all equal. In practice, the Order's knee-jerk habit of deference to the more educated is tough to break. Even among those who dive headfirst into the Locust idea that all individuals are equal (with the self more equal than others) wind up making concessions to those Locusts who know the Way and can teach it.

It takes three Locusts in agreement to induct a new member. The exception is when a city has fewer than three Locusts, in which case any Locust can administer the Oath to any member of the Ordo Dracul. (There are rumors about Locusts who start sharing with Acolytes or even Carthians, but such open-ness is exceptionally rare and frowned upon by the Order. Often, it's lethally punished.)

Unlike most conspiracies, the Locusts have no passwords, codes, catchphrases, secret handshakes or other means by which they can find or identify each other. When dealing with Kindred who can compel truthfulness, read minds or move unseen, even those techniques are insufficient to protect a secret. The only sure way to be sure another Kindred is a fellow Locust is to quiz her about the specifics of the Way. If she uses vocabulary specialized to that highly esoteric field of study — phrases like "the bliss of tandem enlacement" or "climbing the tower of the ineffable core" are a good indication, but not conclusive when taken out of context — it's a good chance she's taken the Oath. But, of course, even inquiring about the Way of the Locust can reveal an unhealthy interest in the forbidden Oath — or run the risk of providing clues to the uninitiated.

Concepts: Amnesiac who apparently joined before the torpor from which she has recently awakened, deep-cover spy from the Dying Light, Detached mystic scientist, diablerie addict barely under control, Kogaion who achieved it all and found it empty, mortal Satanist who blackmailed for the Embrace and now has more than she bargained for, neonate with unique expertise dragged in for sheer necessity, obsessed revenger who needs the Way to get at his enemy, shallow but power-mad politician interested solely in mystic might, sociopath who was always looking for a way to molest more than the body.

Quote: *Yes, it is bliss to kill a soul. Why should we feel guilt to take this pleasure once, or twice, or as often as we like? Does not the god you once ignorantly adored consume thousands or more every night and day?*

The Sworn of the Ladder

Just as Mara drew together a group of followers who felt that she was on the true path to transcendence, so did Anoushka. But where the Locusts felt that their salvation lay in devouring, in subjugating all to their self-will, the Sworn of the Ladder felt they could only progress by rising above — by subjugating themselves to the needs of all others. Through selfless acts and virtuous thoughts, the Ladder-Sworn hope to earn the forgiveness of God

and escape His curse of vampirism. It is their belief that even the Damned can change, if they are willing to do the hard work of abnegating their selfish desires and the vile cravings of the Beast.

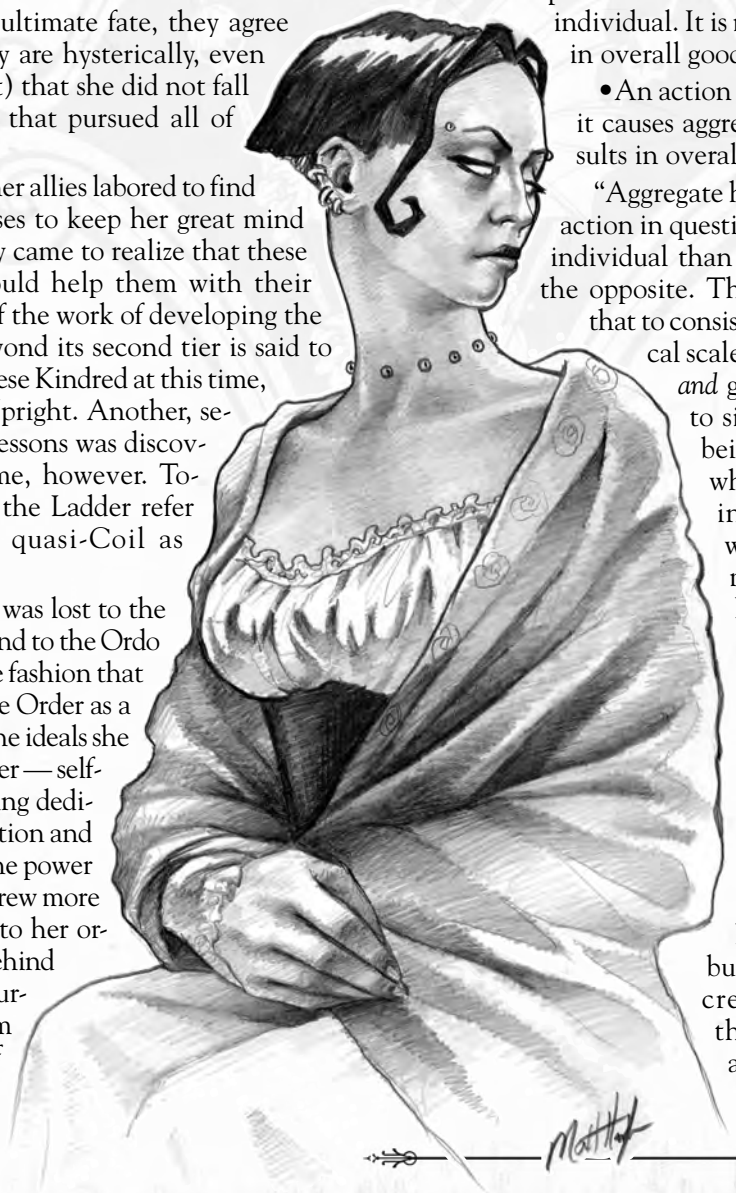
The history of the Ladder begins with Anoushka, the first to take the Oath of the Dying Light. It did not take long (as vampires measure time) for her to become aware of the unreason that constantly gnawed at her mind. She marshaled all her considerable mental discipline and turned it towards resisting and overcoming her inner savagery. But she couldn't do it alone.

As the first of the Dying Light, she had drawn others like her into her orbit: Kindred experts in occult lore, Kindred who were Embraced despite resistance, and Kindred who longed for the (relative) purity they'd had as mortals. She confessed to her closest advisors that she needed their help to remain the woman they knew. In response, her advisors swore an oath to elevate her above her curse — or destroy her if she was ultimately overwhelmed.

The secret history of the Ladder insists that it never came to that. While no Ladder documents record the truth of Anoushka's ultimate fate, they agree (some would say they are hysterically, even suspiciously, insistent) that she did not fall prey to the insanity that pursued all of Dracula's progeny.

As Anoushka and her allies labored to find strategies and exercises to keep her great mind and spirit intact, they came to realize that these same techniques would help them with their lesser curses. Much of the work of developing the Coil of the Beast beyond its second tier is said to have been done by these Kindred at this time, at least among the Upright. Another, secret series of mystic lessons was discovered at the same time, however. Tonight, the Sworn of the Ladder refer to this apocryphal quasi-Coil as Anoushka's Ladder.

In time, Anoushka was lost to the Sworn of the Ladder and to the Ordo Dracul — lost in some fashion that remains obscure to the Order as a whole to this night. The ideals she had embodied, however — self-sacrifice, an unflinching dedication to righteous action and a surpassing faith in the power of God to forgive — drew more and more Dragons into her orbit even as the ideas behind the Ladder drifted further and further from the core philosophy of the Ordo Dracul.



Nickname: The Upright

Within the Covenant: Like the Sworn of the Locust, the Sworn of the Ladder are a secret inside the Ordo Dracul. While there is no central text for the Upright as there is for the Locusts, there is still no doubt that most who join are betraying the Ordo Dracul — perhaps in a more profound way than the Locusts ever could. The reason for this is the ethical code that has, over the years, evolved within the Ladder. Being obsessed with measurement, the Upright within the Order have striven to find a way to measure an individual's moral quality. In the same way that the Paths of Fate can illustrate the parameters of an individual's personality, the Ladder has found psychological and philosophical methods of charting ethical development (though not, alas, the occult "comprehension-at-a-glance" they desire).

The Upright measure exactly how good they are being based on the following two precepts:

- An action or deliberate inaction is immoral if it is intended to cause aggregate harm or if it can reasonably be expected to cause aggregate harm to a thinking individual. It is moral if it is intended to result in overall good to thinking individuals.
- An action or deliberate inaction is bad if it causes aggregate harm. It is good if it results in overall good.

"Aggregate harm" means that, overall, the action in question has more bad effects for an individual than good, with "overall good" as the opposite. The Ladder-Sworn have found that to consistently chart well on their ethical scale, a person must be both moral *and* good. That is, it's not enough to simply *want* to help people by being a brain surgeon. A doctor who operates on someone, trying to cure her epilepsy, but winds up killing her has committed a moral, but bad, act. By the same token, a kidnapper who steals a child out of a car moments before it gets crushed by a bus has unintentionally committed an immoral, but good, act.

By and large, in the eyes of the Ladder-Sworn, immoral acts lead to bad consequences and moral acts lead to good consequences, but the connection isn't concrete. The Upright dedicate themselves to pursuing only acts that are both moral *and* good. This means that they

cannot sit passively by while their fellow Dragons pursue customs like Following the Dragon's Tail (an act that is begun with the intent to harm at least one person and usually ends up harming many) or worse, Counting the Dragon's Scales. Similarly, they are bound by the strictures of their morality to stand in the way of harmful feedings, the Embrace (which creates more dangerous predators upon mankind and damns a soul to eternal undeath) and even the use of Disciplines like Dominate and Majesty. The Ladder-Sworn accept that freedom is good, and powers that strip people of their ability to make rational, informed choices are immoral by nature.

On the other hand, the Ladder-Sworn are Kindred and prone to the long view. They're also experienced Dragons, which inclines them to see complexities as well. Questions of scale intrude on their moral analyses. If, by preventing one murder today, one of the Upright loses a position that would let her prevent 100 deaths in a fortnight, and she can easily predict both those outcomes, is she really being ethical by accepting the immediate but lesser good? Some say "yes," that seeking the broadest scale for healing is the broadest good and, therefore, the most likely to merit divine forgiveness. Others say "no," that one cannot weigh potential outcomes and immediate outcomes on the same scale. It must be said, however, that the Upright who are inclined to look ahead are by far the most influential. Short-sighted Ladder-Sworn often get sidelined or isolated from the Covenant, if they're not exiled from it altogether.

Thus, the most obvious layer of Ladder-Sworn are Dragons (often Sworn of another oath) who preach self-control, extol the virtues of forbearance (often with pious invocations of the First and Second Traditions) and get sidelined into duties where they can't get in the way of their fellows. Beneath them, however, is a layer of infiltrators whose goal is to get as much power within the Ordo Dracul as possible, in order to mitigate its excesses and steer it towards a more ethical future. These selfless Dragons often seek the Oaths of the Mysteries or the Dying Light, where they can have the authority to judiciously put their ethical beliefs into practice.

While less numerous than the Locusts, the Sworn of the Ladder have far greater control over the decisions and judgments of the Order, because their creed of selflessness leads them to political engagement, whereas the selfishness of the Locusts leads them to disengage. This hunger for power is one reason that the Oath of the Ladder, for all its good intentions — indeed, *because* of them — is far more insidious and corrupting of the Order's more common style of transcendence than the amoral, diablerist Locust Knights.

For the goal of the Ladder is, ultimately, nothing less than the transformation of all Kindred society — not a physical transformation with the Coils (though such a transformation would be a great boon), but a social transformation — making the world's vampires less malignant to the world they inhabit. Far-fetched and ambitious, yes, but the Oath of the Ladder truly would like to see all Kindred voluntarily abstain from the Embrace and engage in feeding behaviors that do not spread death and pain.

If this seems impossibly idealistic for creatures trapped in the prison of the Requiem, remember that these are Kindred who have already partially loosened its chains. Many of them are also old enough that they remember times when socially-mandated death penalties for homosexuality, interracial affection or speaking unwanted truths about the king were common and accepted practice. These timeless idealists have experienced the changes of the Industrial, Sexual and Digital Revolutions — to them, anything seems possible, and they have all eternity to try.

Appearance: Their greater Humanity often lends the Ladder-Sworn an attractive patina of vitality. Other than that telltale appearance of living normalcy, which seems strange to other vampires, but not to mortals, there is no common look among the Upright. Though many of the Ladder-Sworn are truly ancient, they are among the most adaptive of the Kindred, and so often adopt modern fashions and mannerisms.

Haven: Havens of the Ladder-Sworn tend to be in central locations, because the Upright like to be in the thick of the action. This may mean sacrifices of security — even a buttoned-up building downtown may be less defensible than a country estate where enemies can be seen driving up from miles away — but it can also mean proximity to hot feeding spots. The Upright need a huge volume of potential vessels in order to successfully feed without endangering another's well-being. The most dedicated among the Ladder are so strict with their feeding that they rarely take advantage of unwilling mortals, and these vampires consider proximity to a willing herd to be the real measure of a quality location.

Background: Like any secretive insurrection, the Ladder-Sworn are very careful about who they recruit. They tend to favor Kindred with Fate Cards that emerge from a Hope Virtue, but, unlike many Kindred cabals, they have no bias towards powerful recruits. In many instances, the kind of ambition and *realpolitik* experience that produces influence and ability in the undead of other subcultures put would-be Ladder-Sworn outside the parameters the Upright desire. They want members who are decent, not necessarily successful.

At the same time, the Ladder wants Kindred who can commit for the long haul. Young vampires with vestiges of their mortal morals and well-meaning neonates who have steered clear of the worst of vampire existence aren't welcome on the Ladder. The ability to really control

one's own choices requires extensive experience with one's own limits and failings. New Kindred may have good and honest intentions, but they don't have any realistic sense of what it takes to be extraordinarily moral in the face of eternal nights and endless thirst. It's thought that, tonight, the youngest Kindred among the Ladder-Sworn is just under 300 years old.

Organization: The Ladder has three levels of membership that are, of course, called "rungs."

The lowest rung consists of Dragons who have not only demonstrated virtuous qualities, but who have done so at personal cost. Observers from higher rungs often arrange some kind of test for such individuals — if they know the candidate's Fate Card, it's often a test designed to appeal to a personal weakness. If the candidate resists temptation, she's discreetly sounded out for her feelings about covert behavior and checked for indiscretions. If she seems likely, she's offered a position in a "select organization" dedicated to personal betterment within the Ordo Dracul. At this time, she is not permitted to know the identities of anyone else in this organization, nor what its name is, nor the extent to which its existence is forbidden within the Order. She is sworn to absolute secrecy under penalty of destruction. Thus, should a bottom-rung initiate of the Ladder attempt to betray the Upright, those above her will pay a price as well: one of them must perform the terrible and immoral act of extinguishing the traitor for the greater good.

Only the most remarkable initiates — those whose moral discretion and ethical judgment impress even the eldest above them — are told of the apocryphal mystic powers of the Ladder-Sworn. Even fewer yet are taught one of its tiers.

If she acquits herself well on the bottom rung, a few Kindred on the middle rung approach her, posing as internal investigators within the Order. With threats of banishment from the covenant or promises of promotion in the wider hierarchy, they try to persuade her to give up the Ladder. If she does, the promised rewards never seem to materialize, but her contact with the Ladder ends nonetheless. If she hangs tough, the threats prove to be empty, and those who approached her reveal in more of the history of the Ladder and its goals. They administer any Oath that the Ladder uses in the local domain and may teach the initiate the first or second tier of Anoushka's Ladder. However, they do not introduce her to other members of the Ladder yet. Indeed, these middle-rung Ladder-Sworn may not know, for certain, the identities of any other Kindred among the Upright themselves.

The middle-level of the Upright conspiracy is not out of touch with the faction's local leadership, but contact is secretive, guarded by passwords, disguises, dead-drops and often the consensual use of Dominate to erase memories. Middle-rung Ladder-Sworn are responsible for sussing out promising new inductees and protecting the most senior among the society. For the most part, the testing and tracking of bottom- and middle-rung vampires is done by those in the middle ranks themselves. Secrecy and ignorance is one more layer of protection between them and the top-rung Ladder-Sworn.

Reaching the top rung requires moral excellence and a mastery of two tiers of Anoushka's Ladder. Furthermore, a potential top-rung Ladder-Sworn Kindred needs a phenomenal capacity to resist the powers of mental control and telepathy, so that the secret of the Ladder can be kept. Such a capacity might be illustrated by five or more dots in Resolve or the covenant-original Merit, Mind of the Inscrutable Hydra. An individual who demonstrates such qualities, and who recruits another Dragon onto the bottom rung of the Ladder, can be promoted to the top.

At the top, the Upright are permitted to know the names and secrets of as many lower-rung conspirators as they like, though most limit themselves to only absolutely essential information, just for safety's sake. They are also permitted to know the identities of two other top-rung Ladder-Sworn (assuming that many exist in the city), though some effort is made to prevent "triangles" in which each of a trio knows two others, but no one in the trio knows anyone outside the threesome.

Secrecy, even within the Ladder, protects the group from purges by the covenant at large — when a member is captured, there are limits to her knowledge. Those limits keep covenant interrogators from rolling up the whole conspiracy. However, it also means that an infiltrator who learns the passwords and procedures of the Ladder can remain undetected for some time, possibly even posing as a top-rung member, as is rumored to have happened in Paris in the 1970s. The payoff for that risk is that a purging enemy may get half the Ladder members in an area but think she has uprooted the whole society, because all the Upright captured *also* believe she has found the whole society.

Concepts: Crazed Ventrue obsessed with moral uprightness, Daeva sickened by centuries of her own desires and desperate to put them in check, humble guru of simple decency, penitent scholar who has rationally reached a moral foundation, recently awakened ancient whose hundred years in torpor convinced her to turn from her evil ways, redeemed sybarite looking for something superior to selfishness, spy in the house of love.

Quote: *There is no equilibrium for us — maybe none for anyone. You're either going to rise and ascend, or sink and degenerate. It's a hard choice, but at least you have the grace of knowing you are making it. Now.*

That's Crazy Talk

The followers of both secret Oaths are fiercely curious about the fate of Dracula's prodigy progeny, Anoushka. Unlike Mara, whose death is a matter of some firm record, Anoushka's destruction is in doubt. The followers of the Ladder insist that not only did she not perish, she achieved an enlightened Golconda and even tonight walks the earth like a bodhisattva, aiding those Kindred who quest to transcend their natures. Alternately, there's the story that she became human again, had a couple of kids and died in bed, surrounded by adoring grandchildren.

The followers of the Locust, as one might expect, tell different stories, the most common being that she went crazy, degenerated and was beat down like a piñata because she was always a sentimental, weak-ass bitch. But the other rumor, perhaps even more disturbing to the Ladder, is that Anoushka *did* survive and *is* active in the Kindred demi-monde.

Specifically, they speculate that Anoushka became The Unholy. Sure, it sounds crazy to think that a woman whose prime desire was to be a moral paragon might become the leather-clad reaper of the southwest United States, but the Locust-Sworn have come up with some disturbing parallels.

- The Unholy's bestial hands and crow characteristics? Dracula's children were always cursed by becoming more and more animalistic. The same thing explains The Unholy's atavistic mindset.
- Both are short, dark, slight women.
- Both were known for their rapport and communication with animals (though granted, that's not an uncommon ability).
- Most importantly: The Unholy has avoided the torpor that seems to be inevitable for most other Kindred her age. Everyone wonders how she does it. If she were Anoushka, at one time the world's foremost expert on cheating the Kindred curse — well, it suddenly seems more reasonable, doesn't it?

Bloodlines

The Ordo Dracul is known for its sundry supernatural pursuits and connections to all manner of strange powers. Kindred of all sorts may come to the Order of the Dragon in search of personal change, power, escape or shelter. Many Dragon Academies welcome vampires of odd blood if only to take advantage of the opportunity to explore the character of the visitor. Dragons who do not belong to a unique bloodline may be fascinated to learn the stories and history of Kindred who have committed to drastic changes in their Requiems and their bodies.

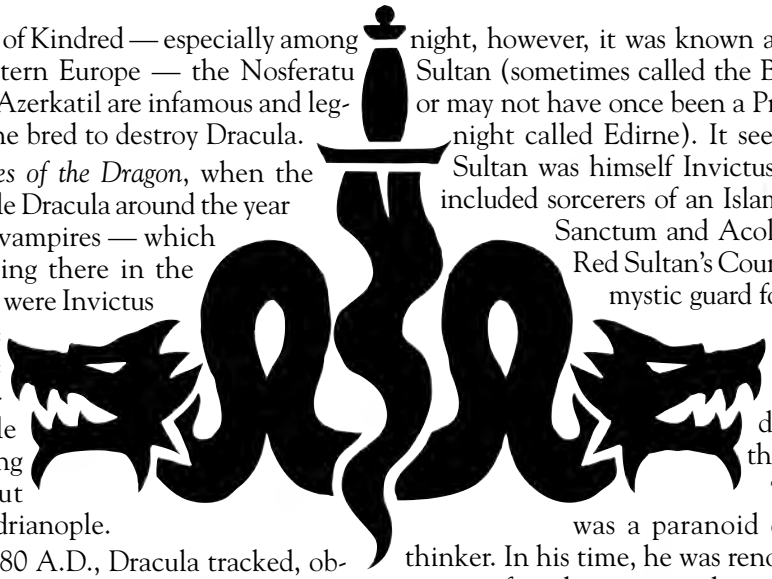
Much to the surprise of the Ordo Dracul's enemies — and sometimes its own members — the covenant has unusual ties to bloodlines with histories and reputations that would normally put them at odds with the followers of Dracula. The Order has even become the home of a bloodline created to destroy it. Not all of the following bloodlines are unique to, or descended from, the Ordo Dracul, but each of these lineages has been irrevocably changed by the covenant's Great Work.

AZERKATIL

THIS IS THE LAST NIGHT FOR ONE OF US, I PROMISE YOU.

Among certain circles of Kindred — especially among the Ordo Dracul of eastern Europe — the Nosferatu bloodline known as the Azerkatil are infamous and legendary: it is the bloodline bred to destroy Dracula.

According to the *Rites of the Dragon*, when the Impaler returned to Castle Dracula around the year 1475, he found Turkish vampires — which he called *ghuls* — residing there in the darkness. Those Kindred were Invictus from Adrianople, the Ottoman capitol of the Impaler's time. They defeated Dracula in battle that night, but in so doing stirred him to seek out more of their kind in Adrianople.



Between 1475 and 1480 A.D., Dracula tracked, observed and studied the Turkish *ghuls* of Adrianople's bazaars and palaces. Tonight, little is known of what precisely Dracula learned of the Turkish Damned, but it seems clear that, from the end of the 15th century onward, some Kindred of the Ottoman Empire knew about *him* and, later, the Ordo Dracul. Tales of the vampire-dragon, Embraced by God, circulated throughout the Kindred courts of the Empire. Like dragons themselves, these stories grew longer and more fearsome over the years. They coiled together and slithered into tangled tales of venomous hate and bloody wrath.

To protect the Kindred of the Ottoman Empire and confront the old enemy of the mortal Sultan, a handful of dedicated warriors and assassins gave their Requiems to the service of their undead caliph and succumbed to the mystic experiments of Turkish blood sorcerers. They became the first "Dragonslayers" — *ghuls* dedicated to the pursuit and elimination of the Wallachian demon known as Dracula.

THE COURT OF THE RED SULTAN

In the nights of the 16th century, a powerful society of *ghuls* concerned with protecting Ottoman Kindred from outside threats, from occult menaces and from the hungry jaws of other vampires was operating in Constantinople. Not much remains of that society tonight —not much that is easy to find, at any rate. Modern knowledge of that *ghul* faction exists primarily in the form of confused legends, badly weathered rumors and the hazy memories of the most ancient Azerkatil. In its night, however, it was known as the Court of the Red Sultan (sometimes called the Blood Sultan), who may or may not have once been a Prince of Adrianople (tonight called Edirne). It seems likely that the Red Sultan was himself Invictus, but that his followers included sorcerers of an Islamic creed of the Lancea Sanctum and Acolytes of the Crone. The Red Sultan's Court, it seems, was a kind of mystic guard for the Princes of Turkey — they practiced blood rituals and created ghoulish soldiers for the defense of the Damned of the Ottoman Empire.

The Red Sultan himself was a paranoid occultist and brilliant thinker. In his time, he was renowned by his Court as a master of mathematics and science. He may even have been a sorcerer in his own right, and might have been the equivalent of the Bishop of Constantinople into the 17th century. The Sultan vanishes from Kindred lore in the late 1600s, possibly falling into torpor as a result of his presumably considerable age. Without his leadership, his Court seems to have dissolved into smaller, competing coteries of self-serving mystics.

LEGENDS OF THE DRAGON

It's unclear tonight exactly when the Red Sultan first became aware of Dracula the Damned, but is easy to see that the Court had little first-hand contact with the Impaler. Rather, they were reacting to overblown tales of "the damned dragon, the Impaler returned from beyond death." It seems the Court believed Dracula to be a bloodthirsty monster more fearsome than common Kindred. One account written a Turkish Kindred of the 16th century and discovered by the Ordo Dracul in Istanbul in 1924 describes Dracula as "a demon escaped from the Pit to drink the souls of the Damned in death as he did the blood of the living in life… he is as much vampire as devil." They called him, simply, "the Dragon."

Some tales of the time claimed the Dragon could consume blood through his fingers, transform himself into a great serpent and breathe fire. Other stories depicted him as a skinless figure with two mouths that flew screaming through the night. His fingers, it was said, were like knives and his tongue was a venomous snake. His scream was thought to drive mortals and Kindred insane.

The Red Sultan and his sorcerers believed Dracula was creating an undead army in preparation for a bloody return to Turkey and a conquest of the Ottoman Empire. They were terrified that the Impaler, who was mad in life, would be uncontrollable in undeath. They feared that Dracula — who might not be a vampire at all, but the recipient of some other unholy curse — would destroy the secrecy that kept the Kindred safe and plunge the Empire into a supernatural war.

To save the Empire, and all Kindred, they created the Azerkatil.

Fathers of the Dragonslayers

The Red Sultan, unwilling to wait for the Dragon to come and threaten the Empire, demanded his sorcerers conceive a force of assassins to locate and destroy Dracula. In response, the Court experimented with many changes of the Blood, mystically altering the Vitae of newly Embraced *ghuls* to create a breed of the Damned capable of facing off against the Dragon's considerable powers. It's impossible to know how many Kindred gave themselves up to the Court's experiments and changed their blood at the order of the Sultan's sorcerers.

No Azerkatil knows the whole truth of the bloodline's creation. It's said that Kindred of every clan were subjected to arcane rituals to influence the properties of their blood. As desirable mystic traits emerged, the subjects were consumed — diablerized — by other vampires of the court. In time, the Sultan thought, the right collection of mystic qualities could be absorbed into the Vitae of a single vampire, and that vampire would become the progenitor of a new lineage of deathless assassins. In time, it seems, the Sultan was proved right.

The blood of the Azerkatil contains mystic power drawn from the Vitae of an untold number of clans and short-lived bloodlines populated by lone vampires. The Azerkatil's unique Discipline contains grains of power sifted from the diablerized souls of countless extinct bloodlines. The weakness of its blood comes, in part, from the last of the Court's subjects, from the vampire that first manifested the change of Vitae that pleased the Sultan.

The true founder of the Azerkatil bloodline is lost to history, however. All that is known of that mysterious *ghul* is that he or she was a Nosferatu, as the Red Sultan is believed to have been. Some Dragon historians speculate that the Red Sultan himself was the Kindred who consumed the earlier subjects and became the father of the Dragonslayers.

The secret sect of the first Dragonslayers was made up of mortal mercenaries, soldiers and assassins chosen by the Red Sultan and Embraced into the bloodline by two or three followers of the first Azerkatil Avus. Those first sires were not dispatched to Europe by the Sultan, and all the vampires who once knew the first Azerkatil are either asleep, destroyed or keeping quiet. The so-called First Dragonslayers are therefore not actually the first of the line at all. Rather, they are the original force of assassins assembled and dispatched by the Sultan in the 16th century.

The Name

The name "Azerkatil" is something of a mystery itself. Half of the name seems to be the Turkish word *katil*, meaning "killer" or "murderer," but the other half is unclear. The word *azer* meaning "fire" might be drawn from the Greek spoken throughout portions of western Turkey, but it's just as likely that the name is some abstruse invention of the Red Sultan. Historically, most Azerkatil refer to themselves simply as Dragonslayers in whatever language they like.

The Red Sultan

If the Red Sultan vanished in the late 1600s and reappeared tonight, in 2005, it might mean he'd laid torpid for almost 300 years. That suggests a Nosferatu of about Blood Potency 6 and with a Humanity of 2. If he really was the first Azerkatil, he probably has considerable control over the bloodline's unique Discipline, Suikast. If he never became a Dragonslayer himself, perhaps he was a part of some other bloodline, and knew firsthand of the possibilities of willing changes into the Blood. If your chronicle is making use of the **Vampire** sourcebook **Bloodlines: The Hidden**, the Sultan might even be a member of the Rakshasa bloodline detailed in that book.

Mission Against the Dragon

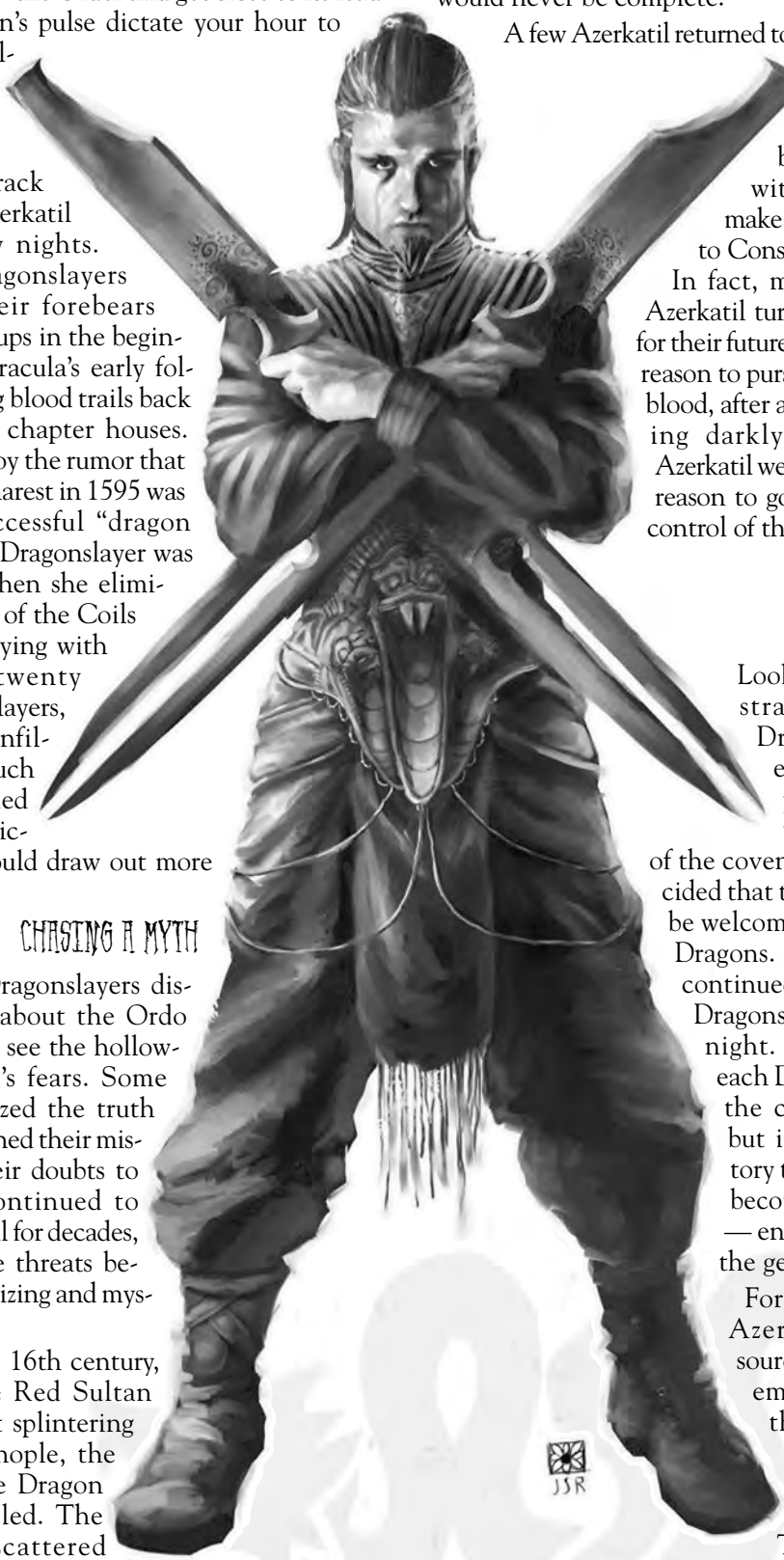
The facts of the Dragonslayers' mission are clouded by dreams of torpor. Every one of the Azerkatil that survived the initial mission against the Dragon had gone into torpor by the 19th century as a result of mystic rituals and efforts of will to increase the potency of their blood. Most of the First Dragonslayers are still thought to be torpid tonight, though the exact number that survived to the modern night is uncertain.

The First Dragonslayers were dispatched from Constantinople to Europe over a period of roughly twenty years in the middle of the 16th century. None of the First Dragonslayers, therefore, knew exactly how many of their brethren had undertaken the mission against the Dragon with them. Six Dragonslayers, it's rumored, set out on the first night, however, bound for Castle Dracula.

The Dragonslayers' mission was not simply to eliminate the Dragon, however. The Red Sultan needed to

know what terrible forces the Dragon was amassing and what other vampires might be conspiring with him. Thus the Azerkatil were meant to scour the land for all information available about Dracula and the rumored "Order of the Dragon." If possible, the Azerkatil were to infiltrate the ranks of the Order and get close to its leaders. "Let the Dragon's pulse dictate your hour to strike," the Red Sultan was rumored to say. "Be patient, but do not hesitate."

It's difficult to track the history of the Azerkatil during those early nights. Some modern Dragonslayers speculate that their forebears worked in small groups in the beginning, ambushing Dracula's early followers and following blood trails back to the Order's first chapter houses. Other Azerkatil enjoy the rumor that the great fire of Bucharest in 1595 was the result of a successful "dragon hunt." At least one Dragonslayer was revealed in 1663 when she eliminated three masters of the Coils in Prague after studying with them for nearly twenty years. Most Dragonslayers, however, did not infiltrate the Order in such ways — most singled out and ambushed victims they hoped would draw out more valuable targets.



Chasing a Myth

Inevitably, the Dragonslayers discovered the truth about the Ordo Dracul and came to see the hollowness of the Sultan's fears. Some Dragonslayers realized the truth early on and abandoned their mission. Most kept their doubts to themselves and continued to stalk the Ordo Dracul for decades, looking for the true threats behind their philosophizing and mystic experiments.

By the end of the 16th century, however, with the Red Sultan gone and his Court splintering back in Constantinople, the mission against the Dragon had all but unraveled. The Dragonslayers, scattered throughout Europe and the Mediterranean, drifted away from their directive like boats cut loose from a pier.

Eventually, most every Azerkatil had to accept the truth: Dracula was no demon. The Dragonslayers had given their Blood in pursuit of a myth. Their mission would never be complete.

A few Azerkatil returned to Turkey in search of vengeance against the paranoid fools of the Court, but most had become too disillusioned with their old masters to make the perilous journey back to Constantinople from Europe. In fact, more than a few of the Azerkatil turned to the Ordo Dracul for their futures. The assassins had good reason to pursue new changes in their blood, after all. With eternity sprawling darkly before them, many Azerkatil were desperate to find a new reason to go on, a new way to take control of their destinies.

Dragonslayers and the Ordo Dracul

Looking back, it can seem strange that the Ordo Dracul would accept its enemies into its ranks. In practice, of course, there was never any meeting of the covenant in which it was decided that the Dragonslayers would be welcomed into the ranks of the Dragons. Surely a few Azerkatil continued to be enemies of the Dragons; certainly a few are tonight. The circumstances of each Dragonslayer's entry into the covenant were unique, but it is an odd fact of history that more than a few did become Dragons themselves — enough, at least, to inspire the generalization.

For the Ordo Dracul, the Azerkatil are an obvious source of fascination. They embody, by chance, both the central philosophy and the central methods of the Order: change and experimentation. The Azerkatil exist as a

result of Dracula's journey to Adrianople — they are an effect of his Damnation, manifested miles away and years after the change made to his own existence. What's more, their unique blood is the result of mystic experimentation. In a way, the Dragonslayers are model Dragons.

In the centuries since the First Dragonslayers disappeared, the Azerkatil have come close to vanishing altogether. The First Dragonslayers were never intended to sire progeny, and indeed it seems the Red Sultan bred them to be a single generation of assassins, to prevent their prized blood from falling into the service of the Dragon. Still, enough Kindred have taken on the mantle of the Azerkatil to keep the bloodline in existence. The Order itself has facilitated this in some domains, to keep the line from dying out. Thus the Ordo Dracul can be seen to have adopted the Azerkatil, even though several of the world's Dragonslayers continue to distrust and revile Dracula's followers to this night.

Parent Clan: Nosferatu

Nickname: Dragonslayers. Some Slavic Kindred call them Traitors, however, for turning on their Turkish fathers. Some Turkish vampires call them the same.

Covenant: Though the Azerkatil bloodline is most often associated with the Ordo Dracul tonight, Kindred of this lineage cannot truly be said to hold any one loyalty in common. In truth, the Order was little more than the bloodline's portal for passage into Western history. It's through a quirk of fate that Dragonslayers are often thought of as members of the covenant they were created to destroy. It's an oddity of the Dragons' ancestral fascination that the Dragonslayers were accepted into the Order as products of Dracula's time on Earth.

The first Dragonslayers were agents, indirectly, of the Invictus of Turkey. Tonight, Azerkatil are still likely to pledge their Requiems to the service of some undead ruler, though their master is as likely to be Sanctified as Invictus. Indeed, it seems Dragonslayers have an innate hunger for servitude, for a master to protect or an enemy to plot against. In this regard, an Azerkatil might become involved with any covenant by serving one of its leaders or figureheads.

Appearance: The vast majority of Azerkatil come from Near Eastern blood, even tonight. As predators of predators, Dragonslayers project an unnaturally dangerous image to mortals and Kindred alike — they stare like hungry tigers through the bars of a cage. This terrible dread is only exaggerated by the Azerkatils' Nosferatu blood. Like the Nosferatu, no two Dragonslayers are exactly alike, but in this line a few features are common: inhumanly green eyes, widely spaced fangs, and spiny black hair.

Haven: The earliest Dragonslayers were nomads, roaming eastern Europe in search of Dracula and his offspring. In the nights since the first Azerkatil failed in their hunt, Dragonslayers have taken to nesting like any other Nosferatu. As a group, Azerkatil tend to place very little importance on personal comfort — many are effectively homeless, finding new sunless holes to sleep in every few nights. Instinctually, Azerkatil prefer havens that are remote and difficult to locate over havens that are close to food or even difficult to outright penetrate; a Dragonslayer would rather not be found at all than be well defended.

Background: If a stereotypical image of the Azerkatil exists, it is that of the first few encountered by the Ordo Dracul: adult Turkish men with several days' worth of facial hair, powerful limbs and elaborate outfits befitting a courtly Ottoman assassin. Even tonight, the majority of Azerkatil are thought to be males of Turkish, Greek, Israeli or Syrian descent. Most Azerkatil, from the 16th century to the 21st, come from the ranks of mortal soldiers and mercenaries. Some have formal military training, some have experience as guerilla troops, but few are thugs.

Despite the stereotype, a large number of Azerkatil are (and were) women. Though very few Kindred become Dragonslayers anymore, it's thought that more female vampires than male joined the Azerkatil line in the 20th century. This new generation of Azerkatil reflects the larger role female soldiers are playing throughout the world, and has brought new purpose to the line. They may change the perception of the bloodline from a directionless family of failed assassins to a tradition of devoted and deadly Archons in service of local Princes, like swords of Damocles.

Character Creation: Physical Attributes are vital to a Dragonslayer, who must be able to outclass even the most formidable opponents in hand-to-hand combat if they're unique Discipline is to come into play. Skills such as Weaponry and Brawl are obvious choices. Combative Merits, such as Weaponry Dodge and the Two Weapons Fighting Style suit their purposes, as well. But in the modern night, when experience with bladed weapons is rare, Azerkatil are just as likely to focus on the other iconic abilities of the bloodline: Skills like Stealth and Intimidation. The First Dragonslayers relied on well-crafted ambushes and surprise as much as martial prowess.

Cunning, also, is vital to a Dragonslayer — dots in Wits describe an assassin that is alert and quick. Resolve and Composure give the character the Willpower necessary to face fearsome elders and put the Beast to use.

Many Dragonslayers have little use for high levels of City or Covenant Status, as recognition is seldom in their best interest. An Azerkatil is no less likely to learn a covenant's unique Disciplines, however.

Bloodline Disciplines: Nightmare, Obfuscate, Suikast, Vigor

Weakness: Azerkatil exude a similar disturbing, inhuman presence as the Nosferatu, though the demeanor of the Dragonslayers is almost always one of menace and peril, like a calculating killer. Like other Nosferatu, the 10-again rule does not apply to an Azerkatil's dice pools based on Presence or Manipulation in social situations. Additionally, any 1's that come up on a roll are subtracted from successes. (This latter part of the weakness does not affect dramatic failure rules.) This weakness does not apply to dice pools that involve the Intimidation Skill or the Composure Attribute.

In addition to that inherited weakness, an Azerkatil character is hindered by the cold way he instinctually regards other vampires, like a killer waiting to strike. A Dragonslayer's Humanity dots affect Empathy, Persuasion and Socialize dice pools for interactions with other Kindred just as they affect interactions with mortals (see p. 185 of **Vampire: The Requiem**).

Furthermore, the Dragonslayers were never intended to reproduce. Though modern Azerkatil can't be sure how the Red Sultan instilled this weakness into the bloodline, its effects are undeniable. A Dragonslayer must expend *two* dots of Willpower, instead of just one, to Embrace a childe.

Organization: Though many older Dragonslayers quietly wonder how things would have been if they'd slain their Dragon — imagining a proud domain of Azerkatil Sultans and triumphant Regents in the dark mountains of Romania — tonight there is virtually no larger organization of Azerkatil. The majority of modern Dragonslayers dwell in domains with just one or two others of their kind, typically a sire, childer or Avus. Of those, a large number sulk in the shadows of old legends, knowing little more about their Blood than the tales told by Dragon historians.

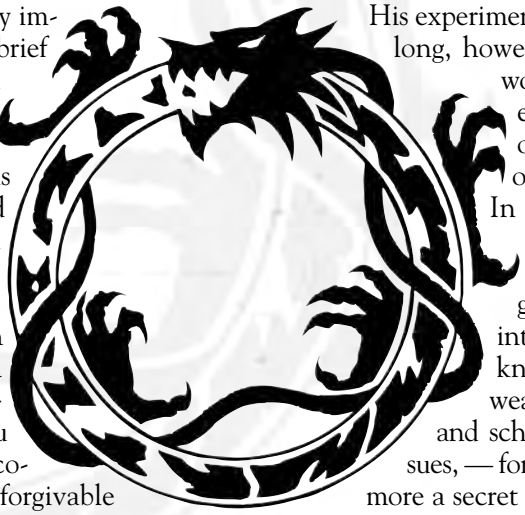
Azerkatil are typically placed in one of two categories: the First Dragonslayers, and all others. Those first fearless Dragon-hunters are seen by many modern Azerkatil as heroic father-figures, despite their failure to slay the Dragon. If any of them remain tonight, they may lay torpid beneath the earth somewhere, intending to resume the hunt for Dracula when he returns to prowl the land again. They, no doubt, will have little love for the Azerkatil that spawned in their absence, against the intent of the Red Sultan.

Concepts: Assassin who has outlasted all his foes, assassin-for-hire, bodyguard, deserter from an undead army, Kindred terrorist, martyr-in-training, monster hunter, Ottoman Empire special forces soldier, reformed killer.

Dragolescu

Don't be so judgmental. The sins you speak of were our — pardon me, my — ancestor's.

The Dragolescu bloodline was very important within the Ordo Dracul for a brief time. It emerged as a line of modern nobility, intelligent, forthright and bold. The advances of their founder into the realms of the dead and his ability to communicate with and make use of human ghosts provided the basis for much of what the covenant knows about modern haunts and Wyrm's Nests associated with death. But the bloodline fell from grace in the middle of the 20th century, and now the name Dragolescu has come to be synonymous with sycophancy, name-dropping and the unforgivable sin of self-enslavement to otherworldly spirits.



A Traveler from the East

Ioan Dragolescu, the bloodline's founder, changed his name to John T. Darlington when he arrived in London in 1884. The story of his Embrace is strange. Ioan was a Romanian doctor fleeing his native lands for reasons he has never fully explained (but given that his interest in communing with and enslaving the dead by his own admission before his Embrace, that might have had something to do with it). While on the ship, Ioan met a vampire of Clan Ventrue who had once been a member of the Ordo Dracul, and was, like Ioan, fleeing from retribution. A storm blew the ship off course and the two of them commiserated and found common ground on a number of points, not the least of which was "modern" medicine as applied to theosophical and metaphysical problems.

Ioan's sire, whom he swore never to name, decided that while he himself was a poor fit for the Ordo Dracul, this young physician would be perfect. Since the Ventrue had left his old life behind, he suggested that Ioan undergo the Embrace and begin his unlife in London. Ioan agreed, and rose the following night as one of the Kindred.

With his sire's help, Ioan Dragolescu, now John Darlington, sought out the Dragons of London and easily passed their tests of membership. He particularly excelled in the Coil of Blood, learning all three tiers within a decade. In 1895, Sigmund Freud's work inspired him to rethink the way the Ordo had been approaching their methods of teaching, and Darlington became one of the first Dragons to incorporate psychoanalysis into preparations for chrysalises. His experiments with these methods didn't last long, however (although his psychological work did receive a number of followers, and the "Darlington Methods" of preparing for learning the Coil of the Soul is still popular tonight). In 1897, the publication of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* threw the covenant and Kindred society in general, particularly in England, into an uproar. John Darlington was known to London's Kindred as a wealthy Ventrue who chose research and scholarly pursuits over covenant issues, — for at the time, the Ordo Dracul was more a secret society than a covenant. Following publication of Stoker's novel, however, the Ordo Dracul was revealed for what it was and any "unaligned" Kindred came under close scrutiny. Darlington decided that the direct approach was safest, and announced to the vampiric community that he was a Dragon.

The Ordo Dracul's leadership in London had mixed feelings about this admission. On the one hand, Darlington was a respected membership of the undead community and a promising student. On the other, he was cocky and bold, and worse, he was a neonate (if a talented one). Gossip in London seemed to indicate that Darlington was either going to greet a sunrise soon or was going to receive a promotion within the Ordo Dracul. His next announcement clinched the decision.

Blood of My Blood

"Over the last few years, I have carefully researched my own mortal lineage," explained Darlington in letters sent to key members of the Ordo Dracul and the Invictus in London. "As some of you know, I am not born of England, much though I have come to love her in my time here. My native land is that of Stoker's whimsical fable, and indeed, in my living veins ran the blood of Vlad Dracula himself. I am a direct descendant of his line, and I am proud to claim membership in both his family and the covenant that he founded. The name I was born to is Ioan Dragolescu, and that is the name I shall use in Kindred circles henceforth."

Darlington wisely went underground for a short period of time following this announcement, to avoid any hasty action on any other vampire's part. The Ordo Dracul and

the Invictus both researched his claim and found that he was, in fact, correct. The Dragolescu family was descended from a peasant family that Dracula had elevated to noble status in 1457 after fathering a bastard with one of their daughters. The blood claim was weak, but true, and this left the Ordo Dracul wondering again what to do about John Darlington/Ioan Dragolescu.

Why Invictus?

Historians sometimes wonder why Darlington sent his letter to the Invictus as well as his own covenant. The Invictus, after all, was probably the most powerful covenant in London, and could easily have covered up the information in the letter and slain Darlington. The simple answer is that he wanted two opposing factions (the Ordo Dracul and the First Estate) to see his claims — but then why not involve the Lancea Sanctum or the Circle of the Crone?

The answer is that Darlington knew of the Invictus' penchant for placing importance on blood ties. While normally their interest rests largely with vampiric rather than mortal lineage, a claim of kinship with Dracula (who, remember, was much on the minds of Kindred at the time) was a claim the Invictus had to investigate, both as governors and as aristocrats. The remarkable thing about Darlington's decision wasn't that he chose to involve the First Estate, but that he trusted Invictus genealogists to tell the truth about their findings.

The Restless Dead

In 1901, a few nights after Queen Victoria died, Ioan Dragolescu came out of hiding and reentered vampire society. Apart from using his real name among vampires (though he kept his "John Darlington" handle for use when dealing with mortals), very little about him seemed to have changed. Upon returning to London, he immediately gathered a coterie of Kindred familiar with the spirits of the dead and began research into the mysteries of ghosts.

Why the sudden interest in spirits? In actuality, it wasn't sudden. Dragolescu had always found ghosts fascinating, but, like most Kindred, he possessed little facility for dealing with them himself. After the whirlwind of activity surrounding his lineage and the exposure of the Ordo Dracul had died down somewhat, however, he made these spirits his primary focus. During his time in hiding (which he claimed was spent in Ireland), he received a visit from a ghost of a vampire victim. Fascinated by the notion that Kindred the world over had been creating ghosts for time immemorial, he decided that these restless shades might carry information crucial to the transcendence of the undead.

The Kindred he assembled were of various ages and covenants, but all shared some experience and knowledge about ghosts. On the night of their first meeting, Dragolescu put forth his notion that the departed could act as teachers and perhaps servants to the undead, a notion that at least one of the Kindred present (a Daeva belonging to the Lancea Sanctum) found offensive. As she turned to leave, a disembodied hand, glowing a luminous shade of blue, appeared in the air and gestured for her to return to her seat. Unnerved yet inspired by this event, the Kindred took the name "the Blue Hand Coterie" thereafter.

During the years following, the Blue Hand participated in séances and exorcisms as often as it could. It was during this period that Dragolescu put forth his theories of *Essentiaphagia* or "soul eating," which would later evolve into a Discipline of the same name. The Blue Hand investigated hauntings all over the British Isles and sometimes even ventured to mainland Europe, but for the most part remained focused on London. Members left, fell into torpor or met Final Death, of course, but others joined as well, including Dragolescu's first childe, an Irish medium named Bridget Derry. The coterie reached 16 members in December of 1913, and on the winter solstice that year, Ioan Dragolescu once again shocked the Kindred world.

The Blue Hand Massacre

Sixteen Kindred and five mortals entered Dragolescu's home outside of London on the night of December 21, 1913. Included among the Kindred were the two remaining original members of the Blue Hand (one of whom was the Daeva who had triggered the appearance of the hand), Dragolescu himself and Bridget Derry. The other 12 Kindred were mostly neonates, some of the Ordo Dracul and some of other covenants, but all of whom had aided Dragolescu in finding and cataloging ghosts. The mortals were "sensitives" and mediums, and all were there under duress.

Over the course of the night, Dragolescu used methods of torture and execution designed and perfected by his infamous ancestor to murder the five mortals. Two of the five remained as ghosts. Dragolescu then used a heretofore-unseen Discipline to control and draw power from these shades and immobilize the non-Ventrue Kindred present (six of those present were Lords). These Ventrue then committed diablerie upon their prisoners, each one consuming the souls of two of the helpless captives. Dragolescu himself committed the foul crime three times in one night.

Not all of the Ventrue present that night came through intact, of course. Two of them went mad, and were destroyed the following dawn. The others, though, pledged themselves to Dragolescu and became part of his new bloodline. "The dead shall bow before us, nourish us, guide us and provide for us," Dragolescu reportedly said before falling into slumber that morning. "The Coils of the Dragon begin with flesh, progress to blood and end with souls."

Needless to say, there were repercussions.

The Madness of the Dragolescu

Diablerie is a violation of the Traditions and invites retribution from several quarters, but Dragolescu and his conspirators had thought ahead on that point. The Kindred whom they chose to diablerize had no childer and their sires were either dead or hadn't been heard from in decades. Dragolescu knew that he couldn't get away with his crimes forever, but hoped to forestall the consequences until he and his bloodline had the support of the Ordo Dracul. In that he was successful. The more important cost of his action was to his mind and soul.

The Ventrue are no stranger to madness. Dragolescu, by the time of the Blue Hand Massacre, was already suffering from delusions of grandeur and mild paranoia. His triple diablerie made his blood powerful and granted him facility in Disciplines he had previously never known, but it also worsened his already wavering sanity. Following the Massacre, Dragolescu began referring to himself in plural. At first, other Kindred thought this to be a form of royal "we," but it soon became clear that Dragolescu actually believed that he was more than one being. Members of his bloodline adopted this quirk as well, but only after they had achieved some proficiency in Dragolescu's new Discipline.

Worse still, the Dragolescu discovered that their minds were never at rest. Plagued by knowledge of the afterlife and (for those who emerged from the Blue Hand Massacre) by the remnants of the souls they had consumed, they could not take solace from a day of sleep or even a sense of achieving a goal. *Ad infinitum* became the bloodline's watchwords, and no accomplishment, no victory, no discovery would ever satisfy them again. It was this attitude that earned the bloodline the nickname of "the Restless."

The new bloodline's members spent several weeks after the Massacre consolidating their forces and continuing their research. One of them, though records are unclear as to which one, sired a childe during this time as well. The childe fled London in a panic after an "incident" at a haunt, and nothing more is known of her, including whether or not her Dragolescu heritage ever came to the fore.

The Ordo Dracul Accepts the Restless

Dragolescu met with London's Kogaion, and the two of them spent four full nights in conversation. When they emerged, that Kogaion met with members of the Sworn of all three Orders, and after much deliberation (during which Dragolescu and his followers were kept under "house arrest," probably to protect them), decided that Dragolescu's previous and ongoing contributions to the Ordo Dracul were enough to balance the crimes he and his followers had committed. The covenant provided protection to the Restless, in some cases promising the rest of Kindred society that they would handle punishment internally. The First World War, of course, probably acted to distract Kindred in England from the matter of Dragolescu, and some have even postulated that he might have somehow sensed the turmoil to come and chosen the date for the Blue Hand Massacre based upon that sense.

Had Dragolescu made public appearances after that point, he probably wouldn't have survived. By his own admission, though, he was finished with playing the political games of Kindred society, stating that they could never be resolved and their players would learn nothing. He and his bloodline had other concerns.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Dragolescu bloodline made great advances in the Ordo Dracul's understanding of ghosts and haunts. The Restless corresponded with Kogaions and Kindred scholars across Europe and in the United States. Dragolescu stayed in London, but wrote frequent letters to members of his bloodline in his native Romania. Some of those letters survive, and express a deep-seated longing to return:

"We dream again of Romania, of our home and our mortal family. Decades since we died, and yet we are still only ancilla in the eyes of the Kindred. The other Kindred can rest, but they are single beings, one body and one soul. We are many…

"Is it possible to return? Does anything exist outside of London, outside our adopted country? Does the Thames lead anywhere, do the ships that leave port ever arrive at their destinations?

"Is Romania, then, our home? Or have we always been here? No, Romania exists and is our home, for we are descended from Him, from Vlad the Impaler. Such ghosts he must have created. Such restlessness there in the land of our birth."

The Beginning of the End

No matter what his feelings about his homeland, Dragolescu did not leave England. In 1933, Dragolescu received a number of guests, most of them members of the Ordo Dracul, at his home in London. It was the first time since the Blue Hand Massacre that he had allowed Kindred other than those of his bloodline into his house, and certainly those present felt a great deal of trepidation. Rumors about a repeat of the Massacre flew, but Dragolescu made his plans very public, assuring the Kindred in power that he had no intention of harming any of his guests.

Whether or not that was true will never be known. Over the course of the night, Dragolescu claims, the voices of the spirits around him grew in volume until he could no longer hear those physically present. He called upon his fellow Restless to enact rituals to rid the area of spirits so that he could think straight, and then explained what he had seen. He claimed that the Dragon was rising, and that as before, he would lay waste to his country and slay a multitude. This time, however, he would use the "breath of the Dragon," rather than his claws. None of the assembled Kindred had any idea what this could mean, including Dragolescu himself. As the decade wore on, however, the meaning became horribly clear.

The Second World War was hard on England's Kindred. With so many of England's mortal sons fighting, the vampires of the Isles had trouble feeding. Many Kindred sank into torpor rather than take the chance of being bombed or starved. Dragolescu, however, was more alert than he had been in ages. He followed Germany's progress doggedly, and actually had to be discouraged from traveling east to visit the country himself. (His bloodline felt that his desire to do so wasn't entirely rational and would end in disaster.) As the war progressed, Dragolescu's dreams became filled with images of poison, starvation and death, and he quietly supposed that Hitler was the rebirth of Dracula and that all other nations would fall before the Reich.

Needless to say, this attitude wasn't popular among the Kindred of England. His own covenant warned him to keep his opinions about Hitler to himself. Expressing support for Hitler was insane enough, but any statement that could link the Nazis with the Ordo Dracul on an ideological level invited reprisals from other covenants and mystic societies, and the Dragons themselves. Dragolescu protested that he was not a Nazi and, in fact, didn't care one way or another about Hitler's racial or political propaganda. He was only concerned with the effect Hitler's actions would have on the ghostly population of the world; for much as Dracula had done in the 15th century, Hitler was on the verge of wiping out a significant percentage of his country's citizens. In the end, however, Dragolescu agreed to keep quiet, stating that "the end will come to pass no matter if we are silenced, and the unquiet spirits will serve us as we strive towards infinity." By then, though, several of the influential Kindred of London, and of England as a whole, knew the name of Ioan Dragolescu, and equated it both with the Ordo Dracul and with the fascism of Nazi Germany.

The Sworn of Mysteries and the Sworn of the Axe noticed this, and began keeping a very close eye on Dragolescu.

The Dragon Falls

In April of 1945, Adolf Hitler committed suicide. A week later, Germany surrendered. Dragolescu, listening as his adopted country celebrated the demise of his hero, lost the few remaining shreds of humanity and sanity that he possessed.

A month later, Dragolescu began a ritual designed to make his undead body the conduit for every ghost murdered during Hitler's regime. He felt that with that much spiritual power at his command, he could give some new purpose to the millions of dead, salvage some new power from the ashes of Europe and, in the process, become what Hitler could not. Whether or not it would have worked is unknown. Kindred of the Ordo Dracul swooped down upon Dragolescu's home as the ritual built in power, razing the building and destroying his notes.

Dragolescu faced a trial by the Sworn of Mysteries. His crime was subjugating himself to the spirits, which carried a penalty of destruction. During the trial it became clear to Dragolescu that he had no way of successfully fighting the charge. He had made his bloodline a scapegoat, and for all he had contributed, the Ordo Dracul would never trust the Dragolescu bloodline again. Dragolescu issued a prediction to the court on August 7, 1945. He stated that a member of his bloodline would one night arise to complete the ritual he had begun, and become the unliving embodiment of all of world's unquiet dead. That day, awaiting sentencing, Dragolescu somehow immolated himself, possibly with the help of one or more ghosts.

The Dragolescu Tonight

The Dragolescu bloodline, however, was too valuable to the Ordo Dracul to exterminate. Their facility with ghosts and haunts makes them superb "bloodhounds," and members of the bloodline tend to be sent to cities with large numbers of reported hauntings. The stigma of their founder's madness and devotion to Hitler's Germany has stuck with the bloodline, however. While Kindred outside of the

Ordo Dracul have rarely even heard of the Dragolescu, those inside the covenant call them "Pretenders," and usually claim that their Essentiaphagia Discipline is nothing more than a specialized form of Auspex that allows communication with ghosts. This misconception suits the Dragolescu just fine, as they are still trying to live down their founder's actions.

The Dragolescu are ambitious and driven, but, like Ioan himself, most of them are overly focused on the spiritual and ignore temporal realities as much as possible. As such, the Ordo Dracul finds them useful when dealing with spirits, but almost never includes them in diplomatic coteries. Modern Dragolescu sometimes feel cheated by Ioan's actions, and many search for a way to redeem their line in the eyes of their covenant. Despite all that has happened, the Dragolescu are extremely loyal to the Dragons, and still take extreme pride in their founder's relationship to Dracula.

Parent Clan: Ventrue

Nickname: Formerly the Restless, now Pretenders

Covenant: Despite their travails, the Dragolescu are for the most part still loyal the Ordo Dracul. What few remain usually become spiritual bloodhounds for the covenant, seeking out haunts and ghosts — under strict supervision, of course. Occasionally, a Ventrue from another covenant, usually the Circle of the Crone, joins the bloodline. The Invictus of some domains welcomes members of this bloodline, if they can verify their lineage back to Ioan Dragolescu. Why the First Estate is willing to accept the Pretenders is unknown.

Appearance: The Dragolescu are born of nobility, and, being a Ventrue bloodline, many of them are acquainted with high society. Their attire tends to be slightly dressier than appropriate for most occasions, and is often somewhat outdated, in favor of fashions from the 1940s and 1950s. Since Dragolescu are so often in motion, they tend to favor clothing that holds up to travel and activity well — something they can wear while kneeling in soot.

Very few non-Caucasian Pretenders exist, but this is more a result of the bloodline's European location of origin than of any racial preference. Non-Caucasian Dragolescu are still likely to be English or otherwise European.

Haven: Unlike some Ventrue, the Dragolescu don't tend toward lavish havens. Spacious, yes, especially if the Pretender in question is in the habit of creating ghosts rather than simply using them. But since the Dragolescu don't rest easily, they don't spend much time actually in their havens (again, unless engaged in research). A Pretender's haven is likely to be sparsely furnished but overflowing with books, notes and spiritualism paraphernalia, and might either be meticulously ordered or so cluttered that only the owner could possibly make sense of it.

Background: The Dragolescu Embrace almost exclusively from the ranks of mortals who have some affinity for sensing, communicating with or even controlling ghosts. The Essentiaphagia Discipline is much easier to master if the practitioner instinctively understands some of the truths about spirits, after all. The Pretenders aren't as particular as their parent clan about Embracing from high society, but they do prefer people educated in classics, literature, folklore, history and the occult, which aren't exactly blue-collar pursuits.

Ventrue outside of the bloodline may join, but the Ordo Dracul regulates this very carefully. Only those Ventrue who are judged to be strong enough to handle the restlessness and mental rigor of the bloodline are allowed to become Dragolescu. Ventrue who do often take "Darlington" as a middle name as a nod of respect to their new family.

Character Creation: Mental Attributes are usually primary, but Physical or Social might be secondary, depending on the approach of a given Pretender. Skills depend on the background of the Kindred in question, but every Dragolescu has some rating in Academics, Investigation and Occult (thus Mental Skills are usually primary). Mental Merits are appropriate, though Social Merits tend to dry up quickly, given the bloodline's reputation in the Ordo Dracul. Remember that a second dot of Blood Potency is necessary to be a member of any bloodline.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Dominate, Essentiaphagia, Resilience

Weakness: Dragolescu suffer the Ventrue clan weakness (-2 penalty to Humanity rolls to avoid acquiring derangements after failing a degeneration roll). In addition, the Dragolescu know that the soul is eternal. Far from giving them hope, however, this knowledge wears on them, grinding their souls down as they face the prospect of eternity without rest or succor. Dragolescu characters cannot regain Willpower in any other way than by fulfilling their Virtue or Vice. They do not regain Willpower through rest, accomplishing goals or even at the end of a story.

Organization: The seat of Dragolescu power, such as it is, still rests in London. Despite the fact that the bloodline founder was Romanian by birth, the bloodline thinks of itself as undeniably English. Beyond that, a city with a Dragolescu presence typically also has a greater-than-average number of haunts. The Ordo Dracul keeps very close track of the Pretenders, however, never sure if or when Ioan Dragolescu's last prediction will come to pass.

Concepts: Blue Hand apologist, detective, disgraced Ventrue scion, genealogist, ghost hunter, ghost wrangler, haunt architect, horror writer, medium, prophet, student to the Kogaion.

LIBITINARIUS

"NOW SLEEP THE SLEEP OF KINGS, MY LORD, AND BE REBORN."

The Libitinarius bloodline began as a mortal cult hidden behind the scenes of University College in the 1880s. It is a manifestation of Europe's renewed scholarly interest in classical art and culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The so-called Morticians have successfully resurrected ancient mortuary rituals and funerary magic through the mystic properties of the Blood. Tonight, Libitinarius Kindred are the undertakers and funeral priests of the Damned, preparing the corpses and spirits of vampires for the long deathlike sleep of torpor.

In 1884, a wealthy and idle Englishman named Ivor Gardner began funding the harmless ritual ceremonies of a few overenthusiastic classics professors of University College in London. Originally, the ceremonies were little more than a colorful way of paying respects to the ancient peoples the professors were studying every day. Due to their interest in religion in the Ptolemaic era, the professors centered many of their rituals on Serapis, a composite god combining elements of Osiris, the Apis bull of Memphis and various other Hellenistic deities. The ceremonies were secret only because the professors were embarrassed to be spending their time singing in Latin and reciting Egyptian "spells."

With the addition of Gardner's interest and money, however, the monthly ceremonies became more and more elaborate. Before long, Gardner was bringing other visitors and guests with him and the ceremonies had become something more akin to costume parties. The ceremonies were kept secret if only because exclusivity is attractive.

In October of 1885, however, Ivor Gardner died at just 44 years of age. In his will, Gardner indicated his desire to be buried by his professorial friends in a suitable ancient ceremony. In exchange, he left a considerable fortune to the "secret society of Serapis." In honor of Gardner, the professors buried him according to the funeral customs of the Roman goddess of corpses, death and funerals — Libitina. Somehow, between the richly funded grandeur of the ceremony and the real pathos of the participants, the motives of the attendees changed. By 1886, the ceremonial club that had jokingly called itself the "society of Serapis" had become a cult of Libitina.

In 1888, the cult drew the attention of a corpse. One of the original ceremonialist professors, Dr. Henry Weeks, was a ghoul in service to a vampire of the Ordo Dracul. Weeks provided his master with access to the university's library and facilities, and Weeks' master provided him with Vitae and tales from ancient Kindred. After learning of the cult, Weeks' master slowly insinuated himself into the cult as a figurehead and idol… and revealing himself as a vampire to the cultists.

Pairing the resources of the mortal professors and the Ordo Dracul, the cult became a formidable collection of minds and texts. The cult and the Dragons, through Weeks, cultivated knowledge of Ptolemaic religious practices and spells of the ancient world. Due to the unnatural needs of the Dragons and the funerary expertise of the cultists, the focus of the group's occult studies remained on Greek and Roman interpretations of Egyptian mortuary magic. The beginnings of the Mortualia Discipline were coming together in those nights, and Weeks and his master knew it.

By 1891, Kindred of other covenants were also interacting with London's cult of Libitina. Not long after, the question of the Embrace was brought up again and again among the living and the undead of the cult. In 1892, Weeks was Embraced by his master for the purposes of taking over as the "risen mouthpiece for the dead" within the cult. Shortly thereafter, Weeks oversaw the performance of an ancient Greco-Roman funeral ritual held for the benefit of his aged sire. Using artifacts and incantations gathered over the past few years, the cult of Libitina prepared the body of Weeks' sire for its long sleep — for torpor. The climax of the ceremony was the casting of an Egyptian funeral spell and the accidental destruction of the ancient urn on which it was inscribed.

Something went wrong. Weeks and the other Dragons couldn't explain precisely what might have happened, but the broken relic and the spoken spell *did*

produce a magical effect of some kind. The magic of the spell was infused into the blood of Weeks — the only non-torpid vampire at the ceremony — and transformed his love for his sleeping sire, his tangible Damnation and his intangible hope for the future into an potent new mixture of the Blood, which Weeks held onto with all his will — he refused to let the power of the spell in his blood "separate" or thin. Within a year of his Embrace, Weeks had become the founder of a new bloodline. It was a remarkable achievement for a young vampire, and suggested that Weeks had an intuitive understanding of the Blood and an incredible understanding of the mortuary magic he had studied for so many years.

Weeks named his bloodline "Libitinarius," after the Libitina-worshipping morticians of the classical world. By 1911, he'd gathered a small circle of fellow Morticians around him, drawn from the ranks of both the Order and the university. Weeks completed his exploration of the Mortualia Discipline in 1901 and began to guide his fellow Morticians in its use soon after.

Tonight, Weeks continues to practice the art of Mortualia at the behest Princes and Regents throughout England and Europe.

CULT OF LIBITINA

Such is the story shared by the Libitinarii, at least. More than a few of Weeks' fellow Dragons suspect it's fiction, invented by Weeks and his absent master for the purpose of getting the artifacts and texts they wanted altogether in one place. An investigation performed by a London Dragon in 1954 turned up suspiciously little evidence of any professor named Weeks working at University College during the time of Weeks' tale. In 1978, an Acolyte occultist and historian in Rome found evidence of Kindred "torpor burials" from the 11th century that make use of many trappings of the Libitinarius line — Roman-styled canopic jars for storing Vitae, etched incantations and "waking charms" with many similarities to those used in modern Mortualia.

How is it possible that Weeks became the sire of a bloodline so soon after his Embrace? How is it possible that he gained mastery over the powers of his Blood so quickly? Was it really the result of an "ancient incantation?" Some of the scientific minds within the Order remain skeptical. Occam's Razor suggests a simpler alternative story is more likely: Weeks is a liar.

Except for a core group of loyal followers, Weeks' tale was witnessed only by mortals (now dead) and the torpid body of his mysterious master (who has not yet awakened). No impartial participants remain to corroborate the account tonight. How much of it is misremembered nostalgia? How much of it is outright fiction? How much of it is true?

BURIED

It is more likely, say the skeptics, that the Libitinarius bloodline is old — even ancient — and that Weeks and his absent master (if he truly exists) were among the last of their kind. Perhaps Weeks was already a member of the bloodline when he came upon the Society of Serapis. Perhaps Weeks even orchestrated the very formation of the society and the subsequent cult of Libitina to create a flock of followers and win the bloodline some temporal power.

Kindred scholars of various covenants have speculated that the mystic aspects of the Blood may lay dormant in childer for generations, as the echoes of power from a distant sire. Though the childer may not activate the power of the Blood within themselves, it may yet be passed on to grandchilder. Thus, even centuries after a bloodline dies out, it might be resurrected when a distant descendant transforms his Vitae and his Requiem into a sanguine mixture like that of his ancestors'. Perhaps it's possible that Weeks' story was essentially true when it first happened centuries (or even millennia) ago in Rome or Alexandria.

The Imaginary Vampire

The grimmest and most dramatic of the Libitinarius conspiracy theories suggests that Weeks' sire is a figment of his imagination, given some semblance of existence in the minds of his followers through the powers of Dominate. Some of Weeks' tales suggest his sire was so ancient, and had so many names, that his "real name" had become meaningless. Practitioners of Dominate could see that as a way to cover for the inconsistencies of altered memories. Scholars of Egyptian theology and the occult could speculate that a being without a "true name" does not truly exist.

On the other hand, perhaps Weeks needed to create a cover story to protect himself, his sire or the bloodline itself. What if the true origin of the Libitinarius bloodline was rooted in some dark crime, such as diablerie? Perhaps the first Libitinarius was altered by the blood of a mage or other supernatural creature? Perhaps the secrets of Mortualia were dug up from some vampiric tomb that Weeks wants to keep to himself?

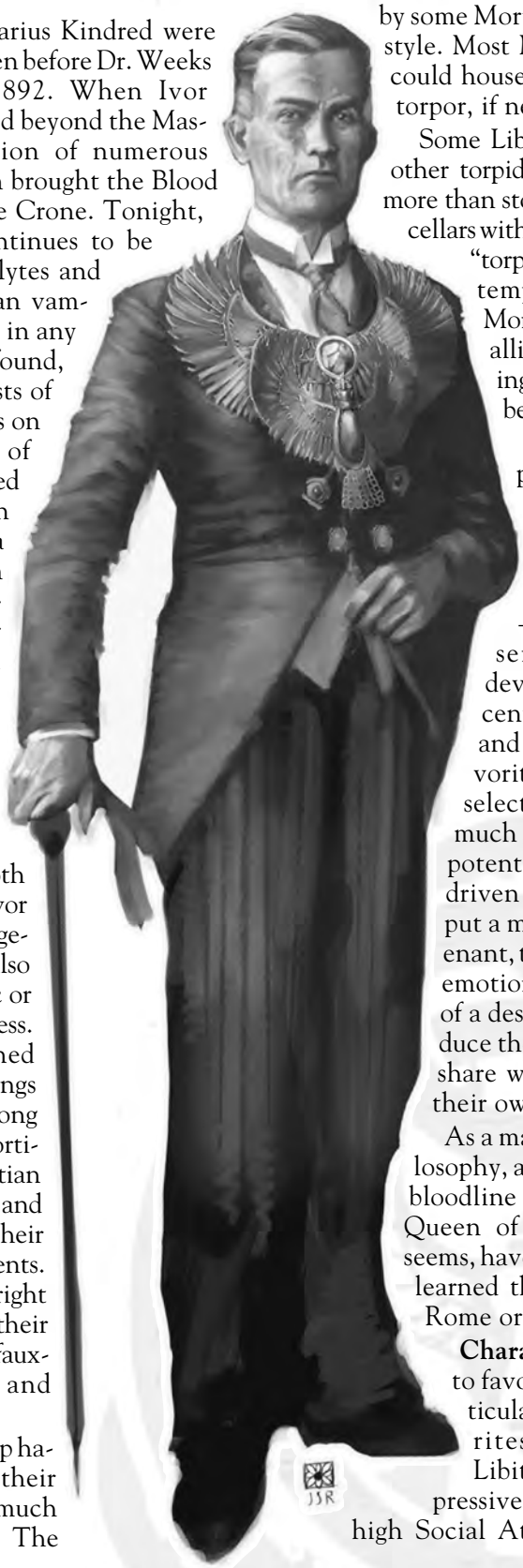
Whatever the truth, the Order has not yet had sufficient reason to challenge Weeks' story. For a century, Weeks has been a loyal, if shy, member of the covenant and an aid to its allies. Though some among the Sworn continue to keep watch on the Morticians, their scrutiny has been applied with exquisite patience for 50 years and isn't likely to change until some new

facts are unearthed. One night, if the tale is true, Week's sire will awaken…

Parent Clan: Mekhet

Nickname: Morticians

Covenant: The first Libitinarius Kindred were members of the Ordo Dracul even before Dr. Weeks founded the bloodline in 1892. When Ivor Gardner's Serapis cult expanded beyond the Masquerade, it drew the attention of numerous Acolytes. Those Acolytes then brought the Blood of Libitina to the Circle of the Crone. Tonight, the Libitinarius bloodline continues to be made up almost solely of Acolytes and Dragons. Invictus and Carthian vampires may deal with Morticians in any domain where they can be found, depending more on the interests of the individual Kindred and less on politics. Sanctified Kindred of some domains focus on the shared Greco-Egyptian influences on Theban Sorcery and Mortualia and even participate in Libitinarius ceremonies as secular performances. In other domains, the Sanctified regard Morticians as admirably learned providers of a service that has been sadly and needlessly draped in the trappings of pagan idolatry.



Appearance: Libitinarius Kindred come from all races and both genders. As academics, many favor a classical, professorial style. As ageless undead historians, many also find ways to incorporate archaic or classical art styles in their dress. Scarab brooches, old-fashioned beards or mustaches and ornate rings or necklaces are common among older Libitiniarii. Younger Morticians may sport Latin or Egyptian tattoos, elaborate body piercings and other physical decorations from their mortal lives as archaeology students. Some Libitinarii display downright archaic fashions even outside of their Mortualia ceremonies, such as faux-Egyptian eye make-up and Roman-style dresses.

Haven: Many Morticians keep havens that suggest nothing of their unique blood — they nest very much as any other Kindred might. The ideal haven for a Libitinarius, however, is as secret and secure as a Theban tomb. Underground chambers protected by secret doors and modern security systems are ideal. Solid stone or metal sarcophagi are used by some Morticians, for protection as much as style. Most Morticians seek out havens that could house them safely through decades of torpor, if necessary.

Some Libitinarii also maintain havens for other torpid vampires. Often these are little more than storage containers, mausoleums and cellars with solid locks and sturdy doors. These "torpor tombs" may see any number of temporary residents throughout a Mortician's Requiem. The favors and allies a Libitinarius gains by protecting and maintaining such havens can be considerable.

Background: Libitinarii select progeny almost exclusively from the ranks of academia. Simple scholarly types are seldom impressive enough to warrant a Mortician's Embrace, however — only leaders in their fields deserve to experience the development of their studies over centuries. Historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists are typical favorites. The Morticians are, after all, selecting students and colleagues as much as childer when they consider potential progeny. Most Morticians are driven to sire childer out of a desire to put a mortal's talents to use for the covenant, the bloodline or themselves. More emotional Libitinarii select progeny out of a desire to show them eternity, introduce them to ancient Kindred and freely share what they know of the past from their own experience.

As a matter of practice, rather than philosophy, a large segment of the Libitinarius bloodline is made up of subjects to the Queen of England. Most Morticians, it seems, have an English accent, whether they learned the language in Calcutta, Cairo, Rome or London.

Character Creation: Libitinarii tend to favor higher Mental Attributes, particularly Intelligence and Resolve. The rites and ceremonies of the Libitinarius bloodline are most impressively performed by characters with high Social Attributes, however. Because the

Mortualia Discipline requires the creation of certain tools and charms, the Crafts Skill is also invaluable to a Mortician.

A Libitinarius who tends to the torpor-haven of another vampire (or, indeed, any Mortician who discusses Mortualia with outsiders) would benefit from dots in Subterfuge if he values the secrets he keeps. The Academics and Occult Skills are also plainly useful to a Libitinarius; most Morticians were the sorts of humans who studied those Skills in life.

A Mortician with City or Covenant Status might have a reputation as the go-to guy for Kindred concerned with torpor. The Haven Merit is vital to many Morticians, as well. Haven Security almost always takes priority over Size and Location.

Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Dominate, Mortualia, Resilience

Weakness: Like all Mekhet, Libitinarii suffer the pains of fire and sunlight more severely than other Kindred. A Libitinarius suffers one additional point of aggravated damage from any source of fire or sunlight (see p. 172 of **Vampire: The Requiem**). Furthermore, Morticians find it more difficult to resist the dark sleep of the Damned than other Kindred. Libitinarius Kindred suffer a -2 penalty on all Humanity rolls to awaken or act during the daytime. This penalty also affects the character's Humanity dots for purposes of determining maximum dice pool sizes when awake. (See p. 184 of **Vampire: The Requiem** for information on daytime activity.)

The most dreadful weakness of the Libitinarius bloodline, however, is a secret kept even from many of its members: in the 1930s, Dragon Morticians in the American Midwest discovered that the change Dr. Weeks made to the Blood was not as dramatic as it first seemed. The mystic power of the Mortualia Discipline is not so far beyond the reach of ordinary Kindred that it can be considered truly unique. In practice, any Mekhet vampire can learn Mortualia as an out-of-clan Discipline provided a Libitinarius is willing to teach him. If this secret were to be revealed, the Libitinarii bloodline would wither and die as Kindred ceased to commit their eternal Blood to the lineage to keep its unique power in practice.

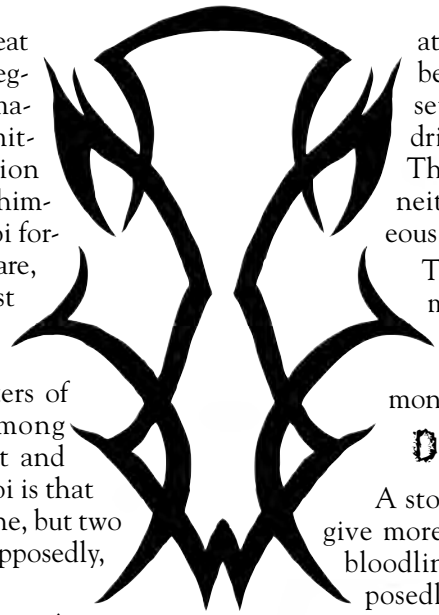
Organization: Libitinarius vampires naturally fall into informal hierarchies based on education and experience with Mortualia. In general, these Kindred interact something like a university professors. Age and experience is respected, and often deferred to, by younger Morticians, but colleagues of similar ages place a greater practical importance on skill than age. An ancient, experienced Libitinarius is more likely to be loved but a brilliant and clever Libitinarius is more likely to be followed.

Because Morticians love to talk, debate and lecture, they also tend to swell their ranks in domains where they reside. Thus, in many domains, Libitinarii are seen as a social group rather than a lineage. Certainly, some domains are home to a lone Libitinarius, but eventually most seek out contact with other history buffs, antiquarians or armchair archaeologists to satisfy their minds.

Concepts: Disturbed surgeon, Egyptologist, funeral home director, hospice nurse, occult archaeologist, pagan priest, Roman religion revivalist, taxidermist, undertaker.

Moroi

You didn't say you needed him alive



The Moroi bloodline is one of the great mysteries of the Ordo Dracul. The legends surrounding the bloodline's formation are strange enough, but the (admittedly murky) history of its association with the covenant states that Dracula himself recruited them, binding the Moroi forever to the Dragons. The bloodline is rare, especially outside of Europe, and most Dragons who have heard of the Moroi know them as fearsome combatants. "When the Moroi arrive, seek shelters of stone," goes a maxim common among Kogaions. But perhaps the strangest and most persistent rumor about the Moroi is that the bloodline is descended from not one, but two clans. Both Nosferatu *and* Gangrel, supposedly, can become Moroi.

In Romanian legend, a *moroi* is a vampire rising from the body of a stillborn infant. Elders of the Moroi do not recall if the Romanians took their name to describe their legend, or if the bloodline took the name of the legend as its own. A story handed down from sire to childe within the bloodline, however, draws a connection.

The legend states that a female vampire, mad with grief for the life she had lost, Embraced her infant child. When she beheld the abomination that she had created, she left it in a graveyard and fled west, to meet her end as the sun rose over the mountains. The child, by sheer luck, rolled into an open grave and was there shielded from the same fate. That night, two Kindred, one Gangrel and one Nosferatu, heard the child's cries. They retrieved the infant monster from the grave, and discussed what to do with it. Letting it live would be cruel, they agreed, since even if it could develop the mind of an adult, its body would never age. They decided to destroy it, but instead of simply burning it or leaving it for the sun, they instead chose to commit diablerie on the infant.

Two Kindred committing diablerie on the same target is impossible, of course, but the legend states that this is precisely what these two vampires did. The infant, condemned to undeath with a soul unblemished by sin, gave power to both of them. For that monumental act of cruelty, however, God cursed them both at that moment. They would henceforth be hunters and killers and nothing more, set apart by mortals by deformity and driven to kill by the howls of the Beast. Those Kindred became the first Moroi, neither Nosferatu nor Gangrel but a hideous amalgam of both.

This story, of course, is unverifiable and modern Dragons consider it little more than superstition. They do agree on one point, however: the Moroi are monsters and killers first and last.

Dracula and the Moroi

A story that the Ordo Dracul is willing to give more credence is that of how the Moroi bloodline came to join the covenant. Supposedly, in the years following his transition to undeath, Vlad Tepes wandered the world, looking for information about his kind. He came into conflict with vampires of several covenants and (presumably) all clans, but early in these wanderings, he chanced through a village surrounded by a dense forest. He saw that the villagers lived in fear, and were much more superstitious than even normal Wallachian peasants. In particular, there were no cats anywhere in the village, and the villagers killed the animals if they found them. Domesticated animals were blinded when they reached maturity, and the villagers crossed themselves whenever birds flew overhead. Dracula discovered that they believed that all animals were servants of the *moroi*, and only by blinding their livestock could they prevent these monsters from possessing the animals or turning them against their masters.

At the same time, the villagers only cut wood during the day, and refused to leave their homes after dark. They would not open their doors to anyone once the sun had set, for fear of a *moroi* in the form of a trusted neighbor or friend. Intrigued, Dracula ventured into the woods to find these "*moroi*." He was not long in looking.

The vampires he found were ugly and bestial, and yet possessed qualities Dracula valued — brutality, hunger and even a strange sort of loyalty. He shared his knowledge with these Kindred, and they spoke for weeks on topics of rulership, superstition, hunting mortals and the

society of vampires (of which the Moroi knew little more than Dracula). Finally, Dracula took his leave, but before he did, those few Moroi promised that if Dracula needed soldiers, they would come.

This story is apocryphal at best, and does not address the fact that Dracula never mentions the Moroi once in the *Rites of the Dragon*. Indeed, the Moroi were not seen or heard from again (as a bloodline of Kindred, at least — their legend persisted among mortals) before Dracula vanished, and his covenant took organized form.

When they reappeared, however, their loyalty was unquestionable.

The Spider Killings

From the time of Dracula's disappearance in the 16th century to the first decades of the 19th, the Ordo Dracul might have foundered and vanished at any time. The reasons for this instability are discussed in Chapter One. The fact that the Ordo Dracul survived at all, much less gained the power that it did in the 1800s and remains tonight, amazes many Kindred historians.

Very few Kindred historians know of the Moroi, of course.

The Moroi could do little about the lack of focus and infighting that plagued the Ordo Dracul. Those problems would have to work themselves out over time. What the Hunters could do, however, was mitigate the persecution of the Dragons by other Kindred sects. In cities where the Ordo Dracul needed a foothold but the established Kindred were both powerful and intolerant, the Moroi would creep in, slay a few key individuals and leave. They never declared themselves and never spoke a word of their loyalty to the Ordo Dracul or of their origins in Dracula's homeland. Further, they never (or rarely) committed diablerie upon their targets, knowing that this unforgivable crime would invite more dogged repercussions. In most cases, the Dragons did not even know about their mysterious benefactors, and arrogantly considered the fact that many of their most stringent opponents met Final Death to be a sort of divine providence.

The fact that no one connected these deaths to the Ordo Dracul didn't stop perceptive Kindred from connecting them to each other, of course. The killings happened according to a pattern, but lack of easy communication and the nature of what that pattern meant slowed Kindred investigators considerably.

The Moroi would first kill off a target's herd, servants and any other important mortals, including surviving family. This happened in the space of one or two nights, three at most. The Moroi rarely struck singly. Instead, an entire coterie of Hunters would hunt down the appropriate mortals and slay them. Rather than trying to cloak their killings as accidents or even mundane murders, the Moroi would simply drain these people of blood, leaving them as desiccated husks. When this was complete, the Moroi watched their vampire targets, waiting for them to flee, go to ground, enter torpor or otherwise protect themselves. At that point, the Moroi struck, attacking their foe with as much force as they could bring to bear. The battle was typically over in moments.

While the Moroi never gained the infamy of VII (because they did not mark their crimes and were never as widespread), their tactics did gain some attention. These killings came to be known as the work of "the Spiders," after the desiccated husks left behind, and having a vampire fall to these mysterious assassins was said to be an omen of bad luck for the Kindred of a city.

To this night, no one (except the Ordo Dracul itself) has connected the "Spider killings" to the Ordo Dracul. This is indeed fortunate for the Dragons, as doubtless some Kindred must survive who lost sires, childer or allies to the Hunters, and would surely want revenge.

The 19th Century

Very little is known of the bloodline's activities from roughly 1820 to 1900. The Spider Killings ceased as the Ordo Dracul experienced its boom in membership (see Chapter One for more details), and the word *moroi* existed only on the lips of those knowledgeable in Romanian folklore.

Modern Moroi haven't provided a reason for this absence, but the Dragons assume that the bloodline, knowing that the Ordo Dracul was now capable of standing on its own, decided that their methods would do more harm than good. This is true, but there is more to the story than that. The Moroi also saw that the world was growing smaller, and as they learned more of Kindred society, their views of that society and their own origins were challenged. Was it *possible* for two clans to form one bloodline? Could their own legends about Dracula be trusted? Were they merely an experiment performed in the early nights of the Ordo Dracul, "programmed," in a sense, to defend the covenant? Where was Dracula, now that the Moroi had risked all to defend his followers?

The Ordo Dracul was blissfully unaware of the turmoil in their vicious guardian bloodline. In the meantime, the bloodline retreated to rural villages, leaving behind the cities and dense population centers (and thus other vampires). Moroi who survive from that period, of course, have only hazy recollections, but all report feeling lost or useless, as though their reason for existing had been fulfilled. Indeed, an investigative coterie in France recently reported finding a disused haven, probably (judging from the bones lying about and the legendry of the local area), belonging at one point to a Moroi. A pile of ash and some charcoal smears on the floor provide the only clue as to the former occupant's fate, but more interesting was an

inscription on the wall, written in Latin. It said simply:, "Nothing left to kill."

The bloodline might well have died out completely before the modern age, having silently and ferociously shepherded the covenant through its own dark age. But the Moroi are creatures of blood and violence, and the first half of the 20th century would bring both to levels that Dracula himself could scarcely have imagined.

The Dragons' Fangs

World War I coaxed the Moroi in Europe out of hiding. The carnage and confusion in France provided opportunities for feeding such as the bloodline had never seen, and, even farther east, the new weapons being unveiled intrigued the Moroi. The Ordo Dracul, and Kindred society in general, reeled from the slaughter of so many of their vessels, but, in the midst of that carnage, the Moroi presented themselves to the most powerful of the Sworn and the eldest Kogaions they could find. They made no offers, but simply stated that they had once served the covenant at the behest of Dracula himself, and would hold to that bargain now, if the Dragons desired.

The Ordo Dracul did not waste such an opportunity. Entire coteries were formed to track down the Moroi. Those that agreed to serve the covenant were treated well, trained, fed and educated in matters of language, mortal customs and any other necessary skills. Those that refused were normally destroyed, but killing a Moroi is no easy feat. Even tonight, the Ordo Dracul admits that some Moroi escaped and are still at large. Tracking a Moroi, in fact, is often a task given to a martial coterie when the Ordo Dracul feels it has outlasted its usefulness.

Most of the Hunters, however, were eager to join with the covenant. The Ordo Dracul began studying the Moroi and determined that, somehow, Kindred of both the Gangrel and the Nosferatu clans dwelling in isolation in the Romanian forests had somehow "merged," creating a mutual bloodline. The theory is that Kindred of each clan had changed their Blood into a semblance of the other clan's Blood. The Ordo Dracul has tried to replicate this feat, but has not yet succeeded. Of course, given the relatively brief time since the "discovery" of the Moroi, it might simply require more research and experimentation.

Aside from the sanguinary questions they presented, the Moroi also had more basic uses in the Ordo Dracul. The covenant first attempted to use them as guardians for Wyrm's Nests, but with a few notable exceptions, this didn't work out very well. The Moroi are killers, not watchdogs. If denied their appetite for murder, they tend to go out looking for it, and this kind of aggression isn't advisable when trying to keep a Wyrm's Nest hidden and its energies untainted. No, the best use for the Moroi was as weapons.

As the 20th century wore on, the Ordo Dracul slowly established enclaves of Moroi in various places in Europe and the Americas. These enclaves were usually located outside of major population centers, but close enough to humanity to provide food. The Ordo Dracul also sank a great deal of time and energy into teaching the Moroi to feed without killing, and, in some cases, assigned a Kindred Confessor to these enclaves to temper the Hunters' bloodlust. Suburbs, though not desirable for most Kindred, more closely resembled the rural villages of old than anything else in the modern world. Tonight, the Ordo Dracul often arranges to purchase a house in the center of a suburb if it needs a coterie of Moroi near a given city. That suburb usually experiences a sudden spike in deaths and

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disappearances, but the Moroi eventually calm down and temper their hunting habits somewhat.

Moroi are occasionally included in normal, student coteries, given the opportunity to study under a mentor and learn the Coils of the Dragon. This is rare, both because the Ordo Dracul doesn't see the Moroi as having the intelligence and wherewithal necessary to learn the Coils, and because the Order values the Moroi's martial prowess so highly. More often, a Moroi might be included in a diplomatic mission or investigate coterie as muscle (and admonished not to do anything to compromise a mission). The most common use for the Moroi, however, is assassination.

Two Clans, One Bloodline

Readers might well question how it is possible for two clans to "merge" into a single bloodline. The answer: it isn't. The Moroi aren't a single bloodline, but two very similar bloodlines that "evolved" together. The founders of these bloodlines, whoever they truly were, probably did not recognize the differences between their clans, thinking of themselves as vampires first and Nosferatu or Gangrel second, if at all. Isolated together (perhaps even sharing Vitae), their blood merged and mutated, becoming so similar as to be indistinguishable.

Modern Moroi don't distinguish themselves based on parent clan. Since Hunters "born" of both Gangrel and Nosferatu lose their signature Disciplines (Protean and Nightmare, respectively) and gain the remaining Disciplines common to the other clan (Gangrel gain Vigor and Obfuscate, Nosferatu gain Animalism and Resilience), they seem to have the same capabilities. They also tend to share knowledge of any other Disciplines they know with their "sisters" in the bloodline, meaning any given Moroi might well have some knowledge of Protean and/or Nightmare as well as her four bloodline Disciplines. These two Disciplines are more difficult to learn, granted. Of course, characters, not having read the rulebook, have no concept of how many "experience points" a given Discipline costs to learn.

Identifying a Moroi's parent clan by the taste of her blood is possible (see p. 163 of **Vampire: The Requiem**), but a Kindred attempting to do so must have tasted both Nosferatu and Gangrel blood before, and her player receives a –1 modifier to the roll. Also, the Masked Blood Devotion (see p. 200) is only common within the Moroi bloodline, and this also aids in the Hunter being viewed as one lineage, even to its members.

A vampire who makes too great a nuisance of herself, in the Ordo Dracul's eyes, might receive a visit from the Moroi. Sometimes these visits take the form of the Locust and Spider killings of old, but more often the Moroi simply hunt down and slay the offending Kindred. They mask these killings as the work of Belial's Brood, accidents, mortal hunters or the normal Byzantine rivalry of Kindred society (though they never use VII as a scapegoat — it's best not to attract *their* attention). The Moroi can only be "activated" by a Kogaion or a Sworn Dragon with Covenant Status •••• or more, and indeed, few Kindred of lesser status in the covenant even know of their existence beyond rumors.

The Moroi, for their part, bear the condescension of their "masters" well. Paranoids in the covenant feel that the Hunters are merely biding their time, but the Moroi seldom seem angry or resentful of anything the Dragons do. Most, especially those whose Embrace predates the Second World War, just seem pleased to have a place again.

Parent Clan: Gangrel or Nosferatu

Nickname: Hunters

Covenant: The Moroi are a bloodline exclusive to the Ordo Dracul and the unaligned. New members are chosen from within the covenant or Embraced by Dragon Moroi. As mentioned above, some Moroi chose not to join the Ordo Dracul, but they either met Final Death or went into hiding decades ago. While it's possible that a Moroi could join one of the other covenants, claiming to be a "normal" Nosferatu (those descended from the Gangrel are too repulsive to claim membership in their parent clan), their murderous instincts would eventually betray them. It is more probable, then, that any non-Dragon Moroi are unaligned, existing on the fringes of vampiric society.

Appearance: Moroi of either lineage take on a yellowish cast to their skin, which lightens to a slightly pinkish color for approximately an hour after feeding. Their eyes lighten, becoming an unnatural ice-blue or jaundiced yellow. Even Nosferatu Moroi who previously exhibited no physical deformity develop this visage after joining the bloodline. Moroi, therefore, dress to cover their inhuman appearance.

Haven: The Moroi, as a kind of "secret weapon" to the Ordo Dracul, are generally given functional, secure havens, often in a city's Barrens or in a nearby suburb. Sometimes a young coterie is given the task of procuring vessels for a group of Moroi, in order that they be kept out of view of both mortals and a city's Kindred until such time as they are needed. Moroi with a bit more freedom of movement often choose havens near mortal residential areas, so that they can prey on people in their homes. This instinct seems to have remained with the bloodline since its inception in the far-flung past. Indeed, Moroi in less industrialized countries seem drawn to rural or farming communities.

Background: As the bloodline encompasses two clans, Moroi backgrounds vary. Membership in the Moroi is often offered to Nosferatu or Gangrel who are skilled combatants but aren't particularly puissant in learning the Coils of the Dragon. Unlike the Sworn of the Axe, membership in the Moroi bloodline isn't necessarily something to aspire to, as Moroi tend to become sheltered and hidden. When Moroi Embrace directly, they choose soldiers, policemen, gang members and other mortals with some combat experience. Criminals, however, are also common choices, as Moroi Embraced from more conventional stock tend to go mad as the murderous urges appear and their Humanity plummets.

When looking for potential Moroi, the Ordo Dracul looks not only for combat skill and brutality but obedience. The lot of the Moroi is that of a trained killer, let loose upon a target at the Ordo's behest. While cunning is prized, the Ordo looks askance at Moroi who seem *too* clever — they're not prized for their creativity.

Character Creation: Physical Attributes and Skills are primary, almost without exception. Most Moroi have some rating in Intimidation, and many have decent Wits or Presence ratings, but the bloodline's main talent is killing, and this where they receive their training and encouragement. The Ordo Dracul often provides some rating in Herd or Haven, and other Merits vary based on the background of the character in question. Trading Humanity for Experience is very appropriate for Moroi characters. Buying a second dot of Blood Potency is, of course, required to join any bloodline.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Obfuscate, Resilience, Vigor

Weakness: When a Gangrel or Nosferatu becomes a Moroi, she gains a specific form of the other clan's weakness in addition to that of her parent clan. This only contributes to the notion that both clans become the same form of Moroi.

Gangrel Moroi keep the feral urges common to their parent clan. Those urges take on a sadistic, bloodthirsty streak, however, as the Moroi blood imprints a constant desire to hunt and kill (the game mechanics remain the same). The moment Gangrel become Hunters, their bodies change as well (see Appearance, above). In game terms, this deformity is identical to the Nosferatu clan weakness. The 10-again rule does not apply to Presence or Manipulation dice pools (except for Discipline use), and any 1s on such rolls cancel successes.

Nosferatu Moroi keep their repulsiveness in whatever form it took, but usually take the physical characteristics described above as well. In addition, these Moroi grow vicious and bloodthirsty, their higher brain functions lost in the snarls of their Beasts. In game terms, this sadism is identical to the Gangrel clan weakness. The 10-again rule does not apply to Intelligence or Wits dice pools (except for Discipline use), and any 1s on such rolls cancel successes.

Organization: The bloodline itself has no real organization. Coteries of Moroi Kindred are kept separate from each other. They are told that this is because they are too great an advantage, and thus too tempting a target, to be allowed to gather in numbers, and this is true. A better reason for not allowing the Hunters to communicate or gather, however, is that with their skills as murderers and their bloodlust, they could wreak untold damage on the covenant if they ever decided to turn against the Dragons. The Moroi have never given any indication that they are displeased with their treatment, but elders of the Ordo Dracul insist that such a rebellion is a distinct possibility if the Moroi are left unchecked. Whether the elders feel this way out of simple paranoia or because of privileged information is a mystery.

Concepts: Drill instructor for the Sworn of the Axe, former assassin, fugitive-hunter, guerilla tactician, Kogaion's bodyguard, prowler of the Barrens, Romanian lore keeper, serial killer, sleeper agent, unrepentant monster.

A Combatant's Dream

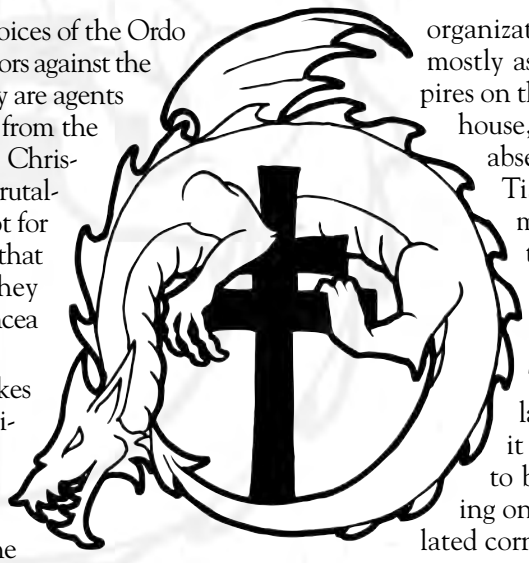
You're right, of course. The Moroi *are* designed to be good at combat. They get two of the three physical Disciplines, plus most of the Moroi have some knowledge of Protean or Nightmare and can get easy access to the other. What are we thinking?

Take another look. They're good at combat — and *very little else*. They suffer from both the Gangrel and the Nosferatu clan weaknesses, both of which are pretty debilitating if you want to do something simple, like have a normal conversation. The Ordo Dracul views them as attack dogs at best, and relics of the covenant's brutal past at worst.

This isn't to say that the Moroi are nonviable or "unbalanced" as characters. They provide interesting roleplaying challenges, to be sure. A character who joins the Moroi bloodline and tries to maintain her Humanity has quite a task ahead of her, as she is in her element *only* when hunting and killing. The primary instance in which a Moroi character "unbalances" a chronicle is if the chronicle is focused solely (or at least largely) around combat. Chronicles that focus on the larger themes of **Vampire: The Requiem**, or even on the themes of the Ordo Dracul in general, don't inordinately favor the Moroi. If anything, these Kindred must struggle to keep up with the subtle espionage and intriguing schemes of their contemporaries.

TISMANU

YOU HAVE THE STRENGTH TO OVERCOME THE WILD EVILS LURKING OUTSIDE THESE WALLS, UNLESS YOU SURRENDER IT TO THEM



The Tismanu are the hands and voices of the Ordo Dracul's Damned faith, and holy traitors against the blessed authority of the papacy. They are agents of atonement for the Dragons, bred from the righteous philosophy of Wallachia's Christian churches and the bloodthirsty brutality of Dracula's crusaders. Were it not for the historical and supernatural ties that bind them to the Ordo Dracul, they would surely be in league with the Lancea Sanctum tonight.

Whereas the Lancea Sanctum takes its lead from Catholic Christian traditions, the pious Kindred known as "Dragon Monks" follow a variation on Eastern Orthodox beliefs. They are a niche subculture born from the unique intersection of Orthodox Christianity, the spirituality of Slavic and Dacian peasants and the faith-shaking truth of vampirism. Thus, the Tismanu are considered to be, foremost, Kindred of a particular philosophical bent, rather than a lineage or familial line — though they are that, too, in the manner that vampires measure such things. In cities where word of the Dragon Monks has arrived in stories and legends of other domains, but no Tismanu vampires are actually present, the moniker of "Dragon Monk" is sometimes misattributed to any priestly Dragon who withdraws himself from the politics and societal scheming of the larger covenant to maintain an introspective, monkish existence. Strictly speaking, however, only those Kindred who study in the remote and historic monasteries of Romania, Greece and the Czech Republic — or under the direct tutelage of a Tismanu Avus — can change their blood into that of the true Tismanu.

OLDER THAN THE DRAGON HIMSELF

The Tismanu were a bloodline back when Dracula was mortal. Kindred of this lineage had already settled into sunless, monastic cells in Wallachia when Dracula was just a child. Thus, it is said that the loyalty of the Tismanu belongs to God, first and the Ordo Dracul, second.

The earliest Tismanu were pious contemplatives struggling to civilize and soothe the Kindred of the surrounding lands — especially themselves. They had little organization in those nights, and existed mostly as pairs of elder and younger vampires on the lookout for troubled Kindred to house, heal and enlighten. In the long absences between vampiric visits, the Tismanu quietly fed from mortal monks — some of whom even knew the true nature of the Tismanu, but kept their secrets to honor the pious efforts of hopeful monsters, like monastic blood dolls. Some Tismanu still maintain similar relationships with such mortal monks; it is a violation of the Masquerade, to be sure, but one that has been going on for centuries in one the most isolated corners of Europe without disaster.

In the decades before Dracula's damnation, the Tismanu were hardly known to most Kindred. They had little or no contact with mainstream Kindred society in those nights; the Prince of Bucharest at the time is said to have denied their existence as "a legend of peasants, undead or not." That small number of vampires who spent nights in the care of the Tismanu — often hiding from the threats and intrigue of the city — did little to publicize the efforts of their reclusive allies. The Tismanu didn't want their refuges to be spoiled by careless vampires, and the Tismanu's refugees wanted to keep their allies to themselves.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE TISMANU

The name "Tismanu" almost certainly comes from the name of a monastery in western Wallachia, called Tismana. Little physical evidence exists, however, to suggest that the monastery is actually a site of historical importance to the Tismanu. Although the oral history of the Tismanu suggests that the first vampire to change his Blood into that of the modern Tismanu first manifested the bloodline's unique supernatural powers in a remote monastery of eastern Europe, the eldest existing Tismanu uphold that the monastery was located in Transylvania, not Wallachia.

Even the name "Tismanu" is a fairly recent development. For decades, the so-called vampire monks of Carpathia had no name for themselves. For a time, it seemed that Kindred historians had neither recognized them as a bloodline nor even as a common philosophy.

Though one Tismanu taught another, who taught another and so on, the line of tutelage was never well-recorded or remembered, it seems. The blood of the Tismanu spread throughout Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia without much fanfare or historical impact. Those who know the Tismanu hardly find this surprising — they do not think of themselves in the same way they think of others. While the first of the undead monks that would become the Tismanu were helping to record the history of Dracula and his land, their own story was going unwritten.

While in Dracula's time it seems that the Tismanu had no name for themselves, later centuries would find them with a surplus. For a time in the 19th century, when the history of the Dragon Monks was gaining popularity with the Ordo Dracul as a tale of dedication in the dark years before the formation of the covenant, the Tismanu were known as Snagovians, after the monastery of Snagov, near Bucharest, where mortal history records that Dracula was buried. This name stuck for a few years among the Ordo Dracul due almost solely to Dracula's celebrity and Snagov's historic reputation. At least one Tismanu lurked in the tiny monastery of Snagov well into the 1900s, but the Tismanu have no other connection to that place.

By the 1920s, the Snagovian name had also fallen out of favor among the Dragons. Those who used it were considered to have fallen for a kind of popular misconception by learned and elitist Dragon academics. During this time, however, the Kindred who would become the Tismanu were spoken of much more often than they were encountered. Dragons throughout Europe talked about "Dracula's monks," but they had little real importance in the covenant. In truth, most Dragons considered them to be some sort of nobly backward, religious bumpkins — they were trivia, spoken about around the local chapter house as a means of seeming important.

Late in the 1930s, however, a few of the Tismanu were persuaded by a Parisian Dragon to transplant themselves to cities in western Europe and America. The spiritual aid and timeless insight of the Dragon Monks, it was thought, could bring special comfort to new Kindred of the Order who found themselves unable to appreciate the history and mysticism of the covenant in the face of the modern age. Within a few decades, the Tismanu had developed new ways of doing things. Quaint new monasteries, paid for by wealthy Dragons, were built in Canada, the United States, Scotland and Germany to house Tismanu coteries. The number of Kindred practicing the bloodline's unique Discipline is estimated to have doubled from 1940 to 1975 — an astonishing growth for the undead.

Yet the Tismanu are by no means commonplace. A census-taker working on behalf of the Prince of Prague concluded that six Tismanu vampires resided in his city, giving it the largest population of Tismanu vampires in the world, by the covenant's reckoning. In most cities where the Dragon Monks reside at all, one Tismanu mentor and one Tismanu pupil is more likely. The Tismanu desire privacy, refuge and a withdrawn location suitable for contemplation. Few cities can offer locations that meet the Tismanu standards for remoteness.

DRACULA'S FAVORITES

One legend told by the Tismanu — and quite popular among the Kindred of the Ordo Dracul — claims that Dracula himself consulted with a Tismanu vampire in the Impaler's mortal years. If the supposition that Dracula struggled with his Beast even before his damnation is to be believed, the Tismanu legend does not seem so unlikely. Perhaps the Impaler took comfort in knowing that even cursed monsters such as the Kindred could find solace and wisdom despite their bloody ways.

It is far more likely, however, that the Tismanu who supposedly conversed with Dracula "over 10 nights, years apart" never revealed his true nature to the Wallachian ruler. The exact era of these meetings is uncertain, but some Tismanu believe the meetings must have occurred prior to the construction of the monastery at Tirgsor, which was a gift from Dracula to the monks he so cherished. In its night, Tirgsor was supposedly haven to four Tismanu, who slept in underground cells dug specifically to house creatures of their kind.

Again, the rumors are extremely suspect. In *Rites of the Dragon*, Dracula makes it clear that he did not consider vampires to be real until he was cursed to join their ranks. Therefore, it is doubtful that he knowingly bestowed gifts on vampires when he was mortal.

What is commonly accepted, however, is that Dracula respected the efforts and enlightenment of the Tismanu during his nights as a vampire in Romania. It seems that the Impaler's appreciation of the clergy did not die with him. Two of the eldest Tismanu in modern Romania claim to have met Dracula, and one supposedly still keeps a letter written by him. These tales, coupled with Dracula's recorded historical appreciation for monks and their ilk, makes the Tismanu prized members of the Ordo Dracul.

PHILOSOPHY

Tismanu philosophy reflects the beliefs of the Orthodox priests who ministered to the peasants of Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia during the Middle Ages. Although many folk remedies exist to combat the spells, hexes and curses of witches and mages across the land, only the holy efforts of the Church are to be trusted. It is the priest's duty to exorcize demons, break enchantments and protect common people from supernatural threats.

The Tismanu perform essentially the same services for common Kindred. In addition, they strive to create safe refuges where vampires can recover from the wounds inflicted by a harsh world and better resist the strenuous

pull of the Beast. Dragon Monks believe it is their eternal duty to make the Requiems of other Kindred easier, to guide other vampires toward an existence free of turmoil and spiritual strife. In the harsh and unwelcoming night of the World of Darkness, this goal seems unobtainable, and the Tismanu see that. Unable to save the world or their own souls, they work to save individual nights from descending into chaos and avoidable evil.

If a Tismanu can bring serenity to another vampire, he is succeeding in his philosophy. When a Tismanu has helped another Kindred attain the personal awareness and insight necessary to change himself — such as by learning the Coils of the Dragon — the Tismanu betters himself as well.

The evil of the world cannot be stopped, but it can be kept at bay. The evil acts that define Kindred existence cannot be ignored, but they can be minimized. The evil in a monster's heart cannot be denied, but it can be put to good use.

MONASTERIES OF THE TISMANU

The Tismanu maintain a number of monasteries across the World of Darkness. Some are open only to Kindred of the Ordo Dracul, others are open to all Kindred. The locations of Tismanu monasteries are not common knowledge, however, and are not meant to be. The Tismanu insist that every Kindred who knows a monastery's location is permitted to tell just one other vampire — ever.

Surely, in time, the locations of these monasteries will be common knowledge, but the Dragon Monks want that knowledge to spread through genuine need and generosity. Kindred on the run are welcome at these monasteries, but the Tismanu do not grant true sanctuary. If Hounds come looking for a refugee, the Tismanu do not stand in the way.

The following monasteries are only some examples of those kept by the Tismanu.

CARPATHIAN RUINS

This ruined, stone retreat lays piled in a crack in the green mountainside like forgotten scree. From the outside, it's hardly possible to recognize that these stacks of stone blocks were once a building. Behind the rubble and weeds, however, a series of rooms stretch deep into the black depths of mountain, and it is there that the Tismanu sleep and store their religious texts. Very few visitors come to a monastery of this sort — a mere handful every 10 or 15 years. The Tismanu keep it primarily for themselves, to study with mentors or lay in torpor to calm their blood. Inside, the monastery is adorned with a few simple candles (evidence of their formidable calm) and a great, gold cross.

HIDDEN PRAGUE

In the heart of a nondescript brick building near the riverbank in Prague, there is a windowless, stone bunker. The building is owned by the ghoul of a Dragon Architect, but the chamber within belongs to a Tismanu. Only a few of the local Kindred in the Ordo Dracul know of its existence, and non-Dragons are forbidden to go there. It is a refuge for Dragons in trouble and a meeting place for secret covenant ceremonies. Though, architecturally, it is little more than a concrete cube, the space inside this modern monastery has been dressed like an Orthodox church. The massive iron door that blocks the sole entrance to the retreat is featureless from the outside — only the Dragon Monk inside can open it.

PHILADELPHIAN REFUGE

Tucked between two warehouses on the edge of downtown Philadelphia is a shabby house-turned-church. By day, it is a functioning Greek Orthodox church, staffed with volunteers who know nothing about

its secret cellar. By day, a Tismanu sleeps below. At night, when the warehouses are empty and the volunteers have gone, the church opens to Kindred of all clans and all covenants. It serves as a kind of Elysium, but the resident Dragon Monk also maintains three private meditation cells (each granting a +2 equipment bonus to meditation dice pools) and a communal haven in the basement, where Kindred are welcome to sleep but forbidden to speak. For those Dragons versed in the third Coil of the Beast, these rooms can also be locked tight and used to Exhaust the Beast.

Parent Clan: Mekhet

Nickname: Traditionally, Monks, but in territories where the Lancea Sanctum holds power, or the nickname is already in use, they are sometimes called Dracula's Abbots or Dragon Monks.

Covenant: All Tismanu are born of vampires loyal to the Ordo Dracul, so far as such a generalization can be made. As much as any bloodline can be devoted to any covenant, the Monks are loyal to the Ordo Dracul. Centuries of tradition have led to the common assumption that no Tismanu in the world belongs to any covenant but the Ordo Dracul. The assumption might even be true.

Despite the strength of their link to the Order, Tismanu may fraternize with Sanctified without suffering suspicion from either covenant — they are ambassadors of sorts to the Lancea Sanctum. The Sanctified seem to stereotype Dragon Monks as simple, old-fashioned and remote religious folk whose beliefs have been molded by Eastern Orthodox theology and archaic, peasant culture into a harmless oddity. More to the point, modern Catholic Sanctified are more likely to regard Tismanu as backwards than heretical. Customarily, contact between Tismanu and Sanctified vampires is kept philosophical rather than political, concerned with theological debate rather than matters of state.

By contrast, such meetings of minds don't often occur between the "favorite monks" of the Ordo Dracul and the pagans of the Circle of the Crone. The popular worldview of the Tismanu counts Acolytes among the masses of foreign heathens to be converted or avoided — the time Dracula spent among the Acolytes is seen by the Order's Monks as an understandable but shameful exploration of heathenism. In the eyes of the Tismanu, Acolytes are unenlightened, like the pagan peasants of old. It's the business of the Lancea Sanctum to confront them, however; Dracula's Monks tend only to the souls and safety of Dragons and their allies.

This relationship with the Lancea Sanctum (and the Circle of the Crone) sometimes helps make contact between the Tismanu and the Invictus somewhat cordial. Political types among the Ordo Dracul sometimes try to stretch the hospitality offered to the Tismanu to cover Dragons as a whole. Carthians and the Unaligned are not regarded as a whole by the Tismanu, but measured one at a time according to their sins and their piety.

Appearance: The eldest Tismanu were medieval Slavic and Greek mortals who took on the chasuble of the Orthodox church either in life or in undeath. Most lived long lives before being Embraced. To this night, the majority of Tismanu are elderly, white men with full beards and uncut hair. Most keep formal, Orthodox religious garb for covenant functions (or even for every-night wear) and favor old-fashioned clothing, from colorful, peasant sweaters to simple, black slacks and suspenders.

Haven: Dracula's Monks sleep in places rich in covenant history, places cramped with Christian iconography, and places steeped in the memorabilia of violent piety — sites with medieval battle memorials or tombs from antiquity, for example. They favor private holy sites (like historic monasteries "owned" by wealthy Dragons or protected by trusts set up by the Order), dark and remote ruins (like forgotten catacombs and collapsed abbeys), and specially constructed, modern havens built as gifts for the eldest Monks by reverent Dragons. (One Tismanu resides in a windowless penthouse retreat in Prague, where he serves as an advisor and counselor for Kogaions of central Europe.) Tismanu frequently, and sometimes foolishly, give the religious and historical significance of a site more weight than its security. Some of the eldest Tismanu, meanwhile, sleep in the soil beneath decrepit and abandoned chapels in the backwoods of eastern Europe.

Background: Though the Mekhet who become Tismanu come from all walks of mortal life, a rarer Requiem leads them to the bloodline. For centuries, all Tismanu were male vampires of the Mekhet clan born as mortals in eastern Europe and cursed to undeath by local vampires. Until the 19th century, only a handful of the few Tismanu in existence had ever dwelled farther from the Carpathians than Prague or Athens. Late in the 1930s, when leaders within the Ordo Dracul convinced a few Tismanu to transplant themselves to Paris, London and New York so that their ways could be introduced to new generations of Dragons, the ranks of the Tismanu began to change.

Tonight, a few female vampires and a scant assortment of non-Europeans have become Tismanu. Most of these exceptional Dragon Monks dwell in North America, but female Tismanu have become more common in Europe, as well (insofar as a subset of a small, niche tradition can be considered common). These modern Tismanu still study beneath the wisdom of elder Dragon Monks, however. For now, the Tismanu still observe the centuries-old tradition that only Dragon Monks who have themselves slept and

studied in the line's historic monasteries may fulfill the duties of an Avus.

Despite the expanding ethnic and gender characteristics of the bloodline, the philosophical make-up of the Tismanu population has gone largely unchanged for hundreds of years. Dragon Monks seek to find peace in their own madness, to steel themselves against the ferocity of the Beast and protect other vampires from the perils of their own damnation. Tismanu Kindred are calmly compassionate and traditionally minded, almost without exception; these Dragon Monks seek to foster relief and create refuges of peace in a world of violence and fear. Those Tismanu who do not feel this way tonight have likely changed from the supportive and settled creatures they once were.

Character Creation: Although they have a reputation as reclusive philosophers and holy men, the Tismanu often favor Social attributes rather than Mental. They are a gregarious, helpful people and, though they are no sort of missionary or evangelist, the most important benefits they offer to other Kindred are delivered with emotional insight, a generous ear or firmly encouraging words. Social Skills are also most favored by the Dragon Monks, who rely on Persuasion and Empathy when providing emotional (and supernatural) aid.

The remote, protected monasteries that have traditionally housed the Tismanu might be represented with the Haven Merit, but most monasteries that house Tismanu are not truly the property of the vampires themselves. Rather, Tismanu tend to maintains havens within a larger monastery or on its grounds — whether local mortal monks know he is a *strigoi* or not. Tismanu do not customarily take vows of poverty (though individual Tismanu might), yet they place very little value on their own wealth. Likewise, the Dragon Monks remain as neutral as possible, politically. Merits such as Resources, Retainer and City Status are uncommon among these Kindred. Allies, Contacts and Covenant Status are actually fairly common, however — the Ordo Dracul respects and protects these historic vampires.

The Tismanu practice a unique Discipline called Eupraxia. Knowledge of its mystic blessings and spiritual power is considered the real mark of a true Tismanu. A Kindred who studies with Dracula's Abbots but cannot muster the powers of Eupraxia is just another monk.

Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Celerity, Eupraxia, Majesty.

Weakness: Like all Kindred of Mekhet blood, Tismanu suffer the pains of light and fire more severely than other vampires. Whenever Tismanu suffer damage from sunlight or fire, they take an additional point of aggravated damage from that source (see p. 172 of **Vampire: The Requiem**).

Tismanu vampires must not only retreat from fire and the sun, but from the outside world altogether. Tismanu must seclude themselves from other creatures to meditate upon their own selves and maintain their own resolve. A Tismanu vampire must keep a haven of his own specifically for this purpose. In game terms, a Tismanu must have a number of dots in the Haven Merit equal to or greater than his Blood Potency. These dots cannot be part of a communal haven, though they may be spread across Haven Size, Location or Security in any combination, so long as the necessary number of dots applies to a private haven of the Tismanu's.

If a Tismanu sleeps anywhere but his own haven, or his haven has an insufficient number of dots in the Haven Merit, he becomes unsettled, nervous, anxious and skittish. Each day a Tismanu spends away from his private haven imposes a -2 penalty to the dice pools of all non-reflexive actions the character attempts (to a maximum penalty of -5). Once the Tismanu has spent at least one day asleep in his own haven, these penalties disappear.

Organization: Strictly speaking, the hierarchy of the Dragon Monks is virtually nonexistent. Tismanu demand their peers respect and obey the bloodline's traditional tenets, but this expectation has resulted in only a skeletal framework of internal authority. In place of their own unique hierarchy, the Tismanu operate within the social structures of the Ordo Dracul and traditional Orthodox monastic law. Because the Dragon Monks so rarely operate their own monasteries, they often hide within the societies of mortal monasteries, existing as strange nocturnal hermits or seemingly mad recluses. Within the covenant, on the other hand, the Tismanu observe rules of conduct, but never become Sworn. The mentor-student relationship is taken very seriously by Dragon Monks, however. A Tismanu without a student is considered to be wasting time.

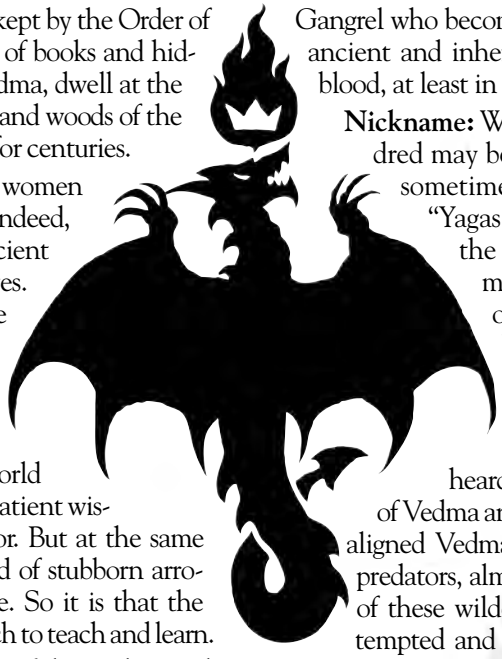
The traditional rules the Tismanu apply to themselves are meant to interlock with those applied by the covenant and the Church. Tismanu respect the elders of the line; a Tismanu never challenges or interrupts an elder in front of non-Tismanu. Tismanu do not reveal the secrets told to them by other Kindred, except to their immediate and current mentor. Tismanu never Embrace without the approval of an elder. Only a Tismanu who has resided for at least 10 years and one night in one of the Orthodox monasteries historically claimed by the Tismanu may induct other Kindred into the bloodline.

Concepts: Ambassador to heathens, covenant counselor, exorcist, lore master, medieval historian, preacher to peasants, protector of refugees, repentant sinner, spiritual advisor, spy among the Sanctified, treasure-keeper.

Vedma

Bring me a white fawn, alive and whole, and I'll perform the hex you wanted. Fail, and in seven nights you'll have the hex on yourself.

Not all of the secrets of vampirism kept by the Order of the Dragon lurk in their dusty stacks of books and hidden scholarly lairs. Some, like the Vedma, dwell at the edge of civilized society, in the weeds and woods of the world, where they have been hidden for centuries.



The Vedma are the witches, wise women and grandfathers of the Ordo Dracul. Indeed, the Vedma claim to carry noble, ancient blood older than the clans themselves. Theirs is a mysterious, primordial line of blood stained on Europe since the nights of the ancient world or, some say, trickling down from the hidden mountain of the Dacians, called Kogaion. They have watched the world change over centuries with a kind of patient wisdom the Dragons praise and strive for. But at the same time they resist change with the kind of stubborn arrogance the Dragons seek to overcome. So it is that the Ordo Dracul and the Vedma have much to teach and learn.

The formidable and strange magic of the Vedma is the stuff of legends in Slavic lands, both then and now. These are the witches and warlocks of the woods who prayed on the common folk of Transylvania, Wallachia and Russia when the world was lit only by fire. These are the hex-workers and deal-makers who traded magic potions in exchange for first-born children. These are the monsters who turned the forest birds against townspeople and flew screaming over the mountains in the dark.

The Vedma believe the power of their blood is an ancient remnant of tonight's more "pedestrian" powers. Their wicked art, called Zagovny, is said to have been sipped from the earth and drunk from the fears of sleeping children. The Vedma believe their Damnation and their power seeps from the land itself. It was the Kindred of this line who kept the secrets of Spoiling — an mystic art of the Blood — when the vampires of old forgot its power. Tonight, Vedma remain the keepers of ancient secrets and fugitives from the modern world. With time and finesse, however, these witches may become stepmothers to Dragons.

Parent Clan: Gangrel. The eldest Vedma, however, maintain a legend that has been passed down through the Warlocks for centuries, which claims the Gangrel are an off-shoot of the Vedma, rather than the other way around. The Vedma claim they come from an earlier era of more potent and formidable vampires, before the spread of Kindred blood diluted the oldest lineages into the clans recognized tonight. Gangrel who become Vedma are therefore restoring their ancient and inherent power rather than refining their blood, at least in the eyes of the Vedma.

Nickname: Warlocks. In domains where other Kindred may be labeled "Warlocks," the Vedma are sometimes called "Dracula's Witches" or even "Yagas," in reference to Baba Yaga. Though the majority of Vedma are women, the masculine nickname somehow caught on during the 14th or 15th century and has been used since.

Covenant: The Vedma line is strongly associated with the Ordo Dracul by those Kindred who have heard of it. In truth, however, the majority of Vedma are unbound to any covenant. These unaligned Vedma are loners, nomads or unusual rural predators, almost without exception. No headcount of these wilder Vedma has ever been seriously attempted and would likely be prohibitively difficult — Vedma rarely interact with one another, and few Kindred outside the line have much interest in plunging into dark mountain woodlands in search of these Warlocks.

The most visible Vedma, therefore, are those who do participate in the urban affairs of covenants and coteries. Of these, the Vedma of the Order are the de facto stereotype: old, riddling witches spying and whispering of the old nights. Dragon Vedma are the speakers for the past in some European chapters and traditional wise women in others. Though the supernatural powers of the Vedma are certainly respected and cherished in those Academies that house them, Vedma of the Order seldom learn the Coils of the Dragon. As a result, Warlocks exist on the verge of the covenant much as they once dwelled on the edges of medieval villages.

Vedma involved with the Circle of the Crone tend to play more central roles — as wise women, high priests and hexers — but most Vedma don't enjoy the idea of being so prominent. Vedma value their protection too highly to be to be easily found when sought and, for a Warlock, protection requires distance from curious eyes. Even a Vedma who stands to gain no renown or prestige in an Acolyte cult might shy away from the covenant's own visibility.

Like so many of the oldest vampiric traditions, the Vedma are often considered by Sanctified vampires to be antiquated heathens too far out of touch with modern philosophy to be meaningful in the modern night. Sanctified Priests may disregard or oppose a Warlock,

but few are likely to entertain notions of conversion. The very blood of the Vedma is wild, pagan and heretical — with their bloody trickery, how could any parish leader confidently believe a Warlock in his domain had converted in her heart?

Secular covenants may find uses for the powers of the blood of Vedma in their various schemes, but most Vedma have little use for political organizations. A few Vedma, to be sure, have secured their relationships with the Invictus or the Carthians of Europe and America in exchange for safer feeding grounds or the promise of privacy, but such agreements hardly constitute membership and seldom lead to anything more formal or binding.

Appearance: In ages past, Vedma dressed in the trappings of witches of other presumed sorcerers. Their garb often reflected the local peasant traditions of weaving and color schemes (and was typically stolen from peasant victims or accessible cottages) but was worn nearly to rags from nights of unclean work and travel through mud and woods. Most Vedma carried a large number of their possessions, and so looked like vagrants or travelers, thick with bags and dangling trinkets.

Tonight, the relative appearance of the Vedma is the same, but the styles are often new. Modern Vedma typically look homeless and crazy, with layers of salvaged clothing and huge, wild eyes behind a face of filth and grime. Some lug huge duffel bags or push shopping carts, while others have rows of plastic shopping bags tied around their belts, each full of stolen and rescued junk.

Unlike other vampires, Vedma do not revert to their mortal appearances when they rest. Instead, all Vedma weather and grow worn out like an old woman's untended house. Their hair grows wild and tangled, their flesh becomes rough and sometimes hairy and their eyes take on unnatural or sickly appearances — some become strong and yellow like a bird of prey's while others turn a jaundiced yellow. Vedma teeth inevitably become a black and yellow mess of jagged edges.

Haven: Vedma sleep apart from mortal and vampire society. How far apart varies, but something in their nature demands privacy and personal secrecy. Caves, cracks in the earth, and burrows beneath tangled roofs of roots are as good as abandoned bunkers, ancient barrows, and derelict automobiles. One rare American Vedma sleeps in the rusty hollow of a rural water tower.

Most Vedma teach their childer or students to sleep within the earth through the powers of Protean; this is one of the few lessons a Vedma is likely to pass on before leaving a childe to fend for itself. Vedma havens, therefore, are often little more than landmarks or shells protecting a patch of accessible earth, where the Vedma can nest like a snake beneath a rock.

Background: The majority of Vedma are European women. Though no arcane factor limits the Vedma bloodline to any gender or ethnicity, the traditionalism and old-world sensibilities of many Vedma lead them to Embrace as they were Embraced. For a long while, it was customary for Vedma to accept students and progeny only from the very old and experienced — even tonight many, if not most, Warlocks are vampires who were Embraced with gray hair and bony, trembling fingers. Damnation preserves their wisdom and experience, gives teeth to their antiquated biases and stagnant stubbornness and exchanges rattling bones and shaking hands with the fortitude of the Blood.

In North America, Vedma are drawn largely from immigrant populations for whom English is a second language. Though the earliest Vedma were Slavs, modern Vedma of the New World (and even Europe, to a lesser extent) are as likely to be Polish, German, Croatian or Russian. Gender has become less of a factor for these American and Canadian vampires, however.

Vedma avoid cities that lay like concrete slabs on the landscape, like stones over crypts, in favor of sprawling cities with pockets of wild, weedy growth.

Character Creation: The Vedma as a lineage are somewhat diverse, but individual Vedma are seldom broad of interests or training. Most Vedma focus on a single, particular category of Attributes and Skills — if Social Attributes are the character's primary category, Social Skills are likely to be primary as well. Different Vedma prioritize different categories, but often focus on a small number of highly rated traits.

Most Vedma are old-fashioned, or even out of touch. Skills like Drive and Computer are seldom found among their kind. Despite the bloodline's typical role as an odd outsider, many Vedma are stronger in Social Skills than the typical Gangrel. Vedma lure mortals (and other vampires) into tricks, traps and bargains. They negotiate deals for hunting grounds and barter for unwanted children. A Vedma may project an image of muscular ferocity or wild-eyed insight, but often that's all it is: a projected image.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Protean, Resilience, Zagovny

Weakness: The Vedma share in the blood of the Gangrel, and so share in their particular curse as well. A Vedma does not enjoy the benefits of the 10-again rule on dice pools based on Intelligence or Wits, and any 1's that come up on a roll with such dice pools subtract from the successes achieved. (The latter part of this weakness does not affect dramatic failure rules.) This weakness does not apply to dice pools involving perception or reaction to surprise, or to the Resolve Attribute.

Like Gangrel, Vedma seem more bestial over time, as the Man gives way to the Beast. Unlike other Gangrel, a Vedma's appearance changes with her blood, as well. Vedma blood gnarls and weathers the body, so Vedma typically appear unkempt, unclean and bordering on wild. Creatures who knew a Vedma before she became a part of the bloodline must make a Wits + Empathy roll to recognize her. A Vedma suffers a –2 penalty to all Social actions with creatures who knew her before she became a Warlock.

Warlocks are never comfortable when surrounded by the trappings of modern mortal existence and civilization, though neither are they comfortable alone in the wild. What a Vedma

doesn't like to feel is caged. A Vedma can never purchase more than two dots in Status or Resources. If a third dot of Covenant Status, for example, were to be awarded to a Vedma character for free, she would be unlikely to fulfill the responsibilities of the position. A Vedma's total dots in any Status Merits serve as a penalty to interactions with other Warlocks.

Finally, the Vedma suffer from a peculiar deficiency in their blood. A Vedma's own Vitae cannot retain the mystic qualities necessary to harness the bloodline's power of Zagovny. On any night when a Vedma wishes to use the Zagovny Discipline, she must first consume an amount of animal Vitae equal to her dots in Zagovny, in one "sitting." (In this case, a "sitting" consists of a single hunting roll or the total amount of Vitae consumed within a five- or six-minute span.) This is not an extended action; a subsequent feeding for the purpose of activating Zagovny replaces the previous attempt rather than adding to it. The character gains no actual Vitae from this consumption; instead, it is instantly used by the Vedma's body to activate the latent powers of Zagovny. If the Vedma consumes less animal Vitae than she has dots in Zagovny, she can only use Zagovny powers rated with dots equal to or less than the animal Vitae consumed. The Vedma's animal Vitae "charge" is expended when the character next spends Vitae to awaken. (Thus, Vedma who study the Coils of the Dragon can go longer between doses of animal Vitae.)

Example: *Siwa, a Vedma Dragon, is soon to set out on a hunt for human blood. She expects that she'll want to use her Zagovny Discipline during the night, so first she attempts a Wits + Survival roll to hunt for sufficient animal Vitae to activate her three dots of Zagovny. The roll nets two successes, so the Storyteller determines that Siwa gets two animal Vitae on her hunt. Therefore, she can use only her first- and second-level Zagovny powers. If she had gotten three animal Vitae — or tried again and got three animal on her second attempt — she'd be able to use all three of her dots in Zagovny.*

Organization: Whether the Vedma are recognized as the potent roots of the Gangrel tree or a branch of it, it cannot be argued that, culturally, the Vedma are an exaggeration of Gangrel ways. Vedma have virtually no organization to speak of — most seek to distance themselves from the majority of Kindred society, including those of their own line. What little hierarchy can be found among the Vedma might be seen as a hint of the mentor-student relationships of the Order Dracul, perhaps arising out of some shared cultural foundation common to the Slavic lands where both the Vedma and Dracula originate. To spread their tales and their mystic secrets, Vedma take on students (sometimes called "pets") and instruct them in the ways of earthly survival and bloody power. A Vedma is likely to take on her own childer as a student, but there are no guarantees — some Vedma progeny are abandoned. Likewise, a vampire who seeks out an Avus among the Warlocks should expect to serve and study before being inducted into the bloodline.

In the last century or so, a handful of Vedma in Europe and North America have come into contact through the social mechanisms of the Ordo Dracul. These Vedma have extended the Vedma tutorial tradition to the Order as a whole, teaching individual Dragons for perhaps a year at a time and sharing the legends and tales of the Vedma with the archivists and Kogaions of the Ordo Dracul. More than a few unaligned Vedma have come forth to take advantage of the covenant's generosity, but just as many have threatened their fellow Vedma to break away from the covenant and honor the old ways.

Concepts: Baba Yaga wannabe, bag lady, crazy unclean artiste, hex master, Kindred boogeyman, nomadic serial killer, peasant-hunting woodland terror, satanic pagan, wise woman of the woods.

Chapter Five: Coils and Miscellanea of the Blood

"I don't know how else to explain it.

I thought it would feel like something had been undone,

you know?

Like the thirst would be weaker.

But it doesn't.

It's more like I'm changed.

Like I've got something that I didn't used to have."

— Ava Curry,

Supplicant of Hunger

The phial, to which I next turned my attention, might have been about half-full of a blood-red liquor, which was highly pungent to the sense of smell and seemed to me to contain phosphorus and some volatile ether.

— Robert Louis Steven, The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde

The vampires of the Ordo Dracul know things the other Kindred do not. Some of those secrets are in here.

The Dragons seek out, collect, hoard, hide and secretly disseminate all kinds of occult lore. They have access to mystic powers long since forgotten by mortals or never before seen by the undead. From the Coils of the Dragon to the ghostly science of Essentiaphagia, from the mystic science of blood alchemy to rituals that consume spiritual essence, the Dragons have a multifaceted catalog of supernatural powers to use against their foes and in support of their colleagues. Many of these powers are laid out below for use by Dragon characters.

First, you'll find information on the Coils of the Dragon and the Disciplines of the covenant bloodlines from the previous chapter. After those come several categories of new Devotions and Merits, followed by the sort of uncommon powers and practices the Dragons call "oddities of the blood."

Not everything in this chapter is right for every chronicle, however, so consult your Storyteller before getting your heart set on any of these new powers. Likewise, don't assume that your character has heard all the secrets of the covenant — even if some of these powers are available to your character, she might not know it yet. Encountering new Coils and discovering new mystic rituals is part of the fun of an Ordo Dracul-themed story. You might enjoy ruining surprises for yourself, but don't spoil the story for your character.

Coils of the Dragon

The Coils of the Dragon extend beyond the nine, varied tiers presented in **Vampire: The Requiem**. Many Dragons believe that each Coil can be followed unto transcendence, and that other, heretofore-unimagined Coils may yet exist to be cultivated from, or unlocked within, the Blood. The number of Dragons who actually succeed in uncovering new Coils is small — especially compared with the number who seem to be trying to do so. More often than not, Dragon mystics merely succeed in finding new ways to learn or embody Coils that the Order is already familiar with.

Although the effects of the Coils, and the purpose assigned to them by the covenant, are clear, it's important to remember that no Kindred can authoritatively say just what the Coils actually *are*. The changes in the vampiric state that manifest through the Coils are unlike the Disciplines mixed in with Kindred blood. They are unlike the mystic rituals practiced by other covenants. The spiritualists, philosophers and warlocks of the Ordo Dracul can see what the Coils do, know how it feels to manifest them and, to some extent, explain how to create them within the Blood, but no vampire truly understands, for certain, what makes them possible. Are they the rungs of a long ladder leading out of Hell, given to the Kindred by God? Are they a demonstrable result of a soul's capacity to brew new power in the Blood? Are they even something that is gained at all — or is each Coil a scale torn from the Beast's hide, or an ounce of damnation washed away?

The more power a Dragon achieves, the less that power is understood.

And yet, a few diligent Dragons *have* discovered new ways to change the Blood and manifest Coils previously unknown to Kindred of the covenant. Such breakthroughs are rare, but so cherished and celebrated by the Order that a surprising number of dedicated or stubborn Kindred continue the search for new Coils despite decades — or even centuries — of fruitless effort.

Not all Dragons who fail to discover new Coils fail to discover other powers of the Blood, however. Centuries' worth of occult, scientific and mystical efforts have led the Ordo Dracul to other new supernatural powers, beyond the Coils of the Dragon. Such powers might be studied, marveled at and even practiced by Kindred of the covenant, but they are not what the Ordo Dracul is truly searching for, so eventually most of these tangential or eccentric powers lose the attention of the Ordo Dracul's best minds and enter a strange category of their own. Some of these oddities of the Blood are presented later on in this chapter.

New Coils and New Tiers

As long as the Kindred of the Ordo Dracul continue to experiment with their own bodies and souls, as long as they continue to explore new philosophies and seek change, new Coils of the Dragon may potentially be discovered. Here, then, are a two new philosophies for students of the Coils of the Dragon to learn. In addition, this section contains a fourth tier for each of the established Coils. These Coils and tiers are learned (and paid for) like all other Coils, as described on p. 149 of **Vampire: The Requiem**.

The Coil of Flesh

A vampire's body is unable to perform some of its most basic functions — breathing, blushing, sweating — without being coaxed with Vitae. The Coil of Flesh restores some of a Kindred's control over her body, so that she may more easily disguise herself as mortal and, perhaps, reconnect with some internal remnant of the human she once was. By passing among the kine, the Kindred has an opportunity to study change and examine artifacts that would otherwise be unreachable.

First Tier: The Man Wakes

The character's Blood Potency is considered to be two dots lower when calculating the length of torpor and determining the potency of Kindred Vitae necessary to revive her by force.

Second Tier: A Taste of Life

The character can summon up the blush of life and the ability to eat food for one scene with a single Vitae. As long as the character has food in her stomach, she suffers no penalties to rolls to resist frenzy based on her hunger.

Third Tier: The Face of Man

The character's hair and nails can be made to grow each day with a single Vitae. This Vitae is in addition to that paid to wake each day. What's more, the character can will her image to appear either clear or blurred in photographs, videos and other visual media with no Willpower expenditure necessary for the scene. Clear images persist for a number of months equal to 12 minus the Kindred's Blood Potency. A Willpower dot must still be spent to make a clear image of the vampire permanent.

The Coil of the Soul

The fourth Coil, the Coil of the Soul, isn't widely practiced in the Ordo Dracul. The more tangible, physical aspects of the vampiric curse seem to be easier to alter — or more insufferable, in the minds of modern vampires — than the spiritual ones on which this Coil focuses. Plus, with sociological and psychological mores seeming to change so quickly in the modern night, finding effective teachers of this lesser-known Coil of the Soul has become difficult.

First Tier: Enliven the Face

Humanity no longer acts as a cap for dice pools involving interactions with mortals. The Kindred has retrained her body to mimic the nonverbal cues of being alive, and it responds almost naturally to the cues of others. She must still expend Vitae to activate the "blush of life," however.

Second Tier: Salve the Mind

The player may spend a Willpower point to re-roll the Humanity roll to avoid a derangement after a failed degeneration roll (though the Storyteller may demand a suitable explanation for the expenditure and a description of what it represents for the character). The player may *not* spend a Willpower point in this way on the degeneration roll itself, however.

Third Tier: Quiet the Soul

The player may spend a Willpower point to ignore all derangements the character has gained since her Embrace. This temporary sanity lasts for one scene, and then her derangements come crashing back. If the character has derangements that were acquired before her Embrace, this tier does nothing to mitigate them.

Fourth Tier

The following tiers only exist in theory. The Ordo Dracul has not uncovered concrete proof that they exist (or at least, such proof hasn't been disseminated to the covenant at large). In some cases, a Kindred might be able to demonstrate her mastery of a new tier without being able to teach others how to manifest it. If the effect of a tier cannot be duplicated in other Kindred to the satisfaction of local Dragon authorities, it might not yet be recognized as a Coil at all.

Which of these powers, if any, are obtainable in your chronicles is, of course, up to the Storyteller.

The Coil of Blood: Orphaned Blood

The Kindred becomes immune to the effects of blood ties. No vampire receives bonuses based on blood ties to affect the character with Disciplines, though she retains the bonus when affecting kin with her own powers. She can choose to have her blood "read" as related to any clan whose blood she has tasted, or no clan at all. The character can still discern the tastes of another's blood, as usual.

The Coil of Banes: Mortal Burns

Fire causes lethal, not aggravated, damage to the Dragon. Note that, for a Dragon with Resilience, this means that fire damage can no longer be downgraded by that Discipline. The character still suffers aggravated damage from sunlight.

The Coil of the Beast: Saddle the Beast

The character can "ride the wave" for a number of turns per night equal to her Resolve dots without rolling to activate the frenzy. These turns may be consecutive, or they can be scattered intermittently throughout the night in any way the character likes. Turns spent in frenzy this way do not contribute to the cumulative -1 penalties on subsequent attempts to ride the wave during that same night.

The Coil of Flesh: The Bruise of Life

The character's flesh is able to heal bashing damage exactly as a mortal does: one point of bashing damage heals every 15 minutes. This quasi-natural healing cannot take place, however, if the character is currently has any Health box marked with an aggravated wound.

The Coil of the Soul: Free the Beast

The character can give her mind over to the Beast long enough to commit one heinous act. To do so, the character

surrenders to frenzy by riding the wave. In exchange for this taste of freedom, the Beast protects the character from the memory of the event. The Kindred has no recollection of her actions during a frenzy of this sort, and not even the power of a Discipline can unearth a memory of it. No matter how vile the character's actions during such a frenzy, she cannot be required to make a degeneration roll for actions she is unaware of. If the character later learns (or is shown) what her Beast did with its freedom, the character loses her moral protection and must immediately check for degeneration as normal.

Apocryphal Coils

As Kindred of the Ordo Dracul have experimented with the philosophies of the Coils, they have found other, related ways to change the nature or the effects of their curse. Some of these changes, despite being related to the Coils, do not demonstrate the larger philosophies of the Coils of the Dragon, however. Whereas the Coils of the Dragon are meant to overcome the curse laid upon Dracula and all Kindred, these apocryphal pseudo-Coils either subvert the power that was bestowed with the curse, or warp the nature of the curse without truly overcoming it.

These philosophies are not officially welcome within the covenant. Knowledge of these powers is forbidden. Dragons found to have studied them should expect to be severely punished. Knowledge of these powers is one of the few ways for a Dragon to be driven out of the covenant — though most such Kindred are rendered into ash within a few nights thereafter.

These apocryphal philosophies are learned, however, exactly like new dots of the Coils of the Dragon, as described on p. 149 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. The "rungs" or tiers of these philosophies are included in the total number of dots a character has learned in the Coils of the Dragon. Therefore, learning these forbidden ways increases the cost of learning new tiers of the Coils of the Dragon in the future. Though these are not philosophically compatible with the Coils, the effort and will necessary to learn them is the same.

Note: *These powers may not even exist in all chronicles. The Storyteller is encouraged to carefully consider the ramifications of any apocryphal Coil on her chronicle before choosing to include them.*

Anoushka's Ladder

The Sworn of the Ladder believe the mystic changes wrought on a vampire by Anoushka's Ladder are the first steps towards divine forgiveness. If any rungs exist beyond the known three, they may lead a practitioner back to a mortal existence or the eternal freedom of a guiltless death.

According to *Rites of the Dragon*, however, it was not the purpose of the Ordo Dracul to regain its lost mortality, but to transcend the curse of vampirism. Dracula did not seek forgiveness, but to overcome his damnation through an understanding of the forces of change and a profound strength of will. In the eyes of many within the Ordo Dracul, the course towards a divine pardon requires many steps backward. Reversing damnation is folly; the way out is through.

Thus the changes manifested in a vampire through these rare and difficult powers are considered contrary to the aims of the covenant. That is, if Anoushka's Ladder is even real. Many, even among the Sworn of the Ladder, suppose that tales of the Upright who learned the so-called rungs of Anoushka's Ladder are, in fact, tales of blessed flukes and unrepeatable circumstances. It's possible for a Ladder-Sworn vampire to do everything necessary and still be unable to learn these secrets.

To learn a rung of Anoushka's Ladder, a character must have at least nine dots in other coils. To enjoy the benefits of any of these rungs, the character must have a Humanity of 8 or higher. Should a character's Humanity fall below the threshold necessary for a rung she knows, she gains no benefit from that rung until her Humanity is raised again.

First Rung: Rise Above Thirst

As long as the character's Humanity is 8 or higher, she spends just one Vitae to rise each week. If the character has also mastered the first tier of the Coil of Blood, this expenditure of Vitae enables her to stay awake for seven days plus her Resolve. The character suffers no penalty for actions undertaken during the daytime, though she is still burned by sunlight.

Second Rung: Divorce the Clan

As long as the character's Humanity is 9 or higher, she is not affected by her clan or bloodline weakness if she has gone at least one day and one night without using a Discipline, whether that Discipline is associated with her clan or not. As soon as the character uses one of her Discipline powers, the effects of her clan and bloodline weakness return.

Third Rung: The Open Cage

As long as the character's Humanity is 10, she is not subject to the Beast. The character no longer experiences frenzy of any sort. She cannot "ride the wave" and is not subject to frenzy under any circumstances.

The Way of the Locust

The Locust Oath to transcend the Kindred curse by any means possible has borne dark and wicked fruit. The Sworn of the Locust were always fascinated by the power of consuming the soul of a fellow Kindred, and their foul experiments have permitted them to expand that ability.

The Locust-Sworn have learned, essentially, how to diablerize humans.

It's an imperfect process, of course. Consumption by a vampire is not the ordained fate of the immortal soul (if, in truth, it is the soul of the victim that's obtained

and not some other mystic aspect of the self). Therefore, a Locust can typically only contain a devoured mortal soul for a limited time. But while that spirit is held, the vampire can enjoy a host of its benefits.

Performing diablerie on a human being does not cause an automatic Humanity loss (though it is still murder, sufficient to provoke degeneration checks based on the character's current Humanity). Diablerizing a mortal does not raise Blood Potency or permanently provide any new knowledge, Skills or Disciplines. It does still stain the aura of the diablerist, but only until the soul escapes. It is still darkly delightful and potentially addictive.

When the Locust takes the last drop of mortal blood, she rolls Resolve + Stamina plus any bonuses earned by studying the following tiers, reflexively contested by the subject's Resolve + Composure. If the Kindred scores more successes, she captures her victim's soul; otherwise, it escapes. The Kindred can hold a soul for a number of nights equal to her Willpower dots minus the victim's Willpower dots; if the result is one night or less, the soul is kept until dawn. After that, the spirit wrenches itself violently free. In the process of freeing itself, the spirit also purges its host. The Kindred rolls her Stamina and keeps a number of Vitae equal to her successes. She vomits up any other Vitae, and his stolen soul with it.

As long as the Locust has a captured human soul within herself, she gains the benefits of all the tiers she knows from the following list:

First Tier: Soul Mask

The character's aura becomes as vivid as a mortal's and she casts a reflection. Specifically, she casts his own reflection — but seen with the corner of the eye, the reflection appears to be that of the person whose soul she has stolen. The character also appears in all visual media without any cost in Willpower, though only until she loses her captured soul. Finally, the character does not provoke, and is not subject to, the effects of the predator's taint.

Second Tier: Marrow of the Spirit

The character takes on an intangible but undeniable aspect of the victim. People who knew the imprisoned soul in its original, human body find the Kindred oddly familiar — though there is often a degree of unease in this familiarity. The character benefits from the "9 Again" rule (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134) on Social actions made against people the victim knew in life. A spouse might momentarily mistake the character for the victim, for example, while a friend might trust the character when he claims to be the victim's brother.

Third Tier: Echo of the Soul

The character can access the factual knowledge possessed by the victim. This does not mean that she can analyze, understand or apply it as the victim could. A character who has diablerized a military officer, for example, is able to recite tactical axioms but is unable to duplicate the dead officer's actual strategic ability. The character can recall information the victim knew in life, such as his passwords or his wife's middle name, with a successful Intelligence + Composure roll, made as a reflexive action (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 44 – 45).

Creating a Coil

The first thing to consider when creating a new Coil is its origin, both in the imaginary world of the story and in the game itself. Understand the difference between what *you* want out of a Coil as a player of the game, and what a vampire in the fictional universe of the World of Darkness might want out of a Coil. A Coil of the Dragon becomes an innate part of the character that learns it, and manifesting a Coil requires a great deal of dedication and drive, so it should seem to arise out of a need the character feels.

Why are you creating the new Coil? From what perspective are you viewing the process of Coil design? Are you a Storyteller creating a new Coil to be introduced in your own chronicle? Are you a player designing a Coil for your own character, to be submitted to the Storyteller for approval? Are you inventing a new Coil in response to a fictional need that's come up in the narrative of the chronicle or to satisfy a demand based on game mechanics?

The answers to these questions lead, suitably, to other questions you should consider as you conceptualize your new Coil. No universal answers exist to these questions, however. You can only determine what answers are right for the chronicle in which your new Coil will be used.

Players and Storytellers will probably approach the process of designing a Coil with different goals and different priorities in mind. Truly, it's best if you look at a new Coil from both a player's and a Storyteller's perspective during the design process, to be sure you're really getting the Coil you wanted — or that the chronicle even has room for a new Coil.

Coils are distinctly different powers from traditional Disciplines, both in the game world and in the game rules, but a good deal of the advice that applies to the creation of new Disciplines applies to the process of Coil creation, as well. Be sure your idea for a new Coil wouldn't be better realized as a new Discipline. Review the guidelines for Discipline creation beginning on p. 260 of **Vampire: The Requiem** before you set out to craft a new Coil.

Purpose

A Coil's purpose is closely linked to its origin, as Coils are created in response to the demands of a story or character. Coils created for either purpose are equally valid, in theory. In practice, however, every chronicle is different, and some demands must take priority over others. Some Storytellers have no interest in allowing new

Coils into the chronicle without a compelling way to involve the appearance of a new Coil in a story, but other Storytellers are comfortable slipping new powers and game options into a chronicle without much fanfare. Some players love to see new powers become available over time, but others may not like to have the menu change after they've placed their order, as it were. Identify what's really important to the stories and players of your chronicle before you create a new Coil.

How do you intend your new Coil to be used in the chronicle? This is not a question of game mechanics (not yet), but a matter of defining the demand to be met. A Coil can be the prize at the end a story, or it can be the catalyst for new stories about the consequences of change. Really, it can be both. But a new Coil isn't necessary to fulfill these purposes. The Coils in **Vampire: The Requiem** can be used in all of the following ways, too, if they are new to the characters. Are you really looking for a new Coil, or a new way to use the Coils? It's possible you're looking for both, but keep that in mind as you read these guidelines.

Are you creating the Coil to individualize or empower a character? Is it meant to represent some strange and misunderstood quality of a mysterious ally or fearsome rival? Is it meant to separate one Dragon character apart from her coterie-mates? Will it be made available to the player's characters, or is it just for Storyteller characters?

Are you creating the Coil to enrich a story? Is it intended as a reward for characters who pursue membership in the local chapter of the Ordo Dracul? Is it a lure meant to get a Dragon coterie to work with a potential enemy? It's perfectly acceptable for a Storyteller to devise a new power just for non-player characters. Such powers create unique dramatic possibilities by redefining what's mystically possible within a given story without necessarily redefining the power level of the whole chronicle.

Origin

What drove you to create a new Coil? Were you inspired by a story you read or some previous chapter of the game chronicle? Were you inspired by a desire to individualize your character or overcome some aspect of the Kindred curse? Does your idea for the new Coil come from an image you have in mind of a vampire shouting at her reflection to negotiate with the Beast, or have you decided that you don't want your character to be so susceptible to frenzy anymore?

A Coil can be created to meet the needs of a story or the wants of a player and her character. Regardless of a Coil's inspiration, you should consider its origins in the game world. The Coil you create might be new to you and your players but a century old in your World of Darkness. Perhaps it was created in the early nights of the covenant but was unknown in the local domain until a new Dragon arrived in town. Maybe the Coil had proven to be less popular in the past so few mentors exist to teach it tonight. Could the Ordo Dracul (or even just one coterie of Dragons) have kept the existence of the Coil a secret all these years?

If you are a player designing a new Coil for your own character to learn down the line, the first thing you have to know is how you expect this Coil to appear in the game. Do you expect your character to be the pioneer of this mystic change? Keep in mind that a new Coil isn't just a manifestation of power in the blood, but a change in your character's very being. Disciplines are powers, but Coils are philosophies as much as anything else. Your character shouldn't be the same after she invents a new Coil, so don't plan on creating new Coils unless you're ready and willing to change the way your character behaves and even thinks.

Ramifications of New Coils

The discovery or first appearance of a new Coil can be exciting, but new Coils affect the game in a way that other Disciplines don't. A Discipline comes into play sometimes, in some stories, but a Coil comes into play all the time, in virtually every story. Plus, while new Disciplines can cause a character to become overpowered, they do reinforce her monstrousness, her deviation from normal human existence. A surplus of Coils, on the other hand, can undermine a character's monstrous nature and excuse her from the curse that this game is all about.

Guidelines for Coil Mechanics

When creating or conceptualizing further Coils of the Dragon, it might be helpful to know the precepts by which we wrote them and the "rules" that we've imposed for game balance purposes. As with any other rules, feel free to experiment with these rules if it suits the needs of your chronicle.

- **The Coils are internal.** The Coils of the Dragon do not directly affect others. They represent changes that the vampire makes to her own undead body, mind or soul. A Coil might alter the way the character interacts with others in some way, as the Coil of the Beast helps a Dragon to resist the torments and provocations of others, but it never *alters* others.
- **The Coils are inherent.** A vampire can't lose a Coil of the Dragon, not even through torpor or diablerie. Once a change has been made, it is a permanent part of the vampire's being. Most Coils are, as a result, reactive or innate abilities, rather than active.
- **The Coils are incessant.** A Coil of the Dragon is not a temporary power that is "switched on" or "summoned up" when it comes into play. Once learned, it is a facet of the Kindred's form, and cannot be deactivated any more than a mortal can stop his own heart. Most Coils do not require the character to do anything to make use of their benefits. A few, such as Chastise the Beast, may involve the use of a Willpower point, but such powers aren't being

"activated" so much as they have actually changed what the character's Willpower points can do. In the case of Chastise the Beast, the Coil has given the character a new use for his Willpower points.

• **Some things are immutable.** A Coil of the Dragon should not alter, overcome or counteract the following: a clan or bloodline weakness, a clan's or bloodline's selection of Disciplines or the degeneration roll to avoid Humanity loss. Naturally, some Coils skirt close to violating this rule (such as Salve the Mind), but these are important, defining elements of individual characters — and of the nature of the game itself.

Coils should not affect clan weaknesses and Disciplines, because those are the purview of bloodlines. Coils should not undermine or oversimplify the relationship a character's *actions* have with her Humanity, because that is a fundamental aspect of a vampire's dramatic tale. That is, Coils should not alter degeneration rolls. A vampire (certainly a Dragon) who wishes to change her Humanity must demonstrate that she knows her actions — not her supernatural powers — are the real proof of her morality. The Coils are meant to be the means for a vampire to transcend her curse and change her fate, but a character who can behave any way she likes without morale, emotional or psychological repercussions is unlikely to change at all.

Disciplines

The bloodlines associated with the Ordo Dracul possess a wide array of different supernatural powers. Knowledge of these Disciplines is hardly commonplace, however. Kindred who encounter a vampire of the Dragolescu line might have heard rumors of their interactions with ghosts, but don't assume so. The Storyteller decides what's common knowledge in the local domain and which rumors have been spreading through the local chapter house. While stories of the Azerkatil might be whispered among the Kindred of Bucharest or Istanbul, vampires in Chicago might have never heard such tales.

A bloodline's Discipline is often at the heart of its secret practices. Even members of the bloodline might not truly know what to expect from higher-level powers until a mentor or Avus shares such information with them.

Essentiaphagia

The founder of the Dragolescu bloodline, Ioan Dragolescu, was always fascinated by the spirits of the dead, even when he was mortal. After his Embrace and during his subsequent journey through unlife, Ioan developed what he called "the Essentiaphagia theory." In his treatise, which he made available first to the Blue Hand in 1905 and then to the Ordo Dracul in 1913, he posits that Vitae is nourishing to Kindred not because blood contains some mysterious but vital chemical or alchemical ingredient, but because it is charged with the soul — the *essentia* — of the vessel. Animals, as creations of the Lord, carry enough of this essentia to nourish young Kindred, but God's curse on vampires quickly develops a more serious appetite, barring them from feeding on lower beasts.

Since ghosts are beings of pure essentia, Dragolescu supposed it would be possible to feed on them directly, not only allowing a vampire to consume a more potent version of Vitae, but sidestepping many of the morale issues of feeding (since a ghosts cannot die again).

The biggest stumbling block for Dragolescu, of course, was that his theorized method of ghost-consumption, called Essentiaphagia, hinged on taking physical sustenance from an incorporeal source. The Blue Hand labored long and hard with this problem, but it wasn't until Dragolescu spoke with an elder Dragon about the forbidden practice of diablerie that he realized how he could change his theory into a practice. To teach his undead body how to drink an incorporeal soul, he would first consume a soul still housed in a physical body. This epiphany led to the Blue Hand Massacre (see p. XX). Shortly thereafter, Dragolescu began experimenting on ghosts more directly, in ways the covenant had never before seen.

The Essentiaphagia Discipline doesn't require the practitioner to have ever committed diablerie, or even to really understand Dragolescu's complex and arcane theories, though members of the bloodline are usually encouraged to read his works while honing their abilities with this Discipline. Each level of the Discipline includes an excerpt from Dragolescu's writings on the subject.

Hunger for Essentia

Dragolescu's Theory: *"The wandering ghost is composed of pure essentia, and the place in which it lurks is thus saturated by it. With proper training, a* strigoi *can focus his hunger on this essentia, rather like the Beast focuses on blood. In this manner, we can see ghosts, though pure hunger does not facilitate communication; if a ghost does not wish to speak with us, we cannot force it to do so. Haunts become evident to the trained Essentiaphagist. Interestingly, sometimes mortals also appear significant when viewed in this manner, as though they are saturated with essentia. What makes a mortal appear thus? I cannot say, but faith and strength of will alone do not seem to be the only factors."*

This power allows the user to perceive ghosts and haunts by sensing the raw spiritual power they emit. The Kindred experiences this first as a sensation of hunger, even if she is currently sated. This feeling is followed by the sight of a luminous apparition (in the case of ghosts) or a faint, yellow glow seemingly cast by the air of a space itself (in the case of haunts).

Successful use of Hunger of Essentia allows the user to delineate the exact boundaries of a haunt and gain some inkling as to how powerful a ghost is. As Dragolescu's theory mentions, however, it in no way compels a ghost to communicate with or even acknowledge the vampire.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Essentiaphagia

Action: Extended. If the character is performing a quick check to see if any ghosts are in the vicinity or if an area is a haunt, this power requires just a single success. If the user wishes to see a ghost more clearly or delineate the boundaries of a haunt, she may continue to roll on subsequent turns to accumulate more successes. Seeing a ghost clearly requires a number of successes equal to that ghost's current Essence score (see p. 208 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for more information on ghosts and Essence). Marking a haunt's boundaries requires a number of successes based on how large the haunt is:

Haunt Size	Successes Required
A small apartment or underground chamber	5
A larger apartment or small house	10
A small warehouse, church or large house	15
A large warehouse or a mansion	20
A sprawling estate or vast network of tunnels	25

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character becomes hyper-attuned to essentia. Everything and everyone glows to her eyes, imposing a –2 penalty on all rolls involving her sight for the rest of the scene.

Failure: Failure indicates that the power simply does not activate, and no successes are achieved. The character knows this immediately and may try again next turn.

Success: With a single success, the character sees a ghost as a ball of light or a faint glow, while the heart of a haunt appears tinted with a faint, dusky glow. With more successes, the character manages to make out more details. When the necessary number of successes have been accumulated, the character sees a ghost clearly (and may be able to identify it) or knows the exact boundaries of a haunt.

Exceptional Success: Extra successes are their own reward, as the character is able to make out more of a ghost's or haunt's features.

This power allows the user to see a ghost or haunt normally, until the glow leaves her sight (this can occur if the ghost flees the area or if the character moves so that the haunt is no longer in her field of vision, for example). If this happens, she must use the power again to regain sight of her subject.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1 to +3	The character has texts that aid in identifying ley lines and Wyrm's Nests. (Only applies to haunts.)
+1 to +2	The character has researched the history of the area or ghost to be seen. (+1 per five successes on the research action.)
+1	The character has not yet fed that night. (Only applies to ghosts.)
—	The character looks for traces of essentia in a calm space with medium light and noise levels.
–1 to –3	The character is distracted by excess noise or light.

Draw Ectoplasm

Dragolescu's Theory: *"We have seen the residue left by ghostly visitations, and seen this so-called ectoplasm drip from the mouth, nose and eyes of mediums during states of possession, automatic writing and trance. Mortal spiritualists have their theories, of course, but I hypothesize that this substance is a kind of 'waste essentia.' Thus it is no more pure, for our purposes, than human Vitae, but might have other uses.* A strigoi *who knew nothing of the Coils would very likely have no facility for metabolizing ectoplasm, but I, as a Scholar of Hunger, should find this no challenge."*

This power allows the Kindred to draw Ectoplasm from a ghost or medium and consume it. While Ectoplasm can be used to increase a vampire's blood pool slightly, it is better used to fuel later levels of Essentiaphagia.

To use this power on a ghost, the character must first find it, usually through the use of Hunger for Essentia, and that ghost must be within a few yards of the character. If the ghost manifests before the Kindred, however, the character may attempt to Draw Ectoplasm at that point (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 210, for details on manifestation). If used on a medium, the subject must be actively involved in contacting or channeling a ghost for this power to have any effect.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Essentiaphagia versus the subject's Power + Resistance (for ghosts) or Resolve + Composure (for mediums)

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire's own essentia becomes caught in a sort of back draft. The Kindred bleeds from the mouth, nose and eyes, losing one point of Vitae for every success the subject rolls.

Failure: The character loses or ties the contested roll. No Ectoplasm is drawn out, but the character may try again on her next turn.

Success: The vampire wins the contested roll. The subject oozes Ectoplasm, which the vampire can then collect and consume. See below for details.

Exceptional Success: The vampire wins the contested roll and tastes the target's essentia directly. The vampire gains a Willpower point (not to exceed the character's Willpower dots) in addition to any Ectoplasm drawn forth.

If the vampire succeeds in drawing Ectoplasm, the subject produces one unit (or point, referred to simply as Ectoplasm) of the substance per success on the vampire's player's roll. Ectoplasm appears as a milky-white or yellow substance, about the same consistency as very thick mucous. One

Ectoplasm amounts to roughly two ounces of material. Ghosts, including those being channeled by mediums, lose one Essence for every Ectoplasm they exude, though mediums do not suffer any adverse effects from the process. Ectoplasm extracted from a medium leaks from his nose, eyes and mouth. If extracted directly from a ghost, it simply falls to the ground. It evaporates by the end of the scene if not consumed. A vampire cannot take more Ectoplasm from a given ghost than that ghost has Essence, and a ghost's final point of Essence cannot be taken using this power.

A vampire can hold Ectoplasm in her undead body indefinitely. Kindred using the Auspex power Heightened Senses notice a strangely sweet, moldy scent of decay around vampires holding Ectoplasm. A vampire can hold an amount of Ectoplasm in her body equal to her Stamina + Size.

A vampire who consumes Ectoplasm has the following options:

• Two Ectoplasm translate to one Vitae. The Coil of Blood has no effect on this exchange. Once added to a Kindred's reserves, Vitae from this source is no different than from that drawn from blood. Ectoplasm must be converted to Vitae at the moment it is consumed. Stored Ectoplasm cannot later be transmuted into Vitae.

• The character can transform three Ectoplasm into one point of Willpower. This power does not allow a character's Willpower points to exceed her Willpower dots. Ectoplasm must be converted into Willpower at the moment it is consumed. Stored Ectoplasm cannot later be transmuted into Willpower.

• The character can retain Ectoplasm in her undead body indefinitely. It can then be used to fuel other powers of Essentiaphagia. The player must keep track of her character's stored Ectoplasm as she does Vitae or Willpower.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+3	The ghost is a willing participant. (The contested roll is still necessary, however, as this power forces Essence to take physical form through means not natural to the ephemeral *stuff* of the ghost.)
+2	The medium is a willing participant. (The contested roll is still necessary, however, as the medium's body cannot be so easily persuaded.)
—	The power is turned on an unwitting ghost or medium.
–2	The power is turned on a ghost (or a medium channel ing a ghost) within 2 yards per Power of its anchor.

Essentia Diffusion

Dragolescu's Theory: *"A ghost may, if it is so inclined and is powerful enough, wreak great change on the area around it. I have observed ghosts shattering mirrors, coating*

walls in blood, calling up swarms of flies, dropping the temperature of an area considerably and even terrifying mortals almost to death. These effects, I believe, are nothing more than the result of a ghost's essentia released from its incorporeal frame and diffused about an area. Indeed, a skilled Essentiaphagist may accomplish the same effects to whatever end, provided he first consumes enough ectoplasm."

This intermediate-level power allows the Essentiaphagist to cause frightening, ghost-like effects in a given area. Kindred can use this power to simulate a haunted site, to frighten mortals away or even to attract ghosts to be fed upon.

Cost: 2 Ectoplasm or 1 Ectoplasm plus 2 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Essentiaphagia

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Kindred loses control of the effect. The essentia dissipates harmlessly, and the vampire loses any remaining Ectoplasm she has stored in her body.

Failure: The character fails to invoke the desired effect. She may try again.

Success: The character infuses her immediate area with the echoes of ghostly essentia. The exact effects of the character's successes depend on the power sparked by the Ectoplasm. The Storyteller decides what specific Numina are mimicked by the Ectoplasm's power, but they are often reminiscent of the ghost from which the Ectoplasm was taken.

Exceptional Success: The character infuses the area with essentia, but the effects are more potent or difficult to resist. The character may be able to select the Numen to be mimicked, if the Storyteller deems he knows enough about ghostly powers to tell one from another.

This power can mimic the effects of the Clairvoyance, Ghost Sign, Magnetic Disruption, Phantasm, Telekinesis and Terrify Numina, described on p. 111–112 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. The Storyteller decides which Numen powers are sparked. This decision may be based on the ghost from which the character's Ectoplasm was drawn, but Ectoplasm is a strangely reactive substance and may produce altogether different effects when filtered through the curse of vampirism.

The roll to activate this power substitutes for the dice pool normally asked for the manifested Numen. The character may be able to consciously guide the effects of the Numen (to cause a specific message to be written with Ghost Sign, for example), but just as often the effects manifest as a spontaneous reflection of the character's own psyche. Many Essentiaphagists, therefore, are just as frightened by the effects of this power as an audience might be.

Effects of Essentia Diffusion never cause damage and cannot alter their surroundings in devastating ways. For instance, this power has never been known to cause flammable items to ignite, although it might make candles flare brightly or turn blue. Sometimes spectral images appear, but they are always hazy and indistinct. All effects of this power, including physical effects such as blood or fog, fade at the end of the scene.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+3	Area is already a haunt.
Special	Any modifier that a ghost would receive to manifest (see p. 210 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) applies to this power.

Mnemophagia

Dragolescu's Theory: "Cognito, ergo sum, *as the saying goes. Where ghosts are concerned, this statement takes on literal truth. A ghost is often nothing more than an echo of cognition, and even more powerful ghosts are best defined by their knowledge, belief and desire than anything else. If it is true that a ghost's essentia is its knowledge, by consuming that essentia it should be possible to consume knowledge. Always present, of course, is the risk of learning things that one does know truly wish to know, but as a creature of science, I will take that risk."*

This vile power allows a vampire to steal knowledge and memories from a ghost. A Kindred can temporarily become an expert in various fields of knowledge in this manner, but the skill she accrues fades from memory quickly, often within moments. The damage inflicted upon the ghost "donors," however, may be irreparable. As such, Dragolescu rarely use this power except in dire situations, and only upon ghosts that they do not wish to have any further contact with. A ghost subjected to this power certainly regards the vampire as a dire enemy from that point on.

As with Draw Ectoplasm, use of Mnemophagia requires that the character be able to see the ghost, and that it is within 10 feet of the vampire. The Ectoplasm used to fuel this power does *not* have to come from the ghost being targeted.

Cost: 4 Ectoplasm plus 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Essentiaphagia – subject's Resistance

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Kindred inadvertently opens her mind to the ghost. The ghost may possess the vampire automatically if it has the Possession Numen (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 212). If not, the vampire loses one Willpower point per success on the ghost's roll, and the ghost gains a like amount of Essence.

Failure: The character loses or ties the contested roll. The ghost understands that the character has attacked it in some way and may flee or counterattack as it sees fit.

Success: The character wins the contested roll. The vampire gains temporary dots in one or more Skills as described below.

Exceptional Success: The character wins the contested roll. There is no further effect beyond the benefits that come with a greater number of successes.

For every success, the vampire gains one dot of a Skill. This Skill must be one that the ghost knew in life. The vampire can choose, in general terms, which memories she consumes, but has no way to know what specific knowledge these memories impart. In game terms, the Storyteller chooses what Skills gain temporary dots.

The vampire cannot absorb information the ghost does not know. As such, absorbing information from the ghost of a doctor who died in 1950 yields very different information than one who died in 1999, although they can both grant temporary dots in Medicine.

Example: *A Dragolescu vampire consumes the ghost of a soldier, looking for skills to help her fight. The dead soldier in question probably had some facility in Brawl and Weaponry, so the Storyteller divides successes up among those three Skills. If she is generous, she may ask the player if his character seeks specific memories (an image of bloodshed and shining steel, the remembered report of a rifle shot) that would narrow the choice down.*

Alternately, the vampire can opt to learn specific memories instead of Skills, sifting through the ghost's memories and consuming images and information pertinent to a given topic. The vampire adds the ghost's Power as a bonus to any Intelligence-based dice pools involving the recollection of memories or information the ghost might have known.

Whatever information or Skills a vampire takes, it fades at the next sunrise. The vampire can take notes before then, but should take care to write down *everything* she needs to know, including any context required for the memory to make sense.

The character must choose whether she seeks temporary Skill dots or the ghost's Power when this power is first activated. Once a ghost has been subjected to this power, it cannot be subjected to it again until the next night. This power unravels a ghost's mind, causing it permanent damage as memories fade and experiences are confused. A ghost stolen from in this way has its Power trait reduced by one.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The Ectoplasm used to fuel this power came from the target ghost.
-1	Each anchor the ghost has makes it more difficult to consume.
-1 to –5	This power has been turned on the subject ghost before.

Ghost Consumption

Dragolescu's Theory: *"This is the pinnacle of my work, the goal I have worked toward for so long. How many have been ruined, their souls lost to Hell or received by Heaven, for me to find this knowledge? This is the Tree of Knowledge, this is what Our Lord bade us shun. But why? A test? Why should we quake at this threshold? I, for one, choose to stride boldly forward. More must die, more souls must be lost, but if I am successful, I will transcend!"*

Ioan Dragolescu's mad theories aside, this power does not lead to the vaunted transcendence that the Dragons seek. It does, however, open the door to power and knowledge beyond what many vampires achieve. Of course, this power has its price — for Dragolescu, that price was his very existence. The Ordo Dracul strictly forbids use of Ghost Consumption and its use is a violation of the law prohibiting entering the service of spirits. This isn't precisely fair, as the power doesn't force the user into a servile relationship with a ghost, but it was enough to convict Dragolescu. The issue has not come up since, but given the other factors involved in Dragolescu's case, it's possible that a new "trial" might end differently.

Ghost Consumption allows a vampire to devour a ghost. Unlike Mnemophagia, in which part of the ghost is damaged so that the vampire may gain knowledge, the ghost actually survives the process of being "eaten" with Ghost Consumption. The vampire gains access to most of the ghost's powers and all of its memories, but the ghost gains the vampire's memories as well. This, perhaps, is the source of the covenant's fear of the power.

As with Draw Ectoplasm and Mnemophagia, this power requires the vampire be able to see her target. In addition, the vampire must be close enough to "touch" the subject (even though the ghost may be ephemeral). Specifically, the vampire must be close enough to "breathe the ghost in," as Dragolescu once described it.

Cost: 5 Ectoplasm and 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Essentiaphagia versus subject's Power + Resistance

Action: Extended and contested; resistance is reflexive. The vampire needs a number of successes equal to the ghost's permanent Corpus rating. The ghost needs a number of successes equal to the vampire's Willpower.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A dramatic failure is rolled for the vampire. The ghost escapes the attack and may retaliate or flee as it wishes. In addition, the vampire can never attempt to use this power on that particular ghost again.

Failure: The character fails to consume the ghost before his will is broken. The ghost escapes and may flee or attack as it wishes.

Success: The character achieves the necessary number of successes before the ghost does and consumes it.

Exceptional Success: The character wins the contested roll. Exceptional success has no effect beyond the benefits of a rapid victory.

If the character successfully consumes the ghost, the spirit takes up residence in the character's body. The character can only have one ghost inhabiting her body at one time. This has the following effects:

• The vampire's body temporarily becomes the ghost's sole anchor. If the ghost escapes, its previous anchors regain their power.

• The vampire gains access to the ghost's Skills and memories as though she had used the Mnemophagia power and achieved successes equal to her Intelligence + Essentiaphagia. These memories aren't stolen from the ghost, however — merely "borrowed" — and the vampire can reallocate her temporary Skill points at any time. Doing so requires one hour of uninterrupted meditation, and allows the ghost an attempt to escape (see below).

• The vampire can use any of the ghost's Numina except Clairvoyance, Ghost Speech and Possession. The dice pools and Essence expenditures for these powers do not change, though the vampire can spend Ectoplasm instead of forcing the ghost to spend Essence. The vampire has complete control of the effects of these stolen Numina.

• The vampire benefits from the ghost's presence by becoming better aware of her surroundings — she has two sets of senses working for her now. Add the ghost's Finesse score to the vampire's Initiative. The vampire can use either her own Wits or the ghost's Finesse in dice pools related to sensory awareness and perception.

• During its imprisonment, the ghost is aware of everything the vampire feels, thinks and remembers, and can talk to the vampire as much as it wishes (the vampire can shut out the voice, but loses the bonus to Initiative in any scene that she does so). The ghost retains this information if it escapes.

• If the vampire meets Final Death before the ghost escapes or is set free, the ghost is destroyed as well.

• The vampire can set the ghost free at any time.

• A Kindred using Auspex •• on a vampire with a ghost prisoner sees a milky-white glow beneath the character's flesh.

The ghost may attempt to escape in the following circumstances: whenever the vampire enters slumber for the day (which may never happen, depending upon which Coils the vampire knows), whenever the vampire rifles through the memories from the ghost to assign her temporary Skill dots and whenever the vampire uses the first four levels of the Essentiaphagia Discipline. Escape requires a contested roll of the ghost's Power + Finesse versus the vampire's Resolve + Occult + Essentiaphagia. The vampire's resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The ghost does not escape but the vampire is aware that it tried.

Failure: The ghost fails to escape, but the vampire is unaware that it tried.

Success: The ghost escapes, and may immediately spend a Willpower point to flee to one of its anchors. If it has no remaining anchors, it immediately passes on.

Exceptional Success: The ghost escapes, and tears the vampire's mind and body asunder as it leaves. The ghost makes a reflexive Power roll, and the vampire suffers aggravated damage equal to the roll's successes *and* loses a like number of Willpower points.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Ghost is being channeled through a medium.
+2	The Ectoplasm used to fuel this power came from the target ghost.
+/-1	Each anchor the ghost has penalizes the vampire's dice pool to consume it and adds to the ghost's dice pool to escape.

Eupraxia

This power is what separates the pious monsters that descend from the unique blend of Orthodox tradition and Slavic folklore from the pious monsters of the Lancea Sanctum. The precise origin of this Discipline is unclear, however. The Tismanu claim it is the result of divine Orthodox faith transferred to the Blood when the first Tismanu was Embraced by a vampire decades or more before Dracula's damnation. The name, Eupraxia, was given to the power much later. Other Dragons claim that, while the Tismanu existed as a lineage of vampire-monks prior to the foundation of the Ordo Dracul, the bloodline didn't gain its mystical powers (and, so, its status as a genuine bloodline) until after the cursing of Dracula. Tonight, it's little more than an academic debate.

The Tismanu named this Discipline after Vlad Dracul's mistress, the mother of Dracula's half-brother, Vlad the Monk. After giving birth to Vlad Dracul's illegitimate son, she devoted her life to worship, retreated to a nunnery and changed her name to Eupraxia.

Eupraxia is a supportive and empowering Discipline. Its effects benefit other Kindred, in addition to the Tismanu himself, much as the priests and monks of Wallachia protected and supported the nobility and peasantry alike. Several of Eupraxia's powers have a darker side as well, but such is the nature of dealing with the souls and wills of cursed and undead monsters.

Blessing of Eupraxia

A vampire with this power is capable of sharing the strength of his will directly with others of his kind. The devout force of the Monk's faith can be felt as a tangible, empowering rush of confidence, certainty and resolve. This power represents the Tismanu's burgeoning ability to mystically connect with the soul of another vampire — or the empty space where a soul should be.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to use. Simply by speaking to his subject in a clear, supportive voice the Tismanu can use a Willpower point of his own to augment another character's dice pool, Defense or resistance trait (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 133). This power allows the subject to enjoy the benefits of more

than one Willpower point per turn, but it does not allow the Tismanu to *spend* more than one Willpower point on that turn. The user of this power is effectively donating his opportunity to use Willpower in that turn to another character. A Willpower point donated through the use of this power cannot be combined with Willpower points from any other sources. That is, a single dice pool or resistance trait can benefit from only one Willpower point at a time.

Example: *Adelphos, a Greek Tismanu vampire, is looking on through a chain-link fence as his fellow Dragon, Jake, is being attacked by bloodthirsty ghouls. Jake has already spent his own Willpower point on an attack made earlier in the turn, but the ghouls keep coming. Adelphos grips the fence in his hands. "Jake," he says, his voice calm and low. "Focus. Have faith." Adelphos spends a Willpower point to add two to Jake's Defense.*

Action: Reflexive

Absolve the Man

This, the most essential spiritual power of the Tismanu, soothes the souls of other monsters and helps to restore a vampire's ability to face the world with confidence and strength of will. A Tismanu who uses this power becomes a figure of faith and personal strength for another Kindred. With a calming or encouraging dialogue, the Tismanu can stir up the personal power a vampire needs to rise above madness or regain the will to go on. As a result of the time the subject spends talking with the Tismanu, she feels soothed, calmed and more in control of herself.

This power can be used on mortals, ghouls and other supernatural creatures, as well, but Tismanu customarily restrict its use to other Kindred. When used on mortals or ghouls, the dialogue required by this power often leads to feeding.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Presence + Empathy + Eupraxia

Action: Extended (subject's Blood Potency + 5 successes; each roll represents 20 minutes of conversation or confession)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A dramatic failure indicates that the Tismanu has accidentally stirred up dreadful or monstrous feelings in his subject. At the Storyteller's discretion, an effect of the subject's derangements may manifest itself in some way (by invoking the Social penalty of Suspicion, for example), or the subject may suffer a -2 penalty to rolls to resist frenzy for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The Tismanu's efforts simply aren't enough to help the subject.

Success: The Tismanu provides some spiritual relief to the subject. The Tismanu can either temporarily diminish the weight of the subject's derangements or restore a Willpower point, as described below.

Exceptional Success: The Tismanu's inspiring efforts truly reinvigorate the subject, who may enjoy both of the beneficial effects described below, if applicable.

When a Tismanu character activates this power, he attempts to grant his subject one of the following two benefits, affecting either Humanity or Willpower. A subject must be able to see or hear the Tismanu directly to be affected by this power. A single creature cannot be the subject of this power more than once per night. This power has no effect on a subject who's been given over to the Beast, such as a vampire of Humanity 0 or in the midst of frenzy. The Tismanu *can* turn this power on himself, provided he meets all of the previously described conditions.

The Tismanu character can provide his subject with moral support, enabling her to overcome a derangement. If the subject has failed a roll and acquired a new derangement that same night, the Tismanu grants her a second chance at the derangement roll she failed — if she succeeds on this re-roll, her new derangement fades away by the time she wakes the next night. If the subject is struggling with a pre-existing mild derangement, the Tismanu allows her to ignore its effects for the rest of the scene. Subjects suffering from a severe derangement have its effects reduced to a mild state for the rest of the scene. Only one of the subject's derangements can be muted at a time in this way, no matter how many derangements the subject may be suffering from overall.

Alternately, the Tismanu can restore a single Willpower point to the subject. This power does not allow the subject to possess Willpower points in excess of her Willpower dots.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie.
—	Subject is a vampire, ghoul or mortal of Humanity 6 or higher.
-2	Subject can see or hear the user, but not both.
-2	Subject is a non-vampiric supernatural creature.
-3	Subject is currently resisting frenzy.
-1	Subject is at Humanity 5.
-2	Subject is at Humanity 4.
-3	Subject is at Humanity 3.
-4	Subject is at Humanity 2.
-5	Subject is at Humanity 1.

Grace of Eupraxia

As the Tismanu's mystic power progresses, he becomes able to help others fight off the supernatural powers of other monsters. With the strength of his pious devotion, the Tismanu fortifies the soul of a subject, warding off occult forces and evil magic. Should the Tismanu's subject already be the victim of a persistent spell or supernatural power, he

might be freed of that power's evil hold, as the Tismanu pits this Discipline against the hostile power in a new contest for dominance. The Tismanu must be able to touch his subject to use this power.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Eupraxia

Action: Instant or contested; resistance is reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The subject is not aided by this power and cannot be the subject of it again until the next sunset.

Failure: The subject is not aided by this power, but the Tismanu can try again.

Success: The subject gains a bonus equal to the user's dots in Eupraxia to resist the next supernatural power leveled against him during the scene. This bonus applies to contested actions and resistance traits alike. If the subject was already under the effects of another supernatural power, the user frees him from it, rather than granting a bonus for future use.

Exceptional Success: A success, except the subject gains the bonus against the next two attempts to target him with an unwanted supernatural power. If the subject was already under the effects of another supernatural power, then extra successes are their own reward, enabling the user to overcome more potent powers.

When applied to subjects under the effects of another supernatural power (such as a vampire possessed by a Numen-using spirit), Grace of Eupraxia allows the Tismanu to cancel the power's effects. To do so, the Tismanu must succeed at a contested action, pitting his Intelligence + Occult + Eupraxia against the dice pool of the hostile power being opposed. The user of the original supernatural power (for example, the Ventrue who Mesmerized the subject nights earlier) does not actually participate in this roll unless she is present in the scene (as in the case of a possessing spirit); the Storyteller simply uses that character's traits to define the power's dice pool for the contested action. If the Storyteller knows how many successes were scored on the original action to activate the power in question, she may choose to use those as the total for the Tismanu to overcome. Note that the Tismanu is the challenging character in this contested action, so if the roll results in a tie, the power being opposed continues to affect the subject.

Example: *Adelphos believes his ally, Alana, has been cursed by a sorcerer. He intends to free Alana with Eupraxia. He sits her in a chair and, following Orthodox custom, dabs olive oil on her face and into a nearby bowl of water. While doing so, he activates Grace of Eupraxia, and his player rolls Intelligence + Occult + Eupraxia to oppose an unknown dice pool from an unknown sorcerer. The Storyteller, knowing Alana is the subject of the Theban Sorcery ritual Malediction of Despair, checks her notes and finds that the Sanctified sorcerer achieved four successes on his Intelligence +*

Academics + Theban Sorcery roll to activate the curse. If Adelphos' roll generates five or more successes, the curse will be broken…

Refuge of Forbiddance

Powerful Tismanu turn their ability to affect the mystical powers of other supernatural creatures into an ability to affect the creature itself. With this power, the Tismanu can repel unwelcome creatures and create an area of refuge around himself. Unwelcome subjects, whether mortal or supernatural, must overcome the Tismanu's fearsome spiritual might to enter this area of refuge.

Cost: 1 Willpower per scene

Dice Pool: This power requires two rolls on behalf of the Tismanu: an invocation roll that defines the area of refuge, and an effect roll that opposes those who attempt to enter the area. The dice pool for the invocation roll is Presence + Intimidation + Eupraxia. The dice pool for the effect roll is the same, opposed by the subject's Resolve + Blood Potency.

Action: Instant and contested; all contested actions are reflexive.

Roll Results

The result of the invocation roll determines the size of the area that subjects can be forbidden to enter. The more successes scored, the larger the area of refuge. (To be sure an area of a certain size is achieved with the invocation roll, subtract one die per step up the area of effect table; then even a single success indicates the desired amount of space becomes the Tismanu's area of refuge.) The exact shape of the area of refuge is determined by the character, who must stay within it to make use of this power. If the Tismanu leaves the area of refuge and returns to it in the same scene, he may resume his use of the same area.

Successes	Space
1 success	5 sq. yards
2 successes	10 sq. yards
3 successes	50 sq. yards
4 successes	250 sq. yards
5 successes	1000 sq. yards

Once the area of refuge has been successfully determined and invoked, the Tismanu makes an effect roll. The successes achieved on the effect roll become the defensive score of the area of refuge. Unwelcome subjects flee the area of refuge when it is invoked unless they achieve more successes on an immediate, reflexive Resolve + Blood Potency roll than were scored on the effect roll. As long as the Tismanu is within the area of refuge, no creature may enter the area of refuge (or cause an object to enter it) without first winning a similar contested action. Unwelcome subjects who manage to enter the area of refuge suffer two points of bashing damage for each success the Tismanu achieved on the effect roll.

The Tismanu can allow any subjects he wishes to enter without attempting the contested action, but once a subject is granted admittance, she can no longer be repelled from the area of refuge.

At the Storyteller's discretion, the Tismanu may maintain an existing area of refuge over multiple scenes (without making a new invocation roll) by paying the Willpower cost again in the next scene. No Tismanu can maintain more than one area of refuge at a time.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The area to be defined is a part of the user's haven.
+2	The area to be defined is an enclosed space, like a room or shed.
+1	The area to be defined is Orthodox holy ground.
—	The area to be defined has some sort of clear perimeter, such as a hedgerow or a line of columns, but is not truly enclosed.
-2	The area to be defined has no physical edge-markers. It is a field, a portion of a larger space or a shapeless stretch of forest.
-2	The area to be defined is the site of current fighting or combat.

Exorcise the Beast

Masters of Eupraxia are able to exert a degree of control over the Beast residing in all Kindred, much as an exorcist exerts control over a possessing demon. According to the philosophy of the Tismanu, this power is meant to be used to alleviate the suffering of a vampire at the claws of his own Beast. The Tismanu seldom reveal the second application of this power, but it can also be used to stir the Beast from its lair within a vampire's will. A Monk of Dracula with this power can exorcise a vampire's Beast, driving it out from the hollows of the will into the empty spaces of the undead soul (thereby separating it from the flesh) or luring it out into the vampire's body (and provoking frenzy).

The subject of this power must be able to clearly hear the Tismanu's voice, so that his own Beast is able to hear it. The words the Tismanu uses to admonish or provoke the Beast clearly reflect the Monk's intent ("Don't stand for that, Andrew. Kill him!") but might not be recognized as the medium of a supernatural power until it is too late.

Cost: 1 Willpower per roll

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + Eupraxia – subject's Resolve

Action: Extended. Each roll represents one turn of vocal rebuking or provocation. One Willpower point must be spent on each roll, to convey the user's voice into the subject's soul, to the Beast itself. Damage done to the user during this extended action does not penalize future rolls (though wound penalties apply as normal).

If the Tismanu attempts to activate this power subtly, so that his subject doesn't realize the source of the influence angering or soothing her Beast, the subject and any onlookers may make a reflexive Wits + Occult roll, opposed by a reflexive Manipulation + Occult roll on behalf of the Tismanu. By winning this contested action, the subject or onlooker sees that the Tismanu is the source of the Beast's influence. Otherwise, she may continue to suspect, but cannot be sure.

This power makes extensive use of the standard frenzy rules on p. 178 – 181 of **Vampire: The Requiem**.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Tismanu's own Beast is roused by the attention focused on another's. The Tismanu must resist frenzy as though he had been betrayed by a partner in a deal (5 successes).

Failure: The Tismanu fails to generate any successes this turn, but may try again next turn.

Success: To soothe or stymie a vampire's Beast Within, the Tismanu adds the successes on his activation roll to any the subject achieves on her next Resolve + Composure roll to resist frenzy. The Tismanu may continue to accrue successes for the subject on subsequent turns with additional rolls. If the Tismanu achieves enough successes, the subject may not even need to roll to avoid potential frenzy. For example, if the user generates five successes for his subject, even a starving subject can automatically resist Wassail when tasting blood (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 179). A soothed subject even finds it more difficult to rouse her own Beast: the Tismanu's successes are added to the five successes that must normally be accumulated in the event that a soothed subject attempts to "ride the wave."

To draw out a Beast, the Tismanu pits the successes accumulated on his extended action against the subject. These successes become the target number of successes the subject must accumulate with an extended Resolve + Composure roll to resist frenzy. All frenzy-related dice penalties (e.g., for hunger or fire) apply to the subject's rolls as usual. Unless stopped, the Tismanu can continue to "raise the bar" for the subject, generating more successes on subsequent rolls to increase the subject's target number even further. If the subject is already attempting to resist frenzy when this power is activated, the Tismanu's successes add to those of other provocative sources (such as an endangered loved one or a bonfire).

When the Tismanu first attempts to stir the Beast, he defines what its target will be in the event of frenzy. He may do this plainly ("Diana betrayed you, Andrew. Make her pay.") or with subtler cues ("Is that *Diana's blood*, Andrew? Diana's blood, Andrew.")

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward, as the Tismanu makes exceptional progress towards calming or goading the subject's Beast.

Some Dragons believe this power was used by the Tismanu in nights past to command and control the influential Kindred who trusted the Monks to be their caretakers. According to these (typically impious) conspiracy theorists, powerful Tismanu discourage Dragons from learning the third tier of the Coil of the Beast — Exhaust the Beast — because vampires who make use of that tier are immune to this power's effects for the rest of the night.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie.
+/-1	Each derangement the subject has makes the Beast harder to soothe and easier to goad with this power.
+/-2	A subject of Humanity 7 or higher is easier to soothe and harder to goad.

Mortualia

Further revealing the Romanization of the quasi-Egyptian funerary necromancy practiced by Libitinarii, this Discipline of torpor and sleep was given a Latin name. As formalized British academics, the early occult Morticians who would later become the Libitinarii categorized these mystic powers with Latin descriptions and titles. As vampires, they gave their elaborately ritualized death magic a musical name, in reference to the Requiem. Literally, *mortualium* are funeral dirges.

The mystic powers of Mortualia are uniquely beneficial to the Damned; they have little or know affect on mortals, or even on Kindred other than the subject. The practice of Mortualia resembles an amalgam of ancient funerary customs ritualized and supernaturally empowered by the Libitinarius who performs them. For Kindred outside of the bloodline, it's difficult to discern just how many of the rituals customarily associated with Mortualia are actually essential to its use. When a Libitinarius brushes a scarab amulet with human sweat, is she activating the actual mystic power of the Discipline, or is she merely respecting some ancient tradition? Are the Egyptian words the Libitinarius recites as he lays another Kindred to sleep actually an ancient spell, or is it something the Morticians invented? That no two Libitinarii perform any Mortualia ritual in exactly the same way only further confuses outsiders.

The truth is a mix of answers, and a vital secret of the Libinitarius line. Although the blood of the Libitinarii has some innate link to the powers of Mortualia, vampires of this line have discovered that the change in the blood necessary to learn the power is not as extreme as that which was necessary to create it. That is, Kindred outside of the Libitinarius bloodline can learn the powers of Mortualia without willing their blood into line with the Morticians. Were this to be commonly known,

the Morticians could lose the unique position they have among the Ordo Dracul. For some Libinitarii, the notion that the Discipline's mystic power would be separated from its cultural traditions is just as unsettling. Kindred of the Libitinarius line are therefore forbidden by their elders from teaching it to those "without the blood." Still, it is only a matter of time a Mortician does, and draws down the wrath of his vampiric family.

In game terms, a non-Libitinarius vampire can learn Mortualia as an out-of-Clan Discipline, provided she is able to find and convince a teacher to share the bloodline's mystic rites.

The powers of Mortualia often refer to the rules for torpor. To review those rules, see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 175.

Exsuscito

This fundamental power of Mortualia requires a Kindred to craft a charm, talisman or other focal object to be given to the subject. Scarab amulets, jackal-headed votive sculptures and gold sun charms are common choices. Each object must be made specifically for the subject, using his own Vitae.

A subject who possesses a so-called waking charm made for him by a practitioner of Mortualia finds he is able to rise more easily from torpor. For Kindred who fear the terrible visions of the deathly sleep, or those who intend to wake at a particular point in the future — perhaps to complete the last act of some far-reaching plan — this is a valuable power.

Cost: 1 Vitae from the subject

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts + Mortualia

Action: Extended. To craft this power's focal object, the Libitinarius must accumulate 15 successes and infuse one Vitae from the subject into the clay, glass or other substance used to create the object. Each roll represents one hour of work. Once the object has been created, it must be delivered to the subject before she next enters torpor, or its power is lost.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Libitinarius ruins the focal object before it can be completed and must start over. The Vitae spent on the ruined focal object is wasted, and the Libitinarius loses one Willpower point.

Failure: The subject enters torpor before the necessary successes are accrued, and so this power never affects her sleep. The Vitae spent to create the focal object is wasted. She must attempt Resolve + Composure rolls as usual to awaken after each interval determined by her Humanity and Blood Potency.

Success: The subject falls into voluntary torpor with the focal object of this power in her possession. She automatically succeeds on the next Resolve + Composure or Humanity roll she chooses to make to awaken from torpor. If the focal object of this power is removed from her person while she lays torpid, she awakens immediately and automatically.

Exceptional Success: In addition to all the benefits of a normal success, the subject gains a bonus equal to the Libitinarian's dots in Mortualia on any dice pools to recognize a disturbance to her torpid body. Normally this dice pool is Wits + Auspex (if the character possesses that Discipline) with a –2 penalty.

Once an Exsuscito charm has been used, its power is lost. A Mortician can never benefit from an Exsuscito charm he made for himself.

Internuntio

This power enables a Kindred to preserve the Vitae of a subject and infuse it with a telepathic connection capable of spanning miles and penetrating the strange nightmares of torpor. Vitae preserved in this way becomes completely inert, except for this telepathic connection — it provides no sustenance, cannot fuel other powers and offers no risk of blood addiction or the Vinculum. Those who drink the Vitae, however, gain an immediate spiritual link with its source. The drinker and the subject can communicate silently, mentally, but with no ability to read the other's mind — when one "speaks," the other "hears."

Libitinarii use this power to communicate with torpid Kindred, who may or may not be able to separate the voice of the drinker from the bizarre nightmares of torpor. This communication can be used to consult with sleeping leaders, warn a torpid Kindred of impending danger or slowly acclimate a vampire to the modern day before she awakes. This power offers no ability to cut through the Fog of Eternity, however, so information shared with a torpid vampire might be muddled or forgotten by the time she awakes, while information sought might already be replaced by fractured nightmares by the time the sleeper is consulted.

At the Storyteller's discretion, contacting the mind of an especially ancient or mad elder might do little more than frighten or confuse the petitioning drinker. In such a case, the drinker may be required to succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll to avoid involuntarily breaking contact with the subject and losing one Willpower point.

This power affects only Kindred and ghouls. It may be used on the Vitae of an unwilling subject if the character has the means of acquiring it, however. If the character is willing to risk a Vinculum or blood addiction, she may drink the blood of a potential subject, and then vomit it up later to be infused with the power of Internuntio. Regurgitating Vitae in this way doesn't excuse the drinker from any of the risks of drinking another vampire's blood; it merely lets her use that Vitae to fuel this power. More often, elder vampires on the verge of entering torpor volunteer their own Vitae to be used in this ritual — often having it drained into ceremonial urns — so that childer and subordinates can reach them through the years.

Cost: 1 Vitae from the subject

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult + Mortualia – subject's Resolve (if unwilling)

Action: Instant. This power is typically activated at the end of an hour-long bloodletting ceremony. Libitinarii often adorn the jars and urns in which Vitae is stored with images representing the subject.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic strain of infusing a spiritual connection into the blood is more than the character can bear. She must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll or slip immediately into torpor. The Vitae used to activate this power is wasted.

Failure: The character is unable to affect the blood, but the Vitae used to activate the power is not used. The character can try again on the next turn.

Success: The subject's Vitae is successfully infused with mystic power. A character who drinks the Vitae is able to communicate with the subject for the rest of the scene. The drinker may end this power prematurely with little more than a thought. The subject of this power may spend a Willpower point to break contact with the drinker.

Exceptional Success: A success, but the Vitae protects the drinker from any risk of Willpower loss from making contact with the mad dreams of a torpid vampire.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The user has a blood tie with the subject.
+1	The subject is torpid when the Vitae is prepared.
+1	Power is infused into the subject's Vitae in her own presence.

Alitum

Building on the mystic connection of Internuntio, the Kindred is now able to preserve all of Vitae's mystic qualities and offer them even to a distant, torpid subject. Vitae effected by this power has all of its mystic qualities preserved for years. Creatures who drink it gain all the benefits and face all the risks of drinking Vitae directly from the subject.

To the subject's advantage, this Vitae can be mystically consumed at a distance, no matter how far the subject is from her preserved Vitae, whether she is awake or torpid. Vitae consumed through this supernatural connection appears to rapidly dry out, evaporate or turn to dust.

This effect can be coupled with the power of Internuntio. Each power must be activated separately. Only Kindred Vitae can be preserved using Alitum.

Cost: 1 Willpower plus the subject's Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Mortualia

Action: Instant. Libitinarii construct elaborate rituals surrounding the use of this power. First, the subject is washed and dressed. Then she is bled slowly over several hours while colleagues, childer and retainers look on or, sometimes, deliver symbolic eulogies. As the subject's blood is sealed in canopic jars, clay urns or glass receptacles, this power is finally activated.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attempt to preserve and empower the Vitae somehow goes wrong. All of the available Vitae is destroyed, and the Willpower point spent to activate this power is wasted.

Failure: The character fails to preserve and empower the Vitae. The Willpower spent to activate this power is wasted.

Success: One Vitae per success is preserved for a number of years determined by the penalty the character took on the activation roll. The subject from whom the Vitae was taken can consume this Vitae at a distance, even in torpor.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward, as the character preserves a greater number of Vitae.

Each preserved Vitae must be contained in a separate receptacle. Once a receptacle is opened, the Vitae within must be consumed within one minute or it is automatically transferred to the subject from which it was drawn. No character can hold more Vitae within her body than her Blood Potency allows, however. Vitae that therefore cannot be consumed or transferred turns to dust and is wasted. The subject of this power can consume her own Vitae at a distance even if it is still enclosed in its receptacle.

An instant action is required to consume each Vitae preserved through this power.

Suggested Modifiers

The greater the penalty the user accepts on her activation roll, the longer the Vitae to be effected will stay preserved.

Modifier	Situation
-1	10 years
-2	25 years
-3	50 years
-4	100 years
-5	Indefinitely

Munimen

A vampire is never more vulnerable than she is in torpor. This power protects the form of a torpid Kindred with a mystic ward. No object, creature or character can damage the torpid subject without first overcoming this ward. Even after the subject has awakened from torpor, she continues to benefit from this supernatural protection.

To use this power, the character must touch the subject. This power only affects vampires in torpor.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Stamina + Occult + Mortualia versus Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance requires an instant action. Libitinarii elaborately decorate the subjects of this power. Some are adorned with traditional amulets, while others are wrapped in fine linens and doused with fragrant perfumes. Some Morticians paint "protective spells" directly on the body of the subject.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The mystic ward is corrupted, but still activated. The character is now unable to make physical contact with the subject until she awakens from torpor. Therefore, the character cannot attempt this power again until that time. The Willpower point spent to activate this power is wasted.

Failure: The character fails to achieve any successes to protect the subject's body. The Willpower point spent to activate this power is wasted.

Success: The character sets the defending successes for the contested action when this power is activated. Potential contestants must overcome those successes with an instant action before they can attack the subject's body. Each potential attacker must succeed on his own contested action to be able to affect the subject. This protective ward lasts until the subject comes out of torpor.

Furthermore, the successes achieved protect the subject for several turns after she wakes. The subject is protected by an Armor rating of 2 in the turn in which she awakens, and for one turn per success thereafter. This mystic Armor has no Strength requirement, Defense penalty or other qualities.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward, as they grant the subject more protection for a longer time.

Reminiscor

The pinnacle power of a Mortualia practitioner, Reminiscor transforms a Kindred's experiences with a particular trade, art form or skill into an intrinsic part of the character's soul. Some Dragons speculate that this power embeds some essential intuition in the subject's psyche. The more occult-minded suppose that this power actually affects the subject's soul. The Egyptian spells that this power mimics suggest the subject's "true name" is changed.

Whatever the truth, this power's effects are clear: it enables Kindred to retain a small part of their personal experience through even the longest and most harrowing torpor. Indeed, something about the experience of torpor is necessary for this power to take affect, as though torpor is the crucible in which the soul is altered.

The character must be in physical contact with the subject of this power. Immediately after this power is activated, the subject slips into voluntary torpor.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Mortualia

Action: Instant. This is the most celebrated power of Mortualia among the Libinitarii. This power is typically enacted in the midst of an all-night ceremony honoring the subject. Demonstrations of the subject's "soul" Skill are common. In some cases, these celebrations involve ritual combat or occult ceremonies. In others, artistic Kindred are invited to perform.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character's attempt to activate this power ends in disaster. The Willpower point meant for use in the ritual is lost and the subject may never again be the target of a Reminiscor effect.

Failure: The character fails to bind the subject's soul to his experiences. The Willpower point spent to activate the power is wasted but the Libitinarius can try to use this power on the subject again in the future.

Success: The character successfully binds the subject's experiences with one Skill to his soul. The subject then enters torpor. That "soul" Skill is, thereafter, never lowered when the character's Blood Potency is diminished. No matter how low the subject's Blood Potency drops, his dots in that Skill remain the same. This power does not enable the subject to raise a Skill beyond the limit allowed by his *current* Blood Potency, however.

Exceptional Success: The same as a success, with no additional effects.

Example: *Vicrum, a well-respected Ventrue and member of the city's Primogen, has had his experiences with Kindred society and city dynamics mystically transformed into an intuitive insight that will pierce even the fog of eternity. When he slipped into torpor at the hands of the Libitinarii he had a Blood Potency of 7 and six dots in Politics. Now, many decades later, his Blood Potency has dropped to 4 and he's lost a dot of Willpower to the Reminiscor ritual, but he still has six dots in Politics. He may not know who's Prince or what covenant is in vogue, but he's sure to catch on very quickly. When his Blood Potency rises to 7 again, Vicrum buys a seventh dot in Politics. Should he go into torpor again, he will keep both his sixth and seventh dots in Politics.*

The subject of this power finds his *capabilities* with his "soul" Skill are not diminished, but his *factual* knowledge of the Skill is still clouded, faded or fractured by the Fog of Eternity. The Storyteller may, as always, deem information to be outside the subject's current capacity to know, whether that information was forgotten or first discovered while the character was in torpor.

This power does not protect the subject against other possible supernatural attacks that might lower the dots of his "soul" Skill.

A vampire may be the subject of only one Reminiscor effect — ever.

Suikast

The secret origins of this legendary and fearsome Discipline have been lost, but its purpose is well known: Suikast was devised to destroy Dracula. The Turkish bloodline known as "the Dragonslayers" has been described more than once as little more than a delivery system for this dreaded power.

How was Suikast created? How did the Turkish enemies of the Impaler manage to transform their fateful plans into a manifestation of vampire blood? Rarely has such an immediate goal been made manifest so quickly in the vampiric form. Many Kindred scholars speculate that the mystic qualities of the blood take many generations to coagulate into cogent and repeatable powers, but history suggests the Azerkatil manifested and refined the power of their blood in less than 20 years. In the modern Ordo Dracul — where the Dragonslayers are held up as magnificent examples of a vampire's ability to change her fate — a simpler, if less satisfying, theory is often offered: the Azerkatil simply wanted it bad enough.

Many of the rumored powers of Suikast are mythical. Whereas tales of the Dragonslayers — in those few domains where the bloodline is known — suggest they can turn a vampire to fire or grow swords from their bones, the majority of this Discipline's powers do not eliminate enemies, but aid the Azerkatil. Most of the original Turkish vampire-hunters who became the Azerkatil were already masterful combatants when they were Embraced; Suikast was only a tool for them to use in their quest to destroy the Impaler.

Will Against Wyrm

The basic power of Suikast helps the Azerkatil to maintain his wits in the face of a savage foe. With this power, the Dragonslayer refines his resistance against the most hindering weakness of a killer: fear. The Azerkatil strive to overcome the Red Fear so that they can retain their cunning while wielding fire, the most terrible weapon in the arsenal of any vampire-hunter.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Unlike most Disciplines, this power is not actively rolled. Rather, this power augments the character's dice pool when resisting frenzy. The character is better able to maintain his calm in the presence of other predators. When encountering another vampire, the character adds his dots in Suikast on rolls to resist the frenzy that stems from the confrontation of Beasts — the Predator's Taint. The character also adds his Suikast dots to all rolls to resist Rötschreck. The character cannot suspend this power, however, and dots in Suikast are not added to any attempts to "ride the wave" of frenzy.

Action: N/A

Serene Ferocity

Did the Turks know about the Coils of the Dragon? This power suggests they did — it bears some resemblance the second tier of the Coil of the Beast. Suikast, however, aids the character when relying on the Beast to do battle with other Kindred. A character with this power seems bred with an instinctual ability to battle the Damned. Even when given over to the Beast, the character is able to manage some cunning.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll to activate and is considered "always on." The character no longer needs to spend a Willpower point to "ride the wave" of frenzy. Although Kindred in the midst of frenzy are typically unable to perform any action that requires much thought, the character suffers no frenzy-based penalties on dice pools to perceive his environment, track his enemies or make use of the Stealth Skill.

The character's dice pool to "ride the wave" is further modified in the situations described below.

Action: N/A

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	The target of the Dragonslayer's frenzy is another vampire.
+1	The target of his frenzy smells of shed blood (i.e., has at least one unhealed lethal wound).
+1	The user has suffered at least one lethal or aggravated wound in an attack made by the target.

Taste of the Dragon

A Kindred with this power has a formidable ability to draw insight from the mere scent and taste of another Kindred's blood. By drinking the Vitae of another vampire — and risking all the associated effects — the character gains a kind of mystical connection to the subject. As long as this connection persists, the Dragonslayer can mystically discern the location and condition of the subject, and even anticipate his actions.

Cost: 1 Vitae (for some effects)

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary to activate this power, and it is considered "always on." Some of the following effects made possible with this power do require a roll, however, to employ effectively.

The character adds his Suikast dots as a bonus to dice pools to track, pursue or otherwise locate any nearby vampire or ghoul with unhealed lethal or aggravated wounds, by smelling the scent of blood in the air or licking a blood trail. The Storyteller determines whether or not a subject is close enough to be detected by the Dragonslayer in this way, based on the successes achieved on the tracking roll. This power does not grant any ability to penetrate supernatural effects, such as with Obfuscate (for that, the Dragonslayer needs Auspex).

The character gains a mystical connection to the last vampire from whom he has fed. This connection shares all the qualities of blood sympathy (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 163), except that the character may add his Suikast dots to dice pools involving the subject's blood. The character can spend one of the subject's Vitae in his system to make a Wits + Occult + Suikast roll as an instant action; each success on this roll reveals one of the subject's Disciplines or Coils of the Dragon — beginning with the most advanced or powerful — followed by the subject's Blood Potency and clan. More specific details on the powers (the exact dots in each power, the specific Crúac rituals the character knows) cannot be determined in this way.

The character may also spend one of the subject's Vitae in his system to gain a +2 bonus to Defense against attacks from the subject for one turn. The mystic connection of the Blood gives the Dragonslayer an intuitive sense of the subject's movements.

This power does not enable the character to store more Vitae or spend more Vitae per turn than is normally allowed by his Blood Potency.

This power's mystic connection persists until the character feeds from another vampire or uses the last of the Vitae he drank from the subject. For the purposes of this power, it's important to record how much Vitae the character has left from the current subject.

Action: N/A

The Dragon's Own Fire

The name of this power comes from an apocryphal Dracula legend that the first of the Azerkatil seemed to think was true. Among the Kindred of Constantinople, it was rumored that the blood of Dracula was caustic, capable of burning flesh and bone like a chemical acid. It was said to be a kind of "dragon's breath," and Dracula was thought to be capable of spraying his lethal blood from his mouth.

This power resulted from the attempts of the first Azerkatil vampires to change their blood into a similarly threatening substance. The name of this power was meant as a sort of jab at their hated enemy, a suggestion that the Azerkatil had learned the Dragon's secrets and replicated his power. Of course, in truth, the Ordo Dracul had no such power until the Azerkatil brought it to them.

With this power, a Dragonslayer with Vitae in his system is never without a weapon — his blood is his weapon. The touch of his blood-slick palm burns flesh. A wave of his slashed arm sprays out an arc of searing blood. To sip his Vitae is to taste pain.

This is the most commonly seen hostile power of the Azerkatil. Most of the first Dragonslayers were even dis-

patched on their mission to slay Dracula without learning the power beyond this one.

Cost: 1 Vitae per scene

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll. By spending the Vitae to activate this power, the character's blood is instantly transmuted into a potent acid capable of burning flesh, bone, metal and stone with aggravated damage. The character can will this blood out of his body through his pores, so that any part of his flesh becomes a dangerous weapon in close combat. Attacks can be made with the blood using either Strength or Dexterity + Brawl.

Successful close combat attacks against the character cause attackers to suffer one point of aggravated damage from blood spatter. Any attempt to consume blood from the character while this power is active inflicts one point of aggravated damage on the drinker for each Vitae taken from the Dragonslayer.

The character is immune to the damage caused by his own blood, but his clothing and equipment are not. The character's blood becomes inert shortly after leaving his body; spilled blood is dangerous only in the turn when it is shed.

This power persists for the rest of the scene, unless the vampire chooses to return his blood to its inert state prematurely.

Action: Reflexive

Burn the Dragon's Blood

This power enables the Azerkatil to infect the Vitae of other Kindred with a withering supernatural curse. The character doesn't even need to make direct physical contact with his opponent — he only needs to open a gash in his foe and expose her vulnerable Vitae to the Azerkatil's venomous will. The curse of the Dragonslayers turns blood into soot, robbing other vampires of their ability to heal and spark the supernatural powers of their own Vitae.

Cost: 1 Willpower

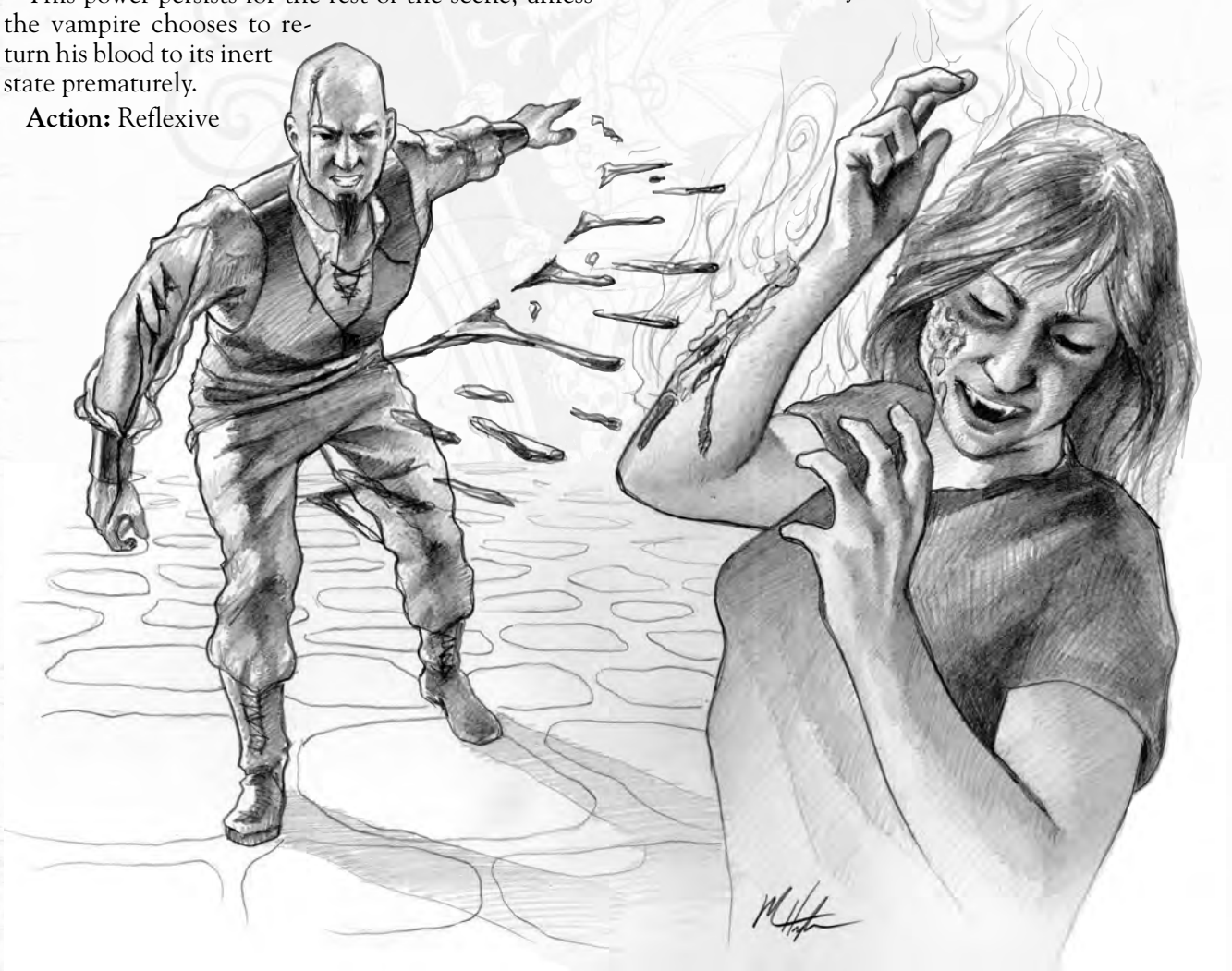
Dice Pool: Stamina + Brawl + Suikast – the subject's Stamina

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The transformation of Vitae occurs in the character's body, rather than the subject's. An amount of the character's own Vitae equal to the subject's Stamina is instantly turned to ash in his veins as the curse is rebounded.

Failure: The character either physically misses his target or fails to spark the fatal reaction in the blood that would curse the subject. There is no effect.



Success: The character starts a terrible change in the victim's blood. The victim continues to lose one Vitae per turn for a number of turns equal to the successes scored on the activation roll, unless she runs out of Vitae or consumes at least two new Vitae, in which case the plague is ended. A second application of this power on a subject still suffering from the effects of a previous application "resets the clock" on the duration of Vitae loss.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes cause the subject to suffer longer.

Each Vitae the subject loses is transmuted into a choking soot that clogs and cakes the vampire's insides. It takes two Vitae to replace every Vitae transmuted through this power. (Imagine that each affected Vitae box on the character sheet is clogged by this power. It takes one new Vitae to clear a box of bloody soot. The second new Vitae fills that box with usable Blood, as normal.)

Zagovny

Zagovny is a kind of sanguine witchery, with a wide array of strange powers. The odd disparity of its effects often confuses other Kindred; many who have never heard of the Vedma mistake each power of Zagovny as evidence of a different parent Discipline. The Vedma thus have a reputation for knowing scores of bizarre Disciplines, when in fact their line has only one unique tradition of power. Like all good witches, of course, the Vedma are loathe to reveal such a secret to others; let their enemies — and allies — make their mistakes.

The supernatural powers of the Vedma have no single origin story. Some among the Old Witches claim that Zagovny is a kind of proto-Discipline, from which other, more common Disciplines have descended. Such Vedma believe other Kindred powers are derived from those of Zagovny. More modern Ordo Dracul scholars have supposed that Zagovny's disparate powers are the result of the feeding habits of the original Vedma progenitress, rumored to have feasted upon mortal witches and mages of all kinds. The blood of the Vedma is, theoretically, now a blend of bizarre, magical ingredients.

One folk tale, passed down from sire to childe and Avus to supplicant, claims that the Vedma's unique powers were drawn from the land itself — that the sacred mountains of Dacia bled magical powers, and the first Vedma drank them up. Thus, Zagovny represents a raw mixture of the magic inherent in the lands that lay in the shadow of the Carpathians, from the rough peaks to the Danube.

Eye of Blood

It is commonly claimed in the folklore of the Slavic peasantry that witches were able to spy on people from miles away. Evil sorcerers could learn a person's secrets in this way, and use them to force good folk to do evil deeds. But first, the witch had to touch you or your belongings.

This power lets a Vedma do just that. By applying a spot of her own blood to the body or clothing of the subject, the Vedma is able to mystically watch him from afar. The Vedma must be able to touch the subject to cast her "bloody eye" on him, but just a fingerprint's worth of blood is necessary to activate this power. Once done, the Vedma's ability to perceive her subject is limited only by her own perceptiveness and mystic power.

The Vedma does not see through the subject's eyes or from the point of view of the blood she applies to him. Rather, she experiences "third-person" visions consisting of images, sounds, emotions and smells, like a kind of arcane telemetry. The sensations come to her in a surreal, almost hallucinatory experience, not unlike a vision gained through the use of Auspex, but in real-time.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Zagovny – subject's Resolve

Action: Instant or reflexive. To apply her "bloody eye" to a subject requires an instant action. To remotely sense the activities of the subject requires either an instant or a reflexive action, as described below. The dice pool is the same for both rolls.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The mystic link to the subject is somehow corrupted. The character receives disturbing and terrifying images, possibly drawn from her own soul, rather than any vision of the subject. The character loses one Willpower point in addition to the Vitae wasted on the failed activation roll and cannot attempt to apply this power to any other subject for the rest of the night.

Failure: The character is unable to make the mystic link manifest and is unable to spy on the subject, though she may try again. The Vitae spent to activate this power is wasted.

Success: The character is able to perceive visions of the subject's whereabouts and actions until the next sunset. She may actively "look in on" the subject with an instant action as many times as she likes during this power's duration. Whenever the subject experiences a substantial sensory change (such as going from a warm cottage into a chilly night or being physically or emotionally hurt), the character may attempt a reflexive Wits + Empathy + Zagovny roll to receive a brief vision of the experience.

The number of successes achieved on the activation roll determines the number of miles the subject may travel from the character without breaking the mystic connection. Each success extends the power's range by five miles.

While the character slumbers, visions of the subject come to her in dreams.

Exceptional Success: Similar to a normal success, except the range of the connection is unlimited.

The visions received by the character may be a confusing mix of images, sounds, smells and emotional sensations. The character gains no special ability to perceive beyond her normal means with this power; the vision cannot be steered. While a sense of the subject's environment certainly comes across through the vision, the subject himself is always the primary focal point of the vision.

The character may take actions to discern details and spot hidden objects in a vision just as though she were there. If the character were looking in on a subject with a concealed weapon, for example, she may attempt a Wits + Firearms roll to notice it. The Storyteller may apply as much as a –3 penalty to dice pools when the character attempts to scrutinize objects or people other than the subject.

If the character has Auspex, she can even bring Heightened Senses and Aura Sight to bear on the subjects in the vision.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is turned on a subject with whom the user has a blood tie.
+1	The subject is a mortal, ghoul or vampire the user has met before.
—	The subject is a mortal, ghoul or vampire the user has never met.
–2	The subject is a supernatural creature other than a ghoul or vampire.

Witch-Cloak

The Vedma are known for their sometimes bizarre appearance and use of trickery to protect themselves. With this power, an Old Witch can disguise herself amid the weeds of an abandoned lot, vanish into a row of roadside trees or appear to change her shape. The Vedma has only a slight ability to control this power, however. Rather, it is a mystic effect that radiates from her own corpse to affect the eyes of others.

Note that this power does not actually change the Vedma's shape in any way. Instead, it plays with the senses of an onlooker. A Vedma may appear to transform from a tree into her normal form, when in fact she was simply standing near other trees. A Vedma may appear to have a wooden post in place of legs, when in fact she is simply wearing a brown skirt. The images perceived by the subject become more dramatic as the Vedma's proficiency with Zagovny increases.

Cost: 1 Vitae per scene

Dice Pool: No roll is necessary to activate this power. Rather, the Witch-Cloak allows the character to add her dots in Zagovny to Stealth and Subterfuge dice pools to hide or disguise herself. Whereas a mundane disguise allows a character to pass herself off as someone else, this power allows the Vedma to pass herself off as *something* else with an extraordinary success. Note that this power cannot compensate for the character's Blood weaknesses or Humanity; a bestial Vedma may go so far as to disguise herself as a wolf, but cannot pass for a normal human. Likewise, the character's disguise cannot dramatically change her apparent Size.

As a rule of thumb, a disguised Vedma does not seem more trustworthy or less monstrous unless she also uses a Skill like Persuasion to change the subject's mind. This power only alters the subject's literal perceptions.

A Vedma augmenting her Stealth Skill with the Witch-Cloak never appears to vanish using this power. Rather, she appears to be something else. A Vedma hiding in a ruined house might be mistaken for a man-sized patch of water damage to the wallpaper, while a Vedma sneaking across a playground might appear as a mass of blowing leaves.

The Vedma's control over this power is influenced by her Specialties. The Vedma may combine her mystic prowess with other equipment bonuses, as well. The mad witches of Slavic folklore seemed to wear their "alternate forms" as capes on their backs or leaves in their hair. No doubt some of those witches were simply fooling the eyes of their subjects with this power.

Action: N/A

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The character is standing still (for Stealth actions).
+1	The character has successfully hidden in the same spot before (for Stealth actions).
+1	The character has successfully fooled the subject before (for disguise attempts).
–1	Each witness after the first present when the character invokes this power.
–3	The character attempts to disguise herself as a person or creature one Size larger or smaller.
–1 to –3	The character attempts to hide in an open or empty area (for Stealth actions).

Witch's Gaze

This power is the Vedma's sanguine manifestation of the archetypal curse of a mad witch — the Vaskania or "evil eye." With just a look, the Vedma can curse a subject, dooming him to suffer a terrible setback, grievous injury or awful malady. The Vedma may inflict a particular curse upon the subject by proclaiming her intent for the subject to hear, or she may simply lay a bane upon him to attract bad luck.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Zagovny versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The subject is not cursed and cannot be cursed by the character again for the rest of the night. The Willpower point spent to invoke the curse is wasted.

Failure: The curse fails to take hold, but the character may try again in another turn. The Willpower point spent to invoke the curse is wasted.

Success: The character wins the contested roll against the subject, and may choose to curse one of the subject's Skills or the subject in general. To curse a specific Skill, the Vedma must suggest the Skill to be cursed with a proclamation (for example, "You rely too much on your guns, fool!" indicates the Firearms Skill, while "Damn your cherished tongue," might indicate Socialize or Persuasion), and the player must specify the Skill exactly to the Storyteller (possibly in secret). The subject has no means of determining which Skill has been cursed other than the character's proclamation. The next time the character fails at a serious attempt to use the cursed Skill, he suffers a dramatic failure instead. The Storyteller is encouraged to discount actions specifically designed to "absorb" the curse; the subject may attempt such actions, but they should not trigger the curse's effect.

The duration of a Skill-specific curse depends on the Vedma's dice pool. The default duration for a Skill-specific curse lasts until the next sunset. Each –1 penalty the character voluntarily applies to her dice pool extends the curse by one more day, assuming she wins the contested action to invoke the curse.

If the character curses the subject in general, he no longer benefits from the 10-again rule for the rest of the scene.

Exceptional Success: Similar to a normal success, but the effects of a general curse persist for the rest of the night. An exceptional success affords no additional benefit to a Skill-specific curse.

The character may affect the subject with only one curse at a time.

This power requires the character to make eye contact with the subject. If the subject is not standing still or otherwise immobilized, the roll to invoke this power suffers a –1 penalty. If this power is turned on a vampire with whom the character has a blood tie, a +2 bonus applies to the user's roll.

Blood Minions

The penultimate power of the Vedma is perhaps the strangest. A Vedma with this power can transform her blood into supernatural animal servants that do her bidding. To onlookers, it appears as though birds, rats or bugs crawl out from gashes in the vampire's flesh.

The animals created with this power are clearly unnatural, with empty sockets in place of eyes, blood-colored beaks or claws or some other horrific sign of their strange origin. These minions can travel any distance from the Vedma, who instinctively knows their location at all times. Though these creatures do not eat, sleep or think, they follow the will of the Vedma exactly. They attack her enemies, fetch objects for her and assist her in the use of other powers of Zagovny.

Blood Minions appear to be made of flesh and bone, but are actually made up something more akin to the ashy remains of burnt paper. If damaged, they crumble into ash. Unlike a vampire, these supernatural creatures can move about during the day.

Cost: 1 or more Vitae

Dice Pool: Strength + Animal Ken + Zagovny

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character opens a wound in herself, but is unable to bring forth Blood Minions. She suffers a lethal wound, and the Vitae spent to activate this power is wasted, but no Vitae is spent on the unformed minions. The character cannot attempt to use this power for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The character is unable to transform her blood. The Vitae spent to activate this power is wasted, but no Vitae is spent on the unformed minions.

Success: The character is able to transform her Vitae into lifeless, animate Minion creatures. By spending an amount of Vitae equal to the Size of the desired creature, the Vedma can create small birds, bats, ravens, rats, cats or even dogs to do her bidding. The character can create any number of Minions, provided she has enough Vitae to account for the Size of all the animals created (in addition to the Vitae spent to activate this power). The character can only create animals using the amount of Vitae she can spend in one turn, based on her Blood Potency. These creatures must be let out from the character's body, through a gash in the stomach, arm or leg, for example, though this wound causes no harm to the character.

Minions created with this power can fly, bite, carry and perform any other actions an animal of the same type could. In addition, the Vedma can use the Eye of Blood power to perceive a Minion's surroundings over any distance and the Flight of the Warlock power to mystically transport herself to a Minion's location. A Blood Minion that successfully attacks a target can destroy itself to subject that target to the Eye of Blood power.

Blood Minions may take their own actions during a turn, but always act on the same Initiative as the character.

The creatures created with this power turn to ash at the next sunset or immediately upon taking any damage, whichever comes first.

Example: *Natya has successfully invoked the power of Blood Minions. Her Blood Potency is 6, so she can spend three Vitae per turn. Although she could spend two Vitae to create a*

cat minion, she decides to transform her blood into three small blackbirds (Size 1 each). She slices her arm, and the tiny birds struggle out through the gash and take flight. She sends two off to track the mortals who just attacked her, and dispatches the third to scout for prey — Natya needs blood.

Exceptional Success: Similar to a normal success, except the creatures crumble to ash on the second sunset, rather than the next.

Game statistics for sample animals can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 202 – 203). Storytellers are encouraged to use those statistics for other, similar animals as well. The traits of a bat can substitute for those of a Size 1 bird, for example.

Flight of the Warlock

Witches in Slavic folklore are often attributed with an ability to fly. The Vedma do not have that ability, but they do have a mystic means of traversing the land. A Vedma with this power can instantly transport herself to the location of a Blood Minion created with her own Vitae. The vampire seems to vanish in a blink of the eye, leaving behind nothing but a chill patch of air and the scent of blood. At her destination, the Vedma's Minion explodes in ash as the vampire appears, perhaps misleading onlookers into thinking the Vedma *was* the animal Minion.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Zagovny

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character fails to travel anywhere. The Blood Minion used as the subject of the power is destroyed, and the Willpower used to activate this power is wasted. The character cannot use this power again for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The character does not achieve any successes on the activation roll and fails to transport herself, but the Blood Minion remains intact. The Willpower used to activate this power is wasted.

Success: The character achieves at least one success on the activation roll and instantly arrives at the spot previously inhabited by her Blood Minion.

Exceptional Success: The same as a normal success, with no additional benefit.

If the character attempts to transport herself to a space in which she cannot fit, this power automatically fails. The dice pool to activate this power suffers a –1 penalty for every mile between the character and her target.

Devotions

The following Devotions are only commonly known within the Ordo Dracul, and in some cases only within certain factions or domains of the covenant. Many of these powers rely on Disciplines or Coils unique to the

covenant and its subcultures. Devotions are grouped together for reference based on their vampiric origins and component powers.

Learning Ordo Dracul Devotions

In certain domains, it may be impossible to learn some of the following Devotions without possessing one or more dots of Covenant Status in the Ordo Dracul. In many cases, the following Devotions cannot be learned at all without having learned one or more tiers of Coils, which has a Covenant Status requirement of its own (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 149). Alternately, the Storyteller may require Kindred outside the covenant to learn the powers they can from a Dragon associate or mentor. In cities where the Dragons are well known, respected or powerful, they may have little fear of sharing some secrets with outside vampires. In cities where the Order is a truly secret society, however, even minor powers may be clutched close in a miser's grip.

Bloodline Devotions

In many cities, the vampires of the Ordo Dracul have a reputation for devising strange new intersections of sanguine power. Beyond that, they have a reputation for intermixing the powers of the blood with great speed. It's rumored that Dragolescu had forged new Devotions within a year of changing his blood. The Libitinarii likewise wasted no time in exploring new avenues of mystic surgery. Certainly both bloodlines, and others within the covenant, have invented powers in addition to these — powers they're keeping to themselves.

Aedo Cordis

(Auspex •••, Mortualia •••)

This strange and ancient power, though now contained under the aegis of Mortualia, is thought to have practiced by the Kindred of Egypt in the nights before even Rome and the Camarilla were known. So say the Libitinarii, at least. A character with this power can remove the heart of another vampire and store it indefinitely. The subject maintains a supernatural connection to his heart through a bond forged with Auspex, however — a vampire's fate is always tied to his heart.

Cost: 1 Willpower per roll

Dice Pool: Wits + Medicine + Mortualia

Action: Extended. The character must obtain a number of successes equal to 15 + the subject's Stamina. Each roll represents 10 minutes of ritualized surgery.

When the necessary number of successes have been achieved, the subject's heart has been successfully removed and can be stored safely away from the rest of the Kindred's body. A vampire whose heart has been removed is not subject to staking or diablerie, but immediately falls into torpor until the heart is set inside her body again. When the character's heart is returned, she automatically awakens from torpor. In the event that another vampire attempts to diablerize the subject's body, the subject merely suffers Final Death; the diablerist gains none of the benefits of diablerie and does not automatically lose Humanity for the attempt (though a degeneration roll is still likely). If the character's heart is destroyed, she immediately suffers Final Death.

The Humanity of a character whose heart is removed automatically drops by one.

This power costs 16 experience points to learn.

Compel Spirit

(Dominate ••, Essentiaphagia ••)

Like the Essentiaphagia Discipline itself, this Devotion is the province of the Dragolescu bloodline. Compel Spirit allows a vampire to use the first two levels of the Dominate Discipline on a ghost just as if it were a material being.

Cost: 2 Vitae or 1 Ectoplasm

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Dominate versus ghost's Resistance

The Kindred must be able to see the ghost, and must have its attention (making eye contact is sometimes difficult with ghosts, as they don't always appear to have eyes, but the character can intuit when she has the attention necessary from the ghost to attempt to use this power). Aside from the different dice pool, Compel Spirit functions exactly like Command or Mesmerize. (Sadly, Dragon experiments suggest that The Forgetful Mind and Conditioning don't work on ghosts at all, no matter how capable the vampire is at forcing her will upon mortals.)

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

Covenant Devotions

Supernatural innovators within the Order are forever experimenting with new ways to utilize the Coils of the Dragon. Some have wrapped their oblique minds around the ways that Disciplines and the Coils might intertwine. Others seek ways to bend the blood's powers more directly to the needs of the covenant, creating functional, investigative Devotions like Sample the Earth. Whatever their motivation, these powers are traditionally kept within the covenant membership. In several cases, these Devotions would not even be of use to outsiders. What does it say about the Dragons that so many of their invented powers are intended to scrutinize their colleagues?

Eyes of the Dragon

(Auspex ••, Any tier of any Coil)

It is possible to cheat many authorities in the Ordo Dracul by mimicking the effects of Coils that aren't truly

known. It is not possible to cheat them all. Those few who have learned this Devotion can merely look at a fellow Dragon and determine if she is using a Coil.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Auspex – subject's Composure

Action: Reflexive

With a single success, the character can determine if the subject is currently benefiting from the use of a Coil of the Dragon. This power does not identify all the Coils the subject has learned — only those currently "in use." For instance, at night, the character is unable to determine if a subject has learned the third tier of the Coil of Banes, because that tier does not come into play at night. If, however, the subject did not spend a Vitae to rise that night because of the first tier of the Coil of Blood, the character may be able to recognize the effects of that tier.

The character can only recognize tiers and Coils that she herself possesses. A Scribe of the Dedicated Hunger who uses this power cannot scan other Kindred for use of the Coils of the Banes or the Beast, because those philosophies are unfamiliar to her.

This power costs 10 experience points to learn.

Masked Blood

(Obfuscate ••, Blood Seeps Slowly)

Often taught to neonate Moroi Kindred when that bloodline was more active, this Devotion allows a vampire to mask her lineage from anyone who might sample her blood.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: This power typically requires no roll and is considered "always on." This power calls for a roll only when a vampire with Auspex attempts to pierce the Devotion. (In that case, refer to the "Clash of Wills" sidebar on p. 119 of **Vampire: The Requiem**.)

The character's blood cannot be identified by taste. No matter how many successes another Kindred achieves on the Intelligence + Occult roll to discern blood ties by taste (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 163), the character's clan and blood relations cannot be discerned.

Action: N/A

This Devotion costs 6 experience points to learn.

Sample the Earth

(Auspex ••, Protean ••)

Identifying Wyrm's Nests is time-consuming and difficult, but necessary to the covenant. With a little training, a vampire with a facility for Protean can merge with the earth and identify any magic resonance coursing through it.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Auspex

Action: Instant

In order to activate this Devotion, the vampire merges with the earth in the suspected Wyrm's Nest (Kindred who are capable of merging with other substances, as described on p. 139 of **Vampire: The Requiem**, may use this power while doing so). The player then makes the activation roll. If the roll succeeds, the vampire knows whether or not the area is a Wyrm's Nest. In addition, the Storyteller should give a short description of the energies surrounding the character: "bloody," "peaceful," "painful" or whatever she feels appropriate. A dramatic failure on this roll indicates that the character not only does not know if the area is a Wyrm's Nest, but loses the ability to use Auspex •• or ••• for the rest of the night (other uses of Auspex are unaffected).

This power costs 10 experience points to learn.

Devotions of the Impaled

The Kindred of the Impaled are obsessed with the historic cruelty of Dracula. In the past century, their bizarre drive to pit the undead body against the insane tortures invented by Vlad Tepes has yielded a trio of remarkable, and distinctly disturbed, Devotions. Each of these powers requires a blend of supernatural strength and fearlessness that frightens many other Kindred. The price is one's eternal Requiem, for each of these Devotions requires the practitioner to push the limits of her own damned corpse.

If you have the **Nomads** sourcebook for **Vampire**, the Love Like Blood Devotion (p. 95) is also an excellent fit for the Impaled. They may not have created it themselves, but they'd certainly make good use of it.

Free Your Blood

(Blood of Beasts, Vigor •••)

The Impaled supposedly invented this Devotion during a bloodletting ritual in which participants, run through with a pike and hung from a wall, have blood poured into their mouths as it is pouring out of their wounds. Dragons who learn this power are able to circulate and burn more Vitae within their bodies than is normally possible. To use this power, however, the Kindred must be able to motivate her will with pain.

Cost: 1 Willpower per scene

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll to invoke.

Action: Reflexive

By spending a point of Willpower, the character is able to take greater control of the blood in her body and force it to act faster and more frequently than would normally be possible for a vampire of her Blood Potency. The character is able to spend one more Vitae per turn than her Blood Potency should allow. As with all of the powers of the Impaled, however, the character relies on a body awareness brought on by pain to make this bloody exertion possible. This power can only be used on turns in which the character is suffering wound penalties from lethal or aggravated injuries. This power *may* be used,

however, to spend additional Vitae when healing, even if that healing negates the wound penalties that made it possible for the extra Vitae to be spent.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

Strength From Pain

(Resilience •••, Vigor •••)

This may be the most celebrated of the powers invented by the Impaled, at least among their own membership. It builds directly on the more common Devotion, Body of Will, which has long been an inspiration to the self-mutilators of the Impaled. By drawing on the anguish of the flesh and a memory of adrenaline, a vampire with this power is able to turn a wave of pain into a surge of strength.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Composure + Athletics + Vigor

Action: Reflexive

Each success achieved on the activation roll allows the character to translate any current wound penalties into a bonus on Physical actions. Therefore, if three successes are scored on the activation roll, and the character is suffering from a –2 wound penalty, her penalty is translated into a bonus on all Physical actions for duration of the existing turn and for two turns thereafter. A new Vitae expenditure and a new activation roll is required if the character wishes to reactivate the Devotion when those three turns are up.

Not that a character with both this Devotion and Body of Will (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 151) may be able to translate her wound penalties into a bonus on Physical actions while ignoring wound penalties on all other actions, if she has the Vitae to devote to both powers.

This power costs 18 experience points to learn.

Will to Endure

(Resilience ••, Vigor ••)

The more seriously a Kindred of the Impaled is hurt, the more badly she wants to fight. The more clearly an Impaled can hear the echoes of mortality in her own pain, the stronger her will to go on becomes. This Devotion is often the one first taught to new Dragons in the faction, because the sensation it creates is often the most extreme. The strange associations that this Devotion creates in the vampires who know it — that pain equals drive, that a wound inspires confidence — lays a valuable foundation for the philosophy of the Impaled. A Kindred with this power is spiritually renewed by the punishment her body endures.

Cost: 1 Vitae per scene

Dice Pool: Resolve + Athletics + Resilience

Action: Reflexive

To activate this Devotion, the vampire must first have her right-most Health box marked with bashing, lethal or aggravated damage, so that she is suffering from a –3 wound penalty. On the turn in which that right-most box is marked, the character is entitled to reflexively activate this power, if she wishes to do so. If the activation roll produces any successes, the character immediately regains one Willpower point. If the activation roll produces an exceptional success, the character regains two Willpower points. This power does not grant the character any ability to possess Willpower points in excess of her Willpower dots. This power cannot be used more than once in any given scene, but the character may pay the Vitae cost in advance if she anticipates being hurt badly enough later in the scene that this power could come into play.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

Merits

The traditions, practices and studies of the vampires of the Ordo Dracul afford them a few unique advantages. These Merits represent specialized training, circumstances and material qualities available to Dragons. Every domain is different. In some cities, these advantages may be available to vampires outside the covenant, provided the character can find some Dragon willing to help her out. In other cities, the Storyteller may require a character to have one or more dots in Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) to purchase one of these Merits. Players looking to purchase these Merits should consult the Storyteller first.

Crucible Ritual (•••)

Prerequisite: Resolve •• and one or more tiers of Coils

Effect: A crucible, in the jargon of the Ordo Dracul, is a Wyrm's Nest with a spiritual atmosphere that facilitates the personal awareness and philosophical growth necessary to learn new tiers of the Coils of the Dragon. Not all Dragons are sensitive to the effects of a crucible, however. Fortunately, the covenant's Masters of the Coils are able to train Kindred to appreciate the subtle effects that crucibles have on the blood and body of a vampire. Some Dragons describe the sensation of being affected by a crucible's energy as "being washed" or "floating back and forth on a river." Others say the they feel the influence of a crucible "in the curse."

A character with this Merit is able to make use of the effects tied to a crucible. In most cases, a crucible reduces the cost of purchasing a new tier in a particular Coil of the Dragon by three experience points. Other crucible effects are possible at unique crucibles, as the Storyteller sees fit. All crucibles require some action on the part of the character to "tune in" to the energy of the site. Often, this requires meditation, but some crucibles may require the character to participate in ritual combat, to walk a particular path through the Wyrm's Nest, to sketch or paint the area or to slumber in its soil.

For more on Wyrm's Nests and crucibles, see p. 40.

Fontal Ritual (••)

Prerequisite: Academics • and Occult ••

Effect: To make use of the spiritual powers contained in the Wyrm's Nests called *wellheads* or *fontal nests*, a Dragon must know an arcane ritual capable of harnessing and channeling that power into a medium suitable for vampires: blood. Before a vampire can learn those abstruse rituals, however, she must be trained in the ways of blood attunement and ritual memorization. Learning rituals is demanding — it requires the Dragon to develop a sort of psychic muscle memory for the words, behaviors and acts of will necessary to invoke a ritual's power. But before the Dragon can "train her blood" to perform a ritual, she must learn how to learn, in a sense.

A character with this Merit can purchase and perform fontal rituals (described on p. 209). In addition, this Merit grants the character a +2 bonus on Wits-based dice pools to investigate or locate nearby fontal nests. This Merit grants no bonus on dice pool for mystic extrapolation, but does aid in dousing (see p. 42).

Geomantic Nexus (• to ••••• and • to •••; Special)

Prerequisite: Occult ••• and Wits ••

Effect: Many Dragons within the Order are fascinated with geomancy — the magic of locations and spatial arrangements. While the Order's version of geomancy borrows heavily from traditional *feng shui* and the European study of ley lines, their long spans of study (and their undead patience) have taken it in some unique directions.

Characters with this Merit have a carefully maintained space that enhances good fortune on actions performed within it. This "fortune" takes the form of a dice pool bonus on rolls involving a specific trait. For instance, a library might be arranged to grant a +2 bonus on Intelligence dice pools, while a ceremonial chamber might be altered to provide a +1 bonus on dice pools based on Presence. These bonuses only apply to actions taken inside the space.

This Merit works somewhat like the Haven Merit, and can even be combined with it. Geomantic Nexus is actually two interconnected Merits. Geomantic Nexus Size defines the size of the nexus (from • to •••••), using the same scale as the Haven Merit (reprinted here for your convenience). Geomantic Nexus Potency defines the potency of the nexus (from • to •••). If your character already has a space defined with the Haven Merit, she can apply the Geomantic Nexus Potency Merit directly to that space without "buying it again." Thus, your character can even add a geomantic effect to a shared haven or to someone else's haven.

- • A small apartment, a suite or a shop; 1-2 rooms
- •• A large apartment or small home; 3-4 rooms

- ••• A small warehouse, a church or a large home; 5-8 rooms
- •••• A mansion, a warehouse or a medium-sized office building; 9-15 rooms
- ••••• A sprawling estate or several floors of a tall building; 16+ rooms

Each dot purchased in Geomantic Nexus Potency adds a +1 bonus to dice pools based on a single Attribute. The Attribute a space affects cannot be changed, but it can be replaced by purchasing this Merit again. A space can only be affected by one instance of the Geomantic Nexus Potency Merit. Therefore, a given space can be aligned with only one Attribute.

Example: *Victor already has three dots in the Haven Size Merit when he buys his third dot in the Occult Skill and becomes eligible to purchase the Geomantic Nexus Merit. Rather than creating his geomantic nexus somewhere outside his haven, Victor chooses to buy two dots in Geomantic Nexus for his haven. Victor's player spends only the experience points necessary to buy Geomantic Nexus Potency ••, and chooses to align his nexus with Wits — Victor doesn't want to be surprised in his sleep.*

This Merit presumes that your character has regular access to the space in question and is able to perform regular geomantic maintenance on it. Your character doesn't have to own the space or be in charge of it, she just needs regular access to it.

The time requirements of geomantic maintenance depend on the size of the space and the size of the bonus. A good rule of thumb is that a space requires about one hour of mystic adjustment and careful alignment every month for every room that grants the bonus. In many cases, this maintenance time won't be important, but in some stories, time is a factor. Either a whole space is successfully maintained, or it's not. Two hours of work on a mansion that normally requires 10 hours of geomantic upkeep aren't sufficient to maintain the bonus in two rooms, for example. The mystic alignment of the whole space must be correct, or there is no bonus. If a space goes untended for one month, its geomantic effects are suspended. To restore the bonus, your character must dedicate sufficient hours to maintenance for the month; it's not necessary to purchase this Merit again unless you want to adjust the geomantic state of a whole new space.

Note that one aligned site can't exist inside a larger one. It's not possible to have a +1 bonus to Manipulation dice pools in the bedroom and a +3 bonus to Presence dice pools everywhere else in the house, for example.

Disrupting a positive arrangement isn't too hard: change enough elements and the balance is ruined. Trashing a room, repainting a house, tearing out the grove of Spanish moss-draped cypress trees on the estate — all these things can disrupt positive geomancy. Generally speaking, a roll isn't even required as long as destruction is occurring. It's up to the Storyteller's judgment when enough

damage has been done, but in no event is it possible to mess up a good vibe and have the Dragon who maintains it fail to notice.

Mind of the Devouring Worm (•••)

Prerequisite: Intelligence •••, Kindred only

Effect: Through rigorous training — everything from mnemonic tricks and psychological concepts like "memory palaces" to ruthless conditioning in which Auspex or Dominate are used to torment the student whenever her mind wanders from the desired concentration — your character gains a phenomenal memory. Mind of the Devouring Worm functions just like Eidetic Memory, except that it can only be purchased after character creation.

Mind of the Unblinking Serpent (••)

Prerequisite: Intelligence •••, Mind of the Devouring Worm, Kindred only

Effect: Once your character has developed incredible memory skills with Mind of the Devouring Worm, she can use them to double-check her own perceptions for evidence of external tampering. By using Mind of the Unblinking Serpent, she essentially compares "mental snapshots" from her memories — even of the recent past — to look for recollections that don't quite "line up." This mental exercise is also useful for picking out small discrepancies within remembered events. Disjointed or distorted memories are of particular concern.

In game terms, this power helps your character determine when Obfuscate has been used (or is being used) or when Dominate has been applied to suppress or alter her memories. When the character consciously decides to scrutinize her memories with Mind of the Devouring Worm, she's allowed an Intelligence + Composure roll. If she succeeds — and a Discipline *was* used to edit her memories or alter her perceptions — she notices that something is not quite right. That's all. It does not penetrate or dispel the illusions of either Discipline, but it can be enough to spark an investigation or inspire new efforts to protect her invaded privacy.

Mind of the Incrumable Hydra (••)

Prerequisite: Intelligence •••, Mind of the Unblinking Serpent, Kindred only

Effect: Your character's mental restraint is now so formidable that she can foil attempts to read her mind by splitting her consciousness in two and directing the telepathic force into a closed loop of thought. Your character enjoys bonuses when opposing or resisting supernatural mental influences (such as Dominate) as though she had spent a Willpower point to add three dice to her dice pool or raise her resistance trait by two.

The nature of the thought-loop varies from Dragon to Dragon. Some have elaborate, circular interior monologues, often rehearsed to be misleading or confusing. Others repeat memorized statistics, recite ancient Javanese vocabulary or make use of disturbingly elaborate dismemberment visualizations. On the other hand, repeating a mantra (something simple like "Fuck you, you can't read my mind") *ad infinitum* can also work, and may even provoke a reaction in the would-be mind reader.

Drawback: This mental advantage can be brought into play with a reflexive action and "kept on" indefinitely. As long as your character is benefiting from this Merit's bonus, however, she suffers a –2 penalty on all dice pools using her Intelligence.

Where's the Wyrm's Nest Merit?

Many players would like nothing more than for their character to be the keeper and protector of a cherished Wyrm's Nest. A character with her own mystical garden to tend or haunted house to sleep in could be terrific fun to play. Indeed, characters with strong connections to Wyrm's Nests are a great way to keep a chronicle flush with story possibilities.

But a Wyrm's Nest isn't Merit material. Merits are an intrinsic part of a character (or character concept), easily purchased by a player with enough experience points and a desire to expand or detail her vampire. No matter how long a Kindred dwells near a Wyrm's Nest, studying it, guarding it and defending it, it is never really *hers* (though covenant elders might suggest otherwise). A Wyrm's Nest is always on the edge of a vampire's control — or just outside her reach. It isn't a part of her character, it's something the character interacts with, often unpredictably.

Put another way, Wyrm's Nests are a part of the setting — they should always be the purview of the Storyteller, rather than a player. Even if the Storyteller gives a player a lot of say over the Nest's use in the chronicle, it belongs to the Storyteller. A Merit, as something the player buys, presents an illusion of control, and although dramatic stories can develop when Merits like Haven and Herd are threatened, the player still gets to think of them as hers. Perhaps more exactly, a Merit implies comfort, a status quo, that a Wyrm's Nest should never quite have. Wyrm's Nests shouldn't be comfortable — they should be mysterious and potentially volatile. Players should never know what to expect from a Wyrm's Nest, so the Storyteller needs to maintain possession of it.

Blood Alchemy

The Ordo Dracul is a society that blends the archaic and the modern, the mystic and the scientific, with the confidence and cleverness of an enthusiast. The covenant's pseudo-scientific experiments with the lim-

its of potable power have created at least one unique mixture of mystic powers: blood alchemy.

The foundation of modern blood alchemy lies in the hexing powers of medieval Slavic witches (or perhaps just the legends that surround them). The wild woodland sorcerers of eastern Europe were said to use occult recipes to create magical potions containing powerful curses. In the early 19th Century, a Scottish Dragon residing in Russia claimed to manifest such powers after "draining the blood from a traitorous *volkhvy* [a peasant sorcerer or priest]." For a time, it was thought that the vampire, Dr. Nicholas Mighall, had founded a new bloodline, but his grandchilder did not inherit his power, and the fledgling lineage died off.

Something else had happened to Dr. Mighall's blood. His taste of the witch's blood had stirring something in his own, and, in time, Dr. Mighall cultivated that sensation into a repeatable power. Over the next few decades, Mighall sought out accounts of other Kindred in Hungary, Poland and Russia who might be able to identify the changes in his blood. It seemed he was not the only Kindred to have access to this little-known Discipline. Vampires in Bucharest claimed to have known of the rare power for centuries. It was called Spoiling, and it was an undead manifestation of folk witchery. With it, a Kindred could distill her own ire and malice into a plaguing curse that stained her victim like blood.

Fascinated with the changes happening within him, Dr. Mighall returned to London in the 1880s to confer with what he considered the finest mystic investigative minds in Christendom — the occultists of the Ordo Dracul. Within 10 years, the first handful of so-called Solutions had been mixed from the persistent Vitae of a Spoiling practitioner. A handful of Dragons throughout Western Europe learned to evoke the powers of Spoiling in their own blood. The new vampiric craft of blood alchemy had been founded.

What Is Blood Alchemy?

In game terms, blood alchemy is the name for a unique collection of Devotions, called Solutions, that allow a vampire to instill other supernatural powers into elixirs created from her own blood. All Solutions depend on the fringe Discipline called Spoiling to function. In practice, blood alchemy is little more than a new Discipline and associated Devotions, but its existence is noteworthy because of the manner of its, albeit slow, spread throughout the World of Darkness. The Discipline of Spoiling has been known to Kindred in certain corners of Europe for centuries, but within a few decades of its introduction to the Ordo Dracul, its mystic powers had been tested, altered, expanded and modified into a new collection of supernatural effects based on the intersection of chemistry and folklore. Like all good Dragon pursuits, it also has its own jargon.

Spoiling

Although it seems that the practice of Spoiling has been in use for centuries, this Discipline went largely unnoticed by Kindred society until the end of the 19th century. Even tonight, most Kindred do not know it exists. Some Kindred blood-scholars speculate that Spoiling is all that remains of a forgotten clan or a dead bloodline that has been diluted back into the larger population of the Damned. It seems fitting, given the Discipline and its uses.

Spoiling allows a vampire to hex a subject or her possessions with a curse of blood. As the vampire's capability with this blood hex improves, her power becomes more and more refined. A novice vampire needs to brush a handful of blood onto her victim just to impose a hindering curse, but a skilled practitioner of Spoiling can hide a small spot on a subject's coat or skin and plague her with several nights of misfortune and weakness.

Unlike many Disciplines, Spoiling consists of only a single power that becomes more dangerous as the practitioner's command of the Discipline increases. Kindred of all clans and covenants may potentially learn this Discipline, if a teacher can be found. In some cases, such as that of Dr. Mighall, the first dot of Spoiling can be learned through happenstance or personal experimentation.

Spoiling is considered an out-of-clan Discipline for all vampires. The experience point cost to learn dots of Spoiling is therefore equal to seven times the number of dots the character will have when the new dot is attained (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 230).

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Stamina + Occult + Spoiling versus the subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive. (An instant action is performed first to invoke the curse. When it is applied, the subject is allowed to contest the power with a reflexive action.)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character loses control of her own hex and its malignant effects interact disastrously with her own Vitae. The character loses a number of Vitae equal to the penalty she was to bestow on the subject.

Failure: The character fails to invoke the curse, and knows it. The Vitae used to activate this power is wasted.

Success: The character achieves one or more success on the activation roll and successfully invokes the curse of Spoiling. Her blood seeps from her hand and sticks there, charged with the malignant curse, until it is applied to a subject. The Vitae carrying the curse retains this charge for the rest of the scene. To touch the subject and deliver the curse, the character may be required to succeed in a close quarters attack (see "Touching an Opponent" on p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Such an attack is an action unto itself.

Exceptional Success: Similar to a success. The additional successes achieved on the activation roll make the curse more difficult to resist.

The character applies a Spoiling curse by placing an amount of Vitae on the subject or her possessions. This Vitae is delivered through the character's touch, and seem to be nothing more than a mundane bloodstain, though that alone is enough to provoke worry. The size of the stain depends on the character's dots in Spoiling — more powerful practitioners can reduce their cursed Vitae down to smaller of doses of blood. As a guideline, a character with one dot in Spoiling needs to apply an amount of Vitae roughly equivalent to a handprint, while a character with five dots in Spoiling needs an amount roughly equal to a thumbprint.

The subject of the curse suffers a penalty equal to all dice pools involving a single Attribute for as long as the vampire's Vitae remains on her body or on any article of clothing she wears, or for a number of nights equal to the vampire's dots in Spoiling, whichever comes first. The penalty imposed on the subject is equal to the character's dots in Spoiling. So-called spoiled blood, can be washed away in the same manner as a like amount of mundane blood, and its cursed affects are removed with it. If the subject succeeds on the contested action to resistant the curse when it is applied, the curse is broken before it can begin and the subject is unaffected.

Every time a vampire purchases a new dot in Spoiling, she selects another Attribute that she can potentially affect with this Discipline. A character with multiple dots in Spoiling can curse only one Attribute with each use of this power, and the Attribute to be cursed must be declared when the curse is invoked (not when it is applied).

Example: *Victor is a Dragon with three dots in Spoiling, capable of cursing a subject's Strength, Wits or Resolve. In this case, he believes he's located the mysterious witch-hunter who's been prowling about his haven, and he plans on deterring the mortal from any future investigations. Victor and his mark are on the train together, surrounded with bystanders. First, Victor attempts to curse his Resolve in preparation for other powers. Victor achieves four successes on his activation roll, and spends a Vitae to bring three fingertips' worth of cursed blood to the surface of his flesh. With a gentle touch, Victor brushes the mortal's jacket, applying the curse. The Storyteller secretly rolls the mortal's resistance. If the curse has taken effect, the witch-hunter will suffer a –3 penalty on all Resolve actions whenever he wear that jacket, for up to three nights. If the witch-hunters washes his jacket clean, however, the curse will be broken.*

Blood Solutions

The Solutions distilled through the techniques of blood alchemy are simply a category of similar Devotions. While the earliest blood alchemists used their knowledge of chemistry to make sense of the changes they were making in their own blood, no knowledge of the physical sciences is actually necessary to create these Solutions. Within the Ordo Dracul, it is a matter of fact that most blood alchemists are also dabblers in chemistry, pharmacology, medieval alchemy or folkloric brews, but only as a result of the practice's history within the covenant. Tonight's blood alchemists are descended from the original founders of the practice. Tomorrow night's blood alchemists may have all but forgotten its roots.

All of the powers of blood alchemy require the practitioner to shed her own Vitae (represented by the Solution's cost) into the mixture. Vitae is the medium through which the powers of blood alchemy are transmitted. That Vitae may be hidden within other substances, but it is the Vitae that matters.

The subject of a Solution's power is always the being that consumes it. (A few Solutions may be suffused into solid foods or even capsules, but the vast majority of Solutions are imbibed.) A Solution retains its power for a number of nights equal to the successes achieved on the activation roll to create the mixture. As with this practice's foundational Discipline, the more dots the blood alchemist has in Spoiling, the more concentrated the Vitae she bestows into the mixture and, so, the easier it is to hide the presence of her blood in the drink.

It is assumed that those who drink a Solution will attempt to resist its effects. All Solutions therefore involve a contested action, pitting the potency of the blood alchemist's sanguine infusion against the Resolve, Stamina or Composure of the drinker, to determine if a subject is affected. Resistance is always reflexive.

When a Solution is first swallowed, the drinker gets a slight but palpable sensation of the coming effect. For psychic Solutions, this often manifests as little more than a developing wooziness, but for Solutions containing physically altering powers (such as Vigor) the oncoming rush is decidedly clearer. Anyone drinking a Solution may choose to forego resistance and simply allow themselves to be affected by its powers — but they don't get a second chance to resist later if they change their minds (or have their minds changed).

The Bottled Command

(Dominate •, Spoiling •)

"Sleep," he said as he slid the awl into his palm. "Sleep," he said as he squeezed one hand in the other. "Sleep," he said as a thick drop of blood dropped heavy and almost black into the glass of white wine before him. "Sleep," he said one last time as that drop sank to the bottom. With one finger, he stirred the wine until the blood had thinned and spread and turned all the fluid an impenetrable red.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Intimidation + Dominate versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive. (An instant action is required to make the Solution; its effects are resisted with a contested action.)

By distilling his will and personality into his blood, the character creates a potable imperative. Essentially,

the character is infusing a one-word command of the type normally communicable with Dominate • into a liquid medium. When this command is distilled, the character makes his activation roll as if he were invoking the Command power of Dominate as usual. Record the successes achieved on the activation roll (if any) for use when the Solution is consumed. The subject who drinks the Solution feels compelled to take the action infused within it unless he achieves at least as many successes on a reflexive Resolve + Blood Potency roll as the character achieved on the activation roll.

If the subject fails the contested action, he is affected exactly as if the Solution's creator had affected him with the Command power in person (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 124 – 125).

This power costs six experience points to learn.

Draught of Revelation

(Majesty ••, Spoiling ••)

"I'm telling you, he won't talk to me," Andrea said. "He's afraid he'll scare me." Victor shook his head and pulled out his silver hip flask. "He'll talk." Victor unscrewed the lid and inhaled, then passed it to Andrea. She sniffed it. "What is this? Bourbon?" Victor grinned. "Pour him a drink. He'll talk to you."

Cost: 2 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Majesty versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive. (An instant action is required to make the Solution; its effects are resisted with a contested action.)

The character's compassion and allure is infused into a drop of blood that loosens the tongue of whoever consumes it. When this draught is created, the character rolls Manipulation + Persuasion + Majesty as though she were activating the Revelation power of that Discipline as usual. The successes achieved on this roll become the successes the subject contests with a reflexive Composure + Blood Potency roll. The results of this contested action are resolved as though the Revelation power were used in person (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 130), except the subject bares his soul to whoever is present when the Solution is consumed, instead of the character.

This power costs 10 experience points to learn.

Eye's Blood

(Auspex •, Spoiling •)

It happened almost immediately. Before Scott had even swallowed, it seemed like the noise level in the room doubled and kept climbing. The music was unbearable at first, and the lights became so separate and so distinct that they lost all meaning for a minute. Outside, a car was running, humming like a brand new engine. Wait, not outside — across the street, or down the block, maybe. How was it possible? How could he make that out? "Pretty awesome, right?" asked Trey. "I told you this guy got some pretty amazing shit, right." Scott looked at the blaring splash of pink light that Trey's face had become and watched it grow its features back. Scott was suddenly very aware of the sound of Trey's beating heart. "Yeah," he said. "Awesome."

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Investigation + Auspex versus subject's Stamina + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive. (An instant action is required to make the Solution; its effects are resisted with a contested action.)

This mystic concoction preserves the psychic power of the character's blood and conveys it to the subject who drinks the Solution. Although only the simplest power of Auspex is distilled in this Solution, the senses of most mortals, ghouls and vampires aren't prepared for the sensual rush that comes with Heightened Senses. Unlike normal uses of the Heightened Senses power, the character is not able to control the effects on individual senses; to boil the power of psychically enhanced senses down to a widely potable approximation, the Kindred must make some gross generalizations with the ways of Auspex.

All Eye's Blood Solutions affect all five senses of the subject. Drinkers with no dots in Auspex find the experience overwhelming at first, at suffer a –3 penalty on all Wits-related dice pools for the first few turns after drinking the Solution. The penalty persists for a number of turns equal to six minus the subject's Wits. After that, the benefits of Heightened Senses override the sensory penalties of the experience.

Perhaps more alarming, a sense of the vampire's thirsting curse comes through the Solution — drinkers find not only that their senses are hyperactive, but that they are inclined to focus on the sound of a beating heart, the smell of blood and the distinctive features of solitary figures in the dark. It's a brief sense of the predatory mind, and most mortals (and many ghouls) are so deeply unnerved by it, that the Storyteller may require the character to check for a derangement, as a result (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 96). Subjects who voluntarily drink Eye's Blood, knowing what it is, may gain a bonus on the roll to avoid a derangement, at the Storyteller's discretion.

This power costs six experience points to learn.

Liquid Memory

(Dominate •••, Spoiling •••)

With each drop, Victor added a little bit more to the story. In this drop, Andrea remembers driving home. The little red spot expanded into the water. In this drop, she remembers leaning on the open refrigerator door looking into a crowded collection of wasted food. Each bloody drip thinned out to nothing. In this drop, she remembers checking her voice mail, and having none. Blood dissolved. In this drop, she remembers turning out the lights.

Cost: 1 Vitae

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

Action: Extended, instant and contested; resistance is reflexive. (An extended action is required to falsify a memory. An instant action is required to make the Solution; its effects are resisted with a contested action.)

Among the most surreal of the known blood alchemy Solutions, this power allows the character to construct memories in his own mind, and then transmit them through this Solution. Compared to the Dominate power this Solution depends on, the effects are incredibly gross and unrefined, but nonetheless useless.

To create the Solution, the character first goes about inventing a memory in his own mind by imagining encounters and conversations, recalling fragments of his own real memories and using other memory tricks. The character does not fool himself with this false memory, but the best mental forgers create recollections so exacting that they hate to part with them. The action required to create a memory is similar to that used in The Forgetful Mind, but it is not penalized by the subject's Resolve (because there is no subject yet, when the memory is created). The character performs an extended Intelligence + Expression + Dominate action to construct the memory, with each roll representing five minutes of mental manipulation. The successes accumulated are used just as the collective successes of The Forgetful Mind, but the character can make twice as many rolls as he has dots in Spoiling when writing a memory for the Solution.

Once the memory is ready, the character can distill it into his Vitae. Doing so requires an instant Intelligence + Expression + Dominate activation roll. The successes on this roll do not add to the memory's successes. Instead, these successes determine the threshold for success on the subject's contested action to resist the forged memory. When the Solution is created, the vampire loses his invented memory's place in his mind. Most blood alchemists that know this power claim they can "remember the memory," but it is a vague and incomplete recollection.

Unlike subjects of The Forgetful Mind, the drinkers of a Liquid Memory lose none of their own. Instead, they strangely incorporate the new memory into an "available space" in their own mind. A false memory depicting an nighttime encounter with a stranger might be rationalized as having happened when the subject was actually asleep ("I, uh, I guess I got up and went for a walk that night. There was this…person…") Wise memory writers design memories to be easily incorporated into the holes of a subject's day.

If the subject succeeds on the contested action to a resist a memory, he is not free of it but knows full well that it is not his own. In time, the memory may fade, but it cannot simply be forgotten. Some subjects believe they've hallucinated or suffered some sort of trauma, but those who know things about the World of Darkness might go looking for a supernatural explanation first.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

Sanguine Strength

(Spoiling • to •••, Vigor • to •••)

"What is this shit?" Holden snapped his nose away from the bottle. "Smells like, what, pennies and sweat, man. Rank." John looked into space. "Just drink it so we can be done." Holden tipped his head from side to side, preparing himself. "Shit. I swear, man. Shit," said Holden. John held out a baseball bat. "Well, what do you want, man? You want to be the guy? Huh? The man? Do you want to be the real thing? Then pucker up, be a man, and down the hatch. We don't got all night."

Cost: 2 Vitae

Dice Pool: Strength + Athletics + Vigor versus subject's Stamina + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive. (An instant action is required to make the Solution; its effects are resisted with a contested action.)

This Solution is thought to be one of the first created by the covenant's early blood alchemists in the 1860s. It is, in a way, the archetypal Mr. Hyde brew. With a successful activation roll, the character infuses the power of his own Vigor into a liquid medium. For each success on the activation roll, another "bonus dot" of Strength can be suspended in the brew, so a maximum of three bonus dots. The effects of this Solution last for the remainder of the scene in which it is ingested. A given subject can only be affected by one volume of Sanguine Strength at a time.

Along with the supernatural Physical power comes an echo of the Beast. Subjects — even mortals and ghouls — who drink this Solution are prone to a kind of violent tantrum that weakly approximates frenzy. If the subject is confronted with stimuli sufficient to provoke an anger frenzy in a vampire, she must (or, at least, should) attempt an extended Resolve + Composure action to overcome her own rage, just as a vampire would. Mortals and ghouls may be subject to unique modifiers to this action, however, at the Storyteller's discretion. The drinker's false frenzy isn't really much more than a terrible display of anger. She retains her own mind, but suffers a –2 penalty to Mental actions for the rest of the scene, and attempts to use his Strength to solve as many problems as possible. She is shaken by an overwhelming violent urge, but she is not truly given over to the Beast.

This power costs six, 12 or 18 experience points to learn, depending on the level learned. The Solution must always be purchased with equal dots' worth of Spoiling and Vigor. The character can bestow a Strength bonus equal to or less than the dots he had in Vigor when he purchased this power, to a limit of three

dots. A character who purchases this power with Vigor • or •• may upgrade this power later by paying the difference in experience points necessary to purchase the power at new its level originally.

Example: *A Nosferatu blood alchemist purchases this power when he has two dots in Vigor. He may only create Solutions infused with a +1 or +2 bonus to Strength dice pools. Later, the Nosferatu buys a third dot of Vigor, but he can still only create Solutions with a +1 or +2 bonus, unless he pays the experience points necessary to "upgrade" this power. For the Nosferatu, who originally paid 12 experience points, the cost is an additional six experience points.*

Wyrm's Nest Rituals

Driven to make use of spiritual forces they can perceive, but do not fully understand, the mystics of the Ordo Dracul have stolen, invented and copied rituals capable of harnessing the power contained in some Wyrm's Nests. Some of these rituals are ancient, extrapolated from fragmentary texts in dead languages, while others are wholly new, the results of cautious or reckless experimentation with misunderstood energies. What all of these rituals have in common, however, is the stage on which they must be performed: the mystic sites known by the Dragons as *fontal nests*.

In some domains, fontal rituals are called "blood rituals," "nest rites" or "inclination channeling." In game terms, they may also be called Essence rituals.

Finding Fontal Rituals

Many, if not most, chapters of the Ordo Dracul have no fontal rituals of real power. Many of the rituals performed by Dragon spiritualists are incomplete, mistranslated or utterly fraudulent, but the Dragons continue to perform them in many domains, whether as a cultural event or for the sake of science. If nothing else, such impotent rituals might form a useful control group.

Differentiating a genuinely effective ritual from a faulty counterpart isn't easy. Even when a false ritual is finally performed, participants may imagine it has had some minor effect on their unlives, like an occult placebo. It is possible to identify the provenance and legitimacy of a recorded ritual with an academic approach, and it's certainly a place to start, but many enterprising Dragons insist that actually performing a ritual is the only way to be sure it is genuine. In game terms, an academic evaluation of a ritual requires an extended Intelligence + Occult action, with each roll representing an hour of study and research. A minimum of 15 successes is often necessary, though especially obscure and complex rituals may require more. To perform a scholarly examination, a character must have access to a record of the ritual.

Some rituals are recorded as complex and archaic notations on paper; the ritual called "Drink of the Resounding Blood" is rumored to have been found written on the endpapers of a Puritanical volume titled *The Dangers of Spiritualism and Ghost Worship*. Other rituals are written out as carefully annotated directions, like a kind of arcane instruction manual. One authentic fontal rite was supposedly "discovered" by the Dragons of Baltimore when it was seen performed by a cult of blood dolls on a VHS tape confiscated from the estate of a dead ghoul. The cultists had neither the knowledge nor the supernatural blood necessary to make the ritual work, but their recitations caught the ear of a covenant Master who later sorted out their intentions from their mistakes, or so the story goes. Fact or fiction, it is certainly true that the circumstances and choices that lead to the discovery of a genuine ritual are hard to foresee.

Fake Rituals

Storytellers who want to leave some question as to the legitimacy of a ritual prior to its performance can require the player of a ritual-learning character to "invest" experience in the ritual as though it were real, without revealing its authenticity until the scene when it is performed. If the ritual is genuine, and the character performs it successfully, the six experience points are spent and the story continues. If the ritual is bogus, the character doesn't find out until he manages to "successfully" perform the ritual — and finds that nothing happens. In that case, the experience points invested in the ritual are returned to him, and the hunt for the scheming bastard who first presented the ritual begins. Stories that end with the revelation of a fake ritual are anticlimactic, though — such an event should be the start of a new story, or just one element in a complex climax. Be careful not to disappoint your players with a big build-up to a disappointing ending.

Learning the Ritual

A fontal ritual cannot just be performed out of a book. To be properly executed, a ritual must be learned. Typically this involves extensive practice and memorization, and often a great deal of study. For a vampire to be able to harness and alter the spiritual energy of a Wyrm's Nest, the ritual must become something she can perform from memory, while making use of the arcane properties of the blood. Dragon ritualists sometimes call this "training the blood."

Before a character can successfully perform a fontal ritual, she must purchase the Fontal Ritual Merit. A character with that Merit may then purchase any fontal ritual for which she can find a useful record, at a cost of five experience points. This experience point cost represents the study, personal focus and minute changing of the blood that goes into learning a ritual. Each fontal

ritual costs five experience points, regardless of how many the character is able to find and learn.

Performing the Ritual

Most Essence rituals are performed in the same general way. All involve a vessel — either mortal or Kindred — into whose blood the mystic power of the fontal nest is channeled. Most disseminate that power through ritualistic feeding or bloodletting. A great deal of ceremony surrounds the channeling and bleeding of the site's energy, and it's difficult to know for sure how much of that ceremony is truly necessary for the ritual to be a success.

Most rituals require only the leading participant to have the Fontal Ritual Merit, though exceptions do exist. Many rituals also allow multiple participants to cooperate during its invocation (see "Teamwork," in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134). The number of possible participants varies with each ritual.

The Storyteller may deem that certain rituals can only be performed at appropriate fontal nests. The Arcane Vitae ritual, for example, may work at a site infused with magical energy but not a site resonating with spiritual essence.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult or Presence + Occult; this dice pool is typically modified by the vessel's Resolve, Stamina or Composure.

Action: Extended. (The number of successes required depends on the ritual; each roll represents one hour of ritual casting.)

While successes are being accumulated on the extended action to invoke the ritual, characters are presumed to be singing, chanting, praying, meditating or otherwise performing according to the demands of the ritual. When the necessary successes have been reached, the ritual vessel must be fed from or bled within a few minutes, or the energy channeled into his blood dissipates and is lost. Once the vessel has been infused with the energy of the wellhead, any vampire that drains at least one Vitae from him can benefit from the effects of the ritual. Consumed Vitae that has been empowered by a fontal ritual should be specially noted on the feeding vampire's character sheet for future reference.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The ritual is a disaster. Some vital portion of the ceremony is forgotten or performed incorrectly, and the ritualist loses control of the mystic forces being channeled. The spiritual energy of the Wyrm's Nest is wasted and the ritual cannot be attempted again for at least one night, but likely longer.

Failure: Some part of the ritual is interrupted, skipped or performed incorrectly, but the damage isn't total. The Wyrm's Nest's mystic energies are not channeled or spent, and the ritual can be attempted again, provided there's time.

Success: The ritual is completed, and the spiritual energy of the fontal nest is channeled into the ritual vessel, which is affected according to the description of the individual rituals, below.

Exceptional Success: There is no advantage to an exceptional success when performing a fontal ritual, aside from the speed at which the process is completed.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+3	The Wyrm's Nest is secret or hidden.
+2	The Wyrm's Nest is private or enclosed.
+2	Ritualist uses a ceremonial altar or other rel evant artifact.
+1	The Wyrm's Nest is away from common traffic.
–1 to –5	The ritualist is distracted or antagonized.
–1 to –3	The ritualist is rushed.
–1 to –3	Weather obscures the ritual area.

Arcane Vitae

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult – vessel's Resolve

Target Number of Successes: 10 (Each roll represents one hour of ritual casting; if the ritual is not completed in a number of hours equal to the vessel's Willpower, the ritual fails.)

The character infuses the vessel's Vitae with arcane power, empowering the effects of the Disciplines it fuels. While performing the ritual, the character dusts the vessel with metal shavings (not lead or iron) and paints occult formulae on his flesh. When the ritual is complete, the vessel must be drained utterly within a few minutes, or the power of the ritual fades. Any number of Kindred can participate in the feeding, provided all of the vessel's Vitae is drained after the ritual is complete.

Kindred who activate Vitae-fueled Disciplines with blood taken from the ritual vessel gain a +3 bonus on the Discipline's invocation roll. Disciplines that do not require an activation roll are treated as though the character had one additional dot in that Discipline. A Kindred with Vigor •••, for example, would be considered to have Vigor •••• when he activates that Discipline using this ritually empowered Vitae.

No more than one additional ritualist may participate in the completion of this rite.

Drink the Resounding Blood

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult – vessel's Resolve

Target Number of Successes: 8 (Each roll represents one hour of ritual casting; if the ritual is not completed in a number of hours equal to the vessel's Willpower, the ritual fails.)

This ritual distills the spiritual resonance of the Wyrm's Nest into the vessel's Vitae. As the ritual is performed, the vessel's mouth is stuffed with material from the site,

such as grass, dirt or shavings of linoleum. When the ritual is complete, the vessel's Vitae is infused with emotional resonance. The vessel's Vitae retains this quality for the rest of the scene, unless it is consumed by a vampire, in which case it retains its resonance until spent. The vessel does not have to be completely drained for its blood to retain its enhanced property.

Kindred with the blood of the vessel in their bodies have a minor spiritual resonance. As long as this Vitae remains in the vampire's system, she gains a +2 bonus on all dice pools for actions that correspond with her resonance. A vampire with a resonance of "fear" might gain the bonus on Intimidation dice pools and on activation rolls for Nightmare powers, for example. The Storyteller decides what actions are suited to the vampire's resonance.

As many as two other ritualists may assist in the completion of this rite.

Feast of Blood

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult – vessel's Stamina

Target Number of Successes: 5 + the vessel's Size (Each roll represents 30 minutes of ritual casting; if the ritual is not completed in a number of rolls equal to the vessel's Health dots, the ritual fails.)

This ritual multiplies the power of the vessel's Vitae, so that several Kindred may slake their thirsts on a single victim. While the ritual is being performed, the ritualist recites an ancient Sumerian lyric describing a crop's growth into bounty and fall into harvest. When the ritual is completed, a number of Kindred equal to the vessel's Stamina can feed simultaneously upon the vessel as though each were the only one drinking from him. Each drinker receives an amount of Vitae equal to 10 plus the vessel's Stamina. Thus, a vessel with Stamina 3 would provide 13 Vitae to as many as three different vampires. The magic of the ritual does not actually *create* Vitae, however; instead, it explodes the Vitae's power within the body of the consuming Kindred. If only two Kindred were present to feed on the example victim above, they would each receive 13 Vitae and the third "seat at the table" would be wasted. Kindred unable to store all the Vitae they receive from the vessel do not benefit from the surplus — excess Vitae is wasted. The victim of this ritual is completely drained of blood by this ritual.

No other ritualists may assist in the completion of this rite.

Essence and Resonance

Essence, as hinted at in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, is the currency of power among ghosts and spirits. Ghosts, for example, use Essence to fuel the effects of their Numina. Werewolves and spirits use it in a similar (but not identical) way. In a way, Essence is created by the interaction of physical and ephemeral creatures — when a living person remembers or pays respect to a ghost, for example, that ghost gains Essence (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 208). Spirits and, to a certain extent, werewolves consume Essence like a kind of spiritual food. Essence is, clearly, vital to the existence of ghosts and spiritual beings.

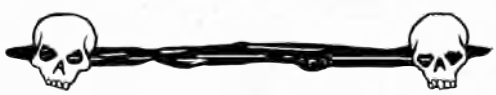
When Essence is created by actions in the material world, it takes on a kind of *resonance*, or emotional aspect. Murders create Essence that resonates with terror, death, hate and other grim emotions. Sites that are popular for weddings and celebrations might resonate with joy. This resonance affects the rituals vampires perform on fontal nests and other mystic sites, because the energy being manipulated by the ritual is (possibly among other things) Essence. Thus, the Storyteller should consider and be aware of the spiritual resonance of fontal nests used as the centerpieces in Dragon rituals.

Werewolves, ghosts and spirits utilize Essence naturally, with intuitive finesse and expertise because Essence is a fact of their existence. Vampires, on the other hand, waste and abuse Essence with sloppily inefficient and heavy-handed rituals on the rare occasions when they manage to utilize it at all. When any of the indelicate rituals in this book are used at a spirit locus or other fontal site, all of the Essence that site would normally produce for the day is consumed at once, regardless of how much is actually used by the ritual or how much a werewolf or other spirit could have drawn instead. In some cases, long-term damage may even be done to the site.

The ugly truth is that most vampires don't truly understand what they're doing when they're dealing with Essence. Rituals like these, and the damage they can cause, contribute to the antagonism between werewolves and the undead. More than a few Dragons have been destroyed by vengeful werewolves seeking to retaliate for damage done to a cherished site, and many of those Dragons might never have known the true nature of their crimes against the spirit world.

Some fontal rituals are instead fueled by the mana found at certain magical sites. Such rituals have the same disastrous effects on the currency of magic as they do on Essence.

Essence plays a much more important role in **Werewolf** than it does in **Vampire**. Storytellers interested in better defining the relationship between these rituals and the mystic energies of other supernatural beings should look to **Werewolf: The Forsaken** and **Mage: The Awakening** for inspiration. The information in those books is not necessary to use these rituals, but you may find whole new avenues for intrigue and drama when you understand how these different types of creatures collide over the supernatural resources of the World of Darkness.



Appendix: Allies and Antagonists

"We were hatched from the shells of our old lives,
but our nest is as wide as the world.
The eggs that hold our sleeping
brothers and sisters are scattered.
We must find them."

— Initiate Tyler Milliken
of the Elysian Hunger

"The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend."

— Abraham Lincoln

What follows is a roster of characters ready for insertion into a chronicle. Need a Dragon Prince for Cincinnati, or Munich or Auckland? Alter the one in this book to suit your needs. Note that any ranks marked with an asterisk (*) are (at least in part) falsely held — the character cheated on a test to get accepted at his or her current rank. Some of these characters could be blackmailed or even stripped of their rank in a Dragon Court if this detail was found out. Others may be beyond reproach.

Dragon Prince

Title: Illuminus* of the Sanguine Curse, Sworn of the Mysteries, Prince of the City

Able to operate equally well in the strict hierarchy of the Ordo Dracul and the fluid pressure-cooker of a mixed-covenant Kindred Court, the Dragon Prince has honed himself to eliminate all weaknesses — particularly weakness of thought.

Optional Background

The head Dragon in an Ordo Dracul-dominated domain, he is constantly beset by the machinations of the Invictus and the Carthians. The Lancea Sanctum and the Circle of the Crone have been largely pushed away by Ordo Dracul repression, which may just make them more dangerous. The Sworn of the Axe constantly perform searches for undocumented Kindred, and any they find are placed under Vinculum to the Prince or to one of his favored counselors. He knows that the Invictus is shielding Lancea members and that the Carthians are concealing Acolytes, but he doesn't have the power to move against either without the aid of the other. So far, they'd rather stick together against him.

His greatest victory has been the suppression of leadership in his two main rival covenants. Anyone who has stood out as an exceptional tactician, unifier or ideologue has been ordered to meet with the Prince to discuss matters — with a refusal of attendance seen as grounds for staking into torpor. Since the Prince always schedules these meetings at noon (to ensure privacy), his rivals often have a difficult time attending.

Clan: Gangrel

Embrace: 1751

Apparent Age: 19

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Occult History) 5, Investigation 4, Occult 5, Politics 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Larceny 4, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Persuasion (Dragons, Carthians) 4, Subterfuge (Lie) 5

Merits: City Status (Prince) 5, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 5, Haven 5, Herd 5, Mind of the Devouring Worm, Mind of the Unblinking Serpent, Resources 4, Retainer 5

Willpower: 5

Humanity: 4 (Megalomania, severe; 5)

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Gluttony (for territory and power)

Health: 8

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 11

Blood Potency: 4

Disciplines: Animalism 3, Coil of Banes 3, Coil of the Beast 1, Coil of the Blood 2, Protean 4 (wolf form), Resilience 3

Vitae/per Turn: 13/2

Elder Guardian

Philosopher of the Sanguine Terror, Sworn of the Dying Light, Guardian of the Valley

Even as a mortal, she sought the uncanny. A theosophist investigator who was Embraced so that she'd be unwilling to reveal what she'd learned of the Kindred (she was too well-regarded by other theosophists to simply be killed), she began her Requiem as one of the Unbound, delving into the same mysteries that fascinated her when alive. When she managed to make peace with a ghost at an abandoned rail yard before a coterie from the Order could do so, they invited her into the covenant, where she was Sworn to the Dying Light before she even learned her first Coil. Many years have passed since then, but she remains fascinated by Wyrm's Nests and is, perhaps, her city's pre-eminent scholar of the phenomenon.

Optional Background

She's been placed in charge of an exceptionally troublesome site, the Valley of the Black Pig. Apparently the natives always steered clear of it before the white man came, but any specific stories about it are lost. Their unease turned out to be well founded, because when the U.S. Cavalry rounded up the tribe's men for slaughter, they found the valley to be a convenient place for the mass grave. It was later farmed by a gent who was some kind of serial killer (though the bodies were never found), and it is now the site of Razorback Valley Mall.

The Order can't simply buy up the place — not without being obvious — so her first job is to keep the mortal visitors safely ignorant. Job two is finding out if the ill aspect of the Valley is due to nature spirits, a covey of ghosts or some unholy alliance of both. All this while keeping other Kindred (or mages, or Lupines, or exorcists, or New Age transcendental gurus or nosy busybodies like she used to be) from poking around.

Clan: Ventrue

Embrace: 1810

Apparent Age: 41

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Investigation (Real Estate History) 4, Occult 4, Politics 2, Science 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Larceny 2, Stealth (Hide) 3, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Empathy 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize (the Uncanny) 3, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 3, Geomantic Nexus (Potency 1), Haven 2, Herd 2, Resources 2, Retainer 3

Willpower: 7

Humanity: 5

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Greed (for knowledge)

Health: 8

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Blood Potency: 3

Disciplines: Coil of Blood 3, Coil of the Beast 3, Coil of Banes 1, Animalism 3, Dominate 3, Auspex 1

Vitae/per Turn: 12/1

Ancilla Guardian

Title: Supplicant of Dedicated Hunger, Sworn of the Dying Light, Guardian of Howard Street

She hadn't been Embraced all that long before she and her coterie stumbled upon the haunted house. In a city where the Order is weak, the Dragons probably couldn't have protected it — except that her coterie-mates aren't in the Order. They represent a pretty good spread of covenants, and the inter-covenant debates ended with the other groups agreeing to let the Order (which claims the most experience with such things) have the house as long as the other covenant's representatives (meaning, the others in her clique) retained access and input.

Winning the house for the Order bumped her up into the ranks of the Oathbound, but her new Oath-mates aren't crazy about the rest of her coterie — and her coterie isn't crazy about her being the official "boss" of the house. They might even find out that the ghost is one of her ancestors, and then who knows what could happen?

Clan: Mekhet
Embrace: 1977
Apparent Age: 30
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2
Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3
Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 1, Investigation 3, Occult 3, Politics 1, Science 1
Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 2
Social Skills: Empathy 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2
Merits: Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 3, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Haven 2, Resources 1
Willpower: 5
Humanity: 6
Virtue: Charity
Vice: Sloth
Health: 7
Initiative: 6
Defense: 3
Speed: 10
Blood Potency: 1
Disciplines: Auspex 2, Coil of Blood 1, Obfuscate 2
Vitae/per Turn: 10/1

Neonate Sub-Guardian

Title: Supplicant of Hunger

Finding a good tutor was his first ambition, and this fellow schemed and insinuated and maybe cheated a little bit to get a good one, a smart and scholarly Sworn of the Dying Light who knew his stuff and concentrated on his small band of students — until it all fell apart.

The tutor got appointed Guardian and now has decided that the best way for his pupils to learn the true meaning of the Ordo Dracul is to dive head-first into the process of guarding, exploring and understanding a Wyrm's Nest. They've all *moved in*. The Coil lessons are an afterthought, but at least Guardian experience is useful when trying to get an oath.

Clan: Ventrue
Embrace: 1999
Apparent Age: 23
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2
Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3
Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3
Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 2, Occult (Coil Theory) 1, Politics 2
Physical Skills: Athletics (Run) 2, Drive 1, Stealth 1
Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 1, Persuasion 2, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge (Blaming Others) 2
Merits: Allies 1, Contacts 1, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 1, Mentor 2, Resources 2
Willpower: 5
Humanity: 7
Virtue: Prudence
Vice: Pride
Health: 8
Initiative: 5
Defense: 2
Speed: 9

Blood Potency: 1

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Coil of Blood 1, Dominate 1

Vitae/per Turn: 10/1

Kogaion Machiavelli

Title: Philosopher of the Burning Terror, Sworn of the Dying Light, Guardian of the Mountain, Kogaion of the City

It all moves in circles.

It began with the mountain. So much from the past is occluded, but the mountain rises above the mists of memory and mystery. Sometimes she thinks she remembers running with wolves, flying with the night-birds, walking forever across ice in a time when the sun seemed to never rise and, once risen, seemed never to set. But she found the mountain, and it was older than her, and it called her with comfort, and eventually, she slept.

When she woke, there were new people, and strange languages and cunning devices of mysterious construction. She learned to speak the new tongue, and to hunt the new men and in time she met other drinkers of the blood. At first there was conflict — she thinks there was conflict, much violence, loss, but the mountain was strong and she had its strength, she fought them but they exiled her, she nestled once more in the bosom of the mountain, once again she slept —

She awakened again to many more people, even stranger machines, a world that is shiny and bright and smelly and crowded, people who are sharp and impatient and intelligent and callous. This time she was cautious, this time she spoke with kindness to the other Kindred, and this time they have welcomed her. She showed them much while they thought they were teaching her. She is a leader now, beheld with awe, and once more she is ensconced on the mountain. She knows them all, knows their places of power and they think she is the mistress of all of it. She watches and makes changes and aligns it all to the mountain, waiting for the day the earth's cleansing fire will emerge.

None suspect that the mountain masters her. None who suspect can be allowed to survive.

Clan: Mekhet

Embrace: Unknown

Apparent Age: Between 35 and 50

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 6, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (History) 1, Crafts 3, Investigation (Recognize Evidence) 3, Medicine 3, Occult (Diabolism) 5, Politics 3, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Larceny 2, Stealth 5, Survival 5, Weaponry 5

Social Skills: Animal Ken 4, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Sense Lie) 5

Merits: Allies 2, Contacts 4, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 5, Fighting Finesse (Knife, Short Spear), Geomantic Nexus (Potency 2), Haven 4, Herd 2, Holistic Awareness, Mind of the Devouring Worm, Mind of the Inscrutable Hydra, Mind of the Unblinking Serpent, Resources 1, Retainers 1, Way of the Locust 5

Willpower: 8

Humanity: 3 (Fugue, severe; 4)

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Wrath

Health: 8

Initiative: 8

Defense: 4

Speed: 11

Blood Potency: 6

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Celerity 4, Coil of Banes 2, Coil of Blood 2, Coil of the Beast 3, Obfuscate 3

Vitae/per Turn: 15/3

Besieged Kogaion

Title: Illuminus of the Sanguine Terror, Sworn of the Mysteries, Guardian of the Cerulean Bridge, Kogaion of the City

Those Locust-Sworn bastards thought they'd put him away. They thought wrong.

The struggle between the Ladder and the Locust had been invisible but fierce in his home city, subtly destructive to the Order as a whole. While the Locusts were more numerous, the Ladder-Sworn were among the strongest and most knowledgeable of the covenant, and

that kept the scales balanced for a while. They couldn't depose him — a Mystery Oath is forever — and they couldn't deny his skill and his learning and his ability to treat with some spirits that no one else (no one with degraded Humanity) could reach.

So they made him Kogaion.

That would seem to have put him in the pole position, but the Locusts were strong in the Axe and the Mysteries, and they had just enough Dying Light members to pirate a number of newly-found Wyrm's Nests and keep them from being assigned by the Kogaion. He's pretty sure the membership lists he has are missing a few significant Locusts as well. It was a nasty position. And then the other covenants made it nastier.

He's got no idea if it was Belial's Brood or the local Invictus or Acolytes or VII or Bruja. Most likely, it was some minor faction being covertly backed by a major covenant, or by some entirely external group. Whatever, they fell on a Caucus like a ton of lead, and now the Ordo Dracul is smashed, trashed, scattered and torn. Too bad for the Locust that the only guy who could gather in the naked, vulnerable Dragons has an incomplete list of Locust members and strongholds. Oh well. He'll have to make do by reassembling the Ladder, and salvaging those in the Order who have no idea that there are secret Oaths.

Clan: Nosferatu

Embrace: 1712

Apparent Age: 19

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts 2, Investigation 4, Occult (Ley Lines) 5, Politics 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Firearms 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 3, Survival 3, Weaponry 4

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 5

Merits: Allies 4, Contacts 5, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 5, Geomantic Nexus (Potency) 2, Haven 4, Herd 2, Resources 2, Retainer 5

Willpower: 8

Humanity: 8

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Wrath

Health: 9

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 11

Blood Potency: 6

Disciplines: Coil of the Beast 3, Coil of Banes 1, Coil of the Blood 2, Coil of Flesh 2, Nightmare 1, Obfuscate 3, Resilience 3, Vigor 2

Vitae/per Turn: 15/3

Inexperienced Kogaion

Title: Philosopher* of the Sanguine Terror, Sworn of the Mysteries, Guardian of the Spreading Elms, Kogaion of the City

How was she to know that being able to lie with such proficiency would come back and bite her pert, attractive ass? At first, lying about knowing the Coils just seemed like common sense. Being a Slave was just about as much fun as it sounded, and when a few other Dragons suggested

a conspiracy to lie better and get away with it cleaner — hell, she'd have been a *fool* to pass that up. Right?

Over the years (and decades) her co-conspirators died, moved to Fresno and passed into a convenient torpor, but by then she was moving up the ranks and, frankly, lying didn't get any harder once she was Sworn. She made herself useful to a couple Guardians, mainly by being a politician who understood how important the Wyrm's Nests were without particularly wanting to run one herself. Perhaps that detached attitude served her well when she became a Guardian, and, instead of provoking some macabre disaster by relentlessly questing for forbidden knowledge, she kept a lid on it, made modest gains and was well prepared to contain it when things went to hell. In point of actual fact, she had delegated a lot of authority to some very skilled Kindred who became very killed Kindred when those critters with the claws and blood-red eyes came pouring out of the basement, but since there was no one else around to take credit she wound up with all of it.

No one was more surprised than she when she was named Kogaion. Apparently all the other eligible Guardians were seen as "politically unsuitable" or "untrustworthy." So now she's got to try and align a set of Wyrm's Nests with comparatively little idea what the hell she's doing, while surrounded by people whose incomplete knowledge of the whole map prevents her from co-opting their far superior geomancy skill.

She's at the point of just throwing up her hands, muttering "fuck it" and making all her decisions based on political stability. It's worked for her so far.

Clan: Daeva

Embrace: 1796

Apparent Age: 23

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Investigation 2, Occult 3, Politics 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Drive 2, Firearms 4, Larceny 4, Stealth 4, Survival 3, Weaponry (Knife) 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy 4, Expression 4, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 4, Socialize (Carousing) 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge (Bluff) 5

Merits: Allies 3, City Status (former Harpy) 2, Clan Status (Daeva) 4, Contacts 5, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 4, Fighting Finesse (Knife), Haven 4, Herd 4, Resources 3, Retainer 4, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 5 (Suspicion, mild; 5)

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Sloth

Health: 8

Initiative: 8

Defense: 4

Speed: 12

Blood Potency: 4

Disciplines: Celerity 4, Coil of Banes 1, Coil of the Beast 1, Coil of Blood 1, Majesty 4, Vigor 3

Vitae/per Turn: 13/2

Lowly Sworn of the Axe

Title: Sworn Slave of the Axe

Just a tough guy who wanted respect but, being fat and from the suburbs, couldn't get it through the typical routes of crime or gangs. So he became a pushy, bullying dick in high school, couldn't find a niche for that skill-set after graduation and wound up on a downward spiral that ended with a sire who recognized what he was *really* good for. He got Sworn of the Axe pretty much by being stupidly brave and stunningly lucky. Now he outranks his sire.

Optional Background

His unusual spread of instinctive Disciplines has piqued the curiosity of a Ventrue Dying Light-Sworn, who theorizes that his sire perhaps diablerized a Nosferatu. Now the Ventrue is struggling for command of the newcomer, against another Axe-Wielder of equal rank. The sire is in there too, angling for advantage with either of those ranking Dragons or, ideally, both.

Clan: Gangrel

Embrace: Last year

Apparent Age: 20

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Showy Kicks) 3, Drive 1, Larceny 1, Stealth (Ambushes) 2, Survival 1, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Persuasion 1, Socialize 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge (Stonewalling) 1

Merits: Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 3, Fighting Style: Kung Fu 2, Mentor 1, Resources 1

Willpower: 4

Humanity: 6

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Envy

Health: 8

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 11

Blood Potency: 1

Disciplines: Nightmare 1, Protean 2

Vitae/per Turn: 10/1

Mid-Level Sworn of the Axe

Title: Scribe of the Dedicated Terror, Sworn of the Axe

She was the daughter of an Italian fencing master who fled to France, trying to escape the Fascists. It wasn't enough. When the Gestapo finally took her father, she made a devil's deal: her eternal service to an undead master in exchange for the unholy power she'd need to rescue her papa. But she betrayed her sire and fled with her father to America. He died in 1981, and since then the Order has given her the only real meaning in her Requiem — not to mention protection from the Acolyte sire who, even now, searches the globe for his wayward childe…

Clan: Daeva

Embrace: 1941

Apparent Age: 18

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts (Cooking) 1, Investigation 1, Occult 2, Politics 2

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

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 3, Persuasion 1, Socialize (Formal Functions) 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Ambidextrous, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 3, Fighting Finesse (Dagger), Fighting Finesse (Epee), Haven 2, Language (English), Language (French), Resources 2

Willpower: 4

Humanity: 5

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Wrath

Health: 8

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Blood Potency: 2

Disciplines: Celerity 2, Coil of the Beast 2, Majesty 2, Vigor 2

Vitae/per Turn: 11/1

Elder Sworn of the Axe

Title: Master* of the Untamed Hunger, Sworn of the Axe

Nobody much likes him, and it's beyond the standard Nosferatu heebie-jeebies. The Ventrue don't like the way he refuses to meet anyone's eyes. The Daeva feel that his preference for a nail-studded club takes the "ogre" schtick a little too far, and the Mekhet don't like the way he carries that damn club *everywhere* — often concealed with Obfuscate. The Gangrel don't like the way he smells, and the Nosferatu think he gives the clan a bad name.

Nobody much likes him. But when there's a fight, everybody in the Academy *loves* him.

Clan: Nosferatu

Embrace: 1642

Apparent Age: Mid-30s

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts 4, Medicine 3, Occult 1, Politics 1, Science 2

Physical Skills: Athletics (Big Weights) 3, Brawl 3, Drive 2, Firearms 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2, Weaponry (Clubs) 4

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Intimidation (Brute Force) 4, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 4, Fast Reflexes 2, Haven 4, Herd 3, Mind of the Devouring Worm, Mind of the Unblinking Serpent, Resources 3, Way of the Locust 2

Willpower: 5

Humanity: 3 (Obsessive Compulsive, severe; 4)

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Health: 8

Initiative: 8

Defense: 4

Speed: 14

Blood Potency: 7

Disciplines: Coil of the Beast 2, Coil of Blood 2, Nightmare 4, Obfuscate 4, Vigor 3

Vitae/per Turn: 20/5

Newly Sworn to the Mysteries

Title: Scholar of Equilibrium, Sworn of the Mysteries

It's nice to be liked, and in the cutthroat world of Kindred politics, someone who's willing to back off, lend a sympathetic ear, go along to get along and stay in the middle of the road can — with *very careful* balance — avoid offending anyone long enough to impress everyone favorably. Even if that impression is slight and lukewarm.

This is essentially someone who got Mystery-Sworn because no other Dragons could present a compelling reason to shoot her down. There were a few who opposed the expansion of the Mysteries just on general principle, but they all figured someone else would take the axe to the pretty girl with the nice smile. But no one did.

Now her sponsors are pleasantly surprised to have a newly minted legislator on their side, as is everyone else who's supported her all along. They're about to find out just how vacuously self-centered she is, as she smiles and nods and agrees to help them out but does absolutely nothing except provide sympathetic noise.

Clan: Daeva

Embrace: 1977

Apparent Age: 29

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Occult 1, Politics 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Drive 2, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Expression 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies 2, Clan Status (Daeva) 2, Contacts 4, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 3, Haven 1, Herd 2, Resources 2, Retainers 2, Striking Looks 1

Willpower: 4

Humanity: 6

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Sloth
Health: 7
Initiative: 4
Defense: 2
Speed: 9
Blood Potency: 1
Disciplines: Coil of Blood 1, Coil of Banes 1, Coil of the Beast 1, Majesty 2
Vitae/per Turn: 10/1

Experienced Sworn of the Mysteries

Title: Scholar of the Untamed Curse, Sworn of the Mysteries

He was going to be a senator, dammit. First a state senator and then a U.S. senator and after that, who knows? He was on his way up when scandal forced him down, and it was only after he was Embraced that he learned the whole thing — the scandal, the Embrace, his utter removal from public life — was engineered by a Carthian who was backing the other party.

He didn't want to put up with that shit, but he perceived that the Ordo Dracul was a softer target than the Invictus — especially since the Order was heavy with Mekhet like him. Sure enough, he's quickly risen through the ranks by doing the political stuff that all the dreaded dark Dragons put off with rolled eyes and turned-up noses. He's got a solid power base in the Mysteries — solid enough that he can sometimes pick up the Academy like a stick and pound on his old rival with it.

The Mysteries are like the state senate. The whole city is the U.S. Senate. Watch out, Carthians.

Clan: Mekhet
Embrace: 1929
Apparent Age: 45
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3
Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3
Mental Skills: Academics 2, Investigation 2, Occult 2, Politics (Kindred) 3
Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms 1
Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression (Oratory) 3, Intimidation (Rhetoric) 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize (Schmooze) 3, Subterfuge (Bureacratic Expediency) 4
Merits: Allies 3, City Status (Politico) 1, Clan Status (Mekhet) 2, Contacts 3, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 4, Haven 2, Herd 3, Resources 3
Willpower: 6
Humanity: 5 (Inferiority Complex, mild; 6)
Virtue: Faith
Vice: Pride
Health: 7
Initiative: 6
Defense: 3
Speed: 10
Blood Potency: 2
Disciplines: Auspex 2, Coil of the Beast 1, Coil of Banes 2, Obfuscate 3
Vitae/per Turn: 11/1

Elder Sworn of the Mysteries

Title: Philosopher of the Invisible Terror, Sworn of the Mysteries

Never underestimate a Nosferatu who managed to get Mystery-Sworn, because you know it wasn't the result of dazzling charm. When a Haunt gets an Oath by acclaim, it's because Dragons owed her big, and *no* Kindred wanted to cross her by giving the big thumbs-down. She doesn't propose much legislation. She's got people for that — a Mystery-Sworn Daeva or Ventrue perhaps, someone she sponsored and taught, someone who can make a good argument. She *crafts* legislation, carefully thinking out every ramification and every argument that can be weighed against her will.

She doesn't say much about the laws others propose, either. She abstains on a lot of votes. But when she expresses an opinion, eloquent people often find a reason to support it, and those who differ tend to hold their tongues. She doesn't threaten, ever. She doesn't have to — bad things just seem to dog the footsteps of those who resist her desires. She doesn't make many promises, either — she lets her votes and her subtle guidance do the promis-

ing for her. Because the damnable thing of it is, she seems to be *right*. Her plans seem to *work*. Her so-subtle nudging seems to make the Ordo Dracul stronger.

Those who are aware of the Sworn of the Locust and the Sworn of the Ladder strongly suspect that she's a member of one or the other. Certainly it would explain a lot about how she gets so much support.

Only a few paranoid Dragons suspect she might belong to both.

Clan: Nosferatu

Embrace: 1814

Apparent Age: 15

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Law) 2, Investigation (Dirty Secrets) 2, Occult 5, Politics 5

Physical Skills: Brawl 3, Drive 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression (Writing) 3, Intimidation 3, Persuasion (Dragon Politicians) 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 5

Merits: Allies 4, Contacts 4, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 4, Haven 3, Mind of the Devouring Worm, Mind of the Inscrutable Hydra, Mind of the Unblinking Serpent, Resources 4, Retainer 4,

Willpower: 7

Humanity: 5

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Envy

Health: 8

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Blood Potency: 5

Disciplines: Anoushka's Ladder 1, Coil of Blood 2, Coil of the Beast 3, Coil of the Soul 2, Nightmare 2, Obfuscate 3, Vigor 2, Way of the Locust 1

Vitae/per Turn: 14/2

Subordinate
Sworn of the Dying Light

Title: Initiate of Invisible Equilibrium, Sworn of the Dying Light

It's a tricky thing, doing something you don't like, just because you happen to be good at it. But when that something is the attainment of occult power, and it comes with political power over your fellow Kindred, that takes the sting out of a lot of boring and repetitive rituals.

An instinctive grasp of occult reasoning caught the eye of an Ordo Dracul tutor, even when the researcher was still alive. Once Embraced, that potential quickly became reality. Coils and Wyrm's Nests and occult geometry just came naturally, and when the student showed the master how to reconcile ancient, northern Chinese geomancy with the latest, pop-culture-infused, New Mexico superstitions, the Master just smiled and proposed his star pupil for the Oath of the Dying Light.

The problem is, the student is more interested in the judge and jury business than more dry, arid theory. Longing to play hooky from the boring stuff in favor of deciding important cases, the skilled apprentice is finding fascinating threads of humanity among the Damned — while the master grits his teeth and wonders how to bring his useful, insightful, but increasingly willful student to heel.

Clan: Ventrue

Embrace: 1980

Apparent Age: 32

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Symbolic Logic) 4, Computer 2, Investigation (Statistics, Legal Connections) 3, Occult 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Drive 2, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression 2, Persuasion (Appeal to Logic) 1, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Allies 3, Contacts 2, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 3, Language (Arabic), Language (Greek), Language (Hebrew), Mentor 4, Resources 2

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 7

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Sloth

Health: 7

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 8

Blood Potency: 1

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Dominate 1, Coil of the Beast 1, Coil of Blood 1, Coil of Banes 1, Coil of Flesh 1

Vitae/per Turn: 10/1

Mainstream

Sworn of the Dying Light

Title: Initiate of the Sanguine Curse, Sworn of the Dying Light, Ambassador to the Circle

Never a big brain, never blessed with big brawn, she found her niche adjusting the relationships between the niches of others. Always the mediator, peacekeeper and diplomat, always finding the compromise, she managed to fuse a wild coterie of arrogant specialists into a team that stalked, dragged down and bested a fairly significant Wyrm's Nest. The Ordo Dracul took it away from her, but that's really just as well. She's a better judge than sorcerer any day.

Over the decades, her record of eliciting grudging agreements between Kindred in court cases led to a high demand for her skills on Dragon Juries, and those who felt she'd given them a fair shake proposed her as the Ordo Dracul Ambassador to the Circle of the Crone. She got confirmed (though not without stepping on the toes of the Axe-Sworn who wanted it) and has made good progress towards a better détente. What she'd really like, of course, is to move the covenants from a stance

of wary suspicion to guarded trust and, eventually, to a position where they might freely exchange information. Each knows the other has goodies it wants, but neither is willing to sacrifice something it fears the other might use to gain power. This sort of thinking just makes her roll her eyes.

Clan: Daeva

Embrace: 1904

Apparent Age: 37

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Crafts 3, Medicine 2, Occult 2, Politics (Circle of the Crone) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms (Scattergun) 3, Survival 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Empathy (Hunger, Addiction) 4, Expression 2, Persuasion 4, Socialize 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Allies 3, Contacts 5, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 3, Holistic Awareness, Language (Spanish), Mind of the Devouring Worm

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 7

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Lust

Health: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Blood Potency: 3

Disciplines: Majesty 3, Celerity 3, Coil of the Beast 1, Coil of Banes 2, Coil of Blood 1

Vitae/per Turn: 13/1

Elder Sworn of the Dying Light

Title: Master* of Invisible Equilibrium, Sworn of the Dying Light, Guardian of the Sacred Palms

When looking for proof that a vampire can survive for centuries without being a fearsome battler, look no farther than this wily politician. Operating on the principle that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, he has found that a lot of knowledge is tremendously dangerous. Above and beyond his occult skill, he is respected (and feared) for his connections to Lupines, mortal sorcerers, the restless dead and other, less clearly identified entities. He has gotten an Oath, controlled one major Wyrm's Nest and created several minor ones — all without ever raising a weapon in anger.

Clan: Mekhet

Embrace: 1676

Apparent Age: 35

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 6, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Crafts 1, Investigation 3, Medicine 4, Occult 5, Politics 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Larceny 1, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy (Sense Hostility) 4, Expression 4, Persuasion (Entreat, Lupines) 4, Socialize 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge (False Sincerity) 5

Merits: Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 4, Geomantic Nexus (Potency) 3, Haven 3, Herd 3, Resources 4, Retainers 4

Willpower: 3

Humanity: 6

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Greed

Health: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 11

Blood Potency: 7

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Celerity 4, Coil of Blood 2, Coil of Banes 2, Coil of the Soul 1, Obfuscate 3

Vitae/per Turn: 20/5

Scrub Apprentice

Title: Slave

She had a hard-luck life followed by a hard-luck Requiem. High-school dropout, truck-stop waitress, small-time pusher — dead-end nobody. Then one night this crazy motherfucker in really nice, really dirty clothes showed up at the diner and started babbling all kinds of crazy shit, calling her "Diana" despite her protests, and he had just enough time to give her the Embrace before some *other* crazy motherfucker showed up and put him down with all the rounds in a semiautomatic shotgun.

She got the hell out of there and figured out pretty quick that she was a vampire, and she had a hard, lousy couple of years as a lone nomad before a traveling Ordo Dracul coterie took pity on her and dropped her with some associates in a nearby city. She's pledged herself to the Order — she doesn't know anyone else who'd want her, and, besides, if it's good enough for Dracula it should be good enough for her, right? — and has managed to find a tutor willing to teach her this "Coil" business.

There's a lot about her new situation that makes her uneasy, but perhaps nothing so much as the first words from her new "master:" "My my, you really *do* look like Diana."

Clan: Ventrue

Embrace: 2000

Apparent Age: Late 20s

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer (Fraud) 1, Crafts 1, Investigation 1

Physical Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize (Ply with Substances) 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Seem Trustworthy) 2

Merits: Barfly, Contacts 1, Mentor 2, Resources 1

Willpower: 5

Humanity: 6

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Pride

Health: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Blood Potency: 1

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Dominate 1, Resilience 1

Vitae/per Turn: 10/1

Unworn Scribe

Title: Scribe of Equilibrium

The Carthians had deep hooks into the local PD, and the Order needed a way to even the odds. Their solution was to Embrace the Internal Affairs investigator who was making the most trouble for their rivals, on the theory that he'd be better able to do so once he knew what he was fighting.

He's pretty bitter about becoming what he beheld, but he's enough of a realist to know that giving up isn't going to make anything better. At least the Order seem to regard vampirism as a Bad Thing — well, something with room for improvement, anyhow. Deep in his heart, his first loyalty is to the force, but he knows he can protect his old colleagues best as a loyal Order follower. As things stand, the Ordo Dracul would certainly prefer a police department free of Kindred influence to one under the Carthian boot heel.

At least, they'd prefer that for the time being. Sadly for him, the Dragon cop hasn't yet learned to take the Kindred view of years and decades, so he can't see how he's helping the police exchange revolutionaries for esoteric occultists.

Clan: Gangrel

Embrace: 1990

Apparent Age: 43

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 2, Investigation 4, Politics (Law Enforcement) 1

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

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation (Bad Cop) 2, Persuasion (Good Cop) 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Allies 1, Contacts 3, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 2, Haven 2, Resources 1

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 5

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Health: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Blood Potency: 1

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Coil of Blood 1, Coil of the Beast 1, Protean 1

Vitae/per Turn: 10/1

Unworn Ancilla

Title: Initiate* of the Untamed Hunger

The Lancea Sanctum was a load of bullshit. Sure, it sounded good to her at first, when she was freshly Em-

braced and horrified by her sire, her circumstances and her sanguine ferocity. The platitudes of the Lancea — the promise of a place in a divine order, the comforting regulation, the psychological framework that helped her explain away her feeding feelings — that was good, for a while. But one night she frenzied, and all the Sanctified prattle couldn't make that acceptable. When an agent from the Ordo Dracul offered her sponsorship, and *showed* her that the Order had tangible control over the frenzy she feared so much — changing sides wasn't easy, but it was inevitable.

The Order looks different from the other side, however. For every Dragon who comes to her trying to eek out some secrets of Theban Sorcery, there are two who suspect she's a Sanctified spy or agent provocateur. She's had to trade a lot of Sanctified secrets just to get enough Coil knowledge to keep the Lancea-haters off her back. But it's becoming increasingly clear to her that the Dying Light knows too much to let her buy in with her minor Theban skills, and that the Mysteries are closed to anyone with the taint of Longinus. That leaves the Axe, and she fancies herself a lover, not a fighter. But she may have no choice if she wants to advance.

Given the proclivities of her blood — and the ire of the Sanctified — she may have no choice but to fight in any event.

Clan: Gangrel

Embrace: 1927

Apparent Age: 40

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Religion) 2, Crafts 2, Occult 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl (Claws) 3, Firearms (Rifle) 1, Survival 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Empathy 2, Expression 1, Persuasion 2, Socialize (Country Charm) 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Allies 1, Contacts 2, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 3, Resources 1, Retainer 1

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 6

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Lust

Health: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Blood Potency: 2

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Coil of the Beast 1, Coil of Blood 2, Protean 3, Theban Sorcery 2 (Vitae Reliquary, Liar's Plague)

Vitae/per Turn: 11/1

Unworn Elder

Title: Illuminus of the Invisible Hunger, Convener of the Caucus

To hell with them anyway, all of them! Years of service, years of instruction, years of loyalty and they repay it how? Not with an Oath of power and authority, no. With the demeaning, *insulting* title of Convener. Damn it all, half of the smug Sworn sitting in judgment have half as much understanding of the Coils, or less, a fraction! They dare not give the Oath, knowing that a new Illuminus in their midst would send all their infantile schemes and ploys crashing down into the dust, *as they deserve*.

Convener. Bah! They think it's a dead-end duty, an empty honorific. They'll learn. Just as so many of them learned before, and took the knowledge and selfishly abandoned their one-time teacher! Ingrates. They'll pay.

Clan: Nosferatu

Embrace: 1879

Apparent Age: 51

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (History) 5, Computer 1, Crafts 1, Investigation 3, Occult 5, Politics (Ordo Dracul) 1

Physical Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3, Larceny 1, Stealth 1, Survival 3, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 1, Intimidation (Demean) 4, Persuasion 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Resources 2, Retainers 2, Covenant Status (Ordo Dracul) 3, Haven 2, Herd 2, Draconic Geomancy

Willpower: 5

Humanity: 4 (Vocalization, mild; 5)

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Wrath

Health: 8

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Blood Potency: 4

Disciplines: Coil of the Beast 3, Coil of Blood 2, Coil of Banes 2, Coil of Flesh 1, Obfuscate 3

Vitae/per Turn: 13/2

The Three Draculas

At any time there are, of course, dozens of Kindred claiming to be "Count Dracula." Amateur actors, lunatics, hoaxers, powermongers, political puppets and other harmless, dangerous, sinister, desperate, pathetic or brilliant individuals. Some are scamming. Some are insane. Most get ignored, keep their mania relatively quiet, get scorned by the Ordo Dracul or get staked by would-be Van Helsings.

But there are a few men — very few — who can make the claim with some credibility. That's not to say that they offer actual proof. But they are vampires, they seem to be old, they can quote *Rites of the Dragon* chapter and verse, they know their Coils, no one's tripped them up too bad on Vlad the Impaler's history and they're tough enough that anyone who calls bullshit on them winds up wearing his own insides. Some of these pretenders manage to convince Kindred within a domain to follow them. Some are followers themselves. Some use the legends of Dracula to gain power over Kindred and kine. Some are used to bring ruin to the Ordo Dracul.

Hollywood Drac

If you asked a skilled but unimaginative artist to draw Dracula, you'd probably get something halfway between Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee, which is as good a description of this American Dracula as any. He's 5'11", he's charming, he speaks excellent English but has enough of an accent to make any number of women delicately shift their hair back behind an ear. He is slow and inviting and makes perfect sense when he speaks.

A few Kindred have survived seeing him act, and they can assure you that he's fast and cruel and brutally decisive when provoked. But his real skills are more likely to be displayed at Elysium than in some challenge with an Axe-Sworn oaf. This showy Count is a performer, first, and a leader, second.

Unlike other claimants, this particular Dracula doesn't get huffy to people who deny his claims. He shrugs, smiles his charming smile and moves on, reeking of confidence and seeming to say, "If my ideas are right, my name doesn't matter, does it?" without speaking a single word. On top of his charm and physical prowess, he's a world-class Coil master. So, as some of his exclusively picked students say, "if he isn't the real Dracula, he fucking should be."

The Gilded Firepug

He's 5'4", which lends him some credibility as an elder. His English is fragmentary, but his antique Romanian satisfies some pretty finicky scholars. Husky, neckless, adorned with a huge nose and flabby lower lip, he's far from the typical image of the Blood Count. But those who remember tales of the indiscriminate destruction this supposed Wallachian rained on Kindred of Paris in the 1990s have few doubts that he could

impale a thousand mortals, given the power to do so and the right mood.

What particularly baffles observers is his fascination with modern culture, a fascination that is in no way lessened by his racist opinions about non-Europeans — opinions that fit right in with someone from the age of the Crusades. It takes little provocation to get him to rail against a degenerate age in which "the heathen races sup at wealthy tables with Christian men and vampires." His flashy style and stubby stature have earned him the nickname "the Gilded Fireplug," which will probably get some whelp torn to pieces if anyone ever explains its full insulting ramifications.

He isn't charming by any stretch of the imagination, but he is certainly compelling. Kindred familiar with the narcotizing ardor of Majesty and the blunt crush of Dominate insist that he does not use those Disciplines. Instead, he seems to possess that incredibly rare, personal magnetism that lead citizens to kill and believers to die. He can be ridiculed outside of his presence, but when he's nearby it's everyone else who seems petty, small and vunerable.

The Romanian Terror

If this wild-eyed sorcerer isn't Dracula, no one's going to call him a liar about it to his face. This is, supposedly, the vampire who taught the Academies of London how to use Mind of the Devouring Worm, Mind of the Unblinking Serpent and Mind of the Inscrutable Hydra. It seems he's also got a fourth trick he isn't teaching anyone — of the three Mekhet who've tried to read his mind, one went insane, one cannot remember the experience and one only shudders, mutters something about an "echo chamber," and theorizes that this Romanian terror has developed a form of reactive, telepathic jujitsu. Any creature foolhardy enough to scan this strange vampire winds up scanning *herself* instead.

It's clear that he's a master of Auspex, and the Kindred who've survived his anger can tell you he's no slouch with Nightmare either. Perhaps most fascinating, however, is his claim to have mastered torpor. He says the dreams of the undead are like an ocean in which most minds drown but where a strong soul can sail. He claims that all his mental tricks and traps are insights gleaned from visions in torpor — visions that he says are glimpses into a deeper and truer reality than most Kindred can ever imagine.

That's the kind of talk that's gotten him a decent-sized following in the Czech Republic. It's the kind of talk that can get an elder's attention.

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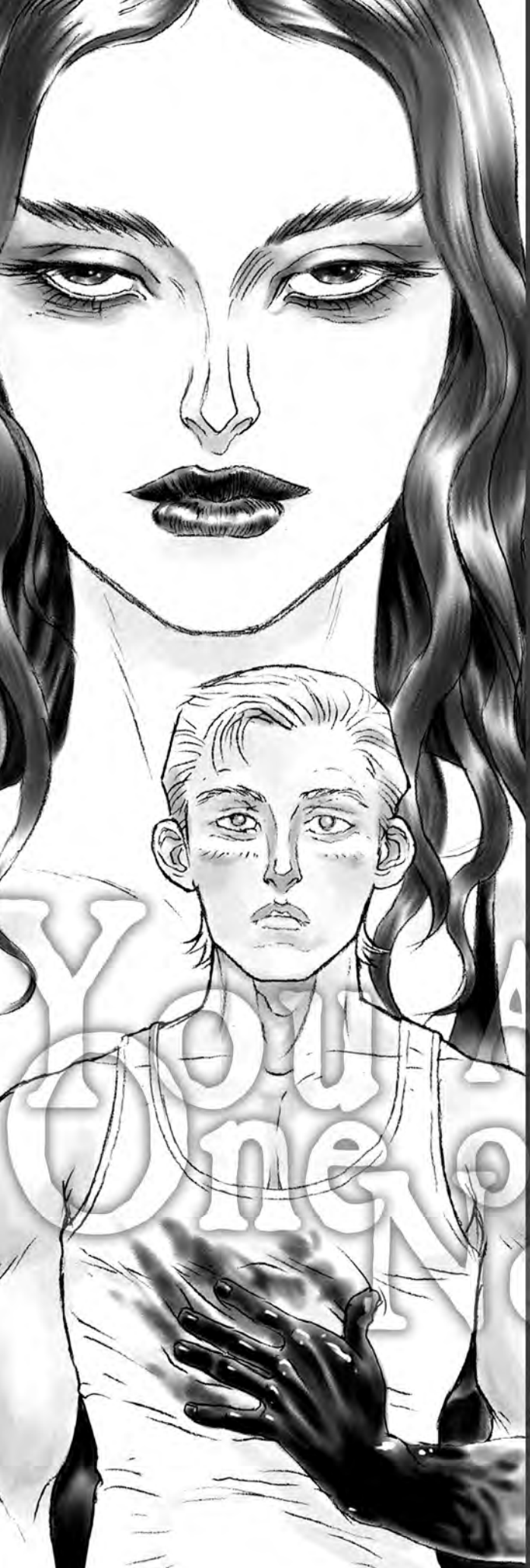

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