



Storyline: Rise Of The Imperator



They came from all over the world: lawyers and street thugs, gladiators and musicians. They entered through library basements, churches and subway tunnels. Over the course of a few hours, they congregated in an underground chamber in Dublin, Ireland.

"Oi! I am Prince O'Connor o' this fair town," a voice yelled over the sea of vampires.

Eager shouts rang off the stones.

"Now," the Prince continued, in his lilting accent, "for the younger folk who may not have heard, there's a reason fer the party."

"Yeah! Why the hell are we here?" someone shouted from the mob.

"I came to kick your ass!" another replied from across the room.

The mob parted to form a corridor between the two and they began to fight. Prince O'Connor smiled and continued.

"This may seem obvious to any of ye who've been on the front lines, but the Camarilla hasn't been very unified lately."

"No shit!" one of neonates commented loudly.

"Yeah, we've been getting our asses handed to us."

"An' I dunno about you," the Prince went on, "but I think it's high time we got rid of the old fashioned Ventrue leadership and put someone in charge who actually knows how to win a fight."





Some yelled "Oi," others went with "hells yeah," regardless of how they phrased it, everyone agreed.

"An' so, lads an' lassies, should any of you feel qualified, I invite ye to take a seat at the table. An now, as host o' this fine event, I declare the rant begins!"

A mob began to form surrounding the table in center of the room where six of the seats were occupied. If you supported one of them, you moved around the room to stand roughly behind where they were sitting. Of course, there were a lot of other people in the room, some of whom might not want you showing your support. It was a lot like a mosh pit - there was punching, shoving and the occasional Kindred hoisted and tossed by his peers, but center stage remained untouched. No bouncers were needed to keep the middle clear. No one in the room was that dumb.

Dmitra Ilyanova folded her hands and placed them in front of her on the wooden table.

"I'm willing," said Don Caravelli from her right.

Tyler leaned forward. "As am I."

"I feel I am... more than qualified," Gracetius smiled as he spoke.

Crusher cracked his knuckles. "I think I have what it takes."

Dmitra surveyed the volunteers. "Let us settle this in traditional Brujah fashion."

Everyone at the table nodded.

"Socratic debate."

"Chairman, I rise to a question of privilege." Lucinde's voice cut through the murmurs around the table.

Jan sat quietly and said nothing as he had throughout the entire meeting thus far. It was safer that way. He had been given the undesirable position of taking minutes. He was grateful for it. It gave him



something to do with his hands.

"Granted." The voice was like ice.

"The kine have evolved. High resolution imagery, bio-weapons, the Internet, these aren't simple-minded folk we can just dominate into forgetting an incident any more. We are teetering on the brink of extinction. All it will take is one misstep, one sufficiently inexcusable breach, and we will be eliminated. The Sabbat, in their blind hubris, are quite happy to make such breaches. Yet if their sin is overweening belief in their superiority to the kine, ours is, perhaps, worse. We have the superior military force. The Sabbat only exist because of our failure to work together. The Camarilla needs a united army - a cohesive military force with a clear and direct chain of command. We can no longer afford to have individual groups working at cross purposes. Too much is at stake here. We need an Emperor: one voice calling the shots, and one mind making the decisions."

"Chairman, I object to the consideration of the question."

"Objection denied," said the voice from the head of the table. "Continue."

Lucinde's lips did not smile, although Jan could tell she wanted to. She turned and stared across the table at Jan.

His mouth ran dry. Crap. She wanted him to speak.

"Chairman," he forced his voice to come out even, "I nominate Lucinde as the Venture choice for Emperor of the Camarilla." Jan moved his hands under the table to hide their trembling.

"Seconded," said Alan Sovereign from farther down the table.

"Point of Order, Chairman." Katarina Kornfeld removed the red horn-rimmed glasses which matched her blazer. "It might be difficult to balance the workload of a Justicar with the workload of the Emperor." She jabbed the air with the corner of her glasses as she spoke. "Is it wise to put all our eggs in one basket?"

Jan stared pointedly at his notebook.

"Chairman, Point of Parliamentary Inquiry." Alan Sovereign's speech flowed from his lips like fine wine. "In the past a new Justicar has been chosen outside the regular rotation due to... difficult



circumstances... As it is in the best interests of Clan Ventrue to secure military leadership of the Camarilla, and as Alastor, Lucinde's expertise in removing undesirables is beyond question..."

Damn the man is smooth, Jan thought, they might just pull it off, but the other ladder-climbers at the table were quick to interject.

"Chairman I object."

"Call to orders!"

"I see no reason to..."

The meeting was quickly disintegrating into a shouting match.

"Order!" Hardestadt stood. Everyone else sat abruptly like marionettes whose strings had been cut.

Jan's head ached from mental whiplash.

"All those wishing to apply for the position of Imperator will submit performance appraisals for consideration. This meeting is adjourned."

The string quartet played Beethoven's third symphony as Madam Guil made her entrance in the Parisian ballroom and began mingling with the guests. Voices wafted back and forth over fans, feathers and ruffles.

"I hear she's still planning on trying for it, despite her recent failures."

"Some think it will be physical, but everyone knows that everything important will always come down to politics."

"What, so we can discover that yet another one is actually a snake in business clothing?"



"Votes and favors my dear, votes and favors," Madame Guil remarked coyly, "now is the time when all those boons come in so terribly handy."

"Oh no dear, snakes are so last century and a shadow was just done, it would have to be something new. A gypsy or a flesh crafter perhaps."

"Maybe is why she is incapable of the smile." Prince Villon spoke over Antoinette's shoulder. " 'er mouth is painted on."

"Brujah aren't a problem darling." Guil commented, laughing. "All you need to know is what buttons to push. And if they're old enough to be put forward as nominees, we know all their buttons."

"The Ventrue can't possibly think their clan is worthy of leading us any more, not with their track record."

Madame Guil draped an arm over Prince Villon's shoulder. "What's really needed is someone with vision, someone who can inspire greatness in others, someone who has a sense of decorum and"

"Someone like you," Villon bowed and kissed Guil's hand.

"Oh," Madame Guil tittered, running her fingertip along the rim of her brandy glass. "I suppose so."

"Of course you are the perfect choice. You-" Annabelle Triabell broke off in mid sentence and shrieked in surprise. The music stopped.

Leaning against the archway on the other side of the room was an absolutely gorgeous woman in pvc pants and a leather jacket. Guests hastened to get out of her way as she sauntered in toward Madame Guil, nodding at a contrite-looking Prince Villon as she passed him. Her hands, wearing studded fingerless leather gloves, removed her mirrored sunglasses and handed them to an equally beautiful, leather jacketed man with dark wavy hair walking behind her.

"Guil." Anneke took the brandy glass from Guil's hand, and downed the contents in one swallow. "You really must learn to ask me first."



Oliver Thrace frowned at the other Tremere in the basement of the Vienna chantry. "The Council of Seven has selected our representative for Imperator. Let us now proceed with ensuring they succeed in attaining the position."

Candles flickered in sconces throughout the circular stone room in the basement of the Vienna chantry. Six members of the warlock clan sat around the table. Wards flickered in the floor, walls and ceiling. Several screens were set up with thaumaturgical projections of Chantry leaders and princes. One chair was empty. On the table in front of it, a disembodied hand with an eye embedded in its palm was staring at Thrace, ready to write any vote it needed to on a piece of paper.

"The Ventrue are our greatest concern," The voice of Prince Anabelle of Quebec, Canada, echoed from the ghostly flicker of her image.

"The Ventrue owe us." answered Rebecca, seated to Oliver's right. "I don't think their elders are aware of how many boons their princes have had to give House Tremere to gain advantages within their own clan."

"But will it be enough?" Lucas Halton's image spoke from his native Huston, projected in Vienna via the same magic used by Anabelle.

The entire table paused as the hand in the seat across from Oliver rocked back on its wrist stump and began to write in elongated script. "What about Karsh?" it wrote.

Erichtho sent a small spider scuttling to fetch the parchment and bring it to her before passing it around to the others. "An interesting point, Doctor," she addressed the hand. "But since his entire clan left the Camarilla, his leadership has been less than satisfactory."

Gabrielle di Righetti leaned forward. "While that can be argued, I think everyone involved knows fully well that Karsh has been hamstrung by the political situation. I, for one, would not be surprised if he claimed that an Imperator backed by all the clans would be far more successful than a Warlord without the main forces of his army."

"Is he actually a threat?" Erichtho asked, "What can he possibly have that would make the Camarilla more likely to entrust an Independent than a member of one of their own clans?"

Once again, the greyish fingers of the hand wrapped around the pen and wrote on the parchment. It held the paper up for all to see. It had written one word: "neutrality." The hand swiveled on its fingertips to survey the table with the eye in its palm.



"The doctor is correct." di Righetti leaned back against her chair. "One of the biggest motivations for any clan to put forward an Emperor is to prevent the others from getting too much power. Should Karsh present himself, he may very well get the votes of any clan whose own nominee is eliminated."

"Then," Oliver Thrace's one eye glinted from the shadows as he spoke. "Let's ensure he doesn't show up."

The light from the wards and candle flames made the tiny spiders in Erichtho's hair seem to flicker in and out of existence. "What of the others? Do we know how the Nosferatu are voting?"

In the heart of Brussels, Belgium, there is a fountain consisting of a small bronze statue of a boy taking a piss. Fittingly, three hundred feet below the world's most famous urinal, through layers of architecture spanning ten centuries, lies the biggest meeting chamber of the Brussels Nosferatu warrens.

Rife with the stench from the polluted Senne river, the cavern was filled with scabbed, pustule-covered, deformed bodies. Several computers were set up with new, flat screen monitors and web cams pointed into the crowd. Everyone was clustered around one revolting creature, and they were laughing their asses off.

"I'm telling you man, comedy central." Alonzo Guillen stood on his tiptoes and spread his arms out, wrists limp. "There they are all prissy footing around and then in walks the leather clad she-bitch and just freakin' owns the place."

One member of his audience fell backward, chortling and slapping her knee with a knobby, deformed hand.

Beetleman snorted. "That's nothing compared to what happened with the Ventrue. I can't help but feel sorry for them. Damn. I'll take ugly any day."

They fell respectfully silent as Prince Baron Dieudonne entered the chamber from a nearby hole. He patted Beetleman on the head as he passed by. "Any news from the Brujah?" he asked the group.

"A group of Brujah agree on something?" The noseless face of Benjamin Rose asked from one of the screens, his slavering voice coming over the secure VPN from Washington, DC.



Everyone in the cavern burst out laughing.

"They're still thrashing it out," the Prince of Washington continued, "Eventually one of the big ones'll snap and then it'll be last man standing."

The Prince nodded. "Keep us posted."

Alonso Petrodon entered the cavern. He was greeted with applause and cheers.

"So, bossman, who're we going to send to be Imperator?" Federico di Padua asked from beside the mess of routers forming their VPN terminal.

Foureyes poked his head out from behind a much bigger Kindred. "Yeah, what baddass we sending in boss? We got someone who can kick all their asses?"

Petrodon nodded. "That's what we're going to determine here tonight."

"Oh man, You're so much cooler than the other bossman." A voice came from Petrodon's left. "He never tells us shit."

A few of the Nosferatu began to get worried looks on their faces and listen intently.

Petrodon had a cruel glint in his eyes. "Ah, well, one thing about us Nos is that we understand the concept of working together. We're just waiting for one more arrival before we get started. In fact, he should be here right..."

Everyone else began to hear it too, a low rumble and hiss of movement. It sounded faintly like a stampede.

"...about..."

Several Kindred's faces fell. Someone whispered "Oh shit."

"...now."



All faces turned to the entrance at the back of the cavern. Black tendrils began to pour out along the walls from the shadows. Like ink that defied gravity, the shiny black substance began to coat everything it touched as it spread out. Several Nosferatu yelped and huddled together as wave upon wave of cockroaches flowed into the room, covering every surface, every bare light bulb, every screen, and blotting out all light from every source with their twitching, clicking bodies.

In the center of the now pitch-black room of terrorized Kindred, a lighter flipped open with a loud click and a tiny flame illuminated the end of a cigarette clipped in a beak-like mouth. Several Nosferatu recoiled from the eerie, twisted face of Cock Robin as he sucked back a drag from his cigarette before flicking shut the lighter and plunging the room once again into darkness.

Everyone held their breath uneasily as they tried to push the little bodies off or themselves without offending the insects' master.

"So," Petrodon's voice cut through the roach-induced shadows. "Any other volunteers?"

Dr. Carmine Morwinski's eyes widened as the woman in the chair across from him opened her third bottle of hand sanitizer. Her white hair in combination with such a youthful face gave a spooky impression.

He smiled reassuringly. "There are definitely concerns regarding a leadership figure. For example, the red finger paint on the wall in this photograph shows rays of light or power coming from a central figure at the highest point in the image. The attack in all directions indicates a lack of discrimination regarding the victims."

She was very beautiful but unhealthily pale. He wondered if she insisted on evening meetings due to heliophobia in addition to her obsession with cleanliness.

"Dr. Netchurch said you're one of the leading authorities on dream interpretation. What about the sculpture?"

"This reminds me of several artistic depictions of Caligula."

"The mad Roman emperor? And the impaled figures?"



"Well, it would be a lot easier if the photographs were taken before the sculpture was lit on fire."

"Do you think the fire is significant?"

"Perhaps an attempt at sympathetic magic - to prevent or erase the events depicted by destroying the image. You said the artist self-mutilated immediately after the creation was burned."

"Yes, he woke from a dream, created the sculpture, lit it on fire, and then removed his tongue and eyes."

"I'm just curious. I couldn't help but notice your concern regarding cleanliness. You mentioned Dr. Netchurch, are you one of his patients?"

"No." she said firmly, "What do you make of the repeated references to a sky mushroom?"

"I've encountered it before in patients afraid of nuclear holocaust. It's a concern regarding of the end of the world. By the way, what is a Camarilla?"

"What? Where did you hear that?"

"You whispered it a minute ago."

"I did?"

"Yes. You also said "Imperator.""

"Oh," her body language changed dramatically. Before she had been concerned and hesitant. Now she seemed predatory. "I was just quoting some poetry."

"Are all these dream sequences and art your own?"

The woman frowned. "What do you mean?"

"You are reacting as though you had experienced them yourself."



The woman shuddered.

"We often try to distance ourselves from things that upset us."

The woman looked up sharply. "Yes. We do." She rubbed more hand sanitizer into her alabaster skin.

"My dear, let me help you. Whatever this Imperator is, whatever this Camarilla represents, I can assist you in defeating it and healing your mind."

The woman laughed loudly. Her eyes were filled with sorrow.

"Doctor Morwinski, you are a kind man. I could make you forget this, but you have been so helpful. I respect your brain far too much to alter it."

"Uh... thank you?"

"It's warm in here. Might we go out on your balcony? I've always wanted to see the city from so high up. We're on what... the eighty-ninth floor?"

"Yes we are," he smiled and stood, walking over to the balcony entrance.

She stood by the door. "After you, doctor."

As Maris Streck left the building she accidentally stepped in the puddle spreading from the crumpled splatter of Dr. Morwinski's body. A gasp escaped her lips and she quickly dug through her purse for a disinfectant wipe to clean off her black pumps.

"Really," she spoke to the mess in the alley, "the OCD isn't that bad. It's seeing the future that's a bitch."

END