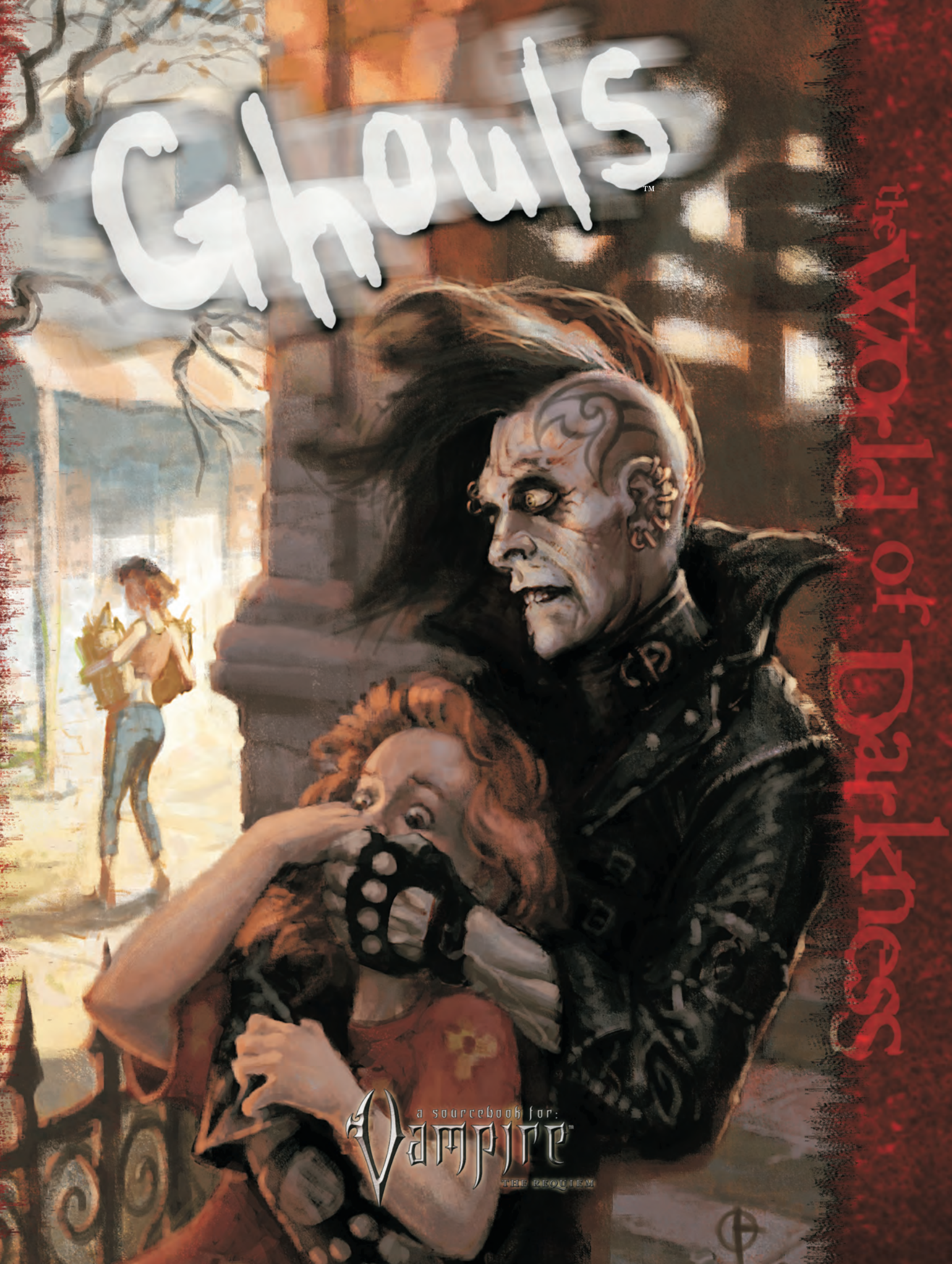


Ghouls

the World of Darkness

a sourcebook for:
Vampire
THE REQUiem



*"A lure, a snare, a chain —
all in a drop of blood."*

—Giselle Warner, Mekhet of the Ordo Dracul

This book includes:

- Complete information on creating ghoul characters
- Details on animal ghouls, ghoul families and the mysterious mandragora plant ghouls
- Details on integrating ghouls into your chronicles



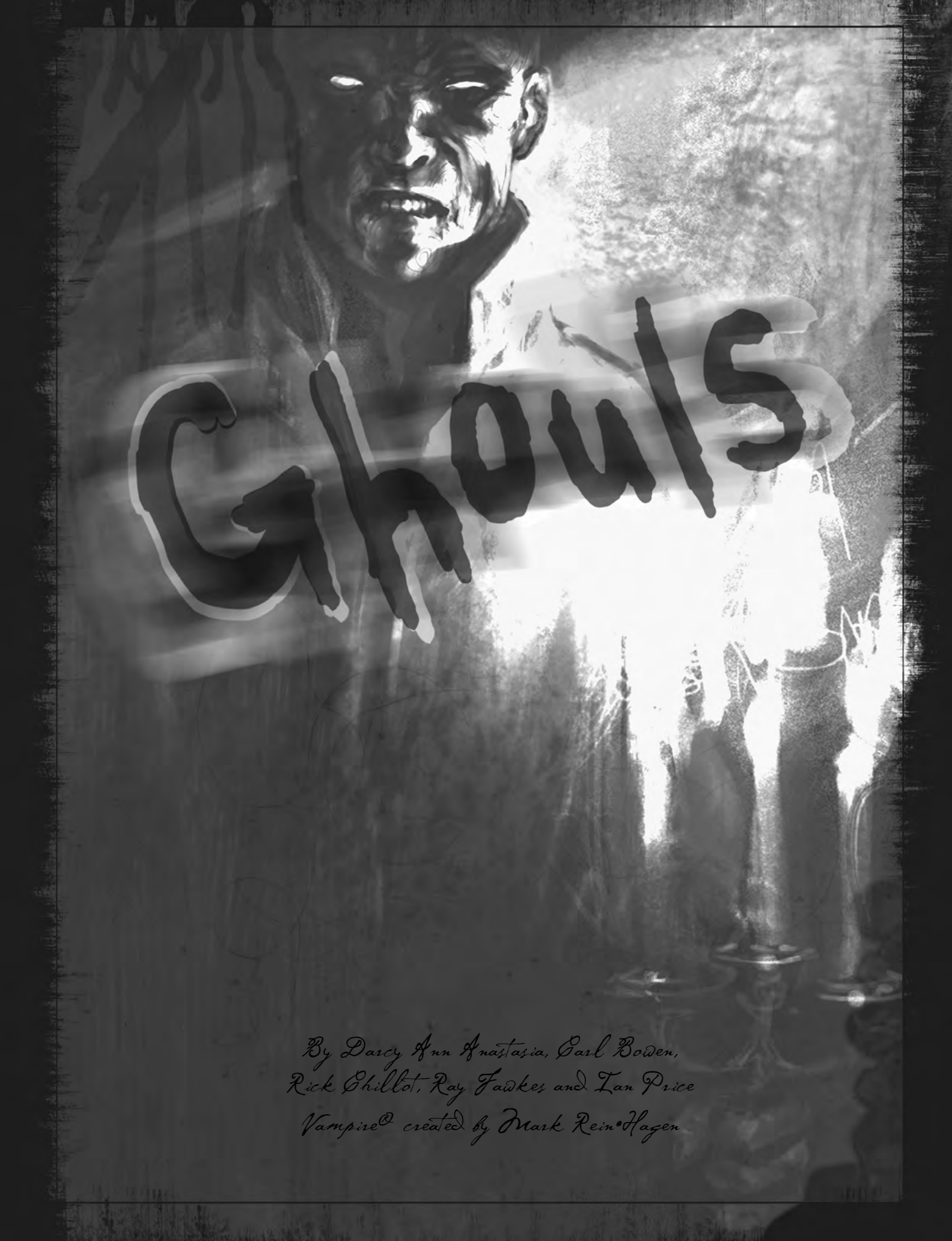
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Vampire
THE REQUIEM



Ghouls

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GhoulsTM

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PROLOGUE: DAY CLUB

4:00 AM

Already she's angry with me. She says I've been a bad boy. She says, "You didn't do everything on your list, did you?" and stares until I look at the floor. I want to tell her I tried, that things are complicated and it will take me some more time. It's not my fault. But she's right. She told me to do these things and I didn't do them. That's the long and short of it.

My hands are shaking, so I hold them behind me. She knows what I want. She doesn't like it when I ask, but it's been four weeks. I'm sweating. Maybe tonight. Maybe she'll give it to me tonight and everything will be okay.

She's naked now. She's always preferred to sleep naked. She stands in front of the cellar door, stroking her pubic hair with two fingers. "Is this what you want?" she whispers.

I lick my lips. The sight of her body makes me bite my lip. We haven't made love in over a year. It's dirty, I know, but I want her. More than anything. Not just sex. To be inside her. To feel like she's all around me, precious and close. I haven't done anything to earn it in a long time, but sometimes she takes pity on my frustration. I wish I knew what she wanted me to do. I'd do it, and we'd both be happy.

She beckons me, takes my chin in her hands and pulls my face to her. I close my eyes. "Open your mouth," she whispers. I do, sure she's going to feed me. She knows I'm suffering. Even though I don't deserve it, she'll give me what I need. Because that's what love is.

Instead she licks the drop of blood that's collected where I bit my lip. The touch of her tongue is a stab of ice, and then it's gone. She pushes me away, laughing, and I fall to the floor. She's slipping her perfect body into a

long satin robe. "Wipe your mouth," she tells me, "and go open the front door."

A greasy stain of a man is waiting on the porch. Some kind of beatnik or hippie. Scum. To think that he'll put his hands on her, those dirty, stained fingernails, those sweaty, grimy palms... He looks a little confused as I stare at him, but then she calls from inside the house and he shoves past me. She's at the cellar door, gesturing for him to go down the stairs. She reaches a hand down his pants, and he makes a lewd comment, groping at her chest. I have to look away.

I hear his voice fading as he laughs his way down the steps. She calls my name and I see her standing there. Her leg is visible through the slit in her robe, lithe without a hint of fat. "I have plans tonight," she says, her voice bored but amused. "Do your chores, and don't be here when I wake up."

She closes the cellar door, and the locks click like cracking knuckles.

9:07 AM

This used to be such a nice neighborhood. I remember when we moved here. What a happy family we were, taking our first steps toward the American dream. The neighbors were decent, friendly people. Now everyone keeps their doors locked and nobody says hello. Most of the old houses are run down and they've been turned into apartments. They're crammed with dirty people who don't even speak English. They don't mow their lawns or plant azaleas.

Across the street, the Wilson boy waves. A behaved kid. Could be in the Scouts. Those Wilsons, they're the only nice family left. I see the father from time to time, and he's always asking me how my "wife" is and inviting us to come over and play cards. It's getting to be too much. In a few hours, when the kid's at school and the parents are working, I'll visit their basement. Do a little work on their furnace. Carbon monoxide is odorless and deadly. Later we'll buy the house, like we

did so many others, and convert it into apartments. We'll rent it out to more anonymous, dirty people.

10:33 AM

Did some trading online. Thought about Buddy Fields, from the old office. If he could see me now, . . . see how much the world has changed. Imagine trading stocks from your own home. This world's not the fantasy I used to see at the movies. No rocket ships or sliding sidewalks, but it's full of things nobody expected, like cable TV and fax machines.

11:38 AM

Tried to take a nap, but as soon as I close my eyes I feel the cravings come on. How long has it been? A month? I hear that some alcoholics drink their own urine for the alcohol. I spend 15 minutes staring at my wrist.

1:00 PM

I'm headed to the diner to see if any of the others are there. Sometimes we call ourselves the Day Club. It's not really a club, though, just an occasional gathering. Some days nobody else shows. Other times I don't show up for weeks. I'd like to see Robin. When I think of the way she pushes her hair back from her face when she talks, it makes me goofy inside. I guess I should admit I'm sweet on her. That perfume she wears. . . . It would just be good to see her. Maybe it would take the edge off for a while.

1:25 PM

I see Robin sitting in the back at our usual booth. She smiles with her eyes when she sees me. She's such a peach. And a real looker. I know some people think of the Chinese as an inferior race, but they fought as hard as anyone against the Japs. It's not their fault the Communists took over their country.

Fex is there too. Pale and skinny, dressed like an undertaker in his black suit and coat. He nods and slides over as I sit next to him. "Hello, Ward," he says to me. "We were just talking about you."

"Hi, Robin," I say. I want to tell her how beautiful she looks, but a pang of guilt stops me. There's definitely something special about Robin, but she can never be the center of my life.

"Your hands are shaking," Fex says.

Robin reaches across the table and puts her hands on mine. Warm hands are nice. "How long has it been?"

Robin has a fresh bruise just above her right elbow, and one of her fingers is in a splint. That Blake — he treats her like a rag doll. Practically tortures her. He's an animal. A monstrous corpse that should be put in the ground for good. If I could, I'd burn him to ashes for what he does to Robin.

She sees I'm looking at her bruise. "It's not so bad," she tells me, letting go of my hands. "Really, it doesn't even hurt." She excuses herself to go to the ladies' room.

I'm uncomfortable sitting next to Fex with no one else at the other side of the table. "That son of a bitch," I finally say to him. "Why does she stay with him?"

Fex actually looks amused. "You know the answer to that one, Ward. We all do. But seriously, you're not looking too good. You haven't gotten any in a while, have you?"

My shoulders slump, and I can feel the sweat on my back. "It'll be any day now, I'm sure of it." I take a sip of water. "She's just testing me. Giving me a chance to show her how strong I can be."

Fex is nodding. "Every moment of weakness is an opportunity for strength," he says.

"Not now with the fortune-cookie talk," I tell him.

"It's true. Some would say our lives are cursed, but I say they're blessed. We've been given a chance to completely surrender our egos, to have them crushed by any and every debasement and cruelty imaginable. Ego annihilation is the first step on any path to true enlightenment."

"Sure," I stand up to walk toward the men's room, but first I lean on the table. "A few months ago I started courting this woman I met at the bank," I murmur. "She was a real doll. We met for coffee a few times, went to a movie. She invited me to her place. A little forward, but what the heck, right? We're sitting on her couch, necking a little. Part of me feels like I'm betraying. . . . Anyway, I manage to keep those feelings under control."

"And?"

"And so we go to her bedroom. And that's when I take my knife out. How do you think she reacted? This lonely professional lady who brings a man to her bedroom, only to have him ask her to cut him while they make love because that's what he's used to?" I straighten up and shake a finger in his face. "Sure, pal. It's a wonderful life."

I'm washing my face in the men's room. As usual, Fex's words crawl all over me. He thinks that once a man's been ground down to nothing, he's got a chance to build himself back up into anything, but I don't buy it. When a man's got nothing left, what's he supposed to rebuild with?

"Ward,"

It's Robin's voice. "Holy cow, Robin. You can't be in here."

"I don't care," she says. I wipe the water from my face, and when my eyes are clear she's standing close enough to kiss. "Ward," she says. "I think I. . . . I mean, you and I—"

I lick my lips. "Go ahead, honey. Say whatever's on your mind."

"Ward, I can't love anybody who's not Blake."

Do I see a tear in the corner of her left eye?

"It's—" I lay a hand on the side of her face. "It's okay. I understand."

"I care for you," she says. "I do. It hurts to see you suffer. I know it's been a long time..."

"It'll be soon, I'm sure," I have to whisper to her.

"Blake fed me last night," she tells me. "I know it's not the same, but maybe there's still some in my body. Maybe I..."

"No, Robin, I couldn't..." But even as I say the words, I'm wondering how it might be to have even a fraction of that taste, just a little bit to calm me down.

Robin pulls me into a stall. She's sitting on the toilet, pulling down her pants, her underwear. "Blake checks my body very thoroughly," she tells me. "He'd notice any new cut or scar. But today there's another way."

As soon as I can smell the blood, I'm on my knees.

6:17 PM

In the park. The sun's going down. I can't go home until she's up and out. For a while Robin's gift calmed me down. Maybe there was something in it. Maybe just the taste, the smell. I don't know. Whatever it was, it's wearing off. I can't keep my hands from shaking. And now that the sun's setting I have a feeling it will get worse. I always feel the cravings worse at night.

I walk past a half-collapsed swing set. The air's turning cold already. I wonder what's it like to get old? I had to stop seeing my brother decades ago. I picked a fight with him and ignored all the letters and phone calls and attempts to reconcile. I couldn't even go to his funeral.

I can't describe to you the taste of her blood, or the quivering high I get when its power rushes through my body. But that ecstasy isn't what I miss the most when she stops feeding me. It's not what I'm craving now. What I need more than anything is the feeling of her in me. When she gives me my fix, I can feel her in my veins. I can feel her touch, her presence, inside my body, wherever I go. She wears me like a glove, filling all my empty spaces, and I'm not alone anymore. And within her I can feel faint traces of all the lives she's tasted, echoes and slivers of memory and a sea of whispers.

But right now I feel nothing.

I'm back at my car, fumbling for the keys in my pocket. By the time I get home she'll be gone, and I'll begin the long lonely wait for dawn.

There's a flash of red in the corner of my eye. The setting sun reflecting off something glassy. I look in the car's side mirror and see someone sitting on a park bench,

holding something to his face. A camera. A long lens. Aimed at me.

I open the door, and suddenly I'm running. I push myself away from the car and I'm moving fast, not certain what to do. The guy on the bench is up before I've gone two steps. He was on his guard. I see blue jeans and a sweatshirt with the hood up. He's fast. He comes to the park's chain-link fence and, without stopping, clears its eight-foot height in a single jump like a track-and-field hurdler.

Somehow I clear the fence too, but I roll on my shoulder when I land and I come up stumbling. At first there's no sign of Camera Guy, but then something moves on my right. A door, the back entrance to some kind of warehouse, now slowly swinging shut.

Inside is a huge storeroom. Cardboard boxes and immense rolls of fabric stacked everywhere. Fluorescent lights, some flickering, cast pale light and gray shadows everywhere. There doesn't seem to be anyone around, but there are a million hiding places. I stop, close my eyes, try to listen for any movement.

I hear it just before I see it, a creak, and the sliding of cardboard against cardboard. I make a blind dive, and when the tower of boxes spills toward me I'm almost out of the way. The slap of the floor against my face is enough to make me shout, but I clench my teeth and keep quiet in case whoever's here doesn't know where I am.

I needn't have bothered. Camera Guy steps out from behind a stack of fabric bolts. My leg is wedged between a roll of tan and white striped canvas and a pile of huge wooden spools. I can see that Camera Guy is shorter than I realized, a kid maybe. Then Camera Guy pulls away his hood and I'm looking at Robin.

I try to pull myself forward. "Robin, I—"

"Ward," she says, squatting down to talk to me. "Please understand. It's Blake. It's what he wants."

"I'm... My leg..."

"He told me to follow you. Find out where you live. Make sure you're out of the way. Ward, he's moving against Theresa tonight."

I can't think. I don't know where to focus. The humming of the fluorescent lights. The hardened gum on the warehouse floor. Robin's tears, pouring down her face. She makes no attempt to wipe them away. I see the knife, an impossible gleam of steel lying at arm's reach, blocked from her view by a swath of fabric. I watch my hand, steady now, close around the handle, see the knife blur through the air and bury itself in Robin's belly.

I shove everything off me, and then Robin's body is in my arms. I can see her wound trying to close around the

knife. She's looking into my eyes as my fingers tighten across her neck.

"Don't even say her name, you whore. You're not worthy of it. You'll never hurt her. No one will. No one." I'm squeezing and squeezing and I don't know how to stop. Robin's eyes roll and glare, and her body thrashes beneath me, slick with blood.

I want to wrap my arms around Robin's body and rock her like a baby when it's finally done, but I've no right to do that. I close her eyes with my thumb and make a pillow for her head with my jacket. I allow myself to hold her hand, like we're sweethearts sitting on the back porch. I realize I'm humming "Stardust."

I'm not sure how I know Fex is standing behind me. Maybe I recognize his shadow. I wait a second before I say anything.

"Tell me again how blessed we are."

Fex's voice is slow and burdened. "One night last week I watched a ghost of light rise from a crypt," he says. "She looked at me, and for a blissful moment I dwelled in a city of liquid radiance. Last night I let a 200-year-old corpse drink blood from my anus." He scrapes a shoe across the floor. "I choose not to waste time wondering if the one is worth the other."

"Why did you put the knife there, Fex? I don't even care how you did it, . . . but why?"

He walks around Robin's body until I can see him. "Ward." He sits on the floor and puts a hand on my shoulder. "She wanted things to end. She didn't have the strength to continue, but she didn't have the will to make it stop."

"She—" It feels weird to be talking about Robin like she's not here. "She never said anything about this to me."

"She cared about you too much to burden you," Fex brushes her hair with the back of his hand, tenderly. "When Blake set her against you, she realized she could use the situation to bring the result she desired. She asked me to stand by and act if needed."

"I want to cry for her, Fex." I sniff, stand up and turn away from Robin. "But I guess I used up all my tears a long time ago."

"Ward," Fex says to me as I walk to the door. "I think you may be approaching a turning point. A chance to break away from your current situation."

"Go to Hell."

"Think carefully about your options," he calls to me. "Some of us share resources and information. If you feel it's time to move on, come see me."

It's nearly dawn. Maybe she's not coming home this morning. Maybe she has other places or other people like me to take care of her. No. Nobody has a connection to her the way I do.

This has to end. I can see that now. I can't go on without her, and I can't stand the idea of her going on without me. So the only solution is for both of us to go out together. I've rigged the cellar door. Even she won't be able to force it open. I've taken all the shades off the windows. There will be nowhere for her to go. In

her fury, she'll rip me to pieces just before the sunlight does its work. If I survive, somehow, I'll burn the house down around me.

I hear the front door open. I close my eyes.

When a minute passes and she hasn't come into the room, I step tentatively into the front hall. She's leaning against the doorjamb.

She's hurt.

The left side of her face and neck is ruined. The skin looks like charred meat. Half her hair is gone.

"They tried to burn me," she whispers, taking a step and grimacing in pain. She stumbles.

I catch her. "It's okay," I say to her. "I'm here."

"They tried to burn me. I can't, . . ." She falls to her knees.

I hold her upright. "You're going to be all right," I tell her. "I'll help you. Don't worry."

She's slipping out of her coat. She pulls away her tattered shirt. "I'm sorry," she tells me. "I don't know why I do the things I do to you."

"Quiet, honey. I'm here, princess." I stroke her hair.

"I know, . . . you must be, . . . needing this." She raises one hand, partially blackened and torn. I can see the bones in her palm. She scrapes one remaining, ragged fingernail across her nipple. A thick, dark teardrop of blood oozes from the wound.

"It's okay," I tell her, fighting back the tears. "It's okay. Didn't I promise I'd always be here to help you? Didn't I say I wouldn't let my little girl go through this alone?"

"I know, Daddy." She takes my face in her hands. "I know. Drink now. Just drink."

I slip the key to the cellar into her hand and push my lips against her breast.



INTRODUCTION

I had been hungry all the years;

My noon had come, to dine;

I, trembling, drew the table near,

And touched the curious wine.

—Emily Dickinson, “I Had Been Hungry”

The urge to sample the illicit is one of humanity’s strongest instincts, and from the Biblical Fall to a modern-day crack house, we see abundant examples of the price people pay for tasting forbidden fruit. Sometimes it’s a price willingly paid, other times, the cost becomes apparent only when it’s too late. And sometimes physical or psychological addiction overcomes reason, and the pain caused by indulging in the forbidden is discounted or even welcomed. For some, the rush of adrenaline and fear that comes with danger is indistinguishable from pleasure, driving them again and again to place themselves in jeopardy in pursuit of a dark delights.

Yet there’s something to be said for those who test the boundaries of human experience. They might be slaves to their own desires, victims of the consequences of their actions, addicts of whatever substance compels them to such extremes, but they have something to teach us. The lesson might be as simple as a warning to avoid the pit they’ve fallen into. Other times, their struggle to find a way back from unknown territory reveals much about the strengths and weaknesses of the human spirit. And sometimes those who cross forbidden borders return wiser, stronger and better able to help the rest of us navigate our own dark waters.

This book focuses on mortals who indulge in the grotesque and abhorrent practice of drinking vampire blood. The power of undead Vitae changes those who imbibe it into creatures called ghouls. A ghoul gains certain physical and mystical benefits from this practice, including a precarious eternal youth, but the price that’s paid is a steep one. Ghouls can be the subject of horrific abuse and degradation at the hands of their masters, and their supernatural enthrallment makes it difficult for them to

resist. The highly addictive nature of vampire blood adds another barrier to any ghoul’s attempt to change his lot.

Ghouls are a resourceful and enduring bunch whose struggles for survival, dignity and even freedom can enhance the stories your troupe tells in the World of Darkness Storytelling game. This book provides rules, story ideas, roleplaying hints and background material to enable you to use ghouls as antagonists, allies or even your own characters in your stories. It’s meant to complement and extend the information about ghouls found in **Vampire: The Requiem**. You’ll also want to consult the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for basic details about the Storytelling System and how to use it.

Setting

The stories generated by this book and its parent game, **Vampire: The Requiem**, are set in a place called the World of Darkness. It’s a setting that’s superficially similar to the world we live in — with the same history, geography, politics and cultures — but with two major differences. First, the World of Darkness is a place of dark mystery. It hides secrets and conspiracies of which most of its denizens are barely aware (if at all). The grim nature of this world is expressed both at the local level (alleys hold more shadows, town councils are more corrupt, potholes and condemned buildings are more numerous) and on a larger scale (wars are bloodier, crime is more rampant, secret societies keep unholy artifacts hidden for centuries).

The second distinction between our world and the World of Darkness is that its shadows hold real, honest-to-goodness monsters. The vampires that ghouls serve are undead horrors who prey on the living. Other supernatural creatures, including werewolves and ghosts, lurk

elsewhere in the night. That's not to say that these beings make their presence known to the public at large. Most people in the World of Darkness don't believe in such things, and will live their lives without getting more than a fleeting glimpse of what's out there. Nevertheless, they are real. Ghouls, servants to the Kindred, come face to face with supernatural entities that ordinary humans will never see.

Ghoul Myths and Facts

As with vampires, few mortals know the truth about ghouls. Here's a summary of the basic facts of ghoulish existence.

- **Ghouls are corpse-eating, cannibalistic monsters:** False. In some parts of the world, notably India and the Middle East, legends describe ghouls as humanoid creatures who dwell in caves and cemeteries, feasting on corpses and the occasional unwary traveler. But in the World of Darkness, the term ghoulish refers exclusively to humans who have been supernaturally transformed by drinking vampire blood. It's possible that such corpse-eating creatures exist in the World of Darkness, or perhaps the Kindred adopted the legendary term to refer to their thralls. In any case, this book concerns itself strictly with ghouls of human origin.

- **Ghouls are humans who drink vampire blood:** True. Not all humans who drink vampire blood become ghouls, however. The blood of vampires has powerful addictive properties, so any human who tastes Vitae craves more of it. Those who drink the blood of a given vampire three times become a thrall of that vampire. They regard that vampire as something between a best friend and God. It takes a specific act of will by that vampire, however, for the thrall to achieve ghoulish status. In game terms, only if a player expends a point of Willpower does the Vitae-imbibing mortal become a ghoulish.

- **Ghouls are mindless slaves of vampires:** False. As a consequence of repeatedly tasting the blood of their masters, ghouls are under the spell of the Vinculum: a supernaturally created emotional dependence. It's a powerful compulsion that makes a ghoulish utterly devoted to the master (also called a regnant), but that doesn't make the ghoulish incapable of independent thought. Situations can arise in which a ghoulish might act in contradiction to the Vinculum, particularly a ghoulish who has been severely mistreated.

- **Ghouls lose their abilities if they stop drinking vampire blood:** True. A ghoulish requires Vitae every 30 days. If that time period elapses and the ghoulish runs out of Vitae, he becomes mortal again. This means that ghouls can't use any vampiric abilities they've gained (though they'll regain access to those abilities if given a subsequent feeding of vampire blood). Also, while



vampiric blood halts the aging process, ghouls who pass the 30-day mark without Vitae experience a return to their true, chronological age.

How to Use This Book

This book gives you all the tools you need to make extensive use of ghoule characters in your Storytelling chronicles. It is a companion to both **Vampire: The Requiem** and the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. You'll need to be familiar with both of those books to use the Storytelling System in any case.

This **Introduction** provides an overview of the ghoule phenomenon and a summary of what's covered in the rest of the book.

Chapter One brings you the world of ghouls in detail. You'll find out how mortals become ghouls and how the human psyche is altered (and sometimes brutalized) by the ghoule experience. This chapter also explores how each vampiric clan and covenant tends to regard and treat ghouls. And this chapter describes variations on the ghoule phenomenon, such as ghoule families (ghouls who can reproduce, producing bloodlines of thralls), independent ghouls (ghouls without a regnant), and animal and plant ghouls.

In **Chapter Two**, you'll find rules for creating and using ghoule characters in your games. The chapter includes ghoule templates, examples of creating ghoule characters, new traits for ghouls and rules for ghoule families and creating mandrakes (plant ghouls).

Storytellers, you'll find **Chapter Three** particularly helpful. This is the chapter that advises you on the challenges and rewards of bringing ghouls into your stories. The chapter offers direction for using ghoule characters as antagonists or allies, as well as suggestions for handling player-controlled ghoule characters.

Chapter Four includes sample ghoule characters of varying degrees of power and experience. Use these characters as antagonists, allies, inspiration for your own ghouls or simply as supporting cast in your **Vampire** chronicle.

Ghoule families are the focus of the book's **Appendix**. In this section you'll find recommendations on how to design a ghoule family that matches the dramatic and logistic needs of your chronicle, as well as discussions of the many options to consider during the creation process.

Theme

You can use the information in this book to enhance and deepen the themes presented in **Vampire: The Requiem**. That game deals with the challenge of balancing vampiric urges against one's dwindling humanity. Ghouls face a similar dilemma, in that the demands made upon them by their masters and their

addictions often conflict with their sense of morality. But while a vampire's existence is something of a downward spiral, as his inner Beast inevitably gains more control over him, ghouls can move both forward and backward in relation to their darker side. In theory at least, a ghoule can abstain from taking Vitae and become mortal once more. In practice, achieving such a goal is a tremendous struggle, with the ghoule repeatedly gaining and losing ground.

Ghouls can also underscore the motif of stories told with the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Such tales center on mortals glimpsing dark mysteries and trying to cope with the implications. Ghouls are the lowest of the low in Kindred culture, which makes them good tools for slowly drawing characters into that nocturnal world. Ghouls can be puzzling adversaries who don't seem to fit any preconceived notions about the supernatural, as the ghoule concept just isn't as common in popular culture as vampires or werewolves. Characters who encounter a ghoule might have trouble piecing together exactly what they've seen, something that displays unusual abilities but seems quite human. A character who's "recruited" as a thrall of an unseen vampire might not realize what's happening at first, if the vampire so chooses. Ghouls are walking examples of the mystery, unpredictability and dangers awaiting those who ask the wrong questions or peer into the wrong shadows.

Mood

Ghouls live somewhere between the secretive, threatening world of vampires and the creeping dread experienced by mortals who glimpse a wider, darker world. They're privy to some of the secrets that hide in the night, enough to recoil in horror from what they're becoming and what their future might hold. But most ghouls also come to realize how much they don't know. The prospect that entities or phenomena exist that are more terrible than what they've already experienced can make ghouls think twice before they attempt to make changes to their own situations. Your stories can emphasize the terrors with which ghouls are well acquainted, the foreboding unknowns that surround them or a tantalizing mixture of both.

Inspiration

The ghouls described in the **World of Darkness** don't appear in literature and entertainment as such, but mortals enslaved to vampires certainly do. And the issues ghouls deal with — addiction, submission, thralldom — are universal. Here are some places to start if you're looking for concepts to include in your ghoule stories:

Ghouls and ghoule-like creatures are found in the mythology of many cultures, especially those of Indian or

Arabic origin. Usually these stories describe demonic, corpse-eating creatures, but perhaps it was the deranged behavior of vampire thralls that inspired such tales. In these stories you might find cautionary examples of the madness to which longtime vampiric thralls could descend.

Dracula, by Bram Stoker, and its multitude of film versions and iterations, are obvious examples, but they bear mentioning since they often include human servants under a vampire's domination (including R. M. Renfield). It's interesting to compare the different takes these stories offer on the vampire-thrall relationship. Sometimes the servant is a mindless slave, other times he's driven mad by the actions his master demands of him. (Renfield himself even tries to repent in some versions of the classic tale.)

Dark Shadows, a television series available on DVD and in syndication, is sometimes derided for soap-opera acting and dated special effects, yet it's great fun

to watch. The Willy Loomis character is a terrific example of a thrall who's desperate to hide his complicity with a monster, and at the same time does all in his power to convince his master to refrain from committing terrible acts.

The memoir *Permanent Midnight* by Jerry Stahl (and to a lesser degree, the film version starring Ben Stiller), depict the power of addiction and the nightmare of recovery. Dark and funny at the same time, it's a story that offers insight into how one might think and act under the influence of irresistible desires.

What's it like to be in love with a monster? *The Torture Garden*, a novel by 19th century French anarchist Octave Mirbeau, explores this question and reveals the intersection between atrocity, degradation and euphoria. For another example of subjugation chosen willingly, consider *The Story of O* by Pauline Réage.





bound in soul and blood

*"You want to write down everything about those first days.
Believe me. I thought I'd never forget, because those
first days with the Blood are...
unlike anything else. But they're a blur, now.
What I really remember is the last few days
of that first month — the way my blood felt stale.
Brittle. Even when the blood's new
and sweet and wonderful, I can remember
that feeling in my gut. The fear that I'd lose it.
The blood."*

Chapter 12
One

*Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us — if at all — not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men
—T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men"*

A ghoul is a human being who drinks inhumanity. Alive and yet not aging, free from vampiric hunger and yet a slave to a vampire's whim, he must balance the shuffle of mundane existence and the Danse Macabre. He experiences both supernatural and mortal conditions at all times, creating a situation far beyond the human one, yet so firmly rooted in it as to outstrip any horror a vampire might feel. Unlike the Kindred, ghouls are still fully capable of feeling, and those emotions are heightened by the awesome power of vampiric Vitae. The Damned walk in mimicry of pain that truly is nothing more than an echo. The triumphs, the loneliness, every last emotion is a hollow rendition never truly owned. A ghoul, on the other hand, has not been robbed of this essential, human characteristic. If anything, the Kindred are secretly jealous of their servant class. At least a ghoul can truly savor the exhilarating highs of supernatural existence as well as the wretched torment. A ghoul's life is pain, and that exquisite pain becomes a religion.

To the Kindred, the formation of a servant class is both a necessity to them and a gift granted to a lesser being. The vampire who wishes to remain connected to the mortal world, to have an actual sway during daylight hours and a realistic touchstone whence to glean information can try to rely on normal mortal employees or dupes, but creating a ghoul makes this connection much more concrete. It rarely occurs to the sadistic, twisted creatures of the night that the blessing they bestow upon their property might be anything less than a grand gesture of favor, though not quite as significant as the Embrace. From the moment a mortal tastes vampiric blood, he embarks on a journey that pales in comparison to that of, say, a heroin addict. The need to maintain the blood connection as well as hold on to the Disciplines that come with the bond is so overwhelming, the ghoul allows himself to be subjugated without question. Eventually, after careful cultivation on the part of the Kindred, a ghoul is so deeply dependent upon the regnant that he has no way out. Blood and power come with the satisfaction of his regnant whereas extreme humiliation and sadistic acts accompany displeasure. Over time, however, the two melt into one masochistic dance that comes to mean the same thing.

Not every moment is misery for a ghoul, though. If such were the case, ghouls certainly wouldn't be long

for this world. While ghouls are a servant class, they are still gods among mortals, with Disciplines that effortlessly conquer the frailty of the human condition. Not banished to eternal night, able to operate with many of the same skills as a vampire and immortal as long as vampiric blood continues to be a diet staple, there is much to be said for straddling the line.

The Ideal Ghoul

Mortals selected by a vampire for servitude are never healthy, whole individuals. The people who would appeal to a cult or alternative religion are the same whom vampires select for servitude. They are broken human beings for whom the inevitable plunge into insidious perversity is not so unimaginable. They are so insecure that being picked out as something singular or special gives them enough of a rush to be willing to suffer the outrages of subjugation. It is an all-consuming erotic bond that transcends normal concepts of love or sexuality, though many mistake it for as much. Being ushered into the world of slavery to a vampire shatters so much of the human spirit and then muddles it with unnatural sensations of deepest affection. It is best (and strangely poetic) to select from those souls already bent toward such a lifestyle.

For those who think they would strain against the bonds of such slavery, the transformation from normal human being to a twisted creature of flagitious tastes might seem inconceivable. How does one go from the normal nine-to-five white picket fence missionary sex American dream to sleep-deprived paranoia where participating in public orgies with a cheese grater as an accessory or sex toy is status quo? Part of it is environmental and the rest is simply the effect of a monstrous lifestyle tainting perception. After spending months or years under the thrall of a vampire, seeing the violence and perversity inherent to the Requiem, the conditioning upon the mind creates a fertile ground for the imagination to run amok. The ghoul's perspective shifts completely left of norm. Even if they yearn for the blessed monotony that used to fill every day, ghouls know that the dull, mundane existence of normal life wouldn't satisfy them. Eventually, ghouls find themselves not so much being dragged, kicking and screaming, into alternative behaviors but instigating them. Once the bar has

been raised and new doors have been ripped open leading to wild experiences, simple pleasures of mortal flesh fall far short.

The transformation of perspective can be torturous for any number of reasons from religious to the moralistic, or even cultural. The simple knowledge of such a damned creature as a vampire is more than enough to haunt a particularly delicate soul. Blood curdles in agony and shame for the deaths the ghoul witnesses, or perhaps even participates in. The helplessness of watching her own life destroyed by the demands of her regnant overwhelms her. Even the passage of time wreaks havoc on the sentient mind, as everything she held dear in mortality dies or fades into obscurity — which is something she shares with her vampiric master. Yet this corrosion is twice the excruciating experience for the ghoul, as she is still alive and still planted among the living. A vampire can find some twisted solace in the fact that he is dead. A ghoul is still alive regardless of the great gulf between her and the mundane world, and often that little bit of commonality is enough to drive her mad with longing.

In spite of it all, the ghoul learns to love every heady moment. He is a member of a clandestine club that gets all the inside jokes and sees the big picture that those walking around during the day in a haze of fairytale bliss miss. A ghoul's blood sings with a power that intoxicates, perhaps painting lips with a smug smile during daylight hours as the ghoul walks among the frailty of unblessed, unwitting humanity. Even among their own, ghouls create a hierarchy based on the power and status of their regnant, as well as the tasks with which they are trusted. In the end, however, it is ridiculously inconsequential, especially to the Kindred who catch wind of it. A slave with supernatural skills is still a slave.

A New Life

The hardest adaptation in the beginning for a ghoul is maintaining the sham of a normal, unaltered life. Every ghoul had a previous life — a job, a family, friends and a normal routine. The addition of a second life is no less of a strain than it would be for a stripper, hooker or drug dealer. In this case, there is no out. The ghoul is bound to this new fate with the potent addiction of blood and the threat of death for any failure. Some secretly hope to be given the Embrace, but with no choice in this new arrangement, the ghoul must make it all work.

To the casual observer, the initial indications that something is amiss — the lack of sleep, erratic behavior, becoming withdrawn, a vagueness that seems secretive when questioned — are easy to pick out. The symptoms mirror that of a drug problem or alcoholism. The health issues that come with drinking dead blood, even tainted blood, only further these notions.

For those ghouls with involved lives, the adjustment is heavily taxing. Trying to serve a regnant while also seeing to one's own obligations is problematic where it's not outrageously difficult. Relationships fall to the wayside or are riddled with drama. Either way, these relationships are doomed to fail no matter how hard the ghoul works at them. The necessary secrecy of a ghoul's alternative activities alienate the mortal side of a ghoul's life. Wives, husbands or lovers perceive infidelities, and are not truly wrong. A ghoul has no more free time than he did as a mortal. His friends soon disappear or perhaps try to intervene should they suspect he has a problem. Family members, no doubt, are likely to pry, depending upon how close a relationship they maintain with the newly endowed ghoul. All of these factors spiral downward into a hellish alienation, if not a horrid revelation of what has actually come to pass. Some ghouls find that they need to relocate from the outset or disappear from their previous identities just to continue to survive while maintaining the obligation to their regnants. Eventually every ghoul's lack of aging forces him to remove himself from his former life so as not to draw unwanted attention to his regnant. As such, part of the journey into a damned abyss is the total ruination of a ghoul's world as well as the effects of those losses upon his personality as time goes by.

Blood

Blood plays a central role in the Requiem. It is no less important and paramount to existence for ghouls than it is for vampires. It is the elixir that keeps them in stasis, forever frozen in time, just as it is with their regnants. As the decades march on, there comes a point where it is the only thing that keeps them alive. Without it, time quickly catches up with them. Regardless, dead blood introduced into a human body creates a chemical change, and the body has to adapt to its invasion. Anything that so drastically affects the chemistry of the body automatically creates a craving in its absence, resulting in an all-out addiction.

The mindless need for blood is a point of control for the regnant and a source of madness for the ghoul. A petulant ghoul trying to resist the disgrace of becoming the monster that he perceives himself to be is able to hold out for a time, but eventually the agony of withdrawal brings him once more to his knees. For a time shortly after the feeding, he feels exhilarated, but the potency always fades away to a dull ache that slowly progresses into a gut-wrenching pain that can only be quenched with Kindred blood.

Psychologically, the power of maintaining the Vinculum also has an effect upon a ghoul. The taboo of drinking blood, the rush that comes with the Kindred Vitae, can turn into any number of mental fixations

and problems. During daylight hours, when a ghoul's regnant cannot see what he's doing, he can engage in all manner of faux vampirism, drinking mortal blood in mimicry of the Kindred, hoping to slake the aching need for more. Many vampires dole out only enough to maintain the Vinculum and prevent the ghoul from aging, always leaving him yearning for more whether he wants to or not.

The proffering of vampiric Vitae could also be the moment of renewed "love" for the devoted ghoul when the regnant shows how much the ghoul matters. In doing so, he reinforces what is already a deeply moving act. Thus can contact and personal interaction with a ghoul's regnant become as much of an addiction as Vitae.

Conversely, it is not unusual for a vampire to keep a stable of ghouls for the purpose of always having Vitae readily at hand. (It isn't always wise to feed from the populace, after all, as doing so taxes the Masquerade or can violate any rules set forth by the local Prince.) The erotically frightening sensation of having one's blood siphoned off to strengthen the regnant, combined with the dread of being drained completely or even the tease of the Embrace toys with a frail human mind. For the more sensitive ghouls, just being used as a meal is a difficult thing to mentally process.

The History of Blood

Ancient cultures have long revered and worshiped the power of blood. Blood has been consumed, spilled and worn for its presumed life-giving powers. Most religions ascribe some sacred or profane significance to blood, such as the modern blood-drinking ritual that persists in Christian communion. The sacrifice of living beings (mostly animals, sometimes human) has always had a foothold in faith, whether this sacrifice is literal or symbolic. For some, such as the Aztecs, Mayans and Zapotecs, the sharing of life force with the universe was all important. Blood sacrifice, especially human sacrifice, was seen as human actions intended to keep the cosmos in balance. It was as much a part of everyday existence as anything else. The Mixtecs regularly used blood from the ears and tongue as part of their rituals, resorting to the extreme of heart sacrifice for only the most important occasions. In short, there was a time in our history when every religion on Earth involved some form of blood worship or sacrifice. Eventually, though, the ancient Jews began to ban the use of blood as a ceremonial activity, beginning the slow elimination across the board.

While not nearly as widespread as in ancient times, blood worship still exists in such religions as Santeria, vodoun and Palo Mayombe. In these modern times, moralities have shifted, as have sensibilities. The use of blood is a taboo, and the ritual sacrifice of even the slightest animal is widely condemned. Yet the power of blood cannot be denied.

Blood Pathology

For a ghoul, who still retains the status of biologically functioning life, feeding from his regnant is a problematic and often dangerous event. A ghoul could very well be taking his life into his hands should his regnant have fed from mortals carrying various deadly, blood-borne diseases. Even Vitae itself can inflict a measure of shock to the system. The first thing a thrall must contend with is the simple fact that vampire blood is cold, unless the regnant has fed recently.

More serious than the repulsiveness of drinking blood are the diseases that it can carry. The two most dangerous blood-borne diseases in the United States are HIV and hepatitis. There are three types of hepatitis, A through C. One can recover from either of the first two in three months and six months respectively. The third, hepatitis C, is the most common blood-borne disease in the US. It is the single largest cause of liver transplants and therefore is deeply concerning to a ghoul. HIV attacks the immune system, and while a ghoul can carry the virus for years before HIV sets in, it will kill her as surely as any mortal once it does.

It is important to note that Kindred are immune to mortal disease but with the more invasive diseases transmitted by bodily fluids such as HIV, a vampire can become a permanent vessel. Traditionally, the Kindred were not so concerned with those careless few who were carriers, but as mortal society's medical sophistication refined, it became a necessity to nip such situations in the bud quickly lest such individuals become a danger to the Masquerade. Indeed, some strict Princes consider the act of spreading diseases an offense punishable by Final Death. Reportedly, those adept in the arts of Theban Sorcery can cleanse a carrier of disease, but a rumor isn't a very solid defense for a vampire accused of being a plague dog.

Other health effects of the ghoul condition include sleep deprivation and impaired or diminished memory and cognitive skills brought on by exhaustion. Ghouls often find themselves unable to remember things properly, or they have a very hazy ability to recall past events. They are often confused about time lines or series of events, even forgetting important details if not mixing them up with unrelated situations. For this reason, an effective ghoul needs to be a meticulous note-taker, lest he suffer the wrath of his regnant. This symptom of the ghoul condition makes some ghouls appear addle-pated when in fact they are just tired.

Another major danger to a ghoul with sleep deprivation is the increased risk of injuries from minor accidents. As such, ghouls often come across as ungainly, lacking in grace or just plain fumbling. The most exhausted ghouls can even have a battered appearance from the myriad bruises or cuts garnered from every day existence.



Extreme sleep deprivation in long stretches (about 100 hours without sleep is a good threshold) brings about hallucinatory spells. Such spells are more horrific for ghouls than for normal mortals, though, in that the surreal horrors that plague a sleep-deprived ghoul actually exist. When a ghoul starts seeing rats peeking at her from under furniture and scrambling up her pants legs, is she hallucinating or is her Ventrue regnant trying to tell her something? Such hallucinations bring about a brand of danger that might end a ghoul up dead by his own hand in the attempts to battle these unseen demons. Any limitless number of strange occurrences can come to pass with such a handicap.

The Vinculum and Sex

The Vinculum creates a false sense of adoration so deep that most ghouls mistake it for love. As is typical of such situations, sex often becomes an issue. Some ghouls might actually be foolish enough to try to consummate their feelings with their regnant, only to be swiftly dealt a contemptuous and outraged rebuff complete with a punishment severe enough to forestall such scandalously disrespectful actions in the future. Such an unadvised ghoul could then be the lucky recipient of a partial castration, the removed bit of which he must then compliantly wear in a less than comfortable spot until such time as the regnant forgives his transgression. A clever vampire can conjure up a limitless

number of hideous but effective punishments in this same vein with the slightest effort. No doubt, a number of ghouls bear the war wounds of these erstwhile advances.

But love is the most potent naturally occurring mind-altering influence that exists. Under the influence of love unrequited in silence or openly sneered upon, already warped thought processes take an even more nauseating turn. It drives people to wild actions. Serial killers are undeniable examples of humanity warped by drought of affection or rebuffed love by a parent. Spree killers and assassins sometimes dedicate their deeds to would-be lovers who spurned them. Sometimes, one who is scorned acts out in the form of cutting rituals that scar his inner thighs or arms. Others engage in highly ritualized BDSM activities performed in secrecy or in clandestine meetings in private dungeons. Insanity isn't always a single drop down a cliff. This obsessive love already occurs in everyday life with these very results. Under the thrall of the Vinculum, rationale is even harder to get a foothold in and the reactions are far more insidious.

Unable to find fulfillment in the usual way without the object of his affection, a ghoul's sense of sexuality slowly alters. Either sex becomes complicated, perhaps even a form of punishment for the inability to deserve the one he truly desires, or sex is replaced entirely with

another activity, perhaps even a strange fetish that is charged with the same energy.

The human mind processes the most bizarre and innocuous of activities into erotic moments. Sitting under the table at Thanksgiving as a child, staring at all the aunt's feet in heels and stockings can turn into a full-blown foot fetish 10 years down the road. Being kicked in the groin on the playground by the little red headed girl can one day become a twisted love of ball-bashing. Watching a film in which an attractive character is captured and tied up for human sacrifice can easily seep into the imagination, rooting itself as the beginnings of a love for bondage.

Of course, violent or scarring acts can also render themselves into twisted sexual manifestations. A man whose wife cheats on him repeatedly with other men can find himself oddly aroused by the idea of his being so worthless in bed that she needs to sleep with another man. A child who is beaten hard can equate that act to love and require it as an adult to get off or just feel wanted. In such a way, a classic submissive or masochist is born.

In this same tradition of environmental conditioning, a ghoul, too, is transformed. A ghoul's regnant can become so furious with him that she neatly ties up his genitals with an industrial-strength thread in an intricate and tight webbing. As dispassionately as she brushes her hair, the regnant attaches the ends of the thread to a door-knob and slams the door shut with preternatural speed, leaving the ghoul to writhe in agony. In the thrall of his regnant's blood, the ghoul suddenly finds his own sexual conditioning. Maiming his own genitals repeatedly by masturbating with toothpaste or sandpaper now fills him with satisfaction, echoing the memory of his experience.

Living in the shadow of the Damned and their wild and violent world, ghoul minds suffer a perspective alteration that forces them to view everything around them in an entirely different light. It can be both horrifying and fascinating at once. For the highly religious, the hapenstance can tax, destroy or even pervert their faith. Plenty of cults or extremists have devolved into sex acts or self-mutilation, murderous deeds, even suicide in the name of a god. All are brought about by a dire stress that warps the mind into believing that this truly is the path of redemption or the only recourse left. Some find that they are latently masochistic or sadistic. This descent only gives them free reign to indulge in their true nature. It is a form of freedom unlike anything that mortal society has allowed them. It quiets the storm of their previously broken lives. In this sick way, some ghouls are better off in their estimation than they were previously.

The change in perspective affects everything the ghouls sees or experiences. Everything from movies to TV to literature can be translated in an entirely different fashion. For example, horror films or any form of violence might illicit arousal rather than disgust.

Everyday objects become more useful or easily sullied in usage. A walk through an office-supply store can be a torture-monger's candy store, rendering various types of binder clips into sweet instruments of erotic pain. Acts that had been inconceivable as a mortal become second nature to the ghoul. Scandalous conversational topics seem less so, or they become delightful for their shock value. The norm for the ghoul has the capacity to traumatize the mortals with whom he interacts.

For many ghouls, mortals become nothing more than ants in a child's sandbox to be tortured, taunted or manipulated unwittingly as they are too tiny or insignificant to see the big picture. The temptation ghouls face to use their power in order to be feared or adored like a god is strong. For the sadistic ghoul, having human experiments to play with is a siren's call with a delicious payoff. Some consider it their obligation to shield humanity from the monstrosities of the night, even going so far as to prostrate themselves to the cause of mortal protection in all aspects when not in the service of their regnant. The circumstance of becoming a thrall to a vampire is an extreme example of stress, and in that crucible, the unthinkable can become compulsory.

The Disciplines that Kindred blood grants ghouls do not manifest automatically into fully realized powers. Often, the ghoul suddenly finds that he is able to do something in a fluke of circumstance, unable to control the ability and then requiring some sort of training to put the pieces together. In such cases, it can't truly be done alone. The ghoul needs his regnant to guide him in the mysteries of preternatural skills. While the regnant might very well want her ghoul's skills to be fully realized for the purpose of being a foot soldier, she might be the sort to use these newfound gifts as a carrot for various reasons. It is an intricate dance of subjugation and tutoring, skillfully rendered so as to nurture the powers inherent in her creation yet not bring about so much spirit as to endanger herself.

Objectification

Objectification is a struggle for the new ghoul, as having free will is a thing of the past. For some, that grates deliciously; for others, the humiliation is too much. Not everyone processes it as suddenly being something special or having a sense of belonging. Not all broken beings are so far gone as to be willing to debase themselves or suffer second-class citizenship even to creatures as awesome and terrifying as vampires. Modern times are not such that slavery of any sort still exists. Entitlement is alive and well, especially in the Western world, and opinions are thought of as a God-given right to be dispensed at any moment it occurs to a person. As such, the average,

mouthy individual is still from a culture where being silent or compliant without practice is rare.

The regnant herself might compare the creation and breaking in of a ghoul to the experience of training a dog, but ghouls rarely wish to think of themselves in such terms. A few ghouls revel in the submissive degradation of servitude with full abandon — docile in public, compliant to a fault and all but running themselves into the ground with the single desire to please the master. Those prideful ghouls that repress the classic submissive hallmarks or find shame in the shocking pleasure it brings, harbor that perverse desire in secret.

In Kindred society, ghouls are property. They have no rights and are not given any credit for having thoughts worth suffering audience to. It is a dangerous faux pas for a ghoul to look directly at a vampire or speak out of turn. In fact, even mingling at a social function is downright scandalous, even to the most socially lax of the Kindred.

This in and of itself is difficult to swallow in modern times, but vampires are creatures bred upon the rituals of times long gone. To a vampire, objectification is beyond the mere ownership and subjugation of mortal flesh for errands. Ghouls can become furniture for special occasions or on a regular basis. With a little creative body-piercing and a set of hanging crystals, a marvelous human chandelier complete with candles held in outstretched arms might be a point of momentary amusement for guests. Glass tables can be especially glorious with a human pedestal to hold it steady.

Acting out definitely results from such oppressive and humiliating experiences. These manifest themselves in ghoul interaction with the mortal world but most palpably among the imagined caste system of the ghouls themselves. Those servants granted the most leeway or blessed by more potent blood lord it over the newly created or less trusted ghouls. Being seen as a piece of furniture at an occasion is guaranteed to engender a level of derision from one's peers.

This stratification is very intricate among the ghouls. In many ways, it is an unspoken situation that becomes an awareness with time and then an allegiance with the growth of their own status. Ghouls have their own self-created pecking order that rules how they deal with one another in subtle yet palpable ways. In social situations, the interactions are very hard to detect, being as subtle as classic Victorian discourse. It might be compared to an afternoon of high tea among British ladies with the wives of the business class mingling with the titled. While the derision is real, it is very finely honed and impossible to truly call anyone on. The result is the same, however. A person knows full well when one has been put in his place, even if it cannot be precisely articulated in so many words. The fine art of polite insult is favored pastime in many cultures.

When ghouls work together at the behest of their regnants, this self-created subculture is most obvious. Those who consider themselves higher up on the imagined ladder attempt to orchestrate while delegating the more menial of tasks to those thought to be beneath the rest of them.

Conflict easily arises between those ghouls who realize that the entire institution is a bunch of rationalized garbage. They violently butt heads with those who feel they have the most at stake, meaning the greater amount of status. It makes for very complicated intrigue or politicking among the ghouls.

In the end, only to the ghouls does any of this truly matter. In the minds of their regnants, this pretentious play at importance has no meaning and is not to be tolerated. As such, those to whom it is vitally important carefully guard the entire structure.

Not all ghouls are drawn into Kindred society, however, or are even aware that any others exist. These servants live in an entirely different level of hell. They have no one with whom to commiserate. They have no frame of reference for their experiences. They live entirely within the confines of the sinister relationship of Kindred and servant, as well as the twisted shadows of their own thoughts. A ghoul in this situation is far more fearful, not sure when or where his regnant might pop up.

At first the solitary ghoul might try to test the bonds of his slavery. Anticipating as much, a wise vampire has ways of keeping tabs on such ghouls so as to give the impression of a godlike awareness. It would not take much to establish dominance with a newly enthralled ghoul. The Disciplines at the Kindred's disposal are beyond the wildest imagination of the average mortal. Witnessing a vampire cross a crowded room in the blink of the eye or shrug off a wound that would cripple or kill a mortal goes a long way toward instilling the proper reverence in a mortal. It isn't all horror and heart-stopping fear. The addictive blood as well as powerful Disciplines doled out sparingly as tempting rewards are often enough to ensure abject loyalty.

Nothing exists for these ghouls but their regnants and the will of the regnants. The ghoul's days and nights are filled with the tasks dispensed to them. Interactions between ghoul and regnant are dreaded yet craved, too infrequent yet haunting every other waking moment with promise. Nothing fills the mind of the solitary ghoul as much as the vampire who created him and the influence this new life has on everything else. This intense focus is far more alienating than being drawn into the fold is for other ghouls, which is far more difficult to suffer.

The Reward for Service Rendered

Ghouls can learn most of the Disciplines available to Kindred. Because they can learn them, however,

does not mean that every ghoul has any proficiency with the arts of the Damned. Chapter Two discusses which Disciplines ghouls can learn and the systems for doing so. Here we discuss the spiritual and psychological ramifications of a living human wielding the powers of the undead.

The Physical Disciplines

The first Disciplines that ghouls learn are the physical ones: Celerity, Resilience and Vigor. Frankly, they are the simplest to comprehend. Any ghoul can understand moving faster or becoming stronger. These Disciplines merely take existing human capabilities and amplify them. Of course, as these Disciplines increase, they grant capabilities that are impossible for normal mortals, but by the time a ghoul is capable of dodging bullets or lifting cars, she has probably long since passed the stage where her conscious mind tries to deny these abilities.

The biggest danger in the physical Disciplines comes from using them by accident. Ghouls can spend Vitae instinctively, before they learn to fully control their power. A frightened ghoul with a Mekhet regnant might flee from an assailant and outrun the cars driving on the street next to her for a moment. A Nosferatu's ghoul in a fight might accidentally crush her opponent's skull with a single blow. In any situation in which a vampire runs the risk of frenzy, a ghoul might accidentally activate a physical Discipline. (While a system isn't really necessary, you can apply the same mechanics for Kindred frenzy if you'd like — p. 178 of **Vampire: The Requiem**.)

Animalism

Especially for vampires who create ghouls from animals as well as humans, having a ghoul with some proficiency in Animalism is invaluable. (See Siobhan the Bat Lady on p. 132 for an example.) Some people have a better facility for this Discipline than others, however. Many people, especially in “civilized” countries, forget that animals are living creatures, seeing them as toys or resources instead. Learning Animalism, then, is difficult and jarring for this sort of person, as she communicates on a basic, instinctive level with an animal, and is forced to confront the fact that the beast before her can feel pain, pleasure and fear, just as she can. More than one ghoul has bonded with her pets after learning Animalism (sometimes inappropriately).

For those people who are better suited to this Discipline (typically those with dots in the Animal Ken Skill), Animalism is a bona fide thrill. Training a dog to respond to a certain command is one thing. Actually *communicating* is something quite separate.

Auspex

The first dot of Auspex allows for superhuman senses, which might seem like a boon (and, frankly, a

lot of fun). The problem comes with control. Vampires can control the very blood in their bodies as a consequence of their undead condition, but ghouls must learn to control their bodies in ways that no mortal was ever meant to. Auspex, therefore, can activate itself whenever a ghoul feels curious or interested, and certainly whenever he feels frightened. Suddenly being able to hear any sound in a building or smell the sweat on a date's body can be a shock, and it could even inflict a -2 distraction penalty in a combat situation at the Storyteller's discretion.

Crúac

Learning any Discipline distances a ghoul from the rest of humanity. Learning blood magic actually erodes that ghoul's ability to deal with people and can even drive her mad in time. This isn't why the Circle of the Crone usually forbids teaching it to ghouls (the reasons are entirely spiritual), but it's a solid reason.

And yet, ghouls *can* learn Crúac. It doesn't happen often and when it does, the ghoul and her regnant are usually burned to death. (Rumors persist, though, of ghouls who were granted the Embrace after showing a great facility for Crúac.) Once ghouls wrap their minds around the notion of performing magic, they don't suffer any particular problem performing the rituals by dint of the fact that they *are* ghouls. Occult knowledge, it seems, isn't affected by the undead condition. Acolytes occasionally wonder if this means that normal mortals, with no Vitae at all, could perform Crúac, but these questions are taboo as far as the Circle of the Crone is concerned.

Dominate

The ability to glance at another person and command his very mind is an extremely dangerous one. Ghouls of the Ventrue often gain some basic facility with Dominate, but their regnants sometimes apply their own mind-bending powers to hide the ability to use the Discipline. Experienced Kindred know that constantly using Dominate can result in megalomania or other forms of insanity, and the victim of repeated use of the Discipline can become groveling and debased, bitter and resentful or simply lose her personality entirely and become little more than an automaton.

That said, many ghouls apply Dominate without even knowing it. Any imperative statement can become charged with power, regardless of how important to the ghoul the statement really is. For instance, a mother might tell her child to “shut up” and then wonder why the boy doesn't speak for the next week. Innocuous phrase like “get lost” or “bite me” likewise become problematic when an inexperienced ghoul with Dominate is involved.

Majesty

Similar to Dominate, but dangerous for different reasons, Majesty is typically taught to ghouls who are intended by



their Daeva masters to act as bait. Like Dominate, a ghoul might activate this Discipline accidentally, but often the only result is that someone notices and fixates on him. Depending on where the ghoul is when this happens, though, this can result in the police taking an interest in the ghoul, in a violent criminal stalking her, or simply some unwanted advances at a time when she would prefer to be alone.

Of course, many ghouls use Majesty to manipulate those around them (once they discover they can control the effect). The problem is that Majesty doesn't bestow the same degree of control as Dominate, especially not early on. A bank manager might honestly want to help a ghoul who comes to him for a loan, but he isn't going to rob his own bank to do it. The best the ghoul can hope for in such a situation is special consideration, but getting it means that the ghoul has been noticed, which many regnants prefer to avoid.

Nightmare

Becoming supernaturally attractive isn't a terribly uncommon fantasy, but becoming frightening isn't high on many people's list of priorities. That said, people who have been abused or ignored throughout their lives might find the ability to scare the hell out of others with a glare to be exhilarating. Losing control of this power, however, can result in mass panic. One person

flees the ghouls, screaming, and then someone else imagines that he has a gun, and soon the spooked herd breaks in stampede.

Obfuscate

Vampires sometimes ask ghouls to act as spies, and arrange for them to learn at least the fundamentals of Obfuscate. Doing so is a gamble, because even with the Discipline, a ghoul might be discovered, and then the vampire has alerted his target that not only is he under surveillance, but his watcher has the resources to teach a ghoul the secrets of remaining unseen. (The ghoul rarely survives being discovered, of course, but that's only a problem for the ghoul.)

But what does Obfuscate mean for the ghoul? The first two dots of the Discipline don't allow for remaining unseen at all, merely for sleight of hand and disguising her status as a ghoul from those Kindred inclined to look closely. As such, Obfuscate is difficult and time-consuming before the greatest amount of utility for a ghoul becomes evident, so only vampires with a great deal of time and patience teach it. A ghoul being taught Obfuscate is either a valued agent... or a well-trained sacrificial lamb.

Protean

Gangrel ghouls normally learn Animalism and Resilience and leave the shapeshifting to beings better suited to it. That said, sometimes a ghoul is deranged, open-

minded or just *strange* enough to learn Protean, and sometimes a vampire is morbidly curious as to what a mortal with the Discipline could do.

The first dot of Protean grants a ghoul the ability to detect vampires via the Predator's Taint, but it also places the ghoul in constant danger of being torn to shreds by any vampire who crosses her path. Gangrel occasionally teach this power to ghouls who are meant to patrol their hunting grounds for any intruding Kindred, but the "power" is more often viewed as a detriment that a ghoul must endure if she is to learn how to truly change her shape. Since most Gangrel are unwilling to impart their secrets to other Kindred, much less lowly ghouls, Protean is probably the rarest Discipline for ghouls to know (outside of Crúac and Theban Sorcery, of course).

Theban Sorcery

As with Crúac, ghouls are forbidden from learning the holy arts of the Lancea Sanctum, as the spiritual precepts of the covenant state quite clearly that humans are inferior to vampires. The very fact that humans *can* learn Theban Sorcery, though, is a truth that the Sanctified would rather not face. If any ghoul is found to possess working knowledge of Theban Sorcery, the best that ghoul can hope for is death. The Sanctified usually ask for a full confession first, though, which can take weeks to complete. Whatever a ghoul has suffered before, these "confessions" make it seem pleasant by comparison.

Ghouls by Clan

While a vampire's clan is much less a determining factor of her personality than her covenant or simply her experiences, one can draw some generalizations with regard to the five major lineages of Kindred and their uses for ghouls.

Daeva

Beauty, intelligence and confidence may all be attractive traits in a retainer, but to the Daeva they are, at best, secondary. The one feature that figures most prominently in a ghoul's service to this clan is *corruptibility*.

On one extreme, these servants are drawn into the wretched mire of their regnant's excesses. Willingly or not, they are conquered, eventually becoming little more than tools of vice. These hollow souls breathlessly submit their bodies to the satisfaction of endless, unspeakable permutations of lust and willingly expose themselves to their regnants' bone-shattering tantrums. Many see their extended victimization as an indication of the regnant's favor, wearing the resulting scars and bruises with pride.

On the other end of the spectrum are those rare ghouls brought into service precisely because they will not indulge these whims. Although the Vinculum binds them, their unnatural love prompts them to defend the virtue of their regnant and work to prevent the descent into

inhuman decadence that plagues the clan. These ghouls shelter the Daeva, often imposing a rigid system of admission to her haven — even, in some extreme cases, to her person. Needless to say, this circumstance can lead to a seriously strained relationship between ghouls and their Daeva regnants, occasionally approaching the brink of explosive release. The abyss of frenzied indulgence that follows when this line is crossed is utterly disastrous for all involved, and the hapless ghouls who bring it about are almost always destroyed. On rare occasions, a Daeva who recovers her senses after such excesses Embraces her mortally wounded servant to reward his efforts (or to avoid taking responsibility for his death).

Enabling the Daeva's vices or working overtime to prevent indulgence, ghouls in service to this clan are involved in desperate, demanding work from dusk until dawn. Neither occupation allows for much of a life beyond service. Exhausted ghouls often find themselves forced to abandon their former lives, leaving friends, family and careers behind without warning. The ghouls of the Daeva might enjoy a life of glamour, but such lives are almost always tortured ones. Luckily, they have their regnant's company.

All Daeva ghouls pay strict attention to their appearance, making sure that it perfectly suits the needs and desires of their regnants. Of course, these needs and desires are as diverse as the Daeva themselves, so the ghouls come in a staggering variety of forms, including cultured, flawless beauties, scarred hard-bodies and ultramodern club freaks. Many bear coded marks or tags of ownership such as distinctive ribbons, pins or tattoos.

Because the selection criteria for Daeva servants tend toward aspects of personality more than skill or experience, any walk of life can produce a worthy ghoul. No matter who a mortal is in his everyday life, he might attract the eye of a Daeva, and that's all it takes. Sometimes, the most satisfying results can be derived from most surprising sources. A completely unobtrusive office worker might be hiding a seething mess of perverse urges that are just perfect for a particular vampire. That old woman in the retirement home could bear a striking resemblance to a guilt-ridden Daeva's disciplinarian mother. No one who satisfies is off limits. Daeva do, however, favor physically robust ghouls. Stamina is a valuable asset when serving the clan.

Sample Concepts: corrupted prom queen, eager punching bag, fawning admirer, stern father figure, slave

Gangrel

Given the Gangrel's relationship with their Beasts, they are the least likely to create ghouls as simple servants. Indeed, many of their ghouls are not even human. Instead, they often gift favored animals with Vitae so that they may walk the night as companions, sharing a basic trust that only the Vinculum can guarantee.

Some Gangrel choose animals as these long-term “partners,” not only for company, but also to learn their ways in the wild. Once imbued with the mystical connection of the Vinculum, these creatures often accept the Gangrel as one of their own and are not likely to flee or bristle under observation. These same animals also become willing vessels for the Gangrel’s own consciousness, serving as more susceptible subjects of Animalism. But the relationship bears a price. Ties of Vitae to the Gangrel gradually warp the nature of any animal, cursing them with bloodthirst and diminishing all but their predatory habits. The creature soon becomes more like the Kindred, losing touch with its own world and providing little in the way of insight. Instead of the vampire learning any sort of purity from the animal, the animal learns true bloodlust from the vampire.

Those rare humans who serve as ghouls to the Gangrel are often little more than obedient camouflage for their predatory masters — window dressing to help put prey at ease. They might be employed to keep a haven occupied in the daytime to keep inquisitive mortals away or to distract and disorient potential troublemakers. Gangrel prefer to recruit these ghouls as surreptitiously as possible, often choosing recluses and other solitary folk so as to minimize the disturbance among the local mortal herd. Most Gangrel retainers are able to drop everything and disappear at the instant they enter service.

Many Gangrel ghouls are free to rest or engage in daytime pursuits of their own choosing, though they are always expected to be available for duty. Because of this relative freedom, Gangrel ghouls tend to develop an intense, genuine loyalty to their masters rather than a sick, sycophantic relationship.

In general, Gangrel ghouls have a hard, quiet edge to them. They’re only really approachable when employed specifically for the purpose of attracting prey. They rarely pay much attention to grooming, choosing instead to concentrate on deeper aspects of the self. Animals in service to the Gangrel are well-fed predators, almost always noticeably robust in comparison with their non-ghoul counterparts.

Sample Concepts: meditative guardian, stoic gas-station owner, streetwise squatter, trailer-park weirdo, weathered sportsman

MEKHET

To serve the Mekhet, one must often show a willingness to learn the truths that most mortals dare not acknowledge. The urgent, ceaseless pursuit of knowledge and experience — preferably unhindered by moral or ethical concerns — is an attractive quality in Mekhet ghouls, many of whom serve double duty as both consultants and snoops. Some are sent out into their regnant’s (or others’) domain with instructions to gather

information, returning for regular, scheduled reportage. Those who serve well are rewarded with Vitae and exposure to occult or otherwise secret information. Those who don’t are likely to simply vanish one night, falling victim to their swift and shadowy masters. Others keep close to their regnants, practicing forbidden techniques and pursuing gruesome avenues of investigation, pushing the quest for understanding further than rational mortals would dare. Bloody occult practices, vivisectionist investigation, psychological torture, necrosexual habits — no subject is taboo to the servants of the Mekhet, and methodology is limited only by the humanity of the regnant. Some Mekhet ghouls begin their work with innocent curiosity and find themselves drawn ever deeper into a horrifying wash of inhuman ideas.

Many servants of the Mekhet find themselves engaged in frequent discussion and comparison of technique with their regnants, and they learn to argue their points honestly instead of searching for the answer that will most please their masters. Since the truth of a ghoul’s words, indeed, sometimes her every thought, is laid bare by judicious use of Auspex, sincerity and intellectual integrity are well-advised at all times. Most ghouls do not see this fact as an invasion of privacy. On the contrary, they come to appreciate the intimacy that arises from serving a psychic master, and they relax into a relationship that seems entirely devoid of pretense.

Unfortunately, this relaxation carries a price. As the typical Mekhet ghoul comes to terms with her true feelings and motives, she has a tendency to treat those features of her personality as *faits accomplis*. A faithful servant of the Mekhet might accept her jealous urge to gouge out the eyes of anyone who looks upon her regnant, and take opportunity to act upon it without consideration. Another might acknowledge his grisly blood addiction as an aspect of his being and make no effort to overcome it. All too often, Mekhet ghouls never bother to hide or resist inadvisable impulses, simply rationalizing them as honest expressions of their inner nature. This means that they are among the most actively, openly depraved of the ghouls, least likely to suppress the baser parts of themselves.

Mekhet ghouls usually bear the marks of tireless effort (not to mention bouts of paranoia): bloodshot eyes, mussed hair, perhaps a wracking cough. Some wear badges or uniforms to indicate affiliation with academic or athletic societies, while others dress as unobtrusively as possible, the better for hiding among mundane mortals in pursuit of a goal.

Sample Concepts: groundbreaking martial artist, insomniac forensic investigator, manic sound engineer, obsessed lab technician, tormented painter

NOSFERATU

Servants to the most horrifying Kindred of all, Nosferatu ghouls tend to be an unsettling breed themselves. The



Vinculum is their carrot, but terror is the oft-employed stick of the Nosferatu, a terror that leaps and bounds beyond any simple, natural fear. So motivated, these ghouls are raw, desperate souls, ready and willing to go to any length in hopes of escaping the wrath of their masters. Nothing is beyond them, because nothing can be worse what lies in store if their regnants are disappointed.

Contrary to expectation, many Nosferatu ghouls actually make very amiable companions. In fact, quite a number are employed simply because they are friendly, outgoing and altogether enjoyable company. All the better to assist in luring unsuspecting mortals into the clutches of the Nosferatu, and all the better to escape notice when assisting in the disposal of victims. Only the truly talented can maintain the façade of social grace in prolonged service, though. Most begin to crack under the pressure, becoming desperate and insincere in their social dealings. Those who do are bound to fail their masters, and in failing, to draw the very punishments that they dread. Some Nosferatu ghouls overcome this eventuality by willfully exposing themselves to truly awful stimuli, learning to appear outwardly calm while screaming inwardly. Others become master manipulators, turning strange behavior back upon their observers and inspiring guilt instead of suspicion. A rare, generally short-lived few become “fear addicts,” craving the rush of adrenaline with which they’ve grown familiar and taking increasingly foolhardy risks.

Nosferatu ghouls often become abusive, turning the fear and pain they experience back upon their own friends and loved ones. They feel powerless, so they must assert dominance over someone, often failing to understand or anticipate the cost.

Nosferatu also often create mandragora (see p. 59). Some claim that properly tended mandragora make excellent disposal systems, while others acknowledge that their creations are just another tool of shock and horror. Regardless, an unsuspecting mortal who wanders into the ghoulish gardens of a Nosferatu might be trapped, restrained and prepared for feeding with relatively little expended effort.

Most mortal Nosferatu ghouls take great pains to appear “normal” and unremarkable. The paunchy, middle-aged man humming to himself as he trims his hedges is a much more likely ghoulish than the filthy homeless man screaming curses at passersby. A few are exceptionally good-looking, but they rarely stay that way for long as the stresses of service take their toll. In general, Nosferatu ghouls are affluent (or at least self-sufficient) and comfortably out of the spotlight. Many are suburban wage slaves or inner-city homeowners with convenient access to the regnant’s domain of choice.

Sample Concepts: avid gardener, charity organizer, crippled ex-model, murderous suburbanite, retired couple on the patio

Ventru

The Ventru surround themselves with the best of the best in all things. Should they expect to be satisfied with anything less in a servant? To be a ghoulish in service to the Ventru, one must be immaculately dressed, impeccable in manner and absolutely discreet. To be imperfect is to be inferior. To be inferior is to diminish the regnant. No Ventru would allow such an embarrassment.

Every ghoulish in Ventru employ provides an exacting service, whether it is keeping house, conveying the regnant around the city or dutifully eliminating threats. They take pride in their own achievements and the foundation of dependable strength those achievements provide for their regnants. No assigned task is worth any less than one’s very best effort. Total fulfillment of duty is total fulfillment of the self. A ghoulish in Ventru service should be an ideal extension of his regnant. These ghouls take great pains to appear dignified, well groomed and well appointed. Uniforms are common, and extensive training shows itself in everything from manner of speech to posture. Ventru often choose as ghouls those mortals who are already experienced servants, so as to minimize the extra training required. Military backgrounds are appreciated as well, since they generally indicate both fitness and a willingness to take orders.

Ventru ghouls are full of surprises, though. Since their regnants are so focused on achievement, it never hurts to have an ace or two up one’s sleeve. Many of the (seemingly) harmless maids and butlers in service to the clan are trained in techniques of assassination, extortion and espionage, all the better to tip the scales in the Ventru’s favor.

Those with the skill and fortitude to maintain a spotless record of service to the Ventru, whether they are traditional servants like valets and secretaries or less visible types, find that they are valued above all others. Often, they are rewarded with access to their regnant’s incomparable resources, wielding significant power in their master’s name. Sometimes, they even earn the Embrace. Quite an incentive, but then again the devotion to service and constant attention to detail required to garner such lofty rewards are monumental.

If the ghouls of the Ventru share one weakness, it is that their obedience is directed by ambition as much as devotion. Whenever something goes wrong in a Ventru household, the ghouls sometimes scramble to avoid attracting blame when they should be working to fix the problem. Such misapplied attentions are rarely public knowledge, though. Most Ventru ghouls know better than to show discord outside the servant’s quarters.

Sample Concepts: cautious stable-hand, faultless majordomo, inscrutable bodyguard, observant maid, pistol-packing chauffeur

Ghouls by Covenant

No covenant eschews the use of ghouls. Thralls are an unavoidable part of the Requiem, whether they are chosen as slaves or protégés. Each covenant has a different way of dealing with its thralls, however, so what we present here are generalities. Regardless of covenant, a vampire is an individual and can largely do as she likes with her ghouls. Still, the covenants come with built-in philosophies on how to handle all aspects of Kindred existence, including how to choose, use and discard ghouls.

THE CARTHIAN MOVEMENT

Carthians are ultimately undecided regarding the creation, existence and function of ghouls. The politically charged covenant is a relatively new one and hasn't yet chiseled its precepts in stone. Still, the regnant/thrall bond is something of a "hot button" issue among the vampires of the Movement. After all, the status quo among Kindred sees humans as cattle, playthings or slaves. Ghouls are simply an extension of that idea for most, acting as supernaturally gifted cattle, playthings or slaves. The Carthians, however, challenge the status quo, sometimes to achieve specific measures, other times simply to fly in the face of stagnation. Moreover, they see themselves as potentially bridging the gap between Kindred and kine. How do thralls fit into that worldview? Are ghouls the key to bridging that gap? Or are they instead remnants of an old paradigm, acting only as illustrations of outmoded caste systems and blood-compelled fealty?

MEANS TO AN END

In point of fact, many Carthians rebuke the very concept of the regnant/thrall relationship, finding it representative of an ugly class-based system. It's for this reason that the Carthian Movement, already small, features fewer ghouls than any of the other major covenants.

That said, the Carthians are hardly unified in their beliefs. Many Carthians reject the creation of ghouls, but others still favor fostering thrall-based relationships and concede that the end justifies the means. It all comes down to individual Carthians and the status of the Movement in individual cities or regions. The Prefect of one city could make the creation of ghouls anathema, but the Prefect of another might not establish a rule either way.

When a Carthian does choose to foster a regnant/thrall bond, little in the way of any firm blueprint exists for what the covenant wants. It's almost entirely up to the preferences of the individual vampire. Carthian Kindred do seem to gravitate toward a few different types of ghoul, however.



The first type is the politically motivated mortal. For the most part, mortals in the World of Darkness are as faithless in their politics as they are in their religion. Most people are ignorant of political issues, preferring instead to remain numb and uninvolved. Those who *are* politically aware tend to enjoy a self-interested perspective. The individuals that call to Carthian vampires are those people who espouse different, often radical, political agendas, and who are willing to take action to make such agendas a reality. Frankly, the actual political leanings matter little. Carthians are interested in wild-eyed liberals just as much as hard-line conservatives. Anarchists, libertarians, green-thumb eco-warriors — it doesn't matter, as long as they are willing to challenge dominant worldviews with a combination of philosophy and action.

Another type of Carthian ghoul prospect includes people who are already in power. Those Carthians who truly espouse an “end justifies the means” philosophy are the most likely to approach these mortals in a frank attempt at manipulation. Carthians recognize that the world is a mortal one and that vampires are a distinct minority. To achieve certain goals and make gains, mortals must be manipulated. Yes, it's unfortunate and perhaps enforces the status quo, but again, sometimes a Carthian understands that some concessions must be made in the quest for change.

Many younger, inexperienced Kindred of this covenant attempt to make ghouls of prominent figures, such as mayors, celebrities or corporate CEOs. Doing so brings a quick and often painful lesson down upon their heads. First, a vampire is foolish to think that he was the first to have thought up such a plan in the first place. Some vampire out there has already either done it or rejected it for good reason. Second, it's a good bet that claiming such a figure of significance will upset the balance and earn the Carthian quick enemies. Many covenants invoke a mostly unspoken *laissez-faire* approach to many prominent figures. Not only does fettering such a popular mortal one way or another upset whatever balance the covenants have achieved, but doing so is a subtle, inevitable breach of the Masquerade. Making the mayor or some pop star into a thrall is simply too obvious. Better instead to make thralls of those who have *some* power rather than *all* power. Directly manipulating the head of a particular hierarchy is perilous. Offering power in return for servitude to someone further down the ladder, however, is a more covert and acceptable way of gaining an influential thrall. Such choices might include county commissioners, building inspectors, club owners, even shipping clerks. All of these choices allow Carthians some access to what they want. The county commissioner might not be able to make citywide decisions, but not only can he influence them, he has access to important data and documents. A building inspector might not have his finger in every pie, but the one sphere of influence he has is considerable and allows him into protected areas easily, as well as to potentially condemn buildings.

UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

Thralls of Carthian Kindred don't often have shared experiences. Ultimately, for most ghouls, life in service to the covenant becomes an issue of feast or famine. Some Carthians seem to want to give to their thralls the same degree of freedom and choice that they themselves so desire. Among these ghouls is an unwritten “do what thou wilt” attitude, allowing them a surprising degree of latitude. Unfortunately, not all ghouls are interested in such latitude. For one, Vitae becomes less accessible. Not only is the vampire choosing to keep the ghoul free of his influence, but by their nature, most Carthians are consistently occupied. Moreover, any feelings of skewed love or blood addiction can't be fulfilled or even tasted when the regnant is unavailable. More than one Carthian has let his ghouls alone long enough to cause the bond between them to wither and die.

On the other end of the spectrum are the vampires who refuse their ghouls any freedom at all. Of course, such a refusal often comes in a very utilitarian guise, and the ghoul is told that to achieve one's goals one must make the appropriate sacrifices. Thralls in this position rarely have a life of their own, and they often have their own identities drowned in whatever “cause” their regnants are pursuing that week. The covenant's prevalence of Mekhet also means that many ghouls suffer near-constant manipulation. These Carthians often micro-manage their ghouls' lives to the point of insanity. Ghouls suffering such manipulations at the hands of their Carthian regnants often begin to question what's real and what's not as their minds are pulled this way and that by Discipline use.

Prudent Carthians recognize the pragmatism of having ghouls, and they find a balance between allowing them needless freedom and crushing them with control. Ideally, thralls wouldn't be bound and manipulated, but as the saying goes, Rome wasn't built in a day. (Nor did it collapse in one, some Carthians add.)

PRAGMATISM

Other Kindred use ghouls as cattle, pets, servants and functionaries. Ever seeking to buck trends and kick the status quo to the curb, the Carthians use ghouls in myriad ways in direct opposition to the slavery they see in other regnant/thrall relationships. Where others use ghouls as pack mules or sex toys, the Carthians attempt to maintain some kind of skewed partnership with their thralls, an attempt that inevitably fails due to the hollow nature of the relationship. Can one truly be a friend or partner to someone who unswervingly follows your most debased command? Many vampires, even Carthians, suggest that the thrall isn't innocent here, having entered into the bargain with some selfish motive driving him to accept the Vinculum. (Of

course, this isn't necessarily true, but it's an easy way to turn the blame away from the regnant and put it upon the ghoul.) Regardless of whether or not the thrall knew the true reality of the bargain, it is still improbable that any kind of authentic relationship can form from this mystical bond of blood.

Kindred of the Movement come to understand this over time, though how this changes the function of the ghoul is up to the individual vampire. Many, after realizing that the bond is ultimately a false one, give up on their thralls, allowing the Vinculum to lapse. Others go the other way, hardening their hearts against the reality of the relationship and treating their thralls much like any other vampire.



INSURGENT CELLS

Not all Carthians are possessed of patience or wisdom. All in all, many vampires of the Movement are young, passionate and brash. Those who are able to look past such impetuosity, however, have found a curious and somewhat unprecedented social model that serves as an unusual function for the covenant's ghouls. Ghouls are arranged secretly in localized cells. The term "secret society" would be applicable except for the fact that such an order rarely extends past the borders of a city or domain. The thralls populating these cells are everymen, for lack of a better term. Common, blue-collar individuals who would generally slip under the radar of most Kindred if only because carpenters, housewives and warehouse workers are so low in the pecking order to warrant little to no attention.

These "commoner" thralls are given as much power as the Carthians are willing to grant, including Disciplines, information on the local power structure for both mortals and Kindred and even specialized training such as computer hacking or lock-picking. Such groups act more or less like insurgent or terrorist cells. One cell does not know of the next and probably knows next to nothing about his fellow ghouls. These thralls undermine the political and social configuration of a city's Kindred through both covert subterfuge and overt violence. Anything goes in regard to what the cell is asked to do. It might organize a union protest, thus stopping work on the Invictus Prince's new pet project. Members might hack into the wireless network of a prominent Ordo Dracul member or help distribute propaganda to an isolated group of Lancea Sanctum novitiates.

Some particularly zealous Carthians use their cells for violent purposes. Should the Movement feel particularly persecuted in a domain or end up as a constantly oppressed scapegoat, its members might resort to strapping explosives to cell members in an attempt to blow up the Sheriff's limousine. The Carthian party line doesn't *generally* support such extremism, but every bushel features one or two bad apples.



As mentioned, some Carthians choose ghouls specifically for their placement in the mortal world, so to speak. Some go for the big fish (mayor, chief of police, city celebrity); others wisely choose less visible but equally influential candidates (members of the zoning board, health inspectors, reporters). For instance, a member of the zoning board could introduce a vote to change the zoning of an area from commercial to residential, thus overturning an out-of-the-way casino planned as a cash cow by Invictus interests. Such pawns might also serve as spies. The reporter, for instance, has access to a number of places by virtue of having a press pass, and he can also gain a wealth of information from a global informational database such as LexisNexis.

Of course, some Carthians violate the interests of their peers and use ghouls as the sycophantic abuse victims that some Kindred expect them to be. Others prefer to create ghouls and leave them with no function, and some avoid creating ghouls altogether. The Movement's treatment of thralls is analogous to its political policies — scattered and without any such methodology taking prevalence.

AS GOOD AS IT GETS

The benefits of life as a ghoul within the Movement are a mixed bag. As the years pass, a vampire's predatory instincts deepen, and the Man dwindles as the Beast grows. Fortunately, the Carthian Movement is populated predominantly by neonates and young ancillae. Ghouls tend to be treated better by the simple fact that few regnants within the covenant have gone far astray from their Humanity. They still remember what it was like to live and breathe. While few regnant/thrall relationships could ever be called "friendship" or "true love," relationships within the Movement are probably as close as it gets. Not only do the vampires recall their fleeting humanity more clearly, but their adherence to new and revolutionary political systems (particularly ones interested in equality and the link between Kindred and kine) also inspires a leniency that other covenants wouldn't dare adopt. Still, Carthians must question the relationship that comes with the bond, knowing full well that the union's intensity is largely artificial, spurred on by hunger and addiction. Is such a model of interaction desirable or acceptable, or is it a damnable endeavor?

Regardless of whether a regnant considers his thrall as a partner or as a pawn, that thrall ostensibly enjoys a degree of freedom unseen by other ghouls. The Carthians tend to keep a very long leash on their thralls, allowing them to have friends, family or jobs, all in an effort to maintain their humanity. This is advantageous in theory, as ghouls are not restricted or enslaved as such. It's also frustrating for some, because ghouls do not gain easy audience with their masters, or have easy access to Vitae, Disciplines or the object of their attraction — the regnant herself.



CIRCLE OF THE CRONE

Thralls of the Circle of Crone, typically called “votaries,” are worlds apart from ghouls in service to other covenants. To them, the Vinculum is a tie to very real dark gods, to powerful mystical energies, to true pagan grandeur. Ghouls of this covenant are adherents, worshippers, even ritual participants. Time and practice twists them into maladjusted zealots. Some are eventually chosen to join the ranks of the Circle, whereas others are graciously damned to a life of constant sycophancy.

ACCEPTING THE MYSTERY

Ghouls of the Circle differ from the thralls of other covenants because they learn considerably more about the covenant in the beginning, even prior to becoming thralls.

Part of what attracts a mortal to the Circle of the Crone is the engaging and persistent “mystery” of the group. Admittedly, this quality appeals to only certain types of people (self-professed pagans, the obsessively curious, schizophrenics), but to those people, the covenant represents a kind of affirmation of the magical reality that they have secretly suspected. The Circle isn’t necessarily revealing a whole *new* truth to these converts, but instead only deepens the story, growing the mythology out of what was already believed true. These people are already willing to accept hidden truths or a secret metaphysical reality shrouded in a pagan worldview.

Socially speaking, the concept of joining a cult is alluring to some. These individuals are allowed access to secrets, gaining entrance to some abstruse inner circle of people purporting truth. Ultimately, even those who aren’t so keen on the pagan ideals become zealous if only to remove the stigma of being a social outcast.

For as much as potential thralls learn, however, they’re still kept in the dark regarding the reality of the Circle and its Acolytes. Potentials might be aware that they could become part of some pagan circle, but they don’t necessarily know that it’s a *blood* cult. More importantly, when they finally do learn that blood is intrinsic to the group and its rituals, they’re still kept ignorant of the fact that vampires not only exist, but also control the cult. Yes, the drinking and sharing of blood is made apparent, but rarely does a vampire reveal her true condition. Instead, the passing and drinking of Vitae is explained away as a sharing of power, or as a metaphorical ritual implying a sanguine offering to dark powers. Some Acolytes explain the truth of the situation just before the third taste of Vitae so that a thrall is made aware of his final choice in this matter. Others of the covenant feel that such power cannot be chosen, but instead can only be forced outside one’s own locus of control. They choose to keep

future ghouls completely ignorant until the time in which the Vinculum firmly takes hold.

When seeking a votary, a vampire of the Circle likely looks for a curious combination of both inner strength and obsequiousness. While those traits are typically opposite, they can be found as the core values of potential zealots. Zealots remain strong in their convictions, but their convictions are driven by a need to serve. Such is the nature of what the Circle seeks from its thralls.

HOW MUCH DO THEY KNOW?

Votaries know very little *truth* about the covenant. They are initiated into some of the core concepts of the group, to be sure. For instance, all ghouls of the Circle are taught that creation is the crux of all things, and that through tribulation comes illumination. For all intents and purposes, however, votaries are necessarily below the uninitiated “chorus” of the group (meaning those vampires not-yet-Acolytes). Votaries are allowed to take part in some of the lesser rituals or more common holidays, but are never granted access to any of the Circle’s secrets, great or small. Crúac, as well, usually goes completely unmentioned, though there is no reason a thrall *can’t* learn the secrets of blood magic.

Ultimately, it’s important to know that while all ghouls are loosely familiar with the overarching covenant, most believe that they *are* in on all the truths, and that those truths indicate the presence of scattered blood cults and dark gods. They are unlikely to know how far the Circle extends, for while the covenant remains unconnected from city to city, it still maintains a global presence. Such ghouls are likely to think that the cult they belong to is purely a local phenomenon. Only later, with age, experience or the Embrace do votaries grow to learn the breadth and depth of the Circle of the Crone.

STUNTED CREATION

Creation is power, say the Acolytes. The act of conception and nativity is impossible as a vampire, rendered permanently unattainable by the Embrace. Still, the Acolytes are not hindered by such limits. Instead, they strive to push past it and manage some kind of creation, such as gardens, animals, art or architecture. Some feel that such creation and invention is hollow, however, fueled purely by ennui. Such Acolytes take a more literal view of the concept of creation, and instead seek to come as close to human conception as possible. In doing so, they create others either through the Embrace or by making thralls. Since the act of the Embrace is forbidden, creating ghouls is a far more accessible route.



Therefore, ghouls are perhaps more significant in the eyes of Acolytes than to vampires of other covenants. Thralls to other Kindred might be seen as servants, or worse, beasts of burden. In the Circle, the Acolytes still believe that votaries are unformed and inferior as creatures, but they are more akin to children than fools. Children start off fumbling but have the chance to grow, to experience pain and suffering, and to eventually enter into an act of creation themselves. Votaries are considered children by their Acolyte regnants.

Ghouls are not treated any better in the Circle than they are in other covenants, however. Yes, some Acolytes treat ghouls more respectfully, even reverentially, but another core tenet of the covenant comes into play and can make a votary's life very difficult, indeed. That concept suggests that enlightenment is gained through tribulation. All creatures are weak and fallible. The only way past such frailty is through pain and suffering. Such suffering comes in many spheres — social, emotional, physical — but no matter the shape, pain is the crucible in which a being's core persona is formed. So, the Acolytes do their level best to bestow misfortune and difficulty upon their ghouls, all in an effort to enrich their existences and illumine their souls. Some within the covenant use this precept as an excuse to cause pain unto others, but most Acolytes are just as willing to create difficulty for themselves as they are for others.

The regnant is responsible for his votary, so he is also responsible for his votary's enlightenment. What form this enlightenment takes is up to the Kindred. Physical pain is an easy and popular option. Some seek to cause temporary pain (lashing with a whip or running a ghoul through a gauntlet), whereas others prefer to cause lasting pain in an effort to see how well the votary can push past lingering difficulty. Lasting pain might be incurred through breaking the bones of an important limb or possibly sewing the votary's mouth shut. Pain isn't the only choice for invoking tribulation, and some even consider it unfashionable. Some Acolytes find it far more interesting to cause some manner of social or emotional pain. The ghoul might be vocally degraded and insulted on a day-to-day basis, humiliated in front of other Circle members. Or his loved ones might be tortured or harmed in some fashion instead, which is either videotaped or performed directly in front of him. (Particularly cruel or "enlightened" Acolytes might force the ghoul to commit the horrid acts upon his loved ones.)

One method that is gaining some notoriety within the covenant is a survival test that loosely combines physical, social and emotional suffering. Thralls are let loose in the wilderness for a predetermined period of time (a week is common). They are given nothing to help them, and are sometimes delivered into the hands of Mother Nature much how they were born — naked and covered in blood. If they



survive, they are worthy. If they perish or go mad during their blood-soaked exile, it's regrettable but such are the ways of the gods. Those ghouls who purport to have learned something during the journey are considered destined for greater things within the Circle. Ghouls who learn how to kill animals (or one another) for food, or who perhaps return with a deeper understanding of the ineluctable cycles of life and death, are quietly noted and watched for a potential Embrace later down the line.

INTUITION

Acolytes tend to differ on the function of votaries. That difference actually spawns from the fact that many within the covenant feel that ghouls shouldn't be bred for function at all. Acolytes who claim as much don't feel that the covenant is best served by such a detached and utilitarian mindset — leave such icy pragmatism to the prigs of the Invictus.

Circle members of this opinion create thralls partly because it helps give them power, according to covenant's pagan principles regarding creation. Mortals are made votaries within the Circle for little other reason. From there they become companions, pets, ritual participants, even lovers (though true "love" rarely enters the picture). These Acolytes don't choose a mortal based on any kind of skill set or potential function. Their choice of an individual to become a votary is one that is altogether more intuitive, more personal, based on emotion and "feeling" than anything practical. Whatever happens from that point forward is an organic development. While the Requiem puts the Kindred outside the natural order, at least such development harks back to a more natural progression. It is a luxury afforded to the thralls, according to their Acolyte regnants.

Other Acolytes choose mortals based solely upon their potential efficacy within the Circle. They hope that their choices reflect ability, that the mortals chosen make a functional fit within the group or at least to the individual vampire. Whether it's a tough body, strong mind or some other requisite criterion, the votary is chosen to perform some particular duty or task.

Most prominent tasks relegated to votaries are the menial ones associated with the various rituals and ceremonies of the Circle. Vampires perform such grunt work if necessary but prefer to leave such chores to the votaries. Thralls may be required to entice mortals (or kidnap them) for blood rituals and human sacrifices. Votaries may also be required to fetch, or keep an inventory of, prominent ritual objects and reagents. (Unlucky is the ghoul who mistakes a jar of cow's gall for one filled with a mandrake's lacrima.) All manner of menial tasks may be relegated to ghouls: collecting and storing various blood types for various rituals, going into the wilderness to find specimens, even feeding and caring for the Circle's many pets and gardens.

BEASTS OF THE CIRCLE

The Acolytes are the most likely Kindred to create animal ghouls. Beasts play small parts in many pagan traditions, symbolizing primal nature and existing without a need for mere humanity. Moreover, witches have the custom of using creature "familiar," animals that act as spiritual touchstones and beastly servants. As such, many Acolytes choose animals as ghouls, often their first act of creating a thrall.

Hounds and cats are typical animal thralls, but some Acolytes prefer more exotic beasts. Owls are particularly popular, symbolizing both the Crone herself and her esoteric wisdom. Hares are also common (representing fertility), as are foxes (cunning) and serpents (wisdom). Occasionally, a member of the Circle attempts to make a dangerous predator her thrall. Creatures such as bears, wolves or any of the "big cats" are sought after as predator thralls. More often than not, though, attempting to engender such a relationship ends in the vampire losing hope, or a hand.

Acolytes are also prone to creating mandragora. For one, the mystical mandrake tears are used in a number of Circle rituals. But more importantly, plants are symbols of fertility and creation. Fruits represent the yield of copulation and are often used in sacred sexual rituals within the covenant. Thorns draw life-giving blood. Leaves of different plants can be used to cure diseases or kill as poisons. Plants symbolize that constant life-and-death cycle, and all the better to have them living ceaselessly on as mandragora.

See p. 107 for information on animal ghouls, and p. 59 for mandragora.

One thing that separates Circle votaries from ghouls of other covenants, however, is that they are considered for more important tasks, as well. Votaries are often chosen with an eye toward an eventual Embrace into the Circle of the Crone, implying that not only is the ghoul better than an average lackey but that the votary will be subject to a number of tests and ordeals to determine his true worth. As such, Acolytes are willing to give prominent ghouls more important tasks. Votaries may be allowed to scout out new locations for cult temples, or might even be allowed to hunt for potential votaries or Kindred to bring into the Circle. A votary, even one who has performed only drudgery for his regnant, might one night be asked for his advice on some semi-important matter. (Such a question is likely to be couched in ambiguity so as not to give away any unnecessary covenant secrets.) Ostensibly, the highest task a ghoul can be asked to perform is to head up, or even to establish, one of the Circle's many mortal blood cults.

Of course, not all thralls are exceptional or considered for a higher station among the Acolytes. Some ghouls are boxed into an endless life of menial servitude. Those who offend the Acolytes or reveal an ineptitude regarding the Circle's pagan ideology have it even worse. These votaries often end up as mere objects, literally acting as perhaps a table or a chair. Some of these lesser ghouls end up as humiliated and abused sexual servants. Strong but foolish thralls end up as studs, ghouls forced to impregnate other ghouls past countless bloody miscarriages in the hopes of finding that *one* connection that allows a true thrall lineage to form.

DANCE OF THE DARK GODS

Probably the chief benefit for votaries of the Circle of the Crone is that they were chosen because of their beliefs. The Circle allows its ghouls to practice those beliefs (provided they are appropriately colored by the teachings of the covenant), and moreover, gives them the tools and encouragement to be devotees in some form. While some are expected to be slaves or servants, the majority of covenant thralls are allowed a measure of freedom and free-thinking that other covenants might not permit. Yes, pain and suffering are critical parts of the deal, but most ghouls are able to look past that and accept that they have been given a place among the "true" gods and goddesses — monstrous as they might be.

Of course, Circle thralls are also encouraged to explore the limited powers available to them. They are allowed to learn and use various Disciplines and are actually taught how best to use the vampiric Vitae that is given them. They aren't told to hide their powers, and moreover, the covenant encourages its ghouls to use them to gain power over other mortals. They may not be Kindred, but votaries are still made to understand that they are better than mere mortals, and are connected to something infinitely more powerful than those blind and fumbling sheep.

A more abstract reward expressed to Circle thralls is "love." While the bonds formed by the regnant/thrall relationship tend to be either completely hollow or otherwise twisted, that doesn't stop the Circle from calling it "love." Acolytes tell their thralls that they love them and deserve love in return. Thralls are often pushed to label the intense feelings as such, and while a ghoul's regnant might be her master, she might also feel that he is father, brother and lover. While what results is rarely anything beyond the bloody bonds joining a cult leader and his sycophantic adherents, ghouls are still able to count this connection as an "advantage" of sorts. The sensation might be empty and without merit, but that doesn't stop them from pursuing the illusion.

Invictus

Mortals are the key to power in this world, according to the Invictus. The covenant doesn't see them as equals. Its perspective is a narcissistic self-assurance that even six billion humans can't equal a single Prince of the First Estate, and that is because people don't *have* power, they are merely the *key* to it. Mortals are like money, bullets or livestock. They are resources to be used and controlled.

This attitude clearly pervades the way that the Invictus sees and deals with ghouls. Not only are thralls not considered equal, they don't even have the *potential* (as ghouls) to be on the same level as the Kindred of the Invictus. They are the serfs and vassals of this feudal faction, never allowed to rise above. Ghouls help their masters achieve power, but they are never meant to taste it themselves.

Subjugation

What, in the eyes of the Invictus, makes a mortal a good thrall? Alternately, what attracts a human to becoming a ghoul for a vampire of the First Estate?

Ghouls are largely chosen for their submissive tendencies. Key to the covenant's attitude toward thralls is that they are to respect their masters, offer themselves completely and know their place in the hierarchy. Humans who are brash, confident or egomaniacal do not make proper ghouls for the covenant. Not to say that some vampires of the Invictus don't relish the act of abusing such a person into surrender, but most simply prefer to start out with humans who already know their place. Submissives, conformists and those of negligible self-image all make appropriate thralls, for these people act ostensibly as servants in their everyday lives. They are the abused housewives serving brutal husbands, the addicted runaways serving their habits, the civil servants clinging to the bottom rungs of the ladder. They are the perennially downtrodden, the terminally subservient.

Invictus regnants offer potential thralls a curious and somewhat ironic conundrum. They offer them a "special" life, but that "special" life isn't much more than an endless stretch of addiction and subjugation. Yes, it's unique in the fact that thralls gain access to a supernatural world and are ultimately set apart from the rest of humanity, but that doesn't mean the cost truly matches the reward. Still, such a thing appeals to many mortals, even the parts of it that are seemingly at odds. Those submissive individuals without confidence see an opportunity where others might see a road to ruin. They get to be a part of something special, something different, and while the price may be exorbitant, it's worth it to some just to have a taste of the extraordinary. The irony is that, while these potentials are consciously interested in being somehow exceptional, their subconscious is perhaps attracted to the potential abuse and slavery that comes part and parcel with being a thrall of the First Estate.



THE OATH OF VILLEIN

The supernatural process of molding a mortal into a thrall isn't all that's required of a ghoul serving a regnant of the First Estate. While that process creates a fierce bond between regnant and thrall, it doesn't create any connection to the covenant as a whole. Like all members of the First Estate, a ghoul must swear an oath not only to her regnant, but to all the Invictus.

The oath, called the Oath of Villein, refers to a type of village-born serf from medieval feudalism. The villein was a bondsman, bound to the land and the lord that owned the land. He had no rights save that to live. That is, his lord could not kill him without reason and propriety. A villein's assets were his lord's assets.

This oath invokes much of this same principle and carries it over to thralls. The oath itself is generally public, done before someone of local importance within the covenant such as Primogen, Priscus or Sheriff. (Rarely does a Prince concede his time for such a paltry oath.) Truthfully, the physical act of the oath itself changes from city to city, though most would have the ghoul believe it remains static and has since the Middle Ages. Generally, a draught of blood is taken from the thrall's wrist, and those present all sample his Vitae. The ghoul swears fealty to his lord and to the First Estate. From there, he is meant to take his third and presumably final drink before the bond is fully established, though typically, this act is now more cosmetic. Generally, the regnant secures the final bond *before* the oath takes place, in an effort to save herself any potential embarrassment.

Hollow and Debased

Ghouls of the First Estate are a wretched lot, living lives that are barely their own. It's the lot they've chosen, however, or at least the life to which they are now beholden. In a twisted way, perhaps by some grim symbiosis, it works out for both thrall and regnant.

Kindred within the Invictus tend to keep the majority of their ghouls for a very long time. Other vampires may go through ghouls relatively quickly, but the Damned of the First Estate are seemingly bound by an unwritten tradition to hold onto thralls for as long as possible. Many ghouls have served their masters for decades, kept alive past their natural life spans due to the Vitae in their bodies. The tradition seems largely unwritten by the oaths that hold the covenant together. While a thrall's oath to her regnant is significant, also important is that which the regnant promises to the thrall. This oath bonds the two individuals together, lord to lackey, and the bond is only made supernaturally more secure by the sharing of blood.

This long-lived and long-serving nature of ghouls in the covenant creates a psychological state less likely to be found in the thralls of other vampires. First and foremost, it creates a kind of Stockholm Syndrome in the thrall. While part of this dependency is present in all ghouls by virtue of the Vinculum, it's a hair different for ghouls of the Invictus. Their long-serving nature coupled with the often passive-aggressive and disproportionate treatment shown by their regnants only serves to magnify and warp the "love" felt for their masters. Any act of kindness by the regnant, however small or insignificant, is a wondrous gift, a boon from on high. Such generally inconsequential motions — holding the door for a thrall once in a blue moon, giving her a paltry trinket of cheap pewter, granting her a single night of total freedom a year — seem suddenly huge in comparison and are treated as expressions of the vampire's love. Curiously, some ghouls experience a kind of *reverse* Stockholm Syndrome, whereupon the vampire begins to develop unusual (and potentially perverse) feelings of affection for the ghoul, even though the thrall is never considered an equal.

More sophisticated (or at least self-aware) thralls are able to look past this condition, but they are still unable to escape the long-term effects of existing as a ghoul beyond a rational timeframe. Such sensitive or attentive thralls begin to question their own compulsions toward love and sycophancy at every turn, and they often develop irrational bouts of paranoia as well as feelings of overwhelming inadequacy. Some ghouls develop a complex love-hate relationship with their vampire masters. They are unable to deny the cravings to serve and the need for blood, but behind all that festers a deep-seated hatred. If they could, these thralls would drag their masters into the noonday sun. Many of these thralls eventually develop mild derangements that grow to major mental fractures over the decades. What might start as obsessive-compulsive behavior could turn into full-fledged schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder or even multiple personalities.

Live to Serve

The regnant/thrall bond is seen as a critical link in the chain of being, at least by the standards of the First Estate. Much as the Catholic Church extols the virtues of having children or much as Southern landowners were expected to keep slaves, Invictus vampires are expected to have ghouls. As such, this covenant probably maintains the largest numbers of thralls in the Danse Macabre.

With such a broad array of ghouls within its estimable ranks, the Invictus doesn't narrow its function of thralls to specifics. While other covenants generally use ghouls to fill a few particular functions, Invictus vampires are ultimately allowed to guide their servants in whatever fashion they deem most significant. (Those above the

regnant in the covenant hierarchy are allowed to “suggest” that the vampire use her thrall in specific ways, should she disagree with the ghoul’s current purpose.) Ghouls may serve as physical labor. They may serve as staff at the manor. They may be used for sensual pleasure or cathartic pain. Thralls may be used as appointment setters, drivers or waiters, or they may be asked to perform more specialized functions such as bodyguard, accountant or real estate agent. Some are used as pets, while others are used in a form of twisted companionship and social dominance.

Two notable functions are particularly common within this covenant, however. The first of these is the role of pawn. Strategy is crucial to most of the Invictus Kindred. It’s critical to keep a vigilant eye toward what is often seen as a citywide chessboard. Ego generally dictates that each vampire sees himself as the king (or at least queen) of the board, with all of his inferiors filling in the lesser board positions. At the lowest level are, of course, the pawns. Pawns can be neonates, but neonates are only so useful when operating in the world of mortals. Better still to have actual mortals when hoping to play that game.

What function do these pawns play? They act within the mortal world as secret representatives of the vampire’s will. They buy property, steal files from employers, negotiate labor disputes. They are lawyers, businessmen, politicians. They are not meant for menial tasks. Their jobs require having some authority within the human realm.

Ghouls acting as pawns live both better and worse than their peers in this covenant. Their lives are better because, when they are not acting out the will of their regnants, they are left alone. Pawns work better, after all, when they appear normal to other mortals and don’t “spook the herd.” Moreover, if a vampire wishes to keep a pawn secret, he will keep his distance from the thrall except when absolutely necessary. Hence, regnants are mostly hands-off when it comes to these servants. The unfortunate part of being a pawn is the same as the advantage, which is the lack of proximity to one’s master. Vitae is harder to come by, and a ghoul wanting to bask in the glow of her regnant is unlikely to be granted such an audience.

It’s important for a regnant to consider who best will act as his representative in the daylight, mortal world without giving up the game. Ghouls of this stripe are of various levels of influence and power. Of course, a wise Invictus vampire chooses not the CEO, but his secretary, for her proximity to power and willingness to serve. People already in power are less hungry for it. Those near it but *without* it are starving for a taste, and they sometimes make fine thralls.

The other function used almost exclusively by the First Estate is the role of courier, as the covenant largely eschews modern communication. When no other choice

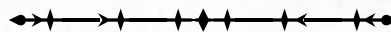
presents itself, a vampire might buckle down and use a portable phone. He is unlikely to use such contemporary amenities as fax or email, however. When a message is particularly important, an Invictus vampire often relies upon the use of messengers. Some Kindred use other Kindred when passing along a missive of the utmost importance, but if the message is less significant, the vampire is likely to place the epistle in the hands of a favored ghoul. Some vampires choose thralls specifically for this role, hoping that the ghoul will be fast and efficient. (Many such ghouls were once professional drivers or a bicycle messengers.) Ghouls carrying messages are at great risk, however, subject to attacks by the enemies of the Invictus. Hence, couriers are also expected to be good fighters, or at least smart and fast. (Of course, at times, the Invictus might *want* a message to fall into the wrong hands as a strategic move.) A rare few vampires of the covenant even allow prized ghoul couriers to carry *only* the most secret and noteworthy messages. Ghouls can be trusted, even if only because the Blood demands it. Unless they are tied to a regnant through Vinculum, other Kindred are unlikely to be so easy to trust them with important information.



PROXIES

One practice that has long been out of form but is recently coming back in vogue is the usage of ghouls as “proxies” at court. A proxy stands in for the vampire at certain auxiliary functions. Rarely is the ghoul allowed to make any particular decisions beyond those scripted offerings sent along by the regnant. Generally, the proxy is a powerless mannequin. Some regnants who are dismissive of or disinterested in political affairs allow thralls more power, but this is atypical.

The Invictus uses ghouls-as-proxy more often than any other covenant. First, the covenant has an obscene number of ceremonies and affairs that need tending, and some younger members of the Invictus consider these traditions tedious. Second, the Invictus is willing to grant a little power here and there to particularly prominent or long-serving ghouls. While they never recognize thralls as equal beings, they also don’t consistently relegate them to animals or objects, like some of the other covenants do.



Of Patience and Power

Objectively, being a ghoul to a regnant of the First Estate comes with the same advantages offered to any other ghoul: access to vampiric Disciplines, unnatural life span, boosts in physical prowess. Of course, the same disadvantages are present as well. For the most part, Invictus thralls are treated slightly better than most of their counterparts in the Lancea Sanctum or the Ordo Dracul.



One item that separates Invictus ghouls from other covenant thralls is the power, or, at least, the potential power, intrinsic to the position. Because ghouls are expected to serve their masters for decades or centuries, they gain more responsibility over time. Responsibility sometimes equates to secrets, stronger Disciplines, even a greater degree of freedom. While it could take 50 years to achieve such advantage, it isn't an unobtainable dream. She can't really use it to harm her master, though she can undermine the allies of her master or the machinations of the covenant somewhat — which is extremely unlikely. Better yet to use such power against her regnant's enemies (provided she still feels the twisted bond and hasn't bucked against the leash) or even against her *own* enemies. Moreover, should her regnant meet Final Death or should she find some arcane manner in which to sever the Vinculum, she has the rare opportunity to become a rogue ghoul whose power stops being only potential and becomes actual clout and strength.

While perhaps not technically an advantage, ghouls both suffer and benefit from what some call the “kick the dog” syndrome. The theory goes that, when a master kicks his dog, the dog goes on to bite someone else. Power is transferred down the line but never comes back to reverse the authority. In this case, a regnant might lord over her thrall, demanding unreasonable things from him or even bodily abusing him. The ghoul cannot act out against his master, so he invokes his own authority upon others. Ghouls of the Invictus are given just enough freedom to still have extended dealings with the mortal world, a privilege that ghouls of other covenants don't always have. In this manner, ghouls enact influence over human beings, thus furthering the “kick the dog” process. Ghouls of the Invictus are allowed (even encouraged) to lord over lesser beings. Not only does this allow the ghoul to displace any rage and frustration away from the covenant, but it also creates further links in the regnant's chain of control. If the ghoul gains power over another, the regnant gains that power by virtue of the authority over her thrall. Hence, allowing ghouls that small freedom actually only strengthens the regnant's own locus of control.

Lancea Sanctum

The Sanctified think little of mortal beings. Yes, humans are children of God, but so are horseflies, sewer rats and pack mules. Such a designation provides only relative value. Moreover, the Sanctified consider themselves far above mortals on the cosmic chain of being, knowing that they are predators sanctioned by God.

Ghouls, by their definition, are mortal beings. Those few benefits that separate them from average humans aren't self-obtained advantages, but are instead granted by the Kindred. In the eyes of the Sanctified, ghouls are better than mortals, but only by a hair's

breadth. Ghouls are still weak, fallible creatures, nominally as blind as every other human animal. They aren't useless, however.

God's Dogs

Becoming a ghoul to the Sanctified is a choice, albeit one where all the facts might not be known. A mortal entering into this pact generally knows little of the covenant, and probably instead knows only of the supposed spiritual and religious ramifications (i.e., the further connection and understanding of God's plan). Beyond that, what else beguiles a human to become slave to a Sanctified vampire?

For one, the Sanctified tend to put forth a strong presence. The Sanctified seem surrounded by an intangible gravitas. While such an atmosphere can be off-putting to many mortals, it's attractive to some. Such mortals include the types of people who would be drawn into the sphere of a religious or cult leader, or those whose self-esteem is weak and withered. These individuals are the kind most often chosen as ghouls to serve the Sanctified.

Of course, the choice goes both ways, and relies more heavily on the vampire's desires than the sycophancy of the human. Kindred of the Lancea Sanctum seek specific things in the hunt for new thralls. The first consideration is generally the intended function of a prospective ghoul. Unlike other Kindred, the Sanctified don't choose humans for general companionship or out of some twisted mockery of love. Those vampires also rarely enthrall ghouls out of religious duty, as meager mortals don't merit any kind of salvation.

No, the Sanctified recognize when they need someone to do a job that is generally beneath their attention. As such, they choose a human as one would choose a tool or an animal. To pound nails, one shouldn't use a saw. Alternately, a horse is for riding, and a mule is for carrying. Ghouls are seen the same way. If a vampire of the covenant requires a servant to carry boxes of sacred texts, he chooses a ghoul with a broad back and strong shoulders. If that vampire requires someone to help him navigate the world of mortal commerce (banks, stock market, tax fraud), he finds a human savvy with finance. As one Sanctified Archbishop often says to his congregation, “To write the Word of God I have my pen; to kill the enemies of the Word of God I have my knife.” The same saying applies to how the Sanctified choose their ghouls.

Spiritual Self-Loathing

Make no mistake, life as a ghoul of the Sanctified is unpleasant at best. It's not that ghouls are abused or tortured bodily. They are simply seen as lesser, and are treated as such. Abusing ghouls does little for the covenant (though such egregious behavior certainly happens).

Needlessly neglecting or mistreating a dog eventually causes the dog to bite or become worthless. The same attitude commonly applies to how the Sanctified treat their ghouls. Harming them without reason only causes difficulty as the ghoul seeks to rebel or simply attends to important tasks with diminished zeal.

Of course, two small exceptions to this unspoken rule of abuse apply. The first is that some ghouls necessitate abuse. Some of the thralls chosen to serve covenant members are creatures that loathe themselves. Self-hating ghouls often require maltreatment as part and parcel of the bargain. The other exception is punishment. The Sanctified generally feel that making a human into a ghoul is a gift. Most see it as an *undeserved* gift, as well, like feeding a dog filet mignon. Therefore, when ghouls go astray or don't excel at their tasks at the appropriate and accepted rate, they are punished for mistreating God's gift. The reprimand comes in whatever form the Sanctified regnant chooses, though it often takes the shape of some kind of religious or ascetic punishment. Ghouls might be denied food, blood or sleep. Alternatively, they might be forced to stand facing a corner for days on end, reciting passages and prayers from *The Testament of Longinus*. Punishments are rarely extreme,

though some more ardent Sanctified whip their thralls with metal-beaded lashes or even hobble them by cutting their Achilles tendons or by crushing the bones in their feet with a mallet.

THE BIG LIE

Sanctified vampires have little problem lying to their thralls about hope and salvation. If converting a mortal to a thrall means promising some kind of God-sent deliverance in the beginning, so be it. If getting a ghoul to perform unique or difficult tasks requires offering intangible rewards of spiritual blessing, that's perfectly acceptable. The point is, the Sanctified believe they owe their thralls nothing. Enslavement is their only reward.

Pack Mules and Prey

Ghouls fill many functions within the covenant, though most ultimately end up as worker bees for the covenant, enslaved to perform the tedious tasks the Kindred see as beneath them. Yet some ghouls are elevated



AVERY



beyond such pathetic undertakings. Ghouls who show especial merit or appeal in some fashion to their regnants are often granted more significant jobs, much like how a prize horse is set aside to carry only the royals.

One such task that is gaining fashion in the covenant is using ghouls to fetch prey. Many Sanctified see the employment of thralls in this fashion as dismissive and lazy. After all, the Lancea Sanctum purports that vampires are consummate predators who don't require paltry human assistance to scare up food. Those who exercise this tactic, however, offer that manipulating mortals to serve up other mortals as meals is the finest exemplification of one's own monstrous nature. Wouldn't wolves be more efficient if they could convince a single deer to bring back the whole herd? Ghouls chosen for such utility are often monsters themselves, or are at least selfish enough to sell out their own kind for meager gifts from their masters.

Some ghouls in the Lancea Sanctum are chosen for more "human" functions. These thralls are used to negotiate land deals, buy property, transfer money or purchase goods or other services. They don't typically serve the Kindred at all hours of the night as some of the lesser, unskilled ghouls do. For the most part, such ghouls are allowed to exist apart from the Sanctified except for crucial meetings (and sessions of sharing blood). Unfortunately, many ghouls in these positions don't last long. Often, Kindred of the Lancea Sanctum have been apart from humanity for too long and don't necessarily understand how things work in that world. Moreover, some are simply too old to understand how modern mortals operate. When a thrall fails to get her regnant master precisely what he wants when he wants it, even if the request is absurd or impossible, the thrall is likely to be punished. Punishment of this nature isn't exactly fair, as the burden of misunderstanding belongs usually to the vampire, but who ever said life as a Sanctified thrall is fair?

Rare Sanctified take ghouls as pets. Most don't approve of such behavior, for having pets requires getting awfully close to the "animals." Others argue that using mortals as pets is on par with owning a well-heeled hound, a cat or a hunting bird, and needn't carry any gross stigma. Pets of the Sanctified ostensibly live the best lives out of all of the Lancea Sanctum thralls. They're fed well, generally not mistreated, and might even sleep beneath the finest linens. Of course, they're also granted no lives of their own. Thrall pets of the covenant live with or near their regnants, and while they are favored ghouls, they're still treated like leashed animals. Moreover, regnants of such thralls often attempt to further evoke elevated feelings of love and devotion to both them and God, all of which breaks down the thrall's mind until all that's left is blind servitude.

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

The Sanctified create and use ghouls, for the utility of such a practice is undeniable. Still, there exists within the covenant a disdain for the custom. Why? Because of God.

The Vinculum creates feelings of unnatural, hollow "love" for the regnant. The thrall is held by this artificial attraction, bound by it theoretically forever. The problem is that the only entity that the covenant truly believes deserves love is God. The Vinculum, on the other hand, establishes the regnant as the highest and most significant being (if only in that single regnant/thrall relationship), and leaves God and the teachings of Longinus completely out of the equation.

Most are able to see past this, explaining it away that a mortal's devotion to his regnant means little. Why care what the thralls think when such creatures are nothing more than chattel? Still, many are uncomfortable placing themselves before God, for fear that such an act is a divine offense and tantamount to the lowest treachery. It's for this reason that Vinculums between Kindred of the Lancea Sanctum are especially frowned upon; such a bond bypasses God entirely.

Blood of Heaven

Some mortals make an ill-informed choice to be ghouls serving Sanctified masters. Others are beguiled or forced into the role. Regardless of how the ghoul is brought into the fold, most ghouls of the covenant live similar lives with comparable drawbacks and benefits.

Unfortunately, the advantages of being a thrall to a Sanctified regnant end up being few and far between. Some advantages are obvious, as certain benefits are conferred to all ghouls, regardless of covenant or regnant. For some, the ability to heal wounds and deny the ceaseless march of age is worth every stolen moment. For others, the violation of enthrallment ends up being a Devil's bargain, made foolish and awful in light of what such slavery truly means.

Thralls of this covenant gain some small advantage that separates them from the mortal slaves of other covenants. For one, some mortals are engaged by the presumed proximity to God. While any human in his right mind would see the relationship as painfully flawed, and moreover, a relationship God would surely never endorse, ghouls are rarely in a "right mind." As such, the artificial feelings of love and addicting bliss granted by the Vinculum sometimes elevate the ghoul to a seemingly beatific state. Such a glorious state, false as it is, is addictive not only physically but spiritually as well. While ghouls ultimately serve their regnant before they can

serve God, their regnant still tells them to serve the Holy Father, and that's good enough. It provides the ghoul with the belief that her state is not one of slavery, but instead one of sanctity.



FORBIDDANCE OF BLOOD (•• THEBAN SORCERY RITUAL)

With this ritual, the Kindred can prevent a ghoul from using Disciplines. The ghoul must be under a Vinculum to the character (though a four-dot variant allows a Sanctified vampire to perform this ritual on any ghoul). If the player rolls an exceptional success when casting this ritual, the ghoul cannot use *any* Disciplines. A standard success only bars the ghoul from using non-physical Disciplines (that is, any Disciplines other than Celerity, Resilience and Vigor). The effects of the ritual last for one month.

Offering: A apple, which must pass from the vampire's hands into the ghoul's. (The ghoul does not have to willingly accept the apple.) Once the ghoul touches the fruit, it rots in seconds.



Of course, the ultimate reward that is dangled in front of many thralls is that they could eventually be chosen to become Kindred of the covenant. This potential promise, however, holds little truth and goes generally unfulfilled. The covenant maintains an unspoken rule disdaining the practice of bringing ghouls into the fold. Something about the idea remains base and vile, for ghouls (while better than most mortals) are often deranged, addicted creatures. Does God deserve sycophancy from such broken animals? Are such creatures worthy of God, as well? The answer to both questions is usually a swift and unchallenged "no." It's not completely unheard of, however. Some ghouls are capable of standing out, of excelling and showing a truly pious face in light of all that's happened to them. Even then, such thralls are tested again and again (questioned on dogma, forced to suffer physical and emotional pain, asked to perform egregious tasks in the name of the covenant) before ever being granted the Embrace.

One advantage absent from most ghouls within the covenant is the learning of Disciplines. Most Sanctified see Disciplines as synonymous with the vampiric state. As such, powers tied so closely to the Curse are not to be granted to mortals. Allowing mortals to learn and use Disciplines is equal to giving a handgun to an infant, or worse, like trying to teach a mongrel dog to read. If thralls are ever allowed access to Disciplines, it's almost always the physical abilities, Vigor, Resilience and Celerity. No law or written dogma states that thralls cannot learn other Disciplines, but such a thing is socially unacceptable. For the most part, the Sanctified aren't capable of preventing ghouls from manifesting

Disciplines. Ventrue of the covenant can sometimes Dominate ghouls not to use these gifts, and more conventional mind-control techniques (shame, guilt, fear) can also be effective. The covenant has one other recourse: the Forbiddance of Blood ritual (see sidebar).

One rule that is written is that ghouls may not learn the covenant's Theban Sorcery. This power is meant only for the Sanctified, and even then it isn't meted out to just anybody. Whispers suggest that a few particularly favored ghouls over the centuries have been granted entrée into the secrets of Theban Sorcery, but no names or facts have yet been verifiable.

ORDO DRACUL

Kindred of the Ordo Dracul are deeply contemplative of the vampiric condition. The Dragons test, investigate and explore every aspect of the Requiem, establishing a frighteningly complex picture of how all the elements of the Kindred's state and existence fit together. The creation and utility of the regnant/thrall relationship is one vampiric capability, so the Ordo Dracul encourages exploration of it just as it demands exploration of blood addiction, the origins of the Disciplines and the ways in which vampires beget other vampires. This covenant creates and uses ghouls quite regularly. For a relatively small group, its members maintain a large number of thralls.

While being a ghoul to a vampire of the Ordo Dracul comes nominally with the same benefits and problems of being a thrall to any regnant, proximity to the covenant makes a ghoul's life unique and separate from others. For one thing, it's a rather broad and unfortunate dichotomy, as Kindred of the Order generally see ghouls as one of two things: property or protégé.

THE PROCESS

Vampires of the Order choose their ghouls in one of two ways. The first and more common way is simply to find a mortal who seems to suit a number of qualifications and offer to him the regnant/thrall relationship. The second way (one typically regarded as unique to the Ordo Dracul) is to "farm" a new ghoul from one of the many ghoul families maintained by the covenant.

The first method is similar to that of other covenants, though it arguably contains a more clinical slant. The Dragons believe that the act of creating a thrall is an integral part of the Requiem, so they take the process very seriously. Potential mortals are examined from afar for months and are examined up close through both fleeting and extensive "chance" meetings. Usually, ghouls found in this way are more of the protégé type than of mere property. Simple menservants are often culled from the thrall families associated with the Order. When a vampire seeks out a student and potential Dragon, he generally hunts down a mortal who exemplifies a very specific set of criteria.



Curiously, one of the ways many Kindred of the covenant find ghoulish protégés is through the act of Following the Dragon's Tail. When a vampire kills a mortal at the behest of her mentor and scrutinizes the chain of events that occurs after such a murder, she leaves in her wake a number of affected humans. While murder has physical and economical ramifications to be sure, the murderer is usually more interested in the social and emotional affects such an act has on those who were part of the victim's life. From this stable of people, a vampire often finds a prospective thrall. Some suggest that this is simply due to the proximity of the people in the victim's life. When a vampire dissects and analyzes this social network, she is likely to become unusually informed in regard to these people. Others believe that something more intuitive is at work, some aspect of the predator that has yet to be defined. It goes against the natural order, really. When animals destroy competitors, they also tend to destroy their competitor's family and companions. In this case, the vampire actually takes in one of the victim's brood or associates and elevates him.



THE DRAGON'S FENCE

Certain Kindred within the Ordo Dracul are expected to track as many ghoulish bloodlines in the world as possible. This role, given the title of *Balaur Gard*, or "Dragon's Fence," is granted to Kindred of the Order who are roughly in the middle of the Dragon's Tongue. The title (a Dacian term said to have been in use for several centuries) is passed to a new vampire in a region approximately every decade or so. While not the most important duty in the Order, it carries with it a certain prestige that stays with a vampire even after she has left the role and passed it along to another.

The function is, as said, to note and track as many ghoulish bloodlines as possible. While the focus of this study is slanted more toward those thrall families who are already associated with the Ordo Dracul, it's important to note that the list also includes many non-Order-related lineages. It's not enough to merely list the families, however. The entire bloodline must be mapped as far back as genealogy allows, and moreover, the actions of individual family members are tracked and noted. Of course, the Dragon's Fence is not capable of performing this task by himself, so he uses an extensive panel of Order vampires and esteemed thralls to maintain this information.



More "common" ghouls, however, are chosen from the ghoulish families associated with the Ordo Dracul. While thrall bloodlines are rare, vampires of the Order claim a number of them as servant stock. When the time comes for a Kindred to choose a ghoulish for himself, he may visit one of the many domiciles that house

some or all of a particular ghoulish family. He may even spend time, anywhere from a single night to a single year, among the family, testing, tasting, discovering who will best suit his needs.

Of course, this isn't an option for all Order vampires. Some simply do not have access to any of these rarified bloodlines. These families aren't widespread enough to be found just anywhere. Sometimes, a vampire is willing to wait and risk the perils of traveling in order to find a lifelong servant. Other times, the danger intrinsic to such a journey might be too high to justify the result. Another obstacle in the way of claiming a ghoulish from one of these bloodlines is status within the covenant. One is required to have certain eminence within the Ordo Dracul before he is allowed access to the esteemed breeding stock. (Barring exceptional circumstances, assume that a covenant member requires at least Covenant Status ••• to be able to select a personal ghoulish from any of the Order's claimed bloodlines.)

UNDER THE GLASS

Generally, vampires see ghouls as mortals among the vampires of the Invictus and Carthians, as models of creation to those of the Circle of the Crone, and as two-legged pack animals to the predators of the Lancea Sanctum. To the Damned of the Ordo Dracul, however, ghouls are hardly personified at all, perceived as little more than objects or automatons.

The Dragons tend to have a clinical outlook. The intellectual nature of the covenant, combining the two spheres of *occult* and *science* into an experimental amalgamation, demands such a detached and dispassionate attitude. Ghouls, as such, are viewed in a light complimentary to what the Order vampires need. Ultimately, human beings are complex social animals with intense emotions, connections to societal networks and frail psyches. The Ordo Dracul has interest in these things, but only from a distance. Covenant members are glad to explore them, but only without getting their hands dirty with such leftover feelings, and *only* if it can help to unlock the grim cryptography of the vampiric condition. If it can't, then such human studies are worthless. A covenant ghoulish, as a human being, is only put under the microscope when it suits the needs of his regnant. Otherwise, that ghoulish is expected to perform his task, and that is all.

This situation is both advantageous and problematic for a ghoulish of the Order. It's advantageous because, for the most part, ghouls are left to their tasks, provided they perform them well. They typically aren't subject to some of the strange humiliations and violations that come with regnants of other covenants. Vampires of the Order just don't have the time or luxury to play needlessly with their servants. Unfortunately, this indifference toward ghouls creates very little attachment between regnant and thrall.



Yes, the thrall still develops those addictions of the blood and that certain uncontrollable adoration for her regnant, but any hope for returned feelings is a distant dream at best. Unless the vampire is hoping to experiment with that bond and note the power of his blood to affect the thrall, he's likely to avoid her entirely until he needs something. Again, the Dragons see ghouls of this sort predominantly as objects. They can be picked up and used at will, and when finished, they may be quickly discarded.

Another problem for these ghouls is that they are a consequence of the blood as conferred by the Requiem. Thralls make up one small part of the larger equation, which makes them subject to experimentation. Experimentation in this manner can be unpleasant but tolerable, or it might be so horrifying that it leaves a thrall next to worthless. For the most part, vampires of the Order don't plumb the depths of a ghoul's social or emotional states. Although all rules have exceptions, generally those two spheres of existence matter little to the grand scheme of the Requiem. What does matter, however, are the physical and mystical properties of the regnant/thrall relationship, and these properties are what most experimentation is meant to explore. It may involve drawing weekly draughts of blood, lightly damaging the flesh of the thrall to see how long she heals naturally, or commanding her to invoke her Disciplines in any

number of ways. All experimentation is meant to help answer what ghouls are, how they are truly made, what they are capable of and how the ghoul condition relates to and can help a vampire trump the drawbacks of the Requiem.

OCCULT VARIABLES

Morbid curiosity leads to constant experimentation within the Order, which is sometimes reflected in the manner in which ghouls are chosen. Some vampires within the covenant actively seek out mortals who are somehow already affected by the occult world, be those mortals haunted by ghosts, crippled by shapeshifters or possessed of arcane or psychic abilities.

One current trend among some of the more mysterious covenant members is to attempt a regnant/thrall bond with humans who live on or near to so-called "wurm nests," or those presumed geographical junctures of ley lines. The in-vogue assumption purports that humans chosen from such places of power are somehow special or that they have a greater aptitude for esoteric talents or might instead make better vampires. (In fact, most ghouls chosen from these places fall under the "protégé" category, selected to eventually become vampires of the Ordo Dracul.)



In the end, most vampires of the Order are practical, and won't sacrifice a perfectly good thrall to the autopsy table. Curiosity is a potent lure, though, and coupled with an insubordinate or inefficient thrall, it can lead to grisly experimentation. Many thralls have met untimely deaths at the end of a bone saw or a toxic tincture of mercury-poisoned Vitae. Sometimes, to find out what really makes something tick, it must be dissembled, obliterated to its smallest components.

SERVANT VERSUS STUDENT

The basic dichotomy that applies to ghouls of the Ordo Dracul is protégé versus property. Ghouls of each stripe are likely to have wildly different experiences and are chosen for clearly separate functions.

Ghouls chosen as "property" are just that, automatons owned (paid primarily in blood instead of money) to perform certain functions. For the most part, ghouls of this nature are a servile class within the covenant. Valets, maids, drivers, couriers — all are suitable concepts for thralls of the Order. Of course, each servile role is applicable to serving a Kindred master more than a mortal one. Maids polish silver, but they also might be required to dust the display case of weird skeletons or scrub the bloodstains from the cellar floor. Butlers usher guests inside, and they might also need to bring the master of the house a certain "vintage" of Vitae — one not bottled but still trapped in the wriggling body of a 12-year-old boy.

About half of these ghouls are chosen from the bloodline breeding stock that is monitored and maintained by the covenant. Family ghouls, those chosen from the lineages of the Angustri clans or plucked from other "farmed" families, tend to develop a kind of servant culture within the homes and havens of the Order Kindred. Such cultures grow into an entire "lower class" within a manor house, as the servants collect in one lesser portion of the home while the regnant lives hidden in opulence or among his other experiments. Servants might catch few glimpses of the master (seeing him once a week or even once a month) but hear his whispered missives and the screams of his "research subjects" through the walls and ceilings. (Vampires subscribing to this pattern must be wary, however, for such a servant culture often knows more of his secrets than they are willing to let on.) Vampires not pulled from ghoul lineages and chosen independently often have a hard time assimilating with the current staff of servants, and may even be abused at their hands, bullied because he's different or lesser. Some regnants are known to purposefully create such a situation to see what results from such interactions.

Not all servants are relegated to menservants or housemaids, however. Many vampires believe that having a staff of servants is antiquated and instead prefer to have

a few ghouls assigned to key functions. Thralls could be scribes, for instance, copying old tomes into new books or even computer documents. In fact, as the Order is a technically sound covenant (at least in comparison to the other groups), a ghoul might even be used to maintain a physical computer network or to monitor, track and encrypt occult data over the Internet.

Protégés, of course, receive different treatment and are expected to perform different tasks than their inferior cousins. After all, the point of a protégé is breeding a ghoul eventually meant for the Embrace. It seems sometimes easier to test and mold candidates for the Ordo Dracul in this manner than to rely on already cursed Kindred who come with preconceived notions, bias and other baggage.

What are protégés expected to do? Plenty. One of the advantages of being just property is being left alone for much of the time — an apprenticed ghoul is not so lucky. A ghoul of such importance is under the gun *and* under the microscope every hour of every night. These thralls are expected to partake in some of the Order's arcane experiments, they are schooled and tested on the group's occult philosophies, and they are even allowed to learn what the Coils of the Dragon are (though they cannot learn such abilities themselves, of course). Such prized ghouls are practically the analogs of mortal medical students. They are quizzed constantly, required to learn inhuman amounts of information and granted very little sleep. This is a testing ground for the Embrace, but there's no telling how long a protégé must endure such a lifestyle. A few are allowed into the Order as a vampire within the year, but most wait decades before being given the Embrace.

Failure for ghouls of any kind within the Order is not an option. When an object has lost its function, it is abandoned or destroyed. A ghoul who has lost her function is either subject to disfiguring experimentation or simply exsanguinated.

TO BE LEFT ALONE

Ghouls of the Order are not granted much benefit. They are servants, meant nominally to act as handmaidens or butlers to their Dragon masters. Worse still is that any servant is subject to experimentation at any time, be it physical, social or emotional. Is there *any* benefit?

One advantage is that servant ghouls of the Order are generally left alone to do their job. They are programmed with certain tasks and expected to perform them accordingly, without fail. Bring a draught of blood upon waking, press the linens, dust the beakers and so on and so forth. If a ghoul attends to these tasks regularly and with minimal error, she is likely to be left to her own devices for the rest of the time. What she does with this time is up to her. She may commune with the other servants, take long walks around the vampire's estate or read books

from the common shelves. Order regnants are generally detached and hardly notice their servants. Only when a ghoul stands out as particularly strong or weak does she become the target of scrutiny and action by her master. Standing out as weak is a surefire way to end up as nothing more than a dismembered corpse and few notes in the master's experiment log.

Standing out as strong, however, is a way toward future advantage. Being skilled or able means that a ghoul *might* be able to transcend her place as property and become more of a protégé within the covenant. Doing so comes with its own sets of advantages and disadvantages. Advantages have already been mentioned, for being a protégé is an inroad to power within the ranks of the Order (and possibly the Embrace). The disadvantages are, of course, that a ghoul is now an obvious and unavoidable part of her regnant's Requiem. She is no longer off the map, so to speak, and anything she does will be studied with a grim scrutiny that could get her tortured or killed for a single misstep.

Ghoul Families

Thralls are largely alone in this world, singular in their suffering and blessings. Yes, other ghouls exist, but for the most, ghouls remain unconnected, save for one or two others like themselves. A rare few aren't even aware that there are other similar individuals out there, kept ignorant by their regnants in an effort to make them feel even more freakish and alone than they already are.

This isn't always the case, however. Sometimes extraordinary circumstances occur and allow for a thrall to pass along her enhancements as well as her inclination toward servitude. The condition of being a ghoul is normally impossible to pass along to another. Only a vampire can invoke and enforce such a bargain. But sometimes, this control passes from a vampire's hands, the blessed curse contained in the blood of a ghoul is passed to her child, and that child becomes something altogether different.

Birth

Under normal circumstances, if a pregnant woman is made a thrall by a Kindred, the pregnancy is terminated. She miscarries in a flush of blood and paroxysms of pain. If she doesn't miscarry, the child carries to term but is stillborn. The same goes for a woman who becomes pregnant as a thrall. If she manages to conceive at all, the body aborts the child at some stage of the pregnancy.

An exceptional few children *do* survive, however. Despite a body's attempt to rid itself of the fetus, the child somehow survives and ends up being born alive. The frequency of such an occurrence is miniscule, less than one percent of all possible cases. Moreover, the conditions that lead to such an event are unclear and

seem different every time. The stamina of the woman is not a factor, for enthralled children have been born of women with both strong and frail constitutions. They have also been born from mothers with mental illness and mothers with a supposedly clean bill of health. Plus, to confuse the issue further, some women die during childbirth, where others do not.

Some Kindred (those aware of the possibility of thrall bloodlines, for such a thing is not common knowledge) speculate that the women who are capable of birthing ghoul children must already be descended from a ghoul family somewhere down the line. Once a child is born in this way, that child's female descendents continue to pass along the tainted blood, creating new family thralls. Even men of a ghoul bloodline have the chance to pass this along, whether impregnating another ghoul or a mortal. (The chances of a ghoul's seed fertilizing an egg and causing the birth of a thrall child are far better should he impregnate another ghoul as opposed to a "normal" human, though.) Because the women of a ghoul family spawn infant thralls almost 100% of the time, it's believed that when a seemingly mundane ghoul (i.e., a ghoul *not* of an analogous bloodline) manages to carry a thrall child to term, that woman must unknowingly be part of a ghoul bloodline.

Others consider such speculation idle and baseless. Plus, it presents a "chicken and egg" enigma. Somewhere in history, perhaps as far back as the origins of the Kindred themselves, a woman must have had a ghoul child survive to birth, and that woman could not have been part of a ghoul bloodline. But how could she have given birth if such a thing *didn't* exist? Which came first, the ghoul child, or the ghoul legacy?

It asks a lot of troubling questions and provides few answers. Do all ghoul families technically descend from a single bloodline, existing as distant branches of a very strange lineage? Or is the phenomenon isolated and unique, popping up here and there merely as an act of chance? Is there even a way to predict which women are capable of carrying such a glorious abomination to term?

First Family

Where did ghoul families come from? The truth of the matter is relative to the teller. Few Kindred agree on the subject, and even less care enough to inspect it beyond a cursory examination.

Most of the prominent information on the subject, regardless of its accuracy, comes from the Ordo Dracul. The creation of ghouls and by proxy, ghoul families, falls within their range of interests. Furthermore, the Order holds the greatest number of thrall bloodlines operating in its employ and continues to experiment on these bloodlines in an effort to deepen its understanding of the subject. The Order's conclusions on the current conditions of ghoul families are clear and able to be meted out with examina-



tion and experimentation. The conclusions gained about the *history* of thrall bloodlines is something few Kindred outside of the covenant are willing to agree with, much like the Order's assertions about the history of vampires or its founder, the illustrious Vlad Tepes.

Ultimately, the Order claims that the first ghoulish bloodline came from the powerful Vitae of Dracula himself. Unfortunately, the fog of history that plagues all vampires hasn't made this assertion clear or provable. Some suggest that the Dragon lorded over a single family of powerful ghouls, a bloodline born of the Bathory family. Others aver that Dracul left a legacy of many ghoulish families, such as those plucked from the ranks of Turkish janissaries or the local boyars. Of course, none of these bloodlines are seen in evidence today, at least not in any known or public fashion. Either the lines ended in death, or such a story should be chalked up to covenant legend.

Most Kindred cry foul at the Order's claim to be the origin of ghoulish families, believing it to be as absurd as the ideas behind the Dragon's own purported "origins." Other covenants declare that they have evidence identifying the phenomenon of ghoulish families as being significantly older. The Circle of the Crone, for instance, points to a few of its own thrall lines, such as the Nirriti Cult, as evidence of something supposedly far more ancient, older even than Christianity. Of course, the Kindred of the Lancea Sanctum scoff at the Acolytes for believing such nonsense, for surely the first ghoulish bloodline originated at or around the time that Longinus speared the side of Christ. Their history offers that it could not have happened before that, because vampires did not exist before that. The Invictus is mostly mum on the subject, idly waving it off as something that surely grew out of the nights of ancient Rome. And the Carthians are not yet developed enough to have a unified opinion of this phenomenon.

Is there any truth to be found? The only truth that seems relatively certain is that, despite the contentions of the Ordo Dracul, ghoulish families have been around longer than anyone knows. Beyond that, few facts are forthcoming.

Blood Ties

Belonging to a family of ghouls can be a very different experience from being a single thrall to a Kindred regnant. Knowingly or not, a thrall enters into a supernatural contract, a bargain of the blood. Such a bargain could be theoretically aborted before it begins, if the potential thrall became wise (or lucky). Moreover, the death of a regnant or other rare occurrences could grant precious freedom to an enthralled mortal. Such is not the case for members of a ghoulish family. They are born into it, so escape comes only with death

The elements of being a ghoulish within a bloodline can vary in other ways, as well. These differences are not always obvious.

Age

Unlike regular thralls, members of a ghoulish bloodline do not suddenly relinquish their supernatural condition when their source of Vitae is withdrawn. Some bloodlines are disconnected from their original vampiric masters. Some families are so far removed from their regnants that only the eldest among them even knows the truth about what lies dormant among the roots of the family tree. As such, aging does not catch up with those without a source of Kindred blood. In fact, thralls from a bloodline age more slowly than mortals, even without vampiric Vitae coursing through them. Such ghouls physically age about two years for every three they live, existing half again as long as the average human. If a mortal's expected age of death is 80, his ghoulish counterpart lives to approximately 120 (provided the ghoulish belongs to a bloodline). Moreover, when the ghoulish actually has Vitae in his system, he stops aging altogether, much like the average ghoulish. Returning to a state without the Vitae does *not* then suddenly invoke a grotesque spate of aging.

Stranger still, while the body ages more slowly, the mind does not. Provided there's nothing unusual about the health of the individual, the mind of a family ghoulish develops at a normal rate, sometimes, even faster. This is advantageous, to a point, but also bizarre. A child of a ghoulish family may truly be nine years old, but appears six; a 15-year-old looks 10. Mentally, the child is far more developed than she physically appears, creating the appearance of being hyper-intelligent and eerily aware. Provided she exists under circumstances that allow her to commingle with normal children, this development can create a number of problems. Wise ghouls learn to "play dumb" when necessary in an effort to manipulate their lesser-developed "peers." Still, though, it takes a toll on the mind of such a child. It's for this reason that many children of ghoulish families feel disengaged from the rest of the world, suspecting that they are somehow out of sync with humanity. Many children of this ilk develop minor or moderate mental illnesses as a result. Some are labeled early on as "autistic" or as suffering from Asperger's syndrome (a syndrome characterized by repetitive behavior patterns and impairments in social interaction, coupled with strange, early forming intelligence).

Subservience

Ghoulish families were and are used for their servile qualities. Whether such breeding was purposeful or eerily serendipitous doesn't much matter. Ghouls belonging to a bloodline are supernaturally tractable. Their blood calls

to serve, it begs to be submissive to the superior will of the Kindred. A vampire can easily step in and invoke her will upon a thrall belonging to a bloodline, regardless of whether that individual is technically anybody's ghoul or not. Moreover, forming the regnant/thrall bond is simpler, as well. The vampire needn't extend as much of herself into the process, for it seems that the will required to keep a ghoul from aging is already in place. The programming not only makes the ghoul more susceptible to a vampire's mind manipulations, but ameliorates the creation and maintenance of the bond in general. The vampire needn't exert her will. The strength of Vitae is enough.

Note that this tractability doesn't necessarily translate over to the ghoul's dealings with humans (or even other supernatural entities). While it's possible that the individual is generally submissive regardless, it's just as likely that he's a social powerhouse, even a dominating presence among others. But such authority and confidence goes quickly flaccid when confronted with the presence and power of one of the Damned.

Curse All Their Own

Individuals who belong to ghoul families but who have not been made into ghouls run the gamut of strange experiences. No matter who they are or where they live, they often seem somehow out of step with the rest of the world. They are the weird children who know too much, the strange adolescents in dark clothing, the malcontent artists and the sexual deviants. Some are able to turn their outsider status to their advantage, using it as a way to stand out and eventually become popular. Others are doomed to discontent and exile, accepted only among the others of their family (or other such black sheep), for they are the only ones who understand.

While being a social pariah isn't good, other potential drawbacks are worse. For one, many suffer from nightmares, often coupled with resultant insomnia. Their sleep is often plagued with horrifying dreams or hypnagogic hallucinations whose imagery often seems focused upon blood or faceless, shadowy apparitions. Some don't experience these nightmares and must endure various mental illnesses instead. Such illnesses are rarely so extreme as schizophrenia or sociopathy, but they are still persistent and troublesome. Such a person might become obsessive-compulsive at a very early age, or he might develop seemingly irrational phobias or neuroses. It's even possible (though less common) that the individual shows signs of psychosomatic problems such as rashes, premature hair-loss or severe asthma.

Breeding

Obviously, ghoul bloodlines survive because of breeding. While normal ghouls aren't afforded the chance to propagate normal humans much less thralls,

members of such a supernatural lineage pass their condition to their children. Breeding isn't as simple as it is for non-ghouls, however. While a female of a thrall family isn't prone to miscarry, the process still carries certain stipulations.

For one, conception does not occur as often as it does among normal mortals. The chances of a seed fertilizing an egg decrease by two thirds from a regular human's chances *unless* the copulation occurs between two ghouls of extant bloodlines. The chances of conception are the same as those of the rest of humanity provided both participants are of thrall blood.

The beginning of a ghoul bloodline is limited only to women. A ghoul male cannot pass along the condition initially. Such a state is conferred only when a pregnant woman is made a ghoul, or becomes pregnant as a ghoul, and the baby somehow survives. After the bloodline is established, however, men or women of the line can pass the condition along.

Breeding is still a complicated matter for ghoul families. Not only are they socially stunted, but the chances of procreation decrease if both parties aren't of thrall lineage. Several families have their own tried-and-true methods of breeding, however.

Inbreeding

As mentioned, the chances of conception are far greater when the sex occurs between two individuals of ghoul bloodlines. It's only rarely that one ghoul family is even *aware* of others like it, and while members might accept the possibility that others like them exist, they certainly don't have names or addresses. Add in the fact that many ghoul families are intensely insular (and frankly, dysfunctional) anyway, and the logical choice for procreation is inbreeding.

Of course, "inbreeding" isn't a popular term. Many prefer instead to call it by its scientific name, consanguinity. The problem with the concept is that the closer the genes of the mother and the father are, the greater the chance becomes that recessive genetic disorders will persist and occur in the offspring. For the most part, ghoul families who submit to inbreeding make sure that it happens only through cousins or more distant relations. The chances of mutation in this case are slim, but they become more viable as generation after generation continues to propagate the same sets of genes. The bigger issue at hand is that such breeding is socially taboo in Western civilization.

Of course, some families seem unconcerned with breaking such social norms. They might even engage in dangerous inbreeding between direct siblings or offspring and parents. Genetic mutations in this regard are far more likely, and they can create a number of problems in children. A single deleterious mutation can cause muscular dystrophy, mental illness, heart problems or



physical disfigurements such as a cleft lip or an unformed limb. If such inbreeding occurs for generations, it wouldn't be altogether unlikely to have a child with a club foot huddling in the corner eating roaches or his own fingernails.

Intermarrying

Sometimes, a ghoulish family learns of another like itself. Perhaps the family's regnant provides this information, or perhaps a particularly cunning (or lucky) family member finds it out for himself. In such cases, some families decide to intermarry, or at least, breed with one another. Not only is conception normalized by this act, but the chances of problematic genetic disorders are made insignificant. Moreover, it expands the bloodline's social unit. The families might be isolated from the rest of so-called normal humanity, but they have more in common with others like themselves.

Of course, not all Kindred accept such social connections for their thralls. A regnant whose family begins to interbreed with another similar bloodline must then deal with that family's master. Like two elders, they must come together and decide the fate of both families and the resultant children. Which family does the child join? Is the child sought after, or does neither vampire want such an awkward addition? Plus, it's not guaranteed that both Kindred even want to deal with one another. Creating such a bond between thrall families connotes at least an unofficial alliance between the two vampire regnants, which might not be possible for a number of political or social reasons. If the two masters are of the same clan or same covenant, it becomes easier. If not, political and ideological disagreements are likely to rise and stop any such breeding from happening. (And woe to the families who secretly agree to such allegiance without the express consent of their regnants.)

The other solution is kidnapping. Some families actually have a long-standing tradition of "raiding" other ghoulish families like an invading tribe, stealing a suitable breeding partner, and bringing them back to the kin. Unfortunately, such "stolen mothers" rarely fare well within their new families. They are typically treated poorly (sometimes even shackled up in cellars or attics), and further function as a brood-mare for all the males of the family. Some are accepted as parts of the family, but most are considered lesser beings worthy of spite and abuse.

Normal Is As Normal Does

Not all ghouls of an appropriate bloodline seek to mate with others of their kind. Many choose to emulate a normal lifestyle and have children with normal, non-ghoulish humans. Doing so comes with consequences, however. Not only are the chances of conception greatly reduced, but bringing a normal human into the demented world of a ghoulish family is an exercise in cruelty. Even if

the family is kind to the newcomer, the vampire regnant probably won't be, either outright murdering the individual or properly humiliating him and subjecting him to the Vinculum.

Some ghouls in this situation know that they are potentially destroying the life of their mate and simply don't care. Others take it further and attempt to enforce some kind of twisted eugenics program by "breeding in" desirable traits to the family from the outside. Blond hair? Fair skin? No heart murmur or deviated septum? Any number of traits (or negative traits) may be sought after in such a system. Anything to keep the family strong and pure.

Bloodlines

What follows are descriptions of a few of the established ghoul families in the World of Darkness. These examples are not the only thrall bloodlines, but they are prominent ones.



ESCAPING THE BLOOD

The families described here are incredibly dysfunctional entities, as most thrall families are. Any hopes of being a normal, nuclear family living in the suburbs behind a white picket fence are dashed as soon as the regnant enters the picture.

That said, some members of ghoul families *want* to be normal, and they seek to no longer be part of their respective bloodlines. Such individuals still technically belong to their ghoul parentage, regardless of whether they were born to the flesh-eating vagrants of the Alley Men or of the inbred Gravenor family. They might not exhibit all of the traits of their family if they are capable of escape, however. Yes, a ghoul might technically belong to the Nirriti Cult, but if she manages to successfully separate herself from the bloodline, she is unlikely to continue the family's bizarre practices.

Of course, escaping the family is never easy. Not only must one escape her pursuers (for no family or regnant tolerates a fugitive's flight), but she also must outpace her own fears and flaws. Such twisted families come with built-in problems (mental illnesses, strange rituals, blood addictions), and an escapee must also attempt to separate herself from these deeply ingrained habits. Some are incapable, and either commit suicide or return to the kin that birthed them — not to mention the vampire who enslaved them.



The Alley Men

The gulf between rich and poor widens every year. Among the urban sprawls, the wealthy celebrate their luxury in towers of glass and steel, or in secluded mansions tucked away from the metropolitan tangle. The

poor live in apartments unfit for most animals, and the poorest among them don't live in apartments at all. They are consigned to the streets, alleys and abandoned buildings. The numbers of homeless have swelled in recent decades, men and women cast away from society. Some are merely destitute, some are addicted, and others still are lost to madness.

Among the countless numbers of homeless, some unique madmen dwell. These madmen are also addicts, hungry for the taste of blood. These dispossessed men and women were once servants of an old and powerful vampire, a vampire who made many enemies and was left hanging from a construction crane as the sun rose. Over the last two decades, these ghouls lost their original purpose but gained a new one — to no longer be slaves and to take what they want from the wretched bloodsuckers by force.

Call of the Wild Angel

They don't look like it, but the so-called "Alley Men" are all part of a larger familial network, a bloodline of thralls once bred to serve. They do not act like a family, and they hardly recognize one another as mother and son or brother and sister. Instead, they treat one another as members of a disconnected tribe. A pecking order exists among them, but it rarely remains stable for long. Night after night, somebody new stands atop the hierarchy after beating or torturing another for dominance.

It wasn't always like that, however. While always homeless, the ancestors of the Alley Men were street preachers, a small family of a mother, father and two boys, who shouted the word of God in the alleys and hollered sermons from street corners. One night, a hirsute individual in a long coat and with a fierce black beard approached them calling himself the "Wild Angel." He told them that he was "a representative of God on High," and would give them a taste of divine power if they aided him in a few small tasks. He was gruff but captivating. He showed them a few tricks ("little miracles," he called them). They agreed, eager to be a part of something larger than themselves, happy that someone was not only listening to them, but had directly *approached* them. They asked few questions. Before morning, the destitute family was on the way to becoming enthralled, through the power of the Wild Angel's blood.

Their task was simple. They must be the eyes and ears of this man on the streets, in the places that the dispossessed go and dwell. It is in these places, the Angel said, that the Devil breeds dissent against God. The Wild Angel explained to his new servants that he was one of God's spies (he sometimes even called himself Zophiel) and that he was working to undermine a diabolical group he called The Spear.



The new thralls agreed to its task without question. Not only did their desire to serve the Lord outweigh any personal needs and wants, but the blood on their lips sang to them, commanded them with what they believed was the power of Christ Himself. The family remained unaware of what its “holy benefactor” really was, and simply never wanted to ask.

Over the years, the Wild Angel encouraged the family to grow. He spat Bible passages at them as evidence that God wanted them to procreate, passages from Genesis such as, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth,” or, “With spasms of distress you shall bring forth children.” And so, the family grew. He gave it “communion,” asking his thralls to partake of him (i.e., consume his blood) so that they could be closer to God. They spied for him. They watched as others, ones he called “devils” and “dyubbuk,” passed information in alleys or exsanguinated homeless victims in the shadows between buildings. They even brought him food, capturing any mortals who seemed corrupt and impious (ideas relative to each ghoul).

Then, one night, he was gone. His blood (still fresh on their tongues) cried out as he was destroyed.

Devolution

While the family did not recognize it as such, its members were addicted. Every one of them, weak without the precious Vitae, was desperate for another taste. It wasn't long before the family members were able to unconsciously turn this preternatural hunger into action, spinning it into a task that they believed was demanded by God Himself. Knowing that there were “devils” out there, the family went on the hunt. Its members vowed to track down these vile degenerates and take their blood in the name of God and of the Wild Angel.

Over time, this practice was muddled by the burgeoning madness of the bloodline members. Eventually anybody became fair game for the hunt, provided they were unholy and impious — two distinctions that could conceivably be anybody on the street. The mere idea behind the consumption of blood fueled the family, feeling that God and His servants had granted a secret mandate to destroy the wicked by consuming them. The family recognized that some blood was different from others. Drinking the blood of mere humans and not devils was nowhere near as powerful, but they still felt it a necessary and suitable action. After that, the family devolved further, and drinking blood became coupled with flesh-eating. After all, the consumption of flesh and blood was a cornerstone of the family's faith, was it not? It seemed only a natural way to vanquish its enemies (and, subconsciously, find and consume the Vitae of other vampires to help quench the addiction).

Hungry Hunters

Over the last 20 years, this family has been largely cast adrift on the sea that is the urban sprawl. Those two decades have not been kind to these ghouls. Madness has seeped in and has been bred into the blood. And they have not capped their breeding. In fact, their rate of procreation has only increased, as they are convinced that they must populate the Earth out of some twisted religious urge. Even before the Wild Angel was destroyed, they numbered at least two dozen. By now, the numbers have doubled or even tripled. They do not see themselves as family. Any patrilineal surname has long been lost to them, along with any scraps of sanity.

The Alley Men — a name not recognized among the members of the family, but instead a name given by those Kindred who are aware of this degenerate bloodline — are wretched creatures. They hunt vampires, recklessly seeking the taste of Kindred Vitae. Some mumble Biblical passages as they hound their prey, while others are hardly capable of human speech anymore, instead resorting to feral hisses and snarls. Many of the older ones are quite competent at tracking and incapacitating vampires. These destitute and itinerant ghouls tend to hunt in packs of three or four, picking off Kindred who have strayed from “other devils.” Should one of the family members die, so be it. They breed in hopes of siring more of themselves, either with one another or by seducing strangers into seeding the wombs of their women. When one member of the bloodline falls, the rest consume him, eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

Of course, the Alley Men do not just hunt vampires, though that is the primary task that drives them. They destroy anyone who stands in their way, and they hone their hunting skills on humans. They drink the blood of “corrupt” humans and sometimes eat their flesh. Some cook the meat over barrel fires; others are happy to have it raw.

Many Kindred don't believe in the Alley Men, believing instead that any mention of such cannibalistic, urban “beast-men” are nothing more than scary tales or object lessons on how to properly treat ghouls. Others believe that they cannot be ghouls at all, but are probably shapeshifters relegated to the fringes of the city. (Or, if not shapeshifters themselves, they are probably relatives of those cursed animals.) Some few vampires know the truth about these cannibal ghouls, and mostly go out of the way to avoid the homeless, for among the ranks of the destitute, these blood-hungry fiends might dwell.

Angustia

The Ordo Dracul is notable for its use of thrall bloodlines. The covenant is nigh obsessed with all the options and permutations available to the Kindred. One

of those permutations is the creation of ghouls, and a less common option of that ilk is the creation, breeding and maintenance of a ghoul family. Such families are quite useful to higher-ranking covenant members, for a number of them can be bred for intense servitude. Moreover, an entire servant family could theoretically double as a curious social and supernatural experiment when time allows. The Order certainly loves its experiments.

Most ghoul families watched and controlled by the Ordo Dracul act as little more than house-bound servants. They turn down beds, monitor the “wine cellars,” scrub bloodstains from bathtubs. For the most part, these families are not suitable breeding stock for future Order members. While occasionally a member of one of these bloodlines is secreted away and given the Embrace, such families are generally meant to be inferior personnel, more slaves than protégés.

One bloodline, however, is unique among the covenant-bound families. The Angustri family, a small clan of Roma Gypsies, has served the Order since 1941 and managed to collect a certain prestige and notoriety among the Kindred of the covenant. The bloodline is renowned for handling much of the covenant’s dirty work, and perhaps more importantly, keeping records of all the pertinent knowledge and data associated with the Order’s “work.” The bloodline’s almost dangerous proximity to the covenant’s secrets mean that some of the Angustri ghouls are eventually chosen for the Embrace, or are instead drained of blood and buried six feet deep.

Born with Teeth

Both before and during World War II, the Nazi party was deeply concerned about the so-called purity of its country and of the people within its boundaries. As such, Hitler and his party made no small effort to collect and purge all “degenerates” from Germany, including Jews, Russians, homosexuals, the handicapped and Roma Gypsies.

In 1939, all the members of the Angustri family were rounded up in Germany and taken to local work camps. In 1940, at a conference in Berlin, the Nazis decided that all of the captive Gypsies (30,000 of them) would be transferred to camps outside the country, mostly located in Poland. All 25 members of the Angustri family were taken to the camp at Treblinka. Right off the train, 19 of them were taken away and gassed. The six who remained, three men and three women, were made to work and suffer at the hands of local camp “doctors.”

Secretly overseeing this camp and other camps was a Mekhet vampire of the Ordo Dracul. This short and stocky woman was Giselle Werner, a Dragon with an insatiable curiosity. The camps, to her, were an experiment — not one of her own, but that diminished their value only slightly in this case. While the Nazis were

occasionally detrimental to the covenant’s activities, the camps remained models of human suffering. How much could a mortal take? How tough were some, how weak were others? Did the blood of desperate men taste differently than the blood of the Nazis in control? Did this apply at all to the vampiric condition, and if so, how? She watched with clinical curiosity. The Angustri family had not piqued her interest... not until a night in late 1941.

One night, the Nazi doctors took one of the Angustri girls into surgery, accusing her of whoredom, claiming she was simply “*viel zu schön*” (far too pretty). The girl, Pesha, was the subject of several gruesome operations in a single night. The fingers on her left hand were sewn together. Her face was scarred with a series of latticework cuts and then awkwardly stitched. Similar incisions were left on her stomach and back. The worst, however, were the operations meant to obviate her reproductive capabilities. She was given an oophorectomy and a clitoridectomy. Then she was put back with her family.

Three days later, held at gunpoint, the guards forced her to have sexual relations with her younger brother, Balo. The most surprising — and at the time, the most horrific — event was yet to come. Two months later, Pesha began showing the signs of pregnancy. With that, Giselle Werner became intensely interested in the Angustri family. Was it possible that this family was somehow preternaturally made to survive? Was there something different about it, something not present in the rest of the herd? Giselle decided to find out. After discussing her plans with other local Order members, she went to the camp at Treblinka and used her guile and Disciplines to track down the Angustris. She made them a one-time offer, and that was to promise their family’s blood to her and the Order. Seeing little choice, the family members agreed and were secreted away that night, never to re-enter the barbed wire gates of Treblinka’s death camp.

Seven months later, Pesha’s child was born, forced from her ruined womb in a gush of blood (that Giselle saved, along with the afterbirth). They called him Danior, meaning “born with teeth.” Thus began the ghoul bloodline of the Angustri family.

Emergence

For the first few years after the liberation, Giselle used the Angustri family as simple servants. The eldest and largest man would help to guard her chambers, while the others served largely as butlers. The women functioned as domestics, cleaning up messes, dusting shelves and locked cases, bringing and pouring draughts of Vitae for the mistress of the manor.

And yet, each Angustri, unlike Werner’s other thralls, rarely obeyed her to the precise letter of the law. They

seemed always to find the loopholes in commands, or simply exploited what wasn't said while performing what was. They were dangerously curious. As a matter of fact, they were often caught looking through forbidden books or handling some of Giselle's collection of artifacts and puzzle boxes. She punished them, of course, but it didn't seem to matter. They would return to their wayward habits whenever possible, even going so far as to offer whispered disrespect. This behavior fascinated Giselle. She wondered why they continued to buck at their leash when the promise of swift and unpleasant punishment was at hand every time? Even young Danior seemed possessed of a keen intelligence and a bitter, anarchic streak.

Giselle decided to further experiment with the family, offering tasks different from (and above) those expected of her other servants. The tasks were rarely pleasant, nor were they simple. Such tasks served both as tests as well as necessary evils. Bodies needed to be removed and secreted across town, a function now given to the Angustri. Giselle's specific and fickle tastes in blood were hard to serve (one night, it was cripples, another it was virginal boys), so she demanded they fetch her meals. Moreover, Giselle did not always prefer her meals directly from the body, and sometimes asked that the Angustri ghouls remove the blood and contain it in various clearly labeled phials. The Angustri performed their tasks. They did not do so perfectly, but they did so eagerly. More importantly, their rebellious habits dwindled (though never disappeared). It seemed, Giselle decided, that they had simply been *bored*.

Protégés

The Angustri bloodline has grown, shepherded along by Giselle Werner and several other Kindred of the Ordo Dracul. No longer located only in Germany and Poland, the family can be found serving various Order members across the world.

No longer relegated to domestic employ, the Angustri are chosen by Order vampires to perform those tasks that are both difficult and distasteful. They collect parts and people for the covenant's experiments. They rid the covenant of enemies when the Kindred themselves wish not to be bothered. They pass messages through dangerous territory, thief well-guarded and well-regarded treasures from other ghouls and vampires, and even keep heavily annotated books and records detailing the specific data of the Order's "research." The Angustri family members serve as assassins, scribes or simply go-to functionaries. They are known to be both troublesome and effective.

Crassus

Wealth dominates the Crassus family empire. The Crassus are American royalty, with holdings and assets

worth more than the GNP of most countries. The family has its hands in manufacturing, banks, technology and construction. The familial homes are located in and around every major city in America, and many in Europe. They own a seven-level mansion in Manhattan's Upper East Side, as well as several manor homes in Newport, Rhode Island and vineyards and palatial estates in California's Sonoma Valley. Even the adolescents of the Crassus family can buy the time of the most prominent politician, lawyer or celebrity. They are socialites, power brokers and venture capitalists. They are the kings of men.

They are also the slaves of the Kindred, and have been since the braziers of Rome shone brightest.

Bets and Bargains

The details of the Crassus family history are long lost, trampled and buried as time has passed. Some "facts" have emerged, and while most in the family believe unswervingly in these details, a wise few are dubious of such so-called truths.

For most members of the family, the legend is this: In approximately 70 BC, Quintus Crassus was a man about Rome. He was an architect, a public speaker, a master huntsman and a holder of 500 slaves. He made most of his wealth from his architecture and from buying and selling the city of Rome part and parcel. The legend further suggests that at one point, not only did Crassus own most of Rome, but even helped to fund Julius Caesar's quest to become praetor (and later consul). From this single man grew one of the most powerful families of the Western world.

But the familial myth misses a few key steps along the way. Quintus Crassus was wealthy, indeed, but he lost most of it by the time he was 25, for Crassus was a consummate and ill-advised gambler. He bet on everything: chariot races, gladiatorial matches, even snake fights in the dusty alleyways of Rome. He lost practically everything, and he and his wife Livonia became quickly destitute. The family's history doesn't account for this, nor does it account for the presence of a man called Lysander. Lysander was a vampire, a Ventrue by blood, reveling in temporal power and sexual debauchery. He saw how far the great Crassus had fallen and decided to offer a bargain to the gambler. If the two offered themselves completely, Lysander would restore them to their position of prosperity. Crassus was stubborn, but the sweet succor of opulence was too alluring to resist. In the end, he sold his and his wife's souls to this creature of the night, becoming little more than the vampire's toys. But, as in the deal, Quintus and Livonia were once again granted great wealth, which in turn bought them the power that has stayed with the family until this very day.

American Empire

The Crassus family is monstrous. Hundreds belong to the blood, with the family's numbers spread far and wide. Countless brothers, aunts, cousins, second cousins, all exist together to form this bastion of capitalist royalty. All of them are ghouls.

Not all of the family *knows* what it is, however. In fact, only a minority within the bloodline is cognizant of the existence of the Kindred or even that their blood is somehow supernatural. Of course, the family recognizes what is largely an unspoken and unmentioned fact: Its members age very slowly and seem preternaturally healthy. Those Crassus family members in the public eye take to wearing makeup to “age” themselves to at least appear somehow in-sync with the rest of humanity, while those who remain largely hidden from the world revel in their protracted life spans. But few are aware of the reasoning behind this strange biological characteristic, and even fewer know that the family long ago sold itself to a blood-drinking fiend.

So, how do members of the Crassus family become true ghouls, servile to the Kindred? Lysander no longer exists, having perished at the hands of barbarians in the early part of the first millennium. Lysander was a popular man, however, and he cultivated many associates and allies over his years, also passing the Curse to several childer. All of these acquaintances are allowed to choose prominent ghouls from the Crassus blood. Some choose a teen Crassus daughter because she is eerily beautiful or because she is a snot-nosed socialite who needs to be knocked down a peg or three. Others prefer to pick from the *crème de la crème*, the elders of the blood. They include mostly men (though some women have come into power of late) who have access to money, fame, industry and other elements of temporal power.

All the regnants of the Crassus family are Invictus, although the Crassus family isn't an “official” Invictus bloodline and is only open to those once in favor with the deceased Lysander. The process of choosing a ghoul from the ranks of the Crassus is usually very simple. The vampire visits with the local Crassus elders and discusses his options. If no family members are nearby that suit his needs and wants, he may extend his search to members outside the domain and have them flown in. Once a ghoul is chosen, she is stolen away for a time and indoctrinated. The regnant and thrall commit to the Oath of Villein, and the thrall is humiliated in whatever fashion the vampire sees fit — sleep deprivation, sexual degradation, performance of grotesque scutwork. Once the thrall is sufficiently broken in, she is returned to her family and is called upon only when needed. Beyond that, the ghoul is able to live her own life (provided she is able to stand the mental rigors of her shame and ruin). Those of the family who remain ignorant of the Crassus



condition see the new Kindred regnant as perhaps a distant uncle or a secretive lover. While the family always has its suspicions regarding the truth of such a strange and sudden relationship, few could truly guess of the reality of the situation. Those who *do* guess at it (or see something that they are not supposed to) are either chosen to become ghouls or are casually pruned from the family tree.

The purpose of Crassus family ghouls is almost universally the same, as Lysander more or less dictated their purpose countless years before when he decided to “share” the Blood. Crassus ghouls are not meant to work as functionaries. They are not domestics, they are not drivers or maids or tailors. They are toys. The ghouls serve as human dolls, poseable and articulated. They exist almost totally for amusement, whether that amusement is sexual or even intellectual is up to the demeanor of the regnant. Some are chosen to be deviant playthings, others must submit to countless hours of chess or midnight croquet. A side benefit is, of course, the family’s access to worldly power. The Crassus lineage has unprecedented access to a bevy of temporal advantages, advantages that connect unseen puppet strings to various low-level politicians, high-level CEOs, socialites and celebrities. But those things are seen largely as added features. The most desirable attribute is to take these powerful men and leash them like whipped dogs.

Gravenor

A manor lies at the end of that long, pitted road that descends deep into the swamp. Most know that the manor belongs to that old Gravenor family, though few truly know who or what the Gravenors are. Rumors mix with truth, and locals whisper crazy stories when glancing down that shadowy drive that cuts through the marshes. Rarely does one see a member of the Gravenor family. Occasionally, one is caught in town buying wick string for tallow candles; others are seen as shadows, wandering in and around the periphery of the swamp. Some people are content to believe that the Gravenors are just a strange, secluded family; others are certain that the Gravenors are inbred or escaped lunatics or some kind of cult. The truth is all of that and more. Yes, the Gravenors are inbred. Yes, they’re crazy. Yes, they’re certainly secretive.

But what people don’t know is that the Gravenor family has long served a torpid creature of the night, a Nosferatu vampire sleeping in the cellar of the old Gravenor manor. Locals sense that madness lies down that rutted, boggy road, but few locals know just how deep that madness goes.

Swamp Butchers

The Gravenor family came to the New World in the early 19th century. At the direction of the family’s eldest,

Roderick Gravenor, the family originally made its way in the country through hog farming and butchering. Already possessed of some money (for the Gravenor family was of distant Welsh nobility), it was not long before the coffers of the kin began to overflow. They opened several other farms and became especially adept at rendering hogs, that is to say, making useable as much of the pig as possible, turning once-useless waste into lard, gelatin, scrapple and bone meal. The blood and fat ran thick from the Gravenor land.

Nobody knows exactly what attracted the attention of the itinerant Nosferatu, Grigor Swancott. Was his interest piqued because he too was of some Welsh nobility? Or was he instead merely drawn by the heady scent of pig’s blood in the air? It’s possible that his reasons were incomprehensible to a sane mind. Whatever the case, he came to the family late one storm-tossed October night, bringing visions of terror and tales of monsters far more horrible than he. He held the Gravenors fixed where they stood and hammered his own paranoia upon them. For many nights he commanded them to stay as they grew hungry and tired, steeping in the Nosferatu’s own madness. Every night he awoke anew and assaulted them again with the brunt of his lunacy. By the end of the week, the Gravenors had claimed a small part of Grigor’s insanity for themselves, and that madness was immovable. Grigor believed that he had found solace in the storm, a safe place with those who understood him. Of course, he did not have the presence of mind to realize that he had forced this understanding upon them.

Grigor’s belief was this: Forces beyond his control were trying to destroy him. These forces were represented by “invisible monsters” from “other planes of existence” that sought to undo him at every turn. The Nosferatu was certain that they crept silently between worlds, watching him and moving within his peripheral vision. These monsters showed their horrid faces in distant mirrors, shambled slowly across hazy horizons, dwelled beneath stairways and dirt mounds. Grigor never seemed sure exactly what these creatures were. Sometimes he called them *coblynagh*, or “the Cobblers.” Other times he gave them far grander names — “The Watchers from Beyond the Door” or simply “The Strangers.”

The Gravenors, to Grigor’s addled mind, represented a powerful opportunity. Their home, a bog-bound manor only a few miles from the pig farms, seemed isolated and defensible against these entities. Moreover, the wealthy and insular family seemed natural allies to the fanatical Nosferatu. And so, after having broken them down and infected them with his paranoia, Swancott accepted some of the family members as his ghouls, while placing the rest under the Vinculum.

Over the following decades, Grigor’s mind degraded further, while the ranks of the Gravenor family grew in

defiance of potential miscarriages or stillbirths. Grigor would not allow the family to breed outside its bloodline, instead compelling them to couple with one another. Cousin to cousin, sister to brother, it didn't matter. Roderick Gravenor, the head of the family, was the most... fruitful when it came to breeding. He even seeded the womb of his own daughter.

Then, some 30 years after his introduction to the family, Grigor awoke one evening believing that the alien entities had finally found him. Every shadow was a new fiend, every water stain on cracked wallpaper was a new face. He fled to the root cellar, curled up in an old claw-foot bathtub on the shattered, dusty floor, and retreated into a deep, unshakable fugue.



IS GRIGOR RIGHT?

Grigor — and the entire Gravenor family by proxy — is plagued by the fear of terrible monsters seeking to gain entry to our world. It seems the product of a delusional mind, and evidence certainly supports that. Swancott and many members of the Gravenor kin suffer from paranoid visions and peripheral hallucinations. Such mental fractures easily explain away the phobias and irrational paranoia. But as the saying goes, "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you."

Is it possible that Grigor is right? Are there really strange creatures outside this world trying to get in? Are they demons, fey spirits, ghosts or something altogether stranger? It seems impossible, until one considers that those traveling nearby claim to have seen hominid beings lurching through the marshes, and others have seen red eyes staring at them from the rearview mirrors of their cars...



Isolation

Grigor's own torpid state is reflected now in the family's moribund paralysis. They live, secluded and largely inaccessible, breeding only with one another. They wear antiquated clothing, they don't use phones or other modern trappings (electricity was accepted only grudgingly), and they speak in outmoded dialects. They don't... *look* right, either. Most of them are pale, with their eyes either too far apart or too close together. Some have veiny webbing between fingers or toes. Others seem to have strange skin disorders, such as rashes, shingles and constant bruising. A new son, Owen, was born with porphyria, a disease that makes the sufferer frighteningly sensitive to light.

The family continues to worship its master. Grigor abides in the same claw-foot tub down in the cellar, but that tub has been made into something of a tomb or reliquary. The family surrounds him in garlands of

swamp blossoms and burns fat beeswax candles in a five-pointed star around the body. They bring him blood, as well. Mostly, they kill animals, but from time to time (on holidays or other "special occasions") they murder a lost traveler or other stranger and pour the blood into Grigor's motionless mouth. The family also partakes of their regnant's own Vitae from time to time, chewing holes in his waxy arms and drinking a taste here or there.

The Gravenors also maintain Swancott's paranoid delusions. Most members of the family pay more than just lip service to the idea that evil forces conspire against their sleeping master. They engage in home-spun superstitious protection, such as pouring lines of salt across doorways or littering their lawns with dead blackbirds. Any outsider may be seen as kin to the enemy, so the family remains as isolated as possible from other people, walking to the nearby towns only when absolutely necessary.

Curiously, one thing most of the manor-bound family doesn't know is that the bloodline extends beyond the swamp. Many Gravenors over the last century have been exiled from the manor for various reasons and sent to work at the pig farms (or rendering plants) miles away. While some of these Gravenors still feature many of the strange congenital defects of their peers, they tend to be more connected to the "real world." Some generations aren't even aware that Grigor Swancott exists. (It's rumored that some of these Gravenors have even fled the farms for the cities, disappearing among the throngs of humanity.) From time to time, one of the Gravenors in the manor visits the farms and chooses a potential "bride" from among the ostracized ghouls.



GRAVENOR MANDRAGORA

The marsh surrounding the crumbling Gravenor manor is a dank, forbidding place. The house specifically (a sprawling Victorian monstrosity) is surrounded by a number of black willow trees, hunched over and leaning toward the house as if trying to crush it.

Some of these dark, drooping willows are mandragora, trees that have been made to drink the Vitae of Grigor Swancott. They sway and lurch even when there is no strong wind, and the vine-like tendrils are capable of tangling unsuspecting mortals who wander through their foliage. The trees, like all mandragora, produce the glutinous bloody sap called lacrima. Many of the elder Gravenors harvest this substance from time to time and use it in both food and drink. They feed each mandrake with the stolen blood from their Nosferatu master. (See p. 59 for more information on mandrakes.)



Nirriti Cult

The Kindred of the Circle of the Crone face a painful dichotomy about their place in this world. They believe that Creation is power, and yet, they are the children of a monstrous mother. The idea of conception and formation are central to the covenant's goals, yet they are forever cursed to be figures of destruction. Their wombs are withered and dead, and the only way to create anything is to use the blood stolen from other beings, potentially destroying such beings in the process. Moreover, a vampire's taste of creation is truly a mockery of the real thing, a vicious duplication of the Curse rather than a genuine act of conception.

Some Acolytes struggle with this conundrum for their entire Requiems, whereas others merely grow comfortable with the contradiction and accept it. Rarely does a member of the Circle find any true peace about it, and even more unlikely is the Acolyte who has actually managed to include creation while largely excluding acts of destruction.

Except for Alma, of course. Alma, a *Daeva ancilla* of the Circle, has found a way to shirk the mantle of destruction so critical to a vampire's Requiem. Or, at least, Alma *thinks* she has done so. In her mind, she has achieved a careful harmony between good and bad, pleasure and pain. She believes that she is on the positive side of the spectrum, leaving the negative and evil side to a bloodline of ghouls she has claimed as her own. This lineage is known within the Circle as the Nirriti Cult.

Hand of the Goddess

The Nirriti Cult (also known throughout its history as the "Children of Nirriti," or the "Blood of Nirriti") did not begin with Alma. Instead, its origins lie with her sire, the long-dead Vishram. Vishram, also an Acolyte, was not as obsessed with the refutation of the Curse as his childe would later become. Rather, Vishram was consumed with self-interest, invoking the destructive abilities of the Kindred whenever it served his whims, and offering only loose devotion to any ideas of creation.

Dwelling in England for the better part of the 19th century, Vishram had ingratiated himself with the mortal spiritualists of the time. Many of these so-called occultists favored such parlor tricks as table levitation, séances and fortune telling. Many also called upon angels and ghosts to aid them and speak to them from the "other side." Vishram became the center of these spiritualists for a time, attempting to steer them away from such modern occult notions and turn them instead toward forgotten pagan ideals. He spoke to them of reincarnation, of the cycles of creation and

destruction, and he helped teach of the sacred powers of various goddess figures. Vishram did not do these things out of any great faith or devotion to the Circle. While he was technically an Acolyte, he became involved with the spiritualists only to serve his ego, placing himself as the central, dominating figure in a cult of personality.

Frankly, it didn't work. The spiritualists always sought to syncretize Vishram's ideas of the goddess with the cryptic mysteries of the occult, ideas that Vishram felt were more useful to the fools of the Ordo Dracul. Before leaving England, he heard of a small mystery cult living in Keighley and worshipping a forgotten Hindu goddess. Further investigation yielded the fact that this group actively venerated a figure associated with the Hindi goddess Kalikamata. This figure, the demigoddess Nirriti, was an ancillary figure of destruction, a splinter identity of Kali herself. In Vishram's eyes, these people were lost sheep, ignorant of true possibility. They needed a hand to guide them, and Vishram gave them that hand.

He made the primary members of this small cult into his own personal ghouls. He used them in myriad ways, mostly to stroke his own ego and to "shepherd" them into depraved acts for his own amusement. They were his servants and sycophants, ever reaching for the dangling reward of the Embrace. Such a reward came for only one of them, a favorite ghoul named Alma.

At around the same time, her own sister became pregnant with the child of one of the other cultists. The sister perished in childbirth, but the child did not. It was here that the bloodline was born.

Afterward, Vishram was not long for this world. He disappeared one January night just after the turn of the century. He was gone for months. Finally, a small part of his fate became known when his face, separated from the skull, was sent to his childe. Alma found the skin, desiccated and ashen. One word was painted across his forehead in white: "Impure."

The circumstances surrounding Vishram's disappearance and Final Death remain unclear. Alma's suspicions ranged from a number of competing London mages to some mysterious and unrevealed covenant. What she did know is that the single word, "impure," was significant. In the time she assumed control of the Nirriti ghouls, she soon came to believe that Vishram had truly failed the Circle, had engaged in too much destruction but not enough creation. She became fixated upon the notion that destruction begets destruction, while creation fosters only purity. Alma also began to believe that Vishram had misused the cultists in general, exploiting them only for his own entertainment. It was then that she changed the direction of the cult, instituting a mandate that has been in place until this day.

HOW IS THE CULT A BLOODLINE?

At this point, the cult consists almost entirely of ghouls from a single descendent, hence belonging to the same supernatural lineage. The cult doesn't think of itself as family, however. While it maintains some understanding that producing children together certainly links each member that way, Alma has given the cult the idea that it is more than just a family. The members needn't share a last name or any other familial trappings, because the links and manacles of the goddess Nirriti fetter them to one another. That is all they need to know.

The cult has some members who are not part of the bloodline. Such members are ghouls of Alma's, and may one day contribute seed or egg to the group's unholy pairings.

Perverse Absolution

The new direction demanded by Alma is a bizarre one, placing the cult in a kind of "sin-eater" position. That is to say, Alma has shed herself of her sins and inhumanity. Any dark impulse or evil act that comes to her is foisted upon the cult, meaning they become the carriers of her wishes, the enactors of her grotesque will. If Alma has a sudden urge to harm children, to take their tender little hands and break every bone in them, she calls upon some of the servitors of Nirriti. The cultists do as Alma's whims demand. When Alma wishes someone violated, the cultists do so for her (perhaps even consummating such abuses upon one another). Alma carries this relationship to an almost absurd point. When she feeds, rarely does she actually go out and drink the blood from the flesh of a mortal. Instead, she has the cultists hunt in her place, finding and exsanguinating any and all suitable victims. (The process for this can be grisly, for many times Alma actually insists the ghouls bite the victim, swallow his blood, and spit or vomit it into buckets for her own consumption later.) Meanwhile, the vampire sits idly by, tending to her gardens or her pets. Sometimes she sculpts porcelain, other times she pens poetry beneath the moon. In this way, Alma considers herself "pure," unsullied by perversity or depravity. The cult becomes her dark side, absolving her of any destructive habits.

The cultists themselves are a mixture of the bizarre and the mundane. At the insistence of Alma, most of them appear to live relatively normal lives during the day, going to jobs, living in rented flats, eating lunch with acquaintances. Yet, under the light of the moon, they come together and effectively remove the masks of a mundane life to become the cultists of Nirriti and servants of Alma. They engage in calculated orgiastic rituals meant to make them pregnant with the spawn of Nirriti, and they also

perform acts of bodily mortification. They cut, brand, pierce and whip one another, all below the standard borders of clothing so as to keep the scars hidden from public life. Some have tried to escape this life of extremes, but few make it far, for when the cult mobilizes to find such a traitor, it acts with frightening efficiency.

Fostering Thrall Bloodlines

Many ghoul families occur inadvertently. A child of a ghoulish mother inexplicably survives, and generally, a bloodline is born whereupon the thrall condition can be carried through generations.

Some Kindred seek to create their own ghoulish bloodlines, fostering such families into being. Doing so is never easy, and attempts end in failure far more often than in success. Still, some vampires have actually had some measure of victory.

Repeated Attempts

One method of cultivating a ghoulish bloodline is the old "try and try again" method. A vampire regnant with one or more ghouls commands his servants to mate. Most attempt to have ghouls mate with other ghouls, provided the regnant has access to enough ghouls of both sexes. Eventually, a female ghoulish becomes pregnant. Alternatively, a male ghoulish might impregnate a mortal woman and have the vampire make her a thrall in turn.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, such awkward experimentation ends in miscarriage or stillbirth. Repeated biological failures take quite a toll on a female, as even her more vigorous ghoulish condition can handle this constant physical and emotional burden for only so long. Eventually, the process either deadens a woman's womb or simply kills her.

Of course, the improbable sometimes happens and a woman remains "blooded up" (as vulgar Kindred call it) with child. The child is born alive and in relative health, even if the mother perishes. From such an event, a ghoulish bloodline is born. But such an occurrence is so rare as to be almost unattainable.

Rituals

Some covenants, or particularly old individual elders, claim to have rituals that increase the chances of success during a ghoulish pregnancy. Their respective keepers guard these rituals closely, regardless of whether they succeed in fostering a thrall bloodline.

Most of these rituals originated with the Ordo Dracul, as that covenant is ostensibly responsible for more ghoulish bloodlines than any other. These rituals, of which there are dozens, are said to be contained in a book called the *Libret al Cal Pur-Sânge* (Book of the Blood Mule). Many of the written ceremonies are simple. The pregnant ghoulish might merely need to drink larger draughts

of the regnant's Vitae during the nine months, or she might instead need to consume more obscure reagents (such as the distilled afterbirth of a stag, the blood of an infant, potions of blended maggots). On the other hand, some rituals are impossibly complex. One ritual, the *Sarpe din Mormânt*, involves binding the mother-to-be to a wooden chair, and applying 144 leeches to her naked flesh. During the time of the ritual, which lasts a full week, she is also fed small but constant amounts of mercury (though some older Order Kindred insist that adder venom is a better poison). At the end of this ritual, it is expected that the mother will die but that the child will not only live, but be quite strong and stalwart.

The Circle of the Crone are said to have a number of rituals to ameliorate the conception of thrall bloodlines, as well. Most of these rituals involve just as many obscure reagents and elements as the Order's rites, though the Circle tends to have more natural and mystical elements, as opposed to the Order's more occult/scientific "techniques." The number of Circle rituals pale in comparison to the elaborate catalog of ceremonies held in secret by the Ordo Dracul, however.

Crossbreeding

Some Kindred are aware that it's easier to start with a member of a pre-existing thrall lineage than it is to

create one's own. Such vampires have occasionally accomplished such crossbreeding through a number of methods.

For one, if a vampire knows of a pre-existing ghoul bloodline, he might try to negotiate with that family's regnant. Such negotiations involve trading ghouls, favors or territory for such a "special" thrall. It's also possible that the two Kindred engage in a kind of alliance, offering to serve common interests while also sharing the two ghoul bloodlines that emerge. Such alliances are more likely to occur when the two vampires are of the same covenant, but this certainly isn't a requirement.

Of course, some negotiations fall apart or never happen in the first place. Some vampires simply kidnap members of other ghoul bloodlines and bring them home to their own ghouls. The abductee (almost always a woman) is raped repeatedly until her womb bears the fruit of a splinter bloodline. From there, she is either incorporated into the vampire's own stable of ghouls (if possible) or is simply killed.

Rumors

The process of creating a new and future bloodline of ghouls is awash in esoteric lore and legend. Like any inscrutable and seemingly impossible event, the very concept is informed by a number of rumors, some of which include:



- A pregnant ghoule will not miscarry or give birth to a dead child if she is made to drink a weekly draught of mandrake lacrima. Other variants of this legend suggest that she must be injected with the lacrima, or must have the mystical “mandrake tears” inserted vaginally.

- Only women born under the second day of a new moon are able to give birth to a thrall child. Alternatively, some suggest that only a woman born on a Friday the 13th can carry a ghoule child to term, whereas others add that she must also be the seventh daughter of a seventh son.

- If the woman is forced to drink her own blood (or in some rumors, consume her own flesh), she is able to deliver the child alive, though she herself will perish. Other legends demand that she not consume her own blood, but instead must drink the blood of the father.

- Some say that the act of conception must occur in certain places for the child to survive. Some of those potential places include the following: hallowed ground, on top of a child’s gravesite, at the nexus of ley lines, at the very spot the woman’s regnant was Embraced or at the spot where Lucifer supposedly fell from the sky and struck the earth.

- One of the more popular legends is that the chance for success in creating a ghoule family is doubled or tripled if the regnant is also of a unique vampire bloodline.

Independent Ghouls

Vampiric power, mortal freedom: independent ghouls have the best of both worlds. With no regnant to command them, they’re supernatural freelancers living on the edge between mortality and the Embrace. They can walk in the sun as well as the dark, staying young, cheating death, mastering Kindred Disciplines and enjoying pleasures that ordinary humans can’t imagine. Right?

Actually, nothing could be further from the truth.

Independent ghouls’ lives are not easy ones. At best, they’ve traded one set of challenges for another. At worst, their lives are more wretched and painful than living under the thrall of a vampiric regnant. Rare is the rogue ghoule who would, given the chance, make the same choices that put her where she is. And yet, they do possess the potential to change their nature and reverse the direction of their lives. The independent ghoule is one step away from being a mortal again, but it’s a step that many are unwilling to take. Frankly independent ghouls aren’t actually independent at all. They’re addicts, and their addiction rules them as ruthlessly as any vampire master ever could.

Independence Day

How does a thrall become independent? Bound by Vinculum and blood addiction, few ghouls can take any action to bring about their own liberation. So the vast majority of unmastered ghouls become so by pure chance.

The twists and turns of the Danse Macabre can send even the most resourceful vampire to a Final Death without warning, cutting his thralls loose from their blood bond in the process. Sometimes a regnant goes into torpor or becomes otherwise separated from her ghouls, causing the Vinculum to fade and eventually snap. Some regnants simply lose interest in keeping thralls or become unable to sustain them, allowing the blood bond to wither (if they don’t kill the thralls outright when they no longer want them around). And on rare occasions, a vampire might take pity on a ghoule and release him from service.

The loss of a regnant doesn’t automatically result in independence, however. Depending on the circumstances, a ghoule might respond in any number of ways. Some give in to despair and end their lives. Others are eliminated or enthralled by the master’s enemies or associates, seeking to prevent a Masquerade breach. Ghouls who expect the master to return one night might continue acting in the regnant’s interests by choice, even when they are not supernaturally compelled to do so. And some ghouls, having lost the capacity to act independently after a lifetime under a regnant’s control, reject their newly achieved freedom and try to find a new master as quickly as possible.

Another possibility exists for ghouls who find themselves without a regnant. Of those few who manage to avoid destruction or a second thralldom, some take the opportunity to give up their ghoule status and reconnect with mortality. Some ghouls have no choice. With no ready source of Vitae, their ghoule nature fades away and leaves them fully human. For other ghouls, the desire to live some sort of normal life motivates them to forgo Vitae deliberately. In either situation, those ghouls who become human again pay a significant price. Ghouls who stop taking Vitae must cope with tremendous cravings as their addiction demands to be fed. These urges are powerful enough to cause derangements, nightmares, even suicide. And even if she beats the addiction, the ghoule must live with terrible memories of her experiences as a thrall, as well as the oppressive knowledge that vampires exist.

As a result, independent ghouls tend to be exceptionally tough and resourceful. To survive the dangers inherent in losing a master, and recover one’s sense of self after prolonged outside control, requires both physical hardiness and a singular force of will. Second, for whatever reason, independent ghouls don’t consider the life of an ordinary mortal to be a desirable or achievable goal. Some are too deranged or blood addicted to consider an attempt at normalcy. Others refuse to give up the rush of Vitae and the dark thrills of interacting with the Kindred. Some even have agendas that require them to maintain themselves as ghouls, to take revenge against the force that destroyed their regnant, to lash out against Kindred who’ve wronged them or to protect themselves and their loved ones from supernatural threats.

Living with the Undead

Independent ghouls have all sorts of motivations and desires, but all ghouls who hope to operate independently must satisfy three imperatives: acquire Vitae, avoid blood bonds and survive.

As far as acquiring Vitae goes, some independent ghouls like to style themselves as predators of predators, hunting the Kindred for Vitae the way the Kindred stalk mortals. But unlike vampires, ghouls who take this approach have few advantages over their prey. Not only are most vampires more powerful and skilled than the average ghoul, it's rarely possible for the ghoul to know ahead of time just how outmatched she is. And since most Kindred have enemies, they don't often put themselves in vulnerable positions. Furthermore, while the Kindred have physical enhancements and the rhapsody of the Kiss to help them to draw blood, the feeding process for ghouls is a dangerous and messy affair. Vampire ichor doesn't flow from a wound the way human blood does, so extracting it takes more than a scratch or a bite.

Despite all these handicaps, some ghouls sustain themselves by taking Vitae from unwilling vampires. Their success depends on maximizing what few advantages they do have, and the foremost of these is knowledge. The more a hungry ghoul knows about the habits of the local Kindred (their hangouts, their factions and their territories), the better chance the ghoul has of choosing the right victim. Some independent ghouls become expert observers of vampire behavior. They can identify a weak but overconfident neonate or spot a vampire who has barely enough strength to limp home after a night of debauchery and violence.

Hunting in groups can improve the success of independent ghouls, making it easier to ambush, overpower or ensnare a carefully selected victim. But remember that ghouls are addicts. Their first allegiance is to their addiction, not their fellows. Small groups of ghouls do sometimes work together successfully, but conflict over Vitae often fractures such allegiances before too long. When ghouls do band together, it's typically on an ad-hoc basis. A ghoul who needs some assistance might recruit whoever happens to be available (assuming he's managed to establish some relationships with other independent ghouls, which is a difficult achievement in itself). Once that goal is met, the group probably splits up.

Some ghouls prefer to do their hunting in a "smash-and-grab" manner. They overwhelm a vampire with physical force, carve or slice off a sizable portion of undead flesh, and then run, hoping their acquisition contains enough Vitae to satisfy them. Others find a way to immobilize the victim, with anything from heavy chains to a pit of wet cement to the use of an appropriate Discipline, so they can draw Vitae in a

more controlled manner. Stories do circulate about ghouls who keep vampires imprisoned and gradually drain them until there's no Vitae left. But since it's hard for a ghoul to be certain what abilities a given vampire might possess, confining one for even a short time would be extremely dangerous. Such tales are... *probably* groundless.

Some independent ghouls see themselves more as scavengers and parasites than predators. Hungry ghouls have been known to appear at sites of vampiric conflict to take blood from weakened or incapacitated Kindred left behind after the battle, or to lap up Vitae from the ground or from discarded weapons. Certain ghouls excel at locating poorly defended havens and making a daytime entrance to siphon away Vitae while the vampire slumbers. (Perhaps the traditional notion of ghouls as corpse-eating monsters stems from witnesses who saw ghouls breaking into tombs where vampires slept.) These ghouls might create elaborate devices to penetrate a vampire's flesh and slowly draw out Vitae without disturbing the sleeper.

A more common way of acquiring Vitae without violence, though, is for a ghoul to enter into some kind of agreement with a vampire. Independent ghouls might possess unusual skills or abilities or be privy to knowledge that makes it worth a vampire's while to trade for Vitae (be it her own, or that of a childe, associate or captured enemy). Working for the Kindred can also provide a source of funds and material comfort to ghouls who lack the ability to achieve gainful employment. To that end, some independent ghouls spend almost all their time creating and sustaining a network of contacts and informants, in the hopes of gleaning facts that the Kindred find useful. Others hire themselves out for short or long-term tasks, the kind that vampires can't perform and ordinary mortals can't be trusted with (such as intercity transport and various daytime activities). Bargaining with the Kindred is a risky proposition, of course. It's hard for the ghoul to be certain that a prospective trading partner won't decide to just take what he needs by force. Yet a ghoul who's proven herself useful to multiple clients might develop a reputation that motivates local Kindred to negotiate in good faith (or something close to it).

The Sweetest Poison

The catch-22 at the heart of an independent ghoul's existence is the fact that the very substance that he can't do without is the same substance that could cost him his freedom. Three draughts of Vitae from the same Kindred creates a blood bond, which means an independent ghoul must constantly seek new sources for the vampiric blood he craves. There's no easy way to do so, which is why nearly every independent ghoul must be something of an opportunist. A ghoul who doesn't make a habit of hunting Kindred would be sorely

tempted to make a move if she happens to come across a vampire who's too weak to fight back. A ghoul who prefers to secure Vitae through barter and bargaining finds it hard to ignore a back door into a vampire's favorite sleeping place.

To most Kindred, ghouls are thralls and nothing more. A ghoul who has no master, some would say, is a threat to the Masquerade and an affront to the superiority of the Kindred. They consider the phenomenon of kine willfully seeking Kindred Vitae to be a reversal of the natural order of things. And many regnants dislike independent ghouls for fear that their own thralls might become tempted to follow suit. The bottom line is that independent ghouls who seek to make deals with the Kindred need to be careful who they approach. A vampire who views ghouls with contempt might decide to slaughter the ghoul for such effrontery. Some Kindred even make it their business to actively hunt and eliminate any independent ghoul who lacks the protection of vampiric patron or ally. In a sense, independent ghouls must navigate a double Masquerade, hiding their nature from mortals as well as from hostile vampires. It's a burden that's uniquely theirs, and one to which these tenacious survivors are uniquely suited.

Animal Ghouls

It is possible for a vampire to choose an animal as his thrall. Of course, such a thing is uncommon for a number of reasons. For one, many Kindred (especially those of the Lancea Sanctum) look down upon the act of enthralling animals, seeing it as little more than fornicating with beasts. Why lower oneself? Are the predatory whims and needs of the Damned truly served by such stupid creatures? Another reason is that animal ghouls simply aren't as useful. While a regnant likely believes that her thrall will never match her own intelligence, mortals still possess a greater comprehension and intellect than their animal inferiors. Can a dog accurately convey a message? Can a python drive the Mercedes and take down messages from a digital phone? To many Kindred, animal ghouls are incomplete and lacking in any finesse.

That's not to say some don't prefer them, however. Animal ghouls offer some benefits that aren't typically found in human ghouls. As simple creatures, animals are unlikely to rebel against their masters. While such treachery is rare and exceedingly difficult, a human thrall can exert her will to ignore others' plans to harm her master. Animals do no such thing, and they don't come to despise their masters as human ghouls are wont to do. Plus, animal thralls are simple. They do not require complex training or vast emotional or physical effort to program them accordingly. A hound will fetch the master's slippers, a raptor will claw an enemy's eyes with its talons, or a cat will act as its regnant's eyes and ears even in

the middle of the day. Human beings come with emotional baggage; animals don't.

Of course, many Kindred simply subject animal companions to the Vinculum, hoping to create a bond with such a creature without the investiture of will required to create a ghoul. Still, some prefer the long-standing potential of animal companionship, and since ghouls don't age, the vampire need never fear having to bury her beloved pet. Vampires who do decide to take that step and enthrall an animal often have particular purposes in mind that range from the very simple (travel companion) to the elaborate (a physical avatar of the vampire's faith and belief system).

Conventional Uses

Generally, a vampire who seeks to create an animal ghoul does so for simple, non-mystical reasons similar to those behind creating a human ghoul. The vampire needs to exploit someone for a certain function. In the case of an animal thrall, the vampire usually sees some function that either cannot be filled by a human, or he would prefer not to be filled by a human. Such functions aren't too far afield from what one would expect from a regular animal companion (pet or livestock), and they don't elicit unusual attention.

- **Defense:** Most Kindred are capable of defending themselves, at least against a single other foe. The Curse comes with a number of mystical and physical defenses, which appear the first night of a vampire's existence. That's not to say he's perfectly protected, however. A vampire (especially a neonate) can be easily harmed by even an overwhelming number of mortals, and should his enemies be more serious or more focused, he might meet Final Death before he knows what's happening. Hence, defense is worth considering. Some Kindred prefer human ghouls as protection, surrounding themselves with ex-cops, pit fighters or steroid junkies. Others, however, find animal ghouls to provide better and unexpected defense.

Most often, a vampire chooses a dog as an animal protector. A dog doesn't attract undue attention, and dogs are easier to obtain and replace than most domestic animals (aside from cats). Finally, dogs can be capable fighters. The right dog is fast, can take a beating, and has a set of teeth that can rend meat from bone if need be. Obviously, only certain canines are useful in this manner. While bigger isn't always better, a rat terrier makes a far less fearsome warrior than, say, a Rottweiler. Other popular dogs include shepherds (German, Belgian), Doberman pinschers, boxers, mastiffs and the pit bull terrier. Many such dogs are chosen from local pounds or are won (or stolen) at animal pit fights.

Some Kindred choose more... interesting animals to provide protection. Falcons have come recently into vogue with more upscale Gangrel. Some choose less acceptable

animals. Some Kindred have been seen with wolves, or stranger still, with tigers, panthers or lions. Most such creatures are illegal to own, and those that are legal can only be raised in certain states with a number of very expensive licenses on hand. The biggest issue with such creatures is that aside from illegality and difficult care, such beasts draw undue attention. Such negative attention is exactly what most vampires fear, and it makes owning such animals hardly worth the risk.

- **Companionship:** Much as some of the Damned choose humans as companions (pets, really), they might choose animals for the same purpose. Such animals aren't chosen for any real use beyond very long-lived companionship. Again, dogs make a popular choice, except one needn't choose a particularly tough or vicious breed. Cats are equally common.

Truthfully, nearly any creature can be made into a pet by using the Vinculum. The only reason to spend the time and energy in making a creature a thrall is out of some kind of twisted need for "love." Some vampires are able to fixate on a single being as the "one thing" keeping them from falling over the edge. Many Kindred learn the hard truth about such a relationship, however, when they destroy a ghoul "pet" in a frenzy of rage or hunger. When that touchstone is destroyed, many Kindred topple into that monstrous darkness that perpetually threatens to consume them.

- **Travel/Beast of Burden:** This last category is rarely invoked anymore, as animals are no longer required for travel or to carry pack items. What once could have been schlepped on the bowed back of an old mule can now be thrown in the back of a Lincoln Navigator. Why ride a horse when you can buy a fast motorcycle?

Still, it's not completely unheard of for some Kindred to use animals in this manner. Particularly old vampires might have been Embraced before the implementation of automobiles (or even trains), and may have a piebald stallion as a ghoul from two centuries ago. Some vampires are simply uncomfortable with using modern machines. Plus, some nomadic Gangrel recognize that cars can't take them everywhere. If there's no access road, you can't get to that old cabin up in the Rockies in a Suburu Outback.

Mystical Purpose

Animals have long been associated with mysticism. A cat might be a witch's familiar; a charmed serpent is emblematic of Eastern mastery, the bull and scorpion are both symbols of old Mithraic blood cults. Therefore, choosing an animal as a thrall could also have a mystical reason as opposed to a mundane or practical one.

- **Avatar of Faith:** Becoming Damned kills much of what makes one human. It guts an individual, scraping away the vestiges of a normal life. Many vampires recognize this growing barrenness and seek to replace it with

other things — love, friendship, hope, faith. While these things become hollow mockeries of the original intention, many Kindred mistakenly assume that such distorted facsimiles are the same thing. Faith is perhaps one of the most commonly grasped straws, as many vampires place some kind of devotion in one of the more orthodox covenants like the Circle of the Crone or the Lancea Sanctum. Such a vampire's choice of ghouls, animal ghouls in specific, attempts to reflect or even mimic the symbols of one's supposed faith.

The Acolytes offer the best examples of this. Scattered among the Circle's intense pagan symbology are animals. Some of these creatures are associated with specific goddesses. Owls are associated with Lilith, the Mother of Monsters. Cats are connected to Inanna, Queen of Beasts. Bats are linked to the Underworld's Ereshkigal; crows to the flesh-eating Macha. Rats are sometimes associated with the stolen Persephone. Acolytes choose such beasts as ghouls to act as literal, living symbols of their faith. Most Acolytes call such creatures "fetches," eschewing the more vulgar "familiar." Kindred of the Circle tend to hold their fetches in reverent regard, treating the creatures as if they are true extensions of fiendish divinity. Such creatures live in as much opulence as the Acolyte can afford. The vampires go so far as to grant these beasts greater privilege and luxury than the Circle's own *human* ghouls.

The Ordo Dracul engages in similar practice, though admittedly the scope of the custom is far more limited. Dragons often choose creatures who symbolize the covenant's founder (and, according to them, the progenitor of all of the Damned). Some choose reptiles to epitomize the influence of their founder, Vlad Dracul, the sole reason being that such creatures are the closest extant manifestations of actual dragons. While some Kindred choose lizards (anything from monitor lizards to actual crocodiles), most select some manner of serpent as a ghoul. Serpents are both functional (poisonous snakes, specifically) and symbolic (representing not only Dracula, but also the ideas of forbidden knowledge and occult wisdom). Some vampires of the Order choose adders, pythons, boa constrictors or even cobras. Their treatment of such beings is far different than that of the Acolytes, however. Vampires of the Circle see their animal thralls as manifestations of the divine. Kindred of the Order, on the other hand, realize that the serpents are purely abstract. While the reptiles are certainly representative of vampiric power, they don't actually count as divine vessels.

The other faith-based covenant, the Lancea Sanctum, cares little for animal symbols. While certainly some animals represent the power of God and others could theoretically exemplify the predatory condition, the Sanctified prefer to keep such symbols as metaphorical. They are better left to books and sermons than

actual use. Besides, the covenant perceives having animal thralls as “lying down with beasts,” and therefore strictly taboo. It is rumored, though, that one Gangrel Bishop actually has a small flock of sheep and a pond of koi, all of which are ghouls meant to embody Christ and his miracles.

- **Eyes/Ears:** Some Kindred choose animal ghouls as mystical tools, and are relatively unconcerned with the symbolic nature of such beasts. While any animal can become a spy or a vessel for the appropriate vampire with Animalism, it’s far easier to use a creature with which one is comfortable. (Vampires looking to use Animalism on beast thralls have the normal +2 modifier.) In fact, employing an animal as a spy is difficult when the vampire is unfamiliar with the creature. Animals do not think or convey messages in easily decipherable terms — or even in human terms. Kindred seeking to commune with a creature for the first time with Feral Whispers must work hard to translate the images and instincts through the animal’s growls or snorts. Such conveyance is far easier when the animal has been with the vampire for a long period of time, however. It’s for this reason that many Gangrel like to have long-term animal thralls. Over time, they come to understand the nuances of communicating with the creature.

Animal thralls needn’t function only as spies. Vampires can also use the creatures as vessels for their consciousness by using Subsume the Lesser Spirit. In this way, a vampire can become a flying blackbird or a ravenous wolf. Again, it becomes all the easier when such a creature is a ghoul.

The intended use of the creature helps determine just what species of ghoul a vampire may choose. A vampire seeking a fast and easily hidden spy might choose a cat or even a rat. Ferrets are also popular, as they are swift and can squeeze in and out of tiny spaces. Moreover, they don’t attract undue attention. Provided he doesn’t mind attracting attention (or has a way around such notice), a Gangrel might instead seek a more vigorous creature, such as a falcon, hound or even a wolf.

Bizarre

Few Kindred are the pinnacle of sanity. Time and the richness of the Blood confuses them, and the long sleep of torpor does little to help. It only muddles the once-obvious line between reality and nightmare. Moreover, some vampires are lunatics even before time thins their sanity.

The fact is, many of these Kindred become incapable of having meaningful relationships with anybody. Relationships with human ghouls devolve over time into demented subjugation, removing any utility from the bond. It’s for this reason that some Kindred, seemingly unable to cope with “normal” communication, resort to creating and relying upon animal ghouls. Those who do

so might choose simple animals for companionship, or as animals representing whatever broken faith the vampire holds dear.

Of course, not all Kindred choose animal thralls with such clear vision. Some barely make a conscious choice at all, almost inadvertently giving some destitute creature (or creatures) the blood and the fortitude of a thrall. When this happens, it cannot be categorized, nor can it be sliced up and understood in any sane manner. Such occurrences can only be classified as “bizarre.” A few examples of vampires invoking weird bonds with weird creatures include:

- An unaligned Nosferatu living in the slums gave his Vitae and his very will to a few roaches dwelling with him in his 15th-floor walkup. Few are certain why he did this, but a number of whispered stories persist. First, that the roaches are capable of acting as his eyes and ears, and being so small and robust, they are capable of getting just about anywhere. Second, in a story few believe but none are willing to dismiss outright, it’s suggested that the roaches have multiplied and the thrall condition has passed down to all the connected generations of roaches. This ghoulish “roach bloodline” is terrible in its scope once one realizes that a cockroach can lay up to 50 eggs at a time and lives for two years. It’s easy to see how far, wide and fast such a bloodline could spread.

- About 10 years ago, a Gangrel living in the hills of West Virginia with his Damned “kin” went down to the deep, dark fishing hole near his home and fed his blood to a couple of catfish. By now, those catfish are said to be up to 10 feet in length and nearly 500 pounds apiece. The Gangrel feeds them local stray dogs and cats and occasionally also fills their bellies with local children who have “gone missing.”

- A Daeva performance artist with a penchant for the shocking and the macabre made a ghoul of her favorite pet: a Goliath bird-eating tarantula she calls “Lord Byron.” Normal bird-eating tarantulas grow about 12 inches in diameter (the size of a dinner plate) and can run 25 miles an hour, even up walls or ceilings. Infused with Kindred Vitae, Lord Byron has outgrown such statistics, practically doubling them. The Daeva also uses the spider to hunt. While his venom isn’t enough to kill a human, it causes enough pain and numbness to hamper the movement of human victims.

Mandragora

The majority of Kindred recognize the fact that mortals and animals can be fed Vitae and turned to ghouls by the infusion of a vampire’s supernatural will. Few, however, realize that it’s also possible to force a similar alteration upon living plants.



Some who are aware of such a possibility might refer to such altered flora as a “plant ghoul,” but such a term is a misnomer, for the properties of a Vitae-infused plant differ from those granted to actual ghouls. As such, most Kindred in the know call these creations mandrakes or mandragora, separating them appropriately from human or animal ghouls.

Creating Mandragora

Many Kindred who try to turn a plant into mandrake often face disappointment. Mandragora are rare and unusual specimens that cannot be made from most plants. The majority of flora, in fact, are simply too delicate to support the physiological and supernatural changes intrinsic to the process. As such, only the toughest plants are candidates for this bizarre enhancement. Qualifying plants are ones that are capable of surviving varying qualities of soil, temperature and pollution. Some trees are particularly robust, as are many of the plants known as “invasive” or “alien,” meaning plants that grow unfettered and are notoriously difficult to destroy.

A vampire who believes that he has a plant that meets the qualifications for the process is in for further effort that might be beyond his patience or abilities. Generally, the process requires at least three months. Once per month, the vampire must feed his own Vitae to the plant, typically by saturating the ground around it with Vitae. How much Vitae he feeds to the plant depends upon the size of it. A small tangle of English ivy requires significantly less than, say, a black locust tree. At this point, the plant is not yet a mandrake, though it takes the Vitae in through its root system. During these three months, the plant continues to have small amounts of the mystical Vitae broken down within it, and it doesn’t need any of the other life-sustaining elements (water, sun, nutrients from the soil) to survive.

Vitae isn’t the only requirement, however. This process doesn’t give the flora any kind of intelligence or awareness, but it does grant it a kind of singular instinct unseen in other plants, even in carnivorous plants. Part of this is due to the Blood, yes, but another part comes from the vampire’s own will. In this process, the Kindred actually infuses the vegetation with part of his own hunger and instinct, which awakens the plant to similar hungers.

Unfortunately, not all mandragora “take” after the three months have passed, and no one is precisely certain why. Some plants are assumed to be inherently weak; others figure that it’s the vampire himself who was too weak to foster such an aberrance of nature. Failed mandragora die quickly, usually over a period of a few hours. Green turns to brown, and healthy leaves and vines shrivel as if blasted by heat. The soil takes on a rotten smell like that of a bloated corpse.

Sustaining Mandragora

Plants that survive to become mandrakes require vampiric Vitae to survive. Nothing else is required to keep the plant in its strange state between life and death. The plant doesn't need sunlight, it requires no water or fertilizers. It gains its entire sustenance from the Blood. How much it requires is dependent upon the size of the plant. Small plants might require as little as a single Vitae per month, whereas larger plants (trees, for instance) might need as many as three. Without this sanguine sustenance, a plant withers and dies after a full month has passed without Vitae. It doesn't revert to being a living plant, it simply perishes over the course of several hours.

One dominant exception separates mandragora further from animal or mortal ghouls, however. From time to time, the mandrake can survive on *non*-Kindred blood. Every other month, a vampire can feed the mandrake an equivalent amount of blood from human or animal sources instead of from her own body, thus saving herself from diminishing her own Vitae.

Mandragora do not need the blood poured upon the ground, as they do when they are becoming ghouls. The nature of the physiological changes allows a mandrake to consume blood through the plant's stomata, hungry pores that open on leaves, thorns and flowers. These pores can consume blood poured over the mandrake, though old-fashioned Kindred can still feed their creations by soaking the surrounding soil in Vitae, as the root system still functions as a sustenance-delivery system.

Physical Properties

The first thing a vampire might notice about a mandrake is that it moves. Such movement is slight, nothing so drastic as flailing branches or thrashing roots. Leaves tremble, boughs sway slightly, vines seem to creep and slither.

The second thing is that the plant's appearance changes. A quick glance might not reveal these changes, but any prolonged examination makes such physical alterations obvious. Healthy green turns to a sickly olive-drab, while any robust brown turns dark and almost dirty in appearance. And yet, this appearance of sickness is belied by an unnatural aura about the plant. Those looking upon the plant cannot help but note that it shouldn't be alive, and yet, it's quite apparent that it is alive and thriving. (Moreover, this aura of preternatural life swells and glows all the more after the plant has been fed blood.)

A mandrake takes on other odd characteristics, as well. It no longer grows, but its leaves, branches and vines seem to tangle inward upon one another. They no longer search out light or water, but instead snake together in a confusing snarl. That is, until some source of blood (human,

animal or vampire) comes near. Should blood be nearby (whether contained in flesh or spilled out), the plant moves, slowly and slightly, to seek out the Vitae. Vines meander blindly toward the source, while leaves point toward the blood like organic dowsing rods.

Mandragora are incapable of actually attacking living creatures, simply due to their slow movement. Only a fool wouldn't attempt to outdistance a pair of vines seeking the warm pulse on his neck. As such, it's rare that a mandrake is capable of feeding itself. It's not impossible, however. While a plant couldn't consciously conceive of such a tactic, it's possible that in searching out blood, vines or branches somehow trip or disable a human or animal, which might be enough to allow a whipping limb or curled thorn to sneak a taste. Alternately, some insects or animals might try to make a home out of a mandrake, perhaps by making a nest in its boughs or laying eggs upon the leaves. Such creatures might fall prey to the hungry plant. Of course, actually getting blood requires something sharp enough to cut flesh, which is why many vampires prefer mandragora with thorns or sharp branches.

Another substantial change in the vegetation is its inability to reproduce. Becoming mandragora destroys any chance the plant has of creating other plants. Most mandragora stop seeding and fruiting altogether. Those that continue produce hard, worthless seeds alongside bitter, shriveled fruit.

The final, though perhaps most important, physical change to take place is what happens inside the plant — the creation of *lacrima*.

Lacrima

Lacrima (also referred to as "mandrake tears") is a thick sap found in the stalks, branches and veins of all mandragora. This rust-colored fluid runs thick, less like fresh blood and more like older, congealing Vitae. It even smells like thickening blood, exuding an acrid odor of decay.

Curiously, lacrima is similar enough to Vitae to allow some vampires (those of less potent blood) to gain nourishment from it. Unfortunately, such nourishment is negligible, providing only a fraction of the sustenance that even an animal's blood could provide. Lacrima might run thick and taste strong, but its potency is too delicate to be used for feeding.

This sanguine sap, however, offers other benefits and properties that some Kindred find intriguing. For one, the taste, while not exactly pleasant, is queerly compelling. So compelling, in fact, that some vampires become addicted to the taste, and to what they claim is a "rush" that accompanies it. The memorable flavor of lacrima alongside the potent sensation gained from drinking it has caused some vampires to attempt to manufacture and sell bottles of this strange herbal claret. Such bottles rarely contain 100%



lacrima, for few plants are able to produce high volumes of the fluid. Most bottles contain no more than one-third of the stuff, with the rest being some notable draught of blood (e.g., the blood of a wealthy man, the blood of a nun, the blood of a child). Vintners of such “wine” rarely sell such a product for money. Money, after all, comes easily. Such bottles are usually traded for items and secrets of significant value. Even higher prices can be inveigled from those rare few addicts who swoon at the thought of another taste.

DARLING'S LACHRYMALIS

None are certain exactly when or where the process of concocting lacrima into “blood wine” originated, but many agree that the one who has done it most (and best) is a Daeva who goes only by the name “Darling.”

Darling's identity remains an intriguing mystery for many. The vampire's location, gender and age all remain complete enigmas and allow for a number of competing theories to duke it out as might a host of urban legends.

What is known is that Darling creates a number of bottles of this lacrima wine, and that these bottles somehow find their way into the hands of

powerful Kindred. Where they come from remains unknown, And if any *do* know, they certainly aren't telling.

All bottles feature a hand-written label penned in a delicate calligraphy. These labels note the contents as being *Darling's Lachrymalis*, and then give details as to the year and specifications of the draught. The label might, for instance, purport that the wine was distilled in 1999, with the sap drawn from a Hardy Celeste Fig Tree, mixed with the blood of a dying bride. Below the delicate script is always a quote attributed to Diogenes: “The wine I like to drink most is that which belongs to another.”

One other notable property of lacrima is its effect upon mortals. The taste, while stimulating to the Kindred, is poisonous to humans. Lacrima enervates and diminishes the nerve endings of a mortal being, and such an effect is often permanent. The fluid rarely kills, except in large doses (and few are willing to waste this bloody sap on something so meager as the murder of a human). The effect is instead one that deadens a person's senses and the feeling upon skin. A teaspoon of the clotted sap reduces the feeling of even the most heightened pain. Of

course, it also causes the person's limbs to work at half their previous efficiency, and it practically destroys any ability to taste or smell. The poisonous effects of *lacrima* don't just affect mortals, however. Any animal feeding on the sap suffers similar, or likely worse results. (Such effects can be seen around mandragora that are left open to nature, as the plant is surrounded by a few corpses of herbivorous creatures such as deer or rabbits.)

Rumors of Taste

Aside from the known effects of mandrake tears, many Kindred also purport that the sanguine sap can be used for a number of other mysterious purposes. A few such assertions follow:

- Vampires suffering from the fog of memory associated with particularly potent blood and torpor can experience moments of clarity when fed mandrake tears. Others suggest that particularly ancient vampires can even stave off torpor for a time by consuming *lacrima* mixed with other as-yet-unmentioned reagents.
- The Order of the Dragon claims that feeding *lacrima* to a ghoul does not poison the thrall, but instead makes the thrall's own blood poisonous to mortals and vampires. They say the ghoul's blood is poisonous for seven hours following the ingestion of the *lacrima*.
- Some say that the secretive covenant called VII uses *lacrima* in a number of ways. One of those ways is said to help covenant members use their Disciplines more efficiently. (Supposedly using *lacrima* to power physical Discipline increases their potency.) Rumors suggest that another use is that *lacrima* ameliorates the covenant's grotesque mind-control techniques.
- The Circle of the Crone reportedly uses *lacrima* in secret rituals, mixing it with other infusions gained from toxic plants. Allegedly, the Circle believes that drinking this concoction grants hallucinogenic visions that allow users to speak to ancient dark gods.

Examples

Some plants are able to sustain the mandrake condition, while others perish for being too frail. What follows is a list of plants that are known to be able to hold the biological and supernatural changes intrinsic to the process.

- **English Ivy:** Also known as *Hedera helix*, English ivy is an invasive plant that winds about trees and other flora and is sustained almost like a parasite. The natural version grows quickly, carpeting a forest floor in what is generally termed an "ivy desert," destroying any biodiversity present. The mandrake version of this plant is somewhat different. The process stunts the ivy's out-of-control growth and tends to reduce its potential spread to that of 10 square feet or so. Also, the vine itself tends to grow fatter (sometimes as fat as a man's thumb) to

help contain the mandrake's *lacrima*. Starting with a young and small patch of ivy requires only one Vitae per month. Larger patches (those that measure more than three feet square) require two.

- **Roses:** Almost all varieties of rose are hearty enough to sustain becoming mandragora, regardless of the size of the plant, length of thorn or style and color of the bloom. Roses take on a few unique conditions once imbued with a vampire's essence. First, a mandrake rose's bloom changes. No matter what its original color was, the bloom becomes what some growers call a black rose, even though the color is actually a deep, dark crimson. Second, a rose blooms only after being fed blood. A blood-born bloom continues for a full month after the feeding. Third, a mandrake rose becomes more susceptible to a dark fungus found on the leaves called blackspot. Blackspot doesn't kill the rose (as it might if it were not mandragora), but it renders some leaves warped and bent with shadowy spots crusted upon them. Roses require one Vitae per month to sustain.

- **Teasel:** Teasel is a thistle with small, sharp spines and little violet flowers. It's not a particularly attractive plant, but some Kindred favor it because it doesn't need to be cut or otherwise damaged for the gathering of *lacrima*. This plant (also sometimes known as Venus's Basin) has several upper leaves that join around the stem and form a cup. Once, the Greeks favored drinking the collected rainwater from this botanical basin for its unproven medicinal properties. As mandragora, water doesn't necessarily collect in this cup, but *lacrima* does. Over the period of a week, this floral bell fills with the rusty sap. This sap figures into a few of the more esoteric rituals of the Circle of the Crone. Teasel requires one Vitae per month to sustain.

- **Black Locust:** Few trees seem to be able to sustain the mandrake condition. Many affected trees die — their bark turning black and their leaves withering off the branch. The process takes anywhere from a few hours to a few days. Moreover, not many Kindred are willing to invest the time and Vitae necessary to feed a whole tree. One tree remains a certain survivor, however, should a vampire choose to take the step of making it mandragora. The black locust tree is an aggressive, robust tree. Its bark is darkly colored and lined with small thorns. The branches are crooked and twisted (appearing doubly so in winter, when the leaves are gone). Black locusts become even stranger looking as mandrakes. The branches twist further, the thorns grow one or two inches longer, and the leaf covering becomes sparse and inconsistent. Some Ordo Dracul Kindred are said to have a brooch featuring a silhouetted image of a thorny black locust. The reasoning for this is as yet unknown. Such trees require three Vitae per month to sustain.



ghoul characters and special rules

"They never tell you everything.

Never.

*They lie to you from the first night. Sometimes
it's for your own good, but most of the time
it's for theirs. There's always an unwritten rule,
always a way to make them angry
and get yourself hurt that they didn't tell you about.*

It's an invisible line.

Cross it and you're done."

I love you not only for what you are, but for what I am when I am with you. I love you not only for what you have made of yourself, but what you are making of me.

I love you for the part of me that you bring out.

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Having seen how ghouls of every stripe fit into the neofeudal society of the Kindred in the last chapter, it's now time to look at how to make ghouls fit into your **Vampire: The Requiem** games. (More information on how to use them in your stories appears in the next chapter.) This chapter looks at how to create convincing and effective ghoul characters, whether you're a player who wants to portray a ghoul or a Storyteller who needs to use a ghoul in an important supporting role. It also examines how the various special rules and systems in **Vampire** either apply to or ignore ghouls. Finally, it provides some rules concerning specially bred ghoul families, animal ghouls and even bizarre and subtly dangerous plant ghouls.

Special Concerns for Creating Ghoul Characters

For the most part, creating a ghoul character works just like creating any other mortal character with the **World of Darkness Rulebook** does. Ghouls are mortals, with the same run of Attributes, Skills, Merits and advantages. They're subject to the same dictates of Morality, and they're just as open to gaining derangements as anyone else when their human nature erodes (or reveals itself, depending on your basic outlook on human nature).

Yet the process of character creation for ghouls deserves special attention throughout, just as the in-story decision a vampire makes to turn someone into a ghoul does. It takes an act of will to force someone to become a ghoul, and although it's not as costly as Embracing someone, it's still not something a vampire does lightly. The Kindred look for certain factors or aptitudes when they scout for prospects to make into undying mortal servants, and they usually choose after careful deliberation. Ghouls serve specific functions — from protection to being a daytime business liaison to simple companionship — and it behooves Kindred masters to make sure that their chosen ghouls are ideally suited to perform those functions. Therefore, it behooves you, the Storyteller or player, to think not only of what makes the ghoul who he is, but also what purpose his master intends him to serve. Even if he no

longer serves that purpose because he's gone rogue or his master has entered torpor, something about him in his ignorant, brutish and short mortal life attracted a vampire's interest and was deemed worthy of preservation and a degree of trust.

CHARACTER-CREATION PROCESS

Use the character-creation rules from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** — summarized on p. 34 of that book — and add the following template to ghoul characters during Step Five:

Note the original regnant's clan or bloodline.

Assign one automatic Discipline dot (of Celerity, Resilience or Vigor only) from the original regnant's clan or bloodline. Choose one additional Discipline dot from the original regnant's clan or bloodline.

Ghouls can have additional Merits from a special ghoullist (see p. 70)

Although their regnants use Humanity, ghouls still use Morality. Ghoul Morality starts at 6.

Roll a die to determine how much unspent Vitae is currently in the ghoul's body (maximum equal to the ghoul's Stamina).

Roll a die and multiply by three — the result determines how many days the character can go before his next hit of Vitae.

Step One: Character Concept

The concept stage of character creation is the most important one in the process. It's the seed from which the entirety of the character blossoms. It's the final reference point when asking or answering any question about what makes the character who he is. Regardless of what sort of character you are creating — be it the most entirely innocent and ignorant mortal, the most knowledgeable and damned monster, or anywhere on the spectrum — the guiding factor that informs every decision you make should be whether what you're about to do fits the concept.

For creating ghoul characters, the concept gains a secondary characteristic that is wholly unique to ghouls. That factor is the ghoul's utility, that is to say, what purpose his regnant intends him to serve. The

creation of a ghoul is a serious and intentional act, rather than just an accidental byproduct of the Vinculum, and the Kindred don't engage in it without a reason. Whether a ghoul spends all the rest of his existence fulfilling that original utility or not, he wouldn't have been made a ghoul in the first place without it.

Another important facet of determining the ghoul character's concept is to determine the ghoul's mental state vis-à-vis his intended utility. Is the ghoul content to do what his master asks of him? Does he consider it an honor to have been chosen from the myriad cattle and uplifted into the gothic, neofeudal world of the undead? Does he consider his duties to be nothing more than responsibilities or obligations that no one else will take care of if he doesn't? Does he spend his every waking moment fighting his warped emotions for control of his treacherous body? The degree to which a ghoul *willingly* carries out his regnant's orders is as important (if not more so) than what those orders actually are. And don't confuse a ghoul's honest willingness to do his master's will with the dread enchantment woven by the Vinculum. Even the most hopelessly blood-bound thrall realizes that the cloying "love" with which the Blood infects his heart is not genuine. The blood bond is only an obstacle in the character's path, not a defining aspect of his personality.

Another important aspect of a ghoul's servitude is whether the ghoul is still in service to his *original* regnant. Vampires can be vain and jealous creatures, and they aren't likely to part easily with the resources that ghouls represent, but it does happen. Some Kindred tire of their ghouls and callously dismiss them, cutting off their supply of precious Vitae. Others succumb to torpor — be it a result of age, Blood Potency or violence — and strand their ghouls in the daylight world without them. (If those ghouls are lucky, the master leaves them in the care of his waking childer. If the master is lucky, he can still rely on the loyalty of his childer and his legacy ghouls when he reemerges.) Others might even swap ghouls as a show of trust or as a means of settling some minor dispute. Finally, it's not unheard of for Kindred to lose control of their ghouls entirely and for those ghouls to go rogue. Ideally a Vinculum would prevent such a thing, but not if a Kindred is too cruel or too lax in maintaining the blood bond.

While determining the character's concept, don't lose sight of his human side. As with creating any World of Darkness character, you must think about what early formative experiences made the person who he is as well as how he lives his life based on those experiences. The type of person a character is when he knows nothing about the supernatural secrets of the world informs the reaction he'll have when he not only learns of the modern-gothic world of the

Kindred, but becomes a part of it. A devoted family man who spoils his children because he himself was abused as a child, for instance, will react entirely differently to becoming a ghoul than would a hard-boiled private investigator who was enthralled and subjugated only after his investigations uncovered a Kindred *consigliere's* damning secret.

Some sample concepts for ghouls include daytime haven guard, business-world insider, cult recruiter, confidante, sexual plaything, bodyguard, prospective childer, Prince's Seneschal (a dangerous gamble, but not unheard of) and rogue vampire-hunter. Those choices might seem somewhat simplistic in light of the foregoing, but keep in mind that a concept is only as simplistic as the amount of thought you put into it. Adding in the aforementioned considerations at this early stage will provide depth and layers to the ghoul character's personality that make him more interesting and memorable before even a single dot gets filled in on the character sheet.

Steps Two, Three and Four: Select Attributes, Skills and Skill Specialties

Ghouls receive the same basic spread of Attributes, Skills and Skill Specialties as every other mortal World of Darkness character. On top of their single free dot in each one, they receive five, four and three dots in their primary, secondary and tertiary Attribute categories. They receive 11, seven and four dots in their primary, secondary and tertiary Skill categories as well. The same penalties applying to untrained Skill use as normal, and buying the fifth dot in any Attribute or Skill costs two dots. Finally, ghouls receive three free Skill Specialties to apply as you see fit.

The mechanical process of filling in various dots is the same for a ghoul as for any other mortal, but that mechanical aspect is never the whole story. When you are following Steps Two, Three and Four, keep in mind the story purposes to which you intend to put the ghoul character. The concept of the ghoul's utility, as described under Step One, is an especially important consideration during these proceeding steps. That is, if the vampire specifically chose the character to fulfill some role, the vampire must have seen in him a certain useful potential (in the form of his Attributes) that ideally suited *that* particular mortal to the task in question. If the vampire needed a daytime haven guardian, she would choose someone strong and tough and able to think and react quickly when trouble arises. If the vampire needed a confidante or a sexual plaything, she would want someone alluring and... sturdy, as well as someone unlikely to flinch in the face of the vampire's baser confessions and desires.

Useful Skills and Specialties are equally important to prospective Kindred regnants, yet not always quite as much as Attributes are. Many regnants are willing to train their most trusted servants in the requirements of their special daytime needs — often conferring various Skill Specialties — but it does behoove Kindred to choose mortals with *some* talent in the Skills they require. A vampire who needs a front-man to run the homeless shelter from which he selects his victims might be willing to teach a smart, young college graduate the ins and outs of the culture of the city's downtrodden (thus justifying three dots of Streetwise). If the vampire needs a mortal lawyer to manage his estate during the daylight hours, however, he's not going to waste his time teaching the Academics, Investigation, Politics, Expression, Persuasion or Subterfuge that a competent lawyer should already have.

OPTIONAL RULE: EVEN BETTER GHOULS

Making a ghoul more powerful — especially a rogue you intend to use as a dangerous antagonist or an older ghoul who has been in service to his regnant for countless decades — is usually a matter of adding experience points. (See p. XX for guidelines.) Should you wish to make a starting ghoul character more powerful immediately but keep him or her young and relatively inexperienced, though, this option provides for doing so.

When a mortal first becomes a ghoul, he gains another free Attribute dot. This dot must come from the regnant's clan's favored Attributes (see p. 92 of **Vampire: The Requiem**), and it remains a natural part of him for as long as he remains a ghoul. If he switches regnants without falling behind on his monthly Vitae upkeep, he retains that original extra Attribute dot. If his upkeep lapses and he ceases to be a ghoul, he loses the extra dot. If he survives long enough to bond himself to a new regnant, however, he gains a new bonus Attribute dot from one of his new regnant's clan's favored Attributes.

If you find yourself wanting to add on optional benefits that normally apply only to vampires, however, you should probably stop and ask yourself why that is. Maybe what you really want to play is a young, inexperienced vampire in the first place.

It's also often the case that a regnant chooses a ghoul with certain Skills or Specialties that utterly baffle her (i.e., the regnant) but which appear necessary. Older vampires engage in this practice the most often, as their static natures leave them largely unable to cope with the velocity at which society changes around them. The Computer Skill is one of the most

sought-after Skills in this category (if not *the* most), but others such as Science, Drive, Streetwise and Firearms are all common alternatives. Relying on another Kindred — especially a younger one — for help in these areas is one way for an older vampire to keep up, but such Kindred are more likely to simply make their Skills available in exchange for favors than they are to *teach* those Skills. Some Kindred Embrace childer for this purpose, but doing so is inherently more costly and dangerous. To create a childe is to create not only a rival but to commit a grievous sin in defiance of the Traditions. Therefore, creating a ghoul is usually the safest means to this end, not to mention the fact that a ghoul is inherently easier to control than even the best-behaved and loyal childe.

As far as these concerns go, they come up largely to rationalize how the ghoul character's Attribute and Skill dots grew to the levels they did. Thinking along these lines helps you reinforce the concept under which you are creating the ghoul and codify the capacities in which the ghoul will best serve his regnant.

Step Five: Add Ghoul Template

It is at this point that the character takes his first fateful steps into the periphery of the Danse Macabre and becomes a ghoul. He gains certain immediate benefits as he becomes more than human. At the most basic level, the ghoul earns access to certain vampiric Disciplines. To determine the Disciplines to which the character has access, you must choose which clan his original regnant belonged to, as well as that of his current regnant (if the answer is not the same). You should also decide which covenant, if any, the ghoul's current and/or former regnant(s) belonged. Finally, the ghoul also gains access to certain Merits that might have been unavailable to him heretofore. (A list of those Merits appears in the write-up of Step Six.)

NB: This part of the character-creation process takes place only *after* the mortal character's regnant has spent the single necessary Willpower point that converts the mortal into a ghoul. If you are simply building a mortal prelude character who hasn't yet undergone the change, you should be thinking about this step but refrain from making actual alterations to the character sheet until this change occurs.

Regnant's Clan and Covenant

Strictly speaking, the choice of clan is the most important thing you need to know about your ghoul's regnant, as the regnant's blood transmits a natural aptitude for his in-clan Disciplines to the ghoul, especially the physical one inherent to his clan. (If you're using the optional rule to this effect, the regnant's clan also confers a favored Attribute dot on the ghoul.) Deciding on the regnant vampire's covenant

doesn't confer any particular mechanical benefit in and of itself, but this is as good a point as any to make a note of it.

Such an important background character in the ghoul's life should be more than just a faceless cipher with a bag full of clan benefits and covenant beliefs, though. A ghoul's regnant is the most important character in the ghoul's life, even disregarding the artificial emotional inflation of the Vinculum. If not for the regnant, the character couldn't be a ghoul in the first place. Even worse, if not for the regnant's regular Vitae upkeep, the character would find himself in a truly awful situation as his powers dissipate and his advanced age and frailty catches up to him in a rush. It's never a bad idea, then, to take a moment to sketch out the basics of who this Kindred is. It's even better to come up with a fully fleshed out **Vampire** character, preparation time permitting. Think about not only what the regnant is like and what role he plays in the Danse Macabre, but how he treats his servitor.

This point is also the one at which to decide for certain if the ghoul character's current regnant is his original regnant or if he's switched up at some point. This decision has a more concrete mechanical effect if you're building an older ghoul with experience points, but it's an important factor to consider in story terms for a starting ghoul character as well.

Discipline(s)

The most obvious benefit to becoming a ghoul is the access to the regnant's Disciplines. As per this character-creation template, you may select two Discipline dots that the ghoul can use. One of those dots must be the first dot in the physical Discipline that is in clan for his regnant. For quick reference, the in-clan physical Disciplines for the five main clans are as follows:

Daeva	Celerity or Vigor
Gangrel	Resilience
Mekhet	Celerity
Nosferatu	Vigor
Ventrue	Resilience

Aside from that first dot in a mandatory physical Discipline, the second dot is available from a wider variety. As long as it comes from a Discipline that is in clan for the regnant, the ghoul character can have it.

If, when he creates the ghoul, the ghoul's regnant is an active member of a bloodline — be it his sire's bloodline, a clan bloodline or a bloodline of his own inception — the bloodline's Disciplines are all considered in-clan for the ghoul's purposes. (So yes, if a Morbus vampire makes some poor bastard a ghoul, that ghoul can have one dot of Cachexy on top of his single dot of Celerity at character creation.)



If the ghoul's regnant has more than one in-clan physical Discipline when he creates the ghoul, such as a Daeva or a member of the Bruja or Toreador bloodlines, the mandatory physical Discipline dot can come from either Discipline. That choice is up to regnant, based on how he most needs his ghoul to serve him. Although the adoption of the first Discipline dot is technically automatic, there is still an element of choice involved on the regnant's part. The regnant thinks about and concentrates on how he intends his own transferred Vitae to serve him through his ghoul, and the expense of the Willpower point "locks in" that decision. The second dot comes as a result of intentional instruction, but the first is almost subconscious. It's occurred to some Kindred who've studied the phenomenon that with enough meditation and concentration they ought to be able to subconsciously imprint *any* in-clan Discipline automatically when they first change a mortal into a ghoul, but the idea has never progressed beyond the hypothetical. Whether doing so would require a greater force of will, a wild Crúac rite, a solemn Theban Sorcery ritual, some bizarre tier of the Coils of the Dragon or means even more obscure remains a mystery for now.

(In reality, though, that distinction is important in your actual game only if another one of the players' characters in the game is playing the Kindred regnant in question. Otherwise, you, the player of the ghoul character, get to make the decision and retroactively attribute it to the ghoul's regnant, as long as you clear it with the Storyteller first. The second free dot remains up to player choice and what the regnant is willing to teach.)

When choosing that second dot of Disciplines for the ghoul, keep in mind what purpose the regnant expects the ghoul to serve. The physical Discipline dot comes naturally (as much as that term applies to this process), but any other Discipline dot comes only at the regnant's behest and with his express teaching. No vampire gives away powers freely, especially to a servant, so the granting of additional power is intended to reflect some specific duty the ghoul is to perform. Having nailed down your core character concept by this point, as well as sketched out what sort of character your ghoul's regnant is, figuring out what this responsibility entails should come fairly easily. The ghoul bodyguard of a Ventrue record-producer might just need two dots of Resilience to make him a better meat-shield for the boss. The ghoul partner of a Daeva ballet dancer might need a dot of Vigor and a dot of Celerity just to be able to keep up with her regnant. A ghoul caretaker of a Nosferatu's "Menagerie of Misbegotten Horrors" sideshow might find a dot of Nightmare, in addition to his automatic dot of Vigor, especially useful in getting rid of snooping animal-rights activists.

It is only possible to learn a Discipline that the regnant does not possess if it is the ghoul's physical Discipline. That is, if a Mekhet vampire with no dots in Celerity creates a ghoul, the first Discipline the ghoul develops will still be Celerity, even if the Mekhet knows other physical Disciplines. If the Mekhet is likewise deficient in Auspex, however, the ghoul cannot learn Auspex until the vampire does.



DISCIPLINES — ONE DOT OR TWO?

Where Disciplines are concerned, a character created with the ghoul template from this book is slightly different from a ghoul created from the **Vampire: The Requiem** book. Characters with the ghoul template provided here are assumed to have gone through the process of mastering a second Discipline dot's worth of supernatural power. Whether this extra dot makes the initially gained physical Discipline higher or is allocated to some other Discipline, it represents a deeper understanding. The template provides for a character who's become somewhat accustomed to his state, while the rules in **Vampire: The Requiem** concern a newly created ghoul.

These two rules might seem to be in conflict, but a moment's reflection reveals an easy solution. For creating regular starting ghoul characters, assume that at least some time has passed between the first time the character imbibed Vitae and the start of the story. For players of Kindred who wish to create ghouls during the story — or characters who will become ghouls after a prelude as mortals — you may assume that the ghouls gain only one dot of a physical Discipline as per **Vampire: The Requiem** p. 167. The second dot's abilities will come out after the regnant tutors her ghoul in his newfound abilities (though the player of the ghoul character must pay for the new dot with experience points). The length of time this instruction takes will vary, depending on the story and the circumstances.



Step Six: Select Merits

Step Six is largely the same for ghoul characters as it is for any other mortal character. Only one of the Merits among those listed in Chapter 5 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** is forbidden to ghoul characters (namely the Unseen Sense Merit on p. 109). What's more, ghouls have available to them a selection of additional Merits from the **Vampire** rulebook, as well as an assortment of new ones presented in this book. The most important of those is the one- to five-dot Regnant Merit (see p. XX), but it's not the only one.

That being said, however, certain of the Merits in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** are more appropriate for



ghouls than other Merits are, and they deserve a bit of attention. In addition, some others are far less common among ghouls. The Common Sense Merit (**World of Darkness Rulebook** p. 108) is a good example of the latter. When a ghoul has become so completely blood bound to his regnant that thoughts of her subsume his heart's every desire, cogent thinking is usually the first casualty. Also, when the mistress strings out the upkeep of her deliciously addictive Vitae, the ghoul's thoughts are consumed with when his next fix will be. This isn't to say that ghouls can't be thoughtful or circumspect in their duties — they'd be pretty rotten servants if that were the case — but their supernatural obsessions tend to cloud their minds.

A couple of Merits that would make sense for almost any ghoul character to have are the Physical Merits: Iron Stomach and Natural Immunity (**World of Darkness Rulebook** p. 113). The latter is almost a no-brainer, considering the fact that the ghoul is drinking other people's blood regularly. Vampires aren't affected by any diseases that might be hiding in the blood they drink, but they're frighteningly proficient carriers and incubators of the same. Not only can they pass them on to future victims, but they can pass them to their ghouls as well. Therefore, having the Natural Immunity Merit insulates the ghoul somewhat from the accidental harm his regnant brings his way. The Iron Stomach Merit has less of an immediate benefit — the act of drinking Vitae is nowhere described as harmful outright — but just think about it for a second. To become a ghoul, the mortal must drink a vampire's cold, dead blood. He cannot freebase it or run it through an IV or vaporize and inhale it — he must literally *drink* it. And that's just gross.

(Regardless, both of those Merits occur more as meta-concerns brought up by the players than they occur organically as a result of character creation. Kindred don't normally seek out mortals with a physiology matching those Merits, after all. Most are too wrapped up in their own needs and desires to care whether ghouls can stomach the taste of their blood, and too few are even aware of the risks of contamination that drinking blood poses. The only common exceptions are Kindred of the Morbus bloodline, who can feed only on diseased or dying mortals. Most of them screen prospective ghouls as carefully as they can for signs of exceptionally healthy immune systems, lest they infect their servants.)

As for what other Merits are most appropriate for ghouls, that decision depends largely on what purpose the ghoul is intended to serve. A ghoul who's been groomed as his master's lawyer and business-world face man could do well with Encyclopedic Knowledge, Language, Contacts and Status (on pp. 109, 114 and 116 respectively in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The

two- or four-dot version of the Striking Looks Merit (p. 117 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) would be ideal for a ghoul plaything of a lascivious Daeva or spiteful Nosferatu. Danger Sense, Disarm, Fast Reflexes and Giant (on pages 108, 110 and 112 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** respectively) would all make good choices for an imposing ghoul bodyguard. A ghoul *valet de chambre* could even benefit from Eidetic Memory (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 108) as he must not only remember his master's personal tastes but keep up with what's in style year after year after year.

In general, you can purchase Fame, Resources and Status (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 115-116) for a ghoul character, but you would be justified in letting the ghoul share in his regnant's dots of those Merits if the regnant has enough to go around. Of course, you could also play against type and have the ghoul be the one with all the money, social standing and recognition. The benefits of those Merits could, in fact, be the very things for which the vampire needs the ghoul in the first place.

While the **World of Darkness Rulebook** provides all the Merits available for mortal characters, some specialized traits are relevant only to ghouls. Unless otherwise stated, these Merits are all available at character creation and during the course of a chronicle.

Haven

Ghouls may purchase the Haven Merit on p. 100 of **Vampire: The Requiem** for use by their Kindred masters. Normally, dots in this Merit are donated toward the Haven totals for the regnant. Those who manage to keep a useful haven secret from their regnants may use it as their own private hiding spot, which is just as difficult to find as any other secure haven. If they do so, however, they risk potentially fatal repercussions if it is discovered. Should those repercussions not come, the Kindred regnant might simply co-opt the ghoul's former hiding spot as a backup haven.

Inherited Ghoul (••)

Your character used to be a ghoul in service to another regnant, and was passed down to her current master (probably when the last one went into torpor or suffered the Final Death). The intimate relationship she shared with her previous regnant left her with information that could be valuable to others. During situations in which information pertaining to your character's last employer is a factor, you should apply a +2 modifier on an Intelligence + Composure roll to see if she can recall anything useful. *Available at character creation only.*

Regnant (• to •••••)

While many ghouls are little more than unquestioning slaves, your character enjoys the benefit of a

special relationship with her regnant, which goes beyond the simple master-servant boundary. Your character can rely on her regnant to provide information, extra Vitae, equipment or even to personally intervene on her behalf. Conversations with your character's regnant might be genuine interpersonal dialogue rather than the simple dispensation of orders, and you might even find him turning to your character for true companionship. This doesn't suggest that the ghoul is anything remotely like an equal to her regnant, just that she isn't necessarily made to feel like a lowly, servile nonentity.

There are a variety of beneficial relationships with regnants. One ghoul might enjoy service to a generous master who isn't significantly influential, while another is sheltered by her regnant's status without receiving any special attention from him. The advantages of this Merit are split into three factors — power, favor and trust. Players who choose this Merit must also choose how to allocate these three factors when spending points. For instance, the first dot might go toward Regnant Power with two more going toward Regnant Favor. Each one of these characteristics has a limit of five dots, and the fifth dot costs two dots to purchase.

A ghoul with a powerful regnant finds that her dealings with local Kindred and their ghouls are, while not simple, at least a bit easier. Her compatriots (and regnant's compatriots) know who she serves, and probably won't be eager to impede her, especially if the news of such interference reaches her regnant's ears. A regnant represented by several dots in Power might hold a significant position in the city (such as a respected Primogen, Priscus or Prince), while one represented by just a couple could be an acknowledged member of a powerful covenant. Each dot of Regnant Power confers a +1 die bonus on Persuasion, Intimidation and Socialize rolls when in conflict with a local ghoul or Kindred. Regnants whose ghouls have no dots allocated thus are local bottom-feeders.

Note that Regnant Power need not be a simple reflection of title or position. A Priscus regnant might actually earn very little respect from the local Kindred, while an unaligned vampire without ties to the local vampire community might be so old and dangerous as to be feared by all.

Regnant Favor reflects the master's willingness to provide her ghoul access to Vitae, resources and equipment. It doesn't necessarily reflect an emotional bond between the regnant and ghoul as much as it does a measure of generosity. Each dot of Regnant Favor could reflect an additional hit of Vitae (one at a time) that a ghoul may request from her regnant per month without risking his wrath. Alternatively, Regnant Favor could be used in place of Resources to determine whether a ghoul can afford to secure equipment. A

ghoul with three dots in Regnant Favor could requisition a heavy pistol from his regnant, while one with five dots could take one of his regnant's sports cars from the vast warehouse-like garage. Regnants without any dots allocated to this category are typically tight-fisted with their resources (and Vitae) and not likely to give any gifts without some real convincing.



REGNANT OR MENTOR?

Despite a veneer of similarity, the Mentor Merit (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 115) is actually quite different from the Regnant Merit offered here. The Mentor Merit gives a character "a friend and teacher who provides her with advice and guidance," and a relationship based on friendship and guidance is nothing like the power dynamic between regnant and ghoul. A ghoul isn't a Kindred's friend, he's the Kindred's *slave*. The regnant doesn't offer guidance, he issues *orders*. A mentor teaches Skills and offers advice because he genuinely wants to help the character improve his life. A Kindred teaches Disciplines and sometimes Skills, not to improve his ghoul's life, but to make the ghoul a better servant. Where a mentor might even be willing to use his influence on a character's behalf, a Kindred would sooner write off a worthless ghoul who gets herself into a tight spot.

This isn't to say that a ghoul character can't take the Mentor Merit, even in addition to the Regnant Merit. Ghouls, especially younger ghouls, are still predominantly human, and human beings often need the wisdom of well-meaning people with broader bases of experience. What is extremely unlikely, however, is that a ghoul's regnant and the ghoul's mentor will be the same character. The mentor would instead be someone such as a parent, close older sibling or former employer whom the character still trusts. The mentor could also be an older ghoul in service to the same regnant, such as the preeminent scion at the head of a ghoul family. He could even be a ghoul servant to a *different* Kindred — especially an elder one who knows what the new young thrall must be going through. A different Kindred than the ghoul's regnant might even engage a ghoul in a mentor-and-student relationship, though such arrangements are rare. The motives of any Kindred who would do so, risking the wrath of a jealous and paranoid regnant, should be considered suspect from the start.



Regnant Trust is a measure of the extraordinary quality of the relationship your character enjoys with her regnant. Some ghouls are simply well liked by their regnants and are more likely to be afforded some breathing room with respect to their performance. The Kindred knows that his trusted ghoul will perform whatever job has been set before her, so he's willing to let some minor early setback slide. An especially trusting regnant



might even gift his ghoul with tidbits of forbidden information, which might prove infinitely more valuable than a gun or a car. Each dot of Regnant Trust confers a +1 die bonus on Persuasion rolls in dealings between your character and her regnant. Regnants who are represented by having no dots allocated to this category don't necessarily dislike their ghouls, they just fail to see any reason to be friendly with them.

Note that ghoul characters may not share the Regnant Merit. If several players wish to have their ghoul characters serve the same Regnant, they should all spend the same amount on Regnant Power. The favor and trust aspects of the Merit reflect personal relationships, however, so they can be different for several characters in service to the same master. They can also change in time as the various characters demonstrate their worth.

Sexualized (..)

Maybe it's something brought on by the Vitae, or perhaps it's the perverse function she serves for her regnant. Regardless, the ghoul now has an intangible undercurrent of sexual power and experience that those exposed to her cannot help but notice. This carnal aura can be a potent tool in taking advantage of weak-willed or lustful individuals. What's more, it bears no relation whatsoever to the character's physical appearance. Having this Merit grants a +1 modifier on all Presence or Manipulation rolls when the character is attempting to intimidate, seduce or distract others.

Drawback: Some mortals might find themselves disturbed by the feelings your character's presence stirs in them, especially if those feelings seem inappropriate. (For instance, if your character is very young, very old or contrary to the subject's gender preference, a heady mien of sexuality can have a profoundly troublesome impact.) This drawback doesn't change the bonus your character can apply to dealings with them, but it could change the way those characters react when considering their actions later.

Source Sympathy (...)

Prerequisite: Empathy •••

A good servant responds unerringly to her master's emotional state. With this Merit, a ghoul enjoys an emotional connection with their regnant similar to the blood sympathy felt by vampires (**Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 163). Some ghouls develop this ability over decades of service, while a few rare ones seem to do so almost immediately.

Ghoul characters with this Merit sometimes experience vague moments of recognition of intense emotions just as their regnants are feeling them (even if the two of them are in separate rooms or divided by trackless miles). If a long-dormant Kindred is just arising from a



period of torpor, his surviving legacy ghouls might start to key in on his hunger and confusion and be drawn to where their once-master has reemerged. Just as with the blood sympathy of Kindred, the Storyteller may ask the player of the ghoul to roll the character's Wits + Occult. The number of successes reflects the amount of useful information the character learns.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Players cannot dramatically fail a roll for Source Sympathy.

Failure: Nothing happens.

Success: The ghoul has a strong general impression of his regnant's experience and has a general notion of the direction and distance to her.

Exceptional Success: The ghoul knows exactly what his regnant is feeling, and the awareness remains for a scene, fading slowly. He also knows exactly where she is. Note that unlike the Kindred's blood sympathy, the ghoul does not literally share the experience with his regnant. He only understands the effect it has upon her. If the regnant is ambushed in her haven while the ghoul is out running a daytime errand, the ghoul might suddenly realize that the master is not only awake but afraid and angry. He does not, however, feel the self-same mortal terror or outrage that the master is concurrently experiencing.

This effect goes only one way. The regnant feels no such connection to the ghoul. Source Sympathy doesn't confer any Discipline bonuses when targeting your character's regnant.

Staff (6 to)

Prerequisite: Resources (varies)

Your character has official command over a staff of employees. These people are mundane mortals, but they're also professionally trained and capable of taking on a host of roles. An aristocratic household, for example, might employ a number of maids, valets and cooks, while a social predator might have publicists, investigators and lawyers on the payroll.

The number of dots in this Merit reflects the relative size and complexity of the force at your character's disposal. You can assign a category to each dot, reflecting the separate tasks that can be delegated at any given time. For example, if your ghoul has Staff •••, you could assign the dots to chauffeurs, gardeners and security guards. Your character could then assign tasks involving driving guests, landscaping and guard detail to her own employees without requiring special effort beyond a simple dispensation of orders.

The number of dots your character can have in this Merit is limited by the number of people your household can afford to employ. You may not have more dots in Staff than you have in Resources. It's also possible

to have the ghoul's regnant be the one whose Resources dots support the service staff. In such a situation, the Kindred is the true master of the house, but the ghoul character is his butler or housekeeper in an Edwardian manor-house-style division of labor. And while the ghoul might be the one giving the orders and maintaining the staff's affairs, the master's wishes are the rule of the night.

Unobtrusive (•••)

Prerequisite: Stealth ••

Your ghoul character performs her daily duty with such apparent single-minded purpose that she seems to fade into the periphery of Kindred perception. Granted, Kindred rarely notice each other's ghoul servants anyway, but this Merit reflects a feature of a ghoul's service that is truly unusual and useful. Your character has trained herself to notice details without appearing to pay them any heed at the time, storing them for retrieval from memory later. She makes an excellent spy, retaining information without consciously noticing it, so that even the most discerning subjects (sometimes even those with Auspex) tend to ignore her.

In studying a subject or a location, the character gains a +2 die bonus to escape notice as long as she's engaged in some practical task at the same time. (Such tasks include driving, clearing a table, gardening, washing a car, performing a mundane desk job or any other such routine, monotonous drudgery.)

To retrieve the information he's "stored," a character must engage in silent, sometimes ritualistic, contemplation. He could engage in such mnemonic techniques as the "memory palace," he could undergo hypnosis, or he could simply meditate. This Merit also grants a +1 to the ghoul victim's Resolve for purposes of resisting The Forgetful Mind (Dominate •••).

Step Seven: Determine Advantages

For the most part, the advantages step of the character-creation process doesn't bear examination here. The mathematical process of determining a ghoul character's Defense, Health, Initiative, Size, Speed and Willpower is identical to that of determining those advantages for a mundane mortal character or even a Kindred character. Above and beyond the math, however, some story-related concerns raise their heads where ghouls are involved, and those concerns are addressed here. A ghoul character's relationship to his Willpower trait, his Virtues and his Vices all deserve special attention, and coming up with his Morality trait is actually a little different.

Willpower

Willpower is a troublesome personality trait to pin down as it applies to ghoul characters. Technically, it

measures a character's confidence and emotional resilience, and regaining spent points of it is a matter of reaffirming a character's sense of self and wellbeing. Yet if there's a more antithetical description of the dependent and enthralled conditions of a ghoulish life, good luck finding it. In even the least abusive regnant/thrall relationships, the powers of Vitae addiction and the Vinculum combine to wash out a ghoulish sense of self. The servant's life and daily focus is directed entirely to the master's needs, and that condition is hardly synonymous with an independent strength of will.

You could say, then, that a ghoulish Willpower represents not so much his own reserves of tenacity and fortitude, but his utter devotion to his master. The trust his Kindred regnant places in him gives him strength, and fulfilling his duties for her reaffirms his sense of purpose. Knowing how much the master needs him bolsters his resolve, and keeping in mind the Vitae that will be his reward for faithful service helps him maintain his composure in the face of desperate and dangerous acts he's obligated to perform. Basing one's confidence and sense of self-worth on someone else in this way can be dangerous, though, as many spent and broken thralls have discovered over the centuries. If something awful happens to the master, everything that made the ghoulish what he is will be obliterated in one soul-shattering moment of wretched despair.

Not every player actually wants to portray such a painfully dependent soul, however, so Willpower can take on a different aspect that isn't quite so terribly debilitating. To such ghoulish characters (especially younger ones or those older ones who have gone rogue), the Willpower trait represents the last lingering shreds of self that exist in spite of the master's control. The character recognizes how false and alien is the love that the Vinculum imposes on him, and although he is hard-pressed to resist his master's commands, he derives some strength from the fact that he must be *forced* to comply. Such a ghoulish is a tragic and deeply conflicted character who can languish for decades unto centuries torn between his conscience and his master's whims.

In laying out the dots for the two Attributes that compose the Willpower score, keep in mind the character's concept. The ideal that makes the ghoulish who he is will help you determine what the character's Willpower stands for. Doing so will also help you keep in mind what it means when you actually spend that character's Willpower points during the story. In most cases, the expenditure of a Willpower point represents a fresh burst of renewed faith or a surge of confidence that propels the character toward victory. Such is usually the case with ghoulish characters as well, but spending Willpower for them can have an alternative dimension that isn't quite

so life-affirming. For some truly whipped ghouls, spending Willpower points represents not confidence but surrender. In putting his fate entirely in the hands of the providence that his love for his regnant represents, he achieves a samurai-like fearless efficiency that can be disturbing to behold.

Virtues and Vices

For a young ghoulish character, the Virtues and Vices that inform his Morality arise naturally as a result of his upbringing. Such is even the case for some older ghouls who cling to those ideals feverishly in hopes of them providing some bulwark against the tidally overwhelming Vinculum. For some ghouls, however, especially very sheltered ones or those who have served for a century or more, their Virtues and Vices derive entirely from their relationships with their regnants. Such characters see giving their blood to their masters as acts of charity, and they have faith that the destruction of their mortal lives (while tragic) actually serves their masters' greater purposes. They have the fortitude to give up their mortal pasts for their regnants' greater good, and they do what they can to give their weary masters hope that the Beast can be made to submit to the will of the Man. They don't let unjust wrongs done to their masters go unpunished, and they have both the temperance and the prudence not to beg their masters for Vitae or waste the gifts they've given.

By the same token, though, such dependent ghouls tend to derive all their worst traits from their unnatural condition as well. They envy and despise anyone to whom their masters show the slightest illicit favor (especially other ghouls). They glut themselves on precious Vitae any chance they can get, and in their greed, they do their best to edge out anyone else who even appears to be a rival for it. Such characters' lust for the damning Blood is second only to their obsessive physical desire for their regnants, and in their pride, they remain convinced that no one else is so loved or so worthy of love as they must be in their masters' hearts. In their sloth and distraction, they allow any lingering personal relationships to sort themselves out while they focus exclusively on their masters' needs. And woe be unto anyone who is foolish enough to incur a ghoulish pent-up wrath by threatening or making untoward advances on his regnant...

Morality

As noted on page 66, a ghoulish character uses the Morality trait rather than Humanity. Despite the damned Vitae in their systems, ghouls are still mostly human, so they don't rely on the artificially constructed illusion of Humanity that the Kindred require. Nonetheless, ghouls are simultaneously more

and less than entirely human, so a starting ghoulish character's Morality starts at 6 rather than the standard 7. Applying this template for character creation assumes that the ghoulish character has been serving his regnant for some time now and that he's performed some questionable acts in the course of that duty. Perhaps he routinely shoplifts medical supplies to treat the wounds he earns as a result of his master's displeasure. Perhaps he gladly roughs people up if they have the audacity to get too close to his beloved master without her permission. Perhaps he once seduced and kidnapped some hapless person from a nightclub and brought her back to his gravely wounded master, then disposed of the desiccated, lifeless body when the master was feeling better. Or perhaps he betrayed his regnant to her enemies and has since become a remora-like rogue.

Regardless, the ghoulish is assumed to have committed either some heinous sin in the past or practiced a pattern of selfish indifference sufficient to warrant the reduction in Morality. If nothing else, an important part of every ghoulish silently condones the violent and predatory act of Kindred feeding, because that act provides the addictive Vitae that keeps them coming back for more. Ideally, no human being would wish that on another, but human nature in the World of Darkness is far from ideal, and the cost of mortgaging one's soul for a cheap and damning fix is a steep one. Despite the reduction in Morality, though, you need not levy an automatic derangement on a starting ghoulish character in recognition of the rules on Morality loss on p. 92 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. You aren't forbidden to do so, but you may assume instead if you wish that the ghoulish has made at least that little amount of peace with the situation in which he's found himself.

If you're playing a fresh ghoulish character who's just been exposed to the truth about the Damned — as in, it happened in that very game session — you may waive the Morality reduction, but that's the only circumstance in which doing so is appropriate. (Remember, though, that you get only one automatic Discipline dot in such a situation.) If you wish to create a regular starting ghoulish character with a Morality of 7, you instead have the option of spending three Merit points to do so before play begins. If you are of a mind to do the opposite, you may further reduce the ghoulish's Morality to 5 for a bonus of five extra experience points.



I WASN'T ENTHRALLED LAST NIGHT

Storytellers may choose to allow players a certain number of experience points to spend before play begins, in order to represent a period of enthrallment between when the regnant first made the character a ghoulish and the actual start of the chronicle. The older and more influential a

Kindred is, after all, the older and better trained his ghoulish are likely to be.

Regnant's Standing	Experience Points
Established Ancilla	35
Prominent Local Figure	75
Elder or Other Esteemed Figure	120



Step Eight: Living Reflections

Having completed every step in the character-creation process thus far — doing the math and keeping each decision focused on your original core character concept — all that remains is to lay out the final specific details. If you have truly thought through the character-concept step, this last step actually comes fairly easily. If you've been playing it fast and loose up to this point, slow down and think about a few key factors that make the ghoulish who he is. Think first about how long the character has been a ghoulish. Has he had time to achieve a separate peace with his nightmarish condition, or is he still struggling in vain for some way to undo it? Does he still consider himself a human being who's been enthralled by a monster, or has he redefined himself as a lowly servant groomed only to tend to the needs of a better class of apex predator?

Second, think about the ghoulish character's Kindred regnant and what sort of relationship exists between them. (This is also a good opportunity to build the Kindred character with the **Vampire** rulebook if you haven't done so already.) Does the regnant withhold her Vitae, making the ghoulish beg for it? Does she dole it out frivolously, paranoid that the ghoulish's loyalty will evaporate without it? Is the vampire cruel and callous, trusting in the Vinculum to keep her servant at heel? Does she disingenuously dote on her ghoulish, talking down to him like he's a beloved pet? Does she actually have genuine feelings toward him? How does the ghoulish feel toward his regnant? Is he torn between the false love of the Vinculum and how much he truly despises her? Is he an unwitting dupe whose once-honest love dovetailed naturally with the Vinculum? Is he looking for the first opportunity to destroy or abandon her? Has he done so already to a previous regnant? If so, what were the circumstances of that desperate act, and how does he maintain his ghoulish state alone in the World of Darkness?

And above all, keep in mind that a ghoulish should be a character first. Thus far, this chapter has focused specifically on what makes a ghoulish character different from an average mortal. Don't forget, though, that a ghoulish character is just as much a person as a mortal character. He has interests, pet peeves, a sense of personal style and a set of personality quirks that bring him to life and, in many ways, make him seem no different from any other



man on the street. If you have not done so thus far, set aside the ghoul for a moment and focus on what makes your character a person before play begins.

Last but not Least

Finally, all you have left to do is make two pivotal die rolls. First, roll a single die to determine how much Vitae the ghoul has in his system when play begins, remembering to keep the result to a maximum of the character's Stamina. Next, roll a single die and multiply the result by three. That number equals the number of days the character has left before he must seek out more Vitae, especially if he spends all the Vitae he has left before then.

Game Effects of Being a Ghoul

Becoming a ghoul changes a mortal's life undeniably. Some see that change as a blessing, while others call it a curse. Some naïvely consider it the first overture of true trust and reliance between themselves and their regnants, while others recognize it as the first step into a quagmire of dependency and cruel false-love. To some, it's an escape from a drab life of dead passions and dreams forever out of reach into a modern-gothic world of decadent bliss and unimagined powers.

Despite myriad opinions on the subject, though, no single black-and-white alternative truly epitomizes the experience. Every alternative contains a seed of bitter truth, and if a mortal remains a ghoul long enough, he'll come to recognize the validity in each position. Becoming a ghoul introduces a host of damning consequences to a mortal's life, but it also confers a range of powers of which most mortals cannot even conceive. Granted, ghouls' powers rarely rival those of the undead, but in some ways, the price they must pay for their dread blessings makes for a lighter burden than even the most humane Kindred must bear.

Body and Blood

For all the importance of the Blood to a ghoul, the physical blood itself is fairly insignificant. The ghoul must drink the crimson liquid to partake of the power it bestows, but it simply flows down into his stomach and is processed just as any other liquid would be. It doesn't enter his circulatory system or flow through his body when he spends Vitae, as Vitae does in a Kindred body. The Vitae doesn't bestow extra Health on a ghoul, nor does it magically increase the amount of blood coursing through his heart. All it does is impart a measure of the Kindred regnant's damnation, which is actually made possible by the expenditure of the Willpower point.

Nothing physically happens to the ghoul's body when he spends his Vitae to activate a power, though one can sometimes see a faint lurid fire burning deep within his

eyes when he does so. None of his own blood evaporates (which would cripple him instantly with the bends if it did), nor does he lose any Vitae if he starts bleeding from open wounds. By that same token, a vampire cannot gain access to another Kindred's Vitae by drawing off the blood of that Kindred's ghouls, nor can another ghoul maintain his unnatural state by bleeding a fellow thrall — though a desperate, unhinged ghoul might not know that or care. Also, a ghoul's blood is no different in terms of what an elder vampire of high Blood Potency needs to survive. If mortal blood is no longer sufficient, a ghoul's blood isn't either, no matter how much Vitae that ghoul has in his system.

The only supernatural effect that Vitae has on a ghoul's body that makes him demonstrably different from the mortals around him (other than the respite from aging) is its effect on his aura. A ghoul's aura looks much like any other mortal's aura, though it's likely to be shot through with deep red and bright green and somewhat weak and muted (see **Vampire** p. 120). Yet if one looks closely enough with Aura Perception, one might notice veins in the ghoul's aura that are as pale as a vampire's aura normally is. The distinction of a pale streak in a weak and muted aura is an especially fine one, though, levying an additional -2 penalty to the user's Aura Perception roll.

Finally, at no point may a ghoul have more Vitae than he has dots of Stamina, and no ghoul can spend more than one Vitae in a single turn, no matter how old he is or how potent his regnant's blood is. Also, a ghoul is aware of how close to depleting his Vitae resources he is at all times.

Blood Ties

The Blood consumes a ghoul's life. It keeps him from aging, it heals his wounds, and it gives him power. It also helps him love his regnant if he's not particularly inclined to do so at first. Yet for the wonders it bestows, the Blood asks a price that every ghoul is obligated to pay. That price comes in the form of blood addiction and the Vinculum.

As with any mortal, blood addiction is instant and permanent for a ghoul, and it can only be resisted, not defeated. After the first time a person drinks Vitae (whether or not that's the draught that turns him into a ghoul), resisting the temptation to do so at the next opportunity becomes physical rather than academic. For the character to resist, the player must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll. Each time he gives in, he incurs a cumulative -1 penalty to subsequent resistance rolls. When the penalty turns the standard roll into a chance roll, the addiction becomes total and resistance becomes all but impossible. In fact, a dramatic failure on the resistance roll even inflicts a derangement.



Understanding the nature of Vitae addiction — perhaps from painful experience — many regnants use it against their new ghouls. They feed their enthralled servants Vitae as often as they can safely do so, normally once per night, to smash the ghoul's resistance to bits as quickly as possible. (If the vampire does out just the bare minimum of a single Vitae per month, the ghoul might be able to work up his nerve enough to resist and rebel in the interim.) Working up such an intense blood addiction so quickly in a ghoul can be problematic, though. A deeply sprung addict isn't the most competent bodyguard or lawyer or financier, after all, and the regnant always risks some other vampire tempting her ghoul away with offers of more frequent hits of the Blood. Yet if the ghoul's only purpose is to be a doting, biddable plaything, breaking his will with a rapid escalation of addiction isn't beyond the pale. Otherwise, waiting for a deep-rooted addiction to take hold in a ghoul's mind is just a matter of time anyway.

Despite all its intensity, however, a blood addiction can be knocked back if a ghoul is willing to undergo a grueling "rehabilitation." If a ghoul can work up the nerve to forgo the Blood long enough, he'll no longer

be a ghoul, and his body will start to rapidly age to catch up with his current chronological age at a rate of one year per day. This experience isn't a pleasant one, but it does have one benefit. If the ghoul can endure it for 25 full days (equivalent to 25 years) and survive, he cures his addiction completely. That goes only for the period of rapid re-aging, though. If the character had been a ghoul for less than 25 years (and thus would go through less than 25 days of rapid aging), he is plain out of luck. Not even surviving a full 25 years after that period will cure him.

Keep in mind also, that resisting the lure of Vitae does take the edge off the craving. Each successful Resolve + Composure resistance roll adds a +1 bonus to future rolls (or cancels out a lingering -1 penalty). An exceptional success even resets the penalties to 0. Yet while that rule (from *Vampire*, p. 158) applies just as much to ghouls as other mortals or Kindred, the odds are stacked against ghouls in the long run and their regnants know it.

Blood addiction notwithstanding, most Kindred regnants also enthrall their ghoul servants with the Vinculum as quickly as they can. Doing so takes only three consecutive nights, and each step afflicts a ghoul with

an ever-increasing love and trust that the regnant is under no obligation to return. The third time a ghoul drinks his regnant's blood, be it on the third consecutive night or the night of the third month of his Vitae upkeep, his player must roll Stamina + Resolve – his regnant's Blood Potency. (He may *not* spend Vitae for a +2 Stamina bonus on this roll, as using the Blood's damning power to resist the effects of its own damning power is patently counterintuitive.) Should this roll somehow achieve an exceptional success, the Vinculum remains partial and not *quite* so consuming as it could become next time.

Just as with a blood addiction, the odds are against a ghoul being able to hold out forever against a full Vinculum to his regnant. The only real way to hold off a full Vinculum to a single regnant is for a ghoul to continuously sustain himself with Vitae from an unending line of different Kindred. (Rogue ghouls who have turned into vampire-hunting guerillas often attempt to sustain themselves thus.) A ghoul can have any amount of partial Vinculums to any number of different Kindred until the one fateful night he's forced to take that third drink from one Kindred and he succumbs at last. The only up-side to that event is that any partial Vinculums he might have accrued up to that point are all washed away.

A ghoul may also attempt to break his regnant's Vinculum if he can somehow go for 50 years without tasting that Kindred's Vitae again. (The player may then attempt a Resolve + Composure roll to break the bond.) Days spent rapidly aging after one ceases to be a ghoul count as years toward this total, as do any years a ghoul manages to survive after the rapid-aging period ends. It's even possible for a blood-bound ghoul who's been horribly mistreated to snap his Vinculum all at once, though his ability to do so depends on his specific circumstances. For that reason, most Kindred regnants don't abuse their servants *too* horribly for *too* much of the time. The Kindred have learned from hard experience that the power of the Vinculum goes only so far without at least some veneer of real emotional connection backing it up.

(See pp. 160-162 of **Vampire: The Requiem** for more information on the Vinculum.)

Taste of Family

A ghoul's palate can never be as refined as a vampire's, but ghouls can learn to discriminate between subtle varieties of Vitae that are very closely related to his regnant's. When a ghoul tastes Vitae, his player may make an Intelligence + Occult roll (which receives a +2 bonus if the ghoul is using Heightened Senses). If he's successful, the ghoul can tell whether the Vitae is his regnant's own blood or comes from certain members of his immediate "family." That is, he can tell if

the Vitae belongs to his regnant's sire or one of his regnant's childer. The ghoul must be subject to a full Vinculum to his regnant in order to be able to do this, and his palate becomes no more discerning than that. He couldn't tell *which* of his regnant's childer's Vitae he was tasting, for instance, nor could he recognize the Vitae of a stranger from the same clan. Even other Kindred co-sanguineous with his regnant remain a mystery to him. Furthermore, a ghoul's blood doesn't carry the family's "flavor," regardless of how strong his Vinculum is to his regnant. Therefore, a Kindred couldn't taste it to try to figure out who the ghoul's master is.



OPTIONAL RULE: THE THRILL AND RELUCTANCE

Every experience that revolves around Vitae is a huge rush for the ghoul. While the player is marking down Health points lost to feed her character's regnant, the ghoul is lost deep in the heady, orgasmic pleasure of the Kiss. When the player refills the Vitae pool on her character sheet, the ghoul feels her master filling her body and soul. When the player marks off Vitae to power a Discipline, enhance an Attribute or heal a wound, the ghoul is enwrapped in an exquisite double-bind. Not only is the character caught up in the intensity of the power of Vitae, but she weeps for the loss of having her master's soul entwined with hers.

There are advantages and disadvantages to these strong feelings, and this optional rule codifies some of them in concrete game-mechanic terms. One advantage is that when a ghoul is full of Vitae to her Stamina maximum, she ignores two dice of wound penalties. (That is, she suffers wound penalties only when she has damage marked in her last Health box, and then only a –1.) The pleasure, fullness and strength of purpose afforded by such a large proportion of Vitae are greater than all but the worst of pain. One bonus die can also be applied to any roll to resist or withstand interrogation, intimidation, fast-talk or seduction that is intended to harm the regnant through the ghoul. If, for instance, some enemy is trying to torture the location of her regnant's haven out of the ghoul, the ghoul's player adds a +1 bonus to the Stamina + Resolve roll she makes to resist those efforts. (See p. 81 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for full rules on resisting interrogation and torture.) The bonus remains only for as long as the ghoul does not spend any Vitae, though. That ghoul might even die for refusing to spend any Vitae to heal her wounds, enhance her Stamina or activate her Resilience, but she can at least die satisfied that she never betrayed her master.

The other edge of the sword is that not only does the ghoul lose these bonuses when she spends Vitae, but it takes a concerted act of will to expend the very last bit of it. If a ghoul's player wishes to spend her character's last Vitae, she must

make a Resolve roll. A -1 penalty for each week the ghoul has gone without drinking any new Vitae applies to this roll, even if the ghoul has been walking around for several weeks prior completely full. Psychologically speaking, the length of time since the last drink is what matters, as the lingering uncertainty about when the next draught might come (if ever...) undermines the ghoul's resolve.



Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The ghoul is too afraid of losing everything, and cannot use up the last bit of her connection to her regnant. The last bit of Vitae may not be expended until after the ghoul gets another drink (at least one more full Vitae). The ghoul's action for this turn is also wasted while she debates internally about the situation.

Failure: The ghoul cannot bring herself to expend the Vitae this turn, thus wasting her action for the turn with the internal struggle.

Success: The Vitae may be expended, though making the decision to do so takes up the character's action for the turn, due to the monumental will needed to fight the addictive feeling. The effect she was going for becomes active at the beginning of the following turn.

Exceptional Success: The Vitae may be expended as a reflexive action as normal. This especially stable ghoul is able to trust her master implicitly, probably believing that it will be easy to recoup her losses.

Once the last drop of Vitae is expended, the ghoul is in for a month of hell if she can't trust or convince her regnant to provide more Vitae soon. For one thing, most ghoul characters are already completely addicted to their regnant's precious blood. Ghouls beholden to this optional rule undergo an especially brutal withdrawal during the month that they slowly return to being mere mortals. Members of ghoul families don't have it easy here, either. While they don't lose their ghoul-family potential, they do suffer the agony of withdrawal. In fact, it lasts longer for them. Since the state of being a ghoul is so geared toward having the Vitae inside, not having it hurts that much worse. Assess a cumulative -1 penalty to all of a player's rolls for each week that her ghoul has had no Vitae in her system. At the end of one month, when a regular ghoul turns back into a normal mortal again, these penalties disappear at the rate of one per day (provided the ghoul is young enough to survive that long afterward). A ghoul from a family of ghouls is in even worse shape. The penalties disappear at the rate of one per week.

This rule is meant to apply in total — both the good and the bad — when it's in play, but since it's optional to begin with, you *could* divide it into two

separate rules and use either one. (Players of characters who have a Stamina of only 1 — and, therefore, only one Vitae between exceptional endurance and potentially crippling indecision — might especially appreciate that.) Using only the rule's negative aspect hammers home the unceasing dependency that pervades a ghoul's every waking moment. Focusing primarily on the positive and applying only that aspect highlights the idea that not every part of being a ghoul is so crushingly dreadful.

Benefits of Ghoul Blood

While not so varied or flexible, the tools at a ghoul's disposal are comparable to what their Kindred masters inherit at the moment of their own death. What a ghoul lacks in outright power is made up for by the ability to feel real emotions (if tinted and subverted by the *Vinculum*), the ability to heal *without* Vitae as well as with it, and the ability to walk in the sunlight. Meanwhile, she exceeds all other mortals through the gruesome wonders of the Blood. In brief, those wonders include the cessation of the aging process, access to the Disciplines of her regnant's clan, the ability to enhance Physical Attributes and the ability to heal some wounds instantly. Ghouls also need not spend Vitae to rise each night, so they can conserve what's in their systems until they really need it.

Living Stasis

When a mortal becomes a ghoul, his body ceases to age and enters a kind of living stasis. A ghoul child doesn't grow up or mature. A pregnant woman doesn't normally carry to term (it's possible; see p. 89 for more information). A character who's going bald doesn't get any more bald, nor does an adolescent in the midst of puberty ever escape his awkward and hormonal stage — though he's no longer subject to growth spurts. Wounds incurred before or after the change continue to heal naturally, as that process isn't a function of aging per se, and mundane illnesses such as chicken pox or the common cold run their course naturally. More serious diseases that might be in progress, such as multiple sclerosis, cancer or Parkinson's disease, freeze in their tracks alongside the aging process, growing no worse.

Of course, the ghoul must still eat, drink, breathe and sleep lest he starve to death, suffocate or otherwise ruin himself, but other than that, the Vitae sustains him.

Physical Augmentation

One of the more useful powers ghouls receive is the ability to augment their Physical Attributes with Vitae, much like vampires can. For every Vitae a ghoul makes his body burn, he may increase a physical dice pool by two dice for one turn. He can reflexively increase Strength, Dexterity or Stamina pools thus.



Spending Vitae to boost an Attribute task doesn't grant actual additional dots in the given Attribute, however. A ghoul cannot spend Vitae for extra Stamina and expect to receive two extra bonus Health dots as a result, even for just one turn. The extra Stamina dice would, for instance, help the ghoul withstand the effects of a contact poison just long enough to deliver one last message to her regnant, though. They would aid in rolls to activate various Stamina-based Discipline powers as well.

Healing Wounds

Ghouls heal damage naturally over time just as normal mortals do. (See p. 175 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for more information.) In this respect, at least, they have an advantage over their regnants in that they don't have to gravely injure other human beings (by feeding) to make themselves better. If they can rest safely, time will heal all wounds. Yet even on the periphery of the Danse Macabre, time and peaceful rest are rare luxuries.

Fortunately, ghouls can also spend their Vitae to heal themselves instantly, much as vampires can. In a single turn, a ghoul can spend one Vitae reflexively and heal two Health points of bashing damage. The sensation is cool and soothing as bruises fade or minor scrapes seal themselves as good as new. Should his wounds be more

severe, he could instead reflexively heal one Health point of lethal damage for one Vitae. Doing so is far less pleasant, as bones fuse where they lie and muscles, nerves and skin stretch and melt back together without an iota of anesthesia. It can be an incredibly painful process, and should a ghoul not take the time to properly clean, dress and set his more serious wounds, he could be asking for more trouble than the unnatural healing set out to solve.

Where this healing capacity can seem truly miraculous, though, is in healing aggravated damage. Normally, mortals heal aggravated damage at a rate of one point per week, but ghouls can heal a single Health point of aggravated damage in just two nights — as quickly as a vampire can do. Doing so is no easy proposition, though, as healing such a grievous injury costs five Vitae over the course of those two nights. A ghoul need not spend all five Vitae at once, which is fortunate, but he must have access to that Vitae. A ghoul can have only as much Vitae in his system at a time as he has dots of Stamina, so only the hardest and toughest ghouls are likely to have enough Vitae on hand to heal a single aggravated point of damage. A lesser ghoul must rely on the generosity of his regnant and hope that his regnant doesn't simply dispense with him instead. And that covers only one point of aggravated damage. Healing an aggravated wound completely leaves a wicked

scar to remember the trauma by, but it restores full functionality to the damaged body part — even an eye or a reproductive organ.

In addition to this healing ability, ghouls are also exempt from the Incapacitation rule on p. 173 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** as long as they have Vitae within their bodies. Normally, a mortal who has bashing damage marked in his rightmost Health box is subject to reflexive Stamina rolls that determine whether he remains conscious. Not so for a ghoul. It's not until his damage is upgraded such that a lethal wound fills that box that the ghoul collapses on the verge of death. Even then, however, he retains the wherewithal to reflexively spend a Vitae to repair that last lethal wound. This capacity might not make him a superman who can take on an army of hooligans, but he could rise from death's door long enough to hit the emergency switch that locks his regnant in her panic room. Of course, when the character's rightmost Health box is marked with an aggravated wound, nothing can save him.

Likewise, ghouls are no less susceptible to diseases, chemicals or toxins than regular mortals are. The anti-aging effects of the Blood put on hold the progress of any congenital conditions that would have affected them in later life, but even Vitae cannot cure cancer or magically un-infect a careless ghoul with herpes. Nor can it protect the ghoul servants of a Morbus from the contagion brewing in the vampire's every drop of blood. (A ghoul can use her Vitae to boost a Stamina roll to withstand the effects of chemicals or disease, though.) The stasis effect of being made a ghoul even halts the progress of any serious medical condition toward which the ghoul has a genetic predisposition. Yet with the most persistent chemicals or pathogens that affect ghouls after the first ingestion of Vitae, it's only a matter of time before the ghoul succumbs.

Using Disciplines

Of course, the most multifaceted and broadly appealing benefit that comes from being a ghoul is the ability to use vampiric Disciplines. As soon as he's first made a ghoul, the character gains an automatic dot in the physical Discipline that's in-clan for his regnant. As per the template provided in this book, a ghoul character also receives a second dot of a Discipline from his regnant's in-clan selections. That second dot can be the second in his physical Discipline or the first dot from another Discipline.

Once a ghoul has learned these basic Discipline abilities, developing them into more formidable powers is a different story. A ghoul character must have a teacher for every dot of a Discipline that he intends to learn, even if the Disciplines in question are in

clan for his regnant. What's more, the experience-point cost for increasing the number of dots he has in a Discipline is double what a Kindred character would pay. Developing the physical Disciplines is somewhat more natural, in that the character need not have a teacher for every additional dot, but the experience cost is still double. Regardless, he must still be taught the first dot in those physical Disciplines that are not in clan for his regnant.

If the ghoul's regnant is a member of a bloodline, all of his bloodline Disciplines count as in clan for the ghoul's purposes as long as the regnant enthralls the ghoul *after* becoming a member of the bloodline. Should the regnant form or join a bloodline after he's enthralled a ghoul, the ghoul doesn't immediately share in the same in-clan benefit. While a Kindred can force the mystical nature of his own Vitae to change, it's harder to pass that change down to his ghouls through the Blood. The change overtakes a ghoul much as a Vinculum would. Over three successive nights, the regnant must feed the ghoul his Vitae and spend a single point of Willpower each time. (The ghoul cannot achieve the same effect by spending his own Willpower.) The regnant can either induce the change slowly over the course of three months during the ghoul's regular Vitae upkeep (as long as the regnant spends the Willpower and not the ghoul), or he can force the change to take place in three whirlwind nights. Only after those three feeding sessions have occurred do the in-clan costs for the extra bloodline Discipline apply to the ghoul (assuming the master even intends to teach the ghoul the new tricks).

Ghouls use Disciplines exactly the same way that Kindred do, paying the same costs listed in **Vampire: The Requiem** (with their players making the same rolls). They can even learn Crúac and Theban Sorcery if they can find willing teachers and somehow accrue the necessary Covenant Status. The only Discipline-style powers that ghouls cannot ever use are the tiers of the Coils of the Dragon. Those powers are designed to specifically deal with aspects of the vampiric condition, and ghouls simply aren't vampires. Any other Discipline power, however, relies only on the willingness of the regnant to teach it or the ghoul's ingenuity in somehow forcing a vampire to teach it (not to mention the grossly inflated experience-point costs). And yes, if it need be said, that means that ghouls *can* learn the one- to five-dot applications of those Disciplines — everything from Feral Whispers to Convocation of Hotoke.

Although nothing is technically forbidden except the Coils of the Dragon, the idea of ghouls using Disciplines raises certain logistical rules questions that must be addressed. The specific powers from the core **Vampire** rulebook that raise questions are listed here with page

number references. If a power from that book is *not* listed here, assume that it works just the same way for a ghoulish user as it would for a Kindred user. (The functions of Discipline powers from other **Vampire** supplements are left to Storyteller discretion.)



THINK ABOUT IT FOR A SECOND...

No Kindred in his right mind is going to teach a ghoulish any of the more powerful or versatile applications of the various Disciplines, no matter how loyal, skilled and useful that ghoulish has been. A ghoulish with Body of Spirit? Preposterous. A ghoulish with Conditioning? You have to be kidding. How would a vampire hope to control such a powerful ghoulish?

Then again, if a vampire *is* willing to teach a ghoulish to wield such incredible power, how powerful must he already be himself if he's not worried about what the ghoulish will do with it? How high unto completely unhinged would such a vampire have to be? And what, exactly would he intend for that ghoulish to do with those powers? Does he intend for that ghoulish to go out and dispose of with his vampire rivals while he watches from afar? Does he have more than one such ghoulish?



Animalism

•••• Subsume the Lesser Spirit (p. 117)

When a ghoulish uses this power to take over the body of an animal, he cannot do so for nearly as long as a vampire can. While he's out of his body, his body falls into a state that's so near death as to be almost indistinguishable, such as when a person falls into deep icy water and remains submerged for a long time. If he remains in this state for too long, his body will die, snapping his animating spirit back just in time to be dragged on to whatever final reward awaits. The ghoulish may remain outside his body for no more than 15 minutes per dot of Stamina he possesses.

••••• Leashing the Beast (p. 118)

As the ghoulish doesn't actually have a Beast, he can't make himself a target of this power. Otherwise, it functions normally.

Auspex

••••• Twilight Projection (p. 123)

As per Animalism 4, the ghoulish can't remain disconnected from his body indefinitely. He may use this power for 15 minutes per dot of Stamina he possesses. After that, his body dies and takes his soul with it.

Cachexy

•• Contaminate (p. 249)

The disease that the ghoulish user spreads must be a communicable one with which he is currently afflicted. To contaminate the object in question, the

ghoulish character must literally bleed out the equivalent of the one Vitae he must spend, thus inflicting one point of lethal damage on himself.

•••• Plague-Bearer (p. 250)

The disease that the ghoulish user spreads must be a communicable one with which he is currently afflicted, as per Contaminate. He need not literally lose any blood, however, when he spends Vitae for the effect.

Dominate

Keep in mind that a regnant can use any Dominate power except Conditioning on a blood-bound ghoulish without the need for eye contact. In addition, ghoulish cannot use any Dominate power at all on Kindred. Ghoulish can affect mortals, other ghoulish and possibly Lupines and mages with Dominate, but a factor of the Willpower the regnant must initially spend to create the ghoulish imparts a subconscious protection against being Dominated by his lowly servant.

••• The Forgetful Mind (p. 126)

A ghoulish cannot restore original memories that have been stolen or re-written by an application of Dominate used by a vampire. A ghoulish user can write *new* memories in over those memories, but he cannot undo the damage a vampire has done. Remember also that having the Unobtrusive Merit grants a +1 to the ghoulish victim's Resolve for purposes of resisting this power.

•••• Conditioning (p. 127)

Ghoulish with this power can recognize when someone is trying to use it on them. Also, all successes on the activation roll are doubled when a vampire is using the power on one of his thralls, regardless of whether that thrall can use the power herself.

••••• Possession (p. 128)

As per Animalism 4 and Auspex 5, the ghoulish can remain outside his own body for only 15 minutes per dot of Stamina he has at a time. After that, his body dies and takes his soul with it.

Majesty

Like Dominate, Majesty doesn't work on Kindred targets when ghoulish use it. It works just fine on any other sort of target against which a vampire or ghoulish would try to use it.

•••• Summoning (p. 130)

Summoning works at any point of the day during which a ghoulish uses it, and it ends at sunrise.

Nightmare

• Monstrous Countenance (p. 133)

This power works just fine on humans and other ghoulish, but it doesn't work on vampires. The Kindred have to co-exist and deal with the Beast every night, and there's nothing within a ghoulish that this power can reveal that rivals the Beast's ferocity.



••• Eye of the Beast (p. 134)

The same proviso holds true here. A ghoul can show another ghoul, a mortal or some other creature an affected shadow of the Beast with this power, but any Kindred knows the difference. Vampires are unaffected by ghouls' uses of this power.

Obfuscate

•• Mask of Tranquility (p. 136)

Ghouls don't invoke reactions tied to the Predator's Taint in the first place, so this power doesn't affect that aspect of their lives. It does, however, hide the telltale veins in their aura that give away their ghoul condition. When this power is active, a ghoul's aura looks no different from any other mortal human's aura.

Protean

• Aspect of the Predator (p. 138)

Ghouls don't invoke reactions tied to the Predator's Taint, so this power doesn't affect that aspect of their lives. They can adopt a likeness of the Beast with this power, however, though doing so is a dangerous gamble. When this power is active, the ghoul character has an effective Blood Potency of 0 and he invokes the Predator's Taint in the same circumstances under which a Kindred would. (See **Vampire**, p. 168.) Granted, having an effective Blood Potency of 0 means that the ghoul will *always* react as if in Rötschreck and the vampire will *always* react in a frenzy if either cannot control himself, but such is a ghoul's existence. The benefit of this power is that a ghoul can use it to tell at a distance if a stranger is a vampire or not (i.e., whether that stranger invokes the reaction or not). The power has no effect between two ghouls, even if they are both using it at the same time.

•• Haven of Soil (p. 138)

A ghoul with this power cannot use it indefinitely. He can remain interred for 15 minutes per Stamina dot he possesses, after which he dies. When that happens, his body congeals back into its normal shape at the surface of the material with which he has blended, but it remains composed of that material and part of that material thereafter. While he's blended (and still alive), Morality is the trait rolled to determine his awareness of his surroundings.

•••• Shape of the Beast (p. 139)

When a ghoul uses this power, he becomes a living, breathing animal. Since his intelligence is still human, though, all Animalism powers are still useless against him.

Crúac

If a ghoul character is going to have Crúac, his player must purchase it at character creation. In order for the ghoul to have learned Crúac, the player must purchase at least one dot of Covenant Status (Circle of the Crone)

at character creation. (Justifying such a thing is usually a significant enough bar to entry in and of itself.) The first dot of Crúac must be the second Discipline dot a ghoul gets at character creation as per this book's new ghoul template.

For every Vitae a ghoul character spends to activate a Crúac ritual, he must also bleed out the equivalent amount of blood from his own body (inflicting one lethal wound per Vitae required). A ghoul's Vitae isn't in his blood exactly, but the nature of the rituals demands a blood sacrifice nonetheless.

•• Cheval (p. 143)

Since a ghoul who is "riding" another's senses enters only a trancelike state rather than a torpid near-death state, he can use Cheval for as long as a vampire could.

•• Hydra's Vitae (p. 143)

If a ghoul uses this ritual, he turns his own blood into deadly poison just as a Kindred user would. Unlike a Kindred user, however, he then subsequently dies, as he has just turned his own blood into *deadly poison*. As long as that blood remains in his body, however, it retains its poisonous quality.

•••• Blood Price (p. 144)

When a ghoul uses this ritual on a vampire, its effect steals actual Vitae (not just mortal blood) and transfers it to the ghoul. The ghoul can use this Vitae for his monthly upkeep, but he must spend his own Willpower when doing so. This power also works when used on a ghoul, but it only steals actual Vitae that a ghoul takes from his regnant or another vampire.

••••• Blood Blight (p. 145)

A ghoul afflicted by this ritual suffers the damage and loses the Vitae normally, but no physical blood in his body is consumed.

Theban Sorcery

If a ghoul character is going to have Theban Sorcery, his player must purchase it at character creation. In order for the ghoul to have learned Theban Sorcery, the player must purchase at least one dot of Covenant Status (Lancea Sanctum) at character creation. (Justifying such a thing is usually a significant enough bar to entry in and of itself — more so, even, than with Crúac and the Circle of the Crone.) The first dot of Theban Sorcery must be the second Discipline dot a ghoul gets at character creation.

• Blood Scourge (p. 146)

When a ghoul character performs this ritual, he must literally slash his wrist and bleed out the blood that makes up the whip. Doing so inflicts one point of lethal damage per whip he creates (the maximum of which is equal to his dots in Theban Sorcery). This "damage" doesn't actually harm the ghoul until the duration of the effect has expired (after a number of

turns equal to the number of successes on the activation roll) and the whip turns to dust.

- Vitae Reliquary (p. 146)

A ghoul cannot create a Vitae Reliquary, as his blood isn't the physical seat of his Vitae, but he can use the Vitae stored in a reliquary that someone else created for his monthly upkeep. He must spend the necessary Willpower point himself.

Devotions

Ghouls aren't barred from learning Devotions, but they must be taught each one. That is, they cannot simply figure Devotions out on their own even if they have the requisite Discipline combinations already. Furthermore, the experience-point costs listed for Devotions in **Vampire** are doubled for ghouls. Finally, a ghoul cannot use any Devotion that consists of Dominate or Majesty on a Kindred victim.

The Care and Feeding of Ghouls

To reiterate from **Vampire: The Requiem**, a Kindred doesn't create a ghoul simply by feeding a mortal dupe some Vitae. While doing so can make a mortal dependent and more loyal, it makes him no more powerful. Nor does it give him any actual Vitae to spend. To complete the transformation, the vampire's player must expend a point of Willpower at the same time (i.e., reflexively during the same turn), imparting a whisper of his own damnation upon the mortal. Thereafter, the ghoul requires at least one Vitae and another Willpower point every 30 days for as long as he is expected to remain a ghoul. As long as he doesn't spend that Vitae, however, he remains a ghoul.

Yet over the course of his existence as a ghoul, the ghoul isn't as solely dependent on his regnant as the regnant might wish him to believe. First of all, the Willpower points that must be expended need not come from the regnant after that first fateful time. That first Willpower point forces the condition on the ghoul, but every subsequent point only reinforces the condition. That being said, the ghoul himself could spend the Willpower when he tastes the Blood, making him complicit in his own damnation. Kindred masters of younger ghouls don't often tell their servants that such a thing is possible, though, since there's no guarantee that the ghoul would actually do so. Once a ghoul has lived long enough and been thoroughly ensnared by the Vinculum, he's usually all too willing to submit himself to his condition lest he be robbed of it. (Note, however, that no one else can spend this Willpower point to accomplish the same effect. The ghoul can submit himself or the Kindred feeding him can force it on him, but no third party can do so.)

Another aspect of the condition that many Kindred keep secret from their ghouls is that *any* vampire can

supply the Vitae required for a ghoul's upkeep. The childer of a weak or torpid vampire can feed his ghouls for him when he can't do so, or a desperate ghoul could even beg Vitae of another vampire if his regnant has gone missing or no longer requires his services. A ghoul who's gone rogue can even support himself on the Vitae of unfortunate Kindred he hunts down and subdues (as long as he spends the requisite Willpower point). One thing a ghoul can't do to maintain his state, however, is draw off a large portion of a vampire's blood (likely as a prelude to leaving him out for the sun), store it in a freezer and sup on it for as long as it holds out. While doing so would preserve the physical blood itself, that blood would cease to actually be Vitae within a few moments of it leaving the vampire's body, making it useless for the ghoul's purposes. (See **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 156.)

Should 30 days pass since the ghoul's last Vitae ingestion and the ghoul not receive any new Vitae, he finds himself in dire straits. He remains a ghoul for as long as his last lingering Vitae remains in his system and he continues to spend Willpower monthly toward that purpose, but if he should spend his last Vitae, every benefit he derived from being a ghoul vanishes. If he receives new Vitae and a Willpower point is spent, the 30-day countdown begins anew. At the same time, if a ghoul spends all of his Vitae before the 30-day limit expires, he doesn't immediately cease to be a ghoul. It's not until the sun rises on the 31st day that he gets into trouble. If he can get new Vitae and spend the requisite Willpower before then, he remains a ghoul.

Once a ghoul has exceeded his 30-day limit and run out of Vitae, however, he becomes mortal again as the Kindred's pollution is scoured from him. Every benefit that being a ghoul gave him disappears, including the ability to use Disciplines. He doesn't forget how to use those Disciplines (meaning he'll have access to them again if he's subsequently made a ghoul again), but he cannot use them without the taint of undeath inside him. He isn't set free from any Vinculum or blood addiction to which he was subject as a ghoul, but the powers he was granted are stripped away.

What's worse, the living stasis in which he existed as a ghoul goes away and life catches back up to him. From sunrise to sunrise after the mortal is no longer a ghoul, the character ages one year per day for every year that he remained in stasis as a ghoul. This process is painful and debilitating, levying a -5 dice pool penalty on any physical action until it has entirely run its course. That might not be so bad for someone who was a ghoul for less than a year or for only a few years, but legacy ghouls who served their regnants for decades or centuries are unlikely to survive another couple of months. Granted, how much time they have depends on how old they were when

they first became ghouls, but aging 60 years in 60 days is more than the human body can withstand. And if becoming a ghoul originally halted the progress of some encroaching medical condition, that condition comes back with a vengeance as well, progressing one year per day without any benefit of treatment.

Yet hope persists even in these circumstances. Should an abandoned, rapidly aging ghoul receive a fresh infusion of Vitae and Willpower, the aging process stops again and a new 30-day countdown begins. The physical penalty for enduring the rapid aging disappears, and the ghoul can once again use any Disciplines he learned back when he was a ghoul the first time. This second chance doesn't take the ghoul back to the person he was when he was first made a ghoul, however. It merely halts his decline at this new point and reestablishes that point as the "first" time he became a ghoul.

Some especially malicious regnants allow their ghouls' Vitae upkeep to lapse briefly, either to punish the ghoul for failure or willfulness, or just to watch what happens. Doing so can either break a headstrong ghoul's resolve, or it can push a strong-minded ghoul into open acts of rebellion. Such heartbreaking cruelty can even convince a ghoul that the worst pain and hopelessness is preferable to serving a callous inhuman monster for even one more night. Whether that means the ghoul flees his master and tries to ride out the withdrawal or drags the monster out into the sunlight in hopes of joining her in death depends on the ghoul's history and his current mental state. That, and whether he has the strength to overcome the Vinculum...

Derangements

The stresses a ghoul experiences are often extraordinary. Many must abandon their former lives completely, becoming little more than objects of pleasure and tools of destruction. Horrifying demands, endless abuses and frenzied passions are heaped upon ghouls as a matter of course, and always from those whom they think they love. It's hardly surprising, then, that a significant number of them go insane.

The following are a number of the most common ghoul derangements:

Fetishism (mild): Your character formulates an irrational, pleasurable association with an object or situation, usually as the direct result of his regnant's proclivities. To fully enjoy himself, so to speak, he needs to duplicate the situation or be in the presence of the object. This can lead to some truly bizarre behavior, often triggering a cycle of gratification and guilt that's extremely difficult to break. If your character experiences something that reminds him of the event or object he's chosen, roll Resolve + Composure. If the roll fails, your character focuses on re-creating the situation or coming in contact



with the object in question. For example, a ghoul who fetishizes his regnant's habit of having him lick her leather boots might experience a compulsion to press his face to the boots of a woman he sees walking by on the street if he finds her attractive.

Masochism (severe): Your character is no longer satisfied with the presence of the object or duplication of the situation. He must now be hurt by it in order to enjoy himself. The effects of fetishism apply, but the character must also suffer an amount of bashing damage at least equal to his Stamina during the compulsive activity in order to be satisfied. Without the interference of an outside agent, he won't stop until the damage is inflicted in full.

Blood Fascination (mild): Your character is overwhelmed by an unnatural fixation with blood. Beyond the act of drinking Vitae, she finds herself drawn to the sight, smell and sensation of fresh blood in small quantities. She might choose to cut herself on occasion, just to watch the seeping wound, or she has a habit of ordering extremely rare steaks just to smell them. This fascination goes beyond the blood addiction that most ghouls suffer. While an addicted ghoul consumes blood at any opportunity, a fascinated one holds on to keepsakes such as vials of blood, soiled bandages or color photographs of crime scenes. Whenever your character encounters a quantity of blood, roll Resolve + Composure. If the roll fails, she's compelled to take a "souvenir." If she goes for a period equal to her Composure in days without encountering blood or images of blood, another Resolve + Composure roll is required. If it fails, she searches for more.

Hemophilic Compulsion (severe): Your character's no longer satisfied with the keepsakes of just any blood. She must draw it fresh from a victim herself. Whether it comes from injuring an opponent in combat, cutting a masochistic lover or a more heinous assault, the character must find a way to satisfy this urge with alarming frequency. Every time a number of days equal to your character's Composure passes, you must roll Resolve + Composure. A failure indicates that the character must go out immediately with intent to wound a victim and save a quantity of his blood.

Degenerative Fixation (mild): Your ghoul character becomes acutely aware of his unchanging state with the passage of time and begins to obsess over his appearance. He wonders constantly how he would look if allowed to age naturally, and he often searches himself for signs that the Vitae is beginning to fail him. Every time the character encounters an image such as a mirror or photograph of himself, roll Resolve + Composure. Failure indicates that the character is convinced that the signs of encroaching age are visible and must beg his regnant for more Vitae at the first opportunity.

Identity Erasure (severe): Your character becomes irrationally afraid of the mystical mechanism that keeps him young, worrying that the slightest reminder of his actual age could tip the balance and cause it to fail. As a result, he works to eliminate any evidence of his true identity, including documents, photographs, friends and relatives. Whenever your character encounters evidence of his mortal life (including a person who knew him), you must roll Resolve + Composure. A success on this roll means that your character can suppress the urge to destroy the evidence. Failure means he must attempt to erase it immediately.

Insomnia (mild): Your character has trouble getting the required amount of sleep, and not just occasionally. It happens more often than not and leaves her feeling tired, irritable and unable to concentrate. Any time the character is engaged in a stressful situation (Storyteller discretion), roll Resolve + Composure. Failure means that your character is unable to sleep properly and suffers a -2 penalty on all rolls the following day. Each day thereafter is considered "stressful" and requires a similar roll until the character succeeds and gets a full night's or day's rest.

Cataplexy (severe): Your character has so much trouble resting that her body is beginning to fail her. Whenever the aforementioned sleep roll fails, the character suffers from bouts of overwhelming feebleness throughout the following day. Any circumstance resulting in an intense emotional reaction such as laughter, anger or fear requires a Stamina + Composure roll. (The ghoul may use Vitae for a +2 bonus on this roll as usual.) Failure means that the character slumps to the ground, paralyzed with weakness for a full turn even though she remains fully conscious.

EMBRACING YOUR GHOUL

Should a vampire choose to Embrace a ghoul, perhaps as a reward for years of exemplary service, you proceed more or less as you would in creating any Kindred character. The erstwhile ghoul's Blood Potency becomes 1, and he gains a dot in one of the two favored Attributes listed for his sire's clan. He retains any dots in any Disciplines he learned while he was a ghoul, even if his ghoul condition had lapsed due to lack of Vitae. If he had only two Discipline dots at the time of his Embrace, he gains one more from those that are now in clan for him. If he had more than three Discipline dots already, he doesn't gain any. Also, only the Disciplines that are in clan for his sire are now in clan for him. The new vampire now uses Humanity rather than Morality, though his Humanity rating remains the same as his Morality was before the Embrace. Finally, once the ghoul is Embraced, he retains any blood addiction and Vinculums he possessed as a ghoul.

Ghoul Bloodlines

The families detailed in Chapter One are only a few of those currently in existence. Some of them are highly visible, such as the Crassus, but most are small. They receive little notice from their masters, let alone other Kindred. Still, the potential for servants who can be maintained at smaller personal expense of Vitae is attractive, so many other ghoulish bloodlines might exist. It happens by accident, as in the case of the Nirriti Cult, or by design, as with the Gravenor family. These families might have wealth, power and influence like the Crassus or be subject to poverty, hardship and anonymity like the Alley Men. In any case, should you want to create these families for your own chronicle, this section contains the systems for doing so. (Storytelling advice for creating ghoulish families can be found in the Appendix.)

The First Generation

Ghoul families have to start somewhere. Did some debauched Daeva simply end up with a pregnant ghoulish after one too many orgies? Or, perhaps a more calculating Ventrue desired a permanent staff of thralls and sought the means to carry out that desire. Was the project motivated by the ideology of a covenant, such as a Dragon whose interest lay in studying this aspect of the Kindred condition? Or was it a personal project, unrelated to the vampire's grander aims?

SO YOU WANT TO BE A FAMILY'S REGNANT...

Yes, Storytellers, you know it will happen: Inevitably, players will want to create their own families of ghouls. Either they'll want their characters to custom-design a pre-existing family and play a ghoulish from that family, or their vampire characters will want to start their own. They might even want to have it both ways, with a character who starts off in possession of thralls from a previously existing family. What do you say to them?

It depends on whether you want to focus the time and effort necessary on it. If it's not something you want to focus on, then there doesn't have to be much work involved at all. You can feel free to say no. You can also feel free to say, "Sure, you can start with a ghoulish family. Buy them as several Retainer Merit dots." The family probably shouldn't have any special strengths or weaknesses, though, unless you and your players are willing to go through the entire process of creating the family and its history. For a simple family of household servants, a dot or two in Retainer for each should be fine. For anything more, not only would the cost in Retainer dots go up, but a suitable story should be involved detailing the search for fertile

ghouls and the pattern of breeding from that point, as well as the treatment of the family by its master over time.

Remember, though, that if your players are enthusiastic about having their characters do something, they'll be enthusiastic about your chronicle if it lets them do it. Check out the first two commandments on p. 194 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** and don't shy away from the players' desires.

Fertile Ghouls

The first step in creating a ghoulish bloodline is finding ghouls who are capable of having babies. Doing so generally involves a lot of experimentation of a carnal variety, which raises all sorts of questions. Does the Kindred join the fun? Does she watch for pleasure? Does she watch out of detached interest? Is this simply a clinical breeding process? Of course, finding a mother and father for the bloodline might also involve searching through libraries of ancient texts and compiling a list of the proper qualities that allow a woman to be fertile, and a man to be virile, as a ghoulish. Depending on whose libraries are consulted, the information will differ, both in flavor and in accuracy. Lancea Sanctum texts are likely to say that God will grant only girls of proper morality this favor, and their paramour must be similarly virtuous. Ordo Dracul libraries, on the other hand, are likely to yield up odder combinations, such as a virgin boy of 13 with his close relative, and both must drink each others' blood on the night of the full moon, copulating at midnight. The Circle of the Crone might espouse extreme fertility, with texts recommending that a potential ghoulish parent already have sired or birthed several children. Regardless, it should take a significant amount of effort in research, experimentation or both to find a breeding pair. Finding more than a single pair could be the focus of an entire story.

No single set of qualities makes a woman a good ghoulish mother or a man a good ghoulish father. Certain things are helpful, though. High Stamina is very helpful. For the male, it means he is more healthy and virile, increasing the chances of conception in general. For the female, high Stamina means the body has more support to give the child when it comes to carrying the baby to term. High Willpower is also helpful on both parts, because the will of the individual does influence the power of the Vitae within them. Those with high Willpower can overcome some barriers imposed by being ghouls through the strength of their desire. Still, unless the Storyteller says that the particular conditions needed according to research and/or experimentation have been met, a ghoulish mother has very little chance of conceiving and delivering a living child. Even if the Storyteller determines that



the conditions have been met, the chances don't improve much.

The process of research — be it textual study, searching out knowledgeable Kindred or performing sexual experiments — involves an extended roll. Asking around and textual study should probably be roleplayed in more detail than the experimentation, unless your troupe is mature enough to handle the subject and everyone present is comfortable with it. In any case, the specific roll made is up to the kind of research being done.

Asking around might involve Manipulation + Persuasion, Intimidation or Socialize, depending on how the questions are asked. Persuasion involves direct, but wheedling questions. Intimidation is direct and commanding. Socialize is subtle and indirect, and it takes much longer. Subterfuge would be another option for asking around cryptically, but doing so takes even longer than Socialize. If the character has contacts in an appropriate field, the player may add a bonus die to each roll. Allies, Mentor or Status also provide this bonus if they represent an appropriate person or group. Each roll takes one night of work.

Study of texts both ancient and cutting-edge could involve several Skills as well. Intelligence + Academics, Computer, Investigation, Medicine, Occult and Science could all apply. Academics shows that the character knows how to do research. Computer helps a vampire access online databases faster and makes the data more likely to come for free than otherwise. Investigation is a helpful skill when determining whether information is true and relevant. Medicine provides knowledge of how the body works, so it is perfect for identifying relevant details in modern medical science that could explain what's happening in the ghoul's body and find a way around it. It might also represent more traditional, holistic medical knowledge that would give some insight into the conditions necessary for procreation under adverse circumstances such as a ghoul's body. Occult similarly helps with knowing the nature of Vitae. Science works on a similar theory to Medicine in the modern sense, allowing the character access to modern knowledge and techniques of doing things with technology that could help. Each roll requires one week of work (at least 25 hours).

Experimentation takes time, but for Kindred with Lust as their Vice it might be the preferred route for precisely that reason. No systems are required. The ghouls are simply paired off and made to mate, just as any normal couple attempting conception. Innumerable wives' tales exist regarding helping conception along (as do some legitimate facts on the subject), but it really boils down to persistence. Tracking the female's ovulation is possible with over-the-counter implements, and it might add equipment modifiers to the conception roll.

Whenever the Kindred has his subjects and any other accoutrements prepared, the ghouls attempt conception. As stated, this act can take many attempts (even for a normal, mortal couple) and some Kindred have waited years to achieve positive results. Some, of course, become bored with the notion and give up, while others try to increase their chances by having several breeding pairs trying simultaneously. For every week of persistent attempts to conceive, the Storyteller should roll three dice, modified as follows:

Situation	Modifier
Every 5 successes on the Kindred's extended roll	+1
Ghoul mother has the Iron Stamina Merit	+1
Father is not a ghoul	+1
Mother has proficiency in the Resilience Discipline	+1
Conception attempts timed with mother's ovulation cycle	+1
Mother has been a ghoul longer than one full year	-1
Mother has proficiency in the Protean Discipline	-1
Father is a ghoul (but <i>not</i> a member of a ghoul family)	-3

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Conception occurs, but the mother's body immediately and violently miscarries. Damage to the woman's reproductive system means that any future conception attempts incur a -3 modifier.

Failure: No conception occurs. The couple may continue trying.

Success: Pregnancy occurs, but it is very high-risk. See "Ghoul Pregnancy."

Exceptional Success: Pregnancy occurs, with slightly lessened risks for the mother. See "Ghoul Pregnancy."

Ghoul Pregnancy

Conception is only the first step. The living stasis in which all ghouls exist makes a ghoul child *very* difficult to carry to term. Every four months of pregnancy (i.e., once per trimester), the Storyteller should roll the female ghoul's Stamina, with the following modifiers:

Situation	Modifier
Medical care	+1 to +5, depending on how much money is available
Mother keeps herself in good health	+1
Exceptional success on the conception roll	+2

Mother is not subject to intense emotional stress	-
Mother is traumatized or otherwise stressed	-1
Sub-par or no medical care	-2
Mother smokes, drinks or otherwise poisons herself	-2
Mother spends Vitae for any other purpose but this roll during the trimester	-3

If a woman becomes a ghoul while pregnant, the Storyteller should immediately roll her Stamina, subject to any of the above modifiers that might apply. The results of the roll are as follows:

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The pregnancy terminates and the ghoul gains a mild derangement. Future conception attempts suffer a -2 penalty.

Failure: The pregnancy terminates. Depending on the circumstances, the mother might gain a derangement (Storyteller's discretion).

Success: The pregnancy remains viable, if high-risk.

Exceptional Success: The Storyteller need not make this roll for the next trimester. If this roll was for the third trimester, the baby is delivered without incident.

When it comes time for the baby to be born, the Storyteller once again rolls the mother's Stamina. If this roll fails, the mother dies in childbirth or the baby does not survive the delivery. If the roll is a dramatic failure, both perish. On a success or an exceptional success, both survive. All of the modifiers listed for the trimester Stamina rolls apply, as do any others the Storyteller feels appropriate.

Raising Ghoul Babies

Even if the baby and the mother survive the delivery, the first generation is far from secure, and the work is far from over. Raising the child presents all sorts of questions and complications. The very first question is, how to feed the child until she can eat solid food? Breast feeding might seem like a good option at first, but the mother is still a ghoul, and doesn't produce nearly enough milk to sustain a child (since the Vitae in her body is constantly at war with the hormones that facilitate lactation). Baby formula is probably the way to go, as despite the clear health benefits of breast milk for normal children, ghoul children present quite a different set of problems.

Raising the child presents its own issues. A regnant might like to think that he can raise the baby and thus control its personality and development, but no vampire is capable of raising a newborn because newborns

require around-the-clock attention and care. Besides, while ghoule mothers might be fiercely loyal to their regnants, their devotion to their children is natural, and potentially stronger. The mother's Resolve + Composure roll to be able to harm her regnant does not receive any of the normal penalties if her child's safety is a factor. Whether she lets the vampire take her baby or attacks him and successfully rescues her child, the emotional consequences for her are staggering. The Storyteller may call for a degeneration roll or simply impose a derangement. Wise Kindred either work closely with their ghouls to raise such children or simply kill the parents off.

How the child or children are raised makes a lot of difference. Even if this process is being mostly glossed over in order to establish history, make sure to devote some thought to this part. Raising this first child establishes important precedents that shape how the family members relate to each other over the course of the family's growth. The special difficulties mentioned here mesh with all the usual difficulties of raising a child. How is the child disciplined? What kind of schooling does he or she get? Public schooling is probably out, given the dilated aging inherent to the child's condition. What kinds of friends does he or she have? Do the parents have more children at the same time, thus complicating the rearing of all of them? These questions and others like them should be considered, either over the course of a very involved story or over the course of a discussion of the family's history.

Selective Breeding

Once the first child reaches maturity, the work of building the family really begins. It also becomes more complicated. The original pair of parents can continue to have more children, but unless congenital defects constitute an acceptable problem, it becomes necessary to find additional breeding stock. Conception and pregnancy works much as described thus far for a female member of a ghoule family attempting to become pregnant by a normal mortal or a male non-family ghoule, or for a male family ghoule attempting to impregnate a female ghoule. Only if both parents are members of a ghoule bloodline do conception and pregnancy chances normalize, which means inbreeding often really is the simplest solution, if not the most pleasant. Some Kindred think that "pleasant" is not worth the bother, and are simply content to kill off or ignore those children born defective.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Generations of breeding and conditioning, along with the supernatural influence of the cursed Vitae

they thrive on, changes members of ghoule families in fundamental ways. Just as Kindred have their specialized strengths and weaknesses, families of their thralls start to take on their own special qualities. Each of the ghoule families described previously in this book has existed for several generations, and thus has family strengths and weaknesses that reflect the conditions under which they developed. Over several generations, it is possible that player- or Storyteller-created ghoule families will develop such strengths and weaknesses as well.

Strengths and weaknesses should balance each other out, because the vampiric curse takes away at least as much as it gives. Particularly adverse conditions and more inbreeding are likely to create ghouls whose weaknesses outweigh their strengths, but strengths should never outweigh weaknesses. They can only balance equally because ghouls are not as fully cursed as their vampiric masters, who certainly suffer more curse than blessing with their bloodthirst and deadly sunlight allergy. Let the strengths and weaknesses of the ghoule families in this book serve as a guide to balancing what your ghoule families gain as they expand.

The Ghoule Families

The next few pages contain write-ups for the five ghoule families introduced in Chapter One. Each includes an introductory paragraph from the files of the *Balaur Gard*, further information on the origins of the family, where its members make their havens, their relationships with the Kindred clans and covenants, and their unique strengths and weaknesses. Each write-up also includes a sidebar that includes some notes on the very slight ray of hope available to the members of the ghoule family. If the sidebars don't present a cheerful scenario... well, that's deliberate. Ghouls in general don't have an easy time of their existences, and for all their "advantages," family ghouls are some of the most wretched creatures in the Danse Macabre.

Creating Mandragora

For those Kindred who know what makes a plant capable of surviving the transformation into a mandrake, the process can be boiled down to watering the desired plant with blood and hoping for the best. This is not a sure-fire way to ensure that the plant takes in the Vitae as nourishment, however, and it is necessary that the plant do so in order to become a mandrake. Nor is knowing what plants are susceptible or how much Vitae the plants need and can handle an easy prospect, and overfed or underfed mandragora will die.

The Alley Men

Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor's heart as well.

Annals of the Balaur Gard: the so-called "Alley Men" or "Wild Angels."

"Here recorded is the of the rogue thrall bloodline known commonly as Alley Men, but self-titled the Wild Angels, as set down by Dr. Aaron Jorgunson, Guardian. This self-claimed title seems to stem from the Kindred who called himself Zophiel, thought to be of the Lancea Sanctum, who discovered and fostered this family within the last three decades. He was an unruly sort, and through his apparent insanity and megalomania, he represented such a threat to the Masquerade that the Prince of the city was forced to invoke the Lextalionis upon him. It is then that the most interesting thing happened: Instead of disbanding, the small family of fanatics put together by this Zophiel began hunting Kindred! Searching the minds of those subjects we have captured and interrogated, it seems that they possess no true knowledge of what it is they hunt. Zophiel told his followers that they were to hunt demons, and to feast on their flesh and blood in holy communion, for when you slay a true demon, God will change the flesh into that of Christ, and grant you his Spirit and Power. This, of course, is consistent with some of the rhetoric we have all heard from the Sanctified, but the covenant has been quite uncooperative in helping us to identify Zophiel. Regardless of the allegiance of their progenitor, the fanaticism of these mortals makes them very dangerous. Still, observing them from a distance may prove fruitful, as their persistence and growth has proven that it is possible for a family of thralls to exist and thrive without a master to tend them."

Nickname: While Kindred nickname these vagrants Alley Men, the ghouls call themselves Christians and servants of God, or sometimes wild angels, if they call themselves anything at all.

Origin: The Wild Angel was an unknown in Kindred society, until he created this family of thralls. Signs point to him being a Gangrel of the Lancea Sanctum, but this isn't entirely certain. The Sanctified of the area won't verify his existence and no one has taken credit for his murder. Even his clan is unknown, because now that he

is dead and his thralls are not bound to a single master, they have tasted the blood of many clans and bloodlines. Therefore, different Alley Men exhibit different Disciplines. One might have Vigor and Celerity from a steady diet of Daeva Vitae, while another might possess Resilience and Dominate due to a feast of Ventrue blood. Almost all Alley Men are rogue ghouls, but a few small branches of the family have come under the influence of one Kindred or another.

Clans: Of the clans, the Ventrue have the most interest, and have had the most success in bringing these vagrants under control. The respectable veneer with which these Kindred surround themselves is both intimidating and desirable to the generally homeless Alley Men, and the Ventrue's ability to subjugate thralls' minds helps to subjugate their murderous impulses. The Nosferatu and the Daeva have shown some interest in using Alley Men, but far less success at controlling them. The fact that the Nosferatu and the Daeva lack the ability to use Dominate is part of the reason, but the fact that these clans fit the Wild Angel's description of "demon" is perhaps the greater obstacle. Mekhet Kindred tend to see the Alley Men as pests — sometimes amusing pests, but pests nonetheless. Some Mekhet feed the Alley Men tidbits of information designed to lead them to rival Kindred; others simply kill or ignore the ghouls. The Gangrel rarely come into contact with these rapacious thralls. If they do, the foolish thralls are usually viewed as territorial rivals and threats.

The Alley Men are aware that different types of demons exist, but what one "cell" of Alley Men knows is by no means indicative of the entire family. A small family might be constantly searching for a single demon called "Mekhet," while another knows that "the Daeva are comely, but still demons" and nothing more.

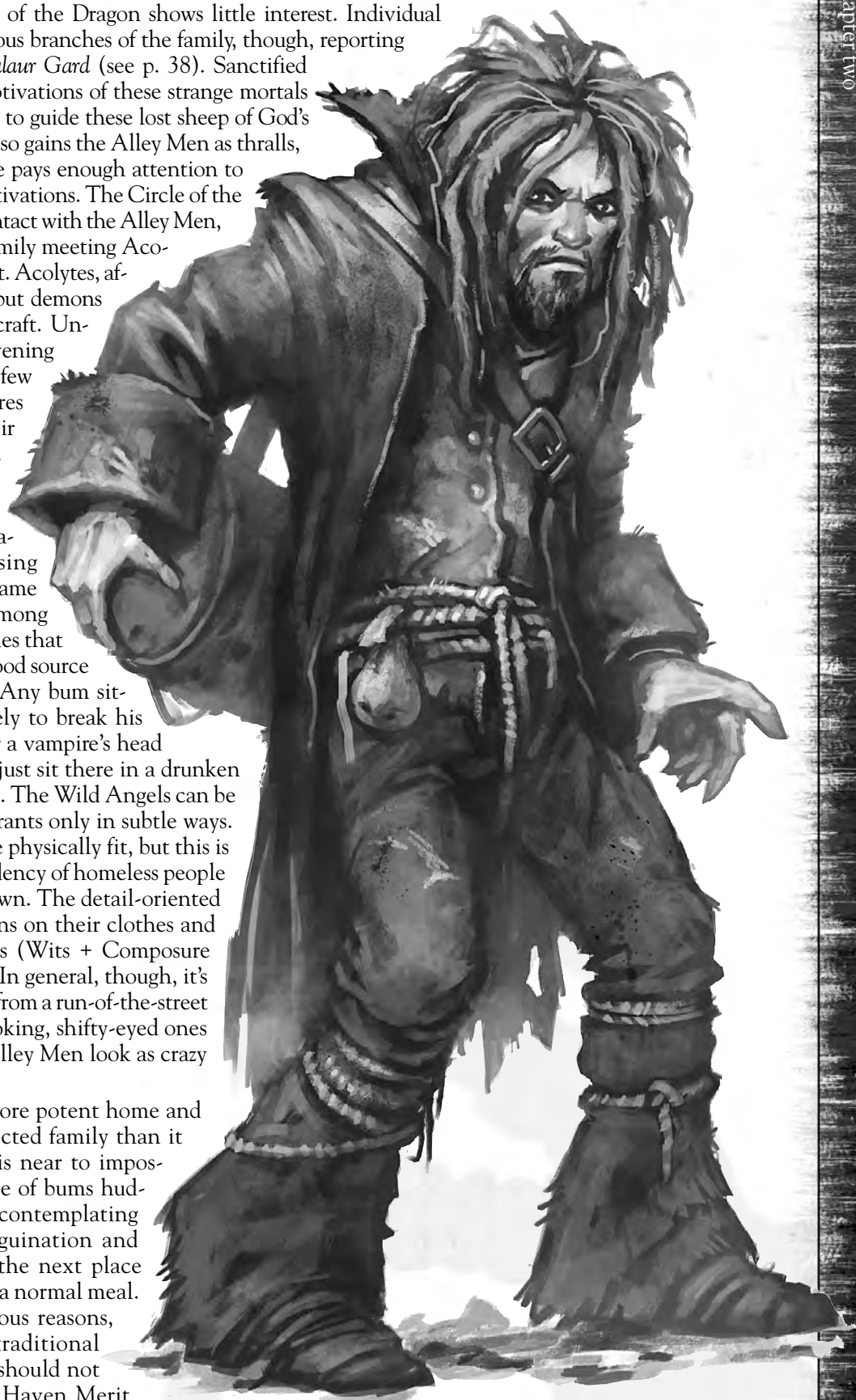
Covenants: No covenant truly desires to deal with the Alley Men, preferring to pretend that they don't exist. The family members themselves are unaware of the existence of such social structures among the "demons" they hunt. The disfavor shown to these rogue ghouls has a different flavor for each covenant, however. The Invictus see them as a serious threat to the Masquerade. The Carthians, on the other hand, see them as an interesting, but failed, experiment. The Ordo Dracul's position is that



this is the unfortunate result when caution is not exercised with the gift of Vitae. As a whole, however, the Order of the Dragon shows little interest. Individual Dragons do keep tabs on various branches of the family, though, reporting their findings back to the *Balaur Gard* (see p. 38). Sanctified Kindred who discover the motivations of these strange mortals often take it upon themselves to guide these lost sheep of God's back to the "true fold." Doing so gains the Alley Men as thralls, but it is rare that any vampire pays enough attention to find out or care about said motivations. The Circle of the Crone hasn't yet had much contact with the Alley Men, but the results of the ghoul family meeting Acolytes would probably be violent. Acolytes, after all, are not only demons but demons who willfully practice witchcraft. Unbound Kindred truly fear ravening packs of Alley Men, and not a few of these independent vampires have met Final Death at their hands, knives, axes and teeth.

Appearance: These ghouls earned their nickname the hard way. Alley Men, bag ladies, bums, cardboard housing residents — it's all much the same thing. Word has gone out among the Kindred in some large cities that the homeless aren't as easy a food source as they are in other locales. Any bum sitting in an alleyway is as likely to break his half-empty liquor bottle over a vampire's head and set fire to her as he is to just sit there in a drunken stupor while she feeds on him. The Wild Angels can be distinguished from other vagrants only in subtle ways. They tend to be slightly more physically fit, but this is hard to notice due to the tendency of homeless people to wear all the clothes they own. The detail-oriented might notice small bloodstains on their clothes and blood under their fingernails (Wits + Composure with a -5 penalty to notice). In general, though, it's very hard to distinguish them from a run-of-the-street vagrant. Not all the crazy-looking, shifty-eyed ones are Alley Men, and not all Alley Men look as crazy as they are.

Haven: Anonymity is a more potent home and shield for this loosely connected family than it is even for the Kindred. It is near to impossible to discover which circle of bums huddling around a trash fire is contemplating their next target for exsanguination and cannibalism as opposed to the next place they can get some booze and a normal meal. Alley Men do not, for obvious reasons, have havens in the most traditional sense. For that reason, they should not be allowed to purchase the Haven Merit under normal circumstances.



Strength: Aside from the ability to blend in with the background in any city (+2 dice to avoid notice in an urban environment), a starting character of this family may choose the starting two Discipline dots in *any* Discipline or Disciplines the player wishes (subject to Storyteller approval, of course, and one of them must be a physical Discipline). These two Disciplines may be advanced without a vampiric tutor, so long as the character continues to receive a steady supply of Vitae.

Weakness: Whether they're called Alley Men, Wild Angels or just plain bums, this family of ghouls is habitually destitute. The following Merits are not allowed for a starting character from this family: Encyclopedic Knowledge; Fighting Style: Kung Fu; Gunslinger; Stunt Driver; Barfly; Fame; Haven; Inherited Ghoul; Regnant; Resources; Retainer; Status. Alley Men also start with Morality 5, one dot less than most other ghouls. On the bright side, they may spend one or three Merit points to raise this trait to 6 or 7 (respectively), which is a far cheaper rate than usual. This is due to the fact that the Wild Angels *are* motivated by higher ideals, despite their gruesome methods. Growing up not only on the streets, but with the utter, cannibalistic depravity typical of these particular vagrants, leaves these ghouls profoundly traumatized to begin with, however. Therefore, players of Alley Men may *not* lower their characters' starting Morality in order to gain experience points. In addition, most Wild Angel characters have made enemies among the local Kindred, either by their own actions or those of their families. The player and the Storyteller should work together to decide who the character's enemies are and how deep their hatred runs. (What Disciplines the Alley Man knows should be a good road map to the clan, at least, of the enemy vampire.)



HOPE — THE WILL OF GOD

Homeless, murderous, cannibalistic... why would anybody live like this? No social group can survive for long on a diet of pure horror. In fact, the reason that it is nearly impossible to distinguish them from other homeless people is that most of the time they are *exactly* like most homeless people. If they have not decided as a group that someone is a sinner and a demon, interacting with them can even be pleasant. They have friendly conversations with people, often sharing the more socially acceptable parts of their faith like some sort of ascetic missionaries. The Wild Angels are in fact poor by choice. They put into action their belief that one cannot love both God and money, and they live to spread the faith. Many branches of the family go to church on Sundays regularly, or they hold their own private worship services that follow very traditional Christian patterns.



Organization: The total number of Alley Men in the world is unknown to anybody except perhaps the Dragon's Fence, but they are fairly numerous. This family is, completely by accident, organized like an effective guerilla operation. Each family member knows only his or her immediate relatives, meaning that no single person can give away the identity of more than three or four other Alley Men. Despite this, information can pass startlingly quickly, even across oceans, through the grapevine of connections within this group of homeless nomads. Wild Angels who notice the effectiveness of this organizational scheme credit it as evidence that they are doing the will of God.

Several rituals are common among many the "cells." Few Alley Men follow all of them, but even fewer do not follow any. These rituals are never performed in the same place twice, but the only requirement for a place to perform them is that it be secluded. Condemned buildings, dark alleyways, and unlocked exterior basements all do the trick. The most common ritual is the sexual initiation of girls who have reached menarche. As soon as a girl reaches sexual maturity, the family puts the word out and finds a suitable man of the family to impregnate her. The family pulls in as many favors as necessary to keep the pregnant girls off the streets, to ensure the carriage of babies to term, but once the baby is weaned, the mother is back on the streets to blend in once again.

As soon as the infant reaches the toddler stage, he typically undergoes a ceremony involving bathing the child in blood and giving him his first taste of blood and flesh, in a perverse imitation of the Christian sacraments of baptism and communion. After this, every time that a Wild Angel eats flesh and drinks blood, it is in the same twisted communion ritual. They believe that God rewards them for killing demons by transforming the blood and flesh into that of Christ, thus granting them power. When they manage to kill an actual vampire, it seems to validate this belief.

When male children become sexually mature, they are initiated into the priesthood of their cause. This involves drinking the menstrual flow of their mothers, directly from the source, soon after the taking of their "holy communion." The final part of initiation into priesthood is to impregnate a girl from another part of the family. Due to the fact that this impregnation is necessary to continue God's mission for the family, this second part of the initiation is as universal on the male side as was mentioned earlier for the female side. A girl cannot become a woman without carrying a baby to term for the sake of the mission, and a boy cannot be considered a man until his seed is carried to fruition.

Concepts: cultist/cult leader, mugger, lunatic, street-preacher

ANGUSTRI

CURIOSITY MAY KILL CATS, DARLING...

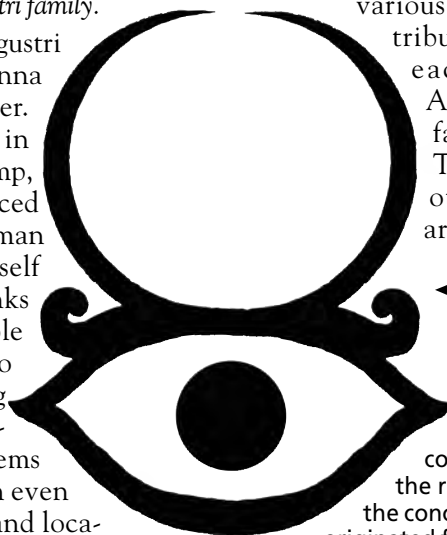
Annals of the Balaur Gard: the Angustri family.

"This record of our covenant's Angustri family of thralls is here written by Anna Valshenka, student of Giselle Werner. My sire discovered this bloodline in 1941 in a German concentration camp, the same year in which she Embraced me to save my mind from the German gas. Since then I have applied myself to the study of genealogies in thanks to my mistress, and I have been able to trace the Angustri lineage back to the early 16th century. Comparing these with some of our order's earliest records of apprenticeship, it seems that there was, in fact, a connection even that far back in history. The name and location of one of the younger Angustri sons of that day who left no progeny matches up with the records of one of our own named Mikal Angustri of Venice. The records indicate that he had been taken as a thrall, and some time later was deemed worthy of the Embrace. Unfortunately, the boy was too reckless in his experimentation with the Coil of Banes and he burned in the morning sun. Even more unfortunately, no records that I have yet uncovered directly verify my theory that the boy had enthralled his sister with the Vinculum, though I have discovered that she gave birth to a daughter shortly after her brother met Final Death. She then died in childbirth with terrible blood loss. That child is a direct ancestor of Pesha Angustri, who my mentor discovered is capable of carrying children to term while under the influence of Vitae. Pesha is alive and well tonight, serving my mistress Giselle by producing many children by many different men, as our search for the best characteristics to foster these bloodlines continues. Her horrible disfigurements are almost completely mended, thanks to the wonderful power of the Blood."

Nickname: Gypsies

Clans: Since Giselle Werner is a Mekhet, most Angustri are Mekhet ghouls. This is because most of them work directly for Giselle or one of her progeny. The remainder have been parceled out to other members of the Ordo Dracul whom Giselle trusts to continue the work of breeding these thralls in a variety of situations. Twenty-four other Kindred in

various places around the world, evenly distributed with six from each other clan, each received a breeding pair of Angustri children for study after the family had grown to 110 members. Therefore, some Angustri serve the other clans as well, but the majority are Mekhet ghouls.



GYPSIES?

Members of the Angustri family are aware of the different clans of vampires, as well as the different covenants. They have, in fact, studied the records of their masters and come to the conclusion that the Mekhet clan actually originated from the Gypsy people. Their primary "evidence" for this is that Mekhet vampiric abilities match those of the legendary Rom: they possess the Sight (Auspex), amazing powers of stealth (Obfuscate) and the speed to escape persecution (Celerity). They explain the odd name of Mekhet by positing that when a branch of the family traveled to Egypt far back in history, some creature from there must have envied their abilities. This creature might have been a vampire already, or a sorcerer of some kind, or some kind of demon. In any case, the Angustri believe that this creature stole the blood of their ancestors, and so gained their power. The other clans are all considered *gaje* (outsiders), and so their Angustri servants are somewhat less loyal and cooperative (those Angustri who subscribe to this legend, of course).

Of course, this is probably nothing but a family myth, propagated to keep the now far-flung family members feeling connected, and to help them deal with their servitude. The victims of the horrors of Nazi concentration camps and then eternal slavery to vampires, the Angustri simply try to validate their existence and their identity any way they can.

Covenants: As has already been mentioned, this family is a pet project of certain members of the Ordo Dracul. It is possible that the family will be spread around the Ordo Dracul even more if the breeding programs are successful. Members of other covenants are not at all likely to possess members of this family as servants, although it must be said that the official position of other

covenants is that they aren't interested. The wise know to keep their hands off the Angustri, though, because the Dragons take meddling in their experiments very seriously. For their part, the Gypsies realize that the Dragons have treated them well on the whole, and that they probably would not have as much luck with the other covenants.

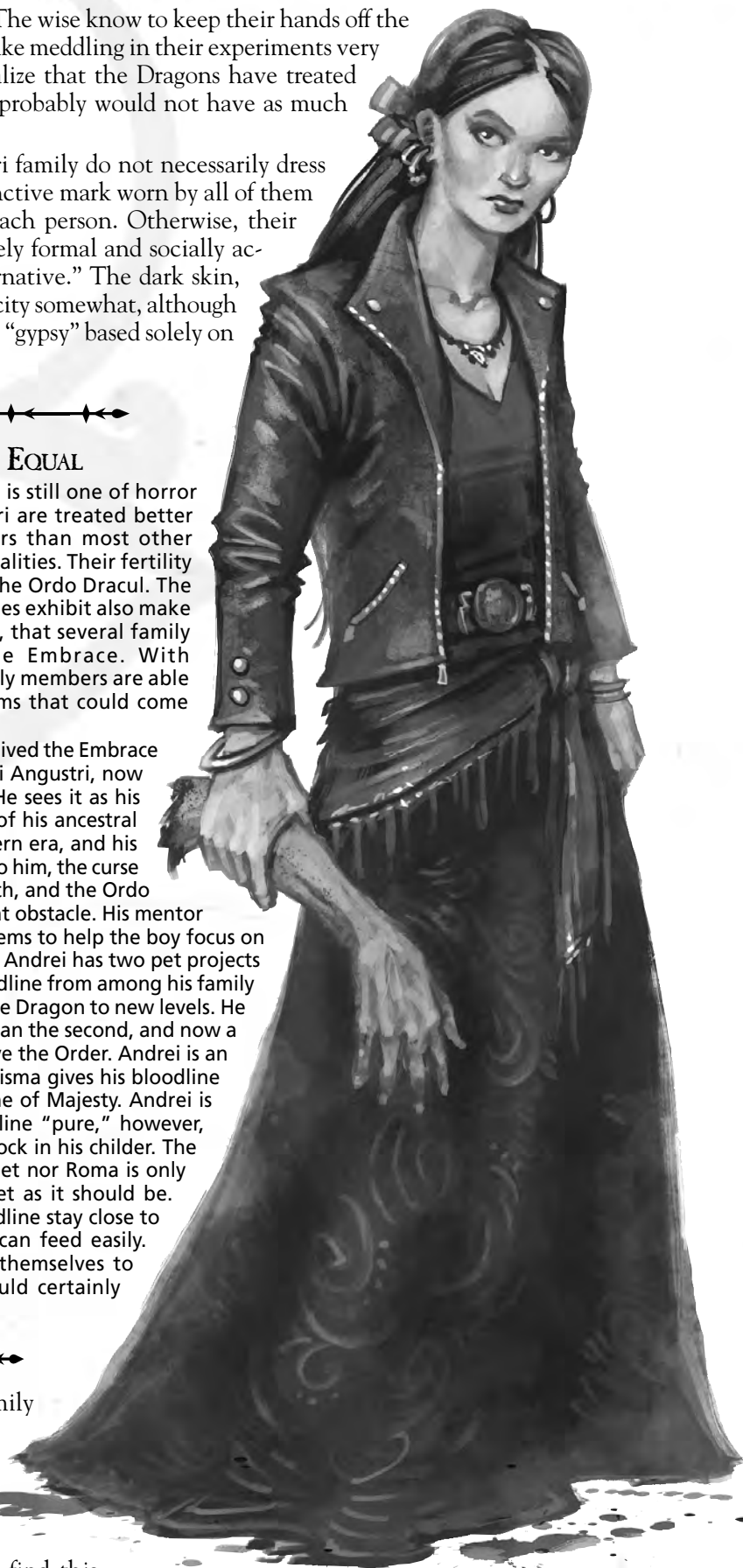
Appearance: Members of the Angustri family do not necessarily dress like "traditional gypsies." The only distinctive mark worn by all of them is their earrings, which are unique to each person. Otherwise, their dress ranges the spectrum from completely formal and socially acceptable to completely casual and "alternative." The dark skin, eyes, hair and accent indicate their ethnicity somewhat, although few Americans can recognize someone as "gypsy" based solely on complexion or accent.

HOPE — NOT QUITE EQUAL

Although their condition as ghouls is still one of horror on a very personal level, the Angustri are treated better on average by their Kindred masters than most other ghouls are thanks to their valuable qualities. Their fertility is not the only quality that interests the Ordo Dracul. The cleverness and curiosity that the Gypsies exhibit also make them ideal protégés. So ideal, in fact, that several family members have been granted the Embrace. With connections like that, the mortal family members are able to escape many of the worst problems that could come with their situation.

One of those Angustri who have received the Embrace is a young man by the name of Andrei Angustri, now of the Mekhet and the Ordo Dracul. He sees it as his family's destiny to regain the powers of his ancestral blood that have been lost in the modern era, and his personal destiny to guide them there. To him, the curse of vampirism is an obstacle on that path, and the Ordo Dracul a tool to help him surmount that obstacle. His mentor encourages this mindset, because it seems to help the boy focus on his work, and the boy's insight is keen. Andrei has two pet projects at the moment: fostering his own bloodline from among his family members and advancing the Coils of the Dragon to new levels. He has been more successful at the first than the second, and now a few members of his bloodline also serve the Order. Andrei is an extremely charming man, and his charisma gives his bloodline a natural predilection for the Discipline of Majesty. Andrei is also obsessed with keeping his bloodline "pure," however, and this obsession creates a mental block in his childer. The blood of anyone who is neither Mekhet nor Roma is only half as nourishing to Angustri Mekhet as it should be. Therefore, most members of this bloodline stay close to mortal or ghoul family so that they can feed easily. Angustri Mekhet also cannot bring themselves to Embrace non-Roma (and Andrei would certainly destroy any who tried).

Havens: Ghouls of the Angustri family tend to share whatever Haven their regnant has, but their independent temperament often leads them to find some obscure corner to call their own, into which they can disappear when they want to. Their regnants generally find this



practice to be irritating at first, but most quickly learn that there is no way to put a stop to it. Eventually, some come to enjoy it, as it forces them to be more intimately familiar with their own havens than otherwise. Although they continue to punish the Gypsies (so their other ghouls won't get the wrong idea), those Dragons who have Angustri retainers are generally grateful for the lessons that their servants teach them. For outsiders, the result of this relationship is that an Ordo Dracul haven that has Angustri retainers is much harder to penetrate, whether by stealth or by force, than would be immediately apparent.

Strengths: Their blood affinity with the Mekhet allows members of the Angustri family to select one Mekhet Discipline to learn even if their regnant is of another clan. This Discipline must be the second Discipline learned — the first must be a physical Discipline of the regnant's clan. Angustri who are Mekhet ghouls learn one of their Disciplines with the facility of a Kindred (use out-of-clan Discipline experience values). From the perspective of their Kindred masters, one other quality of this family is very desirable: The seed of their men is potent, and the wombs of their women are particularly fertile. Angustri never fail to conceive, and their women never fail to carry the babies to term, though mothers and children sometimes die in childbirth.

Weaknesses: The similarity of blood between Mekhet vampires and the Angustri's Roma blood is a double-edged sword: The Vinculum is easier for the Mekhet to enact upon the Angustri. The first drink counts as the second, and the second drink counts as the third. The unusual fertility of the Angustri is as much a curse to them as it is a blessing to their masters, for it is this fact more than any other that ensures their eternal slavery to the Kindred.

Organization: Within the Angustri family, the highest authority they recognize is Pesha, who is the oldest living member of the direct line. Though she still appears the same as she did at 18 when she was first made a ghoul, Pesha is now more than 60 years old and full of the wisdom of those years. Pesha has refused the Embrace several times, because she loves the sunlight. "Besides," she points out whenever offered this boon, "as a vampire, I could make no more babies." The German scientist who accused her of being a whore might actually have been on to something, because whether by original preference or by development over the course of time, Pesha is now a very lustful individual. Angustri boys in their teen years often receive the exciting honor and privilege of having their first love-making with "Grandma" Pesha.

The family is, in general, a gerontocracy. Age and experience have the biggest say in who makes family decisions, but the words of a clever youth are rarely ignored. Of course, the family makes very few decisions for itself, because all its members are still slaves to the Kindred of the Ordo Dracul. On the other hand, individual Angustri do have a high degree of freedom as long as they complete their assigned tasks. Even so, most Kindred never look at them as anything more than fertile breeding stock and efficient tools, and that is their place within the Order. Within the small (but slowly growing) number of Angustri whom the Order has Embraced, the status of their family members becomes truly equal in private. Appearances must be maintained in front of other Kindred, however, which causes significant tension when those appearances involve whipping a family elder or the like.

Concepts: con artist, fixer, fortune-teller, negotiator, body or body-part collector, assassin

Crassus

What would you like for your birthday, son? A baseball bat? A baseball team?

Annals of the Balaur Gard: the Crassus family.

"I, Antonio Giueppe, set down this account of the thorn in my financial side, the Crassus family. Many years ago when I was young, these people were good Italians. My sire — rest his soul, may he awaken from the death-sleep soon — told me once that their history goes back to that great city Byzantium. Well, whatever their origins, how the mighty have fallen! The Crassus of today are putrid Americans with no regard for business, only for money. They do not even care where it comes from. In their personal debauchery they live ignorant that their lives are orchestrated by that bloated, ancient covenant of the Invictus. It seems that a few family members know, but they have been spellbound by their masters not to let on, lest they lose their privileges. Their financial clout does not seem to come from any particular acumen on their part, but instead is manufactured for them by the Kindred who manipulate them. The only amusing thing in this dreadfully tactless manipulation is to see what happens when the Invictus manipulate the family elders, and the Carthians sink their teeth into the ignorant youth. The resulting fracas over the scraps is quite ironic, as was the case with the collapse of the Veritas Insurance Corporation last year. On the whole, though, this family follows the usual rule: Bloodlines of thralls breed in the weaknesses rather than the strengths of humans, making the line suitable only for menial, unimportant work."

Nickname: Caesars

Clans: Due to their station in society, it is only natural that many Crassus are enthralled to Ventrue masters. As much as they are rich, though, the family is corrupt, especially the youth. Younger Crassus especially often end up serving Daeva regnants, indulging their corruption and making the future of the family seem uncertain. Actually, Lysander himself (who enthralled the first family of Crassus) was a Ventrue, using the family strictly for his own amusement. Some of the younger Crassus are not as tactless as the others with their debauchery, and



a significant number of the Toreador bloodline have been attracted to the ironic idea of having Caesars for servants. Nosferatu and Mekhet Kindred have taken a few of this family into their households, but not many — the Crassus prefer to avoid the shadows and pretend that everything is normal. If any Gangrel possess Crassus servants, they are keeping quiet about it. In any case, it is certain that the Crassus are willfully ignorant about their situation, and even the ones who drink vampire blood and offer up their own blood for drinking to ensure the family's continued wealth try their very hardest to rationalize it some other way. Because of this attitude, they know absolutely nothing about their masters save what they are forced to know, which suits most of them just fine.

Covenants: The Crassus family is a battleground for the continual struggle over temporal power between Kindred of the Invictus and the Carthian Movement. Lysander, the vampire who first enthralled the Crassus in ancient Rome, is known to have been a member of the Invictus. This knowledge, along with the knowledge of Lysander's clan, is only common within the Invictus. The other covenants simply don't care, because these games of power and money don't interest them. The Sanctified would rather purge this family of sinners from existence and start fresh. The Circle of the Crone pays no attention at all, while the Ordo Dracul keeps track only as a formality, with mildly disgusted amusement.

Appearance: The Crassus are legitimate businessmen, or sometimes "legitimate" businessmen in the Al Capone sense. Either way, they buy, they sell, they make money. This means that every single one of them is well groomed and well dressed, whether they like to be or not. Teenage Caesars who feel the need to rebel still take advantage of the family's fat coffers to buy only the trendiest and most chic (or most expensively daring) clothes that their parents wouldn't approve. After all, why settle for less than the best?

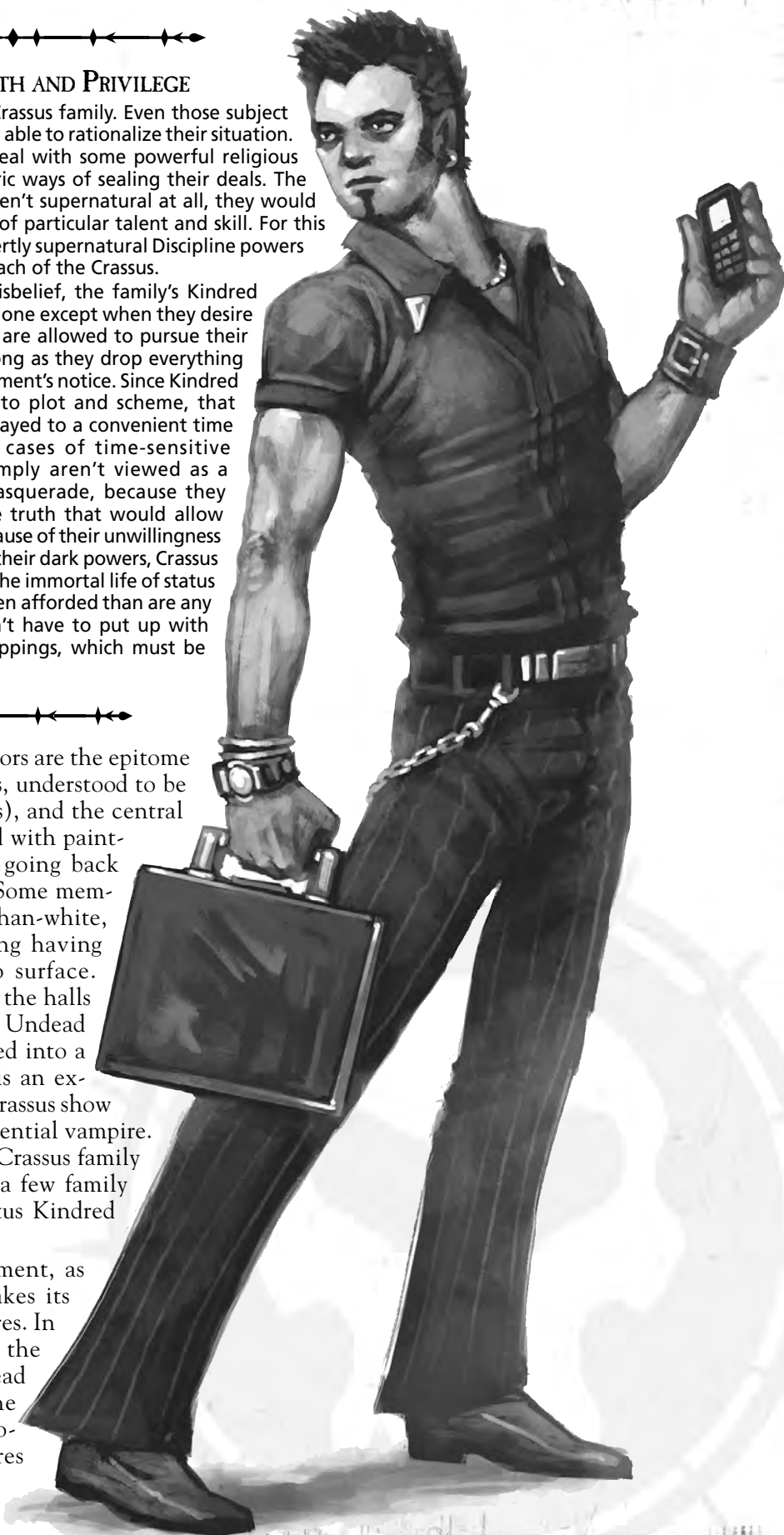
HOPE — WEALTH AND PRIVILEGE

Ignorance is bliss for the Crassus family. Even those subject to the Vinculum are generally able to rationalize their situation. They have simply struck a deal with some powerful religious extremists who have eccentric ways of sealing their deals. The abilities they have gained aren't supernatural at all, they would argue, but simply the result of particular talent and skill. For this reason, some of the more overtly supernatural Discipline powers remain forever out of the reach of the Crassus.

Because of their willful disbelief, the family's Kindred masters usually leave them alone except when they desire something from them. They are allowed to pursue their own lives and agendas, as long as they drop everything to assist their masters at a moment's notice. Since Kindred have an eternity of nights to plot and scheme, that moment's notice is often delayed to a convenient time for the thralls, except in cases of time-sensitive emergency. The Crassus simply aren't viewed as a potential breach of the Masquerade, because they cannot handle knowing the truth that would allow them to be so. Therefore, because of their unwillingness to acknowledge and exult in their dark powers, Crassus characters are freer to enjoy the immortal life of status and luxury that they have been afforded than are any other ghouls. They also don't have to put up with nearly as many regular whippings, which must be counted a plus.

Havens: The family's ancestors are the epitome of DWMs (Dead White Males, understood to be of the ruling or moneyed class), and the central family property has halls lined with paintings and busts of these men going back more than a thousand years. Some members of the family are whiter-than-white, centuries of mostly inbreeding having caused albino tendencies to surface. Some few of those pictured in the halls of the family estate are really Undead White Males, having graduated into a higher status of power. This is an extreme rarity, however, as few Crassus show the qualities desirable in a potential vampire. The entire north wing of the Crassus family estate is off limits to all but a few family members. A coterie of Invictus Kindred makes its home there.

This is a common arrangement, as the wealth of this family makes its homes ideal havens for vampires. In smaller Crassus homes (more the usual size for a mansion instead of sprawling complexes), the house often becomes the domain of one or more vampires once the children are asleep



in bed. The masters of the house by day are degraded slaves by night. For the paranoid regnant, Crassus money can buy walled compounds with guards, dogs, guns, barbed wire and the like. The latest electronic security systems? Military-grade equipment? It's only money, after all.

Strengths: When it comes to wealth and temporal power, the Crassus have it to spare. They are first-class sycophants with centuries of experience in pandering to others, especially to the dark masters who control their fates. The following Merits are available to them at half the experience point costs: Allies, Barfly, Contacts, Fame, Haven, Inherited Ghoul, Regnant, Resources, Retainer, Staff and Status. Starting Crassus characters may not apply this price break to their Merit dots, but they do get a choice of extra free dots: two dots divided between Academics, Persuasion or Socialize; or four dots divided among any of the aforementioned Merits.

Weaknesses: Centuries of breeding, interbreeding and ingesting Kindred blood have taken their toll on the Crassus family. Crassus ghouls suffer either from the same moral weakness as Ventrue Kindred, for the same reasons (see **Vampire: The Requiem** p. 113) or from the Daeva's weakness against their Vices (see **Vampire: The Requiem** p. 105). The inevitable degeneration takes hold of many weaker-willed family members, whose deaths are conveniently faked to put off suspicion about the family's unnatural longevity. These supposedly dead individuals are then taken to

the family estate, a large portion of which is actually a private asylum for those who couldn't take the pressure.

Organization: The Crassus are a family, but they are also a multinational conglomerate of trust funds, stockholders, corporations, tax shelters and shady holdings. The number of members of the direct bloodline is staggering, very near to 1,000, while relatives by marriage involved with the business exceed 5,000 in number. The number of actual ghouls made from those who have the potential is a mere fraction, though, somewhat less than a tenth of total family members. Ghoul or not, almost every single member of the family is directly involved in the business of making the family more money. Ultimately, the destination for all of this money is the trust funds and other investments held directly by the stockholder panel of Crassus, Inc. That is, by those members of the family who know of their dark secret. Once a year, all of the "major stockholders" come together to get a picture of everything the family owns and controls at the time and decide the direction of things for the next year. These decisions are left to the mortals most of the time, because they really are superb at making money. When their Kindred masters have an agenda to advance, however, they show up at these yearly meetings and pay close attention to everything discussed. At the end of the family summit, if a Kindred speaks, his word is law.

Concepts: billionaire, capitalist, CEO, dilettante, investor, manager, rebellious spoiled youth

GRAVENOR

NO TRISSPASTING

Annals of the Balaur Gard: the Gravenor family.

"My hand scribes this record of the Gravenor bloodline in the name of my mentor, Claude. My name is Marie. The family once attained moderate wealth based on its profession of hog farming, but a failure to keep up quickly enough with the latest developments in agriculture, combined with a general loss of interest in mortal society, has reduced both the size of the family and the value of its holdings significantly. There has been a split in the family, between those directly involved with maintenance and support of its businesses and those who live at the family manor under the watchful eye of Roderick Gravenor. Roderick is the thrall of a Nosferatu by the name of Grigor Swancott, though all indications point to Grigor falling into torpid sleep, because he has not been seen outside the manor for decades. Almost all members of the Gravenor family have survived from that time, around the year 1810, when Grigor first joined the family. The split in the family occurred when Roderick and his grandson Eric had a violent disagreement over the introduction of electricity into the family's hog farms and slaughterhouses shortly before the beginning of the Great War in Europe. Eric promptly married outside of the family, making him a permanent pariah. From time to time, others who have offended Roderick are sent out to 'Eric's Farm,' giving us a revealing look into what has become of the family at the manor. Mostly, this seems to include a long list of congenital defects, but it also includes rampant paranoia and a strange sense for things unseen. Roderick has been seen visiting the farms from time to time, and each time he brings home a young man or woman — presumably for the purposes of adding to the breeding stock, but selected based on qualities I have not yet been able to piece together."

Nickname: Throwbacks

Clans: Because only one vampire is involved with the Gravenor family proper, all those who live at the manor are Nosferatu ghouls. Of course, any clan might pick up those who have left the family and spread to the four winds. Their predilections make

them especially suited to service for other Nosferatu, as well as Mekhet and Gangrel Kindred.

Covenants: The Gravenors have no association with any covenant as such, but the Ordo Dracul watches them and all their scattered progeny with at least mild interest, as they do all such projects. Their interest also extends to the family manor, because although little information exists about it, there seems to be some kind of occult manifestation around it, perhaps a nexus of ley lines. The Circle of the Crone is also interested in the occult strangeness of the Gravenor estate, and keeps an eye on it. The other covenants do not have time for backwater rubbish like this family.

Appearance: As noted in Chapter One, the Gravenor's choice of clothes has not changed since the 19th century, and many of them have shocking congenital defects. The members of the Gravenor family range from those who were alive in the 1800s (who look fairly normal), to those born more recently (who are much more likely to exhibit obvious signs of inbreeding). Gravenors who have escaped the manor still sport mild (though often noticeable) congenital defects and the remnants of paranoia, but nothing quite so obvious or frightening. They also tend to dress in modern clothes, even if their taste runs to conservative styles, and the escapees do know how to use modern technology.



HOPE — MORTAL TERROR

Grigor Swancott was a lunatic, and eventually his lunacy drove him into torpor. Yet, what could drive a Nosferatu, a creature with the power of Nightmare at his command, to such degeneration? The fact that none of those living at the Gravenor estate can ignore is that *something* did. *Something* gets into fights with the trees they've fed on Grigor's blood, sometimes tearing off branches or withering the plants prematurely. *Something* breaks windows, and it's not spastic little Timmy. (He gets tied down at night.) *Something* writes eerie messages in the steam on the mirror while Daddy's shaving, and *something* looks into Suzie's bedroom window at night with glowing red eyes.



To the outside world, the disgusting effects of inbreeding are rationalization enough to stay away from the house in the swamp. Those who live there are trapped in a world where rationalizations are futile. The problem is, they also don't have any real idea what they're dealing with. The reality of it all is reinforced almost daily... though in a way that, when they talk with family members who have left the enclosure, is doubtful and might simply point to slipping sanity and cabin fever. Each person living at Gravenor Manor has one or more personal tokens that prove, at least in their own eyes, the truth of what they fight. Players of Gravenor characters can take heart one of two ways. Either (as escapees) they are out of the insane asylum and free, or (if they live inside) they know that what others call crazy is really the only sane way of dealing with an insane truth.



Havens: The Gravenor family has two primary domains: the Gravenor Manor and Gravenor Hog Farms & Slaughterhouse. Living at the first counts as Haven ••• (Security ••, Size •), while the second can be purchased as Haven •• (Security • Size •) for any character with at least Status • in the company, representing living quarters on the property. Those who do not live at the family home may buy other havens if they wish to do so, as their funds (and player access to Merit or experience points) allow.

Strengths: Grigor Swancott's obvious insanity aside, it seems possible that he was driven insane by something very real. Members of the family of ghouls he fostered have inherited his sense that *something else* is out there. This sense functions like the Unseen Sense Merit (World of Darkness Rulebook, pp. 109-110), except more potent. Any kind of supernatural phenomenon can be sensed by a Gravenor, and in such situations the player may make a Wits + Occult roll to see if the character realizes what she is sensing.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The feeling goes unnoticed entirely. A sadistic Storyteller might also decide that the feeling is mistaken for something else, but should note that this sense also functions as a sense of danger, and that the level of a threat cannot be mistaken once noticed.

Failure: The character knows she



is feeling something, but she can't tell what's causing it. Surprise is still prevented, as the feeling causes the character to sit up and take notice of potential dangers.

Success: The feeling indicates what kind of creature or occurrence is happening in a way the character has felt before and is able to put a name to, such as "vampire," "werewolf" or "shambling swamp monster hiding under the muck." Once the source of a feeling has been identified, the character retains the same sense of it for the entire scene.

Exceptional Success: The exact direction and approximate distance to the source of the feeling can be determined.

Weaknesses: Congenital defects make life very difficult for the Gravenors. Players of Gravenor characters should choose one of the following defects:

- **Albino (Sunlight Allergy)** — Take bashing damage from sunlight in the way a vampire would take aggravated damage.

- **Grotesque Physical Mutations** — A penalty of -2 dice on all Presence and Manipulation rolls dealing with those outside the family. Striking Looks Merit may not be purchased for this character.

- **Severe Mental Illness** — The character possesses one severe derangement, which is congenital and can never be removed.

Organization: Roderick Gravenor is king in his own house. His rule is somewhat tyrannical, but most members of the family recognize this as a necessity in their besieged state. Those few who complain are exiled to the hog farms, or "Eric's Farm" as Roderick puts it, despite the fact that his grandson Eric died of old age more than a decade ago. Life at the Gravenor estate is a strange cross between traditional family life circa

1800 and life in the Confederate States' military. There is also a fair amount of Elizabethan occultism mixed in with the family's traditions, as well as old Welsh mythology about fae creatures and ghosts. One of the boys plays reveille every morning, and Roderick personally inspects the condition of everyone's dress and rooms 10 minutes later. After this, his wife Eliza serves a very homey sort of breakfast, and friendly family chatter can be heard around the table. Then the daily chores begin: a séance to determine the will of their master Grigor, a warding against faeries with wrought iron bars on certain windows, exorcising the kitchen and so on. Lunch and dinner are also communal family affairs, and taps is played before bed each night. A different brother and sister pair is assigned to watch duty each night, and during this time they are discouraged from fooling around with each other. That's to be reserved for the daytime, when the monsters are less likely to come out.

The family farm is run like many modern businesses, though it is still privately owned. Most employees aren't even Gravenors, though many in the management are. Legally and by tradition, the farm still belongs to Roderick, who shows up on occasion to make demands, which are always met, if only to get rid of him. The demands seem random to outsiders, but are guided by Roderick's sense of what occult materials will be needed in his fight against the Cobblers. During each visit, Roderick can tell who would be a good candidate for joining the family, and his demands always include one person he wants to bring back with him. He visits once, sometimes twice, in any given year.

Concepts: bugle boy, believer, disbeliever, hog farmer, daddy's girl, family exorcist, escapee

The Children of Nirriti

Figure

Annals of the Balaur Gard: the so-called "Children of Nirriti."

"This record exists to tell the tale of the thrall bloodline formed by the cult of Kali in her aspect as Nirriti. There is very little to tell about these ghouls. The Circle of the Crone keeps them much as they do many of their other cults, but they have managed to institute a successful program of breeding in this case. They do this for their own silly superstitious reasons. Since their silly superstition seems to give them certain facilities with the Blood, however, it is worth noting the particular rituals involved here. As is the case with many of these cults, the Nirriti Cult practices extensive ritual cutting and self-mortification, in conjunction with carefully orchestrated orgies. In this case, the act of procreation itself seems often to be the desired end of the rituals, ensuring the continuance of the bloodline. Sex is also used in Tantric rituals, as it is with other cults set up by the Circle. Some particularly important rituals call for human sacrifice. Most of the time, some outsider is waylaid for this purpose, but it seems that a member of the cult is required in some instances. In at least one instance, I was able to witness a ritual in which a pregnant mother was sacrificed, but her child was retrieved from the womb and survived. It was most fascinating to watch that child grow up. Of course, all the blood from these sacrifices is drained, and most of it is eventually consumed by Kindred from the Circle."

Nickname: Sin-Eaters or simply Cultists

Clans: The cult was founded around a Daeva and is led by his childe, but a fair number of Mekhet and Nosferatu of the Circle have become interested in the Nirriti Cult. Gangrel sometimes find the pleasure/pain thrill of the cult alluring. Ventrue are positively disgusted with the idea usually, but a very few of them have taken a hand with the cult once in a while, especially if they develop derangements of megalomania and delusions of grandeur. The mortal Cultists themselves are utterly unaware of the Kindred politics that go on around them as they zealously follow their High Priestess Alma with the utmost dedication.



Covenants: Obviously, the Circle of the Crone directly controls the Nirriti Cult through Alma. The Circle views the cult as a useful tool and a successful endeavor, sometimes modeling other cults it wishes to set up after the way Alma administers the Nirriti. Alma has allowed several other members of the Circle to join her in her peculiar form of absolution through victimization, though she requires that anyone who wishes to do so submit to a Vinculum to her. Other Covenants look on with mixed envy and distaste. For the Ordo Dracul, envy is the predominant emotion, because many among them wish they could have tools so zealously loyal. The Invictus and Lancea Sanctum mostly view the cult with distaste, although they envy the zeal of the Cultists.

Kindred of the Carthian Movement are often intrigued by any form of cult activity because of what it implies in regard to what people want from society, and the Nirriti Cult is no exception to this pattern of general interest.

Appearance: As directed by their High Priestess, the Children of Nirriti feign normality by day. They work at various jobs and have regular apartments or suburban houses. Nirriti Cultists dress conservatively during the day to avoid attracting any sort of attention, and are usually careful to do their jobs sufficiently without any hint of excellence. They are polite but not friendly, meeting those who try to form closer relationships with pleasant rebuffs or false openness. Really, each Cultist is always in a state of anticipation, hardly able to wait for the appropriate moment to rip off the stifling clothes of normality and dance naked before the dark goddess.



HOPE — FUTURE DAMNATION

Some players and Storytellers might find themselves attracted to the concept of playing the thralls who do evil things so that Alma and her cronies can feel good and pure. Most people will probably get sick of this after a while. Fear not: There is a light at the end of the tunnel, even for the vessels of Alma's sin and torment. The most obvious form of this is that when Alma considers

a Sin-Eater to be sufficiently advanced in the faith, she arranges for that person's Embrace, allowing him the purity of the Requiem as she has found it. Such converts then gleefully set about foisting their former duties of pain and torture on their newly subordinated Cultists.

The other interesting thing is that Alma actually buys into her own philosophy. She has spent so much time ridding herself of her sins, even in such odd ways as she has chosen, that her destructive desires have diminished greatly. In fact, although her Humanity is fairly low, she maintains almost ironclad control over her Beast, seldom succumbing to frenzy. She allows her childer to create childer of their own only if they have reached the same level of sinlessness as herself, and no Nirriti Cultist without at least Willpower 7 ever receives the Embrace. Usually, once Cultists have shown a sufficient degree of faithfulness, they are sent on to Alma's personal serving staff. The tasks Alma asks of her personal staff are quite tame compared to the usual activities of the Cult, allowing those who reach this plateau to start freeing themselves of corruption and move toward purity.



Havens: Alma's haven is built on the dreams and contributions of her followers. She owns a property that, at just over 20 acres, is truly palatial by the area's standards. On this land she keeps many plants and animals that suit her tastes, caring for them and breeding them. The huge house and grounds serve both as canvas for Alma's creative endeavors and as ritual observance spot for the most significant ceremonies of the Nirriti Cult. Cultists commute from all over the area to attend some of the monthly and yearly observances. Alma has also gifted some of her most trusted servants with the Embrace, and they own similar though smaller havens.

Strengths: Even as ghouls, members of the Cult may purchase up to Status • in the Circle of the Crone, and just as for vampires, Status in the Circle of the Crone confers the privilege of learning Crúac blood sorcery. Nirriti Cultists may also have a vampiric mentor (normally Alma or a former Sin-Eater).

Weaknesses: The mindset of the Nirriti Cultists is fragile. They truly believe in their mistress' dogma, but when they fall into a moral quandary, they don't cope with it well. Whenever a Sin-Eater loses a dot of Morality, she automatically gains a derangement, regardless of her Morality level. No Morality roll may be made.

Organization: Alma is High Priestess. No one may surpass her, for it is through her advancement that others may ascend to higher levels. If the High Priestess were to die, the whole cult would suffer a setback to the level of her chosen successor. Alma does, however, employ other Kindred as priests and priestesses of her cult to keep track of the herd. Several of them are her own childer and all are bonded to her through full Vinculum. Under these Kindred are the mortal supplicants, those with some small amount of status, whether they know what that means, or (more likely) not. Under the supplicants are the children, for though all cult members are "Children of Nirriti," some have matured and are children only in the sense of descent. The average cultist is still considered a child, and is afforded no respect until a certain amount of extremely unpleasant drudge-work has been completed. Then the real rituals begin — the learning process that can take a child and turn him into a supplicant, and perhaps eventually a priest.

Concepts: attention addict, true believer, sadist, masochist, alternative lifestyle seeker



The Blood and the Wine: Lacrima

The standard effects of lacrima were covered in Chapter One, but it is worth reiterating them here and putting some specific rules effects on this special substance. Only Kindred with Blood Potency 1, or who have learned the Blood of Beasts tier of the Coil of Blood, may feed on lacrima and gain any nourishment. Even then, to gain a single Vitae, a vampire would have to consume all of the lacrima a mandrake creates in a month, thus negating its ability to “feed” itself.

Drinking enough lacrima to restore one Vitae could create lacrima addiction. This is exactly like blood addiction, but only in respect to lacrima. This addiction is handled identically to blood addiction in all rolls and effects. This addiction can be difficult to sate, because once the Kindred’s Blood Potency rises above 1, the lacrima stops providing nourishment and it must be appropriately blended with nourishing blood to slake the craving. Only Darling (see p. 62) knows how to create such mixtures, though, as far as anyone knows. (At Storyteller’s discretion, it might be possible to find a recipe with some extensive legwork.)

Mortals who ingest lacrima immediately suffer ill effects, though less so if they are ghouls. Ghouls merely throw up the lacrima. Regular mortals have no such luck. A mortal whose player fails a Stamina roll (with a –3 penalty; Toxin Resistance Merit applies) when the character ingests lacrima suffers one point of lethal damage and receives a –2 penalty to all rolls for the next 24 hours from numbness, weakness, and general lack of mental clarity. A tablespoon is enough to induce these effects. Further doses increase the effect. A tablespoon of lacrima is considered to have a toxicity rating of 1 + the number of tablespoons already ingested (see p. 181 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). A cup of lacrima is enough to kill most people.

Tears of the Clans

Mandrags aren’t common by any means, and most Kindred have no idea that these creatures even exist. Therefore, very few vampires indeed realize that lacrima varies based on the regnant’s clan.

The special properties of mandragora according to their regnant’s clan are similar in effects to facets unique to that clan. In most cases, a target must ingest some of the lacrima for the effect to take place. Unless otherwise noted, the special effects of the lacrima are in addition to its poisonous and addictive properties.

Daeva lacrima is especially addictive to Kindred. The roll to avoid lacrima addiction suffers a –2 penalty. To

mortals, the poison of this lacrima isn’t damaging, but intoxicating. A mortal ingesting even a tablespoon of Daeva lacrima becomes euphoric and aggressive for the remainder of the night (subject to the same aforementioned Stamina roll; every two dots of Blood Potency the regnant possess levies a –1 penalty, rounded up). The mortal also produces pheromones that act as a natural aphrodisiac. For the remainder of the night (or unless the mortal covers the scent somehow), all seduction and other social rolls that would be favorably influenced by sex appeal receive a +2 bonus. In the morning, however, the lacrima burns through the mortal’s system, wracking him with pain and inflicting two points of lethal damage.

Gangrel mandragora are special indeed, becoming faster and more aggressive than other forms of vampiric plants. A mandrake fed with Gangrel Vitae takes on a particularly menacing appearance and gains an attack dice pool equal to its regnant’s Blood Potency, attacking any sanguine creature other than its master.

Mekhet Kindred produce lacrima that causes nightmarish hallucinations in mortals. The mortal’s player makes the same Stamina roll (every two dots of Blood Potency the regnant possess levies a –1 penalty, rounded up). If it fails, the victim suffers visual and auditory hallucinations for the remainder of the night. These experiences don’t spring from nowhere. The victim doesn’t seem creatures leap out of thin air, but might see shadows lengthen and reach for her or be unable to bear the sound of fingers drumming on a table. The effects are the same as listed on p. 177 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Kindred and ghouls do not suffer this effect from Mekhet lacrima.

Nosferatu vampires create mandrakes that constantly secrete a thin sheen of lacrima. This lacrima is so pale in color that it resembles water or dew, but unlike other forms of lacrima it works on contact. When it touches a mortal’s skin, it creates a stinging sensation in the flesh and auditory hallucinations of loud, high-pitched shrieks — the legendary “screaming roots” of the mandrake. Any time a mortal comes into contact with this poison, his player should roll Stamina. Every two dots of Blood Potency of the regnant (round up), levies a –1 modifier to this roll, while the Toxin Resistance Merit bestows its normal benefit. If the roll fails, the mortal suffers as described under a Nightmare 2 (Dread) for the remainder of the night. If the roll is a dramatic failure, the mortal suffers as though a vampire had used Dread on him and achieved an exceptional success. Nosferatu lacrima has no special effect on Kindred or ghouls.

Ventru produce lacrima that weakens the will of anyone who imbibes it. The victim must roll Stamina as described (every two dots of Blood Potency the regnant

possess levies a -1 penalty, rounded up). If the Stamina roll fails, the mortal becomes highly suggestible. All Resolve and Composure rolls suffer a -3 penalty for the remainder of the night. Ghouls are subject to this effect, but Kindred are not.

Effects of the Vinculum

The bond between a regnant and her thrall is different, and certainly more useful, than the bond between a mistress and her mandrake. Regardless, a bond still forms, though the benefits of such a connection are limited. First, while the plant attempts to taste the blood of all sanguine creatures (including vampires) that come near it, it never acts out against the regnant. In fact, some plants even shudder slightly and ease away from the presence of the regnant, a physical action noticeable only to those standing nearby. The regnant also gains $+2$ on any die roll attempting to physically examine or affect the mandrake (for example, Intelligence + Science to determine health of plant, Wits + Medicine to retrieve lacrima from mandrake without harming it).

This weaker Vinculum is formed immediately after the first drink, provided the plant becomes mandragora and does not perish.

Animal Ghouls

Animal ghouls function almost identically to human ghouls. The only mechanical differences are as follows:

- Animal ghouls can only learn physical Disciplines. At the Storyteller's discretion, it *might* be possible for an animal to learn the first dot of Auspex or Animalism, but this would require decades of training and an incredibly intelligent beast.
- Regnants receive a $+2$ bonus on any use of Animalism on an animal ghoul.
- Animal ghouls spend Vitae instinctively to increase Attributes to escape or attack or heal, but they *never* spend their last point of Vitae unless they would die otherwise.
- Animal ghouls cannot form ghoul families.





storytelling ghouls

*"I know you're scared, Amy.
I was, too, but you don't have to be afraid of him.
He's not like... he won't hurt us.
He needs us. And I need you.
I can't grow old, Amy. It's too late for that.
And I don't want you to, either.
If you love me,
and you want to be with me, then do this.
Nothing has to change. It can be just like this.
We can be just like this. Forever."*

chapter three

*I'm loyal to you Master, I'm your slave, I didn't betray you. Oh no, don't.
Don't kill me. Let me live, please. Punish me — torture me — but let me live.
I can't die with all those lives on my conscience, all that blood on my hands.*

—Renfield, *Dracula* (Universal Pictures, 1931)

If vampires are predators and mortals are prey, what are ghouls? Are they something halfway between the two? Are they tools of the vampires who created them, resources in the same category as a safe haven or a well-populated feeding ground? Are they codependents and enablers, helping the Kindred convince themselves they're worthy of adoration despite their terrible acts? Are they the blue-collar caste of nocturnal society, doing the work that vampires consider beneath them? Are they symbiotes, servicing a vampire the way remora are said to clean the teeth and gills of sharks? Are they servants, cronies, lesser partners, slaves, willing victims, sycophants, worshippers, traitors, monsters, keepers of secrets, representatives of mortality, tragic heroes, untouchables, losers, addicts?

On any given night, a ghoul can be any of those things. In your **Vampire** story, they are one thing more. Used effectively, they provide the most valuable tool in a Storyteller's toolkit: the unexpected. Here are some reasons:

- **Vampires underestimate ghouls.** Attitudes toward ghouls vary among the Kindred, but few vampires hold them in any but the lowest regard. Even if one's own ghoul has proven to be exceptionally resourceful, it's hard to have any respect for beings who've exchanged their free will for the pleasures of Vitae. Ghouls might be considered anything from trusted servants to amusing pets, but rarely are they considered threatening. This makes them perfect vehicles to introduce surprising dangers or plot twists to your story.

- **Ghouls are invisible.** Many Kindred don't even consider ghouls worthy of contempt, granting them no more attention than a lap dog or doormat. But ghouls see and hear things, and while their understanding of vampires and the Danse Macabre might be incomplete, they can put some pieces together to assemble a more complete picture than their masters realize. A ghoul probably won't betray his master, but he might be willing to part with information gleaned about other Kindred who've visited the master's home or crossed the ghoul's paths during his duties. A vampire who lets the wrong words slip in the presence of a ghoul might come to regret it later.

- **Ghouls know vampires.** Ghouls know vampires are real, and many have a broad understanding of their capabilities. Depending on how they serve their masters, ghouls can have a deep enough knowledge of various aspects of vampire unlife to be a threat, especially if they compare notes with other ghouls. Vampire-hunters might wonder if garlic repels the undead, but a ghoul has likely seen for herself that it doesn't. A ghoul also gains some specific knowledge of how the vampires in her particular city operate — where the feeding grounds are, perhaps, or which abandoned warehouse is used for strange vampiric rituals. They might notice subtleties that escape even Kindred notice, such as how a vampire looks when she forgets to simulate breathing, the different blink rate between the living and the undead or the uncomfortable twitching of a hungry neonate.

- **Ghouls can do what vampires can't.** Vampires are powerful beings, capable of commanding other minds, changing their shape or displaying astonishing speed and strength. But the warmth of the sun is forever denied them. While the Kindred spend a significant part of every 24 hours completely immobilized, ghouls can move freely during night or day. Ghouls also have an easier time traveling. A ghoul antagonist might decide to skip town, returning later when your characters' attentions is fixed elsewhere. A ghoul associate or thrall can fly across the country to perform a task for a city-bound vampire. Can vampires ever be certain, though, what a ghoul is up to between dawn and dusk?

- **Ghouls are addicts.** The twin scourges of Vinculum and Vitae addiction curtail a ghoul's freedom. Usually these forces work in tandem to keep the ghoul motivated to obey her regnant, but not always. How well does loyalty, even supernaturally inflicted loyalty, hold up against a craving for Vitae? When a regnant withholds, or can no longer provide, the Vitae a ghoul so desperately needs, addiction could bend or break the bond between master and servant. Addicts can be motivated to do strange, dangerous, even suicidal things to serve their needs. A ghoul who begins as an ally of the players might become less dependable and more treacherous as her craving for Vitae goes unfulfilled.

- **Ghouls have a human life.** By choice or necessity, Kindred eventually sever their ties to their mortal life.

In some ways, their subsistence on human blood makes this possible. Capable of hunting for their food, and free from ravages of age, disease and mundane injury, vampires can survive using their new abilities and wits. Ghouls still need to eat, though. They might need to keep their day jobs, to maintain their finances, to attend to the mundane details of mortal life. They might try to maintain connections to their family and friends. Such responsibilities not only give them different motivations than vampires, they help ghouls blend in with mortal society. Ghouls make excellent sleeper agents, and they can establish themselves as ordinary mortals in a vampire's neighborhood, business or household.

This chapter focuses on ways to use ghouls in your chronicle. For broader advice on Storytelling, be sure to look at the appropriate chapters in the **Vampire: The Requiem** and the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. You'll find information on theme, mood, plot and various dramatic devices that can enhance your chronicle. Even if you're an experienced Storyteller, it doesn't hurt to review the advice therein when planning your stories.

Using Ghouls as Antagonists

Clever ghouls have a clear stealth advantage if they know how to use it. But why would a ghoul choose to act against the Kindred, who tend to be more powerful,

hold greater resources and can generally end a ghoul's existence with impunity (or prolong it tortuously)? Here are some scenarios that might result in one or more ghouls confronting your players' characters as enemies:

- **Just following orders.** The simplest motivation for a ghoul to oppose a vampire is that he's acting under the command of his regnant. Properly used, a ghoul can be a potent weapon for one vampire to aim against another. Because they're familiar with vampires and can be trusted not to breach the Masquerade, ghouls can perform tasks that ordinary thralls can't. The characters' enemy might send an experienced ghoul to keep them under surveillance, hoping to track them to their havens or overhear their plans. A ghoul might be used to lure a character into a trap or compromising situation. A ghoul who's heavily armed, skilled and well trained might even be able to accomplish a direct assault on a vampire, especially if the ghoul has useful Disciplines and the element of surprise.

Ghouls used as proxies by an antagonistic vampire needn't be confined to short-term hostilities. Imagine a ghoul who poses as a blood doll or willing victim to a player's character. Over time, the character trusts the ghoul more, and perhaps the ghoul even pretends to be blood bound. (Remember that a ghoul can be bound by only one master, so he needn't fear a second Vinculum.)



Now a vampire has a spy getting ever closer to one of his enemies, and he doesn't even need to expend Vitae on the ghoul.

- **Vengeance.** It's fine, even appropriate, for a ghoul to be abused or insulted by his master — at least, that's what the influence of the Vinculum leads a ghoul to believe. That imposed good will doesn't apply to other Kindred, though. Certainly most ghouls act subservient to a vampire who asserts her superiority, if only to avoid having their throats ripped out. Yet a ghoul who's pushed too far, humiliated too much or injured too callously is capable of harboring a desire for revenge and, in some cases, acting on it. Vampires who mistreat an associate's ghoul might find that outside the direct control of her regnant, a simpering lackey becomes a determined killer. Forced to endure indignities heaped on them by their regnants, some ghouls might transfer their resentment to other Kindred. Ghouls who harbor a hatred of vampires might express it secretly, keeping their activities hidden from their masters. Ghouls who have no masters might devote their lives to vendetta, traveling from city to city and wiping out relatively weak and inexperienced Kindred.

Some Kindred wait for decades, even centuries, to enact revenge on their fellows. Ghouls retain more of a mortal outlook on time, though, so are likely to strike more quickly when they've been wronged. Perhaps the characters have finally managed to destroy the ancilla who's been plaguing them since their Embrace, but what about the ghouls he left behind? Though their blood bond is no more, decades of worship and loyalty don't vanish overnight, especially if the thralls were well treated or at least not overtly abused. Will they target the characters, perhaps wielding some of the resources their regnant once controlled?

- **Vitae.** Few creatures in the World of Darkness are as desperate as a blood-addicted ghoul whose master is missing, especially if said ghoul is in danger of aging rapidly once the Vitae in his system is depleted. Such motivation can push a ghoul to take extreme actions, from ambushing a vampire to attempting to invade a haven. Few ghouls will confront one of the Kindred directly, though. Some have learned a thing or two about stalking from observing their masters, and they can suppress their Vitae cravings long enough to find inexperienced vampires, observe them and attack when their prey is weak or distracted. Others act more as parasites than hunters, siphoning Vitae from a vampire in a poorly guarded haven, or lapping up Vitae shed when rival Kindred come to blows. (This last method probably wouldn't yield any positive results for the ghoul unless the Vitae came from a vampire with an especially high Blood Potency, but by the time the ghoul reaches this point, even the merest possibility is enough.)

Ways and Means

It's simple enough for a ghoul to ambush your players' characters in a dark alley (perhaps inflicting a few painful wounds and escaping, perhaps having his head handed to him). But a ghoul antagonist can be much more than a one-time opponent. Here are some ways in which ghouls can make your vampire characters' unives miserable:

- **Blackmail.** With some careful surveillance, a ghoul who knows the identity of a vampire could collect all sorts of information to use against her. Ghouls are well aware that vampire society acts to conceal the existence of the Kindred, so they are unlikely to try to "out" a vampire by revealing his nature to the media or law-enforcement (especially since their regnants would likely suffer as well). They could threaten to disclose some choice details about a character's nighttime habits to former friends and family, though. They could even alert the authorities. A vampire who kills during a feeding certainly wants to avoid the nuisance of homicide detectives knocking on her door. Or maybe the ghoul could reveal that the character is still "alive" despite having faked her death.

Ghouls who know a bit about how vampire society works can threaten to pass on the information they've gathered to a vampire's rivals, especially if it concerns behavior the ghouls suspect to be a violation of vampiric laws. In exchange for keeping quiet, a ghoul might ask for Vitae, information, material goods, even an attack against another Kindred whom the ghoul wishes destroyed. Depending on how much you want to challenge your players, you can have a ghoul take extensive defensive precautions. She might contact the characters by phone only, tell the characters that the incriminating information will be released in the event of her demise, or meet with them only in crowded, public places. Or maybe the ghoul leaves herself open to a preemptive strike, if your players come up with the proper strategy.

- **Collateral damage.** A ghoul who's motivated to go up against one of the Kindred will be delighted to learn of any ties that vampire has to the living. Friends, family, coworkers, employees... a ghoul who wants to inflict pain or damage on a vampire could target them for anything from harassment to murder. And how will the character protect them during the day? Even property or sentimental objects — an art collection, a favorite sports car, the house that's been owned by the character's family for generations — could be threatened, damaged or destroyed.

- **Shattered reputation.** Ghouls who've served the Kindred for long periods of time know full well that a vampire's standing among her peers, betters or covenant can be as critical for survival as a light-proof bedroom.

Even though they don't fully understand the ins and outs of Kindred society, they know that certain actions bring the wrath of other Kindred upon a foolish vampire. Suppose a character tends to rely on the homeless as a quick Vitae source. And suppose the news media starts reporting on a number of dead bodies found in the character's feeding ground. Will the Prince guess that a ghoul's been following the character and smothering his vessels as they recover from the Kiss? Or will he suspect that someone's been a careless feeder and send agents to flush out the culprit?

- **Vampire-hunting.** Sometimes the mortals win. Clever, lucky and careful humans who've had a glimpse of the creatures that rule the night do sometimes strike back, sending unwary Kindred to their Final Deaths. So how much more dangerous is a vampire-hunting ghoul, who's Vitae-empowered and has observed the enemy close up, perhaps for decades? A vampire who's been targeted for destruction by a ghoul finds that his antagonist knows far more about vampiric behavior than seems possible. Some ghouls might work with mortal allies or even lead a group of mortals who consider themselves "monster-hunters." In such cases, ghouls must conceal their predilection for drinking the blood of the undead, lest they find themselves ostracized or worse by their former associates.



THE SILENT MAJORITY

It should be mentioned that the ghoul/regnant system works quite well (at least from the Kindred point of view). The vast majority of ghouls aren't running around following their own agendas, they're serving their regnants with all the twisted loyalty ensured by blood addiction, Vinculum and the occasional reward for good service. If it were otherwise, the practice of keeping ghouls would be much less common than it is. This chapter focuses on the small fraction of ghouls who have the wherewithal, resources, independence or luck to serve as antagonists, allies or even characters for players. But it's important that most ghouls your players' characters come across be firmly under the heel of a regnant (as well as their own addiction to Vitae). That way, the odd ghoul who is something more catches your players off guard.



Ghouls as Allies and Associates

If nothing else, ghouls are survivors. How else could they establish an ongoing, intimate relationship with monsters that could drain them dry on a whim or snap their necks in a fit of pique? A ghoul's survival depends directly on her ability to be useful to her master. And that could mean anything from balancing

the books to burying the bodies to tolerating abuse that would fracture the minds and souls of ordinary people. As a result, ghouls develop all sorts of skills, knowledge and abilities. And that makes them an excellent resource for your players' characters, though not without cost. Here are some scenarios in which characters might find themselves offered, or in need of, a ghoul's service.

- **The ghoul on loan.** Characters who curry favor with a well-placed vampire might find that he's too busy to help them personally. Instead, he'll give them "use" of one of his ghouls. This offer could seem like a weak substitute for actual assistance, until the ghoul demonstrates his competence, skill, Discipline use or resourcefulness. Remember, some ghouls might be decades older than the characters, which allows ample time to develop impressive proficiencies in whatever fields are helpful to their regnants. Add that to their capacity to act during daylight, and a ghoul on loan can quickly become a valued adjunct to a vampiric coterie. Of course, although the ghoul acts appropriately subservient, his real loyalty is only to his regnant. So he'll keep eyes and ears open for any weakness or proprietary information the characters might let slip, and dutifully report them to the regnant for future reference.

- **The missing master.** In this scenario, it's the ghoul who approaches the characters for assistance. The ghoul's regnant has gone missing, and the desperate thrall needs the characters to find out what happened. Perhaps the master is sire or Avus to one of the characters, or perhaps they've had some previous partnership, alliance or association with the missing vampire. If the characters are unlikely to help out of the goodness of their hearts, you can sweeten the deal by having the ghoul offer the characters access to a significant resource his master controls. Territory, vessels, influence, material wealth... all of these could be theirs if they help (and maybe they'll get a taste of it up front). Or perhaps the desperate ghoul can perform daylight tasks that have been frustrating the characters for some time.

- **Regnant shopping.** Ghouls respond differently to the destruction of their regnants. Some destroy themselves in desperation, certain they can't live without their longtime master (and her Vitae). Some seek vengeance on the responsible party, acting rashly or planning a careful vendetta. Some survive the initial wash of anguish and struggle to piece a new life together, and that can mean finding someone new to serve. A ghoul desperate for a new regnant might be a pathetic wretch who regards vampires as dark gods but makes things more difficult for a character in her attempts to impress him. Or her inner submissiveness might be masked by an outer shell of competence and skill. The ghoul might perform a number of useful services



anonymously, only revealing herself when the character is suitably impressed.

• **Quid pro quo.** Some ghouls whose regnants are missing, in torpor or gone forever decide to try to establish themselves as independents. They don't wish to forgo the costly pleasures of Vitae (or they can't shake off the addiction), so they spend time at the fringes of Kindred society, watching for vampires who are willing to spare some Vitae in exchange for services. Wary of the Vinculum, these ghouls face an immense challenge, in that they can't rely on a single source for repeat service without losing their freedom. Some ghouls can maintain their independence because they possess exceptional skills or knowledge. Others have found a niche filling the gaps created by vampiric limitations: daytime surveillance expert, intercity courier, criminal law legal consultant. More commonly, ghouls barter for Vitae by performing tasks too demeaning for Kindred and too horrific for an ordinary mortal. Such tasks could be anything from procuring victims for a bloody covenant ritual to performing debased sex acts for the amusement of a depraved coterie. Whatever needs your players' characters have, chances are there's a ghoul somewhere willing to fill them for a taste of Vitae.

Ghouls have other needs and desires than Vitae. Perhaps a ghoul is worried that family members will be caught in the crossfire of an upcoming vampire turf war, and she wants the coterie to watch over them. Maybe a ghoul is desperate to learn a new Discipline in order to be more "marketable" as a freelance servant. Or maybe the players' characters are the only ones who have a clue to the whereabouts of a ghoul's long-lost master. And sometimes a ghoul just needs someone bigger, stronger and tougher than him to pull off a crime, get him out of a jam or protect him from a more-powerful rival.

Acts of Allegiance

For the Kindred, "ally" is always a provisional term. The vampire who lets her guard down, counts too much on another's assistance or doesn't take steps to verify an "ally's" trustworthiness is asking to be left high and dry when the moment is right. Such is the Danse Macabre. It's the wise vampire who extends his innate distrust to any ghoul who seems to be on his side. While it's true that some ghouls are so cowed, intimidated or dominated by their masters that they've lost the capacity to do anything that would arouse the ire of a vampire, such is not always the case. In fact, the same ghouls who have the capacity and independence to offer service to a vampire are the ones most capable of hiding their true agendas and turning against a vampire associate if it seems prudent. If your players' characters aren't care-



ful, their association with a ghoul provides ample opportunities for making them regret their naiveté.

Vampires need to be cautious about allying themselves with ghouls for several reasons. Vitae addiction is at the top of the list. Trusting someone who's addicted to one's very blood has inherent dangers. Vitae is hard to come by, and it's the rare ghoul who wouldn't be tempted to help herself if her vampire ally became incapacitated or weakened. The predator/prey relationship is another complicating factor. Ghouls are more like human beings than like Kindred, and human beings can't help but harbor ill feelings for the predators that feed on them. Can a vampire ever be certain that the ghoul's natural distaste, disgust and fear won't get the better of him at an inopportune moment? A vampire who has some need to work in proximity to a ghoul associate is wise if he avoids overtly vampiric acts, especially feeding. Finally, consider that a ghoul's professed loyalty to one vampire collapses like a house of cards if she becomes blood bound to another. Relying on a ghoul who's not blood bound means leaving the door open for a rival to acquire a spy or assassin for the price of a few drops of Vitae.

At times, a ghoul ally or associate is worth the risks. Ghouls can enrich stories as well as perform valuable tasks for players' characters. Here are some examples of what ghouls have to offer:

- **A 24-hour day.** As vampires, your characters are excluded from taking any actions during the day. If they have the services of a ghoul, they can have a foothold in the daytime world. Characters needn't wait passively for the sun to set before acting. You can have significant actions take place in daylight and allow the characters to act through their proxy. Doing so can also raise the tension level of your games. Once the characters become used to having their wishes enacted during the day, and even begin to depend upon it, what happens when they wake up to find their ghoul has failed, defected or disappeared?

- **An unusual specialty.** As mentioned earlier, ghouls pick up a lot of tricks through the course of their unnaturally extended lives. A ghoul who's served a regnant for a century or longer might be one of the few living beings who can speak a defunct dialect, locate the burial site of a long-vanished family member or repair a pocket watch that's prized by a high-ranking member of a regnant's covenant. Locating such a ghoul could be a quest in itself. Characters might have to start with whispered rumors, track them to close-mouthed thralls who know of the ghoul in question, retrace the steps of the ghoul's since-dead regnant, locate other Kindred who once bartered for the ghoul's services... In the end they might find that the ghoul is now blood bound to a new,

tightfisted regnant, which means they'll need to find a way to "liberate" him.

- **A sympathetic ear.** More than one vampire has wished for guidance in navigating the moral labyrinth brought on by the Embrace. But who can be trusted with a vampire's fears, concerns and indecision? Other Kindred will be quick to exploit any weakness. The Masquerade precludes recruiting a mortal advisor, and few mortals could cope with the truth of a vampire's existence anyway. But a ghoul, who's been up close and personal with vampiric horrors, might have some insight and be able offer a mortal point of view to a character struggling to balance humanity and the Beast. Experienced, older ghouls might even fall into a sort of mentoring relationship, if both parties can overcome mutual distrust and wariness.

How the characters meet and establish such a relationship could make for an interesting story. Perhaps the ghoul stumbles across the vampire character when he's weakened by an attack, pulls him into a temporary haven, then disappears without asking for recompense. Later, it's the ghoul who's in trouble, and the vampire has to choose whether to risk his own safety to help. Or maybe a wise stranger drops a casual bit of advice to a Kindred neonate which turns out to be critical later on. The character returns to the stranger again and again, each time opening up a little more and getting better guidance in return. One a pattern of trust is established, you can add further twists to the relationship. Even seemingly stable, well-adjusted ghouls harbor a strong addiction and might have well-concealed derangements. What happens when the ghoul's afflictions get the better of her? Will she betray the Kindred who's confided in her? Will the vampire understand or seek retribution?

- **Temptation.** While some ghouls might inspire vampires to preserve their vanishing humanity, others have the opposite effect. Ghouls can offer characters an opportunity to act on their basest impulses, seemingly without consequence. Many ghouls are willing, and able, to do the dirty work that a vampire at the beginning of his Requiem might be squeamish about handling. "Take care of" a neighbor who's getting too curious, "locate" some cash, "convince" a police detective to conduct his investigations elsewhere... It all becomes easier when you can leave the details to someone else. At first, the ghoul's activities might be minor and nonviolent — a burglary here, a stolen car there — but the ghoul might soon decide that the best way to carry out her assignments is to shed some blood or break some bones. Perhaps the characters don't even notice the blood being shed in their names until they're confronted with the aftermath of an assignment gone wrong.

Ghouls offer more direct temptations to the vampires they serve. Even if they are not blood bound, some ghouls will do anything for a Vitae fix. Others have been so damaged by their treatment at Kindred hands that they've developed derangements that motivate them to invite abuse. When a ghoul deliberately incites a character's anger or openly asks to be beaten or injured, do your players take the easy way out and have their characters dish out some pain? Or will do they act nobly and try to find other ways to relate to a potentially helpful associate?

Ghoul Characters

You already know that ghouls are more than Vitae-empowered thralls, but you might still be wondering, why play a ghoul? Or perhaps you're thinking, "How am I going to handle this character in my chronicle?" Remember that, like other characters, a ghoul is an individual. Like everyone else, ghouls have motivations, goals, beliefs, misconceptions, fears and desires. If you and your player have a clear concept of who a ghoul character is, not just what he is, it's much easier to involve the character in your stories.

Master and Servant

One of the first issues to consider is how the character became a ghoul? If you're starting with a prelude story, in which characters begin as mortals, you'll need to plan the events that will lead to the character's transformation. If the character starts as a ghoul, it's still important to know how and why she got there.

Think about the ghoul's relationship to the regnant. Up to this point, we've been discussing ghouls who have enough resources and freedom of movement to act as effective antagonists or allies, but it's probably a good idea for a ghoul character to be more restricted than independent. Players shouldn't use ghoul characters to have their cake and eat it too, gaining some supernatural characteristics while maintaining the freedoms and advantages of their mortal nature. Existence as a ghoul has significant drawbacks, and the biggest one is being under the thumb of an autocratic master.

Key to the ghoul/regnant relationship is the reason that the vampire decided to take on a ghoul in the first place. The Kindred have many ways to acquire servants, from bribery to blackmail to blood bonding. Why did this particular vampire feel it necessary to expend the effort to create a ghoul? Does the character possess some unique skill or ability? Was he "promoted" as a reward for some exceptional act? Perhaps the ghoul proved his worth to the vampire before her Embrace, and she decided he'd be a valuable resource for her Requiem. Maybe the ghoul was a mortal underling who discovered her employer's true nature and was offered the opportunity to gain power and status.

Perhaps the vampire desires the company of a friend or lover from his mortal life, one whose obedience, loyalty and love will be without question. Maybe the regnant has need of a ghoul to carry out some specific, critical scheme, and the ghoul is likely to be eliminated afterward unless he proves useful. Whatever the reason, you and your player should come up with it early, since it suggests other details about the ghoul, including Skills, Merits, background and personality.

It's also important to think about why and how the ghoul decided it would be a good idea to taste the blood of a vampire. Of course, some ghouls aren't given much of a choice: one drop of Vitae, give surreptitiously or by force, engenders a craving for the next, and the next, which brings on the Vinculum. So it's possible your player's character is recruited against her will or without warning. Some players, expecting their mortal character to be Embraced, might appreciate the surprise and challenge of becoming a ghoul instead of one of the Kindred. (Don't spring this on a player if you're not certain he'll go along with it, though.)

But many good reasons exist for making the character's transformation into a ghoul an act of choice. **Vampire: The Requiem** is meant to be more than a series of nocturnal adventures. It's a game of personal horror, where the struggles going on in a character's head are at least as important as fending off attacks by werewolves and vampire-hunters (and probably more important). And few things could be as horrific as suffering the depredations, degradation and moral challenges of a ghoul's existence, knowing that you put yourself there.

If you're running a prelude chronicle, the details of how the character becomes a ghoul will be worked out in the game. You should have a plan in place, though, and you'll want your player to think about why her character might choose to become a ghoul. Is he a thrill-seeker who leaps into danger without considering the consequences? Is he a timid mouse who can't resist a chance to gain some power (even at the cost of subservience to a greater power)? Is the potential regnant someone he cares for, takes pity on, and is willing to help navigate the Danse Macabre? Has the would-be ghoul's first glimpse of the supernatural world made him feel he needs the protection of a powerful patron? Is he seduced by the prospect of immortality and eternal youth?

If your player has expressed interest in playing a ghoul, he's already made his choice. But with a little planning, you can make the character's transition fraught with unexpected challenges and tension. One way to do so is to make sure the stakes are high. Grant the character a generous amount of resources: a good job, a full bank account, a loving family. Start him off on top of the world, and when the time comes, let him realize that his soon-to-be regnant considers all of the above to be his

property. Now how easy is it to accept that drop of Vitae? Or you could take the opposite approach. Give the character a glimpse of glamorous Kindred society that makes her own life seem drab and unimportant. Have her new nocturnal “friends” — thralls, ghouls, maybe even a vampire trolling for new servants — imply that in exchange for a few hours of service a day, she’ll gain all sorts of exciting perks and power. Make the case for being a ghoul seem obvious. Then, when the choice seems inevitable, let the character encounter a ghoul who’s wretched and miserable in servitude. Can the character be certain which reality will be hers once there’s no turning back?



STARTING OUT UNMASTERED

It’s a good idea to make a player-controlled ghoul start out with an active regnant. This gives the full experience of life as a ghoul, with all its attendant horrors. Also, if the character is put in play after already establishing his independence, it means some of the most important events in his story have occurred off screen. You and your players don’t get to participate in the ghoul’s struggle for freedom. If you do decide an independent ghoul best suits your chronicle, here are some ways to do so without giving the character too much of an unearned advantage.

- The ghoul’s master is missing. The regnant might be in torpor somewhere, busy elsewhere or lying low as part of some long-term plan. Regardless, the ghoul has been abandoned and must find her own way. The master left without any warning and didn’t leave behind any resources or instructions to help. The good news is that since she’s blood bound and her master hasn’t met the Final Death, she can take Vitae from repeated sources without fear of Vinculum. The bad news is the master had enemies who won’t trust the ghoul’s motivations and could decide to kill her out of sheer spite. And one night the master might return, upending whatever kind of existence the ghoul manages to carve out for herself.

- The regnant is lax. Perhaps the ghoul’s master has lost interest in maintaining a thrall or no longer needs the ghoul’s services. Or maybe the ghoul earned a degree of freedom after performing an extraordinary service. The result is that the master no longer makes demands on the ghoul, so the ghoul no longer has access to a regular supply of Vitae. Worse, the ghoul can’t be sure that the master might not have a change of heart and call the former thrall back to servitude.

- The regnant is gone for good. A ghoul who’s survived his master’s destruction need never again fear falling under her sway. If he wants to maintain his freedom as well as his ghoul status (and youth), however, he’ll need to keep finding new Vitae sources to avoid the Vinculum.



A Ghoul's Life

Once you have an idea of why and how your player’s ghoul character enters into servitude, you can start thinking about the ghoul’s role in serving his or her regnant. You don’t want to overwhelm the character with unending misery or drudgery, as that’s rarely a good time for a player. So sometimes the ghoul/regnant relationship will be prominent in a story, while other times it occurs mainly in the background. The regnant can be a great tool for the Storyteller. Since the character is compelled to go where she’s sent, you can use the regnant to place the ghoul wherever you need her. And sometimes the ghoul’s servitude is a good source of conflict, as when a ghoul has to figure out some way to accomplish a task without angering his master. But even when the regnant doesn’t have a direct role in a story, he should have some kind of presence — complicating things by sending the ghoul on minor tasks, restricting the hours the ghoul can act freely, demanding that the ghoul provide an accounting of his off-hours activities. Properly used, the ghoul’s regnant adds inconvenience, tension, complexity and sometimes danger to any endeavor in which the ghoul is involved.

Here are some ways that ghouls and regnant interact, with suggestions for how their relationship impacts the ghoul’s existence:

- **Command style.** How does the ghoul’s master issue his orders? A hands-on regnant might want to know where her ghoul is at almost all times. The character might need to be present when the vampire arises each evening. The regnant might require the character to report his whereabouts via phone every hour between sundown and sunup, and woe to the ghoul if he’s not where he’s supposed to be and the master finds out. Otherwise the regnant might be mysterious, rarely visiting the ghoul in person, preferring to issue commands through intermediaries, phone messages, talking ravens and other indirect means. The regnant might not seem to actively track the ghoul’s activities, but every time the ghoul strays from her boundaries, her master sends a warning to keep her on the right side of the line. Some regnants might switch from one extreme to the other, depending on how much they need the ghoul’s services on any given night.

Aside from mode of command, consider also the mood of command. You can have great fun playing the regnant, giving the ghoul’s player clues to the master’s state of mind by varying the tone used to issue orders. Does the regnant bark commands like a drill sergeant, reminding the thrall with each edict that he’s little more than a slave? Does the regnant talk like a lover, a parent or some twisted combination of the two? Perhaps the regnant follows the



“barking dogs don’t bite” pattern so that when he blusters and bellows, everything’s fine.

- **Duties.** What are the character’s primary responsibilities? If you’ve decided that the ghoul was chosen because of a specific or unusual skill, that’s likely to take up most of the ghoul’s time. Such duties might be mundane at first, even routine. A ghoul might have to spend three hours a day attending to his regnant’s financial investments or spend five nights a week playing piano at the master’s nightclub (or guarding the door in the back). But the pressures of vampiric unlife sooner or later result in the ghoul being trusted with other tasks. And some of them are likely to be dangerous, grotesque or just plain baffling. Instead of simply delivering packages to various seedy locations, a ghoul courier might be told to open up one of the boxes one night and bury the skull that’s inside it somewhere in the mayor’s back yard. As time passes, the ghoul’s assignments might raise increasing challenges to his moral code: rough up a street punk one week, vandalize a city councilman’s car the next, set a residence on fire the week after...

An alternative to gradually raising the stakes of a ghoul’s duties is to alternate mundane duties with tasks

that are degrading or distasteful. The ghoul might be required to clean the stable of his master’s favorite horse — using only his hands. She might be sent to represent the regnant at a formal banquet, where she’s ridiculed for her low breeding and lack of social graces. Some ghouls might be used to satisfy sexual fetishes of a regnant’s mortal guests or as a feeding source for Kindred visitors. In some cases these kinds of assignments are deliberately inflicted by the regnant out of sadism, or to remind the ghoul who’s in charge. In others, they demonstrate the regnant’s lack of regard for the thrall or general lack of humanity. Use the more extreme options sparingly. It’s not much of a fun game when your character is constantly abused and debased, but do remind the character from time to time that his life is not his own.

- **Reward and punishment.** Vitae and the withholding of the same are the ultimate incentives for a ghoul’s behavior (aside from the desire to please brought on by the Vinculum). But most Kindred use other techniques to visit swift pain or pleasure on their thralls, depending on the ghoul’s behavior and the master’s whims. What kind of treatment can your player’s character expect from the regnant? Ghouls



with a master who favors the stick more than the carrot will tend to be more desperate to complete their allotted tasks. Those who can expect lavish rewards for a well-done job might be more likely to show initiative and act on their master's behalf even when not ordered to do so. And there's nothing like a regnant who seems to dish out punishment at random to keep a ghoul on his toes.

Assuming the character is too young to worry about unnatural aging, she still craves Vitae to soothe her addiction, and she needs it to maintain the supernatural benefits it brings. But very few Kindred are generous with the Blood. It takes only one dose of Vitae per month to maintain a ghoul, so why treat

your ghoul more often than that? Give the character some access to Vitae, so that every story doesn't center on a quest for vampire blood, but scrounging for Vitae is part of a ghoul's lot, so you should make it scarce enough that she'll need to be cautious about wasting it.

A ghoul's regnant might feed the ghoul on a schedule based on the ghoul's duties. If the schedule is inflexible, the ghoul might sometimes come up dry and need to tough things out until the next feeding. Some vampires "refill" any Vitae expended by a ghoul acting under orders but won't feed a drop to the ghoul who comes home low on Vitae after getting in a bar fight on his own time. Others feed their ghoul if asked,



ROLEPLAYING THE VINCULUM

The Vinculum is a powerful connection between regnant and thrall, but it doesn't reduce a ghoul to the status of a mindless automaton. (Indeed, some ghouls might wish it did so they wouldn't have to contend with conflicts between their master's commands and their own morality and self interest.) The best way to think about the Vinculum is that it transforms the regnant into the most important, most loved being in the ghoul's life. Ultimately, it takes good roleplaying to act out the Vinculum in your game. To that end, here are some points for you and your players to keep in mind:

- **The regnant always gets the benefit of the doubt.** Sometimes the people we love act poorly, make unreasonable demands or inflict pain on us. But because we love them, we assume they have some reason for acting the way they do, even if it's one we don't understand. Ghouls who are ill treated will try to convince themselves that they deserve it, or they'll come up with some other excuse for a regnant's "eccentricities." They might hate what their regnant does, says or demands, but they still love the regnant.

- **Ghouls act on their regnant's behalf.** A ghoul doesn't have to be given specific orders to act in defense of her regnant or to advance her regnant's interests. If she hears of a threat or uncovers something that might be of use to her master, she should act just as she would for a parent or loved one. Sometimes ghouls even convince themselves that their regnants would be better off not knowing certain things. A ghoul might withhold information, for example, if he thinks his master would endanger himself by acting on it.

- **Love isn't always enough.** The Vinculum brings on love, or a perverted version of it, but that doesn't always mean obedience. Ghouls who are asked to perform distasteful, dangerous or difficult tasks might want to please their regnants. But at the same time, morality, disgust or fear might cause them to hesitate, act slowly or perform less effectively than the regnant desires. And it is possible for the ghoul to choose not to obey an order, or to act in a way that would bring displeasure from the master. Vampires know this, which is why few of them rely solely on the Vinculum to ensure obedience from their thrall. Lavish rewards and harsh punishments are part and parcel of most ghouls' lives, especially the latter.

Ghouls who disobey never do so casually or without significant mental anguish, even if disobedience allows them to avoid committing a heinous act. When your player wants his ghoul to commit an act of disobedience, challenge him to come up with a reason to betray the person he loves and adores more than anyone. In most such cases, you should pressure the player to come up with some way for the character to act on her misgivings without disobeying her regnant outright. Perhaps the ghoul follows the instructions to the letter while slightly altering their spirit: "eliminating" an innocent mortal by frightening him out of town instead of killing him. Perhaps the ghoul acts carelessly or clumsily, making sure that his attempt to firebomb a church is thwarted by the authorities. Or maybe the ghoul can come up with a cunning argument that will convince his master to try different tactics. He could even throw himself at his master's feet and beg that he not be given such a task.

As per **Vampire: The Requiem** (p. 162), if a completely blood-bound ghoul wishes to act in a way that might result in indirect harm to a regnant, the player must roll Resolve + Composure at a -3 penalty. Acting directly against the regnant imposes a -5 penalty. (In either case, dramatic failure precludes the character from attempting such actions again for a month.) But before any dice are thrown, challenge the player to rationalize why his character would take such drastic measures. Simply preserving one's own life or that of an innocent isn't enough, for isn't the regnant a better judge of who deserves to live or die than the ghoul? If you're convinced that the character has good reason to consider harming the one he loves above all others, allow the roll.

The Ghoul in Your Chronicle



but they aren't always around to take the request. Some ghouls might not realize that other vampires' blood can empower them, or they might consider feeding from other Kindred to be a betrayal of their master. Offering services to other vampires is an option for a hungry ghoul, though, if those services don't conflict with the wishes of one's regnant. Some ghouls are able to establish a network of neonate vampires who don't mind trading some Vitae for short-term assistance. An ally or childe of the regnant might feed the ghoul out of pity.

- **Lifestyle.** How does the ghoul balance her duties with her former life as a mortal? You could rule that the regnant takes the ghoul in and provides basics like food, shelter and clothing; but that removes significant roleplaying challenges from the game and waters down one of the big disadvantages of serving as a ghoul. Imagine the story possibilities for a character who must accompany a vampire to a crypt hidden in a sewer pipe just before dawn, then go to work and explain the strange scars, bruises and lingering odor of sewage to his fellow office workers. Or the ghoul who's attending his niece's birthday party, gets a knowing wink from one of the guests, then recognizes the stranger is a thrall of one of his regnant's enemies. The more you incorporate the character's personal, mundane life into the story, the more horror ensues when his ghoul activities start spilling into it.

On the other hand, the ghoul who depends on her regnant for material needs faces a different set of challenges. What happens when the master is displeased or simply forgets to attend to the care and feeding of his pet? A ghoul whose bank account becomes inaccessible, who's kicked out because this month's rent wasn't deposited or whose car or credit card are confiscated as stolen property can slide quickly into homelessness or incarceration. What a regnant gives, a regnant can easily take away.

Besides working out the details of the ghoul character's life, consider how the character relates to and interacts with other players' characters. There's no one right way to include a ghoul character in your chronicle. Here are some variations, and the challenges of each.

- **Ghouls and vampires.** The most obvious way for a ghoul to be introduced to a chronicle is to have the character work with or alongside a coterie of vampires. This scenario allows the characters to complement each others' strengths and weaknesses. The ghoul can help the Kindred by acting during daylight hours, while the vampires offer strength and protection to the ghoul. Neither needs to hide his or her true nature from the other. All the attitudes that ghoul and vampire allies have toward each other

make for some interesting roleplaying possibilities. (Neonates and new ghouls don't start out with preconceptions about each other, but they're bound to pick up on the attitudes expressed by their respective peers.)

To bring a ghoul character into a vampire coterie, consider making the ghoul a thrall of one of the vampire's sires. Doing so means that the vampire and his allies will have to be somewhat careful about heaping unwarranted abuse on the ghoul, since he's a valued possession of someone with authority and influence. In fact, it might be interesting if the sire in question is a bit more relaxed and forthright with the ghoul than with his own childe, since the ghoul, after all, won't go on to become a potential rival. A vampire might even find that his sire trusts his ghoul's word over his own childe's.

The ghoul's regnant needn't have a direct connection to the other players' characters. Perhaps the regnant is unaware of the characters' existence. They're just neonates, after all. The ghoul fell in with them because one of their goals happens to coincide with the ghoul's current mission. The ghoul and the vampires might achieve an uneasy alliance, knowing that the situation could change if the ghoul's regnant comes into conflict with the coterie, their sires or their peers. If you're running a prelude story, in which all the characters begin as mortals, perhaps one of them becomes a ghoul while the others are Embraced. True, the ghoul character is less powerful and is subject to another's will. But his situation is reversible (at least in theory), and he can walk in the sun. Will the other characters resent him, eventually turning against him in jealousy and mistrust? Or will he become their link to humanity, providing the group with a mortal point of view when they're tempted to indulge in unsavory acts?

The ghoul might be a thrall of one of the other characters, but that's not a scenario recommended for beginners. Making one player's character subservient to another requires that both players agree and can handle the situation maturely. It could be fun to play the sniveling minion of a creature of the night, but even experienced roleplayers become annoyed if their character is treated like dirt for the amusement of another player. You'll want to allow this option only if you're confident your players can stay true to their characters and won't let things degenerate.

- **Ghouls and mortals.** Not all World of Darkness games need to revolve around vampires. If you're running a mortal chronicle, either on its own or as a prelude to a game with supernatural protagonists, consider the possibilities of one of the mortals becoming a ghoul. How long before the mortal characters start

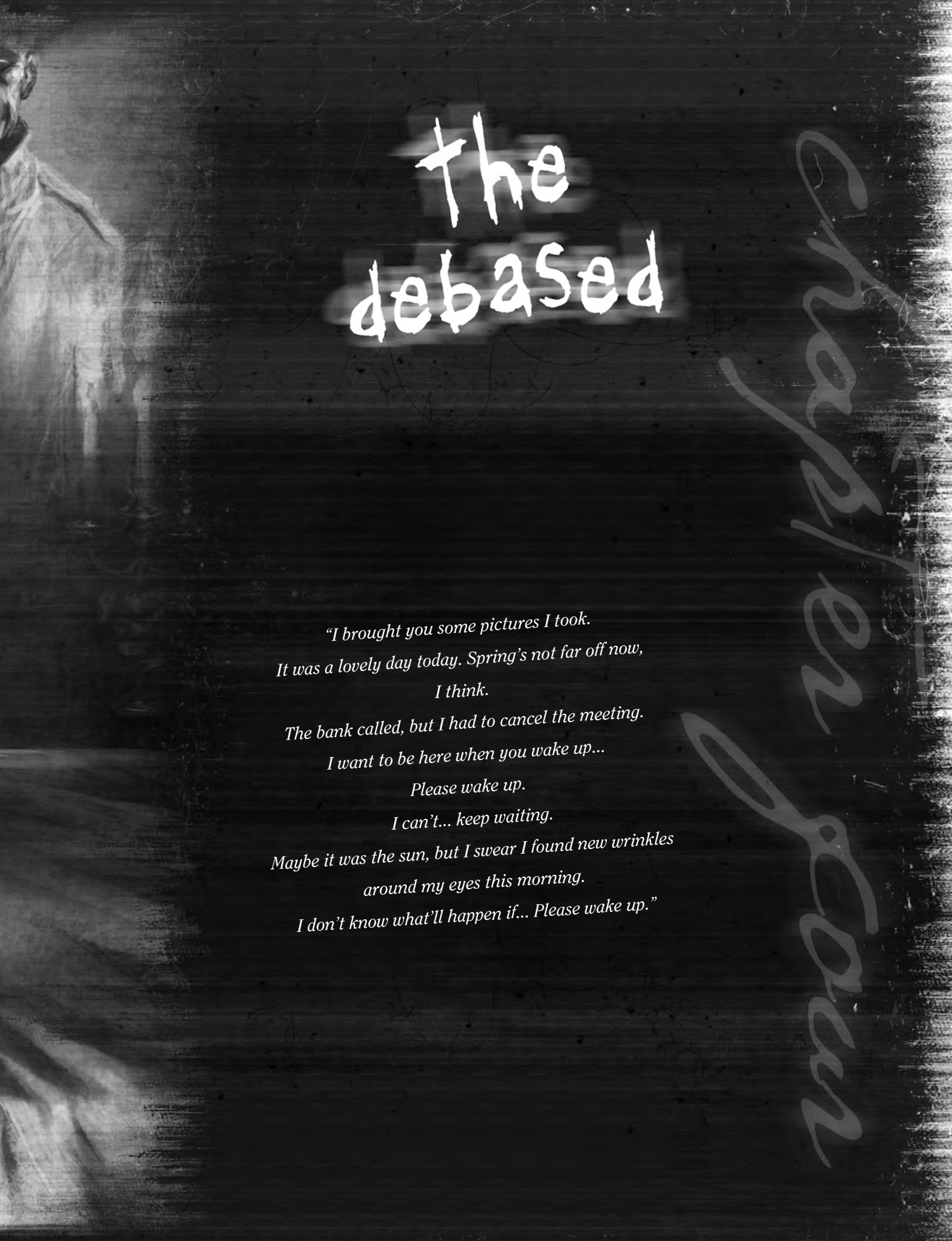
wondering about their comrade who's become so strong and tough? What happens when they find out the truth? Will they try to cure him of his apparent addiction? Can they ever trust him again? Will they consider him a monster that needs to be destroyed? You might even allow the ghoul player to conceal his character's true nature from the other players in the group, challenging them to deduce what's going on based on in-game events only.

- **The all-ghoul chronicle.** If all the characters in your chronicle are ghouls, some matters become a bit simpler. The characters' abilities are more evenly matched, and you don't have to worry about sending vampire players out of the room when you

need to run a daytime scene. The ghouls needn't hide their true natures from each other, as they would among mortals, and they needn't fear their colleagues attempting to feed on them. The group will still develop its share of conflict and tension. Any ghouls who have the same regnant are bound to view the others as rivals for their master's attention. Even if they are commanded to work together, they'll want to upstage each other and curry favor with their regnant. Ghouls who serve different masters need to be cautious about how much to trust another ghoul. They know all too well that an alliance, or even friendship, can't stand when the Vinculum demands otherwise.







the debased

*"I brought you some pictures I took.
It was a lovely day today. Spring's not far off now,
I think.
The bank called, but I had to cancel the meeting.
I want to be here when you wake up...
Please wake up.
I can't... keep waiting.
Maybe it was the sun, but I swear I found new wrinkles
around my eyes this morning.
I don't know what'll happen if... Please wake up."*

Chapter 10

*"Those who love God, and by Him are abandoned in the dark of night,
are guilty, because they are abandoned."*

—Pauline Réage, The Story of O

This chapter contains a wide variety of ghoulish characters to use in your chronicles. These characters might be useful as inspiration for creating ghoulish characters if your players wish to take on the roles of ghouls in your chronicle. They might also be useful as servants for vampire characters. For some of these characters, we have indicated what level of the Retainers Merit might represent them. No game mechanic exists to quantify exactly how many dots of Retainer translates into the traits of a ghoulish character, but the characters in this chapter should serve as a good yardstick.

Of course, the characters contained herein can also be used as antagonists for your characters, regardless of whether your troupe uses ghouls, vampires, mortals or even other supernatural beings. Remember that "antagonist" doesn't necessarily imply physical violence or even a directly opposed agenda. A ghoulish character serving his master might not bear the characters any ill will or even know they exist, but he might turn out to be the one thwarting their every move just the same. Most ghouls won't survive very long in combat with a single vampire, let alone a coterie. When considering these characters as antagonists, think *conflict over combat*.

Tim Michaels, The Abuser

Background: Tim Michaels wasn't anybody's idea of a prize catch. A high school dropout, he barely managed to acquire his GED, barely managed to survive a stint in the Army without a dishonorable discharge, barely managed to find a factory job and barely managed to scrape together enough money to buy a trailer. He met Lisa in a bar one night after work, and she was just drunk enough to fall for his line. Six months later, they were married.

Tim didn't know how to be a husband, though. He'd never had any real luck with relationships, but Lisa was so demure and so cooperative that he assumed she'd be that way forever. When he discovered that she had opinions and desires of her own, he didn't handle it well. Fortunately, as Lisa didn't have a job, she could stay inside until the bruises disappeared.

Tim never considered himself "abusive" or a "wife-beater"—those were titles for men on the daytime talk shows that his mother watched religiously. He considered himself a "tough husband" or a "real man." He knew enough not to beat his wife too seriously. He didn't *enjoy* it, he told himself, he just needed to remind Lisa of her place occasionally.

And then one night, a man knocked at their trailer door and asked to see Lisa. Tim wouldn't have let him in, and he isn't sure why he did. The man just seemed trustworthy somehow. The man and Lisa went into the bedroom for most of the night, while Tim sat on the couch trying to figure out why he wasn't angry or jealous. Shortly before sunset, the man staggered out, his chest covered in blood. When Tim rose to confront him, the skinny bastard knocked Tim out with one punch.

When he came to, Lisa was sitting on the floor next to him holding a razor blade. Before he could get his bearings, she slit open her hand and shoved it into his mouth. Tim recoiled, but the blood tasted... good.

The next few days were strange. Lisa was there with a smile on her face when Tim got home from work, but before he fell asleep, she slit her hand and fed him the blood. He didn't question it, not because he didn't realize how bizarre it was, but because he didn't know how to frame the question. He thought about hitting his wife again, but when he tried, his mind rebelled. As much as he wanted to, he couldn't bring himself to strike.

Tim has since learned that his wife is a vampire. He doesn't know the term "Kindred," and he doesn't know anything about clans, covenants or Disciplines. Lisa has taught him how to control the blood enough to heal



himself, but she refuses to show him more. Tim, as usual, doesn't question this, but the knowledge that his wife is part of something much larger than their marriage eats at him. She leaves at night and sometimes doesn't return home for days at a time. When she does come home, he tries to hit her... but can never manage to do it.

Tim is a time bomb. He knows he's being used, but he doesn't understand how or to what purpose. He knows that what happened to his wife didn't happen at random, but he doesn't know *why* it happened. He can't hit Lisa anymore — the Vinculum has seen to that — but he is one inch away from finding someone else to hit. Tim has also been considering following Lisa on one of her trips, just to find out what's going on.

Description: Tim Michaels is burly man in his early 30s. His hair is thinning, though he doggedly refuses to do anything but comb it forward. He favors T-shirts (bought in bulk) and blue jeans, but he wears an expensive aviator jacket that he oils and maintains lovingly. Since becoming a ghoul, Tim has started to drool uncontrollably, so he keeps a handkerchief in his pocket to mop his mouth.

Storytelling Hints: Tim is a somewhat sad case. He didn't know much about the world *before* the supernatural intruded, and he's even more confused now that his wife is a vampire. He doesn't respond to mystery with curiosity, but with anger and violence. Yet the thing that confuses him the most (Lisa) is the one thing he can't ignore or beat. As such, Tim is a good object lesson for the characters in what happens when a normal person is introduced to the Requiem and then allowed to fester (especially useful if the characters are considering making ghouls of their own families).

As Storyteller, it's left to you to decide Lisa's clan and covenant, but more importantly, who earmarked her for the Embrace and why. This information might be either the critical mystery of your story or just background noise, depending on your preference. Either way, if the characters get near Lisa, they might find her husband lurking nearby, a seething cauldron of hatred and fear.

Tim is approximately a three-dot Retainer. He is loyal and combat capable, but his temper and his limited intelligence and initiative are serious liabilities.

Apparent Age: Early 30s

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Crafts (Leather) 1, Investigation 1, Politics 1, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Punches) 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Intimidation (Seething Rage) 3, Streetwise 2

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Fighting Style: Boxing 4, Regnant 2

Willpower: 6

Morality: 6

Virtue: Temperance. While Tim spends most of his time angry, he doesn't lose his temper often. His time in the military taught him good self-discipline, and he doesn't like to be out of control, so he rarely drinks to excess.

Vice: Wrath. Tim reacts to uncertainty and mystery with anger. What he doesn't understand frightens and enrages him. Since he's not very bright, this means that a great deal of the world makes him angry.

Health: 8

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

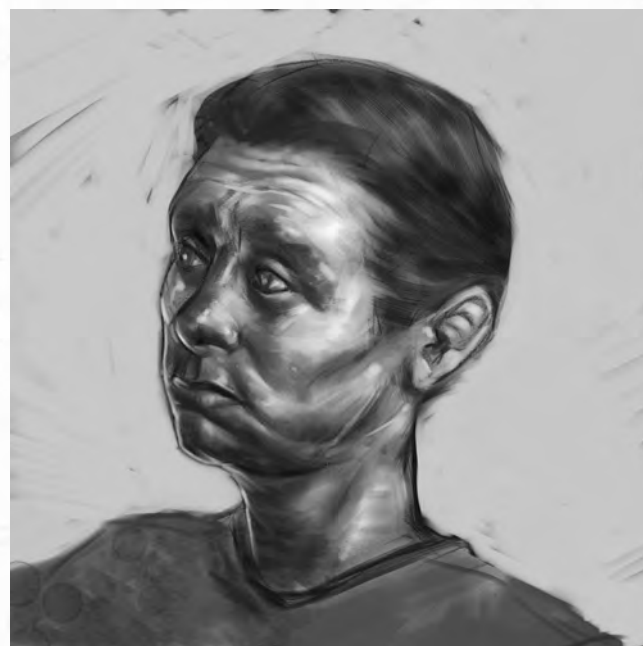
Speed: 10

Disciplines: Two dots from the physical Disciplines, depending on Lisa's clan

Masque, The Prince's Double

Background: Masque doesn't remember his name or origins. He doesn't remember when or why the Prince of the city first put him under the Vinculum. He doesn't recall if he has any living family or any mortal acquaintances. In fact, he only thinks of himself as mortal at all if he is forced to do so.

Masque is the thrall of a paranoid Prince. This Prince doesn't wish to become a recluse, but he also doesn't trust other Kindred, even at Elysium. When making public appearances, the Prince uses Masque as a body double. Over the years, the Prince has taught his ghoul the basic arts of most of the Disciplines that he knows and instructed Masque in the basic truths of the Requiem — including enough about the Prince's covenant to be able to maintain the charade. On some occasions, the Prince even equips Masque with an ear piece and feeds him information while remaining safely hidden.



For his part, Masque has progressed well beyond any feelings of resentment for his regnant. Indeed, he thinks of himself as the Prince's reflection or shadow, an extension of the Prince rather than a free-thinking entity. Over time, the Vinculum has evolved from simple loyalty and love into a perversion of Masque's own identity. When the Prince is not around, Masque believes, on some level, that he is the Prince. When the Prince is near, Masque fades into the background, waiting for a command. During this time, Masque does not acknowledge anyone else unless he is ordered to do so by the Prince.

While he certainly doesn't have the breadth of knowledge that the Prince does, Masque knows more about the Requiem than most neonates do. Most of his knowledge is practical rather than theological or philosophical. For instance, he might know that the Ordo Dracul is interested in scholarly pursuits and that the covenant behaves like a secret society as opposed to a religion, but he knows nothing about the Order's belief that Dracula was cursed directly by God. He knows enough about the Kindred of the city to be dangerous to them, however, if he could be tricked into revealing what he knows.

Description: Masque is nondescript. He blends effortlessly into a crowd when he's not impersonating the Prince. He bears enough of a resemblance to the Prince to facilitate passing as him (which was probably the reason Masque was made a ghoul), but without the clothes and the attitude inherent to playing the role, Masque is just a man on the street.

Storytelling Hints: Masque is a body double, meant as bait for those who would harm a powerful and paranoid vampire. You might even decide that he is not the first Masque, but one of a series of unfortunate ghouls to a vampire with many enemies. (If this is the case, the Prince might have a reputation as having nine lives or being immune to fire.) If the characters wish to destroy the Prince, they might fall victim to the deception, at least initially.

On the other hand, suppose that someone *does* destroy the real Prince, or that he slips into torpor or otherwise vanishes? If the Primogen or other powerful figures in the city are aware of Masque and the role he plays, it would be a simple matter to make the ghoul into a puppet Prince. He'd have to be slightly more reclusive, of course (because every time he appears in public is another chance for a perceptive vampire to figure out the ruse), but he would make for a superb shadow ruler of the city's Kindred.

We've left the Prince's clan and covenant unstated on purpose. The "Prince" could be a Sanctified Bishop, an Ordo Dracul Kogaion or a Carthian Prefect as easily as an Invictus Prince. The Prince would ideally be a Mekhet or Nosferatu, as both of those clans know Obfuscate as a clan Discipline — which is essential for the ruse as both the Prince and the ghoul need *not* to trigger the Predator's Taint.

Masque is a five-dot Retainer. His derangement limits his utility somewhat, but his knowledge of the Requiem and his Disciplines more than compensate.

Apparent Age: Depends on the Prince

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Investigation 2, Occult

(Kindred) 4, Politics (Kindred) 3

Physical Skills: Stealth 3, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Empathy (Playing off Expectations) 3, Expression 2, Socialize 2

Merits: Eidetic Memory, Unobtrusive, Regnant 5, Source Sympathy

Willpower: 5

Morality: 4

Virtue: Prudence. Masque cannot afford to take chances. A cut on his finger would blow his cover (and probably inflict irreparable damage on his psyche). He has the patience and perception that only the truly delusional possess.

Vice: Envy. Deep down, Masque wants the power that the Prince holds. He transfers these feelings to other Kindred, usually the Prince's rivals.

Health: 7

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Disciplines: Celerity 1, Obfuscate 3, Vigor 1, plus any others the Storyteller requires

Derangements: Identity Erasure (severe; see p. 87)

Rose Tremens, The Multiple Suicide

Background: Rose Tremens wants to die. She's tried to die over a dozen times but just doesn't seem to be able to make it stick. She blames her father for all of the things that have gone wrong in her life, including her failure to end her own life.

Carl Tremens was a sick individual before the Embrace. His wife was domineering and frigid, and during their 12 years of marriage before cancer took her life, Carl lived in a state of barely controlled sexual repression. He stared hungrily at any woman who crossed his path but was far too afraid of his wife to do anything beyond that. She died about the same time that his oldest daughter, Vanessa, reached puberty. Coping with the mixture of grief and joy at being a widower (much more socially acceptable than being a divorcée) and not at all psychologically whole, Carl began molesting Vanessa. She kept this secret for years, even from her younger sister, Rose. On her 18th birthday, when her father informed her that she would attend a local college so she could live at home, Vanessa hanged herself in the basement.



Carl once again found himself alone and repressed, but he had promised himself he would never touch Rose *that way*. That vow lasted roughly three months after Vanessa's death. Rose, like her sister, was so terrified and brutalized that she couldn't bring herself to report her loathsome father, but she also began to see why Vanessa had ended her own life. Rose developed a fixation with suicide and read books upon books on the subject. When her 18th birthday came, she promised herself that the next time her father raped her, she would take her own life. But Carl didn't come home that night.

Three days later, Rose reported him missing. The next day, the police found his car parked near an adult bookstore known locally as a popular place to cruise for sex. The only evidence in the car was a splash of blood, the same type as Carl's. Rose was investigated, of course, but never seriously considered as a suspect. The police felt, correctly, that she didn't have the capacity to hurt a fly.

In her heart of hearts, Rose slowly came to believe that Carl was dead. She had to wait until the police declared him legally dead before she could sell the house or do anything else of the sort, but more important than that was the psychological benefit it granted her. She slowly began to let go of her suicidal fantasies and even began attending college, working toward a psychology degree.

And then, on Rose's 20th birthday, Carl returned. Rose and her new boyfriend had returned to the house and had just reached the bedroom, in various stages of undress, when he appeared. He snapped Rose's boyfriend's neck with one hand, then sank long fangs into his neck and drained his blood. Rose passed out, however, when he looked her in the eye and she saw the lust therein.

When she awoke, he forced her to drink his blood, among other things. He kept her prisoner for two more nights in order to cement the Vinculum, and then explained what

had happened. Rose remembers very little of this conversation. She was just waiting for an opportunity to get away and die. In the weeks that followed, she finally found the strength and the means to try... but failed. The first time, she followed her sister's lead and attempted to hang herself. Just before she blacked out, however, her survival instinct kicked in and she snapped the cord with strength she never knew she had. The second time, she cut her wrists... and watched in horror as the wounds closed. The third time, she leapt in front of a car, but the leap carried her all the way across the street, out of harm's way.

There have been other attempts, but something always goes wrong at the last minute. Rose's ghoul nature makes her resilient, and the Vinculum manifests as a sick loyalty to her father that thwarts her own deepest desire: to die, and thus break his heart again. Carl is blissfully unaware of his daughter's plight, but he gives her blood at least four times a week. He uses her to maintain his house, pay the bills and give him a place to stay during the day as well as in more depraved capacities.

Rose understands that her father is a vampire, but her notions of what that means are very much influenced by popular culture. She believes that she is *unable* to die until he permits it, but she is ever hopeful that someday, she can find some way to end her miserable existence. Fate seems to have other plans, however.

Description: Rose is a pretty young woman of about 20 years. She is slender and well proportioned and has fair skin and blond hair, but her expression is disconcerting. She always looks as though she is about to burst into tears. She still attends college (though on a part time basis) and dresses like any other coed.

Storytelling Hints: Rose knows that other vampires exist, but she doesn't know anything about them. If asked, she wouldn't be able to say what her father's clan is, but if they were listed for her, she knows the word "Daeva." Carl belongs to the Ordo Dracul, but Rose is too far removed from Kindred society to know anything about the covenants. Her father only made her a ghoul to facilitate his own lusts and to provide himself a safe haven. If her desire to die ever outweighs the Vinculum, however, she might burn the house down with them both inside.

If Rose were to meet other vampires, she would probably inquire as to whether or not death is even possible for her. If another vampire makes a good impression on her and speaks to her kindly, she might even ask for his help in ending her life. Embracing Rose or killing Carl might provide enough of a shock to cure this obsession, or at least make it shift focus. The Ordo Dracul, in particular, would be very interested in what would happen to someone with such a strong suicidal urge if she were made a vampire, given the survival impulse that comes with the undead state.

Rose is a two-dot Retainer. She is intelligent, but only knowledgeable about suicide, and is so damaged psychologically that she is unreliable as a ghoul.

Apparent Age: 20

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 1

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Suicide) 2, Computer 2, Investigation 1, Occult 1, Science (Psychology) 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Running) 2, Drive 1, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Regnant 4, Striking Looks 1

Willpower: 4

Morality: 7

Virtue: Charity. Rose is a very giving person, because she doesn't expect to be around long enough to make hoarding anything worthwhile. She really does have a generous streak, but her mental problems have made it fester into a martyr complex.

Vice: Pride. The only reason Rose hasn't put a gun in her mouth is that she can't stand the notion of mutilating herself too badly. She is proud of her looks and the work she has put into maintaining them.

Health: 8

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Disciplines: Celerity 1, Vigor 1

Ambrose Heath, The Medical Examiner

Background: Ambrose Heath, or "Amby" to his friends and compatriots, likes to say that he's a policeman's lynchpin. After all, without him to say how a person died, or indeed, that a person is officially dead, many investigations would never get off the ground. He also jokes to his cop friends that he at least had the brains to stay out of a profession where people shoot at you regularly, but in which he still gets to play with dead bodies. His cop friends tolerate these jokes because Amby gets it. No matter how weird the guy is, he understands that there's shit out there that you just don't talk about without at least four empty shot glasses in front of you. Amby can put that stuff in context, make it make sense.

That, of course, is what the vampires pay Amby to do, and he isn't paid in money.

Ambrose first ran across the Kindred fresh out of college. He'd originally planned on being a doctor, but he didn't respond well to pressure. He likes solving puzzles and being thorough, and is fascinated by human anatomy but would never want a job where lives are on the line. Being an ME was a perfect fit, then. His first week on the job, the body he was examining sat up, grabbed him by the neck for a second, and then went back to being "dead." Ambrose had seen cadaveric spasms before, but had never heard of anything that deliberate. He decided to investigate further, and the vampire he'd been examining decided to simply reveal

himself rather than kill the young ME. He put Amby under the blood bond and used him as a convenient way to escape enemies and occasionally get access to a ready (if disgusting) blood supply — the recently dead.

This all might have gone on for years had Amby's regnant not been destroyed in an accidental fire one evening. Amby didn't miss the Vinculum (he was never comfortable with the way it made him feel toward his regnant), but he did miss the blood. Fortunately, he had enough wherewithal to ask the right questions of cops and other examiners and found some of the city's Kindred quickly. He offered his services in the same capacities as for his regnant. He could make sure a Kindred "corpse" was removed from a crime scene quickly, and with a little help could even mask the vampire's identity, supply a replacement corpse (always plenty of John Does around) and provide a quick snack of blood. All he asks in return is a bit of Vitae for himself. He keeps careful track of the Kindred from whom he's fed, and accepts money or favors from repeat customers.

In recent months, the Kindred of the city have given Amby another task. Cops, paramedics and other people who work night shifts often come into contact with the supernatural. Amby, as a man of science and a generally amiable guy, makes a perfect front man for the supernatural. A dead guy gets up and runs away? Must not have been dead. There's a condition that weakens the heartbeat so you can't always find a pulse. Guy had fangs? Here, I'll email you something a dentist friend sent me on a genetic tooth condition. A girl burned in sunlight? Nah, probably just too much hairspray and carelessness with a cigarette. Happens more often than you'd think.

Of course, in the process of "debunking" the supernatural, Amby has learned an awful lot about it. He probably knows more about what lurks in the city's alleys and sewers than most vampires — not that he's ever made a list or a database or anything. And if he *had* made



such a list, he certainly wouldn't show it to someone. Not without some really potent persuasion.

Description: Amby is about 35, with short brown hair and big, goofy smile. He works nights most of the time (that's when the murders happen, after all) but seems more alert and in better health than most graveyard shifters. He listens to jazz on a walkman when he works on a body, as it helps him concentrate.

Storytelling Hints: Amby is a good example of an independent ghoul who doesn't bear the Kindred at large any ill will. Of course, this is because he was well treated and given a good deal of autonomy when he *did* have a regnant. Despite his fairly wide base of practical occult knowledge, he hasn't met many other ghouls and doesn't know how bad their lives usually are. If he did, he'd probably be compelled to do something about it — and he knows which buildings one could torch on what nights in order to reduce the city's undead population, if one were so inclined.

Apparent Age: Early 30s

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 2, Medicine (Pathology) 3, Occult 3, Science (Biology) 3

Physical Skills: Drive 2, Firearms (Pistol) 2, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Expression (Quick Thinking) 3, Persuasion (Reassuring) 3, Streetwise (Kindred) 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Contacts (Kindred, Medical, Police) 3, Danger Sense, Status (Medical Examiner) 2

Willpower: 5

Morality: 6

Virtue: Faith. Amby has seen enough of the supernatural to know that there is a greater world than most people see. This higher truth scares the hell out of him, of course, but he knows it's there and believes that he leads a charmed life. (He is, after all, swimming with sharks on a regular basis.)

Vice: Sloth. Amby avoided becoming a doctor because he didn't feel he could handle the responsibility. He now devotes a good part of his life to helping others blind themselves to the truths of the world, and he isn't motivated enough to capitalize on his knowledge or his position to any great degree.

Health: 7

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Celerity 1, Obfuscate 1, Resilience 1, Vigor 1

Peter Hamlin, the Judas Goat

Background: A "Judas goat" is an animal kept in a slaughterhouse to lead the other animals to the knives. The Judas goat is unharmed, but the animals following

it are slaughtered. Over time, perhaps, the animal wonders what the bellows and screams behind it signify.

Peter Hamlin knows those screams and what they mean. He has been a Judas goat, of a sort, for nearly a decade.

A petty thief and occasional numbers runner, Pete Hamlin was a well-known figure in the rough parts of the city. He was widely regarded as harmless, though. Popular wisdom had it that he refused to carry even a pocket-knife, so great was his desire to remain unthreatening. Popular wisdom also had it that he had a yellow streak down his back a mile wide and that anyone's grandmother could knock him down in one punch.

One night, Pete was working the lock of a local liquor store. A power outage had felled the alarm system, so he decided to take luck as it came. He was so intent on his work that he didn't hear the vampire creep up behind him. All he felt was a clammy hand over his mouth, pulling him around to face the owner. That owner was hideous. Its face was horribly lopsided and its eyes small and pinkish, boring into Peter's head like maggots. The face leered and Peter saw huge fangs dangling there. He passed out at that point and woke in an alleyway not from the liquor store.

The creature explained that it needed food, but that it was too obviously monstrous to hunt. The city had become too bright, it said, and it needed a lure. Pete stammered, "Bait?" The Nosferatu shook its head and reminded him that if bait does its job, it dies. If *Pete* did his job, he wouldn't die. A second look at those fangs convinced him.

Peter hates being a ghoul. Looking at his horrible regnant and feeling admiration makes him feel dirty, to say nothing of the fact that he now convinces people to follow him to their deaths. He recognizes that without the Vitae, he'd never be able to muster the strength to do his job, but he misses his old life. He has no idea how many vampires might stalk his city, and the knowledge



that they are as widespread as they are would probably kill the poor man with terror. He only knows that if his master fails to eat, it'll be him, the Judas goat, under the metaphorical knives.

Description: Peter is a thin, nervous-looking black man in his late 20s. He can never seem to style his hair in any attractive manner and usually just wears a hat. He is careful to avoid dressing in any way that might convey a gang affiliation.

Storytelling Hints: Peter is an unfortunate case. He's not a moral man by any means, but he certainly doesn't want to be doing what he does. He's a good character to introduce if the troupe's characters are mortal (he might even figure into the prelude of a Nosferatu character), as he can lead them straight to a dangerous predator. His regnant probably doesn't hold any real power in the city... but then, he might well be a Sheriff or Hound. Peter has no idea how vampire society works, he just knows that his job is to lead people into the dark and then get out of the way.

Peter is a four-dot Retainer. His only major drawback is his cowardice, but fear doesn't cripple as much as motivate him.

Apparent Age: Late 20s

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Occult 2, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Sprinting) 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 4, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Persuasion (Quick Cons) 3, Streetwise (Gangs) 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Barfly, Contacts (Gangs, Organized Crime, Homeless, Police) 4, Regnant 2

Willpower: 4

Morality: 4

Virtue: Prudence. What others call "cowardice," Pete tends to think of as "I'm still alive, aren't I?" He knows full well that one good decision can mean life or death on the streets, and he has absolutely no qualms about letting discretion be the better part of valor, even if that means running like a punk.

Vice: Greed. Peter's regnant allows the young man to strip the bodies of his victims for anything of value they have. Pete doesn't like to admit it, but that takes the sting away to an uncomfortable degree.

Health: 6

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Disciplines: Obfuscate 1, Vigor 1

Ginny Allan, The Werewolf

Background: Ginny is cursed. She was bitten by a wolf a few months ago, and strange things have been happening

to her since then. She has the strangest hunger for flesh and blood. Her libido, always active, has increased to insatiability. And she has recurring dreams in which Satan comes to her in a wolf-skin and makes her his lover, giving her blood to make her strong.

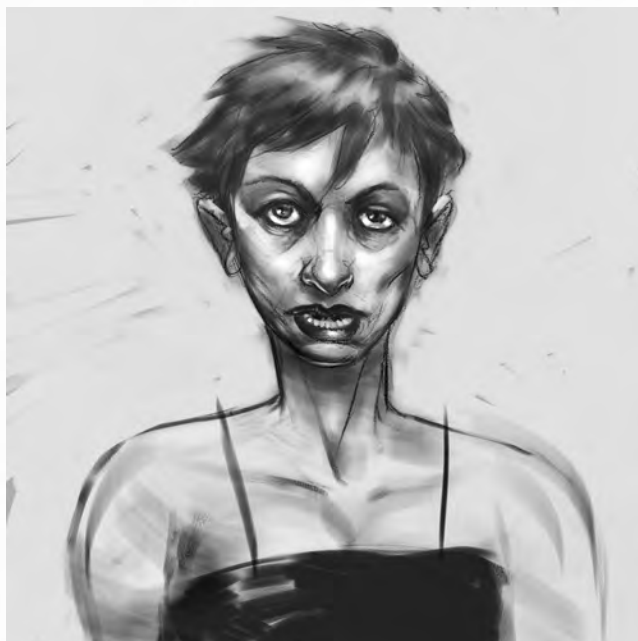
Ginny is deluded, of course, but she's more correct than it might appear. She *was* bitten by a wolf, but her lupine assailant wasn't actually a werewolf. It was a Gangrel in wolf form, on the edge of hunger frenzy. The vampire drained enough of Ginny's blood to make her sick and disoriented, but he managed to stop himself before he killed her. As he watched her stagger away, he felt a pang of guilt and made a mental note to check up on her in a few nights, just to make sure she was all right.

When he found a few nights later crouched in front of her refrigerator sucking on a piece of raw steak, he knew that he had damaged the young girl's psyche terribly. He tried to explain to her what had happened but couldn't get through to her. Ginny saw him as Satan, come to make her his bride. And, little by little, the vampire came to enjoy this turn of events.

The Gangrel in question was relatively young and constantly disillusioned with the vampiric state. He had attempted to find answers to his spiritual questions in both the Lancea Sanctum and the Ordo Dracul, but he had not been fully admitted into either covenant. Wandering without purpose, he found a young woman who so fervently believed in the supernatural that all it took was one bite and little blood loss to convince her she was a werewolf. He decided that he would play the role for her, at least for a while. He comes to her at least once a week, lies with her and feeds her his Vitae. She believes that she changes shape and runs with him as a wolf, but in fact her "shapeshifting" occurs only in her mind. Like most delusional people, she has constructed a complicated set of rules concerning why she can't shapeshift anytime she wishes, but as she grows more powerful as a ghoul, she sees her "dark power" increasing. Perhaps, one night, she *will* master shapeshifting, and then she can run alongside her master, hunting together.

Until then, though, she poses a danger to everyone around her. Ginny is only 17 and is a senior in high school. She has already been suspended twice since the incident, once for starting a fight, during which she bit another girl on the arm, and once for having sex at school. She is in therapy but is smart enough to tell her therapist convincing lies. Meanwhile, she confesses her true feelings to her regnant when he visits. In the interest of the Masquerade, he attempts to steer her toward keeping her power under control, but everything he says (indeed, everything anyone says) filters through her delusions until she hears only what she needs to hear. "Don't start fights at school" becomes "Choose your prey more carefully."

Ginny has been considering sneaking out at night to hunt. She knows she isn't strong enough yet to attack



grown men, but that's fine. There are plenty of children in her neighborhood.

Description: Ginny is a rather plain girl of 17. She has brown hair cropped short and dull green eyes. Since the "curse" set in, she tends to paw at people while she talks to them, pace when she is bored and pant when she's angry or aroused. She also dresses more revealingly since the incident, claiming (to her regnant) that his blood warms her without the need for much clothing.

Storytelling Hints: In general, vampires know very little about werewolves. The two species don't cross paths often, and a great deal of misunderstanding based on legends and popular culture separates the two. Ginny has never met a vampire, as far as she knows, but they would fit nicely into her derangement and she wouldn't feel any need to disguise what she is (or at least, what she believes herself to be) to one of the Kindred. As such, a coterie might believe it has found a young werewolf eager to exchange information, when in fact it has found only an insane young ghoul.

Or, if you'd really like to pull a bait-and-switch with your players, what if Ginny really *is* a werewolf? Werewolves aren't created through an infectious bite in the World of Darkness, but for Ginny the bite and the blood might stimulate her lycanthrope heritage into activation. This, of course, would prove a great surprise for her regnant and might lead to a rash of werewolf activity in the area as Ginny's people try to track her down.

Ginny is a two-dot Retainer. Her occult knowledge is extensive, but it's nothing that a mundane (and sane) researcher couldn't unearth.

Apparent Age: Late teens

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 2, Crafts 1, Medicine 1, Occult (Werewolf Legends) 3, Politics 1, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Bites) 1, Drive 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Intimidation (Creepy) 2, Socialize 1

Merits: Contacts (High School) 1, Regnant 4, Sexualized

Willpower: 4

Morality: 6

Virtue: Faith. Ginny believes in Satan and his love for her unwaveringly. Any rational action she undertakes is because she believes it will please him.

Vice: Lust. Sexually active since age 13, Ginny has an unhealthy obsession with carnality. She uses sex as a way to gain power over others, to feel validated and simply to pass the time until her master comes for her again.

Health: 8

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Disciplines: Protean 2, Resilience 1

Derangement: Schizophrenia (see p. 99 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*)

Miracle Edwards, The Runaway

Background: When Miracle was old enough to ask about her name, her family told her that it was because she wasn't expected to live more than a few days past birth. They said they were afraid to name her until it was clear she was going to live. This is all true, but the reason that her life expectancy was so poor wasn't because of any normal medical condition. Miracle was the child of two ghouls, brought together by their respective sires for the purpose of starting a new ghoul family.

Miracle lived a fairly normal life up until her 15th year. Of course, due to her status as a ghoul child, she had only aged to about 10, and she had received all of her schooling at home. Her parents had been quite strict about her manners and her behavior, lest a careless turn of phrase arouse suspicion. She had very little experience with the world, and on the rare occasions her family did take her out, people just assumed her to be an especially precocious child. When she was 15, however, her parents' regnants, a Daeva and a Ventrue, paid her a visit and explained to her what she would be doing with her life. She sat, horrified, as they spelled out her entire life to her. She would be allowed to age until her body reached age 20, and then she would be placed under the blood to the vampires, their blood mingling so that she would be held in Vinculum to both of them. Then, after she had completed all of the schooling they required for her, she would be expected to breed with other ghouls, creating a new family of servants for her masters. As consolation, she was told, she would be allowed one month per year to do with as she pleased.

To Miracle's credit, she did not outwardly panic, nor did she respond with enthusiasm (which would have made her would-be regnants suspicious). Instead, she became pensive, and asked for some time to think it over, which they granted. In the weeks that followed, she formulated her plan.

Realizing that she had perhaps 15 years until the onset of slavery, Miracle began preparing. Knowing that her parents and their masters would watch her for any signs of rebellion, she meticulously learned as much about finance, banking, computers and bureaucracy as she could. It was slow going, of course, since she had to make it appear necessary for schoolwork — and her parents were still schooling her. Still, over the next decade she grew proficient with computers and their utility in concealing money, until she turned 24. Her body appeared only 18, but that was enough. She emptied her dummy accounts and fled.

During her preparations for escape, Miracle had never come up with a plan or a route, nor had she made any friends or contacts. She feared for their safety if she were found out, and her reclusive life hadn't prepared her well to make friends. One cold November night, she fled into the world with a bag full of money and no idea where she was going except *away* from the horror that was to be her life.

Description: Miracle is an attractive girl, apparently just over 18. She has high cheekbones and bright, blue eyes, but she also inherited her father's weak chin. She typically braids her long hair or piles it under a hat when she wants to avoid notice. Miracle buys clothes from thrift stores, wears them as long as possible and then ditches them and buys more.

Storytelling Hints: Miracle is smart and resourceful but naïve and desperate. She recognizes that she won't get far without help, and as much as she hates to admit it, other vampires might be helpful in slowing her "masters" down.



She is aware that her heritage makes her susceptible to Kindred Disciplines, so she guards her thoughts and emotions carefully around them. She takes solace in the fact that if another vampire kills her, her troubles are not only over, but the regnants would probably avenge her.

We've left it to the Storyteller to determine the covenants and power levels of her regnants, as well as how far from home Miracle currently is. If the regnants have a great deal of clout within their covenant(s) and clans, they can more easily follow her. If they are relative neonates, they can't expect much in the way of immunity but can often keep below the radar as they hunt their prize.

Miracle would make a three- or four-dot Retainer merely for her expertise as a financier, but taking her as an employee or servant would require dealing with her pursuers.

Apparent Age: Late teens

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer (Finances) 3, Investigation 2, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Larceny 1, Stealth 1, Weaponry (Fencing) 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 2, Persuasion (Playing on Sympathy) 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Finesse, Languages (French, Spanish, Italian) 3

Willpower: 5

Morality: 6

Virtue: Justice. Miracle fled because what was happening to her was *wrong*. She knew, deep down, that her parents and their regnants were evil, and she refuses to let herself sink into that mire.

Vice: Pride. In the face of how wrong and debased her family is, Miracle has an elevated sense of her own self-righteousness. Because she is coming from a situation so fraught with immorality, she considers herself above any wrongdoing.

Health: 7

Initiative: 5 (7 with Fast Reflexes)

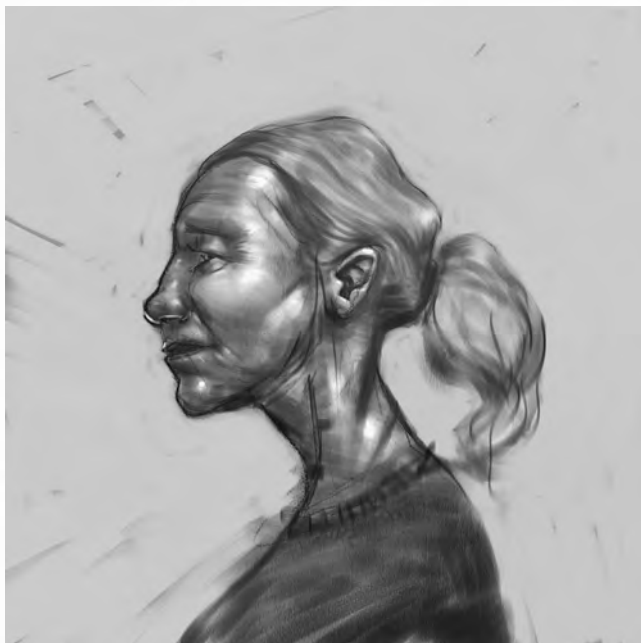
Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Disciplines: Dominate 1, Resilience 1, Vigor 1

Siobhan, the Bat Lady

Background: Siobhan Connelly isn't a goth trying to show off her connection to "creatures of the night" or a vampire fanatic. She's just a woman with a background in zoology and a predilection for flying insectivores. She started studying bats when she was still in high school, earned a Ph.D. in Zoology for her work with bats, then spent years traveling the world studying the animals. After a long and fruitful career, she retired to her hometown, bought a house with a large chunk of forested land, and set up several bat nurseries.



She had been retired for only three months when she was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. Never married and with no surviving family, she returned home from the doctor's office that night and wandered in her woods, numb and in shock, watching the bats swoop and dive.

As she watched, she saw a flock of bats all heading in the same direction, almost as though they were being led or called. Intrigued, as she had never seen this behavior before, Siobhan followed the bats and found them circling a woman in a clearing. The woman was pale and luminous, young-looking but with an obvious aura of power. Siobhan stepped into the clearing and the woman looked up at her, obviously startled. As she did, the bats took to the skies, freed from whatever power had held them there.

The woman snarled at Siobhan, baring her teeth, but Siobhan had already had one great shock that day. She stood her ground, and the vampire — a Ventrue of the Circle of the Crone — decided to speak with the brave mortal. After their conversation, however, the vampire realized that in Siobhan was an important and untapped resource, and Siobhan discovered that there was a way to avoid the agonizing death that awaited her. The Ventrue did not wish to Embrace Siobhan, but the zoologist didn't wish to give up her daylight existence anyway. So the Kindred made Siobhan another offer — become a ghoul and help her raise a flock of bats, bound to the vampire's blood and willing to serve.

Over the ensuing years, Siobhan has taken to her new life well. She realizes that someday she will have to move, but she wasn't elderly when she retired and she still has a few years left of people simply marveling over how well she wears her age. In the meantime, she acts as a votary (see p. 28). The local Acolytes perform rituals on her land, and her regnant, now a high-ranking member of the Circle, calls down the bats bound with her Vitae. But Siobhan's regnant admits that without the Bat Lady, as

the local kids call her, she wouldn't be able to command and make use of the animals nearly as effectively.

Description: Siobhan's hair was once a coppery red, but it has turned gray with age. She has fair skin, worn from years of world travel. Siobhan almost always wears blue jeans and heavy shirts, and she ties her hair back with a faded green bandana. When on her homestead, she often has a bat sleeping in her shirt pocket.

Storytelling Hints: Siobhan is a rarity, a ghoul who is content with her lot. What she doesn't know, of course, is that Ventrue tend to go mad as they get older, and her oh-so-understanding regnant is only one bad night away from megalomania, violent rage or worse. The Vinculum is strong, but Siobhan is an intelligent, mature and willful woman, and her love for bats rivals the blood bond. If her regnant ever became abusive, she might send a bat out to find help in the person of another vampire.

While the bats that Siobhan tends aren't very large or at all dangerous to humans, she has had years to practice learning their "language" through the Animalism Discipline and spends the first few hours of every day conversing with the animals, learning the news of the area. She passes most of this information along to her regnant, but doesn't always consider certain tidbits to be significant.

Siobhan is a five-dot Retainer.

Apparent Age: Late 50s

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 2, Occult 2, Science (Zoology, Bats) 4

Physical Skills: Drive (Off-Road) 2, Firearms 3, Stealth 3, Survival 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Bats) 4, Expression (Lectures) 2, Intimidation 2, Socialize 1

Merits: Contacts (Scientific, Academic, Bat Enthusiasts) 3, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Fame 2, Regnant 3, Resources 2

Willpower: 8

Morality: 6

Virtue: Hope. Siobhan is used to trying to convince others. She has lobbied for endangered species in several countries and refuses to allow other activists to give up in the face of corporate pressure.

Vice: Gluttony. Being an animal rights activist never deterred Siobhan from enjoying good food. While her active lifestyle keeps the weight off and her status as a ghoul keeps her healthy, she is definitely an Epicurean. This attitude has, of course, transferred to Vitae as well as food.

Health: 8

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Disciplines: Animalism 3, Resilience 1



creating ghoul families

*"How did it start? I can't say.
The way it always starts, I guess.
Somebody wants something.
My great-grandfather didn't want
to leave his wife behind — didn't want to die on her.
She died in 1921, though. And here I am,
looking that bastard in the eye every night.
Living his mistake."*

aspen

*The relatives are leaning over, staring expectantly.
They moisten their lips with their tongues. I can feel
them urging me on. I hold the baby in the air.
Heaps of broken bottles glitter in the sun.*
—Mark Strand, “The Dreadful Has Already Happened”

Most ghouls walk a solitary road, but some manage to defy the properties of vampiric Vitae and spawn more of their kind. The ghouls families that result live under a strange hybrid of familial ties and supernatural taint, and each has something unique to add to your chronicle. This chapter offers guidelines to assist you in creating a ghouls family to use in your stories. You’ll also want to familiarize yourself with the material written about ghouls families in Chapters One and Two of this book.

The amount of detail you put into your ghouls family is up to you. The more background you develop, the more thought you put into the family’s history and the more time you take to flesh out the whys and wherefores of the family’s existence, the more you’ll be able to do with it in your chronicle. Not only will the ghouls family seem more substantial to your players, you’ll have a rich source of ideas for use beyond the initial story. Maybe the circumstances of the family’s origin don’t come up the first time some members meet the player’s characters, but maybe a later story requires the characters to revisit the family and piece together its history. Perhaps the player’s characters don’t end up meeting all the extant family members right away, but they turn up every so often, harassing the characters as they attempt to take care of unfinished business.

Story Functions

Like “standard” ghouls, ghouls who are part of a family or bloodline can serve as antagonists or allies for characters in a chronicle. They can also be used as characters for players. Most of what’s been written about singular ghouls in Chapter Three of this book applies to ghouls families as well, but the ghouls family phenomenon has a few twists of its own.

- **Ghouls families are horrific.** It’s one thing for individuals to give up their freedom in exchange for the dubious pleasures of Vitae, but imagine being born into such a family and finding out that not only are you expected to be subservient to an undead monster, your own nature compels you to do so. Encountering or interacting with a ghouls family can bring players and their characters face to face with supernatural oppression that’s been going on for generations, perhaps centuries. It can give them a sense of

how powerful and insidious the dark forces in their world really are, and how difficult it is to stand against them.

- **Ghouls families function as groups.** For various reasons, most ghouls don’t work well together unless a common regnant strictly controls them. They tend to distrust each others’ motives, knowing how easily the Vinculum can turn friend to foe. Yet, as twisted or dysfunctional as they are, ghouls families are still families. Their members tend to watch each others’ backs, cover each others’ tracks and share resources. Families who are isolated, inbred or deeply entrenched in their territories can be obsessive and fanatical in their drive to protect their regnants and their family lines. This makes them dangerous antagonists. A coterie that attacks or abuses a single ghouls might find itself ambushed the next day by a pack of relatives who know enough about vampire capabilities and weaknesses to be a serious threat. On the other hand, if a ghouls family is willing to exchange favors, a smart character could benefit from a whole network of helpers.

- **Ghouls families can be somewhat independent.** Although ghouls in a family are born to servitude, they often have more freedom than most single ghouls do. It’s often a matter of logistics. Creating and maintaining a thrall is a significant investment of Willpower and Vitae, so most Kindred keep just a few ghouls at once and pay fairly close attention to their ghouls’ activities. A ghouls family doesn’t need regular feedings to maintain its ghouls status or unnatural youth though. At any given time, a few thralls might not need to be actively “working” for their master. Instead, they can interact with your characters, perhaps keeping their true nature hidden until you’re ready to reveal it.

Ghouls families are also better equipped than their singular counterparts to survive the destruction or absence of their regnant and make their way as independents. They don’t revert to their chronological age in the absence of Vitae, and they age more slowly than ordinary humans in any case. And unlike single ghouls, they have a built-in network of allies to help them obtain the Vitae they crave. Some ghouls families go to ground when it becomes clear that their master will be gone for a prolonged period, scraping

by as best they can until her return. Others take the initiative and try to better their situation, using their abilities and skills to seek out Vitae and resources. They might try to take advantage of a vampire who comes their way or form an uneasy alliance with characters who can help them achieve their goals.

• **Ghoul families can provide a large cast of characters.** It's a challenge to design a story around a single ghoulish (or, indeed, any single character), but you can surround your players' characters with ghoulish families quite easily. They're the inbred hicks who dwell in shacks far from the city, the obsessively normal suburbanites who share blood in their family room every Sunday, the bed and breakfast run by blank-faced eccentrics who seem strangely unfazed by the characters' odd hours. And remember ghoulish families need not always seem odd to the casual observer. They can be quite adept at covering each others' indiscretions and blending in with their surroundings. So your troupe's characters might not realize they're surrounded by ghouls until it's too late.

Creating a Ghoul Family

Chapter One discusses what is necessary, from a setting perspective, for ghoulish families to even occur. Here, we pay more attention to what's required in your chronicle to introduce a band of these miscreants.

Origins

You may decide that details of your ghoulish family's origin are lost to history, but it's worth at least thinking about the circumstances of the family's creation. If their roots stretch back a century or more, the family is likely to possess some archaic habits or affectations, especially if some members have been around since the beginning. Some families might be almost obsessed with recapturing the way of life they knew as free mortals, living in a home with minimal or no electricity. Their style of dress or speech might be peppered with anachronisms, especially when they're out of the public view. They might hold old-fashioned ideas about manners, honor or style that make it difficult for the characters to relate or interact with them.

Think about the family's regnant. Why did he need a family of ghouls in the first place? The answer suggests the family's activities, specialties and the resources and Disciplines it favors. Suppose the master is a vampire with great wealth and an aristocratic background. She might have created or adapted the ghoulish family to be a source of perpetual house servants who are loyal, discreet and capable of handling occasional messy tasks. A regnant who was being harassed by multiple enemies when the ghoulish family came into her influence might have used it to establish a safe haven where she could lick her wounds and plan her retaliation. In the first case, perhaps most of the ghouls are well-trained servitors

placed in the homes of the rich and powerful to spy for their regnant. Their veneer of propriety and discretion hides great skill in observation and espionage. In the second case, descendants of the original ghouls might be organized into small survivalist communities. They live off the land and wait patiently for the return of a master some can barely recall.

The clan and covenant of the regnant can also affect the circumstances of the family's origin and impact its history. The prior example of ghoulish survivalists would fit well with a Gangrel master, perhaps one who's been somewhat successful at establishing a haven outside city limits. A regnant active in the Ordo Dracul might use a ghoulish family as a renewable resource to help with investigations into the nature of Vitae. In that case, family members who become educated and demonstrate their intelligence would be able to help plan and execute the experiments, while ghouls who fall out of favor find themselves the subjects of various laboratory unpleasantness. (See Chapter One for useful information about the attitudes of vampire clans and covenants toward ghouls.)

Next, consider the family's ghoulish founder. By definition, the founder is a woman, the one who first bore a child despite her ghoulish nature. In some families, however, an early male ancestor might be considered the founder of the line, perhaps because he survived longer or made a stronger impression on later generations than that first mother. Of course, unlike mortal clans, it's quite possible for the ancient progenitor of a ghoulish family to still be around. Is she a venerated figure who rules the family with an iron fist (perhaps even more feared than a shadowy or often absent regnant)? A wise sage who's preserved the family through centuries of depredations and supernatural horrors? Or has age and senility left her a fragile, weakened husk, kept in a hidden room and tended more out of tradition and pity than respect? Characters might find that the founder is a dangerous enemy, a resourceful ally or an insane wild card.

Whether or not the founder still exists, the family might still tell stories about how she came to be enthralled. Did she promise servitude to a vampire in exchange for protection, not realizing that her future children and grandchildren would suffer under the same yoke? Did a vampire somehow sense that she had the potential to bear children while enthralled, and seek her out? Some ghoulish families might worship the founder as one who elevated them to a state beyond normal mortality; others might curse her as the cause of their bondage. Understanding the family's relationship with the founding member could be key to understanding the family itself. A group that re-creates its founder's first taste of Vitae in the form of a mystery play is likely to go above and beyond the call of duty to protect its

way of life. A clan whose members spit at the mention of the founder's name might be inclined to overlook some actions taken by the players' characters against the regnant (though overt hostility will be viewed through the influence of the Vinculum).

GHoul VARIATIONS

Using a ghoul family in your chronicle is an opportunity to try some variations on the usual ghoul template. After all, ghoul families are much rarer than their non-familial counterparts, and nobody's really sure what causes the phenomenon. So who's to say that some families don't diverge from the characteristics of a typical ghoul? Also, ghoul families who've been in isolation for long periods of time, perhaps without direction of a regnant, might develop physical or mental oddities such as unusual derangements, superstitions or traditions. Altering the ghoul rules a bit has the added advantage of keeping your players off balance, making it harder for them to guess what exactly their characters are facing. Here are some possibilities:

- **A vampiric family.** What if a ghoul bloodline is more sensitive to Vitae than most? The ghouls develop more vampiric characteristics than other ghouls, which yields both benefits and disadvantages. Perhaps these ghouls can learn Disciplines more easily, granting them advanced

abilities or an unusually wide variety of Disciplines, but direct sunlight is painful to them. Or maybe they can actually restore some of their expended Vitae by taking blood from mortals, but it takes an entire body's worth of blood consumed over several days to restore a single Vitae. And, lacking fangs or other vampire enhancements, taking the blood they need is a messy and complicated affair.

- **A hive mind.** In some ghoul families, a combination of inbreeding and blood bonding could knit the individuals together into a single, like-minded unit. Perhaps family members can communicate with each other telepathically, sending images, emotions and commands if not complex messages. Or perhaps their unity goes further, and the entire family seems to operate with a single mind. What one knows, they all know; what one sees, they all see.

- **A family of animals.** Is it possible for animal ghouls to reproduce? Normally, no, but you might decide to create an exception. Perhaps a resourceful vampire developed a method or lucked into a formula that allows ghoul animals to breed. Such creatures might gain more benefits from Vitae than typical animal ghouls. Imagine a brood of dogs who've developed a rudimentary intelligence, maybe that of an eight-year-old child, and access to a few Disciplines beyond the three physical ones. Add that to their natural cunning and instincts, and you've created a surprising and dangerous take on the ghoul phenomenon.





Parameters

Once you know where your ghoulish family came from, it's time to paint a fuller picture of what the group looks like today. Here are some parameters to consider:

- **State of the union.** Where is your ghoulish family in its development? Is it on the rise, reaping significant rewards from a regnant who's a power player in Kindred society? Or is it past its prime, with numbers dwindling and resources stretched to the limit? A powerful family is less inclined to ally with your players' characters without significant recompense, but ghouls in dire straits are more likely to view the characters as a much-needed source of Vitae. A family on hard times might be willing to negotiate for favors but could turn quickly on a vampire who lets her guard down. Or you could decide that a family with power and influence is ambitious and eager to amass more for itself and its regnant. That might motivate the family to try to separate the characters from their resources, turn the characters over to their enemies, blackmail them or assassinate them on someone's behalf. Or consider an old, declining family that desires an end to its unnatural state. Unable to deliberately abandon its regnant, the family manipulates the characters into being the instruments of its deliverance.

- **Size.** Certain practical considerations limit the size of the family. Ghoulish family members needn't receive Vitae as frequently as standard ghouls, since they don't revert to their true age in its absence. They do lose access to Disciplines and special abilities, though, which could limit their effectiveness at the tasks given to them by their master. And a blood-addicted ghoulish who's been denied his fix is likely to develop derangements, or at least be distracted by unquenchable cravings. Family ghouls need at least occasional Vitae feedings. Ghouls also require food, shelter and some measure of mortal comforts, even if they can fend for themselves to some degree. So even though a ghoulish family could provide one regnant with dozens of thralls, only vampires with plenty of resources find it worth the expense to maintain a large family of ghouls. Less well-off Kindred insist that a ghoulish family keep its numbers down, or they simply won't provide food, shelter, money or Vitae to more than a handful of family members.

- **Wealth and resources.** Few ghoulish families can count on their regnant to provide them with more than their basic needs. Even a wealthy master who staffs his manor with ghoulish servants might house the family in quarters that are little more than stables. And why not, if you needn't worry about your staff quitting or complaining to the authorities? Many regnants, however, allow ghouls to keep whatever financial or other gains they can acquire on their own. Some even encourage their thralls to show some

initiative, since their success means they draw less from the regnant's pocket. Of course, the master probably feels free to help himself to whatever funds the ghouls manage to scabble together, keeping the family's financial status significantly below his own.

But ghouls needn't always be poor, and you can catch players off guard by playing against the stereotype. Perhaps this family is a group of corporate raiders who manage their regnant's business empire and keep a sizable chunk of the profits for themselves. Or maybe the ghouls come from the upper crust of their society, and their regnant finds it useful to keep her thralls among the bluebloods.

If your ghoulish family is well off, where does the money come from? Some families, their morality already eroded by decades of servitude to a vampire without conscience, turn to various criminal ventures to support themselves. Some run schemes that feed off the master's enterprises. If a regnant makes money selling stolen goods, for example, the ghouls might make some cash on the side by finding buyers for items that are too mundane to attract the regnant's usual clients. Other families have some success selling their services to organized crime, using Disciplines and ghoulish hardiness to intimidate or fight off mortal authorities and rivals. Such schemes are small scale and local, since no regnant appreciates unwanted attention coming his way.

Ghouls can also develop connections and resources independent of their regnant's assets, especially if that regnant is no longer around. These represent opportunities to help or hinder your players' characters in unexpected ways. A family with some criminal activities might be able to call on help from the rough side of town in a pinch. Ghouls who operate a small zoo could dispose of some corpses that would draw unwanted attention to the characters. You might place a family of ghouls with an academic bent in a university setting, where it conducts discreet research for Kindred clients in exchange for Vitae. Some families might serve in the military or with the police, using their status to protect their regnant or harass her enemies.

- **Disciplines.** Access to vampiric abilities is one of the hallmarks of existence as a ghoulish. But ghouls have little say in which Disciplines their master passes on to them. Physical Disciplines are the most common among ghouls, as they're the most intuitive and reflexive of the Disciplines. When other types of Disciplines appear in a family, it's usually because the regnant had a specific need for servants who could, say, commune with animals or read auras. High Discipline levels are rare, and ghouls pay an extra cost for Disciplines outside of their regnant's clan, but the family might include an exceptional individual who was favored with advanced training.



• **Structure.** Ordinary families can contain dysfunction, rivalry and resentment, and the same is true of ghoulish families. Members of the family might be more loyal to each other than two non-related ghouls under the same regnant, but that doesn't mean that rivalries or out-and-out feuds don't occur. Younger members might resent the heavy hand of older ghouls and see them as unwanted barriers between themselves and the master. Older ghouls might feel out of place in the modern world and resent the habits and attitudes of the youngsters. Perhaps one branch of the family feels another is unjustly favored by the regnant. Maybe some family members struggle to resist the domination of the master and secretly plot to escape. Characters who can identify potential fault lines between family members might be able to exploit them to their advantage, provided they choose the winning side.

Ghoul families need not always follow a literal family model, with a patriarch or matriarch doling out orders and the youngest members holding the least power or authority. Some ghoulish "families" are organized in other ways, making it more difficult for their enemies to realize what they're up against. Imagine a convent established by a vampire who wanted to establish a foothold in a remote location. He installs the female members of a ghoulish family as nuns. A century later, the cloistered sisters wait patiently for their regnant to awaken from torpor, doing what they must to keep anyone from finding out what lies sleeping beneath their chapel. Or perhaps an eccentric regnant prefers to keep most of his ghouls from aging into adulthood, at least physically. A cadre of seeming preschool children who have the intelligence and experience of 80-year-olds presents all sorts of possibilities for espionage, theft or assassination.

Master of the House

The ghoulish family's relationship to its regnant is a defining characteristic of the family's existence. The family's very survival might hinge on its usefulness to the master. Should the regnant choose, he can inflict any number of punishments. Yet the ties of need can pull both ways. Some vampires rely so heavily on their ghouls that they'd find it difficult to get along without them. One family's regnant might run his ghouls into the ground, figuring that another generation will step up and take their place, while another regnant is surprisingly lenient when the ghouls displease her, knowing that the family makes her unlife much easier in the long run. Some Kindred even use ghoulish families as substitutes for the familial network they had in life. They might create roles for themselves as anything from a founding father to a grandmother to a rich uncle. Eventually most Kindred come to realize that Vinculum-inspired love and adoration is hollow and unnatural. A regnant who showers her "family" with gifts and

money and insists on being referred to as "Auntie," though, might reveal that she's relatively new to her Requiem (or, conversely, that her Requiem has taken a toll on her sanity).

ON THEIR OWN

A ghoulish family that no longer has a regnant might be trapped in a downward spiral, unable to replace the resources that their master no longer provides. Or they might use what's been left behind to build a new future for themselves. Here are some ways that ghoulish families might respond to the loss of their regnant:

• **Hunker down.** Some families go into survival mode when the master is gone. This is especially true for ghouls who are tightly controlled and not used to acting independently, and for ghouls whose regnant is expected to return one night. Families in this state put their energy into fulfilling their basic needs: food, shelter, self-defense. They limit their contact with the outside world but try to harvest Vitae if an opportunity presents itself — if a Kindred neonate wanders into their territory for instance. Such a family might be desperately afraid of falling under the sway of another master and might go to extreme lengths to protect its privacy and keep local Kindred from becoming aware of its existence.

• **Regroup.** Families who are resourceful and adaptable, or who have managed to gain control of some of their former master's assets, might see their independent status as a chance to advance their own interests. They might negotiate with the supernatural entities around them such as individual vampires, covenants, ghouls and other ghoulish families to perform services in exchange for Vitae or other forms of payment. They might also actively and aggressively hunt vampires to replenish their Vitae levels, sometimes serving as assassins at the same time.

• **Self destruct.** When the absolute control of the master is gone, the resulting power vacuum might lead to a struggle for control of the family. If the regnant didn't have a favored thrall who acted as her voice to the rest of the group, there might be no clear candidate to rule in her absence. Ghoul family infighting can be nasty and bloody, as the ghouls channel decades of resentment and shame into their first chance at grasping real power. Yet sometimes no clear victory is achieved, resulting in a feud between ghouls that continues for years. In their desperation, ghouls might seek to hire or coerce your players' characters into helping their faction come out on top. Or the mayhem might cause collateral damage that draws the characters into the fight.

How does the regnant issue orders to the family? A typical scenario is for one or two favored family members to be granted the "privilege" of communing regularly with

the regnant. Those trusted servants then disseminate the regnant's orders to the rest of the group. In such a situation, characters who co-opt or win over one or two family members can gain influence over the entire clan. Some regnants prefer to maintain a mysterious distance between themselves and their ghouls, making contact through whispers, voices and seeming dreams. In that case, the family might not even realize the true nature of the master, considering her to be an angel, ancestor spirit or dark god. Others find it difficult to gain information about the regnant, let alone confront her directly. On the other hand, if they can demonstrate that the ghouls' conception of their master is different from reality, they might be able to weaken her hold on them.

Consider how much of a presence the master has in the lives of the thralls. If the family is a small one, it might be possible for the members to receive attention from their regnant on a nightly or almost-nightly basis. A CEO who uses his ghouls to staff his company probably wants to monitor their activities closely, for example. That means the ghouls could be a source of information about their master's comings and goings. A trusted few might even be aware of his plans and his relationships to other Kindred (though they won't part with such information easily).

Regular contact with the regnant can have different effects on the loyalty of the ghouls. A master with a relatively high Humanity, who treats his ghouls fairly, doesn't abuse them and rewards them personally for their services, might be adored with cult-like affection. A regnant who is monstrous in appearance and behavior might raise conflicts in the minds of her thralls every time she appears. Ghouls who are under the influence of the Vinculum maintain a core loyalty in any case (see "Roleplaying the Vinculum," p. 141). But those whose master is as frightening as she is beloved are more likely to struggle against the blood bond when circumstances allow.

In a Family Way

Ghoul families usually have little to cling to. Their freedom, their property and their dignity are in the hands of their regnant. As a result, some hold even tighter to the one thing they do have: the family line. Perpetuating the family can become a near obsession, even though it means dooming more generations to servitude. Ghoul families might put more energy toward establishing the next generation than their regnant requires. Indeed, some ghoul families keep their breeding activities as hidden from their master as possible, knowing that he might become concerned if the family grows too large. Ghouls can be fanatical in their attempts to do whatever is necessary to allow the family line to continue.

Although family ghouls age slowly, or not at all when taking Vitae, their lives are hard and dangerous. Homicide, suicide, madness and accidental death reduce their numbers, so ghoul families must have a strategy for producing new members if they're going to last beyond a generation or two. Those who rely on kidnapping or other coercive techniques need some way of hiding their activities, especially since no regnant puts up with undue attention. This could mean the family is so isolated that it stays under the radar of local authorities: the backwoods clan that raids local towns for breeding stock every 50 years or so, for example. Or perhaps the family is incredibly careful and meticulous when acquiring new mates, taking pains to select victims who won't be missed, spending time and money to cover its tracks, and so forth. Some families have influence that keeps law enforcement or other investigators off their trail. In any case, families that breed successfully possess formidable skills or resources to bring to bear on anyone who tries to thwart continuation of their lines.

Many ghoul families are woefully unaware of the most basic facts of their own existence, but some have managed to glean knowledge that increases their chances of breeding successfully. So it's possible for a family of ghouls to know that a union between two of their kind has a greater chance of proving fruitful. The two options for acting on this knowledge are breeding within the family or finding another ghoul family with which to breed. Each presents challenges. Ghouls who opt for inbreeding typically develop a family culture that touts the "purity" of their bloodline and the dangers of mixing it with the inferior blood of outsiders. Family members are taught from childhood that marriage to a cousin, sibling or other relative is normal and desirable. The mutations and birth defects that inevitably result from repeated inbreeding are overlooked. Progeny with extreme deformities may be kept hidden or even killed.

Breeding between ghoul families presents its own difficulties. It's the rare family that's even aware that other ghoul families exist. Contact between ghoul families is even less common. Where exceptions occur, it's likely the result of steps taken by the regnant of one or both families. A vampire who intended to breed his thralls and sell them to other Kindred might have formed an alliance with a like-minded peer, establishing connections between the two ghoul families that persist even in the absence of one or both masters. A regnant might have loaned out one of his ghouls to an ally; when the ghoul returns, she brings stories of another family of thralls that wishes to establish ties with her own. Ghoul families might have met as enemies, combating each other without knowing the real reasons their regnants clashed. Perhaps the families' enmity continues to this day, but they make an un-



easy truce when it's time to add to the gene pool. Or their feud might continue, with each side raiding the other for breeding stock as needed.

Paying the Price

No family endures the rigors of ghoulish existence without physical or psychological scars. Some ghoulish families are burdened by guilt over atrocities they've committed at the behest of their master or to ensure their own survival. Many have developed distorted worldviews to help them come to grips with the horrors they've experienced. Some carry disfigurements as a result of inbreeding, poverty, supernatural abuse or other traumas. When designing your ghoulish family, think about what its unnatural state of existence has done to it. Here are some possibilities:

- **Physical abnormalities.** Some or all family members might carry specific physical defects or unusual traits. If a family is closely inbred, defects tend to be more severe with each generation: a missing finger or malformed ear for the grandparents, a withered hand or foot for their children, missing or extra (nonfunctional) limbs among the grandchildren. But the effects of inbreeding needn't be so obvious or extreme. Subtler physical oddities can actually be more disturbing or eerie. By the time your players' characters see a fourth person in town who's missing a left eye, they should wonder what it means.

Once they realize that it's a common trait among the ghouls who have been harassing them, they'll never trust anyone wearing sunglasses.

It's not just inbreeding that engenders physical freakiness in ghoulish families. Perhaps the same phenomenon that allows the family to breed also marks them with specific bodily traits. They might all carry the same spider-shaped birthmark that their founding mother had. Or maybe the cumulative effect of feeding on their master's Vitae has imprinted the family line with some of his characteristics. They might bear lesser versions of the disfigurements carried by their Nosferatu regnant, or possess scars that mimic a fire-induced injury suffered long ago by the master. Some families might have strange traits that defy explanation: the women always conceive twins, but one is always stillborn. The children's hair changes to pure white when they reach their 13th year. Family members emit a faint odor of rotting meat, cast doubled shadows or speak with odd squeaks or hums beneath their voices.

- **Delusions and derangements.** It should come as no surprise that ghoulish families exhibit a high incidence of mental illness and outright insanity. Ghoulish psychology is covered in Chapter One of this book. Members of ghoulish families experience many of the same challenges to their psyche and humanity as single

ghouls. What makes it a family phenomenon is the recurrence of specific psychological abnormalities among family members and across generations. In some groups, the family's beliefs and traditions shape a ghoul's derangement in certain directions. If a family member is taught as a child that her regnant is always watching her and can whisper his thoughts into her head, and has a few real experiences that seem to demonstrate that it's true, she'll come to believe it. Eventually she might actually hear her master's voice whenever she's tempted to stray.

Some derangements seem to run in the family, and they shape the family's beliefs and activities rather than the other way around. A family without a consistent source of Vitae might develop elaborate blood-sharing rituals to help endure the throes of blood addiction. They might become obsessed with taking blood from each other or ordinary mortals. A group with a high incidence of megalomania might convene family gatherings where would-be leaders fight each other for status and authority. A family might have a well-fortified basement, where those who succumb to fugue states or uncontrollable rage can be kept until they're fit to rejoin their relatives (or are needed for tasks that a ghoul who's relatively sane wouldn't attempt).

- **Vampiric affectations.** Some families develop physical traits that echo those of vampires. Others seem to have absorbed the behavior patterns of the Kindred that rule them. Perhaps the regnant once imposed unnatural behaviors on the family members, or maybe they emulated their regnant out of worship or fear. Whatever the reason, strange vampire-like habits are now as natural to the family as sitting down to Sunday dinner. A group under the domination of a Mekhet might keep its house dark and shadowed even during the day. Some families might avoid mirrors, cameras or fire. A family might enact its own versions of Crúac or Theban Sorcery rituals their members have glimpsed (though such rites contain no power).

- **Social enmity.** A few ghoul families are quite adept at seeming normal, and most can pass as such if they limit their contact with ordinary mortals. Some, however, become marked as pariahs, eccentrics, degenerates or freaks by other members of their community. Depending on their behavior and the frequency of their interaction with the neighbors, they might be feared, shunned or hated. Local restaurants refuse to serve them, their children are tormented at school, the police look the other way if a family member is caught alone and assaulted by a group of neighborhood vigilantes. Ghoul families won't respond directly to such persecution, for fear of drawing more attention to themselves and their master. They'll take revenge in indirect ways — a ransacked house here, a missing child there. Some victims will suspect the family's involvement, raising the levels of tension and revulsion.

Putting it All Together

As you work out the details of your ghoul family, keep in mind the strengths and weaknesses of your players' characters, as well as the playing styles and preferences of your players. That helps you design a ghoul family that's an effective Storytelling tool. If your players have a tendency to fight first and ask questions later, you might want to come up with ghoul family antagonists who are tough, clever and numerous, challenging the players to use more than brute force to overcome them. Or maybe the family has skills and inclinations that the characters don't, forcing them to come up with some way to bargain or ally with the ghouls. If your players like stories of much pathos and character interaction, you might develop a family of ghouls who are cruelly used by their regnant and seem to want freedom, even though the Vinculum prevents them from articulating their angst. What will it take for the characters to try to right the situation... and how can they do it?

When designing a ghoul family, don't just assign random characteristics and quirks because they seem spooky or dramatic. The family's history, the identity of their regnant, their physical or psychological burdens, their current status, should all fit together as parts of a coherent story.

For example, suppose you've decided to set a family of ghouls on a small island off the coast of a larger city. It's a spot that's isolated, but relatively close to urban areas: a perfect haven for a vampire willing to expend a bit of effort getting to and from his feeding ground. You decide that the ghoul family once operated the lighthouse on the island, but since it was decommissioned decades ago, few folks on the mainland even realize anyone's still living there.

Since we've placed the family in a rural area, it doesn't have any difficulties with neighbors. Yet a century or more of isolation has produced physical and mental abnormalities. About a third of the group suffers from muteness. Family lore suggests that the founder, the daughter of the original lighthouse keeper, went mute upon the birth of her first child. Now those who display this affliction are considered especially close to the founder and are treated with deference and respect. The family has created its own sign language that allows its non-speaking members to communicate. These details make family members stand out when they're away from home. They also give the family an advantageous communication method and hint at the group's origin story.

The family's regnant is a Gangrel mercenary who uses the island as his primary haven. He favors the ghouls who most please him with Vitae, wanting them to compete with each other and so weed out any weaklings. But sometimes he treats the family to extra Vi-

tae by bringing a crippled enemy to the island and setting the ghouls loose. Aside from that, he expects the ghouls to fend for themselves however they can. The family has come to regard the master as a kind of personification of the darker side of nature. Like the tide and the storms, the regnant can't be resisted or bargained with, or even understood. The best the ghouls can hope for is to avoid his wrath and hope to earn his favor.

Some of the feral nature of their Gangrel regnant seems to have rubbed off on the family, and family members spend weeks at a time roaming the island's wilderness, living almost like animals. Everyone in the group is intimately familiar with every inch of the island, which gives them a tremendous advantage in dealing with hostile visitors. The family's primary duties are to keep strangers from discovering their master's haven, to protect the island from any Kindred or supernatural incursions, and to eliminate the remains of any victims their regnant brings back from the mainland. Occasionally the regnant brings a few ghouls with him to perform tasks in the city. The ghouls become pathologically edgy and agitated when off their island, however, especially

in an urban environment, so such missions rarely last longer than a few days. If the players' characters come into conflict with the group, their chances of success are greater if they can challenge them away from their home turf.

These details suggest others, and make certain choices less appropriate. As a rural, isolated, primitive group that's not particularly social, this family isn't likely to be wealthy. Nor would we expect them to know very much about other ghoul families, Kindred society or the modern world. With a physically limiting territory and a regnant who expects them to be almost self-sufficient, they're likely a small group no attempts to breed until they lose one of their number. Not that you couldn't make them wealthy, numerous and well connected if you like, but you'd need to come up with reasons for such unexpected traits. Otherwise your players might start wondering how such a family could exist, instead of trying to understand or overcome them. And once the players think of your ghoul family as something you invented, instead of an entity with which they need to interact, your story grinds to a crashing halt.





