

Chapter Three: Vampires and Familiars

Vampires are Real

You make assumptions about the world, about the general *shape* of it. Animals, for example. You never really think about it, but you figure you know all the big land animals, right? Oh, sure, not every particular *species* of musk ox or wild cat, but if you've seen a jaguar and a tiger and a lion, there's no *real* surprise to be had from a puma or lynx or even a cheetah.

I somehow managed to make it to the ripe old age of 28 without ever seeing or even hearing of an okapi, until one day I found myself at the San Diego zoo, walked up to the okapi enclosure, and... well, if you know what an okapi is, you're laughing. If not, pull a quick image search. It was, very briefly, like stepping off the curb of reality. Had the universe somehow made a clerical error with a zebra and a giraffe? Had the San Diego zoo hired Dr. Frankenstein to run its breeding program? But then I found the little plaque giving the animal a name and explaining where it came from, and that feeling of wobbly unreality gelled into an amusing anecdote. Turns out there was a big animal I missed, that's all.

It's a bit like that on the night when you go from *knowing* that vampires aren't real to seeing the fangs slide out from where there *absolutely definitely can't be any fangs*, but once things calm down and you're somehow still alive, the world doesn't gently resume its former shape. It feels cold now, brittle, like a frozen lake late in winter that might drop out from under you any time.

Vampires aren't real: you stacked twenty years, thirty years, forty years of life on top of that assumption. But there are the fangs: maybe in your friend's neck, maybe a stranger's, maybe, oh God, they were in yours. There are the eyes, green and curious a minute ago, now red and deep with undertow currents coming toward you in the dark. The movement, which is not like how anything living moves. The strength.

For lots of people, it's a final nasty shock and their heart stops beating before the puzzle can finish reassembling itself in their head. You're lucky. You survived. You survived, and discovered a whole dark and wriggling underbelly to the night that you never knew was there, and you're part of it now.

Well. Maybe lucky isn't the word. But you're *here*, and so are they.

But What are They?

So: Vampires are real. But what *are* they? Damned, wicked souls cursed by the trigger-happy Old Testament version of God? Tragic victims of some freaky pathogen? A race of mutants who evolved alongside humanity and have been preying on it since the dawn of time? Invaders from a sunless world beyond the stars?

You know they *exist*. You know they're *powerful*, and *hungry*. But when you think about it, world-shattering as it may be, that's not very much knowledge at all.

Let's go into the dark together, shall we? To see what we can find.

Ignorance: A Necessary Aside

Here's the thing to remember if you're playing a familiar: Vampires tend to be imperious and controlling. Your familiars probably don't know most of the stuff in

this chapter, because vampires tend to dole out information on a need-to-know basis, and there's *definitely* no basic information packet that gets handed out right after a monster feeds you some of their blood.

Here's the thing to remember if you're the Master: Most vampires are ignorant of the majority of this information, too. They have no great archive of their history, no central database to reference to satisfy their curiosity. If they have questions—and they almost always have questions—they need to hunt after the answers themselves, or reach out to another monster to ask.

Ancient Hungry Corpses

Here's half of the truth: Vampires are probably as old as death. As long as people have been dying, a few people have been making the trip back. They don't know where they came from, any more than the living do. They have some stories. They have a few theories. There are even some histories. But answers? Those are harder to pin down.

Here's the other half of the truth: There's more than one road leading back from the sunless country, and every few centuries or millennia, somebody finds a new one. There's no such thing as *a vampire* haunting the night, sucking the blood of the living. There are *several different kinds* of monster roaming around, all of which are given to night-haunting and bloodsucking.

Is there some ultimate force—an ancient curse, a wrathful God, a mythic First Vampire—responsible for these different horrors? Or do people who find their way back from the grave just tend to come back changed in similar fashions, the way there are certain common features to any path leading to the top of a mountain? Maybe that's the sort of thing vampires debate behind closed doors, when there's nobody else around to see how much they don't know about themselves.

This is the big thing most familiars don't know, and a lot of them don't survive finding it out the hard way: the vampire *you know* isn't necessarily a reliable guide to what *other vampires you encounter* might be like.

Brothers and Strangers in Blood

What do vampires have in common? They all drink blood. They all avoid the sun. And they can pass on a little bit of what they are to a living person by feeding them blood to create a familiar. If something died and came back with all of those features, it's fair to call it a vampire.

(*Wait a minute*, you might be saying, *you make it sound like there are people who die and come back without all that stuff being true*. If so: You're a fast learner, you might just make it.)

Past that, vampires are defined by their lineage. If your vampire patron ever makes good on their promise to make you like they are, that's exactly what they'll do: make you the same sort of monster they are.

If you're a vampire, then finding a vampire from another lineage is a kind of affirmation: you're not alone in the night, not a singular freak of nature, act of God, or clerical error in the bureaucracy of life and death. But it's also terrifying: here's a potential rival predator sniffing around the same blood supply you're dependent on, and you *don't know what it is*. It's *like* you, but it's *not* like you. Is it stronger? Can it do something important that you can't? Shit, does it know something about your lineage that you don't?

In the end, fear and caution tends to rule all interactions between the undead. When you lie to people so you can suck their blood every night, it gets hard to trust anybody, even someone from your own lineage whose pedigree you can connect to yours through a web of common ancestors and blood-siblings. A stranger of your own kind? All you can ever know for sure about *them* is that they lie and kill to survive, night after night, because that's how it is for you. And some bizarre off-brand vampire that doesn't even work by all of the same rules you do?

Still, the world's old, a new night arrives every time the sun goes down, and all sorts of strange things happen.

Candlelight Societies

Can vampires come together to build something more than a solitary eternity of blood and paranoia? They can try, and have done so several times. Nearly all such endeavors have been restricted to members of a single lineage, and nearly all of them eventually crumbled for one reason or another. Here are a few that are still remembered and spoken of among the history-minded of their respective bloodlines.

The Long Night Society

The Long Night Society was a coven of Carpathian vampires who operated during the 18th and 19th centuries, ranging throughout the arctic northern latitudes of Canada and Alaska. A band of familiars made up of fur trappers, hunters, and prospectors transported their coffins by sledge and wagon across the barren territories throughout the spring and summer months, then retreated south into more hospitable climes as fall closed in. As the arctic nights grew longer and longer, the vampires of the Long Night Society ranged across the tundra in the form of wolves, bats, and snowstorms, wiping out the isolated camps of white prospectors, traders, and furriers. When they found a native settlement, they would spend days or weeks picking off its members one by one, bleeding the site to destruction. Prey was thin on the ground, but they savored the freedom afforded by the month-long polar night. As winter came to an end and the sun began to menace them once again, they drifted south to meet their blood-starved familiars and to begin the year's travels once again.

The entire Long Night Society disappeared somewhere in Yukon Territory in 1897, in the midst of the Klondike Gold Rush.

The Pact of Garkain

A rare example of a short-lived cooperative venture between vampires of two lineages, the Order of Garkain was a network of Carpathian and Penanggalan vampires who worked together to secure hunting ranges outside of the well-tread boundaries of colonialized Australia between 1800 and 1860. The Pact was formed in response to a distinct tendency for familiars sent to explore the outback to fail to return—a pattern that proved to hold true for vampires venturing out in search of their missing servants. The surviving records of the Pact of Garkain describe several native supernatural predators documented in the Australian wilds, but also the growing suspicions of the Pact's members that one of their own was using the fellowship's shared information to betray and assassinate their fellows, manufacturing evidence of native blood-suckers as a cover-up. The Pact dissolved into infighting and paranoid resentment during the second half of the 19th century.

The outback remains a dangerous place for foreign vampires to the present day.

The Ghost-Restraining Temples of Ayutthaya

A series of small, secluded blood-temples were raised up throughout the jungles of what are now Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia between 1400 and 1700 CE. Each temple was overseen by a living god or goddess in the form of a Penanggalan vampire. The majority of these temples received lavish tribute from their familiars, generally in the form of captured peasants, farmers, and merchants, though a few were openly venerated by nearby mortal villages, who drugged travelers and delivered them to the hungry spirits of the jungle.

Very little of the blood from these tributes was consumed by the vampires in residence. Each temple was raised to contain and keep dormant a teeming nest of Langsuir, a kind of feral quasi-vampire native to the region, which were at that time far more numerous than the Penanggalan. Most of the harvested blood went to keeping each temple's Langsuir torpid and sated.

The Ghost-Restraining Temples fell during the chaos in the wake of a series of wars in the mid-16th century, as the flow of tribute was fatally disrupted at several of the larger temples. The Langsuir rioted, devoured their familiar keepers (and, in several cases, the vampire administering the temple), and existence became very precarious for the undead of Southeast Asia for the better part of a century, until the Langsuir cannibalized one another back into relative obscurity.

The Library of Fangs

The Library of Fangs was established by a circle of Lamia scholars in New Kingdom-period Egypt with a noble goal in mind: to preserve the knowledge of the ages. Unfortunately, the vampires who made up the membership of the Library were always prone to disputes and quarrels over the rights to texts, historians, or the validity of varying accounts of events none had been present to witness firsthand. The Library as a physical institution was moved many times, from sites ranging from Avaris to Faiyum (formerly Shedet and Crocodilopolis) to Naqada (then Ombos). Some sources date the Library of Fangs as far back as 1500 BCE; most agree that the vampires maintaining it went their separate ways in the wake of the burning of the Library of Alexandria, around 400 CE. Many of its writings are still believed to be hidden away in submerged chambers and secret temples scattered throughout the Egyptian desert.

The Voices of the Earth

The Voices of the Earth were a widely-scattered network of vampires active within the mound builder civilizations of North America from roughly 1000 BCE to 1000 CE, making them one of the largest and longest-lived candlelight societies. They sent their familiars far and wide with the common goal of establishing boundaries for their respective territories and making sure no new vampires were created within this network; the punishment for intentionally creating new competition for blood within the domain of the Voices was destruction, while resources were joined to hunt down accidental inductees into the brotherhood of eternity.

The network of the Voices simply fell apart over time, as a malaise settled into their bloodline and rendered their concerns moot.

The Blood Sages

The Blood Sages were a group of Pisacha active during the 13th and 14th centuries in Tibet, operating three heretical Kagyu Buddhist monasteries where they offered enlightenment through the revelations of the blood. They were eventually uprooted and destroyed by Penanggalan

vampires driven into Tibet by the military actions of the Yuan Dynasty, who were uncomfortable with the amount of mortal attention the Blood Sages were drawing to themselves.

The Worms of Cappadocia

The Hitties tunneled into the hills of central Anatolia, carving out first simple shelters and then entire cities that would remain in use for thousand years. It's not clear when vampires first crawled down those holes seeking safety from the sun and access to the blood within, but by the 5th century CE a loose cooperative union of Sasabonsam had claimed Derinkuyu, Kaymakli, Özkonak, and at least seven other sites. The Worms shared familiars and other cult resources to protect themselves from discovery and to ensure no other vampires preyed upon the limited resources of the underground cities. It's unclear when or why the Worms abandoned the tunnels, but they were nowhere to be found by the late 14th century.

Six Families

How many kinds of vampires are there? Truthfully, nobody knows. Lineages have appeared and vanished from the Earth in the past, or at least, they certainly *seem* to have gone extinct; a number of old Corse and Penanggalan diaries speak of enormous green-haired, one-eyed vampires in Japan and Korea which certainly don't seem to be around anymore. New ones appear sometimes, and maybe they spread, and maybe they don't. And of course that's leaving out vampire-like *things* like the Langsuir of Southeast Asia, or the Impundulu and Ishologu of South Africa. (Honestly, who's to say what is or isn't a vampire?)

Here's an easier question to nail down, then: How many kinds of vampires have managed to spread across all or most of the globe? The answer, by most accounts, is six. Six lineages who all shun the sun, survive on blood, create familiars to serve them, and retain enough memory, identity, and self-control to act like human beings when it suits their needs.

If you're lucky, you won't ever encounter any of them, but if you're a familiar that ship's already sailed. Let's go meet the world's scariest dead people.

Carpathian

Regal, bestial, proud, rapacious, and eager to stake their claim in the night. By most accounts, the youngest and also the most virulent of the major lineages. When someone says *vampire*, they're generally thinking of a Carpathian.

Appearance

Carpathians can generally pass for human with no difficulty whatsoever if they've fed recently. After five or so nights without blood (sooner with significant exertion of their various powers), the mask starts to slip: the Carpathian's skin grows cold, pale, and clammy; their eyes recede into darkening sockets, and eventually develop a reddish tinge; after all other changes, their fangs finally protrude more and more, defying all attempts at retraction. By the tenth night without feeding, the only thing keeping anyone who sees a Carpathian from identifying it as a vampire is the average person's certainty that there's no such thing as vampires.

Feeding

Carpathian vampires possess two long, retractable fangs where the canines in their upper jaw formerly resided. While visibly pointed even at full retraction, they're usually able to pass for normal teeth until extended for feeding.

Carpathians feed on blood by sucking at the puncture wounds created by their fangs. Being fed upon creates a narcotic, dreamlike haze that obscures memories of the attack, although victims are frequently plagued by later nightmares. Carpathians can lick the wounds they create to prevent victims from bleeding out, creating scabbed-over puncture marks that heal completely over the course of a week or so.

Carpathians prefer to feed nightly if possible, but can go without blood for up to two weeks before hunger pangs begin to impede their ability to function. Starvation to the point of withering into stasis takes about 60 days.

Characteristics and Weaknesses

Every Carpathian loses its reflection somewhere in the journey back from the land of the dead. They don't show up in mirrors, photographs, or even video footage. Once upon a time this was no great burden for the lineage, as only the wealthy were given to own looking-glasses. Now, it makes prudent Carpathians paranoid about venturing into public situations where every third mortal seems to be waving around a cell phone camera that can reveal them for what they are.

Carpathian vampires become drowsy and sluggish once the sun rises, and generally fall into a deathlike slumber from sunrise to sunset. The touch of the sun burns them like a red-hot brand, and can kill them in less than a minute of full exposure. Carpathians suffer a number of other banes as well: the scent of garlic makes them ill, inducing convulsions if they draw too close; a holy symbol brandished with intent to drive a Carpathian away provokes excruciating pain, as does attempting to venture onto any sort of holy or consecrated ground; they cannot wade through running water (attempting to do so paralyzes them, leaving them flopped down in the current until it washes them ashore or someone pulls them onto dry land); and they are flatly incapable of entering a home without invitation. If forced to do so (such as being shoved or carried across the threshold), they're incapable of any action but trying to crawl back outside.

Finally, piercing a Carpathian vampire through the heart with a wooden shaft is immediately lethal.

Powers

For all their many weaknesses, Carpathians are formidable creatures. They can move, react, and pounce as quickly as a spider: if you're in the same room as a Carpathian, you're within arm's reach. Their wounds heal in seconds, and they're as strong as any three men. Anyone who looks into a Carpathian's eyes is at risk of becoming the vampire's slave.

Above all else, though, Carpathians are the lords of the feral world. They can summon and command animals to hunt alongside them. They can transform themselves to suit the needs of predation and survival. They can assume the shapes of many beasts, split into flocks of crows or bats, conjure animalistic features into their own flesh while maintaining their basic human form, or even melt into and move within features of the natural world such as night-fogs, plants, fire, smoke, or the soil itself.

Origins

As their name indicates, this lineage hails from somewhere within the craggy slopes and deep gorges of the *Carpații Meridionali*. Many members of the bloodline name Vlad the Impaler as the progenitor of their lineage, having escaped from Hell to continue his gruesome war against the Turks, but folklore and fragmentary records within Romania describing bloodthirsty nocturnal corpses predate Count Dracula by several centuries. While some believe these reference vampires of other lineages, others suspect the Carpathian bloodline is significantly older than its most famous alleged member.

A few scholars of the lineage claim the first Carpathians were soldiers of the Legio XIII Gemina who, buried in the blood-soaked earth of Dacia, one night crawled out from the caves and ravines beneath the Piatra Craiului Mountains, too forlorn and homesick for Rome to remain among the dead. But these accounts, too, are difficult to substantiate.

What is certain is that the lineage quickly spread from its birthplace in the land beyond the forest, forking south into Turkey and Greece even as it spread up along the Transylvanian Alps to infest the rest of the Balkan region in short order. By the 16th century Carpathians had established themselves in France and Spain, and by the 17th had spread as far as the British Isles, the New World, Scandinavia, western Russia, and North Africa.

Genesis

The rapid diaspora of the Carpathian lineage across the world can be largely blamed on the ease with which these vampires spread their curse. They need only drink a mortal to death, then feed some of their own blood back into their victim's mouth before the body grows cold.

The primary factor limiting the lineage's growth is how dangerous newly-turned Carpathians are to those who create them. These vampires awaken ravenous and bestial (usually assuming a form mixing together features of human, bat, and wolf), remain that way for several nights, and are completely immune to the hypnotic arts of the Carpathian who created them. Indeed, any existing conditioning or commands are destroyed in the journey into and back from the grave.

Corse

Slow, powerful, putrid, infertile horrors as ancient as fear itself. This is the oldest lineage that still walks the Earth, possibly the first of all vampire-kind. After uncounted ages, immortality has rubbed away all distinctions of this bloodline save for their great age; now they are *old*, eternally so, and it remains to be seen if the vitality of their hoary blood can be renewed.

Appearance

No Corse can pass for human without recourse to its dark arts. The youngest extant members of the lineage look like grotesque, rotting corpses; the majority are long-desiccated cadavers, their writhing skeleton held together by a few leathery scraps of skin, enclosing a shriveled sack of withered organs.

Once upon a time, these ancient horrors could walk undisguised among the living. When newly-made, they were pale, unblinking, but not *inhuman* beings, who moved with a stately and purposeful dignity. But there are no newly-made Corses. Not anymore. Now they rot. Now they shuffle, bent under the weight of ten thousand years and more.

Feeding

Corses lack fangs, and as such, must resort to other methods of bloodletting. Many use antique razors or knives to open human veins for their repast (or make elaborate arrangements for donors to bleed themselves for the vampire's benefit), while others lost their taste for ceremony long ago and simply bite into their victims, using the force of their horribly powerful jaws to get the blood flowing. There's no special sensation associated with Corse-bite other than the extreme pain one would expect of a monster chewing your flesh open.

Corses have no particular means to prevent a victim from bleeding out, and their bites tend to leave blatant, ugly scars when not immediately fatal. As such, most Corses without willing donors kill when they hunt. Luckily, they need comparably little blood to survive, and only tend to feed twice a month or so. Hunger doesn't begin to compromise a Corse's behavior until six weeks have gone by, and it takes six months for starvation to incapacitate one of these ancient monsters.

Characteristics and Weaknesses

The most distinguishing feature of this lineage is its immense overall age. The youngest known Corse was turned in the Sudan 800 years ago; most are much older.

The sun can trouble but not destroy a Corse. They become drowsy once it rises, and generally fall into slumber during the day, but can shrug off this sleep with some effort. If exposed to the sun's rays, a Corse's flesh unwinds itself and its bones begin to crack and splinter; this is immediately painful, and intensifies over the course of several minutes until the vampire is able to do nothing but weakly attempt to drag itself into cover while shuddering in agony. However torturous as this exposure may be, it's not sufficient to kill a Corse by itself; come sunset, the vampire's agony abates and it slowly regains its mobility as its flesh and bones mend themselves.

A Corse is also subject to a few other banes. It can't look directly upon a holy symbol, not even one passively decorating a wall or worn as jewelry. If presented with a scattering of coins, rice, beans, beads, or similar small objects, the vampire is compelled to count them before it can move past the spillage (but most have become very good speed-counters over their long unlives). If a Corse finds itself at a crossroads, it becomes briefly confused and loses its sense of direction,

unless it is pursuing a mortal to drink their blood and can see that mortal while moving through the crossroads.

Fire is the great bane of the Corse; their ancient flesh burns readily, and their bones splinter and explode. Damage from fire can take months or even years to heal, if the Corse isn't killed outright. Their heart is another vulnerable point; if pierced (by stone, wood, metal—any substance will do), the Corse is immobilized until the impaling weapon is withdrawn or rots away. Many Corses have spent centuries left paralyzed by hunters who mistakenly believed they had slain their quarry.

Powers

A Corse's powers are primal and fearsome. Those who gaze upon a Corse's rotting visage may be snared with a hypnotic fascination (even if the vampire's eyes are two empty, crusted sockets). Indeed, their senses are frighteningly acute no matter how rotted or even absent the relevant organs may be; they can track a mortal by the sound of their heartbeat, smell blood from over a mile away, and even snatch bits and fragments of thought from the minds of those before them.

A Corse is slow, by vampire standards—no faster than a human being even when newly-made, and all surviving members of the lineage are slow, shuffling things—but unmatched in power. The thin, stick-like arms of a Corse can easily tear a boulder in half or smash down a brick wall with little effort. Once it catches hold of someone with the intent to do harm, there's no hope of breaking the vampire's grip.

The greatest art of the Corse lineage is the ability to pollute the minds of those around them with primordial darkness. The most common use of this power is to befuddle the senses so that others perceive the Corse as a living person rather than an ancient, bloodthirsty skeleton, but more aggressive applications can bring a person's deepest fears screaming up into their waking perceptions, flood their mind with unwanted and unwarranted emotion, or strike a hammer-blow against their psyche, allowing the Corse to read the resultant fractures or even to force them into involuntary action. A Corse need not be fast enough to run someone down if it can panic them into running straight into its inescapable grasp, after all.

Origins

Very little remains of the origins of this lineage, including its name. These vampires have infested nearly every human culture to ever exist, and have named and renamed themselves across diaspora after diaspora. Where any language in history has a name for a monster that rises from its grave to bedevil the living, it may well be referring to this lineage. Or, it may not. At some point, as younger lineages appeared around the globe, it became fashionable for these hoary creatures to refer to themselves as "first among the dead," and then simply as the dead. All other monikers have fallen to dust.

No one knows exactly how old the Corse lineage really is. It most likely first appeared in East Africa at some point in the Upper Paleolithic era, but that's like throwing a dart and confidently proclaiming that it has struck a board *somewhere* in North America. Petroglyphs in a cave in Tanzania dating back to roughly 10,000 BCE depict what appears to be a Corse stalking a group of warriors, but other relics of the lineage indicate that the bloodline was already old even at that point of prehistoric antiquity.

The history of the Corse lineage may well be the history of vampires in totality; or these hoary immortals may simply be the only survivors of an array of lineages dating back to antiquity that otherwise died out before the advent of writing and farming, before the glaciers receded. No one really knows.

What is certain is that Corses have been riding waves of human migrations across the world since prehistory. Their relics can be found on every continent save Antarctica.

Genesis

According to the hazy recollection of the ancients, Corses have always passed on their brand of immortality through happenstance. When they killed, there was always a slim chance that the victim would rise up and join the lineage: perhaps within the hour, perhaps a fortnight or even a month later. The body would grow pale and cold and would not rot, and then eventually it would stand and speak and hunger.

There was another way, the oldest of Corses insist, sifting through two thousand years, three thousand years, four thousand years of endless nights—a way to inflict eternity upon a mortal deliberately—but this secret was guarded jealously by the most powerful among the lineage, and it has been lost.

A small but motivated subset of the lineage is actively involved in seeking out relics, diaries, and oral accounts of the bloodline's history in hope of rediscovering that lost secret, because without it, the lineage appears doomed to vanish from the earth at last.

The Corse lineage is *old*, so old that whatever black miracle or godless curse gave it birth has been worn thin as paper by the passage of an entire epoch of nights and blood. Corse-victims have risen to join the bloodline less and less frequently ever since the Warring States Period, even as the eternal stasis that preserved the ancients in the form they occupied on the night of their death began to slip, inch by inch, giving them more corpse-like features, eventually progressing to full-blown rot and ruin. A thousand years or so ago there simply stopped being any accidental conversions, and the lineage came to realize that it could account for none among its membership that knew how to deliberately create a Corse. And so their numbers have dwindled, century by century, as fire or treachery dragged them back into the darkness beyond the grave one by one.

Lamia

Elegant monsters of antiquity with the blood of terrible gods in their veins. Lairing in temples raised up to their own glory, these very small and very hungry divinities are never found without an entourage of familiars.

Appearance

While Lamiae generally have no trouble passing for human if they wish to, most prefer to accentuate their inhuman features while within their lairs or temples.

Every Lamia bears at least one feature drawn from some manner of venomous animal. Examples might include scaled thighs or shoulders, serpent-slit pupils, an hourglass marking on the back or stomach, bright coloring around the eyes and lips which might be mistaken for garish makeup, or an array of tiny secondary eyes scattered through the vampire's hairline which resemble forehead lines when closed.

Feeding

Lamia vampires all have some manner of drawing blood, but the exact configuration of their fangs shows substantial variation. The majority of the lineage possesses two long fangs which fold back along the roof of the mouth in the manner of a serpent, but other Lamia sport retractable fangs which replace the eyeteeth of their upper and lower jaws, or an entire mouth full of serrated shark-teeth, or a darting needle concealed beneath their tongue.

A Lamia's bite inflicts both paralysis and euphoria. The paralysis wears off within five to ten minutes of feeding, but a residual pleasant manic energy persists for the rest of the night and often well into the following day. Lamiae rarely kill when feeding unless they have some ritual purpose in mind, and are capable of causing the puncture wounds they create to instantly clot and scab by blowing on them.

Lamiae are a blood-hungry lineage, preferring to feed nightly and experiencing hunger pangs after only three or four nights. Incapacitation from lack of blood sets in after a fortnight.

Characteristics and Weaknesses

Though not intrinsic to the bloodline in the manner of their venomous markings, the most widespread characteristic of the Lamiae is their religious fixation. These vampires believe the blood of ancient gods runs in their veins, and habitually raise up small, hidden temples that act as both the Lamia's lair and also a site of devotion.

Lamiae can be detected by their refusal to set foot upon any land or building consecrated to a benevolent higher power; should they be forced to do so, their bones begin to crack and shatter until they can escape. Furthermore, Lamiae cannot consume alcohol or the blood of any animal not consecrated as a sacrifice; doing so renders them ill to the point of near-immobility for hours.

While Lamiae have no difficulty remaining awake during the day if they wish to, they take extreme precautions to avoid the touch of the sun, which causes their flesh first to age rapidly, then to rot and decay. Five minutes of exposure is sufficient to kill a Lamia, and ten leaves nothing but a bare skeleton. Recovering from sun-damage can take months or even years.

Fire is the other great bane of this bloodline: for whatever reason, Lamiae find flames to be as solid and impassable as stone, and being set ablaze immobilizes these vampires even as they burn.

Powers

While Lamiae lack the terrible strength found in other lineages, they make up for it with nightmare speed. An angry Lamia can strike faster than the eye can follow, and outrun a sports car on a short sprint. They also exhibit a supernatural allure and charisma that compromises the emotions and judgment of others, and easily wins them worshipers and lackeys.

Most of all, though, Lamiae revel in the spark of monstrous divinity within their blood. They can hear and even consume prayers, grant small miracles to those who please them, and afflict their enemies with strange blood-curses. They can also bring forth monstrous power from their undying flesh, temporarily assuming a unique god-form with features such as multiple arms, a serpent's tail, a nest of spider legs, or a jackal's snarling head.

Origins

The Lamiae claim their history stretches back to around 1700 BCE, when they arose in the city of Babylon. During one hot and abysmal summer, so the stories go, the terrible goddess Lamashtu visited her depredations again and again upon the city. While it was common for the gods to send demons to vex mankind in those days, Lamashtu was a daughter of Anu, the sky-god, and committed evil of her own volition rather than at the command of Heaven. She devoured men and drank their blood, and howled like a beast in the throat of night.

One night it occurred to her that she was without children of her own. Having no taste for love or courtship, she decided to steal the children of Babylon and make them her own. She nursed them at her breasts alongside asps, and taught them to drink blood and eat prayers as she did, and then set them upon the city, and was pleased with her mischief.

The Lamiae spread far and wide across the ancient world, coming to heavily infest Greece and Persia, Rome and Egypt, and eventually spread into both Europe and Asia Minor. Wherever they went, they raised up hidden temples, forever motivated by a need to venerate and be venerated. Their devotions were in no way limited to Lamashtu: wherever they found a monstrous deity, the bloodline came to identify with it. They built altars to Lilith and Tiamat, Amanozako and Itzpapalotl, Apep and Ahriman, Chernobog and Kali.

Genesis

Lamiae create new vampires exclusively from among the dead. First, the Lamia locates a suitable corpse, which cannot have been touched by the light of the sun since the moment of its death, and which must be at least three days dead (but can potentially have been deceased much, much longer—so long as the entire skeleton is present, the resurrection-rite is possible). Then she cuts her own heart out of her chest, pierces it, and anoints the corpse with her heart-blood before replacing the organ back in her body. The corpse rises as a new Lamia within the hour.

Penanggalan

Unliving riots of flesh and hunger whose will cannot be denied. These grotesqueries are among the most adept of all vampires at passing among the living, and potentially the most horrifying when it comes time to slake their unnatural thirst.

Appearance

Penanggalans are generally indistinguishable from mortals when at rest or in social situations. When on the hunt, their aspect changes completely. The vampire's head and guts detach from the rest of the body, either slithering along on a nest of viscera or flying through the air in search of prey. When threatened, the vampire's trunk and limbs are capable of reconfiguring into whatever form is best-suited for defense: bones, muscles, and fat all slide and shift according to the vampire's whim to create claws, armored plates, pads of cushioning or smothering fat, even new limbs formed from repurposed organs and muscle.

Feeding

Penanggalans can elongate and sharpen their teeth to produce as many fangs as necessary to suck blood from their prey. Most hunt in the form of a detached head and dangling viscera, crawling or floating about in search of prey; while they're entirely capable of feeding in the manner of other vampires, with their body joined and intact, Penanggalans find the sensation of stolen blood suffusing their exposed guts and organs intensely pleasurable and few are willing to forego this luxury for the muted satisfaction of feeding with their innards already joined to the rest of their body.

A Penanggalan grows sluggish and languid for several hours after reconnecting its head and viscera with its trunk in the wake of a successful feeding, as the stolen blood circulates out from gore-swollen organs into the rest of the body; during this time, the Penanggalan once more experiences the pleasure of feeding, leaving the creature distracted and lazy. Acutely aware of their vulnerability, these vampires tend to retreat to wherever they feel most safe during this period.

Most Penanggalans refrain from killing when they feed, smoothing closed the flesh over their bite wounds and returning to the same victim or group of victims again and again. Of all bloodlines, Penanggalans are among the most likely to drink from sleeping victims. The bite of a Penanggalan is numbing, tending to send sleepers even deeper into slumber; those awake for the horror of an attack by one of these vampires at least find the experience painless once the fangs slide in.

Penanggalans tend to feed once a week, and can go for up to a month without blood before hunger begins to compromise their judgment. Starvation is capable of killing a Penanggalan, and will do so after about two months without blood.

Characteristics and Weaknesses

Penanggalan present the outward appearances of life to a greater degree than other vampires: they're warm to the touch, they have a heartbeat, and they breathe. They can even consume mortal food and drink, although doing so grants them no nourishment.

The only sign giving away a Penanggalan's true nature is a faint smell of vinegar that follows them around at all times; some vampires take pains to disguise this with perfume.

Penanggalans have fewer banes than most other lineages. The scent of fresh pineapples repels them, while pineapple juice burns them like acid. Any sort of jagged impediment, particularly set in a window or doorway, is terribly dangerous to a Penanggalan in its head-and-viscera state: broken glass, thorns, barbed wire and the like are all capable of piercing deep into the vampire's guts and spilling out all of its stolen blood, or even snagging and immobilizing it entirely in extreme cases. Finally, Penanggalan can be drowned or suffocated.

This lineage is less vulnerable to the sun than most, and can walk about in daylight for up to an hour each day without harm. Once this grace period expires, the vampire begins to wither and steam until all of the blood in its body evaporates and it falls to the ground as a desiccated husk. Most Penanggalan are very wary about venturing out during the day, as none of their powers function while they're exposed to sunlight, and they can be slain as easily as a mortal.

Powers

Penanggalan are unnaturally strong and swift, capable of running down and overpowering jungle predators with ease (though they can derive only scant nourishment from animal blood). They exude a magnetic, feral allure that makes it easy for them to insinuate themselves into the lives of potential victims.

Most of all, though, they are masters of the flesh—both their own and that of others. Every part of a Penanggalan's body is potentially dangerous; they can whip out their viscera to grasp and entangle victims, exude sticky blood to cling to walls or ceilings, and reconfigure every scrap of bone, muscle, skin, and fat in their body into any configuration that suits them. Sometimes this means a subtle alteration to disguise the vampire's true appearance; sometimes it means elongating themselves into a scuttling, spider-like horror with meter-long limbs of ropy, exposed muscle tipped with ribs repurposed into jagged claws. They can also, if their subject is restrained or cooperative, reweave the flesh of others in similar fashion, though most find little use for this art and simply use it to smooth closed the wounds they create during feeding.

Origins

The lineage believes its first members to have been explorers from the Langkasuka kingdom circa 200 CE who found... *something*... lurking in the jungles of Malaysia and Sumatra, and who carried the infection back to the rest of Southeast Asia. Most of the bloodline's historical sites are to be found in what are now Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines, though more recent sites can be found in Japan, Korea, China, Burma, Tibet, and the eastern coast of India down to Sri Lanka.

The bloodline seems to have spread outside of Asia in significant numbers only in the last three hundred years or so, but can now be found worldwide.

Genesis

A Penanggalan can only reproduce once every 50 years, and does so by dredging up a writhing "seed" of flesh from deep within its body, disgorging it from the throat and placing it within a living body (traditionally the seed is swallowed, but it can also be forced into an open wound or otherwise forcibly implanted). Once the infected subject dies, by *any* means, they return three nights later as a new Penanggalan.

Pisacha

Skinless, thirsty shadows roaming from corpse to corpse. Pisachas are the strangest of the six major lineages, confounding many expectations of vampirism.

Appearance

In its natural state, a Pisacha resembles a bloody cloud or slick drifting through the air or sliding across the floor or walls. While possessing a cadaver, it is a walking and talking corpse, able to pass for human at casual inspection if the body is sufficiently fresh and undamaged.

Feeding

Pisachas can only feed while possessing a corpse. They lack fangs or natural weapons of any sort, and feed by drawing close to their victim and inhaling over an open wound or orifice, drawing streamers of blood through the air and into their corpse's gaping mouth. As a result, many Pisachas prefer to feed on sleeping or unconscious victims, though a few attack directly with knives or razors and feed from the resulting wounds. Being fed on by a Pisacha produces a fearsome chilling sensation, which in no way impairs a victim's ability to fight back if they're conscious at the time: another reason most of these vampires target those who are incapable of doing so.

Pisachas prefer to feed nightly if they can, but can abstain from blood for up to ten days before hunger compromises their rationality. Starvation is capable of killing these vampires, eroding their true body mass to nothingness after three to four months.

Characteristics and Weaknesses

Pisachas are inherently bodiless, existing as a pool or cloud of roiling blood. In order to interact with the world, they pour their sanguine mass into a corpse and animate it. A Pisacha-occupied corpse loses certain tell-tale markings such as lividity and cloudy eyes, and is generally capable of passing for human under casual inspection, but it's still pale, unbreathing, and room temperature to the touch, and any gross injuries (such as bullet wounds or signs of advanced decomposition) remain. Decay is greatly delayed but not entirely suspended while the vampire animates the cadaver; a Pisacha can generally use a fresh corpse for four to six weeks before rot begins to compromise its ability to pass for human.

The easiest way to spot a Pisacha-possessed cadaver is by the fact that it casts no shadow.

Pisachas suffer from a number of banes. The blood of a holy man is anathema to these vampires, causing them to immediately and involuntarily vomit their cloud-body forth from whatever corpse they possess should they be so foolish as to feed from such an individual. They suffer a compulsion to pick up and neatly set aside any spillage of rice, seeds, grains, or other foodstuffs scattered in front of them. A Pisacha cannot enter a home without first being invited, and being forced across the threshold causes it to erupt through the pores of its stolen body, unable to follow the cadaver across the threshold. Attempting to wade across running water is deadly to these vampires, causing their true form to bleed out through the corpse's skin and to dissipate in the water. Finally, a Pisacha can be trapped and immobilized within a cadaver by piercing the corpse's heart with a shaft of wood.

A Pisacha *cannot*, however, be killed simply by inflicting violence upon its stolen corpse. Only starvation, dissolution in water, or the light of the sun can kill members of this lineage. Pisachas become drowsy once the sun rises, but are capable of remaining awake through the day with

some effort. They make every effort to avoid the light of the sun, however; the touch of sunlight boils their blood, steaming them away to nothing within seconds.

Powers

While no stronger than an ordinary man, a Pisacha-possessed corpse can move with the speed of a striking cobra. Furthermore, these vampires exert a morbid fascination, a dark charisma that makes it easy for them to secure invitations into the lives and homes of others. Their senses are also preternaturally acute, and many of them are capable of minor feats of extrasensory perception.

The most fearsome dark miracle of the Pisachas is their command of primordial darkness. They can merge into shadows, command darkness to solidify into weapons or servants, drown screams in a blanket of silence, and pull shadows around themselves like a cloak to vanish from sight. It's all but impossible to know when a Pisacha is present if it doesn't want to be detected.

Origins

This strange bloodline dates back to at least 200 BCE, having risen from among despised criminals and abandoned plague victims left to rot in the wilderness of the Kashmir Valley. Even the earth itself rejected the spilled blood of these wretched creatures, sending them back into the world nameless, faceless, and burdened with an unholy hunger.

The relics and historical sites of these vampires are heavily scattered across the Indian subcontinent and much of Nepal and Tibet. By the fall of the Roman Empire they had spread out across much of the Middle East, the Mongolian Steppe, and into the fringes of the Balkans.

Genesis

Pisachas produce more of their kind by pouring roughly half of their blood-mass into a corpse that is unburied, unshriven, unmourned, and which has been given no funeral rites or postmortem care of even the most rudimentary sort since the moment of their death. A new Pisacha rises within the cadaver the following night, leaving the "parent" vampire drastically weakened for years to come by the reproductive act.

Sasabonsam

Long, gaunt, fearsome stalkers in the night. This ancient and powerful lineage is noteworthy for its elaborate lairs, fierce territoriality, and inhuman demeanor.

Appearance

While most vampires walk easily among the human masses and hunt by seduction or deception, the mere sight of a Sasabonsam is immediately alarming. These vampires are long, gaunt, almost skeletally thin things, with elongated limbs and iron talons tipping their fingers and toes. Their eyes are two black pits, their ears are often elongated, their noses flattened and upturned like a bat. They can sometimes pass for human with the aid of a heavy coat and hat, but even then they stand taller than most doorways and move with an odd, stilted gait. When at their ease, most Sasabonsam fold themselves down into a crouch like a spider, and prefer to move on all fours with rapid scuttling motions. Many eschew clothing altogether.

Feeding

Sasabonsam possess long, non-retractable fangs in both their upper and lower jaws. There's no special sensation associated with this lineage's bite aside from pain, and they have no method to stop a bite from bleeding, and so these vampires tend to kill when they hunt.

Luckily, Sasabonsam are among the least blood-dependent of the major lineages. Most hunt only once or twice a month, and can go six weeks before hunger begins to take control of them. Starvation to the point of withering sets in after three months.

Characteristics and Weaknesses

Sasabonsam are long-limbed scuttlers, easily able to scale and cling to walls and even ceilings. Their claws and fangs are made of iron, and about half of the lineage displays a thin, hairless, whiplike tail.

These nocturnal predators cannot pursue their prey into a private home without an invitation; attempting to do so causes them to sweat out all of their stolen blood in a matter of seconds, leaving them weak and disoriented. Linseed and kapok oil will drive away a Sasabonsam, as will the sound of recited prayers. The touch of running water burns them like a weak acid, making them loathe to attempt to cross even the shallowest of streams.

Sasabonsam find it almost impossible to resist the urge to slumber once the sun rises, but are easily roused from this deathly sleep. The touch of sunlight heats their bones until they glow white-hot, cooking the vampire from the inside-out in a matter of only a few minutes.

Piercing a Sasabonsam's heart with metal doesn't kill or immobilize the creature, but it does negate all of its supernatural powers, and the vampire cannot draw out the offending implement under its own power; it must convince someone else to do so.

Powers

Though they lack any sort of powers of supernatural allure or hypnosis, Sasabonsam are fearsome hunters: swifter and more powerful than a lion, and with sharper senses as well. Their most terrible gift, however, is an inborn talent for necromancy. Sasabonsam find it easy to interrogate the dead or raise up corpses to do their bidding or guard their lairs.

Origins

The first Sasabonsam laired in the wilderness and hunted at the fringes of mortal villages and cities, and so their origins are poorly documented. Some speak of a curse leveled by a wandering god; others speculate at unforgivable crimes, punished by a sorcerer's curse. Regardless, the first signs of this lineage date back to West Africa sometime around 500 BCE.

The Sasabonsam seem to have spread quickly from their original range along the Ivory Coast, both east into the continental interior of Africa as well as north into Libya, Egypt, and the Middle East. By the height of the Roman Empire they had thoroughly infested Italy and Greece, Asia Minor, and portions of Russia.

Oddly, while the lineage made it into South and Central America not long after the Spanish, they don't seem to have spread into North America until the early 19th century; even today, the Sasabonsam are much more likely to haunt dying mining towns in the flyover states than to attempt urban predation in a large American city.

Genesis

Creating a new Sasabonsam requires a long and involved ritual, which these vampires traditionally teach to their offspring before driving them away to find hunting ranges of their own. The Sasabonsam first drains a victim to death, then hangs his corpse head-down from a tree. Baobab and rubber trees are traditional, but any tree will do. The tree's roots must be anointed with a blood sacrifice every night for 42 nights; animal blood will suffice for the first 41 nights, but human blood is mandatory on at least the final night. Over the course of the ritual, the hanging body lengthens and deforms, assuming the inhuman features of the Sasabonsam lineage. If the body is disturbed or pulled down, the ritual is ruined and they cannot rise as a vampire, so Sasabonsam go to great lengths to ensure their hanging tree is obscure and well-guarded by day and by night.

Meet the Help: Familiars

What's a vampire? For our purposes, let's say it's a dead thing that drinks blood. For *your* purposes, let's say it's a dead thing that can *share* that stolen blood.

Carpathians, Lamia, Sasabonsam—all six of the grand lineages of the night are capable of feeding a bit of blood to one of the living. People so polluted are bound to the vampire and infected by a bit of its unnatural power. They've gone by many names over the centuries, and even go by many names tonight, but *familiar* is the most common.

That's you, for better or worse.

Everybody Needs Somebody

Vampires would generally like to be like Louis from *Interview*, or better yet, Lestat—cool, independent, immortal, an uncaring predator gliding through an endless succession of nights. But generally speaking, they're not. Louis and Lestat lived in a story where nobody seemed inclined to investigate their murder-a-night feeding habits, one where they could stay in fancy hotels for years on end despite sleeping through all the hours when banks are open.

The fact of the matter is, for all their terrifying power, vampires are creatures of severe limitation. Of the major lineages, only Penanggalans can venture outside during the day *at all*, and they're severely limited in their ability to do so. A Corse in a big city with a grid layout like Washington or New York is going to become disoriented every block or so when it comes to an intersection. An impaled Sasabonsam *must* convince someone else to draw the knife or arrow or whatever out of its chest. Carpathians and Pisachas need to be invited into residences.

Every vampire needs a sunlight agent, a daytime guardian, a driver, or just a pair of helping hands sooner or later. Vampires would like to be lone wolves, but a lone wolf is a vulnerable wolf. Vampires are murderers, which is to say criminals, and criminals are safest when nested at the heart of a protective conspiracy.

Those Chosen to Serve

Depending on someone doesn't come naturally to a dead, blood-drinking monster, so you'd figure they'd be exceedingly picky about who they bring into their confidences and make into a familiar. In most cases, you'd be wrong. Oh, sure, there are a few vampires—Pisachas especially—who will stalk a prospective familiar, learn about them, secure blackmail and make back-up plans in case things go wrong, but the truth is that most vampires recruit familiars more or less on a whim.

Vampires are very impressed by the idea of decades or centuries-spanning schemes, outliving their enemies, things like that, but the truth is that most live night-to-night. When you have to hunt people to survive, you get comfortable improvising or you don't last very long. And so vampires often recruit their servants based on rigorous criteria such as "He was right next to his car and I needed to get out of there *immediately*," "She's pretty," or "After I bled her, I realized she looked like my sister and felt guilty."

Other familiars are, of course, chosen for utilitarian reasons. A vampire decides that having a homicide detective under its sway will make life easier, or wants to subvert an agent in a certain company. And, of course, there's always good old-fashioned networking and nepotism; like any criminal enterprise, many familiars are brought to a vampire's attention by an existing familiar:

“You know, if you’re looking for muscle, my cousin Rodrigo is a really tough dude and he can keep his mouth shut.”

The Red

The blood is addictive, and the blood is *powerful*. Once you’ve had it, once you’ve felt it burning through your veins, you always want more. That’s the hook the vampire sets, of course—they can count on their familiar to come back for another taste, and as long as they don’t push things too far, loyalty tends to take care of itself.

But it’s not just an empty hook set in a familiar’s mouth, the blood. It doesn’t just make you *feel* strong: *it makes you strong*. At the most basic level, every familiar is well-suited to act as a bodyguard if nothing else. As soon as the vampire blood makes its way down your throat, it makes you hale and hearty and swole. Your physique doesn’t matter. Are you a flabby computer nerd? 108 pound teenage girl? Ordinary person of unexceptional height, weight, and build? The blood doesn’t care. The blood makes you powerful. Not *impossibly* powerful, not superhumanly powerful, probably, but at the very least you can pick a big guy up by the collar and toss him around the room. You can move a fridge without help. You’re ‘80s-pro-wrestler-on-steroids strong, and you don’t need to diet or hit the gym to maintain that. You get that even if the blood’s coming from a lineage like the Lamia or Pisacha, where supernatural strength isn’t among your master’s dark miracles.

You’re tough, too. You shrug off incidental bumps and bruises, and you heal up fast, even from serious injuries. That can take some serious getting used to, but a veteran familiar eventually learns not to worry about even serious injuries like broken bones. If you need to jump off of a roof to get away from the cops, *go for it*. A shattered ankle isn’t a big deal. You’ll be okay in a night or two.

Some vampires don’t bother telling their familiars about the ersatz immortality the blood conveys (as long as you keep getting your monthly hookup anyway), but for others, it’s the main selling point of their arrangement. Serve loyally, and you can have eternal youth. Or, maybe you’re already up there in years, maybe you left *youth* in the rearview a long time ago; in that case, indefinitely postponing your appointment with the reaper can sound pretty good. Good enough to do a monster’s bidding for, anyway.

The strangest twist of the blood is that it carries traces of the vampire’s strange dark miracles. These bubble up in a familiar’s dreams and passions: moments when a surge of anger pushes an aching sensation all the way to the tips of a familiar’s fingers; or which draw her, in the depths of slumber, into the echoing shadows that lurk between life and whatever waits beyond. For some familiars these strange sensations never become anything more than odd phantom impulses haunting the fringes of their existence, but for the curious and the diligent, there are gifts to be found in the echoes of power carried by the blood. That furious ache can be sharpened into literal claws. Dreams of darkness can be harnessed in the waking world to summon up tenebrous shrouds. It’s a pale shadow of a real vampire’s powers, but it’s a lot more than anyone else can do.

The Black

Of course, it’s not all perks and roses, the blood. The strength and toughness and longevity and magic are great, sure, no question, but the blood messes with your head. It’s addictive, yeah, but that’s not all it is. Something *happens* to blood as it passes through a vampire’s body. Maybe it

picks up just a hint of the waters of the Everafter, washing away a little bit of who you were and replacing it with, well, what the master *is*.

Familiars call it by a lot of names, but ultimately it always circles back to a darkness inside. It's something that taints you, stains you, and sometimes rises up to swallow you. You can still walk in the sun, but you can't shine a light where the dark lives now, deep in the pit of your soul.

It rises up when things are bad, makes them even worse than they already are. It tries to take over when you don't know what to do, when panic or despair are already holding court. The trouble is, the dark doesn't have solutions, just teeth. It only knows how to cut the Gordian knot, to *run* or *devour*. If it's the Terror that takes over, then you're sprinting blind, using that blood-granted strength to smash down doors and muscle through people and whatever else might be in your way until you're out of there. Good for a shootout, maybe, not so much for a parent-teacher conference, but better than the alternative.

When the Hunger takes over, that's the worst. When your back's up against the wall, and you can't hack it, you can't handle it, the blood inside can take over, and all it knows to do is to devour the problem. Some familiars never run into the Hunger, and they generally tell themselves it's something that would never happen to them. They're wrong about that; they're just lucky, nothing more. Every familiar has the potential to snap, vanish into a red haze, and come back to themselves in the middle of eating somebody's face. If you're lucky, the master or your fellow familiars help you clean up the mess and cope with the aftermath. If you're unlucky, then the only immortality waiting for you after the cops gun you down is in the form of internet memes about crazy dudes hopped up on bath salts.

Those Who Command

There are a lot of templates for a relationship between a vampire and a familiar, ranging from *lover* to *blackmailer*, but most often the vampire styles itself as master and treats its familiars as servants. Still, the needs of vampires vary widely, and there are many ways to serve, and many ways to command.

Carpathians

Carpathians like to empower their familiars directly from the vein: a quick bite to the wrist, and then you're drinking straight from the tap. It's thick and wild, Carpathian blood, heavy with the promise of violence and the stirring of feral instincts. Carpathian familiars who fall into the Hunger are rarely surprised by it; you can *taste* the potential in your first sip of the master's blood. It's part of the allure, to be honest.

Carpathians tend to recruit for expertise, convenience, and indulgence. Expertise is the most straightforward: They're impulsive and acquisitive monsters, and many eventually find themselves in need of an antiquarian to preserve a growing collection of precious keepsakes; or a buyer to curate their collection of art, or instruments, or rare books, or whatever it is they fixate on to occupy themselves.

Convenience is another matter. Carpathians are among the most active hunters of the various lineages, and they *like* to hunt, but it's not always practical. Sometimes the vampire wants to spend the night in, and have dinner brought to it. A familiar can be used as a blood supply in a pinch, of course, but it's more useful to have a servant that can bring in blood to order, whether

that's in the form of enticing in sweet young things from the club, or building and maintaining a dedicated blood cult.

Indulgence, of course, is what makes immortality bearable. Sooner or later, most Carpathians will create at least one familiar simply for the sake of stimulating dinner conversation, or to have an in-house performer on tap, or to otherwise brighten up what would otherwise be endless nights of bare predation devoid of humanity or beauty.

Carpathians blood, it should be said, is also capable of creating animal familiars—fearsome hounds are among the most popular, but some Carpathians empower broods of rats as spies and assassins—and some vampires of this lineage go so far as to have a dedicated animal-handler among their stable of human servants.

Corses

It usually takes some sweet-talking for a Corse to recruit a familiar into its service. A few first meet their prospective servants while wearing a false-face woven from illusion and desire, but as a whole the lineage frowns on extended masquerade with those the vampire will keep closest to itself. More often, a Corse relies on existing familiars to draw new recruits into its web of influence. A familiar's first meeting with their patron-to-be often occurs in a dark room, confessional booth, or other setting which obscures the awful truth of the Corse's appearance. These ancient horrors generally have the patience to ease agents into their service one step at a time, enticing them with occult and historical secrets, demonstrations of power, and promises of the rewards of loyalty. By the time a familiar finally tastes the blood, they've already pledged themselves in so many other ways.

And well that they have, because feeding from a Corse is a harrowing experience. These vampires store their stolen blood in a withered sac of organs stretched between spine and ribs, and generally pierce this sac with a finger or the tip of a knife, letting the familiar prove their devotion by licking or sucking up the leaking fluids from the vampire's decaying organs.

Corse-blood is thick, black, pungent, and when it hits your stomach it feels like the Earth itself leaping up into your bones and muscles. You can feel a curse as old as humanity, maybe as old as death, passing over you and leaving a bit of its shadow clinging to you. You know, deep in your bones, deep in your viscera, that the old rotting thing truly is as ancient as it claims to be, and that you've now been woven into its ages-spanning tapestry.

Of all vampires, Corses are most likely to keep familiars to attend to their night-to-night concerns: transportation, security, purchasing of basic necessities. As the centuries pile on, Corses tend to vanish into their studies and vendettas, leaving the rest of their affairs to a staff of blood-addicts.

One duty nearly all Corses delegate to their familiars is the job of keeping the vampire fed. Corses are slow and often violent feeders, with very specific preferences breaking down along two lines. Either a Corse has absolutely ritualized its blood-drinking and expects its familiars to find regular, willing vessels to bleed for its supper on a regular basis, or else murder is one of the few things that can still rouse the creature's passions, and it will demand a sacrifice every few weeks. Such Corses often lair in buildings with an extensive sub-basement or similarly labyrinthine area in which to slowly stalk and consume prey. Corpse disposal, of course, is another routine duty for the familiars of such monsters.

Getting High on Your Own Supply

As a general rule of thumb, vampires don't like to feed on familiars. They *can*, but they find something about the blood off-putting, and less nourishing than it otherwise should be.

Lamiae

Lamiae are the most consistent and prolific creators of familiars, but also the most discerning. They also don't generally care for the term *familiar*; those fed on Lamia-blood are *acolytes*.

With their penchant for creating blood-cults, Lamiae are always on the prowl for new recruits, but not just anyone will do. Faith is a prerequisite, of course, but nearly every Lamia has a list of other qualities they require from their acolytes: for one vampire loyalty may be paramount, while another prizes ambition and sets its acolytes at one another's throats, even as a third will only give the blood to those displaying heterochromia of the eyes.

Unlike other vampires, Lamiae generally draw in a wide net of living associates to fill out the ranks of their blood cults, and only a select few of these will ever be granted a taste of Lamia blood. In the eyes of the Lamiae, acolytes are not merely empowered servants, they're being granted the signature honor of drinking the blood of a wicked god.

As demanding as Lamiae can be, there are some definite benefits to entering their service. They're much less likely to simply pull up stakes and abandon or destroy their familiars than vampires of other lineages; once an acolyte has drunk from the Lamia's veins, they've been touched by godhood, after all, and this *must* be treated with proper gravity. Lamia acolytes are also less likely to be given demeaning or degrading tasks than other familiars; not only does the cult have common mortal dupes for that, but it's beneath the dignity of an acolyte's secondhand divinity.

When Lamiae bestow their blood, it's almost always highly ritualized, although of course the ritual varies from vampire to vampire. Some prefer highly sensual and personal affairs where blood is taken directly from an opened vein; others amass the entire cult to witness the vampire's favored chosen drinking from a bloody chalice each month.

Lamia blood carries with it a mild euphoria reminiscent of the lineage's bite, usually followed by primal nightmares of storm-wracked seas, boiling skies, and poisonous things creeping through an infinitude of darkness.

Penanggalans

Penanggalan blood almost seems eager to make its way down the throat and into the body. It's an independent, wriggling presence in the flesh and mind that only slowly assimilates into a familiar and feels like part of her.

Within Southeast Asia, it's traditional for a Penanggalan to feed her familiars while detached from her trunk, forcing them to lap up dripping gore from her exposed viscera to display their devotion. This practice has fallen off elsewhere, and the majority of modern Penanggalans simply open a vein or force beads of blood up through their pores when feeding their servants.

Of all vampires, Penanggalans are the most likely to keep familiars as bodyguards, and among the least likely to use them to procure blood. They take comfort in knowing that their empty trunk is well-guarded while they're off hunting, and Penanggalans enjoy their gruesome form of

the hunt in a way echoed by few other lineages. For most, the thrill of finding a target, feeding, and returning to their body is the highlight of their existence.

That isn't to say Penanggalans regard the rest of immortality as merely passing time. No other lineage matches the range or depth of appetites felt by a Penanggalan, and so they cherish familiars skilled as procurers: of drugs, of alcohol, of fine food, of sexual partners, of every other sort of earthly pleasure normally denied to other bloodlines.

Like Carpathians, these vampires are capable of creating animal familiars. Unlike Carpathians, they rarely do so, as Penanggalan blood invariably drives animals into a violent, manic state that even the vampire itself struggles to direct or control. An animal fed for a year or more on Penanggalan blood eventually begins to lose its physical cohesion, unspooling into a nightmare of writhing meat and jagged bones with no desire but to kill and devour.

Pisachas

Pisachas are second only to Lamiae in their reliance upon familiars. Burdened with an unusual amount of restrictions on their movement and hunting opportunities, Pisachas primarily use familiars as procurers of victims and corpses. In the past this meant they tended to accumulate bandit-gangs or insinuate themselves into the courts of the nobility, but in the modern nights the lineage has diversified greatly. Hospitals are a favorite recruiting ground for Pisachas, as are schools, orphanages, prisons, and any other place where a few humans are given disproportionate power and control over their fellows.

Pisachas recruit very few familiars in fits of passion; the vagaries of corpse-jumping tends to preclude close relationships, and so these vampires tend toward transactions of loyalty and service for power and aid, sometimes backed up with blackmail.

For a Pisacha, empowering a familiar is the inverse of feeding. Their blood doesn't circulate naturally through a possessed corpse; the blood *is* the vampire, and uplifting a familiar means bestowing a tiny fragment of the Pisacha's essence into one of the living. The vampire draws close, to within kissing distance, and breathes out a stream of blood into the familiar's waiting mouth. There's nothing pleasant about the process; even the usual rush of power doesn't come until later. In the moment, it's like inhaling a dark, desolate wind from the far side of Hell. It's like drowning. Fragments and particles too scattered and broken to really call *memories* rattle through the mind, leaving a sour impression of *something else* in the familiar's soul for the rest of the evening. But eventually this spiritual invasion fades, and power waits in its place.

The medicine may be bitter, but Pisacha familiars line up for it month after month.

Sasabonsam

Sasabonsam select familiars for almost entirely utilitarian purposes. They're horribly alarming to behold, and unlike the ancient Corse lineage, have no inherent tricks to help themselves pass for human. As such, a Sasabonsam has only two options: either recruit blood-addicts to tend to the vampire's needs, or exist as a solitary, animalistic hunter at the fringes of the human world.

Like Corses, Sasabonsam tend to recruit outward from their first familiar rather than prowling for potential help themselves; it's easier than repeating the tricky dance of threats and promises over and over again. Transportation, acquisition, security, blood: a Sasabonsam generally uses its agents for all of these things, rewarding them with power and the kind of assistance that can only come from an immortal, inhuman killing machine. Additionally, although they look like feral

monstrosities, Sasabonsam are among the most scholarly of lineages. Many have a deep and abiding interest in the occult, and tend to draw academics and explorers into their service—ostensibly as research assistants, but often simply so that the vampire has someone to discuss its thoughts with who can keep up.

Sasabonsam attach very little pomp or ritual to the creation of familiars; their iron talons are well-suited for opening a vein, and they see no need to complicate things more than that. Sasabonsam blood carries an earthy, metallic undertone, and the power that rushes into a familiar in the wake of that first drink is chilling, otherworldly—unmistakably something unholy and unhallowed, dredged up from beyond the grave. The senses ache for hours afterward, giving the impression that the familiar is just on the cusp of detecting... something, some great and hidden mystery of the world... but eventually the sensation fades, leaving behind only tantalizing hints at the deeper power that waits to be unlocked from Sasabonsam blood.