

Out in the Night Air

Or: Covered in Blood and Running from Savages

By Rev. Dr. Pinky Berkowitz

As told to Peter B. Sears

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Dedication: This is book is dedicated to everyone who ever tried to discourage me from writing for any reason whatsoever. I hope those hyena bastards are smoking a cold turd in hell now. It's also dedicated to the rare insightful few who didn't. But mostly...This book is for Emma.

This book is not intended as a challenge to White Wolf Games Studios or their trademarks.

Foreward

This book has been a long strange trip. But as I often say, buy the ticket, take the ride. I got in trouble, caused other people to get in trouble. I was forced to settle down in one spot for the first time in a number of years. Built a proper refuge out in the sticks in my home state. Discovered that there were a few folks out there who buck the trend of covenant dogma and proved to me beyond a shadow of a doubt that not every Invictus or Sanctified was some kind of rat bastard pigfucker.

Which is an unfortunately tangled kind of compliment to those people. I'll keep their names to myself so they don't get the stink-eye from their covenant heads for merely talking to me. The last hassle those kind people need is to be mentioned by name in a book I wrote. In any event, it gladdens my heart to finally realize that I'd been seeing in black and white and that now I can see in color. It's good to be wrong about things like this, and I cherish these moments when I realize that not every person in the covenants that have personally caused me anguish is into the hardline stance. This is a good thing and needs to be encouraged.

Like any creative project, this one was a journey of discovery. Over the course of the last year, I've learned a bit about myself and have softened my stance on some things and hardened my stances on others. Rather than alter my essays from earlier in the year, I present them as an honest document of who I was and how I felt at that time. As a result, certain bits and opinions are a bit inflammatory. If you are of a covenant that might take offense at these writings, I can only half of an apology. I had my reasons for writing as I did. But as you continue I can only hope you'll see that I stop tarring everyone with the same brush...

Although, if you read something that offends you. and you decide that I'm talking about people like you specifically, Then fuck you and the house you haunt. You're the reason that kindred society is fucked up and maybe we'd all be a lot happier if you gave yourself a sunlight enema.

On to happier matters. Many questions about this books security have been raised over the course of it's writing. I hope that the massive outlay of cash that I have been forced to part with will be sufficient to shut you paranoids up. I was forced to purchase an out-building, one of those pre-fab structures for the back half of the Holler. At present, this serves as the book bindery, I'm looking to purchase a fully automatic press operation but those things are goddamn expensive. But if I do, Carthian Press will be a fully realized reality. I have some people who do the work on the bindery. I won't say anything about them other than they are people who know how to handle firearms and know what a stake is useful for. This operation is situated in the middle of a holler filled with VC anti-personnel devices.

This holler is also situated on the fringe of werewolf country, and is in the middle of an area that still has pockets of Brood rolling around. In addition, I may or may not have rigged the out-building to explode. So don't come around here looking to make any ruckus. Hell, the plain vanilla rednecks in this part of the country might jack you up for breathing up their air, especially if you turn up in some frock coat and lace cuffs get-up.

Originally, this book was to have pictures, but thankfully, cooler heads prevailed, and I am indebted to Oliver Hearst for talking sense to me, and for doing it in such a way that he didn't make me feel like a fucking child.

In addition I am indebted to Alexa Veda Karan for editorial services and for not laughing in my face at some of my wilder ideas. Although I'm sure it was a near thing...

Additionally, I am indebted to the members of the Carthian Movement who have seen fit to take part in my program to help educate the young members of our covenant. For security's sake, I won't mention their names here. But they know who they are.

Mahalo

-P. Berkowitz (The Lodge, 2007)

Introduction

If you are reading these words, then it's just barely possible that something in this rotten sadistic world has gone right. You are a person who has just undergone a traumatic and transformative event. Something so soul shattering and freakish that you are having trouble wrapping your mind around it

You are dead.

You are a Vampire.

You must maintain your existence by stealing blood from the living.

You are no longer fully in control of yourself. You share your head with the worst psycho roommate ever and he makes you do things, things that you regret, things that could get you killed.

You find yourself hungry and with poor impulse control. Your passions run wild and when they do, innocent people can get killed.

You find yourself terrified of fire of any sort and the rays of the cloudiest overcast daylight can sear you to ash in a very short amount of time.

You find yourself forced to divorce yourself from your old life and to hide from human society at large.

You've been dragged kicking and screaming into this Ur-life by some other undead asshole. Maybe you wanted it, not realizing what you were getting into, or more likely they decided for you. Sometimes they do this because they wanted to catch your expertise for themselves. Sometimes because they wish to bend your resources to their will. Sometime...Just because they get lonely.

You find yourself on the bottom rung of an entire society of these predator assholes and anything you desire in this existence you can have, as long as you can prize it out of the clutching hands of someone else. And there is precious little slack in these chains.

You live in twilight world built on ageless tyranny and at every turn other will try to enslave you or destroy you. Assuming you don't destroy yourself first.

This book is for you.

About your Arrogant Correspondent

It all started for me with a beating. A beating that in all likelihood, I may have deserved.

While "Pinkie Berkowitz" is hardly a household name, it is one of my better known "Noms de plume" under which I support myself. I think it's my favorite actually. A band of my acquaintance use to have it as their name and when they broke up. I asked if I could use it. The name stuck.

I'm not a fan of my given name. Let's just leave it at that. My parents were historians and had no idea the sort of ribbing I'd be in for from other children. All I can say is that "Lord of the Flies" is a kind portrayal.

My first writing gig was at the base newspaper in Fort Knox, Kentucky. And yes, I did some time in South-East Asia, but mostly behind a desk. Whenever an army recruiter sees that you're from Kentucky, They expect strapping and dumb. I must have been a disappointment. I was a sports writer then. It was something I could do, and I liked it enough to keep my nose clean and my ass out of the stockade. After my tour, I took my GI Bill and went back to school and went into Journalism. I think because the idea of a house-car-dog-wife-2.5 kids scared the shit out of me, and I wanted a career that would keep me from affording any of that.

I didn't set out to be a music critic. I wanted to write about the politics of the day, but being a long-haired hippy freak with an unfortunate taste in hallucinogens, It was unlikely that I was going to be in the White House press corps. Even trying to cover local politics was an invitation to be stoned to death by angry villagers.

Since I knew about music, and had a gift for invective, that's what I fell into. And honestly, it was probably just as well. Political writers can't get the good drugs, nor do they get laid as often. Sorry. That's the biz.

Rock Journalism is no bed of roses. It's no pleasure cruise. I've been stabbed, shot at, arrested without cause, and thrown the occasional beating for the things I've said and done. Once, at Studio 54, Debbie Boone rabbit punched me and then expertly hip-tossed me over the bar. As I was helped to my feet, the bouncers were dragging her out and her PCP-laced eyes locked with mine and she screamed, "I'll fucking kill you Berkowitz! I'll gnaw on your liver and dance in your fucking blood. You fucking cock-sucker!"

To this day, I have no recollection of writing the review "You Light Up My Life- A big, fat, vinegary douche of an album" Which I am pretty sure precipitated the attack. Had I but known that Debbie Boone knew kung-fu, I probably would have moderated my words a bit.

It was similar situation that I found myself in that night in Austin. I had been taking it easy down there. I'd gone to see a local band that night named "I want my Two Dollars!", A band about as tired as their cheese-ball name. But they had seemed nice in the opening interview at least, and although their songs were for shit, they did choose good covers and were tight in play.

I wasn't paying as much attention to their set as I could have been as I was eating mushrooms, or as I like to call them "Much-rooms". This particular batch was practically BLUE with wholesome goodness. Eat one of these, and you'll see Jesus. Eat a couple and Jesus will clear his schedule to chat with you about stuff. Heavy stuff...The kind of stuff that

only an insider, like Jesus, can get you hip to.

I ate 7 of them.

Now for those of you unversed in the ways of illegal narcotics, you should understand that I was not, in fact, trying to carbonate my brain-juice or some similarly heinous thing. I had, over the course of time developed a positively Herculean tolerance. Believe me, cover enough crappy bar bands over a career of 20 years+change and you'll develop the appropriate calluses too.

So, I waited until afterwards to finish the interview, Turns out some skeeve from another band that I had reviewed earlier in the week turned up to their show. They were friends with said skeeve and the aforementioned skeeve went on about the hatchet job I had done on him, (A righteous one, I recall.) and had poor-mouthed me to the band. They Googled me up backstage instead of drinking, and decided to end the pernicious menace I, obviously, represented to all cheese-ball Texas bar bands.

Even in my addled state, declamations like "We're gonna fucking kill you shitbird!" registered. I, of course, landed on my ass from the shoving.

Flying through the air, propelled by the drummer's well-toned arms, was a time of introspection for me. It seemed a lot longer than it was, but drugs'll do that to you. I wondered to myself, "Have I made a disastrous career choice? Maybe rock journalism isn't where I belong after all. Perhaps, I should instead, be in Bali. Painting nude girls. Not painting portraits of Balinese nude girls, you understand, but applying paint to the actual Balinese nude girls. What fucked up turn of events has led me to this unpleasant pass?"

And as I lay on the pavement, contemplating career options. An even odder event came to pass. My Uncle Ambrose stepped out of the shadows and began to lay waste to my

assailants.

I had known my uncle my whole adult life. He was a charming guy, witty, urbane, well-read. He struck me as being a little OCD, but always tried to deal with it as best he could and with some humor about his condition. He had the most finicky diet of any person I ever met, due to his host of allergies and he'd picked up a decided aversion to getting up while the sun was up. He was an academic, and wrote late into the night, as was his wont.

Yeah. Well I **didn't know** at the time. Vampirism is one of those things that once you know about it, you can at least START to see the patterns. What had my brain coming loose, like a U-haul from the trailer hitch at 75 mph. was, "What's Uncle Ambrose doing in Texas? And why is he kicking the shit out of those assholes? And what's with the fangs?"

The last thing I remember was being hauled to my feet and being inspected by his sad and ancient eyes. He said something to me then, but I couldn't make it out. It was probably very important, whatever it was he said to me.

When I awoke. I was hungry.

Yet more about lovable, cuddly, me.

So. All of us have been here.

There's a point, in each of our unlives, where each us wakes up for the first time and I don't care who you are, you know, on some level that something has gone terribly wrong.

Now, it's not an obvious wrong. It's not waking up and feeling that your bowels let go in the night while you were drunk. It's not waking up and smelling smoke. It's not waking up next to the cooling body of a Mexican hooker as the Policia beat on the door.

It's more like. "Jesus I feel like crap. What's this taste in my mouth? Am I sick? Why do my eyes hurt? What the fuck was I drinking last night.

Even if you're the kind of person who wanted the Embrace, who worked for it, who yearned for it... There's still enough of a tape glitch in your brain from the dying to where you wake up that first time and you go "WTF?"

Your subconscious knows. It knows something in you that is supposed to move has gone still, and something in your back-brain starts going, "Something is wrong. Something is wrong. HEY ARE YOU FUCKING HEARING ME? SOMETHING IS **WRONG!**"

With some folks it's like in the movies. They don't know exactly what's happened but they don't feel right. They try to eat something and puke it up. They end up encountering the scent of blood for the first time and even then they try to lie to themselves and say that it's not what they think it is.

But it is. The awful realization is there, like the sword of fucking Damocles.

Do you remember what it was like when you realized that you were different? Do you remember how you felt? Fuck all the years that have passed since then. Do you remember at all what it was like?

I'll say some things about my Sire that have become obvious to me only in hindsight.

1) He was thoughtful. He provided my first kill. A man who... Well... Let's just say the man had it coming. I looked into what my sire told me about him and it was true, all of it.

Granted my head and emotions were all over the map and I wasn't on board with the whole killing another person thing. But my hunger wasn't going to let my pesky principles in the way. When you're in the grip of the first hunger, It does NOT MATTER. You will eat your one true love and when it all clears off, You'll scream and cry and beg the heavens that it isn't true. You'll ask God to strike you dead on the spot... But in that hungry haze, you will kill them and eat them and you won't be able to stop.

This is why I work so hard these day to make sure I'm well fed. Most vampires develop a system of some kind and only really hunt when it falls apart. You need to have a few systems so that if one isn't working, you can switch to another without real trouble instead of finding yourself trolling around the sketchier parts of Oakland at 4 in morning with a tight belly and a short fuse.

2) We didn't get along. I didn't realize that he thought I had given my consent to be embraced until 4 years after I left his tutelage. I don't remember having done so and so naturally I felt utterly betrayed. I've since communicated with him about this at the behest of one of his friends and we settled things between us.

3) I wasn't his first choice. A cousin of mine was his first choice. An accomplished historian and author like Ambrose himself. But Chuck had died in a boating accident in the Netherlands. Ambrose had a tradition of embracing one member of the family every generation or so. Of course, being as OCD as he was, it never occurred to him that I wouldn't fit in with the other Ordo Dracul and that maybe he should give it a miss this time around. So he held his nose and brought me across. Oy vey iz mir!

4) He got me to promise when I left him that I'd reconsider my politics and my field of study in 25 years. So I have to give him points for taking the long view and the hands off approach. Who knows, maybe in 25 years, I'll have certain things out of my system and be willing to consider a life in academia.

But let me be clear on this: I got enough strict hierarchy shit in the army and even though I am at times an avowed coward, I would definitely brain anybody on the spot who referred to me as a "Slave". Fuck a whole bunch of that.

5) He gave me a good education about kindred life, answered my questions, and didn't lie to me a LOT. In fact, he was very careful to tell me that there were things he couldn't tell me. And he also told me when he didn't know the answer himself. He was very clear about those things. That's an Ordo Dracul thing I think. Either that or he was just rigorous about the exact truth of an answer. And that's the best that you can hope for out of a sire.

6) He had a Ventrue friend work me over with Dominate so that if I went to see anybody in my family I would frenzy.

I hated him for years for this. Even after I began to see the wisdom of it. it was a fast and painful way to cut me off from my life and many kindred take years to go about this. It

was painful and yet it may have saved me some pain in the long run...

I still find it hard deal with and I was a CONSTANT disappointment to my parents...I just hate to think of them wondering what happened to me... Or worse, thinking that they had a pretty good idea of what happened to me because of my errant ways and so they shed a bitter tear or two and moved on. Sure, I could have written them a letter or called or something, but that would've opened up a whole can of worms that I wouldn't have been able to re-can.

I couldn't tell you what sucks more.

So after years of bitterness and recriminations, I told my sire that I wanted no part of the Ordo, or him anymore. And I hit the road. And for the most part it was my home.

Do not adjust your set

Your sire can tell you a lot about kindred society but you'll never know how well, or even if, you'll fit within it. That only comes with walking into some burg unannounced and then cruising around and getting in people's faces until they decide they need to sit you down and give you the "Talk."

The "Talk is usually something on the order of

- 1) Who the fuck are you?
- 2) Who the fuck do you THINK you are?
- 3) You got a sire that can back up any of that?
- 4) Have you stopped beating your wife?
- 5) Are you a diabolist? Member of the VII? Belial's Brood? Whatever covenant the Prince around here hates THIS week?

And then usually, if they find you are none of the above and you don't give them too much sass... They cut you loose and promptly forget all about you. Some princes will want you to cough up a boon of some kind if you plan to stay around. Some will want a boon just for not waxing you on the spot. So, I usually say "yes, sure, fine, whatever you say pal."

And then leave town. Jerks like that make me itchy. In some cases, they have enough Majesty to summon you back, so you need to get far away.

The problem is that Kindred society is a major adjustment for people. It takes a while to learn it's ins and outs. Each place you go will have it's own special twists and turns too. And no amount of reading or mentorship can really prepare you for walking into a room filled with predators.

Never mind that your innards will clench with nearly every new face you encounter. Better to meet people at a party or formal court where everyone has their party manners on. Better to meet that way than on the street.

That's a little thing called "The Predator's Taint" and it's the reason why all first impression between kindred can get sticky and unpleasant.

See, the new blood in your system has done some weird things to your body. You don't breathe. You don't leave fingerprints. You don't get a stiffy or turn up to room temperature unless you push some blood into it.

Your mind doesn't function the same anymore.

Hey, when your living, Your endocrine system and physiology regulate some of your mental and emotional functions. But when you die all that shit goes out the window. That's why some of your emotions feel unreal and a pale shadow of themselves, and others feel like a raging fire that never seems to run out of fuel.

In addition to all this, the lizard brain within us, the "R" complex upon which the rest of brain is built, becomes kind of supercharged. Your fight or flight reflex becomes hair trigger light and you can go into a horrifying frenzy that makes the worst PCP freak-out seem like a tea dance at the arboretum. There are certain instinctual things that can set you off and these are almost always things that can destroy you like fire, or sunlight, starvation or even the mere presence of other vampires.

There are a couple of things that can forestall this kind of thing, and I'll talk about this, but the best defense against flipping out, is knowing it could happen.

This is why kindred society is such a trial ALL the time, and is so hard for newbies to adjust to. Most people embraced into this bizarre half-life don't make it through their first

year. Many people are simply temperamentally unsuited to it and to living in a society of half crazed dead people who are almost all jerks of some stripe or other. It's easy to step off the curb when you know that all you have to do is sit and wait for sunrise... And keep from bolting until it's done its work.

Being in the company of predators is rough. Most seem to exude a continual attitude of "I could eat you" without being aware of it. Or maybe they are and lean into it some.

Yeah. Being a new fish in the prison yard of Kindred Society is bad enough. The sharks circle you and try to decide if you're exploitable, or interesting, or fuck-able, or drinkable. Some will approach friendly and try to add you to their circle of friends or point you in the direction of the asshole who they feel you are more temperamentally suited to hang with. It costs them nothing to do this and yet you'll still feel like you owe them for this.

This is entirely by design.

People are like any resource in the kindred world, finite and worth fighting over.

A word about the opposition

I am a person who tends to speak first and count the cost later. To some, this is courage, to others it's the most damning sort of weakness.

To me, it is simply who I am. And in writing perhaps I find the most basic sort of balance of that equation. I cannot write without thinking and thinking hard.

If there is anything I sometime find a curse, it is that I have perspective. I can, many times, see the other side of most arguments. It robs me of the purity and drive of the ignorant, or the zealous.

It is from this curse that I must, in the interests of full disclosure, tell you an uncomfortable truth.

I respect the Invictus.

Oh, I'll slag them. I'll harangue them. I'll charge them with every calumny under the sun. I will wreck their plans at every turn I can manage and ridicule them in every open court. And when they come to try to make me fear them. When they come to beat me into submission. When they offer me their poisoned chalice... I take the hit. I accept the beating. I spit their blood into their faces as best as I am able. And then I look them in the eyes and ask if it make their fuck hard for them.

But....With that said, I must say that there are times and places where if the Invictus did not exist, we'd have to invent them.

The Invictus operate under a simple and powerful idea. It's called Noblesse Oblige. The idea is compelling. Those who wish to lead people must make themselves fit to do so.

This is a correct idea and it's basis is what makes the Invictus respectable. They push themselves hard. They work long into the night to make their domains into safe and calm places. They take a certain proprietorial pride in their domains. And indeed such places are often near utopias for kindred and kine alike.

But like many powerful ideas, there are pitfalls to it.

The first is that the definition of what makes a person fit to lead, varies from person to person. Some of these definitions are by their natures lazy or self serving. In those cases, Invictus are only organized out of habit, and rather than do anything serious with their power, they sit around and play "Oo what a big TITLE I've got."

Others definitions cause able kindred to snap under their own self imposed strain. Jeebus knows that I would crack like a pinata under my own idea of what would make ME fit to lead. My candy would spill upon the ground.

The second problem of Noblesse Oblige is that too often "leadership" is confused with "Rulership". The perks that a man amasses by dint of his service to the community, become his due. His right.

And then obedience becomes his due. His right.

We're not that different, honestly. Each of us serves the community in our own way. But the rewards we seek in recompense differ. The Invictus want a Kindred society that they run. The Carthians want a Kindred society that runs itself.

And in truth, there are those who need Invictus. They need the rules, order, and structure that they represent. There are many kindred who don't desire the seats of power, nor the responsibilities that come with them. There are numerous kindred who wouldn't know the first thing about leadership and in the hands of those kindred, domains would flounder uselessly or be crushed by tyranny utterly.

There are many who need the Invictus and I think the world is a better place with them than without them.

But I do know that this twilight world would be a great deal more peaceful if the Invictus would understand one simple thing.

There are many people who need the Invictus.

We aren't those people.

One more cross to bear

Had to tell a good friend to piss up a rope tonight. And that's got me angry as fuck right now.

There are some people who feel that my book is a threat to the Masquerade. Just like mortal politicians they try to campaign with fear and a barrage of hypothetical situations. Now granted, the security of my project is something that is, at best, an afterthought in my creative process. I have discarded at least a few separate plans for the dissemination of this book. And in this end of things I am willing to be educated.

But don't tell me that the best thing for the security of the masquerade is to stop writing the book. That's bullshit.

"IF...", they say, "IF... my book were to fall into the hands of hunters, why it could blow the whole thing wide open."

There are two points to consider. Points that my esteemed nemeses among the Invictus have failed to consider.

I don't see them volunteering burn their own diaries, or pressuring the Sanctified to burn their holy books. Or asking the Crone to toast their Books of Shadows or even suggesting out loud that it would best if the Ordo were to torch their monstrously huge libraries. No it's only me, seemingly, that is a threat to the whole thing. Which is double standard bullshit. I don't care what you do. There will always be people who stalk vampires. You can triple-encrypt. You can write your missives in Sumerian. You can even pen your works as a series of Scandinavian kennings, but there are going to be people who are going to find ways to extract their meanings. No book is safe. Thus all books are a potential source of intelligence to our enemies.

So why are they busting my balls? What's that about huh?

Is it just the MAN trying to keep a whigger down? Are they just trying to promulgate the idea that the Carthians are incapable of keeping secrets out of the hands of mortals? Cause if that's the case, get ready to fight those jerks on a whole new front. They love the idea that we are incapable or incompetent. Even though there are more of us who are capable with the technologies that scare the shit out of them. Sure, our covenant has its share of screw-ups and malcontents and people who couldn't cut it in other groups. But other groups have their share too. So, point that finger elsewhere.

Worried about the mortals who run the NSA cracking your Email and phone calls? Here's a thought: GET OFF YOUR PURULENT FIRST ESTATE ASSES AND START PROTECTING CIVIL LIBERTIES, YOU CHOAD MONKEYS!

As I've tried to explain, over and fucking over again, the whole point of this book is to help instruct young kindred in the ways of the world. Especially young people who don't have a mentor looking out for them. It's all well and good for the Invictus to decry this book as unnecessary, because all of them had a mentor and a proper education.

But not everyone has such advantages and it's those people I'm trying to reach. It is those people who need the advantages of self-education the most. It is those people who are most likely to break the masquerade in their naivete.

I am working to make a SAFER kindred society and I personally don't understand why I'm being given such shit for it. This is what I told William Talbot and it's what I'll tell any other Invictus who bothers to ask me.

So, could we not crucify me, until I've actually created a real honest problem.

And could we leave off pressuring friends to get me to stop. I won't and you'll just make an enemy of me. My friends already understand this. Why don't you?

Running out of time

You're running out of time.

You may not believe it but it's true. You think you've got eternity. But you don't. Every second that slips by you in the night, every minute that crawls by while the day-sleep claims us, is just one more that we've lost.

You might not feel it at first. You might look on vampirism as a murky jewel. Filled with time to explore things, or learn things, or drive ambitions, or fight for the causes that you care about. You may be filled with energy now. You may look towards a future that you'll have a hand in shaping. Vampirism kids a lot of people into thinking they can remake the world in some way. Some of them are even right.

But we don't get to live in that bright shining future. We are stuck in place. We do not age. We do not die, except by violence. We do not get to share the lives of our friends and family. We won't get to sit around with our contemporaries and compare our aches and pains, The acid reflux, and the knees turning to liquid shit as age advances are battle-scars that we'll never proudly display in our ongoing struggle with life.

We'll lose our friends. Our family will wither and die, like a cherry blossom. We'll be a cold shadow in the twilight by their lonely grave wishing for a way to call them back, **aside** from the curse that afflicts us...Don't be fool enough to go that route. That's how the Invictus dynastic families got started. And you can see how that turned out.

Sometimes, we cut our life off from ourselves quickly. And other times, we lose it piece by piece over many years. I don't know what's worse.

We don't all go the same direction in our first few years as vampires. Some reach for Heaven. A prime mover. A reason for all of this. Some wallow in hells of their own making. Others think to themselves, "Fate has made me a monster. I shall be the best one of all". Others struggle to find Purpose with a capital "P" in the Requiems.

And that's usually a good idea. Try to find some kind of purpose to put yourself to. It will at least distract you from the night to night misery of vampiric existence.

A guy I used to know, would talk about the "long dark tea-time of the soul". He was talking about the ravages of immortality then too. There isn't a kindred I know who doesn't have at least a long moment of wishing for death at least once a night. Even the people who seem to be having fun. ESPECIALLY the people who seem to be having fun.

I usually get it from walking at night in urban areas. A whiff of a steakhouse down the block. Music bleeding out of a club. drunk yuppies laughing at some in-joke they'll still be telling well into their 40's. We are surrounded by the things we've lost touch with.

Not only that but the time slips away from you in other ways. Your life becomes a weirdness magnet. You end up seeing more weird shit in the space of a weekend than a para-psychologist sees in his whole career. Ever been chased around a haunted mansion by an ghostly Irish band? Woken from a stupor only to find a zombie crawling up your leg? Had to deal with Aztec cultists who just can't get their apocalypse soon enough? And these are just the stories I can fucking TALK about. I'm not even an Ordo Dracul or a Crone. And those guys are PROS!

Not to mention, you'll end up frittering away your time on power games and title snatching. You'll eventually meet another kindred who fits your criterion for "Arch-nemesis" and the two of you will go to work hacking away at one another. That's a good distraction too. It might keep you busy for a full century if you play it right.

But that's part and parcel of the problem. When you first discover you have the ability to come back from death, to heal grievous wounds. To stand against crazy and horrific threats to your existence and not only survive but prevail, Well. An odd thing happens to you.

You get brave, perhaps for the first time. You're willing to write checks that you aren't sure that your ass can cash. You're willing to test the boundaries of your existence a bit.

Lean into it. It doesn't last. Nothing does.

Well, no. That's not true. Something lasts.

Fear.

Fear creeps up on you. It's like herpes, or kudzu. Once it gets a foothold, you'll never be rid of it.

Fear, will be with you until you die or take your rest. Fear creeps up on you. It sneaks out of the shadows and gives your soul a wedgie it never recovers from. Never mind that there's always going to be some grand high poobah of vampire-town who is always going to be more powerful or two steps ahead of you. Never mind that there are things stalking the night that make vampires seem as dangerous as little baby ducklings. Never mind that there is always some prick around the corner looking to catch you in an unguarded moment and offer you some attractive form of suicide.

The real fear, the fear that sits on your chest and rides your soul and laughs it's way through your day-sleep, is the one where you lose control.

Wassail.

Seems like a harmless word doesn't it? But it's connotative freight is enough to break most people. At some point, You'll have a frenzy, maybe even a brush with Rotschreck. But at least, that clears off. Right? Maybe you do something horrifying in the mean-time, but once it clears off, and you deal with the aftermath...Well, you're back to being you

But there are kindred, Some young, some old, who go up over the high side and they never come back.

It's these fears. This panoply of inner terror that colors everything we do in our unlife. As we age, fear becomes our constant companion, our sole caregiver. Oh sure, Blinding Rage may stop by occasionally for a chat, and by this point in things, even he's a welcome change. But he never stays, and Fear just clucks it's tongue, and goes and puts the kettle on and switches on some televised fishing, and offers you a crossword puzzle.

The clock ticks audibly and Fear mumbles under it's breathe about how you're really too old for all that sort of nonsense and isn't it better that you're nice and paralyzed like this. Fear spreads it's smelly afghan over you and you find you can't move. And decades pass until you finally break, or slip into a hellish torpor that you are ultimately grateful for.

Change is scary. Fear makes it scarier.

Action is dangerous. Fear makes it impossible.

Power is attainable. Fear makes it pointless.

Fear is there. And beyond even that, is the fear that the things you've done WILL be judged...

So. When I tell you. Take every opportunity. Do it.

When I tell you, "Be brave. Be strong. Stand up. Be counted. " Listen.

When I tell you to, "love when you can." Give your heart.

When I tell you to,"Relish the anger that moves you." Reach both hands deep into that deep red place and clutch it to your cold dead bosom.

Because you are running out of time

The voice in the whirlwind

We've lost our way.

As a covenant, we've gone so far and yet we seem to be standing still.

We lose brothers and sister left and right to the Invictus. People who were a part of us.

Why?

Why do they leave us?

Is it the endless wrangling? I look on our various mailing lists and I am filled with bile at the words of people that purport to be part of my covenant. We can only fight bad ideas with better ideas but we have no mechanism for determining what is a good idea and what is a bad one short of experimentation. And with the subjective nature of what we can value as a “good” idea”, even something pure and beautiful can be decried as unfair or broken. Even tyranny can be held up as a good thing. By people who OUGHT to know better.

Is it our fractious nature that make it so easy. Almost contemptuously so, for our enemies to set their barbs, place their pry-bars, and then simply let us tear ourselves apart.

Is our covenant so full of malcontents and fuck-ups (Myself included) that we are simply incapable of lasting success. Even our steps forward are shackled by the mistakes, outright malfeasance, and our inability to sit on our loudest and most foolish members. (Myself included)

Who are we anymore? Are we the covenant that builds. Are we the covenant that tries to do the right thing even when it's difficult. Are we the covenant the hopes to break the cycle of inequity, injustice and tyranny?

We don't seem like it.

We seem like a bunch of wrangling unbound, people who don't belong to something larger than ourselves.

I've been sober for months now.

I grow angrier every night.

Soon. This cabin will no longer hold my anger.

We have lost our way. We have no greater theological issue driving us forward and appeasing the irrational lobe in our heads. We have no tradition and oaths and inertia holding us together. We don't even seem to have one another anymore.

How can we get it back?

I don't know. But I'm going to find out, and not just for me.

Our movement cries out not only for intelligent leadership, but spiritual leadership as well.

To quote Edgar Friendly, a character in a movie that I like, "I'm no leader. I just do things. Sometimes other people come along."

The Fine Line

Every kindred walks a fine line in their unlife. Friends help us to stay on it. Enemies try to push us off. We walk the fine line because we cannot go back. We try to keep a grip on ourselves. Hold ourselves in check. We try to be in the world of the living as much as we dare. We try to be in the world of the dead as much as we can stand.

We fail, and we fall.

And that's necessary. Part of the learning process really. To be damned is to be stuck in the "cosmic high school of life" with no hope of recess. Others learn the lessons of life. They take in their knowledge and then they are allowed to "go home" at the end of the day. But for us, we are stuck. We have no hope of escape short of our violent destruction and most of us simply aren't ready for that.

Each of us is driven by our rage, our hate, our fear. We try to walk that fine line that keeps us from losing control. That line is between us, and some desperate act of violence. The point of, "**Fuck it, I don't care anymore!**"

And that's why we oppose the Invictus.

Now. I know what you're saying. You're saying, "Whubba huh? Pinky back up. I think you lost me.

The way that the Invictus, and to a lesser extent, the Lancea Sanctum, operate is via a top-down autocracy, or oligarchy. Now I don't know about you. But I tend to be uncomfortable in any social situation where I am not the biggest asshole in the room. I feel much the same

about political situations. I am distrustful. But I am not distrustful by nature, or out of habit, or out of my enormous monolithic ego.

I am distrustful because I know ME. I know the amount of effort it takes to keep me in some kind of check. I know the number of times I've been furiously, wall-punchingly, livid with people I CARE about. I know how much it takes to keep me from occasionally going on a goon binge and dragging the entire movement down with me.

Now, if I can't trust ME, in a position of power because of all that. How on earth do you think I'm going to be able to trust YOU! You have different values than I. You have different feeling and thoughts. And you have your own best interest at heart. Not mine.

That is why Carthians struggle. We want kindred society to be a society of laws, and checks, and balances. We strive against those who would make it a society of power-bases and cults of personality.

Because we know our hearts.

Because we know that they aren't pure.

Love makes you do the "Wacky"

If you haven't heard yet, here's the word.

Blood can enslave you. If you take from another vampire, you can wind up in their thrall. It can be calculated, or maybe you get hurt, or torpored, and the donor means well... But make no mistake. You can end in up in a unrequited slavish love affair with someone if you've drunk from them too often.

Some say three drinks is the magick number. I've known people who've resisted the bond up to six. There's no good way to measure.

Imagine you're a kid again. Your hormones are going crazy, and you meet someone who sets you on fire inside. Love in human beings is a matter of chemistry and this particular person puts a half-nelson on your emotional apparatus the likes of which you've never felt before. You are moved to the extremes of bad poetry and making mix tapes to show them how you feel. "Oh Yes!" You think in that cramped space you call a head, "Soon, she will unlock the meaning in these very specific Men Without Hats lyrics, and her heart will be MINE!"

They don't share your feelings of course. That'd be too easy. No. You have to PROVE your love. You have to make yourself worthy in their eyes. Which leads to all sorts of painful teen romance unpleasantness. You start to feel like a character out of Shakespeare... and not one who's going to end well.

Do you understand the sort of feeling I'm talking about? You do? Good.

The Blood Oath, makes that look like a clumsy pass and retreat on a Friday night at your local Bennigans.

The best definition of love that I ever heard was that it is the state of connection. That it is to feel as if someone else's happiness is important to you own. Not MORE important than your own. just important... Know what I mean?

I've been married a number of times. So, obviously, I haven't gotten it right yet. I'll say this for me, I've only had two of my former wives try to kill me, and only one tried more than once. So, better odds than I would have given myself.

Love, when you're kindred, is slipperier than a bar of prison soap. The idea of trusting another predator with anything belonging to you, much less any warmth left in your dead un-beating heart. Well, to say that it seems counter-intuitive is perhaps an understatement of some depth. An understatement on par with "Jesus Christ had an effect on the course of western religious thought."

Add to this, the unpleasant problem of the blood being addictive and psycho-reactive, and so it seems as if each and every relationship where blood is an issue might be a sham...From ghoul to paramour.

So this leads us to the question: Is the blood a curse? Or is it a means to keep us from being lonely? Don't know as I'll ever know. Made a few mistakes down that road myself. Conan had the riddle of Steel. We've got the riddle of Blood.

Love conquers all.....I should know I've raped, pillaged, sacked, sieged, and razed by it.

The person with whom you become bonded becomes the most important person in your world, more important than yourself. And push come to shove, most kindred will lean into that kind of sick power over another. You'll find yourself crying at the words of Percy Sledge's "When a Man Loves a Woman" because you know what he's talking about. You've been there. You are there. You bought a summer home there... and odds are good, that if your regnant has anything to say about it, you'll die there.

There are stories about how to get out from under. Heck if there's one thing in the Carthian movement that we excel at, it's sneaking out from under. Some say that time away from the object of your affection is the only thing that can blunt the edge of the knife. But that's like being a dry drunk. Offer the hair of the dog and the traitor in your mind says, "Well...One SIP couldn't hurt us. Could it?" And then you're lost. Worse if you're a Daeva. Most Daeva embody the Oscar Wilde quote "I can resist anything, except temptation." The only thing that worked for me was to stay away. I had to leave town altogether. Torpor might work too, but that's a little extreme in my book. Hmm. Love someone who doesn't love you. OR get your brain scrambled...Decisions. Ain't they a cracker?

So, It would seem that taking blood from another vampire ought to be the last thing you should ever ever do. And if you have any knowledge of vampirism, it ought to be complete anathema to you right?

And yet, when blood is shared between people with great affection for one another...It becomes the closest thing we undead creatures have to complete trust and love. Maybe, an obsessive love at times, but a love that can sustain as well as consume its participants. And even if it does burn you inside...It may be the only warmth you are liable to feel in this cold and sere existence. Like so many things in this "life" it requires a balancing act.

So what am I telling you? I'm telling you be careful. Always think twice. Ask yourself if you know what your getting into.

It's a hard road to hoe when someone lured you away, gave you that taste you were hungry for, and then said "No thanks" when you offered yours. The pure shock alone of realizing

how badly you've been had will make you want to frenzy...and you still won't be able to bring yourself to hurt them. You'll want to, oh god, you WILL want to.

Take it from someone who knows. Mortal rape is usually over quickly. It's aftermath takes a lot longer. But being enslaved to someone via the blood is like a rape that can last forever.

Let's just say that I had a bad experience okay? I don't have a ghoul. That's how horrified I am by the whole thing.

Getting Biblical

They say that if you want to avoid fights you should always avoid the topics of Sex, Politics and Religion. I've never been able to avoid fights, so i've been very careful to get good at talking about all three.

I often have trouble with the Sanctified. It is mainly because so many of them lack any sense of humor. Look, I believe in an organizing force abroad in the world. I believe that while I may not perceive it, that there may be a "Plan", of some sort. I might even allow that God has some specific use for the Damned in his great and grand design.

But you tell a member of the Sanctified that after chowing down on 'Shrooms, you talked Politics, and played a few games of Uno with Jesus Herbert Christ aboard his UFO...Well, after that you'll probably be picking up your teeth. I certainly was.

Is there a Plan? Am I in it? I am enough of an egomaniac that when things get really bad, i'll dig out a bible from the hotel desk and start reading through Revelations just to see if I'm mentioned by name.

I do think that God is strictly a big picture man. I don't think he's got his eye on the sparrow, like the song says. I think he's got his eye on the whole of it. I also think that individual lives mean exactly nothing in the grand scheme of things. I don't think God talks to anyone down here. And I certainly don't think that God talks to anyone with a big enough ego to go around telling people about it.

I do think that there are powers and agencies that are abroad in the world. Travel around a bit and you'll see that the religious experience comes in a lot of flavors. God doesn't tend to little shit. He's got angels for that.

The question then becomes, Does God talk to his angels? I'm inclined to say No, simply from looking at the state of the world, But hey, I could be wrong. That's what separates me from most of those guys, the ability to admit that I could be wrong, the ability to consider that the big intricate thing in my head may have NOTHING to do with what's really going on.

The thing you have to learn about dealing with any Lancea Sanctified, or Crones too for that matter, is this:

An Argument is when 2 or more people are talking to one another and listening to one another.

a Fight is when one side has stopped listening.

Arguments are good. Fights are bad. Arguments can teach you things. Fights can't. Fights can only waste your time, your energy, and occasionally, your blood.

Who knows, maybe the Lancea can offer you a moment or two of comfort, in this tea dance in the garden of agony. But more likely they want your power and obedience. You be the judge. Your mileage may vary. I find that I can still get along with the more academically minded Sanctified. Because those guys are the one who are still asking questions. When I was a kid I got bounced from sunday school. Now, I know most of you are thinking, "You? Pinky? Bounced from a church? Shocked I am, to hear such a thing. Shocked I tell you!"

Well as it happened, the main reason why I was bounced is because I kept asking questions. And when it became clear that the adult didn't have the answers, or at least didn't have answer that they felt they could share with an eight year old. Then, I became suspicious of the whole thing and started asking more questions they couldn't answer. Until finally they sent me home. My parent were told that I could come back when I had more faith.

It wasn't that I lacked faith. I was a little kid. I asked questions because I wanted to know MORE. I wanted to understand more...

It is my considered opinion that if you don't ask questions...You don't have faith. You have a habit.

As always, I am reminded of the words of the mortal Harry Anderson who said this: "The trick is to keep an open mind, but not so open that your brains fall out."

He was speaking of cons and scams, but it's applicable to organized religion too.

Me? I'll take shamanism. No one to tell me how to live or think is always the way I'm going to want it. Also, there's Peyote.

On the Road

I travel. Not a lot of vampires are comfy with whole idea of travel. It only takes one bad experience with being caught in the middle of a desert, and no Protean to speak of, to wreck your night. There are so many things that can go wrong that traveling is a trial for human beings too and they TAN, not burn. You get me?

I'm not saying my life on the road hasn't had its problems. I've had more than one situation wherein a maid has completely ignored my "do not disturb" sign and found me sleepy and pissed off. I've had more than one occasion where I was forced to jack a car, because my ride had crapped out on me. (That happened 3 times on the way to Barstow. I don't what it is about me, and Barstow. It's cursed.) But at least I've weathered these times, and I can honestly say that I think I've learned from them.

Here are some hopefully helpful tips:

When away from the cities, keep moving. Be like the shark, because to stop is to probably die.

Out in the hinterlands, it can get hairy. Not being a Gangrel, I am far from maximized for that environment. There are werewolves and less identifiable critters moving around out there. So, I say to you, Keep moving. If you're driving from city to city, and your car craps out, you have only a few options. You can hole up in the trunk. (And you'd best have a trunk. Don't let the rental car company fob you off with a hatchback.) You can call to the destination city, and hire a cab at exorbitant rates to run you in before sun-up. You can attempt a car-jack, or hitch in. You might be able to get roadside assistance or Triple A to run

you into town proper and sometimes this is the safest bet as long as the distance ain't too far, and you've got no reason to snack on the tow truck driver.

Never snack on the driver. It's not a good plan, and it can crab your action something fierce, especially if you realize too late that you can't drive a stick. Happened to a friend of mine.

Don't give the police a reason.

Pay attention to your tags and stickers. Keep your car in good working order. Make it unmemorable. Don't paint it red. Keep calm and cool and collected. Never mistake a speed trap shakedown for *agita* from the prince. Don't screw around with or be disrespectful to state troopers. They've been out on the lonely roads and they've seen some things. They are probably better armed than you. I'm betting that they are better with their hand cannon than you are with that sword. Good luck drawing your katanna around your seat-belt. Speaking of which, keep that gear stowed and secured when you travel.

Stay away from sports-cars. I don't care how rich you are, they attract the wrong sort of attention. While you might outrun his police package Crown Vic, you won't be able to outrun his motorola radio.

Do not, under any circumstances consent to a search of your vehicle, your person or your bags. Cops that wish to search them are fishing. The cop's job is to bust people to generate revenue for the state. Don't help him at any turn. Don't believe him when he says that cooperating is the best way to get it all over with. Cops lie. They lie all the time. I have extensive experience with being stopped with illegal narcotics. Imagine what would happen if he saw the bloodstains. Make the pig-fucker get a warrant to search your car. Most won't bother if you won't play ball. Also, take into account the hour. It's unlikely he can get a warrant for searching your car at 4 am.

Cultivate a low profile as a driver. Although, I do know a guy who went the other direction.

He bought himself an RV, which he light-proofed and then painted it with blue and yellow house paint. With 10 foot high letters on each side saying "JESUS IS LORD!" Even the jack-off cops leave a guy like that alone. They're too scared that they'll walk up to the driver's side window and discover that the driver is wearing a child's severed head as a hat. Thankfully he hunts, carefully, and the RV isn't some sort of mobile abattoir. If he did get stopped though, and there WAS a problem, he'd be unable to dump that vehicle fast enough.

Know when to cut your losses. There is going to come a point, where you're going to have to kill a cop. Maybe, you've got a body in trunk. Maybe a friend is going to be uncool and frenzy. Maybe you know for a fact that the prince is out to hose you and he's got hooks in the State Police. Whatever the reason, Your best bet is to jump the guy by surprise. Put his body in your trunk for dumping later, Remove the battery cable from his cruiser. Use his shotgun to take out his dash camera and radio, take the shotgun with you and leave the STATE as quickly as possible. Don't go back for a good long while. Definitely acquire a new vehicle at your earliest opportunity, and do it legally if you can.

Eating good in the neighborhood

1) Major American cities almost always have stockyards. If you can still eat animals. Go this way. Most cities have at least one vampire who has twigged to this basic necessity. Be ready to pony up to this guy. If you know the guy already from travel to the city, bring him a nice gift. Why the hell not?

2) Find out when last call is in the town you're traveling to. Your hotel phonebook will have listings for local bars. There is a lonely girl or guy sitting at a bar in your town right now. If you have the right skills, you can lure them back to your hotel and give them the hottest night of passion they've had in a long time, possibly ever. You can deliver on the promise to screw them so well, that they'll be weak afterwards.

3) Be careful with hookers, strippers and pizza delivery people. Their time is monitored, they WILL be missed, and they are suspicious by nature. In addition, if you drink from hookers, and they get weak from it, they'll have great trouble walking back out on those enormous clear heels of theirs.

4) What I said about being careful around those people goes quadruple for front desk people. Don't shit where you eat, and definitely don't shit where I eat! One uncareful nosh on a desk clerk can lead to stake-armed maids at noon. It happened to a guy I know. If you do something like this out of desperation, CALL someone and let them know that it might be a problem.

5) If you are in an area where there are multiple hotels. Snack away from the one you are staying in.

6) If you visit a city regularly for some reason, You might start making a list of all the places in that city stay open all night. If you make a habit of cruising the local gas stations, Wal-Marts, and laundromats, you probably meet every Gangrel and Nosferatu in that town. I knew a Gangrel who kept well fed by luring men into the lawn and garden sections of Wal-Mart for sex. There's nobody around late at night, and it's just kinky enough to be really interesting. Your mileage may vary.

Don't mess with the Locals

Being just another freak in the freak kingdom is easy enough if you take precautions. But the unfortunate fact is that most kindred don't like you, even if you're just traveling through. Add to this, that there is a guy whose job it is to come out and roust you if the prince just THINKS you might be a troublemaker/VII/Brood/some covenant he hates. Add to this, the fact that most people entrusted with this job are some kind of whack-job combat monkey, and you can see where you might end up with some maniac, standing on your throat screaming "Waffles! Delicious Waffles!", at four in the morning, at a motel six outside of

Waddy-Peytona. That's not something you want to try to deal with with a head full of acid. Believe me on this one.

As a member of a "Polite" society you might want to send word ahead when you decide to travel. You might consider an itinerary, and few postcards to the right people. Harpies really like it when you post them something on the order of, "I'm coming to town on this date, I plan to be out in two days. I have no other business pending with people in town. Here's my contact information...

This will be fine for most towns and small cities. In larger towns it's a much bigger production. Most harpies in those places are old and have old school ideas. Contact with them has to be much more flowery. (Read=a huge waste of your fucking time) and even so, they may defer to having you meet the prince. Which is almost never fun, if you just want to stay the night and go on about your business. In addition, if they want you to meet the Prince, it's because he's suspicious, and that's virtually never a good time. I've found that I can get some mileage out of asking suspicious princes if they would be so kind as to appoint some poor shit-bird to show me around town and keep me apprised of all the stuff I need to stay away from. The benefits of this are multi-fold. It puts me in a tiny debt to the local prince, but also makes me a known quantity should I want to travel through again. It helps the shit-bird, because it's erasing some small debt he has with the prince, Or at best, is creating a tiny debt he can exploit. And it helps me because it gives me a native guide. And I also don't have to be looking over my shoulder for my entire stay wondering where the spy is. I KNOW where the spy is. Who knows, I might even make a friend out of the poor bastard.

A Man Alone.

Edward Abbey once observed that the basic premise of Anarchy was, that since so few people were actually capable of ruling themselves, that it followed that even fewer people were capable of ruling others. He's right. And while Anarchy has an attraction to every Carthian, most Carthians seem to outgrow it at some point.

See, eventually, even a dullard like me can see, that politics abhors an anarchy like nature abhors a vacuum. Some kind of system will always creep in and take the place of people doing what's right, leaving one another alone, and taking responsibility for one's own actions.

And that's a shame. Until we evolve out of that need, we simply have to deal with politics, so I guess it kind of behooves us, to work hard at trying to find a better solution every single night we exist. Being an island amidst the sea of chaos that is modern life is not a picnic. And there are many people who simply can't hack it.

Sadly, there's no real governing body to make sure that a person is a fit parent. This goes double for vampiric embraces. There are all sorts of people who aren't really set up to be a night dwelling predator, and this may not have anything to do with being retarded or even a little gullible. Some folks have trouble based on the idea that killing is something you shouldn't do. That lying isn't something you should do every SINGLE night. And they struggle with the sticky exigencies of their new existence. Occasionally, smacked off an even keel by cognitive dissonance that would make even Freud blow his own head off.

Add to this, the general tendency of friction-filled relations between kindred of all sorts, and soon you'll find that while the Carthian Movement may have some of the best esprit d' corps

of the other covenants, there are still going to be times when one half of the Carthians present will want to kill everything causing them problems, and the other half will want to sing Kum Bah Yah.

Here's the thing that will help you most in the nights to come. Act as if no one is going to help you.

If you want it, you need to get it. Or trade with someone who can. Never count on your covenant to aid you in times of need. Never count on the masses to rise up and smash the oppressors. Never count on another vampire to not screw you if they lose nothing by it. The less baggage you have, the less you have to leave behind if they come for you in the night. Hold yourself to a standard, because no one else cares. In the end, you will be the only one who'll know what you've done and you'll have to live with it all. You may have to live like a rock, like an island. And if you can't do that...

If you can't live with the idea that you'll have to take responsibility for yourself, Then stay up for the sun. It'll hurt, but not nearly as long.

It will get lonely. Don't embrace someone as a means of easing it. When your life is a wreck the LAST thing you should do is drag somebody else into it. There will be times, when it will be just you against the status quo and the people propping it up out of habit.

Relish those times. They are large and can't move as fast as you, You are small, mobile, fast, and if you're smart enough and powerful enough, you'll do more damage than they ever thought possible.

When there are others behind you, you will feel strong. Don't. Know that every person behind you in a cause is simply one more pair of hands to hold the enemies knife. Betrayal is a fact of life in kindred politics and many times, it has nothing to do with Dominate. Do what

you must. If others follow, fine. But don't ever expect it to hold together. The revolution always eats it's children. Remember that a human being said that first.

Gloomy outlook, I admit. I come by my low opinion of sentient mammals honestly. I covered the music industry for 20 years and it's given me an insight into the very pinnacles of scumbaggery. The blackest calumnies imagined in the twisted minds of the most horrifying members of our kind, pale in comparison to the everyday sins of record producers and executives.

I can honestly say that one of the proudest moments of my life was tuning up Sir Robert Stigwood with his own tennis racket. That thrice-damned hyena-fucker bled like Dusty Rhodes in a cage match. And he **deserved** it.

Look. It's not all that bad. There are friends to be made. Love to be tasted. Knowledge to be gained. You might even get ambitious and make some changes in the world for the better. It just seems to me that all the good can be gone in a single night. Things can turn bad so blindingly fast and the shock to the system that this creates paralyzes you from action. Make those friends. Taste that love. Drink deep of the knowledge to be had. Treasure it like they are getting ready to tax it, but when it's gone, don't stand there as the boom gets lowered on you. Hit back. Or run like hell. BETTER PLAN: Hit back AND run like hell!

And remember. When everything that you worked so hard for is gone, try going the other way. Think of the devastating loss as a new freedom. If you can manage that, there's nothing that can stop you.

If you figure it out. Tell me how.

A good man's Job

"A good man is a bad man's teacher, and a bad man is a good man's job." - Lao Tzu.

Any project like this is a journey of self discovery. Over the course of time, I have left my normal regimen of recreational chemistry behind me in exchange for the clarity that comes in its wake. That clarity is painful and at times, is more than I can bear. I bear it, because I believe that the work is important.

Also in the frame of self discovery is the fact that while I may bust covenant philosophies in general, and certain covenant members in particular, I also meet people who are thoughtful, and insightful people who haven't bought into covenant dogma and who no longer espouse the whole, "My Covenant right or wrong!" attitude that marks the very young, the ignorant, and the mentally lazy. Covenant Dogma is a sickness and it needs to be battled like the cancer it is. Dogma of any stripe is the most abject sort of acquiescence, and an abdication of any sort of responsibility for the contents of one's own head.

And it's this thing that I come to address today.

There are so many of us that are disappointed. Disillusioned. Broken under the weight of trying to deal with the internal pressure of our own covenant.

So many times, I hear from thoughtful and insightful people within my covenant that the Carthian movement doesn't really stand FOR anything. We only seem to stand against something. And it certainly seems to me that if the Invictus disappeared tomorrow night then we would fall to ripping one another apart in no time flat.

Cynical? Maybe so.

And that's one of our problems. We've lost hope. As a covenant, we're very young still and suffering from growing pains. And while we're off to enough of a strong start, that we're no longer considered just another flavor of Invictus, We still haven't found our way yet.

Our peers in the other covenants have a vision that propels them onward and gives them strength in the face of adversity. A vision. The Invictus see the golden city where they run stuff and everyone knows their place instinctively. The Lancea Sanctum see a kingdom of God. With the Kindred as the scourge of mankind as is their proper role. The Circle of the Crone seek a greater and greater harmony with the natural world, perhaps to find a true and complete balance. And the Ordo Dracul look forward to a goal of not only squirming out from under the curse of vampirism, but of turning it back on itself and becoming more than just mere kindred, all using nothing more than their knowledge and their will.

And what do we have?

Brotherhood? That can be a hard road to hoe when vampires are such passionate and excitable creatures. You may love your brother normally, but there are going to be times when he's just jumping on your last nerve with his hobnail boots. You know that there is a person across the table from you right now. You've bled for him. He's bled for you and you know when things are rough you can count on him. But there are still times when you want to shake him like a british nanny. And once frenzy enters the picture, all bets are off.

A common enemy that binds us together? Sure, but more than once I've seen the revolution eat it's own children. So, every triumph over the enemy is the death knell of the thing that binds us together. Too many times have I seen Carthians triumph only to see the vision that bound them together break into a hundred pieces. A hundred visions... One of the major problems with a Carthian victory or assumption of power is that it has a bad effect on Carthians just getting their first taste of power in kindred society. Many times, it turns them

into creatures worse than the Invictus they were standing against. I've heard it said that Power Corrupts and that Absolute Power corrupts absolutely. This, in my experience, is false. Power simply magnifies what is there already. If you've got a person in the movement who really ought to be in the Invictus instead because of his attitudes, give him some real power, and you'll see what he turn into. And you really shouldn't be surprised.

Belonging to something larger than oneself? Fine. But so do Belial's brood. That doesn't make us better vampires any more than nailing apples to a telephone pole makes it an apple tree. Community is good, but it's not the point. It's a bit like attending the neighborhood Baptist church when you're an Atheist. You may like the neighbors, but it doesn't really change what's going on in your head. If you and they aren't on the same page, sooner or later that love-fest is gonna be over.

Greater political variety? I'm not sure that's a real plus. I feel like our experiments have become diluted and diffuse by social and political movements that would destroy a HUMAN soul. Much less a peaked and puny soul like mine. Honestly. Nazi Carthians? What the fuck is that about? Collective personalities? Are you shitting me? Is anybody even keeping a running record of what experiments worked and what experiments didn't? Are we simply doomed to repeat our mistakes over and over, because we don't have as keen a grasp of history as the INVICTUS.

I, personally, am not a big fan of re-inventing the wheel.

So. it would seem too often that we come to a place where we end up with empty pockets and a broken heart. And that's mainly because we wanted everyone to have a place at the table. There's nothing wrong with allowing everyone to have a place at the table. But there is something wrong with everyone having a place at the table without paying for it. Especially if those of us who ARE paying for it, go hungry.

Fuck that noise. I think it's time for a brutally honest re-appraisal of the whole scene.

There is one realm in which we may be able to find our real niche. I think it's about time, we start learning how to take the high road. I think that it's very likely that the desire to truly be Carthian is, at its base, a desire for moral and ethical fulfillment. I know that my own sense of injustice is so keen that my discontent rises up within me like a bilious tide. I find that I reek of enraged gall when I encounter the night-to-night tragedies of kindred existence.

My heart hurts...I feel the pain, and unlike many others, I don't seek to ignore it except when it's crippling me. And so maybe, just maybe, the whole point of the Carthian Experiment is to reach up and be better than we are.

Must we be perfect? No.

Must we be saints? No.

Must we choose pacifism in the face of the oppression to come? Hell NO.

But I do think that we need to TRY to be better people. To choose courage, To choose compassion, To organize, To never stop educating one self, to feed the hunger, but also to feed the spirit, to find positive purpose in unlife. To help one another as best we can.

Maybe even to find that the moral and ethical fulfillment we seek will pay off in many ways we can't even see now.

What if we were a covenant that did what we said we were going to do? In some, that would inspire respect. In other's it would inspire abject terror.

What if we were a covenant that kept its word, without needing a bunch of magickal oaths?
What if we were a covenant that served as an example to people of what happens when you don't deny your humanity or sell off chunks of it for Occult power and geegaws.

That I think would be a covenant I would be proud to be in, and I suspect, would be the sort of covenant that many others would feel great pride in belonging to.

Now, Do I desire to set us up as some kind of moral authority for the kindred nation? No. That's easy, sloppy, and will create more anger and animosity than our current state. I want each and every Carthian I meet to be some kind of Exemplar. Find your own path, but once you do, run full tilt boogie on it. Never stop moving. Never stop learning. Never stop trying to make a difference no matter how many times you get kicked in the teeth for it.

Confucius says: When the people are ruled with force, and subdued with punishments. The people will be orderly, but they will have no shame. When the people are ruled by example, and subdued with courtesy, then they will be orderly and you will teach them shame.

That I believe is a very real goal for us.

So let's get cracking.

Long night's journey into Day

Tonight, I'm standing on top of a large building. The 5th/Third Bank building to be exact. Known to most people in the city of Lexington as the Big Blue Dork building. There is strong wind up here. It'll knife right through you, like a mugger on 7th street.

I could give in to it. Let it take me in its cold caress and carry me over the edge. Off the helipad, and down to the street below. And end to things. Laughing all the way I imagine. But there are no guarantees. I might live through it, and that would suck. And invariably create a problem for some poor shmuck on the ground who got too close.

So tonight, I sit up here with my trusty laptop and think.

I'm counting my odds. They aren't good. People who try to upset the status quo, especially those who try to upset it for the better, usually end up dead. I admit, I'm dead already, But there's dead and then there's DEAD, ya know?

I got an idea in my over-heated head. I want to learn how to be a better person, a better vampire, a better Carthian than I am. I want to do what can to make the world a better place, and more importantly. I'd like to find a way to be enough of an example that other people might try it too.

Yeah. I'm a little drunk. What's it to ya?

Is it too much to ask? Yeah. It is, kind of. It's why guys like Christ didn't go over so well in the hometown.

I don't expect my covenant to come save my ass.

I don't expect anybody to risk themselves for me.

I certainly can't presume to beat the jungle drums and expect anybody to come over the hill, guns blazing.

Especially since I'm finding that the effort to organize our covenant at the national level is perhaps, a Grand Guignol folly writ large.

You want the world to be a better place? You can't do it by organizing or debating. You have to do it with your own hands. You have to work at the local level.

Learning how to be vampire is a quick and brutal process and lots of things can get lost in the shuffle. It's a bit like encountering Barry Manilow tearing the throat out of an unsuspecting passerby. There are a lot of sudden realizations.

1) "Hey. Isn't that Barry Manilow?"

2) "Hey. Why is he hairy and why is his mouth smeared with gore?"

3) What the fuck? Am I on Candid Camera?

4) Hey. He looks hungry and pissed!

5) Okay. I'm running for my life through this airport lobby, being chased by Barry Manilow.

(Yes. that one. The slightly faygeleh jewish boy who writes the songs that make the whole world sing. THAT GUY.)

When if you just stopped and slowed down you'd realize it was just the acid, fucking with you.

A lot of people suppose that when they become a vampire, that it mean that they have to try and be a better predator, make themselves less than human to get by alright.

By that logic, if you lost a leg, then you'd simply better cut off your other leg in order that you could install wheels on your stumps. Making you into a better bobsled driver, or some shit...Okay, I admit it. Some of these metaphors are too tangly for even me.

All I'm saying is that were still people underneath, deep inside, where it still counts, and the person that forgets where he came from is doomed.

Sadness. loneliness. Grief for things lost on this cold blustery night. But still full of the knowledge that this too will pass. When I stop reaching up, when I stop trying to learn, when I stop trying to be better...That's when it will be all over for me. And knowing me, I'm not going to be one to die by degrees. I won't suffer the death of a thousand cuts.

I'm probably going to turn into some creepy needlessly messianic nut bar. The kind that lives up in the hills in a compound somewhere surrounded by land mines. Trembling, paralyzed by an imagination that won't shut the fuck up when i really need it to, foreseeing some apocalypse or another. Some weird shamanic loon who rolls into town making viscera

curdling pronouncements, and then buggering off into the hinterlands on some unknown cyclical schedule. Possibly tied to the phases of the moon, or how well UK is doing in the B-ball season, or maybe when American Idol sends me into some lathering wall-punching fit.

And if that's the price for trying to hang onto my humanity, I'll pay it.

If the price is unending agony, I'll pay it.

But I can only pay my own price. I can't sit back and watch someone else pay it for me. Nor can I pay that price for someone else.

I read once that some people think it's better to be a live jackal than a dead lion.

But in actuality it's better to be a live lion. And if you're smart, it's easier too.

I look ahead now. No. I've not been into the mescaline. I'm using my powers...

I'm seeing a vision of a group of people. Smart, compassionate, canny. minds like pirates, hearts like boy scouts.

They live in a world where hands are turned against them.

They live in a world where vampires want to ruin them for daring to aspire to being better than the base unliving matter we are.

And yet, they burn inside. They are kept warm by the glow of doing what is righteous and they will go to what lengths they can to protect themselves and the people they care about.

They help one another, not out of some convoluted favor economy or some bullshit tradition, but because they simply want to help.

They live and let live as best they can.

They stumble, and occasionally they fall. but they work real hard to learn from their mistakes. And they work even harder to learn from the mistakes of others.

Will they survive? My powers don't stretch that far. But if they have no other effect, they teach the other vampires loose in the world that there is an alternative to hypocrisy, a remedy for shame.

Good luck to you. I hope someday that I'll be one of you.

And maybe on that night, I'll come up to this roof top and instead of seeing an end to pain, I'll see the beauty of the view from up here.

How to be a professional Asshole

"I believe in equality for everyone, except for journalists and photographers."

-Mohandas Gandhi

Lest you think that I'm angling for sainthood or some shit, I'm going to go in the opposite direction now for a bit. While, I would like to see us reach up and take the high road some day, it's important to know how to break an enemies balls today. And I don't mean single combat either.

There are too many kindred wandering around thinking that each and every problem is solvable by violence. It's not. In fact, it occurs to me that there are many, many, many, problems in the world of the undead, that are made worse by violence. Especially, since most vampires think that if you mean violence to someone, then you mean to kill. Logically, this makes sense. If you're going to mess over an enemy, you want to mess him over so thoroughly that he has no means or desire to come back at you. To many this means final death, or at least a vigorous torporing and concrete overshoes.

This is not to say that a good fist fight can't be educational or enlightening to the individual you mean to correct, but Kindred tend to take such things to extremes. And once the blood is up, there's no telling how it will shake out. Oddly, I've found that kindred are less able to forgive a slap in the face, then they are an accidental gunshot. Go figure. This is why, whenever I expect to have someone come round and roll me, I try to have it done in such a way where it's nice and public. I find that ridiculing a person publicly while getting the crap beat out of me often pays better dividends in the long run. Yeah, I'm a Daeva, but I'm no great shakes at kindred slap-fighting. I will however fucking kill you in the court of public opinion.

But as I say, things can get crazy when violence is the first resort. I used to know a Mekhet, he confided in me that he had a means to rip the masquerade to bits, and it was set to go off if he got killed or went into torpor longer than a month. I asked him why he would do that, and he looked me full in the face and said, "Pinkster, If I die. I don't give a good GODDAMN about whether the masquerade is protected." He had a compelling point, and he may not be the only one out there.

In addition, I heard about an incident that claimed the lives of 7 kindred. They were going after a guy who was known to have black streaks in his aura, a sign that he was a diablerist...Turned out not to be true later, Apparently someone had lied. Go fig. But he had done some thinking about whether he was going to go out quietly or take some motherfuckers with him. Apparently, the fellow cut open his stomach the night before the fight, pulled out his small intestine and large intestine, Taped four white phosphorus grenades he'd bought on the black market. Pulled their pins, holding the spoons down and put them inside his belly. Jammed in enough intestine to keep them from jostling around, and duct taped his belly shut long enough to heal it. When the sheriff and his deputies came round to fuck him up, they got overzealous and ashed him. As his body melted away, the spoons on the grenades popped and BLAMMO.

There are some who say that violence never solves anything. They are wrong. There are certain problems that violence solves EXTREMELY well. But the number of problems that violence solves, is usually massively overestimated by the congenitally violent.

As a result, what I'm going to talk about are ways that you can operate that don't involve violence, but can mess your enemies over thoroughly.

I didn't do a lot of investigative journalism, but I did enough over the years, that I have learned a trick or two. In addition, it taught me how to pick open a hotel room door, hot-wire a car, Fast talk a desk clerk and similar useful skills.

Smarter dudes than I have likened the kindred game of politics and social brinksmanship to a game of Chess. a struggle of move and countermove. One that involves seeing the pieces in action and thinking four or five moves deep at all times. This is a decent analogy for the most part and allows the user the idea that he's fairly smart and capable at the game.

But I tend to think that Kindred society is wired a bit more like Professional Wrestling. One guy has the belt. Other people want the belt, or want to keep the belt out of the hands of those they hate. All plots follow from that.

When you see that, it makes you realize how stupid the whole game is. And that the whole tangled affair is mostly based on greed, lies, assholery, and tiny slights that get under thin skin. Sadly, oftentimes, it's the only game in town.

As a result, whenever you are presented with new information you must ask yourself two very important questions before acting in any way.

- 1) Cui Bono? (Latin for "Who Profits?" Always ask yourself who stands to gain from any action in the kindred world. Cynicism isn't just a philosophy, it's a way of unlife.)
- 2) Can this be checked? (Whether it's information from your bestest buds or your worstest enemies, You should work to check out things before acting on them. if that means making some elaborate plan to test out theories and gossip, then so be it. Better you should do that, than make a plan predicated on bad intel that gets you or someone else killed. Even information from people you trust implicitly has to be thoroughly checked. Not because you

distrust them, but it's good to know exactly how they got the information in the first place. Provenance is important. Also, does anybody in your coterie have the ability to check someone to see if they've been kinked with Dominate? Are you checking one another for that shit on a regular basis? Don't you think that'd be a good idea from now on?)

The craft of unraveling a mystery is very simple actually. You ask questions. Then you check facts, then you figure things out. Then you ask questions, check facts, and figure some more things out. Lather, rinse, repeat. Keep doing this. If someone tries to kill you, it means you're getting close. I learned this from a Travis McGee novel I found shoved between the seats on a plane trip to Guatemala. And it has stood me in good stead, lo these many years.

Intel gathering is a fine art...Actually, it's kind of a coarse art, but it's an art-form none the less. People who are in the world at all generate data to greater and lesser extents. And following a data-stream back to it's source is the way the work is done. I used to know a Nosferatu who made a habit of checking license plates of cars at any kindred gathering. (He always used to say, that kindred had a way of purchasing cars that said, "Look at me!" Or "Don't look at me!" He said he'd never met a single kindred who drove an Acura.) He had hooks in the DMV, and with the advent of RFID chips, found ways to automate surveillance on each and every car. He took pictures surreptitiously (Oftentimes, a more reliable way of telling kindred from ghoul than predator's taint.) And studied the details very carefully. He taught me all about stealing trash from the homes of kindred and ghouls, Kindred don't leave behind fingerprints. But ghouls do, and with the right equipment, those prints can be lifted off with masking tape and put onto a murder weapon. Not only that, but trash can be a rich mine of information in tossed bills and other sorts of discarded data. It's also quite amazing what you can find in the dumpster of a corporate target. And the best thing of all, is that while trash-mining is kind of shady, it's almost always, (depending on local statutes) Legal.

The only problem is that occasionally it can get you in trouble if you're not careful. They caught up to my Nosferatu friend and waxed him. Of course, I imagine him in hell right now having the last laugh. Behind his destruction, 3 local corporations went belly up, 3 ghouls committed suicide and 14 were arrested and tried for various crimes. (12 convictions for those keeping score at home.) It crippled that town in a way that it never recovered from.

Here are some tips on being a spymaster:

- 1) Figure out what you want to know.
- 2) Figure out how you're going to verify the intel that's coming in.
- 3) Tell the people in your spy network what you're looking to know. They can't read your damn mind. "Just keep your eyes open." isn't going to work.
- 4) Make certain they check in on a schedule.
- 5) Make sure at least one of your spy's tasks is to keep an eye on one of the other spies.
- 6) Make sure that each spy has one piece of serious information that is fake but is the sort of information that is going to require enemy action to check, or will generate gossip in the enemy camp. That way you can tell where the leaks are coming from. This is S.O.P for counter-intelligence.
- 7) A bear trap is pointless unless there is a chain attached to it.
- 8) Make sure that your spies are in the habit of offering information first and speculation last.
- 9) Break promises to your spies and expect them to fuck you hard. Trust is hard to come by in the espionage community. When it is broken, there WILL be consequences.

You will want to become an information junkie. Happily, having been a real junkie, I can give you some tips:

1) Know what you want to know. (Wow. That sounds familiar doesn't it?)

You can make yourself crazy trying to keep up with all the information that is available to sift through. If you have the wherewithal to employ your ghouls gainfully, one of the best ways to use them is to get them involved in the collection process and helping you to summarize the material that come your way. The internet alone, generates more data than you could look at in a hundred years if it broke down TODAY. So try to figure out ways to keep your focus as narrow as possible. Taking in data in the days of print media and television was a lot like drinking from a garden hose when you were a kid. Taking in data in the internet age is a lot like trying to drink from a fire-hose instead.

2) Unplug occasionally.

Truly, you can OD on information like any drug. Set aside at least one night a week where you unplug completely. Vary that night occasionally, so you don't fall into a trap of some sort. If you don't give your mind time to process, then the steady feed is entirely useless.

3) Change it up

Just like riding one drug into the ground develops tolerances, You need to vary the streams of data that come into your possession. The Internet is fine and all, but it's distinct and idiosyncratic. Just as is public data from municipal sources. you might spend a few nights per month taking a stroll through the microfiche records of old newspapers from your hometown. You can seriously jack up elders who think they are the only one who knows what happened many years ago. In fact, there might be a LOT of interesting material from the past of the

city. Be on the lookout for mysterious deaths and suicides, sudden madness, Real estate deals, shit like that.

See what you can do about getting your hooks into newspaper morgues and tape galleries of local television. Local radio may not keep much in the way of recordings of their news outlets. In fact, i worked for about 3 months at an NPR station during my college years, and we routinely bulk erased the tape reels and recycled them. This may have changed since. For all i know, you can run a radio station of a single workstation with terabytes of storage. You should probably be aware that other kindred might have their paddles in the same creek. You'll either have to "deal" with them or, better plan, You might arrange an information exchange. Nobody can hold it all down. Holding down a corner of it, might make you valuable to someone with similar interests.

4) Nobody talks to cops or dicks.

So, it's kind of important to come up with a good premise for talking to people and getting information out of them. In espionage circles there is a nice handy acronym for the primary motivators. M.I.C.E. Which stands for Money, Ideology, Coercion, and Ego. Private dicks usually can get a lot of mileage out of some story involving an inheritance. Usually, the wheels start turning and the interviewee starts to think, "Hmmm... Maybe if I point this guy in the right direction, I'll see a taste."

Ideally, you should have at least one premise for each point of M.I.C.E, So that you can work with additional approaches on the same person. However, you should always try Ego first, and you should always save Coercion for last.

Traditions

Weirdly enough, I am a staunch believer in the traditions of kindred kind. Even when they are occasionally a real impediment to taking the fight directly to those who would stand against us. Which reminds me of a pretty good quote I saw earlier this week.

"An Enemy, is someone, on either side of a conflict, who will get you killed."

Reminds me of a lieutenant I served with during my stint in the army. He met with a bad end. Not my doing. I didn't even suggest a potential plan to certain people he'd fucked over previously. I'm a peace loving soul.

Where was I?

Oh yes. The Traditions.

Lots of young vampires get this very basic idea that the traditions are there simply to fuck you up. It doesn't help matters that zealots and politicians inevitably drape themselves in upholding the traditions in the same way that human politicians and zealots wrap themselves in the flag. It's no less vomitous. And in many cases creates contempt for the traditions and the flag that is undeserving in and of itself.

The problem is that they use it as a club to keep you in line. This book has seen more debate about breaking the masquerade than nearly any thing I've seen in local domains for a while now...Mainly because of fear that I'll say things in this book that will be helpful to the hands of vampire hunters. You see, the powerful use the INTERPRETATION of the Masquerade as a means to club any sort of behavior that they dislike. They routinely use the bogeyman of concerted human effort as a mean to scare compliance out of people. "It threatens the masquerade!" and "It emboldens the Terrorists" are just different verse of the same song.

I don't doubt that back in the days when churches held a great deal more sway than the X Box, that a large breach in the masquerade would be enough to get the peasants to arm up. Break out the torches and the pitchforks and go roving about the countryside looking for unclean creatures of the night, or Negroes. Whichever they found first.

But look at people today. I mean, really LOOK at them.

Their government has turned into a despotism that would make Nixon's dick hard from beyond the grave. Corporations have stolen from the people and polluted their land, sea and air. And while there are a handful of dedicated and true blue people out there trying to get the message out, for every one person like that, there are scores of ignorant fools who want to blame it all on Liberals, or Jews, or whatever group they're eating the hater tots for that week. Jesus, if I was still breathing I'd have tried to assassinate Rupert Murdoch by now. (Fuck killing the President. I'd want to kill someone with actual power.)

Do you really suppose that this fractious group of people, untested and untempered for a whole generation could really get it together to wipe out the conspiracy of bloodsuckers that have been keeping them down for centuries?

C'mon. Pull the other one, as the English say.

Sure, big events can galvanize a community and might cause a lot of trouble at the local levels. And there are humans out there that know about us, and this could fuel their recruitment of course, but when you get right down to it, Humans are a lot like an LJ flamewar. Someone will say that vampires exist. Someone else will say they don't. The first guy will call the second a Nazi, and 95 percent of the listeners will tune out.

So, What does this mean to you?

Keep your city tidy. If you have to fight with someone, make certain you do it far from human habitation. If you make a mess, then clean it up. Being Carthian is not a license to be sloppy. Less so in fact, you at least have brothers and sisters who can help you clean a crime scene, or spoof the witnesses, or get rid of a corpse, should it come to that.

Helpful Tip: get three hay-bales, lay the corpse on top of them. Soak with gasoline. Get three more hay-bales and place them on top. Soak with gasoline. This will create a fire that is hot enough to melt even the long bones. Even if an investigator can figure out that there is a body in that mess, it'll be impossible to identify. Make sure you are way out in the country. Bring along the ghouls, some hot dogs, some marshmallows and a few beers. And nothing will look untoward if cops are called.

Helpful Tip (2): Parts of the south are riddled with large limestone deposits. This means that there are places in the south that are riddled with sinkholes. Sinkholes can be very large and very deep, and they can be a handy disposal spot for corpses. Do yourself a favor and do some preliminary recon prior to dumping the body. You might run into other people doing the same. Awkward!

Helpful Tip (3): If you have a body that you intend to dump in a body of water, you must do it properly. First, cut off the head and hands and dump them in a separate spot. This will make body identification nearly impossible. There is always the possibility that a unique tattoo or other bodily feature might give it away. Second, wrap the body in something heavy (Like a rug or a tow chain.)

It is vitally important to slash open the abdomen. Gasses build up and can cause a corpse to

rise. There's always the classic cement overshoes.

The Masquerade means taking precautions. Being careful, and if you do this, and are willing to help others do the same, then this means they can never use it as a club to beat you with.

And as far as the other things go, I hope i never get old enough to forget what it was like for me to adjust to this Ur-life I'm living now. I hope i never forget, because i can only assume that that is what causes someone to think it's okay to embrace someone else. Maybe you think you can embrace a loved one or some treasured ghoul in the heat of a battlefield injury. Maybe you think you're lonely. Maybe you have reasons...I don't know. Maybe you even know someone so desensitized by modern life, that they WANT it...

It's still a bad idea. It was a bad idea to embrace ME and I'll tell anyone that to their undead face. I don't think I'll ever see this "life" as a gift. But, I can at least aspire to be something better.

Amaranth...Well that's a whole nother kettle of fish. Suffice it to say that I think I've got enough crazy crap rattling around in my head, without eating someone else's soul. And from what I understand, Diablerie is a lot like potato chips. You might not be able to stop at one.

If you're reading this now, I'm dead.

Ha. Made you look.

But, I've been thinking about things. One of the primary bitches that Invictus have against me and my books is the premise that my book could be used by vampire hunters as a means of increased knowledge to hunt our kind. Never mind the fact that trying to argue against hypothetical arguments is bullshit and a waste of time.

Vampire hunters are a problem of course, But one of the things that a vampire has to take into account is the idea that we're not going to go peacefully, in our sleep, when we do go.

Odds are good that some night that piece of intricate planning that you've done to wax some other vampire asshole is going to succeed beyond your wildest dreams or go tits up in some spectacular, sky-lighting, fashion. Either that or the VII or the Brood are going to come riding over the horizon and you'll find that the only power that you actually have ends at the end of your nails. Maybe you'll go down swinging in some righteous cause. Maybe you'll be in the business end of some political corn-holing or double cross. Maybe you'll burn in the sun. Maybe you'll burn in front of the whole court.

In some ways, you'll be lucky. No more reindeer games. No more politics. No more selling off bits of your soul so that you can simply continue. Sure, you'll be dead, but there are bigger prices to pay. You already know that. And if you don't you're too dumb for this book to help.

But you will be dead. And that means you'll be leaving a number of things behind. Things that need to be dealt with.

Your Haven

Odds are good that if you snuff it, you'll leave behind a haven filled with compromising materials that could be used by law enforcement or organized vampire hunters, or worse, your enemies...

Trust in the vampire community is scarcer than most commodities. Please note that I have just made an understatement of some depth. Even among Carthians, it can be a crap shoot. It's why we place such a high premium on DOING for one another. We're trying to get into the habit of helping one another. So, in one's finality, it's important to have at least one person in the movement, someone that you TRUST with a capital T...To enter your haven and steam-clean the place.

That person will need to know the codes, the keys, the one safe route, and they ought to have this information in such a way that they don't actually have it in their head. (A safety deposit box is a good way to go, in my opinion.)

This trusted person will be the one person who will know your post-mortem secrets and will be the one person who can bear them for you after you are gone. Choose carefully.

The reason you do this is manifold. Smart princes and sheriffs might have something in place like some goon who goes around and does this sort of clean-up work on their behalf and on their orders. If they find something that could pose a problem for the movement, like a journal, or a computer with sensitive information on it, Well, they aren't likely to share. And they ARE likely to jam it in your ear-hole and gorm it around a few time until they turn you into a hand puppet.

Also: If you live in a semi-public place, Sooner or later, mortals are going to end up going into your place. Maybe the land-lord sends in some dude to toss your crap out in the street because you haven't paid the rent. If you were a mortal, you wouldn't want the jerk-off going

through your PORN, much less finding evidence that you were some kind of night stalking secret master of the world.

Your Peeps

Now, I travel light. I don't make too many friends and I'm not big on ghouls. I, personally, wouldn't know what to do with a full on Kindred style power-base if it ran up and bit me on my naughty bits. Do I have I point here? Yes, but I also like saying things like "naughty bits" My point is that when you're gone, the mortals that depend on you for Blood, money, sex, or whatever are left in the lurch. Many of them aren't going to adjust well.

I heard that there used to be Prince in this area who got ganked and 3 nights after he died, a group of four of his ghouls did their level best to burn the fields and nearly every structure in town. I've also heard of at least a couple of situations where some kindred gets offed and his ghouls go into some sort of pre-programmed shutdown that brought the entire municipality to it's knees.

Just as it's imperative to have a plan in case of a fire, it's also a good idea to have a plan for the Mortals when things go awry. Even if it's no more involved than, putting a business card in someone's hand and saying, "Go see this guy if it doesn't look like I'm coming back."

You should also impress on them the seriousness of their situation. They exist in kindred society largely at your leisure. Independent Ghouls exist, but they are very few and singular individuals. It is IMPERATIVE that you make them understand their place in the structure.

They are a security risk.

They are in possession of closely guarded secrets. The one person who could be counted on to vouch for them is now deceased. It's also widely known that Ghouls that have lost their

domitor are emotionally unstable and they're liable to do something rash... The worthies in the halls of power will look at one another like mafiosi, and shrug, and say to one another. "Why take a chance?"

And that's two in the back of their fucking skull in a parking lot of the Wal-Mart.

Grim. I know. And YOU know it's true. So when you tell them that it's a really good idea that they immediately get in touch with the designated kindred of your choice or that they get in the wind, grow old gracefully, and never so much as say the word "Vampire" in their sleep. Impress on them the seriousness of their position in the wake of your perishment.

As a matter of courtesy, you might also want to discuss this thing with the vampire in question and gain his/her assent. It won't do to have them turn up one night and be one more mouth to feed. Just make sure that the vampire in question doesn't have an unhealthy interest in that ghoul. He might take it into his pointy head to gank you and gain the ghoul as a bequest.

Chattels

It's far more common in Invictus circles to set up elaborate and byzantine legal structures enabling the smooth translation of wealth from one kindred to himself, or to another kindred, or group of kindred in the case of his shuffling off his immortal coil. But there's nothing stopping the Carthians from at least having a few things and understandings in place, so that Carthians don't waste a single moment arguing over who gets what. I came from a southern family and I've seen entire communities rent apart and bullets traded over who Aunt Beulah meant to have that oak sideboard. I bull you no shit.

As a result, if you possess real property, take some time to hire a lawyer and set something up. Put a goodly chunk of money into a trust fund. (That way, you simply change the identity of the administrator of the trust instead of having to impersonate your own fucking grandchild or some crazy crap like that.)

If you have personal articles that you wish to have distributed amongst the other members of a coterie. Go to the trouble of making a public admission of this, or at least creating a fully holographic will stating as much. Don't let them come up with their various ideas of what you "meant". Be clear and unequivocal about this shit. It will save arguments later. And God KNOWS us Carthians like to argue.

I don't know what flavor of Carthianism you plan to practice in whatever place you may be, but it is my considered opinion that anyone who wants to pressure you into donating something to the "Cause" after you've died, is looking to send you on a suicide mission as soon as possible. Fuck them, and the Odessa-based breeding program they came out of. If your city votes to have every piece of real property you own become property of the Carthian Movement after your death, I'd instruct my ghouls to set fire to everything I own. But then, I'm big on personal choice and small on being told what to do, especially after I'm dead.

Companies can be a ticklish thing. A change in leadership can queer the whole pitch. On the other hand they can be vital parts of the Carthian influence machine. If no one has the real ability to run the company from the outside, then it should probably be liquidated. But if it's too necessary to dismantle, then seriously consider bringing the board of directors into the larger conspiracy.

In any event, talk to a lawyer. Make a will. Make it as iron-clad as you can manage, and make sure that you gear up some grease on the judicial side of things, so that the Invictus cannot tie your will up in probate court for YEARS.

Also: There is one good way around that whole pesky, "Didn't leave a body behind" problem.

You can of course wait for seven years and then have someone declared legally dead. But sometimes, that's not going to get it. If you clue in your lawyer, then he can create a number of quit-claim deeds and keep them safe until given the proper code words. Then you can create a sale contract, which provides the lawyers fee and the sale price of single dollar. (Which does interesting things to property valuation and taxation. Then all your inheritors have to do is turn up with the code words. The lawyer dates the quit claim deeds, Sells the property to you for a dollar and his fee, and you're in good shape.

Vengeance

Well what better time? After all, what are they gonna do to YOU? I have a few things of my own in "Button Down" mode. If something untoward happens to me, then I suspect that a number of complete bastards are going to have their style cramped.

Childish? Maybe.

But hey, If I'm going to die, then I want at least someone to cry real tears of pain and curse me shaking their tiny fists at the heavens. Fuck em and feed em fish heads.

I'm kind of a prick. Insofar, as I keep a dossier on the various kindred I meet. Sometime things cross my desk and information gets added and I suspect there is a large amount of damaging material. If I had more energy for that end of things, I might be a DANGEROUS prick. But I don't.

Still, it's kind of amazing what you can pick up passively. The patterns one can see. And I'm sure that that an edited copy in the hands of the right journalists and cops might create a lot of tension.

What's the whole point of this morbidity? Maybe I'm just a little tired of this covenant crashing and burning on the basis of one charismatic and organized individual holding things together, only to get ganked and leave EVERYTHING in disarray. Seen it a few times. It's another symptom of our continued unwillingness to take the reins of destiny and get our act together. You are a vampire. By definition, this means that you have to play a tighter game than mortals do or they'll gank you. And if they don't, the other vampires will. This means that you should try to tighten your game at every turn, even when your piece has been removed from the board.

Pay attention. Learn what you can. Be as far ahead of the moves as you can be. When it's your time to step off the stage, then make sure that those who helped you are rewarded and that those who hurt you get it in the pants. Otherwise, you won't get a seat in Valhalla. And that would be too bad. I understand that the beer there is good.

The Chain

We have but one ritual. It's the one thing we do that connects us, That bolsters us in terms of Esprit de Corps. It helps us remember why we do what we do. It helps us learn why others do what they do. In my completely arrogant opinion, we don't do it often enough. We don't look one another in the eye and say what's in our heart as often as we could. In nearly every Carthian get together we ought to start with this. I think that if we did there would be less tendency to screw one another over small shit.

If handed the chain, I usually say something like this:

I'm the kinda guy who's always been bad about being told what to do. Maybe it wasn't something in the water in Lexington, growing up. I'm the kind of prick who used to put out his cigarette on the no smoking sign. The only reason I did time in the freaking army was because it was better than the state pen. The only thing that got me through was the fact that I knew a guy who saw some of my writing and put me on the base paper.

When I became a vampire there was a path mapped out for me. I wasn't interested in it, but that seemed besides the point.

When it was clear to my sire that I wasn't interested in the path before me. He set me free. He always took the long view. He was good like that. And then I hit the road.

I didn't join anything right away. I wanted to be careful. Even then I knew that the choices you make early on in your requiem can have lasting effects on the rest of your unlife. But I

was in hotel in the midwest somewhere. Fuck, I don't even remember where...I'd been alone for too long I think. Wandering the roads like Marley's ghost or some shit.

I'm not really a joiner. I'm fairly sure that any group that would have me as a member is awfully lax in their standards. I don't want to make a long story longer by going into the event that made me see that the Movement was the way to go. But I will say this...It made me see that our death is a form of stasis against which we have to fight tooth and nail.

Movement is what separates us from the other kindred. Our desire to move, to grow, to change, our restlessness at things that have grown old and stale. Our will to alter the world and not fall back on traditions simply because that's the way it's always been done. There are few carthians that I would consider "lazy" Because each of us seems to know that we need to keep moving. To be in the world and to do our part, like any sentient being, to try to make the world a better place.

We don't always agree on how to do that. We don't always agree on why. But we each know that to do less, is the true final death.

The Needle Like Point of it ALL

Wake Up!

Wake Up!

Don't be lost when time comes.

Don't be lost when time comes.

For the day of the cometh...As a THIEF in the night!

-James Brown "The Old Landmark"

I've got to be out of my head.

When the vampire gestapo come for me, I imagine the only defense I'll have is people leaping to my defense saying only. "Don't set him on FIRE! What's wrong with you? Can't you see he's simply out of his tree with foolishness! And in truth, if things keep up the way they've been going, I'll be reduced to drooling and random hooting. Possibly I'll even take to cyclical ululation like some freakish thrice-damned undead cuckoo clock. Yessir. I am Cuckoo for Coco-puffs!

I sit in my little cabin, surrounded by guns and porn and liquor. The place smells of wet werewolf, because my neighbors have developed a taste for my home-made Potcheen. The holler is horribly be-weaponed with every dirty VC trick I ever saw, heard about, or read about. I'm even wondering if some enterprising Crone has managed to cross Kudzu with crabgrass. If so I'd happily buy it off him and create the world's only attack lawn. The crickets are doing their thing out there. Will likely do so long after I'm gone. I can feel the madness creeping up my spine some tangerine-sized goiter. Likely I'll go out on the back lawn and start shooting at shit or bellowing into the darkness.

I am frustrated in ways that I cannot articulate. Possibly my howling and wild gesticulation might yield some meaning to close observers, but I doubt it. I try. I try very hard to get my

point across, to let people know where I stand and let them tell me, if they are so inclined. But this book is starting to drive me mad. Mad as a hat box full of eels.

I am starting to become tiresome to myself, and this is no more than to be expected. Even a person with an enormous ego like mine can only stand so much of the sound of his own voice. I began an essay some night ago and had to stop because I realized that I was echoing main points from earlier work. Am I repeating myself?

What the fuck am I even talking about anymore? Does anybody take any of this shit seriously other than myself? Who am I kidding?

What am I trying to do?

How can I exhort the Carthian Movement to greater coherence and organization, when I can't even display any myself?

I had an idea when i started that i wanted to write a book to help younger Carthians than myself, figure out things. But even so, that's only part of the plan really. I guess what I'm trying to do is get us to wake up.

But I don't guess I've done a very good job of that. Most of the Carthians I know and nearly ALL of the Invictus I know consider my arrival in their city to be like dropping a bomb on downtown. Survivable, but grisly and public and scary as hell. Some of that fear is calculated I suppose, I do like to be unpredictable. If you act predictable, they will assign you a mental box in their head. If for any reason you deviate from that prescribed area they will flip out all out of proportion with the deviation. Better to be unpredictable, to vacillate from calm, studied, lucidity to a lathering, wall punching, fit. Force people to react to you. At least that's my thinking at times... Sometimes I'm even sober when I'm thinking this. It's like I often say: "One man's holocaust is another man's fireworks."

But all the sturm und drang doesn't seem to be waking up the Movement. It slumbers and rolls over in its sleep. I've met more than a few Carthians on the road who made me reach out and shake them and say. "Yes, you were embraced at night, It is imperative that you act as if you weren't embraced LAST NIGHT!"

Let me tell you a story. Some time ago I found myself in some mid-western burg. I'd been traveling for a bit. I think it was New Mexico somewhere. I wasn't a Carthian then. I was just rootless. I was covering a Tejano band that I'd heard some good things about. They were in town for 4 days and since I figured I'd be in town that long myself, I bothered to present myself to the local prince and his court. As fate would have it, they left me cooling my heels for the bulk of the night while they brought in a local Carthian woman for questioning.

Now you should understand, that I am a poor liar. Always have been. I guess it was from when I was a kid. My parents used to get so torn up about my grades. I was a smart kid. It was obvious to them that I ought to be doing better. But the fact was I was bored shitless in school and couldn't focus. They didn't know about ADD back in them days. I was just lazy apparently. So many times, I'd lie about my report card, tried unsuccessfully to forge it once. Didn't do so well. My dad was a calm man, but if there was any thing that drove him to real honest anger. it was me lying. The grades were bad enough, but to lie about it...And to have my momma shed tears over it was more than he could countenance. And as a result it was the one thing that would drive him to spank the holy crap out of me. So, I've never been a good liar. It's cost me in some ways. And in other ways it's saved my soul.

But, as a journalist, I have learned a thing or two about telling when other people are lying. The shift in stance, how the blink rate goes up, how a person will unconsciously touch their face, how a person will repeat a question while they stall to create an answer. The body language of stinking mendacity, I got a pretty good idea of when somebody is pissing on my boots and telling me it's raining.

And as near as I could tell, everyone in that court was lying their asses off. The sheriff had hauled the woman in and presented a bunch of hearsay evidence that this woman had been feeding sloppy in territory other than her own. Oh, they made a show of it of course, I judged that the woman wasn't much older than I, but she held herself with a bearing beyond her years. As if this whole thing merely pained her. That this sad little pantomime was merely another in a long string of indignities that she and her fellow Carthians had been forced to endure over the years.

The trial dragged on. A Mekhet crony of the Sheriff was brought to certify the "Truth" of the evidence and were it not that I was very young and wasn't even recognized in the city, I would have spoken up for her. God knows she could have used some kind of advocate. Finally, they brought in her obviously Dominated childer to corroborate their testimony and she couldn't take it any more. She lost her temper, and I gather by the startlement of the players in that bit of political theater that it was a rare thing. Something they honestly hadn't expected.

She reminded me of Isabel. My first wife, she was fiery, passionate, smart, but most of all, AWAKE.

This story does not have a happy ending. They torpored her on the spot. Tossed her in some disused corner of the prince's place to sleep it off, for as long as it would take. I gather they had meant to wring something else out of her instead and no one went home happy. It made me sick to watch. I don't exactly even remember how I managed to get through my introduction. I wanted to vomit. Even now the memory of it makes me want a firearm in my hands. If I'd known more courage in those early nights...Who knows how things would have turned out.

That night, I asked a few questions and found my way to the other Carthians. I told them the whole gods-blasted story and counseled them to wait for tomorrow night.

I went back to court early that night and coated the doorknobs with DMSO and LSD. It takes a good bit longer for acid to work on Kindred. We don't circulate blood the same way. But after an hour or two things started to happen. I left town after placing one phone call. I

heard later that power changed hands in that town in 3 hours.

It taught me something. Actually it taught me a few things. Honor costs a lot. It's worth paying for.

But it also taught me the worth of standing by one another. And that is the Movement at it's best. That's what I'm hoping to awaken. That's and a sense of what is righteous and what is crap.

Sadly, the only thing I seem to be awakening these days is the Invictus. The only message they seem to derive from my message is that I'm some sort of dangerous kook.

Okay, they may have me there...But that not ALL that I'm about.

Look: Kindred forget things, real important things.

Not small stuff like, "Did I leave the oven on?" Or "Has the baby had his insulin yet?"

No. I'm talking about big things. Things they ought not to forget.

That's the reason why I'm working so hard to catch this stuff while it's scalding and vaporizing through me in my vampiric "Youth" I don't want to forget. I don't want to let the really important things slip away between the back alley deals and the nights of craven non-stop fear. Sure, my requiem may be an untainted atavistic endeavor, but I'm watching the kindred around me and I'm watching what's going on inside me.

Sure, you can learn a lot from experience. But if you're paying attention, you can learn a lot from the bench too. I've heard it said that to learn from your own experiences is intelligence. But to be able to learn from another's experience is Genius. And that's what I'm aiming for. Although my actual aim is for shit. It's why I use a Mac 10. I'm a fan of spraying

and praying.

But I am digressing. A bad habit I have. One that I fear will haunt me to the end of my days. What I'm trying to say to you my friends is that so many things get lost in the shuffle. As you try to acclimate yourself to this brand new life you can forget where you came from.

You were human once.

And while you've got a new diet, and a new social set, (including "Frenemies"), and some new weird elements to deal with...You were still human once. Your whole life wasn't leading up to this.

The reason why I bring this up, is because a lot of people start casting away the morals and ethics that they used to possess as human beings. This is bullshit. Just because you have to steal blood to continue living does not give you a license to eschew doing the right thing. Fate has not made you a monster. Only YOU can make you a monster. Nobody forced you to leave a trail of infant corpses in your haven to putrify. YOU made that particular design choice.

In fact, I know at least a couple of people who have turned their unliving state to their advantage in their quest to do more good in the world than they would have had the power to do in their breathing lives. I know there are some Sanctified who take issue with this stance, But honestly, you can choose to destroy maniacs and criminals instead of people who aren't harming anyone as part of your scourging of mankind. Which do you think is more likely to be in line with God's plan. (Since you guys are the experts. Right? I mean since you KNOW everything that's going on in God's head, and who the fuck am I anyway. Right?)

Sure, the way we live pre-disposes us to evil. I'm not disputing that. But if there's anything

that vampirism does it makes making hard choices all the more keenly important.

If you learn nothing else from this book, learn this thing:

Being a Vampire means making choices. And the unfortunate thing about that is that most choices in the world of Vampirism are IRREVOCABLE.

Think it though my fine Carthian friends. Each time you take a ghoul, make another vampire, take a life, drink a soul, make an (Im)mortal enemy. You are making a choice that can't be taken back. Sweet Pan Fried Jesus! If that basic idea alone doesn't move you to wake up and pay attention, then I don't know what to tell you. You'll find out sooner or later. probably sooner. And odds are good that it's gonna HURT.

Major Adjustments and Upside Down Living

One of the major downsides of being a vampire is that it costs you. Not just in the great big ways that really hurt and leave you bleeding inside, But also in tiny miniscule ways that erode your patience and fuck up your Christmas every single night of your existence.

You can no longer go out in the sun. You can't even stay awake for very long barring supernatural help or a bad case of Rotshreck. This much you tend find out very quickly. And no, Bactine does not really help much. Ditto for Aloe.

But there are hidden costs in that bald unpleasant fact. Costs that may take months to make themselves felt, and quite honestly can require more time and energy to work around than just about anything else in your unlife. I can't imagine what it was like for vampires before they had internet shopping and Wal-marts open all night. It must have involved a lot of legwork for ghouls. Dominate can smooth the road for a lot of things but even it's utility can be blunted. So let me tell you a little of what you're in for.

Employment:

You're boned. No seriously. You are seriously boned. Most 2nd shift jobs start while the sun is still up, and most third shift jobs end as the sun is coming up. You can usually make a few extra bucks by ripping off those you feed on, but that's never a long term solution. (And stay away from most jewelry and watches, if you try to hock them it can lead right back to you. Cash and credit cards only. and dump the cards after a few uses.)

You might be able to pick up some work of a part time nature, if you're careful. And there's always night school during the winter months to help get you into a career that you can set your own hours in. The main problem you'll run into is what are you going to do in the summer? When the sun is usually up by 6 am and isn't down until well after nine. This can crab your action something fierce.

Now, well heeled kindred always have the option of going into business for themselves,

and they'll find no shortage of mortals willing to run their business for them. But if you're a Carthian, odds are good you don't have that kind of jack.

I know a few people who've managed to keep jobs that they already possessed by pulling the "I've contracted Porphyria" stunt. But it's an active impediment to getting any kind of NEW job. They just won't want the hassle of dealing with your "Disability" especially if it means that some manager has to bestir his ass early in the morning on your behalf. Yeah. That's going to happen. That sound you hear in the distance is the rolling of my eyes.

Crime is always an option if you have the aptitude for it. And you don't always have to be a violent sort for this to be a viable career path. Each kindred community needs a vampire that can make fake ID's and forged documents. Each kindred community could stand to have a person who deals guns and has the necessary tools and acumen to repair and modify them. Nosferatu can be kings of shoplifting and car boosting, but even they need a chop shop or fence to take goods to. Hell, You're a Carthian, in any given group of kindred, you'll be the one expected to be carrying a set of lock-picks. At least that's the stereotype.

Thankfully, the time of the land-line is nearly over, and the time of the cell phone is fully upon us. This means that if you manage some sort of gig, and you don't have a permanent address of some sort. (Gangrel earth melder...I'm looking at you!) Then it doesn't serve as a means to keep you out of gainful employment. Although I am told that if you purchase a cell phone, you mustn't earth meld with it in your pockets. Leave it nearby, set to silent ring. That way you can still get messages.

Most work at home gigs are some kind of scam. ESPECIALLY that one where you assemble baby shoes... Which is sad because if there was a real honest work at home workforce, it would be a positive boon for people like us. You might be able to pull off a gig as the sort of person who does things specifically at odd hours because that's where the money is. I know a statistically significant number of kindred who started out as Limo drivers and cabbies in their first years of unlife. I know a guy who bills himself as an all night plumber. I met a woman in Tampa who has a gig as an all night dentist. (Oddly. She wasn't kindred. She just didn't like the sun.) I know at least 4 kindred who've set themselves up as Computer

consultants of various sorts. Most businesses and private individuals have some means to work around problems during daylight hours, but if the server goes tits up at 4 am, Their options are limited as you might guess. This can be a double boon to people like us, especially if you know that you can be invited into a home or business late at night and possible grab a "snack" while you're at it. The only downside to that is that many times if you're doing work in private homes, the owners might have pets and they won't take well to you.

Truthfully, once you become kindred, the goal that you must pursue for the first few years of your unlife, unless you have it already, is complete financial independence. You don't have to be rich, that draws attention of it's own. I know at least one Carthian CPA who is constantly exhorting other kindred to make sure they pay their taxes and keep clean records. You want enough money to be to step away from concerns for a few days and not be missed. You want enough liquidity at all times, that you can leave town on 20 minutes notice.

Necessities and Sundries:

Before the advent of the internet and Wal-mart being kindred in a modern society was a great deal tougher. You couldn't bank, You couldn't invest except through an intermediary. Paying utility bills and dealing with parking tickets required ghoul action. Shopping for the simplest things required an old money name, or some Dominate to get them to stay open late enough for you to come by and buy.

Thankfully, those days are over. Modern American society's Judeo-Christian work ethic has forced the corporate entities to create this world as a 24/7 kind of world. And the only places where this doesn't seem to be the case are the smaller towns, that don't have a walmart or other big box store open all night. I once knew an Ordo Dracul who got into a scuffle with some local Lancea Sanctum in his home town, and he managed to cramp their style something fierce with nothing more than equipment and household chemicals he was able to pick up at any grocery.

But there are also pitfalls. While internet shopping can be great, you may have to deal with delivery drivers who won't deliver unless you come to the door and sign for it. Worse, you

might have the sort of neighbors who might steal a package left on your doorstep. Both of these situations may require you to shake someone like a Polaroid picture.

Also, The use of the Internet is eminently traceable. I know a few kindred who are so paranoid that they use some proxy server in Greenland for every single thing they do, but for most kindred, especially most kindred like me, who are computer savvy, but not a total bit-head, this is not practical. Practice about a middling level of good old fashioned operational security. The best thing to do is pretend the NSA has an elbow deep file on you already and there is a million dollar price on your head. And that ought to get you in the right head-space.

Get yourself a mail-drop. If you're lucky enough to have a place in your home town that's open all night. then that's a bonus. Many places like this have security cameras, so take some elementary precautions. Also, this mail drop is literally your life-line in some ways. DO NOT under ANY circumstance use it for things that might constitute mail fraud. Find someplace else for that. Get the extra large drop box if they have it. This will save you from having to come in during regular business (Read= Catch on fire) hours and deal with some counter-monkey in order to get your package.

The Night Dwellers:

There is usually a sub-culture of people who live on the third shift in some way. If they've been living that way long enough, it suits their temperament and odds are good that they've seen some ODD SHIT in their time. This can be a problem for you if you aren't paying attention. I mentioned some of this earlier vis-a-vis Hookers, strippers, desk clerks, pizza delivery types, and things like that. In some ways these people are the sorts who are most likely to be awake and aware of the supernatural in your town. But in other ways, they can be some of the best people from whom you can recruit likely contacts. Especially since most of them are mobile in some way. I once ran afoul of a donut delivery man turned vampire hunter in Missouri. Dude, just seemed to know, I wasn't even planning on staying in town. I was just getting gas, so when he tried to jump me in the parking lot of the Gas n' Sip, I was more than a little nonplussed. I didn't whack him. He was actually really strong. And if it hadn't been for the fact that I am an inveterate chicken-shit when surprised, he would have gotten me. Happily I got a good look at him, and a better look at the plate number on his

van. Turned out that the locals had been trying to run that freak down for weeks. Poor bastard's sister got torn apart by a Gangrel and he had the bad luck to see it, and the good luck to get away.

Conversely, I know at least one Harpy who had one of her people set up an information network with all the 2nd and 3rd shift desk clerks and B&B operators in the region. It wasn't fancy. Just a few extra bucks, in cash, on the first of the month for logging in some data and the occasional phone call. The ghoul who ran it passed himself off as a spook of some sort, and since the town had a military installation or two, he had a lovely premise for paying off people and keeping it all on the down low. I happen to know that that harpy reaped fat dividends in city status as a result, and in addition worked closely with the Sheriff and Hound to monitor the comings and goings.

In addition to the people who are up all night working, there are also people who are up all night playing. My advice on these people is that if you have dealings with them, be certain that you pay attention. And if you are smart, you should get real good at spotting the signs of various types of drug use. This in many ways is fairly obvious. I mean, if you're hunting in the hotel or airport bar, You're close to your room, you won't have to drive somewhere if you snuggle up to some stewardess who's three sheets to the wind. That's easy.

But if you're at a titty bar, and the pretty young thing is grinding her neck into your mouth practically, it might be good to know if she's coasting on heroin or flying on Crank. Take it from a man who broken his rules on this score more than once. MANY strippers and hookers enjoy recreational chemical abuse. And for me this is usually not an issue unless it makes it difficult to get back to the hotel before dawn. I got badly burned one morning because I lost track of time. Crazy little bitch was very high on hashish. Took me an hour to get back to my car. Took me about another 20 minutes to unlock it. Couldn't stop giggling.

Oh and another thing. I don't recommend that you hunt via smash and grab style. Even if you're large, beefy, and borderline insane. That sort of hunting draws all sorts of unpleasant attention. But as a man who used to be a night manager for a large porn palace, I can tell without any degree of fear of contradiction, that if you walk into a titty bar, you find at least one woman who will gravitate to you. There are women out there who are so bent up inside that they just pull to someone who they know is liable to beat the living shit out of them. It's sad and disgusting, but it's true. So if you're that kind of maniac, do yourself a favor and find

that kind of woman. At least you'll be fulfilling one another's needs. Oh and if there's more than one strip club in town, you might cruise the circuit. If you don't she'll think you respect or something and that'll queer the whole pitch.

Oh and one more thing about strip clubs. Don't go TOO hungry. Take the edge off first if you can before you go. Light nips is the best way to go.

Had a girl pass out on top of me. I thought she was just energetic. Turned out she was on speed and hadn't slept in three days. That was an interesting evening let me tell you.

Social troubles:

Your family will be a sore spot if you have contact with them. Most family functions, take place in the afternoon. If you were simply working a third shift job, you'd be crabby as hell, but you'd at least be there. But that not the case. So say goodbye to weddings, funerals, most Easter and Christmas services. 4th of July cookouts. Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner and usually, family gatherings of any sort.

Most of your friends will eventually come to understand that you are operating on a different schedule from them. This will cause them to call you a great deal less frequent. The sad part about that, is if your friends call you up and you go out and have fun together, you will invariably get a call from some other Carthian in dire need or some asshole prince who wants you drop everything and come here and deal with something NOWNOWNOW! Make a habit of turning your phone off if you plan to hang with people you are friendly with. Even if you are only professionally friendly with a group of people, it's a good idea to devote a couple of night per month to their upkeep. Make sure people know this too. The last thing you want to deal with while networking at the club is some asshole on the phone going "The Cultists are moving tonight!"

The other end of this problem is that after 2 Am or so, most people don't want to be up. Sure, occasionally a late night of it is okay, but many times you'll find yourself lonely.

Early morning can be lonesome. But, on the other hand, it's kind of rare for kindred political bullshit to break wide after 4-ish, So you can often devote that time, till day-sleep comes with some kind of personal project that doesn't involve people or ghouls. I write. I

also read voraciously.

if you're taking night school courses or some kind of correspondence course, this is the perfect time to do your studying. Catch up on paperwork. Do craft projects whether they be home-made explosives or knitting. Relish the quiet time. All too often it's in short supply.

You might consider getting yourself a DVR player, especially if you've been in torpor for a while and are having trouble adjusting to pop culture. This is a vast improvement over the shit poor quality of late night television. Now you can watch whatever you want, whenever you want, and the machine finds that content for you. So if you like Opera, or Golf, or even just tittering over the inaccuracies of the History Channel. You might consider this as a serious purchase. At least you won't be completely lost about what your friends are talking about in terms of the new programs.

Rhythms of the City:

Learn how your city breathes in and breaths out. Cops go on duty and come off duty at approximately the same time. Figure about middle of the shift and that's when the bulk of the graveyard cops are on lunch. Getting across town at 8pm is different from getting across town at 2 am.(the bars are closing) And that's different from getting across town at 6:30 to 7:30 when morning traffic is starting to become an issue. I remember a recent thing that took too long to deal with and the drive back to Winchester would have taken only 10 minutes if i were alone on the road. But it was late enough in the early morning that traffic was pouring into Lexington going the other way. The idiot fucknut ahead of me was slowly bumping along, I can only assume he was half asleep as many morning driver are. The road to Winchester is only two lanes. And I couldn't pass him! No Shit, There I was, in full clench mode, because that Pig-fucking Sunday driver was keeping me from my haven. And I was going to BURN because of it. I'm surprised I didn't start shooting at him. The good news though, was I had done enough scouting of my local terrain and knew a back road I could turn off on to get me up here to the Lodge. Otherwise, it could have been grim.

Learn where the cops hang out. Take some time each night to get to learn a new bit of your city, unless your ethnicity makes this dangerous and impractical. Know where things are. You've got all the time in the world. Fucking use it. You never know when knowing a part of the city like the back of your hand will pay off.

Into the Meat Grinder with You!

Vampires loves them some politics. Vampires and politics go together like Hot dogs and chili. It's all about manipulating the environment. And if you don't participate, well then you're letting other vampires manipulate your environment for you. And that's rarely ever a good plan. Whole books have been written on political maneuvering and the management of power and they can tell you the both the gross and fine art of shoving the chess pieces around. But that's more advanced study than I'm after here. The work of this book is to help you find your feet and enable you to work your way around. If you want to skin-dive into Machiavelli or the 48 rules of Power, then you are more than welcome to do so, but I'll only be talking about Vampire politics here and what you can do to stay out of trouble, until you WANT to be in trouble.

So let's begin at the top:

The Prince:

Or Commissar, or Queen, or El Jeffe Grande, or Grand High Poobah or whatever he/she wants to call himself. This is the guy who is ultimately in charge of the security of the realm, Promulgates it's prosperity, is responsible for upholding the traditions, in both letter and intent, and in most cases is responsible for the punishment of those who transgress the laws both written and unwritten.

Usually, he's also the guy who takes the blame when anything goes wrong. Which is unfortunate, and not always fair. But them's the breaks in a tyranny. Buy the ticket. Take the ride.

Oh yes, Every form of kindred government is a form of tyranny. It's inescapable, like hunger for blood. But there are things that can be done to mitigate tyranny. And I know that at basis most forms of Carthian experiment are geared towards that very end. I don't believe in a completely fair government, but I think we've got our eye on the idea of trying to at least

make it better.

Not all Princes are Alpha wolves, but all of them started out that way. The one thing that most Alphas cannot abide is a PUBLIC threat to their authority. They might be able to deal with a private threat with more equanimity, but I wouldn't put money on it. my friend.

Smart princes tend to be the sort of people who are able to separate themselves from the night-to-night cut and thrust of kindred political jousting. Perhaps they have a vision for the future that they'd like to see realized in some way, Perhaps temporal power just makes their trousers tight. You won't know until you have an opportunity to get up close and personal with him. Which is something you should avoid unless he's a fellow Carthian, and probably even then. It's usually a bad idea to come to the notice of powerful people. It either arouses their jealousy or makes them think that you would make a useful tool. Neither of which are things you should desire.

For his part, if he's any kind of smart at all, he'll want to keep you at a remove. He may have to sentence you to death someday, so there's no point in getting chummy. Smart Princes know what their responsibilities are, and they strive to do no more than what they are strictly called on to do. Smart prince know how to delegate, and don't need to get involved in every single thing that comes down the pipe. Smart princes listen to their advisors, but also seek to corroborate their words. Smart princes turn up in unusual places and gather intel unfiltered by the perceptions of others, usually incognito. Smart princes understand that not everything can be controlled or brought to heel. Smart princes understand that it is possible to cross the line and be dead within 3 nights.

When you are in the presence of the prince, especially if you are in his public presence, You keep civil tongue in your head. Sass-mouth can get you destroyed with the full weight of the court behind it. I've found that I can get by with a little informal bonhomie, but your mileage may vary. The Prince is one of those few kindred that you can feel safe talking with alone. (Although, you might want to get yourself checked for dominate afterwards.) The only time

this might not be a good idea is if the prince is particularly old, particularly Ventrue, and liable to snack on you.

The Seneschal:

This guy you gotta watch out for. He's the dude who's job it is to keep a finger on the pulse of every little single piece of unpleasantness in the local realm. He's the guy who is responsible for paying attention. He's the dude who wants to know your name, your clan, your covenant, your underwear size and every single piece of data he can get his mitts on. Not only is he in charge of paying attention to what's happening now...But he's also sort of in charge of anticipating what's coming next. And most importantly, He's the guy who makes the call on whether the prince must be involved or not. He's the rock damming the stream, as it were. In fact, most Seneschal's that I've had any dealings with have taken it as a personal insult if I've so much as talked to the prince without their leave.

Prince/Seneschal relationships can be ticklish. Most rely on trust, which is a hard commodity to come by in kindred life. The best relationships of this sort are predicated on a very basic principal. The Seneschal is considered the Heir Apparent in any realm where he serves in return for his diligence and hard work. In any realm where a seneschal is taken for granted or sees the prince prefer another over him or her, that realm is in for a massive screwing at the hands of the Seneschal and his staff. I've seen it more than once. And usually the feelings of betrayal are so poisonous that they can even open the door for recruitment to the Brood or to VII.

The seneschal can often be seen by others as a kind of school vice principal. Not really in charge, but usually has to play the role of the hard-ass when it comes to discipline. Often times, he's the one who schedule meetings, prepares intelligence briefs. Acts as the designated Asshole when the prince cannot be seen to be harsh. Prepares the prosecution against courts involving judgement of traditional crimes, and in at least one case that I saw,

presided over court exclusively while the prince walked around obfuscated.

Smart Seneschal's find ways to temper the harshness of their role as best they can manage. In addition, they find ways to delegate authority. Smart Seneschal's also learn to temper the impulse to make sure that the prince hears only HIS words. Smart Seneschal's gather a staff around them and occasionally I have seen Sheriff's deputies that have overlapped their duties with that of the Seneschal.

The Sheriff:

This guy has a hard road to hoe at times. For the most part he serves the will of the political power-base as he is charge with enforcing the traditions, but many times, this Kindred is also pressed into service as de-facto war-leader in times of city invasion or internal strife. He does not have the luxury in this case to treat any one who crosses his path as a potential target/snack like the prince hound does.

In addition, because of the role he is in, he is often in the uncomfortable position of being entirely reactive to events. Often times, he has to wait until a crime has been committed, and then he has to find out about it, and then he has to go investigate it. Either that or he gets the phone call that apparently ALL of the Brood in the goddamn world have turned up and are chewing on the populace in the north side of town, and aren't YOU supposed to be on top of that shit Dudley do-right?

Smart sheriffs don't bother to play the role. They don't come on all heavy. They don't feel like they have to. If you're in the realm for a while, they wanna know who you are, but for the most part, they are probably not interested in getting all into your business unless Carthians have been fucking up in that realm a lot lately and there are axes to grind. Smart sheriffs' understand that they are on the reactive end of a job that requires both tactical smarts and strategic smarts. Smart sheriff's understand that a lot of the time, their power stops at the end of their fist, and being that this is the case, can be personally powerful and unstoppable

in combat, but ultimately pointless in the macro-scale of an invasion unless they've planned well and trained their deputies well.

Smart Sheriff's outfit themselves and their deputies with some kind of badge of office and don't just trust that you'll know them on sight. Even smarter one make sure that this badge of office is known by harpies in the surrounding area, so that they can spread the word. In addition, one of the few Sheriff's that I had an opportunity to talk with at length about his job, was proactive enough that he'd done some work to secure the cooperation of city sanitation workers and landfill personnel with a few extra bucks each month. Sure, the cops got called each time a body was found, but so did the Sheriff. And it helped him pin-point occasional Brood sortie groups with greater accuracy. Smart Sheriffs work as closely as they can with the Harpy and the Seneschal to share incoming information.

The rule of thumb to follow when the Sheriff is involved, is that if he's come to collect you to bring you before the prince or some shit, unless you are dead to rights guilty and lose nothing by running, you should go along. They may just want to talk to you, they might even appreciate your cooperation. Even if it looks like real trouble, you might be able to argue your way out. If the Sheriff is a jerk though, or some kind of thyroid case, then you might have to run.

The Harpy:

It's so easy for this job to end up in the hands of someone who doesn't know how to do it. And in fact I sometimes question it's utility at all. After all, what's the fucking point of having someone who is the social arbiter of the kindred scene. It conjures up the mental image of some mean, pointless, jumped up debutant, with nothing better to do than cut other people down, and massage the social scene for his or her own personal gratification.

And then again on the other hand, it can be one of the most vitally important jobs within a realm. If done by a person with the right sort of temperament and a head screwed on straight.

The responsibilities of a Harpy are multi-fold and if not attended to, can cause great strife in a domain.

First, a Harpy is responsible for the recording of boons, a vitally important job because many times the favor economy of a domain might be the only thing staving off a full scale war.

Secondly, Harpies are oftentimes charged with knowing who is who and what is what, a responsibility that backstops the Seneschal and Sheriff. This is indeed vitally important, because the harpy might be the only person that most kindred will talk to willingly. Smart harpies do this by dint of making a point of circulating as far and as wide as they can, touching bases with as many kindred as they can manage. Many times, they might be the first kindred to even talk to a person at a kindred gathering if they are new in town. Smart harpies go out of their way to be cordial and friendly. They are usually good at it too. And when you mumble something about being a Carthian, even an Invictus harpy is liable to go, "Oh! I see. Well have you met your Prefect yet? Do let me introduce the two of you. " Smart Harpies are able to make political hay out of introductions and make people feel like they owe them in the process. Most of them even like doing it.

Third, A harpy is often called on to arbitrate matters and hopefully defuse them before they become a matter for the prince to decide. In fact, some princes will heap extra punishment on top of people who's dispute could have been solved if they'd bothered to trouble the harpy to arbitrate. I've even know a couple of Harpies that took on the weighty responsibility of being the proctor of a formal duel.

Fourth, A harpy is often called on to act as de facto diplomat to surrounding regions and to other groups of occult creatures. I know not all harpies do it, but many times they will set up some means of communicating between domains and this will often become the official means of diplomatic communication. In addition, older kindred who mean to travel, often tell the harpy that they mean to go somewhere and the harpy gets in touch with the various stops along the route and informs them of the elders presence in their territories. It's polite and goes

a long way towards forestalling misunderstandings.

Fifth, and most commonly abused, is the responsibility to socially correct wayward kindred in the way of proper etiquette. Now I'm a big believer in politeness...Most of the time. Politeness is the grease which allows the social machine to function. And at times, it is important for certain people to be called down for their behavior. (Usually, this person is me, but then again, I'll tend to repay rudeness with rudeness beyond imagining.) Many times, I have seen this aspect of the harpy's work overshadow their other duties, which sucks as it means that you're getting gigged like a frog because the harpy doesn't like your face, or those shoes are simply so last fall, or whateverthefuck.

It also means that you could get frozen out of being able to avail yourself of the other services the harpy provides. A harpy's benign neglect can be as damaging as a seneschal's careful scrutiny. Make an enemy of a harpy only when you absolutely must.

The Creeps:

Which I suppose would be my catch-all name for any elder with an ill-defined place and title in kindred society. They gain the benefit of status without a great deal in the way of honest responsibility. Primogen, and Priscus, and even some covenant heads, are the primary batch I'm talking about here. Most of them aren't the sort of people who are willing or able to be prince, or indeed desire any serious responsibility in kindred society, but they are old, some are powerful, and most like to be humored at least.

In one respect however, they can be massively potent and useful to the city at large. The Creeps tend to accrete power in the same way that a grain of sand inside an oyster becomes a pearl. This power is often in the material realm of a domain, largely in the realm of influence. When an effective prince can get the creeps...Elders, I mean, on board with some plan or defense of the domain...Well. It's rare to see an entire domains resources marshaled, but it's freakish effective when it happens. Usually the Seneschal is the guy who has the detailed list

of who has what and who's bailiwick is whose.

The Hound:

If he's any good at his job, you won't see him coming until it's too late. If he's even half smart, he won't want to be chummy with you for the same reason the prince has. He's the prince's personal button man, and his presence means you've become enough of a problem that he doesn't want to deal with putting you on trial. He doesn't want to deal with you rousing up your fellows in your defense. He just wants you to go AWAY.

Lesser Offices:

In any domain, there's usually a plethora of smaller offices and sets of responsibilities. Most people in these gigs are looking to impress somebody higher up. Some of them go all tin pot dictator on you. Others are more broadminded and visionary. You've got deputies, whips, heralds, Masters of Elysiums. In cities where a single covenant dominates heavily there may be more lesser offices, and also overlap with establish offices you'll find in other cities. In other words, try real hard not to be rude to anybody you don't know.

Which is good advice at any time really.

Here's a few general tips for swimming in this particular pool.

- 1) Be polite, until it's no longer time to be polite.
- 2) Never slag another Carthian at court. If you have to slag another Carthian, make sure it's out somewhere away from court, or as part of some calculated plan to make others think

there's a divide within the movement.

3) Lie, but only for entertainment purposes. There are usually enough elders creeping around at a formal court that can read the truth, So, don't bother with lying over anything big or ass-saving.

4) Use the buddy system, There are people at courts, who will try to get you alone and then do awful things to you. Usually over some momentary slight. I knew of a Carthian that got dominated at a formal court in an elysium, no less, who was ordered to go home and execute his mortal family. And he did it. And the bastard got away with it...Until I heard about it. I gave that loathsome psychopath the "Savage Henry" treatment.

5) When covenant heads start talking about loyalty, honor, and family, expect a larger than usual screwing to come down the pipe.

6) When someone asks a boon of you, be ready to ask a boon in return. Favor economies work best when you strike while the iron is hot, before the gratitude is quite forgot. Gratitude has a shorter shelf life than tuna salad at room temperature.

7) The one thing that elders have gotten good at over the years, is turning on a dime politically. You won't beat them at this.

8) Come to court with an agenda. Leave court when it's clear you'll get nothing on it. Also leave court if you've gotten EVERYTHING on it. There's no point in dicking around.

9) Yell. Scream. Rant. Rave. Throw things. But when you are at court, strive to outdo the Invictus in courtly politeness and political coherency. Because if you step out of line at court, they will hammer you all the harder.

9a) The Corollary to that rule is: That if that doesn't work, then you must TRANSCEND the political in a display of naughty behavior and hair-curling invective so offensive that they won't be able to believe they've even seen it. If you're going to fuck up, you might as well fuck up BIG.

10) If you listen, you can hear the change in a person's voice, from where they are thinking for themselves to when others have done the thinking for them.

11) You can dick over a Mekhet politically by questioning his motives. You can ruin a Ventrue by questioning his sanity. You can crab the action of a Daeva or a Gangrel by pointing out they probably haven't thought it through all that well. But Nosferatu who have managed real political power, have no such levers. Fuck with them at your peril.

12) When you realize your opponent is demonstrably correct about one thing, there are only two responses. 1) "Well, even a broken clock is right twice a day." and 2) "Anyone can take a simple truth and build an impractical and absurd world out of it."

13) There is no such thing as brownie points. If they want you to do something for them, future consideration is worthless. Make them give you something real. And make sure the harpy knows about it. As my mentor, Mr. Lynch says, "There is a reason that the Invictus has to back up their word with magic. Sometimes promises are broken. Usually the really big ones."

Psyche Out!

True story:

After I got out of the Army, I took my GI bill and went back to school. After life in barracks, I didn't really have a lot of problems with idea of sharing space with another human being. Some people do. I was an only child and it took me a while to get used to it in the army. But that environment is optimized for directing one's hate towards one's Drill Instructor. It's easier that way I guess. So, I went off to school without a care in the world about what sort of roommate I would get.

I probably would have had less trouble with a coke fiend or a snake handler as it turned out. My roommate's name was Ty. Not Tyrone, or Tyrel or anything cool like that. Just Ty. He had a white trash mustache and unfortunate hair. He fancied himself a musician and a ladies man (Claims, which I saw little evidence to support.)

He was one of those sorts of guys who, no matter what the subject was, had to know more about it than you. Granted, I hadn't done as much living as some at that age, but Jesus GOD! This guy! He was from some backwoods town in Western Ky. and he was convinced he was tougher than I and had lived harder than me, I had a fairly robust Juvie jacket by that time and had been to motherfucking VIETNAM by that point. Granted. I had been mostly involved in the bureaucratic end of things, but that didn't mean that I hadn't been shot at least twice. He was one of those guys that make you think every single word out of his mouth was pure horse-hockey. Not a malignant liar, but the sort of fellow who reeks of mendacity simply because he runs out of truthful things to say. You know, a punk-ass motherfucker.

His crimes were many but small mostly. Due to an error, we only had one desk and chair in our room, which he promptly claimed. He also claimed the lower bunk, but sleeping in the upper bunk was something I'd done in the service, so it was fine. He left the door to the room open constantly. I value my privacy and my quiet time. He enjoyed the ambient noise of the hall we lived on. He borrowed music of mine and played it so often that he beat it to death

for me. To this day I can't listen to Jefferson Airplane without twitching. He started taking up a lot of space in our tiny room. He brought his drum kit from home. (I never once heard him practice) So there was a point where I had exactly 10 inches of clearance for leaving the bed and hitting the ground without piling into his kit. He would open the windows in the dead of winter and nestle under the electric blanket that his mom had sent him.

Liked a cool head and a warm body Ty did...When I explained to him that it was causing me to freeze in the night, he looked at me like a dog watching a card trick. Pigfucker.

He was also in the habit of telling me that any woman that I was interested in was after him. He also had this fucking alarm clock. it was like thrice-damned foghorn going off in the morning. It woke other people up on the hall. and he would just slap the fucking thing's snooze alarm and roll over. Imagine, poor tender Pinky, desperately in need of his beauty sleep being dashed awake each morning about 8 times by **Voooooooooooooooooooo!**

I merely tell you these small crimes against me to flense your mind of any possibility that Ty didn't have it coming. I don't think I really hated him, but he was thoughtless and he was making my life unnecessarily difficult. In questioning others, I got the distinct impression that most thought he was punk-ass as well, but didn't really consider him worth hating. I didn't either, until the Cookie Incident.

Every hall has one. Hell every barracks has one. He's the sort of fellow for whom the meal plan is just not going to get it. And so eventually he comes around to scrounge what eats he can manage from anyone gullible to cough up to him. Locusts have more conscience.

Apparently from the rambling discursive account I was given by Ty, Rudy showed up at his open door and asked if he had any snacks, Ty said no ,busy with studying, but that I might have something to spare. And so, Rudy went into my fridge and took my oreos. He cocked his head at me, not understanding why I was pissed off that he had been so free with my things. What next? "Hey, You dude got any spare cash?" "Nope, but Pinky just got some

money from home. I think it's over there somewhere..."

In truth, he had no way to know that it had been a particularly heinous day on campus. My J-school teacher had given me a "Come to Jesus" talk about my attitudes that had included a little Pentacostal flavored fire and brimstone. Awful Jack-ass. Lunch had been a hurried affair, I'd slipped and twisted my knee earlier that morning, and Mary-Ann Mckendrick told me that afternoon that she didn't date non-greeks. I had just gotten loose from play practice and all I goddamn wanted in the depth and breadth of the whole of creation was a blessedly silent roommate, and glass of milk and a tall stack of Oreos. And now I was to have neither.

There is something you should understand about my basic make-up. I have three levels of Angry.

Level one is mild pique. Usually characterized by yelling and throwing things. This usually lasts 30 seconds tops and is seriously tiring to me. Usually I'm all blown out after that. Granted, that changed a bit with my Embrace but usually an extremely short duration fool fit is my general way of dealing with too much stress at once. Most people who get to know me well discover that once it's all out of my system then I am usually entirely done with being mad and they shouldn't take it personally at all. Which is good. I hate going on goon binges like that. They solve exactly nothing.

Level two is a great deal more serious. Let's say you and i are working side by side for a couple of hours. If I haven't said a word to you in all that time, it's because I'm stewing. A person who loves the sound of their own voice as much as I doesn't really clamp down and give the silent treatment to someone unless they are seriously pissed off. Which is usually the case if I'm quiet and tense. I'm clamping because I've learned that when I'm that mad, I am liable to say something that is either legally actionable, or is one of those things that once said, cannot ever, ever, EVER, be taken back. Something on the order of "Well then fuck you

Mary-Ann. Fuck you and the needle dick you squirted out of, you jumped-up, pin-wheeling, copper-plated, horse-faced, swamp-cunted, debutante WHORE!"

You see?

Level Three is a place I rarely get to. Level Three is thermonuclear war. Kill them all. God will know his own. Nuke the site from orbit, it's the only way to be sure. I am thankful that I don't get to that place very often. It demands action. Usually, because to not act, is to walk around tense as a werewolf on crank, with eyes starting from one's skull and hands clutching an invisible neck... Level three is not a good place. I can't live there for very long.

That night, I lay in my bed staring at the ceiling and all but trembling with anger. Such a little thing, but it was the straw that broke the camels back. I was wondering if I could handcuff him to the bed without him waking up and then tune the sonofabitch up, but had to discard that plan as impractical because of the upper bunk. I also considered getting in the habit of waking up before him, and unplugging his clock. But this lacks the raw satisfaction i would need.

And then, a week later a beautiful thing happened. I learned a very basic truth about Revenge. If you pay attention and you are patient. Your enemy will inevitably hand you the means of their undoing.

My Mamaw loves me. And when she was still alive, she would occasionally send me a few bucks, while I was away at school. But on special occasions, she'd also send me a batch of her no bake oatmeal cookies.

Ty fancied himself something as having an interest in recreational chemistry. I could tell from the way he talked he was all talk and no action, but i let that go. In those days, I was

playing things fairly straight. I had tried a little grass in 'nam. But I've never been much of a smoker. Don't like it. Wasn't keen on needles either, Don't have much trouble with them now though. So for the most part I was still feeling my way, But even I knew I had more experience than Ty.

Now, for the most part, I am, as I have said, a POOR liar. But for some reason I was just ON that afternoon as I pulled Ty into the room in a state of manufactured panic. I told him this outrageous story about my ex-girlfriend, who had gone on tour with her band. And that she'd sent me a batch of her homebrew cookies. We were still kinda close you see. The unfortunate thing was that Dorm policy about illegal narcotics was fairly fucking stiff and they'd toss me out on my ass with a devil may care flick of the wrist, if it got around that I had a batch of cookies loaded with DMT.

He was hooked. He wanted to try a cookie, but I Huck Finned him. "Oh no Ty. You don't want a piece of this. The last batch she sent me nearly had me clawing my eyes out, there's no way to tell how this trip is going to go."

But he persisted... I said, "Well...It's against my better judgement man, but it's your funeral.. Just...Do me a favor. Stay in, and turn the lights off. Listen to something mellow and you probably get a really mellow high out of it."

Promising that he'd stay in and keep the lights out. I gave him one cookie. Locked the rest of them up in my trunk, and then went out to the student union building. Thankfully, I'd have a night free of his assholery and then I could rub his face in his ignorance when I went home. But oddly enough, it didn't play out like that. Ty turned up at the student union shaking his head and going, "Dude...What did you say was in those cookies again?"

He was having psychosomatic reactions to non-drugged cookies. Sort of like the way you can catch a "buzz" off half a beer when you're young and don't know anything.

So, jumping back into my show business, i hustled him back up to the dorm. "Dude you are going to get me in so much trouble. Did any campus cops see you? Those hyenas would like any excuse to stomp on my kidneys. Are you okay? Are you having color changes? Seeing haloes?"

When I returned to the SUB, my friend Abdullah asked me what that was all about, and so over the course of a game of pool, I told him the story. Which he thought was just about the funniest thing ever. He went out and told everybody at the Black Panther meeting and the next day again at Students for a Democractic Society. It got all over campus at roughly the speed of light.

Three days later, Ty announced he was moving out. "I knew there wasn't anything in those cookies."

I looked at him with a predatory smile and said "Sure you did."

Psychological warfare is so much more rewarding than actual warfare. As SunTzu says, "The purpose of Warfare is not to destroy the enemy, but to sap the enemies will to fight."

So, In addition to this long ass story, I have some tips on Psych-ops and how to go about them.

Never go for the big gun first:

There are a number of reasons why if you're seeking to cripple someone emotionally, you should seek re-dress in stages. Be calm. Be cool. Be altogether collected. Ask that the wrong

be righted in some way. Seek redress via means that kindred society actually provides. If nothing else, you might go tell the Harpy what some dumb-ass kindred has done... You might tell her sire about the way she acted.

You might get told at each stage of the game to go fuck yourself, but this serves to prevent a serious situation from getting more serious. Who knows, by taking the intermediate steps, you might indeed manage to forestall a larger problem. The target might have an attack of conscience, or someone might sit him down and give him a good talking to. And if it doesn't fix the problem, then at least it cleans your conscience about jamming it into their gall bladder and twisting it. In addition, you want any campaign of harassment to have a certain theatrical edge to it, and that's just not possible if you go for the big gun first. They should never know your true measure, and they should never know what's coming next, they should only know that it will top the last outrage. You want your final vengeance to be grisly, public and biblical in proportion. A sort of Grand Guignol of razor blade justice, that will live on as a monument and an example of what happens to people who cross you. Your target should wake up screaming and get an eye-twitch each time your name is mentioned in casual conversation and he should be utterly terrified of the idea of trying to get back at you.

As Caesar said, "Let them Hate, so long as they FEAR."

Take your time:

Cool off. Relax. Take the long view, develop intelligence on your target rather than rushing around trying to rally a boot squad to go fuck up his Christmas. Revenge is a dish that is best served cold. And if you do it right, then the asshole(s) in question will be out shafting someone else in the meantime and will likely blame them for any problems YOU create. As I said, be patient and pay attention and sooner or later they will SHOW you where to stick the knife. Who knows, perhaps along the way you will meet fellow traveller who mean to shank your target and that file of intel in their hands may mean joyous news of their impending

doom and spotlessly clean hands for you.

If you are going after a group. Don't bother with the bottom feeders:

Frontal assaults are pointless and counterproductive and will often garner sympathy for your target. Also, it's unlikely that the bottom feeders will know or care what's going on. It's not fair really to cornhole them for simply being a part of it. You want to be a great deal more surgical. Find out who is the rock damming the stream and set your charges THERE. That way the bottom feeders learn it's bad to screw with you indirectly and the body count is kept manageable. They'll try to foist the bottom feeders at you as a means of defense, but avoid them as best you can. It boots you nothing to wax them.

If your campaign requires your personal involvement, then try not to look like a maniac to outsiders:

Go about seeking redress in a sane and calm manner and try to put on the face that you are simply trying to handle the whole matter in a calm and rational manner. When you are forced to use the Big Gun, it will appear as if you've done all you can to forestall this grim inevitability. This is not say that you can't enjoy a private giggle or two at the targets expense, but publicly, you cannot afford to be seen as being childish or petty. You may also be perfectly sane to people outside the conflict and give the target the crazy eyes and quote Revelations at him when others aren't looking. Then he's the one that looks like a jerk when he tries to convince others YOU are the crazy one. You see the beauty in that?

Be ubiquitous and make sure they understand that anything can happen.

In a time-release campaign of harassment, make sure that the target doesn't have too long between events. He's liable to get his bearings back and try to get himself out of the reactive

mode. There is NO power in being reactive. So keep up the pressure. Keep them in the white-water. One Mekhet I used to know started messing with a Crone that was causing him problems, He kept up a steady stream of problems for the acolyte by dint of post it notes. Post-its on his windshield, post-its in his office, finally in his haven. Each more horrifying than the last. Each creating a nameless creeping dread in the victim. Each creating a piece of the pattern. The best thing about patterns in psychological warfare is that when you create a pattern, people fall into it even though they know they shouldn't. They glom onto the format as a way to understand what's happening to them. This is what makes it all the more shattering when you viciously break the pattern. Done right, it can generate sphincter-clenching terror.

Don't take back more than you are Owed:

It's called "getting even" for a reason. You might take a little more in recompense for that lost little bit of self respect you were forced to part with in the first place. But try to keep your head on straight. Even the craziest elders are rarely going to kill someone over a slight at a party.

Before making the run, you should sit down and think very seriously about certain questions:

Like, Should I fuck with this target at all? Or will I go to my grave with their teeth in my throat. Also, you should seriously consider how much you are willing to expose your own involvement in the run at the target. Some plans will require you to be right out and public in your run at them. Others will require you to smile in their face at court and commiserate with them at the run of bad luck they seem to be having. If your involvement requires secrecy, you should plan what to do if that secrecy goes away. Maybe someone gets mouthy or someone says something relatively innocent and the penny drops. Maybe your Aura gives you away. Whatever happens, you need to know exactly how to proceed, because if you don't

IMMEDIATELY step up the campaign, it will be perceived as weakness and your target will get his feet back under him and come after you.

This ought to go without saying, But HAVE A PLAN. and don't ad-lib! And figure out what is liable to be the price for being caught...If it's not worth paying, either forget it, or go back to the drawing board until you can do it without paying that price.

Sterilize at every step.

Buy necessary tools and equipment away from home. Pay cash. Never use a phone that you use for other things. Use the mail drop. Never use your own credit card. Never use your own computer. Never use your own printer.

Pay attention. Destroy plans after you've made and memorized them. Involve as few other people as you possibly can for operation security sake. The less anyone else knows, the less they can give away, whether by treachery or by forcible interrogation. Don't motherfucking talk about what you're doing. The temptation to brag is large, DON'T. Also, don't drop hints. What are you, the fucking Riddler? Only amateurs leave behind a calling card at the scene.

Deny, Deny, Deny!

Act shocked. Act outraged! But admit nothing and don't EVER say you're sorry. Lies! its all lies I tell you!

And perhaps most importantly, Know when to stop:

Keep a running meter in your head that keeps track of how much you've done or how much this whole thing has cost you against the original transgression and the pain it caused you. When that meter cause the scale to go clunk, STOP. Because to continue past that point is obsession and that's never good. Hey, who knows, you might teach your opponent a valuable

lesson that he/she takes to heart. That's honestly the best you can hope for. Most other forms of recompense are a pale shadow of the original sin. But you need to keep track of where you are on the road to some sort of vengeance or tactical harassment. Because if you step off the road, you can get lost in the forest real easy.

The Heart of the Movement

Any man who afflicts the human race with ideas must be prepared to see them misunderstood.

-H. L. Mencken

I love the Carthian movement. It may not seem that way from the way I talk about it, but I do. I may not agree with everyone in the Carthian Movement, but the way we work is that I don't have to. Hell, My fellow Carthians are often my biggest sources of stress and we sometime fight like cats and dogs about our various attitudes, and thoughts, and policies. But introduce someone giving us some shit into the mix, and we slap back to back so fast, it'll make your ear pop.

And that's good. We certainly have our problems. We have perhaps more than our share of growing pains as a covenant. We seem to be, as I have occasionally said a natural roosting place for fuck-ups and malcontents of many different flavors.

What many people don't seem to understand, is that when I say something like that. I don't always mean it as a slur. Fuck-ups are kindred who didn't fit in other covenants. They weren't able to please some elder, or they didn't fit someone's narrow criterion. Malcontents are kindred who saw that something was wrong, or fucked up, or broken about the covenant they were in, and they weren't interested in dummying up. Perhaps they spoke loud and long about it. Like hazing, many elders forget how much it sucked when it was done to them and so they pass on the cycle of abuse and say blandly "It was good enough for us, when we were young."

Maybe they had the wrong ideas. Maybe they weren't total jerks. Maybe they weren't

convinced that shit-canning their humanity or their ties to the human world was a good idea. And perhaps they didn't have the good taste to shut their neonate mouths

You know who's motivated to prove people wrong? Fuckups and malcontents are. And maybe someday we'll be an entire army strong.

But until that night arrives, Here are some things about rolling Carthian Style.

1) Not too many elders to boss you around.

Or give you shit, or test you, or treat you like chess piece, or a prop. This is not to say that we don't have a few elders. But thankfully, most of them are the same sort of people who didn't really want to buy into the whole power trip in the first place. Oh sure, You get the occasional half mad demagogue. Or some shmuck who got bounced from the halls of power, and has decided he's going to forge the Carthian Movement into his own personal fighting force. Sometimes mooks like that last like a vigorous cancer. Sometimes they get educated. A lot of the time, they get themselves perished.

We've got a few elders, and for the most part they're okay.

2) You decide your own level of involvement.

Now me, I ramble. I go from place to place. Report what I know, say what I think (Which usually is a marvelous distraction for the local muckety mucks. Other Carthians get a lot done when I come to town. But I live out in east bum-fuck and for the most part, all I want is to be left alone to write and ponder this time-bomb in my mind.

I don't want a lot of calls from other Carthians, and once that's known, for the most part it's

respected. I'm available for emergencies and all. Don't want to say that I'm some anti-social maniac, but I value my alone time.

Other folks, well they go the other route, They're out there every night, doing some kind of committee meeting or talking or thinking strategy. Constantly working the angles. Chained to their blackberry or some other technological based madness. Constantly on the prod. Me, I couldn't live like that. I'd be biting peoples head off left and right.

The point I am ham-handedly trying to make is, that as long as you can find a niche and work it, you've got a place with us. But in the ineffable words of RuPaul, "You better Work!"

This is not to say that peer pressure doesn't exist, but thankfully, it works both ways in the Movement. You might get hassled if you don't kick into the pot every so often, but the guy who's constantly taking from the table is going to get it just as hard.

I once read a thing that keeps this silly dinner table metaphor in my mind. A man dies and he's right on the borderline as to whether he's to go to hell or heaven, So St. Peter says, "Well, We can show you both and you can decide where you're more likely to fit.

So he takes the guy to what appears to be a large campfire. There are people sitting around the campfire and in the center is a large cookpot. There is a smell of delicious stew. The only weird thing is that each of the campers has a long, long spoon. And they dip their spoon in the stew but as they try to bring the spoon to their mouths, they usually spill the bulk of it. "This is Hell." St Peter says.

The man looks at the campfire, the campers and see their hungry faces. It makes him sad. So he asks St. Peter to show him Heaven. And St. Peter just smiles. " Heaven is just like this. only with one key difference... In Heaven, the people have learned how to feed one another."

3)Creation is the most sincere form of Critique

Vampires fall into static patterns. And it usually takes me...I mean US, some kind of trauma

to make us make changes in the ways we're doing things. Sometimes, we as a race, are slow to keep up with the world and it hurts us in ways small and large. So it's kind of nice to have a covenant that doesn't put a lot of store in the concept of "tradition". Let's face it, we don't have the stamp of the Catholic err, Monarchal church on us, or the cult of personality of some Wallachian monarch, We don't have the historical weight of pagan beliefs or neofeudalism weighing us down.

History doesn't stop us from doing things. It also doesn't make us chickenshit in the face of the new things abroad in the world. Look, I was born in the last century and in this country. I'm not keen on going back in time and doing things the way we used to do it in the old country. Humans stopped doing it that way for a reason. IT SUCKED!

4) No one is going to choose a path for you.

To my way of thinking, Carthianism is a form of vampire libertarianism. We try as best as we can to hammer home the basic idea that it's up to you take responsibility for yourself. In your first nights as a Vampire there will be a lot of people wanting to recruit you, or pressure you, or seduce you. In the Movement, we don't choose a path for you. We may have suggestions, and we reserve the right to suggest them to you, but no one is going to cram it down your throat. No one frankly has the time or energy for that shit.

5)There's no Theological Imperative.

One of the best things about being in the Carthian Movement is that not only are you allowed to believe whatever you want to believe about the eternal verities, But, in addition, we also don't set any kind of policy based on that stuff. This is a vast relief to me. I'm a Unitarian, and distrustful of organized religion as a matter of instinct. But that's me. If you want, you can attend a Sanctified Mass, You can hang out skyclad with the Acolytes or talk Magick/Science with the Ordo. I, personally, have done all of these things in the interest of

completeness.

But the most important bit about that is this: You're going to be surrounded by a number of intelligent, hope-driven, largely SECULAR people. And since no one is interested in having any one else's religious dogma predominate, they don't want religion clouding the process at all. Which means you can actually base arguments on things like logic and facts. Which is always a bonus in my book. Extraordinary claims need extra-ordinary proofs in the Carthian Movement.

Except for Bigfoot. I know that bitch is real. He still owes me 12 dollars.

The Wringer

Once upon a time, I was a young handsome prince.

Fuck you, I was.

I was loose for the first time in a while. I had just gotten my degree and into college after my hitch. So for the first time in years, I didn't have someplace to be or someone i had to see.

It was nice...For about a month.

I had fallen in love with the romance of being a real writer. Have Selectric, Will Travel. That was me. I was smoking again, and drinking pretty hard. I was writing like crazy. Most of it was shit, but enough of it had the promise of being good that I kept going. There was only real and unfortunate problem. I wasn't getting paid. A fellow can get by only so long mooching off his friends. And at that point in my development, I felt like I only really needed 3 things in the world. Grass, Pabst, and cat food. Not an ideal way to live.

So I started casting about for a job. The city editor at the Herald-Leader took one at me and had me escorted from the building. I wasn't suited to television journalism. Radio was possible, I got a gig but lost it after a month. That wasn't my fault really, I wasn't aware that the news director was the owner's nephew. The pranks just got out of hand. That's all.

So the local scene was played out. and then I saw an ad in the Rolling Stone, and I hate to use the cliché, but it changed my life forever.

I got a job as the playwright in residence for the glorious people's socialist revolution of Guatemala. Again, the romance of being a writer this time writ large on the loose-leaf notebook of history! Manuel himself picked me up at the airport and we discussed what I'd be doing for the revolution as we drove up into the foothills of Puerto Barrios. Colonel Orosio had taken over the country and had done what most tin-pot dictators do. Manuel and his guerilleros had done what they always do, and it was the same old thing that people in Guatemala had been fighting over for decades. But Manuel, who had been educated at U-Mass, had this idea that there was a place for theater and poetry and music as a way to win the hearts and minds of the people, helping them to rise up against their oppressors. And Manuel was that rare combination of Che Guevarra, Jesus Christ, and Batman. He had the Look of Eagles and if he believed it, then you did too.

In one year, I learned more about fighting a war than I had in 3 in Vietnam.

There were many reasons for this. One is that I am a shit-poor playwright. Secondly, the struggles of the oppressed, makes for preachy theater. Third, people are completely unable to care about people they don't know half a world away except as some sort of abstraction. We'd done the same thing with South-east Asia, but I'd gotten caught up in Manuel's vision and had forgotten all about it. When I returned to the "real" world, I tried selling the plays I had written and discovered this hard cold fact.

But despite my failures on the artistic front, I did bring something to the table that no-one in the army had. Logistical expertise.

See. I worked in the army shuffling papers all day, handling the day to minutia of getting people and materials from one place to another. I'd heard it said that amateurs study tactics. Professionals study logistics. I'd never understood what that meant until that point. Manuel's people were dedicated, some of them were hardened veterans of a dozen clashes Orosio's

men. Some of them were Irwin Rommel crafty. But they were FAR from being any kind of organized. We lost an engagement because a truck was late with some needed gear. The driver had decided to stop off for a siesta and deliver the weapon afterwards....Manuel shot him stone dead in the middle of the courtyard. PopPop! and then a dumb surprised look.

So, I brought a certain amount of tactical and logistical acumen that they were unused to having. I trained a small number of the men for various tasks and helped them to understand why it was important. And if they had doubts...Well. Most of them had seen Manuel kill that driver. Usually, all I would have to say was, "Do you remember Paco?" And they'd get on it tout de suite!

The other thing that kept me alive was that I married Manuel's sister Isabel. Being in Guatemala for that year taught me a great deal about myself and about war and what it means, and how it's fought, and the attitudes that are necessary for victory.

So let's talk about conflict for a moment. There are many who suppose that conflict is an integral component of life in the Carthian Movement. This is largely true. However, It should not be misunderstood. To say that Violence is integral to what we do is false. There are pacifist Carthians, I'm not one of them mind you. But they are out there. and they do their work by steadfastly refusing to give in to violent acts and tendencies. Although, the exigencies of kindred life often mean a softening of the stance of personal self defense. So while he may not strike first, he might also know jiu-jitsu.

Look. This is one of those things that is vitally important to understand. Your attitudes shape what you do, How you do it, and how you react to events. So, if you are under the impression that our covenant is involved in some total, unending, jyhada-like war with the Invictus or any

other covenant, well then you blind yourself to the subtleties of kindred life. In doing so, you might also be missing out on ways to make the world better. It's not impossible for Invictus and Carthians to work together. It's certainly tricky, and not without risk, but it is possible. And I'll go you one better. It's possible to do this without having some large external enemy breathing down your neck.

The political game is one that requires a little more soothing and a little less fist. Carthians with no status and no political power don't get involved in that level of our covenant's work, and so often they see those who do as sellouts and Invictus wanna-bes. Conversely, those who do have city status and a measure of political power are constantly having to go around behind the less powerful ones and clean up their messes. This makes no one happy.

So here are a few things to help us understand who we are, what we do, and the best attitudes we can promulgate for ourselves and others.

We aren't here to start a fight.

Ostensibly, the goal of every Carthian is more freedom, more justice, more equality, more ability. That's the prize we should have our eye on. Some of this can be gained by talking. Some can be gained by compromising. Some can be gained by political theater. Some can be gained by being an example to others, and teaching the opponent shame. Some can be gained by losing gracefully. Some must be gained through struggle and hard work. Only a fool or a thug thinks it can all be gained by violence. Look at each one of your brothers and sisters. The people who are closest to you. Who know you and feel much the same things you do. If you go into a war, you must be prepared to lose them. Each and every one of them. Are you prepared for that? Are they? Every single night, you have to ask yourself, is it worth the cost?

I don't tell you this to get you to expose you belly submissively to the enemy. Resistance is almost always worth the cost. But full out war must be entered into the same sort of solemnity as putting the entire house down payment on 22 black and saying let it ride.

We will however finish any fight brought to us.

One should anticipate that our attitudes, our actions, our very existence outside the halls of power will breed jealousy and contempt. "HOW DARE THEY!" they ask from their ivory towers. "How dare they demand a voice in their own governance. Haven't we been doing it for centuries? WE built this city. The system isn't broken. Why fix it?" There are going to be people who are going to take an instant dislike to you simply because some Carthian said some shit to him that really got under his skin 80 years ago. And there ain't a damn thing you can do about that.

So it is imperative that each and every Carthian work for peace and prepare for war, should it come. I'm not saying that someone giving offense is cause for war. I'm not saying the usual bullshit games of dominance and politics are worth fighting and dying over, But there will come a night, when all the festering resentment may boil over. And you and your brothers and sister may have to take on all comers. Be ready. Be able. And when the enemy comes...Smile and show them your enthusiasm.

Be ready!

This would seem to be the advice that I've just given above, but it's larger than that. Know what you're going to do if you win some victory. Know what you intend to do if you've been handed an utter defeat. Know what you plan to have in place and running should you find yourself in control of the city for the first time. Hell. I saw one turnover of power where the Ordo Dracul got fed up with the Lancea sanctum over doctrinal issues and oppression, and unseated them. The Ordo had no interest in ruling, and since they didn't want to turn around and hand power to the Invictus (Who were allied with the Spear) They essentially handed the whole thing to the Carthian Movement in one nice neat package. And this was so unexpected that it tore the Carthians apart and they were out of power within 2 weeks. If they'd had a

plan in place at all, they'd have been much more able to fight off the Invictus in that conflict. Be ready. Things can turn on a dime. Sit down and think these things out and talk with your brothers and sisters about what to do when the shit hits the fan. Too often I see Carthians taking action without thinking it through. Without thinking five moves deep like their opponents try to do. Without any idea of what to do if they win, lose, or DIE. That shits got to stop. We need to SCARE other covenants with our ability to organize and move with little notice. The Invictus has one thing over us in spades. They are habitual about their organization. If someone dies, everybody on their team already KNOWS who going to step directly into that kindreds shoes.

So think about that. Take a few minutes to consider. Think about routes out of the city. Caches of arms and cash. Boltholes and impromptu meeting places. Plan for the future. It's what we fucking DO.

Each of us have at least 1 role to play.

But we can always aspire to more. We can always learn and grow. And the person that once was an unlearned beat-stick can become an experienced combatant and then a tactician. And from there, the political necessities of military command can prepare you for the sticky morass of the political game. You decide your own level of involvement in your destiny. So wake up and pay attention. Warriors have the place in this movement. Philosophers do too. Scientists and occult scholars, Criminals and demagogues, Even loudmouth drug-addled shaman's have their particular uses. To think otherwise is to place no faith in the tools given to us. To think otherwise is to denigrate to contributions of our brothers and sisters, even if we don't see their immediate use. And to be sure, there will be times when we have more need of warriors than peaceniks, But never underestimate the times when a peacenik might be the one making ALL the difference.

Diversity breeds flexibility and is a survival trait

The Carthian movement is at times a fractious movement. We have many people that come to us with ideas and thoughts and plans and a goodly chunk of them were people who for one reason or other didn't fit with any other covenant. As a result we can often-times be at war with ourselves. But where others see chaos, I would, to paraphrase Einstein, see opportunity.

You see, our fractious nature makes it very hard for other covenants to predict what we'll do. And to many kindred minds this is scary as fuck. In addition, we are larded down with a number of factions and study groups. With our use of the internet we can have conversations with kindred all over the world, and the best bit is, if you don't like one faction or another and you feel they don't serve your needs specifically, then there is NOTHING stopping you from creating one of your own.

Can you see the beauty in that? Why not turn a weakness into a strength? I've always found that if you have enough problems and enough conflicts, then if you start sticking them together in creative ways, then you'll have solutions. It never fails.

We only make war for one reason.

Thugs,killers, pyschopaths, control freaks, and maniacs make war for many reasons. Violent natures, boredom, ideological agression, cash...Whatever.

A true Warrior only makes war for one reason. Love.

Love of friends and family, Love of liberty and equality, Love of home and circle, Love of justice and hope. These are the things that drive a true warrior to the extremity of war. War is a grim and unfortunate thing, and anger and hate have no business being part of it. One should approach war as one of the grim duties of life, with no more feeling than to chop wood or carry water. Fury breeds bad strategy. Fury breeds bad Tactics. Fury makes you reactive and mentally passive in combat and that can utterly seal your doom.

Warfare is deception.

For all of Manuel's learning, he'd never been exposed to Sun Tzu. I had. So I taught him that when you are many, you must appear to be few. When you are few, you must appear to be many. When you are near, you must appear to be far, and when you are far, you must appear to be very close indeed. He took to that like a duck to water and Orosio's men didn't know what hit them. As a vampire, one is given certain gifts in the way of creating deception in the mind of the enemy. Anyone who thinks that there will be a straight up fight between warring factions is either a fool or very young.

Slow is fast and fast is slow.

This is a maxim I learned from Wally Gertner, the only man in the army that I would have called a true bad-ass. A fellow Kentuckian, he was a sniper and did spec-ops. The way he put it was like this. When you are clearing a hot zone, you must go slow. When a target attacks, you must keep your head, sight down on him and squeeze the trigger deliberately, not by reflex. Put the bullet between his eyes. If you are in a rush to clear an area you might not kill the man as quickly and as definitively as you should. In that situation, he might have the opportunity to shoot back, killing you or one of your comrades. In other words, take the time, to do the job. Because if you don't do it right, you might not get the chance to do it over.

Also, as part of this advice he explained to me that it's ALWAYS a bad idea to go running off after the enemy by yourself. I've seen this more than once and he's totally right. With Dominate and other various disciplines, it's possible to completely destroy an entire unit if the enemy can catch one of you alone for a minute.

Big weapons don't make you big

Firing automatic weapons can have similar physiological effects on you as taking cocaine. It can make you feel invincible and unstoppable. Unfortunately, you need to keep your wits about you in combat, to keep your head cool. Warfare is a rapidly evolving situation and mental passivity in the midst of it, is death. The way it was told to me was like this:

Speed beats Strength.

Surprise beats Speed

Tactics beats Surprise.

And it should go without saying that in order to utilize tactics you've got to keep a clear head.

When you cannot attack the enemy directly, You must destroy his supply lines.

This is why logistics is so important in the field. You have to get the soldiers to and from the engagements safely. You have to deal with transport for medical personnel, You have to worry about how the food, water and ammo can be transported. Only a fool expects his soldiers to forage while they are in the field. An army travels on its stomach as Napoleon once said. So while protecting your own supply lines and bases, you must work to crab your enemy's action via the same mean. You can kill a lot more soldiers by denying them food and medical care than you can by shooting them. Saladin destroyed much of the crusader army by making them chase him around the desert for days, and then when they were weakened and lost, he fell on them like darkness across the land.

The rule of thumb is that no more than 25% of your combat capable force should be part of any sortie group. The rest should be in protective stance, This prevents you going out and waxing the enemy only to discover once you've returned, that the enemy has made an end run around you and killed everyone back at base. It's almost always better to take a smaller force and be smart and cagey with them, rather than take a large force and use them carelessly.

Believe me. I learned this the hard way. Manuel thought we finally had Orosio on the run and so he committed a large force to a battle with the Colonel's men. We prevailed, and chased him from the field only to discover that a group of new conscripts had broken into our camp and killed all of our support personnel.

Including my wife.

So. Pay attention to the costs of warfare. When you're willing to pay them in order to make the enemy stop. Pay them. But know that tears will be shed. It's always part of the price.

Shotgun Advice

Mom was always hard to shop for. She always seemed to be “happy” with whatever I got her for Mother’s day, or Christmas. But sometimes you could tell, just that little trace around the eyes where you’d know whether you’d hit the mark or whether you’d gone far afield. So i got in habit of getting her about a dozen little small presents. I figure in a gift basket of little small things, especially, if they were tchotchkes or geegaws i got in foreign countries, she’d find something out of the batch that really pleased her. I began to call this practice “Shotgun” gifting. And it seemed to work for me. Along the way of writing this book i wrote a small slush pile of general bits of advice that i hoped to work into some place or other. Not every bit has managed to work itself into one of the essays you’ve already read, so here is a selection of bits of random wisdom. I hope some pellet of wisdom strikes you in the right place, or saves your bacon some night.

There are always going to be kindred who will press your button. They will press your button again and again and they simply won't understand why you're going to get upset. They are blind to the consequences of their own actions. It is a crime and a sin not to take advantage of such blindness.

Beware the naked man who offers you his shirt.

Power is never free.

Never puke while time traveling.

Status will never be important to me. I decry it as useless and at best a necessary evil. To my mind, Status is the ability to get people you don't know and don't care about, to do things for

you that either you can't do, or don't want to do. If I'm right or people care about what I'm doing, then I rarely even need to ask them for help. This encourages me to be right. It also encourages me to be the kind of person that people care about. Which do you think is better?

Dogma is not the beginning of faith. It is the end of it. It is also the end of thought.

In the hands of some people, Occam's Razor, becomes Occam's Chainsaw.

There's an old saying that, "Minds are a lot like parachutes. They only function when they are open." To which I would like to add, "...And it's usually a good idea if you pack them yourself."

Never let other people interpret scripture or politics for you. Do your fucking homework.

You learn something new every night. But that's no trick. Try learning something True every night.

To borrow a phrase from Bertrand Russell, 1/3 of all the kindred in the world are interested in educating and enlightening the other two thirds. Usually by force.

Tell the truth. Most kindred aren't prepared for it.

The unpleasant thing to remember is that we are a family. A dysfunctional family of liar, thieves, and killers. At least we don't have to get together for the thrice-damned holidays.

Powerful people want you to be smart enough to do things for them. But not smart enough to

do things for yourself. Any additional smart that you have is an impediment to them screwing you.

Once you become indispensable at your job, you'll never get promoted out of it.

There are always going to be people who are going to be grateful that you are running off to die on their behalf...Until you come back that is. That shit makes my back teeth itch.

When your life seems to be crumbling around you, do not reach for religion nor strong drink. It's too easy to overdo both.

People who you owe have a vested interest in seeing you grow and prosper so they can be repayed. People who owe you wouldn't mind if you turned up dead. It's best to maintain a healthy balance between the two states.

Tattoo this on your forearm: The Sherrif is not your friend. No matter how much Majesty he commands.

If you can FEEL the system closing in, it's time to destroy it.

The basic purpose of the Carthian Movement is not to be Anti-Invictus. It is to be Anti-ASSHOLE. No matter what covenant they be from...Even our own.

Proceed carefully with friends from other covenants for they will always be subject to pressure from within. And there is no release from that short of jumping ship. Also be

mindful, that if your friend in the other covenant is on the receiving end of pressure for associating with you, and that pressure STOPS for any reason, then something bad is coming down the pipe for the both of you. Be mindful.

Act like you have an Ace up your sleeve at all times and you will be treated as if you do. Occasionally, it's a good idea to even have one. When things turn bad, smile a predatory smile and walk away shaking your head, as if the enemy has no idea how badly they've fucked up.

Talk the talk, but walk the walk, otherwise no one will care if you call bullshit.

I can tell you something about Belial's Brood. In the course of my life and Undeath i have met a number of people from many different walks of life, and the people that reeked most of utter loser-dom were the racists and the satanists.

Their power lies in their desperate savagery and how attractive their ethos is to people equally fucked by life. And that's about it.

Plan A is always that big intricate thing you've got in you're head. You know, the one that you and your friends came up with and worked on until it was a masterpiece of gamesmanship and skullduggery.

Plan B usually defaults to, "Oh shit...GET HIM!"

Plan C usually involves running for your life.

It is permissible at times to default to Plan C.