

# Under the Table and Bleeding

## Or

### The songs of the circling buzzards

By Corneilius Erasmus Eldridge, laird of Winchester,  
Ky. A.K.A. Reverend Doctor Pinky Berkowitz.

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Dedication: This book would not have been possible without the help of many. But I am most indebted to Stanley Carlson, William Della Cava, Janosh Pilyenskev, Lady Paige Newsome, and the House of Karan.

**Damned if you do, Damned if you don't.**

This time out it will be different.  
This time, mere words will change the world.  
I have foreseen it.

Most think I'm insane for writing about what I write about. Most consider me a fool or a fuck-up. Let them. Let them drag me kicking and screaming into the daylight and burn me completely away. Let them burn me at the stake and scatter my ashes. Let them brag to my few friends and twist their bitter knives as much as they are able.

But my words will last longer than I.  
I may not be an Ordo Dracul, but I have much respect for the Dragon and what he tried to do.

In fact, I have respect for any mortal man who sees a world that needs changing, who sees minds that need opening, who sees hearts that need saving, and does what is needed.

And I am not going to stop.

## **On the Necessity of a sense of Humor**

A story to illustrate, perhaps even illuminate a point:

When I was a very young man, I took a job as a security guard at Central Baptist Hospital. It was only for the summer, as I needed a little dough to scrape by. The security outfit was low rent, and I was paid very little. It was an exceptionally drab kind of job. Third shift, and dull as hell. But it certainly wasn't the sort of gig you could do while baked or loaded, so I'd save it all up for the weekends. I learned many things from this job:

- 1) Doctors are pricks
- 2) You can live off of vending machines junk food for about a week.
- 3) If you have a uniform and a clipboard, you can go anywhere and question anyone.
- 4) Waiting for the funeral home to come collect someone out by the loading dock will make you philosophical for the rest of the night.
- 5) A cadaver on a gurney will find the slightest tilt in any paved surface. You gotta watch them like hawks.
- 6) There is a guy in nearly any job who is too dumb to be doing it, but weirdly this guy has a vast amount of low animal cunning when it comes to trying to make you look bad, so you won't get HIS job. It doesn't matter if you

explain repeatedly to the dimwit that you DON'T WANT his stinking job.

7) More babies are born on nights of the full moon; also, thunderstorms are a big night for babies.

8) The primary responsibilities of a security guard in a hospital is to walk around, shake door handles, escort nurses to their cars and very occasionally, keep family members out of a room while a patient is coding.

9) No one is impressed by yoyo tricks and prick doctors feel it's unprofessional to practice while on your rounds. If you have a dumb-ass senior guard who feels that your going to take his job you will be hearing about the incident from everyone for at least a month.

As you can see it was an interesting summer.

The most interesting bit of the summer happened one night in the arse end of august. It was hot and sultry like nights in the south often get. Heat lightning kept us guessing about the possibility of some rain. I was hanging loose with another guard. The other guard I hung with was a cool guy, and he understood that a LOT of this job was about waiting around for something to happen. He and I would hole up in a waiting room just off the surgery suite and watch the late movie or read. Sean was a good guy and we got along fine.

So one night, we get paged to come to the ER. Stat! Normally, it's just somebody flaking out and many times they calm right the hell down when they see two guys in a uniform rolling up on them with INTENT. When we arrived at the ER we were pressed into service along with the nurses and orderlies.

This woman couldn't have been more than 5' 1" She'd tried to drink herself to death, and her 8-year-old son had called the state police. The staties brought her in and she was acting so erratic that they decided to put the restraints on her while they pumped her stomach.

She had broken two sets of restraints by the time we had gotten there. She had the crazy strength full bore, and it took about 8 of us to hold her down, I had had my hands pressing firmly down on her left knee and Sean was right across from me. She bucked and made wild animal noises as they tried to work the tube for her stomach pumping in through her nose. Quite possibly one of the most intense scenes I had seen in my entire life at that point.

The process of pumping a stomach is actually fascinating if a bit grody. They run the tube down into the stomach, pump out the contents as best they can, then they pump in

charcoal, which absorbs leftover alcohol that has already passed into the stomach wall. Looked horrifying. Scary too. I've never been a problem drinker as a result. Go fig.

I was standing there with my shaking hands hold her in joint restraint as best I was able, trying not to look like a shmuck. When the phone at the nurse's station rang, asking for the head nurse. And then not 1 minute later she was paged. And then WE were paged. Until finally, the head nurse, said to the hapless girl manning the desk, "You get on the blower right now and you tell them we're tied up right now!"

And without a moment to think about it, I said, "Well actually SHE'S the one who's tied up, but you get the point..."

God help me, that lame rimshot line, that a Catskill tummler wouldn't have touched with a ten foot pole, got a laugh from the ER people. Each and every one of them with a sense of humor so gallows black that it would have your average Goth look askance and say, "Dude, too far!"

And when it did, my hands stopped shaking.

We laugh because if we do not, we will most assuredly shake apart.

### **Our motto here at camp: Clean Mind. Clean Body. Take your pick**

Let me be perfectly frank. I am one who finds myself ill at ease among other kindred for the most part. In fact, I find that during most kindred social gatherings there is at least one point or another where voices get raised. This is usually my cue to skiddoo. I don't like to fight. I can, a bit, but it's not my meat and drink.

So when someone gets their nose out of joint over status or some equally pointless pecking order horse-crap, I start tapping my wrist, looking towards the horizon, and making my excuses. "Oo gawd! Is that the time? Jesus, It's almost spring. I gotta get outta here. I got things to do. I gotta pot roast in the oven. I gotta marmoset to floss. I'm a busy guy..."

There are many reasons for this. One of the main ones is that vampires as a whole are kind of excitable. You may have noticed yourself losing your complete shit over something that wouldn't have even tweaked you during your breathing days.

Another reason is that Elders come in all shapes and

sizes, You may not realize that the 12 year old in the FUBU gear next to you at the gathering is actually senior to you by about 400 years, and might be able to lob your body through a plate glass window across the street. If this doesn't teach you to respect strangers, no matter what they look like, you are flatly too stupid for immortality. Happily, this is a self-correcting problem. Sooner or later you'll mouth off to someone who is more than capable of breaking you into pieces and sending those pieces on separate vacations. In fact, it's likely that they'll do this REFLEXIVELY. They may not even mean to kill you, but it's just that you said the wrong thing at the wrong time, and then turned out not be very sturdy. They may even be genuinely remorseful, May even roll up on your sire, and even apologize for breaking their kid.

But this won't comfort you very much, seeing as how you're exanimate and all.

But this isn't even the main reason that Kindred gatherings ought to make you nervous and have your antennae up. We are a large extended family of liars, thieves and murderers. That's bad enough. But along the course of your Requiem, you may do things. Awful things, terrible things, Things you cannot justify to yourself or forgive yourself for. And many people crack under those



sorts of stresses. And each time you do those sorts of things, you find yourself giving in to those urges more and more.

Insanity is a low-grade fever that runs through the body politic of kindred society. In any given group of more than ten kindred there is likely to be at least one person who is cocoo for coco-puffs. I've been to a gathering of at least 200 Kindred.

And to make it even worse, the tendency is for the elders, the most powerful of our kind to step off the curb, usually in some dramatic *sturm-und-drang* fashion.

And let me assure you my friends, for every single kindred who is flatly, obviously, full goose bozo, gone up over the high side, CRAZY with a capital "CRA", there are at least six kindred of your immediate acquaintance who have gone mad in some quiet way that you may not notice until it's far too late. He may be lucid for long periods of time. May even be a strong political ally of yours. And you may not even know that he's wearing underwear made from the skin of Argentinean babies.

Some recover. Most don't. Most get sicker and sicker with each passing night, until sooner or later joining the Brood seems pretty fucking tame compared to your night-

to-night itinerary of calumny.

Sadly there is a great tendency to turn a blind eye to these activities. Some people in other covenants indulge in practices that erode their basic humanity. Even the Ordo Dracul has a particular blind spot about this, eschewing traditional human morality in the name of scientific inquiry. Not all go down this road, but enough do, that it frankly scares the shit out of me.

This will come off as serious blasphemy to some, and naiveté to others, but it is my considered opinion that to reject human morality is to become alien. To reject human emotion, as the basis of one's emotional apparatus is to invite the hunger to rule your heart...Or what's left of it. And that way lies madness.

We all make mistakes. This much is assured. Hell, a number of us wouldn't be like this, if it weren't for the mistakes we made or the mistakes made by our sires. We are going to do things in the midst of frenzy. We are going to do really unpleasant things in the name of political expediency or some idealistic intent. We might even trade away pieces of our basic humanity in exchange for mystic power or occult understanding.

And I, personally, am going on record as saying, "THIS IS A BAD PLAN".

Let me put it to you like this: Your sanity and its maintenance is one of your most primary responsibilities. It is your responsibility to yourself, and to your covenant to retain your sanity. And it's my opinion that you cannot abdicate your responsibility on pain of death or torpor.

And this, from a man who has explored a goodly chunk of his own brainpan with a saucy mélange of chemical entertainments.

Guess what, I live alone for a reason. I try to stay sober for kindred gatherings. And even if I do some crazy thing, odds are good that I'll be sober tomorrow night, crazy people will still be crazy.

Look, the fact is that if you don't keep your humanity and sanity together you are essentially asking, nay demanding, that other members of your covenant deal with the messes you make. Some covenants are by their nature more forgiving of this sort of thing than others, but all of them will have a breaking point. No one wants to deal with a vampire who flips out over nothing or who curls up into a fetal ball and starts mewling when things get

tough. NO ONE.

Nobody else wants to carry your fucking baggage.

Truthfully, I don't see how kindred politics function in face of this unpleasant tendency to madness. The fact that we still often run under political systems that Caligula would feel at home in might have something to do with it. But that's a screed for another time.

Check yourself.

Get someone you trust to check you too.

Keep an eye on your friends and speak the fuck up if you feel you need to.

Avoid, or if necessary, put down any kindred who have left their humanity and their sanity behind. And if you have to put them down, do so without hatred. Maybe after they've had a long rest they'll be more amenable to treatment.

## **A turning point:**

I stood outside of the wreckage of my home. It was night and the moon was shining brightly. I could, I suppose pick out the shapes of constellations in the bits of broken glass strewn all over. As it was, I was counting the cost, and couldn't be bothered.

This year had been an unqualified disaster. I had been shot at, abused by Invictus, and nearly killed by Brood. Add to this that I had offered myself to Emma and been politely, but firmly rejected. That I had been betrayed by a kindred that I had considered a friend, even if I thought his politics were insane and doomed. And perhaps worst of all. In the face of all this, I had managed to make "Out in the Night Air" into a reality, only to have the Carthian Movement roll over and go back to sleep. I couldn't even get other kindred to tell me what they THOUGHT of the book.

And now, I stand outside the ruins of my house. The wreckage of my savings for the last few years. And I count the cost.

The printery is gone. Blown up. All the extant copies of the "Out in the Night Air" gone with it.

The laptop and the base system are gone. My notes. My work. All vanished into a sloppy mess of melted plastic. My record collection... Oh sweet mother of fuck, that one hurts... I have been buying vinyl since I was eight years old. I had signed stuff that Mick and Keith had given me, that I could've EBay'ed and bought a whole other house with...

The gun collection. The drugs I had been given by Guatemalan friends. The Still. The notes for the next

book...

All of it gone.

Even though I lacked the capacity. I felt the urge to vomit.

Mind you...It was not for nothing. They came for me first. I had exposed myself too much in working the various clubs in town, trying to get a line on the Brood and their movements. But when they did come for me, they had been unready for the mantraps and anti-personnel devices I had strewn about the Holler. They had been further discomfited by the fact that the printery had been rigged to explode since more or less the day I had bought it. They had further been disconcerted by the fact that I knew how to use a shotgun, both at range and close up. And when the Gangrel finally wrenched it out of my hands, further surprised by MY claws tearing his filthy, stinking, devil worshipping guts out.

Perhaps the only real gift that I ever got from Daniel. I'd like to call myself a hero, but truth be told, I was nearly shitting myself from the time I heard the first claymore go off. I had been expecting it, but NOT really expecting it. Do you know what I mean?

The only thing, that I have working in my favor, is a few contacts and allies. And a brand spanking new identity, that was in my pocket on the night they came for me. I am already hearing the siren call of the road and wondering if I have any real reason to stay in Lexington, other than I fought to protect it, and I'd like to break something off in Daniel's fascist gizzard and gorm it around a few times until he's a fucking hand puppet.

And that's when I felt him. He was good enough to let me know it was he. And in the state of mind I was in, it was best. He and I had never precisely gotten along, but he had always cultivated a feeling of letting you know exactly where he stood, and not minding if you did the same.

"I came as soon as I heard."

I turned, and looked at Ambrose Eldridge. He had the same lean and precise look that he'd always had. He was in one of his suits, looking out of place out here in the country. His eyes and his tie-tack reflecting the moonlight.

"Oh?"

"Yes. There are a few Invictus, who even now are crowing

that you are dead, or being shopped around for destruction by an Invictus hand."

"Daniel will be upset. He was going to sell me off for political advantage. He hadn't actually received any takers."

"You know this for certain?" Angry. And angry with Daniel...I wondered why.

"No. But it's what he would have done. How did you hear?" Ambrose smiled, a rare thing. "Some Invictus simply cannot keep their mouths shut."

I nodded. My sire was much more versed in the ways of Majesty than I. he wielded the power of Revelation like a scalpel.

"So what brings you here?"

He spread his hands. "Believe it or not. I was worried about you."

We stood there regarding one another for a long while.

"What will you do now?"

"I don't know. Revenge is pointless and probably counter-productive. Plus I'm sure that Daniel is being lionized by the kindred in the region for his strong and decisive leadership. They don't know he's a prick.... yet."

Ambrose considered this. "Even so. You are at a crossroads. Yes?"

"Yes. In the immortal words of Tyler Durden, it is only



after you've lost everything, that you're free to do anything."

"Durden?"

"He's a MODERN philosopher, you wouldn't have heard of him."

"Even so, he seems to have hit the nail on the head. May I make a suggestion?"

I sighed. Knowing what was coming. Feeling the Ordo Dracul pitch from many miles off. "Yeah okay..."

"Take this...As an opportunity. An opportunity to remake yourself."

"As an Ordo Dracul I suppose." I snorted. And then I looked back. He was seriously considering it. He hadn't been previously.

"Well. I don't like to push. But there ARE worse directions you could go in. You've made your own attitudes towards the Ordo Dracul quite clear in your words and writings."

I stopped. "Wait. You read my book?"

"Of course. But I honestly think that you're trying to bootstrap the Carthian Movement into some sense of direction, and most of them don't want that at all. Some do, obviously. But most get tired of fighting the tendencies of their other, less directed brethren."

I had to sit down. "You actually read my book."

"You know I don't like to repeat myself. I found it interesting. And I think you were exceptionally kind when speaking about me. Considering..."

"That's...That's water under the bridge."

"Is it? Is it really?"

I didn't know what to say just then.

"Look. You're expecting a pitch, so I'll give you one. You're wasted among people who cannot direct their own change. You have the intellect, and more importantly, the passion to seek out new horizons. There will ALWAYS be a place for you in the Ordo Dracul, if you have these gifts. Moreover, I happen to know that House of Karan speaks very highly of you, as does the House of Dragolescu."

"Alexa tolerates me because I make her laugh."

"Is that wrong somehow? Ah.... Lord in his heaven. I keep forgetting how young you are. Even though you, among all of my childer seem to have done the most living. You simply need to add a bit of science to your poetry. Science and poetry are like shoes on your feet. You can get a lot farther with both, than you can with just one. Now.... Pitch bloody well over. Now to advice. As I said, take this as an opportunity. Like going to a new school, or traveling, like you used to do so easily. Take each change of venue as an opportunity to remake your self anew. Keep what you like. Discard those elements of

yourself that hold you back. Shed your skin like the proverbial snake. There are many people who think they know who and what you are. Surprising prick bastards like that is one of the best things in life. And I KNOW that you enjoy it."

He had me there.

"I wouldn't study with you."

"No. I concur. Besides. My path lies with the Dying Light, and I discover, from your work, that you are a deeper thinker than I ever gave you credit for. Your path should lie with the Mysteries. Seek out the Karans and ask them most politely. There is much they can teach you. And even if you don't join us, find a better use for your time than..." He waved his hand. "All of this."

"I can't believe you really read my book."

"Yes. You need an editor though. The wild run-on sentence roams free across the pages of your work."

"Busted."

"Indeed. I am staying in town for a few more days, looking in on some of the Ordo Dracul in the area. We should talk more Corneilius."

"I wouldn't mind that. I wouldn't mind that at all."

It wasn't until an hour after he'd gone, that I'd realized that he had used my given name and I hadn't

wincing.

And I knew why. It was because he was right.

That man...The one known as Pinky Berkowitz, was dead. He had died in a fire. There wasn't anything left of what he was, and what he'd tried to do really. His heartbreaks. His betrayals. His losses were like ashes on the wind. Maybe some would mourn, and maybe some would not. But make no mistake. That man gave up his life.

And in realizing this, I felt a great weight lift from me. A weight, I hadn't even realized that I was carrying. Maybe for the first time in my whole sordid requiem, I am beginning to see that unlife is not necessarily a cross to be borne. But that only thinking makes it so.

Pinky Berkowitz is dead. Let him rest. Let him find peace, a peace that eluded him in his requiem. My name is Corneilius Erasmus Eldridge.

## **God's own Anvil**

Lexington is shuffling. Daniel has disappeared. Perhaps feeling the rumblings among Kindred who were tired of getting lectured.

Those who supported him most closely seem to have left town as well. Aaron took the reins of power in the city

and collective sigh of relief was heard among us all.  
Yes, me included.

I get along with Lord Savage, truth be told. And he has Paige to rein him in when his beast is too close to the surface. We still talk music on occasion. He was as despondent over the loss of the record collection as I was. Bless him; I had to beg off allowing him to purchase half of E-bay and Amazons music. I'll get a good chunk of it back. After all, I have time working to my advantage.

I busy myself most nights with courses in Psychology. Summer schedule has me only able to audit courses very late in the evening. If it starts before 9, I'm not usually up yet, much less in from Winchester. For a while I had a spot on campus that I could meld with in relative obscurity, but that still makes me nervous. There are too many cameras on campus. I'm afraid to wake up one night and arise to find a freshly installed camera looking right at me.

In any case, I am also loading up my Ipod with psychology lectures from across the country. God Bless the iTunes store.

Someday, I may even want credentials, but I happen to know that those are easier to come by than the goddamn

knowledge. And it's the knowledge I want.

I do still have to stifle my laughter from time to time in my courses. Especially when some TA is talking about the effects of drugs that he personally hasn't tried. Jesus, I could teach a course in that.

Recently, I pursued a diplomatic embassy to Cincinnati, along with Aaron and Paige and a few others. (Cody was along for the ride. I begin to see why that poor bastard is as messed up as he is.) Unfortunately my big fat flappy mouth got me in trouble.

I began to talk about my interest in re-joining the Ordo Dracul and in talking with others, apparently let loose with more information about the workings of the Covenant than others are comfortable with.

So I ended up getting lectured by the local Ordo about the matter. To be entirely fair, Prince Dahlia was correct. But being Mr. Secret Guy is going to be hard for me. And also they were far kinder to me than the Invictus have ever been.

Soon. I will head to Columbus. I hear there may have been a change of Praxis. I wonder if Emma will be there. I wonder if she survived.

## The White Bear

Go into the corner of your haven right now.  
Stand there and shut your eyes.  
Do not think of a white bear.

See how ridiculously hard that is?

I have a sneaking suspicion that it is the mind's tendency towards perversity that is the single most powerful thing afflicting man and kindred kind. True change in one's character is unusually hard, especially if it's entirely self-directed. Especially, if it is not because of the action of external enemies, or traumatic events.

I used to hassle my Mother all the time about her packrat ways. She wasn't a full-on pathological hoarder or anything like that. Dad wouldn't have put up with that I don't think. But 4/5ths of the books in the house were hers. Every single flat surface in our home was covered with a pile of some damn thing or another. Our home was often times stuffed to the rafters. She had a sewing nook in the house, which held PILES of cloth and accessories. I think I may have seen her actually sew all of 5 times in the whole of my life.

But once you hear from dad, (Drunk, after thanksgiving dinner) that maybe you ought to lay off of your Mom

because when she was eight her house burned down and she lost everything in the space of a single night, and you start to feel like a monstrous shit-heel...Well. Maybe patterns in the mind exist for a reason.

Perversity is that voice that says to you in the middle of the stunt. "OHMIGOD! THERE'S NO WAY IN HELL WE CAN PULL THIS OFF!" And even if you say, "Pipe down back there!" Your muscles still believe. And you go one way, and the Sea-doo goes the other way, and you skip across the water like a flat stone hucked by a teenage boy. And while perversity has claimed the lives of more than one drunk redneck hollering "Hey Y'all Watch THIS!" It is ten times more dangerous to kindred.

You see, it is my contention that kindred vitae, does something to us on a mental level. It certainly sharpens our responses to instinctual kindred behavior. We flip out over fires and sunlight. We become frenzied over slights because they challenge our dominance. We become scared or enraged at the unexpected predator we meet. These are all instinctual triggers. They are remnants of our R-Complex, the lizard mind, which our higher brains use as the concrete foundation of the house that is our brain.



We also rest in deep torpor, marinating in our memories, having them become loose and plastic on us. I cannot tell whether I am more scared of this, or I consider it a great blessing. If anyone could stand to forget a few things, it's me.

But beyond that, our blood is psycho-reactive. I'm not spilling any Ordo secrets by telling you this at all. It's readily apparent.

Look around at the wild proliferation of powers and bloodlines that exist among our kind. Each of them is a standing monument to some Kindred, who decided to make it bend THAT way, instead of THIS way.

Each power came from someone who bent time, and effort, and energy, and passion, into creating something that was new. And while I suspect I shall offend those of my readers of the Circle, and of the Spear. I suspect that their arts are fruit of the same tree. This, to my mind exalts their arts rather than denigrates them. But I suspect they won't see it that way.

In other words: Where the blood is concerned, thinking makes it so.

Now do you see why perversity is so dangerous to us? It's almost like pinching a balloon. You strive to create

something and in turn you develop some weird weakness that other vampires don't have to struggle with. BAH!

I suspect that I shall have to undertake to teach myself greater mental discipline.

I have at least changed the sorts of drug I abuse of late. Where I would a nice cocktail of my vitae, blue gel LSD, DMT, and Ayahuasca. I am now mixing up batches of Ritalin, Adderal, Choline enhancers and other smart drugs. For the first time in my life I am experimenting with going in the other direction instead of running from my insight because it's too hard to bear. I am running towards it with a stick in hand hoping to beat it into some sort of submission.

This is not to say that I don't still enjoy the occasional cranial vacation. But these days I have to stay sharp...And if I want a reason to keep from indulging. (Hard for a Daeva) I just remember the Brood attacking the house. A nightmare scene right out of Bosch, and I was straight as an arrow.

Hopefully, I'll be able to learn this sort of mental discipline; before I become so dull I am no longer allowed to talk to people at parties.

## **I do bad things**

The heart of the political mind is to divorce feeling, compassion, and morality from tactical thinking. This is why they call it "The Art of the Possible". Oftentimes, to walk in the world of kindred politics is to walk in a snake pit with ankles covered in barbecue sauce. And when one reacts, as one must, by anticipating an attack, it is often other kindred and other human beings who pay the price.

To be clearer, I dislike kindred politics because I don't like the person I become when I engage in them. I spend a lot of time alone. I joke, that I am the most beloved of kindred princes, as I give no orders and yell at no subjects. But in truth, if I had subjects, I would probably have to be a bastard to them in order to keep us ALL alive.

Kindred can be remarkably circumspect, secretive, and downright Arcane at times. Even obvious yahoos like me can put on a sneaky pair of pants when moved to do so. An elder can be a paragon of secretive living, having learned all of the tips and tricks of several lifetimes of staying out from under unwanted scrutiny from humans and other kindred.

And yet, that shit can go out the window in the blink of an eye when the blood is up. Treachery, rivalry, and downright frenzy can unseat the reason, and Masquerade breaches ensue. Violence gets out of hand and hunter groups are born. And when it all clears off, there is usually an amount of shame, horror, and copper-plated "Oh shit, the prince is going to kill me" sphincter-clenching terror to be dealt with.

Are there things that can be done about it? Well, yes. But many times, to move in haste is to cause pain to someone in the political realm. Expediency is rarely a balm to political wounds. At times, one has to make moves and do things that in hindsight one can only feel a deep curdling shame for.

Like say, as a result of plans gone awry, a running gun battle between some gang-bangers and some Kindred leaves a shudder-some amount of evidence of kindred existence in it's wake. Not only that, but events going on the city cause a public viewing of were-raccoons.

No. I am not making that up.

As a journalist, I can tell you that there is no such thing as "killing a story". Stories never completely go away. They may fall through the cracks. They might even land on the net or in the Weekly World News. But once scented, a true journalist wants to know, no matter what his editor might say. This, one might infer, makes the work of covering the masquerade tricky. Especially if you don't have as much of a stranglehold on your Media or your Police as you thought.

The only thing that can make these things go away is quick action, and a larger story to cover.

I have some people who are for want of a better word, criminals. One could call them the "redneck mafia" if one was so inclined. Coke, and Meth, and Oxycontin, and more Grass than you can shake a stick at passes through the hands of guys like mine than you would ever believe was possible. Want some shit-bird tuned up or shot-gunned by a truck full of good ol boys? I got the hook-up. Need anti-personnel mines and traps made? I got guys. Want fires and explosions, I know at least one fella who only needs the chemicals available in any all night wal-mart. Documents? Credentials? Forged papers? They got guys that can do that too.

Recently, I had to cover a running gun battle on the interstate involving Kindred, and some giant fucking raccoons. Somehow I divined that my friendship with a number of media people was NOT going to be enough to stop the Masquerade from popping like a huge zit.

So I went round to my media friends and used my Revelation on them, made them tell me where the bodies were buried. Made them tell me all the things that would get fired, arrested, divorced, or in some cases, the combo platter... And then made it abundantly clear that there would be serious problems if anything got out without my say so.

And then I went round to my friends in low places, and using the my Awe and a gift for invective, stirred them into a mob of pissed off white trash, ready to take it out on the "spooks and jigaboos" shooting up their fair city. That yes, maybe TODAY was the "day of the rope" And that protection of the white race was as necessary as breathing.

And then that night I sat in front of an Archbishop and got her to thank me for it.

And while I can smile on the outside, While I can look smooth and cog...

Inside I feel filthy.

Sure, one can argue that any city where I can stir up a race war in single night of trying is one that had racial tension already. And one can even argue that in a roundabout way it might even good for the community. Might prevent racial tensions from boiling over for another ten years or so. Cincinnati goes through that shit every so often...

But that's bullshit. I've taken 10 showers since and I still don't feel clean.

I tell myself, that I do the needful. But if I was smarter, nobody would have to be dead, or injured in order to cover the activities of other kindred.

I look ahead, at the nights to come. I know I can't lay aside such useful tools. To do so would be to deliver other kindred into bondage or death, and scumbags or no, they are still my people.

I look at my own soul with this heavy knowledge, and know that the road to Golconda is shut to me.

I'll never be a saint. I'll never walk this darkened orb with a soul that knows no weight of damnation.

I, like most others, will simply have to make do with doing the best I can, and hope that it will work for me.

Light a candle for me will you?

## **The Nearly Lost Art**

There are so many kindred who have lost any ability to look ahead and see what is to come. I begin to suspect a kind of evolutionary drift. As lives speed up and technology increases, the ability to look ahead in time, to be able to see the consequences of one's actions. The simple act of having a VISION for the future is being bred out humanity and out of neonates.

Understand. I've done a lot of questionable things. But most of them I did with at least a nodding understanding that there would be a price paid for them. In most cases they were even prices I *expected* to pay.

I've been married six times, and in all of those relationships I only ever cheated once. It cost me.

I was married to Barbara. I was working in New York. During the daytime, I'd write my articles. But during the long, long nights, I worked at my primary job, which was as an "event coordinator" for Studio 54. Steve Rubell was a friend of mine.

Now, you might think that "Event coordinator" is a fancy



but largely meaningless title. You'd be right. Essentially, my job consisted of scoring large amounts of cocaine for our premium guests. I scored this cocaine by dint of the fact, that I had worked with a number of smugglers, and had good connections in Guatemala.

Funny thing about cocaine, People will do things for cocaine. Addicts will sink to amazing levels for things that they are addicted to, but Cocaine gives you a kind of mental invincibility, that once tasted, you want again and again. So, I have seen people do the most amazing things for blow. I have seen and even been involved with some of the most depraved acts of sexual theater to elicit enough toot to get through the weekend.

So one night, Barbara came home from dance rehearsal and caught me in bed with Bianca Jaegger. And she was so vexed with me that she got my 357 out of the dresser and shot me in the kneecap. It never did heal completely right. Tonight, like many nights, I can feel oncoming storms and might carry my walking stick.

I never cheated before or since. Cocaine fuzzed my ability to use proper judgment. Vitae does that to most of us as well, but it is important to think about things that we DO want to do, and the things we do NOT want to

do. We must take the moments of rest we have and deeply consider our acts and try to think ahead and see where they will lead us.

Because I guarantee that our enemies will be looking to lead us in directions that we do not want.

### **On fighting the beast**

In the raising of any child there comes a point in the mental development where abstractions become possible. As a young child, the concepts of good and evil, justice and injustice, selfishness and selflessness, are not a part of the mental make-up of a child. They aren't instinctual. They have to be taught, whereas causal relationships are more easily understood by the mind of a child.

(I.E. If I do "X" I will receive a spanking.)

The reason why, is because these concepts don't exist in nature. As my dear mother was wont to say, "Nowhere is it written in stone that life is fair, Cornielius."

So fairness, justice, right and wrong, good and evil, are

all things we made up, as a means to create a safer and more sophisticated society. Nature exists in a state of cycles and striving to maintain balance. Fairness doesn't enter into it.

So, we spool ahead. As we grow older these abstractions grow more sophisticated and more cemented. As we grow old we invest a certain amount of emotional energy into these abstractions. For some people it's more energy. For other people it's less. It can depend on dozens of factors including upbringing, environment, and the occasional moment of clarity, maybe even a "Saul on the road to Damascus" moment or two. Not that I would know anything about that...

In any case, what makes a person a human being, and not an animalistic savage, is A) an understanding and adoption of an abstract moral and ethical code. And B) an emotional investment in that code

It doesn't even matter what the code is. It could be traditional and ancient, or evolved and highly personal. As you adopt it and you believe it you become civilized. Most of our ethics and morals are fairly universal even if our value structures aren't the same.

To put it more simply, I'll use a personal example. While

I was a young boy, I went to a Baptist church near our home. Occasionally I still find myself examining things as a Baptist might even though I long ago stopped going to that church. I became a Unitarian, mainly because I developed an allergy to religious dogma of any sort. And even though I still sorta believe in God, I try to live my life as if God doesn't exist, and that the only arbiter of judgment in my life is the ability to look myself in the eyes in the mirror when I awaken. You might think this gives me a lot of wiggle room, but you'd be wrong, because it means putting the responsibility back on myself.

And we all know what an asshole I am. So, yeah, it's a full time job, keeping myself able to stand the sight of me.

See, we've three portions to ourselves. The ID, which is all about the desires, the hungers, the rages, the lusts. You know, like your drinking buddies, only less responsible.

We have the Superego, which is where those morals and ethics bind up, and where our emotional investment lives. The part that is always pushing for a better Pinky B. The part that wants to feel like a white knight. In my case, he has to settle for a tarnished and battered Don

Quixote...But always on the prod to try and live up to the ideals we accepted as children.

And then we have the Ego. He doesn't evaluate and find you wanting. He doesn't judge, because that's not his function. He doesn't bother with morals and ethics. All he does is sit at the center of you and tell you if it can be done or not. He considers. He thinks without moral restraint. You ever sit next to someone you love and find some cold part of yourself considering what your life would be like if they died right now. And of course, your Superego recoils in horror. "HOW CAN YOU EVEN THINK OF SUCH A THING?"

But it's easy. It's built into you. There is a cold part of us in each human mind. And I admit, that there have been times, when my ID howled in rage, and my Superego was so wounded that it was stunned into silence. All there was was the Ego, talking to me in a low and silky voice that I could almost hear. He said, "You want vengeance. Here's how we'll get it."

Now we come to Kindred Psychology. I've talked about how I think the "R" complex changes our instinctual responses, indeed strengthens them. I've also talked about how the usual emotional engines in our bodies have

changed with the cessation of our endocrine systems. Causing some emotions to feel like pale imitations, and some emotions seeming like an out of control fire. These changes in the basic makeup of the structure of the mind have far reaching effects on kindred, even though they do not effect specifically the triune emotional structure. The ID, for his part is largely unchanged. The Superego still does his work, making you feel good or shameful depending on your choices in this Ur-life. And the Ego still considers coldly like a ticking clock.

The only problem is kindred life has a way of damaging ethics and morals and abstract structures in the mind. Not only that, but it can also damage those emotional investments. And when this happen, the mind falls back on more instinctual behavior. Humans can sense one of their own falling into savagery, why shouldn't they subconsciously fear us as we fall closer and closer to bestiality?

Humans and Kindred alike are more than capable of suffering enough pain to let the life long patterns of morals and ethics slip from their fingers. Each of us is capable of saying, "Fuck it. I don't care anymore." And open the door to more natural, and more savage patterns. Humans have more in the way of stopgaps to this, and a human at the nadir of his own existence can still turn a

corner and come back from it.

But Kindred have a stronger urge to instinctual patterns than humans do. And we don't have working glands that can put the brakes on our rages. Physiologically, we are kind of boned.

But this is not to say that we have no recourse. I, personally, know a number of Kindred who have battled back from the abyss. And I've had a dark moment or two myself.

Some kindred swear by trying to struggle out of the patterns of Kindred society, and to a degree that's helpful. You certainly won't see me railing against some kindred funding a soup kitchen or working with the poor. Or struggling to keep a woman's shelter open. Even I am not THAT cynical.

But doing the work is only half the battle, and there are many who fail as a result of not understanding this. Doing the good deed is a good deed, but re-dedicating yourself to the morals and ethics of your life is the other half. You must emotionally re-invest in the morals and ethics in order for them to live in your mind again. To keep your mind from falling back into the other pattern, to prove to yourself that human is the way to be.

It's not enough to want to climb up out of the pit your unlife has become. You have to CARE.  
And for some, that's too much to ask.

Pity them. And when their mind is gone, end their suffering.

### **The After Point Theory**

"Science is a means of talking ABOUT the universe that binds it to a common reality. Magic is a means of talking TO the universe in words that it cannot ignore. The two are rarely compatible."

-The Phantom Stranger "The Books of Magic"

There is a clear dichotomy in the shadowy world. Science works and magick works. Just because a person becomes a member of the nighttime community, doesn't mean science stops working altogether. But then again the change into a supernatural creature changes the way we can perceive the world. The supernatural exists. Regular everyday people may only be able to perceive it dimly. As if they only had a set of "Rabbit Ears". When you become enmeshed in the world of the supernatural, you develop better antennae. Maybe even a radar dish.



So, for a person, raised in THIS century and in this country, dealing with the oddness of the world and the chaos it brings can be a bit hard to digest at times. We are raised to be rational. We are brought up to be analytical. And so, when we run into things that run fully counter to the world we understand, there is work to be done to make it all fit within our worldview.

Hmm. Let me come at this from another direction. Take a rose. Juxtapose it with a cross and you create a symbol. Symbols are powerful. Symbols work on a level where words do not. They are both inherent to, and transcendent of, meaning, and they operate on a level that we only dimly understand.

The rosy cross is a particularly interesting specimen. It's so old and has so much connotative freight attached to it that it's almost meaningless. Or rather, have so many meanings that it's too much work to sift out one. This leads me to the basic idea that the power of magic is inherently intuitive. Science seeks out replicable results and observable phenomenon. Magic however is finicky at best and an exercise in handling, distilling and using chaos.

However, unlike the quote above, these two things are NOT

mutually exclusive. A true understanding of occult practices is a complex mix of scientific methods and intuitive leaps of faith. Sometimes, even the odd drug-inspired epiphany.

### **Covered in Bees!**

I've turned into my parents. I've become an academic.

I didn't mean to, of course, it certainly was not the plan. I suppose that in my younger years, I was rather keen on much more low-rent, romantic way of living, culminating in a dramatic flameout that would leave people talking about me for decades. Something that would make the legend of Sid and Nancy seem like a bedtime tale for very young children.

I never understood Pop. He was an academic sure, but he always seemed...I don't know...UNCTIOUS to me as a kid. It's only as I look back and realize that academia is a kind of snake pit and that my father was really rather good at being liked. And that's a fair trick in academic circles. Academics are a weird species. They are more excited by ideas and facts, than by people or the world. Engineers are much the same way. They like machines and

math in preference to people. Machines and Math are only slippery things if you don't understand them. The same can't be said for people, you can understand people very well, even understand certain specific people VERY well, only to have them turn on you and become slipperier than a greased record executive.

So now, I find myself nipple deep in books on a semi-regular basis. I feel as if my mind is sweating and that there is a low constant humming going on in my back-brain. It's as if someone's moving furniture back there, and they still haven't got the floor plan exactly right. "Nope. The armoire is two inches too broad. We'll have to move it around again boys." This would be less alarming if it weren't still going on in my day-sleep. One of the few real perks of being undead is the distinct lack of dreams.

For one thing, my sire is making a regular habit of checking in on me every 6 weeks. This would be enough to set me on edge, except each time he turns up he also has an armload of study materials. The sort of materials that would have made me cry bloody tears for release two years ago. But I did ask him to, and now I'm taking up the great work seriously.

I'm finding that part and parcel of beginning your steps in the great work is to find out what has been done already. It's humbling each time you think you've got an original idea only to have your sire turn up with 12 books dating back to the 14th century having to do with your incredibly arcane and abstruse idea that you thought was SO original.

Humbling. I'm not good at being humble. I don't really think anyone in the Ordo Dracul is. But I think that's a topic for another night.

In addition. Every so often I go visit my mentor. Ms. Alexa Veda Karan. And we talk philosophy and occasionally religion as well.

This is not nearly as easy as it sounds, Mainly because I don't like feeling ignorant in front of the lady.

Unfortunately, nearly everyone is ignorant compared to Alexa Veda Karan. This of course means once I return here to the Lodge, I go out to the public library and bring home a stack of additional work.

This occasionally leads to me yelling at people in bars about epistemology and Immanuel Kant. This sort of thing is not healthy under the best of circumstances.

Is this quest for greater academic acumen making me

more or less erratic? It's hard to tell. God knows when I was going to school I didn't take it nearly as seriously. I was just back from the war, and I had seen some pretty heinous stuff over there. Even though I was behind a desk most of the time. I didn't have PTSD, but if you were going to school on the GI bill and you wanted to get laid, you basically acted as if you were fried from the war, and not from the fine, fine drugs you had managed to smuggle home. Jesus, I was Journalism major, and my doctorate is from a Guatemalan school.

Which is not to say that I am a poor student or that I am uneducable. It's just that I can only seem to focus on things that I am truly interested in. I find myself unable to care about things I don't actually care about. To complicate matters, it seems that the more esoteric and pointless a thing is, the more likely it is to groove me. This tendency is one that I have happily parleyed into a career in writing for magazines.

Magazine writers can make a living out of writing about the most pointless shit in existence. There once was a time when I could literally tell you nearly everything you could possibly want to know about building ships in bottles. Wrote 3 full articles about it, and referenced bottle ships in at least 6 other articles for that year.

Did you know that people who build ships in bottles have a whole magazine of their own? It's true. In fact, to quote George Carlin, "Every single activity that more than 6 people in the continental United States indulge in, has it's own magazine."

To this, I would add that they've got a plethora of websites and at least two web forums. One where they all argue and call each other Nazis, and another where they only talk about how much they hate the original forum.

Sorry. Mind wandering. Need to go fix a hole, I guess.

### **Madness takes its toll. Please have exact change**

I want to talk about something tonight, but I don't know what about.

That's the problem with words. they are inherent to, but also transcendent of meaning. Don't believe me? Read some poetry and STFU. Words are slippery things. Imprecise. Using words to describe the human condition is like using a barbell to swat a fly.

And I guess that what's hard about the so-called "Soft Sciences" They aren't expressed in cold, uncaring numbers but in words, for emotions that don't have names and in

feelings impossible to quantify.

Presently, my field

.....  
.....of study is  
psychology. And it too is slippery and imprecise, but  
then, considering my history and my own close personal  
affinity for Chaos...Well. I wouldn't do well as an  
Engineer.

The premise is simple. Get a good understanding of Human  
psychology and then, see what can be done to transplant  
that understanding to the Kindred condition. I am  
convinced that there isn't enough of a body of knowledge  
of Kindred Pathology.

Not that I'm thinking along the lines of pop psychology  
or anything like that. Hmm.

"I'm Okay...You're a blood-drinking monster."

Nah. It'll never sell.

If you're kindred, you're also saddled with the  
additional burden of having to constantly check yourself.  
Coping strategies can all too easily turn into full-blown  
pathologies. For instance, I used to have this habit of  
separating my internal dialogue into two distinct voices.  
The voice on the right? The voice of reason. (My Nemesis)

He was the analytical side, the math and all that. He was the one voice capable of pulling me back from the brink.

And the other voice, the voice on the left was the voice of the heart, the voice of the emotions. Sometimes it was good to talk these things over with myself, especially if it was an internal matter. Not so good for helping you choose a candy bar at the Pick n Pay.

And you had to think out loud. Some things were perfectly reasonable until you said them out loud and heard how they sounded out in the cold harsh light of day. Thoughts are fluid. Words are concrete, or at least more concrete than thoughts anyways.

There were times during my college years when you could see me, moving about on campus. I would walk late at night, most of the times, to a local store nearby for a late soda and a snack. (Chips, and the occasional hostess cupcake.) And I'd be muttering to myself a mile a minute. Figuring out the interior of my own mind. Nowadays, were I to go about muttering to myself, they'd assume that I had finally gone up over the high side. Or maybe bought a cell phone with a blue-tooth earpiece.

And maybe they'd be right to think me mad. I spend too much time alone trying to ponder this mystery inside my



own head. You know, the one with the fangs... Lord knows that I've been alone too long. Wandering the roads, and now, hole up here in Winchester.

I catch myself driving and feeling like the song on the radio is talking directly to me. Can't think how long ago, but I did that all the time. Now it seems as if it's coming back. Used to be it was a love song, fresh out of a relationship and still hurting. Like salt in knife fight wound.

Last night, I caught myself singing along with "Against the Wind", cause these days, it's about me.

And that's not all. Occasionally, I get this urge to...Sermonize. I'll get some burr under my saddle and I'll start frothing at the mouth and going off into some kind of crazed screed on my perception of reality and it will not matter who or what is going on until I've finished my thought. Happily, I can feel this tendency coming on. It starts small. But usually it swells to the size of a grapefruit and begins working its way up my spine, beating the shit out of my chakras until it cracks full blown into my head and then I'll be delivering a sermon at 4 in morning stark naked from my balcony in the Opryland hotel. Because BY GOD, PEOPLE GOT TO KNOW!

And you know, such behavior is usually tolerated from Carthians. But I'm Ordo now, and people are going to be keeping an EYE on my activities. It's just not cricket to fill up on mind-expanding drugs and go on an extended dance mix goon binge.

I starting to feel like a dude who's had his crutches kicked out from under him.

### **Three Unpleasant Facts**

I come by my cowardice honestly. At least, I guess its cowardice. I have this tendency toward sheer self-destructive bloody-mindedness in fights that I can see coming, but when attacked by surprise, I tend to run for the hills.

Maybe that's smart. Maybe it's chicken-shit. I don't know. I dislike examining my flaws, especially when I feel that this is one that is deep and ravine-like.

I've become at least a little inured to a beating that I can see coming. Sometimes, I can talk my way out, other times, not so much. Didn't always used to be that way.

When I was a kid, I had a bad combination, little shrimpy body, oversized head for my ill-concealed genius, and a

big mouth. And it was this big mouth and my bad temper that got me in trouble. And it got the shit kicked out of me on a semi-regular basis.

Shocking, I know.

Actually, it wasn't that I honestly had a bad temper. It was that I didn't know how to control it at all. Of course, the young bastards that populated my schoolyard, were looking for a little sport, They knew, somehow, in that way that bullies always seem to know, that I would be useful for some fun. So they'd bait me until I lost my temper, or until I cried... and then my sight would go all red, and when it would all clear off, I'd be on the ground, with my ass firmly kicked.

Never learned how to turn my anger into strength like the Hulk.

And indeed, I come by my keen sense of injustice honestly too. I read a LOT of comic books.

I learned to read early. I had Sesame Street and just before first grade, the Electric Company too. When I was given my first book to read in school, I gave it back to the teacher and asked for another. It was supposed to last me all year. She hadn't believed me of course, so she asked me about some of the stories, and I told her

what I thought about it.

I got another book. Ill-Concealed genius. Remember?

Mom says I was always doing shit like that. She told me I never crawled. That I would sit and scoot around on my butt, and when I got tired of that, I got up and walked. Back in those days, comics were 50 cents unless it was an Annual or something. Most of my money went for comics. Because some things were right, and some things were wrong. And that was the way it was.

Reminds me of the line from "Garden of Allah" by Don Henley. "I can remember a time when things were a lot more fun around here. When good was "good" and evil was "evil". Before things got so...Fuzzy."

The bulk of my life is dealing with the "Fuzzy" But back in those days. It was a little clearer.

At least it seemed that way.

In any case, I got the crap kicked out of me on a regular basis as a kid. I don't like to fight, because for the most part I suck at it. That's fact one.

Fact two was, that I had a girlfriend.

The path of my romantic troubles leads back to the fact that I never really had a latency period. I always was

interested in girls. I probably would have been better off if I'd had that period that most boys had where I thought that girls were icky. But I was, in this, a prodigy as well.

I was sweet on a girl named Lisa. I don't know if Lisa was ever sweet on me. But we would play together and when we did, life was fine. At least, I thought so.

One day, I was on the monkey bars. Not a huge fan of the monkey bars, but variety is the spice of life. Anybody who's been through my medicine cabinet can infer that I'm a subscriber to that particular philosophy.

Until I saw Ricky Bates chasing Lisa and another friend of mine across the playground. I heard a scream.

Ricky, was a fairly chunky lad and certainly bigger than me. One of the pack of slightly older kids that made my life a living hell. He seemed to be chasing Lisa, and another girl, Robin, also a friend. As I said, there was a scream. It did not appear to be a scream of young people playing. It seemed to be a scream born of fear.

And in putting these things together in my head, I came to a conclusion.

I swung down from the monkey bars, I rather fancy like Batman, and when I hit the ground. I was no longer Corny Eldridge. I was an avenging fury. I ran up behind him and before he had even known what was happening, I had dotted both of his eyes, and was savagely throwing my shoulder into his breadbasket.

Needless to say, Recess was cut short for me.

I was unceremoniously dragged in front of my second grade teacher, a nice lady named Mrs. Shepherd and I was quizzed about my violent behavior in front of the whole class. I told my side of course. Sans poetry, I couldn't really focus very well. Adrenaline was juddering all up and down my young body.

Of course, my girlfriend and my other friend were horrified. "We were just playing!" they said. And you know, it's possibly true. It's certainly possible that they were just playing. Ricky certainly had the fucking chutzpah to look like a "victim". It's certainly possible that the scream wasn't something life threatening. It's possible that I miss-read the whole thing.

But at that time, and in that place, the fact that they'd defended him seemed like the keenest betrayal. I had done the right thing. I had protected someone that I cared about. And I frankly did NOT understand, why she was looking at me as if were some new weird creature.

I looked around the room. I saw them looking at me, with their bovine eyes. Fear. A little hatred. I had never thought that I was different from my classmates. It had never occurred to me that I was different from everyone I knew.

I was wrong. And now, I could see it. It was a hard thing to see and know at the tender age of 7.

That's fact number 3.

### **Why I don't write much about my Requiem**

I've been asked by a few people who've read some of my work, why it seems like I write about my breathing life in great detail, but I tell few stories of the years as a vampire.

It's not because I detest being a vampire. I do. But it

is what it is. And writing about my own self-hatred is a bit Emo for my tastes.

It's not because other vampires get testy when you mention them by name in a book, especially when you are enumerating their less-than-stellar qualities. I've gotten used to stress from people upset over things I've written. Although most of them might SAY they want to kill me. Few actually try.

I guess, maybe I write about my breathing life, because I'm trying to make some sense of it. Isn't that what you're supposed to do with your afterlife? Maybe, It's a process of putting all of that to bed. I hope not. Maybe it's a process of trying to learn something from my past that will serve me in this new life. I don't know if I believe in karma or reincarnation, but by all accounts, if they exist, I am outside the Wheel of Life, Death, and Re-birth.

Am I looking for Golconda, Transcendance, Some higher spiritual state?

In truth, I don't think I have the stamina, the intestinal fortitude, the spiritual juice, for the long haul.



I am not a good man.

Seems so bald when I put it in print like that. But, it is what it is.

I'm not a good person. I've never pretended to be so. I have my moments when I'm good. And I have my moments when I'm utterly devoid of human kindness.

You can live as a human and not a very good one. I tend to think that if I'd just died, I'd have gotten into heaven, as most of my sins are penny-ante bullshit.

I never was a killer.

And therein lies the rub, as the bard sez. It's not that I'm a worse or better person, but that the opportunities for big extravagant evil are a great deal more prevalent in my unlife now. Lean into the anger and bitterness at this point and I am liable to commit sins that are NOT non-trivial.

My very presence in the world presents opportunities for the destruction of lives and souls. I must have blood to survive. I must hunt living creatures to obtain this blood. My blood in the mouth of another can bend their soul to my will or, in the case of an embrace, steal their life and give them this forsaken existence.

I, and every vampire in this world, am a door to let in suffering. And I say to most of the Sanctified that I know, "Isn't that enough?"

In truth, all I ever wanted was to write, maybe explore a chunk of the interior of my head-meats with exotic chemical entertainments, and settle down with some lady able to put up with my more extravagant ass-holery.

Now? Well. I still get to write.

## **The Paths of Fate**

Nobody is really sure where the origins of Tarot card reading start. Many lay this interesting form of divination at the feet of the Gypsies. So, I suppose it's no surprise that the Ordo Dracul took it on in a different form.

I learned how to read tarot some years ago. I was married to Rita and we were living in SoCal. I had some trouble getting full time work. I was working at Show-World at the time. But it was only part-time and on the third shift. Rita was an actress, so it was always feast or famine with us. Mostly famine. There was a point where I

set up shop out on the boardwalk near our apartment near the beach. I probably would have made more money as a street preacher, but I took up fortune telling instead. I studied with one of the finest readers I knew, Charlaine Borodin. Her thing was palms. But she did it all. Palms. Cards. Tea leaves. Passing birds in flight. She was writing a book on divination, which I think is still in print. It's titled, "Are you SURE you want to know?"

In any case, much of what she taught me. I used, and as time went on, found my own way of working, as any tarot reader will do. The funny thing is, Charlaine tested me, I'm about as psychic as a rock, or at least I used to be. Tarot is the only form of divination that I've ever been able to do with any degree of facility.

I think that's mainly because I approach Tarot reading from a distinctly scientific and psychological standpoint. The arcana of the tarot deck are roughly equivalent to Jung's psychological archetypes. The work of manipulating the symbols of the deck helps us shake up our ways of looking the elements in play in our lives. This may help us tactically in our understanding.

I think if there is anything magickal at work in the reading of Tarot it is that you want to open yourself and

turn you intuition up to 11. Not only can you learn a great deal more about the person that you're reading. But occasionally, you'll get messages "from beyond" or at least, you won't know exactly where they are coming from. Maybe the subconscious knows something you don't, or maybe some power from somewhere else is passing you notes. It doesn't matter how you look at it. I've learned from hard experience, to listen to these messages and make sure they come out of my mouth. I find that before reading Tarot I like to picture raising my antenna up the back of my head. I think it helps me key into the proper frame of mind. I've also found that 2-5 alcoholic beverages can also help me get there.

First you have to acquire a deck. There is a lot of folderol that goes into this, but you do what works for you. I know at least a few people who would only use a deck that was given to them as a gift. I know at least one reader, who has about a hundred different decks, and uses an extremely exacting, perhaps even OCD, method of choosing which one to use for particular questions and people.

Go to some occult bookshop and browse. Find a deck with the sort of symbolism that calls to you or speaks to you in some way. You can even find such things on Ebay if you're so inclined. Although, I can honestly say, you can

walk into most occult bookshops looking pale and tragic, even have your fangs showing, and no one will give you second look. They won't think you're a vampire, they'll just assume you're a loser.

Next, you'll need something to store your deck in. Lots of folks favor black silk. I have a wooden box made in India by a blind monk that I keep mine in.

When you return, burn some sage, in a safe manner and pass both the deck, the cloth, and the box, through the sage smoke. This cleanses it of influences.

When you purchase the deck, normally there will be a little booklet that comes with the deck. Throw this book away immediately. It is incredibly general and not very helpful at all. Buy a decent book on tarot symbology. If your particular deck is somewhat popular, it may have a book(s) of it's own. I favor the Thoth-Crowley deck, as Aleister Crowley is something of a hero of mine. That deck has a few good books.

I also favor the Crowley deck because it is read all upright. This way, the interpretation of the card is more up to you. Each card has a light side and a dark side, in

terms of its meaning. It also means I don't have to memorize two sets of interpretations based on orientation of the cards. It does mean however that I am forced to pay more attention to the position and context of the card layout.

I tend to use the Celtic cross spread. It is the one that I can do in my sleep. I know a couple of others, but this one is fairly deep and comprehensive. I also do a 4-element spread that only requires 4 cards, but I tend to do that one if I'm reading for numerous people.

Note to Daevas: Tarot draws cute girls out of the woodwork and makes you seem mysterious.

You have 3 sorts of cards to work with:

### **1) Major Arcana**

These tend to be cards that are most powerfully connected to Jungian archetypes. They seem also to be the sort of cards most powerfully symbolic. If there are not many Major arcana in a spread, then that means that events in the Querrent's life are largely under their control. It also means, that there isn't much going on.

If there is a large number of Major Arcana, it means that more of the elements in your life are in play, but that you are also not as in control of events. I refer to this

as being "Squeezed by the forces of Destiny"

## **2) Minor Arcana**

Which deal more with the symbols of the everyday life rather than the large arc of a person's existence. I look for preponderances of suits. If I see lots of Disks and lots of Wands, then I can see a conflict between the material life, and the spiritual life.

I pay very close attention to Cups, because if the emotional life is out of whack, it seems as if every thing is out of whack. You can have a life where everything is shit and garbage, and if you emotional life is okay, you'll make it through. But you could have a life where you are wrapped in velvet and covered in grits, and if your emotions are out of balance, you won't see it or feel it.

When reading for vampires, I also keep a close eye on wands. Wands have to do with the root power of fire. And fire is rarely the vampire's friend. They also have to do with our passions. And our passions can get out of hand pretty quick.

## **3) Court Cards**

These have to do with the cards that are the "face" cards in a normal deck. There are a number of ways of naming these cards, kings, queens, princes, princesses, pages,

jesters or whatever.

In reading Court cards, the general tendency is to read them one of two ways. Sometimes they have to do with states of beings, aspects of personality that you have within you. People are multi-faceted for the most part, and they can call on various parts of themselves at times in their lives.

But they can also have something to do with the people you know. It may be that a particular court card is telling you to seek the council of someone you know because his or her advice might help you or point you in the right direction. I also tend to look at the number of court cards that turn up in a spread. If there are many, I will point out to the Querrent that their situation has many actors on-stage. Much like a soap opera. If there are few, or none, it tends to indicate that a problem or situation is largely internal.

### **Steps Along The Path:**

#### 1) Learn and Forget:

Read your book on Tarot. Learn it as best you can. Keep it with you. Read it over every so often, you might be able to get new insights from it from time to time, But, as you begin reading, not only for yourself, but for others, move away from the book and start looking for



meanings of your own for the various cards, You might keep notes of the spreads you do for yourself and how those situations play out. One card in the Crowley deck, the 8 of Wands has as its keywords, "Clear, swift, direct communication." This, for some reason, almost always pre-saged a knock down, drag-out argument with Rita over some damn fool thing or other. The kind of argument that for one reason or another was actually cleansing and helpful...Cathartic even. And undoubtedly that kind of argument is clear, swift, direct communication. Go fig.

## 2) Commonalities:

It is not unusual for people who have something in common, to have certain commonalities in their spreads. I can think of no better example than when the girls at Show-World found out that I read Tarot. I ended up becoming the personal guru of three-dozen strippers whether I wanted to or not. It is also gave me a permanent nickname for the Prince of Cups. "Oh look. The Asshole Boyfriend card. Quell Surprise."

## 3) Important Safety Tips:

-If you're reading for a couple. Read for them separately. Trust me. It's important.

-If you're reading for a cute girl, it is permissible to tell her that she really need to hook up with older man,

say, a fella who shaves his head, maybe a little soft in the middle. As long as you also say, "Okay, now that I've got the obvious come-on out of the way, let's get back to work. Shall we?"

-Remember that you're only dealing in potentialities. And in addition, the cards will occasionally tell you flat-out that the important thing you were thinking about is NOT what you need to be paying attention to.

- There is such a thing as the Tarot equivalent of "Well, DUH!"

-There will be times, when you'll throw a card and have no idea what it means in the larger picture. It's okay to throw another card on it, to see if that helps. If it doesn't, it's not going to get any clearer. It's the tarot equivalent of "Reply Hazy, Ask again Later."

-The Querrent's filter is more important than your own. You interpret. They assign meaning to the archetypes. That's the way it works.

-Pay attention to your intuitions. When I first met Susan, one of Rita's friends, I was asked to throw Tarot for her. In the obstacle position, I drew a 5 of wands. Now, I personally hate the five of wands, because I think of it as the writer's block card. And it's usually a crap card for anyone in a creative field. But for some reason, when I was looking at it, I flashed on the fact that also means, spiritual attack...And before I knew what I was

saying, I threw back another shot, looked Susan in her pretty green eyes and asked her if her house was haunted. She nearly jumped out her chair, "How on EARTH did you know that!" It turns out that Susan lived in this creepy old house that had been in her family, and apparently they'd had troubles with a poltergeist for years. Which I ended up sorting out, by scientific application of extremely loud heavy metal and a copy of the current exorcism rite that I had borrowed from a friend. I don't know how I knew, but I do know to pay attention to the gut when I read.

-Realize that your own readings can be tricky. You are, generally speaking, too close to the problem at times. It can be very trying. But that's no reason to stop.

-Always try to end on an "Up" note. Even if the reading seems to indicate the oncoming freight train of doom, try to find some way to give helpful advice if you can. Even if that advice is, "There are certain things coming down the pipe that you should avoid like nympho goth jailbait."

-I always like to clear my mind before a reading for myself. I council people to do the same, then ask them to cut with their left hand.

**So shines a Good Deed in a weary world**

In my Requiem, I have occasionally found myself blessed. And in many ways I try to live up to those blessings. It is rarer than you would expect to find a simple bit of kindness. And yet, I find that occasionally, my actions seem to speak to some in the undead community in a way that makes them want to take me under their wing.

I would like nothing better than to name each and every kindred who has shown me kindness. I feel indebted to them, in the best way imaginable. But I fear that to do so in these pages would be to paint their backs with targets, from people who are less than charmed with my antics.

Virtue, when it rears its head in the Kindred community is such an unknown and unexpected event, that in many ways it scares the shit out of many of them. Especially the more politically inclined of us. In a very real way, to choose virtue is to choose death. It opens the heart and exposes the soul, and in a society of predators, it is seen as weakness.

It is NOT a weakness. It is an uncommon strength.

Once, when I was at college, I met a young girl named Tammy. I was pushing my bike back up the hill. There was

hill between the campus and the nearest Gas N' Go. It was the only place where you could acquire smokes, cokes, chips, and porn. The hill was such that it would almost freeze my eyeballs riding down it, so the trip back uphill was non-trivial. Especially burdened with extra weight.

As was my usual custom, I was muttering to myself. Or rather, "Thinking out Loud" as I liked to call it. Tammy was also walking up hill. Thinking heavy thoughts.

For some reason, I know not why, I didn't clam up when I got close to her. We struck up a conversation on the way up the hill and continued it at the top of the hill. There was this stone bench, where we sat and before you know it, two hours had gotten by me.

To this night, I couldn't tell you what it was we talked about. But it was good talking to her and I guess she liked talking to me. I for one reason or another wasn't on the make or anything. We parted, and I went back to the dorm and didn't think another thing about it.

We didn't see a lot of one another. But when we did, it was always pleasant. We traveled in different circles I guess.

One night, while I was lazing about the student union, I

found her working the grill and said hey to her. She threw a steak hoagie on the grill for me, but I told her I was skint. She said to me. "No problem Pinky. If it weren't for you, I would have left this school that night that we met."

"What?"

"All I'm saying is that I was ready to pack it up and go the hell home. But meeting you and talking with you got my mind off my troubles, and made me feel like I had made a friend. It made all the difference."

I could have fallen through the floor. It pointed up the power of kindness to me. Niccolo Machiavelli once wrote, "Do good when you can. Do evil when you must." I have a sneaking suspicion that too many kindred have forgotten the first half of this quote.

## **Toccata and Frug**

The plan was simple.

Janosh had known about the place for many years, and although it had changed some, it still held its power. It had been a home to Lexington's first lunatic asylum. Now it was just one of a number of Transy's residence halls. Its essence had changed but according to Janosh, it still

claimed lives on occasion. In terms of student suicides it still had the highest body count.

Janosh had scouted ahead. Easy to do when you can assume the form of mist. It's a trick I lust after a little bit. But not easy to learn if you are not of Gangrel blood. Strangely, Janosh begrudges teaching Andre or I anything involving the coils or any of the inner mysteries. But when he learned that I had claws, he was interested, and told me he'd teach me the ways of the wild, if that is what I wished. I think that since the only Gangrel around these parts are pissed- off descendants of the pissed off Indians he killed in the first place...I guess he just misses having someone to talk about that sort of stuff with.

We made our way into the deeper part of the building. He would ghost ahead and unlock doors. Some very old. I'm not sure anyone on the physical plant staff had been down here in years. Transy itself is shot through with a honeycomb of tunnels, many of them made by Janosh himself.

I had to ask him to repeat himself. His tortuous Russian accent making Dahlia's seem clear as an alpine lake. He snorted and wheezed at me in that way of his. Janosh has

a slow gravelly way of talking that makes me think of glaciers scraping over the face of a continent.

"I said, are you prepared?"

"Yeah. So...How do we do this?" I said turning on the battery camp lantern and setting it in the corner.

"You will be covered in clay, den I vill make the ritual and place you in the box where you will sleep the day away. Do you have any questions?"

"Um. Yeah...Why I don't I just sleep in the earth?"

"Part of the ritual is that I must set the crate on fire to seal you vithin."

He hadn't told me about that part.

"YOU DIDN'T TELL ME ABOUT THAT PART!"

"Shh!"

"You didn't...Tell me about that part.

"The clay is vet. You are in wery little danger."

"But enough to trigger a frenzy right?"

Janosh shrugged. "You can always remain a slave."

"I told you how I feel about that word."

He looked at me and opened his hands at hip level as if to say, "Stop me from saying it."

Which, maybe in about million years of cold hard undeath, I might be able to do.

"Alright fine..."

"Do you still vish to?"



"Yeah...I do."

I got undressed, and starting smearing the cold red clay on my body. It was important to cover as much as possible. Then I laid in the crate we had stolen from the funeral home earlier that week. Explaining the concept of burglar alarms to Janosh was interesting, as was explaining why a funeral home would need such things. Indeed, trying to explain the concept of necrophilia to him was...Well. He didn't take it well. It rubbed him wrong, let's just say. As a result he had been grumbling about "Sicknesses of the modern age." most of this week.

Once I had laid in the crate, He took the great slabs of modeling clay we had acquired and pressed them into place all around me, filling the rest of the space in the crate.

"Do you have anything to say before I close you in?"

"No. Nothing at all."

He looked at me as if he didn't believe me, put the last of the clay slabs on top of me and then put the top on the crate.

I could hear hammering. I fancy I could even faintly smell the kerosene he was pouring over the crate.

I could feel heat.

My sensory apparatus, deprived of anything else to focus on, began to climb up my spinal column in a unfocused fear. No air to breath. Nothing to taste, my fangs protruding in my mouth. I was reminded of those old episodes of the Incredible Hulk on TV. Certainly I wasn't going to turn green, but there something knocking on my backdoor and it was telling me. "Smash your way out of this crate. DO IT NOW."

Instead, I let the heat sink into my bones. I couldn't really stir or move. I sat there and told myself to let the heat sink into my cold unliving bones and let it heat them the way life once had...

But it wasn't working. And the low yammering feeling that was climbing up me like a cat on a screen door was joined seemingly by a chorus of anguished cries. Lost souls stuck in the bowels of this place. Angry. Afraid. Begging me...

It was at that point, where I was happy that I had taken a heroic amount of Mescaline.

I hadn't really told Janosh that I would do so. Kindred physiology being what it is, I had to ingest a LOT of it, and took almost a day and a half for it to kick in, but it lasted and was very potent. And added bonus, since I was taking it in via direct blood infusion, I wasn't

puking my guts up.

The toy surprise in my head cracked open and I had that feeling of going over the edge.

I was driving my car out by Keeneland as a much younger lad once, where I rounded the corner and came out from under the streetlights. It was raining and was right on the edge of twilight, so didn't have my car lights on yet. In that moment, it looked as if the road had just dropped away to the point that the visual cue caused a feeling of falling vertigo, until, hands shaking, I was able to get my lights on and convince my body that we were still on solid road. A road we'd traveled before. That's the way I always think of it, like the start of a roller coaster ride. A rising, a pressure of potential energy building up. And then the world drops away. A feeling of being carried over the brink. Sometimes, I even scream.

Couldn't this time.

To move was to break open the shell of the world's egg and let the fire of the LORD shine on my poor dark heart. Fire was out there. FIRE! And I was in this warm sweaty womb, being born; passing through, finding oblivion...what was I doing here? Call the police. I need help. I need. I can't move. I'm like a turbine wrapped in

engine sludge and I can't turn... can't find the pieces of the puzzle. I know there's some judo to this. Some pivot and turn to this fear. But I can't grip it and I'm falling down, down, down. The ring of fire. The ring of fire.

I could feel parts of my mind churning like they were burning away. Like pain in a shiny plastic bottle being rattled like the last pill...The last pill for the pain. Dani laughing at me as I offered my blood.

OH no.

Please God/Goddess, not that.

But already too late. My knee flared from Barbara shooting my kneecap.

The clean slate of Dolores's eye as she bore down on my in the Honda civic.

Like pieces of a broken glass coffee table the memories fell down on me. Cutting me. Hurting my eyes.

The tears I had wrung out of Emma, and Ilse, and God knows how many other I'd disappointed.

Me staggering through the house, flames everywhere, holding my guts in with my free hand.

The light slipping out of Isabel's eyes.

I was bucking. I can't move. I have to be still. I mustn't move. I have to be still to move is to die. To be

still is to die. My mind is on fire. My body doesn't care anymore.

There was a crack and the light was coming in. I wondered if I would even have time or air enough to scream before I was wreathed in God's fiery vengeance....

When I found myself on the beach, I was surprised to say the least.

It was a black sand beach. The sun was going down. He sat on a beach towel that looked like an American flag. He looked up and smiled.

He was drawing in the sand with a stick he'd found. Alchemical symbols it looked like. I recognized the one for Mercury and the one for Fire.

He was me.

Or...Well he looked like me. Kind of. He looked a great deal more... what's the word i need here? Focused. I guess. He had a kind of intellect that when roused was a little intimidating in it's intensity. I nearly took a step back when he looked up at me, as if to regard me with the whole of his considerable mind.

"I was wondering when you'd turn up here."

Using my great command of the English language, I said nothing.

He put the stick down and it slithered away.

"I was hoping you'd find your way here a little more naturally. Like in meditation, or in Kundalini experience. But I guess we each have to find our way in our own ways. You require stress and short duration insanity I suppose."

"Who are you?" I found myself croaking.

"That." He said, "Is a good question. Perhaps I am a portion of the godhead. Dracula saw god supposedly. Why not you?" he rose in one smooth motion and walked out onto the surf, I mean ONTO the surf, like it was solid land. " Or maybe, I'm just a bit of strong mescaline, fucking with you..."His tap shoes starting in a slow rhythm, the cane twirling in his fingers, "Or quite possibly I am part of your subconscious mind, throwing you a much needed life preserver.

I looked down at my waist to find it ringed and bearing the legend "S.S. Titanic"

"Maybe, I'm the combo platter. These things are rarely as simple as we'd like them to be in our waking minds.

"Okay."

"Okay. Acceptance. I can dig it. So what's next? What's happening? What's the story?"

"Um. "

"That's so you. Perfect opportunity to talk to your perfected self and you're stuck for what to even ask..."

"Perfected self?"

"Yep. Or at least. That's what I'll call it. But you're here. Here for a specific purpose."

I remembered.

The next thing I knew, there was a very good Margarita in my hand, as we sat under the palms.

"Go ahead. Drink it. It's like those ones you had at Joey's place after Rita got that small recurring role on "The Streets of San Francisco."

I drank it. It was good. I had not forgotten.

"See. Not everything in the inner world has turned to shit and garbage. The mind never truly forgets. We are all collections of pleasures and pains, so it behooves us to pick the best ones we can." Perfected Me clinked my glass with his Boilermaker from my college days and drank it down.

"Pleasure and pain, good and evil, selfish and self-less. Up, down, and all around. The world is a place of juxtapositions and yet paradoxes don't exist. Why do you suppose that is?"

"Umm. I don't know...Why?"

"Alchemical marriage. Dope. Pope. Soap on a rope." His eyes seemed far away and yet close and looking into me at

the same time. "Look it's all about making new things. Nail two things together and you get something new. Nail two neurons together and you get new thoughts. Pow! Blam! Peanut butter and chocolate. You savvy?"

I reached out with my hands to either side of me, and grasped them closed, as if I were grabbing onto reality and holding on for dear life." Sorry. Had to get my bearings."

He smiled. "That's the best thing about you in some ways. You may be scared and you might be in an unfamiliar place, but you press on. You roll with the weird."

I thought about this. "I guess I do."

"And another thing. You don't like being scared. But you end up running towards the things you fear to try to beat them into submission whether you want to or not. It's the way you've wired yourself."

"I suppose so."

"And another thing." He said, as he poured another margarita into my glass. "You want so badly to be worthy."

We walked to the edge of the bridge. The earthquake had snapped it in half. We stood on the edge regarding the plunge and the drop below. The twisted pieces of rebar slightly waving in the breeze.

"Is that wrong?"



"Nah. Not so much. But it does bespeak a level of self hatred, that paralyzes you."

"Will I ever overcome it?"

"Maybe. Probably not. But I can say you've taken a step towards harnessing it. And that's pretty darn good."

"I guess."

"Don't kid yourself Corneilius." He smiled as he leaped over the side. "I can't give you answers you don't already know."

I leaped. I landed in a ball-pit at a chuck-e-cheese. He was smiling and backstroking nearby.

"Look. I came here for the knowledge to change myself."

"You did. You did that. That was done. I'll conjugate the verb the rest of the way if you like. The first one is always hardest. The first always needs fire and pressure and time. You have made yourself into a diamond, and now the process is to cut yourself properly so that you can shine. And you can do that. You may be the most protean souled Dragon to walk the path since the Dragon himself.

"Really?"

"Only you can know for sure. But isn't Ex Stasis interesting? Something you've sought to indulge in all your life. And most of your death. What if it's YOU that overturns the apple cart in every movie chase scene. Wouldn't that be something?"

He had me there.

"Look", he said, "I have three things to tell you before we part ways.

"Okay." I said as my bag came around on the carousel. Atlanta hasn't changed at all except for that all of the people have become vertical bands of indigo light.

"Number 3, the heart is a knife. The only question is, is it in your hand, or is it in someone else's hand."

"I don't..."

"Shh. Accept now, question later. Time is short."

"Okay. "

"Number 1, question the steps, but never doubt the path. And most importantly...number 2. Each creature, even an undead creature has the necessary tools to reshape himself into what he needs to be.... The only important bit is...what do you need to be?"

I walked out into the field. Mom had a sister who had owned a farm. There was a cornfield. I stood there thinking on his words...

The sun came out from behind a cloud. I felt its warmth on my face.

I knew then, what I needed to become.

They call this process Chrysalis. It is a form of

rebirth. When Janosh saw that I hadn't fallen to the beast or gone irretrievably mad, he did something he rarely does. He smiled. And I, covered in dry red clay and hungry as a son of a bitch.... I smiled back.

"Now you vill newer be a slave again. Da?"

"Da."

### **How to make enemies and antagonize people**

Apparently, all you need to say in the Ordo Dracul is.

"Hi My name is Corneilius, My mentor is "x"...and that's more than enough to garner you a good half dozen enemies.

This is something that I will never understand the basis of. In academia, in the Ordo Dracul. Anywhere, for that matter. It's just so nonsensical. How can a society that so prides itself on it's intelligence and perspicacity still persist in small-minded horse-shit like deciding you're an enemy based on who is teaching you. It offends my sense of justice. Moreover it slams the door in my face of potential learning from as many sources as possible.

And it pisses me off simply because I am more than capable of offending people, antagonizing people, and getting into trouble ALL BY MYSELF.

I guess it's true what they say; the reason why academic politics are so vicious is because the stakes are so small.

I am making my presence felt on the Ordo Dracul mailing list. I've jumped out there and I've been introducing myself, and doing the "Daeva" thing of being mister social and mister schmooze. Good thing I spent all that time in journalism and the music business as it has taught me how to smile in the face of people who want to kill me on the spot. It's handy.

Which is not to say that I'm only making enemies and frenemies. But the politics are a little more twisty-turny than what I was used to in the Carthian movement. Former Carthians on the OD list report the same.

It's a different culture there is all, and I suppose that I'll just have to get used to it.

I am however starting to realize that I come off much better in person, which doesn't say much for my skills as a writer. And since I'm not in the habit of using majesty on fellow kindred, I guess it says I'm developing some personal charm.

I may have to rectify this. I might have to turn up to a large gather out of my head on drugs and jabbering about strix. Wouldn't do to get too respectable.

Humility does not come easy to the dragon. In its first incarnation, the Order of the Dragon was a society of the nobles, the aristocracy of Dracula's time, and the time of his father. To a degree, our society mirrors that one, insofar as it has the tendency to bring out an aristocratic manner.

As a former Carthian, I used to bust on the Invictus extensively. On more than one occasion I got my ass kicked in an open court by some Invictus worthy or other, normally I prided myself on being able to get to my feet afterwards, look the bastard in the eyes, and say "Did that make your cock hard for you? Got a little wood from that. You hit like a fucking girl, ya know."

Don't misunderstand me. I've met Invictus that I've been able to respect and a few that I could work with, but I did so bust on them. My favorite jab was to mention that the Invictus's favorite game was "Oo, what a big title I've got."

And then I went and joined the Ordo Dracul, That possesses nomenclature that make the Invictus appear to be paragons of modesty. Ah, sweet axe of irony. Are you responsible for the cold clean blast of breezy air across my frontal lobe?

Ah well.

As I make my journey through the Danse, and through the Ordo Dracul, I find that if there is one element that is both our greatest strength, and our greatest weakness, it is that we are people of will. While we may be scientists, scholars, judges, seers, and warriors, each of us also bears a touch of nobility in our makeup. I have yet to meet a single dragon in my journey so far that wasn't a lord or a lady in her own way. Perhaps they weren't masters of a vast domain, but within their own scholarly bailiwick they strove for pre-eminence.

The great work is not only the circumvention of the vampiric curse; it is the drive for greater self-confidence. To make oneself, a man or woman of supreme will. One must. To stand against the curse of God, one cannot be a coward or be bereft of a spine.

In essence of course, this translates into a society of

willful persons, each looking for their own personal vision. The only thing that holds us together is a desire for something larger than our own wills, our own egos. I don't know about you, but I know that my ego is ENORMOUS. Truly monolithic. Anyone attempting to deflate it is going to need a pickaxe or something larger. And I fear there will be casualties, if it happens. Perhaps even into surrounding counties.

The large thing, the thing that is larger than ego, is what enables us to work together, not the inertia of habit, not the rules, the ranks, the laws...All that stuff does is point the way.

The large thing is learning. The large thing is the raw desire to KNOW. As my sire once said to me, "Corneilius, You are not a scholar. Nor do I ever suspect you will be. But you are an information addict, and if there is any more necessary trait for a dragon to have, I don't know what it is."

Because to know is to invite change. To know is to desire evolution. To know is to find purpose.

And in truth it is that larger thing, which enables us to not only grudgingly follow orders while grinding our

teeth. But to find fellowship and respect for other dragons. I, personally, don't know dick about ghosts, or funerary rights, or a dozen other esoteric disciplines. But it gives me a warm feeling approaching buddhistic calm, to know that I know people who know that stuff, and are inclined to share.

So. Nothing wrong with the big ego. Kind of necessary for the work. But also, important to have the love of the Large Thing. Kind of necessary for the work and everything beyond.

## **The Zen of Dishwashing**

I am an excellent dishwasher.

I've had a lot of jobs in the course of my life and a few over the course of my Requiem. But the one that I inevitably end up doing for one reason or other whenever I move around in the world is washing dishes. It's simple, if not necessarily easy. It's even a job one can do if you don't really speak the language, as I discovered when I was stuck in Iceland for the better part of a year. And once you master the mechanical moves of the work, your mind is free to wander. It's a good job for someone with a contemplative mind



It's even good for people who desperately need regular catharsis, because you get to yell at servers.

"Pinky! We need silverware right now!"

"Um. Okay. Silver takes 10 minutes."

(Dumb look) "But we need silver NOW!"

"Well then I suggest... you go back in time to ten minutes ago, notice that silver was running low and then come back HERE, AND GODDAMN TELL ME THAT WE ARE RUNNING LOW ON SILVERWARE YOU STUPID FUCKING JACKHOLE!"

See the brilliance of that?

Well. I'm not writing about washing dishes out of need to tell such stories. Although they can be fun. I am writing about dishwashing to try to get to a basic theoretical premise.

Learning is an evolutionary process and it usually progresses in four stages.

### **1) The understanding of basic principles.**

In washing dishes, there are few things are fairly universal. Knock the refuse off the plate. Into the wash water. Maybe a scrape, maybe not. Then into the rinse water. Then a quick going over with the dishtowel. Put it in the drain rack or onto the shelf.

Simple. A monkey could do it. But you can't proceed until

you understand how and why each of these steps is there. Heck, you can even still screw it up if you don't understand the why of the process. For instance, You have to make sure you use the rag to dry things off. You can't just set it in the drain board, or else you'll get streaks and spots. Rookie mistake.

## **2) The automation of the basic principles.**

This part of the process is getting the work down to a science. Imprinting it into your muscle memory so you can perform each step automatically, without thinking about it. This frees the mind from the work and enables it to be useful for other things, like observing the process for shortcuts. Like handling odd hiccups in the process. Like fantasizing that you're in Bali painting nude girls. Not painting portraits of nude girls mind you, but applying paint to the actual nude girls... And wondering what series of disastrous career choices led you to this sorry pass.... Or in my case, led to this pass AGAIN.

## **3) The Sophistication of Principles.**

There comes a point in the process, when you've gotten dishwashing down to a science, and then there comes a point when it's become an art. You learn to utilize your time to it's utmost. You'll put the dishes in the scalding hot wash water and let them sit for 3 minutes,

knowing in that three minutes the hot water will loosen the food on the dishes, making for less expended effort in removing the food from the dishes. In the three minutes you can attend to other tasks, you learn to run a new sink of hot wash water while doing the rinsing and drying. Saves some waiting.

Once you begin to practice the sophistication of principles, you begin to notice that you are able to finish the process in record time, or to wash the dishes and tidy up the whole rest of the kitchen in the same time it used to take you just to wash the dishes.

This is also the point where you can begin to fiddle with your own temporal sense. Those who have some skill in playing video game may know what I am speaking of. You get to a point of mastery where your reflexive abilities begin to allow you to slow down the sense of the passage of time. In the video game, you slide into your groove, and you see holes to slide your ship into that didn't exist a quarter of a second ago. You are able to fire and move, and note that the shot will hit without slowing down to see it.

This, in the dishwashing example, is typified by being able to manage insane deadlines, to stretch two minutes into a seemingly endless state, or to manage 8 hours working in front of a hot tank into a quickly passing evening. It's a useful trick and I commend it to your

use. You don't even need hard narcotics to make it work.

#### **4) The Mystification of Principles**

Now, this is the part that makes most people stare at me like Amish folks tooling around the local Best Buy. It is possible to reach a place in the practice of any process where you proceed to a point of practicing it as a form of meditative trance. Dishwashing at the Zen level is normally found when you can have someone watch every step you take and still have him or her look at you and go.

"How in the hell did you do that?"

It is a form of spiritual work. In the example of washing dishes it is an acknowledgment that a pile of dirty dishes is chaos, but that there is order inherent within it, and that the process of washing the dishes is to extract that order, and thereby give the heart ease.

It is my contention that each and every endeavor in our world reaches a point where we must by our very nature, delve into the world of mysticism to reach practices that would be called the zenith of excellence. All logical systems eventually break down due to our imperfect understanding of ourselves and the world we live in. Often, to reach that zenith, we must reach into the murky realm where science cannot take us. Knowledge and faith are like the shoes on one's feet. You can get a lot farther with both than you can with just one.

As a result, this zenith is not reachable by raw intellect, and needs to tap into the recesses of the intuitive mind.

To attack this from a more scientific standpoint, a person in the beginning phases of the process would be heavily into beta wave brain-wave patterns, but as he progresses he would move into waking states of alpha, and then alpha-theta.

The mind functions much like the gears of bicycle. For various tasks they switch back and forth from gear to gear. But once this process is understood and a person can identify his or her various states of consciousness. It is simplicity itself to call forth those states. This, if practiced over time, occurs as a natural progression. It is interesting to consider that since brain-wave patterns are consciously manipulable, if finding one's way to the upper reaches of the intuitive learning process is possible via producing the brainwaves first and then tackling the process and see if they'll stick faster.

I have heard it said, amongst Martial artists that if you take ten guys, and teach five of them pure mechanics, and teach the other five a mix of mechanics and philosophy, The guys with the mixed training will wipe the floor with the mechanics every time.

So maybe there's something to it.

**Some of these jokes are just for me.**

A story:

Recent travails have got me going down the paths of memory once again. I am being asked repeatedly about my motivation for joining and staying in the Ordo Dracul. Moreover, I find I'm being asked about my motivations for writing about my experiences. Some interesting dialogue has come out of that amidst some of the condescending wankery that inevitably goes along with it.

It got me thinking about Iggy Saint.

Disco was dead. Or at least it was on the table and the guy holding the paddles was yelling, "CLEAR!" I'd gone through a bad two years, getting shot and dumped by Barbara, plus the better part of a year spent in Riker's awaiting trial on a bullshit trafficking rap.

That's one of the main reasons why I almost never "Deal". The penalties are WAY stiffer. Now if I HAVE drugs, and I can trade them for goods and services, well... That's a different story isn't it? In any case, my lawyer was the

inimitable Pedro Bazzarone Esq. He was a Puerto Rican from the deepest darkest parts of Queens, and he was without a doubt, a Juridical Shark. If you were innocent, and could pay, He could get you off. He wasn't one to make a guarantee or anything, but in the PR community, he was considered as ineffable as night following day. They whispered that he had powers and that the devil was scared of him. I'm not sure, but I think he may have been responsible for those pictures on the side of 5 gallon buckets they use in restaurants. They usually come filled with mayonnaise or pickles or something like that. And they have a picture of a drowning child on the side. Yeah. My lawyer was THAT guy.

It took nine months, and the entirety of my royalties from the sale of "The Happiest Place on Earth", but he got me off. The cocaine trafficking task force had some kind of hard-on for putting me away until I could only consume soft food.

Apparently, some ass-bag got them to believe that I was single-handedly responsible for all the cocaine traffic in Manhattan. I suspect Steve Rubell of diming me in order to save his bony ass.

Happily, Pedro took their case apart in open court and made them look like the putzes they were. "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, if my client were responsible for

that level of trafficking, don't you think he'd live in a nicer apartment? Madre de dios! I'd have moved out of the lower east side at least!"

You know you've got the jury on your side, when they are laughing up their sleeves. It was not without cost though; His demolishing their case in court, and the subsequent newspaper headlines meant a distinct rise in traffic violations for Puerto Rican offenders.

In any case, for the first time in months, I was free and I was clear. I was also homeless, and broke, and stuck in Manhattan. Which is not a fun place to be either.

I was able to get my literary agent on the phone, and after some nagging, managed to score a miniscule advance on my next book. Acquiring an extremely tiny apartment, I set about finding a job.

I ended up washing dishes pursuant to getting a better job. Of course, one of the major downsides of washing dishes while looking for a better job is that it is more than capable of stealing every single erg of useful energy out of you. Which means the job you only needed for two weeks, stretches to seven months, and you're STILL too tired to go out and look after a shift.



I was doing some writing too. But at that point nearly everything that I was writing was utter shit. More's the pity. Some of it got printed.

Making a living as a professional writer is not the most stable existence in the world. Plus, like some monstrous fool, I refused to move out of Manhattan. I was paying at least 900 hundred dollars a month for an apartment in a building smelling of piss and dead rats. And I was lucky to have it. I've seen people pay more to live in a closet shared with an entire Korean family and their goat.

This was further aggravated by the fact that Manuel would occasionally send me a lovely care package of fine uncut cocaine. Sadly, I could not use this precious resource, as the creeps in the task force were still following me around. They would have liked nothing better than to take up residence in my poor culo with an electron microscope.

As a result, I didn't do a lot of sleeping.

In any event, the one saving grace that I gained from that awful time was meeting, and washing a lot of dishes with, Iggy Saint. His real name was Nelson Morris. He was short, skinny like a piece of wire, and had the most intense gaze of any human I've met before or since. He had that Rasputin vibe.

He had a way of carrying himself that seemed to say, "You mess with me, and you'll probably beat me, but it will cost you dearly. I will die with my teeth in your throat."

A guy that intense had no off switch. I never offered him coke; I think we'd have all been killed in the resultant gravity well he'd have generated. He liked to mellow out on weekends and smoked grass with a handful of downs. At least when he wasn't playing.

Iggy Saint was a part of the punk movement that swept New York. And he and his band, "Fuckable Saints" played in the shittiest clubs in the city. But they did play steadily. And since Iggy and I had become fast friends, we went all over town looking for music and kicks. We got thrown out of a lot of places over the course of that year.

Iggy was kind of a contradiction. When he was onstage, that was the whole of his world, and you could feel it out there in the dark. When he was loaded, he was as inert as a human being could be and still retain a pulse. And yet, there was a restless hungry mind in there. He could talk knowledgably about physics. He never watched television except for PBS. I still remember the 3-hour

argument he and Warhol got into about aesthetics and the influences of eastern art forms.

And you know, hanging out with him had interesting effects on me. For one, my writing stopped being shit. It got published less often, but when it did, it wasn't a mortal fucking embarrassment. In addition, some of the work I had done was starting to form into a book on the band and the punk scene. It made my agent happy. He almost smiled.

I remember the late nights sitting in CBGB's filled to the brim with liquor and other less savory chemicals, talking about things with Iggy and Johnny Serrano. To this day, I am convinced that Johnny only knew three chords. But he always played them like he meant them. You know what I mean? It wasn't until they finally settled on Benny Gudmundsdottir as the regular drummer, that the band was really born.

Benny was like Iggy's opposite. He was built like a bear, was kind of scattered mentally, and had a smile for everybody. But he played drums like he was giving out a needed ass kicking. An ass kicking, he seemed to take rather personally.

I did a little of everything. I helped carry shit into and out of gigs. I helped lean on club owners. Actually, we all took turns doing that. It seemed an article of faith that each night the band played we would have to then, convince the owner of the place that, yes we had in fact played the gig and would goddamn like our money please. I even sang back-up on a few tracks that never got used.

In any case, we got noticed by some joker with a pornstache and a shiny jacket. He came around and laid his card on all of us. He talked very big about punk, said he knew people. Having been around the music biz some already. When he finally got around to laying a contract on Iggy, He and I took it away saying we needed to read it. We sent them back twenty pages of notes and threatening invective.

We got a better contract by being willing to bite the hand that was feeding us. There's a lesson in that.

The one thing we absolutely could not get them to budge on was the name of the band. And in truth, we kind of knew it. I don't know how or why the band's new name became "Hungry Tree" I just don't remember the conversation. All I know is that we were ALL high.... And

for some reason it seemed genius brilliant at the time.

But "Hungry Tree" was, by the time we went on tour, the name of the band.

We cut an album. The only album the band ever cut. It was called, "Habit of Force." There was an incident involving the first producer the record label tried to force on us. He was some skeeve who had that "I know more than you" attitude. Some jumped up A&R man, high on coke, convinced he could run a board, the kind of dude who had a tie that had musical notes on it.

I'm not exactly sure what started the argument; All I know is that I was coming back from the can, when I saw Iggy head butt the guy across the bridge of the nose.

Johnny and I held the guy back while Benny lifted Iggy off the ground to keep him from killing the dude, and I don't think he really understood that Iggy would have bitten his face off, for fucking with his album. After that, the label brought in Bruce "Cowbell" Dickinson. And things went fine.

They sent us on tour. They hired some douchebag road manager, who was such a crap-weasel, that BENNY threatened to kill him. Which is how I ended up being the

road manager for the Hungry Tree world tour.

It was fun while it lasted. We discovered Hashish. We got thrown in a drunk tank in Belgium, which touched off a riot, and the venue we were to play in got burned down. We had great fun hassling disc jockeys in England. We also found that our hardest audiences were in England. They'd invented the whole punk thing and kind of resented us horning in on it. We ended up playing every single club in England and Scotland that we could shoehorn into the schedule, mainly because we started to take it personally. Many times, we went home with spit in our hair, but other nights, we earned their respect. There was a LOT of road pussy. I'm very glad that I was not married at that point. As road manager, I naturally didn't get a lot of the A-list women, but I got more than my share. I felt like a bass player in Earth, Wind and Fire. Austria was especially fun. Apparently, there are more women who really enjoy fellatio in Austria, than any other country in the world. Who knew?

It all ended up in Iceland. We found ourselves staying with some of Benny's relations. We were playing this place; I think it was called "The Fishtank". They even almost had a stage. We were in back. Their "Green room" being about the size of a postage stamp. Benny and Johnny

were out back smoking and lining up some local talent for the sexual Olympic events scheduled for later that night. I was sitting and I was into a groove of writing, but it wasn't going well. It was shit.

Iggy came in with his axe. He looked tired. The road hadn't been good to him. He sat down and looked over at me as I was tossing my notepad across the room.

"Not going well?" He sounded like he was developing a cold.

"No. I can't...You know. I can't get at it."

"Naw dude. I know."

He lit a smoke, and jacked his axe out of its case. He looked over and asked me with his eyes whether I minded. And I didn't. He cracked his knuckles and then with a quick sip of his beer, started to play.

He was playing something classical. Sounded like flamenco inflected Bach. To this night, I still don't know what exactly he was playing. I think it was something he improvised on the fly. I was, to put it mildly gobsmacked.

"Dude." I said. "Where in God's green Earth did you learn to play like that?"

"Julliard.... Hey let me ask you something Pinky."

"Sure."

"When you write something. Who are you writing it for?"

"Well...I guess I'm writing it for the people out there who read it."

"Um...No. Sorry dude. But you're wrong."

"Beg Pardon?"

He gave me that look, as if to say, "You do too know what I'm talking about."

"You write it for you. You write it because you need it. You write because it fills some need within you to express."

"Isn't that a little egomaniacal?"

"Fuck yes. Dude. Life itself is an act of optimism, how can any form of art be anything less than pure egomania."

"You make it sound like a good thing."

"Well.... We all have something that feeds us inside. That's necessary to us. But you know there are guys who write novels and shit, and throw them in a trunk. They do this crazy personal thing, but they don't share it with anyone, and that's something I don't fucking get."

"I'm not sure I'm following Ig."

He smiled a tired smile. "Sure you do. Expressing yourself is necessary like air. Art is Egomania, but the only thing that balances it, is the sharing."

"Why's that?"



"Because man. It may just be that the thing that your trying to say is the thing that the dude next to you is trying to put his finger on."

"You mind if I write that down?"

"Hey. Knock yourself out."

I smiled at him. "I'll be back in bit. I'm going to go and try to whip that miserable piece of shit they call a sound system into shape."

"Business. See you in a few."

He used to say that all the time. Never "Cool." Or "Rock." Or "Solid." He always used to say "Business." Nod his head and move on. I never did write that thing he said down. I didn't have to. For one thing, I knew it was true. There are things that you hear, and for some reason they just ring your inner bell. You know?

But the second reason was it was the last thing he said to me. After the gig. Iggy went back to the hotel, took some downs, so he could sleep and never woke up. His heart muscle had suffered damage over the years, and the road tour had just been too much.

We all ended up stuck in Iceland. It was the biggest

thing that had ever happened in the town we were playing, so naturally the local gendarmes decided to make it into a huge investigation. The record label fucked us on some expected per diem. Fucked us HARD. Benny shrugged his shoulders and decided on the spot to stay there. He did take up a collection to help Johnny get back to New York.

And me...Well. I ended up staying and marrying one of Benny's cousins. Ilse maybe knew a total of 60 English words. But we had enormous sexual chemistry. So I went back out and got another job washing dishes...

Six months later, Ilse and I called it quits, and by that time, I had enough money to go home. But I never forgot what Iggy said. I do write because I'm trying to touch something over and above myself. Trying to connect with something inside me.

But it's not enough to touch the beyond, you have to bring it back and share it too. People liking it, or even understanding it completely is entirely incidental.

As Cyril Connolly Says, "Better to write for yourself and have no audience, than to write for your audience and have no self."

## **Delores**

At the best of times, Memory is both a comfort and a betrayal.

I can remember her completely.

Her red hair down a little past her shoulders. Her blue eyes, serious and vulnerable. She was lowering her arms, I don't know from what, I can only assume from a cat-like stretch as she turned to face me. She was naked. I was too. Coming in from the bathroom, with necessary equipment for what was to come.

In that timeless moment, she caught the light. Her long lanky body covered in freckles. Bathed in daylight coming in through the white curtains.

And I. I was as one dead. In that moment, I saw the hand of the artist at work. And from that moment on, I was as a tree that had been struck by lightning.

Our relationship was never simple. She'd break up with me. She'd come back. She'd make the rounds of my friends. But had a hard time watching me suffer at other times. We broke up. We made up. She was free in some respects; she was the emotional equivalent of a burn victim in others.

She was a snob. There's really no other way to say it. She looked down her nose at nearly everything I liked. If it wasn't over a hundred years old, she wasn't a fan. Granted, there are times, when I'll choose Chopin's nocturnes over the Clash, but I can't make a steady diet of it.

I got really sick and tired of feeling like I had to justify everything to her.

She also had a way of being casually cruel. In private, she liked to be tied up and spanked a bit. But in public, she could use mock offense to the point of driving me to distraction. God help me though if I REALLY offended her. Talking with her on the fucking phone was like negotiating a minefield.

There were times when I wish I could simply hate her. It would have been a great deal simpler. I even told a good friend that I would sooner stick my dick into a box filled with brown recluse spiders, than become emotionally entangled with that woman again.

Not long after that, we got married in Vegas.

You try to explain these things to your friends. You try to explain them to yourself. You walk in the freezing rain, making laps around your apartment, rather than go

in and face the music.

The mind understands, and can only recoil in horror as your fucking limbic system, traitor that it is, destroys you again and again. You think, "That's it. I'm done. I have drunk from the bitterest cup and I can drink no more poison."

And yet, on the edges of your consciousness, you find yourself hearing the voice.

You find yourself kissing the freckly shoulder and the nape of the neck. You can still feel the taste of her on your mouth...And you know you are lost.

Powerless.

Chained.

Some few, who know me, wonder about my relationship with Delores. They wonder why I would stay married to a woman who tried to kill me, at least twice that I know of. In my defense, I didn't know shit about mental illness in my breathing life. Had never felt the husky breath of full-blown insanity, until I saw it in her eyes that day she tried to run me down with the car.

So. I get a little agitated with people who talk about insanity but haven't really seen it up close. Insanity is not a fucking abstraction.

But what kills me about all of that, is knowing, that if she ever turned up in my life again, stood on my doorstep, freed from the Home for the Criminally Insane, for the first time in decades...Would I still love her?

Am I still lost?

## **The Utility of Failure**

I have always been of the opinion that learning from your mistakes is a sign of intelligence, but that learning from another persons mistakes is a sign of genius.

An interesting dialogue with a fellow dragon has got me thinking along these lines of late. He pointed out that some of the things that I talk about in my various works include the sorts of things that if they were tried by other Dragons in their quest for knowledge could result in death or worse.

Whereas, I feel that if I make it fairly obvious that I am talking about plainly dangerous practices then it's only extremely foolish dragons that would try such

things, rather than learn from my spectacularly bad example.

Experience is an ungentle and vigorous teacher, but since pain signals create the strongest chemicals in the brain, it is figuratively true what Nietzsche says, "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Although perhaps it should be more accurately rendered as "Whatever doesn't kill you, instructs you."

The history of scientific endeavor is strewn with failures that turned out to be great discoveries. While I am certainly not extolling the virtue of failure for failures sake, I can say that the general tendency of modern scientific pursuit and scholarship has bred out the courage necessary to handle failures and get actual utility out of them.

I hope that it is fairly obvious to those who read my work that I am writing from the viewpoint of "Hi there, it is unwise to light oneself on fire and then fling oneself from a moving car. Here's why..."

I find that I have a much harder time when I am not meeting certain people in person. In some respects, the Carthian movement was almost completely devoid of any

sort of pecking order. Whereas in the Ordo Dracul, if they don't know you personally, there is usually the attitude of " ...And who EXACTLY are you?" Which explains the titles I guess. Remnants of a nobleman's upbringing. And yet I find that the titles are still impenetrable to me, as they say almost nothing of a particular dragon's character or his virtues, as titles of old used to do. No. All it tells you is what a particular dragon has mastered. And if they don't like the pedigree of your title, or you use no title at all, they can and will discount your words, no matter how right you are. Even if you've tested it on your flame broiled and road-rashed hide. C'est la Follie.

But that's the beautiful thing about the Great Work. You decide your own level of involvement. You can calcify in your thinking and condescendingly dismiss younger minds or you can engage in earnest dialogue. Guess which one benefits us all. Even if it's to gently explain why a particular theory is harebrained.

Pecking orders are useless and frankly I feel that status among kindred is a crutch for kindred who lack actual social skills. I kind of suspect that nearly every Daeva feels this way, but is too polite, or scared to say so. I wonder if the encroaching insanity that is so endemic to



elder kindred is akin to Asperger's syndrome.

And speaking of Madness. I found some interesting material recently related to Alchemy. What most outsiders don't know about that august art is that while it is certainly a forerunner to our modern science of chemistry, it is also a metaphorical art. Practice in its disciplines was supposed to be a form of spiritual discipline as well as a practical science. The idea was, that the process of turning lead into gold was just a stepping-stone to greater trans-formations of the soul. Naturally, since GOLD was involved, spiritual matters tended to get lost in the shuffle.

And this is an idea with an interesting twist in Chinese alchemy. Which is so odd and foreign that it's like **porn** to me. In Chinese Alchemy, one didn't practice the work in a laboratory; one created and mixed the chemicals inside oneself to create the changes that one desired. It was the first step on a long road to creating immortality for oneself. You balanced your Chi, and then you made alterations in yourself, much like the process of Chrysalis.

And that's when it hit me. As per usual, the Asians had once again found the backdoor into a scientific practice.

Parse it:

Our minds are made of electro-chemical matrixes. Those chemical reactions influence, and are influenced by, emotional states and brainwave patterns.

In order to continue living healthy lives, or unlives, as the case may be, you need a varied diet of emotional states and changes in brainwave patterns. Too much of one thing over a long period of time could cause imbalances. Or one really serious stressor that knocks a human mind outside of its tolerance for load, and you create a pattern. I already know that pain creates the strongest chemical bonds in a human mind, as I referenced above. So it's not too much of a jump to suspect that events or conditions that can create what we would classify as insanity are a result of a chemical process that has become an indefinite chemical bond within the mind.

And this is where it gets weird and interesting. There is already research that posits that cognitive therapy can have as much impact as drug therapy when it comes to treating certain types of insanities and mental conditions.

Now bring in Alchemy, a metaphysical practice, designed to create changes of a spiritual and potentially a physical nature within the human body.

If one could create an Alchemical map of the chemical reactions of emotional states and brainwave patterns. One could conceivably plug this into a form of cognitive therapy. One could solve the equations of the emotions. One could erase insanities.

One could, if one were inclined, conceivably work the equations that perfect the self.

And if there is one person who is qualified to study the naked vampire psyche by virtue of his abuse of several types of exotic chemical entertainments. I am he.

Might be a good project for this weekend.

**Kathleen Turner Overdrive**

I am over clocked.

And you know, I kind of like it. I've been working on a

few devotions, and I am finding that the one that come to me best are the ones that don't involve huge mystical mojo. No, the ones that seem to be coming to me most easily have to do with manipulation of my body and my senses. The Adderal/Ritalin/Choline Enhancement cocktail is starting to bear fruit!

I've always had what I refer to as a keen "internal Sense" It's just one of those things. In a rough and tumble life, I am usually able to determine after a car accident, or after a beating, that I am okay, or that I will need to be taken to a hospital. Recent events involving a long conversation with a colleague pointed up certain possibilities. I was of course bitching about certain drugs have greatly magnified onset times because my circulatory system doesn't work the same way it used to.

Since, my pumping mechanism doesn't work any longer, my blood tend to work its way through my body via capillary action, as if I were an enormous sponge. But after talking with someone, centuries my senior, they put me wise to the fact that certain forms of muscular contractions can still create a kind of siphoning action. This of course, sent me back to the books. And after a few nights worth of looking I stumbled across what I

needed in "Vitruvian Kindred" and "Undead Yogi practices"

Not that it is comfortable at all. And there are weird side effects. Unusual tactile sensations. Occasional synaesthesia. Blood tastes a little funny... I think I could feel some natural cycle in my pancreas start and then stop. Occasional bouts of Priapism...

Thankfully, Priapism isn't life threatening to me, like it is to human beings.

In any case, the good side of it is, that I am able to create an effect like the Blush of Life over a much longer period of time. Which is good. Winter struck pretty hard in this neck of the woods, and I have to be careful when I'm out of doors. Have to make sure people can see my breath properly.

I'm not one of those sorts of kindred who think that it's okay to segregate myself from humanity. I'll grant you that many times there are situations that involve being secretive and discursive for humanity's sake and for ours as well. But when you shut yourself off from the mass of humanity, you will most certainly stagnate. Look, I'm not one to bust on someone coming to kindred gathering dressed in some fin-de-siecle get up. Hell. Among the boring business suits, these people add a dash of color

to the proceedings. And hey, as long as they aren't tooling around the RACK dressed like that, let them be comfortable sez I.

But, if you're cruising around looking like a movie extra because you DON'T KNOW HOW to dress in proper human society, you are an active danger to the masquerade and someone needs to school you.

And you know what, if you're sufficiently old and crabby about being schooled about those sorts of things, then you are a self-correcting problem. The only question is whether or not the mortal hunters track other kindred based on who you have contact with. Granted, a bit of Obfuscate can go a long way, but then again, it doesn't cover everything, you know? You wanna die. That's your business. But please, leave me out of it, Okay?

In any case, while I was monkeying around with my central nervous system, I decided to give myself Quicken Sight. Came in handy at a recent poker game. Also my sire recommended it to me. He's into some new television show about a man who can read micro-expressions on a persons face. Quicken Sight makes those expressions huge and readable, even to someone without that kind of training. It's kind of neat. I was able to realize that at least 2 of the guys at the table were in cahoots with one another, spotted 4 separate tells, that I wouldn't have

seen otherwise. And caught the dealer bottom dealing.

Oh, I left them alive. I called up some redneck friends who turned up right at the point they were cashing out, but we certainly left them alive.

Broke. Yes.

Naked. Sure.

Painted with swastikas. Definitely.

Dumped down by the interstate... Well, yeah we did that.

To my credit, on the trip back I called the state police, because it was very cold outside. I'm not a MONSTER ya know.

### **Why a sense of shame is important**

Recently, it has been my misfortune to witness a full on hissy-fit amongst the Ordo Dracul. Now, if you think it might have been over something going on in Indianapolis, Well, you can certainly be forgiven for over-estimating our ability to pay attention to actively threatening situations, in the face of arguing about bullshit.

The problem is this: Even though there are Onyx crafted Legislative prohibitions against it, There are at least a few Ordo Dracul who assume that since they outrank the

mass of people who are involved in an internet mailing list, They are therefore entitled to push people around.

There are at least few Ordo Dracul of my Internet acquaintance who are condescending, pretentious, windbags. And it's not bad enough that they denigrate and simply don't bother to listen anyone younger than themselves. That's assholeish enough, but to assume that they can browbeat someone halfway around the world on the basis of their rank, even though they don't belong to YOUR academy. Well, that's a level of assholery that many others and I aren't prepared to deal with.

Moreover, Should you feel pushed to the extreme of challenging someone to the Code Duello over something that offended you on the internet, Well...Maybe you should put down the mouse and back away slowly. Maybe you should grow a second millimeter of skin. I don't know. Maybe you could learn how to automate your ability to ignore someone, which is one of the finest things that the internet has yet created. Shit, there are times when I wish I could press a button marked "Ignore" in my real life interactions.

Frankly, if I were the Grand Wyrm of an academy someplace, I certainly would take issue, with some



jumped-up, copper-plated bastard causing problem for my students from far away. Possibly enough issue to jump on a plane and go kick someone's ass.

And lest you think this is an AGE issue. It's not. It's an ASSHOLE issue. I know a number of elders. Most of whom I get along with. Why? BECAUSE THEY AREN'T ASSHOLES! THAT'S WHY!

Let me lay it out for you as gently as I can:  
While the Internet may seem like it is solely a home for Lolcats and videos of people getting hit in the junk, it has positive uses too. For instance, it can be a useful exchange of timely information and interesting ideas. If you're the sort of Ordo Dracul who is easily mortally offended. And you assume I am talking about you. Why not ask yourself, "When was the last time that I offered more to the discussion at hand, than waving my dick around and demanding that people kiss my ring?"

Personally, I think that a person who enters into an Ordo Dracul forum ought to be bringing their best and brightest thinking to the table. I think that a person who sets fingers to keypad ought to do so to share the lore that we have fought so hard to acquire and to find ways to help each other in our struggle with the Great

Work.

I think that any person, who uses that forum as a way to massage their own ego, ought to feel a deep and pervasive shame, and frankly I feel a great swell of pity for any students in your academy, who MUST bow to your authority.

Do you think I'm talking about you? I probably am. Come around and look me in the eye if you want to be sure.

## **I'm a Tool**

It ought to be easy.

Seriously. As the information age becomes a large part of our nightly existence, the use of a computer becomes an extension of the mind in the same way that the katanna was considered an extension of the samurai's spirit.

Which points up an idea of the body being the toolbox of the mind, and the mind being the toolbox of the soul. A messy toolbox to be sure.

Before I die, I would like to learn how to organize and program my mind like a computer. I do not wish to eschew my emotional apparatus, in order to do this. I have met a few who have seemingly accomplished this feat, only to leave aside their emotional apparatus, and frankly, I don't think they did themselves any favors.

There has to be some way to integrate emotion into cognitive process. Yeah, you'll note the lack of me holding my breath. If it were easy, everyone would have done it.

So, as the nights wear on, are we becoming more organized in our thinking, or less? Ask most elders and they'll say less. In modern society there is less use for some of the more interesting skills that the mind is capable of acquiring. Oral history is nearly a thing of the past. One practically has to have a raging case of Aspergers in order to become a savant or polymath. How many people do you know who consider becoming a "Renaissance Man" to be a very real life goal?

And yet, on the other hand, I think that there are more people in the world who are capable of multitasking than at any other time in history. Sure, I might not now be able to remember phone numbers because my phone remembers

it for me... But there are other little understood mental gifts finding new niches in our existence all the time. I myself have been conducting little experiments with my time sense and my internal senses. Not to bust on my long suffering sire, but DAMN there are nights when I wish I was embraced as a Mekhet.

It is my hope that the next jump in human evolution is a much greater organization of the mind-body-spirit connection. I suspect however that such an evolutionary jump will be the deaths knell for the kindred race unless we find some new way to interface with Hominis Optima. I wonder what they would be like if embraced?

As an Ordo Dracul, I too, am looking for the next quantum leap forward. Part of this requires learning what has gone before and absorbing what is useful. (A sort of academic Jeet Kune Do, if you will.) The other part of it is doing what hasn't been done before in order to create useful and meaningful change.

This path is far from easy, but I am unhampered in some ways that John Q. Mortal isn't. For instance, I'm not screwed by having only half of a paradigm. Science works. Magick works. I can sometimes choose one from column "A" and one from Column "B". Also, physical death from vigorous practice of certain processes is less of a

concern. This can be useful in ways that I am only now beginning to utilize. Although, I must admit. Sanity Erosion is still a very real fear.

So, my work proceeds apace. I am occasionally hampered by the fact that my learning is extremely broad but shallow. I flit like a hummingbird between studying psychology, alchemy, philosophy, comparative religion, practical chemistry, meta-cognitive studies, and various other odd disciplines and then go round again to see what I can shoehorn into my messy and hastily organized toolbox of a mind. But then again, some people find greater utility to hone their minds into a specific sort of tool and then make an effort to wrap their life around its use. There's nothing wrong with this approach. Many people do it and are successful with it. A tool designed to do a single thing IS more effective usually than a tool designed to do a dozen things.

But on the other hand, what is more attractive to me is to turn my mind into a Swiss army knife. I side with Heinlein. "Specialization is for insects." And besides, if the only tool you have is a hammer then every problem starts to look like a nail.

I am continually surprised by running into kindred who have managed to master one discipline or more in the

space of a very short Requiem. I suppose I understand its utility, but it's probably not going to ever be my path. This prevents me from becoming some sort of discipline-based powerhouse. By my calculations, I might approach being actually dangerous in combat in 50 short years... But then again, on the other hand, I find that those same kindred who become very potent in some sphere or other, often become mentally passive in battle and are entirely at sea when their mojo is flatly not working.

Victims of their own success I guess. I sincerely hope that I am never that successful. Because too much success leads to the death of thought.

## **The Guatemala Trip**

To put it mildly, I needed to get out of town.

I'm not much of a fan of Kindred Gatherings as most people are well aware. But I would've stayed. Had planned to stay. Aaron Savage, my friend and prince has been on a particularly angry streak of late. He's still functional but he has the tendency to yell at the people who help him the most and not count the cost. Daniel used to do that too. Daniel had an excuse though. He was Gangrel and

not prone to thinking things through when he was a living breathing con man, with arrest warrants in four states, and 11 pissed off wives scattered all over the country. So I was prepared to stay. Help out. Be all diplomatic, and stuff. Turn on my party manners and deal with visiting dignitaries. And then I got wind that Ms. Lee Halliway was thinking about attending. And that was pretty much all it took.

I don't know if you watch any TV at all. I do. There's this little show I like called Firefly. In it there's this character by the name of Jayne Cobb. I know that pop culture references are usually lost on my kind.... In any case. Jayne Cobb is big, dumb and mean, and is, for the most part, kind of a badass. But when hears that Reavers might be coming, well that's pretty much all he has to hear. He's ready to pack up the gear and get back to the ship, at a dead run if necessary. Reavers make Belial's Brood look downright civilized.

Yeah it's kind of like that, with that woman and I I can deal with her when she and I turn up in the same city. But the idea that she might come round here. Where I LIVE and stuff...Well. I was not properly prepared for it. And most of the kindred who know me, also know of our storied "Relationship." and for the most part they were all, "Go. We got this. It's all good. We understand."

So, I made some calls and left for Puerto Barrios as quickly as I could. Had a good friend and occasional traveling companion drive me to West Texas. I don't fly commercial airlines since 9/11. It's too risky. I don't want to get pulled out of line and get dumped in some interrogation room for 6 hours. Odds are good I'm on SOMEONE'S list as a terrorist or enemy combatant.

My life is a tangly mess sometimes, But John and I took turns driving and I had an extremely well stocked Ipod for the trip.

I hadn't realized how much I missed the road until I started packing. And also realized how little I could realistically take with me. I have forgotten how to travel light. I am also a bit rusty with speed seduction. Used to be able to do it like a champ. Find a bar, find the girl, chat for 20 minutes, less if she's raring to go. Little bit of Majesty, a little bit of faded natural charm. Two rounds of whiskey and shake well... Back on the street in maybe a little more than an hour, West Texas makes that a little bit harder to manage. I'd forgotten the distances.

Moreover. I had John with me, and John is not versed in Majesty. He's a good spotter. Better with his Auspex than I am. But you've got to find just the right girl(s) if you're going to get fed. Most girls would not be into a



scene involving multiple dudes they'd just met in a honky tonk. A few nights we went to rest hungry and snappish with each other. John if you're reading this, I apologize.

Finally, after loading up from loose women in San Antonio, we burned for Brownsville and I went sniffing around for a pilot with questionable moral standards. If you know a certain patois in the piloting game, and have ready cash, yes, you can hire a puddle jumper flight into Mexico proper. But air control right there is notoriously tight, so it is a considerable risk. With John working as my back-up man, we found a guy. Our cover story was that we were with an "Agri-business" concern and that we were returning a soil sample to our lab. I made it very clear that we were working for someone interested in soil that would grow certain things... and then showed the man two bank rolls. One I gave to him. The other, I strapped with a rubber band around the barrel of the Mac 10 I shoved into the back of my pants. He got the picture. We unloaded the 50-gallon drum of topsoil into the back of his plane,

Once we were in the air, He asked me where I learned my atrocious Spanish. "Kentucky" I told him. And he shrugged and nodded as if that explained everything. I explained about my "Exotic skin disease" problem, and

later went on to point out that if I was disturbed in my sleep, I might shoot up the place by reflex. Unfortunate habits born of working with unscrupulous men," You understand of course, Ese?"

"De nada, Jefe. I leave you in peace."

"Gracias. I really appreciate it."

I worked my way back into the cargo hold, stowed my bag, made up the bunk to look like I was in it. Then popped a single claw and opened the barrel. True to form it was filled with soil. We'd even showed the pilot. He nodded his head, but when he dug his arm in, there wasn't any contraband, to his surprise. I hopped up on the barrel and sifted into the earth.

Happily, we weren't boarded as we made our way southward. I would not be found by customs agents, but then I'd have to explain to the pilot where I'd gone. And people are WAY more superstitious down here. And I certainly didn't want to kill the guy. And it was in this way we made our way south to Guatemala.

The pilot, who was named Humberto, Left me on the tarmac. I'm sure he thought I was out of my mind, But he helped me hand cart the barrell out of the hold and we rolled it to a corner of one of the rusting Quonset huts that sat

on both sides of the airstrip. Well. You could charitably call it an airstrip. If you were desperate. We rolled it there. I gave him the other bankroll we shook hands, i gathered up my bag and we set off in different directions. That barrel is still sitting there for all I know.

Rather than go into the office and try to explain why this dumb looking gringo has no papers, I decided to walk until I could find the road. If the sun came out, Well...Daniel had given me one good gift before he turned into a jerk.

Traveling is made easier when you realize that you don't have to care about comfort. I walked in the jungles and reacquainted myself with the land I hadn't seen in a long long time. I put the newly bought and well honed machete to good use. I even carried one of those gee whizzy survival knives with the compass in the top. Turned out that the compass was the most useful bit as it helped me orient. These jungles had seen many armies troop back and forth across them, so I took some time reorienting and re-learning a number of wayguides. Some of the ones made back in the day were barely visible, but there was usually one that was newer and as I said, the compass helped. Nearly tripped over an old-school bouncing betty, and nearly trigged a deadfall or two. Not much had

changed in this part of world.

Or maybe it had. I certainly had. For one thing I had never remembered the jungle being this colorful before. That was from the Auspex. It was a riot of sensation and color even in just moonlight. I walked. The mosquitos wafted down for easy breakfast, but I had denied my blood to come to the surface of my skin. Frustrated they flew away. It also kept my clothes dry. Otherwise I would have been a mess.

I walked. I had missed this place. Its sights, its sounds, its music. I found an encampment of soldiers. No idea whose they might be. They had a harmonica and they sang a song of love and loss. Though my belly was rumbling, and hunger was near to me that night, I sat in the dark outside the light of their fire, while they drank mescal to kill the boredom. I was more hungry to hear their voices. That would have to feed me tonight.

I made my way to Puerto Barrios. I walked for the most part. People in this part of the country see a lone blanco walking by himself, they assume two things, Either he's a scientist, or he's crazy, or both. Most assume he has some cash. Ran into occasional trouble with soldiers on the road. Most of the time, I could just sift into the earth until they passed. Easy peasy. At least once, I got caught with my attention elsewhere. I was sitting on the

back of a farmer's truck shooting the breeze with him when we rounded the bend in the road and there they were. They apparently wanted money. I told them i had none. They took my gun and asked again with it cocked at my temple. I smiled. Because it had been a while since I'd done anything like this and told him to go lick a dog's ass till it bleeds. Then, I let fly with the most vicious display of invective. The sort that would make an East Jersey longshoreman blush. Never got to finish though, as the soldier drilled me. They unceremoniously hucked me off to the side of the road after going through my pockets. I sifted into the earth, bag still on my back, minus one ipod. Fuckers. Still, I had my credit cards tucked into the hollow of my boot. and they hadn't seen or bothered with my gee whizzy knife. Shot me with my own fucking gun...

God reminded me how tight he was with Karma two nights later. I came into to town proper. Puerto Barrios had changed and had changed in many ways big and small. I remember when the edge of town still bordered on actual jungle. But a surprising amount had been cleared away. The highlands and the hills were still wild and unruly but town had hotels and paved roads and the port was a stop for cruise ships now. I saw more white Touristas than I ever thought I would see. Fat ankled housewives

with Mississippi accents and skin like an alligator purse.

They had strip malls for Christ's sake.

This is not to say that I did not avail myself of modern conveniences. First a shower. Then 40 minutes haggling with a Rastafarian at a booth in the strip mall for a cell phone. Cleaned, and properly civilized for the first time in days, I hit the hotel bars, shamed a bar-tender from overcharging two ladies for margaritas and within 30 minutes had both of them up to the room for a snack.

Didn't know where to begin looking exactly, It hadn't occurred to me to ask how to get to Manuel's place from town.

It also wouldn't do to simply begin asking around for one of the most powerful cocaine dealers in Guatemala. It might attract all sorts of unwanted attention. And as I may, or may not have mentioned, I was a gringo with no papers or passport of any kind.

Felt kind of dumb. You'd think I'd be a little better at this sort of thing but I'd been using different reflexes for years.

So, without much of a plan, I went looking for a little trouble. I figure someone at a dog fight or a cock fight might know what I'm looking for.

I was walking through La Vientende, bored and watching the locals and tourists walking. I heard a mission bell tolling and music in the middle distance. When I happened to notice what looked like a bunch of tough boys, moving down the street. They seemed to have their slightly too-loud voices on, and the padre walking in front of them seemed to be trying to pick up the pace. But he was an older man, and they were young, like a group of hyenas.

I assessed. I am not one usually for heroism. This much is clear. But something about these guys wrankled me. Bugged me. and while I'm not the most religious guy in the world. It seemed fairly obvious they were stalking the priest. Like predators.

I might know a little something about that.

I'm not even a little bit stealthy so I clunked up to them in my mall-bought flip-flops. The street itself mostly empty of locals and Touristas.

"Hola Padre. You need some kind of help?"

The Padre turned and looked over the shoulders of his potential assailants. He was not heartened to see some crazy blanco, who was soft in the middle looking to take on five young and lean looking toughs.

"Go your way kind sir. God will see me home safe."

"Yeah maricon. Go back to your cruise ship" Their alpha male said as he turned to face me, clearly relishing the two-fer he'd just been offered. But as he turned there was a puzzlement dawning on his face, in fact, the cigarette that had been dangling from his lips fell to the pavement and he turned...Well he wasn't whiter than I, but he was a damn sight paler than he had been. I was face to face with the little Pig-fucker who had shot me in the head with my own gun. I lowered my head a bit, smiled a very toothy smile and said. "Dios es muy Bueno" And then, I was among them.

Now, I am not the kind of vampire who has ever become anything remotely adept at fighting. I tend to overthink. and overthinking is death in combat. So is mental passivity. They are like the two sides of a single board stretched across a ravine. Go too far either way and sooner or later you will get killed. You have to trust training and instincts, but not so much that you are unable to handle an evolving situation. You get me? Besides, fighting with other kindred is different. usually it's whap/whap/whap! and then run. Because if it's not going down in three whacks, you are.. At least that's been my experience. As a result of all these factors I have a distinct and useful advantage in this fight. I am NOT arrogantly taking it for granted that I



am going to win.

In addition, while I am not the best-trained fighter, I do know a thing or two. I'm a big believer in certain scientific principles when it comes to fighting. For instance, the center line of a human body is the most heavily armored part of the human body and bone density there is the thickest. You can break ribs with a punch, but it's a rare man indeed who can break a breastbone. therefore, when attacking, always attack at an oblique of about 45 degrees from the center line. in practical terms this means step left, then kick hard.

Also it's good to use natural hard points on the body against natural weaknesses. An elbow driven right into a solar plexus muscle is a good way to drive the air right out of an opponent. Which is what I do to their piss-scared little alpha. Then I pivot left and kick like a motherfucker. I am rewarded with a crunching sound and a bubbling moan.

One of them, with a bit of intelligence unlimbers his switchblade and sketches 3 quick cuts at me, forcing me to back up. Celerity or no, the little guy is faster than me, but he misses as I give ground quickly. The other two still standing move in tandem to each side of me. The one I have dubbed "Zeppo" is grimacing and holding his side. He's a bit bigger than the others. He balls up his fists, but doesn't charge me as that would tangle him up with

"Chico's" knife. These guys have fought together before and are good at it. The other guy, circling to my left, "Harpo" has pulled out of the back pocket of his jeans a set of nunchuks that look like they've seen some work. The guy behind "Chico" also has his knife out but his concentration is split between trying to help their leader (Who I won't even dignify with a Marx brother. I will call the leader "Shemp") to his feet. He's trying to do that and keep the priest cowed.

Pressing the advantage I've already got, I huck my rucksack at Chico, which he can't actually deflect with the knife. But this leaves me slightly open for the nunchucks and I pay for it with a bright blossom of pain where he catches on the upper arm, jamming it hard into the ball socket.

Zeppo, seeing Chico is hampered moves in and fetches me a good smash across my face, breaking my nose. In return I give him a good hard shot in the bread basket, but he's solid there. He's favoring his hurt side by keeping it away from me. he's got the reach, so he can.

Groucho gets Shemp to his feet and they move to surround me. Chico moves in again and slices at me but this time I have less space to move and I take a cut from him.

Nothing that would kill me, were I living. Hurts like a mofo though. I am rapidly getting boxed in here. While I am still registering the cut from Chico, Harpo's chucks

flick out like a striking snake and strike me squarely on the temple.

Okay. Forget pain. Never mind the whole world of pain that just obliterated the ability to see or think straight, but unless you've HAD your chimes rung like that you just can't know what a game killer that move is. Sensing an opening while I am still in the process of trying to clap my hand to my poor broken head-meats, Chico moves in and with a powerful, elbow driven move, drives the switchblade all the way into my chest. He's lucky, he misses the rib and it goes directly into the lung.

I don't frenzy. I know me. If I frenzy, I'm a dead man. I don't fall either. They back up, admiring the way they've killed me. Shemp even smiles and winks at Chico, for a job well done. They are waiting for the gringo to fall down so they can laugh and then get back to business.

But I don't fall down. I can feel my claws lengthen. I feel my teeth click into place. I open my eyes burning with a rage that I haven't let out in a good long time. My toe claws shred the cheap flip-flops.

Moving faster than they can see, I grab a hold of Harpo's

midsection and rip it out of him. The spray of his belly and suddenly flying entrails instantly coating me and most of the rest of the gang. I taste the flying blood but do not savor it. Still moving I sketch some insanely stupid kick I saw in a movie once, at Zeppo's head. Blood and Vigor give me the sort of elevation and power that I don't normally possess, my toe claws rend his face and instantly blind him. His gobbling scream is a counterpoint to Harpo slipping noiselessly to the ground. Chico, bereft of his weapon ,and now his compatriots, is kind of stuck while I remove the knife from my lung and drive it into his eye.

Groucho fires a gun as I close in, but I'm too fast and too close. I snatch it out of his hands, and then bite his throat out. I drink while Shemp fires his gun at me, but now I have a handy drinkable shield. Then, edge off the hunger I shove him aside as Shemp fires wildly. It's true. Most people don't know how to shoot at a target that's charging them. I grip him by the throat and slam him against a wall. Then using my strength, I haul him off his feet.

I look up at him. "Where is it?"  
He's either too terrified to speak or can't because I'm choking him. I do smell piss and shit.

"WHERE IS MY IPOD!"

Still speechless, his free arm fumbles the ipod out of his pocket and shakily holds it up. Wiping my gore-spattered hand on his shirt, I take it from him and put it in my pocket.

I bring him down to the ground. Hand with claws still on his throat. red eyes. big teeth. I lean into my Majesty.

"Who do you work for?"

"The General!"

"Why is he picking on priests? ANSWER ME YOU FUCK!"

"I don't know. I DON'T KNOW! Don' kill me!"

"Give me one good reason I shouldn't! You fucking shot me by the side of the road. I wasn't resisting, you fucking son of a whore!"

"I have a family. Please!"

Imagination is both a blessing and curse. I can of course picture Shemp here with a fat smiling wife, and a bunch of squalling Shemplets. Part of me thinks that they'd be better off without this jumped up little scumbag punk. The hungry and angry part of course...But then the imaginative part is able to see this guy maybe being a good father. His daughters and sons looking up to him like a hero. Four of these men won't be going home to sons and daughters that love them...

And that's when it crashes into me. Hard. like a school bus going over a cliff and landing on me grille-first. "Go home. Tell your General to leave priests alone. Gather your family and leave this city and when you arrive in your new home, turn your life to God. If you ever raise a hand in anger to another human being except in your own defense, I will return and I will render GOD'S Judgment on you. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

He shakes his head, and with more strength than I meant to, I throw him away from me. He sickens and disgusts me. Almost as much as I sicken and disgust myself. I want to vomit.

A noise forces me to turn in the direction of the priest. Unsurprisingly he has his cross out, and shame piles upon shame as I can only imagine how this man must see me. I look at him and then a funny thing happens.

"Pinky?...Pinky Berkowitz? Dios Mio. Is that you?" and then it clicks into focus. I figure out why this rankled me in the first place.

"Esteban?"

"Si!" He nods his head. "You have changed some hermano."

This is an understatement of some depth.

"Wow... This is awkward."

We stand there amazed for a bit. Until he shakes it off.  
"The shots..."

"I know. is your mission close?"

"It is. Follow me."

And there it is, Estaban Morales saving my bacon all over again...

When I had first come to Guatemala, Hired on as the revolution's in-house playwright and poet or whatever, It was Estaban who took me immediately under his wing. And when I created the tactical logistics system that the guerillas started using, he and I went all over this country and parts of Mexico. During that time, we got shot at and got drunk together more times than I care to count. He was an interesting cat. He was also Manuel's cousin, but they'd had a falling out some years ago. Looking at his priestly get-up, I think I can guess why.

I sat in the middle of the mission, with a monk's robe and cowl on while Estaban disposed of my clothes. I felt like a dog in a manger. I looked up at Christ's agony which was of course the centerpiece of the sanctuary and couldn't even ask for forgiveness in the space of my own head.

I try not to kill. I've slipped sometimes, because of hunger, and there was that first thirst. But by and large, I am not a killer. I've been moved on occasion to

kill other vampires. Always in self defense.

And to try to assuage my conscience by using the lord's name makes me feel filthy too. How can I do such a thing?

I'm not one of "God's Monsters" as the Sanctified style themselves. What made me claim that mantle in the heat of the moment. Shame, I suppose. Or maybe more of that stuff has rubbed off on me than I thought. Maybe it's just a desire to not end another life.

It's Kind of weird for the little boy who got sent home from Vacation Bible School for asking too many questions. But it wasn't because I had no faith. It was because i wanted to know MORE. and they didn't really have a lot of answers.

"What are you thinking about?" Estaban asked as he came in.

"Jesus."

Estaban snorted. I lowered my head in a pained smile.

"So...You're a vampire?"

I looked at him with as dead a pan as i could manage.

"Nah. I just get cranky when I haven't had my coffee. You know how it is."

"Nice to know that some things never change."

"You'd think so."

"You uh...You filled out some." Estaban smiled a bit.



"I'm not the only one. Attend to the plank in your own eye brother." It eased my heart just the tiniest bit to be able to smile in return.

"It's good that you still think of me as one."

"Vampir...Err...Not drinking your coffee can make a real prick out of you, if you aren't careful. I'm usually pretty careful."

"That's new. You never used to be careful."

"When I make mistakes, people die. You saw that tonight. It'll MAKE a man careful."

"I saw." He sat next to me. "Are you alright?"

"No Estaban. I don't think I am."

We sat there for a while. I think i could have sat there forever, or at least until sunrise...

"So. Can I assume that you are here to see Manuel."

" I am, But i'll understand if you don't want to..."

"I'll take you."

"Thank you."

We sat there for a while longer. Then I went out into the yard and slipped into the earth.

When I rose that night, I found the courtyard of the mission deserted. The clouds were threatening rain. A storm perhaps. I could taste one coming; and the smell of flowers.

And just like that, I was down the silken cord of

memory. Isabelle and I caught in the rain...Laughing as it got worse. Making our way back to the barn with the horses. We brushed them down quickly and then off with the wet clothes. Me: a damn sight more attractive than today, Her: a glorious goddess. The smell of her skin, the way she kissed me with her eyes wide open. Those eyes of hers...The way they seemed to promise the answer to every mystery in my life.

I hadn't wanted to fall in love with her. Even one who has lived in as Rabelaisian a fashion as myself, realizes that there are rules. That there are situations that are never going to be easy or uncomplicated. Isabelle was Manuel's only sister and his only surviving family. He was very protective of her, Manny was always an intelligent and rational individual, but not always where his sister was concerned. So it occurred to me that if he was willing to kneecap one of his men who had whistled at her, there was no telling what he'd do to a gringo who so much as touched her.

I don't know how it happened. A smile. A look that lingered too long. Papers passed from hand to hand and an accidental touch. Soon. I would lay in my bunk unable to sleep.

Ever been in love so badly that you ached? Felt like your insides were grinding together? Like a man realizing for the first time in his life that something is missing and

it's the one thing you can't live without.

And then one fateful night in a barn finding that she felt the same way about you? Had lost sleep over you? Wanted nothing more than to hear your voice in her ear and feel your hands on her body. To know the unbounded hot rush of love spill out of your heart with the force of a geyser.

It's true what they say, You never forget your first love...Especially if she's a ghost...

I sat in the courtyard and ruined a perfectly good handkerchief drying my bloody tears. Then I went looking for Estaban.

We drove up to Manuel's mansion in an old jeep that belonged to the mission. We stopped off at the hotel where I got a change of clothes and a hot shower and I reclaimed my bag. Checking out, i bumped into the two ladies from the other night, but my thoughts were elsewhere, and time was pressing on me. We drove up the mountain pass road and away from the bright lights of Puerto Barrios. As we drove, I spotted old landmarks, and more memories came rushing back...I was alternatively glad and sorry I hadn't charged the batteries in my Ipod. But at least Estaban was there and we told stories to

pass the time. We had only one bad moment rounding a corner and I could practically feel the sheer drop-off. Estaban mentioned that it was one of the few places where the road was that narrow. But it kept the whole mountain defensible. They couldn't really get trucks up the mountain. Anything particularly heavy that needed to go up to Condor's Nest was brought in by helicopter. Finally we arrived at a gatehouse manned by a young boy of only 12 years and an older man who didn't wake up the entire time we were there. An RPG launcher lay across his lap. He snored. The boy grilled us mercilessly. After a call up to the house, He allowed us to pass and we drove on. We drove over a short bridge that I'm pretty sure was wired to explode. and into the courtyard of Condor's Nest. Men in uniform moved about with purpose, each carrying what looked like stamped chinese AK 47's that I had brokered the deal for a good 10 years ago. Each of them was immaculately kept. A small forest of Aerials sprung like a tuft of grass from the top of the main house. The courtyard was wide and spacious. A man in a white linen suit approached our car as Estaban and I got out.

"Buenos noches Padre. How may i be of service?"

Estaban grimaced. Manuel was known for attending weddings and christenings in the area and for giving to the church. This person was assuming that he was here to put

the touch on his Padron. I could practically hear Estaban grinding his teeth.

Nodding his head in my direction. "Pinky Berkowitz is here to see Manuel Villalobos."

The man in the white suit looked at me with a professional distaste usually reserved in this area for CIA operatives. "I see. Will you wait here?"

"De nada."

He flinched. CIA that actually bother to learn Spanish are usually more troublesome. Then he made a short bow and headed back to the house at an untroubled pace.

"Thank you Estaban. I appreciate your driving me up here."

"Someone's got to keep you out of trouble." he rumbled.

"And I'd appreciate you keeping your mouth shut about the other thing too."

"I figured as much." He looked away. "I know you of old, and in truth, you saved my hide. Besides, who would believe me?"

"I think you'd be surprised. My kind aren't exactly rare, and many of us aren't as careful as we should be."

He nodded. and then drew me in close and hugged me. "Take care hermano."

"Vaya con Dios mi amigo."

He got back into the jeep, which I think was held

together only with paint, thumbtacks, and his faith and drove away.

I was led into the conservatory of the house. The room was of a warm and burnished wood. My ears told me that its acoustics were top notch. There were three solid walls of cd's. a baby grand piano, wooden file cabinets of sheet music. But the lone man there was simply playing a guitar that he'd had since he was 6 years old. he was leaner than last time I'd seen him. His long grey hair setting off his face as he concentrated on the intricate piece he was playing. He wore grey slacks and a grey shirt. His one adornment, a worn wedding band on his hand.

"Well... If it isn't the revolution's own Mariachi."

"Well... If it isn't the People's piss poor playwright." He looked up then and smiled. And damn if he still didn't have that look of eagles. Manuel had always had that sheer raw presence that in my opinion most practitioners of Majesty can't even pull off. He had intelligence in those eyes. and he had a way of talking to you, that was always slightly Socratic. Like he was inviting you along... After meeting him the first time, I never had trouble understanding why his men would follow him into hell itself if he just asked them.

He smiled again. "I have been saving a bottle of

fine tequila for you." And nodded his head in the direction of the baby grand. And it was at that exact moment that I was so glad that I had studied certain changes to my vampire body that would enable me to hold foods down. I poured us two glasses and sat down next to him.

"My doctor says that I must not drink tequila anymore, and I will suffer for drinking this, but tonight I think you and I must drink together. No?"

"Si."

"You look both younger and older than I expected."

"It's not the road, it's the mileage." I had to be a little coy. I was embraced 20 years after he'd seen me last and I'd lived hard, but it's been over 20 years now since I was embraced. but he nodded as if he understood.

"Still, for a man your age. You look good."

"You too. How's Angelita?"

"Dead."

I set my glass down. "I'm sorry."

"It was her time."

"Why didn't you mention it in Email?"

"It never came up. I didn't want to burden you."

Manuel was like that. About certain things he was very private.

"How are the kids?"

"They are fine. Some of them have been in America long

enough to have a real idea of what their father does. A couple of them don't like me very much because of it. But I notice that the trust fund checks get cashed."

"That's hard cheese."

He set his guitar aside and picked up his glass, "The hardest." He held it up. "What shall we drink to?"

I lifted my glass and let it catch the light. "The days when we could make a difference."

"Slainte!"

"La chaim."

We drank. I recognized the flavor of the Tequila instantly as it scoured my interior with fire. Manuel's father had made it long ago and we had gotten badly tore up on it many times in the old days. If I were still living, it would undoubtedly kill every single bacterium in my system. It was also good for stripping paint and varnish from old furniture. No wonder his doctor had forbid him. We both ended up coughing.

Manuel was a study in contrasts. The eldest son of an upper middle class family. His family had made tequila for decades, His father wanted him to expand the business and had sent him to study business at U-Mass in America. Unfortunately, he'd gotten sidetracked due to his interest in philosophy and political science, and he'd come back to Guatemala as a dyed in the wool socialist.



He joined the Guerillas and fought against the local douchebag dictator at the time. One Colonel Orosio. But when the last offensive had gone badly, we returned to camp only to find everyone slaughtered. Including his sister, my wife. Isabelle. I think the heart went out of both of us that day.

Some years later, when I was running grass around the gulf, we bumped into one another and renewed our acquaintance. He'd gone into coke and I ended up doing some running for him. He still sends me care packages about twice a year.

"So. what brings you to my corner of the world? Are you in trouble again?"

"Well. I'm avoiding a certain woman, but I've been meaning to get back here for years. It seemed like the timing was right."

He put his guitar carefully back into its case." I'm glad you came, but I'm not sure I hold any faith in timing. I am being beset on all sides these days.

"Really?"

"Sure." he said. Middle management in the Cali and Meddellin cartels are always looking to kill or co-opt any competition. Keeping up with advances in technology that the coast guard has is a constant expense and if

that isn't bad enough. General Orosio is pushing me because he wants the money I generate to funnel into his hotels.

"OROSIO!"

"Don't get excited. it's his son. He came back here 10 years ago with a bankroll and set up his own complex but he's got money into the hotels, the tourists, and the cruise lines. Now he's turned his eyes towards cocaine."

"His son?"

"I've seen pictures. he's the spitting image of his father. Moves around a lot like his father did too. The locals say that he's a Curandero." He smiled at the ridiculous notion.

I began to get a sinking feeling. "How do you mean? He threw his eyes at the ceiling in disbelief. "Oh you know, the usual stuff, they say he can't be killed. They say he has the power to bend the minds of men. They say he drinks the blood of virgins and only goes abroad by night. Peasant horseshit." he finished his drink.

I began to feel a distinct clenching in my viscera that had nothing to do with Tequilla.

As it got very late, I went to my room within the estate. Mind whirling. I brought up the tequilla and got it out of my system then I readied myself for bed. I closed the heavy drapes as well as possible, then wrapped myself in

the blankets and crawled under the bed face down. Ordinarily, I would've opted for bathroom like in a hotel, but the bathroom here had windows. Plus I can explain away my odd sleeping position under the bed as a weird phobia or quirk more easily than I can sleeping in the tub. I drifted off.

When I arose, I called downstairs and Manuel had handily anticipated my needs. He sent up two maids to make the bed, and what looked like a bloody mary and a small bottle of tequilla. There was also a breakfast tray. Breakfast was not much on my mind. The two maids seemed to have a certain expectation in their eyes...and after the last few days it was agreeable to me. Manuel is nothing if not a good host. So, I took what I needed from them without too much coaching and left them both weak in the knees...But not too weak. And after a quick shower a rinse of the mouth with the Tequilla, I headed downstairs.

I knocked around a bit. I talked with a few of the soldatos here. I was impressed by their professionalism. They had been told who I was and that I was given the run of the place. I found my way into the back-side of the estate and located what looked like another courtyard that faced out over the mountain. Manuel was standing

next to a tree looking out over the mountain. Storm clouds still on the horizon and again the smell of the flowers. They grew all over the walls of this courtyard. The same flowers that Estaban had grown.

Of course.

The larger stone was for Angelita. It had been about a year or so, Manuel had loved his complicated little butterfly. Had given her 10 kids. But the smaller stone was for Isabelle.

"I brought her up here many years ago when we acquired the place." he said, answering my thought. "It was hers you understand. Even the children were taught that this place was for their Aunt Isabelle. I wanted her to have a good view, and her flowers of course.

I used every single bit of Ordo Dracul discipline I have learned to keep from tearing up.

"I come here to think, and usually to pray."

"Think?"

"Si. I am thinking about getting out of the business. Leaving it all behind. Besides, I am more than comfortable. Angelita is gone and the kids are spread far and wide. This son of Orosio is as bad as his old man, and the escalation is just getting worse and worse. And I am so tired..."

"So leave it behind. Estaban will be thrilled."

He snorts, just like his cousin does. "I suppose he would at that."

"And besides, the cocaine trade ain't what it used to be."

"Isn't THAT the truth! Crystal meth has kicked us all where it hurts."

We sat and looked down the mountain.

"I will give it up." He said finally. "If Orosio wants it, he can have it."

"Good." I said. I meant it. Not only was I happy to see a distinct lack of conflict between Manuel and Orosio. Who I had already convinced myself was a kindred, and thus disinclined to play fair. But it would heal some of the breach between him and his cousin. Both of them were men that I liked and admired.

We were both feeling so good about this decision that the dull krump that came the front of the buidling almost slid by us. But the staccato report of AK's in the night would have woken us both up from a sound sleep.

"Oh fer the love of CHRIST! Really? Seriously?"

We got quickly to our feet and headed toward the door. But it was opened by manuel's assistant. "Jefe! We are under attack!"

"I can hear that fool! What has happened?"

" Some of the cars in the courtyard have exploded. Some men have climbed the mountain to get at us. The men are dealing with it. We must get you to safety."

Manuel turned to me and dialed for command voice. "Pinky. Go with this man to the safe room, I will direct the men personally from the surveillance station."

"Fuck that! I'm staying with you. I'm going to help."

And it was only because he was turned to me that he didn't see the raised hand with the butcher's knife, and he didn't see in the eyes of the little assistant that no one was home. But I did, and while I'm not the brightest crayon in the box. I can do the math pretty quick. So I was able to yell and point in time. And as a result, the assistant was off the mark and he buried the knife deep into Manuel's shoulder.

He raised it again to finish the job but I caught his wrist. Manuel slumped against the wall. I grabbed a hold of the assistant's belt and ran him over the edge of the courtyard and threw him off the side of the mountain. He didn't even scream.

I ran back and looked him over. The cut looked nasty but he wasn't bleeding like he'd been nicked in an artery. Using my strength, I hauled him onto my back and fireman-carried him into the house.

It took 3 LONG minutes to find the infirmary, and this with the help of excited and upset soldiers. But get him to the infirmary we did. The doctor, already working on soldiers, left off and saw to his wounds. I recognized old Paulo and helped as best I could. While not possessing a medical degree, I can administer a local and start an IV without shaky hands. Old junkies have their uses. When I had run out of useful skill attending to Manuel, I moved around the room and saw what could be done for the men. The infirmary, while not spacious, was filled. The attack on Condor's nest had harmed a few of the men and killed a couple too. To my shame, I surreptitiously took from some of the dead men. It was an hour before we had word that Paulo had managed to close all of the internal bleeding he could find, and that his breathing was more or less back to normal. In that time, I had ministered to at least 4 soldiers and been questioned by Manuel's chief of security. I answered his questions with the attitude of understanding he was doing his job, But he couldn't wrap his head around the idea that Manuel's assistant had tried to kill him. It simply didn't add up to him. The man's loyalty had been beyond reproach for years. But then again he didn't know what I knew about Dominate. I kept answering his questions while working on the men until finally he came around to making the point that nothing like this had ever happened until

I turned up.

At which point my patience evaporated and I slammed him against a wall. To my credit, I didn't show him my fangs, but he saw something in my eyes I think. Then his people pulled their guns, until Paulo came over and broke it all up and yelled at the security chief and threw him out of the Infirmary.

When Paulo told me that he was out of the woods, I retraced my steps. I found myself out back again and standing by Isabelle's grave. The storm had come in and the rain was starting to soak me. But the rain was warmer than me. I looked down at the old and simple stone. I traced her name with my finger. Isabelle Eldridge... You know how the guy in movie falls to his knees and screams "NOOOO!" up at the sky? I fell to my knees all right, but if I opened my mouth right now, it would not be like that. It would be an incoherent howl. And I would not be able to stop. So I let my bloody tears come. Let them be washed away by the warm gulf rain.

Colonel... General Orosio had incurred a debt. He was going to pay that debt.

I may be no-ones hero. Nor am I likely to survive going against him. But that didn't matter anymore. he had incurred a debt. and he was going to pay it with the last drop of his (probably) kindred blood.



I am just sorry that it took so long.

I went back inside. I changed into some dry clothes and went to see Paulo. While he was working. I made certain that Manuel's IV drip was spiked with some PinkyB to speed his healing. Then I got him to tell me where to find the head of security I'd just slammed up against the wall. I went off looking for him, found him in about 20 minutes and made my apology. I understood he was doing his job and moreover, as someone who had served with Manuel back in old days, knew the kind of loyalty he inspired. I don't know that he would have accepted my apology, if I hadn't used my Majesty, but then again...I wasn't risking it.

Then I explained that I had a personal stake in taking this fight directly back against the General Orosio tomorrow night and that I had certain skills but that I had need of certain materials. He understood, I quickly wrote out a shopping list and promised him that I would be back and ready by not long after sunset tomorrow.

Then I went back to Isabelle's grave and sifted into the ground beside her.

When I rose from the Earth the next night, I had that

feeling. I don't get it very often, but occasionally I do. There is something clean and direct about that feeling. To feel like you're an arrow being aimed at a target. To feel in your guts that no matter what happens, the world will be a different place tonight. Not because it will change on its own but because you mean to ACT tonight. that you're not going to just upset the applecart, but you mean to kick the whole fucking thing down the hill.

I found Fernando, the head of security, and out-lined what I had planned, which he promptly pronounced as a suicide mission. It probably would be if I weren't dead already. As it was there was some question as to whether it would work at all. But as I had suspected. Orosio had headed to old familiar haunts. He'd turned a former government installation into his palatial villa. Middle of the jungle, heavily fortified, and the land surrounding had been mined and trapped since back in the old days.

Ground that we'd scouted many times back in those old days.

In any case, what I had asked of him was no skin off his nose. And as far as the materials, they were all replaceable. If Jefe's loco gringo friend wanted to die, well that was his lookout right?

I choose a pair of good boots, Black BDU pants, (summer weight, rip stop,) a black shirt, and an Alice pack for even weight distribution. I found some new czech handguns in stock. I took 4, one for each side and two in the small of my back. loaded up with 3 clips each. I then drew an H&K from the armories high end stock, with a halo sight and a silencer. Took 4 clips and got a look of grudging respect from Fernando when i taped them together properly. I took a healthy number of smoke grenades, a small toolkit, a roll of duct tape. I also requested a number of household chemicals and he had filled my order to the letter. I strapped on my gee whizzy survival knife. Shoved my little cell phone in a Alice pocket after getting Fernando's number. I explained that on the outside chance that I would be able to call for an Ex-fill, that I'd really appreciate it if he came running and gun blazing if you please...

I hadn't been in a chopper since Vietnam. I don't much care for them. It's a good thing Kindred don't get airsick. But I was able to listen to appropriate music on the way and that helped me stay in the right frame of mind. I was dropped off where I had asked to be. Hadn't done a real line drop since basic training. But I hadn't forgotten how either. I slipped into the jungle and

seriously wished I had learned some Obfuscate. As it was, I could only ramp up my Auspex and keep my eyes as peeled as they could be.

I had "Prison tatooed" a rudimentary map on my left forearm. It would be gone by tomorrow night. With any luck I wouldn't need it past that. I expected a ring of mines and man traps, an inner ring of guards and/or dogs. a kill zone around the house and more upscale anti-personnel measures and surveillance on the house proper. Happily, this region had occasional quakes so geophones and similarly sensitive measures would be off the menu. That sort of set-up was more than capable of stopping an invasion force or at least slowing it down. It would be useless against some lone pissed off nutcase with an axe to grind.

I moved through the jungle. The traps were plain to my sight. I walked through, and over, and around them. Some seemed a bit lazily constructed. My werewolf neighbors had done a better job fortifying my holler back home. But with auspex and proper knowledge, even the mines weren't a deterrent to me.

I reached the edge of the ring and found myself a good vantage point up in one of the trees. Claws can be

excellently useful for tree climbing. I watched. I waited.

I would see three man teams, moving in a triangular formation. From my vantage, I could see that they had night-vision goggles. They were well armed and at least semi-professional. Still, since I was out of their direct eye-line, being off the ground, they didn't see me. I'm not real smart when it comes to stealth. Many people I know are more capable in that field than I. But even I have a few advantages. Infrared isn't going to pick me up as well as a living threat. And if a guard is within a foot of my position, I don't have to move or breathe.

Rather than give myself away, I set the H&K for three round bursts. Carefully screwed the silencer into place. Turned on the Halo sight, which was better for my purposes than a laser sight, and when I was ready, began picking off soldiers.

Now, I have not entirely given up my humanitarian impulses. I am actually fairly decent with a gun. I like guns actually. Made a lot of money writing reviews for firearms of all sorts. And while I am more than capable of taking a life with one, I am also more than capable of kneecapping a man from many yards away. So in a very short amount of time. I was able to drop each of those

men to the turf screaming at their ruined knees, ankles and what-have-you.

Their cries bring other sentries. Their radios chatter. I have kicked the wasps nest and now they all come buzzing. I toss a smoke grenade into their midst and drop to the jungle floor. I shoot four more soldiers because the smoke doesn't jam me up nearly as much as it does them. I move off into the jungle and using my speed, I circle the compound about halfway around. I sight up on their northerly guard tower and empty a clip into it. I don't think I do much damage, but the smoke grenade that follows is enough to upset them plenty. I can hear vehicles moving around now, staccato AK fire from jumpy soldiers and bright lights being shined into the darkness. I shoot a couple out and move again. Lather, Rinse, Repeat.

A jeep drove near, I opened my pack and removed my prepared chemicals. I had asked for a number of unlubricated condoms. These I had filled with crystal drano and tied off. I had also asked for a number of 20 ounce plastic bottles filled with gasoline. I uncap two. Drop the condom into the gasoline and recap them quickly. One I toss underneath the jeep, the other I hurl as far as I can up towards the Hacienda. Turns out my miniscule

amount of Vigor will actually get them pretty far. Then I fade back into the jungle. a sentry sees me and shoots at me. Hits me twice actually, but I am already moving at quite a clip. As he's trying to direct his fellow soldiers in the same direction. The jeep explodes sending fire and metal shrapnel in all directions. There is screaming and blood and fire. Normally, I would be getting ready to take to the hills, but the Dragon has steeled me against the red fear and I merely slit my eyes to keep it from fucking up my night vision. There is a dull whump from inside the compound and I see fire there too.

At some point, I find a soldier on the ground. I fuel myself from the blood he no longer needs and take his AK. and his radio.

I set the selector switch to single shot. I tape the gun to a tree with the duct tape and then trigger a smoke grenade. I jam a screwdriver into the tree to keep the trigger pulled and then make for the left flank. The soldiers come buzzing in like angry hornets, massing their fire on my position. Shooting unobtrusively from their left flank, I put half of them on the deck before they know what's happening.

I find a dead tree, using my claws I rip a hole in it and stuff my guns and pack inside. hopefully above eye level.

I sift into the earth and force myself to wait a full ten minutes. Since I cannot look at my watch while sifted in the earth I time this by singing "Shine on you crazy diamond" in my head. It's about 10 minutes and change.

When I arise, I nearly have a soldier stumble over me, I am forced to kill him quickly with my claws. I take his blood and then stuff him into the hole in the tree after I've retrieved my weapons. The soldiers, lulled into a false sense of the engagement being over, have spread out some into the jungle. Probably with orders to find and kill the enemy force. They don't know that they are dealing with only one vampire.

I begin speaking to them on their radio telling them that the Judgement of God is upon them. This time, I feel no shame. I am using the power of fear. Of the darkness, of their own imaginations. At one point I go running through a group of soldiers trusting my speed and my handguns to jack them up badly. I do. but not without taking a another bullet or two. Sadly their training works against them as they all shoot me at center mass.

Sun Tzu says that the first principle of warfare is deception. I make them believe that I am ALL of Manuel's soldatos come back for vengeance.



I am waiting. Waiting for an opportunity. I pepper the south guard tower with coke bottle bombs. Parts of the hacienda are burning now. Every man detailed to put out fires is a man I don't have to kill or wound. Soon, the smell of smoke will work it's way inside. Orosio will feel it gnawing at his calm.

I divest another soldier of his uniform, and at one point run screaming out of the jungle, into a knot of soldiers, by the time they see that I am a blanco, I am among them and shooting. hands, shoulders, knees. I am forced to kill at least two. Moving at the speed I am, they are having trouble hitting me. and as like as not are hitting one another. I drop another smoke grenade and I am gone.

I take another short siesta and then blow up another jeep. The rounds of the mounted 50 cal cook off and fleeing soldiers still ended wounded. I am shot twice. I take more blood from a soldier felled by the 50 cal and creep back into the jungle.

There are still more of them. and only a few hours till daylight. I use the last of my improvised munitions on the house. I end up getting shot in the back by full auto

fire. Rag-dolling me and spinning me around. But the explosion serves as cover for my escape and I limp away into the jungle. The soldiers can make any number of mistakes. I can only make one. I sift into the earth and heal my wounds safely. I am nearly out of bullets for the guns.

I feel a rumbling in the earth. I sift out of it to hear what i had been hoping to hear. Trucks.

There is only one road into the hacienda. I have carefully stayed away from it. But now I am up and sprinting towards it. I climb a tree near the road and zero in on what I had hoped to see, 4 army trucks coming out out of the gate. I wait until the first truck nears me and I leap from the tree like a black shadow.

Well at least that would have been the plan. I actually landed rather heavily and felt my knee go. But I was at least able to hang on long enough to empty my last clip at the windshield of the truck behind us. I am rewarded with the truck slipping off the road and piling into the jungle. Sadly, trucks exploding usually only happens in movies. A man pokes his head out of the truck next in line and starts pointing and firing at me. The soldiers in the truck underneath me start firing through the roof. Most miss. Some hit. I am starting to get hungry and a little desperate. I crab myself around and punch my fist

through the top of the cab, grabbing the driver.

He leaves the truck at a high rate of speed, leaving me with only a fistful of his uniform and we, predictably leave the road as well. We flip on the slight embankment and I am tossed into the jungle. I land hard. I try to get to my feet. There's blood in my mouth, and I think it's mine.

There are lights coming toward me...Pissed off soldiers surrounding me.

I look up. Hard to move now. I see a man approach. It is the General, surrounded by his soldiers.

He sees me. I see him. We know one another for what we are. I flinch and try to shy away from him. He smiles.

"Take him back up to the house." He says to his men. "Put him in the "Guest room".

Some young fellow, eager to please, shoves a gun butt in my face, and when it fails to put me out, does it again.

As you can well imagine, there is a bit of a pause in the narrative, A glitch in the tape, as it were.

When I awake, My hands are chained above my head. I feel as if I had been worked over by some professionals. To either side of me are heavily muscled ghouls with shock-rods. They give me a taste of that. It's a bit like having my central nervous system set on fire. I can

practically feel my fillings revolving in their sockets. My mouth hurts. My hair hurts. I can feel the broken cheekbone where the guy gun-butted me trying to re-knit. I stop it from doing so.

"Well." He says in English. "It has been a long time since we've seen one another Mr. Berkowitz"

"I'm surprised you remember me General." I say in Spanish. "Never knew you knew my name."

I should describe the bastard properly. He was always fairly lean and his moustache was thick. He had the eyes of a shark and a ramrod straight posture. His face had retained a pockmarked texture even in death that assured that the only easy blood he would have would be from whores. Whores paid in advance. He wore a black uniform not unlike the one he wore in his breathing days. He seemed comfortable in it, at home. I suspect he's really looking forward to torturing me.

His eyelid twitches, "Of course. You and your tactics set back my timetable very badly during the old days. If you hadn't come along, I would have rolled up Manuel a long time ago. As it was, you gave his organization a working spine. I would be remiss if I didn't find out who had done this thing."

"Were you on some vampire's payroll then too?"

"Few men of power in this part of the world aren't. Drink?" He held up a chalice, which I can only assume held his own vitae. "I suspect you must be thirsty." "Ah. That would be Invictus hospitality, would it not?" Still a little venom in me, I guess " The First Estate is strong here. It's no feat of deduction on your part." He smiles. "I can make you drink you know."

I catalogued my various pains. Felt the gnawing thirst deep in my bones. "No thanks. I'm good." "Hmm. No. This really won't do. You're spoiling my plans. I need you healthy and hale and working on my team. You're going to rid me of Manuel and you're going to rid me of his troublesome priest of a cousin. And you are going to do it because you will crave my approval... And you will thank me... as is only proper." He walked over to me and shoved his goblet in my face. "Now DRINK!" he said, spearing me with his gaze.

I felt his Dominate fall on me like a sack full of anvils, I had been in this particular position more than once. And like always, I resisted. But this time was slightly different. I'd learned a few things about mental discipline and those mental tricks were always useful to me but his mental force was pushing through them like nothing before. General Orosio had been used to being

obeyed all of his adult life and it showed in the strength of his formidable will. I felt my defenses crumbling. My body betraying me, the thirst overpowering reason. I looked at the blood in the glass.

And then, it happened. I had saved it. Had held it in reserve. Had carefully put it in my mind at the start of this attack. I had thought that I might need it. My mind went away and found itself back in time. Holding her in my arms. Her light touch on my shoulder. Those eyes which promised the answers to all the secrets in the world. Her touch. Her smell. Her light musical voice. She was a better singer than Manuel, and I used to lie awake next to her listening to her lightly singing in the night.

perfectly at peace. Each and every day of our courtship and our marriage passed in front of me. I remember how we had gotten Estaban to find us a priest to perform the ceremony. Secretly, so we could present it to Manuel as a fair accompli. And how he had ratted us out. Manuel had turned up at the wedding and rather than being mad, was merely annoyed at us for nearly robbing him of the opportunity to walk her down the aisle. He had seen that his sister was truly in love. He did punch me in the face though. You know, afterwards. And then clapped me on the back and set down some tequila in front of me. I remembered it all.

And like a dark swelling madness in front of me. I

remember coming back to our base and finding them all dead. Holding her still lifeless body in my arms. The smell of her blood running out of her. Her eyes still and empty. The world seemingly coming apart under my feet. My Isabellita ripped from my life.

This man doesn't know me. He has no way to know that I'm the master of losing a fight.

*Something was holding my arms up. I didn't like it. I brought them down. I think I may have broken some bones doing it. I could smell blood but I knew somehow it would not be good to drink and slapped it away. The kindred in front of me staggered back holding his wrist. He was scared. it made me smile to think he was scared. His pets ran in. They had sticks which hurt when they touched. I hurt one and made him let go of his stick. Then I clawed the other. The vampire tried to yell at me and make me do things but I wasn't completely there anymore. A part of me was right there. Might have stopped me, but he didn't. I jumped on the big man with the stick and drank. It was hot and good. The vampire ran. I was going to enjoy chasing him.*

*He didn't get far. I am fast. I grabbed him and clawed him. He screamed. He tried to do that mind thing to me. I hurt him with my claws. But he wasn't going to go fast*

*like those men with the sticks.*

*Good.*

When it all cleared off. I was covered in ashes. I set fire to the house. The men, already unnerved ran into the jungle. Many of them never to return. I made my way out into the jungle and found where I stashed my Alice pack. I called Fernando. He was there within 25 minutes. By that point the house was well afire and made a good way to locate the place. He looked at me like I was some kind of atavism. I suppose I was, covered in dirt and blood and ash. We flew home.

Over the course of the next week there was a series of suicides of prominent businessmen in Puerto Barrios and beyond. Forewarned, Manuel divested himself of his cocaine holdings in a deal brokered with one of the cartels. I forget which one. And with a sudden vacuum of leadership in the hotel and shipping industries, Manuel was able to parley his wealth into more honest and legitimate business. It would mean no more care packages of high grade cocaine, but I think I could do without. He even bought a small distillery his father had owned and turned it into an upscale boutique distillery for high quality cerveza and tequila. He was happier than I had



seen him in years. Estaban came to condor's nest and they embraced once again like brothers.

When time permitted later. I asked him to pray for my soul. He said that he would.

Manuel with his new influence got me a new passport issued under my stolen identity, and a lovely berth on the cruise ship home. He even managed to enable me to disembark without being seen. I found a limousine waiting to take me home. I had very little luggage. All i had was my Ipod, and a potted flower. One of Her flowers  
But then again. What else did I need?

## **Shotgun Advice**

Things to remember when doing an Occult Investigation:

- 1) Always carry a flashlight, AND matches. and put the matches in something water tight. A zip-lock bag if nothing else.
- 2) Never wear shoes you can't run in, opt for a steel-toe and a non-slip tread.
- 3) Having it in your palm pilot is seldom a substitute for having it written down in your field manual, or stored carefully in your head.
- 4) Always keep an open mind, but not so open that your

brains fall out.

5) For every useful book you find, there are four that have no index, 6 that are unavailable or destroyed. 2 that were written by people who went crazy and 5 that are subtly wrong.

6) When doing ritual work, measure twice and cut once. Actually, measure five times, and re-think cutting at all.

7) You will learn way more by doing fieldwork. However, research work won't get you killed. So, yeah, it's a trade off.

8) High test rope, plastic tarp, and a shovel in the trunk at all times.

Don't fall into the trap in philosophy of writing about what you know to be true in your heart and then trying to extend that knowledge to cover all facets of life.

Physicists haven't got a unified field theory yet. Why should philosophy be different?

Even philosophies you disagree with violently may yet have something to teach you. Even a blind chicken gets a piece of corn now and then.

More Philosophers should start by asking themselves, "How could my followers misinterpret this and cause the deaths

of innocent people?"

Philosophies that are built on the idea that people can agree on what virtue is, and that people want to be virtuous all the time, are doomed to failure. This does not however detract from their attractiveness. Such philosophies are a bit like the girl you fucked, who turned out to be crazy and ruined your life.

It's always easier to take power from someone else than to develop it for yourself. This is one of the reasons why it's always harder to hold on to power, than to get it in the first place.

Power is ephemeral. Never forget this.

If you must fight over something, make certain that you are fighting over something that is not fluid. Fluid things can evaporate.

When a vampire tells you anything about their mortal friends, compatriots, or even family, you should assume that screwing with those people will create an undying enemy. Better be sure before you do.

Don't be a dumbass. If you need to go down there, hire the Nosferatu. But make sure you only pay him half up front. And tell him when you're expected back. And it might not hurt to tell him how many people will come looking for you, should you not come back on time. Not to dis Nosferatu at all, But I've seen too many shrug and say. "Accidents happen". And if you're a Nosferatu, and you're offended by that, don't even front and act like its never happened.

If you expect to live in a city for any length of time, scout yourself a series of dead drops. You just never know.

When you see another kindred do something or say something completely crazy, there is always the tendency to want to back up. Don't. It telegraphs your desire to run. If you need to run, it should come as a complete surprise.

There is no "One Big Truth". There are a lot of little truths, spread throughout the depth and breadth of creation. A wise man collects truth wherever he can find it. Just as there is no "One Big Truth", there is no "One Big Lie" There are a lot of little lies spread hither and yon. A wise man does not bother to collect lies. We have

Government for that.

Be responsible for your own readiness. By this I mean, Zombies don't give a shit about your Majesty or your pacifism. Never have only one tool in your tool box.

Afterword:

Pardon me while I take a moment to compare myself to our founder insofar as i look back at the opening essay of this book and wonder, as he did, "Jeez...Was i ever that young?"

Strangely, I think this can be a good thing for kindred. Maybe not so much shame at the enormous ego, thinking it could change the world with words alone. More like wondering what happened to the enthusiasm for such a task. More like wondering if you can get any of that back.

This book started, as my other one did, as a journey. I had an idea of where it would go and how it would unfold. Naturally, fate had other ideas. My life took some twists and turns and so naturally this book did too.

I have no idea what I will write next. I wouldn't worry; I'll get some burr under my saddle that I'll have to talk about. What its shape will be, remains closed to me except in dreams. Some night, I'll drag it out into the light and wrestle it like a pissed-off angel from the Old Testament.

As of this writing, my new house rises on the ashes of the old. The Lodge is remade anew through the kind auspices of William Della Cava and soon I will live in my preferred home

again.

I think I'll rest for a bit.

The best thing about the Great Work, is that it will always be there.

-Mahalo.

Corneilius Erasmus Eldridge

Supplicant of The Untamed

Laird of Winchester.