

G U R P S[®]

BLOOD & TYPES

DARK PREDATORS AND DEADLY PREY: VAMPIRES AND VAMPIRE HUNTERS



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CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION 4

Good Evening 5

The Legend of the Vampire 5

About GURPS 5

 What is a Vampire? 6

About the Author 6

Elements of the Vampire Legend 7

 Death 7

Symbolism of the Vampire Legend 7

 Disease 8

Funeral Customs 8

 The Night 9

 Predators 9

 ... *For the Blood is the Life* 9

 Sex 10

Metaphysics and the Undead 10

1. HISTORY 11

Variety of Vampires 12

Lilith 12

 Glossary of Foreign Vampires 13

Vlad Tepes 14

Primitive Beliefs 15

Ancient Beliefs 15

 Assyria 15

 Babylonia 16

 Egypt 16

 Greece 17

Elizabeth Bathory 17

 The Roman Empire 18

Vampires of Other Cultures 18

Native Soil 18

Gypsies 18

The Vampire in Europe 19

 The Middle Ages 19

19th-Century Transylvania 20

 Slavic States 21

 The Balkan States 21

Arnold Paole 21

Peter Plogojowitz 23

 Western Europe 24

 The Epidemics 24

The Gothic Period 25

Tournefort in Mykonos 25

The Vampire of Croglin Grange 27

The Gothic Tale 28

The Modern Vampire 29

 Film 29

Lord Byron 29

Life After Death 30

 Life, Death and Beyond 30

Bram Stoker 30

Lord Ruthven 31

 Day and Night 33

Varney the Vampire 33

 Feeding 34

Carmilla 34

Count Dracula 34

 The Curse of the Vampire 35

Modern Vampires 36

 Timeline 37

2. CHARACTERS 39

Men and Monsters 40

Vampire Quirks 40

 Character Point Values 41

Reputation, Status and Wealth 41

Character Types 42

 Vampire Character Types 46

Advantages 48

Disadvantages 49

New Disadvantages 51

New Skills 51

3. CREATING VAMPIRES 52

Vampire Characters 53

 Other Sourcebooks 53

Vampire Occupations 53

 New Rules 54

Called Shots 54

The Vampire Player Character 55

 Beginning as a Vampire 55

 Becoming a Vampire 55

Liquid Weapons 55

 Vampire "Races" 56

 Playing a Vampire 57

<i>Special Effects</i>	57	Vampir	104
Racial Advantages	58	Vyrolakos	105
Racial Disadvantages	64	Vampire Minions	106
Combat, Injury and Death	68	Animals	106
Invulnerability	68	Human Minions	110
Resurrection	68		
Vulnerabilities	68	6. CAMPAIGNS	111
Injury and Damage	69	The Vampire Campaign	112
HT and Recovery	69	Types of Campaign	112
		<i>Other Monsters</i>	112
4. MAGIC	70	Traditions of the Vampire Tale	113
Mana	71	Horror	113
Types of Vampire Magic	71	<i>Vampires in Yrth</i>	113
Aspected Magery	71	Tragedy	114
<i>Vampires and Demonology</i>	71	Romance	114
Racial or Innate Magic	72	<i>Non-Humans and Vampirism</i>	114
<i>Exorcism</i>	72	The Campaign World	115
Innate Magic for Vampires	73	<i>Destroying Vampires</i>	115
Innate Spells	73	Mana Level and Magic	116
Vampire Mages	76	<i>Crossover Campaigns</i>	116
New Spells	76	Tech Level	117
Magic Items	77	Background	117
Magic vs. Vampires	78	Campaign Themes	118
Vampires and Psionics	78	Night Stalkers	118
		The Fledglings	118
5. BESTIARY	79	The Immortals	118
Vampire Types	80	Vampire Politics	119
<i>Scientific Explanations for Vampirism</i>	80	Urban Jungle	119
The Basic Vampire	81	<i>Historical</i>	119
Adze	83	The Quest	120
Alien	84	The Outcasts	120
Astral	85	Race Wars	120
Baital	86	Dark Future	120
Ch'iang Shich	87	<i>Generic Adventure Seeds</i>	120
Civateteo	88	Setting	121
Gaki	89	Horror	121
Ghul	90	<i>Historical Adventure Seeds</i>	122
Gothic	91	Fantasy	123
Half-Vampire	92	<i>Medieval Transylvania Adventure Seeds</i>	123
High-Tech	93		
Human	94	BIBLIOGRAPHY	124
Incubus/Succubus	95	Books	124
Lamia	96	Fiction	124
Lilitu	97	Non-Fiction	124
Loogaroo	98	Film	125
Modern	99	Early Films	125
Nosferatu	100	Hammer Films (1958-1974)	125
Penanggalan	101	Other Modern Vampire Films	126
Strix	102		
Ustrel	103	INDEX	127



INTRODUCTION



NO OTHER MONSTER

in fiction and myth is more enduring than the vampire. The vampire legend stretches from the earliest roots of civilization to the pop-culture of the space age. It has a unique hold upon our collective imagination, with the power to both horrify and fascinate. Perhaps this is because the vampire is based upon the primal fears at the core of human experience: the fear of death, of the predator, of the power of sex, of the night.



Before exploring the variations of the vampire legend, it is first necessary to ask, “What is a vampire?”

The vampire has many guises. It is a type of ghost. It is a demon. It is at once a human and a wild beast. It is the fear of death and the dead; the pale, hairless spectre that looms from the shadows driven by a jealous hunger for the living, or the hooded figure standing silent in the graveyard. Yet the vampire is also the fear of evil in human form. It may be the cold and ruthless killer or the blood-crazed madman, the black magician made monstrous in the image of the forces he serves, the assassin in the night, the seductive sexual predator . . .

At the same time, the vampire can be a romantic figure or an object of sympathy. He may be the anti-hero or the tragic villain, struggling nobly against his fate or using his powers to battle greater evils. A vampire may have had centuries to acquire wisdom. Yet he is an outsider, cursed never to look upon the sunlit world of mortal man, feared and hated because of his very existence.

Yet with the many faces of the vampire, there are certain essential characteristics. The vampire is nocturnal; a creature of the night. It is a predator and a cannibal. It is dead and yet alive, belonging fully to neither realm. Its curse is a disease that may be spread to its victims. It wears a human form, and yet is both more and less than human.

Regardless of the reasons, the vampire seems to be a permanent part of our imaginations. It is our dark side, our fears and fantasies brought to . . . well, something like life.

✠ GOOD EVENING

“Throughout the whole vast shadowy world of ghosts and demons there is no figure so terrible, no figure so dreaded and abhorred, yet dight with such fearful fascination, as the vampire, who is himself neither ghost nor demon, but yet who partakes the dark natures and possesses the mysterious qualities of both.”

— *Montague Summers; The Vampire: his Kith and Kin, 1928*

VAMPIRE. FOR MOST PEOPLE, the word conjures an image of a sinister but distinguished looking gentleman with a black cape and oversized canine teeth. The image has been reinforced countless times, by gothic novels, late-night movies and children’s Halloween costumes. But the vampire is more than that. There is a shadowy history as old as mankind itself of bloodthirsty revenants, fiends and ghouls lurking in the darkness waiting to pounce upon the unwary with razor fangs, bringing death . . . and worse.

The sinister aristocrat of the gothic genre is only one chapter in the long history of the vampire. The undead have lurked in the shadows of man’s subconscious in many different lands and times, in many different forms. The archetype of the vampire pervades the folklore and legends of people all over the world; it is a personification of the most basic fears inherent to the human condition. Vampires have endured through the centuries, because they are *us*. They are our dark side, the receptacle of our fears and desires that are not allowed the light of day, monstrous yet still wearing human faces. This is the secret of the vampire’s immortality.

✠ THE LEGEND OF THE VAMPIRE

THE LEGEND OF THE VAMPIRE is unusual in that it is nearly universal throughout human culture. Nearly every mythology has a creature that corresponds to the essential characteristics of the Undead. Despite boundaries of long centuries and thousands of miles, the vampire looms over widely disparate peoples around the globe.

About GURPS

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Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set**, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the **GURPS Basic Set** — e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the **GURPS Basic Set**, Third Edition.



About the Author

Lane Grate is a freelance writer and game designer with 16 years of experience in roleplaying. He has been previously published in *Rogue Mistress*, a supplement for Chaosium Games' *Stormbringer*. His greatest educational achievement is attending nine years of college without graduating from anything (including high school). He was once described by a teacher as "the perfect example of a bad example" and he has always tried to live up to this.

His main areas of interest are horror and dark fantasy, existentialist philosophy, herpetology, cyberspace exploration, the occult sciences and all things Gothic. Contrary to popular superstition, he could go out in the daylight if he really wanted to and he is quite capable of eating garlic.

He is currently maintaining a nocturnal existence in Missoula, Montana, where he has more good friends than he deserves.

What is a Vampire?

The problem in tracing the vampire through history is partly linguistic and partly conceptual. Many cultures failed to distinguish the vampire as a unique monster. In the legends of many different cultures, the archetype of the vampire is present, but inextricably linked to other supernatural phenomena, so that it becomes impossible to say what differences exist between vampires and other malevolent entities, particularly ghosts, demons and witches. Yet in most cultures, there is a spectre at the crossroads, a creature caught between life and death who hungers for mortal lives.

By the strictest interpretation, vampires may be defined as beings who were once living mortals who have died and returned from the grave as nocturnal predators of human beings. However, there are always exceptions. There is an entire bestiary of monsters from around the world who fit the archetype of the vampire. Many early vampires were demonic beings who were never human. There is an entire category of astral vampires who were not necessarily dead. Many Gothic tales include vampires who may walk abroad in daylight. Yet there are common themes that connect all of the creatures from different times and different lands.

There are three main varieties of creature that will be considered in this work:

Mortal vampires: These are living humans, who, through some personal inclination (and usually the help of some supernatural agency) have become cannibalistic predators upon their own species. Such a being may or may not possess supernatural powers. Often this condition comes about through consorting and bargaining with forces of darkness.



The Undead: These are former mortals who have died and come back from the grave. They are usually required to prey upon others simply to maintain their existences. They may be bloodthirsty monsters who have lost all traces of their human natures during their transformations, or unwilling victims who have been cursed with existences they do not want (but perhaps can't bear to end). These are the vampires most commonly associated with the word; the animated corpses that suck the blood of the living to continue their own morbid half-life.



Being dead already, this variety of vampire can be extremely difficult to dispose of, possessing an unnatural relationship to the conditions of life and death.

Spirits and nonhuman entities: These are parasitic beings of nonhuman origin that may masquerade as mortals in order to be closer to their prey. They are often of a less corporeal nature, with the ability to exist as non-physical spirits or materialize as solid and tangible presences. Such creatures can be very difficult to exterminate, as they may not be dependent upon the existence of their physical forms. Many of these entities have demonic or infernal origins.

Of these general categories of vampiric creatures, the primary focus here will be the true undead. Mortals and spirits, while included for the GM's use, are exceptions to many of the traditional rules of vampirism (see below). The terms vampire and the damned are employed as generic terms for any vampiric being, while the terms revenant and undead are applied specifically to "true" vampires.

✠ ELEMENTS OF THE VAMPIRE LEGEND

VAMPIRES PERSONIFY SOME VERY FUNDAMENTAL FEARS. These basic fears, inherent to the human condition, are the themes around which every vampire tale, fictional or folkloric, is woven. These themes also serve to define the true vampiric archetype.

The five primary themes at the heart of the vampire legend are death, disease, the night, predators and sex. It is these topics and their attendant anxieties which give the vampire its identity.

Death

One of the fundamental themes of the vampire legend is the creature's relationship to death. The horror at the heart of the vampire tale is, first and foremost, the fear of mortality. For mortals, death is frightening. This vast unknown, looming inescapably for all, produces a whole litany of attendant fears: fear of dying, of others dying, of what happens after death, and of the dead themselves. Thus the vampire tale, with its cemeteries and tombs, its living corpses and their prey and its tantalizing promised glimpses into the mysteries beyond life has been an ideal vehicle for confronting the spectre of the reaper.

Generally speaking, all vampires are willing or unwilling bringers of death. An intimate relationship with mortality is thus required for both vampires and those who hunt them. The vampire is death given human form, regardless of its method of killing. Whether a slow wasting or a savage attack, the end result to the mortal victim is the same.

Symbolism of the Vampire Legend

The vampire can be seen to represent more than just pre-scientific superstition or an interesting literary bogey man. The vampire has been used both deliberately and subconsciously to symbolize many different religious, social and political situations. The archetype has also been a receptacle for many subconscious fears and desires about both sex and violence.

To some early Church fathers, the vampire represented the restless dissatisfaction felt by a soul who had turned away from the salvation of the Church. This manifested in the belief that one who was lost to the Church, for example by excommunication or suicide, was predisposed to become a vampire.

The vampire has been used as a political statement by some writers as a metaphor for the parasitic relationships of different social classes, and indeed, possibly the first use of the word "vampire" in the English language may have been in the article "Political Vampyres," published in *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1732. This article spoke of a type of financial vampirism practiced by greedy officials and tax-happy bureaucrats: "These Vampyres are said to torment and kill the Living by sucking out all their Blood; and a ravenous Minister, in this part of the World, is compared to a Leech or Bloodsucker, and carries his Oppression from beyond the Grave, by anticipating the publick Revenues, and entailing a Perpetuity of Taxes, which must gradually drain the Body Politick of its Blood and Spirits."

The vampire is also the Jungian Shadow, the dark side of human nature made flesh. The reversal of human values (day to night, good to evil, alive to dead, etc.) is one of the best-defined characteristics of the undead. The vampire is the reflection of mankind, "through a mirror, darkly," and as such inspires both the fear and desire that accompanies the forbidden elements of human nature.



Funeral Customs

A great many of the rites and taboos associated with laying the dead to rest also imply a fear of what will happen if the dead become restless. Funeral customs from all over the world hint at this morbid possibility, and many of these customs have survived until the present. Even the modern tradition of placing a head stone has a more sinister undertone than merely erecting a monument to the deceased; the heavy stone was once intended to keep the corpse in its place.

In countries where belief in the undead is strongest, all sorts of elaborate practices keep the dead in their graves. Corpses are bound with cords, nailed or spiked down, pierced with needles and spikes, and dismembered or maimed (usually the legs) to prevent any nocturnal wandering. In fact, the now-famous wooden stake originated as just another tool to pin a suspect corpse to the earth.

Similar methods were used to hinder the vampire's efforts if it should rise again, such as sewing shut the eyes or mouth of the potential undead. Another widespread practice was the burial of suspect persons at a crossroads, in the supposition that when the monster rose it would be unable to decide which direction to go. In some lands, corpses were buried face down in the hope that, should the dead awake, it would be confused and dig deeper into the earth rather than rising from the grave.

Some cultures routinely dispose of bodies by cremation, the only certain way to prevent the dead from rising, by denying them a body altogether.

"True" vampires are neither dead nor alive, but exist in an intermediary state known as undeath. These vampires are privileged with some insight into one of the fundamental questions of human existence, namely, "What lies beyond death?" The vampire has passed beyond this great veil, and returned. In this state between life and death, the creature is outside the normal cycle of human existence. Because of this, it does not need to fear death as a mortal must, yet to maintain this unnatural unlife a vampire must take the lives of others. We find the vampire once again at the crossroads, caught between the extremes of human experience, for he is both the dead and death itself.

Disease

In many of its manifestations, the vampire is intrinsically linked to fears of pestilence and disease. In fact, this seems to be the very source of some vampire tales. In plague-stricken societies with little medical knowledge, the undead can be seen as a pre-scientific metaphor for contagion; specifically, that the dead were still a menace that could bring death to the living. Most reported epidemics of vampirism coincided with outbreaks of plague.

Indeed, the reported symptoms of vampiric predation were most often a type of wasting sickness, as the victim's life was drained by the jealous dead. Weakness, paleness, shortness of breath, and other infirmities were thought to be caused by the creature's attack. Disease carrying vermin, such as rats and fleas, also became associated with the vampire, either as his minions or as a disguise.

Finally, the condition of vampirism itself has many qualities of a disease, particularly in the European folklore that became the basis for the modern conception of the vampire. It is a condition that brings death, and is transmitted from one victim to another. In fact, some early reports maintained that a person could be infected with vampirism by merely eating the flesh of an animal that had been preyed upon by a vampire. Left unchecked, vampirism, like the plague, could soon assume epidemic proportions.

Not surprisingly, the vampire has seen a great deal of attention once again, right when the metaphor of death and disease brought by the sharing of blood is once again a topical comment on the frightening realities of life.

The Night

The fear of the night stretches back to the earliest roots of prehistory, when mankind huddled in caves with only the light and warmth of the fire to hold the darkness and the predators that lurked there at bay. While the night has become less dangerous over time, even the most modern “civilized” cities become more perilous in the hours between dusk and dawn. Understandably, then, darkness still triggers some of mankind’s primal fears.

The night represents the unknown, with its impenetrable shadows that can conceal menaces as well as blind man and make him more vulnerable to the threats they conceal.

The night is the vampire’s realm. In many ways, the vampire is the night on a symbolic level, and like his cave-dwelling ancestors, man knows instinctively that the only safety is the light of the sun, or its earth-bound surrogate, fire. This is the reason for the universal use of fire as a weapon against vampiric monsters; it is a source of warmth and light and thus an ally of the living.

Predators

The fear that is inspired by the vampire is also the primal fear of the predator. As members of the animal kingdom, mankind has always had to face the realities of the food chain. The vampire is a complex symbol for these realities. First, he represents man’s fear of becoming the prey of something more dangerous than himself. No one likes the idea of being stalked, caught, and most horrifying of all, consumed. Perhaps because it is another fear that dates back to man’s earliest experiences, there is a special terror that comes with the thought of falling victim to the fangs of the beast.

... For the Blood is the Life

“But you must strictly refrain from partaking of the blood, for the blood is the life; you must not eat the life with the flesh.” *Deuteronomy 12:23*

Since the earliest times, man has understood this simple axiom. To primitive man, this was an easy relationship to observe; the blood is the life. As blood drained away from a man or beast, so did the life. Thus, blood became identified as the physical medium for the more etheric energy of the soul or spirit. Blood sacrifices proliferated in many cultures, with the blood once again symbolic of the life-force it carried. It only followed, then, that if the loss of blood caused weakness and death, that the ingestion of blood might provide strength and vitality. Some primitive peoples took this form of sympathetic logic to the extreme of performing ritual cannibalism, drinking the blood and eating the flesh of respected enemies in the hopes of acquiring their strength.

With the advent of Christianity, blood acquired a new host of mystical and miraculous characteristics, once again symbolic of a supernatural immortality.

With all of this potent mystery and symbology attributed to the blood, it is little wonder that it was assumed that if the dead hunger for life, they might take it in the form of blood.



Metaphysics and the Undead

To be undead means to exist in a physically and metaphysically “unnatural” state. The vampire’s existence is inherently opposed to the sources of life, whether natural, like the sun, or supernatural, like forces of spiritual “goodness” (however that is defined in the campaign world). The vampire’s very existence is an affront to nature. Many vampires are directly in league with whatever “demons” or forces of darkness are native to their culture.

In most cultures, there is some belief in the continued existence of mortal souls after death. Whatever these beliefs are, the vampire stands in opposition to them. The vampire cannot follow the natural course of the spirit after death, but remains tied to the physical world for all eternity. Even if destroyed by appropriate means and granted the peace of permanent death, the vampire is generally barred from whatever spiritual rewards await mortals, and possibly damned to some form of punishment.

Because of their spiritual exile, however, vampires may have access to the secrets of the Other Side. They may see the metaphysical action behind the scenes. One familiar method of demonstrating this is the countless tales in which a vampire lives long enough to perceive the reality of some form of reincarnation, invariably in the form of a previous lover thought lost to the ravages of time.

Secondly, the vampire represents our own savage side as hunters and carnivores, illustrating the condition of a biological organism; to survive, man must kill and consume other life.

Finally, as a predator with human form, the vampire illustrates our own dark side, and the reality that the most dangerous predator that man can face is another human.

The predatory nature of the vampire shows through in his very appearance. The most easily recognizable feature of the undead are the sharp fangs of the beast. Many independently formed legends all attribute the vampire with the ability to assume the form of one or more animals, usually nocturnal predators such as cats, wolves, etc. Countless varieties of vampire around the world possess vicious talons, glowing red eyes and animal forms – all outward manifestations of the beast within.

Sex

The legend of the vampire has had distinctly sexual elements from its very beginning. The earliest known depiction of a vampire is a Babylonian bowl engraved with the image of a beheaded female vampire crouching above a male victim in an unquestionably sexual pose. This tradition saw its way through a variety of early versions of the predatory but seductive female vampire, through the suave and compelling aristocrats of Gothic fiction, and into the popular image presented by contemporary cinematic presentations.

As an archetypal receptacle for the dark side of human nature, the vampire has had attributed to it the sexual taboos of various cultures. In many early tales, this was as simple as a depiction of a sexually aggressive female. This intimidating image fueled the vampire legend through much of the ancient world, as well as during the Middle Ages when succubi and witches served the same purpose. It was believed commonly across the Slavic and Baltic countries that spawned the European vampire that lecherous or unusually sensual people

were predisposed to rise again as the undead, and many tales from the same areas relate the predisposition of the vampire to return to his widow with carnal intentions.

By the time the vampire entered the popular imagination by way of literature, he was no longer a bloated corpse of a peasant, but rather a smooth, Byronic aristocrat with a strange power of fascination over all mortals who crossed his path. Even Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is primarily the tale of the Count’s frustrated romantic overtures toward Mina Harker. By the early days of cinema, the predatory seductress had returned with a vengeance, and the term “vamp” became popularized.

In the most modern interpretations, the erotic elements of the legend have become even more strongly emphasized. The vampire has become less a serious object of superstition and fear and more romanticized; the perfect inhuman lover.



INDEX

- Academic character type, 42.
 Acute Senses advantage, 48.
 Advantages, 48; *racial*, 58.
 Adventure seeds, 120.
 Adze, 83.
 Age/Youth disadvantage, 49.
 Age, 33; *and point values*, 41.
 Albinism disadvantage, 49.
 Alertness advantage, 48.
 Alien Vampire, 84.
 Alternate Identity advantage, 48.
 Amnesia disadvantage, 49.
 Ancient beliefs, 15.
 Animals, 48, 62, 65, 73, 106-109.
 Animal Empathy advantage, 48.
 Anti-Hero vampire character type, 46.
 Appearance disadvantage, 49.
 Appearance: Horrifying racial disadvantage, 64.
 Appearance: Monstrous racial disadvantage, 64.
 Aristocrat character type, 42.
 Arnold Paole, 21.
 Aspected magery, 71.
 Assyria, 15.
 Astral Projection innate spell, 76.
 Astral Vampire, 85.
 Astral Entity racial disadvantage, 64.
 Aswang, 102.
 Babylonia, 16.
 Bad Smell racial disadvantage, 64.
 Baital, 86.
 Balkan states, 21.
 Basic vampire type, 53.
 Bat, 106.
 Bathory, Elizabeth, 17.
 Beast Summoning innate spell, 73.
 Beast Control innate spell, 73.
 Bebarlang, 85.
 Becoming a vampire, 31.
 Beliefs, *ancient*, 15; *primitive*, 15.
 Berserk disadvantage, 49.
 Bestiary, 79.
 Bibliography, 124.
 Bite racial advantage, 58.
 Black Magician vampire character type, 47.
 Bleeding, 69.
 Blessed items, 77.
 Blood, 64; *. . . is the life*, 9.
 Bloodlust disadvantage, 49.
 Bloodthirst racial disadvantage, 64.
 Body of Air innate spell, 73.
 Books, 124.
 Bram Stoker, 30.
 Bruxsa, 102.
 Byron, Lord, 29.
 Cabal, 123.
 Called shots, 54.
 Callicantzaros, 103.
 Campaigns, 111; *crossover*, 116; *themes*, 118; *world*, 115.
 “Carmilla,” 26.
 Carmilla, 34.
 Cat, 31, 107.
 Ch’iang Shich, 87.
 Character point values, 41.
 Character types, 42; *vampire*, 46.
 Characters, 39.
 Charm innate spell, 73.
 Chordewa, 85.
 Civateteo, 88.
 Claws racial advantage, 58.
 Clergyman character type, 42.
 Clerical Investment advantage, 48.
 Clerical magic, 78.
 Clinging racial advantage, 58.
 Clouds innate spell, 73.
 Combat magic, 78.
 Combat, 68.
 Communion, unholy, 36.
 Count Dracula, 34.
 Croglin Grange, 27.
 Crossover campaigns, 116.
 Curse, 35.
 Damage, 69.
 Dark Future campaign, 120.
 Dark Vision racial advantage, 58.
 Dark-Aspected Magery advantage, 72.
 Darkness innate spell, 73.
 Daylight, 33.
 Death, 7, 68; *permanent*, 32; *temporary*, 32.
 Dehydration, 69.
 Demonology, 71.
 Dependency racial disadvantage, 64.
 Dhampir, 92.
 Disadvantages, 49; *new*, 51; *racial*, 64.
 Discriminatory Smell racial advantage, 58.
 Disease, 8, 35-36, 74, 82, 100.
 Doctor character type, 43.
 Doesn’t Breathe racial advantage, 58.
 Dog, 107.
Dracula, 27.
 Dracula, Count, 34.
 Dread racial disadvantage, 65.
 “The Dusseldorf Vampire,” 38.
 Egypt, 16.
 Elizabeth Bathory, 17.
 Enemies disadvantage, 49.
 Enhanced ST racial advantage, 59.
 Enhanced Move racial advantage, 59.
 Enhanced IQ racial advantage, 59.
 Enhanced DX racial advantage, 58.
 Enhanced HT racial advantage, 59.
 Enslave innate spell, 74.
 Entertainer character type, 43.
 Epidemics, 24.
 Equipment, 41.
 Esoteric History skill, 51.
 Europe, 19; *western*, 24.
 Exorcism, 72; *skill*, 51.
 Extra Encumbrance racial advantage, 59.
 Extra Hit Points racial advantage, 59.
 Extra Fatigue racial advantage, 59.
 Fantasy, 123.
 Feeding, 34.
 Film, 29, 125.
 Fledgling vampire character type, 47.
 Fledglings campaign, 118.
 Flight, *racial advantage*, 59; *skill*, 51.
 Fog innate spell, 74.
 Frightens Animals racial disadvantage, 65.
 Fritz Haarmann, 36.
 Funeral customs, 8, 22, 24, 26.
 Gaki, 89.
 Ghul, 90.
 Glossary, 13.
 Gluttony disadvantage, 49.
 Gothic Vampire, 91.
 Gothic *period*, 25; *tale*, 28.
 Grave Mist innate spell, 76.
 Greece, 17.
 Gypsies, 18.
 Haarmann, Fritz, 36.
 Haigh, John George, 37.
 Half-Vampire, 92.
 Hannya, 90.
 “The Hanover Vampire,” 36.
 Hard to Kill racial advantage, 60.
 Henchman character type, 43.
 High-Tech Vampire, 93.
 Historical campaign, 119.
 History, 11.
 Holy water, 55.
 Holy items, 77.
 Hordes, 106.
 Horror, 113.
 Human minions, 36, 110.



Human Vampire, 6, 94.
 Illness, 69.
 Illuminati, 116, 123.
 Immortal vampire character type, 47, 63.
 Immortality, 7, 30, 33, 47, 63, 118.
 Immortals campaign, 118.
 Immunity to Poison racial advantage, 60.
 Incubus, 95.
 Infectious Attack racial disadvantage, 66.
 Infravision racial advantage, 60.
 Injury, 68, 69.
 Innate spells, 73.
 Innate magic, 72.
 Insects, 83.
 Insubstantiality racial advantage, 60.
 Intimidation skill, 51.
 Invisibility racial advantage, 61.
 Invulnerability, 68.
 Jaracacas, 96.
 John George Haigh, 37.
 Ka, 104.
 Kephn, 101.
 Kurten, Peter, 38.
 Lamia, 96.
 Langsoir, 88.
 Legends, 5; *symbolism of*, 7.
 Life after death, 30.
 Lifebane racial disadvantage, 66.
 Lilith, 12.
 Lilitu, 97.
 Literature, 30.
 Loogaroo, 98.
 Lord Ruthven, 31.
 Lord Byron, 29.
 Lowlife character type, 44.
 Lycanthropes, 110.
 Mage character type, 44.
 Magery, *advantage*, 48; *aspected*, 71;
dark-aspected, 72; *moon-aspected*, 71;
star-aspected, 72.
 Magic, 70; *combat*, 78; *clerical*, 78; *innate*,
 72; *items*, 77; *necromancy*, 78; *racial*, 72.
 Mana, 71, 116.
 Materialization innate spell, 76.
 Megalomania disadvantage, 50.
 Metamorphosis, 56.
 Metaphysics, 10.
 Middle Ages, 19.
 Minions, 106; *human*, 110, *lycanthropes*, 110.
 Modern Vampire, 99.
 Molotov cocktails, 55.
 Money, 41.
 Monster vampire character type, 47.
 Moon-Aspected Magery advantage, 71.
 Mormo, 96.
 Morph racial advantage, 61.
 Mortal vampires, 6, 68, 94.
 Multiple Forms (Shapeshifting) racial advantage, 61.
 Native soil, 18.
 Necromancy, 78.
 Night Vision advantage, 48.
 Night Stalkers campaign, 118.
 Night, 9.
 Nightlife character type, 44.
 Nightmare innate spell, 74.
 No Reflection racial disadvantage, 66.
 No Body Heat racial disadvantage, 66.
 No Shadow racial disadvantage, 66.
 Nocturnal racial disadvantage, 66.
 Non-humans, 114.

Nonhuman vampires, 7.
Nosferatu, 29.
 Nosferatu, 100.
 Obayifo, 98.
 Occultism (Demonology) skill, 51.
 Occultism (Vampire) skill, 51.
 Occultist character type, 44.
 Occupations, 53.
 Odious Personal Habits disadvantage, 50.
 On the Edge disadvantage, 50.
 Outcasts campaign, 120.
 Owl, 88, 97, 103, 108.
 Pacifism disadvantage, 50.
 Pallor racial disadvantage, 67.
 Paole, Arnold, 21.
 Paranoia disadvantage, 50.
 Penanggalan, 101.
 Pestilence innate spell, 74.
 Peter Kurten, 38.
 Peter Plogojowitz, 23.
 Plants, 77, 115.
 Plogojowitz, Peter, 23.
 Poison, 60.
 Policeman character type, 45.
 Pontianak, 103.
 Possession innate spell, 77.
 Predators, 9.
 Primitive disadvantage, 50.
 Primitive beliefs, 15.
 Private Investigator character type, 45.
 Psionics, 78.
 Quest campaign, 120.
 Quirks, 40.
 Race Wars campaign, 120.
 Racial advantages, 58.
 Racial disadvantages, 64.
 Racial magic, 72.
 Radar Sense racial advantage, 61.
 Rain innate spell, 74.
 Rat, 108.
 Raven, 108.
 Recovery racial advantage, 61.
 Recovery, 69.
 Regeneration racial advantage, 61.
 Regrowth racial advantage, 62.
 Reputation disadvantage, 50.
 Reputation advantage, 41.
 Resurrection, 68.
 Roman Empire, 18.
 Romance, 114.
 Romania, 22.
 Ruthven, Lord, 31.
 Sadism disadvantage, 50.
 Scientific explanations, 80.
 Scientist character type, 45.
 Secret Identity disadvantage, 51.
 Secret disadvantage, 50.
 Seducer vampire character type, 47.
 Sense Life innate spell, 74.
 Sense Spirit innate spell, 74.
 Sensitive Touch racial advantage, 62.
 Serpent, 109.
 Sex, 10, 19, 34, 47; see also *Succubus*.
 Silence racial advantage, 62.
 Skills, 51; see also *Spells*.
 Slave Mentality racial disadvantage, 67.
 Slavic states, 21.
 Sleep, 34.
 Sleep innate spell, 74.
 Soil, *native*, 18.
 Sonar Vision racial advantage, 62.
 Soul Jar innate spell, 74.
 Speak with Animals racial advantage, 62.
 Special effects, 57.
 Spells, *innate*, 73; *new*, 76.
 Spirit vampires, 7.
 Spirit Fire innate spell, 77.
 Star-Aspected Magery advantage, 72.
 Starvation, 69.
 Status advantage, 41.
 Steal Strength innate spell, 75.
 Steal Youth innate spell, 75.
 Steal Health innate spell, 75.
 Stoker, Bram, 30.
 Strix, 102.
 Student character type, 45.
 Succubus, 95.
 Suicide, 31.
 Super Jump racial advantage, 62.
 Survival (Urban) skill, 51.
 Suspended Animation innate spell, 75.
 Swarms, 106.
 Tech Level, 117.
 Tepes, Vlad, 14.
 Timeline, 37.
 Tlalicque, 98.
 Tragedy, 114.
 Transformation, 37.
 Transylvania, 20.
 Tunneling racial advantage, 63.
 Tympanios, 105.
 Ultrahearing racial advantage, 63.
 Unaging racial advantage, 63.
 Undeath, 32.
 Unhealing racial disadvantage, 67.
 Unholy Communion, 36.
 Unliving racial disadvantage, 67.
 Unnatural Feature racial disadvantage, 67.
 Unusual Background advantage, 48.
 Urban Jungle campaign, 119.
 Ustrel, 103.
 Vampir, 104.
 "The Vampire of London," 37.
 Vampire Politics campaign, 119.
 Vampire Hunter character type, 45.
 Vampiric Invulnerability racial advantage, 63.
 Vampiric Resurrection racial advantage, 63.
 Vampiric Immortality racial advantage, 63.
 Vampiric Dominance racial advantage, 63.
 Van Helsing, 27-29.
Varney the Vampire, 26, 33.
 Victim character type, 46.
 Vlad Tepes, 14.
 Vulnerability racial disadvantage, 67.
 Vulnerability, 68.
 Vyrolakos, 105.
 Weakness racial disadvantage, 68.
 Wealth advantage, 41.
 Werewolf, 98, 110, 112.
 Windstorm innate spell, 75.
 Wolf, 109.
 Yrth, 113.
 Zombie innate spell, 75.