

Chapter 1

Preparing to Play Vampire: The Requiem

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the art of storytelling
 - ▶ Knowing what you need to play the game
 - ▶ Deciphering vampiric truth from fiction
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All of us have played make-believe at some point in our lives. It might have been “Cops and Robbers” or “Cowboys and Indians.” No matter what the game, you forgot who you really were for a few hours and assumed the role of a daring hero or dangerous villain. You imagined yourself as someone else, even in your own backyard, and your friends did the same, all in the spirit of having an adventure or telling a story. Whether you knew it or not, that imaginative activity was called *roleplaying*, and it’s something that people do today, even as adults.

Imagine a game in which you pretend to be something inhuman, something dark, something potentially sinister. Imagine you’re a vampire. A once-living person who has gone to the grave and returned as a nocturnal predator. A hunter who stalks human beings to exist, and who wrestles with what he has become. At one time he was human, and he hasn’t necessarily forgotten what it means to be alive. Imagine playing *Vampire: The Requiem*.

Understanding Storytelling

The act of getting together with a group of friends to play *Vampire: The Requiem*, where you tell tales about vampires, is called *Storytelling*. Storytelling

is an interactive form of entertainment over which no one player has complete control. No one knows just how your collective story will turn out. As a group you decide how you, as a collective and as individuals, respond based on events that arise as the story unfolds.

Knowing what you need to play

Before you begin playing *Vampire: The Requiem*, you need to gather a few items together.

- ✓ Your character, which you create with your imagination. (Don't forget your imagination!)
- ✓ A piece of paper called a *character sheet* that records all the information about your alter ego, a pencil to keep record of what happens to your persona, and your imagination. We provide a blank character sheet at the back of this book.
- ✓ Some 10-sided dice, which are available at most hobby shops in your town, or at game departments in large bookstores. You need as many as 10 of those dice for each player.
- ✓ *World of Darkness Rulebook* by White Wolf, which provides the fundamental rules on which all the games are based.

Beyond *Vampire: The Requiem For Dummies*, you can look to *Vampire: The Requiem* by White Wolf Publishing, which is jam-packed with ideas about the kinds of undead whom you can portray — and face — in your character's nightly adventures.



If you want to mix things up a little, you can play or face off against ghosts, werewolves, wizards, or other fantastic creatures, all of which exist in the World of Darkness, created by White Wolf. Your local hobby shop or bookstore carries other games called *Werewolf: The Forsaken* and *Mage: The Awakening*, both by White Wolf. These books are just like *Vampire*; they provide all the information and rules you need to play different kinds of modern monsters.



You absolutely need the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. It provides the fundamental rules on which all the games are based. If your character runs after an enemy, no matter whether you play a vampire, werewolf, or mage, the rules for deciding whether you catch him are in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. Everything starts with this book, and you should, too.

Introducing the Storyteller



One person in your group assumes more responsibility than the rest. He or she is called the *Storyteller*. The Storyteller learns most of the rules of the game and devises basic plots that occur to your group's characters. He doesn't have tyrannical control of your characters or what happens to them; their fate is still a shared phenomenon. Rather, the Storyteller decides in advance a basic series of events that can happen to your vampires, and the players react to those situations based on their characters' personalities.

For example, your vampires may learn that other cursed beings in the city have been turned out from their hiding places during the day and turned to ash. The local undead community is terrified. Maybe a monster-hunter has discovered vampires' existence and seeks to destroy them all. When the characters' repose is interrupted abruptly one day, how do they react when strangers pull them from their hiding places to be exposed to daylight? Do they attack the intruders? Try to discover who's behind it all? Talk to the intruders? Use terrifying powers to hide before being captured? Only you as a player get to decide, while the Storyteller knows what can happen next in the story based on your reactions.

A collective story is told when action and reaction create a chain of events. That chain could have one intended end to a range of possible finales. Maybe it turns out your characters survive the first effort to destroy them, and they learn that one of the local undead is actually behind it all. Now this betrayer must be found and confronted, but what's his secret and why would he dare go so far as to undo his own kind? That's for all the players and the Storyteller to decide.

The Storyteller, then, is like a ringmaster at a circus. He constantly introduces new acts and events to which everyone else responds. While each player creates and portrays only one character, the Storyteller creates and portrays everyone else whom your character meets. It's a big responsibility, but it's also lots of fun.



There is no winner or loser in a Storytelling game. The goal is for everyone to enjoy him or herself. Players should not be personally antagonistic toward each other, or toward the Storyteller, any more than they would in a game of Monopoly or Hearts. Everyone is in it to have a good time and tell a story. That doesn't necessarily mean that all your vampires always get along. They can squabble and feud or be the closest of allies. No matter what, though, players always need to respect each other and their characters so a good time is had by all.

REMEMBER



None of this is real

This goes without saying, but we have to say it. While you pretend to be one of the undead in a *Vampire* game, remember that it's all make-believe. You are not an eternal creature. You don't drink blood. You can't mesmerize others with a stare. It's a game. When you're done playing, everyone gets up and goes about his or her life. All the action that occurs in the story — from

saving people's lives, to attacking enemies, to seducing others — is all fiction. Players around the table should not touch or attack each other. You as players announce your characters' actions in a fabricated world, while you live in the real world. Everything else you read in this book about vampires, clans, powers, and legends has been made up. None of it is real.

Who Are the Undead?

We've all heard of Count Dracula and other vampires from books, movies, and comics. The classic vampire dresses in black, wears a cape, has a strange eastern European accent, keeps a twisted assistant who does his bidding, and exists in a remote castle, coming out by night to feed.

That's the cliché portrayal of vampires. Now imagine them to be ordinary people — a co-worker, neighbor, or yourself — turned into undead beings. You don't exist in Europe; you exist in the town or city where you live now, but you can't come out by day for fear of being destroyed by the sun. All the people who knew you either don't recognize you or fear you. And you can't fully control an overwhelming compulsion to kill, feed, and sustain yourself — on human blood.

The creatures of *Vampire: The Requiem* are a modern, convincing portrayal of what it might be like to be one of the undead in the modern, industrialized world. Imagine the possibilities of being a dark, brooding predator who seeks out prey among the world's bullies and criminals. Or you can put aside your regular routine for a few hours and imagine yourself as a sensual temptress who lures unsuspecting victims to your lair.

Most stories in the game involve a group of vampires — a *coterie* of Kindred — as opposed to the more solitary stalkers of seminal fiction. For the sake of the game, the good folks at White Wolf have adapted the cultural notions of the vampire to one more suited to a group of players, called a *troupe*. White Wolf also added its own mythologies and social structures to the mix to better highlight the highs and lows of the undead condition.



The origins of vampires

Most vampires believe that their kind have existed for as long as they have had men upon whom to prey. Others believe that the Kindred have been chosen to stalk the night by whatever power chose to create them. Still others believe that vampires are part of the natural but hidden order of the world, attaching vampiric (Kindred) origins to pagan beliefs and ancient mythologies. Many vampires don't care about the secret of their origins, believing the mystery to be as unknowable as the question of mortal life's origin. Whatever the truth, it is known that vampires have preyed upon the world since ancient times. Kindred society's admittedly fallible memory marks the undead as active during the height of Rome, if not before.

Belonging to a clan

Each Kindred is a member of a clan. A *clan* is a group of vampires who share common characteristics. When a vampire creates, or *Embraces*, a new vampire, the Embraced is of the same clan as the vampire who Embraces him or her. Each clan has its own powers, called *Disciplines*, that are reminiscent of "traditional" vampire powers, such as being able to mesmerize victims with a glance or assume the form of a wolf.



Part II covers the various clans and even provides some sample characters so you can get up and running quickly, if you want.

Choosing a covenant

Covenants are like clans in that they are distinctions of vampires. The difference between clan and covenant, however, is that one chooses his covenant. If clan is family, covenant is political, philosophical, or even quasi-religious membership. Indeed, some vampires choose to belong to no covenant at all, acknowledging no authority higher than themselves. Chapter 17 explores the Kindred covenants.



Creating Theme and Mood

While each story you and your troupe tell will have its own unique theme and mood, *Vampire* itself has a certain theme and mood built into it. You can certainly push the overarching themes and moods into the background, but they are present nevertheless.

In some senses, *Vampire*'s mood corresponds to key elements of the setting. The world is grim and brooding, with shadows hiding ugly secrets and terrible threats. Play this up as much as you want — make the game a fount of boundless angst if you choose. Secrets and espionage are part of the setting as well, so a conspiratorial mood is also very appropriate. Optimally, a blend of the two serves the game best.

Many Kindred define their existence as an unanswerable riddle: “A Beast I am, lest a Beast I become.” This idea makes morality the core theme of *Vampire*. How much leeway does a vampire allow her Beast in order to acknowledge it and yet keep it from overwhelming her? Here’s what you can expect in the World of Darkness:

- ✓ **Barbarism.** The world of vampires is like our own, but with a significant upturn in violence and decay. The streets are more brutal, with the desperate eyes of the unfortunate ever watchful for someone more privileged from whom they can steal to make their own bleak lives more comfortable.

- ✔ **Corruption.** The world is nasty and brutish, and anyone who can get ahead had best take the opportunity. This is a world of indulgent clergy, avaricious businessmen, cops looking for a payoff, and gangsters who have no other options than crime.
- ✔ **Medieval imagery.** Think buildings that soar heavenward, studded by gargoyles to scare away evil spirits that are far too real. Honest-to-goodness castles might exist in the World of Darkness where none stand in the real world. Moss and vines cling everywhere. Torches and candles light hallways and antechambers. Walls bear breaches, cracks, or other signs of disrepair. A sense of dread and fear looms visibly on the face of every passerby.

Separating the Myths from the Facts

Where does *Vampire*'s mythology diverge from popular belief? Where do the conceits ring true? The following statements outline real-world legends of the undead, clarifying their truth or falsity in the World of Darkness.

- ✔ **Vampires must sustain themselves on the blood of the living:** Fact. For the Kindred, the act of feeding is highly sensual. The vessel feels ecstatic when it happens, and the feeding vampire undergoes a heady rush. Certain vampires sustain their undeath by drinking the blood of animals, but rarely for long, as either their tastes or the needs of their cursed bodies force them to seek human blood.
- ✔ **Vampires are immortal:** Myth and fact. Although vampires do not appear to age, and some survive for centuries, the Kindred use the word *undead* rather than *immortal*. Vampirism is a curse, not a blessing. It does carry with it great power, but the state of being a vampire also brings with it numerous detriments, not the least of which include the internalized rage of the Beast and feeding on human blood.
- ✔ **A vampire's prey automatically becomes a vampire:** Myth. You do not *necessarily* become a vampire if you're bitten or killed by a vampire. It takes a conscious act of will, known as the Embrace, to create a new vampire. Indeed, a vampire leaves little to mark her passing if she is careful. All a vampire must do to hide the wound left by her feeding is to lick it when she's done.
- ✔ **Vampires have every manner of supernatural power, such as turning into animals, flying, and wielding the strength of a dozen men:** Fact. While these powers are not universal, vampires have unique abilities, known as Disciplines, that can grant individual undead capabilities such as these and more.

- ✔ **Vampires can have sex:** Fact. While the act of feeding replaces all physical urges, vampires can still indulge in sex and even take pleasure from it. Curiously, however, the emotional aspect of sex vanishes after the Embrace. A vampire might enjoy the physical sensation of sex, but no more than she enjoys a particularly savory smell or the touch of a luxurious fabric.
- ✔ **A wooden stake destroys vampires:** Myth. Vampires aren't destroyed upon being staked; they're held in stasis. A vampire's body slowly withers while trapped in this state, becoming ever more corpse-like.
- ✔ **Vampires don't show up like normal people on camera or in mirrors:** Fact. Vampires show up with their features obscured in photographic media (including video footage) and in mirrors. They can temporarily counteract this effect, but by "default," their features are obscured. The same is not true for voice recordings; vampires' voices are captured normally on voice recorders.
- ✔ **Sunlight burns vampires:** Fact. As part of their curse, vampires recoil at the touch of the sun, its vital rays scorching their undead flesh. Vampires typically spend the daylight hours in the cold sleep of undeath, and only the most resolute can shake off the weight of the day's forced slumber for even a short time.
- ✔ **Garlic and running water repel vampires:** Myth. Such notions are nothing more than old wives' tales, cultural biases, or perhaps the banes of certain bloodlines of Kindred.
- ✔ **Vampires are repulsed by crosses and other holy symbols:** Myth — almost. While such is not generally the case, the devout sometimes do affect the Kindred with miraculous aspects of their faith.
- ✔ **Vampires' souls are as dead as their bodies:** Myth and fact. A vampire may believe that he feels an emotion, but what he actually feels is the echo of mortal emotions that the remnants of his soul apply to his current experience. That is, a vampire who feels angry might indeed be angry at the subject of his ire, but the resonance of the emotion actually comes from some situation the vampire dealt with in life. This condition results in many strange situations. A vampire who has never experienced a given emotion before becoming Kindred might become confused, while a vampiric artist might create a work of art that is awkwardly devoid of any true emotional insight.

Getting Sources and Inspiration

Vampires have been part of people's storytelling traditions for hundreds of years. *Vampire* obviously concerns itself with the gothic tradition and a familiar

modern setting, so certain sources are more influential than others. Some titles listed in the following sections don't necessarily feature vampires but are thematically or dramatically suitable for consideration.

Looking to fiction for information

The following works of fiction are helpful as sources of information for your game:

- ✓ *The Vampire Chronicles* by Anne Rice. One of modern fiction's most popular entries in the vampire genre, these books are probably more widely read than their seminal forerunners. The first three titles in the series are the most suitable for *Vampire*, as later books in the series grow more epic in scale and more involved with the stranger fringes of the supernatural world.
- ✓ *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. This is the one that started it all, drawing on real-world history and eastern European lore to make the vampire a contemporary monster.
- ✓ "The Vampyre" by John Polidori. This short story arguably marked the first modern usage of the vampire as a sentient creature (as previous incarnations of vampires were little more than blood-drinking corpses). Possibly homoerotic, this story came out of a group of friends that included Lord Byron (upon whom the Vampyre, Lord Ruthven, is modeled), Percy Shelley, and Mary Shelley, who made no small contributions to the gothic and romantic movements themselves.
- ✓ "Carmilla" by J. Sheridan LeFanu. A wonderful example of the idea of vampires hiding among their prey, Carmilla (or Millarca, or...) moved in and out of the lives of her prey, coming back and reinventing herself as their memories left her depredations behind. "Carmilla" has sexual overtones in the same manner as Polidori's "The Vampyre," further establishing the vampire as a sensual metaphor.

The following works may also help inspire a mood for your game:

- ✓ *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* by Hunter S. Thompson
- ✓ *Trainspotting* and *Filth* by Irvine Welsh
- ✓ *The Bonfire of the Vanities* by Tom Wolfe
- ✓ *The Unburied* by Charles Palliser
- ✓ *The Great Gatsby* and *The Beautiful and Damned* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Following movies that matter

The following movies may provide both information and mood elements for your game:

- ✓ *Nosferatu*, either the original F. N. Murnau version featuring Max Schreck or the Werner Herzog version featuring Klaus Kinski. For weird, unsettling vampires with their own strangeness and derangement, you can't beat the tale of Count Orlock.
- ✓ *Shadow of the Vampire* starring John Malkovich and Willem Dafoe. Speaking of weirdness, this movie depicts the filming of the original *Nosferatu*, calling many elements of the production into question. Was the movie cursed? Did the supernatural really plague the crew? Was Schreck *really* a vampire himself?
- ✓ *The Lost Boys* starring Jason Patric, Kiefer Sutherland, Corey Haim, and Corey Feldman. While it occasionally lapses into lampoon and camp, this is a horror movie at heart, especially in regard to its treatment of vampires. It almost single-handedly establishes the modern vampire as a hip, cool, and counterculture icon, much like the rebels and antiheroes of the Romantic Movement.
- ✓ *Near Dark* starring Lance Henriksen and Bill Paxton. Want to be scared by vampires whose actions have no moral accountability? See this movie.
- ✓ *The Hunger* starring Catherine Deneuve and David Bowie. Bringing the vampire-as-sexual-metaphor notion to the big screen, this is one of the most sensual vampire movies ever made. It also opens with a cameo performance by Bauhaus, for those who like a bit of musical counterculture with their film.
- ✓ The film adaptation of Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, starring Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt, deserves mention, as does Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula*, but both works are mentioned in the fiction section.

To gain further insight into the personal politics and corruption typical among vampires, check out these movies: *Dangerous Liaisons*, *Blade Runner*, *Mulholland Drive*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Croupier*, *Casablanca*, and *Amadeus*.

Listening to vampire-style music

It gets touchy here: So many bands that are popular at any given moment vanish without a trace shortly after their popularity peaks. As such, we'll just touch on a few musical genres and discuss their applicability, listing a few key performers and composers.

- ✔ **Classical:** Any elder who has spent over a century among the undead probably has a greater knowledge of classical musical than popular music. With its intricate arrangements of instruments and careful composition, classical music is the archetypal sound of both refinement and conspiracy spanning centuries. As you might expect, requiems are excellent examples of these types of music. Recommended composers include Beethoven, Bach, Dvorak, and Mozart.
- ✔ **Punk:** Punk's original sound rose out of a desire to rebel against the status quo and be seen and heard doing it. While punk hasn't aged particularly gracefully, it has at least retained its hokey pop sensibilities, losing only the irony of such accessibility. Punk bands not to miss include the Sex Pistols, the Damned, the Misfits, and Black Flag.
- ✔ **Goth:** It doesn't get any more vampiric. Lyrics about bats, blood, and vampires flirt with religious, pagan, or even blasphemous overtones, all put up against a bombastic wall of sound that's heavy on percussion and discordant guitars. Key goth bands (even though many of them deny it) include the Sisters of Mercy, This Mortal Coil, Faith and the Muse, Switchblade Symphony, and Bauhaus.

Hey, who are we to tell you what music to listen to? No doubt you have your own musical tastes and your own ideas for using a certain song to highlight your *Vampire* experiences. You don't even need to confine yourself to "vampire music." For you, a certain Johnny Cash or Public Enemy song might suit a certain story or chronicle far better than Concrete Blonde's "Bloodletting" ever could.



