



CHAINING BEASTS

BY GAVIN BENNETT, TREVOR CHASE AND JAMES KILEY
VAMPIRE CREATED BY MARK REIN • HAGEN

CREDITS

Written by: Gavin Bennett, Trevor Chase and James Kiley. Vampire and the World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen.

Storyteller Game System Design: Mark Rein•Hagen

Developed by: James Kiley

Editor: Ken Cliffe

Art Director: Richard Thomas

Layout & Typesetting: Mike Chaney

Interior Art: Vince Locke, Andy Trabbold, and Kirk Van Wormer

Front Cover Art: Andy Trabbold

Front & Back Cover Design: Mike Chaney

SPECIAL THANKS:

Wil Flachsbart, Ellen Kiley and the Meatnog Gang



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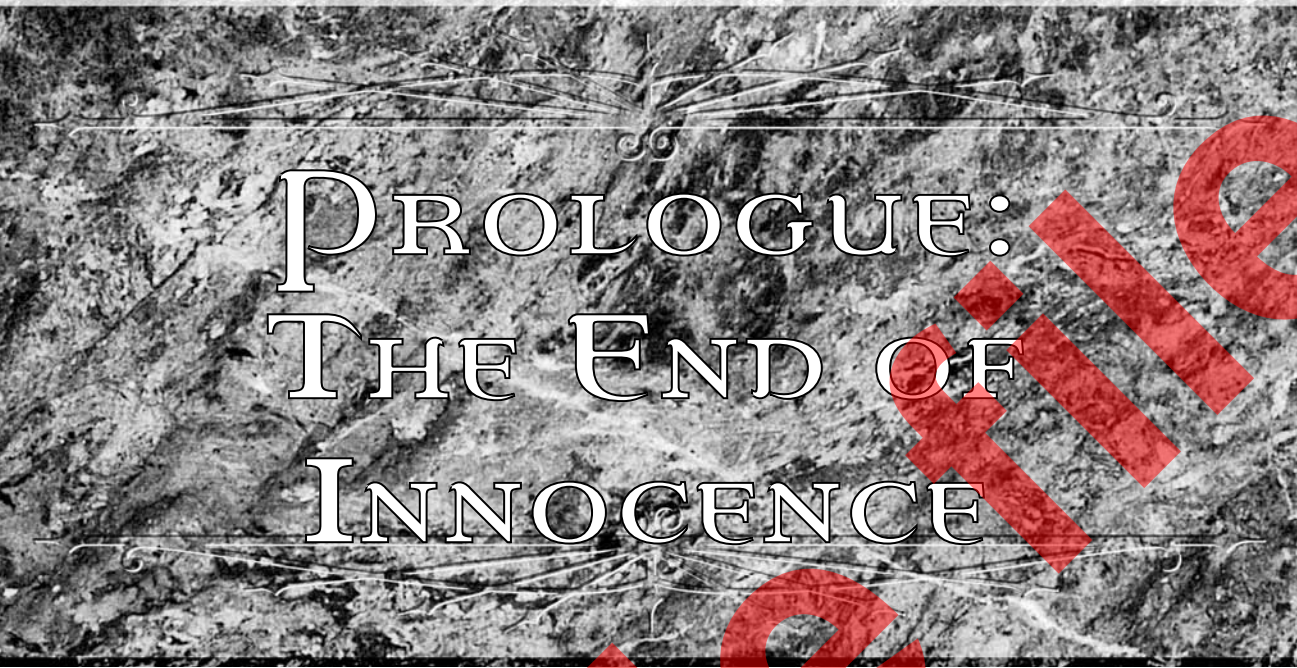
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PROLOGUE: THE END OF INNOCENCE

Something is eating babies in El Barrio.

Yes, you heard me right. Eating. As in, “Cracking the skulls open, slurping out the brains, sucking down the eyeballs like grapes, and leaving a mess of gnawed bones and skin.”

One of ours? Why, yes. Well, vampires don’t *usually* eat people. But a few do. The crazy fetishists choke it down and then vomit it up later. It doesn’t do them any good. It’s the act itself — the ritual — that sates whatever need they have.

Yeah, it is pretty “fucked up.” Damn, I can tell you’re just out of the ground, using talk like that. Once you haven’t used your dick for a decade, that kind of shit will fade.

So what’s next?

No, I’m asking you... what’s next?

Noches mios, I get the fucking pick of the litter every fucking time. Yeah, I said “fuck” so I can sound as fucking stupid as you, motherfucker.

Okay, try this. Someone is killing and eating kine babies in Sabbat stomping grounds... and it isn’t one of ours. And the bishop, she comes to me, and do you know what she says?

I didn’t think so. So I’m through asking questions. Get your Red Flower, man-cub. We’re going hunting.

On the way, I want you to use your eyes and ears and brain. Not like before I changed you. Consider this night a metaphor. A night of the soul, like when I was teaching you. We’re going to look into the abyss, we’re going to take a big swig, and then we’re going to spit it up onto this little bitch who hunts where and how he shouldn’t.

Take the machete. Strap it to your back. Hide it. No, no guns. No use, anyway. We don’t have enough money. And no, we’re not driving. We’re walking.

Damn, even dead, it feels like my clothes are sticking to me. Hot as a bitch. They say this summer’s not as warm as the last two. Not so’s you’d notice.

That’s okay. It’s like a little crucible of Hell. Suck it up, internalize it, and be ready to give it back to that *puta*.

See, his killing, it’s bad enough. Some of our kind don’t give a rat’s ass about yanking a bum out of a subway station and sucking him dry. It’s a waste of resources, but we have to be tolerant. We can forgive a stumble, just not a fall. Even our kind makes mistakes. It’s ones like this thing, though... still going through the old motions as he tries to cling to anything to stop the fall. The fall into the Beast’s mouth.

He probably thinks he’s helping people, the moron. Take a right on 110th, here.

How do I know he’s a “he”? Well, Agent, in my years as Chief of... ahh, I’ll give you this one. You’re young. It’s a “he” because they’re all “he’s.” He’s trying to hide what he’s become in who he was before, and destroying himself and everything around him in the process. I’ve seen it before.

Over to the side, into the shadows. Good. Let your skin kind of... go. Exactly. You’ve got a way with that. Even I can barely see you.

You see them all around. Adam’s blind, idiot children. We walk unseen in the spaces between. We don’t need some artificial Masquerade. It’s not necessary. We are *malanoches* — nightmares. We come as stealthy and silent as a dream, and we teach terrible lessons in our wake. But there’s nothing to be taught in what this one is doing. Turn up this alley.

Speak of the Devil. Here’s our purpose right here. It’s a bit of a distraction, but worth making a point.

The old gentlemen in the suit is Big Business. The ones you see in the news. He gets an eight-figure incentive bonus for



laying off 25% of his workforce. Then there's all his fraudulent accounting, but he's already set up a VP in front of the SEC train. He comes up here a couple times a week. It's the only time you'll see a Lexus here unless it's being stripped for parts.

The girl he's got pinned up against the wall — who knows? He calls them "filthy spic cunts." That's his thing. One of his "little" sins. Not so awful, I suppose. It's just that the \$5 bill he's shoved in her mouth came out of his employees' pockets.

Now wait. Wait until... there we go. Take down those \$5,000 pants, grease up that withered thing with spit, pry on the rubber and... that's it, shove it in hard, just like you do to your employees. You like the pain in her eyes, don't you?

You haven't seen anything yet. Watch and learn.

First, I call up a bit of blood into my palm. Now... you see that shadow stretching out, nuzzling forward like an eager dog? Here it comes, lapping at my hand. Now I tell the shadow to slither out, take that girl's blood the way it took mine.

Regrettable that she gets to escape this world unknowing, but even the mortals' God decreed death for whores.

You see what we're teaching him? You see him lose it as his \$5 fuck screams, withers and turns to a bloodless sack of skin with him still inside her? He fucks the rest of the world and drinks it dry. It's time he knew exactly what it feels like.

That's the fastest I've ever seen someone run with his pants around his ankles. He won't get it up again this side of five-figure therapy.

This is what we do. This is what we are. We are *angelos negros* — black angels. We're harbingers and icons of sin. We sit on the left side of depravity. The girl? A necessary evil.

Here we go. El Barrio. Spanish Harlem. East Side, *vato*. Just 'cause you're pale doesn't mean you have to be so damn white, *ese*. Oh, lighten up.

Okay, watch out. Here it comes, right on time. Step back and watch the bus. The old 10:12. Look at the dregs it vomits out. Each one bloated with anger, despair, sin, hopelessness.

That one... the one with the slumped shoulders and the dead eyes in the young face, almost like one of us. He's Anibal Gutierrez. He works at a convenience store 70 hours a week to support the girl he impregnated three years ago, and the brood she's popped out since. He's lucky tonight. Someone else got double shifts and he can come home early. Good, responsible husband. So young to be so responsible.

Such a dull, plodding life. Let's make it more interesting, hmm?

Watch this. This is a trick I learned from our brethren below. You must learn it someday, though it's not easy. In an instant, I change my looks, coarsen them, become stocky, grow a mustache. And now I step out, and brush past Anibal like so.

Did you see him flinch? Turn? But I was already gone. I moved faster than his conscious mind — what little he has — could register. But his inner eye saw his shift manager, who he despises, whose form I took.

A little nudge, that's all it takes. A little stick in the anthill of rage. No Cainite mind magic. A test, like the thousand mundane ones we face every day. He's free to shrug off the tension. Or more

likely he's free to go home and try to fill up his dead soul with *cerveza* and beat the shit out of his wife and children.

I know which one my money's on. Good *Catolico* that he is, perhaps he has a guardian angel to undo my work. That's okay. We don't tamper with the work of the Creator. We carry it out.

Unlike this fool we go to find.

In the old nights, this never would have happened. Not to this extent. But those times are gone. New York is crazy now. Ever since the Camarilla came and killed so many of us. Then there was that kine mayor. He thought he'd clean up the city. Sent the police turning over rocks they shouldn't have, got everything underneath squirming. Perfect for those of us who were left. Decades-old domains disrupted, food chains knotted up, tensions at crazy angles. We didn't care. We don't need domains. We eat where we want. Fewer street crimes, more police atrocities. It's all the same to us, as long as we've got a place to put the bodies.

That mayor, they call him the Rock now. But there are still some rocks he didn't turn over, some things still squirming in the deep dark. So occasionally, we have to be the exterminators.

You look confused. What's the problem?

Well, yeah, we're supposed to feed on mortals. But we're harvesters of their bodies and souls. That's the role you've been chosen to play.

Here we are. Finding this fool's haven was a piece of cake. I could have guessed even without asking the dwellers below. He leaves the lights on, on a weeknight, well after hours. Even the police should be able to solve this case.

Don't be so nervous. Yeah, it's a church. You think you're in the movies? Nothing's gonna happen. God isn't going to smite you with a lightning bolt. He's got a more important plan for you.

The door is locked, but that shouldn't stop you, right? You were jacking cars and up for B&E well before I found you.

Thank you. Now, be quiet when you open the door, and stick to the shadows.

It's been a while since I was in one of these places. Candelabra, apse, nave, pulpit.... Where's that kid screaming?

Hah! Yeah, that's him, and with the kid! Another collar with penitence issues. They make 'em from priests sometimes — always a mistake. There's that whole guilt thing, and the whole transubstantiation issue takes on... well, you see what the poor, deluded bastard's trying to do.

He's still hung up on his God. He knows he gets power from the blood, but rather than just accept it, he has to filter it through his old life, through his own ego.

So he figures if he can just transubstantiate it all, then it's like he's reenacting the Last Temptation or Supper or Eucharist or whatever. That he's really not killing them. He thinks he's saving them.

I won't even get into what goes through his head when he pukes up the chewed mess. What was that movie a while back? Yeah, *The Exorcist*.

Strange? Nah, pretty typical, actually. Guilt can be a bigger burden than the Curse. But not for us, of course.

What you're seeing, understand, is the Beast. It's the fate of every weakling in the Camarilla, with their Masquerades and

their talk of humanity. They're so stupid. It's like trying to catch a tiger in a paper bag.

This is what I've been trying to show you, so you don't end up the same. To master the Beast, you can't cage it, or nail it to some cross or pretend you're in control. It's like Strength in the Tarot. You can ride it, but you can never break it.

We know the Beast always wins, unless you understand and revere its master. So we pledge ourselves, body and soul, to the darkness. We don't stare into the abyss, we *are* the abyss. And if we accept it, swallow it deep enough, even the Beast gets lost till we decide to let it out.

Anyway, his little midnight Mass is almost over, and the child is about to be the wafer and wine.

Let's move.

Pretend to inhale, three shallow, three deep, like I showed you. Yeah. Yeah. Doesn't feel good, does it? That pins-and-needles feeling all over your body is the blood awakening your cold, dead skin.

Watch this. If you move your hands between the not-breaths, just so, the shadows come coiling round. They're expectant. Hungry. They know they're drinking pure 150-proof sin.

Don't underestimate him. He's one of them, but he's got Cain's blood same as you. They look like pussies, but they're tough as \$3 steaks.

Now here's what we're gonna do. Stay in the shadows and move to the vestibule. I'll step out and wrap the night around me, all dramatic-like. I'm gonna give him some song and dance about how I'm Satan come from the pit of Hell to claim the soul of the innocent. And while he's filled with doubt and the Beast starts clawing up, you move. Don't worry, he won't be looking at you. Call up the blood like I showed you and use the machete. You won't get much more than one or two chances.

Got it? Then go!

Not bad, but damn, he was strong!

Drink up before it all goes dry.

Better?

Okay, get the kid.

The kid. Get the kid.

What? We're taking it back to its mother.

No, we're not going to feed on it. Think. What have I been teaching you? What happens to the kid if you kill it now? Of course it dies, but I mean the essence, the soul?

It's a baby. It doesn't have the knowledge to cover its dick, the knowledge to wipe its own ass. Hello, Original Sin, anyone? It's an innocent. If it dies, it's saved. It gets its little wings and flies off to Heaven. Our master, the Watcher in the Black, goes hungry.

Support his head, like this.

If we let him live, he grows up, and every day his soul gets a little more stained. The world is a shithole, a spiritual toilet. By the time he's 12, he and his *vatos locos* are gonna have a record a mile long. Let him live. Let him bloat like a ripe fruit. Let him get so swollen with sin you could practically pop him. Then we come back for him. Then we harvest him for the Pit.



trabald



INTRODUCTION

THE DEATH OF MORALITY

Humanity. A guide to behavior for the undead. A fading memory of what it once meant to be alive. A fleeting concept to which vampires cling for fear of becoming mindless, ravening predators. There's something not quite right about the notion of humanity. There are plenty of mortals out there who can't abide by the strictures of being humane. Look at the evening news. People inflict crimes, indignities and the cruelest punishments upon each other all the time. What's good or decent or moral about them? Take an average mortal, give him eternal hunger, a mindless Beast and immortality, and never let him see the sun again. Then see how long he holds onto the ethical constraints of his daytime existence. Can he claim to be humane any longer?

For the rigors of eternal unlife, the shackles of Humanity as a moral code aren't quite right. How can human ethics persist for a being that no longer abides by the rules of the living? As long as the childer of Caine have fought to keep the Beast at bay, some have fallen from the way of Humanity to alternate moral paths. After all, why should beings that are no longer alive and human still pretend to be? There are countless Paths of Enlightenment — means by which the undead can struggle to retain their identities, if not their old morality, and stave off the Beast. **Chaining the Beast** looks closely at more than 20 of these vampire callings.

As much as **Vampire: The Masquerade** is a game for mature audiences, Paths of Enlightenment are not for the faint of heart. Paths challenge players and Storytellers to accurately portray characters who are *inhuman monsters*. Depicting these kinds of characters isn't easy or trivial, but the insights a troupe can gain from roleplaying paths can be invaluable. You get to truly explore the foreign existence of vampires; how they literally fail to remain human and become something else.

Players and Storytellers of **Mind's Eye Theatre** should get plenty out of **Chaining the Beast**, too. While this book isn't explicitly aimed at the live-action audience, it doesn't focus specifically on game-system material. It explores the depths of vampire consciousness, morality and identity — just what roleplaying the undead is all about, whether you're in a roleplaying or live-action game.

ENLIGHTENMENT AND MYSTERY

Chaining the Beast is intended as a sourcebook for both players and Storytellers. Players get a primer on running path-driven characters, and a good look at the rewards and challenges of doing so. They also receive guidelines to help portray the moral courses their characters take.

Storytellers get a tool set for depicting characters from the more esoteric Paths of Enlightenment, as well as guidelines on handling players with characters who answer various callings. Some paths are suitable for player use, while

others best serve Storyteller characters or the characters of experienced and mature players.

Chapter One: The Right Road Lost is an overview of Paths of Enlightenment in **Vampire**, including a look at where they generally came from, and which Kindred can use them.

Chapter Two: Rigors of the Way walks a Cainite (and player) through the disillusionment and degeneration that accompanies a plunge from Humanity onto a path, allowing a character to rise through the ranks of self-awareness.

Chapter Three: Paths of Enlightenment describes each of more than 20 paths in detail, including history, current events, ethics and morality.

Chapter Four: Knowing the Way has advice for Storytellers on subjects ranging from mentors to advancement along a path to ways of challenging followers to keeping players from abusing their characters' newfound dedication.

Appendix: Fellow Travelers contains descriptions and basic game information on different vampires who have resorted to morals beyond Humanity. As Storyteller, you can drop any of these characters into a chronicle and spin subplots around them. Some could also function as mentors to Cainites who are new to Paths of Enlightenment. Others might serve as fellow students or rivals on the same course.

THEMES

There are unspoken common threads throughout many of the Paths of Enlightenment. To some degree, they represent the vast unanswered questions of **Vampire** cosmology. As player or Storyteller, you may wish to take advantage of some of these themes and truisms to help define a character's philosophy.

Adam and Eve: The First Mortals play a remarkably minor role in most paths, which is strange. They are the parents of the Sire of all Vampires. They're the zero-th generation, as it were. If the biblical creation myth is to be believed, Adam and Eve are the direct, hands-on children of the Lord God Almighty. They're the bridge between vampires and God. So, what does their absence from a path mean? What does it say about vampire self-perception and origins?

Death: Not even vampires are sure where ordinary mortal souls go after death. Some might stick around as ghosts, and others could go to Hell. But the rest? Do they return to any "great cycle"? Do they just go into nothingness? As the undead, do vampires even have souls any longer? Are they lost, recycled, or sent to Heaven or Hell to allow the undead remains to persist on Earth? What does the relativity of death mean for beings seeking direction afterward?

Diablerie: For some paths, diablerie is the ultimate sin (just as murder is among mortals). Other paths accept killing one's own as a warrior's just reward or the ultimate honor paid to another Cainite. Scholars disagree as to what happens to the soul of a vampire taken by diablerie, or if that soul might even overpower its new body. What does a path's prohibition against or encouragement of feeding on other undead say about the morality of those who adhere

DISCLAIMER FOR THE MORALLY CONFUSED

You are not a vampire. You don't live by an inhuman moral code. The Paths of Enlightenment in this book are descriptions of the activities of wholly fictional creatures and characters. Even when you're roleplaying a character devoted to one of these practices, keep the real world and real morality in mind. These paths are not intended as any kind of behavioral suggestions for you. If living any of these tents seems like a good idea, make an appointment with a mental health professional.

to the course?

God: Who? We last heard from God either 2,000 or 10,000 years ago, as far as anybody can tell. If He really did curse the First Vampire, where's He been since? Can the Kindred get His attention? Is He doing all this to them on purpose? Or does God even factor into a Cainite's existence? He supposedly created man in His own image, after all. If the undead are no longer "man," does biblical justice even apply to them?

Golconda: Some paths suggest that there is a metaphysical point of moral perfection, a stage of enlightenment at which human, vampire and Beast all stand on equal footing. Other paths consider the concept to be a blasphemy concocted to fool the weak. It isn't as though there's any proof either way; the existence of Golconda is a matter of faith. The question of whether particular paths are best suited to reach Golconda or find another way is a matter of debate, to say the least. The question is, what does a vampire seek at the end of his path? Is there a metaphysical destination or is walking the road its own reward?

Heaven: In ways that are perhaps more foreign to vampires than the existence of God, the existence of Heaven is (pardon the pun) up in the air. Some Cainite scholars posit that the world is decayed because, while there is a Hell, there is no Heaven. Few paths address the existence of Heaven, except insofar as it corresponds to (or is a metaphor for) Golconda. But what if Heaven does exist? Is salvation even possible for vampires, despite the legends of Golconda? Do creatures who turn to paths turn their back on forgiveness? Is accepting the Curse of Caine worse than having been afflicted with it?

Hell: It's depressing yet somehow unsurprising that while many Cainites are unsure of the existence and nature of God and Heaven, some are certain about Hell and its inhabitants. The Path of Revelations glories in contact with Hell, while most other followings eschew demonic realms. In most cases, Cainites avoid Hell not because they're afraid of its evil or distance from God, but because they fear being enslaved or losing what little soul they have left. But can even demons find redemption if they only seek it?

USING PATHS

Paths of Enlightenment are not for every player, nor are they for every troupe. Players who find a certain poignancy to the struggle for Humanity may find that paths go too

far. A vampire on a Path of Enlightenment has decided that Humanity just doesn't work for him. As a result, the character is likely to engage in activities that certain groups may find distasteful. A level of discomfort is to be expected whenever these concepts show up in a game. After all, we are humans, and most of us believe that we follow fairly conventional moral schemes.

Paths of Enlightenment aren't for troupes with immature players. Some troupes may have a hard time getting past problems with characters on the Path of Doing Whatever I Damn Well Please. This problem is addressed in Chapter Four, but if you as Storyteller aren't confident that a player can handle a path, you're encouraged to veto it.

Indeed, your entire troupe should probably sit down and discuss Paths of Enlightenment as soon as they become a possible issue in your game. Players may have points of discomfort — perhaps they don't mind violent murderers such as characters on the Path of Blood, but they may find Cathari (who take pleasure in flesh, drugs and other sorts of debauchery) wholly unpalatable. Pick a level of play that makes everyone comfortable with the chronicle.

As part of that discussion, be sure to talk about the appropriate level of roleplaying that the troupe wants to explore. One group may prefer to portray every event explicitly, including torture, sex and abuse, while another troupe might agree that the Storyteller can gloss over such events. ("You torture one another for hours, and you learn that she has a higher pain threshold than you do.").

Lastly, as silly as it might sound, be aware of any listeners when you play. Are you gaming in someone's dining room? Keep the gore and vileness to a minimum. Are there small children around? They may not be able to distinguish descriptions of depravity in a game from conversations about real life. Use your brain. Try not to offend those nearby who don't take part in your game, or who have little to no idea what you're up to.

SOURCE MATERIALS

There's really no limit to the fiction available that describes characters who have been forced by environment or circumstance to adopt a code of morality unlike our own. Some examples include:

Ronin. A film about what happens to old spies who have nothing left after the conflict that had been the core of their lives collapses from under them. Surely you can imagine some vampiric parallels.

The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, by Steven R. Donaldson. Like a follower of the Path of Paradox, Thomas Covenant does not quite accept the reality of the world in which he finds himself, and commits crimes against its inhabitants as a result.

Schindler's List. Oskar Schindler simply cannot adhere to the apparently common and everyday morality of Nazi Germany. He must transcend the behavior of those around him in order to adhere to a higher morality and to retain his sanity.

Blade Runner. There's a group of people out there who aren't human, but who believe themselves to be. Then there's the protagonist who believes himself to be essentially human, and his job is to kill the first group. But his job grinds away his humanity. Or maybe he isn't human, after all.

The Elric series, by Michael Moorcock. Elric of Melnibone is the prince of an ancient and decadent society. He's willing to make bargains with demons, kill casually and wield a soul-drinking sword, all in order to acquire power and to ostensibly help his people.

The Amber series, by Roger Zelazny. There's this family, see, full of insanely powerful immortals. And to them, our world is just a shadow of their true world, and we only barely exist as independent beings. Begin.

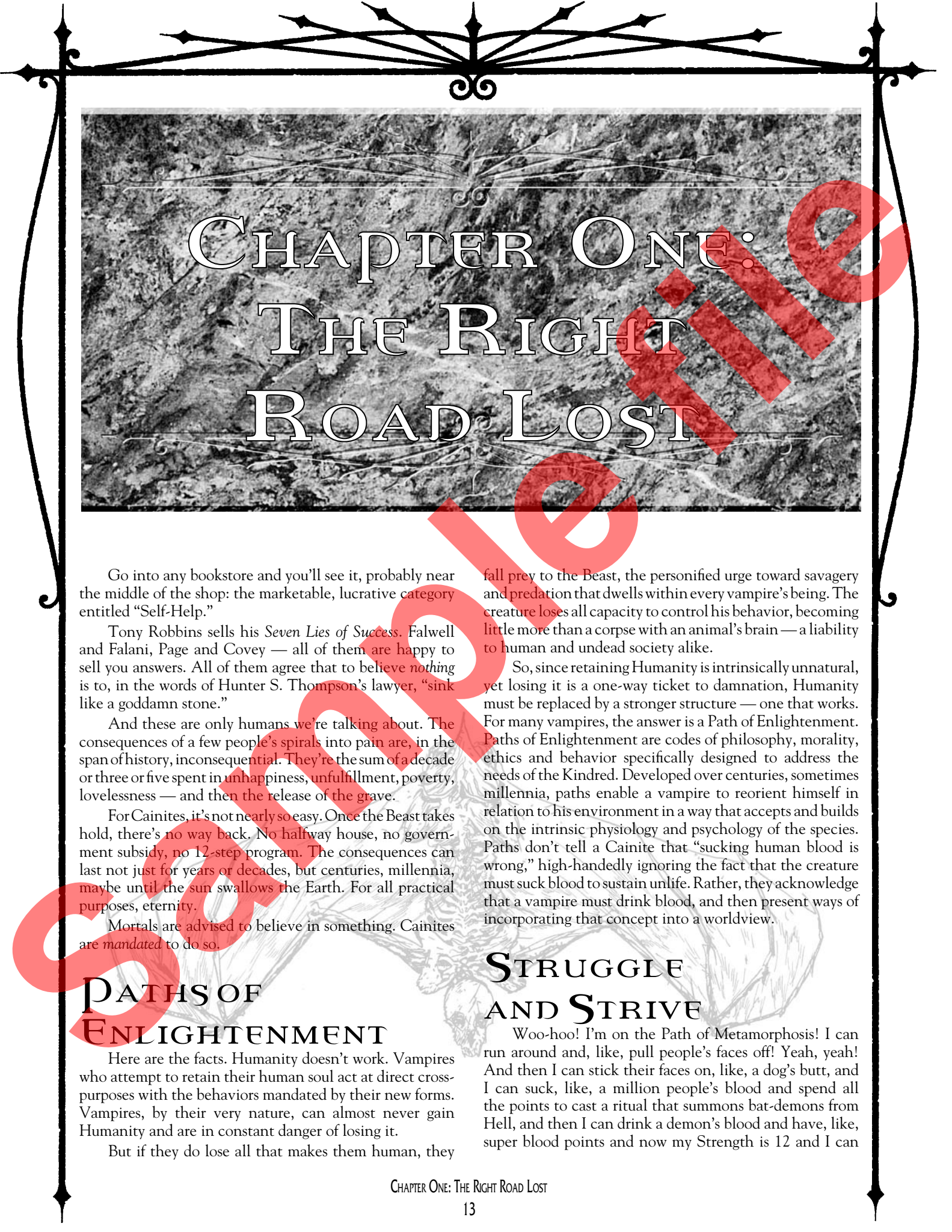
Apocalypse Now. Captain Willard is sent into the jungle with orders to kill the apparently insane Colonel Kurtz, who has set himself up as a god in Cambodia. Madness surrounds Willard and slowly changes his perceptions and environment until he begins to abandon his sanity and become more like Colonel Kurtz.

The Godfather. Having left his family's criminal life behind to attempt to join the world of ordinary folks, Michael Corleone is drawn back in against his will. By the movie's conclusion, he has abandoned the life he craves and accepted the Mafia's code of ethics.

Time Enough for Love, et al, Robert Heinlein. This quasi-series of science-fiction novels takes place in a future distant enough that mores regarding sex and incest are quite different from our own. The series smacks a little too much of Heinlein-as-dirty-old-man, but it's a quick read.



trabbold



CHAPTER ONE: THE RIGHT ROAD LOST

Go into any bookstore and you'll see it, probably near the middle of the shop: the marketable, lucrative category entitled "Self-Help."

Tony Robbins sells his *Seven Lies of Success*. Falwell and Falani, Page and Covey — all of them are happy to sell you answers. All of them agree that to believe *nothing* is to, in the words of Hunter S. Thompson's lawyer, "sink like a goddamn stone."

And these are only humans we're talking about. The consequences of a few people's spirals into pain are, in the span of history, inconsequential. They're the sum of a decade or three or five spent in unhappiness, unfulfillment, poverty, lovelessness — and then the release of the grave.

For Cainites, it's not nearly so easy. Once the Beast takes hold, there's no way back. No halfway house, no government subsidy, no 12-step program. The consequences can last not just for years or decades, but centuries, millennia, maybe until the sun swallows the Earth. For all practical purposes, eternity.

Mortals are advised to believe in something. Cainites are mandated to do so.

PATHS OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Here are the facts. Humanity doesn't work. Vampires who attempt to retain their human soul act at direct cross-purposes with the behaviors mandated by their new forms. Vampires, by their very nature, can almost never gain Humanity and are in constant danger of losing it.

But if they do lose all that makes them human, they

fall prey to the Beast, the personified urge toward savagery and predation that dwells within every vampire's being. The creature loses all capacity to control his behavior, becoming little more than a corpse with an animal's brain — a liability to human and undead society alike.

So, since retaining Humanity is intrinsically unnatural, yet losing it is a one-way ticket to damnation, Humanity must be replaced by a stronger structure — one that works. For many vampires, the answer is a Path of Enlightenment. Paths of Enlightenment are codes of philosophy, morality, ethics and behavior specifically designed to address the needs of the Kindred. Developed over centuries, sometimes millennia, paths enable a vampire to reorient himself in relation to his environment in a way that accepts and builds on the intrinsic physiology and psychology of the species. Paths don't tell a Cainite that "sucking human blood is wrong," high-handedly ignoring the fact that the creature must suck blood to sustain unlife. Rather, they acknowledge that a vampire must drink blood, and then present ways of incorporating that concept into a worldview.

STRUGGLE AND STRIVE

Woo-hoo! I'm on the Path of Metamorphosis! I can run around and, like, pull people's faces off! Yeah, yeah! And then I can stick their faces on, like, a dog's butt, and I can suck, like, a million people's blood and spend all the points to cast a ritual that summons bat-demons from Hell, and then I can drink a demon's blood and have, like, super blood points and now my Strength is 12 and I can