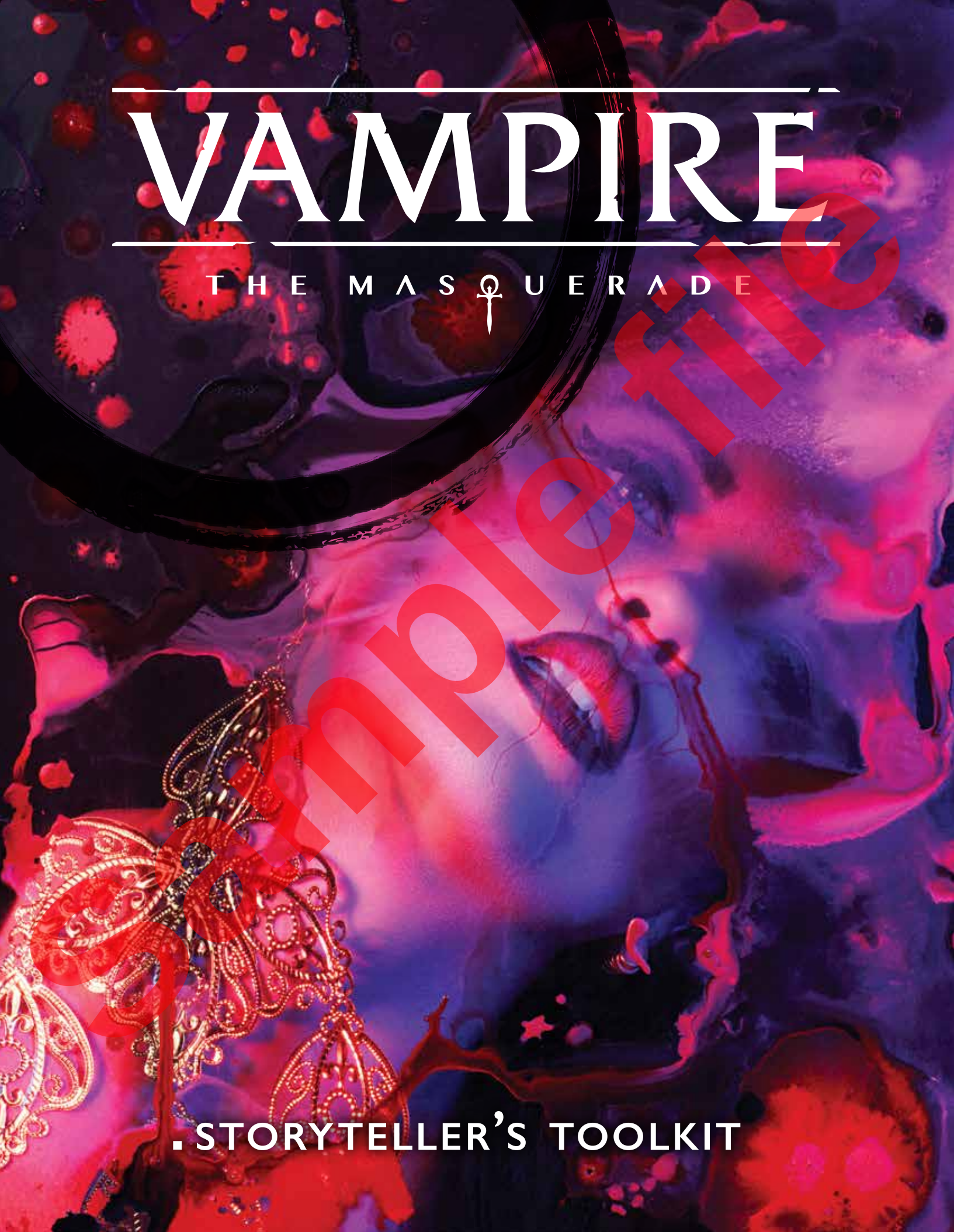


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Breathing Life into Your Chronicle

The Vampire core book provides a lot of helpful advice on crafting and telling stories set in the World of Darkness. However, what does it feel like to really live in the World of Darkness? Part of the art of Storytelling is to fire the imaginations of your players, transporting them and immersing them in the game world. The more detail and description you can offer, the easier it will be for your troupe to think and act in character. The more real you can make the world, the more invested the players will become in its future.

Sights

In every scene, to give each player a similar sense of place, it is important to describe the environment surrounding their characters. Where are the entrances and exits? Are there obstacles or weapons within sight, that might be relevant if things turn violent? Are there any deep shadows or other hiding places? Are there signs stating any important information? Are there other objects in the room which might invite curiosity? If there are other people present, what do they look like? Are they displaying any clear modes of behaviour, such as fear, deference, or aggression? Preparing these sorts of details will help bring the scene to life, even if these details may not be directly relevant to your story.

Documents & Props

Physical objects are good visual aids and can provide a great tactile element to your games. If you are playing in a well-known town or city, providing maps, guidebooks or local tourist information is an easy step that can give the players a real sense of place.

If you have time to make the effort, you could consider generating documents that are directly relevant to your story. For example, if a player character receives a letter in your game, then actually writing out the letter authentically to put in the hands of that player will leave a strong impression. Similarly, preparing telegrams, emails, handwritten notes, diary excerpts, etc. for your players to come across serves to help increase their immersion. If your players are willing, you can even encourage they write back or engage in ongoing correspondence with the other characters of the game world.

Although table-top role-playing largely takes place in your troupe's collective imagination, and there is no requirement to resemble your character physically, some players – particularly if they have some difficulty acting 'in character' – may find benefit in adopting simple props that bring out their fictional persona. It doesn't have to be much – a hat, a wig, some jewellery, a pipe or cigarette holder, glasses or a monocle – whatever helps the troupe embrace the character.

LIVE ACTION ROLE-PLAYING

Live action role-playing (LARP) is a sister activity to tabletop role-playing that fully embraces the physicality of the game world and its characters. Rather than describing the actions of your character, to be played in the imaginations of the troupe, you physically act out your wishes yourself, for real. In live games players dress to resemble their characters and are usually required to remain 'in character' at all times.

Vampire: The Masquerade has a long and acclaimed associated history of live role-playing. The early adoption and conversion of the World of Darkness by LARP enthusiasts led to the creation of the Mind's Eye Theatre (MET) rules system and the founding of many supporting fan clubs such as the Camarilla and One World by Night. Several versions of the MET system have been published over the years by White Wolf and By Night Studios, and player networks have expanded to allow characters and chronicles to cross national and international borders. Games continue worldwide to this day, with major events in the calendar – such as the annual Grand Masquerade in New Orleans – planned and supported by White Wolf themselves.

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Smells

A more visceral way to describe a scene is to discuss what the characters can smell. A garage may reek of grease and engine oil. In a hospital, an antiseptic odour may mask more unpleasant notes of illness, disease and human effluent. A stately home may be unusually dusty, or it may be spotless with a strong smell of lacquer and furniture polish. In an abattoir or at a murder scene the air will be filled with the unmistakable, coppery fragrance of freshly spilled blood. In a public sewer, every breath will be filled with the vilest smells imaginable and may require a test to overcome.

Sounds

Similarly, it is useful to talk about what the characters can hear. If the location is secluded and relatively silent, every small noise in the background will be much more accentuated, whether it is simply the ambient groans of an old house, the lilt of voices in another room, distant dogs barking, or the wailing of sirens in the distance. If the characters are in a public or crowded place, it may instead be quite difficult to hear what is going on. Heavy background noise or loud music may be good for masking sensitive conversation, but it also makes it easier for others to sneak up or even ambush them.

Music, Light & Atmosphere

Music in particular can do a lot to bring a sense of atmosphere to your games. Rather then telling players that they can hear music, why not actually play that music? Even if music is not an integral part of the scene, putting on some music in the background while you play Vampire can immediately shift the mood of the room in a direction that serves your Storytelling. Using specific film or TV soundtracks can also be a shortcut to generating an appropriate tone to suit your needs.

If you actively put playlists or soundscapes together for your games, genuine silence also becomes a powerful tool, giving more power to non-player character speeches, or allowing you to linger in specific details of scenes without any other distractions. Silence is also a helpful precursor to a jump scare (see below).

Light can also be a powerful way to control the mood of your games. Given that the scenes of Vampire almost exclusively take place a night, it can feel more natural to play at night. If you are playing Vampire at home, you could experiment with candles, dimmer switches or colour-change lightbulbs to help immerse your players and make each scene of your scenes feel like they are set in different locations.



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