



C L A N B O O K :

Gangrel

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SPECIAL THANKS

Tim "Snake Fighting" **Avers**, is very scary fighting snake rolled up newspaper setting on fire.

Ken "Out-of-Towner" **Cliffe**, for continuing his habit of party-dodging.

Rebecca "Nutritionist" **Schaefer**, for dragging Chad out of the damn house before he ate one more bowl.

Brian "Joe Six-Pack" **Glass**, for bringing random beer in the homemade carrying case.

GET BENT

The raw, bone-chilling, ache-inducing, wet-ass, pre-SuperBowl weather.



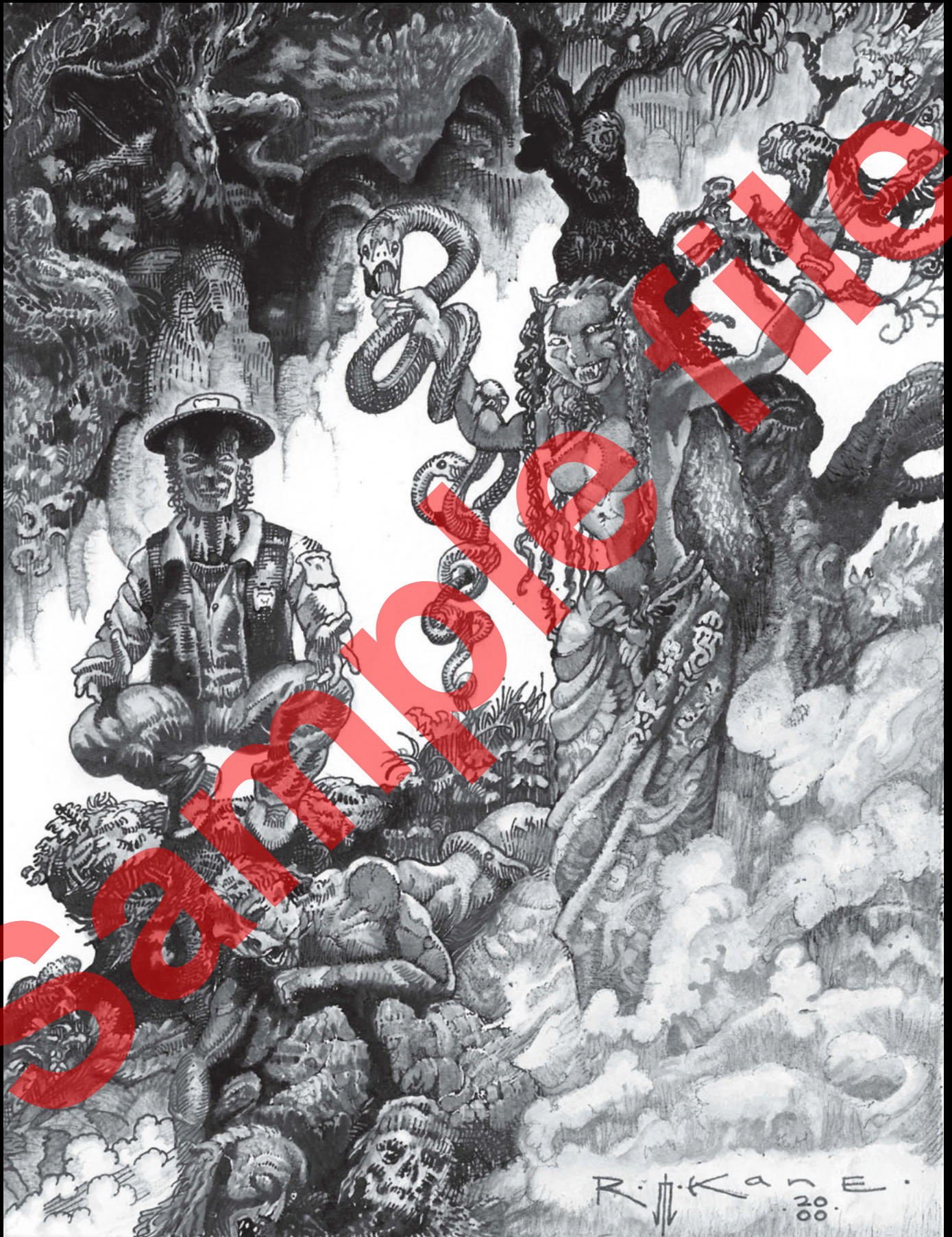
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AFTERMATH OF INDEPENDENCE

My shitkicker boots make a shuffle-then-thump sound on the city sidewalk. The sound isn't alien — they do have cement where I'm from. What's fascinating is the chorus of echoes my footsteps set off, reverberating through this corridor of glass and steel. If I stomp real good and listen real close, I can catch the echo whizzing back and forth across the street three times before the noise of the city overwhelms it. That game was fun, until the delivery truck roared past.

I must look like a rube, or worse, a cheap tourist. Who else would be walking around downtown on a Wednesday night with an armload of white-handled shopping bags, a baseball cap and these boots? It's a good thing I pay cash. The department store clerks might think I'd stolen a credit card. I don't care where they think the cash came from, so long as they don't sic the rent-a-cops on me. That would get complicated.

I might as well be a tourist. I only come into town twice a year to pick up consumables, comestibles and indispensable. On my way back to the subway station, I mentally check through my purchases. It would suck to get halfway home before I realized I'd forgotten something. Five pairs of jeans — I'm hard on denim. One pair of chinos, which pass for dressed up. Three white dress shirts, five flannel shirts, needles, buttons, thread — I may be a walking stereotype, but I can and do sew on my own buttons, thank you. Batteries, all shapes and sizes. Good soap, deodorant, and cologne — the trick to smelling like a human. People aren't stupid. Even if they don't know they can, they can smell a predator, and then they get panicky. Camouflage is the key. Not just sight, but smell and sound, too. That's why I bother to juggle this last bag with a greasy burger and fries — who expects to see a vampire carting around fast food?

Another two blocks to the subway, 45 minutes underground, then another eight blocks to the parking lot where I left my van. I hate leaving it so far away — it's got everything I own in it — but it isn't exactly built for city driving. My pride and joy is a '69 Chev Sportsvan — no power brakes, no power steering, and it might as well be built out of cast iron. I once hit a really pissed-off

werewolf with it at about 60 miles an hour, and it felt like I'd gone over a speed bump. I call them werewolves, and not because I think that's what the furry bastards prefer to be called, but because when I see one slaving in the moonlight, I think, "Oh, fuck, werewolf!" and not "Oh, fuck, Lupine!" He did leave a dent in my bumper, though.

One more block. I've got it pretty good, all things considered. I'm about the only Gangrel I know with a steady job. It's not much — I'm just the night ranger at the National Park. I wish they'd come up with a better job title than that, because I've heard all the '80s guitar-rock jokes I can take. Still, the job means a small but steady paycheck and a secluded place to park my van on the grounds. Management becomes very understanding of your odd schedule when the senator comes for a midnight nature walk, and his whiny kids get to see the deer and hear the wolves howl no matter how much noise they make tromping through the forest. I know there are werewolves around, but so far they've left me alone. I guess we've got an understanding in place — as long as I don't fang the kiddies who visit the park or devour wolf cubs, they'll turn a blind eye when the occasional poacher goes missing, or adventurous teens and lonely single mothers leave a little paler than they came in.

The mouth of a dark alley looms ahead, mid-block. As I pass, a quick slither of movement catches my eye. I freeze, and the shape freezes too. A voice that sounds like it's been scraped from the bottom of a barrel drifts to my ears. "Everett." I know that voice.

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I'm lying on the forest floor, face pressed into the rotting leaves and twigs. It's night, but the usual woodland sounds are hushed — something's on the hunt. In fact, she's standing right over me, her clawed feet just inches from my face.

She's been following me for some time now. I've seen her every couple nights for the past few weeks. I thought maybe she wanted to hook up. When I finally got the pluck to introduce myself, it turned out that what she really wanted to do was chase me through the forest until I died. So here I am, watching my blood soak into the humus, wondering, if this is what the bitch does for foreplay...

Then I can hear a new noise. I can't lift my head to see, but it sounds like booted feet, not bare and clawed like hers. For a wild moment, I imagine an ax-toting ranger come to rescue me, but the boots come to a stop not far from her and stay put. The man's gravelly voice sinks quickly to my level. "This is him?"

Her feet turn to face him, as I imagine the rest of her does. "Yep."

There's a grunt from above. "Doesn't look too likely. I wouldn't pick him." I am strangely offended.

My soon-to-be-murderer is patient. "I didn't ask you to approve him, Sheperd. I asked you to help me stand the watch."

The man, Sheperd, I guess, squats down, taking some time to fold his bulk down low enough to look at my face. He's none too pleasant to look at — I wish he'd stayed standing. "You've beat him up pretty good, Jane. Think he'll make it?"

Her answer is couched in an amused tone. "I needed to make sure he wasn't the type to roll over and die. He'll be fine. They all make it unless you kill them outright beforehand, stupid." I fail to see the humor in the current situation,