



Ethan & Hamza

“Me and Hamza? Yeah, we’re best friends. We’re never out of each others’ sight. Got a problem with that?”

“Ethan is jock-bro with pasta for brains and I love him more than any other dude on the planet.”

“We’re not monsters. Okay fine, we’re really trying not to be monsters.”

“I mean, there’s room for more on the bed...”

Affiliation: Thin-blood fledglings, no sect

Ethan & Hamza seem to be a duo straight out of a young adult-comedy show: varsity-swimmer Ethan and geeky digital artist Hamza, thrown together as roommates during their freshman year of college, whose friendship then blossoms and transforms into an unshakeable bond over their academic life.

Except that their story took a darker turn. At the end of their junior year, the openly bisexual Hamza and the sexually-curious Ethan, already enmeshed in romantic tension, brought a strange, alluring woman back to their dorm. The sex was

novel, kinky—and utterly transformative. The next night, the pair found themselves overcome with an overwhelming Hunger for blood. The woman was nowhere to be seen.

In their newfound, initial blood-frenzy, the pair drank deeply from the visiting girlfriend of one of their floormates—and in a panic, left her for dead in a hidden corner on the campus grounds. When the guilt-ridden duo returned later that night, the body had vanished.

The pair bumbled their way through their first months as Kindred. As thin-bloods, they’ve managed to maintain some of their mortal, collegiate, life. In vampire society, however, they’ve made few connections, let alone allies. Unfortunately, they’ve also somehow annoyed a handful of local figures in Kindred society.

It’s now Ethan and Hamza’s final year at college. With vampirism, possible enemies, and only a hazy conception of what the future holds, the pair have become even more inseparable. Are they best friends? Dating? Fuckbuddies? Even they don’t know. What they do know is that they have to rely on each other to make it through the upcoming nights.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools:

Ethan: Physical 5, Social 4, Mental 3.

Hamza: Physical 3, Social 4, Mental 5

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools:

Ethan: Athletics 5, Insight 4, Brawl 4.

Hamza: Subterfuge 5, Craft (Drawing) 4, Technology 4

Disciplines: none

Appearance

At his university, Ethan fits the archetypal “jock” look: Ethan is a muscular, white man with red hair in his early twenties, and often wears either athletic gear or university-branded apparel. He has a light dusting of freckles on his face and startlingly green

A LETTER HANDWRITTEN IN CRIMSON INK BY A TREMERE WARLOCK, DELIVERED
BY A STRANGELY VACANT GHOUL

My Dear Rose,

May I take a moment to enthuse about how pleasant it was to make your acquaintance at our last social gathering? I seldom have the pleasure of such inspiring company. Your wit, your knowledge of the world, your keen observations, and other amiable qualities (with which I shall not bore you by repeating) were a true delight. You are a credit to your clan, and indeed, to Kindred society as a whole in our humble city.

May I be so bold as to request the pleasure of your company on the night of the 15th? My Sire is hosting a ball, and you would honour me as my companion for the evening.

If you condescend to grant me this honour, you may simply hand a note to this ghoul, who will seek me out. He will dissolve within the hour if you do not, whereupon I will graciously accept your polite refusal of me and refrain from future overtures.

Your servant,

XXX

A Voice Message (Perhaps on an Old-Fashioned Cassette Tape?)
From a Nosferatu Ancilla

You don't know me. It is unlikely you've even heard of me. The rest of Kindred society don't like to talk about topics they consider unclean.

Apologies, that was not an auspicious start to what I'm hoping will be a pleasant message. Do not be alarmed. I simply meant to convey that I'm going to keep my identity shrouded for a little while longer. Forgive me, but that is a precaution I'm accustomed to taking—please excuse this lowly Sewer Rat her faults!

You see I have grown to...admire you from afar. Your grace. Your stunning competence. The way your hair moves in the breeze. The way your voice resonates across open spaces. The way your fingers...no that's verging on what the kine might call "creepy"...

Ah...now I fear that you're picturing some sort of lecher stalking you from the darkness, fondling herself while leering at your every movement. I don't really have a way of disabusing you from this notion apart from these mere words! I am no pervert, using the shadows to mask my dark desires. I am simply...

A woman. A vampire, yes, a cured one, yes...but still just a woman. I have not fallen so far that I don't consider myself a woman anymore. Or so I'd like to think anyway.

I am a woman, admiring you from afar and I would like to continue to do so for a little while longer—just a little while longer—before making myself known to you.

Because in the twisted, blackened heart that languishes in the prison of my ribcage, I have finally felt the blush of...dare I say...love?

Rules of Desire

Most stories of romance require nothing more than the basic rules of **Vampire: The Masquerade**. The Storyteller should review these optional abilities and Advantages from the perspective of how they want the game to be focused. Using or not using any of them helps make the game into the experience you want it to be.

If you're uncertain about a specific mechanic, discuss it among the troupe and get a feel for how you see it impacting the game. You can then decide together whether to use it or not.

Merits and Flaws

Each of these merits and flaws have been designed to allow for specific types of **Vampire** play.

Looks

The way you want to play sex varies wildly between different chronicles and troupes. Some prefer to fade to black, others focus on the most vampiric aspects of mutual blood drinking. This merit is designed to allow for more mortal-style sex.

•• OR •••• **UP ALL NIGHT**

Not all Kindred resemble walking corpses as they lose themselves to the Beast. For purposes of the Blush of Life, eating or drinking, and sexual intercourse, treat your Humanity score as one point higher than it is (maximum 10), or two points higher if this merit was purchased for 4 dots. Nosferatu cannot select this merit, and Hecata can only select it as a two-dot merit. This merit doesn't combine with others that treat your Humanity as higher: if you have multiple ways to treat your humanity as higher than it is, choose the most effective one in any situation.

Psychological

Some stories of desire include a fixation on or obsession with another character. The merits below allow you to portray obsessed characters. Work

with the storyteller to determine when a new story begins based on the narrative being told and your intentions with the character.

• **SOOTHED BEAST**

Choose a storyteller character as your obsession. Once per session when in the presence of your obsession, you can choose to ignore one Bestial Failure or Messy Critical. If this character dies you immediately gain three Stains, but can choose a new obsession at the beginning of the next session.

• **FALSE LOVE**

Choose a storyteller character as your obsession. When in their presence, treat your Humanity as one dot higher (max 10) for purposes of the Blush of Life, eating or drinking, and sexual intercourse. If this character dies you immediately gain three Stains, but can choose a new obsession at the beginning of the next session. This merit doesn't combine with others that treat your Humanity as higher: if you have multiple ways to treat your humanity as higher than it is, choose the most effective one in any situation.

Supernatural

The Blood Bond is in many ways the antithesis of love. Instead of genuine emotion, the Blood enforces its own affiliations in your mind. Because of this, the Blood Bond may create any number of complicated situations in stories of romance.

TWO MASTERS (• FLAW)

You can be Blood Bound to two individuals at the same time. This may cause no end of trouble if your character is prone to drinking the Blood of other Kindred for recreational reasons. The Storyteller should disallow this Flaw if Blood Bonds are unlikely to be an issue for the player character.

Disciplines

Players may find the following options useful in telling stories of romance, tragedy, and personal horror. Note Le Sang de l'Amor was previously published in Blood Sigils, but it's too appropriate to not include here.

Forbidden Love

Otherwise known as “star-crossed lovers”, the characters in “Forbidden Love” are deeply smitten with each other, and probably there would be no issues with their romance if it not for one big obstacle. Their sects are sworn enemies, one of them is promised to another, they’ve taken vows of celibacy, or their relationship is considered to be against the law in the time and place where they live because of their gender or skin tone. The whole world seems to be against them — making their love so much more intense and their stolen moments all the more enchanting.

This type of romance is great for tension and suspense, as the insurmountable odds keep the romance exciting without any of the everyday difficulties of a real relationship. It lends itself well to historical settings and settings where society is generally very formal.

Example

Petrus and Marcus belong to the same monastic order in the late 1500s. Their friendship has been allowed to blossom but their love is not accepted by the order or their faith. When Petrus is given the Embrace, he thinks they can finally be together. But Marcus is unwilling to give himself to the Devil for the sake of love, and their relationship remains impossible.

Hook

For a sweet side quest with a tragic twist, let the players’ characters think the lovers are headed towards Happily Ever After and get them to help the lovers get together — only for it to end with terrible consequences for everyone involved.

Scenes

- The lovers meet for the first time. It could be Love at First Sight (see Additional Tropes) or it could be the first sparks that light the fire. They may not know that they are supposed to be enemies initially.
- The lovers share a stolen moment, but are almost discovered and have to focus on making their escape in separate directions.

- The lovers gain an ally who promises to help them but, through malice or clumsiness, only makes their situation worse.
- One of the lovers gets caught by the allies of the other and taken prisoner. It’s up to their partner to choose between love and loyalty.

Tips

- To keep the stakes high, make sure the outcome of the lovers getting each other will be catastrophic and that the reasons they can’t have each other are weighty and not primarily of their own making.
- If the lovers are players’ characters, have your players write love letters in between sessions.
- *Forbidden Love* easily becomes Destructive Romance. The stakes are so high that the lovers have no way back once they’ve chosen each other.
- *Forbidden Love* can also include incest, adultery, abuse, large age-gap relationships and similar issues, making the line between romance and horror thin. Treating abuse as romance can be a sensitive issue for some players, and you may want to check in with your troupe if you’re thinking of taking this path.

Twists

- The coterie has good reason to be against the lovers uniting and is actively working to keep them apart.
- Only one of the lovers is actually aware that the relationship is forbidden, as they’re pretending to be someone else when they communicate with their partner.



Destructive Romance

Two characters are locked together in a relationship that is good for neither one, yet they can't let go of each other. They probably try over and over again, but every separation only makes them more desperate to reunite, and their attraction feels transgressively passionate because it is also deeply unstable.

The Destructive Romance is a typical outcome of the Blood Wedding, but one doesn't have to be supernaturally linked together for eternity to trauma bond. All that is needed for that is that every hurtful separation, every earth-shattering argument or cruel wounding is sooner or later followed by a tearful and promising reunion. At the edge of the horizon, the light of Happily Ever After (see Additional Tropes) always looms, but it is never reached.

Over time, this romance breaks down one or both of the lovers until they are a shadow of their former selves. They may not realize how bad their situation is, or they may not care. And if they should, finally, decide that they want out, the price to pay will be terrible.

Example

Sebastian and Avery have been dating each other for a century. They also see other people, but it's clear that they are the only ones who really matter. They've been very passionate for the last few years, but recently Avery discovered that Sebastian has been lying. All the old fears are returning, and Avery has decided to test his lover's loyalty.

Hook

Put the coterie in the middle of the brewing trouble by getting one of the players' characters to go on a few dates with one of the Destructive Romance partners. Don't let the coterie find out that the

Kindred they thought was a potential ally and relatively charming date actually has a wickedly jealous primary partner... until it is way too late. Let the coterie become pawns in the relationship game between the older and more powerful couple and let them struggle to figure out how to get out of it with their fangs still attached.

Scenes

The lovers haven't seen each other for a long time, but suddenly one of them pops in to visit the other, demanding to be fed whatever friends they have for a snack.

The lovers have agreed to break up and one of them convinces a player's character that it's for good and they are ready to settle down with someone new: them.

One of the lovers sacrifices themselves to save the other. Or, at least they make it look like that. When the other one runs after them out into the sun, they are finally free.

Tips

The Destructive Romance easily becomes very self-centered. Make it inclusive by involving the players' characters directly and making the actions of the supporting characters grandiose and outward-directed.

In fiction, the Destructive Romance can sometimes be fixed by supernatural means. In **Vampire**, becoming undead tends to exacerbate problems rather than make them go away. Play with expectations by letting your group think that helping the lovers become more powerful will fix their relationship.

Twists

- The relationship is a polyamorous triad or quad.
- The lovers think their relationship is healthy and consider themselves a power couple.
- There is an outside reason the couple can't split up. Maybe one of them is a Ventrue who thinks their partner is the only one they can feed from.



Laws Against Love

Examples of arbitrary, possibly cruel laws regulating love in a given domain are presented here. The purpose of such laws from the Storyteller’s perspective is to make romance illicit and exciting, possibly even revolutionary.

TABLE I: Laws Against Love

Law	History	Resistance
No Malkavian is allowed to have a Blood Wedding.	A Malkavian broke the Prince’s heart. They reacted by banning Blood Weddings for the whole clan.	Malkavians hold secret Blood Weddings.
All romantic relationships with mortals need explicit permission from the Prince.	Local Kindred made a sport of competing for the affections of specific mortals. It got out of hand and resulted in Masquerade breaches, illegal childer and bloody vendettas.	Now you need a fake mortal lover to show to the Prince and a real one you see in secret.
Blood Bonds are only allowed with members of your own clan.	Making a play for influence by seducing and Blood Bonding members of other clans has been a source of strife in the domain.	The inter-clan Blood Bond has gone from a tool of oppression to an exciting and illicit thrill, no matter the consequences.
No sire may have a romantic relationship with their childe.	Local Anarchs don’t accept using the relationship between the sire and the childe for romantic leverage, arguing that it’s fundamentally unbalanced.	Brave neonates point out that local Anarch ancillae have many such relationships and they’ve gone on for decades.
Mortal lovers must be put down once the relationship is over.	Too many former mortal lovers who know about Kindred left to their own devices after a vampire gets tired of the romance. It’s a threat to the Masquerade.	Secretly leaving your mortal lovers alive because you’re too sentimental to kill them.
Only the Prince is allowed to love the descendants of the Toreador Methuselah Helena.	The Prince says they once saw Helena at Elysium centuries ago and fell in love. They’re jealous if the progeny of Helena gets intimate with anyone else.	Every time someone has a petty grievance with the Prince, they get back at them by hitting on Helena’s progeny.
If a Nosferatu wants to make a public appearance with a lover from another clan, they must first make a petition before the Keeper of the Elysium.	A cruel Toreador Keeper seeks to humiliate the Nosferatu for fun.	An Anarch revolution in the domain.
The Tremere Regent has the right of refusal for romantic relationships with members of their own clan.	The local Tremere Regent is a controlling tyrant who sees their own clan as a private romantic preserve.	Members of other clans gallantly volunteer to romance local Tremere in secret.
Romance between Kindred must always happen between three or more vampires.	Ideologues in this Anarch domain successfully argued that love between just two vampires was a Camarilla holdover.	Some romantic arrangements between local vampires consist of a pair of lovers and a friend who pretends to be a lover with both of them.
Blood Bonds must be limited to those between a vampire and a ghoul.	Local Anarch leaders decided that Blood Bonds between vampires are unbecoming and morally wrong.	Local ghouls realize they’ve been had, organize and kidnap a number of vampires as sources of Blood.

Some Kindred use their Blood to influence their lovers. You should think about that, and what it says about them. Forcing some poor soul into a Blood Bond because you can't seduce them on your own. It's an embarrassment.

Just consider: All those Kindred who entrance their victims, what are they really saying? That they can't do it on their own. That is the message.

I've been here long enough to have heard all the counterarguments. A Ventrue friend once told me he prefers to use the blessings of the Blood when he hunts because he finds mortals so tedious. Listening to their concerns, pretending to emphasize with all their troubles and all the rest when you really just want to sink your fangs into their neck.

I suppose that's why he's struggling to hold onto what remains of his humanity. It's easier to stay connected to the mortal world if you care.

The game is only fun if you risk losing. That applies to romance as much as it applies to everything. I don't use my Blood when I seduce a mortal. Or a neonate, or an elder. I use what I had when I was still mortal and make it work for me.

I know what people think when I talk like this. I was gifted so generously even in life that there's no way I'd ever lose a game of romance. And it's a fair point. Who wouldn't want to be in a dalliance with me?

That's why when I go out, I often do it in disguise. I pretend to be a mortal or an unknown neonate and see how far I can get.

I remember one sweet Anarch boy who found me out after we'd already spent months together in a simple and innocent relationship. Well, as innocent as it could be considering that he was teaching me how to hunt among the students in the city college. He was so proud of the tricks he'd come up with. It was really quite amusing.

But then one night, one of my clan came slumming to the bar we used to go to and recognized me.

My lover was aghast. "Why did you deceive me like this?" he kept asking.

He just didn't get it. I didn't have any malign plans. I didn't wish him ill. I was just toying with him, that's all. Is that so wrong?

— Victoria Ash

Bleed

Roleplaying tends to involve a variety of emotions. Feelings of success and failure, loss and affection, cringe and laughter. Games make us feel, and games of romance more than most others.

The term bleed, coined by the game designer Emily Care Boss, means the transference of emotions from your character to you and vice versa. Your character gets dumped by their lover and this makes them feel sad. The mechanism of emotional bleed means that as the player of your character, you might feel this sadness as well.

(Bleed is also discussed in the *Players Guide*, p. 204.)

Bleed works the other way around too. If you're angry at an enemy in the game, it's not so rare that your character would become angry as well.

When it comes to player motivation, there's another relevant term, coming from the Nordic Larp tradition: bleed hunting. This means purposefully playing in a way that maximizes bleed. This is what you do if you enjoy roleplaying as a way to experience strong, powerful feelings arising from play.

Bleed is one of the big reasons why romantic play is fun. It means we can taste emotions and experiences outside our normal life through the fictions we create together while we roleplay. Understanding bleed is useful in figuring out why some game experiences hit us as hard as they do. After all, it may feel strange to be sad because you broke up with your pretend persona's pretend boyfriend. Yet because of bleed, emotions experienced through a character may feel real even though they're from the context of fiction.

The fact that fiction can create emotions in us should not be so strange. We cry and laugh at the movies as we witness the happy and sad fates of fictional characters. In roleplaying games, the difference is that because each player usually emotionally identifies with a single character, that character's joys and sorrows tend to affect us more strongly than if we just watch a movie.

Of course, sometimes the emotions we feel while we roleplay have nothing to do with our own character. Perhaps we witness another player's character try to seduce a Brujah revolutionary, only for the attempt to end in a miserable failure. We emphasize and feel the embarrassment of the situation even though we're just bystanders. Or perhaps a coterie of Storyteller characters gets treated unjustly by the Prince, making us feel righteous anger even though it's just something that happens in the background.

Emotions from fiction affect us, whether through character-based bleed or other means. This is one of the joys of make believe.

PLAYING FOR BLEED

Here are a few ways you can maximize the bleed you're feeling in a game:

Familiarity: Make a character similar to yourself, who wrestles with issues that you know from your own life. When these issues show up in the game, you now have emotional responses to them from lived experience.

Relatability: You'll experience more bleed if your character is someone you relate to, even if they're not actually similar to yourself. For example, there might be a type of sexuality or gender expression that you find emotionally relatable even though it's not your own.

Interesting Emotions: Create a character prone to emotions that you're interested in and steer them in a direction where those emotions can come into play. For example, you're struggling with anger. You decide to steer your character into situations where anger is a possible response, to explore the emotion and see what you can do with it.

Here are ways to minimize bleed and keep the emotional impact of play at an arm's length:

Unrelatable Character: Create a character you have difficulty relating to so that you have to play them more as an abstraction than a person you emotionally identify with. If you have trouble grasping the emotional lives of the privileged rich, play a character who was born with a silver spoon in their mouth.

Circumstances Which Fail to Resonate: You always identify powerfully with circumstances where you or your loved ones are subjected to injustice. You don't want to have to care quite so much in the game so you decide to play a frivolous fop who is rarely subjected to injustice, and blind to it if he witnesses it around him.

Cool: Your character is so cool, they're impervious to powerful emotion. They're so cool, they're unaffected by emotional displays from people around them. This too makes a character less prone to causing bleed. You don't feel anything when there's nothing to feel.

Bleed and Calibration

Roleplaying games can make us feel and sometimes they make us feel things too intensely, or in ways we don't like. For example, perhaps the events of a game make you feel helpless, like you have no agency whatsoever. While such emotions can be interesting for some players to explore, many, perhaps most, would rather avoid them. This is why it's useful to consider how much emotional intensity you're interested in experiencing in romantic play.

This is something you can do both individually and as a troupe. You can do a round where each participant, Storyteller included, talks about what kind of emotional play they're interested in and what they're comfortable with. Many are fine with being present for intense play from other participants even if they don't want to play in such scenes themselves.

One of the factors that often affect how intensely we feel the emotions arising in play is age and consequently experience. Of course, people are different and there are no rules that apply in all circumstances, but it's common for younger players with less experience with real-life romance to be strongly affected by the emotions involved in this type of play.

A player in their forties, with a number of real-life romantic relationships behind them, can relate the events of the game to their actual experiences. Sometimes this makes bleed stronger but it can also give better tools for dealing with the emotions at hand.

Bleed is not an uncontrollable force. It's possible to consciously play to increase or decrease bleed, both as individual players and as a troupe. For more on this, check the sidebar "Playing For Bleed" on page 19.

Playing For Emotion

The play is shaped by what the players are trying to do. Here are a few common examples:

Win: You want to win at confrontations, whether physical, social or mental.

Succeed At Tasks: You want to fulfill the tasks your characters have set for themselves or received from someone. This is the foundation of mission-based play.

Feel Effective And Competent: You want to feel your character is cool and competent, in control of situations they're in.

In a sense, all of the above are variations on the same theme, where success equals fun.

It's important to consider what your troupe is interested in going for because sometimes when you play for maximum emotion, you may end up running counter to all of the above goals. If that's what everyone wants, it works fine. If there are different player goals at play, the result can be frustrating.

For example, let's say that your character has been sent to wrangle a political favor from their lover, an important Malkavian ancilla. This is necessary for the characters' mission to succeed. However, while you play the scene with your lover, you get sidetracked because of the prospect of emotionally interesting play. The scene becomes a confrontation between lovers and your character leaves in a huff. No favors are gained.

If everyone is playing for high drama, this is great stuff. Such a scene can be followed by another between the players' characters where accusations fly and emotions run high. But if the players are operating on the assumption that everyone should work to make the coterie succeed, this can become a problem.

Fortunately there's room for compromise even if different playstyles and motivations are in effect. For example, let's say you want to play a disaster of a character always prone to messing things up

in a chronicle about high-achieving Archons on an undercover mission. The solution could be the same as in many movies and tv series: You're professionally hyper-competent but your personal life is an absolute mess.

Whatever you decide to do, the main thing is that everyone in the troupe is on the same page.

Calibration

How to calibrate your play so that you can have the experience you want while maintaining your boundaries? This section builds on the tools and concepts given in *Vampire: The Masquerade*, p. 421. You'll find descriptions of core techniques such as Lines and Veils and the X Card there. They apply to romance as much as they do to all **Vampire** roleplay.

Sometimes these tools are also grouped under the umbrella term "safety" but the intent here is to showcase that they can be used in a broader set of circumstances. Roleplaying romance has its own pitfalls but it tends to be significantly safer than actual, real-life romance.

The first thing to consider is the context of play. Here are a few examples:

An ongoing, private chronicle among friends: In terms of building trust among the participants, this is the format with the most potential. You all know each other, you know where your boundaries are and you have enough shared history to help when you have to resolve problems. You're only beholden to the people in the room. If they feel safe and comfortable, it's all good. The main issue you may face is that a player might not want to leave the game even when it stops working for them because they don't want to be excluded from the group. This means that even though you know each other, you shouldn't take that as an excuse to stop listening. Sometimes the people we know the best surprise us and we should always be ready to readjust so everyone feels good about the game.

Starting a chronicle with new players: You intend to keep playing for a number of sessions and you don't all know each other so well. This is where some of the group calibration methods discussed in the next section on come onto their own. The goal is that you can get to know each other as fast as possible so that you have a solid understanding of each other's boundaries and preferences.

A Convention One-Shot: You're playing a short game at a convention with strangers. In this context, it pays to play it safe both as a player and the Storyteller. You should use the tools provided in *Vampire: The Masquerade* (p. 421) allowing for calibration of the experience on the fly. If you want romantic content in the game, discussing it beforehand might be a good idea, depending on your local play culture. It's unlikely you'll have time to build trust among the participants using the same in-depth process you'd use when starting a chronicle because it's so time-consuming.

A Streaming Game: Your game is public, watched by an audience ranging from a few dozen to tens of thousands of people, depending on your reach. This type of game requires you to consider an entirely new level of possible issues. All of the people participating in the game might be okay but if the audience sees something they violently dislike, there might still be serious consequences.

The *roleplay* safety theorist Johanna Koljonen uses the following categorization:

Physical Safety: Are the players physically safe in the game? In the case of most **Vampire** games, this is not a prime concern. Our living rooms and convention floors tend not to be immediately hazardous although it always pays to know where the nearest first aid kit is located.

Mental Safety: This is what we usually mean when we talk about safety in roleplaying games. When we violate each other's boundaries and fail to respect calibration mechanics, we've made the game unsafe in a mental sense.

Community Safety: Do the events of the game have a wider impact on the level of the community?



If you play in the privacy of your own home, this level of safety might not come into play at all. However, if your game is public, it's possible the people around you may have opinions about it. This is why you may wish to consider the nature of your audience and calibrate your game accordingly to make sure that you don't get unwanted community repercussions. This is especially relevant in a game like *Vampire* where we play characters who may engage in morally repugnant acts, such as killing people in a Hunger-driven Frenzy. It's not a given that this causes trouble, but it's something to consider because it makes the safety dynamics of a public game decidedly different from those of a private session.

(Running Actual Plays is further discussed in the *Players Guide*, p. 200.)

While the Storyteller is probably the one who takes the lead with questions of calibration, it requires buy-in from all participants to truly work. Everyone in the game must decide that they're committed to the well-being of each other. Depending on your play culture, this may be a no-brainer or something you need to state out loud so that everyone has a chance to adjust to these priorities.

Calibration, group cohesion and trust are useful things to have for any roleplaying game but they're particularly relevant in games involving romance. Like horror, romance is a genre that benefits from emotional involvement, and those emotions can make us vulnerable. If we feel unsafe or insecure, we're afraid to let our guard down and really get messy with the game. This is why calibration tools make your game better in addition to making it safer. Players who feel secure are able to go further than players who don't.

Preparing To Play

Mutual trust and understanding of each other's boundaries are key components of roleplaying romance successfully. Here's one way you can go about establishing trust among your troupe:

1. Do a round where each player (always including the Storyteller) says how they feel about romance as a topic for roleplay.
2. Do a round where everyone says what they're afraid of happening during the game.
3. Do a round where everyone says what they hope happens in the game.
4. If you have the time, you can do bonus rounds:
5. What kind of romance is each player interested in playing or finds thrilling?
6. What kind of emotional resonances are people looking for? Happy? Sad? Tragic? Cringe? Funny?
7. Each player tells a story related to romance from their own lives.

The purpose of these rounds is to structure discussion around roleplay, romance and your game. The idea is that everybody gets to speak and all can listen to each other. Indeed, listening to each other is at least as important as speaking yourself. Maybe more important.

After trust and understanding has been established by doing the rounds, you can introduce the Lines and Veils tool (*Vampire: The Masquerade*, p. 423) and go through it with each participant, including the Storyteller.

Different Troupes

Circumstances among different troupes vary wildly in terms of what the participants are comfortable with and want out of the game. Romance requires considering things that may not come up at all with other types of play.

One of the most important aspects is simply one of comfort with romance as a playable subject. Some

players may prefer talking through romantic scenes in the abstract, just describing what's happening to their characters and keeping themselves at a remove. Others may be perfectly comfortable looking another player in the eyes and saying: "I love you."

Both are fine! Trouble comes if the comfort levels among different players are wildly divergent and players don't take the time to lay out where their boundaries lie. Obviously, the intensity of play should follow all the boundaries and preferences set out by different players, whether it's about specific subject matter or questions of style.

Roleplaying games can be played by people of all ages but **Vampire: The Masquerade** is an adult roleplaying game. Considerations of age may come up with romance as well. If your group has players of wildly divergent ages, and particularly if you have young players, you may wish to keep romantic subjects limited. (But if you're a group composed solely of twentysomethings, go nuts!)

If you want romance to play a role in an ongoing or future chronicle, discuss the matter with your co-players and consider going through the following topics:

- Who is interested in playing romance and who isn't?
- What kind of intensity feels comfortable? (Remember that a player who doesn't want romance for their own character may still be perfectly comfortable with watching intense play from others.)
- What kind of boundaries do different players have especially regarding romantic play? (For example, a player might say that they don't want to play scenes where their character gets cruelly dumped.)
- How they wish to play scenes involving intimacy and sex?

It's important to have these discussions with the entire troupe present because it helps players learn each other's boundaries and preferences. Their comments may also spark reflection in each other, bringing up more relevant points.



Getting Involved

There are many different actions that allow you to play on romance even if your character is not personally involved in any romantic situations:

Be the Wingman: When your coterie-mate goes out for the purpose of finding love and affection in the sordid wastelands of urban nightlife, you can be there to help! Make them look good, talk them up and retire discreetly when things get going.

Gossip: Why talk about the threat of the Second Inquisition or wonder about the occult conspiracy brought to light among the city's Kindred when you can exchange rumors about the love lives of everyone you know? If there's no salacious gossip to be had, you can just invent something. Surely the Anarch gang bosses and Camarilla Primogen won't mind if you spread entertaining fake rumors about them?

Meddle: Why should you focus on your own love life when you can meddle in those of others? Whether it's other players' characters or supporting characters, you can always start involving yourself in the romantic affairs of someone else. You can give advice, help arrange dates or otherwise make yourself a party to something that doesn't involve you.

Play the Matchmaker: Your character tries to set up other characters for a date or other romantic situation. You can play a matchmaker for Storyteller characters or other players' characters. You can do it with a serious purpose because you think that these two characters could be good for each other. Or you can do it with some other goal, such as comedy or for malevolent purposes.

Sabotage: Try to destroy a relationship or stop it from happening in the first place. You see two people dancing intimately, obviously attracted to each other. You bump into them, spill your beer onto one, and then when they are cleaning up in the bathroom get the other high by offering them drugs. Whatever it takes. If your targets are in a relationship, you can spread rumors of infidelity or even try to seduce one of them yourself and get them to leave their partner.

The Storyteller can take any of these actions and use them for supporting characters as well. The players' characters visit the Prince on an important task but he refuses to listen to them, instead unburdening himself about a romance that just ended. When the characters insist, he says he's too heartbroken to think about anything as trivial as politics.

Just as the characters think the audience is over, the Prince asks them to take him on a night out on the town, pretending to be a mortal. Maybe a sordid one-night stand would help him get out of his funk? ■