

POOLS OF RED

A Brinkwood Questline by Erik Bernhardt

INTRODUCTION

The story opens with the brigands coming across a folio full of important secrets: alchemical information necessary to make blood sterling. With this information at hand, they have the opportunity to counterfeit, poison, or otherwise dilute the blood supply of their vampiric enemy. The story culminates in a grand ball, hosted by the Countess where the brigands can explore different opportunities to use their tainted blood sterling.

This story is intended as an opening to a *Brinkwood* campaign, but can be played at any point in a campaign. Simply remove any sections tagged *Opening*.

A FOREST CHASE

Our story opens on a winding, woodland path, somewhere in the North of Cardenfell. It is the dead of night as a carriage races across the muddy road, the hoofbeats of a brace of horses kicking brackish mud into the trees. A coachman, dressed in the livery of a vampire lord, urges the horses onward with the crack of the reins, and the beasts whinny as they gallop down the trail. There is no doubt that this carriage and its occupants are pursued, hunted, and that the dark will offer no respite as their pursuers chase them down.

Our view shifts to each pursuer in turn, brigands all. What do we see as our view shifts to each brigand in turn? What do we hear? What thoughts pace their mind as they close in, working together to hunt their prey?

In this section, we give the players a chance to introduce their brigands and see them work together to bring down a vampiric foe. Make it clear that it's up to the players how exactly they do this, and remind them that they can use flashbacks to set up any prepwork, traps, or extra positioning they need.

A TEMPTING PRIZE

Once the brigands have stopped the carriage and searched it's contents, introduce their prize, the alchemical folio:

A prize awaits in a leather folio. It contains sheafs of parchment, each detailing alchemical formulas and notes on the properties of blood sterling. Useful stuff--perhaps your allies can help you decipher it.

RETURN TO THE REFUGE

This is an *Opening* segment, intended to set the scene of the brigand's refuge and introduce their allies and fae patron. If you're in the middle of a campaign, you can cut straight to *Flaypool*.

Our brigands are not alone; they have new-found allies that accompany them into the forest. As the woods contort and bend, shifting to allow the brigands passage, these allies follow, their faces a mix of awe and fear. But who are they?

- Are they *Fletchers*: bowmakers, artisans, and spies, persecuted for practicing the forbidden martial art of archery?
- Are they perhaps *Stokers*: radicals clad in zeal and fury, wielding bombs as well as rhetoric?
- Or are they humble *Diggers*: farmers, agriculturists, and peasants who have learned to reclaim and re-invigorate land thought all but lost?

Once the brigands decide on their allies, reveal the refuge:

With a touch from a brigand's palm, the trees of the Brinkwood part, revealing their refuge home. Shifted to be a bit larger to accommodate their allies, everything is still where you left it. What small patch of the refuge have you staked as your own? What comforts have you brought with you to remind you what you fight for?

Encourage the players to paint a picture of their refuge, calling out specific details or elements important to their group or their character.

THE PATRON'S ADVICE

As your allies, worn from the journey, settle into the refuge and begin setting up tents and other makeshift shelters, a whisper from the woods catches your attention. Your fae patron wishes to have a word with you in the sacred grove just beyond your refuge. You bid a temporary farewell to your allies, promising to return quickly before walking to a stand of trees that bend to allow you access to your patron's grove.

Your patron's grove reflects their court, no matter the current season. But which court does your patron belong to?

Are they of **Spring**, the Court of Roses, they of rebirth and renewal, who take their inspiration from the colonial uprisings who have pushed back the long tendrils of the Crimson Crown's influence, who value allies and accord more than all others?

Are they of **Summer**, the Court of Flames, they of fire and fury, who instill their brigands with a love of more direct and sudden bursts of action?

Or are they of **Winter**, the Court of Frost, they of slow, inevitable victory. They who do not plot, do not scheme, but simply creep into opportunity as it presents itself, and take what they can to speed the inevitable winter that creeps towards your vampiric menace?

OUR EXQUISITE FAE

This section is an abbreviation of the "Exquisite Fae" minigame, used to construct the basics of your fae patron's nature.

One of you first catches sight of the shape of your fae, indistinct as they move through the trees that border this grove. What, roughly, do they look like?

After a moment, your fae steps into view, clad in their ancient finery. What do they wear?

Finally, your fae speaks to you, what does their voice sound like?

THE FAE'S PLAN

This next session can be read in the fae patron's voice or summarized. Essentially, the goal is to put your brigands onto the track of Flaypool and to establish the relationship between the brigands and their fae.

Ah! My friends. Come. Sit. Have you eaten yet? What do humans eat again? Bark? Sunlight? I... hm. I have plenty of both, if you like.

I am sure you have much news to share, eh? New allies join us, we grow, day by day. Good, good. They are welcome to the Brinkwood. I'll instruct my fellows not to lead them into unending mazes or to send wild beasts to tear them asunder. Ah, but more importantly, I have my own news to share!

A few sprites have whispered to me of an opportunity not too far from here. The village of Flaypool--do you know it? A place of wond'rous color, my friends tell me, though the folk there seem a bit sad. My friends whisper to me of blood-that-isn't-blood, a great river of it, that stains the earth beneath it red. Blood-that-isn't-blood, blood that might poison vampires foolish enough to drink it! What do you think, eh? A clever opportunity, isn't it? Perhaps your new friends can help you devise a way to help us trick some vampires into drinking this blood-not-blood.

ALLIES IN FLAYPOOL

Again, this following section can be summarized or abbreviated, depending on your wishes. The goal is to establish the major players in Flaypool and to give the players context about the village itself. By the end of this section, your brigands should decide which faction in Flaypool they wish to meet with.

Ah. The Redflow. Yes, I've heard of it. It's a foul river that runs from the dye pools of Flaypool. Perhaps it gives the village its name. I... hm. I suppose it could be confused for blood, if mixed properly. Maybe with blood sterling or some other concoction? There's a great deal of iron in it, and while the bloodsuckers consider themselves connieuseurs of blood, small doses might slip past their senses.

We don't have many people in Flaypool, but we have a few potential allies you could reach out to.

Envel Godest runs the guildhall in the Dripmarket. He's a guilder man, or at least friendly with them. No friend to the vampires, that's for sure. He makes sure the dyers get a fair price for their work; does what he can to keep the Dyers Guild intact. A reasonable man, almost to a fault.

Arzhela heads up the Azure Smugglers. They mostly keep to themselves in the Old Jail. Friendly with the Reavers, they are. Had some run-ins with the Albatross out near Fell's Hollow, and I heard they held their own. They're criminals, of course, but they're smugglers, which I suppose is the best type of criminal to work with.

And then there's old Green Teeth. Has a right score to settle with the vampire lord that rules Flaypool, if the rumors are true. She's keen on the Poisoners, and has a hut out near the Backdraft.

A word of caution, though: all three of them aren't terribly keen on each other, and they aren't likely to work together. Old, bad blood in Flaypool. You'll understand if you go there.

TRAVELOGUE

Travelogue is an optional mechanic designed to quickly illustrate transitions between different areas of Cardenfell. Feel free to skip this mechanic if you don't have enough time for it, or if your group isn't terribly interested in how they get from Point A to Point B.

Treat this roll as a **teamwork** action, with the travel leader taking a point of stress for each "failed" roll, but taking the best single die result as the result of the total roll.

- On a critical result, gain +1d to your engagement roll and one additional downtime action. Narrate how you skillfully traverse Cardenfell, and what extra time you gain on your journey, allowing you to arrive ahead of schedule.
- On a roll of 6, gain +1d to your engagement roll. Narrate how you successfully navigate Cardenfell.
- On a roll of 4-5, gain no bonus to your engagement roll. Narrate what problems you ran into during your travel, and how you overcame them.
- On a roll of 1-3, lose -1d on your engagement roll. Narrate what difficulties you faced during your journey, and what it cost to overcome them, be it time, patience, or preparedness.

THE BLOOD OF FLAYPOOL

This section encompasses the next primary piece of this story, the village of Flaypool. The GM's goal here should be to paint a picture of the village itself, and let the brigands loose in it to cause trouble and (hopefully) make a few friends. Feel free to summarize or discard any of the descriptions below.

WELCOME TO FLAYPOOL

You smell Flaypool before you see it. A terrible, acrid scent wafts on the breeze, making you gag and retch until you remember some vinegar-soaked rags your allies prepared for you. Wrapping them over your faces makes the stench bearable, though it only worsens as you approach the village. The few scattered trees in your approach are dead, though they, along with the rest of the landscape, are strangely beautiful. The trees, grass, and even the dirt are flecked with bits of color, hues of dye that blend and mix into small, muddy pools in your footprints as the ground turns into muck beneath your boots.

As you crest a hill, you see Flaypool laid out below you. Bubbling vats of dye mark the village, sending plumes of smoke colored emerald green, shining crimson, and deep azure blue wafting into the air. You see a few of the landmarks of which of your allies spoke.

LANDMARKS

*The **Dripmarket**: an open-air bazaar below the lines of drying linens that splatter bits of dye onto the stalls and shoppers alike below.*

*The **Old Jail**: a small, bailey-like keep has a few cheerful lamps lit in the window of different colors, and occasionally you catch the sound of music and merrimaking from within.*

*The **Backdraft**: a long, sloping edge of the village, where, when viewed from above, the acrid smoke of the vats mixes into a beautiful rainbow pattern.*

*And finally, the **Redflow**: a long wound of a river that drains off from the Vats and winds through the entire village before petering off into a distant delta near the sea, at least a dozen miles away.*

And in the distance, several miles removed from the village, you see a palatial manor, overgrown with ivy and vines. Perhaps the home of the elusive Master in Emerald?

PEOPLE OF FLAYPOOL

The folk of the village dress themselves in sturdy coats and linens, and wear masks of soaked cloth and heavy brass goggles. Their clothes and what little of their skin is exposed is flecked with the dyes they live and work around. Likewise, the buildings are radiant with color. Some row houses are painted in bright, pleasing colors -- likely one of the Countess's many "beautification" projects -- though grime and discordant flecks of dye tarnish them. Likewise, statues and strange, twisting structures dot the landscape. Many of the structures appear to have had a purpose once, though all lack some key detail; be it a door, a roof, or some other critical component to make them useful, as if the fickleness of the Countess was passed onto her architects.

POTENTIAL ALLIES

THE GUILDERS - DYER'S GUILD

Due to their familiarity with trade, the local Guilders know best how to weaken the economy of the Vampire ruling class. If told of the alchemical folio, they will offer to manufacture as much counterfeit blood sterling as they can... so long as they decide where it's spent. The guildmaster, Envel, will ask the brigands to steal the ledgers of the Master in Emerald, as it is commonly known that the Master owes a great many debts to other vampire lords. By using the corrupted blood sterling to repay these debts, the rebellion can filter corruption into the blood supply without arousing suspicion.

The Guildhouse is an odd affair, stuffed as it is into an old warehouse near the Dripmarket, splattered with layers upon layers of dye. Inside it is fairly comfortable, with parlors, kitchens, and the crackling of a well-kept fire. A dyer points you to the guildmaster's office, which itself is a rather cramped affair, packed with books and ledgers. It is surprisingly tidy, and you get the impression that Envel Godest knows exactly where everything is.

The guildmaster is a skinny man with a groomed mustache and a pair of thin glasses, though his hands are dyed quite a mottled assortment of colors, evidence that he wasn't always a mere bookkeeper or merchant. He escorts an elderly woman from his office and presses a small pouch of coins into her hands. She thanks Envel with a nod, and leaves quietly. You see the shadow of something dark and vengeful pass over his face, but it softens as he turns to you. "Apologies. Newcomers, is it? Please, have a seat, and tell me what I can do for you."

If asked about the woman, Envel will adopt a wrathful expression, and explain that the woman's daughter recently went missing. It's an open secret that the lord of Flaypool, the Master in Emerald, sometimes steals young men and women away. The best he can do is offer a weregild to the parents of the taken children, though he wishes he could do more.

If asked about poisoning vampires, he will encourage the brigands to think bigger. He believes that he could arrange for quite a bit of poisoned blood sterling to be created, but the important thing is making sure it flows into vampire veins. The Master in Emerald owes quite a few debts to desperate loanfangs, landlords, and other immiserated vampires who would likely drink the blood sterling they were given--if the brigands could manage to get their hands on the Master's account books.

THE REAVERS - AZURE CLOAKS

The Old Jail, a former prison, has become a raucous tavern house since the Azure Cloaks took it over. A burst of laughter is heard from within as a drunk stumbles out of the front and retches into a gutter of swirling dye.

Inside, you see the folk of Flaypool engaged in merriment, drinking, singing, and, most significantly, gambling. You see that most folk have removed the heavy cloaks and gloves they typically wear, revealing skin mottled and dyed in much the same way as everything else.

At the center table, a group of Bluecloaks throw dice with a large, burly-looking Loanfang. The Loanfang throws the dice, and a mocking jeer goes up from the crowd at the result. The unlucky vampire servant slams his fist on the table in rage.

"Curse you, Arzehla! You load your dice--I know it! You'll rue the day you cheated the Bonethrower! You'll all rue it!"

If approached, Arzehla will be a bit cagey until the brigands demonstrate they're here to do business or have some association with smugglers and other ne'er-do-wells. Once the brigands establish a rapport, Arzehla will open up and talk freely of her hatred and contempt for the vampires.

If told of the brigand's plan, she will offer aid in distributing and poisoning the blood silver, if they agree to raid the Emerald Manor for the necessary silver. She will suggest spending lavishly at an upcoming ball in Drancaster in order to get the blood silver into circulation (while at the same time bolstering the rebellion's resources).

THE POISONERS - OLD GREENTEETH

Old Greenteeth is not old, and in truth, it is her gums that are green, not her teeth. She made an enemy of the **Master in Emerald** and was tossed in a vat of boiling green dye; which unbeknownst to both parties at the time was only at a tepid heat due to lucky scheduling. She survived, albeit with a guttural cough.. She wishes to murder the Master and flee Cardenfell; noble aspirations, but she has little care for her fellow mortal.

From above, the Backdraft is strangely beautiful as it's colors twist together into a prismatic miasma, but the wafting fumes of dye make you wary to stray too close. On just the outer periphery of the slope down to the Backdraft, you see a small hut tinted a sickly greenish hue by its proximity to the acrid smoke; the dwelling of Old Greenteeth, if the rumors are to be believed.

You catch sight of the hag herself as you approach, muttering to herself and poking at the dirt with a long, dirty cane. After a moment, she reaches into the loamy soil and pulls out a strange twist of roots. "Bileroot. Only thing that'll grow in this bloody soil. Ruinous. Ruinous poison," she mutters, mostly to herself in a hoarse, scraggly voice. She turns to you with a grunt, fixing you with a mean eye. "Agh. You lot've come then? Come in, come in out of the smoke before it eats you up from the inside." She laughs at the thought of your insides liquifying and gestures with a cane towards her door.

Inside is a rather homey, if sparse, little room dotted with vials and bottles on rickety shelves and roots dangling from various fish-hooks, along with other, stranger things in jars. As you enter, she shucks off her cloak, revealing her mottled green skin beneath, though you can see now she is no hag, but a coarse, tough-looking fairfolk. "You lot have come for poisons, I imagine? Only reason anyone comes here. Hope you've brought coin."

If asked about the poisoning of blood silver, she'll ruminate a bit on it before announcing with a twisted smile that it can be done. She even offers to do it, free of charge, if the party will exact her revenge upon the Master in Emerald. If they'll bring her his head, she'll make them any poisons they wish.

THE EMERALD MANOR

No matter which faction the brigands choose to ally themselves with, their goals all align at the Emerald Manor. Any raid on the Manor is a foray in and of itself, and should be regarded as such from the perspective of planning and execution.

Most importantly, the brigands should find the Master in Emerald's invitation to the Drancaster Ball at some point during this foray, be it on the person of the Bonethrower, the Master in Emerald themselves, or hidden in the vault or their study. If for whatever reason the brigands don't come across the invitation, their allies should let them know about the Drancaster Ball, and suggest that it would be a good place to spend their tainted blood sterling.

LOCATIONS

Gardens: The Emerald Manor is surrounded by a sprawling hedge maze, nigh unnavigable. Within it, starving vines and emerald servants may menace the players.

Emerald Salons: The outer portion of the manor is lined with two separate green glass enclosures that contain various plants and small dining areas. The Master of Emerald takes breakfast in the east and dinner in the west, all the better to observe his gardens from emerald safety.

Inner Halls: The inner halls of the manor are twisting and labyrinthine, as well as overgrown and decaying. Ivy and rot eat through beams, and the silent, shimmering servants don't seem to pay such ruin any mind.

Study: The Study is behind a hidden panel, and holds untold volumes, principally regarding botany and agriculture, but within an oak desk lies the Master's ledgers.

Dungeons and Vaults: Beneath a mausoleum crypt in the gardens lies the dungeons and vaults of the manor. The vaults themselves contain bloodwine and blood sterling, while the dungeon usually has an unfortunate villager tucked away in it. In the evenings, they are brought out of the dungeon to be fed upon, and their blood is drawn to make bloodwine in the mornings.

THREATS

Emerald Servants: Shimmering, invisible wraiths that do the Master's bidding. They act as guardians, gardeners, and on rare occasions, bodyguards.

Starvling Vines: Animate vines that choke and ensnare their prey before draining them of blood to produce grapes heavy with bloodwine.

The Bonethrower: The Bonethrower can be seen stalking around the manor, arguing with invisible servants, and searching for the Master of Emerald.

The Master of Emerald: He will confront the group as they try to leave, using vines and hedges to stymie their progress through the hedge maze and chasing after them. He will flee from a direct confrontation, using his powers to cover his escape into his vaults.

THE DRANCASTER BALL

The Drancaster Ball is the capstone of our story, intended to let the players socialize, mingle, and deceive their vampire adversaries. While the ball is intended mostly as a social foray, it can also be played as/mixed with elements of a heist or a raid.

The ball is a grand fiat, thrown in honor of the Countess's ancient victory over her father's "tyranny." It's colors are purple and black, purple for the majesty the Countess won, and black in a mockery of the mourning for her father's "betrayal." It is well-attended by many lesser vampires hoping to curry favor with the Countess, as well as ambassador delegations from all the lands the Crimson Crown dominates.

It is centered on the Operatic Palace, a grand structure near the center of Drancaster that serves as a beacon of the Countess's culture and wisdom.

SCHEDULE AND DANCES

As guests arrive starting at 7pm, an aperitif of brandy laced with small amounts of blood is served, as well as a few scattered hor d'oeuvres.

By 9pm, the official opening of the ball is announced with a chime from the Palace's bell tower, and the first dances are scheduled to begin. Per tradition, the first several dances are carole or group dances, meant to remind the attendees of the stifling, boring ways of the Old Kingdom. These dances are interrupted by a couple dance, the Danse Macabre, that is danced typically by two performers, one in the guise of the Countess and the other in the guise of her father. The dance culminates in the Countess figuratively (and sometimes literally) dispatching the Father, and going on to dance singly with her most loyal allies... and sometimes her greatest enemies.

It is often unclear whether or not the Countess dances the Macabre herself or has a proxy do it in her stead, but she is fond of making dramatic reveals, sometimes revealing her part as her Father, the Countess, or one of the rivals she dances with afterwards.

After this dance, the ball breaks into couples dances for several hours more, until the banquet is called at approximately 1AM, again announced with a tolling of the palace's bells.

As the supper banquet winds down, the Janus-Faced Devil ritualistically begs the Countess' leave to provide "light entertainment." When the Countess gives her assent, a large, intricate set is revealed from a previously hidden alcove, and a grand opera of love, loss, and beauty is performed, often with allegorical messages meant to aggrandize the Countess and irritate her enemies.

After the performance, if the Countess is pleased with the performance, the lead actor and actress are often inducted into vampiredom with a ritualistic "gift" of blood sterling, served by the Countess herself. If she is displeased by the performance, the cast becomes dessert.

Finally, dancing and revelry continues late into the night, with the official close of the ball announced by a final tolling of the bell, at which point the remaining lords and ladies are expected to say their final goodbyes and depart.

GUESTS

DRANCASTER LOCALS

The Crowned is a known criminal, tolerated by the vampires in Drancaster for the blackmail he can so easily get his grimy hands on. Someone once tried to kill him by dipping his head in molten bronze, but he managed to shank the assailant after suffering horrible burns to his scalp and brow. The Crowned could be a vampire if he plied his influence right, but he doesn't care for it; he blames the Crimson Crown for the thousands of small slights, degradations, and insults he's born.

He extorted an invite out of one of the more "official" guests, but his presence here is barely tolerated, and outright looked down upon, by the more civilized vampires in attendance. He is attending the ball to remind several petty lords and ladies of the blackmail he holds over them, as well as to keep his eyes open for new opportunities for wealth and power.

The Smoker has a laugh; it's a deep rumbling thing like a furnace hacking up broken glass. He's not a vampire, though he was once. He served the Baron and can only laugh when asked about it. Smoke pours out from his eyes and between his teeth unless he's drinking his rotgut. He knows all the hidden ways in Drancaster. Some say he can talk to rats. He thinks he could take this town--he'd just have to crucify a few vampires of station on pikes of brass. He helps a lot with smuggling from the Drancaster Bridge, but no one can easily tell who he's playing for.

No one's quite sure how the Smoker got his invitation, and his constant hacking laughter and ill-manners are sure to annoy some of the more politik guests. One might speculate that is exactly why he is here, invited with the express purpose of annoying or irritating his fellow vampires, all the better for the Countess to redirect their hatred or keep them on edge. His own motives are rather plain--he's here for good food, good wine, and to make a few more contacts for his smuggling trade.

THE COUNTESS'S COURT

The Countess herself is in attendance at this ball, though when and where she will reveal herself for maximum awe and acclaim is anyone's guess. She wears the most beautiful fashions out of Innisfirth, smiles at all, and bathes in the admiration and adulation of her peers.

To her, this ball is a game, set to pit her enemies against one another, keep her allies on their toes, and perhaps ensnare a traitor or two. She is very much looking forward to the proceedings, and should the slightest imperfection be noticed, her vengeance will be terrible.

The Conductor's haunting music laces the evening winds of the Countess's domain like poison in a wine goblet, promising comfort, but seeding only strife. In a decade's long experimental phase, the Countess values the Conductor's pursuit of perfection within such a mercurial field. Those who dare play a discordant note, or fail to live up to their place within the Conductor's orchestra, are damned to the brutal form of an Organist and cast out into the wilds until they have lived their art.

The Janus-Faced Devil is a true horror of the Countess' tastes. A towering, rail-thin vampire who wears a gilded theatrical mask of three faces, the Janus-Faced Devil operates the various upscale stage productions desired by the Countess. Such displays are as baroque as they are abstract, with copious razor-wire and vicious, vile deeds performed to the fervor of a lustful crowd.

The Devil is on hand to direct the festivities of the evening, including, of course, the centerpiece operetta they have devised for the occasion. If anything goes wrong with the performance, they are likely to fly into quite the rage.

The Sommelier is always close at hand, devising and administering the ideal cocktails, poultices, and wines to keep the Countess in her "ideal" mood. Tonight he presides over the vintages of bloodwine that will be served. He is chiefly concerned that they may, in fact, run out of libations, so greedy are the appetites of the guests. Such a disaster would be intolerable, and he may just put himself in a compromising position trying to prevent it.

CRIMSON CROWN DELEGATES

The Exiled Prince swore his allegiance to the Crimson Crown to ensure his dominion over the people of his ill-charted homeland. He hoped to reign for a thousand years, but his atrocities and abuses had sullied any promise he could offer his subjects. They rose in rebellion and put his bondsmen to the pike. Only through craven deceit did the Exiled Prince flee to his survival. He is forever marked by this shame, and in the halls of the Crimson Crown, he is little more than an exotic trophy, a pathetic curiosity and cautionary tale. He endures the mockery and barbs with narrowed lips. There will be a reckoning for such venomous words, for they mock not just him, but his culture, and the long work of his ancestors. He attends this ball for the same reason he attends any event: he seeks silver, allies, and soldiers willing to plunder his homeland and see him crowned once more.

The Courtier is an intolerable and debauched noble from the mainland whose vicious sadism is slowly being challenged by others in the Countess' court. The Courtier is a guest, someone the Countess is forced to entertain for the sake of hospitality and appearances. The Courtier would drain anyone if it made for a fun anecdote in the mainland courts of the Crimson Crown, and the Countess would just as soon catspaw rebels into ending this blight upon Cardenfell before another incident occurs.

She attends the ball chiefly for the fun of it, but also in hopes of reconnecting with old "friends" and, more likely, rivals from the mainland.

The Mercantilist is not the highest ranking delegate from the mainland, but they are certainly among the most influential. Controlling vast sums of blood sterling by way of hoarding influence over ports, warehouses, and toll-roads across the continent, their wealth is well-secured, impossible to harm without choking supply lines and gaining more high-ranking enemies. Such security in power leads to frivolity, and they have raised war hosts and butchered territories to the last, all for sake of reprisal against minor insults--or at least, this is the rumor they have cultivated. They are eminently practical in their investments, more than willing to allow proxy wars and "charitable causes" to dilute or redouble their power. They'll never know the want of a dram; they've rigged the world to ensure this. They attend this ball in the hopes of further vaunting their social status, for despite all their influence, they are not held as mighty as their hungering ambition desires. They grin, through gritted teeth, at the lickspittle sycophants who swarm them in the hopes of increasing their own petty lot.

THREATS

Assassins: Vampires treat balls as opportunities to make contacts, probe for weaknesses, and in some cases, eliminate a troublesome rival or two. Chances are just about everyone at the ball has someone out to kill them.

Bodyguards: Where there's assassins, there's bodyguards. These range from the most highly trained and loyal guards of the crimson crown to petty loanfangs, mercenaries hired for a single evening to take a blade or two for their master.

The Queensguard: In attendance is the Queensguard. Officially there to protect the various envoys of the Crimson Crown, they are also there to intimidate the local vampires. Dressed in crimson capes and full plate steel, they each wear a steel mask and a peaked helm, resembling the conquistadors who first brought the Bloody Isles to heel. Challenging them is likely to be a quick death, but dispatching one or two would send a clear message reverberating across the isles.