

Hey--

Well, it's been quite a while since I posted here, and to be honest, I thought I'd never do so again.

I also swore I'd never own nor play a new card (Camarilla edition or beyond), with the exception of a few signed raptors (and that only as a keepsake, as I was playing one of the decks mentioned in the flavor text), but that went by the wayside.

I got sick of being on the outside looking in, in the end, and I bought a pair of each starter from Camarilla Edition and Anarchs.

I still hate the new layout, especially the backgrounds on the crypt cards, but since it's too late for it to go back to the way it was, I guess I just have to accept it.

As much as it pains me to admit it, LSJ did a magnificent job on the precon for the Camarilla Edition, and the Gangrel starter from Anarchs. As for the Barons and Gangs starters, I suppose they're all right, but the clan-based starters are the best we've seen yet -- even better than the Final Nights Giovanni starter, which was pretty good.

In any case, when I started coming back around to play, there were a lot of new faces and new players. Since I was building decks composed entirely of the contents of starters (my limitation on going in for the new cards is that I will never, ever, ever mix old and new cards, in either the library or the crypt -- as far as I am concerned, these are two totally different games that just happen to be 100% compatible), and I was seeing a fresh new generation of players struggle their way up the deckbuilding learning curve, I posted a little something-something to the Boston area mailing list, a primer of sorts, but it turned out to be too long to be posted there permanently in the archive.

So, at the prompting of another player, with the intentions of both having it posted somewhere "permanent" on the web, and sharing it with the VTES community at large, here is my original post, unedited.

One last thing before I paste in the post: I had to swallow a fair bit of pride to even dare to show my face in here again, so, as far as that stuff goes, for the most part, just save it. If you don't know what I'm talking about, then fine, but if you do, just leaving it be will be greatly appreciated.

Oh, and there's more to be gleaned by going to the Boston Jyhad mailing list archives and searching out the "deck templating" threads which were posted in October 2003, if anyone wants a little more on how this whole thing came into being.

Here it is, then. I hope someone gets some use out of it:

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Strategy Guide For Noobs: Deckbuilding 101

Hey --

Well, I've wanted to do this for a long time, but only recently have I felt ready to do what'll probably end up going down as a first draft. I was also hoping that someone else might do it for me, but you know how that goes.

Obviously, I'm not the best VTES player ever -- not even close. But I'm not so bad, when I've got my mind on the game at hand, and I've played games with lots of the best players, and if they give me the breathing room, I can jam a nice sharp stick right in their eye. I have a pretty solid grasp on the fundamentals of the game, and I made the leap out of noobdom pretty quickly, but there are a lot of folk infinitely more qualified to write this kind of primer.

Only nobody else seems to have just gone ahead and done it, so I figured I would. The question then becomes: just who the hell is going to read it?

Anyway, here it is.

A VTES strategy guide for noobs: how to build a deck that doesn't exactly suck.

-Introduction--

So, you wanna build a VTES deck. Well, all right. That's a great start, in and of itself. You could throw 12 vampires in one pile, without much thought or effort, and then do the same with another pile of 90 or so library cards, and BAM -- you're playing VTES.

Or not.

What you're actually doing is sucking. That initial sucking phase goes on for a while, usually, even in spite of somewhat more effort than the aforementioned deckbuilding technique -- individual players vary in how long they take to evolve out of it. Some sad few never leave it at all. We don't see them much anymore: sucking gets pretty frustrating after a while, whether or not it's your own fault, whether or not you can *admit* that it's your own fault.

But one thing that's fairly universal amongst noobs, I think, is the desire not to suck anymore. After all, sucking, well, sucks.

So here's what I have to offer up: the lessons I learned in my slow migration out of the land of suck and into the land of playing the game. If I ever make it into the exclusive land of being an utterly bad mamba-jamba, I'll write you another primer. Promise.

Here's what this "article" is not: a primer on how to play the game. I'm not the guy to write that article at all. Talk to peal, or one of the other acknowledged masters of the tactical side of the game.

This article is about strategy, and in VTES, strategy is almost entirely in the realm of deckbuilding. Almost the only time you actually see strategy happening in realtime VTES is when players going into the finals of a tournament are choosing their seating, or, even more rarely, when someone pulls off a kindred restructure. Once you have cards in your hand and opponents sitting down at a table with you, you're wholly in the realm of tactics -- it is at this point that you had better hope you put the requisite effort into the strategic portion of the game: your deck. Because your opponents probably have.

I think it's pretty rare to find players who are masters of both aspects of this game. Winning a table of VTES, excepting those rare moments of dumb luck when everything just collapses in smoke, thunder, and flame, and suddenly one blinking, dumbfounded player is left gaping the words, "I won?" means that you were brilliant on two separate occasions: once when you built the deck, and once when you played it. But one of the best parts of VTES is that a poor player will usually lose, even with a magnificent deck, and an incredible player can often sweep a table with an Assamite starter.

In any case, this all starts with the desire to build a deck. Implied in that, you want to build a deck that can win. It doesn't have to: it almost certainly won't, very often, when you're still a noob. But it should be able to: it needs to be capable of winning a game, so that you can, as a player, grow into it. It's kind of like giving a novice guitarist a really nice guitar, instead of a crappy one: you're giving him something he can grow into, rather than something he'll grow out of.

Inspiration to build decks comes from lots of different places, once you get the VTES jones in your blood. I'd say that the vast majority of inspirations for decks come from clan-based considerations. At heart, you're just crazy about those Tremere, and you want to build a deck that reflects your interests in the RPG, or whatever. Or maybe you've seen other players having fun with Malkavian antitribu, and you want to give it a go. The storyline tournaments that White Wolf sponsors lend to this. Personally, this is my favorite way to deckbuild, though I've tried all of the others. An advantage of clan-based decks, at least ones that are built with a focus on in-clan disciplines, is that your vampires are going to have a certain shared access to your library, given that they all possess the same key disciplines, at varying levels.

In addition to clan-based deckbuilding, some players build decks after seeing and being wowed by an individual vampire, or a combination of a couple of vampires. Examples of the former are the one-man-show decks that you see occasionally [The Lazverinus Show, Lambach Stands Alone, Go-Go-Goratrix, Dragos Productions, The Baron Spectacles, and others], while the latter approach, which is far less common, yields up a fun and cool kind of deck [such as my old Unre and The Baron deck, or Lambach and Lazverinus: Together Again (For the First Time)].

Some players just build their deck based on discipline combos, which was essentially the idea behind the create-a-clan tournament, but you're going to see it in "real" VTES, as well. I used to have a pretty sweet Presence-Obtenebration stealth-vote / stealth-bleed deck that worked like that. Brad Kellog used to bust out, on occasion, with a nasty Celerity-Thaumaturgy fight deck. Presence-Animalism used to be something of a golden ring, prior to the appearance of the Ahrimanes in bloodlines. This sort of deck may be clan-based, at least in part, as clans often share similar disciplines, but not necessarily so, particularly when the disciplines you're attempting to combine are not shared in-clan by any of the Camarilla, Sabbat, nor

Independent groups currently available.

The same thing goes for decks that are designed to showcase or exploit certain library cards, or combinations. The triple-discipline cards from Anarchs are currently inspiring a wave of such decks, especially Diversion, and we can expect to see more of them after Black Hand is released, and probably Gehenna, as well. In these cases, the crypts are often built to suit the library, rather than the other way around. This method seems kind of ass-backwards to me, but it really works out for some players, just as my approach simply isn't going to work out for some others. VTES is really personal that way -- some players can make things work that nobody else can, and some good players can't make the simplest engines turn over.

The final way that i'm aware of that decks come into being is that you just get the urge to try one of the archetypal deck designs that you haven't explored yet. This is great exercise: the best way to prepare yourself to face the archetypes is to know how they work, from the inside out. In any case, sometimes you just wake up and say, you know, I've always wanted to try stealth bleed, but I never had the 'nads to be that cheesy. Well, I'm here to help you cheese out! And they said I'd never amount to anything. Heh. Or, goddamnit, that's the hundredth intercept wall I've bounced off of in the last six months -- I want one too.

Once again, while I'm about to try to teach you how to build a fair deck from scratch, there's no way this article could hope to teach you how to play it. You'd need like 30 encyclopedia-size volumes to cover that, and I'm writing this in my spare time. And the deck you'll be able to build out of the tools I give you here isn't going to be a finished work: decks rarely are. It's more like the first steps on a long journey of exploration -- the map I give you is only going to get you so far, and then you're on your own. Oh, and watch out for the dragons, by the way.

--Crypt Selection--

Okay, so you've had this bolt of inspiration strike you. You want to build a deck, and you have some idea of what kind of deck you want to build. As far as I'm concerned, point A in all of this is the design of your crypt. This is the alpha and omega of deckbuilding: everything you do starts and ends here. Even if you are looking to build a deck based on library card combos or discipline mixing, I think you should still start here -- it's pretty hard to bend your crypt to suit your library: far easier to build your library to match your crypt. As I'll touch on again, in the section on tuning and tweaking your "finished product," it's far easier and more sensible to make changes to the library than it is to readjust your crypt. Sometimes there's no avoiding the latter process, but changing a single crypt card can instigate sweeping changes in the library.

Allow me to posit an hypothesis:

12 card crypt > 90 card library

These are your guys, this little stack of 12 -- they're the ones that have to do everything that gets done in your game except play master cards [and even some of them will depend on your guys]: don't skimp out during the process of choosing them, or else they're going to let you down in the clutch. The selection of which vampires make it into your crypt, and in what

ratios, may be the very most important thing you do in building your deck. It's this aspect of VTES that makes it the closest CCG, in my opinion, to roleplaying games. And once you've drawn your starting 4 and your opening hand, you're stuck reaping what you've sown for like 2 hours, suck or not [often, mercifully, less time, if you've ended up sucking].

Fortunately, we get to use technology in this process. If you're already sitting there with a stack of 12 crypt cards in your hand, clamoring to get on with it, then great. Though the tools I'll point you towards here may help you reaffirm or reevaluate your choices. And if not, here are some tools you can use to put a crypt in your hand:

- Ethan Burrow's Crypt Monger
<http://monger.vekn.org/crypt.html>
- V:EKN.nu Search
<http://www.vekn.nu/search.php?page=search>
- David Anderson-D'avila's ELDB
<http://www.surlyfrog.com/eldb/>
- Tobias op den Brouw's Discipline Matchmaker
<http://www11.brinkster.com/tobiasopdenbrou/vampcalc.asp>
- Zvonimir Jurisic's VTES Deck Maker
<http://www.thelasombra.com/deckmaker.zip>

While ELDB is not being updated any longer, the other tools are kept current, and they'll all do essentially the same things for you, give or take. They'll allow you to filter the list of available vampires in various ways, until you have the ones best suited to your needs. By discipline, by sect, by title, by size, by special ability, whatever strikes your fancy. Of course, knowing what your needs really are is very important to this process, and I can't really help you out, there. Some players like the pretty pictures. Whatever floats your boat.

Once you get the basic idea of who you think might be hot for your deck, you have to narrow it down to 12 individual vampires. Or less. Often less. Very often less. Let's talk about why.

Good decks often show double, triple, or even quadruple copies of a single vampire in the crypt, depending on how important a given vampire may be to the proper functioning of the deck. The Friendmaker aside, you very seldomly see a deck that consistently gets its entire crypt into play. You'll even see 5 or more copies of a single vampire in a crypt sometimes, but these are usually one-man-show decks, and mildly degenerate in their own fun and funny little way. I'm not going to lead you down that road in this article: that particular brand of madness comes a little later in your career. When you leave no footprints on the ricepaper, grasshopper.

So, when do you double up on a vampire? When the vampire is really good in your deck, and you simply can't find someone else just as good to fit into the slot the second copy will occupy. When it won't bum you out completely to see both of that vampire show up in your opening

crypt draw.

When do you triple? When the vampire is crucial to the proper function of your deck -- you can get by, sort of, without him, but it won't be fun and it won't be easy. Two, or even three, copies of this vampire in your starting lineup is a fair exchange for the promise of his appearance.

And, finally, when do you quadruple? When the failure of that vampire's appearance in your starting lineup means that you lose, fast. If your deck just cannot function without that guy, run 4. This allows for the unpleasant possibility [which will usually manifest itself at the least convenient opportunities possible, like the finals of tournaments] that you'll draw all 4 at the start of a game, but you can accept this, or else you wouldn't allow for the possibility in the first place.

Without wanting to get too terribly far into the whole subject of library card selection just yet, there are two factors in your crypt selection that very directly affect the selection of master cards you run. These two factors are: multiple copies of vampires, which we have already discussed to some extent; and , the capacity slope of your deck [the size of your chosen vampires].

There are several cards that you can run to offset these factors. They include, but are not limited to:

- Information Highway
- Effective Management
- Zillah's Valley
- The Tomb of Ramses III

That last card really sucks, by the way, but some players still use it. <*shrug*> There was a time when it was the only other speed option available besides Information Highway and Dreams of the Sphinx [and, corner-casing, Ingrid Rossler], so be glad we live in these brighter, happier nights.

I can't stress how important Effective Management and Information Highway are, at least to the way I build decks. The tradeoff between a master phase action and a card, and paying a pool plus using 4 transfers to see a new crypt card is extremely favorable. And if you have 6 transfers per turn, instead of the usual 4, it's all the better. The faster you get those guys out there, the sooner you can get about the business of winning the game. And if you're running multiple copies of vampires, these cards are just what the doctor ordered to get you out of swampy, stagnant crypt draws. For these cards to have such a positive impact on your game and to also be free is a gift from above [or, if you're playing Baali, from below].

Because of cards like these, I feel perfectly confident running crypts that look like this:

- 2 Lambach
- 2 Stravinsky
- 2 The Little Tailor
- 2 Meshenka
- 2 Caliban

2 Terrence

3 Gabrin

2 Natalia

2 Sarisha Veliku

1 Joaquina Amaya

1 Vaclav Pelengro

1 Khalil Gibran

1 Salvatore Bokkengro

1 Sasha Miklos

3 Howler

2 The Siamese

2 Cynthia Ingold

2 Jost Werner

1 Greta Kircher

1 Zoe

1 Isabel de Leon

2 Donal O'Connor

2 Constanza Vinti

2 Theo Bell

1 Juggler

1 Damaskenos

1 Judah

1 Volker

1 Earl

1 Allsion Maller

And now you can, too. It may not seem like such a big nor an important thing, but when this little part of the engine is properly maintained, everything else just runs smoother. Since you incorporate a potential problem in your deck design, it is a wise and happy Methuselah who also includes a remedy for his own ailment. Think thermal viscosity breakdown, and just put the damned penzoil in, will ya?

Another effect that you'll see become very important in direct consideration of your crypt selection is the master cards that you end up using to manage pool reclamation. Your two main choices here are Blood Doll and Minion Tap. Tribute To the Master is a distant third choice, though some players swear by it. The primary factor in your decision to use Blood Dolls, Minion Taps, or a combination of the two, will be the capacity slope of your vampires: if you're running huge minions, then Minion Tap is often the way to go, though Blood Dolls should never be dismissed out-of-hand, whereas if they're more moderate in size, you may run a few Blood Dolls and a couple of Minion Taps. If they're a little on the lighter side, you may end up choosing to skip the Taps altogether and just go with 4-6 Blood Dolls. This little section of your deck is extremely important to your long-term survival prospects once a game begins: be sure to give this area the attention it deserves. While it is only 6 to 10 cards deep [plus the possibility of hunting grounds], it is the fulcrum point upon which your game may come to balance, so give it the consideration it merits.

Another factor you may find imposing itself on this decision, which will come up again later, is that of your minions' blood management issues. Certain clans, or discipline combinations, do not work out too well with Minion Tap. An example: my new eurobrujah crypt:

- 2 Donal O'Connor
- 2 Constanza Vinti
- 2 Theo Bell
- 1 Juggler
- 1 Damaskenos
- 1 Judah
- 1 Volker
- 1 Earl
- 1 Allison Maller

You do NOT want to be sucking blood of these guys wholesale: almost all of the cards they're going to be playing cost them blood. It's Blood Dolls for them. Slow, steady, measured movement between your vampires and your pool, or back again, cautious and smart. Another telling sign with regard to this issue: if you're using a Path, and it's really important to your game, chances are pretty good that you shouldn't be using Minion Taps [necessary Path + Minion Tap \neq combo].

And once you labor through all of that [and it should take you a little while to accomplish -- maybe not your first time, but as you get better, it should start taking longer, instead of happening more quickly], you're ready to move on to your library. And, on the upside, that little stack of 12 cards will already be whispering little suggestions to you.

--Library Selection--

Before I start in on the specifics of library building, there's a little theoretical groundwork I'd like to lay out for you. It deals with what your deck is going to do, and how it's going to do it.

Some of you may be familiar with Ben Peal's thoughts on the offensive structure of a deck. Oversimplified, he breaks a deck's offense down into 2 parts:

- Payload [how you do the killing]
- Delivery system [how you make sure the killing stuff actually gets to happen]

This is a pretty solid way of looking at your deck's forward motion, and Peal can give a much better explanation of his ideas on the subject himself [if this article ever gets pasted up on the web page or something, Peal should write a little sub-article, and insert it right here].

I've given this particular aspect of deckbuilding a fair bit of thought myself, however, and I have a slightly different approach. I view a fresh VTES table [4 or 5 players with 30 pool and nothing having happened yet] as a living organism, in a state of perfect health. Then, 4 or 5 different viral organisms invade it, each hoping to colonize it completely. The viral perspective applies to a lot: love, work, and now, VTES. This "viral" approach to VTES, as best I know, is my own twisted little view, and it breaks down like this:

- Viral load [the equivalent of Peal's payload]
- Vectors of transmission [the equivalent of Peal's delivery system, but more (see below)]
- Replication mechanism [how the deck keeps itself going, keeps from running out of steam]
- Protein shell [the deck's defensive structure, how it keeps from dying while it kills]

That last part is the part that is most obviously missing from my understanding of Peal's approach: I see the defense as an integral part of the offense, in that if you're too busy dying, you can't take time to do any killing. Or, as they used to tell me in the Army: if you're not fucking somebody, you're getting fucked.

About the vectors of transmission: this is essentially the same thing that Peal is talking about in his delivery system, but the "s" at the end of "vectors" is very important. I've played in way too many games where my prey was too well-equipped to handle my primary oust method. So what I try to do now is to have a secondary oust method built into the structure of my deck, one that I can flop over to in times of trouble, rather than have to distill a "Plan B" out of the aether. An example of this: both my old pre/obt vote deck, and my new dark Ventrue vote decks could / can switch from stealth vote and bloat to stealth bleed at the drop of a hat, and back, as necessary. If one wasn't working, perhaps the other would carry the day. In my mind, VTES is all about options: the more options you can cram into a deck, the better off you are once the cards and counters start flying.

In any case, once you've got your crypt in hand, and a basic idea of what you want the deck to do, and how you want it to do it, here's where you need to go:

- Josh Feuerstein's Happy Families Script Page
<http://www.lunarcity7.cx/VTES/HappyFamilies.html>

Happy Families is a great idea that has been around for ages, but it wasn't until Josh Feuerstein did the work and turned it into a real power-tool that you could get such killer results from it. You plug in your crypt, choose your disciplines, and WHAM! -- it gives you a breakdown of master, disciplineless, and disciplined cards designed to promote proper card flow in your game play. One of the most significant things about Josh's Happy Families script, which often goes unnoticed, is that you can opt to include or not include both multiple copies of vampires and superior vs. inferior discipline-weighting in the calculation of your crypt-based equation. Make sure to click through the permutations of those two options when you're generating your results, and you'll have 4 possible lists off of a single crypt. Mmm. Options.

So using my crypt example above, you end up with something that looks like this:

- 18 master cards
- 16 disciplineless cards
- 22 Dominate cards
- 18 Potence cards
- 16 Celerity cards

This list will have been calculated to enhance card flow during game play, giving you the

proper ratios of disciplined, undisciplined, and master cards, so that your hand doesn't jam up quite so often during play. And, deliciously, the more minions you influence out, the better and better your card flow becomes.

The problem then becomes, which cards? There's only like a frigging zillion of them to choose from. That's where my generic deck template comes in. In a nutshell, here it is, as designed for stealth bleed or tap and bleed decks:

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Crypt [12]

10-cap to 2-cap slope

Library [90]

Master (16-18)

6x Blood Doll

[or 4, if running 2 Minion Tap]

2x Information Highway

2x Minion Tap

[or 2x Direct Intervention]

[or 2x Misdirection]

1x hunting ground

2x clan-specific master cards

[or 2x Direct Intervention]

[or 2x Misdirection]

1x The Barrens

2x Sudden Reversal

2x Effective Management

Action (14)

10x bleed action cards

[priority to Govern / Enchant]

4x tap or direct damage cards

Action Modifier (18)

18x stealth cards

[or "if you block me..." cards]

[or bleed modifiers]

Reaction (24)

8x bleed bounce or reduction cards

8x wake cards

8x intercept cards

Combat (16-18)

10x dodge or combat ends cards

[or, strike with an optional maneuver cards]

6-8x tricky combat cards

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So you take that Happy Families output you got, which was based on the crypt that you got from Monger or ELDB, or wherever, and now you've a basic framework into which to jam the cards.

Now, this is not the only way to do it. As an alternative, you can look up Ethan Burrow's fine "PADD" modular deck design system in his old Toreador antitribu newsletters. A perfectly reasonable and valid approach, and a magnificent idea, but one that just didn't work for me. As this system may not work for some of you. Systems, in general, may not work for some players -- I can't do a thing for those guys.

You can also use Library Monger, available alongside Crypt Monger at the main Monger page, to list out all of the cards for a discipline, by type, if you like, so that you're allowing yourself access to the whole range of options available to you.

The url for that is:

-- Ethan Burrow's Library Monger
<http://monger.vekn.org/library.html>

Also, like every single other aspect of this missive, this template is not a set of rules, but a set of suggestions. You can tweak it around all you want, until it looks the way you want it to.

In any case, using exactly the steps I've listed above [Crypt Monger --> Happy Families --> generic deck template], here a few decks I've designed. I've been playing some of them for years now, before this system was fully developed, but others are quite new, and I've been playing the heck out of them [the new ones] for the last few weeks, so [if you're a Boston area player] you know just how well they're working out.

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~[My] Setite Budget Deck --

Crypt [12]

1x Nefertiti [10]

2x Khay'Tall [9]

2x Kephamos [8]

1x Qufur am-Heru [7]

2x Count Ormonde [5]
1x Hadrian Garrick [4]
1x Nepata [4]
1x Khalil Anvari [3]
1x Celine Chevalier [3]

Library [90]

Master (18)

6x Blood Doll
2x Information Highway
2x Minion Tap
1x Temple Hunting Ground
2x Opium Den
1x The Barrens
2x Sudden Reversal
2x Effective Management

Action (20)

10x Enchant Kindred
4x Mind Numb
2x Temptation
2x Form of Corruption
2x Arson

Equipment (2)

2x .44 Magnum

Action Modifier (22)

3x Lost in Crowds
3x Cloak the Gathering
4x Swallowed by the Night
4x Form of the Serpent
2x Elder Impersonation
2x Forgotten Labyrinth
2x Aire of Elation
2x Conditioning

Reaction (18)

4x Deflection
2x Redirection
4x Wake with Evening's Freshness
4x Forced Awakening

4x Ecstasy

Combat (10)

2x Fake Out
4x Staredown
4x Catatonic Fear

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~[My] Giovanni Budget Deck --

Crypt [12]

Ambroginio Giovanni [9]
Enzo Giovanni [8]
Andrea Giovanni [7]
Gillespi Giovanni [7]
Stefano Giovanni [6]
Isabel Giovanni [5]
2x Le Din Tho [5]
Gloria Giovanni [4]
Francesca Giovanni [4]
Rudolfo Giovanni [3]
Marcianna Giovanni [2]

Library [90]

Master (18)

6x Blood Doll
2x Information Highway
2x Minion Tap
1x Morgue Hunting Ground
1x Dreams of the Sphinx
1x Path of Bone
1x The Barrens
2x Sudden Reversal
2x Effective Management

Action (14)

6x Govern the Unaligned
4x Scouting Mission
4x Jar the Soul

Allies / Retainers (2)

2x Masquer (Wraith)

Action Modifier (24)

10x Spectral Divination
6x Call of the Hungry Dead
4x Bonding
4x Seduction

Reaction (18)

6x Deflection
8x Wake with Evening's Freshness
2x Redirection
2x Delaying tactics

Combat (10)

10x Spiritual Intervention

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~[My] Lasombra Budget Deck --

Crypt [12]

Aaron Duggan, Cameron's Toady
Antonio Delgado
Aurora Van Brande, Paladin
Cameron
2x Francisco Domingo de Polonia
Gratiano
Guido
Ignacio, The Black Priest
2x Julia Prima
Ramiro

Library [90]

Master (18)

6x Blood Doll
2x Information Highway
2x Minion Tap
1x Political Hunting Ground
1x Elysian Fields

1x Path of Night
1x The Barrens
2x Sudden Reversal
2x Effective Management

Action (14)

5x Govern the Unaligned
5x Scouting Mission
4x Shadow Twin

Action Modifier (18)

8x Shadow Play
6x Shroud of Night
4x Stone Travel

Reaction (24)

4x Deflection
8x Forced Awakening
4x Redirection
4x Eyes of the Night
4x Darksight

Combat (16)

10x Arms of the Abyss
4x Shadow Body
2x Entombment

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~[My] !Malk Budget Deck --

Crypt [12]

Hannibal [10]
Vasantasena [9]
Theron [8]
2 Korah [7]
Kite [7]
2 Dolphin Black [6]
Muriel Foucade [5]
Claven [4]
Idalia [4]
Yorik [2]

Library [90]

Master (18)

6x Blood Doll
2x Information Highway
2x Misdirection
1x Institution Hunting Ground
2x Minion Tap
1x The Barrens
2x Sudden Reversal
2x Effective Management

Action (16)

10x Kindred Spirits
4x Revelations
2x Arson

Action Modifier (20)

4x Lost in Crowds
4x Cloak the Gathering
4x Swallowed by the Night
2x Elder Impersonation
2x Forgotten Labyrinth
4x Eyes of Chaos

Equipment (4)

4x .44 Magnum

Allies (4)

4x Escaped Mental Patient

Reaction (18)

6x Telepathic Misdirection
4x Wake with Evening's Freshness
4x Forced Awakening
4x Telepathic Counter

Combat (10)

2x Disguised Weapon
2x Fake Out
6x Dodge

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New Gangrel Deck --

Crypt: [12]

1 Stanislava
2 Ingrid Rossler
2 Faruq
2 Ilyana
1 Lord Ashton
1 Boss Calihan
1 Bobby Lemon
1 Ramona
1 Bothwell

Library: [90]

Master (16)

4 Blood Doll
4 Sudden Reversal
2 Effective Management
1 Backways
1 The Barrens
1 Ecoterrorists
1 Gangrel Revel
1 Information Highway
1 Zoo Hunting Ground

Action Modifier (16)

4 Conditioning
4 Kiss of Ra
4 Freak Drive
4 Earth Control

Retainers (3)

3 Raven Spy

Equipment (3)

3 Sport Bike

Reaction (28 cards)

8 Cat's Guidance
6 Redirection
3 Forced Awakening
3 Guard Dogs
3 Rat's Warning
3 Wake With Evening's Freshness

Combat (24)

8 Carrion Crows
6 Aid From Bats
4 Superior Mettle
4 Skin of Steel
4 Bone Spur

=====

New Malkavian Deck --

Crypt [12]

Rachel Brandywine [10]
William Biltmore [9]
2x Anatole [8]
Quentin King III (Advanced) [7]
Quentin King III [7]
Dr. Douglas Netchurch [6]
Victoria [5]
General Perfidio Dios [5] !Malk
Jeremy Talbot [4]
Zöe [3]
Milo [3]

Library [90]

Master (14)

6x Blood Doll
2x Information Highway
2x Minion Tap
1x Asylum Hunting Ground
1x The Barrens
2x Sudden Reversal

Action (14)

8x Computer Hacking
4x Revelations

Allies: (2)

2x Muddled Vampire Hunter

Equipment: (4)

2x .44 Magnum
2x Flamethrower

Action Modifier (16)

4x Confusion
4x Faceless Night
4x Swallowed by the Night
2x Forgotten Labyrinth
2x Elder Impersonation

Reaction (28)

8x Telepathic Misdirection
6x Wake with Evening's Freshness
4x Forced Awakening
2x Precognition
2x Spirit's Touch
2x Enhanced Senses
2x Eagle's Sight

Combat (16)

4x Dodge
4x Fake Out
4x Disguised Weapon
4x Read Intentions

=====

New Tremere Deck --

Crypt [8]

2x Rebekka [8]
AUS pot PRE THA
+1 stealth

1x Ardan Lane [8]
dom obf pre AUS THA

primogen
+1 blood on steal-blood strikes
2x Muaziz [7]
aus dom for THA
+1 stealth
1x Carna [7]
AUS DOM THA
primogen
+1 intercept
1x Alfred Benezri [6]
aus dom PRE THA
pander, bishop
1x Cohn Rose [5]
aus dom pre THA
1x Pieter van Dorn [4]
dom pre tha
1x Blythe Candelaria [3]
aus THA
1x Ehrich Weiss [3]
dom tha
1x Saiz [3]
aus dom
!tremere

Library [90]

Master (18)

6x Blood Doll
2x Information Highway
2x Misdirection
1x Academic Hunting Ground
1x Chantry
1x Arcane Library
1x The Barrens
2x Sudden Reversal
2x Effective Management

Action (14)

4x Intimidation
4x Rutor's Hand
4x Mind Numb
2x Graverobbing

Action Modifier (12)

4x Seduction

4x Conditioning
4x Change of Target

Reaction (24)

4x Deflection
4x Telepathic Misdirection
8x Wake with Evening's Freshness
4x Spirit's Touch
4x Precognition

Combat (22)

8x Theft of Vitae
8x Apportation
6x Walk of Flame

=====

As you can see from those decklists, sometimes you have to take a few liberties with the ratios of card types, and even with the Happy Families results. As I said before, none of these guidelines are written in stone: they're suggestions, not rules.

For example, the following pair of decks started as versions of the generic deck template, but ended up radically different in their end-result forms, due to the requirements of the underlying strategies the decks were pursuing. But you can still see the original framework at the base of it all, i think:

=====

New Eurobrujah Deck --

Crypt: (12)

2x Donal [8]
2x Costanza [8]
2x Theo Bell [7]
Juggler [7]
Damaskenos [6]
Judah [6]
Volker [5]
Earl [4]
Allison Maller [4]

Library: (90)

Master: (16)

4x Blood Doll
Information Highway
2x Effective Management
2x Fame
2x Sudden Reversal
Carthage Remembered
KRCG News Radio
The Rumor Mill
The Rack
Warzone Hunting Ground

Action: (10)

8x Govern the unaligned
2x Graverobbing

Action Modifier: (8)

4x Conditioning
4x Seduction

Reaction: (18)

6x Wake With Evening's Freshness
6x Second Tradition: Domain
6x Deflection

Combat: (38)

6x Torn Signpost
6x Immortal Grapple
5x Flash
5x Pursuit
4x Taste of Vitae
4x Disarm
4x Blur
4x Sideslip

=====

New Dark Ventrue Deck --

Crypt: (12)

2 Arika 11, Ventrue, Inner Circle
1 Lucinde Alastor 10, Ventrue, Justicar

- 1 Marcus Vitel 10, Ventrue, Prince
- 1 Queen Anne 10, Ventrue, Prince
- 1 Suhailah 9, Ventrue, Prince
- 1 Victorine Lafourcade 8, Ventrue, Prince
- 1 J. Oswald Hyde-White 8, Malkavian, Primogen
- 3 meaningless weenies.

Library: (90)

Master: (18)

- 4 Blood Doll
- 4 Minion Tap
- 2 Secure Haven
- 2 Uptown Hunting Ground
- 2 Information Highway
- 2 Sudden Reversal
- 1 Elysium: The Palace of Versailles
- 1 Ventrue Headquarters

Action: (10)

- 8 Govern the Unaligned
- 2 Charming Lobby

Action Modifier: (28)

- 4 Awe
- 4 Cloak the Gathering
- 4 Elder Impersonation
- 6 Freak Drive
- 4 Lost in Crowds
- 6 Voter Captivation

Political Action: (20)

- 2 Banishment
- 2 Disputed Territory
- 2 Dramatic Upheaval
- 2 Kindred Restructure
- 10 Kine Resources Contested
- 2 Protect Thine Own

Combat: (16)

- 8 Majesty
- 8 Rolling with the Punches

=====

It'd be hard to imagine two totally different decks, and it's kind of amazing that they both evolved out of the same template. You just have to get the basic feel for it, and then get flexible with it.

As far as the template itself goes, I've covered a lot of it in discussions on the mailing list, but there are some points worthy of mention about the various blocks of cards in it. Here's the template again:

=====

-- Generic Deck Template --

Crypt [12]

10-cap to 2-cap slope

Library [90]

Master (16-18)

6x Blood Doll

[or 4, if running 2 Minion Tap]

2x Information Highway

2x Minion Tap

[or 2x Direct Intervention]

[or 2x Misdirection]

1x hunting ground

2x clan-specific master cards

[or 2x Direct Intervention]

[or 2x Misdirection]

1x The Barrens

2x Sudden Reversal

2x Effective Management

Action (14)

10x bleed action cards

[priority to Govern / Enchant]

4x tap or direct damage cards

Action Modifier (18)

18x stealth cards

[or "if you block me..." cards]

[or bleed modifiers]

Reaction (24)

8x bleed bounce or reduction cards

8x wake cards

8x intercept cards

Combat (16-18)

10x dodge or combat ends cards

[or, strike with an optional maneuver cards]

6-8x tricky combat cards

=====

And some notes:

Master Card Block -- the most important sections here are: pool reclamation block [Blood Dolls, Minion Taps]; hunting grounds [one of the strongest option-producing cards in the game, in my opinion]; Sudden Reversals and Direct Interventions [such strong cards, and getting stronger every day]; and clan-specific masters. Other important considerations: speed cards card-flow enhancers, intercept locations.

Action Card Block -- this is where your guys are going to find the stuff they're going to do, so it's a pretty important block, even though it's not the largest [the "not-my-turn" phase is the longest part of the game, after all]. I can't stress the importance of using Govern the Unaligned, Scouting Mission, and/or Enchant Kindred in bulk quantities for your bleed actions if you're able to do so: the option to transfer down is so incredibly strong in the early and mid-game, and the enhanced bleeds are so strong later. Options, options, options. The tap-cards [Mind Numb, Jar the Soul, and in a like vein, Shadow Twin, Revelations] are very strong, as well, even in short numbers. And let's not forget cheese cards like Graverobbing, Far Mastery, Dominate Kine, Entrancement, and the like -- taking your opponent's stuff, especially your prey's, is so strong.

Action Modifiers -- here's your delivery system, for the most part. You've got your basic stealth, or your "if you block me" cards [Kiss of Ra, Dawn Operation, Day Operation, Daring the Dawn, Change of Target, et cetera], which function as kind of "stealth-by-proxy." And then there's Freak Drive, power card that it is.

Political Actions -- well, if you're going to use them, you'd better make damn well sure to use only the best and most effective ones. Getting a vote successfully called, and then passing it, that's a lot of work, so make certain it's worth it each and every time.

Retainers / Allies / Equipment -- this is another block where you should only include the best and most necessary cards available. If you have the choice between spending blood and spending pool, go with the blood. If an ally isn't going to be just as valuable to you as a vampire with capacity equal to the ally's cost, drop it. And put an Ivory Bow in every deck you build! Also, guns are pretty good [.44 Magnum is about the best deal going] at shoring up decks that have weak combat.

Reactions -- well this is a pretty important block, just as important as either masters or actions, in consideration of the fact that your own turn will only occupy 20% of a game. During the other 80% of your game time, wake cards, intercept cards, bleed reduction, and bleed bounce are the most important considerations: these are the cards that will keep you alive long enough, each time 'round the table, to see another turn.

Combat -- it's important to note that this template is not going to be suitable for building a fighty deck. If you're using this template to build something, the best advice I can give you is: have a plan going into each combat, but don't go bonkers with it, or else you're going to fall flat on your face. Choose your fights very carefully with this style of deck, or else you'll be out of guys, and fast.

By the way, one of the neatest things about this whole templating thing is that it produces a strong enough foundation for your deck that you don't need to go chasing rares and power cards around -- since I'm extremely impoverished as of late, and sold / dumped all of my spare VTES cards a while back, I've been building my new decks almost exclusively out of the contents of starter decks, and they still play just fine alongside decks that cost 3 or 4 times what they do to build.

Okay, so, now you've got a crypt and a library. That's a deck, pal! Get sleeves on those bad boys: you want them to last forever, don't you?

But wait -- you're not done yet. In fact, you're just getting started.

--Tuning and Tweaking--

Well, before I even get started on this section, let me say this one thing: while there are a bunch of ways to go about tuning and tweaking your deck, there is absolutely no substitute for playing real games to gather data about how your deck functions, then sitting down at the drafting table with your deck splayed out in front of you and applying what you've learned. So get out there and play, play, play.

One important point that I think a lot of players overlook [I know *I* did, at first]: when you're gathering data during gameplay, take special care to make note of the positive aspects of your decks' performances. It's incredibly easy to let this slip by you, especially when you're not having the best time of it. But if you only apply the things you learn from your decks' failures, your data is skewed, and you end up not tuning your decks as efficiently as you might. You've got to acc-en-tu-ate the positive, e-lim-in-ate the negative.

Every once in a while, people who play with me might notice me writing on a sheet of paper during game play, and wonder, "Just what the hell is that twisted little weasel up to now?" Well, here's my big secret: in my VTES case, I carry a bunch of photocopies of a deck performance tracking sheet, and I try and take notes, as surreptitiously as possible, about how my deck is working [or, is failing to work -- whichever].

These sheets are handwritten, to make full use of available space on a single page [if anyone ever wants one, at YMG, when I'm about, just ask, and you shall receive], but they look

something like this [adjusted for the typed page]:

=====

Deck Performance Tracking Sheet --

Deck: _____

Table Data:	Starting Crypt Draw:
# of Players: 4 / 5	_____
Seating Position: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5	_____
Predator: _____	

Prey: _____

Cross-table [L]: _____ [5]

Cross-table [R]: _____ [6]

Turn Tracking:

OOOOO	OOOOO	OOOOO
OOOOO	OOOOO	OOOOO

Ousts:	When:	Discards:
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Ousted by:	When:
_____	_____
_____	_____

[notes on reverse side] _____

=====

It's a simple little thing, really, but I find it goes a long way towards keeping me on-track as far as reworking my deck in the aftermath of an evening of gaming, followed by a long, tedious trip home on the subway.

There is, however, another tool at our disposal, for gauging the general effectiveness level of a deck, or, at the very least, its resilience and staying power. A quick trip over to the VTES-In-L.A. website [a veritable storehouse (or, Storage Annex, even) of useful VTES tools, articles, decks, and humor] gives us access to their solitaire playtest method, which you can find at:

-- Paul Johnson's VTES LA Playtesting Method

<http://VTESinla.org/playtest.htm>

Heads up to Paul Johnson for codifying this neat little system. While it seems like an awful lot of complicated work at first, once you get the swing of it down, it goes like clockwork, and with a little time and a six-sided dice, you can get a pretty fair idea of what's going to happen to you and your deck once you sit down at a real table. I use this system quite a bit before I ever field a new deck at a table, in the interest of not embarrassing myself any more than is absolutely necessary. One pertinent bit of information: in conversation with the ineffable David Tatu, elder statesman of VTES that he is, I learned that his Atlanta playgroup set about determining, at one point, just how long the average VTES game tend to run, in turns [rather than in time]. He told me that they had discovered that the first oust generally occurs somewhere between the 8th and 12th time around the table, and the rest of the table usually reconciles itself in fairly short order thereafter. So, the way I look at it, if your deck can withstand 12 turns worth of the VTES LA playtesting method [a system you cannot beat!], then you're ready to try sitting down at a table with something like confidence. If you find the playtesting method creaming you before the 8th turn, it's probably best that you plant yourself back at the drafting table for a little while. And be sure to do the same data gathering while using their playtesting method that you would in a real game [at least, the relevant parts] -- you can never have too much information about your deck.

The vagaries of individual metagame issues aside, there are several questions you can try to keep in your head while you are tuning and tweaking your deck, as well, in hopes of being better prepared for the threats you can reasonably expect to face when you get behind the wheel for a test drive. Here's a short, and necessarily incomplete, list of this kinds of things you want to be asking yourself:

How do I oust:

My prey?

My grandprey?

[In other words, after 1 oust, will my deck keep running?]

My predator?

[It does become necessary sometimes. And if not, will my deck maintain enough steam to continue ousting after 1 or 2 players?]

How many cards are usually in my ash heap when i make my first oust?

How do i keep myself from being ousted?

What are my defenses against:

Weenie bleed decks?

Stealth bleed decks?

Vote decks?

Hardcore fight decks?

Intercept wall decks?

"Environmental damage" [Anarch Revolt/Smiling Jack/Antediluvian

Awakening/Camarilla Segregation] decks?

What cards / approaches do I have no answer to at all?

How do i address those issues?

Do my vampires have significant blood management issues?

If so, what are my solutions?

Again, even as the author of the VTES LA playtesting method makes certain to tell you

repeatedly, there is no better source of data with which to improve the function of any deck than that gleaned from real games against real players. Wank it all you want at home: when the fur starts flying for real, that's when you find out what you've got, and what you don't.

And remember that there is no uber-deck in VTES. No matter how good your deck may be, there's something else that'll just run right up in it and put it down mercilessly. So don't scrap a deck just because of a bad game or three -- give every new stack of cards the chances it deserves before tossing it off as a failed experiment.

And keep this in mind, as well: while I view crypt restructuring as the ultimate last resort, there are times when that is precisely what you need to do. Recognizing those times is one of the hallmarks of becoming a better player. But once you start dicking around with the crypt, you're pretty much forced to go all the way back to the beginning and work through all the steps again, since those crypt changes engender sweeping changes in your library.

--Defense Packages--

I was trying to figure out where this section fit into the body of this missive, and I came up pretty much empty. It sort of doesn't fit in smoothly anywhere. so I'll just tack it on at the end here.

The defensive posture your deck establishes in play is one of the most important aspects of VTES play. In the final analysis, your turn only represents 20%-25% of the time you spend playing the game. It is in the "not-my-turn" portion of the game, by far outweighing your own active part of the game, that you must defend your minions and your pool long enough to experience another effective turn, which is when you will take your best shots at eliminating, or at least whittling down, your prey [who, at that point, is doing exactly what you were doing while waiting for your chance to strike].

As has been noted on countless occasions, there are several hallmarks to "tournament caliber" decks, common themes that are repeated over and over in the listings on The Lasombra's Tournament Winning Deck Archive. That compendium of decklists, by the way, is an excellent manual on deckbuilding technique: not for decks to copy, though there's nothing wrong with that, but to see what a deck that wins looks like, what traits it has in common with other decks that win, so that you can try and incorporate those characteristics into your own designs.

In any event, one of the most significant threads that weave through most of those decks is that of a solid, resilient, adaptable defense. Traditional defensive postures in VTES generally break down into the following categories, or most frequently, combinations thereof:

- Intercept
- Bleed bounce
- Bleed reduction
- Card cancellation
- Vote defense
- Combat evasion

The traditional defensive disciplines have been the following:

- Auspex
 - dedicated intercept
 - bleed bounce
 - bleed reduction
- Dominate
 - dedicated bleed bounce
- Animalism
 - massive untap
 - casual intercept
- Chimerstry
 - stealth reduction / elimination
 - casual bleed reduction

There are, of course, a variety of other defensive techniques applied by various decks. The torpor machine, a deadly weenie Potence rush deck, for example, which displays perilously little in the way of traditional defensive technique, simply bungles any vampire that begins to threaten it. But we are more concerned, here, with the defensive possibilities inherent, by clan and discipline, in a prospective deck design.

Problematically, certain clans, are, by nature of the in-clan disciplines they possess, "defenseless" to some degree or another. Since bleed bounce is quite possibly the most important watermark in the division between tourney-caliber and non-tourney-caliber decks [this is, of course, a gross generalization], the following clans are, therefore, relegated to a certain second-class status:

Nostferatu
!Nosferatu
Gangrel
!Gangrel
Assamites
Setites
Ravnos
Brujah
!Brujah
Blood Brothers
Gargoyles
Ahrimanes
Samedi

In certain cases, however, you will find that there are enough higher capacity vampires in some of the above-listed clans to allow you to build decks that are capable of bleed bounce: my Setite, Ravnos, and Gangrel decks are examples of crypts maximizing the appearance of Dominate, as an out-of-clan discipline, so as to provide bleed bounce as a defensive posture.

I have found, however, that in the cases where it is not possible to incorporate Dominate as an out-of-clan discipline, I am often required to use more intrusive methods of insuring that my

deck does not drop off to power bleed predators [or succumb to a simple, yet terminal, case of "the bleed stops here"]. In such instances, I have found that using weenie Auspex defense packages is pretty much the best way to go.

Why Auspex, instead of Dominate? Well, if I could have used Dominate from the start, I wouldn't be at this impasse in the first place. And since Auspex requires the superior level to be effective in this capacity, the vampires tend to be a little more resilient than Dominate weenies are. Also, Auspex is a more robust discipline than Dominate is, for defense. All Dominate can offer you is bounce, in the form of two cards [Deflection and Redirection]. Auspex, in addition to supplying bleed bounce, also supplies [non-tapping] bleed reduction and dynamic, useful intercept. In addition, Auspex-based bleed bounce is immune to the ravaging effects of Perfect Clarity and the like.

And, if this sort of thing matters to you, using Auspex instead of Dominate will mean you'll never have to endure Matt Hirsch calling you a "cheesy power-gamer."

The classic choices for Auspex weenie defense are:

Zoe [3, AUS]

Isabel de Leon [3, AUS]

They are tiny, and so easily influenced out, and hardly an intrusion into your crypt at all. Pair them with their 4-cap brothers [if the grouping on the rest of your deck allows it] Aleph and Dorian Strack, and you still have 8 main crypt slots available for the heavy hitters.

But, problematically, they are commonly seen, and easy to contest. Having one of these vampires, who is serving a role as part of your defensive structure, contested kicks you in the dingaling in three ways: one, your defensive position is seriously compromised; two, what was part of your defense just became part of somebody else's offense; and, three, your card flow just got horked, as the Auspex cards in your hand just lost a lot, if not all, of their usefulness.

Fortunately, there are some other approaches to the weenie Auspex defense package, which are considerably less susceptible to contestation. There are a few clans which feature Auspex at superior in their lower capacity vampires, but which see less in the way of play.

As it turns out, if you decide to go with a weenie Auspex defense module to shore your deck up, you'll find, via Crypt Monger, that there are forty [40] vampires with a capacity of 6 or less. 5 and 6 capacity vampires aren't precisely weenies, but I feel like the 6-cap point is right about where the vampires start to get a little intrusive, so, with only one exception, I generally stop right there.

I'm not bothering to separate these by group/type here.

Consider, if you will:

Toreador antitribu:

[this is the defense package I used for quite some time with my Ahrimanes, and was how I got started on the whole Auspex defense package kick in the first place.]

Remilliard [4, AUS]
Mercy [5, AUS (and dom!)]
Jost Werner [6, AUS (& +1 stealth!)]
Sheila ezarin [6, AUS (& +1 bleed!)]
[and, bigger, but completely cool, Greta Kircher {7, AUS (& bleed reduction!)}]

Toreador:

Isabel de Leon [3, AUS]
Dorian Strack [4, AUS]
Felicia Mostrom [5, AUS]
Antoinette [6, AUS]
Kallista [6, AUS]
Sigrid Bekker [6, AUS]

Tremere antitribu:

Richard Tauber [4, AUS]
Hannigan [5, AUS]
Elena Mendoza Vasquez [6, AUS]
Selena [6, AUS]

Tremere:

Martin Franckel [3, AUS]
Aisling Sturbridge [5, AUS]
Eugenio Estevez [6, AUS]
Valois Sang [6, AUS]

Malkavian antitribu:

Idalia [4, AUS]
General Perfidio Dios [5, AUS]
Dolphin Black [6, AUS]
Quira [6, AUS]

Malkavian:

Zoe [3, AUS]
Aleph [4, AUS]
Victoria [5, AUS]
Dancin' Dana [6, AUS]
Dr. Douglas Netchurch [6, AUS]
Ozmo [6, AUS]
Tony [6, AUS]

Ventrue antitribu:

Billy [5, AUS]
Marlene, the infernalist, [6, AUS]

Tzimisce:

Devin Bisley [5, AUS]
Elizabeth Wescott [5, AUS]
Caliban [6, AUS]
Corine Marcon [6, AUS]

mixed nuts:

MalDavis -- Caitiff [3, AUS]
Miriam Benyona -- Salubri [5, AUS]
Agaitas -- Harbingers of Skulls [6, AUS]
Alan Sovereign -- Ventrue [6, AUS]
Raful al-Zarqa -- Nagaraja [6, AUS]

Now, if you can't find something suitable for the decks you're trying to tighten up in all of that, you're just too damned finicky!

In any case, after choosing the group of vampires that best matches the discipline spread of the clan or motley crew of vampires you're working with, you're ready to cram them into the crypt, most likely at the lower end, and then go to work on fitting their cards into the library. I'd say that it's fair to expect that the percentage of cards you make available to them be roughly equivalent to the percentage of your crypt that they compose. This, of course, includes disciplineless cards, and it would be a perfectly intelligent thing to do to go back and Happy Families the new crypt, to get an idea of how many Auspex cards the script thinks your new deck can handle. A word of caution here, however: since all of these vampires are packing superior Auspex, don't weight the script towards counting superior levels twice unless the main players in your deck are almost entirely possessed of the superior levels of all the disciplines your deck is based upon.

Another really cool point here: if you choose to go with a specific clan or clans listed above, for your defensive package, then there's absolutely no reason you can't, nor shouldn't include that or those clan's or clans' hunting ground or grounds in your deck. If you're playing a bloodline, the addition of a hunting ground is an extreme benefit. And if you're playing a clan that already has its own, the addition of a second can only be thought of as a plus, assuming you share my feeling that hunting grounds are some of the strongest cards in the game. To that effect, for a while I was running three [3!] hunting grounds in my Ahrimanes deck: Fetish Club, Society, and Asylum! And it was all good.

As far as the minion cards themselves, the obvious choices are:

For intercept:

- Spirit's Touch
- Precognition
- Enhanced Senses
- Eagle's Sight
- Melange
- My Enemy's Enemy
- Telepathic Misdirection

For bleed reduction:

- Telepathic counter

For bleed bounce:

- Telepathic Misdirection
- My Enemy's Enemy

For pissing your prey off:

- Revelations

For combat defense:

- Read Intentions

You can use any and all of these cards, as dictated by personal choice, happy families, the generic deck template, or any combination of these considerations.

--Conclusion--

To wrap things up, while I know not every player is going to agree with everything I've put down here, and not every player is going to find this approach viable for them, I know it's working out for me, in spades. Offering up proof of the results is pretty easy: the decks I listed earlier, namely the Eurobrujah, the Setites, the Giovanni, the Gangrel, and the Malkavians have all been proving themselves for the last two weeks, and each of those decks is built almost entirely from the contents of starter decks. There are only a few non-starter cards in any of them, and most of them are not rares nor "power-cards." Each of those decks is currently boasting a victory-points-earned ratio of well over 50%. That's pretty impressive, given that if all else is equal, anything over 20% is pretty damned good.

So, try it, is all I can say. it's working for me, and it may work for you. If it doesn't, what have you lost?

A moment longer before you quit reading: I'd like to thank the following folks for making contributions [almost entirely without being aware that they were doing so] to this thing:

Ben Peal
Josh Feuerstein
Legbiter
Paul Johnson
The Lasombra
David Anderson-d'Avila
Ethan Burrow
David Tatu
Tobias op den Brouw
Zvonimir Jurisic

Feel free to email me with commentary or criticism, or else just go ahead and post it up on the Boston mailing list.

Peace --

--khs [a.k.a. weaselboy]

kevin_scribner@mad.scientist.com

oh, and:

"eritis sicut dii, scientes bonum et malum."

=====
=====

That's it then.

Peace --

-- khs

"The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

--Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn