Basic Concepts in Deck Construction

Vampire: the Eternal Struggle™ CCG

Version 1.1

by Gregory Williams

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Basic Concepts in Deck Construction

INTRODUCTION

   Vampire: The Eternal Struggle™ is a complex and demanding game. New players are often overwhelmed with the various card types and numerous symbols, not to mention the subtle nuances of game mechanics. So, creating an effective deck can be very difficult and often intimidating for the beginning player. This article is intended to be a guide for new players as they swim the murky waters of deck design. First, we will start with very basic game concepts. Then move on to the six basic deck types and their sub-categories, focusing on their strengths and weaknesses. We will then progress into deck construction, by exploring library card proportions, vampire-capacity ratios, and how to keep the balance between them. Lastly, we will touch on basic game strategy and tactics.

CHAPTER 1: BASIC GAME CONCEPTS

   If, for a moment, we set aside all the confusing symbols, card types, and intricate game mechanics, there are a few concepts and strategies that can be generalized. The two main concepts to consider in **V:TES** deck construction are *How do I oust my prey?* and *How do I keep myself in the game*? Or more precisely, *How will I reduce my prey to zero pool?* and *How do I keep my pool above zero?*

HOW DO I REDUCE MY PREY TO ZERO POOL?

- BLEED ACTIONS
- NON-BLEED ACTIONS
- MASTERS
- SPECIAL

   Fundamentally, **V:TES** is a game of removing *pool* from your *prey*. When constructing a deck, you need to incorporate one or more of the following *pool elimination strategies*:

1. <u>Bleed Actions</u>: Standard minion Bleed-Actions or *bleeds* using Action Cards such as COMPUTER HACKING, ENCHANT KINDRED, MADMAN'S QUILL, etc.
2. <u>Non-Bleed Actions</u>: Directed Actions using cards such as CHOIR, ENTICEMENT, ARMY OF RATS, TRICK OF DANYA or by using Undirected Political Actions like KINE RESOURCES CONTESTED or CONSERVATIVE AGITATION.
3. <u>Masters</u>: *Pool-burning* using Master cards such as SMILING JACK THE ANARCH, ANTEDILUVIAN AWAKENING, ANARCH REVOLT, FAME, etc.
4. <u>Special</u>: There are a few other cards of note that have the ability to remove *pool* from your *prey*. For instance, crypt cards such as GEMINI, JOHN PALEOLOGUS, or CYSCEK. While, these cards may not be strong enough to build a deck around, they can supplement one of the other strategies.

Depending on the type of deck you play, some of these strategies may work better for you. Most decks use minions to *bleed* their *prey*, supplementing this, occasionally, with Non-Bleed Actions and/or Masters. A few decks specialize in using Non-Bleed Actions to oust their *prey*. A common example of this variety is the Political deck, which is detailed later.

HOW DO I KEEP MY POOL ABOVE ZERO?

- BLEED AVOIDANCE
- MASTER CARDS
- MINION CARDS
- SPECIAL

Pool loss is inevitable with any deck, so a *pool gain strategy* must be incorporated into your deck design in order to maximize your *pool* to keep you above zero and avoid being ousted from the game. The most blatant *pool gain strategy* is the straight out ousting of your prey. Some player's focus all their resources on this endeavor, using an all-or-nothing approach in an attempt to oust their *prey* before they are ousted by there own *predator*. Six *pool* from each successive *prey* can be a very effective form of *pool* gain. Obvious drawbacks to this approach are a major lack of defense, most especially in combat, and if your *prey* mounts serious resistance, you can be in considerable trouble from your *predator*. A more balanced approach involves some combination of Masters and/or Action cards in order to gain *pool*. Ways to maximize your *pool* include:

BLEED AVOIDANCE
Since the most common form of *pool* removal is bleeding, the simplest way to keep your own pool above zero is to avoid being *bled* by your *predator*. This is done by either reducing *bleeds* against you [TELEPATHIC COUNTER, IGNIS FATUS, ECSTASY, BANNER OF NEUTRALITY, FOLDEROL, FRIEND OF MINE or GRETA KIRCHER], diverting *bleeds* to other players [DEFLECTION, REDIRECTION, TELEPATHIC MISDIRECTION, or MY ENEMY'S ENEMY], or otherwise countering [CAR BOMB or THE MOLE] or intercepting your *predator's bleeding* minions with your minions. Any effective deck will most likely apply one or more, if not all, of these strategies in order to avoid *pool* loss.

MASTER CARDS
Essential in most decks are some combination of MINION TAP'S, BLOOD DOLL'S, and/or TRIBUTE TO THE MASTER'S. These cards allow you to retrieve the blood you influenced onto your vampires and put it back into your *pool*. While MINION TAP and TRIBUTE TO THE MASTER have one-shot uses, BLOOD DOLL is a permanent card that can be applied effectively in combination with a hunting ground, THE RACK, or with innate hunting actions. For example, blood is moved to your vampire each turn via a hunting ground, then into your *pool* by way of the BLOOD DOLL, to create a simple but effective *pool stream*.

| Blood Bank | → | Hunting Ground | → | Vamp Controlled | → | Blood Doll | → | Your Pool |

Other masters may allow you to gain *pool*, by first spending some *pool* [Secret Horde, Slave Auction, Short Term Investment, Powerbase: Chicago, Blood Puppy, etc.]. These *pool* investment cards can be a good way to supplement your *pool gain strategy*. While some are straight forward, like Short Term Investment, others, such as Blood Puppy, can be tricky and difficult to use.
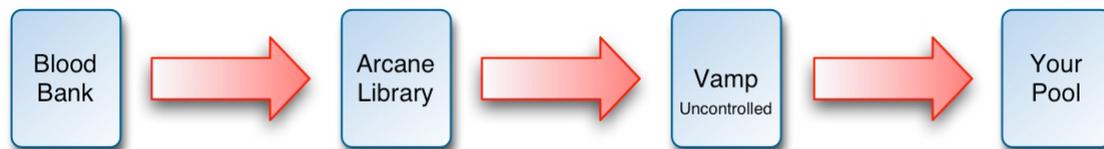
MINION CARDS

Some minion cards, particularly Actions and Political Actions, can be used to gain *pool* [Art Scam, Ancient Influence, Political Stranglehold, Consanguineous Boon, etc.]. There are even a few Action Modifiers that can be used to gain *pool*, as well [Voter Captivation, Bribes, etc.]. The most common cards used to gain blood are Political Actions, which require a vote, or 'referendum', to be passed in order to successfully resolve the intent of the card. This requires you to win the referendum by having more votes than the other players or getting other players to vote with you. This can be problematic and may involve some deal making between players in order to pull off your votes. Actions such as these, which gain you *pool*, can also be blocked, so you may need additional stealth to get them past other player's minions.

SPECIAL

There are a few other ways to gain *pool* that should be mentioned. The 'Edge' can gain you 1 *pool* if you manage to keep it until the beginning of your turn. This rarely happens in most games, as the 'Edge' switches hands between players often. There are even a few Vampires that can allow you to gain *pool* under specific circumstances [Bartholomew, Saqqaf, Victoria, etc.].

Also, players can sometimes transfer blood from uncontrolled vampires back to their *pool*. There are a few cards that allow you to gain free transfers on vampires in your uncontrolled region [Art Museum, Gang Territory, Dreams of the Sphinx, Powerbase: Montreal, Govern the Unaligned, The Call, Enchant Kindred, The Khabar: Honor, etc.]. By using your transfers to move blood back into your pool, you can create an efficient *pool stream*.

CHAPTER 2: DECK TYPES

While **V:TES** is an exceedingly complex game, you can break down the basic deck styles into six categories; or archetypes: 1) **The Toolbox Deck** 2) **The Bleed Deck** 3) **The Combat Deck** 4) **The Political Deck** 5) **The Wall Deck** 6) **The Novelty Deck**. Each deck type has a few subcategories, which are detailed as well.

1) THE TOOLBOX DECK

The term 'toolbox' refers to the fact that this *Deck Archetype* has a little bit of everything, or all the tools you need to make a well-rounded deck. While the Bleed deck focuses on *bleeding*, and the Combat deck on combat, the Toolbox deck will be able to do it all (Bleed, Combat, Intercept, Bleed Avoidance, etc.) to a lesser degree. We will give particular attention to this type of deck in the next section, as it is often the best type of deck for new players.

Strengths: Jack of all trades….
Weaknesses: ….is master of none.

2) THE BLEED DECK

The Bleed Deck focuses on getting by your *prey's* minions to deliver heavy bleeds. For the most part, these decks are light on Combat, Equipment, Retainers, and Non-Directed Actions. Most Bleed decks rely on stealth to get by their *prey's* minions, but others use Action Modifiers to make their *bleeds* unblockable, while still others rely on outnumbering their *prey* with lots of minions in order to swarm past their defenses.

Strengths: Can oust prey quickly; Lots of forward momentum.
Weaknesses: Often lacks significant defense.

- SNEAK BLEED – (Also, STEALTHY BLEED) This deck uses disciplines like Obfuscate, Protean or Obtenebration to stealth your *bleed* actions past your prey's minions. Once past a *prey's* minions, disciplines like Dominate, Presence or Dementation are used to play Action Modifiers to increase those *bleeds*.

- SHUTDOWN BLEED – (Also, POWER BLEED) This type of deck uses cards that shutdown their *prey's* minions, either permanently or temporarily. There are cards that tap your *prey's* minions [MIND NUMB, JAR THE SOUL, MUMMY'S TONGUE, ANARCH TROUBLEMAKER, etc.], or cause their blocking attempts to fail [CALL OF THE HUNGRY DEAD, ELDER IMPERSONATION, PSYCHOMACHIA, etc.], or that inhibit the minion's ability to block [SEDUCTION, BLACKMAIL, PENTEX SUBVERSION, SENSORY DEPRIVATION, etc.]. When you combine these different cards, you can effectively shutdown your prey's ability to block your bleeds. For example, if your prey has three minions in play, you could play a PENTEX SUBVERSION card on one minion during your Master Phase, attempt to bleed while playing SEDUCTION on a second minion, and finally cause the third

minion's block to fail with a CALL OF THE HUNGRY DEAD. This would make all your *prey's* minions unable to block. However, reaction cards could still be played, such as bleed redirection cards. You don't want to inadvertently bleed your *prey's prey* (or *grand-prey*) if you can help it.

- UNBLOCKABLE BLEED – There are some cards that can make a *bleed* action unblockable to all vampires, for instance DARING THE DAWN, DAY OPERATION, or THE GRANDEST TRICK. These cards can be costly, usually sending the *bleeding* minion to *torpor* in the process. This is often worth the price if the action ousts your *prey*. Fortitude is the discipline that contains most of these cards. Since unblockable *bleeds* of this type are so costly, they are used only when the *bleed* is substantial or at a critical moment, such as ousting your *prey*. Again, these *bleeds* can still be redirected to other players, so cards like SPYING MISSION, CONTINGENCY PLANNING, and PERFECT CLARITY are sometime used to counter redirection cards and help you *bleed* responsibly.

- WEENIE BLEED – (*Also, HORDE BLEED, SWARM BLEED*) A Weenie Bleed deck uses large numbers of small capacity minions and/or allies to overwhelm your *prey*. Often, these minions will have *bleeding* disciplines such as Dominate, in order to further increase the bleed delivery. Weenie Bleed decks are often fast out of the gate and usually overrun their first *prey*, but this usually marks them as targets for the rest of the table. Weenie decks can often run out of steam after their first *prey* is ousted. Keeping forward momentum flowing is important for the deck to prevail.

3) THE COMBAT DECK
Combat decks focus on destroying the minions of their *prey* and/or *predator*. The theory here is; that if a *prey* has no minions, he can't block your actions; and if you *predator* has no minions, he can't *bleed* you. No minions….No problem!

Strengths: Can control tempo of the game. Can intimidate other deck types.
Weaknesses: Often lacks forward momentum. Can often waste resources going upstream towards predator.

- INTERCEPT COMBAT – These decks concentrate on blocking the minions of their *predator* and *prey* in order to enter combat. An inherent problem with intercept decks is that it is much easier to block the actions of your *predator* than the actions of your *prey*. Since the most frequent action a minion takes is *bleeding*, and given that *bleeding* is a Directed Action [(D) Action], then only the player in to which the *bleed* is directed can block it. This means that an intercept deck, more often than not, goes upstream towards their *predator*. To help prevent this, intercept decks often use cards like EAGLE SIGHT (in superior) or FALCON'S EYE (in superior), which allow you to block a (D) Action even if it not directed at you. Common intercepting disciplines include Auspex, Animalism, and Chimerstry.

- RUSH COMBAT – Rush decks focus on destroying other player's minions by using cards that allow the minions you control to enter combat as a (D) Action [BUMS RUSH, AMBUSH, Contract, Clandestine Contract, HAVEN UNCOVERED, POLITICAL STRUGGLE, NOSE OF THE HOUND, etc.]. The ability to *rush* other player's minions isn't limited to your *predator* or *prey*, either. Rush decks often employ bullying tactics to get other players to cooperate with them. *"If you don't vote my way, I will Rush your vampire and send him to torpor!"* Threatening other players can be effective, if they are frightened enough of your deck to concede, but wasting resources across table is the long way to a victory point. Make sure cross table *rush's* are truly necessary. Often the threat alone is all that is needed. Rush decks frequently lack in sufficient intercept and/or *bleed* avoidance, not to mention forward *bleed* momentum.

- BRUISE-BLEED – Is it a *bleed* deck or a combat deck? In truth, it's a bit of both. Instead of using intercept or *rush* actions to enter combat with other player's minions, the Bruise-Bleed deck will use heavy *bleed* actions of *+2 bleed* or more, with little or no stealth. The heavy *bleeds* often force the player to block and deal with some serious combat from the acting minion, which usually knocks a sizable chunk of blood off the blocking minion, if not burning them or sending them to *torpor*. If these large *bleeds* happen to be redirected to another player via cards such as DEFLECTION or TELEPATHIC MISDIRECTION, the new target of the *bleed* has a better chance of blocking, since they use little or no stealth. Bruise-Bleed decks will often use cards like FAME and/or TENSION IN RANKS to supplement their ousting strategy.

4) THE POLITICAL DECK

Political decks (or Vote decks) rely on Political Actions to remove pool from your prey. Political Actions are also used for pool gain, as well. Careful manipulation of the voting environment is frequently required for Political decks to be effective, but a Vote deck in control of the table can be extremely successful.

Strengths: Effective at *pool* gain and *prey* ousting (if you control voting environment).
Weaknesses: Table has a number of opposing minions with votes. Votes can be blocked.

- VOTE-N-BLOAT – The Vote-n-Bloat deck often uses larger capacity (6<) vampires with innate titles to call votes in order to oust your *prey*. *Pool* gain is accomplished using Action Modifiers, such as VOTER CAPTIVATION, or with Political actions, like CONSANGUINEOUS BOON or ANCIENT INFLUENCE. When a player starts to accumulate a sufficient stockpile in their *pool*, it is often called 'Bloating'. Hence, the term 'Bloat' in Vote-n-Bloat. For example, a common theme among Vote-n-Bloat decks is to use multiple vampires with the Prince or Justicar titles in their Crypt. This gives the vampire the innate votes the deck needs to pull off its Political Actions, but also allows them access to play 'Prince and Justicar only' cards like FIFTH TRADITION: HOSPITALITY, which adds 4 blood to a vampire. When combined with MINION TAP, FIFTH TRADITION: HOSPITALITY

can be extremely effective way to gain *pool*. Similar cards such as ENTRENCHING, CONCERT TOUR, or RENEWED VIGOR can be equally effective.

- WEENIE VOTE – (*Also, VOTE HORDE*) Much like the Weenie Bleed deck uses large numbers of small capacity minions to *bleed*, the Weenie Vote deck uses them to call hordes of votes that either burn *pool* from your *prey*, or they can gain *pool* for you. These small capacity vampires generally have no innate votes, but rather use Political Actions to call votes that give your minions titles (Prince, Archbishop, Justicar, Cardinal, etc.). Also, Action Modifiers [AWE, BEWITCHING ORATION, etc.] can be used to gain temporary votes for the current referendum, in order to get your votes passed.

5) THE WALL DECK

      The wall deck relies more on defense than on forward momentum. While every deck needs to move forward in order to win, a wall deck limits its resources in this regard in order to form a better defense. The Wall deck shares some traits with other *Deck Archetypes* we've discussed, however, these similarities are superficial, since the deck is played in a completely different manor. Also, since Wall decks often rely heavily on Reaction cards and Masters they are often prone to 'Hand Jam', where a player is stuck with multiple cards of a similar type that can't be played or discarded very rapidly.

Strengths: Effective at shutting down your predator.
Weaknesses: Limited forward momentum. Have to often deal with 'Hand Jam'.

- INTERCEPT WALL – The Intercept Wall is strikingly similar to the Intercept Combat deck, with a few exceptions. While Intercept Wall decks also employ intercept in order to block minions, they instead choose less aggressive combat cards such as MAJESTY in order to end combat or Reaction cards such as OBEDIENCE to end combat before it begins. In the superior version of both these cards, the blocking vampire may untap or remain untapped, respectively. This is huge benefit to the blocking Methuselah and is usually very frustrating to their *predator*.

      Some versions of the Intercept Wall use *pool-burning* cards such as SMILING JACK THE ANARCH or ARMY OF RATS for forward momentum. Since these cards can be burned as a (D) action by a ready minion, they must be defended. Intercept Wall decks rely on cards like MAJESTY or EARTH MELD to end combat and untap so they are ready to block and defend the *pool-burning* cards over and over again.

- COUNTER WALL – A Counter Wall deck makes heavy use of Reactions and *out-of-turn* Master cards to counter the Actions or Masters of other players, most

notably their *predator*. A common measure that is employed in Counter Wall decks is to use Bleed Avoidance cards to reduce *bleeds* against them. [ECSTASY, FOLDEROL, FRIEND OF MINE, IGNIS FATUUS, TELEPATHIC COUNTER, DUMMY CORPORATION, GRETA KIRCHER, etc.] While most decks will use some variation of these *bleed* reduction cards, the Counter Wall deck will employ them in much greater numbers, often mixing in cards that redirect the destination of a *bleed* as well. [TELEPATHIC MISDIRECTION, DEFLECTION, REDIRECTION] Due to the card investment that is involved in countering other players, these decks typically use Bleed or sometimes Political Actions for their ousting strategy. And of those cards, a higher percentage of Retainers, Equipment or Masters are often employed to maximize the remaining card slots.

Two common cards found in most any type of deck are SUDDEN REVERSAL and DIRECT INTERVENTION. Counter Wall decks often make use of these to cancel cards played by their *predator* or other player, further increasing their ability to counter another player's Actions or Masters. Some decks may even include cards that cancel more specific types of minion cards, like Political Actions [DELAYING TACTICS, IRREGULAR PROTOCOL, KINDRED COERCION, POISON PILL, etc.] or cards that require certain disciplines [IRON HEART, DENIAL OF APHRODITE'S FAVOR, PSEUDO-BLINDNESS, etc.]

6) THE NOVELTY DECK

The Novelty deck encompasses a lot of territory. It is any deck that uses non-standard tactics to oust your *prey*. Or any deck that does not fit into the five deck types previously discussed. Here are some examples:

- POOL BURN – A *pool-burning* deck focuses on using Non-Bleed Action Cards and/or Masters [CHOIR, ENTICEMENT, ARMY OF RATS, ANARCH REVOLT, SMILING JACK THE ANARCH, ANTEDILUVIAN AWAKENING, etc.] in order to burn *pool* from your *prey*.

  In the case of CHOIR and ENTICEMENT, the *pool-burning* aspect is similar to Political Actions, but does not require a referendum to be passed in order to be successful. Also, the *pool-burning* affect is a (D) Action, which can only be blocked by your *prey*, but is not affected by *bleed* avoidance cards like DEFLECTION or TELEPATHIC COUNTER. The drawback to these cards are that they are restricted to disciplines specific to certain clans and that these cards often have some requirement that needs to be fulfilled (i.e. Burning the 'Edge' in the case of ENTICEMENT). ARMY OF RATS, on the other hand, is a Non-Directed Action, so your *prey* or *predator* is able to block it.

  In the case of SMILING JACK, ANARCH REVOLT, ANTEDILUVIAN AWAKENING, and JUDGEMENT: CAMARILLA SEGREGATION, these cards are global effects that target all players, including you. You need to be careful when and how you play these cards or you could learn to regret using them.

- RESOURCE DEPLETION – Decks that uses unconventional tactics to reduce your *prey's* resources in order to limit their resistance. There are several variations on this theme:
    - LIBRARY BURNING – Decks that use vampires and various minion cards to burn away the library cards of your *prey*. [EGOTHHA, AGAITAS, AGGRESSIVE TACTICS, SLAUGHTERHOUSE, SCRYING OF SECRETS, FELINE SABOTEUR, etc.] This can be an ousting strategy when combined with BRINKSMANSHIP.
    - BLOOD STEALING – Uses minions and minion cards to burn or steal blood off of other player's minions. [FRANCOIS VILLION, KYOKO SHINSEGAWA, CRYPTIC MISSION, VAMPIRIC DISEASE, LAZARENE INQUISITOR, SUCCUBUS, etc.]
    - TRANSFER JAMMING – Uses vampires and minion cards to steal or inhibit your *prey's* transfers to uncontrolled vampires. [GISELA HARDEN, LAZAR DOBRESCU, BRAINWASH, TRICK OF DANYA, CAIRO INT'L AIRPORT, etc.]
    - MINION STEALING – Uses minion cards to take control of other players minions, either temporarily or permanently, to use as your own. [CORRUPTION, TEMPTATION, MIND RAPE, SPIRIT MARIONETTE, HOSTILE TAKEOVER, PUPPETEER WRAITH, etc.]

- GIMMICK – These are decks that often defy all logic, or good sense, as they try to pull off some wild gimmick in order to win. While unorthodox and dangerous, they are usually some of the most fun.

CHAPTER 3: DECK DESIGN

Now that we have covered the basic concepts and deck types, we can discuss the actual construction of a deck. The first step should be to choose a *Deck Archetype* you wish to play, whether a Combat deck, a Political deck, Toolbox deck, etc. Once you have chosen the type of deck you wish to play, it is time to select what cards to use in your crypt and library. It has been debated whether it is better to choose your crypt or your library first. Both approaches are equally valid, and one approach may be better than the other depending on what *Deck Archetype* you have chosen to play. A good suggestion for beginning players is to choose a preliminary crypt of vampires, select your library cards, and then finalize your crypt selection.

- CHOOSE ARCHETYPE
- SELECT PRELIMINARY CRYPT
- SELECT LIBRARY
- FINALIZE CRYPT
- TEST-DRAW LIBRARY AND CRYPT
- FINAL ADJUSTMENTS

CHOOSE ARCHETYPE – Pick the basic deck type you wish to play (Toolbox, Bleed, Combat, Political, Wall or Novelty). Then select a subclass, if any, such as Weenie Bleed under the Bleed archetype, or Rush Combat, etc.

SELECT PRELIMINARY CRYPT – Keeping in mind the type of deck you wish to play, choose vampires that will best fit your deck. For instance, if your playing a Political deck, you may want to choose vampires that have innate votes, or have disciplines that allow you to play vote modifiers. In a Combat deck, you would obviously want to choose vampires that have combat disciplines. With this in mind, select an initial crypt that you can use as a template to build your library around.
> *Example: Mateusz Gryzbowsky, Calebos, Teresita, Kendrik, Beast, Ox, Christanius Lionel, Nigel the Shunned, Cicatriz, Agatha, Tommy and Shannon Price were selected for a Nosferatu Antitribu Toolbox deck.*

SELECT LIBRARY – Now that you have made a preliminary crypt assignment, it is time to select your library. Determining what ratio of minion cards to use is dependent on the *Deck Archetype* that you have chosen. Bleed decks and Political decks have higher ratios of Action and Action Modifiers, Rush decks obviously have higher percentages of Combat cards and *rush* Actions, and Intercept decks have high percentages of Combat and Reaction cards. A Toolbox deck is always a safe bet and a good *Deck Archetype* for beginners, as it has a balanced ratio of each minion card type. To determine proper ratios we use *classical probability*, which is defined as: "*the probability that an event will occur is equal to the number of favorable outcomes divided by the total number of possible outcomes.*"

$$P(A) = \text{\# of ways A can occur / total number of possible outcomes}$$

So, if you have 16 Masters in a 90 card deck the probability of drawing one is 16 ÷ 90 which equals 0.178 or 17.8%. However, you draw seven cards in your opening hand and the probability increases each time you draw a card. To determine the probability of drawing a Master card in your opening hand of seven, the equation becomes a bit more complex.

$$1 - [((Y-X)/Y) * ((Y-X-1)/(Y-1)) * ((Y-X-2)/(Y-2)) * \ldots * ((Y-X-5)/(Y-5)) * ((Y-X-6)/(Y-6))]$$
$$\text{or } 1 - [((Y-X) * (Y-X-1) * (Y-X-2) * \ldots * (Y-X-5) * (Y-X-6)) / (Y * (Y-1) * (Y-2) * \ldots * (Y-5) * (Y-6))]$$

If X = the number of cards of a particular library type (which in our case is 16) and Y = the total number of cards in your library, then the probability of drawing one card in your opening hand of seven becomes 75.9%.

$$1 - [(74*73*72*71*70*69*68) / (90*89*88*87*86*85*84)] = 0.759 \text{ or } (75.9\%)$$

A 90 card library is a standard for any V:TES deck, unless you are limited in the number of cards that you own or otherwise have a specific deck design that calls for a smaller library. When building a 90 card Toolbox deck, a good rule-of-thumb to remember is: "*10% for Allies, Retainers & Equipment (combined) and 20% (each) for everything else*". In other words, for a 90 Card Toolbox deck you will want to select approximately 16 Actions/Political Actions (20%), 16 Action Modifiers (20%), 16 Combat (20%), 16 Master (20%), 16 Reaction cards (20%) and finally choose 10 cards from Equipment, Allies, and/or Retainers (10%). Thus, a Toolbox deck with these ratios would ideally have 1 Action, 1 Action Mod, 1 Combat, 1 Master, 1 Reaction, 1 Equipment/Retainer/Ally and 1 Other in your opening draw of seven cards.

Example: The following cards were chosen for the Nosferatu Antitribu Toolbox deck.

Nosferatu Antitribu Variant #1

ACTIONS (16)	COMBAT (16)	MASTER (16)
(2) Army of rats	(4) Torn Signpost	(1) Information Network
(3) Computer Hacking	(4) Carrion Crows	(1) Nosferatu Kingdom
(2) Night Moves	(4) Undead Strength	(1) Shanty Town Hunting Ground
(1) Tier of Souls	(4) Immortal Grapple	(1) The Barrens
(2) Cardinal Benediction		(1) KRCG News Radio
(1) Crusade: London	EQUIPMENT (6)	(1) Rumor Mill Tabloid Newspaper
(2) Consanguineous Boon	(2) Leather Jacket	(4) Blood Doll
(2) Kine Resources Contested	(1) Laptop Computer	(2) Minion Tap
(1) Parity Shift	(1) Meat Hook	(1) Dreams of the Sphinx
	(1) Meat Cleaver	(1) Guardian Angel
ACTION MODS (16)	(1) Crimson Sentinel, The	(1) Powerbase: Madrid
(6) Swallowed by Night		(1) Depravity
(2) Lost in Crowds	RETAINER (4)	
(2) Cloak the Gathering	(2) Raven Spy	REACTION (16)
(1) Faceless Night	(1) Mr. Winthrop	(3) Forced Awakening
(1) Elder Impersonation	(1) JS Simmons, Esq.	(3) Guard Dogs
(1) Spying Mission		(4) Cats' Guidance
(1) Domain of Evernight		(4) Falcon's Eye
(2) Animal Magnetism		(2) Pack Tactics

The deck above contains exactly the amounts we suggested, however, this is not an absolute number, only a guideline. Every deck will be different and ratios may vary slightly as you have more or less cards selected for each card type. Also, depending on

the clan you choose, you would want to play to that clan's strengths, using more combat cards and less stealth modifiers for a clan that is more combat-centric while using more Actions and Action Modifiers for a clan that is better suited to stealth *bleed*. In this case, we may want to use more combat cards and a few less actions. For example:

Nosferatu Antitribu Variant #2

ACTIONS (12)
(2) Army of rats
(5) Computer Hacking
(5) Bums Rush

ACTION MODS (14)
(6) Swallowed by Night
(2) Lost in Crowds
(2) Cloak the Gathering
(1) Faceless Night
(1) Elder Impersonation
(1) Spying Mission
(1) Domain of Evernight

COMBAT (20)
(5) Torn Signpost
(5) Carrion Crows
(5) Undead Strength
(5) Immortal Grapple

EQUIPMENT (8)
(4) Leather Jacket
(1) Laptop Computer
(1) Meat Hook
(1) Meat Cleaver
(1) Crimson Sentinel, The

RETAINER (4)
(2) Raven Spy
(1) Mr. Winthrop
(1) JS Simmons, Esq.

MASTER (16)
(1) Information Network
(1) Nosferatu Kingdom
(1) Shanty Town Hunting Ground
(1) The Barrens
(1) KRCG News Radio
(1) Rumor Mill Tabloid Newspaper
(4) Blood Doll
(3) Minion Tap
(1) Dreams of the Sphinx
(1) Guardian Angel
(1) Depravity

REACTION (16)
(3) Forced Awakening
(3) Guard Dogs
(4) Cats' Guidance
(4) Falcon's Eye
(2) Pack Tactics

Notice that the political aspect of the deck has been deleted and combat has become more the focus. Variant #2 uses BUMS RUSH's to make the deck more combat proactive. As you can see, a few cards more or less in each card type can create better balance for your Toolbox deck. To further advance your combat attack, you could possibly drop the ARMY OF RAT's and COMPUTER HACKING's for more BUMS RUSH's. You could also add more combat cards at this point, but the deck would cease being a Toolbox deck and then become a Combat deck. The following table contains some example ratios for Toolbox decks, their respective probabilities, and the number of cards + or – for each library card type to maintain an approximate Toolbox deck balance.

Toolbox Deck Card Ratios

	60 Cards			70 Cards			80 Cards			90 Cards		
	# Cards/Type	(+/-)	Probability	# Cards/Type	(+/-)	Probability	# Cards/Type	(+/-)	Probability	# Cards/Type	(+/-)	Probability
Action/Political Action	11	2	77.76%	12	2	74.92%	14	3	75.48%	16	4	75.91%
Ally	1	1	11.67%	2	2	19.13%	2	2	16.84%	3	3	21.79%
Action Modifiers	11	2	77.75%	13	2	77.95%	14	3	75.48%	16	4	75.91%
Combat	11	2	77.75%	13	4	77.95%	15	6	75.48%	16	8	75.91%
Equipment/Retainer	4	1	60.05%	5	2	41.92%	6	2	43.35%	7	3	44.43%
Event	0	1	0.00%	0	2	0.00%	0	2	0.00%	0	3	0.00%
Master	11	2	77.75%	13	2	77.94%	15	3	78.08%	16	4	75.91%
Reaction	11	2	77.75%	12	2	74.92%	14	3	75.48%	16	4	75.91%

KEY		
	# Cards/Type	Number of cards per library card type. (i.e. Action, Master, etc.)
	(+/-)	Amount plus or minus from each library card type to stay within deck ratios.
	Probability	Probability of drawing a library card type in opening 7 cards.

FINALIZE CRYPT – Once your library is selected, you must finalize your crypt. It is vital that you maintain a balanced capacity among your vampires. Three statistics you should consider when finalizing your crypt are *Average Crypt Capacity*, *Minimum Draw Capacity* and *Maximum Draw Capacity*. Your *Average Crypt Capacity* is the average blood level of the vampires in your crypt. The *Minimum Draw Capacity* is the sum of the capacities of your four lowest vampires. The *Maximum Draw Capacity* is the sum of the capacities of your four highest vampires.

You should strive to keep the *Average Crypt Capacity* of your vampires to 6.0 and under. This is not to say that crypts with an *Average Crypt Capacity* greater than 6.0 aren't viable, they just tend to be slower and make it more difficult to manage your *pool*. With a crypt capacity of 6 or less, you should be able to influence an average of one vampire every other turn. The lower your *Average Crypt Capacity*, the faster you can influence vampires into play. However, lower capacity vampires have a less economical *Ability-Capacity Ratio* (see sidebar).

Ability-Capacity Ratio:
The higher the capacity of the vampire, the better their abilities are relative to their capacity. So, if you spend more pool on higher capacity vampires, you get more bang for your buck.

1-4 Capacity = Capacity-1 ability points
5-6 Capacity = Capacity ability points
7-8 Capacity = Capacity+1 ability points
9-10 Capacity = Capacity+2 ability points
11 Capacity = Capacity+3 ability points

In order to calculate your *Average Crypt Capacity*, add up the total capacity of your vampires and divide by the number of vampires in your crypt. For instance, the total capacity for 12 vampires adds up to 68 (2, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 8, 8 = 68). Your average capacity is then 5.67 (68 ÷12 = 5.67). This is a good average, as it falls below the 6.0 capacity upper limit suggested above. The mean influence a player gets for the first two turns is 6.5 [((1 +2 +3 +4) ÷4) +4 = 6.5]. So, with a crypt capacity of 5.67, you can, with great likelihood, influence one vampire into play on your second turn and, in all probability, influence at least two vampires into play on your third turn.

The *Minimum Draw Capacity* and *Maximum Draw Capacity* tell you the extremes for your initial crypt draw. Given the same crypt example as above (2, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 8, 8), the *Minimum Draw Capacity* would be 10 (2, 2, 3, 3) while the *Maximum Draw Capacity* would be 31 (7, 8, 8, 8). These statistics are good measures of your crypt's balance. A deck can have a relatively good *Average Crypt Capacity* but may not be well balanced. For example, a deck can have an average capacity of 5.5, but the minimum and maximum draw capacities can show it to be unbalanced (1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 10, 10, 10, 10, 10, 10 = 66; Min = 4; Max = 40). *Minimum Draw Capacity* should be close to 13, while the *Maximum Draw Capacity* should average around 29.

With these statistics in mind, you should consider carefully which vampires you want to select for your crypt, as well as the number of copies of each you might want to use. Like library ratios, the chances of getting a particular vampire are predicted by *classical probability [P(A) = # of ways A can occur / total number of possible outcomes]*. If you have a crypt of 12 vampires and you have one version of a particular vampire, the probability of drawing that vampire is 1 in 12, or 0.0833(8.33%). Your chances increase each time you draw a card from your crypt, so when you draw 4 cards into your initial

inactive region, the probability of getting a particular vampire expands to 33.33%. Increasing the frequency of vampires in your crypt will obviously improve the chances of getting that vampire. Putting 2 copies in a 12 card crypt increases the probability from 33.33% to 48.48% with only a 9.09% of drawing both copies (See Table below). Your chances of drawing 2 copies of the same vampire in your opening draw are slightly less

	# Copies in Draw	Number of Cards in Crypt				
		12	13	14	15	16
1	1 Copy	33.33%	30.77%	28.57%	26.67%	25.00%
2	1 Copy	48.48%	46.15%	43.96%	41.90%	40.00%
	2 Copies	9.09%	7.69%	6.59%	5.71%	5.00%
3	1 Copy	50.91%	50.35%	49.45%	48.35%	47.14%
	2 Copies	21.82%	18.88%	16.48%	14.51%	12.86%
	3 Copies	1.82%	1.40%	1.10%	0.88%	0.71%
4	1 Copy	45.25%	46.99%	47.95%	48.35%	48.35%
	2 Copies	33.94%	30.21%	26.97%	24.18%	21.76%
	3 Copies	6.46%	5.03%	4.00%	3.22%	2.64%
	4 Copies	0.20%	0.14%	0.10%	0.07%	0.05%
5	1 Copy	35.35%	39.16%	41.96%	43.96%	45.33%
	2 Copies	42.42%	39.16%	35.96%	32.97%	30.22%
	3 Copies	14.14%	11.19%	8.99%	7.33%	6.04%
	4 Copies	1.01%	0.70%	0.50%	0.37%	0.27%
6	1 Copy	24.24%	29.37%	33.57%	36.92%	39.56%
	2 Copies	45.45%	44.06%	41.96%	39.56%	37.09%
	3 Copies	24.24%	19.58%	15.98%	13.19%	10.99%
	4 Copies	3.03%	2.10%	1.50%	1.10%	0.82%

Probality of drawing duplicate vampires in your opening draw of four.

(left axis label: # of copies of Vamp in crypt / # of copies of Vamp in crypt)

than drawing 1 copy in 12, which is about as low as you will get in a 12 card crypt.

Something to consider is that a 12 card crypt is not always the best option. A 13 card crypt can be better in some situations. For instance, you may be playing a deck that relies on one main vampire, such as LAZVERINUS, THRALL OF LAMBACH. Since you absolutely need to get LAZVERINUS in your opening draw, typically in a 12 card deck, you would need at least four to five copies to insure a draw, if not more. Five is a good number of copies, as you have a 92.92% (35.35 + 42.42 + 14.14 + 1.01 = 92.92%) chance of drawing at least one LAZ', however, you have a 57.57% (42.42 + 14.14 + 1.01) chance of drawing 2 or more copies of LAZ' in your initial crypt draw, while the probability of drawing all 4 is 1.01%. This is a high percentage if you want other vamps besides LAZ', so you may want to play with the ratios to maximize your chances. By playing five copies in a 13 card crypt, your chances of drawing one copy of LAZ' drop to 90.21%, while your probability of drawing multiple copies falls to 51.05% (38.16 + 11.19 + 0.70); and 4 copies 0.70%. Your chances are still over 90% (*loss of 2.71 percentage points*) to draw a LAZ', but you've improved your chances of being stuck with multiple copies (*improved 6.52 points*). Therefore, a 12 card crypt may not always be the best option. The choice is ultimately yours, but using the statistics to your advantage can help you stack the deck in your favor.

When finalizing your crypt, use the ratios to your advantage. The ratio table not only works for the number of copies of a vampire you may draw, but can be used for

other statistics as well. For instance, you can measure the probability of drawing a vampire with votes or the probability of drawing a vampire with superior Potence.

Finally, returning to our previous examples for a *Nosferatu Antitribu* deck, we can now finalize our crypt. We have two variants for the deck, so we will also need two variants for the final crypt assignment. In both cases we have chosen crypts that best fit the libraries we have designed, maximizing vampires with titles when votes are needed or using more combat effective vamps when *rushing* is more the focus.

Example #1: The following selections are for the Nosferatu Antitribu Variant #1. Notice that vampires with votes have been doubled up in the crypt, where 6 out of the 12 vampires have title, so the chances of drawing at least one vamp with votes are 96.96%.

Nosferatu Antitribu Variant #1	
d	
(2) Calebos [8 cap] cel ANI OBF POT {Bishop}	Average Draw Capacity = 5.83
(2) Kendrick [7] aus obf ANI POT {Priscus}	Minimum Draw Capacity = 16
(1) Beast [7] ani cel OBF POT	Maximum Draw Capacity = 30
(1) Ox [6] ANI OBF POT	
(1) Christanius Lionel [6] pot ANI OBF	10 Combined Votes (x4 Bishop + x2 Priscus)
(1) Nigel the shunned [5] obf ANI POT	
(2) Cicatriz [5] ani obf pot {Bishop}	ANI 8 ani 4
(1) Tommy [3] ani pot	POT 7 pot 4
(1) Shannon Price, the Whisperer [3] ani obf	OBF 5 obf 6

Example #2: The following selections are for the Nosferatu Antitribu Variant #2. A few less vampires with votes and more with superior Potence and Animalism for increased combat effectiveness.

Nosferatu Antitribu Variant #2	
d	
(2) Calebos [8 cap] cel ANI OBF POT {Bishop}	Average Draw Capacity = 5.92
(1) Kendrick [7] aus obf ANI POT {Priscus}	Minimum Draw Capacity = 16
(2) Beast [7] ani cel OBF POT	Maximum Draw Capacity = 30
(2) Ox [6] ANI OBF POT	
(1) Christanius Lionel [6] pot ANI OBF	6 Combined Votes (x3 Bishop + x1 Priscus)
(1) Nigel the shunned [5] obf ANI POT	
(1) Cicatriz [5] ani obf pot {Bishop}	ANI 7 ani 5
(1) Tommy [3] ani pot	POT 8 pot 3
(1) Shannon Price, the Whisperer [3] ani obf	OBF 7 obf 4

TEST-DRAW LIBRARY AND CRYPT – No matter how good a deck seems on paper, you never really know how it will work until you test it and re-test it. Randomize your deck as much as possible, then *practice-draw* your crypt and library. A decent crypt draw will show an average of your four drawn vampires near the *Average Crypt Capacity* of your deck. As for your library draw, if you are using the toolbox ratio's you should be drawing one of each primary card type in your draw of seven (1 Action, 1 Action Mod, 1 Combat, 1 Master, 1 Reaction, 1 Equipment/Retainer/Ally and 1 Other), hopefully, with only one or two doubles in the mix.
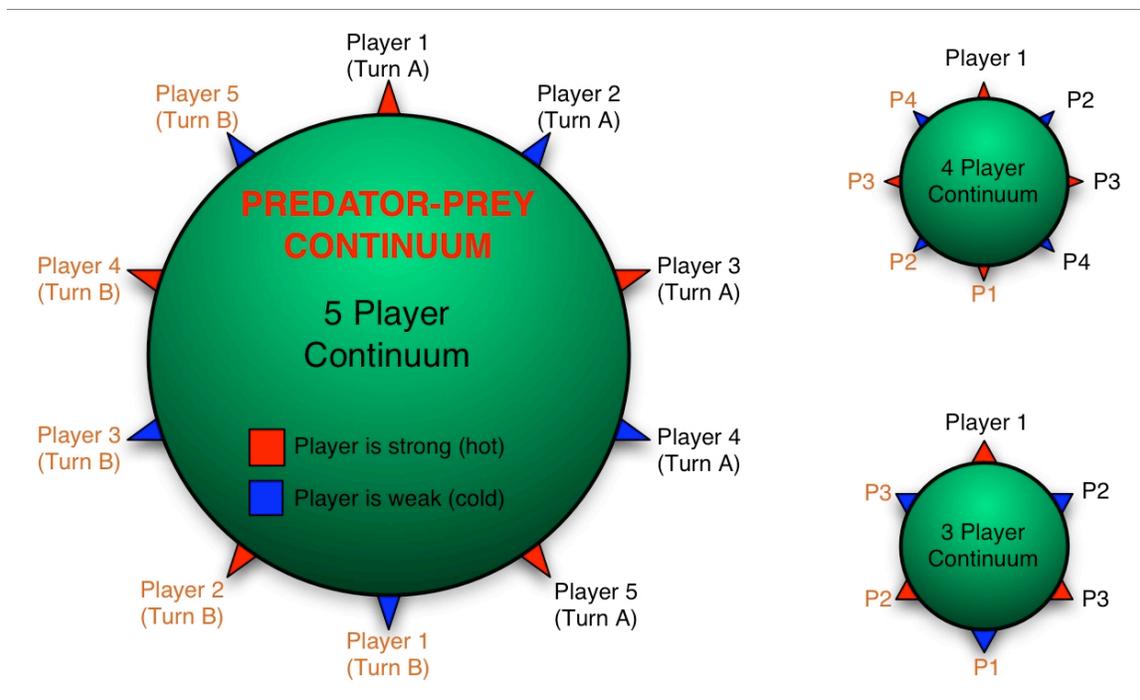
FINAL ADJUSTMENTS – After you've test-drawn your deck several times, make what adjustments need to be made, if any. Now, you're ready to *play-test* your deck. You'll find you might need to tweak the deck after you play it a few times. Decks are rarely ever complete, they are often works-in-progress, so don't be surprised if it takes several incarnations to get the desired result.

CHAPTER 4: SIMPLE STRATEGY

Since you now have a deck, its time to discuss how to play it beyond what's in the rules. There is more to **V:TES** than just *bleed*, untap, and repeat. We will discuss game pacing, table interaction, deal making, how and when to cycle cards, how to manage blood and pool, and also cover some simple mistakes everyone makes.

- THE PREDATOR-PREY CONTINUUM
- TABLE INTERACTION
- THE ART OF THE DEAL
- RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
- COMMON MISTAKES

THE PREDATOR-PREY CONTINUUM – There is an ebb and a flow to any **V:TES** game. When one player applies pressure, another player is relieved of pressure. This is the relationship that forms the *Predator–Prey Continuum*. This continuum is a series of highs and lows in the pressure applied to players in the game. Essentially, it is a continuous downstream flow of cause and effect. In a five-player game, this continuum is well balanced. If we were to assume that player-one had a strong start, this would put pressure on player-two, therefore relieving pressure on player-three, which then adds pressure to player-four, finally relieving pressure from player-five who subsequently applies pressure to player-one. (P1⬆, P2⬇, P3⬆, P4⬇, P5⬆, P1⬇, etc.) Confused?

Basically, a player will have more pressure one turn and less pressure the next, back and forth, until there is some fundamental change the game. Now, I must stress that this

continuum is not meant to be a measure of the amount of pressure a player receives. If your *predator* is a heavy stealth *bleed* deck, the amount of pressure you feel will be considerable, however, no matter how strong that pressure is, it is still subject the high's and lows of the continuum. Sure, one turn you might be bled for five, but the next may only be for two or three. The point here is that regardless of the amount of pressure, that pressure will crest and fall throughout the game. In a four-player game, the continuum is less balanced, since pressure alternates back and forth and there are an even number of players in the game, that pressure tends to fall more on two players and less on the other two players. Balance returns in a three-player game since the number of players is odd again. For the most part, the continuum flows evenly no matter the number of players, but hiccups do arise. A good player learns to cause these hiccups when necessary in order to shift the continuum in their favor. Controlling this continuum is an essential part of winning the game. But how do you control it? This is done by conscious manipulation of table interactions between players. When you can successfully influence other players, you can subtly affect the *Predator-Prey* Continuum in your favor, thus relieving pressure on yourself and allowing you to apply forward momentum.

TABLE INTERACTION – An important part of every **V:TES** game is table interaction. How a player behaves with other players is expressed in the *Player-Archetype* they manifest. Or more simply put, a *Player-Archetype* is the name we give to a Methuselah's table demeanor. In every game there are a number of archetypes that any player may become at one point or another. They are: 1) **The Threat**; 2) **The Thrall** (a.k.a. the Meat); 3) **The Conscience**; 4) **The Manipulator**; 5) **The Wall**; 6) **The Shadow**; and 7) **The Kook**. So, what do these mean? Essentially, these are stereotypical archetypes that players fall into when playing **V:TES**. For instance, a player who is aggressive and shows little compunction is 'The Threat' at the table, while a player who is taking a beating is 'The Thrall' or 'The Meat'. There can be multiple 'Threats', 'Thralls' or other *Player-Archetypes* at the table simultaneously and players may morph from one archetype to another in an instant. The idea is to recognize who a player is at that moment and use that to your advantage.

> 1) **The Threat** – [*"You're the threat now. Just like I was."* BRILL – ENEMY OF THE STATE, 1998] 'The Threat' is usually the player who is making a move in the game or sometimes it's the player who has the biggest stash of *pool* or minions. PRO: As 'The Threat', you need to control the continuum of the game, keeping up your forward momentum while simultaneously, and incongruously, attempting to convince the table you are not 'The Threat'. CON: Once you recognize who 'The Threat' is, you need to neutralize their position as quickly as possible. Please note, that attacking 'The Threat' directly is almost certainly not the best solution. You can talk to the table and simply make others aware of 'The Threat'. In some circumstances you may wish make a case for group coordination to help the 'The Thrall' and hinder the actions of 'The Threat', but only if the situation calls for it.
> 2) **The Thrall** (a.k.a. the Meat) – [*"You are the weakest link, goodbye!"* THE WEAKEST LINK] Being 'The Thrall' is the worst place to be. You're between a rock and a hard place. PRO: As 'The Thrall' you must appeal to the table and convince someone that aiding you is to their benefit, either for some reciprocation

or for just forestalling 'The Threat'. <u>CON</u>: Assist 'The Thrall' when you can, and/or take advantage of their weakness if it can be used to hurt your own *prey*. If 'The Thrall' happens to be your *prey*, then guess who 'The Threat' is at the moment. You are!

3) **The Conscience** – [*"No conscience, no remorse... it's an easy way to live"* ANGEL – BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER, 1997] Typically the player or players who try to maintain a balance or act as a leveling influence in the game. They work to counterbalance 'The Threat'. <u>PRO</u>: As 'The Conscience' you should level out any overzealous action by 'The Threat' and try to be a voice of reason. Appeal to the table to keep the balance. <u>CON</u>: 'The Conscience' is 'The Threat's' biggest obstacle. Sure, many players will sympathize with 'The Thrall', but are usually unwilling to do so since taking a beating from your *predator* is an essential part of the game. When 'The Conscience' speaks up and makes a strong argument to aid 'The Thrall', it is hard not to listen to reason. To neutralize this voice of reason, you need to convince the table that 'The Conscience' or someone else is 'The Threat' and not you.

4) **The Manipulator** – [*"He knows too well how to manipulate the mob"* PROXIMO – GLADIATOR, 2000] The player who is working the table with gentle persuasion, subterfuge or even open coercion in order to steer other players towards 'The Manipulator's' own ends. <u>PRO</u>: As 'The Manipulator', offer other players suggestions that benefit both that player and yourself. For instance, a suggestion to your *grand-predator* that they block a *hunt* action by one of your *predator's* minions; or offer your votes to another player in exchange for some *pool* loss on your *prey*. <u>CON</u>: Once you recognize who 'The Manipulator' is, the best way to counter their influence is to beat them at their own game and usurp their place. Don't let them get away with what you should be getting away with!

5) **The Wall** – [*"He who can destroy a thing, controls a thing"* PAUL-MUADIB – DUNE, 1984] Sometimes a player becomes 'The Wall' by playing an *Intercept* deck, sometimes by playing a *bloat* deck, or sometimes they can shut down their predator by back-stream *rush* actions. A player that walls-up can be very dangerous to the stability and pace of the game. 'The Wall' holds up the *Predator-Prey Continuum* in order to exert some measure of control on the game. <u>PRO</u>: As 'The Wall', you've made it your mission to stall your *predator* (or the entire game) in order to control the tempo of the game. Sometimes this is done in order to build up resources for later forward momentum, or sometimes it's simply done to make you the 'point-of-permission' for other players actions. Use your ability to stall the flow of game to your advantage. Bargain with other players for concessions in order to gain some advantage for yourself. <u>CON</u>: 'The Wall' is a terrible player to face because they don't let you play your game. It can be extremely frustrating if they happen to be your *prey*. There is no easy way to counter a player that has walled-up. The best thing to do is convince them to focus their attention forward or elsewhere. Then bide your time until you can strike and strike hard.

6) **The Shadow** – [*"It was as if he was always walking in a shadow"* BUSCEMI – DESPERADO, 1995] There are times in **V:TES** when you don't want to draw attention to yourself. Perhaps you have a fist full of Masters or maybe you don't

want anyone to notice you have the 'Edge'. Whatever the reason, you have found that you want to blend into the wallpaper and not be a target. PRO: As 'The Shadow', when you need to be unseen, you could try making some idle conversion and hope they don't notice what you're up to until its too late; or you could try shifting attention onto another player with some well placed words. CON: When you recognize that a player is trying to not draw attention to themselves, use this to your benefit. If it's your *prey*, strike while they are weak. If it's your *grand-prey*, put some pressure on your *prey* to help them out. If it's your *predator,* use their inaction to your gain, by building up resources or moving forward, but be careful not to leave yourself open to a trap.

7) **The Kook** – [*"Told you I did. Reckless is he. Now, matters are worse."* YODA – THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, 1980] The last *Player-Archetype* is 'The Kook'. This is a player who has become unpredictable or unreasonable in some way. Whether it is a player who refuses to yield contestation despite all good sense, or they decide they need to cross table *rush* another player "just because they can". Or worse, it's a player who decides to give up and lets their *predator* overrun them. Its rare, but sometimes you come across a player like this who throws off the balance of the game for little or no reason. PRO: Don't be this player! However, if you can feign being this archetype and gain some measure of advantage from it, all power to you. Just beware that 'The Kook' can become 'The Threat' in the blink of an eye. CON: When faced with a player who is unstable and unpredictable, become 'The Conscience' and work to balance this unruly element. If you can't stabilize their play, become 'The Manipulator' and push other players to get 'The Kook' eliminated quickly, hopefully with minimal disruption to your own game.

The *Player-Archetypes* are not absolutes, but rather generalities. There may be a few other archetypes we have not covered, but these seven are the most common. If you know who a player is at a given moment, you have an edge, so use that knowledge to your advantage.

THE ART OF THE DEAL – While the **V:TES** rulebook makes no mention of player negotiations, it is nonetheless, an essential part of the game. Deals can be very tricky for inexperienced players. The thing to remember is that deals can be double-edged swords. A deal which may be good for you now may come back to bite you in the ass later in the game. Therefore, be careful how you word your deals and remember who your deal hurts, because you can be certain that they won't forget.

Deals can be classified as short-term and long-term. Short-term deals usually effect only one or two turns of play, for instance, you may be able to convince your *prey* to let a *bleed* through in order to get the 'edge' away from another player. Or you may loan your votes to another player in order for them to damage their *prey* as well as your own. Long-term deals usually involve the outcome of the game. For example, two players may team up in order to oust a third player who has become 'The Threat' at the table, so they agree to a cease fire until that player is gone.

So, how do you know when to make a deal? You should make a deal anytime you can gain an advantage or counter another player's advantage. Sounds simple, but it does

take a bit of practice. The *Player-Archetypes* we discussed previously can be used to help determine where and with who a deal should be made. Making a deal with a player who is 'The Threat', is probably not the best idea since hindering 'The Threat' should be your goal, however, there are always exceptions. Given that 'The Thrall' is in a tough position they may be ripe to make a deal, provided they have something you need.

How you word the deal is very important, because like any contract you can worm your way out of it if you phrase it right, so be careful of semantics. A player may say, "I won't bleed you next turn if you put some pressure on your prey" and then proceed to call votes that cause you to loose *pool*. This would not be breaking the deal, since they never *bled* you.

There are players who always keep their word and there are players that will break a deal if the reward is worth it. In casual play, breaking a deal should be frowned upon. **V:TES** is a game and it isn't worth hurt feelings if a deal is broken, but Tournament play is something altogether different. You should expect a level of ruthlessness from other players, and it is wise to assume a deal may be broken. You must choose for yourself if breaking a deal is worth it to you. There have been players who have valiantly (some would say foolishly) held to a deal, even when breaking it would have won them the game. Some would see no benefit to keeping that deal, although, a reputation for keeping a deal can be a strong motivating factor when players choose who to make a deal with. Ultimately, the choice is yours, but be sure if you choose to break a deal, it had better be worth it.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT –
- **Vitae Balance**: Sometimes it is hard for new players to know how much blood to keep on their vamps or how much to keep in their *pool*. A good rule-of-thumb is to keep your *pool* at 10 or more and a minimum of 2-3 blood on your vampires, depending on their capacity. Obviously, the more blood and *pool* you have the better, however if your pool is below 10 you should actively be seeking for some way to boost it. If the blood on your vampires is too low, you should *hunt* or find some other way to increase the blood on your vampires. Having a minimum 3 blood on your vamps is merely guideline, you are still in danger of a good Potence or Celerity combat assault, but keeping suffcient blood on your vamps to buffer one solid hit or to pay for Fortitude or *Combat Ends* is a good idea.

<div align="center">

Pool Threat Zones*

13 Pool or greater	Secure
10-12 Pool	Comfortable
7-9 Pool	Threatened
6 Pool or Less	Exposed

</div>

Amount of blood to keep on your vampires

1-4 Capacity Vampires	2 Blood minimum
5-11 Capacity Vampires	3 Blood minimum

The **Pool Threat Zones should look vaguely familiar to anyone aware of the Homeland Security Advisory System, but the point is hopefully not diminished.* ☺

- **"To the Card-Cycle, Batman"**: A solid skill to learn in **V:TES** is how to *cycle* your cards. *Cycling* is learning to play or discard cards in your hand to keep a constant flow of new cards in order to get what you need, when you need it. It sounds simple, but card *cycling* is a difficult skill to master. It's hard to throw a card away, especially since every card in your deck should be important. If you look at a card in your hand and feel no trepidation discarding it, you might want to reconsider why that card is in your deck. There are really only two main ways to *cycle* cards, by discarding them or by playing them. Typically, you should be discarding a card at the end of every turn. There is usually something in your hand that is not vital at that given moment. However, there are times at the end of your turn when you need every card in your hand, this is usually due to some imminent threat in which the cards in your hand may manage to foil, or you may have a good setup for forward momentum in the next round. Forward momentum is important, play your cards to *bleed* or *rush* when the opportunity arises, in order to keep a solid flow of cards in your hand. It's not uncommon to see a player rush a vampire in order to *cycle* into some defensive Reaction cards or into some stealth modifiers for *bleeding*.

    It's important to remember how many copies of a card you have in your deck. For example, if you only have one copy of a HUNTING GROUND in your deck, you might want to hold onto to it until you can play it. But if your *pool* is low - dump it - it's not doing you any good in your hand if you can't pay for it in the conceivable future.

    The worst thing that can happen to your card flow is 'Hand Jam', this is when you are stuck with multiple cards that either can't be played fast enough, in the case of Masters, or simply can't be played due to some external reason, such as your *prey* not blocking your actions and stealth has become overripe in your hand. There are any number of ways in which 'Hand Jam' can occur, the idea is to try and minimize the risk and learn to *cycle* freely.

    In **V:TES**, there are numerous cards that allow players to help *cycle*, such as THE BARRENS, THE ADMONITIONS, DREAMS OF THE SPHINX, FRAGMENT OF THE BOOK OF NOD, etc. Some of these cards let you discard a card (i.e. THE BARRENS), or better still draw cards and then require you to discard (i.e. FRAGMENT). These cards that let you draw first before discarding are much better since they allow you to see what your drawing into, and let you make a better choice of discarding. There are even some minion cards that allow you to *cycle*, like DISTRACTION, INFERNAL PURSUIT, FLURRY OF ACTION, SCROUNGING, etc. And lets not forget vampires that let you *cycle*, such as CICATRIZ, BECKETT, or GIOTTO VERDUCCI.
- **Contestation**: Worse than experiencing the dreaded 'Hand Jam', is having a Minion card or vampire contested. It's never a good position when you loose a card you've invested *pool* into, and a contested card is as good as lost until you win it back with power or guile. There are certainly times when contestation is to your advantage, like when your *prey* is low on *pool*, but more often than not, contestation hurts. Whatever the circumstances may be, it's important to resolve it as quickly as possible. When you are contesting, you are vulnerable. Take stock of the situation and consider who is in the better position to win the contestation. If it is you, how much will it cost you to win? It's not worth the satisfaction of

winning the contestation if it costs you the game. You get no *victory-points* for spite.

When contesting, the player who is forced to pay first is in the weakest position and it's hard to deal from a position of weakness. Don't be afraid to cut your loses and yield. Yielding isn't a weakness, it's a choice. You must sacrifice pawns in chess. However, that's easier said than done, and certainly every situation is different, but if you've been purposely contested it might be better to give up before too much *pool* is lost in the effort. Of course, there are times when what is contested is worth the risk, such as when it's a significant vampire that happens to be contested by your *predator*. If you were to give in, you lose a vamp and he gains one, and that's a multi-vampire swing that's usually unacceptable.

So, if you choose to contest, how do you win without wearing down your resources in the process? You cannot let it come down to a matter of economics. To win, you have to show your strength. You must visibly demonstrate that you can 'out-resource' the other player by either having an effective *pool stream* (i.e, HUNTING GROUND and a BLOOD DOLL, *etc*.) or by wounding them with minions that *bleed* or *rush*. Once you've shown your strength, you now have to verbally convince them to yield. This is never easy, but the more convincing your show of strength, the easier your argument becomes. If you are not able to muscle out of the situation, you need to work a deal. Convince the other player that yielding is in their favor. How? It's no easy trick, but if you have something to bargain with, like votes or a referendum in their favor, your job is easier. And, unfortunately, there are times when the other player just won't give in. It happens. In the end, contestation is a loosing prospect, it drains your resources and the gain is rarely proportional to the cost. Find a way out as quickly as possible, either yield, destroy or bargain, but don't let it go on longer than you have to. Contest only from a position of strength, and yield if the price is too high.

- **Permanent vs. Transitory Balance**: Every deck should have a balance of permanent and single use cards for intercept, stealth and combat. Permanent cards, although not truly permanent since they can be burned, usually have a higher cost but stay in play and can be used throughout the game, such as Unique Locations, Equipment and Retainers. Transitory cards, which usually cost less, are single use cards that can only be played once and then are moved to the ash heap. A SPORT BIKE or a .44 MAGNUM can be more effective in the long run than half a dozen intercept or combat cards, especially if the game runs long and you have used most of your library. Of course, a whole deck filled with .44 MAGNUM's is a terrible idea, but one or two to supplement your deck's combat is a good suggestion. And it is always a good idea to have one or two *+1 stealth* and/or *+1 intercept* permanents in your deck, especially if your ratio of stealth or intercept cards is low. Finding the balance between permanents and transitory cards is critical.

Permanents are less likely to cause 'Hand Jam' than transitory cards. If you had three RAVEN SPY's in your hand, you could play one each on three of your minions in one turn. However, if you had three stealth cards in your hand, you could only play those cards if an action you were attempting was trying to be blocked. If no one attempts to block, your hand could be jammed with stealth.

Conversely, a hand full of intercept can only be played if an action has stealth and is able to be blocked by you. Therefore, it is important to use a balanced combination of permanents and transitory cards to augment your deck.

COMMON MISTAKES –

- "**Senior Moments**": One of the most common errors made by new and experienced players alike, is forgetting to gain *pool* for 'the EDGE'. It seems like such a small matter, but I have watched players forget in many consecutive turns. I have even seen it cost some players the game. Moreover, there are number of other Untap Phase and Master Phase actions players miss due to either lack of concentration or overzealously rushing to their minion phase. Often forgotten are phases when you may need to place a WEEK OF NIGHTMARES counter, or use a HUNTING GROUND, or even forgetting to play a Master card. I cannot stress enough how important it is to take your time and take your turn. Towards this end, I have concocted a couple of mnemonic's that may help players remember to take full effect of their actions in each phase. For instance, for the Untap Phase we could use the following mnemonic phrase: E.R.P.O.H (Pronounced "Air-Po"). These five letters stand for: gaining *pool* for the **E**dge; placing a **R**avnos WEEK OF NIGHTMARES counter; **P**aying contestation, ANARCH REVOLT type effects and paying for Infernal vampires; **O**ther effects like POWERBASES; and lastly the use of your **H**UNTING GROUNDS. Furthermore, a mnemonic for the Master Phase could be P.S.B.I.M (pronounced "Piz-bim"), which stands for: gaining blood from the

UNTAP PHASE   "Air-Po"

E	Gain Pool for the **E**dge and/or Bartholomew (Kiasyd)
R	**R**avnos Week of Nightmare Counters
P	**P**ay Contestation, Pay Anarch Revolt type effects, Pay for Infernal Vamps
O	**O**ther (Powerbase(s), Polaris Coach, The Rack, Extortion, etc.)
H	Place **H**unting Ground Blood on Vampire

MASTER PHASE   "Piz-Bim"

P	**P**alatial Estate Blood
S	**S**ettite Actions (Temptation Counter, Burn Form of Corruption, Phobia Counter)
B	**B**lood Dolls
I	**I**nvestments (Acquired Ventrue Assets, Short Term Investment, etc.)
M	Play a **M**aster card

PALATIAL ESTATE; taking a **S**ettite (as in **Followers of Set**) action to place a counter on TEMPTATION or burn a FORM OF CORRUPTION to steal a vampire; use your **B**LOOD DOLL'S; gain *pool* from a Master **I**nvestment card as a Master Phase action; and finally play any **M**aster cards you are able to play.

- **Rush Delivery**: Remember to take your time during combat and not play your cards prematurely. Let the acting player present all their combat cards first. Too often, players skip a phase of combat and have to backstep, which can lead to 'telegraphing your punches'. The other player may decide to change what they were planning to do, to your sorrow.

- **Peep Show**: Another *faux pas* that is often made by players of all experience levels is forgetting to guard your hand. Sometimes you look over at your *prey's* play area and you get an accidental glimpse of their hand. If you see a hand without reaction cards or if you happen to notice a lack of Combat cards, this could be a huge advantage to your game. This is often more common in cramped gaming areas or at circular tables where other players are at 'just the right angle'. Play your cards close to the vest.
- **Forgotten Gold**: Lastly, read your cards. Sure, you've read them before, but take the time to read a card when it comes into play, especially if you can't remember every detail. World-class players have missed some small things that could have changed the game in there favor. For instance, some vampires *bleed* for more when a vampire of a certain clan is in your *prey's* control, or a vampire gets *+1 strength* in combat with an ally, etc. Reading a card only takes a moment, so don't take anything for granted. I know this seems a very simple thing to do, but winning is in the details. Take the time to read the cards and you may find a something you missed.

AFTERWORD

Hopefully, you were able to find something in this article that will help you become a better player, regardless of your skill level. I have always found that instruction is the best way to learn and I have certainly learned more about **V:TES** from this experience. Good luck to you and I look forward to *bleeding* you soon.

- G. Williams
gregorywilliams@storageannex.com

ADDENDUM: UPDATE 09/15/05

Since the release of "Basic Concepts in Deck Construction" in April 2005, a number of people have been instrumental in helping identify errors within the article, specifically a number of errors in some mathematical calculations. While none of the conclusions were effected, the numbers were unfortunately incorrect in some tables. All errors were my own and I greatly appreciate the feedback I received to correct the article. I feel it only fair to list those who helped with their math skills and thank them for their effort and knowledge. They are: Preston Poulter who first enlightened me to the issue, L. Scott Johnson and Vincent Ripoll, who also created the revision of the French translation version 2.

Also, I was lax in acknowledging some of those who helped with the initial proofing of the article (they weren't mathematicians), and they were my good friends Michael Manning and Grant Garvin. Thanks to all for their efforts in this project!