

On Magic

“So tell me O Great Obnoxious One, is there really magic? I’m pretty sure that vampires are real, I hear tell that there are indeed werewolves, so it rather stands to reason that magic should exist as well.” Actually, I knew about a little magic. Both figuratively and literally. Tiny magic producing tiny results. But I was interested in learning about big magic. While I didn’t know it existed, I felt pretty sure it did.

“You’ve got some nerve, punk,” Gilch declared, casually throwing someone’s parked motorcycle in my direction. I ducked and it missed but only by just. “Calling me obnoxious!” he snorted. “You being the very epitome of the word.” He continued walking down the alley. I easily kept pace with him as we continued crossing out of a powerful Gangrel’s territory and into Brujah-land.

“Of course, I only meant ‘obnoxious’ in the kindest, most complimentary way,” I added with a grin, stepping over the remains of the bike and the bricks that had come loose from the wall when they’d stopped its flight. He chose to ignore my remark. Following his lead, I remained silent until we had crossed through the Brujah zone and into the assigned hunting domain of the Toreador we had come to spy on. In this case her hunting grounds included her haven.

Toreadors were an interesting clan. They are said to have an eye for beauty. And eyes that can potentially pierce any illusion or shadow. They were not known as a powerful clan in regards to fighting prowess. I suppose they had their warriors somewhere. Just because I hadn’t seen one didn’t mean they didn’t exist. From what I heard their clan was more into politics. Kind of like a less combative form of Ventrue. Unfortunately, their eye for beauty didn’t mesh well with Nosferatu being uniformly ugly. Perhaps universally ugly would be a better way of saying that as there was an unending variety to how Nosferatu achieved their ugliness.

As my mentor put it, the two vampire clans did not see eye-to-eye. Quite the master of understatement, Gilch.

“Yes, there is magic,” the Nosferatu eventually answered, his voice taking on the tone and cadence he used when lecturing on a favored topic. Yes! “Blood magic is what we practice. I suppose it’s all technically some cross between necromancy and hemomancy but we don’t refer to it that way. Only the vampires of the Giovanni admit to actually practicing necromancy. Some of ‘em are even good at it.” As we walked by a residential park, I remembered what he’d said about the Giovanni. Something about them being the mobsters of the afterlife or something like that. They were evidently a small clan, even if they did have big finances. Maybe I’d see what I could find on them in Gilch’s library after we finished here.

Turning us down a side street, he continued, “Being vampires... Kindred as we call ourselves, all of our strengths... and most of our weaknesses... come from our blood. Each clan has it’s weaknesses - each clan has it’s strong points. And it all begins with the blood flowing through their veins.” He was well aware that I knew that the vampires of the Camarilla called themselves Kindred. Gilch also knew I did not care for the term and never used it. For some reason, he seemed to find mentioning it occasionally humorous.

“As you’re learning, each of the vampire clans are known for the powers or disciplines that their blood most easily and frequently convey. We have a lot of names for what we do... ‘we’ being Kindred in general. Potence for making ourselves strong, Celerity for making ourselves fast,

Obfuscation for making ourselves hard to detect, and many, many more.” I just loved how he frequently repeated the basics. But I said nothing as I had learned this was the quickest way to get him to move on to the subject at hand.

“But it mostly boils down to hemomancy - also known as blood magic. The combination of this and necromancy form the root source of all we do.” We stopped outside the gate of the mansion our target Toreador woman lived in. After a brief look around and a walk halfway across the perfect grounds, we found a nice spot up in a tree and sat down to watch. For a while I just sat looking around. I’d never seen anyplace like this before. The plants of the estate had been beautifully manicured. Not a single blade of grass out of place. Not a brown single brown leaf on of any of the flowers, shrubs, or trees I’d seen. Just from this vantage point, I could see half a dozen beautiful statues and two exquisitely crafted water fountains. On our brief walk through the grounds I’d seen an incredible mural and a mosaic that seemed to have been made of colored sand instead of tile. The owner of this place was seriously into serious art.

Those guards we had passed and who passed us didn’t realize it but they were doing their best to ignore us... and were doing a damn fine job of it. The power of Obfuscation at it’s finest. Arguably the single most defining power of the Nosferatu. Not true invisibility but rather causing the people around you to so strongly ignore you that for them you simply did not exist. Gilch and I were able to talk to each other without the guards being the least aware because Gilch was damn good at what he did and I was learning quickly. Shaking my head, I realized that all the guards here were either handsome or pretty and in top physical condition. Not just beautiful art and grounds and structures for this estate.

My thoughts turned inward again even as I kept my eyes peeled.

Blood magic. In this particular instance my thoughts returned to that which we were now using. The discipline known as Obfuscation. It caused others to not notice us. They could look right at us and they would not see us. Their eyes would shift away and their brains would trick them and tell them there was nothing there. No so with cameras though. Cameras and other mechanical devices saw right through our magic.

“Of course,” Gilch continued, “the Ravnos practice Chimeristry. It may have its roots in hemomancy - at least the form that they practice - but it’s certainly powerful enough to be considered a magic of its own. The magic of illusion. And illusion can be a very powerful tool indeed. Remember that because I’m pretty sure that Ravnos blood flows through your veins.”

Gilch had briefly mentioned the clan Ravnos in a few of my previous lessons. Another small clan, these were vampires... Kindred, I thought with a smirk... that were best know as travelers and criminals. Most seemed to have a sense of humor that not everyone appreciated. Said to be descended from gypsies if one believed the street speculation.

“So,” he continued, “that gives us three forms of real magic so far: necromancy, hemomancy, and illusion. The one other form of magic that I know of is thamaturgy. This is confusing because the magic using clan Tremere named their rather all-encompassing blood discipline Thamaturgy.” Oh my goodness, something about life as a vampire was confusing? What about being a vampire wasn’t confusing and complicated?

“Once upon a time, thamaturgy was a tiny offshoot of hemomancy. That was a long time ago. Since then, the Tremere have taken it and expanded it out into a type of magic all its own. Last I heard, there were five main branches of the Thamaturgy discipline but the Tremere are a secretive lot, even by vampire standards, and they probably have more by now. They are also said to have perfected a number of ritual magics which I believe no longer have their roots in hemomancy. If

that's true, they are the first vampires to have moved beyond the powers of our blood."

My brow furrowed in confusion before I smoothed it back out. Show no surprise. That was a very important part of vampire life. One he'd been pounding into me over and over and over again. Still, I sent a concerned glance his way before turning my gaze back to what lay around us. In particular, I wondered why he was being so coy about that final bit of information. I knew for a fact that Gilch was using a number of rituals around his haven. This was the tiny magic I already knew that had sparked my curiosity about greater magic. My original question had been about more impressive magic. Not that I'd bothered phrasing it that way. He'd known what I was fishing for. And now he'd gotten around to mentioning ritual magic as though it was a new and unknown quantity.... Unless... could he have said it as a clue that someone was listening in on us? I decided to use my mentor's tactic of talking about something as though it was true and see how he responded.

"You know," I began, trying to sound indifferent, "I met a Tremere a while back. He offered to teach me a few of their disciplines. I think he's got some sort of habit on the side. Wanted cash for the lessons. Quite a lot by my standards. Anyway, I've been thinking about taking him up on the offer if I can get the money together." I really had met the Tremere in question. He'd offered to show me magic all right. He'd offered to incinerate my ass.

"Really?" Gilch asked with a raised eyebrow. "Who was it?" I had told Gilch about the incident back when it had happened. I'd also told him the name of the creep. So far as I could tell, my mentor had a photographic memory. Now I wondered if we were in trouble and if so just how much trouble we were in. Hopefully, this was just a show.

Hopefully.

But I wasn't betting on it.

"Frederick Barnes," I told him, working at not letting any of the worry I felt seep into my voice or expression. "I suppose if I take him up on his offer, I'll ask him about these rituals you mentioned. Maybe see for myself what there is to them. Bet the bastard will charge extra to teach them though." I yawned and took the opportunity to look around. I didn't see anyone, but when dealing with vampires I knew from experience that didn't mean too much. To my ears the story had sounded smooth. Hopefully it would sound just as smooth to whoever was spying on us.

Just then a long, black stretch limo came gliding into the driveway. A Ventrue stepped out, smoothed his hair and adjusted the lapels on his horribly expensive suit. He then turned and walked over to the front door as if he owned the place. He completely ignored the various plants and the assorted art pieces, his focus entirely on the door. I was a bit nervous, just in case whoever it was watching us might feel the need to make a move against us or the limo guy. The front door opened immediately and, without slowing down or acknowledging the maid who'd opened the door, the Ventrue strode into the house and out of sight. Thankfully, no one moved against anyone. Of course, if we were the targets, it seemed quite possible that they might try to stop us on the way out of Toreador territory; but that would be a bit more risky on their part.

"Alright, let's go," Gilch said, casually dropping down out of the tree. "We now know Rodgers and the Toreador who are meeting. That tasty little morsel of information is enough for me for the moment. I need to do some hunting while the night's still young."

I followed him down out of the tree and we began heading away from the mansion. The roving guards moved aside for us without realizing it. It seemed likely that if we were going to be ambushed it would be soon. It was a real effort, but I successfully resisted the urge to flick the safety off on my pistol. It seemed likely that it was going to be a long walk home.

And it was.

“You seem a bit jumpy,” Gilch declared some time later, after we were finally back in his haven.

“Well, yeah,” I responded with a bit of aggravation tinging my voice. “You dropped a couple of verbal warnings. I was worried that we were going to be ambushed the whole way back.”

“Nope,” he replied, sitting down and taking a plastic packet of blood out of the fridge. Without looking, he tossed me one too, which I snagged out of the air. “What happened was all part of the plan.”

“Feel free to elaborate,” I suggested encouragingly with a little frown, sprawling out on the couch. I drank the pack down and waited while Gilch slowly finished his. I knew a lot of vampires disdained drinking cold blood out of a plastic bag. Me, I’d gone hungry for much too long to be anything but grateful for the easy access to dinner.

“The plan was simple,” he began with a smile. “As you know, I don’t particularly care for Toreadors. That one in particular is on my black list. The Toreador and the Ventrue Rodgers are lovers. Poor taste on his part. The Ventrue is also one of the Prince’s errand boys. An errand boy who is much better off if no one notices him due to the, shall we say ‘clandestine’ nature of the errands he runs. The Prince knows the two are lovers and he has her place bugged by his internal security. We were sitting close to one of their microphones. Because we know they are meeting, the Prince will come to worry that his secret errand boy might not be so unnoticed. Particularly if the fellow’s name is bandied around on the rumor mill as part of a hot romance. The Prince will most likely give him the choice of breaking off the affair or being demoted. Being Ventrue, he’ll dump the bitch. This will hurt her both emotionally as well as her standing with the Toreador community. Toreador dump their lovers, not vice-versa. And punishing her was what the whole trip was about.”

We sat in silence for a while. Eventually, he spoke again, “You know one of the Prince’s internal security people is a Tremere. He’ll pass the word about your little friend on to his primogen. She’ll interrogate him severely about what they will undoubtedly believe to be a breach of clan security. I wasn’t kidding about the Tremere and their secrets. They guard them most jealously. He’s in for a rough time.”

“That just breaks my heart,” I told him with a vengeful smile.

“I thought it might,” he replied with the same smile. “Just goes to show you there are all sorts of magics out there. So far as you and I are concerned, the subtler the better.”