

Philosophy 101

“...so the vampire that got me was a Sabbat vampire,” I said, finally understanding what Gilch had been trying to say for the last half hour.

“Not necessarily,” the butt-ugly vampire, who was close to being my only friend in this miserable world, contradicted patiently.

Or maybe not on the whole understanding thing.

These last two months had been real eye openers for me. Let’s just say I was only just beginning to figure out how much it was that I didn’t know. Gilch had explained to me that there were a number of vampiric bloodlines that operated all across the world. Brujah, Nosferatu, Ventruue, and Gangrel, to name a few of the big ones. Each of these clans were known for mastering various talents or powers that their blood activated. Sometimes these talents spanned clans. Sometimes not. Each of the clans had a certain reputation that usually worked hand-in-hand with their powers. For example, the quick Brujah were thugs. That wasn’t quite how Gilch had put it but I’d met enough of them to know this one for a fact. Ventruue, with their ability to mesmerize the mind, were known as politicians. Didn’t mean they all were, just that their blood gave them a certain predisposition towards this.

I was learning a lot.

But there was still so much to learn it was rather daunting. Things like the ongoing feud or sometimes war between the vampires of the Sabbat and the Camarilla and how I fit into the picture.

With a smirk that pulled his features even more out of whack, he continued, “Just because the Camarilla have a stringent set of rules that none are supposed to break, doesn’t mean they aren’t broken. Remember, all vampires used to be human. All their human traits and fallacies followed them over. In a number of cases the faults not only came over but were magnified and liberally added to. No, I definitely do not want to leave you with the impression that the members of the Camarilla do not break the rules. Rules such as not creating other vampires willy nilly. No, I’m only saying that they’re much better at covering it up when they do break their rules.”

“So there’s really no way of knowing if the vampire who killed me was Sabbat or Camarilla?”

“I’m glad to see that you’ve gotten some understanding out of this conversation,” he said with a sarcastic smile that had an even more unfortunate visible effect on his face. Despite the visual this provided, it was nice to know that the old bloodsucker could still smile.

“Does this help or hurt my case for being given hunting grounds in L.A.?” I asked after a moment.

“Neither,” he replied, leaning back against the bare cement wall of his haven. “Regardless of whether you were sired by a member of the Sabbat or the Camarilla, you are a Caitiff. While other vampires have their clans, Caitiff have no clan. No bloodline to call their own. They are castoffs. The Heinz fifty sevens of vampires. To most vampire clans, that means that you rate down at the bottom of the barrel. Down here, with us Nosferatu. Below us, even... at least for most.”

“Yeah, but *you*’ve got a hunting ground of your own.” One which he’d toured with me while showing me the ropes. His assigned zone was a mixture of light commercial properties and a residential section that covered a good-sized area.

“Yes, I do,” he agreed with another smirk.

“So even scum of the earth get hunting grounds?”

“Usually. To those in charge of this city it is more preferable to know where the scum is than to have them wandering around loose causing trouble. It also provides a quick reference and solution to problems arising from poaching claims.”

“And these Camarilla leaders are not going to be concerned that I might have Sabbat blood in me, right?”

He sighed. It looked very dramatic. “No. It will not matter. You do not know your clan and none have claimed you. Therefore, you have no clan. You are Caitiff now. That being said, they will still want to use you and will want to keep track of you. Make sure you remain in your place. Therefore, if you promise to act the part of a good little Camarillian, they will give you a territory regardless of your past affiliations.”

“But I thought they were at war with the Sabbat...” I wasn’t really sure why I was making this so difficult. On the other hand, at least a small part of me enjoyed watching Gilch get riled up.

“I’m going to use small words so you can understand this,” he growled, gritting his fangs as his patience dried up and shriveled before my eyes. I managed not to smile but it was close. This really was important and I really did desperately need to learn it. Annoying Gilch, no matter how entertaining it might be, had to come second. “The Sabbat and the Camarilla both have a couple of basic precepts that they hold dear. The Camarilla loves its laws and its rules. Traditions, they call them. I’ll teach you all about them later. The Sabbat loves to think that they have no laws or rules. Both are illusions.

“Here’s the overly simplistic view. Basically, you have two sets of people in charge of all vampires. The ongoing war works for both sides. For the Sabbat, the weaker, more foolish vampires are culled out during the fighting. This fits in nicely with their ideology that only the strong should survive. For the Camarilla, their most troublesome elements are thrown out on the front lines. This also provides a convenient mechanism for the prince of the city to weaken a faction - be it a bloodline or a social group or any of a number of other cliques that form within the Camarilla - just send them out to the proverbial front lines. It is not as easy as that by any means but that is pretty much what it boils down to.

“This is what they will do to you. You’ll be thrown out into the front lines. Their idea of making you useful.” Me? On the front lines? He must have seen my concern or maybe smelled the fear that flashed through me. “Don’t worry kid. I’ll see to it that you work for me. That will simplify things considerably.” I relaxed again. There was so much I didn’t know about vampires. And while I’d killed two of them along the way, those had been more accidents and dumb luck than anything else. If I was going to be fighting them, I had the perfect teacher for it right here. Yessss, this could become interesting indeed.

“You should by no means think of the Camarilla and the Sabbat as right and wrong,” the Nosferatu continued, shaking his head slightly. “Both sides have a number of terrible flaws in the way they operate. They are more like political parties, or even countries or religions. Each side has their own points of views and their own beliefs. As the lowest of the low, you should always remember that both sides step on those beneath them. I’ve always found blending in to be a most convenient camouflage.” He picked up a bottle of bloodwine and took a long drink.

I sat and thought for a moment. Gilch blending in with anything seemed unlikely but now wasn’t the time to further annoy him. My choice seemed clear at the moment. “I guess I’d better learn the Camarilla theme song then. At least so long as their rules shelter me.”

He smiled. “It’s pretty simple. It goes something like this: we follow, we follow, wherever you may lead.” I was surprised for a moment by his clear singing voice. Even for such a simple,

dumb little snatch of song... it had been beautiful. He took another drink and tossed the bottle to me. I took a long pull myself. Gilch made some damn good bloodwine and he had promised to teach me how to make it.

“That’s one of the things I like about you boy,” he told me with what could have been a fond smile. “Most folk have an aversion to Nosferatu and anything we touch.” His smile turned mocking and his voice took on a bitter edge. “Most Toreadors would rather starve than drink after a Nosferatu. Hell. Most of them wouldn’t even stay in the same room as a Nosferatu without a very pressing reason. You don’t seem to care. You know I’m ugly. And you accept it. You don’t know how much I appreciate having at least one person who doesn’t flinch whenever I enter a room, or talk to me with their eyes focused just over my head so they don’t have to look at my face.”

“Stop it. You’re going to make me blush,” I told him with a smirk, taking another drink. “Anyway, why should I care what you look like? You don’t know how much I appreciate your taking me in. Crap, I’d be dead again if it wasn’t for you. You’ve taught me more about being a vampire in two months than I had learned in all of my previous four odd years of vampiredom.” I took another drink and tossed the bottle back to him.

“Now I’m going to blush. And it’s vampiredom. Vampiredom is all of us. Ignorant git.” He drained the last of the bottle.

“Screw you,” I told him lazily.

“That’s what your mother said and look where it got us,” he replied, throwing the bottle at me. I caught it and sat it on the shelf. This wasn’t just an empty bottle. This was an unfilled bloodwine bottle and time would hopefully change the unfilled part of that.

“That was some good stuff,” I told him, sitting down again. “Now where were we?”

“Screw you.”

“You are *such* a philosopher Gilch,” I told him with a smile.

“Damn straight. Listen to me and you’ll go far.”

“Who was that old philosopher who ended up drinking hemlock?”

“You know, every now and then you say something that leads me to suspect you’re not quite as dumb as I think. But I’m not worried. I’m sure you’ll open your mouth again soon and wash that particular illusion away.”

“Screw you,” I told him again, just as lazily as the first time.

“Thank you for making my point.”

“Hey, what are friends for?”