

Vampires

Most common people believe vampires to be former mortals cursed by the goddess Shallya or see them as daemons of Khâine, the God of Murder, or as the incestuous children of Khâine and his mother Ecaté; and the main religions in the Old World do their best to nurture these folktales. The fact that most vampires are able to command vermin and foul beasts of the World and drink the blood of the living supports the public opinion of Vampires being related to Khâine and Ecaté in one way or the other. The link to Shallya on the other hand lies in an old mythos about the so called Father of Vampires, of whom is said he had been a savage warlord living about a millennium before the founding of the Empire in the east of the Old World. He is rumoured to have been cursed by Shallya to hide from daylight, to punish him for the atrocities he performed in life like butchering good and pious men and women and bathing in their blood in order to lengthen his own life-span. In turn he became even more bloodthirsty and began to drink the blood of small animals and insects until he totally cracked up, and ravaged the Old World in a senseless orgy of bloodletting for many centuries; killing innocents, and infecting others with his vile curse. In the end the warlord allied himself with the dark gods in order to get his full revenge on Shallya. Shallya was not able to destroy the man anymore and anyway it wasn't her credo to destroy life forms, not even such a vile one. None the less she was able to change the curse to such a degree that his offspring became less powerful, and made them spend their unlives hunting the night for their lost powers. The mythical Father himself could not be affected by Shallya, being protected by his dark patrons, but disappeared without a trace, perhaps he reached true daemonhood or is still living somewhere in a quiet exile waiting for his day to come.



The learned men and wizards of the Old World don't believe these folktales, most of them suspect kind of a magical disease, which is passed on through the blood of the victim. This contagion, so they believe, keeps the infected in a state of undeath with strong regenerative powers and without starting to decay as most (un)dead do. But anyway, the churches hold so much power in most of the countries in the Old World, that the public opinion is one characterized by spiritual mythos and propaganda.

The legend of the Father is in fact not that far from the truth, as a couple of dark, unholy tomes describe the story of an ancient necromancer living untold centuries ago in the land to the east of modern Araby called Nehekhâra. About five thousand years ago an ancient civilisation flourished in this land ruled by powerful priest-kings. They were building huge cities and tombs long before the birth of the nations to the north, when the humans of the Old World still lived in crude huts. This civilisation and their religion was possessed by the idea of life beyond death and huge tombs were constructed by order of the ruling aristocracy, where they wanted to be laid to rest after death, often together with their worldly goods and even their wives and servants. The Liber-har-ak-Iman describes the rising of a young priest called Nagash, the younger brother of one of the larger cities priest-king. More than anyone else he was possessed by the idea of eternal life, and when he saw the decomposing mummies lying in their dusty sarcophaguses, he decided to never end like this. The full story of the Great Necromancer is told elsewhere. It is enough to know this vile necromancer created a potion distilled from blood, an idea he tortured out of captured Dark Elves according to the Liber-har-ak-Iman (an female Dark Elf caste seemed to make use of blood to stay young). This so-

called Elixir of Life, created many centuries ago in these far off lands of the great river, gave the drinker immortality as well as rare mystical powers. However it wasn't without side-effects, it corrupted both spirit and body with the unholy demand for the blood of the living. Whoever drank from the elixir, receded from the daylight thereafter, his skin became pale like china and his eyes were filled with red fire. While the term Vampire was the first and still the most used name these creatures were given, they are known by many others. The Bretonnians call them Nosferatu, while the creatures in Kislev are known as Upyr. The people of Estalia on the other hand use the term Wamphyri. There even exist records from ancient Tilea made during their golden age long ago, describing two female Succubi, the Lamia and the Empusa, which were feared as bloodsucking ghouls devouring the limp bodies of their drained victims. In parts of the Border Princes it is known as Vrykolaka or Vlkodlak. In the Empire exist besides the generally common term Nachzehrer, many local designations like Obour in wide parts of Ostland as well as Pamgri in the Ostermark and Strigoii or Moroi in Sylvania. In the druidic Albion Dearg-duls are feared. In far away Cathay the cruel Ch'ing Shuh is the terror of the population. These vicious female ghouls are infamous for her ferocity and her dreadful appearance. She drains her victim not only of life-fluid, but devours them completely. A similar figure also appeared in Ind, the Vetala, a bloodsucking witch. Her male counterpart is the Baital, which appears as human or bat. Luckily this dark and evil potion doesn't exist today anymore, even though those on the search for its powers are still looking after it in the vaults and crypts of Nehekhâra to the day.



The price for the existence as an Undead is high, but to some no risk is too high to attain the powers of the vampires. Vampires are by far stronger than normal humans and it is said they can split a bear's spine with their bare hands or cut a warrior in full armour in two parts with a single blow. They have by nature the power to sense the dark winds of magic and use them to their bidding. Spirits and living dead bow to their will. The beasts of darkness are their slaves, and gigantic hordes of wolves and bats follow them, wherever they go.

The unholy ritual, in which vampires create more of their kind, is called the Bloodkiss. Instead of fully draining its victim, the vampire feeds him/her part of its own cursed blood and sometimes uses its hypnotic powers to let the victim forget this action. The doomed person becomes sick thereafter, then weaker and ultimately dies under apparently natural circumstances. Even when he/she was of pure heart in life, the stained blood of the vampire turns him/her into a sinister, vicious being. The black magic expanding in the body cancels every link to his/her earlier life, and the thirst for human blood covers each compunction. Anyway there even exist cases where the victim of a vampire, which is drained of its blood but not killed thereafter, is infected by the curse of vampirism. These vampires are often of a more ghoulish attitude and often even rule over packs of ghouls. While most vampires, at least the older ones, behave and live in a very controlled manner, usually possessing a cold, arrogant and hyper-rational personality, this species is more aggressive and of a more animal-like attitude. Many vampire hunters and wizards thus suspect that the vampiric contagion passes on not only due to vampiric blood, but can also be transmitted through spittle as it is known for example from lycantrophy.

It is told that the powers of each new generation are weaker than the ones of the preceding, the mightiest vampires therefore are also always the oldest. Each vampire can give the Bloodkiss to many mortal beings, but often give it only to a few. In fact the older vampires

are often those giving the Bloodkiss to more victims, while most of the younger vampires only seldom (are allowed to) give a Bloodkiss in their long, all eternity lasting existence. As those infected by the younger, less powerful vampires will be even more unpredictable and often even more ghoulish than their direct ancestor, and would increase a possible 'food' shortage as well as the threat of detection. As they look for companions in their long, lonely life, they select carefully and take only the mightiest, most intelligent and most beautiful of the living. This is tragic, because the soul of the victim is forever lost in darkness.

The fear of the vampire was for the common population of the Old World always also the fear about salvation and damnation. Not only body and life as such were endangered through a vampire, but its unfortunate victims had no possibility to escape the Realm of Khâine in death. So most common people believe it not unreasonable that the repeated bite of a vampire immediately causes an infection, so that the victim henceforth had to live on as a bloodsucking creature... But there are many more diverse and often weird folk tales believed in rural and sometimes even urban surroundings. A person who was born with a so-called "Glückshaube" (under this are to be understood remainders the amniotic sac, which enclose the baby), emerged according to rural superstition at the fortieth day after his death as a vampire from the grave. Each seventh child, which equals the sex of its older siblings, was born with a tail and was damned to become a vampire. Of equal fate were babies, which were carried unbaptized to the grave. After seven years these children returned to unlife as bloodsucking Undead. It was believed that babies born with teeth would use these teeth one day as a vampire. Pregnant women refusing to eat salt stood in the suspicion to bear a vampire. Already the look of a vampire in the eyes of a six month pregnant woman could lead to the baby becoming a vampire. Only the quick commitment of a priest could prevent this. However not only small children and unborn were endangered, also misers, profiteers, suicides, adulterers and other sinners, who had died without the confession or stood under the spell of the excommunication, returned after common conviction as vampires. A corpse could rise as a vampire from the grave, if at the funeral a boy jumped over the grave or a bird flew over it. Unquestionable was this however the case, if a cat ran over the dead body or the shadow of a person touched the face of the corpse.



The vampire is feared not only because of its sharp teeth and its unquenchable thirst for blood. There are also those unfortunate forces with which it stands in the league making it so dangerous. After the superstition it is namely an envoy of darkness, a scourge for the mankind and a despiser of Sigmarite virtues. For example it is said that the vampire masters the art of transformation. The Undead can transform itself into a wolf, a cat or a hare at will as its purposes benefits. The most dangerous of his abilities however is to transform itself into the form of white mist, since it can move through the most narrow crannies in doors and walls, to gain access to every arbitrary dwelling. Even though it is indeed quite possible for some vampires to have mastered the art of transformation into other living beings, it is surely only possible for a few and probably only for the most powerful. The vampire can summon and command additionally certain animals to use them for his sinister plans, so e.g. whole packs of wolves, rat and grasshopper swarms. The vampire commands in limited amount also the weather, so that it can summon winds and storms. In the darkness the Undead sees with his red-hot eyes like a person in the daylight, for it is a creature of the night, and therefore his power is greatest between dusk and dawn.

With all his powers and allies it appears the vampire is an invincible monster to be. But his union with darkness which grants it these abilities is at the same time also his weakest spot. The vampire shrinks back namely from the icons of the churches fearfully. Holy water and relics rout the vampire into flight. It can not enter sacred ground like a church or a cemetery (unless it is buried there) unless however it has been profaned.



Popular means to defend against a vampire are weirdroot, witchbane, fire and grain. Weirdroot can be used on multiple ways. With the pressed out juice the whole body can be rubbed, particularly the throat, so that the vampire cannot approach its victim too closely. A bunch of witchbane around the throat and in the entire house make the vampire afraid to penetrate into it. Fire drives the vampire off, because it fears the flames which can bring final death. It is said that a handful of grains, thrown in front of the vampire damns it to gather a grain after the other. If it is busy with it long enough and the sun rises meanwhile it loses its power and is a by far more harmless adversary. The vampire cannot escape from its grave, if with pitch the raven crucifix sacred to Morr is drawn onto the coffin lid or a rose was put on it. Besides roses it detests aspen-leaves and branches of hawthorn-shrubs. Occasionally it should suffice also to continually pour water over the coffin of the vampire to lock it inside. If the vampire can be cornered with witchbane, fires or holy relics, still the difficult task of his destruction awaits. A silver blade piercing the vampire's heart finishes him as well as a bolt or bullet from that same metal, which is shot with a crossbow or pistol into the monster's chest. In fact the vampire should never again thereafter come into contact with the light of the lesser moon Morrslieb, particularly during full moon. Otherwise all the dangerous trouble was futile and the vampire rises from its grave again.

If a vampire is discovered in its hiding-place and is in a cataleptic state the most effective means to destroy it finally is the staking. A robust staff from maple-, hawthorn- or poplar-wood or iron is necessary, which must be driven with a single strike into the heart of the Undead. If one requires more than a single blow the vampire is not destroyed for sure. According to a Sylvanian legend a vampire even had once pulled the stake from his chest after a wayward strike and had beaten the bloodhounds of his surprised oppressors. A further method is to behead the vampire with a single blow of a grave-digger's spade. To be on the sure side weirdroot should be pushed thereafter into its pharynx and its body burnt to ash.

By Claas Cassens