

Mature Content Warning

For the past several decades, *Vampire: The Masquerade* has addressed the darkness in the real world through horror stories: it has talked about AIDS, capitalist exploitation, sexual predation, the resurgence of far-right political extremism, religious fanaticism, state and private surveillance, and many other issues. This version of the game does not shy away from any of the above, and we believe exploration of subjects like these is as valid in roleplaying games as it is in other media. Including a problematic subject in a Storytelling game is not the same as glorifying it, and if you take the chance to explore it critically, it can be the exact opposite. If we understand the problems facing us, we are better armed to fight them.

V5 includes in-world references and expressions of the following: sexual violence, political extremism, physical violence and gore, mind control, torture, abuse, imprisonment and kidnapping, racism, sexism, and homophobia, to name a few. It's a game about monsters.

"Why are you telling me this?" you might be saying.

Someone at your table is not familiar with this game. Someone at your table has dealt with some of these issues in real life. Someone at your table wants to know that you read this warning and know you will be considerate to them as players, while putting their character through the wringer.

In the Appendix, you will find concrete techniques on how to handle difficult subjects in your game in a manner that is respectful to your players and their experiences. Calibrate beforehand which techniques your group wants to use. People have different needs and not every method works for every person.

This is a game about monsters. But it is only a game.

Don't use it as an excuse to be a monster yourself.

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Appendix III:

Advice for Considerate Play

Character and Player identity

One of the best things about tabletop roleplaying is that you can play someone different from yourself. No gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, disability, class, or position in society is off limits. But remember that this freedom comes with a responsibility to your fellow players. When portraying someone not like you, the good choice is to create a complex, nuanced and respectful portrayal. Incidentally this also makes for a better game. For instance, your table may include people who identify as trans and, whether they plan to transition or not, they will probably not feel comfortable if you portray the trans experience as a simple preference or a condition to be cured, or if you just assume that all their characters are also trans. Always respect your players' identities and remember that they do not necessarily align with the identities of their characters.

In a Storytelling game, where imagination runs riot and lines are made up on the fly in a split second, using the wrong pronoun for a character or player or accidentally dropping an offensive stereotype in a description are understandable mistakes. Still mistakes, but understandable. Rather than fearing representing different identities,

(and thus excluding, for instance, the trans experience or the experience of growing up as an Arab kid in Northern Europe from your game) play with sexuality, gender, nationality, and so on. Who knows, you may even discover aspects of yourself you never suspected.

If you need help with making your portrayal respectful and true to life, ask someone who belongs to the group you are portraying for tips and insights.

Fascism in Play

Vampire: The Masquerade is not a fascist-friendly game. If you are a neo-Nazi, "alt-righter", or whatever you're calling yourself nowadays, we urge you to put this book down and call someone who you trust to talk about where you went so wrong in your life.

That said, Kindred culture is inherently monstrous. Part of the political horror of Vampire: The Masquerade is surviving in a culture that worships the Bad Old Ways. Large parts of Kindred society (especially the Camarilla and the Sabbat) adhere to cults of tradition, ascribes to the idea of humiliating their enemies with overwhelming wealth and force, and praises religious fundamentalism or even pre-modern ideals like feudal rule. Many Kindred are old enough to remember WWII

in detail and are bound to have opinions on what's going on in the world right now. Even so, it's pretty easy to steer the game away from totalitarian perspectives. Emphasize the differences between individual vampires, and between factions as well as inside factions. Tell stories about infighting, surprising kindness, and new ideas. Play thin-bloods, Caitiff, Anarchs, or even Camarilla members in a Hellene city where most of the Ivory Tower's traditions have been adapted to suit the present. Another way is to play is to portray Kindred society in all its malicious (and fascist) glory, but let the player characters oppose the system, from the inside or from without.

What if someone wants to play a fascist, though, or a Storyteller wants to introduce a fascist SPC? There are plenty of those throughout the World of Darkness — monsters, but many with pretty faces. They can be a tragic villain, or a former friend who fell, or even someone who the player characters think of as an ally. They might be the Brujah neo-Nazi, the far-right Ventrue billionaire, or the Tzimisce eugenicist. Whatever face they present, the player characters should be given the satisfaction of redeeming or destroying them eventually. After all, the player characters are something unique and special — something fascists cannot abide.

Remember: playing a character whose opinions you oppose can be a great way to understand how supremacist ideas work and how to spot and fight them in the real world. Fictionally experiencing seductive perspectives like blaming the Other, conforming to norms and fighting for a grand purpose, can help you spot these tendencies in yourself and others and diminish their power over you.

This is all in character, of course. At the time of writing, the real world is currently inundated with far-right fascist ideologies being given free reign by well-meaning people who want to preserve civility. If you see people at your table opening up with alt-right talking points, we encourage you to shut that shit down. If you become uncomfortable with a storyline in game because of what's happening out of game, use one of the techniques listed here. You are not obligated to tolerate fascists in-game or out-of-game. This game is a way to tell stories about understanding and perhaps fixing some of the darkness in our own world. Use that to your advantage.

Sexual Violence in Games

Let's not mince words here — vampires, since John Polidori's story *The Vampyre* was published in 1819, have been used as a metaphor for human predation. They seduce, beguile, coerce, dominate, and sometimes outright force humans to

perform their will. After all, they are apex predators and consider it their right. Vampires who embrace this perspective ignore or outright laugh at consent.

Consent in this case can be nonsexual, but the nature of the Kiss and the vampire as human predator carries with them an aura of sex. Polidori's original vampire was a sexual predator who drank the blood of virgins on their wedding nights. (Polidori was Lord Byron's friend and literary historians argue that *The Vampyre* was an attempt to depict the poet as a deviant and a sexual predator.) While your Vampire: The Masquerade game could strive to avoid sexual content at all costs, it's important to be aware of the potential for sexual violence as a theme. With that in mind, let's look at a few key points:

SOME FEEDING SCENES CAN RESEMBLE SEXUAL ASSAULT. This could be a huge deal for players at your table who have been assaulted. Unless the character has a willing Herd or is a dedicated Consensualist, Bagger, Farmer, or Blood Leech (core book, pp. 175-178), feeding scenes often involve using Disciplines, tricking, or forcing a human into a situation where you can attack them and steal some of their blood. Exploration into the depths of the human psyche can be intense and worthwhile, but only with the enthusiastic buy-in of your table. If your group wants to avoid the whole “vampire as sexual predator” theme, at least for their own characters, encourage them to

try the more ethical Predator types (listed above) or let your players invest in a willing Herd. The game is designed to allow players to fight against the worst in their nature instead of just giving in to it.

CHRONICLE TENETS. None of the examples of Chronicle Tenets (core book, pp. 172-173) in V5 allow characters to use and abuse humans. Even the hard-boiled “Street Code” set includes the tenet “Respect others, and demand respect”. Removing someone's consent is never respectful. This is intentional. Vampire becomes a stronger moral game if you choose a set of Chronicle Tenets that everyone around the table can agree with.

STAINS ARE YOUR FRIEND. If a player character (including your own) does something that feels vicious and breaks a Chronicle Tenet (like removing or ignoring a human's consent) feel free to suggest handing out one (or more) Stains. Either ask the Storyteller to add one, or if you are the Storyteller, have the player add a Stain. Some vampires don't have much compassion, and have Convictions to match, but nonetheless, every time they turn humans into slaves or playthings, their Beast gets stronger.

ALLOW FOR SELF-REFLECTION... As a vampire's Humanity degenerates, they should have the opportunity to look back and see what they have done. Part of the narrative of Vampire: The Masquerade is the potential for redemption,