

Crusade! Diablerie and Warfare Among the Sabbat

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by Wolfgang Baur

The Sabbat stand-alone expansion for Vampire: The Eternal Struggle introduces a new sect of vampires to the World of Darkness card game, a tightly knit society of violent, screw-the-consequences bloodsuckers with no regard for the Masquerade. Although they're already vile and nasty, a few rules tweaks can make the Sabbat even more vicious. "Crusade!" increases the stakes for games that use Sabbat vampires.

TOTAL WAR

"This war ends when the Camarilla dies."
—Alvaro, Archbishop of Pittsburgh

The war between the Sabbat and the Camarilla is relentless and, well, bloody. Casualties are high, and only combat-ready packs are likely to survive. The following variant rules apply.

Any vampire of one sect may attack any vampire of the other sect as a directed action. This does not tap an attacked minion; however, it does mean that any deck without a way to deal with combat is in trouble. Cards such as Ambush, Blood Hunt, Bum's Rush, Haven Uncovered, Monomancy, and War Party are unnecessary, since attacking opposing vampires no longer requires them.

Vampires of independent clans remain neutral until they fight a combat with one side or the other. Thereafter, all members of that independent clan are assumed to be on the side the first vampire fought for—use counters to indicate this status. Increase the bloodbath with Imperial Decree and Covenant of Blood from Ancient Hearts, allowing Camarilla and independent vampires to attack each other with directed actions.

As always, retainers cannot be attacked independently; attacks against their controllers may be redirected at them normally at long range. Allies are treated just as members of the clan and sect that they are allied with. Sabbat allies can attack and be attacked by Camarilla minions as a directed action, and vice versa.

BLOOD THIEVES

A second important change involves diablerie. Diablerie is blood theft, the draining of one vampire's blood by another vampire. Among the Camarilla, diablerie is more than just frowned upon—it is punished by death if discovered. The harsh realities of existence among the Sabbat, though, make blood theft a matter of necessity. In "Crusade!", committing diablerie against the enemy has no repercussions. The vampires are too busy killing each other to worry about meting out punishment. However, the Sabbat does punish vampires in positions of weakness. The strong may diabolize pretty much at will; the weak should be careful. The following rules apply.

Vampires may commit diablerie normally, but Blood Hunts are only called if one Camarilla vam-

pire diablerizes another. In this case, Camarilla vampires may vote on the Blood Hunt normally. If a Sabbat vampire gains the Favor of the Elders (see sidebar) before diablerizing a member of the Sabbat, she gets away with it.

One note of caution to the would-be Diabolist: diablerie is not a stealth action, so be prepared to fight if the Methusaleh in question has any ready vampires to spare.

Card Strategy. The focus of play in "Crusade!" is shifted away from slow and careful accumulation of power and toward all-out aggression. As a Crusader, you have four goals:

- 1) bring out vampires capable of surviving the war,
- 2) attack other vampires and send them to torpor,
- 3) prevent your own vampires from going to torpor, and
- 4) make the most of diablerie to end opposing threats.

Recruiting Troops. In this new environment, low-capacity vampires are less valuable because they are more easily sent to

torpor. Vampires with a capacity less than 4 are usually too small to survive repeated combats. Increase the size of the vampires in your crypt and play with Information Highway to get your bruisers out quickly. Recruitment and Effective Management are more valuable than usual because of the high casualty rate among minions. Plan on using Giant's Blood, Minion Tap, and other blood-adding tools to keep your vampires in the game.

To Torpor We Shall Go. As you might expect, aggravated damage is useful for getting foes into torpor. Combat cards based on Fortitude, Potence, and Animalism are also more important than usual in this environment. Decapitate is especially helpful in taking opposing vampires out of the game.

Not every deck is a combat deck, though. Stealth-bleed decks, for example, need another way of winning combats. Legacy of Power is one answer to the problem. This card from Dark Sovereigns is an expensive but reliable way to send vampires into torpor. The other option is to avoid the combats entirely. Invest heavily in Majesty, Open Grate, and Elysium: The Arboretum to keep from being pummeled.

FAVOR OF THE ELDERS

*The Sabbat body count has always been high.
This rule keeps it high.*

A vampire seeking to diablerize another Sabbat vampire may first seek the Favor of the Elders. The Favor is a vote taken before diablerie is committed. Only Sabbat bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and prisci may vote. Vote cards cannot be played, just as in Blood Hunt votes among the Camarilla. No ready minion is required to call the vote, the vote cannot be intercepted, and the Favor of the Elders vote does not count as a political action.

If the vote passes, diablerie may be committed with the elders' permission and the Diabolist suffers no penalty. If the vote fails and a Sabbat vampire is diablerized anyway, the Diabolist is burned. Non-Sabbat vampires may not secure the Favor of the Elders.

This freedom to diablerize rewards the strong and penalizes the weak. It also leads to infighting among Sabbat. Then again, civil war within the sect itself has always been a problem. If you like, experiment with the Favor the Elders rule during normal, non-Crusading games using just Sabbat vampires.

Avoiding or Recovering From Torpor. Since any vampire in torpor may be diablerized by any opposing vampire in Crusade games, recovering from torpor is more important than usual. How do you avoid the sleep of the dead? Either don't go into torpor in the first place or recover faster.

Secure Haven (from Dark Sovereigns) is extremely valuable for political or stealth-bleed decks. Combat-avoidance cards, especially Thoughts Betrayed (also from Dark Sovereigns), are also crucial in slowing down the press-heavy, multiround combats that

can destroy even the largest vampire in a hurry. Malkavian tricks involving Change of Target and Bomb may also work.

Recovering faster requires some planning. Waiting for a good time to bring a vampire out of torpor is not an option. It's simply too easy to lose the vampire entirely. Blood-transfer cards, such as the various hunting grounds, Inbase Discotek, and Sermon of Caine, will allow you to keep blood on your vampires. Chantry helps the Tremere a great deal, and any Tremere deck should include several. Sadly, it doesn't help the Tremere antitribu.

Rapid Healing would seem to be a quick fix for Fortitude decks to recover, but look again. Rapid Healing requires a +1 stealth action that any vampire can use to intercept and diablerize the vampire using Rapid Healing--and in the Crusade environment, that's an invitation.

Final Death. Once you have an enemy vampire in torpor, you'll want to burn

him. The simple way to do this is by sending a minion to commit diablerie. This is especially nice since that minion can gain a Discipline master card, increasing her capacity.

Sometimes, though, you can't send a minion to do the dirty work. Maybe you need her actions for something else. Maybe she can't handle combat monsters. Other options are available, including Amaranth, which allows a minion to combine two actions and commit diablerie immediately upon sending the target vampire to torpor. Likewise, The Sixth Tradition: Destruction provides a useful Camarilla response to Sabbat bloodlust.

Other useful tools in a Crusade deck's offense include Nephandus, a Tremere antitribu ally who excels at wiping out Camarilla vampires in torpor. In addition, Soul Stealing from Dark Sovereigns, usually a second-rate card, is almost viable in a Giovanni Crusade deck.

HAPPY HUNTING

As you can see, "Crusade!" requires some changes to standard deck construction, but it does result in shorter, deadlier, and bloodier games. And that, dear reader, is what the Sabbat is all about. ■

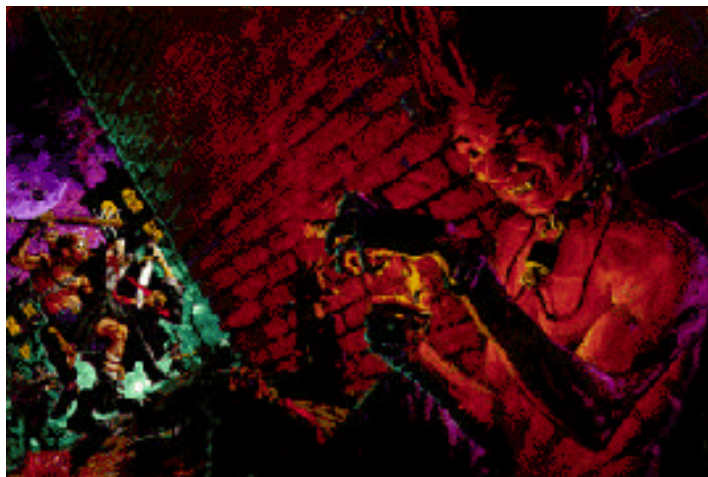


ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT M. FISCHER