

vampires & the Wamphyri
— Basic

COSMIC

WAMPHYRI

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The following notes result from Harry Keogh debriefs. Harry Keogh has been largely responsible for the destruction of a number of the Wamphyri. This file should be read in conjunction with 278, HARRY KEOGH, 279, NECROSCOPE.

The Wamphyri are the original vampires of "myth" and legend. For the last two thousand years vampires have been periodically "banished" from their own world into ours. Prior to that time it seems possible that several of them found their own way to Earth via a "wormhole" situated in Starside, having its exit in a subterranean cave under the foothills of the Carpatii Meridionali, the Transylvanian Alps. This is obviously the reason why, even to this day, that region is associated with vampires and vampirism. It is the source of the so-called "myth".

But the Wamphyri are not a myth. They are the inhabitants of an Earth-type world lying parallel to Earth in a "universe" on "the other side" of our familiar space-time continuum; and but for the fact that the wormhole enters our world deep underground on a watercourse subject to flash flooding, it is quite feasible that by now the human race would have been conquered, converted, and enslaved by vampires.

STAGES OF VAMPIRISM- the Vampire Life-Cycle (in large part speculative):

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In the east and west of Sunside/Starside lie swamps which are always gloomy under rolling banks of fog. In a time immemorial to Sunside's Szgany (nomadic humans), the first vampires came out of these swamps.

The morphology or evolution of the Wamphyri would make for a fascinating study in its own right. (But we must consider any clinical, laboratory, or experimental study of ANY PHASE of vampires and vampirism far too dangerous.) Cyclical, it frequently involves forms other than human. Vampire DNA is unique in being mutative within a single life-cycle without the benefit of generation. Like any disease, but almost sentiently aggressive, it invades non-vampire tissues to infect them. But instead of destroying the contaminated body it passes on its mutant DNA causing the host to adapt- and indeed to mutate- within its own span. Since longevity is invariably a result of vampirism, and barring accidental death or fatal diseases, the lifespan of the victim, then a vampire in his own right, might easily extend to many hundreds and perhaps even thousands of years.

First Phase:

In the vampire swamps of Sunside/Starside, the first (or final) phase of the cycle may be found. It is a black mushroom that ripens to give off red spores.

SPECULATIVE: The spores are the genesis of vampiric life and carry the as-yet "blank" form of vampire DNA. Breathed in, the spores attach to animal lungs and commence leaking their "poison" into the bloodstream along with oxygen. Then the mutation quickens, the victim falls ill, and following a period of some three days emerges as a vampire in his own right. In Transylvania, the illness would occasionally appear fatal and the victim dead. Hence the legend of the vampire rising from his grave after three days in the earth.

The spores do not discriminate; they infect who or whatever breathes them in. An infected fox or dog would have vampire instincts. But the true vampire has instincts of its own.

Second Phase (in part, speculative):

Within an infected host, certain special strands join up to take on a separate, parasitic identity. This may take a few years, decades, or even centuries; the reason for these variations are as yet undetermined. But the symbiotic creature that results is the true vampire: a semi-protoplasmic leech clinging to the spine of the host and extending its own nervous and sensory systems into his brain, literally possessing his mind. It is him, and he is it. And the parasite or symbiont's appetite is for blood. It feeds on the source of life itself: the blood of its host's future victims. Indeed, "the blood is the life."

The symbiont is not necessarily "faithful" to an original host; in Sunside, should a dog or fox host come in contact with a human being, a wholesale transfer of leech from the animal to the human is possible, especially if the animal is stricken and dying. In other words the leech will seek a continued existence- or even better, a higher life-form- in its new host. Among the Szgany of Sunside, the

tenacity of the leech is a legend in its own right.

Third Phase - Wamphyri:

Not only has the symbiont become an integral part of its host's body, but the host's being— even his thought processes, his personality, and of course his DNA— have been altered forever. Just as strands of that DNA have mutated into the leech, so the host's flesh has become in itself mutative. His flesh is now metamorphic: he can within certain limits bring about physical alterations in his shape and form. He is Wamphyri.

Fourth Phase - Back to the Origin (speculative):

In the event of death the symbiont leech (and even the host's "dead" flesh) may attempt a secondary existence by way of reconstitution. Essential fats and amino acids— the building blocks of life— may seek to escape into the earth, there to develop into mushroom spawn that lies dormant until a time of maximum opportunity. How the "vampire essence" or mushroom germs recognize this one opportune moment remains unknown. In Transylvanian legends as in those of Sunside, certain vampire Lords store native soil and sleep upon it— clear evidence of the instinct for survival. And once again, immemorial Sunside myths have it that the Drakuls— an especially infamous line of Lords— kept loam from Starside's swamps for the same purpose, against just such an eventuality.

Final Phase - The True Death:

Decapitated, a vampire dies. (There is no brain for the leech to control to its own ends— but the symbiont itself may still attempt to escape its host's termination). However, the bulk of a symbiont is located mainly on the left or heart side of its host's spine, and a stake driven through the heart will usually suffice to pin the creature there for a time at least. A stake soaked in garlic will certainly do the job, for garlic like silver is a quick-acting poison to vampire flesh. But the only sure way to kill a vampire is to burn it to ashes. Sunside's Szgany stake, decapitate, and burn all vampire manifestations wherever possible. Only then can they be certain that the vampire has died the "True Death." There exists one other phase in the vampire life-cycle (see "Egg-son" or "-daughter" in the next section following).

VAMPIRISM: Infection, Deliberate and Accidental.

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By a bite. The virulence of a vampire's bite, which is usually delivered in the act of feeding, would seem to differ from vampire to vampire. But a Lord of the Wamphyri's bite is especially infectious. It can cause delirium and death, though not necessarily the True Death. When a Lord (or Lady) seeks to "recruit" a vampire thrall or servitor, the bite isn't usually deep and little blood is taken. In this case the bite has been used to transmit vampire DNA, but only in an amount sufficient to bring about the first phase of the change. It may then take years for a leech to develop and the servitor— or, later, the "lieutenant" —to "ascend" and become Wamphyri.

But when a Lord or Lady's bite is excessive and too much plasma is taken— and a commensurate amount of vampire essence transfused— then the result may be "death" of a sort, lasting the specified three days. Then, too, when the victim ascends it will be with the germ of a leech established and growing within him.

"Accidental" infection may occur when an infected animal (such as a dog, fox, or wolf), fighting to avoid entrapment and/or execution, bites a human being. In such a case it is possible for a person bitten in this manner to develop the characteristics of the original host beast. This is the proven source of the werewolf legend; it seems feasible that in Earth's past there were even ("genuine") vampire bats other than Desmodus and Diphylla.

Accidental infection may also occur when vampire blood is spilled, such as in Sunside executions of suspect vampires by the Szgany. In common with AIDS and similar contagious diseases, open wounds and mucous membranes are especially susceptible. Even healthy, whole skin splashed with a vampire's blood or urine should be treated immediately. (Oil of garlic applied with a silver scraper is the best remedy, though no guarantees may be given.)

The most definite, and definitely the most effective form of vampiric infection is obtained when a Lord or Lady wishes to create an "egg-son" or "-daughter." Apart from one rare exception (see "Mother," below) a symbiont leech is capable of pro-

ducing only one cryptogenetic "egg" during its lifespan. In this the parasite relies on the judgement of its usually human host to provide a superior vessel for habitation. The egg-- a flexible ciliolate spheroid half an inch in diameter-- is "willed" into being by the vampire host and passed on mouth to mouth, or by sexual intercourse, or by simple spillage when it must find its own way.

A spilled egg, being protoplasmic, will seep through the skin of a designated host or other acceptable vessel, interacting with him to cause speedy infection and transformation. Any such changeling is considered to have ascended and is Wamphyri.

Not all exchanges of bodily fluids between vampires (the Wamphyri) and human beings are necessarily infectious. The vampire has a degree of control over his parasite, and also over his blood and other plasma fluids. A Lady of the Wamphyri may consort with a human lover without converting him. She simply avoids taking his blood, and following intercourse "wills" her vampire essence to destroy his sperm. Likewise a Lord may will his sperm free of vampiric influence to keep a concubine pristine.

This cannot in any way be taken as indicative of love or even affection; it is simply that the Wamphyri do not casually "create" other Wamphyri. Egg-and blood-sons and daughters are chosen with infinite care, and among the reasons are these: A powerful egg-son may one day usurp the father; knowing and even accepting this, the nature of the man, the prospective host, must first be explored to the full. And egg-daughters-- as all Wamphyri Ladies-- are treated with great care not only by their sires but also other Lords, because while the occurrence is rare, nevertheless the occasional Lady will prove to be a "Mother" or breeder of vampires. The exception that disproves the general rule, a Mother's parasite has the ability to spawn a great many more than the usual single egg.

THE NATURE OF VAMPIRES - A Possible Explanation of the Wamphyri Lifestyle:

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The Wamphyri are aggressive, tenacious, territorial, egotistical, ruthless, and proceed in each mode or mood with passions exaggerated to a degree quite beyond human understanding.

It appears that the symbiont leeches are directly responsible for their hosts' invariably antagonistic natures: unless the host is made strong, the parasite cannot be certain of its own longevity. Lacking aggression the host would be seen to be weak, easy prey to his contemporaries. And without tenacity or the will to survive, he must fail. If territory exists for the taking, a vampire will take it; extending his boundaries makes a Lord safer within his own sphere of jurisdiction. And as for ruthlessness: since the driving instinct of the leech is survival, the question of law and order-- and especially justice-- never arises. Might is the only right. The "evil" of the Great Vampire springs naturally from all of his other vices.

As for the vampire's ego: that becomes glaringly evident in the pride he takes in his violence. According to Szgany legends the first of the Wamphyri was Shaitan, in our world Satan. And pride (or ego, as we understand it) was his downfall, too. It will have been noticed that the above vices are identical with Man's, forming in the main our definition of "evil." In that respect it should also be pointed out that the vampire has no recognition of evil. Regret, shame and guilt are in all probability words that he does not accept, or emotions which-- if experienced at all-- are held in abeyance by his parasite.

As for any comparison with Man's "evil": the scale of difference-- the enormity of the gap between ours and the vampire's capacity for evil-- simply does not allow for comparison.

DISEASES AND VULNERABILITIES:

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"The Wamphyri shrug off most diseases common to man; their leeches produce antibodies to order. There is one ailment, however, whose morbid encroachment may only be delayed by the symbiont's healing powers and the host's protoplasmic DNA. Leprosy, "the bane of vampires," disfigures and kills them no less than it kills wholly human beings, but the disease's progression is usually far slower in the Wamphyri. The symbiont is itself susceptible to the disease, and once the infection breaks through a vampire's resistance and reaches the leech the process becomes irreversible and the True Death results.

Silver is a poison to the Wamphyri. The mythical "silver cross" may well turn aside or stay a vampire's hand, but not by virtue of any mysterious religious power in the cross. The silver itself is the deterrent and may not be considered a "supernatural" element in this regard but simply a poison to the Wamphyri, much as

mercury, lead, and plutonium are poisons to humans. But it does more nearly compare with plutonium in this respect, as it is quite deadly when used correctly. (NOTE: In E-Branch, while the supernatural is never scorned, neither is it accepted until scientific explanations have been ruled out). Silver will sear the vampire's flesh. Wounded with a silver knife, the wound will take longer to heal and leave a permanent scar. Injected internally, as by a shotgun using silver shot, or a gun firing silver bullets, it will cripple and even kill. Vampire flesh damaged by silver in this way must be shed and new flesh manufactured by a protoplasmic process. Garlic is also a poison. And once again, no supernatural reason is attached; garlic is simply poisonous to the vampire, even as various fungi, poison ivy, and many fruits and vegetables are poisonous to man. The smell of garlic, offensive to many humans, is emetic to the vampire; its oil will sting him, causing his flesh to slough; taken internally, if it does not kill him it will certainly damage organs and make it difficult for the symbiont to effect repairs. The Szgany of Sunside make extensive use of garlic, not only in their cooking but also as a poison with which to daub their crossbow bolts. Nevertheless-- and despite the fact that silver is by no means rare and garlic is plentiful on Sunside-- still the Wamphyri have been a scourge among the Szgany from time immemorial to the most recent of times.

THE SZGANY-- How They Relate to the Vampire:

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The Szgany (Travellers, Romers, or Romany) are so called because they are kept on the move by Wamphyri raiders who come nightly into Sunside to hunt. The Szgany are their prey, their livelihood, their sole means of survival and continuity. Without the Szgany there would be no Wamphyri, for the leech would never have had access to humanity and the means to rise above the intelligence level of, say, a dog or wolf. The Szgany provide sport, women for the Lords of the Wamphyri, and men for their Ladies. Szgany blood is the staple diet of Starside's vampires; their flesh feeds vampire beasts; even their skin, bones, and hair are fashioned into furniture or decorations for the manses of their persecutors. The Szgany are to the Wamphyri of Starside as the coconut to the twentieth-century South Sea Islanders: useful in every part, with little or nothing going to waste. But when the Szgany are no longer of use as lieutenants, concubines, or thralls, then they are drained of their blood and butchered, and all unappetizing parts ground down for "the provisioning," as meal for the flying creatures and warrior beasts of their masters.

Wamphyri ESP, And Other "Supernatural" Skills:

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Most Lords and Ladies of the Wamphyri are to some extent telepathic. In addition to being physically stronger than entirely human beings (in an approximate ratio of four or more to one) their sensory skills have also been enhanced-- including several "sixth" or higher senses as defined by E-Branch. It is therefore fortunate that their intelligence has not been enhanced; their symbionts can only make use of what native intelligence was there to begin with, and ruthlessness and deviousness must compensate for the untutored peasant mind, a lack of learning which, ironically, has come about as a direct result of centuries of Wamphyri predation. On the other hand, in response to Wamphyri ESP-- and apparently as a process of natural selection-- the Szgany are adept at disguising their thoughts; mentally they are equipped to "hide" from the telepathic probes of their hunters. But the "supernatural" abilities of the Wamphyri almost always tip the balance their way, and our science is hard-pressed to find an answer to certain of the Great Vampire's skills.

Metamorphosis:

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The entire life-cycle of the Wamphyri could be said to be a series of metamorphoses; a constant ongoing mutation is apparent even in the individual specimen. But in certain circumstances the vampire's spontaneous metamorphosis is theoretically improbable, scientifically baffling, and physically awesome. It is, too, a reality. In battle, the "normal" or "usual" morphology of a Lord of the Wamphyri (the basic structure of his anthropological form) becomes something else entirely when whatever aspect he has assumed is put aside in favour of his parasite's best protective armour and weaponry. His flesh stretches, tears, and refashions itself; hands become talons, while jaws

elongate fantastically to accommodate teeth or tusks worthy of a sabre-tooth or wild boar. His usually pale aspect turns grey to leaden as his skin thickens to hide; the wild, feral yellow of his eyes turns from flame to red (as in infrared perhaps?) especially at night, possibly enhancing his already incredible night-sightedness. And in the fullness of his change, the very sight of him is as a weapon in itself. The closest approximation in Man would be the rage of the berserker- without the berserker's disregard for his own safety. For over and above all else, survival is uppermost in the vampire's symbiont-controlled mind.

Survival: the basic instinct that quite literally lends a vampire wings. For in certain extremes many of the Wamphyri can so change their shape as to flatten their bodies, lengthen their arms, sprout webbing like the membranes of a bat or flying squirrel, and form aerofoils to support their weight or at least allow for gliding. And the most adept of all are capable of controlled flight and aerial manoeuvres. In this respect it seems reasonable to suspect that there is something of the bat about them. There are giant bats in Starside- they are often the watchdogs of the Wamphyri- and if an infected bat with a spore grown to a leech were to bite and pass on its characteristics to a man...?

This theory might well account for the sensitive, convolute snout to be found in a great many Lords and Ladies of the Wamphyri; also their night vision and of course their tendency to flight. But what theory or accident of evolution could possibly account for their mist-making? Or is this "simply" another facet of the vampire's powers of metamorphosis?

For when the Great Vampire is in danger- or conversely, when he sets out to creep up on prey or a foe- he can "create" or "call up" a mist to cover his movements. And vampire mist is not the often humid and softly lapping vapour we know but slimy and cold as a cold sweat. And the vampire Lord's enhanced senses- the normal five along with his telepathic probes- are carried in his mist like electricity in a wire but faster than the speed of light, at the speed of thought.

As for the mist itself:

It issues from the vampire's pores, as sweat issues from ours. But the process is brought about through his will. There is a theory, however fanciful, concerning the way in which the earth itself is caused to release its moisture: that the vampire mist is some kind of catalyst, as when dry ice is released over a cloud to excite precipitation. But this scarcely explains the volume of such mists as are generated by the Wamphyri.

For HYPNOSIS, ONEIROMANCY, AND OTHER POWERS OF THE WAMPHYRI, see also the Appended Notes to 176, E-BRANCH AND OTHER TALENTS.