

THE CULT OF AUGURS

(ALA VATICINUM: KING OF PROPHETS)



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History

Section One - The History of the Cult of Augurs in Ancient Rome

During the days of the Camarilla, the Cult of Augurs served as the spiritual advisors and leaders of Roman Kindred. In a mirror of mortal Roman society, the Cult wielded a great degree of influence, as the blessings of the gods were highly sought after. Military actions, new construction projects, political policies, faithful kindred sought the opinions of the gods and Augurs before undertaking any of these endeavors. An augury could doom a venture before it was even begun, or urge the Senex to put such weight behind it that it couldn't possibly fail.

The Cult arose naturally as Romans joined the ranks of the Undead and sought to maintain their own customs while still keeping the Masquerade. By the final nights of Rome, they had become as riddled by corruption as any Wing of the Camarilla. Powerful Kindred would pay for the right words from the Gods, and the Cult contained enough people that simply wanted to advance their own power, that it was not a difficult thing to find an Augur to say just about anything. The Cult had significant pressure upon it from both the Senex and the Legio Mortuum to provide favorable readings and auguries that in many ways, their hands were tied from providing real guidance any further. The fall of the Camarilla and the Cult's survival until modern nights has given the Augurs a new chance at reclaiming their once influential position, and perhaps even an opportunity to reconnect with the will of their gods, but it will not be an easy road.

Section Two - Survival and Transition after Rome

With the fall of the Camarilla, the Cult of Augurs was nearly destroyed. Two members, Kalliope Thetis, and Flaviana Galla, managed to escape the destruction wrought on Rome. Flaviana went underground, hiding her affiliations until modern nights, while Kalliope joined the Invictus. Recently, with the re-emergence of the Strix, Kalliope gathered a coalition of faithful Kindred, and led an effort to re-awaken the Cult of Augurs. It was at this time that Flaviana chose to reveal herself and provide the guidance necessary to rebuild.

Section Three - The Cult in Modern Nights

The modern Cult of Augurs attempts to recreate the structure of their ancient Roman heritage, but with Flaviana as the de-facto leader of the Cult. She keeps an agent in each nation the Cult is active in, fully tied to her by vinculum, who reports to her directly (and independently of the Rex Sacrorum of that nation) and presides over the initiation of new members.

Politically, the situation has changed greatly for the Cult since the days of Rome. No longer is their religion officially imposed by the Senex, so much of their influence is lost. Recovering their standing will be difficult, with the Lancea Sanctum and Circle of the Crone competing for religious dominance already. On the other hand, the Cult no longer has to worry about punishment from an unhappy Legio Mortuum, or sanctions from the Senex for unfavorable readings, and without any regulation, the opportunists in the Cult who do manage to find a niche for their religion stand to gain a great deal.

Tenets and Laws of the Cult of Augurs

Section One – Tenets of the Cult of Augurs

Ritual Is Faith

To most members of the Cult of Augurs, it doesn't really matter *what* you believe, so long as you make a point of performing the proper rituals. Those who memorize dozens of complicated (and crowd-pleasing) rituals and observances tend to go far in the Cult, while faithful but subdued Kindred are less likely to attract attention and aid.

Even those with true belief admit that elaborately staged rituals and expensive sacrifices are more likely to appease and honor the gods. These vampires point to the structures and detailed practices of Veneficia, the blood magic of the Cult, demonstrating that more demanding and sophisticated rituals tend to produce more powerful results.

Blood is Power

Those with true belief know that sacrifice is the fuel that feeds the flame of power. For Kindred, there can be no greater sacrifice than blood – whether one's own Vitae, or that of the nourishing mortal stock. All of the rituals of the Cult are centered around the willful surrender of blood to the gods, invoking a divine exchange for power or knowledge.

Those who care little for faith still understand that blood is the ultimate currency of Kindred society, and they structure all of their operations to provoke sacrifice from the masses. Many of the rituals of the faithless Vaticinators are constructed so that they can skim a proportion of blood (or a fair representation of it in influence or other resources) from the obeisance of the Covenants.

Section Two- Laws and the Traditions

The Traditions

The Masquerade- The Cult of Augurs often has to take special care to uphold the Masquerade. Veneficia required a great deal of blood and planning, and ritual sacrifice is usually granted special attention by law enforcement agencies. The Cult must put in extra effort to ensure their activities remain unnoticed.

Progeny-Progeny as a tradition is not nearly as difficult for the Augurs to respect than their fellows within the Circle of the Crone. The belief structure of the Cult doesn't place any special weight on the power of creation, and so siring childer is not as important to them. To the Cult, keeping good relations with Kindred in power is far more important to their efforts at rebuilding influence.

Amaranth-Amaranth is treated with just as much horror and revulsion amongst the Cult as it is amongst the five Covenants. With no specific rites and beliefs on Amaranth, most members bring their own views, which amongst well-educated Kindred, are almost universally negative.

Elysium-Elysium is a tradition well-respected by the Augurs, and one which they realize is strategically important for them. Some amongst the Cult have begun a push to convince Princes or Primogen that it's not a *true* Elysium unless the Cult itself blesses the site. While this is expected to ruffle some feathers, the Augurs are hoping that the cost of getting the Augurs to bless the sites will be judged less than the unrest should a Prince ignore the Cult.

Current Traditions and Customs of the Cult of Augurs

Initiation

Inducting a new member into the Cult of Augurs is, like most important events in the cult, a matter of grand ceremony. Prospective members are brought before Flaviana's agents to undergo the Rite of Joining. The Rite requires the Kindred to submit their will to, and drink the blood of, the ritual master. Members who are unable to drink blood due to the rules of their Covenant duties (such as Mystery-Sworn Ordo Dracul), are instead wretched in curses should they ever betray the Cult. Finally, they are presented with the traditional iron ritual knife and black or grey robes of an Augur, and granted the title of Vaticinator.

Once their loyalty is assured through the blood bond, Vaticinators can begin to learn the secrets of Veneficia, and begin to lead the rituals and rites of the Cult for the public.

Structure and Rank within the Cult

The Cult's structure is somewhat less formal than during the height of the Camarilla, as they no longer boast the numbers they once did. On a global level, Flaviana herself provides leadership for the Cult, and maintains her grip through her agents in each region. Blood bonds between her and her agents ensure their loyalty, and the initiation rites of the Cult mean that most Augurs will follow the lead of Flaviana or one of her agents.

Within each domain, the head of the Cult, the Rex Sacrorum, provides leadership and guidance for the Cult, and presides over and facilitates the most important rituals. Rituals somewhat less important to the Augurs' political goals (but no less vital in the night-to-night functioning of the Cult) are handled by Epulones, who perform the bulk of the rituals the Augurs do. Scholars focus on rebuilding and maintaining the Veneficia. Vaticinators are those Augurs who have not yet chosen a role, and assist in rituals as needed.

To gain higher degrees of initiation within the Cult requires a trip to Flaviana. Members who wish to join the higher echelons of the Augurs must form a vinculum with her, ensuring their ultimate loyalty to the Cult and Flaviana.

Vaticinator (Cult Initiation 1/2) – Vaticinators are the rank-and-file of the Cult of Augurs. All members of the Cult of Augurs are Vaticinators. Their role varies based on what higher-ranked Cultists require of them, but they are able to train in the art of Veneficia, run rituals, and perform many duties within the Covenant. Ancient Roman tradition held that Vaticinators wore grey or black robes, and carried a ceremonial iron knife with which to perform sacrifices.

Scholars (Cult Initiation 3+) – Scholars are those Cultists who focus on keeping, preserving, interpreting, and rebuilding the rituals of Veneficia. The stereotypical scholar keeps great libraries of occult and esoteric knowledge, and in modern nights focuses on rebuilding the vast body of Veneficia lost to the Cult. Denoted by a white stripe on their robes, the Scholars also speak in a distinctive Scholar's Cant, designed to obscure their speech from non-Scholars.

Epulones (Cult Initiation 4+) – In the days of the Camarilla, Epulones were highly sought after, as the Augurs who presided over blessing official functions, gatherings, and spaces. Denoted by a red stripe on their robes, Epulones carry a shallow bowl to catch the blood of sacrifices. The Epulones are best poised to influence the faithful, but until the Cult regains its former status, are also likely to have to work the hardest to rebuild the reputation of the Augurs.

Rex or Regina Sacrorum (Cult Initiation 5) – The Rex or Regina Sacrorum is the ritual leader of the Cult of Augurs within a given region. As the most learned and closest to the gods, the word of the Rex Sacrorum is considered highly important, and their influence both within the Cult and outside it is considerable.

Other Customs and Traditions

Public Rites – The public rites of the Cult are performed with great gravity and an air of exacting detail. While they may or may not be sincere (and may or may not incorporate the true magic of the Veneficia), they are always spectacular. Those among the Cult who cynically provide a service to the highest bidder believe that they are bound to give the client something worth paying for – and something that nobody else is qualified to give him. Those who truly believe in the power of the gods take the arcane, multi-tiered rituals very seriously, knowing that the harder they work, the more likely the gods are to take notice.

The most common public rite of the Cult is the augury; a reading of omens designed to provide a recommendation on a course of action. Of the many auguries performed by the Cult, the most popular is the haruspices – the examination of the entrails of a sacrifice. Specialized rituals dictate the exact details: which organs must be examined, what type of animal is to be sacrificed, and the circumstances of the sacrifice. Other types of professional augury performed by the Cult include the interpretation of dreams, the movement of undirected animals (birds or rats) or inebriated mortals, the movements of fire, blood, or water, and most dangerously, the colors of the approaching dawn.

Many of the other rites involve ritual cleansing, blessing by bathing in sacrificial blood and prayers designed to invoke or appease vengeful gods.

The Calendar – The Cult of Augurs presides over a regular ritual sacrifice meant to maintain the blessings of the gods on the whole of their domain and guarantee the continued good grace of Kindred society. Three times a month (on the nights of the full moon, half moon, and new moon), the ritual is performed in great assembly, before a mass of the cult, with attending Kindred from all Covenants. On these nights, the highest ranked Cultists call for the appeasement of the gods and the reversal of ill omen, spilling a great quantity of blood.

The Veneficia – Veneficia are the legal ritual sorceries of the Cult of Augurs, powered by Vitae and known to invoke potent real-world effects. Drawn from the secret teachings of the Cult, Veneficia represents the dedicated practice for the true believers and the ultimate tool of intimidation for the cynics. No less arcane than the general public rites, these rituals have been proven to work *only* when the complicated steps and full sacrifice are performed properly. The magic of Veneficia may be invoked without belief in the gods, but not without belief in the Veneficia and their rigid requirements.

Attitudes and Stereotypes towards outsiders

The attitudes and stereotypes of the Cult of Augurs are nearly as varied as the individual members themselves. Cult members come from all five Covenants, and all five Clans, and as such each tends to bring their own perspectives to the Cult. On top of that, the Cult is a relatively new entity in modern nights, and as a group hasn't had the time to really develop consensus. The blood bonds required for membership do offset that to a degree, and lend a certain degree of group-think to the Cult.

Carthian Movement:

By and large, the Carthian Movement is not overly concerned with spirituality, but tend to be more open-minded than the Invictus or Lance. This makes the Movement a fertile ground for new recruits. Carthians looking for some spirituality in their Requiem may turn to the Augurs. For the Cult, the Carthians represent perhaps their best opportunity to return to the days of Rome, where the Cult provided guidance for entire domains of Kindred. The political experiments of the Carthians are far more likely to be bent to the Cult's purposes than the rigid inflexibility of the Invictus.

Circle of the Crone:

The Cult of Augurs doesn't easily get along with the Circle of the Crone. Although many of the beliefs of the Cult filtered to the Acolytes in the centuries after Rome, to the highly structured Cult, the Circle of the Crone seem like unorganized riffraff. Nevertheless, their respect for ritual and the power of blood provide common ground for Acolytes and Augurs to get along. The similarities between Cruac and Veneficia also provide a draw for the scholars of each group, to study the connections between different forms of Blood Magic.

Invictus:

The Unconquered provide a stable, strong foundation for the Cult of Augurs, and if the Cult could gain support from the Invictus, they would secure a powerful place in Kindred society. However, given the close ties between the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum, this is easier said than done. Many Invictus seek power in any form, however, and the highly-structured rituals of Veneficia fit the Invictus mindset quite well. As long as true faith isn't required, power-hungry Invictus are likely to seek the benefits the Cult offers.

Lancea Sanctum:

While the Cult of Augurs' blood magics don't require true faith, they are universally based in pagan Roman traditions, a fact which doesn't sit well with most Sanctified. This makes for cool relations between the Cult and the Lance. For the most part, the Lance is mostly a roadblock towards attaining temporal power, and there are few opportunities to be had with them. Members of the Lancea Sanctum are not permitted entry into the Cult of Augurs.

Ordo Dracul:

The scholars of the Ordo Dracul are mostly willing to leave politicking to the other Covenants, so the Cult and the Ordo tend to get along well. The Ordo doesn't forbid spirituality, and scholars of the Covenant may be interested in the opportunity to study blood magics without putting their members into serious danger infiltrating other Covenants. The Cult of Augurs, for its part, sees a Covenant with solid respect for ritual, which makes for disciplined recruits.

Unaligned:

The Cult of Augurs has no real unified view on the Unaligned. Typically, the Cult looks for dedicated members, and the rumored flightiness of Unaligned may give stricter Augurs pause before inducting them, but for the most part, the Augurs consider each Unaligned on an individual basis.

Daeva:

Daeva typically make dedicated and fervent adherents while their passions last, which makes them devoted Augurs. Their tendency to give in to their vices can occasionally provide a strain on the highly formalized rituals of the Cult, but their dedication makes up for the rare instances in which Daeva lose their control and disrupt a rite.

Gangrel:

Few Gangrel are seen as having the patience or dedication for the highly formalized rites of the Veneficia, and so the Cult does not boast the same weight towards Clan Gangrel as the Circle of the Crone. Nevertheless, the religion of ancient Rome was bloody and savage by modern standards, and this appeals to some Gangrel. While the Cult would hope to avoid violence, Gangrel warriors amongst their ranks help to ensure the Cult's security.

Mekhet:

Clan Mekhet has always been highly sought after for its visionary qualities, and the Cult of Augurs continues in placing this value on the Clan. Seen as specially blessed by the gods for the discipline of Auspex and their talent in seeking secrets, the Mekhet clan may be more important to the Cult now than they ever were in the past. With a renewed focus on rebuilding their lost body of lore, any Mekhet that can be brought to the effort is a valuable asset indeed.

Nosferatu:

Nosferatu find that their information-gathering skills are highly valuable to the Cult in regaining their influence. Primarily, they function as spies or intimidators, to urge members of the Covenants to follow (or seek) their auguries. An adept Nosferatu can ferret out who is launching important ventures, so the Cult knows who to approach and when to offer their services. In addition, their intimidating abilities ensure any who seek to blackmail or bully the Cult will meet with strong resistance.

Ventru:

The Ventru, with their skills in dominating both mortals and animals, make for valuable additions to the Cult. Nothing keeps an unruly sacrifice in line better than a swift command from one of the Lords. In addition, the Ventru bring much-needed resources and business savvy to the Cult, which will be increasingly useful as the Augurs seek to expand.

Joining the Cult of Augurs

Required Approvals

Joining the Cult of Augurs requires a Global approval per the Global Addendum III.C.4.b. Ranks in the Shadow Cult Initiation: Cult of Augurs merit requires low approval for the first dot, mid for the second, high for the third, top for the fourth, and global for the fifth. Membership is not limited by Clan, and like all Shadow Cults, is not limited by Covenant.

Upon purchasing the first dot of Shadow Cult Initiation: Cult of Augurs, the player gains access to Veneficia at a cost of new dots times seven, and new rituals can be bought at a cost of ritual dots times two, per the addendum.

Advancing to Cult Initiation: Cult of Augurs 3 or more requires a global hard-proxy visit to Flaviana Galla in addition to the approval levels listed.

Recruitment

The Cult recruits members from all five Covenants and all five Clans, although members of the Lance are often reluctant to participate in pagan rituals. In general, the Cult sees two major outlooks, true believers and cynics. The true believers are those who have actual faith in the old gods of Rome, and believe their rituals and rites reach the ears of their deities. Cynics, on the other hand, recognize that the rituals work independent of faith, and see the Cult as a path to power and influence.

Regardless of their outlook, potential recruits need to have patience and an exacting eye for detail. Veneficia is not an art that tolerates mistakes, and the rites are intricate and time-consuming. Those without the patience, should they make it past the initiation in the first place, are likely to remain Vaticinators.

Those seeking to join the Augurs first need to find patronage within the Cult. After undergoing testing to determine a candidate's patience, control, and attention to detail, the patron is likely to look for specific skills depending on the patron's outlook (devotion and faith for true believers, salesmanship and panache for cynics). Prospective members are then brought before Flaviana's agent (with the approval of the area's Rex Sacrorum) to be vetted, blood bound, and finally initiated. While exceptions will be made for those who can't submit to blood bonds, such recruits are typically swathed in the most virulent of curses should they ever betray the Cult. Other than the rare exceptions, all members of the Cult are expected to submit to and maintain a vinculum with one of Flaviana's agents.