

A Philosophical Look at Belial's Brood:

A Treatise

For many people, the perception of the Belial's Brood is one of antagonism and violence. Indeed, many would suggest that Forsworn are murderous, demon worshipping monsters that jeopardize the Masquerade and leave a path of destruction in their wake. In this document, we will attempt to understand more behind the origin of Belial and how it relates to the Forsworn. Additionally, we will discuss how the concepts of Belial impact the manner in which the Forsworn are portrayed.

Belial is referred to in many religious texts, two of which are the *Torah* and the *Bible*. In the *Bible*, Belial is primarily used as an analogy for Satan. This would suggest that the Belial referenced in Judeo-Christian concepts is being primarily cast as the "villain"; and lends credence to the almost stereotypical "demon worship" concept. However, more modern religious texts such as *The Satanic Bible* suggest a more naturalistic definition of Belial: Belial represents a being of independence and self sufficiency. This definition is more compatible with the suggested intention of *Belial's Brood*, and as such will be the direction that is focused on.

"And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"

– 2 Corinthians 6:15

If Belial is not inherently tied to Judeo-Christian concepts, then what is Belial? Part of that answer depends on the specific Faction that a given Forsworn is a member of. Some of the Factions, such as The Nameless and the Throne of the Smokeless Fire, tie in closely with the concept of a Judeo-Christian God. This is especially true for the Nameless, who use a modification of the virgin birth story utilized in both Christianity and other theistic beliefs in order to suggest the divinity of the central character. Still other Factions such as The Scarlet Rite pursue enlightenment towards Belial outside of any significant religious or theistic beliefs. This does not mean that other Factions necessarily abandon belief in Belial as a divine entity, only that the pursuit of truth does not require a belief in a form of divinity.

"I can tell you this: The Prince doesn't turn up in photos or mirrors or anything. He sold his reflection to Red Jack. Traded it for some kind of witchcraft."

- Mythologies

So what else could Belial represent? As we have seen within the World of Darkness, other entities have the capacity to provide benefit to the Vampire race. The first and most logical candidate would be Spirits. As many players have seen, Stirges have the capacity to utilize Vampiric abilities (such as using Dominate); and can act in ways that seem impossible to “normal” Vampires. Additionally, from reference in *Mythologies* and *Book of Spirits*, Spirits have the capacity to grant abilities to Vampires. As such, this could indicate that Belial is a Spirit. Indeed, the word “demon” as taken from the ancient Greek refers to spirit. Additionally, Belial is referenced within the Goetia of the *Lesser Key of Solomon* as a “King” Spirit. While the book is not assumed to be actually written by Solomon, the fact that Belial is listed and mentioned as a high ranking Spirit is very telling about the possible identity of Belial. The concept of sacrifice would also ring very true if the Forsworn were interacting with a powerful Spirit, as exchange and sacrifice are very common tenets within the spirit world.

“Belial means ‘without a master’, and symbolizes true independence, self-sufficiency, and personal accomplishment.”

– The Satanic Bible

But perhaps Belial represents an even more simple meaning. Belial can be interpreted to mean “yokeless”. In this sense, Belial could be a completely internalized representation. This would be consistent with methodology by which other Vampires gain their learning or enlightenment. The Circle of the Crone, the Lancea Sanctum, and the Ordo Dracul all show internalized learning systems that are consistent with the concepts of the Forsworn Investments. Dependent upon the specific Faction of Belial’s Brood being considered, the comparisons can be very similar (theistic or naturalistic).

“Ave Satani, and by my hand it is done.”

– Belial’s Brood

However, even though other groups find ways to gain learning and insight through beliefs both religious and internalized, no other group seems to have its members as heavily altered as those of the Forsworn. Why do members of this sect seem to change in such a fundamental manner compared to other groups? This touches on the core belief of the Forsworn, and ultimately one of the reasons that this group is a challenge to play as both a player and an NPC. From a psychological standpoint, it can be difficult to think of the Beast in a positive manner. *Requiem: MET* has many references to the Beast, and the imagery is generally negative. Combined with the minimalistic and destructive description of Belial’s Brood inside the same guide, it is quite easy for individuals to come up with a picture of the Forsworn as destructive and chaotic monsters. This is, in some regards, the rationale behind the “Cade era” of Brood

within the Camarilla. What must be considered, however, is the mindset towards the Beast. We would not consider animals hunting in the wild to be “good” or “evil”, nor should we consider the transition from Man to Beast with such simple terms of morality. The Forsworn understand the importance of this. In fact, this condition is central to the Pursuit.

“A Beast I am, lest a Beast I become.”

– Requiem: Mind’s Eye Theatre

As the Forsworn’s primary effort is to pursue the truth of their existence and to embrace their Beast, they will generally have lower Humanity than most Kindred within similar time frames of existence. This is not to suggest that members of Belial’s Brood are more “evil” than other Kindred, rather the Forsworn have rejected the anthropomorphic notions that most conventional vampires continue to hold onto after their Embrace. In essence, this is the Lie that traditional Kindred maintain: Vampires believe that they are still as human as the memories they have retained. Members of the Belial’s Brood recognize that their Humanity is the crutch that provides them assistance on the path towards enlightenment; but should not be retained throughout the transitory period. Moreover, they do not cling to the notion that they are human. The Beast, that part of the Vampire that guides the most primal of actions, is seen as a gift as opposed to a curse. While each Faction uses Belial for the goal of the Pursuit in a different manner, all of them recognize the symbolic importance that Belial represents towards their individual paths of enlightenment. If the belief in the mortal life was one based on primarily Judeo-Christian concepts, then the vampiric belief within Brood could well be one that was antithetical to such a belief (such as Lucifer or other “anti-God”). If the belief in the mortal life was one of relativistic or naturalistic morality, then the vampiric belief could possibly be based on hedonism and excess.

One of the alternate meanings of Belial in Hebrew that has been presented is “without worth” or “worthless”. In some ways, it could be suggested that the study of Belial within the Forsworn is one of making the Man worthless and losing the yoke of the Lie, while working towards being truly unmastered. Although this pursuit is alien to most Kindred, these goals are not inherently antagonistic towards Kindred who do not subscribe to Forsworn beliefs; and members of Belial’s Brood believe that the Pursuit should be an individual experience. As proselytizing to individuals not within the Covenant goes against the ideas of self reliance and individualism that is advocated by Belial, interactions outside of the Covenant can be challenging. While members of Belial’s Brood can be absolute in their lack of compassion or empathy, this should not be used as justification for Forsworn to employ pointless and gratuitous violence.

“But for corruption thou hast made Belial, an angel of hostility.”

– The Dead Sea Scrolls

Looking into the history of the Forsworn as related to Kindred, we see a series of violence, especially during what is commonly referred to as “Cade Era”. While it is often suggested that the Brood led by Cade were not properly representing the desires of the Brood, it is ironic that Cade’s error was that he was too fervent in his belief of the Brood, leading to the mistakes that ended up plaguing the group as a larger whole. One of the strongest admonitions that consistently resonates through the Forsworn is the importance of avoiding proselytizing. The Call is truly an experience that must be internally found. The mistake that Cade made was an attempt to show vampires the benefit of the Brood. Cade, being a charismatic individual, was able to bring a lot of new members into the ranks. Unfortunately, with no true understanding or insight on the path of the Forsworn, most of the members did not truly understand how to demonstrate their intentions of loyalty towards the Covenant they had recently discovered. Indeed, with large populations of initiates, the opportunities for proof turned into little more than mob scenes of initiates throwing themselves at Kindred societies with almost no possible hope of success. This, combined with the natural misinformation and xenophobic attitude that is prevalent within Kindred society led the vampire populace to believe that members of the Belial’s Brood were inherently violent and hostile. While violence can well be part of the journey that members take, it is not the focus of the journey, nor should it be assumed to be so.

“The children of Belial are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known.”

– Deuteronomy 13:13

So who exactly is Belial? While it would be easy to ascribe divine concepts to Belial, those beliefs would not be accurate or essential to the concepts of the different factions of the Forsworn. However, the history of Belial intertwines closely with the teachings within the Bible and the Torah. Moshe Rabbeinu, also known commonly as Moses, was born in Egypt during the reign of Seti I. While not particularly interesting in of itself, Moses’ life was one of self preservation. The child of a prostitute, Moses was set beside a river bed when his mother chose not to keep her unwanted infant. Moses was discovered by Bithia, the daughter of Ramesses I, and raised as her son. While Moses was exposed to the better education of the time, he was still treated differently from the rest of the family due to his adopted status. This resulted in Moses becoming more predisposed towards violence and rebellion as he continued to grow up. Moses would frequently indulge in all manner of wanton acts, from carnal to violent, each act more equally depraved. When he was given power over soldiers, he demonstrated that he had great skill at war; but remained always self confident and prideful. Finally, in an act of

frustration, the Pharaoh sent Moses out with unskilled troops to take other lands in the Pharaoh's name, hoping to be rid of Moses once and for all. During Moses' travels, he continued to be drawn to acts of violence and aggression, including the killing of some of his own men. The others, fearing for their lives, left Moses behind and returned to Egypt. Believing he would be discovered, Moses traveled across the Sinai Peninsula (after kidnapping a woman) and came upon a mountainous region where he dwelled for some time. It was during this time that the Spirit of the Unnamed One approached Moses. It came up from the ground in a burst of flame, and told Moses that he would return to Egypt and give true freedom to those who would ask of it. When Moses asked the Spirit what its name was, it responded with the now well known, "I am what I am." Why did this Spirit choose to aid Moses? Perhaps because Moses had demonstrated the will to survive and to be self reliant. Or perhaps, because it understood the naivety of humans. For whatever reason, Moses believed in the divinity of this creature, and returned to Egypt, which was now under the rule of Ramesses II. When Moses arrived and demanded the freedom of the slaves on behalf of his god, the Pharaoh asked what god had sent him. Moses whispered the name of the Unnamed One into his ear, and he passed out from having heard it. Then the Spirit went throughout the land, destroying livestock and killing people, its lust for blood and flesh being boundless. It was here that the decision to release the slaves was made, and the people left Egypt. During these travels, the Spirit called Moses up into the mountains, and became one with him. Moses was now truly "yoke less", and referred to this freedom as Belial. The Spirit which once guided his hand now shared his thoughts, and he would begin to instruct the former slaves into the meaning of true self reliance. It was during this time that Belial would issue commands to his followers, which make up the bulk of the Biblical Deuteronomy. While it may be hard to conceptualize a divine creature issuing such stark and absolute punishments for certain things, it is not so hard to understand how the alien logic of a Spirit would attempt to encapsulate human "morality" into the confines of words. This cruel and unforgiving nature was well suited for these people, and allowed them to begin to find success as a group. And, although Moses himself did not continue on much further with these people, his profound impact upon their society is still felt to this very day within several different religions.

This would not be the final appearance of Belial within society. While it is unclear if Moses/Belial carried on through time, or if the Spirit that occupied Moses departed, what is known is that the Spirit known as Belial returned once more, portraying a Roman centurion who would later be referred to as Longinus. Of course, the man was not relevant to this story, the Spirit who had followed the slaves he had released so many years ago took note of a human who would refer to himself as the "Son of God". Why did the teachings of this Jesus individual bother the Spirit so greatly? After all, many of the slaves and their future generations considered themselves the "sons of God", which pleased the Spirit. It is clear from the texts in Exodus that the Spirit would not have any other god considered equal. Moreover, the very philosophy that was being prescribed by this individual was antithetical to the nature of the Spirit. Instead of teaching others to stand up for themselves and better their situation, this man spoke of forgiveness in the face of hostility, and putting one's trust and belief in another. These were the very qualities that led the former slaves into the position they had once been in! Belial waited patiently for an opportunity to see this man to his demise. By reaching out with his influence, he turned both the individuals who claimed to be loyal to him away, and the people he claimed to

represent. While executions involving crucifixion were not unusual, Belial allowed his influence to reach out to the other soldiers present, that they might be especially harsh and cruel with this one. And Belial himself took the final blow on this man. The Testament of Longinus provides a great deal of insight into the parallelism between the stories of Moses and the stories of Longinus, lending support to the idea that Longinus, instead of being a new person who was influenced by the Spirit known as Belial, was indeed Moses who had joined with Belial. However, one thing that is made clear in these passages was that Longinus had been imbued with the ability to pass his own lust for blood and violence onto others. This suggests that Moses probably was also able to do the same, explaining some of the earlier parables of the Forsworn and their first existence. Indeed, it lends weight to the notion that the first “vampires” were most likely descended from Moses; and would explain the penchant for blood offerings that is common with Judaic beliefs. The difference between the Moses of the one period of time and the Longinus of this period of time was that Moses/Belial sought to enlighten humans, whereas Longinus/Belial sought to enlighten vampires.

Unfortunately for Belial, his action regarding the apocalyptic preacher Jesus created a martyr for the Christians, and led religious viewpoints in an entirely different direction. The teachings of Jesus became adopted and propagated by his former followers. While they employed the same ruthlessness and violence that he advocated, they personified a god wholly removed from him. And while the members of the Forsworn who were to become part of the Mercy Seat faction understood the message he attempted to deliver upon his return, the Lancea Sanctum incorporated the bastardized teachings of Paul the Apostle, believing that guiding humans towards a reward was the intention. Worse still, the name of Belial was taken to mean “worthless”, effectively teaching all further individuals that it was impotent and powerless. Later Westernization of the word demon brought about an even greater fear and loathing towards anyone who said they would follow other creatures. It may very well be that Belial’s frustration at these reactions is exactly why proselytizing is so discouraged among the Forsworn. After all, it personally discovered the fickle and unreliable nature of others. But for those who understand the truth of Belial’s word, they can truly comprehend what freedom means.