

## A Recipe for Alchemy

Every good recipe begins with good ingredients. Or at least proper ingredients. This is one of the big things that cooking and alchemy have in common. To be honest, I don't know jack about cooking. Before I ever moved out on my own, I got seduced, stuck in a barrel with some rocks and chains, and pitched into a river. After that, I never needed any more of my meals cooked so I never got around to cooking for myself. Still, I've been around people who cooked for longer than not... if only by a rapidly narrowing margin. I think the distinctions between cooking and alchemy are not so great as one might initially think.

So it should not be too surprising to learn that on occasion my alchemy sessions begin with me mimicking the Swedish Chef off the Muppet Show. Sang, my dog, does not seem to appreciate the humor of this. However, Marlon, the guy acting as my assistant, gets a big kick out of it. Which was almost enough incentive to get me to stop... but not quite.

Some of the ingredients for this recipe had been around for a while. Despite going to great efforts to ensure they were stored properly, for a few, using them would be pushing the envelope for functionality. And pushing things in alchemy could be a dicey proposition. Still, that seldom deterred me and I had a good feeling about tonight.

This evening's exercise was simple enough really. I would be concentrating blood for the purpose of refilling my hip flask. Recalling prior events as well as the state of certain ingredients, I reminded myself that it *should* be simple, not that it necessarily would be. Fate on occasion seemed to enjoy kicking me in the delicate danglies.

Hopefully not tonight though.

\* \* \* \* \*

Open Gilch's old book Nocturnal Formulations to the appropriate page. I've refined the formula found there to make it more efficient, but I always enjoy the feel and the smell of the old book.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Ow dammit!" I declared, rubbing my head from where Gilch had slapped it. "What the hell did you do that for?"

"Because you're touching one of my books!" he snarled, apparently on the verge of being truly angry.

"Geez man," I scowled, carefully closing the book and putting it back on the shelf. "Sorry," I began with heavy sarcasm, "I come from a land where books are read, not where they're used for decorations. Had I known you wanted the pretty book to remain pristine and out of the hands of unschooled heathens like myself, I wouldn't have dared contaminate it with my vulgar touch." Damn but I can be poetic when I'm pissed off.

The hideous Nosferatu stared at me for a good ten seconds before erupting in laughter. He laughed so hard he literally had trouble standing up. When he finally mostly got control of himself again, he gasped out, "Okay, maybe you can read some of my book. You vulgar heathen

scum.” At which time his laughing once more went out of control and this time he did fall down.

\* \* \* \* \*

Before beginning your work, have your equipment prepared and ready to go so that nothing need be delayed for lack of proper gear.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Alright,” I whispered to myself as I approached the meth lab. This one was in the Dallas suburb of Duncanville. It had been cleverly hidden in a shed behind a house that seemed to be vacant. ‘Seemed to be’ being the operative phrase here. I’d scouted the area earlier and there were no vampires actively involved with this little operation. At least not on a nightly basis. The place was in the territory of some Brujah jackoff but I didn’t think he knew about it. That or he didn’t care.

Around here, meth labs were almost a dime a dozen so it could go either way.

Now normally I wouldn’t have cared about a meth lab one way or another. Unless it just happened to have expensive, hard-to-find glassware I didn’t have... but which was called for by many of the alchemy experiments I’d been itching to start again. In which case, it was worth one car-jacked pickup for transporting said glassware and a few ounces of rapid-delivery lead with which to pay for it.

Hmm. With both the lookouts in the house now dead, perhaps I *should* actually consider the house as being vacant now.

While approaching the door to the shed where the lab was located, I reminded myself to be careful of my shooting. Last time I’d gone to similar effort and I’d managed to shoot one of the lab guys right into the extremely fragile equipment I’d been there to steal....

\* \* \* \* \*

This recipe would be using two different kinds of vampire blood. The first was a fresh young Gangrel.

\* \* \* \* \*

This scout hadn’t gone particularly well. I’d been looking for some out-of-the-way places to meet my supplier of dead or soon-to-be-dead Sabbat vampires. What I’d wanted was a number of back-road kinda places with crossroads leading quickly back to major thoroughfares. What I’d ended up with was backwoods right next door to suburbia.

“Camarilla scum!” a young man... no, a young vampire declared. Well, by most descriptions I was indeed scum. And technically, I was in the Camarilla. However, I’d never really thought of myself as being Camarilla scum. I suppose I more thought of myself as being a

variable-flavor sort of scum.

“Die you bastard!” he yelled. However, instead of pulling a weapon or something at least moderately intelligent like that, he threw off his vest and began changing into a wolf. Blinking in surprise, I looked around to see if there were other Sabbat Gangrel rapidly closing in on me.

No. Just the one dork slowly working his way to being a wolf.

With a shrug, I pulled out the Glock. Hey, when the blood delivers itself...

\* \* \* \* \*

It is not a good idea to mix different vampire bloods together unless you know how they will react with one another. And in this case, I didn't have enough of the second blood to run a proper series of tests on it. So instead, a buffering material was needed. In this case human blood would keep the vampire bloods from interacting long enough for the next stage of the process to occur. Or, more accurately, ghoulish blood. A ghoul being a human with vampire blood in them. However, if you knew how the vampire blood in them reacted, then the ghoul blood would still serve its purpose as a buffer between the two flavors of pure vampire blood..

\* \* \* \* \*

“Hey Boss?” Jane asked as Marlon kept an eye on her vitals while she donated blood.

“Yeah?” I replied, barely paying attention as I looked over my upcoming training regimen as would be required for my continuing Nemesis training.

“My new job's going well. I... I'm thinking about moving out and getting an apartment,” no question, there was definitely a measure of trepidation in her voice.

“I see,” I replied, not looking up from my program notes. “You still planning to keep your ears open for me?”

“What? Sure, why wouldn't I?” she asked, apparently surprised.

“You still okay with donating blood every so often?” I asked, ignoring her question.

“Sure, that's no problem, Boss.”

“Then I hope you get a nice apartment,” I told her as I flipped to the next page. “Let me know where it is when you decide on one. You have your concealed carry permit?”

“Yes, of course,” she replied, sounding relieved.

“Don't let it expire. And keep your eyes out for any weirdos or stalkers or anything.”

“Don't worry Boss, I will.”

“Good. Then be thinking about what you'd like as an apartment-warming gift.”

“Oh wow. Thanks Boss.”

“No need to thank me until I actually get you something. But be thinking about what that something might be.”

“I will Boss. I will.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Once the buffering fluid is added, the second vampire blood must be added quickly, otherwise the buffering blood will all be contaminated by the first vampire blood and you might as well not have added in a buffering fluid at all.

\* \* \* \* \*

“What the hell is he? Or it?” I asked, looking down at the corpse in the back of the truck. Only from the smell of the blood could I tell that the body actually belonged to a vampire.

“I suppose it’s possible this is some type of gargoyle,” my supplier guessed.

“Could be,” I muttered neutrally, poking the creature with a pointy finger-claw I’d just grown. The outside did indeed feel more like stone than skin. However, the bloody holes belied what truly lay underneath. “How much blood you figure he’s got left in him? And how long has it been dead-dead?”

“Been dead better part of an hour. I drank my healing blood on the way to meet you,” he replied, looking with some pride at the dead... whatever the hell it was.

I sampled a little of it’s blood. It was strong. Tasted vaguely Tsimesce... which helped along the gargoyle theory somewhat as they were the bloodline who had supposedly created gargoyles in the first place.

“Judging from the size of the holes in this thing, there can’t be much blood left....”

“True,” he agreed a touch nervously. “But it’s strong blood. And without question it’s rare.”

“Alright,” I agreed. “You have a valid point. And I can see why you didn’t bring me a live one despite that being what I ordered for this one.”

“Yeah, he didn’t get unconscious the way my trap usually works and he weren’t apparently too keen on dyin’ either. He’s a real prize, wouldn’t you agree?” I didn’t choose the people I worked with based on their grammar. And a good thing too.

I glanced from the monster to the vampire and finally saw what had been right in front of my eyes. My supplier had gambled again and had lost bigger than normal. “How much are you in for this time?” I asked with a frown. His gambling habit was annoying but without it, he probably wouldn’t be freelancing Sabbat vampires for me either.

“Five large,” he replied, looking down at the ground.

I felt my eyebrows rise. “Well, this guy alone damn sure isn’t worth that much. However, you’ve been a good supplier to me. I’ll pay you your five and you bring me a few extras on the side. Deal?”

“Yeah,” he replied, sounding like he wasn’t sure if he should thank me or not.

\* \* \* \* \*

Add obnoxiously expensive, rarified ingredients into an attached fume cannister. Apply high heat to fume cannister for four minutes and thirty seven seconds then remove heat. Open valve allowing fumes to enter main blood tubes. Close valve again after sixty three seconds.

\* \* \* \* \*

“So, what do you need this stuff for anyway? This is, to say the least, an eclectic list,” the vampire named Chester stated with a puzzled frown.

“A friend of mine asked me to help him gather this crap,” I lied. “Can you help me find it or not?”

“Why should we bother?,” Danny asked. “I mean really? We don’t know you. To us, you’re just another Caitiff.”

“All three of you are Caitiff!”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Kim asked, almost sounding puzzled.

“What kind of lousy vampires are you anyway?” I asked as my frustrations threatened to bubble over. “You run a bookstore but you don’t have any books worth a crap. You’re Caitiff but you treat other Caitiff the way other vampires treat you... what’s the deal here?”

“You’re Camarilla,” Chester informed me without looking up from my ingredient list. “The Camarilla and its members exist only to give us grief. Look down upon us as though we were a lesser species. No, you being Caitiff doesn’t matter nearly so much as you being Camarilla does.”

“Alright, then,” I began, drawing a deep breath. “Tell me what you need. You’re right, I am in the Camarilla. And I’m fairly well connected. What do you need, maybe we can make an exchange?”

“Nothing,” Kim spat. “We want nothing from you at all.”

“Well then,” I began with a feral grin, “Maybe we can work out a deal after all. You help me get me the ingredients on the list, I’ll get you some cash to cover it and I’ll ensure that you get nothing from the Camarilla....”

\* \* \* \* \*

Using low heat, bring the blood container to a simmer. Watch carefully while part of the fluids move through the long glassware until what’s left drips out in a collecting beaker. One must be ready to adjust the heat if the fluid moves too fast or too slowly as it has to be just right. Continue simmering while the important part of the fluids slowly works its way through other tubing and drips out into the waiting flask. Yumm. And unrefrigerated it would last at least three nights. More than that was pressing one’s luck because when the stuff went bad, it went *bad*.

This batch would produce almost two quarts of concentrated blood. Bigger kick in a smaller package. Much easier for carrying around. And the other great part was that it would last for weeks if refrigerated. It had been a good recipe to start with and I’d managed to improve on it a bit to make it even better.

Kinda like cookin’.

My grandma’s recipes had been good. My mother’s had been even better... after a couple of unfortunate events resulting in partially inedible meals.

Another big similarity cooking and alchemy seem to occasionally share.

But not tonight.