

Credits

Authors: Jess Hartley, Monica Valentinelli, Filamena Young

Creative Director: Richard Thomas

Developers: Russell Bailey and Eddy Webb

Editor: Genevieve Podleski

Book Design: Ron Thompson

Interior Art: Ken Meyer, Jr.

Cover: Christopher Shy

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Strange, Dead Love

- Table of Contents -

Introduction - 6

Chapter One: Props and Themes - 10

Chapter Two: Shards - 24

<i>Strange Beginnings</i>	24
<i>The Prime's Child</i>	26
<i>Embrace for Love</i>	28
<i>Kick-Ass, Heroic Outcasts</i>	31
<i>A Plague for a Dowry</i>	32
<i>The Estate</i>	35
<i>The Wild War</i>	38
<i>Beast No More</i>	40
<i>Tales of Filted Lovers</i>	43

Chapter Three: Storytelling - 48

I could tell by the way his sheets whispered against his skin as he sat up that they were Egyptian cotton. My hunch was confirmed as the fabric pooled around his otherwise naked hips. Cool, crisp, and with none of the slipperiness that silk would have offered, they had to be at least 500 thread count.

What can I say? I notice details when it comes down to the nitty-gritty. And, happily, the nitty-gritty was exactly what it was coming down to.

I couldn't bring to mind his name, but he had a body no woman could forget. He was perfection. Honey-blond hair. Bright blue eyes. Broad shoulders and six-pack abs. He was a long stretch of sculpted steel and sex appeal. And he was calling my name.

"Lis..."

There was altogether too much space between where I was standing and the bed he was lounging in. Of course, at that moment, a hair's breadth would have been too much space. I wanted nothing more than to trace my fingertips over his golden skin... along the lines of that chiseled chin... across the golden sheen of barely-there chest hair and down the treasure trail it made beneath those pristine white sheets.

"Lis!"

He wanted me too. I could tell by the hunger in his voice. The urgency grew, pulling at me, but the distance between us stayed the same. I felt like I was standing in cement. No matter how badly I wanted to, I couldn't step forward, couldn't move, couldn't reach out for him.

He scowled, but it wasn't me he was frustrated with. Somewhere, in the distance, a trill of beeps repeated themselves over and over. He frowned as if trying to place the sound.

I blinked, flailing for my bedside table even as I croaked out a curse at the ringing phone pulling me out of what promised to be an extremely hot dream.

I glanced at my alarm clock as my fingers wrapped around the phone. 9:04 AM. Not an unreasonable hour for a call. Unless you'd been working until after the sun came up the night before, that is.

"This had better be important." I sounded like I'd been gargling gravel as I growled into the phone and flopped back onto the coarse sheets of my real and altogether-too-solitary bed.

"I need you." The voice on the other end of the line was half honey, half whiskey, and all male.

"You and half the city, Gabriel..." I sounded almost as tired as I felt, but despite my exhaustion I found myself reaching for my robe rather than crawling back under the covers. Something was wrong.

"Alicia." He drew my name out into extra syllables - Ah LEE see ah - where most folks settled for a short version - Lis - that rhymed with "freeze."

Not even my father called me by my full name. No one but Gabriel Boucher.

“What’s going on, Gabriel?” Even as I was grilling the owner of Ciao Bella, the nightclub I’d been “working” outside last night, I was also leaving my bed (and the dream-blonde) behind. I tripped over a duffle bag I’d dropped before falling into bed just after dawn. The well-worn zipper split, spilling a pair of neon-green go-go boots and a jumble of clothing. The boots had platform heels easily 8 inches tall, making them longer than the miniskirt they were tangled in. I sighed into the phone, kicking the mess out of the way as I waited for Gabriel to explain why he was waking me up when I’d only left his club a few hours before.

“It’s... complicated.” Gabriel’s voice, a subtle blending of the myriad European countries he’d spent time in, was normally unshakably confident. The hesitation in it, as much as the fact that he’d dared to rouse me from my bed, would have been enough to call me to him. But his next words assured I was on my way.

“I’m calling in my favor.”

The cell phone silence hung between us, and I found myself holding my breath, hoping for more details that I was certain wouldn’t be given, at least not over the phone.

“I’ll be there in ten minutes,” I said. He hung up before I’d finished the sentence.

It wasn’t until I was in the shower—quick wash and rinse done, hot water cascading over me as I tried to collect my thoughts—that I realized how serious the situation was.

Gabriel had called me at 9 in the morning. He’d risked my wrath, knowing he’d be waking me after only a few hours of sleep and before my first cup of coffee. But that wasn’t the worst of it.

It was morning. Daylight. Gabriel Boucher had just called me at 9AM.

I turned off the water and leapt out of the shower, barely bothering to dry before I was pulling on clothes. Not the stuff I’d worn last night, or my normal uniform. Showing up wearing my blues and a vice-cop’s badge was no way to avoid attracting attention in the Gabriel’s neighborhood, even at 9 in the morning. I settled on jeans and a t-shirt, plus a jacket to hide my sidearm, and boots sturdy enough to kick the ass of whatever I was going to be facing.

A minute later, hair pulled back in a still-dripping bun, I was locking the door to my apartment and sprinting for my car.

I threw on my sunglasses against the glare of the morning sun through my windshield as I slammed the car into gear and merged with the post-rush hour traffic. As much as I hated early mornings, there were folks out there who liked them even less. Gabriel Boucher was one of them.

Gabriel wasn’t just a night owl. He wasn’t just “not a morning person”.

He was a vampire.

And if he was calling me at 9 in the morning, the already-weird world as I knew it had just taken a hard left turn for the über-bizarre.

Introduction

“Love never dies a natural death. It dies because we don’t know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of withering, of tarnishing.”

- Anaïs Nin

Introduction

The rustle of silk. Spicy perfume. Bare skin, cool to the touch. A long neck. A throbbing pulse. Hot breath. An anticipatory quiver.

Then, sharp fangs.

All to feel a kiss. *The Kiss*. One letter distinguishes a vampire’s ecstasy from mortals’. A single kiss may lead to a human orgasm. Another, a Kindred Kiss. Similar? Or nothing alike?

Underneath it all, turbulent emotions shatter dreams and fulfill mortal fantasies of love and desire – emotions a Kindred can no longer feel. Or can they? Is love the sole province of the living? Or is it something more, something so powerful it can transcend the vampiric condition?

Strange, Dead Love not only explores the difference between the physical and emotional aspects of love, but also explores romance as a genre – in all its seductive and passionate glory – within the context of **Vampire: the Requiem**.

Playing for Love

Romance isn’t just about sex, and it’s not just about falling for someone so hard it hurts. It’s not about denying a predator’s true nature or seducing mortals in the name of love. Romance is all about emotion and how two (or more) characters build on their feelings to experience a moment of intimacy – one that we can all relate to.

To vampires, there is nothing more intimate than the Kiss: that moment when a Kindred feels something more powerful than orgasm. That instant when a vampire buries her fangs in another’s neck not only to sustain her life but because it feels *that good*.

Like horror, romance is both a genre and a mood. It has certain conventions and tropes, but it also has a

story structure. In a chronicle, a Storyteller maps out the beats of a plot; in a romance, an author or a screenwriter designs the steps to intimacy between two or more characters. We’ll show you how to implement a relationship-driven plot, and also how to add in elements that your coterie can respond to.

There’s more to romance in **Vampire** than a single Kiss. It’s also a vital way to help characters better understand each other and themselves. Building relationships, whether they be Kindred vs. Kindred, Kindred vs. mortal, or Kindred vs. society, not only draws from the character’s cultural and social expectations, but their Virtue and Vice as well.

Many contemporary readers look to Anne Rice as the first author who blended sexy vampires with beautiful mortals, but she’s only a recent example in a proud tradition. Long before Anne Rice, vampires often took the guise of the mortal’s dead lover. Some works explored not only social taboos, but sexual. Throughout the literary history of the vampire, the emphasis on romance has allowed readers and viewers to either sympathize with the undead or fear the monster. In more recent examples such as *Twilight* or *Buffy: the Vampire Slayer*, protagonists can even fall head over heels in love with the undead.

Those of the Daeva clan are seductive and tantalizing, perfect for a romance. They are the epitome of a Kindred lover and their entire existence is shaped by desire. But the Daeva are not the only Kindred in the **World of Darkness** who can imitate love and sex. Any Kindred – monstrous or beautiful – may fall into the illusion of a deep, emotional connection or have an erotic one-night stand. Sometimes, that dream is shared with other Kindred. Other times, that fantasy happens with a mortal, whether he’s aware of it or not. Either way, romance is a very human trait and something Kindred can never fully understand... until it happens to them.

How to Use This Book

It is not uncommon for a vampire's desire for romance to end in tragedy. In **Vampire**, romance is seldom about the happy couple with a glowing future. It's about the consequences of a Kindred's desire and the lengths they'll go to indulge it. How many rules would a Ventruë break to pursue a lover? What would a member of the Lancea Sanctum think about a Nosferatu who's a regular at the local strip club? What's to stop a Wrathful Kindred from killing his jealous lover?

Strange, Dead Love is a toolkit for answering these questions. While romance, more than almost anything else, is something that needs to be customized for individual characters and players, there are classic story elements and structures that you can use to bring it to life

for your chronicle. We'll give you the tools to immerse yourself as much (or as little) in the more romantic side of **Vampire**.

To that end, **Strange, Dead Love** is a little bit different from most **Vampire** books. While other books focus on how a particular subject changes in the World of Darkness, this book focuses on how to leverage World of Darkness elements to tell stories in the paranormal romance genre. Chapter One explores stages of intimacy, romantic themes, and genre props. Chapter Two provides "shards" - chronicle frameworks and variations for telling your own romantic stories. Chapter Three discusses storytelling romance, with advice for both beginning and experienced Storytellers. This last chapter also suggests ways to play romantic games for two, sharing the duty of storytelling between both players.

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