



CHAPTER ONE: THE BUSINESS AT HAND

No man profiteth but by the loss of others.
— Michel de Montaigne

It is true that, in most industrialized nations of the modern nights, the billowing black smokestacks and poisonous coal dust that characterize so much of the work of Charles Dickens are gone. The abject poverty and assembly-line misery of the working classes have given way beneath the relentless tread of government safety regulation and the never-blinking eyes of governmental compliance concerns like OSHA. The lot of Joe Average has, at least on the surface, improved drastically since old Charles sat at his writing desk and gazed out over a redbrick, smoke-bleared hell of man's own creation.

Is this because the gargantuan corporate entities have reformed, seen the error of their old, heartless ways? Is it because the banks have ceased trying to find more and better ways to cheat you out of your own money? Is it because those with the capital have come to truly care about the fate of all those who made their own wealth possible?

Not at all. Rather, they've learned the value of subtlety in the face of public opinion.

At the top of the gleaming steel and glass towers that are the homes of capitalism's elite, things are the same as they always were. Here, fortunes that are older than many of the Kindred travel back and forth between corporate holdings, one step ahead of the tax laws and creditors alike, carried on the backs of pricey attorneys. In smoke-filled, mahogany-paneled boardrooms, sums of money inconceivable to most of the workforce change hands back and forth between the same four or five dozen names that have commanded them for generations. Sure, a great many of those sitting at the top of the pile are Kindred, but a vast majority are not. Whether they're drinking Dom Perignon or precious vitae, they've all got something in common, something that hasn't changed since the day the first man realized he could elevate himself above his fellows by "supervising" them: They don't give a rat's ass about the people who have lifted them up to where they are now.

The faceless masses believe they've got it better now than they used to. And it's true that, for the most

part, the physical dangers of the job have deteriorated somewhat in severity, with carpal tunnel syndrome and repetitive strain injuries taking the place of the slightly more incapacitating dismemberment and Black Lung disease that were the risks of the trade in days gone by. Row upon row of carbon-copy desks, perhaps with the illusion of privacy afforded by a veneer-over-particle board cubicle, have replaced the steam-filled, sweat-soaked factory floors — not for all, of course, but for the average white-collar employee.

But if this new setup provides a safer work environment for the body, it fails to accomplish the same service for the mind and soul. Dulled by year after year of endless, unrelenting sameness, the minds of the drones that used to be individuals simply become that much more susceptible to suggestion, without even the need for that extra edge wielded by the Kindred. They become simply cogs in the machine, a machine that grinds ever onward, its only purpose to make even more for those who already have it all.

It's no wonder the Kindred have such an affinity for the corporate sector; the damn thing's as dead as they are.

Of course, saying that the Kindred compete in "business" is like telling someone you're traveling "overseas." It may be technically accurate, but it doesn't give much in the way of detail. In order to understand how to take power, you must understand those who already have it. What follows, then, are recommendations on how to begin the struggle to carve out your character's own little niche, techniques for prying loose some prime "domain" for your own benefit. Once you know how to take what you want, you can pick and choose the industries and arenas you wish to play with; some of these, along with a partial listing of what gains they can provide and what you might accomplish with them, are also presented below.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

While there are many ways to get your foot in the door of the corporate sector — mortals do it all the time, after all — it's exceedingly difficult to obtain any real power when you're trying to make your place above the ground floor. Owning two percent of a company's stock may bring in a bit of income, but it's not going to go very far in gaining you a voice (let alone dictatorial power) in the company's direction. Acquiring more, though, is a grueling, arduous process, one that's going to earn you far more than your share of powerful enemies and attention before the night is over.

Never forget that while the elder Kindred already in place have a heavy cache of advantages to draw on, you possess your own; don't be afraid to use them.

THE ADVANTAGES OF YOUTH

The elders have more money than you, they have more experience than you, they have more lackeys than you, and they have a lot more to lose than you. If you're going to foster any hope of succeeding, you must figure out what you have that they don't — and figure it out fast.

THE INTERNET

This is definitely the best weapon in your arsenal. Most elders won't even look a computer in the eye, let alone check or trade their stocks on one of the magic boxes. While your rival listens to his lackeys' daily reports, you're already point-and-clicking on Ameritrade. He's waiting for his ghouls to check into that corporate buyout he read about in the paper; you're already skimming the news services at the Motley Fool to find out exactly who did what to whom, how much they made, and how you can turn this to your advantage. The Internet not only enables you to learn what happened before your elders do, but react to it more quickly as well. Don't be afraid to act fast; it's the only way you'll get ahead.

While this is a weighty advantage, you'll find yourself somewhat restricted in what you can truly accomplish with the Internet. Reacting to new information quickly is all well and good, but it's helpful only if the information itself is worthwhile. Finding out that nothing has changed doesn't do you any good, no matter how quickly you happen to receive that particular news bulletin. Only rarely is your ability to react fast going to gain you more than a few slivers of stock in a corporate or financial institution. While the high-tech start-up companies don't have the unbreakable glass ceiling of old money holding the neonates down, they also don't have the technophobic old vampires favoring them; the kine in charge are going to be up on the same technologies and techniques that you are. Be ready to use these magical mystery tools you've been granted by the information age — but don't count on them alone to save your ass.

While we're on the subject of the Internet, remember that some of those elders who have been talked into computerizing their records haven't yet fully grasped the need for security. If you, or your pet hacker, can find a back door into your rival's records, don't for one minute be afraid to arrange a bit of sabotage, or at least a little insider trading.

THINK GLOBALLY

Most of your rivals are still dwelling in a time, or at least a mindset, in which national and international barriers were far more concrete than they are tonight. With phones, the Internet and a global

economy, you have markets open to you that your competitors haven't even considered. Can't seem to get things up and running where you are? Accumulate stock in corporations based in Taiwan. Come back at your local rival later, when you've got more of a power base to stand on. This does more than enable you to tap into resources other Kindred in your area haven't considered; it also gives you access to allies they would never work with. If you keep your power base local, your rivals are always going to have some idea who you're working with. If, on the other hand, you've got something shaking in Colombia, Hong Kong or Cuba, they're going to find it that much harder to keep track. Sometimes an unknown ally is more useful than a powerful one.

The key here is to diversify. The fact that your rivals might never consider investing in the Brazilian coffee crop at the same time they were gobbling up stock in Time-Warner doesn't mean that you can't do just that. Which, in fact, brings us directly to...

CROSS INDUSTRIES

Until relatively recently, most large industries tended to be fairly self-contained. Odds are that many of the elders in the corporate sector still see themselves as being dominant in one particular field. A vampire who thinks of his portfolio purely in terms of "the steel industry" is going to be caught flat-footed when, after you've begun to gather influence in pharmaceuticals, you suddenly make a grab at his own holdings as well. Not only does branching out make it harder for the old guard to guess what you're going to do next, it also makes it more difficult for them to cripple your own operations by attacking any specific asset.

In much the same way broadening your geographic sphere can bring unexpected allies into your camp, so can diversifying your industries. After all, the more fields in which you can claim some authority, the more Kindred (at least the younger ones, who haven't themselves diversified their influence already) are going to have to come to you for favors.

TECHNIQUES OF ACQUISITION

While the differences between a corporation and a law firm, or a bank and a hospital, are substantial, the truth is that every major business has certain features in common. The ideas given below don't apply equally to every form of "business" — you cannot, for instance, expect to supply venture capital to a bank — but these techniques are sufficiently wide-ranging that each one applies to multiple sorts of entities. With a little experimentation, you'll learn quickly which techniques work best for which businesses.

OLD AGE AND EXPERIENCE

Youth may indeed have its advantages, but never forget that the elders didn't get where they are by just letting it happen. They have as many advantages as you do — probably more — and they won't hesitate to use every last one of them to bring you down if you so much as look wistfully at their accumulated power.

The elder Kindred have a great deal more experience in defending their property than you do in taking it. Make full use of modern marvels — because unless they don't understand it, they've already figured out how to use it better than you have.

Elder Kindred have many times more resources to throw at you than you do at them. Remember, they're already sitting where you want to be; all the power you imagine you'll be taking from them, they've got right now. They can afford more than you can, they have more people working for them than you do, and they have more Kindred owing them favors. If you're going to do this, hit them hard and fast; as soon as you give them time to react, you're not only dead, you're most sincerely dead.

Never, ever, take on an elder in a fair fight. True, they want to avoid that even more than you do — they have, or believe they have, a lot more to lose. But if it does finally come down to face-to-face contact, you'd better have the numbers on your side. You'll probably lose, of course, but maybe your companions will buy you time to get in a lucky shot, or at least run the hell away. This is a political battle; you'd be better served to keep it that way.

Above all else, keep it contained. At the moment, you've only got the one elder to worry about (as if that weren't enough already). The other Kindred, unless they've established important liaisons with your rival, aren't going to care what happens to him, so long as you leave their piece of the pie alone. Don't ever make the mistake of including your rival's peers in your agenda. Working against one, you have a chance; if you persuade the entire machine to move against you, you might as well give up and go home now. Remember, you're undead. You have plenty of time to deal with the others after you've stabilized your current situation.

BUYING STOCK

It seems almost too simple to point out, but this is the way most kine gain their own influence. Still, while this can work on a small scale, it's exceedingly difficult to take any real power this way. For one thing, most young Kindred don't have an unlimited source of capital to draw on; if they did, they wouldn't have to scabble for resources in the first place. For another, the elders have been playing the game — and the market — since the first moment it existed. They know how to play better than you do.

Still, it's occasionally possible to catch one of them unawares. As we've already indicated, launching a hostile takeover via the Internet, moving with a speed most elders can't begin to comprehend, can sometimes succeed in peeling away a controlling share of a vampire's pet industry. Don't count on this working with any frequency, though. For every success achieved this way, a thousand failures line the same path, in the world of mortals as well as that of the Damned.

If you're trying to gain any real semblance of control by buying stock, you'll have much better odds of success with younger high-tech firms. These tend to have fewer shares of stock on the market, fewer powerful forces interested in buying up or maintaining that stock, and (usually) sell at a lower rate, at least until they truly take off.

Be warned, though, that even though it seems like a great opportunity, buying stock immediately after a company's initial public offering (IPO) is often a dangerous thing. Most companies see their stock rise in the months (or, in some cases, weeks or even a few nights... er, days) immediately following their IPO; but more often than not, they come crashing back down to a more realistic level not long after. Sometimes, finding out *when* a potential gold mine is about to go public is just as vital as having the capital to invest in it in the first place.

The elder Kindred learned long ago never to invest heavily unless it's a sure thing. Don't let yourself be fooled into acting where they know better. At the same time, take advantage of the fact that you may have access to more recent information than they do; look before you leap, but don't let their apparent hesitation alone stop you from grabbing an opportunity when it arises. Remember that these guys won't let go of what they've attained. Sometimes getting there first is the best solution.

VENTURE CAPITAL

This is a technique limited in its application, but quite effective under the proper circumstances. Why worry about trying to take charge of a promising

start-up company when you can cement your position from the ground up? If you provide the seed money for a new venture, you've already got as much influence over the fledgling company as you could possibly want. Threatening to cut off the funds that are keeping a company afloat until its IPO can make people toe the line *real* quick.

The problems with playing the angel investor, however, make this worthwhile only in select cases. Consider the fact that you've got to have the money to invest, so this isn't likely to be your first acquisition. The second is that it only works with relatively new companies, and that really isn't where most of the power is. Still, if the result proves promising enough, it can pay off in spades down the road. Who would have guessed that in its dozen years of existence, AOL would merge with corporate giants a hundred years its elder?

FAVORS AND PRESTATION

The standard coin of Kindred give-and-take, favors and prestation are actually less effective in business than they are elsewhere. It's not all that hard to call in a favor to arrange a meeting with your clan primogen, or to otherwise pull some strings. It's a little more difficult to convince an older Kindred help you become her greatest competitor.

Your single best bet at attaining positive results is by offering your services to protect your elders from others just like you. Become a protégé — take on a mentor. Show them exactly what you can do with your mystic "Internet." Direct their gaze toward that new automotive concern in India, the one that might just threaten their own monopoly in a few scant years. Make them realize just how vulnerable they really are, how little they know about the way things now work — and offer to shield them from it. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Most Kindred are truly averse to giving up any of their hard-won power — but if you can make the old guys understand what they face, they may decide that it's better to give you some of that power now than to risk someone like you taking it all later. Not only does this gain you some measure of power immediately, but it puts you in a perfect position to take advantage of your employer's information and resources for your own ends.

Of course, performing favors and calling in debts are hardly restricted to Kindred interaction. It can be just as effective — often more so — to be owed debts by kine in positions of authority. The world is theirs, after all. The best way to encourage a corporation or other institution to do what you want is to call in a debt owed you by the CEO or other senior members of the board.

The simplest way to place such an individual in your debt is with information. If you've established contact with an executive assistant or data-entry clerk in Corporation A, this grants you some amount of access to that entity's future plans and projects. By selectively passing this information along to certain individuals in Corporation B, you've established yourself as an ally, and one to whom they owe a debt. With the proper amount of care and secrecy, you can turn this into a ladder of favors. Your new contacts in Corporation B now give you information on their projects, which you in turn take to an even higher level of management back at Corporation A. Back and forth, each time rising through the ranks with the importance of your insider information. Cover your tracks; kine aren't all stupid, and if you don't take the proper precautions, someone's going to figure out that the intelligence their rival's been receiving is the same as the information you've been asking about. Still, done properly, this sort of tradeoff can put you on the fast track to having influential figures on each side firmly entrenched in your web of favors and debts.

RUMORS

The stock market is a volatile thing. A word about a corporation's plans and finances whispered in the right ear — particularly when backed up by insider knowledge, perhaps gained by making use of various disgruntled employees — can result in a drop of shareholder confidence as surely as if the company itself had announced an impending bankruptcy suit. Leaking such secrets to the media, rather than directly to the market, not only erodes investor confidence, but the confidence of the public as well. If those rumors come from otherwise unimpeachable sources — for instance, other contacts on Wall Street a given Kindred might already have made — the credibility of a corporation's CEO and board of directors can be utterly demolished in the eyes of the public and the markets.

In and of itself, a rumor campaign isn't likely to drive a company to the point where it becomes an easy, or even viable, target for takeover. But it's a wonderful way to undermine confidence in the current regime; combined with one or more of the other techniques given here, rumors are stepping stones toward greater acquisition.

THE LITTLE PEOPLE

While it's not exactly the most efficient (or most elegant) way to do it, sometimes a corporate structure can be steered in the directions you want it to go simply by suborning the right people on the board of directors. Blackmail, an exchange of favors



as discussed above, even the occasional (and very subtle) judicious use of Dominate, can start you moving in the right direction. This particular technique poses its own risks, though. Your influence in such situations lasts only as long as your people remain in place — and as most Kindred have long since learned, mortals are quite fragile. Furthermore, you risk colliding head on with other Kindred who have the exact same thought. I can imagine nothing more embarrassing — not to mention potentially dangerous — than trying to blackmail a CEO into doing what you want, only to discover that the man you're messing with is the regnant of a Toreador harpy who holds a grudge.

Choose your catspaws and puppets carefully. Sometimes, the obvious choices are the worst. Do you really want the company's CEO to be the one who's beholden to you? Sure, it's useful, and he can pull all sorts of strings. But at the same time, most companies long outlast their executive officers — and so will you. Think about it — that's the first example that sprang to your mind and mine. Do you really want your resources arrayed in such plain sight? Won't that lay your skullduggery bare the moment your man does something uncharacteristic?

If you must go for the upper echelons of the company, don't limit yourself to a single powerful individual. Don't take the CEO if you can dig a good solid claw into, say, four or five other members of the board. True, they'll go the way of the dinosaur eventually, but you won't lose all your leverage in one fell swoop, and that gives you time to find new connections.

The truly farseeing Kindred, though, doesn't restrict himself to those at the top. Consider for a moment just how useful the "little people" can be to a "silent" partner.

Janitorial Staff

Easily the most overlooked and underappreciated sector of the workforce, they are by far the most useful for an up-and-coming neonate — often for that very same reason. It is the janitors who have instant and unquestioned access to pretty much anywhere and everywhere. A friend on the janitorial staff can often smuggle you into places that even a Ravnos would have difficulty approaching. They overhear a lot more than they're given credit for, and they have access to the trashcans and shredder bins of entire offices. These people are as invisible as you can get without the use of mystical powers; the larger portions of corporate America have been trained to see through them as though they weren't there. Almost nothing can happen behind the closed doors and tinted windows of Wall Street without the man with the mop learning about it.

The fact that they're almost all drastically underpaid and forced to stare into the depths of luxury on a daily basis doesn't hurt your cause either. Odds are, if you're willing to be even moderately generous with the dead presidents, you'll be able to get any number of them working on your behalf without so much as a single hypnotic suggestion.

Accounting

Whether it's in-house or through an outside firm, most businesses of moderate size and up have a specific department — or at the very least a single individual — responsible for crunching (and, as often as not, playing with) the numbers. From loopholes in the tax code to hidden accounts to proceeds from under-the-table projects, there isn't a corporation in the world that doesn't have *something* it wants to keep off the books. But what the law doesn't know, what the employees don't know, what even half the board of directors may not know — the accountant, he knows.

One productive trip to the accounting department can pay off for enterprising young Kindred. Everything from insider information to extortion and blackmail material can be found here, neatly laid out in steady rows of numbers.

Or, if you'd prefer to keep it simple, you can always mess around with the figures. The man in charge of a company's accounting has his hands around its throat, and most companies are a lot easier to acquire once they've had to file for bankruptcy. If you're willing to settle for damaged goods, this can be a lot easier than trying to wrest shares of a healthy institution away from someone.

It may be a bit harder to suborn the accountants than it was the janitors, of course; the math club tends to be paid better and has a hell of a lot more to lose. Still, it's a rare thing to find an entire accounting department or firm in which *someone* hasn't had her hand in the till. And if all that fails, you no doubt know more direct methods of "persuasion."

Human Resources

Sometimes it's a lot easier to lay claim to a company after it's gone at least partially down the tubes. This can, of course, be done by driving it into bankruptcy, using the accounting department as mentioned earlier. The other way, both subtler and less financially damaging to the corporate entity itself, is through manipulation of the human resources department.

By devastating employee morale, it becomes a fairly simple matter to drive the employees away in droves. The human resources department in many companies has absolute power over the payroll, over project assignments, even over the hiring — and firing

— process. Mistakes and poor decisions in any or all of these areas can very quickly result in a miserable population of workers. As the employees flee, projects fail due to lack of skill and effort, and the company's reputation begins to suffer. Taken a step further still, if the problems continue, the company's performance overall will slide downward, damaging their market worth and stock values. It is entirely possible for a Kindred in the know — in other words, the one responsible for these problems to begin with — to stand prepared, ready to swoop in and snag the various stocks that are being dumped across the market. It may even be possible to claim a controlling share in this manner; at the very least, it provides a comfortable margin for your next attempt.

SCREW UNTO OTHERS

Safer than using these techniques to acquire your own interests is to use them on a rival's resources. If you swoop in and buy CrapTek on the cheap, well, you've earned yourself some interest in CrapTek. But wouldn't it be better if your nemesis has all his eggs in CrapTek's basket and the whole thing goes to... well, you see where I'm headed with this.

Believe me, they'd do it to you if they knew you were there.

Tellers and Data Entry

Corporations and other businesses live and die by their data. Accountants keep the books straight (or crooked, depending on the business and the particular accountant), but they're not responsible for *generating* the information. The people who do — those whose plodding, mind-numbing tasks are made up solely of reading information off a paper and punching keys on a computer — have a gun to the heads of their bosses and institutions of employment, if only they knew how to pull the trigger.

Think, for instance, what you might accomplish with the services of a single bank teller. With someone to provide access to the bank's account information, you can do as you please with the money involved. The ways in which you can use the power of the banks are discussed in some detail later on, but access to a bank's tellers can put you on the road toward gaining power over the entire institution. Money can disappear utterly, or change hands and locations without rhyme or reason. It should, in fact, be a fairly simple matter to make it appear that someone within the operation has been embezzling from his own bank.

You may not even have to manufacture evidence of wrongdoing. If the company has been funneling profits into a cover corporation or a Swiss bank, two departments will know about it — accounting and data entry.

Why would you want to cause this sort of damage? Most businesses and banks become a lot easier to acquire once they've started to fail. Executives get out while the getting is good, leaving gaps in the power structure that you should be only too happy to fill. They might even become desperate to save their precious institution, willing to perform very nearly any favor you ask, if you can only make the hurting stop. You may even succeed in loosening the grip of the Kindred already attached to your chosen institution, as the elders see their cash cow suddenly failing and seek a different investment.

You'll most likely have to extort or otherwise coerce cooperation from the tellers, though. You may find that some of them are not easily bribed, considering the hefty criminal penalties for the actions you'll be requiring them to take. In fact, you're almost guaranteed to lose at least a few pawns during the initial investigations that will occur automatically once the bank or corporation starts showing discrepancies in its numbers; but if you're prepared for this ahead of time, you should be able to continue the operation with little to no impact on your ability to function.

Secretarial Staff

When you get right down to it, these are the people who actually run the company. While the janitors can usually find out at least the basics of what's going on, the secretaries know before it happens. Hell, secretaries usually know more than the executives themselves, since they're the ones who record, organize and file it all away. When was the last time you heard a secretary asking an executive where to find the Bank of America file?

If you can gain any kind of leverage with the secretaries of a company, you've got it made. Need to know what the board's going to do before they do it? Need to know who the CFO is meeting with, and what it concerns? Or maybe it would interest you to know that Mr. Williams has his secretary tell his wife that he's got a conference every Wednesday night when no such meetings exist.

But the secretarial staff isn't simply a source of knowledge. It is they who pass along the messages, memos and information that guide the company in its everyday dealings. The right word, squawking fuzzily from the intercom, can set the executive beyond the oak door to making all sorts of interesting decisions and judgment calls.

As with the accountants, secretaries can be difficult to persuade without resorting to blatantly supernatural means. Still, many of them can indeed be tempted by the promise of the riches they see every day and the opportunity to rise higher than a job that still, for much of society, carries a derogatory connotation.

AN OBJECT LESSON

Suppose, then, that a hypothetical Kindred, who happens to be the primogen of Clan Ventrue in Houston, is a staunch supporter of that city's prince. Suppose, too, that she happens to have a great deal of her own personal power and fortune tied up in, say, the pharmaceutical and medical industry that thrives on Houston's world-famous Medical Center. Now, for the icing on the cake, let's point out that Houston,

CARROT AND STICK

It's always advisable to hold at least two measures of influence over your various pawns and puppets; one punitive, one rewarding. You might be blackmailing that executive assistant into passing along insider information by threatening to tell his wife about the affair he's having with the accounts manager, but sooner or later, you may just push too hard too quickly. No matter how desperate people are to keep their secrets, there comes a point at which they'd rather let it get out than remain a slave to someone else's whims.

If, on the other hand, this particular executive assistant is making an additional five K a month working for you, he's got something else to lose by breaking off your "partnership," and he probably won't feel quite so much hatred toward the Kindred holding his leash. Remember, even the blood bond can be weakened by prolonged periods of poor treatment, and most of your mortal "contacts" aren't going to have nearly so intense an attachment to you as a trusted ghoul would. Be ready to force cooperation any time it becomes necessary, but always be sure to reward such cooperation when it comes easily. If you don't have the cash resources to make huge payoffs then you'll have to find some other way of rewarding useful pawns, but it's important that you do it. Hell, get that executive assistant out of his three-series Beemer and into a five-series — just hide that expense somewhere else in the account registry. It makes things far easier (and far safer) in the long view, and the long view is all the undead should ever really be concerned with.

located as it is in the southern portion of the state of Texas, is one of the largest Camarilla cities near the Sabbat-infested Mexican border.

You and your hypothetical ambitious coterie have just learned, through various insider contacts, that a Chicago-based pharmaceutical concern is about to make a hostile takeover bid against that primogen's holdings. You know that she's got the finances and contacts to fight them off — but you're pretty sure that, in the fiscal chaos, you can acquire a controlling stock in one of the smaller companies that falls under her larger umbrella, sweeping it out from under her very nose. This particular company, though small, brings in a hell of a lot more capital than you've ever seen; furthermore, it gives you easy access to a particular restricted substance that just happens to satisfy the addictive cravings of the current boy-toy of another hypothetical Kindred, the Toreador primogen. Suddenly, you're a player in the game on a brand new level.

Congratulations. You've just scored a major victory in your own little corner of the Jyhad. Are you a genius? Or a dumbass in over his head? Let us proceed.

Between your own efforts and the attempted hostile takeover, that Ventrue primogen finds herself with a much smaller pool of resources to draw upon than she used to. The fact that she "allowed" one of her holdings, even a small one, to be stolen by a group of upstarts (read: you) has cost her dearly on the Kindred political front. That support she used to be able to count on from the Toreador primogen? Gone, not only because the Ventrue's lost some status, but also because she's no longer so easily able to provide chemical favors for the Toreador primogen's pet.

With the sudden weakening of his staunchest supporter, the prince finds it more difficult to maintain his eminence among the primogen. To complicate matters, a third hypothetical Kindred, the Malkavian primogen, has got his own unintelligible projects going. The Nosferatu are refusing to come out of their sewers, and the Toreador primogen, smelling weakness, suddenly makes a play for yet more of the Ventrue's crumbling territory.

If the Sabbat chooses this particular time to make a move on Houston, maybe even a crusade — well, there's a serious problem, isn't there? And at least a large chunk of the city's current instability is *your* fault.

So where does legitimate personal gain end and treason to the prince and Camarilla begin? If the prince — or anyone in a position of power — is weakened or even overthrown by your efforts, how much of that is acceptable in the dog-eat-dog world of the Kindred?

Take it a step further. While most clans aren't the monolithic entities that naïve or treacherous Kindred sometimes portray them as, some inspire (demand?) more allegiance than others. Among the Ventrué, for instance, it's considered bad form to blatantly yank power and property away from one of your fellows. But among the Tremere, as we all know, you can backstab each other to your dead heart's content — as long as you don't bust up the pyramid, whatever purpose that serves.

No simple answer exists, of course; there's no such thing where the Kindred are concerned. What one Kindred calls "treason," another calls a perfectly legitimate business acquisition. Whichever approach you take, be aware of the consequences that any drastic shift in the balance of power may cause. Despite any gains you may have achieved through your efforts, you're not by any means guaranteed to like — or even survive — the final results.

Hypothetically. *Ab ovo usque ad mala.*

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Now that you've got some idea how to go about taking what you want, it's time to decide exactly what it is that you *do* want. "Business" encompasses an enormous variety of entities, and each comes with its own set of advantages and privileges. Even with eternity ahead of you, you can't have it all — and you certainly can't *start* with it all. The list below is by no means comprehensive, but it ought to provide you with a few reasonable places to build your empire.

MONEY LAUNDERING

Just about every type of business, from the largest corporation or bank to the smallest struggling firm, is good for purposes of fronting and money laundering. Funds funneled into a business — preferably from numerous, untraceable sources and in cash form — can then be invested or banked on behalf of the business itself, or else transferred to a third corporate or financial entity that can in turn transfer the funds to a fourth, and so on. Move the money around enough, and it becomes practically impossible to discover its original source. If done properly (in other words, clandestinely), this is a good way to turn illicit gains into legal capital, and it's one benefit you can pick up in almost any niche of the business arena. This is especially useful if you're already got a substantial amount of interest and influence in criminal activities and organizations, and are looking to branch out.

CORPORATIONS

Tobacco. Pharmaceuticals. Automobiles and electronics. Soft drinks. All these, and a thousand more besides, are the sprawling corporate entities that lurk like bloated spiders in the web of international commerce. Other forms of big business exist — some of them may even be more useful in many respects — but it is those entities that fall under the umbrella definition of "corporation" that are the ambrosia of the ambitious Kindred.

"Corporation" is, in many ways, a vast category. Unlike others covered here (i.e. banks, law firms, etc.), there is no set sphere of influence. The very term "corporation" is, perhaps, not entirely accurate for what we're looking at; nearly any business in any field can incorporate, if they so choose. Many other businesses presented in this chapter could easily fall under this particular heading as well. For the sake of discussion, however, we're talking "corporations" in the paranoid, big-money-makes-the-world-turn sense of the word. Each of these is an entity designed to rake in huge amounts of capital while providing goods or services, and each is run by a large group of people (board members and shareholders) who actually have little or nothing to do with the work at hand. Steel and computers and Coca-Cola are all lumped together because, at their heart, these are all the same species of creature. They tend to operate in the same manner, and they all provide — roughly — the same sorts of benefits to the Kindred involved with them.

Against the backdrop of the modern nights, every nasty theory, every Hollywood stereotype, is true to some degree. Corporations tend to be faceless entities that seem to have an unending supply of resources, all of which they will happily use to stomp flat anyone who dares to rock the boat. The vast majority of them are owned and run by old money, an elitist boys' club that enjoys fine cigars, elegant cars (driven by someone else), the best champagnes and grinding the little people beneath their \$2000 Italian leather heels. If you're mortal, it's nearly impossible to move beyond a certain step on the corporate ladder, because you've got to wait for someone to die, and then hope that you, for some incomprehensible reason, are the one chosen to take the place of the fallen.

If you're Kindred, it's not much easier. You quite simply can't work the day shifts and you can't just wait for someone to die. Eternal unlife makes wonderful opportunities for long-term yield.

WE WERE HERE FIRST!

If you're going to set about trying to take corporate and financial power away from someone, you might do

well to learn who it is you're about to make very, very unhappy. While all the clans of Kindred can probably claim some interest in the corporate sector, a select few have a great deal more of it than others, and it is these wicked fellows from whom you're going to have to steal what you want.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that the Ventrue have — or at least are believed to have — the largest dominion in this particular arena. While they've got their fingers in everything, they tend to focus a bit more on the actual corporations, often backing the "old money" fortunes that keep the wheels turning. The Toreador also play the business game more so than their other companions in the Camarilla, for their comfortable unlives don't come cheaply. Close behind them are the Giovanni, though the Necromancers seem a bit more interested in the fiscal entities — banking and other financial institutions, for example — than they are other forms of business.

On the Sabbat side of things, the Lasombra cast their long shadows over the field as well; the Keepers, however, often find themselves with the leftovers; not because of any lack of skill or ambition, but simply because so many of the larger national and international business entities are based firmly in Camarilla-dominated or Kindred-hostile territory. Still, they find their influence slowly beginning to grow as they move to rectify the situation, and the power they already wield should never be underestimated.

As a side note, the Camarilla has recently discovered that the Assamites are also heavy into big business, though their sphere of influence is only now spreading to the Western world to any great degree. With the clan apparently split, however, and with the current diaspora outward, business-minded Ventrue, Giovanni and Lasombra are suddenly finding themselves very nervous. I'd like to say "I told you so," but the Assassins have been so cagey that I don't think anyone saw it coming. Good for them — sort of.

WHAT'S IT ALL GOOD FOR?

Check this out. Apocryphal? Perhaps. It came over my fax a year ago, or maybe 18 months. Who wrote it? I don't know — the source was phreaked. Save your damn questions for later.

"Ms. Burae? Your 11 o'clock is here to see you."

"Thank you, Jenny. Send him in. Then you can go home for the night."

Medea Burae reached out and flicked off the intercom, cutting her secretary off in the middle of her "Thank you." She ran a hand over the crisp pleats of her suit — navy blue, of course — and through her mass of dark hair. It wasn't

that she was particularly concerned with her appearance; she knew full well that she was as well coifed and pressed tonight as always. It was a simple habit she'd picked up as a mortal and hadn't quite — even so long after her Embrace — managed to drop.

Her eyes narrowed as the door to her office drifted open and sent a beam of florescent light stabbing into the room like a lance; it was blotted out an instant later by the shape of the man she'd arranged to meet. She could smell the sweat on him, knew he was nervous because he showed no trace of it in his expression. The man was a professional at hiding his true feelings — but not from someone like her.

"Take a seat, Senator."

The chair made a muffled sound, almost a gurgling noise, as it was dragged across the carpet. "Thank you, Ms. Burae. I..."

"My apologies if I sound abrupt, Senator, but time is pressing. You assured me that you could arrange FDA approval of the new drug with some alacrity. We're still waiting."

The senator smiled wanly. "There were — problems, Ms. Burae. I'm afraid that it's an abortion pill, and there's no issue that's a bigger kiss of death..."

"I need RU-486 approved, Senator. Certain — temporaries of mine, if you will — have requested my financial aid on a project. I need the resources the new medication will bring me. And you, Senator, need my contributions if you want this next reelection campaign to be anywhere near as successful as your first one. Yes?"

"They would certainly be helpful, Ms. Burae."

"And you wouldn't want me to throw my support behind someone else, would you? Someone more likely to be able to help me out of situations like this?"

"No, madam. I can't say that I would."

"Then I think we understand each other perfectly. Don't we Senator?"

Given that it's one of the hardest domains for an eager young Kindred to break into, why would you want to have anything to do with the corporate sector at all? What possible advantages could there be that you couldn't more quickly attain by going through other, more easily approachable, forms of business?

Glad you asked.

Wealth

Let it never be said that money — and lots of it — is a useless commodity for the Kindred. While most Ventrue or Lasombra (loath as they are to agree on anything) would probably tell you that money is just a means to an end, the fact remains that it's a very powerful means. Money alone won't buy you the sort of power or position you crave, but it will definitely grease enough wheels to keep you moving ever nearer your eventual goals. Very few institutions in the world can generate the sorts of mass currency that a

successful corporation can — assuming you can pry that money away from those who already have it.

The problem with wealth — at least according to everyone who doesn't yet have it — is that it takes money to make money. The reason that corporations are so damned effective at raking in the green is because they have so much capital to draw on already. This is why Kindred cling such influence, perhaps even more than those involved in other institutions — everything you need to set yourself up for unlife can be found here.

HIDDEN ASSETS

Sometimes, the wisest (and richest) of the Kindred choose to invest in companies and corporations in which they have no interest beyond the fiscal. After all, they need somewhere to put their wealth, and ways to build it, as much as any mortal. Not every financial play is the first step in some greater scheme to accrue more power; sometimes a Kindred's investments really are just investments.

These Kindred often go about trying to select the most unlikely businesses they can imagine. How likely does it sound that a Cainite would invest in Martha Stewart's company? Or in the upcoming action blockbuster starring Arnold or Bruce or Keanu? Kindred investors are quite active in Hollywood and Silicon Valley, in publishing, in silverware and greetings cards; if it's a business that you can't possibly imagine the Kindred sinking their fangs into, they're there, as investors if nothing else. Ever since its IPO, the World Wrestling Federation has had an astonishing number of Kindred choose to invest. Using the term "vampire" won't even raise an eyebrow if you're talking about Microsoft.

This has to do with a lot more than finding new and interesting places for their money, of course. Most Kindred who choose such... unique... investment strategies are thinking defensively. Their enemies are going to find it a lot harder to go after their assets if they don't have the first clue what those assets are. Perhaps even more importantly, it's never a good idea for the Kindred to act like stereotypical — well, vampires. They don't wander around downtown wearing black capes, they don't bite the necks of everyone they meet (well, not publicly), they don't proclaim "I want to suck your blood!" and they don't limit their investments to interests that allow them to "control and manipulate." It protects the Masquerade, it protects them from hunters, and it protects them from each other.



Consider, too, the advantages that the Damned have when playing the stock market. Your average mortal is hoping for the fast money, even if she knows enough not to expect any such thing. Sure, some of them are clever enough to be patient, to go for long-term investments. Slow and steady wins the race, and all that. But the kine are constantly tormented by the knowledge that their time is limited; take too long to accrue your various millions, and you won't be around long enough to enjoy them. The Kindred, on the other hand, have nothing but time. It's going to take 150 years for your current stocks to pay off in anything resembling the fortunes you're hoping for? So what? You'll be here in 2149 (assuming the doomsayers are wrong and Gehenna isn't just around the bend), ready and able to enjoy your long-awaited riches. Hell, buy a post office box and take the long sleep until then, if you can't wait. It takes more than a little effort for young Kindred to shake the human must-have-everything-now mindset, but once they manage, they almost invariably find that patience is, indeed, a virtue — maybe one of the few the Kindred have.

Political Influence

If there's a political arena that's as hotly contested as the corporate infrastructure, it would have to be the government (see the next chapter). It's all well and good for those Kindred who already have favors owed them among the various legal bodies, but what happens when you need something done in the halls of power and you haven't yet managed to put one of your own agents through the doors?

One word: lobbyists. These are, in many ways, the lifeblood of modern corporations. The amount of legal bribery that occurs on Capital Hill is staggering, but this is how big businesses stay in business. Need a favor from a particular congressman? Need this bill passed, or that bill vetoed? Or perhaps, as with Medea Burae, you need the wheels of the bureaucracy to move just a little bit faster than you can accomplish by yourself. (Was she really behind the legalization of the abortion pill? I doubt it, but no single person is ever responsible. I'm sure her contacts added their voices to the general din, though....) It's a simple equation. Politicians who need money and will do damn near anything to get it, plus corporations who have the money and need favors from the politicians. By working your way into the corporate structure, you can kill two birds with one stone. It's nearly as good as having direct influence over the governmental figures themselves.

Favors and Leverage

Regardless of what the specific industry is in which you've involved yourself, chances are others are in there with you, Kindred and kine alike, who are going

to need something only someone in your field can provide. Whether it's computer software or military hardware, telecommunication or transportation, you are now in a position to grant your petitioners favors. If you happen to pull the strings at one of the larger airlines in your city, for instance, the local Kindred are going to be coming to you when circumstances demand they fly. Yeah, they'll resent owing you something. Better that, though, than take an average commercial flight and risk God knows how many things going wrong on the way.

The flip side to this is that you can, if you're willing to risk the danger to your good reputation, use those favors to put your rivals in less than desirable circumstances. Using the previous example of arranged air travel, you always have the option of arranging accidents to make sure a particular plane suffers difficulties and is forced to redirect. You wouldn't want to make things dangerous for your Kindred passenger — no need to risk the Masquerade by keeping the plane in the air past sunrise — but you could easily arrange for the gentleman to miss that important meeting with the Giovanni in Boston. Be careful doing this, though. If it happens too often, the other Kindred are going to realize that you're abusing your position. They'll stop coming to you, even if you *are* the only game in town. Betrayal is a part of Kindred nature, but employ it judiciously.

But why limit your relationship with other Kindred to granting favors and boons on a one-to-one basis when you can often squeeze juicier concessions out of them? Suppose for a moment that, rather than the above-mentioned airline, your enterprise of choice is the local steel industry. Seems unlikely that there's anything you can provide that another Kindred would desperately need, right?

Wrong. What about the automotive industry in your region? What about construction companies? What — if you happen to be in the proper geographic location — about local shipbuilders? All of these are massive, hugely profitable interests. All of them are almost certainly the domains of other area Kindred. And all of them are utterly dependent on your steel for their commercial survival. Who needs favors when you've got extortion? A threat to cut off their supply of raw materials — a threat that you assuredly have the power to back up — practically guarantees cooperation on their part. That is, at least, until they throw up their hands in frustration and seek out the services of the nearest hit man, but you knew there were risks involved when you became a steel baron.

All of this works both ways, of course; you'll have to ask favors from those institutions outside your particular sphere of influence, and you run the same risks of



being muscled around in dealing with them that they do in dealing with you. But hey, at least having the weight of your own local industry gives you a fairly hefty bargaining chip.

Status

Never, never, *never* underestimate the power of status. Most elder Kindred, at least, if not some of their foolish progeny, recognize the inherent difficulty in doing what appears to come naturally to them. This whole “manipulating people and controlling stuff” gig is *hard*, and the fact that so much of the corporate structure is owned by those same elders makes getting involved in it harder still. The elders won’t necessarily *like* you if you manage to snatch away some of their turf — odds are, in fact, that more than one of them will consider you a threat and do their damndest to destroy you utterly — but they *will* be forced to respect you, at least a little.

Herd

Admittedly, you don’t want to take advantage of this too often. Corporations may employ thousands of individuals, most of whom are nameless and faceless numbers as far as management is concerned. Nevertheless, if one of them starts screaming “vampire,” or if they start dropping dead in unusual numbers, HR is going to notice.

Still, for the occasional emergency, it’s certainly good to know that you have unrestricted access to a place where you can find large numbers of delectable kine just waiting to assuage your thirst. Even after dark, the average corporate headquarters is brimming with life, from the janitors and security to the industrious (that is, type-A obsessive) personalities who are there working late in order to wrap up this or that project. It is, in light of all the other benefits, a minor bonus at best — but it is also, perhaps, the one that speaks most closely to the true nature of the Kindred. I’ve heard the saying, “Stay in the red” before. That’s good advice.

BANKING AND CREDIT

The corporations and other such entrepreneurial concerns may very well generate the vast majority of the money currently circulating throughout the economy, but they don’t have any direct authority over those currencies. Consider, for a moment, that for all the trillions of dollars such entities earn in any given year, only a tiny portion of that is “real” money. Most of it, in the form of stocks or other securities, doesn’t exist in any liquid form, tangible or electronic. Your 100,000 shares of WhateverCorp may technically be worth millions of dollars, but you can’t exactly spend those shares, can you?

WHAT ABOUT THE SABBAT?

What, then, does the Black Hand get out of this sort of thing? The sect as a whole certainly acknowledges precious little in the way of status involved. Even with more and more of the Sabbat being forced to admit that the mortal world has its uses, the sect still has only minor respect for those who have found a way to take advantage of that fact.

Is it the wealth? Cainites of the Sabbat like money as much as the next blood-sucking nocturnal marauder, so that's always a plus. Still, it seems that profit alone isn't enough of an incentive for members of a sect that often consider themselves a superior race bent on a holy crusade.

Government influence? Well, maybe a little. Those Sabbat who have managed to place themselves in such a position are certainly more than willing to use what authority they have. The problem there, though, is that the Camarilla has a lot more people in equal, or even more influential, positions.

But then, that's really the answer. The foremost goal of the Sabbat, as far as its interest in the corporate sector, is countering the Camarilla. The Black Hand's interest in affairs of business — or at least a large proportion of that interest — is self-defense. It has seen, now, just how much the Camarilla can accomplish using the kine as its weapons, and the Sabbat leadership (such as it is) is determined not to let that advantage go unchecked.

If you're dealing with real currency, liquid assets, you're talking banks and credit.

As with other sorts of businesses, things in the banking and finance sectors seem to have gotten a little better for the common man over the past century or so. Most banks, pretending concern with public image, have cleaned up their act; rarely, now, will you find a Mr. Potter lurking behind the counter, ready to foreclose at the drop of a hat and put your family out on the street. The credit unions aren't lying in wait for you to miss a single payment before they jack your interest rates through the roof. Not even these treasured financial institutions are deaf to the modern call for customer service.

And as with the corporations, it's all a front. Think the banks aren't still greedy, top-heavy institutions that could give the corporations a run for their money? Think again. Sure, they may look more friendly on the surface; it's a lure. Those constant mistakes that seem to crop up on bank statements

from time to time, the sort that cost \$20 here, \$50 there — they're not mistakes. When was the last time you saw one in favor of the consumer? They're no longer foreclosing on that first missed mortgage payment because they'd rather hit you up for the interest later when you have the money — money that you probably had to get by taking out a second mortgage with someone else.

Remember what the banks are doing with your money while they've supposedly got it stashed safely away — they're playing the stock market. Doesn't matter if they lose millions; it's not their money at risk, after all. They, like everyone else, are looking for that quick gain. The banks, in fact, are even more anxious for instant profits than most, since they know that they've got your money only until the moment you decide (how dare you!) to take it back. In some ways, banks are no different than any other large business — someone (or a small group of someones) sits at the top, getting rich off the labor of the guy who puts a few bucks in the bank after cashing his check at the liquor store.

If the Kindred feel a kinship with the corporate entities because they, too, are the living dead, then their affection for the banks must come from the fact that they're both parasites.

THE LOVE OF MONEY

Time for another story. This one's one of my favorites, but only because I'm involved. The names have been changed to protect the guilty. Try to guess which one's me. No, not Johanssen, but thanks for the clumsy attempt at flattery.

Mr. Johanssen leaned back ever so slightly in his chair, fingers steepled together before him as though he were about to pray. "Are you quite certain I can't convince you to change your mind, my boy?" he asked softly, eyes focused on a spot just over Alexander's right shoulder.

"I said no, didn't I?" The Brujah was trying desperately to hold onto his temper — satisfying as it might be to tear the Blue Blood a second useless asshole, he knew full well the trouble it could get him into — but what self-control he'd managed to dredge up was fraying around the edges. "How many times I gotta fucking say it before you figure it out?"

"Oh, I've quite well figured it out, Mr. Grant." Without taking his eyes off that same, empty space, the Ventrue reached into his coat pocket and removed a cellular phone no larger than Alexander's palm. With a casual flip and the stab of a single button, Johanssen raised it to his cheek. "I'm afraid Mr. Grant has chosen not to cooperate, Samuel. Yes, go ahead; just as we discussed. Thank you."

Alexander glared suspiciously as the phone disconnected with a click that was audible even across the plush office. "What was that about?" he growled.



LAUGHING ALL THE WAY TO THE BANK

Again, we see Kindred stratification and specialization evident in the financial sector. Although most clans can honestly claim an interest in banking and finance, a select few clans have proven themselves the masters of the game.

The Ventrue (and, to a lesser degree, the Toreador) would like to believe — and more importantly, would like everyone else to believe — that they've achieved the same level of mastery here that they have over the corporate interests. And it is true that the Ventrue attained a greater degree of fiscal mastery than most of the other clans. But when it comes to banking and international currencies markets, even the Blue Bloods find themselves occasionally outmaneuvered by the Italian Necromancers, at least in certain colloquial situations. The Giovanni, though best known (or perhaps stereotyped) for their connections with the realm of the dead, are bankers nonpareil in the world arena. They've learned to play games with numbers that should be downright impossible by all known laws of mathematics and finance. Rumor has it that the Ventrue have begun consulting the Tremere on the matter, concerned that there might be a supernatural element in play. The typical Tremere response to such a rumor is to scoff, claiming that if there were any such widespread mystical manipulation of society they would know about it, and that the Ventrue simply don't want to believe they've been bested at something.

For the first time in minutes, Johanssen let his gaze squarely meet that of his unhappy guest. "What, that? Nothing, really. I merely arranged for Samuel to place a call to one of my colleagues at Visa."

"Visa? You worried about a credit card?"

"Me? Not at all. I'm afraid that I've just utterly destroyed your family's credit rating, though."

Alexander froze; it took everything he had, including the knowledge that the bastard had a great deal of security waiting just outside the room, to hold onto his temper. He could feel the Beast begging to be set free. "You did... what?"

"Oh, dear, I'm sorry. You're still quite attached to your mortal family, aren't you? Such a shame, really. As I understand it, they were just about to buy that house. Must have the extra space, with the new baby on the way."

"You son of a bitch!"

"I am, at that. I can make it go away, of course, just as easily as I made it happen. Now, Mr. Grant, would you care to reconsider your position?"

Considering that banks don't have outstanding stock the way most corporate entities do, many younger Kindred hungry for their first taste of power assume that securing influence in a larger company is easier than going the route of the banks. While it's true that the average mortal would find it nigh impossible to assume any role of true authority in the banking structure (unless he actually managed to work his way through the ranks to CEO or the like), the fact is that fewer Kindred are involved in banking than have their fingers in other corporate sectors. Furthermore, perhaps because influence in banking is less about gaining money and more about directing it, those who *are* here aren't quite as jealous about guarding their territory. That's not to suggest that they welcome outsiders moving in on their turf, merely that the competition is a *little* less cutthroat. So what, then, can you do with sway among the banks and credit unions?

Wealth

Banks and related fiscal interests are like other businesses; they're designed to make money. Interest payments, service fees, foreclosures and resales, and of course the various stock market games they play with the money deposited by the unwashed masses — all these and more are intended to bring the banks more green than they're required to pay out. With the larger institutions, these can prove to be truly prodigious sums of cash.

But before you go racing off to blood bond your local branch manager, bear a few caveats in mind. Banking doesn't happen at the street level; those who hold the true power are the ones who haven't seen a drive-through teller or an ATM machine in years (if ever). As with the massive businesses discussed earlier, banking's financial power begins, and ends, at the top. The people who make money off the banks are never the ones who work in the actual branch offices. If you want to be a part of that, you need to find yourself a corporate headquarters, not some tiny branch inside your nearest supermarket or next to the gas station on the corner.

The other downside is that, while you can skim a bank, it's not going to generate the sheer magnitude of income that a corporation would. With fewer people at the top, no stockholders requiring them to pay out dividends, and fewer mass-moneymaking projects, banks aren't expected to create the same tidal waves of cash that other large businesses do. That, and, unless *you* own the bank, someone's going to be watching that money like a hawk.

Emergency Funds

While banks don't generate the profits many corporations do, they're still sitting on the largest

stores of liquid assets in the world. A Kindred with connections in a large bank or credit union can come up with almost any amount of money on relatively short notice.

This is not, however, your money. You can use it if you need to, but it all has to be accounted for. If you aren't able to put at least most of it back, you're going to have problems. As much as the elders want you to believe otherwise, Kindred simply can't subvert certain elements of kine society. If a national bank comes up \$500,000,000 short, or American Express discovers an eight-figure debit on the books, a mass investigation's in the making, and serious repercussions for all concerned shall abound. You might be able to get away with it once — for a discreet amount — but you'll likely wind up destroying the institution you've spent so long trying to master, and you'll definitely lose at least some of your highly placed contacts. It's good to know you've got the option for emergencies, but this isn't one you want to abuse.

Fiscal Power

This is the big one, the meat and potatoes of the banking and credit industries, and the best reason in the world for the Kindred to be interested in this particular field. Banks and credit agencies have the financial futures of nearly every citizen of the industrialized nations in the palms of their hands. This may or may not include your rival Kindred — but it almost certainly includes some of their ghouls, or allies, or acquaintances, or agents, or rivals.... Think about it.

Is the Toreador who owns that nightclub an enemy of yours? She'll see the error of her ways the next time she needs a loan to keep her establishment afloat while she remodels to follow the ever-changing tide of mortal trends. Or, as with Mr. Johanssen, perhaps you've got a fellow Kindred who's reluctant to do you a favor. He may just have to rethink that decision with financial ruin hanging over his family's heads like the Sword of Damocles. People, groups, businesses — all these can be raised up by a gleaming smile from the banks, and all can be thrown down from on high by the smallest frown. The American dollar bill proclaims "In God We Trust." Become that god, and see exactly what you can do.

LAW FIRMS

They lurk in the shadows of modern society, waiting to pounce on unsuspecting prey. They pull strings, direct corporate and political interests from behind the scenes, always letting their catspaws take the fall when things go south. They accumulate unheard-of wealth and power, all at the expense of the little people, the masses about whom they couldn't care less. They feed on the toil, the misery and the blood of humanity.

CLAN WARS

Okay, if individual Kindred can use their own influence in banking to damage or even destroy their rivals, why isn't the same thing done on a clanwide scale? Why haven't the Ventrue, for instance, crippled the Giovanni in any and every city in which they've competed? Why haven't the Tremere used their own banking influence (and that of the Ventrue, for that matter) to keep the spreading Assamites out of the various industries across America and Western Europe?

Most Kindred don't particularly advertise their presence, of course. Unless one's sources of information are pretty damn good, there's no real way to know for sure that the foreign investor who just bought heavily into your town's automotive plant is actually a schismatic Assamite. To make a clanwide sweep, even on a local scale, requires pinpoint-accurate information, and that's just not easily available.

Perhaps more important is the fact that *more* power doesn't necessarily mean *enough* power. While it may be true that the Ventrue are better globally than the Giovanni at playing the banking game, the Giovanni are no slouches at it themselves, particularly in certain local contexts. The Ventrue have certainly been able to drive them out of the industry in select cities, but they've typically taken one hell of a beating in doing it. In many of these cases, they've found their own interests in the Giovanni's area of expertise similarly threatened in retaliation.

No, this sort of fiscal dancing is all well and good on a private, individual level. The moment you start blatantly using your newfound power against entire clans, you're going to have a war on your hands. It's probably not one you can win — even if only rival Kindred align against you.

They also spend a lot of time working with Kindred. Some resemblance, isn't there?

Much like the fatty excesses in a pot roast, the lawyers of the world almost invariably rise to the top. Some work alone, or nearly so, others in firms so large they practically qualify as small corporations in their own right, but the best ones all exert an influence far beyond their apparent positions and means.

The thing about law firms that make the Kindred salivate like Pavlov's dogs is the scent of so much power in such small packages. While some are truly monolithic, the average firm isn't really all that huge, certainly

not in comparison to the sort of power it wields. One loyal agent in the upper levels of the firm can accomplish feats the likes of which it would take an entire department to arrange in a corporate setting.

And getting that single loyal agent isn't all that difficult. *Everybody* in a law firm has something to hide, and if you can dig that something up, you own them.

Am I saying that every lawyer in the world is corrupt? Well, no, not all of them. Always beware of those who want to make a difference instead of making their fortune — every occupation has its zealots. But moral bankruptcy is common among lawyers, and the zealots don't tend to become senior partners. Corruption not only implies the presence of information the

THEY HAVE THE LAW ON THEIR SIDE

While it's safe to assume that certain clans have more interest and more agents in the legal field than others, it is absolutely impossible to say with any certainty that Clan X has the most influence over lawyers in general. The sheer number and variety of law firms, combined with obvious utility of having such an organization working on one's behalf, have led to an astonishing interest in this particular area, even from some of the clans who don't normally profess interest in such things. Before the Camarilla reclaimed New York, it's believed that the Tzimisce, of all clans, could claim direct influence in at least half-a-dozen firms in Manhattan alone and had at least one partner among them within its own ranks (presumably as a ghoul).

As a side note, there's been growing awareness among the Camarilla clans that a group of Malkavians has been calling in favors, pulling strings and otherwise bending over backward to ensure that their pet lawyers manage to get violent criminals declared insane as frequently as possible, thus assuring that they're sent to mental institutions rather than maximum security prisons. This has proven difficult, given the current public impatience with the insanity plea in general. Nevertheless, several dangerous individuals have indeed disappeared through the doors of various hospitals, never to be heard from again. When pressed on this question, several highly positioned Camarilla Kindred have uttered vague assurances that they "know" the Malkavians aren't Embracing these maniacs. The Malkavians themselves, or at least those who choose to entertain any discussion on the issue, never do more than shake their heads and smile.

lawyers want kept quiet, but it also suggests a relatively high level of greed. Put those two factors together, and you've got a situation tailored for the Kindred to step in and exert real influence.

POWER OF ATTORNEY

Lawyers and law firms are the tires on which other businesses ride. They aren't exactly a part of the machine *per se*, but you couldn't get very far without them. Every large business has either a legal department or a relationship with a particular firm — often both at once. Holding a law firm under your belt gives you access to courtrooms, boardrooms, government offices and police substations.

Even better, it's possible for a vampire to stake a claim on a law firm without having to compete with another Lick. Oh, you'll have to fight tooth and nail if you're trying to steal away one of the larger, more powerful firms, but if you're willing to settle for a young agency and allow it the time to grow...

Legal Representation

This may qualify as a no-brainer, but it's worth pointing out nonetheless: Lawyers are really handy to have around when you need a lawyer. Kindred usually find it in their own best interests to avoid legal trouble — those daytime court appearances can be the Final Death of you.

While you'll probably be able to avoid trouble with the law, what about your pawns? Ghouls, retainers, allies and lackeys all have an inexplicable tendency (usually at your selfish behest) to find themselves in all sorts of trouble, and running afoul of the law certainly qualifies. Assuming you don't already have the clout with the city or county authorities to have your people sprung, the next best thing to have is a lawyer who knows what she's doing and is either completely under your thumb or owes you a massive favor. Hell, or you could just hire her. Lawyers don't come cheap, though — at least, not the ones you want.

The secondary benefit of this particular arrangement is that you can sometimes position your own lawyers to make things uncomfortable for your enemies. Losing a case takes no skill, but it takes an expert to do it deliberately and still look like she was trying her damndest to win. Evidence can be misplaced or simply not entered into the record; information can be buried, witnesses discredited. You won't get an opportunity of this sort often — make sure you're prepared to take full advantage of it.

Easy Access

At times, even the police and FBI envy the lawyer's ability to go where he wants, when he wants. It's like having a badge to flash wherever you go, with no

jurisdictional boundaries. Rare indeed is the security guard, receptionist, secretary and even executive who won't open the door at the first mention of "I'm a lawyer." They wouldn't admit it, of course, but they're scared. In tonight's world of instant lawsuits, no one's willing to take the chance that you might just have valid reason to be upset with them.

What this *won't* do is earn you access to restricted areas; even the most timid night watchman is probably going to figure out that an attorney's got no business in a warehouse at 3:00 a.m. But if you're trying to make an after-hours appointment with the CEO of your rival's pet company, or need a few minutes to talk with a city councilman, having a lawyer to make the arrangements cuts through a whole lot of red tape.

Business and Political Contacts

Perhaps the most useful thing about law firms is that they're easier to get a handle on than corporations or political offices — but they have a substantial amount of pull with those same corporations and political offices. It's a rare circumstance when the lawyers tell the CEOs and the politicians what to do; it's a far more frequent occurrence that the lawyers tell these people what *not* to do. Corporations and political hopefuls are fearfully vulnerable to the threat of lawsuits. The negative publicity alone can often damage such entities beyond repair, and that's not even taking into account the legal costs of mounting a courtroom defense, nor the obscene damages that can accrue if the defendant should happen to actually *lose*.

By example, take a second look at one of the situations described earlier. We've discussed the possibilities inherent in your power within the steel industry, as regards the hammer you now hold over the heads of your nearest rivals in the automotive trade. Now reverse those positions — *you're* the car guy, and it's that damn Brujah (who's got juice in the steelworkers' union) trying to shove you around.

Time to break out the lawyers. The odds are good, no matter how much leverage that Brujah punk has, that the mortal management of the steel mill is going to back down when you inform them you'll be seeing them in court. They're not actually gaining anything by holding back (they don't have your rival's vested interest in seeing you fail on a personal level). Hell, they're *losing* money, because you're not paying for materials they aren't delivering. They're going to be pretty anxious to avoid the fallout of a prolonged court battle when there's no apparent reason to fight one at all.

If you can gain any sort of hold on their *own* lawyers, that's even better; most executives would rather shoot themselves in the groin than go against the advice of

their own legal department and risk getting sued for all — and more than — they're worth.

And as far as the impact lawyers have in terms of politics, just take a look at the American presidential race in 2000....

Discrediting Individuals

Take a step down on the scale from huge businesses and politicians to the individual. You don't have to lose a lawsuit to be discredited in the eyes of your peers and the public. All you have to do is be named as the defendant enough times — or, in severe cases, in just a single suit. People, who would almost always prefer to think the worst of their fellow man, will probably assume there's *some* truth to the allegations. A run of malpractice suits can destroy even the most well respected doctor. Litigation on the grounds of excessive force and brutality can ruin that cop who refused to do you a favor. Allegations of sexual abuse of a child diminish almost anyone in the public eye. Focus these attacks on the agents and pawns of rival Kindred, and you can wound if not cripple their operations.

Be careful. If the same law firm is constantly bringing the suits to court, even the dullest judge (or Kindred) is going to notice. This particular technique works a whole lot better if you've got your fingers in several different firms. In fact, if you can do that, there's no reason even to wait for the first trial to be over before launching your second salvo. Having the same charge coming from two unrelated sources does wonders toward establishing guilt in the court of public opinion. If you're able to do that, you've won the real battle before the jury's even been seated.

HIGH-TECH FIRMS, TECHNOLOGICAL START-UPS AND DOT-COMS

This may be the single arena of the corporate sector where the neonates have the edge over their venerable elders. If the Kindred at the top of the pile can't understand computers, electronics or the Internet well enough even to turn them on, they sure as heck aren't going to be able to compete in a field that's based entirely on understanding, using and selling such technologies. The notion of e-business is no more natural to these ancient creatures than is the drinking of blood to a mortal. They sit back, allowing their ponderous corporations to operate in the ways to which they've grown accustomed, and don't understand why the past year has seen them lose 37 percent of their market share in the software and electronics fields.

Incidentally, while computer hardware and software make up a substantial percentage of this particular market, don't make the mistake of assuming that's all there is. Many of the new start-ups are based in other markets, such as telecommunications or electronics. Imagine the uses inherent, for instance, in a new company that offers satellite-tracked, temperature-controlled shipping of biological samples. And yes, most of what you offer will also be available from the larger corporate entities; what makes you high-tech (and therefore incomprehensible to the ancients) isn't merely a factor of *what* you provide, but also of *how*.

It's easier to sink your talons into a fresh new company. Even assuming you haven't been a part of it since the beginning (venture capital is your friend), you have far fewer stocks to buy (assuming the company's even reached its IPO yet) and far fewer people to bribe, blackmail or blood bond before you've achieved a controlling interest or dominant position.

That said, there's a reason the elders aren't more concerned with figuring out the high-tech start-ups — high-tech start-ups ain't where the power's at. True, it's a rapidly growing field, one that the elders have wildly underestimated, and eventually it's going to threaten everything they hold. For now, though, these are still the little guys, the underdogs. If you're looking for a quick route to power, you aren't going to find it this way. If, on the other hand, you're more concerned with establishing a firm, steady base, and willing to work up from there, this may be the way to go. Note that I said *may* — the vast majority of these interests go under within the first few years. Those that survive, however, show an amazing degree of strength and resiliency.

Remember, it wasn't all that long ago (particularly as Kindred measure things) that nobody had ever heard of Microsoft....

WHAT NOW?

Small, young high-tech firms are the guerrilla warriors of the corporate battlegrounds. They don't have the men, the resources or the experience of the big boys. On the other hand, they move fast, they think and plan in new directions and can react more quickly than larger companies. Tonight's truly successful start-up might just grow up to be the massive corporation of tomorrow.

The risks are high, certainly. For every one company to successfully cross the finish line into stable operations, hundreds of other competitors stumbled at the starting gun, ran out of breath on the second lap or were shot by a sniper in the stands. Sales probably won't be as high as anticipated, unexpected cost overruns can quickly eat into your initial stockpile of capital and

THAT DOMAIN NAME IS ALREADY TAKEN

In a field in which the old guard are the outsiders, it should come as no surprise that the traditional clan-to-clan ratio in the e-business and high-tech fields is a far cry from what it is in more traditional enterprises. While a few young Ventruie, Giovanni and Lasombra have involved themselves in these particular ventures, they can't even begin to claim the sort of dominance they hold elsewhere. A few intellectual types among Clan Brujah, not surprisingly, hold a sizable chunk of the interest in the growing wave of start-ups. What is perhaps a bit more startling is that the Tremere and Toreador run them a close second, at least among Camarilla clans. The Tremere bought in because the Warlocks have always been quicker to understand new puzzles and procedures than many other Kindred. The Toreador invested because many of the clan's neonates see the twin procedures of building a new business and working with computers to be nothing less than new forms of cultural patronage.

The Followers of Set also seem to have a vested interest in the growing field of e-commerce. The ability to conduct commerce with anonymity, to rake in a substantial amount of money and set up channels of communication without the accountability of a standard business setting intrigues them. Furthermore, they've discovered the many advantages inherent in providing venture capital to a rapidly growing business; it grants *carte blanche* to make suggestions (and occasionally demands) further down the road.

resources, and 18 other tiny companies are trying to snare the exact same market demographic. It's difficult to worry about what sort of value your stocks will see after your IPO when you're not even sure the company's going to survive to see next month.

Assuming, however, that you've chosen wisely and affixed yourself to one of the true up-and-comers, what exactly can you do with it?

Growth Potential

While there's certainly a great deal to recommend them in the here and now, most Kindred (and most people, for that matter) are more interested in new companies for what they might become further down the road. No, you probably won't be the next Microsoft or America Online, but if you are, you've achieved all the benefits of running your own corporation, and you didn't have to battle any of the big boys to get it (though you'll probably end up having to battle some

of them to *keep* it; it's going to be just as appealing an idea to them as it is to you).

Over the course of years, the successful company develops an enormous network of contacts in the corporate and government sectors, and it develops a market niche that others in the Kindred community will want to exploit. All the favors, all the connections, will eventually become available to you, if you've just got the patience.

Most kine would go insane waiting, of course; but if being undead doesn't teach you patience, you're going to have a very tense eternity ahead of you.

Corporate Pull

No, you don't have the same degree of prestige that the larger corporations have with one another, but that doesn't mean you can't occasionally exert some leverage on the big boys by playing to your strengths. They probably have greater resources than you do, but it's nearly impossible for a large corporate entity to accomplish anything *quickly*. (It was AMD, after all, and not Intel, who marketed the first gigahertz chip. It may have had its flaws, but sometimes being first is all you need.) If you're developing a competing technology — or better yet, one that nobody else is currently investigating — the corporations are going to be very interested in making some sort of deal.

Sometimes you want to go ahead and make those deals. Sure, being first to market can bring in a substantial profit, but the corporations often pay handsomely if you just agree to slow production or even leak the technology to them. If your rival company also happens to represent one of your rival Kindred, you can probably squeeze the promise of a favor or two out of him for a rainy night.

You can panic the corporations further by threatening to take your new technology to the government before they can. Big government and big business usually walk hand in hand, especially in the modern nights, but that doesn't mean the folks at Capitol Hill or the Pentagon aren't going to work with some young upstart if it's to their advantage. If your new product happens to drastically improve, for instance, the accuracy of the American census, your competitors may just fall over themselves offering you favors if you'll just hold off and give them the time they need to present their own alternative. And if they *don't* make you such an offer, you still got a government contact out of the deal. Either way, you come out ahead.

Access and Information

Many banks, corporations, and even some government offices farm work to outside sources for their computer hardware, networking and Internet security needs. If this happens to be your own company's area of



expertise, you'll find yourself with easy access to corporate or financial records and data. Nearly every computer security firm leaves itself a backdoor into every system they install. Learn to access that, and the company in question won't be able to hide a thing from you.

Computers aren't by any means the only field that allows for covert gathering of data. Influence over a telecommunications concern allows you to eavesdrop on all sorts of exchanges, from modem lines to cellular conversations. If your business is a consulting firm — "efficiency experts" or onsite repair — you have by definition been granted access to a company's holdings and locations. This gives your personnel an unquestioned right to be there, yet the company itself knows little to nothing about them. This gives you a perfect

SHADOW OF THE BLACK HAND

If the balance and ratio of clans involved in the high-tech industries are turned about from where they stand in other corporate areas, it should come as no surprise that the balance of power between the sects is tilted differently here as well. Not to say that the Camarilla doesn't still hold the lion's share of influence among the "new economy" companies that harbor Kindred interest, but the Sabbat holds a lot more sway here than they do in most other businesses.

The Sabbat entered this particular arena from a position of weakness. Since a vast preponderance of Sabbat Cainites never saw mortals as especially useful, they never made the same effort to understand, much less influence, kine institutions. It's only in recent years that this outlook has begun to change within a small but growing faction of the sect, and they've been somewhat desperate to make up for the Camarilla's centuries-long lead. They have, therefore, been grabbing for fiscal and corporate power wherever they can get it — and since newer businesses and industries provide easier opportunities than older ones, the balance of newly enlightened Sabbat entrepreneurs winds up here.

In fact, it's just possible that fear of the Sabbat running unchecked in these industries might finally provide the impetus for some of the Kindred elders to get off their asses and investigate new technologies. The Sabbat isn't running unchecked, of course. It's still outnumbered by rival Camarilla and independent vampires in these fields. Regardless, most of those rivals are neonates, so the elders of the Camarilla don't put much faith in their ability to hold the barbarians at the gates.

opportunity to take a peek where you aren't normally wanted, or to dig up a bit of dirt on the corporation's own employees — or even the corporation itself. Even a seemingly unimportant bit of data picked up this way — such as the fact that every copy of Windows 2000 in the legal department has the same registration number, and is therefore pirated — can provide leverage for future endeavors.

HOSPITALS AND THE MEDICAL ESTABLISHMENT

Antiseptic white walls lock the world outside, featureless except for security-glass windows that reveal nothing but a colorless landscape of indifferent offices and impersonal recovery rooms. Mounds of paperwork smother the desks at the nurse's stations, each one advertising the salient points of the life — and quite possibly death — of another human drone. Fuzzy and laced with static, disembodied voices pour from the PA system, summoning this specialist to that bedside, or spouting "Code Blue!" and other ciphers.

You'd think that here, in what is ostensibly a place of healing, the unrelenting grind of society would recede. That this place, if no other, would be a refuge for society's walking — or crawling — wounded.

You'd be wrong, of course. There's a great deal of money to be made off human suffering. In the managerial offices of these massive hospitals, bureaucrats pore over the week's financial reports and worry only that patients will die before they've paid for their treatment. HMOs, most of whom would rather see each and every one of their clients die than pay out a single cent in benefits, call the shots, crippling those remaining doctors who've still managed to hang onto the desire to actually help their patients.

Don't have insurance? You'll be treated — the law requires it — but you're going to get the doctor who graduated at the bottom of his class, the one who's hooked himself on morphine. The medical field is exactly like every other industry — greedy. If you want the best care, you've got to be able to pay for it. Nothing comes cheap anymore, not even your own health.

FIRST, DO NO HARM

More than a few inexperienced neonates make the mistake of underestimating the power held by hospitals and medical communities. Here, they don't see anything like the enormous sums of capital or the glamour (in an economic sense) of the corporations, nor the obvious opportunities for extortion inherent in the banking and credit industries. Mention the medical establishment, and they look at you blankly. What good are doctors to the Damned?

WHO'S ON CALL?

The battle for the medical establishment is a furious one among the Kindred, but a select few clans have dominated this particular struggle — at least for the moment.

On the Camarilla side, the Tremere and Malkavian clans usually have the greatest influence in the field of medicine. Always interested in the workings of the human (and inhuman) physiology, and constantly searching for new experimental subjects, these Kindred cling like leeches to every hospital they can.

Among the Sabbat, it is the Tzimisce — most of whom would claim they couldn't care less about kine industry — who secretly prowl the back corridors and upper-floor offices of the hospitals. And while lumping the Tzimisce in with the Tremere is a wonderful way to bring yourself a hideous and painful death, the fact remains that the two clans share this interest in the field for precisely the same reasons — accessibility of raw materials.

The Setites also appreciate the uses of the medical establishment, though their interests are often less physical than those of the Tremere and Tzimisce. People in pain, the Setites have long since learned, will often agree to anything, no matter how immoral or degrading, if the person asking can just promise to make the torment stop. Some of the Serpents' most prodigal contacts — good, moral people before their accidents or illnesses — have been acquired in just such a manner.

The fact that contacts in the local hospital provide easy access to all sorts of restricted substances doesn't hurt any Kindred's feelings, either.

That's true, of course. It's equally true that a Kindred in the position to pull strings at the city's largest hospitals can accomplish things that no one in any corporation, no matter how powerful or well placed, could so much as dream of.

Masquerade Protection and Other Cover-Ups

The medical establishment's single greatest value, at least to the Kindred, is the ability to hide a multitude of sins. Sometimes young Cainites — Brujah get the worst rap for this, but it happens to everyone — lose control. Or maybe you've got the growing signs of a Sabbat incursion. Maybe you just have a madman loose in your particular urban jungle who happens to be one of the Damned. Whatever the specific cause, even the most Tradition-fearing Camarilla city is going to have the occasional exsanguinated body turn

up at the local morgues, or — even worse — living victims wheeled into the local emergency rooms. This is where access to the hospital's physicians, nurses, orderlies or receptionists can prove invaluable. Records can be altered, proving that the victim in question was admitted for something else entirely, or even destroyed, eliminating any paper trail that might prove the individual in question was ever admitted at all. Other causes of injury or death can be faked; bodies can be improperly examined or autopsy avoided altogether with the proper shuffling of papers (or corpses). Remember that as much as the Kindred hate being near an open flame, the hospital incinerator is your friend. The easiest solution is to have the coroner herself under your thumb, but it's hardly the only way.

Of course, the Masquerade isn't the only secret a Lick in the know can preserve with the proper access to hospital personnel. Corporate interests can be protected, and criminal investigations can be thwarted or sent spiraling in the wrong direction. Any situation that involves an injured person falls under your jurisdiction.

Access to Rivals' Agents and Information

Speaking of the infirm, imagine what you can do with (or to) the ghouls, agents, and other mortal liaisons of the city's Kindred. Most of the Damned fortunate enough to possess loyal servants, whether they're ghouls or simply oblivious mortals with something to gain, would prefer to place those individuals in harm's way rather than face physical danger themselves. That, combined with the penchant such retainers have for embroiling themselves in trouble, makes for pretty high on-the-job injury rate for some Kindred's lackeys.

Though exceedingly uncommon, you must be prepared to jump on these opportunities when they're presented. Most of the time, you're not going to have another Kindred's accountant lying in your recovery room. The rare times that it *does* happen, you're sitting on a veritable gold mine of leverage and information — if you can act quickly enough. You need not resort to strong-arm tactics or Disciplines, though such might occasionally prove necessary if there's a very specific piece of information you're looking for. Just learning the individual's address or place of employment can enable you to track him down later. Even something as simple as keeping track of the license plates of those who come to visit him can clue you in to who else your rival might have on his roster of contacts.

Sometimes, the very nature of Kindred associations can give away secrets about the undead, if you know how to look. If you know for a fact that the gay Korean kid in room 412 is an associate of the Ventrue who owns

the steel refinery in the city's industrial park, and if both his visitors were also effeminate Korean boys, and the ultimatum the Blue Blooded bastard sent you last year was *also* delivered by such an individual — well, you've probably got a pretty good idea what the gentleman's chosen blood type is, don't you? Admittedly, most situations (and most Ventrue) aren't going to be quite that obvious, but it doesn't take Sherlock Holmes to pick up on such cues when they're provided, as long as you've kept your eyes open.

Herding and Blood-Banking

Mortal accomplices may come and go, governments may rotate personnel during elections, corporations may be broken up by the Justice Department, but the Hunger is eternal. It hangs over every moment of Cainite existence, threatening to destroy everything the Kindred has worked for in a single instant of uncontrolled frenzy. But for those fortunate Kindred who have succeeded in winding their tendrils through the width and breadth of the medical establishment, the Hunger is far less of a concern. They know, no matter how bad things become, that they have an emergency store of sustenance.

Assuming the Kindred in question knows how to read a medical chart, the average hospital is practically one big buffet. Hundreds or even thousands of patients lie cooped up in their private little rooms, many of them already unconscious. A Kindred loose in the halls of medicine is fairly analogous to the kid in the candy store. And if the weakened individual proves too weak to survive the loss of a few pints of blood — well, unexpected deaths aren't precisely unheard of in hospitals, especially since it's often HMOs calling the shots instead of the doctors themselves (though you'd better make sure you have the resources to protect the Masquerade).

If the Kindred isn't averse to the idea of cold blood, hospitals also provide emergency stores in the form of blood banks. Most such institutions keep at least a moderate store of blood, for use in the emergency treatment of severe blood loss and for transfusions. While such plastic-wrapped "fast food" isn't precisely the tastiest, it keeps a long time if properly refrigerated, and it travels a lot more easily than a trunk full of duct-taped living vessels.

This isn't solely of benefit to you, either. The city's other Kindred are sometimes going to find themselves in need of emergency feeding privileges, privileges you can dole out in exchange for all sorts of favors. The Gangrel, for instance, with the urge to head out into the country for a while, or the Malkavian who incurred the prince's wrath one too many times and needs to leave town without delay; both these

Kindred, with several nights on the road ahead of them, might just be particularly grateful to anyone who might provide them with a few meal's worth of portable vitae. True, neither of them are in much of a position to do you any favors immediately; prestation has an awfully long memory.

Access to Restricted Materials

The obvious benefit to this comes in the form of drugs that are otherwise exceedingly difficult to obtain. Leaving aside the fact that many of these can bring an insanely high price on the streets, and are thus a good source of quick, relatively untraceable income, many are also useful for their other inherent properties. The

THE TIES THAT BIND

Some of you more devious power-players out there, those who have made (or intend to make) a habit of providing blood-banking services for your fellow Kindred, might be tempted to begin injecting just a wee trace of your own vitae in with the juice, in an attempt to create at least a partial bond between yourselves and all those Kindred who sup from your grail.

In a word: Don't. This definitely qualifies as a Bad Idea. Even assuming you're able to doctor the plasma bags without being detected (and that's going to be difficult, given the standard level of paranoia among Kindred), you're not going to get away with it for long. Unless you're dealing with a rank neonate, your "dinner guest" is probably going to recognize by taste that something isn't right; remember that Kindred vitae has a bouquet all its own, and feels substantially more potent when it's working its way through the system.

And once your secret's out, it's just a matter of time. Losing your client base (and thus your steady if slow supply of acquired boons) is just the beginning. If you're lucky, you'll just be dragged before the prince (or whatever local authority there might be in your city) for judgment and punishment. If you're a bit less lucky, your previous clients may just come back and kill you. Under the circumstances, quite a few princes might just grant them permission to do that, and that's assuming they bother to ask her first.

The quantity and severity of the enemies you'll make this way simply outweigh the possible benefits. Treat fairly with the other Kindred, at least in this particular regard. You'll find it works out a lot more favorably in the long run.

proper chemical stimuli can render subjects docile, even pliable. Why bother to Dominate someone and risk them remembering and questioning their strange behavior when you can inject them with enough hospital-grade morphine to make them think up is down? This is, of course, to say nothing of the leverage a Kindred can exert once he's become the primary source for a particular councilman's Percodan addiction.

But the ability to acquire nifty toys isn't limited to drugs. A Kindred with the right connections could, without a terrible degree of difficulty, gain access to sample cultures of all sorts of interesting diseases. No, you're not going to have access to the truly nasty ones like Ebola, anthrax or smallpox. These tend to be restricted to heavily guarded government and Center for Disease Control installations, and are never worth the risk of playing with, anyway. On the other hand, influenza cultures can be found at nearly every major hospital. If you're able to plan ahead and make sure you've cultivated a contact who knows his Third World diseases, you may be able to acquire even rarer materials, such as cholera (outbreaks of which, though extremely uncommon outside the poor, underdeveloped nations, are not completely unheard of in even the most modern cities).

Why on earth would a Kindred *want* to spread a such a disease? An outbreak of influenza will eventually be brought under control, but it will definitely result in a huge amount of police, paramedic and other official activity in a given geographic area in the interim. If the public knows the epidemic is the source of the problem, they're not going to question the presence of so many emergency personnel. The fact that the real reason you wanted them there was to allow the prince's people in the police and fire departments to burn out a lurking Sabbat pack is something John Q. Public need never know.

Turn it around, and these illnesses can be used as weapons. An outbreak of cholera will completely shut down a portion of the city while the CDC and other medical authorities look into it. This can temporarily cripple any of your rivals' interests or businesses located in the hot zone, especially if that particular company appears to be the source of the contagion.

You'll want to be exceedingly careful with this, of course. You're not trying to wipe out a large portion of the city's population (though admittedly you probably can't, not with the diseases you'll have available), and the other Kindred may take it unpleasantly if they learn that you're waging even a limited form of biological warfare on them. Still, when carefully monitored and modulated, such endeavors are sometimes worth the inherent risks involved.

Social Climbing

Hospitals are always in need of contributions. This establishment needs \$10 million to continue its research into childhood heart disease, that one needs a new facility for transplants, the other is running out of room and ER doctors, and so on. The best way to earn that money, of course, is throw a fund-raising gala that's going to draw the rich and powerful from all over the city — not because they give a damn about childhood heart disease or transplants, but because this is a good place to be seen and to show off your "generous" side.

For the Kindred looking for an "in" into the city's upper crust, this is the way to do it. Such events are the perfect place to meet and network with the scions of the capitalistic economy, the people who have the most say-so by virtue of having the most cash. Hobnobbing with the social elite opens up a whole new wealth of possibilities, opportunities that success in the business arenas, no matter how complete, simply cannot provide.

LABOR UNIONS

Not specifically a business in and of itself (though some might argue the point), organized labor is still an integral part of the business world. At least on the hypothetical, moral level, the unions are the one substantial force in the entire corporate sector that fights for the little people. Although utterly without voice in the chambers of power, the boardrooms and offices high atop downtown skyscrapers, the workers refuse to remain silent. In theory, the unions provide them with the representation that old money and new greed have denied them, outfitting them with not only a platform to air their grievances and demands and desires, but a base of power with which to negotiate.

It's all well and good, in theory; when it comes to reality, as with so much else in the modern nights, things don't work out precisely the way they should.

The labor unions of the world, as often as not, are cesspools of greed, corruption and barely restrained violence. Organized crime has so many fingers in the unions that it's nothing short of amazing that there's room for even a single member who isn't a wise guy of some sort or another. Union leaders and management have become greedy. They no longer demand from the corporations and businesses what they think is fair, instead seeking to milk those in power for all they can. Spite, too, plays a major part in the behavior of the unions. The corporations have become the enemy, and more than one union protest has dragged on long past the

LABOR INTENSIVE

It should come as little surprise that many Brujah, both in the Camarilla and among the anarchs, are quite heavily into the labor unions. The idea of power from the workers speaks to the communal Brujah consciousness, the same sense of the proletariat calling the shots that led to so many European Brujah supporting communism. The Nosferatu maintain an active interest in the unions as well; laborers often have a much better idea of what's happening behind the scenes than management believes, and the Sewer Rats relish the opportunity to acquire that information without the "higher" clans ever figuring out where they're finding it. Among the Sabbat, it is once again the Lasombra who can claim the greatest interest in the unions. The Sabbat Brujah, all told, are far too violent to successfully operate behind a kine organization. The Lasombra appreciate the anticorporate stance that most organized labor seems to take; it puts them at loggerheads with the Ventrue and other Camarilla business types, a position that they very much enjoy taking.

The Giovanni, on the other hand, often surprise people who assume that their occasional New World forays into organized crime automatically grant them a high level of influence in the unions. The truth is that the Necromancers have comparatively little to do with these organizations. This is due primarily to a combination of two factors. One, the Giovanni are normally in competition, not cooperation, with the Mafia, and the Mafia still holds a vast amount of sway with the unions. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, the Giovanni don't really have all that much use for organized labor. Their efforts, when they're aimed at the world of the living at all, tend to focus more on high finance than on the common worker.

Finally, in the nights since their clanwide drop in numbers, the Ravnos — or those few who maintain a regular haven in the industrialized areas — have developed a surprising interest in the unions, and for much the same reason as the Nosferatu. Many Ravnos have grown understandably paranoid in recent nights, and contacts and allies within organized labor aid them in keeping an eye on the corporate structure — which often translates into the Kindred elite in any given city — without bringing themselves to the attention of those in power.

point where the corporations would have given in, for no purpose other than to hurt business that much more.

The truth, however, is that the unions no longer have the power they once did. Public sympathies have shifted. Those who once firmly backed the poor, oppressed laborers now curse those same strikers for delaying airplane flights and creating a rise in the cost of automotive parts. As other factions of organized crime continue supplanting the Mafia — long the true patron of organized labor — the unions find themselves being muscled around once more by the corporations they could formerly stand up to. Still, the labor union is far from dead, and they still hold in their grease-streaked hands the power to make the corporate world take heed — so long as the request is properly phrased.

UNION DUES

Other than providing benefits and leverage, a labor union doesn't actually *do* much of anything. It doesn't generate a product or service that fills a consumer niche or — more importantly — a Kindred need you might exploit. It doesn't generate even as much income as a small law firm or dot-com, much less the staggering sums of wealth you might acquire in the corporate or banking sectors. So why in Caine's name would you ever want to bother with an institution like this?

Corporate Leverage

The first and most obvious advantage to cultivating influence in a labor union is simply that you can use it in the same way its members do — as a hammer held over the heads of certain corporations and industries. Every firm, every plant, every institution that employs physical laborers probably has a union, and that union has power. Airlines and automobile manufacturers need people on the line to put the pieces together, repairmen to fix them when they break down. Shipping concerns need dockhands to load cargo. Even actors and teachers are unionized, should the need ever arise for you to flex your muscle in those particular fields. The threat of union action, shouted loudly enough and to the right people, can sometimes evoke drastic changes on the part of management. A strike can financially cripple a company, often causing lasting or permanent damage if the timing is just right. A strike by airplane mechanics, for instance, is damaging to the airline even at the best of times. If it happens during the peak of the holiday season, it becomes a blow from which the company won't recover for years. Once you've managed to convince the unions to strike, it becomes a matter of what your objectives are. If you're trying to wring concessions out of the corporation in question — or the Kindred involved with it — this is the time

to present your demands. If, on the other hand, you're simply trying to damage the entity in question, you can sit back and enjoy the show.

Strikes are massive, public things, and they draw enormous amounts of attention. This is not a weapon to be wielded subtly, or often, and there's practically no way to do it without impacting interests far outside your immediate industry. A strike by the workers at a steel plant doesn't just cripple the local steel industry, but the automotive industry, construction and uncountable others besides.

Furthermore, because union action involves such an enormous number of people, you're not going to be able to create one solely on the basis of your own personal concerns. It doesn't matter how much leverage you have over the people in charge. You might have in your possession signed and documented proof that the local union leader shot Kennedy from the grassy knoll, went home, raped his own daughter and molested the family dog, and it still wouldn't be enough. You will not be able to get a union to strike unless the workers already have some serious grievances with the company. It's a decision that has to be ratified by too many people — and impacts the livelihoods of too many people — for the unions to ever take such a step lightly.

Of course, odds are pretty good that the workers *do* already have some issues to take up with management, issues that you can exploit to get the results you want. Remember that most large companies these nights couldn't care less about their workers, and the employees know it. Creating a strike out of whole cloth is a daunting task. Exacerbating and exaggerating problems that already exist until you can push the union into such an action — that's easier.

Mob Connections

Not every labor union is connected to the Mafia, any more than every lawyer is corrupt or every politician is on the take. Nevertheless, the stereotype comes from somewhere, and a Kindred with connections to the right unions can often continue up the chain of contacts until he reaches the "made men" who call the shots.

Any neonate who wants to survive long enough to see what undeath has to offer had better show some respect for the power with which she's about to shake hands. The Mafia is dangerous, even to the Kindred, and the fact that the union can supply you with a means to contact them doesn't for one minute mean they're going to have any interest in hearing what you've got to say. Once you've been introduced to La Cosa Nostra, you'd better be prepared to talk not only quickly but very, very persuasively.

IS SILENCE GOLDEN?

So just how quiet are you being about your newfound power? Is it common knowledge among the Kindred that you're now the man to see about air travel, or covering up potential Masquerade breaches at the local ER, or talking the Construction Workers Local 147 into going back to work? Or have you been trying to keep yourself shrouded in the secrecy that so many Cainites seem to prefer, pulling the strings of Crichton-Lawler and Northwest Confederated Banking from behind the curtain?

It's not an easy choice to make. As with so much else regarding the Kindred (and business in general), there are distinct advantages either way.

Should you choose to keep your presence secret, it makes it substantially more difficult for your enemies to target your assets. How do you strike at the holdings of a rival when you don't know precisely what those holdings are? More to the point, you can fend off attempts to usurp control of your influence by other Kindred because they won't know from what quarter your countermeasures might come.

On the other hand, if the other Kindred don't know what you're involved in, you've lost a substantial amount of leverage in the game of prestation. How do you expect them to come to you for favors if you haven't made it known that you're the one to see in any given sphere of influence? Not even the most desperate Cainite is going to be trusting enough to agree to owe a boon anonymously. Public (in Kindred terms) knowledge of who you are and what you're involved in puts you in a much better position to play politics — but it also makes you an easier target.

As with everything else in the Jyhad, it could be a matter of unlife and death — and it's entirely in your hands.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

The options presented to you so far barely scratch the surface of Kindred involvement in mortal affairs of business. For every industry mentioned here, a hundred others wait to be tapped. Want easy access to the movers and shakers of the city, the politicians and fat cats and other scions of high society? Involve yourself in the largest of your city's charitable organizations. Trying to enlarge the underground networks for your Nosferatu brethren? Construction companies are the way to go. Imagine what an enterprising young Kindred could

accomplish with an advertising company under her direction. Or a movie studio. An insurance company. A nationwide security and private investigation firm, like the Pinkerton Agency. If the kine put money into it, the Kindred can pull power out of it. Don't allow yourself to be limited to what you've read in here; this is intended only as a starting point. When it comes down to it, your only *real* weapon in the Jyhad is creativity. Think of what the elders haven't thought of, and exploit it.

And Remember — business in the modern nights *never* favors the little guy.



CHAPTER TWO: SOCIAL CLIMBING

As we ascend the social ladder, viciousness wears a thicker mask.

— Erich Fromm

At its broadest possible definition, “society” refers simply to the civilization in which humans live and Kindred... exist. Using this definition, claiming that your goal is to attain influence “in society” is analogous to claiming that you reside “on Earth.” In other words, pretty much meaningless.

“Society,” of course, has narrower connotations. It most commonly refers to certain sectors — usually rich, powerful, flamboyant sectors — of civilization. What do the words “high society” conjure up? Images of black-tie soirees and evenings at the theater. Gala fundraisers attended by people who turn enough profit in a month to run the charity in question for an entire fiscal year. Cutting-edge fashion and elegant nostalgia. Very dry martinis, stirred, not shaken (I never understood why Bond ordered his the other way). This is the breed of mortal that runs — or thinks it runs — the world as we know it. It is to this level of social decadence that many of tonight’s *nouveau riche* and social climbers aspire. And it is these circles to which those Kindred who would seek to “control” kine society, as if such a thing

were possible, flock, drawn like moths to a flame — or like fish to a brightly-colored lure.

Of course, no matter how much power they may have — and they have much of it — this sort represents only a single facet of modern culture. For all that humanity seems to have progressed from the feudal system of the middle ages, for all that slavery has been officially done away with, the countries of the Western world labor under an unspoken caste system nearly as strict as those found in less “advanced” nations. Just because society’s so-called less desirable elements aren’t labeled untouchables doesn’t mean they’re not treated that way. A substantial line of demarcation separates high and low society (it’s called the middle class), and odds are good that you’re never going to see figures from opposite sides of the line acknowledge each other at all, unless it’s over an incredible photo-op or as one drags a filthy squeegee over the windshield of the other’s car. Any Kindred with half a brain will be aware of this sociological divide, but only the wisest Kindred know better than to limit her options. Much to the surprise (and chagrin) of both Kindred and kine blue-bloods, you’ll find

distinct advantages to patronizing both halves of modern culture, services the poor can offer that the rich never could. Influence in society must come from both sides if you want to build a truly stable base of power; support yourself with only one, and you're much more likely to find yourself toppled.

Influence over mortal society, high and low, is a subtle thing. Of course, that applies to Kindred dabbling in everything, to one extent or another, but it's worth paying special attention to here. A Cainite with a contact in government can sometimes push decisions through intervening red tape. One with massive corporate influence usually has the leverage to demand or extort what she wants. A Kindred with connections to La Cosa Nostra — well, get in his way, and you may very well find yourself at the bottom of the river. But what about the Kindred whose focus is on the ebb and flow of mortal society, who rides the tides of fashion and fad? She simply doesn't have the muscle, the leverage, the power of her contemporaries.

Or so it seems. The truth is, influence in society is the more subtle side to the "harder" influences of corporate and government power. It is less direct, often less immediate, and may require more effort before you start to see some returns. Yet, like the supernatural Kindred gifts of charisma, it often proves advantageous in the long run, and often leaves behind a much smaller trail of irate allies and angry pawns. The rising politician who jumps when you clap because you've got documented proof that he cheated the IRS for ten years running may do as you ask, but he's not going to be happy about it, and he's likely to stick a knife (figuratively or literally) in your back the moment it's turned. The one who doesn't mind doing you an occasional favor because he enjoys your parties and because you've given generously to his campaign fund may not go quite as far out on a limb for you, but he's also not actively looking for a way to push you over the edge.

The biggest problem with gathering this sort of influence is that you haven't got a convenient starting point. There is no CEO of the city's wealthy, no governing board of the poverty-stricken. The old adage "It takes money to make money" certainly applies to society's upper crust; if you haven't already got a fortune, or at least a name that was once connected with such a fortune, you're likely to find the doors of those in power extremely difficult to open. At the opposite end of the spectrum, it's relatively easy to develop individual contacts within the dregs of society — but while having the homeless fellow who lives under the overpass at the Commerce Street exit beholden to you might prove useful, it's not likely to make it any easier for you to expand your influence.

But hey, if it was easy, anyone could do it.

What follows is a brief primer on the top and the bottom, the upper echelons and lowest depths of the

Western world's social strata. How to get yourself involved, what these people are (and are not) good for, and which other Kindred you'll most likely have to deal with once you're there — basically, everything a hungry young Kindred needs to make his mark in society. Be careful, though; these are the masses — both poor and unwashed, and coifed and perfumed — of humanity. Some of the jockeying for status is brutal enough to make even the harpies wince, and just because they don't have your fangs doesn't mean they won't bite.

STORYTELLERS TAKE HEED!

We certainly don't want to discourage you from making full use of the ideas presented in this chapter, but you should be aware that, in many ways, properly running a story about gaining influence in society is more difficult than running other sorts of political chronicles. Strings can be pulled in government, in the corporate sector and on the streets. This is not so amid the labyrinthine culture-within-a-culture that is so much a part of society itself (and high society in particular). Everything is give-and-take, favors exchanged and reputations built and ruined. A character should never be able to call up a contact among the city's rich and powerful and "have something done." It's not like owning your own company or your own senator — you're asking for help, not calling the shots. Everything is either a favor granted or a favor repaid.

At its basic level, it's almost as if your players' characters were part of a second political scene not unlike the game of prestaton played by the Camarilla Kindred. They may not call them boons, and you're unlikely to find yourself staked and left for the sun if you fail to honor the rules of the game, but it's still roughly analogous. Ultimately, it means more work for the Storyteller and the players both. Someone needs to keep track of who owes who, of what favors have been called in and which are still looming. Additionally, the Storyteller really needs to know exactly who the characters can call on. Do they know someone who's got the contacts (and more importantly, the leverage) at city hall to have that apartment building condemned? Do they know someone who's got enough pull to procure that strange Nosferatu the sold-out opera tickets she's demanded in exchange for her information?

It can be a blast, playing a game that involves this sort of web of favors involving mortals, and not just among the Kindred. But be aware of what it entails before you take it on. If you don't think you're up to it, have your players stick with the more direct forms of societal influence.

HIGH SOCIETY

To the “have-nots,” who primarily view the lives (and unlives) of the “haves” through the filth-encrusted lens of Hollywood and television, high society is a world of pure privilege. Money carpets the halls, garages spontaneously generate gas-guzzling luxury cars, vintage champagne and the finest vitae pour forth from gilded kitchen faucets. Celebrities schmooze with politicians, the idle rich with the movers and shakers of civilization, and no one has a care in the world, because they’re all loaded enough to bribe even the mosquitoes to go pester someone else.

That, of course, is what they want you to think. The power of society’s darlings isn’t actually built on money, though heaps of dollars certainly don’t hurt matters any. The truth is that a good chunk of their power is entirely illusory. They’re only powerful as long as the little people (that would be you and me, if you haven’t gotten that yet) *think* they’re powerful.

And since so much of what makes them who — and what — they are is based on reputation, the parties and gatherings these people throw are rife with enough character assassins and cordial venom to shame the bitchiest of Toreador.

Still want to get yourself tangled up in this school of social piranha? Then pay attention; they’re damned useful people, if you can survive your first introduction into the swarm.

UP THE LADDER

So far, all you’ve seen is the downside to high society, how hard it is to get involved, how vicious a playing field it is, how many powerful Kindred — many of whom are elders — have arrived before you. It’s enough to make even the most stubborn neonate start to think that her efforts are better directed elsewhere.

Don’t. For those tenacious enough to pull this off, the rewards are commensurate with the exertions required to get there. What follows are only a select few suggestions as to what uses you can put these people to; I’m sure a few minutes of thought on your part will produce a lot more, but these should start the ball rolling.

Wealth

In a word, naturally. They say that in America, for instance, five percent of the population controls 95 percent of the wealth. It’s that lucky five percent you’re dealing with now, and expect plenty of that wealth to go around. This isn’t nearly so important to those lucky Kindred among us who’ve already got bank accounts so big they need an extra deposit slip to handle all the zeroes. But for those of us who aren’t



UNLIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS

The reason, one would assume, that you want to assert yourself among the city's high-and-mighty is because that's where the power lies. You were probably smart enough to figure this next part out anyway, but here it is: You ain't the only one to hit on this little idea, and many of them have been here a lot longer than you have. You think family dynasties like the Kennedys go back a ways? Imagine the sort of social standing you could have if you'd personally been around longer than any single one of those familial tribes.

First and foremost, clawing their way to the pinnacle of the cultural heap with bile-coated fangs and manicured talons, you've got the Toreador. These social butterflies have more long-term mortal contact than just about any other clan (except maybe the Brujah), and the good opinion of the mortal herds around them is quite nearly as important to them as are the opinions of the Kindred. Of all the clans, the Toreador are the most likely to interject themselves into the posh milieu of the upper crust just because they want to, rather than out of any attempt to gain something out of it. Of course, if you take that to mean that they won't use their contacts and leverage to the fullest, you deserve whatever they do to you.

Those self-proclaimed rulers, the mighty and exalted Ventrue, are the runners-up. Nearly as great a presence in high society as the Toreador, the Blue Bloods are, by and large, a bit more traditional in their endeavors. That means they usually try to ingratiate themselves with the rich and famous because they've got something to gain from it, and not due to any lingering need to fit in with the upper classes. And the Brujah are up there, too. Most of those Licks who still refuse to see the Rabble as anything more than leather-clad bikers are stunned to see them hobnobbing with the best of them, but it happens. Happens frequently, in fact. Rebel doesn't mean stupid or illiterate, now, does it?

You're not going to see much of the Black Hand in this area. Even those Sabbat who get off on playing with their food tend to prefer the more direct approach. Since high society is all about exchanging favors and who you know, it's more the elder Lasombra's *métier*, as well as a few of the less twisted Tzimisce and the Toreador *antitribu*. Which doesn't mean that you're not going to find non-Camarilla Licks playing at being Jay Gatsby. The Giovanni circulate through these crowds like extras out of *Dangerous Liaisons*. The Followers of Set have long since discovered that people with more money than God tend to get bored very quickly, and there's nothing those Serpents like better than rich, jaded boredom. It's like a Christmas present to them, and a growing number of them are picking at the ribbons.

staggering under the weight of our wallets, this is an excellent source of funds.

Of course, they're not just going to give you money. Sure, most of you probably have ways to encourage compliance, but if you really think you can just Dominate the Trump into giving you a million-dollar check, I dare you to go try it and see how long it takes to come back and bite you on the ass.

Still, you can accomplish this. If you're working on bringing a young company off the ground, high society is a great place to go trolling for capital. Your ideas don't even have to be all that good, so long as they *sound* good. Convince the rich old lady that you've got a feasible — and profitable — idea for the "next big thing," you can probably milk her for a hefty chunk of change before her lawyers and accountants manage to reign her in. Hell, three years ago, you could just walk into a room full of tuxedos and whisper "Internet" and they'd throw handfuls of cash at you. Of course, you'll want to actually have a start-up in the works. Nothing puts a crimp in a Kindred's unlifestyle than daylight courtroom appearances on fraud charges, and if you've been feeding the nice old lady nothing

but bullshit, her lawyers are going to find that out. They can haul your ass in for conning her, but they can't sue you because she made a dumb decision. Fine line, don't cross; you know the drill by now.

What if you're an artist? The social clans love this one. The nights of nobility patronizing the gifted painter or lyrical poet are still upon us, and the truly talented (or magnetic) artisan may still be fortunate enough to find somebody with delusions of taste and too much money. Then again, you may truly be worthy of patronage. That, however, is a matter of taste I'll leave for you to quibble about yourselves.

And then, of course, there's the *Pretty Woman* method. Not that I recommend you going around subjecting every rich man, woman and child in sight to the blood bond (especially since the odds are pretty good that one of them is already in thrall to someone nastier than you are), but the occasional judicious use of artificial affection seriously loosens the purse strings.

Every single one of these techniques could easily benefit from a selective use of Presence. In fact, this is exactly what I was talking about earlier, with my "Presence — subtle, Dominate — sledgehammer" spiel.

Dominance leaves people with questions. "Why did I just write her that check?", "Why can't I remember anything about last night?", "Why on earth did I let him *do* that to me in front of the guests?" Bad news. All they're going to remember with Presence, though, is that they liked you, they really liked you. And that just makes it easier for you to convince them to give you what you want.

Make sure that you're very careful with whatever wealth you do glean from the upper classes this way. Always remember that your source could dry up at any moment — damn those accountants and their advice, anyway — and don't squander what you've managed to gather.

Connections

This, more than wealth, is the most common reason for Kindred interest in high society. Mortals — and Kindred, too, but let's not get into that — are attracted to money. It's like a pheromone. And powerful people feel the attraction all the stronger, since they need money to keep themselves powerful.

Put more simply: Rich people know powerful people.

It's very much a "jack of all trades, master of none" situation. No, you're not going to be able to tell Senator What's-Her-Name to do what you want, *now*, the way you could if you had influence over her personally. You won't be able to have ownership of that lot transferred into your ghoul's name as quickly as you could if you had your fingers in City Hall. You can't put the word out that the law firm of Grant and Cleburne must lose their current case.

On the other hand, while you may not have the same degree of influence as a Kindred who's devoted his attention to a specific arena, you've got a much wider field to play with. Once you've made it big with the jetsetters, odds are pretty good that various people who run in your social circles will have some amount of clout in all these areas. The senator may not know you from a hole in the wall, but if you spend an evening a week drinking cocktails (so to speak) with her largest campaign contributor and celebrity spokesman, you can certainly get a request onto her desk. And you may not "own" the chairman of Crichton-Lawler, but you attended his daughter's coming-out party. You're asking your contacts to ask favors of their contacts, so you'll certainly owe them a favor in exchange; but the job's still getting done, isn't it?

It's precisely because of this wide range of influence provided by society's upper crust that this is often a stepping stone to larger things. It's far easier to extend your reach into other arenas — acquiring your own corporation, for instance, or suborning a local city official — from a position in high society than it is when you're still a no-name Lick off the streets. Gossip in the

world of the rich is a wonderful thing; these are the people who hear that the councilwoman's stepping out on her husband or that the VP of marketing has a 2,000-dollar-a-day habit. They might be tempted to squander such tidbits in a simple war of prestige; you, of course, know how to make far more productive use out of them.

Protection

The simple fact is, for all that most governments claim that the laws apply to everyone equally, some people can buy more equality than others. Sure, the IRS and the DEA need to take down a fat cat every now and again, just to keep the plebes happy, but by and large law enforcement is more concerned with the street-level dealers and random car-jackings than with the sins of the modern aristocracy. The words of the day — and the night — are status quo.

This, then, is the best place to be when things go south. No, you still don't want to leave a trail — of paper or of bodies — leading right to your door. Hungry as the media are for headlines, not even the most corrupt cop can ignore something that obvious, no matter who the suspect in question may be. Most of the time, though, the police aren't going to pursue a line of inquiry that may put them in trouble with the powers that be.

Even more to the point, if you've thoroughly enmeshed yourself in a web of favors, the rest of the city's elite aren't going to want to see you get taken down, either by the police in a criminal matter or by an up-and-coming rival in their own midst. Those who owe you will hope to repay their debt by standing by you; those whom you owe will realize that you can't repay them from jail, poverty or whatever the consequences of this particular matter may be. The combined whims of two dozen power brokers make one hell of a safety net.

Celebrity

Most of the Damned hope that Andy Warhol was wrong. Most of us don't want fifteen *seconds* of fame, much less our allotted fifteen minutes. There's nothing (most) blood-sucking night-creatures fear so much as the spotlight. But fame has its advantages, and if we can't claim them for ourselves, the next best thing is to frequent the company of those who can.

Celebrities meet people, people who even the rest of the rich folks can't approach. They speak for charitable organizations, for politicians and for pet causes — and that means they can introduce you, if you ask nicely. Being so-and-so's friend can be almost as useful as actually being so-and-so, and it doesn't warrant your face in the tabloids.

Besides, celebrities often have fans and groupies flocking around them, and some few of them might just be funneled into a personal herd if you have the

presence (or Presence) to draw their attention away from their original infatuation. And no one will question them hanging out with you, since you hang out with their favorite celebrity. Convenient, no?

Manipulating Trends

I'm sure you've noticed by now how unimaginably stupid most trends seem to those who aren't caught up in them. Who cares what name's printed on the tag on your underwear? What the hell use do you have for an SUV? And for the love of God, why would you want to be so damn skinny you look more like a corpse than most of the undead? And yet, these things become popular somehow, don't they?

It's that whole illusory power thing. Boil it down, you're left with this: People do stuff to be more like celebrities and rich people because they think they're supposed to want to be like celebrities and rich people. It's a case of envy beating up common sense, making it eat dirt and go stand in the corner. You care who designed your clothes because you want to be like the other people who wear his gear. You drive an SUV because all the other successful people drive SUVs. And you want to weigh in at 80 pounds and wear a size 0 dress because that's what Callista Flockhart and Sarah Michelle Gellar weigh, and they're richer than you, more successful than you, and probably get more ass than you do.

Put yourself in the proper place among the celebrities and well-to-do, and you can help direct these things. Something becomes popular because this pop star, that actor and some other popular politician are doing it. Even if you yourself don't have the fame to make a new fashion or activity the "in thing" — and considering your nocturnal unlifestyle and liquid diet, it's probably best that you aren't all that famous — any Kindred active in high society undoubtedly knows people who are. Convince them to do it, and you'll soon have a sizable proportion of the kine herds following suit.

All of this begs the question, though, as to why you'd want to do this. That one, I can't much help you with. I don't own a fashion empire, or the local Ford assembly line, or have a particular fondness for that bright orange that was all the rage last summer. If I did, though, I could certainly see why I'd want to pull stunts of this sort, and you've probably got interests that I don't. Hell, if nothing else, maybe you could reinvigorate the goth movement. Damn, but those people made it easy to feed.

Interestingly, for all that this seems to just scream "Toreador," the Ventrue are most frequent trend-manipulators. Enough of them have feeding requirements that are impacted by fashion and fad to make this a most attractive option for the Blue Bloods.

Reputation as Tool and Weapon

This is the harpies' game, pure and simple. The war of words. Be careful here. Attempting to destroy someone like this and failing can be just as damaging as if they'd launched a successful attack on you.

Remember what I said about gossip? The information picked up in the swirl of "cultured" conversation doesn't have to be used just for the sake of blackmail or extortion. Sometimes you just want to see somebody crushed, pure and simple. This'll do it almost as fast as a Potence-driven bludgeon, and it leaves less of a mess. Because the movers of society are so dependent on their reputation with the teeming masses to maintain their power, they're incredibly sensitive to reputation within their own ranks as well. It's expected that those in power have a rather sizable stockpile of skeletons in the closet — but it simply doesn't do to let the specifics out. It's gauche.

Depending on the precise makeup of the high society around you, it could be any little thing that brings a rival's reputation crashing down around his ears. Certainly revealing a penchant for pedophilia or heavy criminal contacts would do the trick. Some of the "elite" are so sensitive to status, though, that the discovery that a rival's fortune is newly made in electronics, rather than dating back generations, or that he invested in a company that folded ahead of schedule are also enough to shred his reputation past the point of repair. Tonights aristocracy don't care about value and they don't care about ability; it's all about appearance, their own little private Masquerade. Someone who looks bad, is bad. Ain't reputation a bitch!

And the best thing about all this is that a bad reputation is a socially transmitted disease. Destroy someone's rep, and their entire support group's going to quietly (or not so quietly) dry up and disappear. No one wants to be associated with the outcast for fear of being condemned right along with him. No one's going to help him, do him any favors or even be caught dead (or undead) speaking with him. I can think of no quicker way to make a society darling *persona non grata* in the halls of power.

The flip side to this, of course, is that if you can garner yourself a good reputation, you'll find a lot more people will go out of their way to help you. Favor rubs off almost as easily as disfavor, after all, and a rising star's coattails are always big enough for one more rider.

DO YOU HAVE AN INVITATION?

The catch — you knew there was a catch, didn't you? — is making it past the doorman (literally as well as figuratively). These people don't just open their homes to some guy off the street. If you're rich and

famous, you can probably make enough of a splash to earn their attention by throwing a few big bashes or contributing to a few pet causes — but then, if you're rich and famous, odds are pretty good you're already a part of this incestuous little society, or at least in touch with those who are. Maybe they haven't already opened their door to you, but at least they haven't raised the bridge and released the hounds.

Maybe you can attract society's notice with a display of some kind, sort of like the artist I mentioned earlier. But let's be realistic, okay? Most of us can't tell Shakespeare from the back of a cereal box, and we think Rembrandt is a kind of toothpaste. The vast majority of people (to say nothing of Kindred) lack anything in the way of the artistic skill it would take to have our work shown anywhere other than our parents' refrigerator.

You might — and this is an awfully big "might" — be able to start small and work your way up. Try to make some sort of impact in a pet charity of theirs. Get close to a servant or an employee. Hell, maybe see if you can't work for them in some capacity; it's demeaning, yeah, but it puts you in proximity. The problem with this method is that it takes forever, and that's assuming it works at all. So many of them have trained themselves never to notice the "help" that you could probably drink their entire household staff dry in front of them and still remain unseen.

That's an exaggeration.

As much as I hate to encourage this sort of thing, this situation may best be solved by more heavy-handed (that means "Discipline-oriented," for the subtlety-impaired among you) tactics. The trick is to have the chance to mingle with these people, to get them to notice you, to think of you as part of their circle. If that means you have to give the doorman an extra "nudge" to let you in, then that's what you've got to do. Presence is your friend here; Dominating these people can lead to all sorts of problems, though you should be able to get away with it occasionally if you're discreet. Once you're in, you're probably all right; these people put great trust in their lackeys. If you got past the tuxedo-clad bruiser at the door, obviously you're supposed to be there, so no one's going to question you as long as you took pains to look the part. Then it's just a matter of turning on the charm — be it natural or otherwise — and making sure the host knows who you are and wants to see you again.

Oh, a quick word of warning. The genteel folk don't gather in small numbers. Parties, charity events, political dinners — they all involve lots and lots of kine in an enclosed space. Feed before you go. One poorly timed frenzy can ruin your whole evening.

SOME THINGS MONEY CAN'T BUY

So what if you're rich and not famous? Merely having money — unless you're talking about enough to buy a handful of undeveloped nations — isn't enough to get you noticed. A lot of the new breed of rich person made her millions off Internet start-ups and high-tech companies, industries that the old guard just doesn't respect yet. Money's a useful tool for attracting the attention of high society, but you still have to do something with it.

Your best bet is to finance something. Sure, you could open a nightclub or a restaurant, but while those are probably going to endear you to the lower classes, they aren't generally the sort of places that draw accolades from the modern aristocracy.

Art galleries are always good options. Make sure you've got some good stuff to show — the more *avant-garde* the better — and arrange (via Presence and bribes, if you must) for some favorable word of mouth. If your gallery has any luck in becoming the place to see and be seen, even if it's only for a short while, you've hooked at least a segment of the upper class. Granted, the gallery's probably going to operate at a loss — most of those places do, even considering the sorts of people they attract — but if the suits are fighting to get in so they can schmooze with the right people, it's serving its purpose just fine.

Charities are another safe bet. You don't have to start your own, though you'll find all sorts of advantages to doing so if that's really an option. Just find out which ones are popular right now and let it be known that you give generously. Even if the mere fact that you've got a common interest with the well-to-do doesn't draw their eyes, you'll certainly be invited to all the organization's dinners and events. Once you're there, all you've got to do is start shaking the right hands and parroting the right catchphrases.

And, of course, if you happen to be in a position to pull strings with a major corporation or government office, you can always make your introductions by doing someone a favor. But since the majority of you haven't reached that stage of influence in any given arena, that's probably not a viable option. Write it down on your "to do" list, though.

THE DIRECT APPROACH

Just because you've followed my advice and had your first taste of influence over the gentility doesn't mean you can just sit back and wait for the favors to come pouring in. This is about appearances, remember? That means you've got to keep those appearances up. Attend the theater and the opera. Show your face at various balls and dinners. Put in appearances at parties. Be a part of the scene. This is an entirely social game you're playing. If that's not your thing, you probably haven't made it this far anyway, but it still bears repeating: If you're not absolutely secure in your ability to blend in, to stay in control, to maintain the Masquerade, then this undertaking isn't for you. Go shoot at some Sabbath or something; you'll be killed just as quickly, but at least you won't take the rest of us down with you.

Involving yourself in high society is probably something that you want to do in person, rather than working through ghouls and proxies. This is a very personal-contact-oriented arena. It doesn't do you any good to have a prized ghoul accumulate a dozen favors from the wealthy and powerful, only to lose the ghoul in a car accident or due to a misunderstanding with the local anarchists. As difficult as it is to make an impact in the upper class — especially without the benefits of Presence, which most ghouls are unlikely to possess — you've really got all your eggs in one very fragile basket if you go this route.

This is not to say that there aren't some hefty difficulties to be worked around if you involve yourself directly. The most obvious — and potentially the most destructive — is that bothersome thing called daylight. Not every function you'll be invited to is going to begin after sunset. The first or second such invite can be regretfully declined without hassle; by the time you've reached your seventh or eighth, you're going to start drawing some odds looks unless you've got a brilliantly polished cover story.

Never forget that these people are powerful. Maybe not as much as they think they are, and maybe not as compared to the movers and shakers among the Kindred, but nevertheless, this isn't a segment of civilization that you want upset at you. By directly involving yourself in their world, you run the risk of suffering the full brunt of the backlash should anyone ever turn these techniques around on you, stripping you of your reputation and status. It might seem safer, on the surface, to let a ghoul take the risk, since your ghouls are by definition more expendable than you are. Still, while you may prefer not to take the risks yourself, the odds are good that your ghoul's never going to attain the power you crave at all, and that does you no good whatsoever.

LOW SOCIETY

Is there such a term as "low society?" Screw it; there is now.

Low society is not precisely the exact opposite of high society. It doesn't refer merely to the poverty-stricken, junkies and crack heads, though these walking snacks are certainly included in the definition. Perhaps a better definition would be the "common folk." Not necessarily those who are starving, but simply those who don't have enough to ever approach the world of the rich and powerful.

Yes, it includes the homeless — but also those who run the shelters. Those living in crack-house apartments and middle-class housing. Movie theaters and pool halls, truckers and soccer moms. Everybody, in essence, who's utterly unimportant.

Sound useless, don't they? You let the Ventrue, the Toreador and all the others keep right on thinking that. Truth is, the people at the bottom rung can do things for you that those clinging to the top cannot.

First off, there's a damn sight more of these people. When your two categories are "disgustingly rich" and "everyone else," it doesn't take a calculator to figure out which side of the line the largest part of the population sits on. Yet there are fewer people to notice when Joe Normal starts acting strange — or vanishes entirely — or at least fewer people with the power to do anything about it.

Keeping that in mind, don't underestimate the power of the common folk. That's what your rivals are probably doing, and that's why you've got the advantage — if you know how to grab it.

THE WORKING CLASS

What do you do with them, then? After all, we've pretty much defined low society as meaning any and all people who don't have access to power or wealth. Seems like we've classified them right out of any modicum of use, doesn't it?

Not at all. Everybody's good for something, so long as you know how to take advantage of them. I'll give you a few suggestions here — but considering that you can probably figure out a new and interesting use for almost every mortal you meet, this should be considered a jumping-off point at most.

Herd

Yeah, you hear all about those elders having their own private herds of kine, just waiting to get munched on at the Kindred's whim, don't you? Makes you downright envious as you creep your way through the Rack or spend tedious hours seducing a likely looking (and moderately intoxicated) sorority girl, doesn't it?