



Kickstarter Manuscript Preview #2A:
Kindred Religions –
The Ashfinders

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Kindred Religions

“Every methuselah is capable of shepherding a flock of devotees, convincing them of miracles of the Blood, and forcing them to supplicate before an almighty leader. Every methuselah is a god just waiting to take on the title.”

— Shrug, Nosferatu Mistress of Cardiff

Undeath causes many a crisis of faith. The devout Christian might cease to believe in the sanctity of life and the forgiveness of God Almighty. The Muslim might fail to reconcile their own experience with the Qur'an's teachings on death as a long night of sleep, where upon dying, the individual immediately discovers their destiny in heaven or hell. The Hindu waits for their atman to be reborn in a new body, only to find themselves locked in their own damned, unliving shell.

It is enough to drive one away from faith entirely, and yet, vampires discover new beliefs. There will always be great mysteries in the world, and faith has provided millions, perhaps billions of humans with answers, and comfort where there are no answers to be found.

Vampirism is a terrifying state in which to find oneself. It's only natural that Kindred flock together to find meaning, purpose, and sometimes, salvation in communal struggle. Sometimes it comes in service to a higher power, other times it comes through examining the Beast within, and rarely, it leads to transcendence beyond a vampire's base instincts.

The religions presented in this chapter all exist within the World of Darkness, with some as prominent vehicles of vampire faith, and others merely existing on the fringes of Kindred society. In your chronicle, these might act as backgrounds, support networks, the sources of powerful Mawlas, or the font from which to draw horrifying antagonists.

The Ashfinders

“We are one click away from becoming the next step in Cainite evolution. One share from enlightenment. One algorithm away from becoming gods. This is our path, to share and understand that which has come before us.”

— Amber Freeman, Duskborn Influencer and Yogi of the Cinder Institute

The Ashfinders are a new philosophical movement within the tangled web of Kindred religious observances. These Yogis are born from the literal ashes of the ongoing Gehenna War, the cult built around the understanding that there may be ways other than diablerie to evolve a Duskborn's powers. The Ashfinders and their wider conglomerate — the Cinder Institute — possess a multi-faceted dogma, but it boils down to one part ecstatic bacchanalian cult, one part data-mining firm, and a healthy scorn for vampire society. Seen as the “other” by mainstream Kindred, Ashfinders have come to terms with this separation by reveling in life's greatest pleasures and showing off with the use of social media. While this bravado is tacky to some, by enjoying existence, or some semblance of it, Ashfinders remind themselves of what they lose if they give themselves to the Beast. It is also a way to tell the Camarilla to “fuck off, the Duskborn are here to stay.”

Dust to Dust

The Ashfinder movement is reactionary, built from a quest for survival and a disillusionment with political factions such as the genocidal Camarilla, who have made no secret of their hunt for thin-bloods. While there are those Kindred who sympathize with the plight of the thin-bloods, this cult is now seen as an open threat to vampiric society. The cult counts few true

Kindred among its membership, though the majority of the “full-blooded” Kindred who support them have Anarch tendencies. One of the Kindred who mentored the early members of this cult was the Tremere Dr. Mortius (see p. XX), who has been instrumental in providing information and thaumaturgical ability to the Duskborn in exchange for small portions of Ashe — a drug created from vampire remains — for his own personal experiments.

Donning the mask of millennial high society, the cultists portray themselves as ambitious revelers enjoying the peak of the nightlife scene while searching for enlightenment. The hustle of life and unlife blend together into a perfectly edited Instagram photo. This hides the underlying fractious after-effects of Ashe use and the “fake it ‘til you make it” mentality which drives the religion forward. Donning loose forms of organization, the Ashfinders are a conglomeration of influencer culture, New Age philosophy, and the quest for Golconda through the deliberate and systematic annihilation of as many Kindred elders as possible.

While diablerie is a sure-fire way of becoming notorious among the Damned, these thin-bloods have discovered a way to synthesize necromantic power, thin-blood alchemy, Thaumaturgy, and the ashes of dead Kindred to ingest the shattered elements of the Beast. This drug — known on the street as Ashe — is consumed any way the Duskborn prefers, whether eaten, injected, snorted, or rubbed into an area rich in blood vessels. Doing so creates a bond with the memories and powers of the dead. This way, thin-bloods continue to possess the benefits of walking between the two worlds without having to completely compromise their morality.

The Ashfinders’ agenda is an incredible threat to the Camarilla and cults who venerate the ancestors. The knowledge and pervasive nature of this new party drug alarms many within Kindred society, especially as it’s apparent Ashe has no effect on non-Duskborn. It is highly addictive and has horrifying consequences if taken in excess. The Ashfinders are flooding the party scene in Chicago, Ibiza, Bangkok, and supposedly elsewhere with their new drug, and offering the recipe to anyone bold enough to ask. The drugs they pass around may not even be Ashe, but merely marketed under that name to drum up excitement and enticement. The real drug is the physical embodiment of a culture of sharing as it blossoms into a perfect death spiral. Ashe is sharing the memories, abilities, and Disciplines of dead Kindred, all blended into a psychedelic euphoria seldom seen among vampires. There are even rumors certain special batches cause the Hunger to slip away for brief moments of time. The ritual to create the substance itself is incredibly dangerous and can cause lasting consequences for both the creator and the partygoer who eventually imbibes the drug.

The use of Ashe has generated some unintended side effects in its users. Some Ashfinders find their withdrawals completely consuming them, and the after-effects drive many to kill vampires so they can obtain their next fix.

Are Millennials Killing Kindred Elders?

On its surface, the Ashfinder movement provides a communal and welcoming space for any thin-blood who chafes under the pressure of vampire politics. Its membership cultivates a deliberate marketing and social media campaign to propose and propagate centering activities such as meditation, yoga, esoteric classes, and other forms of New-Age prosperity practice among Duskborn. These sessions are also offered to the public, using the kine as a sort of barrier against any bands of hunters looking to harm the thin-bloods. Through the fashioning of these carefully crafted communities, the Cinder Institute was built. On the backs of donations and delicate social engineering, the cult built a new corporate center within the Hive of the Chicago financial district. Hiding in plain sight, the Institute provides a multitude of philanthropic and spiritual services for the Kindred and kine of Chicago. This hub has

satellite studios all over the greater Chicagoland area and has recently branched out to build a consulting service wherein “meditative gurus” can use video conferencing platforms to give sessions to those willing to foot the cost.

The Cinder Institute is a fantastic front, forged in the fires of social media presence and club scene culture, and one the Camarilla would balk at. While these Kindred and kine find store-front enlightenment from the teachings of New Age spirituality, they routinely proceed to throw afterparties in nightclubs and lofts. The locations of their budding “guru” network are very specific, with connections to the cities of Bangkok and the island of Ibiza, both known for their vibrant nightlife. The cult’s public face lures in disenfranchised thin-bloods, who sample the drugs, and then join the cult. They then go on to advertise their experiences in clubs, retreats, and times spent meditating — not referencing the drug, naturally — to lure further adherents to the cult. The cycle goes on and on, using social media marketing as a highly efficient cult-building tool.

The endless party lifestyle this perpetuates does nothing but bolster the fledgling Golconda cult. People want to feel good about themselves, and what better way than to pair wellness of body and soul with a decadent social gathering.

With the boom of Ashe and the demand for the substance growing, the cult’s Tremere sponsor, Dr. Mortius, considers how best to farm Kindred “humanely” for the drug’s creation. While the potency of the substance is dependent upon the age of the vampire from whom it was synthesized, Mortius has discovered the memories of the vampire can still be transferred over to the drug user and provide the same sense of fleeting joy, no matter the age of the drug’s Kindred of origin. With the Gehenna War ongoing, the amount of raw materials coming in from battlefields has not diminished, as the thin-bloods and Mortius use agents on the front lines to discreetly harvest remains for shipping back to more lucrative market sites. With social media’s tools at hand, the ability to hound a vampire into fleeing their haven is also an option the younger members of the cult have grown to enjoy.

What exactly is an Influencer?

Influencers are social media personalities who wield enormous social clout over their followers on whatever platform they prefer. Some of these people choose to put their lives on display for whoever wishes to watch, promoting whatever they wish, and go on to create a cult of personality around themselves. They may also offer “advice” on subjects, often amounting to nothing more than product pitches. This strange voyeurism, in turn, provides intense political, social, and economic force when an influencer’s followers are told to consume, destroy, or act in a certain capacity. This form of marketing presents a face to potential consumers and builds a “relationship” much as we see in traditional sales. Products and beliefs an influencer may recommend, events they may attend, even things they wear may become overnight successes or failures at the whim of these mini-celebrities. This exchange humanizes the consumerism involved, creating deep devotion within their own small cults of personality.

Within the context of the World of Darkness, these influencers function identically. If the influencer is a vampire, then the vampire might use their following to take part in the Jyhad and turn followers against or in favor of Kindred in their domain. Such activity should warrant a Blood Hunt in Camarilla domains, but many Princes and Sheriffs are too long in the tooth to even understand the influencer phenomenon. One set of groups who do keep a close eye on this online behavior are Second Inquisition bodies such as

FIRSTLIGHT. For thin-bloods, influencer culture is a way to garner influence under the radar of the Camarilla's watchful eyes. For the Inquisition, it's a fine way to identify a city's Kindred as the online vampires talk about their friends and rivals. For now, the Cinder Institute seems to be a legitimate front for New Age businesses and party lifestyles. The Inquisition has yet to realize vampires are behind it.

Data Mining

At the core of the philosophy, the use of Ashe is a sacrament toward the goal of enlightenment. By "sharing" the memories of the dead, Ashfinders might discover truths about their existence, their curse, and their possible powers. These mental walkabouts are often taken in meditative places of relaxation, with stronger doses of the drug. Trip-sitters are present to record the vampires' meditations and report them more widely within the Cinder Institute. These memories never leave the Kindred, causing occasional dysphoria within many of the Ashfinders, making them question or lose who they really are after extended use. Yet cult members continue to use the substance, as the memories gained are of insurmountable worth. To be able to find and use lost resources or contacts, or to locate lost fortunes or acquire knowledge built over centuries, is a short-cut for which these thin-bloods willingly make the sacrifice.

Mortius sits at the head of the Cinder Institute, monitoring the results gleaned from Ashe use. He finds that the cultivation of Ashe becomes simpler with time, and the data synthesized from the experiment compounds upon itself. Mortius is in the fortunate position of getting to study thin-blood activity as much as he wishes, being seen as a benevolent godfather by many of the Duskborn, while acting as the puppetmaster behind an entire cult. As for Golconda, his theories weave back and forth. The amassing of knowledge at such a scale is any Tremere's dream, and his allegiance to House Ipsissimus (see **Anarch**, p. 170) wavers as he finds more power at his fingertips via the Ashfinders than the New-Age House could ever provide. Practically at will, he can witness the range of human and Kindred existence, though he can't experience it himself. What he questions now, however, is why his test subjects keep seeing shadows move out of the corners of their eyes, and why there are areas in his lab that fill him with seething dread. It seems the ghosts of the dead blame him directly for the desecration of their remains.

Cinder Institute: Ibiza

One of the centers of power for the Ashfinders exists on the island of Ibiza, where several coteries of vampires dedicated to this cult sample the blood of the thousands of tourists who pass through the clubs, beaches, and bars every year. In a strangely seasonal cycle, the Ashfinders are active in the domain between the months of May and October, but sink into torpor or fly to Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, or Morocco for the other months of the year. Ibiza's tourist trade drops with the weather, therefore the vampires move in and out too.

The cult has no formal hierarchy, hasn't appointed a Prince or Baron over the island, and has yet to organize hunting territories or Elysia. They're fiercely territorial over the island's south coast, where in places like Platja d'en Bossa they receive shipments of Ashe from domains on either side of the Mediterranean and mix them up with the blood of intoxicated kine to create exciting cocktails.

Despite the length of time Ibiza has been a party venue, few vampires took advantage of its throng of drunk, often doped-up mortals until the Cinder Institute set up on the island. Now that they're there, it's proving difficult to make room for the Ashfinders during their feeding

seasons, which has led to consternation and conflict between them and the Kindred who do make Ibiza a permanent residence. Many suspect a war might be brewing. It's likely the Ashfinders will seize the island in its entirety in the coming months, acting as an invitation for fledglings wanting to embrace an unlife of thrills and no consequences, and for mercenary Kindred looking to profit from serving Ibiza's non-Ashfinder vampires in driving the cult off the island.

Ashfinder Convictions

The Ashfinders are a new cult, with some Convictions handed down from the mind of Mortius in the Cinder Institute, others passed on by yogis and gurus within the ranks of Ashe-takers. Some of these common Convictions include:

- **Always sample new experiences on offer**

The Ashfinders are libertines and new experiences are a part of the package that comes with taking Ashe.

- **Never withhold Ashe from others who wish to sample it**

Experience and sensation are to be shared. Solitary euphoria is a hollow high.

- **Never allow someone to silence you**

The Cinder Institute requires the spread of its word to draw new adherents and new experiences. Silence is a method of the Camarilla.

- **Always listen to those of greater experience**

Wisdom can be gained from those of greater age and experience. One doesn't have to believe or emulate every word and action, but listening is mandatory.

- **Always know where your next fix is coming from**

Ashe isn't to be sampled once and forgotten: it's a way of life. Only a fool takes the drug and fails to take account of their forthcoming supply.

- **Never allow the kine to realize your undead nature**

Though the Cinder Institute advocates the spread of their word, they are very specific that Ashfinders must keep their vampiric states a secret from mortal followers. As far as the kine are concerned, Ashe is just a new lab-grown drug that doesn't give them a buzz like it does to you.

Perspectives

Anarchs: *Our closest allies of the "full-blooded" variety exist in this sect, but they'll never understand what it is to go through existence half-formed, impotent in the middle of a measuring contest. They might be sympathetic, but they've no idea what to do with us. I think if we fell completely on their mercy, they'd make a nice padded room for us to bounce around in and feel like they've done a good job.*

Camarilla: *For a whole bunch of reasons, some of them valid, they'd see the Cinder Institute wiped off the face of the Earth. The good news is they're so behind the times they don't even know what the Ashfinders are, what we do, and why they should be bothered.*

Church of Caine: *When we kill, it's for enlightenment and the betterment of Duskborn society. When they kill, it's because they think they're angels of murder, or some shit. They revere the act of bloodshed itself. At least for us it's a means to an end.*

Cult of Shalim: *Is there such a thing as pursuing enlightenment in the wrong direction? If so, this cult has it down pat.*

Mithraic Mysteries: *Some people call us a cult. This is a cult. They embrace the whole robes, ceremonial masks, chanting, and ranks nonsense. They know their god is dead too, so what's the point? Does it provide them comfort?*

Beast Shards

Beast Shards — or just Shards as they are known in Ashfinder circles — are mischievous and dangerous monsters who stalk in the wake of a creator or user of Ashe. Many Ashfinders see the destruction of their first Shard as a rite of passage, proving their mastery over their vampiric natures. Most Shards exist as a shadow version of their previous body, wisping and twitching in and out of existence. They possess no human features beyond a distorted body shape, and their actions are generally more feral than reasoned.

Shards hide themselves and stalk Kindred, possessing portions of their previous identities' Attributes and Skills. These may be modified as the Storyteller sees fit. Dr. James Mortius is researching whether an amalgamation of these entities could exist, or if they breed at all.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2; Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Composure 1; Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 5

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl (Claws) 4, Stealth 4, Survival 2; Animal Ken 3, Intimidation 3; Awareness 2

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Dominate 2, Obfuscate 3

General Difficulties: 4/1

Special: Beast Shards cannot communicate but they can create empathetic hotspots that cause humans around them to bend their Resonance to a Shard's will. A mortal who passes through this hotspot, rarely wider than 3 yards/meters squared, must make a Resolve + Composure roll (Difficulty 3) or the Beast Shard dictates the mortal's new Resonance, lasting until the end of the scene. Beast Shards attack with claws that deal +2 Superficial Health damage.

Amber Freeman (ThriveHive)

Epitaph: Ashfinder Yogi and Influence Junkie

Quote: *"If these elders wish to rip away our right to exist then we will pave a path unseen in this Jyhad. A path through these ancient crumbling monsters right into Golconda. One like, one retweet, one upvote can and will open this door. We will be left atop the embers of history, watching the sun come over the horizon. Something they will never do again."*

Clan: Thin-Blood

Mortal Days: Selfies and Brunch

Left much on her own throughout her formative years, Amber grew up like many millennials, cultivating a group of friends in chat groups and via social media. Filling the void her parents left was easy to her. Amber was a natural at the budding world of social networking and wielded it to her advantage. She began documenting her lifestyle and mentoring others in the discipline of yoga, despite having no formal training in the practice. Her charisma and perceived innocence attracted viewers and followers by the thousand, many of whom didn't emulate Amber, but just watched, and watched, and watched.

When she finally went away to the University of Chicago, Amber had already cracked over 300,000 followers on social media under the name "ThriveHive." Her subtle blend of "woke" style philosophy, Earth-based spirituality, and self-discipline earned her a place as a student

in the new Social Media Administration track in the Communications Department. Amber began receiving offers from “green” companies looking for her approval and patronage. With just a simple promo lasting for a month’s worth of videos, she made some start-ups into city-wide successes. The money she earned from these endorsements helped her balance out her feel-good lifestyle with a healthy dose of partying in and around Chicago’s Rack. Despite her New Age devotion to clean living, she was still a young woman enjoying the wild scenes of the city’s nightlife. A mixture of drugs and sex helped fuel her sense of control over both herself and her surroundings, and she felt comfortable in her balance between hedonism and purity. It was something she never had at home and surely was never going to give up.

At the end of her freshman year, she was recognized for her abilities and grades, receiving scholarships from both the Bishop Blake Educational Fund and The Stewart-Freeman Fund for Young Women. It was at the reception of this second award ceremony, one her parents promised to attend but ended up missing due to last-minute “events,” that she met her eventual Mawla, Naomi Stewart.

Kindred Nights: Selfies and Enlightenment

Naomi wanted to know if the young woman was the real deal or just another poseur using her power for her own benefit. The young woman impressed Naomi; her convictions and power were new, exciting, and focused. Naomi, in need of an assistant with such grace and control, took Amber on as an apprentice. Naomi had no desire to offer Amber the Embrace herself, but through a deal she brokered with a Caitiff named Tim Roche, who owed her a favor, Amber received the Embrace after a night of fine dining, drinking, and sex.

After Amber realized the truth of the “date” Naomi had arranged between her and Tim, she railed and kicked out against the Ventrue and her manipulations. Naomi attempted to pacify Amber with talk of the eternity she now had to lay down a good influence for fellow Kindred and young women. Night after night came lessons in Camarilla law and power dynamics. Amber was a good student but revolted against the fact she was now Damned. She wanted to make the world a better place, not control it. Naomi desperately reassured her, but the Ventrue’s words slid off their target. Amber continued building her empire of self-help with ever more fervor, and while she accepted that Naomi wasn’t the worst of the bunch, the fledgling and her Mawla now rarely see eye to eye.

Posing as Naomi’s ghoul and changing her name to Amber Freeman, the two sometimes still visit Elysia around the city of Chicago. One such evening, a Warlock named Dr. Mortius grabbed hold of Amber. He knew of her “situation” and wished to offer possible solutions. Intrigued, Amber lied to her sire and met clandestinely with the doctor. The two combined their resources to build the Cinder Institute, all as Mortius provided Amber with copious supplies of Ashe.

Amber is now the face of the Cinder Institute and its satellite studios. While she understands taking Ashe is nothing more than consuming dead Kindred, she justifies it as poetic justice and a part of Earth’s cycle of renewal. She knows older vampires want to eradicate her ilk’s existence so she champions the use of Ashe as a spiritual road of advancement. She traveled to Bangkok under the guise of seeking a cure for her vampiric state, but truthfully, she leads her new cult in advancing her message of Golconda and freedom from the curse to other thin-bloods.

Plots and Schemes:

- **The Wholeness and Wellness of Diablerie:** Naomi has taught her adopted child about the sin of diablerie, but the possibilities of potential power through consumption of

another vampire's blood and soul appeals greatly to Amber. In the meantime, Amber routinely partakes of Ashe (without Naomi's knowledge) to grow in power.

- **Gold Dust:** Amber knows little of Golconda, but believes the consumption of Ashe is a potential route to reaching it. The amount of good done by someone immortal and not cursed could change the world, and what better way of learning how to cure the world's ills than taking on the memories of her ancestors? She has been looking for the ashes of older Kindred to support this theory and has supposedly gathered a sample of one from a trip to Spain.

Domain and Haven:

- **Wicker Park Two-Flat (Contacts 2, Haven 2, Herd 2):** Amber has blended into the Rack of Chicago and ingratiated herself into the Chicago party scene. Her haven is next to one of the Cinder Institute's yoga studios and occult bookshops, which provides her a source of blood and confidantes within the local occult community.

Thralls and Tools:

- **ThriveHive (Influence 4, Fame 2):** ThriveHive is an international influence marketing scheme. Compounding her knowledge of Kindred politics with influencer swagger, her message now reaches over 700,000 followers. Her brand provides significant income from marketing products and is now building a financial portfolio with Naomi Stewart's help. She routinely pitches for the Cinder Institute on her vlog.

Kindred Relationships:

- **Kevin Jackson (Fear):** Amber is terrified of the Prince of Chicago. She knows she will be Blood Hunted if the Prince ever finds out about her work with Dr. Mortius, and has even heard tell the Camarilla routinely purges thin-bloods. Her only hope is to become useful enough to the Camarilla that they won't kill her, or build up enough of a shield through her cult that she no longer needs to fear the Ivory Tower.
- **Naomi Stewart (Mawla):** Naomi uses her nights to aid Caitiff and Duskborn in rising above the bias pervasive within the Camarilla. Naomi respects Amber and her talents, but is busy with her own machinations for Ventrue Primogen and often forgets to check in with her adopted child. Amber suspects Naomi had a weak-blooded Caitiff Embrace her for plausible deniability, and so a Blood Hunt, if called, could take place without the flack hitting her Mawla, straining the relationship between the two.
- **Dr. Mortius (Admiration):** Amber looks up to Mortius. She truly believes the Tremere wants to help her and the other thin-bloods become more than a shattered and scared community. For now, she does as Mortius tells her when he commands her to not share their experiments with Naomi Stewart.

Whispers:

- **Liars and Thieves:** Amber is a Tremere ghoul of Dr. Mortius and assisted in the liquidation of the House Carna chantry in Milwaukee. She masqueraded as a Bahari to throw off the trail of the Ashfinders.
- **Prophet of the End Times:** Amber sees herself as a new prophet for this age. She wants to bring thin-bloods out of the shadows and give them rights and privileges. While violence isn't her first choice, she is beginning to believe it is the only choice.
- **Paragon:** Kevin Jackson knows of Amber's plight and is grooming her from the shadows to show to the rest of the Camarilla. His goal is to normalize the thin-bloods and tear

their population away from the Anarch Movement. He wants an example for the Ivory Tower of what lengths these Duskborn are willing to go for recognition.

Mask and Mien:

- Amber's real surname is Gallagher, but she adopted the name Freeman after her Embrace. In truth, her changed identity has done her little good, as her internet followers all know her as Amber and ThriveHive, and she has no way of erasing all online record of her existence.
- Amber is a small-framed, freckled woman, who when online has a perpetual genuine smile and commonly wears yoga gear and eco-friendly threads. In person, she's less confident, though alcohol and drugs quickly boost her self-assuredness. She wears her blonde hair in long braids.

Sire: Tim Roche

Embraced: 2015 (Born 1991)

Ambition: Find a step on the path to enlightenment

Convictions: Never stop striving for wellness

Touchstones: Sandra Kowalski — Amber's webmaster

Humanity: 8

Generation: 14th

Blood Potency: 0

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4; Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3; Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 5

Skills: Athletics (Yoga) 4, Drive (City) 2; Etiquette 2, Insight 3, Leadership 3, Performance (Vlog) 3, Persuasion 3, Subterfuge 2; Academics (Communications) 2, Awareness 2, Finance 2, Medicine 1, Politics 1, Science 1, Technology (Social Media) 4

Disciplines: Thin-Blood Alchemy 4

General Difficulties: 4/2

Dr. James "Mortius" Howitt

Epitaph: Thaumaturgical Scientist

Quote: *"The most important thing, the only reason to exist, is the work."*

Clan: Tremere

Mortal Days: Blood Sorcery Savant

Raised by monks among the ranks of other orphans, his parents having succumbed to plague in his youth, James Howitt never knew the warmth of kin or the care of a loving mother. He was a perpetual loner in life, working harder than the other children and rejecting their calls to play. He earned praise from the brothers at the monastery for his candlelit writings and illuminations, despite never seeking a pat on the head from one of the venerable masters. His sole love and focus was "the work," as he called it, and in that he excelled.

Where many of his peers went on to join the monastery or priesthood, James departed on his 14th birthday and never again looked at religion as anything but a distraction from the work.

He translated texts from around the known world, penned his own treatises on sciences, sorceries, and beliefs, and earned many a wealthy patron through his efforts. For many years, he occupied a tall stone building in Edinburgh as a city elder, unaffiliated with any order but famed for his intellect and skill in academic pursuits.

James was in his 40s when he first became aware of blood magic. A dabbler in alchemy and, according to some, a hedge wizard, it came as little surprise to Edinburgh's small Tremere contingent when James started probing for insight into the arts of the Blood. He was taken on as a ghoul, and to every Warlock's great surprise, showed more skill with the clan's Thaumaturgy than many of the city's Kindred.

Mesita — the Tremere Regent of Edinburgh — came to Howitt one night during his studies, and offered him life eternal to continue studying the world's great mysteries and become more than apprentice in the field of Blood Sorcery. James took his time to consider the offer before accepting, despite the inkling that Mesita was deliberately cutting off his advancement by ending his natural life.

Kindred Nights: The Work Goes On

James never stopped his research or practice. He was determined to become what he called “a master of destiny and life” through studying every avenue of sorcery, philosophy, and alchemy. With an eternity, it seemed easy. Mortals might discover one or two things in a short lifespan. He was convinced he could achieve more than any living being with immortality stretching out before him.

Among his grand works were his translation of the Book of the Grave-War, a tome said to contain information enabling the breaking of the Blood Bond; the creation of dozens of minor and major Rituals utilized by the Tremere all over the world in the modern nights; the establishment of research chantries in various cities, including Shanghai and Milwaukee; and the co-development of the Ashe drug with the thin-bloods of the Cinder Institute, informally known as “the Ashfinders.” Still, he feels his work isn't done. “The work” is not yet finished.

James wasn't in Milwaukee when the city's Tremere Regent — Carna — broke her bonds to the clan and formed her own house. He returned to the wreckage, however, and the few vampires who know him well say he seemed elated. He spends most of his time these nights wandering, sometimes teaching, most often researching, but always pursuing the work so important to him.

James was supposed to be one of the attendees at the great convention in Vienna, when the assault on the Prime Chantry saw the clan's highest levels annihilated or sent to torpor. He opted at the last minute not to attend, and hasn't spoken of the event since. As Clan Tremere found itself fragmented in multiple splinters, James informally broke from the core faction and aligned with House Ipsissimus, due in most part to their eagerness to research, expand mental horizons, and avoid the Camarilla hierarchy, which doesn't interest him in the slightest. His defection angered prominent members of House Tremere and House Carna, but he really couldn't care less, having been apolitical his entire existence.

Plots and Schemes:

- **The Work:** The doctor is constantly in pursuit of “the work,” but only Mortius knows what this work entails. He seeks to bend, twist, and burn the Blood in vampire bodies, subjecting it to every force, every element, and every chemical compound to see what reacts. He wants to understand the Blood, master it, and eventually, learn all the secrets behind its manipulation. Mortius doesn't hold stock in the Caine myth. He believes all things in this

world — vampires included — are subject to science and physical principles, and are therefore tools waiting for the hands of learned masters.

- **Clouds of Ashe:** The Ashe experiments started as one of Mortius' trivial hobbies, after he discovered what the Duskborn could do with this drug, but have borne surprising fruit. While his initial studies indicated there may be some resonant force present in vampire remains, the capacity to transfer memories from victim to Ashfinder opened his mind to new possibilities. Ashe, therefore, is a whole new dimension of learning, and the current users are simply test subjects. Mortius is playing the long game with this drug and eagerly notes its long-term effects in consideration of how to refine them.

Domain and Haven:

- **Marquette University Campus (Contacts 3, Haven 3, Herd 2):** Mortius spends much of his existence moving between domains, but often returns “home” to Milwaukee, the city in which he spent much of the 20th century. He keeps a body of contacts among Marquette faculty and a fringe religious group known as the Cult of Isis, but feels increasingly drawn to Embrace students just to drain them, which intrigues him as a grand new experiment of the Blood. The domain has plentiful occult phenomena to study, so he's happy remaining there for months at a time. Unfortunately, the current Prince of the city is prone to persecuting vampires who move in and out of Milwaukee without contributing to its defenses (see **Let the Streets Run Red** for more on the domain of Milwaukee).

Thralls and Tools:

- **The Cult of Isis (Allies 3, Retainers 3):** This cult of mortal witches and vampires linked to the Bahari operates in many domains across the world, tending toward spaces afflicted with severe occult phenomena, such as Cairo, Thessaloniki, Edinburgh, and Milwaukee. Though their membership is entirely non-male, James lends them his research in exchange for their acting as his sometime bodyguards and spies.
- **The Ashfinders (Mawla 2):** Mortius is the hidden head behind the Cinder Institute, though he has less interest in its operation than he does in the results of Ashe usage. The majority of its members are — to his mind — junkies and lab rats. However, the cult also acts as a group that offers guidance and aid when James needs it, so as their sponsor, he looks out for them and they look out for him.

Kindred Relationships:

- **Amber Freeman (Curiosity):** As one of the pioneers of Ashe ingestion, and one of the drug's biggest promoters, Amber is a curious test subject for Mortius. He sponsors her, gives her advice, supplies her with Ashe, and watches the dominoes fall while taking notes, as her followers fall deeper and deeper into addiction. He has no real affection for the young vampire.
- **Carna (Resentment):** What Mortius tells people is that Carna stole his research and used it inappropriately to form her hellish cell of Kindred. What actually happened, is while Mortius translated the Book of the Grave-War and practiced its Blood Bond-breaking Rituals, he never got them to work. Believing the book incomplete or inaccurate, he moved on to other things. He greatly resents that Milwaukee's puppet Regent — Carna — somehow cracked the code without telling him, and wants to know how she did the deed.
- **Karl Schrekt (Fear):** James has remained apolitical for most of his existence, aligning with the Camarilla because it suited him, and falling within the core of Clan Tremere because they schooled him, and sent him books, students, and blood for study. His break from Schrekt's wing of the clan was meant to be quiet, but apparently the head of House

Tremere is livid Mortius just walked away with hundreds of years of research, especially as the doctor was supposed to attend Vienna when the attack on the Chantry took place. Mortius is deathly afraid of what will happen if Schrekt catches up to him.

Whispers:

- **Hot Dose:** Mortius knows how fucked up the users of Ashe are going to be and doesn't care at all. He's poisoning them to eradicate thin-bloods and form a new case study.
- **Peas in a Pod:** Mortius and another Kindred scientist named Netchurch often exchange notes, sometimes acting as peers, other times as rivals. Both are detached from compassion.
- **The Call:** Mortius has been feeling the Beckoning with each night of rising, and only subdues it through transfusions of vitae directly into his dead heart.
- **Traitor:** Mortius knew exactly what was going to happen in Vienna, which is why he didn't make the journey and why he's so scared of Karl Schrekt.

Mask and Mien:

- James took on the name "Mortius" in the 19th century as a flight of fancy. He has no great connection to the Clan of Death, nor is he particularly morbid — though he is studious and stuffy — but the name keeps people guessing. It doesn't serve as an effective Mask, however, due to the strangeness of the name. It hasn't occurred to him yet to change it.
- Mortius is a stooped old man with a beard and grey skin marked where he suffered the pox as a child. He rarely makes eye contact and speaks mostly in a mutter. He was Embraced in his 60s, which at the time was a venerable age, and it shows in his appearance and manner.

Sire: Mesita

Embraced: 1566 (Born 1516)

Ambition: Further "the work"

Convictions: Never turn down the opportunity to experiment

Touchstones: Grace Brooker — mortal witch from the Cult of Isis

Humanity: 3

Generation: 7th

Blood Potency: 5

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4; Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3; Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Resolve 5

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 8

Skills: Drive 1; Etiquette 1, Insight 1, Leadership 1, Subterfuge 2; Academics (Anthropology, Archaeology, Mathematics) 5, Awareness 2, Medicine 5, Occult (Alchemy, Blood Sorcery) 5, Politics 3, Science (Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Geology, Physics) 5, Technology 3

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Blood Sorcery 5, Dominate 4

General Difficulties: 7/3

Ashfinder Blood Alchemy

The thin-bloods who make up the majority of the Ashfinder cult have turned their Alchemy over to the process of ingesting Ashe and retrieving memories and powers from it post-

consumption. Crafting Ashe is Blood Alchemy of the Fixatio form, therefore requiring Intelligence + Blood Alchemy to create it. Receiving powers from Ashe is Blood Alchemy of the Athanor Corporis variety, as the drug only conveys benefits when ingested, injected, or otherwise exposed to a Duskborn's dead blood vessels. The distillation roll is therefore Stamina + Blood Alchemy, together with a Rouse Check as the vampire consumes the ash with a mix of vitae (commonly their own, but sometimes from another source).

Level 3

Concoct Ashe

The process of creating the Ashe drug is a form of Blood Alchemy in itself, and generally takes place in a laboratory or workshop due to the need for an open flame and metal filings.

- **Ingredients:** A destroyed vampire's ashes, an open flame reaching 1,500°C, aluminum filings.
- **Dice Pools:** Intelligence + Thin-Blood Alchemy
- **System:** The vampire's ashes are contained in a vessel heated by an open flame and then mixed with aluminum filings. Each success on the distillation roll produces a single Ashe dose suitable for a Blood Alchemy ritual requiring the drug. On a critical win, the dosage provided from the alchemy is doubled. On a total failure, the sample is ruined and a Beast Shard (see p. XX) emerges in the area.

Chemically-Induced Flashback

Upon imbibing the concoction of vampire ash and vitae (generally the alchemist's, though it doesn't have to be), the alchemist experiences the destroyed vampire's memories.

- **Ingredients:** A sample of Ashe, sufficient vitae to compel a Rouse Check from the donor.
- **Activation Cost:** One Rouse Check (additional to the check required if the vitae donor is the alchemist) and 1 Superficial Willpower damage.
- **Dice Pools:** Stamina + Thin-Blood Alchemy
- **System:** Once the concoction of Ashe and vitae is inside the vampire, their player makes a distillation roll (two Rouse Checks if they are the vitae donor at that time). If in a place of calm, where meditation is possible, the alchemist adds two additional dice to the roll. For every success, the Storyteller grants a short memory belonging to the destroyed vampire who has just been consumed. On a critical win, the alchemist can request a memory from a period or event the alchemist specifies. On a total failure, the memories come through confused and muddle the alchemist permanently, removing their own memory of a place, event, encountered character, or other moment from their life, to be discussed between the player and Storyteller.

Level 4

Discipline Channeling

Counterfeiting Disciplines is part and parcel of Blood Alchemy's use, but the ability to channel a Discipline from the ashes of a deceased vampire is a form of necromantic Alchemy, at least according to Dr. Mortius and the Duskborn who practice it. Those who

practice this Alchemy find themselves able to use any one of the Disciplines of the destroyed vampire, even if they would typically not have access to powers of this level.

- **Ingredients:** A sample of Ashe, sufficient vitae to compel a Rouse Check from the donor, crushed leaves from the indigo plant.
- **Activation Cost:** One Rouse Check (additional to the check required if the vitae donor is the alchemist, and also additional to any checks required for the chosen Discipline's use) and 2 Superficial Willpower damage.
- **Dice Pools:** Stamina + Thin-Blood Alchemy to initiate this power. Blood Alchemy replaces the standard Discipline requirement for using the power. For example, Spark of Rage (**Vampire: The Masquerade** p. 265), as part of the Potence Discipline, requires a dice pool of Manipulation + Potence. When used as part of Discipline Channeling, it requires a dice pool of Manipulation + Blood Alchemy for use.
- **System:** Once the concoction of Ashe, vitae, and indigo petals is inside the vampire, their player makes a distillation roll (two Rouse Checks if they are the vitae donor at that time). If in a place of calm, where meditation is possible, the alchemist adds two dice to the roll. On a success, the Storyteller grants the alchemist access to one of the Discipline powers (such as a specific level 1 power or a specific level 3 power) the deceased donor possessed. The Storyteller may state the Disciplines and specific powers the former vampire held so the alchemist can choose from a list, or if the alchemist has a power in mind, they can request this from the Storyteller. The Storyteller has final say. The Ashfinder gains a power they can use on one occasion before the end of the chapter. On a critical win, the alchemist gains the use of two Discipline powers until the end of the chapter. On a total failure, the alchemist succumbs to a hunger frenzy aimed at any nearby vampire.

Ashe Addiction

Every time a thin-blood takes Ashe, they suffer Superficial Willpower damage. If they take any Aggravated Willpower damage while experiencing the effects of Ashe, they must roll to resist a hunger frenzy as they suddenly crave the vitae, experiences, and powers of other vampires. This frenzy is pointed at other Kindred. If the vampire ingests any vitae as a result of their frenzy, they recover a point of Aggravated Willpower damage but their Hunger rating increases. Addiction to Ashe can be a paralyzing circle of needing more and more blood to survive and Ashe to continue experiencing the buzz of power.