



Kickstarter Manuscript Preview #2D:
Kindred Religions –
The Church of Set

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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 Church of Set

“If it seems sickly, infect it. If it looks flammable, light the match. Everything that remains is a thing that can’t be plagued, can’t be burned, won’t be defiled. And such things belong to Him.”

— Nonus Dis, Priest of the Cave of Apples in his Eighth Hour

[LAYOUT: PRAYER CARD]

Ancient to the Ancients

Rise up! Rise up, o childe!

Wield your flesh that rots not, your Blood that sours not,

Strike at the chains that crush all souls in common!

Your sire advances to lay bare your heart,

To guide you through Duat, to Set the Triumphant.

He is roused at your coming, enfolds you in his arms,

Kisses you, consumes you,

Fixes the undying stars in their orbits around you.

The false gods fear you,

The great Eternals surround you,
The unread vessels serve you,
Vitae is threshed for you,
Life is distilled for you,
Your monthly feasts are made with it,
Your yearly feasts are made with it,
As ordained and made evident by Set,
Your torturer, your father, your lover.
Rise up, o childe, you shall not die!

Hymn 11, the Book of Going Forth By Night

[/PRAYER CARD ENDS]

The Chaos Cult

A vampire can follow Kindred society's laws, uphold the Camarilla's Traditions, cling onto their pillars of Humanity, and struggle nightly with the growling Beast in their heart. Or, a vampire can make their own laws, drive their heel into the Camarilla, divest themselves of their mortal shackles, and make their Beast a weapon.

The Church of Set favor the latter option. It is what they preach. It is what they believe. Possibly the oldest of all Kindred religions, stretching back in time across millennia, the Church of Set have always been present to "liberate" vampires from society's strictures and encourage them to find their true calling.

Yes, many fall, become wights, and are used as valuable teaching lessons. But for those who survive? They become stronger, and praise be to Set for helping those vampires become everything they are meant to be.

Due to their attitudes toward liberation from rules, theoretically, many Kindred should oppose the Church's very existence. They are servants of chaos, advocating that unlife only possesses meaning if vampires free themselves from the edicts of ancient masters such as Princes and Justicars. Yet, vampires see in the Church of Set wisdom that comes through age and experience, freedom through anarchy, and a chance to rebel against all the external tyrants and internal guilt trips that hold them down. Whenever a domain holds a temple of Set, the Kindred know there's a place they can visit for a form of enlightenment, counsel, and hard, bitter truth. They also know that by attending this temple, they can find purpose in the meaningless nature of eternity.

The Church of Set is strong because it appeals to a Kindred's base nature, while promising to eradicate the worst of those desires. It is chaos, storm, and promise of change. When the alternative seems like stagnation, it's no wonder neonates of tonight increasingly flock to the temple doors.

Despite their message of freedom, however, the Church of Set is not some utopic faith to which all fledglings must cling. Even the Ministry — the clan most commonly associated with the Church, through their Blood, founder, and religious practices — urges caution to those seeking to follow Set's path.

Church and State

In the nights following Gehenna, a curious — though not unprecedented — schism occurred within the flocks of Set, so the Serpents claim. Just as Set's sarcophagus at Ombos was said to shatter many centuries ago, so too in these nights did the body of Set's faith fracture into dangerous shards.

One such splinter group, shedding ties to its venerable history and even abandoning the name of the Red God himself, refers to itself as the Ministry. The Church of Set refers to them as heretics, and yet, it is the Ministry who dominate the clan tonight. To understand the Church of Set, one must first understand the Ministry.

The Ministry are the Clan of Faith, but they are not a single religion. The Ministry holds the keys to salvation and uses them to deface every surface around them. They are known to steal, reproduce, and even forge texts of orthodox doctrine, disseminating them among unbelievers, unworthies, and the otherwise unready. Doctrine is often twisted to fit their own needs, especially when it comes to the holy search for the mysteries of Set. Ministers have shown themselves eager to enshrine Set within or attribute to him anything that benefits their autocratic philosophies or actions, syncretizing him with tyrannical kings, chosen Antediluvians, or, among the radical fringe, Set's inimical brother Osiris. The Ministry is content to use Allah, Catholic saints, Vishnu, or any other being of reverence as a mask for Set. They attract followers because the clan is made up from followers of every religion, every culture, and every background. The Ministry are a clan of chaos, but they are the body, the bureaucracy, and the society that ostensibly governs the realm of faith among Kindred.

The Ministry perverts doctrine of all religions to bring its members closer to Set. They are wreckers and despoilers to some, but liberators and counselors to others. Ministers might spread terrible lies about supposed abuses of power committed by the Church of Set, just as the Church of Set finds itself taking in Ministry survivors who have been subject to those same abuses. It is not unheard of for a temple of Set to offer shelter to kine or Kindred misused by the Ministry. To many, it appears the Ministry and Church are at war. To others, it is clear a cycle of abuse and manipulation in the form of nurture propels vampires between them.

The Ministry is devoted to the cause of individual Anarchs rather than the spirit of independence and freedom as a whole — that is, Ministers seem eager to rule Anarchs rather than convert them, in contradiction to the edicts laid down by the Red God. This is where the clan and the Church most widely differ. As infiltrators and warmongers, the Ministry makes itself a frequent target of the Camarilla, but while the Ministry take the flak and earn support from their downtrodden Anarch brethren, the Church maintains a distance. The Church does not involve itself in the sectarian wars. So committed is the Church to decrying these pretenders that they will justify a Contending — a trial more akin to a kangaroo court than a place to express one's defense — against any adherent who abets a Minister outside the Church, to be called off only if the wayward child returns to the flock and sufficiently atones. Anyone shown the true path who still allows the silvery voices of the worldly to lead them astray has become useless in the eyes of the Red Pharaoh.

To the rest of the world, the Church and Ministry appear to occupy a shared history, but distinct spheres in these modern nights. They share some members, they share some ideals, but the two are opposed at a structural and philosophical level. The Church of Set's leadership outwardly regards the Ministry as insignificant, incorrigible children at best. Ministers are not in the business of being ignored, and seem to delight in overt, ill-advised stunts that threaten scrutiny by the Second Inquisition. Such theatrics are to be smothered or

undermined with any resources a temple, priest, or lay member has at hand. The Church even says honest cooperation with the Camarilla to suppress known Ministers is preferable to the Ministry operating unchecked.

The Clan of Lies

Of course, that's what the Church of Set wants other Kindred to think. The damage from this so-called schism is difficult for any outsider to ascertain. The Church of Set maintains the fractures between Church and Ministry are dire heresies. Some Ministers, however, believe the front-facing aspect of the clan is just that: a carefully erected façade that allows the Church to continue its own practices and aims, deflecting all out-of-clan attentions toward the new kids on the block making such a noise within the Anarch Movement.

If this is true, the Church of Set is successfully playing the Anarch Movement and many of their own clanmates. The Serpents have, after all, served Set for millennia. An overnight reformation is unlikely. The danger to the clan from all this scheming, is the possibility of their new face growing in power and relevance over the ancient traditions and beliefs of the orthodoxy. If the Church of Set deliberately cultivated the Ministry, they may have lit the fuse for a bomb destined to collapse their foundations.

Divine Origins

Was Set really a god? That is a question many Kindred aware of the Church are obliged to ask.

The Church of Set claims that millennia before two brothers squabbled over their offerings, a mighty family reigned over the Earth, and among them dwelt the forebear of what some crudely refer to as the Followers. Set, of violent storms, of the cruel red desert, of the incomprehensible outsiders beyond the civilized world. Set the warrior, Set the triumphant. Set, who would be king.

In the faith of ancient Egypt, and through the ages to tonight, metaphor is more valuable than linear narrative. The myths remain in fragments. The interpretations mature with each new era.

In one translation, Set is a betrayer to his kin. His father, Ra, retires the throne and grants it to Set's brother, Osiris. In a cold rage, Set slays Osiris — some say by drowning, some by dismemberment. In another version, Set is betrayed. Osiris at turns visits upon him a great violence, or tricks him into an unwinnable conflict, or steals Set's consort for himself. Osiris takes advantage of his own brother's weakened state to seize rule of the world from him. Or, perhaps, Set never wanted to reign — an Anarch, even then, striving against the tyranny and corruption of Ra's bloated, degenerate court.

Regardless of interpretation: there is a great sin against truth, and Set the Pharaoh never sits upon the throne. Setites of tonight abide by this message even now: members of the Ministry may claim cities for their own, but if you are a member of the orthodox Church of Set, you must never take rulership.

According to legend, when Ra discovers what Set's done to his brother, he levels a curse similar to that from Noddist theology, and banishes Set to the shadows. When Osiris tricks him and the terrible serpent Apep sinks its fangs into Set's mighty heart, it is the monster's venom that corrupts his physical form to resemble an eternal corpse. When Set must hide himself from his despotic siblings in the stygian waters of Duat, it is through starvation that he resorts to drinking naught but blood. Or so the myths go.

Curse, liberation, radical conversion. All of the stories together make the shape of truth, but in the telling they become lies. The Church preaches that Set made his curse a gift and delivered it to his congregation, the gift of flesh that never rots and blood that flows more potent than the rivers of the underworld. The corruption of Apep burned through that which was fallible in him and left only perfect, atom-fine edges of obsidian. Duat's unliving waters could not have converted the god, changing him from one purpose to another, so much as *everted* him, stirring the exalted appetites within.

The question remains: Was Set a god? The question is incomprehensible to those of the faith. He *is* a god, and, in the curious para-temporal way gods have about them, will always be a god, and has always been a god. He sleeps in the temple at Ombos. He winnows unrefined souls with his childer. He makes his living church among them.

And when the tragic heroes of the *Book of Nod* walked the Earth, Set's "followers" were already ancient.

A History in Whispers

Regardless of how one feels about his eminent divinity and the mythical origins of his church, scholars of the Hecata, Malkavians, and Ministry record Set's last appearance on Earth as 33 BCE. He sundered the ground with earthquakes, shook the palaces of Cairo with wild storms, and delivered his final mysteries to the faithful. When a cabal of Hierophants and witches came to his resting place, they found the obsidian sarcophagus empty and shattered, razor black shards embedded in the sandstone walls.

The ancient Hierophants of the clan ruled in his absence. The faithful tended to Egypt through the reign of each pharaoh and invading king, guiding from the shadows and pruning the crop as they had already done for millennia. Their ideology and history had already prepared them in unique ways for the many and varied changes in leadership, from Macedonian to Ptolemaic. Enemies of the word of Set were deeply polluted — by necessity of their rejection of him — and it was the role of the faithful to encourage that pollution to destroy their enemies from the inside out, and make those who survived worthy of Set's favor.

None of the fearsome conquerors of Egypt showed any interest in rooting out the priests of Set and plundering their flocks. While a few elder leaders grouched at the supposed dilution of his kingdom by endless waves of barbarians, the orthodoxy held — Set is also the god of foreigners, in his role as the Lord of All Outside Egypt, and there was more to gain in bearing an invader's indignities than in burning him out.

The faith's greatest test, however, came during their first Inquisition. Not the Christian-led burnings Western Kindred refer to — for the Church of Set, their Inquisition came a full century earlier, at the hands of the Sultan Baybars. His commitment to the eradication of infidels did not stop at his decisive campaigns against European crusaders. Baybars' Mamelukes destroyed ancient temples, burning and burying their relics. They hunted two Eternals of Sothis, methuselahs of the Church, and brought them to their final death. They pillaged the Founding Temple Ombos, most holy among the Church's body, and desecrated its contents.

The Purge of Baybars drove the Church of Set out of Egypt and into exile, taking with them any artifact they could carry. They lived in diaspora for decades until Baybars' assassination. Many of the old treasures smuggled out during the Proclamation of Red Tears still have not been returned, though modern movements arise to repatriate those that have found their way into the collections of unwary museums or wealthy erudites.

The Burning of Baybars

A special yearly ceremony is held in orthodox temples of Egypt, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. Some particularly radical branches in the West may participate, though the ritual trappings are singularly difficult to come by. On the anniversary of Baybars' death in 1277, the faithful gather around a ceremonial brazier, tended by the acting Hierophant or High Priest. He reveals a knife of obsidian, and a bone preserved from Baybars' corpse.

Leading the flock in the Execration Litany, the priest shaves a sliver from the bone and holds it over the fire, releasing it at the climax of the ritual chant. When the wraith of the old Sultan appears in the flames, the followers shout it down, spit on it, and otherwise relish the eternal torture so delivered on their ancient enemy.

Forty years of exile in foreign lands brought the followers of the Church new wisdom through pain. They found that while the European Kindred despised them for their faith or their subtleties or their skin, they craved what the Church could provide them. The Church of Set fed these cravings gladly.

It began with simple trade goods — silk, spices, rare animals. The Church's coffers swelled, and so did the hungers of wealthy Europeans. Setite merchants began to trade in opiates, hashish, specialized servants. Then, goods more abstract and cunning. A perfect forgery of a grant of arms, for an ambitious commoner. An ignorant child with particular physical traits, to pass off as a rival's bastard. A sorcerous elixir of potency, for a knight afraid to meet his death in foreign lands. The Church grew as a network of fixers and informants, collaborating in secret, passing goods from follower to follower. Each branch and temple began to keep records of their resources, as well as members' skills and connections.

Set's treasuries grew, and so did his flocks. Setites learned they could lean ever harder on those who had grown dependent on them for favors of their own, deeds they couldn't risk doing themselves. Entrenched as they were, the faithful of Set could avoid the worst of another Inquisition, purchasing the silence of infidel priests and redirecting hunters to worthier targets. Meanwhile, Western clients who could withstand their poisonous addictions were invited into the Mysteries of the faith. And those who fell were, naturally, doomed from the start.

More Modern Deceits

With the Renaissance, and the resulting Age of Reason, the West saw a resurgence of classical thought and gnostic cabals. Philosophers of science needed ever more taboo materials for their research. Alchemists, sorcerers, and their secret societies became inexplicably fashionable. There were seductive new ideas to spread, and who better to help their dissemination than the world's first cult of mystery?

The thought-experiments of the Enlightenment led to wars of revolution and renewed conquest. The nascent New World promised liberty and happiness, as entire peoples from half a world away paid for it with their bodies. The Church was there, too, everywhere, a contact in every port and palace; sometimes, they were first.

The presence of the faithful in all corners of the conscious world, and their history of playing both sides, leads many outsiders to think the Church had some part in every atrocity of the last three centuries. According to the Church, these claims are flimsy lies. The Church of Set has and always will stand in opposition to all forms of tyranny, whether from one man over few or one man over a nation — or one false god over a universe. The Master of Duat did not

allow himself to be denied the throne of heaven only for his childer to love other kings and despots.

As such, it must come as no surprise that many of the faithful in these modern nights have taken up with the Anarchs, though members of the Church rarely cling to the Movement as fiercely as they do to the faith. Leave that for lay-Ministers. Church members are encouraged to enjoy the disdain of all sects, in their own understated ways. Outsider Kindred have long disdained the Setites as up-jumped pimps, troublemakers and fixers. Being underestimated serves the Church just fine... especially now.

After the Red Star appeared in the sky at the turn of the millennium, the high scholars and new witches reached an exceptional consensus: the Red God sleeps no longer. He is *here*. The modern world groans under the distended corpse of capitalism. Whole nations are bought and sold on the trade of weapons and narcotics. The Second Inquisition burns Princes in their manors. Those with Blood of a thinness previously thought impossible walk the land — walk in the *light!* The Earth itself simmers and boils with the injustices visited on its body.

The world is ready for Set. And if they are to be believed, it is the faithful of his Church that will begin the threshing.

Sectarian Matters

If the Ministry so despises the idea of authority, why did it beseech the Camarilla for membership? While desperation and fear are as likely causes as any with the Gehenna Crusade arriving at their doorstep, the clan's true aim was to change the world's most powerful Kindred sect from the inside while benefiting from its walls. For all their talk of freedom from hierarchy, the clan still possesses Hierophants and church leaders who instruct and guide their less enlightened fellows, so installing their religious structure within the Ivory Tower would not be so anathematic to the Ministers as many might believe.

The clan's greatest philosophical division in these modern nights comes between the Ministry and the Church. The clan's "rebrand" or schism — depending on who one asks — that led to the Ministry's creation came before the attempted entry into the Camarilla, but following the failure of that coalition, many Serpents loudly eschewed the sects entirely, declaring themselves Orthodox Setites, Snakes, or the Church of Set. The vampires who cling to the Ministry epithet are more inclined to associate and politic with Kindred from other clans and join the Camarilla, Anarchs, and Ashirra, while the Church of Set takes the view of "once bitten, twice shy" and despairs for their liberal-minded clanmates, who they feel are destined to face bloody betrayal yet again.

Snakes in Their Hidden Nests

Because of the Church of Set's reputation, both unearned and carefully cultivated, leadership must construct and disclose their houses of worship with a prudence bordering on paranoia. There are many branch cults with no physical structure to speak of, all the better to go to ground if the Camarilla or the Second Inquisition decide to drive out the snakes.

Mortal-facing fronts are small, mobile institutions, meeting regularly and in-person, usually with Greco-Roman influences. In the '70s, these were bland New Religious Movement centers. The '80s and '90s saw a switch to substance-abuse support groups. These nights, pop-up mindfulness practitioners are coming into fashion. The format does not matter — the Church favors any organization that preaches detachment from what binds you. Even at this level, the doctrine of the Church of Set can be introduced in subtle, bowdlerized formats.

Leaders are encouraged to downplay use of serpents and Egyptian gods in their organization names and heraldry, in favor of the more palatable imagery of Mars, Bacchus, or Pluto — all three, if possible, as they are identified with Set as Typhon Trismegistus.

Pierce this mundane shroud of counselors and life coaches to find the true face of the Church — the temple. The architectural requirements for a temple of Set are few but unusual: there must be an inner room from which all outside light can be blocked, and there must be space within this room for a larger-than-life statue of the Red God. Movie theaters are the obvious choice, and darkrooms are equally valuable though rarer in this age of digital photography.

The Church is nothing if not resourceful. Lacking the space or resources to construct a new temple, and in absence of the perfect preexisting architecture, many smaller temples are assembled in abandoned garages, cellars, or large storage units, with the inner sanctum separated from the outer by blackout curtains.

The temple's outer sanctum prepares the celebrant to face their god. Priests help them strip to their skin, cleanse themselves in a consecrated mixture of ashes and urine, and finally dress in *shendyt*, or Egyptian waistcloths, in deep red and green. Past the light-blocking barrier, the inner sanctum is stark and somber, empty save for the black statue of the Master of Storms and the dim red lights that illuminate its alien edges. Individual prayers and offerings occur here, as well as the smaller or quieter rituals.

Temples with size and secrecy enough can stockpile donations within their walls, serving as a storehouse within the greater decentralized treasury of the Church. Still older temples feature libraries of Setite ritual and magical texts. These texts are precious in themselves and never loaned out under any circumstances.

The most ancient artifacts and cornerstones of the Church's doctrine can be found in aptly named Founding Temples. Such temples include Red Hook in the Harlem borough of New York City, founded in 1893 as the oldest temple of Set in the Western hemisphere. Scholars of Typhon Trismegistus make regular pilgrimages to the Cave of Apples temple in Naples, when they can manage the trip, though this seat of Church operations in Europe has been steadily emptying in the nights since the Beckoning began. Of course, most famous is the legendary temple Ombos at Naqada, Egypt, once the resting place of the Red God himself. Some say Ombos still lies in ruin, and some claim it is rebuilt. The few modern pilgrims have not returned or even sent back word.

Rituals of Liberation

The experiences of the faith are intimate and individual to each member. Church leadership encourages its flock to pursue personal relationships with the Master of Duat. However, study of the canon set down by priests, meditations on the revelations of wisdom, and performance of the Mysteries must be conducted or shared in fellowship with a member of higher rank available as a guide (the better for leadership to root out any heresy in its infancy).

Kindred are encouraged to maintain a shrine to Set within their haven, provided it does not detract from attending Church rituals and ceremonies. The shrine belongs in the darkest part of the darkest room, cordoned off by black curtains. The altar can be as elaborate as the worshiper feels necessary, though the Red Pharaoh is not known to be impressed by extravagance. The only required accoutrements are a small icon or statuette of Set, wrought in black and red; a bowl for offerings; and an incense burner with *kyphi*, if the worshiper can find it, though juniper or cedar incense are also known to please the Ruler of the Desert. The worshiper may wish to keep implements of pain or torture at hand to enhance their prayers.

With access to a shrine, a Kindred of the Church is expected to perform the nightly offering ceremony. It begins with burning incense until its smoke hazes the air. Then the celebrant parts the curtain to the shrine, bowing before the image of the Red God while offering a favored hymn or a simple “Eternal homage to you, Set the Liberator.” They cut their palm to allow some vitae to flow into the offering bowl, mixing it with beer. The icon of Set is dressed in green and red cords, smeared with the still-bleeding palm. The celebrant may linger in meditation, inserting needles under their fingernails one by one or flaying a digit to allow pain to clear their thoughts. When the offering is complete, they extinguish the incense and withdraw from the shrine, scuffing their footprints as they go.

The Lesser Mystery of Set

Of less intimate but far higher meaning are the two Mysteries of Set, the Lesser and the Greater. The Lesser Mystery is observed once a month during a full moon, with special significance given to mysteries that occur during a lunar eclipse. Any Kindred who know of the performance — though not necessarily who is sponsoring it — are welcome to attend and liberate themselves. Many recruiters consider this a necessary community outreach event.

In the Lesser Mystery, the facilitating priest places emphasis on revelations — in this case, making dramatic shows of magic, supposed artifacts, and other entertaining displays. The most common sight at these ceremonies is a large python serving the priest as a ghoul, passed among the spectators.

Following his revelations, the priest conducts sacrifices, though these will be called by another name. Sometimes the attendees are asked to paint a source of anger onto a red clay vessel, and then dash it against the wall. Sometimes they are bidden to pour their wine over specific stones in the floor. Sometimes the audience comes looking for the Set they hear of in Camarilla whispers and are disappointed to find anything less than ritual slaughter.

This Mystery is a lesser eversion, a small liberation from the assaults of the soul. But for every attendee who feels the rebellion rise within them, and every member the priest deems worthy, there is a second event to come immediately after: a revelation of one of the Gates.

The Nine Gates

The Mysteries of the Nine Gates of Wisdom are cornerstones of the religious experience of the Church. It is impossible to progress in the hierarchy of secrets without receiving their transformative lessons. The Gates are as follows: Ecstasy, Terror, Wrath, Desire, Satiety, Despair, Ignorance, Chaos, and Blood. Passage through each requires a guide well-versed in their execution, though an initiate’s awareness of the Gate ritual itself is not essential. Indeed, the Church encourages initiation without any anticipation or prior agreement on behalf of the initiate, for the most effective, visceral experience.

As the Gates reveal discrete truths or experiences meant to strip the initiate of corrosion, each calls for a wholly different approach and atmosphere. Scholars recommend the Gate of Ecstasy as an initiate’s first, as it is the most palatable and most expected Church experience. The initiate of Ecstasy is subjected to intense sensory experiences meant to awaken her body and smother her ego. The second Gate is usually of Terror: the guide encourages the initiate’s starving id to express itself via her basest, most primal fear, then directs her need for relief to the waiting arms of Set and his Church.

From here, the path is individualized to each initiate and her necessities, though many sponsors move on to Wrath, doing whatever is required to goad the initiate’s rage into a single livid explosion, incinerating the last of her false self. The Gate of Desire draws from the initiate her most abhorred, subjugated needs, and encourages reflection as she indulges

them — why are they so hated? Must she suppress them, after all? The Gate of Satiety gathers the seas of the initiate's hunger and drowns her in them, until the very thought of indulging a past pleasure is revolting to her. Under the Gate of Despair she loses everything she once thought vital to her self — her temporal joys, her wealth and possessions, her playmates and false loves — in order to learn that nothing outside the truth in her soul can possibly define her. At the Gate of Ignorance, she experiences life-changing doubt brought on by a shattering revelation, that something “true” upon which she built the foundations of her being is not true at all. And in the Gate of Chaos, she is shown with unerring soundness that the world itself is a lie, devoid of any reason or sense, and any belief she once placed in the material is guided to its proper home — belief in Set and his unbreaking Church.

At any of these Gates, a vampire may suffer frenzy, gain Stains, or devolve completely into a wight. The Church of Set covers this truth up, assuring its newest members that they will be supported through these trials, with the priest pointing to the handful of ranking Setites in attendance as evidence of how the Church looks after its own. This sense of brotherhood is a lie. Until a vampire has passed through every Gate, the initiate is on their own. If they fall, they must pick themselves up. If they cannot, the priest should experience no regrets over that vampire succumbing to the Beast in perpetuity, as clearly they were unworthy. Domains where the Church of Set holds sway may have a stable core where the Church is at its strongest, but in the domain fringes, more wights prowl than perhaps in any other cities.

On the Gate of Blood

Of the Nine, the Gate of Blood is considered most sacred, and absolutely vital to full participation in the Church of Set. To be initiated in the mysteries of the Gate of Blood, the celebrant must make herself a life sacrifice to the Red God. Her guide, acting in their authority as a divine agent of Set, consumes every drop of her blood before replacing it with some of the guide's own. The initiate wakes from their glimpse of Duat, reborn in the love of Set the Triumphant. The Gate of Blood is a time for somber reflection on the part of the guide, and ecstatic revelry on the part of the celebrant.

Kindred laity recognize this as an Embracing, done up in the trappings of Egyptian esotericism. Though the Church considers Kindred adoptees of the faith already inducted in the Gate of Blood in their own way, priests of Set are eager to perform a facsimile of the ceremony for them, that they may be Embraced again.

The Greater Mystery of Set

Of the Greater Mystery, little is written or discussed. Its very nature compels secrecy — to discuss the Greater Mystery outside the confines of its performance is considered heresy. There are, however, aspects of it that all members of the Church understand:

The Greater Mystery of Set is a ritual performed over the course of several nights, once a year, during a new moon in the darkest month. Those of the Fourth Hour or later, who have already experienced a Lesser Mystery, are obligated to attend. In the first night, sacred objects are brought to the temple — an obsidian shard of an ancient sarcophagus, a winnowing-fan, red clay vessels of unknown contents. A mortal man of a certain age must be brought into the temple, dressed finely and treated in all ways as a king, his every desire attended to. From the temple's outer sanctum, the leading priest declares the start of the rites, and there is an all-night feast, though not necessarily of food.

The second night, all initiates must be cleansed in dark water, which they are allowed to procure from different sources, and can wear only green or red as they go about their nightly business. At least once in the night they must visit the temple to leave offerings for the ritual pharaoh.

In the third night, the fasting begins — Kindred initiates may only drink the blood of those who are under the influence of entheogens. Kine initiates likewise must begin imbibing hallucinogenic drugs. The doors to the temple close to all who are not allowed participation in the Greater Mystery, save the ritual pharaoh, who has lived three days now as a god on Earth.

Of what happens in the fourth night, only those present know. But in the fifth night, all emerge from the temple in states of injury or exhaustion, and the sacred objects are carried out — an obsidian shard sticky with fluid, a filthy winnowing-fan, red clay vessels now empty, and several crude cedar boxes that smell like a butchery. The ritual pharaoh is gone, though one member of his body remains with the priest.

In this final night there is an hours-long feast held somewhere secluded outside the temple, featuring all manner of catharsis—specially-brewed beer, hashish and narcotics; carefully monitored frenzies and fights; orgies selective or all-inclusive; and other more exotic manners of release.

Any who discuss what they performed or witnessed while in the temple, either then or later, are silenced at all costs and made subject to a Contending. Rarely has such a thing been an issue — it seems the Greater Mystery is far too intimate and personal for anyone to want to share its wonder openly.

Beginning the Journey of the Faithful

All souls, living and unliving, knowing and unknowing, shadow the journey of the dead through Duat, an underworld of black water and pale flame. The existence of this journey, and each person's unwitting recreation of it, may not be made obvious to the believer until they are well along their own journey. Leaders of the Church take care to note each member's progress, so no one is forced to bear the scouring of a revelation before they are ready.

The First Hour of the Journey by Night represents Ra's descent into Duat, and Church doctrine likens it to struggling to make out shapes in the darkness. The Church designates potential converts and curious individuals "just trying it out" as unbelievers in their First Hour. Recruiters make themselves constantly available to the First Hour initiate, anticipating his needs and meeting these to the best of their ability, all while watching carefully for signs that the initiate is ready to be guided through his first mystery.

For many, their first mystery is a surprise. They receive an invitation, formal or informal, to a celebration, the details of which are vague and mundane: a secular party, a small benefit concert, a get-together over vitae and wine. The celebration turns out to be a thin front for a performance of the Lesser Mystery of Set — but the recruiter-turned-guide is careful to conceal the fangs of doctrine under the shadows of a pleasing garden.

Many performances of the Lesser Mystery end in the revelations of the Gate of Ecstasy, for precisely the reasons anyone would expect. The guide crafts their initiate's sensory deluge to fit her particular tastes. This can be head-pounding music and half-moons of molly, ending in a blur of flesh and heat. It can also be a flight of delicate mortals with carefully curated Resonance and choice Dyscrasia, in a garden heavy with night-blooming jasmine. One's unknowing passage into the Second Hour is unforgettably pleasing, leaving the initiate with an enthusiasm that will serve them well in the trials to come.

There are moments when the pain and chaos of the material world align to provide Set's guide with the circumstances necessary to initiate her charge in the revelations of their next two Gates. When the Second Inquisition flashes its muzzles, or the Camarilla levies incomprehensible rulings, or petty grievances sour the bonds of a coterie, the guide is there, offering shelter to her initiate and leading them to the shadow of Set.

The guide does not rely on these moments to occur naturally. When necessary, she creates them herself, using her access to the Church's considerable network of contacts and resources to set the stage for the wisdom of the Gates to make itself manifest. The unknowing initiate may soon find themselves beset on all sides by sudden, unimaginable hardship with no discernable source or reason — lovers turned unfaithful, Touchstones in mortal danger, evidence mounting for crimes never committed.

Does the guide feel remorse? Yes, at times her heart aches for the state of this world, that it could construct a soul-cage only torture can break. But the initiate draws closer to salvation in Set's arms with every new torment. More often, the guide feels joy... and envy.

In the Fifth Hour of the Journey by Night, Ra and the host of the dead finally reach the august tomb of Osiris, enthroned in black wings, suspended over a lake of fire. In the initiate's Fifth Hour, they have been broken upon four Gates in total. They have seen the world for what it is: twisted and restrictive, a place where the true self cannot find happiness. They have known the love of Set and his Church, the only place where they can be truly free. Their sponsor can now reveal herself and her mission, confident that the initiate is ready for the truth. They are ready for a joyous welcome into the Church of Set, openly and officially.

The initiate is central to the confirmation ceremony, flensed of everything but their Gate wisdom and newfound love of the Church. The night begins with somber rituals meant to reenact their Embrace into the shadow of Set, and ends with familial love. These re-Embraced fledglings appear drunk on renewed devotion to their Church, but are undeniably spirited and courageous, making them essential to the recruitment of new members. At this level, they are permitted further revelations denied to others: namely, study of Church doctrine, and membership in performance of the Greater Mystery once a year. Members in their Fifth Hour only now realize there were even Hours to begin with, and often look back on their journey so far with a fearful wonder.

The Journey for Mortals

For kine, the Journey by Night is conducted with rather more caution and patience. They are recruited through one of the Church's front organizations, invited to Lesser Mysteries scrubbed of most overt vampirism, and guided through the more "palatable" Gates first. While boons and favors are still dispensed with reassurances and warm smiles, the Church presses back on mortals much sooner than Kindred. Members will find themselves volunteered for small tasks or donations — certainly nothing that comes close to what they have so far enjoyed on the Church's dime.

As the mortal initiate passes into their Fourth Hour, the demands of the Church loom large. Tithes increase in frequency, flooding the mortal with debt. Church leadership now screens and approves relationships with outsiders, so that they won't in their ignorance interfere with an initiate's fragile enlightenment. Errands for the Church are now arduous undertakings — the mortal only has time for their Church membership. Kindred of higher levels may be granted permission to Blood Bond or ghoulish mortals in their Fourth Hour, making the prospect of leaving the Church even more difficult. Indeed, most of the

Church's labor force comes from mortals in their Fourth Hour, known interchangeably as the Hour of Trials or the Hour of the Final Labyrinth. Still, kine are promised the greatest revelation to come if they remain — and having seen the results of a Contending, they know all too well the consequences of leaving.

The Later Hours of Night

At the Sixth Hour, a Kindred must have mastered a total of six Gates of Wisdom. A member of this level now shoulders the heavy responsibility of guiding others through Gates they themselves have mastered — including the Gate of Blood, if Church leadership blesses them with permission to Embrace a childe. A Kindred in the Sixth Hour of her Journey by Night is a full-time member of the Church of Set, a spiritual employee. She may entertain other hobbies, projects, or titles, but only if these enhance her usefulness to the Church and to the Red God. If she fails to bring Set his due of souls — either in new fellowship or destruction-by-vice — she must also take care to guard herself against a Contending on the basis of infidelity.

In the Seventh Hour, one of the Paths that an initiate may follow comes to a premature end. This is the Hour of Set in his aspect as Triumphant Warrior and Consumer of Apep. Those who follow the Path of Wepwawet forever delay their spiritual development to serve under the Triumphant's command. These warriors are fearsome ascetics, mortifiers of the flesh, and protect the Church as swords of Set. Those lucky enough to study with the paragon Faruq Abd al-Qadir in his training hall at Abu Simbel will find themselves traded like currency from temple to grateful temple. For all the adoration they receive, however, one of the Gates will always be out of their reach. They are figures demanding both pity and great respect.

For those on other Paths, the Seventh Hour begins after the mastery of eight Gates. This Hour confers the authority to open and manage local temples as a priest of Set, one small node in a network of tithes, favors, treasures and hirelings. For many, this is the Hour of their spoiling. Once, they only had access to pleasures the Church gifted in its wisdom, a leash perhaps too short to choke on. However, not even a follower of Set is immune to corruption through power — and just as well, because that which can be liberated, must be. Such a weak leader is allowed to take his fill, as the Gate of Satiety allows, but his elders will step in if it seems he has more followers consumed than converted.

Mastery of all Nine Gates of Wisdom is required to reach the Eighth Hour, the time in which Ra throws open the doors to Osiris's tomb and makes ready the way for the host of the dead. Upper management of the Church can be found at this level — High Priests of older temples (such as Khaled al-Fakhani in the Court of Humility), acclaimed Bahari witches and the greatest of blood-sorcerers.

Members of the highest circle of the Church of Set dwell in their Ninth Hours, a level reached only by the aged, the accomplished, or the gifted. This is the Hour of the Antipode Labyrinth, when Ra reverses his course through the sandy maze of Sokar. High Priests of Founding Temples guide the Church's ambitions from here — or, they did, before the Beckoning left their offices empty. The Church has many millennia of practice at operating independent of centralized authority, though concerns rise through the ranks regarding non-clan Kindred stepping into the vacuum left by Beckoned elders.

Demigods travel in the Tenth Hour of the Journey By Night: the *Djet Sopdet*, Eternals of Sothis, methuselahs who were Embraced 1,460 years ago at the beginning of a Sothic Turn. While nominally the heads of the Church, few continue active management at this level. It is

understood they have their own pious undertakings to attend to, but no one of the Tenth Hour has been seen or spoken to since the Beckoning began.

Of the Eleventh Hour, there is only One. Lord Set, the Red God, remains in this penultimate state, delaying his passage beyond Duat to guide followers in the shadow of his Church. And beyond this lies the Final Hour: passage into the primordial *Nun*, where the flensed and faithful will find a new world, or create another. Or so the orthodoxy claims. No single entity, living or otherwise, has experienced crossing beyond.

Church of Set Convictions

While ultimately, doctrine is less important to the Church of Set than ritual and experience, neither of those will be of much use to an initiate who has no idea why she is doing what a priest commanded her to do. That said, the Church follows closely the idea of secret knowledge: that certain authorities possess divine dispensation to withhold truths from followers who are unready to receive them. An initiate is meant to receive the lessons on her body and soul first, as guided by someone well-versed in the mysteries, before she is permitted to study the texts of a temple library.

The Church of Set finds the idea of commandments distasteful, but for those who require an easily-memorized litany of convictions, the doctrine of the orthodox Church commonly manifests as the following Convictions:

- Always strive to liberate others of their vices

Vice is a tool, not a recreation. The faithful initiate can best serve Set by winnowing the souls of the world — that is, separating the wheat from the chaff — by determining who is prone to degradation and who is strong enough to resist. What can be liberated, will be liberated, and what remains will be a legion of refined souls in service to Set, freed from their bondage to literally anyone and anything else. You are the thresher, not the threshed.

- Never refuse aid to another member of the Church

The Church of Set claims that when they rule this world, or move on to the next, they will do so as a brotherhood of many. There are no kings here, save the Red Pharaoh himself.

- Always respect the commands of those in later Hours

The priests, and also the warriors and faithful witches who plumb the depths of Duat ahead of you, have made ready the path you yourself travel. You are free, but they are more free. Their wisdom and guidance must be observed.

- Always do what is necessary to test another's resistance to liberation

What an individual might think of as "compassion" is, to the Setite mind, nothing less than violence. In refusing to test another soul's limit for freedom, you are dooming it to slavery and denying Set his due. Do not wait for permission when their liberty could begin *now*.

- Always seek the mysteries of Set, hidden throughout the world

The more Mysteries a Setite understands, and the more secrets they wield, the better they will serve the Red God and his Church.

- Always do what is necessary to test the flaws in a social order

Beware the individual who desires authority. Organizations both mortal and Kindred are inherently degenerate by virtue of their disconnection from the true

god. If they are really as inviolate as they claim to be, then they must be brought into service of Set's living Church, or otherwise dismantled and allowed to rot.

On the Church of Set

As attributed to Khalid al-Fakhani, priest within the Church of Set in the Las Vegas domain

Before the Red Star appeared, the Church of Set were referred to as the Followers of Set. This is an extremely literal translation of the phrase Walid al-Set, and does not convey the full extent and power of the faith. To call the Church "followers" is like referring to the Roman Catholic Church as "followers of the Trinity." It is technically correct, of course, but it leaves out so many of the nuances that it might as well be useless.

Many atrocities have been laid at the feet of the Church of Set over the years. I will not waste time trying to correct them all. Some are even completely true. I venture to guess that most of them have a grain of truth at the core, but like any resource shared by immortals, time and distance devour the truth alive.

Is the truth important here? I will politely say no. Mythology is built by the people who subscribe to it, and is a reflection of the flock rather than of the god.

Liberation is our guiding light. We, the members of the Church of Set, seek to ruin, that we may find those resistant to the ruination. We do not seek to destroy Osiris; that would be foolish. Rather we bring those who cannot handle the truth of the Outside, that which Osiris and Horus sought, farther into the darkness. We bring them to Set, so that Set may protect the rest of us from the searing light of what waits beyond the doors of the world.

An interesting note on the Church of Set is how we define "we." There are those of the Ministry, of course, but to think that our membership is defined by bloodline or even Path is small-minded. The Church of Set welcomes members from across sects, and numbers among her body the paths of Lilith, Typhon, the Warrior, and others. Morality is personal. Doctrine is essential. In order to be a member of the Church of Set, you must be inducted by a priest, and follow the guiding principles of the Dead God. Judge those in your city. Protect your flock.

The Church of Set has existed for thousands of years, ever since Set passed into Duat. We are in every city. You cannot cross a domain border without running into an adherent. Even if you do not see us, we are here. Ideally, a Setite presence (and yes, the word Setite is acceptable, like Muslim for Islam) should contain at least one priest and one warrior. The priest guides the flock, and the warrior keeps it safe. More are, of course, encouraged, but be careful to balance out your fury with your place of succor. Priests report to bishops, and so on, up to the head of the Church in Cairo. Titles of priests who handle lesser priests in several domains may vary by location.

While liberation may entail torture and death, be careful to keep your flock at a manageable level. Killing off all of your flock in a suicide pact is just not our style. If your faithful are dead, they cannot continue to spread liberty, and they cannot be further liberated themselves.

Should you have Bahari in the domain, convert them. Give them a safe space to practice their arts and explorations. The followers of Lilith are useful to us, and they understand the exploration of the dark in a way some of us do not. Many of them crave structure, as much as they struggle against it. Give them a place in the hierarchy, and duties to fulfill. If you know anyone in the Order of Taweret, make introductions. We used to have witches in the Church, long ago, but their ways were lost to us. In many ways, the Bahari fill that role. Let them do so.

Should there be young, eager warriors not affiliated with the Church of Set in your domain, pay them. Give them work. Let them see you as a source of problems to handle, and you will have devoted Setite warriors in under a year. Feed their need for violence, and they will commit violence on your behalf.

Should there be eager neonates, feeling isolated by their sires, and craving a slice of what the city has to offer, give them a taste. Allow them to assist in managing the mortals who run errands for you, or plant a word in the mayor's ear. Make it clear that you are the giver of these gifts, and they will come to you, friends in tow. Recruiting elders who already look at the Church of Set askance is a difficult task, and they will always be using you for their own aims. Do not allow this. Instead, go to their children, and raise them in the ways of Sutekh. It is through the children that societal norms change and we become more powerful by the night.

I suppose that could be the single simplest principle in the Church of Set. Feed someone's vices, and they will commit more vices on your behalf. The Church itself might not be simple — we span borders and cults and belief systems — but this is the simplest act we can commit to further the glory of Set. Those who indulge and fall are failures and tools. Those who overcome are worthy of passing through the Gates of our faith.

The Ministry represent us, but we represent their heart.

Dua Sutekh.

Setite Temple: Kharkiv

Kharkiv exists as an unusual domain, having recently experienced an almost-citywide conversion from the Camarilla to the Anarch Movement. The Prince stepped down, a new Baron stepped up, Primogen joined a wider council of elders, and the Sheriff — who attempted to cling on to her position — vanished one night, to the mourning of nobody.

Kharkiv likewise exists as an example of what the Church of Set can do to a Camarilla domain if they get inside the heads of power players and convince them of the promise of Setite liberation. For years, the Setites have worked on the city's influential Kindred, one by one, pushing them to the brink of falling to the Beast before snatching them back as saviors every time. They show the possibilities of freedom without binding mortal ties and undead regret, and cut those fetters if they feel their converts are ready. Some resist or realize the manipulation, only to find their peers among the governing Kindred are already members of the Church or worse, to return to their havens and find Setites already there, ready to “vanish” the vampire who opposes their plans.

Despite their success in working on the city's Kindred, the Church of Set couldn't care less whether the Camarilla or Anarchs govern Kharkiv. Set prohibits them from ruling a city, and they've no real desire to become political advisors. Their objective is to test every vampire and indoctrinate those left standing into the cult. They observe the domain of Indianapolis in the United States, where the Ministry rule with a laissez-faire, any-faith-goes attitude, and believe Kharkiv needs to correct the mistakes made to the north. Priests Vyacheslav and Akhtem feel it's integral to the strength of the Church to convert every meaningful vampire, and eradicate the opposition as the sandstorm scours skin from a cadaver. If only the worthy remain, they can then move onto another city instead of arrogantly trying to rule this one. They take the view that the liberated should rule themselves.

The Church of Set in Kharkiv operates a single, unobtrusive temple in the city, into which only confirmed members of the cult may enter. A single-story grey building in the thick of an industrial estate in the Kyivskyi District, the temple is the Church's statement that

appearances matter far less than content. Within the temple, Setites may indulge in any pleasure they can pick up from Kharkiv's streets or ferry in from elsewhere, as long as they leave the temple the following night with no desire to ever revisit the experience. Sometimes, that requires murdering a vessel to whom the vampire has become attached. Sometimes, it means experiencing heroin in bloodstream, procuring a blood doll of rare Resonance, or even taking Ashe (see p. XX), with the guarantee they'll never do so again. The grey temple is a testament to the Setite ability to risk temptation and overcome, if they're worthy of doing so.

The cult's public face comes through their operations in the Karazin University, where a handful of its members claim territory, and a storefront in the Ave Plaza shopping mall, where they meet Kindred of other cults in what is advertised as a Scientology testing office. Unlike most domains, many meetings between Kindred occur to discuss faith, experiences, and tests of one's self-control. To an outsider, it initially seems evangelical Christianity has taken hold among the city Kindred, as the name "Set" is rarely mentioned outside the converted, though Priest Akhtem consecrated the museums along Sumska Street as a place to use Church terms freely, after the M. F. Sumtsov Historical Museum hosted an Ancient Egyptian exhibition there in 2019, containing the most intact enameled sculpture of Set dated from at least 3,500 years ago.

Kharkiv's Church of Set possesses a loose hierarchy, with the priests on top — three of them Ministry, two of them from other clans — and everyone else a warrior, who defends the faith, or a believer. Kharkiv's Kindred have quickly adopted the term "believer" to point to those who the Church of Set has saved, "non-believer" to those still to be targeted, and "the lost" for those in need of pity, ostracism, or elimination.

Perspectives

Anarchs: *Of all the Kindred sects, this one is the most tolerable. They're aimless but do have a propensity for enjoying unlife in a way in which so many other Kindred fail. The Ministry can guide their energies to something of worth while we hide in their shadow.*

Ashirra: *We occupy a necessary place in this sect, acting as advisors and counselors without ever truly entering their political and religious hierarchy. Sometimes an outside opinion is required. The Banu Haqim would have the entire Ashirra turn on us, but thankfully, there are more clans to that sect than a cabal of rabid assassins. Of note, the Ministry have no presence among the Ashirra. It is a sect where we represent ourselves.*

Banu Haqim: *Where they admire and cling to law and autocratic rule with an almost feverish enthusiasm, we believe in freedom to explore one's existence, and that the only way to truly find oneself is to do so without strictures. It is no surprise we have been at odds for centuries.*

Camarilla: *They were right to reject the Ministry. We work best without the Aeons pulling our strings.*

Hecata: *Our relationship with the Clan of Death is deep and important. Remember the parable of Nakhthorheb and Lazarus, and how both of our clans understand the lands of the dead better than any other.*

The Ministry: *A body cannot stand without a spine and a brain. One might say they are the spine and we are the brain. Or perhaps we are the heart and they are the flesh surrounding. Either way, some of us are of the Ministry, others are not, but we cannot expect an entire clan to fall into lockstep in service to the greatest of faiths. No, they protect us, we guide them, and they can remain the cosmopolitan front to our beliefs.*

On the subject of Paris

The mystery behind the perpetrators of the Paris bombings that led to the Ministry's rejection of the Camarilla (or the Camarilla's rejection of the Ministry) and subsequent joining with the Anarchs is ongoing, though the clan isn't openly making strides to discover the perpetrators.

The prevailing rumor of the time was that the Banu Haqim sabotaged Ministry and Camarilla relations to better insure their own admission into the Ivory Tower. Several prominent Serpents refute this theory, however, based on the risk the Banu Haqim faced if their attack on Camarilla Justicars and Setite Hierophants was discovered. Though, those same Serpents state, the Banu Haqim certainly make for perfect scapegoats. The two clans have fostered a rivalry for centuries.

Investigators into the Paris bombings wonder whether the Camarilla set up the attack to remove troublesome Justicars, deal a blow to the Snakes, and impress the Banu Haqim. Others wonder if it wasn't just another Second Inquisition attack with a hell of a lot of collateral damage. With the Lasombra's recent entry into the Camarilla, further thoughts go to the Magisters taking early steps to remove a potential rival, though the fear such an attack could cause might have jeopardized their attempt.

The clan's conspiracy theorists quietly discuss whether the attack was orchestrated by the Church of Set to sabotage the clan's liberal arm before it made a terrible decision, while others theorize the Ministry might have planned this all along to make them more sympathetic to the Anarch Movement (and remove some powerful Hierophants at the same time).

The truth may never be known.

Animals

Vampires of the Ministry, and the orthodox branch of their clan, are as capable of shifting into the form of a wolf or bat as any vampire with the required level of Protean, but the clan has a special affinity for beasts of importance in Egyptian mythology and various types of snake.

Boa Constrictor

There exists an instinctive fear of the animal that can wrap itself around you, squeezing the air from your lungs and cracking your bones in its tight grip. Boa constrictors are native to the Americas, with Ministers identifying as members of the Tlacique — a vampire cult focused on Aztec mythology — commonly taking constrictor form using the Discipline of Protean.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 1, Mental 1

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 3

Exceptional Dice Pools: Brawl 6, Stealth 6; Intimidation 4; Awareness 4

Special: If a boa constrictor successfully grapples an opponent, it may constrict its victim for +2 Superficial Health damage.

Cobra

The cobra is renowned for the way it rears before striking and its notoriously venomous bite. While they range in size, the largest are up to four yards/meters in length. Ministers proficient

at changing form often adopt the shape of a cobra, while some endeavor to make animal ghouls of these venomous creatures.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 1, Mental 1

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 2

Exceptional Dice Pools: Brawl 6, Stealth 7; Intimidation 4; Awareness 4

Special: If a cobra successfully bites a mortal opponent, it deals +2 Aggravated Health damage and its venom kills or debilitates the victim by the end of the scene if not treated. Against vampires, the venom from a cobra bite has no effect.

Jackal

Small, fast members of the wolf family, jackals primarily prey on small mammals and birds, or scavenge where possible. Though not the toughest of creatures, the jackal is an important animal in Egyptian mythology, encouraging some Ministers to take jackal form for religious reasons.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 1, Mental 1

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 2

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics 7, Stealth 6; Intimidation 2; Awareness 3

Special: The jackal's long, curved canines inflict +1 Superficial Health damage on bite attacks.

Oksana Koblenko "Proserpina"

Epitaph: Blackmailer for the Greater Good

Quote: *"Did you see the screens I sent? Good. Never mind how I got your texts. Let's talk about how to keep your Prince from getting them, too."*

Clan: Caitiff

Mortal Days: The Scapegoat Daughter

Natalia Koblenko studied law on a merit scholarship at the Karazin University, concurrently pursuing a Juris Doctor and a Master of Laws. She was poised, eloquent, the superstar of the Koblenko family, the true joy of her mother's life.

Her twin sister, Oksana Koblenko, hated her.

Oksana pursued a degree in engineering at the same school, without a scholarship, or poise, or her mother's love. She didn't want to be an engineer, but a throwaway comment from her mother convinced her it would finally get her attention. She kept her head down. She stayed away from boys. After a disquieting self-discovery, she stayed away from girls. She repressed everything that wasn't perfect, compressed it down until she felt like she might blow to pieces.

Oksana let it out in little ways. Little cuts, mostly, high on her bicep where the scars wouldn't show. Then little thrills she could get away with. She snitched on fellow students because it made her feel good to receive praise for exposing their secrets. She started accumulating stores of blackmail material on students, teachers, even family members. She called them "little tricks." She'd find a way to slip them into the public, in an email to her sister, or a text to a classmate, and watch them work. Entropy — the breakdown of order, the flaws in trusted systems — fascinated her more than anything.

It started little and grew from there. Her tricks got better. Her cuts, deeper. She started going to group when her dormmate caught her; *Olympian Counseling Center — Free to Karazin Students!* It helped, a little, to be around others like her. She had more focus, which she bent toward her little tricks. She found out she could sell them, and her skills. People paid her money for acquiring intelligence and extorting unsuspecting victims. Sometimes she'd see the aftermath of her tricks in the local news, and it'd be her first smile in weeks.

Then someone tried to kill her sister.

Kindred Nights: The Wanted Child

Oksana woke up in the dark, slumped in a chair. The night was a blur of unimaginable, bone-deep pain. Pain, and a bleak, acrid hunger. Three white shadows loomed over her. They brought her something big, warm and struggling. She bit into it without thinking. It tasted — no, *felt* incredible, a better release than the knife's edge.

The white strangers asked something. She couldn't make it out over her throbbing head. They muttered. Got angry. Started arguing. "God *damn* it, Simon!" A woman, high and panicky. "You dumb piece of shit, that's her *sister!*"

She choked on fear, the scent of it rolling off them, and her own, crawling up her throat. The strangers kept arguing. One grabbed her by the shoulder and hauled her to her feet. *What do we do now? We got the wrong damn Koblenko!* They dragged her outside, fighting in angry whispers. Oksana stumbled free of the white claw on her shoulder. She ran, they shouted. The metro was smears of wet light, incomprehensible.

Oksana ran forever and everything melted together like a nightmare. Until finally, finally, something looked familiar.

Olympian Counseling Center — Free to Karazin Students!

It was closed, of course. But she forced her way through the locked door. The group leader was there, young and quiet and red-headed, sitting in the dark with a familiar woman. "Oksana." He remembered her name. "What happened?"

She told him about the white strangers, about biting and drinking. She told him about the cutting (though he already knew), and more poured out of her like black water. The engineering degree she didn't want. The girls she didn't want to notice. The little tricks. Her sister, her disgusting sister, better than her and everyone knew it and Natalia didn't have the decency to feel bad about it. Nobody wanted her, nobody. Not even her mother.

Akhtem sat with her for hours. The woman — another group member — came and went as Oksana sobbed and Akhtem listened. He didn't flinch, or ask questions, or raise his eyebrows or scoff. He simply let her purge.

"You've been hurting for a long time," he said when the black water finally stopped. He pulled her to him, an arm around her shoulder like a cloak of snow. "You'll hurt for a long time more," he admitted, and she found herself reassured by it — a plain, respectful truth. "There is someone who wants you," he promised, gripping her hard. "He led you to us," the woman finally spoke, "because he wants you to meet him."

This was how Oksana found the Church of Set in Kharkiv, to her mind quite by accident, but to the Church by an act of providence. They assured her that her reason for being there was ordained by a force greater than any single being, and tutored her in the existence of a vampire. They reminded her it couldn't just be coincidence that she was Embraced so close to a Setite temple. They praised her good work so far in liberating others, and made sure she knew that good work was to continue, but under their direction.

Now, Oksana is a dedicated agent and adherent of the Church of Set, traveling between domains, serving her temple's will. She finds even greater pleasure and purpose in her actions now than when she performed them as a mortal, as she finally receives congratulations for her achievements. The Church of Set liberated her, and she uses its ways to liberate others.

Plots and Schemes:

- **Secure the Temple:** In the midst of a new Anarch court, Akhtem's hold on Kharkiv's Kindred wavers between those driven politically and those who feel the summons of faith. What he needs is a front that can hold up to all scrutiny, cover its tracks, and grant protection to other Kindred Church members. Oksana is intent on procuring this for him by expanding her network of victims and defrauding anyone who would stand in the way of the temple's expansion.
- **New Brothers and Sisters:** The feuding Anarch gangs in the northwest represent huge, untapped potential. The Church can help them. Oksana knows it, but they need to know it, too. She's taken it upon herself to deliver digital "presents" to prominent gang leaders, like blackmail material on rivals or stolen identities to be mined for resources. No strings. For now.
- **There Can Only Be One:** Natalia Koblenko finished her Juris Doctor and her Master of Laws, made a huge splash in the political and public law arena, and is now on track to be the youngest woman to run for — and win — the Kharkiv mayoral seat. Baron Karina wants Natalia in her retinue, and thwarting the Baron's attempts is another of Oksana's full-time jobs. Oksana knows she should be beyond care for her sister's progress or downfall, but she doesn't care. She finally feels superior to Natalia and refuses to let that change.

Domain and Haven:

- **Temple of Gray Veils (Haven 2, Herd 4, Resources 2)** When not holding support groups at the Olympian Counseling Center, Oksana works on the establishment of a second Kharkiv temple, in the stockroom of an abandoned KARE Kharkiv furniture store. The faithful number seventeen kine currently, most of whom comprise a strange diversity of recovering addicts. Oksana runs stolen power through the stockroom, making the place livable for her kine. The temple has a stockpile of useful contraband, as well as a directory of Church members in the south who can provide off-site resources. It also features a small library of old orthodoxy texts, which Oksana has not yet read.

Thralls and Tools:

- **Court of the Obsolete (Herd 3)** Oksana's personal herd knows her as the Proserpina, an affected cybergoth goddess who holds court with her lessers, the vast majority of them sniveling incels. She's yet to master the art of nurturing Resonances and takes anything she can get. Her followers adore her (Oksana's Presence makes sure of it), and while they aren't the most useful bunch, they faithfully follow the doctrine she lays down. Someday they'll be ready for the temple.
- **Tara Bakurova (Ally 1)** When she met Tara, a fellow self-harm survivor with a similar history of familial trauma, Oksana wanted desperately to be friends. When she got to know her, a determined, fiercely romantic young woman, Oksana wanted desperately to be lovers. She refuses to bring Tara into her herd — she wants her to love Oksana, not worship the Proserpina — but also worries that Tara will recover and leave the group before she's ready to join the Church.
- **Natalia Koblenko (Enemy 1)** Beautiful, passionate, talented Natalia, sharp as knives and twice as deadly. Natalia knows her twin is still in the city. She's seen her fingerprints all

over — every local corporation suffering a public scandal, every sudden failure of the local government following a virus or leaked information, every feeble attempt at a smear campaign against her law offices. Natalia won't be brought down to her level. But she *will* find Oksana.

Kindred Relationships:

- **Akhtem Veksler (Mawla 2, Adoration)** Akhtem saved Oksana from a premature final death in the chaos of Kharkiv. But he did more than that — he re-Embraced her in the love of the Red God, and now he guides her as a divine agent of Set. Little is known of the man save his basic history: he abandoned his father's faith to come west with the late 19th century goldrush... and found something better. His influence is well entrenched in the city but maintaining a permanent temple has eluded him. Oksana wants to prove herself indispensable to his plans.
- **The Ministry (Jealousy)** Oksana has observed how representatives of the Ministry are accepted across domains as diplomats, counselors, and bureaucrats, and while she doesn't know any Ministers personally, dislikes what she interprets as their cowardice. To Oksana's mind, they don't deserve to be successful because they abandoned their orthodox beliefs. She's only new to the Church of Set, but the Ministry's polytheist, liberal bullshit is not for her.
- **Simon Danilenko (Anger)** Oksana hasn't heard from Simon, personally, since he mistakenly Embraced her a few years back. She *does* keep in touch, though, looking into his latest vices so she can deliver them to him, in the hopes that one will be his undoing. Oksana knows he isn't fit for divinity and will find a way to destroy him if she can.

Whispers:

- **Doppelganger:** In her efforts to become a self-taught Mask cobbler, Oksana has learned how to craft replica documents and spoof data from pre-existing Masks. So far, three titled Camarilla vampires have been brought to task for breaches of the Masquerade, only for the Sheriff to later learn the breaches were committed by Anarchs using stolen Masks.
- **Muckraker:** Oksana's got taps on major cell towers all over the city, and for the past few years she's been training an algorithm to sniff out Kindred texts with telling keywords, like juicebag, leech, donor, and lick.

Mask and Mien:

- Oksana Koblenko appears to be a young woman in her early twenties, 5'4" and bony, with dim, sad eyes and a small mouth. Her short, soot-black hair feathers her cheekbones and brushes the edge of her jaw. She writes more eloquently than she speaks; her voice tends toward sudden stops and mumbles. Though she doesn't have a Mask, she does have several online personas.
- At work in the Church, Oksana dresses simply: dark red leggings, a red tunic top, fingerless gloves to keep the joints in her sensitive hands from stiffening while she codes. She travels in a haze of *kyphi* incense, and even outside the temple bleeds a faint aura of frankincense and pine.
- When she appears to her cult as the Proserpina, Oksana's frame becomes delicate and ethereal. She accentuates her eyes with charcoal, weaves long golden cords into her hair, and dresses in a cyber-nouveau collection of neon green straps, gold rings, and heavy black fabric. Her Proserpina persona gives her an ocean of confidence she doesn't normally have, but she tends to fall into campy "dark goddess" clichés.

Sire: Simon Danilenko

Embraced: 2015 (Born 1993)

Ambition: See a permanent temple of Set established in Kharkiv

Convictions: Never refuse aid to another member of the Church; Never turn down the opportunity to liberate others

Touchstones: Tara Bakurova — fellow self-harm survivor; Natalia Koblenko — narcissistic nightmare twin

Humanity: 6

Generation: 13th

Blood Potency: 1

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

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 5

Skills: Craft (Electronics) 2, Drive 1, Larceny (Extortion) 3, Survival 1; Etiquette 2, Insight 2, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 4; Academics (Research) 2, Awareness 1, Finance 1, Investigation (Scandals) 3, Occult (Church of Set) 2, Politics 2, Science (Engineering) 2, Technology 4

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Presence 3

General Difficulties: 4/2

New Coterie Type

The Church of Set are masters of secreting members of their cult among other Kindred sects and within foreign domains. Many Kindred of this religion form coterie specifically for this purpose. Some utilize the sbirri coterie type (see **Vampire: The Masquerade**, p. 199), while others opt for the more aggressive saboteur type.

Saboteurs

“We will erode their domain brick by brick.”

The saboteur coterie is one without an immediate powerbase or roots within their new domain, but their reach among the kine is likely impressive. They often have the support of a vampire assigning them to the task of spying, assassination, or political disruption.

- **Contacts:** (••) (disenfranchised, outsiders, etc.)
- **Influence:** (•) (surveillance companies)
- **Mawla:** (••) (the vampire who set them to their task)
- **Mask:** (•) (cover identities)
- **Resources:** (••) (liquid cash to assist with their cover story)
- **Adversaries:** (••) (at least one vampire who would oppose their mission with violence)

Possible extras: Domain (if the coterie is embedded in their current locale), Status Flaw: Suspect

New Powers

The Ministry and their orthodox clanmates in the Church of Set practice some refined versions of their clan Disciplines, utilizing the powers of Obfuscate and Presence to better create cult members and crush weaknesses, and Protean to better emulate their clan founder. These powers are not exclusive to the Serpents, but few outside the clan use these Disciplines in the ways the Ministry does.

Obfuscate

Level 2

Mental Maze

Prerequisite: Cloud Memory

Amalgam: Dominate 1

Serpents maintain that the power to Obfuscate is less about illusion and more about perception. Mental Maze is the ability to remove all sense of direction and location from a victim, allowing the vampire to make their target a prisoner in their current environment, such as a home, a nightclub, or worse — a vampire's cellar. The victim finds their location folding back on itself, subtly altering their perception of previously visited rooms, convincing them that an actual exit will only lead deeper into the maze, and eventually breaking them down into a state of panic and fragility.

Cost: One Rouse Check

Dice Pools: Charisma + Obfuscate vs. Wits + Resolve

System: The vampire must be able to communicate with their victim in some way, causing them to read or hear words to the effect of “you cannot escape.” The vampire must be present for the power to take effect. If the vampire is successful on the above roll, their victim struggles to find their way out of any multi-room structure in which they're currently situated.

If anyone attempts to assist them, the victim must succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll (Difficulty 4) or immediately distrust the individual guiding them, as their environment conflicts with any guidance given.

If the victim makes no attempt to escape, then no further effects take place. Mortals cannot successfully escape, though the Storyteller may have them attempt to for narrative purposes. If supernatural victims attempt to escape, they only get one attempt, and must roll Resolve + Survival (Difficulty equal to the number of successes the vampire's player rolled when using the power). Anyone who fails to escape a Mental Maze loses two Willpower points and cannot attempt to escape again in this scene.

Normally, the power sees use in a multi-room structure, though with the expenditure of a Willpower point, the vampire may apply the power's effect on a victim in a single room or an outdoor (but still densely-packed) environment such as a forest or construction site.

This power is usable on multiple targets at once (if they all hear or read the same message), though the player only makes one roll, and the victims each make individual rolls to resist.

Duration: One scene

Presence

Level 3

True Love's Face

Prerequisite: Entrancement, Mask of a Thousand Faces

Amalgam: Obfuscate 3

Combining the powers of Entrancement and Mask of a Thousand Faces, the vampire is able to take on the appearance of someone their victim loves, whether or not the practitioner has seen the recipient of this love before. Their appearance (including body shape and voice) only changes to the eyes of the beholder. The vampire gains no additional knowledge of the “true love” beyond what their victim might tell them.

Variants of this power exist, allowing vampires to appear as the object of a victim's hatred or fear. A strong emotion is all that's required to apply the power, whether in the form of passion for a new lover, care for a child, or resentment of an ancient rival.

Cost: One Rouse Check

Dice Pools: Charisma + Obfuscate vs. Wits + Composure

System: On a successful roll of Charisma + Obfuscate, the victim sees and hears the vampire as a loved one (or other human recipient of strong emotion).

Duration: One scene

Protean

Level 5

The Heart of Darkness

Amalgam: Fortitude 2

Practiced almost exclusively by vampires within the higher echelons of the Church of Set, this power enables a vampire to remove their own heart and store it outside their body. The vampire's flesh and bone warp as they reach their hand into their bare chest without the need for incision, after which point they remove the heart. This power is not without risk to the practitioner, and can only be used by a vampire on themselves. The vampire typically places the heart in a ceremonial canopic jar or urn, though there is no restriction as to where the heart can go. For as long as it is removed, the vampire is immune to staking attempts, unless a stake is driven through the removed heart. The vampire's emotions are detached — metaphysically and biologically, if the heart can be said to be the font of emotion — providing them a resilience against their Beast's urges but a remove from compassion and warmth.

Cost: Two Rouse Checks

System: This power requires no roll, but takes three turns to complete and inflicts two Aggravated Health damage to the vampire, requiring the expenditure of a Willpower point when removing the heart. No powers can be used to mitigate these effects. Reattaching the heart requires two Rouse Checks. Once removed, the vampire gains +2 dice on attempts to resist all kinds of frenzy but adds a -2 dice penalty to all Insight rolls.

Damage visited upon the heart does not physically manifest on the former host's body, at least until destruction. However, if the heart is dealt Aggravated damage equal to or greater than the vampire's Health, the vampire falls into torpor. If an extracted heart is destroyed — it possesses the same Health and Fortitude as its former host, but can only be completely

destroyed with fire or sunlight — the vampire experiences final death. While the heart is removed, the vampire's body cannot be staked unless the heart is located and separately impaled, in which case the vampire falls paralyzed. The vampire is still susceptible to death via fire or sunlight even without a heart.

Duration: Permanent (or until the heart is destroyed/returned)