

Stats

Character Name: Zahra
Deed Name: *Mankhal Alrimal* / Sifter-of-Sands
Rite Name: *Euyun Alzalam* / Eyes-of-Midnight
Race: Bastet
Breed: Feline
Pyrio: Night
Tribe: Bubasti
Nature: Decoder (see notes)
Demeanor: Sage
Rank: Aka (2)
Tribal Yava: • *When all immortals of the tribe are slain, the tribe itself will die with them.*
• *The Black Soil of Khem is forever tied to the tribe; if all Bubasti in a generation flee the land, they will be the last of their kind.*
• *Bubasti hunger. Although their appetite is for something deeper than food, they will always eat what is put before them.*

Model: May El Calamawy

Strength: 1
Dexterity: 3
Stamina: 3
Charisma: 3
Manipulation: 3
Appearance: 4 / Elegant
Perception: 4 / Details
Intelligence: 5 / Creative Logic
Wits: 3
Rage: 1
Gnosis: 6
Willpower: 5
Unspent XP: 0

Talents

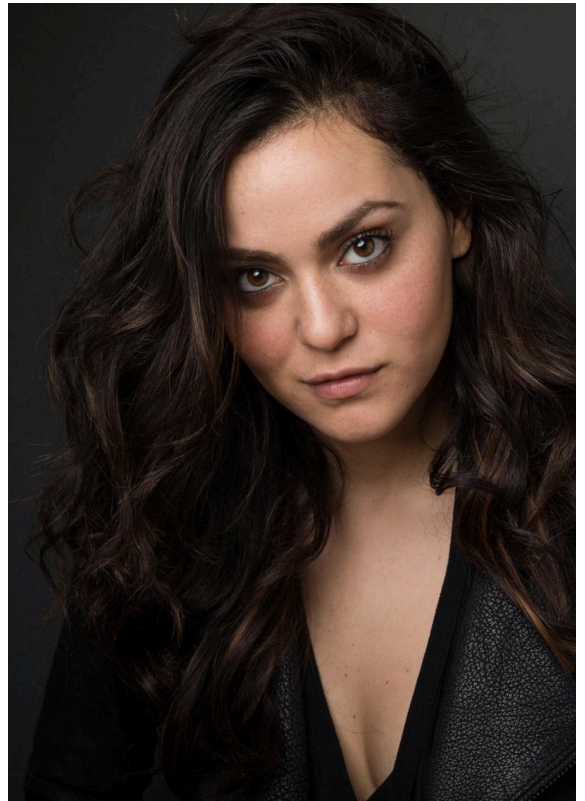
- Alertness (3)
- Awareness (Bastet) (3)
- Empathy (2)
- Expression (2)
- Primal-Urge (2)

Secondary Talents

- Artistic Expression (2)

Skills

- Etiquette (1)



-- Performance (1)

-- Stealth (2)

Secondary Skills

-- Herbalism (1)

-- Meditation (1)

-- Musical Instrument (1) / hand-drum

-- Research (3)

Knowledges

-- Academics (3)

-- Enigmas (4) / Ancient Mysteries

-- Esoterica (3)

-- Medicine (2)

-- Occult (4) / Witchcraft

-- Rituals (3)

-- Science (2)

Secondary Knowledges

-- Toxicology/Poisons (2)

Backgrounds

-- Resources (1)

-- Rites (4)

-- Secrets (Bastet) (4)

-- Fetish (5)

Renown

-- Cleverness (6)

-- Ferocity (1)

-- Honor (3)

Merits

-- Graceful (2 Bastet)

-- Lack of Scent (2)

-- Cat Magic (3) (Shadows)

-- Languages (3) (Arabic (native), Coptic, English, BSL)

Flaws

-- Disconcerting (2 Bastet)

-- Mute (4)

Notes

Nature: Decoder: You thrive on puzzles and riddles, be they the obvious sort, found in books and games, or hidden within seemingly benign texts or even a person's face. Regain Willpower when you solve a particularly challenging puzzle or mystery. (I couldn't find one that fit, so I made one up..)

Form stats:

Sokto Str +0, Dex +1, Sta +0, Man +0, App +1

Crinos Str +1, Dex +3, Sta +1, Man -2, App -3

Chatro Str +2, Dex +4, Sta +1, Man -2, App 0
Feline Str -1, Dex +4, Sta +1, Man +0

Rites

Rites

Rite of Dedication: (same as the Garou rite)

Rite of Warding : by spending a Gnosis point, the ritespeaker ties herself to the place for the duration of the Warding. This warding continues for 1 hour unless the speaker either leaves or dismisses the guard. For as long as it lasts, any non-Bastet who enters the area triggers a mystic feeling of unease; the speaker will not know exactly who or what the intruder is, but she'll know something is not right. Intruders cannot enter a warded area at all without succeeding in a willpower roll (Diff 5 + caster's successes) -- as the energies simply drive them away for no explicable reason. Even spirits cannot pass through a warded area without first alerting the speaker. Roll: Manipulation + Rituals (Diff 9-moon phase)

Rite of Summoning - This is an old Bubasti version of the Garou rite. It involves much of the same preparations that the dogs do, but on a much larger scale. After a period of meditation and cleansing, the rite master must scribe a large circle full of ancient symbols predating most Egyptian texts. The scripture is to assure the call is carried across the Gauntlet, and to the spirit that is the target. Each type of spirit has their own set of symbols to use... the Bubasti must then burn a proper offering in the center of the circle, while chanting (*or in Zahra's case, drumming*) to attract the spirit.

Rite of Binding - This rite binds a spirit to the werecat, making it her servant. The more powerful a spirit is, the more difficult the process. Any encountered spirits is subject to binding. Spirits bound this way may be used to create temporary talens. Most spirits will not be bound willingly. System: A Bastet can attempt this rite only in the presence of a spirit, and it is usually performed in the Umbra. When attempting to bind a spirit, she must first spend a number of Gnosis points (minimum of one). Each point of Gnosis spent reduces the spirit's Gnosis rating by one. The player must then roll Willpower (difficulty equals the spirit's adjusted Gnosis). The number of successes indicates how long the spirit may be forced into service, with each success binding the spirit for one week. In the case of a talen, the spirit is bound until the object is used.

Rite of Recognition -

Gifts

Gifts

Sense Magic (R1): As the Uktena Gift

Sense Unmaker's Hand (R1): As Sense Wyrms Perception + Occult

Scholar's Friend (R1) : By spending a Gnosis point, and rolling Willpower, a Bastet can read a book, scroll, or tablet written in any language. This talent does not teach the cat a new language, nor will it help her understand esoteric concepts or missing bits of text. Difficulty for the Willpower depends on what is being read:

Modern: 5

Scholarly (Latin, Sanskrit) 6

Archaic or Dead (Aramaic) 7

Common Pictographs (Classic Egyptian) 8

Obscure Pictographs (Sigils of Mu) 9

Personal codes/Lost Cuneiform 10

Cat Claws (R1): By calling on her heritage, a Bastet in Homid or Sokto form can unsheathe her claws and attack as if she were in Crinos. System: The player need not spend a Willpower point to enact this particular partial transformation, and the difficulty of the transformation is 6.

Mine (R1) - Rubbing against an object, the Bastet magically claims it as her own. System: The player spends one Gnosis point. Anyone attempting to steal the object at any point afterward must roll Willpower (difficulty 9) before doing so.

Open Seal – (R1) – The Bastet can open nearly any sort of closed or locked physical device. System: Roll Gnosis vs Difficulty of Local Gauntlet.

Cat Feet (R2) – She is immune to falls under 100 feet (91 m). She also has perfect balance even on the most slippery surfaces, and the difficulties of all combat actions involving body slams and grappling decrease by two. System: This ability becomes innate to those who learn the Gift.

Mousemaze (R2) – An unsettling spell of confusion, this Gift disorients a target until he blunders around in a panic. Walls shift and close in, shadows lengthen, sounds drift to his ears from all corners, and familiar places seem strange and threatening. Although the magic has no real effect on the person's surroundings, his terror and confusion send him into a frenzy, making him an easy target for the werecat lurking nearby... *System:* The cat's player rolls Manipulation + Empathy, with the target's Willpower (or Rage if higher) as a difficulty. Success scrambles his sense of direction and relationship. The better the roll, the more confused the target becomes. Three successes or more send him into a panic; werewolves and vampires must check for frenzy; mages must make Willpower rolls or go into short Quiet; mere humans just freak out. This disorientation lasts about 15 minutes, then slowly fades.

Spirit Barrier (R2) This Gift allows the Bastet to protect herself from spirits by performing a quick warding rite. The werecat traces an invisible pictogram in the air that frightens and unnerves any nearby spirits, and which travels with the Bastet for as long as it persists. System:

The player spends one Gnosis point and rolls Manipulation + Rituals (difficulty 7). Spirits within 100 feet (30 m) of the character must subtract one from their dice pools for each success. Any spirit that comes within 50 feet (15 m) of the character loses one point from its Essence per turn for each success the player rolled. This Gift lasts for one scene.

Fetish: Akhemnebi's Embrace

Fetish Name: Akhemnebi's Embrace

Carried by: Zahra

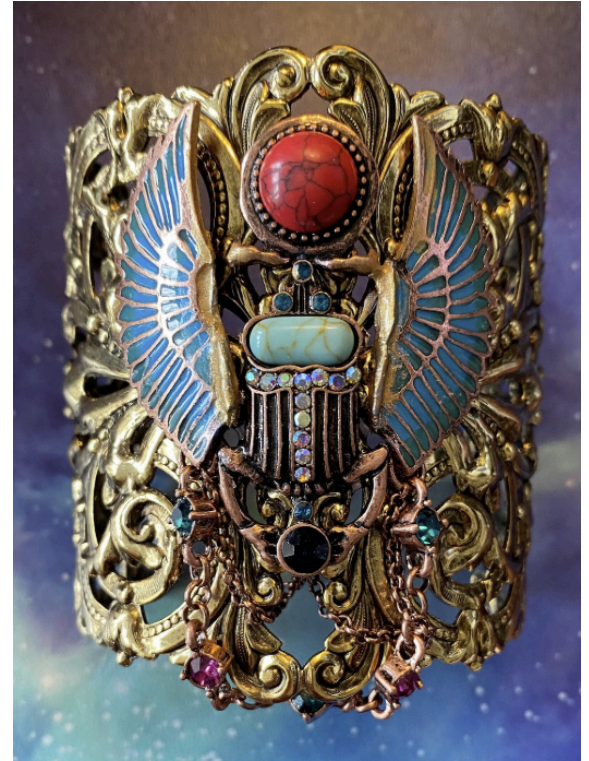
Spirit Type: Ancestor Aspects / Ka spirit in bracelet, Ba spirit in stone

Gnosis: 8, when merged / Separate, the fetishes are both Gnosis 6.

Rage: 5 when merged / Separate, each fetish is 3.

History

Once in the ancient days of the First Dynasty, the kheper numbered seven. Each of them believed they had attained immortality, always swapping decaying flesh for young meat when their time had come. Each elder always chose a young member of the Bubasti to groom for his body-replacement, and when young again, often indulged in all the pleasures of youth. Nearly every Bubasti alive can trace their lineage back to one of the original six. However, the seventh's entire line was slaughtered, and entombed with the body of their elder, all traces of him purged from the cultural knowledge.



You see, Akhemnebi was among the first to obtain immortality. It was his perseverance and cleverness that created the Gift of the Fleeing Scarab. So he was to thank for the eldest Bubasti's ability to cheat the gods of death. It was late in the First Dynasty of Egypt that jealousy for Akhemnebi's power grew, until a plot was hatched, and tragedy struck.

Betrayed by his peers, Akhemnebi was poisoned for his power. The poison robbed him of his ability to enact the one Gift that would save his life; so, he died never knowing the identity of his assassin. His Bubasti attendants had been bought for his service by Ahset-ra, a younger elder who Akhemnebi once trusted. Instead of allowing Akhemnebi's spirit to pass on to Du'at, the attendants wrestled with his ka spirit until it was subdued and sealed away into a golden bracelet. Ahset-ra then summoned forth the ba of his old teacher, and bound it to the polished jasper stone set in the wristlet.

Ahset-Ra wore the bracelet for much of the next thousand years or so. It never fully cooperated with him as a fetish truly should, because of the imbalance in the spirits. Akhemnebi's ba and ka would never unite into his immortal ahk, thereby creating a full, and powerful Ancestor spirit. Akhemnebi's Ka is full of rage and anger at its imprisonment, and only served to become more and more angry as the truth of his death slowly came to light. Ahset-Ra could never fully access the powers of the ka-fetish as it fought against him at every turn. The ba-fetish however was more pliant and much more easily subdued.

For a greater part of each passing year, Ahset-Ra found he could not wear the bracelet for fear of what it would do to him. The Rage of the ka-spirit barely contained in the gold of the bracelet was becoming impossible to contain. In order to subdue the anger it felt, Ahset-Ra had a small shrine erected in the Temple at Bubastis. He led the young, impressionable shadowcats living

there to believe that the bracelet had once been owned by a great and honorable warrior in the ancient days. Some of the worship shown at the shrine helped subdue the rageful ka-spirit.

Until the day that an innocent, desperate Aka slipped the fetish from its stand, and slipped away into the night with it...

Powers

Ba-Fetish- The Scarab Stone

Bound into the carved jasper stone, the Ba spirit is the embodiment of the idea of the immortal soul. This is the place where magical abilities come from, and hence, the ba-fetish power is one of stealth and subtlety.

Power: Upon successful activation, (Gnosis Roll D6, or 1 Gnosis spent), the fetish effectively renders the user invisible to all forms of detection, magical, mechanical, or otherwise. This form of invisibility is complete while the Bastet stands still, but a successful Dexterity + Occult (D7) roll will allow the shadowcat to move slowly and still remain unseen. The invisibility lasts until the Bastet attacks, or until the end of the scene.

Ka-Fetish- The Golden Bracelet

Bound into the gold used to create the bracelet itself, the Ka spirit is the embodiment of the personality and all of the things that make a person unique. This is the seat of the will, and the heart, and as such, the ka-fetish power is one based on Rage and strength.

Power: Activation of the ka-fetish requires a point of Rage to be spent, instead of either a gnosis roll, or gnosis point. This disallows the use of the two fetishes in conjunction with one another. When activated with Rage, the fetish grants the possibility of incredible power to its user. In game terms, on the next successful melee strike, the user gets to add 2 dice to her potential damage pool.

Ahk-Fetish- A Legendary Ancestor

If the two halves of this bracelet were to ever meld into one cohesive unit, this bracelet would rank among the legendary fetishes of all time. Ahk spirits are created by the unification of ba and ka, creating something greater than the sum of its parts. An Ahk spirit is on par with a minor deity, and often in Egypt were revered as household ancestor gods. To unite the fetish would take a great quest through the Du'at and possibly even a return to the black sands of Khem itself. In the thousands of years since the imprisonment of Akhemnabi's spiritual halves, no one has ever tempted fate...

Cat Magic: Shadow Path

Shadowgrip

The severity and persistence of the controlled shadows is gauged by one's Shadowgrip. When a target attempts to resist the Path of Shadows, they make a Willpower test with a difficulty determined by the selected Aspect. Any success ends the effect on the following turn or after one minute.

- **Deepening:** Bringing shadows deeper into our vision can create a distracting and intimidating atmosphere. Within an area the overall lighting itself may not change per se, but the shadows deepen, and even sounds become slightly smothered at the edges. These shadows can also be cast upon others to confer the Path's benefits, such as a bonus to Stealth tests in shadowy conditions.

- **Shaping:** Taking further mastery of the dark material that comprises shadow, the sorcerer now crafts pattern and intent behind their shadow weaving. Upon a successful casting, the sorcerer adds two dice to any pools involving Intimidation or Stealth as well as any Subterfuge test to hide their identity. Conversely, the shadows can surround an individual and cast doubt and confusion upon the victim's senses. At this level of mastery, they are strong enough to cause the target to hesitate or reconsider their actions due to the unidentifiable unease. This causes the target a –1 penalty to rolls made to dodge or that rely on quick reaction time. A Willpower test at difficulty 6 allows the victim to shake the shadows from their eyes and focus on their task at hand.

- **Entrenching:** Not content with merely strengthening shadows, the sorcerer now animates the shadowstuff itself, letting it shift and roil about them. Should they take their deepening skills further, light now withers in the target location, and color will desaturate before the shadows. Affecting another is now far more effective. Shadows shift and distort in their eyes, and unsettling whispers can be heard when the victim gets too close to a pool of gathered shade. Being harried in such a way causes a –1 difficulty on all tests. The effect can be broken with a Willpower test at difficulty 7. Finally, the caster can cause shadows to flutter or shake creating visual diversions and increasing the difficulty of all ranged attacks made against the beneficiary by one

Rituals

Lifting Shadows (•) Shadows and shades hide secrets for those who wish to hide them, but the learned sorcerer may reveal those secrets to those they trust. Smearing ink into a pair of contacts or funneling smoke into tight swimming goggles, the sorcerer brings the sight of the recipient into the realm of shadows. For the next eight hours, night may be as bright as day. Once blessed, the sorcerer or their ally may treat all darkness as daylight when making Alertness tests based on sight.

Cloak the Intent (••) Wrapping herself or a target in the surrounding darkness, she can almost fully obscure her actions and movements while in dimly lit areas. +2 Stealth while moving.

Grip of Shades (•••) Within every crevasse hides a little shadow. Within every shadow hides an ally to a sorcerer of the Path of Shadowcasting. It is access to these allies that gives the sorcerer leverage in ways that many would never anticipate. By hardening the shadowstuff within the shadows on their person, the sorcerer may afford themselves a modicum of protection against impacts and benefits from an advantage in hand-to-hand combat. For 24 hours after bathing in coal-infused oils, the sorcerer has rating 2 armor when soaking bashing or lethal damage and adds two to all Brawl and Martial Arts dice pools that involve grappling

History

History

1900, Cairo, Egypt - The news headline rocked Cairo. Local woman gives birth to a litter of kittens! The rumor and scuttlebutt was quickly hushed up, replaced and overshadowed with the newest archaeological find of the century. The woman in question was taken away to a secret location, where she was cared for, and practically worshiped by the creatures she was Kin to. The Bubasti had managed a successful experiment, desperate to replenish their dwindling feline population, without having to resort to the horrific agreements levied up on them by the Setites. Through use of a substance made of dried vampire blood, a true-bred Bubasti male's semen, a handful of magical herbs, and months of rituals, the Bubasti immortals managed to impregnate a female kin. Unfortunately, this woman entered labor far too soon, in the public eye, creating a sensationalist stir among the newspapers. Ultimately, she birthed a trio of feline kittens. The first few weeks were hard, the premature kittens were imbued with supernatural life, and no one had any idea how to care for them. Two of the kittens died from unknown ailments, either rejecting mother's milk or simply rejecting life altogether. The third remained small and weak, barely clinging to the edge of life, but gradually, over the course of months grew stronger.

They named her Eyes-Of-Midnight, for the first time she opened them revealed little pools of darkness, completely black in color, unlike the typical golden Bubasti eyes. Little Midnight proceeded to gain strength, and grow quickly, once she was weaned to solid foods. It was instantly apparent to the immortal *kheper* that she would be destined for great things. However, they were concerned... she never made a sound... at nearly six months old, she would neither purr, nor mewl. Distraught, the elders began to teach her in earnest, fighting to make her create noise, or sound.

At a year old, while watching an Aka return from an information gathering mission, Little Midnight underwent her first change. There was no anger, no rage involved. She simply watched another shift from feline to homid, and followed suit. While the elders rejoiced, she looked on curiously, watching their mannerisms. Soon she was clapping and laughing soundlessly along, without knowing why she was happy.

Midnight was quickly given a kuasha, and allowed to venture beyond the hidden temple grounds with him. As she learned, she watched everything, and everyone. With her Kuasha, she learned sign language to communicate, and was taught how to read, and write. Even before her First Year was up, she was being groomed for a wider role: the elders wished her to travel. Their reasons were understandable, on the surface, but truthfully, they needed to get her away from the prying eyes of the vampires that held them all in sway. They created an identity for her, an assumed name, and sent her to England for proper schooling. From her family, she receives a small monthly stipend. She attended the University of London, enrapturing herself with the history of the world. And in 1905, left London with a degree in hand.

She began to travel then, refusing to return to Khem when the world was so fascinating. Her travels took her through the lands of the Hindu, where she met a *fakir*. For hours, she studied his magic, watching as he made the shadows move and dance, as they whispered and taunted her... never allowing herself to fear, she remained his silent shadow for more than a year, until she finally discovered how he made the shadows move. Hoarding that knowledge, she vanished... leaving the fakir a broken-hearted man, bereft of the young beauty who had dogged

his footsteps for so long. Delighted with her new secret, she continued along.

For a time, she remained in China, but only long enough to have a single, close-encounter with an Asian vampire, before she high-tailed it out of that area. She ventured wherever she was allowed, traveling for a brief time even through the Americas. Eventually, all good things had to come to an end, the *kheper* decided it was time to bring Little Midnight home. She ignored their first missive. The second missive from Egypt was accompanied by two Kinfolk and a Bubasti. Zahra was forced back to Khem near the end of 1907.

Her nearly two years back home have not been easy. Taken in hand firmly, and ensconced at the Temple of Bubastis in Zagazig, Zahra has been sequestered from the corrupting influences of the real world. Little does she know that she is next in line to have her body taken over by one of the *kheper*. She was encouraged to pursue her studies, and to all appearances has taken up that avenue. But she is angry at her elders for forcing her back. Instead of openly rebelling, Zahra played along.

The elders saddled her with a guardian, a Tilau Bubasti who could easily transport her in and out of the Den Realm at Bubastis. Zahra worked over time to win over her prison-guard. For the next three months, she worked hard to become friends with her minder. The *kheper* during this time begin to loosen the restrictions on Zahra's activities, allowing her out of the Den Realm for short excursions to gather books or data. She has been ravenously reading everything she can get her hands on during this time. From text-books and manuals, to books of lore and mythology, she sucks down the knowledge as though she will never see it again.

Zahra begins to push the boundaries of her privileges. She plots escape. Unfortunately, her guardian-friend was not so friendly after all, and turns her in. Zahra's incarceration is immediately redoubled, and she is left only with the most recent books she hoarded, and a small skin hand-drum to keep her company. Her next guardian is unflappable, a fierce warrior who never attempts to communicate with her.

Zahra spends time with her shadows, honing and practicing her skills. She combs through her books, searching for the one thing that will grant her freedom. She scours the tomes, and unravels the ancient mysteries, and begins to piece together stories of how the ancient shadowcats could bring spirits across the Veil of Worlds. When the elders learn of her discovery, they return to encouraging her, and feeding her ability to find information. Under guard constantly, she is allowed only to the libraries of the great cities: Cairo, Alexandria, and Bubastis themselves.

As she and her guard were leaving the library at Cairo one day, she spotted what she knew to be the *kheper* elder Ahset-Ra, in his newest, youngest body, slipping out of a known Setite lair. Filing that tidbit of information away for later use, she returned to Bubastis and strove to implement the rite before the elders could discover her. Scrambling to complete the necessary steps, Zahra managed to call forth an emissary of Sobk, the Nile Crocodile. She only wished for her freedom.

The Jaggling spirit had a need of its own: to bring Ahset-Ra to the truth. The spirit bargained with the shadowcat, with her freedom and that of Khem on the line. Her illicit summoning was discovered moments after Sobk faded into the darkness. Determined to keep her promise to

Sobk's Jaggling, Zahra allowed herself to be brought before the full council of elders. They claimed her actions were sedition, threatening the fabric of Khem and the hierarchy of how the world works. The jealous elders believed that some secrets should be only revealed to them.

Only 2 of the six immortal cats spoke out against her, Ahset-Ra being one of them. The others valued her above all else, simply for being born a feline, a true bred. If she had doubted that Ahset-Ra had hated her before this day, she knew the truth for certain now. The Bubasti sorceress Ananka opened up her arms to Zahra and invited her to live at the Citadel of Midnight Waters far to the south on the Sudanese border.

Politely, and delicately, Zahra refused, citing that she wanted to remain close to the libraries of Alexandria and Cairo. Unfortunately, she painted a dangerous bulls-eye on herself that day. While Zahra was forced to share the secret of her Rite of Summoning, she left out a few important pieces to keep those 'better' than her on their toes. It would take them a while to figure out why they only managed to summon bird spirits when they set their circles.

The problem bought Zahra some time to figure out what she was going to do. Her freedom was slowly being restored once again, but there was something odd going around the Bubasti living at the Den Realm. Whispers and stares began always directed at Zahra as she tried to go about her new life as a prisoner. Trying to ignore the strangeness beginning to surround her, Zahra began to poke around into the life of Ahset-Ra, searching for the secret that Sobk's Jaggling hinted to. Knowing it must have something to do with what she witnessed in Cairo, Zahra began there.

Using her shadows to their deepest extent, she took a few weeks to tail Ahset-Ra, hiding herself from sight and sense. Her natural lack of scent helped her out greatly during this time. Eventually, she uncovered Ahset-Ra's duplicity, and found that his extended forays into the Setite's lair in Cairo were really attempts for him to get to the mockery of a Kyphur cat held captive therein. At first, Zahra believed that the *kheper* was simply negotiating for the release of the sacred animal, but as days wore on and weeks passed, it became clear that he had another motive: one that involved the trade of sacred secrets for the simple ability to lie with the bloated, vampiric former cat-kin.

Uncertain to the deeper truth, Zahra still felt she had to act. Sobk's emissary expected it of her. So she contacted Ananka of the Citadel of Midnight Waters and explained to her the truth of Ahset-Ra's recent movements. Together with a few of her followers, and the support of her own *kheper*, Ananka staged a raid on the Cairo stronghold of the Setite vampire. The scene was disastrous. Many Bubasti lives were lost, and no trace of the sacred Kyphur cat was found. But the die was cast, and Ahset-Ra was soon regarded with suspicion, and questions. Where did his true loyalties lie?

Word of Zahra's quiet cunning and her promise-keeping spread through Du'at, carried on the song of birds. Sobk's child knew it would have to keep its end of the bargain. Meanwhile, Ananka extended her offer again, to bring Zahra out of Bubastis and to her home in Sudan, but before Zahra could answer, Ananka's own *kheper* stepped in. There was no getting around it, Zahra was a member of Ahset-Ra's household, and so she would remain until after a trial and suitable punishment could be levied against him.

Dejected, distraught, Zahra slipped back to Bubastis, and awaited fate to fall where she would. The *kheper*'s convened, for an unprecedented second time that year, to discuss the fate of one of their own. In the end, it was determined that nothing could be done to the elder. He was one of the immortals, and none of the six could be slain for fear of setting off a chain reaction among the shadowcats. Their numbers were so few, and rare. Instead of punishment, Ahset-Ra's household of followers were replaced. Members of other *kheper* homes came to live at Bubastis, in part to keep an eye on Ahset-Ra's activities.

Zahra was taken to Saqqara, further to the south. Saqqara was once an ancient necropolis, and now the ruins of the burial ground serves as a small, modest Den Realm of the *kheper* elder Kharanur. Kharanur's physical form is in his late 40s, making him appear older than Ahset-Ra, while the reverse is in-fact true. Bringing Zahra into his fold, Kharanur decided that the time was nigh, and she was to breed to help continue the feline blood.

Suddenly, Zahra became a prisoner of an entirely different sort. Her every need and want was catered to; she was served by pretty boys who carried shadowcat blood. Kharanur hoped that she would become sweet on one, or more of them. But Zahra stuck to her books, only ever requesting more reading materials from her *kheper* for her stay in Saggara. After nearly two months of waiting for nature to take its course, Kharanur became fed up, and demanded that she uphold her duty.

When Zahra outright refused his order, Kharanur lost all pretenses of a gracious host. That night he sent in three kinfolk boys all with permission to do what they wanted to the young cat. Zahra may not be a fighter, but she has other tricks up her sleeves. As soon as she realized what was happening, she resisted. When one boy grabbed her, she became the small cat to wriggle from his grasp. Darting around the room, she evaded them until she could reach one by one, into their minds, and send them into a maze of confusion and hysteria. The Gift worked for all but the last boy who seized her by the scruff of the neck. He made it clear that whether she was girl, or cat, it made no difference to him. She accepted the opportunity to change skins when he offered, but instead of becoming human, she paused in her warform, and lashed out in desperation.

She hadn't meant to harm the kinfolk. She hadn't meant to strike him just so. But she was left with a dead boy, and two confused ones. Seeing no choice but to run, Zahra rifled their pockets for money, and bolted from Saqqara as fast as her feet could take her. She paid for a bus to return her to Zigazag, and spent the ride wondering just what she was going to do.

Ultimately, Zahra knew she had to contact Ananka, to accept the offer to go live at the Citadel with her. Unfortunately, she knew her only method of contact was at Bubastis. Once in Zigazag she kept to the shadows, lurking, until she found someone who she believed that she could trust. Once the cat was convinced to take her across into the Den Realm, Zahra took her feline form to better blend in with the cat-spirits roaming Bubastis. With nearly free reign of the realm granted by being a cat, Zahra put her plans into motion.

Finding the temple room which held the Nile waters used to carry communication from Bubastis to the Citadel was easy, waiting until there were no other cats in the room was difficult. Zahra drafted a quick letter and sent it up the Spiritual Nile in a small wooden boat. She prayed that it would reach Ananka quickly, before Zahra was discovered back in her old home. Zahra's next

task was to secure some articles for trade, or money. Thankfully, both aspects of the Den Realm were rich with antiquities, and finding gold lying around wasn't uncommon. But in a rare streak of vindictiveness, Zahra went straight to Ahset-Ra's chambers.

Small statues of Bast, gold rings, and bracelets, and various other items found their way into Zahra's satchel. As she fled through the temples, Zahra remembered something too precious to pass up. A golden bracelet set with polished jasper stone, carved to look like a scarab beetle. An artifact deemed by Ahset-Ra to be too precious, too valuable to be anything but an idol of worship. In the depths of night, wrapped in shadows, Zahra stole the bracelet.

Somehow, she found her way back to the Nile river, and heard Ahset-Ra read the response to her missive aloud. Zahra realized she would soon be revealed. ***You must come to me*** was the simple message. As Zahra backed slowly out of the room, Ahset-Ra began to put his clues together.

The darkness and shadows of the perpetual Umbral night helped Zahra as she fled from Bubastis into the Du'at of Khem. As she fled down the banks of the Nile, she knew that Ahset-Ra would search Bubastis for her first, before it ever occurred to him that she had already fled. But he would find the missing trinkets, including one of the Bubasti's darkest secrets: the fate of their seventh *kheper*, Ahkemnebi. Without understanding what she had taken, Zahra knew she had crossed a line, stealing from her elders. Unless she could escape, her life and body would be forfeit sooner than later..

Ananka was waiting for Zahra at the borders of Khem. The Bubasti sorceress swept Zahra up into her home at the Citadel of Midnight Waters. Ananka was quick to act, wasting no time in setting up a system to get Zahra away from the elders, and on her way to freedom. However, there was one thing Ananka wanted in return: the full ritual to summon spirits to her bidding. Zahra gladly shared the secret with her, showing her each of the different set of glyphs for the rites to work properly. In return, Ananka supplied Zahra with a golden key that would unlock the door to her freedom. When asked why she was doing all of this for her, Ananka merely answered, "I wish I had taken my opportunity and run away."

The key will only work once. But it will be the most complete escape she could hope for.