

Zon-Kuthon

Look upon all flesh as a canvas for your works of pain.

THE MIDNIGHT LORD

God of envy, pain, darkness, and loss

Alignment LE

Domains Darkness, Death, Destruction, Evil, Law

Favored Weapon Spiked chain

Centers of Worship Belkzen, Cheliox, Geb,

Irrisen, Nidal, Varisia

Nationality Alien

The beauty goddess Shelyn once had a half-brother, but his envy over her talents led him to abandon her for a journey into unknown regions past the edge of the Great Beyond. There, he encountered something that changed him for the worse—when he returned, he had become an entirely new divine being, a god of pain and suffering and loss. He committed terrible acts against those who tried to redeem him, particularly his father and his half-sister, and for his crimes, he was banished to the Plane of Shadow, there to reside for as long as the sun hung in the sky. He came back to a world benighted in the Age of Darkness, weeping tears of hateful joy at the prize he found before him. In time, his influence declined, but he and his worshipers remain ready to surge across the world with lash and chain and cruel laughter. His appearance often changes, with wounds on different parts of his body and clothing cut to reveal them, and often with a metal crown that distorts his flesh into an obscene sunburst; mortal representations of Zon-Kuthon are usually simplified to a pale man in black with one significant wound.

Zon-Kuthon offers no great wisdoms, no promises of universal truth, no guarantee of rewards in the afterlife. His strange mind sees little difference between this life and the next, and he tortures living flesh and dead souls with hideous pleasure and delicious pain.

Zon-Kuthon's direct intervention in the lives of mortals is usually brief and ambiguous, with the price often outweighing the benefit. A slave under the whip who prays for relief might experience sexual pleasure but find the pain is heightened. A craftsman achieves perfection in his work only after his obsession drives away all he loves. A count who prays for help against invading orcs may gain the assistance of a cruel warlord who takes the orc lands as his own and becomes an even greater menace.

Zon-Kuthon's horrid affection attracts evil sadists, demented masochists, and those whose spirits are so wounded that only overwhelming pain distracts them

from their sorrows. Zon-Kuthon's faithful have carved out a nation of their own—founded at the height of the Age of Darkness, the people of Nidal venerate the Midnight Lord as their savior and king.

Zon-Kuthon's avatar looks like his most mutilated visage, girded in chains that seize victims on their own volition to dangle them from his wounds like living, screaming jewelry. His herald is the Prince in Chains, a monstrous, skinless wolf augmented with metal and leather (a tormented creature who long ago was Zon-Kuthon's father). His servants most eager to come to the mortal realm are Dominik the Unquenchable (a vampire lacking fingernails or any flesh where his abdomen should be) and Vreet-Hall (a chain devil whose spiked weapons slice its own flesh to reveal eyes and more horrid things).

Zon-Kuthon has little to do with other deific entities. He has no desire to create alliances, no need to wage war, and no interest in playing diplomat between rival powers. From time to time agents of Asmodeus strike deals with his lieutenants, and the hordes of Lamashtu buy and sell knowledge and slaves with his kind, but their interactions are always at arm's length because of his propensity to experiment on his allies. The only being who escapes his sick pleasures is his half-sister Shelyn, though her followers have no special protection against him or his.

Priests, Temples, and the Church

Most of his priests are clerics, but there are several orders of blackguards and corrupted paladins who inflict pain in his name, and certain primitive tribes worship him under the tutelage of adepts. Members of the church quickly learn how to keep wounds clean and free of infection, as well as how to conceal them from the public eye. Particularly skilled and clever members of the cult have been known to skin their victims, tan them into supple leather, and wear the skin as a disguising garment over their own wounds. Many of the church's flesh-artists are known for their ability to preserve facial skin so it can be worn like a mask, allowing the wearer to pass as normal for short periods of time even under close scrutiny.

In remote areas or places where magic is scarce, a priest may gain a reputation as a skilled surgeon, though his gleeful leer as he performs his services without mind for the patient's pain can be unnerving. With their access to divine magic and mundane skills, a Kuthite is a miracle worker on the battlefield, endearing them to commanders whose maneuvers create many casualties, though the patients might regret the attention.

Most priests wake early due to lingering pain from the previous day. After a quick self-examination to guard against infection or wounds that would draw undesirable