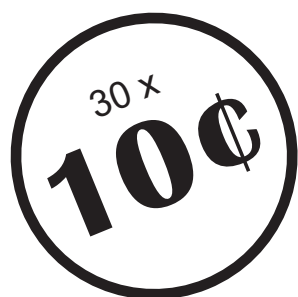


CURSE OF THE VULTURE-GOD

STEVEN S. LONG

CURSE OF THE VULTURE-GOD



A Hero Plus Adventure for

PULP HERO

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members! Here's your secret message for
this Hero Plus Adventure. Use your secret
decoder ring to read it!

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24 14-7-9-13-15!



CURSE OF THE VULTURE-GOD

HERO PLUS ADVENTURES

Curse Of The Vulture-God is one of Hero Games's *Hero Plus Adventures*, a series of short, no-frills, inexpensive adventures in PDF format. Hero Plus Adventures are designed to provide roughly one game session's worth of entertainment, though they include suggestions on how to lengthen or expand the scenario if you want to. They're written with simplicity and ease of use in mind so you can run them with a minimum of preparation.

PRINTING

The general statement on the credits page notwithstanding, DOJ, Inc. grants each purchaser of *Curse Of The Vulture-God* permission to make one (1) printed copy of this adventure.

When a colleague of theirs uncovers a new clue leading to the undisturbed tomb of a pharaoh, the heroes find themselves plunged into the middle of a millennia-old scheme to unleash an ancient, imprisoned evil. When their efforts to resolve the crisis only make things worse, they have to race against time to destroy the newly-arisen priest of the evil vulture-god, Ehbek-Reme!

Curse Of The Vulture-God is a *Pulp Hero* adventure designed for characters built on a total of 150 Character Points or less. The optimal number of PCs is four to six, but you can scale it up or down based on the number of opponents you pit against the heroes in various encounters.

BACKGROUND

In the days of ancient Egypt, a few dark and evil-minded Egyptians worshipped Ehbek-Reme, the vulture-god, son of Set and god of darkness and cruelty. Their cult was a shadow upon the land, a force for chaos and destruction. In time a mighty pharaoh, Amen-ta-hetep, destroyed the cult and executed its leader, the high priest Takhat-nakht. As he died, Takhat-nakht cursed all of Egypt, and prophesied that he would not truly die, but one day would return to make Ehbek-Reme supreme among all the gods.

Fearing this might be true, Amen-ta-hetep and the priests of Horus took steps to prevent the prophecy from coming to pass. After Takhat-nakht was slain, they mummified him and buried him in a deep, unmarked tomb which they protected with many wards and seals. Some years later, when Amen-ta-hetep died, he was buried in a tomb directly Takhat-nakht's, that he might guard him and keep him imprisoned for eternity. The priests cast special spells over the mummified pharaoh, giving him the power to rise from his sarcophagus to fight any who would try to despoil the tombs or free Takhat-nakht.

Despite Amen-ta-hetep's efforts, the cult of Ehbek-Reme did not truly die. It survived by lurking in the shadows, its few members passing the worship of the vulture-god from father to son, mother to daughter, right down to the present day. The cult's goal, then as now, has been to free Takhat-nakht that he might return to life and lead them... but the spells and traps placed upon his tomb, and the fearful presence of the pharaoh's mummy, has always thwarted them.

Recently the cult's current leader, a devilish little man named Aboosh, devised a plan to achieve the cult's long-held goals. Rather than try to penetrate the tombs by themselves, the cultists would use cat's-paws — a famous archaeologist or two. Someone who

doesn't worship the vulture-god can get through some of the wards easily... and then, while they're fighting (and hopefully destroying) the pharaoh's mummy, the cultists can sneak down into Takhat-nakht's tomb, free him, and escape by a tunnel the cult dug centuries ago in a failed effort to get to him. Then Ehbek-Reme will reign supreme!

But Amen-ta-hetep's mummy isn't the only thing protecting his (and Takhat-nakht's) tomb. The priests who interred him gave the responsibility to watch over the tombs to their sons, and their son's sons, and so on through the centuries. Today this group, the Brotherhood of the Western Ankh, continues to monitor and defend Amen-ta-hetep's burial-place.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventure begins when Sir Robert Munson, an old friend of one or more PCs, wires them that he's found a lead to the long-sought tomb of Pharaoh Amen-ta-hetep. He claims to have bought it in the Cairo marketplace (though in fact that's not the truth, as described below). He asks the heroes to come help him open, excavate, and catalog the tomb — a priceless opportunity that could make them all as famous as Howard Carter!

While sailing to Egypt, the heroes are attacked by a mysterious group of marauders! The Brothers of the Western Ankh have gotten wind of what's going on, and, suspecting the heroes of being vulture-god cultists (or, at best, woefully ignorant), they've decided to cut the problem off at the source by killing them. The heroes win the fight, but are left wondering who attacked them, and why.

After landing in Egypt, the heroes and Munson head out to the tomb, which is located beneath what seems to be a hill in a rocky valley not far from the Valley of the Kings. Their bearers and servants, unbeknownst to them, are all vulture-god cultists! The expedition finds the tomb and starts digging without major mishap, and soon uncovers the entrance to the tomb.

The heroes enter the tomb, marveling at the wonders they see before them, untouched for thousands of years. But then the pharaoh's mummy awakens and attacks them! The Brothers of the Western Ankh arrive to help him, putting the heroes in the middle of a swirling melee. During the ensuing fight, the bearers and servants sneak away, enter Takhat-nakht's tomb by a secret staircase, and escape with the high priest's mummified body, leaving the heroes to die.

After they realize what's happened, the heroes and the Brothers have to team up to track the cult

down and stop it from reviving Takhat-nakht. They arrive when he's just begun to awaken and his powers are weak, giving them a chance to defeat him. If not, the world is surely doomed....

PART ONE: JOURNEY TO EGYPT

The adventure begins when the heroes receive a telegram from their old friend, noted archaeologist and Egyptologist Sir Robert Munson. It reads:

Have discovered new lead tomb Amen-ta-hetep. Come to Cairo soonest to join expedition! Wire with travel plans.

—Munson

(As a fun prop, create a telegram and “deliver” it to the players.)

No true Pulp hero could resist an invitation like that! As any hero with an appropriate Background Skill (SS: Archaeology, KS: Egypt, KS: Ancient History, or the like) can tell the group, if Munson has found a way to locate the never-uncovered tomb of the powerful pharaoh Amen-ta-hetep, it's a discovery that will make the tomb of Tutankhamen pale in significance.

To give you the chance to stage an initial encounter with the Brothers of the Western Ankh — thus injecting an early bit of action and clueing the heroes in to the fact that there's more going on than a simple archaeological expedition — try to arrange it so the heroes have to get to Egypt via ocean liner. Don't start the adventure until they're far enough from Egypt that they can't get there easily. If they have access to a plane or prefer to fly, try to find a way to stop them from doing so, or make an ocean voyage more attractive somehow. If you absolutely can't get them on a ship, stage the first encounter with the Brotherhood of the Western Ankh at the airfield when they land, at their hotel in Cairo, or the like.

SHIPBOARD BATTLE

One night while the heroes are relaxing (eating, playing cards, dancing, or engaging in some other form of entertainment that the ocean liner has to offer), a group of Arabic-looking men swarms into the room and attacks them! Since the heroes aren't expecting trouble, they shouldn't be armed; they'll have to deal with these attackers using their fists, their wits, and whatever they can find in the way of impromptu weapons. See the accompanying sidebar for a character sheet for the Brothers.

If possible, draw this fight out a bit. Make it a running battle around the ship as the heroes try to stop their attackers, who will retreat, take hostages, and do whatever they must to win the battle (remember, they're fanatics!). Give the heroes plenty of interesting scenery to swing from, jump over, and hit people with. If you need floorplans for the ship, try these websites, which have maps of the Queen Mary:

<http://www.paper-dragon.com/1939/images/queenmarydeckplan.jpg>

<http://www.queenmary.com/factsandhistory.php?page=deckplans>

The fight should be tough, exciting, and offer plenty of opportunities for heroic action and daring-do. In the end, the heroes should win... and if possible, all the Brothers should be dead or beyond their reach (e.g., thrown overboard) when it ends. The rest of the adventure works better if the heroes think the Brotherhood is inimical — if the heroes don't yet know exactly what's going on. If necessary, assume each Brother has a hidden cyanide tooth and uses it to commit suicide if he has no other option.

When they search the bodies of their defeated adversaries, the heroes note several interesting facts:

1. Based on appearance and clothing, each of them seems to be Egyptian.
2. Each of them has, somewhere on his person, a tattoo of a blue ankh (*crux ansata*) turned on its side, with the loop pointing to his right (the viewer's left). (See the sidebar for an example.) Most of the time the tattoo's on the center of the chest, but some have it on the back or the upper arm.

IN CAIRO

Thankfully, the rest of the journey passes without incident and the heroes arrive in Cairo. Sir Robert meets them at the docks with a group of native Egyptian porters to carry their luggage. Two of the laborers, Baktiar and Wasim, are his personal servants. They seem very solicitous of him — they protect him from the sun with an umbrella, carry things so he doesn't have to, and see to his every need. Nevertheless, have any hero with Acting make a roll. If he succeeds by 3 or more, something about Baktiar and Wasim doesn't seem quite right to him — they “rub him the wrong way,” so to speak, though he can't put his finger on why. (If no hero has Acting, use PER Rolls instead.)

Sir Robert, an Englishman in his late 40s, is friendly, effusive, and glad to see the heroes. He's excited at the prospect of discovering and opening the pharaoh's tomb and is eager to get started. He suggests that he see the heroes to their hotel, and in the morning he can explain the situation and they can finish outfitting the expedition and set forth into the desert.

The heroes are now free to enjoy Cairo's night life. If you want to extend the adventure a little, roleplay the evening a bit, or even throw in some encounters while they're on the town. Perhaps the Brotherhood of the Western Ankh attacks them again, or they run afoul of pickpockets, encounter a *femme fatale*, or get swept up into some sort of short, simple murder plot that has nothing to do with Sir Robert's expedition.

The Map

When they meet the next day, Sir Robert shows the heroes the cornerstone of his expedition: an ancient papyrus map. He unrolls it with great care so as not to damage it, and carries it with him in a sturdy leather tube. Any hero with an appropriate Background Skill or Forgery (Art Objects or Documents) can make a roll to determine that it's authentic — and it is.

The map shows a valley, with the pharaoh's tomb marked on it and various lines of hieroglyphics in the margins. According to Sir Robert, the hieroglyphics

BROTHER OF THE WESTERN ANKH

11	STR	14	DEX
13	CON	10	BODY
10	INT	8	EGO
13	PRE	8	COM
5	PD	3	ED
3	SPD	6	REC
26	END	20	STUN

Weapons:

Dagger (HKA 1d6-1, STR Min 6, Can Be Thrown)

Pistol (RKA 1d6, 6 shots)

Abilities: Concealment 11-, KS: Egyptian History And Civilization 11-, KS: Brotherhood Lore 11-, Stealth 11-, WF: Common Melee Weapons, Small Arms

25+ Disadvantages: Psychological Limitation: Fanatically Devoted To Preventing The Rise Of Ehbek-Reme



offer directions and descriptions that allowed him to narrow the search and, eventually, find the right valley.

If questioned above the provenance of the map, Sir Robert explains that he bought it from an old bookseller in the *souq* (marketplace) of Cairo. He didn't realize what it was at first, exactly — he just liked the look of it and thought it was worth the minor price the man asked. Later, after he examined it and discovered what it was, he tried to find the old bookseller again, but to no avail.

Unfortunately for the heroes, Sir Robert is lying. The truth is that his servants told him they found the map one morning on his doorstep in the same leather tube he carries it in. He assumes someone who knows his reputation as an Egyptologist left it for him as a present, but he doesn't want to sully the whole story by admitting he doesn't know anything about it. He's also afraid no one will take his expedition seriously if he tells the truth. His persuasive servants, Baktiar and Wasim, convinced him to keep the facts about the map secret. They're vulture-god cultists, and the ones who "left it on the doorstep." It's an actual relic the cult's using as part of the overall scheme.

In any event, there's no question of the map's authenticity as a relic, and Sir Robert's convinced that it's shown him the way to Amen-ta-hetep's tomb. Now he just has to lead the expedition there and prove it.

The Expedition

The heroes can now help Sir Robert finish outfitting his expedition. He's got the necessary permits taken care of, and can afford to fund the expedition himself, so all they have to do is let him know what they think the group needs. With the help of Baktiar and Wasim, he's already arranged for porters, bearers, and laborers... who, unknown to him, are all vulture-god cultists!

If you want to expand on the adventure, this is another excellent opportunity. The Brotherhood of the Western Ankh could attack the heroes while they're in the marketplace buying the supplies. It's a rollicking, two-fisted brawl through the stalls and dusty streets as the heroes try to defeat their enemies and get away with the supplies!

PART TWO: THE PHARAOH'S TOMB

The trip across the desert to the valley where the tomb's located is simple and uneventful... unless you prefer otherwise. The Brothers might attack again, a sandstorm might strike, or the heroes might meet an ancient old man who utters a cryptic warning and then falls dead — whatever you want to do that fits the tone of the adventure.

Once the expedition arrives, the laborers set up camp. According to Sir Robert's research, the low, flat hill on the eastern side of the valley is actually the tomb. The workers start digging in the locations the heroes and Sir Robert think are most likely to contain the entrance to the tomb. This being a Pulp adventure, they PCs find what they're looking for in just a couple of days: a large, flat capstone on the top of the tomb sealing the entrance to a tunnel. A ladder leads down into the structure itself.

An hour or so later, the capstone's been fully cleared and the workers are ready to lever it up out of place. Feel free to ratchet up the tension a bit by describing the scene and implying that something may come *out* of the tomb when it's opened... but as the capstone's lifted, nothing unusual occurs.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to the heroes or each other, two groups are sneaking around nearby. First, a group of vulture-cultists is in the rocky hills around the valley, making its way down a tunnel the cult dug to Takhat-nakht's tomb years ago. When the diggers reached the tomb's walls, the protective magics on it killed them, and the cult abandoned the project. But the cultists believe that once they gain entrance to the tomb from the *inside*, they can safely smash down the wall and use the tunnel to escape with Takhat-nakht's body. Second, a group of Brothers of the Western Ankh, commanded by their leader Bahram al-Mutaba, is getting ready to raid the campsite to help Amen-ta-hetep protect the tomb and keep Takhat-nakht from returning to life.

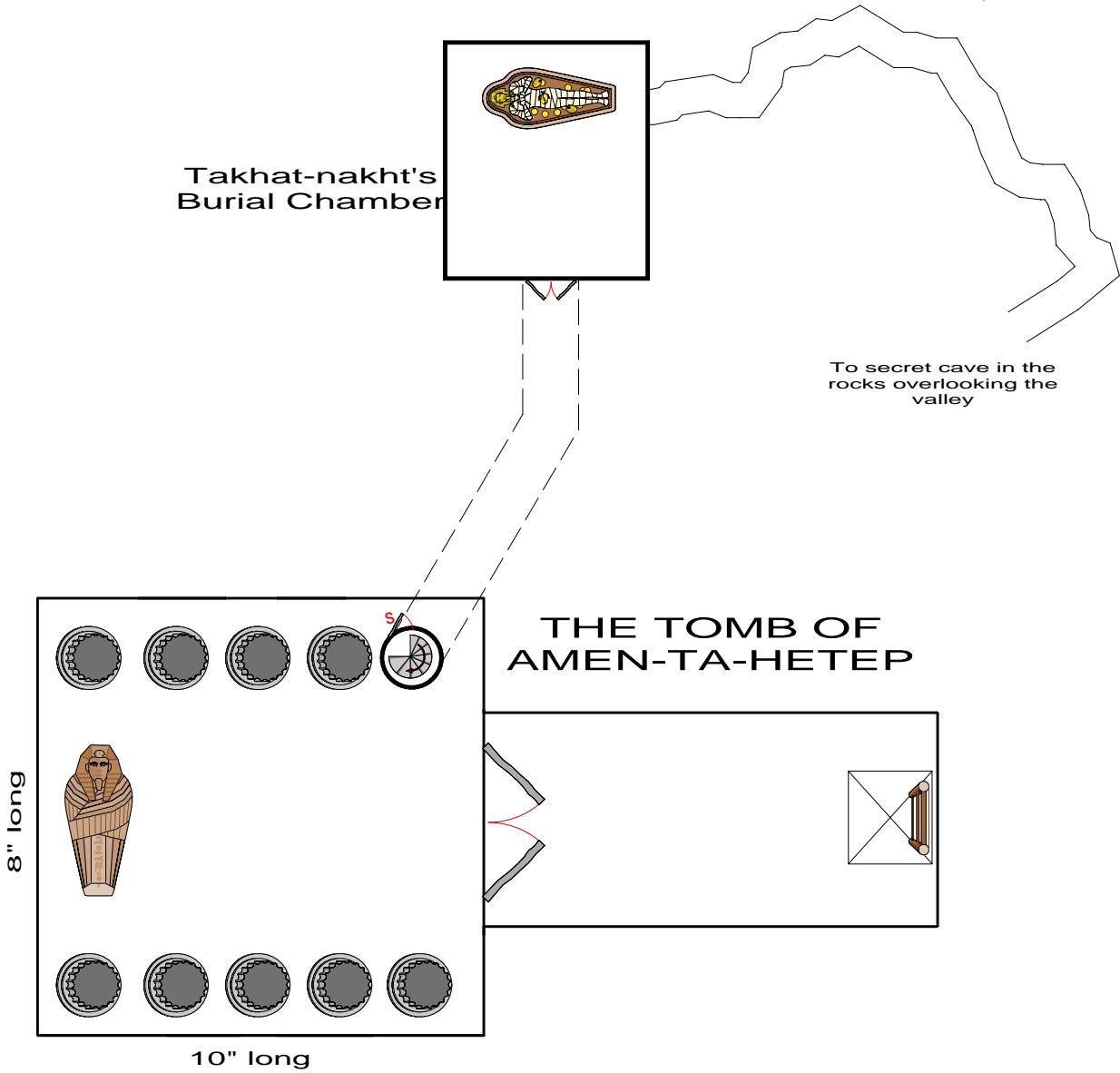
IN THE TOMB

The heroes, Sir Robert, and a contingent of laborers climb down the ladder into the tomb. (If the heroes forbid the laborers to enter, they'll sneak down later while the heroes are occupied.) The walls of the antechamber are decorated with beautiful Egyptian paintings... and the doors leading into the next room are still sealed!

They're also protected by a trap. If the heroes don't make a Security Systems roll at -2 to detect the trap, and another at -4 to disarm it, when they try to open the doors anyone within 12 feet (2") of them falls into a 30 meter (100 feet, or 15") deep pit! Half a minute (3 Turns) later a block of stone falls from the ceiling into the pit, crushing anyone inside.

The accompanying map shows the tomb. The main part is a squarish room, 8" x 10", with 1"-wide columns down either side and the pharaoh's sarcophagus along the center of the western wall. The room is lavishly decorated with wall-paintings and filled with rich grave-goods... but if the heroes (or, if necessary, Sir Robert) make an appropriate KS or SS roll, they realize there aren't nearly as many grave-goods as one would expect for a pharaoh of Amen-ta-hetep's prominent and importance. One conclusion is that he was moved here from an earlier, safer location... but that just doesn't seem right. For some reason Amen-ta-hetep wasn't given many goods. It's almost as if his burial here served another purpose than just honoring and protecting him in the afterlife...

As noted on the map, one of the columns conceals a hidden staircase. The cultists know about this, and how to open the secret door. When the fight begins, as many of them as they can get away with it sneak over there and head down to Takhat-nakht's burial chamber. Do your best to arrange things so this can occur without straining verisimilitude too much. If you absolutely can't get away with it, assume the cultists smash into Takhat-nakht's tomb through their old tunnel — now that the heroes have opened the pharaoh's tomb, the protective magics that once stopped them from doing this have stopped working.



The Mummy Awakens!

The sarcophagus, as the centerpiece of the room and the pharaoh's resting-place, is sure to attract the attention of the heroes. As they examine it, they hear a muffled *BOOM* from inside — almost as if something struck the sarcophagus. Then, suddenly, the lid flies off and the mummy emerges! Treat this as a Presence Attack 10d6, which will hopefully be enough to make the heroes hesitate for the rest of Segment 12.

For Amen-ta-hetep's mummy, use the character sheet on page 122 of *The HERO System Bestiary*. If necessary, beef it up or add optional powers so it can go toe-to-wrappings with the heroes for at least a couple of Phases.

The Brotherhood Arrives

After a couple of Phases, a group of yelling, shooting, rampaging Brothers of the Western Ankh descends on the chamber and begins fighting the heroes! Now trapped between an angry mummy and an angry mob, the heroes may be in real trouble.

After a couple of Phases of fighting, let the heroes make PER Rolls. If any of them succeed, they notice something that makes them suspicious — the open secret door in the column, a cultists slipping into the column, the sudden complete absence of the laborers who entered the tomb with them, or the Brotherhood's sideways-ankh symbol on the mummy. They might even hear the muffled detonation of the dynamite the cult uses to blast through the wall of Takhat-nakht's tomb to get to the tunnel. Alternately, maybe Bahram al-Mutaba realizes something's amiss and tries to call a temporary truce. (As leader of the Brotherhood, he can command the mummy to stop fighting.)

However you do it, get the heroes and the Brothers to stop fighting and realize they're basically on the same side. With that realization they should figure out that they've been tricked. If they haven't noticed it already, now they should spot the secret door. Rushing down to the lower level and Takhat-nakht's burial chamber, they discover that his tomb's empty... and there's a tunnel leading up toward the surface!

Trapped!

As they charge up the tunnel, have the heroes make PER Rolls. Any PC who succeeds sees the bundle of dynamite left in the tunnel by the fleeing cultists! Any hero who tries to proceed gets caught in an RKA 4d6 Explosion that collapses the tunnel. The only way to remain safe is to dive back into Takhat-nakht's tomb. If appropriate, you might have Bahram al-Mutaba throw one of the heroes out of the way and take the blast himself... and then, with his last dying breath, beg them to stop the cult once and for all.

The heroes return to Amen-ta-hetep's tomb... only to discover the cult's sealed them in by putting the capstone back in place! They can't last long down here — there's only a little air and a few light sources — so they'd better think of a way out fast. If nothing else, you can have several strong PCs and Brothers climb up the ladder and lift the capstone, but if the PCs can think up a cleverer solution, let them.

PART THREE: TAKHAT-NAKHT RISEN

Either based on the horrific paintings on the walls of Takhat-nakht's burial chamber or because the Brothers tell them, the heroes now realize the mummy taken from the second chamber by the cultists was that of the high priest of Ehbek-Reme, the evil vulture-god. The Brothers can also explain that the cult intends to resurrect him so it can rule the world with the power of Ehbek-Reme (if there are no Brothers left alive to tell them this, let the heroes make Deduction or appropriate KS/SS rolls to figure it out). It's up to the heroes to prevent the cult from performing the Ritual of Rebirth and save the day!

The question is: where has the cult taken the priest's mummy? A spell of such power can only be cast in certain places, and as any character who makes an appropriate KS or SS roll can discern, the most likely one based on importance and proximity is the Oasis of al-Arnabah, located in the desert far west of the Valley of the Kings. And sure enough, if the heroes head that way they'll soon see tracks indicating someone else passed that way recently....

The heroes arrive at the Oasis — a pond surrounded by luxurious growths of palm trees and similar plants — some hours later. (If possible, arrange events so this takes place at night.) The cult had set up for the ritual in advance in a clearing near the water — there's an altar (on which Takhat-nakht's mummy now lies), fire-filled braziers, and other accouterments. Dozens of robed cultists watch as their leader, Aboosh, finishes casting the spell. As the heroes watch, he steps back from the mummy and makes one last gesture. They're too late!

With a jerk, accompanied by a peal of thunder and flash of lightning, Takhat-nakht sits up. If the heroes keep watching, he unwraps his bandages to show himself hale and hearty once more — a living, breathing, evily handsome man of obvious power. If the heroes attack immediately, he removes his bandages with a flash of magical fire.

Now it's time for the big, climactic fight pitting the heroes and the Brotherhood against the cult and the newly-arisen Takhat-nakht. You'll find a character sheet for Takhat-nakht at the end of this adventure; for the cultists use the Brother character sheet from earlier in this adventure.

Since Takhat-nakht possesses great mystical power, he should give the heroes a hard time in the fight, especially if they don't have any mystics of their own to oppose him. If necessary, diminish his powers a bit, or give one of the Brothers enough protective magics to shield the heroes a little. This should be a tough fight, not necessarily one the heroes win. If they lose, Takhat-nakht heads to Giza to found his new Egyptian Empire, and the heroes have to follow him there to get another crack at him (perhaps with a detour to the Egyptian Museum to pick up an enchanted weapon they can use against him).

CONCLUSION

Assuming the fight goes the heroes' way, the threat of Takhat-nakht and the cult of the vulture-god Ehbek-Reme has been ended... for now. No doubt other cultists remain elsewhere in Egypt, and the day will come when they're ready for another attempt to take over Egypt, and then the world — and, of course, get revenge on the heroes.

TAKHAT-NAKHT RISEN

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 [4]
20	DEX	30	13-	OCV: 7/DCV: 7
20	CON	20	13-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-
20	EGO	20	13-	ECV: 7
25	PRE	20	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
14	COM	2	12-	
8	PD	4		Total: 11 PD (3 rPD)
8	ED	4		Total: 11 ED (3 rED)
4	SPD	10		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
10	REC	4		
40	END	0		
40	STUN	5		Total Characteristics Cost: 147

Movement: Running: 6"/12"

Cost Powers END

45	<i>The Gifts Of Ehbek-Reme:</i> Multipower, 45-point reserve	
5u	1) <i>Fire Of The Gods:</i> Energy Blast 8d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	2
4u	2) <i>Hand Of The Gods:</i> Telekinesis (20 STR), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	1
3u	3) <i>Curse Of Scorpions:</i> RKA ½d6, NND (defense is Life Support [appropriate Immunity]; +1), Does BODY (+1), Continuous (+1), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Limited Range (10"; -¼)	2
4u	4) <i>Curse Of Weakness:</i> Drain STR and DEX 2½d6, two Characteristics simultaneously (+½), Limited Range (10"; +¼)	4
100	<i>Armies Of The Dead:</i> Summon four 395-point mummies (see <i>HERO System Bestiary</i> , page 122), Slavishly Devoted (+1), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Arrives Under Own Power (-½), Summoned Being Must Inhabit Locale (-½)	9

Talents

6	Combat Luck (3 PD/3 ED)
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Skills

2	AK: Ancient Egypt 11-
2	KS: Egyptian History 11-
5	KS: Egyptian Myth And Legend 15-
3	Stealth 13-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 179

Total Cost: 326

75+ Disadvantages

10	Distinctive Features: Mystic Aura (Not Concealable; Always Noticed; Detectable Only With Unusual Senses)
15	Hunted: Brotherhood Of The Western Ankh 14- (Less Pow, Destroy)
25	Psychological Limitation: Must Fulfill The Will Of Ehbek-Reme (Very Common, Total)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Life/Holy Magics (Uncommon)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x BODY from Life/Holy Magics (Uncommon)
181	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 326