



THE PHARAOH

Supplement for the Rivers of London RPG



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The Pharaoh

The Pharaoh is known by many names including the Lower Mississippi, the Pharaoh, and the Black Pharaoh. He is the powerful genius loci of the lower Mississippi River. His area of power stretches from the Gulf of Mexico up to the confluence with the Ohio River. In terms of raw power, he is equivalent to Mother or Father Thames.

Physically, he is a muscular African American man with dark skin typically dressed as a pharaoh or in a pinstripe suit. His base of operations is the Memphis Pyramid located on the Memphis, TN waterfront along the Mississippi River. From his headquarters, he controls a growing financial and political empire.

Backstory

The Pharaoh was born of violence and murder in the late 1960s. His body was thrown into the river and he was reborn as a genius loci. For those of you planning on using the Pharaoh, feel free to set the details of his death as needed. If you have no need to do so, have his death be a murder by the Klu-Klux-Klan during unrest and reactionary backlash to the civil rights movement.

Memphis Pyramid¹

The Memphis Pyramid is the center of the Pharaoh's power and his base of operations. The Memphis Pyramid was built in 1991 as a basketball stadium to redevelop the Pinch District, an area that had been devastated by urban renewal.² It copied the form of ancient Pyramids to capitalize on the riverfront



Flickr.com/photos/exothermic

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memphis_Pyramid

² <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/622-the-great-american-pyramid/transcript>;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinch_District,_Memphis.

location, the Egyptian name of the city, and trends in post-modern architecture. In the early 2000s, the stadium lost its main use, as a new larger stadium was built for Memphis' new professional basketball team. The stadium lay mostly unused for the next few years before Delta Bank, a regional bank controlled by the Pharaoh, beat out Bass Pro Shops to take over the Pyramid.³ The stadium was renovated to form a smaller theater/throne room, office space, and the Pharaoh's personal quarters.

At the time of the game's setting, the area around the Pyramid is being redeveloped by the Pharaoh's business interests. New contemporary offices, a new rail station, and midrise apartment blocks all in a neo-Egyptian style are rising around the building.

Delta Bank

Delta Bank, National Association is a Black Owned Bank/Minority Serving Financial Institution⁴ founded in 1955 by a group of Black businessmen in the Mississippi delta region. Delta Bank was formed as the legalized segregation and near-universal discrimination at the time prevented African Americans from obtaining loans on reasonable terms. Delta Bank, controlled by local Black professionals and funded by members of the community was able to provide the credit people needed to purchase homes and operate businesses. Early on, the then-fledgling *genius loci* fell in with members of Delta Bank and became its honorary chairman and patron. Delta Bank steadily grew, leading a seemingly blessed existence, and managed to avoid the Savings and Loans crisis of the 1980s and weathered the Great Financial Crisis with ease.

Today, Delta Bank is a regional bank operating in 8 states, with 300 branches, and has almost 100 billion in assets.⁵ The bank is a major player in retail banking across the lower Mississippi valley and is a

³ In reality, Bass Pro Shops converted the Pyramid into a its flagship store.

⁴ These terms refer to banks formed or mostly served various minority groups that were unable to obtain banking services from mainstream banks due to segregation/hate.

⁵ To put this in perspective, this would make it the 35th largest bank in America (Out of 5,112 banks at the time) at the time. It would be very important to the local and regional economy but not a national or international force like Citigroup, Toronto Dominion, Barclays, or JPMorgan Chase.

The Pharaoh, *genius loci*

STR 80	CON 50	DEX 55	INT 70	POW 200
DB: 0	MOV 9	MP-	LUCK 200	

Advantage: Natural Toughness

Disadvantage: vulnerable to cold iron.

Skills

Athletics 70%, Navigate 70%, Observation 60%, Read Person 80%, Research 30%, Sense Vestigia 90%, Social 70%, Stealth 20%; Fighting 50%, Firearms 50%.

Languages

English (own) 70%, Creole 40%, French 40%, Spanish 20%.

Powers

The Glamour, Luck of the Demi-monde

Demi-mode affinity

Water

Vestigia

Humid weather, a chanting crowd, and fresh earth.

major player in Texas and the broader southeast's financial markets. Its current branding has adopted a number of stylized Egyptian elements with scarabs, hieroglyphics, and other elements in branch designs echoing Ancient Egyptian architecture.

The Pharaoh's Objectives

The Pharaoh appears to be consolidating power and influence in the American south. While like most

fae/shades, he is somewhat inscrutable about his ultimate goals, it is clear he is building a power base. Through Delta Bank he has built a large network of business interests, most of which deal with the Mississippi river. His business interests usually include allusions to water or ancient Egypt.

He has begun to grant audiences to local political officials. Now, local politicians seek his (literal) blessing, and he is known as a kingmaker in some state and local races.

Relationship with Demi Mode

- New Orleans Witches: Many are followers of the Pharaoh, especially those who practice ritual magic as opposed to the more formal European methods.
- New York Library Association: Friendly but guarded. May butt heads over ownership of artifacts.
- FBI: Aware of him but relationships are guarded at the national level. Local agents may be more involved for good or bad.
- Alderman Tactical Solutions: Hostile. ATS is hostile to genius loci in general and the Pharaoh in particular. Their reactionary tendencies and desire for power make them especially threatened by a powerful Black magical force. They tend to refer to him as the “Black Pharaoh” as an insulting reference to the Lovecraftian Nyarlathotep.⁶

Symbolism

To help GMs role play as the Pharaoh and his followers, I've included this section to discuss some of the intended themes and culture the Pharaoh draws from to help provide inspiration.

Following the end of slavery and the liberation of the south, African-Americans were left as a people

without a culture do the alienation of the slave trade and Jim Crow laws. With the rise of a distinctive Black culture including Black Nationalism, African-Americans began efforts to adopt various aspects of African cultures as their own to reclaim their birthright. This occurred with both cultural practices likely practiced by direct ancestors as well as those practiced across Africa more broadly. One strain of these cultural and intellectual trends is referred to as Afrocentrism.

Ancient Egypt was a popular civilization to draw ideas and customs from as Miranda Lovett states “For a young Black person struggling to connect to their ancestral cultural heritage, Egypt is a familiar, attractive place to start.”⁷ The broader awareness of Ancient Egypt as a great civilization is attractive as it is both familiar and prestigious. This adoption is not without controversy as some followers of Afrocentrism have promoted broadly inaccurate claims about the ethnic makeup of Egypt among other claims. Present day Egyptians have pushed back on these claims⁸ and black nationalist subcultures like Hoteps⁹ are known for misusing Egyptian culture and history for culture war purposes.

My intent here is not to portray the Pharaoh as representing the more toxic aspects of modern adoption of Egyptian history and culture. Instead, it's more to reflect the admiration of African-Americans (and Memphis more broadly) for this great civilization and the wonderful absurdity of building a giant pyramid as a basketball stadium turned sporting goods store. Drawing on some of the more negative associations of Afrocentrism can be a way to frame hatred of the Pharaoh by ATS. A powerful Black man adopting the symbols of the first great western civilization and its kingship is fundamentally a threat to their conservative order.

⁶ Call of Cthulhu exists as a game in the ROL canon, so Lovecraft's work must as well.

⁷ <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/hotep/>

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/apr/28/cleopatra-was-light-skinned-egypt-tells-netflix-in-row-over-drama>

⁹ <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/hotep/>

Hopefully, this will help you characterize the Pharaoh and demi mode politics surrounding him in your game.

Using in Your Game

The Pharaoh can be used in a few ways beyond the upcoming scenario by this author.

- As a patron. The Pharaoh may wish to hire or otherwise seek the services of the party to help resolve a situation outside his sphere of influence. He can afford to pay them handsomely with material rewards or favors.
- As a rival. In scenarios like *A Regular Picture Palace Drama*, the Pharaoh's agents can be the competition as multiple factions race for a MacGuffin or similar.
- As a complicating factor or red herring. The Pharaoh's agents may have stumbled into a situation and added complications for the investigators. The agents may provide to be allies or otherwise create drama.
- As an ally. A party fighting ATS would likely find the Pharaoh an enthusiastic ally.

Interacting with the Pharaoh

The Pharaoh rarely leaves his pyramid or meets with strangers instead acting though agents. The

Pharaoh's agents typically come in pairs. They are usually Black, have a deep southern accent, and are dressed in expensive suits with touches of Egyptian iconology in jewelry, patterns, or other styles. They will present business cards identifying them as vague senior employees of the Lower Mississippi Group, the holding company that controls Delta Bank and the Pharaoh's other interests. See the Appendix for examples. They tend to be confident, polished, difficult to phase, and readily identifiable by veteran investigators or those who pass an **Occult** test.

A party could contact the Pharaoh by approaching any Delta Bank branch (or other front company) and requesting a meeting with their aquatic financing division and leaving their contact information. Representatives who are in the know will follow up with the investigators. This method of contacting the Pharaoh would be discoverable with a **research** test or automatic for an investigator familiar with the Pharaoh.

Investigators who have impressed the Pharaoh may find themselves offered an audience. It will be suitably dramatic with the party meeting him in his box/throne room in the new smaller venue within the pyramid. Extreme glamor and similar effects should be used liberally. The Pharaoh is a man who chooses words carefully and is almost curt with short confident statements.

Sources

1. Wikipedia, Memphis Pyramid: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memphis_Pyramid
2. Memphis Pyramid: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Memphis_Pyramid_HDR.jpg
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5. Sapiens, Reflecting on the Rise of the Hoteps, Miranda Lovett: <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/hotep/>
6. The Guardian, Cleopatra was light-skinned, Egypt tells Netflix in row over drama, Harriet Sherwood: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/apr/28/cleopatra-was-light-skinned-egypt-tells-netflix-in-row-over-drama>

Handouts

Business Cards



Logo Large

