



# THE RISE OF THE RED GOD

A Penny dreadful for Victoriana  
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INTRODUCTION	2
BACKGROUND	3
ACT I: THE THING IN THE THAMES	6
ACT II: THE INVESTIGATION	11
ACT III: THE TEMPLE OF SETHOS	28
EPILOGUE	45

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*dedication here*



thanks

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THE RISE OF THE RED GOD

# INTRODUCTION

*"In time I will master the rituals contained in the Book of the Dead and resurrect our great predecessor, Maatseti, to liberate our people from the yoke of the English tyrants."*

— Professor Kassam el-Kheir

While London sleeps, the sinister servants of an ancient Egyptian god lurk in subterranean tunnels, conducting experiments on unsuspecting victims and exploring the dark mysteries of arcane magic that could resurrect a terrible power. The characters first encounter evidence of their foul misdeeds while walking along the Thames at night, when a horrific discovery rises to the surface of the murky waters. Their involvement arouses attention, both from a winsome young woman whose brother has gone missing and a shadowy band of thugs intent on waylaying them. The characters pursue an investigation that leads to the dank examination room of a Limehouse morgue, the stuffy corridors of the British Museum, and eventually to the underground sanctum of the vile Fellowship of the Red Pharaoh.

## HOW TO USE THIS ADVENTURE

*Rise of the Red God* deals primarily with uncovering the fantastic and horrific, which the heroes must confront despite social barriers and class prejudice. It introduces the characters to various establishments and resources in London during their investigations, and offers as adversaries furtive villains who aim to threaten the stability of far-off lands throughout the British Empire. The adventure gives beginning players a chance for their characters to explore various locations in London and test their mettle against insidious foes.

Since the action takes place in London, *The Smoke* may prove an invaluable asset to tracking events, adding atmosphere, and imbuing the adventure

with a better sense of location. Most adventure settings offer enough description to conduct characters along the main course of the scenario, but additional source material on London can help develop other areas should the characters divert into uncharted territory.

Prepare to run *Rise of the Red God* by reading it once. Consider what characters the players choose to use and develop various ways of bringing them together in "Act 1: The Thing in the Thames" (you'll find several ideas at the beginning of that section). Review "Act 2: The Investigation" to understand the motivation of various non-player characters, the information different sources can impart, and the difficulties members of various classes may encounter while interacting with these sources. You may also wish to familiarize yourself with the numerous deadly obstacles in "Act 3: Temple of the Red Pharaoh."

## BACKGROUND

The notes below offer information to better understand how events and personalities in the adventure fit into the larger Victorian world.

## THE POLITICS OF EGYPT

Egypt plays an important role in the British Empire despite being more than 3,000 miles from London and a fortnight's travel by land and sea. Since the decline of the pharaohs, various foreigners — from the Persians, Greeks, and Romans to various Mohammedan dynasties — have ruled it as a subservient province. Although now officially a territory within the Ottoman Empire, it is technically ruled





by the French and British, who are intent on recouping trade debts and monies invested in the construction of the Suez Canal. Europeans run the major bureaucracies that keep Egypt stable, and influence its rulers, including the present-day monarch Khedive Ismaïl.

Throughout the century explorers, adventurers, collectors, soldiers, bureaucrats, and throngs of tourists have plundered Egypt's ancient ruins. Some were simply treasure-seekers, but many sought archaeological wonders to bring back to museums, universities, and private collections, further fueling British (and generally European) interest in all things exotic and Oriental.

Many Egyptians act kindly toward the British, viewing them as saviors from a overly bureaucratic and tyrannical Ottoman rule. Some resent Europeans for pillaging their ancient heritage, imposing their strange customs, and generally controlling their country much as a hostile foreign power. Among the many furtive political groups that plot the downfall of the ubiquitous Europeans in Egypt is one that seeks to employ ancient magic and the aid of Egypt's most nefarious god to rid the land of the perceived invaders.

## FELLOWSHIP OF THE RED PHARAOH

The principal adversary in *Rise of the Red God* is a sinister cult bent on building Egypt into a political and military power — as it was in the ancient world — by using arcane magic from the time of the pharaohs like Ramses the Great and Tuthmosis III (often called the Napoleon of ancient Egypt). The Fellowship of the Red Pharaoh believes that by combining such arcane artifacts as the Book of the Dead with the correct rituals and spells, they can resurrect a high priest of the god Sethos whose mummified remains only recently resided in the private collection of a wealthy collector.

Although the Fellowship has a vast, secretive following in Egypt, enclaves in most major European capitals work to further the cult's aims. They maintain contacts with Egyptians living far

from home, monitor relevant political matters, re-acquire previously pillaged artifacts when possible, and generally carry out the group's clandestine agenda. The enclave in London, one of the more powerful offshoots, has a diverse assemblage of loyal minions and a labyrinthine base far beneath the city streets complete with a hidden temple to Sethos. (You can read more about the Fellowship of the Red Pharaoh and its minions in *Faces in the Smoke: Enemies & Allies*, an upcoming *Victoriana* supplement from Heresy Gaming.)

In Egyptian mythology Sethos occupied the role of a villainous god, a force of Entropy and chaos within the world. In most legends Sethos serves as the antagonist responsible for murdering Osiris and defying his son Horus. His epithet of “Red God” comes from his supposed domain, the red desert wasteland (as opposed to the life-giving black soil of the fertile Nile valley). Scholars debate whether Sethos was truly a demonic figure or a necessary deity whose strife and chaos brought balance with peace and stability. The Fellowship of the Red Pharaoh views Sethos' awesome power as a force for change. Through strife, torment, and conflict, they intend to transform the world into a place where Egypt and its people no longer serve foreign empires, but become a dominant nation.

## GRUESOME EXPERIMENTS

The Fellowship's current experimentation with the magical enchantments contained within the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead requires subjects —bodies prepared at death according to the specific instructions and rituals detailed in the papyrus scrolls. Corpses stolen from morgues have already been tainted, so the Fellowship relies on its minions to surreptitiously prey on wayward and insignificant members of the lower class. This practice has served to fine-tune the rituals, but has not satisfied the Fellowship's leader, Professor Kassam el-Kheir. To successfully resurrect Maatseti (literally “Justice of Sethos”), high priest of Sethos during the reign of his illustrious master, Ramses the Great, el-Kheir must ensure the spells work on one already imbued with magical talent.



He arranged the abduction of a young, middle-class thaumaturge, Simon Hawthorne upon whom he could further test the Book of the Dead's effectiveness on a subject's ability to use magic.

As the Fellowship increases its activity and nears the day when it can fully resurrect Maatseti, its minions have made mistakes that threaten to betray the cult's secrets. The bodies of those employed in the experiments feed the enormous crocodiles and hippopotami living near and protecting the Fellowship's subterranean lair, but some avoid their intended gruesome fate (or actively escape themselves) and occasionally float up into London's extensive sewer system. The characters encounter such a ghastly sight in "Act 1:

The Thing in the Thames."

The authorities have previously dismissed the occasional disappearance of a low-life scum from the city's eastern districts and dockyards. They could not in good conscience overlook Simon Hawthorne's vanishing — unless distracted by such a horrific occurrence as a mass of bodies floating down the Thames. Ever reluctant to investigate a fantastic matter they hope resolves itself, the police focus on the sensational and ignore the young Ellen Hawthorne seeking her missing brother. In frustration, she turns to the characters for assistance and involves them further in the Fellowship of the Red God's sinister plot.







## ASSEMBLING THE CHARACTERS

The characters may have formed some prior association, in which case gamemasters simply need to arrange for at least one of them to witness the mass of writhing flesh floating down the Thames. It is of course, not always that simple!

Disparate characters — especially those who cross class lines — might require a bit more finesse to draw them all into the action. Here are some situations based on class that might help involve different characters:

*Upper Class:* Since London's wealthier neighborhoods stand to the west and northwest of the Thames, upper-class characters have the first opportunity to notice the mass floating downriver. They might notice it while gazing out of their carriage rolling along the Thames or across one of the bridges on their return from a late evening engagement.

*Middle Class:* Depending on their occupation, characters of this class might have business out this late (closing up shop, staying late to work at the store) that takes them near the Thames. Members of the upper-middle class might also notice the mass from their carriage or a cabby as they head home after a late evening out.

*Lower Class:* Rumors of strange disappearances have already permeated the throngs crowding London's poor districts. Those along the Thames report occasional finds of grisly remains too mangled to positively identify as people. Most dismiss these discoveries as corpses of cattle or horses who drowned upstream, but some speak of a ghastly factory in Pimlico that butchers people at night and tosses the remnants in the Thames. Intent on investigating these rumors for

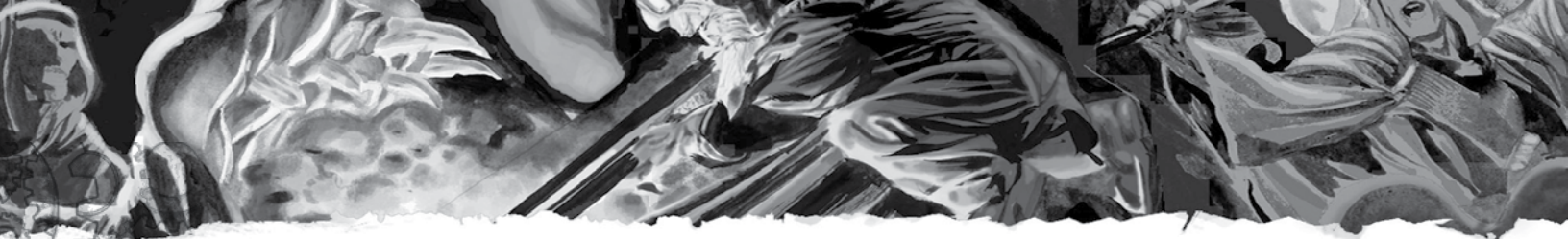
themselves, the characters patrol the riverbank at night (when few would notice or suspect their odd behavior) seeking evidence of these fantastic tales.

Characters might go out at night seeking a family member, friend, or contact they suspect has disappeared (who may or may not have been abducted by the Fellowship of the Red Pharaoh). Such searches inevitably bring them along the shores of the Thames, or the dockyard districts near Limehouse, prime locations to witness the floating mass or hear rumors of other disappearances.

An encounter with a hysterical citizen may also convince members of disparate classes to investigate. A crazed cabby, certain he saw something horribly immense floating in the Thames, accosts the characters. His insane babbling and constant pointing toward the river should at least spark some concern.

As a last resort, any characters who seem to have trouble joining the group, or otherwise getting a view of the formless mass receive a mysterious note: "Ill things float in the Thames that betray the Red God's rising." Hopefully their inquisitive nature and concern for unnatural occurrences motivates them to investigate.

Assume each individual character has a stake in following, examining, and eventually confronting the horrid heap. Their separate courses tracking it down the Thames eventually unites them, possibly while trying to hire a steam launch to sail out for a closer look, or ultimately while confronting the mass when it washes ashore near the Limehouse pier.



# ACT I: THE THING IN THE THAMES

*"I swear I've not had a drop, guv. I saw it with me  
own eyes: a tangled mass of living flesh squirming  
in the bloody Thames."*

— George Nichols, Cabby

