

Ars Magica

# Lands of the Nile

Egypt, Ethiopia & Nubia



by Ferguson,  
McFarland & Shirley

## Lands of the Nile

# Credits

**AUTHORS:** Timothy Ferguson, Ben McFarland, Mark Shirley  
**DEVELOPMENT, EDITING, & PROJECT MANAGEMENT:** David Chart  
**PROOFREADING:** John Nephew  
**ART DIRECTION & LAYOUT ASSISTANCE:** Cam Banks  
**COVER ART:** Christian St. Pierre  
**INTERIOR ART:** Brett Barkley, Jenna Fowler, Jethro Lentle, Jeff Menges, Christian N. St. Pierre  
**CARTOGRAPHY:** Matt Ryan  
**LAYOUT:** Joe Hanna  
**ARS MAGICA FIFTH EDITION TRADE DRESS:** J. Scott Reeves  
**PUBLISHER'S SPECIAL THANKS:** Jerry Corrick & the gang at the Source.

**FIRST ROUND PLAYTESTERS:** Jason Brennan, Justin Brennan, Elisha Campbell, Robert Major, Leon Bullock, Peter Ryan, Chris Barrett, Jonathan Elcock, Lloyd Graney, Peter Hiley, Phil Jenkins, Kevin Sides, Donna Giltrap, Malcolm Harbrow, Aaron Hicks, Richard Love, Christian Rosenkjaer Andersen, Pelle Kofod, Dan Ilut, John Illingworth, Robert Brown Llwyd, Matt Ryan, Niall Christie

**SECOND ROUND PLAYTESTERS:** Donna Giltrap, Malcolm Harbrow, Aaron Hicks, Richard Love, Helge Rager Furusest, Ola Hulbak, Karl Trygve Kalleberg, André Neergaard, Pelle Kofod, Christian Rosenkjaer Andersen, Dan Ilut, John Illingworth, Robert Brown Llwyd, August Ryan, Matt Ryan

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Timothy Ferguson** is a librarian who lives in Gold Coast, Australia. He'd like to dedicate this book to his wife and children. He would also like to thank the other authors for stepping in and finishing the book during a period of personal crisis. Finally, he'd like to recommend *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium* by Okasha El Daly, which was of great assistance in his sections.

**Ben McFarland** lives in the wilds of Upstate New York, where he continues to venture into mysterious regions in search of adventure with the priceless support of his wonderful wife, Mandy, his family, and the excellent advice of his steadfast friend, James.

**Mark Shirley** is a computational biologist living in the northeast of England. This book was a massive eye-opener for him: he was familiar with medieval Europe, but had little idea about the cultural richness of the kingdoms of the Nile Valley in the same period. He'd like to thank the usual suspects: family, ferrets, and friends (these are not mutually exclusive).



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## Chapter One

# Introduction

*"[In Egypt] there are races horrible on account of their strange faces and monstrous appearance...it also abounds in wild beasts and serpents; and precious stones, cinnamon, and balsam are found there."*

—The Beatus Map

This book describes the lands of the Nile Valley. The River Nile is a major geographical feature of Mythic Europe, dividing as it does the continents of Africa (to the west) and Asia (to the east), just as the Don separates Europe and Asia, and the Mediterranean Sea separates Europe and Africa.

Many people think of Egypt and picture barren deserts. However, more accurately Egypt and Nubia (and to a lesser extent Ethiopia) are the lands on either bank of the River Nile. These are therefore exceptionally fertile lands of plenty that are surrounded by deserts and wastes. Visitors are often struck by the bounty of the Nile Valley: its fecund pastures, fields, orchards and groves; its rich tropical forests teeming with animals; and its lush swamps, marshes, and reed beds.

This book concentrates on the lands of the Nile in the thirteenth century. There are countless books available - scholarly, popular, and game-related - which provide information about the culture, customs, and religion of pre-Ptolomey Egypt. That material has not been reiterated here, but could be consulted by troupes wanting to include elements of Ancient Egypt in their game. It should also be noted that this is also Egypt from the perspective of its 13th century inhabitants, and so there are features that do not agree with modern archeology.

## Themes

There are a number of saga themes that run through the Valley of the Nile. None

of these are mutually exclusive, and in fact some complement each other well.

## The Red and the Black

The continent of Africa - which includes the lands of Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia - is a battleground between two vast magical spirits, entities so great that it is difficult to conceive of them as singular beings. Instead they are constructs of ideas that are most commonly summarized as The Red and The Black. The Red, sometimes called the Hunger, is the destructive force of the desert. It seeks endlessly to consume the lands on the edges of the Great Desert that constitutes the heart of Africa. It is a force of chaos inimical to mankind by its very nature and that promotes sterility and destruction. The Red has servants and allies among hostile creatures, spirits, faeries, and jinn. One of its chief servants was a giant called The Kom, but it was slain and seeks to reconstitute itself (see Chapter 7: Pakhoras). The Cult of Dedun (see Chapter 7) indirectly serves the Red by accumulating power through death and decay.

The Black, or the Hope, is best expressed as the spirit of the Nile. The lands described in this book are awash with fertility and abundance, located as they are within the stronghold of the Black. This power is beneficial to humankind, but only by accident - the Black is too vast to notice the humans that thrive under its auspices. The Black has its servants much like the Red, including the lector priests who served as magicians to the pharaohs. Wesir, the human who first discovered how to become a Daimon (see Chapter 4: The Akh), became a powerful servant of the Black and is more commonly known under his Greek name of Osiris.

More about the Red and the Black can be found in *Between Sand and Sea*, Chapter 2.

## Egypt Just Grows Marvels

The vast number of tombs found in Egypt is a puzzle. Muslim scholars are keenly aware that Herodotus, writer of the *Histories*, did not agree with the age of the world as calculated from Scripture, and that his list of pharaohs is far longer than possible. They are also aware that if they look for physical evidence of the pharaohs Herodotus names, they can find it: their tombs are where he says they are, and their names appear on lists written by the ancients. This contradiction is meditated upon by Sufis and Christian mystics alike, who have come up with a variety of conclusions, most of which have little bearing on the daily life of people. It is, however, considered good for every person, whose path on the Hajj goes through Egypt, to see the monuments, as they are part of the shared accomplishment of humanity.

It is generally believed that God put all these monuments in Egypt so that people would look at them and become wiser. There are more tombs than historically possible because God has made the lands of the Nile as a storehouse of wonders. By seeking out these monuments and digging up their treasures they are not diminished in any way, for God will make sure there are enough for all to appreciate the wonders. This is another aspect of the superabundance and fertility that is characteristic of The Black.

Every place along the Nile has an undiscovered treasure. This is a belief so firmly held by Egyptians that there is a government department which licenses a guild of treasure hunters, and takes a cut of their finds (see the Guild of Seekers in Chapter 4). For decades, during droughts, the Egyptian government subsisted almost entirely on treasure taxes. Treasure is everywhere, and if there is a place without a treasure, a faerie is likely to put one