

THE VALLEY OF THE PHOENIX

An introductory scenario for ZENOBIA.

Valley of the Phoenix basically provides the referee with a fairly linear adventure that he can use to introduce various concepts from the ZENOBIA rules. Characters are created, an expedition organised, monsters fought, NPCs met and dealt with, poisons and spells survived, tricks and treasure to be discovered. Experienced players will probably not find the adventure a challenge - but that is not its intent. With this in mind four pe-generated characters are provided for the use of beginning players.

PRE-GENERATED CHARACTERS

Adonis

Adonis is a fight-hardened gladiator. His parents were Armenian slaves working on the estate of a landowner in Tarsus. After killing a man over a gambling debt, the slave Adonis was thrown in prison to be executed. He killed two more of his prison warders and his talent was spotted. Deals were made and he was sold to a lanista to train as a gladiator. He is brutal and unsubtle. When the Persians recently attacked Dura Europus where he was on tour fighting, all gladiators were granted their freedom if they fought for the defense of the city. The city fell anyway, and so Adonis roams the Desert Kingdoms looking for a way to earn a living by his grisly trade.

MIGHT	4	COMBAT +7	GEAR
FATE	2	Previous XP: Gladiator	Shortsword +2
HITS	20	Special Skill: Killing Blow	Spear +3
CRAFT	1	Money: 45 denarii	Helm
LEARNING	1	Culture: Aramaean	Waterskin
		Languages: Basic Aramaic	3 Torches
ARMOUR			Pack
Light Armour (-2)			Firebow

Bellus

Bellus is a legionary officer, a centurion. Originally a Cypriot peasant, a plague decimated his home town and he sought a home with the legions in Antioch. He became a great soldier, stern and disciplined. When the soft Antioch legions fought the Persian army it fled in disarray. Disgusted, Bellus wandered south to Ægypt where he was officially discharged. Now he fights for his own interests, not the Empire's.

MIGHT	5	COMBAT +8	GEAR
FATE	5	Previous XP: Legionary	Shortsword +2
HITS	15	Special Skill: Hard To Kill	Shield +1
CRAFT	1	Money: 55 denarii	Pilum +3
LEARNING	2	Culture: Imperial	Mail Cuirass
		Languages: Basic Aramaic	Greaves
ARMOUR		Fluent Imperial	Pack
Heavy Armour (-4)			Firebow
			3 Torches
			Waterskin

Medoullah

Medoullah is a Saracen nomad, born in the desert and trained to ride camels, follow the oasis trails and kill the enemies of the tribe. When the Empire fought her tribe, Medoullah fought back hard but was captured and sold into slavery. She was purchased by the wise and gentle Ægyptan doctor Userkaf and is now a very useful assistant, bodyguard and courier. He gives her great freedoms, knowing she is loyal and enjoys her new life. Consequently she has developed some skills as a herbalist and tender of the sick.

MIGHT	2	COMBAT +5	GEAR
FATE	5	Previous XP: Desert Warrior	Shortsword +2
HITS	20	Special Skill: Desert Travel	Aqua Somnus
CRAFT	1	Money: 50 denarii	2 Daggers
LEARNING	1	Culture: Aramaean	Spear +3
		Languages: Basic Aramaic	Cloak with Hood
ARMOUR			Pack
No Armour			Firebow
			3 Torches
			Waterskin
			Hairpin
			Sling & 10 stones

SETTING

1013 AUC - Imperial occupied Ægypt - the city of Herakleopolis

SUMMARY

The strategos (local governor) of Herakleopolis, Dionysus, has been stricken with a mysterious and deteriorating disease. He is being treated by the wise physician Userkaf and his Saracen slave girl, Medoullah, at his palace. It is Dionysus's arch rival, Antinous the governor of the Fayum, who is responsible - he has sent his sorcerer Sebekare, to make him ill. Dionysus suddenly hears that a phoenix bird is building a nest in the Eastern Desert and decides to despatch Medoullah and a small detachment of mercenaries. A feather of the phoenix has amazing healing properties, and they must get hold of one for the physician. The nest of the phoenix is made of immensely valuable myrrh, but the heroes cannot take any of this - they risk the wrath of the solar gods. Unfortunately, the sorcerer Sebekare has learnt of Userkaf's plan and rides into the desert with a guard to stop the player characters.

HEROES' INTRODUCTION

"You are a small group of tough mercenaries and fortune-hunters currently in the rich Imperial province of Ægypt. At the moment you are riding into the desert, to the east of Ægypt, with a young Saracen slave-girl called Medoullah. She works for an Ægyptian physician who is back in the city you have just left - his patient is your boss, the local governor, and he is seriously (and mysteriously) ill. Hopefully, you can prevent the local governor's death - the physician has heard that a phoenix is making a nest out in the desert, and its feathers have immense curative powers. Medoullah knows this desert well and will guide you on your way."

“The phoenix is a magical and magnificent bird, blessed by the sun gods, and each 500 years it creates a nest of frankincense and myrrh, which the sun sets alight, the Phoenix fans the flames, and burns to death. It is then reborn and flies to the temple of Ra in Heliopolis depositing the valuable remains of its nest there. The physician warns you not to touch the treasures in the nest of the phoenix, for the sun-gods may take offence and retaliate.”

DAY ONE: THE WADI

It will take two days of camel ride to reach the top of the Wadi Araba as it climbs drily away from the farms and orchards into the mountains. Before it peters out completely the player characters must take one of the branches, which passes a summit called the Golden Peak, and descends into a hidden valley, home of the Phoenix. This will require half a day. Day one begins with a fight! Sebekare has bribed a ruthless gang of Saracen nomads he encountered to attack the player characters when they pass.

“As you spur on your camels up the rocky valley toward the distant brown peaks, you see a black nomad tent pitched on the valley floor, several camels tethered nearby. An Saracen bedouin steps out and waves to you welcoming. As Medoullah will tell you, the desert folk live by their hospitable ways, and will never let a stranger pass without a rest, mint tea and food.”

If they ride on: the Saracen shouts and curses, two bedouin step out behind rocks about 10m ahead and rush them, brandishing spears. Tent flaps are pulled back by the leader and two Saracen bowmen open fire from just inside the tent!

If they enter the tent: they see two Saracens eating and drinking, and ask the PCs to join them. The leader also joins in. Much talking and feasting. Medoullah might (LEARNING roll) remember the leader as being one Farouk, a tough mercenary, a cut-throat working for who ever pays the most. Their story is that they are waiting for friends from the coast then will rejoin their tribe in the north. (LEARNING roll) for Medoullah to know there is no such tribe. At some point they may ask her to dance. Ultimately, they will be ambushed when not ready - eating, sleeping etc and not have their weapons to hand. Throw one Saracen per character starting with the bowmen (give them daggers). The leader will pull out a small turquoise scarab beetle (given to him by Sebekare) and fling it in front of the player characters while hesitantly shouting out a word of power. In a FLASH! a giant scarab beetle stands before them and charges! The Saracen leader will ride away into the desert while they fight it.

Medoullah may try seducing one of the Saracens during the night. They are all ill-disciplined and will fall for this trick. They may (on a FATE roll) tell her of the ambush and warn her to get away fast ... or, if she does really well, even help the player characters to escape. The turncoat will stay with them, turning mercenary and fearing Farouk's wrath. His name will be Abnari. If this happens, have the Scarab pursue them and fight them.

SARACEN BOWMAN 1	COMBAT 3	HITS 6
SARACEN BOWMAN 2	COMBAT 4	HITS 8
SARACEN SPEARMAN 1	COMBAT 3	HITS 6
SARACEN SPEARMAN 2	COMBAT 3	HITS 6
SARACEN LEADER	COMBAT 4	HITS 8
GIANT SCARAB	COMBAT 5	HITS 14, 2 Attacks, Lt. Armour

They wear bedouin robes, carry the weapons above plus little Saracen knives, and in total carry 6 silver denarii (quite a bit for bedouin, who would generally carry none). Also found will be water, food, blankets, etc. also a two healing salves able to cure HITS up to its initial level. Any captured alive can be made to tell of their bargain with the frightening and important Ægyptian wiseman called Sebekare and his companion (who dashed off on camels eastwards sometime last night)

DAY TWO: SARACENS & PHOENICIANS

“The second day of travel is hard , hot and sweaty. The valley narrows, rising higher into the mountains. Dust, flies and rocks make headway more difficult. As the blood-red sun settles slowly behind you, you spot a large camp of assorted tents ahead. Gathered around a group of fires, the tents seem to be of two different types, one set Saracen bedouin, the others are those of Phoenician merchants. Which do you head for?”

To The Saracens: The player characters will be welcomed warmly if Medoullah is still with them. Lots of genuine feasting and drinking. Medoullah wil be asked to dance. The Saracens will tell of the strange two men arriving on camel this afternoon, and meeting with the Phoenicians as if long-lost friends. They match descriptions of Sebekare and his guard. In the night a great sandstorm will prevent anyone from moving on. The player characters may want to investigate the Phoenicians’ tents in the night. There are four large tents, with a guard at each, people sat around fires etc. The Saracens say that the sorceror is in the large main one.

Inside he is with his guard and two Phoenician merchants who are running the small caravan. They eat and talk of trivial trading matters - then as they drink he talks of his quest for the phoenix and the harnessing of its resurrecting qualities. The merchant tells him how much the nest would fetch, not to mention the Phoenix itself (5000 denarii and 10,000 denarii ...!). Sebekare tells him he can have the nest, he wants the magical qualities of the phoenix. He will try to kill any who stand in his way. The Phoenicians plan to leave at first light, heading for Herackleopolis, Sebekare and his guard plan to leave in the dark of early morning during a supernatural sandstorm.

To The Phoenicians: These are bad-guys, bought off by the sorceror who is resting with them, with his guard. (See above). They will off course welcome the tired player characters and put them in another tent with water and food, and tell Sebekare. He will have poisoned the food, each player character suffering 1d damage and unconciousness. Then when all are knocked out, or if they start causing trouble, he will send in two timid Phoenician guards to kill them with his bodyguard (who is actually a Sphinx!!). A fight will surely ensue.

PHOENICIAN GUARD ONE	COMBAT 2	HITS 4
PHOENICIAN GUARD TWO	COMBAT 4	HITS 5
SPHINX	COMBAT 7	HITS 15 - 2 Attacks, fights with all four claws

As this battle rages a great sandstorm will engulf the camp, preventing anyone from leaving. Sebekhare of course will be on his way to the Valley of the Phoenix.

DAY THREE: VALLEY OF THE PHOENIX

Although the caravan route to the Red Sea continues to follow a branch of the wadi further north, Medoullah leads the player characters away south, down a tributary valley or gorge. She has never actually been down here before. Standing watch over the dry gorge is the Golden Peak, a sandstone mountain with almost sheer sides. Refer to the Valley of the Phoenix Map for the following locations:

1 - *The gorge* is narrow and almost meets overhead. Suddenley dust and rocks cascade down the gap - all heroes must roll MIGHT or suffer 1-3 pts of damage.

2 - *Snaking up the cliff side is a rough path*, perhaps used by mountain goats. The path also carries on along the valley floor.

3 - *Either side of the gorge stand two tall statues* of unnamed kings, both standing arms at sides, one foot forward. Both have sinister eyes, fashioned from valuable-looking jewels. The statue on the left holds a copper axe, that on the right a gold axe. They are 3m tall. The jewels are worth 100 denarii each, the gold axehead maybe 1000 denarii, the copper axe is magical, glowing in the darkness. Inscribed on it is its name: 'The Axe of Everlasting Light'. However, anyone touching the right statue finds that it comes alive, and attacks the heroes with the gold axe. It seems to be made of crumbly stone, and can be hacked apart.

COMBAT 7 HITS 24

4 - *Myrrh trees*, all well tended. Grooves can be seen where sap is being collected.

5 - *The Guardian of Ra*. This guy in his early 30's, wearing Ægyptian soldiers garb and carrying a shield and spear comes forward from around the side of -6- the temple. He looks old beyond his years, and tells the heroes they must depart. He warns them they must go. His bronze helmet has a little solar disc on it. He will fight to the death.

COMBAT 4 HITS 12

Spear and shield are normal, but the helmet is cursed! Whosoever wears it will be possessed by one of Ra's demons as the wearer tries to walk out of the valley. From that moment, he will stay in the valley and tend the trees, looking after the nest of the phoenix. He cannot willingly leave, and if forced, will always return. He cannot take the helmet off. If the heroes have killed the phoenix (the wearer **cannot**) will attempt to kill them as they leave the gorge...

6 - Shrine of Ra, tended by the guardian. It resembles a small stone porch with two imposing pillars, leading into a dark hall in the cliff. Two seated statues of Ra flank this portico. In the dark hall (light filters in from high sun slits) is a tall statue of Ra, incense burners and lamps burn. In a room of to the side is the guardian's quarters, with bed, wicker chair, 3 jars of myrrh (40 denarii each) and a dagger inscribed with "Child of Ptah, Immortal God Ra". It is not magical, but the handle has a sun disc/rays design (double cost of dagger).

7 - Scorpion caves. As the heroes wander along the dusty cliff top they come across three caves leading into the cliffs. Inside are three Scorpion men who will either emerge to fight (perhaps one is on the cliff above and tosses down a net catching the lead hero on a failed MIGHT - 2 roll). Or the heroes will stumble into their lair.

COMBAT 3	HITS 7	Spear	2 attacks, Lt. Armour
COMBAT 5	HITS 10	Spear	2 attacks, Lt. Armour
COMBAT 5	HITS 11	Sword	2 attacks, Lt. Armour

* A critical success during an attack indicates a poisoned tail strike. Victims must roll FATE or suffer 1d+5 points of damage (see Poison rules).

8 - Giant Eagle. Swoops down out of the blue sky. COMBAT 4 HITS 11. First attack is powerful dive at +1, it takes 3 rounds to set up for another swoop. A critical hit indicates the griffin has been able to drag its opponent into the sky with its powerful talons.

9 - Abandoned Camp. A small pool of water is surrounded by tatters of a shelter and 3 skeletons sprawled in the sand. Water tastes lovely but is poisoned (4 point damage)! See rules for Poison. Scraps of armour an old dagger and 2 spears can be scavenged. Also up to 9 denarii can be recovered in jewelry and metal.

10 - As the canyon progresses, sides get steeper, and behind, a breeze eddies the air, whipping up sand. Same ahead. Colours seen within, burning bright scarlet and orange ! Sand elementals. Fight to death.

SCARLET SAND ELEMENTAL	COMBAT 7 HITS 4
ORANGE SAND ELEMENTAL	COMBAT 7 HITS 8

When they wound they burn and gash. Difficult to fight, but a few good blows with weapons will harm the sand-spirit, disturbing the flow of sand and energy. Once 'killed' an Elemental can restore itself after 1d hours.

11 - A high and precipitous gorge wends its way east deeper and deeper into the cliff. What order are the heroes in? Suddenly ahead is a large scarab beetle:

SCARAB with HORN	COMBAT 5 HITS 10, 2 Attacks, Lt. Armour
SCARAB with PINCERS	COMBAT 5 HITS 6, 2 Attacks, Lt. Armour

and from behind, another lands:

SCARAB with WINGS COMBAT 5 HITS 9, 2 Attacks, Lt. Armour

12 - The Tunnels. These are dark warm and smelly. Bits of dead and dried goat are scattered around. As it twists and turns, the tunnel is lined with piles of sand blown into the caves, more dead goats scattered around. The mounds are sleeping desert ghouls! There are two - 1 in front, 1 behind. Ghouls are unbreathing desert creatures, feeding off carrion like human-jackals, and able to hide under the sand.

BLOODY GHOUL COMBAT 3 HITS 6
STRINGY GHOUL COMBAT 4 HITS 8

Amongst the sand lairs, the heroes might find a glass perfume bottle worth 21 denarii and a silver chain worth 15 denarii.

13 - The Pit. The tunnel widens slightly, and arches up into the darkness above. Across the tunnel from wall to wall, is a long pit, 6 metres along, 6 metres across. Spaced evenly across it are 9 stone pillars, reaching up to form stepping stones across. At the bottom are several dozen cobras and pit vipers. On the top of each pillar are inscribed hieroglyphs, each one different. Referee: to get across, the players have to step in order of the phrase that they saw on the shrine back in the valley - or guess ... If they get the order wrong, the pillar suddenly starts sinking, and the hero gets one chance (only) to jump across onto another pillar - hope its the right one! To jump - make a MIGHT roll. If failed, bitten by 3 snakes each turn! Correct way across is IMMORTAL GOD RA.

The inscriptions are:

- Heroes on this side of pit -

CHILD	IMMORTAL	DIVINE
HERO	GOD	LORD
PTAH	SET	RA

14 - The Phoenix Tree. In a beautiful rocky grotto open to the blue sky are myrrh trees and bushes filled with flowers. A stout and ancient tree grows in the centre, and at its top is a huge golden nest, sparkling with myrrh, frankincense and gold. At the base is a rope hanging down, and amongst the branches emerging to where the nest is, is the sorcerer Sebekare. He clutches a shortsword and is gathering items from the nest - the sky suddenly darkens, the sun turns blood-red.

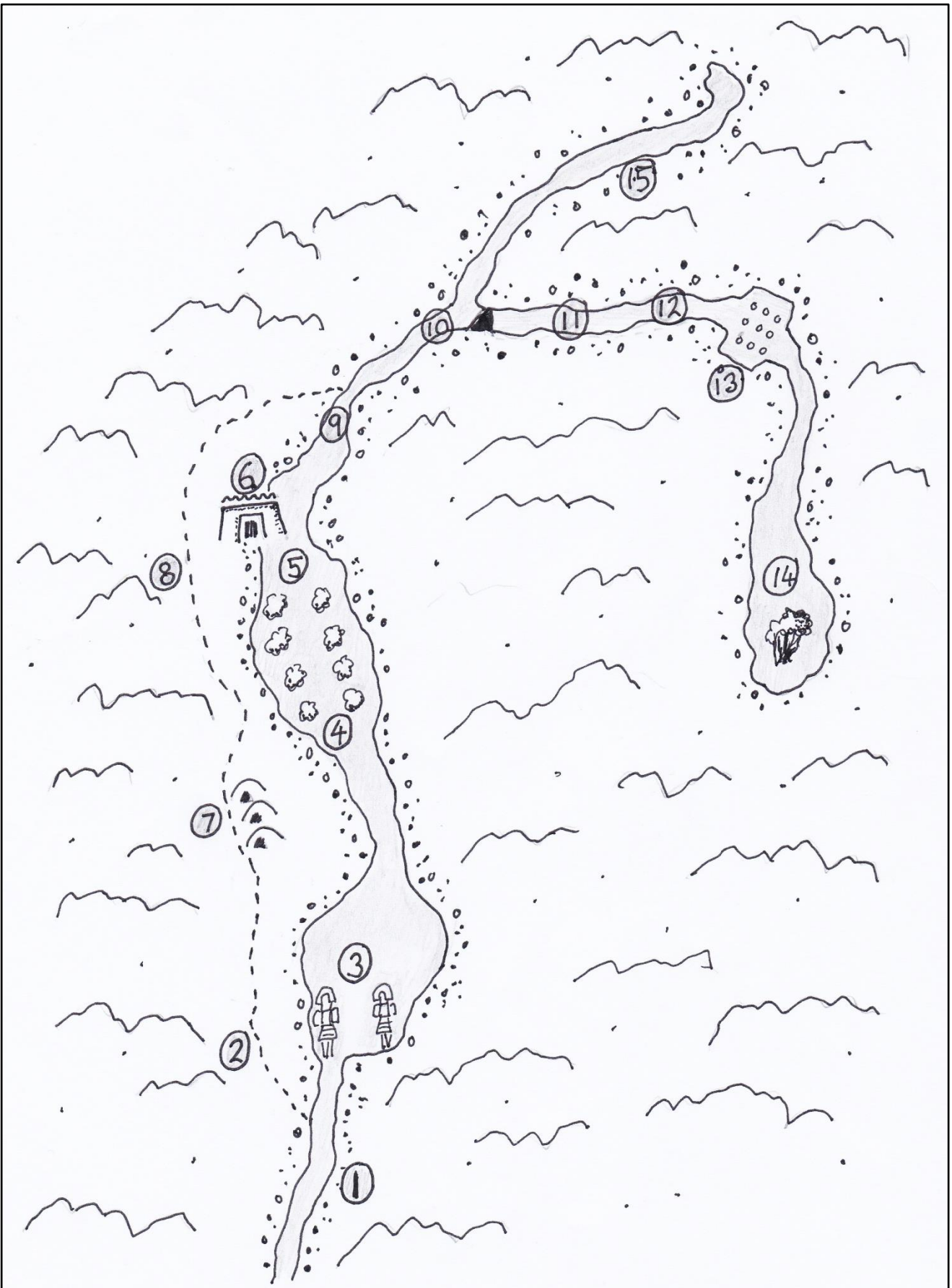
If not stopped: The phoenix, in its golden splendour arrives, trying to land in the nest, Sebekare leaps up stabbing it and wounding it badly. He finishes it off and using tail feathers of the dead bird, casts a 'flying' spell and disappears into the blood-red sky. A great wind blows through the grotto, blowing away flowers, leaves, sand - all heroes suffer 2 points if they stay, each round. After 5 rounds, Ra unleashes a firestorm on the grotto - anything still there suffers 4d damage(or 2d if they make a FATE roll), anything in the tunnels or gorge suffers 2 points unless they make a FATE roll.

If stopped: Player characters can climb up after him or try shooting him. If he notices them climbing up, he will cast Agony (make climbers roll MIGHT to stay in tree!). It takes 3 turns to climb into nest. He may also cast Charm or Sleep. If he is kept occupied then the phoenix returns, and attacks him, grabbing him in its talon. The heroes will then feel the temperature in the nest rise, smoke curls around it and Sebekare screams. In 3 turns it goes up in flames - Sebekare too (or does he?). End of bird - watch it be reborn!!! A lone feather will float down out of the sky if the heroes stop him killing the bird. Or bird flaps down with bundle of feathers, gold and myrrh. Last two worth 380 denarii.

SEBEKARE COMBAT 5 HITS 16 - Most spells -Shortsword.

CONCLUSION

The trip back should be uneventful, if the heroes have any feathers then the physician will take them off the heroes and the local governor will be restored to health, and very grateful. Perhaps the governor could suggest a quest for them, or have a problem that he needs sorting out. How about his arch-rival?



VALLEY OF THE PHOENIX

