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“Beyond the Grave: The legends and lore of the wight, wraith, and mummy”

By Tom Moldvay — Dragon #198 (October 1993)

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Undead, Mummy, Ka

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CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Desert, rivers, subterranean
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary or small bands
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Spirit food
INTELLIGENCE:	Average to Genius
TREASURE:	50% A
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful neutral

NO. APPEARING:	1 or 2-12
ARMOR CLASS:	1
MOVEMENT:	9
HIT DICE:	9+6
THACO:	11
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2d10
CRIT. HIT/FUMBLE:	55%(+60%)/45%
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Fear, spellwriting, curse, statue animation
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Weapon resistances, spell immunities and resistances, spirit doors
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (5'-7')
MORALE:	Fearless (20)
XP VALUE:	14,000

A ka is a kind of super-mummy. Once, the ka was a noble, king, or pharaoh. After death, the mummified body continued to live on in the tomb as an undead monster. A ka is not necessarily evil. It attacks only when its tomb offerings are threatened or when under the control of a cleric. A ka looks like a normal mummy—i.e., as a bandage-wrapped corpse.

Combat: Like a normal mummy, a ka possesses supernatural strength that lets its blows do more than normal damage. Instead of a rotting disease, however, a successful hit by a ka imparts a curse upon the victim. DMs may make up their own curses or may use the following table (roll 1d20; all curses last until removed):



- 1-3: *Ill luck:* All future rolls for the cursed individual are -1 on a roll of 1, -2 on a roll of 2, or -3 on a roll of 3.
- 4-7: *Withering touch:* An arm or leg withers and becomes useless. (4 = right arm, 5 = left arm, 6 = right leg, 7 left leg; loss of a leg reduces movement by 3).
- 8-11: *Mutation:* A body part becomes mutated to some other form (8 = a leg, 9 = torso, 10 = an arm, 11 = head).
- 12-14: *Alteration:* An attribute chosen at random is lowered by -1.
- 15-18: *Death wish:* Extra damage is suffered during subsequent attacks. (15 = +1, 16 = +2, 17 = +3, 18 = double damage).
- 19-20: *Cursed item:* One magical item, chosen at random, loses its benefits on a 19 (as per cancellation). On a 20, the item actually becomes cursed (use the closest appropriate cursed item from the Treasure Tables; hence a sword +3 would become a cursed sword -2).

As with mummies, the mere sight of a ka may cause fear and revulsion in any creature. A save vs. spells must succeed or the victim will be paralyzed with fright for 1d6 melee rounds. There are no bonuses to the die roll.

A ka can be harmed only by magical weapons, which do only half normal damage. *Sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, cold, poison, paralysis, polymorph, and electricity do not harm it. It suffers only half damage from fire or holy water. A *resurrection* spell turns a ka into a normal human (of 10th level fighting ability) unless the ka saves vs. spells.

A ka has a limited magical ability. A word written by it has the force of a *command* spell. It takes a full round to inscribe such a word. Characters need not see the written word for the spell to take effect.

The ka is able to fragment its spirit. These spirit fragments can inhabit special magical stone statues within the ka's tomb. Treat these statues as stone golems. A ka can inhabit 1-4 statues at a time. If the ka's mummified body is destroyed, its will lives on in the statues. Inside a statue, however, a ka no longer possesses its curse or magical writing powers, and it may be affected by forms of attacks to which the mummified body is immune. Note that the ka has no power to activate any other statue but those in its tomb.

A ka may also walk through special spirit doors carved into stone or wood or painted on a wall when the body was buried. A ka could walk through a spirit door carved into rock, attack the party, then retreat back inside its tomb.

A cleric has the same chance to turn a ka as he does a vampire.

Habitat/Society: A ka was once a living ruler. It still retains some friendliness toward character races, especially members of its own race and nation. Thus a human ka has an affinity for humans, a dwarven ka for dwarves, etc. This affinity is even stronger if, in the DM's opinion, the ka and character share the same cultural background.

If no attempt is made to steal its tomb treasures, a ka may be placated by showing it reverence and giving it additional grave goods. Such goods may vary from simple food to elaborate treasures. At the DM's discretion, a ka that has become placated may be asked

questions that require simple yes-or-no answers. The greater the offerings, the greater the knowledge such a ka may impart.

Wealthy individuals are usually buried alone. A ka is, hence, generally encountered as a solitary creature. Sometimes, however, many graves are crowded into one tomb to discourage robbers. In this case, the tomb is shared by a related group of kas.

It started in Egypt...

In ancient Egyptian belief, there were two main spiritual forms of the deceased, called respectively the ka and the ba. The ka was supposed to dwell in the tomb—more precisely, in the mummified body—and it was the form in which the dead received their funerary offerings.

It seems that the ka represented the life-force of an individual. It was created at the time of his birth, remained with him throughout his life, and subsequently lived in the tomb after death. The dead were sometimes referred to as "those who have gone to their kas," and the tomb chapel could be called, "the house of the ka." Ordinary people had only a single ka but gods and pharaohs had several.

The importance of preserving the corpse can be seen through the ka belief. The more intact the corpse, the better the home for the ka spirit. The great pyramids and other tomb structures of ancient Egypt served primarily not as monuments but as houses in which the kas spent their afterlife. The richer and more important an individual, the better he wanted his death-home to be, and pharaohs were the most important individuals of all.

Thus it was believed that the dead lived on in the tomb. This belief may have originated in earlier burials, which took place in the desert away from the Nile. The desert dried the corpses and helped preserve them. At the same time, the liquefaction that accompanies corruption would be drained off into the sands. A sandstorm could easily uncover earlier graves, exposing the contents. The Egyptians would chance upon a body that had been buried for centuries and find it better preserved than a corpse left out near the Nile for several days. It is not surprising that a belief arose that the dead lived on in their tombs.

Once such a belief became established, one obvious result was the desire to build the best possible resting

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place for a beloved family member. Burial chambers grew more and more elaborate. For a time, huge pyramids were built to house pharaohs, who were the sons of the sun god. Such an extensive building effort could not be maintained for long. Later tombs became less grandiose than the pyramids. Still, such tombs, cut into solid rock in the Valley of the Kings, were elaborate affairs.

Pharaohs and nobles could afford elaborate tombs. Others had to settle for simpler graves. Yet every effort was made to ensure the well-being of the dead in their afterlife.

The articles used by the living were included in their death goods. Clothing, tools, weapons, cosmetics, even games were entombed with the dead. Complete meals were laid out to be buried with the corpse for future use. Funerary rites, conducted by priests, insured a continuing supply of the things that made living pleasant.

Each tomb, sarcophagus, or coffin had a stylized door outline carved into it by which the deceased could leave to pick up offerings, then reenter the tomb. The ka could literally walk through stone or wood once the appropriate magic had been performed. Such an action was possible because the deceased was now a spirit and the door was a magical spirit door, not a real one.

At first, grave goods were literal. Baskets of food, whole chariots, favored horses, household slaves, and the like were entombed with rich pharaohs. Such gifts were, of course, expensive. It was impossible to include them in every burial without begging the nation.

Magic came to the rescue. The same grave goods could be included in miniature, or merely painted on the wall. Hence tombs might contain a set of miniature servants or soldiers, miniature boats and chariots, even miniature food baskets. Likewise, the scenes painted on the walls were not for decoration or art, but to magically supply the dead person with goods and services in the afterlife. Thus there would be painted scenes showing the preparation of every stage of food from planting or hunting to the final cooking and serving.

A particular style evolved that concerned itself more with the essence of things than with a naturalistic

presentation. A profile included a whole enlarged eye to show how important sight was. A pharaoh was drawn larger than nobles who were, in turn, larger than servants, thus continuing in death the distinctions made in life.

The final stage in the logical progression of the magic was to merely write the items on the tomb wall, or on papyrus lists that could be entombed with the dead. Egyptian writing, which had evolved from pictographs, was itself viewed as magical. To chisel a name, paint it, or merely write it down was not simply to name a person or thing, but to conjure it magically into the presence of the tomb for all time.

Naturally, steps were taken to discourage tomb robbery. Such robbery deprived the dead of goods for all eternity. Some traps were incorporated into the tomb, but the Egyptians relied more on curses, written on the tomb wall. Again, such writing was considered magical, and the effects of the spell would last as long as the markings survived.

No matter how well the Egyptians mummified their dead, bodies could decay. To counter this effect, the priests evoked more magic. Life-size statues were included in the tombs. The ka could use these statues as alternative homes. Detailed paintings of the individual and special face masks served the same purpose, as extra homes for the ka. As a last resort, the individual's name was carved on rock or otherwise written repeatedly. If there was no place else to go, a ka could inhabit the carved or written name.

Thus, the worst curse an Egyptian could think of was to destroy the statues of a person and to remove his name from every reference. Such an individual would be cursed to wander eternally in spirit form, never to be at rest or enjoy the afterlife.

The second spiritual manifestation of an individual, the ba, was usually represented as a human-headed bird. This spirit was thus able to fly from the corpse. It left the body at the time of death and was free to travel. In early beliefs, it rode with the sun god during the day and had to return to dwell with the ka at night. In later beliefs, the ba journeyed to the other worldly domain of Osiris to be judged and (presumably) enjoy an afterlife.