

The Curse of Tutankhamun

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Today, King Tut is a household name — he's that Egyptian pharaoh you probably learned about in elementary school. He wasn't always part of curricula, however: for over 3,000 years, the name Tutankhamun was unrecognizable.

Ascending to the throne at just 10-years-old in 1323 BCE, the Egyptian pharaoh named Tutankhamun ruled for just eight short years. Because he was born to sibling parents, he had many health issues during his life.

He had genetic neck problems, which caused difficulty moving his neck. He suffered from multiple cases of malaria (seriously, what're the odds?), and walked with a cane. Life was not so glamorous for the ruler.

The pharaoh passed suddenly at the age of 18, leaving no heirs to the throne, as his wife Ankhesenamun bore two stillborn daughters. Next in line was his Grand Vizier Ay, who married his widowed wife and took control of the kingdom. The Tutankhamun family line was broken.

Quickly, King Tut was placed in a tomb among his worldly treasures, which was then sealed for all of eternity. With the doors locked and location hidden in place, the reign of King Tut vanished and was buried in a thousand years of sandstorms.

With a grave that went untouched and unheard of for more than 3,000 years, the name Tutankhamun remained mostly unknown...until England's Howard Carter laid his eyes on a collection of Egyptian artifacts.

The moment he saw those pieces of history, Carter became entranced and completely bewitched by archaeology and discovery in the Egyptian lands. At the age of 17, Carter left England for his first expedition with only the chisel that his grandmother gave him.

Shortly after arriving in Egypt, Carter crossed paths with an incredibly wealthy man named George Herbert, better known as the 5th Earl of Carnarvon. This was a pivotal moment in his life — and King Tut's.

See, Lord Carnarvon ended up in Egypt because of his love of cars. An automobile accident in Germany left him with permanent health issues, and as a result, doctor's suggested he move to a hotter and dryer climate. A place like Egypt.

Moving to the city of Luxor, which sits upon the ancient pharaoh's capital of Thebes, Carnarvon picked up a new hobby. He, like Carter, became interested in ancient artifacts. It was when he bought a plot of land in the Valley of Kings that Carnarvon met Carter.

Carter was young and hopeful and told Carnarvon of his newest expedition to find the hidden tomb of King Tutankhamun. Carnarvon offered to fund Carter's excavations, and he subsequently poured money into Carter's hunt for 15 years — with little to show for it.

Desperate for continued funding, Carter grid mapped the entire Valley of Kings, willing to search each and every one. Nearly 30 years later, on a November afternoon in 1922, Carter excavated his last square. Beneath the tomb of Ramses VI, Carter uncovered a set of stairs that led beneath the earth.

He feverishly dug out the staircase, eager to see where they led. Carter's whole career was riding on this discovery. Finally uncovering a mud brick door sealed with a cartouche, his mortal eyes couldn't believe what they were seeing.

The door seal indicated they had found something big. Carter sent a telegram to Carnarvon imploring him to come at once. While he waited for Carnarvon to arrive, warning signs started to appear...

A messenger came to Carter and told him a cobra had gotten inside his home and ate his canary, a symbol of peace. Completely freaked out, the messenger told Carter to abandon the mission: this was clearly a warning from unseen forces.

Carter did not abandon his mission, though, and, after three weeks, Carnarvon and his daughter, Lady Evelyn, arrived at the door of the great archaeological discovery. There, they met Carter and his assistant Arthur Callender.

Unable to wait for the proper protocol, Carter smashed the door open and barged into the tomb of King Tutankhamun, disturbing his final resting place. They had just discovered the first completely intact Egyptian tomb — and it was all caught on film.

The tomb was divided into four different rooms, all filled with ceremonial objects designed to guide Tut in the afterlife — gold, massive statues, the pharaoh's throne. An intricate death mask lay upon the king's face. Hieroglyphics painted over the walls cautioned a message for anyone who read it.

It read: "Death shall come on swift wings to him who disturbs the peace of the King." Carter ignored this, and blinded by discovery, removed the treasures from King Tut's tomb. He even wanted the jeweled amulets on the mummified body. Stuck with resin, Carter ordered that Tut be dismembered to retrieve the jewels.

That's when things started getting a bit strange. Afterward and back at his home, Lord Carnarvon was shaving when he nicked a mosquito bite on his face (oddly enough, it was in the exact spot that King Tut was scarred). The cut became infected, poisoned his blood, and killed him.

Not long after, the Carnarvon's family dog was peacefully sleeping when it yelped and died instantly. The press was all over the strange and tragic events that followed the negligence of the discovery. Tourists flocked to the cursed tomb to get a look.

Still, no one took the tomb's warning seriously. A tomb visitor and railroad businessman, George Jay Gould, fell ill with an aggressive fever and died. Sir Archibald Douglas Reid, the radiologist who performed the x-ray on the mummy was also stricken with an odd fever and passed the following day.

Even officials weren't safe. Egyptian noble, Prince Ali Kamel Fahmy Bey, was shot dead by his wife after visiting the tomb. Then following his visit, the British Governor-General of Sudan, Lee Stack, was assassinated while stuck in heavy traffic.

Anyone who entered the tomb was touched by this curse. Hugh Evelyn-White, one of the first professionals to enter the tomb, fell mentally ill and hung himself leaving a note that read, "I have succumbed to a curse, which forced me to disappear."

More lives than not perished at the hands of this unworldly hex. By 1929, artifact collectors feared the curse and began turning in Egyptian artifacts. So whatever happened to the man responsible for opening this can of worms?

Carter worked alone to log all 5,000 pieces of artifacts found in Tut's tomb, all of which were eventually confiscated by the Egyptian state. He lived on for many years like a broken man, haunted by the tragedies that struck in the wake of his discovery.

Plagued by the curse, he ordered King Tutankhamun's mummy be restored and returned to his final resting place as it should have always stayed. He passed away, alone and defeated. Inscribed on his gravestone, from one of King Tut's artifacts,

read: "May your spirit live, may you spend millions of years, you who love Thebes."

For Carter, the curse took its time, as a swift death wouldn't be punishment enough for the man who spent his entire life obsessing over another man's treasures. His passing wasn't the last strike of the curse: Lady Evelyn was about to find out what King Tutankhamun had in store for her.

On the 50th anniversary of the tomb's discovery, it was decided to display some of King Tut's artifacts. While doing so, two workers preparing the artifacts dropped dead, seemingly out of nowhere. Still, the artifacts were shipped from Egypt to London.

More than 30,000 people viewed the museum exhibition, one of which being Lady Evelyn. Never having returned to Egypt after her father's death, curiosity got the best of her. But she couldn't just go to see what killed her father just once.

She became utterly obsessed with the exhibit, visiting it time and time again. The stress she placed on her body took its toll, and after her fifth visit, she suffered a massive stroke and never recovered from it. Was it the curse, still seeking vengeance in honor of its young pharaoh, or merely a coincidence?

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