

THE MUMMY'S CURSE

1 Egypt, Valley of the Kings, November 1922. In a dry, dusty valley, two men discover a sealed stone door that leads to an underground chamber. They make a small hole in the door and peer into the dark room. Priceless treasures lie everywhere – golden chariots, thrones and chests. Two life-sized statues, carved in black, guard the chamber. In an adjoining room, still hidden from their eyes, is the golden shrine of Pharaoh Tutankhamun.

2 This scene is history, not fiction. The men were Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon, both keen archaeologists. They had come to the valley because it was the burial place of the kings of ancient Egypt, the pharaohs. Many royal tombs had already been found. Sadly, their treasures had been stolen centuries before. But Carter was convinced that one more tomb remained undisturbed – the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun!

3 Tutankhamun is a shadowy figure. When he died, details of his reign were erased from public monuments, and there are few surviving written records. He became king in about 1333 BC, at the age of ten, and was married when he was still a child, perhaps even to his sister. His mother may have been Queen Nefertiti, a queen of great beauty. Tutankhamun died when he was sixteen or seventeen. Archaeologists believe his enemies might have murdered him.

4 The ancient Egyptians believed their pharaohs were gods, whose spirits lived on after death. Their bodies were therefore preserved or 'mummified' and surrounded with objects for the afterlife. These included precious items such as golden chariots, statues and jewellery. Mummies and tombs were thought to be the earthly homes of the dead spirits. Disturbing or robbing a tomb made the spirit homeless. Curses were therefore often inscribed at the entrance to a burial chamber, threatening anyone who entered it with terrible punishments.

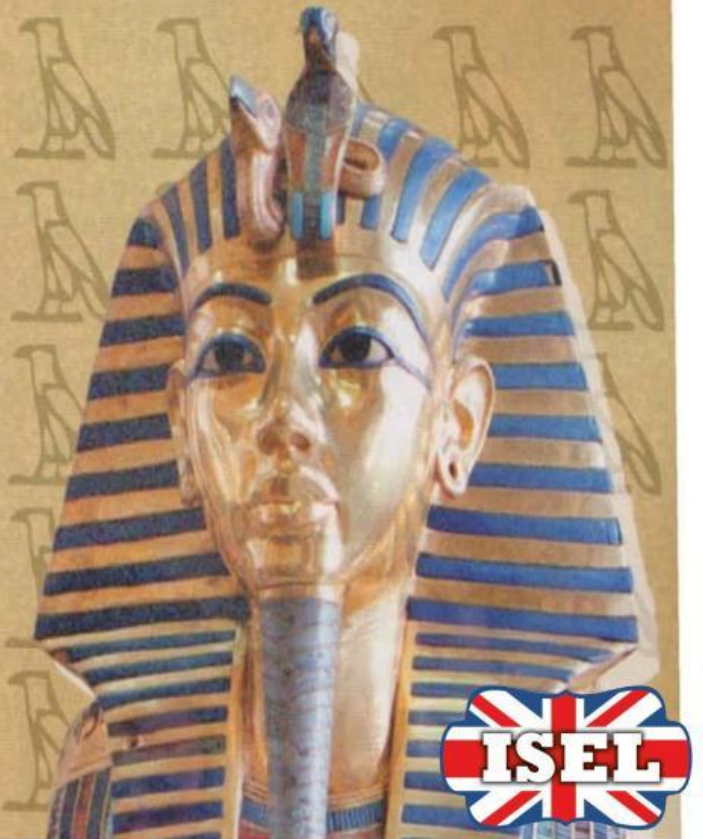
5 Carter and Carnarvon must have known about 'The Mummy's Curse'. They ignored it at their peril! Days before discovering the tomb, Carter had bought a pet canary in a golden cage. His servants considered it a lucky charm. But on the day the tomb was found, a cobra killed the canary. Cobras were royal snakes, worn on the headdress of every pharaoh! Was this the start of the curse?

6 News of the new royal tomb spread quickly. But it was three months before Carter could open the burial chamber. Invited guests gathered around, eager to view the mummy that had been left undisturbed for 3,000 years. When the door was finally opened, everyone gasped in wonder. The mummy lay in a massive golden shrine. Symbols were carved along the sides to guard it from intruders. Did they include a curse? Subsequent events suggested they did.

7 Carter was exhausted. He had been digging for months and was in a highly nervous state. One day he argued with Carnarvon and threw him out of his house. He may have regretted this later, but in just one month, Carnarvon was dead. A mosquito bite on his cheek had become infected and Carnarvon, never a strong man, developed pneumonia and died. The mummy was said to have a wound on its cheek, too! Could the curse have caused Carnarvon's death?

8 Stranger events followed. At the time Carnarvon died, the lights went out all over Cairo. At exactly that moment, over in England, Carnarvon's dog howled and dropped dead. Later that year, his younger brother died unexpectedly. Carter's assistant died suddenly, too. In time, more and more people who had entered the tomb met untimely ends. By now Carter must have been wondering if a similar fate awaited him! In fact, he survived, but his health was ruined and he eventually died a bitter man.

9 The excavation of the mummy's tomb brought nothing but tragedy to the people involved. But was it the result of the mummy's curse? We may never know.



4 Read the article and choose the best answer, A, B, C or D.

- 1 In paragraph 2, the writer states that Carter
 - A was intending to rob a tomb.
 - B wanted to be the first to discover a royal tomb.
 - C had already discovered a number of tombs.
 - D believed he could find a particular tomb.
- 2 What does *shadowy* mean in line 17?
 - A mysterious
 - B impressive
 - C suspicious
 - D fascinating
- 3 What does *these* refer to in line 29?
 - A the tombs
 - B the spirits
 - C the objects
 - D the bodies
- 4 Why did Carter buy the canary in a golden cage?
 - A Because it might bring him luck.
 - B To guard him in the tomb.
 - C So he could keep it at home.
 - D To please his servants.
- 5 When the burial chamber was finally opened, the people present were
 - A disturbed.
 - B amazed.
 - C scared.
 - D puzzled.

- 6 What does the writer suggest about Carnarvon's death?
 - A It was the result of exhaustion.
 - B It may not have been natural.
 - C It was caused by Carter.
 - D It was due to malaria.
- 7 What is meant by *met untimely ends* in line 66?
 - A had to retire early
 - B became ill for no reason
 - C were unlucky in their lives
 - D had their lives ended early
- 8 What does *it* refer to in line 70?
 - A the excavation
 - B the mummy
 - C the tomb
 - D the tragedy

5 Match words (1–9) from the article with the definitions (a–i).

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|-------------------------|---|
| 1 peer (line 4) | a continued to live |
| 2 adjoining (line 6) | b look carefully at something which is difficult to see |
| 3 undisturbed (line 15) | c next to and connected to |
| 4 erased (line 18) | d removed |
| 5 threatening (line 34) | e not touched by anyone |
| 6 peril (line 37) | f breathed in suddenly |
| 7 gasped (line 47) | g saying that you will hurt someone |
| 8 wound (line 58) | h great danger |
| 9 survived (line 67) | i an open injury to the body |

