

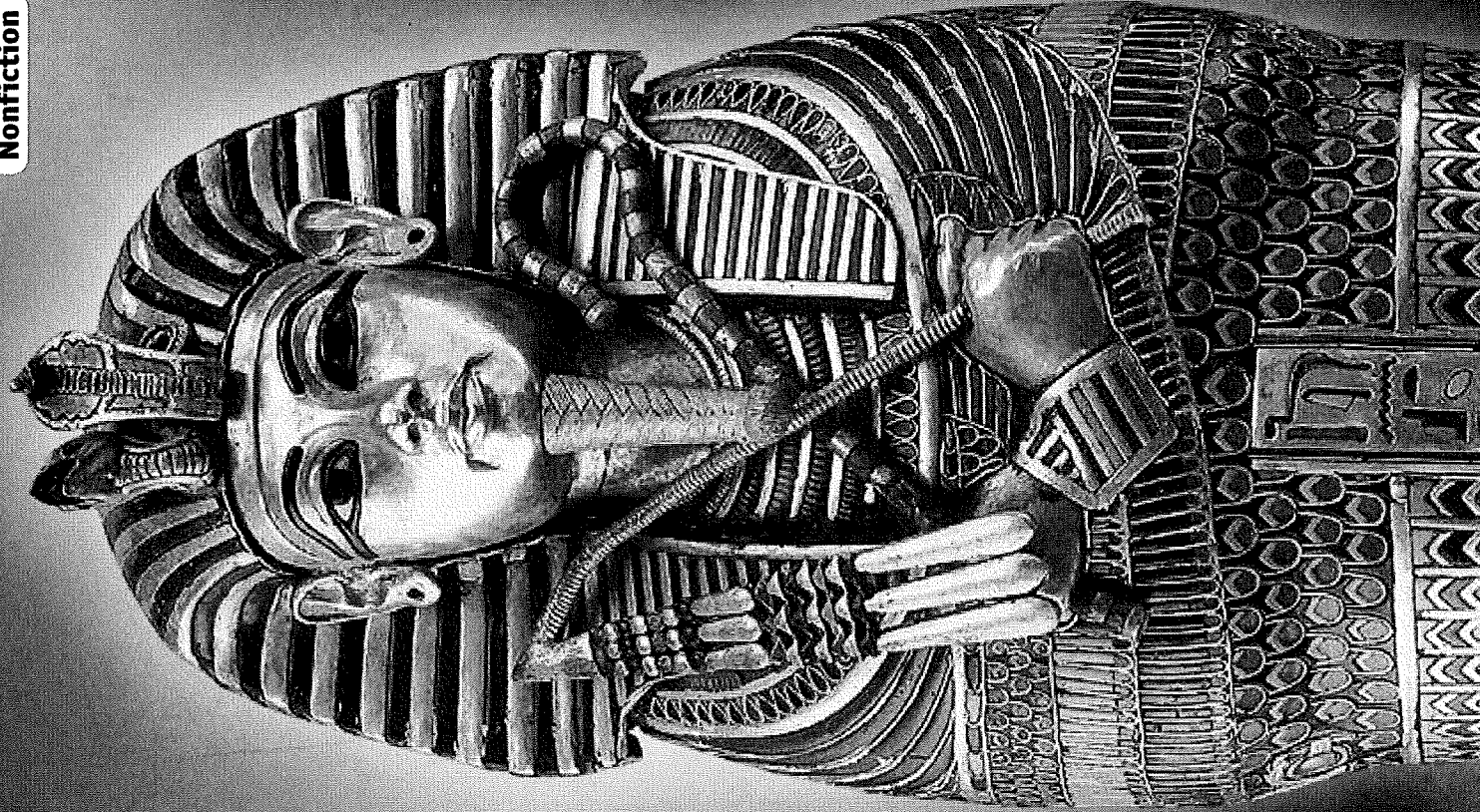
**NARRATIVE
NONFICTION**
nonfiction that uses
literary techniques

Nonfiction

THE RETURN OF THE MUMMY KING

How a teen pharaoh who lived 3,000
years ago became a modern celebrity

BY KRISTIN LEWIS



He is the king of ancient Egypt. At only 9 years old, he rules over an empire that stretches across hundreds of miles and has millions of people.

As is suitable for a pharaoh, his head is shaved. When he walks, his heavy gold jewelry clanks together, a kind of soundtrack to announce his power and wealth. At night, his servants wave giant fans over him so the crushing heat does not keep him awake. Everywhere he goes, people bow to him. They say he can read the minds of the gods.

But his life isn't all glamour. He has an empire to run, and it is one of the most powerful in the world. That's a lot of pressure for a kid. Fortunately, he has advisers to closely guide him.

But then, tragedy strikes.

When he is about 18, his life comes to a mysterious end. All of Egypt mourns his passing. His body is taken to the priests, who spend 70 days performing the sacred ritual of mummification.

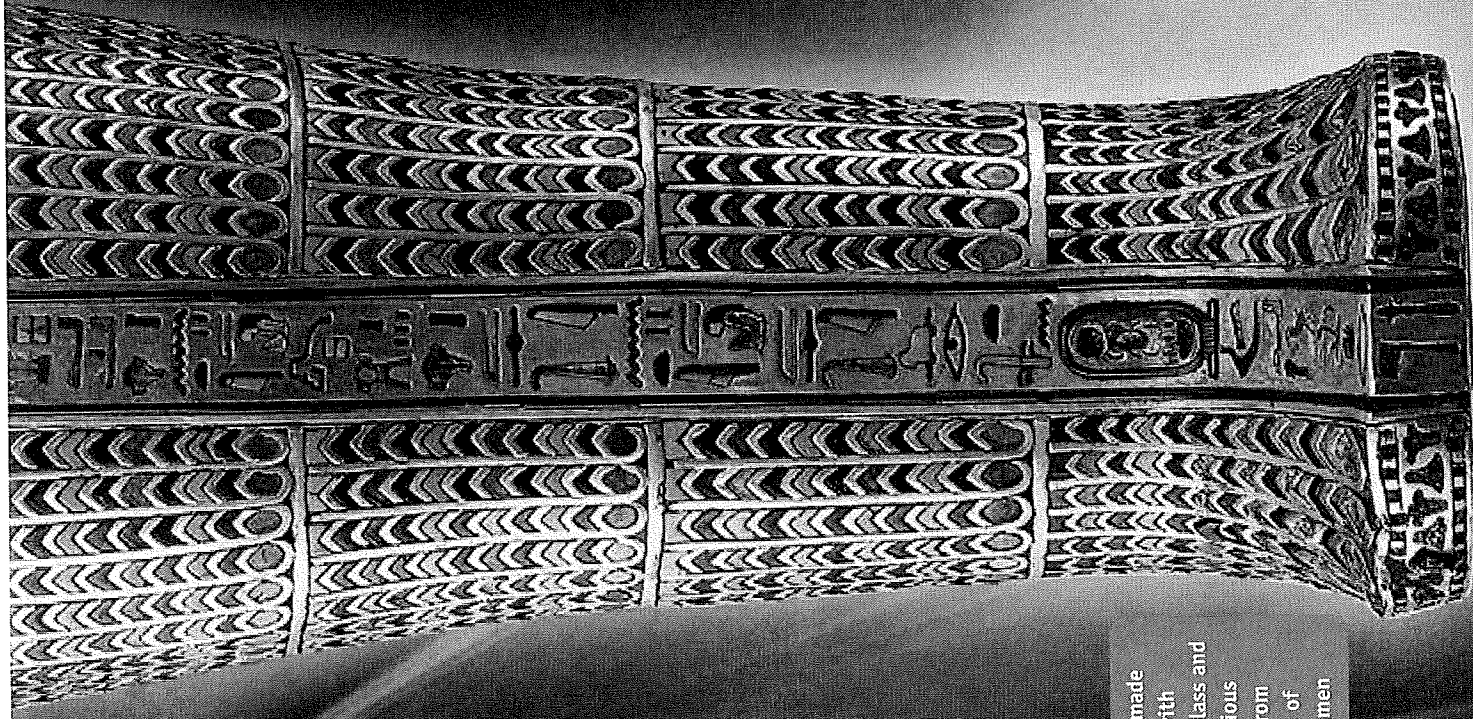
After a grand funeral procession, he is buried in a tomb in the Valley of the Kings, where many pharaohs before him have been laid to rest. Buried with him are treasures: jewels, statues, food, weapons—everything he might need in the afterlife.

But what no one could know is that he will have an afterlife here on Earth. Thousands of years from now, his name will be spoken around the world. Kids will study him in school. Researchers will dedicate their lives to solving the mystery of his life and death. Millions will travel great distances to see his treasures.

His name is Tutankhamen.
And he will be immortal.



A coffin made of gold with colored glass and semiprecious stones, from the tomb of Tutankhamen



A CELEBRITY

Tutankhamen is a name known around the world. (He has been nicknamed “King Tut.”) Just whispering his name brings to mind images of mummies and curses and golden treasure.

The story of how Tutankhamen came to be a celebrity in our world is fascinating, and his long-ago life is mysterious. Today, we know that he became pharaoh at the age of 8 or 9, around 1332 B.C. We also know that he only ruled for about a decade. In ancient Egypt’s long history, there were more than 170 pharaohs. Tutankhamen is a drop of water in the ocean of history.

Had he lived longer, Tut might have accomplished many things. But we’ll never know what might have been.

In fact, most of us wouldn’t know his name at all if it weren’t for a team of archaeologists combing the golden sands of Egypt in 1922.

IMPRESSIVE FINDS

In the early 1900s, long after Tutankhamen was sealed in his tomb, a British archaeologist named Howard Carter was spending a great deal of time in the Valley of the Kings. Carter

would have been a familiar figure to the many others at work in the valley.

At the time, archaeology was a growing field. Its purpose was—and still is—to study ruins and artifacts that date back thousands of years. Like detectives analyzing clues, archaeologists study their finds. They form theories and draw conclusions about how people lived in the distant past.

Carter had moved from England to Egypt in 1891. He was 17. He took a job painting pictures of the colorful drawings and **hieroglyphs** on ruins. He went on to work on many **excavation** projects.

These projects were huge jobs. Hundreds of people might work

on a site where ruins had been discovered. In the Valley of the Kings, this work was performed mainly by local Egyptians. They prepared fragile artifacts for travel through the harsh desert and across the Nile River. They were experts in moving sand and rock. Children often helped too by carrying away dirt and rocks.

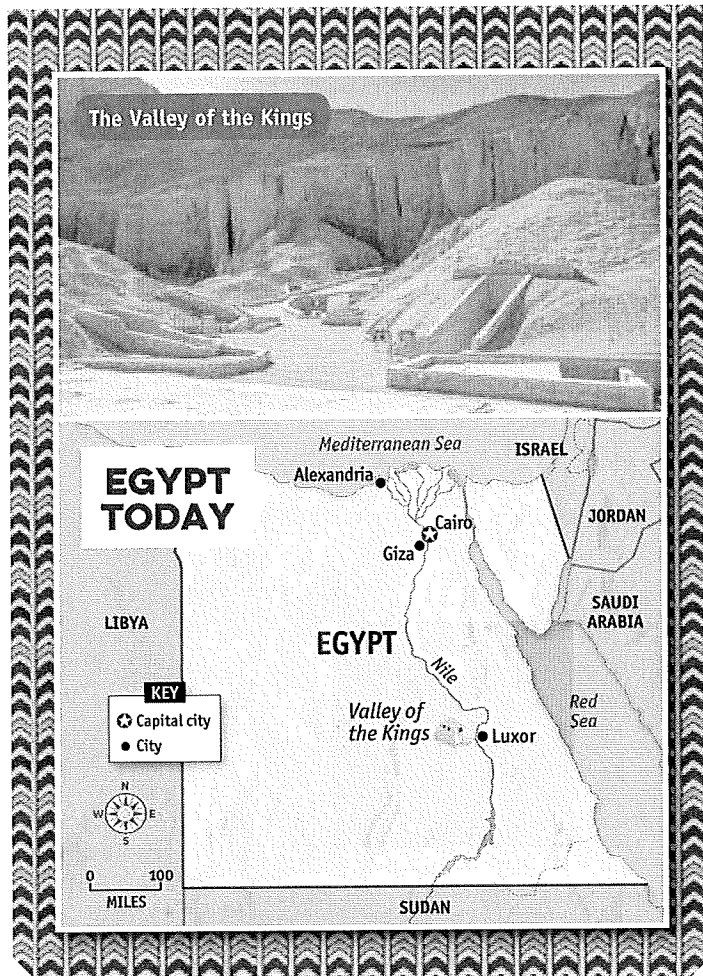
By the time Carter was working in the Valley of the Kings, there had already been impressive finds in

the area. These finds included the tombs of many pharaohs. But the tombs had already been emptied. In ancient Egypt, tomb raiding was a big problem. In fact, the stealing got so bad that the mummies of many pharaohs were moved out of their tombs to secret locations.

THE SEARCH

In 1907, Carter was hired by a wealthy man from England. The man’s name was Lord Carnarvon. Carnarvon was fascinated by ancient Egypt. Carter’s job was to **catalog** the many artifacts Carnarvon had gotten from tombs of Egyptian nobles.

Carter’s skill and attention



Jim McLendon/Magnum © (map)

to detail impressed Carnarvon. So in 1914, when Carnarvon got permission from the Egyptian government to dig in a new area in the Valley of the Kings, he asked Carter to lead the project.

Carter and his team searched tirelessly. Yet seven years later, they had found nothing. Carnarvon was getting impatient. He had already spent a small fortune funding the search.

Was there nothing left to find in the Valley of the Kings?

Carter didn't think so. He

convinced Carnarvon to give him just a little more time.

But this would likely be Carter's last chance.

THE TOMB

On November 4, 1922, a member of Carter's team named Ahmed Gerigar was supervising work clearing sand and rubble. Then something extraordinary was found in the sand: a single step.

The workers eventually cleared the sand to reveal an entire staircase leading underground.

And at the bottom of the staircase?

A door to a tomb.

How quickly their hearts must have beaten when they realized what they had found. The seal on the door seemed to be intact. Did that mean this tomb had never been looted? Was it possible that it held the mummy of a pharaoh?

In late November, Carter, his team, and Carnarvon opened the door. A rush of stale air hit them—air that had not been breathed in thousands of years. They walked into the darkness, with little more

than the flickering light of a candle to guide them.

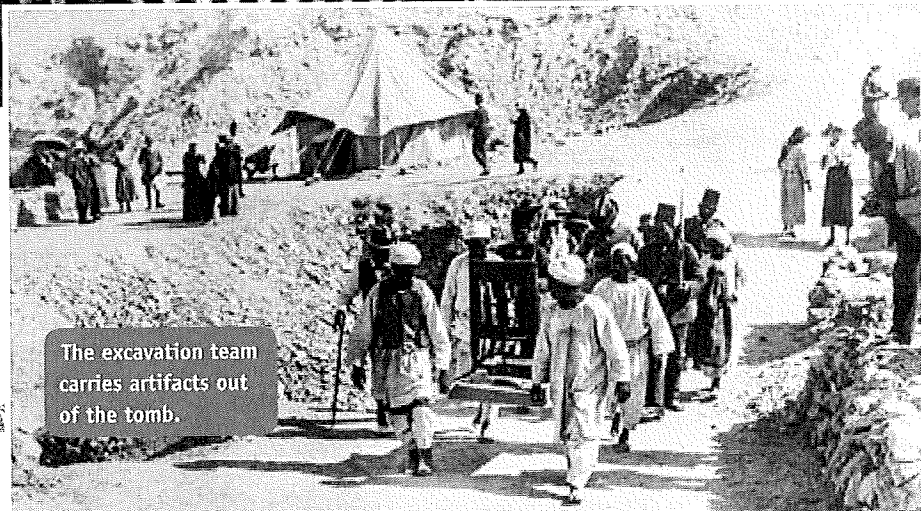
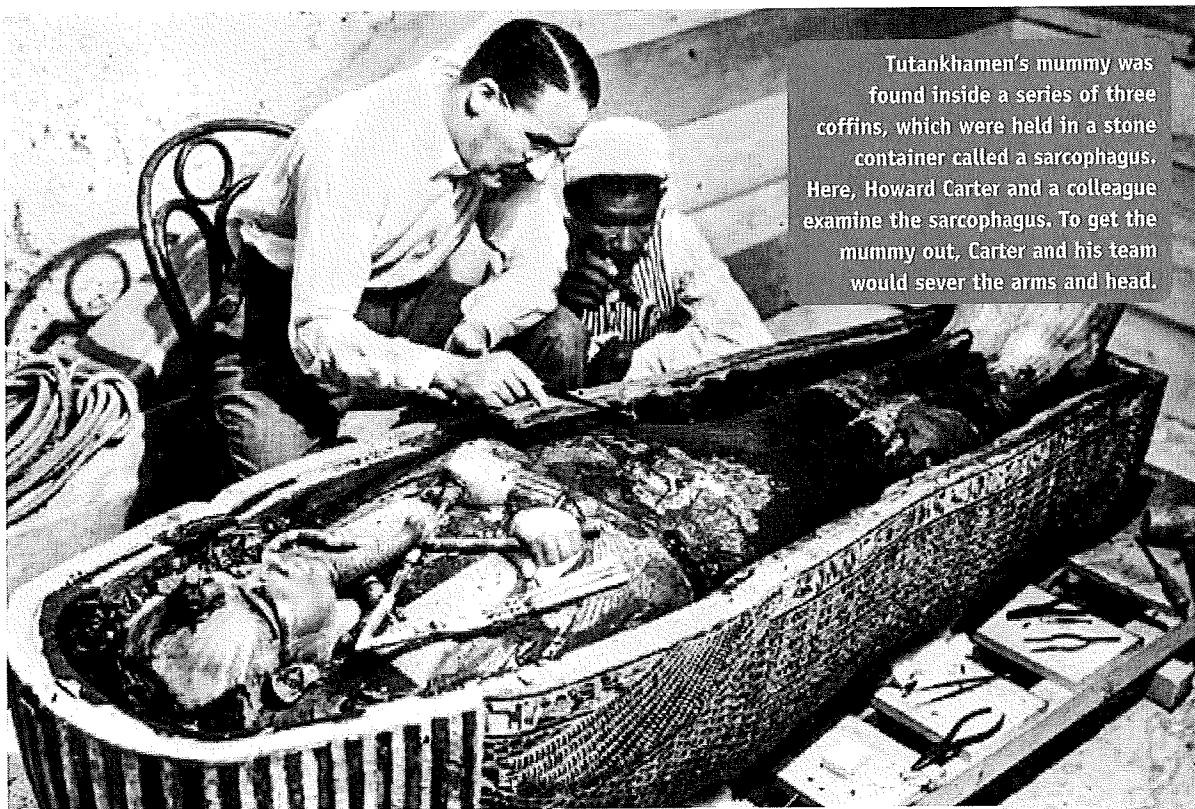
As the story goes, Carnarvon called down to Carter. "Can you see anything?" he asked.

Carter replied, "Yes, wonderful things."

As Carter's eyes slowly adjusted to the dark, strange shadows took shape.

"Details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues, and

gold—everywhere the glint of gold," Carter would later write in his journal. "For the moment—an eternity it must have seemed to the others



standing by—I was struck dumb with amazement.”

As they would soon learn, they had found the tomb of King Tutankhamen.

DAZZLING DISCOVERY

Tutankhamen’s tomb held thousands of objects. The world had never seen anything like them. There were bright-blue rings and sandals made of gold. There were fancy couches, glittering jewels, and stunning statues. Eventually, some 6,000 items would be found within the tomb’s four rooms.

To archaeologists, the items were priceless treasures. They helped create a vivid picture of ancient Egypt. Indeed, Tutankhamen’s tomb would prove to be one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of all time.

But perhaps the most thrilling discovery of all was Tut himself.

It took more than a year to reach the room that held the king’s mummy. It was inside of a gold coffin, held within two larger **gilded** coffins. Another two years of hard work would be needed to get the mummy out.

PHARAOH FEVER

News of the dazzling discovery spread quickly.

Newspapers published giant photographs of the latest finds on their front pages. Families went to the movies to watch footage of the excavation. It must have seemed as though you could reach through the screen and touch the carefully carved chairs and gem-covered chariot wheels. For many in the early 1920s, Tutankhamen’s tomb was also a welcome distraction from the painful memory of World War I.



The war had ended just a few years earlier.

The public was soon swept up in “Tut-mania” and “pharaoh fever.” In the United States, people became obsessed. President Herbert Hoover named his dog King Tut. Women began

wearing their hair in ancient Egyptian styles. There were Tut dances and Tut songs. Advertisers used Tutankhamen to

sell everything from cookies to lemons.

For many Black Americans, Tutankhamen became an icon, a symbol of their heritage and connection to the African continent. During a period of artistic outpouring in the 1920s and 1930s that came to be known as the **Harlem Renaissance**, Black artists and writers celebrated ancient Egypt in their work.

MAKING A MUMMY

Mummification was a sacred ritual in ancient Egypt.

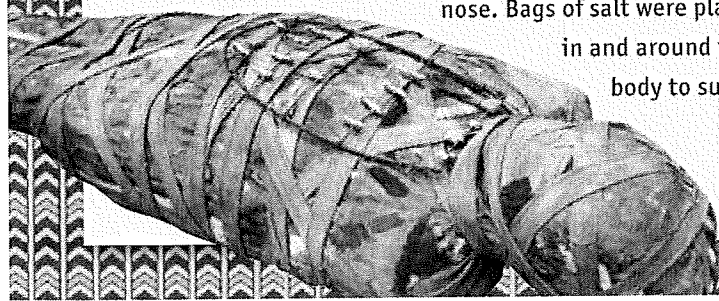
The ancient Egyptians believed that people’s spirits returned to their bodies in the afterlife. The purpose of mummification was to preserve a body for as long as possible. The intestines, liver, stomach, and lungs were removed and placed in jars. (The heart was left in the body.) The brain was carefully pulled out piece by piece through the

nose. Bags of salt were placed in and around the body to suck

out all the moisture. After a few weeks, the body became dry and stiff.

Next, pieces of cloth were stuffed inside the body to give it a more lifelike shape. The skin was coated in oils and with glue that became as hard as rock when it dried. Then came the painstaking work of wrapping the body in strips of linen. Prayers were said and charms were placed between the layers to ward off evil spirits.

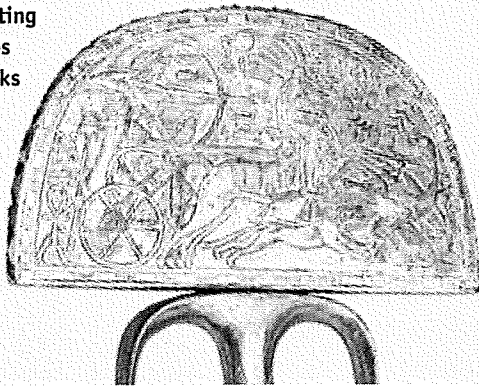
After the mummy was buried, a final ritual was performed: the Opening of the Mouth. This ritual allowed the person to eat, drink, and speak in the afterlife.



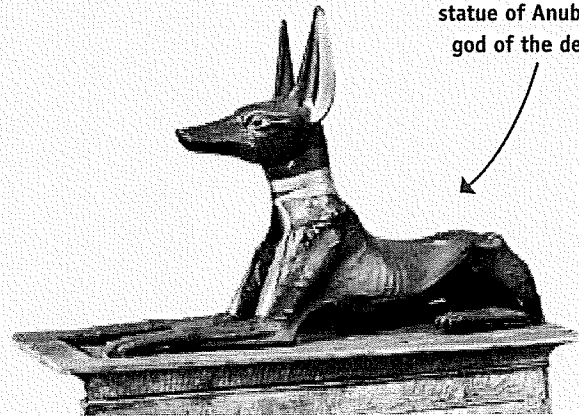
TREASURES OF THE DEAD

Some of the thousands of objects found in Tutankhamen's tomb

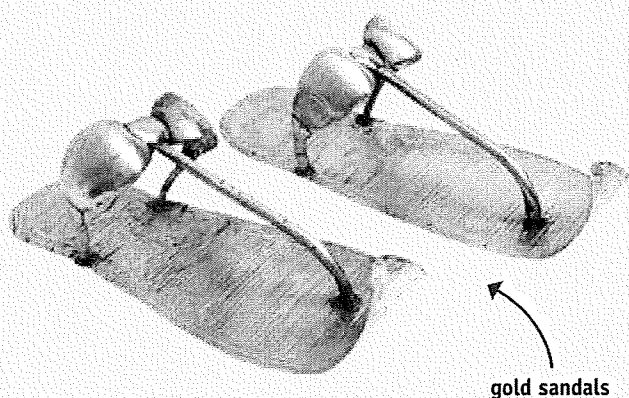
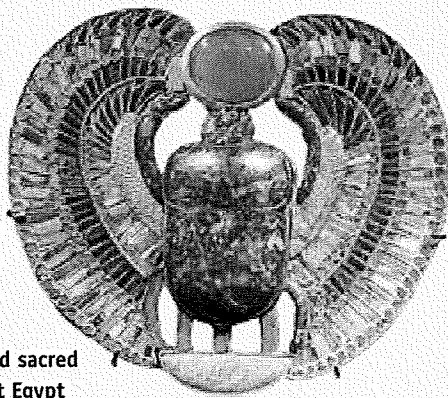
gold fan showing Tut hunting ostriches and ducks



statue of Anubis, god of the dead



ornament featuring a scarab, a beetle considered sacred in ancient Egypt



gold sandals

THE CURSE

But as fascination with Tutankhamen grew, so did a scary rumor. There were whispers of a “mummy’s curse.” It was said that something terrible would happen to anyone who dared disturb the tomb of Tutankhamen.

A few months after the discovery, Lord Carnarvon was found dead. Two other English men died after visiting the site. After Carter gave one of his friends items from the tomb, his friend’s house burned to the ground.

Was Tutankhamen angry that he had been disturbed? Was he taking his revenge?

Probably not.

Each tragedy had a reasonable explanation that had nothing to do with angry mummy kings. Carnarvon died from an infected mosquito bite, for example. He had already had health problems too. And nothing happened to Carter at all. He passed away in England, 17 years after opening the tomb. If the tomb were cursed, wouldn’t he have been its number one victim?

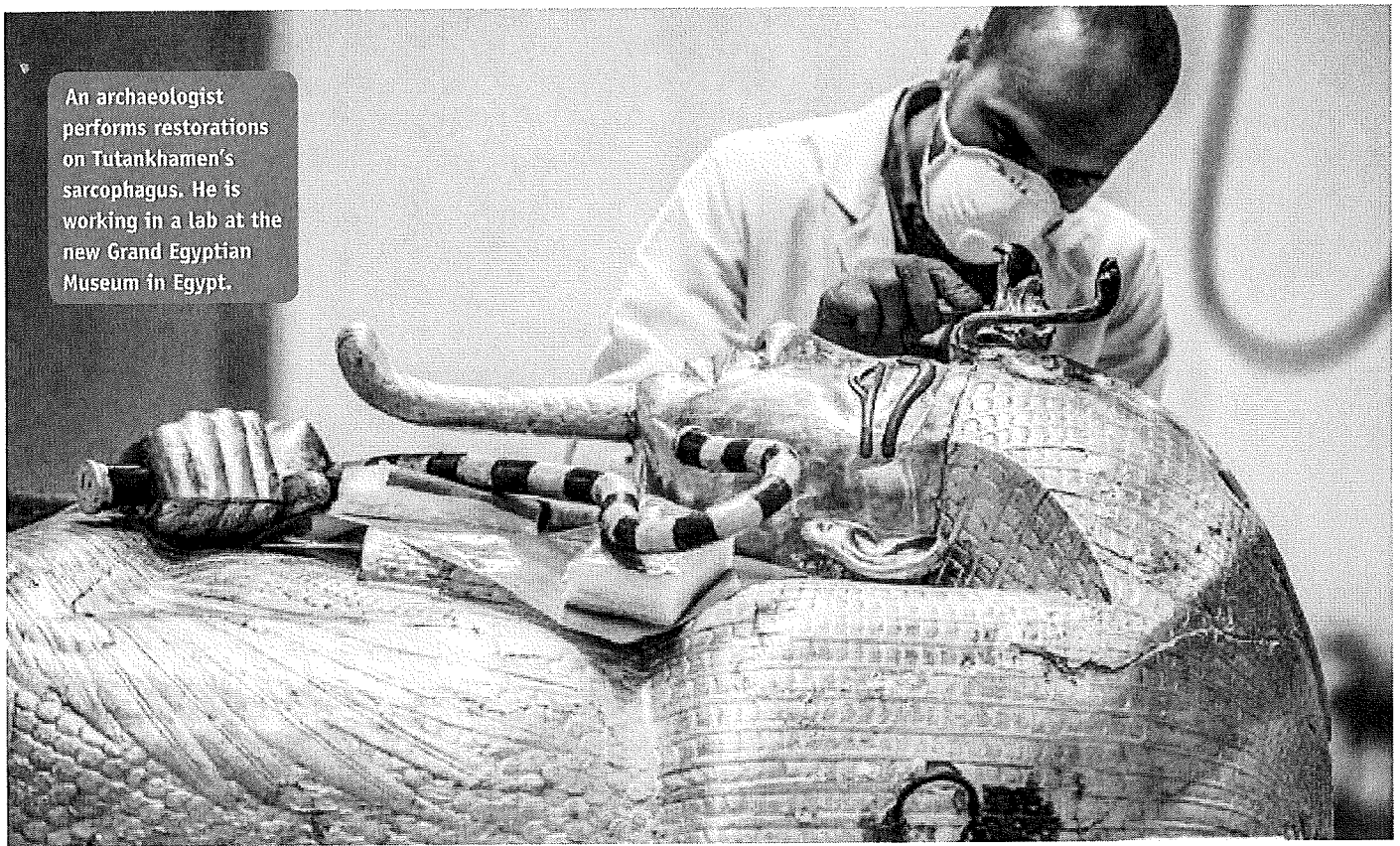
DEEPER QUESTIONS

It’s likely that tales of the curse were exaggerated to sell newspapers. Yet the stories of the curse raise deeper questions: Who did the tomb belong to? Who had the right to take its contents? And who decides the answers to these questions?

Carter and Carnarvon had hoped to take at least some of the items from the tomb back to England. But in Egypt, it was illegal to remove artifacts without permission. Carter



An archaeologist performs restorations on Tutankhamen's sarcophagus. He is working in a lab at the new Grand Egyptian Museum in Egypt.



and Carnarvon did not receive permission, but it's suspected that they took many items anyway.

The truth is, the theft of cultural artifacts had been going on for years in Egypt. The sale of **antiquities** could make a lot of money. People would pay a lot for vases and coffins and other treasures from ancient times. These objects were seen as status symbols for wealthy Europeans—sure to impress neighbors and party guests.

WHO WAS HE?

It's been 100 years since Tutankhamen's tomb was

opened. And Tut's star shows no sign of dimming. A recent exhibit, "King Tut: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh," began traveling the world in 2019. (It was stopped in 2020, when the pandemic struck.) It featured hundreds of objects, jewelry, and sculptures. Some of these objects had never been allowed to leave Egypt before. When the brand-new Grand Egyptian Museum opens later this year in Giza, Egypt, it will house thousands of objects from the king's tomb, together for the first time in a century.

Yet the boy king himself remains as fascinating and

mysterious as ever. Tut's life comes to us through the objects the pharaoh was buried with—the golden funeral mask, the golden shoes, the statues and jars of food, the jeweled charms on his body.

But who was Tutankhamen really? What made him laugh? What made him cry? There was a trumpet in his tomb. Did he play it or simply enjoy its music?

We will probably never know the answers to these questions. But we do know this: The name Tutankhamen is part of our history now and will not be forgotten.

Tutankhamen has become immortal. ●

Writing Contest

Create an advertisement for a traveling Tutankhamen exhibit. Your advertisement can be a poster, commercial, or social media ad. Send your work to **Tutankhamen Contest**. Three winners will each get *The Curse of the Mummy* by Candace Fleming.

Entries must be submitted by a legal resident of the U.S. age 18 and older, who is the teacher, parent, or guardian of the student. See page 2 for details.

Get this activity online.

