

The Heterodoxeum:

A Natural History museum that explores the wonders of the nonsensical world.

Book 1

"Curse of the Rat Mummies"

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"Everything you can imagine is real."

-Pablo Picasso

**Chapter 2**

Help each other.

Whitcomb had finished gathering his supplies and Krasitzky finally made his way to the crash site with his parachute still dragging behind him.

"Old boy, it would have been easier if you folded up the chute", observed Whitcomb as he carefully lit his pipe as to avoid singeing his giant mustache.

"But then I'd fall down." Krasitzky remarked with his head arched back, still trying to stop the bleeding.

No one was able to make sense of that last line.

"Are you ready?" asked Jo.

"In there then?" Krasitzky pointed to the sand dune, then sniffed and righted his head.

"Just a minute," Whitcomb said with some embarrassment. "My pants seem to be slipping." He tightened his belt. "Ah, that should hold. I found a much better loop. (Harrumphs.)"

"Must be an old person thing", Jo whispered to Paul.

"Do you have the camera and my can of white paint?" asked Whitcomb.

Paul grabbed them from the debris thrown from the plane. "Yes, I've got them."

"Smashing! Follow me. Keep a keen eye young lad."

All three scientists plus Paul approached the large mound of sand. Krasitzky was carrying his new shovel he received for his birthday but not with an expression of excitement. He was distracted by his growling stomach. After all, it was lunch time. Whitcomb paused at the foot of the mound of sand to re-ignite the tobacco in his pipe. Paul knew what his mentor was up to, he'd seen that look in Whitcomb's eye before.

"Kras, Old boy", Whitcomb addressed professor Krasitzky and blew out the match, "Did you know that while you were trekking through the desert to rendezvous back at our improvised base camp, we buried your lunch under this hill of sand?" He took a puff from his pipe.

Krasitzky was unconvinced.

"It's your favorite, grilled spaghetti with peppers and onions on a watermelon seed roll."

That did it. Krasitzky's hunger got the best of him. Without thinking twice, he frantically dug away at the sand, searching for his sandwich, the way a dog digs up a neighbor's flower garden. Truck loads of sand were removed through Krasitzky's legs by the paddling motion of his hands. In minutes, an opening into an ancient tomb-like entrance way was unearthed. It was eerily similar to the entrance of King Tutankhamen's Tomb discovered by Howard Carter in November of 1922, but instead of having 39 steps leading down to the entrance like King Tut's, there were 52.

"It must be in here." Krasitzky thought.

He broke the door down and rushed into the darkness. Whitcomb and Jo exchanged amused smiles.

"You say he's brilliant, Professor Whitcomb?" Paul asked.

"Quite." claimed the professor, while snuffing out his pipe.

Now back in 1922, some scholars have suggested the famous archaeologist, Howard Carter had an opportunity to loot King Tut's

tomb the night before officially documenting his findings. This can only be seen as outrageous slander. Whitcomb has always stood firm against this accusation, claiming that it was, "A horrible attempt by some jealous uneducated blokes to discredit a great adventurer's character."

In any event our team of archaeologists not only would never think to do such things as loot a tomb, they never got the chance. For a loud crash, like a loaded bookshelf falling down a flight of stairs, thundered from the darkness.

"Hey, I don't see it. Are you sure it's down here?" Krasitzky whined.

"Shall we?" Whitcomb said to Jo.

"Yes, I think we shall." They lit their torches and descended the steps leading into the dark unknown chamber.

Our team was cautious and deliberate of their movements. Each step was well calculated. "You know... the Egyptians never built anything without careful planning." Jo wondered as she walked down the stairs. "Why are there 52 steps?"

Paul tried to work out the answer to that, having recently taken a course in Numerology.

"Let's see... What's 52?" he brainstormed out loud. "There are 52 cards in a deck. No, that can't be it. There are 52 white keys on a piano. I don't hear music as we walk. Um, the atomic number for tellurium is 52. It's used to make stainless steel, or chrome. Does anyone see any tellurium in here?"

Our team searched the area but none was to be found.

Paul reasoned on. "O.K., so there's no chrome anywhere... What else?"

"There are 52 weeks in a year." Jo added. "Each step might represent an actual week of time and we are descending through the seasons."

"That's good, but we would probably see some hieroglyphs relating that." He checked his compass. "Besides, this descent is leading us due south, which would not allow for much sunlight to enter this hall. If it was season related, I think this stairwell would have been in alignment of the East-West cardinal points. Don't you?"

"Good point, Lad, (harrumphs)." Whitcomb praised. He handed Krasitzky a sandwich.

"What about the number itself?" Paul continued. 52 can be broken down as  $5+2=7$ . That's significant. The number seven is filled with energy. It is the symbol for Spiritual Perfection. Maybe that's what we're descending into here. This could be a place where one can find a true perfection of balance and harmony of the ancient world transcending into modern day."

"...Like doing yoga?" Krasitzky asked.

"Could be." Paul concluded.

A sense of seriousness and importance had swept over our team.

When they entered the first inky black chamber, the glow from their torchlights illuminated a pile of sand rapidly growing beneath their feet, as if a mole or gopher were entering the room. Instead of the expected mole, two deranged skeletons emerged. One of an ancient Nile crocodile and the other of a sacred Egyptian ibis with their skulls reversed. The crocodile turned to his partner and spoke in a high pitch ibis voice,

"I told you not to do that again."

Aggravated, he corrected his head situation, switching skulls with extreme force, causing the ibis to stumble around dizzily. The now corrected crocodile adjusted his skull with his hands, cricked his neck, and turned menacingly toward our invading group of scientists. He did speak in the Egyptian language, but our team was able to read the subtitles.

"How dare you enter these quarters while I was eating? What rudeness. No intruders are permitted beyond the yellow line. Didn't you see the sign?" His voice was now deeper and scarier and he was holding an axe guitar in his right hand. "This party is by invitation only and you are not on the guest list. There's a dreaded curse on all those party crashers who enter beyond this point, uninvited, especially those who arrive without bringing chips or dip."

"I told you this was the City of Crocodiles," Paul whispered to Jo.

"How can you tell?"

"He's a rocker."

"So..."

"So, it's the Crocodile Rock. Don't you remember Elton John's song? This is where it happened."

Whitcomb had heard enough.

"What?! (Harrumphs)" He had lost his patience. "Are you trying to convince me of any notion that a superstitious curse could possibly exist in this day and age, you reptilian, musician, no skin-ee-an, pile of bones?"

"Whitcomb, don't you remember what happened to Colonel Salt?" reminded Krasitzky. "The entire band turned psychedelic colors after that incident in the Philippines. I don't think they ever got back to normal. All they sang were hate songs after that."

Jo added "Don't forget all the hubabaloo surrounding the deaths of Howard Carter's entire team. They all died after unearthing King Tut's tomb."

"That's right." Krasitzky remembered as he became fearfully nervous. "Carter's financial backer and partner, Lord Carnarvon, got bit on the cheek by a mosquito and became sick and died. Remember?"

"...A mosquito? Really, old boy? Honestly, you think a mosquito's a curse? (Harrumphs)"

Krasitzky went on, "How about the cobra that ate Carter's favorite pet canary?"

"Listen to yourself, old boy." Whitcomb said calmly. "Snakes get hungry. Besides, what bird brain brings a canary to an expedition?"

Paul quieted the pet bird in his pocket.

"But, there were eleven more people connected with opening Tut's Tomb who all died of unnatural causes." Krasitzky said grasping for straws.

Literally, he was. During his argument with Whitcomb he cracked open a cream soda he had intended to drink with his promised lunch and was fishing a straw among many from inside his vest pocket.

"And Lord Carnarvon's three-legged dog also died." Paul noted. "He supposedly howled and dropped dead at the exact moment Lord Carnarvon breathed his last."

"Absolute hogwash." reassured Whitcomb. "Those people died seven years after they discovered the tomb. The press was just fishing for

a story. You know how newspaper reporters work. (Many harrumphs)"

"Maybe you're right." Jo's fear diminished. She giggled to herself because she sometimes gets distracted by Whitcomb's big white mustache moving as he speaks. She likes to pretend it's alive.

"Could you imagine if it jumped off his top lip and started running around?" she whispered to Paul. "I bet that old lady with the broom would squash it for sure."

"You mean Mrs. Carson the baker? She does wield a mean broom. Do you think she's a witch?" Paul whispered to Jo, as if they were in school.

"Are you two finished?" Whitcomb said sternly.

"Yes, we're behaving." Jo calmed herself down and addressed the scary crocodile bones, "What kind of curse do you refer to, my weird talking skeleton friend?"

The crocodile answered in a voice that rumbled like ten thousand vacuum cleaners and one blender turning on at the same time, "If you so take another step in this tomb, a nagging, complaining relative will show up at your doorstep and move in with you until you die."

The ibis opened its beak, "We'll even send a relative you didn't know you had."

A chill came over both Jo and Krasitzky. "Ooooh. That's the worst kind."

Whitcomb took over the conversation. "Yes, yes, that's all well and done, but tell me, where were you during the bombings of '42?" making a WWII reference.

"1142?" asked the Crocodile.

"No...1942."

"Why, we were guarding this tomb."

"What did you say? I couldn't hear you," Whitcomb directed.

"Then come closer," the crocodile invited Whitcomb with the intent to bite the unsuspecting professor. "We were guarding this tomb."

"You mean you've been sealed up here all this time?" Whitcomb kept a good distance between them.

"Yes," the crocodile said confused by Whitcomb's questioning.

"So, if my calculations are correct, that's nigh over 3000 years.

Surely this modern air will turn you to dust."

The crocodile and ibis turned to look at each other.

"You know, I think the talking white bushy mustache is correct in his reasoning." said the crocodile, with a certain air of scholarly pompousness.

Then, as if by magic, an eerie wind blew in from nowhere and rapidly decayed the two skeletons to dust blending their collapsed remains with the sand.

"Now then", Whitcomb turned to the team proudly as he won a battle of wits, "(harrumphs) if there are no more crude interruptions, let us proceed and do the job we came here to do. You heard our reptilian host. We were politely "INVITED" to take a closer look."

Smiles danced across faces in appreciation of Whitcomb's cleverness, but quickly waned, for the journey into the unknown continued. The closer look was happening. Our specialized team of scientists were looking deep into what seemed to be a never ending pitch black corridor of syenite blocks.

"It's really hot down here," Paul noted, wiping sweat from his brow with Krasitzky's shirt sleeve.

"Well if it ain't the heat, it's the economy." Krasitzky chimed in. "Do you think this is the entrance to the Labyrinth, Whitcomb?"

Whitcomb reasoned while walking down the corridor leading to the next room. "(Harrumphs) We haven't fully explored it as of yet, but, if we take into account the fact that there's no chrome, I don't know who suggested that or how that even came up, and the fact that this place seems to be all built with syenite stone. We should be safe in concluding, at this time, that this most certainly seems to be the one and only hidden La... Great... Thing! Has the gravity switch been turned off?" Whitcomb yelled as his torch light illuminated the next underground chamber.

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