

Brief Review

By June Pulliam

Stephens, John Richard, ed. *Into the Mummy's Tomb*. New York: Berkley, 2001. 352p.

John Richard Stephens's *Into the Mummy's Tomb* is a unique blend of fiction and non-fiction, providing a bridge between history and literature. Nestled in between stories by well-known authors such as Anne Rice, Bram Stoker, Ray Bradbury, Agatha Christie, Edgar Allan Poe, and Tennessee Williams, are non-fictional accounts by famed Egyptologist Howard Carter, an Egyptian priest, and a ghostwritten account by H. P. Lovecraft for Harry Houdini, who traveled to Egypt in 1910.

This collection is quite refreshing after a summer where *The Mummy Returns* mangled ancient history by presenting us with a pale Nefertiti sparring with another woman in a sort of Egyptian aikido for the amusement of her father the Pharaoh (Nefertiti, you may recall, is believed to have been dark skinned, perhaps of African origin, and was not the daughter of a Pharaoh. She did, however, marry a Pharaoh, King Akhenaten, who moved the Egyptian capital from Thebes and demanded his subjects embrace a sort of monotheism). Especially interesting is Stephen's introduction. It provides a concise overview of the how and why of mummification, what happened to these mummies in later centuries (often ground up for medicine, burned for fuel, used to thatch roofs), and the truth and fiction of their curses on anyone foolish enough to disturb their rest.

The fiction in this collection isn't new, and some of it is well known. Standard fare such as Anne Rice's excerpt from *The Mummy: or Ramses the Damned* and Bram Stoker's abridged version of "The Jewel of Seven Stars" can be found throughout. Interspersed are little known pieces by well-known authors—such as Louisa May Alcott's "Lost in a Pyramid, or the Mummy's Curse"; Tennessee Williams' "The Vengeance of Nicotris"; and Ray Bradbury's "Colonel Stonesteel's Genuine Homemade Truly Egyptian Mummy." Overall, Stephens's choices present a good range of a relatively small sub-genre of horror fiction that's received renewed interest after several blockbuster films about mummies and tomb raiding. They deal with everything from our own fascination with mummies and ancient Egypt to curiosity about what happens to the body after death.

The non-fiction selections are equally entertaining, and provide a useful framework for reading the fiction. Arthur Weigall, then head of the Cairo museum, describes a series of strange coincidences surrounding items his friends had excavated. Various 19th and 20th century Egyptologists describe first hand experiences raiding tombs. An ancient Egyptian priest's account of demonic possession is written in such a way as to make it look nearly 1000 years older than it was and thus, make his story seem more authentic. Howard Carter describes when he first breached King Tutankhamen's tomb.... The list goes on.

Into the Mummy's Tomb is a necessary addition to the collection of any serious fan of horror or mummies.

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