

Hypogeum

Strange Encounters

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Published: 2011



Blistering hot, the sun beat down on them, leaving them thirsty and smelly. Up here on the hill, they could see the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. It was a beautiful sight that they enjoyed on their breaks. The billionaire was in a hurry to build his new estate on the tallest hill in Malta and left the men with a tight schedule. And if they finished early, they would get a bonus.

With the land already previously cleared out, they were ready to start building the foundation. Suddenly, a mysterious hole revealed itself and the men circled around it.

„What can we do now? We can't finish with this hole here,“ Arturo complained.

„We'll try to fill it and then build around it. We're already one day behind—no one has to know about this obstacle,“ explained Lawrent. „The sun is starting to set so we will continue tomorrow, at daybreak.“ Collecting their personal things, the men started to disperse.

Drinking down at the local bar, Arturo started to complain. „I don't understand why everyone drops what they are doing for this guy. I mean, he no different than you or I.“

„You complaining about that rich guy, again?“ asked the bartender.

The guy sitting next to him responded, „Because he has money!“ After taking another sip of his beer, he added, „Anyway, what are you complaining about? He's given you a job.“

Everyone knew about the billionaire who purchased the highest piece of property on the island and that he was building a large estate so he could live like royalty while he was here once a year. While most civilians were upset about it, they became tamer with the idea once it was approved by the government and the positive effect it would have on the economy. As no one knew who the billionaire was, curious glances were always cast toward any visitors of the island.

„Ya, well, we'll see if his house remains standing with that hole in the ground,“ Arturo casually commented as he finished his mug of beer. Exhausted, he paid the tab and left the bar, oblivious of the curiosity he stirred.

The next morning, Arturo arrived at the construction site to a raging Lawrent and several men dressed in expensive suits. Assuming it was the billionaire and his fancy friends, he spit onto the ground before climbing to the top.

„This is unbelievable!“ Lawrent yelled. „On whose authority do you have to shut us down? We're already behind!“

Lawrent then approached Arturo and the gathered men. „May as well go home. Looks like we're finished until Mr. Lamont straightens this out. Hopefully we'll still make bonus,“ he half-heartedly mentioned.

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Forty years later, the museum had already reclaimed the land and built a two-story building over the hole, which had come to be known as the Hypogaeum. The hole was deteriorated from a large slab, what was believed to have been placed to conceal a temple. Down within that hole 7,000 skulls were found, massed where the bodies would have been impossibly close to one another. It is one of the greatest structures known to exist from prehistory and still remains pristine.

Anxious to learn more, an embassy worker, Louise, paid a tour guide to take her within the depths of the rooms. With three stories to explore, she slowly took her time to memorize the carvings and smooth doorways and walls into her mind. The infrastructure was amazing and beautiful. As the purpose of the structure was still not known, Louise imagined it was a place of ceremony as well as a burial site.

As the tour guide introduced her into the Trilithon chamber, his voice echoed within the deep structure. Several long and rectangular rocks were holding up a wider rectangular rock, forming an archway within the center of the room. Smaller, more round rocks formed a pile, as if discarded. She discovered a small

cave off of this chamber and a carving of a fat lady holding an ax. After looking questioningly at her guide, he answered, „The carving suggests that a warrior was put at rest here.“

All of the rooms were connected by chambers, all also accessible by a hallway. The decoration consisted of immaculately designed ceilings, straight lines that were architecturally carved out around the doorways and ceilings, and painted images of red and black spirals, handprints, and floral designs. Each chamber was illuminated by the glow from the guide’s lantern. The chambers remained black, unrevealing the depths of their secrets. One chamber had stairs and a doorway that led to nowhere.

Intrigued, Louise walked toward the steps, and tested the strength of the steps before she proceeded. They were on the third level and the guide seemed nervous to be down here but she was adamant that she finish her tour. Discovering a burial chamber, not any bigger than three feet, she squeezed through it, to the other side. A large room accommodated her and at the end of the floor space, there was an opening to a cavern. Straight across the cavern, there was a small ledge that led into another space. The room had a glow and she didn’t ponder where the light was coming from.

Standing on the edge, she peered down into the depths below. She could tell it was steep and not seeing a bottom, discerned it was very deep. The cavern was wide and as such, her exploration ended here. Suddenly, the room got very cold and Louise crossed her arms for warmth.

Across the other side, coming from inside the room with the ledge, shadows started to emerge. Then creatures showed themselves. They were of human form with hunched backs, and long, thin gray hair. Naked, they all stretched out their arms and with clawed hands, pushed a great gust of wind toward Louise. Stumbling backwards, she ran out of there as fast as she could, back through the tight burial space, and into the room where she left the tour guide.

„Hello?“ she called, the only response her echoing voice. Darkness surrounded her, as she was left with no light, and she clung to the smooth walls, inching her way out of the chamber. With no vision, she desperately felt her way around with only the cold walls her guide. The only sound she heard was her breathing. Heart racing, blood pounded through her head.

Darkness overwhelmed her and she thought she heard hissing noises. Earlier she was thinking how awesome it would be to be buried here, but she was thinking hypothetically. She wasn’t ready to die yet. Near tears, she followed the smooth curvature of the walls and knew she was on the right track, as her body was steadily inclining. „Hello?“ she called out again.

After what seemed like hours, but were only a mere few minutes, she saw the light at the top. Climbing up through the ladder that allowed visitors passage, she was back in the museum. With the setting sun shining through the windows, she could finally see. The building was empty. „Hello?“ She knew the museum was closed, that she was allowed an exclusive view, due to the fact that she was an embassy worker and she had paid the guide handsomely. She kicked herself for not getting his name, as she was excited about the opportunity. Where could he have possibly gone?

After Louise unlocked the door to the museum, and left it unlocked as she left, she ran home. When she looked at the small mirror that hung over her sink in the kitchen, her eyes looked ghastly. She looked like she had seen a ghost.

After a restless night, she went back to the museum in the morning. She tried to look as fresh as she could but still could not hide her fear and her need for answers. The doors were open and she allowed herself entry. Inside, one woman sat alone at a desk. „May I help you?“

„Hi, um...yes, I,“ she paused to take a deep breath and fearfully glanced toward the open hole of the ancient sanctuary. „I wanted to see if you had a tour guide working today.“

„Well, yes, but not until later today. Would you like to sign up for a tour?“

„No, but, um...“ She could tell she was making the clerk nervous. „Would you mind telling me his name? I spoke to him yesterday and I forgot his name.“

„His name?“ she replied. „I’m sorry, but all of our guides are female. Might you be mistaken?“

„No, I’m sure. I was here yesterday and he gave me a tour. I paid for an exclusive tour. Surely it’s recorded in your books?“

Flipping through her schedule, she then looked back up at her. „I’m sorry, miss. I am not sure how I can help you further. The museum was closed yesterday and while it’s true that we have exclusive tours, I have no record of a tour yesterday.“

„Something happened down there and I really must talk to someone about it.“

Curious now, the clerk asked, „Something happened?“

„Yes.“ While pacing the floor, Louise re-accounted the events of the previous night.

The clerk abruptly stood from the desk. „Ma’m, now I am really very sorry but there was no one here last night.“

Interrupting her, Louise quickly added, „The front door was open. Last night I left the door unlocked.“

„No, no, no, it was locked when I got here this morning. Now please leave or else I will no choice but to call the police.“

Deflated, Louise took one last look at the open chamber and then left the building. Rumors quickly spread about her story and she was labeled as being crazy.

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As years flew by, the mystery of the Hypogaeum, as ceremonial and burial grounds, continued to grow. Visitors from all over the world, visiting from Europe or from cruise ships, added the tour to their itineraries. The waiting list continued to grow and grew from a waiting list of a few days to a few weeks.

The museum was now filled up with artifacts found within the chambers. A steep stairwell now paved the way for the tourists, to keep them from danger as well as to preserve the sanctuary. Lights now lit up the dark passages, as well.

On a particular cloudy day, which was rare for the treasure island of Malta, a school trip was planned for some students and their teacher. They followed the guide down into the depths of the cavern and the children, for the most part, were well behaved. While the teacher was asking the guide about the carvings and chambers, the kids became bored and ventured further into the sanctuary.

With no adult watching, they ducked underneath the stairwell, and walked deeper into one of the chambers. Finding a small chamber, they ventured further into it. „Cool!“ some of them proclaimed, leading the others to follow them within. The ledge on the other side beckoned them to jump across the expansive cavern, and they even took bets. Before any of the kids became brazen enough to try it, a small shudder shook the ground underneath them.

As the teacher was genuinely interested in the ancient caverns, she was loaded with questions and interest. Becoming absorbed with the guide's intellect, she neglected to watch the children. Suddenly noticing they were gone, she and the guide walked into the next chamber, which also marked the end of the tour.

Ancient dust bellowed in cloud formation throughout the small chamber. While they couldn't see the children, they could hear them crying through the collapsed wall. The guide was clearly upset and ran back to get help.

Not much longer and the entire museum and ancient chambers were filled with police. It was a delicate situation as they did not want to disturb the historical compound any further but they also needed to save the children. Being three stories deep from the surface of the ground, and with the all-consuming cave-in, the children could not be rescued.

For several weeks, the teacher and the children's mothers swore they could hear the children's voices coming from deep under the ground, from all around the island.
