

The Power of Curses

Why superstitious beliefs take hold **BY KRISTIN LEWIS**

The Chicago Cubs celebrate their World Series victory.



Last November, the world went nuts when the Chicago Cubs won the World Series. It was a historic moment: The Cubs hadn't won it in 108 years.

Why? The Billy Goat curse, of course. Or at least that's what some fans believe.

According to legend, in 1945, William "Billy Goat" Sianis tried to bring his pet goat to a Cubs game. When informed that his goat would not be admitted, the offended Sianis cursed the team, saying: "The Cubs ain't gonna win no more!"

So last year when the Cubs beat the Indians in the final game of the World Series, it seemed the curse was over at last.

Why It Rained

Most of us understand that curses are **malarkey**—no more than leftover beliefs from the distant past, when people did not have the scientific understanding

that we have today. Ancient humans didn't know why storms happened or how diseases spread or why crops failed. It was widely believed that the way to deal with such problems was to win favor from the gods. That usually meant sacrificing animals (or people).

Faith in ritual sacrifice must have been reinforced each time it seemed to work. Say animals were sacrificed because of a drought. Then it rained. What better proof could you ask for?

All these years later, many of us still have at least a few superstitious beliefs. Think about buildings that don't have a 13th floor, because the number 13 is considered unlucky. Or tennis star Serena Williams, who wears the same socks to each game during a tournament; she says it brings her luck. Or sports fans who wear their team's jersey throughout the season without washing it—to avoid **jinxing** their team.



Apparently the Billy Goat curse applied only to the World Series. The Cubs have won many games since 1945.

Sense of Control

Why do we hang on to such superstitions?

One reason could be that they give us a sense of control. There's a lot in this world that we can't do anything about; it's comforting to think that we can help

ourselves by carrying a lucky penny, knocking on wood, or avoiding black cats.

In fact, superstitious rituals *can* have an effect. If Serena's sock ritual boosts her confidence and helps her focus, wearing the same socks for two weeks straight might really help her win. The same goes for the Cubs, but in reverse: If the players believed their team was cursed, their performance could have been negatively affected.

One thing is certain, anyway: After more than a century of failure, the Cubs waited long enough for their victory. ●

WRITING CONTEST

If most people believe that superstitions are malarkey, why did superstitions have so much power during the excavation of King Tut's tomb? Why do they still have power today? Send your answer to **TUT CONTEST**. Five winners will get *The Red Pyramid* by Rick Riordan.

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