

A lifetime journey scarred the reign of ivan the terrible: from infant-czar to ty...

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Ivan the Terrible was not always known as being terrible. When first reigning as Czar over Russia, he was a normal leader. It was after the five scars marking his journey through life that he had a mental breakdown and went out of control. Ivan was only three years old when his father, Vasili III, died in 1533. Since he was too young to reign, his mother Elena was made regent on his behalf. This was surprising because she was a woman, a commoner, and a foreigner by birth. Anxious to avoid a civil war, it was the older prelates of the church who supported Elena's regency. Elena herself had no illusions about her position, and she feared for the safety of her sons since she knew that Vasili's family wished to seize the throne. After involving Russia in two wars, in both of which it failed miserably, Ivan's mother Elena was poisoned. Now Ivan was an orphan, with both parents dead when he was just eight years old. This is Scar Number One: The Death of Both of His Parents. The ruling class at this time was known as the Boyars, and these Boyars held the responsibility of "taking care" of Ivan.

During his childhood, Ivan would live in constant fear of them. Ivan's first sign of mental and emotional illness came while he was a teenager. He loved to torture animals, often throwing them into the Moscow's city walls, yet he spent hours in church. Two major events took place at the age of 17. In December of 1546, Ivan made an announcement in the presence of the Metropolitan Makari and the Boyars. In his statement, Ivan announced his intention of marrying and of being Russia's first ruler to be crowned Czar. To choose his wife, a letter had been sent to all the noble families of Russia, instructing them to dispatch their unmarried daughters to Moscow for the Czar's inspection. More than 1,000 young women arrived at the Kremlin.

Each day the number of women was reduced by Ivan, who sometimes moved openly among them and sometimes hid and listened to them talk.

Occasionally he visited the ladies' dormitories to see which of them were peaceful sleepers. The number was reduced from 1000 to 12 to 1. That one was Anastasia Romanov.

On February 3, 1547, they were married at a large and extravagant wedding. Almost a year later, the newly crowned Czar of Russia would have one of his first tests: The Tartars. The Tartars (A. K. A. the Mongols) possessed the territory of Kazan, which lied along the lower region of the Volga, and it was always a threat to Russia's security. After being defeated in 1548 and 1549, Ivan's troops, known as the Streltsy, turned the tables on the Tartars with the recent invention of guns. The Streltsy was able to get a foothold and a place for future military attacks in the area of Kazan. In the spring of 1552, the Russian army lay siege to the city of Kazan. General Kurbsky of Ivan's Streltsy used large explosions to finally create a hole in the wall protecting Kazan. Russian troops poured through the gap and smashed the Tartars. In the end, over 60, 000 troops died as Kazan became a Russian city. Ivan returned to Moscow a hero. When he returned, Ivan had the Cathedral of St. Basil built to commemorate the victory. Ivan thought it was the most beautiful thing that the architect had ever built. In fact, Ivan did not want this architect to build anything more beautiful. So to reward the creator of the church, Ivan removed the architect's eyes, blinding him. After victory in Kazan, Ivan came home to meet the first son of the royal family, Dimitri.

But the new father did not spend much time with his newborn son because Ivan fell ill with the plague in 1553. Apparently dying at age 23, Ivan tortured himself with the thought that his wife and son might have to endure the same sort of treatment which he had suffered in his childhood. This is Scar Number Two: Ivan Falls Dangerously Ill. In an effort to save his family, he asked the Boyars to swear allegiance to his son. The Boyars refused. Ivan was astonished and furious. To save his wife and son, Ivan made a bargain with God. Ivan said he would take pilgrimages to different Monasteries if God let him live. Ivan lived and went on a pilgrimage. On one of his pilgrimages to the North of Russia, Dimitri drowned. This is Scar Number Three: The Death of Dimitri. It shocked Ivan that his son would die while he was making a pilgrimage for God. Ivan began to see the setbacks in his trips as the vengeance of God for his sins. Also on the pilgrimage, Anastasia fell ill. After giving birth to a boy whom was named Ivan for his father, a daughter who died at the age of two, and another son named Feodor, Anastasia died in 1560. This is Scar Number Four: The Death of Anastasia. Ivan was so heartbroken that for a time he refused to see his children. Then his sorrow was expressed in unbridled fits of rage and destruction. The death of Anastasia brought a despair that most people would call insanity.

Ivan began a reign of terror as the Boyars and their families were found dead. At this time, informers could go to the palace and tell Ivan of any grievances they had with someone. No claim, no matter how outrageous was accepted as truth. Judges no longer needed evidence, and trials were no longer needed to convict. Ivan's character became so violent that he would kill anyone who annoyed him. It was at this time that he earned his title of

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Ivan the Terrible. Within a year after Anastasia's death, Ivan had remarried. His new wife was the beautiful Circassian princess, Maria. She was illiterate, wild, spiteful, cruel, and uncouth. Most historians believe that Ivan killed her. Ivan the Terrible would always be seen carrying a long, wooden staff. Ivan committed many of his treacherous killings with this staff. After using it, Ivan would always run to church because he felt bad about killing. Then, the next day, he would kill and return to church again. This happened over and over again. General Kurbsky was the hero of the war in Kazan and was the right-hand man of Ivan. Because of the number of confiscations, tortures, and deaths, Kurbsky fled Russia and became the commander of the Polish army. This is Scar Number Five: General Kurbsky Flees Russia. This factor contributed to Ivan's horrible paranoia. His paranoia would lead to the establishment of his secret police known as the Oprichniki.

The Oprichniki was an early Gestapo of 6, 000 little Ivans unleashed on the citizens of Russia to torture, rape, loot, and murder. They were above the law. This secret police dressed in black monk's robes, and they took an oath of loyalty to Ivan. The Oprichniki's chief executioner, Skuratov, who never seemed to tire of his gruesome duties, and he often feasted with the Czar. Thousands died during his reign of terror, which lasted for ten years. Ivan transformed his palace into a monastery as he, now wearing a monk's robe, woke up at 3: 00 AM every morning to pray. He spent his morning in prayer, and his afternoon in torture. Ivan and the Oprichniki carried out the deportation of over 12, 000 Boyar families to Siberia, taking away their wealth and their influence. In 1570, Ivan committed the wholesale massacre of the citizens of Novgorod. It started with a banquet at an Archbishop's

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home. Each day, 1, 000 men and women were tortured and killed in front of their children in the city square. Both Ivan and Ivan Jr. witnessed the slaughter. This went on for five weeks, and each session ended with Ivan going to church. The total killed in the Novgorod massacre: 60, 000. At the end, Ivan encouraged his men to burn and pillage the countryside. This once great city never recovered. When Ivan returned to Moscow, he conducted “The Great Festival of Blood”, in which so-called traitors were murdered.

The Crimean Tartars attacked Moscow in a surprise raid. In 1571, the Crimean Tartars attacked in great force, advancing to the very walls of Moscow. Ivan reacted to the danger with a characteristic fit of panic and fled to a place of safety. So did many of the Oprichniki, leaving Moscow defenseless. The Tartars entered the now-undefended city and for days they looted and killed. Soon after, the city was in flames, and little could be done to save it. This is Scar Number Six: Moscow Burns in a Tartar Attack. When the fire had burned itself out, all of Moscow but the Kremlin had been reduced to a heap of ashes and the river was filled with bodies. The Tartars did not bother to stay. Ivan returned to the capital angry and humiliated. Since the Oprichniki fled Moscow, Ivan disbanded the force. Now the Oprichniki was hunted down while the lands they had confiscated were restored to their rightful owners. At a later date, the Tartars returned to attack Moscow for the second time. This time Ivan’s army won. The Russian military hero was not awarded with medals. He was rewarded with death. Ivan and his eldest son both wanted to marry. They both decided to select their wives at the same time. The Czar and the Czarevitch, as the crown prince was called, interviewed their future wives together. The Czar chose a

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merchant's daughter named Martha Sobakina. The Czarevitch selected a commoner's daughter named Evdokia Saburova. They honeymooned together in the now-ravaged Novgorod. The Czarevitch Ivan was loved and admired by his father. Both of them had a lot in common, including their love of torturing. One day, Ivan entered the Czarevitch's home and criticized the dress that his daughter-in-law was wearing. She was expecting a child and might not have been looking her best, but her husband, offended by the Czar's rebuke, defended his wife. Within seconds, both men had lost their tempers and were fighting. Ivan raised his long, pointed staff and hit his son with it. It wounded young Ivan mortally; five days later he died from the blow. This is Scar Number Seven: Ivan the Terrible Kills His Son. The loss of his son had now made Ivan IV completely insane. At the funeral, Ivan constantly banged his head on the casket. He now roamed the palace groaning and pulling his hair from his beard. After a dream about the Czarevitch, Ivan now had conversations with his son. Though still in his early fifties, when he died in the spring of 1584, he looked like an old man. During the mid-1950s, under Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviets opened Ivan's grave to examine the body. A large concentration of mercury was found. In the 16th century, mercury was taken as a medicine, and Ivan took a lot. Mercury is no longer used because it causes mental illness, and this may have made Ivan crazy. The reign of Ivan the Terrible contributes to Russia's incredible history. His life in truth had been a failure. Politically he had failed to break the Boyars' hold over the ruler; militarily he had failed to secure for Russia a Baltic port; personally he had been the cause of hundreds of thousands of deaths and of his own greatest grief in killing his son. Yet, Ivan the Terrible

was personally almost wholly responsible for developing Russia's consciousness of herself as a nation and for setting up political and cultural targets for the Czars who follow him. Payne, Robert; Romanoff, Nikita. Ivan the Terrible. New York: Crowell, 1975. Troyat, Henry. Ivan the Terrible. New York: Dutton, 1982. Microsoft Encarta 98