

Celebrate a birthday during a pandemic?! The answer becomes a surprise for school friends. The amusing illustrations help to tell a story of disappointed feelings that take a turn into the perfect celebration, minus the cake and the ice cream.

The Awakening of Khufu

By Les Lester

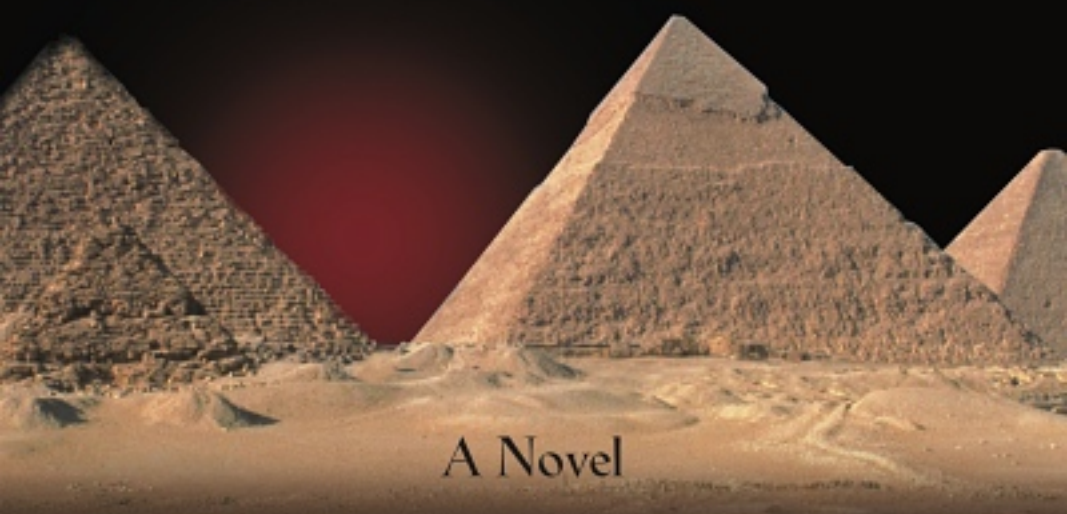
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NEW REVISED EDITION

The Awakening of Khufu



A Novel

Les Lester

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Third Edition, New Revised Edition

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008941524

ISBN: 978-1-60145-651-9

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Kanefer Books

2021

Author's Note

Dr. John Henrik Clarke, noted historian, artfully summarized the importance of knowing history utilizing the metaphors of a clock, a compass, and a map. When people know where they are on the timeline of history, they have clarity of purpose and direction. I hope this quote moves you, the reader, like it did me many years ago, when I first read it:

“History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day. It is also a compass that people use to find themselves on the map of human geography. History tells a people what they have been, and where they have been; what they are and where they are; and more importantly, history tells a people where they still must go, and what they still must be.”

It is in this vein that ***The Awakening of Khufu***, through science fiction, seeks to help readers accurately find themselves on the clock, compass, and map of human geography.

Les Lester

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Hannibal peered at himself in the full-length mirror in his bedroom. *Not bad for forty-two*, the tall, mustached professor mused. He straightened his bow-tie and congratulated himself for having gone out and purchased a tuxedo. Marika had chided him about it for years.

“What do you think?” a cheerful voice rang out. It was Marika in her trade-mark pose—arms outstretched, palms facing skyward.

“As pretty as you were at nineteen,” James said suavely turning around to admire his elegant wife of some twenty years. Her lovely honey-colored complexion, framed by flowing braided tresses, and knowing brown eyes, gave her a look of an Egyptian queen. Her dress was black, with shining glitter-like starlets. And it hugged her figure in all the right places.

They would make their grand entrance at the Museum of Science and Industry awards ceremony in style. The handsome, articulate professor was one of the awardees of the night. He had written his short acceptance remarks on a five-by-seven index card. He always wrote the names of those who had helped him in some capacity, just in case he overlooked someone in his litany of acknowledgments. It was his way of remaining humble and remembering that his success had not come from his efforts alone.

His research on human-memory prints in the nucleus of human cells had rearranged science's conception of what was possible in the realm of human biology. He had found that the body essentially reproduces itself on the micro level. All of the potential for a complete human being is inherent in each tiny cell, his research had proved. And to top it off, the storage segments for memory in the brain were also preserved in each cell.

The study had been quite simple, he reflected. He had merely inserted color-coded fluorescent dye into the nucleus of single cells, much like physicians do on the macro-level with colors that differentiate organs within the human body.

And as he had theorized, the segment within the cell that reflects the brain color-coded to the exact sequence in his study as on the macro level. But the real leg work had been done by Japanese scientists, who had cloned primates from single cells and documented the results alongside of his memory tests.

"Okay, Doctor, I'm ready when you are," Marika said enthused. She knew this was a special night for him, and she wanted to do her best to make him happy.

They drove over to Lake Shore Drive and headed south to 55th Street where they exited and turned into the parking lot of the white marble and granite Greek-styled classical structure. James pulled up in his Jaguar and gave the valet a sizable tip, instructing him to leave the car out front, as he and his wife might leave early.

Inside, clusters of Chicago's, and America's, Who's Who stood in small groups chatting as waiters and waitresses, dressed in black and white, served hors d'oeuvres and drinks. More guests sat at large round tables with white tablecloths.

Up front, at special tables reserved for honorees and their guests, Edwards and his wife Jheri waved greetings to James and Marika, who nodded occasionally at recognizable faces as they headed towards the Edwards' where they would be sitting. Finally, they reached their table and were met by greetings from two other couples.

"James...Marika, I'd like you to meet Jerome Jerrod and his wife Margaret. You've heard of Syntec Software, haven't you?" Edwards asked.

"Yes...the pleasure's mine," Hannibal said shaking hands with the well-known computer software tycoon. Jerrod looked just as he did in the newspapers and on TV. He was built like an NFL linebacker, but graying around the temples with gray bristles in his moustache. He was fifty or so but had maintained his physique and was apparently still ruggedly athletic.

His wife, meanwhile, reflected his suave bearing. Sveltely built, she had maintained her girlish good looks and flashing personality.

"I understand your husband is some kind of a guy in the medical world," Margaret said to Marika, flashing a cool smile that immediately put others at ease.

"Yes, I'm proud of him. He works hard, and it has certainly paid off."

"Honey, you haven't met the Studienmachers," James said gesturing to a young white couple across the table. "Todd and Jan Studienmacher, they're buyers for the Harvard Feld stores."

The couple, in their early to mid-thirties, smiled graciously. Could be cousins or close with the billionaire Feld family, James figured. Well pedigreed folks in their early

thirties have a way of emerging at settings such as these, he mused.

A mix of ethnic and cultural groups populated the hall. This was the kind of event where Democrats and Republicans, Muslims and Christians, conservatives and liberals all came together for a worthy cause. The event themed: ‘Science Makes Sense’ was a fund-raiser to help the museum in its new expansion project.

James scanned the one thousand or so strong gathering and noted the many well-heeled movers and shakers.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” a voice rang out getting the crowd’s attention. “You’ve probably noted that the fare this evening is finger food,” a cherub-looking man, with a salt and pepper mustache, declared from the podium. “Many of us can afford to miss a full meal,” he said hands on his ample mid-section.

The crowd roared in laughter.

“If you haven’t had your fill, there is plenty left at the buffet area; or our first-class servers are here to help you. If you will, just mingle for the next ten minutes or so and then we’ll get on with the evening’s program.”

Two servers converged on both sides of their table.

Marika began her order: “I’ll have the salmon, mix the cheeses—”

“Mr. Hannibal,” a foreign-accented voice rang out.

James turned to see two well-dressed Arab-looking men standing over him.

“If we could have a moment with you please, Mr. Hannibal?” One man handed James his business card, while the other stood genteelly alongside him.

THE EGYPTIAN MINISTRY of SCIENCE and TECHNOLOGY, the card read.

“How might I help you?” Hannibal said rising—wondering what the men could possibly want with him.

“I’m Ahmed Salih,” the man who had handed him the card said as they walked.

“And I’m Reshef Ottah,” the other man said.

They walked toward the buffet area and the man who had handed him his card began.

“Our scientists in Egypt have looked into your cell-memory research, and we believe that you are just the scientist who can assist us in developing an unprecedented study in DNA sequencing.”

“DNA sequencing?” James asked.

“Yes. DNA sequencing. Our scientists believe technology has reached the point where we can actually clone an ancient pharaoh.”

The word clone sent shivers down James’s spine. He had made up his mind years earlier that he would never get involved in the science; even though he realized, given his background in genetics, that he was as prepared as anyone to accomplish bio-cellular cloning. In fact, he had stopped his cell-memory research just short of validating his memory theory because he did not believe in cloning.

But the Japanese had no such reservations and had documented his assertions through their primate studies.

“Yes. Let me explain, sir,” Ahmed continued. By now they had exited the noisy hall and were standing in the concourse area where it was quieter.

“Mr. Hannibal, our government is willing to pay you two million dollars to help us clone the DNA of an Ancient Egyptian pharaoh.”

James was startled. He half wondered if the guys were part of some practical joke that was being played on him. But they remained solemn.

“We are serious, Mr. Hannibal. I know this seems far out, but we’ve been asked to make this offer to you with our government’s backing.”

James looked at the men incredulously. What they were suggesting was a radical break with what, theretofore, had been the domain of God and nature.

“Why has your government asked me and not the Japanese?” he asked pointedly.

“Unfortunately, we are just the messengers, Professor. You have our employer’s card. Please think about our offer, and we will get back with you. Or, you can call Mr. Raheem Nadat—the Egyptian High Consular of Science. That is his name and phone number on the business card. Enjoy your night, sir.”

James still held the card in his hand as the men returned inside. He understood the science of DNA sequencing well. But he recognized the potential offshoots of the science, and its possible impact on society. He put the card in his cardholder and proceeded to re-enter the hall.

The program had just begun, and Marika looked up at him with a supportive smile when he reached their table and sat down next to her.

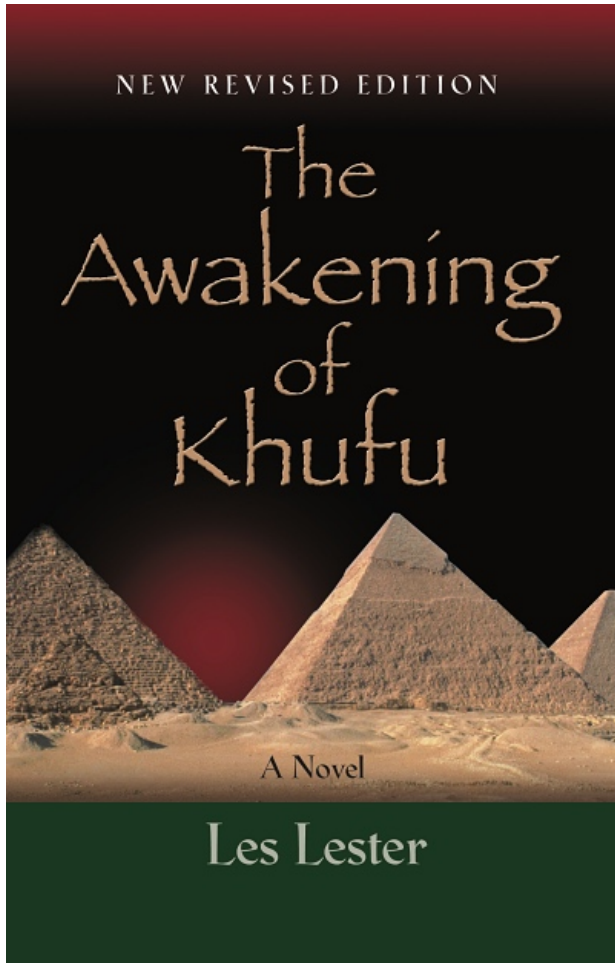
“You haven’t eaten a thing...What did those guys want?” she whispered.

“I’ll tell you later,” he mumbled.

The key-note speaker was now being introduced, and he stepped to the podium amid avid applause from the assembled guests.

He talked about new scientific discoveries and their impact on modern life. He lauded the advent of the Internet and its role in accelerating the flow of information across vast physical and intellectual borders. He championed scientists for not allowing themselves to settle for the status quo, praising them for using their innate talents and skills to help make the world a better place.

After the speech, awards were given in a number of categories ranging from philanthropy to invention. James's name was called and he walked to the podium genteelly amidst applause and a standing ovation. He accepted his plaque, posed for pictures, and pulled out his five by seven, ensuring that he didn't leave anyone out. Lastly, he mentioned Marika and her steadfastness despite the obstacles they had faced together. He left the podium amidst another standing ovation, and a teary-eyed Marika welcomed him to his seat.



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