

The North Wind Descends

N. L. Holmes

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The North Wind Descends is a historical mystery about corruption, greed, and vengeance in ancient Egypt.

A diplomat is set on the trail of an assassin in N. L. Holmes's historical mystery novel, *The North Wind Descends*.

Lord Hani, a diplomat long out of favor with the pharaoh, is surprised when he is sent abroad to negotiate for supplies for an upcoming military campaign. The murder of a Babylonian diplomat forces him to put aside his plans and find the killer before Babylon declares war. But the more Hani and his associates investigate, the closer they come to royal secrets that may derail their careers—or end their lives.

Part of a series, *The North Wind Descends* finds Lord Hani facing problems both on the job and at home. Corrupt officials, terrified slaves, and bands of brigands form a net of danger and intrigue that threatens to embroil Egypt in bloody conflict. Hani fights not to be distracted by shocking revelations about his own family. And, as ever, his investigations are subject to the whims of scheming royals and cutthroat politicians.

The book draws inspiration from a tumultuous, poorly remembered time in Egyptian history. A map, a cast list, and a glossary help with understanding and keeping track of this meticulously reconstructed world. The characters are a mix of real historical figures and fictional creations, and some of their inner thoughts are inconsistent with previous characterizations. Hani, too, is more loose-lipped than is wise or typical of him. Still, this is a complex, attention-holding cast: despite his power and position, Hani is enchanted by birds and rainstorms; Amen-nefer's charming veneer is stretched thin over his violent, misogynistic impulses; and Ptah-Mes, Hani's friend and former superior, has grown jaded after years of political turmoil and the murder of his rebellious wife.

Egypt's empire is expansive, and Hani travels throughout the region, visiting opulent palaces and dusty side streets in his quest for answers. However, it is small details that make this ancient world come alive: the dim light of clay lamps, the shape and smell of fresh bread, the lingering stench of blood at the scene of the diplomat's murder.

Lord Hani is assigned another mystery late in the story. It is tangentially related to the primary mystery, but its true purpose is to set up a conflict for the next series installment. As the story progresses, Hani grows ever more disillusioned with his government, and by the fact that the powerful always manage to avoid just consequences of their actions. By the end, he struggles to control his rage long enough to do his job: defeat a monstrous opponent and restore peace to Egypt and her vassal states.

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EILEEN GONZALEZ (November 25, 2020)

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