

MPM

A bulletin on the doings and undoings of
Barbara Mertz/Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels
Issue Number 35
Winter 2000/01
Kristen Whitbread, Editor

The Amelia Peabody Books By Elizabeth Peters

In chronological order:
Crocodile on the Sandbank
Curse of the Pharaohs
The Mummy Case
Lion in the Valley
Deeds of the Disturber
The Last Camel Died at Noon
The Snake, the Crocodile and the Dog
The Hippopotamus Pool
seeing a Large cat
The Ape Who Guards the Balance
The Falcon at the Portal
He Shall Thunder in the Sky
Lord of the Silent

also look for:

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MPM: Mertz . Peters . Michaels

The official Barbara Mertz/Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels website
by Margie Knauff & Lisa Speckhardt

PUBLISHING SCHEDULE

Lord of the Silent
He Shall Thunder in the Sky
The Camelot Caper
Summer of the Dragon
Falcon at the Portal
Street of the Five Moons
Trojan Gold
Borrower of the Night
Silhouette in Scarlet

1 May 2001
3 April 2001
January 2001
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Is there anything as horrible as starting on a trip? Once you're off, that's all right, but the last moments are earthquake and convulsion, and the feeling that you are a snail being pulled off your rock.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Hour of Gold, Hour of Lead

MPM

Dear Friends and Gentle Readers:

This is our holiday greeting to you all. Whatever festival you celebrate, may you revel in every moment. I will be celebrating Christmas with friends in Egypt, and on Dec. 27 I will join the "Amelia Peabody Expedition" for New Years (the real millennium) and a Nile Cruise. I've been talking about doing this for years, and decided I had better do it while I can still walk and talk. I look forward to seeing all of you who have signed up, and I can promise you a wonderful experience. Museum Tours caters

to the real Egypt enthusiasts, which is why I am going with them instead of another company. From the Giza pyramids to the Valley of the Kings, from Karnak to Assuan and back, Bill and Nancy Petty include all the sites you will ever want to see, and more. I will bring my pith helmet.

The handsome cat in our photo* is Mr. Emerson, whom I feel obliged to defend against certain allegations made by a certain person in the last newsletter. Admittedly, Emerson's voice resembles that of a bat; it is a squeak almost beyond the range of human hearing. Admittedly, he is not much interested in fighting. However, he is a great explorer, bolting out the door every morning in pursuit of...something...and he does not come back until he's good and ready. (Always before dark, though; I live in the country, away from through roads, but I don't allow the cats out at night or when no one is in the house.)

But to return to Emerson. The fact is, I don't know what the Hades he does all day. No trophies have been brought back. Maybe he communes with rabbits or excavates in the cornfield. HOWEVER. He is gorgeous. That is a sufficient resemblance.

LORD OF THE SILENT has been edited, copy-edited and revised, and I am presently working on the galleys. At this moment I'm somewhat sick of it, but I am also very pleased with it. I hope you will be too. (Pleased, that is.) Harper Collins is putting out an abridged audio version to coincide with pub date in May, and Recorded Books will be doing the unabridged...whenever they get around to it. Frankly, it drives me crazy waiting for their version because I am addicted to the ineffable Barbara Rosenblat's readings. If you feel--the same way, YOU harass R.B. I'm delighted to report that Barbara will be reading both the abridged and the unabridged. We have been listening to her reading of HE SHALL THUNDER IN THE SKY--we bribe the staff to get roughs several months before the audio is generally available--and it is superb. I wish I could tell you when you can get it, but I can't. Call Recorded Books and yell at them.

I have begun work on the next book, which is tentatively titled THE PLACE OF TRUTH. At the urgent request of my publisher, it will be another Amelia. I'm sorry if this disappoints some readers: I would still like to do another Vicky, and fill in some of the Emerson's "lost years," and of course I could--this is a free country, right? But an urgent request from a publisher carries a lot of weight with those of us who make our living writing books.

Kristen and I are also working on the Amelia compendium, which will include articles on various subjects touched upon in the saga, lists of characters and places, and a lot more stuff. If there is any topic you would particularly like us to cover, here's your chance to get your two cents in.

In case you wonder how I spend my spare time, I am also revising RED LAND, BLACK LAND.

Kristen and her husband Tim do everything else.

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year, and thanks to all of you who have and will send cards and little presents. I'm sure you understand that I may not be able to respond personally to each.

Barbara

* See back of newsletter.

One of the strangest quirks of the human mind is its capacity for being moved to tears, laughter, anger, anxiety, joy by a "person" who exists nowhere except in imagination!

JaneFitz-Randolph, How to Write for Children and Young Adults

Flo Rutherford: Miss Molly seemed to be very contradictory in regard to her age. If she is indeed Bertha's daughter and 14 years old, why would she agree to be thought of as younger, especially~when at first she tries to get away with being 'seventeen...well...sixteen..."?

MPM You are not yet acquainted with the full depths of Molly's perfidy. She has obviously been told (I bet you can't guess by whom) to conceal her real age. After her first look at Ramses she tries to pretend she is older. When that doesn't work she has to go for younger.

I just loved the mental picture of Amelia skulking about the gardens in medieval regalia complete with hennin....I'm also trying to picture Cyrus in assorted periods of Louis XIV's reign, and the goatee just kills it, except right at the beginning, before wigs were in, which of course makes the image funnier. (Cyrus in petticoat breeches???)

MPM I did think Cyrus with goatee as Louis XIV was funny.

Kira Rutherford: Nefret's name. How is it pronounced? We have always said 'NEFret", emphasis on the first syllable. However, Barbara Rosenblat says "NeFRET", emphasis on the second syllable, on the recordings. . . .How is it supposed to be pronounced?

MPM Nobody knows how the vowels for n-f-r were pronounced, so you can do anything you like with them. Not only are vowels omitted but there are absolutely no clues as to stress. So I left it to Barbara, whom I admire as much as you do!

Sister Mary (Anne) O'Neill: I was rather astonished to see your reference to my Uncle Jim, [James O'Neill] my Father's youngest brother. . . . It seems that my grandfather James was a Vice-president and Treasurer of the Allen Car and Steel Works (Eddystone, PA) which was the forerunner of the Baldwin Locomotive Works. James was told to be a dentist, evidently did so, was established in an office by his father. After a short time.. .James left and went to New York to be an actor. As children, the five of us, at various times, went to New York to visit my uncle (now retired and in the restaurant business). The house in which we lived was over a hundred years old when we were children. I recall seeing play-bills and posters of James O'Neill with Lillian Gish (?) and Mary Pickford.... There were a number of these.

MPM James was a very well-known actor in his time, as you know, and I'm sure Amelia would have admired his work. I do get the most fascinating bits of history from my readers!

Irene Pabst: It did puzzle me that Sennia, a 2 year old who could not

yet speak, was begging in the street and then expecting Ramses to want to have sex with her/her mother. In the same vein, what did Amelia "not know" before she went to the Syrian Christian woman in Nefret's hospital with Ramses - that men preferred very young girls?

MPM Sennia could talk at 2 - but not clearly - she would speak a street dialect Amelia would find difficult to understand. I am sorry to say that children did solicit for their mothers - and worse. If you re-read Sophia's statement about how some men "protected" themselves I think you will comprehend why Amelia was so horrified to think of her nephew doing such a thing.

Are you a bit homophobic, or just against that slimy rapist Zaal?

MPM I can't imagine why a loathing of men who prey on women and/or men should suggest homophobia.

Why are all your heroines now smaller, thin, blond and very pretty? In contrast to Ramses/David? Or to the girls' courage? It is still hard for less gorgeous readers.

MPM Amelia isn't small, blond, and pretty. I made Lia and Nefret blond because everybody else had dark hair. As a less gorgeous reader myself, my imaginary personas are always young and pretty. What's the point of an imagination if you can't use it to your advantage?

Jan Dew: If it took 50 of the Emerson's staff (including the indefatigable Daoud) to move the statue, how did Sethos manage to get it in the tomb in the first place?

MPM The M.C. can do anything. Ask him. ~~.....~~

Phyllis Page: Will you please clarify the pronunciations for Bastet, Seshat, and Anubis, showing the syllables that should receive the accent?

KDW Bah'stet, Seh'shat, Ah-noo'-bis (Hint: If you are still uncertain just listen to the Recorded Books version of the Peabody novels. Barbara Rosenblat's pronunciations of the names are perfect.)

Did you bring Sethos back to life after his perceived death in The Snake, the Crocodile, and the Dog as an original plan, or were you influenced by readers who did not want to see the last of him? Or did you just decide yourself that you didn't want to see the last of him even though you'd planned to kill him off? You never explained how he lived through that first experience.

MPM Do I have to?

I have a recollection of Emerson telling Amelia about trying to find his half-brother in the snow in an earlier book. Assuming I am right about this, did you know at that time that the half-brother would be Sethos?

MPM You may be right, but I'll be damned if I can remember it. I've known for a long time who Sethos was.

Joan Peceimer: I was a little saddened to see Sethos die, but he went

in a most honorable way and if he stayed around too much longer I was thinking Amelia might succumb to his charm.

Flo Rutherford: Now, about Sethos, who is presumably really dead this time - how long have you known about his relationship to Emerson? Was this something you had planned from first introducing him back in *The Mummy Case*, or did the realization come later? If it was part of the long term plan, was his choice of soubriquet intended as a hint? After all, Ramses did at one point refer to his father as Osiris (et al.) If so, it went right past us, as it was evidently intended to.

MPM Since a number of you are asking...

As for an authentic villain, the real thing, the absolute, the artist, one rarely meets him even once in a lifetime. The ordinary bad hat is always in part a decent fellow.

Colette, *la naissance du jour*

ALL ABOUT SETHOS

I can't remember exactly when I figured out who Sethos was, but when I planned the Quartet, at least five years ago, I had it pretty well worked out. I'd even written the scene of the "boy in the snow." (One has to get these ideas down on paper when they come, or risk losing them.) I was particularly pleased with myself for thinking of it because it answered so many of the questions I had tossed out, more or less at random: Why does Emerson hate his first name? Why is he so evasive about his mother? Why is he so hostile toward "aristocrats"? Why does Sethos detest Emerson so much? It's not only that Sethos has fallen for Amelia; "a student of psychology like myself" might suspect that in part he wants her because she is his brother's wife - and that the mason he appreciates her is because he shares some of Emerson's attributes. The scene at the end of *Lion in the Valley* (which I still think is one of the funniest scenes I've ever written) hinted at some of this. I have a weakness for witty rascals, so as time went on I made him wittier and a little less rascally.

I knew at the end of *The Snake, the Crocodile, and the Dog* that he wasn't dead, and Emerson suspected such was the case. (Re-read the last scene between Emerson and Amelia and you'll spot the clues.) The haste with which his lieutenants whisked him away, before she could examine him properly, and her own love of melodrama led her astray.

When the war (I am referring to WWI) broke out, I realized that Sethos would be involved somehow, on one side or the other. I already had one truly vile villain, and anyhow it was unthinkable that Sethos would sell out his country - and Amelia. As for his demise - don't tell me Amelia didn't enjoy every last moment of that final scene with Sethos!

COOKIECOOKIECOOKIECOOKIECOOKIECOOKTIE

Life is too short to stuff a mushroom.

Shirley Conran, *Superwoman*

However, cookies are another thing altogether. Which is why, no matter how complex, it is always worth trying a recipe at least once. Speaking of which, I would dearly love to reproduce a recipe from *Rosie's Bakery - Chocolate-Packed, Jam-Filled, Butter-Rich, No-Holds-Barred: Cookie Book* by Judy Rosenberg, but I don't wish to get myself into copyright trouble. Still, if once in a while you experience that baking mood that a chocolate chip (or variation thereof) won't satisfy (though they're in there too!), you **need** her book. There are cookies in there like no other I've ever eaten!

In lieu of her wonderful recipes I offer this simple one - my daughter whips up these for us

in less than 10 minutes (that's the "before baking" time). And yes, they're delicious -- would I include any other kind?

Plain Shortbread

Preheat oven to 350°F

Beat the following together in a bowl (we use a mixer) until fully mixed:

2 c. flour

1 c. butter softened

1 1/2 c. confectioners' sugar

1/4 tsp salt

1/4 tsp double acting baking powder

Pat mixture into 9" round cake pan and lightly prick the top all over with a fork. Sprinkle the top with sugar, or cinnamon and sugar (to your taste- 1-2 Tbsp).

Bake 30-35 minutes. Cut wedges while warm. Wonderful after it has sat on counter for a day. (Or in the microwave if there is a pet who will help themselves.)

If I knew what I was so anxious about, I wouldn't be so anxious.

Gertude Berg, Molly and Me

My Dear Mr. Emerson,

My sincere apologies if you believed yourself to have been maligned in any way in the previous newsletter. (I'm not certain you are bright enough to realize whether or not you have been maligned but that is another issue altogether.) I too, have been pleased to note your adventurous spirit of late . heading out the door before I arrive every morning and leaving after everyone has left for the day. save Barbara. And no, I am certainly not suggesting that you flee every morning simply to avoid being regularly extracted from behind the copy machine in order to help socialize you (according to mistress's orders). I fully agree that you are as magnificent as your namesake. And, in fact, the few times I have actually seen you of late I have been struck by precisely that momentary fleeting impression of beauty. Sort of an amorphous silver streak on the horizon, as it were. In my case, I am certain you will grow mm into your title every day, even if no one will ever have the opportunity to appreciate the change because you won't come out from under the bushes.



Sincerely,
Kristen Whitbread



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