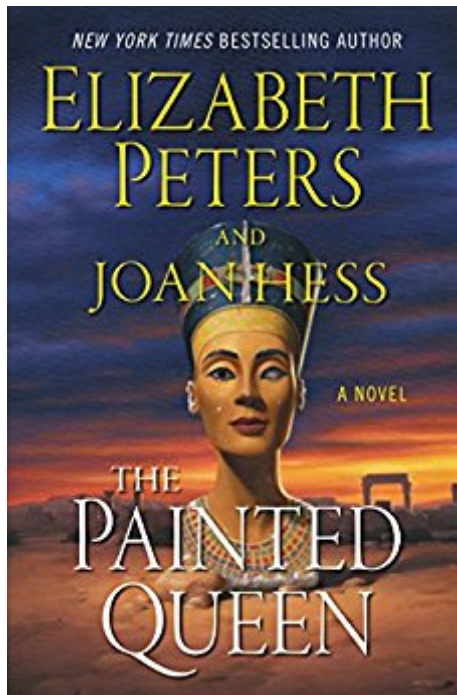




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# **The Painted Queen: A Novel (Amelia Peabody Series)**



## Synopsis

Egypt, 1912 – Amelia Peabody and her dashing archeologist husband, Radcliffe Emerson, are once again in danger as they search for a priceless, stolen bust of legendary Queen Nefertiti and Amelia finds herself the target of assassins in this long-awaited, eagerly anticipated final installment of Elizabeth Peters' bestselling, beloved mystery series. Arriving in Cairo for another thrilling excavation season, Amelia is relaxing in a well-earned bubble bath in her elegant hotel suite in Cairo, when a man with knife protruding from his back staggers into the bath chamber and utters a single word – "Murder" – before collapsing on the tiled floor, dead. Among the few possessions he carried was a sheet of paper with Amelia's name and room number, and a curious piece of pasteboard the size of a calling card bearing one word: "Judas." Most peculiarly, the stranger was wearing a gold-rimmed monocle in his left eye. It quickly becomes apparent that someone saved Amelia from a would-be assassin – someone who is keeping a careful eye on the intrepid Englishwoman. Discovering a terse note clearly meant for Emerson – "Where were you?" – pushed under their door, there can be only one answer: the brilliant master of disguise, Sethos. But neither assassins nor the Genius of Crime will deter Amelia as she and Emerson head to the excavation site at Amarna, where they will witness the discovery of one of the most precious Egyptian artifacts: the iconic Nefertiti bust. In 1345 B.C. the sculptor Thutmose crafted the piece in tribute to the great beauty of this queen who was also the chief consort of Pharaoh Akhenaten and stepmother to King Tutankhamun. For Amelia, this excavation season will prove to be unforgettable. Throughout her journey, a parade of men in monocles will die under suspicious circumstances, fascinating new relics will be unearthed, a diabolical mystery will be solved, and a brilliant criminal will offer his final challenge . . . and perhaps be unmasked at last.

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## Customer Reviews

All Elizabeth Peters (Barbara Mertz) fans know that this was the Peabody mystery she had started, but not completed, when she passed away almost four years ago. A longtime friend and associate (Joan Hess) courageously took on the job of completing this work to give Amelia Peabody (et al) fans one last shot at the characters they've come to feel close to over the course of the last few decades. Why do I call this courageous? Because Peters' style had a rather unique quality, with braggadocio mixed with a deprecating humor in a way that just worked, and was quite unlike anything I'd personally read before. I didn't think the style would be impossible for another writer to spread in to, but I considered that it could be very challenging. A second aspect is that, for me at least, the underlying plots of the murder mysteries became secondary to the sense of family and the development of characters like Ramses and Nefret. The adventure of solving the crimes was at times part of the character development, and at times something I wanted to have done so that I'd find out what would happen in their personal stories. So yes, I got hooked into the soap opera element of the continuing series -- hungry for the next news of Ramses and Nefret's romance -- anxious for the next contact with Sethos and what it would mean -- wondering if Emerson's brother and sister-in-law would ever come back in for a major contribution. Why do I mention all this before I discuss "The Painted Queen"? Because the manner in which the character development and humor are presented are, to me, the hinge upon which the success of this novel rests as an integral entry in the Amelia Peabody series. The result, I'll report, is a bit mixed, but it weighs in much more on the positive side of the ledger. I find the characterizations to be true, and the elements of the plot live up to the series as written by Peters. Amelia's "journals" provide the essence of her entertaining personality, if not always presented with the subtlety of Peters' style. "The Painted Queen" covers a

"lost year" in the series, and one that came in the middle of a most important sequence of character development. It is set after "The Falcon at the Portal", where Nefret marries someone other than Ramses in a mistaken rage at Ramses -- and "He Shall Thunder in the Sky", where Ramses and Nefret have a very rocky road to reconciliation. After having Ramses and Nefret present as a happy couple and competent motive force, I'm not sure how you mentally go back to a time before that, but then again Peters intended to fill in many of the missing years, and those include periods of time "pre-Ramses/Nefret". This was the third book in that goal, after "Guardian of the Horizon" and "A River in the Sky". Thus far I've read the series in publication order, so I have yet to "go back in time" to those books, meaning that "The Painted Queen" is my first experience of these missing years. However, it comes not long after I read the two novels which bookend it, which put me in a good position to evaluate it against the timeline. Hess seems to get right into action more quickly and with a more rapid pace than I've been used to from Peters. Some might think that an improvement. I have come to enjoy the circumlocution which Peters frequently employed with both Amelia and Ramses, so I found delays before and during action to be a charming element of the color of these novels, and therefore the slight difference in Hess' style was more noticeable for that reason. However, I don't really consider this a criticism, just a difference, as had to happen in some ways when one author completes the work of another -- especially in a series this long with such a well established style. So while "The Painted Queen" doesn't serve as a wrap-up to the series, as one might expect of a "last book", it does give us a last experience with the characters we've come to enjoy and feel close to. It is certainly a solid offering. While some passages seem to lack the light touch of Peters, the overall tone is quite familiar and acceptable. If you're a fan of the Amelia Peabody series, you certainly won't want to miss this last tribute to the characters and their marvelous author.

The first Elizabeth Peters novel I read was *The Seventh Sinner* (highly recommended if you haven't read it). After reading it, I immediately went and read every book of hers I could find. Then, when I discovered she also wrote under the name Barbara Michaels, I read those. In fact, my very first review on way back in 1999 was for an Elizabeth Peters book! I loved them all. But most of all, I found I loved her Amelia Peabody series. When Ms. Peters (Michaels/Mertz) passed away in 2013, I was so saddened. Her books brought (and still continue to bring) such joy. When given the opportunity to read *The Painted Queen*, I was excited and worried. I've never read Joan Hess. Would she do the book and our beloved characters justice? Oh, I'm so happy to say that she did - this is an Elizabeth

Peters book! Within a few pages, I forgot my worries and was thoroughly enmeshed in an Egyptian Adventure! Amelia and her cutting wit (and equally dangerous parasol). Handsome Emerson (sigh). Nefret and Ramses and David and, of course, murder and mayhem and tombs (oh my!). Oh, and wondrous secrets from Ancient Egypt. Hess does Peters justice! While I'm very sorry that this is the last book we'll read from a favorite author, I felt like this book was a little gift to her fans. And I think Ms. Peters would have been absolutely delighted with the end result. And a quick note: you may want to skip the introductions and get right to the treasure of the story. Take the time to read them. They are by people who knew Ms. Mertz (Peters/Michaels) well. They're funny, touching (have Kleenex), and will give you a chance to get to know your favorite author a little better. Hint: there's a lot of Amelia in her! And a quick note to Ms. Hess: Thank you for doing our Amelia and her author justice. This fan appreciates it!

Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. , I need more stars. A typical Peabody adventure filled with archaeological infighting, a family of assassins after Peabody and her son Ramses, and a delightful farce, concerning a famous artifact. And, after years of delay, joking with my sister that this book would not come out in our lifetime, I finally held *The Painted Queen* in my hands on its release date. And, for a day I could not open it. I was so aware that this was it, the final Elizabeth Peters Egyptology mystery. Once I read it, there would be no more. I also had mixed feelings about Peters' drafts being completed by Joan Hess. I have always enjoyed the latter's Claire Mallory books but had found her Maggoty world impossible. No need to worry. This collaboration was so well done, it was seamless, with no indication of what was Peters and what was Hess. I absolutely love this series, going back to my initial finding of Crocodile on a Sandbank so many years ago. I also have been known to sit down and reread them all again, looking forward to enough time to pass to do some rereading. As usual Peabody is oblivious to others, which causes her again to notice Ramses looking at a distressed Nefret, with no curiosity as to why. This also causes her not to wonder about a look Emerson gives their son near the end and what the two men in her life are up to. The results of that look are hilarious once understood by the reader. The only thing missing is not enough Sethos, but all in all a very satisfactory conclusion. This book is one of the fill-ins Peters added to flesh out her series near the end, not a continuation. The main reason I wanted the series to go forward was to see what Peabody's granddaughter Charlotte would get up to as she grew up. Perhaps best left to the imagination.

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