



## The Painted Queen

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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's bestselling, beloved mystery series

Arriving in Cairo for another thrilling excavation season, Amelia Peabody 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 Armana, 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.

## **The Painted Queen Details**

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## From Reader Review The Painted Queen for online ebook

### **Andrea says**

I adore Amelia and her clan so was extraordinarily excited when this book was announced.

Unfortunately, the pacing and dialogue are off, the characters are not themselves, and the plot makes no sense. There are numerous glaring conflicts with the Amelia canon, which drove me nuts. Shouldn't the editor have caught these things? Maybe I wouldn't have noticed had I not re-read the three preceding books in anticipation of this one. I had hoped for a story that would shed more light on the resolution of the trauma at the end of Falcon at the Portal, but all of that pain and suffering was brushed aside and instead there were comic book villains in the form of Geoffrey's family.

The archaeology bits are interesting in light of the real controversy around Nefertiti, but there was far less archaeology than in the other books. Instead, lots of naps, baths, flitting around, and odd arguments. I'm going to re-read He Shall Thunder in the Sky now and pretend The Painted Queen never happened.

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### **QNPoohBear says**

#### **3.5 stars**

Amelia Peabody Emerson and her husband, Professor Radcliffe (never call him that) Emerson, the greatest Egyptologist of the 19th- and (dare Amelia say it) 20th-century are back in Egypt for the 1912-1913 season. After their last season was cut tragically short, they hope to finish excavations where they left off and hope Emerson will keep from enraging M. Maspero (again) long enough to get a firman for a better location. The season gets off to an exciting start when a murderous thug enters Amelia's private chamber intent on harm when someone intervenes to stop the attack. Surprised and confused, Amelia sets about trying to figure out who her enemies are (the list is long). Emerson, on the other hand, is determined to protect the love of his life with his own brute strength and sheer will no matter what. Meanwhile, Ramses and David are in Palestine doing who knows what and Nefret is continuing her study of medicine. With the children grown, Amelia and Emerson can finally be alone! Not so fast- M. Maspero has a job for the Peabody-Emersons: go to Amarna and find out what on earth is happening with Herr Morgenstern, who is supposed to be excavating the site, but has been behaving erratically. The Peabody-Emersons discover Herr Morgenstern's behavior is linked to a bust of Queen Nefertiti or should I say busts? There are several floating around but only one is genuine and different parties are after it with their own agenda.

Another exciting adventure for Amelia and co. Unlike everyone else, this book isn't the end of the road for me because I am reading on chronological order in which the stories take place. I needed to know what happened next after the shocking ending of the previous installment. This one picks up the threads but all was not resolved entirely to my satisfaction. I need to read on I suppose! The plot is fast paced with danger lurking around every corner and Sethos not far behind. The narrative sticks with Amelia's point-of-view for most of the book when a few fragments of "Manuscript H" work their way in to show what is happening with Ramses and David. Their plot was far more interesting than the wildly improbable assassination attempts by bungling idiots. From their names to the ridiculous ways they were vanquished was all to coincidental and smacked of a silly novel by the likes of Miss Smith. I couldn't put the book down because I wanted to know who and what was going on. The ending was too abrupt and anticlimactic for me. I was left

feeling a bit lost and confused as to how the two stories come together. I guessed the identities of the villains just before Amelia did. The story also contains the age old debate between Amelia's firm belief in Christian doctrine and Emerson's atheism. I love the way Amelia and Emerson concluded the debate. Amelia, thankfully, refrains from Victorian moralizing in this book. On the negative side, the reader almost has to be aware of the political situation at that time or some of the undercurrents in the plot don't make sense.

I just adore Amelia and Emerson. They're one of my favorite literary couples. Even after so many years of marriage and all they've been through, they're still deeply in love. Emerson even manages to say so, in his own special way. I loved every scene they were in alone and how they're still a healthy married couple despite everything else that is going on. They made me chuckle a lot.

Ramses has the best traits of his parents but is his own independent man. Despite me not liking him as an adult, I found myself missing him when he took so long to enter the story. I was disappointed there wasn't more from his point-of-view, especially earlier in the story. Nefret is as sweet and loving as ever, but with a new soberness from her experiences. None of the story is from her point-of-view and I was frustrated because I wondered what was going on inside her head. David is a real action hero. Lia will be pleased when he returns home to relate his adventures. I was surprised she didn't insist on joining him. Sethos manages to be very enjoyable despite who he is. We get to see a new side of him here when Ramses tries to outmaneuver a master.

There are several new characters here. Herr Morgenstern is the most important. He is a noted archeologist who has been behaving erratically. The mystery is why and what happened to Nefertiti? He comes across as naive at times and at other times possessed by something or even cursed. Herr M provides a lot of chuckles here. There's also Mr. Buddle, a mysterious man who acts for the financial backer of the excavation. I didn't really care for him much. He was a bit pompous and stupid. Herr von Raubritter is another mysterious man claiming to be an archeologist but doesn't seem to know the first thing about excavating. He isn't in the story long enough to get an idea of his personality. He seems like he could be a villain but is he? Mr. Dullard is a hairy missionary with a voice that doesn't match his figure. Like Emerson, I didn't trust him at first but then I grew to like him. I was surprised by the outcome of his plot. Finally, there's Miss Ermentrude DeVere Smith, a writer of silly romance novels (the kind Amelia secretly enjoys). Like Emerson I have little use for made up, silly, affected women and Miss Smith is no exception. Amelia is too kind to Miss Smith. There is ONE more new character introduced at the end. I found him enjoyable and amusing- a fresh and youthful charm to keep the novel's tone light.

I didn't notice a whole lot of difference in the writing so overall, great job to Joan Hess for taking on the daunting task of finishing another author's work. I'm sure her friend Barbara is smiling on from the Egyptian afterlife.

I did notice some anachronisms and American speech patterns pop up once in awhile. I didn't question the word choices too much but high sticklers beware.

For those who haven't read any of the other books in the series, Amelia recaps past adventures but I wouldn't recommend starting with this one.

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### **Moonlight says**

I love the Amelia Peabody books. I was won over by Elizabeth Peter's humor and the extraordinary way she

wove mystery, archaeology, history and social commentary. She could juggle a cast of dozens and make you feel like each character was a three dimensional human being. I would have loved to read her version of this story.

I can't imagine a more daunting task than to try to complete this last novel for her. Amelia's voice was so much a part of Barbara Mertz that to do so successfully is probably too much to ask of any author.

I was struck within a chapter or two with how drastically wrong the "voices" of the characters were. Their dialog was off. The humor was missing. The story does not transition from scene to scene as flawlessly as I have come to expect from Elizabeth Peters. Worst of all, though, is that characters began behaving wrong. For example, Fatima fights with Emerson, David and Ramses have a bitter disagreement, and Ramses argues for a violent solution before trying a nonviolent one.

After awhile, I began tracking errors for entertainment. Fatima is the cook and punishes the Emasons for being late for the meal by burning the meat. Mahmoud is the steward and serves the meals placidly. Amelia is proficient in Hebrew even though she couldn't read or write it in *The River in the Sky*. Katherine Vandergelt is her oldest friend who has known Ramses since he was born even though the Emasons didn't meet her until *Seeing a Large Cat* when Ramses was a teen.

(I guess I shouldn't have prepared for reading this book by rereading all the Amelia Peabody novels that lead up to the events in this book.)

I gave this book one star because it does not measure up to the other books in the series. A good editor familiar with Elizabeth Peter's work should have been able to spot these errors and eliminate them. Someone who loved the Amelia Peabody series, like me, might like to read this to see where Elizabeth Peters wanted to take us. And some sardonic types might take perverse pleasure in seeing how many continuity errors they can find. But unfortunately, I cannot recommend the book.

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## **Teri-K says**

I love this series. I've read or listened to all of the books several times. But when this book was announced I was skeptical. I don't believe I've ever read a book completed under these circumstances that was nearly as good as the original author's work. But the early reviews were pretty good so I gave it a try, and ended up not finishing it. In fact I returned my audio copy to Audible for a refund.

I didn't expect the characters voices to be true - that seems to be a detail only the original author could get right. But I did expect them to act according to character. And I thought the series would be treated with care, which to me means doing your best to get the continuity right. Neither of these things happened.

Amelia, Ramses, Nefret, and even Emerson all acted out of character, and when they were in character it often felt forced, not natural. I found myself wondering who these people were that had taken on the persona of characters I knew so well. :(

As for continuity, I'm actually not a big stickler for it. Especially when an author comes back and fills in a

series I expect some things to be fudged, ignored, or glossed over. Timelines, for instance, often have to be altered. So I didn't think the problems others mentioned in their reviews would bother me that much. It became, however, a matter of what I could bear. Like a roof buried under too many feet of snow, eventually the errors piled up so I just didn't want to read any more. For me the final insult was when Amelia sat down with a lady novelist she'd just met and discussed their adventures at the oasis. No. Just - no. They *never* discussed this with *anyone* outside the family. And when they talked among themselves they were careful not to be overheard. Anyone who knows the series well knows that.

I don't actually blame Hess for these errors. She has several of her own series to keep track of and doesn't have time in her life to become an expert on Amelia. But they should have found somebody who was an expert and had them check the manuscript. It wouldn't be difficult to find such people, and they took their time releasing this one anyway. So why not take the time and trouble to get it mostly right? To me it feels disrespectful not to bend over backwards to release a final book everyone could be proud of. Instead we're left with this mess that I just couldn't finish.

(Though I'm sure some day I'll grab it from the library and read it all. Just not right now, when I've recently reread the series and it's fresh in my mind. I'd rather say goodbye to Amelia and her family with good memories.)

I like to think of it as a tribute to Peters that no one can copy her style or capture the characters, place and time like she did. :)

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## **OutlawPoet says**

\*\*\*ARC received via Amazon Vine\*\*\*

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 Amazon 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!

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### **The Library Lady says**

There have been examples before of someone taking the unfinished work of a beloved author, and doing a very good job of it. The prime example I would think of is Jill Paton Walsh, who not only took Dorothy L Sayer's Thrones, Dominations and completed it believably, but has gone on to write her own Peter Wimsey mysteries. She occasionally gets a detail wrong, but overall, the transition is nearly seamless.

Unfortunately, the selection of Joan Hess to finish this book was not an equally wise decision. She was a good friend of Barbara Mertz (Elizabeth Peters), she had talked about her work with her, she had visited Egypt with her. But her own charming mysteries are modern day books set in the American South, and her writing skills just don't mesh with Peters' work. She doesn't have the feel for the just-before-WWI setting, for the nuances of daily life. Small details, like the mention of "pita" and "hummus", terms NOT in Amelia's vocabulary, jarred me. The interaction between the characters feels awkward. She may love the characters Peters left behind, but she doesn't catch their voices. I was constantly aware that this wasn't a true Amelia book.

What this winds up being is Peters' manuscript combined with very high quality fan fiction. And though I could wish for more Amelia books, from the forwards I gather that Hess clearly isn't planning on writing them. And no matter how well this book sells (and it will) I hope that Mertz's heirs stick to that plan!

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### **Wendy Benavides says**

#### **Disappointing.**

It seems the author was trying too hard and fell short. There were inconsistencies with the rest of the series, for in chapter 5 we read "Katherine was my closest confidante; she had watched over Ramses since his birth and was as bemused as I by his eccentric nature." However Katherine doesn't meet the Emerson's until Ramses is 16 in Seeing A Large Cat. Also some of the characters didn't ring true. Nefret is portrayed as someone who would never harm anyone, but in the other books she sleeps with a knife under her pillow. It's a good story but just doesn't seem to fit in with the rest of the series

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## **Jane says**

Like most avid readers of this series, I was eagerly looking forward to spending time with Amelia, Emerson and their family and friends. I realized that it would be a daunting task for Ms Hess to capture the style and wit of Elizabeth Peters writing, but I wasn't expecting a story full of so many errors - errors that are just careless. It's almost like she hadn't read the other books in the series. Things like: Nefret did not have a clinic in Luxor at this time, she had a hospital in Cairo; she didn't go to Paris to recover from the trauma in The Falcon at the Portal, she went to Switzerland; Daod did not have multiple wives and a large family; Amelia carried brandy in her belt of tools not whiskey; she wore trousers as her working costume not a divided skirt; Catherine was not Amelia's oldest friend and did not know Ramses as a baby - he was 16 when they met. These are just a few of the mistakes, there are many, many more. I'm surprised that Elizabeth Peters' long-time editor didn't catch these pointless mistakes.

In addition to these errors, there are plot points that don't make sense and people acting out of character and the voices are often wrong. So instead of enjoying this book, I find myself noticing only the errors and saying things like "Emerson wouldn't act like that" or "Amelia wouldn't say that". I'm only a third-way through this book and I can't believe I'm trying to decide if it's worth it to finish the story. It's very disappointing.

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## **Christina Startt says**

I'll start off my review by saying that this is for the Advanced Reader copy I received, and I fully intend to read the official copy in July.

I waited on pins and needles since I first heard whisperings of this book. I was intrigued and excited that, yes, Amelia would be gracing us one final time. And then suddenly, she was here, in the rough stage, maybe, but here nonetheless. I vowed to read slowly, and slowly I did.

Here's a confession. When was in the first few chapters, and even at times near the end, I experienced what I can only describe as psychological block. I felt as though there was a strange barrier between me and the characters. I can only assume this is because another author was attached to the writing. I think knowing this had me so worried everything would be different, that I couldn't settle at first. Maybe reading so slowly exacerbated this feeling, or maybe in the long-run, being able to reflect on the contents of each chapter helped me recognize the characters for who they've always been.

Ms. Hess did not disappoint me. I eventually was able to see past the fact that this wasn't 100% MPM, and fell into the story with pleasure. Amelia and Emerson were FANTASTIC. I was laughing often at their banter with each other and other characters, as I followed the fantastical mystery along, fully enjoying how so very Amelia Peabody it was. So many assassins, so little time.

AND SETHOS. GUYS, SETHOS WAS A DREAM. All the crazy disguises and appearances had me in stitches. I think that perhaps he won the day with this book. The sass was strong as ever, and his interactions with Ramses were amazing.

I think my only issue with it was that Ramses and David felt a little off to me at times. I think this was mostly due to them saying things occasionally that didn't strike me as quite Them. And I was sad at the lack of Nefret, and a little surprised at the lack of interaction she had with Ramses. Now, obviously, I understand

that they probably can't even stand to look at each other what with Falcon being the previous book in the timeline, but I was hoping for something verbal to illustrate the stress between them. Mostly, we get the idea through Amelia's observations of the pair. Perhaps some of these little things will be altered in the official copy, since I know some changes were definitely made.

One of my favorite things about this book were all the little Easter eggs thrown in, which the Reader will certainly recognize when he or she comes across them. They'll make you smile very hard!!!

As all of you who have read this Amelia and all the others know the feeling, suddenly I hit the last chapter. I couldn't really believe this was it, despite the July release, and I had to mentally prepare myself. In the words of JK Rowling, all was well. The ending showcases Amelia in all her vivacious glory, and I couldn't have been happier with it. The fact that Painted Queen takes place primarily in Amarna seems to me a wonderful way to bookend a series that has been so much to me these past few years, and I give my thanks to MPM, Joan Hess, and Salima Ikram for their hard work in giving us this final, wonderful Peabody adventure.

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### **Renee says**

After rereading one novel in the Amelia Peabody universe, my excitement for The Painted Queen grew exponentially, as did the poignantly bittersweet ache of returning to my absolute favorite fictional family for the final time. The Painted Queen takes place the year after Falcon, in the lead up to WWI. Cue the drama! Cue the ridiculous adventure!

And... I have to admit that I was vastly disappointed. Elizabeth Peters only completed a third of the manuscript prior to her illness, and to a devout student of her work (aka ardent fan girl), the transition between Peters and Hess was obvious. For the majority of the novel, the characters are shells of themselves. The series' strongest trait is its characters, and none of them feel right. It's like reading fan fiction by a writer who is not up to par with all her canonical facts.

Ramses: Too honest, too direct, too snappish. And there are no brooding passages, no sardonic self deprecating remarks, no cynicism. Nothing swoon worthy.

Nefret does not giggle nor is she as impulsive, brave, or involved as usual, and neither she nor Amelia would nap so frequently or admit it at the very least.

Amelia is even more prone to silly bouts of derring do, and it doesn't work as well in this context. I became - - dare I admit it? -- a trifle bored.

And the plot inconsistencies: the big one is the location of Nefret's Cairo clinic that Hess has in Luxor. And then the common knowledge of the Lost Oasis. I can't imagine that Amelia would admit that to anyone, especially a new acquaintance. That was a well kept secret. The length of Katherine and Amelia's friendship is also confused with Evelyn, and then there are the flagrant anachronisms.

The best part of this is the introduction for MPM: a send off to one of my favorite writers. In the future, I will revisit beloved books in the canon in order to get my Emerson family fix.

I did appreciate Hess's attempt to bring closure to this final manuscript. No one can take MPM's place, but Hess does succeed in providing an ode to her and-- of course Amelia's -- indomitable memory.

2.5 stars.

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## **Laine says**

It is obvious Joan Hess admired Barbara Mertz greatly and wanted to do her stories justice. Her introduction is heartfelt and I can only imagine the difficulty of writing a book in the middle of such an established series. Unfortunately, I agree with those who have described the Painted Queen as mediocre fanfiction. In his moving tribute to the Amelia Peabody novels following the death of Elizabeth Peters, Orson Scott Card pointed out that many mystery writers mistakenly believe they are funny. Elizabeth Peters was funny! She also wrote characters who were flawed, true to their own time, and still endlessly endearing. Her mysteries were fun and engaging, without ever feeling over-the-top. The same praise cannot be given to The Painted Queen.

The Painted Queen falls at a particularly emotionally fraught point in the story, between two of the most intertwined novels of the series (in my opinion). The characters seem unlike themselves in general, from (view spoiler). Amelia also seems to have lost some of her feminist principles, hoping Ramses did not learn (view spoiler) among other odd comments.

More grievous was the characterization of Nefret and Ramses, both of whom act like pre-Falcon at the Portal versions of themselves beyond a few bits of lip-service paid to the events of that novel. Ramses also (view spoiler). We are told who the characters are, frequently, but they never act like themselves, and the relationships characters are off for the time period in which this novel is supposed to take place, especially with (view spoiler).

The errors in continuity, such as Nefret being referred to as Ramses' little sister in spite of her being three years older and the fact that she is continuously referred to as Dr. Forth even though she didn't become a doctor until she spent 1913 in Switzerland, could have been overlooked had the overall plot been better constructed and the characters felt more like themselves. As it stands, I'm grateful Elizabeth Peters herself wrote Tomb of the Golden Bird before her death, and that this book is so obviously flawed that I can easily ignore it as canon.

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## **Terry Weingart says**

I am a long time fan of Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels/Barbara Mertz. I own the Amelia Peabody series in hardcover and paperback and e-book.

This book will not be added to my collection.

The relationships were off, the voices were off. Stupid mistakes threw me out of the story. Then Nefret started giggling and said something and in my mind I was hearing Claire Malloy's annoying daughter, Caron, and that was it for me.

The story descended into a sly parody starring Claire as Amelia, Pete as Emerson, and Caron as Nefret.

It seemed like the series had not been read prior to this book being written. No mention made of the reason Nefret went off to marry Geoffrey or where that "reason" was. No mention of Walter or Evelyn? Amelia

saying "Inshallah"? I was thrown out of the story constantly. The ending was abrupt to say the least.

This is not the way I want to remember the Emersons.  
I just want to cry...

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### **LK says**

I hate to let Amelia go but this was a fine final installment. Ms. Hess did an admirable job finishing Ms. Peters manuscript - a task that must have been intimidating.

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### **Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says**

I was thrilled for the chance to read THE PAINTED QUEEN. Before I started to read this book I didn't know that this is the last book in the Amelia Peabody series. Elizabeth Peters never finished it before she died and her good friend, Joan Hess, took over and spent three years working with it before it was released. I have to admit that reading about Elizabeth Peters made me a bit sad about the fact that she never got to finish this book. She was a wonderful person who was a dedicated author who loved writing.

**READ THE WHOLE REVIEW OVER AT FRESH FICTION!**

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### **Sarah says**

Honestly, this book missed the mark. Badly.

I can tell that Joan Hess was trying to do justice to the series, but fell far short. If I loved the series less it might be possible to look beyond the constant mischaracterization and frequent continuity errors (I could elaborate on them but I'd be here all day).

I'm glad I read it for the sake of completeness, and the last chapter (which was written by Mertz before her death) was a lovely reminder of the best parts of the series and shows what the book could have been.

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