



The Jackal's Head

Elizabeth Peters

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Althea Tomlinson's ostensible reason for returning to Egypt is to chaperone a spoiled teenager through this fabulous desert land. The truth is more complex . . . and dangerous. Ten years ago, something that happened here brought about her father's ruin and subsequent death—and Althea intends to clear her disgraced parent's name and finally lay a dark past to rest. But there are some mysteries best left buried in the shifting sands, and a devoted daughter's search for answers is stirring up forgotten memories almost too painful to endure, that propel her onward among ancient tombs, legendary treasures, miraculous discoveries . . . and ever-closer to her own threatened doom.

The Jackal's Head Details

Date : Published June 4th 2002 by Avon (first published 1968)

ISBN : 9780380731176

Author : Elizabeth Peters

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Northern Africa, Egypt, Thriller, Mystery Thriller, Audiobook

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From Reader Review The Jackal's Head for online ebook

Susan says

This is a very early Elizabeth Peters thriller, so don't expect Amelia Peabody for a heroine or Ms. Peters' trademark humor. This book's heroine is the type who has the reader thinking "Don't open that door" and "Don't go down that passage" as she flounces off to prove her independence and gets into a fix requiring the hero to come to the rescue. The strongest part of the book is the Egyptian setting and archaeological background.

C. says

One of **Barbara Michael's** standalone novels, which felt like a modern Amelia Peabody and Radcliffe Emerson in 1968; "**The Jackal's Head**" surprised me by being highly enjoyable. Perhaps because "jackal" can have ugly connotations and having disliked one of her single novels, set in México; I long put this aside, bracing myself for a dud. What a joy to get it out of the way and love it. I wanted to bestow five stars, for the flying of pages and breathless circumstances of great discovery while evading danger. The last few chapters were like "Relic Hunter", a 1990s Canadian television show I loved. Intelligence, knowledge of a subject, and calm are the engrossing way to save any protagonist; no implausible happenstance here.

I give four stars because one secondary character was written as too horrid a personage, dissimilar to the gruff Radcliffe in **Barbara's** Amelia Peabody series, who has a loving nature with family. Her writing of early scenes of this novel disgusted me, actually, with her thinking it all right to have a character who strangles the protagonist until she is about to black out; as if not killing her all the way makes this acceptable. Her reason for him acting so violently is just as inappropriate: the protagonist daring to tell him off! Who the hell strangles a girl for that! That she later thinks of this jackass as a love interest shows one stupidity of that fictional era.

If we excuse that, more concrete villains emerge and we turn from Father-avengement to a speeding archaeological race. The target is an Egyptologist's highest dream: the resting place of Queen Neferneferuatn Nefertiti, who died in 1331 BC and her controversial husband, Akhenaten, who was Tutankhamen's brother. All dialogue is very natural and wittily funny along our present day lines.

Teri-K says

This is an early Peters, written before the Amelia Peabody books were begun. It's interesting to see in it the seeds of the later series - this book visits many of the same places, including the Winter Palace and Gurnah. There's even reference to a Master Criminal, and John, (a name Peters apparently loved), is kind of an early Radcliff Emerson. Reading it that way may be more fun than reading it for straight romantic suspense, because it's only partly successful as such, as Peters hadn't yet reached her strengths as a writer. Still it's not a bad book, only suffers in comparison with her later work. Fans of Mary Stewart's romantic suspense might like this. 2.5 stars

Kathy says

This is an older book, written back in the sixties. Tommy (a female) travels to Egypt to clear her father from charges made 10 years ago that he was selling antiquities. The truth was that he had discovered an unknown tomb. Tommy strives to find the tomb, find out who is buried there and find the bad guys.

Lori S. says

In a lot of ways, this book reads like a primer for the later Vickie Bliss novels.

Heather says

Spoilers

Much as I enjoyed the idea of discovering Akhenaten's tomb, the romance really bothered me in this one. John is extremely controlling, doesn't listen to Althea at all, and gets so angry with her that he chokes her till she blacks out. How the ever loving hell is that supposed to be romantic!?!?!?!

Sarah says

This was an enjoyable read, but it wasn't spectacular. Despite the sense of urgency in the last 100 pages with Tommy locked in a tomb, and she doesn't know what part of the country she's in, without food or water and waiting for a murderer to come back (and I would think the dehydration for the 12 or so hours in the hot, dry air would have had more of an impact), I didn't feel the urgency that much. Usually when I'm reading something where the heroine is fighting to escape a dangerous killer, like Nevada Barr's Anna Pigeon series, I get so wrapped up in it, I can't stand to put the book away at bedtime. That intensity just wasn't there for me. Part of that is probably because Tommy isn't actually being chased most of the time, until she gets out and Hassan is out there waiting. But I think a bigger part is due to the fact that I didn't identify with Tommy's character enough, and that's because we don't get enough of it. We get a lot of her backstory in terms of her first 15 years of her life, but then we get 10 years of nothing. I wanted to know a lot more, such as what she does for a living, and more importantly, how did she live as an orphaned 15-year-old? No other family is mentioned aside from Tommy's mother who died in childbirth. It doesn't sound like her father would have left her much money, and even if he'd left her a millionaire, you still aren't allowed to just live on your own when you're 15.

There were also too many parts that I had to reread to understand. I'm still not completely sure how Jake died. At first I thought he died in Egypt. Then we find out it was in a car accident in New York after meeting Bloch and tempting him with the stolen statue. It's never spelled out, but I guess it was truly an accident, since Bloch had to wait 10 years to find the location of the tomb after Jake's death.

The ending is a bit awkward, and I'm not sure I like Tommy ending up with John at all. He says he doesn't want to be a father-figure, but he sounds like he's probably even older than her father. Tommy describes him

as being silver-haired in her memory of him from ten years earlier. And her excuse that she knew John was the innocent one is weak: "I don't know. I mean, I did know, but I don't know how I knew." I suspected John was the innocent one of the two archaeologists because Tommy hates him from the beginning, and even when she softens towards Mike, she still has this animosity to John that she doesn't even bother to hide, which apparently turns out to be due to the sexual tension between them. I also don't know what to do with John's reaction to Tommy saying a few things were destroyed when she was rolling around with Hassan in the tomb. Her stopping herself with "Oh Lord. I didn't mean it to sound like that," and his icy reaction of "It conveys quite a graphic picture" seems to imply what "rolling around" would imply today, that they were engaged in some sort of sexual behavior, when that idea should be absurd to everyone. I hope John wouldn't think she was in on her own kidnapping, especially after seeing her appearance after her escape, and that she'd be doing any fooling around with Hassan, who tried to kill his own twin brother.

Finally, it took a lot of convincing for me to finally get that Tommy is supposed to be 25 years old during the present action. After about the third time it mentions that she was 15 ten years ago, I finally accepted it, but I still thought her character was portrayed as older. She refers to the two grad students, who have to be at least 22, as youths, which is an unlikely thing to think she would call a couple guys who are only three years younger than she is. She also seems to try to make the difference in Tommy's and Dee's ages much greater than the 8-year difference. Tommy actually says something like "to use a euphemism" what telling Dee to stop flirting with Hassan. If the word flirt was considered teenage slang at the time, she certainly wouldn't have to explain that to Dee. Tommy also calls Dee a "modern teenager," which is hilarious, because she was a teenager only 6 years ago.

Now that I've done a lot of complaining, I'd like to say that I enjoyed all the information about Egypt, which interests me, and it probably helps that I can picture the Valley of the Kings, Hatshepsut's temple (where Tommy is knocked out by Bloch), and the ancient worker's village for the workers who would have worked on some of the tombs. It was nice revisiting the area, although about 40 years earlier that I was actually there.

Yinzadi says

The protagonist's future love interest chokes her until she passes out, because he wants her to stop talking. Her other male companion on the expedition shakes her and threatens to spank her. After she is brutally attacked, she blames herself for provoking the man. I kept wondering if I were somehow misinterpreting things, it was so unbelievably terrible.

If this is your first Elizabeth Peters book, don't let it put you off trying her other works. The Amelia Peabody series is excellent, and thankfully a lot more feminist than this parade of normalized abuse.

Priscilla says

I loved it.. i have read it 3 times over the years i always enjoy the plots twist the characters are enjoyable they keep the story line moving with all the excitement and historic land marks
i am a big Elizabeth Peters fan she got me hook after i finished this book a few years ago :)

Russell Nelson says

Almost a romance

Shiloah says

There is something slightly addictive about Peters' novels!

Lia Marcoux says

A little Gothic for my tastes, but a lot of fun, especially since the lost treasure sought in this story is still lost in real life! Also includes a delightful aside about the state of slacks in the late sixties.

Agilborder says

Good

Darla says

(Genre:Fiction/mystery) 2.5 stars. Althea (or Tommy) Tomlinson grew up in Egypt with her archeologist father. But when he was dismissed from his position for attempting to sell a fake antiquity, they returned to the states. Tommy's father died in an accident shortly thereafter, leaving her an orphan at age 15. It's been 10 years since then and Tommy has been living and modeling in New York. But when she receives a cryptic letter from her father's Egyptian friend/dig worker, she knows she has to return and face her past as well as her father's dishonesty and death. Finding passage to Egypt in the company of a rich man's daughter, Tommy soon finds herself in the middle of a mystery, surrounded by people she hasn't seen in 10 long years. A mystery that centers squarely on her father & his career ending disgrace.

Meh. It was an okay mystery. While I did guess who the bad guy was, there were at least 2 plot twists that I didn't see coming. I didn't always like the voice of the main character and I thought the romance that they threw in at the end to be crazy (like 'why would you want to be with someone who treats you like that' kind of crazy). But the setting was interesting and you can tell that Peters knows her subject (Egyptian archeology). So 2.5 stars it is.

Note: I listened to this book on CD and that might have affected how I felt about it. It had more profanity than I liked, as well as some suggestive content. Nothing overly explicit, though.

Kate says

Published 1968 and unfortunately not Peters' best work, without her trademark feminism nor quirky characters. Extra star for tomb description. Sometimes I wonder why they republished these when she got

popular - these are formulaic and conservative even for the time. Zero chemistry between the heroine and love interests. This reads like a Harlequin draft of some of her better work.
