

Jungle Utopias

THE MISSION (1986) dir. by Roland Joffe

MOSQUITO COAST (1986) dir. by Peter Weir

Robert Bolt, who wrote A M a n f o r A l l S e a s o n s and
L a w r e n c e o f
A r a b i a, also wrote THE MISSION, a beautifully filmed account of a

THE MT VOID

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conflict of religion and politics in 18th-century Brazil. The issue is whether a Jesuit mission that stands in the way of slave traders will survive when even the Church itself is siding with the slave traders. Jeremy Irons and Robert DeNiro star.

Peter Weir (T h e L a s t W a v e, G a l l i p o l i, and
W i t n e s s) directed
M o s q u i t o C o a s t. The story is of a mechanical genius who is disillusioned with the United States and takes his family to the jungle to build his envisioned ideal society. Harrison Ford, Helen Mirren, River Phoenix, and Andre Gregory star in this adaptation of Paul Theroux's novel.

Mark Leeper
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CROCODILE AND THE SANDBANK by Elizabeth Peters
Mysterious Press, 1975, ISBN 0-445-40651-8, \$3.95.

THE CURSE OF THE PHARAOHS by Elizabeth Peters
Mysterious Press, 1981, ISBN 0-445-40648-8, \$3.95.

THE MUMMY CASE by Elizabeth Peters
Tor, 1988, ISBN 0-8125-0760-6, \$3.50.

Book reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Amelia (Peabody) Emerson is an "emancipated woman" of the late 19th Century. She is also one of the most aggravating heroines I have encountered in fiction. This is not, as might appear, a sexist remark. Amelia's husband has precisely the same set of faults she has-- overbearing manner, abruptness, temper, refusal to admit even the possibility that s/he is in error--and she regularly castigates him for them, in her writing (the books are told in the first person) and in her conversations with him.

In CrocdileandtheSandbank, Amelia first meets her husband,

Radcliffe Emerson, in Egypt while he is excavating a tomb and she is cruising on the Nile. There they are confronted by an ancient Egyptian curse--or are they? Of course they aren't, and the reader knows this, so the question is who the villain is. The whole situation is fairly obvious, although the abrupt introduction of accomplices to explain inconsistencies is annoying.

The same basic situation--and flaws--can be found in TheCurseof
thePharaohs and TheMummyCase, though Peters does abandon the "curse"

motif in the latter and make it a straight case of figuring out who the smugglers are and what they want. However, she makes up for this improvement by introducing the Emersons' incredibly obnoxious son--the most nauseating toddler since the child in Sonof
Frankenstein (Well, he comes by it naturally--a chip off the old blocks.) At four (so far as I can tell) he's reading hieroglyphics and arguing archaeological theory.

In spite of their flaws, though, I enjoyed the books. Maybe it was because of the Victorian writing style. Maybe it was because Peters can write an obnoxious first-person character that the reader can tell is obnoxious without the character ever realizing it (sort of a tongue-in-cheek obnoxiousness, if you wish). The mysteries themselves are reminiscent of Agatha Christie plots, at least to me, and I would imagine your reaction to Peters would be similar to your reaction to Christie. (I admit a certain extra interest in this series, since I expect to be visiting Egypt soon. In fact, I am now reading Christie's mystery set in ancient Egypt, DeathComesasanEnd, and will probably comment on that in a couple of weeks.)

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