



The Cats of Seroster

Robert Westall

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Cam, a lad of 18, is tricked into a errand to the sinister Seroster, a distant city. Try as he might he cannot rid himself of the mysterious letter or the bloodthirsty knife that goes with it. The author is a two-time Carnegie Medal winner and a Smarties category winner in 1989.

The Cats of Seroster Details

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Author : Robert Westall

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From Reader Review The Cats of Seroster for online ebook

Nadya says

Hard to follow. Could have been a good book if the writing was better.

Catrina Donnelly says

I first rad this book when I was about 11 - it is still my most favourite book and I still have a trusty copy to pick up and re-read whenever the mood takes me!

Georgina Allen says

As good as when I read it as a child, although I did pine for a more definitive ending. I wonder if that was intentional to leave room for a sequel?

Great adventure plot, though. Wasted on kids really ;)

Roane Swindon says

Perhaps I was simply not in the mood for this novel. I went into it with high expectations, since I am somewhat of a Robert Westall fan, and while I found it ambitious and intriguing I felt that the performance was lacking. Read my full review on my blog soon.

Laura says

I read this when I was 13 and remember loving it. Also that the principal cuss was "catsarse". Totally going to revisit as an adult and see what I think of it.

Elizabeth says

This is a fascinating YA novel by an author I've somehow missed. It's a kind of historical fantasy set in France early Tudor times. A very clever young Mr Fixit from England is caught up in the fate of a mysterious city where an ancient breed of Egyptian cats are trying to right a great wrong. There's nothing twee about these cats - they're dangerous and fey. Our hero foolishly accepts the gift of a knife which frees its previous owner from an unwanted life but ties the new recipient inexorably to the cause of the City, try as he might to escape his destiny. After a much savagery, heartache and cunning the book culminates in a brilliant battle. And along the way there is some very clever plotting by both author and protagonist. And

over all the great golden cats and the snarly black ones preside over everything. I see that Robert Westall was a well-known award winning writer in his day and I now intend looking out for more of his work.

Noodles says

This book is very cleverly written.

It has elements of: a journey story, coming of age and finding your place in the world, magic and mystery, political struggles and oppression, natural mysticism.

Cam, the hero, doesn't know what he's getting himself into, and he's battling against his own destiny as much as against his enemies. The reader of the book doesn't have a clue where it's going either.

This book doesn't flinch from the brutal side of life - it's not one for the young or sensitive child.

I loved the cats, with their special communication, and the way the author describes how the cats (and other animals like horse) experience the world. The passed on 'tribal memories' of the cats are nicely portrayed, a bit like human culture in the days before writing. The historical connection was brilliant (won't say more on that to avoid spoiling!).

May have just talked myself into reading it again now!

Andrew Hollingdale says

Having read this many years ago I decided to give it another go as an adult and I must admit that it was very enjoyable. Without giving too much away it is a mix of medieval adventure, mysticism and talking cats.

Although originally a children's book I suppose it would now be classed as YA. There is some violence but nothing that I would consider too over the top.

Whilst the chapters are not particularly long the writing is certainly not aimed exclusively at the younger reader - something I think that Robert Westall should be applauded for. The characters are well rounded and even the good ones have their flaws. The cats are also well rounded with their own distinct personalities. The locations and events described paint a vivid picture of the world.

As I mentioned previously, I enjoyed this book and would urge anyone to pick up a copy if they come across one (sadly I believe it is now out of print). Whilst it may not be to everyone's taste, it will provide readers with an interesting journey, and, after all, every road leads to Bubastis.

Anna Hepworth says

This book has taken me many many months to read, and I can't point at anything in particular that is 'wrong', but I really struggled to latch on to the story. Which is odd, because much younger me would have devoured it in a sitting or two, and it is very much along the lines of the kind of YA that I'm interested in reading (although -- civil war, so not so much). And had I read it as a child/teen, I'd probably be completely enamoured of it now, as a reread - because there are so many details to go 'ooh, that bit, I loved that bit'.

The Seroster of the title is an inherited wizard/leader-in-times-of-troubles position, although much of that aspect of the story is told in hints and moments. Which it needs to be, because it is the story of a young man who becomes the Seroster, and his role in the defeat of the tyrant/usurper. But it is also the stories of the cats, and their societies within the human society. Not pets, not parasites, but something much more symbiotic --

the city lives and dies with the cats.

In some ways a classic quest novel, there are enough unusual elements that it would be simplistic to pigeon hole it as such. For me, the real stand outs of these elements are linked to the cats. Telepathic to an extent that they can manipulate certain other groups, a caste structure that comments on and mirrors the semi-feudal setting for the humans, and a beautifully developed religion and spirituality.

But it is very much a boys (and mens) story. Although there are numerous women throughout the story, enough to circumvent that common question of 'how do they maintain the population with that kind of gender imbalance', few women feature as part of the story. Fewer have names. (except cats. There are female cats with power and influence as well as significant story threads). And while it is nice that they exist in the story in good numbers, there are places that they could have been included as more than shadows, even keeping within the particular tropes of fake-feudal* fantasy.

* I'm not exactly sure of the time period that this was set, but there are multiple references to witch-hunts and the like. So, in terms of 'real world' history, 'feudal' is probably the wrong term, but in terms of a number of the included fantasy tropes, it is definitely that city state/very small regional focus that I associate with fake-feudal fantasy.

Jen says

"Rex, I gypped us some."

The curious phrase that pops up at random in the mind of the main character throughout.

I read this book long ago, when I was still young and wistful- and mostly because of the image of the attractive young man on the cover of the copy at my library.

I then had to own it, and have re-read it on occasion, most recently being last summer.

It intrigues, and does not disappoint.

Robert Westall's tale opens the reader to a world where cats communicate with each other via thought-images, their actions are likened to sun-worship, and their purpose is to protect and defend ancient cities from attack and marauders.

These stewards shelter and rear a missing heir while providing armies to a lone warrior who does not want nor realize the burden laid on him, nor the task he faces.

It's a clever use of history combined with innocent-seeming domestic creatures in order to overthrow oppressive rulers in the fantastical adventure of a coming-of-age tale.

"Rex Aegyptus sum- I am the king of Egypt".

Sandra4444 says

One of the oddest books I've read, but at chapter 14, I'm giving up. What made me decide to stop trying to finish this book was the situation with the cats. It confused me and the writing when the cats communicated was annoying to read. My favourite parts of the book were those with Cam, but they were not good enough to make me get through the whole book. A shame, because I despise not finishing a book, but in this case, I'm not interested enough to see where the story is going.

imyril says

This is one of those few childhood favourites that I don't seem to share with many people - but what's not to like about a historical fantasy with telepathic cats set in southern France?

Englishman Cam of Cambridge is on the move again after his clever thinking gets him accused of witchcraft. Desperate for work, he's easily persuaded to carry a letter to a distant city - only to realise it has mysterious strings attached: a dagger he can't get rid of, and pursuers who want him dead. Hiding in the wilderness, he is adopted by a huge golden cat - but Amon is more than he seems, with an agenda of his own. Cam's destiny is intertwined with that of the cats and the city, whether he likes it or not...

Mystical cats notwithstanding, this is an unlikely children's book in many ways and stands up reasonably well to an adult reread. Its (human) female characters are sadly limited - not even getting a name (for which I'm docking it half a star) - but its matriarchal cats are a joy.

Full review.

Drakov Kinski says

This is one of my all time favorite novels. I first picked up this book in the late 1980s as a middle school student. I have since read the story at least five times. Westall creates likeable characters and has a way of making the cats almost human. I always wished he would write a second book giving us more info about Cam and Amon's later adventures. Loved the fantasy setting and the ancient Egyptian mythology infused in this book. Writing this review makes me want to read it again. How "unfu!"

If you haven't read this story, I highly recommend it and could definitely see this some day making it to the silver screen or at least a full length animated series. Hint, hint Netflix!

'S just my opinion says

I first read this twenty-some years ago when I was in high school and found it at the library. The story Bothered me (yes, with a capital B). I returned it, thought about it, and checked it out again and again. I lost track of how many times. But I was never fully able to stop thinking about Cam and all the cats.

Flashing forward to a year ago. I remembered it, wanted to read it again. Of course the library's copy was long gone, so I bought a copy off the internet.

And yes, it still Bothers me. And I still wonder about what ever happened to Cam.

Huw Collingbourne says

The first novel by Robert Westall that I haven't been able to finish. His best novels (such as The Machine Gunners and Blitzcat) are superb. This one never really engaged me, however.
