

FOR BOOK CLUBS

Whether you're a Seer, a Firekeeper, a wizard, a Sarrian warrior, the Crown Prince of Caithen, or a commoner, there's something for all in this *Moth and Spark* Book Club Kit. Host an event that even the dragons would want to attend.

"The novel is something like a Russian nesting doll: it's a Jane Austen novel inside a Princess Bride type fantasy romp inside a much darker Tolkien-esque story of politics, war, magic, and dragons."

—CHARLIE LOVETT, AUTHOR OF *THE BOOKMAN'S TALE*

ANNELEONARDBOOKS.COM



/ELISABETHANNELEONARD



@ANNELEONARDAUTH

ORIGINS OF *MOTH AND SPARK*

IT BEGAN HERE:

“The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking, and looking, and thinking for your approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike them.”

:Elizabeth to Darcy, *Pride and Prejudice*

There are very few literary couples more interesting—or fun—than Elizabeth Bennett and FitzWilliam Darcy. So when I realized it was time to write the love story that had been fighting to get out of me for years (I shudder to think of myself as “romantic”), what better inspiration than these two characters? Now let’s add a war. There’s actually one going on in the background of P&P (probably one of the Napoleonic wars), but hardly anyone realizes it—there’s one tiny allusion at the end in a sentence about Lydia and Wickham: “Their manner of living, even when the restoration of the peace dismissed them to a home, was unsettled in the extreme.” Since I wanted my love story to be on a bigger scale, I decided to foreground the war.

Then stir in some dragons. It turns out almost everything is better with dragons. With my couple, my war, and my dragons, I had what I needed to start, and the book began. It twisted and turned and shapeshifted in the way that books have of doing, and ended up something very different from what I had imagined when I set out. When it came time to choose a title, I was stumped. Everything I chose emphasized one thing over another: the love story vs. the adventure, dragons vs. politics, hero vs. heroine, epic fantasy vs. novel of manners. So eventually I went for the symbolic. There are moths in the book, and sparks, and they have real significance for the narrative, but they also represent the tension between desire and immolation, love and power, self and other.

Ultimately, for me, the book is a love story with an adventure, or an adventure with a love story. But it’s out of my hands now, and its “aboutness” will become what you, the readers, make of it. —ANNE LEONARD



CHRONOLOGY OF HISTORICAL EVENTS

(T = M&S Beginning)

- 700: First successful unification of the country under one king. ("Treaty of Pell," referenced in Chapter 3 when Tam goes to the library.) Wizardry is at its peak as a political tool.
- 500: Mycene takes the dragons and absorbs Caithen into the Empire. Wizard power begins to fade.
- 300: The Fires. Persecution/Inquisitions of wizards and assorted other undesirables.
- 225: Last war with Argondy.
- 200: Last major civil unrest in Caithen.
- 98: Aram's father born.
- 94: Rois born.
- 79: Wizard village established, first Basilisks.
- 64: Hadon born.
- 54: Aram born.
- 40: Hadon crowned.
- 32: Aram crowned. Kynos born.
- 30: Tam's father goes to Sarium. Aram & Talia married. Theron born.
- 29: Tam's parents married.
- 28: Efan born.
- 27: Mari born.
- 25: Corin born.
- 20: Tam born, Tai born.
- 8: Tam's father goes to Sarium again. Tam and Efan travel with him as far as eastern Illyria. Corin goes to university.
- 6: Tyrekh comes over Black Peaks and takes Na-ir.
- 5: Tyrekh takes Cylicia, moves into Liddea. Corin finishes university and takes on full-time responsibilities.
- 3: Tyrekh finishes conquering Illyria and stops moving. Efan and Cina get married.
- 7 MONTHS: Tai and Ader get married.





PLACES IN CAITHEN

CAITHENOR: the capital. A hilly, medium-sized city surrounded by farmlands. Most of the novel takes place either in or near Caithenor. There's no particular place that it was based on or that I visualized when describing it.

THE BLOODHORN: particularly high mountain with a horn shape like the Matterhorn, but colored red.

THE CITY OF SILENCE: abandoned city in the northwest; now a tourist attraction.

DALRINIA: A small city in the north in a mostly agricultural area. It's old and quiet and out of the way.

DELE: Caithen's largest city and hub of foreign commerce. It's located on the side of a bay, with low hills around it. Think typical seaport.

THE DRAGON VALLEYS: Huge volcanic canyons where the dragons lived. They are remote and challenging to get to. They are entirely imaginary.

THE FELL HILLS: rugged terrain that would be called mountains if they weren't backed up against really high mountains (15-20 thousand feet). The opening chapter of Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* was somewhat of an inspiration. (And there's an odd book, give it a read sometime.)

HARIN: Easternmost city in the country, medium-sized, near the border.

THE HOLD: Small military proving ground in the Fell Hills.

KARISS: a small town in the southeast.

LIDEN: The major university city, small and quiet. I imagine it as a combination of Oxford and Annapolis, Maryland.

MOUNT FANG: another large mountain.

PELL: Second largest city in Caithen in the west. The Treaty unifying various small countries into one nation was signed here.

TOWER PEAK: a large and impressive mountain where the climactic scenes of the novel take place. Tower Peak was inspired by the Minarets in the Eastern Sierra of California, and by some of the other mountains in the Sierra Nevada and around Yosemite National Park.

THE WIZARD VILLAGE: well, this is secret, so you don't get to know anything else. Oh, that's right, it's on the map. This is a village of about 500 people on the coast in the mountains and owes a lot in my general visualization to the small Mexican town of La Mision in Baja California—both in the arrangement of a village on hills beside a river emptying to the ocean, and in its rural poverty. The surrounding valley is more like Yosemite, though.

OTHER COUNTRIES

ARGONDY: borders Caithen on the east.

ILLYRIA: lies east of Argondy. Conquered by Tyrek.

LIDDEA: lies east of Illyria. Conquered by Tyrek.

CYLICIA: lies east of Liddea. Conquered by Tyrek.

NA-IR: east of Liddea, at the end of the Narrow Sea, and west of the Black Peaks.

SARIUM: east of the Black Peaks.

MYCENE AND THE MYCENEAN EMPIRE: Mycene lies south of the Narrow Sea. The Empire stretches east and south. Caithen is the only vassal state north of the Narrow Sea. The northeastern part of the Empire is separated from Na-ir by desert.



MAP OF CAITHEN BY RACHEL SMITH



MOTH AND SPARK CAST OF CHARACTERS

ALINA: a baron's daughter

ALRIC: a soldier

ARAM: the king

ARNET: a baron

BERK: the royal doctor

BRON: Corin's captain

BRYDEN: Aram's clerk

CADE: a courtier

CINA: a baron's daughter, married
to Efan

COLL: the Lord Marshal

CORIN: the prince

DARRIN: a count, courting Jenet

EFAN: a merchant, Tam's brother,
Cina's husband

ELLID: a duke

ELYN: a courtier

ENNOC: a dragonrider

GEROD: the commander of the
palace guard

GUYE: a duke

HADON: the Emperor of Mycene

HYRNE: Tam's father

JENET: a courtier

JOCE: a wizard-spy

KELVAN: a wizard-spy / dragonrider

LIKO: a gentleman fallen on
hard times

LIS (UNNAMED): Tam's mother

MARI: Corin's older sister

MATTAN: a duke

ROIS: a wizard

SEANA: a duchess

SIKA: Aram's dog

SIMOUN: Seana's husband, a duke

TAI: Corin's younger sister

TALIA: the queen

TAM: a young woman

TERON: Corin's clerk

THERRY: a courtier





DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Discuss the meaning of the symbols in novel's title.
2. If you were to wield one magical power or vessel from *Moth and Spark*, what would it be?
3. Who was the most interesting character in the book and why?
4. From magic to dragons, the author has created a lush, detailed, and fantastical world. Be it political, ethnical, or cultural, what aspects of Caithen society reflect our current world?
5. As the author suggests, one can view *Moth and Spark* as a love story with an adventure, or an adventure with a love story, but the “aboutness” of it is up to the readers. In your opinion, what is *Moth and Spark* ultimately about?





A CONVERSATION WITH ANNE LEONARD

MOTH AND SPARK IS YOUR DEBUT NOVEL. WHY DID YOU SET OUT TO WRITE A FANTASY IN YOUR FIRST GO AROUND? ARE THERE PARTICULAR ASPECTS TO THE GENRE THAT YOU FIND INHERENTLY FASCINATING?


Moth and Spark is my debut, but not my first book—there's a large manuscript stack of others. I've always written fantasy. It started because that was what I loved to read as a kid, and it continued because I like making up worlds and because I'm interested in the issues of societal power and justice that fantasy can engage with. Why do leaders make the choices that they do? What gets wars started? Does power corrupt? What about family dynamics in royal families? The unpublished book whose writing preceded *Moth and Spark* had a character trying to overcome his father's legacy as a tyrant, and that's certainly a question I want to explore more.

YOU HAVE, TO PUT IT SIMPLY, A LOT OF DEGREES—A BA, AN MFA, A PHD, AND A LAW DEGREE. HOW HAS YOUR BACKGROUND IN HIGHER EDUCATION INFORMED YOUR WRITING? IS THERE ONE DEGREE THAT INFLUENCED THE CONCEPTION OF *MOTH AND SPARK*?

None influenced the conception of *Moth and Spark* directly, but certainly my education played into my writing. My BA at St. John's gave me a broad awareness of ideas and concepts about the world, both philosophical and scientific, and the lit Ph.D. built upon this with a narrower, deeper focus into how readers engage with stories. My MFA is in fiction, so I learned a lot of my craft there, and when I was revising *Moth and Spark* I kept remembering things I'd been told in workshops 20 years earlier. As for the law degree, one of the reasons I went to law school was that I realized my fantasy fiction was starting to have legal arguments about power and justice in it, and I decided that if that was what I was going to write, I should be paid accordingly. I started *Moth and Spark* the summer before law school, and then worked on it while in school and then in practice. I had to keep legal concepts from contaminating it (especially medieval property law). Reading cases is great for any writer, though, because they are stories of conflict and resolution laid bare.

DRAGONS PLAY A LARGE ROLE IN THE BOOK AND, IN MANY WAYS, HAVE BECOME A POWERFUL SYMBOL FOR THE FANTASY GENRE. WHAT IS IT ABOUT DRAGONS AND OTHER MEDIEVAL CREATURES THAT APPEAL TO YOU?

Well, everybody seems to love dragons! Sentient flying beasts that can breathe fire—how cool is that? I think the thing about dragons is that they seem more possible than other mythical creatures, such as hippogriffs, because we had the dinosaurs. When you go into a natural history museum and look at a *T. rex* skeleton, it's scary and impressive and amazing, and it just seems like if that could exist dragons should too. (I suppose this thinking could apply to unicorns, but horses are just so ordinary and dinosaurs are not.) Also, dragons are bigger and smarter and more powerful than humans, but they have their dragonish ways that makes them different from humans, and it's fun to play around with those differences.



FROM THE VISCERAL DESCRIPTIONS OF CAITHEN TO THE FIREKEEPERS, SEERS, AND THE OTHER MAGICAL CHARACTERS INHABITING THIS BOOK, THE WORLD YOU'VE CREATED IN *MOTH AND SPARK* IS LUSH WITH DETAIL AND WONDERFULLY IMAGINATIVE. HOW DID YOU BEGIN CREATING THIS WORLD?

The book basically began as a book just for me—I'd thrown in the towel on trying to get published for a while and had decided to go to law school so I could make some money writing something more interesting than web copy. I realized I had this fantasy romance Cinderella-type story that had been trying so hard to get out that it was hijacking all my other fiction, so I should just write it. Therefore I went with a fairly traditional European style fantasy setting—the conventions were all part of the story. But I updated it to more or less the early 1800s, and then I pulled a lot of details from 19th century novels and other materials. Some stuff is based on Greek mythology and literature. Some is from my own observations. My hobby is photography, and I have an eye pretty well-trained to see details and notice patterns. I looked at pictures of things online when I wanted to describe something I didn't know well, and I spent a fair amount of time on Wikipedia finding out about poisons and medicines and weaponry and horses and . . . The Internet definitely helped my research.

THERE ARE VARIOUS MAGICAL POWERS OR ITEMS IN *MOTH AND SPARK* THAT THE CHARACTERS WIELD OR USE. IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE ONE MAGICAL POWER OR ITEM TO HAVE AT YOUR DISPOSAL, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

For good or for evil? (Laughs maniacally.) The ability to cast illusions would be pretty great, and of course I'd like to play with fire, but I think the thing that I would really want is the ability to use visions to see the past. I'm a person who is more inclined toward finding things out than manipulating the world, so seeing the past, even just in snatches, would be amazing. This use of visions is more implied than spelled out in the book, because the characters are learning about it too, but that's the underlying magic that could be tapped and used.

NAME ONE FANTASY WRITER AND ONE NON-FANTASY WRITER THAT HAVE INFLUENCED YOUR OWN WRITING.

One fantasy writer is J.R.R. Tolkien, but not for the reasons most people have. When I go back to reread the Lord of the Rings, what I really pay attention to is his use of detail—it's very plain language but extremely vivid, and I consciously used it as a model in writing this book. My favorite sentence in the Trilogy is this one from *Fellowship*: "The sky spoke of rain to come; but the light was broadening quickly, and the red flowers of the beans began to glow against the wet green leaves." It's so simple and vivid at the same time, and not bloated with adjectives at all. Without a really well-grounded normal world, strange and exotic things tend to just be confusing.

One non-fantasy writer would have to be W.B. Yeats, especially his earlier, more mythic poetry. Again, he is fabulous with detail and language. When I get stuck on something I'm writing, I pull out my Yeats and read through and usually it loosens a

block. (I find that poetry does that generally, but Yeats is my favorite.) And there are some specific poems of his that I used for inspiration while writing *Moth and Spark*; one ("Byzantium") is quoted at the beginning of the book.

WHO WOULD BE IN YOUR DREAM BOOK CLUB?

This is actually a really tough question, because college and graduate school was like one long unending book club, and I'm not sure I want another one. But, dead people with whom it would be fun to talk books are E.B. White, Raymond Chandler, Mark Twain, George Eliot, and E. Nesbit. Among the living let's have A.S. Byatt, Stephen King, Toni Morrison, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Mary Doria Russell.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NOW?

I don't like to talk too much about anything I am currently writing, because there's always the chance it will wither on the vine, but I am working on what is technically a sequel to *Moth and Spark*. *Moth and Spark* is a standalone, and lots of people seem thrilled by that (editors, are you listening?), and ideally this other book would be a standalone too, though chronologically about 6 months after the events of *Moth and Spark*. It's a very different, darker story and I'm experimenting some with structure, so it's not a carbon-copy by any means. After that I want to do an SF dystopia about drought, which I got the idea for in a California Water Law class. As a writer, I don't want to keep telling the same story—I want to stretch and write as many different stories and worlds as I can.

