



The Chalice

Nancy Bilyeau

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It was a time of fear. It was a time of prophecy. It was a time for one woman to show a courage she never knew she had...

Winner of the Best Historical Mystery Award from the RT Reviews, 'The Chalice' is a thriller told from the point of view of a young woman caught in the crosswinds of time: She has pledged to become a Dominican nun in an England ruled by Henry VIII, who has ruthlessly smashed his country's allegiance to Rome. By 1538, the bloody power struggles between crown and cross threaten to tear the country apart. Joanna Stafford has seen what lies inside the king's torture rooms and risks imprisonment again, when she is caught up in a shadowy international plot targeting the King. As the power plays turn vicious, Joanna understands she may have to assume her role in a prophecy foretold by three different seers, each more omniscient than the last. The life of Henry VIII as well as the future of Christendom are in her hands—hands that must someday hold the chalice that lays at the center of these deadly prophecies. As she struggles to forge a life for herself in a country that rejects her faith, she must also decide if her future should be shared with a man--and if so, which of the two men who love her should be chosen.

The Chalice Details

Date : Published March 5th 2013 by Gallery Books (first published February 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9781476708652

Author : Nancy Bilyeau

Format : Hardcover 496 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Mystery, English History, Tudor Period

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From Reader Review The Chalice for online ebook

Allison says

I've had a hard time categorizing this series. *The Crown* was nominally a historical mystery, which is why I had picked it up, but ended up being more historical suspense. Now *The Chalice* drops mystery altogether, focusing instead on a prophecy for Sister Joanna that throws her into danger. So maybe historical suspense is the most appropriate label, at least so far. The fact that it is difficult to categorize is one of the reasons I'm enjoying the series.

The story focuses on a Dominican novice during the time when Henry VIII was dissolving the monasteries and priories and stripping the churches to fill his coffers. Joanna, who took vows to avoid the tumult of politics, has been torn from that peaceful existence and is now trying to make a living in the village near her old priory. A few of the friars and nuns remain together, attempting to continue their observances as well as they can while being reviled by the locals who once came to them for aid and education. They find themselves at the mercy of petty authorities with the weight of King Henry behind them.

This is a great perspective on the time period. It does not deal very directly with the Royals, instead showing how ordinary, loyal papists made their way through the tumultuous changes of the English Reformation. From this angle, it was not a holy enterprise!

At the end of *The Crown*, I had an idea of where this sequel might be headed. I thought that with the Priory closed and Joanna no longer a novice, she would settle down and find herself a new life - most likely (hopefully!) with Geoffrey. She would maybe run into some new intrigues and mysteries related to his position as a constable. In my experience of historical mystery/fiction with a side of romance, this was the predictable route, and one that I would have been perfectly happy to explore.

I was completely wrong! There was very little about this book that I could have predicted. Although there was part of me wishing for those next steps that I had envisioned, it was refreshing to find myself being led around by the nose without any idea of where it was going to end up. The way that Bilyeau intertwines Joanna's life with actual events of the time, giving this insignificant woman an importance that few people are aware of, is brilliant.

Joanna is once again caught up in politics against her will, dragged into matters beyond her understanding by family ambitions, and tossed about by forces beyond her comprehension. She is confused and changes a lot during the book, betraying her sense of self and struggling with guilt. The prophecy forces her into crises, muddies the waters of right and wrong, and inexorably drags her in a direction she does not want to go. But rather than making the plot predictable, the prophecy plays out with enough twists to bring about a satisfying ending, so that you look back on what happened with new understanding.

Both novels so far have been very well done. I'm looking forward to the next installment but I no longer have any expectations about where it could go next. (I still have hopes for where it might end up eventually.)

The Lit Bitch says

This novel is solid. It has a well constructed unique plot with an equally unique heroine. Joanna is a well constructed character, I simply need to know what happens next! I want to know if she finds happiness, love, and if she ever gets to have a nice quiet life in the country with her tapestry loom!

This was an exciting read! The Tudor period is such a stormy and unsettling time in history and what could be a better setting for a religious historic thriller? The time period Bilyeau chose is so rich in history and excitement...you just can never go wrong with the Tudor period when it comes to stories about corruption and treason.

See my full review here

Erica Hafferkamp says

I honestly don't understand all the positive reviews for this book. I found the protagonist to be completely unbelievable - the least "nun-y" nun ever (one minute bemoaning the destruction of her beloved religion, the next throwing herself at two different men, the next praying again...come on). In fact, I didn't find any part of the book to be believable, especially not the characters or their motivations. I understand that this is supposed to be more of a historical fantasy than straight historical fiction, but I found it completely implausible and ridiculous. I only finished it because I had to for book club.

Jenny Q says

4.5 Stars. Having really enjoyed Nancy Bilyeau's debut novel *The Crown*, I couldn't wait to see what was next for former novice-turned-spy Joanna Stafford. When *The Chalice* begins, Joanna is struggling a bit in transitioning into secular life now that the monasteries and priories have been dissolved and Henry VIII has effectively eliminated the role of the Catholic church. She's determined to build a life in the village of Dartford, close to her beloved priory, and close to the two men in her life who have become more than friends, constable Geoffrey Scovill and former friar Edmund Sommerville. But Joanna is of noble birth, niece to the executed Duke of Buckingham, cousin to the Duchess of Norfolk, and cousin to the Marquess and Marchioness of Exeter, and her family arrives unexpectedly, asking her to come back and take her place in the world she was born to.

Though they promise her she won't have to return to the dreaded court she despises, they have ulterior motives in bringing Joanna back into their world. Thanks to her service to Katherine of Aragon, her mother's Spanish heritage, her friendship with the Lady Mary Tudor, and her own devout Catholic faith, she's the perfect pawn in a plot to save Christendom from the whims of a tyrannical king. Struggling to adapt to her new lifestyle and her status in society and her interactions with the nobles of the realm, Joanna is drawn into a dangerous game involving international spies, necromancers and seers, and the political maneuverings of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V as Henry VIII prepares to welcome his fourth bride, Anne of Cleves. Torn between her duty to God and to family, and to a king whose destructive policies have upended her life, Joanna is forced to play her part and see the treasonous plan through to its conclusion to protect her loved ones, even if it means her death.

Just about the only drawback for me in *The Crown* was the pacing and some slow periods that had me skimming forward to the action, but *The Chalice* suffers from no such ailment! It's nonstop from beginning to end, with one plot twist after another, and I could not put it down. Nancy Bilyeau has meticulously researched the time period and it comes to life in her hands as she weaves Joanna in and out of the factions of Henry VIII's court, where intrigues, plots, and suspicions abound, where fortunes can change at the drop of an ax, and where no one is safe from the ambitions of those closest to a changeable king. *The Chalice* is superbly written; Nancy Bilyeau's style is effortless and she has a talent for crafting sophisticated, intellectual, and exciting historical thrillers.

There's no doubt Joanna Stafford is one of the more memorable and interesting characters I've come across in Tudor fiction, and while she was given the freedom to really grow and come into her own in this story, I didn't always agree with the decisions she made. Sometimes I wished I could reach through the pages and shake some sense into Joanna, but she was always true to herself and what she believed in, and I can appreciate a character's ability to make me care so much that I get angry with her when she doesn't do what I want her to do! At the end of *The Crown* I lamented the state of Joanna's love life, and I'm still lamenting it at the end of *The Chalice*, though not for lack of development and some really emotional turns of events. Poor Joanna. Is everything ever just going to fall into place for her so she can live a normal life? I'm hoping we'll find out in the next book in the series. Joanna has made some powerful enemies, but she has also made some interesting friendships, and I have a feeling her relationship with poor little Catherine Howard will be taking center stage very soon. This series is a must-read not only for Tudor fans but for all fans of top-notch historical fiction.

Margaret says

This is one of those books, you know the one? It's the one that very early on you stop for a sec and just sit in awe, marveling at the talent of this author. You can just tell with the flow of the words, with the vivid pictures forming in your mind, that this is going to be one of those books that will stick with you long after you are finished. Not just because of the wonderful story (because this is a WONDERFUL story), but also because of the amount of work you know went into it. The amount of research that had to be done and then writing the story made me realize that this is an author with some serious talent. It's like a jigsaw puzzle, where every piece fits together perfectly with no bent corners, missing or forced pieces. I can picture a huge bulletin board, full of sticky notes of 'who is who' and 'who did what', then with string connecting the notes making sure each sticky note was put in the proper place. With this book all those notes were perfectly positioned, there were no disjointed scenes or out of place story lines. It flowed so nicely that I had a hard time putting it down.

We all know the stories of Henry VIII and his wives, but with *The Chalice* (set after the death of Queen Jane) this was a story that showed a darker side to Henry VIII's reign, there was suspense, romance, religious, spiritual elements, mystery along with the supernatural stuff, action and so much more packed into this book. Not a small book, close to 500 pages, but worth everyone of them.

The first book in the series *The Crown* was just as good and I am hoping that there will be a third because I miss Joanna already.

justonemorechapter.com

Judith Starkston says

Bilyeau's first book, *The Crown*, brought us the determined but naïve Joanna Stafford, Dominican nun and daughter of a disgraced aristocratic family, during Henry VIII's reign. In *The Chalice* Henry's dissolution of the monasteries has sent a more experienced but no less stubborn Joanna out into the secular world where she's trying to build a quiet life as a weaver of tapestries. A mysterious prophecy and those who would like to use it to further their power and political desires drag her unwittingly into a bizarre plot against the king and his plans to undermine "the true faith" in England. The most powerful people in England once again tug and pull at Joanna, alternately threatening her life (and those she loves) and courting her as an essential

element to their plans. Joanna's devotion to the Catholic Church and her abhorrence of Henry's destruction of the cloistered life make her willing to participate to a certain extent—a dangerous vulnerability as it turns out—but she becomes entangled in acts that she never anticipated and that violate her deepest beliefs. Faith, its value, and the willingness of supposedly true believers to exploit faith for their own ends, become intriguing, multi-faceted themes in this book. Bilyeau continues from her first book the subtle, complex development of Joanna's character and combines that with a fast-paced, unexpected plot to hold the reader's interest on every page. From mystical prophets to court intrigue to the challenges of romance and love amidst those who had once sworn themselves to chastity, *The Chalice* is writ large across England and the Continent as history and supernatural mysticism combine in this compelling thriller.

Kimberly says

The Chalice is the second book in the Crown series by historical fiction author Nancy Bilyeau that takes place during the reign of King Henry VIII. While I haven't yet read the first book in the series I can say that *The Chalice* can be read successfully as a standalone but it was so good I'm definitely going to have to borrow *The Crown* to get more of the author's writing.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading *The Chalice*. Historical Fiction is one of my favourite genres so it was a real treat to be invited to join the tour for this novel. Rarely have I read a novel that brings this era of England's dark history to life in such a rich and imaginative way that is both captivating and depending on the scenes, disturbing and dark as well.

While I read about Joanna's tale I became completely immersed in the story. For me if an author is able to suck me into the story from the very beginning like Nancy Bilyeau did while I read *The Chalice* that's a sign that she's an author to watch and after finishing this book I can honestly say that Nancy Bilyeau can write anything and I'll read it.

I loved the characters in *The Chalice*. Joanna is probably one of my top 5 favourite historical fiction heroines ever. Her intelligence, cunning, caring and kind personality really counter balanced the dark undertone of the novel. I was surprised to find that rather than use the side characters more as props to the story the author used them to their full potential making them all integral to the telling of the overall tale which I loved. I love when there's a rich variety of characters that have some real substance to them even if they're the bad guys.

I also learned a lot about being a lady in waiting and the customs of going to court as well as other things about life during the tumultuous time period *The Chalice* was set in. You could tell right away that the author takes her craft seriously and you can tell that she's researched the time period thoroughly and that she has a great passion for her work. The amount of detail in the novel was fantastic and was neither too much or too little and I feel as though I learned something reading *The Chalice* which is not something you can say about just any novel.

The story itself though blew me away. The amount of intrigue and betrayal is potent and the plots abound in *The Chalice*. While there is the brief mentioning of events that have taken place in the first book I didn't feel like they spoiled the first book for me and I'm glad that I was able to take part in the book tour for *The Chalice*.

Overall, Nancy Bilyeau wrote a fantastic piece of historical fiction that is both lovely and brutal. I would recommend this book (and the first one even though I haven't had the pleasure of reading it yet) to anyone who loves historical fiction. This is a fantastic novel to read and will suck you in from the first page.

***I received a free copy of this book in exchange for my free and honest review. All thoughts and opinions expressed herein are 100% my own.**

Wanda says

4 APR 2015 - this second entry in the series is better than the debut. Sister Joanna is a terrific character. Moving on to #3.

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

It's no secret the Tudor era is not a favorite of mine but Nancy Bilyeau makes me sing a different tune: first, with her fabulous novel *The Crown* and again this year with the sequel, *The Chalice*.

Returning to the 16th century and her ex-nun Joanna Stafford, this novel delves more into Joanna's life and past as well as the drama Henry VIII's decisions were wrecking on the country. As with *The Crown*, Bilyeau opens her novel with another fantastic first sentence -- *When preparing for martyrdom on the night of December 28, 1538, I did not think of those I love.* -- and the story races from there.

Joanna struggles to make sense of her life and the rapid changes she's endured: once a dedicated nun, she's now living a secular life due only to a decree of the King and by no choice of her own. Raising her cousin's child -- a woman burned at the stake for treason -- Joanna hopes to make a living weaving tapestries when conspiracy and danger find her again. Brought to London with the promise she won't be forced to go to court, Joanna instead is embroiled in a plot to return England to the Catholic Church when she factors into three prophecies, including one by Elizabeth Barton, the Mad Maid of Kent. (Which, if there's going to be religious conspiracies, give me an oracle nun, and I'm in heaven.)

Although from a noble family, Joanna is hardly a typical courtier, which makes Bilyeau's novels such a refreshing entry in the Tudor genre. Bilyeau articulates what it might have been like for those who took religious vows, forced by edict to abandon their life and their beliefs. While the dissolution of those institutions might have ferreted out those who weren't truly religious, for those who were devoted -- like Joanna -- the world has upended. She still believes Henry VIII is divinely ordained, for example, and is rocked to the core when those around her suggest he isn't.

There are some hints of romance in this book, but there's a twist: Henry VIII banned former clergy, nuns, and monks from ever marrying. Still, Joanna feels some attraction to men now -- a monk she's known, a sheriff she just recently met -- and she has to navigate this new tension as well.

I'm not super familiar with this era, so I can't say how many liberties Bilyeau has taken (if any) but I loved the mix of historical and fiction. Joanna is able to move through two worlds -- court life and religious life -- comfortably, and as an educated woman, has a smart 'voice' through which to tell her story. (Although I will admit, she maddened me at times with her choices!)

For Tudor fans, I think this is a must (I've read a few reviews by folks who say this one can be read as a fine standalone, but I encourage you to start with *The Crown*), and for those tired of Tudor novels, but interested in meaty hist fic, pick up these two. Joanna Stafford might be one of my top ten favorite heroines and I'm *dying* for the third book.

Hannah says

This is a really good series. Looking forward to #3, The Tapestry.

Erin says

Find the enhanced version of this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot...>

I admit it has been a while since I picked up a Tudor novel. It is such a popular period and there has been such a slew of new titles in the last few years that I suffered a little bit of burn out. This being the case, you can probably understand my initial trepidation at taking on Nancy Bilyeau's *The Chalice*.

Having finished the book I look back at laugh at my skepticism. Bilyeau's writing is wonderful not to mention addicting. She strikes the perfect balance between fact and fiction, never over burdening the narrative with dreary monologues or allowing the plot to diverge too far from historic events.

Now as far as protagonists go, you'd be hard pressed to find one comparable to Joanna Stafford. She is intelligent without coming off arrogant and kind without coming off saintly. She is incredibly dynamic, a personality I wanted to read about and at the end of the day a reader can't ask for more than that.

Unfortunately I can't say how this its piece compared to its predecessor as I've yet to read *The Crown*, but I will say I appreciated how Bilyeau approached writing a sequel in that she doesn't spend a lot of time rehashing. Written as a standalone, *The Chalice* can be enjoyed by those with absolutely no knowledge of Bilyeau's work.

The Chalice is an intriguing suspense made all the more fascinating in its focus on those individuals displaced by Henry's Reformation. Refreshingly different from most Tudor pieces, it is a compelling page turner that is sure to satisfy.

Lisa says

Hugely disappointing. The first book was terrific - engaging, suspenseful, a good mystery in search of the crown. I was hoping for this book to continue in the same vein, another adventure in search of a relic, but it did not. This book centers much more on the romance, court drama, and some rather implausible prophecies involving Joanna - none of which I particularly cared about. Very little actually happens, but it takes a lot of pages to get there. This is definitely a big step down from the first book.

Christine Roberts says

“*The Chalice*” by Nancy Bilyeau begins at what we assume is the end, the prologue telling us exactly where protagonist Joanna Stafford will be at the end of this long and arduous journey. I received a copy of this book

through a Goodreads giveaway, and immediately borrowed “The Crown”, Bilyeau’s first Joanna Stafford novel, from my local library to familiarize myself with the setting and characters. I enjoyed “The Crown”, and was very eagerly anticipating the arrival of my copy of “The Chalice”.

When “The Chalice” begins, Joanna is in a graveyard, preparing to save the bones of a saint from the clutches of King Henry VIII’s guards. This novel is set in the aftermath of Henry’s divorce, subsequent marriages to Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour, and his separation from the Catholic Church and the establishment of the Church of England. Henry is on a quest to remove all traces of Catholicism from England, including dissolving priories and monasteries all over the country, and forcing churches to turn over all relics and paint over murals and artwork depicting the saints. Having pledged herself as a novice in the Dominican order, but never actually making the vows to become a nun, Sister Joanna resolves to live by the rules and morals of her order, even though it has been dissolved. She joins together with a group of sisters from her priory, and a brother who had joined their community shortly before its dissolution, and tries to live her life in peace according to her beliefs.

This is Joanna Stafford, though, and anyone who has read “The Crown” knows that trouble tends to come to her, even if she tries her best to avoid it. This time, her troubles arise from a series of prophecies, known only to a select group of people that indicate that Joanna can be the only one to stop Henry VIII’s reign of terror and restore peace and Catholicism to England. Joanna tries her best to avoid both the people that are familiar with the prophecy and the implications of it, but eventually she can no longer avoid her fate. Calling upon all of her strength and faith, Joanna embarks on a journey across many lands, putting herself directly in harm’s way, until she decides to fulfill the prophecy on her own terms.

I enjoyed this book, actually more than “The Crown”, both because of the pacing and the eventual outcome. Joanna Stafford is a realistic heroine, with flaws and doubts just like any normal person, but her unshakeable faith makes her a very strong character. Her group of friends, including Brother Edmund, Sister Winnifred, Geoffrey Scovill, and Arthur, her ward, are well rounded and interesting, and contribute much, both to the story and to the reader’s understanding of Joanna. I call this series “Tudor-adjacent”, because while the reader spends some time with King Henry VII, his wives, children, and courtiers, the main characters circle around the periphery of his world. They are important enough that Joanna being near the King, or associating with his court, is not outside of the realm of possibility, but this is not simply another novel about Henry VIII. All in all, a great read, particularly for fans of the Tudor era and historical fiction in general.

Caz says

This is the second historical novel to feature Joanna Stafford, niece of the Duke of Buckingham and formerly a novice at Dartford Priory. The first was *The Crown*, in which Joanna was forced into the service of the powerful Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner in order to save the life of her father.

I don’t think it’s essential to have read that book first in order to fully appreciate this one, as the story stands alone, even though many of the historical figures we encounter appear in both. I regret to say that I haven’t read *The Crown*, but definitely intend to do so in the near future.

In *The Chalice* the English Reformation has led to the destruction of the religious way of life and Joanna, while still referred to as ‘Sister’ is no longer a novice nun. She continues to reside in Dartford, intent on starting a tapestry-weaving business; but as a member of a prominent family, related to both the King and the Duke of Norfolk, the powerful factions around her are not willing to leave her to a peaceful life in obscurity.

The story hinges on a prophecy made about ten years before the action of the book, in which Joanna was told that she would be the one to bring about a change in the fortunes of the Catholic Church in England and to undo all that Henry VIII had done to crush it. Despite her devotion to her faith, or perhaps because of it, Joanna wants nothing to do with the prophecy and in any case, does not see how someone as insignificant as she could possibly be destined for such an act.

The prophecy also tells that Joanna will need to meet with a further two seers in order to discern her course of action, something that she is determined never to do. But as events ten years later bring her into contact with the Exeters, Norfolk, Gardiner and the Spanish ambassador, it becomes clear that she is never going to be able to escape her destiny.

The plot is complex, but never confusing. Bilyeau’s writing is superb, and for the most part, well-paced; and in the character of Joanna Stafford, she has created an extremely likeable, multi-faceted heroine who is shown to be fallible as well as heroic. Joanna is devout, but it’s clear that she would have probably had trouble with vows of obedience. She has problems controlling her temper at times, and has an inquiring mind; perhaps not the best qualities in one expected to conform and submit without question. She is kind without being sugary-sweet, intelligent, but not all-knowing. Her impetuosity and honesty lead her into dangerous situations and attract the wrong sort of notice – yet she is brave, determined and self-possessed.

She has faults – the way she continually denies her attraction to a man who loves her passionately and instead turns to one who, while also loving her, is a much less ‘dangerous’ choice – is a huge self-deception on her part, as well as being somewhat frustrating for the reader. But although there are strong threads of romance running through the book, it is not the main focus. Joanna knows she has more to do than fall in love and finally, having been rather beaten down by circumstances, she makes the decision to hear the final prophecy and meet her destiny.

The Chalice is a superb read, full of suspense and intrigue. The author’s attention to historical detail is excellent – from the conventions of Court life to the day-to-day existence of the lower echelons, and she presents the reader with a fascinating glimpse of the intricate power struggles and politics of Henry’s court. She also raises an interesting question concerning the fate of those expelled from religious orders due to the Reformation; no longer able to serve God in their chosen manner, they were also forbidden to marry and were forced to live on the fringes of society, banned both from a purely religious life and a secular one. If I had an issue with the book as a whole, it was with the fact that the final section which deals with Joanna’s journey to and escape from the Low Countries felt a little rushed, but that didn’t in any way spoil my enjoyment of it.

I can think of no higher praise than to say that this was one of those rare occasions when the fact that the story is told in the first person didn’t bother me in the least – which just goes to show how gripped I was!

Highly recommended – and I hope there are more of Joanna’s stories to come.

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

Having gone straight from *The Crown* into *The Chalice*, I'm remarkably impressed by how largely consistent the two books are in quality, and I had a very similar reaction to this installment, which is to say largely positive but lacking that spark that really makes it a me book. In *The Chalice*, the stakes for Joanna Stafford are raised as it becomes more about her and less about Catholicism in general. Readers who loved *The Crown* will likely find that they are similarly thrilled by *The Chalice*.

Perhaps what I enjoy most about this series is its unique perspective on a heavily documented, in both fiction and nonfiction, historical period. We are obsessed with the Tudors, most specifically with King Henry VIII's reign. The drama, the sex, the beheadings, and the betrayals make that period such ripe fodder for entertainment. As such, it's been done to death, except that clever authors can still manage to put a unique spin on well-trodden ground. Rather than focusing on the usual suspects and court life, Bilyeau looks at this turbulent period in English history from the perspective of a novice nun, and puts the shift to Protestantism into sharp, personal relief.

Though not of a religious persuasion myself, the way that Bilyeau confronts these issues is fascinating. The former nuns, friars and monks are lost in this new world, the priories and monasteries having been dissolved at the end of *The Crown*. Some of the former religious personages manage to establish fairly ordinary lives, marrying and finding professions. Many, though, live together on their pensions, trying to keep life as much as it was before as is possible. Others, desperate, wander the kingdom in search of God and a sign, beaten and battered by the judgmental and fearful. Their world has changed so rapidly, which is all the more upsetting for those who have been cloistered in places of routine and unchanging order.

I still really like Joanna Stafford, but she wasn't quite as level-headed in this one. She waffles back and forth between her two love interests and the possibility of being single. To distract herself from her indecision, she throws herself into absurdly idiotic schemes in the name of her faith without thinking them through. She gets arrested so many times and saved by her connections, thus embroiled into another huge scheme where she's manipulated by other forces, wresting control for herself at the last minute through her badassery. The way that all came out just felt rather contrived. In addition, I wasn't a huge fan of the mysticism angle, though it was an interesting interpretation of King Henry VIII's difficulties fathering children.

Like with *The Crown*, *The Chalice* was a bit of a slow start for me, though I did get quite absorbed at certain junctures. The slowness was not aided by the one formatting change Bilyeau made, adding a prologue and epilogue to this installment. I did not much care for these, as they, like most, are intended merely to drum up dramatic irony. The prologue hints that Joanna might die, and then jumps back two months to wind the story forward. I'm not a fan of this narrative device at the best of times, but thought it particularly weak here, since the moment therein isn't even the culmination of the main plot arc, but a minor, stupid plan. The epilogue just felt redundant and out of place, but is, likely, paving the way for book three.

All in all, I'm still quite impressed with this series and do plan to read the third book when it comes out. They're definitely good reads for those who appreciate historical fiction with less of a focus on romance and sex scandals.
