



The Disorderly Knights

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The third volume in *The Lymond Chronicles*, the highly renowned series of historical novels by Dorothy Dunnett, **Disorderly Knights** takes place in 1551, when Francis Crawford of Lymond is dispatched to embattled Malta, to assist the Knights of Hospitallers in defending the island against the Turks. But shortly the swordsman and scholar discovers that the greatest threat to the Knights lies within their own ranks, where various factions vie secretly for master.

The Disorderly Knights Details

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From Reader Review The Disorderly Knights for online ebook

Kate Sherrod says

Oh, Lymond, Lymond, how I do want to love thee. And every book you almost, almost talk me out of it. Every book you look guilty as hell of whatever crimes most have all of Scotland/France/Malta/Wherever up in arms, and every book you turn out to be, well, I'm trying not to spoil anything here, but there are three more books in this series, so certain truths are probably pretty evident, even to the kinds of people you're so very, very good at fooling...

The Disorderly Knights, the third in the great Dorothy Dunnet's great Lymond Chronicles, broadens the geographic, political and moral scope of our favorite Renaissance bad boy considerably. The Knights of the title are none other than the famous Hospitallers, aka the Knights of Malta -- though an argument could be made for that title also applying to a mercenary company our man forms when he finally gets back to Scotland about halfway through the novel -- and they're in a bit of a pickle, one that the King of France seems to think Lymond might be able to help them out of, or at least bear honest witness to. The King of France being something of a Lymond fanboy after Lymond's exploits last novel in defense of the six-year-old Mary, Queen of Scots, who is engaged to marry the King's son. Ah, dynastic politics!

The problem the Hospitallers face is the same one they were formed to face, namely the Turk, whom they've helped to protect Europe and bits of North Africa from for a good 400 years. But as of the late 16th century, though, well, the Knights have gone a bit to seed. The Grand Master is a bit of a jerk, and a Spanish jerk at that, and the Holy Roman Emperor being Spanish as well, unseating the GM and putting an effective leader in charge is tricky, especially when the good candidates for that job are all either French or Scottish...

Really there's only one Scottish candidate, though, a man in whom our Lymond has definitely met his match. Sir Graham Reid Mallett, nicknamed Gabriel, is everything Lymond is but turned up a notch: a great big gorgeous blue-eyed blonde who is also a genius, a brilliant leader of men, a great strategist, fighter and tactician, but also a holy man, because like the more famous Templars, the Hospitallers are all warrior monks, in the service of God and the Roman Catholic Church, priests with swords. When he and Lymond meet up, the whole world seems fixed to change. Gabriel becomes obsessed with winning Lymond over for Jeebus and won't take no for an answer; Lymond, of course, is loyal only to Scotland and his family and finds religion profoundly unnecessary, if not actually detrimental to a well-lived life. But like I said, Gabriel won't take no for an answer, and soon insinuates himself into every possible aspect of Lymond's life as the duo and a small contingent of Hospitallers first fail to defend various tiny Mediterranean islands from the Turkish onslaught and then, for an encore, lose the famous stronghold city of Tripoli to the Turks. Oops.

Covered in glory like that, what can they do but return to Scotland, where Gabriel has stashed his drop-dead gorgeous sister, Joleta, whom he has already intimated is his ace in the hole (umm) as far as winning Lymond's soul for Christ is concerned, because of course Lymond will convert for the privilege of maybe getting to schtup her. Really, kind of a Lymond thing to hope to do, as Lymond has, more than once, proven that he's not above seducing the odd strategically important round-heeled woman to achieve his goals. Did I mention Lymond has met his match here? Except that now we find there are two of them!

Of course by about two thirds of the way through the novel, the reader discovers she's misread pretty much everything, because the only person better at deception and red herringry than Lymond is his creator, Ms. Dunnett. But when it's artistes like these, it's a pleasure so to be fooled.

Meanwhile, there is everything one would turn to some good historical fiction like this in order to enjoy: more amazing sword fights, sieges, battles of all sorts, border reivers and the Hot Trodd law (and lots of

other weird Renaissance English/Scottish border law), sexual politics and oh, about the sexual politics...

I've not yet mentioned the women of *The Disorderly Knights*, apart from the sex bomb Joleta, who is really the least interesting figure in the book. Most of my old favorites are back and getting good page time, with Lymond's mother Sybilla stealing scenes as usual, but also of note are two others, who come to the fore in this novel after kind of making me yawn in *The Game of Kings and Queens Play*: Oonagh O'Dwyer -- former mistress of a would-be king of Ireland, who spent most of *Queens Play* trying to abet her man in his plots to conspire with the French and Scots to throw the English out of Ireland (we all know how well that worked), only to have an encounter with Lymond that looks to turn out to be way more important than it seemed at the time -- and Philippa Somerville, twelve or thirteen-year-old daughter of an English lord who was friendly with Lymond back in the day but who herself hates Lymond like poison and spends a lot of *The Disorderly Knights* just entertainingly gnashing her teeth at him until circumstances and her own sense of fair play cause her to woman up and kick about 20 kinds of ass all over northern England and southern Scotland and become my new favorite Dorothy Dunnett lady.*

So I find myself so eager to tear into the next book, *Pawn in Frankincense*, that I don't see any reason not to, even though lots of other good stuff beckons from my to-be-read pile. I was warned that this might happen.

*Though her presence reminds me that my other favorite bratty Dunnett tween, Lady Agnes, has disappeared completely from this narrative, and that makes me a little sad. Agnes does not hold a candle to Philippa in the awesomeness department, but she was terribly amusing in *The Game of Kings* and I miss her a lot.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

It took me over a month to work my way through this third novel in Dorothy Dunnett's challenging *Lymond* series. It's lengthy and complex historical fiction novel, and there were more than a few detours for me along the way (I was easily distracted by other books in the early stages, but that was my fault as much as this book's). But once again, as the story started moving toward its climactic scenes, and events got more and more exciting and gripping, and the pieces started to fall into place and answers to surface, I was totally sucked in.

It's the 1560's, and Francis Lymond, who is too talented and observant for his own good, is sent by the King of France to the island of Malta, which is in the control of the religious order of the Knights of Malta. Immediately he's surrounded by political and religious intriguing for power, which takes a break (or does it?) when the island is attacked by a Turkish force. From there the action moves to Tripoli (more battles and intrigue, and a truly nail-biting scene with attempting to defuse a bomb) and then back to Scotland, where Lymond forms a private army and continues his life-or-death battle with an opponent who is subtle beyond belief.

The sometimes excessive flowery language and use of random and obscure quotations (more often than not in a foreign language, untranslated of course; Dunnett isn't one for coddling her readers), which was a major issue for me in the first book and somewhat less in the second, has been toned down **a lot**, making this book much more readable. This is still a challenging read, however, with lots of different personalities to keep track of, political and family conflicts to understand, and layers of complexity and deception to unravel. It challenged my brain, and occasionally frustrated me, but in the end I can only say that this was incredibly awesome.

ETA: Huge spoilers in the discussion thread below, mostly unmarked. Read at your own risk.

Giki says

The third in the Lymond chronicles series. If you have got this far then you have probably read and enjoyed the first two books. You will be just as frustrated, disappointed, shocked and annoyed by this glorious book as you were by the previous 2. I kind of despise myself for being so consumed by these books, but like the addict I am, I dived straight into the next one after finishing this.

The book opens in raucous style with Will Scott marrying his auntie in the middle of a border raid. After France, for political reasons best instantly forgotten, Lymond is required to travel to Malta to assist the knights of St. John in the defense of the Island against the Turks. His decision to go is definitely not in any way influenced the fact that a certain Oonagh O Dwyer has taken up residence on the nearby Island of Gozo.

Throughout the early part of the book I feel Lymond is like a frustrating shadow – always somewhere else – his story told, as usual, through someone else's eyes, but we seem more distant from the action and the sparkling wit than in previous books. The language has changed also, gone are the over complex, obscure, multilingual references in everything Lymond says. Perhaps he learned in France, just how irritating everyone else found that. I kind of miss it, it was part of the rhythm of the reading, you can skim over, ignore what you don't understand, or you can rub away and reveal the gems underneath.

Lymond has changed too, he is sober for one thing, and appears competent and in control, at the peak of his powers. Trying to build for the future. Taking responsibility for his own actions and the consequences they might have. He seems to have learned from O'Liamroe's painfully spelled out lesson on leadership at the end of the last book.

And then he does something. Something so despicable, unexpectedly cruel, selfish and ill-timed that there can be no going back, there can surely be no redemption now. I felt nauseous with the force of it, as if I, in admiring so much this book and being so engrossed in the reading of it, was somehow partly culpable for the shocking transgression. The author's skill is such that I hardly notice the writing, the way she leads us into this trap, this is fiction after all, but the emotion is visceral.

This book is wonderfully well written, intelligent, shocking and irreverent – the author is in complete control at all times. She has a wonderful talent for historical description, her descriptions of the people and places of 16th-century Scotland, that I vaguely remember from my dull dry high school history lessons, are wonderfully evocative and alive with atmosphere. I know how it feels now, to stumble around the night time streets of old Edinburgh, and what dangers may lurk around every corner.

Read this book – there is good stuff here. Expect to work for it, but it will be worth it in the end.

Misfit says

Francis Crawford of Lymond is sent by the French King to the Island of Malta where the Knights Hospitallers are threatened by an invasion from the Turks. While there Francis is caught up in the politics of the Knights, in particular one Graham Malett who the reader will discover is not at all what he and his convent raised sister are what they appear to be on the surface. As Dunnnett slowly peels back the layers of her story, the reader is taken from Malta to embattled Tripoli and then back again to Scotland as Francis intrigues to discover Graham's hidden agendas. To say much more would give away the whole plot, but be prepared for some memorable moments that will stick with you for long after the book is finished. The scene

with the sheep (LOL), the nail biting suspense in Tripoli as they try to defuse the flame before Tripoli is blown to bits and of course the final climax during the sword fight between Lymond and his greatest enemy.

Throughout, Francis Crawford is a fascinating hero, and is as suave, debonair, flawed and fascinating as only a 16th Century version of James Bond could be. This is a complicated tale, and one that a reader has to pay close attention to, if you let your mind wander you may have to back track occasionally as I did. Dunnett is also very subtle (sometimes too much so!) and you do have to wait until the very end when all is revealed during a heart stopping sword fight in an Edinburgh cathedral, and a big surprise for Francis that will have you scrambling for the next book in the series, Pawn in Frankincense: Fourth in the Legendary Lymond Chronicles. Five stars.

Trin says

Aww yeah. This is where the series really gets cracking. Suddenly we have:

- An ongoing plot!
- More recurring characters!
- Philippa (Philippa Philippa Philippa!) getting to *do stuff!*
- Another goddamn badass sword fight!
- LYMOND'S NEMESIS!

We also have:

--Lymond DECIDING ONCE AGAIN NOT TO SIMPLY TRUST PEOPLE LIKE HIS OWN MOTHER AND BROTHER AND TELL THEM WHAT THE FLIP IS GOING ON AND ASK FOR HELP UNTIL LIKE PAGE 400 JFC FRANCIS...but that is more of a feature than a bug. (Oh, *Lymond.*)

It's a wild freaking ride -- it really does fly by in comparison to *Queens' Play*. And you can see Dunnett enjoying herself, and sneaking in all kinds of clever hints and jokes *just for herself* -- or those who have the foreknowledge that, with these twisty-turny books in particular, can only come from rereading. How delightful.

Now if only I hadn't left the next volume at work, so I could ill-advisedly begin reading it right now, at 11:47 p.m. on a Sunday!

sarah says

[a lot of the conflict here turned on the supposed chastity or lack thereof of a female character, which always makes me uncomfortable no matter how villainous that character might be or how consistent it might be with the time period the book depicts. (hide spoiler)]

Melanie (Mel's Bookland Adventures) says

Dunnett always toys with you and your expectation of where the plot is going. Loved it.

Danica says

MUCH TOO LENGTHY THOUGHTS:

Well, I seem to have been properly sideswiped by this one. or perhaps the more accurate verb would be trounced. trammled. shebanged. My sleeping habits these past few days have been nothing short of atrocious. Even as I type this I am thinking of throwing aside my laptop and making a dive for Pawn in Frankincense, lying but a few feet to the right of my itchy fingers. (I suppose I should be grateful there is no title in this series called The Fianchettoed Bishop, because book 3 has enough of the religious zealotry and evilly cunning dudes scheming death and warfare and spit-roasted babies to last for the rest of the series. And I do hope it does.) I think I prize the earlier books more for their depictions of character interactions, which feel slower and deeper and more mysterious than the relationship development you get in DK, because rather than sitting the characters down and setting them to brooding and Having Feelings (cf. nol), Dunnett effectively hands everyone guns and fires the beginning volley. To great effect: the need to know what happens next becomes something like a physical compulsion. I HAD to keep reading through the last 100 pages. During the whipping scene I was sitting at the Korean restaurant during lunchtime with my mouth slightly open and a piece of seaweed hanging out of it. I'm not kidding, I even got a piece of tofu stuck in my craw.

My earlier complaints are put to rest, at least for the duration of this book. Mostly I couldn't predict what would happen next, although sometimes I did (e.g. totally called the reason for Joleta's surprise appearance in Lymond's room). And it was epic. Oh, was it epic. And some scenes, like the aforementioned one, scorchingly intense.

Still, the effect is strangely two-parted. On one hand, I am amazed that Dunnett is able to so completely enthrall a jaded reader such as myself; and yes, pretentious though that may sound, I feel qualified to say so because I've read so many damn books, and it gets harder and harder to completely suck me in, to knock me onto my butt with something I've never seen or felt or been made to feel before. Always, there is a stupid little voice piping up in the back of my head, saying things like "But that plot turn was badly handled!", or "This character could use a little bit more meat here..." (IT'S LIKE HAVING BHARATI MUKHERJEE HANGING OVER MY SHOULDER WITH HER DESSICATED HAIR AND HER YAPPY LITTLE DEVIL DOG FOR ALL THE REST OF MY READING DAYS. BANISH THE THOUGHT.) But maybe, maybe, the problem is that all the books I've been reading are too, well, same-y: contemporary literature, written by writers schooled to write in certain ways. And certainly not in the glinting, intricately embroidered, pillowy-plush sentences that Dunnett is so skilled at unfurling, billowing, over her entranced readers:

"Between the palaces of the knights and those that served them; the convents, the elegant homes belonging to officers of the Church and the town; between the bakehouse and the shops of the craftsmen, the arsenals and magazines, the warehouses, the homes of merchants and courtesans, Italian, Spanish, Greek; past the painted shrines and courtyards scraped from pockets of earth with their bright waxy green carob trees, a fig, a finger of vine, a blue and orange pot of dry, dying flowers and a tethered goat bleating in a swept yard, padded the heirs of this rock, this precious knot in the trade of the world. Umber-skinned, grey-eyed, barefoot and robed as Arabs with the soft, slurring dialect that Dido and Hannibal spoke, they slipped past the painted facades to their Birgu of fishermen's huts and blank, Arab-walled houses or to sleep, curled in the shade, with the curs in a porch."

I just want to rub that sentence all over my body. Okay.

On the other, I still miss a certain depth of character intimacy and relationship development. Richard nursing Lymond back to health. Thady Boy and Robin Stewart on the clock tower. Lymond and the little Queen jesting about turnips. Instead, we get Lymond directing all after masterfully revealing the machinations of the most vile gorgon to ever blight the surface of 16th century Scotland and everyone meekly doing as they're told because, duh. Lymond=genius. There's not much time left after the revelations of evil-doings and harlotry and political intrigue and nonstop action and also SWORDFIGHTS (FYI not as good as the Richard-Lymond showdown. true fact.) and OSHIT EVILLEST VILLAIN EVA!!! for quiet looks to be exchanged between Lymond and Jerott which simultaneously telegraph compassion, pain, understanding, resentment, and love all rolled up into one smouldering synaptic exchange.

But, you know, I have a feeling that that's coming up. :D

Spoilery thoughts:

+ I know the ending was supposed to be horrible, and I did feel sickened by the casualties and Joleta and Gabriel's very staged performance before the legions of St. Mary's, BUT I ALSO LOL'ED WHEN GABRIEL WAS LIKE, "I spit upon your grave! May your son's putrefying corpse boil over with maggots! And now I vault over pews and run away, glinting evilly, MWAHAHAHAHAHAHHA!" lolllll. Over the top.

+ Holy shit guys. I LOVE RICHARD AND SYBILLA OKAY. I love the part where Richard slams his hands down on the roundtable gathering and in answer to Lymond's request for help is like "NO >:E" and when Lymond closes his eyes in anguish jolts him back to earth by adding "NO, WE MUST HUNT HIM DOWN RIGHT NOW!!". Also love how Sybilla's opinion is the only opinion that makes Lymond seize up and, looking shiftily from side to side, inch towards the nearest exit. My heart squeezes from my adoration of the Culters. Squeeeee.

+ Speaking of Richard: his honesty = Lymond's inability to tell the truth to exculpate himself from blame makes for a great dramatic device. This has happened at least twice by this point. Interestingly, the reader gets put in the same position.

+ Jerott Blyth is pretty cool, but I have a feeling he becomes a fuller character in later books, since the treatment of the tragic death of his fiancée is mentioned about three times and then is dropped completely in favor of Antics. I like how he trails around after Francis for most of the book though, muttering under his breath and darkly massaging the pommel of his sword. Oh wow that sounds perverted. MOVING ON. It's interesting that Lymond swears to himself that he'll get Jerott out of this safely, and interesting that he reacts in such a way to Jerott's request to stay, since the book doesn't really provide firm reasons for *why* he'd feel that way. Although god, I still love this scene. So much tension. So many feelings. Jerott being all woobie-eyed and beseeching and Lymond's reaction. as;skgjsaklsgjlaskgja.

"They ask more than anyone can give," said Lymond, his manner suddenly altered, and got up. "Is this true? You see beyond Gabriel's shadow to the ideal of the Order? And beyond mine to ... what I mean to do, rather than what I do?" He smiled, though not with his eyes, and coming forward, stood with Jerott in the doorway. "You will find your place, Jerott. Good luck. And God speed you to France."

He did not touch the departing man, nor did his eyes have in them any of Gabriel's lucent candour; but Lymond's voice was as Jerott had rarely heard it, pared of all mockery, and a little of the warmth he was suppressing, despite his effort, showed through.

And for some reason, this brought Jerott's whole mechanism for speech, emotion and deed to a shuddering halt. He stood, his stomach turning within him, and heard Lymond add, his voice cool once more, "How unimpeachably shiftily it sounds. What a fate for the tongues of the world, that after Gabriel all that is true and simple and scrupulous should sound like primaeval

ooze."

It was then that Jerott took heed at last of the knot in his belly and the ache in his throat, and announced, regardless of every plan he had made, "I should like to stay. May I?"

"Oh, God, Jerott," said Francis Crawford, and the blood rose, revealingly, in his colourless face. "Yes ... but ... oh, *Christ* I'm glad; but if you touch my back once again you'll have to see the whole bloody thing through yourself."

Residue of childhood affection? Pity for the guy because he's spent his life in unknowing worship of unmitigated evil? A simple yearning for friendship? Desire for eye candy*? (If I had to guess I'd cast my vote for door 4 3, actually.)

+ Joleta freaked me out, man. I know you've said that you hate what happens to her, Nol, but I can't imagine lovely fanfic. At first she was hilariously naughty, oh, shooting the horse, oh, haha, hilarious, and oh, now she's gone and got the baby drunk, haha, what a darling girl, let's braid her hair and give her cuddles, BUT THEN she becomes SINISTER and MENACING and CRAZY. I have problems with the way promiscuity=bad in this book, so it's not like I think that b/c she had the temerity to have sex with men THEREFORE SHE DESERVES TO DIE, but her complicity in her brother's plots weren't exactly. you know. fraught with guilt. If anything she just seemed like she was deriving way too much unhinged enjoyment from lying and killing things (Sybilla's cat ;_____;).

+ In contrast, Philippa Somerville = AW YEAH.

+ How impressive that Dunnnett is able to tie this roil of plots and subplots into a unified whole? Very.

*words or phrases used to describe Jerott Blyth: handsome; magnificent; beautifully built and hard as iron; magnificent eyes (twice); handsome, smouldering knight that Francis always dragged around with him; curling raven hair and hawk nose; beautiful young man

xebec says

ok here is my review for this book

in helpful illustrated form

Algernon says

Dear me, said Lymond mildly. I am being taken to an unfortified island, where half the defenders and most of the defence fleet are missing, to lay down my life in defence of an Order incompetently if not culpably led, wholly divided among itself, given over to fighting for secular princes and entirely denuded of money with which to pay me for my services. Where are Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude and Justice? Where are the the Eight Beautitudes of that proud White Cross? Where are the Crusaders of Yesteryear, chaste and highborn, dying in virginal joy for their wovs?

The third outing of Francis Crawford of Lymond takes him to Malta, last refuge of the once powerful Order of the Knights Hospitaliers, now torn apart by internal struggles mirroring the larger conflict in Europe

between the powerful monarchs of Spain, France, England, Germany (Heir to the holy Roman Empire), the Italian city-states and the Papacy. Instead of pulling together in one direction, the knights are separated into factions formed around their national origins. From this situation the big winner is the Ottoman Empire who steadily gains ground in the Mediterranean and along the North African coast, with the aid of Barbary corsairs.

The metaphor of the chess game is still the foundation on which the plot is built, with a new game starting, introducing new pieces ready to be sacrificed, raising the stakes to higher levels of complexity and danger. Another returning element is the murder mystery angle, as Francis Lymond is sabotaged every step of the way by a secret opponent. The identity of this adversary is not as skillfully veiled as in the previous two books, but that's OK because for once we are dealing with an enemy as intelligent, as strongly motivated, as driven and as ruthless as our nominal hero. It is a duel of titans that starts rather innocuously with heated philosophical, religious and moral debates and finishes with barred steel clashes in earnest, as entertaining as an Errol Flynn classic movie but a lot more disturbing in terms of emotional torment (view spoiler)

- I hope we all strive for perfection. Shoddy work earns no miracles, surely. But we are human. We can achieve so much only. With our knowledge of divine grace within us, we may become more than human, that is all.

- Why ascribe it all to Divinity? Zest and power and exhilaration may spring from much that is far from the divine. Faith in one's cause, one's leader, one's love will equally do.

- All these things are fallible.

- Of course they are. But are the channels of Holy Church immune to error? Her priests, her offices, her very tenets are subject to doubt. Her interpreters are only human, and most souls, however aspiring, follow the human instrument, not the belief.

This is an example of the kind of verbal skirmishing Lymond engages in as he tries to remain a free agent while his loyalty is courted insistently by the Knights of St. John, the Queen Regent of Scotland, the King of France and the Turks. Sir Graham Reid Malett, better known as Gabriel, a Grand Cross of Grace in the Order, is the most persuasive and articulate of them all, and he is not above using his own sister, the breathtakingly beautiful Joleta, as an instrument of temptation. The passage is also an apt illustration of the underlying humanist nature of Francis, who puts his trust easier in human nature rather than in some abstract Divine Force.

Speaking of Francis, he is both a chameleon, presenting a new aspect of his personality in each novel, and consistent in his proficiency at everything he sets up to do. In the first book he was the young, tempestuous second son fighting to clear his name of slander, a fun loving, raucous, exuberant and morally flexible rascal. In the second book he was the gallant knight defending the life of his infant Queen, putting his own life on the line while also being the soul and inspiration of wild parties and wicked pranks. In this third guise he is a lot more tempered, keeping the wilder part of his nature under strict control, cold blooded and grim, abandoning laughter, music, drinking, wenching in order to become a leader of armies at a still very young age. He starts by leading the defense of Malta, Gozo and Tripoli against the Ottoman fleet, with mixed success, and in the second half of the novel he moves back to Scotland in order to establish his own mercenary company at St. Mary : an elite troupe of soldiers led by a core group of talented Renaissance men, not only warriors, but architects, lawyers, poets, merchants, etc..

Brute force is the most saleable commodity in Europe today. In six months mine shall be in the market, washed, sorted and trimmed, and priced accordingly.

The St. Mary captains provided me with the first small grumble about the series: they were introduced too abruptly, out of thin air, already familiar with Francis and apparently with background stories I should recognize easily. Instead I struggled for a long time to differentiate between them and to keep track of what

is the particular talent of each one of them. They are: Jeroth Blyth, Graham Reid Malett, Lancelot Plummer, Fergie Hoddin, Randy Bell, Alec Guthrie, Hercules Tait, Adam Blacklock, Salablanca the Moor, Archie Abernethy. For what is worth, it gets easier as the story progresses, especially when you get to the fourth and fifth volume in the series. (yes, I read them already, I'm behind in reviewing the books)

A divided nation; a divided God; a land of ancient, self-seeking families who broke and mended alliances daily as suited their convenience, and for whom the concept of nationhood was sterile frivolity .. what could weld them in time, and turn them from their self-seeking and their pitiable, perpetual feuds?

I thought to repay a debt by giving my own land for a few months the security it had lacked for forty years .. But we are still infants, where emotion finds outlet in force and force is met by emotion, and people cannot conceive of themselves yet as nations instead of as families ... and certainly not as a brotherhood of nations, when even the sister religions bring their armies against one another.

The intention behind the formation of the company is a noble one, as seen in the quotes above. The political spectrum in the XVI Century Europe is still primarily feudal, with kings often having less actual power than their nominal vassals, without standing armies (with the exception of the Turks, which might be one explanation of their succesful campaigns). Soldiers were amateurs, farmers called up by their landlords in times of trouble, or knights more interested in personal feuds than in defence of the nation. Lymond sets up to remedy the situation and his boot camp recruits are so brilliantly succesful in policing the troubled border between Scotland and England that the higher powers decide they cannot allow an unaffiliated private army to roam their lands. Both the Queen Dowager and the Knights of Malta plot to remove Lymond from the command of the company and to appropriate the men for their own interests.

In this way the novel weaves together the personal struggle between Lymond and his archenemy with the larger issues of Europe in its moment of transition from small barons to centralized power. I will direct my final remarks at the personal level instead of the grander picture, as I find my fascination for Lymond unabated at he end of these three books. Dunnett prefers to let the image of her hero develop indirectly, through the eyes of his anturage and through the results of his actions instead of letting him explain his reasons and motivations plainly.

You draw your strength from the Devil to seduce men. - this exclamation comes from Jeroth Blyth, a young Knight in the order and the third incarnation of the innocent accolite that falls under Lymond's spell.

He regards boredom,I observe, as the One and Mighty Enemy of his soul. And will succeed in conquering it, I am sure - if he survives the experience. - this from the Chevalier de Villegagnon, another Captain from Malta impressed by Lymond frantic energy and reckless abandon to the moment of action.

The trouble about Mr. Crawford is that he puts up with his enemies and plays merry hell with his friends. - this from Kate Sommerville, a rare disinterested friend of Lymond, painfully watching as he destroys his health and his peace of mind in trying to bring down a ruthless adversary.

I said in a previous review that Francis likes to keep the cards very close to his chest and to hide behind a confusing barrage of obscure poetry and misdirecting classical quotes. The instants where he lets the mask drop and bares his soul are rare as diamonds and come unfortunately in moments of great stress and pain:

What does anyone want out life? What kind of freak do you suppose I am? I miss books and good verse and decent talk. I miss women, to speak to, not to rape, and children, and men creating things instead of destroying them. And from the time I wake until the time I find I can't go to sleep there is the void - the bloody void where there was no music today and none yesterday and no prospect of any tomorrow, or tomorrow, or the next God-damned year.

He had become a soldier not out of passion for fighting, but out of necessity. He covers his hearts with the heaviest plate armour after seeing his best friends hurt as a result of his actions. He remains romantically unattached, despite the powerful women gravitating around him: Oonagh, Joleta, Phillipa. He is a 'philocalist' by his own admission (new word I learned here), a man whose greatest passion is to be found in books and music, avenues mostly denied him by outside circumstances and self-imposed loyalties. His exuberant nature escapes from time to time from his rigid control, providing yet again some of the funniest and most memorable set pieces in the book: a flock of sheep chasing the English raiders away (*On the day that his grannie was killed by the English, Sir William Scott the Younger of Buccleuch was at Melrose Abey, marrying his aunt.*) ; a night chase to defuse a bomb in the citadel of Tripoli, an irreverent Border trial of Scottish lairds, etc. - a remainder that the series is also a ton of fun, a rollercoaster ride, an irreverent look at historical figures.

conclusion: no sign of slowing down or fading interest in the continuing saga of Francis Crawford of Lymond. Best historical novel since sliced bread or whatever. Book four, here I come!

Stephanie Ricker says

I think the Dunnett obsession grows very slowly, but once it's upon you, you don't have a hope of escape. This book was bloody brilliant. Dunnett's writing is so intelligent, I feel somewhat like a little kid sitting at the adults' table, only understanding about half of the conversation. She uses words that even I've never heard of--that sounds terribly arrogant of me, I realize, but it's a fact that I rarely run across a word I don't know. "Corymb," "calyx," "firlot"...I had to look all of them up. Her books are so full; this one was just over 500 pages of tiny print, and each line is so filled with meaning that it takes considerable digesting. I liked this third book the best so far, probably because I found it the easiest to follow in terms of the history and politics of the time. I still gave myself whiplash several times as I sat up in shock as I got a hint of certain twists. "She wouldn't...surely...would she?" Oh, she did. Dunnett is a sadistic genius. In every book, she manages to make you absolutely hate the hero, and that takes some doing: we're conditioned to like the protagonist. But in every book, she still manages to make me despise the hero and love him all over again by the end. She takes characters I thought I loved and turns them into villains. She delights in killing off lovable characters, but she somehow always ends up having such good reasons for doing so. I haven't run across a writer who can so consistently break my brain in the best of ways in a long time. In summation, I cannot recommend her work highly enough. If you don't like it at first, please stick with it and give it a good, long chance; it's worth it!

Cphe says

Third installment of this very excellent historical series. This book introduces a villain almost as compelling and mesmerising as Francis Lymond himself.

Can't add much more than what other readers have already stated. These books are lengthy and have quite convoluted plots but the characters and their motives are wonderful and engaging reading. Wonderful author and simply a top notch series

Sandra says

Oh my god! What a book! There's only one problem! Now I've gotta read Pawn in Frankincense! And I'm already dreading it all being over!

Dunnett spins a wonderful, intricate, suspenseful plot. Sometimes she makes me laugh, sometimes she makes me look up words, but always she entertains me. What rewards a little work can bring. :)

This series has made me fall in love with the characters over time. The depth of character building is phenomenal. The plotting is sine qua non. The world building is impeccable. What else can I say? Just read them. It's worth it.

The The Dorothy Dunnett Companion is very helpful to those of us who can't just identify quotes and French off the top of our heads.

Lucinda says

Complicated, like all her books. She has no tolerance for lazy readers, and the ending! I have to find the next book right now!

Shannon says

It's been a long time since I've read books that make me jump up and down with excitement, or throw the book away from me in anger. I was shaking, overcome with emotion, as I read the final scenes of Disorderly Knights. Dorothy has such a gift for story-telling and character development. It is hard to believe that with a three-page character list at the front of this book, I have a firm grasp of each personality (which is not due to any lack of complexity).

I knew, from Game of Kings and Queen's Play, that Dorothy had produced the hero to end all heroes (despite a few definite character flaws and a sometimes questionable set of morals, we love Lymond, don't we?) – but in Disorderly Knights she also hands us the villain to end all villains. Oh my god this man will send shivers down your spine (but of course, discovering that he's a villain takes the whole book.... Dorothyyy).

Dorothy's play with good and evil in this book is perfect. We must understand the intricacies of religious tension in 16th century Europe, and in the first half of this book we are in Malta battling the Turks in the 1565 Siege with the Knights Hospitaller (do not even get me started on Dorothy's historical accuracy).

As a last, quick side-note – Oonagh is the strongest female character I've ever encountered, Phillipa creates all sorts of trouble but I adore her, Kate breaks my heart, Sybilla is amazing (I love the Cutler family interactions in general), and Joleta... there is too much to say about Joleta I can't even get started.

I defy anyone who can put down this book during the last 100 pages.

Elizabeth says

Dunnett remains the only author I've read in the last ten years whose books make me repeatedly exclaim, laugh and gasp aloud. I found this the least gripping of the Lymond chronicles so far, and it's taken me 6 weeks to read it--too much exposition of the "they went here, they went there, this and this and this happened" type, but it still had wonderful jaw-dropping moments. Like when Gabriel's shirt gets ripped off and we discover that HE TOO is scarred with HIS SISTER'S MARK (BLEH!! BLEH!! BLEH!!) or the heart-stopping paragraph when he describes in shiveringly graphic detail what his plans are for Lymond's son (BLEH!!!!).

I like it that mousy 13-year-old Philippa is turning into a hero. Most of the female roles have either been good-sexy or bad-sexy, or beautiful and patient. And very grown-up, apart from the lovely, brief portraits of small, sweaty, red-cheeked and red-haired Mary Queen of Scots.

Morgan says

Seriously amazing. I loved the first book and liked the second but this one was possibly my favorite. This might have to do with it involving more familiar characters and thus requiring less confusing set up than the previous two.

These books are wonderful and really reward close reading. The historical details are amazing. I just finished and immediately put my bookmark in the next book.

What really pulls the books, though, are the amazing characters. Lymond is so likably flawed and a fantastic antihero. The whole Crawford family are pretty much the most awesome people to exist. Phillipa is wonderful, Oonagh is one tough cookie and the Scotts continue to be lovable. The fact that the book can be full of so many characters that it makes my brain hurt, and yet they all manage to feel real and well defined is amazing. I think I could literally gush about these books forever but I need to start the fourth one already!

Alex Farrand says

"so small a spirit, to lodge such sorrows as mankind has brought you. Live...live...Wait for me, new, frightened soul. And though the world should reel to a puny death, and the wolves are appointed our godfathers, I will not fail you, ever."

Now, I fall into a book hang-over. Scene.

Disorderly Knights is the third book in the series the *Lymond Chronicles*. Lymond after his french court insanity in *Queen's Play* leaves to help the Knights of Malta defend their home from the upcoming evasion of their mortal enemy, the Turks. Lymond's life is a struggle to survive, but he faces a new enemy who is willing to move pawns more deliberately.

Game of Kings is still my number one favorite within the series so far, but *Disorderly Knights* came very close to the top spot. Here are a few reasons why:

1. This novel took place partly in Malta. I am part Maltese. Anyone wouldn't be able to tell, because I do not

have the maltese look. I did not get my mother's beautiful olive skin color out of the genetic gene pool. It is unfortunate, I know. I have the eight pointed star or Maltese cross tattooed to represent my heritage. I have never once read a book that mentioned Malta. It is a very beautiful island, and I would love to go back.

2. This book incorporates the Knights of Malta. Awesome, I never read a book with them either.

Those reasons alone made me quite excited to read this book from the beginning.

Unfortunately, the timing of this book didn't sit well. It looks like it took me a month to read this book, and I am pretty sure I didn't read every day, because I am swamped with real life issues. Currently, my family and I are trying to move to our new home, which has been extremely stressful. I am never moving again. If you didn't know all of Dorothy Dunnett's novels need commitment, and the time to really imagine what is happening. She definitely did not write for a lazy reader. Therefore, reading was very slow going for me. So far, all her novels are really hard to start, but eventually Lymond just grabs you by the hair and never lets go until you finish. You are absolutely exhausted by the end and your hair is a mess, but it is totally worth it.

In this novel, we see a surprising turn of events. We see Lymond start to mature from the boy to a responsible young man, which is lovely to see. In *Queen's play* I felt so awkward reading about him acting like a lunatic. Sometimes, there were moments where I would want to put the book down, because I didn't want to associate with him any longer. Isn't that funny? It was like having a crazy drunk friend who just acts wild, and I just wanted to walk away from the situation, because that friend was embarrassing me. That is how amazing of a writer Dorothy Dunnett is, and she must of been exhausted writing about Lymond and his adventures. I am super impressed and inspired to write like she does. I need a bigger vocabulary.

It was a build up, but like I said totally worth it, and those last few chapters were phenomenal. Crush my heart into pieces Dorothy. It wasn't your fault, I know. But did you have to write the truth! Just a great end, and cliff hanger. I am very excited to move on to *Pawn in Frankincense* and see what Lymond does next.

Recommended series. I wish everyone to love it. Happy reading.

Dillwynia Peter says

I'm a little conflicted about this book in the Lymond series. I loved much of it in retrospect but there were a good 200 pages of this 590 tiny print book that bored me to tears. I'm hoping it was just me being tired rather than the novel itself.

At heart this book is about a psychopath, except it will take you close to 90% before you discover this & then all the previous actions & comments make perfect sense. Before then, Lymond is truly annoying & a shit at baiting an honest and honourable man. There will be incidents that seem to be overexplained and narrated, which once again, at the end prove necessary for you to believe in why our "man" is a psychopath.

The historical aspects are beautifully done as always by Dunnett: the insidious infighting of the Spanish & French that weakens and destroys the St John Templars of Malta, the unrest within the Arabic world as the Ottomans gain power & territory, and the intrigue that surrounds the Scottish court as this small country is being played with master players of the French & English royalty - are juggled and captured in a way that entertains AND instructs.

So in construction we have the scene set in the shorter 1st two parts, along with a big slab of history; in the final longest Part, we are reading a mystery. For those coming after me, this is really really important. Stick with it & enjoy the fun at the end. In someways it felt like two separate novels with a common link; so along

with all the mystery, the historical references and me being rather overworked as I read this, it was all too confusing & frustrating. However, this lazy weekend has finalised the read & I now respect the mastery that I have come to know Dunnett. I'm really keen to get the next one, as from the title I suspect it is a carry on from the latter events in this novel.

Poiema says

I jumped in at the middle of the Lymond Chronicles series with this book, my first DD read. I had to take it slow, as the vocabulary was challenging, the plot rather complex and detailed, and the war accoutrements unfamiliar. This is a substantial piece of writing that requires your full attention, and in return you garner history, full throttled action, colorful geography, and mind boggling plot twists. This is not my typical genre, but the adventures of the Scottish Lymond, a brilliant and enigmatic 16th century mercenary, captured my imagination and provided me with a pleasantly challenging summer read. [Note: some PG-13 scenes.]
