



Pawn in Frankincense

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Pawn in Frankincense is the fourth in the legendary *Lymond Chronicles*. Somewhere within the bejeweled labyrinth of the Ottoman empire, a child is hidden. Now his father, Francis Crawford of Lymond, soldier of fortune and the exiled heir of Scottish nobility, is searching for him while ostensibly engaged on a mission to the Turkish Sultan. At stake is a pawn in a cutthroat game whose gambits include treason, enslavement, and murder.

Pawn in Frankincense Details

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Author : Dorothy Dunnett

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Supriya says

I have NEVER read poetry so obscure that Googling it doesn't turn up at all. I can now paraphrase the Koran's injunctions on left-handed people, recite the names and succession of upto ten of the 16th century Grand Masters of the Hospitaller Knights, use the word 'corybantic' in conversation, and probably even play a little bit of chess. And for all that, my god, the book still took my heart out and ate it. I hate Lymond. HATE him.

Oh Jerott Blyth, I love you, though.

Sandra says

Holy smokin' story! I nearly had a heart attack several times and if I hadn't been at work, I would've sobbed my eyeballs out.

And of course, now I can't stop, so planned November reads??? Bye-bye! This series is absolutely wonderful.

Why are people surprised that Lymond loves? Of course he does -- so intensely he just can't show it.

I can't say anything at all without it being a spoiler...Lymond takes a gift to Sultan Suleiman in Istanbul from the King of France chasing his bastard son before the baby is murdered by the totally evil Graham Mallett. As always we see him through everyone's eyes but his. New characters and old, ever fascinating and richly drawn. Incredible detail of the riches and cruelties of the Islamic countries of that time. The looting of Hagia Sophia, the maze of the Seraglio where the harem is kept, the polishing of Phillipa - his old friend's daughter from previous books. All of it fine, beautiful, terrifying, and achingly sad.

11/17/10 I'm adding this bit from a blog post that was lifted by someone else in a yahoo group devoted to Dorothy Dunnett because it so much says how I feel/felt about these boooks: Unfortunately the 'lifter' didn't give a source so I can't either. But anyone who grows to know and love Francis Crawford of Lymond will be able to relate.

"It's a good thing she's dead." It was my friend Nora on the phone. Not hello, Penelope, this is Nora, how are you? Just "It's a good thing she's dead, or I'd kill her."

I'd bugged Nora to read the Lymond Chronicles, raving that it was the most intense reading experience of my life. Now Nora had just finished book four, Pawn in Frankincense. She was crying, she was raging, and she wanted nothing better than to throttle Dorothy Dunnett. I knew how she felt.

Lymond is my favorite sort of hero: the tormented mastermind. He is a poet, musician, mathematical genius, and the greatest military mind of his day. He is witty in at least a dozen languages. He is also so racked by self-loathing that he repeatedly tries to goad otherwise nice people into killing him. He commits appalling acts for reasons that may become clear only hundreds of pages later into the story. Which brings me back to Nora's phone call. Dunnett inflicts some cruel sucker punches on her readers. This is embarrassing to admit,

but at one

point, I screamed "Traitor!," threw the book across the room, and began wailing in grief. My bewildered husband tried to comfort me, saying "But it's only a story." Only a story? For the past six weeks, it had been my life.

Misfit says

Pawn in Frankincense opens up shortly after the end of The Disorderly Knights, as Jerrott and Philippa track down Lymond on his search to find Francis' child, stolen by renegade Knight Graham Reed Malett and hidden somewhere in the heart of the Ottoman Empire. Francis uses his position as an emissary of France delivering gifts to Suleiman the Magnificent as an entrée into the mysterious world of the east as he and his companions continue their desperate search for Lymond's son. However, the deliciously evil Graham's schemes lead them on from one false lead to another, as the web is spun to bring Francis and troops further into Graham's evil web. Nothing and no one is as they seem, and the author throws many red herrings and surprises into her tale and eventually we discover that there are two blond, blue eyed children being sought. One child is Francis', who is father of the other?

Although separated, Lymond and his followers all end up in Constantinople, as Graham's plots come to fruition and Lymond, Jerrott, Archie and the mysterious Marthe with the striking resemblance to Lymond begin the fight of their lives in a real life chess game with deadly consequences for any who are "captured", and Francis battles to maintain his wits against the deadly addiction Graham's schemes have unknowingly afflicted him with.

As with the first three books in the series, 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 book is filled with non-stop action and suspense and ends with quite a big surprise of a cliffhanger which will send the reader reaching for the next book in the series, The Ringed Castle (Lymond Chronicles, 5). A solid five stars and my favorite so far in the series.

Bibliophile says

Still one of the most emotionally devastating and beautifully written novels I have ever read. There are a couple of scenes in here, that still, a dozen years and three re-reads later, make me sob like a baby. (If you've ever wondered what an ichneumon is - a kind of mongoose - or what 16 century Constantinople looked like, you'll satisfy those cravings with this book too. Did I mention how beautifully written it is?)

And Lymond ... he is at his most human in this one, vulnerable, lovable and self-sacrificing to an extraordinary degree.

Kate Sherrod says

The character of Philippa Somerville pretty well stole my heart in the second half of the prior Lymond novel, The Disorderly Knights, as I watched her turn from passionate Lymond-hater to grudging Lymond supporter largely via her well-developed sense of fair play. You've got to enjoy any character who can not only admit

she's wrong, but take all the necessary steps to redress the wrongs she's done in thought or deed. Philippa is, in other words, a character with character. And she's not even a grown-up yet as that novel ends!

In *Pawn in Frankincense*, she is still quite young* but that doesn't stop her doing exactly what she wants, which in this case is to take off in search of Lymond that she might continue to make up for her earlier bad opinion of him by helping him in his current quest in a way that, she has decided, only she can. Even though she really doesn't know nothing about nursing no babies, as it were.

Babies? Yes, babies. For it turns out that Lymond is a daddy, having apparently fathered an illegitimate son on the lovely but perhaps slightly foolish Oonagh O'Dwyer in between bouts of derring do back in *Queen's Play*. Which son, partly through Oonagh's own questionable choices and partly through the machinations of Graham Reid Mallett, revealed last novel as the Moriarty to Lymond's Holmes, has been hidden away somewhere in the Ottoman Empire (!) and, as *Pawn in Frankincense* opens, is basically being used as the titular pawn by Mallett. Lymond, of course, claims not to care all that much about a mere by-blow but he'll be damned if anybody gets used as a human shield by his enemy. Philippa, though, dear Philippa, is not fooled, and bullies her way onto the team solely by means of her advanced emotional intelligence, even though she has no idea how she can really be of help. So she just starts learning stuff along the way. Like, oh, Arabic and Turkish, for a start. Go, Philippa, go!

Meanwhile, another remarkable woman has shown up on the scene, the fabulous and enigmatic Marthe, who is attached to Team Lymond as the assistant to the builder of the world's most expensive spinet, which TL is charged with delivering on behalf of the King of France (remember, Lymond's prior exploits on behalf of the current Queen of Scots who is also the Dauphine of France have landed him a French title even though he's Scottish) to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. Thus giving TL the perfect cover for looking for the baby McGuffin.

But back to Marthe. Marthe, Marthe, Marthe. She is blond and blue-eyed and comes off as kind of cold hearted and genuinely doesn't care if other people think poorly of her and devastatingly cunning and intelligent and manipulative and cynical and... sound like anyone we know? I mean, Sebastian and Viola called, they want their bit back, amirite?

No, seriously, amirite? Because all we get are hints that somehow, this French woman with a French name might possibly be, somehow, rather closely related to Lymond. Whom, by the way, she cannot stand. Um, wow. Just wow.

And it all ends, bizarrely and very excitingly, in a live chess (but not Doctor Who live; in this case, live means "people used as pieces" not "currents of electricity running through the pieces") game deep in the seraglio of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. And things get tense and tragic. And also weirdly satisfying in a way I totally did not see coming.

I now already want to go back to the first book and read all these again -- and I'm not even finished with the series!

The blurb for the next Lymond novel, *The Ringed Castle*, indicates that his next adventure is largely in Russia. But with things as they've ended here, I cannot imagine how that's going to come to pass. But I don't have to. The brilliant, the wonderful, the mind boggling Dorothy Dunnett done it for me.

*But turns out to be not quite as young as I've been thinking. Lymond speaks of her and treats her as younger than she is for a variety of good, if irritating, reasons, and since a lot of the fun of reading these books is

being misled by Lymond, well, there you go. At any rate, as becomes clear in this novel, Philippa is 15 going on 16, so probably newly nubile, and given the adventures she has, it's probably just as well that most everybody believes she's still a kid -- though, of course, the concept of the teenager had a few centuries before it really became a thing. As such.

Danica says

Oooooh boy. I feel like I'm at the top of a rollercoaster's first, steepest drop. Here I go.

Edit: ARRRRRGH SO FUCKING GREAT.

EXTREMELY LENGTHY THOUGHTS TO COME LATER.

Edit the second:

I could not stop reading this book. Stayed up until 4 am on a weeknight again, then proceeded during the next day to read it in the bathroom, over a breakfast of oatmeal, and in the car, while waiting for traffic lights to turn green. Seen by the lucid light of day this fixation seems a little overwrought. Why am I weeping on the airplane with the wadded up ball of my Southwest complimentary napkin affixed to various parts of my splotchy, streaming face? Why, pray tell, am I contemplating the idea of purchasing all eight of the Niccolo books new, off of Amazon.com?

But man oh man, this one hit all of my buttons. Like ALL of them. Continent-spanning action: check. Dazzling descriptions of exotic locales: check. Political intrigue: check. Massive emotional stakes: check. Gorrrrrrgeous, mind-expanding writing: yes! Requisite writerly showboating which in the past has availed itself to cheetah hunts, rampaging elephants, moonlit rooftop races, epic castle sieges, and other carnivalesque riots of activity, but now expands its scope to include, um, gymnastics performed atop galloping horses?: yup. Main character, through no small devising of his own, WRITHING IN HELLISH AGONY (and if you read this series you will understand why this is a source of jolly good fun rather than an indication of my own severely unbalanced mental state): check. Complex, pivotal, nuanced girl roles: uh huh. Adorable kid-mommying scenes that made my ovaries squirm: check. Tension between main character and his dedicated captain/brooding Christian knight/loyal friend so thick you could stand a spoon in it: awwww yeah.

Longer thoughts continue here:

<http://rondaview.livejournal.com/1229...>

Morgan says

OH MY GOD MY HEART. I just....WHAT. SO UPSETTING. Every book I think it can't possibly get worse and then it DOES. And every book I think I can't possibly love this book series more and I do.

I think it's been years since a book has made my cry uncontrollably like I did reading this one. So heartbreakingly good.

The plot is crazy as usual and this book, like the third, was action packed pretty much from start to finish. All the new characters were great, especially Marthe, who is badass. All the characters are so well drawn and developed and feel so much like real people. Also they are awesome. (Lymond! Phillipa!) I missed the Crawford family but if I had my way these books would be all Crawfords having fun times instead of being emotionally destroyed.

I'm so afraid of the terrible things that I'm sure are to come in the next book. But I feel like starting it now. SO GOOD AND YET SO UPSETTING.

Cphe says

Fourth book in the series of the wonderful Lymond Chronicles. In this action packed adventure Francis Lymond and his entourage (for want of a better word) find themselves in the heart of the Ottoman empire on the trail of Lymond's arch nemesis, the wonderfully sinister and machiavellian Graham Reid Mallet.

Another convoluted and compelling plot, in the hands of a masterful storyteller. Well worth a look.

Giki says

The fourth installment of the Lymond chronicles – I would advise reading the other 3 first, especially disorderly knights as you might be a bit lost otherwise. If you haven't read them yet then don't read this – or any other review – There will be spoilers.

At the end of 'disorderly knights' Philippa prevents Lymond from killing Gabriel in order to spare the life of a child, Gabriel escapes in the confusion and lures Lymond onto the depths of the Ottoman empire. It is no problem for the gloriously feisty Philippa to convince first Jerott and then Lymond that they really need to take a 14-year-old girl along as they try to resolve the problems that she has caused. Jerott is a man who needs leader he can worship like a god. He found that in Gabriel and even when the truth began to come out he would not give up hope that he could somehow be saved until the bitter end. Now he has transferred his allegiance to Lymond things are more complex, he knows Lymond is flawed and will always challenge his faith and loyalty, but still he follows passionately. They are joined by Marthe – a grumpy clock maker whose origins are shrouded in mystery but who bears more than a passing resemblance to Lymond.

As the chase around the Mediterranean develops it becomes clear that things are never straightforward, Gabriel holds all the cards and the others must follow the game he has devised. Only Phillipa has a clear sense of purpose, she knows what she must do and does not flinch when sacrifices need to be made.

This is a fantastic story, A cleverly constructed puzzle, It draws you in through many layers and builds to an ending that twists and turns into a knot of emotion and drama. As you would expect if you have read the previous books, it is shocking and challenging, bad stuff happens, good people cause pain, suffering and death by their actions, and no-one is truly good anyway. , difficult choices must be made and innocence must be sacrificed for the greater good. Of course Lymond is arrogant, rude and controlling, he is a driven man on a single-minded quest to destroy his enemy.

I felt actually pretty ill after the end of this book. I had to spend a couple of days in bed. I think I had a bug but can't rule out that it might have been psychosomatic.

I still recommend reading this book – I can't wait to read the next but I dread to think what horrors the author has in store for the main characters.

I love this series and this has been my favourite book so far

April says

This was gripping, if sometimes painful, reading. As other reviewers have mentioned, a 5 star rating feels inadequate. At this point, I'm certain this is the best fiction series I have read. Ever. Bar none.

Great characters. Ripping story. Fantastic writing. The historical elements are meticulously researched, yet woven into the stories perfectly. The books get rave reviews from virtually all readers. Many reviewers mention reading the series multiple times. I expect I will do so also. I am extremely perplexed as to why they are not widely known, and not nearly as widely read as they deserve. I recommend these books for anyone who enjoys fiction. If you are considering starting the series, try to do so when you have some time to read. Or, prepare to stumble sleepily through your days. I assure you, you will not put these books down and go to sleep at a reasonable hour.

I am eternally grateful to goodreads reviewer extraordinaire, Lightreads, for bringing these novels to my attention.

Algernon says

I have run out of stars to award and out of superlatives to describe how awesome this historical epic by Dorothy Dunnett is. The previous three books were all five stars for me, but Pawn takes the game to a whole new level of emotional turmoil. Gone is the playful, mischievous tone of the youtfull Francis Lymond. Gone is, for the moment, his political ambition to make a name for himself and to prop up his beloved Scotland teetering monarchy. This time it's personal!

- *'I wish to make my fortune with you.'*
- *'Well, you can forget about that, for a start,' said Francis Crawford. 'And if your place in Paradise has been written, then for God's sake hang on to it. Because we're going in the opposite direction.'*

Note : may contain spoilers from this point forward about events and characters from the previous volumes. i recommend reading the books in chronological order.

His Nemesis, Graham Reid Mallet, has been thwarted in his plans to take over the mercenary company Lymond created and forced to run away. But he has promised revenge and the lynchpin of his dirty plans is Khaireddin, an innocent child unknowingly fathered by Lymond in one of his past affairs. The child is hidden, kidnapped and then moved from one city to another all along the Arab controlled part of the Mediterranean coast, leading Lymond and his companions on a wild goose chase fraught with peril - the roadway to Hell alluded to in the above quote. The title of the fourth novel references Khaireddin as the pawn in this latest game of deadly chess Dorothy Dunnett is constructing, with frankincense as the symbol of Oriental mysteries. But there is a remark by Jerott Blyth that I found more relevant and with a deeper reach into Lymond motivations:

You summon and you throw away. You treat love like a bird for the table ... Like a pawn, now in frankincense, now discarded and thrown in the dirt. You don't know what love is, either of you. And God help us and you, if you ever find out.

I see it as a comment on Lymond's previous gamemaster role, his intellectual detachment and his ruthlessness in following his plans, as opposed to those driven by their emotions, by their passions. In the beginning of the series Lymond was indeed more than a bit annoying in his multiple accomplishments and arrogant superiority. Chapter by chapter we watch now as he struggles to maintain his cool exterior demeanour while Gabriel strikes indiscriminately at the people around him. When the control slips, Lymond is deadly, and towards the end of the novel he will sacrifice his own health and sanity to put a stop once and for all to Gabriel power plays.

Lymond was too near the edge: too near the limit of the drug: the place where, driven beyond their means, first the body relinquished the race; and then the mind. Madness cometh sometime of passions of the soul, as of business and of great thoughts, of sorrow and of too great study, and of dread.

The amount of suffering Lymond is forced to go through is staggering, eclipsing often all other considerations about the wealth of historical detail in the novel and the clever plot twists or reversal of fortunes for the secondary characters. I know now how some of the other readers were pushed to throw the book at the wall in anger at reading some of the most painful scenes in the novel. (view spoiler)

I have become familiar enough with Mrs. Dunnett style to recognize the building blocks of her grandiose structures. The books share a basic similarity of plot and characters, yet within these boundaries there is always a sense of wonder and plenty of surprises to keep the reader guessing at the final resolution. For example, Jeroth Blyth returns as the hero's sidekick - the slightly naive and good intentioned youth who needs to have his eyes opened and his illusions dispelled. He is joined in the role of revealing Lymond's character indirectly by Phillipa Somerville, very young but now exactly naive, a practical no-nonsense girl that stubbornly goes her own way, and provides some of the lighter, wittier conversations in the novel:

'It seems to me,' said Phillipa prosaically, 'that on the whole we run more risks with Mr Crawford's protection than without it.'

Another recurring theme is the murder mystery, investigative angle, as some of the new characters have hidden agendas and one, a traitor in their midsts, is actually sabotaging the whole endeavour. Two strong women characters are introduced as important players in the game : Marthe, a mysterious adventuress that has an uncanny physical resemblance with Lymond, and Guzel - the very ambitious mistress of the Berber corsair Dragut Rais. Of the new male characters two stand out : A French naturalist studying the Arabian culture and Mikal, A Pilgrim of Love. The pilgrims were wandering minstrels reciting Persian love poetry, a fascinating aspect of the Ottoman Empire culture that usually gets ignored in the accounts of wars and atrocities.

There is that which melts the soul in a young deer walking impulsively, in trust, in grace and in courage. I have opened the book of love ... I read and write in it. Thou, too, shalt read.

The third recurring element is putting Lymond on trial towards the end of the novel, inviting the reader to sit and judge the morality of his actions and the lessons to be learned from his mistakes. It sounds a bit didactic, but in practice it is one of the most passionate moments of each novel, as well as the most revealing in terms

of the actual motivations of the secretive Lymond. He rarely talks about himself, and we have to rely on witness accounts and indirect proofs to know what goes on inside his head, so when the mask is lifted it is worth noting:

It isn't that music doesn't matter: the reverse, as it happens. So my defenses against it are very strong. Can you understand that?

I extrapolate this declaration to his interest in Scotland and to his love life. He hides his true feelings because they are the most important part of his life, not because he is cold blooded or incapable of commitment.

The amount of historical research that went into the novel is amazing. It is so well integrated into the actual plot that you don't notice the difference between real historical figures or events and the fabricated ones. The struggle for control of the North African coast towns, the visits to the Greek Island or to Smyrna and Aleppo, the final stay in Istanbul at the court of Suleiman the Magnificent make this volume the most cosmopolite and colourful in the series, justifying the exclamation of one of the journeymen:

Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage!

The politics are also spot on, although they feature mostly in the final chapters, being overshadowed for most of the novel by the personal duel at a distance between Lymond and Gabriel. But I checked out on the internet and there are some fascinating articles about the succession fights and the harem rivalries in the later years of Suleiman reign. Roxelana, the Hurem Sultan, is a fascinating figure that inspired many romantic poets and writers beside Dunnett.

I also have some more personal reactions from the novel. I have been to Turkey recently, and two of my most memorable experiences have been a Sufi ceremony with music, prayer and rotating dervishes at a 13th century caravanserai, and a visit to the Byzantine water cistern in Istanbul. Both are included in the text. The Bektashi creed is a variant of mystical Sufism, more poetry than dogma, still active today despite persecutions by the mainstream imams:

I have put five things into five things. Having all, I have put knowledge and wisdom in hunger; do not search for them in satiety. I have put riches in contentment with little; do not search for them in avarice. I have put happiness in knowledge. Do not search for it in ignorance.

This is not the only example that I have come across in Islamic teachings that strongly contradict the image of the murderous fanatic. On the contrary, the Ottoman empire has been historically more tolerant of alternative belief systems than their Western counterparts.

And here's how a visit to the catacombs is described in the book:

He [Jerott] stood in a limnophilous palace of marble whose faint columns, rank upon rank, marked the darkness like runes and upheld, with their ghostly carved capitals, the winged vaults of the ceilings which spread, mottled with moisture, far over his head. Its carpet was water: water which ran green and icy and clear under his feet and licked and floated and sucked at the white marble pillars in their dim and motionless rows: a forest rooted in foam. A forest a thousand years old.

I've read about Dorothy Dunnett fan clubs who meet annually in locations described in the books. I know if I

ever get to visit / revisit myself some of these places, I would look for the shadows of Francis Crawford of Lymond and of his companions.

Book five coming up soon!

Marquise says

How do you review a book for which the current rating system with its maximum five stars looks so insufficient? That's the dilemma facing me. And as much as I think I can't do justice to it, words might convey what the five stars can't: explain why exactly I came to love this.

The *Chronicles of Lymond* had a very rough start for me, very rough; not so much for the usual reasons as for the protagonist character himself, and I was highly sceptical of the day I'd adore the series ever arriving. Like it, maybe. Love it, unlikely. Yet that day has arrived, and after "Pawn in Frankincense," there's a place for Francis Crawford of Lymond and Sevigny in my very short list of favourite literary characters.

All right, all right, that's too solemn a way to put it. I have a crush on him, I bloody love him!

Done, that's better now. Forward to the review, bos'n.

When the book opens, we see him through the unsentimental point of view of Philippa Somerville, the girl that hated him for long, and the circumstances are so deceptively decadent that we're ready once more to place Lymond back so neatly in his little incurable rake box: he's gambling at a bathhouse with a dubious personage . . . and some nuns. Could it look any more debauched? Yet hardly a couple of pages go by before we learn that, as it's a rule in Dunnett's books, nothing is as bad or as good as it appears, and Lymond is really on a mission that has for a purpose to recover a child born in the Turkish harem of Dragut whose parentage is part of the plotline's mysteries. Off we go then on another adventure sailing out of Lyons, with a troupe including headstrong Philippa, loyal and tortured Jerott, ambiguous Marthe, even more ambiguous Kiaya Khatún, tightfisted Gaultier, trusty Salablanca, and sickly-sweet solicitous Onophrion. This voyage will take them along the coast of the Moslem-ruled parts of the Mediterranean, chasing the child Khaireddin from one place to the next barely stopping to catch their breath, always finding his trace, always getting within arm's reach of him, and always crashing down when about to snatch him from his kidnappers. It's a mad game in which the personage behind the kidnapping dangles Khaireddin as a carrot before the Scots hare to keep him racing against time and hope. People die, people betray, people hold fast to friends, and people love during this years-long race that concludes in the most exotic of places, the seraglio of sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in Constantinople. There, Lymond and his nemesis see each other and have to play chess with human lives; it's an astoundingly brilliant scene that will put Lymond in the impossible position of playing God with living and breathing pawns. He is a genius at chess, yes, but is encumbered by the burden of scruples, a disadvantage in this circumstance. The decisions he makes are therefore sure to break the readers' heart. That's as much as can be said without spoiling everyone roundly.

The pace of this storyline is sprightly and rarely allows the reader moments of pause, and the revelations come in so quick and fast as in a long line of ducks ready to shoot. I'd joked that Dunnett had pulled the rug from under me so many times that I was collecting bruises, and as hyperbolic as that might sound, it does illustrate how surprising the twists were. I didn't expect nor guess practically any but one, which is disgraceful for my poor analytic skills, but with a writer like this one, I don't mind feeling all fooled and

silly. It's even part of the charm of these books by this point. Does it speak for the extent of my conversion that I've come to have an indulgent soft spot for the rhymes and the often unintelligible quotes that frustrate so many? Yes, that's actually happened. I don't know from where they come and for the most part not even what they're about really, but there are some that I liked, such as the one Lymond sings to Marthe.

Speaking of, the female characters are strong in this narrative, a very appreciated bonus in a genre that tends by one reason or another to feature mostly males. To the likes of Lady Sybilla, Christian and Kate from previous installments we have to add Marthe and Philippa now. Both are so well-defined, each in their own consistent characterisation, and add the commonsense touch to the testosterone-driven swashbuckling, and in some instances even save the day for the whole group. Philippa, to me, has added a new dimension to the phrase "The things we do for love" that strips it of its negativity whilst keeping the undercurrent allusion to sacrifice. One can't help but love her personality, her practicality and no-nonsense worldview, a much needed anchor to reality that was so needed in these books.

No, I can't do justice to this book... You will have to read it and submerge yourself into the plot, and see with what emotions you emerge at the end. To me, this deserves to be more widely read and appreciated, so paraphrasing the wise words of Gandalf: Run, people, run to read this now!

Dogbite Williams says

As the tension mounted to what I still consider, nearly half a century later, the most electrifying scene I have ever read, I was startled to realize my hands were sore from gripping the book so tightly.

The Lymond Chronicles are a staggering achievement by a towering intellect that will never be surpassed. The greatest historical fiction ever.

Trin says

Or: the one where it gets real gay.

Also, separately: *real* scary.

Before rereading it, I had four main memories from this book:

- 1) Lymond finally revealing his age.
- 2) Marthe explaining to Jerott that it's not *her* that he truly wants.
- 3) Oonagh in the garden.
- 4) *That fucking chess game.*

I forgot precisely when these things occurred -- quite a bit more book happens after #4, for example, than I recalled, and Dunnett drops #3 on *page 62*. Damn, girl. Sure, just toss away a scene that has traumatized me for nearly 15 years -- and will probably continue to do so for another 15 -- like a tenth of the way into your novel. It really makes one worry -- wisely -- about what she's holding in reserve.

Anyway, what impressed me most on this reread was, first, how wonderful Philippa is. I knew this, but I had forgotten many of the details, and that is a shame, because she is just one delightful detail after another.

Second, Gabriel is one of the most evil motherfuckers in anything ever, and if they do indeed make a TV show out of these books, whoever plays him will be ruined for me forever. I can't wait.

I have absolutely no memory of having written a review of this in 2016, apparently? But here it is, for posterity:

--Review from 2016--

Having now read the entire Lymond series, I can say with certainty that this is my favorite installment: it's just a roller coaster of emotional and physical turmoil all the way through, and I mean that in the best way possible. As for the climatic chess game: I'm *still* sweating. This is the best thing I read all...whatever year that was. 2004, I think.

Shannon says

Please, do me a favor, and block off a significant portion of your day to finish this book ALONE. I had a busy week, and ended up only having time to read on the bus. When it got to that scene I was finding it difficult to breathe, difficult to continue reading without shaking and crying, and I had to take breaks from the scene to breathe and look out of the window so I wouldn't throw the book across the crowded Ride On bus and break down into tears. On the walk from the bus stop to my building I actually told myself I had to be as strong as Philippa / Marthe, and I held my head up high with watery eyes and braved the five-minute walk without having to stop and cry. As soon as I was alone in the bathroom, the intense emotions took their toll.

What a beautiful book, though! Dorothy paints an exquisite background for us, as we go baby hunting all across the Mediterranean and end up within the gorgeous Topkapi Palace in Stamboul / Istanbul / Constantinople. It was such fun to imagine the city in all her splendor under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, with Rustem Pasha as the Grand Vizier.

We are in Jerott's head for a lot of Pawn in Frankincense, and . . . Philippa's!! Philippa comes along for the ride, and we love that don't we? She is so identifiable, and she made the book fun with her letters back to Kate and her sweet, enduring innocence. Dorothy has created a handful of the strongest female characters that I have ever encountered in fiction, and Philippa is our strong little pre-teen/teenager (who ends up proving herself beyond anything I would have imagined). For about a week I was convinced that I would name my first daughter Philippa, but I'm starting to rethink that. It's kind of a horses' name, isn't it?

Lymond has so many feelings! We never see them, but in this book we certainly do. I felt like I actually knew what was going on behind those cold beautiful blue eyes for awhile there. Oh my, and Marthe, and the poetry! Ohh, and this book is so gay! Much gayer than the last (some of it is only there if you notice it... not super obvious, but some of it is pretty blatant). And Philippa in the Harem! Scandalous!

I was looking forward to witnessing an Oonagh-Lymond conversation in the first half of the book, and that was cruelly denied to me by Gabriel. We did pick up another badass female king-maker of sorts, though, which is Guzel / Kiaya Khatun. We also get Mikal, as one of my new favorite minor characters!

In conclusion: Lymond's parent(s) were fucking around, what will Kate say when Phillipa comes home bahhhh, and will Marthe actually be kind to Jerott??

Hobbes says

These books just keep getting better!

Heartbroken and devastated by the evil and impossible decisions Lymond has to make while trying to save many lives, not least his son.

Lymond, and on a separate mission Phillipa Somerville, both follow the trail for Lymond's son across the middle east. Constantinople at the height of the Ottoman Empire comes vividly to light. Dunnett hits us through all the senses with stunning descriptions and historical accuracy.

This time Lymond doesn't control all the pieces on the chess board, least of all the pawns. And, the shocking live chess game could never be burned from my memory. Nail-biting, eviscerating stuff of nightmares.

So much torment, sadness and grief... Dunnett kills off more than a few established characters in this book and being so divested I was devastated. Moreover, though the reader is still not privy to Lymond's perspective, the other viewpoints are illuminating, especially so in their misconceptions of Lymond's character and motives. So many subplots and unpredictable twists and stings in the tail. This is a much more personal story compared to previous novels and not only for Lymond's character.

Emotional doesn't even begin to describe how I feel after that ending!

Alex Farrand says

Holy cow! RTC

Brittany says

Well, I keep changing my mind about which of these books is my favorite. This one comes up more often than others, though, so I think this may just be It. (For the curious, the books in order of quality (generally) go: 4, 3, 6, 1, 2, 5.)

In this book, Lymond finally squares off with Gabriel. Of course, there are plenty of enigmas, traps, and red herrings along the way, before everyone finally ends up in Istanbul (Byzantium, Constantinople, or Stamboul, depending on where and when you are in the book.)

This features one of the best exchanges between Lymond and young Phillipa (Lymond: "The coast is a jungle of Moors, Turks, Jews, renegades from all over Europe, sitting in places built from the sale of Christian slaves. There are twenty thousand men, women and children in the bagnios of Algiers alone. I am

not going to make it twenty thousand and one because your mother didn't allow you to keep rabbits, or whatever is at the root of your unshakable fixation."

"I had weasels instead," said Philippa shortly.

"Good God," said Lymond, looking at her. "That explains a lot.)

Anyway, this book is wonderful. It has all the humor, wit, adventure, and depth of character that marks this series. Plus, it features Philippa taking a course in Running to Seed, and a death scene that ties only with the one in Lions of Al-Rassan for the most likely to break your heart. There's also a very cute scene with a couple of kids (baby goats).

Jackie says

The words now had meaning. All poetry had meaning, and sorrow she had never envisaged.

It would take a review approximately the length of the book itself to do *Pawn in Frankincense* justice, and even that would likely only capture a fraction of the topics up for discussion. I'm going to breeze past the ever-sexy brand of Orientalism, the through-line of drugs, and the beautiful and telling descriptive language Dunnett employs.

Is this entire series about a man learning, at long last, how to have friends and family? And, if so, is this installment the most perfect, heart-wrenching distillation of that theme? Or what?

However much I try--don't let me turn you against me.

("Or what?" is probably wrong. "And what?" would be better. Because, when you get right down to it, what *isn't* this series about? In which specifics *can't* you read broader implications?)

I started this re-read intending to keep my eye on Jerott Blyth, a character who has grabbed hold of me much the same way Jim Prideaux grabbed hold of me, and for similar reasons. (I couldn't help feeling he deserved better. I couldn't help feeling that he fell for the wrong people, possibly even misplacing his trust.) I even developed a hashtag for it, like you do, based on the phrase that Facebook status generator coined for me: #jerottblythstudies I dog-eared page after page, building a case for...what? Repression? Sadness? Secret heroism? Deep imperfection? Why would I try to build a case for those things? Dunnett makes them obvious.

I got sidetracked, as I was bound to, by the kids. The kids, the kids, the kids. I was sidetracked by the kids, and the totally pointless and heartless yet entirely human need to track them and try to figure out whose son is whose once and for all, as if Dunnett didn't make that pretty remorselessly clear the first time I read it. Still, I was hoping, alongside Jerott, that there was some answer to be had, and wishing, like fans of *Romeo and Juliet*, that somehow I'd reach the story's conclusion to find an entirely different ending waiting for me.

It's a fairly common response, when revisiting stories (on the page or on the screen) you first encountered as a kid or teenager, to be left completely gutted, which you never were before. Roger Ebert broke it down really nicely once, in a review I can no longer find. Adults know more about the world and as a result are more likely to cry in movies. They're more likely to cry at anything--happiness, sadness--because they can

extrapolate and recognize either how random or how rare those circumstances were.

So I was never going to be able to track Jerott Blyth. I realize that now. I was always going to be spending the last third of the book going, "Gah! Gah! No, no, no, no!" because what other choice did I have? Philippa Somerville, if she were clued in to the whole picture, would have been making the same noises.

In the end, you can't track anyone but Lymond himself, and that is a feat. The man only gets three (by my count) close-third opportunities to narrate his own story in this particular tome, so he is, as ever, a cypher. And yet, underneath it all, it is just possible to see him continuing the learning he embarked on at the end of *Queens' Play*. "He formed an attachment for you, and you used him," is how Jerott sums up Lymond's interactions with one tertiary character. Isn't that always what he does? Isn't that Jerott's own problem? And Mikal's problem, who's also standing right there, silently cracking up (well-balanced through amorality?) despite it all? Will Scott and Robin Stewart's problems, back in the day? And it happens to women too. You can't really blame him when his reaction is to further distance himself from others, cut the bonds of friends and family. You can't really blame him...but you *can* at the same time. 60% of the time, he is the architect of his own misery, and a well-timed conversation with someone who cared (and there are, shockingly, plenty of them) could have nipped it in the bud.

Leaving him was less like leaving even the most simple of her friends in Flaw Valleys, and more like losing unfinished a manuscript, beautiful, absorbing, and difficult, which she had long wanted to read."

So if the whole series is about learning to trust the people closest to him to be able to handle his presence, where does this book leave things?

"Duty, friendship, compassion I do owe to many. But love I offer to none."

Sure. Sure.

Elizabeth says

WAAHHH! Definitely the most readable of the Dunnett books so far, but what an emotional roller-coaster. I got kind of fed up at the end of Lymond's complete lack of resource against his enemy... It just all seemed so damn pointless and unfair. And actually, having finished it, I'm still not sure what the *point* of the whole search was, apart from turning Our Hero into an emotional and physical cripple. OK, so he gets to kill Gabriel, but even the Mean Old Omniscient Narrator says that the killing meant nothing, given the state of mental collapse that Lymond's in by the time he gets to do it.

Philippa is wonderful. I love the way she gets to mature, and blossom, and manages to be heroic while maintaining her own femininity and character (and, despite the seraglio and the marriage, even her virginity!!!). It just about kills me who she ends up married to. I kind of toyed with the idea myself while reading, but never imagined Dunnett would entertain it as well--nay, even EFFECT it by the end of the book.

I have to say, people accuse me of needlessly tormenting my own fictional characters, but at least I don't go around cutting babies' throats. And I do try to land my favorites in situations they have a chance of

recovering from eventually.

Marthe... hermaphrodite or woman??? Lymond... Did he sleep with Dragut or not? Khaireddin... How far does he take his clients? Oonagh... murder or suicide? Man, I don't know why I keep reading this stuff, it's so ultimately UNFULFILLING. A bit like being an opium addict, I suppose.
