



El Rey de Hierro

Maurice Druon

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"¡Todos malditos, hasta la séptima generación!". Ésa es la terrible maldición que el jefe de los templarios lanza a la cara de Felipe el Hermoso, rey de Francia.

Corre el año 1314 y la profecía parece haberse hecho realidad: durante más de medio siglo, los reyes se suceden en el trono de Francia, pero nunca duran mucho tiempo. De las intrigas palaciegas a las muertes súbitas e inexplicables, de las batallas entre las dinastías a las guerras desastrosas, todo parece fatalmente regido por el sino de los Reyes Malditos.

El futuro de Europa está en juego durante esos años negros. Un periodo turbio de la historia y, al mismo tiempo, una época extraordinaria... Maurice Druon supo narrar como ningún otro las historias secretas, las pasiones y debilidades de ese periodo.

El Rey de Hierro Details

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From Reader Review El Rey de Hierro for online ebook

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

George R. R. Martin once wrote in a blog post that if you love his A Song of Ice and Fire series and are looking for "something like it", then you really need to check out The Iron King by Maurice Druon. In the newest edition of the book's foreword, he calls it the "original game of thrones" and credits it for being one of the great historical novels that inspired his own epic series.

Even if I hadn't known all this, the parallels are clear; this is only the first book of The Accursed Kings series and already it has it all, just without the fantasy elements -- conspiracies, assassinations, illicit affairs, royal scandals, rivaling families, public executions, lies, sex, betrayals and torture and poisonings and death curses, oh my.

Originally written in French and published in the mid-1950s, the books in this series were long out of print and apparently quite difficult to get your hands on, until now. Fortunately, the English translation of the first book recently made it back into print (with the rest to follow, I hear), thus resulting in yours truly just about tripping over her own feet rushing to press the "buy" button for the Kindle version. Even without GRRM's glowing recommendation, I'm always up for good historical fiction, especially books involving European monarchies and the Middle Ages.

The Iron King is a fascinating take on the events which preceded and led up to arguably one of the most significant conflicts of the medieval period, The Hundred Years' War. King Philip IV of France, called "The Iron King" because of his aloof nature and severe rule, sentences the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar Jacques de Molay to burn at the stake. Upon his death, the Templar maintains his innocence and publicly curses the three men whom he feels has unjustly put him there: Pope Clement, King Philip, and Guillaume de Nogaret, Keeper of the Seals.

Meanwhile, all is not well in Philip's family. Two of his sons, Louis and Charles are being cuckolded by their wives, cousins Marguerite and Blanche of Burgundy. If that wasn't bad enough, his third son's wife, Jeanne of Burgundy, is also privy to these affairs, even if she doesn't cheat herself. When Philip's only daughter Isabella discovers what the Burgundy women are doing to her three brothers, she begins scheming to expose them, and Robert III of Artois, who harbors a deep hatred for the Burgundys, is only all too happy to help.

The scandal is blown wide open, of course, as we know from the events of the Tour de Nesle Affair. The king and his family recall the the last words uttered by Grand Master Jacques de Molay: "Pope Clement, Chevalier Guillaume de Nogaret, King Philip, I summon you to the Tribunal of Heaven before the year is out, to receive your just punishment! Accursed! Accursed! You shall be accursed to the thirteenth generation of your lines!" Are the troubles involving the unfaithful wives part of the curse? Or is the worst yet to come?

I have to say, I liked this book a lot. The story takes quite a bit of time to get set up, but then so much of the history and the characters have to be detailed and introduced. As the reader, I felt I needed the ramp-up

time to refresh myself on the historical facts and get all those "Philip"s, "Charles"s and "Louis"s sorted out anyway. As always, trying to keep names in order is a common occupational hazard when reading historical fiction about European kings and queens. However, all the people and events Druon decided to include and write about in his storytelling are there for a reason, building up and forming a cogent picture by the end of the book.

Also, fair warning: the writing can be a little hard on the eyes. As with many books translated from their original language, it's not always pretty. I'm not sure this can be helped, and I certainly don't hold that against the author or the translator; sometimes, that's just the way things are. I admit I've had better times with other translated-to-English books, but then again, I've also had worse. The experience was definitely not as rough as I expected after seeing other reviews talking about the same topic, and to me the book was still very readable and easy to get into.

See this review and others at The BiblioSanctum.

Nataliya says

"During his reign, France was a great country, and the French were the most miserable of all people."

George R.R. Martin has apparently called *The Accursed Kings*, a seven-book historical novel series by Maurice Druon, '**the original game of thrones**'. Which pretty much means that soon everyone and their grandma will be reading these.

Well, for once I'm the cool kid (*ahem, I mean, nerdy overachiever, of course*) who can say - Well, I first read¹ these books years ago, having spent every penny of my sparse pocket money on these tomes.

¹ Actually, 'read' is an incorrect description. I **inhaled** these books (figuratively) at the age of 11, completely entranced by the fascinating world of historical intrigue, **for the first time having realized that history is not just the boring collection of dates, names and battles** - that the wheel of history can be turned by people who are very much unaware of the overarching implications of their actions and scheming.

This book, the first in the Accursed Kings series, drops the reader smack into the middle of French palace intrigues that surrounded the last year (1314) of the reign of **Philippe IV** (*a.k.a. Philippe the Fair* - as in '*pretty*', and not '*just*') - and **into the thick of the events that eventually precipitated the Hundred Years' War between England and France**.

'Sir, you have turned the fractured land into a united country that is beginning to have a single beating heart.'

Philippe IV, informally known as the titular Iron King because of his iron will and cruelty, "*the impassive and cruel ruler*" who "harbored the dream of the greatness of France as a nation" and managed to turn it into

a force to be reckoned with (*but, at the same time, the land of incredibly heavy taxes and cruel tyrannical attitude to anyone from whom the king could get the money to finance his dream of absolute power*) and also the place where "everyone had to obey, bend their backs, or break their foreheads on the granite of the monarchical rule". **Philippe entered the annals of history as a ruthless, merciless, cold ruler - something that in this book he's unaware of until the baffling discovery - alas, too late.**

"Two terrifying phrases that turned his heart cold: "Even if there's nobody in the world more handsome than Philippe, he can only look at people but he has nothing to say to them. He is not a human, not even an animal - he's just a statue."

And another testimony of yet another witness of Philippe's reign: "Nothing will make him bow; he is the Iron King."

'The Iron King,' muttered Philippe the Fair. 'So was I this good at hiding my weaknesses? How little the others know about us, and how strictly will I be judged by the posterity!'"

Philippe the Fair did not appreciate strong opposition - something that the Order of the Knights Templar has learned the hard way, having been mercilessly destroyed by the king's power, with its elderly leader Jacques De Molay burned for his supposed crimes to which he had confessed after years of torture. And, burning to death, De Molay, tortured and betrayed, screams out a curse that, according to Druon, will haunt the King and his progeny for years to come:

"Pope Clement... Knight Guillaume de Nogaret... King Philippe - within a year I will call you to the Lord's judgment and you will be justly punished! Accursed! You shall be accursed to the thirteenth generation!"

King Philippe seemingly would have had no reason to worry. With three adult married sons and a daughter married to the King of England, his descendants should have ruled France for centuries to come. **Alas, the direct line of ruling House of Capet came to the end a decade and a half after the chilling curse** (*not a spoiler, okay - it's history*). Was it the Knight's Templar curse? Was it simply an unlucky yet inevitable chain of events? Who knows. **But, as history shows, the actions of people involved in making history can have consequences no one can foresee.**

"People called to play an important role in history mostly are unaware how the events they usher in will play out. These two, talking in Westminster palace at the March sunset in 1314, could not even imagine that due to coincidences, due to their own actions they will give push to a war between the kingdoms of France and England - a war that would last for more than a hundred years."

These two, as it turns out, are Queen Isabelle and Robert D'Artois, conspiring to bring to light the infidelities of **Princesses Marguerite and Blanche**, married to Isabelle's brothers, the sons of King Philippe the Fair.

Robert D'Artois, a scheming brute giant of a man (*six feet tall in the 14th century was no joke!*), deprived of his inheritance and status, will do anything to hurt his aunt Mahaut to whom he lost his inheritance - another skilled intriguer and a mother and cousin of the adulteresses. **Queen Isabelle**, a spurned wife of Edward II of England who allows his 'favorites' to run his kingdom, is indignant of the shame the affair brings to her royal family of France - and is resentful of the pleasures and happiness the others - and not her, the Queen and the

unloved wife - are allowed to have.

One of the strongest elements in the entire 'Accursed Kings' series is the larger than life character of Robert D'Artois, the scheming intriguer pursuing his never-ending goal of righting the real and imaginary wrongs against him, obsessed with power struggle between him and **Countess Mahaut D'Artois**, a powerful woman who appears to be evenly matched in the art of intrigue with her boisterous nephew. Robert, a cruel and merciless man is nevertheless somehow absolutely charmingly fascinating in his humor and unstoppable vitality.

When I was 11, I was torn between having a serious literary crush on him and his complete opposite - cold-headed and rational Philippe, count of Poitiers, the middle son of Philippe IV (and, since history precludes the idea of spoilers, future Philippe V).

In this world of palace intrigue, **Robert, Mahaut and Charles Valois** (*Philippe IV's younger power-obsessed brother*) are the aspiring puppetmasters trying to use the rest of the world as their marionettes. Philippe IV's children Isabelle and (eventually) **Philippe de Poitiers** are worthy schemers in their own right. **Tolomei**, an Italian banker, however, knows where the money is - since no scheming can be done without the money. And **Louis X the Quarreler** (*Philippe IV's eldest son and the heir to the throne*) is a weak pathetic man who is destined to be a marionette rather than a puppetmaster.

This is a book full of intrigues and politics - and scandals, love, deceptions, betrayals, heartbreaks, murders, cruelty, vitality, blood, money, and all the other things that make history so alluring and yet so terrifying.

And, if you want to find out what happens in the end, you don't need to wait until you read all the books (*even though they all have been finished long ago, in 1955-1960, with the unexpected 7th volume following in 1977*) - you can consult your history books (or Wikipedia, really) to see how it all turned out. **And you will see that everyone is in this book to play a role that the unrelenting history has decided they should play, no exceptions.** (view spoiler)

And you do not have to be a history buff to understand and enjoy the plotline of this book (I surely wasn't one at eleven!) - Druon weaves the political details of that time into his narrative quite seamlessly, easily bringing his readers up to speed on the 14th century France.

When I started my re-read, I was a bit afraid that the overwhelming childhood adoration of this book will not stand the test of time. **I should not have worried - it withstood that test with the untouchable air that would have made even Philippe the Fair envious.** It's a lovely fascinating and nicely paced book that brings history to life - to the point where a certain nerdy 11-year-old reader would bring it to school to read it at recess. **4 French lilies and a relieved sigh at the lack of disappointment and disillusionment in this beloved childhood companion.**

"Do I need to remind you, Isabelle, what we are obligated to sacrifice for the sake of our position and that we are born not to succumb to our personal grievances? We do not live our own lives; we live for the sake of our kingdom and only through this we can find satisfaction -

of course, only if we are worthy of our high station in life."

A side note: There is a lovely 1972 French TV series based on this book, made to look almost like a theater production, and it has English subtitles. It's quite interesting, and can be found here:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIIdo7B...>

Another side note: I read this book (both times) in Russian translation as I don't read French and English translations of French books are in my opinion too lifeless and cumbersome. So I cannot comment on the quality of the current translation - but the Russian one (for those who read it) is full of life and is truly excellent.

Leonel says

Espectacular, increíble la manera de escribir de este autor. Te deja con ganas de más. Incluso a los que no les gusta la historia les va a encantar. Cuando termine los 7 hago una evaluación como corresponde, ahora es imposible.

Roman Clodia says

'Power is a bitter thing'

An eminently readable historical novel, the first of seven, retelling the story of the Capet dynasty in medieval France. This first book follows Philippe IV (Philip the Fair) from his suppression of the Templars to his death in 1314.

The book was originally published in 1955 and there is a slightly old-fashioned air to the narrative. It reminds me a little of Dumas but without the swashbuckling and sense of humour, especially his *La Reine Margot*, though this is lighter on atmosphere. Druon moves between the machinations of the court and the sexual intrigues of his three daughters-in-law, though both are always seen as political.

There are some simplicities in language (they are there in the original French so it's not merely a translation issue) but this is historically detailed to compensate. What it's not is a version of the Philippa Gregory historical romance with modern personalities dressed up in medieval costume. Thankfully!

Amparo says

Simplemente, una delicia de lectura.

Matt says

As Druon opens his series in the early 14th century, much is taking place in France. Philip IV has ultimate control of his subjects and has married his daughter, Isabella, to the King of England in hopes of holding some degree of control on the other side of the Channel. Philip has finally captured the leadership of the Knights Templar and is set to bestow the ultimate punishment, with the backing of the Church, to uphold his image as the Iron King. Even while Parisians support the religious group, an example must be made of them and those who seek to contradict the concentrated leadership in Paris and Rome. When Philip executes the Templars as heretics, a final prediction from the pyre sees three prominent men cursed with death by the end of the year. A pall spreads across the land and all eyes are on those named. Meanwhile, Queen Isabella learns that her sisters-in-law have been being anything but princess-like back in France and she sets a trap and watches the downfall. During a trip to see her father, Isabella lets the information come to light, which leads to a number of horrific events, all solidifying the Iron King's moniker. While those in court continue to live high on the hog, their financial situations are precarious, balanced by a number of Italian money lenders, whose power could topple the monarchy at any turn. With a secret passed along from the Templars, these lenders hold more than monetary power over the political elite. Druon sets the tone for what will surely be a series full of intrigue, power, deception, and utter ruin.

While called a likely precursor to the Song of Ice and Fire series penned by series fan George RR Martin, the series remains fairly ensconced in history and its realistic portrayal. With a flair for the dramatic, Druon introduces the reader to a number of characters sure to play key roles throughout the series, even if their importance is not fully known at this point. Having not seen the mini-series and not being a historical buff of that period, I am eager to be surprised by much of what occurs and the characters whose lives become highly important over time. History and politics buffs, as well as those who find monarchical series (a la Tudors) will revel in the story lines and plot development.

Kudos, M. Druon for this wonderful opening novel. I hope my attention is kept with the next six instalments.

Chris says

So, this is being marketed as "the original Game of Thrones". With blurbs and a new introduction from George R.R. Martin himself. What an eye-catching endorsement! I was sold.

Well, yes and no. It's actually quite different than GoT. But at the same time, I can see where it's an influence on Martin's story. Not the only one, but it's certainly there.

That said, it's quite an enjoyable novel. It has held up well over time (published in 1955 originally) and survived translation (from French). It moved at a quick pace and was quite compelling.

Susan says

The Accursed Kings Series Books 1-3: The Iron King, The Strangled Queen, The Poisoned Crown is a sequence of seven historical novels by French author Maurice Druon about the French monarchy in the 14th century. The Iron King is the first book in this series which has been translated into English.

King Philip the Fair rules with an iron fist, but is surrounded by scandal and intrigue. This is a book filled with scandal, murder, political intrigue, sex and espionage. It is perfect for those who love historical fiction, set in an intriguing period following power players of Europe. American author George R. R. Martin called

The Accursed Kings "the original game of thrones", citing Druon's novels as an inspiration for his own series A Song of Ice and Fire.

I cannot wait to continue this series!

4 star

Nadine says

The Iron King, dubbed the original Game of Thrones by George R R Martin, follows Philip the Fair at the end of the final trial for the powerful Knights of the Templar.

I'm guilty of reading this because of George R R Martin. The wait for The Winds of Winter is proving to be more difficult than I thought so I grabbed the next best thing.

Throughout the entire book you can clearly see the parallels to A Song of Ice and Fire. I may have read too much into some smaller details, but it was nonetheless fun and exciting to see hints of ASOIAF sprinkled throughout.

With any historical fiction novel you have to go into the book with a bit of knowledge of the time period to really enjoy the story. There were many times I had to refer to the character list and timeline at the beginning of the book to situate myself in the story. So I advise future readers to watch a documentary about Philip the Fair before reading.

Overall, the story was full of intrigue, mystery, and murder. I would definitely recommend this book to fans of ASOIAF and fantasy readers (since historical fiction and fantasy are almost sister genres).

A. S. says

"The Iron King" by Maurice Druon follows the intrigues, passions, murders, and backstabbing within the French dynasty in the 1300s. It was originally published in French in the 1950s, and is the first book in the Accursed Kings series (there are seven in all, and they follow the story of the dynasty after it's—you guessed it, cursed—in the first book, by the unfairly executed Grand Master Jacques de Molay).

I like historical fiction novels, and Druon's series was very popular when it was initially published. Though I've heard of it, this was my first time actually reading it. The title of the book, "The Iron King" refers to Philip IV (Philip the Fair), the King of France who has a fiery temper. After he is unable to overtake Jacques de Molay's Order of the Knights of Templar organization, the King gets his vengeance by sentencing Jacques and the rest of the senior participants of this organization to a lengthy jail sentence, and ultimately to burn at the stake. Jacques, whose organization was dismantled and life ruined, vows revenge. He curses the people who did this to him—the King of France (the Iron King), the Pope, and the King's Minister Guillaume de Nogaret. As the story starts unfolding further, the curse begins to work—and, reminiscent to Agatha Christies "And then there were none,"—the recipients of the curse start to die one by one.

Meanwhile, the Iron King's sons—Louis, King of Navarre and Charles, are being cuckolded by their cheating wives—Marguerite and Blanche. Worst of all, the cheating scandal is revealed to Isabella, the Iron King's daughter and sister to the cuckolded husbands. The informer, Robert III of Artois, seeks to fulfill his

own agenda after losing a long battle over inheritance with the mother and aunt of the unfaithful wives, Mahaut, who also happens to be Robert's own aunt. If her daughters and niece lose favor with the Iron King, Mahaut's power will substantially weaken and Robert might be able to wrench away the inheritance.

Even though Isabella is married to a homosexual husband, the King of England Edward II and scarcely happy in her private life herself, she seeks Robert's help in getting evidence of their affairs and providing it to the King of France, her father. If the scandal gets revealed, then both the lives of the unfaithful wives and those of their lovers, the Aunay brothers, Gautier and Philippe, will be in danger.

Not everything gets wrapped up neatly (this is a series after all), and as the book ends, France's kingdom is left in turmoil. Though the writing style isn't easy on the eyes, the interesting storyline more than makes up for it. Looking forward to reading the second book, which will hopefully come out. Highly recommended.

Victoria says

4,5/5

Une excellente lecture, pleine d'intrigues et de conspirations. L'Histoire comme un roman, passionnante et vivante !

Terence says

"This is the original *Game of Thrones*," or so says the man who would know, George R.R. Martin, and *The Iron King* certainly has more than its share of murder, adultery, conspiracy, star-crossed lovers and bloody-minded cruelty. The only thing it doesn't have is dragons (unless you count the ones on heraldic devices). It's an account of the last days of the Capetian dynasty of France, when the feudal society of the Middle Ages was giving way to the modern state, and England and France became locked in the deadly embrace of the Hundred Years' War.

The Iron King opens a generation before the war, in 1314, when Philip the Fair successfully concludes his persecution and destruction of the Knights Templar, one of the most powerful organizations in Europe. On his pyre, its last Grandmaster, Jacques de Molay, curses the Capetians unto the 13th generation. (And, within a year, all three architects of the Templars' fall would be dead. Coincidence? Well...yes. The curse is the stuff of urban legend; and does it really make sense that a man brutally tortured for seven years and being burned alive would have the presence of mind to enunciate a curse against his tormentors? But it does make for a good story.) Between the death of de Molay and Philip, the royal family is torn apart by adultery. The wives of the king's three sons are implicated in affairs. Two are condemned to convents, and the third is put under house arrest (she hadn't had a lover but she helped the others conceal the trysts), and the hapless lovers are tortured and brutally executed. Meanwhile, the king's daughter, wife of Edward II of England, is taking advantage of the situation to put herself and her young son (future Edward III and instigator of the Hundred Years' War) in a position to claim the crown of France.

I would love to recommend the book wholeheartedly but I cannot. The translation is not very good. It reads like a school exercise. Something I'd expect from a student in a (admittedly advanced) French class. It competently translates the French, I'm sure, but that's all it does – there's no life in it. Times like this I wish

my grad-school French was up to reading the original.

Nevertheless, I'm interested enough in the story – and the translation *does* on occasion rise to the level of excellence the story deserves – that I'll persevere through the 2nd book – *The Strangled Queen* – at the very least.

* As an aside: One of my favorite books about the period (the 14th century) and one I'd eagerly recommend is Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror*. If a bit dated, it brings the period to life by following the life and career of one of France's premier – if now obscure – nobles, Enguerrand de Coucy, who dies a prisoner of the Turks in 1396 (if I recall correctly).

Ton says

The Iron King is set in 1314, the year in which the Trial of the Templars reached its conclusion, and the French court was shocked by the Tower of Nesle affair. If you know what happens in these events, this novel is not for you. Prior knowledge will reduce the book to a travelogue featuring nothing but the drabest of landmarks.

The Iron King is Philip IV, called the Fair, ostensibly because he's as pretty (and as sentimental) as a statue. Philip is obsessed with strengthening the monarchy of France, by any means necessary. In the first part of the book the last phase of the Trial of the Templars takes center-stage. This trial, beginning with the arrest of all Templars in France on November 13th 1307, shook Europe. The Order of the Templars was one of the most powerful and wealthiest organizations in Europe; that a king would indict and persecute them was virtually unthinkable (and would not have worked had Philip not had the pope on a leash in Avignon). The second phase of the book centers on the Tower of the Nesle affair, the last part is about the curse of the Templars (hence *The Accursed Kings*) and the Lombards' efforts to escape persecution.

The reason for the bad review is not that nothing happens in this book; it's because the book isn't written in anything resembling an engaging style. Druon is almost as statuesque as he claims Philip was. Almost everything is written from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, and even when not, the characters still don't come to life. We are told this or that person is, for example, jealous, or an intriguer, or devoted etc. etc., but it never comes off. They remain one-dimensional, and in this way the book entirely fails to draw one in. Druon obviously knew what he was talking about (even though current scholarship may disagree with the theories he espoused in 1955), but it falls flat because it doesn't engage. I love Medieval history, and I had to force myself to finish this. Sad, because this book could have been so much more.

Kalliope says

No, I did not read this book, first in a series of seven, because the saga has been one of the sources for the Game of Thrones, about which, both in its book and filmed versions I know little more than this. No, I read it because I am interested in the end of the Capetians and the beginning of the Valois dynasty.

In this novel we are presented with a few episodes at the end of the life of the King of France **Philippe IV (1268-1314)**, le Bel. As his epithet indicates, he was a man considered of great beauty, if of a cold and inexorable beauty. Like his implacable and stony personality.

His reign was relatively successful and he achieved many of the aims he set himself. As a close contemporary of **Dante Alighieri (1268-1321)**, he also shared with the poet a deep enmity with the **Pope Boniface VIII** (pope during 1295-1303).

Dante put the Pope in one of the circles of his Inferno, and Philippe put the Pope in his place. That is, the French King would not accept any spiritual authority over his own, and much before Henry VIII did so in England, Philippe assumed both the holy and terrestrial powers over his land. The by product of this conflict is that the Papacy was also extracted out of Rome and placed in the South of France, in Avignon.

Philippe certainly had an ability to deal with his problems in a surgical manner. If not his beauty, his coldness could be put to merciless use. As a solution to his financial problems he expelled the Jews--again much before Queen Isabel and King Fernando did the same in Castile and Aragón-- while also expropriating them.

But this novel does not really deal with the above, though, since it starts later. Maurice Druon begins his saga of *The Cursed Kings* with another one of Philippe's deeds: his definitive eradication of the Templars. This brutal undertaking provided him with a similar financial windfall to that obtained from the Jews. We also see him attempting another of these profitable measures for a third time. The last to be shorn of their wealth were the Lombard bankers. But death for the beautiful king before he could succeed in this.

To the end of the Templars Druon intertwines another episode in this novel which provides plenty of dramatic feed: the scandal of the Nesle Tower.

If Philippe had the envied luck of any medieval king, for he had three sons all eligible to succeed him as heir, he had been less lucky with the three women his numerous male progeny married. All three women, two of them sisters, and the third a cousin. All three, Marguerite, Jeanne and Blanche were not too happy with their respective royal husbands and found solace elsewhere - in the Nestle Tower. They were found out and locked up. To add to the already dense intrigue, the sneak had been the sister in law, the Queen of England, Isabelle, mother of Edward III.

And so we get closer to the beginning of the Hundred Years War, and I pick up the second volume.

I have decided to write about the style and the writing in a future review of a subsequent volume.

Maya Panika says

Enough is enough. I'm giving up on this book. I - as I'm sure were many others - was lured into reading this on the promise of George RR Martin's recommendation: 'This was the original Game of Thrones'. It wasn't, not even close. It's a history book disguised as a novel, written in a tedious and childish style.

Harsh, I know. In its defence, it's an old book (1955) that's been recently re-launched and it's a translation - either or both of these elements could be the reason why this book didn't work for me. The main problem wasn't the subject, which is a truly fascinating one, a complex and interesting period in European history, peopled by intriguing and extreme characters, the problem throughout was the writing style, which alternated between a dreary monologue of facts, and imaginary conversations which never engaged and were, at times, simply bizarre. It didn't feel real. It quickly became very annoying. The only thing I can say in its defence is that it is thorough, if you love this particular period of history, and, maybe, if you're a younger reader, this might work for you.

It's not often I don't finish a book I'm intending to review. Writing is hard; every author's work deserves careful consideration. I won't usually review any book until I've read it all, but sometimes that's just not possible. I got halfway through, I gave it that much of my time, but reached a point where I really could not turn another page. Life is just too short to spend reading books you're not enjoying as much as I was not enjoying this.

Nermin says

Like many people, I decided to pick this up after GRRM's recommendation. In one of his blog post he calles this book the 'original Game of Thrones'. Well, I could spot some similarities but despite it and GRMM's claims, I really don't think A Song of Ice and Fire resembles this book. So if you pick this up expecting another GoT, you may be slightly disappointed.

But just like A song of Ice and fire series, this book is full of court intrigues, betrayals, gruesome executions and sex sex sex. Needless to say, I love reading about this things and I love historical fiction. So I ended up enjoying this book much more than I thought I would when I started it. It was a surprisingly light, funny and compelling read and I can't wait to lay my hands on the second book of the series!

Jeffrey Keeten says

“It must be admitted that such things were common coin of the period. Kingdoms were often handed over to adolescents, whose absolute power fascinated them as might a game. Hardly grown out of the age in which it is fun to tear the wings from flies, they might now amuse themselves by tearing the heads from men. Too young to fear or even imagine death, they would not hesitate to distribute it around them.”

Philippe IV, the Fair, of France

Philip IV, known as Philip the Fair, came to the throne at the age of 17 and ruled France for 29 years. He was a dispassionate, imperial man. His ice cold blue eyes betrayed nothing of the workings of his mind. He fought with Edward I King of England. He defied the Pope. He expelled the Jews in 1306, over 100,000 of them were frog marched out of the country. On Friday the 13th in 1307, Black Friday as it famously came to be known long before it became a celebrated day of Walmart shopping, he arrested the Knights Templar and seized all their property.

He simply owed the Jews and the Knights Templar too much money. Of course a king can not say the reason he is forcibly expelling one group or torturing to death another group is because he is...well...a welcher. The Jews are one thing. You can just give them a boot in the buttocks on their way out of the country and no one will care, but the Knights Templar are quite another thing. In fact they are a rather dangerous lot, skilled swordsmen, warriors for Christ none the less, and they have more than money enough to curry favor with those that can extract them from the clutches of the crown.

This is delicate matter that can not be handled delicately.

Philip **The Fair** must have sat down and made a list of every dastardly thing that a man or an entire organization can be accused of. The short list: apostasy, idolatry, heresy, bestiality, obscene rituals, financial corruption, fraud, secrecy and of course the ever popular sodomy. After all it gets cold in those Middle Eastern desert climates at night, sometimes a pair of saddlebags are not a pair of saddlebags. (Those aren't pillows!)

This all leads to torture and more torture.

Jacques de Molay, Grand Master of the Knights Templar was of particular interest to the crown. He was tortured for seven long years.

"And more recently he had undergone the torture by stretching, the most appalling perhaps of all those to which he had been subjected. A weight of two hundred pounds had been tied to his right foot while he, old as he was, had been hoisted to the ceiling by a rope and pulley. And all the time Guillaume de Nogaret's sinister voice kept repeating, 'Confess, Messire, why don't you confess?' And since he still obstinately refused, they had hauled him from floor to ceiling more hurriedly, more jerkily. He had felt his limbs becoming disjoined, the articulations parting, his whole body seemed to be bursting, and he had begun to scream that he would confess everything, admit every crime, all the crimes of the world."

Now I have never looked at a goat with desire or had any inclinations for devil worship, but if you swing 200 pounds off my leg and jerk me up and down until all the joints of my body dislocate I will admit to fornicating with the devil while he fornicated the goat or any other thing you want me to confess to if you will make the pain go away. De Molay, after a valiant effort to resist, has admitted everything that Philip needs him to confess.

This book starts in 1314 with a few strategic flashbacks to catch us up on how things happened, but I wanted to give a little background on Philip before discussing Maurice Druon's book *The Iron King* first in a series of seven novels published from 1955 to 1977.

That stench in your nostrils is the reek of betrayal.

So after seven years Philip has what he wants so it is time to start piling up the wood and get ready for the smell of singed flesh. He brings de Molay and a few of the remaining high ranking Templars to the final show trial so that the charges can be publicly read. De Molay puts a damper on the event by renouncing all the charges and placing a curse on Pope Clement V, de Nogaret, and Philip IV.

“Accursed! Accursed! You shall be accursed to the thirteenth generation!”

The crowd is swayed for a moment by the spirited defense offered by the Knights Templar, but they really came to see the show and once the first lit torch is dropped:

“A huge sigh rose from thousands of breasts, a sigh of relief and horror, excitement and dismay, a sigh made up of anguish and of revulsion and of pleasure.”

Blanche of Burgundy, one of the scandalized cousins.

All three of Philip’s sons have been married to a girl from Burgundy, political alliances. The three girls are cousins, muses of beauty, and thick as thieves. Isabella, Philip’s only daughter, has been married off to the King of England Edward II with the hope that peace can be achieved and sustained. Philip would like to see his grandson on the throne of England. Druon makes the case that Isabella may have had bigger plans than that for her infant son.

Poor Piers Gaveston lying dead at the feet of one of his assassins Guy de Beauchamp. Was he killed because he was having pillow fights with Edward in the bedroom or was he killed because he’d gained too much influence too quickly?

Despite Isabella’s renown beauty, Edward likes to spend his time with boys, spilling his royal seed other places than in the fertile womb of his queen. When he becomes too close to Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall, his wife proves to be more like her father than her three brothers. She arranges to have Gaveston ran through with a sword and beheaded. His body left on the very road he was executed on. Gaveston irritated more than just the queen with the special attention he received from Edward. It wasn’t hard to find men willing to take him off the chessboard.

When Isabella hears her sister-in-laws might be committing acts of adultery she concocts a plan that will hand irrefutable evidence to her father. She doesn’t like her sister-in-laws and doesn’t mind exposing their conduct even if it embarrasses her father and the French court. This scandal was called the Tour de Nesie Affair named for the tower in which these royal women and their young lovers were “supposedly” meeting. There is speculation that these accusations were all part of Isabella’s grand plan to eventually see her son ruling France.

Queen Isabella

Now with three brothers you would think that there would be no chance for the future Edward III to ever be next in line for the French throne. Each of the three brothers became King in quick succession, all died young, and all failed to produce a male heir touching off a little dust up called The Hundred Years’ War. Edward III, was the closest male heir to the House of Capet, but the French slid around that issue by declaring Edward III unfit under the rules of the Salic Law. This law covers a lot of different aspects of the

rules and conducts of the Franks, but the section we are most interested in is the part where it states it is against French law for a female to sit on the throne of France nor shall any male heir from her line be qualified to be King of France either.

Knowing Queen Isabella, as I've come to know her under the guiding hand of Druon, I can only imagine how much stewing, plotting, and conniving she will be doing with the hope of seeing her son in her father's chair despite the stipulations by the Salic Law.

I have stretched out the history, giving everyone some of the lead up to the events in this novel and also flashed forward a bit to see where things will be going. George R.R. Martin has been leading the surge in bringing this series back into print. He has said that he was heavily influenced by Druon and states that "*This is the original Game of Thrones*".

If you love *Game of Thrones* you might just like this series. If you don't like *Game of Thrones* you might just love this series. There is intrigue, uneasy alliances, betrayal, lust, gamesmanship, and a minor Italian character named Guccio Baglioni who when he meets a mother and daughter can't decide which he will try to seduce first. Ahhh those Italians.

I'm looking forward to book two called *The Strangled Queen*. Now isn't that quite the tantalizing title.

Alejandra Restrepo B. says

No me resisto a un libro de historia bien contado.

Cuando los encuentro me pregunto por qué los profes del colegio no enseñan historia así.

Un libro muy bien contado acerca del reinado de Felipe "el hermoso" y la maldición que recibió de los templarios.

El ser humano ha estado dañado siempre, el poder, la ambición y la crueldad han sido parte de la historia desde que el hombre es protagonista de ella.

Esta colección de siete libros es super recomendada para los amantes de la historia.

César Lasso says

Si no es un clásico de la literatura universal, esta novela es ya un clásico del género histórico. Bien documentada y entretenida, su interés no decae nunca. Acompañamos en ella a Felipe el Hermoso y a la familia real francesa a principios del trágico siglo XIV. Pero también se nos presentan otros personajes y dramas, como el de los Templarios cuando se abolió la orden, el de los banqueros italianos residentes en Francia, o el de nobles arruinados a punto de ser embargados.

Aparte de la minuciosa documentación histórica, el autor muestra imaginación para reconstruir los sentimientos de sus personajes. Un detalle violento son las escenas de torturas y ejecuciones en la Edad Media. ¡Ni el autodenominado Estado Islámico es tan refinadamente perverso!
