



Dolly and the Starry Bird

Dorothy Dunnett

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Also Known As *Roman Nights*

Johnson Johnson, in Rome to paint a portrait of the pope, helps British astronomer Ruth Russell recover a friend's camera and accidentally discovers a murder victim.

Dolly and the Starry Bird Details

Date : Published August 12th 1982 by Vintage (first published 1973)

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Author : Dorothy Dunnett

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Genre : Mystery, Crime, Contemporary, Thriller, Mystery Thriller

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From Reader Review Dolly and the Starry Bird for online ebook

Genevieve says

An interesting story buried under a narrative voice I found very hard to deal with. Will read another in the series to see if it works better for me.

Kspear says

Not my favorite Dorothy Dunnett, but one which showed me just how good a writer she was. The humor is very dry, and you really have to pay attention. It's all worth it.

Luke says

I fell into the trap. I judged a book by the author (not the cover) I found and bought a book by a author I liked and expected to like the book too.

I suspect most people have read these crime books based on their love of her historicals. Dolly and the Starry Bird was not great. Which tells me (I'm not a Dunster.... Not a starry eyed fan) the author had a special formula when she wrote the Lymond Chronicles.... Still she was a great writer.

These crime novels (I read two) were books of her time, and not timeless crime novels.

Leslie says

Also known as Dolly and the Starry Bird. Good suspense/mystery tale and the main character Johnson Johnson is fun, but not the same caliber of writing as Dunnett's historical fiction.

Christina Veldman says

The Johnson Johnson series, like most Dorothy Dunnett novels, are difficult to get into and understand. However, for me, I find the end result most rewarding, and this crime story being no different. The ending was a real surprise, but that for me wasn't what was most interesting. As usual, it was the portrayal and the dissection of Johnson Johnson himself that was most thought-provoking.

Catherine says

Roman Nights was a great addition to the Johnson Johnson series. I just did not see the twist at the end at all!

Loved the characters and the mystery. Highly recommended.

Runningrabbit says

I believe this is my very favourite Dorothy Dunnett. Witty, groovy, charming, and a great mystery story. Fabulous - I absolutely love the characters.

David Chess says

Kind of fun, light British decadent-but-proper murder-mystery of (Bohemian) manners. Nice beach or airplane read.

Andrea says

A good deal less annoying than the previous outing. Interesting to have an astronomer main character (though the astronomy worked mainly as a setting, and several infodumps at the beginning).

Tim says

Unlike her historicals, I found Dunnett's mysteries to be uninteresting. This is the only one I read, so maybe I'm missing something. I was always resentful of the time she took to write these...

Jane says

Well, I certainly had no idea whodunit. Having read Dunnett's historical fiction, it was fun to see her weave the same kinds of many-layered characters and plots into a mystery. And, use the same techniques to keep readers in the dark!

Sandra says

4.5 stars. Oh noes! This one was sad!

Joy says

Ruth, an Englishwoman in Rome, heads the Frazer Observatory. That sounds glamorous, but it has a staff of two. The glamour comes from her boyfriend the marquis's son and their friend the daughter of a rich Italian

prince. They all run with the yachting crowd.

But something has gone wrong. Ruth and Charles, lunching at the Rome Zoological Gardens, are being followed by a pair of sinister men, one of whom gets his head blown off. From there it's a chase through Italy and across the Mediterranean, much of it in Dunnett's best rollicking tone. An uncivilized group, or maybe groups, want pictures from whichever camera Charles has been using. They are befriended by a famous artist blessed with remarkable timing, the unlikely name of Johnson Johnson, and a yacht named *Dolly*.

I treasure Dorothy Dunnett's style. Here's an author who knows how to write detail into a chase: *Halfway across, he glanced around and saw us and, spinning around, started off, fast, in another direction. Two Fiats, an Alfa Romeo and a Mercedes-Benz allowed him to pass and met, uncontrollably, in his absence. There was a bang, followed by a quartet of long, tinny rattles. Mr. Paladrini, in a burst of imperishable speed, nipped onto the pavement and vanished down a flight of steps signposted SOTTO PASSAGGIO PEDONALE, followed by an erratic file of afflicted motorists, a number of bystanders, two carabinieri, and us.*

And some more whimsies that delight me:

Every observatory is round and has spiral staircases. That is why astronomers go everywhere in single file with their elbows tucked in.

There was the grinding noise of a number of people changing their minds.

The pebble glasses turned on the bifocal spectacles in a dazzling encounter of vitrines.

Helen says

International intrigue mixed with Beadeker's guide to Rome!

Brittany says

These mysteries, what will all the wonderful characters, action, humor, and romance, would make wonderful movies. This one, maybe because its set in Italy, forcefully reminds me of *The Tourist*. In a good way.

In this book the protagonist is astronomer Ruth Russell, doing a research stint in Rome. She's wry, witty, and just pretty darn fun to hang out with.

The cast of characters are weighted heavily toward academics, most of them being the type of people we all recognize from studies abroad. Johnson seemed to have just as much fun romping with academics and artists as he does with upper-society types. These books are well-written, elegantly plotted, always keep me guessing, and a whole lot of fun. Also, I love the way Dunnett deals with heroines at the ends of books.
(view spoiler)
