



A Game of Sorrows

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It is 1628, and Alexander Seaton's happily settled life as a university teacher in Aberdeen is shattered by the arrival in town of a stranger who looks like his twin and who carries a plea for help from Alexander's dead mother's family in Ireland. The family has been placed under a poet's curse, threatening death to various members. Elements of the curse have already begun to play out. Reluctantly answering the call, Alexander leaves his home and his beloved Sarah and travels to Ulster, to find himself among a family torn apart by secrets and long-buried resentments.

In the course of seeking out the author of the curse, Alexander becomes deeply entangled in a conflict that involves fugitive priests, displaced poets, rebellious plotters and agents of the king. Confronted by murder within his family, he finds the lines between superstition and faith, duty and loyalty are becoming increasingly blurred, while his Scottish homeland grows ever more remote.

A Game of Sorrows Details

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Author : Shona MacLean

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From Reader Review A Game of Sorrows for online ebook

Lorna says

I think it was probably well researched but not a period or a place of which I know anymore than the basics. I maybe should have read the first one first but hey ho I haven't. It is definitely worth a read and I may have underrated it. Some of her characters lacked reality or substance.

Kulaprabha Marlene says

I wasn't so gripped by this second book in the series as I was by the first and third books. More of an adventure tale than a murder mystery though there are murders in it. Quite a lot of them. But by about half way through I did realise that I was intrigued and I would be carrying on to the end. I also realised how little I know about the 17th century history of Ulster.

Bill says

I only read this book because the author has a PhD from Aberdeen University in Scottish History (specialising in 16th & 17th century) and also researched for the book in Queens University, Belfast.

The story covers much of Northern Ireland and is centred around Carrickfergus.

Now that I have been living in Aberdeen for many years, born in Belfast and brought up near Carrickfergus, where I briefly taught Maths and Engineering, I was interested to look back a few centuries regarding life in Ulster.

Apart from that, I didn't find the book entirely to my liking

Chris Stanley says

This book is fantastic. The Redemption of Alexander Seaton was excellent and this sequel is even better. I studied 17th century Irish history long ago and a little understanding of the period only added to my enjoyment of the book. Some lovely characters and some seriously nasty ones. I hated to put this book down. Very highly recommended!

Silke says

The atmosphere created made me feel like I was right there standing next to the characteres, seeing what they

laid eyes on, smelling what they smell (which isn't always pleasant given the setting), listening to the different voices and languages - I really enjoyed it. Especially since it brought a period of history to my attention I did not know so much about and I'm much looking forward to learn more now.

Caty Toward says

Great series of reads

Annet says

Beautiful book. It is a bit long and I do understand the criticism of some readers you loose track of all the names and characters, the longness of some story parts, but what wins is the beauty of the story, the atmosphere created, the interesting history, the poetic language, so I really enjoyed this story, although halfway though I also lost interest a bit for a moment. The last part say 150 pages when I could only read a few pages almost every day I really enjoyed. Knowing the book was waiting for me for if only 2 pages before sleep. Time lacks me at the moment to read....unfortunately. I like this writer and I hope a new book will follow soon about Alexander Seaton.

Cathy says

Lots more travel and action in this book. Story focuses on distant past (Seaton's) and the present and it's personal this time. The Irish don't come out looking very well in this book, but then neither do the British. But that's the way the situation is -- some people on each side are bad apples that make the situation worse.

Calum says

I strongly advise you to read Shona MacLean's books if you get the chance! 'A Game of Sorrows' is the second historical mystery written by Shona MacLean that follows on from her first novel 'The Redemption of Alexander Seaton'. This historical thriller is very well researched and sweeps Alexander Seaton from Aberdeen in Scotland right back to family roots in Ulster and to family feuds that he may have wished he had never had to know about. Set in the 17th century the story unfolds about family clans secrets curses murder and long held resentments in a land torn apart by conflict. This is a fast paced story that is hard to put down once started!

Teresa says

Several reviewers have given this book poor ratings, saying, among other criticisms, that the plot was convoluted, implausible, etc., but it struck me that life in Northern Ireland in the early 1600s amidst the clashing of cultures, language and religion in continual struggles for power and survival with so many

undoubtedly finding themselves caught somewhere between warring sides no matter what their personal beliefs, needs, history, loss or gain or royal mandate, was just this convoluted and implausible...but true. I found it much easier to remember characters in this book than in MacLean's first, and found this exciting narrative much more difficult to put aside when work called. I'm looking forward to her third in this series, but was surprised to see the title slightly changed and the author's first name replaced by initials... perhaps to make it clear to readers that these are not light romance novels written by a woman? If so, that necessity makes me sad. These are exciting, well-researched historical mysteries; the main character is a man; there is more adventure and intrigue than romance, though there is some of that too. I was interested by book 1, "The Redemption of Alexander Seaton;" book 2, the historic tragedy of the O'Neills, of Ireland, and poor Alexander's strange involvement, as he is dragged through this adventurous "Game of Sorrows," fascinated me.

Alan Thomson says

Excellent book following The Redemption of Alexander Seaton. It continues in very much the same way with a different plot following Alexander's family in Ireland. Very well written and I really liked the historical detail. The plot I found exactly the right balance between exciting action and description and the book was the perfect length. Congratulations to the author. I am away to start the third in the series

Susan Anderson says

Oh dear. I read the first book - the Redemption of Alexander Seaton and found it mildly interesting, but not enthralling. And then read the blurb for the second. Ireland in 1628 - and by co-incidence, was studying the same period at uni. Events leading up to the 1641 uprising. So - lulled by MacLean's academic credentials, thought it might be a little light relief from my academic studies.

And what a disappointment. OK - I had no problems with the historical background. So what was left was a totally confusing romantic chase around Ireland - with monks and rebels and female cousins and vengeful grandmothers. Oh - it is so boring - and could have been written in any historical background! Sorry - whether or not MacLean is a meaningful academic writer - I have no idea. But as a writer of fiction - no way. As for Seaton, I am left with absolutely no interest as to whether he gets back to Scotland and marries his servant. This is my second try at the Seaton and definitely my last.

Cornelia says

I have to admit: I needed to stop reading this book. I bought it as a translation (German), so I can only write my review about that one, but I think my words can probably also be applied to the English original.

To start off: I am someone who starts and ends books as they come, since I always find at least one interesting point in the story of a book, or character, that just keeps me going, so that I at least have a small urge to finish the book to see how everything turned out. I normally do not stop reading books only because they seem to be boring at first.

But with this one, the book just continues to be boring. It sounded really interesting at first, and I even wanted to read it after I realised that the book was the second part of a series, but now, after 200 pages or so I

just cannot bring myself to finish it. The story just becomes more absurd and even though it is supposed to be thrilling, it is not. And it is not just the story, but the way in which the dialogues are created and how the main character tells his story. Alexander Seaton just continues to ramble about everything.

And I really NEEDED to stop (now here comes the actual spoiler) at the point of the story where he is the prisoner of the supposed to befriend family of his grandmother and sleeps with the supposed-to-be-wife of his cousin. Even though he is drugged, I somehow cannot forgive him for that. If he would have been forced to do it while someone was holding a knife to his throat, alright, but he wasn't even forced. And I think this was not even the worst part of it. It was the way in which Alexander narrates the story. He always talked about how much he loved the maid of his best friend, Sarah, and how much he finally wanted to get back to her and then he just sleeps with the fiancé of his cousin. Even though his mind somehow tells him: Stop!

And that's just why I had to stop. So, to summarise: The story was boring, the characters were boring (at least the main character, which makes it worst), and then things like the one described above happen. I honestly do not even care if he dies in Ireland or not. Which is sad, because the story looked promising.

Alexandra says

It was actually more use for my essay than all the monographs I've been reading lately - I shall have to skim this again and take notes next time...

Alison says

brilliant story kept me hooked, shame work stopped me reading it in one go.

Carmilla Voiez says

I loved the first book "The Redemption of Alexander Seaton", a real page-turner, and expected this one to provoke a similar effect. It sort of did, but not for the first 100 pages. It's obvious that Shona MacLean knows her subject well, however I have always believed that part of an author's skill is knowing what not to include and sadly, the first 100 pages was full of awkward info dumps. Keep going though, because when the story starts to take off it becomes a gripping tale of political intrigue. For the first 100 pages I would give it 1 or 2 stars, but from thereafter it is easily a 4 star read and I found myself submerged in a beautiful land, 17th century Ireland, and its diverse people.

Roberta says

I thought the first book in the series was boring. When I told the person who recommended it to me that I HATED the setting, he assured me that the setting changed in the second book. I should have asked him if it got any better. It didn't. To make a painfully long story short, because Alexander Seaton's mother eloped with his father, she was estranged from her family. The nasty, self-centered, vindictive, manipulative

matriarch of his mother's family gets her mitts on Alexander Seaton and he spends the rest of the book trying to stay alive so that there can be a #3 in the series.

LJ says

First Sentence: The bride's grandmother smiled: she could feel the discomfort of the groom's family and it pleased her well.

It is disconcerting enough to be accused of less-than-reputable actions you know you did not commit, but even more so when confronted by a man who could be your twin. Alexander Seaton, a reputable teacher at Marischal College in Aberdeen, has never known any family beyond his now-dead parents until now. Near-twin cousin Sean O'Neill is about to change all that with an entreaty for Alexander to come with him to Ireland. It seems his grandfather is dying and the entire O'Neill family is under a curse which only the proven existence of Alexander can break.

It is always frustrating when you absolutely love an author's first book and are then disappointed in their second. Unfortunately, that was the case here.

In "The Redemption of Alexander Seaton," I felt great empathy for the character and came to care about him. In this book, other than as the "voice" of the story, and the one to whom everything happens—how many times can one get hit on the head without major concussion or brain damage—we learn little about his internal makeup. Yes, it is interesting that he is such a fish-out-of-water character being an academic caught up in conflict, but he never really comes to life.

I've never been to Ireland, but I did love MacLean's descriptions. She made me feel as though I were standing next to the characters, and wished I could be. I also felt she well conveyed the sense of Ireland as a land where faith and superstition walked hand-in-hand.

While I found the history fascinating and gained a better understanding of the conflict between the Catholics and Protestants, English and Irish, I felt MacLean became so caught up in the history, I somewhat forgot about the story. I was also interested to learn that a troupe of traveling players may have performed Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing" in Ireland during this time.

The story was interesting but I found it difficult to keep track of all the characters and, because most of them were simply that, there were few about whom I really cared. I am, by no means, ready to give up on MacLean. I do hope, however, her next book focuses more on telling us a whopping good story.

A GAME OF SORROWS (Hist Mys-Alexander Seaton-Scotland/Ireland-1628) - Okay
MacLean, Shona – 2nd in series
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Sarah says

Only reading this to humour a friend... why do I do this. Rubbish, mostly.

EDIT: I did make it to the end, and added an extra star for a (ridiculous) story that kind of held my attention, and some pretty decent history behind it. But as a novel or mystery, pfft.

Margareth8537 says

Audiobook read by David Monteith.

Second book of a trilogy about Alexander Seaton.

In this book Alexander goes to Ulster to help his mother's family. His grandmother fears the threat of a curse, caused by her own marriage and then her daughters' marriages which seem a betrayal of the Irish. A vicious woman who is tied up in her Irish roots, she will do anything to promote the cause.

This period with English Planters brought over to colonise Ulster is a little known period, and explains much of the later hostilities in Ireland. It takes place almost 400 years ago, during the Stuart period. It is sad that some memories should last so long.

Listening to the introduction I thought that it did not sound particularly interesting, but I misjudged it.
