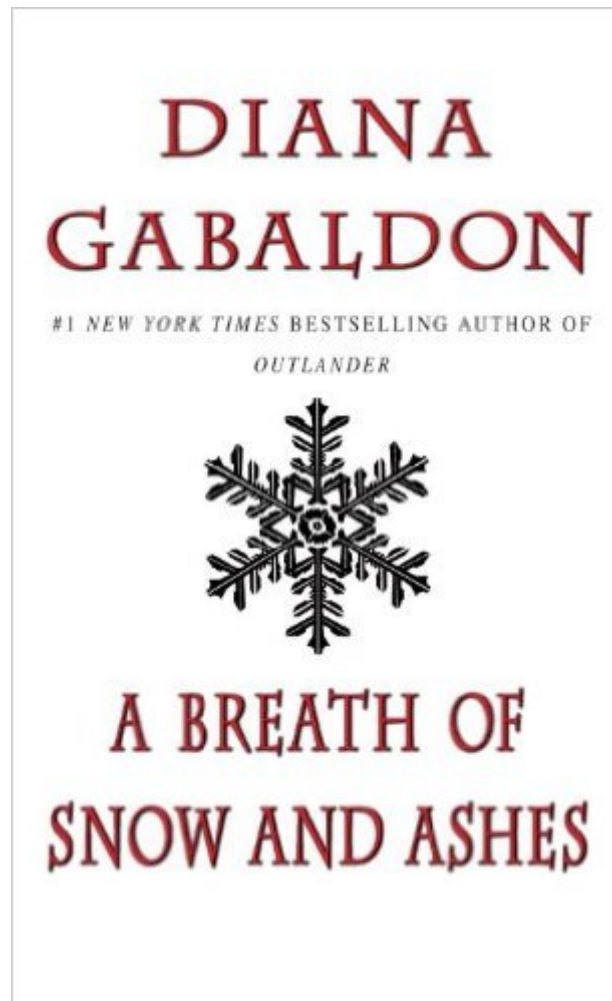


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A Breath Of Snow And Ashes (Outlander)



Synopsis

This sixth novel in Diana Gabaldon's bestselling Outlander saga is a masterpiece of historical fiction from one of the most popular authors of our time. A Breath of Snow and Ashes continues the extraordinary story of 18th-century Scotsman Jamie Fraser and his 20th-century wife, Claire. The year is 1772, and on the eve of the American Revolution, the long fuse of rebellion has already been lit. Men lie dead in the streets of Boston, and in the backwoods of North Carolina, isolated cabins burn in the forest. With chaos brewing, the governor calls upon Jamie Fraser to unite the backcountry and safeguard the colony for King and Crown. But from his wife Jamie knows that three years hence the shot heard round the world will be fired, and the result will be independence—with those loyal to the King either dead or in exile. And there is also the matter of a tiny clipping from The Wilmington Gazette, dated 1776, which reports Jamie's death, along with his kin. For once, he hopes, his time-traveling family may be wrong about the future. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was one of those many readers who loved the first four books but was harshly critical of The Fiery Cross, her fifth book. However, this book is terrific. First of all Claire and Jamie are more present in this book with all their love and passion, fierceness and courage, which had been dimly expressed in The Fiery Cross. Brianna and Roger are more believable and loving towards each other - Roger is less of a wimp, Brianna has gotten over her whinny self, and Jemmy is a terrific kid, not just a pooping, nursing machine. Ordinarily, I am impatient of a lot of description, do a lot of skimming, and

want to get down to the meat and potatoes of the plot. But not in this book. Every vignette, even if not central to the plot, is vivid and fascinating, giving the reader a glimpse into life in those days. I found myself devouring every word, enjoying the journey rather than being in a rush to the destination. Gabaldon is just such an incredible writer; such an imagination - you find it hard to believe she wasn't actually there. And when Jamie says things like "If I die, dinna follow me. The bairns will need ye. Stay for them. I can wait." I find myself crying and feeling like an idiot, since this is fiction, but it touches me so. Enjoy!

If you've been waiting for certain things to be resolved . . . well, you're in luck. It was with a great deal of satisfaction that I finished this book (at 2:30 this morning), because I finally had answers to a lot of the things I'd been wondering about. Unlike *Fiery Cross*, this book is much faster moving, with no long descriptions of diaper-changing. Brianna and Roger seem to have found their places at Fraser's Ridge . . . Brianna is much more likeable, much more mature, and a lot less whiny. And, of course, Claire and Jamie are featured very prominently . . . it's still their series. There's action, adventure, abduction, illness, war, and of course, sex. A book more in the tradition of *Voyager* and *Drums of Autumn* . . . I wasn't disappointed.

Bodice-ripper romance? Check. Historical fiction with oodles of period detail? Double-check. Time-traveling fantasy? You bet. *A BREATH OF SNOW AND ASHES* (actually, all six volumes in Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series) combines most of the genres I love, which means I couldn't put it down --- and at a hefty 992 pages, that's saying a lot. While immersed, I felt I was never far from Fraser's Ridge, the North Carolina homestead where Jamie Fraser, an exiled Scotsman, and his wife Claire, doctor and displaced 20th-century person, make their home. There are two other refugees from the contemporary world in the community: the Frasers' daughter Brianna (conceived in the 18th century, born in the 20th), and her husband Roger --- plus assorted saints, ruffians, eccentrics, rogues, floozies and fanatics. Gabaldon's conceit, for those new to the books, is that certain individuals are able to pass from one century to another by means of ancient circles of standing stones. In *OUTLANDER*, the first volume, Claire time-travels quite by accident while vacationing in the Highlands; from 1946 she is hurtled back some 200 years, when the Jacobites, Scottish supporters of Bonnie Prince Charlie, were fighting to oust the English and reestablish their own king. She meets and marries Jamie, but after the rebels are crushed at Culloden in 1745 and he is condemned to death, she returns to modern life (and her bemused 20th-century husband) to save her unborn child. Sounds pretty crazy, but Gabaldon makes it plausible because her research

is so meticulous and her characters so sympathetic: heroic, yet attractively flawed. You get to know the central quartet --- Jamie, Claire, Brianna and Roger --- especially well, since they take turns narrating the book. Okay, I'll admit that the two couples' literally timeless devotion and undying ardor (sex scenes galore!) are so idealized that lots of plot action is essential to keep the reader from becoming bored and/or skeptical: Somebody (Claire twice and Brianna once) is always getting abducted by villains and rescued by the clan. But *A BREATH OF SNOW AND ASHES*, though a close cousin of the historical romance (think a more prolix version of Philippa Gregory), has another dimension, thanks to the sci-fi element. A modern sensibility and vision lurk within the pre-electric interiors and wild, uncharted scenery of Fraser's Ridge --- Brianna dreams of hot running water; Claire struggles with the concept that she is Jamie's property; Roger, originally an historian, looks ahead to the triumph of the revolution and the bitter fate of the Native Americans. The book reminds us how dangerous it was to be on the "right" side of the Anglo-American conflict, and how hard and labor-intensive it was to accomplish the simplest tasks of everyday life. It shows us Claire and Brianna recreating resources we take for granted, from matches to ether (Claire's medical adventures, wherein she combines contemporary knowledge with herbal traditions, is my favorite part of the series; in this volume she handles a breech birth, fixes a twisted hand, and treats syphilis with a home-grown form of penicillin). The women characters are not only amazingly strong, but also possess a feminist consciousness that they bring to bear on an impressive number of unwed pregnancies and other local scandals. And always the modern refugees are wondering whether there are other time-travelers like themselves --- whether, in fact, every invention is really a reinvention by people from the future. The temporal ambiguity of the book also gives it emotional depth. All the characters, time-travelers or political exiles, have a feeling of displacement and a deep longing for the home they've parted from. Jamie, contemplating the "glorious, terrifying" emptiness of the land, becomes aware of a "more terrifying emptiness within": He "had said good-bye to Scotland at the rail of the Artemis, knowing full well it was likely his last sight of the place. And yet the notion that he would never set foot there again had never fully settled on him 'til this moment." Our stories of pioneers and immigrants have passed into myth, so it is easy to forget how much courage it took to break with the old and familiar and sail off to a whole new continent. *A BREATH OF SNOW AND ASHES* isn't great literature. It's way, way too long; full of breathless prose, cornball archaic language, and Gaelic phrases; easy to make fun of or relegate to the status of guilty pleasure. And yet, there is something so honest, rich and complete about the alternative worlds Gabaldon creates that I think she is a kind of genius. I can't wait to find out what happens next in the story of the Frasers and their kin (the end is quite a cliffhanger). If you're already addicted

to Claire and Jamie, this review probably isn't even necessary. But for Outlander "virgins," I have some advice: Pick up a copy of THE OUTLANDISH COMPANION, Gabaldon's handbook to the series, which includes not only synopses of the first few books but also family trees, character analyses, research minutiae, a Gaelic glossary and grammar, and more --- all the insider info a hardcore fan could want and a newcomer could need. --- Reviewed by Kathy Weissman

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