

The Hymn to Dionysus

Natasha Pulley

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Natasha Pulley's novel *The Hymn to Dionysus* explores a classical struggle between order and chaos through a slow-burn romance that bridges ideologies.

After failing to protect a godly passenger on his legion's ship, Phaidros, a Theban knight who fought in the Trojan war, lives a muted, mechanical life. Years later, Thebes strains under the weight of a severe drought and a burgeoning succession crisis. When rumor spreads that a god of madness walks among them, Phaidros dreads divine retribution for his failures at sea.

Then Phaidros meets a charming witch, Dionysus, and his hopeless, duty-bound exterior cracks. Phaidros's relationship with Dionysus leads him to challenge the memory of his late commander, Helios, and his loyalty to the queen of Thebes, both of whom embody the system of honor that gives his life structure. Despite his deep connection to his duty, interacting with Dionysus makes Phaidros feel alive and vibrant. Their blooming romance is as intense and enigmatic as the madness that threatens Thebes.

Dionysus, who blends authentic humanity and incomprehensible divinity, is intoxicating to follow. In some moments, he is a perplexing embodiment of social catharsis who evades understanding by design. In other moments, he's as grounded and human as anyone else. A moment late in the story explains Dionysus's origins in detail, unraveling some of this mystery.

The characters are witty and snappy, each embodying a unique ethos that illuminates the world's structure. However, the political situation in Thebes is somewhat complex, and the bevy of personal and political problems occurring all at once leads to a somewhat obscured central conflict early on.

A tightrope walk between madness and duty, creation and destruction, the fantasy novel *The Hymn to Dionysus* revisits a classic to explore the idea that love conquers all in more divine terms.

VIOLET GLENN (March / April 2025)

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