

### The Favourite



Queen Anne was the first ruler of the newly united Great Britain in the early 1700s; the last Stuart monarch before the Hanoverian dynasty that's still with us (God save the Queen!). So, there's your history.

Here, the widowed, childless, semi-invalid Anne is a lonely, eccentric figure, stuck in the gilded cage of her palace, who leaves the managing of national affairs to her childhood friend, the formidable Sarah Churchill.

Sarah is the wife of John Churchill, head of the armed forces (and of another dynasty that's still with us). The Duke of Marlborough, as John is also known, is off fighting the French, *comme de tradition*, and one of Sarah's jobs is to bully parliament into keeping his war funded.

Sarah, then, is pretty much in charge until the arrival of an impoverished cousin, Abigail, who seeks work as a servant. Abigail then sets about working her way up the hierarchy, all the way to the Queen's bedchamber...

This witty, bawdy and occasionally absurdist story of court politics is great fun (despite some gratingly annoying music) and probably accurate (at least) in showing how fragile both power and social status were in that era.

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