



The Exiled Queen: A Roman Era Historical Fantasy

Roxana Arama

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An intriguing, expectations-defying heroine pushes the boundaries of her world in the rewarding fantasy novel The Exiled Queen.

In Roxana Arama's lavish fantasy novel *The Exiled Queen*, a memorable princess proves her resilience against threats to herself and her country.

In the Lucretian era, Andrada, whose mother died, was sent away to be trained and educated as a boy. Years later, she yearns for her father's acknowledgment. But because he is the king of Kerta, he never makes time to meet her. Meanwhile, the threat of a Roman invasion looms.

In the book's beginning, Andrada's capable intelligence, keen powers of observation, and innate practicality are showcased alongside her desire to be deemed worthy by others. She is as spirited as a warrior, but her claim to becoming the future queen is questioned by the nation's chieftains, spurring her to participate in a challenge to prove herself. In the end, though, she ends up in an unwanted alliance with King Nicetas, whose reputation and scars reflect his long experiences with warfare.

Issuing halfhearted prayers to the gods, falling into fated encounters, and finding her circumstances politicized, Andrada is an intriguing but lonely heroine who lives within the strictures of her status (without genuine companionship, she becomes attached to her maid). Though she starts out naïve, she awakens to the potential of having power and learns to parlay her situations to her advantage. And her story points to feminist themes as well: while women in her world are expected to be subservient and to bear children, Andrada bristles at such expectations. The fact that it is not always difficult for her to resolve her conflicts strains credulity, though, as do some handy interventions.

The book's scene setting is intricate, making note of details including a wolf-head insignia, a crystal pendant, and silver-stitched clothing—all signaling Andrada's kingdom's rituals and wealth—alongside period-establishing mentions of Latin codices and Homer's *The Odyssey*. The more elaborate details of her world, including conflicts among the Dhawosian regions and issues around mining and border trading, are hinted at, as is the world's mythology (there are mentions of an underworld that suggest the belief that multiple forces watch what happens above). The perspectives of neighboring rulers enrich this panoramic worldbuilding.

Exciting developments spur the story forward, as when Andrada discovers the truth about an ally and acts with uncommon acumen, or when a murder leads to unjust accusations. Such enthralling plot twists push the heroine to grow. She reconfigures her beliefs—and reconsiders her place in the world once more—in the book's rewarding conclusion.

The Exiled Queen is an engaging fantasy novel in which a woman who has lost her title gains far more during a quest for personal restoration.

KAREN RIGBY (March 5, 2024)

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