



When We Were Kings

Auryn Hadley

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Alternate cover for this ASIN can be found here

Tossed into the gladiator arena, everyone expected the delicate girl in the fancy pink dress to be the first to die. Leyli had other plans. Surviving was at the top of her list. Revenge was a close second.

Having grown up behind the sheltered walls of the Oberhame Palace, she knew what the crowd wanted. Norihame had built their culture from the scraps of their neighbors. Gladiators were just one part. Evidently, political coups were another, and she'd just become a pawn in the games of men. But why was she still alive? They'd killed her brother, the heir to the throne. Had they gotten to her father? Was the king dead?

In the cell beside her, the Lion of Lenlochlien was impressed. The first day, they all cried. Men, women, it didn't matter. But this one was different. Her tears didn't slow her down, they just made her stronger, and when he looked in her eyes, he saw it. Her desperation was feral. It meant she wouldn't hesitate to do what she had to. She might be cornered, but that bitch was the kind that would bite.

When he offered advice, she took it. When he told her how to be better, she tried. When she kept coming back after each round, he dared to hope that she'd survive. He had no idea that he was about to become her best weapon. Leyli didn't just want to live through the games, she wanted to protect her father's throne, but to do that, she had to become someone else. She couldn't be the Princess of Norihame. The Lion had to make her a Wolf.

Chained side by side, he'll show her how to be a killer. She'll give him a reason to keep fighting. Together, they'll learn that it takes a friend to survive.

When We Were Kings is a complete novel without a cliffhanger ending.

When We Were Kings Details

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Author : Auryn Hadley

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From Reader Review When We Were Kings for online ebook

Katrina says

4 very solid *

This book was a total surprise in a best possible way. While I would have loved to see more of the world-building (I found the background a bit sketchy - the action takes place in medieval type society and setting but it is more like a hazy watercolour instead of a well-defined drawing), the characters are well developed and extremely appealing, the story is exiting and moves at a good pace – brisk but not hasty, and the writing style is very “readable”. Is there a romance? Yes, but not in a conventional way. Is this book romantic? Absolutely. Will I be reading further? Hell, YES.

Casie says

This book was absolutely amazing!

I could not put it down, the Wolf and the Lion were everything! The world building was believable and full of amazing characters.

Gavin says

This fantasy/romance was a difficult book to rate. Mostly because it was a strange mix of good, average, and bad all rolled into the one story!

The plot was fun sounding in theory. Leyli, a pampered princess, is kidnapped and thrown into the gladiatorial arenas after being sold as a slave and forced to fight for her life. She is soon taken under the wing of legendary Gladiator, and fellow slave, the Lion of Lenlochlien. The pair bond as he teaches her to survive and she gives him a reason to want to continue to survive. Throw in the fact that Leyli had to hide her identity and that the person who ordered her abduction still wanted her dead and it made for a potentially fun tale.

It was a fantasy romance tale with a bit of action to spice things up but that is actually where the problems began. The good first. The characters were both very likeable and I feel like the romance was a good one. There was an instant attraction but the romance developed at a slow pace which I enjoyed. I was also a fan of the way the duo treated each other as equals. The bad was the fact that the action scenes were actually pretty dull and some of the stuff was a little too ridiculous and simplistic. You guys know I'm pretty tolerant of a lack of realism, especially if a tale is aiming to be light and fun, but even I was rolling my eyes that a pampered princess could kill 14 men on her first day as a gladiator with zero training and not a superpower to her name!!!

My lasting impression was that this was an OK read that had some real positives (the romance) and some dull moments (the action) but it is not going to be something that sticks out as particularly memorable for

me. It was very readable though and I did enjoy it.

Rating: 3 stars.

Audio Note: Justine Eyre was fantastic as always. Such a pretty voice. She is the perfect narrator for romance audios and just one of my favourite narrators in general!

Jacob Proffitt says

This is a fantasy with a heavy thread of romance through it and I had a very hard time putting it down. There are some elements you kind of have to get through, but I was only barely aware of them as I breezed past on my way to complete engagement and became aware of them mostly in after-analysis. This has two of my very favorite weaknesses all in one place—the strong woman determined to do what needs to be done and the competent, strong man who cares deeply and does his best to protect the people he cares about. I fell for both near immediately and the rest was just a long enjoyment of seeing them work their partnership out.

Okay, in fairness to those who may not share my tastes, here are the things you have to get past. The biggest is the setup. The economics of the gladiatorial arena don't really work. I mean, there are a *lot* of people dying in that thing and the population it'd take to feed that machine would be pretty extreme in a pre-industrial society without magic. Leyli's first day is also something of a stretch. She's a princess who hasn't had to do anything strenuous in her life and that first day would have taxed an athlete. Don't get me wrong because Hadley has a real talent with the fight choreography. That's incredibly hard to write because too many details and the pacing bogs hard but too few and the reader feels blind and deaf. Not only that, but the things she has Leyli do would work for a motivated amateur and they make sense in context. So the fighting is both well-written and realistically-choreographed. There's just too many of them on that first day and there's no way she'd have the physical reserves.

The only other part I had to get past was the ending where (view spoiler) I wish Hadley had engineered that better. I have no idea how. So I'm giving this one a pass, too.

So that's some heavy passes I'm handing out on this one. And I'm not even bothering to rewrite those in my head (as is my superpower). I'm just giving this thing five stars because their relationship? Yeah, that just works and is full of passion and loyalty and sacrifice and faith and all of the things I love in romance. Which is funny because (view spoiler).

A note about sex and stuff: There's no explicit sex in this book. But Leyli is functionally a slave and it's clear that the only way she avoids being sold for sexual favors is that a pregnant gladiator is unlikely to survive long enough to be profitable. That said, she's in very close proximity to Tristan through much of the novel and there are some scenes of unclothed physical proximity. And some of those become intimate in the sense that they care for and about each other and some of that is expressed in mutual body-care. And note, I *do not mean anything sexual* in that. At all. Still, it's enough that I can't really tag this as either steamy or chaste. I kind of love the constraints here, as you see the two of them develop such a strong and intimate relationship even though there's no sex even remotely possible because pregnancy pretty much means Leyli dies.

Rebecca says

Another Amazing Book by Auryn Hadley

This is my seventh book by Hadley, but my first book outside of the Salrick Lux series. I wasn't sure at first if this one could hold up against how amazing the Ilieri series is but this book is every bit as good. These characters are so alive and you end up rooting for them throughout the story. This is one of the best partnerships/romance between two characters that I've read in a while and I exclusively read romance so that's saying something. I highly recommend this book.

A Little Nerdy says

Who doesn't love a princess who becomes a badass! A forbidden Love. That ending though had me feeling a little hurt. I loved these characters and storyline.

Natalia says

AMAZING BOOK!!!

Started with this book not knowing what to expect and full shock because this books is AMAZING!

So i'm starting by saying that i love strong female roles, the type of woman that in face of danger, fight even if they dont know how, they try!

So Leylani is my new favorite female lead character.

The book start's with Princess Leyli being sold to a Gladiator Arena, she is kidnapped from Oberhame Palace. Instead of surrender and accepted death in the sand arena, she remembers all the fighting lesson she saw her brother take and manage to live the first day of combates with some help of the gladiator in the cell next door.

The books is full of action, well described fighting scenes and humor.

The artwork from the cover cud be more update, but cant get it all...

Im jumping already for the 2nd book...

Dr. Shaz says

3.5 stars

I really enjoyed this one, I had to take away half a star because there are some glaring issues where nearly impossible things happen that you just need to accept move past to enjoy the story.

Leyli is a princess, kidnapped from her bed and tossed into the Gladiator arena where she is expected to die. BUT, she doesn't, she lives through her first day and taken under the wing of The Lion (Tristan), a veteran gladiator who teaches her to fight and becomes her tandem partner in the arena.

This book throws you right into the action with Leyli in the arena which hooked me right away. She survives her first fight though a lot of luck, which is actually written in a way to be somewhat believable. Unfortunately, right after this is where one of those issues I mentioned above crops up, when she is then thrown into a number of additional battles in the same day, with no training and no stamina and manages to continue to survive under conditions that would probably make a trained athlete crumble. However, if you can get past that, the action scenes are well written and fast paced, with Leyli's determination to survive really coming across the page.

There has a heavy thread of romance weaved through the story, and the development of their relationship is enjoyable to read even though they remain "platonic" throughout. But beyond the romance, the book is filled with fighting, blood, gore, and death and can be brutal at times. I really enjoyed the whole world of the gladiator and watching Leyli's character grow from a pampered princess whose only purpose in life was to be married into a warrior. She is vicious at times, but never loses her humanity.

The other glaring issue happens near the end (view spoiler) but honestly, by that point, I was so invested in the story that I didn't really care.

I will definitely be starting book 2 right away

Mello ♡ Illium ★Harry★ ?Myrnin? Torin Ichimaru says

Excellent

I loved this. Leyli and Tristan are great. Their teamwork and feelings for each melt my heart. I hope they get to be what they want to be together. There's a new arena to fight in now. I hope Palino gets what he deserves. I hope we get to see some of the other gladiators again, too.

CharlieB says

Wow...surprisingly could not put this book down. I want more. I loved the Bad ass heroine. Will definitely be reading Book 2!

ME1.0 says

Satisfying. Really really satisfying. Especially for my fetish for books about gladiators and fantasy like this. Just one thing: What's up with the cover? I know that if I ever write a book it will be one of the last things I care about, but still...

Mara says

A weak beginning marred it a bit, but otherwise an interesting fantasy with a romantic thread. I simply could not really believe in the opening scene, had it been luck or such, maybe. Still, good, going on

book 2.

Megan says

I freaking loved this book. It was so good! I have had this book for awhile but I HATE the cover.. so I just haven't picked it up. Also I have a physical copy of it so every time I got it out to start it, my husband would give me a look.. So yeah.

I actually listened to the audiobook and I am in love with everything about it. I wish the rest were in audio because I loved listening to it. But its not and I don't know if the next one will be put into audio and I don't think I can wait to find out what happens.. so it looks like I am going to have to get over the cover situation. Even though the second book cover is not as bad as this one.

Stella says

5 stars

I read a lot of indie work. It's rare that I'm moved enough to write a review.

In this case, I was not only moved enough to write a review, but to buy the rest of the series, and snag the first book of a different series by the same author on KU.

When We Were Kings is the sort of fantasy that I usually roll my eyes at: young woman sold to become a gladiator, taken under the wing of older, very successful gladiator, learns to become gladiator herself. A Mary Sue story, right?

...except no. Not right.

Young woman throttles back shock, capitalizes on rage, uses her mind. Successful gladiator is impressed enough to offer a kindness and then befriend her out of self-benefit. Young woman ruthlessly works to get better.

And better.

And to win.

Did I mention that young woman is a princess, kidnapped and sold into slavery? Or that there are very real communication restrictions that are part of the culture, so she doesn't know if her father the King is even still alive?

This is the story of how combat can turn two people into comrades-in-arms, and then more. This is the story of a woman using her brain and her will to survive. This is the story of a woman who would be a King.

Read it.

You won't be sorry.

Chelsey Nixon says

#SpoilerWarrior

I recently changed how i review books, and decided that I would only give 5 stars to the books that I could recommend to my husband, who is my opposite in every way. He enjoys a good story, and a challenge, and j know that he'd enjoy this book as much as I did.
