



## The Emperor's Arrow

*Lauren D.M. Smith*

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**Grand Prize Winner of Harlequin's 2015 *So You Think You Can Write* contest** Debut author Lauren D.M. Smith delivers an epic fantasy romance in this soaring tale of a kickass warrior and the emperor she's honor-bound to defend

*The bride candidates have been summoned. Their numbers are many, yet only one is an Amazzi warrior. Only one would give her life to protect him.*

Evony of Aureline, warrior of her people, has no intention of becoming a hideous old man's bride. Though her people have sworn their loyalty to the legendary emperor Galen, Evony knows little of courts and intrigue. It's simply not her world.

Yet it's on the palace training grounds where Evony's archery skills gain her the respect of soldiers and legates alike. The emperor himself takes notice of the beautiful, ruthless warrior. In turn, the young, steely eyed Galen is nothing at all what Evony expected. *This man could very well conquer her heart. But does he feel the same?* As the rivalry among the remaining bride candidates intensifies and the plot for the throne unfolds, Evony must make a grave choice: fulfill her destiny and protect her people or follow her heart and pursue true love. Either way, the honor of the Amazzi people and the future of the empire now rests with Evony of Aureline. For she is the Emperor's Arrow.

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## The Emperor's Arrow Details

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## From Reader Review The Emperor's Arrow for online ebook

### Marta Cox says

For a debut novel this is pretty impressive. I loved the idea of this almost Amazonian like heroine and her attitude was simply divinely funny. Evony is a proud warrior and has no dreams of being an Empress but still tries her best to make her people proud. The simple fact of the matter though is her competition are not really the sharpest tools in the box and Evony quickly stands out . Yet political intrigue ( which Evony has no experience of) and traitors at large mean pretty soon her skills are really put to the test!

Ok the very obvious romance angle needed a bit of polish for me . Evony fell vibrant but alas Galen perhaps not so much and don't get me started on their intimate scenes because hey clever hands and odd words just didn't do it for me. Yes I just felt uncomfortable which was a shame as I'd been well and truly sucked into the story in spite of not being enamoured with Galen. In fact if it had lacked any real sex and been a YA read I think I might have been happier.

The last third had me reeling as Evony turned into the Energiser bunny! I kid you not! That woman does not quit . The enemies of Galen just felt too stupid to live and the instant about face at the end seemed a little rushed but nevertheless I did enjoy this book and would happily read more from the author .

I was gifted a copy from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review

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### Jess the Romanceaholic says

I can understand why this book won the contest -- it was hard to believe that this is a debut author.

With a cool twist on the Amazonian legends, a strong heroine, a crafty emperor, intrigue, betrayal, and....a Bachelor-style contest to find the Emperor a wife?

That last part is not nearly as ridiculous as it sounds, and combined with great pacing, interesting characters, and just the right amount of steam and action, I thoroughly enjoyed it.

While the HEA wasn't exactly what I'm used to, and the chemistry between our protagonists not necessarily there from the beginning, I still enjoyed romance, and was happy with the way things worked out in the end.

Overall a very solid 4/5

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### Lady Entropy says

If I had to describe this book to someone, it'd be The Selection if the protagonist was Katniss while channelling Wonder Woman, and all set in a fantasy version of Ancient Rome.

This sounds awesome, right? Especially when I actually liked The Selection. And, at first, this book is the best. It was on the fast track for a four star. The protagonist was sensible and non-nonsense, could fight and fend for herself, there was a conspiracy, and a distinctive lack of misunderstandings. Sure, there was the predictable "I trip on the Love Interest, and don't realize it's him because I think he's old and ugly and he's actually smoking hot". But hey, I'm flexible, you can get away with that if you give me a good book.

But as the book went on, it went from a solid four to a one star in parts. And that broke my heart.

Right, from the start: the protagonist is an Amazi (because Amazon would be too obvious) who is sent to the mainland to participate in a contest to determine the new Empress. The daughters of nobility all around have been summoned and they vie for the position and the right to marry the Emperor (who's pretty much Alexander the Great via Caesar, instead of avenging his horse, he was avenging his sister). There is a conspiracy to kill the Emperor, and by hosting this contest, he feels it is the best way to pull his invisible enemies out in the open, as he knows some of the nobles are behind this, but not which ones.

Now, this right here is the set-up for an amazing book.

Unfortunately, this is not it.

Instead, the book only focuses on how special Evony is, how good she is in battle, and how all warriors in the castle are inferior to her. I have some issues with that portrayal (especially seeing how Rome worked, and how military service was mandatory) but hey, it's a fantasy, I can dig it. What I can't dig is that there is this amazing plot waiting to happen and Evony doggedly avoids it. Instead of dealing with the other girls, trying to figure out who the ones working against the emperor are, she snubs them except for her sidekick, and totally fails her mission.

That's right: the Emperor gives her a mission (because the Amazons in this world are renowned for being super loyal to the Emperor despite refusing to accept the habits of the mainland, which I thought was awesome) to find out who might be in the conspiracy by befriending the other girls and she totally ignores it. Instead she just hangs out with the warriors and constantly shows them how much more awesome she is.

And this ties to another problem: the other girls. If the Selection was bad in that most of them had little development, in Arrow of the Emperor... they have none. There is the obligatory evil bitch, and the saintly long-suffering BFF of the MC and everyone else just blurs into each other. The secondary characters in this book are terrible, and the fact that the MC is the only warrior amongst them enhances the "special snowflake" syndrome that annoys the fuck out of me. At least in the Selection and the Hunger Games, while the MCs were competent in their own rights, there were other people who were just as good: the guys from the Legacy tributes were far better warriors than Katniss (and she only defeats them by a mix of luck and cunning), and the other girls in the Selection, while not talented musicians, were just as beautiful as America and more competent in other areas. Evony is... well, a snowflake. And that makes the world boring. Oh SO boring. And just like that, an amazing plot is dead. Because Evony has no interest in dealing with the other girls, and because they are not well built as characters, the revelation of who was involved falls flat. I felt no shock or emotional connection. Hell, for a while, I was hoping it was the BFF just so it would make me feel something. But nope. It was one of the highly undefined and uninteresting girls who I knew nothing about. It would be an amazing plot to pursue, with Evony trying to wade in a world she understood nothing of, fighting something, for once, that couldn't be defeated with blade and bow.

Then, there's the issue of the book forgetting it's supposed to be an original work and not just a Selection rip-off. The Selection lays the rules about how the choosing of the queen goes pretty early on: it's not just a way to get a wife for the prince - it's a television spectacle, a concocted reality show -- while the prince does get to choose his bride, he can't appear to favour any contestant too much as to create tension. While this is taken from the Hunger Games and how it is handled, the Selection does it a lot better. Not because it's a better book (it's not) but because there is so much you can spin and fake in a show where the main interest is for children to kill each other. On the other hand, the Selection's concept is all about hype and maintaining interest and drama as much as possible, because there is limited interest in the concept of a single guy

choosing a favourite among a ton of girls. Most of the time, the choice is done earlier on (as happens in the Selection) but it has to be spun for as long as possible to keep audience interest.

Now, Arrow was meant to be a completely different kettle of fish: this was an Emperor determining his wife. There was no show, no spectacle, no anything. But every now and then, the book forgot it was NOT the Selection and tried to give us reasons like "Evony can't enter the archery contest because the public would see it with her being favoured over the others".

Look, there were NO RULES other than "You have to pass the trials we give you". This is about AN EMPEROR choosing a bride, not a televised show to calm down the masses (now, if the Emperor had a circus where the brides fought to death for the right of marrying him... that'd be a lot more interesting). There is no reason why Evony couldn't go to the archery contest, because even if it was favouring her, the damn Emperor could do whatever he wanted, as this was a set up to unroot a conspiracy, not a popularity contest. The book starts with a totally different concept and set of rules, but then starts to act according to another set of rules completely unrelated and directly lifted from the Selection.

And this falls into the issue of how the book is, well, incredibly stupid when politicking and intrigue are involved. The author clearly has issues writing anything on the topic, and she just tacked on the conspiracy to have an excuse for a battle in the final scene. I would have praised the emperor if his idea for the contest would be to get the daughters of all the nobles and keep them in the palace as "hostages" so they would not dare to launch an attack while they were there. In turn, this would give him more time to ferret out the conspiracy. Or, he could actually do this as a trap: set himself as a target, allowing the girls to get close to him and discreetly have them watched all the time. It would offer his enemies a too good opportunity to get to him, and all the Emperor would need to do would be to include a couple of plants (like Evony and maybe other girls from trusted friends) and let them act.

But nope. He did claim to want to use the seeking of a bride as a way to ferret the conspiracy. However, as girls got sent home because they failed trials, there was no way for him to know if they were part of the conspiracy or not. Unless being anti-Emperor automatically made you superskilled. Or protected with Plot Armour (which, obviously, was what happened in the book, because, SPOILER, the involved party was never kicked out of the competition).

TL;DR: this book has an amazing book inside of it. It has a great, super concept, and the building blocks for an a super clever book with an interesting and different main character. Unfortunately, this is little more than a first draft of that book. It fails in most accounts, with a weak setting, underdeveloped secondary characters, nebulous motivations and shaky plot.

And it breaks my heart to say so, because I had LOVED how amazing it sounded in paper. I am not sure if it was time or maturity that failed the author - if she needed more time to finish the book (as it was a contest) or if she simply needs to get more experience as a writer. This author can do better than this, I am sure, and I look forward to reading her future endeavours.

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### **Mandi Schreiner says**

When I saw that this debut author was the winner of the 2015 So You Think You Can Write contest sponsored by Harlequin, I was excited to try it. I also love to try fantasy romance and this one seemed to fit the bill. I initially loved the world and the heroine - but by the end of the book, I had many frustrations.

Evony is our heroine and she is an Amazzi warrior. She comes from a land full of warriors and she is very skilled at combat and an amazing archer. Wanting to provide children to her people, she is on the hunt for a stud -- she isn't too concerned about finding a lifemate, as long as she can find a man who is both physically and mentally approved to give her a healthy child.

Everyone in the world is loyal to the mighty Emperor Galen. He has conquered all lands and tales are told about how power-mad he is and how beastly his nature can be. With this knowledge and gossip floating through her mind, Evony is summoned by the Emperor, as is one woman from every land, to go through a series of tests - after which, Galen will choose his bride. It's like a fantasy version of the television show, The Bachelor. Galen does need a bride, but he is also searching for those who want to rebel against him.

Evony arrives along with all the other women and immediately gets put to her first test - they have one hour to find an object that best represents what an empress should be. The field is then narrowed to twenty...contestants... and the story goes on from here. More tests for the women, both physical and theory and Evony finally meets the brutal, scary Galen who actually turns out to be a lovely gentleman. I think it would have been more fun if Galen did posses a more big and scary personality at first - to see how Evony handled him. But he is actually quite calm and sometimes I forgot he is the man who conquered the entire world.

At first, I loved Evony. She is bad ass, kick ass - any type of ass you can think off. She is a warrior and she is mature and level-headed and I thought she would start as a great foe/partner to the fierce Galen. But as the story progresses, Evony excels at everything. Every test - whether physical or mental, she has answers for. I wanted her to succeed, obviously, but she had zero faults. So it made the competition with the other women null and void, because she was obviously the clear winner from the start. She had to remind people all the time that she was an Amazzi warrior, if they ever threw doubt her way. Another frustration is that I got a little bored by the competition. It just didn't go anywhere. Evony would always be superior and the story would go in a circle around this theme.

My biggest frustration though is the romance. Quite quickly, Galen realizes that Evony can be a big asset to him, and smartly so. He wants to get to the bottom of why his sister was killed. He brought in a girl from each noble family to see if he could "smoke out those who plotted against him, as well as give him leverage against them." He notices how smart and capable Evony is and asks her to be his eyes and ears around the other women when he can't be there. She felt like an adviser to him, and then they start making out. It felt awkward to me. This is only told in Evony's point of view so I don't know the intimate thoughts Galen was having, but Evony was not having very intimate thoughts about him. There chemistry was great as adviser/advisee, but not great as romantic lovers. There was no sexual tension and even when the "I love you" came it didn't feel right at all.

If the romance had been really strong - I think I could have let the other stuff that bothered me go.

So yes, I've dumped on this one a bit but at the same time, that foundation for a fun fantasy is there. The world is there, and Evony had a chance to be a really cool heroine. It just missed the mark for me.

Grade: C-

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**Katie\_la\_geek says**

From reading the description of this book and looking at the cover I had a good idea of what this book would be. I thought it would be about a warrior woman protecting an emperor. I thought it would be full of action scenes and maybe some big battles.

I was wrong. I didn't get any of those things. Instead this book turned out to be a fantasy version of *The Bachelor*.

There were three things about this book that really grated on me.

- 1) I found it pretty boring. By 60% I still felt like nothing had happened. Our main character had completed some tasks, managed to make all men love her (bar one) and saved the emperor from an assassination attempt. Not much else. I thought there would be action and fun. No. There was nothing fun to be found.
- 2) It was a bit reparative. Too many kissing scene's, too many confrontations with the other vapid, bitchy wanna be bridezilla's in the competition. Too many archery practise scenes (I know she can shoot a bow, I don't need to be reminded every five pages). Too many descriptions of her forest at home.
- 3) The characters had zero personality. Evony is perfect at everything but she lacks any type of charm. Galen is no better. I knew very little about who they were as characters and this really made this book hard to like. It also had a negative effect on the romance which I found I didn't care much about.

Clearly this one was not for me.

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### **JAIME says**

After a slow start, this was okay. It had that same feeling of 'The Selection' though less lame since Evony pretty much didn't want to be there other than to shoot arrows and get knocked up.

It read really YA, but then somewhat explicit sexy-times. So.

I would have liked heaps more backstory re: the Empire and Evony's clan, but I believe this is a standalone. Still, it was a fine read for a Sunday night where wine was involved.

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### **Beth says**

*The Emperor's Arrow* is a masterfully blending of *The Bachelor* meets *Xena Warrior Princess*.

Evony is a strong female warrior with mad archery skills. She finds herself thrust into a contest to become the bride of the Emperor. Evony has absolutely no interest in becoming the Emperor's chosen bride but it is almost immediately apparent that she is going to make her mark on the competition just by being herself.

Evony requests the right to keep her fighting skills up and begins to train with the men, quickly earning their respect and admiration. Galen keeps his true identity from Evony while he trains beside her.

Betrayal makes it certain that Evony will need to use her skills to defend Galen and his people.

I loved Evony, I wasn't a big fan of Galen. That being said, I still really enjoyed this story.

Smith pens a tale that hauls the reader right in and keeps you invested till the end.

Kudos on this debut, *The Emperor's Arrow* will keep me coming back for more.

I received this ARC copy of *The Emperor's Arrow* from Carina Press in exchange for a honest review. This book is set for publication July 18, 2016.

My Rating: 4 Stars

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[Barnes & Noble](#) | [Amazon](#) | [itunes](#)

Reviewed for:

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### **L.R.W. Lee says**

4.5 Stars!

This is a good story with enough action and adventure, mixed with a sweet romance, to have me satisfied as I close the book. That said, I thought the premise of this being similar to *The Selection* fell short. There wasn't much by way of relationships between the anyone other than the Emperor and the main protagonist. There was only mild cat-fighting one would expect, but the relationship between the two main characters seemed more one-sided and while I cared deeply about the girl, I never quite identified with the guy. It felt like he was flawed but we could have gone deeper.

I still enjoyed the read though and found it an enjoyable way to spend my Sunday afternoon.

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### **Monique V says**

3.5 stars

It's a really quick book. It feels more like a short story. I had lots of problems with this book

- 1) The secondary characters where not memmorables.
- 2) There was no chemistry between the couple plus insta-love
- 3) lack of world building.

Anyway, it was still very enjoyable and fun. There where some really great moments and we'll written sex

scenes too so I think this author could write way better stuff in the future!

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### **Angela James says**

I love a first kiss scene and while I was editing, I thought this between the emperor and Evony is wonderful!

“You are aware Amazzi don’t typically have much trade in intrigue? I’m not certain how much use I will be, but I will certainly do all I can.”

“I can ask nothing less,” he said, with a tiny quirk of his lips that seemed to be the closest thing to a smile to cross his face. Evony often wondered why nothing seemed to please this man. “I will of course reward your efforts. Do you wish to be empress?”

She snorted. “No. I came because you requested a daughter of our clan. Once I’m released from this competition, I will complete my secondary mission and return home.”

The wrinkle reappeared in his forehead. “What is your secondary mission?”

As he was the Adnuhom, Evony saw no reason not to tell him. “To find a man who is suitable to act as stud to me. I would like to find a lifemate like my mother did, but I’m not certain I’ll be able to. But it is my duty and honour to bring children into our clan. Since I was already to come to the mainland, it was decided that I should do this as well and save myself a trip later.”

Galen stared at her, his lips parted slightly. He blinked slowly a few times before his gaze narrowed. He ran his stare over all of her then met her eyes again. “That...That may work well for both of us.”

“What do you mean?”

“We both seek the same thing: Heirs. You would like a daughter, and I would need a son to succeed me. If I cannot find a suitable woman to become empress and you cannot find a man to suit yourself, we could pair up until we both had our heir. I imagine I would be considered suitable.”

It was Evony’s turn to stare for a moment. She could hardly argue with him, not when he was the Adnuhom. Legend said that one of the ancestresses of her clan had become the lifemate of one of the Fuscienne men which had forged the alliance that persisted today. Which made Galen practically Amazzi. He seemed healthy, strong, and intelligent. She imagined any children of his would be the same. It was certainly an interesting offer, but she wasn’t without concerns. “How can you be certain we’re compatible physically?” she asked, thinking back to the stories some of her aunts and cousins had told her. “It would be difficult to produce multiple children if we aren’t.”

“There is a simple method to test that,” he said, taking a step towards her.

“What is it?” Evony asked, leaning forward. No one had told her you could test for that! If she could learn this test, it could make it easier to find a suitable man, and maybe even a lifemate!

“Like this,” he said, reaching out and pulling her towards him. An arm snaked its way around her waist so her body was pressed into his, while his other hand cradled the back of her head. His warm, soft lips were against hers in a moment. Evony opened her mouth to say this wasn’t a test and was rewarded by the

entrance of his tongue.

Evony tried to pull away a little at that and made a little noise of protest that quickly died away. Because was Galen was doing with his tongue and lips made her flush all over. His lips opened and closed around her lips, while his tongue explored her mouth like it belonged there. He was even so bold as to flick her tongue with his.

The new sensations brought a familiar tightness to her breasts and lower. He had to feel the way her nipples stood up, given the way her chest was pressed into his. She knew her face was flushed, her skin feeling hot, the familiar tug of need making her shift her weight. It was so much stronger than she'd ever felt it before. Her body wanted this and more.

Without thinking about it first, Evony began to reciprocate. She did her best to match his lips movements, pressing herself even more closely against him, one arm going around his neck, the other wrapped into the folds of his tunic. This seemed to encourage Galen and he pushed himself forward, forcing Evony to back up until she was against the wall.

With the full force of his hard body against her, Evony found herself enveloped in Galen's scent, a clean, faintly spicy smell that made the space between her legs get even tighter. His lips continued their delicious assault on hers and Evony fought back as best she could. From the way Galen shifted against her, Evony thought she was doing well, until he moved away.

As he pulled away and the comparatively cooler air hit where his body had been, a little whine came from the back of Evony's throat. She didn't want to stop. Not so soon at least. Her chest heaved, and Evony realized she was warm all over and slightly out of breath, like she'd been running.

Galen was breathing harder as well, but he seemed to be handling it better if the way he was focused on straightening his tunic was any indication. Once he was finished, he looked at her. "I believe we are very compatible."

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## Mei says

If you liked the writing style of Poison Study, I'm sure you'll like this book too! Attention: only the style is similar, not the sotry!

The heroine, Evony, is a bride candidate for emperor Galen. And you realize, as soon as the book starts, that she's not your usual Empress material! She's first and foremost an Amazzi warrior! She's very. Very skiller with her bow...

But, that's not all! She doesn't want to become an Empress; she's just looking for a ... **STUD!!!** And she starts the list of potential fathers of her future child immediately! LOL  
She's hoping that she will find her lifemate, but she'll be content with a good, intelligent, handsome stud!

The Amazzi warriors are kind of Amazon warrior women, but they have a big plus on them: Amazzi don't kill their male offspring: they love their males and treat them as equals.

So, Evony enters the contest, but she's not accepted by all the other contenders. She's too outspoken, too wild, too big, not enough lady-like!

I liked her immensely!! She's hilarious in her honesty and the way she treats and speak to Galen!

*Evony raised her eyebrows. "It's the term my people refer to you as. It means 'the man we bow to'. I'm surprised you're unfamiliar with it."*

*He blinked and then frowned slightly. "Why would that surprise you?"*

*"We are your people. I would have thought you would be familiar with our word for you. The Amazzi have been the allies of the Fuscienne before your family became emperors."*

*"Then you are displeased with me?"*

*Evony shrugged. "No. Merely surprised."*

*"You are not particularly respectful," Emperor Galen said, eyeing her.*

.....

*The emperor frowned slightly. "You always call me Adnuhom. Is it necessary?"*

*"No. I'd thought using your title was more appropriate, but if you don't care for it, that's fine then, Galen."*

.....

*"I will of course reward your efforts. Do you wish to be empress?"*

*She snorted. "No. I came because you requested a daughter of our clan. Once I'm released from this competition, I will complete my secondary mission and return home."*

*The wrinkle reappeared in his forehead. "What is your secondary mission?"*

*As he was the Adnuhom, Evony saw no reason not to tell him. "To find a man who is suitable to act as stud to me. I would like to find a lifemate like my mother did, but I'm not certain I'll be able to. But it is my duty and honour to bring children into our clan. Since I was already to come to the mainland, it was decided that I should do this as well and save myself a trip later."*

Galen was good too, but not even near as much as Evony!

He's honorable and hot, but he too stiff and Evony is just what he needs!

The story is pretty simple and you already know what will happen, but I still enjoyed the trip toward the end! All thanks to the very easy to read writing style, which was the perfect mix between fun, witty dialogue, good descriptions and fast paced action.

I don't know if the author intends to write the sequel (or to make this a series), but if she will I'm sure I'll be reading it! :)

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Cece ♡Rants, Raves & Reviews♡ says

[The Emperor's Arrow](#) ~ a unique twist on Amazonian legends, a strong **heroine**, a crafty **emperor**,

intrigue, **betrayal**, and....a Bachelor-style contest to find the Emperor a wife?

So Evony enters the contest, but she's not accepted by all the other contenders. **She's too outspoken, too wild, too big, and not very lady-like!**

*“The way everyone reacted to her was beginning to make her feel like some kind of beast, as if she was a wolf that someone had let into the flock and that everyone was hoping would pass them by.”*

But, that's not all! She doesn't even want to become an Empress; she's just looking for a ... **STUD!!!** And she starts the list of potential fathers of her future child immediately! LOL

So basic plot is Evony is summoned by the Emperor, as is one woman from every land, to go through a series of tests - after which, Galen will choose his bride. **It's like a fantasy version of the television show, The Bachelor.** Galen does need a bride, but the main point he is searching for rebels.

Evony's POV was hilarious and realistic in the way that if Amazon who believed in **equality of women** had to live in a hierarchical society that thought women should just make babies. She has strong opinions about things but doesn't give a shit about titles

*“Rakin studied her for a moment. “This was by order of his imperial majesty,” he said, stressing the title the tiniest bit.*

*“She took a step closer so that there was barely a hand’s difference between the two of them. “Then tell his imperial majesty that he is an idiot!” she snapped”*

Overall it was a good story with **action and adventure**, mixed with a sweet **romance**, to have me satisfied as I close the book.

*“They were straining, but holding. But she didn’t know how long that would last. She wished she had more arrows, more people, more time to prepare. This was the hand she’d been dealt, and it was the hand she was going to have to play. And more than anyone else, she wanted to win.”*

So here's my main complaints:

1. Secondary characters were not memorable
2. I wish the chemistry between the two had been built up a little better
3. More world building, i was actually really interested in this world with a crazy warlord and female warriors on
4. I wanted more fighting with people up to Evony's skill level

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## Ali says

Review for: The Emperor's Arrow by Lauren D.M. Smith

Rating: ★★★?? 3/5

**SUMMARY:** Evony, an Amazzi warrior and member of clan Aureline, has been summoned as a bride candidate for the Emperor. Though she has no intention of marrying the Emperor, her loyalty to the Empire and her honor demand that she participate. However, as she gets to know Emperor Galen, she realizes that he is nothing like what she thought, and she finds herself wanting to get to know him. As the rivalry among

the remaining bride candidates intensifies and the plot to overtake the throne unfolds, Evony must make a grave choice: fulfill her destiny and protect her people or follow her heart and pursue true love.

#### REVIEW:

This book was good. There were a lot of things that I really loved about this book, especially the fact that Evony was a total badass, and I really like the Amazonian-like culture that she came from. I also liked that she never really changed for a man, and was hell-bent on being accepted as she was. I also really liked Admina, who was such a sweetheart, as well as Chana. I just wish we got to know a little bit more about her and some of the other bride candidates because they all seemed so interesting.

However, I wasn't the biggest fan of Smith's writing style. I felt that it was stiff and repetitive in some areas, and was more of a tell and not show, which is not my favorite style type. BUT that does not mean that other people won't like her writing! I also felt that the romance was lacking in build up, and I felt that the readers weren't able to really get a sense of Evony and Galen's relationship. To me, it felt that their relationship seemed less romantic than friendly, and went from 0-100 in no time with no indication of how either character really felt for the other. While there was some world-building, I was hoping for a little more. Evony's culture was explained a decent amount, however we were given no explanation of how Galen "conquered the world", how big this world was, or really any explanation of the mainland's culture.

Overall, I think that this is a good book, especially for Smith's debut novel. There were a couple things that I wish would have been a little different, as I had really wanted to give this book a higher rating.

\*(I received a copy from Carina Press and Netgalley in exchange for an honest review)

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#### Christa says

How to describe this book? It's like if Wonder Woman entered the Selection series by Keira Cass. It honestly feels a bit like Wonder Woman fanfiction but that is not meant as a negative.

Evony won a contest amongst her warrior clan and was chosen to go to the mainland to be entered in a contest for the emperor to select his next empresses. She did not realize that was her "prize" and wants to compete with honor, but also is not actually interested in leaving her island clan. She does have a side mission. Since there are few men on her island that are not relatives, she is going to find a man "stud".

Galen is the young emperor who suspects that a coup is forming. He is bringing a daughter from every noble family in to spy on them.

I love books where the cultures clash. Most feel like Evony is a barbarian and she has a hard time understanding their mainland ways.

This is a fantasy romance, although it's very low fantasy. There are no mythical creatures or superpowers.

Similar reads: Promise of fire by Amanda Bouchet has another strong female main character. Fantasy of frost by Kelly St Clare has similar culture clashing.

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## **Lillian ? Cloud 9 Books ? says**

### **\*\* 2 Stars- It's okay \*\***

Great story, atrocious execution.

I loved how it was about a bachelorette contest, but the writing was just poor and frustrating.

The sexual tension clashed with the writing style.

It was also disappointing to discover that Evony wasn't like Xena or some other strong female character. Would I recommend this book to anyone? No.

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