



Once We Were

Kat Zhang

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"I'm lucky just to be alive."

Eva was never supposed to have survived this long. As the recessive soul, she should have faded away years ago. Instead, she lingers in the body she shares with her sister soul, Addie. When the government discovered the truth, they tried to "cure" the girls, but Eva and Addie escaped before the doctors could strip Eva's soul away.

Now fugitives, Eva and Addie find shelter with a group of hybrids who run an underground resistance. Surrounded by others like them, the girls learn how to temporarily disappear to give each soul some much-needed privacy. Eva is thrilled at the chance to be alone with Ryan, the boy she's falling for, but troubled by the growing chasm between her and Addie. Despite clashes over their shared body, both girls are eager to join the rebellion.

Yet as they are drawn deeper into the escalating violence, they start to wonder: How far are they willing to go to fight for hybrid freedom? Faced with uncertainty and incredible danger, their answers may tear them apart forever.

Once We Were Details

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Author : Kat Zhang

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From Reader Review Once We Were for online ebook

Stuti (Turmeric isn't your friend. It will fly your ship says

While *What's Left Of Me* solidly beats down *Once We Were* in various aspects, mostly creativity, I think that latter was a much more enjoyable read.

Picking up a few weeks and apartments after *What's Left Of Me*, the story now follows Eva and Addie's lives on the periphery of rebellion. Far from being assimilated in either the real Underground or the normal people, they live inside walls and forced ignorance. Comes along a new member, a girl named Sabine, who entices them into instigating their own secret revolution. On the personal level, now that it's Eva and Addie for real, there are falling-outs and disagreements.

Once We Were wasn't a blow-off-the-roof book like *What's Left Of Me* had been for readers, it's the one that makes me very certain *The Hybrid Chronicle* and I won't be parting way anytime in the near future.

Where the first book had been Eva's story in shade and her eyes were just seeing, this installment is about her assimilating to and into the world; for the first time in so many years, she's looking for real. Naturally there will be mistakes and there will always be Addie. This was my favorite part of the book- Eva and Addie/Addie and Eva. The girls have now a way to lose the other and a need for privacy; what is brings along is one ignoring the other, Eva being deaf to Addie's wishes, and general maybe in order. I liked the development of their individual characters, and also as a pair.

Moreover, something that hadn't really clicked with me in the sequel, the writing, astounds me now. *Kat Zhang* is a damn good writer, and while still it doesn't slay me, her prose is very refreshing. And fun. And water-like. I don't know why I think that but reading her books makes me feel so coolly hydrated and her sparse writing, something as follows, reminds me of droplets of water as it splashes.

The first blink was followed by the first breath. Then the second. The third.

Addie was gone, and I was still here, sitting on the bed.

Alone.

The plot is being woven more complicated, although it manages to remain mostly straightforward still. There are many new characters and I haven't forgotten them- along with their souls, they made for a *huge* number of personalities to distinguish amongst. I liked them all and even more, I loved the romance.(hint: there's some with Addie, too). It's simple yet not so, just as Zhang's writing. Now that the story isn't just about Eva, we finally have some dirt on this parallel world. *Ugh, call the moral police! They're not helpful nations!* There aren't many answers solved, and I'd really like to know more about hybrid conditions in other nations, but it's all very vague on some of these details. It's not as clear as I'd hoped, but I think that's intended and just adds to the charm.

There are so many problems to face in this installment, moral and emotional, about strengths and the rights

and the wrongs, and how far is too far. I just ate it all up. Because how can you not?

Sometimes we make mistakes and they're so terrible the word mistake doesn't seem big enough to encompass it. but it happens. and the only way to make up for it is by cleaning up the mess.

The lack of creativity and concept is what will probably disappoint many readers. After the wonder of *What's Left of Me*, OWW almost seems run of the mill. *Kat Zhang* has just built on top of her original concept, and there's nothing out of the ordinary here, especially the whole plot deal. Except the characters, and the writing, and the discord, and then some. Also, the pacing is slow in the beginning, but candidly speaking, when I have stuff like this...

But the thing is, sharing hands doesn't mean sharing goals. Sharing eyes doesn't mean sharing visions. And sharing a heart doesn't mean sharing the things we love.

...I don't really give two unhygienic shits about the pacing.

Aside: Group orgy. Make of that what you will.

Make of this what you will, too. *It's all connected...*

Many thanks to the publishers for providing a review copy.

Mark says

THAT COVER I CANNOT HANDLE THIS SOMEBODY HOLD ME.

usagi ?? says

4.5/5 stars.

"What's Left of Me" was definitely in my top ten of my favorite debuts of 2012, and so I was really, really happy to get a copy of this next installment in the series, "Once We Were". While not quite as frenetic in its pace (except for the last quarter or so), "Once We Were" is a quieter book that reflects on what has happened in book one, and what's on deck for Addie, Eva, and the rest of the hybrids on the run, as well as delves a little deeper into the differences between Addie and Eva in pretty much every way. So for those that want that non-stop action from book one may be a bit let down, but "Once We Were" is just every inch as good as its prequel - just a little emotionally deeper.

Since the technical areas were more or less just as awesome/flawless as book one (though pace did lag a bit, admittedly), I'm going to delve a little deeper into the issues brought up in the book, and maybe try a little analysis/speculation/meta. I'll try to keep it as spoiler-free as possible.

If there was one word I had to pick for this book, it would be "growth". This book is all about growth in so many areas. It's about Addie and Eva, growing both together in one body, and apart as separate entities/people. It's about growth in terms of adolescence - the last phase of innocence of childhood, the shedding of the last ignorances of the world that we wear around us as people before we become adults. It's also about the growth of the world around the Americas, and the Great Wars (Civil [speculative], WWI and WWII [explicitly mentioned]), and the growth of a people on two continents from mild fear into witless terror of the hybrids, by a government grasping on whatever it can to survive, and keep control. And finally, it's the growth of a bunch of people, brought together by pure circumstance, creating and growing their own resistance in order to survive.

The growth of Addie and Eva, and both of them as separate people is obvious. This is where I think where the book slowed down for a lot of the early readers. Addie and Eva very slowly start testing the limits of the body they share, as well as the mind - how long can they "disappear"/"submerge"/"sleep"/"dream", leaving the other soul to have sole control of the body for a certain period of time. They also start testing the limits with each other, both attracted to different boys, and both having to share a body that will be touched by a boy they don't consider theirs (there's a very sensorily vivid scene with Addie, Eva, and Jackson about halfway through, but that's all I'll mention when it comes to spoilers). How does that feel? How long can they keep being patient with that other soul, allowing them physical and emotional time with someone that isn't each other? Zhang uses free-form poetry to describe the "dreaming" times of the souls when they leave the other alone, and those are quite vivid, as well. I can see why it might not have worked for other readers - free-form poetry isn't for everyone, especially when experimentally stuck into a traditionally-structured novel. But for me, it worked. It made sense. It made the sense of "dreaming" and separation from that other soul, as well as how far deep down the bond to the other soul went all the more vivid and real.

There's also the sense of psychological growth - from being a child, trusting everyone who helped them get to Anchoit, to becoming an adult - an "awakening" (which made a really nice contrast to the "dreaming" the souls do when they "disappear"), and a loss of innocence. Is the resistance really the best path for Addie and Eva, both together as one person in one body, and as separate entities? Can they really truly trust who is taking care of them, keeping them out of the hands of the government? And can they keep up this path without destroying themselves, each other, and the budding (and established) relationships around them? The rebellion as a metaphor for growing up (that's how I saw it, at least - just a bit of meta on my behalf) was very finely wrought, and you weren't bludgeoned over the head with it. Even if the pace is slower here, I don't think it's an obvious part of the book on the whole as a metaphor, though there were some scenes/chapters that were very obvious about it as individual parts building the whole. You have to look beneath the surface just a bit. Pay attention to the scenes where Addie and Eva are learning how to "disappear"/"dream", and I think you'll see what I saw. At least, I hope so. Even if it was unintentional, I have to give a golf clap for Zhang for pushing the psychological envelope there. In a lot of YA, we see obvious, explicit (in terms of being mentioned and established as official events) awakenings and losses of innocence, but I think that there's a little less of this quieter examination of the fine line between childhood and adulthood, and what it takes to pitch one over the edge into adulthood.

The world also opens as we see more of Anchoit - we get some important information about the world in general, and how it's different in terms of alternate timelines/histories since the US Civil War (this was hinted), and WWI and WWII (this was explicitly touched upon). We also know how far the control of the

anti-hybrid government reaches in terms of physical geography, and how the world around it has progressed, basically leaving it behind. I won't spoil anything, but comparing The Americas (as they're called) to Soviet Russia would be a pretty good comparison. Technologically behind by a few decades, trading with whatever country that will continue to side with it and supply it, and so forth. Not a ton of information, but we get a few more bones thrown our way to furnish the physical world of The Americas in our head as we read through this series.

Final verdict? While there is a LOT of exposition (Zhang almost gives George R R Martin a run for his money with the amount of exposition here), there's also a lot of good sensory input as well. "Once We Were" doesn't disappoint, at least, not for me. "Once We Were" is out now from HarperTeen in North America, so be sure to check it out when you get the chance. And be sure to stop by the blog on September 20, 2013 for a guest post by Zhang on the process of writing a sequel!

(posted to goodreads, shelfari, librarything, and birthofanewwitch.wordpress.com)

Kat (Lost in Neverland) says

COVER REVEAL:

I CANNOT EXPLAIN MY HAPPINESS.

Well, I can try.

September, come sooner.

Steph Sinclair says

Whenever I look at *What's Left of Me* and *Once We Were*'s covers, I can't help but to think that the cover artist truly *gets* this series and how clever he/she is. This always gets me excited because I love seeing the cover actually mean something to the book. As much as I love pretty dresses, it's the depth and complexity

that I really crave. It's the kind of cover that you don't quite understand just by looking at it, but as you start reading, pieces of the puzzle fall into place. If *What's Left of Me's* cover shows Eve, the recessive soul, struggling to find her voice and strength, then *Once We Were* depicts two souls (the outlines of the face), two distinct personalities, searching for their own identities. But how independent can you be from someone who you share a body with? Someone who has a different set of hopes, dreams and goals? And what if you were the recessive, finally in charge of some of the bigger decisions? How do you cope with the newfound responsibility? And what if you screw up?

"Maybe I really had been meant to fade away."

In *Once We Were* Addie and Eva are presented with something they'd never thought were possible: the ability to "go under", where one soul would purposefully fall into an unconscious slumber to allow the other privacy. This works out well for relationship purposes, allowing Eva and Ryan some much needed alone time (because, yikes!, talk about awkward when you're trying to make-out with your boyfriend), but it also allowed something Addie and Eva never really encountered before, keeping secrets. And unfortunately, those very secrets continued to push them further and further away from each other.

And unlike in *What's Left of Me*, I found myself growing increasingly more frustrated with Eva as she and Addie continued to go in different directions. Their chemistry, bond and fierce determination for one another was what made it easy to connect with their story. But this time around Eva, who now gets a taste of freedom, becomes very wrapped up in the plans for a revolution that she forgets to pay attention to Addie. It's interesting how the two have switched roles in that regard and how it's Addie who begins to take more of a backseat. It's also interesting how different they really are and how little I realized this in book one.

"But the thing is, sharing hands doesn't mean sharing goals. Sharing eyes doesn't mean sharing visions. And sharing a heart doesn't mean sharing the things we love."

I'll admit, it was difficult for me to connect with Eva due to the decisions she made and risks she took. However, *Once We Were* was Eva's time to find out who she is, and in that search, mistakes were to be expected. My biggest issue was the fact that she continued putting not only herself and her sister in danger, but the people who rescued her and her friends as well.

As soon as an opportunity arrived for Eva to be apart of something big where she could help change the system, she stopped thinking things through, started keep secrets, lying to those who cared about her, agreeing to compromising situations that put her sister at risk. At times, I started having conversations in my mind with Eva, going all Uncle Ben on her: "With great power, comes great responsibility." Yada, yada, yada. But I had to keep reminding myself that this is a character who isn't used to making such HUGE decisions. The redeeming factor is that she does recognize how terribly she's been to her sister and to others. She does try and fix her mistake at great sacrifice to her own person. So, Eva is far from being a terrible character, but *Once We Were* does show her flaws more, and sometimes at a more frustrating degree.

As expected, Kat Zhang's writing is beautiful, fluid and mesmerizing. It was one of the things that caused me to fall in love with *What's Left of Me* and I was so happy to see that continue here. This time around we were also treated to some sections of prose that's written in verse to show the passage of time when Eva "goes under." During that time the verses had a whimsical quality, that made me think of

floating

in a pool

hot summer day

smiling faces

relaxing in the sun

bliss

Still, *Once We Were* didn't capture my attention the same way *What's Left of Me* did, and I did struggle a little to get hooked. Thankfully, the last third does pick up, but I was disappointed to have waited so long for it to do so.

What I was really curious for was more world building. I wanted to know how the rest of the world views hybrids, and since Eva and Addie's knowledge is limited, so is the reader's. This time around there we have a new character named Henri from central Africa who's able to give us a small glimpse at how the other nations feel the Americas. However, their conversations are few and far between and I would have loved to know more about the other countries' views on hybrids. I'm hoping that'll be discussed more in book 3.

Final thought: *Once We Were* mainly focuses on Eva and Addie as individuals instead of just one person. They spend more time apart, losing the connection I had with them from *What's Left of Me*. But I do think this experience has really brought them closer and has set the stage for the final book in the series. With so many questions remaining unanswered, I'm eager to find out what happens next!

Win an ARC HERE. Ends 9/18.

Disclaimer: I picked up an ARC at Book Expo America 2013.

More reviews and other fantastical things at [Cuddlebuggery Book Blog](#).

Daphnee (daphneereads) says

I had a hard time finishing this book. It was good but I thought the first half was really slow but then it picked up and almost had a happy ending. I don't really know what the third book will be about honestly.

Belle says

Waiting for the e-price to go down...

Pre-read:

IT HAS A TITLE AHHHH! And an interesting cover. From far back it looks a little weird, but then you click on it and it's actually very pretty. I especially like the red lettering because it really pops. I love the covers to these books and I really hope that they don't change them!!!

Gillian Berry says

Rating: A slow beginning and somewhat "meh" characters are overcome by an AWESOME ending and world-building that makes me think.

Originally posted at [Writer of Wrongs](#)

My review of *What's Left of Me*

spoilers for book one below

The cover: I love these covers. They are so unique and seem to capture the spirit of these novels: two girls struggling to find out who they are when they're so tangled up in someone else, when they *are* someone else.

The story: I'm not really sure how to organize my thoughts for this book. On the one hand, Zhang sets up some truly moving and deep philosophical questions (the whole two souls, one body thing is pretty complicated), and her writing is exquisite. On the other hand, the pacing for *Once We Were* was almost turgid at times, and I failed to connect until the latter half of the novel. But oh, what a latter half it is. It almost makes up for the many, many talking scenes we get.

Perhaps I've been spoiled by the action-packed, quick-moving books I've read lately. Maybe I'm lazy and impatient and our culture is dangerously addicted to instant-gratifications and we can't handle. Whatever the reason, the beginning of *Once We Were* was a bit of a struggle for me. Addie and Eva, twin souls, have escaped from Normand, the hospital in which they were imprisoned, along with Devon/Ryan (Ryan is the soul that Eva likes) and his sister Hally/Lissa. They are safely hidden in a city with other hybrids who are working underground to rescue as many children as they can.

Maybe I struggled so much because I really couldn't remember that much from *What's Left of Me*, and none of these characters have ever really *popped* for me. They don't pop much in *Once We Were*, either, and it's especially difficult when nearly every character is two for the price of one. I felt a lack of emotional connection, which is usually a dealbreaker for me, except that I was invested in one thing: Eva and Addie's relationship.

In *Once We Were*, this relationship is tested pretty strenuously. These girls are more than sisters; they are quite literally soul mates. But Addie and Eva don't always want the same things. Eva, dormant for so long, is now eager to take action to help the underground cause. Addie feels ignored by Eva and like her separate desires are being pushed to the background. A new wrench is thrown into the mix when Eva and Addie learn that for small amounts of time, one of the souls is able to "disappear", leaving one girl completely in charge

while the other vanishes into a dreamlike state. While this is good for Eva and Ryan's romance (can you IMAGINE making out with someone who has another person in their brain that you DON'T want to make out with while YOU have another person in your brain who doesn't want to make out with either of them???) ARGH), it also sets up new and troubling situations for Eva and Addie. Namely, that they can know completely keep secrets from one another.

Addie and Eva do a lot of internal arguing in *Once We Were*.

I loved reading about the conflicts between Eva and Addie, because the complexities of their dynamic (and all the other hybrids) are the most fascinating part of the book. I don't completely buy all of Zhang's other world-building, but when it comes to the mindsets, feelings, and conflicts of the hybrids, I feel like she nailed it. So much of *What's Left of Me* was about Eva fighting for her right to be alive and independent. *Once We Were* shifts the focus to both Addie and Eva as they try to determine who they are separately *and* together, and what they want to do in the world. Whether they want to fight or run. And if they choose to fight, just how far they're willing to go.

The other hybrids are all a bit faceless to me, to be honest. I remember really loving Hally/Lissa in the first book, but their personalities seemed quite indistinct in this one. Devon, on the other hand, is probably my new favorite. And while parts of *What's Left of Me* truly broke my heart, I never got those levels of feels from *Once We Were*.

Once the action begins, in the last third or so of the book, things get really exciting. Obviously, I can't say anything about it, but you should know that your patience through the slow and thoughtful beginning is worth it. Zhang's prose is also stunning. Her descriptions are not as lush as they were in *What's Left of Me*, but every now and then I'd be bowled over by a specific phrase or word choice. The dreamlike moments, where Eva has disappeared to give Addie some privacy, are written in poetry form, and they're truly beautiful. There's definitely a soft-ish cliffhanger at the end, but that just serves to leave me excited for book three, where I hope the action revs up fully and the scale of the plot gets bigger. But overall, *Once We Were* was a positive read for me, even if it didn't blow me away.

Al Anoud says

So I have mixed feelings about this book.... The series has an original idea, the first book was fast paced and really interesting, furthermore you get to understand and know the characters personalities really well and see how they grow and change. But this book wasn't up to the expectations that the first book has set, which unfortunately many second book fall into this category (it sometimes feels it's unavoidable in trilogies).

I gave this book three stars because even though it was slow paced and at times boring it got right back into the fast paced, interesting plot somewhat in the middle of the book, and delved deeper into the politics behind the hybrid community and how certain moves can lead to their martyrdom without losing pace like it originally did in the begging of the book.

Would I recommend this book? Mmm maybe, depends on how the third book will be.

Amie Kaufman says

What a sensational follow up! *Once We Were* picks up where *What's Left Of Me* left off, and the story is as compelling as ever.

Without giving away too much, I can say that the sequel offers a fascinating view of Eva and Addie's world beyond the walls of Nornand, digging into the challenges of their society and presenting a rich tapestry of characters who each have their own angle and their own definition of 'right'. Kat Zhang doesn't shy away from ethical tangles, and throughout the story I wrestled with the themes and questions she presented. As for the finale... suffice to say I'm already clamouring for book three!

Blythe says

Actual rating is 3.5 stars

Once We Were has left me feeling a whole bunch of conflicted feelings. I did enjoy it as a whole (hence the 3.5 star rating), but it is undeniable that the reading experience I had with *Once We Were* differs greatly from the one I had while reading its predecessor, *What's Left of Me*. Going over my notes as I am writing this review (which is, and will continue to be rather unconventional for me (speaking of which, let me know what you think about this format)), what worked for me in *Once We Were* did largely outweigh what did not work for me, but the two things that did *not* work for me impacted my reading experience well enough to warrant the 3.5 star rating, even though I have many things to praise when it comes to this novel.

What didn't work for me in *Once We Were*:

THE PACING: The pacing in *Once We Were* is, beyond the shadow a doubt, the largest issue at hand for me. Now, I like to think of myself as a fairly patient reader. If a book takes a quarter of the novel for at least a semblance plot to get going, that is generally fine by me. As I near the halfway mark and there is still not a definitive plot or any shred of action aside from dialog, that's where my patience will begin to wear thin. And that's what happened in *Once We Were*. Throughout the vast majority of *Once We Were* (three quarters of the novel), everything is all talk. The character plan all these revolts, and take action with one or two of them, but the revolt sequences are quick and not very thrilling. I almost feel like this novel was a tease over 250 pages long, dragging me along for the action to finally come in the last hundred or so pages (or the last quarter, which I will discuss later). Needless to say, because of this, and the next thing that didn't work for me in *Once We Were*, I felt pretty detached at times.

THE LACK OF AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION: This issue is, surprisingly, not nearly as great as the issue I had with the novel's pacing, but my lack of an emotional connection with the characters this time around certainly left a mark. In *What's Left of Me*, I really, truly cared for Eva and Addie and the secondary cast of characters. I, unfortunately, can't say the same when it comes to *Once We Were*. With this installment, I found myself caring about what happened to Eva and Addie, but I was never really actively *hoping* they'd be okay, because, bringing it back to the first point, there wasn't much action to make me

consider that they *wouldn't* be okay. Just as a whole with the characters, I didn't feel wholly engaged in what was happening to them, regardless of how truly well written the character development in this novel is. Which brings me to...

What did work for me in *Once We Were*:

EVA AND HER CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: Just like she did in *What's Left of Me*, Eva really did grow a lot in *Once We Were*, and her subtle character development was genuinely well-written. (Eva's gradual decline in referring to herself and Addie as a unit, as she begins to refer to herself as one separate entity, using the words "I" or "my" at portions when earlier on she would use the words "we" or "our.") The unfurling of Eva's insecurities, and watching her begin to embrace herself was truly something I enjoyed experiencing, and it only reinforces that Kat Zhang is excellent at character and relationship development, which brings me to my next point...

THE RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT/ROMANCE: The relationship development, namely Eva and Addie's relationship, is just as exceptional as the development of Eva's character. I'm going to keep this portion of the review blunt, as it won't be too difficult to divulge into some minor spoilers or insinuate minor spoilers, but *Once We Were* puts a good chunk of the characters' relationships to test. Seeing some of the relationships tumble, then slowly rebuild themselves in a subtle and believable way was something I really enjoyed reading, and along with that, the romance was really well-written too. Clearly, a romance may be hard to write between two people who have essentially are really four, and you could expect a lot of angst and drama, but Kat Zhang manages to pull romance off very well in *Once We Were*.

THE LAST QUARTER: This portion of the review will also be pretty brief, considering...well, I'll be discussing the last quarter of the novel, and don't want to spoil anything for anyone. But, this is the part of the novel when all that dialog is for something--when everything *happens*. It has its thrilling moments, and its poignant moments, and all around it is just a great ending. Whether or not it made up for having to wait three quarters for it to happen, though, will vary from reader to reader.

Final verdict:

Although it is at times achingly slow and uneventful, Kat Zhang makes up for the issues with the plot in *Once We Were* with her impeccable writing and character/relationship development skills. Zhang's prose is just as amazing and engrossing in *Once We Were* as it was in *What's Left of Me*, and *Once We Were* ends on enough of a cliffhanger (but a bearable one), that I am eagerly anticipating the final book in the Hybrid Chronicles, despite the issues I may have had with this second installment.

Thalia says

Read the review on my blog:
<http://thaliasbooks.tumblr.com/post/5...>

Rashika (is tired) says

***This review has also been posted on *Tangled in Pages*

“Everybody’s got sad stories.” Devon’s voice was as unyielding as stone. “And everyone thinks they’re so very special and broken because of them.”

I read *What’s Left of Me* back in 2012 and fell in love. I read *Once We Were* in 2014 and fell out of love. *What’s Left of Me* became a favorite of 2012 while *Once We Were* became a disappointment and it makes me wonder what went wrong? Was it me? Or was it the book?

I think the answer is both to a certain extent. One of the things that intrigued me in the first book was the hybrids. I was drawn in by this new spin on souls. It was so different from what I had read before and while some of the details concerning the concept bothered me, the uniqueness of it all made it easy to overlook things that didn’t work. In this book, the shiny gleam of originality wore off and I started to get really bothered by the idea of two souls in one body. I couldn’t wrap my head around it and it made no sense to me. It was so HARD to imagine these hybrids. It seemed so weird and some things didn’t line up for me as a reader. I felt like the idea hadn’t been as well thought through as it should have been because it was so DIFFICULT to wrap my head around. I’d be lying if I said it was easier to understand the concept of hybrids in the first book, but the problems with said idea really nagged at me in this book, making it harder to enjoy.

Eva was a character ~~whose name reminded me of Wall-E~~ who really shined out to me in the first book. Her struggles were realistic and her journey was a joy to experience. In this book that went down the drain. She read as a naïve girl who in spite of everything she had faced earlier, learned nothing. She, although not selfish, was incredibly self-centered. She never really bothered to ask how other people felt and went along with whatever she thought was right, dragging her sister and her close friends into her mess. She blindly followed other people because they were obviously ‘right’. It was disappointing because hadn’t the last book taught her anything about how much you can trust people? Character development didn’t occur until the last 20% and by then it was too late. I thought she had had it (referring to a certain event) coming and felt no sympathy for her.

Addie was annoying as always. She is a major hypocrite. She makes it impossible for Eva to have a normal relationship with Ryan for the first third of the book and then gets pissed when Eva freaks out about her relationship with Jackson. Oh and Eva feels guilty. For the most part though, Addie is very subdued. Not in a good way though. She acts even more childish than Eva (and throws tantrums).

The romance is very light and honestly, I don’t give two shits about the romance. It seems too awkward to me. I mean you’re making out with a guy but the guy’s brother and your sister can feel you making out and it seems so weird *shudders*. I am not sure a romance was even a good idea in this case. There was something brought up in the book that would make these romantic situations more bearable but I think that would negate the whole ‘point’ of these books. Hybrids aren’t defects, they’re ‘normal’, so doing what was suggested would be implying otherwise.

The plot was my biggest problem in this book. Where the first book had been doused with the element of danger, something I as a reader LOVE, this book hadn't been. Of course, that isn't to say they weren't in danger, I just didn't feel the danger. I wasn't sitting on the edge, I was roaming around taking breaks because I was bored out of my mind. The plot of this book is basically stupid teens trying to start a revolution. Emphasis on stupid because none of them even think of the consequences and are surprised when things don't go as planned. When I say everyone, I mean even the 'kids' who were older. Who should have been smarter but they weren't. An eye for an eye isn't actually a solution; it just makes both sides half blind and also provides some truth to the government's claims about hybrids being dangerous. I can understand their rage but they are adults. They should know better than to let their rage control them. Their experiences should have matured them even if it turned them into rage beasts out to get the government.

At this point, I am so turned off by this series that I am not even sure I want to go through with it and read the last book. The ending does leave room for improvement but the idea of hybrids no longer appeals to me and is hard to wrap my head around. When I cannot even accept the building blocks of this series, I am not sure continuing is a wise idea, even if I really want to.

Emily May says

Quick warning: this is not a review in the usual sense but a collection of my personal thoughts and beliefs as to why this series didn't work for me.

Some people will probably find my rating for this book generous, while others are sure to think it unfair but, just to make it clear where I stand with this one, I've made it the latest addition to my "it's me not you" shelf. I think it's virtually impossible to be objective when writing a book review. Though one can do their best to take personal tastes, beliefs and feelings out of it, they always manage to sneak in there somehow. When I've tried to balance out past negative reviews with comments for the people who might actually enjoy the book, reading back I can still feel the negative tone coming through. But I really do think myself and this series are completely incompatible on a level that has little to do with the quality of the book and everything to do with me.

This is why I've given a rating of three stars, even though I didn't particularly like this book and I think a part of me knew it was a mistake to carry on with this series after I felt unsure about the first one. For some reason, I am completely unable to suspend disbelief when it comes to these books and the scientific and philosophical issues I have with them are constantly niggling at the back of my mind. It doesn't make any more sense to me than it will to others why it bothers me so much here, why I can happily believe in the plausibility of creatures such as vampires and accept things like them being able to get an erection despite the lack of blood flow in their body. Some authors have rewritten the mythology to explain this issue by vampires being able to control the flow of blood in their body and direct it towards where it needs to go... and I'm like, yeah, that makes perfect sense. I get it. But not with this.

I'll tell you what bugs me, and I realise it's pretty unfair of me to blame a sci-fi/paranormal book for not making sense, but I really struggle to accept this concept and, because I can't accept it, I can't believe in it and I cannot allow myself to become invested in the story. The novel works better for me when I imagine that Eva and Addie are conjoined twins and think about it in terms of the problems they would face that way with both girls wanting to be with different people. I've always been curious how real life conjoined twins get past issues such as these, how they can be accepted as individual people when they must go about their

everyday lives as if they are one.

But Eva and Addie's actual story - as two souls sharing one body - doesn't work for me. I find myself trying to wrap my head around how they both can have physical control of the body, how if one person seizes up in the middle of an awkward conversation the other can then jump in and save the situation. Because: where do thoughts and feelings and speech and control come from? Answer: the brain. How many brains do they have? Answer: one. I feel myself getting ridiculously philosophical here... but what is a person? Is not a person simply a collection of memories, sense experience and gathered knowledge all stored inside the brain? I don't see how two people can exist with different thoughts and tastes and desires... but only one brain.

And the thing it all comes down to is the thing I don't want to say because it always sounds so horrible. So many people put such emphasis on this thing, many view it as the most important thing of all... the soul. I don't believe in it. For one thing, I am reluctant to believe in anything that cannot be defined and the soul is one such thing that has no set definition. For another, the soul has always seemed to me like a piece of human fiction created to give weight to the argument that some part of a person exists eternally, before life and beyond death. Because in order for that to be true, there has to be something that is separate from our body, that is more than matter, more than flesh and bone and electrical impulses running through the brain. I want it understood that I do not believe in preaching and I'm not trying to convince you to see things my way, I just really do want to offer an explanation as to why this book posed such a problem for me. An explanation as much for myself as for anyone else who happens to stumble across my random thoughts.

In the end, I assure you that none of this is a criticism of Zhang's story or writing. I'm angry at myself for being unable to forget these things and just accept this for what it is: pure made-up fantastical fiction. If you actually read this far, I apologise for being so unhelpful with this one and you deserve a medal for making it through my ramblings.

Rose says

Initial reaction: It was decent, probably around my same reaction to the first book (which admittedly I read a while back ago.) The intrigue is strong but the execution felt a bit shaky through the novel.

Full Review:

Don't let my rating of this book fool you - I thought "Once We Were" was a very good book, and a worthy second book in the Hybrid Chronicles series (following up the first book "What's Left of Me.") Following Eva and Addie in this book shows them in quite a few harrowing situations - a struggle between claiming the right to exist as Hybrid souls and changing the status quo from the oppressive network that's quickly expanding its reach and aim. It's an apt theme as far as a dystopian novel is concerned. It also shows Eva and Addie not just as one entity, but struggling to come to terms with their own identities in the mix of some harrowing events.

So you might ask: "Rose, what's the problem with this book?" I'll admit it took me quite a bit of time to really get into the flow of this story. I thought it meandered a bit too much in the beginning and in parts of a sagging middle. Some parts I understood because the story took some much needed (and appreciated) time to flesh out Eva's character for her flaws and struggle to exist independently of her sister. The narrative did a decent job of showing how difficult it can be to have two souls sharing one body and fighting for competing

interests - whether it may be in the vein of relationships or in the measure of what side they find themselves on in the midst of a difficult conflict. But for some reason, the narrative felt like it took a long time to stage that development, though it was progressive. The framework of the supporting characters and their role in the overarching story was fine, but I'm not sure why it felt like it took so long to get to the story's respective climax despite some notably interesting themes, scenes and intentions in the narrative.

I think one thing I like about Eva in comparison to other heroines in YA dystopia is - despite the fact she can make some infuriating decisions in a massive conflict - she's more self-aware and recognizes and learns from her mistakes. She recognizes her sister's wishes when they come into conflict and even learns of the greater repercussions of her decisions as the book marches to a rather explosive (literally and figuratively) conclusion. I really liked the intensity and emotion of the ending - I wish the pacing in the beginning and middle had the same kind of pull. Nonetheless, I find myself eager to pursue the conclusion of the series.

Overall score: 3/5 stars.

Brigid ☆ Cool Ninja Sharpshooter ☆ says

You can also read this review on [Flying Kick-a-pow! Reviews](#).

Thank you Edelweiss for providing me with an ARC of this book!

The first blink was followed by the first breath. Then the second. The third.

Addie was gone, and I was still here, sitting on the bed.

Alone.

The word echoed through the empty chambers of my mind.

Nobody but I knew.

I curled our fingers into a fist, harder and harder until our nails bit a painful line across the center of our palm. Then I studied the stair-step pattern of red crescent moons etched into our skin.

The silence in the room—in our head—was enormous. It seemed at once a great, untouchable emptiness and some stifling, half-living thing that might, at any moment, break down the door hiding me from the rest of the world.

Summary:

The second book in the *Hybrid Chronicles* (the first book being *What's Left of Me*) returns to the same world in which each person is born with two souls. At some point, one soul becomes dominant, and the

recessive soul is supposed to fade away completely.

Eva and Addie share one body, and neither of them ever disappeared. For a long time, the two of them pretended that Eva had gone dormant—but Eva is still there inside Addie's head. When their secret was discovered, they were taken to a government facility where they were supposed to be "cured," but they escaped the cruel experimentation before Eva could be torn away from Addie.

Now they are part of a group of other hybrids who run a secret resistance group. For the first time in their life, Eva and Addie don't have to hide their hybridity, and they can learn new skills from people who are like them. Most importantly, they can learn how to temporarily disappear so that they can have turns with absolute privacy.

But as they become more deeply involved in the violent rebellion, Eva and Addie begin to question how far they're willing to go to win their freedom. The two girls are beginning to clash with each other like they never have before, and their differences could tear them apart.

My thoughts:

I was thrilled to get an ARC of *Once We Were*. I read *What's Left of Me* earlier this summer not knowing what to expect from it, and it was a pleasant surprise. I found the concept fresh and intriguing, and it had an engaging plot and writing style. It was mysterious and innovative, and I was excited to see what the sequel had to offer.

I've been digesting it for a while now, and I think I might have liked it even more than the first book. Neither book is perfect, and there are still some things I'm confused about. But I think *Once We Were* did a fantastic job of raising the stakes and complicating the plot in a very compelling way.

What I liked:

- A lot of what I loved about the first book was present in the sequel. The idea is really cool, and it's not quite like anything I've ever read before. I guess there have been similar ideas before about two people possessing one body, but I think Kat Zhang takes an original spin on it.

- Zhang's writing is wonderful. The descriptions are vivid, the words flow so nicely on the page. It's just so ... delicious. The style always keeps me interested.

- So often, the second book in a series will fall flat. In a lot of other series I've read, especially in trilogies, the second book wanders in this awkward in-between stage where it just feels like it's setting up for the next book and serves little other purpose. But I felt that *Once We Were* did what a second book is *supposed* to do—yes, it does set up for the next book and has a lot of build-up, but it also has its own contained plot. It's very different from the first book without separating from it too much, and it's not repetitive of the first book (which a lot of sequels often are).

Probably the strongest aspect of this book is that it raises the stakes so well. In this second installment, we see Eva and Addie really start to realize their individuality. In the first book, they were so attached to each other (both figuratively and literally), and the bond between them felt unbreakable. While they still love each other in the sequel, we see Eva come to realize that she wants to control her own body and be her own person. It's so complicated, because the two girls want to give each other more control, and at the same time they're so afraid of being separated. And now they're involved in such a dangerous situation in which their

disagreements could ruin the bond that they have. It's such a nerve-wracking dilemma ... It's the kind of book where I don't know what on earth I would do if I was in the protagonist's shoes, and I love how terrifying that feeling is. (Not because it's terrifying necessarily, but because I feel so strongly about it.)

What didn't work for me:

- I was hoping for more answers in this book, and ... well, I didn't really get them. There's still a chance that more will be revealed in the next book. But, I'm still confused about the whole premise of the book. Yes, I love it as a concept, but I don't understand *why* it's happening. I don't know if I'm just missing something, but ... why is it that everyone is born with two souls? Is this an alternate version of our world, or is it our world in the future? And if it is the future, how did this happen? Alien invasion? Pollution? Disease? ... Who knows. I don't necessarily care about not knowing, because there's something I sort of like about how mysterious it is in that regard. On the other hand, I feel like there should be at least a hint of an explanation.

- On top of that, I still don't really understand why hybrids are considered so dangerous and why the government is so paranoid about them. Everyone is always just like, "EEEEK HYBRIDS, THEY ARE CRAZY AND THEY'RE GOING TO KILL US ALLLL." But ... I don't really understand why everyone feels that way.

However, I'm kind of willing to let this slide. I don't really understand it, but on the other hand, I guess it's not that different from what the world is like in real life. There are prejudices against people for all kinds of ridiculous reasons—their race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc. And none of those prejudices make an ounce of sense, either. So the fact that this fictional world is afraid of people who have a "different" characteristic that they can't control and that has no impact on others at all ... Hmm, yeah, I guess that's not that implausible.

- I wish the characters were a bit stronger. I like the concept and the plot and the writing style so much ... but I don't feel much of a connection to the characters themselves. It gets confusing when there are so many characters all sharing bodies with each other and whatnot. It's a scenario in which the distinctions between the characters should be made really strong and clear—and I just don't see that. I don't see much of a difference personality-wise between Eva and Addie or between any of the other double-identities of the other hybrids. Everyone just kind of acts and talks the same way, and I had trouble keeping track of who was who. In addition, it makes it kind of difficult to be invested in the romance. It's like ... I don't care that much who Eva or Addie is interested in, because I feel like the people around them aren't that different from each other.

The final word:

I still love the concept of this series; it's creative and it's different. The sequel does a good job of keeping up the intrigue and adding a great sense of tension. I would like to see some stronger world-building and character development. But I am very invested in the story itself, and I'm excited to see what happens in the next book.

~ Flying Kick-a-pow! Reviews ~

Ferdy says

Spoilers

Not quite as enjoyable as the first book, but still a decent enough read.

-The best thing about the series is the unique world, where everyone is born with two souls.

-The whole two souls, one body thing made for interesting relationship dynamics between family, friends, and love interests... Although, I have to say that element wasn't explored nearly enough for my liking.

-The plot was quite dull. Eva/Addie and Ryan/Devon met some other Hybrids, and then they made plans to take down the evil government regime by bombing different places. It was all rather uninspired.

-I liked that Eva was no longer the submissive soul, she was in control of her body just as much as Addie was. In the first book Eva didn't really have a life — she couldn't move when she wanted, she had no friends, her family forgot about her, she hadn't talked to anyone in years... She only had Addie for company, and most of the time Addie moaned about how things were so hard for her (even though Addie got to live a relatively normal day-to-day life) — so I was pleased that Eva finally got to experience some semblance of a normal life.

-It was good how Eva/Addie could finally be alone in their own body by the other 'going under' — it was fucked up that they shared everything before. At least they'll be able to be alone with their respective boyfriends without the other witnessing and experiencing everything as well. The downside though is that neither knows what/who the other is doing when they go under... which is kind of creepy and terrifying.

-I enjoyed finding out a little bit more about the history of the Hybrids, and what was going on in other countries outside of America. I want to know more though, like how do Hybrids live and work? What if both souls want different career paths? What about relationships and marriage between Hybrids? What happens when twin souls love two different people? And what if the twin souls of those two different people love another two different people? It could go on and on. How would they all live together? And what about kids? Which soul is the parent? What if a female hybrid gave birth, would both souls see themselves as the parent? Even if only one of them was in a relationship and the other one wasn't? What about a male hybrid, where each soul is married to another woman, would both souls consider themselves parents of the kids the other soul had with their other half — since biologically that kid would still be theirs? It's all so complicated. I want less teen angst and rebellion, and more exploration into the dynamics, relationships, and psychology of Hybrids.

-I hated Addie, she was so whiny and cowardly. She moaned about every little thing, she refused to make important decisions, and made Eva choose for her, and then moaned and blamed Eva whenever things went wrong. Her indecision was just as bad as Eva's rash decisions. She had no right to whinge when she put all the responsibility on Eva's shoulders.

Addie was such a self righteous cow, she had a huge hissy fit because Eva was shocked at her getting it on with Jackson. How else did she expect Eva to react after waking up with some strange guy's tongue down her throat? Addie should have told Eva that she was seeing Jackson, that way Eva wouldn't have felt so violated when she woke up. I hated that Addie acted like Eva was in the wrong for the whole Jackson thing, just because Eva's life no longer solely revolved around Addie. Eva wasn't at fault, Addie should have respected her enough to tell her how her own body was being used. Eva wasn't a mind reader, Addie shouldn't have

expected Eva to magically know that she was getting it on with Jackson. I hope Addie dies, she was such a cow.

-Jackson was a bastard. He lied to Addie for months, and he would have made her an accessory to murder — he didn't even care that she would have had to live the rest of her life with the knowledge that she was responsible for killing dozens of people. Also, he watched her get beaten and tied her up and did nothing. I really hope Addie doesn't forgive him, he did way too many unforgivable things, their whole relationship was a lie. I'll be disappointed if Addie forgives and forgets, no matter how much he tries to make amends. I'm sick of doormat YA heroines forgiving douchebag love interests after a huge betrayal. There doesn't need to be any more dumb and weak female characters in YA, there's already plenty.

-I really want Eva to confront her parents about how they moved on so easily from her 'death' and forgot about her. I want to know 1. If they were relieved that she died because it meant Addie would be normal 2. If they really saw her as her daughter as much they did Addie 3. If they had grieved for her and missed her in private and 4. If they were upset when they found out she was alive. I really hope Eva's relationship with her parents isn't glossed over in the third book.

-Most of the characters were decent enough (apart from Addie). I did find Devon a far more endearing character than Ryan.

-In the countries where Hybrids are allowed to exist what happens when one soul in a body commits a crime? Do both souls get punished? How does that work?

All in all, it was an okay read, the plot could have done with tarting up though.

Katy says

I loved "What's Left of Me" - like blown away by the concept and sucked into the story. This one was still enjoyable enough, but I couldn't really get into it until the last third.

First of all, I'm glad to see Eva coming out of her shell. Sure, there were times I wanted to yell at her for being stupid or for being a self-absorbed, selfish brat, but I could sympathize that she finally has an opportunity to let her personality surface. And I honestly do like her. My complaint, however, is Eva was the recessive one, the weaker one. But in this book, Addie was such a weakling, and Eva was the strong, determined one. Like I said, I understand that's she's finally discovering what it's like to be in control, but if she had always been like this, she would have never almost faded away. I had expected this book to be about her finally being able to experience everything, appreciating and savoring each thing she was able to do. Not at all like she was in this book. It's as if she was a different person.

And sort of like my Addie and Eva complaint, I really wondered what happened to Halle and Lisa? Again, I understand they went through a pretty traumatic experience near the end of book 1, but they were so strong and determined back then. They were the one urging Addie and Eva to consider something very dangerous. They hardly appeared in this book, and when they were, they were either aloof, or like the book said, seeking acceptance from others. Not the same characters I grew to love from the first book.

My thing was there were so many characters in this book. I mean, you have a lot of players during a

rebellion, in general, but to double everyone up, it was just a little hard to keep track of.

As for the book itself, it was good, but not mind-blowingly amazing. I don't know, it just felt like any other book about oppressed citizens seeking for equal rights and preparing a rebellion, not knowing who to trust and constantly battling with themselves whether this was the right thing to do. The only thing that stuck out was the two people sharing a body concept. So yeah, I knew Zhang was trying to build up to the big climax at the end, but I struggled a bit to stay with the story, and I kept waiting for something to happen.

And when something finally did happen, starting in the last third or so, everything occurred really quickly, and I remembered why I liked the story so much. There was a LOT of action, a lot of twists and turns, some betrayals and surprises (although some you will probably see it coming). And when Eva and Addie come face-to-face with Jensen again? Okay, totally NOT what I would have expected, and it's got my gears churning in my head.

So okay, I think this book had a lot of the second-book or middle-book elements in it. If Eva and Addie had been portrayed differently or if Zhang had incorporated what was going on in the laboratories more instead of the drama and tension in the little rebellion group, I probably would have been more sucked in. But I just know that book 3 is going to knock my socks off, and I'm pretty excited to find out what Jensen and his gang has up his sleeves and reveal whatever it is that we thought we knew but we really didn't or what we were led to believe is not really as it had seemed. So putting this one aside, the end has me pumped up for the next book.

05.06.13 @ 8:11 PM - The ARC is out! And we don't have a cover yet! Hurry, please, hurry.

05.06.13 @ 8:48 PM - Ahhhhh! We now have a cover! So exciting!

05.07.13 @ 7:46 AM - Wait! Where did it go?

05.10.13 @ 7:20 AM - Look! The cover is back!

shady boots | #WatchPOSE says

A step down from the first book, but eh. Guess I might as well finish the series. I have a feeling I know how it's gonna end, but who knows. It might surprise me.

Brooke ♥booklife4life♥ says

At A Glance

Genre: Young Adult; Science Fiction

Love Triangle/Insta Love?: Love hexagon!

Cliff Hanger: kinda :D

Rating: 4.5 stars.

Score Sheet

All out of ten

Cover: 8

Plot: 8

Characters: 8

World Building: 8

Flow: 7

Series Congruity: 7

Writing: 7

Ending: 7

Total: 8

In Dept

Best Part: More Hybrids :D

Worst Part: Lots of names to remember.

Thoughts Had: Yay more hybrids; who????; whoaaa

Conclusion

Continuing the Series: yes!

Recommending: yes!

Short Review: Yay more hybrids :D i loved the new additions in this book. It was a bit hard to keep everyone straight since some only used their other name maybe twice in the book. So that was a bit hard. The love hexagon going on in this book is making me smile. Devon, Addie, Ryan, Eva, and then (shot i don't remember his name!) Anyhow, great to see how that'll end. The action in this book was great! I was pleasantly surprised by it. I was on the edge of my seat waiting to see how it played out. I need the third book ASAP please! I need to see how this plays out!!!

Review in GIF Form:
