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When Esmay Suiza found herself in the middle of a space battle, the senior surviving officer, she had no choice but to take command and win. She didn't want to be a hero, but Once A Hero....

Once A Hero Details

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From Reader Review Once A Hero for online ebook

Falynn - the TyGrammarSaurus Rex says

I really enjoyed this book - best of the series so far. Lots of fun action but also a few serious issues too.

Scott Holstad says

Call me completely dumb, but I read a full 300 pages of this novel before giving up because it had gotten so progressively STUPID. God, it was a stupid and boring novel. This was my first Elizabeth Moon novel and I had always heard pretty good things about her, but this was not a good introduction to her work for me. When I bought this, I didn't know that this was the fourth book in a large series. It would have helped to read the preceding book and from what I could tell, the preceding book would have been a lot better.

In the preceding book, protagonist Lieutenant Esmay Suiza had survived a mutiny on a warship where her captain had turned traitor along with several other ship captains and there was a battle on the ship leaving her senior officer. She took the ship back to the ongoing warship battle and won, beating all odds. In this book, she's court marshaled for mutiny and is exonerated. She goes to her home planet on leave, has a horrible time, can't wait to get back to Fleet, and upon arriving, instead of being assigned to another warship, she discovers she's assigned to a monstrously huge repair spaceship. It has 18 levels and is the size of an orbital space station. It has 25,000 personnel, a captain who hates her, and multiple admirals. She's assigned to Hull and Architecture, a department she has no experience in, and yes, that's about the most exciting department on this ship. And so begins an entire book of descriptions of inventory racks, getting lost on various levels, eating in mess halls, taking tubes to various levels, other departments, such as Scan, Tactical, blah, blah, blah. Oh my God, is it boring. She has to go get inventory number GS5077658SL or crap like that and find plan FR564972, etc. How many pages of that shit can you read? Fortunately some action finally occurs. Except that it's beyond stupid. They find out about a damaged warship in another sector that they want to repair, so they "jump" without escort to get it, find dead and wounded people on it, transfer all of the bloody but strangely unwounded (after all) people to the sick bay, and start working on the ship, which will apparently take months to repair. Two warships that were with the damaged one leave them to go back to their previous destination, leaving the repair ship alone. Understand that their enemies lack good technology and would like nothing more than to capture this type of ship so they could use it for themselves. And so the 25 wounded crew members of the ship they just got are an enemy commando team. And a couple of hours after they've been in sick bay, the authorities on the repair ship, get them up, give them clothes and IDs and assign them to various departments to work because they desperately need their help. They desperately need the help of 25 people who don't know anything about their ship when they already have 25,000 people? Yeah, that's logical. How freaking stupid is that? When Esmay's assigned person comes, she gets a bad feeling about him, shares it with her boss, and immediately concludes that it's an enemy commando team that attacked the ship they took in, killed its personnel, put on their uniforms, are acting as Fleet personnel, and are now spread all over the repair ship ready to take it over. She just knew it. She knew the plan. Somehow. It's amazing. It's beyond comprehension that she would be able to come to that conclusion just by interacting with one person from that ship. It literally makes no sense whatsoever. It's stupid as hell. Of course, it turns out that she's right, but it's virtually impossible for anyone to come to that conclusion based on just her instinct. And then the enemy commando team of 25 people steal a few dull dinner knives from the mess hall while eating, get together, and laughingly plan to take over the ship, killing as many people as possible with these "weapons" even though they face 25,000 people. Meanwhile, the captain and admirals have been

alerted to everything by Esmay and are planning on taking over the oncoming enemy warships when they arrive, even though they have no weapons. Then they're going to blow up their own ship and people to keep it out of the hands of the enemy. I read a little bit further. The bad guys take a hostage, Esmay's love interest. They kill a few people. But I just stopped because the book had gotten so fucking stupid, I just couldn't continue. I can't believe how boring and how dumb this book and this premise is. I've just finished reading the first 10 Honor Harrington books, which I've compared this book to because of the theoretically strong female protagonists, but David Weber can write a believable, compelling story and Honor rocks. Moon is a weak writer who chooses boring things to write about and writes unrealistic scenes and scenarios and makes her books unbelievable as a result. If she had just made some adjustments, changed some things, it could have been better, maybe much better, I'm not sure. But she didn't and as a result, the book sucks. I'm not going to give any more books in this series a chance. There may be some good ones, but I'm not risking it. Not recommended.

Robert Gluck says

Excellent writing, gripping story, psychologically insightful. I look forward to reading more from Elizabeth Moon.

Beth Cato says

After a break, I'm continuing with the Serrano Legacy series by Elizabeth Moon. The first three books on Heris Serrano--though good--were a bit of a disappointment. I was pleased to find this book, continuing the series with a bit character from WINNING COLORS, was much better and more scifi opera in the style of her later Vatta's War series.[return][return]Esmay Suiza didn't intend to be a hero. But when her spaceship was captained by a traitor, she and others rose in mutiny. Esmay ended up as captain, making a decisive victory against incredible odds. However, in the aftermath, no one knows how the no-ambition ensign did it; Esmay herself is befuddled. When reassigned to a new ship, trouble finds her yet again, and this time Esmay must confront her deepest fears in order to stay alive--and mentally sound.[return][return]Elizabeth Moon writes great science fiction. Esmay is a complicated character. Like Heris Serrano, she's extremely stoic, but Esmay has her reasons--and it's interesting how the reader discovers those reasons along with her. At times, the psychological aspects did seem to drag on too long, but the rest of the book relied on constant action and suspense. I'm looking forward to reading the next book in the series.

Dan says

Reread..

Stefano Amadei says

Monotono ripete per oltre duecento pagine gli stessi tre concetti ok che è la prima parte di penso tre romanzi ma credo che duecentosessantasei pagine per presentare un fatto e un personaggio anche se è la protagonista sono troppi. I cattivi praticamente inconsistenti. Una palla al piede non finirà la saga questo è certo.

Carolyn F. says

I loved this book. I like my sci-fi with a few space battles, some time on-planet, and a little romance. This had them all. I'm hoping that Esmay is in more of the books in this series, although she isn't a Serrano.

Barbara Brien says

I'm starting to think that no one appreciates this book the way I do. I love, love, love this book. Why? It speaks to me, of greatness thrust upon you, of vulnerability, of the family you are born to and the family you acquire, of overcoming trauma, of seeing the big picture, and of taking control of your own life.

When I first read this book, I identified with the main character, as someone who had experienced too many of the same events she did, and needed to learn some of the things she did. When I re-read this book, I learned more about myself as I learned more about Esmay.

Marc says

This was the first of the Familias books I read, and in many ways the best. Not necessarily a good thing. In some ways, this book is an attempt to breathe new life into the series, leaving the played out tales of Heris Serrano behind and moving to a newer and less defined character. It suffers from having to do all the development work in a single book. There are a number of all-too-obvious foreshadowing elements, but these don't ruin the story. I enjoyed the book for what I enjoy other Moon books for, her knowledge of a life that's alien to me, and her ability to present it in a novel.

Kim says

As with too many military sci fi, this book uses sexual violence as a cop out for actual character depth.

Cloak88 says

Slight bit cartoonish, but a good read nonetheless.

Esmay Suiza introduced in the previous novel as the green as grass junior lieutenant who stopped the mutiny on her ship and came back to help is now the main character. Being naturally reserved both in character and culture she rather disliking her newfound status as a Hero.

After endless scrutiny on the military side, a far more personal story begins. A story with a few clicés, but gripping and intense. You dive into her past and slowly discover her past alongside her while she tries to improve herself in the present.

And slowly discover what she could be (or already is...)

A good story with a some cartoonish-ish villains. If you can look past that than this is an excellent novel.

Lushr says

TRIGGER WARNING: sexual assault.

i wish i'd had warning this book would be such a trigger. it's written so well that things i have never experienced were traumatising me. and the subsequent therapy sessions in the book equally healed me.

a total departure from the Serranos. Lt. Suiza is the young woman whose story we follow and she is utterly charming. this book was extremely enjoyable for the great characters, inventive environment (a massive city sized repair ship). and exciting story. however there are two very violent scenes which not all readers may cope with. i found the book worth reading through despite the violent scenes because the book ends with some very good advice and therapy which is therapeutic to read. but i won't re read this title. i just hope for more from Lt Esmay Suiza. i really like her. more than any of the previous characters.

Rachel (Kalanadi) says

Much better than the first three books - and much darker. I suppose I'd put in a trigger warning for rape or childhood sexual assault on this, but it is not at all graphic, just a very difficult thing Esmay learns she needs help to deal with it. I quite like that this is an SF book strongly proclaiming that getting help for mental health is not a weakness. Some excellent military SF elements included too: watch for the EVA walk on the outside of a ship during FTL! Really cool visuals in that, plus once again, Moon shines when she's writing about battle tactics. The DSR setting was very interesting and I hope later books might revisit it (unlikely though...).

Olga Godim says

3.5 stars

A nice space opera, and Esmay is a sympathetic heroine. She is a hero by accident, the best kind, in my opinion. Her personal demons, stemming from her childhood trauma, makes the story even more interesting, as she struggles between her leadership abilities and her deep-rooted feelings of personal inadequacy. The novel is immensely readable and not dated at all despite its respectable (for sci-fi) age – it was published in 1997.

There were two things that concerned me in the book. First – the story seems a bit too abstracted from reality. There is a fight erupting on Esmay's ship. People are dying, but the narrative gallops ahead without even a hiccup, as if nobody notices the dead bodies: neither the characters, nor the author. As if they're not real. Thankfully, those corpses are not real for us, the readers, but they should be real for the protagonist. Second – lots of attention, too much in my opinion, is paid to the geography of the ship, its various wings and corridors. I got lost in all those names and connections and stopped paying attention to them very early in the novel. Unfortunately, the author seems fascinated with them.

Otherwise, a solid sci-fi novel. Recommended to anyone who likes sci-fi.

Thomas says

I'm having a hard time reconciling the reviews for this book with this book. My standards for Space Opera are not especially high, but this thing is an incoherent mess.

It starts out as a military courtroom drama, referring back to the events of (I hope) another book. It morphs into a clumsy soldier returns home/ fish out of water story, turns into a military maintenance procedural before becoming a fairly unambitious actioner, before changing back into a trauma recovery story with a romance stapled to it.

"...Dazzling..."—Booklist

"Where?" Me.

Mardel says

I enjoy a good SciFi novel; especially one that features a woman who is strong and can take things in stride, learning along the way, etc. I also enjoy the whole SciFi feel - the space travel, the talk of FTL travel, all the little gadgetry - nano bots, etc - that go into a book concerning the future and all the possibilities. It's even better when it's obvious that the author knows his or her science but DOES NOT ram it down our throats in the form of pages and pages of science lectures and "learnin'".

Elizabeth Moon does pretty good with this - her women are strong, her science explanations are mostly short and sweet, incorporated in the story. I think she even avoids those pesky long-winded conversations when two characters are discussing theory in their sneaky way of TEACHING the reader something sciencey. EXCEPT-during some conversations with a therapist. Needed, but a little much for me. However - Her characters are pretty close to being a Mary Sue type of character.

Now, I don't think that Moon necessarily WANTS to be a young woman who is perfect in space. I'm saying Esme is CLOSE to being a Mary Sue type. Her character is so close to perfectly unassuming, not appreciating her own knowledge or strengths, possibly keeping them hidden even from her self - that it's almost nauseating.....Despite this...

I did enjoy the story for the story's sake. The narration dialog between characters were fun to read - engaging. Her main character, Esme was saved from being a complete Mary Sue by her RAGE...this rage that she kept tamping down because she had to be in complete control of herself at all times...so much in control that she picked a boring non-glorious career track that she wasn't really suited for.

Even though I found some parts of the novel to be "oh please, sure this would happen"; even though I found some of the characters oh so predictable (the grumpy supervisor, the greedy villians, the hateful captain, etc) I did enjoy the story, because no matter what, and no matter how improbable, Moon can tell a good story. It's entirely possible that part of the story was supposed to show how silly perceptions can be - Esme's self-perception, her crippling way of shying away from her own abilities, her family's perception of the way things should be, her captains's perception of her mutiny, etc. Something about her style and her characters

made me want to keep reading til the end. There was some eye rolling going on while I read, for sure, but still - I want to read more from this series....

I think what got to me, was the way - even though events led to this - a fairly young and inexperienced young lieutenant ends up completely in charge of officers who rank higher than her - what about their experience? But - I remind myself that this is the story - a fiction story of the extraordinary circumstances and actions of a young woman who is fighting for her life, and is overcoming some pretty traumatic events. When I do this, it works better for me as a story.

This is a Serrano Legacy novel - there are quite a few other books in the Serrano series, however, in this particular novel, the Serranos did not have a huge presence as characters. There is the Serrano that was involved in the mutiny, but you only read about her. There is an Admiral Serrano that interacts with Esme for a short time, and then there is the young male Serrano. He befriends Esme, and is one Serrano who definitely feels the heavy mantle of the Serrano expectations and legends weighing him down, expecting so much out of him...He doesn't play a huge part - but is a good friend to Esme with just the slightest beginnings of a romance.

Dana Stabenow says

I am constantly amazed and as a writer humbled by the mastery of absolutely convincing detail that Elizabeth Moon displays in her Vatta and Serrano series, without ever neglecting character or letting the detail get in the way of the plot. No matter how minute the detail (three leaky tubes of adhesive) it always goes somewhere (the disabling of an enemy ship and the complete rout of an entire barbarian horde). This is one of her best yet.

Mephistia says

Many years ago, I read *The Adventures of Paksenarrion*, which I enjoyed so much I named my cat after the heroine. For some reason, I did not search out every other book written by the author, and indeed, over time forgot the author's name until I was recently reminded, and informed she also wrote sci-fi.

This book is nothing like what I expected, and far better than anything I could've hoped for. Apparently it's part of a series (which I realized after finishing it), so it's possible the recent history of events which so influence Esmy Suiza (protagonist) in the first part of the book are covered in depth in one of the earlier books. Here, they are explained, but in terms of dealing with the aftermath: for the first section of the book, I kept wondering if the ebook has somehow been programmed out of order and I'd missed all the action.

But the author believably maneuvers Suiza into the midst of another ship conflict, providing the desired adventure and fast paced plot. It was the aftermath that I thought was possibly the most fulfilling, positive, and surprising ending available. I was genuinely delighted by the last 100 pages or so, and would highly recommend it to any fan of sci-fi

Jack Gardner says

Great Story Telling -- Great Characters

"Once A Hero" and the earlier novels of the Heris Serrano series ("Hunting Party," is the first) are great. Moon comes from a family of Marines, went through officers training school herself, has degrees in history and biology, is a volunteer medical technician, loves horses, and believes women can fulfill military roles. All of this brings color and originality to her novels; which remind me of the "Horatio Hornblower" novels -- which is saying a lot.

Moon depicts some of the best space battle scenarios I've read. No alien beings. The stories involve more than battles; there are mysteries to solve and villainy afoot of more than one variety.

Moon admires the abilities of women in and out of uniform and reminds us not to underestimate them in a pinch. Nor to underestimate the advantages and disadvantages of family relationships. She enjoys throwing the cultures of space fleet officers and upper class society together, just to see what they both might learn.

Moon notes the limitations that female ship captains might face in finding mates and romance, much less raising children. But, while these women are open to romance if it materializes, they are not looking for it.

On economics, Moon is better than most, admires good business sense and accumulation of wealth, depicts a basically capitalistic society, but doesn't have the proper understanding of capitalism, nor appreciate how free markets would work against some of the social and medical disparities she projects. Still, these are not the main focus of the novels. The main focus is on dedicated women, courageous and competent. You'll like `em.

Janet Sketchley says

Esmay is a great character, and I thoroughly enjoyed most of this book. For me, the Bloodhorde enemies were too disturbing in their thoughts and actions, and I ended up skipping their sections. I'm disappointed not to be able to carry on with the characters into the next novel, because I don't often find characters I like as much as Esmay, or science fiction action this fun. For those a little less sensitive, it's a great read. Mostly clean, too. There's one particularly offensive word and some minor things, and the traumatic things are low-key and never flaunted -- just too much for some of us.
