



# The Empty Kingdom

*Elizabeth E. Wein*

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In *The Lion Hunter*, Telemakos, the half-British, half-Aksumite grandson of King Arthur, was sent for his safety to stay with one of Aksum's former enemies. When Abreha, ruler of Himyar, allegedly the boy's protector, catches him in the midst of what appears to be treachery, he sentences him to a fate seemingly worse than death. Not only is Telemakos forbidden to see his beloved younger sister, Athena, but he is also commanded to reproduce the maps that Abreha plans to use in order to invade Aksumite territory. Countries away from his family, lacking any way to tell them what has happened, Telemakos must bring all of his subtle talents to bear in order to regain his freedom. *The Empty Kingdom* is a stunning conclusion to the *Mark of Solomon* duology, a triumph of historic suspense.

## **The Empty Kingdom Details**

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Author : Elizabeth E. Wein

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## **From Reader Review The Empty Kingdom for online ebook**

**Terry (Ter05 TwiMoms/ MundieMoms) says**

I raced through this book in a day and evening after the cliff hanger of the previous book, The Lion Hunter. The two books are meant to be read together but they fit with the previous series of three beginning with The Winter Prince. Perhaps they could be read out of order but I would not recommend it. Upon finishing I just sat with a smile on my face when I closed the last page. So many twists and turns and such a beautiful ending that began five books ago with The Winter Prince which is a very different variation of the Arthurian legend. This amazing author began a book where Medraut (her version of Mordred) is writing the story to his evil mother, Morgana. Through the next two books we enter the story of his son conceived in Ethiopia and named Telemakos. Telemakos is the grandson of two kings, one of Britain (Artos/Arthur) and the other of his homeland. He has dark skin and his father's almost white hair. Medraut is an unforgettable book character as written in these books, but the first book is truly his own. He is wound into the books from beginning to end, but the story becomes Telemakos journey.

I can not even explain why these books are so wonderful. The characters for sure, the intrigue that is subtle at times, and slams you in the face at others. I honestly would not have been interested in reading a series that for much of the time is about a young boy and his even younger sister. It's just not my thing. Yet here I am a couple of weeks after I read the second book, A Coalition of Lions, naming this a favorite series. I read the first book in October of 2012 and somehow was satisfied to stop there. Yet I could not get the astounding trip through the snow where Medraut and his brother Lleu were determined to kill each other and their love/hate relationship during that terrible time. I decided I wanted to know more and got the second book.

Through most of this book Telemakos is a boy of 12 although it covers the next three years. A very clever boy indeed as he and his beloved baby sister are sent to the Kingdom of a rival for their protection, but also with the intention of spying. The relationship that grows between Abreha, the ruler, and Telemakos is complicated. I found it as well written as the love/hate relationship between Medraut and Lleu was in the initial book. The bond between this boy and his sister is beautiful, and I love that she refuses to call him anything other than "Boy" even though he is the most important person in her life.

I honestly can not do these books justice in a review. How do you describe the writing that just draws you in like this to books that I probably would not have tried if not highly recommended by a Goodreads friend, Chachic. THANKS!

An aside, I believe these books are out of print but I found them easily on the Amazon Secondary, ABE books and ebay.

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**Sarah (A French Girl) says**

**\*REVIEW FOR THE ENTIRE SERIES\***

I didn't think this series would become one of my all time favorite, but it did. The first first is some kind of

Arthurian tale, Medraut the son of Morgause being the protagonist. The story was enchanting, disturbing at times and utterly engrossing, mostly due to an amazing cast of characters. Lleu, the Bright One and his twin sister Gorwin, were as amazing as Medraut. I especially have a soft spot for Lleu, how can someone as arrogant and rude as him can also be so adorable?

In a way, *The Winter Prince* is a bit of a stand alone in the series as after this one, instead of talking about Arthur, the story takes place in Africa and by the third book follows an African character named Telemakos. The atmosphere in *The Winter Prince* and in the subsequent books are a bit different. *The Winter Prince* was somewhat sinister and sometimes pornographic (there was no nudity but the things alluded to would have made a nun of a lot of people), whereas the following books are more of a coming of age/adventure sort. A part of me wish Wein had continued with Arthurian tale but another is really happy that she ventured into Africa and had African characters. Besides, I did love all the remaining books and even skipped some of my uni classes in order to read them. That's how much I was into the thing.

Goewin is the main protagonist in the second book and as I already mentioned by the third Telemakos because the main character until the end of the series. I can't tell you a lot about him because I would be spoiling you, but let's just say that he's an African Gen (from the *Queen Thief* series). I absolutely adored him. He was wise beyond his years, but childish at the same time. He could be courageous, but that didn't mean he couldn't feel fear.

The *Lion Hunters* series is somewhat of historical fiction mashed with retelling sort of book. The protagonists are always emmeshed in some kind of political intrigue or another which is normal considering they're all either royalty or part of the nobility. The series' biggest strength is the writing itself. I don't know how she does it, but Wein is able to convey so much emotion into the page that when a character is sad you feel sad with him, when he's happy you share his joy with him.

Wein was also a master at crafting relationships, especially between siblings. She was great at capturing how despite a person can love someone and at the same time be jealous or be mean to them out of grief.

Would I recommend this series? DEFINITELY! You need to read it NOW!

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## **Luisa says**

A fitting conclusion to this series, which I read in three days. Telemakos proves himself again, through even more ordeals and incredible intelligence. But what really got me in this book was the characters. The entire series has really been about families. The plot lines amplify their personalities, but every single character is so much more complex. Even the tiniest characters, rarely seen, contains considerable depth. It's refreshing. There is no black and white enemy. Even the most horrific of Telemakos' abusers is seen differently at the end. There are real issues here involving torture, morality, family loyalties, heirs, it's all so intricate but never incomprehensible. It's tragic while at the same time loving. If I had to complain, I might say that the ending was very sudden, though maybe it's just because I wanted to continue reading this book forever. Now that I think about it, it's also ambiguous. Things don't tie up nicely, there will still be problems. And there's something unfair about it all, but that's just the way politics work. It's oddly realistic. Who knows what Telemakos will do. Who knows what Athena's life will be like. We don't know what happened to a lot of the characters, but it's okay because we got such a full picture of them while they lasted. There's something very rich about this whole series, something very whole, and it's all so satisfying.

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## Elizabeth says

So, um, heh. I'm commenting, rather than reviewing, as one can't *really* be objective about one's own work. But this is the first time that I think I actually just picked this book up and *read* the darn thing, out of context and for fun. Guess what I noticed that I'd never noticed before? It's a *really short book*. Not much happens but the tension is *relentless*.

There is one scene I've never been happy with and it stuck out for me again - where Priamos explains to Telemakos what the Mark of Solomon actually is. I think this all happens too quickly and is too expository.

I have always been, and still am, very pleased with the opening chapters - where everything is re-introduced for the 400th time but still remains fresh. You can read it on its own, or immediately upon finishing *The Lion Hunter*, as it is meant to be read. There are certain threads that do suffer because of the separation between the books - the return of Iskinder, the theme of crucifixion, the references to Anako. Ultimately, it is really meant to be a single continuous story. But given that it had to be split, I think it works as well as it can be expected to work. (Some day, all being well, there may be a combined edition of the two books, properly titled *The Mark of Solomon*!)

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## Nikki says

The Empty Kingdom is quite a long way away -- in time, in distance, and in the kind of story it is -- from The Winter Prince. Medraut and the Arthurian characters are much less in evidence now, and Telemakos is definitely our hero, and one I enjoy completely independently from his links to the Arthurian story, which is almost unimportant by this point in the story.

Unlike The Winter Prince and The Lion Hunter, this book is less about healing and focuses more on the political intrigue. One thing I found very interesting about these books was how unpredictable I found them: I've read a lot of books and usually am able to predict their twists and turns. While some parts of this were easy to guess, most were not. So it's a breath of fresh air in general, as well as an interesting and -- so far as I know -- new addition to the Arthurian tradition.

I can easily imagine that more might be written for this series, and I'd be interested to read it.

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## Sarah says

Excellent written and satisfying in tying up threads, but I was a little disappointed in some of the plot choices. Overall though, one of my favorite series. The winter prince remains my favorite.

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## Sherwood Smith says

Here's what's said on Amazon, which is succinct and doesn't spoil anything: "in The Lion Hunter,

Telemakos—the half-British, half-Aksumite (African) grandson of King Arthur—was sent for his safety to stay with one of Aksum's former enemies. When Abreha, ruler of Himyar, allegedly the boy's protector, catches him in the midst of what appears to be treachery, he sentences him to a fate seemingly worse than death. Not only is Telemakos forbidden to see his beloved younger sister, Athena, but he is also commanded to reproduce the maps that Abreha plans to use in order to invade Aksumite territory. Countries away from his family, lacking any way to tell them what has happened, Telemakos must bring all of his subtle talents to bear in order to regain his freedom. The Empty Kingdom is a stunning conclusion to the Mark of Solomon duology—a triumph of historic suspense."

Oh yes. The prose is exquisite, the characterizations spare and deft, the whole is so beautifully executed. The research is diamond bright, with no hint of "we will pause now and admire all the reading I did!" moments. Anyone who loved Rosemary Sutcliff has got to love these. But you know who I think would be the biggest fans? Those who love Megan Whalen Turner's awesome Attolia series.

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### **Jess says**

This can be read as part of a larger series - The Winter Prince, A Coalition of Lions, The Sunbird, The Lion Hunter, and finally those one - but they can also be read out of order if you can't get your hands on the earlier ones. Do read The Lion Hunter and this one as a pair, because the tensions in this one won't make much sense without that background.

As with the earlier ones, the strengths are really an atmospheric sense of history and setting (rather than a slavish attention to accuracy) and complex, fascinating characters. You can never quite decide if some characters are good or bad, and then you realize they fall into that category of being completely human in their ability to be both generous and self-serving. Some plot elements are wrapped up at the end, but enough of the larger political issues are left hanging for further installations (please please please?) The story really focuses on Telemakos and Abreha, and we don't see much of old favorites like Medraut and Goewin, or even much of Athena (who really deserves some kind of award for most compelling and heartbreaking baby/toddler in fiction).

The whole series is recommended to kids (and adults) who enjoy compelling historical fiction with plenty of intrigue. They require some focus, but are worth the effort. I can see them appealing to kids interested in maps and ancient history, and the type who can read at a high school level but aren't ready for more mature books - although these can be pretty intense.

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### **Meredith says**

Beautiful

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### **Deirdre says**

OK, GOODREADS -- Why did you eat my review? Well, here we go again.

This book is fantastic -- I loved it, and I'm so glad I finished reading it. I almost didn't. I admit, there was a

scene right in the middle of the story that I found so horrific that I had to stop and put the book aside. But after that, the pace picked up and the book came to such a satisfying conclusion -- I can understand those who cried at the end (I didn't but I do understand why someone might -- so beautiful!)

So...I want to keep this spoiler free, but still give an idea of what the book was like.

1. It's really beautifully written, like everything Elizabeth Wein puts out. No annoying grammatical errors or unhappy turns of phrase anywhere.
2. The characters are amazing! And everybody is really well described, but nobody (and that's *nobody!*) is exactly as they appear to be. But yet, nothing is hidden -- a typical Elizabeth Wein trick, I begin to think -- just like Code Name Verity.
3. The plot, also amazing, is completely character driven. For me, this made all of the developments seem very realistic, no matter how fantastic they actually were.

Who will like it? And who should read it? Well, anybody who likes a really well crafted, twistily plotted adventure story with great writing and memorable characters. Which would be everybody, of course. But people who do not like to see young children in difficult/terrifying situations, or people who just can't stand a slow build of tension and need the action to start right away will probably not like it as much as I did.

Before I end this review, I want to leave you with four thoughts -- one is a reflection, two are quotes, and one is "in conclusion," and will tell you whether this story stands alone.

First, in our podcast interview with Elizabeth Wien, she told us that she was writing *The Mark of Solomon* after 9/11, and it became a book about fear, and dealing with fear. This book is #2 in *The Mark of Solomon*. And yes, there's a lot of fear in it.

I was struck by the biblical quote that prefaces the book:

**"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death."  
~Song of Solomon 8 : 6**

It is not immediately clear what this means in the context of the story, but when it becomes clear, it's amazing.

Then there's the title. I don't know whether I should quote the passage it comes from, now that it comes to it. I don't want to spoil it! But it's gorgeous, and it's about perception, and double and triple meanings. I nearly cried at this point -- even though I didn't yet understand everything in the (did I say twisty?) plot.

Oh, and did I mention the ending? And the characters? Telemakos and Athena, I love you so much!!

Finally, does it stand alone? Well, I don't think so. You definitely want to read the first *Mark of Solomon* book, *The Lion Hunter*, before you read this one. And I think the story gains power if you've read the rest of the series first, starting with *The Winter Prince*

Highly recommended! And you'll definitely like it if you like Code Name Verity, or Megan Whalen Turner's *Queen's Thief* series.

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## Maureen E says

*The Lion Hunter* and *The Empty Kingdom*

by Elizabeth Wein

I finished the last word of *The Lion Hunter*, shrieked (quietly--my roommate was already in bed), and dove into *The Empty Kingdom*. I stayed up far too late to finish that one, but it was worth it. Telemakos has grown so much over the course of this series and with the new twists I can't wait to see what he does next.

A Sounisian said that Telemakos is kind of like reading *The Queen of Attolia* from Attolia's point of view. I think that's a really great point. Like Attolia, Telemakos is cut off, highly powerful in some ways and highly powerless in others. When he makes mistakes it is usually in not trusting someone he should have. Although there are definite connections with Attolia, I also saw some to Gen: the cockiness, the sneakiness, the enormous sense of loyalty and the correspondingly enormous sense of betrayal. Both have to deal with a loss of one kind of power and the gaining of another. Gen's attendants and Telemakos's silver bracelet even serve the same basic purpose. And then there's one huge similarity that just happens to be a big spoiler for both series, so I won't say it. But it should be obvious to anyone who's read both.

Anyway, I'm in a state of Attolia fever, due to the upcoming book release (1 month, 8 days! Not that I'm counting or anything), but I think that in this case the comparisons aren't just valid, they're inescapable. And even if you haven't read any of the Attolia books (in which case, *what* is wrong with you?), Wein's books come highly recommended.

She is apparently writing another one, which makes me filled with glee.

Previously:

1. *The Winter Prince*
2. *A Coalition of Lions and The Sunbird*

Book source: Inter-library loan

Spoilery review in which Sherwood Smith also compares them to Megan Whalen Turner's books.

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The answer to my question: yes, Abreha is quite a bit like Artos, punishing but also forgiving (and the parallels to Eugenides are somewhat startling, yes). Given Abreha's demonstrated admiration for Artos, it makes sense. This is one of those books where I know that I'll never be in Telemakos's exact situation, and yet I felt like I learned something. Favorite line: "borne down by the weight of his name"--oh, I love that. After the re-read, I wanted more. I could be content with the series as it stands, because they are all fantastic books and in fact are one of those rare series that gets better as it grows, but I'd also love to have more of Telemakos's story. It's pretty clear that there's more to tell, and I'm a greedy reader. [Jan. 2011]

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Of Wein's Arthurian/Ethiopian series the first, *The Winter Prince*, remains my clear favorite for its incredible prose and emotional heft. However, the rest of the series has been getting better and better. Telemakos is one of my favorite types of characters. As I said in my review, he managed to remind me at



times of both Eugenides and Attolia. These two books are both heartwarming and heartbreaking, and the fact that they manage to be both at once shows how good Wein is. Of course, I am a greedy reader and WANT MOAR NOW! [2010 in books]

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### **June says**

Continues Telemakos trials as a prisoner in another country's court. Forbidden to see his sister and commanded to reproduce the maps to invade his own country, he must use all his skills to escape.

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### **Juny says**

This one was just the perfect wrap up to all the ones about Telemekos. The ending was superb! I love how he learns to move so silently with the bells.

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### **Verity Brown says**

This is not a stand-alone novel, but rather the second half of the story that began in The Lion Hunter.

I must admit that, in spite of having predicted a number of the "reveals" that come at the ending of the story, I was disappointed with how they worked out in practice. Perhaps Abreha's behavior toward Telemakos can be excused/explained by his own upbringing, but it is hard to believe that someone who is supposed to be wise and winning enough to have been elected ruler of a foreign nation could be so utterly ham-handed about gaining the loyalty of a child. I was also frustrated with Telemakos's unexpected boneheadedness in solving the mystery of the seal.

Overall, I didn't like this story quite as well as the other books in this series. Too many bits of it felt artificially imposed for effect, rather than being logical elements of the story. Still, it is a compelling story-- 3.5 stars. I would definitely like to see where Telemakos goes from here.

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### **Chachic says**

Reread this for EWein Special Ops:

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2011 Review for The Mark of Solomon duology: The Lion Hunter and The Empty Kingdom, originally posted here.

I think we've safely established that I'm a book pusher and there's nothing I enjoy promoting more than

under-the-radar books. I am constantly amazed that so many excellent books don't get the attention that they deserve. I reviewed *The Sunbird* by Elizabeth E. Wein last year, hoping that more people would read her books but I haven't been that successful because I haven't seen reviews of that book in the past year. Also, it makes me sad that *The Sunbird* is now out of print. So now I feel like I need to talk about *The Mark of Solomon*, the duology that comes after *The Sunbird*, because the blogosphere seriously needs to show more Elizabeth E. Wein love.

I've already dubbed Telemakos as Gen-in-Africa so that should serve as enough encouragement for all Megan Whalen Turner fans out there. I originally found out about these books from Sounis, back when I didn't have a blog and I got most of my recommendations from that community. If you have no idea what I'm talking about (shame on you!), Gen is the main character in the Queen's Thief series by Megan Whalen Turner and he's all kinds of awesome. Telemakos is young but he's wise beyond his years. His upbringing as a half-British, half-Aksumite noble and his innate curiosity has landed him right smack in the middle of political intrigue involving several countries. I find it ironic that he has such a striking physical appearance - cinnamon-colored skin, bright blue eyes and pale hair - and yet he excels in subtlety. A line from page 11 reads: "Oh, the wealth of intrigue you heard when no one imagined you were listening."

Elizabeth E. Wein is not afraid of letting her characters suffer and even though I've known from the start that Telemakos is as brave as they come, my heart goes out to him whenever something terrible happens.

\*huggles Telemakos\* He also kept surprising me with how intelligent his strategies were. Sorry for being vague but he kept being thrown into situations where he had to make the most out of his wits if he wanted to keep himself and everyone he cares for out of harm. Also, the secondary characters in these books? They're all so smart and complex and they keep readers guessing. You never know who's really trustworthy. Which also paves the way for complicated relationships between the characters. I love that you can feel the love and respect that the characters have for each other but their interactions are never simple.

*The Lion Hunter* and *The Empty Kingdom* should be read together because the first book ends on a major cliffhanger. I heard that they're actually just one book that was split by the publisher, I have no idea why. *The Sunbird* is the first book about Telemakos and *The Mark of Solomon* duology continues with his journey. They're historical fiction books set in Aksum (ancient Ethiopia), Africa but there's a hint of Arthurian legend in them as well. Telemakos is actually the son of Medraut (Mordred) and the grandson of Artos (Arthur). So if you're a fan of historical fiction or Arthurian tales or you just want to read books with excellent worldbuilding, multi-faceted characters and plots riddled with conspiracies then you should pick these up as soon as you can. And spread the word about them when you're done reading.

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