



Rules of Engagement

Elizabeth Moon

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Esmay, a gifted Fleet officer, and Brun, daughter of the Speaker of the Grand Council, have much in common, but their enmity is the talk of the base. When Brun falls into the hands of a fanatical religious militia group, Esmay finds herself in disgrace, suspected of conniving in the abduction.

Rules of Engagement Details

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From Reader Review Rules of Engagement for online ebook

Sarah says

A good book that keeps you interested. I enjoyed it and Elizabeth Moon does a good job of sucking you into the story. I found the whole capture and imprisonment hard to read in parts although I couldn't put it down. I'm looking forward to reading the next one.

G33z3r says

"Rules of Engagement" is a solid, old-fashioned space opera. It returns to the world begun with the Heris Sarrano trilogy, continuing the exploits of Lieut. Esmay Suiza that began in "Once a Hero". It also brings back another character from the Heris Serrano trilogy, Brun, a.k.a. "Bubbles". As with several of the predecessor novels, "Rules of Engagement" tells the story from half a dozen different characters' points of view. It's a good solid blend of action/adventure and character development. I thought the only weakness was the use of an extreme, fundamentalist religious cult as the villain of the piece (amazing one can get a whole planet full of these nut jobs mixing interstellar travel with a very low-tech culture of home-spun garments and agriculture. But then, this is Elizabeth Moon, who also manages to slip some horse-mounted foxhunting into her interstellar tales.)

Snail in Danger (Sid) Nicolaides says

It was this book plus the previous one that made me think that this setting was rape-culture-tastic. It's actually not that bad, but it was a major focus of this book and the one before it.

This one was a bit heavy-handed with the moralizing, plus there was a subplot involving an antagonist that was just ... completely embarrassing/high school/love triangle yuck.

Richard says

I want to say this was simply a bad book but I think that's just my disappointment with Elizabeth Moon for basically phoning it in. She adheres to the rather annoying trope of RAPE IS DRAMA that so turned me off Terry Goodkind's Sword of Truth series. Which to me is just a sign of laziness. I also found it really annoying to have the author keep throwing in lines about the various rapes that are supposed to leave it up to our imaginations as to what happened, as lets be honest, there are only so many ways a woman or anyone for that matter can be sexually assaulted. And I really doubt a culture in which the discussion of sex is not any form of taboo would have people of any age think a line like "she didn't even know the words for what had been done to them". Either fade to black and skip to afterwards or be explicit. This 12a certificate non-sense is just insulting.

The absurd bad guys, who are straight out of a cartoon except for all the rape and breeding of women, don't belong in this series that has been fairly realistic with it's setting so far. The space barbarians where are least

a credible societal model rather than a bad joke at the expense of Texas.

The thing that really did it for me though was her rewriting of Brun's character to something that only barely fit within the believable given how she developed over the first trilogy. I could hear Brun being stretched and twisted to fit into a shape that was more appropriate for her Bubbles persona.

All in all I think I'm done with this series. Vatta Wars is a better series from the word go. The Familias Regnant series is so obviously a trial run that just went out of control.

Leila P says

The first 100 pages were rather boring, but after that things started to happen and then I could not put the book down. Most gripping!

Marsha Wilcox says

This was my intro to Elizabeth Moon's engaging, fast-paced, believable style -- I was hooked! Had to buy the ones that came before, and the ones after. Then Vatta's War ... I want The Speed of Dark. What **IS** the speed of dark, anyway?

Katie Bee says

[that she was in love with Barin, and was jealous of Brun (hide spoiler)]

Glen says

A pair of friendly rivals are having a run of bad luck. Everybody's turned against them, and one of them is captured by a repressive planet.

Then we get some high tech Handmaid's Tale type stuff.

I felt like the book whipsawed between two extremes.

Kate says

[is repeatedly raped and then forced to give birth to the sons of her captors. (hide spoiler)]

Joseph Santiago says

I enjoyed this book and found it hard to put down. This was an easy read that got me solidly beginning to ask myself what I would do in the character's place. It is a hard one to review without giving away spoilers but I am beginning to see how the author is pushing back against gender stereotypes with these characters. This was a good read.

Mr. Joe

Dan says

Reread.

Beth Cato says

Continuing with the Serrano Legacy series. This is the second book following Esmay Suiza.[return][return]After surviving and and refuting a hostile takeover of a spaceship, Esmay is excited to return to school on a command track. It looks like the worst is behind her, and she can become a better officer as a result. She doesn't count on the arrival of the Speaker's daughter, the vibrant and spoiled Brun. Brun latches onto Esmay--just what the overbooked student wants the least--and then starts making moves on Esmay's man. The situation spirals out of control, and after Brun leaves she ends up captive in an impossible situation... one that leaves Esmay disgraced, but ready to come to the rescue yet again.[return][return]I didn't like this book as much as the previous one. The drama wasn't of the space opera variety (not until the end), but more psychological. It was very difficult to read about Brun's situation as captive of a sort of super-future Texan polygamist cult. Esmay's travails were also of a more personal nature, and rather frustrating at times. Most importantly, the major inciting incident of the book didn't feel that horrible to me, because I felt Esmay's sentiments on Brun were quite true.[return][return]In all, an uneven read, but I'm continuing with the next two books in the series.

Dev Null says

Enjoyed this; working my way through the series again, though I think this was the last one, last time I went through.

Solid 3d characters. Interesting world. Action and politics. My one problem with this book is that the central conceit, around which everything else is based, feels so contrived. Brun, who we like from previous books, is the rich girl taking classes at the elite military academy - without enlisting - to try and gain some real world skills. And we like that about her... but she's still a dilettante. She doesn't get what she wants at one point and throws a major spoiled-brat temper tantrum. Esmay, who we also like from previous books, walked away from a privileged life to devote herself to the military. She's taking two sets of classes, so she's overworked and stressed, so when Brun drops the tantrum - including calling Esmay herself a "cold fish", and more-or-less lying to say that she's slept with Esmay's boyfriend - Esmay tells her she's behaving like a spoiled brat, and should grow up. Which she is, and should.

After which incident everyone in the book, including a lot of Esmay's friends, treat her like she has tortured kittens in public. People make comments like "Wow; I'm glad _I'm_ not your enemy." She gets threatened with discharge from the military for goodness sake. And this isn't one person's reaction, it's the universal reaction of every single person who sees the video of the confrontation (which gets out.) It was weird. I actually went back and re-read the section describing the confrontation again, because I was sure I must have missed something. Nope; she pretty much tells the kid behaving like a spoiled brat that she's behaving like a spoiled brat. And for this, everyone brands her as the Flanders Pigeon Murderer, and tries to drum her out of the corps. It's possible their society has different rules, and what she said really was quite awful to them, but we don't really get that from the book. Later, circumstances and backstabbing machinations make everyone's reaction worse, but it just rang a bit hollow because I knew they'd all seen the video of the actual confrontation, which really wasn't bad at all.

However, despite my grumbling, it doesn't take much away from a good tale. It'd be like not liking *Lord of the Rings* because you thought Sauron putting so much of his power in the ring was silly; all right, maybe the premise feels weak, but the story is good. We get Moon's usual touch for gritty realism informing forensics and battles and rescues in space, with an interesting cast and a deep, well-fleshed-out world.

A word of warning; there are some scenes and topics in this book I found disturbing. Not graphic, nor gratuitous, but skin-crawling all the same. Kidnapping, rape, and slavery all make an appearance.

Vickey Foggin says

Esmay and Brun are opposites that could have been the same given different circumstances. I liked the world-building in this one, I liked the kind of young-adult angst that developed between the characters, I liked the escapes and survival techniques. Did not so much like the rapes. Rape rape rape. So much effing rape. Super gratuitous. I flipped past the rape scenes and think most could have been left out.

Peter Tillman says

Rules of Engagement is the sequel to *Once a Hero* (1997), and shares some supporting characters with the Heris Serrano trilogy (1993-95). It's reasonably self-contained, though you'll enjoy it more if you've read some of the preceding books, all of which I've liked.

Esmay Suiza is a likeably nerdy young officer. Her heroic exploits overshadow her difficult childhood, her love life is terrible, she's had a bad-hair *life*... When Brun, rich, spoiled and beautiful, breezes into her life with hairdressing tips, and then goes after Esmay's secret beau... Well!

Another reviewer, Christina Schulman, commented that "these confident, decisive people behave like insecure teenagers when they're thrown together at Command School..." Ah, but I think that's precisely Moon's point -- Cupid's tardy arrow will turn someone like Esmay, a seriously repressed over-achiever, to instant mush. Ms. Moon and I were classmates at Rice in the mid-60s (though I don't think we ever met), and I'm willing to bet she was a TRG, just as I was a TRB -- earnest, nerdy, bad hair, socially-awkward, sexually-repressed... oh god, it's excruciating just to think about those times...

Anyway, Moon's delightfully Wodehousian aunts-in-space arrive just in time to save Esmay's butt (and

career), and young love prevails. As usual, Moon's fast-&-furious action, meticulous military-medical backgrounding, and formidable storytelling skills carry the day.

Rules of Engagement is Ms. Moon's fifth book set in her Familias Regnant universe -- an implausible interstellar constitutional-aristocracy with corruption/kleptocracy/rejuvenation problems -- threatened by, e.g., the Bloodhorde barbs-in-space (Once a Hero) and the NuTexas God-fearing Militia (Rules of Engagement). This background was light entertainment for the Heris Serrano books, but Ms. Moon seems to have somewhat deeper intentions for the Esmay Suiza books, and the backstory creaks ominously under the load. After this obligatory critical carp, I should note that she is just carrying on an historic space-opera convention, and the scratchy backstory will interfere little (if at all) with your reading pleasure.

My 1999 review: <https://www.sfsite.com/04b/rule55.htm>
