



An Arranged Marriage (The Company of Rogues Series, Book 1): Regency Romance

Jo Beverley

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"Jo Beverley strains the boundaries of political correctness . . . There is no denying Ms. Beverley is a master storyteller and perhaps because of this political incorrectness she delivers a powerfully fresh stage for her story." ~Tara A. Green

Ruined through her vile brother's schemes, Eleanor Chivenham is offered rescue by marriage to a rake with an infamous French mistress. Eleanor accepts, determined to treat the arranged marriage with cool dignity.

Then she meets Nicholas Delaney. Not only does he stir her senses, but the trouble and pain beneath his smooth exterior reaches her heart.

Nicholas is indeed troubled. While serving his country by seducing secrets out of a French spy, he is persuaded to marry Eleanor to protect his family's honor. But such chivalry runs counter to his carefully wrought rogue image, and extends the life-threatening plots shadowing him to Eleanor.

To assist, Nicholas re-assembles the Company of Rogues, a schoolboy group he started years before. But not even they can dampen Eleanor's fighting wit that is quickly unmasking their enemy and testing Nicholas' formidable will.

From The Publisher: Author Jo Beverley is known for her consummate attention to historical detail that whisks the reader back in time to a near first-hand experience. Fans of Regency romance and historical British fiction set in the 19th century, as well as readers of **Jess Michaels, Mary Balogh, Christi Caldwell, Stephanie Laurens, Madeline Hunter** and **Mary Jo Putney** will want to read every book by Jo Beverley.

Best Regency Novel, Romantic Times
Bookrak Bestseller
RITA, finalist

"A splendid love story... a veritable feast of delight. Bravo!" ~*Romantic Times*

An Arranged Marriage (The Company of Rogues Series, Book 1): Regency Romance Details

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From Reader Review An Arranged Marriage (The Company of Rogues Series, Book 1): Regency Romance for online ebook

Dina says

From K. @ Ami:

I spent all night working and "torturing myself" listening to Jo Beverley's "An Arranged Marriage." I think I stuck with it so long because my 50% audiobooks were turning out to be a lesson in "you get what you pay for," and I didn't want ALL of them to be one huge waste of money. This book was just flat out awful. If I sat down and wrote out a list of plot devices that I would despise in a romance novel . . . this book would contain them all.

1) Top of the list: Cheating! However, JoBev couches it in the guise of "I'm noble and just doing it for the sake of God and country." PLEASE!! (I know, I know seton -- you warned me!! ;) If the cheating itself (which continued through most of the book) is not bad enough, we get "treated" to an actual detailed LOVE scene of the hero with the villain mistress! (Oh . . . don't worry, she let's us know he's "disgusted" between each detailed line of "kissing her breasts" and running his fingers over her thighs, "just how she likes it." Ooww!!) Was that necessary? Did JoBev think my mental picture needed more enhancement in that regard??! I can't imagine why JoBev felt this scene needed to be included whatsoever. After that . . . just throw in some drugging and raping; alluding to (I think?) the homosexual predisposition by the rapist (the brother of our hero) whom I can't figure out if he's a good character or a villain, or whether the (apparent?) homosexual traits are supposed to be good or bad as she depicts them!?! I can't even form a complete thought on it to write a comprehensive sentence about it! It's that confusing. Sheesh! :D

2) Full of underdeveloped cardboard, cliche characters inserted in the story at awkward moments, all of which I could have cared less about. Some kind of "aunt" (I think?) comes out of nowhere at practically the end of the story who had the most grating personality I can imagine. I'm certain she was supposed to come off as the lovable in a "wise old cranky" spinster (before her time) feminist sidekick aunt. Not!

3) The hero and heroine spend about 90% of the story apart, and in practically the last chapter where you think they are finally going to spend some "quality" time together on the same page . . . the heroine tells him to go away for another three weeks so she can think about it! WTF!!! AHHHH! Consequently, their relationship falls into the author's "telling" me they should be in love, rather than "showing" category.

4) The scenes don't feel like they "track" well. There's just too much going on, without enough explanation to fill the plot holes. Both the main espionage theme is "jerky" and underdeveloped, and the romance is as well (pick a theme, any theme . . . but give us at least one that's fleshed out).

5) JoBev absolutely makes sure you know this book is the beginning of a long series. She's all over the place trying to "set up" future books. (Toward the end, she goes so far as to have an actual scene where the hero sits all their "friends" down in the drawing room and explains the entire plot to them . . . and us, I'm sure!! LOL! I'm not kidding -- It feels like he needed a dry erase board and flow chart to go with it. :D) Too bad she doesn't focus on writing a good introductory book that makes you want to read the series.

On my personal scale of good to bad, this book made "Flowers From the Storm" look good! I think you all know what that means coming from me. LOL! At least FFTS was well-written and "tracked," if not a satisfying love story. This book is a failure on every front I can think of, and I'm amazed it came from the same author that penned "My Lady Notorious." Complete opposite ends of the spectrum. I usually try not to be so harsh on any given author/book . . . but this time I just can't find one redeeming aspect to rely on.'

inbetween says

I'd give minus points if I could. Considering this first book in Beverley's Rogues series was actually the third she wrote for it, it's all the worse - badly (under)written, badly plotted, badly executed. Pushed into 350 pages by an author who has no shame in rushing through the most dramatic storylines by telling rather than showing anything about her paper-thin characters, and not even including (because seemingly not knowing) any historical details, this is yet another huge disappointment.

Beverley would have had working ideas - or at least original twists on old ideas - but to start with the rape (both participants drugged/forced) that's sadly often the norm in bodice rippers, and then to have that "nightmare" just be half a sentence and never dealt with, except in occasional miffed thoughts of the heroine?! Beverley was aware of it, too, because there is one half line where the heroine gets to think that she must be not a lady because she "dealt" with it so well. Except her enjoying shop windows the morning after, and generally being insufferably pleased with herself despite the text telling us the usual tropes - how she's insecure and worries about the obligatory female rival - makes her my least liked/most hated of Beverley's heroines.

She's probably perfectly tuned to the expected audience though, an unremarkable woman that is then called beautiful, doing nothing except tear out facial hair and arrange ornaments in order to incite deep lust and love - why, any woman can do that, so her happy end must make it every reader's, too *bitter* To think this was the book that started it all and reverberated right into the latest one, and then to have not just the heroes this time but the actual plot be less than it seemed in the retelling in sequels?

The second spoiler apart from the "rape" is also told of right in the first pages - the heroes twin brother is gay. And again, the disappointment is so huge because what a smart twist, to make him another victim of the villain, to have them both drugged, to have him have to fuck the supposed whore to prove he's not gay (Beverley read "Bent"?), then to want to atone! Except - Beverley makes him effeminate and positively amoral in claiming his brother had raped her, then blackmailing his brother. I'm worried she will kill him off in the future - sadly I have half a dozen more books already in the mail to me.

But, repeating myself again, there is nothing worse than seeing this huge WASTE of characters and storylines, of the possibility of a truly arranged marriage, how getting-on-the-horse-again right away (ie. having sex with the husband) also isn't immediately the perfect lust, how homosexuality might really have been handled (Kit is extra stuffy and careful due to permanent fear), how Nicholas is forced to prostitute himself for his country (he's visibly suffering from having to be Therese's toy, but of course everyone blames him) ... WASTED. All of it, including actually plausible actions and reactions, due to the usual damn laziness of the editor and a writer who might be better than most others in the field, but never once reaches potential.

The ending though turns a disappointing book into her (hopefully?) worst ever. Beverley has the unbelievable bad taste to follow a tedious hero-retells-everything and tedious heroine-sends-him-away-another-month (there B. gets worse than Diane Perkins!) with the disgusting ending of her asking him "wtf did your brother rape me" and then indicating it's all a grand old joke, like not understanding "erotica" - less the so-called "rape" (and I'd never have thought I'd see the opposite of a bodice-ripper rape as equally bad), not even that the child might be the gay brothers, but that the whole "gay" thing is meant to be amusing. And then it ends without a single romantic intercourse, the woman already a mother and yet not even daring to show or feel any want for her husband. Revolting and depressing (- at least me).

Aayesha Khatri says

One of the heaviest and most brutal books I have ever read. Heroine gets raped by hero's gay brother, to prove that he's a hetero, and forced to marry hero in case of 'consequences'. And soon after their marriage, there is another scene where the hero practically rapes the heroine, because if she does get pregnant, the child could be her husband's, so they could rest easy knowing that. Ugh. I don't know how I read the story after that, but I did. It was several years ago.

This put me off Beverley, but I still gave her a chance and read the second one of this series. Another 1 star. Never read any of her books after that.

Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says

Although *Forbidden* is still my favorite because I loved Frances and Serena as a couple so much (plus Francis is a virgin hero), this is an incredibly effective book. There are so many reasons why this story could have gone the wrong way for me: First and foremost, the hero commits the unthinkable for me in a romance, adultery. However, he has reasons that I could not argue with. He has been asked to cozy up to his former mistress who is actually a morally bankrupt spy, and in order to do that, pillow talk is essential. Also, Eleanor and Nicholas do not have an emotional commitment (this alone would not have been enough for me). Eleanor is dealing with the trauma of having been raped, also living in a household with a brother who is a complete libertine, and never feeling safe. She is way too traumatized to be a 'real wife' to Nicholas initially. Then there's the fact that Eleanor was drugged and offered out to be raped from a person she should have been able to trust, her brother. She is raped by Nicholas' titled brother, who is actually gay, but is hiding it. He rapes her to help preserve his reputation as a heterosexual (there are questions). So you would think, okay, this is a romance? But yes, it is.

It's a bit different for a romance. And the relationship between Nicholas and Eleanor develops very slowly. There is a sexual encounter between them on their wedding night, but it's fairly passionless. Nicholas felt that they should have this so that in their mind, the child that Eleanor could be carrying could be her husband's. Okay, I had no quarrel with that.

I liked the aspect of seeing this couple come to know each other and build a marriage together on what should have been a very shaky foundation. But somehow, a strong bond develops between them. It is nice to see them in later books as they form a happy family and love each other deeply.

Of course, Eleanor has issues with Nicholas' brother. I can't blame her at all. I think he was a loser and a jerk. In a way, he seemed surprised at how much Eleanor despised him. Hello! Not only did he wrong Eleanor terribly, but then he begged his untitled brother to marry her in case of consequences. I have nothing against him as a closeted gay person. I just thought he could have been a man and owned up to what he did.

At any rate, I really did like this book.

Beth F. says

I listened to this story as a free audiobook download from my library.

I thought the premise of the book was completely ludicrous, even by regency smut standards.

At the beginning, the heroine is living with her brother who is a Grade A Pervert of the highest class. He throws wild, drinking parties where men and women canoodle under the influence of alcohol and touch each other in bad places. Eleanor doesn't approve of the goings-on and knows the only reason she is still clinging to her virginity is because she religiously locks her door every night.

But one night, the pervy brother orchestrates the administration of drugs to both Eleanor and the Earl of Stainbridge so she can't lock her door and neither of them are in complete control of their faculties. The purpose for this being that after being raped by the earl, Eleanor would be ruined and her brother would be in a position to force a marriage to another skeevy man Eleanor otherwise wouldn't want anything to do with. The next morning, Eleanor decides to kill herself but is fortuitously saved by her rapist who convinces her that he most certainly did NOT rape her and blames the whole thing on his twin brother. Eleanor believes him, befriends him and confides in him that she is fearful about what will happen to her under her brother's roof. The earl promises to take care of it.

The resolution? He arranges a marriage between Eleanor and the man he's led her to believe is her rapist: Nicholas Delaney, the younger brother. Without questioning all the details, Nicholas goes along with it and on their wedding night learns that Eleanor believes *him* to be her rapist. Once the record is set straight, they get naked and consummate the marriage but there aren't any fireworks.

In time, Nicholas and Eleanor become intrigued by each other and a period of flirtation follows and the next time they make love, they both dig it and it seems like everything is going to be okay. Except that isn't the case, because Nicholas also happens to be embroiled in a political espionage case that requires he continue a physical relationship with his French mistress even though his heart isn't in it and he only wants Eleanor. Nicholas recognizes this as a case where he must "lie back and think of England" so he continues to boink the French mistress through a series of steamy scenes, all the while acting more and more erratic in his behavior to Eleanor (who also happens to be pregnant). One moment he acts like a man who is falling in love with his wife and the next he is rude and nasty to her (to "protect" her from the knowledge of what is really going on).

It all ends well and aside from the plot sucking major balls, I don't have any real fault with the author's writing style or the development of the story. I'm curious enough to check out something else she's written, perhaps something that doesn't start with rape, muddle through some significant issues with infidelity in the middle section and oddly end with a happy ending.

Mara says

Trying to tidy up my TBR list, I decided to tackle some books that have been there for a while. I should have known better, damn me.

If there were minus point for a book I would probably award them to this book. It's not one of the hateful or hideous one. But you really wonder how it could win any prize. The hate for the heroine and her total lack of worth is all mine, but there's no way to deny that this book is all over the place. It has an incredibly stupid plot, with a totally uneven pacing, and characters you could gleefully murder. Please, please, read this.
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

And then these:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

The story lacks foundations, breaks any pact with the readers, and keeps choosing the easy way out. It meanders, steamrolling the heroine in its wake, and it succeeded in boring some readers to tears and probably enraging the rest.

The hero is an ass, stupid, conceited, and absolutely worthless in my eyes. Add to this one of the stupidest heroine you can think of, and clearly this spelled disaster to me.

But while I can suffer any fool, heroines are my pet peeves. I need strong women of some substance. Here we have a paper thin doormat. Worse she's completely fake. She's drugged by her brother who has her raped. Her rapist denies, unburden himself of her on his brother, and proceed to arrange a marriage to this brother letting her believe he's the culprit. Her husband cheats on her for all the book (for the sake of England, mind you!), abuses her, manipulates her. His friends cover for him (sake of England, remember!), lie to her. Her brother sells her a second time. And not once this idiot reacts to anything. [Why the hell add a rape if you then ignore it completely?]

I honestly hate her with a passion. She hasn't suffered enough in my eyes. Sorry. :)Plus, there should have been some serious grovelling here, and it should have been by more than one character....:D

The only saving grace was one of the villains, there was a moment where I really was rooting for this character.

Tammy Walton Grant says

So I'm home sick with a terrible cold and thought to myself, self, you need to read something pleasant. Perhaps a re-read of a book you love? Nope, did that yesterday with Goddess of the Hunt. Aaah, LOVE that book. Maybe I'll try one I bought last week at the used book store. Like this one, "An Arranged Marriage". Sounds promising.

My first inclination that this book was going to be a BIT different was the rape at the beginning. Notice I said rape, not forced seduction. This is a drugged, forced against her will with others in the room holding her down rape.

The heroine has a repugnant brother, who has gambled away his inheritance and seeks to get his hands on Eleanor's. He has set up a marriage for Eleanor to one of his drinking buddies (Eleanor describes him as smelling like a corpse) and in order to get that done he drugs Eleanor. He then drugs another man, Lord Stainbridge - and threatens to expose his unnatural proclivities to society and offers him a valuable jade (threatens and bribes all at the same time, wow!) in order that he will bed his sister. Of course, he tells Lord Stainbridge she is a prostitute.

In the immortal words of Bill and Ted, "Whoa".

As if all that isn't enough, the next day Lord Stainbridge (feeling rather icky, to say the least) goes to the brother's home to spy and catches the woman he raped the night before just as she is about to throw herself into the river. He brings her back to his home, where he spins a tale about his twin brother and how HE was the one who raped her, and that he will make his brother marry her.

Lord Stainbridge sends a letter to the Earl of Stainbridge (his twin) and confesses all to him. Then asks him to marry Eleanor and threatens to cut him off if he doesn't.

At this point, I'm thinking - woohoo! This is going to be different, maybe a bit twisted, and finally, I can recommend a book to Karla (Mossy Love Grotto) that she'll actually like.

Not to be, alas. That first bit must have just been a tease.

They get married, have some wooden dialogue, some drawing-room repartee, some really boring sex, then, we find out he's a spy (of sorts) and is expected to recommence an affair with an ex-lover to extract some secrets for the government. So he leaves her at home with all of his school friends (after telling them all to keep her busy, as they ALL know he is off schtupping his ex for his country).

No more mention of the gay brother, or her brother. Wait, the gay brother shows up for dinner and is all snarky with everyone for no reason I can tell. Is he a bad guy, or just repressed, misunderstood and miserable?

I actually liked a couple of the hero's friends more than I liked the hero. She should have cheated on him with either of them. That might have made the book more interesting.

Oh well, when I left these silly people Eleanor was expecting, Nicholas was spending all of his time with his former mistress, and I couldn't have cared less how it all ended up. What happened to her brother in the end? What about the closeted twin? I'll leave that for a day when I have absolutely NOTHING else to read, or for someone to send me a message and tell me.

Julie says

This book didn't work for me on pretty much any level. The hero is so unlikable (he's cheating on his pregnant wife for most of the book. But it's all for some supposed espionage plot that he's trying to uncover, so that makes it all okay.) He is quite conceited, treats Eleanor badly and hopes she'll get over it someday. He doesn't even really make an effort to get to know her, but gives her a few presents and hopes that makes it all better. Eleanor, the heroine, is so flat as a character it was almost a caricature. She was raped, but pretty much shrugs it off. She's asked to accept her rapist as family and marry his twin brother, and is all, okay, whatevs. She rarely has any emotional reactions at all, and if she does, she immediately apologizes for it. It's entirely unrelatable. The villains don't get any comeuppance at all, most confrontations that would have made the book interesting are done off-stage, and the relationship between our hero and heroine had no rootability to it. Definitely not a book I would recommend.

Elis Madison says

OK. This was me at various points in the book

...when I wasn't

Here's the basic story—maybe you'll see what I mean.

Eleanor Chivenham is in a bad situation that just keeps getting worse. Before their parents died, her brother Lionel persuaded them to make him her guardian. She can't claim her inheritance unless she either marries with his consent or turns 25 without shaming herself. She's stuck in his house, with two more years on her sentence, since she's not meeting anyone worth marrying among Lionel's drunken, lecherous cronies.

Which is not to say there've been no offers. Lately, Lionel has been urging her to marry Lord Deveril.

The dude's an earl and all that, but something about him makes her feel like she's got spiders in her drawers. So she said she'd rather die. At the time, Lionel let it drop, but she knows he's not giving up. She's lying in her locked bedroom, wondering what he'll try next, while her brother is "entertaining" downstairs.

A maid scratches at the door and offers her a nice hot toddy to help her relax. You'd think she'd see it coming, wouldn't you? But you'd be wrong.

Unbeknownst to Eleanor, Christopher Delaney, Earl of Stainbridge, has been drugged as well. Lionel and Deveril had initially offered him a pretty young man. But he had his wits together enough to protest that he was a ladies' man ("was married, you know"). So Deveril offers him the doxy he has waiting for him upstairs. Stainbridge (a/k/a Kit) can't have people getting the idea that he's a Backgammon player, so up he goes.

Eleanor tries to protest as the stranger slaps her and demands that she perform. But the words, "help!" "don't!" "stop!" just won't come out of her mouth. She does manage "please," though. (Because that's *so* much easier to say than "stop" and not the *least* bit ambiguous.)

Her last impressions as she drifts into oblivion are the look on his face and the pain...

Downstairs, Lionel and Deveril talk about how it's a shame they couldn't get Stainbridge to show his true colors so they could blackmail him. As for the sacrifice of Eleanor's maidenhead, Deveril's cool. Taking her

when she's unconscious wouldn't be that much fun anyway. And now that she's been "shamed," she has to marry him. He'll "enjoy her hatred even more when she's compelled to conceal it."

The next AM, Kit goes back to Lionel's place to try to make sense of what happened, and he sees a cloaked figure slip out a side door. He follows, and he catches up just as she's fixing to jump off a bridge.

He snatches her down. They recognize each other. She faints. Shortly after she comes around, he says, "You are the woman who was...introduced to pleasure last night."

Now, me, I'm thinking that statement, coming out of the mouth of a man who slapped and raped me last night, might just make me a little

Not Eleanor, though. This gal is the poster child for Flat Affect. She just calmly clarifies the situation. He raped her. She recognizes him, and besides her brother told her who had the "honor" of doing it. (At this point in the book, I was attributing her passivity and emotionlessness to shock or the near death experience or something, but nope, that's not it.)

Anyway, once they have that sorted out, Kit suggests they go back to his place, and she's like, "sure, why not?" Once there, he insists she have some tea. And because she's had such *good* experiences with drinks lately, she's all, "pass the sugar."

Meanwhile Kit decides to tackle the problem square-on.

Yes, he really does have a twin, by the name of Nicholas. Who is in Paris at the moment, but Kit pretends he just skipped town after "expressing concern" about the events of the previous night. (I can hear that conversation now: "Hey, Kit, I think I raped a girl last night. Bit concerned about it. Off to Paris!")

Eleanor is skeptical—for a second. Then she's like, "You mean it wasn't you? Whew! So now what do we do?"

Kit proposes that she *marry* Nick (because that's just a *super* idea.) Exact words: "P 28 He is very kind-hearted and when he learns of this affair he will want to marry you and make all right." (Eleanor evidently misses the obvious logic problem here. If Nick did it, then he probably wouldn't need to learn about it. But she's not one to question, I guess.)

Kit, to his credit, is at least concerned about his unintended victim, and wants to help her. He's "not the marrying type" himself, not to mention marrying a woman you raped has to be a little awkward. But if she springs a brat in nine months he'd like to keep it in the family. Still, if she's totally opposed to *marrying her rapist* he says he will set her up as a widow in some little burg somewhere, with enough money to live comfortably.

Eleanor considers her options: 1) Return home and marry Deveril. 2) Go back to the bridge. 3) Marry her

"kind-hearted" rapist. 4) Be a fake widow in some distant, rustic place.

#4, right? Independence, respectability, enough money to get by. Maybe some neighbors might suspect a "widow" with no connections, but with an earl supporting the story it would die down quick enough.

But...you guessed it. Eleanor calmly decides on Door # 3. (Now, if her reason had been that she feared her brother and Deveril could track her down, and as a woman alone she'd be vulnerable, I'd buy it. Instead, she worries that she'd have to tell the truth to any man who wanted to marry her, and no decent man would have her once he learned she'd been raped and faked a marriage to cover for any child she might have. Apart from the obvious fallacy of that reasoning, most recent rape victims would be just fine with the "no decent man would have her" part. But not El. Nope. She decides she's better off marrying the rapey slimeball. Because that's *clearly* the best option.)

Kit tells her more about her husband to be. "He lives for excitement and can be careless of who he hurts."

Eleanor's reaction to that? She's a little dismayed that "Nicky" won't be the "comfortable helpmeet" she'd hoped for. (Because *apparently* she couldn't guess this from the fact that he *raped* her.)

Eager to reassure her, Kit reiterates that Nicky is kind and charming...and "*experienced with women.*"

Me?

But Eleanor doesn't even blink about the experienced with women bit. Instead she reflects that men can be different when they're drunk, and then remembers a nice guy she knew that used to beat his wife. "This was not a reassuring thought," we're told. (Um, yeah.)

Meanwhile, in Paris, Nicholas gets a letter from Kit, who admits that he sort of accidentally deflowered a virgin the other night and just stopped her from killing herself the next day. He tells Nick that his allowance will be cut off unless he marries the girl. Nick doesn't need the money, and he's ass-deep in espionage, but hey, why not? Got nothing better to do than marry a suicidal rape victim.

Eleanor receives a ring and a note from her groom to be that reads: "You must know I share all your feelings and anticipation at the thought of the ceremony to come." (Me: Horror? Revulsion? Wow, that's comforting!)

Reading on..."Please wear the small gift enclosed as a sign of your kindness towards me. *Soon I will have the right to give you much more.*"

Now if *I* read that last bit, coming from a rapist who is being forced to marry me?

But here's what Eleanor thinks: "An ambiguous and alarming note, but Eleanor realized it could be read as expressing devotion." (Because devotion from a rapist is a *good* thing.)

When Eleanor meets Nick, as usual, she's just all matter of fact. The one time she snaps at him, she immediately apologizes. And when he takes her aside to "their" room (she thinks of it this way), and she

looks nervous, he asks what she's afraid of. (Me: Are you f-ing KIDDING ME?)

Eleanor: "I suppose I am afraid of the abnormality of things."

A bit later, El encounters a slutty Frenchwoman who seems very possessive of Nick. So the next sharp words out of her mouth are catty questions about the whore! (Because God forbid her rapist should cheat on her with another woman.) Mind you, Eleanor still hasn't said one word about the rape. Apparently she's just going to go quietly to the altar without any effort to find out, at least, whether what he did was an aberration, or whether he's in the habit. Me, I'd think that was somewhat important.

That night, after the wedding, she tries to put him off. He accuses her of being more prickly than a hedgehog. (Am I *really* the only one who thinks that, from her POV, that comment is *a little* outrageous? But *of course* it doesn't faze Eleanor.)

Then Nick smiles at her, and it takes all her *resolution* not to melt and smile back. (WTF???)

OK, I'm going into excruciating detail here. But this is just the first 60 pages. Am I the only one who thinks this woman is several fries short of a Happy Meal?

So then, finally, they talk enough that they both realize that Kit has deceived them, that he's the actual rapist and he's let her think it was Nick. Nick points out that he'd prefer it if he could believe the kid might be his (everybody just assumes that she's knocked up). So El agrees to consummate. Because of course there'll be no problem shagging a guy who looks just like the rapist. At least JoBev had the good sense to make it a challenge for her, and not an orgasmic experience. But still. Seriously. WTF.

Once they settle at Nick's house, he tells her that he's going out—he's going to go pay a call to her brother Lionel, who, Nick assures her, will not trouble her again.

Me: "Ooo! Can I come? Can I watch?" Or at least, maybe, "Do be careful."

Eleanor: Shrugs and goes back to thinking about how to do her hair. (I'm not kidding.)

Before he married Eleanor, Nick was recruited by his country to seduce a former lover (the French whore) to obtain information about a plot to help Napoleon escape from Elba. The marriage, obviously, complicates matters, but he's determined to go ahead with the plan. (view spoiler)

Like some other reviewers, I just didn't get what was so wonderful about this guy.

I did connect with Eleanor. I was furious at the things she went through. But her behavior just kept throwing me off the cart. JoBev paints a character who is just so friggin' placid that nothing ever gets to her—the only time she really loses her cool and yells (because Nick wants her to kiss and make up with Kit), he says "Wow—you must be pregnant." (Because we all know that if a rape victim gets upset at the suggestion that she ought to "get over it" so that the perp can be part of the family, it *must* be hormones.) And of course Eleanor agrees that it must be, and apologizes.

Most romance heroines are feisty or at least strongly passionate, so maybe JoBev was just trying something different, which is commendable. But it didn't work—at least not for me. Eleanor is supposedly driven to the

point of suicide early in the book, but faced with the trauma of rape, of having to marry her rapist, of then falling in love with her husband only to realize that everyone on the planet knows he's banging an abbess, of being treated like a leper in her own marriage, of having to beg him for basic kindness, (view spoiler), she never gets upset (tho she does sink into a rather serious funk late in the book over something else). You get the feeling that even the suicide attempt was just a rational decision. I don't know how the hell I'm SUPPOSED to relate to that.

Oh! And this book abounds with people who need to get their butts kicked. There's the brother who drugs her and puts a rapist in her bed. There's Deveril who is pulling the strings. There's the French whore who is a vindictive, evil, bitch. There's Stainbridge, who wasn't exactly thinking straight when he raped Eleanor, but afterwards was just so astonishingly insensitive you wanted to strangle him. (view spoiler)

Anyway, this gets two stars, mainly because one star is for the rare book that either offends or bores me so much I can't finish. This definitely didn't bore me, and while I was frustrated, I wasn't offended. This is one of JoBev's first published works, and having read and loved LOTS of others, including some that are in my permanent library, I can assure you that this is an aberration. But wow, this one just...

? Irena ? says

0.5

This is one of those times I should have read all the damn spoilers. I could have spared myself. One can never know. I won't tell everything that happens here but I won't bother marking anything as spoiler either. Be warned. I wish I had been.

I am too lazy to list all the things that are horrible in this book and I don't think it deserves more than a reminder of why I hated it. I'll just mention some of the worst.

The hero cheats on his wife almost the whole book. I'm sorry, but it stops being an enjoyable romance when one of the characters does that. And the ridiculous he did it for his country or he gave only his body excuse is insulting. One line is too much, let alone most of the damn book.

And the heroine? God, she is even worse, a total doormat. I'll give you just one of the lines this precious snowflake says: 'I only thought it would help me to establish a good relationship with him if I understood things better.' This is about her rapist.

I wish someone had warned me.

Natalie says

Don't Hate... :D

Not sure about this one yet. I am a big fan of arranged marriage books, not sure why! This one did have some aspects that I liked and some that I really didn't. The part I hated the most was the fact that he had to be

a Man-Ho for the government. What was that?? That just made me feel weird and didn't start me off with a good vibe for the whole relationship. I think I would've liked the book a lot more without that whole thing in there. Don't even get me started on the whole rape thing!

Preeti ♥? (Romance She Reads) says

[So the H's d

Betty says

An Arranged Marriage sounded like something I would like - a couple struggling to find common bonds . This was not exactly the case with this book, however. The characters were not that likable and the situations they find themselves in are pretty off putting. However I did read the whole book and did find points of interest here and there.

Ilze says

Horrible story. It starts off with the heroine being raped by the hero's brother, who was drugged by the heroine's vile and useless brother, after which the hero agrees to marry her for honour or something, although it's advertised to others as an elopement. The hero then spends most of the book in an affair with a French whore because he's some sort of a spy and has to have sex with her constantly in order to uncover some plot involving Napoleon. It's never really explained why the only way he can solve the plot is to have sex with the Frenchwoman, even though it is horribly humiliating for the heroine (apparently everyone in London knows what he's doing). Then the useless brother gets mixed up in a plot with the French whore, blackmails his sister, and agrees to arrange to have her kidnapped by the whore and her buddies, for no reason that I could figure out. At this point I threw the book against the wall.

Funny how Jo Beverley can write some fabulous books that are on my "absolute keepers" list, and others that are dreadful like this one and Christmas Angel, which was the first one of hers that I read. I disliked that one so much that it took several years for me to attempt another one by Beverley.

Jacob Proffitt says

I cannot say how glad I am that this wasn't my first experience with Jo Beverley. What a dismal story! The interesting thing is that her general craft and characterization are okay, but the plot is a great big pile of suck that distorts every other element into the suck-pit of amazing suckitude.

I mean, if you're going to have a hero that you claim is smart and a natural leader and all, then having a story where he's run ragged by a floozy for *months on end*, interfering with his relationship with the woman he loves, is going to undermine everything else you try to tell us about your hero. In short, Nick is a dead loss from start to finish and all his posturing as a sophisticated rogue capable of navigating his world competently and providing for his own is just so much hot air. Indeed, he loses at literally every single juncture where he

might have turned the plot around. I'm not sure what Beverley was thinking she was showing, but a guy worth hanging out with, let alone falling in love with, was not it.

She might have made up for it with a strong heroine who could have been engaging and maybe redeem our hero, but Eleanor was as, or more, of a doormat than Nick was. I mean the ten-penny villains won against both at *every single turn* and (view spoiler). The more I think about it the angrier I get.

And that's before you even get to the central motivation for their relationship to begin with. Starting off with a rape had potential for interesting story developments and hardship, but it had only the very weirdest effect on the story. Having drugs involved muted some of the impact, both emotionally and on the plot, and I can go with that, but it was still kind of weird and much of the plot driven from that point doesn't withstand scrutiny or reflection very well.

And you know what I really hate? (view spoiler) I really hope Beverley resists that potentially disastrous impulse.

So yeah, a lot of ick and no fun made this a real drag. I'm glad I'm through it and hope this doesn't bode ill for the rest of this series.

A note about Steamy: Another part that drained into the sucktic tank. There are a couple explicit sex scenes, but since Nick is still sleeping with his floozy, it's full of shame and doubt and, well, suck. Low middle range of my steam tolerance, but I have a hard time applying the scale through all the suck surrounding it.
