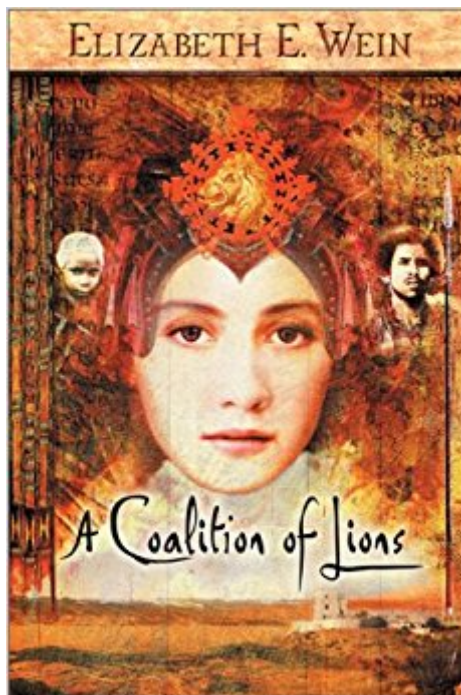


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A Coalition Of Lions



Synopsis

"Elizabeth Wein's storytelling is rich and strange and wonderful."—Robin McKinley After the death of virtually all of her family in the battle of Camlan, Goewin—Princess of Britain, daughter of the High King Artos and his wife Ginevra—makes a desperate journey to African Aksum, to meet with Constantine, the British ambassador and her husband to be. But Aksum has its own political turmoil, and Goewin's relationship with Priamos, Aksum's ambassador to Britain, makes her position more than precarious. Caught between two countries, with the power to transform or end lives, Goewin fights to find and claim her place in a world that has suddenly, irrevocably changed. With taut, evocative writing, Elizabeth Wein transports the reader to sixth century Africa, vividly capturing its sights, sounds, and smells, and with them the lives of the Aksumite and British people. A Coalition of Lions follows Wein's acclaimed *The Winter Prince* in an ongoing Arthurian cycle—and is firmly in the tradition of Rosemary Sutcliff and Robin McKinley in its excitement, attention to detail, and a heroine to remember.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Grade 7 Up—In this story set in sixth-century Africa, Goewin, Princess of Britain, journeys to Aksum (now Ethiopia) after her father, brother, and half brother are killed in battle, to meet with Constantine, her cousin and intended husband, now the Viceroy of Aksum. There Goewin finds a kingdom mired in political unrest and intrigue amid divided loyalties. She also encounters a host of interesting people, including the son of her half brother; the boy's mother; and Priamos, one of

several sons of the emperor, Caleb. The child Telemakos is wise for his years and he and his mother become Goewin's confidants and protectors. Goewin is a strong character, asserting her rights as the last survivor of her royal family and finding her way into the more isolated parts of the extended family. She is willing to take risks, expanding her circle of people in defiance of Constantine's wishes. For this she is eventually placed under guard and later, accompanied by Telemakos, escapes to safety through the dark tunnel of a tomb. This is a complex, but beautifully written story with many significant characters, some of whom are referred to by two different names. This makes it a fairly challenging book to read, but for teens who enjoy historical fiction, it will be a rewarding experience. This book is part two of a projected trilogy that began with *The Winter Prince* (Atheneum, 1993). The maps at the front and the appended list of characters and glossary will help keep readers on track. Jane G. Connor, South Carolina State Library, Columbia Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Gr. 7-12. Wein transports readers to sixth-century Africa in a richly spun historical novel that follows her Arthurian fantasy *The Winter Prince* (1993). The narrator, Goewin, is a passionate young woman who has recently lost her father, the high king of Britain, her mother, and brothers. She and her ambassador friend Priamos venture 4,000 miles from Britain to Aksum (present-day Ethiopia), where Goewin seeks to determine her fate as princess of Britain and promised wife of the viceroy Constantine. The story perks up considerably when she discovers the charming, precocious, six-year-old Telemakos, grandson of the high king. Themes of loyalty and betrayal, imprisonment and freedom, brotherhood rivalry (the coalition of lions), and love fill the pages of this ambitious novel whose magic lies in its emotional intensity and in the unusual vibrancy and intelligence of its characters. Readers unfamiliar with the first book may be frustrated by the complexity of the second, but royal family guides are supplied, along with maps, a glossary of terms, and a historical note.

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After reading and loving *The Winter Prince*, I mentally squawked like a frustrated goose at the beginning; feeling like everything I loved in the previous novel was obliterated. Poor Goewin, Artos' daughter, finds herself bereft; deprived of kingdom and parents and (apparently) both brothers and finding refuge in Aksum, a long-ago Christian kingdom in Ethiopia (a place I had never heard of before, but how wonderful to find Goewin, and my reading self, there). And she's got Priamos, the Aksumite ambassador to Camlann, escorting her; and before long intrigue and trouble breaks out because of Priamos' loyalties and particular history. Not to mention a certain young Aksumite boy,

Telemakos, who is the breakout character of the novel. Goewin has to contend with her own and Priamos' delicate family relationships while fending off marriage with her rather pushy cousin Constantine and figuring out what to do with her life. Good tension - I loved Goewin's constant struggle with Constantine to be considered the princess she is rather than a female pawn. (the Aksumite queen Candake made me laugh when describing him as a "mosquito"). And I loved the relationship between Goewin and Priamos. I think that Constantine and certain other relatives of Goewin's are lucky that Goewin is female; if she wasn't (and Artos hadn't named Constantine as his heir after Lleu because of Goewin's gender), she'd probably have taken back Artos' kingdom and crown by now. I don't think there's ever been an Arthurian-related story that moves the location, and characters, to Africa; and it's done here very well. I wish the novel was longer, and had contained Goewin's last few weeks or days in Britain, the transition from the almost mystically lovely ending of *The Winter Prince* to Goewin's sorrow and weariness as she reflects on her family's destruction is somewhat abrupt.

Sequel to *The Winter Prince*, though focusing on a different protagonist. The first-person voice is beautiful and gripping, but without the tension and darkness that make *The Winter Prince* unique. I was nervous after the first few pages, where most of the characters from the previous book are killed off, but fortunately Medraut makes a comeback, and if I hadn't known that going in, I wouldn't have continued. Unusually, this is a book without a villain- there are antagonists, but as the title intimates, they are not defeated but rather brought into alignment with the protagonists via compromise. There are no irredeemable or even wicked characters, but rather people with differing flaws and agendas struggling to get their way and believing themselves in the right. Goewin, the main character, even identifies with and at times parallels the villain of the first book. The setting is also worth noting- ancient Ethiopia, where the British Goewin flees from her war-torn country, in a neat reversal. Many tropes from the first book repeat- fraught sibling relationships, the problem of lesser royalty, accepting you won't rule, physical abuse and punishment, defiance, the rulers mishandling relationships but then redeeming themselves, a hunt on which loyalties are tested and forged. The plot and setting, however, are quite different. You have to love a YA book where the main motif is the Song of Songs, and the female protagonist is described as "terrible as an army with banners."

If you're expecting more Arthurian legend, after reading *The Winter Prince*, this isn't the book for you. Indeed, considering how this book opens (with Artos and most of his family dead) it's difficult to

figure out how Arthurian legend ever came to be. But if you're good with following Goewin (Artos's daughter) to another amazing 6th century place, the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum, this is a fascinating sequel. Goewin is in a difficult position throughout this book. Although she is technically High Queen of Britain, it would be nearly impossible for her to rule alone, even if her Aunt Morgause hadn't set a price on her head. And Artos's official heir is her cousin Constantine, who is serving as British ambassador to Aksum (a position Medraut once held). Her original plan to marry Constantine is derailed when she reaches Aksum and discovers that Constantine is deeply involved in the country's messy dynastic politics. As a "court intrigue" story, this book doesn't contain a whole lot of action, and the pace is a bit slow, so I would rate it slightly less than 4 stars. But Goewin's effort to find the best future for two kingdoms (and herself) is emotionally engaging.

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