



The Conqueror's Wife: A Novel of Alexander the Great

Stephanie Thornton

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We are the women who loved Alexander the Great. We were lovers and murderers, innocents and soldiers. And without us, Alexander would have been only a man. Instead he was a god.

330s, B.C.E., Greece: Alexander, a handsome young warrior of Macedon, begins his quest to conquer the ancient world. But he cannot ascend to power, and keep it, without the women who help to shape his destiny.

His spirited younger half-sister, Thessalonike, yearns to join her brother and see the world. Instead, it is Alexander's boyhood companion who rides with him into war while Thessalonike remains behind. Far away, crafty princess Drypetis will not stand idly by as Alexander topples her father from Persia's throne. And after Alexander conquers her tiny kingdom, Roxana, the beautiful and cunning daughter of a minor noble, wins Alexander's heart...and will commit any crime to secure her place at his side.

Within a few short years, Alexander controls an empire more vast than the civilized world has ever known. But his victories are tarnished by losses on the battlefield and treachery among his inner circle. And long after Alexander is gone, the women who are his champions, wives, and enemies will fight to claim his legacy...

The Conqueror's Wife: A Novel of Alexander the Great Details

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From Reader Review *The Conqueror's Wife: A Novel of Alexander the Great* for online ebook

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

I loved this book. LOVED. Another top ten read for 2015.

To be fair, I anticipated I'd love it, having adored Thornton's previous novels (*Daughter of the Gods* and *The Secret History*). But this one, featuring those closest to Alexander the Great, really blew me away.

Unlike her previous novels about Theodora and Hatshepsut, it is the figures in Alexander's life who tell his story (and despite the title, more than wives, too): Hephaestion, Alexander's best friend and lover; Thessalonike, his adoring younger sister; Drypetis, the fierce daughter of Persia's King Darius; and Roxana, the scrappy Persian who becomes Alexander's first wife. Through these four points-of-view, we see a kind of Alexander as they know him: inspiring and loving, angry and vengeful, passionate and curious.

Each of the four narrators is wildly different in voice and tone (although almost all have a flirty/combatative relationship with Hephaestion, interestingly enough!). And each figure has a different kind of relationship with Alexander, which makes for an intriguing and more well-rounded portrait. Thessalonike adores her brother while Drypetis wishes Alexander dead. Roxana is determined to keep Alexander captivated while Hephaestion has a long, deep, and complicated one with this mercurial man. While I never fell in love with Alexander, I was taken with each of these four narrators, mesmerized by their lives and their fierce determination to live.

As with Thornton's other novels, the historical details are wonderfully rendered, rich when needed and otherwise unobtrusive. The meat of this book is the relationships these narrators have with Alexander and each other, but the landscapes around them are neatly evoked and echo, in some ways, the tumultuous emotion racing between our four narrators.

Speaking of emotions, I can't finish this review without remarking on Thornton's handling of Alexander's and Hephaestion's bisexuality.

After a battle, you bed a woman to forget what has happened. You bed a man because he knows exactly what you're trying to forget. (p131)

She does so beautifully; it is normalized and remarked upon in equal part, treated in a manner that feels historically accurate without injuring bi/queer readers. There's nothing explicit, either hetero or homosexual, however, for those who aren't in the mood for a bodice ripper (and in fact, the sex here is a far cry from romance, really; a sobering reminder of how bodies are used and traded).

Thornton became an author I automatically buy after her first book; this one just confirmed her as one of my favorite historical novelists. No matter the era or figure, she manages to pluck figures from past and breath into them personality, life, and emotion. This is escapism at its best: treat yourself, and the other hist fic fans if your life, with this one!

Robin says

ARC from NetGalley via publisher. My opinions are my own.

Historical Readings & Reviews

Mass murder, betrayal, brutal and tragic deaths, scheming, love, comic relief, warrior women... a true Greek tragedy.

The title is a little misleading, as Alexander the Great had three wives, all featured in this novel, and also because the tale is told from several points of view. However, the only wife whose point of view we get to read about is Roxana's, so I suppose she is the wife of the book's title, and yet in many ways she is an antagonist in the story. There's lots of complex characters and it's less about Alexander than it is about all of the people in his life, their relationships with each other, and how that influences the future of his empire. In fact, Alexander himself is not a likable character and at times seemed almost like a sociopath, but since it's not really about him anyway, that wasn't a big deal.

With so many characters, it's not surprising that the multiple plots move along steadily. The first half focuses more on character development, so it is slower paced compared to the second half when all hell breaks loose. In some ways I actually felt like the second half was a little too rushed, as the focus turns to the series of events rather than on the characters. But there's no denying that this Greek tragedy is very well told with strong characters and a compelling plot that will keep you saying, "just one more chapter..."

Sandi *~The Pirate Wench~* says

Setting: Greece & Paris 330 B.C.E.

Steam Factor: Mild

Upon Alexander's father's death, his mother will ensure that Alexander fits into his father's place and she will continue to hold the strings of power while he is off conquering the unknown world.

Alexander's sister Nike, dreams of following her brother and becomes jealous of his friend Hephaestion, who shares in all of Alexander's triumph's but he also holds a piece of Nike's heart.

Drypetis the conqueror's captive is cunning, and she will not allow him to control her life at any cost.

When a beautiful woman named Roxana enchants Alexander, he takes her as his wife.

Roxana knows she will need all of her wiles and wits to keep him and survive in his palace.

Once Alexander dies, all hell breaks loose and each woman fights their own battle to control the empire.

Well.. you know the saying, behind every great man there hides a powerful woman.

And The Conqueror's Wife certainly goes there.

I have enjoyed this author's others books, and this one didn't disappoint me as well.

The author did a great job with the historical details of the time period, as well as portraying Alexander the Great through the eyes of his lover, sisters, mother, a captive and his wife.

This may sound like a lot of cat clawing women vying for a greater place, but surprisingly it was really

engaging and interesting and by weaving various view points through these women, an intriguing portrayal emerged in the telling.

Stephanie Thornton is becoming a favourite got-to-read author for me.

Erin says

Engrossing historical fiction that raises the voices of women from their historical footnotes into the limelight.

In historical fiction, Stephanie Thornton is gifted with the Midas touch because all her books are pure gold. The Conqueror's Wife earns a coveted 5 star rating for its ability to keep me glued to my chair for the last three hours. Unsurprisingly, this happens every single time I have read a Thornton novel(The Secret History, Daughter of the Gods, The Tiger Queens) and all I can say is "People, you have reading to do!"

Honestly, Alexander the Great has never really held any appeal for me(and that Colin Farell movie didn't help) but this book was like Gladiator +Spartacus(the television show not the Kirk Douglas movie) + Game of Thrones. At times, it's an absolute bloodbath and the men and women are ruthless. I wish I could be one of those people who is already hyped up about all those upcoming Hallmark Hall of Fame Christmas movies but **I really enjoyed all the treachery, poisonings, and the vengeful nature of many of the characters.** Never fear, I am due for a good Nora Robert's sugary cleanse that will drive it all out of my system.

Now Thessalonike, Roxanna, and Drypetis were all fantastically written characters and drove this novel from beginning to end, but Hephaestion will always have a place in my heart. I loved ST's take on Alexander 's right hand man and I definitely believe other readers will too.

So if you like historical fiction, look no further than a Stephanie Thornton novel!

Elysium says

This isn't an era I know much about and for some reason I've never been very interested in Alexander. But I've heard so much good about Thornton's books that I jumped at this. And good thing that I did!

The story is told from four points of views: his sister Thessalonike, his friend and sometime lover Hephaestion and wives Roxana and Drypetis, Everyone is very different so we get 4 interesting perspectives. These were strong women who knew what they wanted and were ready to fight for it, by any means necessary. And then there was Alexander's mother Olympias who sadly wasn't POV character. She was ruthless, calculating and ready to do anything to get Alexander into power. It would have been great to know her motives for doing things she did.

We don't get Alexander in a very good view but we see better side of him through Thessalonike's eyes. But Roxana I loathed. She was the only character I hated and kept hoping something bad happens to her... My favourite was Hephaestion and I might have had a bit of a crush on him... I don't care to imagine how much more destruction Alexander might have done without Hephaestion holding him back and trying to be a voice of reason.

This was amazing book and it definitely won't be the last! I need to move Daughter of the Gods up my TBR list.

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

"The Conqueror's Wife" is the latest offering from Stephanie Thornton. I have loved her other books so I knew that I had to read this one. In this book, she takes on the people that surrounded Alexander the Great. We meet his family, friends, and lovers. He is definitely larger than life but seeing him through the eyes of those closest to him truly gave me a new perspective on his life and legacy. Filled with vivid characters and lush description, this book is a true treat for historical fiction lovers.

Stephanie Thornton is firmly on my must-buy list by now. I love her books. She focuses on ancient history and has a great way of breathing life into historical figures that makes them feel like people that you could really know in real life. I loved that Thornton chose to tell Alexander's story through those closest to him. No one would have probably known him better than those people. Thornton creates an authentic feeling and original voice for each character.

The historical detail in this book is so good. Thornton is great at world building and does a great job of showing readers what Alexander's world would have been like. It was so vivid to me! I also really liked all of the small little details that Thornton included to even further create Alexander's world. They are subtle but really add a lot to the story. This book was fantastic and I am already eagerly awaiting the next book!

Erin says

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot....>

Stephanie Thornton's *The Conqueror's Wife: A Novel of Alexander the Great* represents a significant challenge for me as a reviewer. I don't want to gush and say it's amazing because no one believes commentary that is one hundred percent positive, but I can't identify a single aspect of the book that I disliked. My coffee deprived brain has also rendered me temporarily inarticulate so I apologize in advance for what is sure to be overt admiration relayed in language that is far too elementary to do justice to the novel in question.

I imagine writing multiple narrators is maddening, but I love the tones Thornton is able to strike in approaching this story from multiple points of view and how the chorus of voices contrast one another as Alexander's story unfolds. Despite constantly shifting perspectives, Thornton manages to keep each voice unique and I thought that lent a genuinely authentic quality to each characterization. It's clear that each narrator has a story and Thornton's effort to illustrate each individual as a distinct and separate entity creates a narrative that is deliciously addictive. On a similar note, I also love that Thornton chose not to write from Alexander's point of view. The decision emphasizes the idea that Alexander did not make himself. His legend has eclipsed the contributions of those who helped him achieve greatness, but Thornton's thesis is that this was not a solo journey and I think choosing to write about his interactions and relationships went a long way in driving that idea home.

Thornton's fierce devotion to historical accuracy is another reason I love her books and *The Conqueror's Wife* is no exception. I can't imagine the effort that goes into recreating an ancient time and place, but Thornton's richly drawn descriptions immerse her audience in Alexander's world and allows them a

comprehensive understanding the culture and landscape of his kingdom. As an author, I'm half convinced Thornton beats herself to a pulp working out the details, but as I reader I find the depth and dimension of her books creative and enthralling.

Few authors have been able to capture political maneuvering in ways that engage me. Chadwick and Quinn jump to mind, but Thornton rounds out the group with her passionate portrayal of the power struggles that defined Alexander's life. Please excuse my phrasing, but how an author illustrates the bureaucratic bullshit that plays out behind the scenes of any ruler can make or break a book. The author must possess a thorough understanding of the material and they must present it with enough complexity to be believable while retaining enough clarity to avoid confusion. Few can do this effectively, but I feel Thornton's mastery of the technique clearly evidenced in her latest release.

I fell platonically in love with Hephaestion and despite all odds the wicked side of me adored Roxana. I admired Thessalonike and was charmed by Drypteis. The Conqueror's Wife was an ambitious undertaking in terms of subject, but the intrigue and drama Thornton creates within these pages is historic fiction at its absolute best. A gripping tale of war, danger, love, determination and intrigue.

Colleen Turner says

Find my full review at <http://aliteraryvacation.blogspot.com>.

I always know I'm in for a treat when I pick up a Stephanie Thornton novel! She is the queen of the strong female protagonist and I have read and adored every single one of her previous novels. The covers just happen to be breathtaking as well, which is always a huge plus for me. Ms. Thornton continues her trend of exceptional novels with *The Conqueror's Wife*, bringing back to life the stories of the women - and one man - behind this great conqueror of civilizations and making them the stars of their own lives instead of the footnotes of history where they have previously been placed.

I think what I appreciate most about *The Conqueror's Wife* is the fact that it feels completely authentic, making it so much easier to imagine these really are the emotions, actions and spoken words of our characters. None of them are perfect but are real and raw and human. Each has their own skills and strengths but also flaws and weaknesses that aren't glossed over to make them more agreeable. To be perfectly honest, it's Thessalonike's determination, Drypetis' spunk and sharp tongue, and Roxana's willingness to do anything to adapt to just about any situation and come out on top that make me enjoy them as much as I do. Even the secondary characters who, let's face it, refuse to be secondary - Alexander's mother, Olympias, Drypetis' grandmother, Sisygambis, Thessalonike's half-sister, Cynnane, just to name a few - are so multi-faceted that you can't help but admire something about them or appreciate where they are coming from even if they aren't overly likeable characters. And don't get me started about Hephaestion, Alexander's warrior lover...with his own sharp tongue and his weaknesses for wine and pretty faces combined with his love of learning and his just and loyal spirit, he might be my all time favorite character in the whole novel! Anyone who can walk away without really feeling for and with these characters is missing something.

Something else I love about *The Conqueror's Wife*, and really all of Ms. Thornton's writing, is the skill taken with descriptions that completely immerse the reader in the world these characters are inhabiting. There are vast riches and many luxuries that some of our characters get to experience, and these are all beautifully presented to the reader, but there is also a lot of bloodshed, depravity and violence for them as well. Let's

face it, this was not an easy time for anyone, let alone soldiers and women. Ms. Thornton places the reader front and center for torture, desecrated bodies, rape and agony - both physical and emotional - so it is impossible not to be a part of all the action, good and bad. All of it is necessary for the story to be realistic and to highlight why some of our characters are the way that they are. I think it is just brilliantly done and I can't help but be amazed at the author's ability to perfectly walk that fine line between realism and vulgarity.

As you might have guessed by now, I am a total fan girl for all of Stephanie Thornton's novels and *The Conqueror's Wife* fits perfectly within my admiration of her writing skills. Who would have thought that the great and powerful Alexander, stylizing himself as a god, would be relegated to the backdrop of his own story, but that is exactly what has happened here. He could have been completely left out of the story and I would have been just as mesmerized with the book because it is the brave, strong and determined women that encompassed his life that shine through. They are the ones that are great and powerful and I am so happy that I've finally learned their stories!

The Lit Bitch says

This book was among my most anticipated novels of 2015. I adore Thornton's novels because they are so unique.

One of the things I love best about Thornton is she writes about both famous and obscure women in antiquity....women that you may or may not have heard of but who have powerful stories.

I love that she has discovered an untapped market in historical fiction. There are shelves of books on the Tudors but not many on Alexander the Great's Wife, Empress Theodora, or the Queens of Genghis Kahn!

So needless to say, having read so many of Thornton's books, then I saw this one I was eager to start it!

There was much to love in this book. Hephaestion's POV was the most memorable for me. Thornton usually focuses on the women but in this case she added a male perspective with Hephaestion which for me just added so much more depth to the story.

I loved reading about his feelings toward Alexander, I haven't read any books with male homosexuality referenced and this book did not shy away from the reality of the ancient world. The ancient Greeks and Romans were often gay or engaged in homosexual relationships which is often ignored in literature and I love that Thornton was bold enough to write it in to her story.....to me it made the story so much more real and historically accurate.

Of the women characters the one I liked the most was Drypetis. For some reason I just connected with her more than the other women. While this book had a lot of strongly written characters and unique POV characters, it didn't clip along as nicely for me as some of the other books she's written. I think my biggest issue was it took a long time to meet and establish the women's roles in the book.

At the half way mark I found myself wondering when all these POV characters would start coming together to make Alexander the 'great' man that he was....it just seemed like everyone was kind of doing their own thing for a while and I felt a little anxious to get into the story. There was just a lot of back story and plot

building happening for my taste. But once I got over the 'hump' it was smooth sailing.

One character I wanted as a POV was Olympias. Thornton did such a good job with her character as a whole but I really wanted to gain insight into her inner workings. She was clearly a powerful influence for Alexander so I naturally wanted to know what was going on from her perspective.

There was a lot to enjoy with this book.....strong characters, memorable POVs, a unique perspective, and marvelous writing! Even though this one was slower for me, I positively love Thornton's books and writing style, if you want to read some historical fiction that's consistently well written and isn't just another romance, pick up any of Thornton's books! You will not be disappointed!

See my full review [here](#)

Diana says

<http://booknerdloleotodo.blogspot.com/>

copy received from Historical Fiction Virtual Book Tours for an honest review

I'm going to try not to fan girl too much but I think Stephanie Thornton is a great author! She seems to have a real passion for history and when she focuses on one aspect or figure she really dissects and gives that time period her all. "The Conqueror's Wife" was a thorough depiction of Alexander the Great. Thornton gives different perspectives with different narrators. Although my knowledge of Alexander is limited I felt like Thornton presented a very thorough Alexander, the story instantly drew me in. I love the "behind every successful man lies one woman (or in this case women). Hephaestion is someone I knew nothing about and found him to be fascinating and his relationship with Alexander had so many levels to it. It's impossible not to notice the importance of Drypetis and Roxana. Their roles in this story added to the emotional but also historical importance of Alexander's accomplishments.

For any readers that have not read Thornton, I can highly recommend "The Tiger Queens" and "Daughter of the Gods." They were both fantastic novels and also very refreshing historical reads. I personally really enjoy that she focuses on women and their importance and I hope that she continues to do this.

Lori says

Brilliant! This novel was both educational and highly entertaining. Stephanie Thornton creates truly masterfully constructed novels. Her characters come to life through her writing. I love that she writes about lesser known historical figures and gives them the attention they deserve. If you are a fan of this genre and have not read her novels, I encourage you to pick one up, I promise you'll not be disappointed.

Celise says

Wow. This is probably the most interesting book I've read this year. I knew very little about Alexander the Great before reading this, but this is some of the best historical fiction I've come across and I found myself quite in awe of the story.

The title is a little bit misleading, as the story is told from four different characters' points of view, not just one of Alexander's wives. In the cases of The Song of Achilles, told by Patroclus, and Nerfertiti, told by Nerfertiti's sister, I had really wanted to hear the story from title character's point of view. In this book however, I didn't much care to hear Alexander's words because the other voices were so interesting. Each character had a fully fleshed out story that I found I cared so much about- even if just to hear how they'd end because I hated them so much (*cough* Roxana).

Hephaestion - Alexander's second in command and sometimes lover, was my favourite point of view. I was definitely in love with him even as a reader. His POV served as the most direct insight into Alexander's campaign, but it was the moments with Drypetis that made him interesting to me.

Drypetis- one of the Persian princesses Alexander captured and took on his campaign. Thornton took a lot of liberties (with realistic justification) with this little known woman in history, and she did a beautiful job of bringing her to life. Some of the more interesting plot developments came through in her chapters.

Roxana - Oh how I hated her by the end. Even then, I loved all of her chapters. What's interesting about the multiple narrators is that some of them truly hated each other, so despite them all being a part of Alexander's story, their individual biases and personalities lent to the intrigue.

Thessalonike- Alexander's sister, and probably the least interesting character. Her POVs offered insight into the treachery of Olympias, Alexander's mother, which I suppose was interesting. I found her personality didn't come through as strongly as the others.

The Conqueror's Wife might have a cover that makes it look like a cheap historical fiction romance (though it is pretty), but it delves right into the horrifying aspects of Alexander's campaign, including the horrible torture scenes, poisonings, and deaths. The women who tell the story lend unique voices and experiences to the time, and colour the period most vividly. The writing is stunning.

Katherine says

"We were murderers and poisoners, innocents and warriors. And without us, Alexander would have been only a man.

Instead, he was a god."

4.5 out of 5 stars

This book was like a bag of potato chips. Once you started, the concept of reading 'just one more chapter' completely blows out the window. Furthermore, this book made me desperately want a TV series showcasing Alexander the Great in all his bisexual glory. Please, History Channel, make it happen.

This isn't my first attempt at reading a book about Alexander the Great this year. I tried to read Legacy of Kings earlier this year, which was about a teenage Alexander the Great told from three POV's (two of which are completely fictional). It completely backfired, mainly because it read more like a Harlequin romance novel. Not to mention the fact that Alexander was barely in the book.

But this attempt succeeded where the other book failed.

Like Herman's novel; this book about Alexander the Great is told from multiple points of view; Thessalonike (his sister), Hephaestion (his friend and lover), Drypetis (Alexander's captive and Hephaestion's eventual wife), and Roxana (the first of Alexander's many wives). While not told from Alexander himself, he still plays a huge role in the story, something I think his narcissistic self would greatly appreciate.

Alexander the Great

"Alexander the Great was not a god. He was only a man who had climbed too high and would soon discover how far he had to fall."

Ah, Alexander; one of the greatest rulers that ever lived. But surprisingly, this book pays tribute to **the more human side of him**, and how maybe (just maybe), he wasn't that great after all. There's no denying his intelligence and military brilliance (they wouldn't be teaching his tactics in the present day if they weren't effective), but he all too often succumbed to the demons of drink, women, and reckless behavior. I mean, we're talking about a dude who, after a servant dumbly volunteers to set himself on fire for him, **actually sets the poor kid on fire**. His mercurial temper and ability to care too deeply for those around him were more his downfall than the fever that actually took him, which is probably why his empire collapsed. Thankfully, he's given plenty of page time to let us know that, and getting to read about this version all-too-human version of Alexander was a real treat.

Hephaestion

"Aristotle had once described our friendship as one soul abiding In two bodies, and he was right, for Alexander's life was as vital to me as my own."

First of all, I would just like to acknowledge the fact that for the first fucking time, **someone has acknowledged the fact that Alex and Hephaestion were bisexual. HALLAFUCKINGLUJAH.** It's a historical fact, for one thing. Not to mention that it makes sense when studying Alexander's character. Hephaestion is the yin to Alexander's yang. More imposing in size but not as great as his beloved, I actually found myself rooting more for Hephaestion than Alexander. His acerbic personality and dry wit allowed for moments of humor in the brutal, bloody world that was ancient Greece. And his banter with a certain Persian princess was priceless. Speaking of which...

Drypetis

"'You're nothing more than Alexander's man-whore.'

'Well, you just slept with him, so what does that make you?'"

I'm not gonna lie; when this book first started, Drypetis was my least favorite character. Incapable of saying anything nice to pretty much anyone, she was rash in her thinking and even sharper with her tongue. I wanted nothing more for her to just shut up; both because she was annoying and my internal fear that her big mouth would get her killed. But surprisingly, she grew on me, especially because this book features pretty much the best love/hate relationship I've read about in a while; **Drypetis and Hephaestion**. Yeah, yeah, I know, he had Alexander, but there's no denying one simple fact; the hate-sex these two have is, in her own words, 'earth-shaking'.

Come for the story, but stay for the hate-sex. You won't regret it.

Roxana

"My beauty was like ambrosia, so sweet a nectar that not even a eunuch could avoid its heady allure."

One thing I want to laud the author on in this book is her ability to make me shift allegiances with characters. Because in the beginning, I actually liked Roxana. Horribly abused as a child by her father, she's dealt pretty much every bad blow a kid could go through. I wanted nothing more than for her to be happy. But gaining power is a funny thing, because once she had her eye on the prize of becoming Alexander's bride, and won that prize, **she became a full-fledged raging bitch**. And it was so delicious to read about. She literally goes to no lengths to protect herself and ensure her rightful place. Cersei Lannister looks like a saint compared to the she-devil that is Roxana. She's a character you'll love to hate.

(and this may just be me, but I was getting serious sibling incest vibes between her and her twin brother Parizad. But maybe I'm watching too much *Riverdale*).

Thessalonike

"He called himself Alexander the Great and claimed that he conquered the world. But he would have been lucky to conquer a stinking midden heap populated by swarms of biting flies had it not been for our cunning and daring."

I'm putting Thessalonike (or Nike) at the bottom of the list because she was **the least fleshed out character in the entire book**. Alexander's half-sister, she's royally miffed that she was left behind when Alexander left to conquer the world. However, once she leaves, she's not given much to do. Her role in the book pretty much consists of the first 15 minutes or so of *Wonder Woman*. You see, her sister in law is an Amazon warrior, and she trains under her so she can learn to fight (see? totally Wonder Woman). And... that's it, really. I would say I liked her, but I felt that I didn't really get to know her from the little I read about her.

Stephanie Thornton's background as a history teacher surely helped in her retelling of Alexander's life. By using the people around him to tell his story, she creates a multi-layered portrayal of a man who, by many student's imaginations, is akin to a God himself. But through the eyes of those who loved and hated him the most, he becomes so much more.

And seeing how much of a narcissist he was supposed to be, **I think that if he read this book, he would be extremely pleased with his portrayal.**

Jenny Q says

4.5 Stars. So I think everybody knows by now that I adore Stephanie Thornton's novels. And I got to meet her and tell her so in person at the Historical Novel Society conference back in June! Her previous three books have been fantastic, especially *The Tiger Queens*. But I must admit, when I saw the subject of her next book, I thought, "Oh, man, why Alexander? He's such a cheap guy!" (To quote one of my favorite movies :) He's definitely not one of my favorite historical figures, and honestly that terrible movie with Colin Farrell probably helped cement that opinion. But Alexander is really just a supporting player in this novel as we see him through the eyes of those around him: his sister, his best friend, his captive, and his future wife.

Stephanie Thornton is a master of creating dimensional characters that dig their way into the reader's heart,

and she's at the top of her game in that respect with this book. I'm not going to go too much into plot so as not to spoil any surprises. Readers may have an overall familiarization with the highs and lows of Alexander's life, but this is really the story of those who surrounded him, and their stories are relatively unknown. I relished learning about them and the triumphs and hardships in their lives. Hephaestion, my favorite, gives the reader the most intimate glimpse of Alexander and also the most unfavorable since he witnesses aspects of Alexander's personality that many others don't. That he is able to root out the underlying causes of such behavior, see past it, and continue loving his best friend anyway is to his credit, as are the instances in which he tries to stop Alexander from going too far. He suffers no illusions about the man who thinks he's a god, yet he suffers from some of Alexander's actions all the same, although occasionally he benefits, which brings me to my next favorite character, Drypetis.

Drypetis is the younger daughter of King Darius, captured by Alexander along with her sister, mother, and grandmother. She represents the viewpoint of the people Alexander conquered. Though she hates Alexander with a passion, after long years in pampered captivity, she comes to grudgingly admit that he is at times brilliant, particularly when it comes to technology and architecture, two of her favorite subjects. She is definitely not your ordinary princess, much more of a sharp-tongued tomboy than a simpering miss, and I adored her. She bears much in common with Alexander's younger sister, Thessalonike, who is left behind with Alexander's infamous mother, Olympias, and witnesses firsthand the behind-the-scenes machinations of a ruling family ruthlessly protecting their position of power. She also spends much time in the company of her warrior sister, Cynnane, and her dreaded tutor, Cassander, who will play a larger role when Nike is finally allowed to join Alexander on campaign and who will play a larger role in history.

And finally we have Roxana, Alexander's first wife and the true villain of the story. Though when she is first presented, she is a very sympathetic character. An abused daughter of a grasping nobleman, she uses her only weapon, her beauty, to scratch out a better existence. The reader can totally understand where she's coming from and root for her to succeed until her ambition grows out of control and causes her to do some truly heinous things. I can honestly say I hated her guts by the end of this book.

And what an ending this book has! In the author's note, we learn that all of the insane things that happen in the final pages of this book in rapid succession actually occurred over a thirteen-year period. I'm okay with that. While it means that, in reality, the events were probably not as dramatic since they didn't occur right on each other's heels, in the book, it makes for one heck of a mind-spinning, emotional conclusion. I so want to give this book a full five stars because of all the feels. I cried at the end.

In Stephanie Thornton's previous books, I have found no flaws in her writing, but in this book, one of my biggest reading pet peeves is prevalent. I am not a fan of "forecasting," which is basically telling the reader to get ready for bad news ahead, and it's used rather liberally in this book. I don't like to be warned. I want to be smacked in the face with plot twists so the full emotional impact hits me. And I am concerned that the author made me admire a historical figure's character (Cassander, whose worth the reader sees long before Nike figures it out) when in reality it appears that he was not such a nice guy. One thing she doesn't mention in her note that I was looking for was some background info on Alexander's sexuality and how she decided to portray it, as it remains a source of controversy. I always like to get a glimpse into a writer's head to hear how they decided to tackle controversial or conflicting historical records.

But in spite of these little things, this is still a damned fine book. Rich in history, ambiance, drama, and emotion and filled with unforgettable characters, *The Conqueror's Wife* is a must-read for fans of ancient history and gripping, transporting historical fiction.

Vanessa says

There will be historical spoilers in here. Things that everyone who knows a bit about Alexander will already know.

As someone who loves to read fictional books about Alexander the Great, but is very picky about them, I can say that there were a lot of things that I really liked about this book, but also quite a few that made me gnash my teeth in frustration.

Starting with the cover, that is really so misleading, that I wonder for what purpose everything about it was chosen. The title alone makes no sense. This book is not about Alexander's wife. At least not solely. Roxana doesn't even show up till almost halfway through the book or so (and technically she wasn't even his only wife).

This story has four narrators: Thessalonike (his sister, definitely not his wife), Drypetis (the sister of his second wife), Hephaestion (his childhood best friend and lover) and Roxana (ding ding ding finally a wife). They're all of equal importance.

Then we come to the text on the back that claims that this book is basically about the most important women in Alexander's life... which is also not true? I can be convinced to count Thessalonike - who wasn't around him for over a decade after he left Macedon - and Roxana.

Hephaestion obviously isn't a woman and Alexander never cared about Drypetis at all. He barely cared about her sister. Her grandmother on the other hand *would* count.

Plus, the arguably most important woman in his life doesn't get a POV: His mother Olympias.

Next the cover text claims that Alexander was a God thanks to those women. Otherwise he would only have been a man.

Let's ignore that the underlying message in the book itself was that he really only was just a man and concentrate on the rest of that claim, because no? Let's remember again, that Olympias aka the only woman who has any right to that claim is only a secondary character and that the narrators are three girls who had nothing whatsoever to do with the military happenings and a man who did, but is apparently not included in the "Alexander would have been nothing without these women"-narrative.

Last but not least: The cover really is beautiful to look at, but makes this look like a romance novel I can buy at a train station.

So basically, you should just REALLY ignore the cover and everything on it, if you're hesitant about getting this book. The cover is a lie.

Now let's first talk about the things this book did right:

Hephaestion.

He was everything I ever wanted him to be. He was competent, he was strong, he stood up to Alexander, he was kind, he was witty and people took him seriously, despite being sure he was the bottom in that particular relationship (several characters remark on that over and over again). Cause yes, him and Alexander are explicitly stated to be lovers and we actually get to SEE it for a change. There are embraces, there are kisses and there is sex (not graphic at all, but there). It made me so happy.

I did find it amusing that people kept falling in love with him, cause usually everyone only looks at Alexander. It was a fun change.

I appreciated that the author tried to give several female characters their own part in this male dominated story. I liked that Cynanne was more than a footnote and that the beautiful Stateira was also a kind person

and not an arrogant airhead.

I thought the writing style was really nice and easy to read. The author didn't include all the historical events we "know" about and only concentrated on the ones important to her story. I thought that was fine, even if I did miss a few, cause I expected them to be there out of habit.

Now on to the things that raised my hackles and made me give this book a star less than I planned to:

I honestly don't mind tweaking history a bit to make it fit your story better - especially when we know so little of it, since all the original sources are gone.

But it's really annoying when it's done in a really clunky way to make certain characters look bad. In this case mainly Olympias and Alexander himself.

I get wanting to show a flawed Alexander. Someone more realistic than the God like image Mary Renault created decades ago. A human.

But here's the thing: You still need to have someone where the reader believes that people can still love him besides his flaws. Especially when you have someone who is clearly a good person like Hephaestion around, who is supposed to love Alexander above all others.

You can't have Alexander burn someone for funsies and then go back to business as usual.

Alexander has done plenty of cruel things, one doesn't need to make stuff up.

Let me give you an example from early in the book (technically spoilery for this particular scene):

Phillip just got murdered. The scene pretty much played out as it usually does. Except it's Thessalonike's POV. I honestly didn't mind that her and Cynanne were there. I don't even mind that the murderer didn't "stumble" exactly.

In every other book he'd now have been beaten to death by the soldiers that followed him. Not in this book. They stop, because Alexander's sister tells them to for some reason. The murderer awaits a much much crueler fate in this book.

And only a few pages later, Olympias gives another character also a crueler fate than we've ever known of.

Guess those are what we call establishing character moments and I didn't like them at all.

Otherwise, I didn't really mind characters traipsing around locations they definitely weren't supposed to be or two female characters having interests their real life counterparts probably didn't have (mainly fighting and engineering).

Which brings me to another thing that truly bothered me: This book sort of markets itself as a book about women. It gives Thessalonike and Drypetis more personality than pretty much any other book I've read. It's also kind to Stateira and Cynanne and several other women in much smaller roles.

BUT Olympias and Roxana are pretty much the same evil harpies they always are in these stories. Olympias pretty much starts out that way, but I had a bit of hope for Roxana when she first showed up. See, in this story she has a twin brother and an awful father, which I thought was to humanize her and it worked for about maybe two chapters. After them, she's pretty much the greedy, green eyed monster we've seen quite a few times.

And yet, I still was annoyed when Dyreptis and Thessalonike were so obviously looking down on her and called her a whore over and over, when what happened to Roxana through most of her life was truly horrific. (Trigger warning for rape in her chapters!)

Not one spark of female solidarity there, just unison in hating on her and her low birth from the moment they met her aka when they didn't know her true character yet.

Things I was lukewarm about:

The romance between Drypetis and Hephaestion was probably supposed to be slap-slap-kiss, but I thought it didn't work. It was pretty much like a highschool romance how they kept insulting each other, while other characters hinted at ~sexual tension or whatever. My eyes glazed over when I read their scenes and it got worse after they got married, cause suddenly it was the epic-est true love to ever exist and he abruptly went from her evil capturer to the bestest husband she could have hoped for. The apple in her eye. Or something. Meanwhile, Alexander and Hephaestion worked just fine, except for one weird fight. Despite not being a monogamous couple, they clearly loved each other deeply and the lack of romance tropes probably helped a lot. I actually have to thank this book for some of my (now) favorite Alexander/Hephaestion scenes in all of historical fiction!

Cassander was another odd case of changing the things we "know". In this book he was basically the best man around after Hephaestion. One argument by the author was, that since we don't have the original sources and the secondary ones clearly adored Alexander too much, it's super possible that Cassander just got the villain edit from them. So basically Olympias and Roxana remained the villains we know, but Cassander got to be a hero. Interesting.

I actually did like him quite a bit (which was a truly weird feeling) and mostly didn't mind *his* romance. It was another slap-slap-kiss one, but it worked a bit better. Probably because it didn't get as much page time as the other and one of them didn't hate the other for their ruined life before madly falling in love with them.

So basically this book was a mixed bag of lot of things I loved and lots of things I either didn't care for or outright hated.

It was still an entertaining read and I can see myself picking it up again and re-reading my favorite scenes a lot.

I could also see myself getting another book by this author, if she chooses to write about another historical favorite of mine.

I'm choosing to ignore the "Questions for discussion" pages at the very end of the book, because just no.
