



Assassin's Gambit

Amy Raby

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Vitala Salonius, champion of the warlike game of Caturanga, is as deadly as she is beautiful. She's a trained assassin for the resistance, and her true play is for ultimate power. Using her charm and wit, she plans to seduce her way into the emperor's bed and deal him one final, fatal blow, sparking a battle of succession that could change the face of the empire.

As the ruler of a country on the brink of war and the son of a deposed emperor, Lucien must constantly be wary of an attempt on his life. But he's drawn to the stunning Caturanga player visiting the palace. Vitala may be able to distract him from his woes for a while—and fulfill other needs, as well.

Lucien's quick mind and considerable skills awaken unexpected desires in Vitala, weakening her resolve to finish her mission. An assassin cannot fall for her prey, but Vitala's gut is telling her to protect this sexy, sensitive man. Now she must decide where her heart and loyalties lie and navigate the dangerous war of politics before her gambit causes her to lose both Lucien and her heart for good.

Assassin's Gambit Details

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From Reader Review Assassin's Gambit for online ebook

Eleanor With Cats says

Awesome! In her goodreads biography, Raby lists her Bujold and Hambly among her influences, and I am happy to say she definitely lives up to their legacy.

First off, I have no idea why this book was marketed as a fantasy/romance, because it is very different from a traditional romance, including elements of political intrigue, PTSD, battle tactics, and regular fantasy/adventure. I'm not sure whether people expecting a romance will like it or not. Although if it brings in more readers, hey, can't be bad, right?

Vitala is shown to have agency in one way from the very beginning of the book. The prologue opens with her having sex with a willing male whose name she can't remember, in order to practice assassination techniques while he is focused and distracted. Then she stabs him and tell him if it had been a real assassination, he'd be dead.

Vitala, whose name means life, is very very capable physically. She's a brilliant caturanga player (caturanga occupies the social position of chess in the Kjallan-Riorcan world) and ends up killing a good many people over the course of the novel while also rescuing several characters. Although her romantic partner Lucien is stronger than her due to his magic as a warmage, they are presented as equals in physical and strategic prowess, and they have a wonderful cameraderie - this is the only romance I've ever read where the hero goes to cheer up the downhearted heroine, does it by making lewd jokes, and gets punched in the nose, after which they both laugh.

In a number of ways Assassin's Gambit is about Vitala's path to nonphysical agency - choosing her own loyalties, choosing her family, choosing a lover, and graduating from a political pawn who is in some ways very very constrained to the empress of two or more realms. Jan-Torres' speech to Vitala about becoming an officer after working only in the midst of physical action on the front relates to this.

In the world of this book, humans can train to become mages and tie their power to stone pendants of various kinds, which must be near them for them to access the source of their magic. There are some interesting consequences to this. First, magic becomes something associated with the upper classes, as only they have the money to see their children trained. (Presumably this is going to be a conservative force in the political structure.) Second, although magical Healing is mostly available only to the upper classes, Warders can make wards against disease and childbirth on anyone who pays them, and most people take advantage. Raby seems to be trying to make a world where there is less stigma on sexually active women. There is still some stigma though, which several characters try to take advantage of to work against Vitala.

Thirdly, the existence of warmages ties into a number of features of the plot. A warmage, as long as his (or possibly her? - while women can be assassins and spies and co-rulers, they do not seem to be warriors) stone pendant is within range, gains not only boosts in strength and speed but also a psychic warning of impending attack. Since the conquered Riorcans are trying to kill their Kjallan rulers to destabilize the empire and try to win their freedom, the Obsidian Circle (the Riorcan underground) is faced with having to deal with well-equipped and trained warmages while having only what resources they can hide and smuggle. The two methods people have come up with for killing warmages are simultaneous three-way attacks on a single warmage and taking advantage of utter distraction, preferably one arranged by the assassin - in this case, orgasm. One of the Obsidian Circle enclaves trains groups of three men as assassins for the first method,

while Vitala was picked as a child for the second method and has been trained to seduce her target, then call her weapons to her and pick him off at the moment of climax. One result of this is that some parts of this book are a bit more graphic than some fantasy novels are. But another result of this - in combination with the existence of antifertility wards and more socio-romantic freedom for women - seems to be increased frank communication with regard to consent.

Although Vitala and her love interest, the new emperor Lucien, are both hiding psychological scars and issues from each other, and Vitala is somewhat shy when associating emotion with sex, since she's had so little experience with that association, they also have a lot of sex scenes where one of them asks 'where do you want me to touch you?' or suggests positions or body parts that might be involved, while still keeping the scene fluid and uninterrupted. I think this is a great model to see in books.

I also enjoy the reversal of the usual emotional roles in Vitala and Lucien's romance. Vitala is the one who has dedicated her life to a cause, and is perfectly willing to give up her love as well as her life to cause Riorca's freedom. It is Lucien who tries for days to get Vitala to let him ride back to the capital after the coup and rescue his 12yo sister from a forced marriage even though he would do much better running and gathering an army if he wishes to keep his throne. Finally, someone acknowledges that women can have causes and make political decisions! Vitala may choose to ignore her orders, either from the Obsidian Circle or her emperor-lover, but she continues to advance her personal cause, the overall freedom of Riorca, throughout the book, no matter which cultural group she is moving within.

I could say a lot more about this book and why I really like it - writing, protagonists that you really like. Time constraints exist, however, and I am going to let you experience the rest of it yourself.

Sarah Mac says

3.5 stars.

Campy fantasy-romance hybrid. If Harlequin had a line called HQN Sword & Sorcery, this would be a perfect fit. :P

The Good:

- cool magical system that's not overdone. Also good flourishes of fantastical violence (which sometimes jarred with the romance portion; see below).
- comfortably familiar Roman-like society with its inherent political & personal difficulties re: slavery, caste, etc.
- solid secondary characters. I definitely want to read about Celeste, Rianne, & Jan-Torres.
- heroine w/ badass skills who isn't afraid of wearing dresses or seducing men.
- the finale where Vitala & ____ team up to defeat the Big Baddie.

The YMMV:

- supremely cheesy romance that (often) abruptly intrudes on the politicking & magic.
- hokey back-and-forth re: the MCs feelz, much of which could be inferred without blatantly stating it. (This is by no means unusual; 95% of post-1995 genre romance falls into the same trap.)
- Gary Stu hero with no real faults. He's an uber-nice guy, which is pretty ideal in RL, but seriously...this dude makes Jon Snow look like Jaime Lannister. I like my fictional heroes with more edge.
- Vitala's lack of good sex prior to Gary Stu. I get why she had issues with certain situations, but surely she

could've enjoyed SOME encounters?

-Vitala & Bayard (her mentor) obv had some major backstory between them, both good & bad, but that wasn't explored.

So, overall...a good lazy summertime read. I enjoyed it despite the faults, & will eventually finish this familial saga. :)

Kara-karina says

I can only say that I've been very lucky with my fantasy books lately. Not only Assassin's Gambit is exceptionally well written, it's unapologetic about the matters of sex, emotional trauma, and has one of the best no-nonsense, sensible approaches to relationships I've seen in a long time. Also, of course it helps that Vitala totally kicks ass! Read it, and I guarantee you won't be disappointed.

Katerina says

I have to be honest, I started reading Assassin's Gambit because of the *gorgeous* cover. I can't even describe how happy I am that the inside was even better!

Vitala Salonius. Half Riorcan, half Kjallan, she was never accepted by either of them. Until the Obsidian Circle, an underground organisation that struggles for Riorca's freedom, recruits her and forges her into a weapon, an assassin with one goal; kill the emperor and spread civil war to a crumbling empire. Preparing her entire life for this moment, she never expected to fall for her target.

Lucien Florian Nigellus. A young emperor striving to hold an empire that faces numerous problems, including economical crisis, rebellions and betrayals. The fact that he is crippled due to a failed assassination attempt doesn't give him much credit.

When these two meet, the entire universe explodes. Through coups, alliances and hard choices, Lucien's brilliant strategic mind and Vitala's ruthlessness and training have the potential to unite two peoples who hate each other in the face of a common enemy. Amy Raby did a fantastic job in painting the politics, the intrigue, the sensitive matter of post-traumatic stress disorder and the battle strategies. The magic system was fresh, something I had never encountered before, with the Riftstones and the Shards and the wardbreakers. But the main theme of the book is the romance between Vitala and Lucien. It started as physical attraction (and they had some very steamy scenes together), the love and trust followed afterwards. Vitala had to balance her commitment to saving her country, a country that never accepted her, with her growing feelings for a man she thought he was the enemy, and had to make some decisions that bereaved her of everything she held dear until then. Lucien was also a complex character, I loved the fact that he wasn't physically perfect and that this didn't stop him from being his smug confident self. They were broken, both of them, and they accepted and embraced that.

I love deeply the books which combine war, politics, assassins and romance, and the Assassin's Gambit fits this profile perfectly. A pleasant surprise, I am absolutely going to read more of the Hearts and Thrones series.

Sonia189 says

Interesting concepts, situations... but some narrative choices felt lacking for me or were simplistic in their reasons which seemed weak. The romance had its moments but wasn't as "romantic" and well paced as I would have liked, so I wasn't always eager to keep reading.

Amanda says

I can't believe that this is Amy Raby's debut. Although some reviewer said this book don't really fit into the romance genre because majority of the the plot was about politics and war, I'm very invested in Vitala and Lucien's relationship and hope they get their well deserve HEA.

For those who wanted to know how much romance is in this book, I will said that both Vitala and Lucien are practically together since the beginning until the end. They seldom separated from each other. In the beginning they are wary about each other identity, but when the truth is out, they embrace it and work together to accomplish a similar goal. Romance author usually use thick sexual tension, unrequited love, big misunderstanding, big revelation that turn a jerk hero into someone you swoon after or lust turn into love to make the story works. But Amy Raby uses non of those. What makes me finish reading the book in one day is the non stop action plot. You just can't wait to see what will happen next to Vitala or Lucien.

Vitala is a Riorcan, but looks like a Kjall because she is a half breed. She was trained as an assassin by the Obsidian Circle to overthrow Emperor Lucien in order to free Riorcan from Kjall ruling since she was eight. I like the fact that although she was trained since young, she know her mission is to free Riorcan and she didn't got brainwash to kill mercilessly or follow any orders blindly. Most of the time she make her own judgement for the goods of the Riorcan people.

Lucien, the Emperor of Kjall is a handicap, who lost his left leg in a battle. Both his elder brother are dead and he only left with a 13 years old sister, Celeste. Although he is handicap, he doesn't appear brooding, but rather friendly and charming at first glance. During the first half, he seems like beta hero, who needs his ass save by the heroin, basically got drag across the country and totally under her mercy. However, as usual beta heroes have genius mind and so do Lucien. At the second half, we can see he is a great strategist and a great leader. He can raise an army for a war. Although there is a mentioned that he is only 22 years old, but honestly, his action is so mature for his age that I thought he can easily be a decade or two older. I like the fact that he is willing to put any pride aside to ally with his enemies.

The story begins with Vitala being summoned to the palace after winning the annual Caturanga game (I just imagine is chess). Emperor Lucien loves the game and every year he will invite the winner to play with him. This is the first time a female won and she even beat him. All she need to do is the get Lucien in bed and kill him while he is distracted. This is because Lucien is a warmage that can anticipate an attack before it happen.

However, before Vitala manage to make her move on Lucien, both of them got entangle in a coup to overthrown the Emperor lead by the Kjall's traitor. Rather than watch Lucien got kidnap or killed, Vitala decide to save him instead. She make him promise that if she help him to get his throne back, he will free Riorcan. While Lucien is recovering from his injuries in Tasox, they met two midwives and a dog name, Flavia. Vitala then lead Lucien towards the Riorcan's land and at this moment Lucien had finally guess that she is from the Obsidian Circle. Anyway, he had no other choices than to follow her and hope to gain ally

with the Circle.

Things doesn't turn out as what Vitala had anticipated, instead of the Circle working together with Lucien, they held him prisoner. She had no choice but to break him out. I love the following quote from Vitala about Lucien.

"She loved that about Lucien, that he accepted new situations instantly and did not ask idiot questions like 'What's going on?' or 'What are you doing here?'"

Many times we see hero and heroin really asked those idiot questions that make me roll my eyes. How true is that. Whenever Vitala appeared to save Lucien, he just grab his crutch and ran with her.

At the second half of the story, Vitala had left the Circle, while she is at lost of where she belongs, Lucien met up with his While Eagle battalion and tried to raise an army of rebel. Vitala was trained to assassinate, and now she is feeling restless with all the inaction because she doesn't know how to help Lucien with his plotting. When Lucien order to have her evacuated away from danger, she takes matter in her own hand.

Of course, in the midst of all the political agenda between Kjall and Riorcan, the relationship between Vitala and Lucien got closer. He even proposed to her with a Caturanga's piece. They are both flawed characters with a haunted past. Lucien had a phobia towards anything lemon because it reminds him of the day when he lost his leg, while Vitala practically had nightmare about one of her earlier kill whenever she engage in sex act. Lucien patience towards her is quite unbelievable, maybe the fact that she saved his life count towards it. But anyhow, the brilliant guy can solve any problems that come in his way.

Initially I'm worried about a possible cliffhanger since this is book 1, but fear not. This is practically a standalone with a HEA. The next book is about Rhianne, Lucien's cousin, who already married with her husband in Assassin's Gambit. It seems like the author is going backwards and talk about how she met her husband.

Khanh, first of her name, mother of bunnies says

Soon, the moment would come, the moment she'd spent eleven years preparing for. Could she seduce and kill Emperor Lucien?

The answer is a resounding NO.

I DNFed this book at 25% because, really, **there is no fucking point**. She wasn't going to kill the motherfucker anyway. It's not only terrible, it **belittles the act of rape**.

He thrust into her, occasionally fondling her breasts or kissing her. She tried to ignore it. Mild discomfort, she told herself. It's mild discomfort, nothing more.

Because if you just pretend that it's nothing, rape isn't a big deal, right?! Fuck that shit. Seriously, fuck that shit.

This is the story of **the worst fucking assassin in the world**. She makes Celaena Sardothien of *Throne of Glass* infamy look...competent in comparison. Celaena may like clothes more than she likes killing, **but at**

least she didn't repeatedly and completely fuck up an assassination attempt. Every other page, I was shrieking at her "WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?! KILL HIM!!!111!!!1"

I could feel my blood pressure skyrocketing. Trying to finish this book might have given me an aneurysm.

First off, that cover is a total ripoff of Angelina Jolie's 2012 Oscar dress.

But that aside, **the main character had so many fucking chances to kill the Emperor. She never takes them.** And the emperor is a fucking "cripple." (The book's words, not mine). The Emperor is an amputee! He's a mage, he's got magic, but still, AN ASSASSIN CAN GET THE FUCKING JOB DONE IN A SECOND. WHY THE FUCK ARE YOU WAITING TO SEDUCE HIM?! The reason given for the hesitation simply doesn't work for me.

The Premise:

"He's crippled and alone," Bayard had said. "Kill him, and you will spark a succession battle that will tear the empire apart."

The female assassin Vitala had one fucking job: Kill Lucien, the Emperor of Kjallan. His father was a despot, currently the kingdom of Kjallan is killing her people, torturing them, enslaving them. Vitala has been trained to be an assassin since she was a child. Eleven years, she has trained for this mission. She has been trained in killing, in court etiquette, in the many ways to seduce a man (hint: aim for the penis). Lucien is particularly interested in **the game of Caturanga.** Caturanga is a strategy game, much like **chess.** Every year, a championship tournament is held in the city of Beryl, and the champion gets to meet and play with Lucien.

Vitala won the championship, and gets to meet Lucien. **Her mission: seduce him, kill him.** His death will create a chaos within the Kjallan kingdom that will free her people, the Riorcans. It doesn't matter if Lucien is guilty of the deaths or not. He must die for her people's plan to succeed.

It didn't matter whether she wanted to kill Lucien or not. Even if Lucien were innocent of all crimes—and he wasn't—he had to die, for the simple reason that he stood in the way of Riorcan freedom. Lucien was a strategic sacrifice.

AND SHE DOESN'T FUCKING DO IT. Years and years of planning, out the fucking window because she is a motherfucking moron of the highest order. She couldn't kill a fucking spider that falls on her in the shower. **Vitala is a fucking failure.**

The Fail!!!!: She fails repeatedly, but here are some of the examples within the 25% of the books I read.

#1: She gets to be alone with Lucien. She thinks he's cute. They're still alone. He doesn't look like a killer, but hey, who cares, right? They're alone. They sit down. Alone. They play a long ass game of Caturanga. Alone. She gets absorbed in the game. They're still alone. There are no magical wards on his body or in the room. They're still alone. There are no bodyguards around. They're still alone. She wins the game. They're still alone.

She'd gotten so caught up in the game that she'd forgotten all about seduction.

OH, SO NOT ONLY DID SHE FAIL TO EVEN TRY TO KILL HIM, SHE FORGOT ABOUT SEDUCING HIM. Nice.

#2: She gets to play with him again! Alone. He's pretty cute! They're still alone. Oh, they're talking about politics now. Cute. They're still alone. She WINS AGAIN! They're still alone. **And, shit.**

Three gods, she was supposed to be seducing him, and once again she was getting too drawn into the Caturanga.

FAIL FAIL FAIL. OH! OH! He's walking her to the door. They're SO CLOSE. This might be it, right?!

At the door, she turned and performed her farewell curtsy.

No.

#3: She's ALONE WITH HIM IN A CARRIAGE! Oh my god, now's the time to seduce him. Get close to him. KILL HIM. They're alone!!! They're making out, they're getting turned on...and...

A spike of heat and pleasure stabbed through her and settled in her groin, where it slowly spread. Pox, pox, pox. She'd let herself get attracted to her target. This was not good.

WHAT THE FUCK?!

#4: They're alone! What a fucking surprise! He's about to seduce her. THEY'RE ALONE.

She giggled, feeling like she'd had too much to drink. Some distant part of her marveled at her absurd behavior. He had stumbled, but she was the one who was off balance. What was it about this man that her body responded to with such enthusiasm?

He's a tyrant. You hate him.

Her body wasn't listening.

OH MY GOD ARE YOU FUCKING SERIOUS?!

#5: THEY'RE FUCKING! Clearly, they're alone. His inhibitions are gone! They're fucking! They're skin to skin. Face to face. Vagina to dick! **Is she going to kill him?!**

"Shh." He worked her with hands and tongue, stroking and tasting. She writhed, utterly out of control, half-terrified at what was happening to her, half-consumed with yearning. She wanted him to stop. She wanted more.

NO! FUCK!

#6: HE'S ABOUT TO GET KILLED BY SOMEONE ELSE. Well, awesome. **Other people are going to do the job for her. All she has to do is sit back and enjoy and take credit for the work.** Except that's just not enough for our awesomely intelligent Vitala. She somehow gets the fucking harebrained idea that **it's better to save him.**

She'd never relished the thought of killing Lucien, and maybe now she didn't have to. She could do more for her people by saving his life.

Awesome! Throw away decades of planning by her country's spy agency. Good fucking job, stupid

bitch.

WHY DOESN'T SHE KILL HIM: Supposedly Lucien is a mage who has the power of precognition, which is why she has to seduce him.

Along with the most dangerous ability of all, the gift of anticipation. A war mage could sense any attack before it came. To get past a war mage's defenses, one had to distract him to the point that he was oblivious to the outside world.

It doesn't fucking work. **A competent assassin should be able to do the fucking job within seconds.**

Furthermore, she actually fucked him. She actually seduced him, and she didn't do it! She just enjoyed her fucking orgasm and forgot all about the fucking mission. And Vitala isn't exactly helpless. She has **magical Shards**. Shards which she can (and has) used to kill a man in a single moment.

Vitala drove the Shard into the soft flesh of his hip and released the death spell.

Pretty fucking neat magical tool. Kill a man in seconds. SO WHY DOESN'T SHE FUCKING DO IT?! Precognition or not, it only takes a fucking instant when she is RIGHT NEXT TO HIM. Which she is, repeatedly!

Fail assassin. Stupid, stupid idiot.

I haven't finished the book, but I predict that this is what's going to happen. Lucien and Vitala is going to fall in love. Instead of killing him, she's going to protect him. She's going to join some kind of alliance to overthrow the evil people of his kingdom and discover that Lucien, instead of being an evil despot, is a kind-hearted king. A benevolent soul. They're going to fall in love. Vitala is going to protest halfheartedly that she can't fall in love because she's an assassin. But they're going to keep fucking and she's going to fall in love with him anyway.

Maybe someone who's read this can tell me I'm wrong, but I don't have high hopes.

Nemo (The Moonlight Library) says

This review was originally posted on The Moonlight Library. This isn't my usual YA, but I did enter Goodreads First Reads competition to win it, and I did really want to read it. Oh my god, I took FOREVER to read this book but I swear it's not a reflection on the book's quality, believe me! I had a really good time when I was reading this book, I've just had THE WORST YEAR for reading. I started reading this in August 2016 after winning it on Goodreads in 2014 (BAD NEMO) and my other review books kept getting in the way, then this year happened and my life went to hell in a hand basket, but when I did have the energy to read this book I adored the chemistry between the PTSD-suffering sex assassin and the sexy, sensitive disabled ruler she's sent to murder. So let me tell you a bit about it.

Vitala is half Kjallan and half Riorcan, and her loyalties lie with Riorca, a country under the oppressive rule of the Kjallan emperor. Using her looks and skills at a chess-like game called Cataranga, Vitala infiltrates the emperor's inner circle and is about to use the only magic that can kill the magically-protected emperor when he is betrayed by an underling. Now Lucien is at her mercy, Vitala realises that it's in Riorca's best interest to get Lucien back on the throne, and through trials, politics, and acts of war with a sprinkling of romance, the two attempt to do just that.

Vitala was an interesting heroine. A lot of people complain about how she didn't kill her mark, but she was smart enough to question her orders and not follow them blindly, finding another way to attempt peace and freedom for her people. Also, where is the conflict if you write "After years of training, she killed her target, and she was OK with that, the end"? She suffers from PTSD due to her training and starts the novel off thinking sex is just a tool to help her kill her marks. With Lucien's help, she comes to realise sex is so much more.

Lucien is a disabled man in an alpha male's role, and learning to come to terms with his leadership in a society that celebrates physical prowess over intelligence, skill and cunning. Lucien is far more sensitive and gentle than the emperor whose throne he inherited, but still carries his authority, and as Vitala discovers this, she figures out he's not the tyrant she's been led to believe he is. Lucien has his own troubles to deal with and doesn't always treat Vitala with the patience and respect she deserves, but they tackle their conflicts in the best way they're equipped to.

I liked the writing. I didn't find it too flowery or sparse. I did have problems remembering all of the world building but I read this over the course of more than a year (which was entirely my own fault) and I think if someone read it faster they could probably do a better job of remembering ranks and countries and all that stuff. I found Vitala's PTSD very believable, and I know firsthand what PTSD is like. I also found Lucien's attitudes refreshing.

I don't know if the pacing was my problem because once I was reading it I didn't want to put it down, but equally I had little initiative to pick it back up again. I think since I knew it was always going to be there waiting for me and like most assassin romances the plot was pretty predictable, but I really did enjoy it while I was reading. Vitala and Lucien's chemistry was off the charts and I very nearly dog-eared some pages to re-read at some point (WHO DOG-EARS THEIR PAGES YOU MONSTER?).

Overall I think if you're open minded, give the book time to show you that Vitala has PTSD rather than losing patience with her struggle and coping mechanisms (I will mention that she is raped and she tries to dismiss it as a minor discomfort, this is so she can deal with the assault and concentrate on murdering her attacker, not to say that rape is actually a minor discomfort), and realise that it's an assassin romance and the romance is written right there in the blurb, you'll probably enjoy the book as much as I did.

Minni Mouse says

DNF at 20% because oh, nooo you don't, you thinly-veiled piece of shallow mediocrity.

Sandy Williams says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book! I came across an interview with the author on the Qwillery review site. Amy Raby talked about the research she did for this book, reading the Art of War and speeches given by real world leaders so she could get Lucien's speeches right. I have to say, that completely paid off. The war strategizing came off as authentic and plausible, and Lucien was great at motivating his troops. (I have to admit here, that I'm jealous. I wish I'd done this type of research for my Shadow Reader novels. I'd love to have more war strategizing in them. Of course, there's not really space for that in my books.)

I enjoyed the worldbuilding in this novel. Not everyone is magical. People have mage stones that sort give or store their abilities. If you take the stone away, they lose their magics. I thought that was neat. I also enjoyed the different types of magic. Wardbreaking turned out to be pretty cool, and war mage magic sounds awesome as well.

In the Qwillery interview, the author said this book was a 50/50 romance and fantasy split. I'd say it's about 70% fantasy and 30% romance. This would have been a darn good book without the romance, but with it, it was even better.

Lucien was my favorite character. He was smart, but he was such a guy, too. His little sexual comments made me roll my eyes (I think in a good way, lol). I enjoyed Vitala's character as well. My only complaint about her is that she didn't feel very assassin-y to me. Not that she didn't have the skills and desire. I guess she just seemed a little soft? Not ruthless enough? Something like that.

I'd love to read more books by this author, so I'm happy to hear we'll be getting Rhianne's story. I'm sure we'll eventually get a Celeste story as well. Sounds great to me.

SIDENOTE: I like this blend of fantasy and romance. It reminds me of a fantasy romance I started writing well over a decade ago. At the time, I didn't realize I was writing a romance. The story never really went anywhere - I was distracted by other New! Shiny! ideas - but now that I think about that book, I might be able to do something with it. Gah! So many ideas, so little time! I need to write faster!

Hetal says

To see more reviews, consider taking a peek at my first in series YA book blog here

3.75 stars

Assassin's Gambit was pretty entertaining. What got me in the end was the hype I'd heard about this book. I went in expecting the next Red Queen or something. Well it's not that exactly, but still pretty good.

Vitala -from a young age- has been trained to be an assassin. Her people are kept as slaves under the rule of the King. It is her dream to assassinate him and free her people. However, when she meets the perfectly broken King Lucien, he is not the cruel monster she was expecting. He loves a challenge and appreciates her both for her mind and beauty. When put into dire straits, Vitala must change strategies, no longer believing assassinating Lucien is the best option for her people. Lucien and Vitala grow close, with Lucien realizing Vitala's mind is not whole and her training has broken something in her that may not be fixable.

This book deals with some pretty heavy topics such as willing and unwilling rape as well as PTSD. If these topics make you uncomfortable, steer away from Assassin's Gambit. I was intrigued by the horrors Vitala put herself through for a country she had never known. However, despite some of the dark themes, the story still managed to be incredibly sweet. Two perfectly broken people trying to change the world for the better, together. Their individual weaknesses allow them to lean on the other, learning to trust someone they never thought they could. This trust slowly leads to love and attempt to work through relationship problems-all while fending off war and prejudice.

Overall an enjoyable read that I would recommend to mature teenagers. Matters of the heart as well human motivations are brought up well and often, making both Lucien and Vitala quite believable as characters.

Mandi Schreiner says

This book caught my eye because I love an assassin heroine. A couple of my favorites being Gin from Jennifer Estep's Elemental Assassin series and Shadow Kin by MJ Scott.

The description of the heroine in the blurb sounds pretty awesome:

Vitala Salonius, champion of the warlike game of Caturanga, is as deadly as she is beautiful. She's a trained assassin for the resistance, and her true play is for ultimate power. Using her charm and wit, she plans to seduce her way into the emperor's bed and deal him one final, fatal blow, sparking a battle of succession that could change the face of the empire.

Except she isn't awesome. She is half Riorca, half Kjallan, two lands that are fierce enemies. She considers Riorca her home, having spent a brief amount of time there as child, yet she looks Kjallan, which is why she was taken at a young age by the assassin group, The Obsidian Circle, to be trained to become a deadly assassin. Her mission since she was a young girl was to be trained to kill the Kjallan emperor, Lucien, to then set in motion chaos, hoping to free her Ricora people that are enslaved. Her training is two parts – first Lucien is a war mage which means he can anticipate when something bad is going to happen. To be able to stick a death shard in him, she gets trained to stick it in when the man is climaxing on top of her. Apparently in the throes of an orgasm, he doesn't pay attention to the incoming warning danger. Her second task is to learn the game Caturanga (like chess) which is Lucien's favorite. He always invites the annual Caturanga champion to play him at his palace.

So Vitala completes her training, (where she practice kills soldiers) wins the Caturanga championship, and finds herself in front of Lucien ready to play her roll. But here is where the story completely falls apart for me.

While Vitala has to seduce Lucien into bed (so they can have sex and she can stick the death shard into him) she gets seduced herself. She becomes attracted to him about five minutes after she meets him. Huh? She has been trained almost her entire life to kill this man and she gets all goo-goo eyed over him already?

Then before she can get him into bed, Lucien's second in command stages a rebellion, and tries to kill Lucien. Now before Vitala really knows what is going on, she has a chance to kill Lucien. But she doesn't take it (I weep). Later she realizes Lucien might be better use to her Ricora people if he is alive. But let me make this point – I never see her act like an assassin. She never comes across as someone who has had a vicious assassin training (yet we are told she has). She falls for Lucien right at the beginning? Where is the intrigue? The suspense? And almost as worse as this, Lucien trusts Vitala pretty much from the beginning. These events would have made more sense if one: Vitalia and Lucien had each hated the other, or tried to kill the other. At least once! And two: Had these events slowed down. The rebellion, the raid, Lucien switching sides all takes place at the beginning of the book. Slow down and let us get to know each player before switching it all up on us.

As the book goes on it continues to go downhill. Vitala is determined to keep it a secret that she works for the Obsidian Circle but slight pressure from Lucien and she folds. Again, not kick ass assassin behavior.

The rest of the book flounders. Letting enemies go when they should have killed them, Lucien not really acting like the strong emperor he says he is and most disappointing, Vitala never coming across as a true assassin.

Rating: D

Lexie says

Dear Khanh,
I regret doubting your opinion on this book. You were so utterly right.

Love,
Me

DNF'ed at like 110pgs...look. I'm not saying an assassin has to kill folk to prove themselves...except if you have ONE OFFICIAL TARGET in your career and instead of killing him you actively aid him in escaping the villainous murderous traitors, assist him in regaining his throne and then MARRY HIM while convincing all your rebel friends it's the RIGHT THING to do...maybe don't call yourself an assassin.

Diana says

I'm a sucker for novels with female assassin's as the protagonist. Thus, I was drawn to reading this book.

Sadly, the book is very underwhelming. Character's are thrown into the foray of the action & plot of the novel with little-to-no background & with triviality. They disappear as fast as they were introduced.

This book is first & foremost a love story. Honestly, it's not even a very interesting one. It's very shallow & I felt no loyalty to either the female heroine or the male hero.

If you're looking for a kick-ass assassin, action & an interesting story, this is not the book to read.

litsiren says

4 stars

My first by Amy Raby and I liked it. The book has a thrilling story which I anticipated. The mystery, suspense and action in this book is really good for adrenaline junkie like me.

A lot things happened in *Assassin's Gambit* and each of the chapters equipped with new surprises, new adventures. And they got me excited at point that I couldn't put this book down because I wanted to know what's next.

I enjoyed reading the main characters. Even though I didn't fully connect to both of them, at least I felt the connection built between Lucien and Vitala. They are amazing and a great couple. Both are dangerous and deadly too. Lucien is a very good strategist. His mind works wondrous regardless of his physical deficiency. Whilst Vitala, she's lethal because she has a plenty of skills and she kills. She's the assassin after all.

Both are tortured souls. Lucien doesn't do brooding but instead, he charms people and laughs quite a lot. He loves socializing, I think. Very fond with challenges. Hence, the Caturanga (game of chess or battleship, I imagined) and Vitala who is really hard to crack. Then, their romance was sizzling. Lucien is so smitten with Vitala and he loves her greatly. For that, I felt happy for Vitala being she didn't feel loved before.

Anyway, I guarantee if you decided to pick and read this book, you won't be disappointed. Next in the series will be about Rhianne and her husband's story. They made an appearance this book but in the next book, it seems like the story will start from the beginning for them. And I cannot wait! Please Ms. Raby, do write faster!

Read on your own peril.

UPDATED

If Lucien is 22 years old and Vitala is two years old (I think, I forgot) younger than Lucien, does it mean this book is New Adult? The thing is the way all characters think and act in the book is so matured. Like they age more than 25 years old or older than that. Where should I shelve this book? Adult? New Adult? But can I put it in Adult because it felt like one?

Sorry for the ramblings. Going to love this series! Keeping tabs on you Ms. Raby!
