

## A World Divided: Phoenix & Calista Saga

**Emily Stone**

**Diana Bloom**

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*A romance novel set in a fantastical land, A World Divided is an idyllic excursion into the ideals of equality and love.*

In Emily Stone and Diana Bloom's romantic fantasy novel *A World Divided*, two royals discover a magical connection between their kingdoms.

On the eve of a ceremony at which they'll induct new warriors into their kingdoms' shared army, Calista and Phoenix bicker. Though they've been family friends since childhood, they've grown apart because of their differing leadership styles. Calista's castle is a community center; she works with her advisor and best friend, Lux, to serve her people in a way that honors how they serve their land. Phoenix, meanwhile, is a loner who mistrusts his subjects and his advisor, Knoxx, who doesn't share all of the news with him.

Calista wants Phoenix to take responsibility for an explosion that killed some of her fishermen. As Phoenix investigates, he becomes suspicious, believing that Knoxx and other renegades are plotting against him. He also becomes enamored of Calista. When the renegades attack, Calista and Phoenix retreat to the forest, where they grow closer—and draw near to a waterfall that could unite their divided world.

Marked by rituals and ceremonies, including inductions, the solstice, and mating bonds, the novel peers beneath regal facades to consider what lurks beneath the surfaces of kingdoms. While the monarchs live up to their responsibilities in formal settings, their bickering hides their secret attraction to each other. And those close to them also conceal truths: Knoxx hides his intentions from Phoenix; Lux keeps her past secret from Calista.

The cast's often combative conversations pair with racy sex scenes, offsetting the stylized tone that's devoted to detailing ceremonies. The earthy prose captures landscapes in beautiful, ethereal terms. It also focuses on people's feelings, resulting in rich, propulsive tension, which can only be resolved if people learn to work together. Phoenix chips away at his distrustful posture by observing Calista's compassion toward others; a potential mutiny is confronted as a result. Ultimately, the couple's individual and differing qualities mean that they complement one another, and their romance is further enhanced by touches of magic and a level of escapism. The book's cliffhanger ending is abrupt, laying the groundwork for a sequel. One character's sudden ruthlessness is shocking, leading to an additional conflict.

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MARI CARLSON (October 7, 2022)

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