

Savage Bred

Victoria McCombs

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In Victoria McCombs's high seas adventure novel *Savage Bred*, betrayal and family sail hand-in-hand.

As the third book of the Royal Rose Chronicles starts, Ontario, the pirate ship's former first mate, has become captain; the previous captain, Arn, had his fealty sold to a king; Emme is regaining her strength from a life-sapping curse; and Queen Isla has declared war on all pirates. Separated and pining for each other, Emme and Arn are caught in the intricate dances of broader conflicts.

The *Royal Rose* becomes a haven for Emme and her brother Emric, who are unaware that power-hungry Ontario betrayed Arn. At the same time, the siblings' mother, Arabella the Ruthless, hopes to rule the seas with her children; her sense of care for them is callous and manipulative. Then the crew of the *Royal Rose* offers Arabella to Queen Isla in exchange for their own safety; Ontario plays both sides, and his political and personal motivations intertwine.

In this series volume, past tragedies come to the fore as well. Arn's violent obedience as a former royal soldier threatens his standing with a new crew, and echoes of the difficult circumstances that reunited Emric and Emme are affecting and germane. And when Emric's past lover, the mermaid Coral, shows up injured, the fallout is heartbreaking.

This continuing story, which takes place on a stage of oceanic proportions, is thrilling: Arabella's whereabouts are ever-changing, and Ontario's motivations are shrouded in mystery. For many of the characters, the prospect of ruling the sea as a ship captain rises above all other concerns. Still, there are consequences to seeking power, including among one's family members (found and otherwise); destiny sometimes intervenes.

In the fantasy novel *Savage Bred*, piracy seems like a romantic lifestyle, but it's also a corrupting one.

ALEENA ORTIZ (September / October 2023)

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