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The Princess and the Captain

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Consider the dust-wrapper: a trim wooden vessel under full sail, pennant streaming, palm trees, a couple of kegs and a seaman's chest on the sandy shore, mountainous islands floating in a brilliant turquoise ocean. The font for the title, set on curling parchment, suggests Olden Days. On the front cover, two gold-rimmed miniatures: a dashing young fellow, a stock at his neck and brass buttons on his coat; and an attractively smouldering, dark-haired girl. And on the back, a third miniature portraying a confused-looking dog who might be a St Bernard.

And that is more or less what you get in this lengthy odyssey of derring-do translated from the French. Princess Malva decides to quit the repressive royal court of Galnicia and takes ship with her loyal maid Philomena. Desperate adventures swiftly ensue. Young Orpheus McBott, hungry for excitement and disenchanted to learn that his respected father was in truth a piratical rogue, volunteers to search for the missing Malva. Our hero rescues our heroine from, yes, a fate worse than death and, again yes, in the nick of time. A company of friends is formed ? the sort of folk you find in companies of friends; lively orphan twins, an eccentric cook, a mute giant, a girl with astonishing powers of healing, and that St Bernard. They are plunged into a series of trials and tribulations, but somehow the numerous tests and adventures come to seem routine. Some of the company die, a couple of them rather inconsequentially. There's a bad enough baddie, but there's nothing which runs deeper and characters, in both dialogue and action, become predictable. Bondoux's world offers almost too many similarities to our own. To the West lies Aremica and to the East, beyond the great Azizian Steppes, the Orniant Empire; while in the heavens gleam the twin stars, Astor and Olux. The book is redeemed to a degree by pervasive high spirits, but it might have been a hundred pages shorter, or a hundred pages longer. There is no inevitable shape to this tale's telling. GF

Running Order:

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