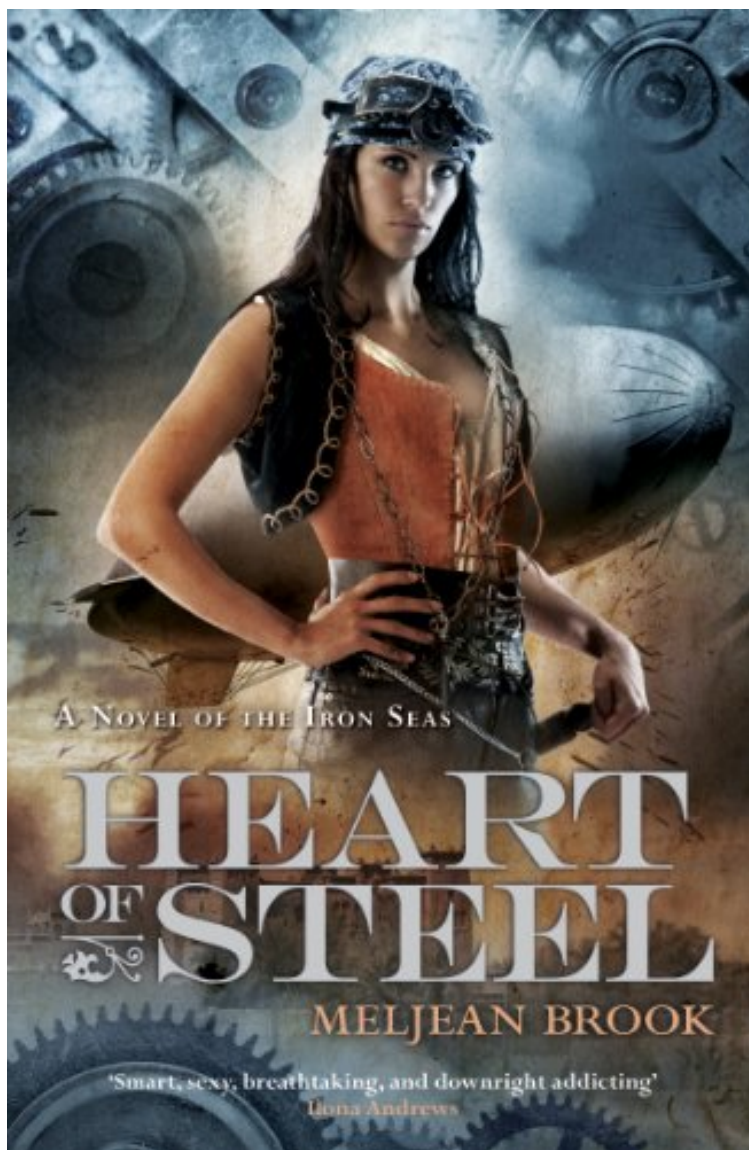


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Heart of Steel



Par Meljean Brook
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn the sequel to The Iron Duke in the Iron Seas steampunk romance series by Meljean Brook, Heart of Steel sees the exotic and dangerous captain Yasmeeen on an action packed treasure hunt across Morocco.As the mercenary captain of Lady Corsair, Yasmeeen has learned to keep her heart as cold as steel, her only loyalty bound to her ship and her crew. So when a man who once tried to seize her airship returns from the dead, Yasmeeen will be damned if she gives him another opportunity to take control.Treasure-hunter Archimedes Fox isn't interested in Lady Corsair - he wants her cold-hearted captain and the valuable da Vinci sketch she stole from him. To reclaim it, Archimedes is determined to seduce the stubborn woman who once tossed him to a ravenous pack of zombies, but she's no easy conquest.When da

Vinci's sketch attracts a dangerous amount of attention, Yasmeen and Archimedes journey to Horde-occupied Morocco - and straight into their enemy's hands. But as they fight to save themselves and a city on the brink of rebellion, the greatest peril Yasmeen faces is from the man who seeks to melt her icy heart . . .

Meljean Brook's *Heart of Steel* is a fantastic steampunk adventure . . . with a sensuous, romantic edge. Praise for Meljean Brook: 'Meljean Brook has brilliantly defined the new genre of steampunk romance' Jayne Ann Krentz 'A stunning blend of steampunk setting and poignant romance - smart, sexy, breathtaking and downright addictive' Ilona Andrews 'Engrossing steampunk adventure . . . a complex, gripping read' Publishers Weekly

Meljean Brook lives in Oregon with her family. She is the author of the Iron Seas steampunk series which began with *The Iron Duke* and is also published by Penguin.

Extrait Yasmeen hadn't had any reason to fly her airship into the small Danish township of Fladstrand before, but her reputation had obviously preceded her. All along the Scandinavian coast, rum dives served as a town's only line of defense against mercenaries and pirates and as soon as the sky paled and *Lady Corsair* became visible on the eastern horizon, lights began appearing in the windows of the public houses alongside the docks. The taverns were opening early, hoping to make a few extra deniers before midday . . . and the good citizens of Fladstrand were probably praying that her crew wouldn't venture beyond the docks and into the town itself. Unfortunately for them, *Lady Corsair's* crew wasn't in Fladstrand to drink. Nor were they here to cause trouble, but Yasmeen wasn't inclined to let the town know that. Let them tremble for a while. It did her reputation good. Dawn had completely faded from the sky by the time *Lady Corsair* breached the mouth of the harbor. Standing behind the windbreak on the quarterdeck, Yasmeen aimed her spyglass at the skyrunners tethered over the docks. She recognized each airship all of them served as passenger ferries between the Danish islands to the east and Sweden to the north. Several heavy-bottomed cargo ships floated in the middle of the icy harbor, their canvas sails furled and their wooden hulls rocking with each swell. Though she knew the skyrunners, Yasmeen couldn't identify every ship in the water. Most of Fladstrand fished or farmed two activities unrelated to the sort of business Yasmeen conducted. Whatever cargo the ships carried probably fermented or flopped, and she had no interest in either until they reached her mug or her plate. When *Lady Corsair's* long shadow passed over the flat, sandy shoreline and the first rows of houses overlooking the sea, Yasmeen ordered the engines cut. Their huffing and vibrations gave way to the flap of the airships unfurling sails and the cawing protests of seabirds. Below, the narrow cobblestone streets lay almost empty. A steamcart pattered along beside an ass-drawn wagon loaded with wooden barrels, but most of the good people of Fladstrand scrambled back to their homes as soon as they spotted *Lady Corsair* in the skies above them hiding behind locked doors and shuttered windows, hoping that whatever business Yasmeen had wouldn't involve them. They were in luck. Today, Yasmeen only sought one woman: Zenobia Fox, author of several popular stories that Yasmeen had read to pieces, and sister to a charming antiquities salvager whose adventures Zenobia based her stories on . . . a man whom Yasmeen had recently killed. Yasmeen had also killed their father and taken over his airship, renaming her *Lady Corsair*. That had happened some time ago, however, and no one would consider Emmerich Gunther-Baptiste charming, including his daughter. Yasmeen had seen Zenobia Fox once before, though the girl had been called Geraldine Gunther-Baptiste then. As one of the mercenary crew aboard Gunther-Baptiste's skyrunner, Yasmeen had watched an awkward girl with mousy-brown braids wave farewell to her father from the docks. Zenobia had been standing next to her pale and worn-looking mother. Neither she nor her mother had appeared sorry to see him go. Would Zenobia be sorry that her brother was dead? Yasmeen didn't know, but it promised to be an entertaining encounter. She hadn't looked forward to meeting someone this much since Archimedes Fox had first boarded *Lady Corsair* and before she'd learned that he was really Wolfram Gunther-Baptiste. Hopefully, her acquaintance with his sister wouldn't end the same way. A familiar grunt came from Yasmeen's left. *Lady Corsair's* quartermaster stood at the port rail, consulting a hand-drawn map before casting a derisive look over the town. Yasmeen tucked her scarf beneath her chin so the heavy wool wouldn't muffle her voice. Is there a problem, Monsieur Rousseau? Rousseau pushed his striped scarf away from his mouth, exposing a short black beard. With gloved hands, he gestured to the rows of houses, each one identical to the next in all but color. Only that they are exactly the same, Captain. But it is not a problem. It is simply an irritant. Yasmeen nodded. She didn't doubt Rousseau could find the house. Though hopeless with a sword or gun, her quartermaster could interpret the most rudimentary of maps as if they'd been drawn by skilled cartographers. That ability, combined with his expressive grunts and eyebrows that could wordlessly discipline or praise the aviators and a booming voice for when nothing but words would do made him the most valuable member of Yasmeen's crew. A significant number of jobs that Yasmeen took in Europe

required Lady Corsair to navigate through half-remembered terrain and landmarks. Historical maps of the continent were easy to come by, but matching their details to the overgrown ruins that existed now demanded another skill entirely that of reading the story of the Hordes centuries-long occupation. Though not ruins, Fladstrands identical rows of houses told another tale, one that Yasmeen had seen repeated along the Scandinavian coastlines. In one of her adventures, Zenobia Fox had written that the worth of any society could be judged by measuring the length of time it took for dissenters to go from the street to the noose. Zenobia might have based that statement on the history of her adopted Danish home; a few centuries ago, that time hadnt been long at all. Soon after the Hordes war machines had broken through the Hapsburg wall, theyd deliberately created a zombie infection that had outpaced their armies, and the steady trickle of refugees from eastern Europe had opened into a flood. Those who had the means bought passage aboard a ship to the New World, but those without money or connections migrated north, pushing farther and farther up the Jutland Peninsula until they crowded the northern tip. Some fled across the sea to Norway and Sweden, while others bargained for passage to the Danish islands. Those refugees who were left built rows of shacks, and waited for the Horde and the zombies to come. Neither had. The Horde hadnt pressed farther north than the Limfjord, a shallow sound that cut across the tip of Jutland, separating it from the rest of the peninsula and creating an island of the area. The same stretch of water stopped most of the zombies; walls built near the sound stopped the rest. Poverty and unrest had plagued the crowded refugees, and the noose had seen frequent use, but the region slowly recovered. Rows of shacks became rows of houses. Now quiet and stable, many of the settlements attracted families from England, recently freed from Horde occupation, and from the New World. Zenobia Fox and her brother had made up one of those families. We are coming over her home now, Captain. Rousseaus announcement emerged in frozen puffs. How long do you intend to visit with her? How long would it take to say that Archimedes had discovered a valuable artifact before Yasmeen had killed him, and then pay the woman off? With luck, Zenobia Fox would send Yasmeen on her way in a fit of self-righteous fury though it might be more entertaining if she tried to send Yasmeen off with a gun. In both scenarios, Yasmeen would hold on to all of the money, which suited her perfectly. Not long, she predicted. Lower the ladder. Rousseau relayed the order and within moments, the crew unrolled the rope ladder over Lady Corsairs side. Yasmeen glanced down. Zenobias orange, three-level home sat between two identical houses painted a pale yellow. Unlike many of the houses in Fladstrand, the levels hadnt been split into three separate flats. The slate roof was in good repair, the trim around the windows fresh. Lace curtains prevented Yasmeen from looking into the rooms. Wrought-iron flower boxes filled with frosted-over soil projected from beneath each window sill. Large and well-tended, the house provided ample room for one woman. Yasmeen supposed that much space was the best someone could hope for when living in a town but she couldnt have tolerated being anchored to one place. Why would Zenobia Fox? She had based her adventures on her brothers travels, but why not travel herself? Yasmeen couldnt understand it. Perhaps money had been a factor although by the look of her home, Zenobia didnt lack funds. No matter. After Yasmeen paid her off, Zenobia wouldnt need to base her stories on Archimedes adventures. She could go as she pleased or not and it wouldnt be any concern of Yasmeeens. As this was a social visit, she removed the guns usually tucked into her wide crimson belt. At the beginning of the month, shed traded her short aviators jacket for a long winter overcoat. The two pistols concealed in her deep pockets provided enough protection, and were backed up by the daggers tucked into the tops of her boots, easily reachable at mid-thigh. She checked her hair, making certain that her blue kerchief covered the tips of her tufted ears. If necessary, she could use her braids to do the same, but the kerchief was more distinctive. There would be no doubt exactly who had dropped in on Zenobia Fox today. The ladder swayed when Yasmeen hopped over the rail and let the first rung catch her weight. Normally shed have slid down quickly and landed with an acrobatic flourish, but her woolen gloves didnt slide over the rope well and Yasmeen didnt know how long she would be waiting on the doorstep. Cold, stiff fingers made drawing a knife or pulling a trigger difficult, and she wouldnt risk them for the sake of a flip or two. The neighbors might have appreciated it, though. All along the street, curtains twitched. When Yasmeen pounded the brass knocker on Zenobias front door, many became bold enough to show their faces at the windows probably thanking the heavens that she hadnt knocked at their doors. No one peeked through the curtains at Zenobias house. The door opened, revealing a pretty blond woman in a pale blue dress. Though a rope ladder swung behind Yasmeen and a skyrunner hovered over the street, the woman didnt glance up. A dull-witted maid, Yasmeen guessed. Or a poor, dull-witted relation. Yasmeen knew very little about current fashion, but even she could see that although the dress was constructed of good materials and sewn well, the garment sagged in the bodice and the hem piled

on the floor. The woman must have recognized Yasmeen as a foreigner, however. A thick Germanic accent gutted her French, the common traders language. May I help you? I need to speak with Miss Zenobia Fox.

Yasmeen smoothed the Arabic from her own accent, hoping to avoid an absurd comedy of misunderstandings on the doorstep. Is she at home? The woman's eyebrows lifted in a regal arch. I am she. This wasn't a maid? How unexpected. Despite the large house and obvious money, Zenobia Fox opened her own door? Yasmeen liked surprises; they made everything so much more interesting. She'd never have guessed that the tall, awkward girl with mousy-brown braids would have bloomed into this delicate blond thing. She'd never have guessed that her first impression of the woman who penned clever and exciting tales would be dull-witted. Archimedes certainly hadn't been. Quick with a laugh or clever response, he'd perfectly fit Yasmeen's image of Archimedes Fox, Adventurer. She could see nothing of Archimedes in this woman, not in the soft shape of her face or the blue of her eyes, and certainly not in her manner. Blond eyebrows arched ever higher. And you are . . . ? I am Lady Corsair's captain. Kerchief over the hair, indecently snug trousers, a skyrunner that had once belonged to Zenobia's father floating over her house, was this woman completely blind? Your brother recently traveled on my airship. Oh. How can I help you? How can I help you? Disbelieving, Yasmeen stared at the woman. Could an aviator's daughter be this sheltered? What else could it mean when the captain of a vessel appeared on her doorstep? Every time that Yasmeen had knocked on a door belonging to one of her crew members' families, the understanding had been immediate. Sometimes it had been accompanied by denial, grief, or anger, but they all knew what it meant when Yasmeen arrived. Perhaps because Archimedes had been a passenger rather than her crew, Zenobia didn't expect it. But the woman should have made the connection by now. I have unfortunate news regarding your brother, Miss Fox. The unfortunate news must have clued her in. Zenobia blinked, her hand flying to her chest. Archimedes? At a time like this, she called him Archimedes, not Wolfram, the name she'd have known him by for most of her life? Either they'd completely adopted their new identities, or this was an act. If it was an act, this encounter was already turning out better than Yasmeen had anticipated. Perhaps we can speak inside, Miss Fox. With an uncertain smile, the other woman stepped back. Yes, of course. Zenobia led the way into a parlor, her too-long skirts dragging on the wooden floor. A writing desk sat by the window, stacked with blank papers. No clickity transcribers ball was in sight, and no ink stained Zenobia's fingers. Obviously she hadn't been busy penning the next Archimedes Fox adventure. A shelf over the fireplace held several baubles, some worn by age, others encrusted with dirt. A silver snuff box, a lady's miniature portrait, a gold tooth. All items that Archimedes had collected during his salvaging runs in Europe, Yasmeen realized. All items that he'd picked from the ruins but hadn't sold. Why keep these? Her gaze returned to the lady in the miniature. Soft brown hair, warm eyes, a plain dress. The description seemed familiar, though Yasmeen knew she hadn't seen this portrait before. No, it was a description from Archimedes Fox and the Specter of Notre Dame. In the story, he'd found a similar miniature clutched in a skeleton's fingers, and the mystery surrounding the woman's identity had led the adventurer to a treasure hidden beneath the ruined cathedral. How odd that she'd never realized that fictional miniature had a real-life counterpart. That she'd never imagined him digging it out of the muck somewhere and bringing it to his sister. That he'd once held it, as she did now. The stupid man. Yasmeen lied often, and so she didn't care that he'd lied about his identity when he'd arranged for passage on her airship. It did matter that she'd allowed Emmerich Gunther-Baptiste's son aboard her airship without knowing who he really was. A threat had sneaked onto Lady Corsair right beneath her nose. She couldn't forgive him for that. Too often, she led her crew into dangerous territory, and they would only be loyal to a strong captain. A captain they could trust. She'd invested years making certain that her crew could trust her, and rewarded their loyalty with piles of money. There wasn't enough gold in the world to convince a crew to follow a fool, and Archimedes Fox had come close to turning her into one when he'd boarded her ship. She'd only been saved because he'd openly thanked her for killing his father, negating his potential threat. He'd become a joke, instead. And later, when he had threatened her in front of the crew, she'd gotten rid of him . . . maybe. Yasmeen turned to Zenobia, who stood quietly in the center of the parlor, tears trailing over her pink cheeks. So Archimedes . . . is dead? she whispered. Funny how that terrible accent came and went. As dead as Genghis Khan, Yasmeen confirmed. Unfortunate, as I said. He was a handsome bastard. Oh, my brother! Zenobia buried her face in her hands. Yasmeen let her sob for a minute. Do you want to know how he died? Zenobia lifted her head, sniffing into a lace handkerchief, her blue eyes bright with more tears. Well, yes, I suppose I killed him. I dropped him from my airship into a pack of flesh-eating zombies. The other woman had nothing to say to that. She stared at Yasmeen, her fingers twisting in the handkerchief. He tried to take control of my ship. You understand. Yasmeen flopped onto a sofa and hooked

her leg over the arm. Zenobias face reddened and she averted her gaze. Not accustomed to seeing a woman in trousers, apparently. He hasnt come around for a visit, has he? A visit? Her head came back around, eyes wide. But I tossed him into a canal. Venice is still full of them, did you know? Zenobia shook her head. Well, some are more swamp than canal, but they are still there and zombies dont go into the water. We both know that Archimedes has escaped more dire situations than that, at least according to his adventures. Youve read your brothers stories, Miss Fox, havent you? Of . . . course. He mentions the canals in Archimedes Fox and the Mermaid of Venice. Oh, yes. Id forgotten. There was no Mermaid of Venice adventure, yet the woman whod supposedly written it didnt even realize shed been caught in her lie. Pitiful. But the question remained: Did that mean Zenobia wasnt the author after all, or was this not Zenobia? Yasmeen suspected the latter. So

he might be alive? Zenobia ventured. He still had most of his equipment and weapons. But if he hasnt contacted you after two months now . . . he must be dead, Im sorry to say. Yasmeen meant it, but she wasnt sorry for the next. And so he is the second man in your family Ive killed. Surprise and dismay flashed across her expression. Yes, of course. My . . . She trailed off into a sob. Oh, that was good cover. Father. Yasmeen helped her along. Yes, my father. After he . . . did something terrible, too. That was good, too. Smart not to suggest that the armed woman sitting in the room had been at fault. Obviously this woman had no idea who shed targeted by taking Zenobia Foxs place. If asked, shed probably say that her fathers surname had been Fox, as well. She wouldnt know that Emmerich Gunther-Baptiste had once tried to roast a mutineer alive.

Yasmeen hadnt had any love for the mutineer but shed shot him in the head anyway, to put him out of his misery. Shed shot Gunther-Baptiste when hed ordered the other mercenaries to put her on the roasting spit in the mutineers place. When Yasmeen realized that shed attained a beauty of an airship in the process, shed shot every other crew member who tried to take it from her. After a while, theyd stopped trying and began taking orders, instead. Did he do something terrible? Ive killed so many people, I forget what my reasons were. A lie, but Yasmeen wasnt the only one telling them. Now it was time to find out this womans reasons.

With a belabored sigh, she climbed to her feet. Thats all Ive come to say. A few of Archimedes belongings are still in my ship. Would you like to have them, or should I distribute them among my crew? Oh, yes. Thats

fine. For a moment, the blond seemed distracted and uncertain. Then her shoulders squared, and she said, My brother hired you to take him to Venice, and was searching for a specific item. Did he find it . . . before

he died? Ah, so thats what it was. Yasmeen had spoken to three art dealers about locating a buyer for the sketch Archimedes Fox had found in Venice. A flying machine drawn by the great inventor Leonardo da Vinci, the sketch was valuable beyond measure. Shed demanded that the dealers be discreet in their inquiries.

Not even Yasmeeens crew knew what shed locked away in her cabin. But obviously, someone had talked. It was a fake, Yasmeen lied. No uncertainty weakened Zenobias expression now. Id still like to have it. As a memento. Yasmeen nodded. If youll show me out, Ill retrieve it for you now. She followed the woman from the parlor and into the hallway. Will you hold the rope ladder for me? Its so unsteady. Of course. All smiles,

Zenobia reached the front door. Yasmeen didnt give her a chance to open it. Slapping her gloved hand over the blonds mouth, she kicked the womans knees out from beneath her. Yasmeen slammed her against the

floor and shoved her knife against the womans throat. Quietly, she hissed, Where is Zenobia Fox? The woman struggled for breath. I am Zen. A press of the blade cut off the womans lie. Yasmeen smiled, and the

womans skin paled. Her smile frequently had that effect. The dress doesnt fit you. Youve tried to take Zenobias place but youve no idea who youre pretending to be. Where is she? When the womans lips pressed together in an unmistakable response, Yasmeen let her blade taste blood. The woman whimpered. I imagine

that youre working with someone. You didnt think of this yourself. Is he waiting upstairs? The womans eyelids flickered. Answer enough. I can kill you now and ask him instead, Yasmeen said. That made her

willing to talk. Her lips parted. Yasmeen didnt allow her enough air to make a sound. Is Zenobia in the house? Nod once if yes. Nod. Is she alive? Nod. Good. Yasmeen might not kill this woman now. She eased

back just enough to let the woman respond. Where did you hear about the sketch? Port Fallow, she whispered. Everyone knew that Fox boarded your airship in Chatham. We realized he must have found the sketch on his last salvaging run. Yasmeen had only spoken to one art dealer in Port Fallow: Franz Kessler.

Damn his loose tongue. Shed make certain he wouldnt talk out of turn again especially if this had been his idea. This woman certainly hadnt the wits to connect the sketch to Zenobia. You and the one upstairs. Was this his plan? Yasmeen interpreted her hesitation as a yes and that this woman was afraid of him. Shed chosen

the wrong person to fear. What airship did you fly in on? Windrunner. Last night. A passenger ship. Whos upstairs? Peter Mattson. Miracle Mattson, the weapons smuggler. A worthy occupation, in Yasmeeens opinion,

but Miracle Mattson sullied the profession. He always recruited partners to assist him with the job, but as

soon as the cargo was secure, the partners conveniently disappeared. Mattson usually claimed an attack by Horde forces or zombies had killed them, yet every time, he miraculously survived. No doubt that if this woman had secured the sketch for him, she'd have disappeared soon, too. Did he hire you just for this job? Yes. I'm grateful. I've been out of work for almost a full season. A full season of what? This woman's soft hands had never seen any kind of labor. Only one possibility occurred to her. Are you an actor? The blond nodded. And dancer. But the company replaced us all with automatons. If this woman's performance was an example, Yasmeen suspected that the automatons displayed more talent. All right. Call Mattson down. Why? Because I'll make you a better deal than he will. Yasmeen wouldn't kill her, anyway. Probably. And because if I go upstairs holding a knife to your throat, he might do something stupid to Miss Fox. Oh. Her eyes widened. How do I call him? God save her from idiots. I'll let you up. You'll open and close the door as if you've just come in from outside, and yell, I've got it! Come see! You'll be very excited. And then? I'll do the rest. She waited for the woman to nod then hauled her up. Now. Yasmeen had to give the actress credit; even with a knife at her throat, she played her part perfectly. Mattson must have realized that something was amiss, however. No answer came from upstairs. Perhaps he'd taken a look out the window and saw that Yasmeen had never climbed back up to the airship. She didn't think he'd heard their whispers. When noise finally came from above, the walls and ceiling muffled Mattson's low voice. Get up. A thud followed the rough order, the sound of a body falling onto the floor, then the slow shuffle of feet and the heavy, regular tread of boots. Stay quiet. Don't try anything stupid. Ah, Mattson. Always predictable. Of course he wouldn't come down alone and risk his neck. He was bringing Zenobia with him, probably with a gun at her head and he likely intended to offer the woman's life in exchange for the sketch. Yasmeen couldn't imagine why he thought it would work. Did she look that foolish? After she handed over the sketch, nothing would stop him from shooting them all. No, Mattson was the only fool here. Knife still at the actress's throat, Yasmeen dragged her into the parlor. She stopped with her back to the window, the actress in front of her and facing the parlor entry. An escape in one direction, a shield in the other. If Mattson began firing, Yasmeen preferred that the bullets didn't hit her first, and the actress's body hid the gun Yasmeen tucked into the sash at her waist. No need to draw it yet. Her blade would do until she was tired of talking. As if suddenly realizing what her position meant, the actress emitted a desperate squeak. Yasmeen hissed a warning in her ear, and the woman fell silent, trembling. The tread of boots reached the stairs. Slowly, they came into view, Zenobia's pale bare feet and Mattson's shining black boots. Her hands had been bound at the wrists. He must have surprised Zenobia while she slept. Rags knotted her brown hair, and she wore a sturdy white sleeping gown. A wide strip of torn linen served as a gag, stretched tight between dry lips and tied behind her head. Her eyes were the same shade as Archimedes' emerald, rather than the yellowish-green of Yasmeen's and bright with anger and fear. Zenobia's gaze locked on Yasmeen's, but aside from a quick glance at the woman's face and at the revolver that Mattson held to the side of her throat, Yasmeen didn't bother to pay her any attention. Mattson served as the greater threat here, and Yasmeen wasn't a fool to be taken unawares while making cow-eyes at a writer whose work she adored. Though Zenobia was a tall woman, Mattson's height left him completely exposed from chin to crown. Idiot. He ought to have been crouching, but perhaps he considered any sort of cower an affront to his dignity. Sporting a neatly trimmed blond mustache and wearing a pressed jacket and trousers, he stood straight as any soldier, but Yasmeen had never known any soldier who took offense as easily as Peter Mattson. The sun reddened his skin rather than tanned it, so that he always appeared flushed with anger as he often was, anyway. Belligerent the moment anyone questioned his character and big enough to pose a challenge, he'd become a favorite amongst the regulars at the Port Fallow taverns who found their entertainment by picking fights. He stopped just at the entrance to the parlor, standing in the foyer and with Zenobia filling the door frame. He'd have a direct line to the front door so he also kept a shield and an escape. The fool. If Mattson didn't want to be shot, he shouldn't have come down the stairs with his gun already drawn. Pale blue eyes met hers. Lady Corsair. Captain Corsair. Her airship was a lady, but Yasmeen certainly wasn't. She didn't bother to correct him, however. Everyone called her by the wrong name. No surprise he did, too. Mr. Mattson, she said. I believe you are here to make an exchange. Your woman for mine, perhaps? I want the sketch. Of course he did and of course he'd never get it. But as a woman of business, she was curious as to what he'd offer. In exchange for what? Nothing. So generous, yet I'm not tempted to accept. You should be. Give the sketch to me now, and my associates might let you live. I'll tell them you cooperated. Yasmeen couldn't have that. And ruin my reputation? I don't think so, Mr. Mattson, especially since you usually kill your associates. I doubt I'll have much to fear from them. You have no idea who you're up against. His gaze left Yasmeen and fell to the knife at the actress's throat. His lips curled. Do you think I care whether she dies? Go

on, slit herThe crack of Yasmeeens pistol cut off the rest. Mattsons brains splattered against the foyer wall. His body dropped, gun clattering against the wood floorand luckily, did not discharge on impact.Eyes wide, Zenobia lifted her bound hands and touched the blood sprayed across her cheek and temple. She startled from her stupor and almost tripped over Mattsons boots when the actress suddenly shrieked, ducking and covering her ears. A bit late for thatthough if she kept screaming, Yasmeeen might shoot her just to shut her up.She tucked the weapon back into her sash and crossed the room to nudge Mattsons thigh with her toe. Dead. Yasmeeen knew many people who seemed to function well without brains, but her bullet had definitely done this one in. Blood pooled beneath his head.A hell of a mess, Yasmeeen said, and slipped her blade between Zenobias wrists, slicing through the ties. She did the same to the womans gag. If you need to vomit, I suggest you do it on him. Theres less to clean up.Thank you, Zenobia rasped. The corners of her mouth were raw. But I dont need to.Then she glanced down at Mattsons face, bent over, and did.Revue de pressePraise for the Novels of the Iron SeasMeljean Brook has brilliantly defined the new genre of Steampunk Romance.New York Timesbestselling authorJayne Ann KrentzA stunning blend of steampunk setting and poignant romancesmart, sexy, breathtaking, and downright addicting.New YorkTimesbestselling authorIlona AndrewsI cant get enough of exploring the Iron Seas; every glimpse of this alternate history leaves me fascinated and hungry for more.All Things Urban FantasyTruly a masterpiece!...This is steampunk at its fun and thrilling best!RT Book s From the Trade Paperback edition.