



The Queen's Rain: After Ever After: Book III

Mindi Meltz

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Those fallible kings who are left standing witness the storied rise of their indomitable queens in Mindi Meltz's stunning fantasy novel *The Queen's Rain*, the third book of the After Ever After series.

King Sol is dead, and Sirenia is held by Barbarians under the leadership of Leo, a heartless usurper. Ella, in exile in the Ghost Kingdom, fortifies herself against the coming difficulties; in a cave held by fleeing Barbarian woman, she begins to recognize her own strength. Meanwhile, Mina summons the audacity to call unicorns back into being, though the people of her kingdom thought them extinct. And Lemara, back in the South Forest, fights against changes to the priestess's role, regenerating the old magic that made her land's wild expanses so special.

The rich, poetic language that marked the previous volumes is represented here as well—deepened, even, by the book's fresh nuances and realizations. There are ghosts and mermaids; there are acts of rebellion and reconciliation, too. And though it follows tragedies, this trilogy entry is a triumphant one: its defiant women cycle their lands toward regeneration, exemplifying strength and challenging comfortable paradigms regarding right and wrong—and even regarding sacred and profane. It recognizes the fragility of lives and kingdoms, noting that “with every magic, when we fell in love with it, we broke it with our clutching hands.” And it elevates women to a place of reverence, noting their singular strength, and casting suspicion on every patriarchal expectation: “everything beautiful that was beaten down and forbidden ... belongs to woman.”

It is human habit, and folly, to fear what is magical: so the unforgettable women of *The Queen's Rain* know. This gorgeous fantasy novel works to reposition what's powerful and elemental about stories we all know well, but whose contours we learned to take for granted.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July / August 2022)

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