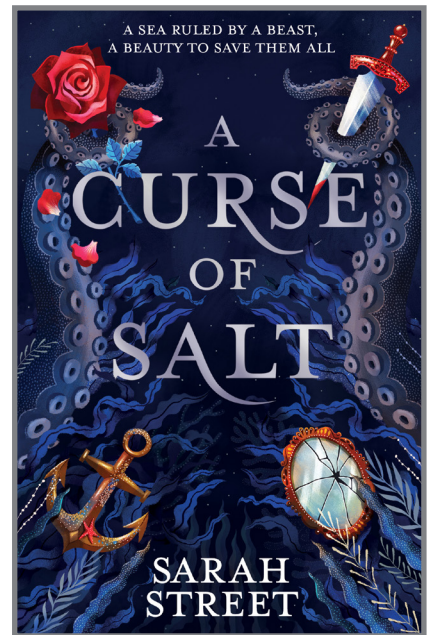


A Curse of Salt

AUTHOR

SARAH STREET



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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Secondary
(Violence, Alcohol References, Sexual References)

SYNOPSIS

A heartless beast

A sister's sacrifice

And a love so strong it will drown the raging sea . . .

THIS FAIRYTALE IS CURSED

In a kingdom that fears the sea, Ria Lucroy longs to be brave.

Bodies are washing ashore and everyone knows who's to blame. Legends of the Heartless King shroud the continent in fear; they call him a pirate, a monster, a god. When his mercenaries raid her father's merchant ship, Ria's family is faced with a horrifying demand. They will spare his life, in exchange for one of his daughters.

Determined to save her sisters, Ria launches herself into the world of pirates. Face-to-face with the Heartless King, she finds he is far more than the stories told. He is a man, with a human name and blood-stained hands, bound to the seas by a centuries-old curse. As their chemistry blooms into something more, Ria finds herself caught in an ancient web of secrets.

Battling creatures of the deep alongside those that reign its surface, Ria discovers how to love a heartless man and that some curses aren't so easy to break.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Street is a YA fantasy author, born and raised on Gadigal land in Sydney, Australia. She has a BA in English and Criminology and spends her days amid a hoard of books, playing Hozier songs to her houseplants and deciding what great body of water to write about next.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What do you think this book might be about?
 - What do you think the roses might symbolise?
 - Looking at the text on the front cover, what does this tell us about the genre of the novel?

- Where do you think this book is likely to be set, and why?
- While reading the novel, keep a character or plot journal. At the end of each chapter note down all the new characters introduced, what you know of them, and their relationship to Ria. Include notes where Ria's relationships change over time, and commentary on revelations and character development. As a class, discuss how Ria's limited understanding of events constrains the reader's understanding of the various characters and their motivations. Why might the author have chosen to craft the novel using this technique? Consider what it adds to the reading experience, and what its downsides are.
- Ria is described on p 39 as 'the sole heir to the throne.' If there were less murdering, magic, and deception, and Ria's world followed the same rules of inheritance as does the British Monarchy, what would the line of succession actually look like?
- What is a vendetta, and why does Bane have one against Oren? Do you think that Bane's attitude and behaviour is justified? Why/why not? If you were living in Oren's realm, would you support Bane?
 - Write a letter from a villager or townspeople to a friend or relative describing Bane's campaign, and sharing your reasons for either supporting him or remaining loyal to the king. In your letter, use examples of his behaviour and motives as mentioned in the story, and present a logical argument for your chosen course of action.
- Aurelia only gradually learns the details of her own family history, as well as the history behind Sebastien's curse. Write a brief summary of both her family history, and Sebastien's, in the style of a dry historical record intended for the archives.
- Why have Aberdeen and her father kept the truth about their family hidden from Ria? Do you think they were right to do so? Why/why not? Write a diary entry from the point of view of one of these two, sharing their thought process about what to tell Ria and Felicie and why they might want to conceal some of the details from them.
- On p 49 Ria says that 'That is what magic was—wasn't it? Something to fear?' Given what you know of the magic that appears and is used in Ria's world, do you think that she is correct in her categorisation of magic as something to fear? Write a short piece outlining the reasons why someone should or should not fear magic, using evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- *A Curse of Salt* contains a variety of fairy-tale elements, as well as several tropes common to young adult fantasy novels. In small groups discuss which elements and tropes you have identified within the novel, and why the author might have chosen to include them. As a class, discuss the conclusions that each group came to, and share your insights with each other.
- When Ria first arrives on the *Blood Rose* she is told to stay out of the Heartless King's sight, and so stays in the cabin for an entire week. She sleeps, wanders around the room, and writes in the condensation on the window. If you were to find yourself confined in Ria's room for an entire week, what might you do to pass the time? In small groups discuss this, and come up with a daily program to keep you from boredom and misery.
- In her verbal confrontation with the Heartless King, Ria accuses him of profiting off others' misery. She says 'Is that what it means to be powerful? . . . Having everything you could possibly need and still taking from others?' In small groups, or as a class, discuss this definition of what being powerful entails.
- What are some of the recurring motifs throughout the novel, and what is their specific symbolism both in terms of modern mythology, and in relation to the events in the book? Write a brief analysis of the symbolic imagery used in the novel, identifying at least two recurring motifs or themes, and exploring their relevance and meaning. Use evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- Paint a detailed picture of one of the scenes in the novel, based upon Ria's description.
- Visit a maritime museum and take a tour of a sailing ship. Upon returning to class, discuss how much magic must inform the layout and behaviour of the *Blood Rose*, in comparison to the ordinary ship you have toured.
- Create a map or diagram showing what you know of the layout of the *Blood Rose* based on Ria's descriptions and your knowledge of sailing ships. Mark clearly on your diagram where magic is used to create larger and more comfortable spaces than reality would allow for.
- Write a short fiction that would fit well in the storybook Ria reads about Sebastien's homeland.
- Ria dreams of a 'world of crimson tides and star-soaked sky.' (p 126). What do you imagine this might look like? Create an artwork inspired by this description.

- In small groups, create a plot map showing the relationships Ria has with the other characters, and how they change over time. Use your plot and character journal from the previous activity to assist you.
- Ria's understanding of who the heroes are, and who are the villains of her world, changes over time as she learns more about events and character motivation. As a class, discuss what makes a character a hero or a villain, and consider at what point in the novel does Ria's understanding of Sebastien, his history, and his motivation, tip her opinion of him over from villain to hero?
- Golde, Sebastien and Aron originally appear to Ria to be effectively immortal—yet they refer to this as a curse. Would you consider immortality to be a blessing or a curse? Why and in what ways? What circumstances might change your answer? Have a class debate around the following topic:
 - Immortality is a curse, not a blessing.
- On p 262 Ria says 'It wasn't fear pushing the air from my lungs but a breathless expectancy, the promise of what lay beyond. Of the truth, at last.' What does this statement mean? How else might someone feel right before the truth is revealed? How would you paraphrase this statement?
 - Create a crossword with descriptive words and phrases from the novel as the answers, and your paraphrased explanations as the clues.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE