**Ship of Destiny: Book Three of The Liveship Traders**

One has to use a jeweler's loupe to find a flaw or a dull moment in this splendid conclusion to one of the finest fantasy sagas to bridge the millennium. True, there are moments in this third novel of the Liveship Traders Trilogy (Mad Ship; Ship of Magic) when things progress too easilyDthe folk of Bingtown, for example, seem to embrace diversity, equality and female empowerment too quickly to be believed. But otherwise, this book soars. Hobb weaves together multiple storylines: there's Althea Vestrit's quest for her family's liveship, Vivacia; the awakening of Paragon (the eponymous "ship of destiny"); the establishing of links between the liveships made of wizardwood and the sea serpents who, cocooned in wizardwood, mature into dragons; the appearance of the dragon Tintaglia; and the maturing of Malta Haven through rescuing the Satrap. Such a profusion of plotlines could have overwhelmed or slowed down the book, but Hobb handles them with such agility that the reader is likely to want not fewer but more stories. The most absorbing theme continues to revolve around Captain Kennit, his mistress, Etta (now carrying his child), and the conversion of Wintrow Haven into Kennit's heir as king of the Pirate Isles. (Kennit, perhaps the most interesting character in the trilogy, clearly was developed with a good deal of scholarship about the history of piracy.) This installment leaves nothing to be desired: the subplots advance in parallel; the nautical themes are handled splendidly; and the characters (including one of the more engaging and terrifying dragons in current fantasy) and world-building are of the very highest standard. Like its predecessors, this is a masterful achievement. Major ad/promo. (Aug.)   
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