



## The Viper

*Monica McCarty*

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**The Viper** Monica McCarty

**The war for Scotland's sovereignty rages on—as Robert the Bruce is crowned king and the Highland Guard, his elite fighting force of legendary warriors, battle for land . . . and love.**

Prized for his snakelike stealth and deadly strikes, Lachlan “Viper” MacRuairi is a warrior to enlist but not to trust. His only loyalty is to his purse, his indifference sealed by bitter betrayal. All that changes when Lachlan is tasked to protect and deliver Bella MacDuff to the king's coronation—and the proud, lushly sensual countess unwittingly challenges him to his greatest battle yet: to love again.

Passionate and devoted, Bella has defied Britain's king and her own husband to place the crown on Bruce's head, and for this she pays a terrible price: Losing her daughter and her freedom to her husband's vengeance. Imprisoned with barbaric cruelty, she vows to reclaim her child, even if it means selling her soul—and her body—to a dark, lethal warrior whose eyes glint like steel, but who makes her skin tingle and her breath race. Together they embark on a rogue mission with sinister twists and turns that threatens not only Bella's gamble to save her daughter—but also her heart.

*From the Paperback edition.*

## The Viper Details

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# From Reader Review The Viper for online ebook

## Tuba Özkat says

Monica McCarty'nin kitapları'nı gerçekten çok seviyorum. Hem anlatım çok güzel oluyor, hem de kurgunun arkası tamamen boş değil. Nani olmaz derli araştırmalar yapıyor, bazı gerçekleri ele alıyor, bazı gerçek kişileri alıyor, onları birleştiriyor, deyiştiriyor, olmasını istediği geçmişi yazıyor.

Bu serisini de çok seviyorum. Evet, bu kitap ilk üçü kadar akıcı bir harekete sahip değil bence. Biraz daha durgun gibiydi, hem de olan onca olaya rağmen!! Ama historical kitapları'nın arasında elmas gibi parlar. Kendi serisi içinde kıyaslısam 4 yıldız verirdim, ama bütün tür içinde kıyaslısam 5 yıldız verdim.

Monica'yla ilgili sevdiğim bir diğeryeyse "yazar notu." Gerçekten çok kıymetli ve ilgi çeken bilgiler veriyor orada. Yazdığı karakterlerin ya da kitapta geçen bazı olayları'nı, savaşları'nı gerçekte nasıl olduğunu anlatıyor. Tarihi bilgiler veriyor, onları bile merakla okutturuyor.

Bu kitapta yine meşhur "SKOÇ MUHAFAZ ALAYINDAN" özel bir muhafızı'mız var... Engerek MacRuairi ve Robert Bruce'a taç taktığı için cezalandırılarak bir kuledeki kafese kapatılan, mahkum edilen Kontes Isabella'nın hikayesi var. Bella ardında kalan kızını kurtarmak istiyor, Lachan MacRuairi de Bruce'a karışık görevini yerine getirmek, bununla işini bitirmek ve huzur bulmak istiyor. Ama kader bu iki kişiyi karışıklaştırıyor :))

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## Duchess Nicole says

I love the way that Monica McCarty uses real people and events and then creates a new world to throw them into. This entire Highland Guard series has been amazing. It reminds me a bit of Virginia Henley, in the fact that the author stays as true to history as she can while writing fictional historical romance.

Lachlan is the bad boy of the Highland Guard, the one who just doesn't seem to give a damn about anyone but himself. We've met him in previous books, namely The Chief, as he and Tor seem to butt heads continually. What people don't know is that his true goal in joining the elite group is to pay back the families that lost loved ones during his clan's darker days. He was betrayed by his wife and mistrusted by his family. In order to move on from his past, he signs for three years with Bruce and the guard.

One of his first tasks is to free Lady Bella MacDuff and bring her safely to the coronation of Robert the Bruce. The MacDuffs have crowned centuries of Scottish kings, and this particular coronation falls to Bella. Despite her husband's loyalties and the separation from her daughter, Bella feels bound to do her duty and take her place in history. Naturally, England's King Edward is incensed. This one act sets off a chain of horrific events, one that leads to Bella's imprisonment in a hanging cage as punishment for her treason against England, a country not even her own.

This story is intense. Neither Bella nor Viper want to want the other. But Viper can't leave Bella to the fate that she chose. He is chivalrous in the extreme, and surprised not only himself and Bella, but the other guard members (whom we see lots of, yay!) when he risks all to free Bella and begins to lose his heart to the tiny, fearless woman.

While the romance is, of course, one of the main aspects of the storyline, there is so much more to this book, and all of MM's books. It is rich in Scottish history, primarily in the time of Robert Bruce. Because come on, that is such a romantic time period!

This was a fabulous Highlander romance. I'll continue to snatch up everything by this author and encourage anyone who reads historical romance to read this author. She is absolutely a go-to author for a guaranteed good read.

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## Kübra Ya?mur Aslanhan says

S?nav sonras? tembellikten yeni yeni kurtulurken sonunda okumaya ve dolay?s?yla hayata dönmeye ba?lad?m. Ve tabii ki dönü?üm böyle bir güzellikle olsun istedim. Sonuçta burada Monica'dan ve bu muhte?em ?skoç Alay?'ndan bahsediyorum.

## ?SKOÇ YAN? ANLAYIN S?Z

Kitap yine ve yine harikayd? çünkü Monica'n?n gerçe?i al?p araya kendi masallar?n? kar??t?rd???n? bilerek okumak apayr? bir keyif veriyor. Kad?n?n yazma yetene?inden, dibimin dü?e dü?e bir hâl oldu?u sava?ç?lar?ndan falan bahsetmeme gerek oldu?unu bile dü?ünmüyorum.

MacRuairi okudu?um di?er ?skoç Alay? üyeleri gibi ?skoçlu?unun hakk?n? veren bir cengaverdi. Bilirsiniz, ?skoçluk mühim bir mevzu sabaha kadar sizlerle ?skoçlar? konu?abilirim. ? Sonlara gelene kadar yüreci?imden kopard???m be? y?ld?z? buraya yap??t?rmy? dü?ünüyordum ama sonunda kavu?tuklar?, birbirlerine aç?ld?klar? anda *yok ben suçluyum, yok ben hatal?y?m* diye Türk filmine ba?lad?lar. Dedim bir durun fgkcdfhgjhfg

Ama güzeldi.

Kendime geldi?imi iliklerime kadar hissetti?im bir historical romance oldu. Her Monica roman? gibi tavsiyemdir ancak bundan sonras?nda çevirinin olmay??? beni üzüyor. Historicallar? TR okumay? seviyorum ama yapacak bir ?ey yok, seriye devam etmek her ?eyden önemli.

**Tabii bu demek de?il ki s?navdan önce yapt???m gibi hunharca ?skoçlar?m? okuyaca??m. O s?navdan önceki kriz an?nda yapt???m bir hareketti. ?skoç istifçili?ine devam edece?im hiç de?ilse kalitesine güvendi?im yazarlar?. Çünkü bir Kübra sözü der ki“ZOR GÜNLER ?Ç?N YASTIK ALTINDA HEP B?R ?SKOÇ ROMANI BULUNMALI!”**

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## Laura the Highland Hussy says

<http://www.demonloversbooksandmore.co...>

This story begins with our heroine Lady Isabella MacDuff being led into a cage-a cage suspended above the courtyard at Berwick Castle. We see her strength of body, mind and spirit tested, as Bella has finally realized what crowning the Bruce king has cost her. The biggest price? She's lost her daughter. They had to leave 12 year old Joan behind with her father, which wasn't an awful fate for the girl since her father loved her, but

imagine a loving mother being forced to leave her daughter behind.

I feel that the hardest part about this book was the emotional torment of Bella. Not only did she leave her daughter behind, but Bella was captured, imprisoned, hung suspended from a cage for almost 2 years, she then was forced time and time again to make decisions no mother should have to make. The welfare of her daughter over her own, of course, but the costs were high. Her jailor/tormentor used her daughter as a reason to keep Bella in line. "We will let you write to her, if you..." or "if you escape, we will hurt your daughter..."

Lachlan and Bella's paths were constantly intertwined, as the two of them spent a lot of time together. He rescued her from her prison, but would she ever allow him close? It seemed that having been an object of lust her entire life, Bella wanted just one man to look at her without that gleam in his eye. But for some reason, when Lachlan looked at her with desire in his eyes, it didn't bother her as much.

I will definitely say that this is a very emotionally draining book. But Bella has become one of my favorite heroines of all time. She survived so much, she did so much, and she never came off as a perfect heroine, she was flawed, and she was so strong. Not just due to Ms. McCarty's incredible writing, but this woman was real, her imprisonment in the cage was real. My favorite thing about these books is the vast amount of truth and history woven into the story. I suggest reading the author's note at the end.

I really like that by the end, Bella was able to see that her husband was not as cruel as she'd originally thought him, that he deserved her pity more than anything, and she was able to let go of many hard feelings (oh don't get me wrong, the man was an ass, but it was nice to see a heroine look back and see that several things could have been handled differently and maybe her marriage wouldn't have been as awful as it had been). That's one of the reasons I love to read Ms. McCarty's work- she never takes the easy way out. Her characters have to work for their happy ending.

The only thing I missed was seeing the Guard act together more. But I think Lachlan needed to realize that even though he always says he works best alone, that he's come to depend on the other members of the Guard. And dare I say it, he kind of likes them. There is a scene at the end where he realizes just how much the Guard means to him, and he to them.

My favorite quote from this book was actually at the end. It shows everything from Bella's spirit, to how not everyone gets the pretty Happy Ever After. Sometimes it's more bittersweet than that, and you have to work for what you want. I loved that.

*"I know you were hoping for a different ending," Lachlan said quietly.*

*This war had taken so much from her. But Bella refused to let it cost her her daughter. "It's not the end, it's only the beginning."*

*With Lachlan by her side, she would fight to the end.*

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## **Kathleen says**

Story Rating 5 stars

Character Rating 5 stars

Romance Rating 5 stars

Heat Level 3.5 stars

Overall Rating 5 stars

Monica McCarty does it again. I just finished this book and I have chills all over. This story was a very emotional one that had me shedding tears often through out the story. What amazed me most is that Monica wove this story around actual people and actual history. Oh I'm sure this book is not for everyone but it was just right for me.

I very much look forwards to the next book in the Highland Guard series, The Saint to be released 3/27/2012

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### **?Karlyn P? says**

Very good. Wow, once again the author has written a story where the H/h are up against the most impossible odds.

Viper and Isabella are both tortured souls, so if you like the tortured soul trope you'll get double your pleasure with this story. Times were very hard in those days, war or not. But fighting enemies and being captured means making impossible decisions that risks your life and others.

Isabella is a true character in history who crowned Robert Bruce, making him King of Scotland and a greater foe to the English King Edward. In this embellished telling she is a mother of an 11 y/o daughter who she was forced to abandon, then later captured by the English. Isabella's quest for freedom and to reunite with her daughter is the cornerstone of this story. Lachlan/Viper (also an embellished true character in history) never forgets her, and finally wins her freedom by helping her escape. But Viper does not trust Isabella, despite his intense attraction to her. His first wife betrayed him and nearly cost him his life, and then lost her own life as a result of her actions.

While this may not be my favorite story in the series, it was still a great read. In places I thought their lust for each other was ill timed considering their initial anger with each other and their tortured state. And Isabella bordered on the TSTL a few times, although for quite understandable reasons. On the plus side, I have to say that the steamy scenes were excellent. I loved how they flowed within the story and were not just intermission breaks that could be skimmed over. Hot! I'm now looking forward to Saints story!! This is one of my favorite series.

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### **Sha Mslvoe says**

Monica McCarty is one of my favorite romance writers and I always know when I pick up one of her books that I'll feel better when I'm finished.

**I love this scene. I laughed hysterically as I read Viper hit Chief :D**

*"Damn it, Viper," a familiar voice said from above.*

*"What the hell did you hit him with?" Lachlan's stomach pitched forward. Ah hell.*

*"Hawk?" His cousin's grinning face peered down at him. He winked.*

*"At your service." Lachlan started over toward the body moaning on the ground.*

*"Who did I hit?"*

*"Chief."*

*He groaned, realizing the leader of the Highland Guard was sitting with his helmed head between his hands. From the dent on the nasal guard and the blood running down his nose, it looked like the small piece of metal between his eyes had saved him from much worse injury."*

I loved this story and will miss it. This is the best Highland Guards epilogue I've ever read. Looking forward to read The Saint.

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## **Aoi says**

The book that I've been anticipating for the entire series! Both Lachlan and Bella are such larger-than-life characters, Bella's fierce courage and Lachlan's bad boy and IDGAF persona; now that their story comes to fruition, it makes quite the tale.

*The Viper* opens with Bella McDuff heroically walking to her imprisonment, to be hung in an iron cage from the highest tower of Berwick Castle. She dared to defy her husband and King Edward by crowning Robert Bruce, a historic privilege granted only to her family, and one of the ways to legitimize Scotland's kings. The price of this act has been her being branded as a rebel, separation from her daughter and a harsh imprisonment.

“Let her be closely confined in an abode of stone and iron made in the shape of a cross, and let her be hung up out of doors in the open air at Berwick, that both in life and after her death, she may be a spectacle and eternal reproach to travellers.”

Spoken by King Edward of England in regards to our Isabel MacDuff

Exiled in the enemy's stronghold, she survives her ordeal by sheer pride and mental fortitude. With everything taken away from her she soldiers on, hoping to be reunited with her daughter once again. Bella was imprisoned for four years before being rescued by the same man who put her there- Lachlan MacRuari.

Lachlan, nicknamed Viper for his talents of evading capture and striking swiftly and lethal, has always been the outsider in the close knit group of the Highland Guard. Unlike the fierce loyalty towards their cause of his comrades, Lachlan's sword arm is loyal to his purse.

As much as they wish to avoid each other, Lachlan and Isabella's fates keep getting entangled- and with each encounter, their attraction intensifies. In the turbulent times leading to Bruce cementing his kingship, both must face their own demons. Being betrayed by the one he trusted, Lachlan has vowed never to form ties again. Bella, knowing only harshness and brutality by the hands of her husband, must risk putting her life in

the hands of a man with no loyalties.

The series keeps getting better and better as it progresses. It was a heart-stopping ride- a truly courageous heroine, an enigmatic hero, the beautiful and harsh setting of medieval Scotland; I literally lived their story through this book.

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### **~ Becs ~ says**

I very much enjoyed this and I think I may well have read it (perhaps devoured is a better word) much too fast.

I'd been looking forward to the story since the little teasers in The Ranger about Lachlan's feelings about Bella's fate. We start the story with Bella facing her punishment - incarceration in a very exposed cage atop a turret in a Scottish castle. I actually felt physically appalled by this because it is based in truth. This actually happened and I have lived in Scotland and it is cold and it rains a lot - it must have been an intolerable ordeal.

I'm not sure of the fate of the actual Isabella McDuff but, of course, Monica McCarty gives us the HEA that she deserves.

Enter stage right - Lachlan - a dour and humourless Highland Warrior. He's not big into trust having been betrayed by his first wife and, both he and Bella, spend a great deal of the novel denying their feelings toward each other to themselves due to their previous experiences.

The story revolves around Bella's attempts to evade her captors and to reunite with her daughter after several years helped all the way by Lachlan who tells himself he is doing this to ease his conscience as he feels responsible for her fate. The story gallops along with several twists until we reach our ultimate HEA.

Thoroughly enjoyable and engrossing.

I have to say I have a hard time remembering who each of the Highland Guard is - I can remember the ones who have already had a book but I forget who the rest are and confuse them all the time. I guess this will become clearer as the books are released.

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### **Alba Turunen says**

Una muy buena entrega éste cuarto libro de la Guardia de los Highlanders. De nuevo Monica McCarty me sorprende con lo buena escritora e investigadora que es (me leo siempre y sin falta sus notas de autora, me chiflan).

En éste cuarto libro toca la historia de Lachlan, el miembro de la Guardia más vil, "malvado" y malhablado,



tiene una fama atroz, se dice que mató a su esposa, y todo ello lo acompaña con una lengua viperina. En contraposición tenemos a Bella, condesa de Buchan, que como supimos en el primer libro, abandonó a su esposo, aliado con los ingleses, para coronar a Robert Bruce como rey de Escocia. Si algo lamenta Bella de la decisión que tomó fue dejar atrás a su hija, durante todo el libro estará presente ése estigma, y no descansará hasta tenerla de vuelta.

Pero nada en éste libro es fácil, es una de las historias más duras que he leído de Monica McCarty, y eso es mucho decir de una escritora que retrata fielmente la historia con toda la crueldad que realmente existió. Ambos protagonistas son personajes, que por un motivo u otro, son perseguidos por los ingleses, y dicha historia, tanto la de trasfondo como la romántica, se convertirá en una vertiginosa huida que no conocerá descanso. En éste sentido es una novela muy movida, con mucha aventura, y en la que están ocurriendo cosas continuamente, pero a pesar de ello no he podido dejar de notar que algunas partes me aburrían, como también (para mi gusto) demasiada escena encamada, normalmente Monica McCarty no abusa de dichas escenas, pero hacia el final de la novela se me hacía un poquito pesada.

Ambos personajes me han gustado, sobre todo Lachlan. Es de esos chicos malos, torturados, taaaaaaan reiterativos en romántica, pero que nunca decepcionan. De esos que sólo necesitan un empuje para enamorarse y volver a ser persona. Bella me ha gustado lo justo, reconozco que más de una vez me ha crispado con sus acciones, que sí, puedes entenderlas, pero se pasa medio libro metiéndose ella sola en peligro sin tener en cuenta las vidas de terceros, ése tipo de actitudes egoístas no me gustan, aunque se justifiquen por un noble motivo, pero si te dicen que estés quietecita, por algo es.

En resumen, me ha gustado mucho, y estoy deseando el libro de Santo, que es el siguiente. Y del cuál, creo que sé por dónde van los tiros tras haber leído cosas de él en éste libro.

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## **Yolanda says**

ay como me ha gustado!

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## **Zoe says**

### **Thoughts after My First Reread**

I have just finished my first reread of this book. My initial rating stands. It is a 3 star read for me. I reread this book because most books I have read recently failed to capture me. I was bored flipping through the pages. The characters seemed unreal. In this hour of need, I returned to Monica McCarty, who always captures human interactions in a way that I can relate to.

I picked up The Viper today for reread, thinking maybe a reread would change my original opinion. I know this book was a lot of people's favorite in the series. I imagine it has something to do Lachlan's "bad boy" image. I did not love this book in my first read. And my second read confirms my original sentiments. But I feel that I understand better why I felt the way I did.

The Viper had everything that a book needs to be successful. A "bad boy" hero who had principles, a bold and strong heroine, rich historical background, political intrigues, impossible love. Theoretically I ought to

have loved it. Monica McCarty did her usual magic. She puts her characters in the most impossible corner and allows them to break free with tender feelings and sexual tension galore. But I think one thing did not work for this reader: the characterization of Bella MacDuff.

The Viper is different than other books in the series that Bella MacDuff and Lachlan MacRuiari were both "older" than other characters in the series, especially Bella MacDuff. Lachlan was 33 and Bella was 28 when the story began. After 2 years of Bella's imprisonment, now we are looking at a 35-year-old Lachlan and a 30-year-old Bella. Being 35, Lachlan was just a tad older than most other heroes we have encountered in the series, but not much. His behaviors were, how do I put it, "fitting" for his character. He made battle/mission decisions, had a dirty mouth (what do you expect from a man named The Viper?), and was not exactly what you would call a prince on the white horse. Bella MacDuff however, was a 30 year old mother for the better half of the book. Her age puts her on a different level. She was significantly older than most heroines in the series. Not by 2, 3 years only, we are talking about by 8-10 years.

A 30 year old woman, I say. But honestly her maturity level was that of a 12 year old girl. Her 14 year old daughter Joan was more mature than her. I usually would respect the pride and determination of a woman such as Bella. But her irrationality and immaturity really diminished any heroine-like feelings she had. It was extremely difficult for me to reconcile the woman Bella was with her age. I expected more from a 30 year old woman. "You should have known better, Bella MacDuff." An 18 year old girl would be excused for her immaturity. Some things only come with age. But a 30 year old woman who had been a mother for 14 years, seriously, show a little more self-constraint and discipline.

Bella did a lot of rash decisions, putting everyone and herself in danger. She was a hostage emotionally because she needed to protect her daughter. I get that. But I still found it annoying in a romance novel. This is why I prefer to not read about mothers in this genre. Their mother status almost always eclipses anything else and that really bothers me. (Incidentally Monica McCarty did MUCH BETTER with a mother heroine in her later book, The Striker, in my opinion.)

Because of Bella's immaturity, I suffered a severe case of cognitive dissonance when I read this book. For a 35 year old man and a 30 year old woman, I expected a more mature relationship. It doesn't have to be slow or less passionate. But I expected the relationship to be more.....I don't know, not quite so juvenile.

All in all, it was not a bad read. I enjoy Monica McCarty's storytelling as always. I just had a serious problem making sense of Bella MacDuff. I did not like her and therefore could not understand Lachlan's fascination about her. Because of that this book lost its allure to me. My 3 star rating was not an accident. And I stand by my original statement: 3 stars with mild disappointment.

Incidentally, the last book of the series The Ghost is coming out this month, it is the story of Joan, Bella's daughter. I am again amazed at Monica McCarty's ability to weave a compelling story. This entire series was a fantastic idea, rich in historical details and full of interwoven intricacies. The Viper is book 4, the first 1/3 of the series. But even in this book, you see the budding relationship of Joan Comyn and Alex Seton. And their story is book 12. Joan's presence in England is planted in book 4, The Viper, whereas Alex Seton's presence in England is then made possible in book 8, The Raider. This means, Monica McCarty had the stories all planned out for all her main characters when she began the series, or at least very early on. The Viper (book 4), The Raider (book 8) and The Ghost (book 12) are connected seamlessly and it all ends where it started: in The Viper, Joan met Alex Seton for the first time. And in the epilogue of the Viper, we see Joan returning to her mother at the end of the war, with Alex in tow. When book 4 was released, we didn't even know that there would be a book 8 or 12. We just knew that there were other characters and more highland guards. But not all of them got stories, poor William Gordon was killed off, for example. And this is just one

of the examples of such connections in the series. Monica McCarty excels at such things, building a story over a span of a decade, across different books and yet, all blended together as if they were small pieces of a large puzzle. Bravo, Ms. McCarty!

I have said before and I will say it again: I love Monica McCarty for her storytelling skills and her way of turning historical figures into fictional characters. She has a loyal fan in me.

### **The Original Review**

I really must first confess that I am totally obsessed with Monica McCarty's stories. I like her writing, admire her ability to weave history with fictional characters, love how intense her characters are and their relationship is, how she always manages to show the internal struggle and make it seem real and unpretentious.

However I cannot honestly say that I cared for *The Viper*. I think all the elements that make me love Monica McCarty's books are there for Lachlan and Bella. It is not the book, it is me. (no matter how much of a cliché it is, it is the truth.) I did not really like Bella as a character and Lachlan.....was rather unremarkable.

My biggest problem with this book, was Bella. Bella was a mother to a 11-year-old daughter when she met Lachlan. Naturally the daughter played a pivotal role in their relationship and the book. And that is exactly why I had trouble connecting with her. I am not much for children, regardless of their age, in my romances. It is especially difficult if they are children of the lead characters. It is only natural for any parents to place their children before themselves. I would not expect any less than that. And that is usually how the stories turn out. He or she would sacrifice the relationship somehow for the sake of the children. This is not something I look for so I usually stay away from books like this.

But I love Monica McCarty. So I thought ah what the heck, I will read *The Viper*. Maybe McCarty's storytelling could help me overcome my mother-as-heroine wariness.

Well it didn't.

I also was not so crazy about how Bella thought the worst of Lachlan for the longest time. I mean yeah I know Lachlan was an ass and probably deserved her hostility. But seriously Bella was not exactly a loving flower in the spring to Lachlan either. She really acted kind of stupid because of her daughter, which is understandable but unattractive in my eyes. She made the choice to support Robert the Bruce, the decision put her and her daughter in danger. Yet she put herself and Lachlan and everyone else on the mission because she had to see her daughter.....I mean lady, shouldn't you have thought about this before you made your decision? No one is liable to fulfill your wish. You don't want to be separated from your child, don't support the rebel king. You want to "do the right thing" then accept that you may lose your child because of that noble decision. Putting everyone else in danger because she "is a mother".....ugh it didn't sit well with me.

I digress. But I think it is evident what bothered me in this book. I did not like Bella as my heroine. That pretty up screwed up the story for me. Make her a widow, a "ruined" noble woman, make her whatever, it would have been better than a mother.

But for everything else, which I love, I give this book 3 stars with mild disappointment.

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## Kari says

I LOVED this book! My favorite in the series so far. I was so looking forward to reading Lachlan's story and was not disappointed. We have a gorgeous warrior rebel, the bad-boy of the Highland Guard, falling in love with a wonderfully strong heroine. I loved Bella, how she goes to hell and back and comes out stronger and a better person at the end. Lachlan is amazing throughout the book, even when he's trying to convince her (and himself) that he's a *Viper*. I was very anxious to see these two together and get their HEA after everything they go through, and the author did not disappoint. Wonderful ending!

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## Dija says

### *Spoiler-free mini review*

I'm so completely hooked on this series and McCarty's world! The Highland Guard books are a combination of every single thing I adore in historicals - beautiful settings, strong heroines and swoon-worthy heroes, heart-stopping suspense, lots of action, adventurous plots, and best of all, unforgettable romances. These books are absolutely perfect for winters and I'm enjoying every word.

### **Favorite passage from *The Viper*:**

“You’re a hard man to love, Lachlan MacRuairi, but I do believe I’m up to the challenge.”

“We’ll probably argue.”

“Aye, it seems likely.”

“I have a bit of a temper when I get angry.”

“I’ve noticed,” she said wryly.

“I can be a mean bastard. I’ll probably say something to hurt you.”

She laughed. “Are you trying to scare me off?”

He gave her a rueful smile. “Maybe.

“Well, stop—it isn’t going to work. I’m quite aware of your faults.”

He frowned. “I didn’t say they were faults.”

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## Jonetta says

Lachlan “Viper” MacRuairi is barely tolerated by his fellow members of the Highland Guard because of his seeming indifference to anything but money for his service. However, they highly respect his warrior skills, his snakelike stealth and ability to get in and out of situations. He's extremely handsome but his sneer, surly personality and reputation keep most at a distance. When he's assigned to get Bella MacDuff to Robert Bruce's coronation, it ends up being a life changing event for both of them.

I knew Lachlan's backstory would provide more context for this complex character and knew the rumors about him were probably distorted. Though not as earth shattering as I would have expected, his story did explain him well enough and I loved his relationship with Bella. She, by the way, was a perfect match for the difficult Lachlan, even though she had a few questionable moments in the story. Her sacrifice, both for

Robert Bruce and her daughter, was heroic but painful and her ultimate punishment was heartbreaking.

This was an exciting, gritty and complicated story. Lachlan's not easy with anyone and his relationship with Bella was well played. The scene in the cottage was gut wrenching, so well written I experienced the emotions of both of them vicariously and it was a pivotal moment for them. The historical context continues to set this series apart from other highlander historical romances and my hope is we get at least a story for each member of the Highland Guard. This one is special.

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