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## Review of The Language of Power

Review of The Language of Power by Rosemary Kirstein

This science-fantasy tale is the third in Kirstein's series about her Steerswoman – and it shows with the ease in which the book gets into its stride.

Steerswomen are collectors of knowledge and seekers after the truth. When they ask questions, people are bound to answer them. However, they also freely share what they have learned with anyone who wishes to know. Wizards also have an impressive store of knowledge, which they use to rule over everyone else. You don't dare ask a wizard anything. Steerswomen dislike and distrust wizards, who mostly despise them – along with everyone else who isn't a wizard...

Still recovering from serious injuries, Rowan travels to the city of Donner, trying to find a way to stop the master wizard, Slado, from devastating isolated populations in a marginal region of the planet, called the Outskirts. Donner is where Slado served his apprenticeship – and Rowan is hoping his past might provide some answers. What she doesn't expect to find is an old friend. But when he starts to demonstrate magical powers far beyond anything she has ever seen, she begins to doubt exactly whose side he is on...

In many ways this story reads like a classic fantasy tale – the protagonist is on an extended journey with a mission that will save her world from a nasty fate... Elements within that world will be very familiar to fantasy fans, including swords, rustic inns, horse and boat transport and dragons... But, when Rowan starts to explore the magic performed by the wizards in more detail, some of the concepts described owe more to a science laboratory than the murky world of the occult. And her take on dragons is original, amusing and scary. Altogether, this novel is an intriguing spin on very familiar territory.

However, this isn't a fast-paced swashbuckler where swordfights are lovingly described slash-by-parry. As Rowan crisscrosses the city asking her questions and slowly finding out more information about Slado, I suddenly realised that I was nearly a quarter of the way through the book. And that I didn't mind. Kirstein had successfully drawn me into her world – and when the characters finally did face a murderous wizard, the long build-up gave the scene additional weight.

The theme of knowledge – who has it and what happens to it over an extended period – is intelligently explored in this well-written story.

My one niggle is that when I investigated the possibility of obtaining the two books preceding The Language of Power – The Steerswoman's Road and The Lost Steerswoman, it became stupidly expensive as neither book is readily available here in the UK. Which is a shame, because this author is well worth further reading.

8/10