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BARNES & NOBLE

# Explorations

A sword with a globe as a hilt is positioned vertically, passing through the letter 'o' in the word 'Explorations'. The globe shows the Americas. The sword has a detailed hilt and a long, straight blade.

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# Darksong Rising

## The Third Book of The Spellsong Cycle

L.E. Modesitt, Jr.

Tor Books

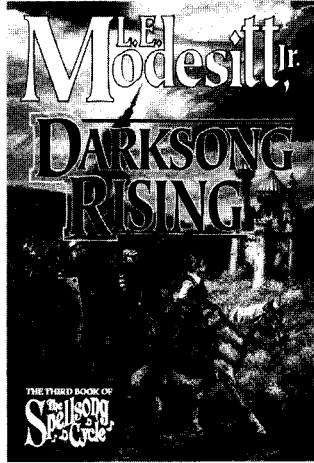
\$27.95; September

I find it amazing that I can remember certain books vividly years after I've read them. I usually equate this with excellent writing and a great storyline. *Darksong Rising* is exactly that—a masterfully written book with a great plot. The story began in *The Soprano Sorceress* back in 1996, continued with *The Spellsong War* in '98, and is continued in *Darksong Rising*.

Anna Marshal, the Sorceress and Regent of Defalk, is again faced with insurmountable odds. In the world of Erde, women are no more than trinkets and power is not earned, it's either handed down by lineage or simply taken. The Lords of the 33 lands in Defalk are unhappy with Lady Anna. She is only Regent until Lord Jimbob, the rightful heir, is old enough and strong enough to rule Defalk. No ruler in memory has been able to save their lands from invasion from the outside or incursion from within. And that's exactly what Lady Anna's goal is, to unite Defalk under one ruler. To do so, she must reach the lords of the 33 to treat women fairly.

Once a teacher, Anna has always had to deal with power and Defalk is not that much different than college administrators or ex-husbands who think that having their dinner on the table is the only reason for having a wife. Because of power, Anna has learned to do what needs to be done. Each time men die

because of her magic, she wonders if she is doing the right thing. Does power corrupt? Has she become the demon that many believe she is? Every time Lady Anna uses her powers to save the lands of Defalk, the sounds and smells of death are unmistakable. The magic literally eats away at her. She is continually eating and drinking huge amounts of food just to survive. Many of her friends and subjects have lost their lives for her beliefs and the struggle



to control Defalk is proving to be a never-ending battle.

*Darksong Rising* is primarily a political novel. There are plenty of battles, but mostly it is Anna trying to find the strength to put down Defalk's oppressors without weakening Defalk or losing her resolve to do what must be done. *Darksong*, the power over living things, is a very dangerous weapon, and it is used against Anna and her supporters from beginning to end. She barely manages to win the day in battle, but the battles are not the deciding

factor of this game. They are political clout and savvy language. Anna must deal quickly and without hesitation with the outsiders trying to take over and just as harshly with those from the 33 who can't bear the thought of a woman controlling their lands or their inheritance of the lands. Poison, murder, betrayal and death are a major part of Lady Anna's life. The rest is taking care of the 33. Should she take action or is no action the way to go? There are always questions, and there is always death.

Even revenge plays a part in *Darksong Rising*. A young man and his brother are out to kill Lady Anna for the death of their father. Their father tried to force himself upon Anna, she defended herself, and left him in a pile of ashes—*Darksong*. The sons learned to use *Darksong* and murdered a whole town just to get back at Anna.

Doubt plagues Anna, but how can she save a world without using the power she was given? Killing thousands of people does not make it easier. It rips out her heart with each death. But Anna cannot, and will not, show any weakness to the 33, or to the leaders of the surrounding lands. She does what she must. She guarantees loyalty with honesty and hard work. No one who travels with her (or is on the receiving end of her power) cannot know the toll her decisions take. Dragging young Jimbob along with her this time may be the most important lesson for the young lord.

Modesitt, Jr.'s *Darksong Rising*, as well as his entire Spellsong Cycle, is a wonderful edition to any fantasy library. Read them all. I'm sure that you'll agree. —J. DeM.

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