



## The Towers of the Sunset

*L.E. Modesitt Jr.*

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## **The Towers of the Sunset** L.E. Modesitt Jr.

Return now to the world of Recluce in The Towers of the Sunset.

Tells the story of Creslin, son of a powerful military matriarch, who chooses exile rather than an arranged marriage. He sets out on a search for his true identity as a man, developing his magical talents through constant conflict with the enigmatic white wizards of Candar.

## **The Towers of the Sunset Details**

Date : Published July 15th 1992 by Tor Books (first published 1992)

ISBN :

Author : L.E. Modesitt Jr.

Format : Kindle Edition 548 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Epic Fantasy, Magic

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## From Reader Review The Towers of the Sunset for online ebook

### Rebecca says

Nothing exciting - about the struggle to establish early Recluce.

Touches on magic, politics, adventure, intrigue and romance but i wouldn't say any particular element stands out.

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### Bill says

Book 2 of the series takes us back to the beginning of the settling of Recluce. It's an enjoyable, nicely written read in general and sets up the conflict between the black and white wizards. But, I did not really like the characters. I found Creslin and Megaera immature and whiny. Megaera (and others) constantly put down men as a species to the point it felt like modern reverse-sexism. Though these main characters had reasons for their behavior and feelings, the results annoyed me. Grow up already. Still I will read the next book published. I do like the world and with the addition of gray wizards, perhaps it will get beyond dualistic thinking. We shall see.

I'm thinking I should have read these books in internal chronological order

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### Ron says

Better. He earned these stars.

A self-contained story, not a rambling part of a dozen-plus saga ala Robert Jordan.

His writing is better, too, though he depends too heavily on clique reversals. It's a good device, just over used.

It is odd, and off-putting, that everything new his protagonist tries works ... often spectacularly. Even as he is berating himself for not single-handedly (and instantly) solving all the problems of the world .

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### Bryan Brown says

Right off I have to clarify that this story would have had a higher rating except for one critical problem I had with the two main characters.

Almost 900 years after the last book, Cresslin, a black mage (subtype: storm) is the oldest son of the Marshal of Westwind. The old legend of westwind seems to have been forgotten and changed into "men suck and should never lead or they will cause wars." Both Westwind and the land of Sarronyn (founded by the first Marshal Ryba and the arms commander Saryn in previous books) follow the legend and are lead by women only. Cresslin is doomed to be marginalized by his community and so escapes an arranged marriage and flees the land for the east.

Meanwhile the female lead, whose name is so convoluted I am just going to call her Maggie, is a grey mage (subtype: only has powers to make her meet the male lead) and is the younger sister of the queen is doomed to be married off for convenience and is punished for having any ability of white magic by being forced to wear iron bands.

They go about having adventures in opposition to the white mages of Fairhaiven. The whites oppose the lands of the legends where women rule and wish to rule all of candor themselves. Eventually Cresslin and Maggie meet and team up. They flee to the desert island of Recluse and found a settlement which they must then defend from the depredations of the white mages and (spoiler!) eventually succeed.

Here is my big problem with this book and the reason I couldn't rate it any higher. Both leads are suffer from severe emotional childhood wounds. They are both widely maladjusted to liking themselves much less anyone else. And yet suddenly after fighting with each other the whole story one night on the beach they magically make up and suddenly get along just fine. This was a fundamental and sudden shift to the characters which was needed to further the story but was completely unbelievable given the motivations and wounds of both characters. From then on, I just couldn't care because the change was done with no real healing to either character but only because it was necessary to bring the story to a conclusion.

The changes of the legend was interesting. The rise of the white mages in Fairhaiven wasn't predicted by anything in the previous history but this book begins to dwell on the concept of balance. When black magic becomes powerful, then white power will rise. And this happens in reverse too. In the end, the land of Recluse is supposed to be dedicated to the concept of balance. I enjoyed the philosophical studies and seeing the history so I will continue to read in internal chronological order.

This is technically the second recluse book by the author and I wonder if the weakness in the writing and characterization is simply due to being earlier in his writing career. The later characters have been better and the later series, especially the imager portfolio, is much better.

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## **David says**

Reading this is like reading an excruciatingly detailed historical account about how someone who lived in the distant past once watched paint dry.

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## **Jim says**

I've read this several times over the years, but it really impressed me & let me down this time. First the bad news. Cresslin is almost too stupid & Magera is a total bitch in the first part of the book. By the end, both are OK, their issues understandable, but I never found their earlier roles all that believable. As usual, I didn't care all that much for the love bit.

So why did I rate this so highly? Mostly because Modesitt did a fantastic job with the history & trends. I absolutely loved the way he turned societies around. If this book was read directly after "Fall of Angels" it would really have a huge impact since 500 years have passed & a necessary virtue has turned into a curse just as bad since it lacks any balance. Balance is a theme throughout his books & it shows well when the books are read in published order, but I think even better chronologically.

As usual, Modesitt paints a complete world with countries rising, falling, & struggling. A lot of action driven

by cut-throat politics & economics.

The second published, #8 chronologically (8C, 2P). The full list of books in chronological order is in my review here.

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## **Michael says**

Another likeable Modesitt hero, another unlikable Modesitt heroine and much more world-building than plot.

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## **Mark says**

“The Towers of the Sunset” is the second book of the Recluce saga. However, instead of depicting events that occur subsequent to the ending of the first book, it jumps back in time to before the island of Recluce was established. Overall, it's a good read if you liked Modesitt's first novel.

## **The Plot**

There are two kinds of societies in Modesitt's world, ones that respect "The Legend" and ones that don't. What "the Legend" exactly is isn't spelled out in the book, although some "quotes" from the ancient "Book of Ryba" are given. The reader soon realizes that those societies that respect "the Legend" are matriarchies and those that don't are patriarchies. The patriarchies are dominated by the white wizards, who are again the antagonists of this book and of the Recluce saga as a whole so far.

Creslin is born into a matriarchy. He is the son of the Marshall of Westwind. He is betrothed, against his will, to the sister of the Tyrant of Sarronyn: a woman named Megaera (Sarronyn is also a matriarchy). Creslin decides that he doesn't want to get married and flees from Westwind. However, he and Megaera share a bond. This bond they share is potentially fatal to Megaera, so she also sets out to find him, not out of love, but out of self-preservation.

Meanwhile, Creslin is being hunted by white Chaos mages, who believe him to be a threat to their empire. The plot goes on from there.

## **The Good**

The characters in this second book of the Recluce saga are more memorable than the ones in the first book. Creslin is pretty well characterized as a young guy who comes into his own over the course of the novel. Megaera is also well done as a conflicted, angry girl who sorts herself out over the course of the book.

The first half of the book, which has Creslin out “on the road” trying to survive, is very well done and he meets some memorable characters, such as Derrild the trader and his family, as well as Hylin, a caravan guard who helps Creslin orient himself to the world beyond Westwind. I found myself really enjoying this section of the book with its chase scenes as well as Creslin's discovery of the wider world around him.

I also enjoyed the relationship between Creslin and Megaera, which was rather well done.

## **The Not-So-Good**

I wouldn't call anything in this book "bad" particularly. When the action moves to the island of Recluce, it sort of shifts to a war between the order and chaos forces as well as Creslin and Megaera's developing relationship. I didn't find this quite as interesting as the first part of the book, and I thought that the relationship between Creslin and Megaera, while more complex than a typical fantasy novel male-female relationship, cried out for a little more complexity. Things just sort of resolved themselves on their own, despite repeated mistakes by them both. I guess this is what happens in real life, but it didn't make for a compelling read.

The antagonists of the book, the white wizards, were rather non-descript. They weren't particularly evil or anything, which is good (I hate it when the bad guys are all like Snidely Whiplash), but I didn't really feel anything towards them. I think good literature makes the reader feel some kind of empathy for an antagonist, and enables the reader to at least see things from the antagonist's point of view. This wasn't done to my satisfaction here.

Some complaints have been made that Modesitt's use of the present tense (e.g.: "Creslin walks quickly through the dry grass.") throughout the book is distracting. I agree with this to an extent, but I got used to it pretty quickly and it didn't bother me very much throughout the course of my reading.

### **Feminism**

I think this topic deserves its own section, because it seems to be the sorest point of discussion regarding this book. The matriarchal societies of "The Towers of the Sunset" are all female versions of patriarchies. That is, take a patriarchy, make all of the men women, and you have a matriarchy. I don't think this would be true in reality. I think a matriarchy would be entirely different from a patriarchy. However, it certainly wouldn't be perfect and it would have its own challenges and weaknesses different from a patriarchy's, as well as different strengths. I think Modesitt really missed the boat here and he could have put out some really fantastic literature exploring the nature and operation of a matriarchy, instead of making the matriarchal women into female versions of "male chauvinists".

For example, Westwind, a matriarchy, has a reputation for having the finest warriors in the world. While the whole Amazon legend theme is not beyond the scope of reason, it really seemed to cement the whole attitude of the novel of feminists being "manly women". I'd have rather read about a matriarchy that thrived by peacefully and cleverly manipulating the patriarchies around it into becoming economically and culturally dependent upon it. That would have been more interesting, in my opinion. However, it should be noted that the fighting skills of Westwind's women becomes key in the plot of the novel, so I guess this depiction of Westwind as a warlike society was necessary.

Megaera, despite being a high ranking member of a matriarchy, has a feminist sensibility that seems to extend to stamping her foot and shouting "Men!" in an exasperated voice. This became annoying very quickly. I would think that, coming from a matriarchy, as soon as she became infatuated with her eventual husband, she would pursue him or at least manipulate him somehow into pursuing her, instead of waiting to be pursued. I would also think that she would assume the leader role over Creslin and that Creslin would have a tendency to allow her to do this and even be relieved that she was taking charge, seeing as they both were born into matriarchies.

I think that Creslin also should have been written differently. As a male growing up in a matriarchal society, he should have had different notions of what is "manly" and what is "womanly". The only way this is depicted is in his general acceptance of women as being good fighters. I don't think that, coming from a matriarchy, Creslin should have taken on a leadership role as readily and confidently as he did. Granted, he was the son of the leader of Westwind, but, as a man in that society, he wouldn't have received any kind of education in war, tactics, or economics. It would have also been inculcated into him at a young age that the

woman is the authority figure in any government or household. However, he doesn't defer to Megaera much at all. The women from these matriarchal societies just seem to want to sit there and be led by him, which seems out of character to me.

### **Conclusion**

I know it sounds like I hated the book, but I really didn't. If you can "forget" that Creslin and Megaera come from matriarchies (which is easy to do since the characters aren't *written* like they come from matriarchies), there is a very good read here. The relationship between the two protagonists is interesting and sometimes even romantic. The action and plot are well done and not rushed in any way. The magic system is still really cool, logical, and interesting. This book was never dull, in my opinion.

If you can overlook the faults listed above, you'll find, I believe, a better novel here than the first Recluce novel. It still depicts order as being "good" and chaos as being "bad", but I've been assured that this changes throughout the series. If you enjoyed the first novel at all, you should read this one. Just be aware of its faults and try to overlook them. I give it 3 ½ stars.

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### **Tanya says**

I'm pretty convinced the L.E. Modesitt sucks, despite a general liking for fantasy writing and series fiction. At least this story wasn't as bad as The SpellSong series.

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### **Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says**

This is a significant volume in the Recluce saga, going several generations back in time to witness the founding of Recluce as a bastion of Order amidst Chaotic or indifferent nations. It begins well enough with poetic language that is a step or two above anything in *The Magic Of Recluce* (although the cod-Biblical language we are treated to at one point is cringe-inducing as are the many song lyrics interspersed, although not as totally lacking any attempt at actual lyricism as the rather dull poetry in Erikson's novels). Things get to an exciting start with the protagonist making a daring escape across snowy cliffs and continue to be exciting as he is captured by the White (Chaos) wizards, has his memory blocked and is put to work on a road crew. Overcoming this indenture is the last moment of high adventure in this book.

Thereafter, the protagonist winds up marrying the very woman he has spent half the novel escaping. They proceed to the isle of Recluce where they carry on the most inane, annoying love-hate relationship that eventually breaks down into love. It's hard to see how anyone could love the self-righteous hero or his equally self-righteous wife; perhaps it's just Modesitt who loves them too much not to give them some sort of happy ending.

Anyhow, the powerful White mages do what they can to scuttle this incipient Black(Order-based) haven, so the protagonist has to weave more and more powerful magics, which have unfortunate side-effects for the rest of the world, something that is rather glibly glossed over as 'necessity'. And then there's all the fucking logistics. It seems as if the second half of the novel is one long list of administrative decisions interspersed with an annoying love plot and a few big ticket magical displays which are undermined by their ambiguous consequences.

Maybe this is a sophomore slump for this series. Maybe I shouldn't have read this book so soon after the first

one. Maybe Modesitt doesn't really get much better than this. I shall have to decide if its worth finding out.

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### **Alexander Sprague says**

While many people comment on what place this book is chronologically, Anyone who is looking at this should realize that the author strongly suggest you read them in order of publication.

I liked this book for a lot of reasons, the first being that it made the world that contains Recluse seem real, it has a history and religion that can be explored later. The system for magic was expanded upon, and the events of the first book, even though they were in the future, seem more clear and epic with the information that I got from this book.

While many are criticizing the book for being simple, I for one would not say that is a bad thing. The story is told in a straight forward manor that makes it so you do not have to cross reference everything and helps the flow dramatically.

Also the characters in this book were just as engaging as the first, or on second thought, more so. Overall a great book, especially if you liked the first.

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### **Pickyreader says**

Annoying is all I have to say.

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### **Ben Babcock says**

It's been almost two years since I re-read *The Magic of Recluce*. I consider the Recluce saga among the "formative fantasy series" of my youth. I associate the word "Recluce" with memories of being curled up in a massive armchair in the living room, rain streaming down the windows outside, cradling a massive 600- or 800-page hardcover book in my hands. That was the life.

With *The Towers of Sunset*, Modesitt returns to the Recluce saga in prequel form: this is the founding of Recluce by Creslin and his somewhat-reluctant partner, Megaera. Creslin is the son of the Marshall of Westwind; Megaera is the sister of the Tyrant of Sarronnyn. Both Westwind and Sarronnyn are western countries of Candar that subscribe to the Legend, which is essentially a garbled creation myth that provides the basis for their matriarchical societies. The Marshall bucked tradition by allowing Creslin to train with the female guards of Westwind, who are among the best in the world. Meanwhile, Megaera is a White witch, a chaos mage, and her sister has had her bound in iron chains since she came of age. Oh, and she's "life-linked" to Creslin, so she feels what he feels and dies if he dies. You can guess how much she loves that.

The plot of *The Towers of Sunset* has many similarities to that of *The Magic of Recluce*, which will come as no surprise if you are familiar with Modesitt's writing. Just as Lerris is dispatched to Candar for ulterior reasons, Creslin too is manipulated by the Marshall, the Tyrant, and even the White Wizards of Fairhaven to fulfil his "destiny", which is the founding of an order-based haven on Recluce. Instead of the Grey mage Justen for the role model/wise mentor figure, we have Klerris, a Black mage. Notably, Creslin does not have a trade; he is a soldier and a musician seems to try his hand at pretty much everything.

Creslin's self-enforced versatility is one of the reasons I didn't like this book. I should probably mention that, unlike *The Magic of Recluce*, I don't think I've read this one before. I would remember being this annoyed. Self-righteous male protagonists bother in fantasy books. You know the type I mean: they bludgeon their way through the plot like a bulldozer, swiping aside any resistance with the fateful words, "I don't have any choice." It's one of the reasons I skewered Richard and the Sword of Truth series. Creslin is not nearly so extreme, fortunately; yet the last half of the book seems to consist of him whining that his choices come down to "let everyone starve" or "mount an increasingly destructive series of order-based gambits to turn Recluce into a nation at the expense of other countries". Indeed, much like my reservations about the end of *The Ringworld Engineers*, I don't think I can condone the way Modesitt glosses over the morality of Creslin's actions. In altering the weather patterns to bring more rain to Recluce, he causes floods and droughts elsewhere. We see these results, but we never really see Creslin called to account for them, except for the toll his use of order in the service of destruction takes on his body (blindness), which I would argue is not sufficient here. Creslin is a war criminal!

Ironically, my feelings were the opposite for the first half of the book: I was annoyed with Megaera and thought Creslin's feelings were justified. She was contradictory and vague toward him no matter how he treated her. Eventually, however, I came to see his actions from her point of view. They're both stupid and probably deserve each other, but on balance I'll have to give the epic award for stupidity to Creslin, for essentially forcing himself upon Megaera by imposing another life-link on them. She is already linked to him, so he feels that he should make the link reciprocal; he'll feel what she feels. But he does this without even asking her permission, which is ... rape. It doesn't matter that "it was going to happen eventually" as a result of her life-link and their mutual order/chaos abilities. The squee factor is definitely there.

When Creslin is not forcing his way into the thoughts of his wife or destroying weather patterns for his own gain, he's usually doing something boring, like guarding a trader caravan or singing in a tavern. I am exaggerating, of course, but I want to emphasize how very workaday the Recluce saga seems to be when it comes to adventures. Creslin is just as obsessed with counting coppers and recounting to us the exact meals he orders at inns as Lerris was; once again, Modesitt focuses a lot on the logistics of life. Alone, this might be enough to dissuade some people from reading the book but doesn't particularly bother me. Unfortunately, *The Towers of Sunset* also seems to miss a lot of dramatic notes. Creslin undergoes a few very important trials, including his escape from the Westwind escort, his confrontation in Fairhaven, and his subsequent recovery of his memory and escape from the road crew. Maybe it's my fault for reading at a baseball game, but the tone and urgency of the writing doesn't always adjust to match the intensity of these moments. Altogether the result is a somewhat flat, albeit very evenly-paced, story.

There is nothing truly unique or exciting about *The Towers of Sunset* to make it stand out. As usual, Modesitt's chaos-order magic system is fun and interesting and stifled by the heavy-handed exposition. The bad guys (in this case, the White Wizards) get their own short chapters of dialogue in which they cackle about their latest gambit to unseat Creslin from Recluce. Modesitt does get two things very right: the epic scale, with Creslin's manipulation of the winds and the destruction of multiple fleets of ships and enemy soldiers; and the toll this takes on Creslin's body. That was a cool price to extract for his unmitigated use of order at the service of destruction. Unfortunately, these two positives do not sufficiently compensate for the dull or even unsavoury parts of this book. It's not a bad book, and to his credit Modesitt attempts to explore issues of gender politics, from his creation of the Legend to the relative roles that Megaera and Creslin play in ruling Recluce. Nevertheless, unless you are on a mission to read the complete saga of Recluce like I am, you might want to skip this one.

### **My reviews of the *Recluce* saga:**

← *The Magic of Recluce* | *The Magic Engineer* →

## **Kathi says**

7/10

This entry in the Saga of Recluce takes the reader to the founding of Recluce as a haven for wizards of order and others. Creslin and Megaera, betrothed and tied together by their life force, battle family, expectations, wizards, assassins, and each other as they find their way to love and learn the price of power and the costs of the decisions they feel compelled to make. The magic system of this world continues to fascinate me. The sound effects in the text are intrusive and the characters are, at time, incredibly obtuse. Yet the story is imaginative and entertaining while posing serious questions about the use of power.

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## **Bob Milne says**

The first time I encountered The Saga of Recluce, I remember being somewhat bewildered by the progression from The Magic of Recluce to The Towers of the Sunset. Instead of picking up Lerris' story, as I would have expected of a traditional narrative, L. E. Modesitt Jr. catapults us back almost an entire millennium to tell the story of Creslin and the founding of Recluce.

Unusual and unorthodox, especially with the following book, The Magic Engineer, jumping forward again to a point between the two books, but that non-linear storytelling is part of the series' charm.

The Towers of the Sunset is part coming-of-age story and part quest tale, overlaid with a heavy dose of world-building. I'll get to the first two items in a moment, but I want to talk a bit about the world-building first. There are political, religious, and cultural elements introduced here that are absolutely fascinating. Where other authors would have settled for a typical matriarchy, Modesitt crafts a gender-flipped society where roles are reversed because of a mysterious mythology known as "The Legend" that adds a layer of intrigue to Creslin's story.

The other aspect of world-building that really excited me about this book in particular is the deeper exploration of the magic system, based not on good versus evil, but on chaos versus order. It's a fascinating system, well-defined, and based as much on science and philosophy as anything mystical. It's also the first fantasy novel I can remember that really wowed me with the use of magic. This is big-time magic, with large-scale spells that not only have impact, but consequences. The weather magic in particular is amazing, especially when Creslin has no clear concept of what he's doing or how, but it's even more interesting after the mechanics are explained.

Getting back to the story, the plotting of Creslin's coming-of-age is a little thin, and it jumps around a bit more than I would have liked, but it certainly has its moments. The mountainside escape from his mother's guards is great, and his magical enslavement on the Wizard's road breathes some new excitement into the tired old trope of lost memories. It's once he and Megaera finally come together, sharing a violent, tension-filled sea voyage to Recluce, that the story really takes off, and the way they begin building a new society is far more interesting than you might expect.

Along the way, Modesitt explores some complex questions of power, morality, gender politics, and family drama. Some of those concepts seem a little dated on a reread but, looking back over a quarter century, it reminds me of how daring and innovative they were for the time. The Towers of the Sunset may seem a bit

simple and straightforward, compared to the complex doorstopper epics of today, but it's an entertaining read that doesn't have a single soft spot or slow moment in the narrative.

<http://beauty-in-ruins.blogspot.com/2...>

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