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A Necklace of Souls by R.L. Stedman

Publisher: HarperCollins

RRP \$24.99

This absorbing tale of a hidden city is set in the mythical world of the Kingdom of the Rose. While the surrounding countryside is devastated by plague and warfare, the kingdom is safe from harm as long as the Guardian sacrifices her freedom and her wellbeing for the people.

In each generation, the Guardian passes a living, magical necklace to the next female descendant of the King. Free-spirited Princess Dana comes to the gradual realisation that she will inherit a life of service and solitude as the Guardian. She rebels against the inevitability of her fate until a wise African woman, N'tombe, arrives as her teacher. N'tombe helps Dana to harness her farsight and ability to dream travel.

Will, a young orphaned baker becomes a powerful ally for Dana. He teaches her how to fight and defend herself against strong combatants. They develop a bond that is strengthened by the storm clouds of war and evil forces. As the two friends face unseen dangers, their futures become intertwined.

The fast-paced novel is an adventurous quest with a fine blend of diverse personalities, drama, challenges, descriptive writing and character growth. The manuscript won the Storylines Tessa Duder Award for unpublished young adult fiction in 2012. It's an impressive first novel that will appeal to readers who enjoy exciting fantasy.

Reviewed by children's book author Jean Bennett

Author's website:

<http://rlstedman.com/>

