



The Magicians' Guild ; The Novice

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The Magicians' Guild and **The Novice** are the first two books of a trilogy. Sonea, a 'dweller' in the city of Imardin in the land of Kyralia, discovers she has magic powers. This is unusual for people from the streets and the slums and could be dangerous if she does not learn 'Control'. Once at the Magicians' Guild, Sonea is taught by Lord Rothen, a kindly older magician, but blackmailed by Lord Fergun, a younger, weaker and snobbish magician who intends to harm her friend Cery and use Sonea for his own ambitions. In **The Novice** Sonea joins classes for young magicians but encounters horrendous bullying and rejection, because of her lowly background.

While in the first part of the trilogy Canavan tells the story from both Sonea's and the magicians' viewpoints, in the second part she takes this one step further. Not only do we follow Sonea and her problems at school but we also follow Lord Dannyl as he ostensibly travels abroad as an ambassador. He has actually, unknowingly, been employed to find out more about the High Lord of Kyralia (the leading magician of the land). Dannyl's journey becomes one of self-discovery, as he falls in love with his young male assistant Tayend and has to admit to himself he is gay. Canavan handles this very sensitively but obviously with some agenda of inclusivity for all. As Kyralia is a homophobic society there is presumably more to come on this theme in the third part.

Meanwhile, the High Lord has taken on Sonea's guardianship. He does nothing to help Sonea when she is bullied by the other novices and indeed wants it to continue as it tests her magical abilities, which are regarded by the Guild as some of the most powerful ever seen. This thread of the story is a hard one to deal with as the level of bullying and the misery Sonea goes through would not be acceptable in any schools nowadays. Next to Harry Potter's suffering at the hands of Malfoy this is many times worse. Thankfully, Sonea wins a duel against her chief tormentor and is left alone towards the end of part two.

Both these books are for older teenagers and could be quite happily read by adult fans of sci-fi and fantasy. The hints at the end of **The Novice** suggest that the third part, **The High Lord** (1 904233 68 6, £7.99 hbk), will be more grown-up and darker still. Canavan writes a compelling story and it is to her credit she has woven many themes and plotlines together, not afraid to challenge her teenage readers.

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