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Rings of Passage by Karla Tipton

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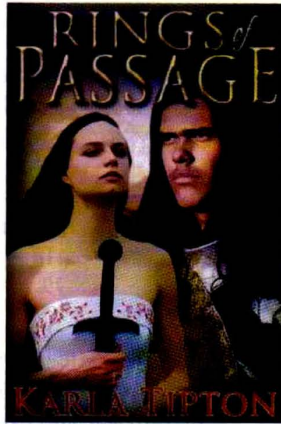
A novel which combines Richard III, romance and time travel might have some of us hastily looking elsewhere for more familiar fare. However, once I had suspended belief and immersed myself in the plot I found myself really enjoying a book which covers all the bases, but with a magical twist.

Karla is a member of the US branch of the Society and so the narrative has its fair share of Americanisms and spellings. It is her first novel and she writes well, maintaining the reader's interest in a plot which bounds along. And having spent time in England researching the period, she has her facts pretty much bang to rights.

The heroine, Anise, is an American actress who is about to appear in a production of *Richard III* and so is appropriately dressed in fifteenth-century costume when she dons an old, worn ring found in a farmhouse she has inherited. The magic powers of the ring cause her to travel back through time in a vortex to 1485 and she is unceremoniously dumped in a forest close to Berkhamsted Castle, where lives Cecily Neville.

Cecily Neville is afraid for her last and best-loved son, Richard, who is spiralling in a miasma of depression since the death of his queen, Anne. Cecily suggests a mistress will help him shake off his dark thoughts and the thought of this is something he abhors; until he meets Anise, that is!

Cut to a dark castle in Wales and we find our evil-doers in the forms of Margaret, Lady Stanley, and John Morton, bishop of Ely, who are crouching over a fire in the bishop's alchemy laboratory. Here are two major villains who are not only plotting for the return of Henry Tudor, but who are also lovers! It appears the saintly Margaret isn't quite as holy as we have been lead to believe . . .



Morton is forging magic rings, following instructions from the old Welsh king, Owain Glendower, who has been dead for decades, but appears in spirit form, travelling through time courtesy of the magic ring he wears and the same vortex which transported Anise back in time. Unsurprisingly, Owain is a powerful and ruthless wizard who is bent on resurrection and ruling Wales again. Morton is quite handy in the black arts himself and can travel through the vortex, materialising in other parts of the country and also to Henry Tudor in France where he provides support and reassurance about the forthcoming invasion.

These magic rings are the links in the chain and they are key to the story. Anise has one, Richard has one, Owain Glendower has one and Morton has made several. How they interact and behave is woven into the events which take place in the last few months of Richard's life. To add further suspense, not all the rings possess the magic of Glendower and this, inevitably, has repercussions.

Anise is witness to the deaths of My Lords Bastard in the Tower thanks to the magical vortex and experiences rough treatment at the hands of Thomas Stanley. Francis Lovell tries to persuade Richard that she is a witch and so Anise has to clear her name and prove her love for the king. Of course, the climax of the story is the battle of Bosworth, where things take a decidedly supernatural turn. If only it had ended that way!

Personally, I loved Karla's interpretation of the evil double-act, Margaret and Morton. The mother-in-law from hell becomes the wicked witch and the dreadful bishop a warlock. Sadly, we know they went on to live in positions of power, but don't let that detract from the story.

If you enjoy a good historical romp which plunges along at steady gallop, then *Rings of Passage* is for you. It is available from Amazon as a Kindle download.

Janine Lawrence