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Court of Wanderers, by Rin Chupeco. Reviewed by Amy Moore.

Amy Moore

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REVIEWS

Rin Chupeco. *Court of Wanderers*.
Simon & Schuster, 2024.
448pp. \$29.99. Reviewed by
Amy Moore.

Court of Wanderers by Rin Chupeco is the second and final book in the *Reaper* duology, following 2022's *Silver Under Nightfall*, and it follows vampire hunter Remy Pendergast and vampire lords Song Xiaodan and Zidan Malekh as they must face down the vampire court and unite them against the Night

Empress.

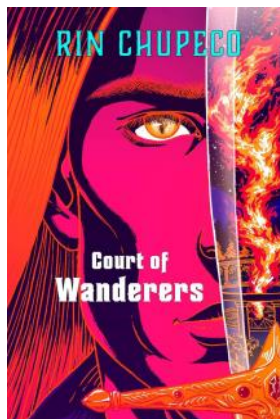
The novel picks up right where the first book ends, with the three protagonists leaving the human capital city of Elouve. Xiaodan is injured from her temporary defeat of the Empress, and Remy is unsure where he stands with the two vampires, but their past conflict is quickly forgotten as they rush toward the Fata Morgana, Malekh's seat of power and a safe place for Xiaodan to rest and regroup.

Court of Wanderers takes off from there, with vivid descriptions of fantastical vampire palaces contrasted with the comforting normality of life within them, with deeper explorations of both the magic in this world and the science that seeks to understand both the natural and supernatural. Once a vampire hunter himself, Remy is shocked at how easily he fits in to this world, when he was always treated with distrust among his own kind.

That surprising ease and comfort is stripped away when Remy, Xiaodan, and Malekh leave the safety of Malekh's court for the seat of the First Court, a temple in a cave deep beneath a lake. There, they must confront not only the suspicions of the other vampire lords, but also the painful mysteries of Malekh's own ancient history—impossible tasks only made harder when human servants start turning up dead.

Ultimately, defeating the Night Empress will require sacrifice from all, and even so, may only happen if Remy can be strong enough to let go of the mother he's grieved all his life and move forward into the future.

While the previous book, *Silver Under Nightfall* was a more slow-paced and political adventure (though it still packed in plenty of bloody vampire battles), *Court of Wanderers* takes full advantage of the stage set by its predecessor. The history and mythology of vampires and the diversity of their world are greatly expanded on as more factions converge on the First Court, making for a more fast-paced and fantastical narrative. The extra fantasy flair present in *Court of Wanderers* does involve a transition away from the more Gothic aesthetic



of the first book, but the horror is certainly still present, insidious and rotting at the core of the novel. Both elements are further bolstered by Chupeco's talent for description. Vivid when setting a scene and riveting in every fight scene, the prose of *Court of Wanderers* never misses.

Characterization is the book's other main strength. All three main characters get their time in the spotlight. Malekh in particular gets more focus here where he was more of an enigma in the first book (fitting, as he gets the cover treatment for this book); the revelations about his history and his place in the vampire world ground him in a way he wasn't in the first book and make him feel far more real. There are also many new characters introduced in this installment; the other vampire lords are all unique and very fun antagonists, even when they're reluctantly agreeing to get along. Remy also has a chance to meet other humans in the First Court who open his eyes to different perspectives outside of the prejudice he was raised in as a vampire hunter from a long line of vampire hunters. As an extension of characterization, the book's approach to romance is also unique, as Remy finds his place with two beings whose relationship is more long-lasting than he is. (As a note, while *Silver Under Nightfall* mostly opted for a fade-to-black approach to intimacy with one or two exceptions, *Court of Wanderers* is more forthright with its sex scenes.) The romance is never prioritized over the plot itself but is rather a compelling undercurrent to every choice the characters make.

Court of Wanderers is a successful sequel and conclusion to the *Reaper* duology, proudly taking on more of a fantasy spin to its own mythology and evolving from its tamer predecessor. Some readers may find the pace more satisfying than others; concepts are introduced rather quickly in some places, and more technically-minded readers may find themselves wishing for more grounded explanations of their inner

workings. Overall, the series is perfect for fans of gaslamp fantasy, character-driven narrative, and light horror balanced with romance elements.