

Keep It in the Dark

Justin Arnold

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In Justin Arnold's steamy fantasy novel *Keep It in the Dark*, young men at a boarding school navigate a tumultuous romance that's threatened by supernatural forces.

Seventeen-year-old Rowan is the unofficial king of Mockingbird Prep. Though his senior year promises to be extraordinary, he is thrown by his new roommate, Casper. Casper's family enrolled him at Mockingbird Prep in order to help him harness his new vampire powers. Should Casper be able to last the year without anyone learning that he's a vampire, he'll be ushered in as the prince of the Belamy vampire clan and whisked away on a debauchery-laden tour of Europe. All is complicated when the boys fall madly in love with each other, despite the challenges of Casper's immortality and the murderous group after him.

These hefty themes are leavened by the fact that both Casper and Rowan lean into humor when they talk. Sometimes, this is used to cover their true feelings for each other. The book's intense and dramatic moments become heartfelt, though, when the boys lower their guards, speak honestly, and are tender with each other.

Beyond its supernatural intrigue, the novel's emotional core rests in Rowan's first forays into understanding his sexual orientation. Herein, vampirism functions as an allegory for LGBTQ+ orientation: Rowan's attraction to Casper confuses him. Still, the two cannot stand to be apart. Their romance is beset by slayers—bigoted individuals who are mired in the past, even though modern vampires don't feed on humans without consent. Still, though a showdown between the slayers and Rowan is inevitable, the story still ends on a satisfying and optimistic note.

Keep It in the Dark is a hopeful fantasy novel that uses sensuality and vampirism to chronicle an LGBTQ+ coming-of-age.

JOHN M. MURRAY (November / December 2024)

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