



Remember Pompeii: The Wanshiqi Trilogy

Kika Emers

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Fluid and immersive, the series-opening fantasy novel Remember Pompeii follows a powerful reincarnated teenager who resists coming of age.

Ancient truths wait to be discovered in Kika Emers's fantasy novel *Remember Pompeii*, which infuses wonder and mystery into its story of wanshiqi entities (neither humans nor immortals) who are thousands of years old.

Strong-willed Kali is a powerful reincarnated sixteen-year-old now living in the twenty-first century. She and her parents have been punished to live out their reincarnations as human beings. They are joined by Kali's grandparents and her boyfriend, Hunter.

Kali doesn't like to think about the destruction of Pompeii in 79 CE, which she was responsible for; the event ruined her family. If she can reach her seventeenth birthday, they will be able to return to the wanshiqi realm, where all higher beings live and enlightened truths are revealed. But Kali isn't ready for the finality of that return; in each new life, she chooses a "death date" before that birthday to keep her family together.

The character development is enticing. As a heroine, Kali is prone to mistakes in her relationships with her family and friends—and with Hunter. Each mistake that she makes reveals a new secret and a new layer of vulnerability. She has a love-hate relationship with her parents, who show up when tragedies occur and criticize Kali for her shortcomings without offering support. Kali's teenage friends make her more human, even sentimental—not traits that are prized in the enlightened wanshiqi realm. And she and Hunter are complementary: Kali destroys and Hunter heals. This dynamic is also seen with her grandparents, who also support Kali and have a balanced connection that tempers their powers.

The worldbuilding is immersive and intriguing. Kali's California existence is a privileged but familiar one, while the distant wanshiqi realm is sheathed in wonder, with hints of its hierarchy of tribes, tribunal chambers that smell of "lilies and moon craters" and "fire and moss," and grand but not infinite knowledge. Wanshiqi beings like Kali practice free will and aren't required to be benevolent. Individual wanshiqi beings can lock beings in other realms; can heal, hurt, and kill other lifeforms; can shapeshift; can initiate wars with their anger; and can control the weather and initiate natural disasters.

The fluid prose is attentive to the senses, as with the sounds of Kali's mother approaching ("her heels *damn-damn-damn* the herringbone hardwood floor, echoing off the chestnut-paneled walls") or in detailing a trip with Hunter to the beach ("The moonlight silvers everything; the sand pales beneath it"). Such details embody Kali's feelings, from anxiety to desire, well.

Flashback scenes to Kali's past lives, including an at-first happy life in Bodie, California, help clarify the stakes as she approaches her birthday and her ultimate decision for this incarnation. Her reluctance to remember Pompeii creates intrigue, deepening everyday situations, as with a class project with Octavius, whose name evokes buried memories

for her, but whose ailing mother she feels prompted to help. Many questions are raised about Kali's past; there's great fun in finding the answers with her.

In the exciting series-opening fantasy novel *Remember Pompeii*, a powerful teenager resists coming of age through multiple reincarnations for reasons that she keeps secret from those she loves.

LEANNE GALVAN (January 5, 2024)

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