



## The Moonstone Covenant

**Jill Hammer**

Ayin Press (Nov 12, 2024)

Softcover \$22.95 (350pp)

978-1-961814-15-8

Formidable wives contend with persecution and past treacheries in Jill Hammer's intricate fantasy novel *The Moonstone Covenant*, set in a cosmopolitan principality.

Moonstone is a place marked by simmering religious and cultural divisions and conspiratorial politics. In this medieval land of gondolas and magic, bridges are "lit with lanterns"; there are stories of demon innkeepers, ghost cats, and winged books. Here, Istehar, an illuminatrix of texts, works on a book with a "moss-silk cover" and "roots woven into it for texture; flowers and syssyrup bark and willow leaves are pressed into its pages."

Istehar is from the Sha'an forest tribe and speaks the language of trees and books. In Moonstone, though, she's viewed as a foreign witch, despite the fact that her people healed the archprince. Her polygamous relationships receive ire, too. Accompanied by her three wives—Annlynn (a warrior librarian), Vasmine (a beguiling ink merchant), and Olloise (an apothecary whose parents were murdered)—Istehar vies with the archprince's power-seeking, Sha'an-hunting son in order to save Moonstone.

The book shifts between the strong, wise women's present stories and stories from their girlhoods. That they are Othered in Moonstone makes them cautious. The particulars of their fascinating crafts—they court favors, recreate a historical poison, and search the labyrinthine, rule-bound library's restricted areas—highlight their savvy determination to anchor themselves as indispensable to the townsfolk even while they protect their own household. Their fertile considerations of loyalty mix with concerns that they could be exiled. Throughout, their relationships with one other, which are passionate and resounding, ground them.

In the romance-laden, mysterious fantasy novel *The Moonstone Covenant*, a women quartet's collective gifts alter their homeland's future.

KAREN RIGBY (November / December 2024)

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