



Choosing a Master: Vampires and the Life of Erin Rose

S. M. Perlow

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Choosing a Master is fun vampire fare, with surprisingly deep relationships and a uniquely twisted mythology.

A human with a unique gift threatens the status quo in the straightforward, engaging urban fantasy *Choosing a Master* by S. M. Perlow.

In the world of *Choosing a Master*, vampires are not only real, they coexist with humans. Vampires have split into two factions: Spectavi vampires drink synthetic blood and work with humans on a daily basis; Sanguan vampires are less concerned with morality and do as they please. In between this cold war, humans continue to thrive.

A recent divorce and other setbacks send John Breen on a journey to Europe, where he willingly allows vampires to feed on his particularly special blood. He crosses paths with Vera Clark, who works for the head of the Spectavi in a secret lab. Each of Vera's projects has the sole purpose of protecting the Spectavi leader.

Ellie is a human in a coma with no hope of awakening, and her high school sweetheart turned obsessive boyfriend, Ethan, a Sanguan vampire, is driven to extreme lengths to save her. He chases down a clue that may lead to a cure. Ethan, John, and Vera find themselves in pursuit of the same goal—one that may shatter the uneasy cold war.

This is the first book in the Vampires and the Life of Erin Rose series. Erin Rose is not yet present, so this personage's importance is unclear. The major conflict in this title is between the two factions of vampires; it proves to be lackluster, with very little happening to highlight their war. Most of the tension comes from the seemingly universal desire to control John Breen's unique blood.

John's blood is an interesting addition to typical vampire lore. Though he is mortal, if any mortal drinks his blood, they are healed of all ailments and can be brought back if very recently deceased. Vampires also become addicted to it. John struggles to do the right thing, healing as many people as possible while protecting himself and his loved ones; that struggle is one of the highlights of the book. The fact that he's safe from no one serves as a compelling narrative drive.

Ethan and Ellie's story is equally engaging. Ethan seems immoral, drinking blood at whim, though he does so for the sole purpose of chasing down a cure for Ellie, who refused to become a vampire. In this novel, when a vampire drinks blood, they receive the memories of their victims, an effect that Ethan uses to seek out a cure.

Tense plotting and pacing complement strong characterizations. Chapters rotate between the major characters' points of view, providing well-rounded looks at action and scenes. The conclusion feels a bit forced; a dramatic showdown in Africa ties things up, still leaving threads for future sequels.

Choosing a Master is fun vampire fare, with surprisingly deep relationships and a uniquely twisted mythology—a promising series introduction.

JOHN M. MURRAY (November 20, 2017)

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