

Mantle of the World Ruler: Book 2 of the Lost Wells Trilogy

Kate Gateley

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Mantle of the World Ruler is a romantic fantasy novel in which two reborn lovers try to understand their place in the prophecy-threatened modern world.

In Kate Gateley's fantasy novel *Mantle of the World Ruler*, a young witch continues to learn and understand her power while trying to stop an implacable sorcerer who's seeking immortality.

It's been a year since Julia learned that her life as a university student was yet another life in a cycle of rebirth thanks to an ancient curse. She hails from a long line of witches capable of Sight, or divining the future through vivid visions. The sole respite in the cycle of deaths and rebirths is the one constant: her true love Dom. The two have spent lifetimes together, apart, and every variation in between, always trying to thwart the machinations of Cassius, who has sought the means of pure immortality for thousands of years.

Julia is destined to be the Sovereign and rule alongside the World Ruler to usher in an era of peace and prosperity. Her curse strips her of her memories until she reconnects with Dom, but her memory never fills in completely. Her fallible memory and growing power help draw the world building out: she's still learning everything herself. Much of the story is told through her perspective with an intimacy that complements the core romance.

Cassius remains a looming threat throughout, but the focus stays on Julia discovering her power and interpreting the visions and her growing relationship with Dom. Their relationship is unusual in that he remembers their shared past, and she has an intense emotional and physical connection to him. Following as she regains some memories and also develops their bond as the current version of herself is equal parts steamy, endearing, and humorous. Julia and Dom bicker, joke with each other, and crescendo in erotic passion while waiting for the means of confronting Cassius.

The story begins right after the events of the first book, but thanks to a careful doling out of context, this second volume is accessible to new readers. There are some elements that are not explained, such as the backstory of why Julia and Dom are trapped in their cycle. Subtle breaks in the ongoing narrative to reflect on previous events—framed through Julia's amnesia—allow the story to keep attention on the romance and the slow build toward a confrontation with Cassius.

The prose is polished, with a keen ear toward dialogue. It uses the unusual nature of long-lived characters to frame events in a humorous way. Dom often lapses into archaic phrases when he's overwhelmed with emotion—as with his tendency to invoke religious concepts when inflamed by passion. The sections told through Julia's perspective are the most compelling: she's an old soul living in modern times, unaware of her past self but aware of how Dom and the magic realm affect her.

The inevitable conclusion finds Julia and Dom becoming aware of how Cassius hopes to achieve his immortality—and how their cycles of death and rebirth are connected to his plans. There's a lack of finality as the narrative is set up to continue in future books. Julia and Dom still must grapple with the prophecy deeming her the Sovereign, with

Cassius's hunt for immortality, and with a painful betrayal.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (January 9, 2023)

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