



The Covens of Elmeeria

Miguel Lopez de Leon

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The Covens of Elmeeria is a believable and inspiring fantasy journey.

Miguel Lopez de Leon's *The Covens of Elmeeria* captures the coming of age of a princess with supernatural powers. This is creative, imaginative middle-grade fantasy.

Princess Nia is caught between two worlds. The only child of royal parents, she is the beloved heir to the throne of Elmeeria, a beautiful, prosperous, and well-fortified kingdom where magic and witchcraft are shunned.

Although she hides her powers from the kingdom, Nia herself is a witch. She satisfies her curiosity about her powers by sneaking off into the forbidden Spectral Forest to explore in secret. When Elmeeria is attacked by a rival country, the fate of Nia's kingdom rests on her ability to use both her royal diplomatic skills and her supernatural abilities to unite the magical inhabitants of the Spectral Forest and the people of Elmeeria.

While the length of this novel is compact in comparison to most high fantasy offerings for middle-grade readers, there's no shortage of royal intrigue and creatively imagined fantasy elements.

The narration follows eighteen-year-old Nia through her daily life of sitting in on her father's policy meetings, battling her mother over ladylike behavior and finding a suitor, and sneaking out with her canine companion, Fetch, to explore the mysteries of her powers in the surreal and isolated Spectral Forest. The two distinct settings are crafted with careful and believable detail.

The precision of word choice in description, dialogue, and action is superb and adds to the page-turning readability of the story. This richly descriptive prose at times exceeds the vocabulary range of the average middle-grade student and may pose a challenge to some young readers. However, context clues abound, making it possible for children to decode and appreciate the elegant prose.

Nia's official courtship rituals at the palace are filled with politics, humor, and romance. The Spectral Forest is particularly well constructed, introducing wholly new types of fearsome fantasy creatures, like an aggressive octopus plant that uses its tendrils to drag victims to its maw, as well as a society of creatures and witches who exist independently of humanity.

This story of a teenager exploring her innate magic, learning how to rule, and finding a suitor follows a predictable, if appealingly sweet, pattern at first. Midway through the book, Nia's predictable life becomes completely upended by a couple of surprise plot twists, shifting the story from a gentle read to a tale of thrilling intrigue and magical battle. Clever plotting and rich descriptive passages make this a fun glimpse into a new fantasy realm.

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CAROLYN BAILEY (April 27, 2017)

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