

DARK VERSE  
BOOK THREE

# THE EMPEROR

R U N Y X

THE EMPEROR  
Dark Verse Book 3



RUNYX

The Emperor  
Dark Verse #3  
RuNyx  
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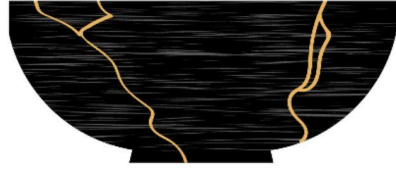
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# *table of content*

Title

Copyright

[Dedication](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Music](#)

[Preface](#)

[Part 1: Breeze](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Part 2: Gust](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Part 3: Tempest](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

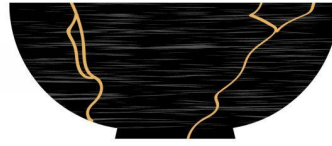
[Chapter 24](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Bonus Epilogue](#)

[Connect With RuNyx](#)

*To every survivor,  
whether you carry your scars on your flesh or in your soul, whether  
you've seen the worst of humankind or fought the worst of fates, you're still  
here.  
This is for you.*



## *author's note*

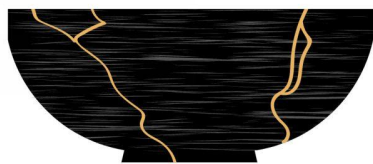
This is the third book of the Dark Verse series and while it deals with a single couple and their relationship over a long span of years, there are characters and events mentioned from the previous two books. If you have not read *The Predator* and *The Reaper*, I highly recommend doing so for a complete reading experience.

If you've read the first two books, I feel I should mention that this one gets much darker. This book contains explicit, graphic scenes of violence and sexual nature.

There are also a few trigger warnings I feel would be fair to warn you about in case you are sensitive to these subjects—panic attack, post-traumatic stress disorder, sexual assault against a minor, violence against a minor, murder, mentions of rape and torture, mentions of human slavery and trafficking.

If any of these subject matters make you uncomfortable, please take heed. Your mental health is of utmost importance and if any of these affect you adversely, I urge you to pause. If you do continue to read the book, I sincerely hope you enjoy the journey.

Thank you.



## *acknowledgment*

Dante and Amara took me on a journey of my own inside myself. Some parts were extremely hard to write and some like water. But I wouldn't be here, much less doing something I love so much, without the immense support of these people.

First and foremost, to my readers, the ones who have been with me through the beginning—thank you. Thank you for believing in me and for giving me something to live for. Knowing you are there to catch my characters when they fall is the best feeling in the world.

Second, to my parents—your endless love for me is the reason I am who I am today. Your love across distance and time is my pillar and every day, I am grateful to be yours. Thank you.

I also want to thank the entire book community that has welcomed me and accepted my characters. To all the bloggers and bookstagrammers, to all the graphic editors and photographers, to the friends I've made and the connections I've established, thank you. To those who freaked out with me and celebrated my book, thank you. I initially wrote a special shoutout and realized it got to a thousand words so I'll just say, THANK YOU to everyone who picked up my babies and took a chance on me and recommended them to others, to everyone who has been kind to me and the few who have become close friends. You know who you are and how important you are to me. Thank you!



And to Nelly. There will never be enough words in my heart to thank you for what you do for me. Your art and vision and generosity truly makes me feel like the luckiest person. Thank you for giving my words the perfect visuals and for tolerating my annoying ass. I love you.

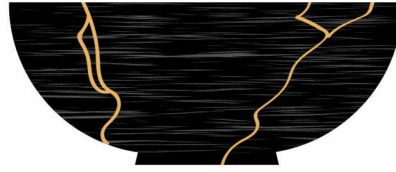
And Rachel, thank you for being my eagle eyes when I got squinty. I appreciate you and your friendship so much!

To my friends. Thank you for being so patient with me when I disappeared for days with messages unread and sometimes read and was a shitty friend basically. I love you.

To my tribe of readers, the gifts you have honored me with leave me speechless. The abundance you shower upon me fills my life every damn day. Thank you so, so much. You make my world a better place.

Most importantly, I want to thank you, the one reading this, for picking up my book and choosing to read me. If you've made it this far, I'm eternally grateful to you. I hope you enjoyed it but even if you didn't, thank you for choosing it. I appreciate you taking the time so much. Please consider leaving a review before jumping into your next bookish world.

Thank you so much!



## *playlist*

*Prisoner - Raphael Lake ft. Aaron Levy*

*The Night We Met - Lord Huron*

*Back to You - Selena Gomez*

*i hate u, I love u - gnash ft. Olivia O'Brian*

*Far From Home (The Raven) - Sam Tinnesz*

*The Beginning of the End - Klergy ft. Valerie Broussard*

*Say Something - A Great Big World ft. Christina Aguilera*

*Little Do You Know - Alex & Sierra*

*A Thousand Years - Christina Perri*

*The Scientist - Coldplay*

*Chasing Cars - Snow Patrol*

*Cry for Me - Camila Cabello*

*Set Fire to the Third Bar - Snow Patrol ft. Martha Wainwright*

*Satellite/Stealing Time - Above & Beyond*

*A Drop in the Ocean - Ron Pope*

*Back in Time - VV Brown*

*In the Air Tonight - Natalie Taylor*

*Shadow Preachers - Zella Day*

*My Songs Know What You Did in the Dark - Fall Out Boy*

*Next to Me - Imagine Dragons*

*Love's to Blame - Joel & Luke*

*Movement - Hozier*  
*Graveyard - Halsey*  
*i love you - Billie Eilish*  
*Skin - Rag 'n' Bone Man*  
*Go to War - Nothing More*  
*Already Gone - Sleeping at Last*  
*Cross Your Mind - Sabrina Claudio*  
*Control - Halsey*  
*Dogs of War - Blues Saraceno*  
*New Divide - Linkin Park*  
*Here Without You - 3 Doors Down*  
*Survivor - 2WEI ft. Edda Hayes*  
*Bad - Royal Deluxe*  
*Wolves - Sam Tinnesz ft. Silverberg*  
*Hurts Like Hell - Fleurie*  
*Fire on Fire - Sam Smith*  
*Distance - Christina Perri*  
*Helium - Sia*  
*Carry You - Jeffrey James*  
*Between - Courier*  
*When It's All Over - RAIGN*  
*Don't Deserve You - Plumb*  
*Holding On and Letting Go - Ross Copperman*  
*Kryptonite - 3 Doors Down*  
*Easier - Mansionair*  
*Rescue Me - OneRepublic*  
*In Need - Gert Taberner*  
*Stay - Gracie Abrams*

*Boomerang - Imagine Dragons*  
*Eclipse (All Yours) - Metric*  
*Please Don't Say You Love Me - Alessia Mamino*  
*Say You Love Me - Jessie Ware*  
*Poison and Wine - The Civil Wars*  
*Here She Comes Again - Royksopp*  
*Vertigo - Raphael Lake ft. Ben Fisher*  
*Starboy - The Weeknd ft. Daft Punk*  
*exile - Taylor Swift ft. Bon Iver*  
*Find My Way Back - Cody Fry*  
*Fuck it I Love You - Lana Del Rey*  
*Fall for You - Secondhand Serenade*  
*I Just Want You - Castle OST*  
*Legend - The Score*  
*One Last Night - Vaults*  
*Rolling in the Deep (Acapella) - Adele*  
*Shattered - Trading Yesterday*  
*Summertime Sadness - Lana Del Rey*  
*Rise - John Dreamer*  
*I Should Go - Levi Kris*

[Playlist on Spotify.](#)

[Playlist on Youtube](#)



The house was old.

The morning was cold.

And the stories, told.

But never loud enough to reach ears that could help.

The man stood by the tree, a tree he'd been using to watch the home for over two weeks. The lone house surrounded by land and mist was eerie enough in itself. Woods at the back, river a mile away, the nearest road two miles, it was truly a home of nightmares. From the outside, it looked like a home he'd once known—with thin, dilapidated walls that never silenced the screams, the rot on the inside enveloped in the stone.

He saw the young boy at the window, early in the morning, his curious eyes trying to find something in the thick fog. He knew that if discovered, the boy would take a severe punishment. But the kid was brave, or maybe desperate. The man didn't know.

He should probably feel bad about using him. He didn't.

The man flicked on the lighter in his hand and raised it to signal the boy. He saw the little eyes notice his arm, quickly looking back to check if anyone was coming. Satisfied, the boy nodded twice. Two very slow, precise nods, just in case the man missed it. The man lowered his arm, getting the answer he'd come for.

Brave little shit had been more help than he'd hoped.

He watched as the kid went back to the room, away from the window, and hoped he didn't die. That none of them died before they were found. That'd be such a waste.

Getting the answer he'd been rooting for, the man stepped back into the fog he'd come from, disappearing from sight.

They weren't ready.

None of them.

PART 1  
*breeze*

A decorative graphic consisting of several stylized, black leaves or feathers falling from the right side of the word 'breeze'. The leaves are arranged in a curved, downward path, suggesting a breeze or falling leaves.

*“In the middle of the journey of our life  
I found myself within a dark wood  
where the straight way was lost.”*

Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*



# Amara

10 YEARS

*They were kissing.*

Amara watched with wide eyes from behind the tree as Mr. Maroni's son and the pretty girl with pink hair stood with their mouths joined. She had *pink hair*. Amara has never seen anyone with pink hair.

Tilting her little head to the side, she tried to see exactly what they were doing. She'd seen the heroes and heroines kiss in movies, but never in real life. Since her father wasn't with them, she hadn't seen him kiss her ma either.

*Wait, were they eating each other's lips?*

*Ew.*

Nose wrinkling, Amara swiped her tongue over her lips just to test how it felt. Wet. *Icky*. Making a face, she kept watching, trying to understand with her tiny mind exactly why they were enjoying it so much. It wasn't like she'd come to spy on them. Not at all. She'd just been walking in the woods (*which she absolutely should not have been doing alone*) when she'd come across a little shack. Curious, she had walked over to see it, and hidden behind a tree after seeing Mr. Maroni's son and the girl.



The *outside* girl.

Amara was young but she knew the rules well enough to know that outsiders weren't allowed on the compound. That was a new word she'd just learned last week—compound. *Caum-paau-nd*. That's what they all lived on. She was allowed because her ma worked at the big house on top of the hill. But this outside girl? She really wasn't supposed to be there. She could warn them. But why? Maybe they had permission. She was with Mr. Maroni's son, after all.

And they were kissing again. Weren't they getting tired? It looked so *boring* after the first few seconds.

Done with the show, Amara decided to go back home since it was already pretty late. The sun was almost set, the sky about to get dark, and the woods could get scary without light. And she was not supposed to roam on the compound after six 'o'clock; she'd get in trouble.

With that thought in mind, she started to run on her little feet back where the woods ended and the buildings began. The sky darkened and Amara panted, getting scared. She didn't like the dark. She shouldn't have stayed out so late. Her small body started to shake as she reached the edge of the woods, and tripping over her own feet, she went down hard.

*Ouch, it hurt.*

Amara looked down at her knee below the hem of her skirt, bruised and throbbing, and winced. Ma said her pain threshold was low. That meant she felt more pain when she got hurt. Threshold was a new word for her too. *Thresh-hold*, she repeated in her head, seeing a drop of blood well up on the skin of her knee. Feeling sick, she looked up at the dark sky to not see the blood.

“Who's there?” the voice of a man came from a distance, reminding her she had to hurry back home. She wasn't supposed to be out on the

grounds after dark, especially not on these parts of the compound.

Standing up, her injured knee wobbly, Amara hurried over to the building where she lived with her mother. As she went downhill towards her home, feeling the throb in her leg, Amara hated the Maroni grounds. Why did it have to be so big, and on a mountain? Hills were hard to climb and get down on.

“Sneaking out again, ‘Mara?’” a boy’s voice from behind her startled her.

Almost falling on her behind again, Amara barely balanced and stopped in her tracks to greet Vin. He was her best friend, her only friend actually. And for some reason, he could never say her name right. She had always been ‘Mara to him.

“Vinnie! What are you doing sneaking around?” she demanded. Vin was just one year older than her — a fact he never forgot to remind her of— and he was wandering even though he wasn’t supposed to either.

Vin came beside her, an inch shorter than she was. She liked to tease him about that until he reminded her he was going to grow tall in a few years and she’d stay the same. Ugh, he annoyed her.

“I was training,” he said quietly, starting the walk downhill, taking her arm to help her. Okay, he was less annoying when he was being nice.

“What do you do in training?” she asked for the hundredth time, genuinely curious. He had begun ‘training’—whatever that was—a week ago, the day after his eleventh birthday. She knew it had something to do with the big guns she saw the guards carrying, but nothing more. And Vin didn’t tell her what he did, no matter how many times she asked him.

He shrugged, glancing at the dark training building to the right, where he’d come from. Amara saw the building in the distance, seeing another boy limping down the hill but in the opposite direction, towards the lake.

The new boy. Even though he'd been staying there for as long as she could remember, everyone still called him the 'new boy'. She'd never met him, but from the way everyone talked about him, she knew he was dangerous.

"Have you talked to the new boy?" she couldn't contain herself from asking.

"He's been here five years, 'Mara," Vin reminded her. "He's not new anymore."

"I know," she stepped over a stone. They were almost home now. "That's just what everyone calls him."

The light from the building showed Vin's dark, floppy hair and dark eyes, his front tooth slightly crooked as he spoke. "He doesn't talk to anyone. The kids don't train with him."

"He's a kid too," climbing the steps, Amara pointed out.

Vin shook his head, the hair on his forehead swaying. "He's not like any of us. Stay away from him, okay?"

Amara looked at the lake in the distance. She'd never been to that part of the compound. Thinking of the angry boy who lived there, she didn't even want to go. On the landing of the huge building where she and Vin lived—she on the ground floor and Vin on the third—she stopped him, excited to share her little finding from the day.

"I found a little shed in the woods today," she told him, trying to keep her voice low so nobody would hear.

Vin, who had been looking up at the stars, looked at her with wide eyes. "You went to the woods alone? Are you *crazy*?"

"Shh," she looked around, scared someone older would hear him. If the news got to her ma, she'd be grounded. She *hated* being grounded. After a second, when no one came, she relaxed slightly.

“The woods are dangerous,” Vin reminded her softly. That’s something every single adult around them had told every kid. *Don’t go into the woods.*

Amara rolled her eyes. “I didn’t go in deep.”

“But-”

“Oof,” Amara exclaimed in annoyance, punching his arm to shut him up. “I wasn’t the only one there. Mr. Maroni’s son was there too. With a girl,” she whispered, remembering the thrill of going into the woods, only to stumble upon the two teenagers.

Vin blinked, his eyes widening in excitement. “With a girl? An outsider?”

Amara nodded, grinning. Vin whistled. Or tried to. He practiced every day.

“They were *kissing*,” Amara informed him, her voice dropping even lower. “Kissing! Can you imagine? He was kissing an outside girl!”

Vin tugged at his collar, looking at the entrance door, looking uncomfortable. “That’s cool.”

Amara grinned. “Are you blushing?”

His chubby face flushed even more. “Of course not.”

Laughing, she nudged his side with her elbow and hobbled to the door. Ma always told her to never make people uncomfortable. Though Vin was her best friend, he was uncomfortable, so she stopped.

“Don’t go there alone again, okay?” he told her, entering the building behind her.

She went straight to her door and smiled at him. “Good night, Vinnie.”

He shook his head, heading towards the stairs, already knowing her well enough to know she would sneak out again. Amara watched his back under the lights in the hallway, seeing the bruise on his leg under his shorts