



# The Witch Who Came In From The Cold: Season One

*Lindsay Smith (Contributor) , Max Gladstone (Contributor) , Ian Tregillis (Contributor) , Cassandra Rose Clarke (Contributor) , Michael Swanwick (Contributor)*

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**The Witch Who Came In From The Cold: Season One** Lindsay Smith (Contributor) , Max Gladstone (Contributor) , Ian Tregillis (Contributor) , Cassandra Rose Clarke (Contributor) , Michael Swanwick (Contributor)

Through a haze of cigarettes and vodka there lies a version of Prague in the heart of the Cold War, where spies practice sorcery in their games of intrigue. While the political lines may be as clear as the Iron Curtain, the battles of magic seldom stay clean and the combating forces of Ice and Flame dance across borders and loyalties. Tanya Morozova is a KGB officer and the latest in a long of Ice sorceresses; Gabe Pritchard is a CIA officer and reluctant Ice recruit. Enemies at one turn, but forced into alliances at the next, their relationship is as explosive as the Cold War itself.

The Witch Who Came In From The Cold is an episodic serial presented by Serial Box Publishing. This collected omnibus edition gathers all 13 episodes from Season 1.

## The Witch Who Came In From The Cold: Season One Details

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Author : Lindsay Smith (Contributor) , Max Gladstone (Contributor) , Ian Tregillis (Contributor) , Cassandra Rose Clarke (Contributor) , Michael Swanwick (Contributor)

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## From Reader Review The Witch Who Came In From The Cold: Season One for online ebook

## OLeg89 says

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## Tim Hicks says

Three, really, but I award an extra star for the concept, which should be encouraged. But not too often.

I read it as a single unit, and I suspect if I'd been fed it in episodes I might have given up.

If this seems long and tedious, wait till you read a real John Le Carre or equivalent. I am taking this one's length and pace as a tribute to those.

Crossing a spy novel with magic is a great idea, although it can make for a tricky plot. And I'm not sure about some of the characters - Sasha and Dom are just icky, and Zerena's a bit cartoonish until the end when things get real. Winthrop and Toms were annoying, but authors get to do that if they want.

The conflicted Gabe was a good choice, well developed. The magic aspects were mostly good, although I never like to see golems -- they're too powerful and the author often ends up handcuffed. The one here was dealt with better than in many books I've read.

Recommended> Hmm. Maybe not if you've never read a spy novel. You need a base to appreciate this one.

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## Stuart says

Really enjoyed this novel, a strange mashup of a spy story and a supernatural story, written by a group of authors writing chapters turnabout, remarkably seamlessly. The authors included two of my favorites - Max Gladstone and Ian Tregillis, so it had a lot going for it from the beginning. There is an overall arc of a story involving the CIA trying to extract a Russian scientist from the grasp of the KGB during a scientific conference held in Prague. Then there is Prague itself as a background, mostly in winter, where the cold seems almost to be another character, and the environmental details stack up to create an excellent feeling of realism, from the troublesome Moskvitch cars to the specialized language markings for Czech words. And last but not least, the extraction is taking place during another episode in the ongoing, perhaps centuries-old, war between the "Ice" and the "Flame", two groups of supernatural witches / sorcerers who are trying to outfox each other in a quest to capture as many "Hosts" as possible, to be used in some nefarious activity not completely defined, but sure to be terrible! The edition I read (I don't know if it's the only one available) came from a company called SerialBox, and included post-it notes at certain junctures, post-it notes with interesting details and insight by the authors, which actually made me look at some of the writing in a new light. (though the penmanship left something to be desired!). The problem that agents of Ice and Flame face (well, one of them) is that their loyalties are often tested - do they cleave to the espionage service that employs them, or to the shadow organization with the long world view? Now, having set up the background, we meet the two main characters, a CIA operative and a KGB spy. Gabe works for the CIA, and, due to a previous magical incident, carries a "hitchhiker" inside his brain, effectively a second personality that wakes

up at unforeseen moments to ruin his life. He is getting help for this from an Ice agent that happens to work for MI6. Tanya works for the KGB, but is also a long-term Ice agent, working to save Hosts from Flame, which is confusingly highly placed in the KGB also. So will she help Gabe or will she hinder him? Prague inserts itself into the story again, with ley lines crossing under a bar frequented by all spy agencies and also by the supernatural rivals. Lots of great twists in the book lead it to a good conclusion, though it is easy to see a sequel being set up. Well worth a read.

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### **Peter Tillman says**

I read the Swanwick story, which is very much *in media res* and just so-so, perhaps because I had no idea of what is going on in the serial. So, 8 deadly words, new book with waitlist, way over-booked.... Probably not for me. Left unrated.

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### **Althea Ann says**

As is obvious from the title, this story takes its inspiration from John le Carré, with its retro depiction of spies and double agents. In 1970s Prague, the CIA and the KGB dance around each other, their social circles and stomping grounds weirdly overlapping as agents maintain their cover stories and attend official functions...

But 'The Witch who Came in From the Cold' adds another layer. Not only are there two political sides in play, but there are two rival and opposing magical groups, known as 'Fire' and 'Ice.' Each of these groups seems to think the other is the Worst Thing Ever - and that the destruction of the world may be in the offing, if they are not stopped. What makes things more complicated is that both the CIA and the KGB harbor both those who have no knowledge of magic at all - AND both Fire and Ice agents. Those who might be political allies could also be magical enemies, and vice versa.

The story follows Tanya (KGB) and Gabe (CIA) as a magical problem that Gabe's been suffering from leads him down the witchy rabbit hole. Lots of jostling for position and questions about who the 'good guys' might be (if anyone) follows.

This was initially published as a serial, and maybe I'd have had a different feeling about it if I'd read it episodically, but read all as one book it kind of felt unnecessarily long and drawn out. But - full disclosure - I find John le Carré a little bit tedious, too (hangs head in shame.) However, I liked the overall concept, and wasn't tempted to give up on it at any point.

I think the story would appeal to fans of Sergey Lukianenko's "Watch" series and Daniel O'Malley's 'Rook Files.'

Many thanks to Serial Box and NetGalley for the opportunity to read. As always, my opinions are not affected by the source of the book.

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## **Cristal Punnett says**

A great story with realistic characters and great mix of a spy novel and magical realism. I enjoyed the setting of Prague in winter. I enjoyed the different episodes written by different authors giving variations in writing styles.

The only downside was some repetition in each episode of the storyline.

I would like to thank NetGalley for this copy.

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## **Sarah (CoolCurryBooks) says**

The Witch Who Came in from the Cold mixes Cold War intrigue with urban fantasy to create a fantastic and original story.

Before I say anything else, I should note that The Witch Who Came in from the Cold is a Serial Box story. Serial Box is a fairly new company that releases “episodes” of serial stories that together make up a “season.” Basically, a written story told in a format more akin to weekly television. Each Serial Box story brings in multiple writers who work together to create the season.

In Prague, both KGB and CIA agents scheme on behalf of their respected countries. But there’s another divide that lies beneath the feuding nations: the magical organizations of Ice and Flame. The Flame wants to see the world burn and built anew from the ashes. The Ice wants to prevent this happening. And magicians loyalties to the Ice or Flame are greater than any national divide. Whether KGB or MI6, Ice agents will cooperate to stop the Flame. Tanya Morozova is a KGB operative and sorceress for the Ice, but she’s beginning to wonder how much the Ice can be trusted. Gabe Pritchard is a CIA operative, but he’s beginning to realize there’s more to the world. Something happened to him in Cairo, and nothing’s been right since... But when he seeks help, he’s directed towards Tanya Morozova. They are enemies in one conflict and allies in another.

I’ve always had a certain enjoyment for spy stories. Be it James Bond or The Americans, I love the shifting webs of loyalties and the questions of who can be trusted. The Witch Who Came in from the Cold amplified those facets with the creation of a whole other level. Plus, magic! Fantasy is my favorite genre, so this mash up had immense appeal to me.

Gabe was obviously the reader’s surrogate. He’s just become aware that magic exists in the world, so the reader is learning about it right along side him. Plus, he’s the fairly typical lead – a straight white American. However, The Witch Who Came in from the Cold contained some really awesome female character’s as well. Tanya is probably my favorite, and I love how she works alongside Nadia, another KGB and Ice operative. There’s also a supporting CIA character who’s gay, and I’m glad that The Witch Who Came in from the Cold chose to address his story.

I’ve had mixed results with the Serial Box format. Sometimes I’ve been thrown off by the transitions between different authors. In the case of The Witch Who Came in from the Cold, the different authors felt entirely seamless. This story did feel less episodic than some of the other Serial Box offerings. Each episode felt more like chapters in a larger story than self contained episodes with their own arcs. It might have made

it more difficult to read an episode a week, but it lent itself well to binge reading the entire season in one go. Which to be fair is how I prefer to view my television too.

The Witch Who Came in from the Cold is a slow burn story, filled with simmering intrigue. The motivations of both the Ice and Flame are shadowy, and I still don't know if either side can be entirely trusted. The plot was filled with twists and turns that kept me flipping the pages. I can't wait for more! Bring on season two.

Originally posted on The Illustrated Page.

*I received an ARC of this novel through Netgalley in exchange for a free and honest review.*

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## **Erica says**

Oh brave, new world! We can now get an app that will give us pieces of a story each week, delivered in eprint format! It's like a podcast only it's a serialized novel. You know, like they used to publish in newspapers and magazines back in the 1890's.  
What a long way we've come.

So this is "Season One" of the first set of stories about CIA Agent Gabe Pritchard and friends, KGB Agent Tanya Morozova and friends, and bartender witch Jordan Rhemes and friends, released via the Serial Box app.

It seems like a pretty fun idea and would probably work fine as a weekly distribution but once all the stories are compiled into a novel, it gets a bit bumpy. You see, there are five different authors writing these stories and it's not like each one is responsible for a specific set of characters (and friends). It's more like that game where you write a paragraph and cover up everything but the last sentence then pass it to the next person who has to pick the story up from that last sentence and move it forward another paragraph before covering everything but their last sentence and passing it along.

In this case, all the writers know the plot and players but, like I said, reading their works all together in novel format creates a jarring sense of identity crises among characters. I think Nadia is the only character who felt like herself throughout and that may have been because she was mostly in the background.

I've never read The Spy Who Came In from the Cold so I can't tell you how close this is to that. I understand that one's gripping and well-written. This one is definitely corny, almost slapstick, written like a campy spy thriller but with magic. Also, 1970's Prague seems to consist of maybe 10 city blocks, a shipping yard, and a river. Everyone knows everyone but nobody seems to know that everyone else is a spy and/or witch. But everyone IS a spy and/or witch and they're all doing counterintelligence on one another while also casting secret spells. There's a lot of running back and forth to the same places, many boring parties with bad food/alcohol, a lot of plot recycling, and not a lot of forward movement for a book of 600+ pages, but it's somehow still a quick read. I mean, it takes me something like six months to read each Ice and Fire book (that's a funny joke if you've read both this and are familiar with those George R.R. Martin books) and this one only took me 2.5 months so that's pretty good.

I think with the right narrator, this would work much better as an audiobook because then the voice actor could bring a sense of cohesion to the story that lacks in print.

All in all, irritating with that damned lack of consistency but a fun read.

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## Julie Capell says

The typical spy thriller is usually confusing enough, with agents and double agents constantly changing sides until the reader just gives up on understanding what's going on and just ends up reading for the occasional bon mot or romantic encounter. At least that's what happens to me.

This series, which adds sorcery as another layer of complexity on top of the usual Cold War allegiances, should therefore have been a complete cluster\*\*\*\* but against all expectations, I found it a highly enjoyable and eminently comprehensible thriller. One might wonder at what point mashups will have jumped the shark (or perhaps that milestone is kilometers behind us) but I am very glad Serial Box took a leap of faith to produce this series. The fact that several incredibly talented writers came on board surely did not hurt the product.

There is a nice mix of female and male protagonists, representing the “usual suspects”—Americans, Brits and Russians. Several characters have decent arcs, confronting not only their prejudices but also their own self-image and entire world view. The plot really hums along, propelled by secrets both mundane and magic. The witchcraft system feels integral to the story and the world; I could completely buy into the idea that the East-West battle was fought not only on the ground but also in the magical energy fields underlying Prague, Cairo, and apparently the entire planet. It's all the more impressive when you take into account that the entire tale crosses the boundaries between chapters written by completely different writers.

I anxiously await the next season of this unique and engaging series.

[This review refers to the print, not the audio version]

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## Mogsy (MMOGC) says

3.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/06/29/...>

I may not be the biggest fan of spy fiction, but out of all the Serial Box series released so far, *The Witch Who Came in From the Cold* was probably the one that excited me the most. To know why, you just have to take one look at that dream team of an author line-up. There are even a couple on there who are on my auto-read list. I mean, that's a lot of talent in one place, and of course, I was also curious to see how their different styles would work together, because as you know this book is a serialized novel made up of a number of individual “episodes”, similar to a season of a TV show.

As you've probably gathered from the title, *The Witch Who Came in From the Cold* draws its inspiration from the Cold War spy novel by John le Carré. Offering a quirky mix of politics and espionage, the story also has a fair bit of magic and other paranormal elements thrown in for good measure. The scene opens in Prague, where both KGB and CIA agents conduct covert operations amidst heightened hostilities between their respective countries. Gabe Pritchard is an American agent who has been struggling with some problems as of late. Ever since returning from another assignment in Cairo, he has been experiencing some strange effects, like headaches and other distractions that seem to strike him at the worst possible times. Eventually,



his actions lead him to cross paths with his Russian counterpart, a KGB operative named Tanya Morozova. While Gabe is aware that she is an agent for the other side, little does he know Tanya is actually more than she appears.

For you see, behind the tensions between the US and Russia, there lies another conflict—the struggle between two magical factions, Ice and Flame. Secretly, Tanya is a sorceress for Ice, working to prevent Flame from realizing their vision of a new world born from the ashes of the old. However, after some disturbing new developments, she is beginning to wonder just how much she can trust her own organization. Complicating matters is the fact that an ally in politics does not necessarily mean an ally in magic, and caught in between are the mundane agents who are blissfully unaware that a whole other sphere of reality lies hidden beneath their own.

After an action-packed intro in the first episode, the story does admittedly slow down somewhat, focusing instead on developing the characters' backstories and how they came to their positions. The magical aspect is made known very early, following Tanya and her colleague Nadia as they track a target through the streets of Prague. This was our first taste of how magic operates in this world, via elementals and human hosts. It's a fascinating system, and this section also does double duty in revealing where Tanya's true loyalties lie. Then there's Gabe, whose chapters alternate with Tanya's. He is an ambitious CIA agent, and sometimes a bit rash, which often puts him at odds with his superiors throughout the course of the novel. His character is also important because initially, he is just your mundane guy who has no idea magic exists. Through his eyes, we are gradually eased into the secret war between Flame and Ice, once it is discovered that his migraines have a magical cause and he is forced to work with Tanya in order to find out more.

I have to say, I really enjoyed the authors' take on the Cold War premise here, especially the added layer of complexity thanks to the imaginative inclusion of the magical war. That said though, due to the constant back-and-forth between the themes of espionage and magic, the pacing did sometimes feel a bit uneven to me. To be fair, I don't read a lot of spy novels, and when I do, they're often of the thriller-suspense variety, so subtler types of plot developments tend to be wasted on me. Not that I didn't appreciate all intelligence gathering, underhanded backstabbing, or sowing seeds of doubt, but after a while, it was clear that I so much preferred the paranormal aspects like ley lines, magical golems, and sorcerous cults. In the end, I was not surprised to find myself gravitating more towards Tanya's chapters, because hers often featured more magic, while Gabe's dealt more predominantly with spycraft.

I also noticed similar themes or story ideas repeated in some episodes. Not sure if this might be a hitch in the editing process, but I suppose when you have multiple authors working on the same project, there's going to be more potential for such issues. Of course, it's possible too that reading the episodes week by week would have given me a completely different experience. On the whole though, I felt that the serialized format actually worked quite well in this case. Transitioning between the different episodes was practically seamless, and there was clear synergy between the authors' writing styles. Books like these are also fast making me rethink my initial skepticism for serial novels. Though I think I will always prefer consuming my serials like my TV shows, i.e. binging full seasons all at once, I'm definitely starting to see their potential for creative storytelling as well as a more entertaining way of reading.

Bottom line, *The Witch Who Came in From the Cold* is another sophisticated and innovative series, perfect for readers who might be feeling up for some fantasy in their spy fiction. Despite some minor obstacles, I had a good time with this book, and it was a treat and joy to see the amazing work done on it by some of my favorite authors.

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## **Bmquiram says**

I really enjoyed the setting and the style the book was set up in. The natural breaks in the story provided a excellent place for me to take a break from the story. Each episode was basically the perfect length for one sitting. The down side of this was that I found it hard to pick up the book again. With the start of each section I felt like I was re-reading information I had already read. Way to much background information to keep me interested.

I never connected with any of the characters and found there wasn't enough fast paced action or magic in the story to counter the slow strategic war part of the story.

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## **Jay! says**

I loved this. I loved this so much. Buying season two of this was the most worthwhile thing I could have done. Ever. Fantasy and historical fiction (especially with a focus on Eastern Europe) are my two favorite genres and this blends them perfectly into a mix I really can't get enough of. Very excited to get my hands on a physical copy in June.

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## **Mitchell says**

The prospect of a Cold War era spy thriller in the fantasy genre excited me, when I first learned about this book, and indeed the premise remains one of the strongest aspects of the book. In Prague, secret agencies of all types wrest for knowledge and power; CIA, MI-6, The KGB--but there are two others operating even beyond the knowledge of the usual organizations, Ice and Flame, cabals of witches who have infiltrated other agencies and are working towards higher stakes--it's not just about the political landscape, it's about the fate of the world itself.

There are a number of characters in this book, but the circle is kept relatively tight--though we follow a fairly large cast of perspective characters, they are generally the only characters in the book, aside from a few extras. It helps keep the story from spilling over itself. Primarily, we follow Gabe Pritchard, an all-American CIA operative who, at some point in his past, had a little run in with something he can't explain, and now there's a hitchhiker in his head trying to get out, and it's affecting his work. On the KGB side, we have Tanya, who is also a witch for the Ice, attempting to extract a young woman of interest to the Ice before the Flame can get her. Invariably, Gabe and Tanya's paths cross, and much of the tension of the book comes from them having to work together for the interests of Ice, while being enemies in their other agencies. This second layer of intrigue adds a nice twist on the usual spy story, in fact--it's not just about who might be an operative for another organization, but who might be a witch working against you.

The characters themselves are fairly strong, due to all of them getting some time to carry the story. There are diverse personalities playing off of each other, but there isn't generally anyone who comes across as incredibly unlikable or annoying, at least for me (although Josh, Gabe's partner in the CIA, gets pretty frustrating).

The book is also episodic, which was one of the most talked about features when I was looking into this book; some people hated it, while other people loved it. I have never read a serial novel before, so I wasn't sure what to expect. If anything, I was surprised by how normal the book read. I don't read closely enough, I

suppose, to really notice and be thrown by different authors writing certain episodes. To me, it just felt like one continuous tale, just like any other novel--perhaps with a few filler episodes thrown in.

That said, the plot is largely the biggest knock against the book for me. By around the end of the book, when the characters are preparing for the ending, I got bored and started glancing over paragraphs until I got to something interesting. The problem is pacing. The story never really builds to anything. Yes, there's an event in the last episode that feels like a "finale" but it's just so underwhelming that it didn't really work for me as a drawing together of the characters and conflicts of the books. It felt more like the authors knew they needed a set piece to finish off on, and delivered, but there was little heart or anticipation to it. The best climaxes are the ones that force characters to overcome their differences, their prejudices, their obstacles, while tying up loose story threads and culminating in an emotional and physical pay-off. I could analyze why I don't think this book's climax accomplishes any of that, but to do so would require spending a lot more time talking about specific scenes and revelations.

So I will just say that the climax doesn't really do much for tying up loose threads--it DOES feel like a logical continuation of the story at that point, but there are obviously a lot of relationships and subplots at play here--in a book where we get scenes from just about everyone's perspective, and everyone has at least three secrets stuck tightly to their chest--and nothing really gets wrapped up here. It feels like the characters end the novel in much the same place as they started, albeit with certain new information that they didn't have before (and which didn't come about from the climax). It's an annoying return to the status quo, and the climactic event feels relatively detached from the story itself. And then the book just... ends. I assume there are more stories beyond this, that they've always intended for a "Season 2" but it's a bad television show that doesn't resolve many of the threads and conflicts by the end of Season 1 while hoping new, interesting conflicts will hook a viewer into Season 2.

I also blame the stakes of the novel, which more or less stay the same all the way throughout. We get a very early distinction between the Ice and Flame, that the former wants to preserve the world while the other wants to tear it apart. While this binary is probably too simple (we learn things about Ice, and we get some perspectives from Flame witches) it also more or less informs the stakes of the novel: if the Flame get what they want, they'll destroy the world. For some reason. Somehow. There are some moments of really good, personal stakes, but they almost always tie back into the Flame being victorious, and this looming threat of the Flame destroying the world. It was hard for me to be invested in such a vague threat, especially when the subversions of the book taught me that it wasn't probably so simple. So when the final threat of the novel more or less is "if we don't stop this thing from happening, it brings the Flame one step closer to destroying the world," I was just bored.

Much of the novel's conflict also revolves around the question of "will they work together?" in regards to Gabe and Tanya overcoming their mundane political animosity for the good of Ice. It's a good question to throw out once or twice, to make us really doubt things are going to go well, but this book asks that question far too many times, and never really changes its answer, so it loses its weight--especially when it's still asking that question in the last two episodes of the book.

Finally, and this is perhaps the most dependent on my personal preference, but I cannot stand when a multiple-perspective story, just before a big event or revelation, switches to the perspective of someone who is either not present at that event, or does not have the information to understand the revelation. There are quite a few scenes where a character will be about to unearth some secret, or will be pulling off an operation they've been building to for a few episodes, only for the narration to cut to another character who, at best, only gets to see the residual effects of that revelation or event. In some cases, we don't return to the original character for some time, and by then the character is living another day and isn't even thinking about what

they've uncovered, so that the writers can reveal it later, from another character's perspective. It felt cheap to me, and annoying.

I had high hopes for this book, and I really did want to like it, going into it. A strong opening drew me in, and the cast of characters was intriguing and varied enough to keep me interested. But the book was average to me, without any sense of rising stakes or tension, capped off by an ending that felt obligatory and didn't really do anything for me. It's hard to make justifications for a book when I'm skipping pages in the last twenty, ready to finish and move on to something else.

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## **Tracey the Lizard Queen says**

3.5 Stars

Review originally posted here: <http://thequeenofblades.blogspot.co.uk...>

Well, I'm not really sure where to start with this particular title. Spies and magic, what can I say? It was rather good. At least, it started out exceptionally good and then deteriorated slightly through the middle and didn't quite make up for it at the end. But still a good read.

For me, the best thing about this book was the whole 'spy thing'. I love a great spy drama and this was up there with the best. It's not without its flaws, some parts were more dragged out than I expected for something originally published as individual episodes. So there were occasions where I thought there was a little too much focus on the environment and not enough on the characters. That being said, the descriptions of Prague are nothing short of magical.

There were some issues with pacing as well, now I'm not sure if that's because it was written by several different authors, or if it's because this is a 'box set', or perhaps something else, but sometimes it felt somewhat disjointed. I was able to look past it though. This is a brilliantly crafted spy drama with some magic for good measure. And some really good artwork my 5th Generation B&W Kindle did not do justice.

\*I received an e-copy from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Rebecca says**

Interesting structure, having been serialized with each chapter written by a different author. It's not flawless, but it works better than you might expect. Cold War witches in which there's both the Russians and the Westerners but also the Ice and the Flame, both of which are horribly mixed so your ally on one level is your enemy on another. So. Much. Paranoia. A lot of fun.

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