



Burning Times: A Cold War Horror Story

James K. Rone

Arno Press

(665pp)

978-1-73400-095-5

A woman proves indomitable in the face of extraordinary circumstances in the Cold War–era horror novel Burning Times.

In James K. Rone's novel *Burning Times*, atrocities are enacted against so-called witches, and strange capabilities awake in a woman as a result.

Eva, in whom unknown powers lie dormant, is a part of the Women's Army Corps, stationed in Western Europe in the final years of World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War. Beautiful, sharp, and ambitious, she has had a lifelong compulsion to see Czechoslovakia, her family's homeland before they fled to Texas for safety. When she receives a mission to infiltrate a Czechoslovakian conference to tout anticommunist ideals, she jumps at the chance to prove herself to her country.

What Eva doesn't anticipate, however, is the danger she's in the moment she steps into the medieval castle hosting the conference. The site is overseen by a formidable archbishop, Vladimir. He accuses Eva of witchcraft and plans to use her as a pawn in a secret society's scheme to revive violent, public "witch" executions.

The narrative often takes the form of a scientific or historical document; at other times, it's more omniscient. The story hovers above the characters, inspecting their inner lives and revealing their motivations in the moment. For example, Vladimir is convinced that he must prosecute Eva as a witch within hours of meeting her, though his plan to lull her into a false sense of security and capture her is still in development.

Historical details overwhelm the narrative; they are often shared via long swaths of exposition. Elsewhere, characterizations are developed in the same manner. Indeed, the book devotes more space to contextual minutiae than it does to its action, robbing it of tension and dulling its conflicts. Eva's appearance is also described to excess; her beauty and allure are among the catalysts for her prosecution. The men around her brim with palpable prejudice and lust, finding excuses to ogle, leer, and think about her body, and she devotes too much thought to how people see her.

The book has atmospheric moments, though. It interweaves psychological, genetic, and historical subject matter well. And the brutality that Eva experiences at the hands of her captors, the horrors that innocents face in war, and the insidiousness of misogyny are detailed in startling terms. Eva, in spite of all of her suffering, proves indomitable in the face of extraordinary circumstances.

In the historical fantasy novel *Burning Times*, a woman struggles against the darkness of resurrected witch trials.

NATALIE WOLLENZIEN (August 3, 2024)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.