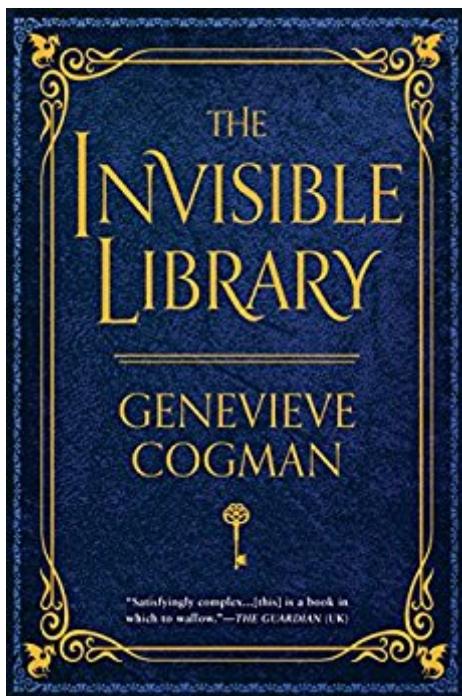


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The Invisible Library (The Invisible Library Novel)



Synopsis

Collecting books can be a dangerous prospect in this fun, time-traveling, fantasy adventure from a spectacular debut author. One thing any Librarian will tell you: the truth is much stranger than fiction... Irene is a professional spy for the mysterious Library, a shadowy organization that collects important works of fiction from all of the different realities. Most recently, she and her enigmatic assistant Kai have been sent to an alternative London. Their mission: Retrieve a particularly dangerous book. The problem: By the time they arrive, it's already been stolen. London's underground factions are prepared to fight to the death to find the tome before Irene and Kai do, a problem compounded by the fact that this world is chaos-infestedâ "the laws of nature bent to allow supernatural creatures and unpredictable magic to run rampant. To make matters worse, Kai is hiding somethingâ "secrets that could be just as volatile as the chaos-filled world itself. Now Irene is caught in a puzzling web of deadly danger, conflicting clues, and sinister secret societies. And failure is not an optionâ "because it isnâ "t just Ireneâ "s reputation at stake, itâ "s the nature of reality itself...FEATURING BONUS MATERIAL: including an interview with the author, a legend from the Library, and more!From the Trade Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Alternate-world hopping. A seemingly infinitely large library. A Sherlock Holmes-like quick-minded detective. Bibliophile thieves. This, apparently, was going to be a book for me. And had Genevieve Cogman stopped there, I might have been more won over by *The Invisible Library*. Or maybe had she stopped at the dragons. Or at The chaos versus order/balance of the universe battle. The vampires. The werewolves. Airships. Magic language. Cyborg-ish alligators. The . . . well, you get the idea. Cogman packs a lot into *The Invisible Library*, too much I'd argue, and between that and some issues of execution, I ended up sorely disappointed with a book I had such high hopes for based on the premise. So about that library and its group of thieves. Though to be honest, they only steal sometimes, so "agents" is a more accurate term, though they call themselves, no surprise here, Librarians. Irene is a full librarian, albeit on the junior level, and her missions involve entering alternate worlds (the library touches upon nearly all of them apparently) in order to retrieve books unique to those worlds so they may be stored in the Library. In this case, she's tasked to find a particular version of Grimm's Fairy Tales in an alternate steampunk-y London. Her first plot complication comes via her just-assigned apprentice Kai (nobody ever lies a tag-along newbie), the second via a rivalry with a higher level Librarian, and the third arrives when she finds out that her alternate London is "chaos-infected," meaning home to the Fae, those aforementioned vampires and werewolves and other such ilk of varying power. The chaos-affiliated Fae are balanced in the universe by the order-affiliated dragons. As you can tell from my intro, the complications keep coming, but suffice to say Irene's mission doesn't go as smoothly as expected, as the book quest gets a murder investigation tacked on (how she meets this London's version of Sherlock Holmes), a potential romance with Kai, as well as a battle against a legendary evil rogue Librarian. And more. It's possible that all these elements could have played nicely together and meshed into a fantastically rich story. Admittedly, it's even possible they'll do just that for some readers. But for me, it was all just a bit too much "too scattered, frenetic, and arbitrary, as well as too surface-level thanks to having so many elements divided over a finite number of pages. My other issues were, as noted above, matters of execution. One problem is the Librarian's magical power of Language, which basically allows Irene to tell targets to "do things" doors to unlock for instance. There are supposed to be limits, but to be honest, the rules such as they are seemed inconsistent at times, arguable at others, and always flexible depending on the needs of plot (working on not depending on how much suspense was needed), making the ability bordering a bit too closely on a deus ex machine. Those rules were emblematic of another problem I had, which was the frequently clumsy (and just plain frequent)

exposition that runs throughout the novel. I lost track of how many times the narrative came to a screeching halt while someone (almost always Irene) stopped to explain a bit of the worldbuilding, or to sort of retcon an explanation of why she shouldn't do A or B in a prior situation (or why she could in this situation). And in quick fashion: characters sometimes seemed overwrought or demonstrative relative to the merits of the moment, the romance elements often struck me as implausible and a bit trite in their description, characterization didn't always seem consistent, some plot points seemed contrived, and actions didn't always make sense to me (not that I didn't understand what was happening, but why the characters wouldn't do something that seemed a lot more reasonable). I could give specific examples of all these, but don't want to belabor the points. Given all these issues with plotting and execution of craft elements, I could have been carried along by rich characterization or great prose. But the characters never really caught me and never subsequently grew on me. Kai seems more a repository of plot complications and Vale (the detective) a pretty two-dimensional Holmes, and where both are seemingly meant to have deeper characterization, those elements felt overplayed in their mysterious motivation and their overwrought emotion. The rogue Librarian brings up some nicely complex points (though ones that don't seem particularly original) about the Library, but feels more stock Villain than a character who is a villain. Irene, meanwhile, is engaging enough, but never really compelling as a character. This is a much longer review than most of my "didn't like" sort, and I think it's because I was expecting/hoping for so much more. Plus, I may be pre-emptively hitting the defense button a bit, because I wouldn't be surprised if this book gets a lot of love (after all, readers tend to love books about books/reading). But honestly, I had a hard time pushing forward in this and considered stopping several times as I grew increasingly frustrated with the level of execution/craft. With such a great premise though, it's possible Cogman's craft will rise to meet the challenge of that premise in book two. I think, however, that I'll let someone else, someone I trust a lot, make that call before I consider venturing back into the series.

This was a fun, engaging fantasy that hit my heart because its main character is a librarian. Her career path is much more exciting than mine though. I've never been sent to an alternate Earth with a dragon as my assistant in order to retrieve a particular book. Irene is up for the challenge. Only, when she and Kai arrive, they find that the book has already been stolen and many, many people are looking for it. Between trying to find the book, dodging the evil librarian who wants to pervert the purpose of the library, dealing with a jealous rival, working with this alternate world's great detective

and dealing with steampunk gadgets loosed by another set of villains, Irene is kept busy and we readers are kept entertained. Luckily, this book is the first of a series because I am eager to follow Irene on further adventures.

I enjoyed the book, but think the world building lacked something. Too much thinking to keep it straight. Irene is a junior librarian at the Library. The Library is somehow outside of the time and space of the universe, of which there are many alternate worlds. They contain varying levels of chaos, magic, and technology. Books unique to an alternate help connect it to the Library. Irene is sent with a student trainee by her mentor/supervisor to obtain a certain copy of the Brothers Grimm from a highly chaotic magic and vampire infested alternate. Things go wrong quickly and they have to strike a deal with a regular person in the universe who is of the great detective type. Steampunk type creatures try killing things. There is also a big bad that is a traitor to the Library floating around. Interesting idea that I will probably try again just far to much going on in the world and it is not built up properly.

There is something to the criticisms that Ms. Cogman has "thrown the kitchen sink" into this first book. Nonetheless, the AU is well-described and throwing in some String Theory only adds to the plot twists. Being a fan of Sherlock Holmes I was happy to see the author bring in a character based on Doyle's great literary creation. Is it a great book? No, I don't think so. The overall four-star rating is accurate, IMHO. It's a good read and kept my interest despite a slow start. Hopefully the character of Kai will develop more depth, as he's the least satisfying to begin with but could, with good writing, be quite the star of the whole series, due to who/what he truly is in this fictional universe.

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