



Spiral Path

Katharine Eliska Kimbriel

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"The world is woven of secrets."

Ritual magic mixes dangerously with wild magic. Yet Alfreda Sorensson's talent has grown until she becomes a target for worldly and unworldly powers. Now, to save her soul, she must leave her pioneer home in the Michigan Territory to take refuge at an elite New York school, where her wild magic places her in direct conflict with the ritual taught to young Americans and Europeans.

Alfreda suspects that half the professors may not be human at Windward Academy. It's a curious place, a last chance for students who can't control their powers, and a place where everything is a test, in one way or another.

At first Alfreda thinks her greatest challenge will be mastering ritual. Then she learns that traitors have infiltrated the school—and the new nation. War looms between the United States and England, and Alfreda answers the call. Only after she spies her way into an enemy magician's estate does she learn the true challenge of her own power—

Because when dark magic finds her, she's utterly on her own.

Spiral Path Details

Date : Published September 16th 2014 by Book View Cafe

ISBN : 9781611384406

Author : Katharine Eliska Kimbriel

Format : ebook 401 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Science Fiction, Alternate History, Magic, Young Adult, Dragons, Paranormal, Demons

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From Reader Review Spiral Path for online ebook

Lesley says

Really enjoyed this but found it ended rather abruptly - however, the fact that there are all sorts of dangling threads leads me to hope that sequel/s are in store.

Shay VanZwoll says

After the better part of two decades, Allie is back with a brand new adventure!

Spiral Path, the third book in the *Night Calls Series*, is a wonderful addition to the story of Alfreda Sorensson's life and training. As a thirteen year old girl, Allie has been through more than most people, even other Practitioners. After surviving werewolves, a vampire, an utburd, and kidnapping by a family of sorcerers, Allie starts out *Spiral Path* with the births of both her sister and a unicorn foal. Realizing that Allie may be in danger from others who realize her future strength and power, Marta takes Allie to Cousin Esme's school in New York to quickly learn ritual magic.

It was really nice to see Allie surrounded by other Practitioners. For possibly the first time in her life, Allie is able to be herself without worrying how other people will see her. Though parts of her life cannot (and shouldn't) be shared with the other students, she fits in probably the best that she ever has. Her studies at Esme's school aren't quiet, however, and her adventures with portals, demons, and hungry biscuits will keep you laughing.

While I loved the first two books in this series, I really enjoyed the change of pace in *Spiral Path*. We're able to see Allie at her best, and the new characters introduced were both well-developed and fun to read about. I really hope that Katharine Eliska Kimbriel continues sharing her stories about Allie, Shaw, and the world they live in.

Sara Stamey says

I was recently introduced to this series, and love the way Kimbriel develops young Allie in her learning path in the magical arts. She's a wonderful character who grows through time, surrounded by a lively and believable supporting cast, in an alternate history rich with sensory detail. "Spiral Path" is one of those stories where you feel you're stepping through a doorway into a world where you can fully participate and literally taste it. (Though watch out for the dangerous biscuits!) Plenty of wonder and danger, too. Come join the magic!

Verity Brown says

Okay, where's the rest of the story?

This book promises so much more than it delivers. When half-trained Allie is singled out by a unicorn as a powerful practitioner, she gets shipped off to a magic school in New York to learn enough ritual magic to protect herself from any big-bads that might try to take her out because of the attention that's been drawn to her. As might be expected, the situation allows the set-up of numerous points of tension: will big-bads pursue her? will a backwoods girl be able to fit in among cultured Easterners? will she be able to cope in this unfamiliar situation? will she succeed in learning a new kind of magic?

Unfortunately for the reader, all these points of tension are casually brushed aside almost as quickly as they are created. Instead we get an almost Mary-Sue version of Allie--the teachers all like her, her fellow students all like her (except for some snobs who never actually pose any real threat), and she can seemingly do no wrong. Rather than developing and resolving the original points of tension, the story plunges Allie into a spy situation that seems to be attempting to make some sort of political commentary on the basis of early 19th century American politics...but which never actually gives the reader enough information to process the commentary. And when the spy situation is over, boom, the book is over.

What the heck happened?

I'm giving this book 3 stars on the basis of the fact that Allie is still an interesting and compelling character, in spite of everything. But taken as an individual book rather than an installment in a series, I'd rate it closer to a 2, on the basis of the problems described above.

Mike says

So...is this it?

You know, when I write a review, I tend to be critical. Possibly overly critical. Just because I enjoy a book doesn't mean I'm going to ignore the ways it may have fallen short.

This series came out of nowhere and muscled my way onto my favorites list. For the first time in a loooooong time, I seriously had nothing bad to say about Night Calls. I was able to point out a few things I thought might bother other readers, but that was all the criticism I could muster up. Alfreda Sorensson isn't the only one with magic; Kimbriel has the touch.

Then I read Kindred Rites, and if it's possible, I may have liked that one even better. It was a bit more suspenseful, but still maintained the slow, detailed, rich tone that so drew me in to Night Calls. Alfreda is a bit older, a bit wiser, and knows quite a bit more about working her craft, but she's still the same young, practical, precocious child who gets in over her head, gets on with things anyway, and with whom you have no choice but to fall in love.

Except now I'm a little torn.

Like books one and two, Spiral Path covers a very short period of time that nevertheless feels...bottomless. All of them are so well-crafted that even though we may only spend a few months at a time with Alfreda and Marta and the others, there's so much detail that it's like you're living right along with them. There are those who don't care for detail when it comes at the expense of action, but in this case you don't read the story, you drop into the pages and live it.

So why am I torn? Because there's no resolution. Or, to be more clear, even though there's a conclusion to the specific adventures that make up the Spiral Path storyline – this does not end with some manipulative cliffhanger – we cannot be done with Alfreda yet. She's barely just gotten to school. She's barely explored her feelings for Shaw. We haven't helped Margaret, or gotten to know Esme's professors, or learned the implications of the unicorn.

In other words: there's so much of everything left to do!

It's been over 15 years between the releases of books two and three! Don't get me wrong. Spiral Path was a sheer delight to read. I certainly recommend reading the series – as if you needed the recommendation if you've already read NC1 & 2 – but good grief, make it last for your own sake, or you'll end up feeling as bereft as I am right now.

Huh. I guess I'll just have to start over from the beginning, won't I?

Sarah Wynde says

I was delighted to see Spiral Path and bought it immediately, no hesitation, which is rare for me. I'd read the first books years ago, and loved them so much that I still have copies on my shelves (multiple moves mean my books get pruned regularly). But I wavered between giving it three and four stars. I pushed it up to four because I probably will re-read it and maybe when I do, I'll be more able to accept it for what it is -- a pleasant, easy, series of ... maybe vignettes? It reminded me almost of Louisa May Alcott.

The main character, Allie, goes to school, makes friends, has adventures, but she doesn't change or grow over the course of the book. Her relationships with other characters don't lead anywhere, almost to an extreme. The two snobbish girls get introduced as a potential conflict which then never happens. The kindly mentor girl's problems are demonstrated and then dropped. The challenging young magical boy's issues are introduced but never resolved. It's not just that it feels unfinished, it's that it feels like a lot of lovely, potentially interesting threads were created and then left to sit, going nowhere.

But the threads were lovely and pleasant and Allie is a great character. The book is fun, just not rich in the way the first two in the series were. Still, I could see this being the kind of book to read when I have the flu and want comfort reading to go with my chicken soup.

Lis Carey says

Alfreda and her cousin and teacher, Marta, visit Alfreda's home for the birth of Alfreda's new sister--and during this visit, Alfreda has an alarming and exhilarating encounter with a unicorn. As exciting and rewarding as this is, Marta is furious with the unicorn; it will make Alfreda far more visible to malignant forces. She needs more protection than she can currently provide for herself, and needs to fill the gap in her education where a knowledge of ritual magic should be.

Marta arranges for her to become a student at the Windward School, in faraway New York. The head of the school, Professor Livingston, is another of Alfreda's cousins, and she, Marta, and her mother will all trade services to the school to cover the cost of her tuition. Alfreda's share of this will be teaching the beginning

herbal magic class.

Allie gets a bit of a break in this outing. Her challenges here are not vampires, werewolves, or evil sorcerers planning to steal her magic. One might almost say they're a bit more age-appropriate: going away to school for the first time, getting to know young people of very different backgrounds from her own, learning the social rules of a larger society, and studying subjects Marta and her mother couldn't teach her themselves. Indoor sanitary facilities and a version of hot and cold running water are new experiences for her. So is cooking as punishment duty, and cooking with a crew that mostly has never cooked before--although some have been taught how to create dinner menus and direct kitchen staff.

Much of the adventure here is the adventure of boarding school with a magical twist, but there are other things going on in the background, and Allie can no more avoid trouble than she can avoid breathing. She's just far too intelligent, inquisitive, and brave, not to mention impetuous.

This is a lot of fun. Recommended.

I received a free electronic galley of this book from the author.

Trish says

One of my favorite series. I really hope she writes another one. Enjoyed her Nuala books. But I really enjoy Alfreda. Every page of the book feels like magic should to me.

Karissa says

This book was just as beautifully written as the first two and a pleasure to read. I just love this alternate history world so much; I also really love the characters and the magic. I will say that the covers for this series could use some serious help (but I guess just don't judge this series by its cover).

My biggest disappointment with this book is that so many intriguing new plot-lines start but nothing is resolved by the end of the book. If it was clear that there are going to be more books in the series I would be thrilled by how things developed! However, it looks like this is supposed to be the final book in the series which is really disappointing. Things were just starting to get really really interesting...

The tone for this book is much different than the first two. Alfreda is in a magic school most of the book dealing with a lot more people and a lot more social issues than she has dealt with previously. I still enjoyed the story a ton; but it was very different. There weren't as many creepy encounters and as much things from the dark.

The world is broadened quite a bit as well in this book. We hear about events from new places and also hear more about Wild Magic and the world it comes from.

Overall I absolutely loved this book and ended up devouring it. However I was a bit disappointed that so many new plotlines were started and not resolved; hopefully we see another book in this series eventually to tie up all those issues. Aside from that issue, this was a delightful fantasy set in an alternate early America. I

would recommend to fantasy fans.

Christina Zable says

Delightful characters, delightful world, ham-handed plotting.

Tigrish says

Review for the first three books in this series:

I don't know if this author is aware that a lot of people do judge books by their cover, yours truly included, and that this series certainly would not have made the cut.

It's too bad, because I am often disappointed when I pick a newly released book with a beautiful cover. Just goes to show, I really should know better.

These books are diamonds on the rough. There is so much potential in this, for a great series, an epic series, perhaps so much as 12 books long. I don't know why this works, the writing, the character building, the level of detail! Awesome! I mean, at times I checked what percentage I was at and was wondering what was going to happen, because the books do not notably cover one event. It appears to be just a life described. I say "just", but really it's... quite something.

Which is why I was so sad to see that this author hasn't been finding the time or funds to carry on this series. These books are good, really good. And I've read a lot of books, good and bad.

To think that Alfreda hasn't even reached adulthood yet, this story could go so many awesome places. I hope one day it still will, and that when it does, I won't have forgotten about it.

C. Mills says

This book follows the characters from Kimbriel's Night Calls series. The books take place in an alternate Michigan, in a wilderness village called Sun Return, about the time of the War of 1812, and has "practitioners," people who handle illnesses and all sorts of other-worldly disturbances; witches, werewolves, vampires, Indians, and other unsettling beings. Alfreda (Allie), was only 11 when the werewolves came, and Allie's older brother is one of the five they took from the village. The werewolf invasion made clear to the family that Allie had to stop quit resisting using her Gift and must learn to use it, to become a practitioner, ones who could "hide in a leaf, "dip" into minds, and find the secret herbs that heal. Allie's education continued, with more and more advanced teachers, through three books filled with risks and grave dangers. In "Spiral Path," Allie's teachers send her to the big city, not only to learn more advanced skills, but to learn how to live in "civilization." The plotting is tight, the settings vivid, and the characters deeply developed and sympathetic. I don't know how to explain further without spoiling something, but, for readers who like fantasy and/or alternate history, this is a very good read.

Dani says

"Spiral Path" is a sequel to "Night Calls" and "Kindred Rites" - both also excellent - but any of the three make good starting points; you can read and enjoy SP without having read the other two. (Once you do, you'll probably go back and read the other two anyway.)

Alfreda is a young girl growing up in the Michigan Territory, somewhere around 1810. It's not quite our 1810, but it's close. (Think of it as our history, but with a bit more magic in the mix. The author's excellent research into the life and manners of the time add a great deal to her books.) Alfreda herself has magical talents. They become hard to ignore as she begins to notice werewolves - and vampires - and things that go bump, not necessarily in the night - and she begins an apprenticeship to a midwife with her own special talents.

In "Spiral Path", the apprenticeship is interrupted (supernatural politics) when Alfreda is sent to a boarding school near New York, to learn ritual magic. The story that follows has the same mix that makes the earlier books so much fun: The characters are rooted in their time; they do not have modern attitudes or manners. The magic and schooling are interesting, but they serve the story, and are not allowed to get in its way. And Alfreda herself is an engaging protagonist - extremely talented, but reserved, and not inclined to tell people what she's thinking.

Very readable. Very re-readable.

TallaCassie says

FINALLY! The wait is over. If you are a fan of Allie's world then you will not be disappointed. Spiral Path picks up where Kindred Rites left us, the story sucks you in and you are seeing through Allie's eyes into the world of this alternate history, and it's fascinating. Ms.Kimbriel's descriptive story telling allows readers to visualize this world as though they are in the story with the characters. These characters are my old friends. I find comfort when I'm with them. Allie is just as beloved to me as Anne Shirley or Laura Ingalls. I only wish this book was longer so I could spend more time with these friends. I eagerly await the next installment.

Sherwood Smith says

I read this in draft. I don't know that it is the best introduction to new readers, but fans of Allie, the heroine of *Night Calls* and *Kindred rites*, will be delighted to see Allie back after a hiatus of a few years. Allie leaves home to go to magic school for the first time, and her friendship with handsome young Shaw shows signs of a closer attachment.

This book might be considered transitional, as it sets Allie up in school, with new friends and new responsibilities. There is more time spent on magic, hinting at connections with the nascent government of the young United States in this alternate world. It's sure to leave Allie's faithful fans anticipating the next book.

