

Frost & Shadows: The War of Miracles

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Frost & Shadows kicks off an intriguing and promising fantasy series that affirms the value of all people.

A teenager faces a monstrous enemy and contends with her supposed allies in Jessie Vallée's series-opening fantasy novel *Frost & Shadows*.

The Guardians are an elite force. They protect others and compel young people with special powers to become tools for the good of "the mundane world." After spending her entire life evading the Guardians, Emma finds herself in the one place she vowed never to go: the Institute of Blessed Gifts, the school where all gifted people are trained and given careers. Emma is torn between her excitement over the freedom and amenities that the school offers and her resentment at being taken away from her dying mother.

At the institute, the benefit that Emma enjoys most is being able to make friends at last. Perky Aria, anxious Jimmy, and studious Mirabel—three teenagers with distinctive personalities, wants, and goals—welcome her. But it is cursed Dimitri, whose kind Emma has always been taught to hate and fear, who most turns her world upside down. Even speaking to him is considered treasonous. But Emma is a brave, curious, and merciful heroine, and she gives Dimitri a chance.

The book moves from its introduction of the school and Emma's fantastical world into an exciting quest: in befriendng Dimitri, the steadiness of Emma's new life is threatened, and she's forced to strike out on a perilous but rewarding path that could result in a better future for everyone. This quest is the novel's true core. In the course of it, Emma and her friends—five burgeoning heroes—are made to rely on their gifts and the power of their friendship to catch a traitor and survive a hopeless battle against a foe whose only goal is to destroy and consume others.

The story's premise is intriguing but vague: for example, it is unclear why gifted children must be permanently separated from their families or why Emma's mother goes unpunished for failing to report her daughter's gift as required by law. The extent of the institute's power and purview also has yet to be established. Each student at the institute has a unique gift, which they harness in creative, even beautiful ways. The climactic battle, in which ostensibly different powers combine, is a highlight that both resolves immediate concerns and leaves a larger objective on the table for future installments of the promising series.

The first book in a fantasy series, *Frost & Shadows* follows a supernaturally gifted teenager as she learns that everyone deserves the freedom to be themselves, no matter the circumstances of their birth.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (April 10, 2023)

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