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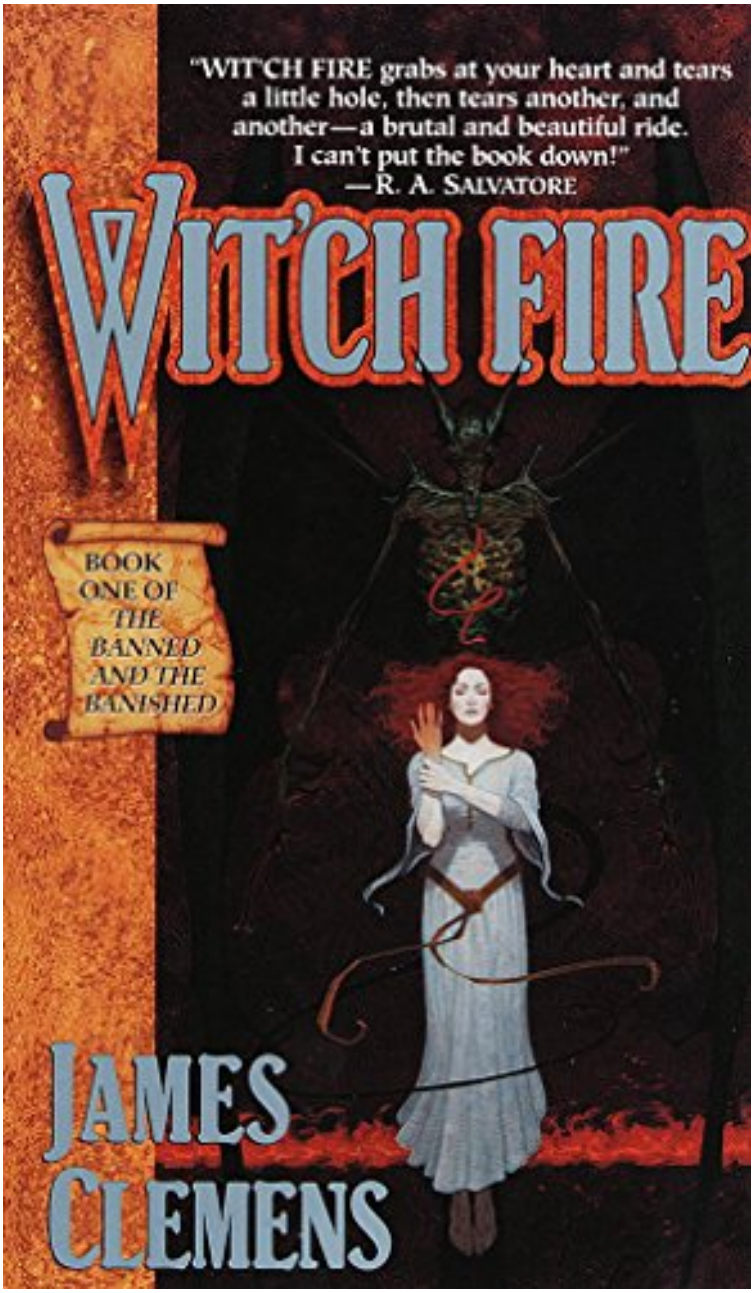
# Wit'ch Fire

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**Par James Clemens : Wit'ch Fire** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wit'ch Fire:

**Description :** Description du produitA magnificent epic of dazzling magic and searing prophecyFrom a brilliant new voice in fantasy comes a band of heroes, a world in peril, and an unforgettable heroine whose unexpected gift of magic awakens an ancient, slumbering evil.On a fateful night five centuries ago, three mages made a desperate last stand, sacrificing everything to preserve the only hope of goodness in the beautiful, doomed land of Alasea. Now, on the anniversary of that ominous night, a girl-child ripens into the heritage of lost power. But before she can even comprehend her terrible new gift, the Dark Lord dispatches his winged monsters to capture her and bring him the embryonic magic she embodies.Fleeing the minions of

darkness, Elena is swept toward certain doom--and into the company of unexpected allies. Aided by a one-armed warrior and a strange seer, she forms a band of the hunted and the cursed, the outcasts and the outlaws, to battle the unstoppable forces of evil and rescue a once-glorious empire...

Prsentation de l'diteurOn a fateful night five centuries ago, three mages made a desperate last stand, sacrificing everything to preserve the only hope of goodness in the beautiful, doomed land of Alasea. Now, on the anniversary of that ominous night, a girl-child ripens into the heritage of lost power. But before she can even comprehend her terrible new gift, the Dark Lord dispatches his winged monsters to capture her and bring him the embryonic magic she embodies. Fleeing the minions of darkness, Elena is swept toward certain doom--and into the company of unexpected allies. There she forms a band of the hunted and the cursed, the outcasts and the outlaws, to battle the unstoppable forces of evil and rescue a once-glorious empire . . ..comWit'ch Fire grabs you in the first scene, and doesn't let go until the very end. This is the beginning of a new fantasy series--the Banned and the Banished--by first-time author James Clemens, but its sophistication and style are reminiscent of experienced fantasists such as Guy Gavriel Kay and George R.R. Martin. Elena is "the wit'ch of spirit and stone," born of a deadly alliance between three powerful mages in fulfillment of prophecy. But can she learn how to use her powers in time to resist the forces of the Dark Lord? She is joined in her battle by some unlikely allies, but the motley crew may be the only hope for a threatened world. Clemens handles plot and characterization deftly, but the addition of lots of un'neccesary apos'trophes to let you know you're reading a fantasy is a little distracting. Still, Wit'ch Fire is a fast-moving, entertaining read that's definitely worth your time.ExtraitThe apple struck Elena on the head. In surprise, she bit her tongue, and her foot slipped off the next rung of the ladder. She fell the two yards to the hard ground and crushed a decayed apple, smearing sticky foulness over the seat of her new work clothes."Careful there, Elena," Joach called from another ladder, the strap from his apple basket digging into his forehead. The basket on his back was almost full.She glanced to her own basket, its contents spilled across the orchard ground. With her face as red as the apple that had dropped on her, she stood, trying to reclaim as much dignity as possible.Wiping her brow, she looked to the sun, which was low on the horizon. Late afternoon shadows stretched toward her. Sighing, she gathered her stray fruit. The dinner bell would be ringing soon. And her basket, even reloaded, was only a bit over half full. Father would be angry. "Head in the clouds," he would accuse her. "Always slacking from real work." She had heard his words often enough.She placed a hand on the ladder leaning against the trunk of the tree. It wasn't as if she was purposefully avoiding work. She didn't mind working long hours in the fields or orchards. But the monotony of the chores did little to keep her attention from wandering to the numerous curiosities around her. Today she had found a kak'ora bird's tiny nest tucked in the crook of an orchard tree. The nest, long abandoned for the season, fascinated her with its intricate weaving of twigs, dried mud, and leaves. Then there had been the lacy spiderweb she had found, heavy with dew, like a jeweled drape. And the molted husk of a fiddler beetle glued to a leaf. So much to study and admire.She stretched the ache buried between her shoulders, staring at row after row of apple trees. For just a heartbeat, Elena felt a twinge of suffocation--the "willies" her mother called it. In the past, many workers had whispered of the orchard's smothering touch. The trees consumed the entire high country, blanketing hundreds of thousands of acres, spreading from the distant peaks of the towering Teeth down to the lowlands of the plains. While the orchard wore many different seasonal faces--a spread of pink and white blossoms in the spring, an impenetrable green sea in summer, a skeletal tangle in winter--its very bulk had a constancy that ate the spirit, draining it.Elena shivered. The branches blocked all the horizons around her. The entwining limbs overhead kept even the sun's touch from Elena's face. When she was younger, she had played among the rows of trees. Then the world had seemed huge, full of adventure and new discoveries. Now, nearing womanhood, Elena finally understood the whispered words of the other workers.The orchard slowly choked you.She raised her face. Here was her world. A trap of trees, leaves, and apples. She could find no break in the view. The cloying smell of decaying apples lay thick on the air. The odor crept into one's pores, marking each person like a dog with its scent, claiming you as its own. Elena spun around, drowning in the beauty of the orchard.If only she had the wings of a bird, she would fly from here. Sail across the plains of Standi, wing over the I'nova swamps, fly among the humped islands of the Archipelago to the Great Ocean itself. She turned in circles under the boughs of the trees, imagining faraway places."When you're done dancing, Sis," Joach called down to her, "you'd better get back to work."His stern words clipped her wings and tumbled her from the clouds. She stared up at her older brother. His voice rang with echoes of her father. For a moment, Elena could even see her father in her brother's broadening

shoulders and strong, sunburned face. When had that happened? Where was the boy who had run screaming with her in imaginary hunts through the orchards?She stepped back toward her ladder. "Joach, don't you ever want to leave this place?""Sure," he said, continuing to pick. "I want my own farm. Maybe I'll stake out some land by the wild orchards near the Eyrie.""No, I mean leave the valley--leave the orchards.""Be a townie in Winterfell, like Aunt Fila?"Elena sighed and mounted her ladder. The orchard had already swallowed her brother whole, his mind and spirit trapped in the tangle of branches. "No," she said, trying again, "I mean leaving the foothills, going to see other lands."He stopped, a ripe apple in his hand, and turned to her, his eyes serious. "Why?"Elena slipped the carrying strap across her forehead. "Never mind." Her basket now felt twice as heavy. Nobody under-stood her.Suddenly laughter burst from her brother, drawing Elena's attention back."What?" she said, expecting ridicule."Elena, you're so easy to fool!" Joach's face split with a mischievous grin. "Of course I want to leave this boring valley! Who do you think I am, some doddering farmer? Sheesh, I'd leave here in a bloody second."Elena grinned. So the orchard hadn't snatched her brother yet!"Give me a sword and a horse, and I'd be long gone," he continued, his eyes wide with his own dreams.They shared a smile across the row of trees.Suddenly a ringing clang echoed across the field: the din-ner bell."About time!" Joach said, leaping from his ladder to land gracefully on the ground. "I'm starving."She grinned. "You're always starving.""I'm growing."Her brother's words were certainly true. Joach had spurted in size over this last season; his fourteenth birthday would come next week. Just a year older than she, he already stood a good head taller. She resisted the impulse to glance down at her chest. The other girls on neighboring farms were already sprouting in all directions, while she, if she took her shirt off, looked not unlike her brother. People had often mistaken them for brothers, even. They had the same red hair, tied in a ponytail in back, the same green eyes above high cheekbones, and the same sunburned complexion. While it was true she had more freckles, longer eyelashes, and a smaller nose, she was still almost as muscular as he. Working in the fields and orchards together since they were children had conditioned them similarly.But the farm work they did amounted to no more than children's chores. Soon Joach would join the men in the harder labors and grow the chest and arms of a true man, even as he grew in height already. Eventually no one would mistake them for brothers--at least she hoped not. Unwittingly, she found herself staring at her chest and thinking fervently, the sooner the better."If you are done admiring those baby apples of yours," he teased, "let's get going."She plucked a fruit and threw it at him. "Get out of here!" She meant to sound abrasive, but her laughter at the end ruined it. "At least I don't keep flexing in front of the mirror when no one's looking."It was his turn to go red faced. "I wasn't ... I mean, I didn't--""Go home, Joach.""What about you?""My basket is far from full. I think I'd better work a little longer.""I could pour some of my apples into your basket. Mine's overflowing anyway. That way it'll look like we did the same amount of work."Knowing her brother was trying to help her, she still felt a twinge of annoyance. "I can pick my own apples." Her words came out more acerbic than she had intended."Okay, I was only trying to help.""Tell Mother I'll be back before sundown.""You'd better be. You know she doesn't like us out after dark. The Cooliga family lost three sheep last week.""I know. I heard. Now get going before they run out of mutton. I'll be fine."She saw her brother hesitate for a heartbeat, but his hunger won out. With a wave, he headed away, marching between the rows of trees, back toward the house. Quickly swallowed up by the trees, even his scrunching footfalls faded to silence.Elena climbed to the top of the ladder and pushed her way up to the more heavily laden branches. In the distance, she spied the multiple trails of chimney smoke rising from the town of Winterfell, hidden deeper in the valley. Her eyes tracked the black, smudged columns until they faded to faint haze high above the valley, where winds blew the smoke toward the distant ocean. If only she could follow ...As she stared, her father's words returned to her, his voice gruff: Your head's always in the clouds, Elena.Sighing, she tore her gaze from the sky and leaned her belly against the ladder for balance. This was her life. Using both hands, she grabbed apples and dropped them over her shoulder into her basket. Experienced fingers judged if the apples were ripe enough to pluck, pausing here, picking there, until all the mature apples from the local branches rested in her basket.As she worked, her shoulders began to ache again, shooting complaints down her back. But she did not stop. Swatting at the flies that circled about her, she climbed up another rung to reach fresh branches, determined to fill her basket before sundown.Soon the ache in her shoulders spread like a weed to her belly. She shifted her position on the ladder, thinking the rungs were bruising her midriff as she leaned. Suddenly a sharp cramp gripped her gut. She almost lost her balance, but a quick hand on the ladder stopped her plummet.Eyes narrowed, she held on to the ladder, waiting for the pain to subside. It always did. For the past few days, she had been suffering from bouts of cramping. She had kept silent, attributing it to the number of blisterberries she had

been consuming. The season was short, and the purplish berries had always been her favorite. Cramping or not, she couldn't resist their sweet nectar.Breathing sharply between her clenched teeth, she rode out the pain. Within a few heartbeats, it faded back to a dull ache. Resting her forehead against her arm, she allowed herself a few deep breaths before continuing.Glancing up, she spotted a sight that made her forget about her belly. The late evening sunlight pierced the canopy of leaves and blazed on a beauty of an apple, exceptionally large, almost the size of a small melon. Ah, how her mother prized these large, succulent apples for her pies. Even her father would be doubly pleased if she returned with her basket full and this trophy of an apple.But could she reach it?Stepping up another rung, one more than her father normally allowed them to climb, she strained an arm upward. Her fingertips brushed the bottom of the apple, setting it to swinging on its stalk.Blast! If Joach were here, he could have reached it. But this was her prize. Pressing her lips together, she carefully eased herself up another rung. The ladder teetered beneath her. Hugging the trunk with one arm, she stretched the other toward the prize. Her hand inched toward the large fruit as her shoulder throbbed.With a triumphant grin, she watched her hand slide into the sunlight outlining the apple. Or at least she intended to. As her hand slipped higher, it vanished as it struck the edge of the sunbeam. Thinking the sun-dazzle had momentarily blinded her, she did not immediately panic.Instead, her stomach cramped viciously, her lower belly flaring with agony as if someone had dragged a rusty dagger through her innards. Gasping, she stumbled down a rung, clutching tree and ladder in a huge embrace.A hot wetness seeped between her thighs as she hung there. Believing the pain had loosened her bladder, she glanced down in disgust. But what she saw there caused her to slip down the length of the ladder and land in a crumpled pile at its foot.Rolling into a seated position, she again examined herself. Blood! Her gray pants were soaked in the crotch with seeping blood. Her first thought was that something had cut her up inside. Then it dawned on her, and a small smile played about her lips. Something she had heard about, had been hoping for, had finally happened: her first menstra.She, Elena Morin'stal, had become a woman.Stunned, she sat there and raised a hand to her forehead. Before she could touch her damp brow, her right hand drew her eyes.It was swamped in blood, too!A thick redness coated the entire surface of her hand like a ruby glove. What had happened? She knew she hadn't touched herself down there. Besides, she wasn't bleeding that much.I must have cut myself on a ladder nail during the fall, or maybe on a sharp broken branch, she thought.But there was no pain. Instead there was an almost pleasant coolness. She wiped her hand on her khaki shirt. Nothing wiped off. Her shirt was still clean. She wiped harder. Still nothing.Her heart began to race, and stars danced across her vision as she started to panic. Her mother had never warned her of anything like this associated with a woman's first menstra. Maybe it was some sort of woman's secret, kept hidden from men and children. That had to be it! She forced her breathing to slow. It obviously didn't last. Her mother's hands were normal.She took several cleansing breaths. It would be okay. Her mother would explain this nonsense. She stood up, and for the second time that day, righted her spilled basket and gathered her stray apples. The last apple she spotted was the giant trophy apple. She must have grabbed it before she fell. What luck! She touched her right earlobe in proper deference to the spirits for this boon. "Thank you, Sweet Mother," she murmured to the empty orchard. Here lay a good omen as she started her womanhood.Bending over to retrieve her prize, she watched her bloodied hand close upon it and remembered the moment when her hand had vanished, disappearing in a blaze of sunlight. She crinkled her brow and dismissed the thought. It must have just been the light playing tricks on her tired eyes.Her hand clamped on the apple. Mother would make a fine pie out of this. She pictured the warm apple and cinnamon oozing from a fresh slice of pie.As she lifted her trophy, the apple quaked in her palm as if it were alive, then promptly withered and dried to a wrinkled, parched mass. Pulling her lips back in disgust, she dropped it. As the apple hit the ground, it flashed up in a flame bright enough to blind her eyes. Elena raised her arm across her face, but the light just as quickly vanished. She lowered her arm cautiously. All that was left of the apple was a tiny mound of ashes.Holy Mother of Regalta!As she backed away from the black pile, the dinner bell again clanked from across the orchard, startling her but also setting her in motion. Abandoning her basket, she fled across the orchard.By the time Elena reached her family's farmyard, only the last rays of the setting sun still glowed in the western sky. Shadows lay thick across the packed dirt between the horse barn and main house. Leaping over the irrigation ditch, she burst from the last row of trees.A wagon loaded with day workers trundled toward her, heading for the town road. Raucous laughter carried across the yard. The mule driver, Horrel Fert, waved her out of the way. "Move it, lass," he called to her. "I've got a boot full of hungry men here needin' to git to their dinners.""And our ale! Don't forget our ale!" someone called from the back of the wagon. His comment triggered another spate of laughter.Elena hopped to the side of the yard. The train of

four mules leaned into their harnesses and pulled the creaking wagon past her. She began to raise her right hand to wave to the departing workers, then lowered it, hiding it behind her back, suddenly ashamed of her stained hand. If the red color was a mark of budding womanhood, she suddenly felt awkward at declaring her change before the rowdy men. She even found her cheeks blushing at the thought.As soon as the wagon lumbered past, Elena darted across the yard, but not before hearing one of the men declare to another, "That girl's an odd one. Always running about. Not right in the head, I wager."Elena ignored the insult and continued toward the back door of her house. It wasn't anything she hadn't heard before. The children at school were even crueler with their tongues. Elena had always been a tall, gangling child, dressed in old homespun hand-me-downs from her brother. She endured being the butt of much joking, often crying herself home. Even her teachers thought her somewhat slow, believing her daydreams to be evidence of a dull mind. This judgment hurt, too, but over time, Elena's heart had grown thick-enough calluses.Isolated, with only her brother and a few youngsters from neighboring farms for companionship, Elena had discovered the joys of exploring on her own. She had rooted out many wonderful places in the surrounding foothills: a rabbit warren where the does and bucks would feed freely from her hand; an anthill as high as her head; a lightning-struck tree that was hollow inside; a patch of mold-frosted headstones from a long-lost cemetery. She would often return exhausted from a day of roaming, bramble scratched and muddy, with a wide grin on her face.Frowning now, Elena slowed her running as she neared the back door.As much as she enjoyed her explorations, she could not ignore that lately a certain discontent had crept around her heart. She found her eyes lingering on far horizons. Her hands itched for something she could not name. It was as if a storm were building up in her bones, waiting to burst free.Elena climbed the back steps. As she reached toward the door handle, her eyes caught the ruby glow of her stained palm in the last rays of the sun. And now this! What did it mean? Her fingers trembled as they hovered over the brass door handle. For the first time, she sensed the true depth and breadth of the strangeness that could lie beyond her orchard. She closed her eyes, suddenly fearful.Why would she ever want to leave her home? Safety was here, and all those who loved her. Here were lands as comfortable as worn flannel on a cold morning. Why seek more?As she shivered on the doorstep, the door burst open before her, startling her down a step. In the doorway, her father towered with Joach's shoulder clutched in his large hand. Both the men's eyes widened in surprise to find Elena on the stoop."See," Joach said sheepishly, "I told you she'd be right in.""Elena," her father said, "you know you're not supposed to be in the orchards alone after dark. You need to think--"Elena flew into her father's arms."Honey?" he said as he closed her up in his thick arms. "What's wrong?"She buried her face into her father's chest, never wanting to move from his arms. More than the thatched roof and warm hearth, here was her home.