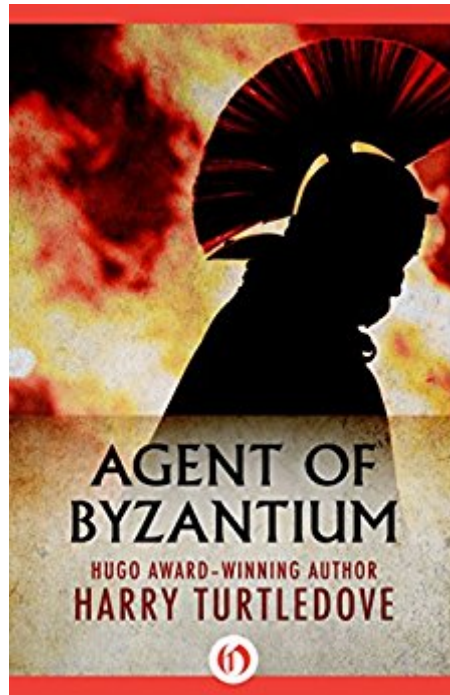


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Agent Of Byzantium



Synopsis

A dashing master spy takes on the enemies of the Byzantine Empire and discovers impossible inventions like gunpowder and telescopes in a magnificent romp from the maestro of alternate-history science fiction. In another, very different timeline—one in which Mohammed embraced Christianity and Islam never came to be—the Byzantine Empire still flourishes in the fourteenth century, and wondrous technologies are emerging earlier than they did in our own. Having lost his family to the ravages of smallpox, Basil Argyros has decided to dedicate his life to Byzantium. A stalwart soldier and able secret agent, Basil serves his emperor courageously, going undercover to unearth Persia's dastardly plots and disrupting the dark machinations of his beautiful archenemy, the Persian spy Mirrane, while defusing dire threats emerging from the Western realm of the Franco-Saxons. But the world Basil so staunchly defends is changing rapidly, and he must remain ever vigilant, for in this great game of empires, the player who controls the most advanced tools and weaponry—tools like gunpowder, printing, vaccines, and telescopes—must certainly emerge victorious. A collection of interlocking stories that showcase the courage, ingenuity, and breathtaking derring-do of superspy Basil Argyros, *Agent of Byzantium* presents the great Harry Turtledove at his alternate-world-building best. At once intricate, exciting, witty, and wildly inventive, this is a many-faceted gem from a master of the genre.

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Customer Reviews

Imagine a 13th century Mediterranean and Middle East...-Where the territories of western and southern Europe won back by the Romans during the 6th century reign of Justinian were not only maintained but expanded.-Muhammad never developed Islam. Instead he converted to Christianity, becoming a holy man, and is now venerated as St. Moaumet. In the absence of Islam's rise, both the Roman and Sassanid Persian (which has by now engulfed the entire Arabian Peninsula) empires remain as the two superpowers, existing in a sort of medieval cold war. Into this world comes Basil Argyros, an agent of the Magistrianoi, the imperial secret police; sometimes he acts as a soldier, but more often he's a spy. During the course of his assignments as an agent of Imperial security, Basil also makes some exciting discoveries, thus making him an agent in another sense: as one who brings change and advancement to the Empire. From the Franks he steals a new weapon, recently cooked up by their monks--gunpowder. He returns from the lands of the Asiatic Jurchen nomads north of the Black Sea with an instrument we know as the telescope. He delivers to the emperor the secrets of printing, a recent Persian invention they've been using to foment insurrection in the Empire's eastern provinces. What perhaps is the most fascinating of all is Basil's witnessing the discovery of inoculation, made during a time of catastrophic plague in Constantinople. Basil's nemesis in many of these stories is the beautiful and deviously clever Persian spy, Mirrane. As the two of them match wits, they develop a mutual respect and admiration, eventually falling deeply in love.

I recently finished the fourth volume of Harry Turtledove's latest series, "The War that Came Early," about an alternate history wherein Hitler started WWII in 1938, after meeting with Chamberlain at Munich, instead of in 1939 as it was in actual history, after Chamberlain and Daladier appeased the German dictator by betraying Czechoslovakia. That series still has, apparently, two books left to run, and sadly, after reading the first four books of the series, I doubt I will buy them. The problem with this series is that Turtledove has developed certain faults as a writer in recent years, and in his latest series, they are all on display. His biggest flaw by FAR is wearisome repetition. You see it over and over again in almost all his work from the last several years. "The War that Came Early" is no exception, where EVERY character, multiple times, is given the opportunity to reflect how crummy European cigarettes have become since the war started, and how harsh they are to smoke,

but the only thing worse than bad tobacco is no tobacco. After hearing the fifth character reflect on that for the umpteenth time, I know far more than I need or care to about the quality of wartime European cigarettes and people's smoking habits. Another characteristic Turtledove flaw, as reviewer Elliott Zink pointed out, is that he continually has his main characters - the ones from whose perspective we are seeing the story unfold -- go through their thought process wherein a question is asked, the characters note their uncertainty or initial doubt, and then come to accept their initial decision.

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